

BLACK CRUSADE™

THE TOME OF EXCESS™



A SOURCEBOOK FOR
FOLLOWERS OF SLAANESH

WARHAMMER
40,000
ROLEPLAY



REALMS BEYOND SENSATION

"It failed to amuse me."

—Kallow the Tame, after ordering the destruction of Brendine II

Though all of the Ruinous Powers claim the Screaming Vortex as their own personal fiefdom, it is Slaanesh who perhaps can best justify this boast. There are certainly more tales that connect the creation of this twisted realm to that of the Pleasure Lord, and thus probably more who believe them to be true than any of the other origin myths. In this Warp-infested location, belief defines reality, so it is entirely possible that now the origin is tied to the downfall of the decadent and prideful Eldar, no matter what once happened. One day, the rise of other beliefs might change its origin to another tale, which would be as true then as the current one is now. Such is the insane nature of the Screaming Vortex.

To journey across the Vortex is to see this madness reflected in the excesses and hedonistic pursuits that drive mortals and Daemons alike. Here entire planets are devoted to the pleasures offered through unshackled desires in Slaanesh's name, either shouted in glorious, ecstatic exclamations or whispered in honeyed, seductive tones. Ships drift across shoals of nebulae like beautiful flowers floating on oiled waters, filled with indolent voyagers entirely consumed with fully assimilating the perfumed breezes wafting in arterial paths across the redolent chambers. Asteroids are hollowed and unhallowed as devotees

too depraved for their home systems fully indulge desperate, unquenchable appetites. In the bulging tips of towering crystal spires, nobles luxuriate in fabrics laced with nerve-induction weave, shivering with bottomless lasciviousness with each caress of silk on flesh. Fresh worlds also emerge from the Warp-loam churning at the centre of the Vortex to hurl far through the anteciduals, each a garish comet streaking bewitching ribbons across the void. Though newly born, tempting flora and savoury fauna eternally inhabit these lands, ready to beguile and ensnare at the whims of the Prince of Chaos.

Even on those places devoted to other gods, Slaanesh can insinuate himself. All beings desire something, and where there is desire, there is Slaanesh. Desire for power, for knowledge, for conquest, for life eternal—all these and more drive Heretics, but once the drive becomes the goal itself, then their lives belong to Slaanesh. Once a Heretic fully embraces his desire, it becomes enflamed until there is nothing but overwhelming cravings, and thus does Slaanesh seduce another to his insatiable cause.

Desire itself can also provide methods to move across the realm. In a place where emotional intensities can warp space itself, horrific appetites can distort reality like wax before a flame. Certain locations have become so permeated with debaucheries and excesses that they seep through the void into far-off reaches, linking space with barbed tethers made of longing and lust. Some who have devoted their sanity to mapping out the Vortex claim to have divined the very weft and warp that defines its unnatural texture, and assert these pink and purple threads twist and turn as desires drive them. Few hold this as useful truth, but it is only a matter of enough desiring this to be the truth to make it so.

CONTRITION

"Never have I beheld such... wonders! I will do valuable work here."

—Scythius the Vile, formerly Inquisitor Dircotis, Ordo [Redacted]

Deep in the Lower Vortex, beyond the violence and bloodshed of Crucible, lies the labyrinthine city world of Contrition. Home to the unceasing urges of its daemonic inhabitants, few mortals ever set foot upon this world, and of the few that do, none do so willingly. Contrition is in many ways a world trapped in a war, but unlike most wars, this conflict is not fought with swords or guns. Instead, the battles that rage through the streets and ring in the plazas and courts are fought with honeyed promises, cunning deceptions, and callous seductions. It is a war perfectly suited to Slaanesh and his Daemons.

THE GREAT CITY

Contrition is a world unlike any other in the Vortex, as its surface is covered with one gigantic city not unlike an Imperial hive but on a planetary scale. But where hive-cities are functional and industrious, Contrition serves no purpose that mortal minds can fathom.

The architecture of the city follows no recognisable pattern, with streets and buildings varying wildly from one to the next. Mighty stone fortresses, replete with towers and battlements, stand next to crumbling ruins that, in turn, surround rotting, miasmal gardens. Great towers of living crystal float majestically above beauteous palaces of pure, white marble, each festooned with delicate razor-sharp blades. Even the streets themselves exist solely to baffle and mislead, as wide boulevards give way to narrow cobbled lanes or abruptly end in solid walls. Grand plazas stand in the midst of forbidding, crenellated towers with no apparent entrances or exits, and endless stairs reach up toward crowded balconies only to end suddenly at doors that were not there before.

No reason lies behind this mind-wrenching metropolis save the ramblings of the insane or the hushed whispers of myth. However, one constant the inhabitants of the Vortex are sure of is the unending conflict that consumes the world. The Ruinous Powers wage a ceaseless war for control of the world, each seeking to tear down the city it has conquered and rebuild it in a form more pleasing to the victor. Huge swathes are trapped in tendrils of flux, with no one power truly holding ascendancy. Here, little more than ever-shifting rubble and ruin exists as each god's forces attempts to assert control and drive the others out.

Although all four Powers have a presence on Contrition, it is Slaanesh that currently holds the most influence. His soaring, serpentine palaces and halls dominate much of the city, and swiftly moving Chariots and Hellflayers maintain his borders. Within this grand domain, a visitor finds epic and terrifying vistas of sinuous, beguiling charm. Scattered across Contrition are the infamous Flensing Chambers, crimson-soaked buildings that are part theatre, part butchers shop. Slaanesh's favoured continually drag mortal captives to these chambers to entertain and feed his Daemonic host. Within the dripping walls, a victim finds all manner of terrible pleasures at the claws of his captors, as his skin is peeled inch by excruciatingly wonderful inch from his body.

In one particular endeavour that the Dark Prince's host currently favour, groups of Daemonettes carry the freshest captives to the roof of a Flensing Chamber. The Daemons then impale their chosen subjects on barbed hooks attached to great silver chains, and cast the wailing, bleeding forms off the roof to plummet toward the ground below. The unfortunate victims then sway back and forth as twitching pendulums, the blades worked into the walls of the Chamber slicing and piercing their flesh with each swing. Once the subjects have ceased swinging, the Daemonette whose work is considered the most artistic can expect to receive great social renown, particularly if the victim still lives at the end.

The Sensoriums are another construct the hosts of Slaanesh favour. These strange buildings resemble great concert halls, with elaborately raised stages and orchestra pits. Before any great ritual or revel takes place within the areas they control, the daemonic inhabitants come here to praise Slaanesh and beg his favour. Scores of slaves and captives are led out onto the stage and forced to perform elaborate and often impossible ballets while their senses are bombarded by all manner of outlandish stimuli. Rapidly flashing lights of indescribable colour, curious piping music and bombastic, discordant explosions of sound, even barrages of exquisitely flavoured liquids, all pummel the dancers. Daemons scatter broken crystals and caltrops of teeth under foot, and fragrant powders and incenses are burned. All the while the Daemonettes cavort with their dance partners, leading the mortals in ever greater acts of debauchery, or striking them down with graceful swipes of their crab-like claws. Recently it has become fashionable amongst the attendants to subject their "guests" to insidious narcotics that induce synaesthesia, confusing the user's senses so that one can hear a colour or smell a sound. When the pavane finally reaches its conclusion, those mortal participants that still live are turned out onto the streets, their bodies broken and their minds forever shattered.

Amongst the twisting and maze-like streets of the city one structure stands above all others: the Great Feasting Hall. The white marble of the massive building has carmine veins of an unknown mineral that seem to writhe and pulse with an unholy life. Within the Hall is a single cavernous chamber, its cyclopean dimensions often too much for a mortal's mind to comprehend. Multitudes of slaves often stand awestruck or scream wildly on exposure to the impossible proportions, clawing at their eyes for blessed blindness. Crowded within this massive room are hundreds of tables upon which lie every conceivable foodstuff. Great piles of meat lie steaming on huge serving platters, and whole carcasses of unrecognisable beasts slowly turn on spit roasts. Scores of slaves, their mouths sewn shut by elegant stitches of burning silver thread, carry gigantic trays of fruits and vegetables across the length of the Hall. Enormous mounds of sweetmeats and delicate pastries sit on ostentatious trolleys ready for insatiably ravenous Daemons to pluck and consume. Everywhere wine flows, blood is spilled, and the air sings with the sounds of revelry. Throughout the hall, the Daemons of Slaanesh stalk, feasting and gossiping. The Daemonettes boast and preen, ever eager to inflate their reputations. Here and there Fiends torment the slaves, mesmerising with their soporific musk before swiftly impaling the mortals on vicious stingers or dragging them off to dark corners for far more terrible purposes. Gargantuan



columns support the Gallery of Creations, which towers high over the excesses below. Here, the Daemons of Slaanesh display their latest and greatest works. Some are masterpieces of the literal sort, wrought in paints and inks or less definable fluids. Others are more visceral, subjects taken from the Flensing Chambers or twitching, pulpy sacks of flesh that once were men. Some simply cannot be defined, existing outside of any sense of mortal perception or morality.

As Slaanesh has risen into ascendancy on Contrition, much has passed into an uneasy peace. The Daemon Princes and Keepers of Secrets that rule in the Lord of Sensation's name have established an elaborate and complex social system to rule. The crux of this government is prestige; in order to gain this power a Daemon must be seen to be more extreme or artistic than its peers, all in ways incomprehensible and utterly beyond a mortal mind. It is not simply enough to have slaves, for any Daemon can enslave a mortal. The Daemons of Contrition must entrap souls with elaborate promises of untold pleasures or addiction to sensations that cannot be found elsewhere in the galaxy. A mortal who willingly swears an oath to a Daemon is worth far more prestige than one that is merely forced into servitude, but the myriad levels and manners of each oath flavours the degree of prestige. Similarly, these Daemons refrain from simple killing, when the thrill of a carefully worded snub or the rush of a vicious scene of social disaster shows so much more refinement. Many Daemonettes have become consummate masters of verbal barbs and scathing retorts, sharp enough to draw blood and tear flesh with each utterance, and delight in intricate waltzes of insult and counter-insult.

This behaviour has led to dozens of cliques forming, as like minded creatures band together for mutual support and admiration. These bands are transitory at best; often members will fall out, turning on each other because of some slight, whether real or imagined. Nothing causes allies to desert quicker, though, than failing to impress at an important ritual or task. This web of social backstabbing and betrayal has begun to spread across the world, and the minions of Slaanesh have caught many Daemons of the three other Powers in salacious games, entrapping them with unspeakable thrills and promises of further entertainment. The Daemons of Slaanesh see this as all part of the Endless Dance and little thought, if any, is given to actual plans. All that matters to these creatures of excess is the next experience, be it the callous joy of a rival brought low or the stinging pain of loss.

THE MISTRESS OF SPITE

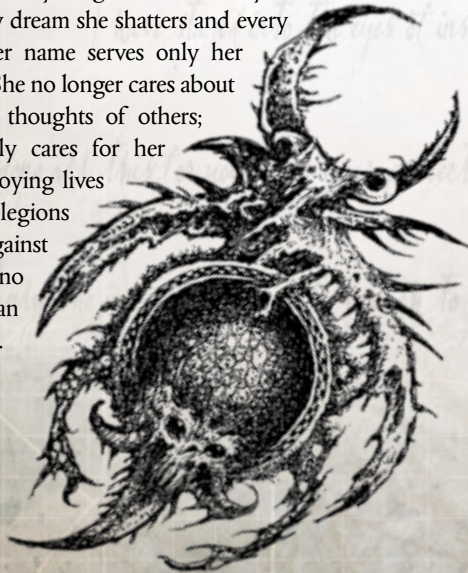
Squatting at the epicentre of the madness like a monstrous toad is a single Daemon Prince of Slaanesh—the Mistress of Spite, a singular Daemon even on a world of Daemons. Her body is swollen with great rolls of fat, far greater than any humanoid form should contain. Huge clumps of blubber hang loosely from her limbs and even her thick, bloated legs cannot support her impossible weight. She languidly reclines on a great chariot pulled by six packs of six Steeds of Slaanesh. Her face is a curious mix of androgynous features and still inspires lustful thoughts in all who behold her, much to their disgust. Three sets of curved horns sprout from her head and a third arm grows from her shoulders, ending in a

vast, pincer-like claw. Across each of her forearms is a long slit, slick with moisture and hiding a long, extendable spur of polished bone. Particularly beloved foes are impaled on these spurs, gazing longingly into the Mistress' eyes as they die shuddering and moaning in ecstatic pain.

The inhabitants of the Great City whisper that the Mistress was once the mortal consort of N'Kari, first and greatest of Slaanesh's Keepers within the Vortex, and that she grew into her new form as she laboured to Daemonhood, performing acts of gastronomical heights that emptied entire worlds. No sooner had the daemonic birth scream of her Ascension faded into Warp-ripples than N'Kari tired of her and discarded her for another plaything. Heartbroken, her pain crystallised to fill the void within her and she swore to share this pain with every other living creature, first in the Vortex and then the rest of the galaxy. Now she dwells on Contrition, her whole existence bent toward inflicting her loss on others. Spreading suffering has become her own desire and these grow with each expiring scream she hears, driving her to replicate that one perfect moment of agony when N'Kari cast her aside.

She is particularly drawn to the emotional pain of heartbreak and betrayal, and has become a master of the social warfare that rules Contrition. Every Daemon on the world both hates and adores her, willing to do anything to please her so that they do not become the next victim of her attention. She, in turn, is all too willing to use this devotion to further her own ends, propelling these sycophants into acts of greater and greater depravity and feeding off the sensations they supply. Her desires now consume her, guiding her to snuff out millions of lives, both Daemon and mortal, in her pursuits. She stages elaborate carnivals, feasts, and rituals involving countless participants. As the sensations of these events build to colossal levels, she drinks them in, consuming all. Gorging herself on the pain and pleasure, the joy and despair, the consumed emotions transfigure into new excesses of flesh rolling on her recumbent form.

At first the Mistress of Spite did all this so that N'Kari would notice her again and take her, once more, as his consort. When she realised that would never happen she began to plot his downfall hoping that if she could amass enough power she could cast him down and replace him, but even that has become a secondary concern now. At present, the Mistress is so enraptured with her power that everything she does, every life she snuffs out, every dream she shatters and every tear shed in her name serves only her private desires. She no longer cares about revenge or the thoughts of others; instead she only cares for her fulfilment, destroying lives and turning legions of Daemons against one another for no reason other than her gratification.



FIENDS OF SLAANESH

Nightmarish creatures dredged from the worst kind of drug-addled dream, Fiends of Slaanesh serve as the Dark Prince's hunting hounds. They seek out his enemies and run down those that escape him, and are eminently suited to their task.

A hideous and bizarre amalgamation of reptile, insect, and man, a Fiend's body is long and slender, segmented and yet disturbingly serpentine. The lithe and sinuous body is sheathed in fine, scintillating scales that glisten and shift as it moves. Four slim legs, each ending in a distressingly human-looking foot, support the Fiend, allowing it to move incredibly quickly, scuttling and prancing with uncanny grace. The head is long and narrow, with two large, saucer-like multi-faceted eyes. The creature's long, slim tongue emerges constantly from its small mouth to taste the air. Coated in deadly anaesthetic poison, a single caress from the tongue can paralyse, leaving the victim helpless against the Fiend's predations.

A Fiend possesses lethal pincer-like claws at the end of both of its shapely arms. Those fighting one of these Daemons should be more wary of the dripping stinger at the tip of the beast's flickering tail though, as the poison it injects can reduce a foe to bubbling flesh in seconds.

When Fiends go on the hunt, they call to one another in a haunting, discordant song. This call is partly psychic, causing terrible distraction for mortals unlucky enough to hear it. Terrible headaches, blurred vision, and, in more extreme cases, bleeding ears and burst eyeballs can follow. For those unable to resist this deadly siren call, a slow, lingering death at the Fiend's claws is soon to follow.

Fiend of Slaanesh (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
48	--	52	44	57	12	56	34	06	--

Movement: 16/32/48/96

Wounds: 22

Armour: None

Total TB: 7

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Psyniscience (Per).

Talents: Hard Target, Heightened Senses (All), Swift Attack.

Traits: Daemonic (3), Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear 2, From Beyond, Quadruped, Size (5), Unnatural Agility (2), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Pincer claw (Melee; 1d10+5 R; Pen 3; Razor Sharp), tail stinger (Melee; 1d10+5 R; Pen 0; Toxic [4]), tongue lash (Melee; 1d5+5 I; Pen 0; Flexible, Snare [3], Toxic [2]).

Disruptive Song: The constant, atonal dirge the Fiend emits causes pain and confusion in anyone fighting it. Any characters engaged in close combat with a Fiend must pass a **Difficult (-10) Willpower Test** (-20 if he is a Psyker) every turn or suffer a penalty of -10 to all attacks directed at the Fiend.

Soporific Musk: The hypnotic scents a Fiend emits can entrance and captivate its foes. Dodge and Parry Tests made against a Fiend's attacks suffer a -10 penalty.

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 10 metres of a Fiend suffer a -10 penalty to Willpower tests.

STEEDS OF SLAANESH

Far beyond the realms of realspace, deep within the ever-shifting tides and eddies of the Warp, lie the Realms of Chaos, personal domains of the Ruinous Powers. Amongst the many territories that make up Slaanesh's personal fief are vast golden fields, great meadows of alien beauty that rise into smooth hills or plunge into perfect valleys. Amongst these verdant fields live the Steeds of Slaanesh.

These steeds, like many Daemons of the Prince of Pleasure, are unnerving in their beauty. Perversely lissom and sinuous, their bodies are slim and long, resembling a great serpent with two athletic legs and a long, balancing tail. A Steed of Slaanesh is capable of great speed and agility, able to leap extraordinary distances and change direction in an instant. Their heads are narrow and tubular, with a round almost jaw-less mouth. Similar to Fiends, Steeds possess long, flickering tongues capable of detecting scents and complex tastes. The favoured of Slaanesh claim a steed can even taste a mortal's desires and are capable of tracking their longings for thousands of miles. These tongues can stretch extraordinary lengths and, when angered, a Steed can ensnare a foe in his coils, leaving him helpless to avoid the Steed's raking, clawed feet. Although their expressive eyes glimmer with an untold cleverness, Steeds are unintelligent beasts, impelled only by the base urges of the Lord of All Pleasures.

Often a Daemonette, or rarer a mortal, may attempt to secure one as her mount. After creeping into the sacred grasslands a Daemonette seeks to distract a Steed with a song or other performance, allowing her to draw close enough to throw a delicate chain of rune-encrusted precious metals around its neck. Once ensnared, a Daemonette must work quickly to mount and assuage the steed for, once riled, the anger of these beasts is a danger as great as their disturbing allure. After successfully calming her chosen steed, the jubilant Daemonette leaves the Golden Fields, forever bound to her Steed. The two are now one, together referred to as a Seeker of Slaanesh. Over time, the Daemonette will decorate her Steed with votive offerings of worship and affection, personal trophies of skilled hunts, and pleasures long remembered.

Steed of Slaanesh (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	--	35	32	67	04	22	33	11	--

Movement: 26/52/78/156

Armour: None

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Athletics (S) +20, Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Psyniscience (Per).

Talents: Assassin Strike, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (smell, taste), Leap Up, Lightning Reflexes, Preternatural Speed, Step Aside.

Traits: Bestial, Bred for War, Daemonic (3), Deadly Natural Weapons (claws), Fear 2, From Beyond, Indifferent, Size (5), Terrain Master, Unnatural Agility (6), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+3; Pen 2; Razor Sharp), Tongue (Melee; 1d5+3 I; Pen 0; Flexible Snare [3]).

Wounds: 16

Total TB: 6

Swift as the Wind: Possessing the speed of desire and the urgency of need, a Steed of Slaanesh is capable of incredible swiftness. A Steed of Slaanesh's Movement rate is double that of normal, before adding any Talents.

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 10 metres of a Steed of Slaanesh suffer a -10 penalty to Willpower tests.

Steeds as Daemonic Mounts: Seekers of Slaanesh consist of a Daemonette (see page 353 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) riding a Steed of Slaanesh, and use the Mounted Combat rules (see page 44). Mortals, including Player Characters, can also ride a Steed. First the Steed must be summoned and made ready. This can be done using a suitable dark action, such as the Rite of Wild Fury combined with the Ritual of Breaking from **THE TOME OF FATE**, or Acquired with an Availability of Near Unique. The latter requires the rider to first succeed in a Daemonic Mastery Test (see page 229 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook). Failure has the Mount attacking the would-be rider. In addition, each time the Mount is wounded, another test must be passed or the Mount will attempt to throw the rider. Daemonettes bond completely with their mounts and never need to take these tests.

KEEPER OF SECRETS

The mightiest of Slaanesh's daemonic cohort, the Keeper of Secrets is a titanic foe. Wreathed in beguiling sorcery and possessed of a delightfully hideous countenance, it is the desires of Slaanesh given form. Legend has it that each can hear anything said anywhere, and no whispered words or furtive conversations are safe from their ears, though what they do with such secrets is itself a secret.

No two of these beings is truly alike, born as they are from the ever-shifting mood of the Dark Prince, although all share similar characteristics. Each is gigantic in stature, equalling the size of most tanks, and all feature six limbs. Four heavily muscled arms, two of which terminate in monstrous pincer-like claws and two shapely legs ending in animal hoofs. Often the faces of each Keeper vary the most, some resemble great bulls or other animals, complete with sharply curved horns. Others are twisted, leering mixtures of male and female that repulse and arouse in equal measure. They stride into battle bedecked in all manner of curious finery, diaphanous silks and multi-coloured robes of aching beauty, or tight-fitting suits of shiny leather, fixed in place with perfect silver hooks and rings pierced in the Daemon's very flesh.

To a Keeper of Secrets, every emotion is beloved. Every sensation savoured, revelled in, and then exquisitely passed on to their victims. Nothing is sacred or sacrosanct; these Daemons enjoy nothing more than the corruption of purity, the debasement of innocence or the inversion of nobility. Fear and terror are sustenance to them, as are hope and despair, joy and dread. A Keeper of Secrets indulges in all of these, swelling with energy as each new sensation is encountered, fed upon, and then cast aside.

In battle, these Daemons are swirling artists of destruction, their terrible claws able to rip open a tank or reduce a power-armoured Space Marine to a beatific spray of blood and entrails. They dance amongst their foes, favouring whomever they please with a deadly caress and ever feeding on the rage and lust they inspire.

Keeper of Secrets (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
8I	44	65 ¹⁴	66 ¹⁶	72 ¹⁴	70	63	75	8I	50

Movement: 17/34/51/102 **Wounds:** 190
Armour: None **Total TB:** 16
Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Awareness (Per), Charm (Fel) +20, Command (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +10, Forbidden Lore (Daemonology) (Int) +10, Inquiry (Int) +10, Intimidate (WP) +10, Linguistics (Int) (All known languages) +20, Logic, Parry (Ag) +10, Psyniscience (Per) +20, Scrutiny (Per) +20.
Talents: Ambidextrous, Assassin Strike, Combat Master, Counter Attack, Crippling Strike, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (All), Leap Up, Lightning Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Precise Blow, Preternatural Speed, Sure Strike, Swift Attack.
Traits: Daemonic (5), Deadly Natural Weapons (claws), Fear (4), From Beyond, Multiple Arms (4), Psyker, Size (7), The Stuff of Nightmares, Unnatural Agility (7), Unnatural Strength (8), Unnatural Toughness (5), Warp Instability.
Weapons: Ætherblade (Melee, 2d10+16 R, Pen 8, Unwieldy, Warp Weapon), claws (Melee; 2d10+14 R; Pen 6; Crippling [6], Razor Sharp, Tearing).
Aura of Acquiescence: The Keeper of Secrets has a powerful aura of compulsion, drawing enemies into its trap of desire. As a free action once per turn, the Keeper may make an Opposed Willpower Test with one enemy within 25 metres. If the Keeper succeeds, it gains complete control over the character until the end of the character's next turn, when he can attempt a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test** to break free of the Keeper's control. If he does so, he may act normally on his following turn. The Keeper can direct any controlled characters as a Half Action; this power can affect multiple characters, but each requires a Half Action to direct.
Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 10 metres of A Keeper of Secrets suffer a -20 penalty to Willpower.
Favoured of Slaanesh: A Keeper of Secrets may use any Slaanesh Psychic Power and passes the Focus test automatically with 1d5 Degrees of Success. He counts as having a Psy Rating of 6.
Soporific Musk: The beguiling scent and spellbinding appearance of the Keeper of Secrets slows its victims' actions, leaving them easy prey for its sweeping claws. Dodge and Parry tests made against attacks from the Keeper suffer a -20 penalty.



NEW RULES: CHARIOTS

- Chariots have several special rules apart from the normal rules from living mounts (see page 44):
- Chariots travel using the Movement values listed for Structured Time. For Narrative Time when travelling long distances, they have a Cruising Speed.
 - Riders can always engage any foes attacking in melee combat, but mounts can only attack if foes are directly in front of them.
 - Chariots use Armour and Structural Integrity to track their status. Like personal body armour, chariots have Armour Points that reduce Damage from accident or attack. Much like a Heretic's Wounds, any Damage the chariot's Armour does not absorb is subtracted from its Structural Integrity. The chariot is damaged, and this loss is permanent unless repaired (see below). Once a chariot has taken an amount of Damage equal to its Structural Integrity, it is destroyed.
 - Heretics can make a **Hard (-20) Tech-Use or Trade (Armourer) Test** to repair a damaged chariot (restoring 1 Structural Integrity, plus 2 additional Structural Integrity per Degree of Success), although this sort of maintenance often takes hours. Destroyed chariots can be repaired as well, but the Test is **Arduous (-40)** instead and can only be attempted once.
 - If half of the mounts are slain, the Tactical Speed for the Chariot is halved, rounding down. As long as at least one mount lives, the Chariot benefits from its all normal Skills, Talents, and Traits for movement.

SEEKER CHARIOTS OF SLAANESH

Chariots of Slaanesh exult in the spreading of both pain and pleasure. Crafted from gleaming metals and overly-adorned with intricately disturbing decorations, Seeker Chariots rejoice in Slaanesh's nature of excess.

Each chariot is covered in hooked blades, razor sharp spikes, and slicing edges. These blades are honed to an edge so sharp that legend says they cut not just flesh and bone, but the victim's soul as well. The rear axle and wheels of the Chariot also hold yet more scythe-like blades and anyone caught in their path is quickly reduced to a gory spray. The wounds it inflicts cause unimaginable suffering as flesh is severed and nerves are stimulated beyond pain. Many victims that survive claim to have been paralysed by the sensations of their wounds, and say that despite the raw agony of their injuries, they felt the disturbing tickle of seeping pleasure that goaded them to continue fighting so they could experience that terrible joy again.

On Contrition, the Seeker Chariots patrol the borders of Slaanesh's domains, racing along the wide boulevards and narrow, twisting lanes at terrible speeds. Chariot crews feed on the sensations such swiftness generates in their hyper-aware senses. Addicted to the glory of speed, the thrill that knowing a single mistake can smash the Chariot to pieces is as delicious as the terror of their fleeing victims.

Many Exalted Daemons and Daemon Princes use these chariots for personal transport, where the speed and agility is as prized as the capacity for inflicting beautiful pain. Raised up on the chariot frame, the rider is also far more recognisable and these Daemons bask in the adoration, hate, and jealousy such status inspires in their lesser brethren.

Seeker Chariots use the rules for Mounted Combat (see page 44). A Chariot is crewed by two Daemonettes (see page 353 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) and drawn by two Steeds of Slaanesh (see page 81). The information given below represents the Chariot only; for the crew and Mounts, use the appropriate creature entry.

Tactical Speed: 26/52/78/156

Cruising Speed: 140kph

Structural Integrity: 17

Armour: 6

Availability: Unique.

Traits: Size (6), Terrain Master.

Scything Blades: A Seeker Chariot is covered in blades, hooks, and sharp edges, and when it makes a Charge or Hit & Run action its target must pass a **Hard (-20) Agility Test** or suffer 1d10+5 Rending Damage.

Unsurpassed Grace: The agility of these war machines and their crew is so great they can preform seemingly impossible manoeuvres. When a Seeker Chariot performs a Hit & Run Action, both the Daemonette crew and the Mounts may make a single attack against the target.

HELLFLAYER

These devastating and rightly feared machines of war are a common sight in the streets of Contrition and other worlds where Slaanesh seeks to extend his presence. Similar in appearance to the Seeker Chariots, a Hellflayer is a terrifying wall of rotating blades, drawn along by two Steeds of Slaanesh and guided into battle by a crew of three Daemonettes.

Used as a weapon of terror and mass destruction by Slaanesh's minions, the Hellflayer is now a mainstay in the armies of the Dark Prince, but this was not always the case.

In ages past, the Hellflayers were used to grind and chop up the fields of corpses that remained after a battle within Slaanesh's realm. The chaotic and flawed appearance of these fields offended Slaanesh's quest for absolute perfection, and so the Hellflayers were employed to remove these blemishes. Of course, this act was devoid of any real sensation or stimulation and so being assigned to ride a Hellflayer was seen as something of a punishment by the Daemonettes of Slaanesh's court. Soon, those Handmaidens responsible for the Hellflayers began to tire of their duty and sought a more stirring use for their talents.

One Hellflayer crew decided to flout Slaanesh's will and brought their machine to battle. The headstrong Daemonettes charged the Hellflayer into the packed ranks of the enemy, creating unspeakable carnage as the spinning blades tore

through the foe. As the ensorcelled blades pierced flesh and severed limbs, the crew gorged on the pain and suffering they caused for each of the Daemonettes had bound their essence to silvered steel. Waves of ecstasy washed over the Daemons as they felt each slice and every cut. This rapture drove them to ever greater acts of violence, lost in the ocean of screams and carved flesh. Their battle lust became so great they easily broke the enemy and carried the day for their god.

When the battle ended, Slaanesh's wrath was great indeed for none of the Ruinous Powers suffers insubordination. However, he was also greatly pleased by the ruin the Hellflayer had brought and declared that from then on to ride a Hellflayer would be a position of pride and great status, the first to engage the foe and the last to leave the battle. As for the first Hellflayer crew, little is known but legends speak of Slaanesh transforming them into living statues, stripped of the ability to feel but forever forced to watch what had been taken from them.

Hellflayers use the rules for Mounted Combat (see page 44). A Hellflayer is crewed by two Daemonettes (see page 353 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) and an Exalted Allurese (a Daemonette with +10 Weapon Skill, Strength, and Agility). A Hellflayer is pulled by two Steeds of Slaanesh (see page 81). The information given below represents the Hellflayer only, for the crew and Mounts use the appropriate creature entry.

Tactical Speed: 26/52/78/156

Cruising Speed: 140kph

Structural Integrity: 17

Armour: 6

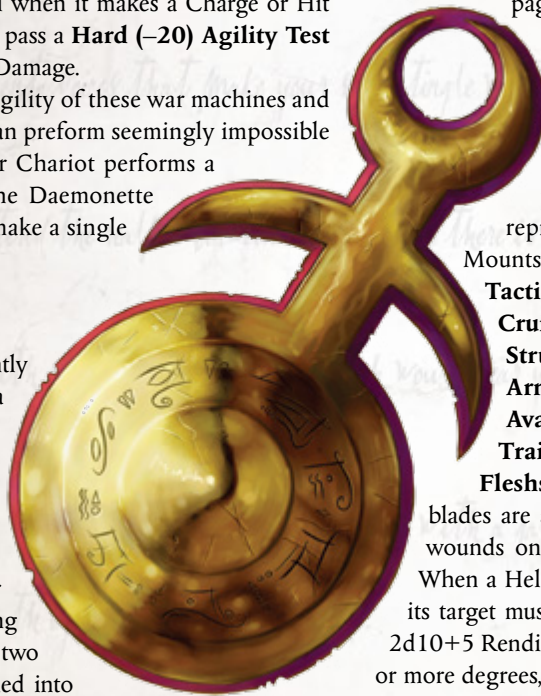
Availability: Unique.

Traits: Size (6).

Fleshshredder: A Hellflayer's giant rotating blades are almost impossible to avoid and cause awful wounds on those unlucky enough to be hit by them. When a Hellflayer makes a Charge or Hit & Run action, its target must pass a **Hard (-20) Agility Test** or suffer 2d10+5 Rending Damage. If the target fails this test by four or more degrees, he becomes trapped against the body of the Hellflayer and will continue to take the above damage until he can successfully escape. In order to escape from being trapped by a Hellflayer, the victim must pass either a **Difficult (-10) Strength** or **Agility Test**.

Soulscent: The Daemonette crew are empowered by the carnage a Hellflayer wreaks, becoming faster and more deadly with every cut. If a Hellflayer inflicts at least one wound from its Fleshshredder special rule, the Daemonette crew gain the Lightning Attack talent for the rest of the turn and all of the next. If a Hellflayer inflicts 10 or more wounds in a single turn from its Fleshshredder special rule, the crew gain the Lightning Attack talent and may re-roll any missed attacks for the rest of the turn and all of the next.

Unsurpassed Grace: The agility of these war machines and their crew is so great they can preform seemingly impossible manoeuvres. When a Hellflayer performs a Hit & Run Action, both the Daemonette crew and the Mounts may make a single attack against the target.



GHIBELLINE

"You ask if it is enough? It is never enough!"

—Beneus III

Pulled with its twin world Guelph from the Halo Stars at the birth of the Vortex, Ghibelline is a beautiful planet strewn with the waste of unnecessary fighting. Across the Seventh Antecidual from neighbouring Q'Sal and the reputed resting grounds of the Kasserkratch from Guelph, this forge planet boasts the most ornate engines of war in the Gloaming Worlds. Though other planets such as the War Moons of Talax claim that the products of the Libertine Council are inferior, many within the Vortex desiring to gain the edge on the battlefield keep them in high demand.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH, APART BY CHOICE

Ghibelline once shared a system with its twin planet Guelph and a single family dynasty, the Meinloka Clan, governed both planets. Lord and Lady Meinloka ruled the worlds, though often split apart by the duties of their station. During the birth of the Screaming Vortex, the family was separated, with Lord Meinloka stranded on Guelph and his Lady on Ghibelline. Torn apart by the force of Slaanesh's initial gasp, Guelph was cast further into the Vortex, shedding much of the energy that it took from its sun. Ghibelline, while also captured in the new whirlpool, was more fortunate, moving more slowly and retaining the heat of its portion.

The two planets are now totally separate and distinct where once they shared a joint future, consumed with rivalry. Though there is much to dispute in each planet's version of the events that drove them apart, Ghibelline contends that Lord Meinloka chose a new wife on Guelph over his old one, rendering her hopeful search for him an empty promise. Neither side, however, disputes that the end result of their warring is a mutual distrust and open enmity between their people. The Meinloka Clan, once a single royal family, is now two distinct factions: the Libertine Council on Ghibelline and the Court of the Pit-Lord on Guelph. They share little in common now save resentment and hostility that has led to many battles that neither side could win. Centuries of such conflict has left a permanent state of simmering non-aggression, though few would call it peace.

With open war now rare, Ghibelline has rebuilt its greatness, re-establishing itself as a powerful mercantile and political power in its own right. Separated into five semi-autonomous city-states, the Meinloka family members rule over the billions of inhabitants with a silken touch. Their subjects carry out their lives in a state of perpetual joy and content, though this has little to do with the skill of their rulers.

The masses are implanted with a sensory implant tied directly to their ruling Meinloka member. As the noble feels extreme emotion, it is passed to their subjects at a lesser level. Over millennia, filters for negative emotions were added and improved so that now only the pleasurable emotions reach the populace. The resulting happiness and devotion to the ruling family is unmatched across the Vortex, as Ghibellines glow from pure joy and eagerly strive to ensure those who rule the city-states as well as their Emperor, collectively known as the Libertine Council, are always as happy as possible. The Libertine Council in turn makes sure that their subjects experience only the finest of emotions, surely greater than mere currencies or other physical rewards.

THE LIBERTINE COUNCIL

The Libertine Council is made up of descendants of the original Meinloka Clan, meaning that the well-being of the planet is tied up in the wants and needs of a single family. In most cases this would not be cause for concern, but the Meinloka bloodline is highly paranoid, and obsessed with the new. Technologies, fashions, foods, experiences—only the fresh and current can sate the desires of the entire bloodline. Every new toy, bauble, experience, or activity they experience brings pleasure, if only for the moment until the new becomes boring and more is needed. Their insatiable need for all that is previously unheard of has driven them to feats of absurd expenditure and danger, even declarations of war.

The current Emperor is Beneus IV, the 216th direct descendent of the Empress. The eldest of the Council members by several decades, he has grown the Grand Game to become the major cultural event of the Gloaming Worlds. The inclusion of other worlds in their planet's celebration is hardly one of pure neighbourly love and admiration, however. The Emperor has crafted the event to act as an effective way to gather what is not already his with the least amount of actual effort. Ideas, technologies, and stimuli of all types fill the streets of all five Kingdoms during the Grand Game, and the Council uses this time to seed its operatives within the servants, concubines, and slaves of their rivals. The Meinloka family, above all other things, covets that which it does not already have. If what is sought is not freely given, then more devious and licentious plans are made to obtain it.

The Council has become rightfully infamous for stealing, co-opting, and seducing secrets rather than spending the time and effort to actually develop new techniques and ideas. Beneus and his kin also direct a vast network of operatives throughout the planets in the Vortex as well. Ghibelline is forever jealous of the wonders of other worlds, and forever eager to possess them to feed its unending hunger for the new and different.

Council Agent (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
34	38	34	34	42	36	42	31	41	10

Move: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 15

Armour: Mesh coat (Arms, Body, Legs 4)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Charm (Fel), Commerce (Int), Common Lore (Screaming Vortex) (Int), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag) +10, Inquiry (Int), Linguistics (Low Gothic) (Int), Navigate (Surface) (Int), Operate (Surface) (Ag), Parry (WS), Scrutiny (Per), Stealth (Ag), Tech-Use (Int).

Talents: Disarm, Jaded, Quick Draw, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee & Ranged), Unremarkable.

Traits: None.

Gear: Best Quality clothing, dataslate, micro-bead, 2 clips ammo.

Weapons: Power knife (Melee; 1d10+6 E; Pen 5; Power Field), hand cannon (Pistol; 35m; S/—/—; 1d10+4 I; Pen 2; Clip: 5; Rld 2 Full).



THE ISLES OF GNOSI

The most remote of the original six kingdoms, Gnosi is now a gutted husk of its former glory. Once one of the most advanced experimental forges on the planet, it was also the home to the most secure gaols, where the Pit-Lord himself was imprisoned after the initial war with Guelph. All that is left now are broken spires and torn foundations. Much was scorched black during the horrific conflict, but have now grown over with ornate flowers and cloying vines. Below the surface, stories of hidden strongholds, profane research, and unholy rituals echo out from the undersea caverns and surrounding reefs, calling out to the unwary to plumb their depths for untold power. Haunted echoes, phantom energy spikes, hulking mechanical creatures, and reported sightings of ancient Gnosian vessels stoke the Libertine Council's fears that something there desires to return and exact revenge. This does little to dissuade agents from Guelph and foreign warlords from attempting to probe the murky waters surrounding the islands or the caves that go beneath the waves. Though some faded Gnosian relics and weapons exist as reminders of the past, many more are believed to remain among the islands, always drawing the unwary into vaults never to leave.

THE GRAND GAME

Once every six years, the Eternal Kingdoms host a spectacle known as the Grand Game. Though its origins come out of the planet's civil war and the destruction of Gnosi, the current celebration dwarfs anything done at the time of the original event. At its inception, the Grand Game was a chance for the best warriors to prove their nation's worth and capture the missing vote of the lost Kingdom for the following six years.

It takes place in huge arenas large enough to hold entire populations, with the previous winner hosting the event. To better enjoy the combat, the arenas are ensorcelled to transmit whatever the warriors experience to the viewing throngs. Hundreds of Grand Games passed this way, but the masses began to tire of mortal emotions and Daemon Engines were introduced. As their engine inflicts damage, watchers feel the rush of the kill, smell the burning Daemon flesh, and feel the agonising death-throes, savouring sensations incomprehensible to mortal minds. These extreme emotions provide safe outlets to populations carefully shielded from anything but permitted feelings, with levels of pain and exhilaration to exhaust even the most passionate.

If this is not enough, there is even more. The Game launches a celebration in which the entire planet becomes a giant revel that can last for months. Streets everywhere are lined with food, drink, substances, and experiences that titillate the senses and overwhelm sensibilities. Homes are opened, and nothing is forbidden.

For many, the sensory input is so overwhelming and alien that they are rendered catatonic. At its end, the population of Ghibelline usually spends several weeks in recovery, many going through withdrawal-like symptoms after being inundated with stimuli. Nevertheless, as soon as it is complete the populace cannot wait for the next one, knowing that no other experience can equal the excess of the Grand Game.

DAEMON ENGINES

Daemon Engines are a bizarre and frightening hybrid of mechanical ingenuity and arcane impossibility. Incorporating the pulsating rage of a Daemon requires strong bindings, powerful enticements or coercions, and terrible sacrifices. Each construct acts as both prison and new body for the Daemon, bound into service but given a corporeal form that it would otherwise struggle to maintain. The Libertine Council specialises in seducing and enticing Daemons to enter willingly into their constructs. Using a combination of hedonistic endeavours and sacrificial offerings, the forges of the Eternal Kingdoms create engines not only deadly on the fields of battle, but beautiful and terrible to behold. Many delight in the combat of the Game, but some escape to roam the dead islands of Gnosi. The forges of Ghibelline are, however, far from the only ones who manufacture such creations, as many warlords lust for their own Daemon entities to have in their own armies.

DAEMON ENGINE TRAITS

Daemon Engine (X): The creature is a hybrid of Daemon and machine, fusing technology and sorcery in a way that is both seamless and horrifying. The visual impact of these entities strikes fear into friend and foe alike and provides it additional protection against standard armaments. The Daemon Engine has the combined effects of From Beyond and The Stuff of Nightmares and is therefore immune to Fear, Pinning, Stunning, Insanity, Poison, and Disease. Psychic Powers that affect the mind cannot control the Engine as it is bound to the sorcerous runes holding the construct together. In addition, Daemon Engines gain a Toughness Bonus equal to the number in parentheses, which, like the Daemonic Trait, can be negated by force weapons, holy/sanctified weapons, or Direct Damage psychic powers.

Daemonforge: Once per encounter, the Daemon Engine can re-roll a Damage roll in its entirety. Any of the re-rolled dice that come up a 9 or 10 also inflicts 1d5 Wounds on the Daemon Engine.

SLAANESHI DAEMON ENGINE TRAITS

Sensory Overload: The Daemon Engine is geared with foul devices to overwhelm their enemy's senses; strobe lights, dirge casters, even waves of pheromones all act to disorient and confound enemy combatants. Unless the enemy has the From Beyond or Machine Traits, enemies attempting to attack the engine must first make a **Hard (-20) Perception Test**; failure means it is Stunned for the turn from the stimuli barrage.

Soporific Musk: An unearthly pleasant scent surrounds the engine, protecting it from melee combat. Any living target wishing to engage the Daemon Engine in melee combat must make a **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test** or suffer the effects of **Table 5-1: Hallucinogenic Effects** on page 150 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook. Any creature immune to mind control is immune to this effect.

Whispers of Delusion: Slaanesh seeks conversion to his cause and makes promises of greatness in exchange for slavish devotion. As the Engine moves, audible whispers of such lies can be heard in its wake. Any creature within 30m of the Daemon Engine must make a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test** or take 1d10 Corruption Points and be unable to act as they are swept away in delusions of their own grandeur.

TABLE 3-9: DAEMON ENGINE CRITICAL HIT CHART

Damage Points	Result
1-3	Distracting Blow —The Daemon is momentarily annoyed at actually being touched by the weapons of its enemies that it requires a Challenging (+0) Willpower Test to not engage the source of that attack in its next attack. If it was already focused on this target, then it will move with all haste to fully engage the target with any and all weapons at its disposal.
4-6	Ablative Strike —The attack strips layers of armour off the engine as well as some of the protective runes. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points. In addition, any future critical hits receive a bonus of +2 on this chart. This is a cumulative bonus should multiple Ablative Strikes hit the Daemon Engine. Roll a 1d10. On a roll of 9 or 10, any shielding ability (Sensory Overload, for example) is sufficiently ruined and no longer provides protection.
7-8	Weapon Damaged —Randomly select a weapon on the engine. That weapon bears the brunt of the attack and takes the full effects of the blow. While not quite as resilient as Titan weapons, the Daemon will try to preserve its integrity. Roll 1d10, and on a roll of 7 or more, the weapon can be used the next round. On a roll of anything less, the weapon is inoperable until repaired outside of the battle.
9	Penetrating Hit —A powerful attack breaches the construct's structure and allows the Daemon to taste the material world directly. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points and roll an additional 2d10 points of damage. The attack also breached the hull in some capacity; roll a further 1d10. On a roll of 9 or 10, the Daemon Engine suffers a Daemon Unbound! Result.
10+	Daemon Unbound! —The attack is strong enough or well-placed enough that the bindings are completely undone and the construct is unable to contain the Daemon within. For all game purposes, the engine vaporises as the Daemon manifests fully in the material world. The sudden release of Warp energy causes an explosion with a 2d10 x10 metre radius, leaving a crater in its place. Anyone caught within the blast radius suffers 5d10+10 E damage bypassing Armour (unless warded against psychic abilities). Reduce the Damage by 2 points for every full 10 metres the target is away from the exploding engine. Alternatively, at the GM's discretion, the blast damage can be reduced to 2d10+5 E and the Daemon can manifest, freed from its shackles. It may offer the players thanks or engage them in combat, depending on the alignment of the Daemon, the players and NPCs involved, and the adventure.



HELDRAKE

Quite possibly the most offensive melding of Space Marine and Daemon, the Heldrake is a perfect flying engine of destruction. Hanging like bats on the underside of Legion vessels, these huge predators detach upon reaching orbit, swooping down to rend any potential threats in the air before turning on other targets. Though a raptorian Daemon largely controls it, inside the Heldrake are the last foetal remnants of the former pilot, who can do nothing more than scream in horror at what he has become, voicing the unearthly howls that come from the beast's mouth.

Heldrake (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
48	33	55	62	38	31	47	42	--	--

Move: 18/36/54/108 (6/12/18/36)

Wounds: 48

Armour: Machine (12 All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: None.

Talents: None.

Traits: Daemonforge, Daemon Engine (6), Flyer (18), Hoverer (6), Machine (12), Size (8).

Weapons: Hades autocannon (Heavy; 300m; 3/6/12; 3d10+8 I; Pen 6; Devastating [4], Storm) *or* baleflamer (Heavy; 45m; S/—/—; 2d10+3 E; Pen 6; Bathed in Fire†, Devastating [3], Flame, Spray), talons (Melee; 2d10+10 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp, Tearing), wings (Melee; 3d10+5 R; Pen 6, Devastating [7], Meteoric Descent††).

†**Bathed in Fire:** Dodge Tests taken to avoid attacks from a Baleflamer suffer a –20 penalty.

††**Meteoric Descent:** If the Heldrake has moved as a flyer in the previous round, it can charge an opponent and ram, relying on the edges of its wings to slay its foes. Roll the attack as normal with any Dodge attempts made with a –10 penalty. This can only be done if the Heldrake is not engaged in melee combat in the current or the previous round. When this is done, the Heldrake gains the benefits of the Hard Target Talent but cannot fire any ranged weaponry.

All Daemon Engines have the following restrictions:

- Daemon Engines use a living creature profile as they are sentient.
- All Daemon Engines have the Daemon Engine Trait (see page 86).
- Any bound crew members cannot be targeted as they are technically part of the construct.
- They must be Size (7) or larger.

Should the engine receive any Critical Damage, the extent of the injury is not only in the systems needing repair, but also in the other binding mechanisms which hold the Daemon in place. As the bindings unravel, the Daemon is able to taste the material world on its own again and it becomes more active in trying to escape. Should the Daemon break entirely free and compromise the integrity of the engine itself, any creature in the Daemon's path is likely to face a Daemonic Entity of significant power head-on. If a Daemon Engine takes Critical Damage, consult **Table 3–9: Daemon Engine Critical Hit Chart** on page 86 to see the extent of the damage to the internal systems.

Unless otherwise stated as belonging to a specific Chaos Power, Daemon Engines can be aligned with any of the four Chaos Gods and can then take any of the Traits listed for that God. Traits for Tzeentch and Khorne are found in **THE TOME OF FATE** and **THE TOME OF BLOOD**, respectively.



DECIMATOR

The Decimator is a hulking monstrosity made of ancient human and xenos technology infused with the taint of the Warp. Unlike Space Marine Dreadnoughts, Decimators are empty of even the vestiges of the living. Housed instead is a Daemon wishing nothing less than the rending of its enemies and the destruction of their works. Though rare within the Vortex, their numbers are growing. Warlords and other champions of the Dark Gods portend that this is a sign that their time is ascendant and strive to enlist these fell machines to their legions.

Decimator (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	38	54 ⁸	60 ¹⁴	30	32	42	37	--	--

Move: 6/12/18/36

Wounds: 48

Armour: Machine (22 All)

Total TB: 14

Skills: Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (WP) +10.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Bulging Biceps, Fearless, Hip Shooting, Marksman, Quick Draw, Target Selection, Two Weapon Wielder (Ballistic & Melee).

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Daemon Engine (8), Fear (2), Machine (22), Size (7), Sturdy, Touched by the Fates (2), Unnatural Strength (3).

Weapon arms (choose any two): Siege claw (Melee; 2d10+8 R; Pen 7; Linebreaker†, Power Field, Tearing) with built-in heavy flamer (Heavy; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+8 E; Pen 5; Clip 10; 2 Full; Flame, Spray), butcher cannon (Heavy; 300m; S/3/-; 3d10+8 I; Pen 4; Clip 30; 1 Full; Devastating [2], Proven [3], Reliable), soul burner petard (Heavy; 80m; S/-/-; 2d10+8 R; Pen 3; Clip 6; 2 Full; Blast [8], Concussive [2]), storm laser (Heavy; 300m; -/-/6; 2d10+10 E; Pen 5; Clip 60; 2 Full; Proven [2]).

†**Linebreaker:** If the Decimator breaches a wall or other fortification, the heavy flamers built into its claws automatically fire. Enemies within 4 metres of the breach take an automatic heavy flamer hit with no ability to Dodge as the area is saturated with burning promethium.

SOUL GRINDER

Soul Grinders are true personifications of the term Daemon Engine, a literal melding of the machine and the daemonic. Daemons fight across the ash plains outside the Forge of Souls, competing for the chance to become fused into the metal forms, where they can exist longer on the material realms. Looking like a Warp-spawned centaur, they share a common chassis with the mechanical Defiler, but incorporate the fleshy upper torso of a powerful Daemon. The visual presence of the Daemon presents the fearful visage of wrathful gods while harvester cannons and giant claws remove any obstacles in their path.



Soul Grinder (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
36	36	63 ⁹	50 ¹²	34	35	43	39	17	--

Move: 14/24/42/84

Wounds: 52

Armour: Machine (20 All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Parry (Ag).

Talents: Ambidexterous, Crushing Blow, Fearless, Independent Targeting, Iron Jaw, Swift Attack, Two Weapon Wielder (Ballistic & Melee).

Traits: Daemon Engine (7), Fear (3), Machine (20), Quadruped, Size (8), Unnatural Strength (3).

Weapons: Daemon claw/blade (Melee; 2d10+10 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp), mechanical claw (Melee; 2d10+12 R; Pen 6; Tearing, Unwieldy), harvester cannon (Heavy; 180m; 3/6/12; 1d10+6 I; Pen 2; Devastating [3]), mawcannon gout fire (Heavy; 45m; S/-/-; 2d10 I; Pen 3; Devastating [3], Spray, Toxic), mawcannon spittle fire (Heavy; 210m; S/-/-; 2d10+5 X; Pen 5; Blast [4], Devastating [4], Recharge, Toxic).

HEMSK AV'LYD

Rumoured to be one of the original warlords of the Screaming Vortex, Hemsk Av'Lyd represents the epitome of the quest for greatness. Legends of his prowess in battle and victories over breeds of xenos dot hundreds of worlds, but all of them recount his love of instilling fear in his enemies before destroying them outright. He made a point of being as close to his enemies, even going so far as to allow himself to be captured, just so he could taste the change in his foes as the trap sprung and they knew they were lost. For Hemsk, it was the most divine pleasure and he was rumoured to have sung as he waded through his foes, even after his Ascension to Daemon Prince. Unlike many other Daemons, he embraced the opportunity become a Daemon Engine, all the better to share his unique pleasures and tortures with even greater audiences.

Hemsk appears more a walking alabaster sculpture than a war engine. He has a rotating, two-faced head with one side showing a closed helmet and the other a screaming face. Each of his four arms hold slim blades licked with deep magenta fire, and each is sinuously articulated and flexible. Only through the screaming face does Hemsk speak. Constantly emanating a droning hum made of subsonic waves, he wades in closely to his foes' lines to watch and feel the tangible signs of fear. The sound of rapid heartbeats, the smell of emptying bladders and bowels, the sight of troops fleeing in panic, all of these things play like a symphony through the sensors of Hemsk's daemonic form. Any who can withstand his song he favours with his closed helmet, testing their mettle though even fewer survive this other face.

Hemsk Av'Lyd (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
54	36	52	48	68	49	53	68	42	39

Move: 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 54

Armour: Machine (30 All)

Total TB: 16

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel) +20, Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +20, Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Heresy, The Warp) (Int), Parry (Ag) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Ancient Warrior, Blade Dancer, Blademaster, Blind Fighting, Combat Master, Hard Target, Lightning Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Killing Strike, Never Die, Preternatural Speed, Rapid Reaction, Sprint, Step Aside, Sturdy, Two Weapon Wielder (Melee), Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Allure of Slaanesh, Daemon Engine (12), Fear (3), Machine (30), Multiple Arms (4), Sensory Overload, Size (8), Unnatural Strength (4).

Weapons: Blades of Hemsk (Melee; 2d10+9; Pen 6; Balanced, Razor Sharp), Hemsk's Voice (Heavy; 50m; S/- /-; 2d10+5 E; Pen 5; Rld -; Clip -; Concussive [2], Devastating [3], Felling [4], Recharge, Spray).

SUBJUGATOR

When Imperial battle titans walk on a planet, their humanoid forms make them seem like giants of legend striding to do battle in the heavens. It is a stark contrast to see the Subjugator darting across a battlefield akin to a nimble predator seeking its next meal. A monstrous combination of the Steeds and Fiends of the Prince of Pleasure, this two-legged sprinting beast is as deadly as it is graceful. Though its sleeker lines and lighter frame would seemingly make it an easy kill, it is a durable machine, capable of dealing damage to both armour and softer targets alike, and then darting away. Its Tormentor Cannon is capable of turning entire regiments of troops into rows of twitching, groaning bodies absorbed in their own ecstasy, while its hellslicer claws are powerful enough to break heavy armour apart like broiled crustaceans. Outside of the Grand Game, they are sometimes sighted in singular battle with the equally graceful scout titans of the dying Eldar craftworlds, each seeming to forgo all other objectives to engage the other to the death. Many theorise that some ancient, personal rivalry drives these combats, perhaps an echo of the Great Fall.

Subjugator (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
44	45	54	48	65	40	51	66	--	--

Move: 11/22/33/66

Wounds: 108

Armour: Machine (26 All)

Total TB: 16

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag).

Talents: Ambidextrous, Blade Dancer, Hard Target, Sprint, Step Aside; Two Weapon Wielder (Melee).

Traits: Daemon Engine (12), Machine (26), Size (9), Soporific Musk, Unnatural Strength (6), Whispers of Delusion.

Weapons: Hellslicer claws (Melee; 3d10+11 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp, Tearing), tormentor cannon (Heavy; 180m; S/5/10; 2d10+6 E; Pen 2; Clip -; Proven [3], Recharge, Reliable, Throes of Anguish†).

†**Throes of Anguish:** Anyone taking Damage must make a **Difficult (-10) Willpower Test** or submit willingly to the painful caress of the Dark Prince. Those who fail the Test suffer 1d5 levels of Fatigue and 1d5+2 Corruption points as the combination of ecstasy and shame assail the psyche.



MALIGNIA

"It is easy for the unenlightened to overlook the true beauty of Malignia. With allure beside grotesquery, bliss beside sorrow, delight beside disappointment, the planet is a tapestry of sensation and excess. The brutality of its threats is merely spice to those with the eyes to see."

—Sevestar Nool, Adept of the Fleshly Orb

A sphere of deepest malachite, the planet Malignia rivals the beauty of any world in the galaxy. Glowing in its quiet majesty, it hangs upon the very edge of the Screaming Vortex, which provides a backdrop of disorder behind the ephemeral beauty of the planet. Malignia beckons all manner of heretics to her ripe surface. It gleams as an emerald in the crown of the Gloaming Worlds, seeming to promise a cool, refreshing respite from the grim toil and grimy effort of life within the Vortex. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Beneath the lush canopy-spanning jungles and forests crouches a most intriguingly lethal biosphere. Not a step may be taken but the unwary traveller takes his life into his hands. Not a moment breathing in the heady perfumes of the most glorious flowers but the foolish and incautious trusts his survival to the most fickle of gods. Every inch of this beautiful planet has been shaped to tease and tantalise the senses, and to challenge visitors beyond the endurance of all but the strongest and most jaded.

Throughout the Screaming Vortex theories abound as to how such a lethal collection could have been brought together on such a singular, lovely planet. Although no proof has ever been found to confirm or refute even the wildest of claims, there is hardly a Heretic calling the Vortex home that does not harbour his or her own cherished theory as to the nature of Malignia and the diabolical intelligence that seems to lurk behind the existence and placement of every scrap of genetic material that lurks there.

The most common theory says that Malignia is simply the result of the mad whim of the Ruinous Powers. This grey and listless supposition states that the bloodthirst of Khorne, the convoluted designs of Tzeentch, the sweet decay of Nurgle, and the rapturous aesthetic of Slaanesh collided with the rampant Immaterium of the Screaming Vortex to form this highly improbable jewel.

The more paranoid among the denizens of the Vortex suppose that the planet was once the private preserve of a great Daemon Prince or Champion of Slaanesh, whose infernal focus upon the planet shaped it into the deadly yet beautiful trap that it is today. The idea that a single entity, mortal or immortal, might shape the entire biosphere of a planet to ensnare the unwary or the jaded seems to enjoy a wide appeal, for many a quest to Malignia has been launched to discover the identity of this phantom Daemon.

There are as many theories on the purpose of this shaping as there are Heretics with the inclination to wonder. The most hedonistic Heretics can see no greater goal than the pure ambition of personal pleasure. Others see within the patterns of allure and death the work of a mad genius designing a most demanding and rigorous hunting preserve. And the most suspicious of these disquisitive apostates see Malignia as a single massive trap, designed specifically to lure some puissant rival or desirable victim into the embrace of sensation unto death



itself. No single figure in the history of the Vortex has ever been identified as the great draughtsman of Malignia, although many have tried to claim the credit, or attribute it to one great warlord of antiquity or another. The most probable candidate, however, is the powerful warlord Sikari the Vile, who several centuries ago made the planet his personal demesne.

THE TALES OF THE VILE ONE

Legends state that Sikari rose to power within the Vortex many hundreds of years ago. From the folklore of his rise it is clear that he felt a strong affinity with the Prince of Pleasure, as his legend is told in part within the six hundred and sixty six stanzas of the celebrated Q'Sal poet Phaegen D'urs' epic poem *Child of Esthesis*.

The poem sings of the great warlord's visit to the benighted water world of Furia, where his armies crushed a series of equatorial shanty fortresses merely to coax one of the great Furia Leviathans to the surface. With thousands of minions singing his glories, he leapt from his warship to ride upon its back across the World Ocean until the beast finally collapsed from exhaustion. Other stanzas talk of Sikari's first foray to the enigmatic Flaming Tomb, tantalised by the concept of an entire planet that presented itself as a single enormous puzzle lock. The poem speaks in nothing but convoluted metaphor of these adventures, however.

The latter stanzas tell of a growing passion for the floating arenas of Kurse. Many tales refer to a time when the victories grew stale, and the acquisition of power had become the worst form of banal distraction, causing Sikari to turn more and

more to the immediate satisfaction and sensations of personal combat. He turned to the bloodworld of Kurse to fill this new hunger, where he is still remembered among the warriors and the spectators alike for his talents in choreographing each bout as an improvised devotional to the Dark Prince. It is thought that during his time on Kurse he became the Vile, and also where he made the acquaintance of the foul Dark Eldar, xenos artists who could truly appreciate his skills and sense of style. Although the *Child of Esthesis* makes no mention of these cruel aliens, whispers abound of unholy alliances sealed in blood and a wide array of bacchanalian rituals that, it is supposed, connect the legends of the great warlord to these enigmatic xenos to this very day.

At the height of his power, the stories say that Sikari directed his followers to the planet Malignia, where his warbands descended upon the planet and purged all other sentients from its surface. At his command, a palace of such grandeur and presumptuous scope that the entire Vortex stood in awe soon arose from the jungles.

It is said that both forges of the Hollows, unbeknownst to each other, contributed to the inner workings of this massive edifice. The Sorcerers of Q'Sal are also rumoured to have supplied knowledge and expertise to the crafting of the palace. The darkest tales and rumours claim that Sikari had saved the bodies of every creature he had ever bested, held in stasis for this very project. These stygian legends say that the bones of these vanquished foes were melted down and then somehow coaxed upwards into the smooth, flowing, beautiful, and yet slightly disturbing lines of the pleasure palace Gratifax.

Many dark whispers speak of xenos influence during the raising of Gratifax, although no proof has ever been found to support such rumours. What is clear is that the palace, graceful and delicate with its tall thin towers and spiralled minarets, is clearly crafted from some ivory-like material that now defies all attempts to scratch or harm it in any way. Despite the fine appearance of the palace's architecture, the walls have withstood countless assaults over time, and very few Heretics have breached them to sample the unnervingly eager hospitality of those who reside within.

As the palace of Gratifax itself was being finished, the surrounding forests were lashed and brutalised into a semblance of domestication. Ferocious, bloodthirsty plants and animals were incorporated into the landscape to provide a beautiful vista from the wide windows of the palace while occupying an integral place in the deliberate and layered defences of the warlord's residence. Such was the fierce efficiency of these native life forms that Sikari took to using them to train his own warriors and security personnel.

Integrated into the defensive structural design of the palace was a vast array of void shields, ancient beyond measure, pulled from the guts of vanquished battleships from half a dozen worlds. Through some strange sorcery, the generators and engines driving these shields were tied indelibly into the life-essence of the palace's living guardians, such that they cannot fail while the palace is defended. These shields rendered the palace, the grounds, and the surrounding countryside nearly impervious to assault from above while not obstructing the views from the palace into

THE PATHS OF SENSATION

To walk through the forests of Malignia without protection is to court a harsh cacophony of scents that batters the mind. Any Heretic on the surface of Malignia lacking basic respiratory protection is subject to any of a number of local olfactory assaults that duplicate the effects of a wide range of narcotics and other drugs.

Unprotected Characters exposed to the enticing aromas of Malignia must make an immediate **Challenging (+0) Perception Test** or roll 1d10 on the table below. For every Degree of Failure (or Success, if the Renegade is in fact courting such sensations), add +1 to the result. These act as if the character took a dose of the drug below, and although this does not result in addiction, any future Test to avoid Addition to these substances will suffer a -10 Penalty.

The effects of the drugs can be found in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook and the Armoury section of this book.

TABLE 3-10: MALIGNIA FLORA EFFECTS

D10 Result:	Effect:
1-2	Obscura
3-4	Satrophine
5-6	Manic
7-8	Glimmerdust
9	Final Kiss
10+	Spook

the bedlam of the Vortex overhead. Guarding the walls and halls of Gratifax itself were legions of automated defence emplacements mounting everything from ancient Imperial siege defences to the most esoteric and arcane of arms. In most instances, mindless creatures man these emplacements, akin in many ways to the lobotomised automatons of Imperial technology, except that these servants are rumoured to have been the fallen enemies of Sikari, twisted and broken in the chambers beneath Gratifax until they begged to be stripped of their humanity and socketed into the mechanisms of their tormentor's defences.

The final line of defence for Sikari the Vile, and his most lasting contribution to the lore of the Screaming Vortex, was the coterie of concubine-witches that rumours say still haunt the empty halls of the vast palace. Wraithlike beings of seemingly unsurpassed, ephemeral beauty, these creatures are supposed to be trapped for all eternity to wander throughout Gratifax. If the tales can be believed, a concubine-witch can only know freedom from the hellish prison of its own body when it receives the caress of a willing suitor. Each appears to possess attributes of both sexes or neither, depending on the viewer, but always alarmingly alluring to all they encounter. The darkest whispers say that, beneath clever illusion, the concubine-witch's true visage is terrible to behold, twisted through hideous psycho-surgery and ritual, face flensed away, massive, thick shunts sunk directly into its brain to tap natural powers, its own sensory organs ground down so as to not distract them from this newly-awakened Warp sense.

The full extent of the gifts these concubines received for their pain and suffering is unknown. However, it is often speculated that they must have some ability to cloud the minds of those they approach, and thus hide their true, hideous appearance until such time as they can make their attack, or attempt to seduce them into offering the caress that can free them from their torment. Considering that Sikari the Vile has been missing for many hundreds of years now, and yet the concubine-witches seem still to man the parapets and guard his gates, it is clear that for any other gifts that may offset their condition, Sikari was able to convey the questionable legacy of immortality upon them.

The most exquisite element of the concubine-witches' plight is that, according to the legends, they willingly allowed themselves to be victimised in this way, such was their immense love for Sikari and the power he wielded. Each witch was allowed to keep full memories of this fact in their altered state, motivated through compulsions beyond denial to protect the warlord and all he held dear even as they railed against the silence of their own minds, immersed in an eternity of regret.

Sikari disappeared after a final expedition to the Flaming Tomb. It is assumed his initial failure there had resulted in an exquisite emotional torture for decades that he could bear no longer. Leaving behind nearly all of his treasures, Sikari the Vile vanished into legend. Now the pleasure palace Gratifax occupies its own unique niche within the ecosystem of lure and trap that personify Malignia. Countless warlords and sorcerers have descended upon the planet in an attempt to claim the treasure for their own. No records indicate anyone has succeeded.

Concubine-Witch (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
32	40	37	36	33	40	37	45	20	08	

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Armour: Ferosilks and chains (2 All)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag).

Talents: Catfall, Combat Master, Furious Assault, Lightning Reflexes, Mimic, Psy-Rating (3), Two Weapon Wielder.

Weapons: Veil of pain (Melee; 3m; 1d10+4 R; Pen 0; Crippling [2], Flexible, Toxic [1]), vicious claws (Melee; 1d10+3 R; Pen 1; Toxic [2]).

Gear: Willowy silks and weapon-jewellery.

Psychic Power: Delude.

Wounds: 12

Total TB: 3

CREATURES OF MALIGNIA

The life forms of Malignia seem to have been designed for their unconventional beauty as well as for their lethality. There is an obscene aesthetic behind the mosaic of creatures, plants, and terrain that speaks of some higher power or intelligence bending the entire planet to its nefarious will, and many powerful beings come to Malignia for the sheer sensory overload that its multi-level biosphere can offer.

The planet presents a veritable kaleidoscope of deaths to the unwary. From creatures that mimic their prey down to the very pheromones they exude, to predators that feed on the raw stuff of sentient emotion, sucking their victims dry of every last drop of feeling before abandoning their withered husks on the forest floor, few other planets provide such a lethal gamut.

One of the most frightening and insidious entities to haunt the forest shadows is the Creeping Death, a form of mould or fungus that turns everything it touches into a perfectly rendered onyx-like statue. The process, however, takes many years, and the victim is completely aware the entire time, experiencing the horrific pain of its own slow death. One nerve at a time, the body dies, leaving behind a lifeless statue to commemorate its own foolishness. Only a single drop or flake is enough to infect almost any living organism, and the cellular infestation occurs so quickly that not even complete removal of the initially infected limb can save them.

Those infected are almost immediately overcome with a wave of crushing hopelessness as they realise their ultimate fate, but the Creeping Death does not let them succumb to this despair. Through a little-understood empathic link, the fungus drives the prey to survive, often forcing them into a gluttonous frenzy and rewarding such behaviour with rapturous feedback. Once the host dies, the Creeping Death itself dies, and so most who fall victim to this blight are generally captured and isolated, or merely killed if those capturing them have no taste for the finer sensations of life.

The Creeping Death makes for a favoured form of assassination within the Screaming Vortex, although almost always frowned upon by others in the vicinity due to the virulent nature of the organism. Rumours speak of some depraved souls, so far gone down the paths of excess that their jaded minds can conceive of no greater experience than to witness the physical pain and helplessness of their own imminent, lingering death.

Bloated Sabre Lion

Haunting the rivers and swamplands of Malignia are the creatures considered to be one of the planet's dominant predators, the Bloated Sabre Lion. The creature's bulk is vast, yet easily concealed when hidden amidst the reeds and shore flowers of the small rivers that abound across the planet. The massive, swollen body of the creature is entirely hairless, its skin soft and pink as a maiden's cheek, which tends to have a disconcerting effect on many who have been forced to confront the beasts.

Although often slow and methodical, the Bloated Sabre Lion is incredibly fast when striking prey from its hidden wallows, attacking with claws the size of sword blades and a mouth full of razor fangs that have been known to pierce the heaviest ceramite armour. Despite the healthy shading of its flesh, it is extremely difficult to spot the Sabre Lion in its own habitat, and the creature, most often hunting from cover, usually strikes with the advantage of surprise. Many storied warriors, coming to Malignia to prove their worth, have been found wanting against this unprepossessing river dweller.

Bloated Sabre Lion (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	--	61	52	18	18	41	15	15	--

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 50

Armour: Thick hide (4 All)

Total TB: 10

Skills: Awareness (Per), Stealth (Ag) +30.

Talents: Crushing Blow, Heightened Senses +20, Lightning Reflexes, Preternatural Speed, Thunder Charge, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Bestial, Brutal Charge, Deadly Natural Weapons, Natural Armour, Quadruped, Size (6), Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+10 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp), jaws (Melee; 1d10+10 R; Pen 6; Razor Sharp, Toxic [4]).

Shade Mauler

An apex predator throughout most of Malignia, the Shade Mauler's dusky skin and wispy fur serve to mask its outline in the murky twilight of its chosen hunting grounds. It is thought to be some form of native primate, and its opposable thumbs and prehensile fingers, each ending in a dagger-sized claw, are formidable weapons against all but the most heavily armoured opponent.

The Shade Mauler is more than a mere predator, however. As one of the many creatures on Malignia who feeds, at least in part, on the emotional effluvia of its prey, the creature often stalks its chosen victim through the shadows for miles, making constant low noises indicating its presence, but not enough for its quarry to attack. The unease thus caused from the constant taunting not only serves to diminish the chosen victim's ability to fight when the time comes, but also seems to somehow feed the creature as well.

Shade Mauler (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	20	48	42	43	25	35	21	15	--

Movement: 4/8/12/21

Wounds: 12

Armour: Thick hide (2 All)

Total TB: 8

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Stealth (Ag) +30.

Talents: Double Team, Swift Attack, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, Natural Armour, Unnatural Strength (2), Unnatural Toughness (4).

Weapons: Teeth and claws (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 2; Crippling, Rending).

It Senses Your Fear: For each fifteen minutes that a Shade Mauler shadows him, a character must take a **Challenging (+0) Perception Test**. Each time this is failed, all Tests taken until the next Perception Test suffer a Penalty equal to the Degrees of Failure multiplied by ten (including the next Perception Test). The Shade Mauler heals a number of wounds equal to the same Degree of Failure, up to its normal maximum Wounds characteristic.

Haemodryad

Easily one of the strangest creatures on the verdant planet of Malignia is the Haemodryad. Intelligent in a diabolical way, these small, ravenous creatures make their homes in the rotted boles of dead trees in the deepest sections of the great forests. It is a most repulsive creature, taking the form of a large, pulsing brain carried along on spindly spider legs and with a whip-like, segmented tail bearing a vicious poisoned stinger.

The Haemodryad has no sensory organs of its own, depending instead on the senses of all sentient creatures in the vicinity including those of its prey. The creature reaches out with psychic tendrils that connect it with all life forces present, tapping into their nervous systems to use their own senses to perceive its surroundings.

Its chosen weapon on the hunt is its ability to craft incredibly enriched illusions in the mind of its prey. The creature reaches into the mind of its victim and weaves an image that offers the quarry its heart's desire. These images are as diverse as the creatures the Haemodryad preys upon, from shapely beings of attractive forms, to an epic discovery lying discarded upon the forest floor. As the prey stands swaying in a daze, the Haemodryad begins to siphon off its life essence, sucking the vital energies from the creature's mind and aging it in a rapid orgy of anima consumption.

Haemodryad (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
42	15	33	30	21	47	19	61	15	--

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Wounds: 10

Armour: None

Total TB: 3

Skills: Charm (Fel) +40, Deceive (Fel) +40, Stealth (Ag) +30.

Talents: Hard Target, Strong Minded.

Traits: Crawler, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (1), Toxic (2), Unnatural Senses (20).

Weapons: Poisoned Barbs (Melee; 1d10+3 I; Pen 2; Toxic [4], Tearing).

A Feast of Essence: When the Haemodryad attacks its victim, the character must take an Opposed Willpower Test. If the character wins, there is no effect. If the Haemodryad wins, the character is incapable of taking any actions until its next turn, during which it must pass an Opposed Willpower Test with a penalty equal to the Degrees of Failure of the last test. For each full Round the character is stunned in this way, it loses a total of 1d5 points from a Characteristics the player chooses. This loss is temporary, but for each 10 points of Toughness lost, the character will lose one Wound as well.



Faetopiary

Faetopiary is found only in the verge territory between Sikari's palace and the greater world forest of the planet. This border region where the somewhat domesticated landscape and the natural lethality of the planet merge is particularly deadly, and the Faetopiary is a primary reason for this.

Presenting initially as a bushy plant ranging in size from weedy to immense, Faetopiary appears as beautifully sculpted topiary taking on any of an infinite number of pleasing shapes. However, when a suitable target presents itself, the plant springs to life with wildly violent abandon.

Tethered to the ground with umbilicus-vines, the plant's range is limited but usually it can move far enough to pounce upon an unwary trespasser and savage them with vicious thorn-claws and barbed spine-teeth. The verge of the grounds of Gratifax are littered with the bones of creatures who believed they had successfully penetrated to a safe zone, only to be brutally murdered by the very bushes of the garden.

Faetopiary (Troop)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
33	--	36	51	38	15	42	20	15	--	

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Armour: Thick, gnarled bark (5 All)

Skills: Dodge (Ag) +10, Stealth (Ag) +30.

Talents: Lightning Attack, Rapid Reaction, True Grit, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, Natural Armour, Multiple Arms (4), Regeneration (4), Size (Varies), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (3), Unnatural Toughness (3).

Weapons: Thorns and branches (Melee; 1d10+10 R; Pen 4; Crippling [2], Razor Sharp, Toxic [4]).

Child of the Earth: The Faetopiary cannot move further than 2d10 metres away from its initial location. If the umbilicus-vine is cut, the creature fights with the Frenzy Skill until the end of the Encounter, but then dies within 1d5 hours.

DARK ELДАР

Ever since Sikari made the acquaintance of the Dark Eldar in the pits of Kurse, these strange alien hunters have been known to descend upon Malignia for their own enigmatic purposes. Perhaps they are hunting for their own sport or to test their prowess, or perhaps they are actually trapping and capturing the creatures of the planet for their own fey purposes. In living memory, all Dark Eldar sighted on the planet's surface are raiders from the Nexus of Shadows, perched as it is so close to the Screaming Vortex.

There are many theories as to why the Dark Eldar of the Nexus of Shadows choose to brave the surface of Malignia, from some arcane compact with the disappeared Sikari to far more pedestrian motivations, at least for a malicious and spiteful race.

One trait many Dark Eldar seem to own in abundance is a never-ending drive to test themselves against a worthy adversary. From the warriors who voluntarily enter the pits of Kurse to the shrieking murderers who form the vanguard of

most Dark Eldar war parties, the thirst for recognition in the face of personal combat is palpable in the inscrutable eyes of many of these murderous xenos.



Coupled with the desire for thrilling combat is the desire to tempt the fate that has claimed so many of their kin over the millennia, and bait the Great Enemy in his own lair. Their first step from the Nexus is often seen as an embarkation upon a path of self-destruction with Slaanesh looming ever in the background, ready to claim his toll in ancient souls. The fact that Malignia has been touched for eons by Slaanesh, and was then consecrated in act and will by the great warlord Sikari the Vile centuries ago, makes the planet the perfect training ground for those wishing to skirt the very edge of oblivion, look down into the abyss, and cast their spite into the face of the Prince of Pleasure.

Known for providing deadly creatures for the fighting pits of Kurse, and rumoured to take even more terrible monsters for their own arenas in the Nexus, these xenos have a long history of capturing lethal beasts and bending them to their dark will.

Those warbands who have met the Dark Eldar in open battle know that creatures trained as battle surrogates often accompany them into combat. From twisted mutant great cats to flocks of vicious avians, the Dark Eldar have been known to train almost any form of lethal fauna to their violent whim.

Aside from the great spectacle combats of the arenas, these aliens have been known to take even the smallest violent specimens and twist them into weapons of assassination. As the approved form of upward mobility in their own society,

these xenos have perfected the art of eliminating social peers and superiors with all manner of weapons and poisons. But for many Dark Eldar Archons, the favoured form of executing one's enemies is through the judicious application of strange and interesting animals from the far corners of the galaxy, often chosen for the spectacular results of their varied forms of assault.

Possibly the most common rationale for the attempted domestication of dangerous beasts from different worlds among the Dark Eldar, and the Dark Eldar of the Nexus of Shadows in particular, is as the use of household pets. Chosen as much for their beautiful aspect as for their amusingly violent and deadly tendencies, creatures chosen to adorn the domiciles of the most powerful and important personages of Dark Eldar society often also serve as a last line of defence in the face of treacherous attack. There is nothing more amusing to a jaded Dark Eldar lord than the sight of an enemy, on the verge of victory, suddenly torn apart by the resident house feline.

Aside from the great, violent animals often captured and broken to the Dark Eldar will, rumours speak of those among the Dark Eldar Haemonculi serving the coven of the Sutured Helix, visiting Malignia for their own torturous purposes.

One of the most insidious creatures of Malignia often used by the Haemonculi of the Sutured Helix is the Oculovyrm. A tiny parasite roughly the length of a nail freshly pulled from a victim's smallest finger, the Oculovyrm burrows into the brain of the chosen victim and taps into their optic nerves, unleashing the full spectrum of light and energy directly to their brain, often driving the subject insane through the painfully intense sensation of visual over-stimulation.

A personal favourite of the Dark Eldar is a plant known to them as Fibrous Tribulation. A small moss-like organism, once placed upon the bare flesh of a subject, this plant immediately sends wire-like tendrils into the meat, rooting deep and attaching to any nearby nerve clusters. Once the attachment is complete, the plant transmits any sensations recorded by its purple-tinged mossy surface into the nervous system of its host one hundred fold. The Tribulation spreads over time, eventually covering the entire host with what appears, from any distance, as fine purple fur. Once a subject is completely covered in the Fibrous Tribulation, the slightest breeze can throw them into paroxysms of joy or pain depending on the temperature. The Dark Eldar will often introduce the Tribulation to a subject before torture, or to those victims sent early into gladiatorial arenas to warm up the crowd. Some have even been known to place the plant upon their own flesh, despite the obvious hazards. The only way to remove Fibrous Tribulation is to burn it completely from the host. Most do not survive the procedure.

The various types of Dark Eldar that have been discovered or glimpsed upon the surface of Malignia are most often from the Cult of the Withered Blade, and range from the Beastmasters that come to capture animals, to the Wyches that come to train or test their expertise. The occasional Bloodbride may travel here to savour the base terrors it offers. There are even dark whispers that Anyalra, Succubus of the Cult of the Withered Blade, occasionally ventures to Malignia herself to further her quest for perfection in the face of the many beasts and other hostile threats the planet offers.

Despite their connection with Sikari the Vile, the Dark Eldar never appear near Gratifax, giving the shields, weapon emplacements, and concubine-witches a wide berth. Some take this as tacit proof of a compact between the great warlord and the deadly xenos. Others of a more suspicious persuasion assume the Dark Eldar are merely biding their time, waiting for others to blunder their way through the defences so they may dance in through the blasted doors, attack the invading Heretics in their moment of glory, and simply take whatever treasures they wish from the cooling hands of the dead. One thing is sure, however; no one who has ever asked any of the Dark Eldar the reason for their reluctance has reported any response other than a cruel, flashing blade.

BEASTMASTER HUNTERS OF THE WITHERED BLADE

Beastmasters are those remote members of the Wych Cult responsible for capturing the fantastical creatures that make their way into the arenas and warbands of the Dark Eldar, and breaking them to the will of their new masters. Although in battle they often are seen riding the dreaded skyboards of the xenos shock troops, when on the hunt within the jungles these solitary beings prefer the stability and surety of their own two feet.

Beastmasters are often drawn to their trade through personalities who prefer to dominate lesser beings and take greater than average joy in inflicting pain and discomfort in others. Because of these tendencies, most Beastmasters equip themselves with weapons more likely to stun or shock than to kill or injure. Bearing weapons such as the cruel agoniser or a whip-thin xenos shock maul, Beastmasters take great joy in bringing pain to their adversaries or their quarry alike.

Beastmaster Hunter (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
46	40	40	38	49	36	42	35	41	--

Movement: 7/14/21/42

Wounds: 12

Armour: Wychsuit (All 4)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Awareness (Per), Command (Fel) +10, Common Lore (Dark Eldar), (Nexus of Shadows) (Int), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S) +20, Medicae (Int), Survival (Int) +20.

Talents: Air of Authority, Ambidextrous, Catfall, Combat Master, Disturbing Voice, Hard Target, Iron Jaw, Jaded, Lightning Reflexes, Pity the Weak, Sprint, Sure Strike, Takedown, Two-Weapon Wielder, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Dark Sight, Heightened Senses (Hearing, Sight), Sturdy, Unnatural Agility (3).

Weapons: Agoniser (Melee; 3m; 1d10+7 R; Pen 6; Flexible, Shocking Tearing), splinter pistol (Pistol; 30m; S/3/5; 1d10+2 R; Pen 3; Clip 40; Reload 2 Full; Toxic [4]).

Gear: Dominar's Mask†, 2 doses of Slaughter and 2 doses of Rose, 2 weapon clips.

†**Dominar's Mask:** The wearer of a Dominar's Mask can re-roll failed Intimidate and Survival (Wrangling) Tests.

Wyches of the Cult of the Withered Blade

The gladiatorial masters of the Wych Cults are experts at nearly every form of personal combat, and the Wyches of the Cult of the Withered Blade are no exception. Following the predilections of their Succubus Anyalra, they strive for utter perfection in everything that they do, often travelling to Malignia to test themselves against the deadly planet. Training to the point of exhaustion every day, in the arena their every move is purposeful and bold. They make no strike without having a riposte at the ready, launch no riposte that does not kiss flesh, and make no wound without knowing exactly what effect it has on their opponent and the combat as a whole.

Wyches of the Cult of the Withered Blade, more than any other Dark Eldar encountered within the Screaming Vortex, take great pride in the artistry of the kill. They wield their weapons with an inventive precision that quite often leaves spectators in awe of their prowess and its results. They pride themselves not on showy, bloody deaths, but rather on the infliction of many minor wounds, sapping the opponent of strength and will, only to bring the bout to an abrupt and violent conclusion with a sudden burst of speed and the finality of a severed artery or vein. The opponent, dead minutes before his brain stops, is left in wonderment and despair as he bleeds out through neat, exact wounds only wide enough and only deep enough to let death in.

Wych (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
48	42	38	32	51	34	48	30	46	--

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Armour: Wychsuit (All 4)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Awareness (Per), Common Lore (Dark Eldar), (Nexus of Shadows) (Int), Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag) +20, Medicae (Int), Parry (WS) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Catfall, Combat Master, Furious Assault, Hard Target, Jaded, Lightning Reflexes, Pity the Weak, Precise Blow, Rapid Reaction, Sprint, Sure Strike, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Takedown, Two-Weapon Wielder, Unarmed Master.

Traits: Dark Sight, Heightened Senses (Hearing, Sight), Unnatural Agility (3).

Wounds: 14

Total TB: 3



Weapons: Poisoned Arena Blade (Melee; 1d10+3 R; Pen 3; Crippling [2], Razor Sharp, Toxic [4]), splinter pistol (Pistol; 30m; S/3/5; 1d10+2 R; Pen 3; Clip 40; Reload 2 Full; Toxic [4]).

Some high-ranking Wyches may replace either their blade or pistol or both with the following weapons: shardnet (Melee; 2m; 1d5+3 R; Pen 0; Flexible, Snare [3]) and impaler (Melee; 2m; 1d10+3 R; Pen 3; Proven [4], Tearing), a pair of hydra gauntlets† (Melee; 1d10+3 R; Pen 2; Razor Sharp, Toxic [2]), or a razor flail (Melee; 3m; 1d10+3 R; Pen 4; Flexible, Razor Sharp, Crippling [4]), or an agoniser (Melee; 3m; 1d10+7 R; Pen 6; Flexible, Shocking, Tearing).

Gear: 2 doses of Frenzon and 2 doses of Slaughter, 2 weapon clips. †A Wych wielding a pair of hydra gauntlets gains the Lightning Attack Talent.



EXILES OF THE NEXUS

The vast majority of Dark Eldar found within the Screaming Vortex operate from the Nexus of Shadows, a dark and forbidding artificial world these vicious xenos have dominated for hundreds of years. For more information about this terrible realm and the foul creatures within, see **ROGUE TRADER** adventure supplement **THE SOUL REAVER**.

MAMMON

"You have not tasted perversity until you have visited Mammon, and witnessed first hand the glorious, unquestioned faith with which its inhabitants strive to prove their worth... there is no better proof of the Corpse-God's impotence than these poor wretches, ever-striving in his name, who are driven to live, fight, and die for generations, never to know reward or relief. It truly is exquisite."

—Belia Dustari, Violatrix of Estaba

From orbit, the planet Mammon appears to be a dun-coloured, lifeless rock marred with huge, circular scars of craters, some of which stretch across entire continents. This is not due to natural occurrences, but instead the work of its natives. War dominates life on Mammon, and has for as long as living memory within the Screaming Vortex. Ancient wars heated the planet very nearly beyond human endurance, boiling off the oceans, killing most plant-life, and leaving instead a barren desert that stretches from pole to pole and all the way around the girdle of the world. What water remains is polluted beyond use from forge run-offs to become foetid morasses of effluvia and concentrated poisons.

Two factions have battled their way across the planet for thousands upon thousands of years, knowing only warfare and strife, with no interruption to the violence and the acrimony. They are bitter rivals made even more violent and intractable through the iron will of complete righteous indignation and unshakeable faith. For upon the cursed world of Mammon the cruellest of all celestial caprices is being played out in bloody earnest every day.

Both of the tattered coalitions roaring back and forth across the blasted surface of Mammon truly believes itself to be the true servants of the God-Emperor on Earth, while the other faction is seen to be the perfidious minions of the Ruinous Powers, whose ascendance keeps the world in thrall. Each and every soldier on the planet, from the highest ranking general to the youngest raw recruit, truly believes, to the very marrow of their bones, that they fight on the side of righteousness. In a region where belief defines reality, their absolute belief has become a power of its own and is the source of both fascination and amusement throughout the Vortex.

THE WAR WITHOUT END

The war is a ceaseless quest to prove themselves the True Disciples of He Who Sits On Terra. Harping demagogues dominate both factions, and extort their people to greater and greater feats of violence and depravity against the enemy. Both firmly believe that only through the utter eradication of the other can they prove they are worthy of salvation. All live for that glorious moment when the last infidel is put to the blood-drenched sword, and the Emperor finally descends unto them and takes them bodily back to Terra. There, they believe they will be rewarded with all manner of foods and other pleasures that have been eternally denied to them upon the ravaged world of their parturition.

Through millennia of warfare, nearly everything has been destroyed upon Mammon. Not even vague records speak of a time when the cities and monuments that now lie broken and scattered upon the sands of the planet were first created. The hordes of the true believers live in the blasted-out shells of former glory, often finding the only shelter from acid rain

and toxic clouds of ancient bio-weapons in the warped and rusted remains of vehicles they no longer have the ability to maintain or use. Villages are seeded in sheltered valleys all over the planet, where the few true-born children are raised in an atmosphere of pure faith, hatred, and fear of the dreaded Other. There is no such thing as a non-combatant upon Mammon, for the Emperor wishes only for them to spill the blood of their enemies onto the sand of this crucible of faith.

For that is the framework upon which hangs every living soul's life struggle. Each person on Mammon is judged upon the depth and conviction of their faith in the distant Emperor only through the pain and suffering they are able to inflict upon the vile apostates. Every moment of every day is spent trying to please the cardinals-militant through their devotion and blind acceptance of what passes for the Imperial Creed on this hellish, benighted world. There is no value assigned to any person, no matter their age or ability, that does not directly catenate to the death or punishment of the heathen foe.

What little treasure is left on the planet after countless ages of strife and warfare is collected in ramshackle cities constructed from the blasted ruins of ancient days. Tottering towers guard shaky walls of rubble and debris as central keeps, the tallest structures in the cities, are thrown together to house the dented, dulled wealth of former empires. These treasures are no longer seen as valuable in their own right, but rather as a means of keeping track of the sanctity of one's faction. Those with the most gold or other treasures, seized from the enemy and kept from them through any means possible, are seen to be in the ascendant in the eyes of the Emperor and thus have struggled that much closer to the gates of heavenly Terra.

Life upon the degenerate world of Mammon is a brutal struggle for survival against not only the hated foe, but against the very planet itself, as the dun orb has suffered such great indignities of warfare that only within the twisted realities of a Warp rift might any life cling to it at all.

Food is scraped from the blasted landscape in the form of foul weeds, dry mosses, and the emaciated bodies of scavenging rodents. In the extreme conditions that dominate much of the planet, the holy warriors are forced to eat their own dead, denying even unto death any form of glory or dignity that might be recognised by the wider galaxy. The soldiers of Mammon do not fight for glory in death, but for the return of the Emperor and the salvation of future generations, and thus even the raw materials of the dead are seen as merely fodder for the eternal struggle. Such is the depth of their faith that they live, breathe, and die not for their own glory, but for the glory of descendants yet unborn, smiled upon by the distant Emperor in future days the current warrior generations cannot hope to feel themselves.

The clothing worn by the righteous warriors of Mammon is fit to cause the most stoic Heretic to chuckle beneath an upraised claw. Ancient synthetic fabrics, tattered and worn from centuries of use, are embellished with crude, hand-made fetishes and decorations that attempt to mimic the regalia of the true Imperial Creed. Having nothing but the debased efforts of previous generations, however, the original source of inspiration for these tokens can barely be ascertained from the maladroit efforts of contemporary artisans.



Reproduction upon Mammon is one of the greatest mysteries to those intrigued by life there. A small number of natural children are born to the true believers of both sides each year, but hardly enough to feed the ravenous needs of their eternal holy wars. No regulated attempt has ever been made to ascertain where future generations are produced, but many theories have been bandied about. Some believe that each faction has discovered ancient cloning facilities beneath the ruins of Mammon's lost glory, and use these debased factoria to create poor copies of themselves to carry out the fight. Others opine that the gods themselves seed the planet with fresh fanatics, dropping them unnoticed into single-minded mobs too absorbed in their own hatred to even notice. A few more fanciful theories speak of the spontaneous creation of human simulacra springing forth from the utter rancour that pervades the planet.

The one constant of life on Mammon is unquestioning faith. These fanatical warriors wage their holy wars with only the most rough-hewn melee weapons such as clubs and spears crafted from rusty rebar or support material pulled from the ruins. Almost all warfare upon Mammon takes the form of large, unruly mobs with makeshift weapons rushing across the blasted landscape at each other screaming their bastardised psalms and litanies in cracked and broken voices, their overpowering faith radiating from their crazed faces in waves. However, occasionally a cardinal-militant dares the shame and ignominy of dealing with the vile Vortex-dwellers to purchase weapons with some of his hoarded cache, such is his frustration with the bloody status quo. Despite the inevitably inferior quality of even these off-world weapons,

they are invariably prized given the low quality of local weaponry. As such, these prizes are only entrusted into the hands of the most lauded champions, and entire wars have been fought to reclaim a single, poor-quality laspistol lost when the champion who bore it into battle fell.

Glory, that most ephemeral of rewards, is often promised to those who fall in the Emperor's name on Mammon, but the never-ending warfare allows for no time to bury the dead with any sort of ceremony no matter how high they have risen. From the lowliest child-soldier or the highest cardinal-militant, all are merely cast aside when they fall. No monuments are raised in their honour, no reminders of their deeds or sacrifices remain. The dead, if they are not eaten to nourish the next wave, are simply churned underfoot by the next assault of the next battle in the next war.

The depths and scope of the faith of Mammon is of never-ending fascination to their celestial neighbours. Mammon is treasured as a living work of art dedicated to the sheer power of human faith as well as the abasement of the Emperor's loyal slaves. There are many theories as to the identity of the artistic genius who could have conceived of such a magnum opus, and many wonder at a mind capable of creating a situation like that upon Mammon and how it could be maintained in the face of an eternity of hatred and bloodshed without let.

There is much speculation as to what power might have brought about the situation on Mammon among the enthusiasts who look to the planet as an ever evolving work of performance art. Some speak of Daemon Princes or even the direct intervention of the Dark Gods themselves, given

the incredibly complex nature of the farce playing out upon the demented denizens of the benighted planet. By far, the majority of the contemplation upon this most glorious work of craftsmanship and ingenuity pertains to the loyalty of the powers behind the eternal dance of violence.

One of the most common theories ascribes the bloody handed god Khorne to the paragon of violence playing out eternally across the planet. Others see Mammon as a vast experiment of the Architect of Fate, allowing Tzeentch to watch how the puppets of the Corpse God might operate under intolerable stress. Some claim that only Grandfather Nurgle would be able to orchestrate such a foetid swamp of spiritual, societal, and material decay. The most common power attributed to this artistic triumph, however, is that most theatrical of entities, the Prince of Sensation himself. The skill to drive an entire planet to the very edge of devotional ecstasy, mindless worship, and beyond, to plumb the very depths of perfect faith, could only be the provenance of Slaanesh.

Whatever the initial source of the planet's grand vision, the contemporary reality of Mammon's fate is a much more pressing topic of speculation among the most high-ranking heretics in the Screaming Vortex. A favourite theory, spoken only in hushed whispers, tells of the dreaded Word Bearers and their never-ending quest to find new excesses in devotion and faith as well as to humiliate the believers of the Emperor. These ancient warriors and their hatred for all proponents of the corpse-god is well known, as is their never-sated desire to push the boundaries of faith to their most bloody and crazed extremes. Many speculate that the Word Bearers use the population of Mammon as a recruiting ground for their slaving cult armies, converting the screaming faithful into bloodthirsty killers wild with abandoned ideals and destroyed faith.

Many heretics cannot envision a more loyal follower than a true zealot for the Imperial cause who has had the caul painfully torn from their eyes. Based upon the truism that there is no fanatic so ardent as the convert, many descend to the planet's surface with the sole purpose of selecting out the most powerful warriors, capturing them, and forcing them to realise the error of their lives by revealing the empirical truth of the planet's position. When confronted with this bleakest of truths, most of the warriors of Mammon experience a mental break, immediately reduced to blubbling, mindless husks with no hope of recall.

A rare few, however, will emerge from the dissonance of this break filled with a furious anger and a righteous ardour to strike out at the Emperor who left their people to languish in animal misery for millennia. These men and women, creatures of nearly pure faith all their lives, have reattached this singular focus upon their new masters and will serve them with all of the mindless loyalty and devotion they had spent their lives squandering upon the corpse-god. It is the existence of these devoted followers that many point to as proof that Mammon is a massive, global laboratory of the Word Bearers, allowing them to manipulate faith and belief with the finesse of a race of maestros.

CONVERSION OF THE BEATII

VOX RECORDING, SUBJECT LOT: 2606

Interrogator: Please be silent ...

Lot 2606: Die, slaves to the Dark Powers! The Emperor defends! The Emperor preserves!

Interrogator: Excellent. Please be silent ...

Lot 2606: You will burn beneath His righteous gaze for eternity! He will –

<<gasps, moans, panting breaths>>

Interrogator: What do you see on the screen before you?
<<sobs>>

Interrogator: What do you see in the black night, my friends?

Lot 2606: That is not our night... What is that ugly stone in the black?

Interrogator: That is Mammon. A world forever consigned to the hell of the Warp. Your world.

<<louder sobs, moans, unintelligible speech>>

Interrogator: All your lives you have toiled in obscurity. The universe cares nothing for your efforts. The Emperor is dead and knows nothing of you.

Lot 2606: No ... NO ... NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO ...

Interrogator: Watch. Watch the bloodshed, watch the murder. Is that your army? Are those your people? Or are those the enemy? Can you tell them apart?

<<moaning and panting, sobbing and cries of wordless denial>>

Interrogator: There is no difference between you and the men you have spent your life destroying. No difference at all.

Lot 2606: Not true ... Blasphemers! ... It cannot be true ... Heretics! ...

Interrogator: But that is the cruellest aspect of truth, my friends: it cares nothing for your own petty regard. What is, is.

Lot 2606: No ... You lie! Minion of darkness, get thee gone, spawn of darkness! We will not gaahhhhhhhhhhhh ...

Interrogator: Your faith is ... impressive. But there is no denial of the truths before you.

Lot 2606: No ... you ... this ... cannot ... be ...

Interrogator: Look into the screen. See the bloodshed. See the horror. Know that the Emperor is dead and his crumbling realm knows not of you.

Lot 2606: <<panting, moaning>> His light ... his light ... his light ... <<tired sobbing>>

Interrogator: Now get up.

<<the distinct sound of a mass pain enducer being fired>>

Interrogator: Can you hear me?

Lot 2606: His light ... light ... never ...

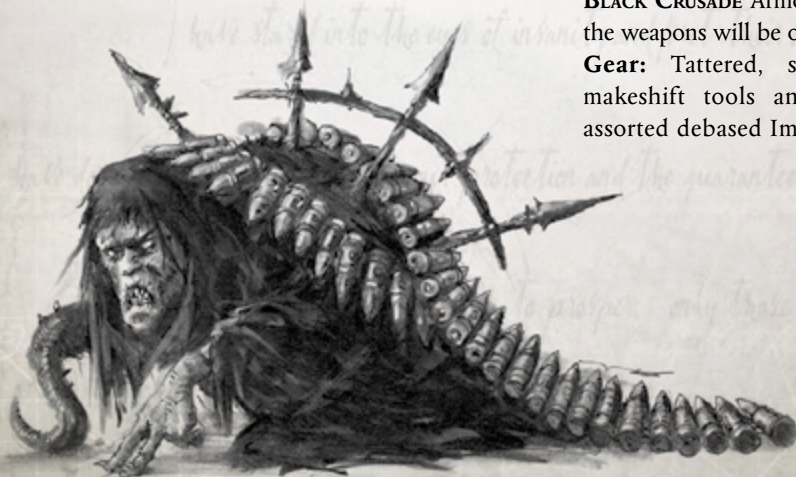
<<a series of sharp reports, screaming, the moaning ends abruptly>>

Interrogator: Clear these away, bring in Lot 2607.

Heretics travel from all over the Screaming Vortex to experience first-hand the debasement of the "Imperial Faithful." These true believers are seen as the epitome of conviction and credence. Oftentimes warlords seeking to train their bands land on the planet to teach their followers the dangers of facing zealous opponents, others will come to the blasted world seeking to recruit these holy warriors to their cause, often constructing elaborate deceptions to fool the natives into thinking they are working with fellow warriors in the cause of righteousness.

Occasionally, in the cause of amusement, a powerful warlord, sorcerer, or some other heretic will unleash upon the people of Mammon a terrible weapon, often granting some champion of one faction or the other a Daemon Weapon or some other powerful relic of the Dark Gods, with the promise that it can tilt the eternal balance and their faction will emerge victorious. Of course, these cruel promises always fall to nothing, causing a great deal of pain and anguish on both sides, and bringing about the fall of the chosen champion. Usually, the relics and weapons used in this way are then recovered. Sometimes, however, such is the violence and the mayhem that ensues that the relic is lost and the heretic must abandon it to the vagaries of fate. It is through events such as this that it is rumoured that the treasure troves of many of the cardinals-militant contain items of untold power without even knowing of their existence.

The darkest consequence of the ever-evolving pageantry of Mammon, however, is a constant low-grade fear that exists in the hearts and minds of those fascinated with the planet. Occasionally events begin to unfold, either on the planet or elsewhere within the Vortex, and rumours surface that the Emperor has taken a hand upon Mammon, that the constant torture of these lost souls has finally caught his attention. His ire raised, he has moved to descend upon the planet in all of his righteous fury to smite those responsible and take these loyal souls into himself for eternity. These rumours are almost always met with mirth, but there is always an undertone of anxiety as well. If belief defines reality in the Vortex, surely such absolute belief in his return must eventually become truth, and if so, what reckoning would he bring but utter destruction to those who degraded his subjects so?



Acceptor of Mammon (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	25	32	31	35	33	38	32	31	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 9

Armour: Scavenged Armour (3 All)

Total TB: 5

Skills: Awareness (Per), Interrogation (WP), Street Fighting (WS), Survival (Per) +10.

Talents: Cold Hearted, Double Team, Frenzy, Jaded, Swift Attack, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Unnatural Toughness (2).

Weapons: Primitive and/or improvised hand weapons (Melee; 1d5+3; Pen 0; Scavenged). Some can also be armed with an array of Average or Common melee weapons, all of which will have the Scavenged Downgrade.

Gear: Tattered, scavenged clothing, makeshift tools and weapons, coveted brass fetishes, assorted debased Imperial icons.

Demagogue of Mammon (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
42	35	39	38	41	36	40	35	34	--

Movement: 4/8/12/21

Wounds: 12

Armour: Scavenged Plate Mail (4 All).

Total TB: 6

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Command (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +10, Interrogation (WP) +10, Intimidate (WP) +10, Street Fighting (WS), Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Air of Authority, Berserk Charge, Cold Hearted, Demagogue, Disturbing Voice, Frenzy, Inspire Wrath, Jaded, Peer (True Believers of Mammon), Swift Attack, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Unnatural Toughness (3), Unnatural Willpower (4).

Weapons: Primitive and/or improvised hand weapons (1d5+3, Pen 0, Scavenged). Select Demagogues can be armed with an array of more advanced weapons chosen from any **BLACK CRUSADE** Armoury, but in almost every instance of this, the weapons will be of Poor Craftsmanship.

Gear: Tattered, scavenged clothing and vestments, makeshift tools and weapons, coveted brass fetishes, assorted debased Imperial icons.

MELANCHOLIA

"As bleak as the hopes on Melancholia."

—Ancient Reaver saying

Believed to have once been a fertile planet capable of sustaining abundant life, Melancholia now stands as a reminder of the unkindness of Fate. Though most natives believe its earliest inhabitants were cast down by their patron deity for being too prideful, most who travel there wonder why any gods would bother with such a wretched place. Such visitors point to the ruined cities, and claim that the ancient Melancholics did this to themselves and are looking for a convenient excuse. Unsurprising, there are few visitors to the planet. Regardless of how or why the civilisation on the planet fell, there is no doubt that those living on Melancholia have little more than a life filled with desolation and misery. Should more know of the terrible appetites its natives possess, just awaiting the proper tinder-strike, there would likely be even fewer.

Dotting the landscape, predominantly around the mountain regions of the planet, lie ruins of amazing stone cities. Vast towering spires that once thrust out of the basalt rock face like reaching arms are now nothing more than mounds of broken masonry and dusty rubble. The rumours of divine wrath as the reason for this devastation only play to the fears of the population, but even the most learned visitors to the surface have commented that there is something odd about the rock itself—that it is almost recalcitrant in nature and unwilling to be stacked or used as a building material. Attempts to use it or the ores it contains to build anything of substance invariably fall apart within hours of completion.

No matter where the location on the planet's surface, the climate is cold, wet, and unpleasant. Rain falls constantly and winds blow it in all directions. While on any other planet this would make a giant swamp, the ground is unnaturally spongy and capable of being dug into by hand. In some places, the land absorbs the moisture and disappears, maintaining a dust-like consistency. Regardless of how much moisture seems to be retained, it always seems to be just enough for the tubers and grubs that comprise the main food sources for the people there. Though these are always found in abundance, there is little joy to be had from eating them.

Communities are large yurt gatherings. Most are made of skins of the small animals patch-worked together and often in need of repair. Little more than basic existence happens here: food gathering and eating, repairing the yurts, and sleep. There is no art, no music, no dance—nothing but the daily drudgery of living another day. Melancholics barely interact with each other unless it is necessary for their basic survival. At the root of all of this dreariness is the belief that their benefactor deity, Shornaal, has deemed them unworthy of more. As a symbol of this, a stone with the curse etched into it sits at the centre of every community. This aspect of Slaanesh, as well as the Melancholics' divergent worship of him, is unlike any other seen in the Vortex.



It is perhaps inaccurate to call the religion of Melancholia “worship,” however, for worship denotes actual involvement and reverence in a spiritual practice. The people have no such thing. Anchored firmly in the shame of the Curse of Stone, Melancholics exude a palpable emotional malaise, making even the strongest off-worlders feel distinctly uncomfortable. Though they do not speak of it in the villages, those who have managed to escape the planet say that it is merely the vengeful aspect of Shornaal as they knew him before they left.

Most do not leave, however, and suffer their lot. When a member of the community defies this and emotes openly, he willingly goes or is brought to the stone containing the curse, touches it, and walks into the wilderness as penance. For the majority of people, this only lasts barely a day as the rain and wind induce a numbing cold that robs people of any desire save to return to the relative dry of the yurts. Those who are clearly in the throes of a much larger emotional outburst could spend days outside the township and might never return. Scavenging parties routinely bring back the belongings of those found, leaving the bodies to decompose in the wastes. Rumours of Daemons stealing those never seen again abound in the townships, but are seldom heard save in whispers and fevered dreams.

THE CURSE OF STONE

*Never again will stone do your bidding
For the price of your pride is misery.
Its beauty and protection I take away from you
And leave you wind and rain in its place.
Should your pride be shared again,
My wrath will be evoked
And my minions will return,
Leaving nothing behind.
But should you climb the walls of your misery
And find the Path of Stars.
Invoke my name,
I will embrace you in the heavens.*

THE EVOKED

Though not Daemons, there is a second community living outside the townships that is rarely seen. They wear elaborate leathers and outsized clothing to both ward off and to more fully appreciate the sour weather, and are often mistaken for inhuman beasts. They live in the mountain-based ruins of some of the once proud stone cities, free from the biting wind and driving rain. They are the Evoked, and maintain that the hope of redemption lies within the curse itself, and have begun reclaiming their inherent nature. Made up of those exiled and their progeny, they tend their own food in underground gardens and look to transcendence through the intensities of emotional life.

Reclaiming one's emotions is not easy, as the apathetic nature of Melancholia's culture and the intense inner scrutiny ingrained since birth are both extremely powerful. The Evoked, while understanding the harshness of it, immerse all new members in intense sensory stimuli. Those learning the skills of the Flesh Shapers use these untouched souls as their first test subjects, melding and moulding tissue like soft clay. In one common practice, strands of flesh are stripped and replaced on other areas of their bodies, enabling trainees to learn the basics of flesh-stitching. Anaesthesia is unheard of among the enclaves, as pain is too useful. The agony of this initiation resonates deeply across the group, causing members to tear their own flesh apart or to slide into total catatonia for a time.

The violent responses are immediately celebrated and soon the majority of the community is swept up in the brawling. Though occasionally there are fatalities, most only come out with textured scars, vivid memories of blood streaming from open wounds, and memorable cracks of breaking bones. Soon after, the experienced Flesh Shapers and their trainees tend to those still living in unique manners, and there is a large feast filled with intoxicating libations and hallucinogenic derivatives of specially cultivated fungi. Cloying scents of spices and incense fill the air, and the constant fevered thrumming of drums allows all to indulge all of their senses fully. At the centre of the revelry lie those rendered catatonic by the initial symphony of pain. Surrounded by the rest of the enclave, the non-responsive are physically coaxed back to the realm of feeling through sensuous caresses and delicate breaths.

A mysterious leader who seems to command the Evoked leads the performance-ceremony, where the sensation of touch, the sickening sweet and spiced smells in the air, and the pulsating rhythm is maintained until the last of the sleepers awakens. The true revels then begin, as all are ready to participate fully to raise their senses and emotions to impossible heights. Though these tales have only come from those who have escaped the world, they commonly relate that such arousals last many weeks, without pause for rest or repose. There is no sensation forbidden, no sin untouched. At some hidden signal, it ends abruptly as the group, sated for the moment, screams out as one to Shornaal, yearning for him to bring them to the heavens. Their piercing cries echo on the dreary winds outside, all the way back to those huddled in the yurts, perhaps igniting within one a small ember of passion.

Evoked Member (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
27	28	34	37	34	34	30	30	40	--

Move: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 14

Armour: Xenos hides (Arms, Head, Legs 2)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Awareness (Per), Charm (Fel), Deceive (Fel), Medicae (Int), Navigate (Surface) (Int) +10, Stealth (Ag) +10, Survival (Per) +10.

Talents: Heightened Senses (All).

Weapons: Stub rifle (Basic; 120m, S/- /- ; 1d10+3 I; Pen 1; Clip 5; Full; Accurate), chain dagger (Melee; 1d10+1 R; Pen 2; Tearing).

Gear: Backpack, combi-tool, filtration plugs, 2 doses of Rose, 3 clips of rifle ammo, enclosed animal skin suit with built in rebreather.

Flesh Shaper Protégé (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
34	35	34	38	39	35	39	45	40	--

Move: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 13

Armour: Flak cloak (Arms, Head, Legs 2)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Charm (Fel), Common Lore (Melancholia) (Int), Deceive (Fel), Forbidden Lore (Heresy) (Int), Linguistics (Int) +10, Medicae (Int), Navigation (Surface) (Int) +10, Parry (Int).

Weapons: Stub rifle (Basic; 120m, S/- /- ; 1d10+3 I; Pen 1; Clip 5; Half; Accurate), chain dagger (Melee; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Tearing).

Gear: Enclosed animal skin suit with built-in rebreather, 2 clips rifle ammo, 2 doses of Rose.

DEKAUL AND THE PATH OF STARS

The Path of Stars, named after the verse in the Curse of Stone, is a loose track the Evoked use to determine whether it is time to rejoin Shornaal. In its most rudimentary form, it allows those further along the path to guide the newer members through the roughest parts of early re-sensitisation. Markers for individual experiences, group rituals, and spiritual revelations are all tracked to show progress. As each of these indicators is noted, it is celebrated, often with the entire community. Many of the Flesh Shapers speak of this process highly, and claim it is an essential part of

their new lives. While each group performs this differently, they all feature intensive revelry and debauched celebration. Only when they have ascended the Path far enough can they hope to achieve the prize of rejoining Shornaal in the stars. Those that leave this desolate world very seldom return, for they know how little Melancholia holds for them. Those few that do are revered as local demigods, as their experiences are seen as transcendent and unfathomable to those who are still in the ruins. These Celestial Pilgrims represent the epitome of DeKaul's teachings and all of the Evoked, regardless of which enclave they are in, strive to follow in their footsteps.

At the centre of the Evoked is a single charismatic leader named DeKaul. Seen only as a masked speaker and spiritual guide, he travels between the different groups of Evoked, teaching the ways of Shornaal, gauging progress, and encouraging or admonishing groups to do more in their deity's name. Unlike other members of the Evoked, DeKaul travels without the aid of the waterproofed skins the others wear. Those who have travelled with him as he leaves have noted that he almost seems to shine from within, a fact that adds to his legendary character and binds all the scattered groups to him. His touch is said to heal, wound, or induce delicious joy in the recipient. Any who have been graced with a private audience are his most devout followers and form an inner circle at each enclave. It is he who announces the arrival of Shornaal's chariot and selects who will ascend to meet it.

The times of ascendancy are rife with favours of all kinds being granted, both to DeKaul and his inner circle, for all of

those who follow him strive to leave Melancholia and rejoin their god.

Those who have managed to escape the planet have spoken little of it, but have alternately laughed maniacally or wept uncontrollably as they remember their individual experiences. The

Flesh Shapers appear to play a strong role in the ascendancy, with the chosen travellers altered physically in ways even the most experienced of Shapers cannot replicate. DeKaul himself takes part in every enclave's ascendancy ritual, often placing the final change on each of those fated to leave: his own personal sigil effectively marking them as his.

Those that leave the planet with DeKaul are soon left on new worlds with new masters, or sold to crew raiders across the Vortex. Their tears flow for many days, but those that prosper remember their lessons and continue their path, waiting for DeKaul to return. Until then, there is a new galaxy awaiting them, filled with new sensations to savour and new experiences to indulge, now that their senses have been opened.



DEKAUL

DeKaul is the defacto spiritual leader of the Evoked. Though there is no hierarchy imposed on them, they all naturally turn to his innate charm and wisdom. He is, however, much more than an enlightened follower of Shornaal. A skilled biomancer and telekine, he has taken it upon himself to become the greatest warlord to emerge from the Vortex. By liberating the denizens of Melancholia, he believes he can stealthily create an army of the most depraved followers of Slaanesh, all of whom will loyally wait for him until he is ready to begin his march. Using the Path of Stars and his connections in the pirate clans, specifically Pseudanor the Liberator, to seed his minions throughout the Vortex, DeKaul is able to lay the groundwork for his master plan, a move into the Jericho Reach as the new Supreme Warlord. With such a force ready on a hundred worlds, all awaiting his command, he might possibly achieve his desire.

DeKaul (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
46	42	47	38	52	53	51	45	62	48	

Move: 5/10/15/30

Armour: Flak (Body, Arms, Legs 4)

Skills: Athletics (Ag) +10, Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel) +30, Command (Fel) +20, Commerce (Int) +10, Common Lore (All) (Int) +20, Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +20, Forbidden Lore (All) (Int) +10, Medicae (Int) +30, Navigate (Surface) (Int) +10, Operate (Surface, Voidship) (Int) +10, Parry (Ag) +20, Psyniscience (Per) +30, Stealth (Ag) +20, Survival (Per) +20, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Blademaster, Blind Fighting, Combat Master, Counter Attack, Disarm, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (All), Infused Knowledge, Leap Up, Lightning Reflexes, Master Surgeon, Orthoproxy, Psy Rating (6), Quick Draw, Radiant Presence, Resistance (Psychic Techniques), Sprint, Step Aside, Strong Minded, Two-Weapon Wielder (Ballistic and Melee), Unarmed Warrior, Warp Conduit, Warp Sense, Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Psyker.

Psychic Powers: Acquiescence, Ecstatic Oblivion, Precision Telekinesis, Telekinetic Shield, Telekinetic Weapon, Warptime.

Weapons: Hand cannon (Pistol; 35m; S/- /- ; 1d10+4 I; Pen 2; Clip 5; 2 Full).

Gear: Mask with built-in rebreather and preysense goggles, four clips of barbed rounds, five doses of Rose.

Wounds: 19

Total TB: 3

REMOVING CHARACTERS FROM MELANCHOLIA

Those from Melancholia have a reputation for being the most bloodthirsty and hedonistic of Slaanesh's followers. Coming from a world so environmentally oppressive has them start out their lives mired in a stagnant emotional pool. Moving out of that, however, has some very interesting consequences for role playing. Listed here are some guidelines that GMs can use for NPCs (and PCs) in their games.

NPCs recently taken from the planet or removed from a village are at the beginning stages of the process. By and large they will be very withdrawn and unresponsive to what is happening around them, only performing tasks that allow for basic survival and remaining almost catatonic. As they are engaged with new stimuli and are kept removed from the surface of Melancholia, they start to engage. Again, initial forays will be along the lines of basic needs, but they begin making social interactions. They are not feral, only repressed, and so use common speech and basic mannerisms.

As they grapple with the new sensations, recovering natives of this forsaken world become increasingly unstable as they have no sense of how to manage their emotions effectively. Outbursts of all types, including violent ones, could be commonplace with massive erratic mood swings also happening frequently. This should be encouraged, as it makes the NPCs from Melancholia very unpredictable and also very adept at disrupting the plans of any would-be warlord.

PCs are a different matter, however. When dealing with PCs from Melancholia, a baseline of emotional equilibrium has probably been established earlier. Therefore, it is appropriate to assign penalties or bonuses depending on the social interactions the PC has had in the past and the intensity of the situation he is in during the session.

For example, an attempt to resist a tantalising food that the PC knows is drugged would require a **Difficult (-10) Willpower Test**. Similarly, a seduction attempt from someone very exotic, very attractive, but also known to be very dangerous against an inexperienced PC could only be swayed through a **Very Hard (-30) Willpower Test**.

As a PC experiences more things, these penalties may dwindle to nothing or may be replaced by a desire to move to extremes. These are in-game decisions and predominantly a roleplaying situation, one that works best organically based on player and GM interaction. Those from Melancholia can make for fascinating NPCs and PCs alike though as they explore their new emotions and sensations, and should offer excellent opportunities for roleplaying.



THE GATES OF MOMENT

"Watch the skies, the ground at your feet, and even the very air around you. But do not trust your eyes! Nothing here is as it seems, and we must remain vigilant and blind to the lures of Chaos if we are to close these Gates once and for all!"

—Final recorded words of Inquisitor Marwin Vermillious of the Ordo [Redacted]

A boiling mass of unholy danger, the Screaming Vortex holds many unknown terrors. Scores of worlds trapped within the Vortex's iron grasp have grown to dark legend, from worlds with atmospheres so poisonous that they melt the hardest metals, to worlds where entire populations wither on their feet as they stare endlessly at seas of standing mirrors, powerless to look away from their own reflections. Most learn how to avoid such hazards, but there is one world that haunts all who see it appear in their skies—a moon that brings nothing but death and misery to all who fall under its gloomy shadow. Known as the Gates of Moment, this shifting planetoid has brought ruin to dozens of worlds not just within the Vortex, but across the entire galaxy.

DISTANT SKIES

Unlike most Vortex worlds, many Imperial organisations know of the Gates of Moment. None of these groups know the moon's origins, but due to its infrequent and violent appearances, scattered records exist of the planetoid's structure and relative size. Although contradictory in many places, most of these reports agree that the Gates of Moment appears as little more than a large barren moon. Deep crevasses tear across the moon's surface, and dark patches of low-lying scrubland cover it like lichen on ancient bark. Its wispy atmosphere sends curls of pink-grey clouds streaking across its surface like thin fingers clutching at a globe. The moon has only one obvious feature: a massive and almost perfectly circular area of ice and snow that seems to radiate energy.

The surface is where the horror of the Gates lies. Anyone foolish enough to seek refuge on it is likely to be trapped there forever, as the skies they leave behind turn to something completely different. Each step across the barren surface can transform the sky above from one impossible vista to another, and even from one time to another. A crew may land upon the moon's surface only to lose the world they came from, the sky above them devoid of anything but distant stars, or perhaps filled with a different planet altogether. Some leave the calm of the Calixis Sector only to find themselves staring up at the blood-red malevolence of the Hadex Anomaly in the far distant Jericho Reach. Others, half-mad from decades captive upon the moon, swear that they walked for years across its surface witnessing everything from the creation of the Eye of Terror, to worlds engulfed by Tyranid fleets, and even a mighty war in the skies of Holy Terra. More disturbing are the reports that contradict one another yet are still true. Several records exist within the Calixis, Lithesh, Aquila, and Ixaniad Sectors of the moon's sudden appearance in the skies of several worlds simultaneously. The reports speak of large invading forces repelled, the moon vanishing soon after whilst others talk of how the Gates hung in orbit for weeks, endless streams of foes grinding away at



planetary defences until the moon simply faded from existence. Some even tell of how the moon never left, and how it waits in the shadows of other worlds for the right time to strike again.

Within the Vortex, the Gates is a bad omen—a hunter's moon that stalks the void of space—and many try fruitlessly to predict the moon's movements. Few civilised Vortex worlds have not felt the moon's malevolent touch, and none can say how many other worlds have fallen to the moon's twisted denizens. More peculiar, though, is how the Magisters of Q'Sal perceive the moon. The sorcery-drenched world has never seen the Gates enter its sky, and when pressed on the subject the Magisters respond with nothing but laughter.

PLAINS OF TORMENT

From orbit, the Gates of Moment appears drab and unremarkable, but the surface is far from dull. No journey across its seemingly endless plains ever stays the same for long, and there are all manner of natural horrors and lingering treasures for the careless and ruthless to find.

Ashen Pits

Stretched between each knotted expanse of barkweed thickets lie the vast ash plains. Coloured the same pink-grey as the hunter's moon's translucent clouds, the ash is light and clogs machinery easily. When breathed, in it has a slight narcotic effect, subtly enhancing a person's senses and filling their heads with the sweetest aromas. The ash hides a deadly secret as it covers many of the caves and crevasses that scar

the moon's surface. The pits are never very deep, but many who fall in and scramble to the surface find the sky above them different from what it was moments ago. Some emerge from a pit only to find their companions long dead, or that they have appeared several days, if not years, before they ever arrived. And some never emerge at all, as it is within these pits that dreaded Warp Talons make their home.

Thorny Wastes

The barkweed groves that cover enormous stretches of the moon's surface are one of the few living things that thrive within the cloying ash. Extremely tough plants that glow faintly and emit a constant buzzing noise, they snake through the ground forming tangled masses of thorns and spines that many within the Helwyr tribes fashion into barbed whips and basic clothing. The juice of the barkweed holds another special significance for the Helwyr, and they value this sour, spicy liquid as it focuses their minds and strengthens their resolve, something they need for the Great Hunts. So potent is the juice that it is one of the most sought-after narcotics within the Vortex. It is exceptionally rare however, as many who attempt to harvest the coarse plant find themselves unable to leave the moon, and the few phials that do make it off the surface fetch astronomical prices.

Frozen Plains

Easily the largest and most obvious feature of the hunter's moon is the great icy wasteland that dominates roughly an eighth of its surface. Pure white and almost completely flat, the frozen plains reflect the light of many different stars, yet it never melts or shrinks. Frozen skeletons and the remains of lone Helbrutes stud its entire breadth, acting as grim wards to all who would brave the journey across, but all who eke out an existence upon the hunter's moon must eventually come to the plains as it is one of the few sources of water. Those that travel the frozen plains face death at any moment, and the unnatural stillness and unchanging landscape is enough to crack the psyche of even the bravest hunter. Some travellers trek for days only to find their own footprints ahead of them, or encounter the remnants of a corpse that bears a striking similarity to their own features.

Worse still are the Frostwyrms, the real terrors of the frozen plains. All Helwyr tribes have tales of the day the Frostwyrms first arrived, appearing all over the frozen plains on the day when the heavens burned the angry red of the Hadex Anomaly. The stories speak of a bolt of energy that shot from the mind-shredding redness of the Hadex and lanced into the surface of the moon. Within days, the remnants of fleeing tribes brought tales of monstrous glowing creatures—their forms described as reptilian or insectoid, or disturbing combinations of both—and how the beasts would emerge from the solid ground to take their prey, and vanish back into the ice as quickly as they arrived. No one knows the truth of these stories, as some claim to have been there the day it happened, whereas others say it happened thousands of years ago. The Frostwyrms rarely leave their icy home, for which the Helwyr give thanks to their pale gods, and are a danger only to those that wish to know the secrets that exist at the heart of the wintry desert.

THE RED MONK

Despite their solitary and wandering existence, the Helwyr tribes share many legends. One enduring story is that of the Red Monk, and those that recount the tales do so with dread-filled voices. Encountered only on the days when dozens of foreign stars split the skies, the Red Monk appears on the horizon and moves with a determined stride. He bears no mark or sigil beyond a golden hourglass etched into his vermilion robes, and as they billow around him all nearby creatures act in opposition to their desires. The Helwyr tell of fearless Scale-Drake herds that flee at the sight of him, how crazed Helbrutes calm unnaturally in his presence, and of titanic battles between the Monk and enormous Frostwyrms that take place far from the Frozen Wastes. As the years pass, the tribes add more examples of the Red Monk's power to the legend, but each tale ends with the same warning: run.

Some speculate that the truth of the frozen plains lies at its centre, where many claim to have seen the remains of a vast, cracked voidship of the hated Imperium. As the tales go, the huge craft sits broken upon the world's surface, split in two and lifeless inside a shallow crater, and several recount symbols of the sixfold-cursed Inquisition, hourglasses, and other icons upon its frosted hull. The same crazed individuals claim there were days when the vessel sat inert, but on other days the lights on every deck would burn with an intense fury it is said. The largest of the Frostwyrms make their home here, coiled around the rear of the cruiser as if drawing energy from the still flickering engines. To enter the ship is to face certain death, but there are tribesmen who swear that riches beyond compare lie within its freezing hull.

The Gleaming Lake

The hunter's moon has one other major feature, a dazzling lake that weaves its way through several glowing groves of barkweed. Those that glimpse the lake in the distance find themselves unable to look away, as it glints and shimmers with such an intense brightness that even the blind perceive its radiance. With each step closer, weary travellers hear the voices of innocent youths beckoning them forward. Those that turn away remain touched by the lake, unable to clear its brightness from their vision like a man who has stared too long at his burning sun. Those who march on reach an odd calm, as the sound of lapping waves overtakes the beguiling voices. However, the gleaming lake holds no water, and those that reach its shores find something beyond imagination.

All who come to the lake find what they yearn for most. Gold, jewels, weapons, food, long-dead friends, helpless adversaries, rare wine, scented candles, rare books—the list is as endless as the whims and desires of mortals. Any who immerse themselves within this perfect bounty find their senses utterly overcome with feelings of satisfaction. The experience is akin to the most potent of drugs, and the greedy or weak-willed spend days or even weeks entranced, sating their every desire until their physical senses give up from the experience.

As a test of will, some bands of Helwyr tribesmen stand at the lake's edge, challenging their ability to resist the blissful delights. Most give into their basest passions though, their delirious laughter echoing up to the multitude of skies above.

However, nothing found within the lake can ever leave its shores. Once removed, their desired possessions disintegrate into pale, crystalline ash as the faintest sounds of laughter fill the air. Some proudly display warded stasis chambers and boast that they still have small trinkets taken from the lake, but as opening the chamber would destroy the contents, none can truly speak to the reality of these claims. Still, these stasis chambers form the focal points for a number of the Vortex's Slaanesh cults, their members shaking uncontrollably as the temptation to open the chamber for even the most fleeting glance haunts every waking moment of their lives.

PREDATOR AND PREY

The reality of the Gates of Moment's lethal environment and limited resources means that every man, beast, and machine lives an insane life fixated on the idea of surviving, even for just a moment more. To most of the Gates' denizens, sanity is a safe-haven of the foolish and a sign that they know nothing of the world at their feet or the ever-shifting skies above their heads.

Helwyr Tribesman

Over the millennia, tens of thousands of disparate groups—traders, pirates, slaves, and even xenos—have found themselves at the mercy of the Gates. Trapped on its surface with only two options—live or die—many choose to form loose nomadic collectives. Commonly referred to as the Helwyr, these insular groups keep nothing of their past and wander the wastes in search of anything that might keep them alive for another day. They exist at the very edge of sanity, their senses frayed from years of consuming barkweed juice, and subsist on whatever meat and water they can find. The tribes take any opportunity to hunt, even hunting other tribes, as all Helwyr know that if they are not the predator, then they are definitely the prey.

The Helwyr's reputation within the Vortex extends beyond the surface of their moon, as they trade in what might be the most exotic (and deadly) commodity the Vortex has to offer—Helbrutes. Roving packs of these transplanted and trapped monstrosities cause death wherever they tread. Over time, the Helwyr learned how to ensnare and subdue Helbrutes, often from the backs of enslaved Scale-Drakes. Their successes draw bands of Chaos warlords to the Gates in the hopes of trading food and supplies in exchange for the Helwyr's enraged captives.

Unfortunately for the Helwyr, their expertise and reputation comes at a dire cost, as all Helwyr answer to the Warp Talons. The Warp Talons never speak, but their ability to leave and return at will means that they dominate the skies. Silently, the twisted Chaos Marines often take captured Helbrutes, sometimes leaving supplies and weapons, sometimes only leaving terrified corpses in their wake. The Warp Talons take what they want, and vanish back into their subterranean lairs, only to be seen again when the Helwyr next wish to trade, or when a Great Hunt starts.

Helwyr Tribesman (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	45	35	35	40	35	45	55	25	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 12

Armour: Helwyr Carapace (5)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Common Lore (Screaming Vortex, War) (Int), Dodge (Ag) +10, Navigate (Surface) (Int) +20, Survival (Per) +30.

Talents: Die Hard, Hardy, Helbrute Hunter†, Jaded, Light Sleeper, Paranoia, Target Selection.

Weapons: Barkweed whip (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 2; Crippling [2], Primitive [7], Tearing), razor rifle (Basic; 80m; S/-/-; 2d10 R; Pen 4; Clip 16; Reload Full; Crippling [2], Razor Sharp, Shocking, Tearing).

Gear: Dust cloak (low-quality clothing), Helwyr carapace (incorporates a rebreather), various tools, 10 doses of Barkweed Juice, 2 weapon clips.

†**Helbrute Hunter:** Well versed in the art of fighting Helbrutes, Helwyr tribesmen weave in and out of combat in a way that easily disorients the insane machines. Helwyr tribesmen do not Test for Fear against them, and may re-roll any Dodge Tests made against Helbrute attacks whilst on foot. Against Helbrutes, the tribesman's razor rifle rolls 2d10 Agility Damage rather than standard Damage, reduced by the Helbrute's Willpower Bonus. Helbrutes reduced to 0 Agility are not destroyed, but are instead ensnared and captured by the tribesman.

Riding Beasts: Any Helwyr Tribesmen can ride a colossal Scale-Drake. See page 46 for details.

Frostwurm

Neither reptile nor insect, Frostwyrms would easily dominate all life upon the Gates if not for their odd refusal to venture beyond their icy domain. Known to grow to monumental sizes, there is virtually no defence against a Frostwurm attack as they possess the unnatural ability to pass through solid matter. Any who venture into the frozen wastes rarely return, as there is precious little warning when a Frostwurm attacks. For a brief moment, the cold expanse grows slightly colder, and a split second later a writhing snake-like mass of claws and teeth bursts from the undisturbed surface to hungrily grasp at whatever it can before descending back into the ground. Nevertheless, rumours persist of an elite cadre of Helwyr that ride Frostwyrms, the phasing ability of these hideous creatures somehow transferring to the men on their backs.



Frostwurm (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
58	--	65	35	60 ¹²	25	60 ¹⁰	25	05	--	

Movement: 7/14/21/42
Armour: Armoured Exoskeleton (6)
Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag) +20.
Talents: Fearless, Hard Target, Lightning Reflexes, Preternatural Speed, Resistance (Cold), Swift Attack.
Traits: Bestial, Crawler, Fear (2), Deadly Natural Weapons, Natural Armour (6), Phase, Size (6), Terrain Master, Unnatural Agility (6), Unnatural Perception (4), Unruly.
Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 6; Razor Sharp, Tearing), frozen breath (Basic; 15m; S/-/-; 2d10 E; Pen 4; Clip —; Reload —; Crippling [4], Spray).
Ghostly Mounts: Frostwurms can be taken as mounts with an Availability of Near Unique. So long as they are riding the beast, characters also gain the Phase Trait.

Helbrute

How the Gates of Moment became home to so many Helbrutes is a mystery. Caged beasts of unrelenting fury, Helbrutes usually march to war under the banners of the Chaos Legions, but here these hulking monsters run wild, killing everything they see. Although once proud and noble Space Marine Dreadnoughts, all Helbrutes despise their existence and yearn for the time when they could still directly experience the thrill of a fresh kill and savour the taste of victory. They gather in small packs and wander erratically across the moon's surface, free from the Legions that would enslave them, and ready to destroy any who challenge them.

Helbrute (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
50	40	70 ¹⁴	60 ¹²	40	30	35	50	05	--	

Movement: 6/12/18/36
Armour: Machine (20)
Skills: Awareness (Per), Intimidate (S).
Talents: Ambidextrous, Berserk Charge, Combat Master, Crazy (see below), Crushing Blow, Die Hard, Disturbing Voice, Fearless, Independent Targeting, Thunder Charge, Two-Weapon Wilder (Ballistic, Melee), War Cry.
Traits: Ammunition Shortage (see below), Auto-Stabilised, Dark-Sight, Fear (2), Machine (20), Size (6), Sturdy, Undying, Unnatural Strength (7), Unnatural Toughness (6).
Weapons: Two power fists (Melee; 2d10+30 E; Pen 9; Power Field, Unwieldy), each of which can contain either a heavy flamer (Heavy; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+12 E; Pen 6; Clip 15; Rld 2 Full; Flame, Spray) or combi-bolter (Basic; 80m; S/3/-; 1d10+5 X; Pen 4; Clip 32; Rld 2 Full; Tearing, Twin-linked). Either power fist may be replaced with one of the following; Missile launcher with frag and krak missiles (Heavy; 300m; S/-/-; —; Pen —; Clip 12; Reload 4 Full); multi-melta (Heavy;



60m; S/-/-; 2d10+16 E; Pen 12; Clip 36; Reload 2 Full; Blast [1], Melta), plasma cannon (Heavy; 150m; S/-/-; 2d10+12 E; Pen 10; Clip 48; Reload 5 Full; Blast [3], Maximal, Overheats), power scourge† (Melee; 1d10+26 E; Pen 6; Flexible, Power Field, Tearing, Unwieldy), reaper autocannon (Heavy; 300m; S/4/-; 3d10+8 I; Pen 6; Clip 120; Reload 2 Full; Reliable, Twin-Linked), thunder hammer (Melee; 2d10+25 E; Pen 9; Concussive [4], Power Field, Unwieldy), twin-linked heavy bolter (Heavy; 150m; -/-/6; 1d10+12 X; Pen 5; Clip 180; Reload Full; Tearing), twin-linked lascannon (Heavy; 300m; S/-/-; 5d10+10 E; Pen 10; Clip 15; Reload 2 Full; Proven [3]).
Crazy: Completely unstable, Helbrutes respond to threats with ever-increasing levels of violence. When a Helbrute suffers Damage, it must take a **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test** as a Free Action at the start of its next Turn, modified by -10 for every 5 full points of Damage it received since its last Round. If successful, it may act normally during its next Turn. If the Test is failed and there are enemies within the Helbrute's Charge Move distance it automatically enters a Frenzied state and must declare a Charge Action against the nearest adversary. If no foes are within the Helbrute's Charge range, it stays stationary and as a Full Action fires all its ranged weapons twice at the closest target, friend or foe.
Ammunition Shortage: Helbrutes trapped on the Gates usually are low on ammunition, having consumed their reserves long ago. When encountered here, they have a maximum of 1d5+1 shots remaining for any weapons with a Rate of Fire of 1. For weapons with higher Rates of Fire, use the maximum Rate of Fire and double the number.
†Grants the Lightning Attack Talent, but only when using this weapon.

Warp Talons

Spoken of in hushed whispers, the Warp Talon packs that live just under the moon's surface are the subjects of much fear and reverence. Each Warp Talon millennia ago began as a Space Marine, but as the obsession with speed and the pursuit of prey overtook their lives, they eventually gave in to the pure excess of the Warp. Now corrupted beyond even their darkest dreams, Warp Talons act as harbingers of doom across the Vortex and beyond. Their grotesque claws are sharp enough to rend holes in reality, and they can appear almost anywhere without warning. They even seem to feed off their victim's fear, and spend a seeming eternity taunting their prey before making the final killing stroke. Huntsmen without compare and addicted to the thrill of the chase, they embody the hunter's moon as much as it embodies them.

Although they never speak—and many do not think they can—Warp Talons drive the Great Hunts. When the time is right and the sky above the Gates shifts to a new location, lone Warp Talons appear before the scattered Helwyr tribes. The tribesmen ready their weapons, and within seconds the Warp Talons take them from the moon's surface to whatever slaughter awaits. Once sated by the thrills and sensations of war, the armoured predators return to the surface of their moon, most of the surviving Helwyr returning with them. The reasons why the fallen Space Marines bring the tribesmen are unknown; some propose the Warp Talons are breeding the greatest tribesmen to become superior prey one day later. Some of the tribesmen use these rare moments to attempt escape from the Gates. Most fail, for while the Warp Talons seem to welcome others to share in the thrill of the hunt, they do not like it when their playthings try to run away.

Warp Talon (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
55	35	60 ¹⁰	40 ¹⁰	40 ⁷	40	50	45	05	--	

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Armour: Power armour (8; Body 10)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Athletics (S), Awareness (Per) +10, Common Lore (War) (Int), Dodge (Ag) +20, Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, The Horus Heresy and the Long War, The Warp) (Int), Intimidate (S), Navigate (Surface, Stellar, Warp) (Int), Operate (Aeronautica) +30, Parry (WS) +20, Survival (Per).

Talents: Ambidextrous, Assassin Strike, Blademaster, Counter Attack, Die Hard, Double Team, Heightened Senses (Hearing, Sight), Hotshot Pilot, Leap Up, Lightning Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Nerves of Steel, Rapid Reaction, Raptor, Resistance (Cold, Psychic Powers), Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee), Warpflame Strike†, Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Daemonic (2), Fear (1), Unnatural Agility (3), Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (4).

Weapons: Two lightning claws (Melee; 1d10+16 E; Pen 8; Power Field, Proven [4], Special†).

Gear: Jump pack, warped power armour (incorporating bio-monitors and injectors, enhanced ceramite plating, osmotic gill life sustainer and spikes).

Wounds: 22

Total TB: 10



†**Warpflame Strike:** Warp Talons often enter combat via rents torn through reality. As they appear, a blinding flash bursts out, disabling their opponents and leaving them helpless. When Warp Talons ambush their adversaries, all characters within 10 metres must take a **Very Hard (-30) Agility Test** or suffer the effects of a Photon Flash (see **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook page 160) and count as Surprised. The Warp-based nature of this flash renders all standard methods of eye protection useless.

†See **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook page 163 for more details.

THE CALIXIAN MASSACRES

In the wake of the War of Brass, the Calixis Sector suffered another blow as the Gates of Moment appeared in a dozen skies across the Sector. From Cindar to Hesiod's Wake it hung ominously in the sky for six days and nights. Raucous Pleasure cults rose up, and packs of Warp Talons appeared across the sector, sowing terror and goading the cults into acts of dark debasement that shattered entire cultures. Millions perished, and when the Gates finally faded away it left the people of the Calixis Sector nothing but fear, sorrow and a reminder of the Warp's untamed fury.

THE FORBIDDEN PORTAL

*"The price of your transgressions is high indeed.
I am here to collect payment."*

—Vaiuri M'atua, Harlequin Shadowseer

Out beyond the Gloaming Worlds, near the edge of the Screaming Vortex itself, is a barren, lifeless world. Its name is lost and precious few would even bother to acknowledge its existence were it not for one feature: the Forbidden Portal.

The Portal itself stands at the centre of a featureless plain along the world's equator, set into the side of a great mountain that rises up from the ground. The peak is not native to the planet, made from a stone not found anywhere else in the Vortex, its existence and how it came to be on this world just one of the unexplained mysteries the Portal presents. Wrought from a curious material that none recognise, the Forbidden Portal has defied all attempts at explanation. Countless theories about its nature and history exist but as to the truth, none can say.

One story tells that once a great city existed on the planet, ruled over by a mighty Daemon Prince. The Prince made war in his patron's name and was rewarded well, but soon began to grow jealous of his god and sought to supplant him. For his insolence, the god scoured the planet clean, removing all traces of the Daemon's existence and sealed him in a great tomb of stone. As a final insult, the god cast the tomb back down onto the planet the Daemon had once ruled, forever cursing him to look out over all that was now brought to dust.

Still other fables suggest that the world is in fact not one, but many planets fused together by the birth of the Screaming Vortex, and that the Portal does not conceal any great secret, or even opens at all. It is simply the result of multiple locations being overlayed and forced together by the power of Chaos.

Wiser minds have deduced that the craftsmanship employed to build such a thing resembles that of a race long dead and vanished from the galaxy. These more erudite investigators have also noted that the Portal itself appears to have been grown, rather than built; the odd materials used in its construction appearing very much like bone or some other organic matter. The truth is still far beyond their grasp, but Q'Sal scholars have discovered the Portal responds to psychic stimuli, though to what end is still beyond them. These same scholars suspect that the Portal might be linked in some way to the webway, the labyrinthine network of tunnels and locations that exists between realspace and the Warp. If this is true, gaining entrance to it would be a substantial boon to any champion with the wit or strength to succeed.

A final theory is that the Forbidden Portal is actually a powerful doorway to the Realms of Chaos, a physical link between this world and the abode of the gods. Only a true champion of Chaos can open it, ripping the Portal asunder with his will alone. On that day, the Long War will come to an end as the Ruinous Powers and their armies stride forth to exterminate the galaxy, snuffing out all life. After these Final Days, nothing will remain save the husks of dead planets, the faded glow of corpse stars, and the victory screams of the daemonic hosts.



These tales and countless others have been the cause of many fruitless expeditions to the Forbidden Portal. Desperate warlords and scheming sorcerers have led their warbands in search of the truth behind these wild fancies and sought to claim whatever prize lies behind the great sealed door. None have been successful. Korgoth the Bloody-Handed, Champion of Khorne, once led an army millions strong against the Forbidden Portal, intent on ripping it open. He and his chosen spent days expending their might against it to no avail. His army soon tired of the fruitless endeavour and proceeded to tear itself apart in a frenzy of violence, much to Khorne's approval. Cyanith Flameborn, Sorcerer Lord of the Thousand Sons, conducted another infamous attempt to plumb the Portal's secrets. His cabal of acolytes, seers, and witches spent decades studying the Portal, learning all they could about its composition and qualities. Cyanith himself led a ritual that lasted a thousand and one days, designed to psychically pierce the Portal's structure and ease the doors open. What became of Cyanith and his followers is not known, for they simply vanished mere moments before the ritual was to finally end.

What is known about this cryptic and fascinating edifice is that on occasion it has opened all by itself, allowing strangely garbed warriors to emerge. These warriors have proven to be sworn enemies of all who follow Chaos and are a bane on the Screaming Vortex. Their acrobatic fighting

style and deadly weapons have claimed the lives of thousands and show no sign of slowing. Where they come from and how they seem to operate the Forbidden Portal is unknown, but their coming heralds a time of destruction and death for all who would follow the Ruinous Powers.

The inscrutable warriors that pass through the Forbidden Portal to make war on the Screaming Vortex are none other than the Eldar Harlequins. Defenders of the Eldar race and enemies to Chaos, the Harlequins have appeared in the Screaming Vortex for their own reasons.

The Laughing God has perhaps granted some knowledge of how to use the Forbidden Portal to the Harlequins. Now they use it as an occasional base and point of egress into the Screaming Vortex. Believing perhaps that the forces of Chaos will never learn its secrets, the Harlequins are seemingly content to leave the Forbidden Portal as it is. Some of their number argue the risk is too great, and there is too much they do not know about the Portal's true potential. These cautious ones recommend sealing the Portal for good, lest some unforeseen tragedy befall them during its use. Until their tasks within the Vortex are complete, however, the Harlequins continue to use this mystery to prey upon and confound their foes.

HARLEQUINS

When Slaanesh was birthed out of the catastrophe known as the Fall, billions of Eldar souls were consumed. Still millions of others were bound to his existence and can only stave off his predations by sealing their souls inside spiritstones or feeding on the pain of others. The consequences of their excesses has doomed an entire race. But not every Eldar was cursed that day; some were protected, hidden away by a clever trickster god. These fateful Eldar have become the Harlequins, warriors of the Laughing God and sworn enemies of Slaanesh, known to the Eldar as *She Who Thirsts*.

Exactly how the Laughing God was able to shield the Harlequins from Slaanesh's ceaseless cravings is a mystery. Legend has it that only two of the Eldar gods remained after that cataclysmic event: Kaela Mensha Khaine, the wrathful war god, who survived by sheer martial prowess, and the Laughing God, who fled during Khaine's confrontation with *She Who Thirsts* and hid in the Webway. The Harlequins claim that he hides there still, mocking the Chaos Gods with his laughter and emerging, now and again, to strike at them. Of all the weapons at his disposal, the Laughing God's favoured method of revenge is turning his Harlequins loose upon the minions of Chaos.

The Harlequins are peerless warriors, each easily a match for all but the mightiest of Chaos champions. Their supernal grace and blistering speed make them impossible to pin down, and their skill at arms and deadly weaponry reaps a terrible toll upon their chosen foe. In battle, the Harlequins are formed into small squads called *Troupes*, each comprising only a handful of warriors. Within each Troupe appear a number of roles, including the Troupe Leader, the Shadowseer who provides psychic support, and the Death Jester, a heavy weapons expert. Troupes are akin to familial groups, equal parts social assembly and military unit.

When engaging an enemy force, Harlequins seek to close the distance to their opponents as swiftly as possible, relying on their agility and bewildering holo-suits to stay alive. Once within reach of their victims, Harlequins enter a captivating, but altogether deadly, dance. Aided by their gravity-defying flip belts, they leap and somersault around their foes, never staying put long enough to be attacked and always keeping just out of reach of their enemies. Their graceful, acrobatic movements serve not only to protect them, but to force errors in their opposition's defences as well. Once an enemy warrior has overcommitted to a wild swing, or stumbled while trying to keep a Harlequin in sight, they strike. Equipped with deadly short-ranged pistols, elegant power-sheathed blades, and the legendary Harlequin's Kiss, they make short work of all they encounter, leaving only corpses in their wake. The Kiss, in particular, is a rightly feared weapon. Consisting of a sharpened tube mounted on the back of a Harlequin's arm, the Kiss is punched into an enemy before being triggered. In a matter of seconds, coils of mono-filament wire burst from the tip of the Kiss, shredding the victim's insides and turning solid flesh into a liquefied morass.

Their arrivals are as inscrutable as their appearance. All Harlequin Troupes are intimately familiar with the webway, using that network to travel between worlds and stage their attacks with impunity. Often a Harlequin Troupe allies with a military force already engaged in a conflict. Sometimes they approach a commander offering their services, if allowed to perform certain deeds after the battle is won. Other times they simply appear on the battlefield, slaying indiscriminately, or abducting certain individuals and vanishing just as abruptly.

Not all visitations from a Harlequin Troupe result in battle, for the Troupes play a pivotal role in Eldar society. Theirs is the task of remembrance and warning. They often arrive at Eldar craftworlds to perform dark morality plays and elaborate dances. These performances seek to remind the Eldar of their history and to warn against repeating the sins of the past. In particular, the *Dance Without End*, the story of the Fall and the birthing of *She Who Thirsts*, teaches that the Eldar race must never forget the price they have paid for their youthful follies. Each Harlequin plays a specific role in these dances, often losing their own personalities to that of the role they play. The Harlequins do not see this as a loss of self, but rather rejoice in the immersion it brings, forever celebrating the meaning such a bond can bring.

The appearances of Harlequin Troupes is a poorly understood phenomenon. Their seemingly random movements throughout the Screaming Vortex sometimes hint of a grander plan, but it is too baffling for a mortal mind to comprehend. Whatever ultimate goal the Harlequins are working toward, if indeed such a thing exists, is purely a matter of conjecture, but it is a subject that has obsessed many across the fallen region. Even those who seek martial perfection and always hunt for new foes to test themselves against know the shudder of fear upon hearing word of a Troupe visitation.

Some scholars on Q'Sal believe the Harlequins' actions are linked to an ancient tale found only in the Black Library at the centre of the webway. This tale, called the *Lost God's Lament*, tells that one craftworld in particular suffered a hellish fate during the Fall.

THE LOST GOD'S LAMENT

Its name has now passed into myth, but this now-lost craftworld's desperate flight from the horrors of the Dark Prince's birth was cut short. The expanding Eye of Terror soon overcame the vessel, and the craftworld was drawn inside the Warp and pulled into billions of pieces. Each piece was scattered across the length and breadth of the galaxy, the millions of Eldar on board were fused with their vessel, each screaming soul bound within a small fragment of the now obliterated craftworld. As the Warp storms raged, many of these pieces were drawn inside the Screaming Vortex and plunged into the myriad worlds that existed there.

Although much of the tale is shrouded in allegory, those who have read it believe that within the Screaming Vortex are countless Eldar souls, trapped in excruciating pain and unable to escape their fate. But, perhaps more importantly, they believe that the essence of the lost craftworld's Avatar lies trapped there too. Each craftworld carries an Avatar, a living embodiment of Kaela Mensha Khaine and the beating heart of the vessel and its populace. After tens of thousands of years, it is unlikely the lost Avatar could be roused from its endless slumber if found, but the tales say that Harlequin Shadowseers believe most fervently that the attempt must be made, if for no other reason than to ensure the Avatar is not corrupted by the powers of Chaos. Should such a thing happen, the results would be unthinkable for the dying race, though many Heretics within the Vortex would delight in such an occurrence.

Amongst these Shadowseers, one in particular is perhaps the most impassioned in her pursuit of the Lost God. Her name is Vaiuri M'atua, and she has become one of the most feared and hated figures known in the Screaming Vortex. Guided by her almost fanatical devotion to recovering the Lost God, she has led her Troupe on raid after raid against the Screaming Vortex. Her tactics vary as wildly as her targets, from daring incursions against heavily fortified strongholds to steal some obscure artefact to all-out assaults on tiny Heretic settlements that leave none alive. She has become a figure of myth, spoken of only in hushed whispers by fearful heretics and scholars. They credit her with all manner of supernatural powers and call her the Wraith, claiming she can step through solid walls and pluck out souls like petals from a flower.

VAIURI M'ATUA

This Harlequin Shadowseer has become a nightmare to all who serve the Ruinous Powers within the Screaming Vortex. Her mission brings her into constant conflict with petty warlords and weak-willed sorcerers, and legend has that she has never been defeated. As her reputation grows, the more powerful denizens of the Vortex have placed numerous bounties on her head, offering great rewards to the warrior who can fell her. Most are too afraid to attempt such a feat, and of those that have tried, none have returned.

Vaiuri's tactics vary little from those of her companions. She excels at sowing confusion amongst the enemy ranks, breaking their coordination and shattering their morale with her devastating Psychic Powers and hallucinogenic grenades. She often strikes from concealment, erupting from a webway portal to overwhelm her foes in a flurry of disorder and lethal strikes from her Witchblade, then vanishing before a counter-attack can be organised.

Of her true plans, none can say for, she tells no one besides her Troupe and they follow her without question. Amongst her own people it is rumoured she has even spoken with the mysterious and deadly Solitaires, enlisting their aid for some, as yet, unknown purpose.

Vaiuri M'atua (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
66	51	45	42	60	58	63	69	65	47

Movement: 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 29

Armour: Xenos Mesh (3 All)

Total TB: 4

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +30, Athletics (S) +20, Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel) +20, Command (Fel) +10, Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +30, Forbidden Lore (Black Library, Daemonology) (Int) +20, Parry (WS) +30, Psyniscience (Per) +20, Scrutiny (Per) +10, Sleight of Hand (Ag) +20, Stealth (Ag) +30.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Blade Dancer, Blademaster, Combat Master, Hard Target, Hatred (Daemons and Heretics aligned on the path of Slaanesh), Leap Up, Lightning Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Psy Rating 8, Rapid Reload, Sidearm, Sure Strike, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Touched by the Fates (6), Two-Weapon Wielder (Ranged, Melee).

Traits: Fear 2+, Unnatural Agility (+4).

Weapons: Shuriken pistol (Pistol; 30m; S/3/5; 1d10+2 R; Pen 4; Clip 40; Reload 2 Full; Razor Sharp; Reliable), Witchblade (Melee; 1d10+14 R; Pen 8; Balanced; Force; Power Field), 4 Creidann (Thrown; 12M; S/-/-; Pen 0; Clip 1; Blast [5], Hallucinogenic [4]).

Psychic Powers: Vaiuri is a potent Psyker and knows all the powers for a Shadowseer as described on page 372 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook.

Gear: Flip belt, holo-suit, 4 weapon clips.

Flip Belt: The flip belt allows the user to manipulate gravity, moving with astounding grace. The user ignores penalties for Difficult Terrain and can re-roll failed Dodge Tests.

Herald of the Laughing God: Vaiuri has successfully found several pieces of the ill-fated Craftworld lost within the Screaming Vortex and rescued the souls trapped within. These souls are now bound to the Laughing God and Vaiuri, providing her a potent psychic weapon. Once per encounter, as a Full Action, Vaiuri can unleash the souls bound to her, causing them to strike out at her enemies. When she does this, all enemies within 30 meters must pass a **Very Hard (-30) Willpower test** or suffer 2d10+2 energy damage.

ignoring Armour and Toughness Bonus. Any character who suffers one or more Wounds from this effect is Stunned for 1 Round and suffers a -10 penalty to Weapon Skill, Ballistic Skill, and Agility for the remainder of the combat encounter.

Holo-suit: The holo-suit generates multiple images of the user. This is treated as a Force Field with a Protective Rating of 35 that never Overloads.

†*Vaiuri's Fear Trait only affects those enemies in melee with Vaiuri and does not affect them if for some reason they cannot see her (blinded, smoke grenades, etc.).*

TROUPE MASTER

Leader in the Dance, Avatar of the Laughing God: a Harlequin Troupe Master is all these things and more. At their simplest, a Troupe Master is the commander of a Harlequin Troupe, as much as they have such leaders. It is he that decides where the Troupe goes next, what dances are performed, and what messages they deliver. If the Shadowseers are the heart and soul of a Troupe, the Troupe Master is its mind and cunning.

When performing, a Troupe Master invariably plays the story's hero or major protagonist. In the Dance Without End, the Troupe Master takes the role of the Laughing God himself, striving against She Who Thirsts and thwarting the newly birthed god's unceasing hunger. Other times a Troupe Master is an emissary for the Troupe, meeting with Craftworld Farseers, Archons of the Dark Eldar, Corsair Princes, or representatives of the Eldar Exodites.

In battle, these mighty warriors are a blur of motion, their holo-suits projecting a constant barrage of illusion. They weave between their foes, never stopping and striking with effortless grace. Wherever a Troupe Master steps, his enemies fall, grasping at bloody stumps where limbs used to be or gurgling through choked mouthfuls of blood as a carefully placed shot tears open their throats. No foe can match him, as he flows around clumsy counter-attacks and vaults athletically away from one enemy only to strike down the next.



Traits: Unnatural Agility (4).

Weapons: Fusion pistol (Pistol; 10m; S/-/-; 2d10+10 E; Pen 12; Clip 3; Reload 1 Full; Melta, Reliable) *or* shuriken pistol (Pistol; 30m; S/3/5; 1d10+2 R; Pen 4; Clip 40; Reload 2 Full; Razor Sharp; Reliable), harlequin power sword (Melee; 1d10+10 E; Pen 6; Balanced; Power Field) *or* Harlequin's Kiss (Melee; 1d10+8 R; Pen 10; Tearing).

Gear: Flip belt, holo-suit, 4 weapon clips.

Dance of Death: The unimaginable agility of a Troupe Master allows him great mobility on the battlefield. Whenever a Troupe Master successfully dodges an attack, he may make a Disengage Action as a Free Action. If he ends this move within 3 metres of an enemy, he gains a +20 bonus to Melee Attacks against that foe until the end of his next Turn.

Flip Belt: The flip belt allows the user to manipulate gravity, moving with astounding grace. The user ignores penalties for Difficult Terrain and can re-roll failed Dodge Tests.

Holo-suit: The holo-suit generates multiple images of the user. This is treated as a Force Field with a Protective Rating of 35 that never Overloads.

Troupe Master (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
71	50	42	44	61	59	57	60	67	--

Movement: 10/20/30/60

Armour: Xenos Mesh (3 All)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +30, Athletics (S) +20, Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel) +20, Command (Fel) +10, Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +20, Forbidden Lore (Black Library, Daemonology) (Int) +10, Parry (WS) +20, Scrutiny (Per) +10, Sleight of Hand (Ag) +20, Stealth (Ag) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Blade Dancer, Blademaster, Combat Master, Deadeye Shot, Hard Target, Leap Up, Lightning Attack, Lightning Reflexes, Precise Blow, Rapid Reload, Sharpshooter, Sidearm, Sure Strike, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Ranged, Melee).

Wounds: 30

Total TB: 4



DEATH JESTER

These sinister Harlequins dress in sombre blacks and purples decorated with skulls, bones, and the trappings of the grave. As such, Death Jesters are a macabre and fearful sight.

Death Jesters act as the heavy support for a Harlequin Troupe, carrying the lethal and rightly feared shrieker cannon into battle. This devastating weapon is similar to the more common Eldar shuriken cannon, but uses bio-explosive ammunition. These unique shuriken are infused with deadly toxins that drive a victim mad with agony. If the initial wound does not kill the target, the toxins cause his flesh to split apart and explode with dreadful effect. Many denizens of the Screaming Vortex have come to hate and dread the distinctive whine of these weapons at work.

Out of battle, the Death Jesters often keep to themselves, and their pitiless sense of humour and mocking laughter is deeply unsettling. In a performance, Death Jesters often play their namesake, striking down the unwary or the foolish and reminding all that none shall be spared the reaper's uncaring attention.

Death Jester (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
57	61	45	40	58	42	58	59	30	--

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 28

Armour: Xenos Mesh (3 All)

Total TB: 4

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +30, Athletics (S) +20, Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel), Deceive (Fel) +20, Dodge (Ag) +20, Forbidden Lore (Daemonology) (Int), Parry (WS) +20, Scrutiny (Per), Sleight of Hand (Ag) +10, Stealth (Ag) +20.

Talents: Bulging Biceps, Combat Master, Crack Shot, Deadeye Shot, Hard Target, Hip Shooting, Leap Up, Lightning Reflexes, Marksmen, Mighty Shot, Rapid Reload, Sharpshooter, Sidearm, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Target Selection, Two-Weapon Wielder (Ranged, Melee), Unarmed Warrior, Unarmed Master.

Traits: Fear (1), Unnatural Agility (3).

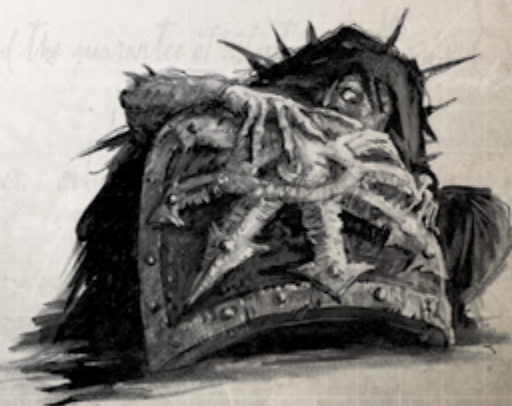
Weapons: Shrieker cannon (Heavy; 100m; – /3/10; 2d10 R; Pen 4; Clip 60; Reload 2 Full; Bio-Explosive†; Razor Sharp; Reliable; Toxic [3]), shuriken pistol (Pistol; 30m; S/3/5; 1d10+2 R; Pen 4; Clip 40; Reload 2 Full; Razor Sharp; Reliable), harlequin blade (Melee; 1d10+5 R; Pen 0)

Gear: Flip belt, holo-suit, 4 weapon clips.

Flip Belt: The flip belt allows the user to manipulate gravity, moving with astounding grace. The user ignores penalties for Difficult Terrain and can re-roll failed Dodge Tests.

Holo-suit: The holo-suit generates multiple images of the user. This is treated as a Force Field with a Protective Rating of 35 that never Overloads.

†A character who suffers one or more wounds from the Toxic quality of the shrieker cannon has been subject to the virulent gene-toxins within the cannon's ammunition. Every turn the character must pass a **Difficult (–10) Toughness Test** or suffer an additional 1d10 Wounds with no reduction for Armour or Toughness Bonus. If a character takes Critical damage because of this toxin, immediately roll 1d5+5 and consult **Table 7–12: Explosive Critical Effects – Body** (see page 250 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) and apply the result. A successful **Hard (–20) Medicine Test** stops further toxin effects, but does not repair any of the damage already done from both from the initial weapon strike and toxin result.



THE ISLANDS OF THE RAGGED HELIX

"Of course you may pass through my realm. Take all the time you wish, I just need a small token as compensation. Shall we say your left eye?"

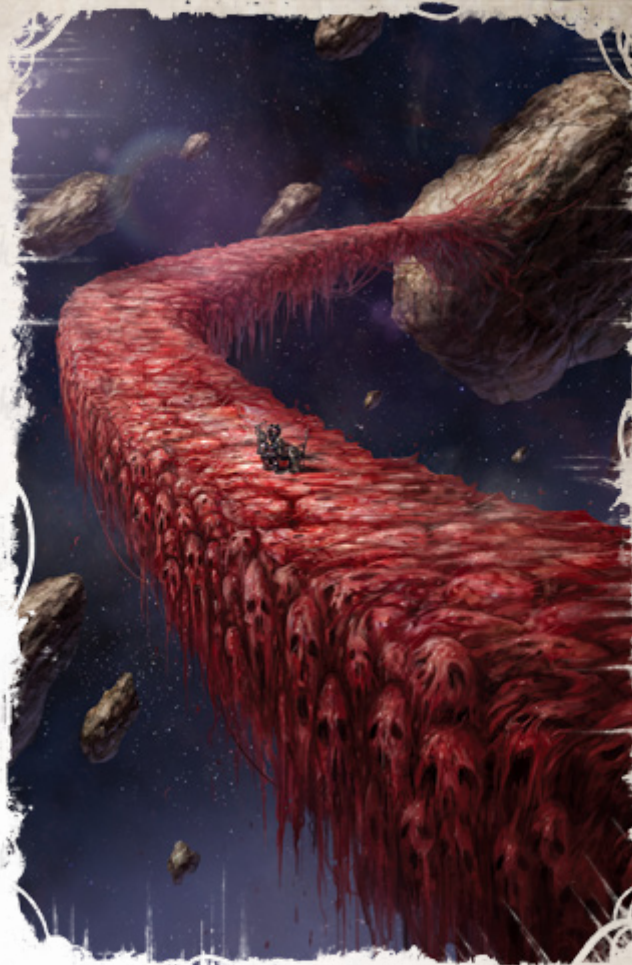
—Beledran Rouge, Pirate Prince of the Ragged Helix

In the space between the Gloaming Worlds and the Inner Ring, flanked by the planets Aphexis and Messia, is the Ragged Helix. This cluster of asteroids hangs in the æther, impossibly chained together with slithers of atmosphere and ribbons of gravity. Whether the force that keeps the asteroids together is a naturally occurring phenomenon, the design of some dark agency, or the result of xenos artifice, no one truly knows.

The Ragged Helix covers a vast area stretching for millions of leagues in every direction. Each rock, which can vary in size from a planetoid to a stepping stone, is linked to the next by a tendril of atmosphere. These create invisible bridges that span the void, allowing mortals to step from one asteroid to another. While some of these wild islands of rock are mere metres apart, others cover a far greater expanse, forcing brave or foolish travellers to walk between the islands held aloft in space, and never entirely sure if they will reach the next link in the chain.

There are a few scholars and dark adepts who see the Ragged Helix as a galactic marvel and a thing of pure beauty, while others see only death. For one thing is certain, the Ragged Helix—like anywhere within the Screaming Vortex—is an incredibly dangerous place. The unwary and ignorant must measure their life spans in minutes should they be foolish enough to find themselves upon one of the islands. Some of the hazards are environmental; while each asteroid boasts an atmosphere, only a minority are breathable. The bridges that link the asteroids are also extremely perilous, for some spans do not actually connect to another asteroid and so deposit the unwary into the cold void.

Despite these elements, they are a minor hazard when compared to the Ragged Helix's many denizens. For a thousand generations or more, the Ragged Helix has been the home to some of the Screaming Vortex's most notorious residents. The Helix is large and there are more asteroids within its bounds than anyone could ever count, and yet there are only a finite number of the larger islands that have suitable atmospheres. These are the most desirable areas within the Helix, and are centres of great conflict. Many host mighty fortresses owned by demented Heretekks, who burrow deep within the rocks for their profane experiments, as well as hosting the workshops and armouries of industry. These corrupted Tech-Priests do a brisk trade, arming much of the Screaming Vortex. Due to the ready supply of weapons and arms, their strongholds are a natural staging point for an aspiring warlord's conquest. In such times, the asteroid-smithies are surrounded with interstellar craft and dread barges of war. While some ships are anchored by psychic tethers or more advanced technology, other cling crudely attach to the floating fortresses with great rune-inscribed iron chains. As the asteroids rotate—for no island within the Helix is ever truly stationary—so too do the warships, following the planetoid along its languid trajectory.



For this reason, the fallen Magos lay claim to many, although not all, of the largest planetoids on the outskirts of the Ragged Helix. There are some Heretekks who have ventured deeper into the Ragged Helix, but they are the exceptions. For, without doubt, the interior of the archipelago belongs to the Pirate Princes.

The Pirate Princes of the Ragged Helix are the most infamous raiders of the Screaming Vortex. Creating havoc in their wake, the Pirate Princes take whatever they wish and destroy anything else, oft-times out of pure spite. They are rightly feared throughout the Screaming Vortex and beyond, known as capricious and merciless hunters. Yet, while the Pirate Princes range far across the Vortex, it is the Ragged Helix they call home, and where they return once they are sated and their ship's hold is full.

Any Pirate Prince worth his reputation has carved out a domain within the Ragged Helix to call his—or her—own. These areas are known colloquially as the Fiefs. The realms vary in size and, in most cases, the larger the Fief, the more powerful and infamous the Pirate Prince who controls it. Some Fiefs cover a single asteroid, while others might only spread across a sliver of a planetoid, willingly or not sharing it with a neighbour. The largest Fiefs encompass several asteroids within the Ragged Helix, the domain linked together by atmospheric bridges. In these Fiefs, the bridges are jealously guarded by the Prince's warband, to ensure he retains control over the whole region. In some cases, the Pirate Prince might deign to let travellers pass through the Fief, the tolls for

crossing the tethers from one island to the next ranging from the exorbitant to the utterly outlandish. The toll could be anything from the tears of a beloved, ecstatic memories of a kill, or the colour of one's eyes.

But it is not just the size of the Fief that defines a Prince's realm. The domains are as eclectic and bizarre as the pirates themselves. A few Fiefs are simply barren areas with a stronghold either built onto or into the asteroid, but there are many more that directly reflect a Prince's personality. This is partly due to the design aesthetics and choices made by the realm's ruler. However, in many cases it is as if the Ragged Helix itself lends a hand. The islands begin to warp and shift to better mirror the sovereign's desires, whims, and persona. This makes asteroids of an established Fief even more perilous than normal as the islands themselves become as capricious and cruel.

There are many Pirate Princes, and each is as individualistic and domineering as the next. Thus the Fiefs are extremely diverse in character. While truces and pacts between the Princes are not unheard of, these are fleeting, for the one thing a Prince hates more than regular prey is his fellow pirates. This means that the Ragged Helix is a metaphorical tinderbox, where only a mere spark is ever needed to bring the archipelago to war. The Fiefs themselves become the battlegrounds, and the keys to victory are the bridges that span the space between to link the islands. To choke a Fief, an oppressor needs to control all bridges that connect the besieged domain to the rest of the Helix. If this happens, then it is only a matter of time before the realm is taken and its sovereign slain. Sometimes, the Prince returns to find his own Fief lost and with it, his power base and status. In these cases, he might become an exile with his crew or simply be murdered by one of them, and so another Pirate Prince rises to try his luck amongst the most dangerous of peers.

THE FIEF OF BELEDRAN ROUGE

In a cadre of cruel beings, Beledran is known as one of the cruellest. A Pirate Prince at least six centuries old, Beledran has been a scourge of the Screaming Vortex for most of his life. Despite his advanced age, Beledran remains extremely handsome; the only blemish on his exquisite face is the mark of his patron, Slaanesh, upon his perfect cheek.

Even as Beledran's victims look up in awe at his beatific visage, most know that they face a cruel and painful end, as he is known to many by his other title, one that leaves little to the imagination: the Red Flayer. Beledran wears the epithet with pride because his raids are rarely for mineral wealth or other valuables; it is the flesh of the living that he desires.

What the Pirate Prince does with the grisly matter he collects is a mystery to many. Only to those who have visited his Fief does it become clear. For Beledran is an artist; a creator of perverse and ecstatic beauty—and his chosen medium is the flesh and skin of his victims.

His Fief comprises three asteroids—a large planetoid and two smaller satellites. While the landscape on all three isles is littered with his work—sculptures large and small made out of flesh and treated to prevent the rigours of Nurgle and ensure they exist for eternity—there is a certain order and thought that has gone into their placement. Rouge, as a follower of Slaanesh, is ever the perfectionist. Beledran's demesne is located on the largest asteroid. It is a grand house with an immaculate garden, where plants and trees impossibly thrive despite the absence of a sun. In amongst the garden and inside the house are Rouge's favourite artistic endeavours; these are normally of a more intimate nature.

One of the smaller satellites has been named the Menagerie, home to the Pirate Prince's largest works. The flesh here has been shaped and carved into nightmarish creatures that Beledran claims to have encountered.

The final asteroid is known as the Stage, for his work does not stop at single subjects. This island is home to great dioramas concocted from flesh. There are scenes of war and carnage from the Great Heresy, the Macharius Crusade, the Sabbat Worlds, and more. Perhaps surprisingly, many of these dioramas show the subjects of the Imperium in a flattering light. On the few occasions this has been brought up with Beledran, he has simply smiled a languid smile and stated that it was the act of carnage and destruction that pulled him to the scene, not who was victorious on the actual day. How he even knows about such events that have happened long ago in places light years away is another mystery that surrounds Rouge.

Of all these artistic wonders, the greatest of the Pirate Prince's work is still to be completed. The tethers that link the asteroids are not visible to the naked eye, and so to cross a great expanse is an unnerving experience. Beledran has never liked this aspect of the Ragged Helix, not because he finds it unsettling—he has walked the Helix for six hundred years—more that it does not suit his aesthetic sensibilities. To remedy this, Beledran has started what he has called his "greatest work," whereby vast bridges of flesh and bone span the voids in his Fief. A rigid structure between two floating islands would never endure, and so Rouge has imbued his constructs with the arcane. The services of K'ralzx the Mage-Wright were purchased to make the impossible, possible. So far the Q'Sal Sorcerer's spell has proven successful, allowing Beledran to bridge the spans. The side effect has been to recall the spirits of those slaughtered to create the structure, manifesting in the bridge as screaming, elongated faces. The Pirate Prince looked upon this new development as a boon, and was reported as saying that it added a whole new emotional depth to the work.

So far the Menagerie has been connected to the demesne, and Rouge has already started on the second bridge. Of course, such staggering constructs require an immense amount of raw material; an unfortunate consequence for anyone who crosses Beledran Rouge's path.

THE FIEF OF LISHKAR DELPHUES

The Pirate Princess Lishkar Delphues is a terrifying individual to encounter. She is an intimidating figure not only in stature but appearance as well.

Even when young, Lishkar was afflicted with a split personality. Lishkar would tell her guardians in the Schola Progenium that she was visited at night by a spiteful old crone. This mysterious stranger claimed that one day, they would be one.

Decades later, when she pledged her allegiance to the Ruinous Powers in desperation to alleviate her plight, it was Slaanesh that answered her plea. A Keeper of Secrets came to her, promising that she would be a powerful leader and that many would tremble at her very name but first she would have to bring her true selves to the fore. With that, the Keeper of Secrets struck out its forefinger and with a single razor-sharp nail sliced down her face.

To look upon Lishkar now is to see the two personalities melded as one. Her face is split in two vertically down the centre by a sinuous red scar, the legacy of the Greater Daemon. One side of her face is beautiful; she would be stunning if whole. The other side is hideous, a horrible crone with weeping eyes. Both sides of Lishkar's personality are incredibly cruel and domineering, each trying to outdo and better the other in everything. To be captured by Lishkar is an unfortunate fate, as both sides suggest and then implement terrible tortures, the split personalities trying to beat the other in the most agonising way.

The rare instances when Lishkar does speak with one voice are in the heat of battle, during which one or the other personality surrenders dominance. The Crone is said to favour caution and careful planning, and excels at leading the Pirate's quarry into deadly traps, while the Girl is more headstrong, preferring strength of force over cunning.

Unsurprisingly, Delphues' Fief reflects her double personality. The domain consists of two large asteroids; one is known as the Girl's Haven and the other is called the Crone's Lair.

Both islands have been turned into grand residences. Each mirrors the look and feel of the owning personality. In the Crone's halls, the decor is cold but broken up by strange and unsettling paintings. Upon the walls are giant canvases showing dual scenes: one in which the subjects are feasting or in provocative acts, with the following painting showing the same subjects in torturous and excruciatingly painful poses. An ornate, colossal chandelier hangs from the ceiling in the central audience chamber. Each of the thousand delicate, hanging crystals that makes up a part of the chandelier is said to contain the essence of one of Lishkar's countless victims.

Directly below the chandelier, and equal in circumference, is a massive pit that burrows deep down into the asteroid. No one knows what is in the pit; even her the members of her retinue are unsure. One thing is certain, something resides within, for every so often otherworldly howls of frustration can be heard echoing out of the hole. One theory is that Lishkar has imprisoned the Greater Daemon that split her in twain, and when the crystal chandelier is full of the Crone's captured spirits, it will be cut from the ceiling to fall into the pit, crushing its prisoner, the resulting act finally separating Lishkar into two distinct beings. Of course, this is all supposition, legend, and hear-say.

Across the atmospheric bridge lies the Girl's Haven. On this island everything is far brighter, and more immediate. While the Crone's side of Lishkar's personality has a preference for slaying those she has captured, the Girl sees them as slaves to be worked hard, toiling within the interior of her asteroid, hollowing it out as she hunts for a rare mineral said to have great restorative properties. Not all captives are sent into the mines below the Haven. There are those she calls "The Handsome Ones." If Lishkar sets eyes on a slave—male or female—and sees an attraction there, she orders that favoured person sent to the tower, a pinnacle-like structure that caps the Girl's Haven. Once imprisoned in the tower, none have ever returned. Lishkar visits the tower every few days when she is in residence. What happens on these occasions none can say, only that when Lishkar returns she is clearly rejuvenated.

THE FIEF OF CRAVELLE GURLSH

The corpulent form of the Pirate Prince known as Cravelle Gurlsh is both vile and horrifying to behold. Never seen without some food in his mouth or hand, Gurlsh's raids focus on material goods. The crews and passengers of his quarry are inconsequential.

Rather than kill them, Cravelle lets the crew go. However, having emptied the target craft of all valuable and usable material, he makes a point of destroying any kind of propulsion the ship has, leaving it a listing wreck and the passengers stranded. That they then suffer slow and painful deaths due to thirst, starvation, and the predations of the strong over the weak is of great comfort to Cravelle, as these are deaths that Slaanesh cherishes.

To the Prince of Chaos, the deprivation of sensations can be as fulfilling as overindulging in them. That the victims of a such kindness are rarely grateful has always been a bit of mystery to this Pirate Prince.



His ship, *The Jilted*, is a hulking, ugly, monstrosity of a void craft. The ship is incredibly slow and, in most cases, his targets could outrun him. And yet, Gurlsh is a prolific raider. It seems the more the prey flees and strives to get away, the closer *The Jilted* gets. How Cravelle manages this is not clear. Can *The Jilted* open pocket gateways to skim along the Warp and rapidly close the distance? Is Cravelle simply blessed by the Dark Prince, who would no doubt enjoy the irony of the slow and dignified always capturing the hasty? Only the dead and Cravelle know for certain. Whatever the reason, when *The Jilted* returns to the Ragged Helix, its holds are always full. The Fief of Cravelle Gurlsh is a ring of asteroids in which his bloated ship rests, anchored in the centre when it's not raiding.

The floating islands of Gurlsh's domain are modest in size when compared to the domains of other Pirate Princes of note. However, with six asteroids under his control, attacking or attempting to siege Cravelle's Fief is a daunting prospect. As well as linking to the next island in Gurlsh's chain, each asteroid has a secondary bridge leading to another part of the Helix. To seal off the Fief from the outside would be an all but impossible task. As such, despite the boundless avarice and ambition of the other Pirate Princes, none has ever attempted an all-out assault upon Gurlsh's lair. This is despite the fact that the realm is rich in valuable resources—the results of the Pirate Prince's long and successful career.

Cravelle is a copious hoarder; mountains of food stuffs rot on at least two of his islands. Gold, gems, and other baubles are piled high on another, while weapons of exotic and xenos origin gather dust in another part of his domain. Cravelle has no real use for such things, and simply collects them from an insatiable, obsessive need—a gift from Slaanesh. To take anything from Gurlsh, no matter that he has no real need of it, would be a terrible mistake. Despite being a Pirate Prince of the Ragged Helix with a fearsome reputation to match, Cravelle Gurlsh is rarely roused to anger. And yet, any petty act of theft against his property—no matter that he has stolen it himself, one of the odd times when Gurlsh does fail to see the irony—triggers a great rage. Woe betide the thief if he is caught, for nothing, not the Emperor, nor even Slaanesh himself, can save the perpetrator from Cravelle's vengeance.

THE HALLS OF DIONAEA

Cravelle Gurlsh, Beledran Rouge, and Lishkar Delphues are but three of the Pirate Princes that inhabit the Ragged Helix. There are many more within the Helix and most—if they have proven worthy enough—have a Fief that is as strange, bizarre, and dangerous as their ruler.

But not all islands within the interior of the archipelago are under the dominion of one of the Pirate Princes. At the heart of the Ragged Helix lies a planetoid that has been called many things in its past, but is currently known as the Halls of Dionaea. It is one of the larger asteroids in the entire archipelago, the interior of which is riddled with passages and chambers through to the very core.

Many might envision large empty passages and caves of hewn rock, but this image could not be further from the truth. The exterior does appear as a barren planetoid, but the large, yearning cave-like entrance reveals the inside of the Dionaea to be richly adorned. Opulence is everywhere within, and beatific statues cast their eyes upon the teeming number of patrons who visit. Great friezes dominate the walls, and intricate mosaics of deplorable images criss-cross vast floors when they are not laid with luxurious carpets with intricate patterns weaved into the pile. Such patterns cannot be looked upon for too long, for it is said that strange visions and temporary madness plague those that follow the weave too closely.

The Hall's visitors are legion. The Pirate Princes rarely work alone, and have large crews and retinues at their disposal; some are indentured workers and slaves, but most are loyal to their Pirate Prince, desiring to share in his glory and wealth. It is these, as well as daring visitors from outside the Ragged Helix, who journey to the Dionaea and partake its countless delights. For the Halls are a veritable pleasure palace; its many chambers cater to every vice imaginable. There are whole districts for gambling, cavernous avenues set aside for prostitution, where any deviancy is fulfilled, and great markets in which exotic wares are traded and the finest food, drinks, and narcotics are sampled.



The Dionaea, sometimes also known as the Honeycomb, is staffed and administered by a strange androgynous race. They are slim with elfin faces and an ink-like patina that shimmers and moves across their skin. The patina reacts to the creature's environment, forming into pleasing or mesmerising patterns in response to external factors such as the moods of the Dionaea's clientele. The xenos are not known to exist anywhere outside of the Dionaea; there is certainly no known mention of them in any ancient infovault or Imperial dataslate. Their only seeming desire is to please the Honeycomb's visitors. They are gracious and welcoming, using their pleasing, shifting colours to placate the guests, and are impossible to provoke to anger—as many have tried, especially those who have lost at the gambling tables. The Administrators, as they have become known, are extremely non-confrontational; they mutter apologies, offer complimentary drinks, and alter their skin patterns into soothing configuration and other physical comforts to placate antagonists. However, should this fail, then the statuary awakes.

The countless statues within the Halls all work as part of the magnificent decor. They can be found in many forms, from grand hounds and rampant lions to depictions of famous Pirate Princes of the past and angelic figures. The majority of the time they remain as still as stone. Should the Administrators or the property of the Dionaea come under direct and sustained threat, then the nearby statuary activates. Moving in a seamless and efficient manner, the statues close in on the perpetrators and eject them out of the area. If the instigator becomes even more agitated and violent, the statues will react with equal force, although they are almost inevitably stronger and kill with ruthless efficiency. Usually, the animation of the statues is enough to placate the individual or group of rabble-rousers, who are then escorted to the exit. Afterwards, the statues return to their former places and positions without a glance at any other visitor or Administrator to continue their silent vigil.

While not necessarily a secret, the Dionaea's unique statuary is not a well known feature. Regulars to the Halls learn early on to not cause too much trouble, but newcomers often only see the supplicating Administrators and so feel

empowered and unduly entitled, especially if they belong to the retinue of a reputable Pirate Prince. Regulars have become attuned to the frequent spectacle and get a sense of perverse joy watching the naive perpetrators dealing with the emotionless, silent, and terrifying vision of the statuary bearing down on them. It certainly always attracts many gawkers from nearby gambling tables.

The statues are not invincible, but it takes a being of exceptional strength to do more than chip rock or dint bronze. There are a few instances where a statue has been destroyed in the course of its duties, not necessarily by brute strength alone, but sometimes if the target of the statue's ire has broken the covenant preventing weapons within the Halls. Those foolish enough to openly brandish even so much as an autopistol do not normally see the statuary move, just a fleeting shadow before their hands are crushed and necks broken.

Due to the Honeycomb's unique status, and its subtle defences, it has become the de facto location for the Pirate Princes to meet. It is neutral ground, unclaimed by any Fief, making it an ideal meeting place should the Princes deign to convene face-to-face. This is where pacts are made, or allegiances changed and plans are instigated to slay common rivals or to invade a Fief. The Administrators serve such important personages with the reverence their notoriety dictates, ensuring that private quarters are organised so the meeting can take place away from prying eyes, and that goblets are always full and platters are well stocked with morsels of food and sweat treats.

The Pirate Princes, like the other denizens of the Ragged Helix, use the Dionaea for their own nefarious purposes, and so give little thought to why it is there.

No one has noticed—or if some have, those individuals rarely care—that roughly six percent of the Dionaea's many visitors never leave. They become lost in the labyrinthine passages, for the deeper they go, the less the corridors resemble the opulent higher levels, and begin to look and feel organic. Passages take on a pinkish tinge, with blue veins as the walls visibly pulse. For—if the maddest, most insane of the Helix's denizens are to be believed—at the centre of the asteroid resides a tentacled monstrosity, a creature of Slaanesh's creation that psychically feeds off the desires of the Hall's

patrons. Intangible sustenance is never quite enough, however. The curse or boon that Slaanesh has gifted his pet is that to power the elfin organic puppets, and the arcane constructs that mete out the Honeycomb's justice above, the creature must also feed on the flesh of its patrons. And so it does, funnelling a small but significant percentage of the visitors into its fleshy passages, which lead directly to one of its many, dripping maws. Legends claim that the victims, their emotional extremes dampened through the actions of the creature's puppets above, last many long weeks until their sensory capabilities are finally exhausted and their sated flesh is consumed.

PIRATE PRINCE SENESCHAL

Seneschals and other high-ranking members of a Pirate Prince's retinue are typical of the clientèle the Heretics might encounter in the Dionaea. The title varies depending on how the Prince organises his retinue. He could be known as First Mate, Favoured One, Officer of the Abyss, Seneschal, or any such epithet. In any case, he is sure to be a member of the Pirate Prince's Inner Circle, if not his closest advisor, and likely holder of his greatest secrets.

Pirate Prince Seneschal (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
41	38	41	41	40	35	30	38	40	12

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 15

Armour: Light carapace (5 All)

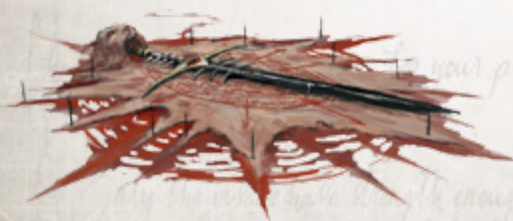
Total TB: 4

Skills: Awareness (Per), Charm (Fel) +10, Commerce (Int) +10, Concealment (Ag), Dodge (Ag), Interrogation (WP), Intimidation (S).

Talents: Disarm, Hip Shooting, Nerves of Steel, Takedown.

Weapons: Inferno pistol (Pistol; 10m; S/-/-; 2d10+10 E; Pen 12, Clip 3; Melta), power rapier with duellist's grip (Melee; 1d10+6 E; Pen 3; Balanced, Power Field). Each seneschal carries his own unique weapons, and so these can be exchanged for similar weapons as desired.

Gear: A Seneschal's gear is highly individualised, but all of it is at least of Good Craftsmanship. He also likely has some form of narcotics. Obscura is one common option, but there are a wide variety of other, more exotic flavours from the Screaming Vortex that he might possess.



STATUARY OF DIONAEA

The sinister statues of the Halls are arcane constructs powered by an unknown force. Their role seemingly is to keep the peace within the Halls of Dionaea, ensuring its patrons can pursue their lusts and desires without fear of danger or reprisal, though many wonder if the imposed calm merely ensures that repressed urges become even more powerful once unleashed.

Statuary of Dionaea (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	--	45	58	45	15	35	15	10	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 30

Armour: Stone construction (All 6)

Total TB: 9

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Parry (WS), Stealth (Ag).

Talents: Cold Hearted, Disarm, Swift Attack, True Grit, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (1), Machine (6), Undying, Unnatural Strength (2), Unnatural Toughness (4), Sturdy.

Weapons: Stone Fists (Melee; 1d10+6 I; Pen 0; Concussive, Felling [2]).

Gear: None.

GAMING IN THE DIONAEA

The Dionaea presents players and the Game Master with an interesting dichotomy to the rest of the Ragged Helix. Here is a place where Heretics can encounter many NPCs in a social context rather than a simple hostile confrontation. It is a great place to instigate a Social Conflict, with plenty of spectators about to appraise the conflict allowing players to increase their standing and Infamy amongst the denizens of the Helix. It is also a good place for GM's to introduce leads and where a Heretic can restock his inventory—or lose it all through gambling!

There are plenty of adventure hooks within the Halls that can be used or ignored as the Game Master sees fit; whether it is sinister statues, mysterious xenos servants, chasing a fellow patron or group through the crowded passages, or even escaping the hunger of a tentacled monstrosity!

The assorted clientele of the Dionaea can be represented using any of the Heretic profiles from pages 360-363 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook.



WORLDS OF THE BLOOD GOD

"Some fool once asked me if the Screaming Vortex was the afterlife. I asked him if he thought it was a punishment or a reward, then killed him to prove my point."

—Captain Elga Irontooth of the *Brass Reaver*

Only the bravest or most foolhardy would ever travel through the worlds of the Screaming Vortex by choice. These places—torn from the physical realm or spontaneously manifested from the Warp—are tainted so deeply that their very essence is formed from corruption. The depths of the maelstrom tear at the very souls of any who would dare to view them, just as its locations often shred the bodies of those who attempt to conquer them.

The essence of the Screaming Vortex is conflict. When it originated—according to myth, with the collapse of the decadent and decaying Eldar civilisation—worlds were torn asunder as the Immaterium began to bleed into physical space. At times, it seems that the place must constantly expand to feed its hunger, digesting and transforming those worlds it has absorbed through ongoing conflict, while continuing to seek out new places to devour.

Time is often a contentious notion within the Warp, but from most perspectives millennia have passed since the Vortex first manifested. Through this time, untold worlds have known terrible and endlessly destructive conflict to honour the Ruinous

Powers. In spite of this, new locations are often discovered within its bounds by the few who dare to explore the swirling maelstrom. Some of the Screaming Vortex's residents—often as a manifestation of their madness—have attempted to categorise and map these locations. Though their work ostensibly serves as a guide to those who might travel between these worlds, would-be conquerors who dare follow such directions risk embracing the madness that defines this place.

Just as the worlds of the Screaming Vortex vary, so too are the ways in which one travels between them. For some followers and these minions, travel through the region is more a matter of force and battle than one of careful calculation. Not all travel needs to even involve a voidcraft, as unstable gateways connect many of the worlds at unpredictable intervals. Often, they appear at unknowable times or within the context of an invasion effort.

For those who follow Khorne, a brutal battle is often the focal point of a transit undertaken in his name. Upon slaying a massive Daemon, its body might transform into a passage between worlds. Alternatively, what seems like a mundane tunnel might become the digestive track of a massive beast that must be defeated before the Heretics' journey can be concluded. Even travelling within a vessel, a swarm of attackers might threaten the travellers and must be overcome anew prior to each arriving upon a world. Defeating such opponents might be a physical manifestation of the metaphysical journey required to reach a destination, or could be for the simple amusement of the Lord of Battles. Within the Screaming Vortex, the line between madness and reality is rarely as clean as a knife's edge, and is more often akin to a widening pool of blood spreading across a star-filled void.

BERIN AND ASPHODEL

"Slaves? You mark my words boy, there's naught down there but a hundred different ways to die. You'd best look for your slaves elsewhere."

—Reaver Captain Hican Matsu (deceased)

Trapped in orbit around the poisonous star of Velaj, the worlds of Berin and Asphodel exist in a state of unending war. Both were drawn into the Screaming Vortex only a few centuries ago, although none can say from where. Some believe they existed on the edge of the Vortex and were slowly absorbed by its creeping expansion, others say they were drawn across the length of the galaxy through ritual sorcery or vagrant Warp tunnels. Whatever the truth, the process utterly ravaged both worlds and their inhabitants, and reduced them to savage barbarism, and any records of their previous existence were completely lost. The two races that now inhabit these worlds certainly have no care for the past, locked as they are in a constant cycle of battle, conquest, and death.

ASPHODEL

A dim and miasmal world, Asphodel's surface is almost completely covered in swamps. Twisted Nendya trees reach out from the scum-laden morass to cover the world's surface in perpetual twilight. What little light does pierce the tree cover is weak and only serves to create deep shadows in which the world's many predators lurk and hunt.

Despite its close proximity to Velaj, Asphodel teems with life, all of it utterly inimical to peaceful existence. Fat sting-flies buzz ceaselessly through the unending wetlands, and hideous blooms of flesh-rotting fungus sprout from the clumps of Tangle Vine that dot the swamp. Great beards of burn-moss reach down from the limbs of the trees, catching the unwary in their corrosive grip. Yet despite this deadly environment, the Kroot inhabiting Asphodel have flourished.

These lithe, avian aliens have adapted almost perfectly to the planet's geography as deadly hunters and warriors. Organised into tribal groups called Septs, the Kroot have spread across the face of Asphodel using their racial ability to absorb the genetic information of other creatures, evolving new traits and, in extreme cases, even into new sub-species of Kroot. By taking on the characteristics of the world's apex predators, they have become one of the most lethal and feared species in the Screaming Vortex, acting as mercenaries in warbands across this hellish region.

However, this forced evolution has not come without cost. Cut off from other Kroot and forced to subsist on primitive beasts and each other, they have regressed into a barbaric state of cannibalism and near constant violence. There seems nothing able to temper their violence, and rival Septs make war against each other in an endless savage conflict of ambushes and guerrilla raids.

With no access to or respite for developing advanced technologies, these Kroot warriors fight with simple spears and primitive missile weapons. This has led them to adopt a very close-range fighting style where stealth and the first strike is all important. Many of the Septs have also become adept at brewing poisons and other elixirs from Asphodel's local flora and fauna; hundreds of Kroot hunters stalk the noisome swamps with their arrowheads smeared in Scorchtip frog venom extract or spear tips wrapped in fronds of burn-moss.



Towards the equatorial region of the planet, the mighty mountain range of Lun rises. Here, the Kroot dimly remember more of their life before coming to the Vortex, and Shapers still lead the Septs. Amongst the rocky peaks, the Shapers teach the secrets of black powder, their poorly understood alchemy of rare mountain minerals and ground fungus harvested from the swamps below, and the manufacture of simple flintlock rifles. They also know the art of capturing and shaping the mighty beasts of the mountains, for here gigantic moon moths and sinuous æther wurms return to roost. The Shapers hunt these creatures not only for the meat and hides, but also for the Conjunction when their fiery heaven returns.

The Shapers believe that life on Asphodel is a test designed to breed strength and cunning. To this end, they encourage the primitive Kroot to make war on one another, believing this endless conflict helps breed the strong and prepare them for the holy time. For when Berin appears for the Conjunction, the Septs gather and make ready for the war in the skies.

THE RED MOON SEPT

Amongst the hundreds of disparate Kroot Septs that inhabit Asphodel, one stands out with infamy even beyond this world. Known for its extreme savagery and complete disregard for the beliefs of the Shapers, the Red Moon Sept has become synonymous with fury, betrayal, and cannibalism.

Where most of the Septs of Asphodel fight for territory, glory, or the blessings of the Shapers, the Red Moon are only interested in killing. Their ritual hunts have become more and more obsessed with death and bloodletting, while their ferocity and capacity for violence have grown to the point where all other concerns have become secondary. Willing to fight anything and anyone, often without provocation, the Red Moon are a scourge on the planet.

Numerous slavers and renegade warbands of the Vortex regard these warriors highly. Even so, many captains and champions making planetfall on Asphodel, seeking new recruits for their bloody endeavours, find themselves victims in the blood hunts of the Red Moon. Stalked through the treacherous terrain, visiting heretics are picked apart, one by one, as the Kroot of the Red Moon close in. Finally, when only a precious few of the landing party remain, the Red Moon packs descend, howling with rage, to butcher their prey in a shower of blood and viscera.

Despite the many threats on Asphodel, warbands still attempt planetfall with some regularity. Many come in search of the dozens of wrecked and abandoned shuttles and landers left by previous visitors. Legends speak of the relics and artefacts to be found amongst the wrecks, if one can prevail against the belligerent Kroot and their inhospitable swamp. That there are more legends than actual facts indicates the deadliness of these xenos and their devolved brethren.

ASPHODEL KROOT WARRIORS

Kroot Warriors are tall and lithe with long, slender limbs and curious beaked, almost avian, faces. To untrained eyes, a Kroot appears too lean and wiry to be a danger, but each is surprisingly strong, with corded muscles capable of viciously fast contractions. This allows a trained Kroot warrior to deliver a flurry of powerful blows in a very short space of time, and makes him a swift-moving terror on the battlefield. On the ground, they move with a rapid, hopping gait, but Kroot are also capable of ascending to the tree cover and leaping from tree to tree with great speed and agility.

The Kroot of Asphodel are known for their stealth and are able to move swiftly and silently through their swamp homeland with little or no evidence of their presence or passing. Those denizens of the Vortex who have studied this behaviour believe this is, in part, due to the Kroot's remarkable digestive system and rapid evolution.

The Kroot digestive system is capable of detecting and isolating useful genetic strands in consumed flesh. This also allows a Kroot warrior to bind useful DNA within unused sections of his own genetic structure and to pass on these genes to successive generations, driving the race to evolve along specific lines. This has led these Kroot in becoming efficient swimmers and climbers, and developing entirely new sub-species.

Asphodel's Kroot culture has devolved and much of their heritage has been forgotten. Where once they fought with powerful firearms, they now rely more on simple spears and bows. Innovation has not been totally forgotten, however, as they have developed a number of simple but effective weapons that utilise the poisonous fauna of their world. Even without more advanced weaponry, the Kroot of Asphodel are a match for most warrior races of the Vortex.



Asphodel Kroot Warrior (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	25	45	40	45	18	44	30	15	--

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: Hide Armour (Body 1)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Athletics (S), Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag) +10, Parry (WS), Stealth (Ag) +20, Survival (Per) +10.

Talents: Counter-Attack, Furious Assault, Lightning Reflexes, Sure Strike.

Traits: Asphodel Fieldcraft, Eaters of the Dead, Unnatural Agility (+2), Unnatural Perception (+2), Unnatural Strength (+2).

Weapons: Hook staff (Melee; 1d10+7 R; Pen 0; Primitive [8], Toxic [2]) or Kroot short-bow (Basic; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10 +4 R; Pen 0; Clip 1; Reload Half; Primitive [7], Reliable, Toxic [2]), claw net (Thrown; 12m; S/-/-; 1d5 R; Pen 0; Snare [2]; Toxic [2]).

Gear: Primitive clothing, grisly trophies, meat haunches, poisoned arrows.

Wounds: 12

Total TB: 4

KROOT TRAITS

The Traits listed below are unique to Asphodel Kroot:

EATERS OF THE DEAD

A Kroot who devours a fresh corpse gains a number of bonus Wounds equal to the unmodified Toughness Bonus that the corpse possessed when it was alive. These bonus Wounds cannot exceed the Kroot's own Toughness Bonus and remain for a number of hours equal to the Kroot's Toughness Bonus or until they are lost, whichever comes first. Damage from any successful attack is applied to these bonus Wounds first before application to the Kroot's normal Wounds. A Kroot can only receive bonus Wounds from one consumed corpse at a time.

ASPHODEL FIELDCRAFT

These Kroot gain a +10 bonus to Stealth Tests, and may make them as a Free Action even when being observed. They also treat forests, jungles, and similar environments as open terrain.

KROOT SHAPERS

Larger and more intelligent than their Warrior brethren, Shapers act as the spiritual and martial leaders of the Kroot on Asphodel. Living on the mountains of Lun, away from the swamp and keeping to themselves for the most part, the Shapers have managed to retain a little of their heritage and have not regressed into the same barbaric state as the rest of the inhabitants of the planet.

On other worlds, Shapers have an instinctive understanding of the remarkable Kroot digestive and evolutionary systems, and direct the development of their species through the careful selection of prey. On Asphodel, this function has become secondary to their spiritual guidance and religious beliefs.

The Shapers believe that the world of Berin is actually their form of heaven, or paradise, and the time they spend on Asphodel is but one of the many stages of life they must endure in order to prove themselves worthy to ascend. Where this belief springs from is matter of debate. Some lore-thieves of the Vortex believe it is some semblance of the Kroot's racial memory of the time before they came to Asphodel and is indicative of their desire to leave. Others think it is simply a primitive myth born from the Kroot's inability to grasp their current, mad existence. Whatever the truth of it, the overriding belief held by all Shapers on Asphodel is in order to attain heaven and leave, they must be strong, and such strength is born from conflict.

To this end, they set rival Septs against each other in a never-ending war, promising the secrets of black powder and a place in heaven to those who prove themselves the strongest. The Shapers not only gene-shape the great beasts used to ascend to heaven, but hunt them as the Conjunction draws near, using traditional methods such as tempting the beasts to land with the promise of food (often in the form of an unwitting volunteer or herd of Krootox). They then lead their brethren, both actual Kroot and the lesser species-variants of Krootox and other beasts, into the skies for battle. Each is doomed to soon die, either in the void or on the harsh surface of Berin, but for that short time their war cries echo across the Vortex and they are truly in heaven.

Kroot Shaper (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	30	48	40	55	35	46	40	35	--

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 18

Armour: Beast Furs (Body 2)

Total TB: 4

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Common Lore (Asphodel Myth, Kroot Religion) (Int), Dodge +10 (Ag), Scholastic Lore (Kroot Physiology) (Int) +20, Stealth (Ag) +10, Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Counter-Attack, Furious Assault, Lightning Reflexes, Sure Strike, Swift Attack.

Traits: Asphodel Fieldcraft, Eaters of the Dead, Unnatural Agility (+3), Unnatural Perception (+2), Unnatural Strength (+2).

Weapons: Kroot flintlock (Basic; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+3 I; Pen 0; Clip 1; Reload 2 Full; Inaccurate, Primitive [8], Unreliable), hook staff (Melee; 1d10+7 R; Pen 0; Primitive [8], Toxic [2]), claw net (Thrown; 15m; S/-/-; 1d5 R; Pen 0; Clip 1; Snare [2]; Toxic [2]).

Gear: Primitive clothing, bone amulets, charms.

KROOT HOUNDS

Slender, swift, and deadly, this divergent species has earned its place in Kroot society as trackers and hunting beasts almost without peer. They resemble quadrupedal Kroot warriors, but have longer and narrower heads, with a more pronounced beak and extended nasal cavity granting the hound a prodigious sense of smell. Their clawed legs have developed long, knife-like claws for ripping at a downed foe.

Kroot Hounds possess simple minds, little higher than most primitive beasts of the swamp. They are an evolutionary dead end, however, devolved to a state that no Shaper can breed back to sentience. They are capable of learning simple commands and fighting with basic tactics to best aid hunting parties. It is a rare warband that ventures into the swamps without several of these skilled killers leading the chase.

Kroot Hound (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	--	45	30	50	15	40	30	02	--

Movement: 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 10

Armour: None

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S) +10, Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S), Stealth (Ag).

Talents: Double Team, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (Smell), Rapid Reaction, Takedown.

Traits: Bestial, Natural Weapons, Quadruped.

Weapons: Jaws (Melee; 1d10+4 R; Pen 1; Primitive [7]).

Gear: None.

TABLE 3-6: KROOT WEAPONS

Name	Class	Range	RoF	Dam	Pen	Clip	Rld	Special	Wt	Availability
Hook Staff	Melee	—	—	1d10+1	0	—	—	Primitive (8), Toxic (2)	3.5kg	Common
Claw Net	Thrown	SBx3	—	1d5	0	1	—	Snare (2), Toxic (2)	2kg	Scarce
Kroot Shortbow	Basic	30m	S/-/-	1d10 R	0	1	Half	Primitive (8), Toxic (2)	1kg	Common
Kroot Flintlock	Basic	30m	S/-/-	1d10+3 I	0	1	2 Full	Inaccurate, Primitive (8), Unreliable	6kg	Rare

KROOTOX

Another evolutionary dead end, this massive beast possibly evolved from an animal no longer in existence on Asphodel (perhaps totally consumed by the carnivorous Kroot), or perhaps was already with the Kroot when they arrived on the planet. Whatever the truth of it, Krootox now lumber through the swamps in great herds.

Krootox are huge animals, four-legged and possessing the beaked, bird-like face of all Kroot sub-species. They are heavily muscled with massive shoulders and thick, powerful forelegs. Asphodel Kroot use the Krootox as beasts of burden, fetching and carrying or occasionally helping with construction, but more often they are put to use as living weapons of war.

In addition to their enormous strength, Krootox are famed for their notoriously short tempers. When threatened or goaded, a Krootox becomes a frenzied monster, smashing through foliage and crushing everything before it. Often, a Kroot warband does not bring these beasts with them, instead preferring to locate a herd near to their intended target. Once a suitable herd has been found, the warband attacks, driving Krootox before them. Many Kroot villages are utterly destroyed, unable to withstand the stampede of dozens of frenzied creatures. With the defences levelled and the remaining inhabitants still reeling from the shock of the stampede, the warband descends, mercilessly butchering the survivors.

Krootox (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	—	60	55	20	15	30	30	04	—

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Armour: Thick Hide (All 2)

Skills: Awareness (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Crushing Blow, Frenzy, Iron Jaw.

Traits: Bestial, Brutal Charge (2), Natural Armour (2), Deadly Natural Weapons, Quadruped, Size (Enormous), Stampede, Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+10), Unnatural Toughness (+5).

Weapons: Clawed fists (Melee; 2d10+18 I; Pen 2, Concussive [1]), beak (1d10+18 R, Pen 2).

Gear: None.

Wounds: 56

Total TB: 5

KROOTOR

Gene-shaped from water dwelling, saurian predators, many consider this to be the apex predator of Asphodel. Strong, fast, and stealthy, each is deadly and greatly prized as a war beast.

A Krootor is a large, quadrupedal creature, its short legs terminating in hooked claws used for scaling obstacles in the swamp. Its wide body is low to the ground, and Krootor spend much of their time swimming, using their thick tails to glide silently through the water. Although primarily aquatic creatures, they are capable of surprising speed on land.

The most distinctive feature of the Krootor, however, is its mouth. Similar in appearance to the avian beak of all Kroot, the Krootor's mouth is much larger. Long, wide, and filled with serrated teeth, its bite leaves terrible wounds that either kill outright, or cause terrible damage as the poisons within its maw take effect. The most common feeding tactic of a Krootor is to surprise its prey, bursting up from beneath the waters of the swamp and tearing bloody chunks of flesh away with savage, clenching bites. Many of the more vicious Septs of Asphodel utilise these beasts instead of Kroot Hounds, favouring their savagery and stealth over the hounds' enhanced senses and greater intelligence.

Krootor (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	—	50	45	25	15	20	30	02	—

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: Scaled Hide (All 3)

Skills: Athletics (S) +10, Awareness (Per), Stealth (Ag) +20.

Talents: Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Takedown.

Traits: Amphibious, Bestial, Deadly Natural Weapons, Natural Armour (3), Quadruped, Size (Hulking), Unnatural Strength (+2).

Weapons: Bite (Melee; 1d10+9 R; Pen 1; Toxic [2]).

Gear: None.

Lock Jaw: If a Krootor successfully hits with its bite it will lock its jaw shut, automatically Grappling its opponent (see **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook, page 243). Any Damage inflicted by the Krootor during the Grapple will be bite damage instead of unarmed. Once the Krootor has successfully inflicted Damage, it has torn a chunk off its victim and ends the Grapple at the end of the turn.

Strong Swimmer: When swimming, a Krootor doubles its Movement values.

BERIN

The sister planet to Asphodel, Berin is a barren rock as different to its twin as can be, an empty desert world bombarded with intense stellar radiation and scoured with endless winds. Life here is harsh and uncompromising, and every day is a battle for resources. The great desert plains offer up little save the promise of a slow death. Useful ores are practically non-existent, as is standing water. Life is a constant battle against the relentless winds and the Orks that infest the planet.

The terrible conditions have made these Orks tougher and larger than many of their brethren scattered across the galaxy. Lacking proper resources, many do not carry complex weapons, relying on weighty blades called choppas and the rare heavy pistol. The inhospitable conditions have had other effects on their lives. On other worlds, a healthy population of Gretchin would support the Orks in their day-to-day life; here, they are little more than a food source. Unable to cope with the lethal sunlight and flesh-stripping winds, many simply do not survive; those that do are often seized as food and consumed to feed the Boyz.

The terrible planetary atmosphere has also led to a preponderance of wild Squigs, and endless species of these feral creatures have evolved under the glare of Berin's toxic star. From the lightning fast, multi-legged Racer Squig to the bloated, gas-filled Balloon Squig, these unpredictable creatures are found everywhere on the planet.

Many Ork tribes settle around desert wells, defending them ferociously from any and all aggressors. A culture of Mekboyz, ingenious Ork inventors, has grown up in these settlements, replacing the typical societal norm of a single Warboss leading the tribe. However, the constant battle for water and other resources means these settlements are temporary at best. Soon enough, the wells dry up and what little minerals can be dragged from Berin's deserts run out, requiring the tribe to move on.

The tribes have become particularly adept at constructing a bewildering array of vehicles for crossing the endless deserts. Rocket-driven sleds and buggies race across the parched plains, while Ork outriderz mounted on Racer Squigs scout ahead. Huge hide-stitched airships filled with hundreds of Balloon Squigs lashed together, or in some extreme cases a single Squig bred to a gigantic size, lurch through Berin's skies as their rocket engines cough and sputter. Some of the more successful tribes even manage to amass enough stolen metal to construct tracked battle fortresses powered with simple, smoke belching Squig-engines.

Orks are an aggressive and warlike race by nature, and those on Berin are no different. When a nomadic tribe encounters a defended well or rival stronghold, bloodshed is inevitable. As the battle for water and resources is a constant struggle, a cycle of never-ending warfare has developed. These Ork tribes spend their whole lives defending their wells and settlements from encroaching nomadic tribes or searching out new settlements to conquer in an orgy of violence. The Mekboyz here excel at creating explosives from what little mineral wealth they can extract from Berin's grasp, and many tribes become obsessed with rockets, bombs, and grenades of all types. These are used in everything from vehicular propulsion to warfare, and battle on Berin is highly mobile and very, very loud.

However, no one tribe has yet achieved dominance for any length of time; the climate and geography of the world make defending more than a single settlement almost impossible. The



dust storms that ravage the world's surface can last for weeks at a time and are capable of obliterating entire strongholds, ripping down walls and stripping even Orks to the bone in moments. Three never-ending great storms in particular, known to the Orks as Ulg, Bur, and Zzuk, are exceptionally devastating. Each of these storms is a thousand kilometres wide and rages across the face of Berin, often clashing together and devastating everything in their path. Ork Psykers, called Weirdboyz, have a curious fascination with these storms, believing that Daemons stalk at their heart tearing Orks asunder and leaving messages in their wake.

These beliefs are perhaps not far from the truth. Legends branded on Q'Sal soul-parchments weep that long ago, before Berin was drawn inside the Vortex, the mighty Khornate Daemon Prince Ak'cogu'thiou'euak fought a great and terrible battle there. The world was not as it is now, but that conflict may have caused the eventual absorption of the world and triggered its slide into barbarism and bloodshed. Who or what the Daemon, known to men as Warfiend, fought against has been lost in the sands of time, but what is known is that Warfiend did not win. His essence shattered, his conqueror bound what remained of the Daemon and sealed it deep below the world's crust. Despite its defeat, Warfiend was not destroyed and raged against its imprisonment. Impotent and powerless, its anger grew and grew until its howls of rage were felt on the world's surface. Such was his wrath that the winds of Berin echoed its call, stirring into a great and terrible storm that lashed the planet in a desperate attempt to crack it open and free the Daemon within. Even now, the dust storms that ravage the planet, destroying all in their path, are but a fraction of the true power trapped at the heart of Berin, seeking escape.

ZURRGAB THE WEIRDBOY

A figure of mystery on Berin, Zurrgab is a nomadic Weirdboy with no clan. What happened to force Zurrgab into this lonely life is unknown. Some Boyz claim he wiped his entire clan out with a poorly thrown Bang Squig, others that he led them into a great sandstorm from which only he emerged. Whatever the truth of it, Zurrgab now wanders the desert wastes alone, forever following in the wake of Ulg, Bur, and Zzuk.

The three great storms are responsible for destroying countless Ork clans and are considered an ill omen on the world, but Zurrgab has become obsessed with them. He picks over the wreckage left in their wake with great care, collecting pieces of debris and the bones of the unfortunate victims. Zurrgab believes that the strange spiral symbols often found carved into these remains form a language, one that he is determined to understand. To that end, he collects these bones and other, less identifiable pieces of debris and stores them in a great cave known as the Ossuary. There he has begun construction of a great throne. He has little comprehension about why he is doing this, only that he must. When the massive throne of bones and skulls is complete, he knows that whoever sits upon it will led the Orks in a great Waaagh! the likes of which has never been seen on Berin, enough to crush the beak-boyz, the world they came from, and anything else in the Screaming Vortex that would stand in their way.

BERIN ORK BOYZ

The vast majority of Orks encountered on Berin are Boyz, massive, barbaric humanoids with dark green skin, deep set eyes, and huge tusks. They do not have ready access to a great many natural resources, and so fight with a far more primitive style than their counterparts elsewhere. An enraged Berin Ork armed with a choppa is still capable of inflicting tremendous damage on any foe and is rightly feared. Their world has led to other, highly ingenious, weapons including buzza bombs and snappa guns.

A buzza bomb is a simple jar of fragile clay into which brave Orks stuff swarms of Buzza Squigs, highly aggressive hornet-like biting insects about the size of an Ork's thumb. When used in battle, an Ork first shakes the jar to anger the Buzza Squigs, thus priming the bomb, then hurls it into a thickly packed group of enemies. The jar shatters, releasing a horde of angry Squigs capable of shredding enemies in seconds. The swarms soon disperse, but there are always plenty more Buzza Squigs for an enterprising Orks to gather.

Equally simple and effective is the snappa gun. The Snappa Squig is a large ferocious breed notable for its massive, tooth-filled maw. Ork Boyz trap these creatures and chain them inside heavy cages with hinged doors and a quick release mechanism, which releases the Squig on activation. The enraged beast leaps out, quickly attacking anything in front of him in a burst of jagged teeth, leaving nothing but shreds of flesh behind before being dragged back into the cage to attack again.



Berin Ork Boy (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	15	45	45	20	20	30	25	20	--

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: Hides (Body, Arms, Legs 2)

Wounds: 14

Total TB: 6

Skills: Intimidate (S), Operate (Surface), Survival (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Furious Assault, Iron Jaw, True Grit, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Brutal Charge (3), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+2), Unnatural Toughness (+2).

Weapons: Berin choppa (Melee; 1d10+7 R; Pen 2; Tearing, Unbalanced), snappa gun (Melee; 1d10+6; Pen 0; Living Weapon†, Tearing), buzza bomb (Thrown; 18m; S/-/-; 1d10+5 X; Pen 0; Clip 1; Blast [4], Crippling [1], Devastating [1], Living Weapon†, Primitive [7]).

Gear: Tattered clothes, bits of shiny metal, assorted tasty snack Squigs.

†Living Weapons inflict one additional hit for each Degree of Success on the attack roll.

Mob Rule: All Orks produce latent psychic energy that makes them feel more confident and aggressive when they gather in large numbers. For every additional Ork within 10m, the Ork receives a bonus of +10 to resist the effects of Fear and Pinning.

Waaagh! on Wheels: Any Ork (including Mekboyz and Weirdboyz) can be upgraded to a Bikerboy, gaining the Operate (Surface Craft) (Ag) +10 Skill and an Ork Bike (counts as a Messiah Outrider but with twin-linked Dakkaguns (Heavy; 75m; -/-/7; 1d10+6 I; Pen 2; Clip 100; Rld 3 Full) and no Sidecar option; see page 49 for rules).

Blood for da Blood God: Something within this planet often infests some Boyz with even greater rage and fury than usual, leading them to abandon proper Orky Kulture and their gods Gork and Mork to follow a darker, even bloodier path. Shunned from their tribes, they wage their own wars upon any foes they find for their own god of slaughter and skulls. These Bloodboyz gain the Frenzy and Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee) Talents but can only use a pair of choppas in combat. They only can gain the Mob Rule from other Bloodboyz, and other Orks do not gain its benefit from nearby Bloodboyz.

MEKBOYZ

The erstwhile leaders and providers for the Orks of Berin, Mekboyz fill a vital role in Ork Kulture. They are similar in appearance to other Orks, although tend to wear better armour and carry bizarre looking, and often very dangerous, weapons. They are larger than Ork Boyz; the confidence their position has given them and constant need to establish their authority over other Orks has resulted in a number of Mekboyz on Berin developing into a warlord role. These Orks are referred to as Big Meks, and their exploits have created both mythic legends in Ork Kulture and mythic craters on the planet.

Orks possess a little-understood form of genetic memory, and are born with pre-learned, instinctive knowledge. This is most prevalent in the Mekboyz ability to design and construct weapons, armour, and vehicles despite having no training or contact with other Orks. Mekboyz far removed from each other are also somehow create remarkably similar devices. Those of Berin are particularly adept at creating explosives, perhaps as there are few metals to make more elaborate items. Where other Orks are content use whatever slab of metal or random Squig they can find to make war, the Mekboyz are constantly inventing new ways to make things explode. These explosives are now used in everything they construct, from highly volatile fuels to their rokkit launchas and buggy busta grenades.

Another important task that the Mekboyz complete is the construction of transport, without which survival on Berin would not be possible. Many Berin tribes become obsessed with speed, and their Mekboyz are often found tinkering with sleds and buggies. There is little that Mekboyz love more than trying to coax more and more performance out of their beloved creations, all the while muttering about how much Squig-power a new engine has or how quickly it can reach "Waaagh!" velocity.

Mekboy (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	25	45	45	20	35	30	30	30	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 16

Armour: Metal Plated Hide (All 3)

Total TB: 7

Skills: Intimidate (S) +10, Operate (Surface), Operate (Aeronautica), Survival (Per), Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Bulging Biceps, Furious Assault, Iron Jaw, Pity the Weak, True Grit, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Brutal Charge (3), Sturdy, Size (Hulking), Unnatural Strength (+3), Unnatural Toughness (+3).

Weapons: Berin choppa (Melee; 1d10+8 R; Pen 2; Tearing; Unbalanced), rokkit launcha (Heavy; 100m; S/-/-; 3D10+3 X; Pen 6; Clip 2; Reload 2 Full; Blast [2]; Concussive [2]; Overheats), buggy busta (Thrown; 21m; S/-/-; 2D10+2 X; Pen 8; Clip 1; Blast [1]; Concussive [3]; Devastating [1]).

Gear: Meks tools, 2 reloads for Rokkit Launcha.

Mob Rule: All Orks produce latent psychic energy that makes them feel more confident and aggressive when they gather in large numbers. For every additional Ork within 10m, the Ork receives a bonus of +10 to resist the effects of Fear and Pinning.

Into the Air! Some Mekboyz grow so fond of rokkit that they wear them into battle and become Flyboyz. Their Rokkit Packs allow them to triple their Base Movement but are one use only, and they must make a **Difficult (-10) Agility Test** or suffer 1d10+5 I Damage when landing.

WEIRDBOYZ

Weirdboyz are Ork psykers, who draw their powers from the Orks around them rather than directly from the Warp. Often tormented with vivid dreams and plagued by almost constant headaches, they are strange and unpredictable figures in Ork society and act as a conduit for the latent psychic energy generated by all Orks. It builds within them, causing immense pressure on the Ork's already poorly developed mind. Many in their younger days are unable to contain the power building within them, and it tears its way out in a flash of pyrotechnics to the roars of delight of all Orks in the vicinity. However, those that survive long enough learn to master their powers after a fashion, and can become powerful, if unpredictable, members of a clan.

Weirdboyz on Berin play an important role in the desert clans, as they are able to sense the presence of the great sandstorms that batter the world's surface and can thus guide their clan safely around the destruction. Some are also able to sense water and mineral deposits in the planet's crust, through methods such as casting pebbles into the air and observing where they land, feeling the pull on carved twigs to indicate locations, or reading the patterns in pools of spilled blood.

TABLE 3-7: ORK WEAPONS

Name	Class	Range	RoF	Dam	Pen	Clip	Rld	Special†	Wt	Availability
Berin Choppa	Melee	—	—	1d10+1 R	2	—	—	Tearing, Unwieldy	5kg	Common
Snappa Gun	Melee	3m	S/-/-	1d10+6 R	0	—	—	Living Weapon††, Tearing	7.5kg	Scarce
Buzza Bomb	Thrown	SBx3	S/-/-	1d10+5 R	0	1	—	Blast (4), Crippling (1), Devastating (1), Living Weapon††, Primitive (7)	1kg	Scarce
Rokkit Launcha	Heavy	100m	S/-/-	3D10+3 X	6	2	2 Full	Blast (2), Concussive (2), Overheats	30kg	Rare
Buggy Busta	Thrown	SBx3	S/-/-	2D10+2 X	8	1	—	Blast (1), Concussive (3), Devastating (1)	1.5kg	Rare

†Any Ork weapons in the hands of a non-Ork also gains the Unreliable Quality.

††Living Weapons inflict one additional hit for each Degree of Success on the attack roll.

In battle, a Weirdboy can often be found where the fighting is fiercest, drinking in the rage of his clan and hurling it back at his foes. This is a risky tactic, however, as the sheer volume of Ork psychic energy can prove too much for the Ork psyker, resulting in a catastrophic psychic backlash and the death of all those nearby, including the Weirdboy himself. Many Weirdboyz carry small familiars called Bang Squigs for just such an eventuality. When he feels control slipping and dangerous amounts of power building, he can attempt to force all accumulated energy into this specially bred Squig and then hurl it at the enemy before the inevitable happens. Even if it fails to work properly, it is always a source of great amusement for all Orks that survive the resulting explosion.

Weirdboy (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	15	35	45	20	25	30	45	20	—

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: None.

Skills: Intimidate (S), Psyniscience (Per), Survival (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Furious Assault, Iron Jaw, Psy Rating 2, True Grit, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Brutal Charge (3), Psyker, Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+2), Unnatural Toughness (+3).

Weapons: Berin choppa (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 2; Tearing, Unbalanced).

Gear: Assorted bone charms, tattered robe, bag of 1d5 Bang Squigs†.

Wounds: 14

Total TB: 7



Mob Rule: All Orks produce latent psychic energy that makes them feel more confident and aggressive when they gather in large numbers. For every additional Ork within 10m, the Ork receives a bonus of +10 to resist the effects of Fear and Pinning.

Ork Psyker: Orks do not interact with the Warp in the same way as other Psykers, instead drawing on the latent psychic energy generated by all Orks. As a result of this, an Ork Psyker becomes more powerful as more Orks gather around him. An Ork Psyker can never use any Psychic powers at the Fettered or Push power levels and is treated as an Unbound Psyker. However, his Psy Rating is increased by 1 for each Ork within his Willpower Bonus in metres, which is increased by a further 1 if any of those Orks are engaged in combat.

'Eadbang: If a Weirdboy rolls doubles while making a Focus Power Test, he does not roll on Table 6-2: **Psychic Phenomena** on page 210 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook. Instead, he immediately suffers a hit to the head, inflicting 1d10 + Psy Rating Energy Damage that bypasses Armour and Toughness Bonus.

Ork Powers: Weirdboyz know the following Psychic Powers: Hatestorm, Doombolt, and Hellish Blast.

†**Bang Squig:** If a Weirdboy suffers an 'Eadbang as described above, he can spend his Reaction to try to force the psychic backlash into a Bang Squig, if he has one. The Weirdboy makes a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test**; if he succeeds, he does not suffer the 'Eadbang effect and instead throws the doomed Squig away, hopefully at his enemies. The Squig explodes, dealing 2d10 + Psy Rating Explosive Damage with the Blast (2), Concussive (3), and Devastating (1) Qualities.

THE CONJUNCTION

Despite their differences, one thing unites the planets of Asphodel and Berin: the time when the two worlds draw close together and the internecine warfare that rages across both worlds is put aside. All thoughts of bloodshed and personal glory become dreams of migration and battle against their ancient enemies, for periodically the planet's strange orbits bring them near enough to one another to dominate each other's sky. To the races of the disparate worlds, this has particular significance.

The Shapers of Asphodel believe this time is their ascension, when the worthy rise on wings of fire into the night, forever to take their place beside their ancestors. It is also the time when the undeserving shall be punished for their lack of faith, when Daemons stalk them in their own swamps and only the skilled survive to try again. The Orks of Berin have a far more practical outlook on the matter; they see Asphodel as another planet, one rich in opportunity and plunder. A planet where they can escape the endless sun and wind, where they can begin the glorious path of the Waaagh!

As the planets come to grow in the skies of the other, each race prepares for battle. The Shapers of Asphodel call the Septs to the foothills of Lun, where they select warriors worthy of the migration. Feasting on the stringy flesh of Icebloom mushrooms, hordes of Kroot begin to excrete a waxy resin that protects them from the harsh temperatures and other perils of the journey. Once ready, they clamber aboard the great mountain beasts. Burrowing into the thick fur of the moon moths and deep feathers of the aether wurms, they attach themselves to the creatures using their hook staves and spiked harnesses, and carve open blood lesions in the beasts for sustenance on their journey.

Across the void on Berin, Mekboyz begin to construct great rokkit ships and vast trakta-beam generators to hurl entire strongholds into the sky. Other tribes use their assembled Weirdboyz to tear entire chunks of the planet's surface free and propel the cheering Greenskins, encased in glowing force fields, into the air.

When the planets fill the other's sky, each race commits to its invasion. In a flurry of activity, thousands of rokkits blast off and swarms of great beasts race to the sky. Inevitably, the two invasion forces meet in the black of space and such is the ferocity of their clash that the heavens scream.



Aether wurms tear Ork rokkits asunder with their terrible claws, and entire septs swarm onto Ork vessels, whose defenders gun them down or tear them to pieces in brutal hand to hand combat. Deadly Ork explosives blast moon moths apart, their charred remains fluttering lifelessly into the ever-hungry void. Battles rage across Weirdboy-powered Ork Rokks as the xenos engage each other, neither caring that victory might also spell cold death. Only a handful of those that set out survives this clash to arrive at their destination.

The planetfalls claim hundreds more lives, as crippled Ork rokkits smash into the surface of Asphodel and drained, nearly dead moths plummet burning through Berin's atmosphere. Each invading race finds it is able to seize great swathes of territory, as few remain behind to defend their world. Soon, though, the native xenos briefly unite again to rid their world of the enemy, with each Ork burned to ashes and each Kroot rendered down for fuel. These fragile alliances cannot last though, and as the last invaders are dispatched, the races once again fall into their old habits of genocide and bloodletting. Such behaviour has made both races of this pair of worlds prized as mercenary and slave warriors across the Vortex, their ingrained desire for migration and travel driving their eagerness to leave their own hellish worlds.



CRUCIBLE

"The Immaterial Ones within this wretched place grow constantly in power, as though its torment transforms them into ever-more dangerous entities."

—Brother Ruine of the Scarlet Eye

There are few who can confirm the existence of any worlds within the Lower Vortex, where reality and Chaos churn to form ever-changing arrangements of unclean matter and profane energies. Here, the true nature of any of these places is more a matter of legend than it is of confirmed fact. The Daemon World of Crucible is one such location, its surface altering with the rise and fall of the Dark Gods that command its form.

Ancient tales indicate that control of Crucible passes between the Ruinous Powers in response to a schedule indecipherable to mortal minds. The appearance and entities present twist depending upon which of the Ruinous Powers might control it. However, regardless of control, the core essence is always the same—inflicting agonising pain upon the souls of any mortals who might intrude upon this place.

For reasons unclear, Crucible exists as a perpetual shrine to pain and torment in all its forms. Apocryphal tales suggest that those who dwell within this unnatural place are constantly driven to inflict pain—both physical and mental—upon every entity they encounter. Only insane metaphors and allegories offer any suggestions as to their motivations, or what might bring others to such a hellish realm. Few ever escape, perhaps from a combination of the horrid beings that roam the unnatural lands, and awakening compulsions in those who stay sane long enough which drive them to become one with the planet.

TIMES OF BLOOD

Crucible's physical appearance is in a constant state of flux, though perhaps it is only how mere mortals perceive its form that actually changes. Throughout these many shifts, its appearance and nature seems to violate basic laws of physical existence. Here, gravity can seem more suggestion than fact and light can shift in direction, all depending on the whims of the Dark Gods and the Warpstorms that make up the Screaming Vortex.

Some Navigators posit that as a location near the centre of the Vortex, travel to this place is accomplished as much by a mindset as by physical transit. It may be possible that changes in the location's appearance and nature are linked to comparable changes in the minds of the beings that are present there. Regardless of the rationalisations involved, there are clear differences in the appearance and essential nature of Crucible during those times when different Ruinous Powers are in ascendancy. While the changes are not entirely consistent from time to time, there are generalised trends within the legends. These are likely the best indicators that a traveller could use to identify a location as the Crucible of myth.

For those who follow Khorne's path, it is his time in ascendancy that is of greatest interest. On such occasions, the world's environs become focused upon a culture devoted entirely to warfare and bloodshed. Rivers that might flow with disease or knowledge transform so that they are flooded with gouts of steaming blood. A bordello might become an arena, or a puzzle maze might suddenly become inhabited by Flesh Hounds. Daemons devoted to the Lord of Rage become prevalent within the domain of



Crucible. It is unclear what happens to the Daemons that were present prior to the change in ascendancy, however, just as it is similarly unclear how these other entities reached Crucible. No matter their origin, something about the Crucible compels its residents to mercilessly punish all who set foot on the surface. While this is particularly true for mortals, the world might also serve as a proving ground for Daemons, including those that might be presumed to have achieved some degree of authority.

During Khorne's ascendancy, the nature of the punishment and testing becomes focused entirely upon physical violence. The essence of the conflicts vary substantially, but it is most often the case that both the subject of the test as well as the administrator have equal opportunities to brutally inflict damage to the other. These are seldom matters of simple torture, for there is little martial prowess in such a petty display. It is conflict and carnage that the Blood God demands, and on Crucible the pain must come through combat. Sometimes, this involves a conflict between dozens of warriors in an open battlefield without allies, and the victor might be the last person standing. At other times, a subject might face endless Daemonic legions, all of which gradually become more powerful with each wave.

Ultimately, no matter the manifestation, the essence of Crucible serves to test the devotion of any beings who travel there. This holds equally true for both Daemons and Heretics. Those who are capable of surviving within its unstable environs attract the favour of their dark lords. Those who prove incapable of mastering the location are ultimately shown unworthy to receive any further blessings from the Ruinous Powers, and find themselves lost in eternal torment.

THE POWERS OF CRUCIBLE

Only a few individuals have been brave or foolish enough to claim to have escaped from the confines of Crucible. There are few consistencies in the tales these survivors tell, particularly between supposed survivors who might have visited the location while different Dark Gods held sway. Madmen, historians, and supposed philosophers have attempted to compile these varied tales into a consistent story. The consensus opinion is that when another power comes to ascendance, its reign triggers philosophical and mental changes among the place's inhabitants. All who dare to dwell upon Crucible as a change takes place are transformed so that they embrace these new beliefs with the entirety of their beings. Through the nature of the Warp, these mental changes are reflected by physical transformation as well. In this way, the essence of the location and its inhabitants remains malleable.

The trigger point for ascendancy seems to be the greatest point of contention between the various legends. Many scholars of the Vortex hold that the changes occur when a certain faction achieves some goal, but what the goals might be are still a matter of violent dispute. Members of the Molten Cult, a tenuous group of Dark Adepts exiled from the Hollows, posit that there are particular preordained occurrences associated with the ascendancy of the different factions upon Crucible. These might be somewhat static events, particularly ones associated with different cycles of the Screaming Vortex, and as different elements of the storm reach different points of the Vortex there could be ramifications for different daemonic factions. It might also be that as human souls reach Crucible, their beliefs and loyalties have a significant impact regarding the allegiance of the location as a whole. Similarly, when souls are slain or convert their allegiance, it might change the ratios. This could serve as one possible explanation for why Crucible's Daemons appear focused on hardening and purifying the loyalties and beliefs of all those who travel to this place, using pain as their method to drive allegiances.

Few, though, would claim any firm understanding of Crucible, especially how it might appear to those who would venture there, either of their own volition or through other powers. Velk'ir sorcerers of Q'Sal sell elaborate charts to predict how the planet twists in coming times; that many have been found exsanguinated or worse could indicate the accuracy of their work. Most simply believe that only the truly mad can begin to grasp how Crucible turns, for certainly no sane mortal can comprehend the minds of the Ruinous Powers.

Even within the different daemonic factions, there are no clear mechanisms for determining which particular entity is dominant within a given faction. There are dozens of Greater Daemons and Daemon Princes active upon Crucible at any given time, each vying for power amidst the churning world, each struggling for dominance in its own manner. Some seek to draw lesser Daemons to their side with promises of protection or reward, others through threat of destruction or banishment, all perhaps unique characteristics of Crucible. Only one power can be ascendant at a time, but it is a short time (though it might seem aeons for those in painful torment) until another takes control. Khorne is served well, though, as all such conflict empowers the Blood God.

BLOODTHIRSTER

Perhaps the most powerful physical manifestations of warfare within the galaxy—and maybe beyond—each Bloodthirster represents the very essence of brutality. These Greater Daemons of Khorne are avatars of the Lord of Blood, and fully demonstrate his lust for battle, rage, and blood. Every sinew of their massive form is solely devoted to constructing a symphony of destructive force in the name of the Lord of Rage.

As each manifestation of a Bloodthirster has its own characteristics, any physical description is prone to be inaccurate in some way. Most appear massive, standing nearly twice the height of a Land Raider. While humanoid, they are characteristically hunched, so have a much longer reach than even this height might indicate. Wide bat-like wings extend from their upper back, adorned with skulls and chains; their legs end in cloven hooves, and their faces typically have a distinctly canine appearance. Their flesh is the deep red of encrusted blood and interspersed with iron-tipped barbs, and tales speak of a massive axe in one hand and a great whip in the other. Their very presence is an assault on reality; blood weeps from the ground where they stride, and each heavy, panting breath issues red-tinged smoke that burns terrible marks into the surrounding air.



Bloodthirster (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
99	40	75	65	50	48	60	75	25	50

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 195

Armour: Iron Hide (All 13)

Total TB: 18

Skills: Awareness (Per), Command +20 (Fel), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemons, Warp) (Int), Intimidate +20 (WP), Linguistics (All known languages) (Int), Parry +20 (WS).

Talents: Ambidextrous, Berserk Charge, Combat Master, Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Hammer Blow, Heightened Senses (All), Inspire Wrath, Preternatural Speed, Resistance (Psychic Powers), Strong Minded, Swift Attack, Thunder Charge, Two Weapon Wielder (Melee).

Traits: Blood for the Blood God†, Brutal Charge, Daemonic (+6), Fear (4), Daemonic Presence††, Dark-sight, Flyer (10), From Beyond, Size (Massive), The Stuff of Nightmares, Unnatural Strength (+14), Unnatural Toughness (+6), Touched by the Fates (3), Warp Instability, Warp Weapons.

Weapons: Axe of Khorne (Melee; 3d10+25 R; Pen 10; Felling [2], Devastating [3], Razor Sharp, Unbalanced), Whip of Khorne (Melee; 10m; 1d10+25 R; Pen 8; Snare [3], Tearing).

†**Blood for the Blood God:** Creatures of Khorne suffer no penalties from gore and blood—all Critical Effects involving gore and blood (such as requiring an Agility Test not to fall over) do not apply to creatures of Khorne.

††**Daemonic Presence:** All enemies within 25 metres of a Bloodthirster suffer a -20 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Emissary for the Skull Throne: Unless the GM determines otherwise, a Bloodthirster is always accompanied with 1d10 lesser Khornate Daemons, such as Bloodletters (see page 351 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook). All Khornate Daemons who can see the Bloodthirster gain the Blademaster Talent and Brutal Charge Trait, if they do not already have them.

Supreme Warrior: When using the All Out Attack Action, Bloodthirsters may make a single Melee Attack that cannot be Dodged or Parried. A Bloodthirster can perform this attack a number of times per combat equal to his Intelligence Bonus (normally 4).



KINSLAYER, HERALD OF KHORNE

Bloodletters are the most common Daemons specifically devoted to the service of Khorne. This frequency should not be taken as a sign that their abilities are somehow lessened, as these creatures are pure manifestations of the Lord of Rage and are amongst the most brutal and devastating warriors in the galaxy. With every swing of their Hellblades, they spread bloodshed and devastation in the name of their dark master.

Even among Bloodletters, some Daemons demonstrate an exceptionally profound talent for destruction, earning the recognition of the Lord of Blood and becoming Heralds of Khorne. These Daemons assume a leadership role among their kind. While usually less powerful than a Greater Daemon, they are justifiably regarded as a significant force to be reckoned with, even among their own kind.

Kinslayer has become one of the most powerful Heralds active on Crucible. When not engaged in a major conflict, Bloodletters typically release their rage upon any opponents available, regardless of their prey's devotion. Ostensibly, this might serve as a portion of their endless preparation for war as well as a way to cull the weakest of their forces. Kinslayer disdains this practice, keeping his followers carefully disciplined. He engages in a never-ending quest to find opponents who have pledged to the other Ruinous Powers. This offers his followers an endless opportunity to utilise their rage to actively weaken the other forces on Crucible. He deliberately herds vast numbers of mortal souls into the incipient battlefields as well, where they can share in the joy of combat through their agonising wounds.

Some believe that Kinslayer receives additional blessings from the Lord of Rage for each Daemon skull he presents to his master. Others watch his ascendancy with baleful senses, trusting that those who have embraced one of the other Dark Gods have surely made Kinslayer a target for destruction.

Kinslayer (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
55	12	45	45	42	35	35	39	17	--

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Wounds: 25

Armour: None

Total TB: 8

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Dodge +10 (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology) +10 (Int), Intimidate +20 (WP), Parry +20 (WS), Survival (Per).

Talents: Battle Rage, Berserk Charge, Blademaster, Combat Master, Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Lightning Reflexes, Swift Attack.

Traits: Blood for the Blood God†, Daemonic (+4), Daemonic Presence††, Fear (2), From Beyond, Size (Hulking), Unnatural Strength (+4), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Hellblade (Melee; 1d10+16 R; Pen 10; Balanced, Power Field, weapon deals +2 Damage for every foe it kills in that encounter).

†**Blood for the Blood God:** Creatures of Khorne suffer no penalties from gore and blood—all Critical Effects involving gore and blood (such as requiring an Agility Test not to fall over) do not apply to creatures of Khorne.

††**Daemonic Presence:** All enemies within 10 metres of a Bloodletter suffer –10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Daemon Slayer: When Kinslayer attacks any character aligned with a deity other than Khorne, his Hellblade gains the Tearing Quality. Should this be a Daemon, his weapon also gains the Felling (3) Quality.

GORECLAW THE RENDER

Crucible represents a fertile battleground for those Daemons who seek to attain greater blessings in the eyes of the Lord of Rage. Goreclaw the Render is one who has already ascended to the immortal status of Daemon Prince within that unstable locale, a success that has only made him hunger for greater opportunities to spill blood and take skulls in the name of his patron god.

Legend has it that this Daemon Prince was once a Chaos Space Marine who tracked down and slew more than a hundred loyalist Space Marines in hand to hand combat, the latest in a long path to glory that had left thousands of headless Adeptus Astartes across the galaxy. After offering up the last skull to Khorne, the Blood God transformed him into a Daemon Prince, granting him a new form in recognition of his ability to hunt down his prey. Goreclaw now resembles a humanoid Flesh Hound, and leads a pack of those Daemons in an unending hunt to find and slay Space Marines—both loyalists and servants of the Ruinous Powers, for Khorne cares not where the skulls come from so long as are they were taken in violence and bloodshed.

Goreclaw the Render (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
78	59	54 ¹⁰	61 ¹⁴	65	49	82	60	41	83	

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 120

Armour: Dense scales (All 7)

Total TB: 14

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness +10 (Per), Command +10 (Fel), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology) +10 (Int), Intimidate +20 (WP), Parry (WS), Survival (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Blood God's Contempt, Combat Master, Combat Sense, Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Disturbing Voice, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Hammer Blow, Killing Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Storm of Iron, Street Fighting, Swift Attack.

Traits: Blood for the Blood God†, Daemonic (+4), Daemonic Presence††, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (3), From Beyond, Size (Enormous), Unnatural Strength (+5), Unnatural Toughness (+4), Warp Instability.



Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+13 R; Pen 0; Tearing), Axe of Khorne (Melee; 3d10+13 R; Pen 10; Balanced, Felling [2], Devastating [3], Razor Sharp).

†**Blood for the Blood God:** Creatures of Khorne suffer no penalties from gore and blood—all Critical Effects involving gore and blood (such as requiring an Agility Test not to fall over) do not apply to creatures of Khorne.

††**Daemonic Presence:** All enemies within 15 metres of Goreclaw suffer –10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Nose for Geneseed: Goreclaw is always accompanied with a pack of 2d5 Flesh Hounds (see page 89). These are particularly adept at recognising the presence of Space Marines, and receive a +20 bonus to any Tests to detect or track such characters.



FLESH HOUND OF KHORNE

Flesh Hounds are great wolf-like Daemons that hunt down and destroy the enemies of the Blood God. They are often unleashed into realspace to pursue those who have earned Khorne's wrath; each is implacable on the hunt and can pursue its target across vast distances. Constantly closing in, their howling often drives their target to madness before the hound's own razor sharp teeth sink into flesh.

Flesh Hounds physically overpower their targets with brutal attacks, savaging them with teeth and claws. Large or particularly well-armed foes (such as armoured vehicles) are encircled instead, with individual Hounds darting in from different directions, worrying at their target until it finally falls from exhaustion or is disabled and unable to move. Once the foe is down, the Hounds rush in en masse for the final kill. Hounds normally hunt in packs, and only the most well-armed and disciplined of groups can hope to face such an assault and survive.

Flesh Hound of Khorne (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
49	--	45 ⁸	40 ⁸	30	15	60	40	10	--

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 15

Armour: Scaled Hide (all 4)

Total TB: 8

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Survival (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Crushing Blow, Double Team, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (All).

Traits: Bestial, Blood for the Blood God†, Collar of Khorne, Daemonic (+4), Daemonic Presence††, Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (2), From Beyond, Natural Armour 4, Quadruped, Size (Hulking), Unnatural Senses (30 metres), Unnatural Strength (+4), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Teeth and claws (Melee; 1d10+12 R; Pen 2; Razor Sharp, Tearing).

Gear: Collar of Khorne.

†**Blood for the Blood God:** Creatures of Khorne suffer no penalties from gore and blood—all Critical Effects involving gore and blood (such as requiring an Agility Test not to fall over) do not apply to creatures of Khorne.

††**Daemonic Presence:** All enemies within 10 metres of a Flesh Hound suffer -10 penalty to Willpower Tests.



SLAUGHTERWING, FURY OF THE HEAVENS

The lesser Daemons of Crucible constantly scurry from shadow to shadow, staying clear of the skies. Tales of madmen pass on the legend of a Daemon Prince that had come to master the skies. This prince—Slaughterwing—became renowned for his ability to mercilessly devastate any and all who were bound to the ground. Swooping in at tremendous speeds, he would strike his foes as he flew past, returning only to gather their skulls so that they might be offered up to the Lord of Blood.

Ancient tales suggest that Slaughterwing might have once been a mortal human who was obsessed with the notion of flight. He had idolised the predators of the sky, dwelling upon their ability to prey upon those bound to a planet's surface. Throughout his mortal life, this maniacal warrior mastered the art of mechanised flight, always killing his opponents in Khorne's name. Only after he had traumatised an entire civilisation so that such was their fear of his ravages that none would ever dare to venture beneath the open sky, did the Lord of Skulls grant his blessing upon the champion.

In some circles, this creature is believed to be little more than a legend. However, when a body is found or a soul goes missing, Slaughterwing is often blamed. According to the tales, his wingspan stretches farther than a tank squadron and he wields a truly massive battle axe. Beyond that, he is seldom described as anything more than a red blur that leaves only death in his wake.

Slaughterwing (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
79	55	62 ¹²	60 ¹¹	88 ¹²	54	58	60	47	93

Movement: 14/28/42/84

Wounds: 101

Armour: Fused Armour (All 8)

Total TB: 11

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Command (Fel), Dodge +20 (Ag), Intimidate +10 (WP), Parry (WS), Survival (Per).

Talents: Battle Rage, Berserk Charge, Blood God's Contempt, Combat Master, Combat Sense, Crippling Strike, Disturbing Voice, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Hard Target, Killing Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Preternatural Speed, Step Aside, Street Fighting, Swift Attack, Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Blood for the Blood God†, Daemonic (+3), Daemonic Presence††, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (3), Flyer (15), From Beyond, Size (Enormous), Unnatural Agility (+4), Unnatural Strength (+6), Unnatural Toughness (+2), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+12 R; Pen 0; Tearing), Axe of Khorne (Melee; 3d10+12 R; Pen 10; Felling [2], Devastating [3], Razor Sharp, Unbalanced).

†**Blood for the Blood God:** Creatures of Khorne suffer no penalties from gore and blood—all Critical Effects involving gore and blood (such as requiring an Agility Test not to fall over) do not apply to creatures of Khorne.

††**Daemonic Presence:** All enemies within 15 metres of Slaughterwing suffer -10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

FURIA

"You've seen what lurks under the dead waters here. Whatever that spawns them from the centre of this world must surely hate all living things."

—Jareen Kolp, survivor of the downed voidship *Endless Vengeance*

Furia's hellish skies stare soullessly down upon a perfect sphere of dark water, floating within the swirling madness of the Screaming Vortex. There is no telling how deep the waters of Furia run; over the centuries many attempts have been made to reach the bottom, all equally fruitless. This has led to the belief in many of the inhabitants of Furia that there simply is no end to the World Ocean. An often-told tale even has it that a void ship once crashed and sank, but the ship's intact saviour-beacon pulsed its continual, remorseless descent into the limitless depths for many years before it finally grew too faint to detect. The final readings indicated the vessel had descended to a depth that would put it far outside the orbit of the planet, still without any sign it was nearing the bottom.

The sky overhead is bleak, and its perpetual cloud cover means that not even stars are visible. The vast emptiness overhead has been known to drive people insane with a sense of immense futility and insignificance. No weather churns the sky or moves the waters, and there are few surface currents to change the immutable skin of the planet. The air is always hot and steamy, humid and oppressive with the dull weight of despair. There is a faint tinge of some vague biological effluvia upon the motionless air, clinging to the back of the throat like an unanswered accusation. The stagnation of the air and of the sad people who populate this tepid, heavy world give a sense of stillness and lethargy that is belayed only by the violence barely contained underneath the waters.

Violent forces constantly churn beneath the surface of the vast ocean, however, giving the lie to the stillness above. These currents are capable of pushing floating villages miles off course in a matter of minutes, while the surface of the ocean, barely rippling, remains strangely calm. On rare occasions, monumental riptides pull entire fleets down into the treacherous waters; here the true masters of Furia strip the vessels bare in moments, allowing the ruined wreckage to sink silently down into the endless blackness below.

BLOOD IN THE WATERS

The native denizens of Furia haunt the inky blackness like vengeful spirits, rendering the entire planet a zone of unrelenting danger and risk. To fall into the waters unprotected means a terrible, violent death at the capricious mercy of any number of savage creatures. One of the most obvious predators of the World Ocean are the Sabre Sharks—long, lithe creatures with pale blue bodies longer than a battle tank and massive, powerful jaws festooned with sword-like teeth. Schools of leaping Dagger Fish make short work of anyone unlucky enough to fall into the water, but they also possess the ability to glide for short periods of time, and are capable of swarming up out of the still water and stripping a small ship of its deck



crew in one flashing pass. Kilometres of Medusa Kelp sit in oily stretches across the surface of the water, like intestines spilled across pools of thickened blood. The kelp instantly paralyses any creature that comes into contact with it, robbing them of all motor function while keeping them gruesomely aware of their predicament and keenly capable of feeling the slightest sensations. Tiny parasites and other creatures calling the kelp beds home then slowly devour the ill-fated prey.

The undisputed lords of Furia, however, are undoubtedly the Leviathans. Enormous mountains of Warp-tainted flesh, the Leviathans' long amorphous bodies are ropey with sinuous muscle, flailing tentacles capable of wrapping an entire village in their grasp, and massive ebon beaks with the strength to crush the hulls of spaceships. Leviathans are not often seen on the surface of Furia, but a horrific flush of red-tinged water known as the Crimson Flow often heralds their approach. No one knows what causes this phenomenon, although many assume it is the grisly remains of a colossal struggle between Leviathans deep beneath the waves. The Crimson Flow is the harbinger of death and despair for the humans on the surface, as the ruddy water drives all of the native wildlife insane with bloodlust and a furious, insatiable hunger. All of this occurs before the dreaded Leviathan surfaces to establish its mastery over all.

There is not a single spit of dry land on Furia, and thus the natives who call the planet home, an unkempt race of humans referred to as Castaways, must fight over a

frighteningly scarce collection of resources. In the absence of fresh water or reliable precipitation, the inhabitants live off the flesh of their catches, saving and drinking the collected blood as the only way to quench their never-ending thirst. These natives live on large floating scrap-towns built from the decaying remnants of starships that arrived on Furia long ago. These human inhabitants are a degenerate horde, their sad lives punctuated with horror whenever the World Ocean's denizens appear to devour them.

Castaways lead a nomadic existence, their large floating scrap-towns at the mercy of the currents. These small colonies are cobbled together from the many pieces of wrecked starships that sometimes bubble to the surface. Most scrap-towns feature a high outer wall of armoured plates surrounding an inner courtyard area of living quarters, rickety workshops, and bare market areas, with a dizzying array of catwalks and gantries suspended above the open lagoons of the inner wards. The most powerful and influential scrap-towns possess a small amount of more modern ranged weaponry, although in many cases these are ancient specimens and poorly maintained. The primary purpose of these weapons is defence against the Leviathans of the deep, but occasionally these communities are called upon to defend themselves from other human settlements as well in the never-ending battle for resources.

THIRST FOR SURVIVAL

Because anything the inhabitants need only ever arrives through the random churn of flotsam and jetsam from the deep, when anything particularly valuable surfaces, a battle is inevitable. For the most part, the Castaways wield only the lowest technologies, jury-rigged melee weapons crafted from the metal bones of ruined spacecraft. Usually these battles are close and bloody, with uncounted casualties being consigned to the ravenous creatures of the ocean. The occasional cough of a rusty chainsword or bark of an autogun invariably marks the presence of a chieftain or warleader of some renown.

Sailing vessels crafted from the scavenged bits and pieces of stranded starships provide the bulk of transportation on Furia. It is not unusual to see a large sailing ship, its hull the sleek shell of a cutter or lander, its masts the support struts or sensor aerals of larger ships, while its billowing sails are the scintillating fabric of grav chutes or solar sails. A few large motorised craft utilise the scant remnant fuels culled from the ruined ships, their dark and smudgy plumes visible for miles in all directions. Even these ships boast masts and sails as well, for it is only a matter of time before the fuel burns out. Among the most powerful men and women of Furia it is not unusual to find small personal watercraft created from the wreckage of bikes and jetbikes found in the dank storage halls of wrecked freighters. These watercraft afford the leaders of the communities and the raiding fleets greater personal mobility in battle as well as a means of escape should the day be lost.

Because of the limited supplies on hand, battles are not uncommon. However, thievery is the preferred means of procurement for most communities. In fact, because of the hardscrabble nature of life on Furia, what little loyalty there is to find on the water planet is only to the immediately family group, and not much even there. It is not unheard of for a man or woman to abandon a family in times of need, taking with them whatever resources might assure them of survival. This appears to be errant cowardice to most denizens of the Screaming Vortex, but it is in fact the doctrine of survival of the fittest in its rawest form. The ultimate reality of any human on Furia is a life of violence, creatures desperate to eat them gliding along at every turn, and surrounded by people who would throw them into the water for a couple of shotgun shells or a scrap of bread. It is a low and desperate life marked by moments of sheerest terror and violence.

The appearance of the rare starship or other wreckage that occasionally floats to the surface of the World Ocean often causes massive battles amongst the various Castaway communities as they fight desperately for the means of survival. The true mystery of Furia, however, is the provenance of these wrecks and the other objects that occasionally come churning to the surface. It is the Leviathans that feed the constant rumours and speculation regarding these wrecks and their source. Clearly Warp-touched and burning with a malevolent intelligence that belies their alien appearance, many assume that the Leviathans are somehow capable of travelling through the Warp, where they prey upon whatever they find there, dragging it back to Furia to feast upon.

Legends speak of violent singularities in sidereal space, vast whirlpools of nothingness that drag in any craft unlucky enough to be caught in their grasp. These vessels are drawn into the singularity and somehow transported to the core of Furia where they are jettisoned with great violence into the World Ocean. Others talk of mysterious paths through the interstices of reality that may link distant Warpstorms with the planetary core, where the victims of the storms are left drifting, shattered and empty. There are almost always survivors on these devastated ships, surfacing with a wrecked ship and then left to the mercies of the World Ocean and its creatures. Sometimes these luckless vagabonds are other than human, and it is not entirely unknown for a vicious xenos predator, an ork Warboss or a Kroot Shaper, for example, to find themselves floating on the currents of the sea only to wreak bloody vengeance upon the Castaways until those sad natives band together to destroy the newcomer.

In the end, there is no way to know what lurks at the centre of Furia. In the crushing pressures and swirling darkness deep beneath the calm surface, some force, power, or phenomenon collects the sad and the lost from across the galaxy and deposits their shattered, devastated shells boiling up out of the inky black. But what causes this, or to what purpose, if any, this power labours, is shrouded in the impenetrable gloom, guarded with some of the most vicious creatures to prowl the Screaming Vortex.

THE CASTAWAYS

Whether living in the precarious hovels of a scrap-town or amidst the desperate crews of a raider fleet, the Castaways of Furia are haunted, wretched creatures. With no obvious mutations, they are nevertheless easily differentiated from the common strand of humanity by their bowed backs and dull eyes. The pressures of a life in constant danger from the violent creatures surrounding them, as well as unvarying deprivation and a culture nearly devoid of the concepts of loyalty and altruism, insure that the merest spark of independence and initiative is beaten out of almost every one of the sad creatures long before they reach adulthood. Nevertheless, they fight like savages when cornered and struggle to their last breath rather than succumb to death.

There exists within the communities of the Castaways a persistent myth that one day a leader will arise capable of delivering them from the misery of their world, or taming their world and turning it into a paradise for humans; the legends never agree on these details, and the people of Furia scarcely care. This paragon of martial virtue is as ill-defined as his ultimate goals, but the vast majority of Castaways believe, even if they refuse to admit this to anyone but themselves. On many occasions, off-planet unscrupulous renegades and warlords have used this myth to control scrap-towns and fleets, bending them to an outside will. Often they search for a particular piece of salvage they believe may wash up upon the planet's World Oceans, or hunt the elusive Leviathans, often a daunting prospect even with the power of an entire fleet or village behind them.

Furia Castaway (Troop)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
38	25	32	31	33	33	38	32	31	--	

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 9

Armour: Scavenged Armour (4 All)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Interrogation (WP), Operate (Surface craft) (Ag) +20, Security (Int) +10, Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Cold Hearted, Frenzy, Swift Attack, Unarmed Warrior.

Weapons: Battered autogun (Basic; 100m; S/3/10; 1d10+3 I; Pen 0; Clip 30; Reload Full; Unreliable, Scavenged) or similar Unreliable Basic Weapons, Castaway chainsword (Melee; 1d10+5 R; Pen 2; Tearing, Scavenged) or Castaway Improvised Melee Weapon (Melee; 1d10+4; Pen 0; Unbalanced), knife (Melee/Thrown; 1d5 R; Pen 0).

Villages may have the following salvaged weapons for defence, primarily mounted on the outer walls: lascannon (Heavy; 300m; S/--; 5d10+10 E; Pen 10; Clip 5; Reload 2 Full; Unreliable), autocannon (Heavy; 300m; S/3/-; 3d10+8 I; Pen 6; Clip 20; Reload 2 Full; Unreliable), heavy stubber (Heavy; 100m; --/--; 1d10+5 I; Pen 3; Clip 75; Reload 2 Full; Unreliable), harpoon gun (Heavy; 40m; S/--; 2d10+2 R; Pen 0; Clip 1; Reload 4 Full; Crippling [5], Primitive [9], Snare [1]).

Gear: Tattered and scavenged clothing, makeshift tools, coveted brass fetishes, fish teeth.

Adapted to Furia: Some Castaways have swam long and deep in the endless seas of Furia, and waters have seemingly welcomed them to life in the World Ocean. They possess the Amphibious Trait; rumours even abound of special denizens, marked for greatness, who not only can breathe underwater, but who the local wildlife is hesitant to attack.

GM Note: Singularly influential or successful Castaways may also be given a Furian Sea-Skimmer for personal transportation across the dread oceans, underscoring their bravery considering the nature of the local fauna. See page 49 for rules.

LEVIATHANS

These colossal sea monsters are warped creatures that could only exist upon a world blessed by the Dark Gods. Most believe Leviathans to be half Daemon and half natural, an unholy collection of nature and Warpspawn that haunt the vast stretches of the World Ocean. Whether they are creatures possessed by Daemons of the Warp, mutated by some brush with the empyrean, or constructs of some dark magi, the beasts are the undisputed lords of their planet, and there is nothing that, when roused, they cannot destroy.

Incredibly violent and aggressive, Leviathans appear as creatures out of nightmare, a foul chimera bringing together the vile, slime-ridden barrel of a giant squid of Ancient Terra with the primeval savagery of an enormous predator of the deep, the majesty of an ancient primordial lizard king and the inhuman intelligence of some dark god out of Mankind's forgotten past. Thick, sinuous tentacles lash out in every direction, each capable of enwrapping the largest vessels to sail the World Ocean. Serrated fangs covering the undersides of the muscular limbs can grip and chew through even the thickest armour. In fact, the teeth found on the inside of the Leviathan's tentacles can be rendered, with patience and skill, into exemplary blades for chain weapons of every description. Renegades from all over the Screaming Vortex journey to Furia for the express purpose of procuring these teeth for just such a purpose.





Leviathans do not appear to be territorial, as they wander freely over the watery planet with no clearly defined pattern. However, they are able to sense scrap-towns from hundreds of miles away and track them for days, attacking as soon as possible with a brutal savagery that suggests some deep and abiding hatred. Only a scrap-town that has secured ancient missile weapons has even the slightest hope of surviving the attention of a Leviathan, and a brutal, violent death awaits any denizens of the scrap-town that does not escape. An important skill successful Castaways cultivate is to know how soon after such an attack a rival scrap-town might be able to swoop in and try to salvage anything useful from the wreckage without attracting the attention of the frenzied creature.

Occasionally two Leviathans attack each other, especially during the Seasons of Blood. The reason for these attacks is unknown, but Leviathans fight with vicious tenacity, destroying anything within miles, and always to the death. The victorious Leviathan never consumes the remains of its victim, but will bellow triumphantly before sinking once more beneath the still waters of the World Ocean. The enormous carcass left behind is often a boon to any scrap-town that manages to secure it, but thousands of native creatures vie for its twisted flesh, sinews like iron cables, and bones with the consistency of steel, all of which sinks beneath the waters once enough of the flesh has been carved away.

Leviathan (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	--	64 ¹²	72 ¹³	52	51	56	38	--	45

Movement: 11/22/33/66

Wounds: 500

Armour: Natural Armour (14 All)

Total TB: 13

Skills: Awareness (Int), Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Fearless, Furious Assault, Sprint.

Traits: Amphibious, Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons (Fanged Tentacles and Gaping Maw), Fear (4), From Beyond, Multiple Arms (10), Size (Titanic), Unnatural Strength (+6), Unnatural Toughness (+6), The Stuff of Nightmares.

Weapons: Fanged tentacles (Melee; 2d10+12 R; Pen 5; Felling [2], Crippling [2], Razor Sharp, Snare [2], Toxic [2]), gaping maw (Melee; 4d10+12 R; Pen 8; Felling [8], Crippling [8], Razor Sharp, Toxic [2]).

Master of the Deep: Leviathans are truly titanic creatures and, as such, in melee most Heretics will not be able to combat the creature itself due to its enormous size. In most situations the creature does not even completely surface, attacking from the waters below with only its Fanged Tentacles which can attack up to 20 metres away from each other. With its immense form mostly submerged, the Leviathan can never be reduced to less than 300 Wounds unless its main body is somehow attacked, perhaps through psychic powers or explosives rigged to detonate below the surface. As an aquatic creature, Leviathans take twice normal Damage from Flame or Melta weapons, but gain the Regeneration (10) Trait whilst fully underwater. If faced with ranged weapons with a hope of damaging it, the Leviathan simply submerges and seek easier game, if the prey is lucky. If the creature is feeling determined though, then nothing may save any unfortunates on the roiling surface of Furia.

Wave of Flesh: When faced with a particularly recalcitrant foe, the Leviathan will often retreat and then come roaring in on the attack at its fastest Movement Rate. The target, which must be at least Enormous in Size, is hit with a weapon with the following profile: Melee; 10d10+24 I; Pen 15; Concussive (5). The Leviathan then attacks normally again in the next round.



KURSE

"Aside from actual wars, the Pits of Kurse are the finest entertainment to be found in the Vortex."

—Kamto Lax, Slaver Lord of the *Crow's Flux*

The Dark Age of Technology saw the rise of thousands of worlds filled with splendour and wonder under the auspices of Mankind. Under the curse of technological advancement man stretched forth his dominion of the galaxy and lost the most vital of spiritual connections. Most of these planets were destroyed with the coming of Old Night and the division of darkness and horror that descended with it, falling to powers and influences man had not even begun to understand, neglected in the pell-mell dash towards technological mastery.

The planet Serenis was one such paradise. Knowing unparalleled peace and achievement, it was a fertile world where Mankind's technical mastery and his eternal search for beauty and symmetry had combined to create an ideal landscape that brought technology, nature, and humanity together in one harmonious accord. Under the guidance of a benign global ruling body, civilisation soared to new heights and achievements never before imagined. Warfare was relegated to sport. No longer did men march out against one another and unleash indiscriminate violence upon their world. Instead, district champions fought for honour and glory for their regions in vast arenas with global audiences, their violence harnessed and codified into the greater planetary enlightenment.

Ivory towers and ornate palaces reached into skies so blue they defied description. Generations of rulers, teachers, and pioneers were commemorated in graceful marble statues whose stoic eyes gazed serenely out over a bustling world moving ever-forward to a glowing and hopeful tomorrow. These leaders presided over centuries of peace and abundance, making unprecedented advancements in the mechanical and biological arts. At the time of the Sundering, Serenis was an exemplar of the hope and promise of the Mankind foolishly laid upon the altar of technology.

THE SUNDERING

The Dark Age of Technology ended in a detonation of violence and bloodshed that human eyes had never before witnessed. Star-spanning empires were riven asunder, entire systems disappeared as the Warp boiled across the known universe, dividing Mankind into terrified, isolated pockets of resistance in the night. Some planets, however, were condemned to a far more dire fate, as these isolated mega-storms swallowed them entirely and transported them, in the blink of an eye, to a universe of nightmare and horror.

It was just such a tendril of the Empyrean that snaked out across the void to engulf Serenis, yanking the planet and its moons out of their own reality and depositing them in a realm of madness. A terrified and confused populace tried desperately to make sense of their new situation. Stars familiar for millennia had disappeared from their skies. Communication with the far-flung outposts of empire had fallen silent without warning. Any ships attempting to leave the planet disappeared into the soupy, swirling chaos of their new sky, never to be heard from again.



The men and women of Serenis would be commended for the strength of their faith and convictions in a just universe. But in the dominion that had claimed them, there was nothing but mocking silence. For months after the Sundering, civilisation continued to move forward as all of the powers of science and technology were bent to understanding the incomprehensible. It was only slowly that the reality of their situation dawned upon the poor lost souls of the benighted planet, and the empty hollow of hopeless despair descended upon them.

At first the denizens of the planet assured each other that what had occurred must have some natural explanation. Some hitherto unknown phenomenon, not understood but understandable, had wrenched from them their skies and galaxy. All that was required to re-establish sanity and the galaxy they knew was for enough data to be collected and collated. Trust was placed with the scientists and researchers, who bent their every fibre to understanding the Sundering and discovering a way to reverse it.

But with the loss of their sky and their sun came the slow death and decay of their world. Crops failed and weather patterns were disrupted, wreaking havoc on transportation and communication, and the global civilisation began to shatter beneath the repeated hammer blows against reason and sanity. Fear rose up to consume their hope, and with this unreasoning dread came the very human need to assign blame and exact punishment. As cultures fragmented, blaming each disparate faction for this or that imagined atrocity, tensions rose, and animal fury swept through each enclave and isolated region.

THE WINDS OF KURSE

The bio-chem lakes and Soul Storms are amongst the most dangerous obstacles to confront Heretics attempting to work on the surface of Kurse, both of which should provide serious but different challenges to players seeking glory and treasure.

Bio-Chem Fog: Unprotected Characters exposed to the toxic smogs must make an immediate **Arduous (-40) Toughness Test** or take 2d10 Damage ignoring Armour or Toughness Bonus, and then a **Hard (-20) Toughness Test**, losing consciousness for d5 rounds should they fail. Only sealed powered armour will protect fully from the gases, and any protective measures should be allowed to have a mitigating effect on the tests.

Soul Storm: Any Characters finding themselves caught in a Soul Storm must make a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test**. Should the Test be failed, for the duration of the storm the character's Willpower is reduced by 10 for every Degree of Failure. In addition, the Character will be affected as if possessing the Frenzy Talent, fully engaged, and treating the nearest characters as enemies unless a **Challenging (+0) Perception Test** is passed.

As resources became harder and harder to procure, charges of hoarding, corruption, and graft became commonplace. And with the first outbreaks of widespread disease and famine, the inevitable accusations of enemy action swiftly followed suit.

Stockpiles of ancient weapons were breached, and soon all of the glorious wonders of the Dark Age of Technology were unleashed upon the already tortured world. Test beds for the most destructive powers Mankind had harnessed devastated the planet. Waves of engineered plagues swept the surface of the planet, decimating the biospheres and scouring the planet. Dreaded atomics were detonated in every configuration known to the ancient weaponsmiths, from the refined airbursts that destroyed the technology of entire regions to the brutal efficiency of megaton fusion bombs capable of levelling entire city-states. The furious power unleashed cracked the very mantle of the planet, the crustal plates collapsing into growing lakes of blood red fire that swallowed cities whole. Battle raged overhead, as well, as each faction attempted to wrest control of the planet's moons from their rivals. A particularly savage spread of anti-matter warheads shattered all of the moons in one massive, excessive strike, leaving nothing but a belt of charred and blasted rock orbiting a planet howling for its own blood.

Serenis, had her leaders remained true, had her people hewed to reason and logic, had been in an ideal position to survive the vagaries of the terrible storm. With the technology and ingenuity that had established them as one of the more advanced and accomplished worlds, their civilisation may well have survived even the madness of the Immaterium. Instead, however, they surrendered to Mankind's basest instincts, and only bloody insanity was their reward. The most brutal, powerful factions rising from the ashes clamped down upon the dwindling resources with an iron control. Institutional

trophy taking was initiated, with millions of skulls culled from the battlefields and devastated cities across the planet, housed in enormous ossuaries dedicated to the glory of victory. The world, engulfed in the Warpstorm, hurtled through space and time, the fury of the great ocean of the Empyrean battering the wounded planet. Burning in an inferno of hatred and violence, the passion of her inhabitants called through the Immaterium, and were answered.

THE AGE OF KURSE

The smouldering cinder that had been the paradise world of Serenis hurtled through a howling rift in reality, crashing into the Screaming Vortex, a blasted and shattered shadow of its former glory. Time and space are elastic in the Sea of Souls, and as such there is no way even the most gifted sorcerer can ever know how long the tortured world had fallen through the ruination of the Warp. The desiccated corpse world that had once been Serenis came to rest amongst the Gloaming Worlds in ages now lost to man, as if it had ever drifted their amongst the others. It was now known as Kurse.

The planet bears no resemblance to its former self. A massive hole, like a single baleful eye, reveals the guttering magma core through an enormous crater, vast cracks in the crust of the planet reaching out in glowing tendrils half way across the world. From orbit, the planet has a mottled appearance, ochres and mouldering greens brushed through the dominant reds of the desert wastes. Lakes of fire reach across the blasted landscape, remnants of ancient super weapons whose flames have yet to die out despite the death of the civilisation that spawned them. Isolated regions of jungle crouch with a strange fecundity amidst the ruination, their dark shadows home to all manner of twisted and vicious creatures, the glorious descendants of the menageries and personal collections of some of the most gifted genetic artisans in the history of the galaxy.

Across vast swaths of the planet, appearing as mere desert flats from orbit, can be found entire plains covered with the bones of the dead. For miles in every direction, often marking the sites of ancient cities, lie carpets of skulls, staring up at the Screaming Vortex in silent horror and recrimination. These are the sites of the ancient ossuaries, broken open in the final cataclysm of violence and destruction that marked the planet's final fall from grace. The sound of the planet's haunted winds blowing dismally through the eyeholes of millions of skulls has been known to cause even the strongest Heretic to seek the comfort of insanity.

In low-lying regions, pockets of hundreds of bio-chemical weapons lay untouched for millennia, ragged and tattered fog banks lethal to even the most protected adventurer. It is these clouds, churning and boiling in their cauldron valleys, that have replaced the ancient beauty of Serenis. The gases and fumes comprise every shade of every colour of the rainbow visible to the human eye and thousands more besides. These colours constantly shift and swirl into each other, inviting any who look upon them to enter and taste of their mystery. Local tribes hold contests of battle and combat near such valleys, and those losers unlucky enough to survive their failure are often thrown into the fog, never to be seen again.

GLORY IN THE PITS

The gladiatorial matches in the Pits of Kurse should be sources of adventure and coin for Heretics willing to brave the Shattered Moons, but brave warriors willing to face off against the many vicious champions and creatures of the pits can earn themselves Infamy as well. In order to track a fighter's success in the pits, both within their own fights as well as with the fickle crowds, the following system is included below. Game Masters wishing to make the fighting pits a particularly central focus of their adventures should feel free to adapt, adjust, or expand on these simple rules as much as they wish.

The Match: Within each fight a warrior's success with the crowd is tracked with the use of Match Points. A character receives one Match Point for every Called Shot that successfully lands on his opponent, with the GM awarding additional points for particularly showy or well-described called shots, or for other impressive feats. Match Points may be spent during the fight for re-rolls or to purchase one-time uses of the following Talents: Combat Master, Crippling Strike, Precise Blow, Swift Attack, Whirlwind of Death, Blademaster. The player should track the total number of Match Points awarded in each fight whether they were spent or not. Most fights in the pits of Kurse are to the death, so the winner of each Match is whichever character survives, but the GM can also stage fights until one fighter is unconscious or a certain number of Match Points is accrued.

Reputation: The successful conclusion of a Match converts all Match Points a character earns into Reputation Points. These points should be used to judge how successful a character has been in previous matches for the purposes of odds as well as selection of opponents. A player may convert Reputation Points into Infamy upon leaving the Shattered Moons of Kurse, at a rate of 5 Reputation Points for one point of Infamy. Keep track of total Reputation still for the purposes of any future fights.

A Foe Worthy of a Saga: The Cultori and Rudiarus make every effort to see that the matches make for good spectacles, and that most opponents are at least moderately evenly matched. These opponents can be human, Pit Brute, or even xenos. Keep in mind whether the Heretic is human or a Chaos Space Marine, and plan the challenge accordingly. A Renegade should not be matched against a Juggernaut, for example, nor should a Chosen be matched against a single Cult Zealot.

Aid from the Darkness: It is entirely against the written and unspoken laws and customs of Kurse for outside agents to aid a pit fighter during a match. However, when the compatriots of a particularly successful gladiator are able to assist their friend without being caught, there is a high level of secret admiration for their ability. A Heretic's companions may choose to attempt such clandestine assistance, through psychic powers, crowd manipulation, and other indirect means. A GM should approach this type of effort with an open mind, set difficulties accordingly, but there should be dire consequences if Heretics are caught doing this.

Pit Cryer: These play a large role in the most successful fighting pits, and are often as famous among the fans as the fighters. Consummate showmen, each knows how to work a crowd and steer the fight so as to most please the screaming mob. If the GM allows it, a PC can adopt the role of Pit Cryer in a match. If at any time a fighter has more Match Points than his opponent, to suitably increase crowd reaction the Pit Cryer can direct the GM to pick out and assign that fighter a single use of one of the Talents purchasable through Match Points. Many of these marquis announcers also have famous catchphrases that they say often and loudly, such as Barciphah Claront's infamous "Let there be BLOOD!" chant, and players acting as Pit Cryers are heavily encouraged to create their own catchphrases to fully create the atmosphere of the pits of Kurse.

But even amidst the rampant mutating jungles, the churning lakes of flame, and the sluggish fogbanks of bio-chem death, the ruins of Serenis That Was can still be seen. Thrusting up through the red dust deserts are the cadavers of ancient statues, their once serene features worn away by time and the desert winds, their once wise eyes now hollow pits of empty despair. The shells of delicate towers and intricate palaces can still be seen in majestic isolation, covered in the rampant, lustrous greenery or sitting in the shadows of deep valleys, poisoned for obscuring all details. In some areas, especially nearer to the Great Eye, stand mute testaments to the works of the ancients: roadways laid down in millennia past stretch for unbroken miles, their foundations supporting them over lakes of burning fury that have eaten away all else, while others reach across gaping chasms, the lands upon which they once travelled having tumbled down into the burning maw aeons ago.

Lost among the devastation and the mutated regrowth, remnants of the forces that destroyed this once beautiful planet can still be found. Rumours abound throughout the Screaming Vortex of depots and research stations buried deep beneath the planet's surface. The wealth of empires must still be buried deep

beneath the dust and ash, depositories of ancient technical lore that could easily establish an erstwhile champion of the Ruinous Powers as a force to be reckoned with. Although no windfalls have ever been reported, the rumours are always rampant, turned over afresh with each new item of destruction that surfaces within the Vortex. The legends still bear sufficient force to draw the greedy and the unwary from all over the Vortex, and neither the murderous vegetation, the vicious beasts of the jungles, or the cannibalistic mutant tribesmen that now call the tumbled-down ruins home are deterrent enough to keep the seekers at bay.

The miracles and wonders of the Dark Age of Technology still call to those brave enough to dare the tortured landscape and vicious denizens. Journeying across the tortured corpse of this long-dead paradise is no easy task, however, and those who come here seeking the ancient treasures of those long-dead adepts must brave untold dangers in their quest for treasures that may not even exist. Multifarious challenges arise to meet each Heretic on their path to glory, but even the most sceptical naysayers cannot deny that somewhere amid the ash, skulls, and dust, some remnant of the strength that once was Serenis must still remain.

The rage-filled natives, known commonly as the Vexed, are the mutated inheritors of the once great planet. Vicious, territorial tribesmen, the Vexed do not know fear, and they suffer no outsider to desecrate their sacred sites. Guarding the overgrown jungles and vast plains are mutated animals of nearly every description, howling for blood and eager to test their mettle against anyone wandering into their range. Churning seas of chemical poisons cover any low-land ruins, while rad storms and lakes of fire threaten to burn anyone foolish enough to make planetfall unaware.

The strangest and most disconcerting phenomena to haunt Kurse by far are the violent atmospheric tempests known locally as Soul Storms. Brutal winds and cataclysmic electrical detonations herald the approach of these terrible events. At the heart of the Soul Storm is a wave front of abrasive dust, the irradiated ashes of the planet's dead. Some say the tortured howl of the winds contains the spirits of all those who died in the great cataclysms that convulsed the planet after the Warp claimed it for its own, and that should one listen carefully enough, and long enough, the secrets of the world could be revealed. However, to most who have tried, all that is vouchsafed them is a burning anger and a bloodlust the match of any berserker in the galaxy. Most succumb, falling upon their companions in an orgy of death and dismemberment, while others, riven of their senses and bereft of even the will to live, wander empty and alone until death finds them; never a long wait on the hell world of Kurse.

High above the tormented world of Kurse, girding it as an ancient belt around the swollen belly of a dying giant, is the debris field that was once the planet's many moons. Although the vast majority of the wreckage is made up of small chunks of blasted rock, still jagged and sharp from their initial splintering, there are, among the floating ring of ruin, larger bodies whose steady rhythm around the planet have allowed for them to be chained together and made habitable through the exhaustive efforts of the Exospectre of Forge Castir, in the Hollows.

The adepts of Castir gathered several different collections of larger rock, chaining them together with massive, groaning links sunk deep into the fractured rock. Many of these asteroids have been hollowed out, engorged with slave pens, chambers of unspeakable torture and experimentation, and shrines to a thousand blood-stained gods. The minions of the Exospectre raised elaborate force domes to surround the curved surfaces of the largest, containing fighting pits excavated from the planet below and transported, stone by stone. The dark adepts maintain the life preserving technologies that guard against the void, keeping the rowdy denizens of the Shattered Moons fed and breathing. However, they seldom take an active role in conflicts within these domains, allowing the men and women drawn here to work out their own problems, either in the conference halls of the lower levels, or in the pits themselves.

THE PITS OF THE SHATTERED MOONS

The fighting pits of Kurse are the main attraction to this forsaken world. The legends of ancient archeotech notwithstanding, there is one thing any rising warlord in the Screaming Vortex can be assured of acquiring from the blasted world, and that is fighters. The pits of Kurse perform several roles for the people of the Shattered Moons, providing a proving ground for warriors whose prowess is known throughout the Gloaming Worlds, as well as entertainment for audiences who travel from throughout the Screaming Vortex and beyond. The gladiatorial matches in the fighting pits, and the training required to do well there, are seen as one of the major sources of trained, bloodthirsty warriors for hire.

The habitats of the Shattered Moons are lawless and chaotic places. A shadowy figure known only as the Rudiarus leads a loose coalition of warlords, proctors, and provides what law there is, maintaining a minimum level of calm within which the business of the pits and the trading houses may work. Rumours run rampant concerning the Rudiarus, but most agree that he is a former pit slave, sold into blood service to some warlord or another, who returned to Kurse after winning his freedom in the wider galaxy. Some whisper that this freedom came at the cost of his master's life, a tale that serves to give many a bridling pit slave a glimmer of hope in their imprisonment.

Several clearing houses, including the Floria, the Bagetelle, and Vrush serve to collect warbands from the planet's surface, providing them to the highest bidders among the Shattered Moons. Warriors so collected may be purchased as individual fighters all the way up to entire mutant warbands. The ferocity and bloody-mindedness of the mutants of Kurse is known far and wide, and they have served as bodyguards, shock troops, and entertainment for centuries uncounted.

An entire circuit of fighting pits have been erected among the wreckage of the Shattered Moons for the express purpose of training and showcasing these brutal warriors. However, for many years now the pits have attracted warriors from all over the Screaming Vortex who go there expressly to test themselves against the deadliest fighters, to build their reputations among the rising warlords of the Vortex, or to prove something to them.

A flourishing gambling industry has also developed around the fighting pits of Kurse, and a progressively violently minded clientele journey to the habitats of the Dark Adepts for the sole purpose of carousing among the seedy dives and laying high-stakes bets on the bloody sport of the pits. Quite often the rowdy behaviour of these gamblers rises to a level seen as threatening to the real work of the pits and the Rudiarus, often after vast fortunes have been lost, but the swift intervention of highly trained warriors and infamous pit fighters, all in the employ of the shadowy lords of the Shattered Moons, has always proven sufficient to quell any such boisterous behaviour.



Various houses, known as Cultori, have risen to supervise the training of the pit warriors. Quite often, expeditions embark for the surface of the planet in a fleet of slapdash shuttles, returning with entire tribes of savage warriors who lack only the final polish of the Cultori to convert them into the berserk mercenaries renowned the Vortex over. The youngest, most violent candidates are almost always sold to hulking, mysterious strangers to the habitats who arrive in unmarked vessels, keep to themselves their entire time among the Shattered Moons, and leave as soon as they have secured their charges. These mystifying wanderers go about cloaked and cowed at all times, speaking only through intermediaries in all their dealings among the habitats.

Among the strangest visitors to the Shattered Moons are those of xenos origins. These strangers, often swathed in concealing layers of exotic fabric, come to the habitats as spectators as well as prospective fighters. Some Eldar, known for their cruelty and bladework, in particular seem to have developed an exquisite taste for the pits, seeming to find the atmosphere and raucous celebrations of death and blood as worthy of their attention. Many have been the local favourites, fighting their way up to the highest levels of blood-fame, only to be cut down in their prime by a lithe, leather-wrapped alien fighter wielding strange and unusual weapons.

THE VEXED

The most numerous inhabitants of the blasted world of Kurse are the bands of wretched mutants known as the Vexed. Descendants of the original inhabitants of lost Serenis, these nomadic tribes wander the desolate landscape living off the mutated vegetation, hunting the enormous, savage predators that roam the planet's surface, and often each other. The inheritors of mighty creatures that once strode across the planet like mortal gods, the only legacy the Vexed carry forward from their illustrious forebears is the mindless rage that afflicted them in their last, twisted moments.

These bands identify by local, family-affiliated clans and hold very little loyalty beyond that. There is no awareness of the wider scope of the Screaming Vortex, of the galaxy their ancestors helped to tame, or even the entirety of the world of Kurse upon which they roam. These tribal units, although savagely loyal within their family bonds, happily sell defeated clans into slavery to Dark Adepts of the Exospectre or flesh-mongers of the Shattered Moons. Although the adepts of Forge Castir frown upon such behaviour, occasionally powerful individuals flout their authority and make unapproved expeditions to the surface to pick and choose their own candidates, to hunt the beasts of the jungles, or to search for invaluable lost treasures of a forgotten age.

The Vexed are twisted mutants, many sporting extra muscular arms sprouting from their backs or sides. Victims of their own uncontrolled rage, the Vexed are incapable of higher organised effort and exist at a subsistence level, hunting for meat and stealing what else they need from weaker clans. Most are the size of well-muscled men, wielding primitive weapons or vicious blades of mutated bone that have grown out of the wrists of several of their arms. Caught alone and fought in single combat, most Heretics would have no trouble against a Vexed, but there is very little that may withstand a concerted charge of these fearless warriors.

The Vexed (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
22	18	36	34	38	20	32	21	15	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 12

Armour: Tough Hide (2 All)

Total TB: 6

Skills: Intimidate (WP), Parry (WS).

Talents: Frenzy, Lightning Attack, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Natural Weapons, Multiple Arms (4), Natural Armour (2), Unnatural Toughness (+3).

Weapons: Bone-blades (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 2; Felling [1], Tearing), vicious bite (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 0; Primitive [6], Toxic [1]).

Gear: Filthy rags, fetishes, brass trinkets.

Born to the Blade: The Vexed learn from birth to utilise every advantage they have in combat. As such, they may fight with a bone blade in each of their four hands at a total -10 penalty to their Weapon Skill.

PIT BRUTES

Rare among the denizens of Kurse are the hulking savages known simply as Brutes. These towering hulks of mutated flesh are often roughly the size of an Ogryn, but lack the refined tastes and developed intelligence of their more famous abhuman cousins. On the surface of Kurse, the Brutes are cast out of their home tribes at adolescence. These Brutes, once cast out, make their best way in a harsh world, wandering aimlessly, fighting whatever they encounter, eating whatever they find, and boiling with an unfocused, ravening anger.

The masters of the Fighting Pits prize the Brutes as both pit fighters and body guards. These giant creatures are gifted warriors, fighting on the planet's surface with improvised weapons such as clubs or spears. In the service of the Shattered Moons, they are often equipped with massive chain weapons and trained in lethal and showy combinations for the pleasure of the roaring crowds. The Pit Brutes particularly favour the brutal chain hammer, a massive warhammer with a broad head housing multiple rows of buzzing chain teeth. In the powerful hands of a Brute, the chain hammer conveys a thunderous impact upon the target, which the savagely spinning chain blades then chew to a bloody pulp.



Pit Brute (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
42	22	45	49	32	22	29	18	05	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 18

Armour: Tough Hide (4 All)

Total TB: 8

Skills: Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S) +20, Parry (WS), Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Deflect Shot, Flesh Render, Furious Assault, Frenzy, Sure Strike, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Brutal Charge (2), Fear (1), Natural Armour (4), Size (Hulking), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+4), Unnatural Toughness (+4).

Weapons: Chain halberd (Melee; 1d10+11 R; Pen 3; Tearing), or two chainaxes (Melee; 1d10+12 R; Pen 3; Tearing), or chain spear (Melee; 1d10+11 R; Pen 3; Tearing) and pit net (Melee; 3m; 1d5+8 R; Pen 0, Snare [2], Balanced), or chain hammer (Melee; 2d10+14 R; Pen 4; Concussive [2], Tearing, Unwieldy).

Gear: Show Armour, fetishes, trinkets.

Blood for the Crowds: If the Pit Brute makes a Called Shot and hits, if his next action is also a Called Shot then it is at +10. If the second Called Shot hits he may make a third consecutive Called Shot at +20, causing double Damage.

KURSIA WARP HOUNDS

Perhaps the most iconic of all the mutated beasts of Kurse are the massive animals known as Warp Hounds. These enormous creatures are prized both as prey during illicit hunts on the surface as well as their inevitable appearance in the fighting pits. They also are favoured as guard animals for those warlords and adepts able to pay for their training and upkeep. There is a fabled connection between Kursian Warp Hounds and the Serenisian War Hounds of legend, but it is unknown if they are direct descendants of these noble creatures, or of their handlers, or an unholy, Warp-spawned amalgam of the two. It is clear that these hounds are cunning and devious, however, often seen as more intelligent than the human heirs of Serenis.

Warp Hounds are truly enormous beasts, nearly the size of an armoured tank. Covered in hides that seem to incorporate leather, fur, and scales in a confusing conglomeration, their skin often proof against all but the most modern of weapons. In appearance, the hounds seem to trace their origins back through canine, lizard, and the ancient Terran rhinoceros, and its fearsome visage most likely spurred the legends that speak of these creatures as servants of dark masters, often sent to punish the weak-willed and the cowardly. Further abilities to sniff out psykers, and a rumoured resistance to psychic powers, have never been substantiated.

Kursian Warp Hound (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	--	56	42	37	26	46	38	10	--

Movement: 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 32

Armour: None

Total TB: 8

Skills: Ambidextrous, Awareness (Int) +20, Climb (Ag), Dodge (Ag) +10, Survival (Per) +30.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Fearless, Furious Assault, Sprint, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Brutal Charge, Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons (Jaws and Talons), Fear (1), Quadruped, Resistance (Psychic Powers), Size (Enormous), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+5), Unnatural Toughness (+4).

Weapons: Adamantine talons (Melee; 1d10+10 R; Pen 2; Razor Sharp, Tearing), dagger-fanged jaws (Melee; 2d10+14 R; Pen 4; Crippling (2), Razor Sharp, Tearing, Toxic [1]).

Leap of the Hunter: If a Warp Hound hits with both Adamantine Talon Attacks, its dagger-fanged jaws attack is +20 to its roll to hit.

GM Note: Kursian Warp Hounds can also be taken as a minion for Heretics with the Minion of Chaos Talent and a SB of 5 or higher who desire a beast that only can guard one's life, but also impress one's enemies.

MUTILATORS

Easily the strangest and most lethal beings seen in this system are the hulking entities known only as the Mutilators, enormous creatures encased in shells of armour festooned with bony ridges and sweeping horns. Although the general shape and outline of the armour is reminiscent of Legion Tactical Dreadnought Armour, the living sheaths of ceramite and bone have evolved and developed somehow so that no two Mutilators look the same, and no hint of their origins can be discerned. Watching the bio-mechanical processes that bring forth the enormous, lethal weapons of myth and legend from their grasping gauntlets is enough to show any observer that these creatures are something truly terrible and unique unto themselves.

No one in the Screaming Vortex knows from whence Mutilators come. They are sometimes seen working with various warbands or renegades throughout the region, although how they were enticed into service is a secret yet to be revealed. Outside of these sightings they are rare indeed, and the location most likely to host one of their rare appearances is the blasted planet Kurse. There is no record of them ever arriving or departing from the habitats or the planetary surface on any known transports. How they might travel through the Vortex is a mystery; some theories speak of secret, clandestine space craft relays that shuttle them about, while others, given far less credit, confer upon the creatures the ability to warp-walk through time and space.

Of even greater concern and wonder are the nature and provenance of these warriors. Again, only myths and legend provide even an inkling of their origins. Some say they are Daemon-forged Space Marine mutants, whom the capricious whims of the Ruinous Powers have changed into a form more

pleasing to the bloodthirsty cries of the Warp. Others say Mutilators were created from the stuff of the Warp itself as avatars of violence and personal death. Some renegades claim that the Mutilators are favoured warriors of the Legions whose dedication and commitment have brought their bodies and their wargear into symbiosis, creating the perfect amalgam of warrior and weapon. Whether any of these tales, or all of them, are true, nothing is more certain than the cold lethality of these enormous warriors and their mutable weaponry.

Mutilators come to Kurse for reasons of their own, never uttered to mortal ears. When they do arrive, however, they immediately wreak havoc amidst the gambling population, who must scramble to rearrange their financial dispositions to cover a suddenly dry environment. At the pits these creatures dominate all opposition with such brutal efficiency that little money is to be made, for few are willing to cover wagers against them. They appear without fanfare or notice, roaring with rage until they are granted a foe, and then, when the enemy is inevitably obliterated, leaving for fresh blood elsewhere. On the surface of Kurse itself they rampage across the blasted landscape, tracking down the most ferocious of mutant beasts for titanic combat. It has been known for a single Mutilator to corner an entire mutant tribe and then slaughter them in a frenzy of blood and fury. Although rare, these tales are sacred to the clans, many of whom worship Mutilators as aspects of the bloody gods that must rule their world.

Darker legends say the monsters scour the planet's surface in search of ancient weapons of power, so potent that the devastating weapons the creatures themselves create pale in comparison. Others whisper that perhaps somewhere on the planet is a facility for the creation of such beings, or for their care or modification. Only one thing is certain: there is no deadlier creature on or above Kurse than the brutal Mutilators.



Mutilator (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
40	35	50	55	38	35	38	36	05	10	

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 48

Armour: Warped Ceramite (13 All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Archaeotech, Warp, Daemonology, Traitor Legions) (Int) +10, Intimidate (S), Parry (WS) +10.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Ancient Warrior, Battle Rage, Berserk Charge, Combat Master, Counter Attack, Crushing Blow, Flesh Render, Frenzy, Killing Strike, Two Weapon Wielder.

Traits: Brutal Charge, Daemonic (+2), Dark Sight, Fear (2), Regeneration (2), Size (Hulking), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (+5), Unnatural Toughness (+5).

Weapons: Any two of the weapons listed under the Violent Metamorphosis special rule below.

Gear: None.

Violent Metamorphosis: Mutilators can form a number of weapons from their Warp-touched bodies, each an unholy amalgam of their original flesh, ancient armour, and the stuff of Daemons. Mutilators manifest two weapons at any

given time, chosen from the list below. As a Half Action, a Mutilator can reform one of their current weapons to one other weapon, also chosen from the list. GMs are free to adopt other weapons should circumstances dictate.

Standard Mutilator weapons are the following: Legion chainaxe (Melee; 1d10+17 R; Pen 3; Tearing), Legion chainfist (Melee; 2d10+17 E; Pen 10; Powerfield, Tearing, Unwieldy), eviscerator chainblade (Melee; 1d10+17 R; Pen 5; Tearing, Unbalanced), lightning claw (Melee; 1d10+18 E; Pen 8; Power Field, Proven [4]), Legion power axe (Melee; 1d10+20 E; Pen 7; Power Field, Unbalanced), Legion power fist (Melee; 2d10+17 E; Pen 9; Power Field, Unwieldy), power mace (Melee; 1d10+18 E; Pen 4; Power Field†), or Legion power sword (Melee; 1d10+18 E; Pen 6; Power Field, Balanced).

Aura of Pain: Mutilators are completely covered in razor sharp spikes, chainblade extrusions, and other implements of violence. In combat, the Mutilator automatically inflicts an Incidental Hit (Melee; 1d10+10; Pen 3; Rending) against any opponent making direct physical contact with the vicious killer, such as a Grapple Action.

The Limits of Steel: Even the arcane powers of the Mutilators know their confines. If, when in battle, a Mutilator's weapon is destroyed, he cannot manifest that weapon again during that encounter.

†If the Mutilator manifests nothing but a single, two-handed Power Mace, the massive weapon gains the Concussive (1) Quality.

MESSIA

"I know not who the mutants serve, but some fool god must love something for it to be so hard to kill."

—Kurst Woebane, Drill-rig commander

A toxic planet near the outer reaches of the Gloaming Worlds, Messia is best known for its unusually long day and the desperation of its promethium miners. With an unusually slow rotational speed—likely due to the machinations of the Screaming Vortex—each day on Messia takes over a year to complete. The only human habitations are cities upon each pole, where they are forever trapped in a state of twilight. In order to heat their structures and provide basic power, these cities constantly send teams of prospectors to travel across the planet's surface in search of additional promethium resources. As the miners travel the desolate landscape, they must regularly face and overcome the massive hordes of mutants that constantly shamle across the surface and change form with the rising and setting of the sun.

MEKONTA

Located atop Messia's north pole, Mekonta is a city whose culture is entirely focused upon physical domination, cunning manipulation, and the notion that force of arms is the only way to secure power. A huge majority of the city's population consist of slaves. The lucky ones participate in blood sports within the city's arenas, to provide entertainment. The remainder rebuild the city as the dayside is constantly shattered under its star's merciless light.

A large part of Mekonta's society is based upon its system of government and inheritance, and the right to own property and govern must be obtained anew in every generation. The ideas of nurture and compassion are virtually nonexistent within Mekonta; once children reach the age of maturity—fifteen years—their rite of passage consists of being exiled from their parents' homes. There is no system of inheritance and when an individual dies, his neighbours immediately begin to fight over his assets. Those who prove dominant through combat and treachery gain control of the property; those who fail in their efforts often become the new owners' slaves.

The city's press gangs constantly roam the streets, seeking out the indigent. These well-armed groups check virtually everyone for their identification, killing those who resist and displaying the bodies as trophies of their skills. Those who do not have identification are immediately added to Mekonta's slave population and sent to work, typically in the mines, refineries, or the city's constantly damaged structures.

The city deliberately provides its slaves with inadequate shelter and too little food to fend off starvation, creating an incredibly volatile environment. Many sicken and die of malnutrition, disease, or from exposure to the elements. The strongest, however, seize what they need from the weakest. This culls the population, so that the city need not care for those who are seemingly incapable of caring for themselves. Prior to death, these weakest of slaves are often sent to the arena, where they usually die in the blood sports.



Of course, such a hostile environment frequently leads to insurrection; so frequently, in fact, that the city's core principles depend upon it. Each landholder maintains weapons that are far more sophisticated than those available to the common slaves. Rebels wielding sharpened sticks face authorities armed with shock truncheons and heavy stubbers. Once a riot is stamped out—there are hundreds each year—the slaveholders seize the leaders. These slaves are surrendered to the arena, where they enter the blood sport competition. Because they have typically demonstrated some degree of competency in a combat situation, they are provided primitive weapons to best exhibit their skills before the masses.

In addition to providing entertainment, the arena rewards those who manage to triumph within the tournaments. Victors are granted far more than just their freedom. The reward for winning a minor tournament includes placement within one of the city's numerous mining expeditions, so that they may travel out into Messia's wilds to prospect for promethium amidst the mutant hordes.

Almost all citizens attained that rank after proving themselves in successful expeditions. After returning laden with promethium and other riches, the triumphant leaders are rewarded with property rights and citizenship—bartered in exchange for the harvested resources. Lesser members of an expedition might horde their shares, working towards eventually attaining citizenship through surviving additional drilling expeditions.

III: MASTERS OF
DESTRUCTION

BARONS OF LEGEND

Legends from Messia's past suggests that the drill-barons may have once held far more power than they do today, something that the cities pray never happens again.

According to one legend, it was Magyar the Cruel who began the drilling process and the tales say that this baron was the one who created the planet's mutants, seeking new liquid promethium strains from their dissolving flesh. Some tales state that Magyar eventually fell prey to the very disease he introduced, and that he yet haunts drill expeditions as a leader of the mutant hordes he created.

Some years ago, the self-styled Lord Pinying the Dominant formed a guild of drill-barons and attempted to hold the city of Mekonta hostage to his demands. Though he could not create an alliance of all of the clans, his small fleet of drill-rigs and warbikes was large enough to embargo the city for four months. He was only defeated when the city agreed to reward the other clans with double payments if they brought them Pinying's head. The head is paraded through the blood arenas at the start of each opening match.

Only the drill-barons remember the Faceless One, for no city ever claimed a sighting of his rusted rig. He lived only for the wastes, and attacked any other clans he encountered for sustenance. Some claim he was a mutant that gained sentience, others that he was a former baron driven to bloody vengeance after being left to die. No one claims to have seen him die though, and mysterious burning wreckage indicates his obscured visage still haunts the outlands.

ZANOK

The ramshackle city of Zanok is located at Messia's south pole. Twin to Mekonta, its star's harsh light and the planet's furious weather devastate it during each long day, and is rebuilt as each night begins. According to legend, a group of slaves founded the city when they chose to establish a new home rather than return with their expedition harvests to Mekonta. The legend is believable as Zanok has neither a slave population nor any system of central authority. Ostensibly, the residents have full freedom to pursue their lives in any manner they see fit. Tragically, the combination of rugged environment and lack of central authority dictates that they seldom have an opportunity to do so.

Considering Messia's hostile environment, it comes as no surprise that the freedoms available to all who dwell within Zanok are often abused. Everyone who lives within its confines are granted full and equal rights, and expected to respect one another's privileges. However, there is no central power structure in place to see that those rights are preserved. As a consequence, the ideals that founded the city see little practical application.

Any time some individual or group commits their labours to building a functional structure, that same group must commit resources to defending and maintaining it for the short time that it lasts. Otherwise, their neighbours may attempt to either seize it or scavenge materials from it to use on their



own construction. A culture of jealousy, greed, and violence supplanted the idealised one of respect and personal freedom. This has led to a city that is a veritable warzone. Places that are not well-defended are often seized by roaming gangs formed out of desperation. Precious resources—including food, fuel, and breathable air—are held through force of arms so that they may be used or bartered for the necessities of life.

Above ground, the vast majority of free-standing structures are little more than burned out rubble. Starving scavengers regularly comb through these ruins, spending precious oxygen as they attempt to find anything that they might use to preserve their lives. Desperate gangs roam the streets looking for prey, while well-armed guards man the perimeters of the few well-maintained structures, such as the refineries and forges.

The majority of the city's inhabitants dwell below the planet's surface, a habit that dates back to shortly after the city's founding. New mines had discovered substantial veins of metallic ores, which in turn led to refineries to convert organic ores into promethium, manufactories to build weapons and raw materials for buildings, and an extensive underground air purification network to keep the mines running.

In time, the purifiers became one of the city's most valuable assets, and any who lived within the mines received a steady supply of air that was largely free from the planet's toxic contaminants. As the ages passed, most of the city's population took up permanent residence within the caves, particularly those that were abandoned as different veins of ore were exhausted.

The caves also have the benefit of being far more defensible than the free-standing structures located above ground. Extended families often secure particular portions of each of the man-made caverns, assuring one another of survival and protection. Open markets regularly take place in the larger caverns, though more often than not clans simply steal desired goods rather than barter for them.

Even in these protected environs, violence and poor maintenance present a significant danger to all involved. Many citizens who survived countless battles have died when caves collapsed. At other times, organised gangs have introduced poisons to kill off whole marketplaces in the hopes of securing all of the assets for themselves.

DRILLING EXPEDITIONS

Messia's two cities are entirely dependent upon the promethium ore drilling teams for their survival. Without these resources, the cities would not have the fuel necessary for survival at the planet's poles. Because of this, the nomadic cultures have learnt to maintain a stable relationship with the two cities. With both, the relationship is largely dependent upon trade. The drilling expeditions cannot manufacture replacement parts or sustain agriculture as they drill and defend themselves from the planet's mutant hordes. Leaders of the expeditions sponsored by Mekonta also work towards acquiring citizenship and power, while the ones that regularly supply Zanok are more typically focused upon obtaining material wealth. Offworlders also sometimes appear to launch their own expeditions for the valuable promethium, or wrest away existing drill-rigs and claim their own fiefdoms in the wastes to expand their power.

In addition to the common risks that are universally associated with gathering any volatile resource, such as raw promethium, there are several other dangers endemic to Messia. The world's surface is vast, and an expedition that suffers a critical breakdown far from the poles is much more likely to encounter one of the myriad hazards long before any sort of aid might arrive. The toxic atmosphere is an ever-present danger; an exposed human who attempts to breathe the planet's native air is likely to die of airway burns from the acidic atmospheric compounds within a few short hours. The stifling heat of the planet's lightside can be potent enough to spontaneously ignite the raw ores if an expedition's cooling systems fail. On both the light and dark sides of the planet, hordes of near-mindless mutants stalk the world's surface. These creatures are focused on the utter annihilation of anything they encounter, including the drill machines. Other drilling expeditions are also often ready to sabotage or attack their competitors in the hopes of seizing a drill site or rival's cargo.

As the members of an expedition face these dangers together, they either develop a desperate camaraderie, or they fall prey to the world's myriad dangers. In many cases, individuals soon discover that they prefer this lifestyle to that of the world's two cities, and many become Chem-Hunters who live out singular lives amidst the wastes or even beyond the planet itself. Several of the drilling groups exist as formal bond-clans that have worked collectively for generations, their massive drill-machines becoming heirlooms that are

representative of their lineage. It is these clans that roam the wastelands outside the cities, with powerful drill-barons commanding each in various levels of ruthlessness and savagery. Battles between rival clans can exist for years, drill-rigs changing hands in each conflict as the clans struggle for dominance over each other and the planet itself.

DAYSIDE MUTANT

Vast hordes of mutants constantly travel across Messia's surface, moving in the opposite direction of the planet's rotation. Under the direct light of Xoson, the planet's harsh star, they shed their normal bulk and become far faster and more agile, while their brains seem to enter a hyperactive state. Under these conditions, the roaming hordes not only become more destructive, they also become dangerously clever in their attacks.

The origins of the mutants are shrouded in speculation for at least as long as humans have been on the planet. Priests and scholars who have studied Messia constantly clash over these legends. Some think that the inhuman creatures are all that remains of a plague-ridden, cursed civilisation. One ancient creation myth suggests that these bodies are but the leftover shells of beings whose souls have been torn asunder. Another believes that a mighty warrior damned his army of followers to this life so that he might be transformed into a Daemon Prince.

There is ample evidence that the mutants active upon the dayside are capable of utilising weapons and enacting complex plans against their targets. However, they seldom have a supply of arms at hand. While their plans may be effective against visitors or the unprepared, they lack the survival gear necessary to launch an attack upon either of the world's cities, due to the colder environments at the poles. Most commonly, as they wander across Messia's darkside, the mutants fail to retain any assets they might acquire on the dayside. As they come to a greater state of consciousness, they must either construct or scavenge any weapons that they seek to employ. Under the toxic influence of Messia's atmosphere, anything they scavenge is likely to be of only limited functionality.

Dayside Mutant (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	23	31	32	28	25	30	15	15	--

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Wounds: 12

Armour: None

Total TB: 5

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness +10 (Per), Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (WP), Survival +10 (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Double Team, Frenzy, Furious Assault, Lightning Reflexes.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapon (Claws), Size (Weedy), Unnatural Agility (+4), Unnatural Strength (+3), Unnatural Toughness (+2).

Weapons: Claws (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 0), great weapon (Melee; 2d10 +6; Pen 0; Unbalanced).



NIGHTSIDE MUTANT

When the mutant hordes cross the line from the dayside of Messia to its nightside, their bodies enter a brief state of suspended animation. After a short time of putrefaction, each mutant begins the transformation into its nocturnal shape. The bodies gradually take on additional fluids as the climate begins to cool from the scorching heat of the dayside. Their mass increases substantially, with decreased movement and general reaction speed. New mutations, including limbs, tentacles, and expanded sensory capabilities often emerge. The change seems to be a physiologically programmed response to the time of darkness or a consequence of the mutants' arcane origin, rather than an unusual intrinsic effect of the star, as no others show similar effects.

At the same time as their bodies slow, their minds slow as well. The mutants become far less aware of their surroundings, and most weapons that were prized during their time in the daylight are discarded during the putrefaction and ignored without thought upon their restoration. There is no indication that the nightside mutants are capable of employing an ambush, using sophisticated tools or weapons, or even exhibiting any significant signs of teamwork. Further, the savage creatures seem incapable of manipulating even the simplest of locks, which they might use to gain entrance to a drill rig. When they encounter such vehicles, they are far more likely to batter ceaselessly at its exterior, hoping to reach the interior so that they might feast upon the flesh that dwells within.

The only thing that seems to disrupt the trek of these creatures is their drive to feed. While some might weakly subside upon the planet's fungal life, the creatures are clearly driven to devour living flesh. The scent of blood may be used to draw a horde of these mutants far from their normal path; even a relatively small supply of prey animals may draw thousands of the slow-moving beings.

Nightside Mutant (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	15	45	47	12	15	20	15	15	--

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Wounds: 14

Armour: None

Total TB: 9

Skills: Athletics (S), Survival +10 (Per).

Talents: Takedown.

Traits: Bestial, Dark-sight, Deadly Natural Weapon (Claws), Size (Hulking), Unnatural Strength (+4), Unnatural Toughness (+5).

Weapons: Improvised clubs (Melee; 1d10+9 I; Pen 0; Primitive [7], Unbalanced), claws (Melee; 1d10+8 R; Pen 0).

Mutations: At least one in three Nightside Mutants exhibit significant mutations. GMs should choose from Additional Limb, Bestial, Headless, Projectile Attack, Tail, or Tentacle Gifts from the Gods from the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook pages 290–299, all with the Khornate alignment.

DRILL NOMAD

The humans that serve aboard the drill rigs spend a challenging existence of conflict and desperation. Few choose this life; most are either born to it or exiled from one of Messia's cities. For the exiles, only a spectacularly successful mission might provide them with the payments necessary to return to a city with some degree of security. In contrast, those born to the life of a driller look to such a success as a means of preserving their clan's vital machinery so that future generations may continue to exploit the world's resources.

When travelling upon the daylight side of Messia, the drill-rigs attempt to find a secure location so that they might safely burrow deep into the planet's crust to extract promethium, for daytime means vicious mutant attacks. In contrast, travel across the nightside is only undertaken for prospecting missions as a long stop risks the slower but dangerously powerful hordes that can overcome the security of even a massive rig.

Drill Nomad (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
23	21	28	30	30	20	32	29	30	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 10

Armour: Climate-controlled suit (All 1)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Awareness +10 (Per), Common Lore (Tech) (Int), Dodge (Ag), Operate (Surface) (Ag), Survival (Per), Tech-Use +10 (Int).

Talents: Jaded.

Weapons: Knife (Melee; 1d5+2 R; Pen 0), stub automatic (Pistol; 30m; 1d10+3 I, Pen 0, S/3/-, Clip 9, Reload Full) or shotgun (Basic; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 I; Pen 0; Clip 8; Reload 2 Full; Scatter).

Gear: Binoculars, spare gas mask, well-worn clothing, prospecting field guide, three spare clips or shell bandoliers.

XURUNT

"Winter approaches and their harvest is ripe. It is time for conquest."

—Gorahn D'Vathe, Chieftain of the Bloody Sword

As one of the Gloaming Worlds, Xurunt's physical scope seems extraordinarily massive, but its gravity is well within a normal range for humans. Some legends suggest that this is because the Ruinous Powers desired a vast arena to test the Xur. Clearly, the constant battles among these native humans serve as a potent example of savagery and bloodshed. Most of the primitive natives devote their accomplishments to their god Baphtar, whether it is the defeat of other tribes or battles against the Svartlings and their Onir—creatures of the underworld that represent nearly as treacherous an opponent as the planet's merciless winters. Only through victory in these constant conflicts can any of the tribes hope to acquire the materials necessary to thrive, often at the expense of their foes.

THE THRONE OF BAPHTAR

A desolate plain near the planet's equator is only disrupted by a massive statue of Baphtar. Much like the other seven statues spread across the planet, this brass structure, over sixty metres in height, depicts a squat, cloven-hoofed, horned humanoid. Unlike the others, at times when there is a warrior or army whose battle rage has proven worthy of recognition, a massive throne devoted to the Ruinous Powers appears between its legs like Canares rising at dawn above the blood-drenched crags. It rests upon a huge, and ever-growing, mound of skulls, and is known as the Throne of Baphtar. According to ancient legend, a warrior who can hold the throne against all comers for a year and a day may become the overlord of Xurunt with all the blessings of Baphtar. Further, he should also gain the ability to instantly transport his warriors between all of the idols of Baphtar distributed across the planet's surface. None of the tales speak of anyone accomplishing this feat, however, in any of the bardic songs that preserve the history of the Xur.

Countless warriors, and their tribes of followers, have seized the throne. Those who chose to take the throne near the start of one of Xurunt's harsh, but brief, winters are generally capable of holding it during that season. However, when the weather warms, warriors invariably turn from the notion of defence to that of conquest. The legends that come with the ancient throne only make control of it even more tempting, for challengers have two reasons to seek to overcome the tribe that holds the throne. First and foremost, it represents one of the highest honours amongst the Xur. Only the world's most powerful warriors might hope to hold the throne against all comers. Further, no warrior wishes to bend the knee before another tribe. According to these myths, anyone who might hold the Throne of Baphtar would become an unbeatable foe. Those who failed to take action against him during his first year might be compelled to submit to his authority ever after.

Legends and glory for the tribe's leader are not the only reason to attempt to seize control of the throne. Even the tribe's lesser warriors are believed to have an ample opportunity to commune with Baphtar when they act upon this site. A stone arena set before the throne is frequently used as a site for furious combats of blade and axe dedicated to the name of their



bloody god. During many of these battles—purportedly only ones that please the deity—the dry moat around the arena fills with blood. In many instances, it is the blood of the vanquished that fills the trenches, but in particularly hard-fought battles the crimson manifests spontaneously, perhaps as a reward from those in the Sea of Souls for such entertainments.

After such fights, the victor receives the opportunity to bathe in that blood. In some cases, the winner may also choose to allow others to join in this foul baptism. This is considered one of the highest possible honours and signs of devoted camaraderie. A portion of the blood is always spilled upon the skulls that support the throne. Moments afterwards, the moat and all of the blood that stains the victor and his comrades turns to smoke, leaving only the crisp scent of burnt blood in the wind. Many believe that those who had an opportunity to partake of this blessing become the chosen of the Baphtar.

Legend holds that in the wake of battles at the Throne of Baphtar, warriors may be directly subsumed by the Warp. These tales tell of Daemons descending upon pillars of fire to remand the bodies of warriors—both victors and the fallen—into the eternal service of the Dark God. These tales fit with ancient inscriptions carved into the walls. On numerous occasions, tribes that have sought to conquer the Throne have discovered the remains of those who have fallen in a previous battle and massive patches of scorched earth. It is clear that any Daemons who visit the site are reluctant to leave any witnesses alive.

Not all who hold the Throne of Baphtar dare to sit upon it, as the bards insist the act of taking the seat draws the direct attention of the god. Many who have dwelt upon it have come

to lead vast armies over the course of their tenure, destroying countless other tribes, and working towards unifying all of the Xur. However, none have ultimately enjoyed success in this path. Each has fallen, either to betrayal or to an alliance of lesser tribes opposed to the tyrant-in-waiting in less than a year after assuming the throne. Only the boldest of warriors dare to seize this opportunity, knowing the fates of all who have gone before him. In spite of this, it is rare that a year passes without some tribal leader attempting to take the throne to begin his own trek towards near certain tragedy, for such is the blood-filled bravery of the Xur to make such an attempt, no matter the price.

THE UNDERWORLD

For the Xur, horrific legends of the Underworld begin with the Svartlings, small humanoid creatures of darkness more at home away from the light of the surface. Far below the rocky surface they perform arcane rituals, sacrificing Xur and even one another to their foul masters. The Onir are the most magnificent of their creations, mechanical constructs granted cognisance with the souls of those the Svartlings ritually murder. Tales vary as to the origins of the Svartlings; many assume they are debased remnants of Xur, corrupted from centuries of subterranean existence, but others claim they must be another race the Vortex claimed in Warp-storm cataclysms. The Xur simply believe that any who fail to prove themselves before the gods are doomed to fall prey to these horrors in the afterlife, in the same manner that these hunched troglodytes claim the living who dare venture below.

The majority of the Svartling civilisation dwells deep beneath the planet's surface, far from the prying eyes of the Xur. In these dank depths, the wretched beings craft complex mechanical devices powered through sorcery ripped from the souls of countless slaves. Anathema to the ways of Baphtar, the Svartlings prey on the Xur to feed their machines and their dark arts. It is unclear if they permit the Xur to live upon the world's surface so that they might continue to use them as fuel for their devices, or if they somehow draw sorcerous energy from the constant conflict upon the planet's surface.

Xurun's underworld extends through countless tunnels and caverns far beneath its surface. Though most openings to the surface are narrow, and must be enlarged so that massive mechanical creatures such as Onir might emerge, there are many larger open spaces deep within the planet. Some of these house sizeable cities of Svartlings and their slaves. Others are used for refining the planet's resources into a promethium-like fuel, cultivating their rheumy fungal agriculture, and the manufacture of their complex machines.

Svartling society is largely divided into four separate subcultures. Highest ranking among these are the sorcerer-priests. These psykers pledge their souls and their services to the Ruinous Powers, just as they struggle amongst themselves to establish superiority. Their sacred pacts sustain their race at the same time as they require a constant flow of slaves to assuage their dark masters. Sorcerer-priests study rigorously for years under more experienced priests, though many who displease their masters become sacrifices instead of priests. Some claim that those who have undergone such training make far better sacrifices to Daemons. Others believe that

the souls trained in this way are better able to control the blasphemous machines that the engineers construct. Some of those trained include humans from above and some that escape from this training often become Xur Sorcerers, if they manage to find their way back to the surface.

The engineers represent the next highest-ranking members of Svartling society. It is these craftsmen who forge the terrible Onir dragons and other complex machines that the Svartlings use in the service of their Dark Gods. They not only design their tools of warfare, but also oversee mining operations, refineries, and the maintenance of the air purification devices necessary to maintain an underworld civilisation. All the while, these craftsmen live in a state of perpetual terror that their latest work might displease the sorcerer-priest for whom they work.

Warriors and slaves make up the Svartling underclass. The warriors—who must constantly manage the slaves—fear the day that their skills fail them, forcing them to live the life of a slave. The slaves live in terror of the day when their souls are needed to power one of the dread devices crafted through their arcane technology. Members of both social classes worship before the might of the sorcerer-priests but also live in constant terror of these dark masters.

Svartling creations, like the massive Onir, are manufactured from ores found deep beneath the planet's depths. As their slaves labour to harvest these precious resources, depleted mines are transformed to expand their habitats. Other mines provide the organic fuels which provide motivating fuel, but it is raw soul-stuff that truly powers each beast. Additional slaves—often ones who have already served for years in the mines and factories—serve as sacrifices for the dark rituals that grant the machines their fury and a degree of sentience. Svartling warriors and engineers then serve as handlers to the mechanical terrors that often go on to devastate the Xur, on their missions to capture additional slaves.

XUR WARRIOR

Warriors make up the majority of every Xur tribe. From early childhood, these savages engage in an endless series of competitions. Some of these are for simple matters of pride and honour, but not all. Even among relatively young children, battles to the death can occur. Such conflicts may be undertaken with little provocation and almost no warning. This is because their society is completely dominated by the notion of permitting only the strongest members to survive.

The Xur believe that showing weakness is a failing in the eyes of Baphtar. A gravely wounded Xur often downplays the severity of any injury, lest anyone challenge his bravery. Many Xur may decide to continue a conflict well after the point has been resolved, particularly when in conflict with beings from other cultural backgrounds. In a losing battle, an entire tribe may be annihilated when all of the members stubbornly refuse to accept the fact that the conflict has already been lost.

Aside from arena battles, Xur warriors prefer to engage in combat while mounted upon the back of a Xurunsh. Their lance-goats are used to guide their mounts and to finish off any opponents who somehow manage to avoid the massive creature's enormous maw. The tips of these spear-like weapons are made of a rare natural glass that absorbs emotional energy from the anger of their wielder. When they strike, they also emit a blast



III: MASTERS OF DESTRUCTION

of rage, enough to stun their victims or further goad the Xurush. Battles fought between tribes using these mounts are renowned, but it is the battles fought against the Onir that can truly create a warrior's legend. Those enormous mechanical terrors dwarf even a mounted Xur warrior, and their defences are such that neither a lance goad nor a Xur is particularly effective against them. In spite of this, the savage warriors engage those beasts without hesitation for the rich resource of metals the creatures offer.

Xur Warrior (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	25	40	35	35	21	30	20	25	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 10

Armour: Beast Furs (Body 2)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Dodge +10 (Ag), Survival +10 (Per).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Double Team, Fearless, Lightning Reflexes, Swift Attack, Zealous Pride†.

Weapons: Lance goad (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 1; Primitive [7], Shocking, Unbalanced), bow (Basic; 40m; S/-/-; 1d10 R; Pen 0; Clip 1; Reload Half; Primitive [6], Reliable).

Gear: Worn animal hides, talismans of Baphtar, trophy skulls.

†**Zealous Pride:** If a Xur wishes to flee or surrender in a battle, he must first pass a **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test**. On failure, he ignores 5 wounds of Damage for the remainder of the conflict, but must continue to fight until the end of the conflict.

XURUNSH

The Xur culture is entirely dependent upon the domestication of these massive carnivorous reptiles. They average more than three metres in length and typically mass more than a Grox-beast. Surprisingly swift for their substantial size, they are also renowned for their thick hide and stubborn attitudes. Atypically for predatory creatures, undomesticated examples of these voracious creatures travel the plains of Xurunt as herds that number into the hundreds. They devastate the environment as they travel, devouring all life which flees before the herd when prey animals eventually become too exhausted to continue fleeing.

Though the Xur spend their lives working closely with these animals, they have learned to never fully trust them. Xurunsh psychology is inexplicable, and it is likely that the animals may never be fully domesticated. A major sign of this is their tendency to turn against their owners, often attempting to devour them in the midst of a major battle or when a lance-goad is used in an effort to control them. Other times, the creatures may turn with little apparent provocation, possibly just deciding that their supposed masters were more appetising than the food that had been apportioned for them. The Xur cherish their beasts though, usually adorning each with more armour and decorations than the Xur themselves might wear. Battle-tales involving a Xurunsh are common, and epic songs involving legendary beasts feature heavily in Xur legends far more often than actual Xur.

Xurunsh are prone to mutations—a consequence of life within the Screaming Vortex. Many of these are physical in nature, often indicated by unexpected growths, additional sensory organs, tentacles, or abnormally constructed features. Other mutations clearly manifest as mental dysfunctions, often associated with their temperamental madness. In many instances, the two types of mutations are associated, creating a cultural problem for the Xur. Some of the most heavily mutated Xurunsh may be considered ideal war mounts, but their mental aberrations leave them as very poor choices as a combat mount. Those Xur who choose to use such animals in spite of the danger often regret their decisions when the beasts turn against them in the midst of battle.

Xurunsh (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
40	12	45	45	25	15	20	15	10	—	—

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Armour: Dense Hide (All 3)

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per).

Talents: Fearless.

Traits: Bestial, Brutal Charge (4), Natural Armour (3), Deadly Natural Weapons, Unnatural Strength (+4), Unnatural Toughness (+2), Size (Enormous), Stampede.

Weapons: Goring tusks and teeth (Melee; 1d10+12 R; Pen 4; Tearing).

Gear: Domesticated Xurunsh may wear Metal Barding, increasing their Armour to All 5. Many also are adorned with Spikes (Melee; 1d10 + 9 R; Pen 0) attached directly to their hide, which may be used to tear an opponent as the beast passes.

Insatiable: A Xurunsh is an unceasingly ravenous carnivore, and many watch for the slightest opportunity to turn on their master. Any time that a rider makes a Skill Test and rolls doubles, the Xurunsh immediately attempts to devour him; the character must make a **Difficult (–10) Agility Test** or the Xurunsh hits with 1d10+8 Rending Damage and Pen 4.

Prone to Mutation: Whenever a new Xurunsh is introduced, the GM should make a **Difficult (–10) Willpower Test** for the new specimen. On success, roll on **Table 9–1: Gifts of the Gods** from page 291 of the **BLACK CRUSADE Core Rulebook** for the beast's mutation.



XUR SORCERER

The god Baphtar preaches against the ways of the psyker, both fearing and hating their abilities. According to the culture's traditions, those who exhibit such abilities are not to be trusted. Because of this, young Xur who demonstrate psychic abilities are often sacrificed to Baphtar, but some are abandoned by their tribes and left to die in isolation amidst Xurunt's merciless wilderness.

Few of these young psykers survive long without the support of their tribe. The Svartlings capture almost all of those who do live until darkness falls. Those creatures closely monitor the surface, and the talents of their sorcerer-priests often enable them to know when and where to look for additional slaves. Svartlings show a marked preference for attempting to capture humans with psychic potential, as these individuals can be used both to aid young Svartlings in mastering their psychic potential and also to serve as even more potent sacrifices to their dark gods.

These young psykers live out their wretched lives deep beneath Xurunt's surface. A few, however, manage to escape and fight to survive on the surface. Their own tribes would kill them on sight, lest their foul sorceries pollute them, so they work their way to new tribes and new lives. Here they work to keep their new abilities secret. They speak little of their experience, though the ritualistic scars that mark their flesh and constantly weep blood quickly identify them as survivors of dark rituals. Most are terrified of nightfall and rarely travel below ground, always insisting on carrying a powerful light with them at all times.

Only the most desperate and unworthy of Baphtar's worshippers would knowingly allow these outcasts to join a tribe, but some do and thus earn their god's rage, as well as the hatred of other tribes. The powers these psykers can wield has tempted some leaders to use them to aid their tribe in combat and survival, as well as to learn more of the Svartlings and the horrors that await below ground. Their lives on the surface lead some of these tribes to escape there though, for on the surface they will know only Baphtar's endless fury for allowing such cowardly magics to befoul his world.

Xur Sorcerer (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
30	25	30	30	35	30	35	30	35	—	—

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Armour: Beast Furs (Body 2)

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per) +10, Deceive (Fel), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Heresy) (Int), Intimidate (WP), Psyniscience (Per) +10, Survival (Per) +10.

Talents: Psy Rating 4, Warp Sense.

Traits: Psyker (Unbound).

Weapons: Spear (Melee; 1d10+3 R; Pen 0; Primitive [8]).

Gear: Hide cloak, facial paints, Svartling talismans.

Psychic Powers: Doombolt, Foul Cage, Warptime.

Fear the Dark: Xur Sorcerers fear darkness, knowing all too well what lurks there. Whenever they must enter an area with little or no light they must first pass a **Difficult (–10) Willpower Test** or take a –10 penalty on any other Willpower Tests until the area is well-lit, or they are once again in a lit area.

ONIR

The Xur are an aggressive culture, and fear few things. In spite of this, their darkest stories and legends are dominated by the constant threats of dragons, known as Onir in Xur-tongue. These massive mechanical terrors often strike from deep beneath the planet's surface with little warning. When one of these horrors assaults an unprepared tribal encampment, it frequently devastates the tribe's warriors, leaving the rest of the tribe too horrified to either defend themselves or flee before its might. In this way, a relatively small group of Svartlings may be able to swiftly round up the survivors, adding them to their slave pens.

Physically, Onir may vary substantially in appearance. Each is the product of the twisted Svartling minds, engineers working in concert with a sorcerer-priest to craft each unique metal beast. Each has a heavily armoured shell, with a carapace that constantly belches smoke and steam, Onir have dozens of limbs, most designed to effectively burrow through the planet's crust and create new tunnels to better assault unwary prey. Other limbs are equipped with a variety of different blades, used to quickly overpower those who dare to oppose them. Their gaping "mouths" typically incorporate a flame-based weapon, which is likely the reason that the Xur associate them with the dragons of ancient legend.

Through their dark arts, Svartling sorcerer-priests are able to utilise mortal souls to grant the machines a limited degree of sentience for a few hours at a time. Without a steady supply of souls, an Onir is little more than a machine that a Svartling engineer may manually control. With them, they are a devastatingly potent combat engine, fully capable of overcoming foes who are far better equipped than the typical Xur.

Onir (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	--	60	60	23	15	21	15	07	--

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: Brass plating (All 5)

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Frenzy.

Traits: Brutal Charge (9), Burrower (6), Fear (2), Machine (5), Deadly Natural Weapons, Unnatural Strength (+6), Unnatural Toughness (+6), Size (Immense), The Stuff of Nightmares.

Weapons: Slicing talons (Melee; 1d10+18 R; Pen 2), dragon's flame (Heavy; 60m; S/-/-; 1d10+8 E; Pen 5; Clip 10; Reload: 2 Full; Flame, Spray).

Gear: None.

Wounds: 85

Total TB: 12

SVARTLING WARRIOR

These sentients dwell within the depths of Xurunt, haunting its vast network of caves. From the planet's dark places, they devote their lives to the service of the Ruinous Powers. They are seldom seen on Xurunt's surface, save when they engage in an action to seize additional prisoners to add to their slave pens. Even then, these attacks most commonly take place under the veil of darkness, when their sensitive eyes are not confronted by the harsh light of Xurunt's star.

Physically, the Svartlings are humanoid in structure, but somewhat smaller than most humans. Their reduced stature is in part due to a marked hunch in their upper back, which extends above the top of their heads. Their skin is a dark grey, similar to the shades of Xurunt's native granite, and lidless, huge red eyes dominate their bald heads. These eyes stand out in the darkness any time that they are struck by a stray beam of light, glowing brightly for several seconds in an eerie reflection.

Only a relatively small proportion of Svartlings are considered warriors, as the majority of the race is too firmly devoted in the service of their Dark Gods to learn basic martial skills. To make up for this limitation, they strive to strike from stealth and exploit the technological advantages they maintain over the Xur. Though their weapons are quite primitive by Imperial standards, they are vastly superior to anything the Xur possess.

Svartling Warrior (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	35	20	25	30	25	35	35	30	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 8

Armour: Arms, Body, Legs 3

Total TB: 2

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (WP), Parry (WS), Stealth (Ag), Tech-Use (Int).

Talents: Deadeye Shot, Rapid Reload.

Traits: Dark-sight.

Armour: Chainmail Coat.

Weapons: Fungal musket (Basic; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 I; Pen: 6; Clip: 1; Reload: 2 Full; Hallucinogenic [1]), dust grenades (Thrown; 6m; S/-/-; 1d10+2 X; Pen 0; Clip 1; Toxic [1], Blast [3], Smoke).

Gear: Flasks of fungal spores and promethium dust, spare igniters, pouch of crystalline shot, daemonic talisman.

Sensitive Vision: Under normal lighting conditions, Svartlings are considered Blinded.



THE WAR MOONS OF TALAX

"The clans are unique... savages in combat, technologically savvy outside of it, and utterly devoid of duplicity by faith. How they have lasted this long in the Vortex is a mystery to me."

—Corsair Captain Gorlod Tane

Orbiting a nameless, reddish-purple dwarf star, the War Moons of Talax appear to be a misnamed system. Those that know its history, however, understand that these are truly the original moons of a much larger planet that died many ages ago. Before the birth of the Vortex, Talax was a system of eight planets orbiting a double-star, all its worlds capable of sustaining life of varying degrees and several inhabited. This changed when the Vortex roared into existence.

When Slaanesh was born and the Screaming Vortex came into being, many of the planets dragged into its midst were destroyed in the process. Talax's two suns collided as the system fell into the swirling tide, and the resulting explosive nova decimated the majority of the system. Of the eight planets, none survived intact; three were immolated in the initial burst of the twin stars, one flew out of orbit where it tore itself apart, and the remaining four were dragged headlong into the Vortex.

BORN FROM VIOLENCE

The journey forever transformed those planets and moons that survived. The Warp compressed the remaining four planets into a huge, singular mass, and the three moons that moved into orbit around it absorbed the unnatural energy the merge generated. This energy found its way into the cores of the moons and ignited something within each, evolving them into bodies where living beings could exist. Though not fully understood by any scryer or seer, the planets do not require the heat of a star to survive, relying somehow instead on the thermal output from its own core. The sorcerers of Q'Sal have sought to attain the knowledge of how this is possible as well as how to replicate it using their arcane arts, but all of their excursions to the War Moons have met with either disaster or capture.

Over time, the moons, bathed in the energies of the Warp, became destination planets for those who survived the devastation of the birth of the Vortex. Rich in minerals and other highly desired resources, all three moons were highly coveted prizes for the first wave of warlords that asserted themselves in the Vortex. Though several of these would-be kings made the attempt to take the system by force, there is no record of the subjugation of the Talax. If the records are accurate, Talax maintains a martial history that few other cultures can match. Even when attacked from space, the Clans have found ways to reach their foes. Whether they captured enemy craft and took the fight to space or fought guerilla wars on the surface, Talax's enemies only took root on the moons as slaves or fertilizer, all for the glory of their god of blood and anger, Gorgeth, who they believe crushed the planets into one and whose rage sustains all life on them.

Cho'unda is the largest of the three moons and the most stark in appearance. Heavily mined and used as the main forge planet of the shaman-smiths, Cho'unda's surface has very little in the way of vegetation or surface water but a considerable amount of open land and mining. With water supplies scarce, the shaman-smiths have placed a stranglehold on the majority



of the precious resources, driving each mining forge into desperate self-sufficiency with frequent raiding parties against their neighbours. Each forge uses its creations or other devices they have captured to vie for the favour of the gigantic Daemon Engine Skull Reaper, the victor forcing the other forges to also craft its superior design while their own are relegated to the vast slag pits surrounding Skull Reaper's arena.

Under the surface of Cho'unda lies Gorgeth's Anvil, the holding place for those deemed dangerous but worthy of keeping. This prison and interrogation centre is where the shaman-smiths perform their blood rituals and torture on sorcerers of all types and enemy combatants. It is a horrific place, filled with the tang of constant bloodshed and the stench of burnt flesh. In cells deep underground, sorcerer-technocrats from Q'Sal, fell engineers of the Hollows, and captured Imperial Tech-Priests have their hidden secrets hammered from their minds. Very few have resisted for long, but many have converted to the glory that is Gorgeth and become valuable slaves, their precious knowledge now ensuring the War Moons grow ever more productive.

Elder, or "Ni'iktu" in the Talaxi tongue, would be a death world in the Imperium, but to the Talax it is merely Gorgeth's hunting ground. Covered in dense forests and jungle, this moon boasts some of the most ferocious creatures within the Vortex, made even more vicious and aggressive from the scarcity of prey and perhaps also the burning hatred venting from the core. The Talax test themselves on this aggressive moon, and harvest its creatures for trade to other worlds.

NI'IKTU CREATURES

Creatures on Ni'iktu are somehow even more ferocious than others of their species found on other worlds. Explanations vary, with the Talax themselves asserting their fury is a gift of Gorgeth to reflect his own rage. To create variant creatures for this jungle moon, GMs should use the following modifiers below and if desired add new Traits from pages 139-144 or Gifts of the Gods (all with the Khorne aspect) from pages 290-299 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook.

- Weapon Skill, Strength, Toughness: +10
- Agility, Perception: +5
- Intelligence: -10
- Willpower: -15

There is only one settlement, located above the jungles on a massive plateau, known in Low Gothic as "Moment's Rest." The fortified town is perhaps the most advanced settlement as it is armed with advanced weaponry and security systems to protect it from the predations of the many carnivores. Moment's Rest has the moon's only landing port, consisting of little more than an open patch of earth and a walled shanty town with pathways leading down below the plateau where the Talax live. Though it would seem that many metres of solid rock would provide more than enough protection, the beasts of Ni'iktu are particularly resourceful and ravenous. Many can burrow through dirt and stone, secrete dissolving acids, or even fly through solid matter, all making Moment's Rest anything but its name.

Those stationed on the moon are tasked with protecting the lone settlement within the plateau from any and all predators, and the clans hold those who take a voluntary post in high esteem. Each is branded after they survive their tour, a visible mark of status across the moons and beyond. During the coming of the blood-soaked time known as the Encarminata, the beasts become even more aggressive, and those manning Moment's Rest must protect the settlement not only for their livelihood but also as it is the only way for reinforcements to arrive. For these defenders, their post is a sacred duty as they believe the plateau to be where Gorgeth rests before roaring forth into battle again.

Ju'ukto is the main inhabited moon for the bulk of the Talax. Where Cho'unda is really home to the shaman-smiths and their creations and Ni'iktu houses the beasts of the system, Ju'ukto, or "Younger," serves as the main base for trade outside the system. Here, the roving clans live predominantly off the land and yet sport one of the most thriving arms and armour marketplaces in the Screaming Vortex.

The individual clans maintain a largely neutral attitude toward each other. In their custom, there are only two offences that instigate violence: theft and witchcraft. Witchcraft tends to be handled within the clans themselves, usually resulting in the ritual and prolonged death of the accused; Gorgeth demands that the Warp-tainted be purged once found and there is little room for discussion or debate. In this, many of the tribes have actually worked together to root out any who have managed to hide in the wilderness. Theft, however, tends to be the dividing force between the clans as it is prevalent and based largely on unmarked territory.

On worlds such as those of Talax where resources are scarce, consumption and replenishment of these resources is paramount to survival. Many millennia ago, the clans established rough borders to allow all to have their own territory to roam. All the resources contained within those borders belonged to the respective clan whether or not the resources were known then or found later. It is this clause of the unknown which has traditionally sparked violence. In years past, as new sources of water and mineral deposits became known, the issue of borders has become more hotly contested. In an effort to control these resources, the clans have engaged in everything from brawls to full-blown military engagements stretching across the entire moon. The conflicts have never been without casualty as, once weapons are drawn, Gorgeth demands that at least one must fall. In most cases, the number is significantly higher than one and Gorgeth is pleased with the blood that soaks into the dusty surface of Ju'ukto.

BRED FOR BATTLE

The Battle Clans of Talax are a fierce people, living almost completely off the harsh landscapes of the three moons and defending a reputation of personal skill at arms and devotion to their blood god that is legendary. Every member of every tribe is equally capable of hunting for food, setting up camp, or leading reverent stories of the clan ancestors. Regardless of age, each person is also a dangerous opponent, as each learns the use of a blade the moment they can walk. Unlike many other tribal cultures, the Talax are not primitive. Roving according to the edicts of Gorgeth, they have also established settlements that act as protection for those unable to travel, such as their elderly, infirm, and injured. The largest of these on Ju'ukto is called the Stride in Low Gothic; on Cho'unda, the largest is the primary starport and forge known as Gorgeth's Anvil. Both serve as the main stations of void traffic for the moons, with Gorgeth's Anvil being the largest in the system.

In these strongholds, the Talax maintain their cultural centre. Housing their larger, permanent shrines to Gorgeth, trading posts, and semblances of central governance, the walled townships help provide a stabilising feature to the nomadic people. Each of the settlements also serves as an inter-clan gathering place for trade of materials, information, and expertise as well as points of departure from a moon. Several times a year, the settlements swarm with multiple tribes, looking to barter resources and restock supplies as they continue their migrations. Outside warlords are eager to learn of these gatherings as they are always hunting for skilled warriors to recruit as bodyguards or elite troops.

The settlements are also where they create their main exports: arms and armour. Using the by-products of their smelting and metal working, Talax armourers have created a process to toughen the hides from the massive carnivores on Ni'iktu and smaller beasts from Cho'unda and Ju'ukto such that they can turn even chain blades. Though the process lacks the refinement of similar efforts on Q'Sal or the Hollows, the resulting lightweight but resilient armour is a favourite among off-worlders seeking protection as well as notoriety.

Where the roving clans are full of active Talax, the settlements house a secondary caste of clansmen. Called the Root Elders, they have removed themselves from their clan when they are unfit for travel due to injury, illness, or age. For most, this is a derogatory status as they are no longer capable of spilling blood on the vast battlefield of their home in the name of Gorgeth. The process is a painful one, with shaman-smiths purifying their blood through an alchemical process that strips any substance but that of the original flesh. Given the clans' propensity for co-mingling blood with other members, beasts, and occasionally the honoured dead, the process of returning the clansman to his original essence is arduous and excruciatingly painful. The hissing concoction they drink forces the blood of the others out through the pores of the skin in painful blisters, split skin, and out of eye sockets in oozing, steaming flows. It is a mandatory rite, though some have chosen death rather than complete this transformation. Most, however, understand the need to preserve the history and stories of the past and teach the youth of the glory that is Gorgeth. The blood-pure of Talax only trust oral tradition, knowing that what is written or coded can easily be altered, and their lore is carried back to the original Elders who formed the first clans. With each tale told, a Root Elder carves a blood-sigil in his flesh to ensure it is remembered, and the most ancient of Elders are covered with layer upon layer of thick, scarred tissue.

BAPTISED IN BLOOD

The Talax worship their god Gorgeth as the source of the heat and fury that powers their three moons. In their eyes, he is a bare-chested warrior-king, wearing an animal skull for a helm and carrying both a hammer and an axe. The people revere him as hunter and warrior, few knowing of the actual Blood God of whom Gorgeth serves as an aspect.

Eschewing lavish temples in favour of portable altars, worship of Gorgeth factors into the daily life of all Talax in a more visceral way. On the surface of the moons, life is challenging at best. The daily strife of survival for the nomadic clans reminds them of Gorgeth's willingness to take the blood of any one at any time, and the natives firmly believe that their deity will take them when their usefulness to the clans is gone. Many hold that Gorgeth comes for a Talax's blood when that clan-warrior cannot take the blood of others, and it is very telling that few Root Elders survive past a single Encarminata once they leave their fighting days.

Though the outward show of worship for Gorgeth seems less combative than other Khornate sects, those who have spent any length of time in Talax have witnessed the blood rituals of the clans. From birth until death, the blood of both fellow clansman and beast factors into all worship to the Blood God. Before their first hunt, the young are submerged in the blood of the burrowing lizards found on Ju'ukto, kept deep within the thick crimson liquid until they can fight out of their clan-mates' grasp to get air. Talax Reavers split their tongues upon initiation with a red-hot blade, their blood quenching and tempering the metal to create their bond-knives. Even at death, clan elders tap the blood from the body before it congeals for use as an offering to their deity. In all things, the blood of those who faithfully serve Gorgeth is among the most sacred offerings. The acts done in relation to the unfaithful, however, are largely unspeakable.

Along with ghastly forms of torture, the shaman-smiths employ a technique of blood-binding used on captives in order to extract information, and to ensure compliance from those deemed as enemies. By commingling the blood of the shaman with their captives, the smiths create a parasymphathetic bond between the two which renders the captive more compliant and open to suggestion. Many of the secrets used in the building of their arms and armour, as well as their own Daemon Engines, came from using this process on captured sorcerers and explorers from the Hollows, Q'Sal, and other population centres in the Vortex. Through such blood rites in the name of Gorgeth, the nomadic Talax have become an industrial powerhouse able to defend their moons from invaders throughout the Vortex. Their greatest challenge, however, comes from within the system.

THE ENCARMINATA

Once every eight cycles around Talax, the skies turn pure red instead of their usual dark purple hue for roughly a fortnight. Known as the Encarminata, the natives recognize this as the holy time of Gorgeth and change their behaviour in league with the colour of the sky. On all three moons, fresh water turns red as blood and the surface becomes noticeably warmer as though the planet's own core burns even hotter. Tempers among its people flare more often and the beasts become more aggressive and territorial. It is very common to see an increase in clan disputes or, as in one legendary event, all-out warfare which almost saw the complete eradication of five entire clans. Here, this unnatural selection acts to weed out those unfit to continue or too weak to answer the bloodthirsty call of Gorgeth.

On Cho'unda, the forges immediately mobilize their latest creations and head toward the Island of Dust, home to the mechanical avatar of Gorgeth known as Skull Reaper. The constructs travel to the centre of the island, battling each other until one remains to challenge the Daemon Engine-lord. Thus far, none have survived this final combat, but in each Encarminata cycle, Skull Reaper has chosen which of the constructs is worthy of Gorgeth and continued existence. Talax versions of the Brass Scorpion and Blood Slaughterer are former victors and are now commodities for sale to the highest bidder throughout the Vortex. At the end of the Encarminata, the forge that built the chosen engine holds a great celebration, and the other forges must sacrifice a shaman apprentice as tribute to Gorgeth as well as produce the chosen construct until the next coming of the Encarminata.

Ni'iktu's wildlife becomes more aggressive and territorial during the Encarminata. Fights between dominant creatures often turn deadly; even lowly insects swarm out to attack with high doses of increasingly toxic venom. At Moment's Rest, the reavers protect the site with both blade and firearm, defending the only bastion of human existence on the moon. They also serve as steward for any who embark on the challenges for clan leadership, awaiting the return of those who have survived and honouring the ones who fell in the attempt.



Ju'ukto uses the Encarminata as a chance to change leadership and complete rites of passage for their people. Gathering at the few settlements and camping outside in massive sprawling zones, youths who have come of age are gathered and inducted into their new clan and larger multi-clan bonds. Through multiple tests, scarification rituals, bloodletting, and combat tests, they become full clan members able to travel as equals and carrying the full weight and responsibility of an adult. Failure to maintain this obligation usually means exile from the wandering clan and adoption by the Root Elders in the nearest settlement, should they not gut themselves in shame.

In addition, across the moons there are possible challenges to clan leadership. Each challenger must prove himself worthy to the Root Elders, before traveling to Ni'iktu for their test of survival against the deadly jungle life. Current leaders must also travel here to hold their power, but in a few instances a clan has deemed one as being revered enough to step down voluntarily, but even then the former leader usually volunteers his blood as sacrifice to appease Gorgeth's appetites. At the end of the Encarminata, the surviving challengers return to Moment's Rest as their clan's new leader. In rare cases, two or more applicants from a single clan have returned, and ritual combat to the death on the stark plateau must dictate the victor. After two weeks in the wilds of Ni'iktu, these fights are often swift and decisive as the warriors are usually injured, weary, and eager for a fast resolution. With either victor, Gorgeth is pleased as blood stains the bare rock.

THE BATTLE CLANS

The Clans of Talax are by no means primitive savages incapable of organization. Crafty as only hunters can be when stalking their prey, Talax has established a record of never having lost a war on its own soil. The average clansman is more than able to hold his own in either a voidport brawl or deadly fire fight. Even the children and adolescents are dangerous adversaries, having trained with blade, fist, and firearm from a very young age. Only fools underestimate the capability of a clansman from Talax.

While the average clansman is a dangerous foe, standing above him in prowess and stature are the Talax Reavers. The Clan Chiefs use these as bodyguards and as the primary guardians of Moment's Rest, and they have a feared reputation among all mercenary factions in the Vortex. Skilled in the arts of battle and relentless in their approach to war, the Reavers use their size and speed to quickly shock an opposing force into submission, rending bone and pulping flesh in graphically intimidating fashion. They are an unshakeable wall of spinning blades and gore appealing to the Blood God for his favour in battle and, as mercenaries, they are a mixed blessing as they sometimes follow their innate bloodlust even against their employers.

Above them all are the shaman-smiths of Cho'unda, the chosen of Gorgeth. Equally skilled on the battlefield and in the forges, the combination of craftsman and warrior is a potent force unto itself. What truly sets them apart from their fellow clansmen is their innate sense of the Daemonic. Some claim to smell Daemons like spoor on the wind, others say they can see through the veil between the material and the Warp. Whatever method they use, the hunters' instinct to capture Daemons for personal use or within the forges is uncanny. Employing the Venic Noose to ensnare them like fresh game, the shaman-smiths are able to bind the Daemons without the treacherous sorcery followers of other, lesser gods must use.

Battle Clansman of Talax (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	28	37	38	36	29	32	31	25	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 13

Armour: Arms, Body, Legs 6

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S), Linguistics (Int) (Low Gothic), Parry (WS), Survival (Per) +10, Tech-Use.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Flesh Render, Frenzy, Hatred (Followers of Slaanesh), Heightened Senses (Hearing), Quick Draw, Unarmed Warrior.

Armour: Treated Xeno-Hides.

Weapons: Chain dagger (Melee; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Tearing), hand cannon (Pistol; 35m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Clip 5; Reload 2 Full).

Gear: Rebreather, 3 clips for hand cannon.

Talax Reaver (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	38	37	38	36	29	32	31	21	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 14

Armour: All 6

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Carousing, Dodge (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Linguistics (Int) (Low Gothic), Parry (WS), Survival (Per) +10, Tech-Use.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Battle Rage, Crushing Blow, Disarm, Flesh Render, Frenzy, Hatred (Followers of Slaanesh), Heightened Senses (Hearing), Iron Jaw, Light Sleeper, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Quick Draw, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee & Ballistic), Unarmed Warrior, Unshakeable Will.

Armour: Talax Hide Armour.

Weapons: Chain dagger (Melee; 1d10+6 R; Pen 2; Tearing), chainsword (Melee; 1d10+7 R; Pen 2; Balanced, Tearing), hand cannon (Pistol; 35m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Clip 5; Reload 2 Full).

Gear: Rebreather, 3 clips for hand cannon.

Shaman-Smith (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
30	28	32	33	36	39	42	31	25	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 16

Armour: Arms, Body, Legs 3

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per), Dodge +10 (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology) (Int) +20, Forbidden Lore (Occult) (Int), Intimidate (S), Linguistics (Int) (Low Gothic), Medicae (Int) +10, Parry, (WS), Survival (Per) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +10, Trade (Armourer) (Int) +10, Trade (Technomat) (Int) +10.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Armour-Monger, Flesh Render, Frenzy, Hatred (Followers of Slaanesh), Heightened Senses (Hearing), Jaded, Quick Draw, Unarmed Warrior.

Traits: Unnatural Senses (10).

Armour: Treated Xeno-Hides and Skullcap.

Weapons: Chain dagger (Melee; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Tearing), hand cannon (Pistol; 35m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 R; Pen 2; Clip 5; Reload 2 Full), sacrificial knife (Melee; 1d5+3 R; Pen 0).

Gear: Rebreather, 3 clips for hand cannon, Venic Noose, assorted vials for collecting blood.

DAEMON ENGINES

Daemon Engines are a bizarre and frightening hybrid of mechanical ingenuity and arcane impossibility. Incorporating the pulsating rage of a Daemon within a base metal form requires strong bindings, powerful enticement or coercion, and blood sacrifice. Each construct acts as both prison and new body for the Daemon, bound into service by its new master but given a corporeal form that it would otherwise struggle to maintain.

The Blood Forges of Talax have a unique way of trapping Daemons in their engines. Built into each is a set of bindings known collectively as a Venic Noose, a simple construct filled with the blood of the freshly slain making it almost irresistible to charnel entities and the minions of the Blood God. Once the Daemon emerges to feast on the blood, the noose tightens and the construct is quickly sealed shut around it, locking the Daemon inside. The Daemon's rage provides the construct with an almost unlimited supply of emotional energy to fuel it. While the process is nowhere near as precise as elsewhere in the Vortex, the shaman-smiths of Talax make some of the most bloodthirsty engines in the Screaming Vortex.

They are, however, far from the only ones who manufacture such creations. Regardless of which planet or faction makes them, all Daemon Engines trade the extended durability of a vehicle for the shock and awe factor of daemonic entities striding across the battlefield on legs of metal and ceramite. As a result, all Daemon Engines have the following restrictions:

- Daemon Engines use a living creature stat-line as they are considered sentient and not mechanical vehicles.
- All Daemon Engines have the Daemon Engine Trait (see page 114).
- Any bound crew members cannot be targeted as they are technically part of the construct.
- Daemon Engines must be Size Massive (7) or larger.

Should the engine receive any critical damage, the extent of the damage is not only in the systems needing repair, but also in the loosening of the Venic Noose or other binding mechanisms which holds the Daemon in place. As the knots relax, the Daemon is able to shuck its bindings and begin to exert its own control over the engine. Should the Daemon break entirely free and compromise the integrity of the engine itself, any creature in the daemon's path is likely to face a Daemonic Entity of significant power head-on. If a Daemon Engine takes critical damage, consult **Table 3-8: Daemon Engine Critical Hit Chart** to see the extent of the damage to the internal systems.



DAEMON ENGINE TRAITS

Daemon Engine (X): The creature is a hybrid of Daemon and machine, fusing technology and sorcery in a way that is seamless and horrifying. The visual impact of these entities strikes fear into friend and foe alike and provides it additional protection against standard armaments. The Daemon Engine has the combined effects of From Beyond and The Stuff of Nightmares and is therefore immune to Fear, Pinning, Stunning, Insanity, Poison, and Disease. Psychic powers that affect the mind cannot control the Engine as it is bound to the sorcerous runes holding the construct together. In addition, Daemon Engines gain a Toughness bonus equal to the number in parentheses, which like the Daemonic Trait, can be negated by force weapons, holy/sanctified weapons, or direct damage psychic powers.

Runes of the Blood God: Khorne abhors the guile and trickery of psykers and their ilk, deeming it unworthy of the field of battle. As such, any Daemon Engine bound to the service of Khorne can have engraved or painted runes of protection and warding from the psychic predations of such cowards. Any psychic power used directly on the engine causes the wielding psyker to roll on **Table 6-3: Perils of the Warp** on page 211 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook with a +30 to the die roll. In addition, they also reduce the damage from any direct damage from psychic abilities by 1d10 points. Runes of the Blood God does not protect against Faith Powers used against the engine.

Bellow of Khorne: A guttural roar emanates from the engine like a primordial carnivore. The deep subsonic sound waves trigger the inherent fear response in all living things. For a Full Action, all living creatures within 100m of the front arc of the engine must take an immediate Fear test counting the Engine as one rank higher than its base rating. Any target failing this test is Pinned for d5 turns.

Aortic Rage: Khornate Daemon Engines are attracted to the scent and spillage of blood. If blood has already been spilled within 100m of the engine, the engine must pass a **Difficult (-10) Willpower Test** or it will move to engage the closest bleeding target using full moves and Berserk Charge (if it has the Talent).

TABLE 3-8: DAEMON ENGINE CRITICAL HIT CHART

Damage Points	Result
1-3	Distracting Blow —The Daemon is momentarily annoyed by actually being touched by the weapons of its enemies that it requires a Challenging (+0) Willpower Test to not engage the source of that attack in its next attack. If it was already focused on this target, then it will move with all haste to fully engage the target with any and all weapons at its disposal.
4-6	Ablative Strike —The attack strips layers of armour off the engine as well as some of the protective runes. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points. In addition, any future critical hits receive a bonus of +2 on this chart. This is a cumulative bonus should multiple Ablative Strikes hit the Daemon Engine. Roll a d10. On a roll of 9 or 10, any shielding ability (Runes of the Blood God, for example) is sufficiently ruined and no longer provides protection.
7-8	Weapon Damaged —Randomly select a weapon on the engine. That weapon bears the brunt of the attack and takes the full effects of the blow. While not quite as resilient as Titan weapons, the Daemon will try to preserve its integrity. Roll 1d10, and on a roll of 7 or more, the weapon can be used the next round. On a roll of anything less, the weapon is inoperable until repaired outside of the battle.
9	Penetrating Hit —A powerful attack breaches the construct's structure and unravels the knots in the Venic Noose. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points and roll an additional 2d10 points of damage. The attack also breached the hull in some capacity; roll a further 1d10. On a roll of 9 or 10, the Daemon Engine suffers a Daemon Unbound! Result.
10+	Daemon Unbound! —The attack is strong enough or well-placed enough that the bindings are completely undone and the construct is unable to contain the Daemon within. For all game purposes the engine vaporizes as the Daemon manifests fully in the material world. The sudden release of Warp energy causes an explosion with a 2d10x10 metre radius, leaving a crater in its place. Anyone caught within the blast radius suffers 5d10+10E damage bypassing Armour (unless warded against psychic abilities). Reduce the Damage by 2 points for every full 10 meters the target is away from the exploding engine. Alternatively, at the GM's discretion, the blast damage can be reduced to 2d10+5E and the Daemon can manifest, freed from its shackles. It may offer the players thanks or engage them in combat, depending on the alignment of the Daemon, the players and NPCs involved, and the adventure.



DEFILER

In some parts of the Vortex, this Daemon Engine is almost as common as converted and corrupted Imperial vehicles. Though the methods for binding the Daemons are different across individual forges, the basic look and design of the Defiler is remarkably consistent even within this unnatural realm. Each is roughly tank-sized, and both extremely violent in its actions and indiscriminate in who bears the brunt of it. Whether using the massive battle cannon to destroy entire formations or ripping apart enemies with its massive claws, this engine of war acts as a harbinger of utter devastation to its foes.

Defiler (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	28	65	65	32	15	34	38	--	--

Movement: 14/28/42/84

Armour: 12 (All)

Skills: Awareness (Per), Parry (WS).

Talents: Combat Master, Furious Assault, Independent Targeting, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee).

Traits: Daemon Engine (6), Machine (12), Quadruped, Size (Immense), Unnatural Strength (+6).

Wounds: 48

Total TB: 12

Weapons: Battle cannon (Heavy; Front Arc, 750m; S/-/-; 3d10+10 X; Pen 8; Clip-; Reload -; Blast [10], Concussive [3], Devastating [4]), monstrous claws (Melee; 2d10+18 R; Pen 8; Tearing, Unwieldy), reaper autocannon (Heavy; 300m; S/4/-; 3d10+8I; Pen 6; Clip-; Reload-; Reliable, Twin-linked), havoc missile launcher (Heavy; 100m; S/2/-; 2d10 X; Pen 2; Clip -; Reload-; Blast [4], Devastating [2]).

GM Note: Many worlds have the ability to make the Defiler, and not all of them align themselves with any single Chaos Power. To make a Defiler more representative of a specific Chaos Power, add the related relevant Traits for that God. For example, if the Defiler is aligned with Khorne, it can have the Aortic Rage and Runes of the Blood God Traits added to it.

BLOOD SLAUGHTERER

Among the most dangerous and plentiful of the Daemon Engines aligned with Khorne, the Blood Slaughterer is a machine devoid of any purpose other than to hunt down and gorge on the blood of those it slays. Housing the spirits of powerful Charnel Daemons, these engines resemble brass and ceramite ticks larger in size than a battle tank and infinitely more lethal. The vast majority of them have two massive glaive-like blades capable of punching holes through heavy armour, but other variants replace one blade with a massive spear thrower called an impaler, a weapon the Talax delight in seeing used against those craven enough to flee from combat. Slaughterers generally patrol in small packs of two to three and are very capable of sniffing out hidden dens of resistance. They are one of the most bloodthirsty Daemon Engines ever created,



revelling in the shedding of blood and the rending of flesh. As a result, it holds the reputation of being one of the toughest to control while on the battlefield, and has occasionally broken free of its handlers in a frenzy of blood and torn flesh.

Blood Slaughterer (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	28	64	68	49	29	37	32	--	--

Movement: 14/28/42/84

Wounds: 48

Armour: 8 (All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Parry (WS).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Combat Master, Flesh Render, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee & Ranged), Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Aortic Rage, Daemon Engine (6), Machine (8), Quadruped, Runes of the Blood God, Size (Massive), Unnatural Senses (40m), Unnatural Strength (+6).

Weapons: Two titan blades (Melee; 2d10+17 R; Pen 8; Tearing) or one titan blade and impaler (Heavy; 50m; S/-/-; 1d10+8 R; Pen 10; Clip -; Reload-; Felling [4], Snare [4]†).

†At the start of his turn, the ensnared targets must make an Opposed Strength Test against the Blood Slaughterer. If he fails, he is immediately dragged a number of metres equal to ten plus twice the Degrees of Failure towards the Daemon Engine.

BRASS SCORPION

Designed to look like the poisonous arachnids of many worlds and roughly the size of an Imperial Baneblade, the Brass Scorpion is a devastating engine of war. With its combination of heavy artillery and mechanical attack claws, the Scorpion is capable of ripping through soft and hard targets alike with ease. Though not as blindly aggressive as the Blood Slaughterer, the Brass Scorpion prosecutes its battlefield with more precision and ruthlessness, using its entire arsenal for maximum violent impact. The shaman-smiths prefer to refrain from ensnarement to form these creations, and instead entice Daemons with promises of mass amounts of bloodshed to appease and slake its thirst for violence. For such reasons, Brass Scorpions from Talax are rarer on the battlefield, as there are very few Daemons willing to commit so fully to incarceration.



Brass Scorpion (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
49	32	80	80	39	37	37	38	--	--

Movement: 18/36/54/108

Wounds: 80

Armour: 24 (All)

Total TB: 15

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Swift Attack.

Traits: Bellow of Khorne, Daemon Engine (7), Machine (24), Quadruped (6), Runes of the Blood God, Size (Monumental), Unnatural Strength (+9).

Weapons: Crushing claws (Melee; 2d10+24 R; Pen 8; Tearing), two hellmaw cannons (Heavy; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+6 E; Pen 3; Clip-; Reload-; Flame, Spray), demolisher cannon (Heavy; 50m; S/-/-; 4d10+10 X; Pen 8; Clip-; Reload-; Blast [10], Concussive [3]), scorpion cannon (Heavy; 180m; 3/6/10; 2d10+5E; Pen 4; Clip-; Reload-; Storm).

DOOM BLASTER

Seldom seen outside of the Vortex and less frequently within it, the Doom Blaster is a rare model for the Lord of Skulls as it is primarily a support engine rather than close quarters warrior. Armed with four heavy mortars, this creation operates far from the front lines, destroying enemies with its long-reaching weapons. Few of Khorne's Daemons have the willpower to resist the call of blood and stay far enough away for their terrible mortars to achieve maximum carnage, however, making the Doom Blaster a highly sought after and prized commodity in any battle.

Though the damage it can cause with its mortars is enough to scare even battle-hardened troops, possibly the most unnerving thing about this engine is its scavenger-like mentality. Very few have seen the shells, known as gravediggers, up close and they are truly horrific things. Made from the bones of those who have fallen to the engine, a Doom Blaster usually lingers on the battlefield for hours to consume the skeletal remains of those it has killed. After consumption, the construct uses its new material to create its ammunition for the next battle, recycling the remains of its victims for endless years. Many believe that each Doom Blaster still has pieces of bone from its first shell, mixing with the blood of the new as the tally of skulls for the Skull Throne escalates.

Doom Blaster (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
26	38	45 ¹⁰	64 ¹⁴	40	32	40	48	--	--	

Movement: 5/10/20/40

Armour: 12 (All)

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10.

Talents: Marksman.

Traits: Bellow of Khorne, Crawler, Daemon Engine (8), Machine (12), Runes of the Blood God, Size (Monumental), Stampede, Unnatural Strength (+6),

Weapons: Doom blaster heavy mortar (x4) (Heavy; Front Facing; 50-500m; S/-/-; 3d10+6 X; Pen 8; Clip-; Reload-; Blast [10], Concussive [2], Devastating [5], Gyro-stabilized, Inaccurate), prow brass-ram (Melee; 2d10+16 R; Pen 6; Razor Sharp, Tearing, Unwieldy).

Salvo of Skulls: The Doom Blaster consumes the bones of those who have fallen to its assault, shaping them into new shells to fire in a never-ending cycle of carnage. When the construct locates a large concentration of softer targets, it will occasionally fire all four mortars simultaneously, looking to create a new harvesting field in a single shot. This attack is made in a single roll covering all four shots with a +10 modifier to the BS Test and the following Qualities added to the weapon: Blast (25), Concussive (4), Devastating (15), and Recharge. The Doom Blaster may not move on the turn after it has fired in this manner.

Cull the Weak! If there is a choice of targets, the Doom Blaster instinctively chooses the highest concentration of softer enemies as its target. A fellow warrior must make an **Opposed Difficult (-10) Willpower Test** convince it to redirect its fire to another target.

Wounds: 88

Total TB: 14

SKULL REAPER

The Talax hold this enormous Daemon Engine as the Avatar of Gorgeth, a living manifestation of their Blood God. Slightly larger than a Warhound Titan, over the centuries it has morphed many of the mechanical aspects to more closely resemble a monstrous Bloodthirster. One fleshy arm houses a turbo-melta gun, capable of reducing all but the most heavily protected fortifications to molten slag. The other arm holds a massive chain axe, but unlike the rigid joints of a Titan, the axe arm is fully articulated as if it were alive.

Though the engine primarily resides on Cho'unda, it has also been seen on other worlds across the Vortex, though none know if the Talax carried it to these battlefields or if it somehow made its own passage. Rumours also put Titans of its shape on warfronts elsewhere in the galaxy, spawning fears that there may be more than one or that the Ruinous Powers are able to project this daemonic construct wherever and whenever they desire.

Skull Reaper is an integral part of their culture, and holds a special role in the Encarminata on both Cho'unda and Ju'ukto. Despite this, no Elder Root has tales of its creation, or perhaps dares not speak of it, and no shaman-smith claims the ability to forge such a beast. Many simply believe Skull Reaper appeared on Cho'unda when their god breathed his hot anger into the War Moons at their birth, to guide the Talax in their worship of Gorgeth and heat their blood for battle.

Skull Reaper (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
52	38	94 ¹⁸	97 ¹⁸	52	47	38	53	--	43	

Movement: 10/20/30/60

Armour: 24 (All)

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag) (against attacks from similarly sized foes), Parry (WS) +10 (against Titan-sized weapons only).

Talents: Berserk Charge, Lightning Attack.

Traits: Aortic Rage, Daemon Engine (9), Fear (2), Machine (24), Runes of the Blood God, Size (Monumental), Unnatural Strength (+9).

Weapons: Turbo-melta cannon (Heavy; 100m; S/-/-; 4d10+20 E; Pen 10; Clip-; Reload-; Blast [5], Devastating [5], Melta, Recharge), massive chainaxe (Melee; 3d10+24 R; Pen 8; Clip-; Reload-; Tearing).



INSIDE THE SCREAMING VORTEX

"Of one thing, we can be certain. There can be no known living creatures or worlds in the anomaly you call the Screaming Vortex."

—Lexographer Milosh Tarnassus to the Collegium Tenebrae

Though the Eye of Terror is possibly the largest and most well known area of warp space intrusion, multiple others are scattered around the galaxy. The Screaming Vortex is one such anomaly, born of the same cataclysm which ruined the Eldar civilisation and created the Eye in its wake. Unlike the Eye or the Maelstrom which manifest as massive rents in real space, the Vortex is aptly named, being a whirlpool descending into darkness. Very few cast their eyes towards this region of space as it is painful to do so. Once caught in its aetheric current, Astropaths and Navigators find it immensely difficult to break free and the constant wailing of those who perished long ago weakens their resolve. Many have sought to peer into the Vortex and been reduced to what the Imperium considers lunacy or heresy. It is for this reason, among many other lesser ones, that the Screaming Vortex lies quietly and waits to vomit forth its own brand of torment on the Imperium of Man.

In the Screaming Vortex, the standard laws of physics, science, and time do not always hold true. The fabric of the warp blends into what was once real space. Planets and other celestial phenomena that were swallowed up by the encroaching whirlpool over the many millennia now bear little resemblance to what they were before and, in some cases, exist where they should not. Navigation here requires direct connection to the warp, either by sorcerer, psyker, or daemonic guide. The Imperial crew that accidentally finds itself in the Screaming Vortex rapidly loses themselves to the seeming randomness generated by the seething energy around them and soon adds their own voices to the choir of the damned.

The Imperium knows next to nothing about the Screaming Vortex, and what little they do know indicates only that there are some inhabited worlds in the outer edge of the maelstrom. Dubbed the Gloaming Worlds, they are the more civilised and developed worlds in the Vortex. They are also where the majority of the human population lives. Though not all of them are inhabited, many are and not all by humankind. Most of the void-faring traffic is found in this area of space, as to go deeper into the whirlpool is to risk both life and soul to the extremely turbulent storms found in the Inner Ring.

The Inner Ring is largely considered ill-sought to all but the most determined or insane. Whereas the Gloaming Worlds show signs of the warp peeking through making it impossible to navigate, the Inner Ring seems to actively try to lose ships and destroy them, adding the voices of those lost to the choir of souls moaning for release. Even within the Vortex, precious little is known about the worlds found here. Occasionally, a person, group, or ship emerges from the Ascendant Spiral to share the knowledge they have gained in an effort to start

a new crusade against the Imperium. More often than not, these individuals are considered impossibly mad, sometimes rightfully so, and are slain outright. Those strong enough to have withstood what the Inner Ring and Lower Vortex have revealed, however, enlighten their new followers with the truth of the warp and the power they can earn. These are the future warlords and leaders who will bring carnage to the Imperium and shake the Corpse-God from his throne.

Below the Inner Ring lies the Lower Vortex, an area of space so saturated with the energies of Chaos that the mere sight of it drives most mortals insane. There are many theories and stories regarding what horrors exist at the heart of the Screaming Vortex, but to date no single account can be verified. It is likely that all of it and none of it are accurate. What is confirmed is that very few who have made the journey to the Lower Vortex have returned at all, much less with any semblance of sanity.

GETTING INTO THE SCREAMING VORTEX

There are many avenues to enter the Screaming Vortex, most of them extremely unstable. As a result, finding a way in other than the 13th Station of Passage is a challenge unto itself. Unlike the Eye of Terror, which almost seems to welcome new minions and followers to the Dark Gods, the Screaming Vortex welcomes no one, ally or enemy, without at least some sort of offering. Though the 13th Station is the most stable and reliable, there are two other entry areas that have been navigated often enough to consider:

- **Exile:** This planet just on the fringe of real space and the outer ring of the Vortex has a single city on it. Here, those looking for an alternate route to the Gloaming Worlds can locate a captain heading that way. The prices are very high, but as yet they have not lost a single ship to the warp. This is also the furthest the Golden Ships of Q'Sal have been able to travel. Q'Sallian captains rarely come here and, when they do, it is often on a specific task from one of the city-masters.
- **Harrowed Space:** Following in the footsteps of some of the more notorious pirate captains, this warp nebula is reputed to be able to breach into both real space and the Inner Ring, some even claim to the Lower Vortex. The risk is extremely high and finding a captain brazen enough to attempt it is almost impossible, but any who do may find power in being able to reach both sides of the veil.

THE OFFERING

Whichever way players use to enter the Screaming Vortex, there should be some sort of ritual that is played out in-game. As part of the offering to the daemonic guide or the Ruinous Powers to grant them safe passage, there should be a sacrifice by each player that is personal, and if multiple trips are made, each offering should be different. The Screaming Vortex is a dangerous area of space and should never be entered or left without some sort of barter with powers beyond their capabilities.

Q'SAL

"Q'Sal always astounds me. Everyone in the prime of their life and with all the things a man could want. It makes me quite nervous."

—Leviticus Schrupf, soul trader

Self-sufficient, largely peaceful, and highly industrious, Q'Sal is in many ways what any world in the Imperium would strive to be. It has no discernible pollution, very little in actual crime, and a trade balance that would be the envy of any sector capital world. The Imperium, however, would raze the planet to the ground simply because all of it is made manifest by the freedom of its inhabitants to use the benefits of the warp, especially foul sorcery. They would doubly raze it if they knew of the dark secrets buried under the seemingly calm façade. Ruled over by the three cities of Tarnor, Velklir, and Surgub, it is surely one of the most important and subtly dangerous worlds of the Vortex.

The juncture of the sixth and seventh anteciduals of the Vortex is a unique place in the anomaly, as normally turbulent space is negated when approaching the system. The counter storm around the planetary system is created by the specific arrangements of the three moons surrounding the planet, Malkys, Wenshai, and Entori, in conjunction with the powerful sorceries created by the Q'Sallians themselves. As the positions of the moons change, so do the careful calculations of the Velk Astromancers and terrible sacrifices to the Master of Fate needed to maintain the calming of the warp. The moons themselves are crucial as each of them has its own special properties. Malkys is a collapsing gas giant, filled with all manner of fuel sources and poisonous substances, both useful in the crafting of new charms and weapons. Wenshai is a death moon, capable of both sustaining and taking life with equal ease, and littered with the bones of those who have attempted to conquer Q'Sal. Entori is a dead rock, devoid of any atmosphere or vegetation yet housing one mysterious structure that pre-dates the earliest known civilisations, along with many sorcerous wards in case whatever once lived there rises again. Though each of the moons is large enough to be its own planet, the sorcerers have somehow tethered them to the planet and use them for Q'Sal's own benefit.

From space, the planet looks almost pristine, unlike most of the planets of the Vortex. While there are a few large inhabited areas, the rest of the planet appears largely uninhabited and calm. Once inside the atmosphere, it is possible to see the farms along the coast and in the heartland of the landmasses as well as the massive forge complexes that dot the landscape. Even in the deserts near Tarnor, the complex irrigation systems and iridescent domes make the landscape more welcoming than they would be without them. Like Chaos itself, though, Q'Sal hides its true nature behind these attractive lies.

Closer examinations reveal small areas of blighted ground. Few know their true origin, but all know that no life can thrive within them, and no weather system seems to affect them. Those who dare delve into these regions find no reasons for such anomalies, though the wisest of the ruling technosorcerers know better than even to travel near them. The occasional storms that ravage the outlying areas of the surface seem to bead off these pockets like water over drops of wax, leaving no trace and no change. They litter the surface like foul ink-blot, the most obvious sign of Q'Sal's true nature.



There is constant tension between the cities. While this is a perpetual state of activity, it occasionally breaks out into aggressive espionage, trade wars, and furtive violence. None of these disturbances lasts for very long, as the one thing the three cities all agree on is that one faction cannot become so dominant that it rules over the other two. The Pact of R'Suleir, blood-bound several centuries ago with the souls of nearly a third of the remaining populace, prohibits all-out conflict between the cities. This has not stopped the exceptionally arrogant or insane, of course, while the vast majority simply have learned to conduct their warfare through sorcerous machinations and duplicitous dealings that cannot be directly traced back to the originator. The crushing of overt conflict has lead the rulers to concentrate their power though, and one day these pustules will burst forth in a planet-wide war that will surely destroy Q'Sal, if not huge swaths of the Vortex itself.

Much of Q'Sal belies the sorcerous nature of the planet. There is a massive void-docking ring that literally surrounds the entire planet, shipyards where the most sought-after vessels are crafted, and the multiple forge complexes of the three cities from which various arcane creations emerge. Again, closer examinations reveal the secrets of power on Q'Sal: the baleful runes burned into metal cooled by streaming blood, the cries of the tortured souls bound with invisible chains as they are folded into warp-charms, devices that flicker into horrid shapes out of the corner of view, and other marks that the Ruinous Powers, not simple technology, are the true masters of the planet.

CRAFTED OF SORCERY, TRADED FOR SOULS

While an equal representation of the three cities nominally runs the orbital shipyards, each constantly vies for greater importance and control. Double-deals and bait-and-switch are commonplace in the docking ring as operatives from different cities will occasionally sabotage private business dealings of another city in order to promote their own materials. While this may seem underhanded and counter-productive, no one faction is ever successful for long, as the other two cities will rapidly move to counter it. They also swiftly act to counter anyone who would harm them, and few dare cross the traders of Q'Sal as they are well-known for their ability to plot and plan revenge. Numerous stories of weapons "accidentally" malfunctioning and killing the user who failed to pay their full due in souls, or items disappearing at the least opportune moment after reneging on promises, litter taprooms across the Vortex. Nevertheless, some people believe they can outwit the Arcanists, and invariably end up quickly erased from common memory, their souls added to the endless numbers that fuel Q'Sal's foul industries.

To trade with Q'Sal is to trade in souls, for in exchange for their expertise, they ask only for new souls. Whether in the form of living slaves that toil on their farms and in their forges, to souls entombed in cunningly made traps and receptacles, the sorcerer-technocrats accept nothing else for their efforts. They often insist the raw materials for their efforts are also provided such as mere base materials of bronze or stone, using their own resources only when specialised materials are needed that they do not reveal their secrets.

The shipyards above Q'Sal are marvels indeed, with huge talons of rune-inscribed metal grasping vessels in claws which will not relax until soul-debts are paid in full. Here the Golden Ships are built and docked for travel across the Vortex. These ships are sleek and gleaming, forged more from insane imagination than blunt metal, and the finest in this nightmare region. Many find to their dismay that these arcane constructs founder once they depart the Vortex though, for the sorcerous calculations used in creating the ships are not viable in base reality. Q'Sal manufactures more common ships to fill such needs, smelted in cold void and hardened to survive away from the warp-effluent that permeates the Screaming Vortex.

The docking ring is spined with lance batteries and warp cannons, as well as hidden pens of fighter craft and daemon engines. Thrall wizards stand eternal watches, soul-bound to vast ocularies to scry for approaching threats. These defences and more have repelled all attempts to take the rings for the last three thousand years.

On the surface, the arcane forges of all three cities are in perpetual motion. Through day and night, apprentices and slaves work until they meet their master's exacting demands. Their products are unmatched in the Vortex, with perhaps only the crude technologies from the Hollows on par with the wondrous creations of Q'Sal.

The Q'Sal Soul Trade is somewhat unique in the Screaming Vortex. While there are other daemonic entities that require sacrifice to garner their favour, Q'Sal is the singular planet of living beings who only trades their wares for living or trapped souls. When asked why they trade in souls, the standard answer

is only silence. Many theorise that Q'Sal needs them to use as bait to capture the daemons for their engines of war. This is true, but only a fraction are needed for such simple activities. The vast majority are fated for a much crueller end. Nations of souls are smelted down to oily elixirs only used to lubricate the tremendous daemon-lathes themselves. The remains of entire populations end as distillations, their souls refined through passage across hot coals of roasting daemon-flesh into pure essences of endless, pathetic pain which burn with a pure, blue flame hot enough to melt adamantium. Endless numbers of souls come to Q'Sal in payment each day, and while many do indeed drive the planet's arcane industries, many are desired simply on the whim of the planet's mad rulers for no other reason than it amuses them.

Devotees of the Imperial Corpse-God are especially favoured for such entertainment. Many find their souls attenuated into threads of purest despair and strung into the musical instruments the sorcerers of Tarnor favour to play for their valued guests. Others are woven into shimmering clothes that shift as the souls within are tormented through the mere contact with their owner's warp-tainted skin. More are mixed with the mortar used in constructing especially unnatural towers in Surgub, the better to help them attain such impossible heights. It is said those who wore the Rosette are fed through portals crossing insane dimensions impossible to comprehend, and the blasted remains fed into glittering gardens of cerulean and fuchsia. The fruits of these labours softly cry with each bite, weeping streams of thin blood from the fleshy pulp. Such is the fate of those who fall to the Changer of Ways and his followers on Q'Sal.



Each of the cities maintains a specific area of expertise, which helps ensure constant rivalry and conflict. In Velklir, the astronomer-binders appreciate the true freedom of the warp, obsessively observing and seeking to contain it in their cunning soul traps and binding rituals. The deserts near Tarnor show their penchant for enabling the warp to actively express itself through unique newly constructed forms that mirror their dark visions. Surgub, isolated along the coast, believes it alone truly understands the spirit of the warp, working with it to control its flow across the Sea of Souls into the soft reality inside the Vortex. Alone, each city is mighty and capable of creating devastating weapons of destruction. Together, they could very well be an unstoppable force, if any one power could unite them to cease their mad internecine fighting.

POLITICS AND INTRIGUE, BLOOD AND SOULS

Much can be said about the quality of the goods that come from Q'Sal—they are exquisitely made and potent in the hands of those who can afford and master them. That many of these are weapons of war is no accident, as the potent sorceries and warped technologies of the sorcerer-technocrats put them in high demand with the would-be warlords of the Vortex. It also locks them into an eternal rivalry with the Hollows. Though the Q'Sallians lean more toward the side of warp-infused creations, those in search of garnering power are always looking for any means to enhance their abilities.

Other than the Hollows, there are virtually no other competitors to Q'Sal in the manufacture and development of weaponry and power sources. There are others in the outer ring of the Screaming Vortex, such as the Binders of Dwimmer, who are able to create similar items, but no others have the capacity for mass production save the Mechanicus. Most of the other sources pale in quality to what any of the three cities can produce, but occasionally a curious Magister will roam the other Gloaming Worlds to see if there are other aspects of his or her craft that he can improve on or add to. These rare wanderers provide the occasional sparks of radically new ideas that improve the quality and nature of the planet's artifice.

On-planet, however, the cities constantly bicker and vie for their own power and a greater share of the soul trade. The machinations to garner power or weaken rivals is bound only by the pact, which expressly forbids outright war. Anything short of that is fair game, so sabotage, double-dealing, and false accusations are not uncommon, nor are assassinations. Despite all that, it is clear that each of the cities knows that its sister cities are necessary for survival. In the rare instances when ideas are shared, truly amazing things have happened. Aether Rays and the Golden Ships are the direct results of all three cities working more or less together, but these are rare occasions indeed and normally require a singular individual whose power and personality can bind the madness of the cities into one vision.

Of the Q'Sallians themselves, like their planet on the surface, they present an ideal society. All are uniformly handsome and healthy, eternally in their prime. Few outsiders dare inquire of those who do not conform to such ideals, however, and those who do are never seen again. Despite the rule of Tzeentch on the planet, Q'Sal hides its mutable nature away from the

rest of the Vortex. Those with obvious physical deformities are flesh-sculpted into more appealing shapes, fractions of their souls used to appease the daemon-lathes that carve their forms. Those gifted with mutations from the Changer of Ways sacrifice their lives to the glory of Tzeentch in massive pyres in secret locations in each city, part of the Pact of R'Suleir that imposes unnatural order upon the wild chaos of the planet. Such offerings appear to mollify their god, for such insanities seem to appeal his twisted nature. Few grow old, using their sorcerous powers to maintain youthful appearance both for themselves and their retainers as a sign of their might, but those who do are rendered down into foul liquids that slake the thirst of labourers working the daemon-forges. Q'Sal values its appearance above almost all else, and its people are as carefully used for this as much as the rest of the planet.

SURGUB

The island city of Surgub lies in the southern hemisphere of Q'Sal at the Bay of Crelix. Roughly 25 kilometres long and 8 kilometres wide (though the dimensions change with each measurement), the island portion of the city serves as the main hub of trade. The bulk of the population lives in the lower tiers of the city's many crystalline spires. Most of the forges are not located in the city itself, as they are inherently dangerous to the population centre. The surrounding smaller islands along the coast house the majority of the most advanced and experimental smithies, as well as many of the caged daemons awaiting binding into new engines and charms.

The architecture on Surgub extends ever upward, a constant declaration of each denizen's superiority over his neighbours. Personal prestige is measured by the height of a sorcerer's tower, with those on par with the ruling Factors living so far above the city floor that they are often unable to see the surface. The bulk of the population lives much closer to the surface, but few save slaves actually touch ground. Surgubites believe that direct connection with the earth grounds their own personal energies and thus is an affront to Tzeentch, making them less able to control the warp energies around them.

Isolated from the other cities, Surgub boasts the most advanced production centre on the planet aside from the shipyards. Surgubites claim that the relative peace enables them to commune far more easily with the Architect of Fate and therefore design creations more aligned with his overall purpose. The grand-theorists of Velklir and the builder-demagogues in Tarnor disagree vehemently, of course, stating that the island's penchant for constant re-iteration of old work does not denote advancement. This does nothing to dissuade the Surgubite architects, who meld stone with warp-energies to defy gravity itself in their insane designs.

Of the three cities, Surgub has traditionally held a view of improving on what is currently known until it reaches its pinnacle. Their constant willingness to mutate old designs has led to tremendous breakthroughs in their main area of expertise: channelling power. No one on the planet understands the flow of warp energy better than a sorcerer from Surgub. Their innate sense of how to bend, slow, and enhance the flow of power has prevented many mishaps in the forges and allowed some of their more amazing creations to be made. The Factors of Surgub even claim that the only

reason R'Suleir was able to bind the Auruntaur was because of a visiting master channeller who rushed to the aid of the constructor-savant. Few believe this to be true, but the stories of the beast's creation do leave many questions unanswered.

Ruling over the city and its forges are the Fourteen Factors, whose palaces stand at the highest points of the spires that crown the city. Rarely seen anywhere remotely close to the ground, these mysterious sorcerers are among the most powerful beings in the city. The Factors watch the three moons' passage and meet only when there are at least two moons in auspicious alignment, with the location of their meeting places determined by which two align, and where. No two meetings are ever held in the same place.

Aside from their seemingly absolute political power, the Factors also wield powerful magics the likes of which very few have ever mastered. Many say that to stand in even one of the Factor's presence is to invite madness and a longing for death. Whether or not this is actually true, the general population lives in fear of these beings, halting all activity should they make a decree or begin designating new ordinances for the city.

Below the Factors are the Forgemasters, artisans and sorcerers without peer outside of Q'Sal. Each operates in his own inscrutable fashion and controls his own tower-complex, where he is able to build items and devices of power. In these halls, the sorcerer's will reigns supreme, and slaves toil constantly to ensure that the output of the forge is never questioned. Outside these halls, each vies for more power and the downfall (literally, in many cases) of their rivals. Schemes within schemes are common, all glorifying their god with each plot and betrayal in his name.

TARNOR

Out in the northern deserts of Q'Sal, the iridescent city of Tarnor is splayed out across the sands like some bizarre gelatinous creature lifted from the depths of the ocean. Easily the largest of the three cities in surface area, Tarnor lays claim to the most efficient and well-developed systems of irrigation and energy maintenance on the planet. Covered aqueducts of glowing marble connect the mountain lowlands to bring cooled water to the city, each sip tainted with the subtle energies of the enscrolled marble.

Most of the city is made of dome-shaped buildings, multi-coloured and ever-changing with the whim of their magister. While these structures are indeed impressive, the real city rests under the sand level, buried away from prying eyes or sorcerous scrying. Most of these colourful domes are retractable, allowing for massive creations to be driven out from the depths below and unleashed upon the Vortex.

Even though each of the other cities has a basic shuttle port inside its walls, Tarnor's flat and spacious landscape makes it the only viable alternative for the main access point off world for the goods they sell and the souls they collect. Here the bulk lifters for the war engines and vehicles, as well as the transports for the living payment, have plenty of open space to land and load. Surrounding the starport is a secondary market for incoming souls used for the Q'Sallians themselves. Here, individual sorcerers are able to hire compatriots from other cities to aid in their projects for a price. Novice sorcerers are usually found here collecting the expertise and contacts they will need to prosper in their dangerous profession, though many never survive their first deal.

Below the surface is a vast subterranean labyrinth where the bulk of the residents live. The layout is one monstrous, unruly settlement quite unlike the ordered area above ground, which changes as various power factions fight each other for prized access ways. Corridors move daily, depending on which sect is dominant, and entire blocks may evaporate into forthcoming nightmares when powerful rivals clash. These would be loud, bustling places in any other city, but in Tarnor they are some of the quietest places on the planet.

Due to the Arch Qaestor's decree, speech is forbidden for the next 180 years due to what were considered blasphemous utterances about the history of Q'Sal. Only a handful of people know what was said and an even smaller number actually heard the words spoken aloud. No native of the city dares say a word, communicating with only complex sign language while their calm-faced masks reveal nothing. Visitors in Tarnor find it exceptionally difficult to make deals unless they understand the signs themselves or hire those willing to translate, a lucrative occupation for many of the lower classes deep in the city.

Even though no one speaks, the one sound that is routinely heard within the city limits is music. Haunting melodies and lilting strings mix with the beats of rhythms so complex a mad mathematician must have concocted them. During the daylight hours, the tones blend together as the harmonies seem to enhance work production in both the slaves and the sorcerers. At night, however, stranger, darker melodies creep into the music and the overall sound is far more dissonant. Visitors who have tried to locate the sources roam throughout the city, never finding anything more than a loss of sleep. Many have postulated that the night music has served as a secondary mode of communication for those who know about the Transgression, and perhaps seek to bring those words into greater circulation. The few who have believed this and worked to decipher have become utterly mad and suddenly disappeared soon afterward.

Tarnor is considered by the other cities to be the stodgy old maid of the three sisters. While the sorcerers there are incredible craftsmen and builders, they are not well known for innovation. In most "discussions" about new creations, especially in the shipyards, Tarnese sorcerers seek to preserve the perfection of the past rather than alter the designs that Tzeentch favoured in the past. Tarnor was the home of R'Suleir and the "birthplace" of the Auruntaur, perhaps the greatest creation of Q'Sal, so their view does have merit. Where Tarnese artisans do excel and push the limits of their capabilities is in refining materials beyond their natural limits. The resilient fabrics of the Aether Rays as well as the gossamer hulls of the Golden Ships are products of this city, making some of their wares the most valued in the Vortex. No one on Q'Sal doubts the reliability and strength of what Tarnor builds, only whether or not they maintain their steadfast dedication to the Grand Architect's design.





VELKLIR

Velklir also faces some of the harshest climates on Q'Sal. Though Tarnor contends with the intense heat of the desert and Surgub occasionally has coastal storms, Velklir is in a perpetual state of cold atop the southern edge of the Corstag Mountain range. The city would normally have a more temperate climate, but the its heights leave it fully exposed to weather from all directions. The mountain range blocks the thunderstorms at lower levels, but they offer no protection in the heights and the storms hit with tremendous power and dazzling lightning, which the sorcerer-auguries carefully study. The population has adapted to the weather well, however, only coming down off the peaks when necessary to associate with and educate their "less informed" brethren.

The walls along the main roads to the city are covered with the faces of past tyrants of Velklir. Carved out of crystal-flecked basalt, the rigid countenances of the former rulers show the seriousness of the Velk's passion for their craft. They also serve as a warning to any non-Q'Sallian who enters the city. Though their cutthroat reputation is already well-known, many off-worlders have come to Velklir to barter and haggle with the Astromancers and had a change of heart when the eyes of the city's past see through their plans.

The highest peak of the southern range, Mount Al' K'Dok flattens out into a great plateau where the bulk of the towers, observatories, and labs are located. Slightly smaller peaks nearby contain some of the more volatile laboratories and city processes, as well as housing vast gardens devoted to myriad colourful plant life. These gardens contribute a unique fungi found only in this area. Originally only a minor strain, it was strengthened with rendered fats and diets of the last visions of dying slaves, and is now a major food source for the city's elite rulers.

Atop the plateau, arrayed against the star-filled sky, are the countless astrolabes, telescopes, and scrying engines of the Velk sorcerers. In Velklir, more than the other two cities, techno-sorcery is pushed to its limit each day. From determining the correct portents to complete a new incantation to binding daemons of immense power into items for sale, the mountain city spares no effort in finding the newest and most fantastical ways to leverage their talents. This obsession drives them to commit increasingly reckless acts of sorcery and divination, frequently rending the veil to the warp and seeking information they were not meant to have. Individual seers have been known to spend weeks in total seclusion pondering the next mystery or designing the next incantation. Though similar efforts are not unheard of in Surgub or Tarnor, to the Velk, it is ingrained in the very nature of the city. As a result, the Velk consider themselves the most skilled sorcerers on the planet, while the practitioners in both Surgub and Tarnor scoff at these reckless applications of the art and shake their heads at the losses incurred with the all-too-common failures.

Lending credence to their self-proclaimed superiority are the city's dual specialities. Velklir is widely known for the quality of the navigational materials from the Astral Seers, whose products guide almost all worthy vessels in the Screaming Vortex. These range from charts showing the movement of stars yet to be born, sapphire mirrors that reveal warp vortices, books bound in daemon-hide with pages that scream their fury at the void and clear pathways across the Empyrean, and mysterious devices of metal and flesh that twist with unseen ætheric winds. All these and more are the hallmark of Velklir, impossible constructions that could not possibly function outside of this mad realm.

The Seers have resources constantly scrying for new signs and movement in the heavens (and hells) to help improve the quality of the artefacts they make and therefore the soul count they receive. Visiting sorcerers from other cities are never allowed into the main observatory, for fear of gleaning information or by some fluke discovering something the Seers themselves did not. Though not as tall as some of the towers of Surgub, those sorcerers claim their direct connection to the more elemental state of change makes them far better servants to Tzeentch.

The other speciality in the mountain city is the containment of warp energy, both raw and daemonic. It is no surprise that the city has its share of accidents given that it works with power in its most basic form, but the Velk pride themselves on their ability to put massive power into items of any size. From the rune-covered stone tablets that power the Golden Ships to the intricate inscriptions placed along the blades of their signature rapiers, Velklir's artisan-scientists are known for the sheer power they entomb into their creations.

Sorcerer-Technocrats of Q'Sal

Every native of Q'Sal exhibits some level of psychic awareness and ability. Most are limited, but the most powerful rise to become the powers that drive the planet. These are the Sorcerer-Technocrats, naturally gifted psykers and engineers who dominate the planet with their creations. Whether they build devices to see the future or weapons to break starships, the forges of these three cities and the arcane engineers who run them are the most vital resource of the planet. Their skills at sorcery are only matched by the byzantine plots they spin around each other, labyrinths of duplicity which tie them together in knots of lies and deception.

Sorcerer-Technocrat of Q'Sal (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
26	26	31	35	31	45	36	51	34	19

Move: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 15

Armour: Mesh Combat Cloak (4 All)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Logic (Int) +10, Inquiry (Int) +10, Commerce (Int), Deceive (Fel), Forbidden Lore (Psykers) (Int), Psyniscience (Per), Common Lore (Screaming Vortex) (Int), Scholastic Lore (Legend) (Int), Tech Use (Int)+10, Trade (Shipwright) (Int).

Talents: Fearless, Psy Rating 3, any two psychic powers from Unaligned or Tzeentch lists.

Traits: Psyker.

Weapons: Power Blade (1d10+8E; Pen:5; Power Field, Balanced) or Warp Staff (1d10 I; Pen 0), Lasipistol (Pistol; 30m; 1d10+2E; Pen:0; Clip:30; Half, Reliable) or Hand Cannon (Pistol; 35m; 1d10+4I; Pen:2; Clip: 5; 2 Full).

Gear: Finely made heavy robes, Tarnor Mirror Mask (Tarnor Only), various warp charms and trinkets.

Additional Skills/Talents by City Affiliation:

Surgub: Forbidden Lore (Warp) (Int), Psyniscience (WP) +10, Trade (Shipwright) (Int) +10, Warp Sense, +1 Psychic power.

Tarnor: Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Archeotech) (Int), Linguistics (Tarnor Sign) (Int), Trade (Armourer) (Int).

Velklir: Navigate (Stellar, Warp), Scholastic Lore (Numerology, Astromancy), Trade (Astrographer).



DAEMON ENGINES

Daemon engines are bizarre and frightening hybrids of mechanical ingenuity and arcane impossibility. Fusing a daemon to a mechanical construct requires the most precise calculations on both ends of the ætheric spectrum. Any mistake in the incantation often lets the daemon loose, or worse. Any defect in the construction results in the daemon having complete control of a mechanism of mass destruction that was to be its prison. As a result, the forge-masters of all three cities take extreme precautions to prevent mishaps, or at least contain them quickly.

Unlike vehicles or war engines, daemon engines trade off the overt durability of total mechanisation for increasing their shock value through fear and warp-spawned abilities. As a result, all daemon engines have the following restrictions:

- As they are sentient, daemon engines use regular living creature's stat-line and overall rules.
- All daemon engines have the Daemon Engine Trait (see below).
- Any crew bound inside or to the engine cannot be separately targeted as they are melded into the construct.

Should the engine receive Critical Damage, the extent of the damage is measured not only in the systems needing repair, but also in the unravelling of the carefully laid runes and bindings upon the daemon inside. As these bindings are ruined, the daemon entity may try to exert itself and break the holds the sorcerers have placed on it. If it breaks free, woe to anyone nearby as a daemon's anger knows no limit! Use **Table 3-3: Daemon Engine Critical Hit Chart** on page 82 for determining Critical Damage on a daemon engine.



Æther Ray

The Æther Ray is a relatively new construct, designed after the Pact of R'Suleir was enacted as a symbol of the newly united planet. This period ended quickly, but not before this new daemon engine took flight. These act as both a transport for the elite of the planet as well as a powerful symbol of a city's might. Those viewing the beast soaring above them know the terrible power enchaind within, and the even greater power it took to keep such a creature bound in service.

Built on a light alloy chassis and draped with metallic fabric daubed with runes that burn the eye, the main chassis is massive and smooth, more akin to ocean life than the air. Once infused with the essence of bound Screamer of Tzeentch, however, it shows its true nature. The fabric hardens as the foul energies permeate the material, translating gross matter into a fleshy alloy that ill-refracts light and brushes off gravity. Sharpened wings grow out from the sides, and an iridescent fluked tail emerges from the rear. Quasi-organic strands extrude along the back, ready for those who dare ride atop the beast to grab hold for their very lives. When the change is complete, the form reveals the daemons used in its creation, a huge flattened metallic ray now ready to take flight. The very air around it shimmers with the contained hate of the daemons bound within, eager for escape and destruction.

Each Æther Ray is bound to a specific sorcerer with runes infused with tendrils of his soul, so while theft is impractical, sabotage is not uncommon. Slight alterations in the runic bindings have enabled some to be used for travel across the void, using globes that appear as thin as soap bubbles to contain lives of the riders. Further research suggests that warp travel is also possible, though no one is known to have tried. To ride atop a Ray, knowing that if the daemon should break its shackles even the smallest amount can lead to a painful, plummeting death, is fearful enough. To ride one through the Sea of Souls could lead to a fate far worse, for death would be only the beginning of an eternity of torments. Some whisper that this has already been accomplished, and Æther Rays are ready to glide above new worlds to spread the might of Q'Sal across the Vortex.

Æther Rays are commonly crafted in three sizes, depending on the desires of their sorcerer-creator. Passengers ride along the back and sides of the daemon engine, holding on via cleverly extruded grips and foot anchors as they fly to their inscribed destination, praying to the Changer of Ways that his eyes not turn to them whilst in transit.



NEW TRAITS

Daemon Engine (X): The creature is a hybrid of daemon and machine, fusing technology and sorcery in a way that is both seamless and horrifying. The visual impact of these entities strikes fear into friend and foe alike and provides it additional protection against standard armaments. The daemon engine has the combined effects of From Beyond and The Stuff of Nightmares and is therefore immune to Fear, Pinning, Stunning, Insanity, Poison, and Disease. It cannot be controlled by Psychic Powers that affect the mind, as it is bound to the sorcerous runes holding the construct together. In addition, daemon engines gain a Toughness bonus equal to the number in parentheses, which like that for the Daemonic trait, can be negated by force weapons, holy/sanctified weapons, or direct damage psychic powers.

Warp Shroud: Much like the Void Shields of the Imperium, the Sorcerers of Q'Sal have found ways to protect their larger creations from damage. The Shroud manifests as a thin nimbus of flame around the construct and protects it from all harm save that from Blessed, Sanctified, or Force weaponry or Psychic Powers. It acts as an additional 2d10 points of armour, but can be possibly brought down when the daemon engine takes Critical Damage.

Æther Ray (Personal)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
26	45	50	50	55	32	46	45	--	--

Movement: 5/10/15/30 (Flying)

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag) +10, Piloting Mastery (Int), Psyniscience (WP) +10.

Talents: None.

Traits: Daemon Engine (5), Fear (2), Flyer (5), Size (7), Warp Shroud.

Passenger Capacity: 3.

Weapons: Ram (3d10+5 I; Pen 2; Devastating (2), Razor Sharp); Hull-mounted Daemonic Breath (Heavy; 200m; S/-/-; 3d10+10 E; Pen 5; Devastating (6); Recharge, Spray, Warp Weapon).

Creating Æther Rays of Larger Sizes

To create Æther Rays for the larger Group and Team sizes, apply the following modifiers and rules:

Group: +5 to Weapon Skill, Strength, and Toughness, -2 to Agility, +1 to Flyer and Size. Passenger Capacity grows to 9.

Team: +10 to Weapon Skill, Strength, and Toughness, -5 to Agility, +2 to Flyer and Size. Passenger Capacity grows to 18 and the Daemon Engine Trait is now 6 (and thus the Toughness Bonus is now 11).

TABLE 3-3: DAEMON ENGINE CRITICAL HIT CHART

Roll	Result
01-3	Distracting Blow: The daemon is annoyed by the touch from its enemies' weapons. It must take a Willpower Test with a level of 50 not to engage the source of that attack in its next attack. If it was already focused on this target, then it will move with all haste to fully engage the target with both weapons. If the Engine has a Warp Shroud, it is brought down on a 1d10 roll of 6 or less.
4-6	Ablative Strike: The attack strips layers of armour off the engine as well as some of the protective runes. Reduce its Armour by 1d10 points. In addition, any future Critical Damage results receive a bonus of +2 on this chart. This is a cumulative bonus should multiple Ablative Strikes affect the daemon engine. Warp Shrouds are brought down on a 1d10 roll of 8 or less.
7-8	Weapon Damaged: Randomly select one of the daemon engine's weapons. That weapon bears the brunt of the attack and takes the full effects of the blow. Roll 1d10, and on a roll of 7 or more, the weapon can be used the next round. Otherwise, the weapon is inoperable until repaired at a later time.
9	Penetrating Hit: A powerful attack breaches the construct's structure and weakens the bindings that hold the daemon inside. Its armour is reduced by 1d10 points, it loses its Warp Shroud, and roll an additional 2d10 points of Damage. As the hull has been breached in some capacity, roll a further 1d10 and on a roll of 9 or 10, the daemon engine suffers a Daemon Unbound! result below.
10	Daemon Unbound! The attack is strong enough or well-placed enough that it undoes the bindings that hold the daemon in the war machine. For all game purposes, the engine is vaporised as the daemon is released into the material world. The sudden release of warp energy causes an explosion with a 2d10x10 metre radius, leaving a crater in its place. Anyone caught within the blast radius suffers 5d10+10E damage ignoring Armour (unless warded against psychic abilities). Reduce the Damage by 2 points for every full 10 metres the target is away from the exploding engine. Alternatively, the GM can reduce the blast to 2d10+5E and a demon can manifest, freed from its shackles. It may offer the players thanks, engage them in combat, attack their foes, or do all three and more depending on the alignment of the daemon and the adventure underway.

Mirrorfiend

The Mirrorfiend is a construct exclusively of Tarnor and is one of the more sought after designs from the desert city. Slightly smaller than a battle tank, it appears as a glimmering, polished beast that reflects base reality into constantly altering shapes on its silvered surface. Shaped like one of the giant beetles of the desert, it moves with an unnatural grace and speed that contradicts its massive form. When on the ground, the body is supported by six spindly legs that do not seem capable of supporting its weight, with insectoid wings of spun light that somehow allow it to scuttle through the air as easily as it does on the land.

Trapped in each shell is a named greater daemon of the Architect of Fate, furious at its imprisonment and eager to wreck its vengeance upon all mortals. The originally dull lead vessel shimmers as the daemon merges with metal, a fraction of its essence transmuting the base shell into a reflector so perfect that light appears to shy away from its surface with disdain, eager to bounce away from such matter.

Chained into its metal cage, the daemon within the Mirrorfiend exerts what power it can onto the outside world through its psychic powers and the metal claws of its new body. Scores of sorcerer-handlers prod the creature against their foes, seeking for the Mirrorfiend to rend only their enemies. They carefully watch the binding wards for signs of decay lest the daemon escape, knowing that Tzeentch is pleased with their display of power only as long as they maintain it.

When sent into battle, massive pincers of daemonflesh emerge, each a symbol of the soul-lust barely constrained within. Its power also emerges as invasive tendrils of warp energies, delving into those near it with twisting visions that reflect the memories of its foes with doubts and fears even as its surface reflects their visages into mutated shapes. Many weak mortals fall to their knees questioning their very existence even before the Mirrorfiend grows near enough to snip off their heads, ending all such doubts. Some Mirrorfiends have even tricked their creators with such powers, breaking free and wrecking death on all around them before returning into the warp. Depending on the soul-chains used to bind it, the daemon engine may also display a

wide range of psychic talents. While armour falls to its mandibles, other targets fall prey to blasts of raw sorcerous energy. All those who witness such destruction know it is only an echo of Q'Sal's possible might should it unite against the rest of the Vortex.

Mirrorfiend									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
39	35	48	54	38	57	50	62	45	--

Movement: (Ground) 14/28/42/84 (Flying) 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 36

Armour: Machine Trait (27 all)

Total TB: 11

Crew: Daemonic Essence.

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20, Dodge (Ag), Invocation (WP) +20, Psyniscience (WP) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Independent Targeting, Two Weapon Wielder (Melee & Ranged).

Traits: Daemon Engine (6), Fear (3), Flyer (10), Machine (27), Mirror of Souls†, Psy Rating (6), Psyker, Quadruped (2), Size (7), Warp Shroud.

†**Mirror of Souls:** When engaging a Mirrorfiend in close combat, a player must make a **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test** before actually attacking, as the polished surface of the beast reflects back every poor choice the character has made in its lifetime. Characters tied to the Ecclesiarchy or who are sanctioned psykers get a -10 penalty to their test as their images show their beloved God-Emperor as nothing more than a shrivelled husk. Success means he may continue his attack, but he loses a Half Action for his troubles while Failure Stuns the character for 1d5 turns.

Weapons: Head-mounted Daemon Pincers (4d10+20 R; Pen 2; Warp Weapon).

Psychic Powers: The Mirrorfiend has access to all the Unaligned, Tzeentch, and Telepathy powers. As a Half Action it may use any two powers every turn it does not engage in close combat, but one power if engaged.

The Auruntaur

Born of a catastrophic mishap within the forges of Tarnor during the last ruinous wars, the Auruntaur literally stands above any war engine produced on Q'Sal. Thus far, only one has been created as its designer and binder, R'Suleir the Grand, sacrificed himself and his life's work to bind the daemoniac monstrosity to his construct. When he realised the power of the daemon he had entreated, he sacrificed the entire slave pool and all his apprentices to control the daemon. This created the single largest war creation to come from the planet. Since the loss of the original designer, however, it is unlikely that there will be another, as any construction like it would break the pact which has maintained the peace.

Only slightly smaller in height than a Reaver Battle Titan, the Auruntaur is a golden, four-legged creature of destruction, built largely of ensorcelled materials and housing a daemon of immense power. Where the main body is entirely mechanical, the centaur-like upper torso is mostly daemoniac. The two arms sport relatively close-range weaponry for something of its huge size, but they are no less devastating to their targets. The right arm is mechanical, covered in spines that almost appear alive but are made of hardened brass. It is tipped with a huge, rune-etched blade of capable of slicing vehicles in half. The left arm is akin to that from a gargantuan Flamer of Tzeentch, fleshy and mutable. It vomits forth great gouts of warp flame, and creatures and vehicles alike are either altered or destroyed under these iridescent fires.

The Auruntaur has no head; instead, mounted firmly in the chest of the torso, are a single red, cyclopean eye and a platform jutting out mid-abdomen, ringed with spikes suggesting a fanged under bite. Atop the platform, bound by the final incantations of the master artificer, R'Suleir's most accomplished apprentices still struggle to maintain control of the daemon. None of them show signs of aging or fading in power, but there are many who wonder how long that will last and what will happen should any of them falter and the daemon gain control.

In generations past, the Auruntaur has awoken to action but none can fathom what drives its actions. It quelled a renegade slave rebellion in Tarnor, but also released a warp-fire plague that burned much of Velklir. It destroyed an entire section of Surgub's outskirts, crashing towers into the sea, but then marched to eradicate an invasion for blood-crazed Khornate warriors. These excursions are thankfully short-lived, few relishing the site of this massive creation marching towards its unknowable destinations. Many of the more power-hungry and mad techno-sorcerers have tried to entreat the daemon-engine to work for them, but are met with infuriating silence. For the last two hundred years, the Auruntaur has been totally inactive, standing vigil over one of the blighted areas at the equator as though expecting something to emerge from the dead zone. Entire cults have sprung up near it to worship the daemoniac machine, their sacrifices perhaps to a god that does not bear witness to their rites. Many of the elite keep wary eyes and warp-auguries focused on the Auruntaur, afraid both that the mad engine might come to life and that it will not should Q'Sal need it to survive.

Auruntaur (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	55	72	64	51	32	46	45	--	--

Movement: 22/44/66/132

Wounds: 243

Armour: Machine Trait (54 all)

Total TB: 14

Crew: Daemoniac Essence and Cabal of nine bound Sorcerers.

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20, Dodge (Ag),

Psyniscience (WP) +10.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Independent Targeting, Two Weapon Wielder (Melee & Ranged).

Traits: Daemon Engine (8), Fear (4), Machine (54), Quadraped, Size (10), Warp Shroud.

Weapons: Daemonblade (5d10+19 E; Pen 12; Warp Weapon), Arm Spines (2d10+12 R; Pen: 5; Rending), and a gigantic Flamer arm (Heavy; 200m; S/-/-; 4d10+9 E; Pen 6; Firestorm of Change†, Flame, Recharge, Spray).

†**Firestorm of Change:** If the Flamer weapon arm wounds a living creature and does not kill it outright, the target must pass a **Difficult (-10) Willpower Test** or gain 1d10 Corruption Points. If it causes Critical Damage to non-living targets, add 1d5 to the Critical Damage done. These points count as a Failing and thus any penalties for Failure should apply.



THE HOLLOWS

"Torn asunder by war and united by hate. Twin Forges hammering out the chorus of battle, crafting talons of death upon brass wings. Lies, threats, contradictions, and half-truths are the local tongue. If the Hollows does not rip itself apart first, it is a lovely place to visit."

—Asrodel the Fated

Amongst the Gloaming Worlds on the outer ring of the Screaming Vortex, few worlds are as immediately recognisable as the Hollows. From the void, the planet seems oddly deserving of the name; like a dismembered corpse, only a little more than half a world spins in orbit. The upper hemisphere is mostly intact, crumbling remains spiralling outwards from the lower half where only a stem has been left behind. Like a rotten, half-eaten fruit cast into the stars, the Hollows is a world that could only exist within the reality-bending zone of a warp storm.

HELLWHISPER

It was not always so—once, when it was whole, this world bore the name Hellwhisper. Rich in natural resources, habitable by a wide array of biologies, and strategically located within the Vortex, Hellwhisper was a rich prize that drew the attention of a group of outcasts from the tech-priests of Mars.

Led by Arch-Magos Elikous, the Hereteks established three massive forge complexes on Hellwhisper and swiftly earned a reputation for producing large quantities of useful technology to the denizens of the Vortex. Elikous left two of the forges to his most brilliant protégés and locked himself away in the third forge, the largest and most advanced facility. There, Elikous focused his brilliant mind and prodigious technical skills upon a mysterious project of his own devising. No records remain to explain Elikous' obsession, but there are many whispered legends of what happened next.

Most of the surviving accounts vary wildly in details and often contradict each other, but the most detailed of these records are the hololiths of Graz'tzar. According to those leximechanics possessing the proper protocols to access such proscribed data, Graz'tzar—first Prophitect of the Stygian Order—spoke only after several sessions of torture and recounted the following tale:

Shrieking daemons emerged from every portal and crevice of Elikous' Forge, and the very metal itself flowed and twisted in bizarre new configurations. The ground trembled and massive manufactorium blocks flexed like muscle and sinew. Bellowing a cyclopean birth cry, the forge-daemon—for no other name could describe such a colossal creature—began an apocalyptic rampage across Hellwhisper. The remaining two Forges deployed terrifying new weapons of legendary devastation, Chaos Titans, and armies of cyber-enhanced followers in an attempt to put down the maddened, city-sized beast. The battle raged for untold weeks, but in the end, the two Forges prevailed—battered and spent, but victorious. No sign of Arch-Magos Elikous was ever found amongst the wreckage of his warp-twisted, ambulatory Forge.



ETERNAL WAR

Whatever the true fate of Arch-Magos Elikous may have been, the survivors of both remaining Forges wasted no time in declaring themselves the true heir to Elikous' legacy, triggering a struggle for control over the planet's abundant resources that has gone on for six centuries.

Hellwhisper was carved up like a feast between the two warring Forges, stripped of vast amounts of heavy metals, chemicals, and precious ores. Deep-core mining devoured huge amounts of the planet's lower hemisphere, depleting nearly half the world's total mass and beginning what was perhaps inevitable from the start. Hellwhisper was gone, and only the Hollows remained.

Now, the planet is consumed by the flames of war; armies of barely-trained menials equipped with bionic war-implants and shock-pikes clash with sophisticated battle servitors while orbital strikes lance down into formations of scuttling Velocireapers threatening the flanks of disciplined mechanical troops. The two Forges employ much more unusual forces as well, willing to utilise ludicrously destructive weapons, soldiers, and stratagems to settle their ancient grudge once and for all.

Although the conflict still grinds on, over the last decade the advantage has been grasped by the forces of the Exospectre, and Forge Castir holds the upper hand on the Hollows. While the armies of Forge Polix still control vital areas of the Hollows—

The viridian glow of a hololith lit up the small control cathedrum, displaying the malignant red glow of the intruders and the daggered icons of Tech-assassins responding to the alert. Garthin wrapped his tattered robe tighter around his augmetics and felt a coil of pure, white-hot fear settling deep into his core. He could feel the power pouring through the complex. The Exospectre had arrived, and in the reflected glow of the hololith in his master's vid-ceptors, Garthin knew there was no escape.

"Master, I... please, let me explain." Garthin's voice babbled through his vox-synthesiser in a rushed blurt of corrupted binary, his fear making him careless in the poor coding of his communication.

The Exospectre said nothing, only glided closer until Garthin was forced to arch his neck in order to meet the Magos' searing gaze. Two hunched servitors attended at the Exospectre's side, their eyes obscured by riveted brass plates inscribed with twisted runes. Ichor and oils dripped from cracks in their plating.

A mechadendrite slithered out from beneath the Exospectre's tattered cloak, its spiked end glistening with foul-smelling oils. The mechadendrite darted forward, stabbing the data-spike into a matching receptor stitched into one of the servitor's skulls. Motionless, the Exospectre paused while the servitor adjusted, shivering. Its mouth opened, lips crawling as a resonant voice issued from the slave creature.

"Let me tell you how much you have failed, Garthin. There are 387.44 kilometres of runemarked circuits in wafer-thin layers filling this sub-complex. If the word 'failure' was engraved upon every nanoangstrom of those thousands of metres, it would not equal one one-billionth of the failure you have displayed at this singular moment."

Garthin threw himself down to his knees, pressing his metallic forehead to the floor.

"Master, I beg you..." He began, only to be cut off by his master's voice. The words were croaked from the servitor's gray, fleshless lips, its face spasming with the force of each syllable, the power burning out his augmetics with each utterance.

"When my great work is complete, worlds will burn. And yet you dither. You prevaricate. You delay. You... are an obstacle. Obstacles must be removed."

Garthin jerked spasmodically to his feet, gaze darting to the door for escape. The hatchway hissed open, revealing ranks of masked Excrucimancers moving in implacable union. Their steps echoed heavily across the cathedrum as they reached for him.

Garthin issued a thin scream, a despairing wail rendered into binary through his vox-synthesiser that abruptly cut off as he was surrounded by the masked figures. Coldly, the Exospectre observed and issued one last command before turning to leave.

"Prepare him. His current form is unacceptable. He is to become an Aposticator, a living reminder of the price of inadequacy."

such as the Forgeflow and Mechmoor—they have slowly been forced back into a defensive posture. Any significant change in this bitter conflict is likely to be wrought from without rather than within—a fact that has not escaped the two rival Magi, who even now seek for allies and mercenaries to support their bid for absolute domination of the Hollows.

Both Magos Onuris and the Exospectre are constantly focused on the war between them, but both would also be greatly interested in tipping the balance of power by gaining an advantage in technology or allies. The Exospectre has already located and plundered a Necron tomb, claiming its technology for his own uses. This act has spurred Magos Onuris to try to establish contact with Necron forces in the Screaming Vortex, hoping to locate a Necron Lord with whom he can bargain for assistance against his hated foe.

FORGE CASTIR

Surrounded by acres of ruined scrap metal and wrecked debris of countless machines, Forge Castir rises like a rust-red mountain many miles above the ground. The Forge belches forth a volcanic plume of toxic gases from the many smelters and manufacturums within. Outside, long, twisting arteries of mag-rails convey raw materials into the forge and sophisticated technology out to far-flung outposts and sub-forges.

A spiderwebbed maze-like system of corridors—lined with pipes, sparking wires, valves and turning cogs—connects the various areas of Forge Castir. Each level is divided into a series of chambers containing individual works in progress. Each item crafted by Forge Castir is an individual, unique piece—many of them masterwork examples of their kind. More than a few items held in chambers near the apex of the forge incorporate various xenos technology and systems, but only a bare handful have anything to do with the energies of the warp. It is not uncommon to find alien traders rubbing shoulders with Chaos Space Marines and would-be champions of the Dark Gods, all seeking a particular weapon or item custom-made from depths of Forge Castir.

The very highest level is crammed with humming cogitators, lovingly maintained by a hand-tuned host of servitors. These cogitators are purpose-built with specific data-matrices to collect and study individual machine-spirits, assigning different areas to catalogue and segregate them by complex occult formulae.

Some Heretekes whisper that entirely new machine-spirits are crafted in the upper levels of Forge Castir, synthesised from the forced combinations of the strongest, most aggressive, or most insane of machine-spirits that the Forge has carefully selected for such traits. These gene-locked infotombs and data-transepts are engraved with minute lines of binary micro-runes and charms to ward off unauthorised access. However, from time to time, a memory cloud of suppressed data escapes even these precautions and infects servitors and Heretekes alike until it is brutally expunged by the Excrucimancers.

The Exospectre

Undisputed master of Forge Castir, self-proclaimed heir to Hellwhisper, and—for the present—pre-eminent Arch-Heretek of the Hollows, the Exospectre is a name that rings with dread and glory in equal measure across many of the Gloaming Worlds. The Exospectre has no other name that is known within the Screaming Vortex, but rumours and conjecture of his origins are nearly ubiquitous throughout the Gloaming Worlds. One of the most prevalent theories is that he was once an orthodox and trusted tech-priest of the Adeptus Mechanicus, possibly as high-ranking as an Arch-Magos. Others claim that he came from amongst the ranks of the Lords Dragon, a secretive and nearly mythical order that polices the Cult Mechanicus from within the Calixis Sector. Some of these suspicions have been noted in a sealed file kept at the Tricorn Palace on Scintilla, capital world of that Sector, although few are allowed access.

In appearance, he is a towering figure over two metres in height, his bulky form concealed by layers of mouldering, ragged robes that swathe him from head to toe. A host of slithering mehadendrites are all the limbs he requires, and the susurrus of oiled metallic scales accompanies his every move. Eccentric even by the standards of Hereteks, the Exospectre does not normally speak, preferring instead to plug one of his mehadendrites into a number of special servitors specially-modified to issue his commands. Some agents of the Inquisition have claimed that the Exospectre possesses multiple bodies, each kept in its own stasis chamber connected to a transmat altar.

In temperament, the Exospectre is a cold and demanding personality, requiring the absolute maximum effort from those who serve him. He has proven on numerous occasions willing to casually execute even high-ranking subordinates who fail him. Hirelings, hangers-on, and followers have not proven immune to his wrath for failing to display the proper respect he feels is his due. It is written in the Temple of Lies on the planet Kymerus that there are few tasks more hazardous than entering into a pact with the master of Forge Castir.

Despite his formidable reputation, many Hereteks seek out the Hollows in order to apprentice themselves to the Exospectre and learn what they can of his secrets. The style of technology within Forge Castir is a product of the Exospectre's genius intellect and desire for precision-crafted individual works; nearly all of the technology he personally oversees requires vast amounts of resources and time due to his search for perfection in every rivet, cog, and node. Amongst the Exospectre's finest creations are the Aposticators, the Tech-Assassins and their Velocireaper hunting packs, the Prophitects, and the Excrucimancers.



FORGE POLIX

At the heart of an enormous fissure in the surface of the Hollows lies Forge Polix. Formed into a cube of brass and steel many kilometres tall, crackling warp energy coruscates along circuit-like designs inlaid upon its surface in minute detail. Near the guttering spring of the Forgeflow, Forge Polix is hellishly lit by the subterranean dark crimson glow of magma.

Nearly every portion of Forge Polix is given over to mass production; huge assembly lines churn out arms, armour, and other devices as automated stamping presses and die-castings create blades, bionics, and vehicle hulls. Much of the raw labour force of Forge Polix comes from the ranks of twisted mutants, with overseers cracking whips and guiding the efforts of shambling Chaos Spawn chained to gargantuan cogwheel assemblies. Workers expire daily in great numbers attempting to meet the ever-rising quotas and demands of the Forge's master.

The raw stuff of the Empyrean permeates Forge Polix, drawn in and concentrated by the efforts of the Idolatres Magi. These Hereteks create, monitor, and modify various chaos gates, warp agitators, daemon lures, and other arcane devices designed to trap and store the power of the warp. Many ships from Q'sal have been known to dock at Forge Polix and exchange soul-engines in return for technology, slaves, and other favours.

Vast amounts of the Forge actually lie beneath the surface, extending deeply down into the Hollows' crust. Here, Magos Onuris has built his research vaults, gene-lathes, ecoliae-cells, and aenigmatoriums—areas where he keeps his most unusual and dangerous experiments. The more interesting and unstable mutations are kept in a "pain garden" of transparent vats filled with writhing flesh.

Zzzarel, sorcerer of Q'sal, inscribed an account of his secret visit to Forge Polix upon the flesh of a hundred slaves. The sorcerer claimed that Magos Onuris possessed a chained Juggernaut of Khorne, kept barely under control in a heavily warded chamber, attempting to unravel the secrets behind the daemon-beast's half-mechanical form. He relates that this affront to the Blood God was especially pleasing to Zzzarel's own master. The sorcerer went on to describe a gleaming river of molten steel flowing through the centre of the forge, a river he believes was actually the pumping blood from the heart of a bizarre alien creature Onuris had incorporated into the very foundations of his forge.

Magos Onuris

Overlord of Forge Polix and a masterful mech-wright, Magos Onuris greedily covets the entirety of the Hollows for himself. Like his rival the Exospectre, few know any solid details of his past; the story propagated amongst his apprentices is that he was once a celebrated Artisan of the Auxilia Myrmidon. Stymied in his desire to study and craft new technologies that incorporated warp energy, he was cast out from the Adeptus Mechanicus after a savage struggle that spread strife across three Knight Worlds. Explorator Cassian of Sanctum has disputed this tale as a fabrication, suggesting instead that Onuris is an expatriate from the hellforges of Xana II. Further muddying the waters, fragmentary records on Altar-Templum-Calixis-Est-17 contain some supporting evidence for both possibilities.



With a mind as twisted as it is brilliant, Magos Onuris has an unhealthy obsession with blending the warp and technology together into new and unconventional forms. The ever-mutating Death-Masques are one of the Magos' most infamous creations, alongside the newer and less-well-known Harrowhounds. Onuris himself is often accompanied by a reeking, lurching "honour guard" of Chaos Spawn, former assistants and the inevitable result of tampering too often with warp energy. The Magos accepts apprentices regardless of temperament or even skill, pragmatically assuming that most will die or mutate uncontrollably before they can learn enough to become dangerous to him. Many of his more talented and disciplined assistants are taught secret lore relating to combining the warp and technology, becoming Idolitrex Magi. These apprentices are given much more latitude and trust, and many venture forth deeper into the Screaming Vortex on special missions for their patron.

Magos Onuris possesses few mehadendrites for his hulking form, preferring bionic limbs and tracked lower body locomotive function. Portions of the Magos' body remain biological, kept by his own preference. However, these biological portions are often renewed or switched out with vat-cloned tissue so that the Magos may personally study the results of new and interesting mutations. Onuris has an odd fixation with masks and has hand-crafted more than a dozen for his own countenance. Each mask is unique, many containing miniaturised weapons and devious devices of his own design. Some of his apprentices believe that a

handful of these masks are identical to the faces of enemies that challenged the Magos' rule of Forge Polix and failed.

One explanation for Forge Polix' remarkable resilience in the war for the Hollows is Magos Onuris' unparalleled control and direction of his battle servitors. Time and again, only the perfectly executed manoeuvres of Onuris' forces have turned certain defeat into bloody victory. The infamous renegade Nina Black declared that the Magos' accomplishments are built upon a rare and powerful Prime Logis Key that he had somehow acquired and bent to his own use, but no one has been able to confirm such an outlandish story.

REGIONS OF THE HOLLOWS

While only a shadow of its former size and mass, the Hollows still contains many diverse and disparate areas of interest. The war that rages across the Hollows shapes every metre, from the tunnel-studded Stem to the ghastly corpse-laden Mechmoor to the plains of the Shimmering Waste.

The Forgeflow

Like a suppurating wound, the Forgeflow is a massive magma tap that once led to the planet's molten core. Since the Hollows' diminution, the flow has slowed to a trickle, yet it still provides unfathomable amounts of raw materials directly to Forge Polix. Magos Onuris' control of this important location is one of the reasons he and the forces of Forge Polix have survived as long as they have in the struggle for control of the Hollows. Clans of mutants called "scrap-scavs" dutifully scavenge chunks of ore, corpses of the fallen, and any salvaged metal they can find to dump into the immense rendering facility at the Forgeflow's edge, separating out every last useful gram.

The never-ending hunger of Forge Polix's industry has whipped the labour force in this region into a frenzy. Ramshackle shuttles transfer out to the corona of asteroids in orbit, breaking them down chunk by chunk to transfer down into the Forgeflow's starving maw. Many claim that the Forgeflow can melt down entire starships belonging to intruders or unwary visitors. There is a well-known bounty for such ships that has led Covenant X to tow wrecked voidships here on occasion in return for repairs and upgrades to their vessels.

Toxic gases churn in the many canyons and wandering, lava-choked ravines that extend around the Forgeflow's source. Raging daemons bound in chains of iron and rune-carved ceramite turn the massive cogwheels that control the magma's flow from lock to lock, channelled off towards various reclamation facilities and conduits into the heart of Forge Polix. Vast nutrient vats containing slumbering Death-Masques line the upper reaches, a guard force to mercilessly crush resistance should any revolt of the scrap-scavs erupt—as it often has, despite the penalty.

Recently, a Chaos Space Marine-led warband of Heretics invaded a small portion of the Forgeflow above the tertiary magma-fall. There, they have begun extorting tolls for its use, causing Magos Onuris to offer a lavish reward for the intruders' permanent removal.

Mechmoor

Kilometre after kilometre of befouled, toxic swamps make up the region known as the Mechmoor. Poisonous fumes and mists from the Forgeflow gather here, permeating the land and air with venomous smoke. Thick patches of mist float in curious currents, questing tendrils of fog seeming to seek out any motion or sign of life. Mammoth ruins jut upwards from the swamp in various places, seeming to defy the ground's efforts to engulf them. These ruins are marked with unknown runes and many of the veterans of the Exospectre's forces believe the monuments to be remnants of the third Forge, long ago lost and nearly forgotten.

This area has been the front line in the major struggle between Forges Castir and Polix, a battlefield for countless skirmishes and ambushes between the two groups. Hordes of mutated Skitarii and battle servitors fight awkwardly through the marsh, only for the survivors to be swallowed in the twisting murk, never to be seen again. Pathways through Mechmoor are rare and impermanent—it is easy for sophisticated tracking systems to become hopelessly lost amongst a host of phantom signals and rusted debris. A handful of landmarks exist, but fixing their precise location has proven to be a difficult task even for a veteran scout.

The environment is not the only danger in Mechmoor—roving bands of creatures have been encountered amongst the corpse-bogs, buried deep within the obscuring mists. Travellers have described the creatures as being simian-like humanoids in profile, cannibals that feed upon the corpses of the fallen. Cal-noran, a Heretek of Forge Castir, asserts that the creatures are in fact the alien Jokaero, inexplicably drawn to the region by the astounding variety of technology to be found lying amongst the open graves of fallen warriors.

Another hazard are a number of wreckage pits, the collected remains of destroyed vehicles, servitors, and automaton destroyed in the fighting. These pits are breeding grounds for the Hollowkynd, strange mechanical creatures that house maddened machine-spirits. The Exospectre's forces have spread the rumour that the Mechmoor Hollowkynd are the result of Magos Onuris' corruption of a Prime Logis Key. Furthermore, the agents of Forge Castir point to this story as "evidence" of Onuris' growing madness and unsuitability for rule over the Hollows.

The Scraplands

Surrounding the outskirts of Forge Castir are the Scraplands—a continent-sized collection of wrecked and abandoned vehicles, rusted weaponry, malfunctioning servitors and crazed machine-spirits. Amongst the vast swathes of debris can be found nearly anything—from a fragment of a machine altar to a ship's cogitator to a flickering hololith mapping out most of the lower Vortex—although the effort required to locate a particular item can vary from a glance to centuries of careful sifting through the heaped mountains of junk and wreckage.



Some areas of the Scraplands are organised into neat rows, whilst others are simply haphazard piles and ridges of torn, twisted debris. Small, scattered groups of humans eke out a base subsistence, feeding upon dark red fungus growing in between towering piles of junk and drinking fouled water flowing in sludgy creeks along fissures caked with broken technology. Heavily patrolled by Aposticators, the organised portions of the Scraplands are generally safer and easier to search, although there is a tariff to be paid to the Exospectre for such benefits. Further out, the unsorted drifts of junk are instead prowled by wild Hollowkynd and infested with all manner of vicious vermin, both mechanical and biological.

A few enterprising warbands have set up temporary trading camps or search zones within the Scraplands, but these never last long—the remnants of abandoned campsites are many, more than a few liberally decorated with the corpses of the would-be entrepreneurs. Some of these warbands have carried wild tales of the Scraplands with them after departing the Hollows. The most common story revolves around a large group of madly cackling Chaos Dreadnoughts wandering the junk-drifts, each one with mismatched, patchwork limbs constructed from a dozen different mechanical sources. Another legend states that a lone Heretek (or possibly a far-flung actual tech-priest), unaffiliated with either of the great forges, has created a hidden manufactorum. Inside, he toils with makeshift tools, constructing a ramshackle Titan from the enormous piles of wreckage available.



FINDING TECH IN THE SCRAPLANDS

Heretics may attempt to locate particular items in the Scraplands by making an Acquisition Test (see pages 305–306 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook). At the GM's discretion, a Heretic may substitute his Perception Characteristic for his Infamy when searching this area; however, doing so entails a risk. A failure on this Test draws the attention of the Exospectre, who demands tribute or vengeance, depending on whether the Heretic is a potential ally or enemy. The GM should carefully consider what kinds of things are appropriate to be obtained from the Scraplands, and that searching this region takes some time, especially for the more rare and unusual items. Near-Unique and Unique items should be all but impossible to acquire without spending decades or even centuries sifting through the dross. However, if the player characters have the resources and time to spend (or a minion or three to dispatch upon this task), then by all means, they should have the chance to find what they seek!

The Scraplands have seemingly always been part of the Hollows and, from time to time, pockets of strange matter are encountered within its boundaries; portions of xenos terrain, flora, fauna, and even chunks of starships have been found here. Magos Onuris has hinted that the Scraplands may, in fact, be one of an unknown number of termini for weapons such as the dreaded vortex grenade and other such warp-based weapons—the dumping ground for when such devices open temporary rifts into the Empyrean.

The Shimmering Waste

Beyond the farthest runnel of the Forgeflow lies the Shimmering Waste: a glass-encrusted, irradiated desert region that encompasses a large percentage of the Hollows' remaining surface area. The Waste is inhabited by the Scav Tribes, nomadic bands of mutants who have grouped together for protection from the Hollows' main dangers. The Scav Tribes possess many unusually stable mutations amongst their gene-pool, and their tribesmen are grouped into several distinct castes, each with its own unique abilities and traditions. Often, the tribes will trade with one forge or the other (and rarely, both), exchanging their own tribesmen to be turned into servitors or worse in return for supplies and technology. On occasion, a tribe's caravan may take shelter with one of the forges for a brief time, only to eventually return to the Waste to avoid being entirely caught up in the ongoing war.

The Wastes are plagued by horrific shardstorms, a unique weather pattern stirred up by gale-force winds that scour the surface with silica flakes, making travel and combat of any kind difficult at best. Nevertheless, the remote location and possibilities for conquest have drawn more than a few warbands into the Waste, and the Exospectre has begun plans to send a portion of his forces there to root them out.

The Stem

The Stem is the remaining portion of the planet's core, extending raggedly below the main hemisphere. While Mechmoor is the location for the majority of conflicts in the battle for dominance of the Hollows, the most savage fighting has occurred around the Stem. Tech-assassins prowl the crumbling edges, taking ruthless advantage of the gravity fluctuations to leap gracefully from rock to rock in pursuit of their prey. Burrowing Termite transport machines relentlessly drill new paths towards flanking positions, and entire regiments of mole mortar teams fire coordinated barrages at enemy strongpoints.

Gravity tends to shift unexpectedly around the Stem, and those travelling in the region know that one wrong move can send an unwary visitor tumbling helplessly out into space. The atmosphere is thin and tenuous at best, requiring vac-suits and respirators to ensure long-term survival.

The Exospectre has a number of his hand-picked Prophitects seeking to craft some way to use the planet's core itself as a weapon, although many have counselled their master that doing so would irrevocably burst the Hollows apart into a collection of asteroids.

FIGHTING IN THE STEM

Conditions in the Stem follow the rules for Low Gravity Worlds (see page 43 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook), with one additional hazard. If a character fails an Agility Test for navigating difficult terrain by three or more Degrees of Failure, he has reached escape velocity from the Stem and should now be considered floating in the void. Characters struck by weapons with the Concussive Trait (or, at the GM's discretion, affected by any similar condition—such as being grappled and thrown) are also required to pass a **Challenging (+0) Agility Test** or be flung into space.



Death-Masque

The industry of Forge Polix is often tainted with the energies of the Empyrean, a product of its master's unhealthy obsession of matching the warp and technology. Magos Onuris is fascinated by the prospect of gaining a measure of control over the Warp's formless corruption, and few of his creations embody this more than the Death-Masques.

Not quite a living creature and much more than a combat servitor, a Death-Masque combines the unstable form of a Chaos Spawn with a massive metal skull-mask from which extends a number of electrodes, wires, and conduits deep into the spawn's shifting flesh. The mask itself contains a number of simple augur arrays and a complex arcanocogitator that, in combination with a regimen of forbidden drugs and bloody rituals, forms a control system to direct the creature's actions and can even stimulate its own flesh to contort and change upon command. Thus does the Death-Masque mutate and twist every inch of its own body to better adapt to its enemy and honour Tzeentch.

Magos Onuris is quite proud of his achievement and keeps a large number of Death-Masques prowling the corridors of Forge Polix and the rim of the Forgeflow, ever alert for attackers from his rival. Although Death-Masques are most commonly encountered on the Hollows, a handful have been traded to other warlords and creatures of influence in the Screaming Vortex. More than a few have ended up as curiosities on Q'sal and gladiator-beasts on the Writhing World. Kravek the Apostate claims to have encountered a wild pack of Death-Masques running loose in the deepest jungles of Malignia. If true, surely Magos Onuris would bargain well for the return of his lost minions.

Death-Masque (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
65	35	60	60	30	10	25	35	--	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 60

Armour: Metal Mask (Head 10)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Athletics (S) +10, Awareness (P) +30, Dodge (Ag) +10, Parry (WS), Stealth (Ag) +10, Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Berserk Charge, Swift Attack, True Grit.

Traits: Brutal Charge, Dark-sight, Deadly Natural Weapon, Fear (3), From Beyond, Machine (6), Multiple Arms (4), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Senses (30), Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Claws, Fangs, Fists, Tentacles, and other Strange Things (1d10+12 R; Pen 4).

Mutable Body: A Death-Masque can reshape its body with bizarre mutations seemingly at will. As a Free Action once per Round, a Death-Masque can do one of the following:

- Change the Damage type of its attacks from Rending to Impact or vice versa. At the GM's discretion, other Damage types are also possible.
- Gain any one Weapon Quality (applying to its Claws, Fangs, Fists, or Strange Things) from the following list: Concussive (3), Crippling (3), Devastating (3), Felling (3), Flexible, Razor Sharp, Snare (3), Tearing, Tainted, Toxic (3), Warp Weapon.
- Gain any one Trait from the following list: Amphibious, Burrower (6), Crawler†, Fear (4), Flyer (12), Multiple Arms (6), Regeneration (3), Size (Enormous)†.

Death-Masques can only maintain one mutation at a time. To maintain more than one, the Death-Masque must pass a **Challenging (+0) Toughness Test** for each additional mutation. Mutations last for 1d5+3 Rounds.

†This selection does not affect the creature's Movement value.



Harrowhound

The war for control of the Hollows has raged for many years and, over time, both rival Forges have gained varying amounts of knowledge about the tools, weapons, and soldiers of the foe. The Exospectre's finely-crafted Velocireapers particularly incensed Magos Onuris of Forge Polix, who found the creatures to be exceptionally annoying. When the fifth iteration of Onuris' gene-lathed Twist Hulks failed in their attempt to scale the Shalerazor Cliffs due to a flank attack by Velocireapers, the Magos swore he would make the Exospectre pay.

Bending his own prodigious talents to the task, Onuris drew upon his vast understanding of integrating the warp and technology together and crafted a cunning shell surrounding a captive warp entity. The shell resembled a massive metal canine, its joints and eyes blazing with corruptive radiance. Pleased with the outcome, Onuris dubbed the new creation a Harrowhound.

Unfortunately, at first the new creations were nearly impossible to control. The beasts would rampage mindlessly, attacking anything in sight until the warp energy within them eventually burned out the shell entirely and the beast would disincorporate. To correct this flaw, Onuris forged a psyber-link between the Harrowhound and a possessed operator guiding the creature from the safety of a rune-carved war casket.

Soon after this refinement, packs of Harrowhounds were loosed at the Battle of Blood Well, skilfully overwhelming prowling Tech-assassins and driving off their attendant Velocireaper escorts. The constructs also threw more than a few maniples of elite Fell Skitarii into disarray, but the outcome of one battle—however well executed—did not change the course of the fight for Forge Polix. The war still wages though, and one day Onuris will have his revenge.

Harrowhounds are excellent trackers, rivalling anything in service to the Corpse-God in their ability to hunt down and kill prey in a variety of environments. The metal skin of the Harrowhound's shell is quite durable, and their daemonic nature gives them many advantages over any creature of flesh and blood. However, even the most carefully-built frame eventually fails when attempting to contain raw warp energy, and Harrowhounds are no exception. It is only a matter of time before the Exospectre picks up on this weakness and devises a way to exploit it.

Harrowhound (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
55	--	40	50	50	30	55	45	--	--

Movement: 10/20/20/60

Armour: None (All 8)

Skills: Athletics (S) +10, Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag), Scrutiny (Per), Stealth (Ag) +10, Survival (Per) +30.

Talents: Double Team, Hard Target, Takedown, Thunder Charge.

Traits: Daemonic (5), Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapon, Fear (2), From Beyond, Quadruped, Machine (8), Stuff of Nightmares, Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (4).

Weapons: Piston-driven Jaws (1d10+10 R; Pen 4; Razor Sharp).

Wounds: 30

Total TB: 10

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 10 metres of a Harrowhound suffer a -10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Barely-Contained Warp Entity: All Rolls on Table 6-2: **Psychic Phenomena** (see page 210 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) are increased by +20 if the Psyker triggering the roll is within 10 metres or less of a Harrowhound. All creatures attacked in melee by a Harrowhound must pass a **Challenging (+0) Toughness Test** or suffer 1d5 Corruption Points.

Hollowkynd

Many mechanical abominations have been raised upon the Hollows, crafted out of cunning tech-heresy and necessity as tools in a bitter struggle for control of the remaining planet. However, some of the most singular and unusual perversions of technology born on the Hollows are not the product of careful research or mad genius. Rather, they are the result of misfortune and chance, accidents sprung from the acres of unattended technology, broken wiring, and the fumbling efforts of half-functional servitors.

One such creature is named the Hollowkynd—shambling humanoid shapes formed of scrap metal, sparking electronics, and broken gears, they wander the Scrapyard and the Shimmering Waste, seeking to find and devour any fleshly creature they can find to ease the torment of their existence.

A Hollowkynd's body has bound within it a gestalt of many tortured machine-spirits. The Hollowkynd constantly keen in binary static, the screams sometimes rising in pitch and volume when tracking prey or leaping to the attack. The howling mob of machine-spirits within a Hollowkynd's body is nearly-mindless with rage, desiring only destruction.

Whilst the Hollowkynd's scrap-metal body is quite dangerous on its own, it is the creature's ability to interfere with and exert some influence over other technology that truly makes it an exceptional threat. Even the Dark Magos of the Hollows are wary when confronting large packs of Hollowkynd, for battle-servitors and Tech-assassins alike can find themselves greatly hampered, attacking phantoms or tearing at their own implants in a frenzy of self-hatred.

Desperate for any advantage he can claim in the war for the Hollows, Magos Onuris has set a number of his finest Idolitrex Magos to the task of finding some way to communicate with the Hollowkynd in hopes of enlisting them against Forge Castir. So far, his efforts have led only to failure.



Hollowkynd (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	45	40	40	20	40	45	55	--	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Armour: Scrap Metal (All 6)

Wounds: 30

Total TB: 8

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (WP), Logic (Int) +20, Security (Int) +20, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Fearless, Ferric Summons, Flesh Render, Mimic.

Traits: Dark-sight, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (2), Machine (6), Multiple Arms (4), Possession†, Size (5), Stuff of Nightmares, Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (4).

†May only be used against creatures with the Machine Trait or creatures with an appropriate cybernetic implant (i.e., Logis Implant, Cerebral Implant, etc.).

Weapons: Encoded static discharge (30m; S/3/-; 1d10+10 E; Pen 4; Haywire [2], Shocking), metal limbs (1d10+8 R; Pen 0; Concussive [1], Tearing).

Binary Wail: As a Standard Action, a Hollowkynd may issue a Binary Wail, affecting all enemies within 30 metres. The Hollowkynd may choose one of the following effects:

- The Hollowkynd makes an Opposed Tech-Use Test to take over control of any servitor. The servitor may act immediately and is under the Hollowkynd's control until the servitor is deactivated or the Hollowkynd is slain.
- The Hollowkynd makes an Opposed Tech-Use Test against enemy foes to Jam any and all of their ranged weapons that do not possess the Reliable Quality within the affected area.
- The Hollowkynd makes an Opposed Tech-Use Test to Stun any creature with one or more appropriate cybernetic implants (i.e., Logis Implant, Cerebral Implant, etc.) or any creature with the Machine Trait for 1d5 Rounds. Alternatively, instead of causing the Stun effect, the Hollowkynd can choose to afflict the affected creature with Hallucinogenic Effects (see page 150 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook).

The Hollowkynd affects the entire area with a Haywire Field Effect (see page 151 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook). Against normal technology, a Hollowkynd using its Binary Wail has the same effect as a Scrap Code Generator (see page 186 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook).

Aposticator

The Exospectre does not tolerate failure. Although many Heretekks seek him out to learn his secrets and labour in his forge as a path to greatness, many more scheme against him to serve their own ambition. Those Heretekks who anger the Exospectre are taken away by masked Excrucimancers into the deepest chambers of Forge Castir to be transformed into hideous conglomerate beasts known as Aposticators.

An Aposticator is a writhing mass of mechadendrites many times longer than a man's height. At the creature's apex is a spheroid conglomeration of bionics formed from the heads of those Heretekks unfortunate enough to earn the Exospectre's wrath. These heads are welded together and wired into one singular—and quite insane—consciousness. Conditioned using stolen xenos torture devices into absolute and unquestioning loyalty, Aposticators serve the Exospectre as guardians, patrollers, and shock troops in the low-gravity conditions of the Stem, where they stride or hover across the ruined setting.

From time to time, the Exospectre despatches Aposticators to serve as interim commanders for Forge Castir before a more permanent leader is sent. Even veteran maniples are uneasy at serving under Aposticators, the eerie, harmonically-distorted gestalt voice of the sundered Heretekks making up its body hardly inspiring confidence under the best of conditions.

Aposticator (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	35	50	40	40	40	35	50	20	--

Movement: 6/12/18/30

Wounds: 50

Armour: Plundered Mechadendrites (All 8)

Total TB: 8

Skills: Awareness (Per), Command (Fel) +10, Dodge (Ag) +20, Intimidate (WP), Parry (WS) +20, Security (Int) +10, Stealth (Ag) +20, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Air of Authority, Baleful Dirge, Combat Master, Disturbing Voice, Lightning Attack, Pity the Weak, Step Aside, Swift Attack, Two-weapon Wielder (Melee), Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Burrower (6), Dark-sight, Fear (3), Hoverer (10), Machine (8), Mechanicus Implants, Multiple Arms (6), Size (Enormous), Sonar Sense, Undying, Unnatural Strength (5), Unnatural Toughness (4).

Weapons: Ballistic Mechadendrites (30m; S/2/-; 1d10+5 E; Pen 2; Reliable, Storm), Manipulator Mechadendrites (1d10+12 I; Pen 0), in-built Powerblades (1d10+10 E; Pen 6; Power Field), plus one of the following: Meltagun (Basic; 20m; S/-/-; 2d10+13 E; Pen 12; Clip 6; Rld 2 Full; Melta), Plasma Gun (Basic; 100m; S/2/-; 1d10+12 E; Pen 10; Clip 24; Rld 5 Full; Maximal, Overheats), or Warp-Render Cannon (Heavy; 100m; S/-/-; 3d10 E; Pen 0; Clip 8; Rld 4 Full; Blast (3), Recharge, Warp Weapon).

Accursed Machine: All enemies with the Machine Trait or enemy vehicles within 10 metres of the Aposticator suffer a -10 Penalty to WS and BS Tests.

Bizarre Contraption: Aposticators possess an in-built Refractor Field (see page 178 in the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) and the following cybernetic implants: Embedded Auspex, Interface Port, and a Servo-Arm. The GM may, at his discretion, add any other cybernetic or bionic implants he deems appropriate.

Host of Mechadendrites: Aposticators gain a +20 bonus to WS and Strength Tests when Grappling and may maintain it as a Free Action. They also possess at least one of each (and more, at the GM's discretion) of the following additional mechadendrites: Medicae/Torture, Optical, and Utility Mechadendrite.

THE CAT'S CRADLE

"Intelligence becomes ignorance through a cunning illusion of life. My existence is a cunning dream of life, my purpose to exchange intelligence with ignorance and transform the materium into the unreal."

—Sorcerer-Lord Visitain, Aspirant of Tzeentch

Within the deepest recesses of the Gloaming Worlds lies a region of space caressed by warp currents and tendrils of the raw Immaterium seeping forth from the boundary of the Inner Ring. Known as the Cat's Cradle, this area is a playground for daemons and powerful sorcerers, speckled with dozens of worlds—some that orbit stars normally, others drifting alone in the void. A number of these worlds are merely illusion, a glamour cast upon the void to fool the eye and sensors of any passing being or vessel.

Plagued with trickery, illusions, and deceit, the worlds of the Cat's Cradle are places where logic and solidity can no longer be counted upon. This region is ruled only by the whims of those beings powerful enough to establish their own domains within.

THE CRADLETHREADS

The realm of the Cat's Cradle is linked together with ancient, interstitial paths that connect each world to the next in a bewildering pattern. These "Cradlethreads," as they are known, are similar to the Webway of the Eldar in that a traveller may pass along them from world to world without the need for a starship. However, few Cradlethreads are known to exist beyond the Cat's Cradle region itself, and many believe that there are none large enough to accommodate starships in the first place. To walk a cradlethread is to step into a column of scintillating light, which becomes blindingly bright at the core. Somehow simultaneously made of all colours and yet none, the radiance of a cradlethread can be spotted from some distance away under normal conditions and reaches to great heights, attenuating towards the upper reaches of a world's atmosphere (assuming it has one).

All that is required is a few short steps, and the traveller finds himself elsewhere, transported to another world of the Cat's Cradle. The arrangements of the cradlethreads and the ease with which they are found vary from world to world, but there is a pattern to be discerned. Many worlds of the Cat's Cradle have incomplete and partial maps showing the paths of cradlethreads that connect them. The Arch-Scholar Kazmir once suggested that the cradlethreads were "a very functional trap," describing the Cat's Cradle as a noose awaiting the necks of the ill-prepared. Kazmir's theory pointed out that cradlethreads are all too often found in convenient locations for travel to be natural, suspecting that instead they were arranged deliberately to guide unwary travellers to the most dangerous and bizarre regions possible—a trap woven into the very skein of the warp.



WALKING THE THREADS

Travelling along the threads of the Cat's Cradle is swift, but often risky. The energies of the warp are closely aligned with the cradlethreads, and walking the worlds of the Cat's Cradle in this manner often suffuses the traveller in the raw stuff of the immaterium.

Using a Cradlethread inflicts 5 points of Corruption. A character may, however, attempt a **Challenging (+0) Scrutiny Test**. If successful, the character suffers one fewer point of Corruption for every Degree of Success on this Test.

Cradlethreads can be detected by a Psyniscience Test (see page 107 in the **BLACK CRUSADE CORE Rulebook**).

It is important to note that the Cradlethreads are certainly convenient, but rarely safe. Generally, the easier a Cradlethread is to find, the greater the threat—either of the Cradlethread delivering the traveller into danger, sending the traveller to a random location, or the Cradlethread itself snapping mid-transit.

Studying a Cradlethread for a full minute and passing a **Challenging (+0) Navigation (Warp), Scholastic Lore (Occult), or Forbidden Lore (Warp) Test** can determine a Cradlethread's likely destination and risk level.

A GM should consider carefully before having a Cradlethread snap for a Player Character's transit, but emphasising the risks of this method of travel is certainly encouraged.

WORLDS OF THE CAT'S CRADLE

Worlds within the Cat's Cradle appear and vanish often at random, and thus the term is used somewhat loosely within the region. There is no guarantee of permanence. Some planets, once visited within the Cat's Cradle, even vanish upon the first visitor stepping upon its surface. However, three prominent realms have lasted longer than many others: Ravelcloak, The Farce, and Recondium.

Ravelcloak

At the very edge of the Inner Ring floats a golden orb, a scintillating lure and terminus of hundreds of cradlethreads. Ravelcloak, as this world has been named by its ruler, is a tempting plum for any would-be warlord to snatch and add to his conquests—and a fatal trap for those who attempt to gather it into their grasp. Millennia ago, this world was discovered by a powerful and ascendant Chaos Sorcerer named Visitain during his explorations of the Screaming Vortex. The final survivor of his warband, Visitain's minions and fellow seekers on the Path to Glory had all fallen victim to hideous fates. The sorcerer claimed Ravelcloak as his own. However, rather than spend his time in quiet contemplation, Visitain spent centuries crafting Ravelcloak into a finely woven eternal labyrinth designed to entrap intruders and destroy their souls. None would surpass his genius, the Sorcerer decided, and thus any who sought passage into the Inner Ring would instead become his playthings.



Visitain possessed great power and cunning, enough to achieve a transformation of his chosen world; Ravelcloak became shrouded in magical mists, its surface layered with phantom webs, mirror-like mazes, and doorways leading only into endless abyss. Ravelcloak stands as a bar to the gate to the Inner Ring, and many aspiring champions of Chaos view passing through Ravelcloak as a legendary challenge that will surely bring surpassing glory to any who can master it. Indeed, the snares awaiting upon Ravelcloak are complex and seemingly endless in number and variation; no two are truly alike.

However, Visitain's hubris is as great as his ability; he believes that none are as capable as he at designing and defeating contests of wits. Each puzzle and trial contains at least one loophole that may be exploited if the captive is lucky or clever enough to discover it. The Sorcerer takes great pleasure in personally taunting any warbands that become ensnared in his deceptions and subterfuge, although this practice has led to a number of defeats when he has underestimated his foes.



The Farce

Perhaps one of the most infamous planets of the Cat's Cradle is the home of a greater daemon of Tzeentch, a Lord of Change known as Sar'tir. This Lord of Change and a coterie of Shaper-Artisan sorcerers from Q'sal created a baroque and twisted world built entirely as a theatre. Called "The Farce," the world consists of ever-changing vistas of stages, stadiums, and amphitheatres. Each theatre is connected to the others by gravity-defying corridors, staircases, and tunnels constructed at impossible angles. The planet is inhabited by seemingly endless rows of silent observers surrounding each stage. The audience is rarely known to move or speak, their purpose focused upon the players and the scenes acted out. Sar'tir takes great pleasure in putting on elaborate pantomimes that mimic foibles of Human and Eldar civilisations. These caricatures are acted out by captives from across the galaxy, representatives of many different races and creeds. Enchanted chains are wrapped around the actors' bodies, forcing them to work their way from scene to scene or face waves of searing agony or death, consumed by eldritch fires. Sar'tir seems to enjoy the shows put on by the most recalcitrant and resistant actors, cackling wildly with glee as Imperial Inquisitors and Chaos Space Marines alike grind out their lines through clenched jaws and stiffly move to their allotted positions upon the stage.

One of the most welcoming worlds of the Cat's Cradle, the Farce offers many pleasures and perquisites for visitors that pass a series of simple tests. Those who fail or refuse to submit to the testing are added to Sar'tir's collection of performers, for such is the price of attendance charged. From time to time, the Lord of Change extends special invitations to particularly powerful daemons and warlords within the Screaming Vortex to witness his latest masterpiece and observe his newest captives in the throes of their forced levity.

Sar'tir's knowledge of plays and pantomimes is seemingly inexhaustible, and there are a number of secrets hidden within the most ancient and rare performances that are displayed within the Farce. News of such a show draws many visitors despite the planet's particular dangers. Rumours have spread throughout the Vortex that Sar'tir has somehow acquired a troupe of Harlequins, and he intends something truly special and significant for these Eldar—a performance of his own creation that promises to reveal hints about many of the most obscure enigmas.

Recondium

A single landmass dominates this world, almost entirely covered by a maze of imposing, interconnected gothic structures. A tiny portion of space within these structures is set aside as cramped living spaces, crooked hallways, and a variety of other functions necessary for human life, but they are given only the barest possible room and resources. The rest of Recondium is used as carefully catalogued storage for books of knowledge, a library known by some as the One Archive. To many visitors, Recondium and the One Archive appear as a sombre place of learning, an exemplary vision of order and solidity amongst the Cat's Cradle. However, this appearance is a thin veil over a multitude of ongoing savage conflicts between camps of scholars.



Known as the Canonicults, these bands of fervent scribes relentlessly scour the books of the One Archive attempting to make sense of the universe. Such an impossible task is taken to absurd heights within the One Archive, for new and contradictory volumes appear at irregular yet incessant intervals, driving the canonicultists into frenzied struggles over the "correct" interpretation of reality. The graven stones of Kezzel, kept within a high orrery in the One Archive, claim that the transition of knowledge on Recondium is the result of a cruel game orchestrated by a powerful daemon lord of Tzeentch. However, many of the stones of Kezzel are but fragments, the victims of some of the most brutal fighting amongst the canonicults.

The inhabitants of Recondium are drawn from a thousand worlds across the galaxy. Any obsessed researcher may occasionally come across a cleverly hidden passage that describes how to access myriad variations of "the truth." Only the most dedicated and radical of scholars find such instructions, but those that do are guided to a ritual that—when performed correctly—brings the scholar directly to Recondium, no matter the distance involved. Recently, the ranks of the canonicultists have swelled with the arrival of a number of researchers from the Library of Knowing upon Fenskworld, in the Calixis Sector.

The endless squabbling and shrill cries of the competing canonicultists makes Recondium unwelcome to many visitors, but such is the wealth of knowledge within the One Archive—even as random and contrary as it may be—that many would-be conquerors are drawn like moths to a flame. Such warbands seek hints and glimpses at dark patterns that lead to power and glory.

THEMES OF THE CAT'S CRADLE

For GM's intending to use the Cat's Cradle in their **Black Crusade** campaign, it is important to remember the core themes and elements of the region.

REAL OR UNREAL

The unique nature of the Cat's Cradle is perfect for GM's to include glimpses of past or future events, old or new adversaries, or interesting and unusual locales that the players may eventually encounter. It is important to note that a GM should generally steer away from using the illusions of the Cat's Cradle to punish his players. Instead, the illusions should be an exciting feature of the region—used to enhance the story rather than throw up roadblocks for the player's progress. Illusions can also be used as a great warning device; a rival warband or powerful NPC can showcase the threat involved by falling prey to the Cat's Cradle, making the players feel wiser for avoiding the danger.

EMBRACE THE ABSURD

Within the Cat's Cradle, nearly anything is possible; a sorcerer or psyker of sufficient power can carve out his own realm, shaped by his will into illusory paradise or phantom hellzone. Few have enough power to make such illusions permanent, but the concept is one that a GM can use to introduce the wildest extremes of the Warhammer 40,000 universe. From ravaging Tyranid swarms to contact with the Emperor himself, the dreamstuff of the Cat's Cradle can produce very memorable scenes!

CONSPICUOUS CONSPIRACY

The inhabitants of the Cat's Cradle are often focused entirely upon their own affairs and rarely take note of visitors. However, when interlopers are eventually noticed, a dozen plots are spun instantly around the intruder's every move. From Machiavellian manoeuvrings to random whims, players in the Cat's Cradle should be aware that, much like its namesake, any disturbance of the threads quickly transmits to the rest of the region. If the players accomplish a great task or discover a long-lost secret, they should expect to receive emissaries and messages from Cat's Cradle notables post haste.



DREAD KORVASKA

"I have been a slave on Ghibelline and a prisoner on Sacgrave, and I would rather be in those places than ever set foot on that accursed planet again."

—Enoch Vruskt, Sergeant, Q'Sal Exploration Force

Defying all basic laws of known physics, Korvaska is somehow able to sustain life. Huddled close to its brown dwarf star, the surface of the planet is just above freezing and gets colder the farther one goes underground. There is nothing that lends itself to having either a breathable atmosphere or any viable ecosystem, yet both exist. Ash plains and basalt mountains define the borders of a landscape heavily dotted with marshlands and dark forests. Almost oppressive in its coldness and shadow, Korvaska is appropriately called the Dread Planet.

The Hereteks of the Hollows have taken a special interest in the star itself, noting that by their best estimate it should have died many millennia ago. Along with the best estimate of the planet's age, it is conceivable that Korvaska is the oldest planet in the Vortex. What the Hereteks have also noted is that the star's orbit is perfectly regular, somehow ignoring the fluctuating tides of the Vortex and allowing it to slip through both the Gloaming Worlds and the Lower Vortex. Along its path, no other stars or systems exist, only cold desolate space. Though no explanation exists yet for the orbit, the star seems to gain energy and density as it makes its passes through the Lower Vortex, almost as though it has consciously changed its path as a matter of survival over the long ages.

Adding to the harsh climate and ash storms that ravage the planet, Korvaska also goes through periods of great upheaval where the actual physiognomy of the planet's crust shifts and roils into new shapes and configurations. The only known component of these shifts is that they largely occur when the planet is within the Lower Vortex. During such times, the planet's surface shifts, roils, and turns, folding parts of its surface back towards the centre and moving other sections around the circumference. These upheavals happen without any apparent sign of tectonic activity or geological catalyst, a phenomenon that puzzles both the Sorcerers of Q'Sal and the Hereteks of the Hollows. Both planets have sent exploration teams to Korvaska and have little in return save for missing or destroyed ships and the ravings of lunacy.

Littered around the planet are ruins of multiple civilisations, half-buried and largely destroyed. Shattered arches of deadened wraithbone juxtapose themselves against cracked walls of veined black diamond. Amidst these ruins, many say that the remnants of long lost technologies lie in wait as well as weapons of terrible power. It is these that Heretics on the path to glory seek on Korvaska. Many make the attempt, but few return unscathed, fewer still having found what they sought. Most of the ruin sites are in some way accessible and descend far below the surface of the planet through labyrinthine tunnels that almost seem modular and ever-changing.

These tunnels seem to go farther and farther into the planet, bending at seemingly impossible angles and doubling back to locations on the surface. While navigation topside is very difficult, within the caverns it is almost impossible even by advanced auspex or warp-eye charms. At multiple points throughout the tunnels, runic stones lay in walls and floors of the tunnels, some duplicated, and others singular. Only the Dark Magi and the Q'Sallian sorcerers have been able to even remotely penetrate the depths of the ruins and the planet, and only in the periods of time when the planet is firmly in the Gloaming Worlds. Both groups agree that they are some sort of marker system but both refuse to collaborate for fear of giving the other group an upper hand in their research. Even so, very little is known about where the tunnels go or what the stones mean.

THE OASES

There are pockets of land that do not ever change on Korvaska, even during the upheavals and the ash storms. In these locations on the planet there are self-contained pockets some 50 kilometres in diameter, each one full of edible plant life, animal life, and fresh water. The oases appear to be perfect in every way, fully self-sustaining and somehow protected from the rest of the planet's harsh environment. It is not, however, a permanent place to stay.

Several hours after a sentient creature enters it, an oasis will actively seek to expel the creature from its borders. For most visitors, it begins with the vague sense of being hunted. The native flora and fauna also start to change and alter into more aggressive and dangerous versions of their former selves. This is a rapid process, as the presence of the perceived intruders seems to agitate and spur the metamorphosis. Some of the earliest explorers of the planet claimed that they were attacked by some form of shambling vegetative life, but this has never been corroborated. The oases seem almost aware, knowing that should any sentient life stay permanently, then it would not be able to survive. Whatever causes this to happen, all visitors to Korvaska know that gathering supplies in these places of respite should be done quickly and efficiently.

The oases also seem to have some sort of protection from the mutants of Korvaska. No mutant has been successfully able to set foot in an oasis and live more than ten minutes afterward. Many have tried and perished and some of the crueller expeditions have detailed reports of capturing mutants that attacked them and subjected them to the fate of the oases. Some turn to dust, others to sludge, but all of them return back to the planet again in one form or another.





THE WINNOWING

The first explorers to return after encountering Korvaska named the shifting of the planet the Winnowing. Trapped on the planet briefly to repair their ship, they witnessed the first recorded mutations in the planet's surface and were appropriately terrified. As they watched entire mountains swallowed up and new marshes form over deserts, some claimed to feel the presence of something or someone around them almost begging them to help. Fearing for their safety, the original visitors quickly departed, several of them soon degenerating into incoherent babbling about "a defiant one" and "the clutch." Though many have looked for references to both of those since, in an area of space with renegades and recidivists, many feel this is truly a pointless search.

Very little is known about the Winnowing as it appears with very little warning and absolutely no mercy. In some cases, the amount of change is minimal and limited to a single location. Other times, there are multiple sites and large continents of landmass altered. As the landscape folds and turns, scraps of ruined structures and possible openings to the tunnels that apparently honeycomb the planet occasionally come to the surface. Each event lasts several days as the planet slowly alters form. Though visible to the eye, the shifts seem to have no major bearing on the overall planet's stability. A rare vid-feed captured from orbit from a Hollows pic-satellite gives the impression that unseen hands are manipulating the surface freely, rotating certain areas and folding others back into the main mass.

Since that time, several other groups have been present during the Winnowing. One of the other unique aspects of these events is that the mutant population seems to flock to the nearest site of transformation. At every occasion that has been documented, the Korvaskan mutants bow down to the motion of the planet, sending a few of their number forward into the destruction to meet their doom. To do this is apparently an honour as there is often ritual combat with the winner being allowed to go forward as a chosen sacrifice.

In every occurrence, more mutants manifest on the surface after all the motion stops, almost as if the planet itself is creating them. Whether or not that is true, the mutant population worships the upheaval whenever it happens, flocking to the closest instance of it like a compulsion. The oases are left unscathed and the towns are largely left alone and undamaged when these occur, but the Winnowing process often changes the physical landscape dramatically enough that the human populations have had to relocate, as their access to the closest oasis has become blocked. The high scryers in Velklir have supposed that the Winnowing is the result of some living force within the planet trying to manifest. Most of these scryers fully descended into madness shortly thereafter, so there is great speculation as to the veracity of their thought.

MUTANTS OF KORVASKA

Other than the dangerous flora and fauna in the oases, there are very few other predators on this planet. That role is filled by the tribes of mutants that skulk near the human settlements and the oases. Though the majority are not overtly large or muscular, they make up for a lack of brawn with speed and cunning. All of them have crude weaponry made from bone or stone, but many of the disparate tribes have taken to scavenging weaponry from the humans they have killed; some have also adapted to using metal weaponry and bows. Each tribe numbers about fifteen or fewer on the average, but particularly strong mutants have been known to lead much larger bands.

Though dangerous enough on their own, Korvaskan mutants show an increasing sensitivity to the warp. Some of the most dangerous mutants in recent history have been able to control flame, alter their bodies or coordinate larger groups over distance. No one is sure whether all of the mutants have low grade psychic abilities, but the ones that learn to control and develop their powers invariably rise to power. Tribes led by these psychically active creatures are among the most dangerous, as their tactics are often unpredictable and their members often more willing to stay in a protracted fight. Without a strong leader present, most mutant raiding parties will flee against steady and determined opposition.

Since there is no food source readily available to them as the oases bar their entry, the Tribes lie in wait for stragglers to leave the oases laden with fresh supplies. They will then attack en masse, trying their best to surprise and subdue their victims quickly. Should these attacks fail and they are fought off empty handed, these mutants are not above cannibalising their own members to keep the rest alive. Particularly strong exploration parties have been known to keep the mutant packs in check by doing enough damage to the mutants that they fall on each other instead of chasing them.



With all the harshness of the planet, the mutant population should die out fairly quickly, but somehow it persists. Through the Winnowing, it appears that the balance of power is maintained as the planet provides new tribes from the upheaval. It is a time of great reverence and renewal for the mutants. They will march for the closest instance of geological upheaval and fall down in supplication before it—chanting, dancing, and occasionally throwing themselves in the midst of it, disappearing below the surface of the planet. Those lost are quickly replaced, as at the end of every Winnowing, new tribes of mutants emerge from the wastes to find their way towards the oases and begin the cycle anew. Where the new creatures come from is a matter of great concern, as it appears that the planet is somehow creating them.

Proteyan Strain

As if the roving bands of mutants were not dangerous enough, Korvaska has a special breed of predator that even they avoid. Known as the Proteyan Strain, these mutants are solitary stealthy hunters that single out targets and observe them before killing, consuming, and then assuming the identity of their victim. In their natural form, they are roughly two meters tall with horrific, deformed faces. Their skins are leathery and tough with thick fur, and they have clawed hands capable of ripping through basic armour with ease. Seemingly intelligent, when possible they stalk, observe, and select their prey carefully before making a move to subdue it.

Blessed by Tzeentch with a natural ability to alter their form, these creatures look for stragglers to prey upon, stalking them in the deep shadows of Korvaska's ruins. Outside of the ruins and the adjoining subterranean tunnels, the Proteyans have seemingly never attacked. The deeper explorers have gone, however, the more commonplace disappearances have become with tales of ferocious, bloody combat. Many believe this is because they are extremely territorial and are hiding or guarding something, though no one has an idea of what that might be.

When a Proteyan kills a victim, it consumes its prey, and is then able to collect genetic memory from that creature. Within minutes, the Proteyan changes form into a copy of its victim, after which the creature uses the remaining clothing and gear. To the unaided eye there is no discernible difference between the Proteyan and its slain victim. The creatures' talents also extend into verbal and vocal ranges, making it able to adopt the exact sound of the victim to speak any languages it has heard before. This makes a Proteyan a terrifying foe, as it will actively sow discontent in the group in order to break them apart and make them easier to subdue. While originally thought to be a natural physical ability, a recent expedition from the Hollows discovered that it is, in fact, a psychic ability that can be disrupted by null fields and Untouchables. This has increased the number of excursions to the Dread Planet, in which explorers seek to capture the creature for study.

Korvaskan Mutant

The mutants on Korvaska are an abnormal breed, if such a term can be used to describe mutants. Far less bulky and plodding than most mutants of the Imperium, these degenerate souls are possessed of additional speed and intelligence that makes them in some ways far more dangerous. Though most are not psychically active, many of their leaders are so, exhibiting reasonable control of their abilities and exercising their control over the others in their tribe. Being unable to hunt in the oases themselves, Korvaskan mutants skulk and prey on the human population, raiding and killing them for their supplies if at all possible. Failure means that the tribe must cannibalise itself to survive.

Korvaskan Mutant (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	31	45	38	48	26	37	35	13	—

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 14

Armour: Toughened Skin (All 3)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Acrobatics, Awareness +10, Dodge +10, Psyniscience, Stealth.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Frenzy, Hard Target, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee), Psy Rating 3 and 1 Random Psychic Power (Korvaskan Mutant Leaders only).

Traits: Unnatural Agility (4), Gift of Chaos (choose at random).

Weapons: Natural Weapons (claws/spines) (1d10+4 R; Pen 0; Primitive (8))

Gear: Native charms and tokens.



Protayan Strain Mutant

The Protayan Strain, unlike its pack-based counterparts, is a solitary creature, hunting by stealth and subterfuge. Psychically gifted with the ability to change form, these creatures seemingly patrol the ruins and the deep, dank labyrinth of tunnels underground. They are generally only aggressive as outsiders go deeper, but have exhibited territorial tendencies. Capable of tool and weapon use and able to imitate to a large degree the abilities of those they change into, it is no wonder that explorers from the Hollows bring psy-deadening technology with them on every excursion to the planet's surface.

Protayan Strain Mutant (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
33	32	45	32	41	46	55	56	38	--

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: Natural Armour (All 4)

Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Awareness +10, Charm +10, Deceive +10, Dodge +10, Inquiry, Linguistics +20, Logic, Psyniscience +10, Sleight of Hand, Stealth +10, Survival, Tech-Use.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Cold Hearted, Hardy, Leap Up, Lightning Reflexes, Mimic, Paranoia, Polyglot, Quick Draw, Rapid Reaction, Step Aside, Swift Attack.

Wounds: 18

Total TB: 5

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, From Beyond, Natural Armour (4), Psyker, Shapeshifter†, Unnatural Agility (2), Unnatural Strength (2), Unnatural Toughness (2).

†**Shapeshifter:** The creature is able to change its form into an exact replica of another humanoid roughly the same size. In order to complete this act, the Protayan must consume the victim, a process which is more like absorption of the body mass rather than actual eating, and takes only a minute or two to complete. Once done, the body of the creature transforms almost unbidden into the form of its most recent victim, retaining some bits of memory and all the physical capabilities of that being. It can maintain this indefinitely unless brought under duress (loss of more than half of its wounds or being knocked out due to Fatigue). If that happens, the creature must make a **Very Hard (-30) Willpower Test** to maintain its stolen form, otherwise it drops back to its natural form. If the creature is subjected to a Null Field or any other anti-psyhic source, it will automatically shift back and take 1d10 Damage from being forced back into its natural state.

Weapons: Natural Weapons (claws/spines) (1d10+6 R; Pen 2), or weapons the victim used.

Gear: None.



THE FLAMING TOMB

"You think me mad, and I do not dispute it. But there is something within that burning orb, and its unleashing will sound the death knell of a thousand thousand worlds."

—High Adept Lobile of Velklir, upon his return from the Flaming Tomb

A burned and blackened orb floating above the milky plane of the Lower Vortex, the Flaming Tomb at first appears to be just another volcanically volatile world, its surface a random pattern of light and darkness as fissures and cracks in its ever-shifting crust reveal the surging magma beneath. But from certain perspectives it is almost as if a pattern emerges from the seemingly random movement—if only one were to look from the right vantage—in the right frame of mind—and at the right moment.

The shifting patterns of the Flaming Tomb are both temporal and physical in nature. The planet is ever changing, with patterns maddeningly eluding analysis. Strange arrangements of shadow and light seem to writhe across the planet's surface, taking the shape of half-remembered glyphs or symbols before disappearing once again into the chaos. Even the shambling migrations of the planet's inhabitants call forth near-recognised pathways in the dark corners of an observer's mind.

The arrangement of these patterns, say those Heretics who swear by their existence, are almost fractal in nature. They spiral deeper and deeper in design and meaning, on the very edge of human perception and understanding, but ever evolving and changing, dancing tantalisingly out of the mind's grasp. Here darkness and light forever chase each other across the surface of the nearly dead planet.

Rational observers say there is no discernible pattern at first glance, but even many sceptics claim that the longer one looks down from orbit, the more frustrating patterns appear to emerge, promising a wealth of knowledge and power to the first adept capable of translating the planet's meaning. They swear that nine smaller patterns swirl within the larger, their shifting nature hinting at the direction of a focused intelligence. As beguiling as the theory is, however, none have yet deciphered the import, if there is one, and many have been driven insane in the attempt.

Among those whose minds tend towards idle speculation, or those who yearn for a quick and easy road to power within the Screaming Vortex, there are many theories regarding the phantom patterns of the Flaming Tomb; patterns that most people who have visited the planet deny even exist. Some unsettled scholars and broken men of the Q'sal city of Tarnor whisper that a powerful entity was trapped within the planet, entombed there by an enormous authority for some heinous crime or failure. Some posit that it is one of the regal Lords of Change trapped within by the displeased Sovereign of Deception. Others suspect that it may be a great daemon prince, some former champion of the Great Schemer whose failure has earned it eternal consignment to the fiery prison. The softest whispers tell of a great psychic champion of the Corpse-God, a servant of the faltering Imperium, condemned to this hellish tomb by a single moment of mortal weakness.



A few souls, shattered and bereft of their senses after too long scrutinising the Flaming Tomb, mutter through cracked lips of a geo-astrological puzzle lock, holding back the tides of the Lower Vortex itself. The massive mechanism needs only the right set of forces applied to break it open and unleash the raw stuff of Chaos trapped within upon an unsuspecting universe. These gibbering lunatics continue to mutter that some force, somewhere in the galaxy, is exerting its influence upon the planet, shifting the tides of magma beneath the surface, and the wandering tribes of refugees upon it, in a never-ending pattern whose ultimate purpose is the opening of a lock few even suspect exists. Who could be manipulating the device, or what may be unleashed upon its opening, even the most deranged refuse to speculate.

Despite the fixation of a fringe element of sorcerous diviners and the constantly shifting nature of the planet's crust, those who wish to can indeed conduct actual studies of its surface and relationship to other systems nearby. The geography of the planet, although always shifting and changing, revolves around nine proto-continents: massive archipelagos of basalt and charred rock gyrating around a central landmass larger than the rest. Each of these masses is rumoured to contain a structure of some kind. Whether these structures are tombs, prisons, or shrines cannot be known for certain. Many expeditions from Q'sal and the Hollows have attempted studies, but none can agree on (or wish to reveal) what these configurations were intended for, or who created them in strange aeons past. Every report of these dark and mysterious locales changes with each new visitation, an attractive feature to the mortal servants of the Changer of the Ways.



Scholars of Tzeentch agree though that there are nine Gates upon the surface of the Flaming Tomb. No matter where one lands on the planet, three are always to the west, three are always to the east, and three are always to the north. These Gates of Heaven are ever evolving, ever changing, and cannot be found by any instruments known to the residents of the Vortex. The Gates are said to lead a suppliant to areas of power scattered around the planet, or to the nine central tombs, or to the Gate of Destiny itself, a half-remembered dream entrance to the nether realm inhabited by the Four Sentinels who guard the Lower Vortex.

Among the many real dangers present upon the planet though are toxic cloud banks, vicious earthquakes, and enormous tidal waves of molten stone that constantly wrack the planet, prodding its few inhabitants into constant migration and continuous warfare over grievously limited resources. Half seen in the shifting haze, daemonic creatures stalk the surface, pursuing their own, indecipherable purposes.

As a desiccated and blasted world of charred rock and magma seas, the Flaming Tomb is not a planet that could support a native population in a rational universe. However, bands of bedraggled and wretched refugees scrape a bare existence from its barren, burnt surface. Living off of dust snails and slag worms, obtaining what water they can from burrowing desiccator slugs, these poor, lost souls know nothing but torment and despair every moment of their lives.

How they came to inhabit the Flaming Tomb no one knows. Despite what must be countless deaths every day to starvation, disease, exposure, brutal and savage warfare, and the predations

of the many fantastical creatures that shadow them across the blighted landscape, their number never appears to dwindle. Most dismiss this as just another mystery of the Inner Ring. Others, however, find a more pressing cause to speculate.

FLAMING TOMB REFUGEE

Most of the inhabitants have no recollection of how they arrived on the Flaming Tomb, and very little memory of their lives before their current, benighted existence. Those few with even partial memories rant and rave to the heavens, claiming to be powerful men and women who cannot even remember their own names. Their clothing, hanging in ragged shreds from their starved bodies, hints at hundreds of cultures and occupations. Within the babble of any given tribe one can hear the accents of Mamon, Hindrance, Q'sal, the Hollows, Furia, and a hundred other worlds of the Screaming Vortex, and countless more besides. Given the pathetic reality of the inhabitants of the Flaming Tomb, it was perhaps inevitable that legends of godly punishment should come to be attached to the planet.

Under the sharp interrogation of remorseless tech-auditors of Castir, the one common memory of all denizens of the Flaming Tomb seems to be one of betrayal. None can fully articulate their fears, and often archivists work for years to decipher the babbling of the worst subjects, but every one of them appears to believe that they are being punished for some lapse of faith, lack of vision, or journey down a false path to power. Just before breaking down into incoherent sobs, every subject seems to declare that they had been on the very edge of greatness previous to being cast into the terror of the Flaming Tomb. No subject brought to this level of recall has ever recovered even a modicum of sanity, however.

Flaming Tomb Refugee (Troop)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
22	18	26	34	28	20	32	21	20	--	

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: None

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Climb (S) +10, Dodge (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Survival (Per) +20.

Talents: Double Team, Unremarkable.

Weapons: Primitive and/or improvised hand weapons (1d5+3 I; Pen 0; Scavenged). Some Refugees may be armed with an array of Average or Common Melee Weapons plus assorted Basic or Pistol Ranged Weapons, all of which will have the Scavenged Downgrade.

Gear: Tattered remnant clothing, makeshift totems, or good luck charms. Refugees may conceivably carry a dizzying array of battered and worn gear, ranging from a beat-up chrono to nearly-depleted, desperately coveted medi-kit. All of these items will be Poor quality due to wear and tear.

A Mind of Holes: Many Refugees bear within their tragedy-numbed minds a plethora of secrets and valuable information, although most cannot remember their own names. Under extreme stress, the influence of a powerful sorcerer, or the inducements of artfully applied pain (with associated **Arduous (-40) Tests**), the Refugee might remember a useful chunk of his past life.

FLAMING TOMB PYROMANCER

Among the sad and roving bands of Refugees that wander the blasted landscape of the Flaming Tomb, a vanishingly small number rise above the masses to positions of power and authority over the rest. Most of these chieftains and petty warlords strive only to better their own situation, while expanding their power and influence over as great a tribe as they can gather. An even smaller number of those, however, are truly special. Whether through the crushing pressures of their bleak lives or due to some special combination of traits or abilities, these few develop into powerful psykers known as Pyromancers.

Some of these sorcerers rise from the general population of the planet, their dormant ability awakening under the pressures of life on the Tomb. Others are psykers who purposefully subject themselves to the planet's dread embrace seeking to expand their power and knowledge. These aspirants tenaciously cling to the belief that something about the planet drags sorcerous ability from those willing to undergo its harsh ministrations. They journey to the Flaming Tomb specifically to study the flames, to scrutinise the symbology of its geography and the language of its burning, poisoned winds. Some find what they seek, their minds expanding under the constant barrage of Empyrean waves washing up from the Lower Vortex and the life of persistent hardship and relentless want. Most, however, are destroyed, either physically or emotionally consumed by the very powers they sought to master.

Some Pyromancers seek nothing more than to lead bands of their fellow Refugees, using them as private armies or legions of slaves. Some have massive strongholds built in the highlands, while others drive their followers across the planet in search of artefacts, the roots of legends, or the fabled Gates of Heaven. These adepts use their mastery of flame and the warp to protect their bands from other groups of Refugees. Some are powerful enough to drive off the Burning Men, or even the attentions of a wandering daemon of Tzeentch. In exchange for this protection, the members of their tribe extend to them every honour and gesture of respect. Within the scope of lives crushed down with hardship and pain, these men and women live like kings.

Some very few Pyromancers, often the most powerful, become creatures of seclusion and isolation. Often they will defeat a rival to claim the vanquished sorcerer's fortress as their own, to use as a base of operations to pursue their studies, or meditations, or searches alone. These are those mysterious figures of legend most often sought out for their secrets and advice by outsiders. Unfortunately for those who seek them, they are also the most capable of defending their isolation, and many is the off-worlder brought to ruin and death in a quest for a Master Pyromancer of the Flaming Tomb.



Flaming Tomb Pyromancer (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
32	40	37	36	33	40	37	45	20	08

Movement: 3/6/9/18

Wounds: 15

Armour: Hide robes (All 2).

Total TB: 3

Skills: Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Heresy) (Int), Intimidate (S), Psyniscience (WP) +10, Command (Fel) +10, Scholastic Lore (Occult).

Talents: Psy Rating 4, Warp Sense, Resistance (Psychic Techniques), Strong Minded, Sacrifice, Bastion of Iron Will.

Weapons: Ritual Sword (1d10+3 R; Pen 0; Psy-Focus), Autopistol (Pistol; 30m; S/-/6; 1d10+2I; Pen 0; Clip 18; Reload Full).

Gear: Tattered Robes, Journals and Notebooks, 3 clips of ammunition.

Psychic Powers: The Pyromancy Powers Manifest Flames, One With The Fire, Fire Bolt, and Fire Barrage (see page 60).

THE BURNING MEN

The strangest inhabitants of the Flaming Tomb by far are the creatures of solid lava that rise up out of the magma seas at times of particular upheaval within the Vortex. These creatures are tall and lithe, moving with the slow and easy grace of liquid stone jetting from a volcano at the peak of its eruption. None have ever been able to ascertain where these creatures come from or why they stalk the Flaming Tomb, but they are the eternal bane of the Refugees who attempt to scrape a living from the blackened soil.

Some scholars of the arcane posit that the Burning Men are creatures who live deep within the magma seas of the convulsing planet. Strange alien creatures, they appear to want nothing from the humans but to be left alone. However, more popular theories state that the creatures are not actually independent entities at all, but rather the manifestation of a powerful will emanating from the Lower Vortex, or the warp, or from within the very planet itself. Some believe this consciousness, vast and incomprehensible to human minds, drives these golems of lava and fire, although to what end no one can truly say.

These beings never attempt to communicate when they appear. They silently pull themselves from the lava flows and relentlessly pursue the desperate humans across the wastelands, driving them like cattle with no fathomable purpose or motive. Sometimes, when they appear in sufficient numbers, they will totally annihilate an entire band, wiping their very memory from existence.

Those whisperers in the darkness who give credence to the wildest tales murmur that the Burning Men are the physical manifestation of the will of the being trapped within the planet, and the forced migrations and massive killings are nothing short of the turning of another tumbler in the lock, bringing the planet one step closer to its mysterious, unknown fate.



Burning Man (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
48	32	40	46	48	35	37	36	10	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Armour: None

Skills: Dodge.

Talents: Combat Master, Preternatural Speed.

Traits: Daemonic (2), Fear (3), From Beyond, Regeneration (2), Unnatural Strength (3), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Burning Grasp (1d10+13 E; Pen 4; Flame), Magma Spray (Basic; 20m; S/-/-; 1d10+8E; Pen 6; Clip —; Reload —; Flame, Melta, Spray).

Body of Flame: Anyone attacking a Burning Man in melee must make a **Very Hard (-30) Agility Test** or suffer 1d10+6 points of Energy Damage as if hit with a weapon with the Flame Special Quality.

Blessings of a Dark Power: Some power within the warp favours the Burning Men. This Blessing has the same effect as a Force Field with a Strength of 20 that does not overload.

Wounds: 18

Total TB: 9

DAEMONS OF TZEENTCH

Due to the Flaming Tomb's close proximity to the Lower Vortex, daemons of every size and description find it easier to exist upon the enigmatic ball of char than on any planet of the Gloaming Worlds or within the Inner Ring. Often, daemons of Tzeentch cavort upon the blasted and poisoned surface, frolicking through convulsive detonations, dancing to the beat of music only they can hear. Those mortals wishing to seek out the daemons of the Monarch of Permutation but lacking confidence in their own powers, often turn to the Flaming Tomb, knowing that there the veil between the material realm and the mindscape is frighteningly thin.

The most difficult to find, even upon the shimmering surface of the Tomb, are the great Lords of Change. In fact, most scholars believe these most powerful of the Prince's minions are deeply loath to go there, as if afraid, or at the very least respectful, of some power or aura that permeates the blackened soil and the thick, choking air. These masters of mutation, it is thought, only make the effort to manifest upon the Flaming Tomb when forced by powers greater than themselves, and do not deign to visit its twisting lands and mysterious tombs of their own accord.

The gibbering Horrors of Tzeentch are probably the most commonly seen daemons to wander the blasted landscapes of the Flaming Tomb. Seemingly oblivious to whatever aura renders the planet anathema to their more powerful cousins, these cackling grotesques often appear on the planet's surface, apparently at random, to dance dizzying arcs across the barren deserts and magma beaches, capering along in their mindless, bandy-legged gait. They do not seem to follow any set purpose in their journeys across the planet. They appear equally likely to shadow a lack-witted Pyromancer, or congregate in chortling hordes upon the plains that hold the various lesser tombs across the planet. Indeed, they seem to hold nothing sacred, nor do they appear to fear anything. Although they do not know any emotions as humans define such things, they do seem to enjoy observing the torments of the humans trapped upon the planet, and often will add to their agonies for no other purpose than the sheer amusement it affords them.





Flamers of Tzeentch

Unsurprisingly, the Flamers of Tzeentch are particularly at home among the fiery fjords and blighted islands of the magma seas. Even as the dancing flames and swirling, poisonous mist seem to call to some mortals, showing them patterns and meaning hidden from most other minds, the Flamers of Tzeentch are often seen, floating undisturbed through the violence and chaos of the abyssal holocaust. As is true of all daemons, the purposes of the Flamers of Tzeentch are beyond the understanding of mortal man, and their comings and goings, especially deeper within the Inner Ring and into the Lower Vortex itself, are nearly impossible to track.

The favoured weapons of the Flamers of Tzeentch, when roused to anger, are bolts of polychromatic æther, pouring from the gaping, gibbering mouths that form at the end of the daemons' sinuous, multifarious arms. This eldritch flame coalesces into coherent balls of warp energy that can spray a large area, pounding even the war plate of the Fallen Legions into submission. These same yawning maws, ringed with vicious, spittle-coated teeth, can be deadly in melee as well, chewing through armour, muscle, and bone with equal ease. When necessary, the Flamers are capable of altering their appendages into strong, graceful gripping appendages as well.

Flamers of Tzeentch do not bother to tread the blackened soil of the Flaming Tomb. Rather, they float gracefully upon a broad disc of undulating flesh, much like a massive jellyfish fused to the trunk of the daemon's body. In this way, Flamers glide along on a cushion of ætheric winds, the frills and folds of their lower bodies always in motion, subject to the currents of the Sea of Souls, no matter where they might wander.

There is conjecture that the Flamers of Tzeentch are the only beings truly able to communicate with the Burning Men and to understand their confounding purposes. If anyone has ever managed to force or tempt a Flamer to divulge this secret, however, none can say.

Flamer of Tzeentch (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
22	38	34	35	34	32	30	34	15	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 20

Armour: None

Total TB: 9

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Psyniscience (Per), Speak Language (Any one).

Talents: Warp Sense, Strong Minded.

Traits: Daemonic (3), Fear (2), From Beyond, Deadly Natural Weapons, Hoverer (4), Strange Physiology, Unnatural Toughness (3), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Bolts of Tzeentch (Basic; 100m, --/6, 1d10+6 E, Pen 6, Flaming), Grasping Claws (1d10+6 E, Pen 6, Flaming).

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 10 metres of a Flamer of Tzeentch suffer a -10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Blessing of Tzeentch: Flamers of Tzeentch are blessed by their patron. This has the same effect as a Force Field with a Strength of 20 that does not overload.

Disc of Tzeentch

Screamers of Tzeentch are often seen skimming along the billowing storm fronts of burning gasses that erupt from the deep magma seas of the Flaming Tomb. Their graceful flight belies the violence and destructive power of the churning flames over which they soar or their own not inconsiderable dangers. Little is known about these Screamers, or why they often congregate in the lower atmosphere of this world. Great shoals of these beasts often appear during times of particularly strong warp tides, when the voices of the Screaming Vortex grate on the ears of even the mind-deaf.

Although the Screamers do not often prey upon the bedraggled denizens of the planet, there are times when, driven by urges or instincts foreign and unknowable to mortal man, they fall upon the human population, driving them from one desolate region to another. Countless refugees may die in these sudden attacks, savaged by the gaping maws, brutalised by the barbed tails, or driven mad by the shrieking hunting cry of the implacable creatures. Many others, driven by a fear that precludes any rational thought, run directly into the roiling magma flows, their bodies exploding into dark and greasy flames as the last of their remains swirls up into the air to join the noxious clouds.

One of the most common reasons for powerful Heretics to visit the Flaming Tomb is, in fact, these swarms of deadly, graceful creatures. Among the devotees of the Master of Magic, there are few possessions more prized than the daemonic mount crafted from a Screamer, known as a Disc of Tzeentch. An amalgam of daemonic flesh, flashing blades, and burnished metal, a powerful sorcerer mounted on a Disc is lethally fast and manoeuvrable, gaining an edge over almost any foe. Screamer are notoriously difficult to summon and break to the Disc, however. Rarely, the fickle God of Change may grant a particularly favoured disciple with a Disc, fully formed and willing to serve. However, for most adherents to the Changer of the Ways, a more difficult path is required.

A Disc of Tzeentch can be forged from the daemonic flesh of a Screamer if the practitioner is powerful enough and masters the proper rites and ceremonies. Sorcerer's eager to obtain a Screamer for this purpose hunt the creatures down on the Flaming Tomb, there to perform the rituals and spells necessary to force the change and subservience upon them. It is a dangerous undertaking, and more fail than succeed. But for the prestige and tactical advantage of a Disc of Tzeentch, many and more are willing to assume the risks.

Disc of Tzeentch (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	02	45	45	50	15	43	40	05	--

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20.

Traits: Bestial, Daemonic (4), Deadly Natural Weapons (Warp Blades), Fear 2, Flyer (6), From Beyond, Warp Instability.

Weapons: Warp Blades (1d10+5 R; Pen 12; Felling (3), Razor Sharp).

Blessing of Tzeentch: Screamer of Tzeentch are blessed by their patron. This has the same effect as a Force Field with a Strength of 20 that does not overload.

Obtaining a Disc of Tzeentch: Although sometimes a gift granted by the Lord of Lies himself, powerful sorcerers may attempt to summon a Screamer and twist it to their purposes through obscure and dangerous rituals. A Screamer is first summoned via the method described for the Ritual of Breaking (see page 61). However, as the Screamer must then be dominated by the sorcerer's will and its very physical structure transformed into that of a Disc, the Ritual will always be two steps more difficult than for a normal Mount.

Daemonic Mount: A Disc of Tzeentch, once summoned and reshaped, will maintain its Disc form for as long as the Sorcerer retains control over it. While riding on the Disc, the sorcerer may use the Disc's movement characteristics and direct the creature to use its attacks in melee. Any attacks directed at the sorcerer riding the Disc should be randomised between the rider and steed. The Heretic is protected by the Disc's Blessing of Tzeentch unless he is using a force field of his own. However, once every 1d5 days the sorcerer must perform an **Opposed Willpower Test** against the Disc to keep it subservient. In addition, any time the

Wounds: 12

Total TB: 8



Disc takes damage of any kind, a further **Opposed Willpower Test** must be taken. Should any of these tests be failed, the Disc immediately reverts to a Screamer and attacks the nearest mortal creature—probably the sorcerer himself.

Chariots of Tzeentch: The most powerful devotees of the Master of Misrule, dissatisfied with a single Disc, will often attempt a far more complicated and dangerous undertaking, the crafting of a Chariot of Tzeentch. A Chariot of Tzeentch requires first a massive iron and brass chariot of the finest craftsmanship be forged and brought to the place of the Ritual of Breaking. Then two Screamer of Tzeentch must be summoned and bound into Disc form and yoked to the chariot with chains of spell-woven gold. Each Ritual of Breaking will be three steps more difficult than for a normal Mount. Once the two Discs have been summoned and formed, they must be bound to the chariot through a Ritual of Binding. The two Discs and chariot now form a Chariot of Tzeentch, which possesses all of the rules and statistics of a single Disc except that the Flyer attribute is reduced from 6 to 5. In addition, any Heretic riding within the Chariot itself has his armour increased by +4.



PHOKULOZORTIS, DAEMON PRINCE OF TZEENTCH

The Screaming Vortex attracts many elite daemons of power. The daemon prince of Tzeentch known as Phokulozortis is, like most things associated with the Master of Metamorphosis, ever changing. Once a mere mortal, he is now eternal, sloughing off his skin for daemoniac flesh. Around the creature, ethereal as if through a fog, there are hints of great feathered pinions, multiple bird-like heads weaving back and forth on long, gangly necks, multiple waving arms with long, delicate hands. But as a true creature of Chaos, he can take any form he wishes. His favourite ruse is to assume the likeness of other daemoniac creatures and play their role throughout a botched summoning or bungled ritual entreaty. He acts out its part flawlessly, a seemingly dutiful and cowed infernal creature. Somehow, however, the endeavours of the Heretics who summoned Phokulozortis will always go awry, furthering the prince's schemes and designs, or those of his master, and bringing nothing but failure and suffering to those weak souls who initiated the summoning.

Phokulozortis is a master manipulator, with the ability to touch the threads of time and space to see what courses will bear fruit and what will not. His advice is always poisoned, for he knows exactly what to tell the object of its attentions to elicit the most violent and profound transformation. No matter the original purpose of those who summoned it, the dance will always follow the tune of the Father of Lies.



There are many tales of Phokulozortis whispered across the Vortex; tales of weak-minded conjurers calling forth beings far above their ability to control, who nevertheless heed the call. These tales follow the benighted sorcerers as their plots and machinations, fed and abetted by the daemon thing they summoned, seem to grow stronger in power and influence, only to have their hopes and dreams dashed upon the sharp rocks of cold reality. Most of the tales end with the mysterious disappearance of the deceived augurers, vanishing without a trace, never to be seen again.

Mortals who study the lore of the infinite and immortal believe that Phokulozortis roams throughout the Vortex in search of those whose overweening pride and faith in themselves make them the perfect objects of its attentions. Whether warlords, political leaders, or clan elders, no one of ambition and moral laxity is safe. There are whispers that the creature has even reached beyond the Vortex, perhaps going so far as to pull strings and claim souls on the very worlds of the Corpse-God himself.

Phokulozortis (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	52	48	39	44	58	48	56	50	23

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 20

Armour: None.

Total TB: 11

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20, Charm (Fel) +20, Command (Fel) +10, Commerce (Int), Common Lore (All) (Int) +10, Deceive (Fel) +30, Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (All) (Int) +10, Inquiry (Fel) +10, Logic (Int) +10, Linguistics (WP) +30, Psyniscience (Per) +10, Scholastic Lore (All) (Int) +10, Scrutiny (Per) +10.

Talents: Psy Rating 6, Mimic, Radiant Presence, Resistance (Psychic Powers), Strong Minded, Sacrifice, Warp Sense, Warp Conduit, Bastion of Iron Will, Favoured by the Warp, Warp Lock.

Traits: Daemoniac (4), Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (3), From Beyond, Unnatural Toughness (4), The Stuff of Nightmares.

Weapons: Shimmerblade (1d10+9 E; Pen 6; Balanced, Crippling, Force Weapon, Razor Sharp, Tearing).

Deft Manipulator: Peering down the threads of the future, Phokulozortis can quickly see the effects of its words and deeds. As a Full Action, Phokulozortis may bandy words with an unwary character, causing an **Opposed Willpower Test**, in which Phokulozortis receives a bonus equal to the difference in their Intelligence Bonuses x 10 (should the character have a higher INT Bonus, no bonus is awarded). Should the character fail this test, Phokulozortis gains a Twisted Fate token for every 10 points he wins by. Phokulozortis may use Twisted Fate Tokens to affect any test performed by that character later in that adventure whilst in his presence, to either add or subtract 10 to the result.

Master of Magics: Phokulozortis is a student of all the wonders of Tzeentch. He may attempt to use any Tzeentch, Unaligned, or Divination Power with the usual Focus Power Test.

Blessing of Tzeentch: Phokulozortis is blessed by its patron. This has the same effect as a Force Field with a Strength of 50 that does not overload.

Daemoniac Presence: Phokulozortis causes all enemies within 20 metres to suffer a -10 penalty to all Willpower Tests.

THE NECRONS

"Of all our arrogant inferiors, I find the slaves of the warp the most distasteful. Not content to merely fling themselves into that wretched sea, they insist on inviting its creatures into our galaxy. This, we cannot allow."

—Necron Overlord Kothorahn, Regent of Ghelleph

The Necrons are a race ancient beyond reckoning, and the god-beings that granted them immortality are as old as the stars themselves. The denizens of the Screaming Vortex know little about this ancient menace, though they know more than the ignorant, wilfully blind slaves of the Corpse-Emperor. Yet the histories and activities of these mysterious xenos remain hidden to even the most blessed of warp-seers and oracles. This fact frustrates the sorcerers of Tzeentch to no end. Ironically, it also gives the followers of Chaos the one insight into the nature of the Necrons that is beyond doubt: theirs is an entirely soulless race.

Long before the rise of man, at a time when Terra was little more than a carnosaur-infested death world, the Necrontyr discovered, or were perhaps discovered by, god-like beings known as the C'tan. The C'tan fed on the very stuff of stars, snuffing them out like candles. It is said, however, that the C'tan truly delighted in consuming the very life force of mortal beings. It is written in ancient prophecies and the journals of madmen that when the Necrontyr discovered the C'tan, they gave their allegiance to these god-beings. Using their impossibly advanced sciences, the Necrontyr fashioned bodies of living metal for the C'tan, beings of infinite energy, to inhabit and so move amongst their servants.

The Necrons were not always as they are now. Before the coming of the C'tan, the Necrontyr were a race of flesh, blood, and soul. The Necrontyr were a short-lived race, their home world burning under the glare of a cruel sun. The spectre of death obsessed the early Necrontyr, whose short lives were spent maintaining the massive tomb-complexes that housed their ancestors. Even once their technology allowed the Necrontyr to depart for the stars aboard slow burning torch-ships, they were a morbid people. The C'tan offered the Necrontyr what they craved most: immortality. The C'tan made biotransference possible for the Necrontyr, who gave up their weak, dying flesh for everlasting metal. Yet they also sacrificed their souls, on which the C'tan feasted. It is impossible to say if the Necrontyr realised the price they would pay for immortality. Yet many Necrons long for a return to the flesh, for to live a cold eternity as a machine is no life at all.

At the time of the C'tan's arrival, the Necrons were engaged in a long and terrible war against the mythical Old Ones. The Necrons had always envied the Old Ones' immortality, and this envy had long ago turned to a burning hatred. The Triarch, the ruling council of the Necrontyr civilisation, used this hatred to unite the disparate Necrontyr dynasties, and so the War in Heaven began. When the Necrons discovered the C'tan, the war was going against them, and victory for the Old Ones was near at hand. The Necrons' newly bestowed immortality did nothing to diminish their hatred of the Old

Ones, and in their durable new forms and with the power of their god-beings behind them, the Necrons assailed their enemies with renewed vigour. The ultimate outcome of this war is unclear. What is known, however, is that it was destructive beyond imagining.

Even more so than many xenos, the minds of the Necrons are unknowable, even to the servants of the Dark Gods. Many question if the commonly encountered Necron foot soldiers even possess sentience at all. It is beyond doubt, however, that the leaders of the Necrons, the so-called Lords and Overlords, possess minds that are cold and calculating beyond the ken of mortals. Yet for all their technology and the power of their star gods, the Necrons are not without fault. Some Necron rulers awake from their epochs-long slumber with defects in the engrams and neuro-circuits that house the remnants of their personalities. Perhaps this could be described as insanity, but it is far from the entropic madness of one touched by the Dark Gods. Like every other facet of the Necron race, it is ordered and exact, like a chronometer that stops at regular intervals, or a cogitator that outputs the same results regardless of the data fed to it.

The Necrons are anathema to the forces of Chaos, but especially so to the servants of Tzeentch. They have no souls to corrupt, their every action is ordered and logical to the point of impossibility, and their living metal bodies are entirely resistant to the mutating effects of the warp. While the Necrons wield powers that may appear as magic to the ignorant, they are in fact the result of technology more advanced than imaginable. They do not use psychic powers to navigate the warp, yet somehow travel across the stars with terrible speed. Some believe the Necrons may even possess the secrets of the fabled Eldar Webway. Even this possibility may tempt a sorcerer to seek out the accursed tombs of the Necrons, and it is whispered that the greatest sorcerer of the Thousand Sons Legion seeks the truth of this rumour.

To the tech-priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the advanced, theoretically impossible technology of the Necrons is fascinating yet heretical. The Necrons themselves are clearly an utter abomination—xenos machines that possess a malign, soulless sentience. The Dark Mechanicus, however, are not burdened by the ignorant superstitions of the fools on Mars. For them, the Necrons and their technology represent a great opportunity. Any rumours of Necron activity are sure to excite the interest of Hereteks and techno-sorcerers, and some would consider a "live" Necron specimen to be an acquisition worth sacrificing an army. This goal continues to prove elusive, though, as Necrons habitually teleport away, disappearing in shimmers of ghastly emerald light when disabled or faced with defeat. Where they go, only their own gods know for sure.



THE PILLARS OF ETERNITY

"For centuries, our tribe has held this sacred command: do not disturb the tombs. And what have you done, boy? Your greed may have doomed us all, and you have certainly doomed yourself. Save your words, I have no pity for those who defy the will of the gods."

—Jorlun, Shaman of the Jth'oru Tribe

At the furthest edge of the Screaming Vortex lies the frozen world known as the Pillars of Eternity, so named for the impossibly tall, ordered columns of ice that dot its surface. Some may assume that these cyclopean structures, clearly beyond the limits of any natural process to form, must be the result of the warping influence of the Vortex. This could not be further from the truth. For beneath the metres of ice, accumulated over countless millennia, barely glimpsed artificial structures exist. On occasion, these pillars give off a sickly green light that can be seen from kilometres away. The people of the Pillars of Eternity know this to be a bad omen, and huddle around their fires with weapons ready. For when the Pillars of Eternity awake, the dead walk.

THE PEOPLES OF ETERNITY

Despite its appearance as a dead world, small tribes dot the frozen surface of the Pillars of Eternity. While many of these humans are marked by their exposure to the warp, the incidence of mutation is lower than on many of the other Gloaming Worlds. Perhaps this helps to explain the high regard with which mutants are held amongst the tribes. Psykers in particular are seen as blessed by the gods, and often rise to positions of authority. No chieftain would ignore the counsel of a shaman, those wise men who guard and pass down the secrets of sorcery.

No one knows how many tribes inhabit this world, and the exact number is ever-changing as groups are wiped out through war, or subsumed into others through conquest or convoluted political manoeuvring. It is clear, however, that each tribe has its own peculiarities. Many of the tribes are nomadic, constantly travelling in search of food, for there is little to be had on this bleak planet. Other tribes lay claim to a spot of frozen ground, willing to lay down their lives to defend it. It is said that one such tribe died out completely from starvation, due to their belief that it was the will of the gods they never abandon their land, even for a moment.

When one tribe encounters another, they often come to blows. The tribes raid each other for food and supplies, and cannibalism is rife. However, in order to survive, the tribes must often band together in temporary alliances. These confederacies may last for hours or centuries, depending on the underlying reasons for the truce and the idiosyncrasies of the tribal leaders—and, of course, the will of the gods as revealed to their spiritual leaders. Within a tribe, chieftains, elder councils, shamans, seers, and a bewildering array of other positions unique to each tribe engage in a variety of duplicities, schemes, double-crosses, and plots. These are not only a means for one to secure or defend his power; conspiracy is viewed as a spiritual act by many tribes, and the literal tentacles sported by the most nefarious of plotters attest to the truth of this. While such obvious mutations are often seen as a sign of untrustworthiness and blessing in equal measure, any



plotter worthy of his gifts savours the additional challenge. This constant subterfuge and politicking is magnified in a tribal alliance, whether it consists of only a pair of tribes, or a dozen. These schemes are compounded by a dizzying array of alliances within alliances between tribes and individuals.

On the rare occasion that travellers from the other worlds come to the Pillars of Eternity, the natives gather in both hostility and eagerness, as they know such expeditions bring with them a bounty of supplies. Of course, in keeping with the duplicitous nature of many of the inhabitants, this hostility may be disguised behind warm greetings and invitations to great feasts and celebrations. Many a landing has never returned, as the armour and weaponry of a travelling warband are often of little defence against poisoned victuals and subtle sorceries. A tribe that is successful in their attack on a group of off-worlders instantly becomes the target of every other tribe in the area and finds itself hard-pressed to defend its plunder. At these times, a complex web of alliances and favours that may date back for generations comes into play.

The tribes all worship of Chaos, and particularly the Changer of the Ways, although with differing names and traditions. Some worship Tchar, the Lord of Magick, others T'chaizen, the Scheme-Father, or Zen'sch, the Great Raven. The J'rkl tribe worshipped Cho'zch in his aspect as the volcano—that is, until his avatar erupted and destroyed their village. Fire is seen as a gift from the gods by all the tribes, and so the J'rkl's neighbours the Llew'lep saw this as a great blessing, converting almost immediately. Differences in worship are often the cause for many conflicts.

None can say when the first humans settled the Pillars of Eternity, but because seniority is viewed as a determinant of status, the tribes constantly argue the point. This has led to ever more outrageous mythical narratives of the various tribes' origins. No fewer than seven tribes claim to have been placed on the surface of their world by Tzeentch himself at the dawn of time. Perhaps the one consistent detail in the teachings of the various shamans and sorcerer-chieftains is the prophecy of the Time of Thawing, or the Great Thaw. The tribes hold that they will be rewarded by the gods for their devotion with a melting of the ice and transformation of the land into a paradise of magic and change, where beneficent daemons walk and the loyal disciples of the God of Change are blessed. Recent events have been interpreted as the first signs of this prophesied time, including melting iceflows, shifting glaciers, quakes, and volcanic eruptions. Perhaps these are indeed signs of Tzeentch's favour, or perhaps something far from it.

A terrible secret is buried beneath the ice, for the Pillars of Eternity is a Necron Tomb World. The Tomb Worlds are the ancient domains of the Necrons, where they have slumbered since the end of the War in Heaven. Now, after lying dormant for millions of years beneath the frozen surface, the Necrons are stirring. As ancient machines resume their purpose, the energies unleashed have begun to cause great geologic upheavals. The first Necrons have already awoken, and are working to raise the rest of their legions. It is impossible to say when the Necrons of the Pillars of Eternity began to rise from their crypts, for time has little meaning within the Screaming Vortex, even this close to the edge.

In fact, the time dilating effects of the warp may be drawing out the Necrons' stirring. Carefully calibrated systems must operate in sync for the Tomb World's denizens to awake properly. The Screaming Vortex disrupts the flow of time and may even cause errors within the Necrons' strange technological systems. While the Necrons are resistant to the corruption of the immaterium, they are not beyond its damaging effects; for while their science may master the laws of physics, their power ends where the warp begins. It is for this reason that the Necrons often equip their Tomb Worlds with massive null-field matrices, strong enough to shield an entire planet from the baleful effects of the warp and the powers of the psyker. The tech-crypts deep beneath the surface of the Pillars of Eternity house just such null-field matrices, but aeons of time have resulted in damage to some systems that is beyond the abilities of the tomb's automated guardians to repair. With the first Necrons arisen, these devices have been repaired, but the energy required to push back the warp on such a massive scale is monumental, and to fully activate the null-fields would deplete the energy needed to revive the Necron legions. Nevertheless, the Necron Lords have seen fit to protect their most crucial facilities with localised null-fields.



THE THAW TEMPLE

From the newly-formed stone on the site of what had once been the village of the J'rklu tribe, the Llew'lep carved a great temple to the God of Change. The shamans and psyk-priests of the Llew'lep saw the eruption of Cho'zch Nokt, the "Mountain of Change," as the first act in the prophesied Great Thaw. To honour the gods and so ensure that the Great Thaw continued, the Llew'lep constructed this great temple from the igneous rock. Great pillars of uneven, porous stone, adorned with multicoloured pennants of imported cloth or human skin, rise many metres into the air. The dark rock is carved with blasphemous glyphs, while statues depict ancient priests and chieftains, as well as the Architect of Fate himself in a number of forms. The positions of these statues change frequently, moved either by the muscle of dozens of men or by sorcerous levitation, depending on the whim of the presiding shaman.

The Thaw Temple has become a pilgrimage sight for several additional tribes, and human sacrifices offered upon its grounds are thought to be especially well-received by the gods. Even off-worlders may be awed by this monument to the glory of Tzeentch. Several others tribes have become quite jealous of the status the temple has granted to the Llew'lep, and even now plot to replace its current stewards.

THE BLACK CATACOMBS

The tribes have many myths and legends surrounding the Black Catacombs that lie buried deep beneath the ice. Scattered fissures and caves lead to extensive tunnels of smooth stone and metal that descend deep into the planet's crust. How far these catacombs go is unknown, for few who descend ever return. Only the desperate, insane, or truly ambitious dare to brave the depths. While the myths speak of immense danger and fierce guardians, they also speak of great treasures and powerful artefacts. The shamans warn that the magicks encountered in the depths are not borne of the gods and are to be avoided. The labyrinthine tunnels are described as truly extensive and entrances have been reportedly found across the globe. The power of the subterranean sleepers is not confined to the depths, but extends up from their crypts and tomb complexes. The tribes shun these areas the shamans call "dead fields," areas where the gods are distant and where magick is weak and ineffectual. The tribes never settle in these areas, which are believed to be cursed ground, and nomads travel many days out of their way to avoid them.

While the tribes may war with and steal from one another, they are united in their praise of the Dark Gods and the fear and loathing they hold for the catacombs and their undead inhabitants. Yet this is not true of all of the human inhabitants. Seldom spoken of by the tribes, the depraved N'cir are a loathsome, troglodytic people who dwell only in the uppermost reaches of ancient, crumbling tunnels, all but forgotten by their builders. It is not clear how this came to be. Some say the N'cir were once a tribe like the others, forced to betray their gods or else face extermination at the hands of the planet's original inhabitants. Others believe that when this tribe first witnessed the awesome miracles of the metallic ones,

they forsook their gods and cast out their psykers. The N'cirr worship the Necrons as gods, offering sacrifices and prayers for guidance. It is said that these traitors construct costumes of scavenged metals, so that their spiritual leaders might take on the guise of their steel gods during ceremonies. It is unclear if the Necrons view these humans as servants, vassals, or vermin, or if they are indeed aware of their presence at all.

Cursed Treasure

In ancient times, the human inhabitants mounted frequent expeditions into the depths in search of arcane wonders. Then, as now, treasure seekers from off-world arrived periodically for this express purpose, and it is possible that some newer tribes are descended from such voidfarers who became stranded. These subterranean expeditions rarely return successful, or at all. The Necrons' guardians have always protected the Black Catacombs, even whilst the Necrons themselves slumbered. These days, the tribes believe that to enter the Black Catacombs is to be cursed, and only death awaits those foolish enough to do so. The tribes have inherited many stories of these terrifying guardians: swarms of metallic insects, blade-handed ghosts that emerge from the very walls, gargantuan metal spiders, and massive serpents that tunnel through ice and rock with equal ease. The stories also tell of such marvels as impossibly large chambers filled with hundreds of thousands of steel skeletons, vast caverns where green lightning arcs between massive banks of arcane devices and crystals, and of shimmering doorways from which none return.

Many of these stories tell of the horrible fates that await those foolish enough to venture down through the caves and crags, into the depths of Eternity's underworld. One such legend speaks of a covetous sorcerer who, against the advice of his fellows, descended into the steel caverns with a small coterie of able warriors. Between the sorcerer's powerful magicks and the warriors' prowess, the party fought their way past the deathly spectres that barred their entrance into the crypts. The tomb robbers eventually located a great chamber filled with urns, chests, and strange sarcophagi. The stone shelves lining the chamber were piled with beautiful treasures—fantastical hololiths, golden jewellery, dazzling green gems, and mysterious cubes of silver. Careful not to disturb the sarcophagi lest they wake the dead, the men plundered the crypt, filling leather sacks to bursting with treasures.

On leaving the chamber, the men became lost, as the corridors seemingly had changed orientations. As the band searched more and more desperately for the way out, the sorcerer's powers of foresight seemingly useless, they heard a sound like an avalanche of steel. Suddenly, wave upon wave of tiny, chittering metal creatures were upon every surface. The warriors had their armour stripped away and the flesh scoured from their bones, but they bought time for the sorcerer to escape with just a handful of the choicest trinkets. In the icy cave that would take him back to the surface, the sorcerer paused to catch his breath. Bursting forth from the ice, a huge many-limbed monstrosity hovered before the sorcerer. Finding his god-granted magicks seemingly gone, the sorcerer was quite literally powerless to stop the monster as it tore into him with its great pincers and whirling blades. As the sorcerer lay near death on the cold cavern floor, his lifeblood freezing as it pooled around him, he watched the monster slowly and methodically pick up each of the treasures in its great claws before disappearing back beneath the ice.

THE ETERNAL LEGIONS

"Their number is legion, their name is death."

—Eldrad Ulthran, Farseer of Craftworld Ulthwé

While the Disciples of Chaos have many enemies, including the Imperium, the Eldar, and myriad other xenos races, these adversaries also represent potential allies to be corrupted, or at the very least, souls to be sacrificed. Not so the Necrons. These soulless automatons offer little satisfaction to the servants of Chaos. They cannot be corrupted, nor mutated, nor even truly killed. Their hollow metal frames offer no sustenance for daemons, for they feel no fear, no emotion, and their souls were already devoured long ago. While a Heretic who understands the Necrons' nature is likely to fear and loathe them in equal measure, he has little to gain by indulging that hatred. Necrons teleport away when disabled in combat, leaving no skulls for Khorne. Their living metal bodies are utterly immune to disease, much to the chagrin of Nurgle's servants. Even Slaanesh's greatest champions could never tempt a Necron, for they possess no base desires, only cold logic. Of all the Chaos Gods, though, it is perhaps Tzeentch, the Changer of Ways, to whom the Necrons prove the greatest foil. When the Necrons gave up their souls in exchange for immortality, they severed the strings of fate. The Necrons have remained in their unchanging state for millions of years, and will remain so for millions more. The Necrons, and all their works, are immune to the warping effects of Chaos, to mutation and corruption. Their nature makes them highly resistant to the powers of the wyrd and sorcerer, while their advanced null-field technology is powerful enough to banish daemons and render the strongest psykers impotent. The intrigues that take place within the courts of Necron royalty are an affront to the Changer of Ways, such "plots" are practically scripted, so lavishly devoted are the Necrons to their ancient codes of conduct.

The Necrons do not truly hate Chaos, as it is doubtful that even the most eccentric Necron Lord is capable of an authentic emotional response. However, their nature compels them to oppose the warp in all its forms, and for all intents and purposes, this adversarial posture may as well be considered an utter loathing. Chaos is the greatest peril for the Imperium, yet mankind paradoxically relies on the warp for interstellar travel, communication, and much more. The Necrons, however, receive no benefit from the warp. They have no psykers to draw upon the Immaterium, while their advanced technology gives them power over the material universe that rivals the abilities of the strongest psykers. Without psykers though, the Necrons are unable to bend the warp to their will; at most they can reinforce the veil and block the effects of the warp. With no other defence against the warp, the Necrons have committed great resources to these advanced null-matrices, gloom prisms, and dusk shields as bulwarks against the Sea of Souls.

Necron attacks often occur with little or no warning. As Necron ships do not travel through the warp, their arrival is not presaged by the immaterial disturbances that announce the coming of Imperial vessels. Often, the first sign of a Necron attack comes with the appearance of a teleported Monolith floating silently in the air. The living metal hulls of these immense pyramidal structures are nearly impenetrable, and advanced self-repair systems are able to recover in moments from damage that would



cripple a battle tank. The devastating weaponry mounted on the Monolith can decimate entire formations of enemy troops. Gauss flux Arcs disintegrate all creatures in the vicinity, while the huge crystal atop the Monolith is in fact the focussing emitter for a devastating Particle Whip. Worse, though, is the Eternity Gate, a green, shining portal in the front of the Monolith. Through the Eternity Gate step Necron forces from an orbiting Tomb Ship, or even a distant Tomb World. The Monolith's durability makes this method of invasion incredibly difficult to counter.

The following pages detail the statistics and game rules for the Necrons and their miraculous technologies. For rules on Necron Warriors, Immortals, Scarabs, and Tomb Stalkers, see pages 368–371 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook.

Canoptek Spyder

Canoptek Spyders are enormous devices, with rounded bodies and numerous claws giving a frightening arachnoid appearance. They are the guardians and custodians of the Necron tombs, hovering through the corridors and maintaining the ancient systems that sustain the Necrons in their deathless slumber. These constructs direct the efforts of subservient mechanisms, including Canoptek Wraiths and Canoptek Scarabs.

When an intrusion into a dormant Necron tomb is detected, Canoptek Spyders both coordinate the defence and attack directly. The fabricator claws which allow the Spyders to make such efficient repairs are more than capable of ripping through armour, flesh, and bone, and they sometimes sport additional ranged weaponry. Once a Tomb World has awoken, Spyders may

accompany their masters on raids and campaigns of conquest. Not only are they deadly combatants, but their Fabricator Arrays make the already resilient Necrons all but indestructible.

Canoptek Spyder (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	25	65	65	25	25	35	45	--	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24 (Hoverer)

Wounds: 65

Armour: Machine Trait (8 All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Furious Assault.

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Fear (1), From Beyond, Hoverer (4), Machine (8), Size (6), Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Fabricator Claws (2d10+12 R; Pen 4; Tearing). Some Spyders may also wield a Twin-linked Particle Beamer (Heavy; 70m; S/-/-; 3d10+8 X; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Blast (4), Concussive (3), Reliable, Twin-linked).

Gear: A Spyder may be outfitted with a Fabricator Array† and a Gloom Prism††.

†**Fabricator Array:** A Fabricator Array grants a +20 bonus to all Tech-Use tests. As a Half Action, a Canoptek Spyder may attempt a **Challenging (+0) Tech-Use Test**. For each Degree of Success, one Necron within 5m automatically passes its next Regeneration Test and removes twice the normal amount of damage.

††**Gloom Prism:** This green crystal, laced with arcane circuitry, creates an anti-psyhic field that severs the connection of daemons and psykers to the warp. Focus Power Tests and Warp Instability Tests within 50m of a Gloom Prism suffer a –30 penalty.

Scarab Hive: Canoptek Spyders contain internal systems which continuously construct Canoptek Scarabs to assist the Spyder in its tasks. As a Free Action, a Canoptek Spyder can release these Scarabs to bolster a depleted Scarab swarm (see page 368 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook) within 20m, removing all Damage it has suffered. Alternatively, the Canoptek Spyder may create a new Scarab Swarm, which counts as having already suffered 20 Damage (this damage may be removed with subsequent uses of this ability). After using this ability, the Spyder must attempt a **Difficult (–10) Toughness Test**. On a Failure, the Spyder has expended a dangerous amount of energy, and suffers 2d10 E Damage with no reduction for Armour or Toughness. It takes time for the Canoptek Spyder's internal facilities to construct new Scarabs in this manner, and so this ability can only be used once every 1d10 rounds.

Processor Link: When Canoptek Spyders operate together, their computerised minds combine to form an aggregate much more powerful than the sum of its parts, allowing them to coordinate their efforts and the efforts of their subservient creatures with startling efficiency. For each additional Canoptek Spyder within 50m, all Canoptek Spyders, Canoptek Wraiths, and Scarabs in that range gain Unnatural Intelligence (1). In addition, all Canoptek Spyders linked in this manner gain the Combat Formation talent, the benefits of which can be utilised by any affected Canoptek Wraiths and Scarabs.

Canoptek Wraith

The inhabitants of the Pillars of Eternity have many tales of the horrific spectres that haunt the subterranean crypts and tunnels. These apparitions are said to emerge silently from the very walls to slay or drag off those who trespass amongst the ancient graves. Canoptek Wraiths guard and maintain Necron tombs, under the direction of the Canoptek Spyders.

Wraiths are frightening constructs, with long, segmented bodies sporting numerous bladed arms and metal tendrils. They glide through the air with disconcerting movements that are somehow both fluid and stilted. Perhaps the most notable feature of a Canoptek Wraith is its hard-wired phase shifter. This highly advanced dimensional destabilisation matrix allows Wraiths to selectively phase parts of their body, and to do so almost instantaneously. This makes Wraiths terrifying foes in battle, as they are able to phase their claws through armour to rend organs and slice bone, or to phase their bodies so that an enemy's blows pass through harmlessly. Despite their size, the Wraiths' abilities allow them to approach foes in silence, or even to emerge from the very walls of a tomb in ambush.

Canoptek Wraith (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	35	55	55	40	20	45	45	--	--

Movement: 6/12/18/36 (Hoverer)

Wounds: 30

Armour: Machine Trait (7 All)

Total TB: 10

Skills: Dodge (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Stealth (Ag) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Crippling Strike, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee).

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons (Claws), Fear (2), From Beyond, Hoverer (6), Machine (7), Multiple Arms (6), Phase, Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Agility (1), Unnatural Strength (7), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Claws (1d10+12 R; Pen 3) and Whip Coils (1d10+10 I; Pen 0; Flexible, Primitive (8), Snare (2)).

Gear: Phase Shifter†.

†**Phase Shifter:** This mechanism grants the Wraith the Phase trait, and acts as a Force Field with a protection rating of 45 that never overloads. Additionally, if a Canoptek Wraith scores three or more Degrees of Success when rolling to hit with a melee attack, the attack cannot be parried, and Damage from the attack is not reduced by the target's armour.

Wraithflight: Canoptek Wraiths may activate their Phase trait as part of a Movement Action, effectively allowing them to pass through solid barriers without slowing their speed.



Deathmark

The tribes of the Pillars tell of a brave chieftain who set forth with his most trusted warriors to find food for his starving people. The warriors discovered a cleft in the ice and, as they delved deep into a cave of shining metal, an eerie green light appeared around the head of one and then another, as glimmering skeletal figures emerged from the very shadows. Only a single warrior survived the ensuing massacre, running blindly across the ice fields, never looking back. Eventually the green glow vanished, yet he found no solace, for his fellow tribesmen shunned him. The people of the Pillars believe that, though the light may fade, those touched by death are forever marked. To this day, one who has been marked for death by the inexorable ones is considered cursed and cast out from his tribe lest he bring ruin upon them all.

Deathmarks are the chillingly perfect assassins of the Necrons. Similar in appearance to an Immortal, Deathmarks are identifiable by the single, sophisticated optic sensor in the centre of their head and the arcane orbs projecting from their spine and shoulder blades. They hunt and kill with the single-mindedness that is only possible for a machine; with no need to eat, drink, or sleep, they can lie in wait for an eternity if need be. What makes Deathmarks the ultimate assassins, however, is their ability to step into a pocket dimension to wait and watch. This is no warcraft, but a technology completely unknown to the younger races. It is doubtful a mortal would survive for long in such a pocket dimension even were he able to gain ingress.



Deathmarks are so named for the shimmering green light with which they mark their chosen targets. Armed with Synaptic Disintegrators, deadly weapons that fry neural tissue with focussed beams of subatomic particles, once they have marked their target few survive for long. The arcane technology that creates this mark is unknown, but it is a powerful beacon that the Deathmarks can view through the thickest stone, the heaviest metal, and even the walls of dimensions. The mark is formed of a mysterious energy known to overload and destroy auspices directed at it. None yet have discovered a way to remove the mark, but a lucky few have survived long enough to thank the gods that it fades and dissipates after a time. At least, so they hope.

Deathmark (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
30	50	45	45	35	40	30	40	15	—

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Armour: Machine Trait (7 All)

Skills: Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Navigate (Surface) (Int), Stealth (Ag) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Crack Shot, Deadeye Shot, Heightened Senses (Sight).

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (7), Size (5), Regeneration (5), Undying, Unnatural Strength (5), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Wounds: 25

Total TB: 9

Weapons: Synaptic Disintegrator (Basic; 120m; S/2/-; 1d10+6 E; Pen 4; Clip —; Reload —; Accurate, Shocking, Special†).

Marked for Death: With a gesture of its skeletal hand, a Deathmark can cast its namesake upon a chosen target. This requires a Half Action and affects one target within 50m, who may attempt a **Hard (-20) Dodge Test** to avoid the mark. Deathmarks suffer no penalties to hit a marked target due to range, darkness, fog, or even complete concealment such as a solid wall (though cover provides AP as usual). In addition, the time required to Aim is halved, rounding down. Therefore, a Half Action taken to Aim provides a +20 bonus To Hit, while a Free Action taken to aim provides a +10 bonus. A Deathmark can only have one marked target at a time. A mark lasts for about one hour, unless dismissed by the caster.

Dimensional Oublette: As a Half Action, a Deathmark can open a portal to a pocket dimension, which appears within 10m. It can be closed with a Free Action. Any creature can pass through an open portal, but the dimension beyond is not intended to support life, and creatures that enter are subject to the effects of suffocation and vacuum as well as a -30 penalty to all tests that rely on sensory perception of their surroundings. While the veil between a Necron pocket dimension and the warp is particularly strong, it still has the same vulnerabilities as the material universe.

† *Psykers who take damage from a Synaptic Disintegrator suffer a -30 to all Focus Power Tests for one round. In addition, any target that takes Damage to the Head location from a Synaptic Disintegrator must pass a **Hard (-20) Toughness Test** or suffer 1d10 permanent Intelligence Damage.*

Destroyer

The tribes of the Pillars have no stories of the Necrons known as Destroyers, for if a Destroyer Cult were truly active on that world, no life would still blight its frozen surface. Most Necron Lords are motivated by a desire for power, authority, or conquest, while Warriors and Immortals live only to serve their masters. Destroyers, however, hold the all-encompassing motivation to eradicate life wherever they may find it. Many Necron nobles long to return to flesh and blood once again. Destroyers have quite the opposite response to their situation, seeking to deny to all others the life that was denied them.

Whether due to a fault in the stasis process, outside intervention, or some inherent defect in their personality engrams, Destroyers are obsessed with a single, overriding goal: the extermination of all life in the galaxy. To this end, Destroyers regularly engage in modifications to their bodies that other Necrons would consider self-mutilation. This most commonly takes the form of replacing arms with weapons, legs with grav platforms, and modifying heads and neural circuitry with advanced targeting systems. The result is a single-minded killing machine able to track its quarry across any terrain and under any conditions, that quarry being any biological creature unfortunate enough to draw the Destroyer's attention.

The insane Destroyers are shunned and feared even by their fellow Necrons. These outcasts gather on the fringes of Tomb Worlds to form Destroyer Cults of the Red Harvest, said to be led by Necron Lords afflicted with the same madness. These so-called Destroyer Lords combine the intellect, cunning, and nigh-invulnerability of a Necron



noble with the deadly purpose and enhanced systems of a Destroyer. If a Destroyer Cult does slumber beneath the ice of the Pillars of Eternity, then woe to the tribes, indeed to the inhabitants of all the gloaming worlds, should it awake.

Destroyer (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
35	45	55	55	35	40	35	40	10	--	

Movement: 6/12/18/36 (Hoverer)

Wounds: 35

Armour: Machine Trait (8 All)

Total TB: 11

Skills: Awareness (Per), Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Crack Shot, Hatred (All), Heightened Senses (Hearing, Sight).

Traits: Auto-stabilised, From Beyond, Hoverer (6), Machine (8), Regeneration (5), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Perception (2), Unnatural Strength (5), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Gauss Cannon (Heavy; 100m; S/4/6; 1d10+12 E; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Gauss†), or Heavy Gauss Cannon (Heavy; 200m; S/—/—; 4d10+10 E; Pen 10; Clip —; Reload —; Gauss†, Proven (4)).

†See page 369 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook for the Gauss Weapon Quality.

Necron Lord

While the bulk of the Necron soldiery exhibit a distinct lack of personality and independent thought, this is far from the case with the Necron Lords that rule over Tomb Worlds, or the Nemesors that lead the Necron armies. The Necron royalty retained their personalities and minds through the process of biotransference, although due to errors in that original process or damage caused by faulty stasis systems, many Necron Lords exhibit strange eccentricities and what could perhaps be considered the Necron equivalent of madness.

Each Necron Lord is a wilful individual with its own personality and goals. Many Lords desire to elevate their status within the Necron hierarchy, perhaps to one day rise to the position of Phaeron and rule over an entire dynasty. Others desire to expand the boundaries of their dynasty's domain through conquest. While some such Lords and Nemesors may exterminate the inhabitants of the worlds they conquer, others are perfectly willing to accept oaths of allegiance and servitude from the lesser races. Still others desire to undo the curse of biotransference, or perhaps to eliminate their age-old enemies, the Eldar. Some Lords are consumed by strange obsessions, such as collecting objects of historical significance or cataloguing every life form in the galaxy.

In battle, Necron Lords are deadly adversaries. Their living metal frames are extraordinarily durable, and feature highly sophisticated self-repair protocols. This raw power is fortified by prodigious skill and unyielding determination. While Necron Lords possess unfettered access to the Tomb World armouries, they almost invariably prefer to wield weapons that highlight their noble status, most commonly the Staff of Light or Warscythe.

Necron Lords are easily marked out through the elaborate decorations with which they are adorned. In some cases these take the form of ancient, mouldering robes, possibly dating from before biotransference. Others are clad in tabards and cloaks of shining, segmented metal. Perhaps this choice of attire gives some insight into the minds of these immortal rulers, differentiating those who long for a return to flesh from those who embrace their undying form.

Necron Lord (Master)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
55	50	55	55	35	50	35	60	35	--	

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 60

Armour: Machine Trait (10 All)

Total TB: 11

Skills: Awareness (Per), Charm (Fel) +10, Command (Fel) +10, Deceive (Fel) +10, Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Parry (WS) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Combat Master, Counter Attack, Crack Shot, Crippling Strike, Lightning Attack, Swift Attack.

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (10), Regeneration (7), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: A Lord carries one of the following weapons: Staff of Light (Ranged: Basic; 25m; S/3/—; 1d10+8 E; Pen 7; Clip —; Reload —) and (Melee: 1d10+12 I; Pen 1; Balanced, Shocking), Warscythe (2d10+28 E; Pen 9; Felling (3), Power Field, Unbalanced), Hyperphase Sword (1d10+28 E; Pen 6; Balanced, Power Field), Voidblade (1d10+22 R; Pen 5; Crippling (5), Felling (2)), or Gauntlet of Fire (Ranged: Pistol; 15m; S/—/—; 1d10+9 E; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Flame, Spray) and (Melee: 1d10+17 E; Pen 5; Flame, Tearing).

Gear: A Necron Lord may carry any number of devices from the **Artefacts of the Tomb** section on page 119.

Destroyer Lord

To create a Destroyer Lord, adapt the Necron Lord profile by removing the Movement values and adding the following:

Talents: Furious Assault, Hatred (All), Heightened Senses (Hearing, Sight).

Traits: Hoverer (6), Unnatural Perception (2), Unnatural Toughness (7).



Lychguard

Some of the tribes' legends are told only rarely, for to speak of certain things is to invite the attention of terrible entities. One such story tells of a metal warrior who came amongst the people of a large village. The creature identified itself only as "an Emissary of the Watcher," and gave the village chieftain two choices: fealty to the Watcher, or destruction. The chieftain, who had hardly achieved his position by bearing his throat to every terrifying monster that threatened his people, refused the offer. The creature proceeded to dispatch the tribe's greatest warriors and resist the psychic assaults of the tribal shaman with not a scratch to show for it. His faith broken, the chieftain collapsed to his knees and swore his tribe to their new master.

Lychguards are tall and broad, larger even than Immortals; as befits their status, Lychguards are marked out with tall crests or headdresses and often wear segmented metal tabards or capes. They serve as both bodyguards and emissaries for Necron nobility and, to better perform these duties, they were permitted to retain the bulk of their intellect and personality. In addition, these peerless warriors were gifted with the highest quality of mechanical bodies, those otherwise reserved for Lords. This nigh-invincible frame combines with the matchless combat skills these dedicated warriors possessed in life, resulting in a warrior with very few equals. Lychguards are well aware of the requirements of their Lords and see it as a duty to deliver only perfect killing strokes; many are willing to weather the blows of their enemies until an opening presents itself, at which time they end the fight with a single swing.



Lychguard (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	45	55	55	35	45	35	50	25	—

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Armour: Machine Trait (9 All)

Skills: Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Parry (WS), Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Blademaster, Combat Master, Crippling Strike, Crushing Blow, Furious Assault, Sure Strike.

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (9), Regeneration (6), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Warscythe (2d10+28 E; Pen 9; Felling (3), Power Field, Unbalanced), or Hyperphase Sword (1d10+28 E; Pen 6; Balanced, Power Field) and Dispersion Shield (1d10+25 I; Pen 0; Defensive, Special†)

†A Dispersion Shield generates a Force Field with a Protection Rating of 65 and an Overload Roll of 01–05. When a Dispersion Shield successfully stops a Ranged Attack, the Lychguard may immediately redirect the shot at an enemy within 25m. This is treated as a Ranged Standard Attack made with a starting base difficulty of **Hard** (–20).

Wounds: 35

Total TB: 11

GM GUIDANCE: KILLING THE UNDEAD

Some GMs may feel that the Regeneration Trait does not adequately represent the terrifying resilience of the Necrons. To reflect the unmatched self-repair abilities of the Necrons, GMs may wish to also use the following optional rule.

OPTIONAL RULE: REANIMATION PROTOCOLS

At the end of every Turn, the GM rolls a **Challenging (+0) Toughness Test** for each incapacitated or "dead" Necron. This test benefits from any rules that grant a bonus to Regeneration Tests, such as a Resurrection Orb or Canoptek Spyder's Fabricator Array. If the Test is passed, the Necron immediately rises to its feet with a number of Wounds remaining equal to the value of its Regeneration Trait. A Necron that fails the test will roll again the following Turn, unless it fails by three or more Degrees of Failure, in which case the Necron's self-repair protocols have been overcome by damage and it teleports away in a blaze of green light. At the GM's discretion, a Necron that is destroyed in a spectacular or thorough fashion, such as being liquefied by a melta gun at point blank range or reduced to scrap by a plasma grenade, may not be able to self-repair during the battle.

Tomb Blade

Tomb Blades are sleek, crescent-shaped attack craft crewed by a single Necron Warrior. Originally developed for void combat, as their exposed pilots have no need for air and do not feel the cold of space, Tomb Blades are also perfectly capable of atmospheric flight. With hyper advanced anti-gravity engines, Tomb Blades are beyond manoeuvrable, defying gravity and inertia as mere suggestions to their movement. Tomb Blades are programmed to evade enemy fire with complex, seemingly random movements, which are, in fact, determined by potent attack-algorithms. While Tomb Blades are crewed by Necron Warriors, in truth they can only be considered pilots in a very limited sense. Necron Warriors lack the independent thought or reflexes to make even poor combat pilots, and rely in large part on the pre-programmed courses and attack patterns of the Tomb Blade. This distinction matters little, though, as the two are hard-linked to operate as a single entity.

Tomb Blade (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
30	45	45	45	35	25	30	40	15	--

Movement: 12/24/36/72 (Flyer)

Wounds: 30

Armour: Machine Trait (9 All)

Total TB: 10

Skills: Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Operate (Aeronautica) (Ag), Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Crack Shot, Hard Target, Hip Shooting.

Traits: Auto-stabilised, From Beyond, Flyer (12), Machine (9), Regeneration (5), Size (6), Undying, Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Twin-linked Tesla Carbine (Basic; 75m; S/-/-; 2d10+3 E; Pen 3; Clip —; Reload —; Shocking, Special, Twin-linked), Twin-Linked Gauss Blaster (Basic; 100m; S/4/-; 2d10 E; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Gauss, Twin-linked), or Particle Beamer (Heavy; 70m; S/-/-; 3d10+8 X; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Blast (4), Concussive (3), Reliable).

Gear: Tomb Blades may be equipped with a Nebuloscope† and a Shadowloom††.

Nebuloscope: Some Tomb Blades are equipped with this advanced multi-dimensional targeter. A Nebuloscope reduces the difficulty of any Ballistic Skill Test by two degrees.

†**Shadowloom:** This small unit absorbs and dissipates photons, creating an unnatural area of darkness for 3m around the Tomb Blade (see page 245 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook for the effects of Darkness in combat). This area of darkness does not cause any penalties for the Tomb Blade. In addition, las weapons inflict half damage against a Tomb Blade with an active Shadowloom.



Triarch Praetorian

While most of the tribes' stories are myth and legend, there are those that have occurred within living memory. The elders of the Gh'on tribe speak of the day only a few scant decades ago when shining skeletons descended from the sky on invisible wings. The visitors entered the village and asked a number of questions about the tribe's customs and myths. With their questions answered, the towering figures conferred silently and departed towards a nearby fissure that would take them into the underworld.

The Triarch Praetorians are the enforcers of the ancient Necrontyr Triarch and custodians of the ancient ways. Unlike other Necrons, Triarch Praetorians are not vassals of a particular Necron Lord or Overlord. As in ancient times, they possess the right to censure nobles who act against the interests or dictates of the Triarch and the Necrontyr codes of honour. Fitted with the same high-quality bodies as Necron royalty, Praetorians are differentiated by their tails and the rib-like Gravity Displacement Packs mounted to their spines. Triarch Praetorians usually carry Rods of Covenant, symbols of the dominion that the ancient Triarch holds over the Necron Dynasties and the galaxy. Much more than symbols, Rods of Covenant are powerful and versatile weapons whose crackling energies may be expended in devastating short-ranged blasts, or released with staggering force upon striking an enemy in melee. Triarch Praetorians are sometimes instead armed with Void Blades and Particle Casters. Void Blades inflict horrendous damage in each strike as the weapon phases between different dimensional states, severing molecular



bonds and causing a chain reaction of atomic disintegration. Like all Necron particle weapons, Particle Casters fire nearly invisible bursts of anti-matter granules that react explosively on contact with matter, utterly annihilating both.

Triarch Praetorian (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
50	50	55	55	35	45	40	50	25	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 40

Armour: Machine Trait (10 All)

Total TB: 11

Skills: Charm (Fel), Deceive (Fel) +10, Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Operate (Aeronautica) (Ag) +10, Parry (WS), Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Crack Shot, Hip Shooting, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee, Ranged).

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (10), Regeneration (6), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Rod of Covenant (Ranged: Basic; 15m; S/-/-; 1d10+12 E; Pen 10; Clip —, Reload —; Proven (5), Reliable) and (Melee: 1d10+28 E; Pen 8; Concussive (1), Power Field), or Void Blade (1d10+22 R; Pen 5; Crippling (5), Felling (2)) and Particle Caster (Pistol; 30m; S/3/-; 2d10+5 X; Pen 4; Clip —; Reload —; Concussive (1), Reliable).

Gear: Gravity Displacement Pack (acts as a Jump Pack but can sustain the Flyer Trait indefinitely).



AETEHK THE WATCHER

As well as the varied scholars of the Vortex can determine, the being known as Aetehk the Watcher is responsible for all of the Necron activity witnessed therein. His undead mechanical legions descend with little or no warning, and thus far the only predictions of Aetehk's attacks have come from the Choir on the Mount on Q'Sal. Why the Choir should be the only seers thus far capable of predicting Aetehk's movements is unknown, but perhaps there is some connection between the Necron and that sorcerous world.

The goal of Aetehk's raids likewise eludes all, however. It is said that Aetehk has shown a willingness to cooperate on occasion with the Disciples of Chaos, behaviour that is quite puzzling to those seers and warp-scholars with knowledge of the Necron race. Aetehk's attacks so far evince no recognisable pattern and Aetehk has shown no interest in conquering territory. While this may be due to the fact that worlds of the Screaming Vortex are too saturated by the warp to be coveted by a Necron ruler, Aetehk must have another goal in mind. Some believe that Aetehk is methodically searching for something, following some precise and logical pattern that so far defies interpretation. Another possibility is that Aetehk is merely gathering supplies in preparation for some future event, perhaps even building his own power base in hopes of overthrowing some higher Necron royal who has yet to make his appearance. Perhaps the most worrisome possibility is that Aetehk is testing the defences of the worlds of the Vortex in preparation for a full scale invasion once his forces asleep under the Pillars of Eternity have fully waked. However, no one has yet identified where Aetehk makes his fastness. Ironically, those who know the most of the Necrons are likely to write off the idea that Aetehk's forces could be based anywhere in the Vortex, knowing as they do that Necrons despise the warp.

Aetehk the Watcher (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
55	55	55	55	40	55	45	65	35	57

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Wounds: 70

Armour: Machine Trait (13 All)

Total TB: 11

Skills: Awareness (Per), Charm (Fel) +10, Command (Fel) +10, Deceive (Fel) +10, Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Parry (WS) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Combat Master, Counter Attack, Crack Shot, Crippling Strike, Lightning Attack, Swift Attack, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee).

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (13) Regeneration (7), Size (5), Sturdy, Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Rod of Night (Basic; 50m; S/3/- E; Pen 0; Clip —; Reload —; Haywire (1), Special), Hyperphase Sword (1d10+28 E; Pen 6; Balanced, Power Field), and Gauntlet of Fire (Ranged: Pistol; 15m; S/-/-; 1d10+9 E; Pen 5; Clip —; Reload —; Flame, Spray) and (Melee: 1d10+17 E; Pen 5; Flame, Tearing).

Gear: Mindshackle Scarabs, Phylactery, Resurrection Orb, Sempiternal Weave (effects included above).

RAUNEK KA, THE HOLDER OF KEYS

Crypteks are the caste responsible for maintaining the Necrons' ancient technologies. While all are masters of science and technology, each Cryptek specialises in a particular realm of techno-sorcery, be it geomancy, chronomancy, or some other esoteric discipline. The one known as Raunek Ka, like many of his order, is fascinated by the prospect of the reversal of biotransference and a return to the time of flesh. Whether this is due to a genuine desire to live again as flesh and blood, or mere scientific curiosity, none can say. While his brethren on distant worlds such as Zantragora obsess over the structure of nerves, tissue, and bone, Raunek Ka instead focuses on what he sees as the defining characteristic of the Necrons' current state: the soul, or rather, lack thereof. Ka believes that it was the loss of their souls, and not the loss of their frail, fleshly bodies, that was the true tragedy of biotransference. And while other Crypteks may be loathe to touch on the matter, Raunek Ka realises full well the intrinsic connection between souls and the warp.

Upon awakening from the Great Sleep, Raunek Ka quickly realised that his Tomb World was now situated in the perfect spot to pursue his research: the border between the warp and real space. However, this satisfaction soon turned to great disappointment as Ka realised that it was utterly infested with warp-spawned horrors.

Raunek Ka has bent all of his resources and advanced technologies to studying the flow of the immaterium, the currents of the Screaming Vortex, and the connection between physical body and transcendent soul. However, his own nature as a soulless machine and member of a race without psykers throws up numerous barriers in this research. Raunek Ka seems to be aware of this and is willing to concede that the inferior races may be able to offer him insights that he can never gain through cold study. He has struck bargains with the denizens of the Vortex for tomes of forbidden lore or first-hand insights into the nature of the warp and the soul. Of course, he is also sure to take captive as many psykers as possible when he goes to raid with his liege, Aetehk the Watcher. As an advisor to Aetehk, Raunek Ka is almost always present during raids and attacks, though his primary focus is on his research. Whether or not Aetehk shares the Cryptek's thoughts on the warp and apotheosis is unclear even to the lesser nobles that make up Aetehk's court. What is clear is that Aetehk listens to the counsel of Raunek Ka in all matters, so long as it does not conflict with his own mysterious goals. It is possible that the continued existence of human life on the Pillars of Eternity is due only to Raunek Ka's wishes, so that he might have a steady supply of test subjects.

In his research, Raunek Ka has gained great insight into the function of the warp and has applied this knowledge to make improvements and subtle alterations to established null-field technology and other anti-psyker equipment. Among his inventions is the Voidstave, a weapon utilising a focussed null-field to disrupt the minds of psykers, and the Aetherscope, a sophisticated scanner designed to detect warp activity.

Like other Crypteks, Raunek Ka stands out from his fellow Necrons due to his long, segmented tail and single, large eye. Whether or not these physical distinctions reflect differences in the physiology of the original Necrontyr race is unknown to even the wisest seers and most learned of xenophiles.

Raunek Ka, The Holder of Keys (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	45	45	55	30	65	45	55	25	27

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 55

Armour: Machine Trait (10 All)

Total TB: 10

Skills: Awareness (Per), Deceive (Fel), Forbidden Lore (Psykers, The Warp), Intimidate (S) +10, Logic (Int) +20, Parry (WS), Tech-Use (Int) +30.

Talents: Luminen Blast, Luminen Shock, Mimic, Resistance (Psychic Powers), Swift Attack.

Traits: From Beyond, Machine (10), Regeneration (7), Size (5), Undying, Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Voidstave (1d10+18 E; Pen 5; Balanced, Power Field, Special†).

Gear: Aetherscope (grants him the Psyniscience Skill, although all tests are one degree more difficult than for a psyker), Canoptek Locusts, Shadow Ankh.

†All psykers within 15m of a Voidstave reduce their effective psy rating by one. Against psykers, the Voidstave gains the Hallucinogenic (2) Trait. Respirators do not confer the usual bonus on the Test to resist.

Raunek Ka's Canoptek Locusts

An example of Raunek Ka's unique handiwork, these small creatures are similar to Canoptek Scarabs, though even smaller. Each Locust contains an arcane energy generator capable of disrupting warp activity in the immediate vicinity, causing psykers to lose control of the power they channel. Raunek Ka is typically accompanied by at least one swarm, which may be concealed somewhere about his person until needed.

Canoptek Locust (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	05	10	20	35	05	20	20	--	--

Movement: 5/10/15/30 (Flyer)

Wounds: 30

Armour: Machine Trait (4 All)

Total TB: 2

Skills: Tech-Use (Int) +30.

Talents: Swift Attack.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, From Beyond, Flyer (5), Machine (4), Size (2), Swarm, Undying.

Weapons: Tiny Claws and Pincers (1d10+1 R; Pen 1d5).

Psychic Plague: Raunek Ka's Canoptek Locusts are little more than psy-disruptors with wings, and their programming leads them to always engage psykers over any other enemies. Psychic powers used within 10m of a Canoptek Locust are treated as one level higher but only for purposes of causing Psychic Phenomena. Fettered powers cause Psychic Phenomena on a roll of doubles, and Unfettered powers automatically cause a roll. Powers used at the Push level cause two rolls on the Psychic Phenomena table, with the normal modifiers.

ARTEFACTS OF THE TOMB

The Necrons have created many wondrous technologies that may seem impossible or supernatural to younger, inferior races. While Necron weapons almost invariably teleport away or self-destruct along with their defeated wielder, it is whispered that this may not be the case with Necron artefacts recovered from the depths of Tomb Worlds. Only the insanely strong or strongly insane would dare plumb the depths of a Necron Tomb in search of mythical treasure, but, then again, in the Screaming Vortex strength and insanity are often one and the same.

Gauntlet of Fire

This fitted gauntlet, wreathed in green flame, is a deadly weapon sometimes used by Necron royalty. A Gauntlet of Fire anchors itself into the Necron wielder's living metal frame, becoming a true extension of his body, and can be activated with a thought. The weapon emits great gouts of emerald flame to immolate targets at a distance. In melee, the flames flare and crackle as the wielder rips into the armour and flesh of his opponents. Due to the complete control the bearer has over this weapon, all WS tests made with a Gauntlet of Fire have their difficulty reduced by one step.

Hyperphase Sword

A potent energy blade, this weapon vibrates between dimensional states and can cut apart armour plating or flesh with equal ease.



Mindshackle Scarabs

Often concealed under the robes and cloaks of Necron Lords, these miniscule automatons can control the minds of mortals by attaching to their brain. Once in position, Mindshackle Scarabs may wait for months or years without revealing their presence, until orders are received from their controller. These interstitial broadcasts may be transmitted from even a distant star system, travelling along the cracks between dimensions.

Mindshackle Scarabs use the profile of Canoptek Locusts (see page 118), except that they lack the Psychic Plague rule and only have 10 Wounds. When a Mindshackle Scarab swarm Damages a character, the target must attempt a **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test**. On a failure, a small number of the Scarabs leave the swarm to burrow into the target's flesh, reaching its brain in 1d5 Rounds. Their Necron controller may activate these embedded creatures in one of two ways—subtly or overtly. Subtle activation may be used to insert an idea or set a course of action that is not completely out of keeping with the character's normal behaviour. This may be resisted with a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test** (the difficulty may be modified based on how "natural" the idea would be for the character). The character only becomes aware of the attempt if he achieves three or more Degrees of Success on this test.

Overt activation forces the victim to obey the spoken or subvocal commands of the controlling Necron without hesitation. Unless resisted with a successful **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test**, the character falls completely under the control of the Necron Lord or Cryptek responsible, and may be forced to attack comrades, surrender important items or information, or even fall on his own weapon. Overt use is extremely taxing on the Scarabs, which "burn out" and become inactive after 1d10 minutes. This frees the victim, but also inflicts 1d10 levels of Fatigue.

Particle Weapons

Another sign of the mastery the Necrons have over the material world, these weapons project incredibly small grains of anti-matter at their targets which, being made of ordinary matter, explode with impressive results. Particle Beamers and Particle Casters are perhaps the most widely known of these weapons, but undoubtedly there are more awaiting emergence from the tombs.

Phylactery

This small cylinder, often worn by Necron nobility, contains a swarm of sophisticated nanoscarabs. The bearer of a phylactery may use it with a Ready Action, releasing the nanoscarabs to swarm over its body, knitting tears in the living metal and bolstering the Necron's own self-repair abilities. For 1d10+5 rounds, the Necron increases its Unnatural Toughness Trait by +4 and automatically passes Toughness Tests for Regeneration. If a Phylactery is ever activated by a non-Necron, that character immediately suffers 2d10 R Damage that is not reduced by armour or Toughness. If the character possesses the Machine (3) Trait or higher, he instead removes 1d10 Damage and 1d10 Corruption Points. A Phylactery is a one-use item.

Resurrection Orb

Mysterious Necron artefacts sometimes seen in the hands of Lords and Overlords, Resurrection Orbs are glowing, green spheres of unknown material that focus energy into the living metal bodies of nearby Necrons, enhancing their self-repair protocols. All Necrons within 100m of a Resurrection Orb (including the bearer) reroll all failed Toughness Tests and treat Toughness Tests for purposes of the Regeneration Trait as **Easy (+20)**.

Rod of Covenant

These signature weapons of the Praetorians can be used to emit powerful blasts at their ranged foes as well as strike with powerful blows in melee combat.



PLAYERS AND NECRON EQUIPMENT

Generally, Necron weapons and gear phase out along with their owners when defeated in battle. Whether due to a malfunction, outside intervention, or some other factor, on very rare occasions something may be left behind. More likely, the Heretics may descend into a Necron Tomb for the very goal of acquiring miraculous items of Necron technology. To find Necron devices available for trade is almost unheard of, but some merchants and traders who deal with the hyper esoteric may be quite unaware of the nature of the peculiar metal cube that has come into their possession. It is recommended that Necron artefacts are obtained through play, and their acquisition may be the very goal of an adventure or Compact. If a GM does wish to make Necron gear available for purchase, however, all Necron items have an Availability of Unique and count as Best Craftsmanship for purposes of Acquisition Tests.

USING NECRON ITEMS

Obtaining a Necron artefact is difficult enough, but using it is something else altogether. Utterly alien minds created these devices, and even the most basic Necron weapon is far beyond the understanding of all but the most blasphemously ingenious Arch-Heretek. Many Necron weapons lack basic components that humans would expect, such as triggers or ammunition. Modifying a Necron weapon for Heretic usage requires a Crafting Test (see page 94 of the **BLACK CRUSADE CORE Rulebook**) with a recommended Difficulty of **Arduous** (-40), taking 1d5 days and requiring 8 Extended Test Successes. Should the character fail a Crafting Test by four or more Degrees, the weapon explodes, dealing 3d10 E damage to all characters within 5m.

The method by which Necron weapons generate the power for their devices is ill-understood. Gauss Blasters and Tesla Carbines draw their power from the very body of the Necron wielding the weapon, so others must use a backpack power supply good for 3d10 shots. The weapon gains the Overheats Quality due to the poorer quality energy, and as it is the ammo supply that overheats and not the weapon itself, damage is applied to the character's Body location. All other weapons (except for Tachyon Arrows) contain an internal power source. Should one of these weapons ever Jam, the internal power supply fails permanently. Necron weapons share a mysterious connection to their masters, though, and should the weapon ever be in the presence of Necrons or a Necron Tomb, the power source could resume its proper functioning while gaining the attention of its rightful owners.

At the GM's discretion, Necron equipment obtained through an Acquisition Test may already be modified for non-Necrons to use.



Rod of Night

A Rod of Night takes the form of a rod of black metal about one metre long, its surface inlaid with silver and gold hieroglyphs, and often topped with an emblem of the Necron dynasties. Much more than a status symbol, a Rod of Night is able to siphon energy from technological devices, pulling it through the air along invisible pathways and storing it to be expended at the desire of the Necron noble wielding the weapon. If an attack from a Rod of Night hits an opponent, the next round the wielder may attempt a **Challenging (+0) Tech-Use Test** to use the Rod in one of the following three ways, rather than attacking normally: As a Tesla Carbine with a 50m range and a Semi-Auto value equal to the Degrees of Success on the Tech-Use Test; to instantly remove Damage equal to the wielder's Toughness Bonus, +1 additional Damage for each Degree of Success; or to replicate the effects of a Canoptek Spyder's Fabricator Array.

Due to its powerful nature, add +2 when rolling for the effect of a Rod of Night's Haywire Quality. When a Prolonged Dead Zone result occurs, the effects are permanent until repaired with a successful **Hard (-30) Tech-Use Test** or use of Luminen Capacitors.



TABLE 3-4: NECRON WEAPONS

Ranged Weapons

Name	Class	Range	RoF	Dam	Pen	Clip	Rld	Special	Wt.	Availability
Gauntlet of Fire (Ranged)	Pistol	15m	S/-/-	1d10+9 E	5	—	—	Flame, Spray	3kg	Unique
Gauss Cannon	Heavy	100m	S/4/6	1d10+12 E	5	—	—	Gauss†	35kg	Near Unique
Heavy Gauss Cannon	Heavy	200m	S/-/-	4d10+10 E	10	—	—	Gauss†, Proven (4)	50kg	Near Unique
Particle Beamer	Heavy	70m	S/-/-	3d10+8 X	5	—	—	Blast (4), Concussive (3), Reliable	25kg	Unique
Particle Caster	Pistol	30m	S/3/-	2d10+5 X	4	—	—	Concussive (1), Reliable	4kg	Unique
Rod of Covenant (Ranged)	Basic	15m	S/-/-	1d10+12 E	10	—	—	Proven (5), Reliable	6kg	Unique
Rod of Night	Basic	50m	S/3/-	—	0	—	—	Haywire (1), Special	7kg	Unique
Staff of Light (Ranged)	Basic	25m	S/4/-	1d10+8 E	7	—	—	—	10kg	Unique
Tachyon Arrow	Basic	300m	S/-/-	10d10 I	20	1	N/A	Concussive (6), Proven (3)	5kg	Unique
Tesla Carbine	Basic	75m	S/-/-	2d10+3 E	3	—	—	Shocking, Special††	20kg	Unique

Melee Weapons

Name	Class	Range	Dam	Pen	Special	Wt	Availability
Dispersion Shield	Melee	—	1d10+25 I	0	Defensive, Special†††	20kg	Unique
Gauntlet of Fire (Melee)	Melee	—	1d10+6 E	5	Flame, Tearing	3kg	Unique
Hyperphase Sword	Melee	—	1d10+17 E	6	Balanced, Power Field	10kg	Unique
Rod of Covenant (Melee)	Melee	—	1d10+17 E	8	Concussive (1), Power Field	6kg	Unique
Staff of Light (Melee)	Melee	—	1d10+2 I	1	Balanced, Shocking	10kg	Unique
Void Blade	Melee	—	1d10+11 R	5	Crippling (5), Felling (2)	15kg	Unique
Warscythe	Melee	—	2d10+17 E	9	Felling (3), Power Field, Unbalanced	12kg	Unique

† See page 369 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook for the Gauss Weapon Quality.

†† When a Tesla Carbine rolls a 9 or 10 for damage, or incapacitates a target, an additional bit is automatically applied to a random target within 15m of the first.

††† A Dispersion Shield generates a Force Field with a Protection Rating of 65 and an Overload Roll of 01–05. When a Dispersion Shield successfully stops a Ranged Attack, the Lychguard may immediately redirect the shot at an enemy within 25m. This is treated as a Ranged Standard Attack made with a starting base difficulty of Hard (–20).

Sempiternal Weave

The Lord's body is threaded with phase-hardened Adamantium as well as other, rarer, metals. This has the effect of increasing his Machine Trait by +1 and granting the Sturdy Trait.

Shadow Ankh

Occasionally seen hanging from the necks of Necron Lords, this heavy amulet, emblazoned with the Ankh of the Triarch, is much more than a sign of status. Shadow Ankhs contain a small, powerful null-field generator, far more sophisticated than those fashioned by the Adeptus Mechanicus. They have two primary effects. First, all Focus Power Tests and Warp Instability Tests made within 30m suffer a –20 penalty. Second, the bearer of the Shadow Ankh is protected by a Force Field with a Field Rating of 50 and Overload value of 01–05, which only protects against psychic powers, attacks from creatures with the Daemonic or Warp Instability traits, and attacks with the Warp Weapon Quality.



Staff of Light

Often wielded by Necron Lords and Crypteks as a symbol of status, these long staves are in fact sophisticated weapons. The haft of a Staff of Light houses a powerful energy generator, and the decorative headpiece acts as a focussing emitter, launching devastating bolts of blinding energy.





Tachyon Arrow

Even by the standards of Necron weaponry, the Tachyon Arrow is astoundingly powerful. Small enough to be mounted on a Necron Lord's wrist, a Tachyon Arrow transmutes a small sliver of inert metal into an energetically unstable projectile capable of collapsing a fortress. The only disadvantage to this astounding item is that its strange ammo supply is exhausted with a single shot, and is far too complex to be reloaded in the midst of combat. Although a weapon, Necron Lords may carry this item in addition to their normal weapon complement.

Tesla Carbine

Sometimes wielded by Necron Immortals, these bulky, intimidating weapons fire arcs of living lightning capable of melting plasteel and charring flesh. The bolts of lightning fired from a Tesla Carbine arc from target to target, almost as if possessed of a mind of their own, and can decimate whole groups of enemies with a single shot.

When a Tesla Carbine rolls a 9 or 10 for damage, or kills or otherwise incapacitates a target, a bolt of electricity arcs to a random target within 15m of the first, scoring an additional hit against that target. This extra hit has the potential to score further hits in the same manner. No roll to hit is needed for these additional attacks, which are applied to the target's Body location.

Tesseract Labyrinth

The appearance of these small cubes of metal belies their incredible effectiveness. Utilising the Necrons' mastery of hyper-geometry and phase technology, Tesseract Labyrinths briefly open a portal to a pocket dimension through which nearby creatures are pulled. As a Full Action, a Tesseract Labyrinth can be used against a target within 2m, who must pass a **Hard (-20) Dodge or Strength Test** or be pulled into an extra-dimensional prison. To ensure stability for all dimensions involved, a Tesseract Labyrinth requires 10 rounds to recharge between uses.

Using a Tesseract Labyrinth requires no test for a Necron trained in its use. Any other character who wishes to use a Tesseract Labyrinth, determine its function, or release its prisoners, must pass a **Very Hard (-30) Logic Test**. If a character also possesses the Tech-Use skill, the test is **Difficult (-10)**. If the test is failed by four or more Degrees of Failure, the character is affected by the Labyrinth as if he were the intended target.

Veil of Darkness

For the Imperium, the Disciples of Chaos, and even the Eldar, teleportation means short ranged travel through the warp. This method would be unthinkable for the Necrons. However, their mastery of dimensional physics, artificial wormholes, and hyper-geometry have given rise to such devices as the Veil of Darkness. Typically used by Harbingers of Despair, the sect of Crypteks that maintains and constructs these arcane devices, Veils are sometimes also gifted to Necron royalty. When activated, the user of a Veil of Darkness vanishes amidst a rippling shroud of energy, only to reappear momentarily in a nearby location.

As a Full Action, A Veil of Darkness can be used to teleport the user and any number of Necrons within 10m of him to another spot within 200m. The Necron using the Veil of Darkness makes an **Ordinary (+10) Tech-Use Test**. On a failure, the teleported Necrons arrive 1d10m away from the intended destination, in a random direction.





THE PESTILENT WORLDS

"Your boasts are empty, little sorcerer. All eventually fall to the Grandfather, no matter how they might scheme or plot."

—Gullivox Arcul, Plaguemeister of the Burrowing Flies

It is easy to believe that the Screaming Vortex exists eternally, for here, time rarely flows in a coherent path. Cyclopean statuary, carved with unfathomable runes that burn the soul, seem to predate the parched worlds of their residence. Ancient chests wrapped in chains, drifting between blind stars, contain scrolls depicting civilisations thriving beneath stars that are frozen clouds that have yet to ignite. There is only debate as to its beginning, and even the most powerful scryers have not foreseen its cessation. For those who follow the Pestilent Lord, though, such matters are of little concern. With their god there is the certainty that all things have an ending and rebirth, and in both there is only Nurgle.

His foetid influences are most readily felt in areas where the Vortex dips too deeply into the Warp and melds into insane foams of madness. No region is exempt, however, for wherever there is life and purpose there is decay and ruin. His chants echo across the stars, the graven tones thumping like the beating of some vast heart that pumps Nurgle's essence across the Vortex. Tendrils of ætheric rot carry the pealing of his heavy, rusted bells, announcing new plagues for the glory of the God of

Decay. Flies cloud the skies, dimming native sunlight beneath the weight of billions of choking insects. He proudly rules his pestilent worlds where there is no life but that which feeds upon decay, and flesh morbidly continues past the point where life should flee screaming from the obscenity it has become.

Nurgle's power waxes and wanes with life and death, always at its height just when life and hope is at its apogee. His greatest plagues emerge in these times, bringing the glories of decay throughout the stars. Loremancers still furtively whisper of the Necrosis, one such event that nearly drowned the Screaming Vortex many millennia ago, when times spoke of the greatest of empires and mightiest of warlords. Appearing from beyond the farthest reaches of the Vortex, it grew in energy as it churned across the Anteciduals. Pestilent waves poured over worlds in noxious showers, leaving only capering Nurglings and sonorous Plaguebearers to tally the dead and the diseases that felled them.

It finally roared through the Frozen Heart and crashed into the centre of this damned realm in a crescendo that reverberated throughout the Vortex. Stars had their burning atmospheres blown into the void, leaving only cold, barren cores of rusted iron. Planets were torn into listless debris, what life that could survive was reduced to base fungi. The befouling wave appeared exhausted, perhaps vented into the space that surrounds the Vortex, and new planets emerged from the receding effects to remake the realm. Yet those left behind, their souls forever touched by Nurgle's mouldering gaze, knew even as they eventually succumbed, that there is no real finality except for their god's inevitable dominion over all.

PYURULTIDE

"Subject 1379-a; this creature exhibits enlarged mandibles, powerful biting reflex, and becomes highly aggressive during vivisection. Would suggest subject pacification before next round of examinations."

—Magos Biologis Devran Saar, now called the Entomancer

Pyurultide hangs in the void like a suppurating wound. A pustulant boil amidst the stars, a blight in space even amongst the varied and terrible wonders of the Screaming Vortex. Clutched forever to Nurgle's rotting breast, Pyurultide stands as a shining example of his paternal love. A festering reminder to all who survey it of the inevitability of decay, the state to which all things must eventually pass.

The planet itself is wreathed in miasmal clouds of toxic vapour. Centuries of biological and chemical warfare by its decayed inhabitants have rendered the atmosphere near-lethal. While still barely breathable, prolonged exposure will spell death as surely as any conventional weapon. Certain areas of the surface are completely lethal. The various gases and corrosive compounds, having settled into pockets of lingering death, consume the unwary in mere moments. Beneath these poisonous clouds, the scars of Pyurultide's legacy of destruction cover its surface. A soup of mud and flesh, pulverised into a near liquid state by artillery bombardments, covers the planet. Rusting hulks of shattered tanks, APCs, and other war machines dot the morass like islands jutting out of a sea of rot. Abandoned earthworks and trench lines riddle the surface, snaking between ruined bunkers and twisted forests of rusting razorwire.

THE SHINING CITIES

Nearer the centre of each continent, larger, more intact buildings begin to appear. The ruins of what once may have been cities emerge from the ever-present smog of pollutants and poison gases. These ruins stand in stark contrast to the rest of the planet's structures, showing a curious degree of artistry in the design. Soaring towers, now broken and blasted, speak of an ancient history that valued form over function. Wide boulevards and elegant plazas suggest that once a race of beings lived here that did not favour destruction but instead aspired to loftier goals of art and perfection. The impact craters and rotting bodies of the dead stand in mute testament that those days are long gone.

THE LIVING SEA

Away from the ruined cities with their enigmatic designs and centuries-old secrets, lurks another curiosity, one of an altogether more loathsome aspect. Pyurultide possesses no oceans. No vast expanses of water separate the continents and no briny depths fill the yawning voids between lands, instead a living mass washes against the various coasts, a sea of insects.

Clouds of foul, chitinous bodies, ceaseless trillions in number, writhe between the land masses. A teeming mass of life so huge as to be incomprehensible to normal minds, it crawls, flutters, and squirms in great tides across the face of the planet. The great swarms are completely inimical to life, comprised of countless species that bite, sting, saw, or spurt, they are capable of killing a human and stripping the flesh from bone in seconds. The various Pox Tribes that dwell on Pyurultide know to stay away from the coasts, but even distance is no guarantee of safety. On occasion, the vast living sea has swept inland, like a tsunami of creeping death. Engulfing any unlucky enough to be caught in its path, these hideous tidal waves of clicking mandibles and buzzing wings wreak unfathomable destruction, before losing cohesion and dissipating, often miles inland. Survivors emerging from their makeshift shelters find nothing but gore-splattered bones and countless billions of insect husks.

Despite the terrible fate that awaits any who approach the living sea, many foolhardy heretics have tried their luck at plumbing its depths. Rumours abound of lost relics, stable Warp gates and other great treasures languishing deep within the insect ocean. Pirate lords and aspiring champions of the Ruinous Powers speak of the fabled Tyrant's Cord and its legendary ties to the planet. Other, wiser minds instead talk of the mythical Daemon Hives, great spawning chambers of nightmarish proportions that constantly squirm with noisome life. Billions of larvae and pupae suckle blindly at the glistening nutrient pools before growing into foul adulthood and emerging into the swarm. But worse, they speak of the terrible hive centres where the colossal Queens nest, endlessly producing eggs to feed the never-ending sea, and guarded by thousands of drones and specially adapted soldier species.

THE POX TRIBES

Despite its caustic atmosphere and deadly oceans, Pyurultide is not devoid of human life. In fact, it supports a population of similar size to most other planets in the Screaming Vortex and, similar to those planets, the Pox Tribes that live here have been forged in the crucible of suffering. Centuries ago, two distinct factions existed on Pyurultide, the ancestors of what would one day become the Pox Tribes and a race of beings now referred to as the Shining Ones. As with a great many mysteries of the Vortex, who or what the Shining Ones were and what became of them is lost, existing now only as myth and rumour. Many believe they were an ancient and now long dead race similar to the Eldar, others that they were simply humans from a different part of the galaxy, drawn into the Vortex by the whim of the Ruinous Powers.

Whatever the truth, it is known that they were a technologically advanced race, possessing arms and equipment similar to that of the hated Imperium. It is widely believed they lived in the great cities at the centre of each continent, many Vortex scholars go so far as to attribute the construction of those cities to them as well. It is also known they warred with the degenerate Pox Tribes that lived further out towards the coasts.

The Pox Tribes long venerated Grandfather Nurgle, seeing his divine hand in the great living seas that plagued their every moment. They saw the elegant Shining Cities as an affront to Nurgle's putrid majesty. Uniting together, the tribes launched

THE TYRANT'S CORD

Game Masters in possession of the **BLACK CRUSADE** GM's **SCREEN** might be familiar with Pyurultide and its denizens, history, and links to the mythic artefact known as the Tyrant's Cord. The events of the **RIVALS FOR GLORY** assume that the heretics did not immediately travel to Pyurultide following their successful acquisition of the Tyrant's Cord.

In addition to its various powers, the Tyrant's Cord is a symbol of profound significance to many of the Pox Tribes on Pyurultide. Once owned by the leaders of the Shining Ones, it bestowed upon them terrible allure and the ability to bend others to their wills, allowing them to dominate a huge portion of the planet. Following the war with the Pox Tribes and their eventual defeat, the Tyrant's Cord vanished, many of the defeated Shining Ones believed that it vanished during the war and led to their eventual downfall. Although they now are no little more than ragged husks in service to a decayed and rotting master, they still remember on some instinctual level that they were not always as they are now.

If a Heretic were to return the Tyrant's Cord to Pyurultide, it could be the pebble that starts an avalanche. Thousands of the Pox Tribes would be drawn to its power. Many may remember their time before the defeat and the destruction of the Shining Cities, shaking off their malaise and returning to the worship of the Dark Prince. Others might remain true to Grandfather Nurgle but wish to follow the bearer of the cord nevertheless. A new chapter of the ongoing war could start, with the Heretics at its fore. Perhaps the Tyrant's Cord might grant its bearer some small measure of control over the Living Seas, able to direct the Tsunamis or parting its unfathomable depths to reveal the nightmare hives at its centre.

If the Heretics are able to use the Tyrant's Cord to unify Pyurultide's populace they stand to gain a huge, if poorly equipped army, one with centuries of experience and an unholy resistance to toxins and biological agents. They might ally with the Entomancer using their new found army to force his compliance or perhaps using their supernatural sway over the Living Seas to grant him unprecedented access to new research. With these weapons and the secrets of the Shining Cities and Nightmare Hives at their disposal the Heretics are taking their first steps towards beginning their own Black Crusade.

a vicious attack on their hated enemies. At first, the Shining Ones technological superiority gave them a significant advantage. Against the simple weapons of the Pox Tribes they saw no real threat. But the Lord of Decay's blessing granted the Pox Tribes a monstrous durability. They were able to withstand the terrible injuries before succumbing, enduring the weapons of the Shining Ones, seemingly without pain or disability. Very soon, the Shining Ones were beginning to retreat. The Pox Tribes seized their fallen weapons and drove them deep inside the cities, exterminating them and bringing the beauteous towers to ruin. The final fate of the Shining Ones is unknown; many believe they were simply wiped out by the victorious Pox Tribes, but one theory suggests they survived by embracing the favour of the Fly Lord.

Following the victory over the Shining Ones, the Pox Tribes began to feud amongst themselves. A second war broke out as the once unified Tribes broke apart, unable to coexist. This second war continues today, centuries later. The death toll is beyond counting, but this is no mindless slaughter like those perpetrated by the minions of the Blood God, nor is this a tactical masterwork of feint and counter with each side jostling for the advantage. The war on Pyurultide is a slow, inexorable march toward oblivion, a meat grinder where a thousand souls a day are cast aside so one army can move ten feet of trench line. The technology of the past is long gone, replaced with the most basic las and solid projectile weapons the Pox Tribes can scrounge together. Sometime past the tribes unleashed deadly viral and chemical weapons against each other in an attempt to gain an advantage. These awful creations, while pleasing to Grandfather Nurgle, have scarred the planet, resulting in the corrosive clouds of death that now shroud the planet.

Constant exposure to the caustic air, a lifetime of struggling stalemate, and Nurgle's own beneficent gifts has wreaked awful changes on the Tribes. Mutations of the most repellent kind are commonplace: suppurating sores, clawed

limbs, twisted backs, and melted flesh adorn every tribesman. Many have become fused with their weapons and equipment, diseased flesh has grown over gas masks and trigger guards with a revolting fecundity. Many tribesmen have swollen to enormous size, becoming tumescent bulges of rotting flesh or towering monsters of claws and oozing muscle.

Amongst the most successful tribes, Blight Drones have begun to appear. The arrival of these foul Daemon Engines is a mystery, with many of the Pox Tribes believing it is a sign of Nurgle's favour, or of hidden Warp-infused manufactorums recently discovered. Whatever the truth, the Blight Drones move across the shattered landscape sowing revulsion and death wherever they pass. These Daemon-machine hybrids are of particular interest to one denizen of Pyurultide, a secretive figure of myth and fabrication known as the Entomancer.

THE MASTER COLLECTOR

The creature now referred to as the Entomancer was once a respected and knowledgeable Magos Biologis of the Adeptus Mechanicus called Devran Saar. Part of an Explorator fleet, he was tasked with cataloguing and classifying new species of flora and fauna during the Angevin Crusade. Absorbed with his work and freed from the petty concerns of morality and emotion, Saar excelled, successfully adding thousands of entries into the datavaults of his fleet. As the crusade pressed on and the Calixis Sector began to take shape, Saar's Explorator fleet grew too bold and voyaged beyond the Imperium's spear tip. They encountered a devastating Warpstorm that ravaged the fleet, ripping vessels asunder and scattering the survivors across the length and breadth of the galaxy. Saar's deteriorating vessel limped back into realspace deep with the Screaming Vortex.

Swiftly caught by reavers, Saar was lucky to escape with his life, piloting one of the few remaining lifeboats away from his stricken ship and down toward the nearest planet, Pyurultide. Finding the planet to be entirely unsuitable for prolonged exposure, Saar sought refuge in a nearby ruined tower of strangely beautiful design. Over the next few days, Saar encountered soldiers of the various Pox Tribes as they fought their war without end. Saar slew several of them and used what little equipment he had left to rebuild them into servitors of a sort. Seeing these horrors, the Pox Tribes learned to avoid Saar's tower, cursing it as haunted or populated by angry Daemons. Fascinated by the tribesmen's mighty endurance and increased pain threshold, he began to study them as a new species.

Saar's life continued in this vein for some time until he encountered a tsunami of the Living Sea. The billions of insects he witnessed filled him with something akin to divine rapture, his mind snapped and he became obsessed with studying the Living Sea, attempting to catalogue every last species within.

Now centuries old, the entity that calls itself "the Entomancer" is quite mad. The entropic atmosphere of Pyurultide and the buckling effects of the Vortex itself have altered Saar's body and implants warping him into an odious conglomeration of man, machine, and insect. His obsessive desires have driven him to make dark pacts with dozens of minor Daemons and petty warlords across the Vortex in order to prolong his life and obtain specimens for study. Those who fail him are soon added to his ever-growing empire of mind-scrubbed automatons or, worse still, bait for the eternally hungry living sea.

SOLDIERS OF THE POX TRIBES

Each of the Pox Tribes on the face of Pyurultide is different. Although united by their devotion to Grandfather Nurgle, each tribe is separated by their unique dedication to a particular, distinct contagion. The Tribes sport many loathsome mutations, and to outsiders, they are nigh-impossible to tell apart, but any scholar looking closer begins to notice certain repeating mutations, or pattern of symptoms.

While all the tribes are abhorrent to look upon, one tribe might be bloated by corpse gas and another swollen by tumescent growths. Certain tribes are be gifted with deadened, rotten flesh that never changes, while others continuously rot and regenerate in perpetuity. The tribes bear these unique gifts like totems, using them to differentiate each other, but they have also taken on religious significance, with tribes holding their exclusive symptoms to be the one true appearance of Nurgle. Believing this, the tribes make war on one another seeking to replace each other's infections with their own. To this end, each tribe has developed powerful and sinister biological weapons, distilled from their own vile excretions.

Although robbed of more advanced technology, the Pox Tribes are still capable of maintaining and constructing simple Las and solid projectile weapons. Occasionally, a tribe discovers a functioning manufactory or military forge from before the war allowing it to field tanks, artillery, and other larger scale weapons of war. The corrosive atmosphere of Pyurultide inevitably ruins these delicate machines, but for a time, a tribe will make great gains in its tireless pursuit of the enemy.

Gifted with great and terrible endurance, a Pox Tribe soldier does not fall in battle easily. Pox Tribe soldiers are killers that many foes underestimate thanks to their incredible resilience. If ever the Pox Tribes could be unified, the Heretic who ruled them would be a force to be reckoned with indeed.

Pox Tribe Soldier of Pyurultide (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	31	39	48	19	29	31	38	20	--

Movement: 1/2/3/6

Wounds: 17

Armour: Ragged bits of flak armour (3 All) **Total TB:** 6

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Command (Fel), Common Lore (Pyurultide), Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (WP), Operate (Surface) (Ag), Parry (WS), Survival (Per) +10.

Talents: Combat Sense, Die Hard, Iron Jaw, Jaded, Resistance (Poison), Weapon Training (Las, Primary, Solid Projectile).

Traits: Unnatural Toughness (2).

Weapons: Battered Autogun (Basic; 100m; S/3/10; 1d10+2 I; Pen: 0; Clip 30; Rld Full; Noxious Discharge; Unreliable), or Corroded Lasgun (Basic; 100m; S/3/-; 1d10+3 E; Pen: 0; Clip 60; Rld Full; Ammo Glutton; Recharge), Rusted Bayonet (Melee; 1d5+3 R; Pen: 0; Toxic [1]), Blight Grenade (Thrown; 9m; S/-/-; 2d10 E; Pen: 0; Clip 1; Rld -; Toxic [2]; Blast [6]).

Gear: Rotted clothing, filthy and decayed trinkets, one reload for primary weapon, 3 Blight Grenades.

PLAGUE OGRYN OF PYURULTIDE

The terrible conditions on Pyurultide have led to almost every inhabitant of the world sporting some manner of mutation. For most this is simply a sign of Father Nurgle's affection, a boon to be worn as a mark of pride. However, for others the Lord of Decay's gifts have changed their bodies so much they can no longer be considered men at all. Their bodies swollen to massive proportions, they tower over the other inhabitants of Pyurultide. Many sport terrible growths of cancerous flesh or huge swathes of dead, necrotised flesh that is impervious to pain. Others erupt into mountains of meat, festooned in tusks, filthy claws, and twisted, gnarled horns. Often, in a perverse discharge of life, these creatures will sprout additional limbs. Some are little more than atrophied stumps, withered and desiccated beyond use, more often though they are perfectly functional. Comprising glistening, raw flesh, they terminate in vicious claws or oozing, dripping orifices.

Although once human, these creatures have now become so common they are virtually a new race. As they bear a distant resemblance to the Ogryn species of abhuman, the Entomancer has designated them Plague Ogryns of Pyurultide, although the Pox Tribes call them simply Hulks or Brutes. Whether these abominations share a common ancestry with true Ogryns is impossible to determine, but has led to the Entomancer to begin research into Pyurultide's history before its emergence into the Vortex.

Plague Ogryn of Pyurultide (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	15	65	55	30	15	20	40	05	—

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Armour: Diseased Flesh (2 All)

Skills: Intimidate (S) +10, Survival (Per).

Talents: Crushing Blow, Die Hard, Fearless, Iron Jaw, Resistance (Poison), Swift Attack, True Grit.

Traits: Brutal Charge (3), Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (2), Multiple Arms (3), Regeneration (5), Size (6), Sturdy, Toxic (3), Unnatural Strength (4), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Claws and Tusks (Melee; 1d10+10 R; Pen 0; Toxic [3]), Massive Club (Melee; 2d10+10 I; Pen 0; Unbalanced).

Gear: Tattered rags.

Wounds: 32

Total TB: 10

BLIGHT DRONE

Nightmarish flying creatures of hideous proportions and terrible intent, these horrific entities have begun to appear on Pyurultide. Poorly understood by the inhabitants of the world, the Pox Tribesmen believe them to be little more than an awful new form of creature spawned in the depths of the great Living Seas. But the truth is far more horrific.

Blight Drones are Daemon Engines, fuelled by the esoteric energies of the Warp. Appearing as an eerie jumble of insect, flying machine, and Daemon, a Blight Drone buzzes through the polluted skies of Pyurultide on rusted and decayed rotor blades. Often accompanied by vast swarms of "mundane" creatures drawn from the Living Sea, Blight Drones spread fear and death wherever they are found. These entities are known to attack any and all Pox Tribesmen they encounter. Tales of them disgorging awful, corrosive acids, and other, less identifiable fluids onto lone targets, and then settling over the remains to draw them up inside their protective body cases are rampant across the planet.

The Entomancer has become particularly fascinated by the Blight Drones and is eagerly seeking to determine where they have come from and, more importantly, why they have appeared.

Blight Drone (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	34	34	61	52	16	43	52	07	—

Movement: 8/16/24/48

Armour: Machine (11 All)

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10.

Talents: Blind Fighting, Two Weapon Wielder (Ballistic).

Traits: Auto-Stabilised, Daemon Engine (5), Explosion of Pus†, Fear (3), Flyer (8), Machine (11), Nurgle's Blessing††, Size (7), Toxic (4), Unnatural Toughness (5).

Weapons: Mawcannon Vomit (Heavy; 20m; S/-/-; 1d10+8 E; Pen: 5; Clip: —; Rld: —; Toxic [5]; Spray), Mawcannon Phlegm (Heavy; 200m; S/-/-; 3d10+8 E; Pen: 8; Clip: —; Rld: —; Blast [5], Toxic [3]), Reaper Autocannon (Heavy; 300m; S/4/-; 3d10+8 I; Pen: 6; Clip: —; Rld: —; Reliable; Twin-Linked).

†**Explosion of Pus:** When a Blight Drone is destroyed, it explodes in a shower of rancid filth and pus. In addition to any other effects generated by **Table 3-9: Daemon Engine Critical Hit Chart** (see page 96), any characters within 7 metres of the Blight Drone when it is destroyed must make a **Hard (-20) Agility Test** or suffer 3d10+8 Energy Damage with the Corrosive, Irradiated (2), and Toxic (2) Qualities.

††**Nurgle's Blessing:** A Blight Drone is a Daemon Engine of Nurgle, and is always Aligned to Nurgle.

DISSECTION RECORD 83162-GANNA,

THIRD ATTEMPT (SPECIMEN 3724-G, MID-SEED DRONE)

THIRD ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE SOURCE OF SPECIMEN'S ABNORMAL TOXICITY BEING...
REMOVAL OF CARCINOMATOUS PROLIFERATING AT 9% INCREASE RATE OVER SECOND ATTEMPT.
BLOODING AT THIS MUST REMEMBER RELATIVITY OF SPECIMEN'S BILE GLAND.

BILE GLAND NOW VISIBLE. MUST REMEMBER FAILURE OF SECOND ATTEMPT.
EXPOSURE TO AIR CORRODED ALL SURFACES IN 7.77 METRE RADIUS.
ATTEMPTING TO REMOVE GLAND NOW.

PUNCTURED POUCH AGAIN. ALL SURFACES IN 7.77 METRE RADIUS ONCE AGAIN
CORRODED. WILL DETONATE. AGAIN UNARMED DESPITE APPARENT TOXICITY.
WILL RUN AUTOMATICAL PROTOCOLS.

MUST REMEMBER. FAILURE IS PROGRESS. PERSISTENCE IS SUCCESS. FOURTH
ATTEMPT TO CORRODE UPON ACQUISITION OF SPECIMEN.

-THE ENTOMANCER

THE ENTOMANCER

Devran Saar has ever been obsessed with life in all its forms. From microbiological organisms and bacteria to massive reptilian and mammalian herd creatures and everything between them. His fascination with life, coupled with his Adeptus Mechanicus background, swiftly led to his ascension to Magos Biologis and his appointment within the Explorator Fleets. It was this self-same fascination that has led to his current predicament.

Trapped on an alien world, cut off from the Imperium, and surrounded on all sides by disease-ridden warmongers and undying soldiers fixated with poisoning the world, his mind snapped and his fascination became obsession. Now consumed with studying the countless denizens of the Living Seas, he conducts a campaign of subjugation against the nearby Pox Tribes, forcing them into acquiring species for him to study and transforming them into unthinking automata when they fail.

Long past the point of sanity or redemption, the Entomancer now resembles an upright insect himself. His once precious Mechanicus Implants have distorted into prehensile sensory organs, twitching mandibles, multifaceted lenses, and grotesque wings. His movements, once deliberate and focused, have become the nervous, blinking tics of a hunting insect. Still his mind strives to complete his work and every day leads to a new catalogue entry in his ever-expanding library, even as what remains of his humanity slips away into an inevitable series of impulses and nervous tics.

The Entomancer (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
48	52	47	56	27	62	59	28	22	25

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: Implants (5 All)

Skills: Awareness (Per), Command (Fel), Common Lore (Int) (Adeptus Mechanicus, Tech) +20, Common Lore (Screaming Vortex), Deceive (Fel), Forbidden Lore (Int) (Adeptus Mechanicus, Mutants) +20, Forbidden Lore (Int) (Daemonology, The Warp, Xenos), Inquiry (Fel) +10, Interrogation (WP) +20, Linguistics (Int), Logic (Int) +20, Medicae (Int) +20, Operate (Surface) (Ag), Parry (WS) +10, Scholastic Lore (Int) (Beasts, Legend, Pyurultide Life Forms) +20, Scholastic Lore (Int) (Chymistry, Occult), Scrutiny (Per), Security (Int) +10, Survival (Per) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +20, Trade (Explorator) +20.

Wounds: 29

Total TB: 7

Talents: Ambidextrous, Baleful Dirge, Cold Hearted, Die Hard, Disturbing Voice, Ferric Summons, Independent Targeting, Iron Jaw, Jaded, Luminen Blast, Luminen Shock, Master Chirurgion, Mechadendrite Use (Utility, Weapon), Prosanguine, Technical Knock, Two Weapon Wielder (Ballistic), Weapon Tech, Weapon Training (Bolt, Las, Plasma, Primary, Power, Shock).

Traits: Mechanicus Implants, Master of the Machine Hive†, Unnatural Toughness (2).

†**Master of the Machine Hive:** As a Full Action, the Entomancer can fall forth swarms of seething technosites that drain the energy from machines and corrode all technology. For the next 1d5 Rounds, the Ranged weapons of each enemy within 49 metres Jam on Ballistic Skill Test result that contains a 7 (in addition to the usual values for which they would Jam). Weapons that Jam this way become corroded, and cannot be used until repaired with a **Hard (-20) Tech-Use Test** that requires 1d5 Rounds to complete.

Weapons: Ballistic Mechadendrite (Bolt) (Pistol; 15m; S/2/-; 1d10+4 X; Pen: 4; Clip: 4; Rld: Full; Tearing), Plasma Pistol (Pistol; 40m; S/2/-; 1d10+7 E; Pen: 8; Clip: 10; Rld: 3 Full; Maximal; Overheats), Venomous Power Axe (Melee; 1d10+11 E; Pen: 6; Power Field; Unbalanced; Toxic [7]).

Gear: Ballistic Mechadendrite (Bolt), Bionic Respiratory System, Black Blood, Blade Tines, Good Quality Cybernetic Eyes, Ferric Lure Implants, Luminen Capacitor, Manipulator Mechadendrite, Medicae Mechadendrite, Optical Mechadendrite, Utility Mechadendrite.

GUELPH

"Though this planet gave us new life, our true home is kept from us."

—Adrius Meinloka, The Pit-Lord of Guelph

Thrown across the Antecidual entries to the Vortex and past the haunting grounds of the Kasserkratch lies the orb of poison known as Guelph. Wreathed in clouds of corrosive, toxic gas, Guelph is known for two things: its massive network of forges and laboratories, and the extremely callous nature of its people. Life on the planet's surface is one of survival for natives and non-natives alike. There are very few food resources and the general population would just as soon kill another person than have to deal with him. It was not always this way, however.

BROKEN APART

Guelph and Ghibelline once shared a beautiful existence among the Halo Stars. Sharing an unusual dual orbit, the twin planets were almost exact mirror images of each other and were ruled by the Meinloka Clan. In order to keep all matters of rule uniform, Lord and Lady Meinloka separated themselves and their family so that in the event of difficulty, the family line would always be present in some fashion on each planet. Both planets flourished under their rule until the cosmic birth of Slaanesh tore it apart.

Unlike its twin, Ghibelline, the birth of the Screaming Vortex did not leave Guelph a beautiful landscape. Thrown further into the swirling energies of the Warp, Guelph lost more of its share of the solar energy as it travelled further into the storm and became a cold, dark planet, with much of its surface becoming uninhabitable. Snaring additional planetary mass from other systems as it flew by, Guelph's system grew into an amalgam of roughly seventeen different planetary bodies. As a result, the planet's stability was also more fragile with the infusion of so many random terrestrial bodies pulling on it as well as the massive amounts of Warp energy flowing through and around it. Massive earthquakes rocked many of the hive cities that survived the initial transition, leaving little more than piles of rubble in their wake. Volcanic activity churned up enough ash to blanket the secondary capital of Kimigstad, encasing it for eternity. The few histories that remain of that time indicate that within a matter of a few years, Folgrat was the only settlement left capable of sustaining life, and even Folgrat had its woes.

Soon after Kimigstad was entombed, the ground beneath Folgrat swallowed it up in a massive sinkhole, deep enough to prevent ready access to the surface but still able to see the night sky. Though little damage was done to the city, they were cut off from the already meagre food supplies they had. Desperate to save what remained of his people, Lord Meinloka rounded all of them up and, using the last measures of their once-proud fleet, they left the planet in search of their twin, hoping beyond hope that Ghibelline had been spared.

GHIBELLINE'S REBUKE

The journey back to Ghibelline was not without peril. Limited supplies meant that food and medicine were rationed through the entire trip. During this time, Lord Meinloka came to rely on his advisors heavily, one being Marchesa Ammarx,

his personal aide and confidant. She provided the voice of Meinloka when the Lord was otherwise occupied and helped ease the pain of austere living conditions for the majority of the remaining population. She was also the single most desirable woman in the fleet, and rarely left Lord Meinloka's side unless ordered. Fifteen months in transit brought the Guelphan fleet into the Ghibelline system, finding their sister world lush, green, and largely unscathed. Lord and Lady hailed each other for the first time in almost a decade and the populations of both worlds rejoiced as they were reunited.

Upon their arrival in orbit, Lord Meinloka took the first shuttle with his heirs to visit the planet, leaving Marchesa in charge of the fleet. The Meinloka Clan gathered, with the Ghibelline side resplendent in silks and brocade and the Guelphan side in haggard cloth and piecemeal armour. For hours they shared their stories and mourned their losses, ecstatic to once again be a unified family. They vowed to begin discussing plans to reintegrate the two peoples at once—but all that changed when Marchesa arrived on the planet.

Though no one has ever discovered why, no sooner had Marchesa Ammarx joined the discussion than Lady Meinloka reversed her decision and ordered that the Guelph leave Ghibelline immediately. Lord Meinloka begged and pleaded, but she turned her back on him and left the throne room without a further word. Stunned and furious, the Guelph king bade his entourage follow and stormed back to his dropship. Meinloka advised his people that his Lady had rebuked them all and that they were now cast out. He ordered all ships to prepare for departure with one stop—a refuelling station orbiting the planet. The Guelph fleet bore down on the station and in short order, raided it for supplies and then scuttled it, sending flaming pieces of it down to the surface with a final message: "We will return for our home." It was the final time any of the Guelph set foot on the planet in peace.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF WARPSMITHS

Transition to the Warp brought haunting dreams to the travellers. Surviving diaries from the crew and civilian population indicate that the dreams were persistent even into waking life. People wandered the ship in the throes of nightmares, though none showed any signs of physical malady. Those affected were quarantined early, but it still spread until all people not affiliated with the military or the fleet were in medical lockdown. Unsure of how to remedy the situation, Lord Meinloka pushed forward with all haste, hoping that there might be some measure of hope back on Guelph.

As the fleet burst back into realspace in the Guelph system, they noticed that much was different. New satellites and orbital stations orbited Guelph and her moons, and hailing calls flooded the bridge. Meinloka was stunned. Guelph had been taken in his absence. He and his people had no home. Answering the hails, he demanded to know who had taken his planet and ordered them to prepare for war if they did not abandon the system. A single face replied to Lord Meinloka's demands, one bearing the armour of a Space Marine. He called himself Jal Khalid and offered aid from his troops, though the Guelph would need to remain in orbit until the nature of the illness was determined. Knowing he would not be able to fight effectively with the entire population of his planet in harm's way, Meinloka acquiesced.

The Brotherhood of Warpsmiths, as the Space Marines called themselves, were sure they knew the root cause of the illness, for it had affected them too, albeit differently. Jal Khalid never divulged how it had affected his men, but their certainty was what Meinloka needed to convince to his people. There was hope of a new life and a future on Guelph for the first time since the birth of the Vortex. Though the initial trials were unsuccessful, the Brotherhood and Meinloka's remaining people worked diligently for months and, at the end of the seventh month, discovered a treatment distilled from the blood of both groups. Meinloka inoculated himself first and then began to administer it to all those who remained in the thrall of the illness. One by one, the Guelph began to awaken and regain awareness. Meinloka pledged Jal Khalid and the Brotherhood their loyalty. In response, Jal made a bold request: the ruins of Kimigstad, and one half of the other planets in the system, to use as research and construction bases. Meinloka readily agreed, adding that they would aid in the production of the Warpsmiths' forges as long as they would help prepare him for the final war with Ghibelline. Jal Khalid was also eager to enter the pact, stating that they would need a "testing ground for their creations." Once the people of Guelph were cured, Meinloka and Khalid finally met face to face.

Forges sprouted up like weeds throughout the system. Excavation sites dotted the surface of every moon or planet Jal Khalid and his troops touched. Soon, these massive excavations became such a commonplace sight within the Guelph system that Meinloka became known as the Pit-Lord of Guelph. Between the highly motivated population of Guelph and the advanced technology and sorcery of the Brotherhood, plans for the conquest of Ghibelline took form and moved forward at a rapid pace. Within a handful of months, Kimigstad had been uncovered and rebuilt as the main forge for the Brotherhood. Within a year, the Guelph Fleet had been upgraded and enlarged. At the end of five years, the Brotherhood had an arsenal of devastating Daemon Engines, as well as an elite guard of Obliterators, that they were willing to lend to the Pit-Lord. The time to reignite the fires of war had come.

Obliterator (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	54	50	55	23	36	39	48	10	14

Move: 3/6/9/18

Armour: Fleshmetal (14 All)

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Archeotech, Daemonology, Traitor Legions, Warp) (Int), Intimidate (S), Tech Use (Int) +20.

Talents: Ambidextrous, Bolter Drill, Combat Sense, Deadeye Shot, Heavy Weapon Training, Independent Targeting, Legion Weapon Training, Storm of Iron, Target Selection, Technical Knock, Two-Weapon Wielder (Ballistic).

Traits: Auto-stabilized, Daemonic (2), Fear (2), From Beyond, Living Armoury, Size (5), Sturdy, Unnatural Strength (5), Unnatural Toughness (5), Violent Metamorphosis†.

Weapons: See Violent Metamorphosis.

Wounds: 44

Total TB: 12



†**Violent Metamorphosis:** Obliterators can form a number of weapons from the raw mass of their Warp-infused bodies. Obliterators manifest two weapons of varying degrees of lethality at any given time, chosen from the list below. As a Half Action, an Obliterator can reform one of his current weapons into any other weapon from the list. The GM can also feel free to have him adopt other weapons as appropriate. Standard Obliterator options are as follows:

- Reaper Autocannon (Heavy; 300; S/4/-; 3d10+8 I; Pen 6; Clip:—; Reliable, Twin-Linked).
- Multi-melta (Heavy; 60m; S/-/-; 2d10+16 E; Pen 12; Clip:—; Blast [1], Melta).
- Plasma Cannon (Heavy; 150m; S/-/-; 2d10+12 E; Pen 10; Clip:—; Blast [3], Maximal, Overheats).
- Twin-Linked Legion Plasma Gun (Basic; 100m; S/2/-; 1d10+12 E; Pen 10; Maximal, Overheats, Twin-Linked).
- Twin-Linked Legion Meltagun (Basic; 20m; S/-/-; 2d10+13 E; Pen 12; Clip:—; Melta, Twin-Linked).
- Legion Combi-Bolter (Basic; 80m; S/3/-; 1d10+9 X; Pen 4; Clip:—; Tearing, Twin-Linked).
- Power Fist (Legion) (Melee; 2d10+10 E; Pen 9; Power Field, Unwieldy).

Living Armoury: Obliterators consume ammunition and fuel for sustenance, and are thusly capable of generating massive amounts of firepower without a need to reload. The Obliterator's weapons never need to be reloaded.

THE WAR OF IDEALS AND THE TRIALS AT GNOSI

The Pit-Lord called for war and was met with the thunderous approval of his people. They had been slighted and cast away from family and home without reason or provocation. Fully half of the capable population volunteered to fight for their honour and boarded the ships bound for their sister planet. Though there are many accounts of the individual battles, there is very little dispute about how the war began. The Pit-Lord and the Brotherhood descended on the outlying planets of the Ghibelline system with the fury of an entire race behind them. As they subjugated these planets and moons, they rendered them wholly subservient to the Pit-Lord's tactical needs, becoming the supply chain for the effort. The campaign made haste to Ghibelline proper, for the Pit-Lord knew that only by removing his former wife, and those family members loyal to her, would he be able to lay claim to his rightful home.

Upon reaching the capital planet, the rules changed. Ghibelline had come into possession of strange new weapons and engines of war; weapons that overloaded the senses, destroyed physical matter with sound, and turned the Guelph soldiers into puppets of

the Ghibellines began to shatter the Guelph lines. Though the Guelph arsenal was more powerful, it required human elements, which were capable of being turned against their own. The Pit-Lord, sensing that the tide could turn, led an assault on the palace to remove his disloyal family from power. His initial attack breached the palace walls, only to find that Lady Meinloka lay in wait for him. Many say that he was betrayed from within, but the Ghibellines claim that it was superior force of arms that allowed them to capture the Pit-Lord and remove him to the remote island nation of Gnosi.

Gnosi was the Ghibelline's most secret research facility. For a month they tortured the Pit-Lord, hoping to wear him down and force him to surrender. They killed his retinue one by one in front of him and subjected him to many of their new weapons, but he never gave them what they wanted. For the month he was in Gnosi, the war continued to grind on, with Ghibelline starting to gain the upper hand. In her final visit to her former husband, Empress Meinloka had the Pit-Lord watch the destruction of the Brotherhood's most devastating creations and the troops that supported him, taunting him with his inability to aid them. But the Pit-Lord was not watching. Recovered memoirs of the jailors of Gnosi reveal that the prisoner seemed to be in silent prayer,

muttering to himself and conversing with some unseen force. Perhaps he had gone mad in those moments, but the Pit-Lord slowly raised his head and bellowed "I ACCEPT!" at the top of his lungs. In that moment, Ghibelline's fortunes changed.

In the blink of an eye, the warriors of Guelph began to change. Their senses dulled, they broke free of the bewitching scents and sounds of the Ghibelline troops. Their bodies became resilient to the blows being landed upon them. Daemon Engines that had been crushed were infused with new energy and reformed into hideous, pox-laden monstrosities.

The Ghibellines, wholly unprepared to deal with enemies that couldn't feel pain and war machines that spat poison and plague across their ranks, began to fall back. In Gnosi, the Pit-Lord grew in size and stature, breaking his bindings and becoming an ogre of a man. Smashing his captors aside, he set about freeing the few of his troops that remained. They too were invigorated, and began to make their way toward the surface, killing everyone in their path.





The accounts of that escape are largely untold, seeing as the Pit-Lord was the only one to survive. Though his people perished, the city-state of Gnosi was reduced to a smoking ruin when he left. The Brotherhood located him and ushered him to safety. Upon his return to the fleet, Jal Khalid informed him that the Brotherhood's craft had been outfitted with a full load of virus bombs. The Pit-Lord smiled and fired only once, upon the isle of Gnosi, before ordering the withdrawal of his troops. "We are patient...we are patient," were the only words he uttered as he walked from the command bridge. The War of Ideals was over.

THE REALM OF THE PIT-LORD

With two massive hive cities and dozens of research facilities scattered around the planet's surface, Guelph is little more than the waste fields for the massive military industrial complex at the heart of the Pit-Lord's fiefdom. Toxic effluents flow across the surface of the planet, and the haze of poisonous gas is ever-present and smothering.

Guelph's two main hives remain much as they were at the time of the War of Ideals centuries ago. Though they have grown in size and stature, both have stayed true to their purpose. Folgrat is the seat of power and the main starport for the planet. The Pit-Lord's fortress, known as the Steel Citadel, sits in the dead centre, majestic and intimidating. Here, Adrius Meinloka still rules the Guelphans just as he has for as long as anyone can remember. He has outlived all of Jal Khalid's original host and been the sole human contact with

the Brotherhood throughout Guelph's current history. It is one of the largest hives in the Vortex, surrounded by toxic salt flats that glow and occasionally catch fire as waste products mix in heady chemical reactions. Most of the food consumed by the Guelphans comes from Folgrat, either as imports from other planets in the system or as vat-grown products known for their nutritional value but certainly not their flavour.

Kimigstad is run exclusively by the Brotherhood of Warpsmiths and, other than the Pit-Lord and selected members of his staff, none but the Warpsmiths and their creations enter or leave. Massive engines of destruction stand guard over the once ash-buried cityscape, and the forges burn night and day. The Brotherhood take customers from all over the Screaming Vortex, but keep their greatest works held out for their own use. Their modifications to other known designs have been found on battlefields throughout and are widely sought out. Though many would-be warlords would love to get their hands on the Brotherhood's engines, very few have the ability to pay for them.

Cold-hearted and callous, the people of Guelph are as unforgiving as the planet's surface. Unsympathetic eyes greet you from every angle in what is referred to by traders in the Vortex as the Guelphan Stare: eyes that pierce you and seem to swallow any ounce of joy from you alongside unchanging facial expressions that emanate bitterness and malice. Most who are not known to Guelph receive this cold welcome from most of the population, but it is not only unnerving looks you get from the Guelphans. Many who journey there seeking weapons and armour from one of the best forge planets in the Screaming Vortex have discovered first-hand that returning home alive is not always a certainty. Blood and death are frequent visitors to the streets of Folgrat, for often nothing more than a small slight. Needless to say, regular travellers to Guelph are few, and usually of an extremely hardy breed.

Guelph Citizen (Troop)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
37	29	39	43	29	35	32	37	35	--

Move: 2/4/6/12

Armour: Rotting mesh (4 All)

Skills: Awareness (Per), Common Lore (Guelph) (Int), Dodge (Ag), Intimidate (S), Survival (Per).

Talents: Betrayer, Cold-Hearted, Die Hard, Jaded, Nerves of Steel, Pity the Weak, Resistance (Poison, Disease, Shock), Shock Weapon Training, Solid Projectile Weapon Training.

Traits: Fear (1), Regeneration (1), Unnatural Toughness (2).

Weapons: Hand Cannon (Pistol; 35m; 1d10+4 1; Pen 2; S/-/-; Clip 5; Rld 2 Full), Electrified Bludgeon (Melee; 1d10+6; Pen 0; Shocking).

Gear: Two clips of ammo.

Wounds: 14

Total TB: 6

DAEMON ENGINES

Daemon Engines are a bizarre and frightening hybrid of mechanical ingenuity and arcane impossibility. Incorporating the pulsating rage of a Daemon requires strong bindings, powerful enticement or coercion, and blood sacrifice. Each construct acts as both prison and new body for the Daemon, bound into service by its new master. The Pit Lord's Warpsmiths on Guelph specialise in altering existing engine constructs to better serve the Great Corruptor. Foul science mixed with Warp-tainted energies change already terrifying war machines into sentient killing beasts. They are, however, far from the only ones who manufacture such creations. Regardless of which planet or faction makes them, all Daemon Engines trade the extended durability of a vehicle for the shock and awe factor of a creature of the Empyrean. Daemon Engines follow the rules below:

- Daemon Engines are sentient, and are thus presented in the same manner as living creatures.
- All Daemon Engines have the Daemon Engine Trait.
- Any bound crew members cannot be targeted as they are technically part of the construct.
- Some kinds of Daemon Engines are always Aligned to a specific Chaos God, while others can be Aligned to any Ruinous Power. The GM should feel free to give any Daemon Engine one or more additional Daemon Engine Traits (such as those found in **Daemon Engine Traits** or on pages 51–55 of this volume) that match its Alignment.



As its cage suffers damage, the bindings unravel, and the Daemon is able to taste the material world on its own again. Should the Daemon break entirely free, it will rage across the battlefield, smiting anything in its path. Whenever a Daemon Engine suffers Critical Damage, consult **Table 3-9: Daemon Engine Critical Hit Chart** below to see the extent of the damage to the internal systems and other effects.

TABLE 3-9: DAEMONIC ENGINE CRITICAL HIT CHART

Damage Points	Result
1-3	Distracting Blow: The Daemon is momentarily enraged by actually being touched by the weapons of an enemy that it must make a Challenging (+0) Willpower Test to resist targeting the source of that attack with its next attack. If it was already focused on this target, then it moves with all haste to fully engage that target with any and all weapons at its disposal.
4-6	Ablative Strike: The attack strips layers of armour off the engine as well as some of the protective runes. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points. In addition, any future Critical Hits receive a bonus of +2 on this chart. This is a cumulative bonus should multiple Ablative Strikes hit the Daemon Engine. Roll 1d10. On a roll of 9 or 10, any Daemonic Shield (Cloud of Flies, for example) is sufficiently ruined and no longer provides protection.
7-8	Weapon Damaged: Randomly select a weapon on the engine. That weapon bears the brunt of the attack and takes the full effects of the blow. While not quite as resilient as Titan weapons, the Daemon will try to preserve its integrity. Roll 1d10, and on a roll of 7 or more, the weapon can be used the next round. On a roll of anything less, the weapon is inoperable until repaired outside of the battle.
9	Penetrating Hit: A powerful attack breaches the construct's structure and allows the Daemon to taste the material world directly. Reduce the armour by 1d10 points and roll an additional 2d10 points of Damage. The attack also breached the hull in some capacity; roll a further 1d10. On a result of 9 or 10, the Daemon Engine suffers a Daemon Unbound! Result.
10+	Daemon Unbound! The attack is strong enough that the bindings are completely undone and the construct is unable to contain the Daemon. For all game purposes, the engine vaporizes as the Daemon manifests fully in the material world. The sudden release of Warp energy causes an explosion with a 2d10 x 10 metre radius, leaving a crater in its place. Anyone caught within the blast radius suffers 5d10+10 Energy Damage ignoring Armour that is not warded against psychic abilities. Reduce the Damage by 2 points for every full 10 metres the target is away from the epicentre. Alternatively, at the GM's discretion, the blast damage can be reduced to 2d10+5 Energy Damage and the Daemon can manifest, freed from its shackles. It might offer the players thanks or engage them in combat, depending on the Alignment of the Daemon, the Heretics and NPCs involved, and the adventure.

DAEMON ENGINE TRAITS

Daemonforge: Once per encounter, the Daemon Engine may re-roll a Damage roll in its entirety. If any of the re-rolled dice result in a 9 or 10, the Daemon Engine suffers 1d5 Wounds (ignoring armour and Toughness Bonus) for each of those results.

Daemon Engine (X): The creature is a hybrid of Daemon and machine, fusing technology and sorcery in a way that is seamless and horrifying. A Daemon Engine has the From Beyond and The Stuff of Nightmares Traits, and is therefore immune to Fear, Pining, Stunning, Insanity, Poison, and Disease. Psychic Powers that affect the mind cannot control the Engine as it is bound to the sorcerous runes holding the construct together. In addition, Daemon Engines increase their Toughness Bonus by an amount equal to the number in parentheses. Psychic Powers and weapons with the Blessed, Force, or Sanctified Quality ignore this additional Toughness Bonus.

NURCLE DAEMON ENGINE TRAITS

Cloud of Flies: Surrounding the engine is a visible and tangible aura made of maggot-flies, poisonous wasps, and corpse locusts. Ranged Attacks against this Daemon Engine suffer a -10 penalty. This is a Daemonic Shield.

Hideous Visage: Increase the value of this Daemon Engine's Fear Trait by +1.

Pestilent Fog: Mists of putrescence surround and follow the engine in its wake, causing slow death to those who inhale the fumes. Any living creature not protected by an environmental seal that begins its Turn within 15m of the engine must make a Hard (-20) Toughness Test or suffer 1d5 Toughness Damage.

FORGEFIENDS AND MAULERFIENDS

Emerging from the twisted minds and arcane forges of innumerable Warpsmiths, Daemon Engines of all types are rightfully feared and admired by all would-be warlords and rulers in the Screaming Vortex. Among the most prized are the Forgefiends and Maulerfiends, dangerously tough and compact constructs capable of rending hard and soft targets alike with little difficulty. Infused with the rage of an angered Daemon, and given the tools to wreak havoc on the living, these creatures are difficult to create and even harder to destroy.

Forgefiends are imbued with the direct power of the Immaterium, manifesting as white-hot, large-bore ammunition rounds tinged with daemonic residue or balls of plasma seething with the raw essence of the Warp. These foul creatures move across the battlefield, searching for any enemy troops or light vehicles they can raze and consume, stopping only rarely to gorge itself or refuel. Though most versions of these constructs have only two weapons where the primary limbs would normally be, newer variants have been seen with a third weapon mount in the head. These variants, often called Cerberites, have proven to be exceptionally adept at clearing out pockets of resistance, and as such are in high demand.

Maulerfiends are designed slightly differently than their cousins. Made for assaulting fortifications and heavily armoured targets, Maulerfiends are given massive power fists capable of punching holes in even the thickest plating available. Along with that are twin magma cutters; high powered but extremely short range armour-breaching implements capable of cutting a light tank or transport in half with little effort. These beasts move quickly across battlefields, actively seeking emplacements or heavy armour while remaining entirely oblivious to barricades and rubble. When they engage a bunker or a unit of armoured vehicles, the Maulerfiend crushes its prey first and if that doesn't crack the shell, it burns its way in. Some variants trade the magma cutters for two sets of mechadendrite-like tentacles used to prevent assaults by walkers or heavy infantry. These so-called "Lasherfiends" have proven to be extremely useful on planets where the opposing force's greatest asset is a zealous militia force willing to sacrifice their lives for their home.

Forgefiend/Maulerfiend

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	38	54	56	28	31	42	48	01	--

Move: 10/20/30/60

Wounds: 45

Armour: Machine (16 All)

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness

Talents: Ambidextrous, Independent Targeting, Two-Weapon Wielder (Melee, Ranged).

Traits: Daemonforge, Daemon Engine (7), Fear (3), Machine (16), Quadruped, Size (7), Unnatural Strength (6).

Weapons:

Forgefiend Options (choose one):

- 2 Ectoplasma Cannons (Heavy; 200m; S/-/-; 3d10 E; Pen 10; Blast [3], Devastating [3], Overheats).
- 2 Hades Autocannons (Heavy; 300m; 3/6/12; 3d10+8 I; Pen 6; Devastating [4], Storm).

Maulerfiend Options (choose one):

- 2 Power Fists (Melee; 2d10+11 E; Pen 9; Power Field, Unwieldy) and Magma Cutters (the Maulerfiend's melee attacks inflict an additional 1d10 Damage and gain the Flame Quality).
- 2 Power Fists (Melee; 2d10+11 E; Pen 9; Power Field, Unwieldy) and Lasher Tendrils (whenever an attack would inflict more than one hit on the Maulerfiend, it inflicts only the first hit instead; any hits beyond the first are negated).



PLAGUE TOWERS

While many warlords prefer to lay waste to a planet from orbit, some prefer to make an example of their conquests. Disciples of Khorne and Nurgle usually follow this path, and while Khorne usually prefers large-scale battlefields where blood flows freely and skulls are piled, Nurgle's followers have a unique reputation for laying siege to a population where it thinks it is safest. At the height of these sieges, Plague Towers are an all-too common sight; looming, rolling battle-towers from a long-dead age, covered in flayed human skin, and carrying disease and filth. Created from a massive pustule summoned by sorcerers or Warpsmiths upon their arrival, these hulking creations are filled with the gifts of Nurgle, ready to be bestowed upon new hosts.

Armed with two conventional wall-breaching Demolisher Cannons, the plague tower has little difficulty shattering a city's defences. The two unique weapons, the Bile Cannon and Plague Mortar, however, are the key elements to the success of this device. The Plague Mortar lobbs shells tainted with contagion as it rolls toward its target, sowing slow death among the population that is not killed outright. The Bile Cannon is designed to rid the initial breach of defenders by blasting them with a foul stream of pus and ichor. Those not instantly killed are covered in oozing rashes and sores as the corrosive liquid works its way through armour. The towers also serve as transports for large numbers of crazed followers. It is no wonder that these hulking engines of war are often seen as harbingers of a grisly end.

Plague Tower (Master)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	52	34	52	34	34	25	34	01	--

Move: 8/16/24/48

Wounds: 56

Armour: Machine (35 All)

Total TB: 15

Skills: Awareness.

Talents: Independent Targeting.

Traits: Assault Ramps†, Cloud of Flies, , Daemon Engine (10) Fear (3), Hideous Visage, Machine (35), Nurgle's Blessing††, Pestilent Fog, Size (9), Unnatural Strength (3).

Weapons: Bile cannon (Heavy; Front Arc; 100m; 2d10+7 I; Pen 7; Devastating [8], Spray, Toxic [3]), two Demolisher Cannons (Heavy; Front Arc; 200m; S/-/-; 3d10+10 X; Pen 8; Blast [8], Devastating [4]), Plague Mortar (Heavy, 750m; 2d10+6 I; Pen 7; Blast [10], Concussive [2], Devastating [5], Inaccurate, Recharge, Toxic [3]).

†**Assault Ramps:** These ramps allow insane followers of the Great Corruptor or his Daemonic minions to mount an assault on the walls of a fortress or city. When a Plague Tower moves into effective assault range of a fortification, the ramps drop to disgorge its passengers. The Plague Tower is capable of holding up to 50 occupants with a Size Trait of 5 or lower.

††**Nurgle's Blessing:** A Plague Tower is a Daemon Engine of Nurgle, and is always Aligned to Nurgle.



THE WRITHING WORLD

"There are multifarious stimuli constantly at work upon the mortal soul. There is rage, passion, love, hate, revenge, curiosity, hope. And the strongest of these, of course, is hope."

—Eructacus Foetor, Shikari Catechist
of the Pinguid Panglossia

Approaching the celestial body referred to in most charts and texts simply as the Writhing World, one experiences a transformative awakening that continues right down to the planet's surface. From a great distance, the Writhing World appears little different from any of the other planets locked within the clutches of the Screaming Vortex. In fact, from extreme visual ranges, the planet possesses a strange, factitious beauty. The swirling tans and browns of the planet's surface are reminiscent of a shimmering sand globe, while floating gracefully above the planet are undulant clouds of black, eddying in the upper atmosphere. An iridescent ring surrounds the whole, playing host to four verdant moons that hang like glowing emeralds upon a golden chain. But as one moves closer, reality opens up like a wonderful, blooming corpse flower.

The first dissonant note a first-time visitor to the Writhing World will note is the composition of the vast, sweeping ring that surrounds the planet. Upon closer inspection, the ring is not, in fact, composed of dust and stone, as one would expect in the sidereal universe. Rather, each chunk of matter fixed within the band is a complicated knot of fey, wriggling meat. Tendrils and flesh undulate to undetectable currents. From the largest asteroids to the tiniest, glittering motes floating around the world, each thrashes softly in a bizarre simulacrum of life.

The four beautiful moons orbiting around the Writhing World pose the most interesting mystery within the system, in their sheer normalcy. The flora and fauna on each are primitive in their development and sophistication, but they nevertheless present a viridian splendour when set against the pale, dun coloured world they orbit. Each glitters with vibrancy, the sparkling jade of a bottle-fly's eye. And each contains untold mysteries that link it to the glistening umber globe below.

As a Heretic breaks atmosphere into the realm of the Writhing World, he will find navigation and flight difficult as the air, nearly solid with the fusty stench of rot, buffets their craft with the capricious violence of a mischievous child. Any attempt to breathe this air without filtration or assistance is to experience the decomposition of an entire planet beneath ones feet. The impression is only reinforced as one looks out over the slowly undulating landscape of this foully-glorious world.

The surface of the Writhing World is formed by an array of fleshy tubules that present in a wide range of sizes. The Great Tendrils are massive, continent-sized masses of rippling flesh, stretching off into the distance. On a more standard planet, these fleshy monoliths play the role of bedrock, mountains, and rolling plains. The flesh that composes them, moving in slow, deliberate rolls, spans the corporeal rainbow from flushed health to gangrenous decay as the entire planet experiences the grand ballet of life, death, decay, and rebirth.

Providing the finer details of the landscape of the Writhing World are the Lesser Tendrils. Ranging from trunks the girth of a corpulent man to hair-fine shoots that seem to shift in a breeze no man can feel, the Lesser Tendrils show more life than their

Greater brethren, standing in for grass, trees, and undergrowth. These lashing whips of meat are far more lively than the Greater Tendrils, often presenting an insidious danger to visitors to the strange planet with their sudden, muscular convulsions.

Most inhabited planets in the sidereal universe are veritably covered in water features, and the Writhing World is no exception. Glistening lakes, rivers, and seas gleam from orbit, giving the planet a wet, shining appearance. Where another world might run with clear, fresh water, however, this mysterious orb drips with bile, phlegm, pus, and other intriguing biological solutions. Each body of water contains a veritable soup of happy microbiotica that presents untold dangers to any lost soul unlucky enough to bathe within the waters. Tales persist among the servants of the Father of Plagues, however, that one truly chosen by Grandfather Nurgle, and blessed with his bounty, might immerse himself beneath the viscous substances and receive untold rewards from their infernal patron.

Due to the constantly shifting nature of the very bedrock of the planet, instability is the only constant. Nothing is certain. The Great Tendrils are constantly on the move, causing disturbing quakes that can destroy the works of man in the blink of an eye. When those tendrils deep beneath a lake or sea shift enough, the contents may drain out, only to emerge at some other point along the planet's surface. Countless aquatic vermin are stranded in a moment upon vast plains of drying flesh, while land-born murine drown half a world away. These moments of upheaval and destruction are referred to as Convulsions, and can occasionally wreak drastic change upon the entire surface of the planet and among the creatures and heretics that call the Writhing World their home.

Of the countless mysteries and enigmas that surround this twisting sphere, possibly the most fascinating is the question of what lurks beneath the churning surface? There are many theories as to what lies at the heart of planet. Countless expeditions have been launched through the millennia, with an impressive roll of the most notable Heretics of the Screaming Vortex gauging their way through the countless layers of quivering flesh. No one has ever returned to the surface with indisputable proof of what lies at the centre of the orb of rotting, squirming meat. This lack of evidence, however, has only fuelled the rampant speculation.

The majority of those who speculate on the nature of the planet maintain that the world consists of nothing but layer after layer of flesh; a snarled tangle of squirming tendrils, pseudopods, and ganglia. If this is the case, it is probable that those tendrils closest to the core are dying or dead, pushed under by their more vibrant brothers. This theory easily explains the pungent, sweet scent of decay that pervades the entire planet while the vermin of the planet and the tendrils on the surface feast on the dead flesh, growing fat and indolent on the easy fare.

Darker tales whisper of an entire civilization lying crushed beneath the flesh, patiently awaiting an intrepid champion who will tear a bloody hole in the planet to discover its ancient secrets. If, indeed, the ruins of a primeval society lie within the embrace of the Writhing World, it might well be the bodies of the countless millions that contribute their feculent flesh to the fetor that greets visitors, feeding the lazy creatures of the world.



The darkest legends talk of the birth of a great being, a Greater Daemon or a Daemon Prince, perhaps. The myths surrounding this belief are varied and contradictory. Some say the planet was forever altered at the moment of Apotheosis. Others that the planet is a living creature, summoned into existence to devour the remains of the godling's birth. The vilest tales of the Sorcerer-Kings and Biomancer Lords imagine the blessed entity itself, in the moment of its unholy ascension, being cast into the ultimate curse of cosmic spawndom for some horrific failing, becoming the very planet itself.

Any of these tales could explain away the ecology of the planet and the stench of the atmosphere, but all leave even darker mysteries as to what might be found at the planet's core. What is not in contention, however, is the veritable explosion of life that crawls across the surface and swarms in the skies overhead.

The surface of the Writhing World teems with the full array of vermin and carrion eaters one would expect feasting upon a ripe and bloated corpse, albeit versions too massive and grotesque to be accurately described with words alone. Enormous beetle-creatures push their way across the cilia plains, grazing upon the wriggling flesh with mandibles sharp enough to cut through the body of a fully-armed Renegade. Swift, scythe-legged Magna-Lice haunt the tendril forests, feeding off the flushed meat of the planet's surface as well as any vermin or human they are able to run down. Crevasses and wrinkles are filled with the writhing larvae of the planet's most famous denizens, the giant bottle flies that make up the Great Swarms swirling across the sky.

Haunting the shadowed depths of the bile seas are enormous, sleek-bodied creatures that skim through the gelatinous fluid, propelled along with the graceful, sweeping motions of their bladed limbs. These insectile behemoths, often the size of void-fighters, are rarely seen as they lurk within the deepest, most dense folds of the seabed. However, the native huskmen of the Writhing World have learned caution when crossing these bodies of oily liquid, lest their callous-boats be overturned, and they find themselves dragged down into the tepid depths.

Life upon this fascinating planet is vibrant and full of energy as the chaotic whirlwind of the eternal cycle sweeps across the globe. Newly-hatched herd-maggots pour across the land, pushing the older corpse-beetles aside, feeding on the rancid flesh of the landscape before erupting into the sky, carrying, perhaps, a fragment of a thought, a curl of meaning, into the surging clouds overhead.

Giant bottle flies, each the size of a man's head, form swarms that stretch for miles and miles into the noisome atmosphere. The low, droning hum of millions upon millions of translucent wings is an ever-present reality to anyone walking the surface of the planet. These creatures, once they leave the shells of their pupal stage and take to the heavy air for the first time, never set claws to fleshy earth again. They remain airborne, a member of the semi-sentient colony mind, until their shrivelled, desiccated body flutters down to join the other detritus littering the landscape, serving to feed the next generation of vermin surging towards the light.

There are many heretics in the Screaming Vortex that believe the swirling, graceful fly-clouds contain a small portion of Grandfather Nurgle's consciousness, or serve as a conduit to that Ruinous Power's thoughts and intentions. They swarm and boil across the planet forming huge patterns that seem maddeningly close to making some sort of sense before the patterns explode into chaos again. No concrete evidence has ever been presented that there is, in fact, any meaning behind the whirling ballet of giant insects, but this lack of surety only serves to spur those desperate enough to seek such contact. Each year, countless men and women descend upon the Writhing World for the sole purpose of gazing upon the clouds and teasing out their possible meaning.

Among the many strange and wondrous creatures that call the Writhing World their home, a hardy breed of humans has existed for as long as the planet has existed within the Vortex. These savage, nomadic tribesmen use the exoskeletons of the vermin for armour, utensils, and anything else they might need. Clothed in the castoff skins of the bloated cadaver wyrms, huskmen tribes are constantly at war with each other over the best hunting grounds, breeding stock, and gelid ponds.

With the flesh of the planet itself as a constant source of nourishment, and the phlegmy liquids of the seas, lakes, and streams a ready supply of water, the huskmen tend to be obese and slow. However, the Writhing World, the very embodiment of death, decay, and explosive rejuvenation, is a seething hotbed of disease and infection. Due in large part to the inherent virulence of their environment, weak huskmen tend to die early, while the strong and tough survive. Through this gradual process of selection and culling, huskmen have become some of the toughest humans in the Screaming Vortex.

There is another type of human that calls the Writhing World its home. Lords of the planet and masters of the huskmen tribes and even the Sorcerer-Kings who stand above the huskmen, the Biomancers are strangers who come to the Writhing World from all across the Vortex and beyond. These sorcerers of life and death find themselves inexorably pulled to the planet to master its lessons of flesh, change, and the hope for rebirth. Many keep to themselves, establishing small sanctuaries far from the tribes and other Biomancers, delving into the mysteries of the planet for a time before moving on. Others, however, develop a taste for the thick, feculent air in their lungs, the soft, pliant flesh beneath their feet, and the reassuring buzz of the fly clouds overhead. These powerful beings establish themselves upon the planet, bending entire regions to their whims with their hard-won powers, and playing with the lives of the huskmen like the toys of a wayward child.

THE CITIZENS OF THE CRAWLING CITADELS

The most infamous denizens of the Writhing World are not the pseudo-divinatory flies, the corpulent huskmen, or the vicious insectile vermin that roam the surface. The reputation and power of the sorcerers that find themselves drawn to the planet's burgeoning explosions of life have spread throughout the Vortex and beyond. Their mastery of the riddles of life and death is unquestioned, and they lord over this planet of flesh with merciless abandon.

These Biomancers venerate the myriad cycles of life. Teasing out the meaning and power within the intricate dance of birth, age, decrepitude, death, decay, and rebirth, are swiftly destroyed by their own research or rise to prominence among the most powerful beings of the Vortex. The most powerful Biomancers are capable of shaping the very flesh of the planet beneath them, and the creatures that crawl upon it. Able to twist living meat and bone to their every whim, Biomancers have the very threads of life at their mercy, spinning armour, weapons, and defences from the very vitae of their subjects.

The vast majority of the Biomancers living upon the Writhing World are not natives of the fleshy orb, but are rather tried and tested sorcerers in their own right. Many of these jovial men and women have followed the path of Grandfather Nurgle throughout the galaxy before finding themselves on this strange, living planet. These powerful masters of flesh and life are not often given to discussing their supremacy or their origins with outsiders, but there are many tales and legends that whisper of their ability to twist the flesh of their enemies against them, causing crippling pain, withering limbs and minds, and reducing even the most powerful warlords to mewling, twisted wrecks with a gesture of their hand.

Among these mysterious sorcerers, there are always four that hold the greatest share of power, lording over the planet even as they push the boundaries of their knowledge and abilities beyond the understanding of mortal men. Each of these Biomancer Lords command one of the four gem-like moons that spin through the kaleidoscopic swirl of the night sky. These planetoids serve as sanctuaries in times of great endeavour, retreats in the face of powerful opposition, and, some whisper, the very source of the paramount manifestation of their power.

There are four of these larger bodies, located within the spinning disk of the planet's squirming ring. These planetoids are more traditional in structure and composition than the planet below, or the ring of matter that connects them. Each is host to a riotous explosion of life reaching up into the tainted heavens only to fall back into the ever-boiling soup of the surface, corpulent and mouldering remains embraced and enveloped by the rising tide of new life.

There has been a great deal of speculation among the beings that concern themselves with such knowledge, as to the importance and power present within the moons of the Writhing World. Certainly, despite the vibrant life present on all of them, each is unnatural and twisted in its own way. Equally clear is that the Biomancer Lords ruling the world below hold their lunar fiefdoms as precious, spending a great deal of time secreted away within their strongholds. Not even whispers speak of what might occupy these lordly creatures in their mysterious lairs, but conjecture runs rampant throughout the Vortex.

Many secret-hunters believe that the truth of the Writhing World's genesis can be found buried beneath the surfaces of one moon or another. The possibility that each worldlet holds a piece of that ancient puzzle has not been lost on the treasure-seekers, either. Other theories speak of ancient sources of power, either sidereal or sorcerous, hidden within the ancient strongholds. Such sources of power would go far to explain the often sudden rise to power of Biomancer Lords when such a conversion occurs. True dreamers speculate that the largest secrets of these dread lords are to be found

somewhere on their orbiting citadels. Whether these answers might address the bloated fly clouds of the planet, or the creation and control of the infamous Crawling Citadels, or of mysteries even darker of nature, has never been resolved. All that is truly known is that the Biomancer Lords hold control of their moons with all the tightness of a death grip, and hold their secrets closely even unto death.

The most powerful of the current Biomancer Lords of the Writhing World is Adipose Rex, Lord of Lowenesse. Adipose Rex is a mammoth, gargantuan man whose portly, smiling face hides the coldly calculating mind of the master of the planet. Adipose Rex rules over the most fecund temperate zones of the northern hemisphere. Despite the impermanence of surface features on the planet, the general temperatures and weather patterns of this zone means that it is most often hospitable to both the huskmen and the panoply of vermin. The moon Lowenesse is a glossy jade ball whose steamy jungles and foetid swamps are aswarm with violent, thrashing life. The Palace of Surfeit, surrounded by swollen, over-ripe trees and the sweet stench of rotting fruit, is an ugly, squat structure built from brown-green native stone. Streaks of mould and moss add slashes of contrasting colours down the low walls.

Graven, the largest moon orbiting the Writhing World, is claimed by the longest-serving Biomancer Lord, Aefluvia Tamlar, Lady of Graven. The moon is a swollen dark olive bulb with veins of feculent brown entwined across its surface. The Lady of Graven claims the temperate southern regions, only slightly less-hospitable than the domains of Lord Adipose. Lady Aefluvia's Castle Nimiety is located beneath the surface her moon, Graven, plunged down through the spongy crust and into the crumbling stone beneath. The atmosphere of Graven is the closest of all the moons to their parent planet's, the odour of decay and dissolution heavy in the air. Although no animal life is visible upon Graven, the spongy moss that covers the entire surface is home to slow-moving, vermiform leviathans who live their entire lives burrowing beneath the surface.

Cord Cantric, Lord of Daedelon, is easily the most destructive, violent, and aggressive of the Biomancer Lords. Lord Cantric claimed the equatorial region of the planet over one hundred years ago, and has not attempted to encroach upon the realms of either Adipose Rex or Lady Aefluvia in all that time. The warmest region of the planet is host to the most aggressive tribes of huskmen, and Lord Cantric has been known to test his creations by engineering massive conflicts among the tribes, and then introducing his creatures and diseases into their midst. The moon Daedelon is completely covered with murky, shallow water and high-reaching, spindly trees. Swarms of flies, smaller cousins to the giant specimens on the planet below, fill the air, fouling the intakes of craft that attempt to land, and making breathing a noxious chore. Cord Cantric's Fortress of Suffiar reaches out from the shadowy depths and plunges thin, spine-like towers into the lowering sky overhead.

The newest Biomancer Lord to rise to prominence upon the Writhing World was Yufreth of Tidec, Lord of Tabelar. Yufreth descended upon the planet alone and unarmed and was immediately accepted by Lord Huwaith Ouse of Tabelar as an apprentice. It is unknown why the recalcitrant old man

was so quick to bring an unknown newcomer into his retinue, but there is no disputing that fact. Yufreth assisted the old Biomancer Lord with several massive enterprises, including the construction and arming of a new, larger Crawling Citadel. Soon after the completion of the behemoth, however, Lord Huwaith disappeared. There were no rumours of a struggle of any kind, nor signs of battle or any other violence. Huwaith was gone, and Yufreth repaired to the old man's lunar sanctuary of De'trop on the mouldering wastes of the moon Tabelar. When he returned, he was the undisputed fourth Biomancer Lord, and ruler of the northern polar regions. Yufreth has not spoken to any outsiders since his rise to power, and has spent most of his time bringing the few tribes of huskmen acclimated to the cold of the north under his sway.

Although each Biomancer Lord maintains a seat of power upon his chosen moon, all Biomancer Lords spend the majority of their time upon the churning surface of their adopted home world. Each rules his own realm from the most magnificent specimens of the Writhing World's infamous Crawling Citadels. Although many lesser Biomancers have mastered the creation of these enormous creature-fortresses, the monstrous examples that house the Biomancer Lords are truly gargantuan and majestic in scope and power.

Biomanced from the flesh of the planet itself, melded with the genetic material of the vermin that inhabit the planet, the Crawling Citadels are like unto nothing seen elsewhere in the Screaming Vortex or beyond. Massive, lumbering constructs, six albino legs push the citadels along, putrescent palaces growing from their hunched, misshapen abdominal masses. The walls are composed of thick exo-skeletal chitin, also a pale, sickly white. Mounted upon these walls can be found a bewildering array of defensive weapons and preparations. Often, weaponry that would do a Titan proud can be found probing the shuddering landscape surrounding a Crawling Citadel on the move, procured through the offices of off-planet intermediaries trading in jewels, precious metals, and occasionally, the sorcerous assistance of these paramount practitioners of the Warp-tainted arts.

In addition to serving as each Biomancer Lord's seat of power and stronghold, the Citadels are centres of learning and the Biomancer's art, with each lord presiding over a court of lesser practitioners, most being those who have travelled to the Writhing World to learn its secrets. Each Biomancer Lord has his or her own policies in dealing with such supplicants. Some have been known to accept many apprentices after only a cursory vetting process, most likely expecting that the danger of the work itself would weed out those who lacked the ability or discipline to master the art. Others set gruelling trials and gauntlets, forcing any who would learn at their knees nearly impossible tasks and insolvable puzzles, only to often eradicate even those who pass these horrible ordeals, for no other reason than to suit their passing fancy. The only certainty any who seek the assistance of a Biomancer Lord faces is that many more have died following that path than have lived to tell of their success or failure.

The Crawling Citadels are garrisoned with forces of a mixed, chaotic nature. Many of the men and women who stand watch upon the ivory walls are warriors recruited from off world, from among the most puissant and intimidating mercenaries of the Screaming Vortex. Many of the rest represent the strongest and most ferocious tribesmen culled from the local nomadic huskmen.



Huskmen of the Writhing World (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
38	25	30	41	35	33	31	30	35	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18
Armour: Chitinous Armour (3 All)
Skills: Awareness (Per), Survival (Per) +10.
Talents: Cold Hearted, Double Team, Jaded.
Traits: Unnatural Toughness (2).
Weapons: Primitive chitin blades (Melee; 1d10+3 R; Pen 0).
Gear: Tattered clothing crafted from sloughed off planetary skin, makeshift tools and weapons, coveted bone fetishes.

Sorcerer-King's Writhing Swarm (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
34	01	21	25	34	07	34	16	07	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18
Armour: Chitinous Armour (3 All)
Skills: Awareness (Per), Survival (Per)
Talents: Swift Attack.
Traits: Swarm, Toxic (3), Variable Size†.
Weapons: Chitinous Jaws (Melee; 1d10+4; Pen 1d10).
†Variable Size: This creature's Wounds value varies for summoned swarms.

Huskmen Champion (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
40	28	32	49	37	36	35	32	38	--

Movement: 3/6/9/18
Armour: Chitinous Armour (3 All)
Skills: Awareness (Per), Interrogation (WP), Survival (Per) +10.
Talents: Cold Hearted, Frenzy, Jaded, Swift Attack.
Traits: Unnatural Toughness (3).
Weapons: Ancestral chitinous weaponry (Melee; 2d10+3; Pen 2; Crippling (2)).
Gear: Tattered armour of vermin chitin, makeshift tools and weapons, ornate bone fetishes.

Magna-Louse (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
45	01	41	58	38	21	38	20	12	--

Movement: 10/16/22/40
Armour: Chitinous Plating (4 All)
Skills: Acrobatics (Ag), Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Parry (WS), Survival (Per).
Talents: Ambidextrous, Berserk Charge, Blind Fighting, Catfall, Combat Master, Hard Target, Heightened Senses (Smell), Leap Up.
Traits: Bestial, Crawler, Deadly Natural Weapons, Quadruped, Size (5), Sturdy, Unnatural Toughness (3).
Weapons: Scything forelimbs (Melee; 2d10+4; Pen 2).
Gear: None.

Giant Bottle-Fly Swarm (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	01	05	22	35	07	45	14	01	--

Movement: 4/8/12/24
Armour: None
Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +20.
Talents: None.
Traits: Bestial, Daemonic (2), Dark-sight, Flyer (4), From Beyond, Unnatural Toughness (6), Size (2), Swarm, Vectors of the Plague God's Mirth†.
†Vectors of the Plague God's Mirth: Whenever this creature hits with a melee attack (regardless of whether or not it inflicts Damage), the target must make a **Challenging (+0) Toughness Test**. If the target fails, he must roll on **Table 2-1: Boons of the Plague God** (see page 40) and immediately apply the results. Non-living creatures (and creatures immune to disease) are immune to this effect.
Weapons: Infectious Maw (Melee; 1d5-3; Pen 0).
Gear: None.

HINDRANCE

"Travel the Vortex, my pretties! Wander free, wander far! Spread the Roffather's gifts and blessings! You are his beloved vectors; there shall be no let or hindrance to your passage!"

—Transmission intercept from the junkyard moon of Alactia

The world of Hindrance, an unprepossessing sallow orb of yellow-brown sands, swathed in murky storms and blasted by a constant stream of Warp energies which swirl and skirl around it, squats within a few scant weeks' travel from the Thirteenth Station of Passage. One of the Gloaming Worlds at the outer edge of the Screaming Vortex, Hindrance's growing reputation as a place sacred to the Lord of Decay has led it to become a place of fevered pilgrimage for Nurgle's followers. Myths and legends surrounding the planet abound; the tattered and rusting vessels of the Nurg Culti now regularly lay over for short periods to allow passengers to disembark and seek some sign of their festering Lord's approval or favour.

THE PATH TO HINDRANCE

Hindrance's planetary system lies directly in the path of a notorious Warp-current known as the Black Gyre, which tips craft emerging from the corpse-shrouded maw of the Thirteenth Station of Passage directly into a whirlpool of eldritch energies which gush inward towards the heart of the Vortex. The Gyre skittishly curls around the hateful region of space known as the Anathema and plunges in a vast spiral into the Gloaming Worlds region. For those caught within the Gyre's clutches, the experience is very much like being trapped in a small boat on a fast flowing river being impelled towards a vertiginous waterfall. The Warp current tears at and rattles any ship that traverses it, the sounds of a billion claws raking along the hull's exterior driving those within to distraction, and making a mockery of attempts to escape. Those battered vessels which survive the Gyre's onslaught are deposited on the outskirts of the Hindrance system.

The system consists of a dim brown dwarf star, then Hindrance itself, a sickly desert world, and Hindrance's two moons, Alactia and Megaria. The nameless star emits a bruised, guttering light and enough heat to provide a narrow habitable zone. Hindrance and its moons float within this zone, locked in a tight, almost inconceivably complex orbit. All three intermittently wander through the pale un-light of the Black Gyre's current, which pours slowly around and between them, flowing in an eerie and unpredictable cascade of unfathomable energies. Where these energies touch each world they scour and blast them, taking the form of great storms that crawl slowly across the surface.

Those entering the Hindrance system from space, whether by accident or design, find themselves challenged upon approach by a small but potent fleet of battered system monitors and light raiders operating from the rusted moon of Alactia. This fleet, known as the Septet, is unusual within the Screaming Vortex for its ostensibly casual attitude towards interlopers. Typically, visitors are hailed in a benign, worldly, and friendly fashion in the name of the Lord of Decay and invited to state their business. Anything short of an expression

of devotion to Tzeentch or an outright declaration of an intent to attack the Septet, Hindrance, or its moons is met with a hearty welcome to the system and a cheerful declaration that the travellers are free to partake in all that Hindrance and its environs has to offer. The Septet will escort visitors to any destination within the system, though they themselves will steer clear of entering the orbit of the black moon, Megaria.

HINDRANCE ITSELF

Hindrance is a fundamentally ugly and bleak world. From orbit its sandy surface is the colour of decaying, greasy flesh. Pockmarked with impact craters from some long forgotten prehistoric cataclysm, the planet is blanketed in endless grimy deserts which are interrupted only by occasional small, black, dead, silty, and oily seas, which ceaselessly gnaw at the crumbling coasts, eroding them slowly but inevitably.

As Hindrance and its moons spin ponderously around the system's feeble star, they pass unpredictably through the flow of the Black Gyre itself, a current of pure ætheric energy that could not exist outside the Screaming Vortex. Such Warp currents, where they touch the surface of a world, are immensely dangerous to anything living on its surface.

In Hindrance's case, where the edge of the Black Gyre's energies first touch the atmosphere of the planet they initially interact with its weak magnetic field, forming sinister flickering green and yellow lights known locally as the Aurora Rancidus. The Aurora is regarded by those who travel the surface of Hindrance as a harbinger of a greater peril, like scintillating scotoma before a migraine, a sign that the Warp-stuff that flows at the heart of the Gyre is about to enter the atmosphere.

Where the true Warp-tainted energies of the Black Gyre seep through the atmosphere, they fall towards Hindrance's surface like stagnant water poured into rancid oil. As they fall, these vast forces coalesce into colossal thunderheads, grey and brown storm clouds that interact violently with the thin dusty air of the world. Vortices the size of continents form, with winds gusting at speeds of hundreds of miles an hour, spinning widdershins across the face of the planet, scouring away everything beneath them.

The storms are so frequent, so unpredictable, so deadly and destructive that nothing can be built permanently upon the surface of Hindrance. It is a world that is constantly blasted and eroded, constantly disintegrating, decaying from one state to a more disordered one. Paradoxically, it is this very quality which makes it so attractive to those who revere the dark god, Nurgle.

VISITING HINDRANCE

Given the vast Warp-storms which buffet the atmosphere, reaching the surface of the planet is no simple task. At any one time there are two or three such nightmare storms crawling slowly across it, and a skilled (or insane) shuttle pilot is required to deposit travellers safely. Fortunately, the Masters of the ships of the Septet have a number of such pilots indentured into their service, and they are happy to barter for the price of passage. Payment in the form of interesting new plagues is particularly prized, but they have been known to accept dilapidated ship components or other eccentric symbolic contributions that amuse them.



III: LORDS OF ENTROPY

There are few permanent settlements on Hindrance; the world is inimical to prolonged human habitation, lacking potable water or sufficient sunlight to foster the growth of even the hardiest crops. Although the thin, dusty air technically contains the correct combination of elements in broadly the correct proportions to render it breathable for augmented humans, the atmosphere is filled with microscopic dust particles which clog the lungs, causing visitors to hack and cough miserably within minutes of arrival. Prolonged exposure to the planet's air causes the lungs to fill with bloody froth, which can lead to death if left untreated.

The skies are grey and stormy, and from the surface the sun appears only as a distant brown smudge, its weak light barely penetrating the murky gloom. While there are small mountain ranges of crumbling sandstone, and minuscule polar caps formed of yellowing and poisonous ice, the principle topography is desert.

PUSULA

Despite the harsh nature of the world's climate, it is far from uninhabited. Visitors escorted to the surface of Hindrance within the rattling and decrepit interiors of the Septet's shuttles are deposited outside the bounds of Pusula, a tiny, filthy ramshackle shanty town of around 300 souls.

Pusula is the creation of a burgeoning pilgrim culture emerging among the Nurg Cult of the Screaming Vortex, a movement which, despite only emerging within the last handful of decades, seems to enjoy a vivid canon of wicked myths and fables of apparently ancient provenance. This loose

collective of pilgrims are a varied lot, their only common denominators being a devotion to Nurgle, an obsession with accumulating interesting new diseases, and a love of travel. They wander across the entire Screaming Vortex and beyond, like a swarm of flies, never settling for long, always cheerfully seeking to infect whatever lies beyond the next hill, the next planet, the next Sector.

There are certain sites which act as nexuses for these peripatetic lepers; particular places which speak to something deep within their polluted souls, and which serve to draw them together for a time to exchange illnesses and reconfirm their faith. Pusula has become such a place.

The town is composed of temporary dwellings constructed with whatever material the Nurg Cult had to hand when they arrived. As such it is a patchwork shantytown, a cluttered and messy place thrown together haphazardly. Tents are the most common form of accommodation, though shacks built from crates and improvised caravans made from bones are also often seen. Pusula is built on a single dust track "street" over a pair of ancient rusty shipping containers of Imperial manufacture, which have been buried beneath the gritty desert sands. These containers are used as septic tanks for the town, though they double as shelters when the Warp-tainted storms pass by, obliterating everything on the surface. Most would find the idea of being confined neck deep in ordure for days on end with hundreds of others in a tiny underground space utterly appalling, but to the Nurg Cult of Pusula, this is regarded as an amusing diversion, a potential anecdote to regale fellow travellers with on some future occasion. Indeed,

some speak highly of the experience, referring jocularly to "taking the waters on Hindrance" as if they had visited some famed spa on an exotic Imperial paradise world.

The town is routinely destroyed by the frequent Warp-storms; this will happen two or three times every year. However, its inhabitants are hardy and optimistic. After riding out the storm in their reeking bunker, the resilient group of survivors simply emerges to gather up whatever building materials remain within a five mile radius and begin again. They regard this constant cycle of construction, decay, destruction, and rebuilding as amusingly symbolic of Nurgle himself.

Pusula is, unusually for a town frequented by followers of the Ruinous Powers, a generally peaceful place. There are occasional outbreaks of violence between cultists, but these usually take place during the rush to the storm shelters, and as such are regarded as unfortunate side effects of circumstances beyond the control of all involved. Pusula is very much a stopover town, a place to visit briefly, and there are no permanent residents.

A rich oral tradition is emerging among the cultists of Nurgle who visit Pusula. Whichever is the largest shack, caravan, or tent present within the town at any one time acts as a general meeting place for the assembled cultists. As the weak light of the sun fades over the horizon, they regale each other with stories about the Plaguefather, and in particular his relationship with the world of Hindrance, which is starting to be regarded as a world holy to him.

LEGENDS OF HINDRANCE

It is now traditional for those Plague Cultists who visit Hindrance to take three steps in their pilgrimage to the planet. Firstly, they must arrive and listen to the legends of those who have travelled into the wastes of Hindrance before them. Secondly, they must then themselves take a pilgrimage into the deepest deserts themselves, in order to commune with the desolate, entropic heart of Nurgle himself. Finally, those who survive this journey (and most do not) must return to Pusula and pass on both what they have learned and what they have been infected with.

The tattered pilgrims of the Plague God are drawn to Hindrance by the belief that there is an intensely symbolic and magically significant link between the planet and Nurgle himself. They see his rotting hand everywhere in the world; in the constant scouring and destruction of the Warp-storms, in the crumbling of the mountains to desert. They believe that Hindrance is an entropic paradise, a world that decays endlessly, a place of divine judgement, punishment, and teaching where Grandfather Nurgle tests the faith of his followers. Those who truly wish to commune with their dark god must travel here and journey to the heart of the deepest Warp-scoured

wastes, there to experience dreams and visions that illuminate their master's plans for them. They believe that here Nurgle either sadly chides his errant children for their failings before magnanimously setting them back upon the path to glory, their sins forgiven, their faith having been tested and restored, or if their faith is weak, punishes them, blasting their souls and funnelling them directly into the Warp itself.

Those who venture forth from Pusula into the wastes of Hindrance tend to do so in jovial plague caravans, filled with dozens of pilgrims bickering cheerfully among themselves. Those few surviving cultists who stagger back in ones and twos to Pusula are somehow altered by the experience. No less jocular, they are nevertheless more focused, more devoted to the task of spreading Nurgle's gifts beyond the Screaming Vortex. They are said to have completed the bleak pilgrimage, and their words are hung upon by other Nurg Cult.

Those who survive the bleak pilgrimage speak in reedy, phlegmy voices of journeys lasting weeks through the blasted desert wastes of Hindrance. They describe an experience which tested their endurance to the very limit: of limping, scab-shod through endless fields of flinty blade-edged rock, of running low on supplies and being forced to turn to cannibalism, of consuming the reeking and diseased corpses of their fellow pilgrims.



THE BONE DESERT

The survivors speak of encountering deserts of yellow-brown bone-scattered sand. At first they encounter a few separated femurs, the odd skull—nothing to the jaded cultists of Nurgle, who will have seen far worse on the journey to Hindrance. Surely these are the remnants of some previous failed caravan, one whose members lacked the true faith of those who now pass them.

Soon, however, the travellers speak of encountering more bones. Not in ones and twos, but in sevens and eights, piled up and against each other randomly. Then dozens in one place. Then hundreds stretched out over several miles. And finally the travellers speak of deserts that begin to consist solely of bones, the grains of sand sinking away beneath the endless tide of death. Millions—perhaps billions—of corpses. The rheumy, inflamed eyes of the surviving bleak pilgrims shine with an unhealthy light as they speak of endless piles of yellowing, desiccated bones, slowly disintegrating and collapsing into dust beneath the pitiless grey lowering skies.

Where have these bodies come from, the Culti ask each other. Theories abound. Some say a great war must have taken place on Hindrance in ages past. Others say these are the corpses of useless slaves dumped from orbit by the Dark Magi of Alactia. Still more posit that there must have been some great civilisation here once, overtaken by a great plague, a suggestion which causes much excitement among those assembled.

Those who have walked the bleak pilgrimage shake their misshapen heads, and claim that instead these are the bodies of all those who died in Nurgle's service, transported here mystically by his servants. They raspingly assert that Hindrance is the cankered eye of Nurgle himself, and that to walk across its surface is to draw his attention to oneself; those deserving of his grace are rewarded, those undeserving are shattered, their bodies cast to the dry surface of the world to crumble to dust.

FAITHLESS

They further regale their rapt listeners with tales of Nurgle playfully testing those who wander the Bone Deserts with encounters with the corpses of the faithless, those who died in the service of Nurgle but without the true love of their master rotting their souls from within. They say that after walking for many days through the Bone Deserts, subsisting upon the rare meagre fragments of parched flesh remaining on the bones of the fallen, the dead themselves arise and challenge them. These "Faithless" take the form of the better preserved bodies, still bearing odd scraps of clothing. Ghastly, sand encrusted dried corpses, the Faithless stagger to their disintegrating feet and lurch towards the pilgrims; their mouths open in a wordless scream of jealousy and hatred, bemoaning the favour shown to them by their very continued existence. Such pitiful remnants of the fallen are feeble individually, but soon arise in greater numbers, shambling towards the interlopers in their dozens. They cannot be pleaded or bargained with, and must be smashed aside by the wanderer, cleaved into their base components, a sight which is claimed by the bleak pilgrims to delight Nurgle, symbolic as it is of the process of disintegration, of things falling apart and returning to the dust.

Faithless Mob (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	01	25	30	21	16	32	20	11	--

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Wounds: 45

Armour: None

Total TB: 3

Skills: Awareness (Per), Heightened Sense (Sound).

Talents: None.

Traits: Dark-sight, Fear (2), From Beyond, Natural Weapons, Vectors of the Plague God's Mirth†.

Weapons: Rotted Fangs and Desiccated Talons (Melee; 1d10+2; Pen 0).

Gear: Tattered rags and parched scraps of skin.

†**Vectors of the Plague God's Mirth:** Whenever this creature hits with a melee attack (regardless of whether or not it inflicts Damage), the target must make a **Challenging (+0) Toughness Test**. If the target fails, he must roll on **Table 2-1: Boons of the Plague God** (see page 40) and immediately apply the results. Non-living creatures (and creatures immune to disease) are immune to this effect.



THE BROKEN TEMPLE

Those few pilgrims who claim to have survived encounters with the massed Faithless say that they eventually pass through the Bone Deserts, discarded gleaming skulls glaring reproachfully at their backs, and that they wander into a new region, the remnant of what must once have been a great volcanic plain.

Here, the cultists spend days wandering across a silent, utterly desolate landscape, with no geological feature more than a few inches high. The skies are dark, a few weak stars glimmering indistinctly. The twin moons pass overhead in unpredictable patterns, obscuring the stars and occasionally eclipsing the murky sun. The glass-black moon of Megaria causes those who gaze upon it for too long to fall into a deep depression, thoughts of despair and misery overtaking their conscious minds. When the rusting junk-moon of Alactia is overhead, those same individuals become cheerful and energetic, despite being by now clothed only in tattered rags and being delirious from lack of food or water.

The few survivors of this fevered death march describe how after what could have been days or weeks of walking, with black sand crunching underfoot, the sky darkens, the tell-tale signs of one of the great Warp-storms' approach. All surviving Bleak Pilgrims tell their audience that at this point they were expecting to be torn to shreds by the power of the storm, which shrieks and wails, and seems to funnel itself purposefully over the horizon. The bleak pilgrims describe how they followed the storm, drawn by some instinctual feeling that they were being called by the howl of the wind itself.

They tell of how, after journeying for a further age, they came to see in the distance what appeared to be some form of low building. As they approach, they realised that they were at a great distance from it, and that as such it was built on an impossibly titanic scale. Approaching the building over hours that eventually stretch into days, they finally are able to pick out its individual features.

There are many different descriptions of the building, and the precise details vary for each teller, leading some to suppose that every cultist sees a different construction. Some describe fallen pillars hundreds of feet in circumference that would have reached kilometres into the sky, supporting a roof that must have weighed more than most cities before its collapse. Others mention crumbling spires or domes; yet others talk of a single fallen ziggurat slumped under its own weight. However it appears physically to those who stagger back from the wastes, the building is invariably described as a "temple," albeit one constructed on a scale which would dwarf all but the largest cathedrals of the Imperium's Corpse-God. Apparently hewn from some black stone, the temple is always spoken of as broken and shattered, and all who have seen it agree that it continues to crumble and disintegrate before their very eyes, with some architectural feature sliding away to oblivion as they approach, or with a constant rain of slates or bricks falling from some obscure corner. This "Broken Temple," as it is known, sits at the heart of the eye of the vast storm which whirls around it.



THE EMBODIED FURY OF THE GODS

As the black clouds of the storm move towards the centre of the vast whirlpool centred over the Temple, they spasm sickeningly, coalescing and splintering into thousands of bestial, winged figures that flock to the jagged rafters of the Broken Temple. The Bleak Pilgrims claim these Chaos Furies are Daemons formed from the very soul-stuff of those faithless Nurgle worshippers whose corpses line the Bone Deserts. They squabble like animals, raking the basalt walls of the temple with their claws, yet they do not assault the pilgrims who approach the temple.

Chaos Fury (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
37	15	32	35	30	11	38	27	09	05

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +20, Psyniscience (Per).

Talents: Heightened Sense (Smell).

Traits: Bestial, Daemonic (1), Dark-sight, Flyer (5), From Beyond, Deadly Natural Weapons.

Weapons: Claws and Fangs (2d10+3 R; Pen 1d5; Tearing).

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 5 metres of a Chaos Fury suffer a -5 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Wounds: 15

Total TB: 4

Inside the temple, stained by accumulated centuries of the stinking daemonic spoor of the Furies, the pilgrims discovered names etched into the walls of the building itself; inscribed in tiny letters, barely legible. There were billions of names, reaching up the towering internal walls of the temple, covering every nook and scone. These are, the Bleak Pilgrims' claim, the names of the followers of Nurgle, chiselled here by some unseen, foetid tallyman seeking fruitlessly to catalogue and define the universe, an insane and impossible effort to trap the universe in unchanging decay forever. Here the few surviving pilgrims find themselves compelled to scour the walls of the temple for their own names, proving their worth as followers of the Rotfather. Given the impossible scale of the Broken Temple, this task can take many weeks; the pilgrims are forced to degrade themselves by consuming the corpses of those who have failed to complete the task; to construct ladders from the bones of these same fallen which enable them to peruse the names marked on the higher walls.

Those who admit defeat in this seemingly impossible task are instantly torn to shreds by the ever-vigilant Furies, their souls ripped from their bodies, there to join the ranks of their killers. However, those who persevere, who remain cheerful despite the seemingly impossible and fruitless nature of their task, are eventually rewarded with sight of their own name, scratched in tiny letters feebly into some obscure cranny of the cyclopean temple. At this moment, their status as a true follower of Nurgle is confirmed. Every survivor of the bleak pilgrimage describes this as a seminal moment, where they feel the eye of Nurgle himself upon them, and hear his distant avuncular chuckle. The Furies shriek impotently, enraged to see another soul escape their clutches, and flee back into the heart of the storm, which retreats and fades away to nothingness, leaving the pilgrims free to continue on their way.



THE BLOATED PILGRIM

Those Bleak Pilgrims who have wandered the Bone Deserts and who have survived the trial of the Broken Temple are now marked as more robust and deadly than those who did not. Their fortitude has been noted by Nurgle, but there is one final test for them.

As they recount their experiences to those who have yet to commence their pilgrimage, their eyes grow bright with awe, and their voices tremble, their throats filling with sickly phlegm. They speak of how, as they staggered in tattered rags, dehydrated, hallucinating, starving, and falling prey at last to the many diseases which have beset them for years, they encountered a single bloated pilgrim in a caravan apparently constructed from bones, pulled by a staggering pony whose tattered and rotting hide hung loosely from its skeletal frame. They explain how the fat, distended pilgrim invited them to rest awhile within his caravan, giving them stinking food and brackish water to drink, nursing them through the worst of their fevers and into yet higher and more disturbed ones.

The Bleak Pilgrims dreamily speak of days in the company of this obese traveller, whose basso profundo laugh and easy, cheerful manner they eagerly attempt to imitate, to the delight of all listeners. They talk of how they would engage in games of riddles, though none of the Bleak Pilgrims can be drawn on the questions that were posed.

Finally, they gleefully divulge that their portly saviour ultimately revealed himself to be no less a figure than Nurgle himself, testing the Bleak Pilgrims' faith and finding them equal to the task of travelling onwards to infect the world. This is invariably too much for the listeners, who angrily denounce the storytellers for exceeding the bounds of reason, and straying perhaps even into blasphemy. Such charges are met equally angrily by the Bleak Pilgrims, and at this stage lesioned hands invariably stray to rusted daggers. Typically, some croaky voice of reason will pipe up at this point, suggesting conciliatory that perhaps the bloated pilgrim is some aspect of Nurgle, or a Greater Daemon in his service. Tempers calm, and a civil debate then proceeds upon the nature of Nurgle's Daemons and how the distinction between the god and the Greater Daemon is a fine one, and perhaps academic. All agree that the bloated pilgrim is truly blessed to have survived his pilgrimage, and voices are raised in praise to the Lord of Decay.

Those who complete this final trial are surely the favoured of Nurgle, and rank among the most devout of his servants. No one knows what happens to those who fail his tests, though it is likely that their bodies rest on Hindrance forever as piles of dust-coated bones within the deep desert, their souls screaming eternally in the insane eddies of the Black Gyre.

MEGARIA

"Slog for two-hundred paces across the surface of the curse-moon. There your ultimate truth awaits you, with bated breath."

—The Many-Eyed Oracle of Chaos

Hanging silently in the grey skies of Hindrance, the moon of Megaria is a baleful and sombre presence. It appears as a black orb, utterly dark. Light seems to fall into the moon itself, and it radiates a dour and palpable sense of menace.

Travelling to the moon is an almost suicidal endeavour; any ship that does so discovers that Megaria possesses a gravity well that is completely out of proportion to its size. While the moon's radius itself is less than a thousand kilometres, it registers to the systems of any approaching vessel as possessing a gravitational field equivalent to dozens of solar masses, triggering klaxons and alarms throughout the ship, as the hull flexes and shudders under the pressure. No ship that has travelled to Megaria has ever returned: instead they have plummeted to the surface, crushed under their own immense weight, which is magnified many thousand fold by the moon's bizarre gravitational field.

The moon thus possesses many of the properties of a neutron star, though its size and stable (if eccentric) orbit around Hindrance, a medium-sized terrestrial planet, suggests that it is in fact something else. For most visitors to the Hindrance system it remains a disquieting enigma.

However, for those who worship Nurgle, it is yet another holy place, symbolic of that aspect of his character which represents the eternal battle against despair and death. Megaria represents death, the end of all, utter desolation and ruin. It is the reaction of living things to the fear of such concepts that empowers Nurgle. As a result, those powerful sorcerers who worship Nurgle undertake great vision-quests to the surface of Megaria in order to steep themselves in its baleful energies.

ALACTIA

"They say that the Magi Morbos have a peculiar inclination toward scrap-code subterfuge; if the rumours are true and I can claim their secrets, no machine-spirit will be safe from my viro-indoctrination!"

—Rhodan Polikharp,
Viral Virtuoso of Addolorata

The third major body of the Hindrance system, Alactia, is famed across the Screaming Vortex as "the junkyard moon." From space, its pitted and rusting iron surface resembles an overripe, rotting, orange-coloured fruit, surrounded by buzzing insects. These "insects" are in fact the mercantile fleets of the Dark Tech-Priests of Alactia, the Magi Morbos, who, from small beginnings, have built their world into a minor regional power.

Alactia is the most habitable of the three realms of the Hindrance system, though this is hardly a proud boast given the generally inhospitable nature of its terrestrial bodies. It bears a thin, acrid atmosphere that can sustain human life of a kind, and it lacks the vicious Warp-driven storms of Hindrance or the crushing gravitational field of Megaria. The surface of Alactia is, save for a few denuded landing fields serving as rough and ready starports, entirely covered in a

blanket of rusting mechanical devices, stacked into towers hundreds of feet high. The moon brims with decrepit mechanical equipment scavenged by the Magi Morbos from sources across the Screaming Vortex and the Koronus Expanse. There are small, hopelessly polluted seas, tainted with runoff chemicals leaking from the vast graveyard of broken vehicles and machines piled along their shores. These seas now only serve to create a sickly precipitation which coats the entire surface of the moon in a veneer of grimy rust.

The Hindrance system occupies a strategic location close to the Thirteenth Station of Passage. It has since time immemorial attracted interest from those enemies of the Imperium who sought to travel between the nightmare realm of the Screaming Vortex and the Koronus Expanse beyond. Some three centuries ago, a small Nurgle-worshipping cult of hereteks affiliated with a larger group of pirates operating within the Koronus Expanse crossed into the Screaming Vortex, and found the Hindrance system much to their liking. These pioneers were much impressed by the clear symbolic links between the system and The Lord of Decay, and thus they opted to stay and transform the world into a place pleasing to them.

Known since that time as the Magi Morbos, these Nurglesque hereteks lack the profound depth of spiritual corruption found in the Biomancers of the Writhing World or the unholy technological prowess of the Warpsmiths of Guelph. Theirs is rougher, readier, and more practical form of expertise, still empowered by the twisted energies of the Screaming Vortex, but focussed upon achieving more modest aims than the creation of new life or the binding of Daemons into mechanical devices. The Magi Morbos instead see themselves as tradesmen, there to fulfil a pressing need among the spacefaring communities of the Screaming Vortex for the maintenance of their vessels, which are invariably much battered by the prevailing conditions. The Magi Morbos spend their days in worn and patched vacuum suits, merrily toiling on the hulls of orbiting ancient starships, like ticks crawling across the corpses of beached whales.

The Magi Morbos are happy to accept payment for this work in the form of slaves or plunder, but show a particular interest in consideration that takes the form of malfunctioning mechanical devices, the older, more decrepit and complex the better. Alternatively, customers are free to infect one of the Magi with some new and interesting disease, or to consent to have their entire crew receive any of the various technomaladies and viral wrack-codes carried by the Magi themselves in payment for work carried out.



MIRE

"You worship flesh, cultist; savour feeling, pretty flesh. Battle is done. You lay dying, now learning the truth of flesh—from flesh that all comes and all goes, and as the Lord of All demands."

—Garlea, Priornite of Mire

Observing Mire from afar, there is little more to perceive than a mass of white and grey clouds that swirl above a barren brown landscape stretched across the whole of the planet. There are no mountains, seas, or fields of growth; only the occasional plain of flat stone or dismal bog dots the land. The texture of the visible terrain is unnaturally smooth and uniform, perpetually racked by rainfall that is as persistent as it is common, no matter where on the planet you might be. Despite the atmosphere's consistent weather patterns, the entire world is almost devoid of life.

The few sorcerers and hereteks unfortunate enough to find themselves on Mire have developed numerous theories as to why and how the planet came to be so barren; postulations of a travelling Warp vortex, races of elemental xenos, and the machinations of renegade Magos Biologis are among the most popular. The truth of the entire matter of Mire has been shrouded by the passage of time, but artefacts of its history can be found by the ambitious and foolhardy.

The near-constant rainfall here does more than fester rot and infection in the living; the entire world is in a constant cycle of decay. The few sheets of slate rock that dot the planet shift slightly in the least viscous seas of mud, opening air pockets re-sealed millennia ago after the world's tumultuous journey through the Warp and into the Screaming Vortex. The most devoted savants of the damnable Imperium of Man and the greatest heretic scholars know only inklings of Mire's true history, and those that perform their own archaeological expeditions rarely escape the ever-churning subterranean caverns.

Once a lush world filled with super-flora, the jungles of Mire developed pestilence of a potency and infectious nature equalled by no other planet in the galaxy. The venomous swamps and forests bred equally toxic fauna, leaving the smartest (and most dominant) life forms, Mirens, to develop cannibalistic diets, consuming their own dead to survive. With this practice and the natural hazards of the planet, its denizens naturally fell into worship of the Plague Lord to survive the myriad diseases spawned on Mire.

No diplomatic visit was required before Inquisitor Vardask deemed it unworthy of re-integration and called down the order for Exterminatus Extremis. Miren fortune-tellers foresaw the death of their world in the entrails of their victims, brought about by the False Emperor from afar and carried out with the most violent pathogen known to sentient beings; a grand ritual was prepared and all the most devout members of their race gathered in the capital of Virulous to beseech the Plague Father for his protection from their impending doom.

Nurgle saw fit to protect these supplicants. The Ruinous Power briefly manifested near Mire, playfully swatting the *Nihilo Ordere* from orbit, causing the space flotilla to pull back and withhold most of their firebomb payload, and trusting that the Life-Eater virus would do its job. The Great Corruptor then wrapped his pestilential arms around the devoted in Virulous,

absorbing the Life-Eater virus that the Imperium of Man dropped onto Mire. Countless acolytes fell to the diseases that emanated from the Father of Pestilence, their immune systems as incapable of coping with the potency of his decaying form as the few plants that survived salvation at the hands of Nurgle.

As the Ruinous Power's attentions left Mire, the vessel's reactor finally exploded; the proximity to the Plague Father's presence caused the huge energy signature to jump the entire world into the Warp, careening through the Empyrean to eventually land in the Screaming Vortex. Travel through the Immaterium shook the planet's fragile core and released massive pockets of air (many displacing the countless Daemons that now inhabit the planet). These previously trapped gasses mixed with the atmosphere and created a torrential downpour that lasted for decades. The Long Rain cleaned away large slabs of slate dislodged by the quakes, but all of the remaining landmasses were washed away into seas and oceans of mud. Those that survived the cataclysm spread word of the inevitable death to any that brave the below.

Of the original worshipers saved by Nurgle, only one or two million survived the Long Rain, and half as many perished from the final death throes of the *Nihilo Ordere*. Those that remained have been bred by the Lord of Decay over centuries, the diseases endured by their ancestors hand-selected by the Plague Lord far in advance to ensure that the perfect carrier hosts eventually sire the bloodline. The warlords that take exceptional Mirens, from sage Priornites to savage Death Priests, to serve in their Black Crusades unknowingly carry with them the truest missionaries of the Master of Pestilence, spreading his infectious gospel to the far corners of the galaxy.

The Mirens spread out from Virulous to the isolated slate rocks that provide the planet's only secure ground, carrying samples from the ultra-polluted swamps that survived a brush against their lord's presence in the vain hopes of cultivating an edible resource. Strained to the limits of fatigue and starvation, they settled apart from one another, creating dynasties determined by plagues passed on through generations of cerebral consumption. The strongest Mirens and those naturally gifted by Chaos are privy to this revered bounty of the recent dead, creating a potent new ruling class often steeped in the powers of the Warp: Priornites.

These brain-gorged scions of disease embody the most potent psychic abilities granted by Nurgle and provide the means through which the Great Corruptor brings his agents onto Mire. This intense breeding program and despicable diet has left a genetic flaw designed for the children of the Plague Father aeons ago; every thousandth Miren born to the tribes possesses a superior immune system extremely resistant to disease. These hapless creatures (named "Pyrions" by their progenitors) are ritually sacrificed by Mire's Death Priests, their insides torn asunder and exposed to sacred samples of Nurgle's Rot before they are devoured.

The Daemons of the Master of Pestilence arise from these ritual piles of discarded humanity, fully materialised in all their putrid glory. This blasphemous practice has gone on for centuries and now the Plague Lord's Warp-children wander the endless mud flats of Mire, spreading the few diseases not already shared by the tribes of Mirens that fiercely protect their tumultuous territories.

VIRULOUS

If it could be said that Mire had a capital, Virulous would be it. Situated in the shelter granted by a massive piece of deck plating that ripped off the *Nihilo Ordere* as it entered into the atmosphere, the entire settlement lives and dies upon the capricious whim of the Keisari, who is blessed by the Plague God.

The Keisari of Virulous grew fat on the brains of every corpse that fell near his tribe, gorging himself for decades on the neural delights of thousands of Mirens. As the population of his city grew, so did the presence of Daemons on Mire. Now dozens of Plaguebearers, Nurglings, Beasts of Nurgle, and Rot Flies roam outside of the haphazard settlement, ensuring that the collected dead are brought to the Keisari for consumption. The ultra-potent Priornite has come to resemble the Plague Father; a rotting collection of fatty tissue ripe with disease and infections, his incredible psychic powers amplified by the disgusting nutrient paste developed only for his consumption. The valuable brains of any corpses that fall in Virulous are gathered together in a massive vat of peculiar liquids, providing the Keisari with mental nourishment.

Virulous is an especially dangerous place, a world where dog literally eats dog, or where they would if they hadn't long ago been eaten by the mutated string of humanity that calls Mire home. The rare establishment of civilised intent can be found, but most Mirens believe them to be haunted. Ultimately, few ever intend to find themselves on Mire, and fewer still stay any longer than absolutely necessary.

The Keisari knows of nearly all that happens on Mire (which is fairly little), absorbing all the knowledge within the minds of those he consumes. There are scores of rumours that travel to and fro in Virulous (most of them about potential sources of food) but few hold any truth. One that has interested the Keisari for some time is the local legend of a death vault in the collapsing mud caverns a few days travel from the settlement. If there is any veracity to the tale, a Warp-sustained strain of the Life-Eater Virus, suspended in a bubble of time that has extended its lifespan a billion-fold.

A more troubling rumour has reached the Keisari and he has begun to mobilize and gather the unholy forces at his beck and call to address it. Somewhere far removed from Virulous, a Pyrrion survived a regimen of harrowing Nurgle's Rot infections and has become an extremely powerful psyker. While the population shuns and fears this unnaturally clean outcast, the breadth and potency of his psychic powers are the stuff of legend, and it is said that he roams the mud flats of Mire. The Keisari rejoices that one day he will be joined with the Great Corruptor, but is in no hurry to do so, and repulses at the thought of a Pyrrion being the means of his end.

Whether or not that bears any truth, there is a great danger that lurks in the endless mud flats which the Keisari is always prepared for. The scores of countless bodies of those who died in the Exterminatus Extremis of Mire suffuse the very soil with bio-matter, and some of their souls linger as well. A Lutomorbus the size of a starship wanders the wastes, crushing Mirens and Daemons alike with its ponderous strides.



MYSTERIES OF MIRE

Several aspiring Priornites and hundreds of Mirens have died attempting to find the rumoured haven of the Life-Eater virus in a desperate attempt to earn the Keisari's favour and a week's worth of all the food they can eat—their bloated emperor desperately wishes to taste the natural growth of Mire, and will reward anyone that can provide it with these boons and gifts more wicked still.

Recently, the word that travels through Virulous claims that the Pyrrion psyker has begun to collect others like himself, and that he plans to sacrifice them all to the Plague Father in a grand ritual that will change the world of Mire forever. The ley lines of the Warp carry portent of this impending rite, and some of the psychic energies from this motley warband are visible from across the expanse of the galaxy to those with a means to perceive them. The end result of the mass sacrifice could be enough to bring this Pyrrion, or anyone that manages to take this boon for themselves, to Daemonhood.

Sightings of the titanic Lutomorbis are as infrequent as an eclipse but, should it ever threaten Virulous, the Keisari has a dedicated (and moderately well-fed) selection of Mirens prepared to carry him within the gutted remains of the *Nihilo Ordere* and down the mile-long caverns he has had excavated within the slate rock beneath it. Should there be any chance that it appears near his settlement, the Keisari will reward any warband capable of subduing or otherwise diverting the monstrosity, perhaps even sharing some of the many heretical (and assuredly inedible) treasures he keeps in this hideaway deep within the slate. Miren hunters, Death Priests, Priornites, and even off-worlders have all been slain seeking this devastating creature.

WRETCHES OF MIRE

These gaunt alabaster humanoids have soft skin covered in diseased flesh and infectious growth, their eyes devoid of pupils and consumed by darkness. Sharpened, yellow teeth spit out their mumbling feral language, degrading in quality as the esteem of its speaker increases. Hunched over and little other than bones, their afflicted skin is chitinous and rough, making their taloned hands into effective weapons.

Their tribal societies worship plagues and sickness, honouring those with the most aggressive or violent afflictions. Cannibalism is as fundamental to their culture as disease. When the rare Pyrrion or "clean one" is found, if it is identified by a Death Priest, it is immediately slaughtered and consumed (just like all of the other dead on their home planet of Mire). The only part of the bodies of the dead that these voracious warriors do not consume is the brain, a sacred organ reserved only for their elite.

Miren Wretch (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
33	22	32	33	29	21	32	17	15	--

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Wounds: 9

Armour: Dead Tissue (1 All)

Total TB: 4

Skills: Athletics (Strength) +0, Dodge (Ag) +0, Stealth (Ag) +0, Survival (Per) +0.

Talents: Lightning Reflexes, Resistance (Poisons).

Traits: Natural Weapons, Toxic (1), Unnatural Toughness (1).

Weapons: Claws and Teeth (1d10+3 R; Pen 0; Primitive [7], Toxic [1]).

PRIORNITE

Some Mirens are naturally gifted by the Plague Father, developing into psykers. These children are the scions of esteemed bloodlines and gain their abilities from generations of cerebral cannibalism that result in a wide range of encephalitic afflictions. Were it not for this sustained diet of brain matter (especially from their kin) these gifts would come to an end, but there never seems to be a time where a clan of these fearfully respected (and dubiously insane) Mirens is lacking a powerful Priornite.

Every Priornite champions a disease; all have access to Nurgle's Rot, but each carries their particular affliction as a badge of pride and supplication to the Plague Lord. While they might suffer from their sickness while in repose, in battle they are emboldened and empowered by the Great Corruptor, their bodies regenerating as soon as wounds are inflicted upon them.

Priornite (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
37	29	31	41	22	29	22	47	45	16

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Wounds: 14

Armour: Rotting Skin Robes (2 All)

Total TB: 6

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Forbidden Lore (Nurgle) (Int) +10, Psyniscience (Per) +10.

Talents: Psy Rating (3), Resistance (Poisons).

Traits: Psyker, Regeneration (1), Toxic (1), Unnatural Toughness (2).

Weapons: Rotmind Rod (1d10+5 I; Pen 3; Force, Toxic (7)).

Psychic Powers: Field of Pestilence, Inviolable Flesh, Nurgle's Rot (see pages 215–216 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook).



LUTOMORBUS

The very soil of Mire is infused with the blood, bones, and brain matter of its populace, congealed instantly into organic slop by the Life-Eater Virus. While travelling through the Immaterium, something congealed the consciousness of the dead Mirens into walking monstrosities that have come to be known as Lutomorbis. These gargantuan creatures rise from the mud flats, their huge bodies formed from countless corpses that form into crude limbs. They walk the surface of the planet from time to time and no scholar yet has been brave or foolish enough to attempt to discover why (and live to tell of it, at least).

Legends tell of Priornites and Death Priests riding on the backs of these massive creatures as they wade into the few battles that mark the history of the dead world, though none are sure how they came to tame or negotiate with such mysterious, morbid beings. These Massive amalgamations of the dead are ponderous but truly dangerous, slamming their enormous fists (jutting with multitudes of jagged and broken bones) into the ground with unnatural force. When a target flees or proves too nimble to slam with its limbs, the Lutomorbis flings pieces of its form at them instead; the corpses explode into bone shrapnel upon impact, killing most near wherever it lands. All the while, it wails a baleful moan as it fights or searches for ever more opponents to add to its body.

Lutomorbis (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	29	81	70	28	15	19	35	11	—

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Intimidate (Fel) +30, Logic (Int) +10, Psyniscience (Per).

Talents: Baleful Dirge, Combat Sense, Whirlwind of Death.

Traits: Dark-Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear 4, From Beyond, Multiple Arms (4), Natural Weapons, Size (7), Regeneration (7), Sonar Sense, Sturdy, The Stuff of Nightmares, Undying, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (8).

Weapons: Massive fists (Melee; 2d10+14 I; Pen 7; Concussive [2], Felling [7]), corpse projectiles (Heavy; 30m; 1d10+14 I; Pen 3; Concussive [2], Blast [5], Felling [4]).

Wounds: 120

Total TB: 15

BEAST OF NURGLE

These bulks of festering Daemon-flesh are barely more intelligent than Chaos Spawn, but equally as playful as their diminutive cousins. They ooze across the battlefield, gleefully wrestling the nearest opponent; once they have succumbed to affliction or been crushed to death, the Beast of Nurgle moves to the nearest target to resume its ghastly sport.



Beast of Nurgle (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
43	34	52	43	25	16	34	34	16	07

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: None

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per).

Talents: None.

Traits: Crawler, Daemonic (3), Dark Sight, Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (3), From Beyond, Natural Weapons, Regeneration, Size (6), Spewing Tentacles†, Sturdy, Toxic (2), Trail of Slime††, Unnatural Toughness (5), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Tentacles (Melee; 1d10+5 R; Pen 0; Toxic [2]).

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 20 metres of a Beast of Nurgle suffer a -10 penalty to Willpower Tests.

†**Spewing Tentacles:** Beasts of Nurgle bear a mass of tentacles on their backs. As a Full Action, a Beast of Nurgle can make a Ballistic Skill Test to unleash one of the following effects:

- **Clouds of Flies:** The Beast of Nurgle unleashes a cloud of biting flies. This has the Smoke (7) Quality (see page 151 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook), centred on the Beast.
- **Foul Gases:** Incredibly noxious fumes spew forth from the Beast of Nurgle. Each living creature within 10 metres of a Beast of Nurgle must make **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test** or be Stunned for 1d5 Rounds.
- **Noxious Fluids:** The Beast of Nurgle sprays a jet of fluid that eats through anything it strikes. One target within 10 metres must make a **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test** or suffer a single hit that inflicts 1d10 Impact Damage (ignoring armour).
- ††**Trail of Slime:** Beasts of Nurgle leave a wake of disgusting slime wherever they walk. Any character who walks through an area so defiled must make a **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test** or suffer 1d10 Impact Damage (ignoring armour and Toughness Bonus) from the carcinogens in the rotting path.





NURGLING

These pernicious and capricious Daemons erupt from the boils and pustules that pock the fleshy hide of Great Unclean Ones. They caper and dance about the greater Daemons, causing mischief whenever possible, constantly giggling as they play. Their enemies are another matter entirely, and would do well to avoid their sharp claws; those that survive the rake of a Nurpling's talons often find their wounds festering and incurable.

Nurpling (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	07	16	25	25	16	16	43	25	01

Movement: 2/4/6/12

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20.

Talents: Swift Attack, Takedown.

Traits: Daemonic (2), Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (1), From Beyond, Natural Weapons, Swarm, Toxic (3), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Teeth and Claws (1d10+1 R; Pen 4; Toxic [3]).

Infected Wounds: Whenever a target fails the Toughness Test from the Toxic Quality of a Nurpling's attack, the target also suffers 1d5 Toughness Damage.

PLAGUE DRONE

The cavalry of Nurgle are one of the fleetest and most dangerous assets of the Great Corruptor's forces. When the call to battle is given, high ranking Plaguebearers and affliction-indulgent Rot Flies undergo a mutual infection that binds their bodies together. They undergo this transformation simultaneously, sharing an intuitive rider-mount persona while gaining additional abilities and protections. They zip through armed conflicts, slashing down foes with Plague Swords while showering the battlefield in disease and pestilence with vile fluids ejected from putrid proboscises.

Plague Drone (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
43	43	43	52	61	34	43	43	25	07

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Armour: None

Wounds: 40

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20, Dodge +20, Psyniscience (Per) +10, Scholastic Lore (Numerology) (Int), Speak Language (Any One, Miren) (Int).

Talents: Crippling Strike.

Traits: Daemonic (5), Dark Sight, Fear (4), Flyer (6), From Beyond, Natural Weapons, Toxic (4), Unnatural Strength (3), Unnatural Toughness (2), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Plague Sword (1d10+11 R; Pen 4; Balanced, Toxic [4]), Pestilent Proboscis (Ranged; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+4 I; Pen 2; Pestilent Slime†, Toxic [4]).

Infected Wounds: Whenever a target fails the Toughness Test from the Toxic Quality of a Plague Drone's attack, the target also suffers 1d5 Toughness Damage.

†**Pestilent Slime:** When the Plague Drone inflicts Damage (after reductions for armour and Toughness Bonus) with this weapon, the target also suffers 1d10 Toughness Damage.

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 30 metres of a Plague Drone suffer a -20 penalty to Willpower Tests.



ABCELLYOTH, HERALD OF NURGLE

The Daemons of Mire do not entirely disperse when they are destroyed and fragments of their being suffuse the planet's soil. Shortly after the dead world's emergence from the Warp, thousands of Daemons that materialised within the many caverns beneath the surface were crushed to death as the mud-caves resealed themselves in torrential washes of dirt during the Long Rain. These disparate expressions of Nurgle's power congealed, coalescing into Abcellyoth, a true Herald of Nurgle. This collection of Warp-spawned entities has been said to turn into a tempest of vermin that descends onto settlements of Mirens bereft of their Priornite, consuming everything but the slate rock upon which their primitive mud-houses and tents once stood.

A scion of disease, this monstrous mass of vermin floats across the battlefield, sewing infection on the forces of enemies and allies alike. They wander the mud flats of Mire, doggedly pursuing anyone unlucky enough to cross their paths without a Priornite to assuage the eldritch consciousness. Even the ravenous Mirens choose not to eat a corpse left by Abcellyoth, leaving what little flesh remains to rot away, or else burning it upon a great pyre, before the ash carries more contagion onto the wind.

Abcellyoth, Herald of Nurgle (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
62	34	54	61	52	34	43	52	34	52

Movement: 5/10/15/30

Wounds: 30

Armour: None

Total TB: 12

Skills: Awareness (Per) +10, Dodge (Ag) +10, Psyniscience (Per) +10, Scholastic Lore (Numerology) (Int), Speak Language (Miren) (Int).

Talents: Crippling Strike, Swift Attack.

Traits: Daemonic (6), Dark-sight, Fear 4, From Beyond, Natural Weapons, Sickly Influence†, Toxic (4), Unnatural Toughness (2), Unnatural Strength (2), Warp Instability.

Weapons: Claws and Teeth (1d10+7 R; Pen 5; Tearing, Toxic [4]), Daemonic Vomit (Pistol; 77m; 2d10+5 I; Pen 4; Toxic [5]).

Daemonic Presence: All enemies within 20 metres of Abcellyoth suffer a -20 penalty to Willpower Tests.

Cloud of Flies: Abcellyoth is composed, of and constantly surrounded by, thick clouds of insects. These noxious vermin provide the Daemon with 7 Armour Points of Cover (which fully regenerate at the beginning of each of its Turns). Abcellyoth can see clearly through this barrier and suffers no penalties from the Cloud of Flies.

Nurgle's Rot: A Herald of Nurgle may call upon the Great Corruptor as a Half Action, manifesting this power as though he was a psyker. As a Daemon, a Herald of Nurgle never rolls on the Perils of the Warp but lacking mortal psyker abilities, it always manifests this ability as a Psy Rating 3 effect that requires a roll on the **Table 6-2: Psychic Phenomena** (see page 210 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook). The

Herald of Nurgle itself, however, is never subject to any negative effects from such rolls. When activated, this power nullifies the Cloud of Flies ability for one Turn as the vermin all swarm Abcellyoth's target to dispense the Plague Lord's horrid "blessings."

†**Sickly Influence:** Any creature that is struck by Abcellyoth's Vomit, Nurgle's Rot, or melee attacks must make a **Difficult (-10) Toughness Test** or suffer a -20 penalty to all Tests to attack Abcellyoth until the end of its next Turn.

THE THANATOR

The Thanator, an ancient overlord of Mire, is a Priornite of the most advanced age and festering power. His sorcerous abilities are terrifying in combat, and his maggot-worm mind is cunning still, despite the long ages he has ruled.

The Plague God has granted this loyal servant of his with not only eldritch gifts, but also with visions. The Thanator awaits the arrival of several powerful Heretics, on whose quest the Lord of Flies has buzzing, gurgling whispers say he must assist. While the Thanator would never defy his dark god, he demands the respect due him as an ancient and powerful patron of rot on the wretched world of Mire from all who pass through his domain. The Priornite Thanator plays an important role in the adventure contained in this volume, **The Heart of the Vortex**, guiding the Heretics to new heights of power and new depths of despair...

Priornite Thanator (Master)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
32	19	23	43	16	55	22	77	65	34

Movement: 1/2/3/6

Wounds: 21

Armour: Putrid Flesh (1 All)

Total TB: 6

Skills: Awareness (Per) +0, Forbidden Lore (Nurgle) (Int) +20, Psyniscience (Per) +20.

Talents: Psy Rating (5), Resistance (Poisons).

Traits: Psyker, Regeneration (7), Toxic (7), Unnatural Toughness (3).

Weapons: Plague-Cauldron Staff (2d10+5; Pen 5; Decay [1] [see page 42], Force).

Psychic Powers: All of the Nurgle Psychic Powers (see pages 215-216 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook).



THE FROZEN HEART

"It's here! It's right before us! All we have fought for. All we have strived for. The beauty. The terror. The very essence of Chaos within our grasp. Brothers, to arms!"

—Last received transmission of Mithros, Bloodslayer Lord

The Lower Vortex defies logical explanation. The power of Chaos engulfs the entire region, leaving it adrift from such mortal concepts as time and space. Within this realm everything is possible and the power of the Chaos Gods is at its absolute zenith. The worlds trapped within the Lower Vortex are raw and seething, utterly untamed and impossible to inhabit by anything more than the most wretched of the lost and the damned. In this realm, Daemons rule and the screams of the pitiful invade the minds of anyone still sane enough to hear them. At the centre of this swirling nightmare lies the Frozen Heart, a world that exists as the literal eye of the storm. Legends surrounding the Daemon World vary more than any within the Vortex, and while records exist of various attempts to claim whatever prize may lie on its blasted surface, little proof exists that any returned.

EYE OF THE STORM

To the cursed few that have stepped upon a Daemon World and lived to tell the tale, the worlds of the Lower Vortex are pure hell. An anathema to traditional life, these worlds boil with the unbridled energies of the Warp and exist as playthings of the Chaos Gods. Spoken of as a world of balance, however, the Frozen Heart appears to differ from these hellscape. Like the eye of a raging storm, the Frozen Heart sits apart from other Daemon Worlds as the Chaos Gods hold equal sway upon its surface. The planet exists as a microcosm of the entire Vortex, with vast regions that exist in an unending conflict for total domination and complete damnation.

Lunatics that claim to have glimpsed the Frozen Heart in dreams or prophecy say it exists as four distinct domains, each one in perfect balance yet endless battle with those to either side. Some liken it to the four seasons of a year, for as the planet spins on an erratic and ever-changing axis, so do the four regions shift and swell. Few believe those that speak of their time on the surface, but nevertheless even the wisest of the Vortex cannot ignore the similarities in the stories these madmen tell.

Stranger still, the Frozen Heart's poles exist as perilous sanctuaries from the rest of the world. Infused by the raw power of the Vortex, these lands exist apart from the specific machinations of any one Chaos God. Men and mutants, gripped by their last vestiges of hope or sanity, drag themselves to these areas in a desperate final attempt to escape the Daemon World's endless cycle. However, the torments they leave behind seem as luxuries compared to what they find in this terrible destination.

THE DOOM OF WARLORDS

An enduring tale within the Vortex tells of a great champion known as Khandor Mithros. A tyrant of extreme cruelty, Mithros focused his attention not outwards towards the greater Imperium, but looked to the centre of the Vortex. Convinced he could claim the Vortex, Mithros launched a campaign of conquest that earned him many titles and a massive army of loyal troops. Finally, convinced of his own supremacy, he headed directly for the Frozen Heart. Records of his conquest stop here, and while some claim to have fled the ruins of Mithros' army through the Ascendant Spiral, almost nothing of Mithros is said to have survived. Many hold Mithros as a warning to those that might steal power from the Chaos Gods, and an inspiration to those mad enough to seek control of the Vortex.

To most within the Vortex, the Frozen Heart is a lurking terror, an undiscovered jewel, and the true axis of the Warp's power. Most know that reaching it alive is all but unachievable, and that reaching it with any shred of sanity is impossible. Yet many have tried, each would-be champion fuelled by the tales of endless riches, unlimited power, and the promise of the great unknowable dynamo—a mythical relic of such unfathomable potency it could decide the fate of a billion billion souls.





UNCONTROLLABLE CALM

Rumours persist that the deeper one delves into the Vortex, the more stable the Warp becomes. True or not, the battle for domination fought amongst the Chaos Gods is endless, and the Frozen Heart plays host to one of the galaxy's most enduring conflicts as each region of the damned world fights daily for a dominance no single Ruinous Power can ever hope to achieve.

THE REALM OF CREATION

As the Frozen Heart turns, so too does the power of Tzeentch reach out to shape and cleanse the previous day's destruction, debauchery, and decay. Within this glittering realm of endless possibilities and shifting architecture, the Changer of Ways weaves new life into the world. Horrors cavort as the ground at their feet heaves and splits with Tzeentch's fleeting desires, and great crystal palaces rise up from the sludge left in Nurgle's wake. Impossible Daemon-plants sprout beside flowing lakes of multicoloured water as Screemers glide among the grasping branches. Mutants of all descriptions parade across the Architect of Fate's domain, their God's insatiable need for change wracking their bodies with boundless transformations. Daemonic sorcerers and colossal Flamers launch streams of ever-shifting energy across the kaleidoscopic skies.

Despite the celebration of Tzeentch's power, the Realm of Creation remains lethal to those opposed to the Great Conspirator, and his multi-hued armies rush to cast aside the forces of Nurgle and claim new territory to renew and evolve. The denizens of Tzeentch's domain also fight a constant battle

THE SHACKLED PRINCE

Deep beneath the Frozen Heart's surface within a massive chamber stands a Daemon Prince so powerful that even his breathing shapes the walls around him. At his feet clusters of insane mutants toil to bring the Prince all he desires, piling objects around him and his throne. The Prince, however, remains unable to indulge in anything, his movement inhibited by four restraints. One is made of gleaming crystal, another of polished brass. Another of studded leather and the final one a decaying rope that the Prince cannot break. Held in place, the Prince endures an eternity of torment, unable to move, unable to leave, and unable to even sit upon the glorious throne behind him. His bellowing screams echo out to no one, not even the uncaring Dark Gods that once gave him everything.

against the approaching forces of Khorne. As the Master of Fortune powers forward, the lands to the rear of his influence twist into a deceptive nightmare of traps and false safe-havens. Here the forces of Khorne struggle against the web of lies before them and the tactics of Tzeentch's mutated rearguard. The fury of Khorne's minions grows until they lash out, madly destroying everything around them, even their allies. This gambit serves Tzeentch well, as despite their equal share of power, Khorne is the most voracious of the Chaos Gods, and the most likely to swallow the world entirely if not held in check by the Changer of Way's illusory methods.

THE REALM OF DESTRUCTION

A land of war and total annihilation, Khorne's domain stands a testament to his brutality. Shrouded in red mist, the Realm of Destruction chokes with the ashes of the dead. As the day passes upon the Frozen Heart's surface, Khorne's legions nip at Tzeentch's heels, tearing down his crystal towers to replace them with mounds of skulls and crude stone temples soaked with the blood of the fallen. Bloodthirsters lead strikes into the coloured lands of Tzeentch, claiming the heads of any mutant foolish enough to stand against the Blood God's horde while Flesh Hounds stalk through the shattered ruins of Tzeentch's domain, hunting down any that try to hide from Khorne's wrath.



Khorne's rage knows no limit, yet within his domain, his ceaseless fury is a double-edged sword. Whilst his blood-spattered legions pour into the edges of Tzeentch's realm, those still in the centre of his lands turn on one another in contests of brutality and murder. Champions rise and fall as the day passes, each one taking the skulls of the warrior before him until the dead outnumber the living. As the influence of Slaanesh approaches, these lost souls fall to obsessive blood rituals and other forms of devotion that take them further from the slaughter, playing into the hands of the sweet encroaching darkness. Like with Tzeentch's trickery, Khorne's own destructive nature stops him from claiming the Frozen Heart for himself, and his insatiable need for greater acts of slaughter pushes his forces ever forward, leaving a broken land of misery in his wake.

THE REALM OF OBSESSION

Whispering seductively to the dregs of Khorne's army, Slaanesh offers a release from the torment of battle and a new life of everlasting pleasure. Slaanesh's domain is unusually dark, thick clouds of perfume and screams of ecstatic torture filling the air as the Frozen Heart turns to claim the blasted lands destroyed by Khorne's fury. Reshaped through Slaanesh's will into a land of excess, glistening meadows and calm waterfalls form from where rivers of blood and fields of crushed skulls once lay. Vast herds of Slaaneshi Steeds run to and fro, seeking new experiences to devour. Slaanesh's minions lovingly convert the ruins of Khorne's temples into luscious torture chambers and sickening pleasure dens. Tended by Daemonettes, the shrines to hedonism consume the population of insane mutants, leaving them unable to move from the crashing waves of sensation that fill every waking moment.

In a cruel twist of irony, the incessant need for greater and more extreme sensations leads to the very downfall of Slaanesh's minions. As the Frozen Heart's cycle moves into its final stage, both mortal and Daemon alike quickly lose interest in their current state of being and obsess over the search for new sensations, rather than the sensations themselves. Monuments to the Prince of Pleasure's glory remain half-finished, and those left mutilated and crippled from the pleasure pits wither and wail in agony as their masters seek greater excesses of depravity. Left behind by the very god that assured them eternal pleasure, these pathetic wretches lack the power to resist the promises of the god that follows in Slaanesh's wake—Nurgle.



THE REALM OF DESICCATION

Like a hungry beast starved of nourishment, Nurgle's pawns fall upon the lands of Slaanesh with ravenous desire. As the Frozen Heart enters its final stage, the quarter of the world that once echoed with the cries of excess falls before a foetid tide of disease and decay. The pathetic creatures that remain from Slaanesh's worst excesses fall quickly while plagues of flies and noxious gasses sweep aside the Pleasure Prince's sickly sweet perfumes. Waves of Nurglings overwhelm the foolish few that seek to maintain Slaanesh's hold on the land as swooping Plague Drones pick off stragglers and deposit them in enormous cauldrons of bubbling disease. The meadows and waters that once enticed thousands rot and curdle, forming swamps and bogs. Tended with great care, Great Unclean Ones watch over their gardens as rotting mutants sally forth to spread Nurgle's gifts.

For the brief time that Nurgle holds sway, the lands under his control remain still. Diseases brew and spread as putrefaction renders everything created and destroyed during the previous cycles to sludge. The joyous laughter of Nurgle's servants and the buzz of billions of flies fill the air. Only those truly dedicated to Nurgle survive in such a corrupted place, with Tzeentch alone holding the power to create life from such overwhelming stagnation and death as the cycle begins anew.



MADDENING HEIGHTS

Separated from the daily maelstrom of renewal and death, the northern pole's barren landscape might appear as refuge to those desperate to escape, but any hope this false reprieve offers vanishes as the madness of the region takes hold. Survival in this bleak environment is next to impossible as dry choking dust claims any who stumble, and rotting, half-buried corpses litter the landscape. However, those that somehow survive face a fate worse than death as their bodies coil and morph, splitting apart and reforming into unnatural shapes. Soon the Warp overwhelms these poor souls, reducing them to the lowest of the Warp's creations—Chaos Spawn.

REALM OF THE WARPED

Mindless and insane, Spawn gallop, slide, burrow, and glide across the pole, devouring one another not out of hunger but simply the unconscious need to survive. In most places, Spawn exist for a brief moment, the energies of their transformation quickly burning out, but upon the blasted planes of the northern pole, these wretches thrive. Once servants caught in the incessant daily ruin of the Frozen Heart, these Spawn know nothing but the torture of their existence and the scorn of the Ruinous Ones.

Chaos Spawn (Elite)										
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf	
35	01	66	63	22	03	16	25	01	--	

Movement: 9/18/27/54†

Armour: None

Skills: Athletics (S) +20, Awareness (Per).

Talents: Furious Assault, Swift Attack, True Grit.

Traits: Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (2), From Beyond, Multiple Arms (1d10), Regeneration (1d5), Size (1d5+3), Stuff of Nightmares, Unnatural Strength (6), Unnatural Toughness (6).

Weapons: Claws, pincers, beaks, vicious maws, etc. (Melee; 1d10+12 R; Pen 0; Tearing).

Touched by the Gods: The profile above represents a fairly typical Unaligned Chaos Spawn. However some Spawn retain their identity as servants to a particular Chaos God, ensuring servitude even in their final moments. The GM can modified the Spawn to match one of the following four types of Spawn, adding the rules listed below to the base profile. In any instance where the same rule repeats, take the higher value.

†A Spawn's Movement values change depending on its Size, Agility Bonus, and other modifiers.

Bloodbeast (Khorne)

Enraged creatures of pure muscle and sinew, Bloodbeasts seek only to devour and destroy; anything to please the god that abandoned them.

Talents: Flesh Render, Frenzy, Lightning Attack.

Traits: Brutal Charge (6), Natural Armour (6).

Painleech (Slaanesh)

A gift for foolish champions that experience too many sensations at once, the Painleech perceives anything and everything around them to an excruciating level, filling the Spawn's last moments with an agony beyond reason.

Talents: Heightened Senses (All), Lightning Reflexes.

Traits: Fear (4), Unnatural Agility (6), Unnatural Perception (6).



Foulspawn (Nurgle)

Followers of Nurgle reduced to Spawndom seem to survive far longer than other Spawn, almost as if the Plague Father takes some unnatural joy in their existence.

Traits: Crawler, Regeneration (2d5), Toxic (3), Unnatural Toughness (8).

Enveloping Abominations: Most Foulspawn attempt to envelop those around them, drawing unfortunate victims into their sticky disease-ridden mass. Foulspawn gain a +30 bonus to Tests to Grapple enemies and inflict an additional 2d5 Damage when using the Damage Opponent option of the Grapple Action. A Foulspawn that kills an adversary while Grappling it increases its Regeneration Trait to Regeneration (2d10) and removes all levels of Fatigue it is currently suffering.

Firewurm (Tzeentch)

The most pitiable of Spawn, Firewyrms seek nothing but an end to their malformed existence. The playthings of Tzeentch, Firewyrms mutate endlessly, taking on whatever aspects the Weaver of Fates desires until the Spawn's hideous form explodes from the strain. This ever-shifting torture makes Firewyrms virtually impossible to destroy, as injuries fade or morph in a matter of moments.

Traits: Fear (3), Hoverer (9), Phase.

Weapons: Blazefire (Basic; 30m; S/-/-; 1d10+9 E; Pen 6; Felling [4], Flame, Melta).

Writhing Transformation: Unlike other Spawn, a Firewurm does not have the Regeneration Trait (remove this Trait from the list of its Traits), and its Wounds is lowered to 18. However, at the start of each of its Turns, remove all Damage from the Firewurm.

Fiery Demise: 1d5 Rounds after a Firewurm dies, its corpse detonates in a pillar of shimmering flame; it inflicts a single hit for 6d10 Damage with a Penetration of 24 and the Flame Quality upon each target within 3 metres.

CHAOS SPAWN AS MINIONS

Heretics may take a single Chaos Spawn as a Minion of Chaos. Heretics may take Spawn dedicated to Chaos Gods even if they remain Unaligned, and may even take Spawn opposed to their own Alignment (so, a Heretic dedicated to Slaanesh can take a Bloodbeast, for instance). Spawn are not easily acquired, however, and must either be found or created.

THE LOST AND THE FOUND

Areas of high Warp energy (especially places like the Frozen Heart and other worlds of the Lower Vortex) are ideal for locating Chaos Spawn. Places with high concentrations of sorcerers tend to act as good areas to find Spawn, either due to the sorcerers that create Spawn or Sorcerers that draw too much energy from the Warp and find themselves cursed with Spawndom. Once found, a Heretic must use the Wrangling rules as part of a **Survival (Per) Test** (**BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook, pages 110-111) to increase the Spawn's Disposition. Spawn start at the Mutinous Disposition, and all Tests to Wrangle are **Hard (-20)** in addition to any Disposition modifiers. Players with access to **THE TOME OF FATE** may attempt a Ritual of Bonding to further cement their hold over the Spawn.

CHAOTIC CREATION

Creating a Chaos Spawn is far less precise, as no two Spawn are alike. A Heretic must find someone to turn into a Chaos Spawn and infuse them with the power of the Warp to create an overwhelming number of mutations. Heretics that find a way to increase an NPC's Corruption to 100 turn that NPC into a Spawn. Once this occurs, the NPC ceases to exist and instead becomes a Chaos Spawn. NPCs Aligned to a particular Chaos God gain the benefits of the specific type of Spawn listed in the rules for Spawn (see page 120). Daemons cannot be turned into Spawn.

BRIEF CANDLE

The life of a Chaos Spawn is usually very short. It takes great care to maintain a Spawn for any length of time, making them temporary Minions at best. Every Round (or minute, outside of combat) that a Chaos Spawn fails to attack an adversary, it gains 1 level of Fatigue. Once it reaches a number of levels of Fatigue equal to its Toughness Bonus, the Spawn dies automatically. Spawn cannot rest to reduce Fatigue, although a Spawn's master (if it has one) can reduce the Spawn's levels of Fatigue by sating its hunger (drenching it in fresh blood for a Bloodbeast, administering electric shocks to a Painleech, and so on) and passing a **Hard (-20) Willpower Test**, reducing the Spawn's current levels of Fatigue by 1 for every Degree of Success. The GM has final say on what constitutes "feeding" the Spawn. Spawn do not gain levels of Fatigue this way within the Lower Vortex.

FRIGID DEPTHS

The Frozen Heart's southernmost reaches look peaceful to those clawing their way out of the daily trials of the Dark Gods, but this could not be further from the truth. A frozen landscape of jagged irregular hills and sharp obsidian crevices, the southern pole hides some of the Daemon World's most terrifying secrets. Mortals that drag themselves to the southern region usually perish within hours, but not from the flocks of Furies that whirl through the ashen skies or to the writhing masses of half-formed Warp entities that slither and scuttle through the black, choking snow. Instead, most fall prey to the mortals that came before, a host of dim shades that drift silently towards their victims, their hollow eyes filled with fury and bloodlust.

LOWEST OF THE LOW

The Frozen Heart plays host to the basest Daemonic entities of the entire Vortex. Despicable knots of teeth, claws, and malformed bodies, these creatures exist as madness incarnate; the Warp at its most raw. Like a living tide, these Gibbering Masses bubble up from the southern pole's deepest regions to smother anything that lingers in one place for too long. They fear nothing, and multiply like living cells before reaching a critical mass and dissolving into the frozen crystals, rendering the snow the colour of ancient ash and incredibly deadly to the touch, for it quickly eats through anything it touches.

Gibbering Mass (Troop)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
25	01	20	25	40	05	25	25	01	--

Movement: 2/4/5/12

Armour: None

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20.

Talents: Fearless, Takedown.

Traits: Burrower (4), Critical Mass (Horde Only)†, Daemonic (3), Deadly Natural Weapons, Fear (2), From Beyond, Size (2), The Stuff of Nightmares, Warp Instability.

Weapons: Tiny Claws and Mouths (Melee; 1d10+2 R; Pen 2; Corrosive, Crippling [2]).

†**Critical Mass:** At the beginning of each Round, the GM rolls 1d10 and adds that to the Gibbering Mass Horde's current Magnitude (if it is being used as a Horde). This can increase the Horde above its starting Magnitude. If the Gibbering Mass Horde's Magnitude ever exceeds double its starting value, the entire Horde dissolves into the ground, covering an area 20 metres in diameter. Any creature that begins its Turn in this area suffers 2d10 Impact Damage, ignoring armour.

†*Gibbering Masses are intended to be used as a Horde, as described on page 348 of the **BLACK CRUSADE** Core Rulebook. The profile above represents a single creature.*

Wounds: 3
Total TB: 5

GRIM GUARDIANS

Records scattered across the Vortex claim that deep within the Frozen Heart lays a device of immense power. Spoken of as some unknowable dynamo, many believe it keeps the Vortex moving and that without it the Vortex would burn itself out in moments. Like the Frozen Heart itself, even the most oft-repeated tales contradict one another with some claiming the dynamo is an ancient machine of alien construction, while others describe it as the first Daemon Engine, infused with the power of four warring Greater Daemons. Others insist the Warp itself created the device, and that it is a mighty Chaos jewel unattainable by mortal hands—a glittering reminder that the true extent of divine power ever hangs just out of reach of all mortals who seek to claim it. Still more wicked whisperers postulate that it is a test, a challenge put forth by the Chaos Gods to their followers, with one simple goal: to winnow the weak from the strong, and give aspiring champions a rock upon which their limitless desires can crash, an unforgiving cliff that shatters their bodies and souls. Whatever this unhallowed relic truly is, tens of thousands have died in its pursuit, and none can claim to have ever laid eyes upon it and lived to reveal its nature.

Despite the contradictory tales, one common thread runs among them. Many tales of glory and doom point towards the Frozen Heart's southern pole as the entrance to wherever the dynamo exists, and almost every tale recounts the terrifying wardens that converge on all who dare approach this entryway. Described by the inhabitants of the Screaming Vortex as restless ghosts or ætheric echoes of aeons long-past, these shadows take the form of fallen heroes and damned heretics. Silent, implacable, and seemingly unstoppable, they power towards their victims and leave nothing behind except the eternally resounding screams of the dead.

Shadow Host (Elite)

WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	34	62	61	51	36	34	45	06	—

Movement: 6/12/18/36

Wounds: 46

Armour: None

Total TB: 6

Skills: Awareness (Per), Dodge (Ag) +10, Stealth (Ag) +20.

Talents: Fearless, Preternatural Speed, Swift Attack.

Traits: Dark-Sight, Fear (3), From Beyond, Hoverer (6), Phase, Size (5), The Stuff of Nightmares, Warp Instability.

Weapons: Ætheric Blade (Melee; 1d10+6 E; Pen 8; Crippling [3], Warp Weapon), Coldfire Blast (Basic; 15m; -/3/-; 1d10+4 E; Pen 0; Felling [2], Warp Weapon).

Consuming Dread: Shadow Hosts loom over their targets, sapping their victim's will to survive before moving in for the kill. Any character against which a Shadow Host makes a Charge Action must make a **Challenging (+0) Willpower Test**. If it fails, the target suffers 1d10 Willpower Damage, plus 1 additional Willpower Damage for every Degree of Failure by which he failed the Test.

Spectral Nightmare: Shadow Hosts defy most attempts at explanation and destruction alike. Even if vanquished, they have a tendency to return, slipping out from the corners of one's eye and back into reality to menace their prey once again. 1d5 Rounds after a Shadow Host is vanquished, roll 1d10; on a result of 9 or 10, the Shadow Host returns to existence 1d10 metres behind the character who last dispersed it. On any other result, the Shadow Host does not reform—yet.



THE ASCENDANT SPIRAL

"They are all dead, yet I alone live. What was it for, oh Dark Ones? To show me your power? To break me? No! You have taught me vengeance, and I shall put an Imperial world to the torch for every comrade you took from me!"

—Unknown survivor found within the Donarium
(current whereabouts unknown)

The Screaming Vortex is a verdant hive of legends and mysteries. From Guelph to Aphexis there are more stories of treasure and horror than there are stars in the galaxy. The Ascendant Spiral, the only known way out from the Lower Vortex, holds many mysteries, yet its real secrets remain obscured. The Spiral appears to terminate inside a space station known as the Donarium. This ancient place of unknown construction is the source of many Vortex legends and also where gangs of slave-trading information brokers strive endlessly to capture those that travel through the Spiral so that they might unlock its true purpose.

THE END IS THE BEGINNING

Nestled somewhere between Contrition, Crucible, and the dreaded Frozen Heart, the Ascendant Spiral is neither planet nor Daemon World. The few that talk about their experiences are often unable to recount how they arrived there, or much of what transpired, but they speak of questions, answers, and a test; details all too vague to get a true sense of what really happened.

Many think of the Ascendant Spiral as some sort of escape valve, or a release from the terrors of the Lower Vortex. In reality, the Spiral takes at least as many lives as it saves, and even those who live to see the cold decks of the distant Donarium arrive stripped of anything they possessed. The only common thread among survivors is a renewed hatred for the Imperium of Man, almost as if the Spiral acts to repurpose any who manage to survive the Lower Vortex by focusing their attention outward. Whether this is the Dark Gods protecting the Vortex from any who might claim it as their own, or simply the results of brainwashing or something darker, none truly know. Whatever the case, those that travel the Spiral find a new beginning as they dedicate their entire being to the destruction of the False Emperor's realm.

ALTAR OF THE DAMNED

As old as the Vortex itself, the Donarium sits not far from Q'Sal in a region of space where the Warp is at its weakest. To approaching vessels, it appears abandoned and misshapen, but the Donarium houses thousands of souls, many seeking answers to why the space station exists, and why it acts as the terminus point for the Ascendant Spiral.

Every few days the Donarium shudders as another batch of survivors appear on the station in an event known as the Emergence. No pattern governs their arrival and these lost souls appear almost at random across the entire breadth of the station, often bereft of anything but the clothes on their back. Within minutes, gangs of flesh brokers swoop in to claim the new arrivals. Some gather their wits and repel the vultures, but most fail to comprehend their new surroundings and the gangs quickly restrain and carry them into the tunnels for

interrogation. Many have tried to explain the Emergence and why the Donarium seems to grow a little with each arrival. Sadly, the survivors offer no answers, and most end up as slaves sold to the ships that pass the Donarium daily.

SKIN TRADERS AND RUMOUR MONGERS

Responsible for most of the Donarium's culture, the Flesh Brokers seek only two things: souls to sell and information on the Lower Vortex. Loose collectives of brokers gather to ensure dominance over large territories in the hope that they might claim as many new arrivals as possible during the next Emergence. Fights are common, with the witless survivors usually caught in the middle. Pulled into the twisted network of the Donarium's maddening layout, survivors are pressed for days or weeks for what little knowledge they retain from their time among the Daemon Worlds of the Lower Vortex, and with their secrets bare the brokers sell these broken, vengeful shells as quickly as possible to free up room for the inevitable new arrivals.

Flesh Broker (Elite)									
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	Per	WP	Fel	Inf
35	26	40	33	42	48	32	38	56	25

Movement: 4/8/12/24

Wounds: 12

Armour: Grisly Hides (All 2)

Total TB: 3

Skills: Athletics (S), Awareness (Per) +10, Charm (Fel) +10, Commerce (Int) +30, Common Lore (Screaming Vortex) (Int) +30, Deceive (Fel) +10, Dodge (Ag), Forbidden Lore (Daemonology, Mutants, Pirates, The Warp) (Int) +20, Interrogation (WP) +30, Intimidate (S), Scrutiny (Per).

Talents: Jaded, Technical Knock.

Weapons: Sword (Melee; 1d10+4 R; Pen 0; Balanced), Scrap-Gun (Basic; 25m; S/-/-; 1d10+7 R; Pen 0; Crippling [1], Inaccurate, Primitive [7], Unreliable).



ESCAPING THE LOWER VORTEX

The highly unpredictable currents of the Vortex make navigation and escape through conventional means practically impossible. Heretics trapped in the Lower Vortex might try to reach the Ascendant Spiral, or might find themselves there without any explanation as to how they arrived. The GM should play up the otherworldly and dreamlike nature of the Spiral, how some view it as a place of constant motion whereas others might see it as a realm of stifling silence. Reality should seem faster and slower, all sounds should echo, and the stars above should exist past a hazy veil of thick fog.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Heretics that find themselves within the Spiral eventually meet the Spiral's inscrutable and unknowable keepers. Some may only meet one, others may find themselves surrounded, and the GM should emphasise how the Heretics each see things differently even when standing right next to one another. The keepers ask each Heretic questions relating specifically to the Heretic—their secrets, their fears—and things that no one but the Heretics could know. The GM should introduce roleplaying opportunities tailored to his group of Heretics, specifically relating to their goals, actions, allegiance, any pacts they have formed. The Heretics must answer truthfully or find themselves eternally trapped within the Spiral.

THE TEST

The Spiral's keepers also test the Heretics, placing them individually into situations that test their resolve, their devotion to Chaos, and their hatred towards the Imperium. The GM should make these scenarios as personal as possible—such as testing a Khornate Renegade against unrelenting odds, or pitting a Nurglesque Apostate against a Tzcentchian Sorcerer in a war of words to sway a crowd of cultists—anything that pushes the Heretics to the limit of their abilities. Again the GM should emphasise the dreamlike nature of the tests, throwing unnatural elements into the ordeal.

DARK LABYRINTH

Heretics that pass the test awaken aboard the Donarium with little knowledge of what just happened. The Heretics still have their clothing and armour, and must choose one weapon to keep, but automatically lose the remainder of their weapons and equipment except for anything the GM deems vital (e.g. Cybernetics and bionics). The Heretics appear in various places across the Donarium, and within five minutes of their arrival must fight off several Flesh Brokers (1d5–3 per human Heretic and 1d5+1 per Chaos Space Marine) with a Surprise Round for the first Round of combat. The Flesh Brokers want to capture the Heretics, not kill them, as they want information about the Lower Vortex. Heretics that defeat or escape the Flesh Brokers can attempt to find one another by taking a **Very Hard (–30) Navigate (Surface) (Int) Tests** every half hour as they move around the space station. Once the Heretic scores 5 cumulative Degrees of Success they locate another Heretic, until all the Heretics find one another. Failure on any Test by 3 or more Degrees results in another Flesh Brokers attack. Once the Heretics have found each other they can make their way off the Donarium however they choose: ships arrive at the space station almost hourly, making passage off the station very easy.

BURNING VENGANCE

The Heretics that survive the experience gain 2d10 Infamy and the Hatred (The Imperium) Talent, covering all Imperial institutions (Adeptus Astartes, Imperial Guard, and so on). Like a dream, the Heretics should remember almost nothing of their ordeal within the Spiral. Attempts to remember require a **Hellish (–60) Intelligence Test**, and the GM chooses what part of the ordeal the Heretic remembers. Heretics with the Trade (Remembrancer) Skill gain a +30 bonus on this Test. The GM should make it clear that the ordeal within the Ascendant Spiral changes some of the Heretics' core motivations. Although unexplainable, the Heretics' primary goal should change to the destruction of the Imperium and their actions and plans from this point forward should reflect the desire to head out into the galaxy and slaughter the False Emperor's minions for the glory of Chaos.

