



Tactica Imperialis

A HISTORY OF THE
LATER IMPERIAL CRUSADES

Dan Abnett
& Andy Hoare

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LATER IMPERIAL CRUSADES





Authors: *Dan Abnett and Andy Hoare*

Editor: *Nick Kyme*

Graphic Design: *Darius Hinks*

Producer: *Marc Gascoigne*

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Illustrators: *Alex Boyd, Christian Byrne, Paul Dainton, Wayne England, David Gallagher, Mark Gibbons, Paul Jeacock, Dave Kendall, Karl Kopinski, Stefan Kopinski, Clint Langley, Ian Peterson, Philip Sibbering, Adrian Smith, John Wigley and Richard Wright.*

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Exordium

TO THE READER OF THIS TREATISE

MANY AND GLORIOUS ARE THE DEEDS OF MAN, AND THERE IS NOT A CITY OR STATION ANYWHERE IN THE VAST REALM OF IMPERIAL SPACE THAT DOES NOT CONTAIN SOME MONUMENT, SHRINE OR CITATION TO THE COURAGE, TENACITY AND SACRIFICE OF THE WARRIORS OF MANKIND. WITHOUT THE CEASELESS, SELFLESS EFFORTS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THEATRES OF WAR RANGING ACROSS OUR GALACTIC TERRITORY, THE IMPERIUM WOULD NOT HAVE ENDURED DOWN THROUGH THE MILLENNIA. THE IMPERIUM IS FOUNDED UPON THE BLOOD, SWEAT AND MUSCLE OF THE WARRIOR CLASSES.

HIGH COMMAND, AND THE OFFICIO TACTICA, TAKE PRIDE IN RECORDING ALL INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS WITH AS MUCH ACCURACY AND DETAIL AS IS POSSIBLE. THE ARCHIVAL BODY OF MATERIAL HELD ON VARIOUS SECTOR CAPITAL WORLDS, AND IN THE ENGRAM VAULTS OF HOLY TERRA ITSELF, IS AN EXTRAORDINARY AND VAST RESOURCE, A TREASURE IN WHICH THE SCHOLAR OR AFICIONADO MAY FIND EXTRAORDINARY ACCOUNTS OF HEROISM AND FORTITUDE.

THESE RECORDS ARE KEPT, PRIMARILY, SO THAT THE DEEDS OF THE PAST MAY NOT BE FORGOTTEN. WHILE THE ARCHIVE REMAINS, THE NAMES AND ROLES OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD MAY BE HONOURED, AND GRATITUDE OFFERED IN THEIR MEMORY. THUS WILL THE DEEDS OF MAN PERSIST.

BUT THE ARCHIVE IS ALSO A WEAPON. FROM IT, WE MAY DISCERN NOT JUST THAT A PARTICULAR VICTORY WAS ACCOMPLISHED, BUT *HOW* A PARTICULAR VICTORY WAS ACCOMPLISHED. WE MAY ANALYSE AND STUDY THE TACTICAL DECISIONS MADE BY THE WARRIORS OF THE PAST. THEIR IDEAS, THEIR INSPIRATIONS, THEIR INSIGHTS CAN BE LEARNED, AND HANDED ON TO EACH NEW GENERATION OF FIGHTING MEN. THE ARCHIVE ALLOWS US TO PRESERVE BOTH HEROISM AND THE MEANS OF HEROISM.

TO PROMOTE THIS ASSET, THE OFFICIO TACTICA HAS SELECTED CERTAIN ACTIONS FROM ITS VAST RECORDS TO USE AS EXAMPLES FOR MILITARY HISTORIANS AND OFFICERS IN TRAINING. THE ACTIONS HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BECAUSE THEY ILLUSTRATE ESPECIALLY WELL A PARTICULAR KIND OF WARFARE OR TACTICAL APPLICATION. THE EXEMPLARS, TOGETHER WITH ILLUMINATING DISCOURSE AND SUPPORTING ANALYSIS, ARE PUBLISHED IN A MULTI-VOLUME SEQUENCE KNOWN AS THE TACTICA IMPERIALIS, AND ARE CONSIDERED TO BE ESSENTIAL READING FOR ALL TRAINEES, OPERATIONAL SUPPLICANTS, NEOPHYTES AND CADETS. THE EXEMPLARS VARY IN ORIGIN AND TONE, AND ARE DRAWN FROM MANY DIFFERENT AGES. THE CORE REPORTS ON WHICH THEY ARE BASED ARE DRAWN FROM A WIDE VARIETY OF PLACES AND DISPLAY SOME VARIANCE IN AUTHORIAL VOICE AND AUTHORIAL SUBJECTIVITY. HOWEVER, EACH ONE CONTAINS A BASIC AND ESSENTIAL LESSON IN THE ART OF WAR.

STUDY THE TEXTS WISELY AND LEARN, FOR THOUGH THE EMPEROR PROTECTS, IT IS THE DUTY OF US ALL TO STAND READY AND FIGHT WHEN THE HOUR DEMANDS.

C O N T E N T S

NAXOS

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ROPHANON

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THE BLACK CRUSADE OF

JIHAR THE LACERATOR

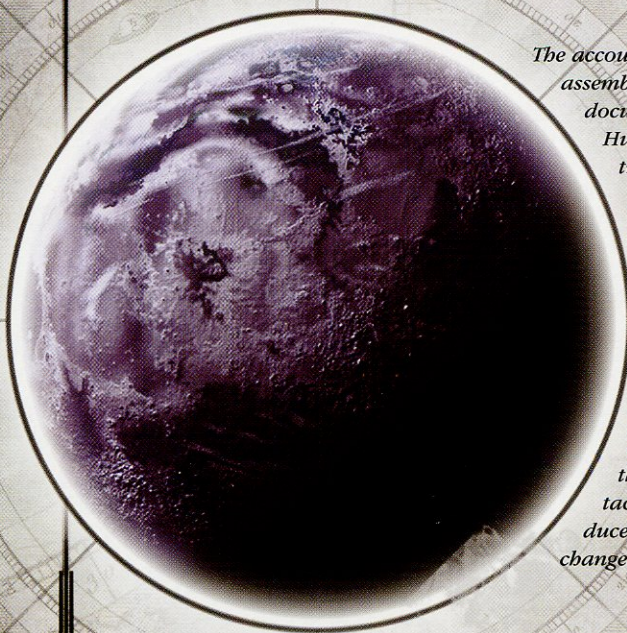
599.M37. 71

Naxos

THE REEF STARS, 811.M41.

'...THE MID-, GULF AND COREWARD REGIONS OF THE REEF STARS HAD LONG SUFFERED PARTICULAR PREDATION FROM THE SO-CALLED DARK ELDAR. INDEED, THE ZONE'S VULNERABILITY TO THE DARK ELDAR — KNOWN LOCALLY AS THE 'PRIMULS' — HAD BECOME ONE OF ITS DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS. DARK ELDAR RAIDS HAPPENED IN 'SEASONAL' CYCLES, THE RHYTHMS OF WHICH WERE INSCRUTABLE TO IMPERIAL EXPERTS. WHETHER DRIVEN BY ELEMENTAL OR ECONOMIC FACTORS, RITUAL INFLUENCES OR MIGRATORY HABITS, THE CYCLES WOULD BEGIN WITH LITTLE ADVANCE WARNING AFTER LONG PERIODS OF DORMANCY, AND THE REGION WOULD BE SUBJECT TO BLOODY RAIDS, WHICH OFTEN CEASED WITHOUT EXPLANATION. DUE TO THE SMALL AND AGILE NATURE OF THE DARK ELDAR RAIDING FORCES, THE CYCLES COULD SELDOM BE STEMMED BY DECISIVE MILITARY EFFORT. HOWEVER, THE EXAMPLE OF NAXOS IN 811 IS A RARE EXCEPTION TO THAT RULE...'

— From *A History of the Later Imperial Crusades*



The account of the Naxos action (811.M41) was assembled from a variety of contemporary documents and reports by Colonel Jan Hulvers in 856, as part of an oversight treatise on the tactical considerations of the Reef Stars commissioned by the Governor Subsector, Joachim Valens, at the time of his assumption of office. An Imperial Tactician assigned to the House of the Governor, Hulvers (778 to 880) was a particularly insightful, no non-sense observer of strategic history, and it is his analysis of the Legio Astartes as much as the dark eldar that makes this report of such value to tactical officers. The account is reproduced here with only minor editorial changes.





NAXOS (FORMALLY 88-B-N-7) is a non-virile, mineral-wealthy world, one of the outer planets circling the star 88 Beta Naxos in the Coreward region of

the Reef Stars (Tarsal/Scorpius 347-23), proximal to the Mandeville Point at 46 Gemos. First identified in M37 during the sixteenth voyage of the rogue trader Benefico Lazale, the system was recommended by him for mineral exploitation, but such development only began in 561.M38, under the authority and benefit of the Governor Subsector at Tarsal. At this time, speculative prospector outposts were established on four of the system's worlds, but within a decade the world now known as Naxos had been revealed as the most resource rich, the other outposts shut down, and all development work concentrated on Naxos itself. It was then that Naxos adopted its name from its local star, being the most prominent in the planetary group.

Naxos is abundant in several rare inner transition metals, including Xygnite, from which the adamantium analogue Temperine can be alloyed, and Phlogesthene, a vital component in the manufacture of heat sinks and the ignition rings of plasma weapons. By 589.M38, the prospector outpost on Naxos had been uprated to a mining station (Grade B1- [a]), in which capacity it continued to develop and prosper until 217.M39, when it was awarded a colonial charter and the mining station received the designation Naxos Colony One.

Despite its remote location, Naxos Colony One fared well for many centuries, and proved to be one of the subsectors most lucrative outholdings. Twice – in 580.M39 and 341.M40 – the colony's governor petitioned for a second colonial charter to be issued, as the workforce influx drawn by the expanding mining operations threatened to outstrip available habitat development. Indeed, around 580.M39, work began to prepare a second colony site a thousand kilometres west of Naxos Colony One. However, in both instances, the charter was denied due to fluctuating economic pressures in the region. At its height, circa 340.M40, Naxos Colony One's population approached three and a half million Imperial citizens, but this figure had declined, by the time of the action in question, to around four hundred thousand.

In the five decades leading up to the events under consideration in this account, the prosperity of Naxos had begun to fall off due to dropping productivity. Mineral reserves were worked out, and the commercial production of Xygnite had effectively ceased by 785.M41. Furthermore, the vast mineral reserves in the Quarades Belt (Tarsal/Opus 960-47) opened up in 690.M41 had swiftly become the region's principal provider of the ores and metals that had made Naxos viable for so long. By 811.M41, Naxos was a colony in a slump.

The remote nature of Naxos's location had also worked against it over the years, as the colony lay vulnerable to periodic dark eldar raids. The entire region was prone to such hit-and-run attacks, and on occasion whole colonies in the zone had been wiped out (cf. Gaudae 9, 55 Trieste, Sycor Outflung). During its comparatively long, robust history, Naxos Colony One suffered thirty-nine raids, the most significant ones being in 476.M40, when eight thousand citizens died in a four-week campaign, and 520.M41, when the colony was besieged and two of the mining complexes destroyed. Estimates vary, but it is possible that as many as a hundred thousand Imperial subjects have been killed on, or abducted from, Naxos since records began.

In 811.M41, there had been no dark eldar predation in thirty years.

Dark eldar military technology places the emphasis on speed and mobility in a raid situation. The notorious jetbike is a principle instrument of lightning attack.



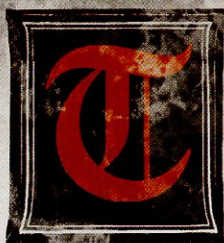
(Opposite.) Naxos Colony One, at the time of the dark eldar raids.

(Opposite – detail.) Continental Naxos, showing the environs of Naxos Colony One, circa 811.M41.

An account written by Tove Layders, a sergeant in the Naxos Colonial Defence Force:

'A DARK MAN ON THE WALL'

It was on the morning of the eighth shift day, close to first sun, and I was about my business on the Rising Side Wall, between the Eight Sixty habs and the old Temper Smelt works. The blue night shadow was still on the Rising Hills, but it was clear enough. I was walking the route to check 476 when I saw a man on the wall walk ahead of me. I decided I would know his business, because at that hour, there shouldn't have been no other up there except me and my watch. I came to him, thinking him to be a habber or a miner on the wander after a drink too many. We sometimes got them up there, the smoke-heads and the swiggers. I stepped up to halloo him, and him with his back turned to me, looking out at the hills. There was something wrong about him, and this, I curse myself, I did not take seriously. He was dark. Tall, thin, dark, a dark man on the wall, his hair fluttering in the wind, very quiet. His hair was very black. Like smoke. I reached out to pull at him, and I made a very proper demand of his business, and he turned, and he looked at me, and he laughed, and he was not a man at all. He grabbed me and with one gesture, threw me off the wall itself into the yards below, which is when I broke my legs and my back. As I lay there, I heard the sound of engines, and saw the dark machines, sharp as knives, come whipping in over the top of the wall above me.



THE RAID LASTED for five hours. A force of approximately four hundred enemy warriors, mostly conveyed on light, grav-capable fighting machines, swept in from the mountains on the Rising (west) side of the colony location. As is the habit of these creatures, the assault was fast-moving hit-and-run. The Colonial Defence Force, under the command of Major Gyorgi Fodor, had maintained a programme of strenuously rehearsed attack protocols over the years for just such an eventuality, and responded with admirable speed. However, the enemy moved with shocking swiftness, using the colony's ore processing trenches and transit channels to stay below the firefields of the defence batteries. Fierce fighting broke out in Mass Residential Habs 12 and 13, and in the auxiliary processor plants at the Rising Three Mine. Eighty-nine members of the CDF were killed or injured in these battles, along with over a hundred citizens. A further two hundred and seventy-three citizens perished in the fires that swept through Mass Residence Hab 13 in the aftermath of the raid. This loss was initially blamed on inadequate evacuation mechanisms, but later studies showed that the attackers had deliberately seeded the Hab area with slow burn incendiary devices, and had disabled the fire prevention systems. Only the stalwart efforts of the Falling Firewatch divisions prevented the fire from spreading into adjoining Mass Residence structures, an effort for which they were later recognised with citations.

In the immediate aftermath, Major Fodor made it plain that the enemy had not been driven off, nor even 'withheld'. The CDF had been fighting for survival. The enemy, as ever operating according to the rhythm of some great and secret tide, had simply

chosen to remove themselves from the conflict.

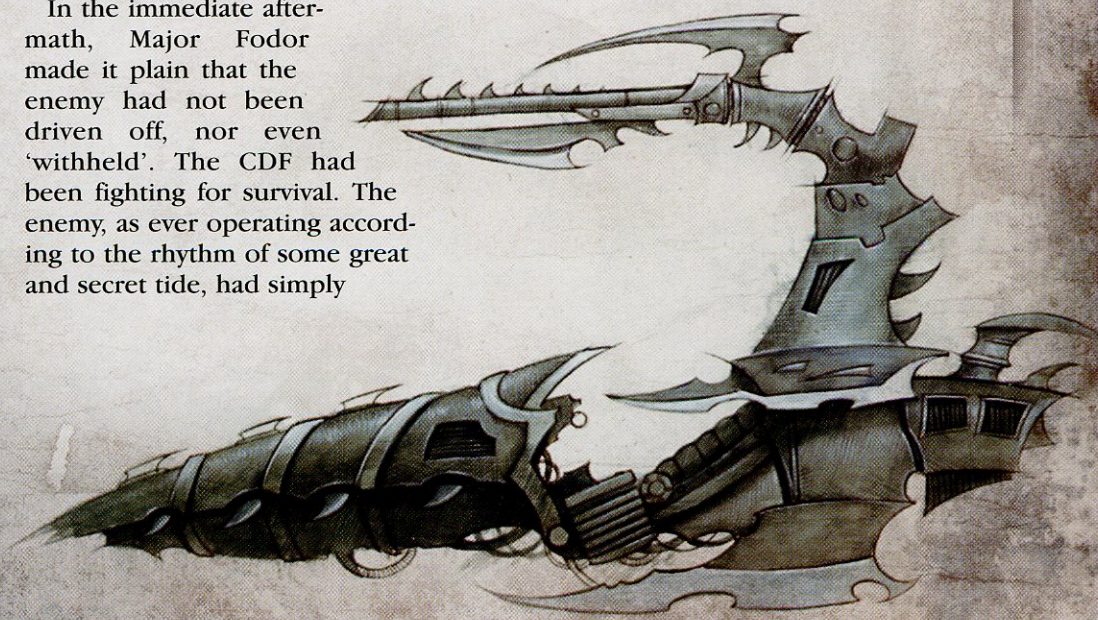
There was little doubt they would return.

THE DARK ELДАР

Precious little is known of the xenotype known as the dark eldar, though their rapacious habits have plagued certain regions of the Imperium since earliest times. Culturally they are a blank, with few pointers to suggest what ambitions and strategies might drive them on, except perhaps the basest urges of plunder and blood. Of all Mankind's principal enemies, they seem to number the least, or at least show themselves in the fewest numbers, and biologically they seem to be related to the xenotype eldar, a similarity that has given coin to their most usual epithet. In the Reef Stars, they are also known, from folklore, as 'the primuls' or also as the 'smokeriders'.

What can be said with certainty is they practise violence against mankind, in swift, shock attacks, and display astonishing levels of cruelty and depravity in doing so. Their technology is advanced, and almost entirely, so it appears, predicated on pain and wounding. During the course of their raiding strikes, they often take human captives – presumably for slaves. In both physicality and weaponry, a primul warrior is easily a match for a Guardsman or armed human. There is also no doubt at all that they are possessed of keen intelligence, but said intelligence is focused completely on cunning and malice. Some expert observers have seen, in their ritual marks and decorations, certain similarities to the abhorrent symbology of the Archenemy. Is it possible, they conjecture, that the primuls are an offshoot of the eldar race that has, like our own shameful traitor kin, fallen prey to the influence of Cbaos and the warp?

With their fast, agile craft and powerful weaponry, the dark eldar were skilled at hit and run tactics.



A dark eldar raider. In both armour and equipment, the figure depicted here is typical of the raiders that assaulted Naxos Colony.





HE COLONIAL GOVERNOR of Naxos, Tobin Clauser, issued an immediate state of emergency and placed the colony under conditions of

martial law. Mining operations in all facilities except South Primary were suspended, and extended mine workings were closed down and sealed on the recommendation of Major Fodor. All leave was cancelled, and defence force reserves armed and mobilised from the worker masses. Clauser was a career politician who had risen to power seventeen years before on the back of a process of reforms designed to bring the colony back to previous levels of prosperity. He firmly believed – a belief based mainly on the strength of recent metallurgic assays conducted in the Rising Mountains – that Naxos had a great measure of previously unrecognised mineral wealth. He had been campaigning hard to have the colony's mining charter extended, and to attract new wealth and investment to Naxos. Clauser, who had not seen a primul raid during his office, realised that the day's events – and its probable sequels – might bury the colony's reputation for viability forever. He sent an immediate request for aid to the Governor Subsector on Tarsal.

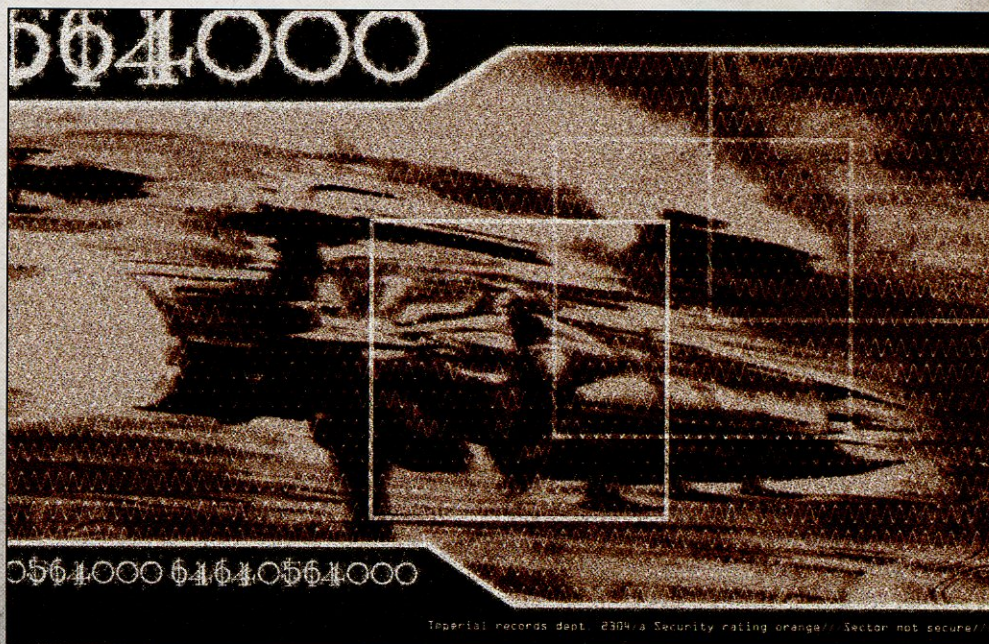
Two days later, via astropathic channels, Clauser received a response. His request had been refused.

The reasons cited by the Governor Subsector for his refusal – a decision

made 'with regret' – were simply ones of mobilisation. The five-decade long dynastic wars in the Carillon Group were still raging, and a hot war had recently broken out with the separatist movement on Bracchia. The standing reserves of the Imperial Guard were at full stretch and none could be committed for at least ten months sidereal.

It is possible that other issues affected the decision. Rumours had begun to circulate at court, and through diplomatic back channels, that Lord Militant Bower, tired with the seneschalship of the Petal Worlds given to him after the Ondurion Campaign, was petitioning to raise a crusade against the greenskins (a military operation later famously curtailed at the eleventh hour after Bower's sudden death). Bower was a figure of immense influence, and those who backed his crusade call with promises of manpower and support would find themselves in favour at the very highest levels. It would be a pardonable sin to suggest that the Governor Subsector was amassing troop reserves in the expectation of lending them to Bower's build up. In the face of such an enterprise, the fate of a single, small, remote colony was a minor thing. It is also possible that Naxos was considered to be as good as lost already. However, the Governor Subsector's message concluded with the curious suggestion that he was 'examining other options'. In his diaries, we learn that Clauser regarded this final phrase as 'an empty promise to save face.'

Pict-capture of the first dark eldar raid.



But it proved to have more weight than that. Two weeks after the primul attack, a starship translated into geosynche orbit above the colony.

Tension in the colony was running high. There had been no further raids by the dark eldar, but rumour and alarm had spawned a thousand stories: of figures in the hills beyond the colony, of spectres haunting the habs at night, and of children taken from their cots. While it is entirely possible that some of these tales had a basis in genuine dark eldar activity, most of them were the product of overheated, over-stressed imaginations. Though unpredictable in almost every measure, dark eldar raids are often notable for the length of time between assaults, as if the enemy delights in waiting to appear again long past the endurance of any patience or courage. It is as if they attack once, and then leave the victims to stew in their own fearful apprehension, tearing themselves apart with panic and ghastly possibilities. Certainly, in that two-week period, eighteen men deserted, another five were executed for desertion, and twenty-nine citizens were killed or injured in outbursts of rioting or street violence.

The arrival of the starship briefly brought the simmering mood in the colony to boiling point. Many believed that this was the arrival of a fresh primul raid. Civil unrest, greater than any seen before, broke out and the CDF had to work hard to contain it.

Two orbital landers, in formation, left the orbiting ship and descended towards the colony. They made no request for landing rights or descent

data. They set down in a slag zone north of the gas separation facility.

They were Imperial vessels. They were Astartes Thunderhawks.

++++++ From: Glauser, Governor Colonial, Naxos
Colony One.
++++++ To: The Office of the Governor Subsector.
++++++ Via astropath - beacon 235671-13(ibg)
++++++ Countersignal 581627

My beloved Sir, I hail thee! Hallowed be the God-Emperor!

This day just now done has seen misery and death visit Naxos. Dark eldar forces have struck at the colony, and we have suffered many casualties. I hereby formally request your protection in this period of hazard.

We spoke together at length, during my last visit to farsal, of the need to insure this colony's future interests as a competitive part of the subsector. You then assured me of your help in this undertaking. Today's attack does more than just damage property and lives. It damages our chances and our future. I urge you to re-examine the assay reports I sent you with my last transmission. You will see at sites ABF21, FGT5 and GJL90 irrefutable evidence of untapped Magnite and Nuurium reserves. Naxos needs time and safety to develop these reserves, and great benefits will accrue from that development, not just for Naxos, but for the subsector as a whole.

I request that a battalion-strength force of the Imperial Guard be despatched to Naxos with all urgency to garrison the colony for the duration of this dark time.

I await your response and remain your loyal brother and servant



Two Astartes Thunderhawks set down on a slag zone north of the gas separation facility.



HOLDING A FORCE of forty battle brothers, Space Marines of the Legio Astartes Chapter the Iron Snakes had arrived on Naxos. They were led by Brother Captain Trokus. Captain Trokus immediately met with Clauser, Major Fodor and other seniors of the colony. He explained that routine strategic monitoring of the region had brought the plight of Naxos to the Chapter's attention, and they had decided to mobilise a force and step in when it became apparent that no Imperial Guard force was available to reinforce. Trokus would not confirm if the Governor Subsector had contacted the Iron Snakes Chapter house or not. In his own private journal, Fodor speculated that the Iron Snakes had been monitoring astropathic traffic, and had learned of the situation by intercepting the encrypted communiqués between Clauser and the Governor Subsector. This notion, which Fodor sensibly kept to himself, was later cast into doubt by another, perhaps more sinister, possibility.

Governor Clauser was at once delighted and dismayed. No governor, his colony in peril, would ever refuse the help of Mankind's greatest warriors (though it is pertinent to reflect that Trokus offered no choice in the matter – and how does a mortal man begin to refuse a brother of the Astartes?). However, there were misgivings. The first, shared by Fodor and the other officers, was that their own command and control of the situation would be diluted at best, dissolved at worst. The Legio Astartes were autonomous and would answer to no master except their own. In all but the largest engagements, Space Marines operated by their own authority.

Whilst respectful of Governor Clauser's status, Trokus's Iron Snakes would expect full cooperation from the colony, and full dispersal command of the CDF and the levies.

The second concern – and perhaps Clauser's greatest worry – was

that the Iron Snakes were not the garrison he had petitioned for. Clauser's simple desire had been for a large, strong garrisoning force that could remain on station at the colony for the duration, for months or even years if necessary, safeguarding the site against any recurrence of the dark eldar activity. Fodor, an experienced and rational man, had advised the governor that any campaign against the primul threat had to be waged using time and patience. The Iron Snakes, like the Astartes of all Chapters, were battle warriors. Their role was to engage and fight in swift, decisive operations. They were too rare, too few, too powerful to be 'wasted' on efforts of fortification.

The Iron Snakes were not likely to stay on Naxos beyond any immediate flash-point.

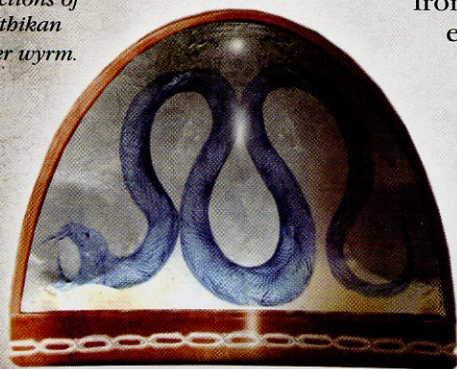
THE IRON SNAKES OF ITHAKA

The so-called Iron Snakes are an ancient and illustrious Chapter that traces its origins back to the Second Founding. They make their Chapter house on the fortress moon Karybdis, which orbits the tempestuous water world Itbaka, a planet from which they draw most if not all of their neophyte recruits. Part of an Iron Snake's rite of passage is to hunt and kill one of the gargantuan water wyrms of Itbaka. It is from these near mythical beasts that the Iron Snakes take their name and their heraldry. Together with the archetypal weapons of bolter and blade, the Iron Snakes sometimes carry battle-modified versions of their wyrm-hunting sea lances.

Sources characterise the Iron Snakes as stoic, ascetic and courageous, but the Chapter is also marked by a history of cunning and battlefield guile. Perhaps more than some other Chapters, the Iron Snakes admire ingenuity and tactical flare, and pride themselves in rewarding wisdom and inspiration. They pay especial heed to their librarians, and make an art of studying tactical sciences. As much as any cadre of warriors can be said to be, they are thinkers and planners, and many of their most famous victories have been soundly won on the campaign's chart table long before any battle commences.

Like all Astartes Chapters, they revere tradition and ritual. Since records began, they have taken it upon themselves to be the particular protectors of the Reef Stars, although they undertake this protection in their own, autonomous manner. Their battle honours include many great triumphs against the forces of Chaos and the greenskins, though they have always considered the special enemy of the Reef Stars – the dark eldar – their particular sworn foe.

Detail, shoulder plate design, Iron Snakes Chapter. The Chapter motif of the double-looped serpent derives from ancient, retro-ethnic depictions of the Itbikan water wyrm.



*Battle-brother of the
Adeptus Astartes, Iron
Snakes, Brother
Calixus of III squad, VI
Company, 'Laertus'*





The signature 'Itbaka' is presumed to represent the name of the Chapter Master, Iron Snakes.

A study of other extant relics of Iron Snake documentation confirms that the Chapter master traditionally styled himself in this way. It is presumed that the assurance's author was in fact 'Great' Seydon, the ancient and celebrated master of the Chapter, though knowledge of the Chapter itself is so scant it is impossible to prove this to be the work of Seydon.

He may no longer have been alive at the time of the Naxos undertaking, and this may have been the hand of an unknown successor.

The massive commemorative painting commissioned from the noted artist Belgof Danziger by the people of Naxos to celebrate the Iron Snakes action. It is believed that the glorified nature of the image is an effort to disguise the negative aspects of the event.



ON THE FIRST evening, records tell us, Governor Clauser held a formal banquet to welcome his visitors.

Captain Trokus attended, along with his squad commanders, though it is recorded that they ate little of the feast and drank nothing except water. They attended in full armour. It is impossible to underplay the effect of the Iron Snakes arrival on the populace of Naxos. None of the colonists had seen a Space Marine before, and many of them believed them to be mythical creatures; such was the infrequency of their appearances. Now they were solid, palpable fact and, moreover, they were terrifying: armoured like giants, each one fully a third larger than the largest man. Their accents were strange, even the smell of them was strange. In a report, Sergeant Victor Temprence of the CDF wrote:

'...I have seen a thing today, which I knew only from the storybooks of my childhood. A snake of iron. Oh, so mighty and so broad and so bold that it might have been a statue on the Colonnade of the Emperor come to life. I call it "it" because it was not a "he" nor either a "she", but a thing like a god. Its armour glowed like the moon, gunmetal

bright, and it smelled of sweet oils and sacred lotions. In its fist, five times the size of my fist, it clenched a spear twice the length of my body. I think we will live, if these gods are with us now.'

Temprence was not alone in his awe. The people of the colony came out to garland the Iron Snakes and laud them. Young boys painted the mark of their heraldry on their cheeks and foreheads.

But there was fear too. For all their splendour and physical size, there were only forty of the Astartes. Would that, could that be enough? Others in the population feared the reverse. They were so dismayed at the physicality of the Iron Snakes; they began to panic as to what threat really faced them. If such beings were needed, what was coming?

As if sensing Clauser's misgivings at their arrival, Trokus presented him with a letter of assurance during the state banquet. Its matter is reproduced below, from a copy held at the Imperial Archive, Tarsal.

AN UNDERTAKING TO NAXOS

To the colonists of Naxos, and to their governor, who is named Tobin Clauser, greetings.

I name my brother, Trokus, to be my proxy in the matter of your deliverance from the smokeriders. I would ask that you trust him as you would trust me, and as you would trust the eternal benediction of the Emperor himself. Alert to your circumstance, aware of your pain, I have charged my brother Trokus, and the battle brothers who accompany him, to quit the Chapter house in full war harness, armed and anointed for battle, and come to your side. It is my pledge, as solemn as any I have given, that the Chapter Iron Snakes will champion the interests of Naxos and the colony thereon. This pledge I make with the water of Itbaka, homeworld. May the Emperor guide and protect us all.

— Itbaka



On receipt of the assurance, Clauser was far from reassured. He spoke with Captain Trokus, laying out his concerns, but the captain reportedly said that he did not expect the 'war on Naxos' to be 'at all drawn out'. Later that night, Clauser sent an encrypted missal to the Governor Subsector, pleading for him to reconsider his decision and send Imperial Guard reinforcement.

He received no reply.



In the week following the arrival of Trokus's force, defensive works were set in motion at the behest of the Iron Snakes. Trokus made his command HQ in the duralite-armoured basements of the Central Refinery, and there gathered his officers, his librarian and also – in a gesture that seemed at best palliative – Major Fodor and his senior men. Fodor's journal tells us that, apart from certain specific details of geography and layout, his opinion, and the opinions of his staff, were seldom asked for.

Apparently anticipating assault from the west, from whence had come the previous attack, Trokus ordered a secondary line of defence built along the Rising Side Wall (1) and also around the span of the Nine Seventy Habs and the Rising Two Mine, and also around the South Ore Pens (2). He ordered that defence batteries be moved from inner colony positions and spaced in the open country south of Rising Two Mine (3), and also in the hinterland (an industrial waste) north of Rising Two and the Central Refinery (4). He ordered two of his squads to take position in the lower

access ways of Hab 10 (5), another in Rising Three Mine (6), and the fourth at the water cooling station at the southern end of the Main Generation Facility (7). Trokus then instructed the CDF to man the new defences at Rising Side Wall and the Nine Seventy Habs (1 and 2), but also positioned a significant number of the levy reserves around the Falling Store Domes (8) and South Secondary Mine (9).

Fodor was beside himself. He confronted Trokus and demanded to know on what basis the Iron Snake captain believed the enemy would assault from the same side as before. The colony's Falling (east) side was woefully under protected and vulnerable, as was, in his opinion, the Refinery Interchange (10).

Captain Trokus was 'polite, but brooked no dissent' (according to a CDF eyewitness). He told Fodor plainly that 'this was the way to protect the interests of Naxos'.

His instructions were carried out against Fodor's objections. Two days later, they were put to the test.

And were found wanting.

Tactical overview of the Naxos defensive strategy.



THE SECOND DARK eldar raid began twenty-three days after the first, to the hour. That was the only thing that marked it in common with the initial assault. As Major

Fodor had predicted, the foe directed their attack in from a different direction altogether.

The dark eldar had apparently concentrated their forces – estimated then at some six hundred plus – in the deep canyons east of the colony, the so-called 'Falling' side. There, below the reach of auspex, they had massed their numbers, and struck at dawn at the comparably undefended flanks of the colony. Racing in across the edges of the land shelf, they struck at South Secondary Mine, South Primary (the only mine unit still functioning) and the Falling Side Wall North, beyond Mass Residence Hab 15. Carnage ensued. The massed levies, most of them miners and hab workers drummed into a militia, were slaughtered. At Falling Side Wall North alone, four hundred and twenty-two men died, many of them valiantly defending the habs of their families and friends.

Lomas Dracks, a militia man, wrote 'It was all confusion. Terrible confusion. We had been told the Iron Snakes were with us, but where were they? I saw my friends and neighbours, good men all, perish, cut apart by blade and blast. The devils were all upon us. They came streaking in on their bikes, cackling as they fired volley after volley into our midst. We had no cover.'

Henas Talby, another of the militia levies stationed at the Falling Side Domes, wrote, 'I was left insensible by the air shock. I am a deaf man now. I saw shapes coming in, and held on to the hand of my friend as we were lifted by savage explosions. Then I found a hand was all I had left of him. Crawling in the dust, I saw South Secondary explode.'

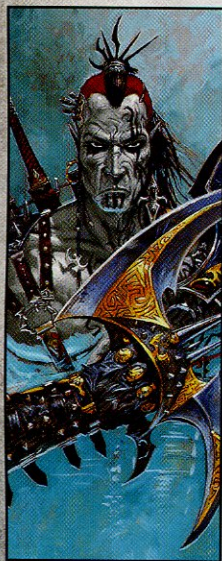
South Secondary Mine did indeed explode, a catastrophic detonation that left nine hundred colonists dead or crippled. Fodor called frantically for CDF strengths to pull back across the colony and reinforce the levies on the Falling side.

He also called to Trokus for aid.

None came.

By the time the dark eldar withdrew, five hours after the assault had begun, South Secondary Mine was ablaze, and nearly three thousand colonists had been killed.

The Iron Snakes had not moved from their positions.



KABIRA

An individual dark eldar, perhaps a force commander or raid leader, 'Kabira' was recognised by Imperial witnesses taking part in a number of brutal raids in the territory at that time. His name is an Imperial approximation of the word uttered in reference to him by members of his host. Kabira's handiwork was especially rapacious and vile, and his crimes were ingenious and cruel even by dark eldar standards. Although his presence on Naxos cannot be confirmed, the raid is likely to have been his work. Though no body was ever identified in the aftermath, it seems likely that Kabira perished during the fighting, as no subsequent sightings of him were made at other locations.



The following day, an air of disbelief hung over Naxos Colony One. The colony's infirmaries were working to capacity to deal with the influx of injured, and labour crews worked in dangerous conditions to bring the blazing mine at South Secondary under control. The entire colony zone was blanketed in thick, black smoke.

The Iron Snakes were held directly responsible for the grave wounds Naxos had taken, by their tactical incompetence and their inexplicable decision not to even show themselves during the raid. But no one dared confront them. Demonstrations gathered in public places, and at the square at the north end of the Colonnade of the Emperor, members of the levy reserves ceremonially cast down their weapons and refused to fight any further. Ecclesiarches were summoned to speak to the dissenters and renew their vigour.

Berated from all sides by citizens and officials who had nowhere else to direct their anger, Governor Clauser went to speak with Captain Trokus at the Central Refinery.

In the gloom of the lumin-lit base-ments, Trokus seemed far more threatening than before. He cut the Governor short before he could iterate his objections, and curtly presented him with a list of troop deployments that he expected the governor to implement immediately (see following page).

Clauser was dumbfounded by the arrogance of the Space Marine commander. One of the Governor's aides, Marten Urken, later wrote of his disbelief 'that my lord the Governor should find the courage to raise his voice to the Space Marine. My lord the Governor shouted his angry denouncement of the Iron Snakes, daring the wrath of the monstrous warrior. I expected, in my true heart, that the great captain would turn and strike my lord the Governor down with the flat of his hand for his impudence. I say that my lord the Governor is, after that one moment, quite the bravest man I have ever seen.'

Trokus did not strike Clauser down, nor even react in any provoked way. He simply, witheringly, told the Governor 'you have your assurance.'

Clauser was dismissed.

Governor Clauser called an emergency session of the Colonial Office, and took advice from his senior men, including the ecclesiarchy, the CDF and the Munitorium. All felt the same dismay as Clauser, the same feeling of wretched helplessness. As Clauser had feared from the moment the Iron Snakes had arrived, here was a bad situation now slipping rapidly out of his control.

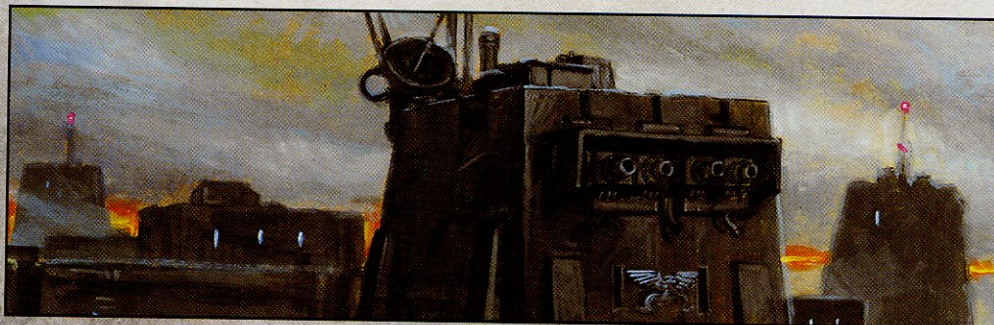
At length it was, perhaps surprisingly, Major Fodor who spoke with the coolest head. Fodor had been openly dubious of the Iron Snakes' schemes all along, but he was at heart a military man, who understood that plans for warfare were often composed from elements that appeared incomprehensible to the soldier on the ground. From the recorded minutes of the meeting, we learn Fodor said:

'From the start of this, we knew we would be passengers in the Astartes war, our voices and opinions ignored. We knew we wouldn't like it. From what I've seen of the captain's strategy, I don't like that either. It cost us dear last night. But I have to believe that there's some hidden sense in it, some greater policy of war that we don't see or understand. In this, we are the common soldiers on the field. So, loathe as I am to suggest this, I think we must go along with it, come what may. We must trust that the Iron Snakes know what they're about.'

Clauser noted this reasoning, adding: 'What choice have we? Cooperate with a plan that we dislike but which might save us... or refuse to cooperate and have no plan at all?'

The motion was carried. Fodor and his officers immediately began to implement Trokus's scheme.

It was not a moment too soon. As if suddenly eager for the blood they had tasted the day before, the dark eldar struck again that night.



Standardised, old-pattern hab blocks such as this formed much of the colony site, and were vulnerable both to missiles and fire



NAXOS COLONY ONE THE SECOND RAID

With grim resignation, Fodor saw that Trokus had altered his plans very little from the previous day. Additional CDF forces were ordered in to bolster the defences along the secondary line of defence built along the Rising Side Wall (1) and also around the span of the nine seventy habs and the Rising Two Mine (2). Sections of the levies were instructed to bolster the line outside the South Ore Pens (3), and extend it as far as the radiator arm of South Primary Mine. Heavy plant machinery, such as excavators and dozers, were moved up to form additional barricades, and weapon teams mounted portable support weapons in and around their armoured structures (4). CDF reserves were also drawn from hab protection duties to reinforce the levies at Falling Side Wall North (5), the scene of the worst fighting the previous day. Secondary sections were placed along South Primary Wall (6), though at the expense of the firewatch efforts still battling the inferno in the South Secondary minehead. Indeed, Trokus demanded that all attempts to extinguish the blaze be halted. 'The mine is lost, and the blaze will die naturally in a day or two. Fighting it is a waste of resources and manpower. A wall of smoke is a good weapon.' Fodor noted that Trokus maintained the positions of his own forces: two squads in the lower access ways of Hab 10 (7), one in Rising Three Mine (8), while the fourth remained at the water cooling station at the southern end of the Main Generation Facility (9).

The vulnerabilities from the previous day remained as stark as before. Fodor was certain that a second blow to the Falling Side defences, by far and away the weakest part, would prove fatal for the Colony, but he also nursed a great concern regarding the undefended portion of the Rising side line, at the Refinery Interchange.

The second dark eldar raid began at dusk, twenty minutes after the start of the evening shift period. Once again, the Falling side of the Colony was the target.



N NUMBERS COMPARABLE

to the day before, the dark eldar massed out of the dying light from cover positions in the eastern canyons.

They struck at

Falling Side Wall North, and for the second day running, the site became a place of terrible bloodshed and combat. A second prong of the dark eldar attack drove in hard against the South Primary Wall, while a third ran the smoke wash coming off the burning mine and sliced in between it and the Falling Side Domes storage area, where it was met by heavy resistance from levies and CDF forces dug in across the transit roads and loading aprons. The fight along the South Primary Wall was intense, and damage was suffered by the adjacent hab blocks, but it lasted less than twenty minutes. A great number of the dark eldar there withdrew, and were lost from sight in the dying light.

The savage fighting raged along Falling Side Wall North and the storage area for three hours. The situation became so intense that Fodor ordered further CDF reserves to move forward in support of the storage area forces, drawing these from the perimeter of the Main Generation Facility.

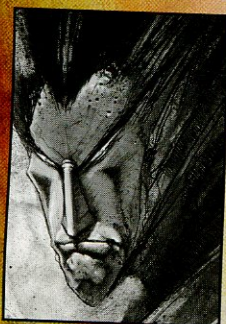
One of Fodor's senior men wrote later: 'I had not seen an equal to that carnage in a long life of soldiering. The ground was spongy with the blood that had soaked into it. Everything was lit by

the leaping flames. One blessing we had, it is not madness to say it, was the bestial lust of the enemy. If they had simply driven at us wholesale, the power of their vile weapons and the speed of their machines would have overrun us in short order. But these murderous beings thrill to strike deathblows by hand, to involve themselves in the melee, as if it is some sport or game. So they came amongst us, with close quarter weapons, diabolic shadows in the fire and smoke. And this gave us a chance to match them, blow for blow. Even then, we did not stand a living chance, but our resistance – and the life of the colony itself – was prolonged.'

Fodor sent several messages to Trokus, demanding he engage the foe. Trokus did not reply. For the second time, the Astartes forces had remained conspicuously absent from the field.

The battle for the Falling side ground on into the night. Just as Fodor began to hope for relief, just as he began to hope that the dark eldar might, as before, simply pull out and quit, an urgent message came through the vox.

In large numbers, the dark eldar – perhaps the very ones who had pulled back from the South Primary Wall earlier that evening, had encircled the colony and began an assault of the Rising side. Having exchanged fire with the defenders positioned before the Nine Seventy Habs and Rising Two Mine, they had driven in, in great force, at the Refinery Interchange.



Sketch artwork produced by an unknown soldier or colonist at Naxos. The dark eldar had a nightmarish effect on their human prey. It is not known if the artist survived the action.



Major Fodor's fears had been realised. By breaching the outer line at Refinery Interchange (1) the dark eldar had penetrated the inner zones of the colony. Crucial objectives such as the Central Refinery (2) and the Main Generation Facility (3) now lay in their sights. The raiders took some losses to the batteries ranged on the hinterland behind the Interchange complex (4), but with little cover available these batteries were quickly overwhelmed or became the sites of fierce close quarter fighting as the raiders dismounted and set about the CDF personnel. Major Fodor, at that time positioned to the east at the Gas Separation facility, immediately set off west to take personal command of the incursion zone battle. Initial estimates put the number of raiders that had penetrated the breach at three hundred.

By the time Fodor arrived, these numbers had risen to almost five hundred. More were arriving at every moment. Apparently summoned by their brethren that had made entry, the raiding bands attacking the Falling side of the colony were withdrawing to swing around the

colony zone and enter the breach. Fodor re-tasked as many of the CDF and levy elements that he could to close into the hinterland area and meet the invasion.

Within forty-five minutes of the initial incursion, it became clear to those on the ground that the raiders were focusing their attack on the Central Refinery. Ringed by zoned shielding, revetments and bladewire, the Refinery was one of the colony's most secure facilities, and this evidently piqued the raider's appetite. They swept in across the hinterland district and began an assault of the Refinery defences and approach tracks. Intense pockets of hand to hand fighting broke out along the principal track, and around the gates to the Refinery compound.

Eyewitnesses reported the scene as 'hellish' and 'infernally'. The entire area was lit red with flame light, and the dense smoke had rendered the night's darkness solid and opaque.

Just before midnight, with the raiders some ten minutes away from engulfing the refinery, Captain Trokus finally deployed the Astartes.

*Naxos Colony One,
Rising side (detail).
The dark eldar penetrate the inner colony.*



(Opposite.)
At long last, the
Iron Snakes
entered the fight.

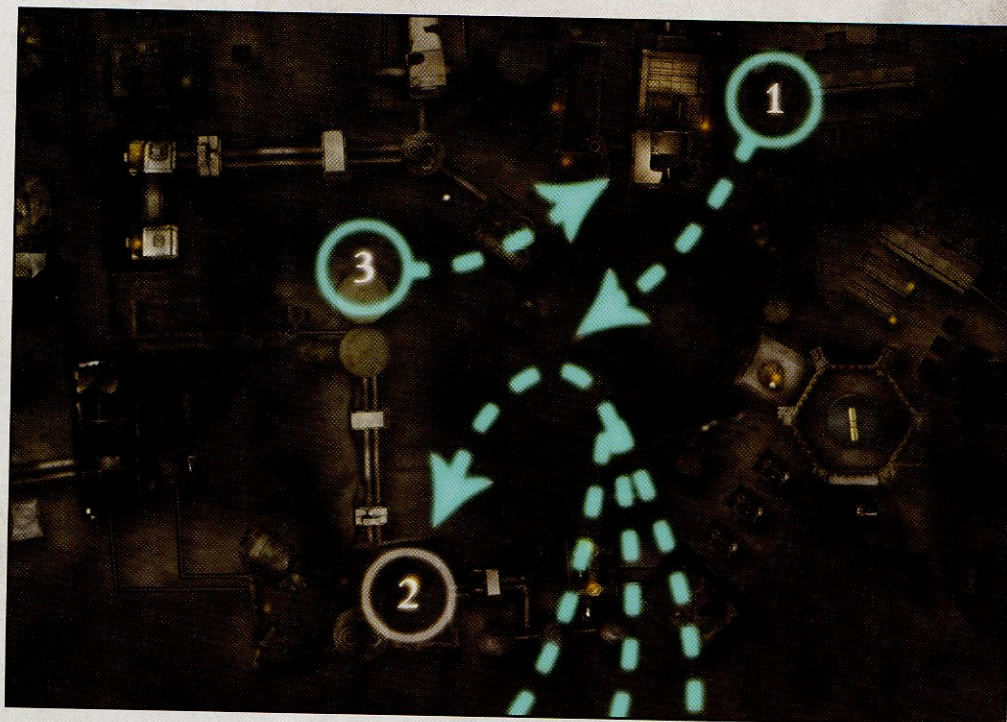


UNDER TROKUS'S PERSONAL leadership, the two squads of Iron Snakes positioned in the lower accessways of Hab 10 (1) broke from cover and assaulted the right flank of the raider's main incursion. The sudden appearance of Space Marine forces seemed to fill the raiders with both dismay and dark glee. They had little option but to turn and engage. In a thirty minute set piece battle, the twenty Space Marines cut a swathe through the enemy mass and left over a

their own reinforcements to outweigh the Space Marine force. But almost all of their raiding strength was already deployed onto the hinterland, their charging impetus gone and their unit cohesion lost in the confusion. All told, perhaps six hundred dark eldar warriors had entered the colony area to be met by the ferocity of an Astartes resistance, supported in full by the eager colonial forces.

Like a pack dog sectioning off a herd of livestock, Trokus drove his two squads north-east and decapitated the dark eldar main force in front of the Central Refinery. About ninety dark eldar were marooned

Tactical overview of
the Iron Snakes'
offensive.



hundred of them dead or dying. Rallied by the sight, the CDF and levies threw themselves into the fray and followed the cutting edge of the Space Marines advance.

The dark eldar forces must have been counting on

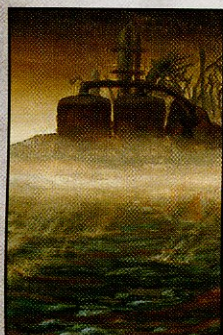
on the Refinery approaches, while the bulk of the raiding force recoiled and began towards Rising Three Mine (2).

Trokus, it was now clear, had planned this trap manoeuvre with intricate skill and confidence, using his limited numbers to startling and devastating effect. He wheeled his two squads west and began to pursue the dark eldar main section towards Rising Three Mine, with large sections of the CDF in support. A running battle broke out. Simultaneously, his third squad, concealed in the water cooling station at the southern end of the Main Generation Facility (3) stormed out of concealment and attacked the remainder of the dark eldar force on the Main Refinery approach. These raiders were, in the space of twenty minutes, annihilated between the Iron Snakes third squad and levy strengths that had remained on station.

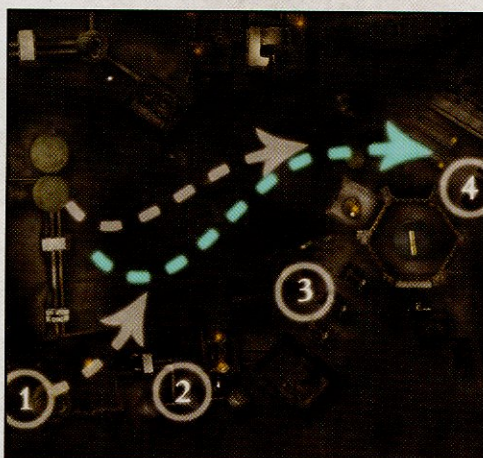




THE MAIN STRENGTH of the dark eldar attack force sought cover in the Rising Three Mine complex (1), intending to turn, dig in and take the fight back onto the numerically inferior Iron Snakes. But Trokus's fourth and final squad was waiting there for them, patiently. At Trokus's order, the fourth squad engaged, and terrible slaughter was done on the enemy as



The industrial and manufacturing infrastructure of Naxos Colony declined in the years following the raid. Some mining facilities were converted to chemical processing work to increase revenue, but the provisions were inadequate.



(Above right.) Tactical of phase two of the Iron Snakes' assault.

they were caught in the open between two opposed fronts of Iron Snake power. Seventy or eighty raiders were slain in that intense exchange.

The surviving mass wheeled east and attempted a dramatic and hasty flight from the colony zone via the Refinery Interchange (2), the way they had entered. Trokus had prepared for this by secretly mining the entire Interchange complex. At this point, he detonated the mines, killing many of the fleeing raiders and forcing the rest to turn in a flight that was little short of panic.

Once again, Trokus herded his foe like livestock, now turning them south in

flight using his own two squads, with the third on his right flank, to channel the raiders against the barrier formed by the Nine Seventy Habs (3). The raiders, now numbering less than two hundred, took shelter in the Rising Two Mine (4). They intended to use this structure to their advantage the way they had hoped to do with the other Rising side mine. This time, no hidden squad of Space Marines awaited them.

Inside, they dug in. The massive rock-concrete superstructure of the Mine complex offered them ideal fortress cover. With the Astartes and colonial forces in the open hinterland before them, the advantage was momentarily theirs once more.

Captain Trokus had also laid charges in the Rising Two Mine. Once the dark eldar were inside, he detonated the charges, triggering a huge explosion magnified by igniting gasses. The mine was levelled.

In short and swift order, the Iron Snakes had annihilated a dark eldar raiding force that vastly outnumbered them.

Naxos Colony One had suffered miserably in the course of the undertaking. The death toll had been high, the property damage immense, and two of the colony's main mining structures had been destroyed, one by deliberate sacrifice. Governor Clauser filed several formal complaints at the way his colony had been used as 'bait and trap', but he was generally ignored or overruled. Some reparation was offered in the form of financial aid by the Governor Subsector eight months later, but it was just a fraction of the commercial value that had been lost. The damage and loss of productivity accelerated the colony's decline. At the time of writing, though still functioning, Naxos Colony One teeters on the edge of unviability.

SUMMARY

After the fact, many telling details emerge from this event. It is clear that the Iron Snakes' scout network and early warning systems had detected a major dark eldar raiding force mobile in the region as much as two years before. From experience, the Iron Snakes knew they might spend decades hunting such an agile, elusive force through the Reef Stars. They needed a trap, and a means to eradicate the menace in one blow.

It seems likely that it was the Iron Snakes themselves who prevailed upon the Governor Subsector not to send a garrison force to Naxos. They wanted Naxos undefended, because they wanted it to appear enticing to the raiders. Furthermore, they knew that the dark eldar were likely to ignore any potential target where Space Marines might be present. For this reason, the Iron

Snakes remained undeployed and out of sight during the initial raids, only showing themselves once the dark eldar had become supremely confident and over-committed.

Naxos was indeed used as bait, and, one might say, given its subsequent economic collapse, entirely sacrificed in order that the enemy be vanquished. However, it is to be considered that the Iron Snakes remit is greater than the defence of one world or colonial outpost. The written assurance given to Governor Clauser that the Iron Snakes intended to champion Naxos's interests referred to a bigger view: the destruction of the dark eldar raiders was essential for the interests of all Imperial subjects in the region and therefore, by extension, in Naxos's interests, even though the colonists had to suffer to achieve it.

The episode shows us just how effective even a small force of Space Marines can be, and offers salu-

tary lessons in the difference between Astartes and non-Astartes mindsets. There is a clinical brilliance to Troken's victory, but a ruthlessness too. For the good of the Imperium, Space Marines may make choices beyond the moral compass of the Guard or the Navy.

It is worth noting, as a footnote, that Major Fodor, who belief that the Iron Snakes were working to some bigger plan was convincingly vindicated, did not survive to see it. He was killed in combat on the approach to the Central Refinery.

The Emperor abhors any life wasted in his name, and we fight, daily, to preserve the vitality of our species. But we must know the value and necessity of sacrifice, and understand what it is to have the strength and courage to make, clearly and confidently, such decisions in the heat of warfare.

Lyubov

THE SABBAT WORLDS, 778.M41.

'...BY ITS TWENTY-THIRD YEAR, THE MONUMENTAL SABBAT WORLDS CRUSADE WAS ENTERING A DEFINING PHASE. UNDER THE MERCURIAL COMMAND OF THE WARMASTER, MACAROTH, THE MAIN ARMIES OF THE CRUSADE HAD SUCCESSFULLY ADVANCED INTO THE SAVAGELY DISPUTED TERRITORIES OF THE CABAL SYSTEMS, A DENSELY FORTIFIED AND DEFENDED REGION, AND WAS BEGINNING TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT GAINS IN THE CARCARADON CLUSTER, A TRACT GENERALLY REGARDED AS THE HEARTLAND HOLDINGS OF THE ARCHENEMY. MANY BELIEVED THAT OVERALL IMPERIAL VICTORY WAS IN SIGHT, PERHAPS NO MORE THAN FIVE YEARS OFF. HOWEVER, OTHERS FEARED THAT A NUMBER OF FACTORS COULD UNSETTLE THE IMPERIAL CONFIDENCE, POSSIBLY WITH DISASTROUS EFFECT. MORE THAN ONCE, THE FORTUNES OF THE CRUSADE HAD SWITCHED DRASTICALLY AGAINST THE IMPERIAL SIDE. THERE WERE TWO KEY CONSIDERATIONS: FIRSTLY, THE FIGHTING IN THE CABAL AND CARCARADON REGIONS WAS ON A SCALE PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN, EVEN IN A LONG CRUSADE THAT HAD WITNESSED MASSIVE SET PIECE BATTLES. SECONDLY, AND MORE INSIDIOUSLY, THERE WAS "UNFINISHED BUSINESS" IN MACAROTH'S WAKE. THE KHAN GROUP, TRAILWARD OF THE CABAL SYSTEMS, WAS STILL BESET BY ENEMY FORCES, MANY OF THEM ATTEMPTING TO AFFECT A COUNTER ATTACK. IN HIS EFFORT TO RACE AHEAD, MACAROTH HAD LEFT MANY UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS TO BE DEALT WITH BY HIS SECOND FRONT, CONFLICTS THAT, IF MISHANDLED OR LOST, WOULD ALLOW SIGNIFICANT ARCHENEMY FORCES TO DRIVE AT THE CRUSADING FORCES FROM BEHIND...'

— From *A History of the Later Imperial Crusades*



*The account of the Lyubov War (778.M41) is taken from operational reports made during and after the action, a body of material later formalised and annotated by General Galen Galt in his book *A Strategic Assessment of the Khan Group Conflicts (799.M41)*, which was later approved for inclusion in its charter list of recommended works by the *Tactica Imperium*. The Lyubov section has often been republished separately for academic study. Galt, at the time a junior officer, served under Carnhide at Lyubov, and later saw command at Chanicia and Xerxes III. The editorial perspective is Galt's, and is reproduced here with minor amendments requested by Imperial Guard High Command.*



BEGUN IN 755.M41, the Sabbat Worlds Crusade was a massive endeavour to liberate over one hundred inhabited systems along the edge of the Segementum Pacificus from the forces of Chaos. An ancient and feudally held region, the Sabbat Worlds has an Imperial history dating back many thousands of years, and in that time has been severally threatened and invaded by the enemies of mankind, most especially the feral, Chaos forces known to occupy the so-called Sanguinary Worlds spinward of the inhabited sectors. Liberated early in their formal existence during a crusade led by Saint Sabbat (from whom the stars take their name), the worlds were extensively retaken by the enemy during the 'Sabbat Incursions' that began a century and a half prior to the Crusade. Though many worlds held out during this troubled and dangerous period, by 740.M41, it was clear the region no longer retained any semblance of central Imperial control, and a crusade-scale mobilisation was prepared to retake them.

Initially generated and led by the inspired command of Warmaster Slaydo, the crusade enjoyed vigorous early successes, despite savage opposition, and this first phase culminated in the critical battle at Balhaut, considered a turning point in the opening decade of the endeavour. However, great Slaydo perished in the Balhaut conflict. His named successor as Warmaster was the young, unproven but brilliant Macaroth, who galvanised Imperial interests with his positive – some might say impetuous – leadership. For the second ten years of the Crusade, Macaroth drove his forces on through a remarkable series of engagements, eventually puncturing the monumental enemy defences at the Cabal System, which opened up the vital Carcaradon Cluster and paved the way for the Crusade's third principle phase, when the Imperial armies confronted the archenemy forces in their own heartland.

However, in the years immediately following 773.M41, the archenemy attempted a considerable counter attack, pincering behind the advancing Imperial front at Macaroth's over stretched lines of supply and communication. The focus of this counter attack was the Khan Stars, a knot of old Imperial worlds and

colonies adjacent to the Cabal Systems, where Imperial governance of the region had once been situated.

Action on this 'Second Front' raged for many years, and many times Imperial fortunes hung in the balance. It was feared that Macaroth's muscular gains to spinward would be for nothing if the counter attack succeeded in its objectives and bisected his advance at the Khan Stars. Tactical scholars believed that if Macaroth's main force was 'decapitated' in this way, nothing could prevent it from being surrounded, overwhelmed and obliterated.

Several of Macaroth's senior commanders were charged with the prosecution of the Second Front, including Generals Van Voytz, Kelso, Bulledin and Luschiem, Lords Militant Cybon and Humel, and Marshal Blackwood. For the most part, their task was to block and defend against the counter attack, but this often meant they had to retake strongly held enemy worlds that Macaroth had bypassed on his way to glory. Left unmolested, these worlds could form powerful beachheads and staging posts for the counter-attacking foe. One of these worlds was Lyubov.

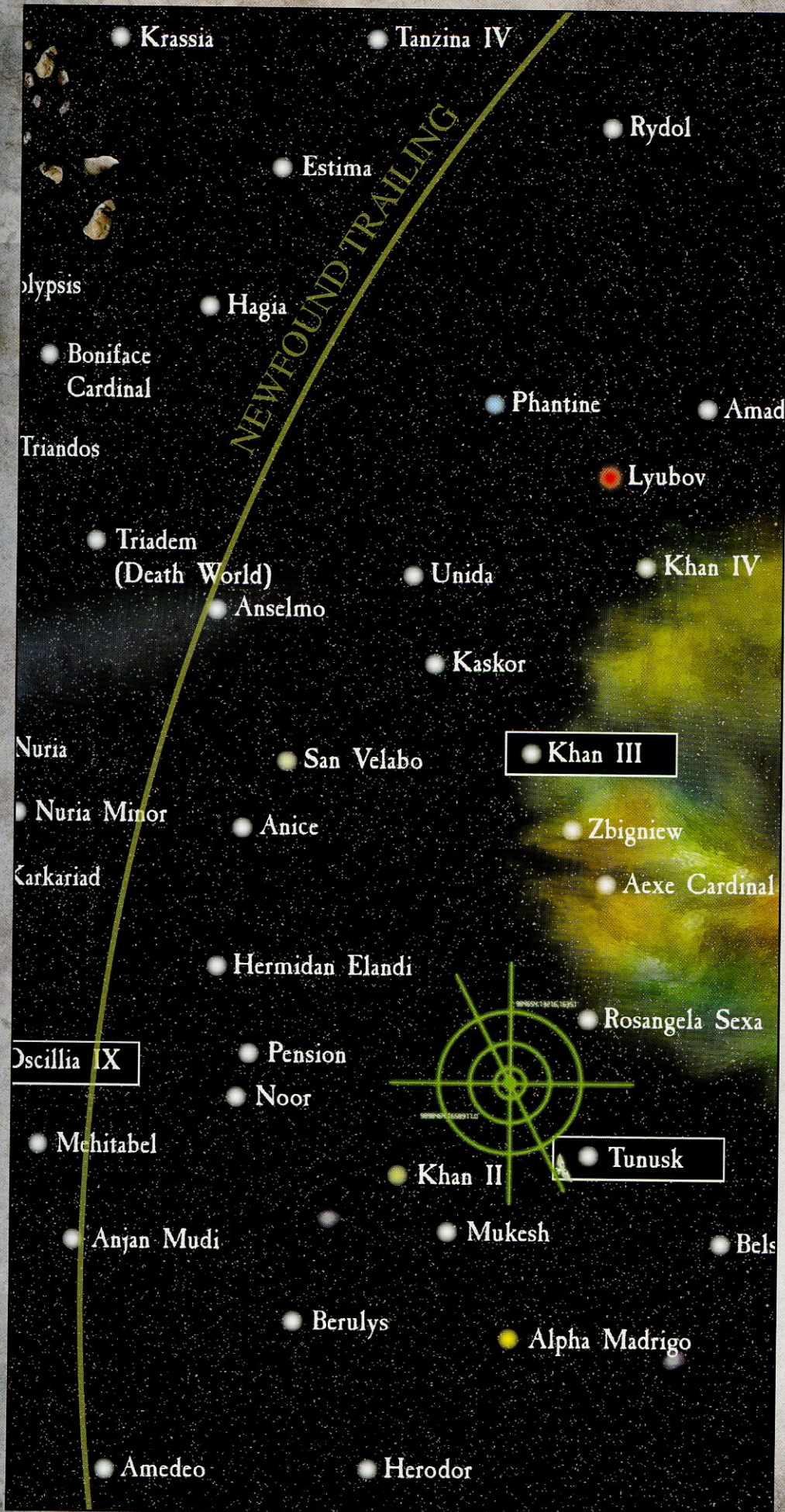
First settled in the early historical period of the region (circa M36), Lyubov had grown to be a hive world of considerable power and manufacturing capacity. With a large population and significant Guard and PDF garrisons, it had been one of the last to fall to the archenemy during the Sabbat Incursions. Effectively conquered in 750.M41, Lyubov had suffered under archenemy occupation for two and a half decades, though several hive cities had remained under Imperial control for good portions of that time, and major land wars had been waged as a result.

Strategically useful due to its location on one of the main jump routes, Lyubov was also believed to be a source of fuel, munitions and other consumables for the archenemy forces in the Khan Group. Late in 777.M41, Lord Militant Cybon ordered it to be retaken, and gave the command responsibility to General Carnhide.

*Examples of
local currency
found on
Lyubov.*



*Lyubov's planetary
disposition in the
Sabbat Worlds system.*





GENERAL ANDREAS CARNHIDE was a veteran Guard commander with a long and respectable military career that pre-dated the start of the Crusade. He

had served under Slaydo during the Khulan Wars (752-754), and had thus become one of the Warmaster's chosen command echelon at the start of hostilities. Prior to Lyubov, however, his service in the Crusade had been unspectacular, as circumstances found him most often in command of deployment garrisons or transit forces. After Balhaut, and Slaydo's death, Carnhide suffered the same fate as many of his contemporaries when he found himself out of favour with the new Warmaster. Macaroth, with characteristic petulance, took it upon himself to give operational preferment to those he felt were 'his own', which is to say the new blood: the younger, often untested officers, who had risen with him on the skirts of Slaydo's command. Many estimable veteran commanders, with nothing to prove in terms of loyalty and ability, were relegated unceremoniously to secondary roles. As a result, a great number of them were saddled with the onerous chores of Second Front Command.

Carnhide, born on Gudrun in 711, was consequently a capable officer who had never been given the opportunity to truly shine. He was well liked by the rank and file, and had an easy nature that seemed relaxed and could often be mistaken, by detractors, for timidity and indecisiveness.

It must be said that his selection for the theatre command at Lyubov was not made on merit. Over stretched and beset by three significant conflicts in the immediate Khan Group, Lord Militant Cybon had tasked the job of liberating Lyubov to the only senior officer he felt he could spare. Similarly, Carnhide was not blessed with control of a well-formulated, well-ordered mission force. Though of decent size, his liberation army was thrown together at the last minute from disparate units, most of whom had not served alongside one another operationally, and many of which had been on front line service for excessive duration and urgently required retirement and restating.

It may be that Cybon considered Carnhide and his force expendable, or Lyubov to be less of a threat than it actually proved to be. Most likely, he regarded Carnhide's taskforce to be a stopgap – a competent but unexceptional commander with a tired, unstructured army, who would keep Lyubov busy until such time as Cybon was clear of his immediate problems and could come to claim victory for himself.

Carnhide's career was long and distinguished. These are just some of the Battle Honours he has earned.



*General Andreas
Carnbide, overall
military commander
on Lyubov.*



((Opposite.) An artist's impression of Araek Etogaur.



IGNIFICANT ENEMY FORCES awaited Carnhide on Lyubov, especially in the so-called 'Transcontinental Nexus' where the bulk of the planet's

most viable hives and manufactory centres lay. Cult armies and levies of prodigious size occupied the zones, many of them drawn from the indigenous population, polluted by the caustic touch of the warp. Those Imperial citizens who had not succumbed to the taint of Chaos were cruelly employed as slave labour in the industrial belt. The archenemy forces were further supplemented by war machines, armour, aircraft and battlefield titans, as well as some considerable numbers of traitor Marines. Usually such archenemy forces are stratified and uncoordinated – united by a common cause but unharmonised in terms of command and control. Cohesion in archenemy armies is often weak or flawed, and rivalry, feuds and internecine power struggles often erupt.

What had begun to make the enemy so dangerous in the Sabbat Worlds was a new unity of command. Though still clan- and cult-centric in nature, the enemy forces recognised one senior overlord or 'Archon', who was the equivalent of the Imperial Warmaster. The Archon, named Urlock Gaur, had evidently claimed, by right of combat or ritual, the overlordship of the innumerable feral clans and factions. Other clan leaders, many monstrous potentates in their own rights, had become his lieutenants or 'magisters'. For the first time, the archenemy was operating with one unified purpose – as much as any army of the Ruinous Powers can be said to do so. Central to Gaur's harmonising efforts was the

Blood Pact. Realising that true, methodical soldiering would win more for Chaos than the rampant zealotry of berserk cultists, Gaur had initiated the development of a personal clan army called the Blood Pact, which he modelled, sardonically, on the Imperial Guard. Indeed, many of those who took the 'Blood Pact' with Gaur found themselves equipped with weapons, kit and uniform procured from dead or captured Imperial Guardsmen. This bastardised, almost parodic, reflection of the Imperium's army proved to be highly successful once it had mastered the principles of proper, disciplined warfare and tactics. The Blood Pact, and a comparable institution named the Sons of Sek (after one of Gaur's most notorious magisters), was able to compete with the Guard on equal terms, to understand its methodology, and turn it against the Imperial ground troops.

The archenemy forces on Lyubov were commanded by a being known as Araek Etogaur, a capable and charismatic leader. Imperial scholars believe that 'Etogaur' is an honorific rank, meaning 'sub-' or 'demi-Gaur', denoting perhaps a colonel or general analogue. Araek Etogaur had forged the disparate parts of the archenemy occupation force into one, coherent structure. The new breed of Chaos army awaited Carnhide's force.

THE BLOOD PACT

Long rumoured to exist, the Blood Pact first manifested in the years directly after Balbaut, at the time Urlock Gaur was achieving his ascendancy amongst the Chaos clans of the Sanguinary Worlds. It is speculated, in fact, that his supremacy was ensured by the fact that he commanded the most effective fighting force of all the magisters vying to be crowned Archon.

It was the use of the Blood Pact in the Khan Group counter offensive, however, that truly proved their worth. Masked in ritual iron visors known as grotesques, and clad in the blood-dyed relics of Imperial uniforms, the Blood Pact are superbly trained and drilled by archenemy standards, and understand all the basic tenets of infantry war, including the use of support weapons. Well led and well organised, they have Imperial levels of communication technology, and speak their own 'battle tongue' or combat-based dialect. The only parts of them that remain bare are their hands, which display the awful ritual scars they receive when they take the pact.



A trooper's sketch of a Blood Pact cultist.





NY SUCCESSFUL LIBERATION of Lyubov had to focus on the 'Transcontinental Nexus', the vast and balkanised heartland of hives and industrial regions that

occupied the southern half of the main landmass. Nineteen separate fronts for mass drop assault were considered and rejected by Carnhide and his planners, including the Sradly Bay, Zinc Hill and Kazenburg. Principal assault of Lyubovhive was deemed unfeasible so long as the outer hives of the Nexus remained active and defensible.

'ACE IN ONE DAY'

Eyewitness: Pilot Officer Gregor Helks, 33rd Callion Air Wing

'...when we came up on [Lyubovhive] we were dropping in from about thirty thousand metres in a flat diamond formation of twenty-five machines. We had the main sun right behind us. Visibility was good, and we got a decent impression of the sheer scale of the main hive. The enemy was up, and in force. I counted about six hundred machines, mostly in dog fights with [29 and 672 squadrons]. It was a massive air duel. Planes from 451 [Squadron, Colonial Xerxes] piled in right past us on a steep dive, moving much faster and steeper than us, so we turned in, stood on our wings, and peeled out to attack. The blessing of the Emperor was upon us! I had my guns on two before I had to turn up out of the dive, and crossed with a third that I am pretty certain I sent to hell. It was deadly work. Every curve and turn, every banking move or roll risked a collision with another craft, friend or foe. It was like shoals of fish, racing and lapping around one another. The G was intense on every turn, and five times, as many as the digits on my right hand, I evaded a fatal clash by a hair's breadth. I made two more good kills, both confirmed, on my way out, then stuck to a trio of enemy fighter bombers turning low and west, and sent one of them down. Then I found myself in a knife fight with an archenemy machine, a devil of a pilot who rolled me around the sky until most of my munition load was gone. I was low on fuel and I didn't fix him. I lost him over the western transits. I think he may have been bounced by some Thunderbolts out of 29, but I didn't see it. Then I turned back for the carrier on the last dregs of my reserves...'

Most objections to the various drop point plans were made by Carnhide's infantry commanders. Intelligencers had procured a great deal of useful data suggesting the Nexus zone enjoyed

considerable air cover from the archenemy interceptor squadrons. Based for the most part on mobile land carriers, these hunter-killer squadrons were hard to track and kill from orbit. Infantry force commanders reasoned that the fighter screen would render any troop drop practically suicidal, while the dense formations of enemy stoop-bombers would swiftly annihilate any forces that made it to the surface intact. This was especially true of the Sradly Bay landing zones that were Carnhide's particular preference.

Carnhide bounced the problem to his Navy officers, initially with requests to bring the landing fleet into a much tighter, lower orbit, from which the carrier machines could be more accurately targeted. Unwilling to risk their line ships and troop conveyances against the range of the archenemy huge anti-orbital batteries, the Navy officers devised a scheme of their own, realising that a flat refusal to Carnhide might result in them being ordered into close orbit anyway.

Flight Marshal Karel Hydun presented an attack plan to General Carnhide whereby the Navy fighter squadrons would be deployed into the atmosphere in advance of the troop drop, to engage the enemy aircraft head to head for air superiority. Such a bold tactic was ordinarily disliked by most Commanders of the Fleet, who resented 'wasting' fighter craft by sending them in without orbital barrage support. However, the individual pilot officers, whose views were often overlooked, relished the notion of such a challenge, and in this theatre, the commanders of the major vessels preferred to gamble their fighters rather than their main ships.

The plan was agreed.

Eight massed waves of Imperial fighters – predominately Thunderbolts but also some wings of Lightnings – began the assault at zero hour on day one. Almost thirty thousand machines were sent in, and were matched, at the height of the engagement, by almost forty-five thousand enemy warplanes. Over all, sixty-three thousand Imperial warplanes were committed to the campaign. The total number of archenemy machines is not known, but is estimated to be around one hundred and forty thousand.

The principal attack zones were the Sradly Bay area, Balk Cliff Hive and the Zinc Hill regions. The most intense of these initial air battles were fought at Sradly Bay on the first and third days of operation, and at Zinc Hill on day four. As the air war entered its second week, a massive engagement, lasting nine hours, engulfed

the coastal zone at Balk Cliff Hive. Later in the second week, more air battles cut across the coast at Sradly Bay North, and then at the start of the third week (Day 15), as final mass engagement took place south west of Lyubovhive itself.

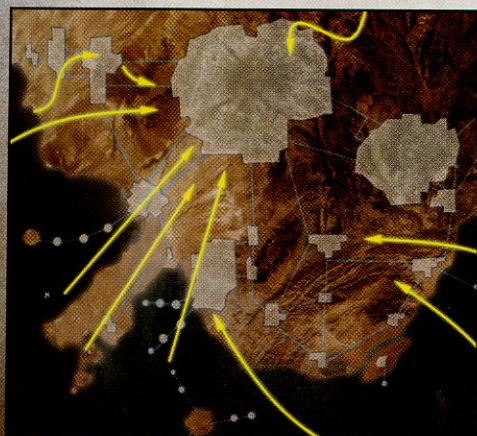
By that stage, archenemy air power had

been reduced to about a third of its starting power. Its wings clipped, Lyubov could no longer protect itself comprehensively from the air. It was now vulnerable to full scale land assault.

But after over two weeks of air combat, the archenemy knew what was coming.



Lyubov, the 'Transcontinental Nexus', circa 778.M41.



The Transcontinental Nexus. The main bias of Imperial air strikes.



Thunderbolts of the 33rd Callion Air Wing come to the aid of a stricken Lightning (75th Goran Goshawk Wing) over Lyubovhive.





IN THE OPENING segment of the campaign, Carnhide had been required to mediate between the interests of the Imperial Guard and the Imperial Navy.

Many of his command elite saw these difficulties as symptomatic of the unalloyed, unfocused nature of the taskforce Cybon had bequeathed to Carnhide and, furthermore, regarded their commander's handling of the problems as weak. However, we may see in hindsight that Carnhide was a skilful manipulator, who concealed his guile well behind a veneer of gentle conviviality. A warrior of the old school, Carnhide had enough experience to know that the Guard and the Navy were august and rival schools of warfare, and that a lack of co-operation between them was as traditional as it was endemic. He orchestrated the air war simply by showing both parties what they didn't want to do, and then standing back and allowing them to conjure their own solution.

Now the land war had to commence. Though the skies were clear enough for a full-scale drop, the Guard was once again resistant. The air war had given the enemy plenty of time to make ready for an inevitable orbital invasion.

Carnhide understood the reservations. A weaker or, perhaps, less flexible commander might well have ordered the Guard in anyway, damning the consequences, but Carnhide believed that the answer lay with the Mechanicus. Another thorny web of negotiation faced him.

If the Guard and the Navy could be famously uncooperative, the Mechanicus was another thing entirely. The Mechanicus priesthood had entered into the Crusade through co-operative pacts carefully formed by Slaydo in the early years, and their war machines had proven invaluable – not to say decisive – in a great number of cases. But they were still an autonomous power, no more willingly subject to the command of a regular Crusade general than the Adeptus Astartes, and it was widely understood that the Priests of Mars were growing increasingly dissatisfied with the progress of the Crusade. It had endured longer than they had been led to expect by Slaydo, and they were being required to provide ever-greater quantities of battlefield vehicles. Macaroth had done little to placate them, and those sections of the Mechanicus that had been assigned to the Second Front greatly resented not being used for the

glory of the primary campaign. If they were to be used at all, they declared, then, in the Emperor's name, they would be used where the true glory lay.

Carnhide had a reserve of over one hundred and thirty titans in his taskforce, the majority of them warhound variants. He believed that the titans had the power and fortitude to break open the ground defences and open a way for the Guard and its armour.

Ground assault, wave one (the Mechanicus).



Carnhide spent hours in patient, respectful talks with the Priests of the Mechanicus. Eventually, he reduced his argument to a very simple piece of persuasive logic. He reasoned that Warmaster Macaroth, boldly seeking triumph and glory, would most likely summon to the front line those units that had shown the greatest zeal and appetite for war, the very hunger for victory that he himself exhibited and which he looked for in others. If the Mechanicus wished to quit the Second Front and be realigned at the front, then an active display of military ambition would be needed. He promised that if the Mechanicus led the ground attack on Lyubov, he would personally see to it that the reports of that action were sent directly to the Warmaster's attention. It is important to note that Carnhide made no other promises, nor any claim that he could bring to bear influence that was not in his remit. He simply seeded the idea in the minds of the priests that they could get what they wanted by demonstrating their desire to meet the enemy.

The titans of the Mechanicus led the assault the next day.

Three key target zones were selected: Srady Bay, Balk Cliff Hive and Zinc Hill. The Titan landings were achieved with the support of long-range orbital bombardment and carpet-bombing.

At each location, the Mechanicus tactic was to land and then radiate its forces out from the landing zone, rather than to drop and then advance on a target. Large areas of territory were cleared at Zinc Hill and Sradhiv in this fashion.







WENTY-THREE HOURS

after the titan operational deployment, with all signs from the surface good, the Imperial Guard at last mobilised in a mass drop of troops and

armour. Two point six million troops went in with the first wave, targeting the three main zones where the titans were already opening the defences. However, a fourth drop force directly targeted Kazenburg. The drop troopers, predominately Carnelian Light Foot, stormed the inner towers of the hive and wrested control of the hive's automatic defences from the archenemy. Though the second largest hive on the planet, Kazenburg fell by far the fastest and most easily, with the minimum of collateral damage. Later, during restoration work, the manufacturing and generating plants of the generally intact Kazenburg were swiftly brought back into use by the Imperial Occupation force, which greatly aided early recovery.

Zinc Hill, a tertiary sized industrial hive in the heart of the southern Nexus, proved

Satellite view of Zinc Hill, overlaid with tactical schematics.



the toughest of all the subsidiary hives to conquer. It had been the most resistant to the Mechanicus assault, and still retained some air cover, which it used to devastating effect. Additional, 'second wave' Imperial Guard elements were dropped close to it and advanced under armour support.

A vast battle then erupted along the western wall of the main hive structure as the Imperial forces attempted to storm the hive. The archenemy deployed many bizarre engines of destruction including mobile wall-top hardpoints and mechanised heavy mortars, which spat, by means unknown to the Imperial tech-priests, geyers of high velocity razor chaff. These latter weapons were able to shred both men and body armour, even at comparatively long range. However, their mechanisms were delicate, and heavy bombardment from Imperial Guard field batteries eventually broke their line.

After three days of constant warfare, the western wall was breached, and Imperial Guard elements successfully penetrated the outer ring of the hive. In the broad agroponic zones inside the wall, the Imperial forces found themselves facing an enemy concealed in a ditch-work of trenches and foxholes. Vicious trench warfare persisted for a further two days until the titan Vainglory Tumultus was brought in to clear the way. Ground troop losses were high. Once the inner hive had been breached, the Imperial Guard was harried by hosts of poorly armed cult zealots, who attacked down the hive streets and stacks with suicidal disregard for their own safety. Carnhide rendered field command to the discretion of his officers on the ground at Zinc Hill, allowing them to deal with the fluctuating and chaotic street fighting on a minute-by-minute basis, rather than issue blanket commands from a distance. Wisely, he recognised that by the time he had made any command decisions based on the data flow, the situation would have already changed.

Later investigation revealed why Zinc Hill had been so hard a target. Araek Etogaur had made his base at Zinc Hill rather than, as many would have presumed, at the major hive. Zinc Hill had evidently become a site of keen ritual or sacred importance for the archenemy forces and was therefore defended with special vigour. It is also entirely possible that Araek Etogaur was in residence at Zinc Hill at the time of the invasion, and the staunch defence was, in part, a cover to allow him time to escape and flee to Lyubovhive.

*A Romantic rendering
of one of the many
monuments
honouring the dead
on Lyubov.*

JAN AAKS, TRP	BORIS DOČIC, TRP	BERGER GERTZEHAMMER, TRP
RUDY AICKMAN, TRP	WILHELM DYBUK, TRP	SOLOMUS GFERTTER, TRP
XERO AJAXIN, TRP	WILHELM DYBUK SNR, CPT	HANS GHLEMAN, TRP
JAN ANKVILLE, TRP	JURGEN ECKS, TRP	JAN GITTLEBACH, TRP
PIETER AQUILLA, TRP	HAVEL ERRIDOR, TRP	JORDY GITTLEBACH, TRP
ANDRAS AQUILLIUS, TRP	BECKMAN ETERHART, TRP	ARIC GITTLEBACH, TRP
BORIS AZZERTON, TRP	WILHELM FARRIS, TRP	LLECH GMEKK, TRP
LUDO BANYER, TRP	GORGY FLEKKER, TRP	HANS CONFALLON, TRP
GORAN BRASH, SGT	JORAN FNEPPERSTEIN, TRP	JOACHIM GOOSMAN, TRP
FULVO BYARNIK, TRP	WALDO FOPP, TRP	DEV GRADDLE, TRP
CATO BYARNIK, TRP	GUIDO FRATERHELMUS, SGT	HOKAN GWENЕК, TRP
GREGOR CANZ, TRP	SILVAS FRETTEL, TRP	JENKO HAAKS, TRP
BASIL CHENKO, SGT	DEV FUTZ, TRP	SIDRIN HARCOLT, TRP
USULK CHENKYOVITCH, TRP	LAMY FUTZ, TRP	JAVIER HARADOM, TRP
GREGOR CIRCO, TRP	ERIC FYZANTIS, TRP	TZEL HZAKIS, SGT
JAN CZACH, TRP	EDERICUS FZAK, TRP	IVAN HERKMAN, TRP
GUDOLF CZACH, TRP	FYDOR GARGARYKUS, TRP	DENSIL HERKMAN, TRP
LUKA DENVOL, TRP	JOSHЕM GARNEK, TRP	XAVIER HICKMAN, TRP
	POUL GERTZ, TRP	



BSERVERS AND COM- RADES

describe General Carnhide's demeanour during the campaign as 'calm and affable' and as 'unflustered, almost relaxed', and this reputation did him no favours later. However, as is evidenced by his campaign journal, he was more than cognoscent of the demands placed upon him, and the difficulties presented by Lyubov as a target.

He wrote: '...grateful as I am for the chance to take an active command, I could have wished for better than this hive-place. The land is tough and uncompromising, and the foe bedded in. There is no time for thorough work to be done by intelligencers, such is the pressure set upon my shoulders by the Lord Militant, and I am given an army to use that, while large, is far from codified and honed. I have not had time to get the wear of it, or to understand its particular traits... review, review, review! All day and all night, just to scan and learn the merits of the men I have at my disposal...'

Once the hour of attack was imminent, his tone became darker: '...I fret for this now, in the Emperor's name. May he protect us. The Navy and the Guard are

bickering at staff level, and the fleet will not move as I dispose them. As for the hallowed priests [of the Mechanicus] I have not even contemplated their sour visages yet... I am shown daily scans of the surface. Perhaps Thunderbolts will open this for us. I have not seen such entrenched fortifications since Balhaut. Men will burn and die, that I can see. Men will burn and die here, as much as on any field of war...'

Following his success in convincing the Adeptus Mechanicus to deploy, Carnhide's tone was lifted, so contemporary accounts run. But again, his journals show the lie of it. 'The titans are in this morning. Good work to be seen, coming back by overwatch. Pict after pict, clear transmission. I've seen walls fall and fortresses begin to burn. Such is the wrath of Mars. But I have stood in the cargo bays, at the foot of a giant titan, and gazed up at it as if it was a god. Now they seem like specks on my magnifier scope, just specks amidst the blooms of fire. There are walls down there that nothing may shake apart, not even a god...'

Perhaps most tellingly, he wrote: '...I have been given an army of pieces and I am expected to make a whole out of it. Better pieces that work, rather than a whole that does not...'

*The Imperial Guard
were a key component
of the Lyubov campaign.*





8th Light Sancon



9th Light Sancon



11th Light Sancon



41st Farset Lancers
(Mechanised)



301st Cadian (recon)



77th Salizar Pike 'The Shakos'



21st Heavy Krassian



982nd Hallowmas 'The Scythes'



51st Chenovian



51st Chenovian (armoured support)



676th Darrague



1st Karrack Las



19th Phantine (airborne) 'The Silent'



82nd Carnelian Light Foot



88th Carnelian Light Foot



97th Carnelian Light Foot



101st Carnelian Light Foot



161st Vitrian Heavy Support



34th Pardus (armoured)



Shenk Auxiliaries (XA7)



8th Fortis Binars



22nd Kolstec



29th Kolstec



86X Kasrkin Special Operational



Iorgan 500th 'The Golden Caps'



142nd Shehunid Raiders



9th Clovis 'The Indomitables'



11th Clovis Heavy Support



23rd Armoured Tollinbraders



58th Rarkonin Las Company



Bekulian Levy Reserves
(muster 3241)



6th Mako



56th Rygol Centurions



112th Falslav



55th Arnaud Fast Attack
(motorised)

**UNITS WHICH PLAYED KEY ROLES
IN THE INVASION OF LYUBOV**



THE SOUTHERN PORTIONS of the Transcontinental Nexus were cleared or in the process of being pacified.

Carnhide's attention turned to the main hive, the gigantic sprawl of Lyubovhive, to which the majority of all extant enemy resistance had retreated.

As a tactical objective, Lyubovhive represented four major discrete strategic problems. First and foremost was the main hive itself. As Carnhide wrote: 'Any force commander, unless he is insane, takes a deep breath before commencing assault on a major hive. In many cases, even the insane ones do too.' In their years of occupation, the enemy forces had turned Lyubovhive into a veritable fortress, armouring the hive's outer structure and festooning it with gun emplacements and malicious antipersonnel devices.

But there were secondary problems. To the west of Lyubovhive lay the ancillary hives Zenic and Zevin, both of which were still in enemy hands. Via these two hives, primary power reserves were fed into Lyubovhive from the power farms on the western seaboard. To the south and south west of the main hive, an overlapping system of defensive trenches, dykes and armour traps had been constructed in a wide crescent many hundreds of kilometres long. Parts of this area had also been mined. It would be a battle just getting to the main hive.

Carnhide's officers offered many conflicting schemes of how best to take Lyubovhive. Some recommended a

frontal assault, others an encircling movement to the east, others still a cross-country drive to smash and cut off the ancillary hives before turning on the main hive itself.

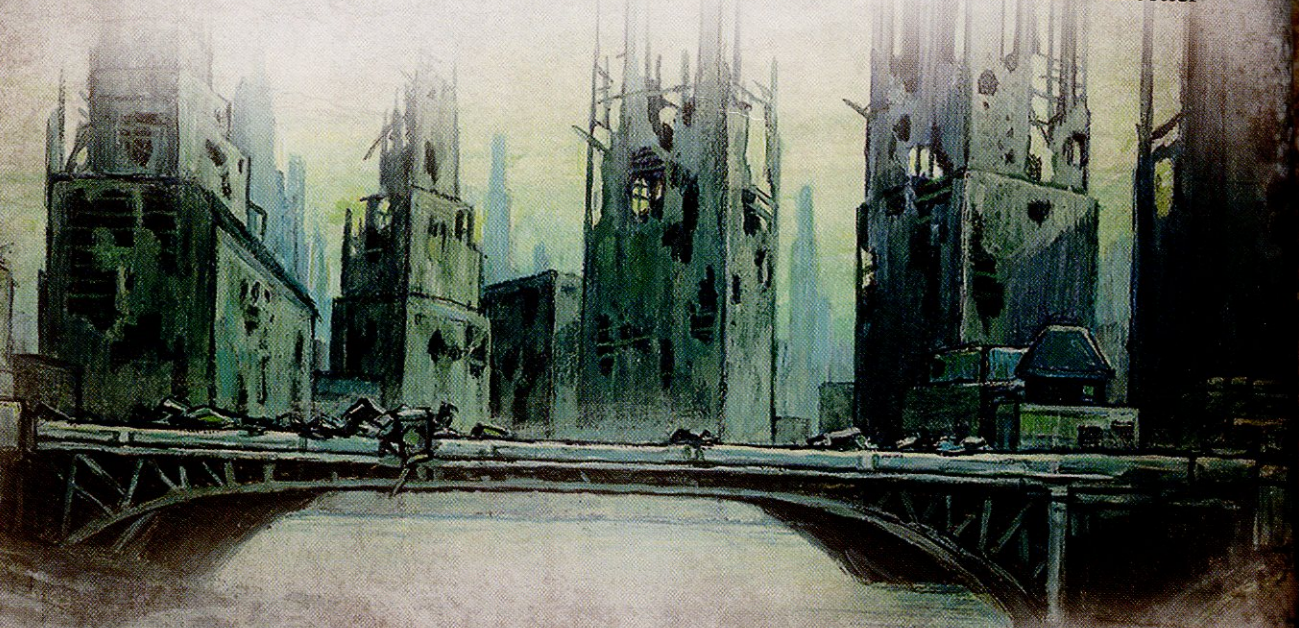
Carnhide, showing remarkable fluidity of thinking (though it was seen as woolly indecision by his peers), elected to try all of the plans simultaneously. In his journal, he reasoned: 'Two concepts strike me with equal merit. One is that no single ploy will bring Lyubovhive to its knees. The other is that an officer usually strives the hardest to accomplish a plan, if it's his plan. He hates to be proved wrong.'

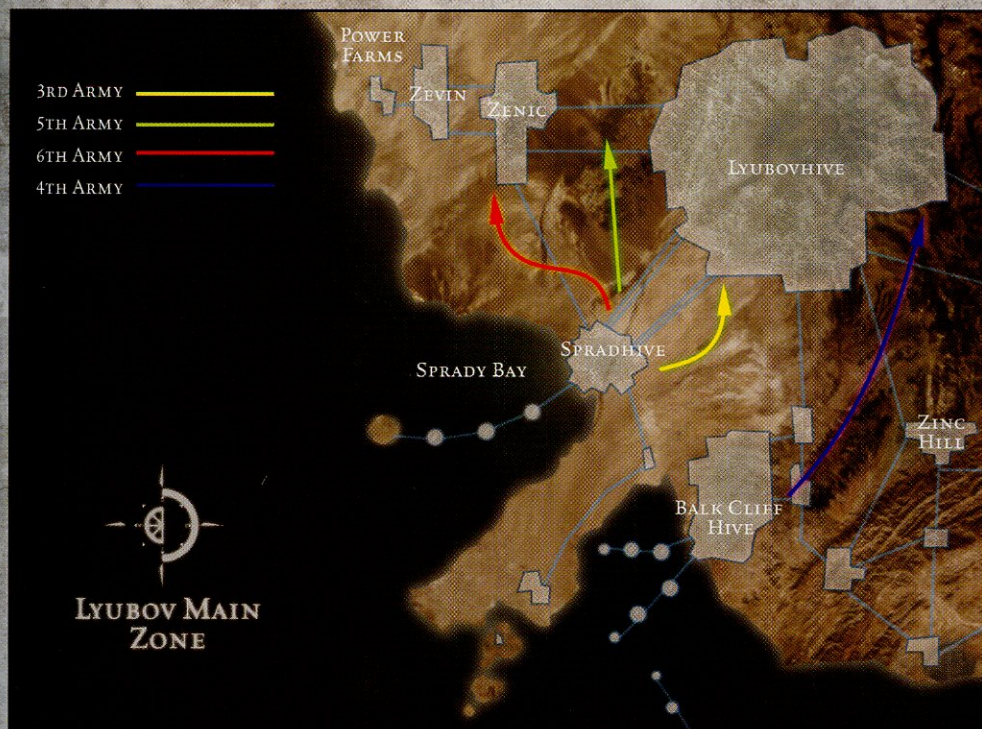
Carnhide divided his considerable forces into six 'armies'. The first, under Major General Arcol, who had recommended a slow siege to wait the enemy out, was to maintain the solid and firm occupation of the areas already taken, standing in reserve if necessary. The second, under Colonel Hjak, who had supported Arcol's plans, was to be kept in a reserve and support position outside Sradhive ready for fast deployment. Hjak's army was mostly motorised light infantry.

The third army, which Carnhide would command himself, was the largest, and would commence the frontal assault on Lyubovhive, cutting a path through the defensive system.

The fourth army, under General Doshen, was to encircle Lyubovhive around the eastern fringe and attack from the north-east sector. Doshen had recommended such a plan. The fifth and sixth armies, both smaller and motorised, with extensive armour, would be commanded by Colonel Paquin and Colonel Varnsetter

The price of dislodging the archenemy forces was ravaged and decimated hives.





Continental map of Lyubov, displaying battle group dispositions.

respectively. They would drive at the ancillary hives, with the fifth army severing the communication links with Lyubovhive while the sixth struck at Zevin and Zenic themselves.

As a final touch, Carnhide brought in the Navy and the Mechanicus again. Privately praising their actions thus far, he told them that the war was almost won and that he would hate to see either of them robbed of their share of the climactic glory by the Imperial Guard. The Mechanicus immediately lent its war machines and titans to the third and fourth army strengths, while the Navy agreed to conduct precision air strikes on the coastal power farms, and then move in to provide air cover for the fifth and sixth armies.

After two weeks of preparation, rearmament and deployment, the main assault began.

The fast, mobile armies of Paquin and Varnsetter struck deep at the southern side of the ancillary hives. Paquin's forces succeeded in destroying all the mass transit and cable links with the main hive in the space of about a single day, and then turned west on the approaches of Zenic. By then, ferocious navy air strikes had reduced the power farms to a molten crater, lifting a twenty kilometre wide pall of black smoke into the atmosphere.

Varnsetter's sixth army broke into the southern side of Zevin, and then ground to a halt as it encountered formidable resistance.

For the first time since the start of the invasion, the Imperial Guard was face to

face with significant numbers of the Blood Pact.

Doshen's large fourth army had been on the move for the better part of three days, and swung around to assault the north-eastern periphery of the main hive. Before they were within shelling range of the hive itself, they were met by enemy armour in huge numbers. Again, these forces were principally units of the notorious Blood Pact, armed with captured and customised Imperial battle tanks. An enormous armour battle began on the north-eastern plains.

Meanwhile, the third army, the largest force, was digging a path for itself up through the crude but lethal defence system erected by the archenemy south-west of the hive. They had been under fire and shelling from the moment they began, but the strengths of the Mechanicus titans served them well. The giant fighting machines would destroy and clear the kind of defences that would stop a tank or an armoured carrier. Two titans were lost in this phase during the huge, set piece onslaught, but by the end of the first day, Carnhide had the outer walls of the main hive in sight.

Then he heard that, in Zevin, Varnsetter's men were being fought to a standstill by the merciless Blood Pact. Worse was to come. North-east of the main hive, Doshen's fourth army was being pushed back and slaughtered.

Both commanders pleaded with Carnhide for support from the reserves. He refused.



MUCH HAS BEEN made of Carnhide's 'cold and heartless' refusal of aid, but the matter has been over-egged. He clearly wanted to support the efforts of his beleaguered officers,

but it was a matter of commitment. Carnhide knew well that the reserves represented by the first and, more particularly, the second army groups, would be vital to reinforce his main assault within a day or two. He could not spare them, or redirect them away from this role, or risk losing the entire war. Carnhide also still had faith in the notion that 'an officer usually strives the hardest to accomplish a plan, if it's his plan'. He had confidence in both Doshen and Varnsetter. They had claimed to be capable of accomplishing their individual objectives. He had to trust them at their word.

The Censorium, Lyubovhive, where Akaer Etogaur made his last stand.



In less than twenty-four hours, his confidence was rewarded. Varnsetter managed to manoeuvre the larger part of his sixth army into an attacking lunge that drove the Blood Pact back about three kilometres into Zevin. Paquin, skimming the hive at Zevin, had moved with admirable speed to support the sixth in a counter strike, and brought the fifth army in to close like a pincer on the Blood Pact's left flank. The fifth and sixth armies were then heavily supported by the Navy wings, which attacked both the Blood Pact in Zevin and strategic targets in Zemic hive. It would be a further nine days before the fierce warfare in the ancillary hives resulted in a conclusive Imperial victory, and losses were high (including Varnsetter himself). But the word was out.

Fuelled by the news that the Blood Pact was not as invincible as their reputation and demeanour suggested, Doshen redoubled his efforts on the north east front, and ran the heavy armour and titans in his command in a long, tight angle of attack across the hydroelectric valleys of the East Lyub

River. Simultaneously, he directed battalions of light support and anti-tank units around to the north in a circling manoeuvre. A second, hellish tank battle developed, blotting out the sunlight with its smoke and dust, but Doshen's gambit was successful. Battered by the advancing barrage of the armour and Mechanicus machines, the formidable host of Blood Pact war machines recoiled north of the hydroelectric valleys and attempted to re-form in squadron strength. Many became easy targets for the advancing anti-tank units and were destroyed before they could reassemble. The Blood Pact armour broke into two distinct elements, both forced to retreat towards the flanks of the main hive. Outside the main east gate, one element was overtaken by a rapidly advancing force of warhounds and tank destroyers and systematically annihilated. The other element attempted to push out against the encircling light support battalions, which punished it severely and broke its cohesion. As Doshen's main force advanced to assault the outer defences of Lyubovhive proper, his light support and tank destroyers prowled the charred hinterland, picking off the last of the Blood Pact's struggling machines, cut off and rogue like wild animals.

By that time, as word that Doshen's first proper assaults on the main hive had begun in earnest reached him, Carnhide had broken the third army past the defence systems and crossed the outer road networks into the shadow of the hive itself.

Trooper Enric Garsh, a Kolstec infantryman with the third army, recorded this chilling and articulate account of what confronted them then: '...the hive itself, Lyubovhive as it is named, appeared to us like a black cliff rising from the cracked grey ground. It was plated in giant sections like a beetle, like the lustrous wing cases of a great beetle, and stacks and spires rose like spines above that towering plating high into the sky, where the smoke and cloud fogged them. The wind was cold and sharp, and there were all sorts of scents on that wind: blood and dirt and oil and ash. We were ascending along the road network that once had led into the base of the vast hive. Many of these were great rockcrete bridges and spans supported on stilts and pylons of stone. All the while, we were under fire from the emplacements and hardpoints

studding the hive's black plating: cannon fire, batteries, las, flamers. They used the flamers closest too, where the range of fire burnt men off the roadways and blistered the surfaces of the bridges until they bubbled and blistered. The barrage filled the air with sparks and darts of fire, dense as sleet. We were told to advance, but we dared not, as to advance was to advance into death, and even our commissars baulked at the option. But to stay put was death also, as the myriad shots and shells dropped in amongst us and blew us bone from bone. So we charged the hive. And it was not death. It was very like it, and it was death for many, but it was not death for me, for I am here writing of it. It was just like death. Very like it.'

General Carnhide's third army penetrated the south-western perimeter of Lyubovhive in the early hours of the campaign's seventieth day. Intense block warfare began, as the Imperial invaders poured in and up through the hive's shelved stacks. Well-orchestrated resistance met them every step of the way, and Carnhide was quickly forced to call in the second army to support him, as he had anticipated.

The fighting continued unabated for eighty hours. Forty-six hours into that period, news came that Doshen's force had also breached the main hive perimeter in the northeast, and was also driving in towards the hive's core. Carnhide's spirits lifted, but were quickly dashed again. As other force commanders had discovered before him, and as many would again afterwards, Carnhide found in the Blood Pact a 'serious and respectable foe that understands with curiously human insight the scalding game that is city fighting. I find I could not section and rout the foe as I would against a confederacy of mindless cultists. The Blood Pact – how I am coming to loathe that name! – lay traps, set ambushes, mine tenements and, even, entire stacks as they retreat. They fight cleverly, and with stealth and guile, employing snipers and booby-traps and even suicide attacks. A chamber is cleared, then the Guardsmen within are slain by Blood Pact lurking in wait on the other side of the wall. I have lost many good men. Too many. And too many of them, I would have shaken by the hand and thanked before death claimed them.'

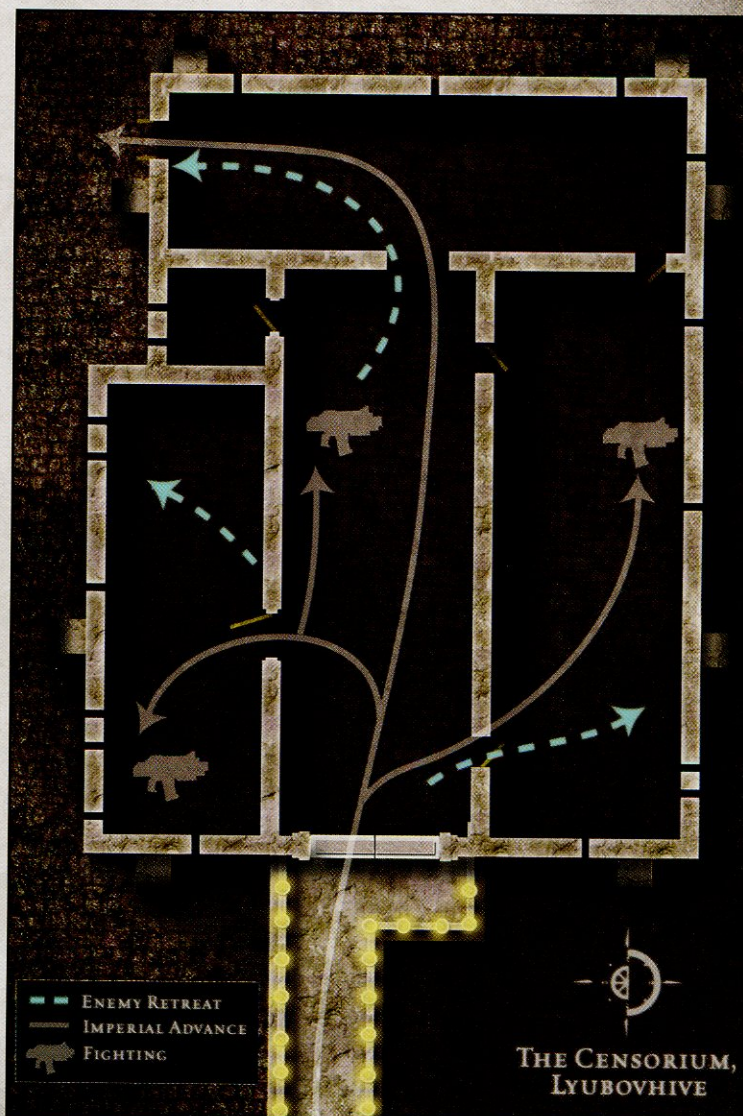
After eighty hours, Carnhide called a halt and allowed the frontline to retire and be replaced. Fighting dulled for a while, though all at the main assault line

could hear the distant thump of Doshen's northeastern attack.

At hour eighty-five, Carnhide pressed on again, with a sudden, furious lunge through multiple levels of the wounded hive, causing a sudden, stung withdrawal on the part of the enemy. They were encountering fewer Blood Pact at this stage, and more and more levies and cultists. A great fire, possibly the result of stray munitions but most probably due to enemy sabotage, broke out in the main hive's northern sectors and burned unchecked. It would later claim and destroy approximately one fifth of the hive.

Carnhide's mind was now focused on one goal: to locate and destroy Araek Etogaur, the charismatic focus of the Lyubov resistance. On several occasions, rumours circulated that the Etogaur had been found and slain, but each one was false. Carnhide drove his forces into the heart of the hive, relentlessly, realising that victory, however painful, was now in his grasp.

Tactical overlay of the Censorium battle.





ATE ON THE SEVENTY-THIRD day of the Lyubov campaign, three fireteams of specialists from the 82nd Carnelian Light Foot, commanded by Lt Victor Gonfal, finally ran the Etogaur to ground.

The fireteams comprised eighteen infantrymen with two crews of light mortar support, and specialised in city block clearance. Gonfal was a veteran officer.

Driving ahead of the main advance, through the now burning habs of northern Lyubovhive, Gonfal's men encountered unexpected resistance from a squad of Blood Pact warriors. The firefight was inconclusive, though it drove the enemy back down a stack way into a vandalised Censorium, and left three of the foe dead on the causeway outside.

Checking the bodies for life signs (Carnhide's men had learned, to their cost, that wounded Blood Pact often played dead whilst palming grenades), Gonfal's medic noticed that the corpses wore 'black garlands and had gold leaf rubbed upon their masks'. Gonfal was at once alert to the notion that these troopers were somehow special or 'raised up'. He sent signals to general command for support.

Before any support could arrive, Gonfal's squads found themselves under renewed fire from the precincts of the old Censorium. Gonfal elected to move, and ordered his mortar teams to shell the facade and the inner yards. After twenty minutes of sustained bombing, which expended most of the group's shell munitions, Gonfal ran his troopers forward through the shelled out ruins of the Censorium front.

They met fierce resistance. Blood Pact troopers came out of all cover, ammo spent, using their bayonets, trench axes and hands to repel the attackers. Gonfal killed six of them personally and, in his memoirs, suggests that many of his men accomplished a similar feat. The Imperials had charged las rifles at their disposal, and made slaughter of the feral brethren of the Pact.

Fighting continued deep into the Censorium quad, and beyond into the holy sepulchre, which Gonfal relates as being 'heinously spoiled and smeared about in all treason.'

By this time, a squad of Kasrkin specialists had closed on the area to support Gonfal. However, Gonfal himself had sighted an enemy he believed to be the

rogue Etogaur. With two of his men, he pursued him through the lower quad and out towards the west door of the Censorium. Turning, as if cornered, the enemy drew a barbed chainsword and snarled into the attack. Both of Gonfal's men died in terrible ways. Gonfal himself fired twice and missed. He had one last charge left in his power pack and he expended it into the enemy's snarling face.

Akaer Etogaur was dead.

It later transpired that Gonfal had missed and the headshot was claimed by one of the Kasrkin marksmen in an adjacent building.

But, in spirit, the work was done. Though sporadic fighting continued for weeks afterwards, Lyubov was taken and Carnhide was victorious.

Carnhide expected glory for his achievement. He did not get it. Doubts were cast on his strength of character and even his ability to command. Deeply wounded by criticism, he published his account of the action at Lyubov and retired from the Crusade. Eighteen months later, he was dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Carnhide's actions on Lyubov, and the nature of his disgrace and death, is an object lesson to all scholars of Imperial tactics. Though he achieved his goals, Carnhide was accused of wavering and indecision, and of muddling his focus. Cybon himself berated Carnhide for 'allowing the parts of your command to do as they will.'

Only history, and the persuasive voice of the *Tactica Imperialis* can amend that slight. Andreas Carnhide understood his duty and his function. Poorly supplied and equipped, he accomplished what his seniors did not believe to be feasible. They accused him of ill focus against a focused foe, but he understood the true nature of the crusade animal, and all its various parts, and allowed them to function at their best, in concert, rather than in cohesion. Ironical then, that against mankind's newest and most united foe, Carnhide chose to play to the strengths of the Imperial Guard, Navy and Mechanicus at its most divided, and make that an asset. Even with his officers, with their disparate plans and schemes, he sought triumph, allowing each one his head.

Though driven to suicide in disgrace by his contemporaries, Carnhide remains an example to all commanders who find the divided wings of the aquila at his or her disposal. Carnhide saw strength and success in disunity just as the archenemy realised the opposite.

His example should be followed wisely.

Rophanon

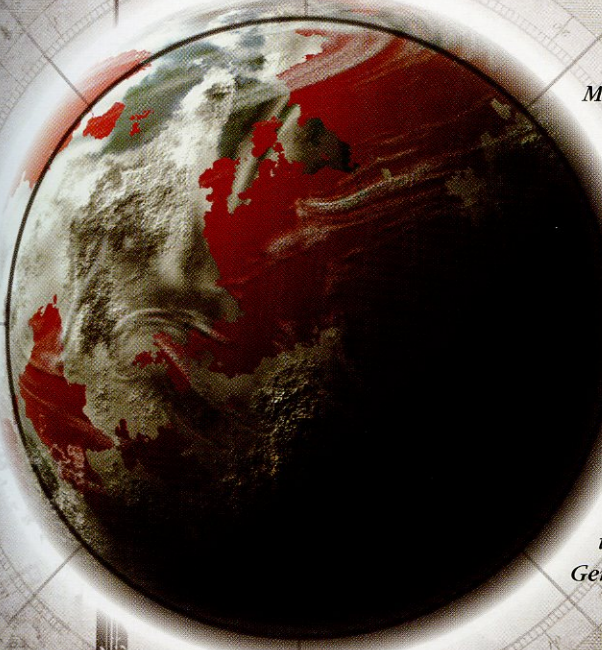
ADMINISTRATUM CHARTER WORLD, 990.M40.

'IN THE YEAR OF OUR GLORIOUS EMPEROR'S MOST BENEFICENT RULE 990.M40, THE DOMAIN OF ROPHANON DID REJECT THE RULE OF THE ADEPTUS TERRA. WOE UNTO THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO TURNED FROM THE LIGHT OF THE MASTER OF MANKIND, FOR TRULY THEY RESIDE NOW WITH THE RESTLESS SHADES OF OUTER NIGHT. THE BATTLES FOUGHT TO CAST OUT THE TRAITORS AND TO RESTORE THE PAX IMPERIALIS RAGED FOR THREE LOCAL YEARS AND A MULTITUDE OF LOYAL WARRIORS MARTYRED THEMSELVES ON THE ACCURSED BULLETS AND BAYONETS OF THOSE THAT SHOULD HAVE CALLED THEM BROTHER.

ROPHANON PROVED ONLY THE OPENING ENGAGEMENT IN A SERIES OF COSTLY WARS THAT DEVoured THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE PROTEAN EBB. THE SORRY ERA SAW THE DEATH OF SAINT KASSIUS LOE, THE SUNDERING OF THE THIRD CONVOCATION OF NEPHILIM, AND THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF TASK FORCE 1293. IT WAS ONLY THE INTERVENTION OF LORD AL'SALABAD AND HIS DISCIPLES THAT SAVED THE ENTIRE REGION FROM SLIPPING FOR ALL TIME BEYOND THE LIGHT OF THE EMPEROR.

HEED THOUGH, UNTO THE LESSONS THOSE BOLD SERVANT'S MIGHT TEACH US. FOR SOME, DUTY DOES NOT END IN DEATH, AND THOUGH THEY REST NOW AT THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE EMPEROR, THEIR ACTIONS ECHO DOWN THE AGES, ENRICHING AND ENLIGHTENING THOSE WHO WOULD LISTEN, UNTIL THE END OF ALL THINGS.'

— From *A History of the Later Imperial Crusades*



Much has been written on the wars that engulfed the Protean Ebb, but the account that follows is the only known description of the fate of the Rophanon system. Other authors have focused on the dramatic death of Saint Loe, to the detriment, some feel, of the wider picture. To date then, this text, penned by the personal Historatirix of the Lord General Blythe is the only version in circulation. It has been put forward by many of Blythe's contemporaries as the definitive account of the Lord General's most celebrated action.



AT THE OUTSET of the thirty-ninth millennium, Rophanon was a world ruled directly by the Adeptus Administratum. A world under charter, the planet was entirely given over to the servicing of the vast, sprawling bureaucracy known as the Priesthood of Terra. Its cities were home to a million dusty archives and its skies were pierced by the soaring silicon spires of its kilometre-high data repositories. But Rophanon was more than this, for the planet had long been classed a Garden World, a place of exceptional beauty that had been preserved, unusually in a galaxy so shattered by war, for its own sake. The most highly ranked of the Adeptus Terra would come to Rophanon to see out their days. These were the favoured few who were allowed to die not tethered to a data-station or amalgamated into an archivum retrieval point. They were allowed the staggeringly rare privilege of seeing out their days with the sun upon their face, walking the paradisiacal gardens and conversing with peers who had served, like them, at the very highest echelons of the Imperium. It was said that three High Lords had seen out their days thus, strolling the vine-lined arboreums of Rophanon having walked the vaulted corridors of the Imperial Palace for so long.

The population of Rophanon were divided into two classes. The Administratum and their servants consti-

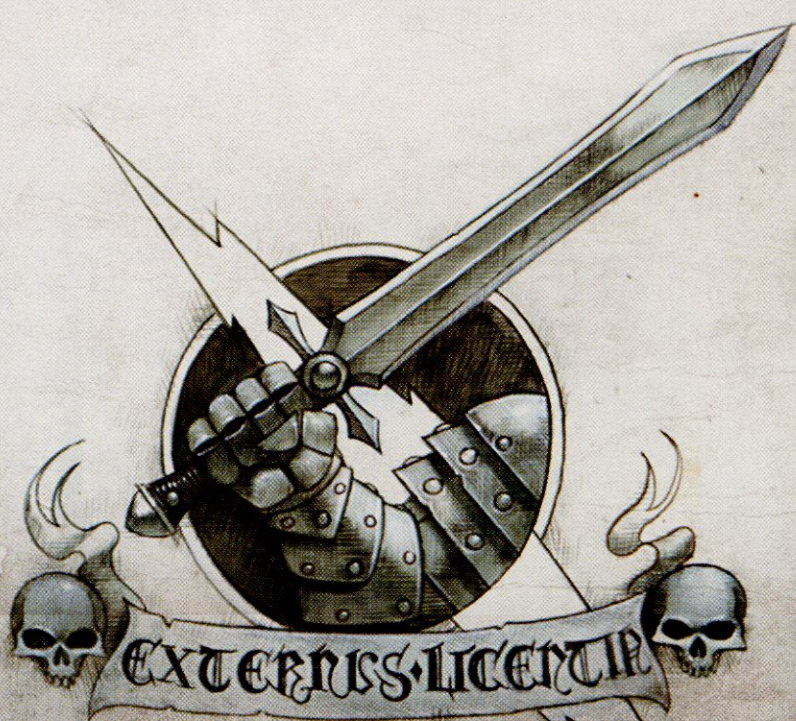
tuted one third of the population, while the planet's indigenous people accounted for the remainder. Millions scraped and bowed, seeing to the every whim of their masters, or served them indirectly, maintaining the weaving green lanes, labouring at the docks or any one of a billion other tasks below the masters' notice. The indigenous Rophanors – for so they called themselves – were invisible to the world's masters, having no rights, no claims to the land and little hope of ever bettering themselves.

So it was for the vast majority of the Imperium. But upon Rophanon it was not always so.

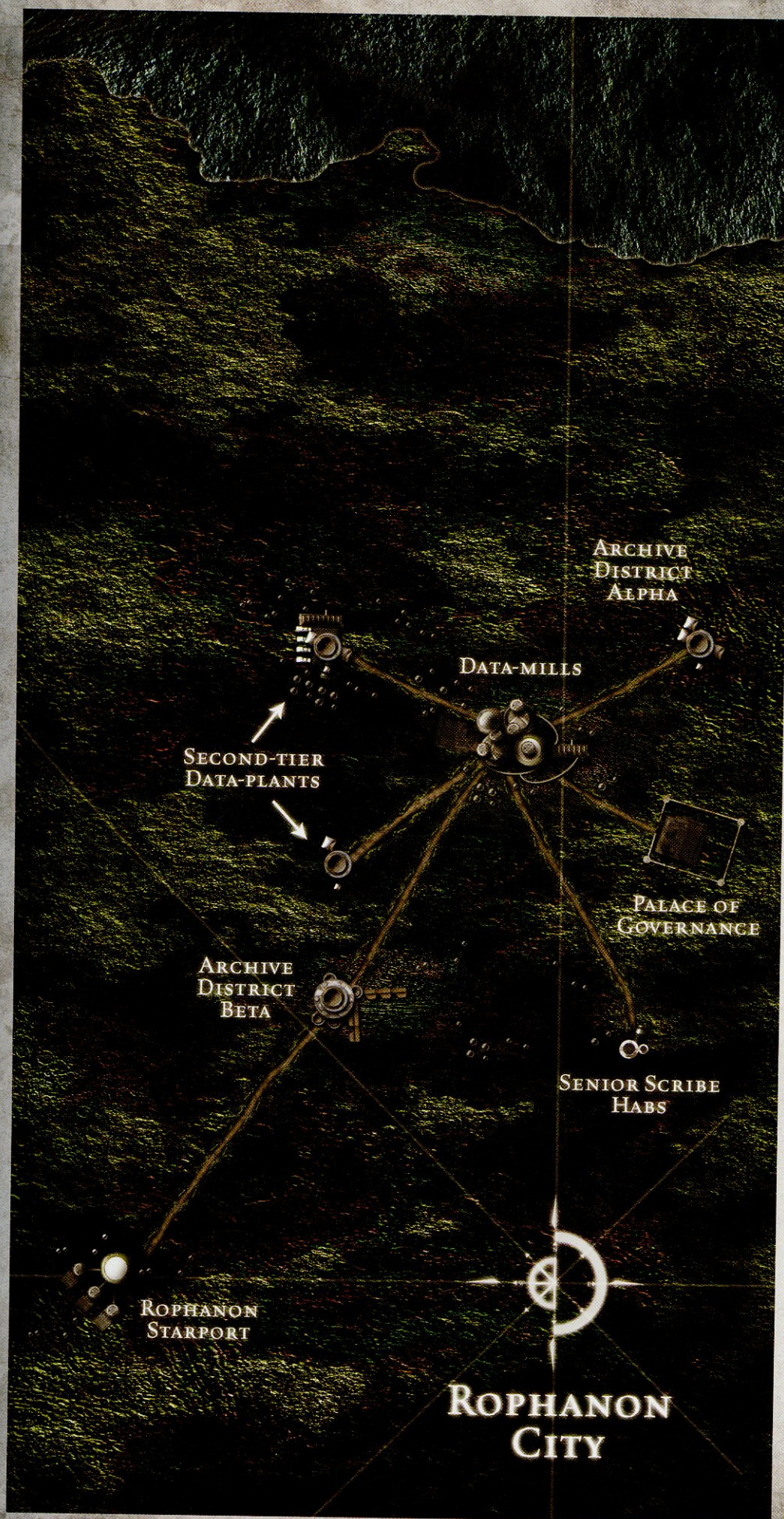
ROPHANON CITY

Once known as Ortis, Rophanon City was the seat of the Administratum's power upon the planet. It was situated at the point of the Isthmus Libratis, and was surrounded on three points of the compass by ancient, delicate glades, and by the tranquil Arium Sea and its coral forests to the north. The city was visible from many kilometres around, its towering data stacks glittering in the violet-tinged sky, its tree-lined walkways crowded with bustling scribes, those gifted the privilege of their own sleeping cell rather than a space beneath their workstation hurrying about the repositories and archives all hours of the day. The city was home to five million scribes and fully twice as many menials. In addition, a planetary defence force garrisoned the region from its barracks around the city, and a further million or more servants of the Administratum might be passing through at any one time, engaged upon errands of the utmost import to the Priesthood of Terra.

The family crest of the ruling house of Rophanon



The principle locations of Rophanon City. The majority of the city was covered in light forest or cultivated arbours.



(Opposite.) Formal
portrait of Artemis
Blythe.



ROPHANON WAS NOT always an Administratum fiefdom. The Priesthood of Terra had not always ruled it, and its people had not always served the servants of the Administratum. Its people were once free, masters of their own world, with their own rulers who reigned in the name of the Emperor.

As with all the major worlds along the Protean Ebb, Rophanon had been settled during the dark times long before the Age of the Imperium. When the colonists had first set foot upon the world's surface, they had looked upon the beauty of the world and determined that they would settle there for all time. But as they explored their new world, they discovered towering silicate spires clustered together at numerous points across its surface. They had no inkling who might have built these strange structures, and found no other sign of intelligent life sharing their world. The settlers, so Rophanon's sagas told, resolved to avoid the spire-cities, seeking to make their homes instead beneath the delicate canopies of the low-growing trees that covered vast tracts of the world's land-mass.

And so it was throughout the centuries. Rophanon prospered, taking its place in the Imperium when the Great Crusade reached the Ebb. Its sons and daughters went off to fight in the Emperor's armies, and many great servants of the Imperium of Man were birthed there.

That was until the last decades of the thirty-eighth millennium, when a quorum of the High Masters of the Administration declared Rophanon under charter. Strategic planning instigated many centuries before had identified Rophanon as the ideal location for a massive data processing and archiving operation required to assimilate and to act upon the vast amount of information generated by the every day tasks of the Administratum. Every day, billions upon billions of reports, messages, dispatches, and communiqués must be received, processed, acted upon and eventually filed away. Rophanon was to provide the archival facilities for a segmentum's worth of data. Its data-mills would process a sea of information, a surging ocean of data that had been acted upon, sometimes centuries before, and was required no more. But nothing was ever discarded, and so the

Administratum determined that Rophanon should be the graveyard, the final resting place for the galaxy's unwanted data.

The Administratum shipped millions of scribes, serfs and menials to Rophanon, within the space a single generation, completely transforming its society. The indigenous population were declared subjects of the Priesthood of Terra, and their hereditary governors relegated to leaders in name only. The so-called High Council of Rophanon, chaired by the hereditary Imperial Commander, provides the visible face of governance. But it holds no real power. The Administratum rule supreme upon Rophanon, and every man women and child upon the world's surface is, ultimately, subjugated to its will.

LORD GENERAL ARTEMIS BLYTHE

The Lord General Artemis Blythe, the so-called hero of the Aylamri Massacres was a proud servant of the Administratum. Having risen through the ranks of the Officio Munitorum's Staff Corps, he took a command rank at the Battle of Aristachus X, where he was Chief of Operations to the infamous Lord Militant Ufak Berk. When Berk was slain by an Infil-traitor sent by his rival Lord Haraldur 'the Unsane', it was Blythe that took control of the Army 17 and averted disaster in the face of overwhelming enemy forces. Blythe went on to lead Army 17 in a series of stunning victories, ultimately securing the entire expanse of the Dragan Reach and scouring it's systems of rebels and pirates in a series of pogroms for which he was highly decorated.

Artemis Blythe is a taciturn individual, not given to the fits of bistrionics for which his former commander Ufak Berk was well known. His manner betrays his background as a staff officer – he is methodical and meticulous in his approach to war, but he is known to display a spark of genius when others would fall back on rigid doctrine. He requires of those officers under him the same painstaking approach to war, believing that one only has the right to innovate when one has a thorough grounding in doctrine.

Blythe is on Rophanon recovering from wounds suffered when his command vessel, the Pride of Eastlight was ambushed at the height of the Dragan Reach campaign. Despite his wounds, Blythe refused to stand down until the campaign was declared complete, literally collapsing with exhaustion at the point of his victory.



(Opposite.) The head
of the Council of
Rophanon, Kruker
Voor.



HOUGH THE COUNCIL
of Rophanon main-
tained a public face
of coexistence and
cooperation with
the Administratum,
it fostered dissent
within its ranks.

Made up as it was by individuals who were proud to trace their family roots to pre-Imperium times, the Council became a secret hotbed of recidivism. Its members sat in open congress by day, debating the matters of import with their peers. But by night they met in ones and twos, and spoke of a time before the Administratum reduced them to mere puppets. And they were not alone, for the indigenous people of Rophanon longed for the time when they laboured not under the yoke of the Administratum, but were masters of their own fate, servants of the Imperium at large, not slaves to a petty bureaucracy.

The council members went forth amongst their erstwhile subjects, planting the seeds of rebellion amongst them. Hooded figures whispered of freedom, of casting off the shackles of the priesthood, of Rophanon taking its place once more amongst the Imperium of Man. Surely, they reasoned, the Emperor would will it thus?

The roots of heresy took many years to spread, but spread they did, until the indigenous people of Rophanon nurtured treason in secret. Though they maintained the illusion of faceless drudge, bowing and scraping to their superiors, the Rophanors grew to hate their lot. And it was the agents of the Council that steered this hatred, controlling it from afar. With a serf in every bureau, archive and officio, the Council knew every secret of its enemy, until one day, it enacted its long-prepared for plan. It issued the order to its followers...

*'...Arise! Cast off
the shackles of the
Priesthood of Terra
and take back that
which is yours.'*

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++ Rophanon 17
++ X2.0.21
++ Orb distance: 1.7 A.U.
++ 1.09G/temp 8c
++ g-class (sub-type: Garden World
under Administratum Charter)
++ Tithe Grade: Exactis Secundus
++ Aestimare: B005
++ Population: 1,893,300,000
++ Notes: Under Administratum charter since
003.M36, senior Priesthood members allocated
honourable retreat or extended withdrawal from
primary duties following exceptional and pro-
longed service.
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KRUKER VOOR

The chair of the Council of Rophanon, Kruker Voor can trace his ancestry back many millennia. His line includes over one hundred Imperial Commanders of Rophanon, and he is, secretly, utterly consumed with hatred for the Administratum that robbed his family of its position as rulers of the world.

In his youth, Voor served in the armies of the Imperium, commanding the Rophanon 3rd in a series of minor wars against orkish incursions along the northern reach of the Protean Ebb. It was only when he returned to the world of his birth that his hatred really began to blossom, for though he was allowed to return, thanks to his position on the council of his homeworld, none of his men were permitted to return to the planet of their birth. Despite the fact that the war against the orks was won, with honour, the Rophanor units were shipped out to serve and to die in whatever conflict required them first. Voor was disgusted, for he had seen his fellow Rophanors fight and die for the Imperium, and when they thought their task done, they were allowed no rest. He saw that no amount of sacrifice or courage or glory would satiate the Imperium's unending thirst for blood.

Upon his return to Rophanor, Voor assumed the position of Chair of the Council of Rophanon, and from his very first day he determined to cast off the rule of the Adeptus Terra. He knew of course that even thinking such a thought made him traitor, but he reasoned to himself that his was neither a treachery against the Emperor, nor Mankind nor the Imperium. He focussed his hatred entirely upon the Administratum, and their exalted governors who ruled his world.

And so, Voor nurtured similar notions held by his peers and by his people. He plotted and planned, and his influence grew, until one, long planned for day, he brought rebellion and war to the world of his own birth, in order, he believed, to make it free.



(Opposite.) One of Lord Blythe's many makeshift command posts employed throughout the hostilities on Rophanon.

Despite the efforts of the Arbites squads on Rophanon, they were unable to prevent the planet-wide rebellion carefully orchestrated by Kruker Voor. The Arbites employed a wide variety of methods to root out sedition, including clandestine interrogation practices to gather information and more overt intimidation and brutalizing tactics. Arbites patrols on Rophanon were often deployed in urbanized districts in Rophanon city, checking and clearing habitation buildings, therefore bringing them into close proximity to the rebels.



HEN VOOR ORDERED his uprising upon the world of Rophanon, he put into action a plan several decades in the making. For years, the Council had been insinuating its agents into every workplace and every dormitory on the planet, spreading its sedition and preparing covertly for the day when the Rophanors would rise up as one and slaughter their masters, taking power for themselves and forcefully reclaiming their world.

These agents were primed with their tasks, though each was allowed to know only a fraction of the overall plan lest they be suspected by their masters and dragged off to the interrogation cells of the Arbites. At sunrise on what would become known as the Day of Returning, these agents received the word, and led their fellows in rebellion.

The first that many Administratum officials knew of the rebellion was when their former servants, previously docile and faceless, turned upon them. Thousands of Administratum officials were killed in their sleep as housemen and menials slit the throats of their despised masters. Many more had precious little more warning than that, the last thing they saw their servants massacring entire halls of scribes.

The rebellion soon spread from the first, key, locations in which it had been instigated. Soon, the Rophanors required no goading to rise up against their masters. The archives and libraria were put to the torch by baying mobs, the sun scarcely having risen before it was obscured by



choking ash, fragments of burning parchment falling from the skies and touching off secondary fires all over the city. An hour after sunrise, a rebel placed a melta charge against the base of one of the silcate towers of Rophanon City, and within seconds it was burning with a white light so intense that ten thousand were incinerated in its heat and one hundred thousand more blinded by the very sight of it.

With anarchy reigning all over their formally idyllic world, the Administratum was thrown into a blind panic. Many senior governors had been lost in the opening phase of the uprising, and the remainder were paralysed with indecision and outright shock. Nothing had prepared the administrators for such an occurrence, and the rebellion looked like it would succeed entirely within those first few hours of bloodshed.

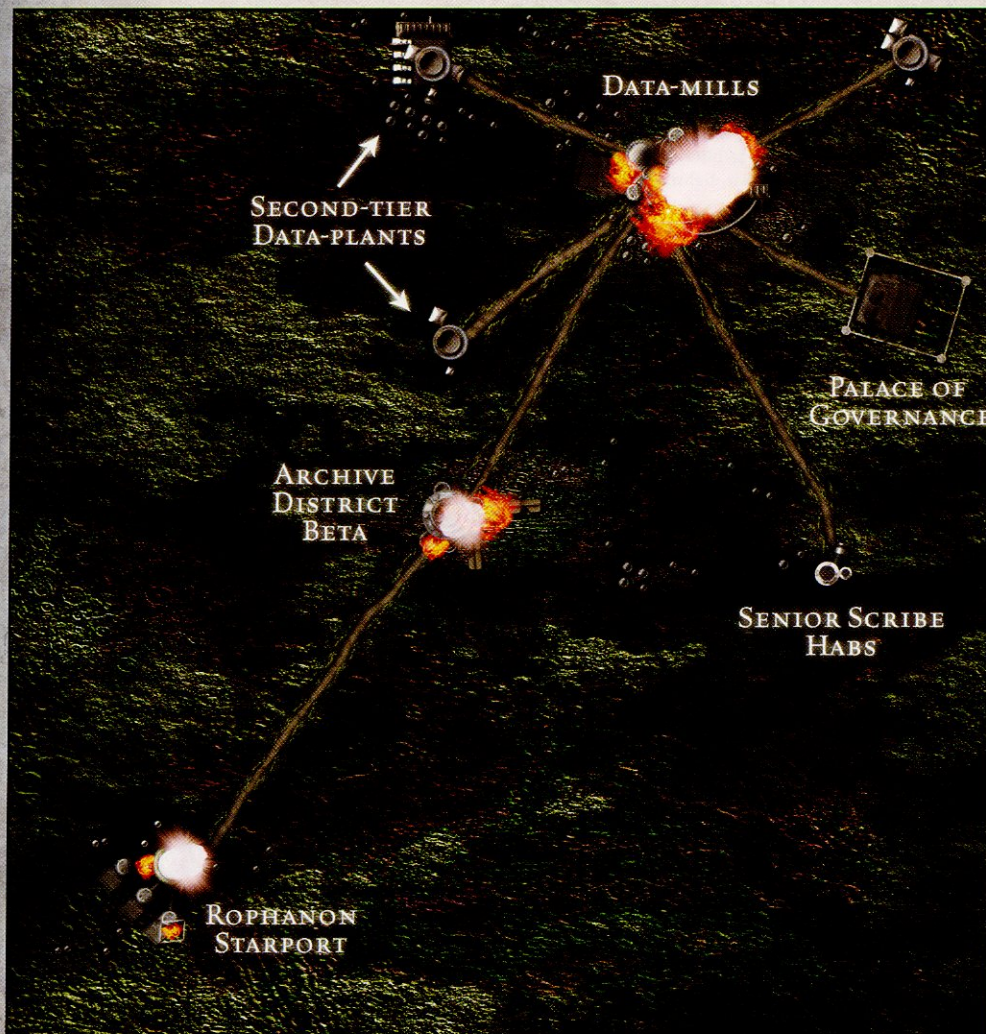
Fortunately, one man had the experience and the courage to step forward and to take control. Artemis Blythe burst in upon the conclave of the surviving administrators as they screamed and argued ineffectively. With a voice made icy and deadly by all he had witnessed that morning, Lord Blythe declared himself the acting commander-in-chief of all surviving military assets, and invited any in the chamber to disagree with him. None did, and Blythe went about the business of imposing some form of control over the rapidly degenerating situation.

Lord Blythe's first action as commander-in-chief was to order immediate counter attacks against those concentrations of rebel forces that could be located. He saw that he did not even have time to establish the full scope of his own forces, and so he simply ordered all units to converge upon a series of objectives, and waited to see which obeyed and which did not. It soon became apparent that only around a third of Rophanon's defence militia remained loyal, and these, it was soon established, were those whose personnel were entirely made up of off-world scribes, judged surplus to requirements or mentally unfit to serve as such. Having been ejected from the archives and work places, these men and women had been packed off to the PDF garrisons, where they would contribute to the world's defence by providing a paper strength far greater than their real, military worth. Two thirds of the PDF, those drawn from the indigenous population, had rebelled.

Having established what forces he could draw upon, Blythe almost despaired of the task ahead of him. He

saw within hours that he had no choice but to call for aid from off world. He would use his rank and his connections to instigate a massive counter attack.

In such situations, Imperial Commanders or, as in this case, their proxies are required to issue an astropathic plea, transmitted in increasingly wide circles until a response is received. Either a taskforce from an existing unit will be diverted, or an entirely new regiment will be raised from the first world to receive the plea. Blythe's cipher carried great weight with those receiving his transmissions, and so a response was forthcoming within days. A crusade fleet three months out offered to detach an element of its ground forces for Blythe's use. These units would muster at Algenon, Rophanon's neighbouring system, and its members would form the cadre of a larger force to be raised from that world's Planetary Defence Forces. Within twenty days, a staggeringly short period of time and one only possible given Blythe's rank, a substantial force was inbound to begin the arduous task of re-establishing order on Rophanon.



Voor's uprising struck first at those locations critical to the Administratum's rule – the data-mill's and archives. The starport too was a prime target, and its destruction forestalled any fast reaction.

*Extract from an
Imperial Guard
training manual.*



ORDERS OF BATTLE OF THE GLORIOUS IMPERIAL GUARD

Upon his ascension to the ranks of the Officio Munitorum, and his induction into the many and varied Staff Corps, the new officer will seek to make sense of the vast sprawl, the magnificent variety of the fighting forces of the Imperium of Man. He will look at the Tables of Organisation and Equipment and perhaps he will shudder with despair, for he will fail to see the logic or the reason in the establishment of the multitudes of warriors before him. He will then look to familiar terms and categorisations with which to interpret the dispositions of the vast fighting forces. But he will fail.

Look not on the vast glory of the Imperial Guard and seek to impose your own, narrow conception of military logic upon it. Perhaps upon the world of your birth an Army is made of two Corps, a Corps of two Divisions, a Division of Three Brigades and so forth. Perhaps the army in which you served as a youthful subaltern fielded Regiments of ten companies, or Legions of one thousand, or Cohorts or Hosts or units with any number of names. Forget all of that.

The Imperial Guard is vast. It is said that were its warriors to form up in column, they would reach from Holy Terra to Armageddon. Its members are drawn, like you, from every world in the Glorious Imperium of Mankind. How many of those worlds even speak the same tongue, let alone share more than a pittance of culture? And how many of those drawn from the tithings, those such as you, know the tiniest fraction of High Gothic? Precious few, do you see? And yet, despite all this, we, the Adjutants and Operations

Officers, the Logisticians and the Tacticae, somehow keep the Armies of the Imperium marching to war.

Take heed, and I shall share with you the basic tenets of the organisation of the Imperial Guard, for that is all you need know, for now.

The Regiment

Every world judged able by the Holy Priesthood of Terra is required to give unto the Imperium no less than one tenth of its fighting hosts, upon a regular basis and in addition when required by circumstance. Said forces must be of the highest quality, and are thus invariably formed from a cadre of the world's best Planetary Defence Force units. They will have their own ranks, titles, formations, doctrines and histories, but regardless of all this, they will be divided into roughly equal units, consisting of several thousand warriors, and given a regimental number.

The Regiment is the only formation that remains even vaguely consistent in size regardless of the world from which it is drawn, though even then, there exists no small degree of variance. It is the basic building block from which all other formations are built, regardless of the naming conventions in use. The Tactica Imperialis lists every single potential formation into which a multiple of Regiments might be combined, and Staff Officers are required to familiarise themselves with them all. You may one day be ordered to prepare a group of nine regiments into two Combat Commands, or perhaps you will be required to provide an Army Group with an

Independent Armoured Brigade. Study well the multifarious manifestations of the Emperor's Armies, and with them deliver Justice unto His foes.

Sub-dividing the Regiment

If the Regiment can be combined with others in many and varied forms, so too can it be sub-divided. All Regiments are divided into a number of Companies, sometimes as few as five and sometimes as many as twenty-five – the number might depend upon the number of troopers in the company or might be fewer if they are well appointed, larger if they are rudely equipped. Regardless, they will be considered of equal strength. Invariably, a Regiment will be organised into administrative groupings, sometimes called Battalions, sometimes Brigades but frequently other terms are used dependent on the Regiment's planet of origin. In battle, these administrative divisions are not used in a tactical sense, but instead the Regiment's officers will divide the force into temporary formations, each of which will be assigned a specific tactical task. Again, the terms for these formations vary, as do their exact application, but the Regimental Battle Group is a common formation, as is the Task Group or the Assault Group. These groups often work alongside units from different arms, forming a combined- or all-arms grouping. An example of this is a battle group consisting of chimera-mounted mechanised infantry, working alongside Leman Russ of an armoured Regiment, perhaps with a detachment of Basilisk self-propelled artillery to act as front line assault guns.

Limitations of the Regimental System

By now, attentive students will have noted a major divergence between a planet-bound defence force and an Imperial Guard Regiment. A PDF unit will be one amongst hundreds, each a standing member of a force expected only to fight in a single, well-defined locale, and able to count upon the aid of its fellows at short notice. Its lines of communication will be short, and sources of replacement of casualties nearby and plentiful.

Not so with a Regiment of the Imperial Guard. A Regiment might be expected to operate entirely independently, light years from aid, or it may be fielded as but one element in a vast army. Its deployment is never predictable, and so it must prepare for all eventualities and be equipped to deal with many foes.

However, there exists a fundamental restriction upon the deployment of the Glorious Imperial Guard, and to this detail you must pay the utmost attention. In days of yore, the Guard and Navy fought as one, united under the auspices of the Imperial Army. I know that such a thought is hard to

countenance, but it is the truth. In those days, rebellion and treason split the galaxy asunder, and fully half of the Imperial Army turned from the light of the Most Beneficent Emperor and turned upon the Imperium of Man. Equipped as they were with their own transports and support vessels, Warp capable, the traitor units could strike as and where they would. In the end, the traitors were brought to heel, and the Army was split asunder. Never again would the power to cross the Great Void reside with one man, one Imperial Commander. Instead, the newly formed Imperial Guard would be dependent upon the Imperial Navy, and therefore upon the entire Imperium to fight.

Furthermore, where in the dark times the regiments had been fielded in massive and coherent, all-arms groupings, these were rendered down. Instead, a Regiment must conform to a (very broadly) defined type, whether Infantry, Armoured, Artillery, Pioneer or any number of allowed variations. This might at first appear at odds with the notion that a Regiment must be prepared to stand alone, but I tell you now, this is entirely deliberate, for it forces a level

of interdependence at levels higher than the Regiment, an independence that can only come from loyal servants of the Munitorum. Were, for example, an Artillery Regiment to turn from the True Path of Humanity, it would scarce be able to resist a punitive assault by a Drop Troop Regiment. Were a Drop Troop Regiment to turn, an Artillery Regiment would soon wipe it out. And so, on a like-for-like basis, a Regiment is capable of taking on any foe, but to operate as part of a larger, strategic grouping it must cooperate closely with its peers.

Heed this lesson well, and forget it at your peril.

Types of Regiment

Of the types of Regiment you will come into contact with as a Staff Officer of the Munitorum, only a scant number can be listed here. All cadets are required to familiarise themselves with all tier-one formations, including all post-M39 recessions.

Potential formation types, along with an example, follows.

Anti-tank:

67th Avellornian Gunners

Armoured Assault Engineer:

22nd Mordant

Drop Troop:

4th Elysian

Garrison:

13th/5th 'Hylgar's
Hell-Raisers'

Heavy Armoured:

57th Thoth 'Ironheads'

Heavy Infantry:

3rd Malkinite

Independent Support: 1st/6th San Quin

Infantry:

47th Finreht Highlanders

Internal Security:

'Detachment Orphan 12'

Light Infantry:

82nd Drookian Fen Guard

Mobile Artillery:

111th Semtexian Bombardiers

Mechanised Infantry:

49th Armageddon
Steel Legion

Reconnaissance:

10th Knovian Gharkas

Shock:

8th Cadian 'The Lord Castellan's Own'

Shock:

Cavalry 73rd Savlar Chem-riders

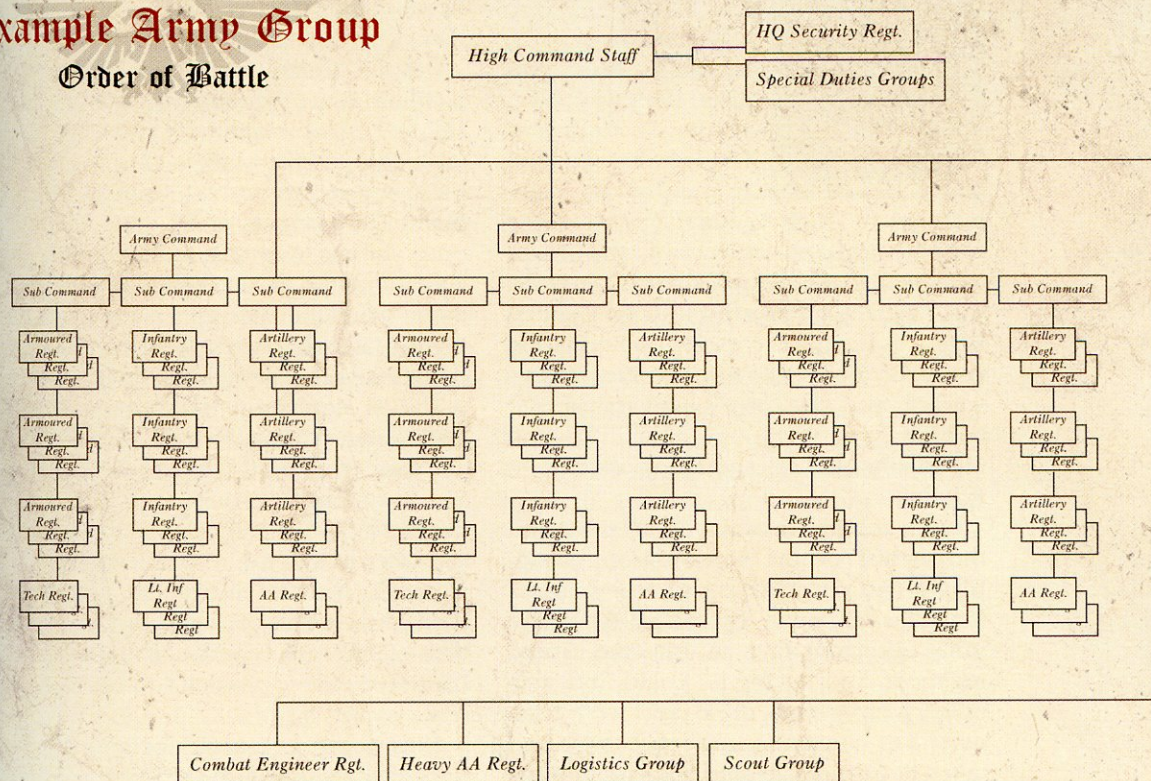
Siege:

2nd Barran Siegemasters

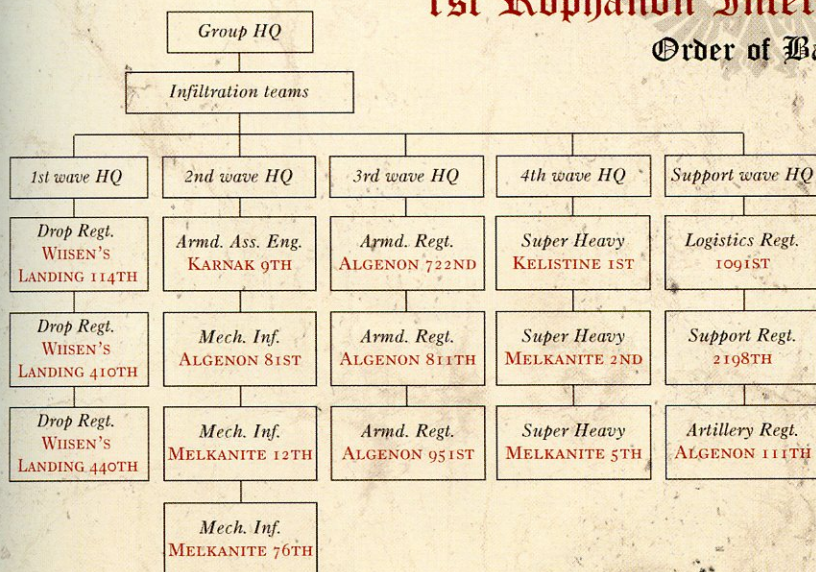
(Following page) Lord High Adept Grelard was the chief Logistician throughout the Rophanon war. Supported by a staff of over five hundred adjutants and savants, over a thousand menials and around five thousand logister-servitors, Grelard oversaw the largest deployment the sector Officio had seen for several decades. Without his specialised skills, the massive redeployments undertaken at the very end of the war would not have been possible, and he was later honoured at the highest level for his efforts.



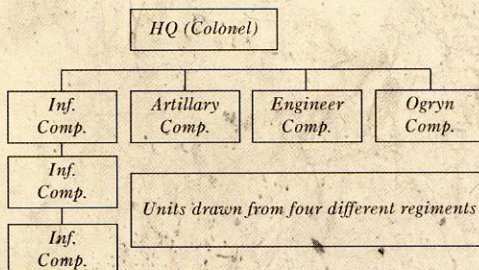
Example Army Group Order of Battle



1st Kophanon Intervention Group Order of Battle



Example Battle Group Order of Battle





THE ROPHANON LANDINGS

The force sent to Blythe's aid was given the title '1RIG', or the 1st Rophanon Intervention Group. It was initially commanded by High Colonel Augustin, the highest ranked officer of the force detached to Rophanon's aid. Command was formally transferred to Lord General Blythe as the fleet crossed into Rophanon space. Blythe remained upon the planet's surface, and the force's staff transferred to his base of operations in the El Phanon Mountains 300 kilometres south-east of Rophanon City.

In the months between the uprising and the arrival of the intervention group, Blythe had consolidated what few forces he could rely upon, organising them into units approximating an Imperial Guard regiment. Led by any he could find with military experience, these units were committed to containing the rebels who had taken Rophanon City, and in disrupting any enemy efforts aimed at consolidating control of the routes between the major cities. Blythe ensured that his forces aggressively patrolled the dense, arboreal terrain

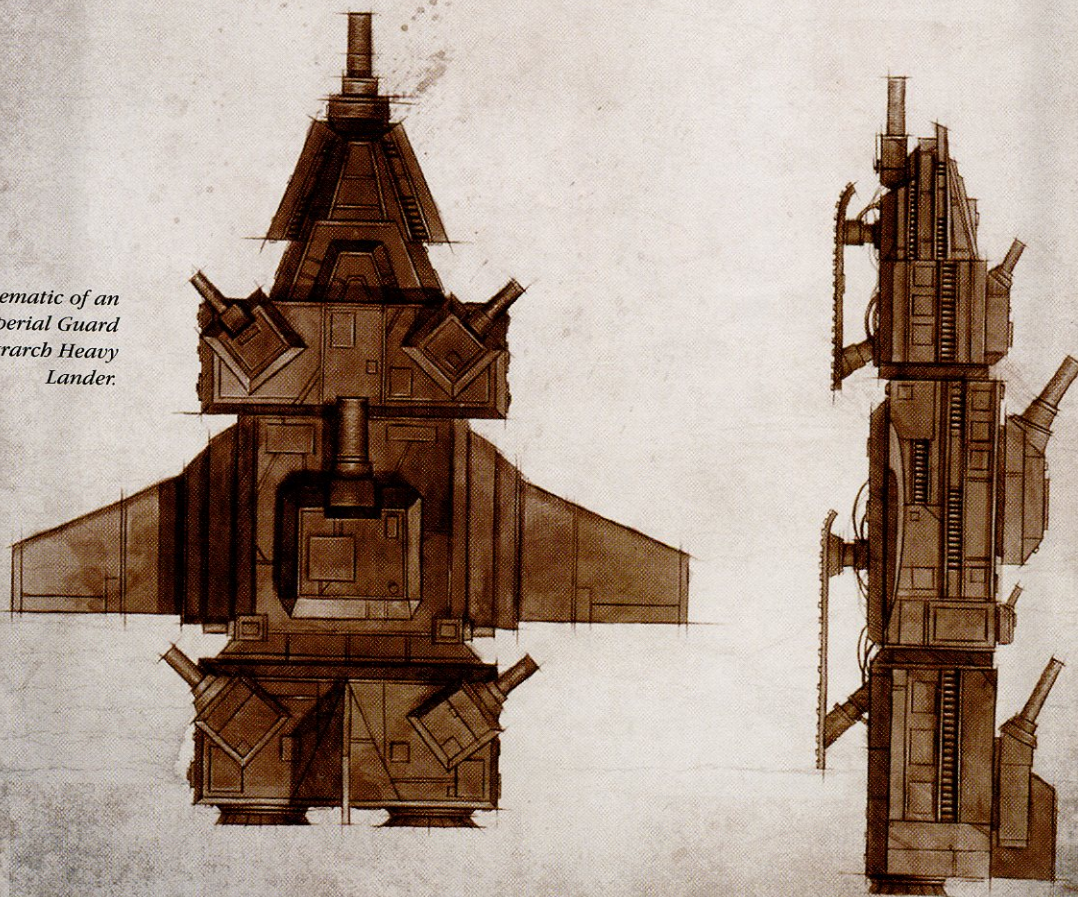
between the cities, intercepting any organised enemies and engaging them before they could link up with larger forces.

Despite initial successes, Blythe was painfully aware that time was running out. He had scant resources, and the units under his command were only as good as the few veterans he had installed to lead them. The troopers of his units were the dregs of the Administratum, though he later admitted a grudging affection for them. When the intervention force arrived, Blythe later admitted, his force had no more than ten days fight left in it.

The 1st Rophanon Intervention Group was configured as a formation referred to amongst the Staff Corps as a Heavy Planetary Assault Group. Such formations had been fielded with success throughout the latter half of the 37th Millennium, and although intensive in materiel, had found favour as a means of deploying large numbers of Imperial Guard units into heavily contested enemy positions during a planetary assault.

1RIG began its assault operations three days after its arrival in the system, Blythe having transmitted his orders and briefed the Regimental commanders as soon as they arrived. He had spent weeks planning the operation, and it is testament to his

*Schematic of an
Imperial Guard
Tetrarch Heavy
Lander.*



skills that he was able to instil in officers he had never before met the courage and confidence to undertake such an operation with so little notice.

The first phase of the assault consisted of the insertion of a number of highly elite kill-teams, each tasked with eliminating planetary defence assets identified by Blythe as able to contest the landings. These consisted of ground missile silos and defence laser batteries able to engage capital vessels in orbit, and all were destroyed according to Blythe's schedule.

The next phase was the insertion of the intervention group's 1st Wave, which was made up of mass-dropped infantry. The method of insertion chosen was an unusual one, only used in this type of operation. Each company of the three Regiments committed to the mass drop was embarked onto a low orbit carrier, each of which was equipped with an massive anti-grav generator that projected a cone beneath the carrier extending to the ground, into which the drop troops would step, to fall at a speed at which they could land without sustaining injury. Such an insertion method is extremely rare, at least in part because the construction and maintenance of the anti-grav generators precludes their common use. It also asks a lot of even the most disciplined and well-trained warrior to step out of a carrier at 50,000 feet equipped with no drop equipment whatsoever. Finally, the carriers are extremely vulnerable during the operation, as they must hold station whilst the drop takes place, and even the smallest movement in their station can result in the anti-grav cone swinging wildly out of position. Should that happen, the troops within the cone will find themselves freefalling from tens of thousands of feet, and in all likelihood they will all be lost.

None the less, the 1st Wave was deployed with little incident, the three Regiments raining troops from the skies over a wide area. The fast-moving light infantry were trained to link up as soon as possible, and to move out on their objectives before the enemy could react. The 1st Wave secured their 'airhead' within an hour of their drop, engaging a number of rebel strongpoints and capturing them in short order.

The airhead declared secure, and the enemy judged to have knowledge of the situation, the 2nd Wave was deployed. This consisted of three mechanised infantry Regiments and an armoured engineer company. These would

perform a lightning breakout, using their manoeuvrability to swiftly locate and engage enemy units that sought to counter-attack the airhead. These units were deployed via heavy lander, each company being delivered from orbit aboard a Tetrarch, an armoured interface vessel designed to carry heavy units such as these into a contested warzone. Despite the heavy armour and banks of point defence weapons carried by each Tetrarch, this wave was only possible because the 1st had neutralised any possible opposition to it, destroying heavy anti-aircraft batteries and observation points from which fire might have been called down upon the heavy landers during the most vulnerable stage of their landing – the final approach.

The 2nd Wave encountered heavy opposition along the settlements to the south of Rophanon City, but mounted a series of counter-attacks that saw them buy time for the 3rd Wave to land. This was made up of three armoured regiments, carried once more upon the heavy Tetrarchs. These took longer to deploy, for the heavy landers were loaded to capacity and therefore only able to approach the airhead at minimum speed. None the less, the 2nd held the massing rebel forces at bay until the first of the three armoured Regiments – the Algenon 722nd, arrived and wiped out a rebel column moving along the main highway, forestalling any further resistance for the remainder of the day.

Overnight, the first three waves consolidated their positions, occupying a ring of strongpoints radiating out from the airhead for twenty kilometres. Overnight, the 4th Wave was landed, consisting of super heavy tanks, and around midnight Lord General Blythe arrived by Valkyrie, taking over the lead super heavy tank, a Storm Hammer by the name of 'Iron Tyrant'. The tank would serve as Blythe's command vehicle for the next phase of the war, the Lord General choosing to lead his forces from the front.

With first light the 4th Wave rolled out, Artemis Blythe stood upon the upper turret of Iron Tyrant, his steely gaze fixed firmly upon the distant, charred black towers of Rophanon City. The first wave of his plan for a blitzkrieg upon the rebel high command had gone well. Little did he know how differently from his plans the war would turn out.



Insignia of the Imperial battle group deployed on Rophanon, and applied to every vehicle in Blythe's force.



THE REBELS' RESPONSE.

Kruker Voor had not watched on idly as the reports of the Imperium's landings flooded in. He had planned his uprising in great detail for many years, and immediately set into motion a series of counter-measures. It was his intention to mire the Imperium's forces in the dense arboreal terrain surrounding Rophanon City, to spring ambush after ambush upon them and ultimately to grind them down in a war of attrition he knew only he had the numbers to win. He had convinced himself, history states, that the Imperium would not be drawn into dispatching a second intervention force to Rophanon, and would instead sue for peace, which he would grant, on condition of the return of his family's position as rulers of Rophanon.

Voor allowed Blythe to advance his forces to within one hundred kilometres of his city, before springing his trap. As one, infiltrating teams of dedicated tank hunters revealed themselves and put krak missile after krak missile into the flanks of the passing Imperium tanks. At the close quarters dictated by the terrain, the ambushes were devastating, accounting for scores of Leman Russ battle tanks. Upon receiving reports of the attacks, Blythe issued an order typical of his command style. He did not pull his tanks out. Instead, he ordered them on, to run the gauntlet, to flush out the enemy ambushers so the mechanised infantry following hot on their heels could destroy them.

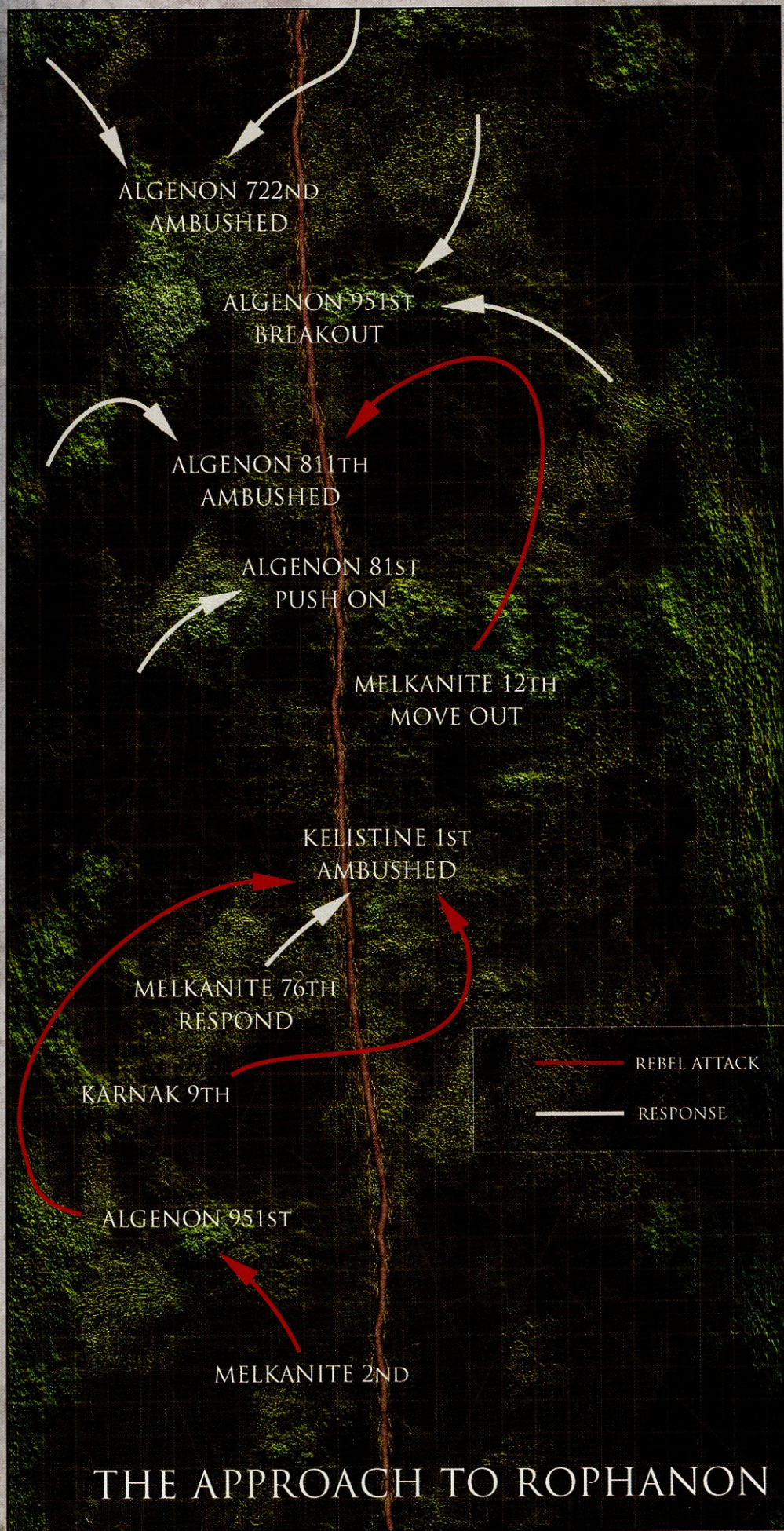
But once again, Voor proved a cunning foe. He countered Blythe's tactic by way of his, and his troops', superior knowledge on their terrain. Under the cover of the low canopies over the dense ornamental gardens, Voor moved huge numbers of rebel troops into positions from which they could assault Blythe's at point blank range. The idyllic gardens became the scene of bitter, hand to hand fighting and within hours the intervention force had entirely lost the momentum gained in the first hours of its advance. Voor had succeeded in his plan to halt the Imperium's forces. He had wrested the initiative from Lord Blythe, who was now faced with fighting a battle for which his forces were in no way prepared – a bloody and brutal battle of attrition.

As the sun set upon the second day of the intervention, Blythe's column was beset by enemy assaults along its length. He had no choice but to order his units to withdraw to a series of pre-registered rally points. His forces fought a bloody fighting withdrawal, Voor's warriors keeping the pressure on the Imperial Guard units all the way. The fighting continued all that night and throughout the next day, only lightening as infantry gained defensible positions from which they could mount localised counter attacks against the pursuing rebels.

Over the next three days, it became obvious to Blythe that in Kruker Voor he was facing a cunning enemy commander. He saw that he had no choice but to alter his plan completely if he was to best this foe. His forces established in their positions, Lord General Blythe called his senior officers to a command conference, and began planning for the next stage of the intervention.

Rophanon's ground to orbit defences represented a serious threat to the first waves of Blythe's forces. They were neutralised during the pre-landing phase of the operation, by a number of highly skilled Kill-teams operating under the direct authority of Blythe's Chief of Intelligence.





With the advance elements of Blythe's forces attacked from many directions simultaneously, the Lord General was hard-pressed to respond before the column was split into smaller pockets. It was a mark of the General's qualities of leadership that he held his Staff together at the critical point, issuing orders in a calm and authoritative manner, despite the fact that the enemy were attacking from every angle. In short order, a series of counter-attacks were launched, and the situation restored, for a time at least.

Naval engagements were common in the early stages of the conflict. This picture is taken from a Rophanon vessel.



LORD GENERAL BLYTHE

soon saw that a war of manoeuvre would fail against as cunning a foe as Kruker Voor, for the rebel leader had the advantage of his warriors' intimate knowledge of the dense terrain. Blythe however was a scion of the Officio Munitorum Staff Corps, and well versed in every possible variation of war. He had the flexibility of mind to see that he would only succeed by discarding his previous plan, and improvising an entirely new one.

Blythe sent out a second call for aid, asking that any and all nearby

worlds dispatch what forces they could. He had no need of specialised units, for he had all the armour he could ever need. What he would need, he saw, were men. Hundreds of thousands of warriors would be required if he were to clear the arbores of the masses of rebels swarming through them. Only then could he resume his advance on Rophanon City, and crush the rebellion entirely.

Aid was forthcoming, in the form of several hundred, hurriedly raised regiments from a dozen nearby worlds. From their strongpoints, Blythe ordered his forces to carve out a solid defence line, to be manned by the freshly arrived reinforcements. Once established, these lines were

to roll forward, the massed guns of the intervention force's tank and self-propelled artillery regiments literally flattening the landscape as they advanced. Within weeks, the idyllic gardens were reduced to a scorched wasteland, the heavily fortified lines of each side facing each other across the ashen ground. Daily, men swarmed across no mans' land, the war transformed into a grinding campaign of attrition, with thousands of casualties being suffered each day. And all the while, the massed tank formations of Blythe's force awaited the day on which they would enact their breakout, planning the assault upon the rebel capital that would bring the war to an end in a single, fell swoop.

But the longed-for breakout slipped further from the Lord General as the war ground on. Voor brought in forces from all over Rophanon to bolster his lines, and so the Imperium was forced to react by throwing up still more defence lines, shipping in yet more regiments to man them. The weeks turned to months, and the trenchlines grew longer and more extensive by the day. All too soon, a year had passed since the successes of the first days of the intervention, and thousands of miles of fortifications criss-crossed Rophanon's primary continent. The formally idyllic arbores were long gone, a bitter memory to those warriors who had been ambushed under the green canopies so long before. Those troopers brought in to man the trenches refused to believe the descriptions of the terrain that had greeted the men and women of the first actions on Rophanon, for all they saw when they looked from their positions was blackened ground and at most the odd, scorched stump of what might once have been a tree.

As the war dragged on, the Officio Munitorum was forced to raise new Imperial Guard units from further and further afield. Lord General Blythe came to see that Rophanon would not be taken by conventional means, for Voor appeared capable of countering every strategy used against him.

Despite the odds of winning the war in his own lifetime, Lord General Artemis Blythe never once faltered in his faith, never abandoned the belief that he would find a way of defeating Kruker Voor. Three years after the initial landings, Blythe found his answer, in a most unexpected place...

BATTLE LINES OF THE ISTHMUS LIBRATIS

ROPHANON LINE

LIBRATIS LINE

IMPERIAL INFANTRY

REBEL INFANTRY

Three months into the war, the Isthmus Libratis was a cratered hell hole. Defence lines and bunkers snaked across its length, many hundreds of thousands, even millions of men manning the extensive siege works.





HE COLD VOID of interstellar space is not as empty nor as devoid of life as Man would prefer. This he had learned on two occasions,

when the vast Hive Fleets of the tyranids rose from the ghostly void and devoured entire star systems on the distant Eastern Rim. A race of slaving, biologically engineered predators; these individually mindless alien beasts were united in a terrible, gestalt consciousness known as the Hivemind. The Hivemind had been beaten, twice, first at Macragge and then at Ichaar IV, though billions of Humanity's finest warriors gave their lives to repulse this most voracious of foes.

At the closing of the forty-first millennium, the Hivemind changed its tack. Instead of closing its light years-wide jaws upon the sectors of the Eastern Rim, it chose an entirely different target for a third assault on the galaxy. This attack, by a fleet of the aliens the Imperium later codified Hive Fleet Leviathan, rose from below the galactic plane as a shark rising from the depths of the seas of ancient Terra.

At first, the Imperium was ignorant of this new threat, until an untimely migration of orks was noted, its origins linked to a new threat devouring their worlds way below the galaxy's core. Investigations proved the worst possible event was occurring – the orks were fleeing (something the race rarely did) a new Hive Fleet.

The Imperium dispatched forces to investigate this new threat, and reports soon flooded back warning of a great darkness approaching. In no time at all, contact was lost with outlying worlds, but from this the Imperium's seers plotted the Hive Fleet's course. They saw that it was headed straight towards the Protean Ebb. Straight towards Rophanon.

When Artemis Blythe and his staff were informed of this new development, by a hooded representative of the Ordo Xenos, the alien hunting arm of the Inquisition, it is said that a shadow passed across the Lord General's face. His staff recoiled in horror at the Inquisitor's message, but Blythe merely grinned a lob-sided and grim smile. 'I'll have them both then,' he said. 'Voor and the xenos at once. They can

spend themselves in their bloody embrace.'

The hooded Inquisitor is said to have nodded once, and simply left.

Blythe then called his chiefs to attend him and retreated to his command bunker. Three days later, he emerged and announced his plan to his staff. The Imperium would draw the Hive Fleet onto Rophanon. There, it could expend its energies assaulting the world, but the Imperium would not oppose it. Instead, Blythe would pull his entire army off of Rophanon, leaving the rebellious populace to fight the tyranids alone. And then, once the aliens had consumed the world's biomass, as he knew they would, he would enact the ultimate doom of Rophanon and of the tyranids. He would declare Exterminatus, destroying the world and every last biological organism upon its surface.

He would, as he had promised, destroy Voor's rebels and the tyranids in one fell swoop.

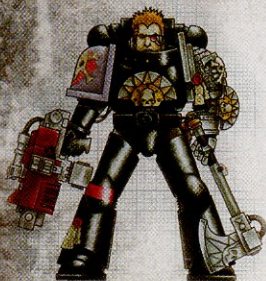
EXTERMINATUS

Exterminatus is the last resort in war, used by the Imperium when all other options are exhausted. To declare Exterminatus upon a world is to visit total and utter destruction upon it. It is to sign the death warrant of every living creature upon it, and to render its surface a blasted wasteland, inimical to life for millennia.

There are many forms of Exterminatus, and many ways of delivering it. One method uses a biological agent that renders all living matter to a decaying sludge within hours, releasing a staggering amount of oxygen into the atmosphere as it does so. This oxygen is then burnt off, igniting the entire atmosphere and incinerating everything on the surface. Another method involves the use of cyclonic torpedoes, a category of weapons that use varying means of scouring the world's surface with nucleonic fire, raw plasma or deadly radiation. Some worlds might be virus bombed – sometimes the viral agents might be keyed to a specific gene code, so as to target aliens, mutated humans, or simply rebels with a predominant hair colour.

Exterminatus may only be ordered by the very highest level of authority, and any who enact it will be answerable to the High Lords of Terra. While raw manpower remains the Imperium's greatest asset, worlds are not so easily replaced, and those who squander such resources seldom remain in power long enough to make the same mistake a second time.

*The Death Watch:
chamber militant of
the Ordo Xenos.*



THE PROTEAN EBB

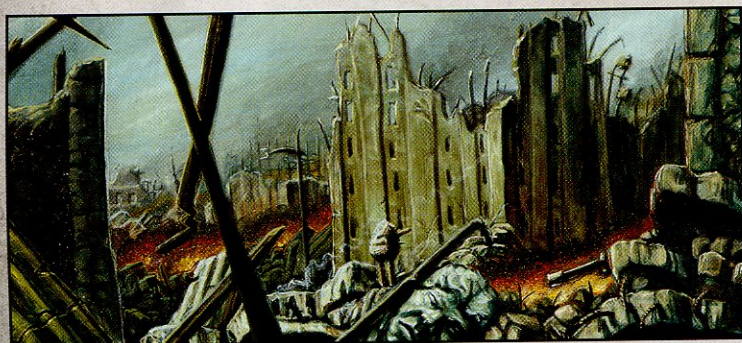
The Tyranid Hive Fleet begins its inexorable advance on the Protean Ebb.





HE DEATH OF Rophanon was brought about in two stages. The first was a simple case of the Imperial Navy intercepting the Hive Fleet as it penetrated the lower reaches of the Protean Ebb, engaging it in a series of escalating actions that saw the aliens commit more and more of their biological ships to the fight. The Imperium used hit and run tactics to draw the enemy on, including a number of boarding actions fought by Deathwatch Kill-teams. Within three

The once leafy arbors and covered walkways were reduced to blasted wastes within weeks of the Rophanon Landings.



weeks, it was judged that the tyranids had committed the bulk of the fleet in pursuing the Imperial Navy towards Rophanon, and the operation was judged a success.

Meanwhile, Blythe was engaged upon the gargantuan task of extricating his forces, without the enemy discovering his purpose and seeking to disrupt him. It is widely acknowledged that a orderly withdrawal is one of the most arduous operations to command, but it is nonetheless a skill in which officers of the Imperial Guard must study, for use – commissariat permitting – in such a situation as that faced by Blythe at Rophanon. Fortunately, as a product of the Munitorum Staff Corps, Blythe was well schooled in the logistics of such an operation.

The Lord General's first act was to order a massive attack along the lengths of the fortifications facing Rophanon City. These he intended as diversionary attacks to draw the enemy's attention away from the far larger operations being carried out in the rear echelons. Here, Blythe was pulling units out, mustering them at the site of the original Rophanon landings, where they were embarked upon super-heavy orbital conveyances, to a shoal of warp-capable transport vessels waiting in orbit. As the front line assaults crashed into the enemy lines,

hundreds of thousands of men and their machinery was being directed towards the landing site, packed on to the conveyances and shipped out.

The assault ground on for days, then a week, and more units were evacuated all the while. Then, as Blythe had planned, the attacks began to loose their momentum. They petered out, with no reinforcements to keep them moving. Voor then ordered a massive counter attack, committing the entirety of his rebel army and leading it from the front in person. The exhausted Imperial Guard units were simply rolled over, and Voor's forces swept through them, penetrating deep into their rear areas.

To Voor, the impasse was broken. Leading his armies from the rear of his Salamander command vehicle, all he saw ahead was empty fortifications and abandoned equipment. Convinced of his impending victory, Voor threw caution to the wind and ordered every single rebel soldier on Rophanon to rise from their trench and attack.

Millions of rebels obeyed Voor's order, screaming with a mixture of joy and bloodlust as they burst from their hated trenches to advance across the crater-pocked no-man's-land. Astonished that no enemy fire answered their charge, they pressed on, and on, until, after days of advancing they bore witness to the sight of the last super-heavy conveyance departing Rophanon atop a kilometres-high pillar of atomic fire.

Voor and his millions-strong rebel army stood gaping at the sheer scope of their victory. They had, they rejoiced, finally repulsed the Imperium from their world, after years of conflict. Voor saw that his nemesis, Lord General Blythe had overextended himself in his final assault, and the rebels' planet-wide counter-attack had smashed his armies so convincingly that he had been unable to halt the rout of his entire army.

Then, at the very moment of Voor's victory, he looked up to the skies. A wind was rising and the clouds stirring into a mighty vortex. The skies grew dark as he watched, and the light grew dim. An acrid stink carried upon the rising winds met his nostrils, and he coughed, realising that the air was thick with microscopic particulates he had never seen the like of.

As lightning fractured the heaving skies, Voor looked up to see a thousand objects plummeting to the ground, greasy black contrails billowing in their wake.

The tyrannids had come to Rophanon, and with them came the death of Voor's rebellion and Voor's people. In an orgy of killing against which the rebels could scarcely stand, let alone fight, the aliens swarmed across the world. The tyrannids are predators rather than fighters, and hold no concept of mercy or honour. They know only hunger, and they slaughter their prey that the Hivemind might gorge itself upon the harvested genetic material, and thus continue its harvesting of the entire galaxy and of every last living thing in it.

Within scant weeks, Rophanon was reduced to a lifeless husk, the tyrannid feeder organisms having sucked up and processed every last scrap of biomass.

At the last, a single vessel, equipped with the fastest drives and the most arcane of shielding devices, slipped undetected from the lee of Rophanon's third moon. In a pass that lasted thirty-two minutes before it used the gravity of the second moon to slingshot itself clear,

the vessel launched its deadly payload towards the dead world. The torpedo slipped past the tyrannid picket ships, diving from orbit to the world below. Three hundred kilometres from the surface, the torpedo detonated.

Rophanon was scoured by the cleansing nucleonic fires of Exterminatus. Billions of tyrannid organisms were reduced to ashes on the atomic winds. By some arcane process known only to the highest-ranking techpriests of the Adeptus Mechanicus of Mars, raw matter was converted into energy, feeding the nuclear fires to a raging inferno that soon engulfed the entire planet. To the opticons of the receding kill-ship, Rophanon became a small star, the alien bioships silhouetted against its dying light.

Rophanon died as the cyclonic fires guttered out. With it perished not only Voor's rebellion, but his people, and with them, a billion and more tyrannid organisms.

Logistics manifest of the Imperial forces deployed at Rophanon.

PHASE 1:

7TH ARMoured ASSAULT GROUP
1ST ALGENON
23RD SQUADRON, ECHELON GAMMA (EXCLUDING DETACHMENT 7)
13TH COUNTER ASSAULT CORPS
12TH, 34TH, 76TH MELKANITE HEAVY INFANTRY
3RD MUNITORUM MEDICAE DETACHMENT
IRIG HEAVY ARTILLERY GROUP

PHASE 2:

SUPPLY ECHELON DELTA SIGMA
ENGINEER TASK FORCE 'VON DU'NA'
ARMY RESERVE CONTINGENT 3, 5 AND 7
ARMY GROUP HEAVY AAA GROUP
IRIG HQ STAFF
IRIG HQ SECURITY COMPANY

PHASE 3:

3RD/1ST MUNITORUM FIELD SUPPLY REGIMENT
99TH FIELD SANITATION LEGION
ALL CROSS ATTACHED FIELD POLICE (RP) UNITS (SEE SUB-FILE XX/840/F)

PHASE 4:

373RD, 404TH, 410TH, 411TH, 440TH WIISEN'S LANDING
14TH, 18TH, 93RD, 104TH, 109TH HAMBERGERWOLD
TASK FORCE 'SCARLET'
TASK FORCE 'CRIMSON'
TASK FORCE 'UMBRA'

PHASE 5:

PERIMETER PATROL GROUP BRAVO
DETACHMENT 7

What price the death of a world? Is it murder to sell the lives of those who have rejected the rule of the Emperor thus? Only the Emperor Himself can truly judge the actions of Lord General Blythe, but history provides a footnote.

History, for what it is worth, records that Blythe's actions cost the lives of two billion souls. But it saved the lives of thirty billion more, for the Tyranid Hivefleet would have consumed every world in the Protean Ebb had it been allowed to penetrate further.

Of his tactics and strategies too, much has been written, for in the opening phases of his invasion Blythe commanded the first successful heavy planetary assault of its kind for three millennia. The order in which he deployed each stage of the landing has become the standard, prescribed model for this type of operation.

But in the end, strategy and tactics serve a greater master. The seeds of the Rophanors' heresy was death. But in death they were blessed beyond measure, for they served their Emperor even as they died.

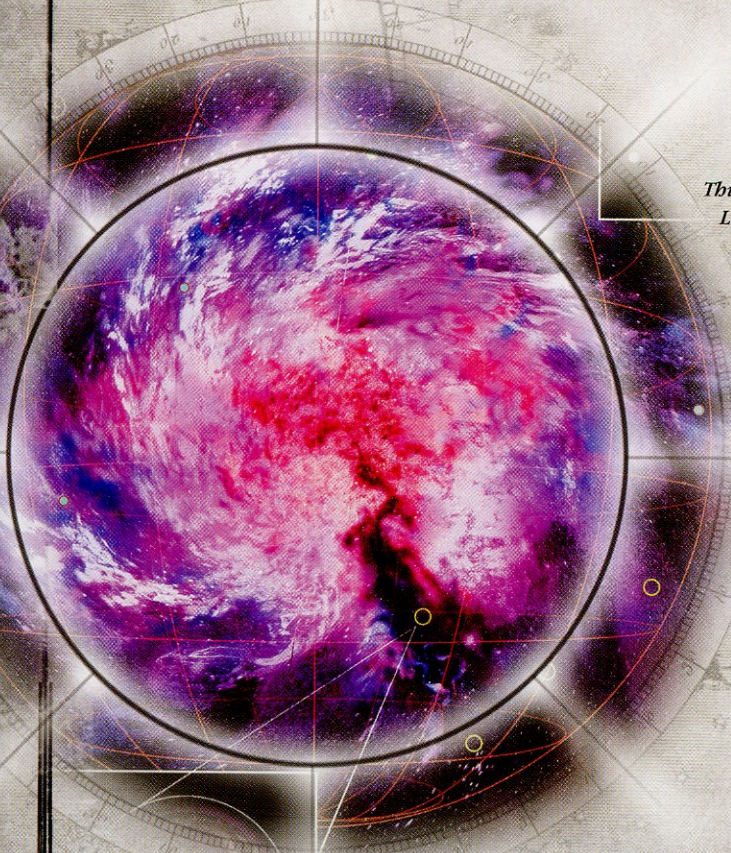
The Black Crusade of Jihar the Lacerator

599.M37

SOME OF YOU WHO ARE ENTRUSTED WITH THE LIVES OF MEN MAY ONE DAY FIND THEIR VERY SOULS ENTRUSTED TO YOUR CARE TOO. THOUGH NONE MAY SPEAK OF SUCH THINGS OPENLY, YOU WILL BE NOW BE AWARE THAT THERE ARE FORCES AT LARGE IN THE UNIVERSE FAR MORE TERRIFYING THAN ANY XENOS, FAR MORE PERNICIOUS THAN ANY TRAITOR.

BUT, BEFORE YOU READ OF SUCH THINGS, YOU MUST TURN TO YOUR CONFESSOR FOR COUNSEL, AND CLEANSE YOUR HEART OF EVERY STAIN. FOR YOU MAY BE CALLED TO SERVE AGAINST THE MOST TERRIBLE FOE FACING MANKIND. YOU MAY BE REQUIRED TO FIGHT AN ENEMY AGAINST WHICH YOU WILL, WITH ALL CERTAINLY, FALL, EVEN SHOULD YOU BEAT HIM UPON THE FIELD OF BATTLE.

PROCEED THEN, WITH YOUR CONFESSOR'S BLESSING, AND READ OF BUT A SMALL PART OF THE THREAT PRESENTED BY MANKIND'S NEMESIS. LEARN FROM THE DEATHS OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE YOU, AND PRAY THAT YOU MAY SERVE THE EMPEROR AS WELL AS THEY. HEED UNTO THE LESSON OF THE 13TH MORDANT.



This account of the Black Crusade of Jihar the Lacerator was compiled by the celebrated Administratum Field Notary Corwen Quilp. Quilp travelled widely throughout the Sectors Occularis and visited a number of the localities mentioned in the original text, though precious little physical evidence of the battles he described remained. Quilp was required to seek special dispensation to write on the subject, and his original text was not published for many years after its writing, for the Ordo Hereticus required it (and indeed the author) be rigorously examined before they would allow it even the highly limited dissemination it received.

(Below, right.)
Segmentum view of
the Eye of Terror.

An unnamed
lieutenant of the
Lacerator, this
individual haunted
the nightmares of
many of the 13th's
troopers. A number of
battlefield myths
surrounding her
were born during the
campaign, ranging
from her prodigious
ability with the
blade to the tortures
she might visit upon
those her forces
captured in battle.
The 13th's NCOs were
hard-pressed to
contain these tales,
lest discipline break
down entirely when
fighting her warband.



PERHAPS ONCE OR twice
in a millennia, a truly
great champion of
the unnameable
gods will arise in the
Eye of Terror.
Through the power
of his implacable will

and the favour of dark powers this champion can weld together an unsteady alliance between the infernal regions of the Eye. How the champion brings the crusade together depends on his nature and his patron god. Some use manipulation, others extortion, others domination, others intimidation. Most simply use all of the considerable powers at their disposal.

Preparations for a Black Crusade can take years, or weeks depending on the whims of the gods. The forges of the hell worlds belch out armour and weapons for the chosen one's followers, dark engines are aroused from their slumber with blood sacrifices, factions vie for command of the massed ranks of crusaders or are crushed into obedience.

When the Black Crusade is launched, the Eye of Terror vomits forth the diabolic hordes: armies of abominations, rank upon rank of huge, twisted monsters; numberless masses of cultists; wild tribes of mutants; ancient and terrifying traitor titans. Spearheading it all are the Traitor Legions, united in their lust for booty and their desire to bring destruction upon the hated Imperium.

The Imperium keeps strong forces stationed around the Eye to fend off these invasions. Entire Titan Legions, Space Marine Chapters and massed regiments of Imperial Guard defend the most vital systems in close proximity to the Eye. But even powerful fighting formations like these cannot guarantee victory over the infernal throng. All too often, the black tide expands and recedes leaving entire systems ravaged and burned. Whole planetary populations are irrecoverably tainted, cities and industries are crushed by the thunderous pounding of diabolic engines of destruction, uncounted citizens are dragged away to serve as slaves and playthings to the damned souls and their daemonic masters at the edge of reality.

Each city ruined, every planet burned brings the Imperium a little closer to dissolution. In an Imperium of a million worlds how much can a single world matter? Enough to have to defend each one against the infernal host, enough to bring the curse of Exterminatus upon those

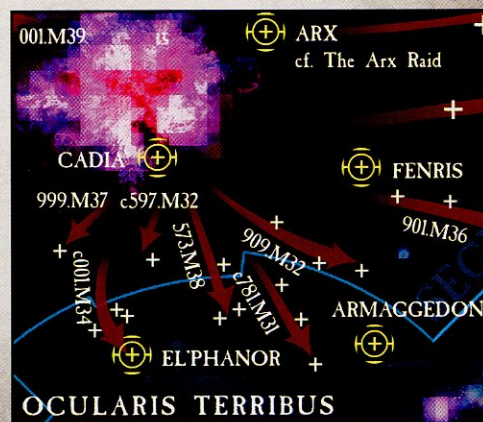
that bend the knee and bow down to the dark ones. A Black Crusade may come crashing forth from the Eye only once in a thousand years but the damage it inflicts can never be undone.

JIHAR THE LACERATOR

Few beings brought such grief upon the Domains of Man in the mid centuries of the thirty-eighth millennium as did the abomination known as Jibar the Lacerator. It is believed that Jibar served as an officer in the ranks of the traitorous Emperor's Children, a former Astartes Legion that fell from the Emperor's Grace at the very dawn of the Age of the Imperium. Jibar the Lacerator is known to follow those powers that may not be named, and in particular, that power known to revel in excess in all things. His service of these powers has seen him slaughter countless millions of the Emperor's servants, and raze entire worlds to ashes.

By the end of the sixth century of the thirty-eighth millennium, Jibar's power was approaching its zenith. Feted by powers beyond the ken of mortal man, he preached his message far and wide, drawing ever more followers to him until his armies numbered untold millions. Jibar the Lacerator led not only his followers drawn from the so-called Emperor's Children legion, but a vast multitude of the most base scum cast out by Humanity. Those reviled for bearing the mark of the mutant, those who would cavort with fell powers, and those who simply refused to call the Emperor master, flocked to his banner, until the ether, it was said, wailed at the prospect of his coming.

Jibar was reputed to be possessed of the most terrible of gifts, granted unto him by his fell master. So dark was Jibar's soul, so utterly twisted was he that the souls of the warp wail in anguish at his passing. Wherever he treads, he is accompanied by a woeful cacophony. The dead, who should by rights fear naught, fear above all what evils he might visit upon them, and scream out for deliverance so keenly that their voices bleed into the world of men. So terrible is this sound that it is said that to hear it is to have one's sanity shattered completely, and irrecoverably, and thereby to enter the service of Jibar and his patron, for all time.



*Jibar the Lacerator,
death to the living,
eternal terror to the
damned.*



Ogryns and ratlings are abhumans tolerated and employed by the Imperial Guard.



THAR THE LACERATOR

was known to covet a cluster of worlds to the galactic south-west of the Cadian Gate. This region, known as Adriada's Gloom, was sparsely populated, unlike many other areas surrounding the Cadian Gate, and was, for this hellish region at least, relatively untouched by war in the previous decades.

The Gloom was, as its name suggests, a veiled region, local space thick with particles that gave its stars a pallid, sickly aspect. Superstition told that the region was so benighted because the Emperor refused to shine his light upon it, as punishment for some terrible deed committed there many millennia before. The truth was perhaps worse, for the void-borne matter that obscured the region was believed to have been created at the very instant the Eye of Terror was created, and as such, was believed to be saturated with contaminants both psychical and spiritual.

Certainly, the thirty or so populated worlds of the Gloom sported an unusually high number of abhumans.

Abhumans are human descended creatures such as ratlings and

ogryns, whose physical appearance and mental capabilities are quite different from those of their human ancestors. They represent the descendents of the first wave of exploration into the galaxy. Over tens of thousands of years of isolation they have evolved into creatures capable of living in high-gravity worlds, in deep space and in all kinds of polluted or dangerous environments.

It is generally accepted that abhumans are a part of the human race and not aliens. Many thousands of years ago the Inquisition led wars of destruction against human-descended creatures, which its masters deemed unworthy of full human status. When human settled worlds were discovered the Inquisition would conduct a lengthy process of DNA analysis to determine if the population was still fully human by the Inquisition's standards. As a result the population of many planets were eradicated and their worlds resettled.

In time the Imperium developed a much broader definition of humanity. Ogryns, ratlings and other strains came to be regarded as human. Other individual abhuman mutations were treated with comparative toleration. However, even today the Inquisition is distrustful of the newly evolved races and of those in the Adeptus Terra who advocate the integration of newly discovered abhuman races into the Imperium of Man.

The abhumans that lived upon the Gloom Worlds, as the region's planets were called, constituted a relatively stable strain. Despite this, they were shunned by the great mass of Humanity, for they were afflicted with a range of mutations that set them apart from normal men and women. Not least amongst these were their disturbing facial features, for some sported tiny, sucking, leech-like mouths, others had small, slit-like and entirely black eyes, while some were missing their nose, with just a pair of hissing nostrils visible. Though not all mutants of the Gloom Worlds suffered from every one of these mutations, all were pallid of colour, their skin ranging from a sickly pinkish-grey to a translucent albino white, their veins visible just beneath the skin.

From the Desk of Chastener Karmensis, Precinct 13, Hyrik III.

Sir,

I write to inform you of my concerns regarding the mutant populations of both this world, and of the other three population centres in this system. You will be aware of previous reports of the ongoing concerns expressed by this precinct regarding the mutants. In past weeks, my Arbites have reported a number of incidents involving mutant behaviour deemed seditious even for these base creatures. They have taken to hurling insults at our patrols as they go about their business of maintaining the Pax Imperialis, and in one incident even went so far as to hurl bodily waste at my officers. It goes without saying that such behaviour can not, and will not, go unpunished, and to date approximately 207 mutants have been executed, and a further 1,293 detained.

It is my belief that some influence is at work amongst the mutant population, stirring them up to these acts of subversion. I therefore request permission to elevate our standing in preparation for a punitive strike against them, for it is my belief that if we do not act, the situation will rapidly escalate beyond the abilities of my precinct to contain.

Your obedient servant,
Radist Vorak.

Having received our briefing at 05.30 local, my company mustered at Depot XX, and was ready to roll out by 08.30. The troops of 5th platoon would remain at depot as a rear party, and I ordered 6th to move out early to take station at point 12/3, from where they could provide a mobile reserve. In all, three Chimeras were out of service, but the company mustered four platoons for the operation.

Moving out at 09.10 local, we were soon in amongst the mutant shanties of Lower Gravesville. We anticipated trouble as we passed through, so I ordered the lead vehicle of each platoon to engage any mutants they saw, in order to force the rest to keep their heads down. Furthermore, I ensured that each lead vehicle was one fitted with a dozer, so as to flatten any of the disgusting structures in which the mutants live that might have been built too close to the main thoroughfare.

The passage through Gravesville lasted no more than twenty minutes, and my platoon leaders reported only limited engagements along the way.

Passing out of Gravesville, we soon found ourselves in the badlands. Aware that mutant outlaws were known to be operating in this region, I ordered the turret gunner on each vehicle to engage any target that presented itself. The waste dunes along either side of the badlands tracks obscure visibility significantly, but I am confident three dozen optional outlaws were neutralised.

At 16.23 the company linked up 6th platoon. Lt Fiselli was in a state of some agitation, but I succeeded in calming him before Commissar Disuka was forced to intervene. He reported having sighted a large concentration of armed mutants moving out of a waste pit three kilometres north.

I deployed 1st platoon to scout ahead on foot, and they took only thirty minutes to confirm Fiselli's report. A mutant force of several thousand is moving directly towards our position.

I have deployed the Chimeras in a defensive position, as I believe our firepower more than adequate to defeat them in short order.

We expect contact within the hour. For the Glory of the Emperor, we shall crush the mutant!

LAST TRANSMISSION OF MAJOR AMRIS, 1ST COY/989TH HYRIK V PDF

I can now confirm that our operation is underway. The first phase assault units are embarked even now, and we have received initial confirmation that Jihar the Lacerator has revealed his intentions. The mutants of the Hyrik system have risen en masse, and in my estimation, the mutant populations of every other world in the region will soon follow suit. The order is given – brace for a new Black Crusade and be ready to act as per Protocol 77.

My masters, I pen this report in a state of some hurry, for I have dire news to report this day.

The mutants of the Gloom Worlds are, as has been theorised, being subjected to some manner of spiritual pollution beyond that which they are born unto. I know not the source, but I fear the obvious. My prognostications are filled with visions of the Oculus, turning its gaze upon the Gloom Worlds as it has not done for many centuries. The mutants, I believe, are in some manner sensitive to its gaze, and are wont to respond by enacting violence upon their masters.

Huge numbers of outlaw mutants are even now gathering in the wildernesses of each of the Gloom Worlds. Already, a number of small battles have been fought against them, but I believe these to be merely the opening skirmishes in a far larger conflict that will soon be upon us.

I believe the mutants have far outlived any usefulness they had to us, and should now be removed as a matter of extreme urgency. Whether they are responding to some activity within the Eye, or whether they themselves are the catalyst, I believe we must call vengeance down upon their sinful bodies before they bring utter devastation to us all.

I beg you my masters, call forth the Sororitas and bring holy cleansing fire unto the mutant! Do this before it becomes too late for us all. Do this before the mutants rise and the Gloom Worlds fall, for all time, to the Dread Enemy!

Communiqués sent by officers during the Gloom Worlds occupation.

LIMITED DISTRIBUTION AS PER PROTOCOL 77

My friends, it has come to my attention that the being known as 'Jihar the Lacerator' is active once more. Not since the Nadine Incident have we been forced to turn our attention towards this vile individual, and the very thought that we must do so once more fills me with righteous contempt. As you will know, in my younger years I faced Jihar in single combat, and I bear the scars to this day. If it truly is with us once more, I swear that I will end its life this time. Only then might I lay down my head, my duty to the Emperor truly done.

This then must be our course. I am now convinced that a Black Crusade is upon us, specifically, it is headed for the Gloom Worlds, and I am sure that none other than Jihar is leading it. According to Envoy Gamma's last report, Jihar still leads the warband we fought against at Outpost Theta 9, so I have reached the conclusion that it is his intention to raise more followers from amongst the mutant population of the Gloom Worlds. This is as good as confirmed by a number of reports I have come into possession of, and it would appear that the Gloom Worlds mutants have been in a condition of agitation for some weeks. We must launch an immediate assault against the mutants, thus robbing Jihar of his main power base. In doing so, it is my belief that he will seek to engage us directly, allowing us to contain his forces and destroy them with our own counter attack.

I have made arrangements for a first phase assault, consisting of forty-three regiments committed to the Hyrik, Dolemite, Amibola and Halvar systems.

I will be blunt, as you knew I would. These regiments are entirely expendable. Their task is to engage and destroy the mutant forces massing in the wilds of each world, and to draw Jihar's personal attentions. Only once Jihar has committed itself to the battle will we act. Brother-Captain Stern stands ready to deploy, and I ask that every member of the conclave stands to and prepares to do their duty unto the Emperor.

Brethren, this may be the best chance to rid the galaxy of this blasphemous creature. Furthermore, following the wounds it inflicted upon my person at our last meeting, I know it will be my last chance.

We do this not for ourselves, but for the very soul of Mankind.

Yours,

Lord Iustus, Nemesis Tessera



HE IMPERIUM'S RESPONSE to the impending Black Crusade of Jihar the Lacerator was swift and efficient, for a great many protocols

and contingencies had long been in place to react to any invasion originating from the Eye of Terror.

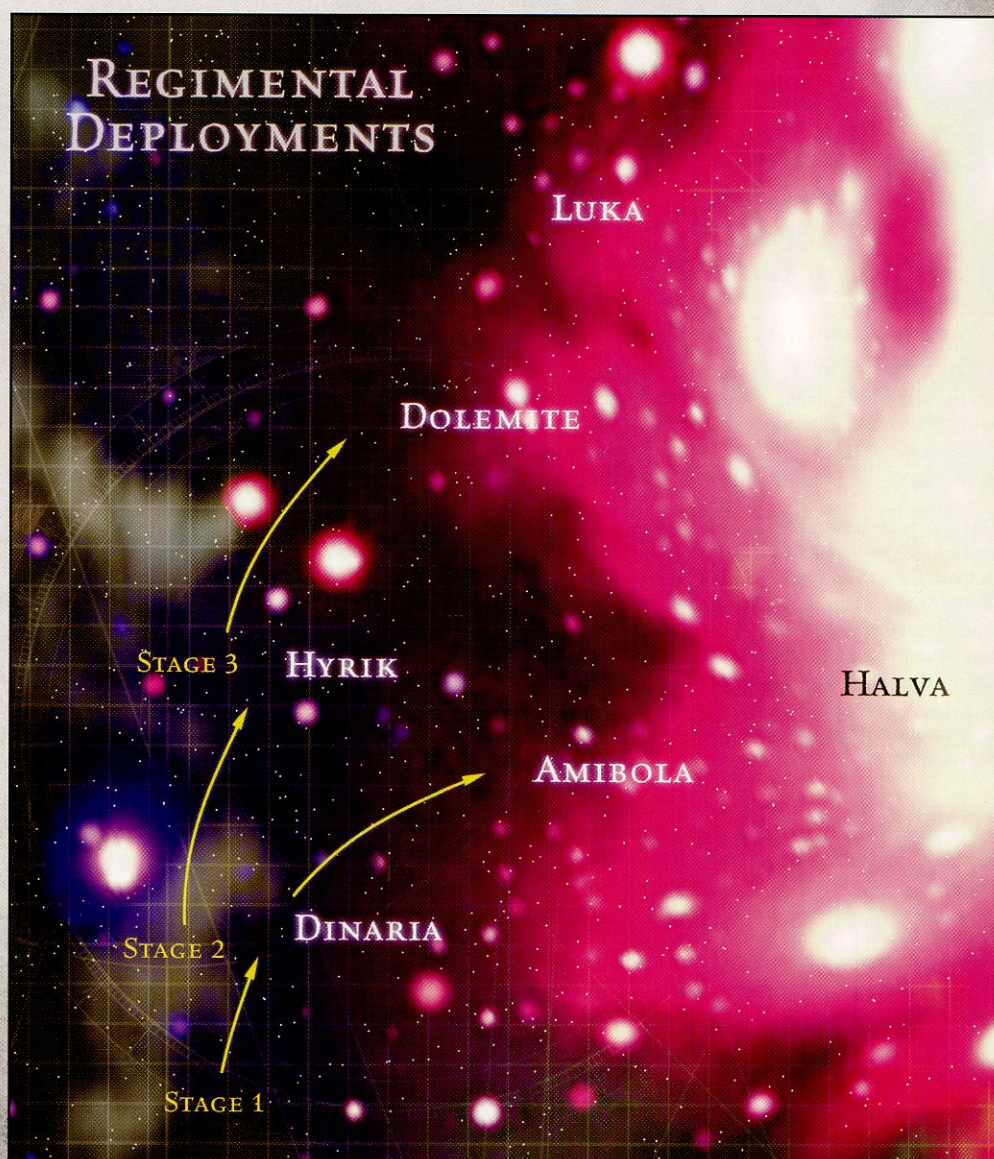
Ordinarily, any Black Crusade would need to engage the Fortress Worlds of the Cadian System if it were to engulf the sectors surrounding the Eye of Terror. On this occasion however, the element of the crusade originating from beyond the Cadian Gate was relatively small, and quite capable of avoiding any counter-attacks committed against it. The Imperium's High Commanders saw that Jihar was not seeking to commit massed forces against the Fortress Worlds, as had many warlords before

him, but was instead seeking to raise the bulk of his armies from the mutant populations of the Gloom Worlds.

Jihar's own forces traversed the Cadian Gate without opposition, the Imperium having decided to allow him to reach the Gloom Worlds unmolested. His small fleet, bearing a company of the dreaded Emperor's Children Traitor Legion, was briefly detected by an Imperial Navy deep space picket squadron before it vanished on a heading, as predicted, for the Gloom Worlds.

Meanwhile, the Imperium's response was mustered. Forty-three regiments, a tiny fraction of the total long held at the ready for just such an event, were dispatched for the Gloom Worlds with all haste, and arrived in the region to reports of widespread mutant uprisings. They were deployed with all haste, the High Command keen to ensure they engaged to mutant forces before Jihar could make his move.

The Imperium's response to Jihar's invasion had been long in the planning, and was swiftly executed.



One amongst the forty-three regiments of the first phase was the 13th Mordant, the so-called 'Lucky 13s'. This regiment had been raised three years earlier, as part of a larger muster brought about by a particularly portentous reading of the Emperor's Tarot. This reading, carried out by a senior psyker attached to the staff of the Cadian High Command, spoke of the coming of one 'whom the dead fear above all else'. So it was that the 13th had trained intensely for the day they would be dispatched to fight one of Humanity's most deadly foes.

Of course, none amongst the 13th Mordant, or the other regiments of the first phase assault, had any clue what they might be facing. The truth of what lurks beyond the Cadian Gate is simply too awful to contemplate for the average man, only the very highest-ranking members of the Inquisition having any real inkling into the threat posed. Despite this, the 13th were well versed in the ways of the mutant, and had participated in a number of purges verging the Sentinel Worlds, gaining invaluable combat experience in the process.

The 13th were shipped from their garrison on Messina in the Thracian Primaris sector, sharing their transport vessel with a number of specialised units attached to them for the duration of the action. These included a tank company of the 9th Messina Armoured Regiment, a Self-propelled Artillery Company of the Angelisar Militia, and a light infantry detachment raised from the primitive, but highly proficient scouts of Beyan 9. The 13th were trained and equipped as assault pioneers, proficient in the use of such engineering stores as breaching charges, stummers, flame throwers and the like, and the battlegroup was therefore put together in order to compliment this utility.

The voyage from the Scarus Sector to the Gloom Worlds was a comparatively short one, but the proximity of the Eye of Terror to the galactic east made traversing the Warp even more perilous than normal. It was only through the skill of the very best Navigators the Navis Nobilite could provide that allowed the 13th to reach the Gloom Worlds ahead of Jihar's Black Crusade.

The 13th's destination was Hyrik V, a world from which reports of mutant uprising had already begun to flow. The native Planetary Defence Forces were ill prepared to deal with the uprisings. Although they had fought against mutant outlaws on countless occasions, they had

never before faced the mutants as a cohesive force. United, the mutants had swiftly overcome the Hyrik V PDF, and had reportedly committed numerous acts of revenge against their erstwhile oppressors. The wastelands of Hyrik V were quite literally swarming with armed mutants, and the settlements within which the stable humans lived were in danger of being entirely overrun.

The 13th and attached units deployed from orbit, an operation that went smoothly and took three days to complete. Three other regiments had arrived by the end of the week, and the combined force, codified Brigade Zero, readied itself for offensive actions against the mutants hordes running wild throughout the wastes.

Meanwhile, and only known to the High Command, Jihar the Lacerator was out there, somewhere in the void, inbound for one planet amongst the Gloom Worlds. Which one he would choose was yet to be revealed.

Jihar had in his service many practitioners of the dark arts. Some were no doubt members of the Traitor Legions, while others were suspected rogue psykers – humans born into prodigious psychic potential and never caught by the Black Ships of Terra.





HIGHLY EXPERIENCED OFFICER called Colonel Bane commanded the 13th Mordant. Bane had served in the Mordant PDF for many years, and was proficient in small

unit actions against the private armies maintained by the smugglers and criminal syndicates of his world. Furthermore, while detached from the 13th he had served in an assault group that put down a mutant uprising in the Scarus Sub-sector, leading the attack on the mutant overlord's hive-lair and ending the uprising.

Bane was therefore judged the ideal commander to lead an assault against the mutants of the Gloom Worlds, and his superiors briefed him to seek out and engage the enemy leadership as his highest priority.

Colonel Bane: commanding officer of the 13th Mordant.



MORDANT

Mordant Prime is a world situated to the galactic north of the Eye of Terror, and is known for the mining of bioluminescent bacteria from which a unique, highly corrosive acid is extracted.

Mordant is classed by the Adeptus Terra as a night world, and its surface is a barren wasteland, totally unfit for human habitation. The only reason Humanity exists at all on the world is to mine the strains of luminescent bacteria that grow beneath the surface. These strains live off of the phosphorite content in the rock, secreting a corrosive acid that breaks down the rock into a digestible form. Over the millennia, this process has formed a vast chain of caverns and tunnels that connect across the entire world. Within these tunnels mining clans extract the bacteria, culturing it in vast cavern-vats, to bleed off the most corrosive acids known to the Imperium. These extracts are shipped to Forge Worlds across the sector, where they find use in all manner of esoteric processes.

The peoples of Mordant can be split into two broad categories: the acid miners, and everyone else. The minors are organised into an ancient clan structure, and have total control over their business. They exploit cheap local labour; paying the workers barely enough to survive in the run down shanty-caverns they call home. Many of the disenfranchised citizens of Mordant turn to a life of organised crime, and gang violence is the only authority acknowledged amongst many of the deeper settlements.

The Imperial Guard regiments drawn from Mordant are raised from amongst those citizens disaffected with life on their world. They cannot live on the pittance paid by the mining clans, and they will not sink so low as to leech off their own people as the gangs do. Mordant regiments are often fielded on night worlds, and are known to make excellent tunnel fighters when the need arises.



THE 13TH'S FIRST engagement against the Black Crusade of Jihar the Lacerator came only nine days after their arrival upon Hyrik V. The regiment and

attached units were stationed five kilometres south of the mutant settlement of Gravesville, a stinking, ramshackle city of around 300,000 situated at the very edges of the wastes in which the mutant armies were believed to be operating.

Colonel Bane was briefed on an army-wide advance to be made across the wastes, in which five entire regiments would seek to encircle the mutant horde and bring it to battle. The 13th were to advance through Gravesville, neutralising any mutant forces they might find there in order to safeguard the rear areas and line of communication of the advancing army.

The Regiment was transported to the outskirts of Gravesville by a Departamento Munitorum mass-conveyance squadron, the infantry embarked on huge flat bed crawlers, each able to carry an entire company and its equipment. The regiment's Sentinels scouted ahead of the column, whilst the attached tanks and assault guns of the Messina and Angelisar armoured units followed.

Under cover of an artillery barrage laid down by the Angelissar units, the 13th advanced into the mutant settlement.

They initially met with little opposition, only the occasional sniper engaging the infantry from the taller structures.

Each time they were shot at, the infantry would call down well-aimed artillery fire from the Angelissar basilisks, silencing the sniper and devastating entire buildings.

After three hours, the infantry reached the centre of the shanty city, and linked up with the attached scouts from Beyan 9. The tribesmen-come-Imperial Guard infiltrators were spooked, but they had trouble communicating to the Mordant's officers exactly what had rattled them, as the two groups spoke very different dialects of Low Gothic and experienced great difficulty in communicating any more than basic messages. Eventually, the decision was made to press on, though those troopers of the 13th in contact with the Beyan Scouts were greeted by an ominous feeling of impending threat.

Advancing beyond the city centre, the lead platoon came upon the first real sign of the enemy. A large thoroughfare that lead northwards out of the city lay before them, and along its length, suspended from rusty iron poles, were strung up the bodies of several hundred troopers of the Hyrik PDF. The lead squads went to cut down the closest of the bodies, determined that such blasphemy should not go unchallenged, when the Beyan scouts cried out, waving their hands frantically and attempting to stop the Mordant from doing so. Too late, the Mordant troopers saw why. The bodies had been mutilated, but not in such a way as might be considered 'normal' in such a conflict. Instead, the body of each PDF trooper had had an intricate web of cuts inflicted upon it, and the Mordant troopers recoiled in horror as they saw that the cuts formed symbols, runes so foul to look upon that men vomited or collapsed to their knees upon reading them.



Observe the mutant: An example of one of the creatures making up the mutant horde at Gravesville. Note the salient features.

- I. Grotesque deformities in musculature and physicality
- II. Crude, often poorly-maintained weaponry
- III. Use of improvised weapons embedded in makeshift armour plate
- IV. Trophies and other scavenged battlefield detritus

MY LORDS

THE MORDANT 13TH HAVE ENGAGED THE ENEMY AT REF 1888/GAMMA ('GRAVESVILLE'). EMBEDDED OBSERVERS HAVE DETECTED MINOR CONTAMINATION AS ANTICIPATED. THE FIGHTING AGAINST THE MUTANTS WAS MOSTLY CARRIED OUT AT CLOSE RANGE, BUT LITTLE OR NO HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT OCCURRED. FURTHERMORE, THE REGIMENT'S PREACHERS HAVE, QUITE CORRECTLY DISSUADED THE TROOPS FROM CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY DEAD, AND SO FURTHER CONTAMINATION HAS BEEN, FOR NOW, CONTAINED.

OF GREATER CONCERN HOWEVER IS THE FACT THAT THE MUTANTS ARE, ALREADY, ENGAGED IN THE ACT OF MUTILATING THE DEAD WITH THE SIGILS OF THEIR CORRUPTION. I HAVE SEEN THIS FIRST HAND, AND CAN CONFIRM THAT THE MUTANTS ARE PLACING THE MARK OF THE LACERATOR UPON THEIR DEFEATED FOES, AND EVEN WORSE, A NUMBER OF THESE CORPSES WERE MUTILATED WITH THE SIGN OF THE PRINCE OF EXCESS.

IT IS MY BELIEF THAT THE 13TH WILL REMAIN COMBAT EFFECTIVE FOR NO MORE THAN THREE ENGAGEMENTS SHOULD THIS LEVEL OF CONTAMINATION REMAIN CONSISTENT. HOWEVER, I CAN ONLY SEE THE SITUATION DEGENERATING AS THE LACERATOR'S BLACK CRUSADE GAINS PACE, AND SO I RECOMMEND A PROTOCOL 77 UNIT DEPLOYED IN ORBIT AGAINST THE NEED TO TAKE THE ULTIMATE PRECAUTION.

YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

AGENT 9.

IMPERIAL ARCHIVE NO. 000000534534/534
DEPT. 60/A 000067547
CLEARANCE LEVEL: 0000002376/B



As the 13th fought its first engagements, its officers could have no idea their every command was being scrutinised by the shadowy agents of the Inquisition.





WITH WORD THAT the region-wide mutant uprising was running rife, Colonel Bane made plans to keep up the momentum of his attack. He knew that the mutants must surely have some centre of power out there in the wastes, and so dispatched the Beyan scouts to locate it. His sentinel scout units leading the way, his regiment and attached units began the long march into the unknown of the wastelands.

The landscape north of Gravesville was a polluted expanse, littered with industrial waste and used as the dumping ground of an entire world for millennia. In places the ground was so thick with garbage that progress was slowed to a crawl, but the Beyan scouts were able to pick a clear path through it, eventually allowing the infantry to make some progress.

The armoured vehicles of the attached Angelissar and Medina units were able to plough through the worst of the terrain, but soon discovered a further hazard. The ground in many places was dangerously unstable, prone to collapse. Three tanks and a self-propelled artillery piece were immobilised, trapped in the collapsing ground, and had to be crippled with breaching charges lest they be claimed and put to use by the enemy.

The trek into the wastes went on for a further three days before the Beyan scouts brought back news of a large concentration of enemy up ahead. Colonel Bane went forward with the scouts, and soon saw for himself what his regiment was up against.

The scouts had led the Mordant to a major enemy base of operations, and Colonel Bane resolved to assault it while he had the chance.

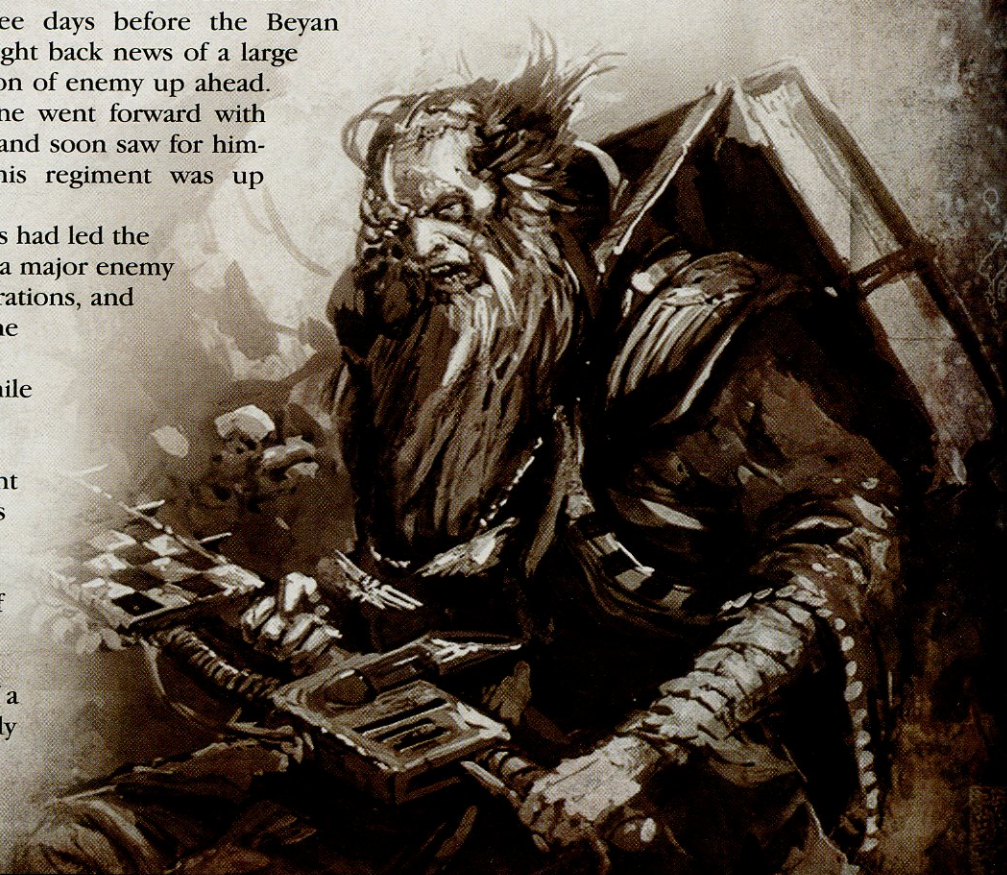
The mutant position was set into the side of a mountain of industrial waste, and consisted of a large, crudely fortified command

bunker surrounded by tiers of smaller fortifications and firepoints. For several hundred metres around this were laid belts of razorwire as well as areas Bane suspected to be minefields.

But most disturbing of all was a mighty structure perched atop the waste mountain. A wide, flat area had been cleared, and around it were all manner of twisted forms, fashioned from rusted ironworks. These forms echoed the sigils etched in the skin of the mutilated PDF troopers Bane's men had encountered at Gravesville, and the very sight of them filled the Colonel with dread. He knew that he would be exposing his troops to a weapon they had never before encountered and had few ways of combating. He passed back the order that the gaggle of priests attached to his headquarters should be put to work. A preacher would accompany each platoon, and guard the souls of his men as they assaulted the mutant stronghold.

Bane finalised his plans for the assault that evening, and briefed his company commanders at midnight. The assault was one for which his regiment had trained repeatedly, and he believed that the tactical advantage was his. His officers briefed and the orders passed on, Colonel Bane settled down for a few hours of nightmare-haunted sleep before the dawn came, and with it, the battle.

Preachers were to accompany all of the Mordant platoons.



The Mordant units moved out just before the wan sun rose, infiltrating deep into the enemy's outer defences before the first shots were fired. Moving quickly, the lead companies used their assault pioneer training to the full, using their stummers to detect and neutralise enemy mines, and breaching charges to assault fortified positions. Soon, the battle was joined in earnest, the attached armoured units adding the weight of their firepower to the assault.

Initially, the attack went entirely as planned, but the 13th soon found themselves bogged down as they reached the base of the waste mountain atop which the enemy command bunker was positioned. The lead company, for this phase 'C' Company, was mauled by a furious mutant counter attack, and the front quickly degenerated into a sprawling mass of close quarters battle. At one point in the mid morning it looked like 'C' Company might be pushed back entirely, and so Colonel Bane personally led a counter push at the head of 'E', 'F' and 'G' Companies, successfully stabilising the situation. By noon, six companies were pushing deep into enemy positions, assaulting bunker after bunker and slowly, a metre at a time, taking the mountain.

It was during this phase of the battle that the Mordant experienced the true hatred that the mutants felt towards the greater mass of Humanity. After action reports tell that the mutants were utterly fearless, refusing to take a single step

backwards even in the face of overwhelming odds. Instead, they would rise from their positions and charge forwards, their lamprey mouths voicing an eerie cry of hatred and loathing.

Because of the mutants' utter refusal to accept that they were beaten, the battle wore on late into the day. It was only when 'I' Company gained a foothold on the enemy command bunker that the defence began to truly collapse. As the sun set on the long day, Colonel Bane led an assault on the inner sanctum of the enemy command bunker, the priest that accompanied his command section beheading the enemy leader with his huge eviscerator chainsword. Bane had won, but he soon saw that the stubborn defence the mutants had put up had taken a fearsome toll on his regiment. 'C' Company had all but ceased to exist, and every other unit had taken substantial casualties. Furthermore, many of the platoon leaders were reporting extreme combat stress reactions amongst their men, particularly those who had fought closest to the top of the mountain, in close proximity to the twisted metal forms at its peak.

With a heavy heart, Colonel Bane ordered his regiment to pull back from the captured position, rigging it with explosives and blowing it apart completely. As the Mordant 13th began the long trek south, black smoke filled the northern skies – the funeral pyre of several hundred brave Guardsmen, and several thousand twisted mutants.

*The ash wastes of
Gravesville.*

My Lords

You will be aware that the 13th have recently returned from a large-scale action in the wastes. I have to report that Agent q fell during that battle, though I am satisfied that his true identity was not uncovered. Neither was his body, as the regiment was ordered to pull back from their objective soon after it was captured.

I stand ready to take over Agent q's duties, and submit this report to you.

It is ten days after the action, and I can report that the regiment is showing signs of a disturbing level of corruption. Individuals are being affected in a variety of ways, but I can see it in the eyes of every last trooper who was present when the objective was taken. The twisted iron structures at the top of the mount, the sigils of the Great Enemy, exerted on them their fell influence. Any who looked upon those crude structures were affected and even those some distance away are, I believe contaminated.

I have observed a number of practices of which I believe the regiment's commanders and commissars are entirely ignorant. Blood letting, scarification and the application of blasphemous tattoos are rife. I have detected an increase in background psychic fields, indicative, I am sure, of an awakening of psionic potential where previously there was none. I would recommend an intensive screening for physical mutation too, though I suspect it will yet be some time before any signs of such corruption are found.

I will continue to serve in any capacity you will, and I am well placed to observe the obviously degenerating situation amongst the rank and file of the 13th. I have no inkling as to whether this corruption has afflicted the higher ranks, though I can scarce believe the regiment's officers would be exempt, given the scale of contamination.

Furthermore, it is my belief that the regiment is, for the time being combat effective, but that this situation may not last for more than one, or perhaps two engagements, dependent upon the nature of the enemy. I would hope that the regiment's preachers will urge the men on to some suicidal act of sacrifice, for in that fate may lie the 13th's one, and only, hope for salvation.

I remain your obedient servant and await your orders.

Agent 12

Troopers of the 13th Mordant

These three troopers of the 13th Mordant are amongst the survivors of the Regiment's C Company. Each is typical of the state of the Regiment around the time of its period of rebuilding after the assault on the mutant stronghold.

Each trooper wears a flak vest manufactured to the Cadian pattern, as Mordant is itself near to the Fortress World of Cadia and therefore receives many of the same patterns of equipment issued to Cadian units. These particular troopers have foregone the standard guards armour issued with the chest plate, and this makes visible the extensive tattooing favoured by all the inhabitants of Mordant.

The helmets worn by the 13th and all other Mordant units are a variant of that worn by the Cadians, although the difference is purely cosmetic and it provides the same level of protection. Mounted upon each helmet is an extensive suite of vision enhancing gear. As Mordant is a benighted world, its occupants are known to have eyesight sensitive to bright conditions, and so it is not unusual for units to be issued with multi-spectral eye protection when such is available.

The lasgun carried by these troopers is a long-barrelled model of the Kantreal-manufactured sidearm issued to almost all units raised within the Sector Occularis.

The troopers' fatigues are a standard green/grey colour issued to all Mordant units upon their raising.

These troopers display a trait common of many of their kin – the carrying of additional equipment into the warzone. Mordant units are notorious scroungers, and often they scourge off Munitorum supply units, who dread requisitions from their quarter masters. Mordant troopers routinely search out and utilise

any additional wargear they can carry, and as such are masters in the use of all manner of equipment rarely used by other troops.

Most notable about these particular individuals however is that their scrounging of wargear appears to have carried over, or mutated into, the taking of trophies from the enemy. This is a trait only rarely practised amongst Mordant units, and is likely caused by the excessive and attenuated combat stress under which these troopers have been operating. Also likely is that the trophy taking is the result of some deeper, spiritual malaise brought on by extended contact with enemy forces tainted by the dark powers.





HE 13th SPENT the next three weeks recovering from their battles in the wastes, the time spent reorganising its units to cover the loss of 'C' Company

and to account for the numerous losses suffered by the other units. Of greater concern to Colonel Bane and his advisors however was a far subtler problem. The men and women of the 13th continued to exhibit combat stress reactions even some time after their return to base. These reactions were said to range from insubordination to outright mutiny, from surliness amongst the ranks to frequent brawling. Even more disturbingly, many troopers had taken to the wearing of trophies; body parts ripped from the enemy dead during the latter phases of their last battle. Such a practice was not unusual on many worlds of the Imperium, but was almost unheard of amongst units raised on Mordant.

In consultation with the regiment's attached commissars, Bane ordered his troops to attend mass twice per day and

ensured that there were plenty of preachers on hand to lift the warriors' spirits. However, it appeared that the malaise was too deep rooted and Bane began to fear that the Commissariat would soon deem it necessary to carry out summary executions as an example to the rest of the regiment.

On top of all this, Bane received word that the war was going poorly as a whole, and that the Imperium had been pushed back across a dozen worlds. Jihar the Lacerator had yet to reveal his hand, and thus far no Imperial unit had succeeded in drawing him to battle. It almost appeared to Colonel Bane that the Black Crusade was achieving its ends perfectly successfully with only the mutants contributing towards its efforts, and he feared what devastation might be unleashed if, or rather when, the Lacerator did commit his efforts to the war.

Bane need not have worried however, for, the very next day, Jihar the Lacerator made his attack. Hyrik V was his target.

The 13th Mordant received precious little in the way of warning of the Lacerator's attack. The first many heard of it was when the sirens began to wail and the gloomy skies became criss-crossed with the fiery contrails of the enemy's drop pods.

As the regiment hurriedly mustered, sergeants and provosts bellowing at the troopers to gather their weapons and prepare for battle, the drop pods hammered to earth a hundred kilometres or so north-west of the regiment's position. Bane knew that another regiment, the 17th Cadian, was encamped in almost the very spot the drop pods were impacting. He ordered his staff to contact the 17th, but all he heard over the vox-horns was panicked pleas for aid, followed by pitiful begging for mercy. At the last, an artillery spotter attached to the 17th transmitted a desperate request for an artillery barrage to be targeted in his exact position, and Bane immediately routed this to the self-propelled artillery units attached to his regiment. Even as the spotter's transmission degenerated into incoherent screaming, Bane heard the rush of incoming ordnance over the vox-channel, and said a silent prayer when it was abruptly cut off as mushroom clouds blossomed on the distant, north-western horizon.

As the colonel gathered his company commanders, he was interrupted by an

Amongst Jibar's followers were a number of warbands identified as former members of the Traitor Legion the Emperor's Children. These so-called 'Noise Marines' carried sonic weaponry capable of incapacitating its victims even as they were driven beyond sanity by the atonal cacophony.



incoming communication from High Command. He was to break camp and move out with immediate effect. His orders were simple. Jihar the Lacerator had come to Hyrik V, and the Mordant 13th were to make every effort possible to slow his advance whilst a defence was mustered.

The battle that ensued was one written in no official history of the Imperium, for it was fought against powers that may not be named, or even described. All that is known is that the so-called Lucky 13's advanced directly towards a foe that had reduced entire planetary populations to gibbering slaves. It is said that the very air screamed with the plaintive wailing of the dead as the regiment advanced, voices from beyond entreating the 13th to turn back lest they too be enslaved for all eternity.

But the 13th did not turn back. They marched on, into the mutant-infested wastelands, into the wailing cyclone thrown up by the unquiet dead. What horrors were called forth from the realms beyond the physical few may ever know, what terrors and temptations the servants of the Unnamed Ones

visited upon the 13th are perhaps best not imagined.

What is known is that somehow, the Lucky 13's stood in the face of those terrors and temptations. They marched on, laying down such a torrent of fire that the beasts of the warp were cast back. At the last, the regiment, Colonel Bane at its head, descended upon Jihar the Lacerator as a vengeful force of destruction. None who witnessed the battle committed its details to record, and only accounts of witnesses many kilometres distant may be read. The dark skies, it is said, were torn asunder by fire and lightning, the heavy weapons of the 13th contesting with the sorcerous blasts unleashed by the Lacerator against them. At the height of the battle, onlookers ten kilometres distant were forced to turn away lest the conflagration blind them, so intense was the fury unleashed.

And somehow, throughout all this, the 13th were victorious. As dawn rose, a column of scorched and blasted men and women staggered from the smoke engulfing the entire northern horizon. Jihar the Lacerator was dead, his Black Crusade halted.

HOW MIGHT THE INSTRUCTOR OR THE STUDENT LEARN FROM THE FINAL ACT OF THE LUCKY 13TH? WHAT LESSONS MIGHT HE DRAW? WHAT EXAMPLE MIGHT HE FOLLOW? WHAT STRATAGEM OR RUSE MIGHT HE EMULATE WHEN HIS TIME TO FACE SUCH AN ENEMY ARRIVES? SURELY, WHEN FACED WITH SUCH A FOE ALL NOTIONS OF STRATEGIES AND TACTICS MUST BE CAST UPON THE WIND. INSTEAD, THE COMMANDER MUST LOOK NOT UNTO THE FIGHTING STRENGTHS OF HIS FORCES, THE CAPACITIES OF HIS LINES OF COMMUNICATION OR ANY SUCH CONCERN. INSTEAD, HE MUST REACH DEEP INTO HIS SOUL AND THE SOULS OF HIS MEN, AND HE WILL FIND THERE THE GREATEST, MOST TERRIBLE AND POTENT WEAPON IN HIS ARSENAL — UTTER DEVOTION TO DIE IN THE SERVICE OF THE EMPEROR, EVEN AS DEATH ITSELF REACHES OUT TO CLAIM HIM. IN THE FACE OF SUCH A WEAPON, WHAT POSSIBLE DEFENCE CAN THE ENEMIES OF MANKIND MOUNT?

PROTACOL 77 DISSEMINATION – ENACT WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT

My friends, our operation has succeeded, against all hope, Jihar the Lacerator is dead. This I know, for I have set foot upon the field of battle, and looked upon the bloody remains. And what a battle was fought that day. Truly the 13th Mordant fought with the spirit of Emperor within the breast of each trooper. I feel the hand of higher powers at work upon that field of battle, and you will forgive me if an old man imagines vengeful angels fought at their sides that night.

Still, even in victory we must hold firm and do our duty to the Emperor and to Mankind. We all know what that duty is, and I now know exactly where my soul shall sleep having enacted it. I, we, are damned, but still we must put aside the suffering to come and give the word.

It is given. May the daemons of the warp go gentle on us, for I know now we are beyond the mercy of the Emperor.

Lord Iustrus, Nemesis Tessera

INQUISITORIAL ORDER 77/THETA 12

++INQUISITORIAL AGENTS IN PROXIMITY HYRIK V.

++IMPERIAL GUARD UNIT '13TH MORDANT' TO BE EXTERMINATED FOLLOWING DIRECT CONTACT WITH CONTAMINATING ENEMY FORCES UNDER AUTHORITY PROTOCOL 77.

++ORBITAL BARRAGE INITIATED IN 5..

..4

..3

..2

..1

TARGET ELIMINATED.

++INQUISITORIAL DECOM TEAMS DEPLOYED.

++STAND BY...

++STAND BY...

++STAND BY...

...



ERE ENDS THE first volume of the *Tactica Imperialis*. Those who truly aim to honour the works of the past and carry the glory of the Immortal

God-Emperor of Man

forward should study the wars described herein. Honour the names of your predecessors, study their deeds, meditate on their sacrifices and seek at all times to emulate their examples.

Seek first to identify the essential wisdom, the eternal truth at the heart of each account, for each has much to teach.

One might look to Carnhide for an object lesson in a vital principle for any high commander – your efforts should be entirely focused upon reinforcing success, and not wasted on shoring up failure. Though not recognised at the time of his greatest battles, Carnhide knew this well, and his deeds are now taught in every Staff Collegia in the Imperium. For that reason alone he was afforded a place in this volume of work.

Look too to the actions of the Iron Snakes at Naxos, for they displayed the detached wisdom with which every commander, no matter his posting, must learn to plan. Captain Trokus displayed a keen sense of timing allied to a ruthless determination to sacrifice all in the prosecution of his mission. Many suffered, yet that mission was successful.

Lord Blythe teaches us a similar lesson, but on an entirely different scale. His command style also married the methodical approach so typical of one risen through the Staff ranks as he did, with a propensity to change plans and surprise his foe. This alone should form a salutary lesson against becoming hidebound and predictable in one's strategy, for then the enemy will be able to predict your actions, and you will be forced onto the defensive. Such is a sin against the Emperor, a waste of his ammunition and of the lives in your charge.

Lastly, look to the fall of Jihar the Lacerator. One might question why such an account has been included in this volume, for surely tactics and strategy played little in the conclusion of that terrible war. And this is entirely the point of its inclusion, for that war was won when the 13th gave themselves wholly unto the Will of the Emperor. They became the vessels of His divine judgment, and through them the Emperor brought low the heretic Jihar. The lesson here is simple. Learn your tactics and your strategies, but never forget that it is not the calibre of your ordnance nor the thickness of your armour, nor the capacity of your logistics train that will ensure you victory.

It is the Will of the Emperor.

Embrace it, and victory shall be yours, of this you can be assured.









*A good soldier obeys without question.
A good officer commands without doubt.*

Dan Abnett lives and works in Maidstone, Kent, in England. Well known for his comic work, he has written everything from the Mr Men to the X-Men. His work for the Black Library includes the popular comic strips *Lone Wolves*, *Titan* and *Darkblade*, the best-selling Gaunt's Ghosts novels, and the acclaimed Inquisitor Eisenhorn trilogy.

Andy Hoare works for Games Workshop as a games designer, where he writes and develops games systems and intellectual property. His previous titles for the Black Library include *The 13th Black Crusade* background book and *Rogue Star*, his first novel. He lives in Nottingham, UK.

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