

WARHAMMER
40,000



XENOLOGY

*Notes and dissections from the alien bestiary of Biegeol, and studies
of its vile specimens, by those present at its destruction*

This background book is an Inquisition investigation into the diverse alien menace that threatens the Imperium. In a far-flung research station on Biegel 9, a renegade inquisitor has gathered together a collection of aliens from across the galaxy, and is keeping them alive to study! When a rival inquisitor is sent to investigate his heretical menagerie, he uncovers many things best left undiscovered.

With stunning background details on all the main alien races of the Warhammer 40,000 universe, and some new discoveries as well. It is full of amazing new artwork, including detailed dissections of the subjects investigated. Dark secrets are revealed, not only about the fascinating creatures under scrutiny, but also the working of the shadowy Ordo Xenos itself. This book is a must for any fans of aliens and the Warhammer 40,000 universe.

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XENOLOGY



NOTES FROM THE ALIEN BESTIARY OF BIEGEL, AND STUDIES OF ITS VILE
SPECIMENS, BY THOSE PRESENT AT ITS DESTRUCTION



BIEGEL-9 INQUIS

Listen not to the alien, look not upon the alien, speak not unto the alien



DISPOITO DIVINUS EX CORPOREUS

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++MISSION DISPATCH, IMMEDIATE EFFECT++

Faithful Sasham - time is short. Know this: your devotion to the Conclave has not passed unnoticed, and in this most urgent matter it is fitting that fate has best positioned you to carry it out. Discard whatever matters you attend to and hasten to the planet Biegel-9.

As a member of our circle you know we have enemies; enemies even among our fellows of the Ordo Xenos. Contention is the price of Idealism, and we Conservati place our ideals above all else. Know now that Chief among our detractors has always been one INQUISITOR RALEI: a thug who has never concealed his Radical proclivity. He has devoted his life to studies of the most heinous abasement, and who has often expressed pleasure in the fraternity of xenogens, and who - if our suspicions are solid - has attempted to gain covert access to the records of our own Conclave. In his life, we were unable to discredit him or even divine his movements. But now we may rejoice: Ralei is dead.

Since intercepting this welcome report, we in the Conclave have suppressed all news of the heretic's demise. Alas, it will not take long for Ralei's friends - powerful friends - to discover his death and attend to his legacy. We must act quickly to expose any trace of his foul deeds, thus casting disgrace upon his peers and strengthening our own brotherhood's standing within the Ordo.

Amongst Ralei's files there exists reference to a "Research Facility" on Biegel-9. Evidently, he assumed governance of this world and established for himself a private enterprise. There is no place better to seek evidence of his crimes. You have ten days, Sasham. We dare not conceal Ralei's death any longer. Get to Biegel-9, decommission this facility and record everything. The purity of the Ordo Xenos demands it. A serpent has grown strong in the company of lions, and it falls to you to smother its wickedness.

In the name of His Grace the Holy Emperor of Man,

LORD INQUISITOR GRÜNDVALD, on behalf CONCLAVE-CONSERVATI

Thought begets heresy; heresy begets retribution.



Formal portrait of
Inquisitor Gründvald

- a. Upper floor/Rootspace: Fortifications and viewing minaret.
- b. Ground floor: Facility operations, living quarters and chapel.
- c. Basement: Laboratory and specimen containment.
- d. Cell list for Basement

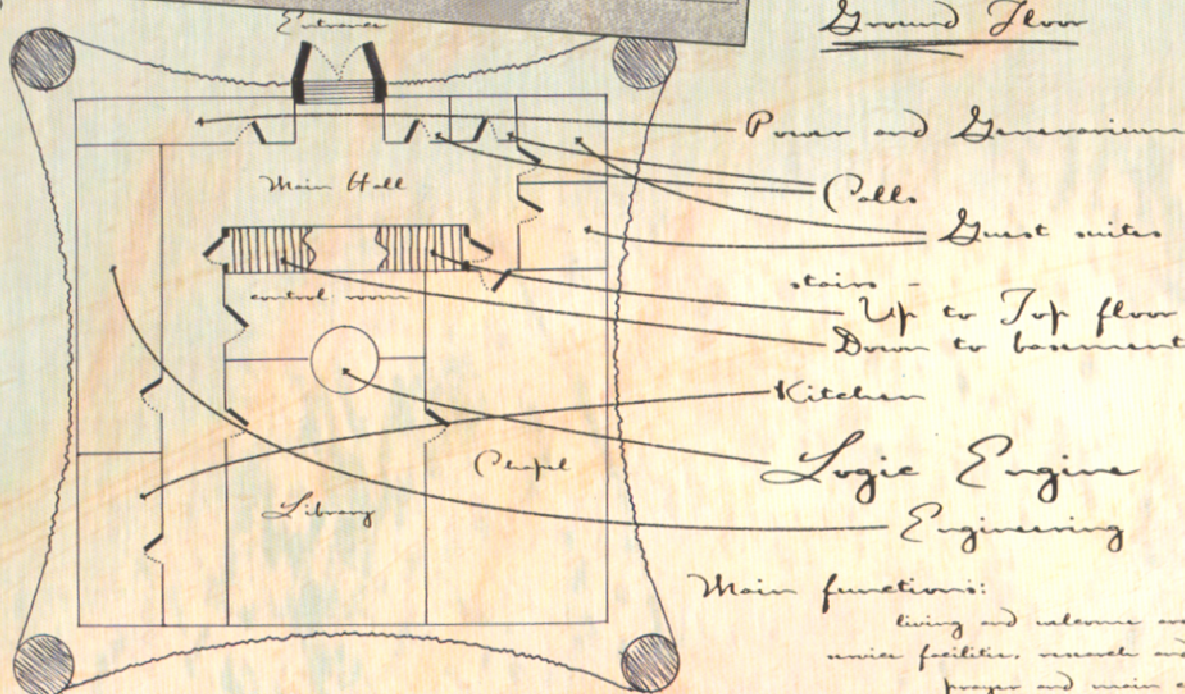
(a) Top Floor

(d) Turret 2

Bestiary Basement cell list

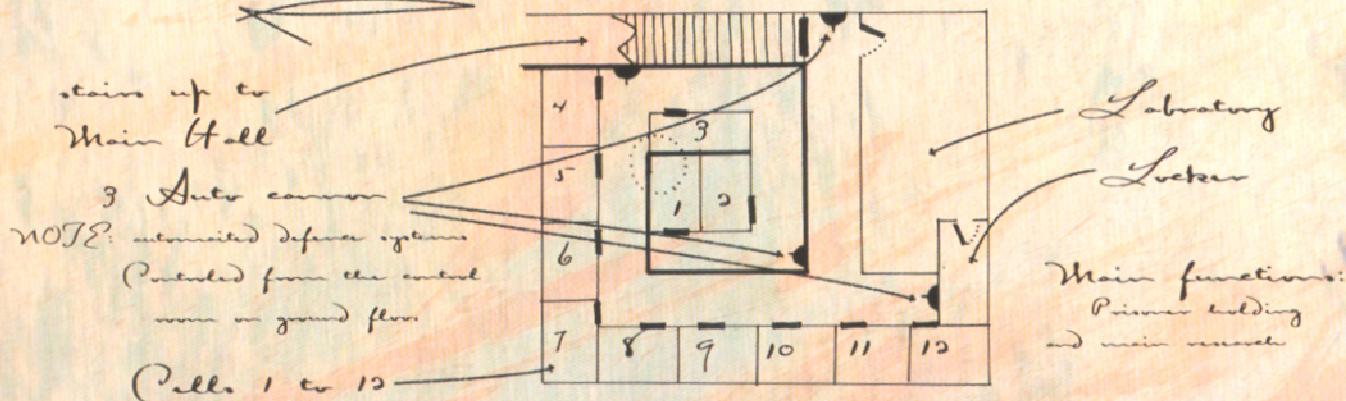
CELL	SPECIMEN	CAP. LOC.	CAP. DATE
1	++UNKNOWN DES.++ Sub/Organic. Gender N/A? FILE: 4/1H/23/NEC	Malquix Prime (born: unknown)	0.578.779.M41
2	<i>Tyrannus dissimulus</i> . Gender N/A. Sub-spec <i>Ultima clavivula</i> . FILE: 21/UG/LIC	Theal's Moon 2 (born: unknown)	0.090.795.M41
3	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i> . Gender N/A. Sub-spec <i>Pacificus 'Magpyr'</i> . FILE: 21/UG/TYR	Pacifica Planus (born: unknown)	0.695.799.M41
4	<i>Vermis (Tyrannus) furii</i> . Gender N/A. 'Classic' specimen. FILE: 21/UH/GEN	Hulk: <i>Stardevil</i> . (born: Ymgarl?)	0.271.789.M41
5	<i>Orkus negra</i> . Gender N/A. Warrior sub-caste. FILE: 109/SS/ORK	Armageddon 1 (born: same)	0.137.800.M41
6	Classification N/A. Comm/res: 'ELDAR'. Gender: Male. FILE: 1/AI/ELD	Salutre Delta (born: 'Ulthwé')	0.767.793.M41
7	<i>Troglydium hrudii</i> . Gender: Female. FILE: 58/NR/HRU	Paternus Gloriam (born: same)	0.257.790.M41
8	++UNKNOWN DES.++ Gender unknown. Comm/res 'UMBRA'. FILE: 8/DP/UMB	Deep Space (U/S) (born: unknown)	0.307.784.M41
9	<i>Bestiola superior</i> . Gender: Male. Aerial sub-caste. FILE: 42/ER/QUO	Vulcoria-Inquis (born: 'Loquit')	0.005.802.M41
10	<i>Tau Tau</i> . Gender: Female. Sub-Caste: 'Ethereal'. FILE: 20/AZ/TAU	Colony #23/Damoc (born: 'N'Dras)	0.906.798.M41
11	<i>Histrio tragoedus</i> . Gender: Male (?). Sub-caste unknown. FILE: 66/DL/THY	Stemivari Factoris (born: unknown)	0.032.792.M41
12	<i>Krootis (mix) aviana</i> . Gender: Male. Race/tribe 'TEHLX'. FILE: 73/WW/KRO	Colony #23/Damoc (born: Kalfch)	0.906.798.M41

(b)



(c)

Basement



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.060.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 55, 6TH/20TH

GUEST SUITE #1

My Lords, I have arrived. I stand in the facility on Biegel-9, ready to fulfil your orders. In ten days I will deliver whatever evidence of Inquisitor Ralei's radicalism I can find, and Emperor-willing shall close his affairs on this planet for good.

[sound of movement]

[rec-obs: arco-coolant system activated by subject]

This hot, ugly little world. The *Perduco Astrus* orbits above us, and I confess I yearn for her incensed hallways far above this sweaty, itchy planet. But... as the Emperor wills.

[sigh]

Masters, given your request for meticulousness, I've chosen to keep a spoken log of my observations. Entries can be recorded directly onto the facility's logic-engine, and from what I've seen, recording devices like this are installed throughout. Perhaps the servant who greeted us is likewise given to vocal diarising? He seems to be the only human here. I daresay his voice is a comfort.

You may note the unusual dating prefix at the head of this report. It seems Biegel enjoys a daily cycle of around 25 terran hours, with some 603 days in every year. The facility's daily businesses are thus recorded according to a simple measure of fractions: each day is divided into 20 fragments, and all 'times' are therefore vague at best. Not the accuracy one would expect from a research facility. I have instructed the logic-engine to attach an Imperial codifier, with check number, year-fraction, year number and millenium, to each of my reports. During my stay here I at least shall preserve the administrative purity of the Imperium.

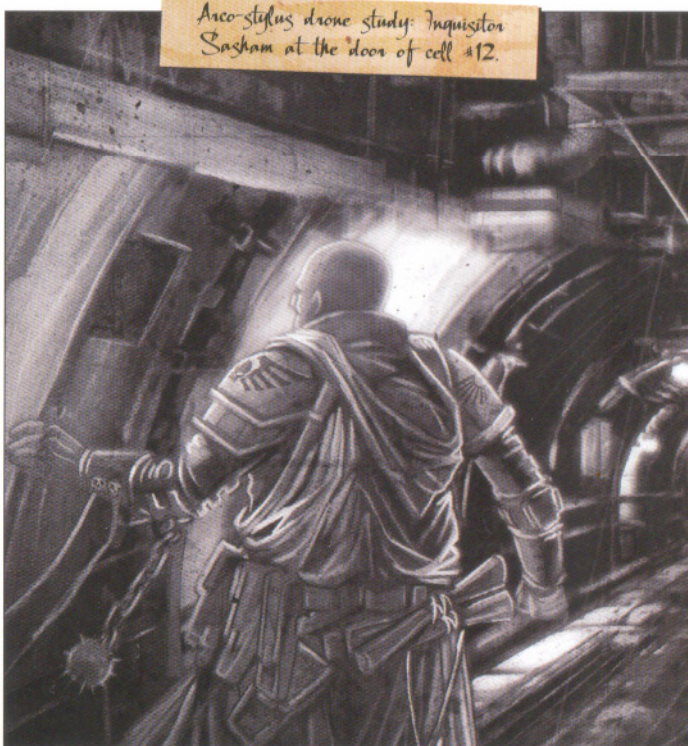
The facility itself looks like a fortress, to my eye. It stands on a ridge, overlooking the rainforest that covers Biegel. Perhaps sixty metres tall to the peak of its minaret, but it sprawls far wider. Clearly it is Imperial in decoration, but I can detect nothing familiar in its architecture. I've dispatched a servitor from the shuttle to record its exterior as a visual companion to my report.

As for the servant I mentioned before, he says his name is Darvus, and he is a curious fellow. I'd hazard that he doesn't receive many guests, and besides a host of servitors he seems quite alone. At first he mistook me for Ralei

himself; evidently the Inquisitor was not a frequent visitor. Of Darvus's role I can say little – he wears black robes in the manner of a techpriest, and is constantly surrounded by a flock of chattering drones, at whose function I cannot guess. To irritate his visitors, perhaps?

I stand in a plush sleeping cell, introduced to me as a guest suite. If this needless opulence is an indication of Ralei's character, I can well believe his descent into Radicalism. Is it not said the heretic seeks solace in spurious wealth and comfort?

For my retinue I have requisitioned less opulent cells, though given that Interrogator Malkis rarely sleeps and Astropath D'Reyx lacks eyes with which to judge her room, I don't foresee complaints. I've told Darvus I expect a tour of the environs in one hour. I'm keen to learn exactly what manner of research is carried out here.



Arco-stylus drone study: Inquisitor Sasham at the door of cell #12.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 55, 6TH/20TH
LABORATORY.**

He's upstairs. Who is he?

He says he's an Inquisitor, but no. The Master never mentioned anyone else. The Master would have *told* me if someone was coming. This pompous oaf with his gaudy clothes and his... His *guns*. Coming here, stamping about like he owns the place, shooing-away my drones like flies. It was all they could do to record the moment. I won't have him disrupting my work.

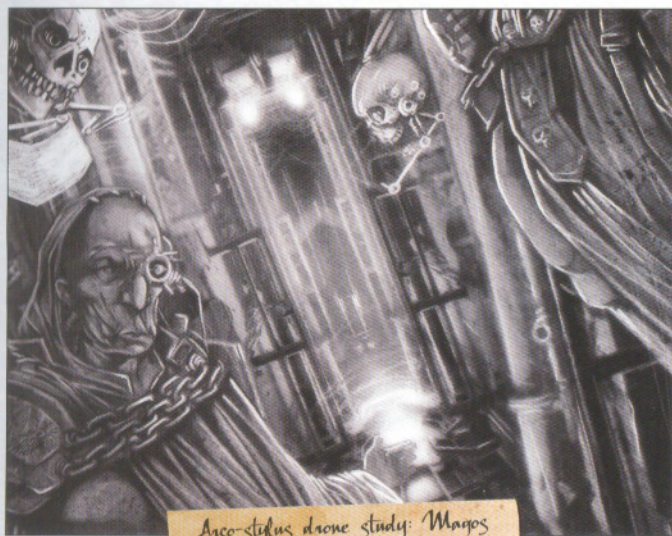
[pause – sounds of heavy breathing]

B-but he has the papers. He has the authority of an Inquisitor.

[pause]

I don't believe the Master would have revealed the existence of his bestiary to this man unless he trusted him. I suppose I must trust this Sasham, too. I must do as he says.

But I don't like his manner. He's demanded an inspection of the building and I dare not disobey. Although I am afraid for my subjects, my treasures. I fear for their lives.



Arco-stylus drone study: Magos Biologis Darvus greeting visitors.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.061.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 55, 11TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

The tour is over. I... I barely know where to begin.

[pause]

[audible breath]

I have discovered the purpose of this facility and it beggars belief. The longer I think upon it the more I grow convinced I must be deluded. But no. I must believe the evidence.

My lords: you have sent me to a zoo for aliens.

[pause]

The tour began well enough. Darvus introduced himself as a member of the Divisio Biologis, which I take to be part of the Adeptus Mechanicus. Usually an association with that clandestine organisation would have aroused my suspicions, but Darvus seemed a lucid fellow and but for the incessant scribbling of his arco-styli drones – which record his work – I found little fault with him.

He showed me first the Control Room, to which I have returned. It is a mass of augers, cogitators and controls, all linked to the logic engine at the core. The ground floor is a humdrum affair, just domestic facilities staffed by servitors. Only the chapel and Librium are of note – the former where I made swift devotions, the latter which contains more volumes, scrolls and datum-files than I have ever seen before.

The facility's rooftop, accessed via a code-locked doorway, is open to the elements and unremarkable, except for the peculiar minaret at its centre and the armaments at its crown. Darvus then took us via a second locked door into the basement.

[long pause]

The first thing to greet my eyes was an autocannon turret – hardly an auspicious start! When questioned, Darvus's explanation for its presence was unintelligible,

and I noted in him a strange transformation. He grew quiet, almost reverent. A room at the foot of the stairs was revealed as a large laboratory, though besides scalpels and operating tools none of its instruments were familiar. Perhaps, I supposed, the facility serves some medical function. I was wrong. Sweet Emperor-God, how wrong.

Beyond was a corridor of sharp turns, walls bristling with camera-drones. Along one wall a series of heavy doors stood out, and I was immediately put in mind of a penal facility. Why, I wondered, should there be isolation cells here?

My lords, I opened a viewing hatch on the first door and all my questions were answered.

The thing inside was a vision of bristles and corded muscles. That is all I can recall, beyond its staring eyes. That it was alive was beyond doubt. In the next cell was another monstrosity, and in the third another yet. I dared not go on! My composure left me and I retreated.

Darvus saw something was amiss. I suppose he'd assumed I *knew* the purpose of his master's facility; perhaps he even thought I had been invited to attend by Ralei. He set-to with complaints and demands, citing his master's good name. I bluntly informed him that his master was dead, and that I would see this freakshow obliterated. In ten days, I told him, I would watch his facility burn.

After that, I came to the Control Room, where I have remained. At Ralei's twisted intentions in creating this collection I can only guess, but the reality is impossible to ignore: he has founded a Xenos Bestiary.

[pause – sounds of switches; controls being manipulated]

I have since uncovered from the Logic-Engine a complete inventory of the specimens held below, which I have attached to the facility's schematics. It represents a list of creatures so alien, so abominable in the eyes of the Emperor, so opposed to the manifest destiny of mankind, that I will not rest until each entry has been struck-through.



Pict-capture (scavitor Cam/90G-F#2): Inquisitorial
Facility exterior (inc. shuttle-pod and environs)

Classified

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 55, 14TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

Dead? He says the Master is dead.

I cannot believe it.

[sobbing]

And yet he hasn't returned to his treasures these past three years. I thought it a long time but...

C-could it be true? Could my Lord have fallen?

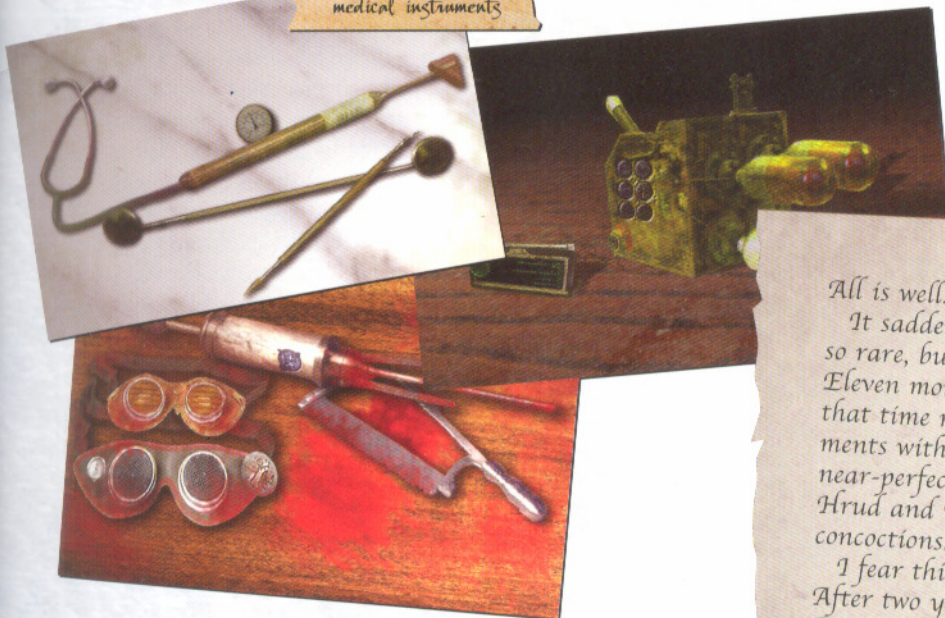
A pox on this Sasham! Him and his warpdamned retinue, stirring trouble. Sneaking here without Ralei's permission. I... I knew it, when I saw him: trouble, I thought. Death.

He says we have ten days. Ten days to destroy a life's work.

It's not fair.

[sobbing]

Various dissection and
medical instruments



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.062.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 55, 17TH/20TH
LIBRARY.

Such arrogance.

I found the attached testimony lying open on a reading desk in Ralei's library. Given the dust I'd say it's untouched since it was written three years ago.

'Supercilious pedants'? He mocks our purity and convicts himself by his own testimony. He abuses the esteem of the Ordo to claim planetary governance, he deceives his masters in his intentions, and he damns himself in his quest to set up a warp-damned zoo. 'Misconduct' indeed!

My lords, the more I learn of this man, the more I thank the Emperor his life is extinguished. Men of such character should not be permitted the title 'Inquisitor'. Learning from aliens? Such casual heresy. I fear that my task of seeking evidence to discredit this man will be all too easy.

[pause, sounds of paper rustling]

Leafing back through the volume, it strikes me how lengthy the breaks between Ralei's visits are. Little

wonder Darvus seems to froth on the edge of sanity. I've given the Magos Biologis instruction that tomorrow morning the systematic extermination of the creatures will begin. His composure was shattered at the news, and he fled like a sobbing infant. Hardly the mental fortitude of a man to be entrusted with such a dangerous ark.

I'm intrigued as to how long this peculiar collection has existed, how many years Ralie has been gathering his specimens, and how he's managed to avoid the gaze of the Ordo all this time. But for tonight – sleep. It has been a long day, and in the midst of this madness I trust rest will bring the perspective I need to do my duty in the morning.

I find myself almost excited at the prospect of the righteous exterminations. As I sit in this dusty chamber I'm reminded of a lesson that I was honoured to hear from that greatest of teachers and founder of our own secret circle, *Dominus Conservati* Malchio. I will never forget his words:

'Brothers,' he said, 'the quest for understanding is a drug. One cannot observe a thing without being tainted by it. Only through the crosshairs of a bolter-sight should man study xeno.'

Extract from Inquisitor M. Ralei's Journal

All is well.

It saddens me that my visits to the Bestiary have grown so rare, but Darvus's capabilities are beyond reproach. Eleven months have passed since my last spell here, and in that time not a single specimen has perished. His experiments with synthesising foodstuffs have produced near-perfect results, and even our fussier inmates – the Hrud and Tau, especially – can be persuaded to ingest his concoctions.

I fear this ledger-entry shall be my last for some time. After two years of searching I have finally delivered to Darvus an adult Q'ori (perhaps the only specimen in Imperial custody), and doubtless the Ordo grows suspicious of my absence from routine Inquisitorial matters. There is no doubt in my mind that certain groups of my so-called 'fellows' – supercilious pedants, the lot – would regard my work here as a symbol of gross misconduct. The honour of planetary governance falls to few individuals, and if it were suspected that my stewardship of this world was a cover for an alien menagerie, how indignant they would be!

No, I shall have to abscond myself from my collection and report in, and pay lip service to my Inquisitorial Commission. Such ignominy! Don't those fools understand? Can't they see that we grow strong by learning about the alien, by learning from the alien – rather than by expunging all trace of it? What wonders they have closed their eyes to! What opportunities for the advancement of humanity.

The fools of the Conclave Conservati – infesting the Ordo like tumours – would call me 'Radical' and spit at my name if they could read these words. For now, I must play by their rules. I must bid farewell to Darvus and our glorious, terrible treasures. For now.

– Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.087.802.M41



Histrio tragoedus: 'Thyrus'

66/DL/THY

DISSECTION REPORT

Classified

SUBJECT: *Histrio tragoedus*, 'Thyrrus' warrior.
AGE: Unknown (13+). Adult. **GENDER:** Male?

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS
ATTENDING: INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM, INTERROGATOR XE'L MALKISS.
DAY 56, 3RD/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is deceased adult genus *Histrio*, member of Thyrrus race (Segmentum Pacificus, homeworld unknown). Cause of death is las-wound to cranium (*a.*) and subsequent systemic trauma. NB: Asphyxiation inadequate means of execution. Annotated observations to follow [see attached Arco-stylus diagram].

- a. Central sensory organ, analogous to human *cranium*. Outer shell is brittle multi-layered protein (cf. *keratin*) lacking polyps and pigmentation of upper dermis. Interior cavity reveals cerebral matter descending to vertical 'spinal' ganglia [see *f.*]. Conclusion: 'brain' analogy inadequate: nervous system is dispersed.
- b. Quadruple ocular organs: suggest periphery-vision 230°. Simple dissection reveals aqueous outer membrane (cf. *choroid coat*) and spongy 'retina'. Forward pair features massed *cone* photoreceptors (high-wavelength prejudice eg: Infrared) whilst rear pair indicate *rod* tendency (extreme photosensitivity).
- c. Ingestion/respiratory filter. Massed fibres (microscopic) of spongy tissue, arranged as lattice. Peripheral musculature alters arrangement and porosity. Conclusion: as noted [see obs. file] subject ingests nutrition via osmosis, altering absorbency of mouthparts with fibrous 'sieve'. Respiratory regulation apparently by same means (ie: organic 'gasmask').
- d. Inorganic decoration (cf. *Clothing? Armour?*), magnesium cable band.
- e. Quadruple forelimbs, vertical arrangement. Each triple-jointed, tough protein shell (as with *a.*), multi-cord muscular core. Simple 'fingerparts' suggest limited dexterity.
- f. Horizontal incision reveals internal nervous system ganglia. Vertical 'shaft' of nerve clusters encased in protein structure, attaching *cranium* (*a.*) to *clavicula* (*g.*) and supporting forelimbs (*e.*). Secondary (complex) clusters distributed into outer dermis (*i.*), (*k.*) & (*l.*) Conclusion: subject lacks endo- or exo-skeleton, supported via cartilaginous central column.
- g. Ambulatory appendages, analogous to cephalopod *clavicula*. Extreme density of muscle cords suggests massive strength and dexterity. (*Spec:* use of lower limbs for acute manipulation?)
- h. Organs of generation? Porous limb with spongy tissue at tip – egg sac? Gamete-depositor?
- i. Central mantle: thick upper dermis with muscular rear wall. [see *k.*]
- j. Mantle incision. Interior cavity almost devoid of distinct organs. Minor digestive arrangement feeds directly into cellular distribution system. Simple pulmonary muscle (*monovalvus*) at upper-right distributes osmotic gases into upper dermis and lower musculature. Conclusion: subject's chemistry operates at cellular level. Upper mantle and interior cavity analogous with 'airsac', in-/de-flated at will.
- k. Dorsal dermis. Inner musculature demonstrates extreme versatility in formation of simple structures – all of limited dexterity (*spec:* communicative?). Upper dermis hairless and monotone (grey), despite extreme colouration prior to death. [see *l.*] Evidence of trace toxins at apex of various nodules (*spec:* polyps contain mild stingers, cf. *Aurelia aurita*)
- l. **DETAIL:** Dorsal dermis. In addition to dense muscle bundles beneath dermis (allowing the formation of physical structures and irregular textures), upper mantle reveals pigmented glands (cf. cephalopod) linked to nervous-system ganglia. Conclusion: Subject can change colour and surface-texture at will.
- m. **DETAIL:** Unknown item (seized at time of capture) – weapon? Technology analogous to plasma-generator: suggests ballistic energy weapon, with quadruple handles. Additional lights/colours/cords purely communicative?

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject biology suggests highly-evolved species, perfectly adapted to survival in atmospheric, gravitational and geographical extremes. Possible vulnerability to excesses of temperature? Microscopic tests to be continued.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologi Sharle Darvus

Interrogator Xe'l Malkiss

Inq Brehm Sasham

Artist's impression of a *Thyrus* in battle



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 2ND/20TH
LABORATORY.

They're asleep. Asleep or skulking in their cells – I don't care.

I don't know why I continue to document my thoughts. The master isn't coming back. He'll never again sift these recordings.

[long pause]

Hah. No. I lie to fool myself. I *do* know why I'm here, unable to sleep, droning into this microphone as I have every day these past fifteen years.

I've reached a decision, and I fear that if I keep it bottled inside I'll *burst*. So here I am, whispering to my secret confidante: a warp-damned logic engine. How foolish I must seem.

No matter. The facts are before me. The brute Sasham will kill the treasures. He will wipe away the studies of my lifetime. I think I *hate* him, and I confess that as I sit here in my lab, surrounded by the blades of my craft, my thoughts darken.

[pause]

What am I thinking? I'm no murderer. And perhaps the pampered oaf would call me insane, but I *will not allow* such casual exterminations as those he proposes.

I cannot stand against him, but there is perhaps a way. A way to salvage some iota of progress. He has allowed ten days for the bestiary's closure, and though it seems ludicrous to even consider this thing, I have no other choice.

There are cyanide canisters in the artefact locker. Supplies to be used only in the direst of circumstances. I daresay this moment qualifies.

[sigh]

And now that my course is set I prepare to pre-empt the bastard. Now I face a choice. The hardest I have ever made. Which will be first? Some random selection? Some biased priority? It will not be the thing in Cell 1 – that much I know. The *perfection* of it... The *stillness* of it. I would not seek its destruction even if I knew how.

So. Which shall it be? Which of my treasures must I kill to prove my point?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.063.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 4TH/20TH
GUEST SUITE #1.

What?

[sounds from off – distant crashing and shouting]

Are we attacked? What... What madness is this? A great commotion.

I thought it a part of an ugly dream but–

[loud crashes]

That's no dream. That's coming from below.

Has one of the xenos escaped? Emperor's Oath, if that's it we must–

[gunshot]

Terra's blood. What the devil is going on? To arms!

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 4TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

There.

[ragged breath]

It's done.

Oh mercy, the gas wouldn't... Emperor. The gas wouldn't kill it. Some sort of respiratory filter, perhaps. An air-bladder? I don't know. I had to shoot it. There's a laspistol in the artefact-locker which I...

[moan]

I couldn't bear to watch it writhe. Lord on the Throne – The thrashing! Its colours! What was it trying to say?

[restrained sobbing]

I'll never know.

[pause]

I can't move the body. I've roused Gakhar, but even he struggles with its weight. Though it shames me, I almost relish the coming procedure; to explore so strange a specimen – there is no greater honour. [distant noises, shouting]

Warpdammit – the Inquisitor is awake. I'd hoped to be free of him until morning.

He's coming.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.064.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 11TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

Sweet throne of Terra, what a morning.

My lords, if my account of yesterday's peculiarities seemed improbable, this morning's events will stretch your belief further still. This place delivers its doses of madness without pause, and I doubt today's surprises will be its last.

[sigh]

You'll recall in my last recording I was startled by a commotion. I summoned my Interrogator and made haste to the basement. Fortunately, during yesterday's tour, I studied Darvus as he entered the access code to the stairs. In such minor observances can the Emperor's Will be served.

The sight that greeted my eyes below will remain with me forever. There stood Magos Darvus, laspistol in hand, flanked at one shoulder by an inhuman devil. Even as I drew my weapon the ramifications of this scene were dawning. From the creature's beaked maw I guessed it to be a Kroot – a primitive species from the Perdus Rift with a reputation for mercantilism – and quickly formed an ugly conclusion: Darvus had employed this beast, this slur upon human purity, to murder me in my sleep. Had it not been for his shrieked supplications I believe I would have executed him then and there.

He claimed this *thing*, which he insisted upon calling by name, was his most loyal servant. He said he'd roused it from its cell to aid him in carrying a load, nothing more. With hindsight I'll confess that throughout this exchange the beast made no attempt to attack or flee, regarding me with uncomfortable intelligence. Nonetheless, so disgusted was I by its unauthorised release that I resolved to shoot it and commanded Darvus to step aside.

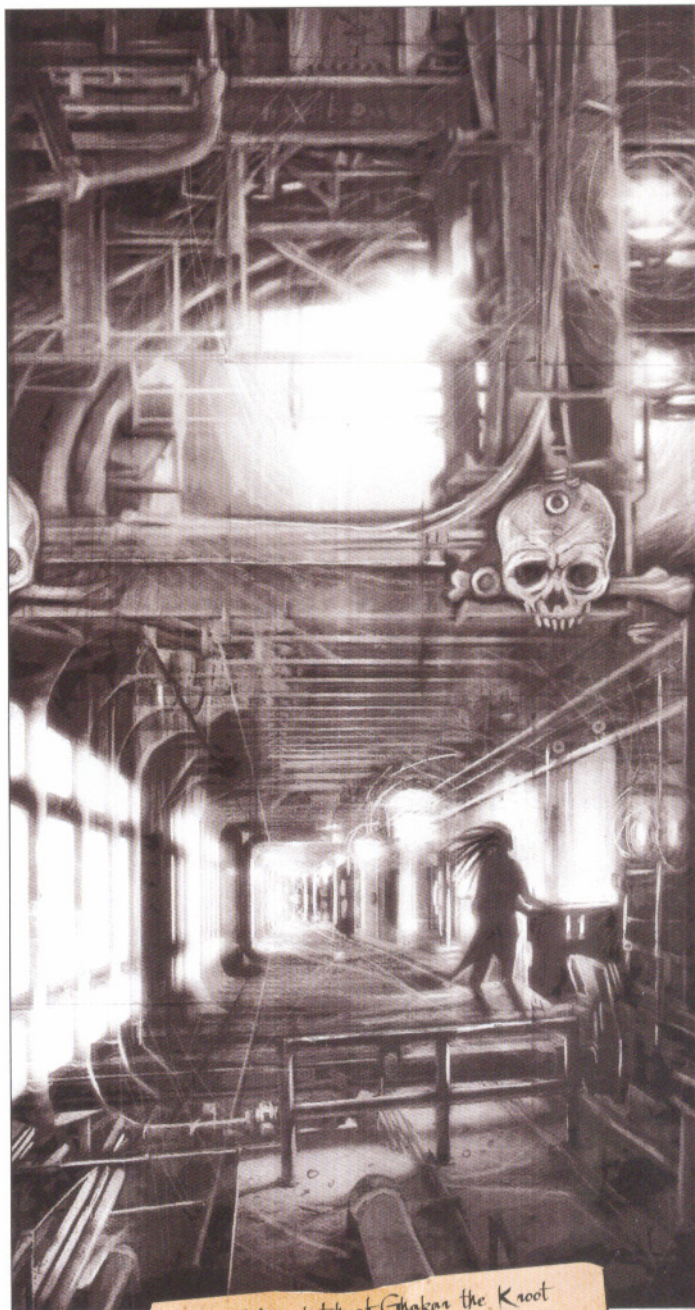
My lords, the contemptible little maggot would not.

You will, at this juncture, appreciate the closeness I came to executing the Magos. Alas, his wittering voice snagged my attention and, intrigued by his assurances that his sole aim was to fulfil my command, I allowed him his say. Let it not be said I am without mercy.

He stated that he'd acknowledged his subjects must die. He said he understood that I'd strike down each one without a moment's hesitation, and in so doing render his research worthless. He said that all he wished was the license to conclude his studies as best he could in the short time I had allowed.

I quite failed to grasp his point. What could he hope to achieve in ten days? Perhaps judging the danger to be over, he invited me to his laboratory, claiming all would become clear. All he asked in return was that Gakhar – the Kroot – be allowed to return to his cell. Intrigued despite myself, I relented, vowing silently that the creature had earned only a delay in its execution.

I followed Darvus into the laboratory and felt my jaw hang open. I cannot adequately describe what lay before me. Instead I offer only the following reports without further comment.



Anco-stylus sketch of Ghakhar the Kroot performing manual labour in the bestiary



LOCATION: STEMIVARI FACTORIS, (SECTOR SAERAPHIL, QUADRUS
GLABORA, SEGMENTUM PACIFICUS)
DATE: 2.306.784.M41
AUTHOR: INQUISITOR MATURIN RALEI

THE DAWN BRINGS FURTHER SETBACKS.

WITH TWO THIRDS OF THE PRIME CONTINENT LOST, AND NO DISCERNIBLE MOTIVE TO THE INVADERS' ASSAULT, THE COMBINED FORCES OF THE 23RD, 57TH AND 19TH STEMIVARI REGIMENTS TEETER ON THE BRINK OF COLLAPSE. BY 0300 IT WAS CLEAR THE ALIENS WERE FOCUSING THEIR STRENGTH ON THE SOUTHERN INDUSTRY CAPITAL (TORRUS HOPE), THOUGH GIVEN ITS POOR STRATEGIC VALUE AND NEGLIGIBLE RESOURCES, GENERAL KOJHMAR'S TACTICIANS COULD NOT FATHOM WHY. THE THYRRUS'S MANOEUVRES BORDER ON THE SURREAL: COMMITTING COLUMNS OF THEIR LUMINOUS WAR-MACHINES TO OVERCOME THE LIGHTEST OF OUR DEFENCES, THEN HURLING SQUADS OF INFANTRY, POORLY ARMED AND ARMoured, AT OUR TANKS. THAT THE EXTREMES OF OVERKILL AND UNDER-ESTIMATION ARE ABSURD IS UNDOUBTED - AND THE FACT THAT THEY HAVE WORKED IS INARGUABLE.

ALAS, INEXPLICABILITY HAS DOMINATED THE CAMPAIGN, AND MY ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN WHAT LITTLE I KNOW OF THE XENOS' WAYS TO THE GENERAL WAS MET WITH ICY INDIFFERENCE. IN KEEPING WITH HIS CLASS, HE HAS LITTLE INTEREST IN THE DETAILS OF THE RACES HE CONSPIRES TO ANNIHILATE. I FEAR THIS OBSTINACY IS TO HIS DETRIMENT: IF HE COULD GRASP THE CENTRAL TENET OF THYRRUS CULTURE - THAT OF SPECTACLE - HE MIGHT DESIST IN HIS VAIN ATTEMPTS TO ANTICIPATE THE LOGIC OF THEIR ATTACKS.

NONETHELESS, AND DESPITE THE ALIENS' IMPRESSIVE VICTORIES ('DAMNABLE LUCK', AS KOJHMAR HAS IT) I CANNOT PRETEND GRIEF. WHEN THE THYRRUS PROPMASTERS BREAK THE WALLS OF THE CITY MY AGENTS SHALL BE WAITING, WITH CLING-NETS AND CHAINS, AND WE MAY LEAVE THIS DOOMED FACTORY-WORLD WITH THE PRIZE WE CAME TO COLLECT. THE INTRACTABILITY OF KOJHMAR'S FORCES HAS SIGNED THEIR DEATH WARRANT, AND BUT FOR THE ACQUISITION OF MY SPECIMEN I WOULD LAMENT THE LOSS OF STEMIVARI FACTORIS...

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 11TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

So much blood.

It's all over my hands. I thought it safe to lift the recording-tube but... Even now I can feel the fluids. My treasure. My colourful, silent Thyrrus.

I've never killed a living thing - before today. Emperor's mercy, there are eleven cells still occupied and all must be vacant in nine days' time. Is it my fate to slaughter my darlings? To see them die one by one, then cut my way into their bodies?

...and surging right at us, all colour lights an' sounds like a chapel service. hadn't been for the sarge's head popping off his neck beside me I'd'a still starin' when them guns opened fire.

'Mesmerising.

'As it goes, this tall fellow yanks me the way and frags the squiddy with a launcher. The Brass never said we was supposed to take prisoners, but I figured because was dressed so smart he was someone from top, so when he says to help him lug the up to his shuttle, I did.

'Course, that meant I was well out the when the slimy-bastards broke the line, now I'm thinking I'm the only survivor from reg, and I still ain't been told who you are anyways, and why you recordin' all this stuff-'

It has been a week since my master delivered it, and I'm grown convinced such a concept as 'emotion' is an impossible analogue for the thoughts and reactions governing the Thyrrus men. It has demonstrated nothing in the way of anger or sadness, has not attempted to escape (nor even investigated its cell), and occupies its time with a strange fluttering movement from side to side, body inflating and deflating. I confess to finding this graceful dance captivating. It is a thing of oscillating colours, malleable textures, sinuous tentacles and complex movements; though in time with what rhythm, and for what benefit, I cannot guess.

As for my fears regarding the synthesis of suitable nutrition, I need not have worried. By some ingenious process, the Thyrrus can absorb what nourishment it requires from almost anything I deposit into its cell. Watching it suck upon growth is a disturbing but fascinating experience. The specimen enjoys no spoon, taking exactly what it needs - no more or less - from the fare placed before it.

- MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS
(FROM LIBRIUM OBS. FILE)

Hah, no. Even *that* cruel future isn't certain.

Since the dissection ended I've heard nothing of the inquisitor. He disappeared upstairs without a word. Have I convinced him? Will he allow me to finalise my studies in this way, no matter how rushed? Or will he ignore the benefits of my work?

I feel poised on a knife edge. If I topple one way I'm condemned to killing my own beauties, to cutting into their flesh. If I topple the other I must watch that... that *brute* massacre them in my stead.

I barely know which is better. I wish the Master were here.

Oh Emperor, this *blood*. Will I never be clean?

STEMVARI TROOPS KNOW YOUR ENEMY



THYRRUS WARRIOR: degenerate slime-coated scum!
Slow-moving, inefficient, physically stunted and
barely sentient – a poor challenger to mankind's destiny!

GIVE THE SQUIDDIES NO QUARTER.

ISSUED: General Kojhmar, Strategic Command

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.064.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 14TH/20TH

LIBRARY.

It's a curious thing, to be mesmerised and repelled simultaneously. With every cut Darvus made on that thing's flaccid corpse, I felt my stomach turn.

And I leaned a fraction closer.

[sigh]

I've been sitting here for two hours. In this library, this testament to Ralei's heresy. Every volume is crammed with notes, images, discussions. Some are Ralei's own, some are covered with Darvus's scrawl. Others are penned by scholars whose names are unfamiliar. All concern the same thing.

Xenos life. Grotesque creatures. Horrendous sights.

How strange that each monstrosity can be distilled to pure knowledge.

[clears throat]

I couldn't resist hunting for information on the Thyrrus amongst the shelves. Perhaps in seeing its body being taken apart I wanted to see its world and its culture suffer the same fate.

Perhaps I was just intrigued.

I attach a selection of my findings as companions to the dissection. If nothing else, it demonstrates a meticulousness in Ralei's research that has immersed him *utterly* in that most dangerous of paths: Xenophilia. A fascination with the unclean.

As to the fate of the other beasts held captive I have not yet made up my mind. To destroy them swiftly and cleanse their taint? Or to indulge Darvus's studies? Is it not plausible some good might come from his works?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 16TH/20TH

LABORATORY.

A breakthrough!

I've spent the afternoon poised over my augers, cutting and slicing, trying to control the shaking of my hands. If only I had more time.

[sigh]

When searching fruitlessly for *relevance*, I attended to my mechanical eye. I've know that in moments of extreme tension its nictitating elements often jam, and had the servitor-engineers provide a solvent to lubricate its parts. On this occasion, a droplet of the stuff fell into my sample. At first I damned myself for a fool and an oaf, but at second glance, oh, the good fortune! Serendipity has always been a faithful servant to the Omnissiah.

Beneath my magnifier was a fragment of fibrous tissue from the creature's mouthparts. I'd hoped to determine what alchemy endowed it with its filtering abilities, but I detected a miracle: the solvent had burned a perfect, clean wound in the tissue.

The practical applications go without saying. I must inform the bastard Inquisitor. How can he condemn my treasures to a hasty execution when such simple studies can yield such results?

A year has passed since the Thyrrus arrived at my bes-
tiary. In that time I have collected as much information
regarding this enigmatic race I could. Combined with
Darvus's observations I feel I now possess an unrivalled
understanding of the species: an understanding that could
prove advantageous if the unprovoked assaults in the
Segmentum Pacificus continue.

All my studies have led me to the following conclusion:
these creatures are concerned not with such ephemera as
'victory' or 'defeat'. Their race exists solely to propagate the
culture it has accrued, to 'self-reflect, self-express and self-
indulge', as Expl. Coriachus scornfully puts it. Lives, wars,
day-to-day businesses: to the Thyrrus such things are not
tenets of free will but elements in a vast alien performance,
an 'existential pantomime' (Magos Patronis)

Little wonder they strike under circumstances sure to
accrue the heaviest casualties - to both sides: they are play-
ers upon a stage as broad as the galaxy itself, and every
movement they make is part of a racial artwork for the ben-
efit of whatever godly 'audience' watches over them. Not for
nothing do their weapons burn with colours and lights as
well as fearsome energies. Not for nothing do they 'scorn
nothing do their weapons burn with colours and lights as
well as fearsome energies. Not for nothing do they 'scorn
their talent for camouflage in favour of gaudy patterns,
clashing hues and startling displays' (Inq. Tamarind). Not
for nothing are their assaults and retreats incomprehensible
to we humans: they behave in accordance with an invisible,
ineffable script which we have not seen - nor could we
understand it if we had.

The Thyrrus present a growing threat to our colonies in
the Quadrus Glabora, but I take heart from the knowledge
we have thus far gained. At least in understanding the inef-
fability of their actions ('A race dedicated solely to the
indulgence of art? I can think of nothing more ludicrous
nor more detestable!' - General Kohjmar), we may relieve

ourselves of the burden of ploddingly, ignorantly attempting
to impose logic upon their movements.
Alas, of their homeworld, or the purpose of their all-consuming
'performance', we know nothing.

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.556.785.M41

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.065.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 56, 18TH/20TH
LIBRARY.

So, a new element to this patchwork. Heresies, curiosities, and now this.

It seems Ralei's—no, *Darvus's* distasteful scheme has borne fruit. The Magos assures me that he has found a simple, exploitable vulnerability in the Thyrrus's biology. By what means he deduced such a thing I have no idea, but it seems mundane titanate grenades could annihilate the wretched creatures en masse. Who would have thought beings so complex would have such a weakness?

They seem gifted in *adaption*, and I daresay given time could overcome even this weakness. But a weakness it is, and one that could save many lives.

And it was discovered in this benighted facility.

My lords, you will appreciate the torment of my thoughts. I trust when you replay these words you will not consider this a laxity in my conviction. I vow to you now that I *shall* close this place within the limits you have set me, but how can I destroy this place whilst such information might yet be eked out?

I have informed Darvus that he may indulge his studies — as rushed and superficial as he complains they are — but one mistake, one infraction, and he shall learn the limits of my patience.

As for Ralei, I cannot bring myself to think better of him, despite his servant's progress. What manner of man dives so deep in waters so dark? I would like to understand him better, I think. One cannot truly *hate* that which he does not comprehend, and — my lords — I wish to hate your enemy.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 57, 1ST/20TH
LABORATORY.

We are saved, for now. The studies can go on. Eight more days to finish them all. To slice them apart.

I can't sleep. There's a spiral in my dreams, and I can't tell what lies at its centre.

[*long pause*]

Tomorrow I must kill another of my treasures. Which shall I watch choke and die? I feel myself drawn again to the door of Cell 1. As if I may find inspiration, staring into the lifeless eyes of the thing inside. Is this an addiction?

Oh, Emperor.



Artist's impression: *Thyrrus soliloquus*
at the battle of Torvus Hope

fig:1 {a}

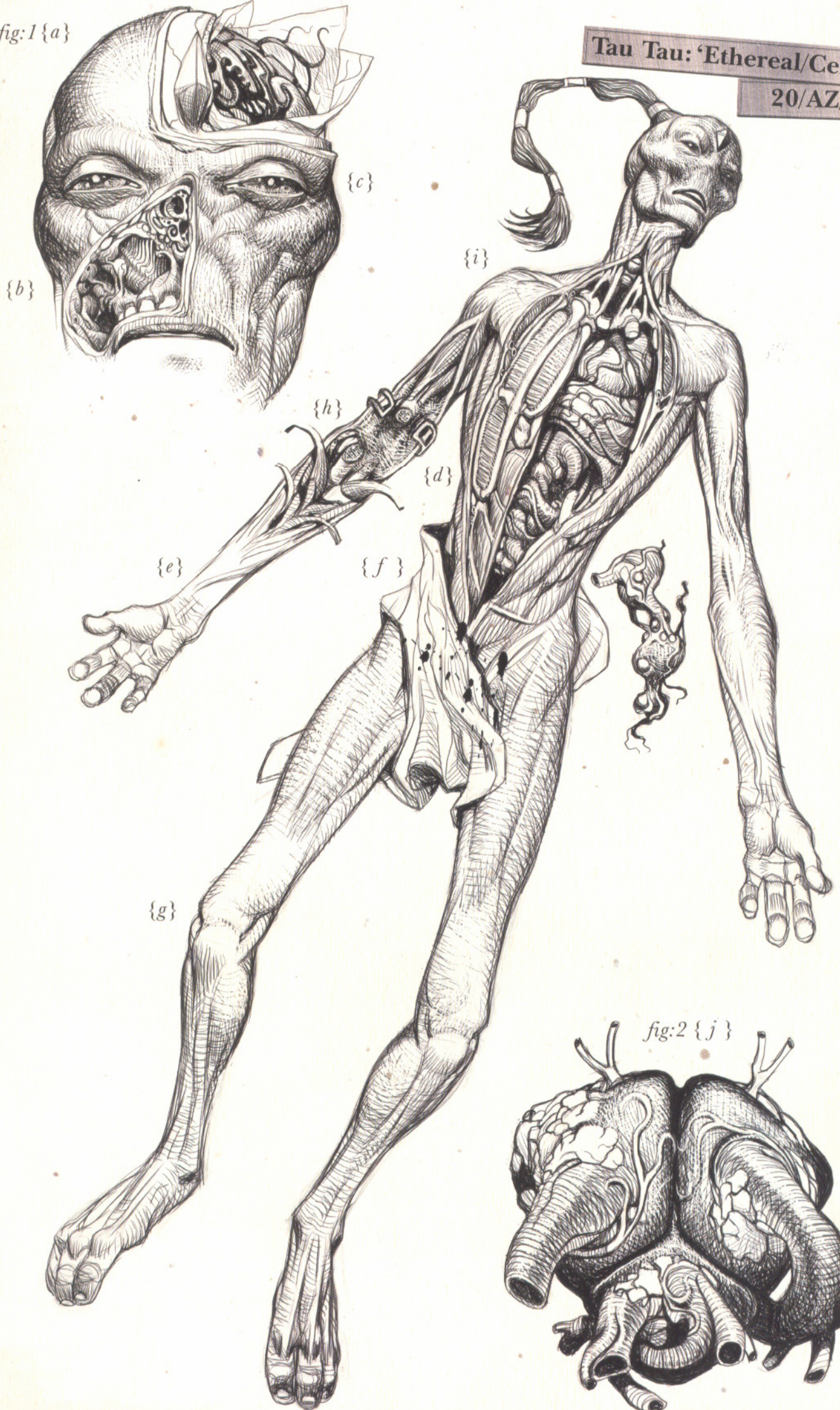
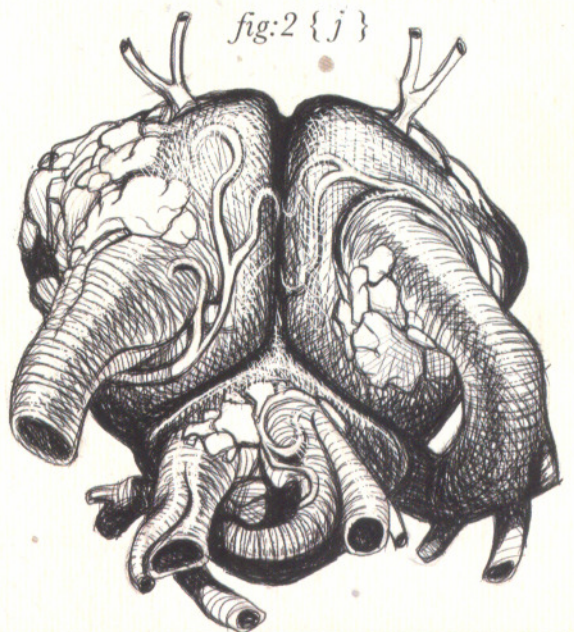


fig:2 {j}



DISSECTION REPORT



SUBJECT: *Tau Tau*; Tau 'Ethereal'.

AGE: 61 'Tau'cyrs' (approx 49yrs). Adult. **GENDER:** Female

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: GAKHAR T'EHLX, then **SERVITOR #32-11-G.**

DAY 57, 5TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is deceased female adult *Tau Tau*. Cause of death is asphyxia following cyanide intake. NB: Specimen was poisoned during sleep, without obvious distress. Annotated observations to follow [see attached Arco-stylus diagram].

- a. Head. Endoskeletal 'skull' reveals age-knitted growth plates: close analogy to human *cranium*. Cavity contains spongy cerebrum encased in fluidic membrane. 'Hair' analogue is protein-fibre extruded from dermis (*spec*: hormonally triggered?).
- b. Olfactory Chasm. Evidence of densely-massed subdermal receptor neurons; unexpected size & complexity of cilia. Conclusion: subject's scent-detection vastly superior. NB: Ethereal caste displays unknown 'diamond' organ.
- c. Ocular organs. Lateral arrangement (185° peripheral) and 'mammalian' structure analogous with human eye. Primitive photoreceptors suggest limited sensitivity of vision. Conclusion: subject relies upon advanced olfactory senses (and technology?) to reconcile poor eyesight.
- d. Internal cavity. Indoskeletal cage of vertical ribs contains upper vital organs. Note size of single folded lung, evidence of vestigial secondary stomachs (*cf. ruminants?* – see *g.*) and *Quadravulvus* pulmonary muscle [*see k.*]. Conclusion: efficiency and durability of internal organs comparable to our own.
- e. Upper limbs. Three manipulatory digits plus opposable thumbs. Unblemished dermis suggests manual labour atypical.
- f. Clothing (majority removed). Complex woven fabric (material unknown); geometric patterns styled in copper filigree.
- g. Perambulatory limbs. Tertiary joint analogous to Terran *artiodactyls*: suggests evolution from cloven-hoofed ruminant. Extreme vulnerability of padded elements incongruous with general robustness of subject. (*Spec*: unusual periods of accelerated racial development have not advanced all organs at uniform rate).
- h. Skeletal cross-section. 'Bones' comprise sealed fibrous strands with internal 'comb' structure (*spec*: less dense in Ethereal specimen than warrior caste). No marrow analogue in evidence: suggest platelet/immuno defences operate subdermally [*see j.*].
- i. Dermis. Uniform monotone (grey/blue) and hairless [*see a.*]. High concentration of porous nodules suggests efficient perspiration process (typical of arid-indigenous organism). Secondary stratum (above musculature) comprises complex tubular runnels, inc. capillaries and glandular nodules. Conclusion: immuno system regulated by dispersed systemic layer, allowing immediate and efficient release of chemical defences.
- j. **DETAIL:** Quadravalvic heart. *Atria* are distinct from *ventricles*, and divided by complex filter-sheaths. Each segment surrounded by fatty deposits of high toxicity; regulated by capillary network feeding renal system. *Spec*: Subject's heart doubles as liver, delivering impurities from circulatory and digestive systems alike, to be filtered and removed as waste.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject's anatomy suggests a highly developed species of analogous physical durability to mankind. Physical structure, general organic processes and reproductive anatomy all show remarkable similarities. Is this racial parallelism purely coincidental?

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.066.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 57, 10TH/20TH
LIBRARY.

I was awoken early today by Interrogator Malkiss, who was as jittery as ever. He's been trying to overcome the StimmPulse addiction he picked-up during our recent undercover operations, though frankly it's a comfort to know he's alert all the time. Thank the good Emperor for his sleeplessness tonight: had he not been awake he would have missed the cries of our Astropath. I've served with five psykers in my career and I know well their eccentricities, but this...

She raved about spirals and iron devils and something she called the 'laughing question'. I don't mind confessing her words unnerved me. Worse still, she'd cut herself: deep spiral slices all over her body.

Malkiss tended to her as best he could, and I took my leave to reflect on this strange event. Is there some malevolent aura to this place, disturbing our dreaming minds?

I decided to breakfast, but the provisions from the shuttle were spent and the kitchen servitors merely glared when I commanded them. Most infuriating! I sought to question Darvus, but his cell - next to my own - was empty, and I hastened downstairs to see what the little worm was up to. I found him in the laboratory - slippery with blue fluids, up to his elbows in the mangled body of a creature I recognised from pict-slates as a Tau: a race of

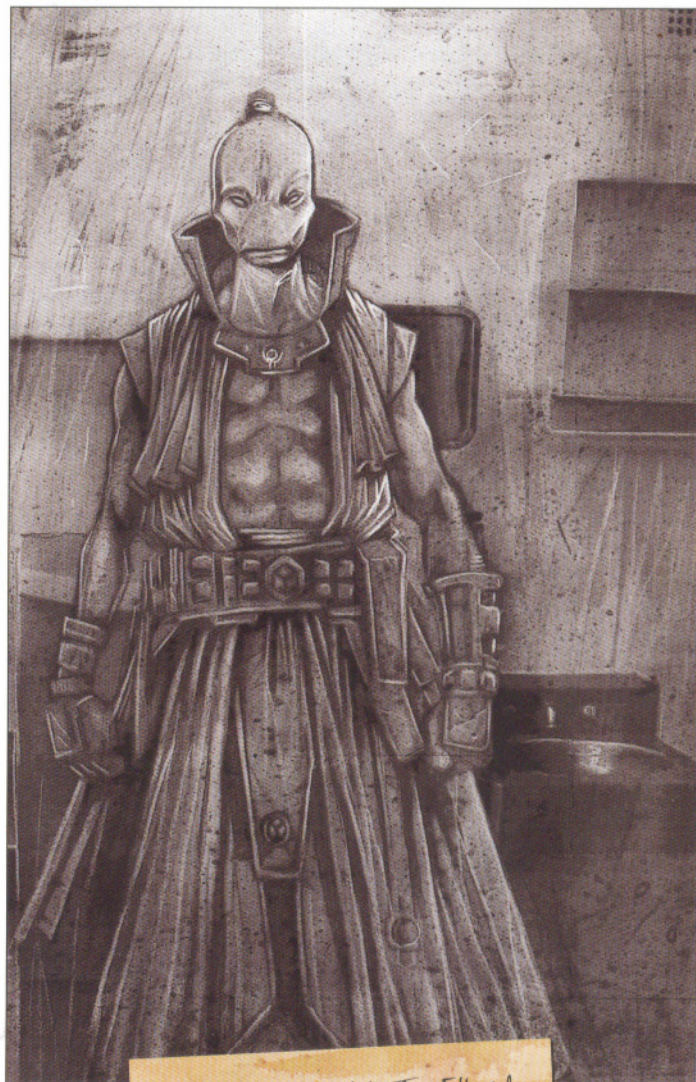
beings from the Eastern fringe whose society is divided by distinct castes, named after the elements. The Fire Caste are warriors, the Water Caste diplomats, and so on. All deeply tedious.

I found myself yet again horrified by the presence of that damnable Kroot. Evidently Darvus needed an assistant to fulfil the menial functions of the lab. A poor excuse to fraternise with his obscene pet! I swear to the Throne, were it not for the possibility of progress in his work I would have put Darvus to a heretic's death two days ago, and burned Gakhar the instant I saw him. Alas, I've noticed Darvus's predilection for childlike sensitivities - slaying his favourite pet, I deemed, would not be conducive to his cooperation. I had him return the beast to its cell, told him I'd tolerate no more of his heresy, and left him to his labours with a servitor attending.

Incidentally, his explanation for the state of the facility's provisions was as curious as it was unexpected. Evidently there's a tiny colony a short way through the rainforest: a group of Imperial zealots whom Ralei invited to settle decades ago. They pay a monthly tithe - foods and materials - to the facility, whose function they could not guess. It seems these pilgrims have fallen behind with their payments. I've sent Malkiss to investigate and while I wait his return I shall log Darvus's dissection report with my other recordings. Perhaps... Yes... Perhaps I shall have a brief hunt through the library's files for anything useful on these Tau.

In the Emperor's name, of course.

*Picts of astropath D'Reyx's
self-inflicted scars*



Anco-stafius study of the Tau Ethereal

Classified

RALEI: So, do you have a name?

[Silence]

RALEI: Oh, come now. I know you understand me. My servant Darvus tells me you've been trying to convince him to release you for hours. Your command of our language is very impressive.

AUN: What do you want with me?

RALEI: Ahhh... There we are. Was that so hard?

AUN: What do you want with me, gue'la?

RALEI: Simply to learn, my nameless friend.

AUN: Forgive my incredulity. Your race has never struck us as holding much interest in learning.

RALEI: Hah. Mercifully we aren't all alike. For example, Aun - that's what your caste is called, yes? - I should be delighted if you would tell me all that you can about the 'Tau-var'.

AUN: The Tau'va. [long pause.] I daresay you think you already know all there is to know.

RALEI: Nonetheless...

[The AUN reclines her head, then straightens]

AUN: Very well. If I am denied the company of my people I can at least represent their righteousness. The Tau'va is the one true pathway. Where you gue'las place your faith in a god that can affect your life not at all, the Tau'va brings every Tau to contentment.

RALEI: But what is it?

AUN: Selflessness, you would call it. The Greater Good. The knowledge that by staring inwards one finds only solitude, but by staring outwards, by devoting oneself to the race and its quest for perfection, there is harmony and peace.

RALEI: An ongoing quest? So you admit your empire is not yet perfect?

AUN: Of course not. What is? The Tau'va is the path, gue'la, not the destination.

RALEI: And you greyskins all just... agree to follow the same path?

AUN: Is that so hard to believe? Why should we rail against that which makes most sense? Each Tau is free to choose their destiny. That they all choose the Tau'va is merely testament to its righteousness. It is a unifying ideal.

RALEI: Unifying. Ah, yes. I've heard that argument before. And what happens when you find someone who doesn't want to be unified, eh? Subjugation.

AUN: You miss the point. The Greater Good is no mere diversion. No empty godhood in which we place our faith. It is a necessity, human. It is the only thing that can save the galaxy from itself. We have a saying. Aur'ocq shath'r'i tskan sha Tau'va. 'Unity comes to all things, in time'.

RALEI: Whether they like it or not?

[Silence.]

RALEI: All right. Another question. What do you know of O'Shovah?

[The AUN stiffens. Long pause.]

AUN: You think yourself cleverer than me, gue'la, but I assure y-

RALEI: Evading my question isn't clever, Aun, just a sign that I've hit a nerve. I ask you again: what do you know of O'Shovah? What do you know of Commander Farsight?

[Silence]

RALEI: Let me start you off. It's a story I heard from a trader on the edge of the Damocles' Gulf. Seems this O'Shovah was a great hero of yours in the Fire caste. Genius at whatever he did, just so long as what he was doing was fighting. Isn't that how it is with you Tau? Water caste to talk and debate, Air caste to shuttle you around, Earth caste to do the dirty work. Everyone with their niche, no interbreeding, no intermixing. So, O'Shovah sets off to reclaim some colonies, and naturally there's an Ethereal in charge. Except the Aun gets killed and O'Shovah ends up in command. Suddenly there's no one reminding him about the bloody Tau'va, and he's a long way from home. So what does he do, Aun? I mean, like you said, the Tau'va is something you choose to follow, yes? Surely O'Shovah would've carried on with the peace and tranquillity crap, despite it all? Aun?

[Silence]

RALEI: Except he didn't. He set up on his own. His very own little empire, without you Ethereals telling him what to do, without your wretched Tau'va running his life.

[Silence]

RALEI: You said it yourself, Aun. Why should we rail against that which makes most sense? Well maybe it only makes sense whilst you lot are in charge.

[Silence]



Author: Genetor Secundus, Zachary Santiago

Date: 0.638.755.M41 On Behalf: Divisio Genetus, Adeptus Mechanicus

Much has been made already of the recent ancestry of the Tau. Their social, physical and cultural evolution has achieved in the past six millennia what other sentient species have not within a hundred. Whilst we may partially attribute their racial divergences (ie: the separation of a core species into genetically distinct 'castes') to environmental conditions ('Zachary's Theorem of Adaptive Divergence', see Ref: AdMech/99348844/Xen583), there still remains an inexplicable ideological jump. Physical evolution may be traced in fossils and artefacts, and though it is true there are great chasms in our understanding of how the Tau 'came to be' (in the proverbial instant our backs were turned), it's my fervent belief that the greatest surprises these creatures offer shall not be physical, but spiritual...

++TIGHTBEAM TRANS-

MIT++

++CORDIALIS MERCATOR
TO INQUISITORIAL ENVOY
RALEI++

++SPECIMENS CAPTURED
AS REQUESTED. ITEM: ONE
KROOT, MALE, UNINJURED.
ITEM: ONE TAU, FEMALE,
UNINJURED ++

++PLEASE COMMUNICATE
COORDINATES OF REN-
DEZVOUS FOR TRANSFER
AND PAYMENT++

++NOTE TAU SPECIMEN IS
ETHEREAL. EXTREME DIF-
FICULTY AND RISK IN
CAPTURE. ADDITIONAL
FUNDS REQUESTED IN
RECOMPENSE ++

Warpdamned bounty hunters!
Always after more money.
But still... An Ethereal?

fig:1

{b

Tau forces led by Commander Farsight O'Shovah, prior to
turning renegade. (Pict-capture: Imperial datum-drone
113-gamma-121842-Z deserted colony world Becubra's Hope)

SHOVN/ARCO/110045 667674.146463M SIG.5564



DETAIL: Unknown 'diamond-organ', in the forehead of the Tau Ethereal. Ridged carapace contains ultradense chemo/hormonal fluids (overpowering scent). Rear ganglia connects to cerebral lobe. Polyp-structures vaguely reminiscent of 'pheromone' glands amongst Terran invertebrates (cf. silk worm). (Spec: Perhaps a pheromonal communication system? The sensitivity of Tau olfactory senses would certainly support a process of airborne chemical 'signifiers'. Perhaps the Ethereal asserts a measure of control over lesser castes? Results are inconclusive, and the purpose of this organ remains unknown.)

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 57, 16TH/20TH
LABORATORY.**

There. Another of my treasures brutalised and lost.

I've delivered my final notes to the inquisitor, while he fiddled with the consoles in the control room. Evidently his grasp of the Logic Engine isn't as complete as he'd like.

I found little of any relevance in my dissection. By the Ommissiah's light, how long can I go on like this?

[pause]

Despite it all, the inquisitor received my notes with indecent excitement. I don't understand him. One moment he'll rail against my work, curse me for a heretic and the next he'll absorb every word of my studies as if entranced.

What could be so fascinating in the findings I presented?

I find the more involved he becomes the less reward my work carries for me. I imagine myself culling my treasures solely for his entertainment.

And always the question: which will I pick tomorrow?

I need to sleep. I cannot.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.067.805.M41

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 57, 17TH/20TH
LIBRARY.**

Darvus doesn't understand. He doesn't realise this one simple diagram – which he took to be so mundane – proves Ralei's point. He hides behind his 'perhaps' and his 'inconclusive', but *I* see the truth.

The Tau'va is no charming ideology, as the Tau would have it, it is a dark thing. And today, Darvus has discovered the means of its application.

The Ethereals have been controlling their subjects all along. Remove the Aun caste, and the Greater Good has no meaning. Without their chemical puppetry, their pheromone manipulation, the Tau Empire is reduced to an anarchic pack of disparate creatures, without cohesion.

That's their flaw. *That's* their weakness. Everything they believe is a lie. If we can open their eyes the possibilities are endless.

How I love to see these arrogant beings picked apart! How I enjoy watching their smug beliefs shredded. Finally, I begin to understand Ralei's compunction in establishing this facility.

[pause]

Again, let me repeat my intentions: it is a nest of heresy and I shall shut it down. But what vulnerabilities will it reveal to me next? I can barely wait.

It grows late. Malkiss hasn't returned from the colony. Where *is* he?

fig:1 {a}



fig:2 {g}



Classification N/A: 'ELDAR'
I/AH/ELD

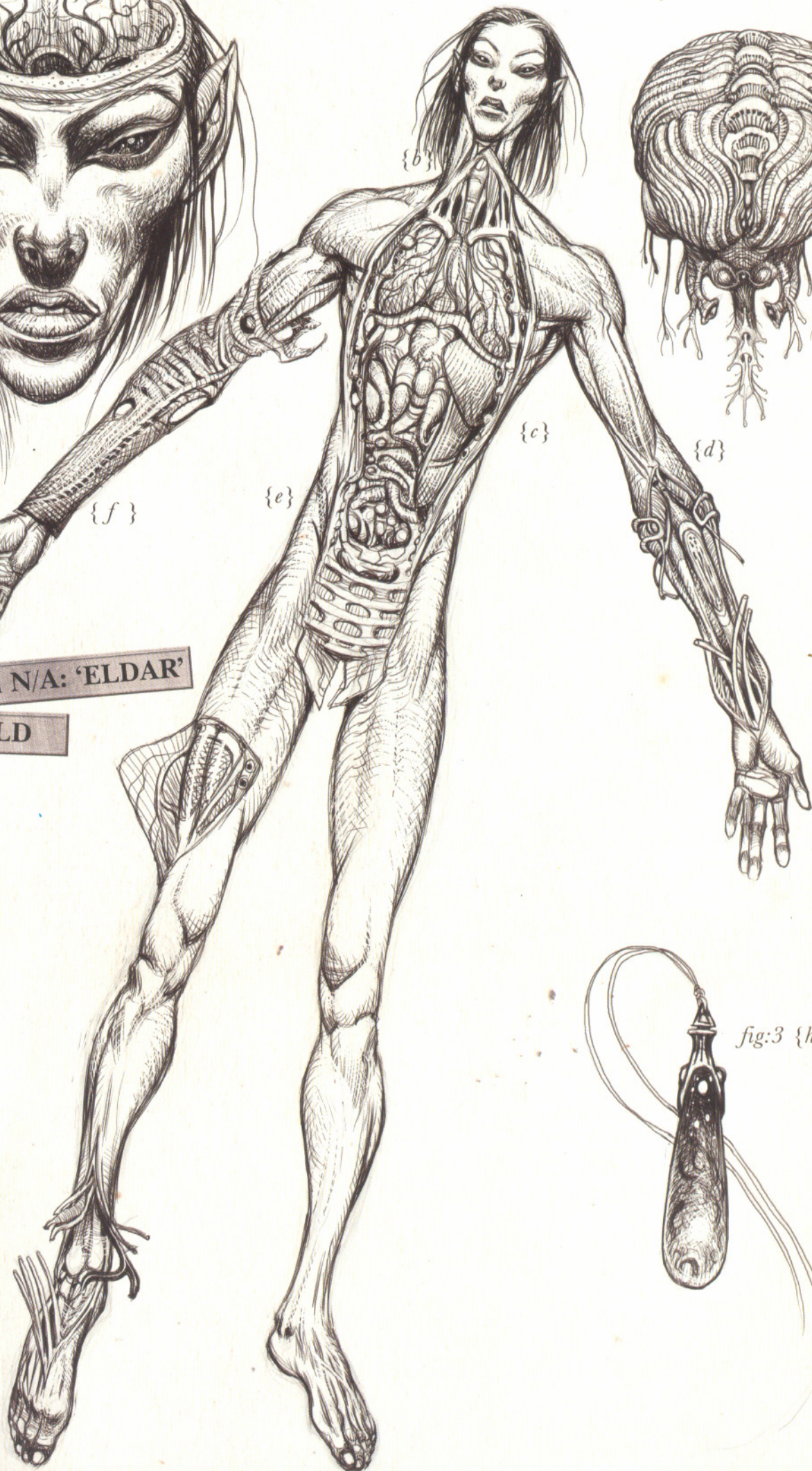
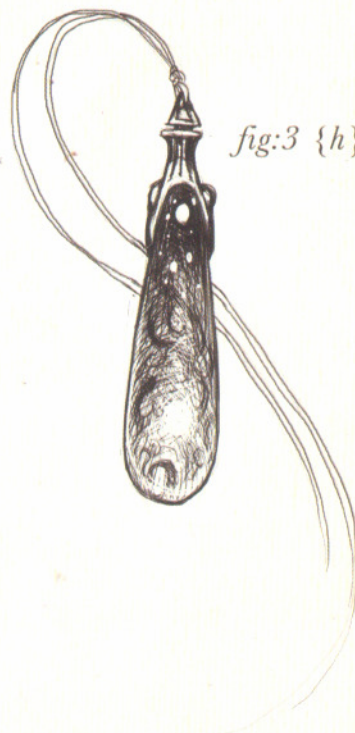


fig:3 {h}



DISSECTION REPORT



SUBJECT: Designation unknown; 'Exodite?' Eldar.

AGE: Unknown. Adult. **GENDER:** Male

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G.

DAY 58, 8TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject lacks *biologis* classification: no 'root' species known nor genetic analogues applicable. Cause of death is asphyxia following cyanide intake. Annotated observations to follow [see attached Arco-stylus diagram].

- a. Head. External analogue to human *cranium*. Structural similarities do not extend inwards: skull demonstrates unusual bone texture [see d.] and teeth fundamental 'outgrowths' of jawbone. Ocular dissection: spherical eye-balls packed with unknown polyps. Conjecture upon quality of eyesight impossible. Pointed eartips packed with nerve-endings (*Spec:* erogenous?).
- b. Neck/vertebrae. Densely packed 'muscle' analogues ('fibres' spiral-structured, *cf.* coiled springs?) surround complex column of intermeshed segments. Entire structure suggests enormous elasticity and tolerance to movement. Conclusion: physiology supports high-speed manoeuvrability. No body fat (or analogue) present.
- c. Internal cavity. Ribs form fused 'wings', arching from elasticated spine. Inner organs multifarious. Association with human organs difficult: suggests vague human analogue, but organs demonstrate complexity and aesthetic 'tidiness' unprecedented in study. Speculative evidence of pulmonary muscle, lung analogues, temperature regulators (twelve, along each internal wall) and detached lymph-glands (free roving?). Conclusion: subject's biology too complex to comprehend within time allowed.
- d. Upper limbs broadly human-analogous (external). Bone texture and formation suggests solidification from liquid; complex joints and 'fused' portions retain flexibility and durability. (*Spec:* organic resin?) No marrow analogue, but internal cavities packed with fibrous channels of unknown purpose (*Spec:* delivery of free-roving lymph glands?). Bones far lighter than human analogue.
- e. Abdominal cavity. Subject possesses flexible bony 'plates', ie: secondary ribcage beneath abdominal muscles; here folded downwards. Digestive and renal systems match upper cavity in grace and complexity (NB: no obvious peristalsis, chemical enzymes or degenerative fluids in evidence: how does digestion *occur* – if at all?). Reproductive organs outwardly analogous to human male, but gamete delivery appears progressive – ie: corresponding organs for successive 'stages'. (*Spec:* conception occurs over extended period; additional genetic material supplied at preordained stages throughout gestation? Inconclusive.) Again, no chemical stores or bodyfat analogues.
- f. Clothing. Loose woven fabric, unpatterned (*Spec:* scout robes?). Material unknown.
- g. **DETAIL.** Eldar brain, removed. Note multiple lobes, extreme density of cerebral matter, various unknown ganglia and central ridged organ, function unknown. Fundamental elements (ie: *occipital* & *parietal* lobes) reminiscent of human structure, albeit with increased density and complexity. Additional layers of unknown composition – *cf.* stratum?
- h. Unknown decoration/artefact/jewel. Subject has worn item since capture. Since death occurred colour has altered (violet to red).

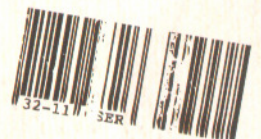
GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject's external and structural anatomy is shockingly human-analogous. As anticipated, internal elements reflect extra-terrestrial origin: overall complexity precludes classification and identification of elements. All organs display an unsurpassed aesthetic order and configuration, suggesting a level of development far exceeding our own. All findings are ultimately speculative. Subject represents a being of such highly-evolved composition it is doubtful we could even comprehend the function of certain structures, even given time to study them.

NB: Why should a creature of such obvious superiority and distinction reflect our structural pattern so closely?
[See also: *Tau, Hrud, Ork*]

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 6TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

What system of selection guides me each day? I can't say. Maybe a subconscious bias? Maybe it's just random. I only know that as I stepped down into the basement this morning to make my way to cell 1 for my... inspection. I passed the sixth cell and happened to glance in. They're strange creatures, the Eldar, outwardly so similar to us but at the same time so different. Like seeing a copy of a painting whose composition you know intimately, and discovering some indescribable element that isn't quite right.

The creature treated my inspection with the same indifference it has every day since its arrival, and I believe I decided then and there that it would be the next to die. Such a godlike thing it is to decide the fates of these creatures. It is as thrilling as it is horrific.

I delivered the cyanide to its cell and commanded the logic engine to seal it tight. It's comforting to have my menagerie overseen by such a dead intellect. The alien died as it lived: calmly. I'm glad. The Thyrrus's death throes still haunt me.

[a loud hammering, off]

What's this, now? A commotion upstairs... Someone pounding on the main door. By the Ommissiah's blood – this place has fallen to riot and restlessness since the upstart inquisitor arrived! Let *him* sort out the disturbance.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.069.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 8TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

Malkiss has returned – battered and bloody from head to foot. He's been beaten to paste by a mob. I've placed him in his cell where he sits gasping, wincing at his wounds. There's no talking to him – his lips are sealed with swelling – but the few words he managed do not bode well.

He says he was followed. Chased from wherever he spent the night. I've left him with stylus and parchment to report, and in the meantime I shall go to the roof for a sight of whatever pursued him.

Why can nothing ever be simple?

*Pict Capture Cauteldrone AA/43-a): Villagers of
Salius Biegel gather beyond facility walls*



Classified

Report FAO Inquisitor Sasham, Author — Interrogator Malkiss

Left Inf. facility approx noon yesterday o-day 57, locald, travelling into forest due west as instructed, seeking Imperial colony. Discovered path, approx two kilometres length.

Discovered colony village o- 'Salins Biegel' approx. 1230hrs. Small settlement — estimated population 200. Extensive forest clearance for grazing livestock o-grax, cantillus, sheep and plantations.

Made contact with villagers: presenting symbols of Inquisitorial authority and demanding audience with leader. Suspicion obvious, but audience with Mayor Okland granted. Mayor is officious fool, disrespectful of authority: cast slanderous aspersions at Inquisition and held me at gunpoint.

During interview following information gathered:

Salins Biegel founded 785. M41 o-twenty terran yearsd, on invitation from 'Governor' Ralei. Villagers have almost no contact with Inf. facility, other than payment of monthly tithe: prearranged quantity meat, vegetable, firewood and o-annually mined iron.

Until recently, villagers had no inkling of facility's purpose, nor cared.

Approx. one week ago, stranger arrived in village. Claimed to come from facility. During audience revealed true purpose of building, ie: bestiary for xenos. Villagers outraged, but sceptical.

Stranger 'proved' authenticity by predicting arrival of vessel within five days. Villagers decided to withhold tithe payment until matter settled. When shuttle from Perduco Astrus landed, colony judged the stranger had told the truth.

Stranger has since vanished.

Population of Salins Biegel in state of open insurgence. Villagers feel betrayed by Inquisition and terrified of alien inhabitants.

Mayor Okland ordered villagers to interrogate me further. During severe beating was able to escape into forest. Hid from search parties overnight, until hounds released at dawn. Was pursued directly to facility. Suspect my escape will exacerbate popular discontent.

Interrogator Xe'l Malkiss

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.069.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 9TH/20TH

CONTROL ROOM

Malkiss has always been a master of understatement. 'Exacerbate the situation,' he says!

I suppose I can't blame them, simple peasants that they are. Their reaction exactly reflects mine on discovering the function of this place. But what of this stranger? What malevolent force is this, stirring disharmony — and able to predict our arrival, no less.

There is far more here than meets the eye. I hope Darvus is content, slicing away in his little crypt, as the rest of the world turns to madness — and all just to allow him an extra few hours with his 'treasures.' If ever there was a case for slaughtering the remaining xenos and having done with it, this is it. Darvus had better make this delay worthwhile.

I go now once more to the library. I find myself strangely calmed by its wealth of knowledge. Perhaps it will bring me the clarity I need, to reflect on the insurrection beyond our walls.

Now. What new subject does Darvus turn his blade towards today?

Author: Explorator (Archeos) Eoia Chouk

Recipient: Inquisitor Maturin Rolei

Date: 0.058.794.M41

Astropathic Duct: Maqvis / Callathii / Björn's (Safaur Inquis)

My lord, forgive me. The expedition you commissioned is incomplete.

As commanded, my crew and I journeyed to the planet 'AR45#33-(Cadia)', which, by dint of its closeness to the Occularis Terribilis, was a feat of diplomatic wrangling and disobedience.

That the planet lies precisely on the border of the 'safe' corridor betwixt Cadia and the Chaotic 'Eye' is evidenced by its barrenness: I doubt any life could exist there for long. We began our excavation without delay, and were immediately rewarded. Ancient artefacts (technologies beyond even speculative identification) were discovered, among ruins. On the fifth day we uncovered a fossil skeleton preserved in gypsum. Given its slightness and bony structure I concluded this to be an Eldar, just as you anticipated we might find. I can only guess at what guided your supposition. Chemolithic tests indicate the fossil is tens of millions of years old. If true, the implications are shattering: these Eldar have been resident in our galaxy - technologically able - for longer than our species has existed.

On the twenty-fifth day we were attacked. From their manner of dress and speed I identified the raiders as from that dark cadre of Eldar, about whom so little is known. They were gone as abruptly as they arrived, taking with them the lion's portion of our samples and slaughtering many of my staff. In the face of despair I persevered. As fortune had it, one of the invaders had been felled, and I compared its body to our fossil.

Understand this: to juxtapose specimens divided by any gulf greater than a few millennia, an archaeologist would not expect synchronicity. Over such a span, a species is inevitably altered; change brought about by diversification, mutation and the like. In such contrasts I might expect a diminishment or increase in average height, a thickening of bone density, or a swelling of the forebrain. Over an age measured not in thousands but in millions, far more profound changes would be assured.

These two Eldar were identical.

The invaders returned during the night and forced our retreat, burning everything. I escaped the planet with nought but my life.

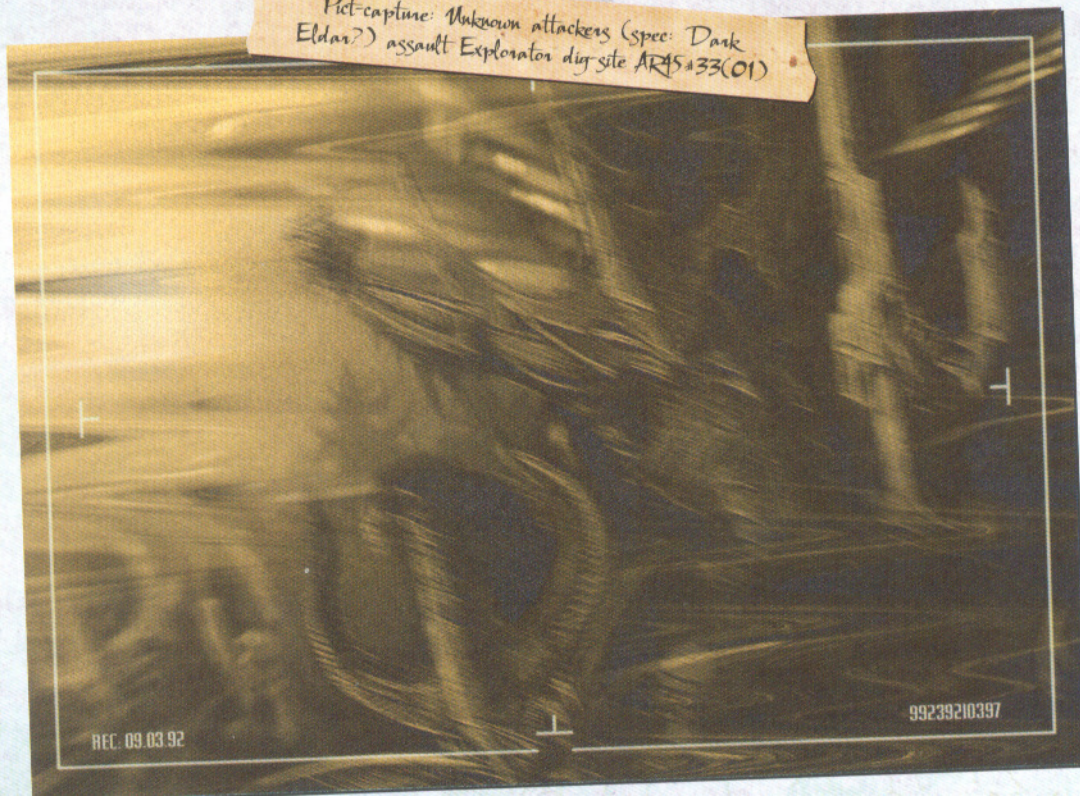
Since my escape, I have tracked down some speculative essays regarding that strange race. Their past (our scholars tell us) is defined around a great tragedy, which left them exiles. Could it be that AR45#33 (spared the full ravages of Chaos by its nearness to the Cadian corridor) is the last uncorrupted of these 'Crone worlds'?

There is another, more troubling issue. As mentioned, evolution has spared the Eldar any changes. For such racial permanence one would expect a level of simplicity, as in the sharks of Terra's inner oceans - unchanged in aeons past. But the Eldar represent psychological and physical complexity on an unknown scale. How has evolution not taken a hand in their simplification? How has their culture stagnated and turned so radically inwards? Such speculations lead me to the same conclusion: the Eldar have not reacted to the ravages of time in a natural fashion.

There are only two other beings I can think of that may claim resistance to generational change. The first are those beings engineered by the craft of genitors and lost sciences, be they livestock or aristocratic bio-pets.

The other, though its history is measured across a span far tinier than that of the Eldar, is mankind itself.

Pict-capture: Unknown attackers (spec: Dark Eldar?) assault Explorator dig-site AR45#33(01)



And now turn to the Eldar specimen, captured last year by my field agents in the Segmentum Tempestus. As an enemy combatant during the Saluete Delta colony war (in which settlers clashed with a pre-existing xeno population), one assumes our captive was part of an 'exodite' community. We know little enough of the Craftworld strain, who appear most numerous (or at least most often encountered), less still of the 'Dark Eldar' pirates, and all but nothing of these reclusive planetary settlers. What caused their departure from the Eye of Terror (where, if Explorator Chouk is to be believed, their ancestry lies)? What was the nature of this racial fall? Such questions and more we had hoped to answer. How infuriating, then, that in its first year of captivity the subject has uttered not a single word, nor attempted to communicate in any fashion. It eats little, maintains its cleanliness, produces crystalline spoor without odour, takes four hours' ritualistic exercise every day, and otherwise perches upon the edge of its palette, staring into space. For such a priceless specimen, it has betrayed nothing.

Thank the Emperor for Darvus's studies. From skin samples he has determined not only that our captive shares the 'cellular' arrangement of our flesh, but that - like our own - every aspect of its biology is governed by tiny strings of twined alchemical bonds. Unsurprisingly, this cellular 'code' exceeds ours in complexity - a quintuple helix where ours is double, twenty chemical bases replace our four, and the Eldar's sample (says Darvus) 'distorts in response to the examiner's concentration'. He theorises this 'resonance' enables the rearrangement of the chemical code, and thereby the transmission of information. Is this how the Eldar utilise their psychic skills?

At any rate, the structural similarities between Eldar and human genetic chemistry are impossible to ignore, as those of our physiques. In a galaxy as given to exoticism

A diagram showing Eldar and human DNA strands

HUMAN DNA



ELDAR DNA



this, can it truly be coincidence that there exists such a wealth of similarity? Eldar, Ork, Hrud, Tau: outwardly each is troublingly analogous. Two legs, two arms. Head at zenith. Two forward-facing eyes. Mouth. Earholes. Teeth. Fingers. The list goes on - and we humans have our own place within it. Is there some deeper pattern being adhered to? Some unknowable scheme that eschews the involvement of evolution and preordains a 'classic structure' in a race's biology?

And if so, who is responsible?

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.824.794.M41

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.069.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 11TH/20TH LIBRARY.

Heresy! How casually he associates mankind with deviants. Has he forgotten his Emperor?

[pause]

And yet even among his speculation there lie glimmers of interest. He speaks of a 'psychic resonance' imbuing the dead alien, and I have a mind to understand better these 'Eldar'. Something about them fills me with tragedy. At one time their empire covered the galaxy - as ours does today. What could have brought them so low?

Is that not, after all, the purpose of studying history to avoid past mistakes?

I have sent my astropath to Darvus's lab. If these ancient beings truly do possess some mystic quality, perhaps she may provide less baseless - and less profane - insights than Ralei.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 11TH/20TH LABORATORY

He sends his lackeys now - is that it? A blind woman sent to spy - who ever heard of such a thing?

[pause]

Or perhaps his intentions are pure after all. Claims of assistance, probing deeper into the histories of the Eldar. Hmm.

In either case, I shan't turn my nose up at the offer. The artefact locker beside the lab positively groans with the assorted detritus of my master's travels. We shall see what the witch makes of the Eldar collection.

Experiment Report, code 1/AH/ELD

Aim: Determination of perceived psychic 'signature' incumbent to Eldar artefacts. Astropath D'Reyx proposes to 'read' each piece.

Method: An assortment of items of Eldar origin are placed before D'Reyx. From the outset she appears uncomfortable and afraid; sweat gathers on her brow and she murmurs unintelligibly. After 4.05 minutes she divides artefacts into piles. A set of Imperial-Guard Enemy Recognition Cards are requested and retrieved from the Library. D'Reyx places one card beside each pile as she speaks.

Item - Group 1 comprises artifacts tentatively identified as "Craftworld" in origin. Foremost is a fluted helm (with bolter damage) recorded as "Guardian." Other items include a nugget of solidified resin (cf. amber?) containing a minute iridescent arachnid, two shuriken discs, a set of plated-armour gloves, a "wraithbone" tablet ("psychically-resonant superplastic" - attrib. Inq. Czevak) covered in interlocking characters of unknown significance, and a slender implement possibly musical in nature.

D'REYX: '...ancient sadness. Starcity circling the burning nest. The silver horde are re-arisen. Kaelis-Ra awakes afresh... The ancient war resumed, spiderscuttle sorrow, all interlinked. D-death in wraithsword, spirits infinity-abound. All is cyclical, all goes round yet remains the same. Always the dirges are echoes, always the boneworks reflections. There is nothing new, just regret and impotence.
'We are lost in the dark, and there is no morning.'

Item - Group 2 comprises artifacts suggesting a "Dark Eldar" source. Primarily weapon-based, identifiable artifacts include a "shredder", a "hydraknife", a "shardnet", as well as various multi-bladed stabbing implements; several poison-laced. Group also includes a sheaf of dried human skins (facial) and a vial of unknown liquid with a hypodermic administrator - presumably narcotic.

D'REYX: 'F-feel hunger for life, locked away in the dark place, hunted and hunting. Quench the thirst of the hungry bitch, feed her. Pain-horror-blood. Cut flesh, part joints, peel skin, rip muscle, taste filth. Kill or be killed. Sanctuary in Comorragh. Sanctuary in murder!
'Cut the world! Its shrieks divert her eye. Cringe and kill.'

Item - Group 3 comprises artifacts tenuously associated with "Exodite" Eldar. Artefacts are few in number and difficult to identify, but amidst various tools of (possibly) agricultural origin, items include a riding harness made of reptile-analogue skin, a set of bones (non human) marked with runes and engravings, an alabaster totem with a pair of bird-legs strapped to its base, the skull of a large reptilian creature (possibly an equestrian-analogue?), and the deceased-subject's "gem" gewgaw.

D'REYX: 'Willing exiles... Forwent the horror, purist and apologist and ascetist, veterans of Isha's war, ventured into shadow. Fled before the bow-wave of excess. Long lost, now, long changed. Solitary with tilled soil and lizard life. In quest and quaint we wax, we wane. We alone have changed.
'We alone shall see out this endless night.'

Item - Group 4 consists of all remaining artifacts: only three in number, which are impossible to classify. The first is a psychoplastic masque (similar but not identical to wraithbone), divided along its centre into dark and light, smiling and scowling halves. The second is a simple black feather (origin species unknown) with a ribbon tied about its shaft. The third is a tiny stuffed mannequin styled as a humanoid figure wearing black and white heraldry with a skull for a head, which - when moved - activates a tiny device contained within to simulate the sound of musical laughter. The origins of these items are unknown.

D'REYX: 'The parade. Oh, silent but laughing, a fluttering thing. S-see his cloak of stars and night. This trickster, t-this endless jester. The Bringer of Night, fooled, diverted, mesmerised, overcome. Laugh with the laughing god, outplay the great enemy, the great Yngir-Star-Hungry.
'And his ancient horde, his data-trove, guarded by dancing shadows. The Library held in ice. We laugh beyond mirth. The punchline is a blade.'

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.070.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 16TH/20TH
LIBRARY.

A poor result. I deliver my astropath to Darvus to delve into the Eldar's past, and receive nonsensical mutterings.

[sigh]

It doesn't matter. The Eldar are a dying race, dwindling away to nothing. I understand now why I felt tragedy when I considered them: not for some wondrous quality that was lost, but for the sheer *idiocy* of an unrivalled Empire tearing itself apart. The Eldars' tragedy was our good fortune. Let their memories rot. I need not learn their weaknesses – they are already a spent force.

Hunting through Ralei's ledger I found a transcript. My lords, do not be shocked by the identity of its author: an

inquisitor more renowned for his Radicalism even than Ralei. Czevak. Ha! To what other crackpot would the master of this Bestiary turn, seeking answers?

And what answers? Something of substance? Something to finally penetrate the veils of confusion? No. The Eldars' past is littered with secrecy and drama – of that we may be certain – but at the end of this day's reflection I stumble only to the following conclusion: *none of it matters*.

Whatever wisdom they would conceal behind riddle and half-truth is empty. Their mistakes will not be our own. Whatever caused their 'fall' is consigned to the past, whatever their ancient enemies – these 'Ymgir-Star-Hungry' – they are lost to time, and are no concern of ours.

Let the stanzas below be my last consideration on the subject, and let their cryptic nonsense speak volumes of the once-mighty Eldar: pleasing to behold, complex and enigmatic – but ultimately hollow.

Author: Inquisitor Czevak
Recipient: Inquisitor Maturin Ralei
Astropathic Duct: ++Unknown++

Understand this, Ralei. The interactions of the Eldar do not suffer human scrutiny. To delve too deep is to invite miscomprehension and insanity. We can but filter what little we know through our own mundane context: and in so doing, negate its value.

Nonetheless, you ask me to divulge what I can upon the history of these beings, and what few contacts I preserve among the Ordo Xenos speak highly of your willingness to delve deep in knowledge from which others would cringe. On this one occasion, I shall acquiesce, and consider my duty executed.

The following is a passage culled from a text held sacred by the host of Iyanden, translated by my xenolinguitor. In a volume of one thousand chapters, these two stanzas are all the Eldar have recorded of their defining tragedies. Why should they indulge in historical scripture when each carries the burden of detail in his memory? The Eldar do not document their lamentations, young Ralei. They live them.

I trust this concludes our correspondence. Do not seek my counsel again.

'First, in surprise lost, an' tears of Isba true spoke are [untranslatable],
Arose in firmament-arched-of-iron, Ymgir-Star-Hungry (lords Misrule).
We/us pantheon dwell, excel [untranslatable], for them, we stand, an'
wraithsword bare.

In pearls of Vaal is Dragon becalmed.

In chains of Kesrouis is [untranslatable] ensnared.

In blood of Lilien is Siren silenced.

An' in laughter, just that, confounded is, this Deathly Kaelis-Ra, and lost
for [untranslatable].

But in victor-clasp pantheon stood, we/us beside, and triumph
[untranslatable] beget.

Yet all are lost, and is on hunger sated.

'Second, in ages unchaste, when distant [untranslatable] gods were,
With triumph of age-lost victory swollen, an' purpose lost to
[untranslatable] cry:

Arose the Thirst.

Arose the snake of we/us.

Arose this echo of [untranslatable] timely excess.

A parting of ways, then. Collapse an' ruin an' blood, and this
[untranslatable] shall the Fall.

(From grace an' youth, we slip)

Some to the green and the soil, long before.

Some to the dark and the [untranslatable], bestride atrocity-veil,

Some to the wraithbarks, an' chased an' thrown out 'pon horror-tide.

An' all else are lost beside.'



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 17TH/20TH
LABORATORY

He's angry.

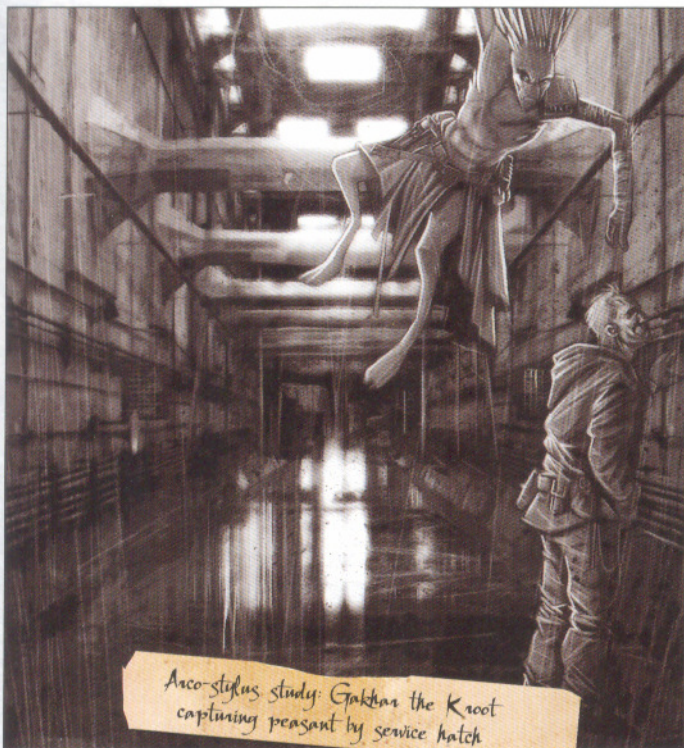
I showed him the results of his astropath's inspection. A direct insight into the psyche of the Eldar, and he turns his nose up and calls it nonsense.

Only by keeping the wretch impressed, by feeding him hints of weakness among my darlings' dissected bones, am I free to finish my work.

His patience will not last long. The mob outside have soured his mood. It won't be long before he once more plans the execution of my treasures.

I must act now. He *has* to understand. We can't equate the xenos so casually with 'evil'. He sits in the library, poring over my master's records, mesmerised and disgusted all at once. I must act quickly. They would never countenance this scheme if they knew about it.

I must free Gakhar in secret, and pray the inquisitor has the sense to recognise my good intentions when all is said and done.



Anco-stylus study: Gakhar the Kroot capturing peasant by service hatch

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.070.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 19TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

Madness! I'm surrounded by it.

He sincerely thought I would be *grateful*?

[pause]

My lords, forgive me, I must compose myself.

[long pause]

A little over one hour ago, Magos Biologis Darvus presented me with a 'gift'. A peasant from outside the keep, bound and gagged – clearly terrified! – for questioning.

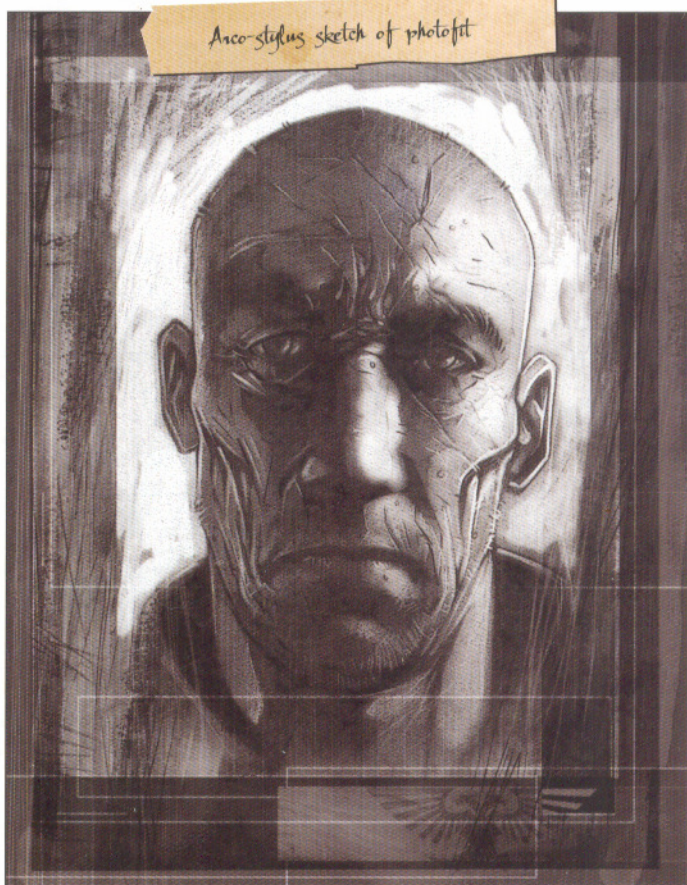
Perhaps I would have been grateful, were it not for the utter impossibility of the situation. Had I not spent all day considering the colonists' insurrection? Had I not

pondered how best to snatch one of them up for interrogation, without inviting assault or murder? And this little man Darvus – he thinks I will believe that *he*, alone, could do what I could not? No. No, he let up his explanation, soon enough.

The thrice-damned Kroot.

He released it to grab the first fool it found. He claimed this was demonstration enough, surely, that the beast was not only loyal, but useful – nay, indispensable.

I do not mind confessing that I lost my temper. Let him bear his bruises as symbols of his guilt. In the meantime I am left with this villager. I suppose it would be wasteful to forego this opportunity. I have a mind to find out more about this stranger, whose gossiping has precipitated the villagers' discontent.



Anco-stylus sketch of photofit

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.070.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 58, 20TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

There. It is done.

I attach an impression of the stranger, as described – under duress – by our captive colonist. The man has been dispatched. I can hardly return him to the crowds outside – not now he's seen the Kroot. And but for a single detail, that might well be the end of the whole troublesome business.

Except that the face he described is not unfamiliar to me. It is the face that hangs in the office, preserved in brushstrokes, It is Maturin Raleigh, but lacking hair.

Darvus must not learn of this. The merest deviation from his work will slip his labours far beyond the limits the Conclave have set.

We have seven days. Let us see how long my patience can endure.

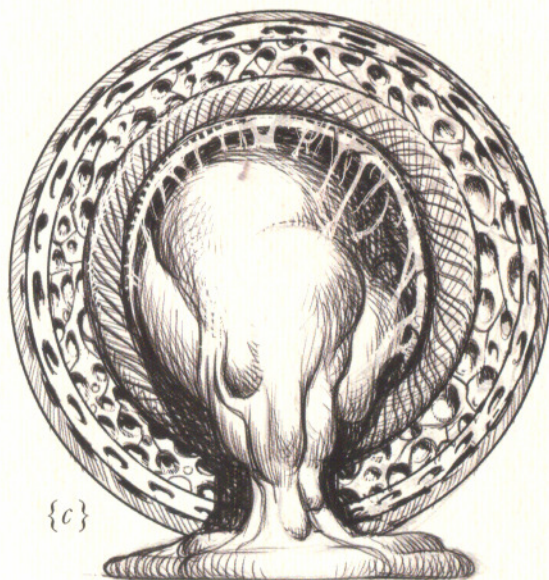
{a}



Unknown Des: 'UMBRA'

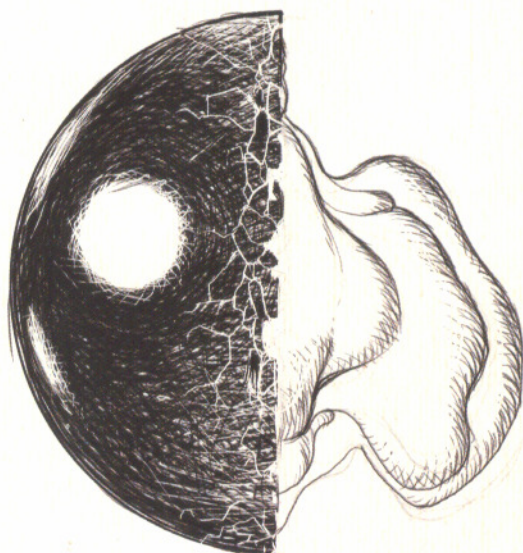
8/DP/UMB

{b}



{c}

{d}



DISSECTION REPORT

Classified

SUBJECT: Designation unknown; 'UMBRA' specimen.

AGE: Unknown. **GENDER:** Unknown.

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G, INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM

DAY 59, 9TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject defies typical biological classification. Cause of death is photoexposure [see attached report]. Annotated observations to follow.

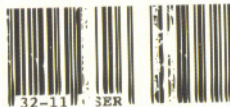
- Body. *Corpus* is smooth black sphere, diameter 80mm. Carapace of unknown substance – glossy, brittle, untextured. Swirling pearlescent patterning faded *post mortem*; surface is uniformly black. Carapace temperature remains 10°C despite application of melta tightbeam and liquid nitrogen. Obvious means of motion, respiration, digestion and excretion are not evident. Conclusion: subject is not organism in standard sense.
- Bisected cross-section. Surface incised with monofilament scalpel. *Corpus* comprises outer shell (thickness 13mm), inner cavity (diameter 54mm) and liquid core [see c.]. Outer shell composed of porous comb-structure, in state of (spherical) omnibalanced vacuum. Evidence of magnetised thread (*ferrous?*) between porous channels.
- Internal viscid. White liquid (total mass 50g). Analysis suggests presence of ferrous alloys, complex amino chains and unknown nitrous compounds. Liquid appears non-Newtonian and prone to random solidification and variation in density. Texture impossible to analyse: viscid appears frictionless. [*Spec:* any concept of familiar 'biology' contained herein? *Cf:* amoeboid lifeform? Could liquid operate as sonic/psychic resonator? *Cf:* *Pyseter catodon*]
- Side-section. Note cracked edges of incision: result of expelled vacuum-pockets within outer carapace.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Corpus dissection of negligible value.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus



Inq Brehm Sasham

Appendix Notes: CAUSE OF DEATH (appended by Magos Biologis Darvus, 1232hrs)

Plan to euthanise Umbra specimen (Cell 8) instigated 0900hrs. Inquisitor BREHM SASHAM attended, claiming desire to watch the author. (*Note the fool spent the whole time gaping at proceedings rather than monitoring me – D.*) Subject discovered in usual state: hovering at head-height in centre of containment cell. Usual attempts to attack via manifested 'shadowlimbs' contained by cell walls. Sasham astonished. Gaseous poisoning failed, 0924.

Inquisitor Ralei notes (ledger entry 6.306.794.M41) initial capture of creature dependent upon aversion to light, used in that instant as means of driving the beast into a prepared adamantium chamber. Theorised, given subject's apparent ability to manipulate and 'solidify' unlit areas, a total absence of shadow could prove fatal.

Accordingly introduced six antigravitic illuminator drones to cell (1102hrs), preconfigured to adopt evenly-spaced positions around subject. Illuminators activated at full strength for period of 30 seconds. Subject's 'body' was observed to brighten. A localised phenomenon (*Spec:* psionic pulse? Deathshriek?) was experienced by Inquisitor Sasham and myself: intense cranial pain, a flicker of images (humanoid figure splintering apart, turbulent warpstorm, deep space, a single word: LINGER).

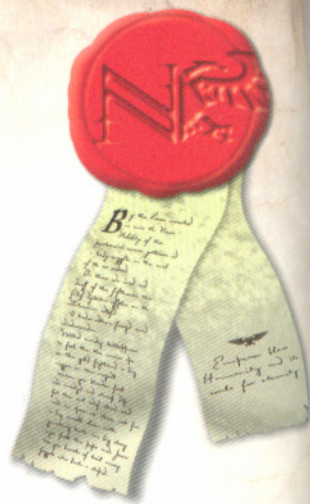
Phenomenon abruptly ended, subject's 'shell patterns' became inert, and *corpus* dropped to floor of cell.

Author: Novator Uncuhli Nachaas (Domus Nachaas, Terra sanctus)

Recipient: Inquisitor Maturin Rolei (Safaur-Inquis)

Subject: First Contact Umbra species.

Date: 0.383.794.M41



Inquisitor,

Permit me to express my most grievous displeasure. It is not the habit of the ancient House Nachaas to operate at the beck and call of the Inquisition. Nonetheless, I am ever his Divine Majesty's devoted servant, and despite its presumptuous tone I must oblige your request for information.

It was within my role as navigator of the Lunar Class Cruiser Marquessa Repentia that I – in the year 604.M41 – observed tactus primaris with the Umbra. During a period of tedious engagement with some enemy vessel or another (a Tau frigate, if memory serves) I took the opportunity to rest. I was thus alone (but for sixty servants and twenty concubines) when I felt a peculiar presence. Had my eyes not denied it, I might have assumed we were warpbound, and some intangible entity were brushing past us, as often occurs in that liquidinous realm.

With the engagement ended (the xenos scum defeated, Ave Imperator!) I was better able to direct the fleet commissar to the points of greatest disturbance. With recourse to vacuum-mobile drones we determined an infestation of sorts: a shoal of black spheres, clustered around the warp-drive and engine vents. These creatures are no new phenomenon, as any starfarer may attest, though it had always been assumed they were some sub-sentient pest indigenous to the vacuum, dumbly attracted to traces of warpstuff as a moth is drawn to light.

On this occasion, one among them gained access to the vessel's interior: affixed to the underbelly of a Fury Interceptor. Observing quarantine procedure, the officer of the watch ordered the pest destroyed and summoned stormtroopers to that end. No sooner had they opened fire, then all hell broke loose.

The creature was able to manipulate areas of darkness, drawing up matter like oil from those zones of deepest shadow: the cracks between bulkhead plates, beneath crates of supplies, even from the pupils of our eyes. This assemblage of umbrous material was deployed in a most horrific fashion: a confluence of hooks, blades, teeth and the like.

Seeing his squad slaughtered, and their barrage ineffectual, the commissar ordered a retreat and vented the hangar to the void. Adeo mori hostis Imperator.

In the years since, news has reached me of increasing incidents like this. I hear that every day the Martian shipyards uncover greater infestations around those warp-imbued elements of their vessels, and while most Umbra are easily dispersed, some – as on the Repentia – turn to murder and violence. It has been said that entire ships have been lost to the shadow-smiths, satellites ripped apart; even planetary colonies engaged by shapeless dark-matter entities (which only the mightiest weapons can harm). True, excesses of illumination seem to deter them, but whatever shadows are thereby cast merely afford greater means for retaliation.

Four weeks ago, it reached my ear that a member of my House was entreated by 'some person' to navigate a voyage to capture one such creature. Ancient Terra abounds with rumour, accurate and inaccurate alike, Rolei, and I'll own that to my ear such a safari seemed implausible, even heretical. And yet here I find myself asked – no, commanded – to give up what I know of the shadowed-terrors to you. A most remarkable coincidence.

Do not presume to pull your rank upon me again, Rolei, or I shall see to it that every party from the Congresium Xenos to the Paternova himself affixes a close eye to your studies, both sanctioned and independent. I believe we understand each other.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.072.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 59, 10TH/20TH
LIBRARY

How easy it would be to question one's own sanity.

I haven't eaten properly in two days. The stores are bare and the only sustenance to be had is mouldy meat, reserved for the Ork. Let it starve.

I can't falter, now. I must remain steadfast. Malkiss is still rebuilding his strength and the Astropath has sealed her door and refuses to answer. Perhaps exposure to the Eldar artefacts disturbed her more than I thought. She's my only means of contacting the Conclave.

[pause]

I've spent the morning watching Darvus work on the Umbra. Emperor's blood, how quickly it struck! Hovering there, unthreatening, before black limbs uncoiled and claws, teeth and puckered lips. A horrifying vision, solidifying from nothing.

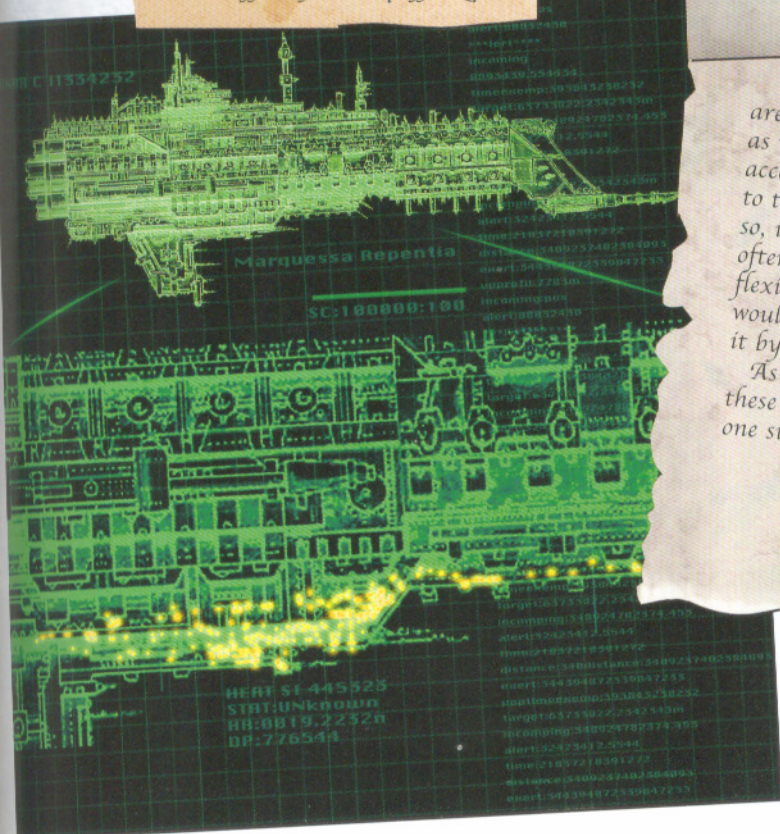
[audible breath]

Since Darvus released the Kroot, I've found myself gripped by uncertainty. He's not to be trusted, and yet his work *absorbs* me. I find myself alternately tranquil and raging: venting my disgust at my own fascination upon the maggot-magos whose fault it is.

Today I resolved to keep an eye on him, to reassert my authority and regain my objectivity. Yet here I am in this library, keen to begin searching for information, records, communications relating to these horrific Umbra.

What affliction is this, that my curiosity is stronger than my suspicion?

Lunar class cruiser Marquessa Repentia



and if we are to countenance the words of Calculus-Logi Byrr, the physical forms of the Umbra may represent a 'miniscule portion of extra-dimensional creatures.' He argues his point thus:

'Consider a being that exists solely within two dimensions. It has no sense of depth, and to its 'eye' (should it have one) any object bisecting its shallow plane must appear as a straight line of infinitely narrow width. To such a being, a human must seem a very curious thing: a straight line that expands and contracts as its body passes across its view. It regards us as mundane objects possessing extraordinary properties - exactly as we perceive the Umbra.'

Despite the vulgarity of his simile, one can't help feel Byrr might be right. In all my hours of research upon the subject, only one other speculative text comes close in plausibility, and that suffers the stigma of its author's reputation; Kurdo Salvador was burned as a self-confessed heretic after its writing:

'Visited I was by the thirster in the dark, her who dance-moans, her who keeps her secrets breasted, her who came upon me and told and told. Time before she was born, she told, time before all that. Wars in heaven and hell, Star Devils lock horns triumphant and Old Gods killed-away. Killed, she says, all but one. Hid away, he did. Up to his Old Ways, tweaking and dabbling, poking and prodding. She says came a time when he's done his work, wants to hide and watch, always watching, so into the warp he goes.

'Then She's born in the longears' brains, see, and she laughs out loud and chops him a million times, and kicks the shards out into the cold. To linger, she says. To linger like always...'

An incredible account, despite its lack of credibility. One thing in particular fits with what we know of the Umbra: regardless of purpose, sentience or biology, they have a demonstrable warp presence and seem naturally drawn to

areas of Empyrean resonance; be they the hulls of vessels or - as witnessed on three separate occasions - suspected points of access to the Eldar webway. Could the Umbra be indigenous to the warp; cast out and scattered just as Salvador asserts? If so, it provides motive for their assaults. Our scholars speak often of the reflections of mankind's 'mass mind' upon the flexible fabric of the warp. To a splintered, confused mind, would it not seem logical to becalm the realm that had ejected it by culling those responsible for its tempests?

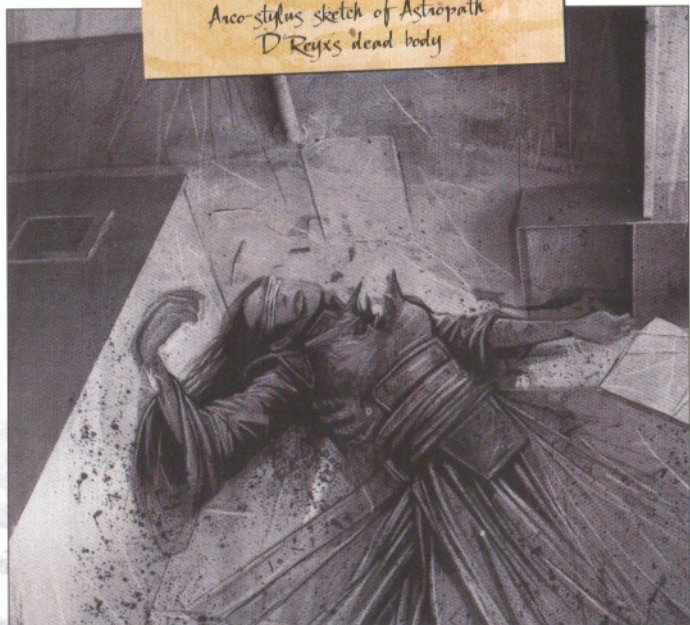
As ever, all we have is speculation. In their spherical forms these beings are poisoned by the light. That one vulnerability, one supposes, is reason enough to celebrate.

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.336.796.M41

Artist's impression of Space
Marines battling the Umbra



Anco-stylus sketch of Astropath
D'Reyx's dead body



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.072.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 59, 15TH/20TH

CONTROL ROOM

For once I find myself in perfect agreement with Inquisitor Ralei. We know the the Umbra's vulnerability. That's all we need. All we should care about.

But it would be boon to know more.

[sigh]

No. I haven't time. There are more troubling events to attend.

Astropath D'Reyx is dead. I found her body on the floor of her cell, wide-eyed, her face a mask of terror.

[long pause]

A part of her body had been eaten.

[pause]

I shall say no more. I shall review the security-auger footage and see the murderer dead for this.

Classified

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.073.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 59, 18TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM.

So. The Kroot. Damn.

[shouts] Damn!

I should have known. I should have taken steps. My astropath is killed. Eaten like carrion. The security footage leaves no doubt. It happened, last night. The Kroot's cell door opens, it exits. The autoguns should kill it. They don't. The cameras track the beast as he goes through her door.

[long pause]

There is no footage from within, nor from the interior of the control room. Whoever it was that released the monster will not be so easily caught out. Can I not even trust the machines in this accursed place?

[pause]

So. A hunt. Under more salubrious circumstances I think I'd relish the prospect... As it is, I have a half-eaten body to discard, a crowd of angry plebeians screaming beyond the walls, and an alien killer skulking in the shadows.

Darvus assures me his favoured specimen won't have ventured far but I'm not inclined to trust his judgement. The Control Servitor has confirmed that only the Magos and his dead master, besides me, have the authority to unseal the bestiary cells... Darvus is as guilty of murder as the thrice-damned Kroot.

I shan't abide by the Magos's xenophilia any longer. I shall kill the errant xeno, and when its body lies beneath my boot I'll execute each of the remaining beasts. To the warp with their secrets, and this bestiary.

And then I shall execute Magos Biologis Darvus as a heretic, and give praise to his Holy Majesty for the chance to do so.

To the hunt!

The last page from
D'Reyx's diary

Diary,

The time is two o'clock. I can't sleep again. There are spirals in my head every time I lie back, and I'm afraid that I might awake with more cuts. How could I have so mutilated myself, and not known it? My nightmares have not been so vivid since the soul-binding.

What's this now? I hear something moving. Is it inside my cell?

Nobody replies when I call out. The noise again.

Like footsteps shod with metal. What in the Emperor's name is this?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 59, 19TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

The upstart is angry.

[laughter]

He storms about like a bull-grox, shouting imprecations, ordering Gakhar to show himself. *Let him.* Let him vent his petulance on me as much as he likes, it won't matter. I'll never believe my dearest treasure guilty. He's... he's served me faithfully these last years, and now I'm to believe he has murdered an innocent woman? No. I think not, inquisitor.

[parroting Sasham's voice] 'But the body was half eaten!'

As if that proves it! To the Kroot, the consumption of the dead is an honour. A devotional act. I have no doubt Gakhar tasted the witch's flesh. But did he inflict the killing blow? No. Not Gakhar.

Then who did?

[pause]

I have my thoughts. I found the witch's diary in her cell, and – Emperor forgive me – I took it. Why? To preserve my suspicions? I don't know. One might as well ask the thing in Cell 1 as ask me.

[Long pause]

Whatever the reason, Gakhar is hunted. And though it pains me to my core to think of him so, I must seek the virtue in this situation. The Inquisitor is occupied. I am left alone to conduct my work.

Just myself and the choice.

Which of my treasures must be next to die?



Arco-stylus captures Gakhar as he leaves his cell despite the Inquisitor's instructions

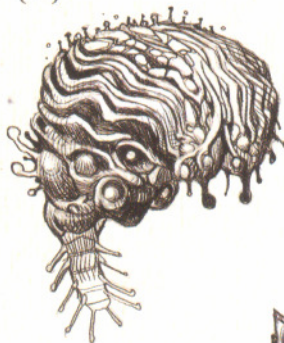
fig:1 {a}



Orkus Negra: 'ORK'

109/SS/ORK

fig:3 {h}



{f}



{d}

{e}

fig:2 {g}

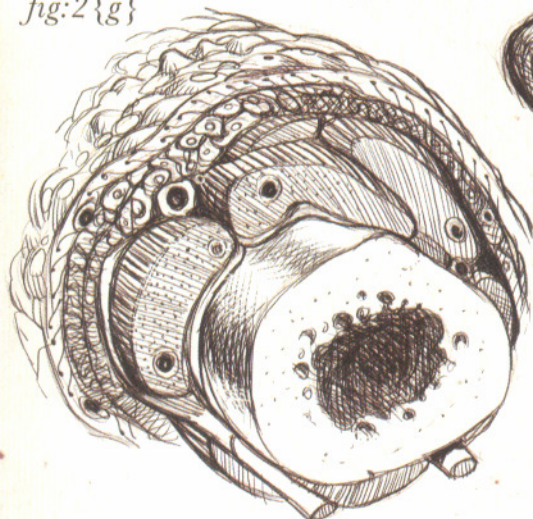


fig:4 {refer 'c'}



DISSECTION REPORT



SUBJECT: *Orkus negra*; Enlarged dominant Orkoid.

AGE: Unknown. **GENDER:** N/A.

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G

DAY 60, 6TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject classification denotes genus *Orkus* (ie: all 'orkoid' beings, cf: 'snotling' (*Orkus ineptus*), 'squig' variants (*Orkus ravenati*, *Orkus giganticus*), etc). Cause of death is asphyxia following cyanide intake.

- a. Head. Superficially analogous to human *cranium* (albeit discoloured, distended). Variety of teeth (molar, canine, incisor analogues) suggest omnivorous/opportunistic dietary habit. Skull opened to remove (vertical) brain [see h.]: far thicker than human analogue.
- b. Facial features. Arrangement consistent with 'standard pattern' [see prior dissections]. Tusks appear decorative/combatative rather than food-practical. Pointed ears and density of nerve clusters analogous with Eldar physiognomy, though in all cases (ocular orbs, scent canal, aural receptors) subject demonstrates stripped down simplicity. Conclusion: Orkoid biology characterises simple, durable principles; toughness and sustainability above quality of sensation.
- c. Surgical evidence: limb-trauma. Crude stitching comprises serrated shrapnel hooked into dermis. Lower limb's colouration suggests surgical graft from alternative source. Conclusion: subject's limb destroyed or amputated, replaced by scavenged substitute. *Pre-mortis* manipulation of digits suggests procedure caused no loss of dexterity or strength, or tissue rejection.
- d. Paunch and diseased skin (*Spec*: result of captivity, ie: lack of exercise/sunlight; diet, isolation [see library files]). Internal organs characteristic of 'simple/robust' paradigm: large, multiple-chambered stomach analogue feeds crude renal system. Bodily cavities filled with fungal 'soup'. (*Spec*: functions of biochemical organs (liver, kidney, spleen, pancreas, etc) fulfilled by internal enzyme).
- e. Bone analogue. Structurally similar to human endoskeleton: fused fibrous calcium phosphate forms cortical structure, but haversian canal at core contains spongy fungal matter (*Spec*: marrow analogue?). Evidence of healed abrasions suggests superior growth across Epiphyseal plate.
- f. Upper cavity. Thick spongy mass between scapula, vertebrae (inflexible, hunched) and sternum. Distinct organs suggest pulmonary musculature (blood is chlorophyll-rich protein and carbon/copper [trace] compound, containing countless distinct fungal organisms) and dense vegetative 'gills' (cf. terran 'mushroom' archeosamples – osmotic oxygen absorption).
- g. **DETAIL:** Dermis cross section. From 'bone' core upwards: 1) capillary system, 2) corded musculature ('sedimentary' composition reflects periods of rapid bulk-expansion), 3) layered skin (cellular composition suggests animal biology, but presence of thylakoid membranes and chlorophyll-A evidence of rudimentary photosynthetic processors), 4) Upper layer (individual nuclei engorge forming leathery surface. Detached cells enter dormant 'spore' state. *Spec*: Dermal cell-nuclei each contain the fertilised gamete required to reproduce *en masse*). Layer is supplied blood via upper reaches of capillary system (1).
- h. **DETAIL:** Brain. Larger than anticipated. Human/Eldar structural analogues, though compositionally unique. Utter lack of fungal/vegetable matter – brain is entirely 'animal' (*Spec*: fungal encoding/information transfer/physical properties orchestrated at cellular level?). Massively developed paleopallium ('old brain') concurrent with subject's natural aggression and pack predilection.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject's biology displays qualities redolent of both animal and fungal physiotypes. Fungal portions suggest a highly durable network of fungal micro-organisms negating complex internal organs, immuno-systems and reproductive anatomy. Animal biology suggests 'primate' analogue (ie: primitive pack-based omnivore). Twin systems segue perfectly, but lack evidence of evolutionary process (ie: vestigial structures). Conclusion: I would suggest that the subject is the result of highly advanced biological engineering: representing the perfect symbiosis of simple, durable, aggressive organic systems.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus





Artist's impression of the savage Orks in the most
brutal aspect of their existence: battle

**Extract: Armageddon - A Trooper's Memoir, by Sergeant
Aggamem Bresko (Published: Coriolis Popular Press
(Administratum Sanctioned), 944.M40**

Let me tell you something about Orks. The techies, you ask them, they'll tell you the whole race exists just to fight - like, without a ruck they're not really living. There's no grudge, no motive, like our priests got. Me, I think that's half right. The way I see it, all that fighting, that's just a natural way for the greens to spread out. What they're really about isn't killing, but surviving. And for that, for the sorts of numbers they got, expanding outwards and kicking a few pinkskins out the way is pretty much vital.

Other thing is, people say the greens are dumb. You spend any time facing them you quickly figure how daft that is. They've got a mean cunning, and so what if they can't tell you the coefficient sustainability of a chaingun's heat resistance? They're busy shooting our heads off while we're arguing over numbers.

They're like a virus. It doesn't need to be clever to spread, not in the way we mean. All it wants is a goal, a means of getting there, and loads of aggression and toughness.

The greens got all that in spades.
Here's a story for you, maybe help you understand. Orks got a hierarchy, like us, but it's not about what medals you got or how many stripes're on your shoulder. It's about the size of your tusks and how many other greens you can kick to crap. First firefight I was ever in, we saw this deformed bugger down in their trench. Nothing major; half his face had no skin, so his skull's showing-through. We often saw him, so we called him Boneyface.

That day we watched old Boneyface get lucky. Killed a Space Marine all on his tod, then grabbed the poor bastard's melta and wasted another four when their backs were turned. Nasty stuff.

The point is, a couple of days later we're back on watch, and who should we see? Boneyface, shouting and yelling - but now he's bloody huge. Like, extra body mass, darker skin, bloody great tusks. That's the orks all over, see? They don't need intellect: when they do well their bodies reward them, bulking them up, filling them out. Like a promotion. And when they don't do well, they're dead.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.074.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 60, 9TH/20TH
LIBRARY.

No sign of the Kroot.

Actually, that's not true. There are too many warp-damned signs. Scratches on the chapel floor, Kroot-spoor behind the kitchen facilities. Every five minutes the logic engine sounds its infernal bell, or the control servitor calls out. Another sighting, another movement-auger tripped. And every damned five minutes I come running, gun ready – to be faced with nothing.

[yawn]

You find me in the library once again. My ire has not cooled overnight, but it seemed foolish to wade-in, shrieking accusations at Darvus. Let him have one last dissection. Let me spend one last day amongst Ralei's records. It relaxes me.

Now... Orks... Orks...

[sound of paper rustling, pages turning.]

Where to begin?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 60, 10TH/20TH
LABORATORY

It sounds as though Gakhar is leading the inquisitor a merry chase.

[sounds of distant alarms, bells ringing]

Heh! Long may it last.

In the mean time I am free to expand my investigations. I have just this instant finished an experiment upon a fascinating phenomenon.

Much has been made of the so-called 'Waaagh' condition; a type of... How to put it? A radical manifestation of the pack instinct.

A solitary orkoid, is a fearsome creature, but so much more terrible would the same beast as part of the Waaagh – a sort of tribal confluence.

Our scholars report that when individuals gather, they find their aggression, their intellect and their physique boosted. By the same token, a massive gathering triggers an escalation of all those things we think of as being 'Orkish': to fight, to survive, to expand, to build, to go fast. That's the Waaagh.

Orks engaged in a Waaagh are seen to enlarge, to gather armour and weapons with no rational consideration for why, to come up with the idea of taking slaves, even to spontaneously develop the concept of religion.

Imperial theorists explore this logic only so far. They think just like that fool of an inquisitor upstairs: they care only for the practicable issues. The Waaagh is dangerous, devastating and expensive. It can be halted or hindered, so they say, through the careful application of assassination – taking out the figureheads. That's as far as their intellects take it.

[pause]

The phenomenon is clearly biological. Any psionic contact occurs at a subconscious level, beyond the brute's ability to control. I've proved it, and but for his ridiculous hunt the warpdamned inquisitor might even be impressed.

[sounds of distant alarms, bells ringing]

Ha!

Microscopic pict capture of ork cells
multiplying at an alarming rate

EXPERIMENT REPORT, CODE 109/SS/ORK.

Aim: Determination of perceived resonance between separate elements of Orkoid biology, as observed at larger, organism-interaction level.

Method: A single lower-dermis cell was removed from the subject's corpus and studied. Immediately following removal the transition from inert cell to spore [see library files] began: nucleus expansion and preparation for division rapidly occurred. Bioelectrical activity was measured, response to touch and temperature stimuli monitored, and cell activity observed.

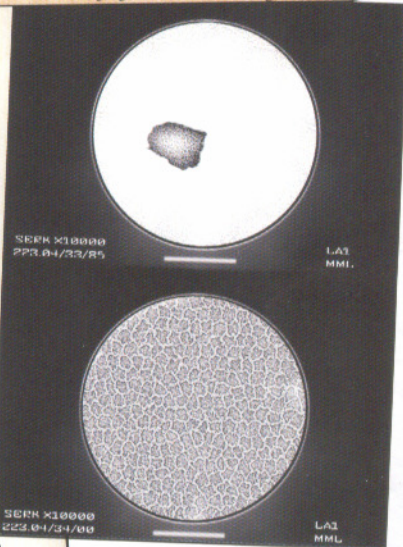
The procedure was then repeated, albeit upon five individual cells placed 1mm apart. Following the procedure all samples were destroyed with flame, the subject's corpus returned to its cell and hermetically sealed, and all equipment, clothing and instruments immediately scarified.

Observations: Activity amongst the second sample-group (2) appears at least 300% that of activity in first (1). The solitary cell develops at a reasonable rate, but those in close proximity to one another grow quickly, dividing and re-dividing. Electrical activity is exponentially increased and response to stimuli dramatically heightened.

Within ten minutes the first cell (1) had divided twice (resultant spore-bundle: four cells) whilst each cell from the second sample (2) had divided five times (each bundle being thirty-two cells), and individual spore-features (embryonic tap-roots) were already forming.

Conclusions: The Waaagh tendency as seen in Orkoid individuals is an organism-scale reflection of a biological activity occurring at cellular level. Separate orkoid organisms, be they adult, embryonic or cellular, generate a constant and stable field of resonance (probably psionic) that, when they intersect, cause biological processes to accelerate, engorge and expand.

The likelihood that this phenomenon is the result of normal evolutionary development is laughable.



My Lord Inquisitor Ralei,

I received your request for information regarding Orkoid procreation with enormous excitement. It's rare indeed to find a person of your rank condescending to pay interest in xenological matters beyond extermination. If it should please you, I've authored similar texts upon the mating ceremony of the Corleone Urchin-Ray, the Mondradorus Gamete-Dance, the frenzy of the 'mud-devils' of Wuzziti Prime and the like. I should be delighted to forward them to you.

In the following observations, a debt is owed to the eminent Genetor-Major Lukas Anzion, whose work in this field - despite his tendency to name every discovery after himself - has enabled our studies. Nos sto in umerous giganticus.

Anzion identified that the Orkoid DNA strand possesses a remarkable tertiary helix: an algal strip of coding that remains consistent regardless of the species in question. Thus the 'animal' portion of the helix varies between gretchin, snotling, squig and Ork, but all share a common genetic heritage in their fungal encoding. Any spore shed by any Orkoid could develop into any strain; establishing a tier-based eco-system based upon food and social requirements. Squigs are inevitably the first to emerge from the subterranean 'nutrient sac', providing food for those that follow. In the typically-named 'Anzion Theorem of Psychic-Physical Growth', the scholar conjectures that spores - shed unconsciously like dead skin - follow a dispersal pattern to ensure an even spread of Orkoid life. Those that fall in areas of the densest population rarely take root, whilst those shed in isolated zones are far more likely to develop. We must thank the Emperor for such small mercies: without this natural retardant, Ork populations would skyrocket. Anzion estimated a single Ork is capable of shedding several million spores during its life, and even spreads spores when recently dead. Thus we have had to increase security in the lab to prevent spores from spreading.

My team have since expanded upon Anzion's proposals and discovered a phenomenon more startling yet, which I call the 'Taeltis Process of Embryonic Selection'. As you're no doubt aware, a healthy Orkoid spore that falls in a viable location (dark, moist and sheltered) quickly plants taproots and forms a subterranean sac of algal sap for the developing organism that provides nutrients. It has always been supposed, even by Anzion, that an individual spore carries a pre-ordained species encoding: that before even it is shed the non-algal portion of its DNA has determined if it shall be squig, snotling, gretchin or Ork. Despite this, we observed that up to three weeks into its development, when an embryo was all but fully formed, the algal sac could regress its growth (literally decomposing itself) and begin anew, constructing an entirely different species. This process inevitably mirrors environmental changes: thus in an infested area the sac may safely gestate, say, a Gretchin or Ork, but if the infestation were then cleared - via genocide or natural disaster - it is likely to liquidise its incomplete resident and begin afresh upon a far simpler, faster-developing specimen; perhaps a Squig or Snotling. The logic here is that smaller specimens spread faster, shed spores at a greater rate, and will therefore expedite a swift reaccumulation of the orkoid population. We must assume that the sac, like adult specimens themselves, is sensitive to the local population density (via the psychic Waaagh phenomenon), and that the algal helix within Orkoid spores is not only dominant to its animal counterparts, but able to reconfigure, deconstruct and alter them accordingly.

It goes without saying this level of biological sophistication (a word rarely associated with the Orkoid, for all the wrong reasons) is beyond comparison. Imagine a human mother being able to consciously choose the physical and mental characteristics of her child, without any surgical intervention. Little wonder the greenskin menace has consistently proven so impossible to eradicate. We are dealing not with the crude, simple brutes of legend, but with the legacy of the most advanced biological creation our glorious Imperium has ever encountered.

- Genetor-Major Gray Taeltis

Excitable he may be, and a little too hasty to conclude, but Taeltis's letter makes for fascinating reading.

That the Orks are an unnatural breed becomes harder to deny. They seem guided at all times by the hand of a destiny resident in their very cells: shaping them, giving them strength and character, propelling them to war. But for a few renowned exceptions (Gazkhull Mag Uruk Thraka in particular, once described by General Yetchenson as having 'more luck with human tactics than us bloody humans'), the Ork is a simple-minded, straightforward creature: cunning, certainly, but focused utterly on aggression and survival. How then does it come to produce space-vessels, or weapons? How does it devise its crude surgeries? The answer is very simple: racial memory. Mekboyz are born, if scholars like Taeltis and Anzion are to be believed, with an existing knowledge of rudimentary mechanics. It seems likely they don't understand why the devices they contrive work; merely that they do. Orcs have a hundred and one pre-programmed specialist castes, each born into societies at the precise moment their skills become needed.

If Taeltis's research is accurate, and the development of an Orkoid is dependent upon the algal helix of its DNA, it seems likely this fungal coding contains every last iota of racial knowledge

the Orkoids possess. So tiny a thing, for so great a purpose! Imagine the consequences should our genetors master the same process. Armies bred with instinctive fighting-skills, Tech-priests able to build the mightiest device without conscious effort, great repositories of information available behind every eyelid.

Could it be that the bolter wound Thraka received in his early life altered his personality and saw him seize the mantle of warlord. Could it be that a simple wound triggered some deep genetic memory of the Orks' creation? Or, more worryingly, does Thraka represent a new caste-type: as clever as any Mekboy, as insane as any Dok, and as shrewd as any human? Only time will tell if he embodies an exception or a trend.

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.558.800.M41

Field drawings: Specialist Ork castes, born with skills and knowledge inherent at instinctive level



Ork graffiti found on the side of their vehicles

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.075.805.M41

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 60, 14TH/20TH
LIBRARY**

More conjecture. More speculation. I find all this discussion of... 'engineered' races and ancient creators difficult to credit. The Emperor's existence is enough to prove the manifest destiny of mankind as rulers of the galaxy, untroubled by xenos life. The notion that some meddling hand was abroad long before He arose... No, I won't believe it.

Nonetheless, never again shall I consider the greenskins a brutish menace whose only advantage is their numbers. Their biology is their greatest weapon. If only we could share some of their secrets.

[*quiet*] What terrible, ingenious things they are.

[*long pause*]

Enough of this lunacy. I've been dragging myself through unclean texts too long. It's impairing my judgement.

I'm going to the Control Room. The alarms haven't sounded for hours. Something's wrong with the logic engine's sensors – there's no other explanation.

If only I could sleep. If only I could eat! If only I could report to you, my masters, but the stores are empty and my astropath is dead.

There is work to do.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 60, 15TH/20TH
LABORATORY**

An idea occurs.

I need something to show him. Something to dangle before him! A *result*.

I've spent the afternoon cleansing my lab of fallen spores – thinking it through... Ork cells, Ork cycles. Everything they *are* comes from that single strand of algal information. A plant scripture... That's the weakness.

I had my servitor fetch me a barrel of herbicide from the workrooms. Dichlorophenoxy acetic acid, the stuff that Chatachans use to clear the jungle. Here it's for mould on the walls.

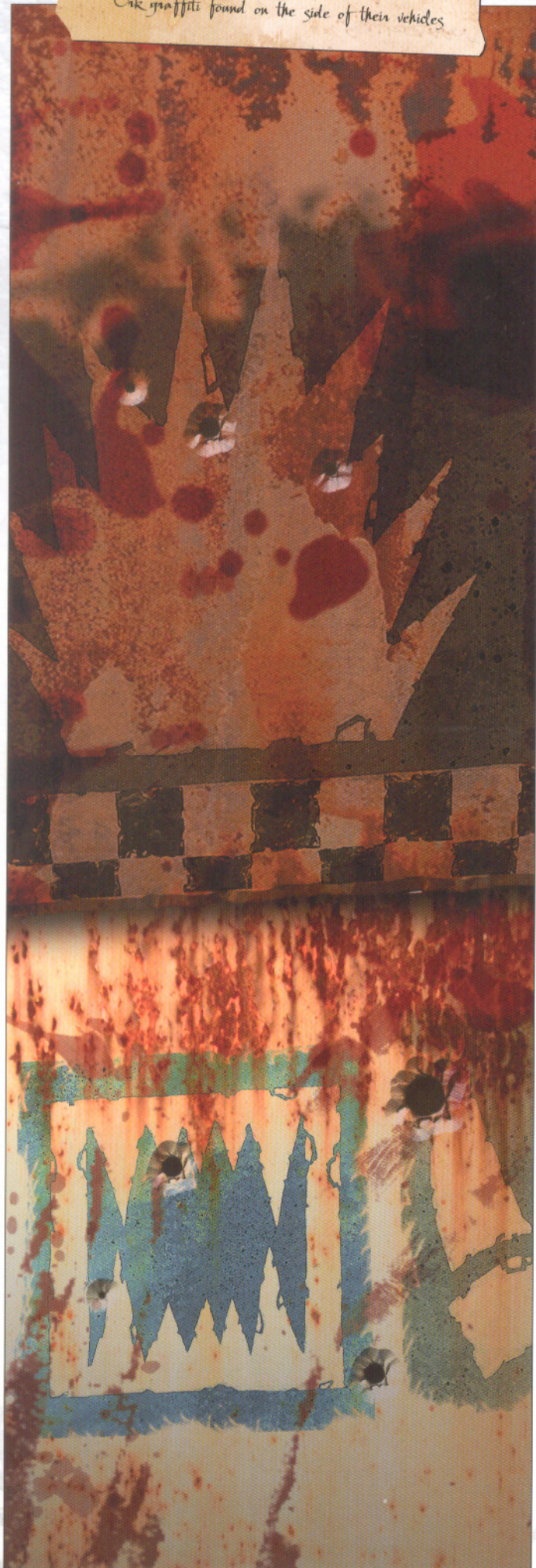
The tiniest amount was corrosive to orkflesh, but at a microscopic level. A miracle! The algal helix was burned through – not destroyed, but decayed, retarded. I left the spores to grow for an hour and came back to find untidy structures, lopsided and tumorous: wretched amalgams of orkoid species.

The rest seemed obvious. A delivery system – hollow-point rounds, maybe, to spread the stuff through a victim's body. It'd be like acid in their blood, you see? Racing through, corroding everything. Infecting. Even the spores on their skins.

It's hardly a miracle cure but maybe it could help.

Who knows? Here and now, it doesn't matter, as long as I can convince the inquisitor.

This isn't science. This is desperation. Let's see if Sasham can tell the difference.

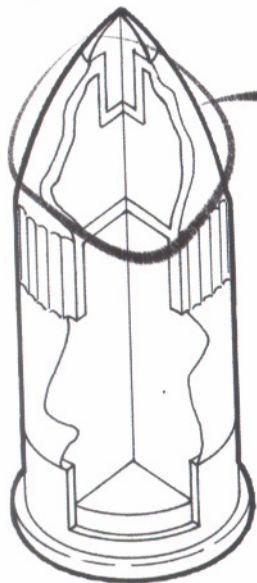


Classified

Annotated diagram of modified better shell

Experimental Better shell v3.5b

inspiration of the 5th strain in the 19th Region in the north
to be distributed to all units attending the Detention of my Prison
along Message 33429



Fluid Reservoir

By incorporating a reservoir under
the explosion bolt in the top
of the better mind, this will
facilitate in the detection of the
proper target for impact.

I have decided that this
will be the best course of
action to use particular target
for the necessary application
for these reasons:

1. there is a need to be sure
2. a big object being used within
placed on the roof in this
case of five out of six
3. there has been too many
problems in the unknown
industry as there are today!

Darvus

100.000000

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.075.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 60, 15TH/20TH

CONTROL ROOM

Now here's a pretty problem.

I've been visited by the Magos. He looks pale, sickly.
Like a toad, I thought. He speaks in strange sentences
and laughs at odd moments.

He came with his begging-bowl for more time, showing
me his results. An Ork spore retardant, he says. A way to
stop them from rebreeding from beyond the grave.

Hmm.

Is this more speculation? I delayed destroying this
place and now, because of that, Darvus presents me with
his ideas and his results. Do I trust him? No. But is it
worth taking the risk that he's lying? Is it worth shutting-
out the chance that there are more revelations to be had
from those squealing beasts locked away downstairs? Is it
worth burning the library?

All the books. All the records.

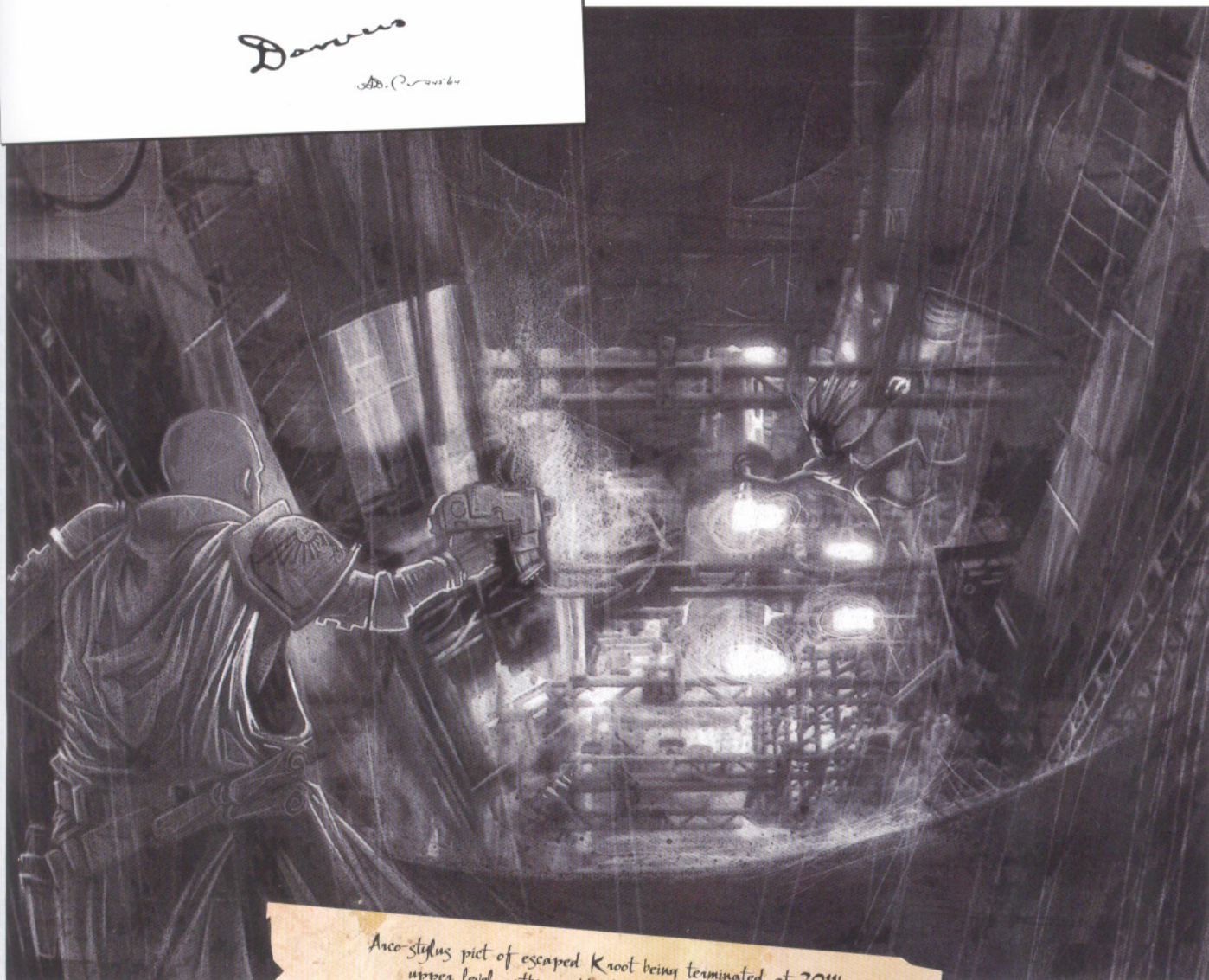
[quiet moan]

I don't know. I just don't know.

I need time to think.

[alarm, loud. Bells ring.]

The security auger! The roof, it's the Kroot. At last.
Now we shall see who is master of this bestiary.



Anco-stylus pict of escaped Kroot being terminated at 2011has
upper level, within sight of villagers encamped beyond

Krootis (nux) Aviana: 'KROOT'

73/WW/KRO



DISSECTION REPORT

Classified

SUBJECT: *Krootis (nux) aviana*.

AGE: 22 (terra) yrs. **GENDER:** MALE.

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G [INQUISITOR SASHAM ATTENDING AT START]

DAY 61, 7TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject classification denotes genus *Krootis*, common to 90% vertebrates indigenous to homeworld Pech. Species designation denotes theorised avian ancestry, with 'nux' qualifier added 700.M41 (Inq. Tekliep). Cause of death is cerebral trauma following shot to brain.

- a. Head. Note beaklike protuberance (serrated, toothless – extreme density and durability), unfeathered quills: probable indicators of avifauna (analogue) ancestry. Ocular organs contain few photoreceptors (*spec*: poor nocturnal/colour sensitivity) but nictitating lens-array suggests acuity and long-sightedness beyond human (*cf*: *Raptus raptus*). Nasal channels are large (suggest high sensitivity); cartilaginous larynx-analogue implies superior vocal dexterity: avifauna consistent. Brain. Broadly destroyed by ballistics. Residual structure appears twin-lobed; foremost highly developed, vertically positioned. 'Polyp' structures cluster at base of cerebrum vertebra-connector; with ganglia attached remotely to digestive system. [*see i., j.*]
- b. Upper cavity. Some las-damage. Chest/abdominal 'scales' [*cf*: Terran reptilia] comprise sturdy exoskeletal plates, without ribs. Interior organic 'frill' components reminiscent of Orkoid lungs, but tissue-based. [*Spec*: oxygen surface-osmosis?] Eight-chambered pulmonary muscle divides alternate bloodtypes amongst systems: e.g. Muscular/dermal structures contain ferro-protein fluids, respiratory organs supply copper-carbonate compound with unknown nutrient structures [*spec*: fungal?] to heart, and digestive/renal systems [*see f.*] employ bloodtype of unrecognisable chemical composition. Conclusion: distinct bodily systems have evolved in isolation, and are amalgamated within subject.
- c. Manipulatory limbs. Three-digit claw with vestigial webbing and devolved feather-analogue quills along forearm. Opposable thumb matches structure of twin fingers, albeit inverted by complex double-joint: when aligned claws of upper limbs identical to lower-limb feet. Conclusion: upper limbs did not evolve from avian wings as previously speculated. If subject's ancestors *were* avifauna, upper limbs have developed as altered copies of perambulatory feet rather than structural changes to wing array. [*Spec*: alternate means of evolutionary development/improvement?]
- d. Bone structure supports avifauna ancestry. Light porous composition, hollow cavities. Spongy marrow-analogue contained within ball-joints but not cortical chambers. Outer bone surfaces segue with cartilage layer and glandular 'fatty' lymph-casing. Conclusion: immuno defences contained within digested fat-stores below musculature; all defences derived from diet [*see i., j.*].
- e. Lower body. Note primitive charm-sash. Some las-damage. Lower chest/abdominal 'scale' plate partially opens to allow procreation. Male organs broadly analogous with human gender-type, though gamete-pouch interacts directly with digestive system [*see i., j.*]
- f. Lower cavity. Diverse organs each operate within distinct systemic chemistry and biology. Only pulmonary and digestive systems are 'hubs' in which all other structures interact. [*See i., j.*] Evidence of chemical filters and renal-system analogue, though subject lacks urinary or defecatory outlets [*Spec*: all waste is absorbed or released via regurgitation or acrid sweat-emission]. Upper intestinal tract feeds network of nodes scattered throughout inner cavity [*Spec*: energy repositories for period of prolonged fast].
- g. Dermis. Human analogue, though hairless. Brown/green monotone (despite ferrous dermal blood). High concentration of sweat pores and subdermal nerve-structures suggests advanced bodily thermal-regulation. Vestigial feather-quills appear random in positioning.
- i. **DETAIL:** Removed stomach analogue. Broadly analogous to human stomach, except presence of neural tissues [*see j.*]
- j. Unknown organ. Appears distinct but segued with digestive tract, incorporating capillaries (non-blood carrying) nodular 'zones' and twin 'connectors': one rising to brain/spine, the other descending to reproductive gamete-pouch. Organ's tissue closely analogous with subject's neural lobes. Conclusion: a sub-conscious 'secondary brain', focused entirely upon digestion. Twin neural tubules suggest this organ has the ability to affect the subject's conscious behaviour (via its 'primary' brain), and the development of its reproductive gametes.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject's physiology suggests a dextrous and athletic organism, whose close ancestral links with prehistoric avifauna would (typically) suggest a primitive race. However, the complexity of the subject's intra-cavity systems, the evidence of its abnormal evolution and the existence of its neural/digestive interface are exceptional. Conclusion: the subject's biology suggests a species that has subconsciously (and without external interference) become the master of its own evolution via dietary habit alone.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologi Sharle Darvus



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.076.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 8TH/20TH

GUEST SUITE #1

I wonder if ever I've slept so well. I feel triumphant. Yes. A well earned rest.

The look on the damned thing's face! We'll have no more trouble with Darvus's wretched Kroot, that's for sure. And as for the Magos – he's defeated. I ordered him at first light to begin the morning's dissection and for just a moment – I could see it in his eyes – he thought I'd spared his misery. He thought I'd allowed him to continue with his works unpunished.

Then I dragged the Kroot's carcass into his laboratory and watched him crumble.

And yes, he begged and pleaded, but I made sure. At gunpoint, I made sure. He's down there now, finishing-up, slicing his pet to shreds.

Let's hope that he learns his lesson. As far as I'm concerned, he's just as guilty of the astropath's death, and but for his expertise he'd be burning on the minaret as I speak.

And I made sure he knew it.

As to the facility itself... I think yesterday's chaos may have bought me a measure of sanity. I'll allow Darvus's studies to go on and... Yes... Bury myself in Ralei's library. For now. Malkiss is on his feet again. He can tend to the logic engine.

[loud banging, off]

The crowd of colonists saw the creature on the battlements last night. Their worst fears have been confirmed. They know we're harbouring aliens.

So far their ire has been focused on chants and hurled rocks. We shall see how far their zealotry goes. In the Emperor's name, I won't stand to have my works or my person threatened, but I won't countenance more violence towards innocent men and women. Not for the sake of an alien zoo.



Anco-stylus study. Sasham poses one foot placed on the dead Kroot's head

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

SUBJECT: CAPTAIN DALIEM MASSENDA

ROGUE TRADER, EASTERN FRINGE

(3.032.797.M41)

'Look, I'm telling the truth. Everything I know about the Kroot, I got from the Tau. I've had maybe a dealing or two with the greyskins. Nothing wrong with that. They're not so bad, for xenos. Trustworthy. Pay good rates. Doesn't exactly make me a bloody heretic, does it?

'From what I know, the Kroot are just some thug-race the Tau swallowed-up.

'Speaking frankly, I don't think they give two hoots for the Greater Good. They're mercenaries. Only it's more than that; it's like they're born opportunists. They'll be loyal to whoever can feed them, pay them, keep them comfortable. At the moment that's the Tau, though that may not last.

'And another thing, the greyskins aren't too wild about Kroot eating habits. They won't touch meat – but the Kroot, heh, that's all they want.

'That's it, really. They live on a bunch of sticky little worlds in tents and tree-houses. Emperor alone knows how they manage to build those bloody great warspheres of theirs, but they do it on their own, without even the Tau.

'I've answered your questions. Don't you think it's time you told me who the hell you are? How did I even get here? One minute I'm on the bridge of my ship, then there's this green light, and now I'm sat here with you answering stupid qu-

****INTERVIEW TERMINATED****

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 12TH/20TH
LABORATORY.

Gakhar... H-he killed you! L-look what he made me *do* to you.

[sobbing]

No, I have to be strong. I can't let this... Emperor I can't let this finish me. The work is all that matters

I'll show him, the bastard.

Where's my scalpel? Servitor!

[clattering, off]

Fetch my knife and micro-auger and bring me the astropath.



Ralei,

Further to your entreaties for information regarding the Kroot held within the Shrine/Archives, find attached a report penned by a now-deceased operative of my Officio.

In context, all you need know is that the operative had been planted among the crew of a pirate captain named Korlia – since declared excommunicate tratoris – with the aim of terminating one of the captain's 'customers'. Throughout the report below, she is using the substance Polymorphine-4 to assume the identity of a (male) crewman. This was the final report she submitted before her untimely death at the hands of the individual she was sent to kill. Requiescat in pace.

Matris Superior

Matris Superior,
Callidus Shrine,
Officio Assassinorum

REPORT BEGINS >>>>

On the third day of the second quarter, Korlia announced his intention to travel to Pech, a major Kroot world astride the Perdus Rift. He claimed to have dealt with the natives before, and that they'd solve his monetary problems by buying the scrap weapons (captured during the raid on the [REDACTED] – see previous report). It was his hope that we could then afford the fuel to take us to [REDACTED], where Lord [REDACTED] would be waiting with his [REDACTED] to buy our higher-priced bounty. Frankly I welcomed the chance to leave the [REDACTED]. Sharing the recycled oxygen of heretics is a wearing experience.

We arrived at Pech on the seventeenth day.

The surface is a tropical jungle teeming with life; though it rapidly becomes obvious that every organism shares a common heritage. Beaks, claws, quills, feathers, tiny eyes and hunched spines: such things are evidenced everywhere, from buglike scavengers to aerial predators, and not least the Kroot themselves. My first encounters with this supposedly barbarous race were uniformly impressive: they are an athletic species that move with sudden bursts of motion – staying perfectly still at all other times. Several – most notably the Shaper (a chieftain, or warlord) – spoke Low Gothic very well: holding beaks open and forming words deep in their throats. Their own language is a series of clicks, rasps and whistles which became quickly irritating – accompanied as it is by manipulations of their high quill-crests, which rattle and rustle most off-puttingly.

They live in strange interconnected chambers made of steel and wood, strung below the canopy, and there seems no sense of personal ownership. From the outset they treated me differently to the other crewmen (I suspect they could smell the Polymorphine and were intrigued by the façade). I was given a tour of the ancestral hunting grounds and invited to a gather-meal. Despite my displeasure at the company of xenos, I could hardly refuse without drawing the suspicion of the [REDACTED] crew.

Native eating habits are not for the squeamish. With different portions of different meats (all raw) divided amongst the kindred by the Shaper, the sounds of frenzied guzzling were nauseating. Evidently, the creatures believe the qualities of their prey can be transferred; thus a female considered clumsy was fed the flesh of an elegant twig-stepping predator, and a cretinous juvenile treated to a sliver of pickled tissue from a dead elder. Whether the benefits of such superstitions are supposed to occur immediately – or upon a purely generational level – is something none of my queries could satisfy.

One other detail sticks in mind. The day before we resumed our journey, I was shown to a forest thicket by an elderly female. She called it the kindred's 'sacred egg', though to me the misshapen lump of metal within had nothing to suggest holiness. She explained such artefacts have been scattered across Pech as long as any kindred could remember, and lore asserted that ancient secrets lay within. I was naturally mystified, though it struck me then that, despite the warspheres in orbit, I had seen almost nothing of Kroot technology. It was only at the female's insistent gesturing that I noticed a 'holy glyph' (her words) on the molten lump: a crude horned-skull with a vast lower jaw. Another enigma.

At any rate, business was concluded that afternoon, and the [REDACTED] left Pech for its true mission. I find myself refreshed (and intrigued) by my time among the Kroot, but eager to reach my destination. There, I vow in the Emperor's name, I shall kill the traitor [REDACTED] at last.

In nomine Imperator, Callidus Assassin [REDACTED]



ADDENDUM TO DISSECTION NOTES.
AUTHOR: MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARL DARVUS



[See attached: comparison of cell samples.]

The image shows a white blood cell taken from the deceased ASTROPATH, D'Reyx. It has long been acknowledged that PSYKERS produce far higher concentrations of these immuno-cells than normal humans. It's been theorised that this phenomenon, along with the robustness of psykers' lymphatic systems, is symptomatic of evolutionary progress; that the unclean witch-filth represent a 'step up', and are therefore in every way superior. Ludicrous. Did the Emperor himself not condemn the existence of mutants?

For my own part, I suspect the frequency of the white cells represents a side-effect of the so-called 'psyker gene' (never satisfactorily isolated, to my mind): the body's silent protest to an unclean physical phenomenon.

Regardless of the reason, D'Reyx's blood – as anticipated – contained a vastly inflated white-cell concentration.

The second image shows a cell from the dermal blood-system of the deceased KROOT. In previous samples [refer to subject notes] the role of such immuno-defences has fallen to fatty 'string-cells' produced in marrow-analogues within bone-joints [see dissection notes]. However, since consuming the Psyker's flesh, Gakhar's arterial networks are almost saturated with these 'copies' of human cellular fortification. The implications are shattering: Gakhar has 'stolen' a blueprint of D'Reyx's natural defences.

Given time, would he have developed psychic talents himself – or at least passed them to his offspring? Was his brain tissue changing its very structure during his final days?

We shall never know. His cerebral matter was utterly destroyed during death, and he takes this miracle to the grave with him.

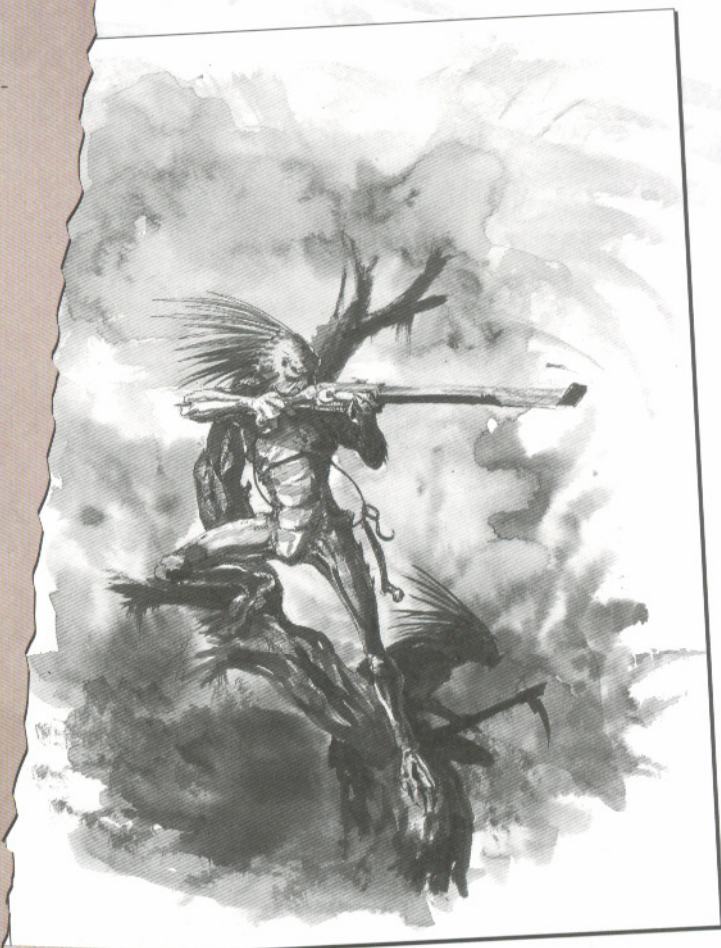


and research to suggest the Kroots' 'neural digestion' operates in two distinct ways.

The first takes the form of a cellular alteration as a result of tissue consumption (as carefully selected by the kindred's Shaper), and depending on the nature of the alternation might take anywhere between a day and a life-time to complete. Such effects manifest as altered mental proclivities, (as referenced in the assassin's report) or a cellular chemical-change. The limits of this process remain unknown: could a Kroot absorb its prey's memories? Could the accumulation of intellect create a hyperintelligent specimen?

The second application occurs at a slower rate, though still far quicker than mundane evolution. This constitutes a more profound physical effect, and occurs across generational divides. A Shaper who desires his Kindred to become stronger, for example, may direct mating-couples to consume the flesh of similarly muscular preybeasts. Offspring will inevitably reflect the flesh-choices of their parents, suggesting a direct correlation between digestive absorption and gamete delivery. I would estimate it takes just three generations for a Kroot to become an entirely distinct species. Naturally, such a thing is studiously avoided by the Shapers: racial histories are studded with examples of the Kindreds whose physical refinements brought them to evolutionary terminus: resulting in, for example, the massive but moronic Krootox or the predatory but barely-sentient Kroothound. Both derived from the same 'root'.

We must speculate that during Pech's prehistory one of its indigenous life-forms, probably avian, developed the 'neural-digestion' organ - naturally or otherwise. From that humble beginning its offspring diversified, formed distinct species, and ultimately replaced all (or at least 90%)



of the non- 'Kroot-based' lifeforms on Pech. All of which begs the question: why do modern Kroot share so many of our own physical characteristics? I've expressed my suspicions elsewhere regarding such 'coincidental' common traits, but in this instant I'm inclined towards a less sinister solution.

At some point within the past dozen millennia, an Orkoid vessel crashed on Pech. How the planet was able to avoid infestation remains a mystery, but it seems likely the indigenous organisms fed upon Orkoid flesh and began to change: gradually assuming the classic phsyiotype shared by Ork, Eldar, Human and so on. This would seem to explain the presence of stellar debris upon Pech and the existence of fungal fluids within Kroot pulmonary systems, but - I acknowledge - would remain a tenuous supposition, but for a single factor:

The Kroot have always propagated a primitive culture; based upon hunting, fighting, wealth and honour. How, then, with such casual success, have they fabricated their Warspheres?

The Kroot possess the means to tap into the algal information contained within Orkoid DNA. Just like the Mekboyz whose data they'd stolen, they intuitively constructed spacefaring vehicles without conscious thought. In short: the neural digestive system was the Kroots' key to unlocking the galaxy.

Let us give thanks, then, for the watchful - nay, repressive - eye of the Tau; and let us hope the Kroot Shapers continue to forcibly avoid any radical changes to their Kindreds. The implications of deliberate Kroot eugenics - seeking improvement and perfection - are terrifying.



Pict capture of Kroot
attack on Sidlat IV



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.077.805.M41

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 14TH/20TH
LIBRARY**

Darvus is deranged.

He brings me this ridiculous report to demonstrate that killing his 'treasure' has denied us a scientific revelation.

He's probably made it all up anyway, the maggot.

[pause]

And yet it would have been a marvel to witness the beast's slow alteration. And might it have provided me with a new astropath, to replace the old?

[pause]

[angry] What am I saying? I countenance heresy! Keeping a witch within my entourage was sick enough, let alone a *xenos* witch.

I'll have no more of Darvus's mind-games. [long pause]

I shall turn to Ralei's ledger [previous page]. Let me see what *he* made of these Kroot.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.077.805.M41

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 16TH/20TH
LIBRARY**

Fascinating.

Heretical, of course, in its admiration, but fascinating.

[pause]

I find myself imagining Ralei, hunched over his desk in this wondrous library, between adventures on strange

worlds, poring over dusty tomes, writing a dozen letters a day, dispatching them to all corners of the galaxy. What a mind, to juggle such resources! There's far more to this man than meets the eye. I almost wish I'd met him.

[pause]

Is it not healthy to respect one's enemies?

[clears throat]

As to the Kroot, their miraculous qualities cannot be overstated. How far we humans would have soared, had we the same neural-digestion.

Their adaptability is their weakness. Suppose our greatest minds were to engineer some disease, some corrupting influence? What would occur if we could introduce it to Pech? Could we regress the Kroot from afar? Could we corrupt an entire race, as Chaos and Xenophilia would seek to corrupt us?

An alluring proposition.

[alarms, sirens]

What? What's all that? It's coming from the control room.

Malkiss! Malkiss, what is it?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

**DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 17TH/20TH
LABORATORY**

Upstairs is in uproar. It's almost funny.

The inquisitor and his thug run about like headless chickens, waving their hands and crying out. What a sight.

I wish Gakhar were here to see it.

We have guests, it seems. A vessel has arrived in orbit. An *inquisitorial* vessel. No visitors for three years, then two within the space of a week.

Classified

[pause]

Why should Sasham be so afraid of their arrival?

[parrots Sasham] 'We're supposed to have ten days. They're not supposed to be here until we're done.'

I can't tell if this bodes well or not. Surely the inquisition acts with one voice? Surely he should *greet* this new arrival?

Either way, there are no new answers. He rages and storms and commands the control-servitor to contact the vessel, to ask them who they are, what they want. But there's no answer.

[pause]

He blames the logic engine, of course. Never himself.

My treasures shriek and thrash in their cells. Do they smell the fear?

Only the thing in cell 1 is still...

[loud explosions, off]

Emperor's blood! What's this, now?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.079.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 61, 17TH/20TH

CONTROL ROOM

Insanity reigns. I'm almost inured to it.

[explosions, gunfire, off]

My lords, I'm needed elsewhere. A brief report will have to do.

An inquisitorial vessel has arrived. I don't know who's within, or why it's here. I fear Ralei's radical supporters have learned of his death and hastened to defend his assets. If so, and they find me already lurking inside, it seems my life, and all I've learned here, is threatened. The logic engine refuses to form an uplink with the vessel. What fate has befallen the *Perduco Astrus*? Is it still above me, awaiting my command, or has this newcomer driven it away?

[explosions, gunfire, off]

And now this. It seems the colonists outside have finally made their move. A short while ago they made a bid for the main door with a crude battering ram.

Without warning, the servitors at the autocannons opened fire. I can't stop them. I can't disable the logic engine for fear of sacrificing my defences and releasing the xenos.

The villagers are dying in their droves, and only now do they retreat to the edge of the forest.

I'm surrounded by vengeful zealots. I can't rely on the mechanical intelligence supposedly defending me. I have an armed vessel hanging above my head, packed with those who would see me destroyed, and a basement below my feet groaning with impure horrors.

If ever there was a time to pray, this is it.

I suspect this will be a long night.

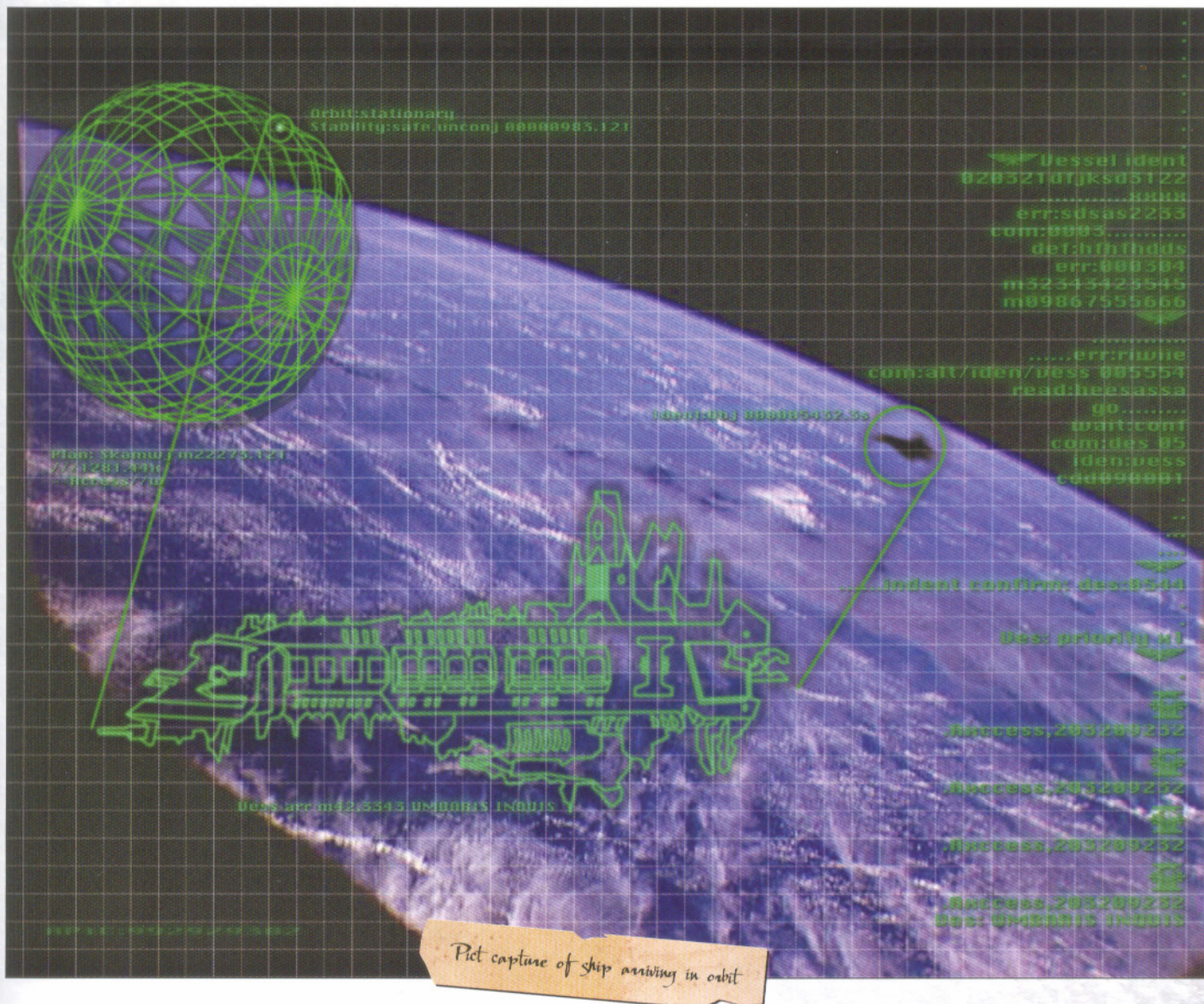


fig1: {a}



DISSECTION REPORT



SUBJECT: *Bestiola superior*

AGE: UNKNOWN. **GENDER:** N/A (MALE)

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G

DAY 62, 7TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is adult warrior/drone of genus *Bestiola* (denoting organisms of common ancestral heritage indigenous to 'swarmworld' Loqit) and species *superior* (in differentiation from non-sentient lesser organisms of same genotype). Cause of death was asphyxia following cyanide intake. Annotated observations to follow:

- a. Sensory node ('head' analogy ineffective). Six ocular orbs (compound sighted, vertical arrangement): each horizontal pair contains photoreceptor rods of specific primary wavelength (ie: red, blue, green). Trio of scent-organs: greasy cilia-layer within connects directly to neural/cerebral 'column' [see i.]. [Spec: despite superiority of vision, engorged olfactory senses and chemical glands [see b.] suggest communicative reliance on scent.] Aural organs not in evidence. Sensory node suspended upon prehensile muscular cord ['neck']; providing total flexibility of vision. Mouthparts within simple proboscis.
- b. 'Chemical' stacks. Complex glands below chitin expel vaporous alchemical cocktails: evidence of pigmented hormonal and pheromonal fluids. Conclusion: subject employs controlled release of vapours as primary means of communication.
- c. 'Clothing'. Simple jerkin comprises brittle 'paper'-analogue outer surface with flexible viscid interior. [Spec: entirely decorous/cultural. Partially-digested exudation. Cf: spittle-layer]
- d. Thorax node. Chitinous endostructure contains ultradense muscular mass, feeding eight limb structures: four triple-jointed perambulatory legs (insectoid analogue), four manipulatory extremities. Chitin upon lower pair of limbs far more dense than upper counterparts. Conclusion: subject's manipulatory hands appear incongruously frail alongside remainder of body.
- e. Abdominal sac. Thoracic joint allows 180° movement. Note plastron patterning (subtly altered during three years of captivity [Spec: biological indicator of subject's age?]). Infused technology at abdominal base suggests bio/mechanical interface port. [Spec: weapon-mounting, vehicular interface, device operation, etc]. Interior of sac comprises complex honeycomb structure; segued chitin, muscular filters and multiple valves: advanced respiratory system, though gaseous intake/outlet valves not in evidence. [Spec: dermal osmosis?]
- f. Missing lower-joint. Portion snapped during apparent seizure, 6.301.804.M41. Joint has not healed fully, nor regenerated limb. General condition of subject's chitin is poor, ie: brittle, flaking, discoloured. Conclusion: Subject's health prior to death was not optimal. [Spec: result of enforced indolence of captivity. Subject's biology and metabolism suggests fast physical processes. Extended periods of inactivity have diminished biological vigour.]
- g. Upper cavity. Internal space divided between pulmonary system (comprising simple double-chambered muscle, distributing viscid amino-base bacterial soup to segmented joints, limb-root muscles and 'head' structures), and multiple chitinous chambers with tubule/valvic divisions containing variable enzyme reservoirs: a partitioned digestive analogue. No defecatory/urinary systems in evidence, though digestive chambers feed into muscular structure at base of chemical stacks [see b.]. [Spec: waste fluids form basis for vaporous glandular emissions.] No immuno/lymphatic analogue in evidence. Conclusion: subject vulnerable to non-digestive, non-respiratory disease.
- h. Endoskeletal chitin. Polysaccharide base with oily surface-layer (unknown). Temperature resistant, shock-absorbing; inflexible.
- i. **DETAIL.** Profile view, sensory node. Note internal brain analogue comprising horizontal strand running through-out muscular neck and into base of upper cavity. Simple enzyme glands suspended at rear.
- j. Wattle/spiny fringe. Decorous?
- k. **DETAIL.** Q'Orl weapon. Technological processes unknown: gaseous? Operational baseplate appears compatible with interface port. [see e.]

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject's biology supports commonly held theory that Q'Orl are evolutionary descendents of primitive invertebrate lifeforms, indigenous to homeworld Loqit. Multiple dextrous limbs and presence of complex bionic technology suggests highly intelligent, advanced species. Deterioration of physical health probably result of inactivity: racial characteristics support theory of short-lived, highly industrious species. Detailed examination of chemical stacks [see b.] to follow.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus



CHAPTER 34

The Q'Orl Swarmworld. LOQIIT & Environs

Sinos Furens: The Frenzied Gulf

Travels in the Segmentum Pacificus by Explorator Mari Alitz

At the start of the fifth year of our voyage, on St Thor's Eve, we passed through a desolate region of the Segmentum. By sheer chance, we rendezvoused with an Administratum colony-ark returning from its seeding project; its colonists still aboard. They explained in fearful tones that their designated world, and all the space about us, lay beneath the stewardship of the 'Q'Orl swarmhood', an alien empire focused around a single 'holy' world – known to Imperial astrogators as Loqiit. Evidently, the Q'Orl were less than pleased to find parts of their territories occupied by human interlopers, and massacred an estimated thirty thousand pilgrims before the ark – the last of its fleet – was able to escape. I myself remained within Q'Orl space no longer than twenty days, and in all that time (despite several danger-fraught encounters with their elegant chainships) saw not a single specimen up-close. The following details are based upon the testimonies of those terrified pilgrims, and upon the colossal wealth of Q'Orl text we encountered: planetary marker-stones, deep-space monoliths (similarly engraved) and archaeological sites. All such texts typically began with the bold pronouncement of the 'Superiority of the Swarmhood', its ownership of the planet/system in question, and its aim in the eventual domination of the Galactic hub. A bold race.

Whilst we humans could never hope to understand direct Q'Orl communication (chemical and olfactory), their runic language is ingeniously simple, based entirely upon a mathematical principal that relates each element of Q'Orl life to a prime number. By employing a single Xenolinguitor Servitor to

cross-reference my collated samples and form likely definitions, it was possible to translate each message with ease.

The Q'Orl are a race descended from winged invertebrates. Whilst all are born equal, several distinct strains develop within the larval nurseries; a result of the forced consumption of hormonal soups exuded by the queen. It seems this one matriarchal individual is responsible for siring the entirety of the (male) race, laying several thousand eggs every day.

The Q'Orl live in vast honeycomb structures that orbit their sacred homeworld, onto which the bodies of the dead are lovingly deposited. Since each adult can expect to live for perhaps ten years, their lives are brief but fast: a reality reflected in their ideology. This is a society almost fanatical in its ancestor-worship: in which progress is made only by taking-up the reins of whatever half-finished project/crusade/campaign one's forebears left behind. Believing in a sort of racial glory – in which only expansion and victory can justify the deaths of the billions of Q'Orl that have gone before – it's easy to see the threat this aggressive little empire poses to the stability of Mankind's righteous dominion. The one exception to the short lifespan is the matriarch herself, who we may speculate lasts hundreds or even thousands of years.

At the time of my writing, Q'Orl spacevesels – whilst unbelievably advanced and heavily armed – are incapable of warp travel: a small mercy that allowed my overburdened navigator to extract us from danger on several occasions. Long may the deficiency prevail! Any expansion beyond their immediate territories would certainly herald disaster and death.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.080.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 9TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM

I think I must have fallen asleep. The guns are quiet, thank the merciful Emperor. The colonists have shuffled out again into the open. They look shellshocked. Angry, but beaten down.

At some point the logic engine must have deemed them no longer threatening – though I have no idea what criteria it used. The workings of the infernal device are a mystery to me, and Malkiss sits here even now, hammering at consoles and keyboards. It's a machine; unthinking, unsentient. Yet it reacts to stimuli in a preordained fashion. Controlling it should not be a problem.

[sigh]

Note the 'should'.

As for the arrival of the inquisitorial vessel, I have discovered nothing new. Malkiss and I have attempted to contact them. Perhaps they're unable to reply. Perhaps they're debating their actions. Perhaps their hostility is such that it doesn't matter *what* I say.

Nor am I able to contact my crew aboard the *Perduco Astrus*. I gave them instruction to remain in orbit until my shuttle returned, but if they're still up there, the logic engine can't detect them. It's hardly surprising. Blocking a surface-signal is no great feat, and given the size of the interloper-vessel, I'm half-tempted to believe the *Perduco* has retreated.

[pause]

Darvus continues his work. Some bizarre thing sprawled across his dissection table, oozing juices. Every day he

grows more deranged, but I can't help *envy* him, in part. He alone is tucked away in his basement, free from responsibility. With each new distraction he must rub his hands in glee: guaranteed another day, another hour, to conclude his work.

Perhaps I should emulate him. Perhaps a foray into the library to hunt information on Darvus's peculiar specimen. Yes. Perhaps that's exactly what I need to calm my nerves.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 11TH/20TH
LABORATORY

It stared at me so strangely, when I came for it this morning.

It was starving. Gesturing with its hands – the sign language it's used these past three years. Just for me. Nobody else speaks to it. Only me.

'Hungry,' it said. 'Want food.'

It had no idea I'd come to kill it.

I let it taste me. I put my hand through the feeding hatch; its proboscis punctured my arm. It was like a communion. There was no pain. I gave myself, and it took only a little.

Did it understand the gesture? Did it feel the connection?

If this is heresy, then purity be damned.

This morning I have killed and dissected a miracle. My soul is soiled by the slaughter. The least I could do was give of myself. A sacrament. The inquisitor wouldn't understand.

Leave him to his damned books. All the data in the galaxy would never give him what I have.

I have touched divinity, and its face was not human.

++GENERAL BULLETIN++
++ALL VESSELS FLEET
PACIFICUS++
++BE AWARE XENOS
THREAT++
++INCREASE SECURITY
++
++ENGAGE Q'ORL CHAIN-
SHIPS ON FIRST SIGHT++
++PREVENT SEIZURE OF
NAVIS NOBILITE PERSON-
NEL++
++LETHAL FORCE SANC-
TIONED TO PREVENT LIVE
CAPTURE++
++AVE IMPERATOR++

which concerns an incident in the locality of the Maachros system. It seems that upon exiting the warp, the wayward frigate *Macharius Memoriem* was unexpectedly engaged by a xenogen vessel. Gunner-command records the tentative identification of a Q'Orl Chainship, though notes that the typical interconnected-segments were in this case encumbered by unidentifiable masses of machinery, many of them apparently Imperial in origin. Given the proximity of the engagement to an unannounced warp-exit, it is a sickening (but very real) possibility that the Q'Orl have captured, or salvaged, Imperial warp-engines.

As to their supposed inability to navigate the empyrean, the *Macharius Memoriem* reports a more troubling discovery still.

Having quickly disarmed the Chainship, the frigate moved-in for boarding actions. As witnessed time and time again, the Q'Orl chose to retreat rather than risk capture: uncoupling their vessel's segments and fleeing in different directions. A single segment of the Chainship was pursued.

Within, besides the (rapidly slaughtered) crew, stormtroopers discovered a human captive: bound and heavily drugged, raving about 'her royal highness' laying 'mag-gots in [his] brain'. My lord – this man was Corchillio Haegrael, a navigator of the House Haegrael and one of the thirty two (or more) bloodsons of the Navis Nobilitate that have disappeared from the Segmentum Pacificus in recent times.

I attach a surgeon's pict-capture of an unidentified organism discovered at the base of Haegrael's spine; the removal of which unfortunately killed him. I need not, I hope, spell out my fears: given the creature's proximity to the navigator's neural tissue, if it is Q'Orl in origin, the disappearance of so many Navis personnel has a despicable implication.

– Extract from communiqué 3433-GR/PATENV/PAC
Author: Navis Investigator Kallian
Recipient: Paternoval Envoy Augustus Daquar
Date: 0.024.804.M41



Pict of grub found in navigator's head after capture by the Q'Orl

(14).

R'K

R'N
R'V
R'Q
R'Z

P'Z

R'K

R'K

R'K

R'K

R'K

R'N

R'K

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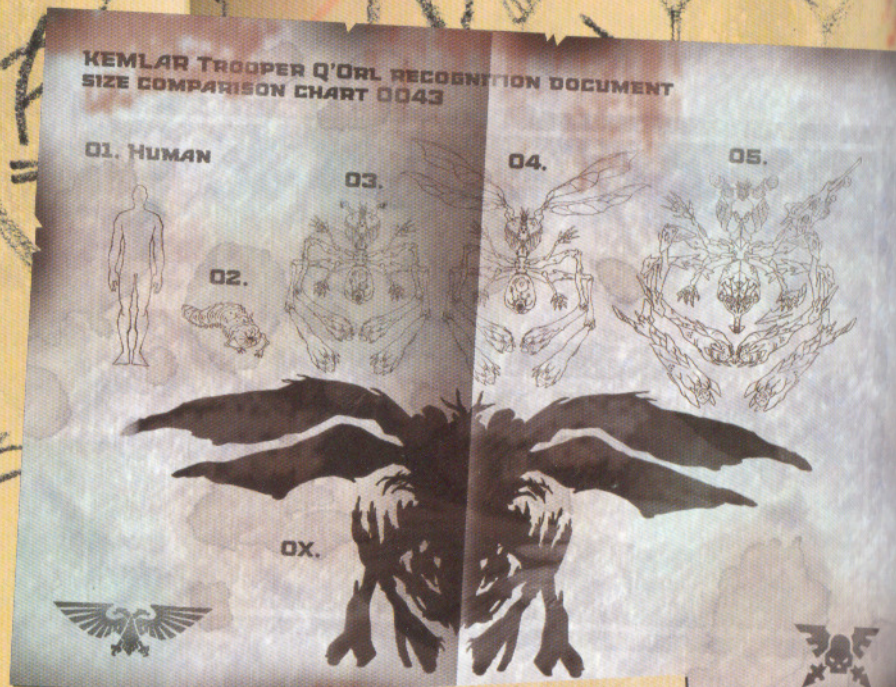
R'K

R'K

R'K

R'K

R'K



Imperial Guard issue spotter's diagram
of the different types of Q'Orl



TEXT-GLYPH TRANSLATION.
AUTHOR: XENOLINGUITOR SERVITOR ARG-391-ZXX

Annotated by Inq. Ralei. See attached notes.

TITLE GLYPH: "HISTORY OF MOST-GREAT ENEMY THAT IS ONCE-FRIEND".

First stanza:
In age of [untranslatable]¹ queen, at hand of eight-disc red.² Beset was the swarm by corrosion named [untranslatable].³ Passed-in by Larvae of the Dead Man-Queen.⁴ Great Horrors and pains came then, and many dead shells scattered on Holy Swarmworld. Grief.

Second stanza:
At height of [untranslatable] came friend-things, named [untranslatable].⁵ In aspect akin to Dead Male-Queen's swarm,⁶ but slender of limb and high, and unlike with-in. Assisted in defence of swarmworld and drove out [untranslatable] enemy. Corrosion passed away. Rejoice.

Third stanza:
In time after friend-things [untranslatable] insist, in pay-exchange for aid. Request not [untranslatable] nor mineral nor royal-soup,⁷ but great [untranslatable]-queen herself. To build a swarm un-corroded. Resistant to [untranslatable].⁸ Refusal. Kinship shattered.⁹

Fourth stanza:
At loss of kinship friend-things enemy. Turned in vile. Iny [untranslatable], and stealth-and-shadow-slip. Stolen away was great [untranslatable]-queen, and lost to the swarm. Horror and grief.¹⁰ Fortune alone endows royal comb-cell egg, and begets Great [untranslatable]-queen. Joy and prosperity in her.¹¹

Study of Q'Orl text-glyphs, taken 5.909.799/M41, Segmentum Pacificus

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 15TH/20TH
LABORATORY

I pulled a strange diamond shaped organ from the chemical stacks on the Q'Orl's back. One on each side; all connected to its brain. I-is this where my blood would have ended, if I'd let the treasure live? Mixed into a pheromone-paste, sprayed in the air like incense? What a thing to see!

[laughter becomes sobbing]

I can't keep killing them. So few remain.

[pause]

I must be strong. I studied thirteen years on Mars to become a Magos. I was revered as a master of my craft.

How did I grow so weak? So attached?

[pause]

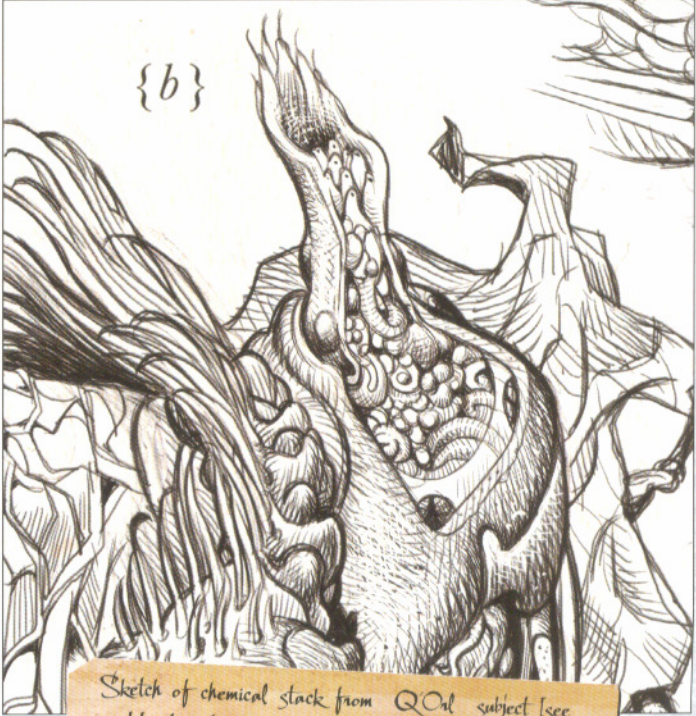
This organ, this bony little pheromone-thing, I've seen its kind before. This very week - pulled piecemeal from another of my slaughtered pets. There. Let *that* coincidence be my offering to the bastard-inquisitor. Let him make of it what he will.

Let him leave me for another day.

KEY

- 1 - 'Untranslatable signifier. Probably the runic 'name' of the swarm's queen at the time this historical event occurred. If the matriarchs typically live for hundreds/thousands of years, it's reasonable to assume the Q'Orl use their names as identifiers of particular historical periods.
- 2 - 'Eight Disc Red': maybe a reference to the novae in the Bolland Rift (Seg. Pacificus) - the 'crown of thorns'? If so, we can date this event to approx. four thousand years ago - the end of the 37th millenium.
- 3 - Some form of disease? Chaotic in origin?
- 4 - 'Larvae of the Dead Male-Queen' - literally: Children of the Dead Emperor. Which is to say: mankind. Q'Orl sickness transmitted originally by human settlers? Influence of 'Nurgle'?
- 5 - The Q'Orl are assisted in their struggles against disease/Chaos by another race of aliens.
- 6 - Eldar? Why would they help?
- 7 - Ah... As soon as the war was won the pointy-ears turned round and demanded payment...
- 8 - Very strange. The Eldar want to take away the Q'Orl queen? Why? And what's this 'uncorroded swarm'? A race resistant to disease? Or resistant to Chaos itself?
- 9 - The Q'Orl are having none of it. They dissolve the alliance and hold onto their queen.
- 10 - Except the Eldar don't give up so easily. Some sort of treacherous act? Did they spirit-away the queen?
- 11 - Luckily for the swarm there's a queen-egg already laid, and so begins the reign of their next matriarch. But the history's title suggests they're not in any hurry to forgive.

What in the Emperor's name did the Eldar want with a Q'Orl swarmqueen?



Sketch of chemical stack from Q'Orl subject [see addendum to dissection 20/AZ/AM on page 20]



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.081.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 17TH/20TH

CONTROL ROOM

Why is it that every moment of reflection, every opportunity to make some sense of all this, is swallowed-up by more insanity? I can barely take a seat in the library without Malkiss calling to show me some irregularity in the logic engine's workings, or alarms peeling for no reason, or my stomach cramping.

And now this. Cries and thumps from outside. The villagers are throwing stones again – and just when I needed to concentrate, to seek some solution to their growing fury, another interruption. Darvus racing into the library, muttering and cursing, waving diagrams and starmaps beneath my nose.

His sanity has gone. I can see that now. It'll be a miracle if he can conclude the few dissections that remain. And if he *can't*? I suppose it makes my job a little easier.

But what a waste.

[pause]

No, I must pray to the Emperor that Darvus's insanity is held at bay until his works are done. But I won't countenance these nonsensical outbursts! 'Look how far apart they are!' he was shrieking, waving his starcharts. 'It makes sense. They've never met. They've never realised the connection...'

I have absolutely no idea what he was talking about.

At any rate, I've sent him to his quarters. Perhaps with a little sleep his faculties may return. In the meantime I've,

dispatched Malkiss to the battlements, to call out to the crowds below. Reassure them of our intent to close down this accursed place. Perhaps negotiate some food.

[pause]

There he is. I can see him now on the security augers. Hands waving, face earnest. Ha! How fine a diplomat he would have made, had I not recruited h–

W-what the... Emperor's oath! What's *that*?

What shape rises up behind him?

Terra's blood!

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 17TH/20TH

SLEEPING CELL #1

What?

[gunfire, explosions, shrieks, off]

Emperor's mercy, what's that noise? I was asleep but...

[gunfire, off]

It sounds like the gunners again. Have they opened fire on the villagers?

[intense gunfire]

No, it's directed.

[shrieking]

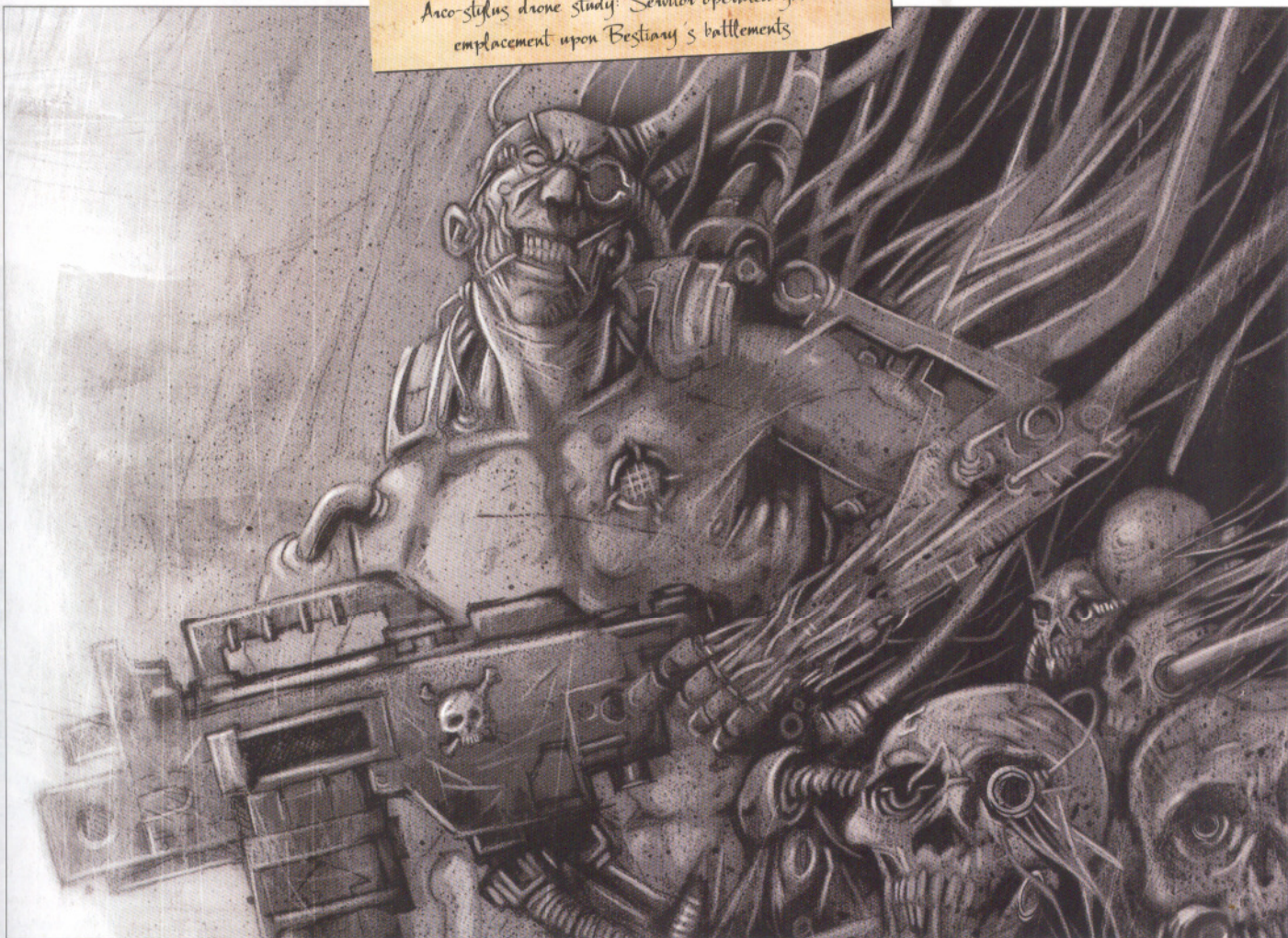
Oh, throne of earth, no! That noise. That squealing. I recognise it.

It's the Lictor from cell 2. It's escaped! Oh, mercy!

[gunfire, explosions, shrieks, off]

And they're *killing* it!

Anco-stylus drone study: Servitor-operated gun-
emplacement upon Bestiary's battlements



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE—
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.081.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 62, 19TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM

It's dead.

More slaughter. More madness. More unanswerable questions.

How does an impregnable cell open itself? How do doors open and shut in sequence, without command, to allow a monster access to the roof? There is more than chance and coincidence at play. Someone has engineered this. Someone has...

[pause]

Ha. 'Someone.' And *who* is there left? Only me and the Magos.

He swears he was sleeping. The snivelling maggot. I'll kill him.

[pause]

But first, the works. Tidying this Emperor-forsaken mess.

My lords, you must excuse my tone. I cannot begin to describe the horror, the tension, the hunger.

[sigh]

The colonists have gone. Fled back to their village, or into the forest – those who survived. I'd guess the alien slaughtered perhaps twenty before the guns opened fire. The butchery disguises their remains; limbs severed from bodies, heads from necks.

Why did the gunners delay? What madness has gripped

this place? Or is it simply that *I* am mad, and see insanity wherever I look?

[pause]

I've sent servitors to retrieve the Lictor's remains, such as they are – and to slaughter a Grox from the colonists' herds. I doubt they'll resist. I've called for Darvus, the worm – he'll finish his warp-damned dissections beneath the muzzle of my gun, and never leave my sight! He rants and begs and raves, of course. He pleads that I spare the lives of his 'four remaining treasures' – a request that leaves me bemused. By *my* count there are but three xenogens left: one a huddled thing of rags and shadows, two that are... predators. *Monsters*. They'll be first to die. I'll not countenance another of Darvus's 'escapes'.

As for the fourth... The man declares with spittle on his lips that he won't let me kill the 'thing in room 1'. His very words.

And yet I have checked. I have stood at the hatch of that cell, and it is empty.

Darvus's insanity has swallowed him whole. I've lost my interrogator as a result, and any hopes of trust from the colonists.

I'll see to it that he suffers for this. I'll see to it he dies a traitor's death. But first he'll tear his darling xenos to shreds – and I shall watch him squirm!

And what of the Inquisitorial Vessel, hanging in orbit, silent, unanswering?

Did they witness this bloody spectacle, from so far away? I pray not.



Vermis (Tyrannus) Furii

21/UH/GEN

fig:1 {e}



Tyrannus Dissimulus

21/UG/LIC

DISSECTION REPORT

Classified

SUBJECTS:

Vermis (tyrannus) furii. AGE: UNKNOWN. GENDER: N/A

Tyrannus dissimulus. (partial) AGE: UNKNOWN. GENDER: N/A

Tyrannus tyrannus. AGE: UNKNOWN. GENDER: N/A

Tyrannus scinderus. (preserved) AGE: UNKNOWN. GENDER: N/A

DISSECTION(S) CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #32-11-G (now deceased), SERVITOR #43-2-Z, INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM

DAY 63, 5TH/20TH

1) *Vermis (tyrannus) furii*.

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is adult genestealer. Principle classification (*Vermis furii*) reflects species-discovery prior to association with Tyranid race. 'Tyrannus' signifier attached c.745.M41. Cause of death was las-wound resulting in cerebral trauma. Annotated observations to follow:

- a. 'Head' analogue. Dense calcified skull (human analogous, besides calciferous 'ridge') beneath leathery dermis – only endoskeletal structure [see b.]. Glandular follicles produce aqueous lubricant (*spec*: enzyme rich? An external immune-system?). Ocular organs closely analogous to human eyes: spherical orbs, cone/rod photoreceptors, retinal sheath, etc. Olfactory organ descends to rear of palette: combining scent/taste. Conclusion: subject uses taste receptors as sophisticated air-analysis tool (*cf.* Terran reptilia) [see f.]. Dense jaw musculature indicates immense bite-pressure and distending hinge. Cerebral cavity indicates human-analogous brain, but damage to neural tissue prevents study.
- b. Exoskeletal/endomuscular structures. 'Skull' forms only internal supporting construction: remainder of subject's body comprised of bony extrusions and exo-plates ('chitin' analogue, though abundant calcifiers prevent chitosan deacetylation). When exoskeleton is removed (requiring energised las-scalpel) muscular 'strands' expand and lose cohesion. Secondary glands on exposed tissue suggest 'chitin' exuded as resin/liquid to replace wear upon upper layers. Conclusion: incongruity of a self-sustaining exoskeletal structure alongside an endoskeletal 'skull' is unlikely to be natural.
- c. Upper cavity. Complex arrangement of unidentifiable organs. Notable variation in texture, pigmentation and density (*spec*: organs derived from varied sources?). Evidence of respiratory gill systems striating dermis/valves between fused exo-ribs, linked to breathing holes upon limbs and cranium. Functions of other organs speculative only: Immuno? Pulmonary? etc. Note epiglottal reproductive structure [see. e.] and copious enzyme-rich ichor (human analogous). Below diaphragm is digestive tract: dense enzyme-rich structure of notable simplicity. Incongruous to complexity of upper organs. Rudimentary defecatory canal below tail-extrusion. *Spec*: grinding plates above gut-sac render all foodstuffs to protein liquid before simple 'stomach-tube' disseminates throughout body. (see other specimens for comparison)
- d. Springlike muscular strands: adaptation for rapid movement?
- e. **DETAIL.** Amputated tongue/ovipositor. Hardened column of ribbed muscle with budded taste-cilia at rear and hollow chitinous ovipositor at front. *Spec*: Reproductive organism delivered to victim's body via muscular contraction, where genetic/reproductive alterations begin [see *Librium files*].

2. *Tyrannus dissimulus* (partial)

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is partial upper-torso of adult Tyranid Lictor. Despite physical trauma caused by concussive artillery, cause of death was las-wound resulting in cerebral trauma (as delivered by Inq. Sasham upon dissection table). Annotated observations to follow.

- a. 'Head' analogue. Structurally similar to Subject 1 (albeit larger, with fused-skull crest-plates more pronounced) and nearly identical to Subject 3. 'Feeder tentacles' are boneless protrusions of forward dermis, with dense muscular packaging. Tongue retains bony spear tip of Subject 1, but lacks ovipositor core. Conclusion: subject does not reproduce parasitically, if at all.
- b. Scythe claw. Primary and tertiary digits of upper limbs are atrophied. Secondary digit is elongated; comprising superdense calcified chitin with unknown resinous compound. Network of fluid runnels on upper surface linked to toxic/chemical gland within palm. Conclusion: subject's biology diverts synthesized toxin to cutting edge of claw.
- c. Flesh-hooks. Sub-dermal muscular strands support barbed cartilaginous structures. *Spec*: subject is able to cast hooks at high-speed via intercostal spasm, snaring and drawing prey towards claws/limbs/teeth.
- d. Remains of digestive tract. Simplicity and structure apparently identical to those of Subject 1, although notably lacking the grinding plates seen in the same.
- e. Exo-skeletal dermis. Subject's physiology matches that of Subject 1 (ie: predominantly exoskeletal, besides endostructural head and spinal structure), but a thin layer of secondary skin (fatty base with porous cellular upper layers) covers 98% of subject's physiognomy. Layer contains tightly structured *chromatophore* bundles [*cf. Histrio trageodeus* – Thyrrus], linked via neural chain-cells to cerebral ganglia. Conclusion: subject is able to alter colour at will.

3. *Tyrannus tyrannus*

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is adult Tyranid Warrior, with 'classical' physiognomy (ie: no radical biomorphism in evidence). Subject lacks secondary limbs (following amputation at time of capture (0.659.799.M41)), for which see *i., j.*. Cause of death was las-wound resulting in cerebral trauma. Annotated observations to follow.

- a. 'Head'. Analogous to previous subjects: internal skull protects neural tissues (again, destroyed by execution-shot). Bony crest and chitinous plates are more pronounced, with minimal dermis-portions in evidence. Unlike subject 1 ocular organs are not human-analogous: shallow plates of photosensitive plasma with various nictitating membranes (magnification, wavelength-adaptive, etc) beneath upper crest-mantle. Conclusion: Tyranid organisms display a dizzying wealth of physical/organic variety, suggesting unnatural inheritance process.



fig:3 {k}



Tyrannus Tyrannus

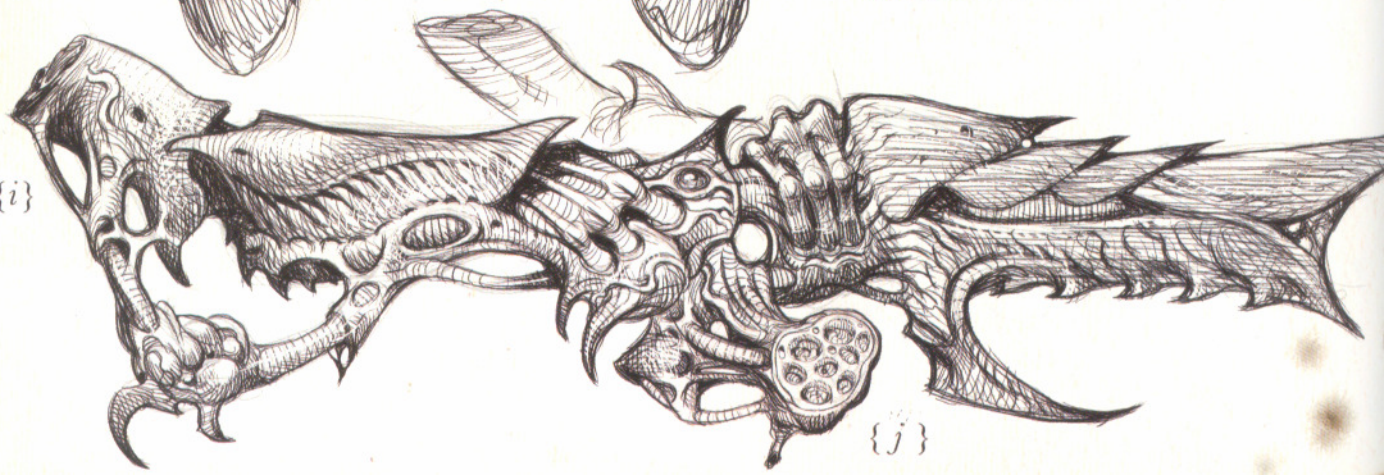
21/UG/TYR

fig:4



Tyrannus Scinderus

fig:2 {i}



- Classified*
- b. Upper limbs. As with previous subjects, topmost claws are clearly combat-adapted. Shape and intent clearly analogous with subject 2, but far smaller. (*Spec*: Lictor represents a specialised sub-strain of Tyranid? Developed claws, chromatophores, etc.)
 - c. Secondary limbs. [see i., j.]
 - d. Chitin plates. As with previous subjects, portions of exoskeletal structure adopts ossified 'scale' pattern: flexibility, powerful armour and versatility of shedding/regrowing. Each scale conceals lateral-arranged glandular duct, producing aqueous enzyme/lubricant (as with subject 1).
 - e. Stinger tail. Atypical adaptation? Ultimate and penultimate chitin-plates segued to form barbed spear. Haemotoxin gland contained at core; analogous to limb-organs in subject 2. Conclusion: specific organic structures interchanged (at random?) between species. Result of tissue graft or inherent growth?
 - f. Thoracic node. [see k.]
 - g. Upper cavity. Organs broadly analogous to subject 1: speculative evidence of pulmonary and respiratory systems (linked to breathing holes at head and limbs), with secondary structures of unknown function. Subject's blood combines complex bacterial organisms with unknown oxy-rich compound [NB: Subject 1 demonstrated internal fluids similar to human – why the disparity?]. As with previous subjects, digestive system (below muscular diaphragm) comprises simple monostructural organ, again lacking the grinding plates of subject 1. It seems likely subjects 2 & 3 may ingest only protein rich liquids (cf: nectar? – note that during captivity a synthetic 'gruel' substitute has proven the most effective form of nourishment), lacking other masticatory organs. As such this stomach is less a digestive system and more a chemical repository – a simple tube/sac to disperse nourishment throughout the body.
 - h. Unknown atypical biomorphology. Muscular cords hang in (deliberate?) hernia from within chitinous sheath. Evidence of chemo-electrical charge residual within tips. *Spec*: some form of pulse-oriented stinger? A vestigial/newly adapted biomorphic feature?
 - i. **DETAIL.** Central limbs. Amputated by retrieval-team upon subject's capture, preserved in formaldehyde. Manipulatory hands (human analogous) are physically bonded to secondary organism (now deceased); sharing circulatory and neural connections. Whether organisms were spawned together or co-joined (fused) is impossible to ascertain.
 - j. Secondary organism. Parasitic creature (without evident neural nexus – ie: unsentient) deriving sustenance from subject via fused tissue (cf: *umbilicus/placental material*). Organism contains yet another separate parasitic lifeform: densely packed larvae within organic seedpod yolks, at hub of peristaltic muscle-column. *Spec*: organism functions as living weapon: rudimentary muscular firing mechanism to deliver larval ammunition into enemy flesh. Larvae (deceased) comprise tiny neural nucleus and massed lacerative tentacles. Evidence of cellular plant material within. Orkoid analogous?
 - k. Unknown Organ. Removed from thoracic node. Black porous spongy texture, immersed in inert oily fluid. Structure and texture (though not positioning nor tissue-type) analogous to spongy ridge upon Eldar brain. (*Spec*: psychic amplification?)

4. *Tyrannus scinderus*.

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is adult Ripper, deceased 10+ years, preserved in formaldehyde solution. Cause of death unknown, though abnormal polyps upon miniscule pulmonary muscle suggest cardiac failure. Annotated observations to follow.

- a. Exterior. Organism is small (40cm) serpentine specimen comprising bony head with interlocking mouthparts and sinuous abdomen. Traction achieved through muscular peristalsis (cf: terran snakes) and constant movement of rudimentary tri-jointed legs.
- b. Interior. Organism displays remarkable simplicity. Three distinct segments: life support (behind head, featuring miniscule pulmonary and respiratory systems), reproduction (at rear, featuring pre-fertilised eggsac) and, central, digestion. An exact replica of the simple digestive tract found within previous subjects, with grinding plates (as with subject 1), but no defecatory canal. Conclusion: Subject exists solely to eat and reproduce, with no recourse to expelling waste: a mystifying and utterly unnatural feature.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

Subjects display stunning variety of organic structures, systems, metabolisms and physical features. But for presence of standard facets (eg: chitinous exo-skeleton, endoskeletal features, six limbs, tail, simple digestive tract, etc) subjects would undoubtedly demand reclassification as distinct genus-types.

Subject 2 (Lictor), despite physical destruction, demonstrates remarkable similarity to physiognomy of Subject 3 (Tyranid), albeit with specialised features. *Spec*: existence within Tyranid race of 'root' species, viable for biomorphic alterations and 'geno-fixed' species, pre-specialised?

Subject 1 demonstrates several significant distinctions: notably its oral reproductive process, its underdeveloped skull crest, and its ferrous human-analogous blood. All suggest a specialised deviation from root: combining facets of 'classic' races [human, Eldar, etc] with Tyranid mainstays. Biology (particularly biological ability to digest complex foodstuffs), morphology and reproduction suggest a creature better adapted to a solitary, self-sufficient role.

Subject 4 represents the pinnacle of biological simplicity. It eats; it lays the eggs it was born with; it dies. In this case reproduction suggests a requirement to multiply and consume – as a swarm – rather than a specialised vanguard deployment.

These creatures are mysterious and utterly alien. Some results from routine experiments are beyond comprehension. Internal organs differ greatly from specimen to specimen and results of tests are rarely the same. Indeed, it seems that some organs have no role at all. Perhaps, in subsequent specimens they will naturally be weeded out by their accelerated evolution.

SIGNED:

Mage Biologi Nade Darius

Ing Brehm Sasham



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.082.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 63, 9TH/20TH
LABORATORY

Yet another sleepless night. Blood and screams and slaughter. And when I *do* sleep...

[ragged breath]

It doesn't matter. The Tyranid scum are dead. Diabolical creatures. Clawed and toothed, shrieking, snarling. Utterly beyond reason. I detest all xenogen life with a passion, but at least those specimens Darvus has hacked to shreds already had some *pretence* of intelligence, the ability to hate us, as we hate them.

The Tyranids don't hate. They don't yearn or care or fear. They can't be reasoned with. I realised that as I watched Darvus mutter and enthuse, cutting and splicing. They are weapons made of flesh, weapons who pull their own triggers.

It was a pleasure to consign the soulless monstrosities to oblivion.

Even that was no simple thing. A shot to the head for the Tyranid and Genestealer, but the Lictor, even blown to shreds, even scattered across the forest, even then it wasn't dead when the servitors dumped it on the dissection table.

Lucky for us I had my gun. I blasted the beast's skull open, and spat on the corpse.

Mm. That feeling again. *Triumph*.

And now the dissections are over and Darvus is off dragging the slices of meat to their cells, to fester and rot. He potters and mumbles, losing his grip. I should stay and watch him, but the library must be *choked* with knowledge on the Tyranid filth. I can almost imagine it. Such a *wealth*... I've killed three of their kind today.

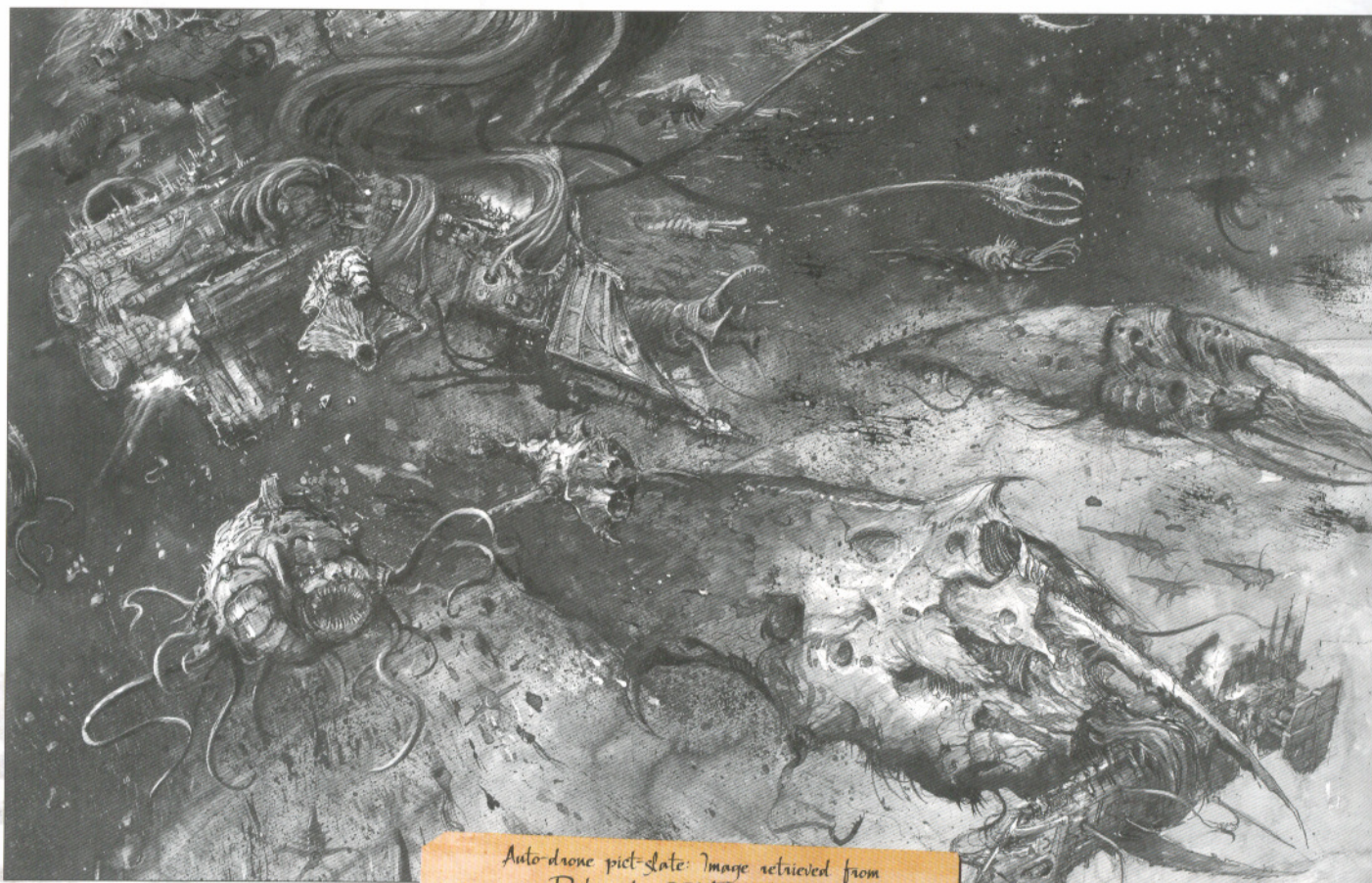
There is something *delicious* in delving beneath the skin of one's crushed enemies.

Yes. The library. What harm does it do, to take a look?



DISPOITO DIVINUS EX CORPOREUS

Genestealers are the most mutable of all Tyranid Vanguard organisms. Many Magos Biologis adepts believe these adaptations depend on the host, however it seems clear to the more enlightened that they are in fact separate species altogether.



Auto-drone pict-slate: Image retrieved from
Data-codex 001/Tyran/Vannak

Classified



Feeder tendrils mutation,
Groglin V
(ref.MBfe274.ch.fdrtl)



Flesh Hooks mutation,
Ixos II
(ref.MBfl288.ch.flshk)



Implant attack mutation,
Tenebria
(ref.MBim274.ch.impttck)



Acid Maw mutation,
Yuris cluster
(ref.MBac269.ch.acdmw)



Tyrannid DNA analysis produces results of massive variance. As anticipated, no two creatures possess identical genetic strands; but neither do different organs within a single specimen, or even adjacent sections of a single tissue-type. A typical sample (if such a thing could be said to exist) does not comprise a consistent chemical-bond helix, spiral, string or otherwise. Instead, cellular information is a patchwork of atypical DNA analogues (some faintly recognisable, others utterly alien), joined in ingenious fashion. In this way, the organism (or segment of it) combines the genetic coding of an inestimable number of other specimens: stolen, altered, recombined and rejoined in ludicrously complex fashion, contained within a cohesive 'whole' common to all. Given how little we understand of even our own genetic rulebook, the intellect required to decode, fragment, and reassemble such an array of alchemical models must be colossal indeed.

TYRANID DNA



My Lord Inquisitor,

FURTHER TO YOUR CORRESPONDENCE, FIND ATTACHED A DIAGRAM PERTINENT TO THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE TYRANID RACE:

Given the extreme danger of observation, the near-impossibility of tracking the hive fleets and the tendency for Tyranid organisms to be 'reabsorbed' by their biological 'starships' after infestation occurs, a protracted study of individual specimens is impractical. Instead, my team have pieced together, from recorded observations of the five-year Avarani Sector incursion, a workable paradigm of the generational changes the swarm is able to affect upon its component organisms [see diagram].

Put simply, let 'A' represent an unspecialised 'root' species within a single hive fleet: Tyranid warriors, Gaunts, etc. Let 'x' and 'y' represent biological qualities inherent to a particular organism 'absorbed' by the hive. These qualities may be structural, chemical or neurological. For the purposes of this demonstration, let each successive 'generation' imply a successful planetary attack; providing enough raw material to double organism output.

Between the first and second generations, the hive maintains its population of unaltered A-type specimens – their versatility and effectiveness long proven. However, the hive also produces experimental batches of root species adapted to incorporate the absorbed-qualities of their previous campaign. Thus specimens Ax and Ay.

Let us imagine that specimen Ax fails to perform well. Its biological adaptation has not proved to be a workable asset, and if any such specimens return from the campaign alive, it is unlikely they will be re-created following absorption. Specimen Ay, however, performs well, to the extent that the hive chooses to propagate the new species for future campaigns.

Between the second and third generations, the hive therefore constructs an equal number of 'root' specimens (A) and adapted specimens (Ay). This diversity assures that unforeseen environmental/conflict situations can be approached with two (or more) potential solutions.

Successive generations may, dependent upon its continued success, maintain the Ay population. If it performs exceedingly well it's even plausible that it would replace A as the root species from which all other adaptations derive. Interestingly, should the hive encounter a situation/environment/enemy against which neither A nor Ay are effective, it is not unknown for a resurgence of the 'lost' strain Ax to 'try its luck': suggesting the hive stores all genetic data.

Obviously, this model is simplified: the reality is that numbers of 'absorbed qualities' undoubtedly run into their hundreds, and that every successful campaign adds genetic possibilities to the biological arsenal. As a demonstration of generational drift, however, this would appear to be an accurate reflection of hive development.

An extraordinary side-effect of this process is that Imperial troops have often witnessed an inexplicable synchronicity of absorbed qualities in entirely separate hive fleets. This is represented here by the adoption of quality y within a root specimen (B) from an entirely different hive, perhaps separated from the first by light years. This suggests a level of interstellar communication our astropaths can only dream of, and links seamlessly with the prevalent theory of 'aggregate intellect': that individual organisms could be regarded as minute elements of a gestalt intelligence, vulgarly referred to as the Hive Mind.

Whilst the biology of many Tyranid organisms hints at the presence of some unifying psychic field, the precise processes that govern it are still a mystery. It has been proposed that certain root organisms – besides fulfilling combative/absorptive functions within the swarm – operate as psionic 'nodes': focusing and strengthening the network of shared consciousness. Sadly, the scarcity of psychic investigations into this phenomenon requires that it remain conjecture, though it has been observed on several occasions that a prejudiced targeting of node organisms (Tyranid warriors, so-called 'Hive Tyrants', etc) can result in a sudden breakdown in a swarm's cohesion: reducing carefully-coordinated attack units to frenzied, primitive animals. Of particular note are those occasions in which so-called 'Hub-vessels' of attacking hive fleets have been targeted; resulting in a massive destabilisation of any tactical control amongst units on the ground. Rare insight into this mystery is provided by unconfirmed reports of Astartes troops successfully boarding such vessels, leading to tales of massive genetic duct-factories, peristaltic chambers and the near-mythical 'Norn Queens,' lurking within.

Such gremlins remain the Tyranid race's most tantalising enigmas. Various credited with utter control over the Hive Mind, biological association with every other Tyranid creature, and sole responsibility for the manipulation of absorbed data, there is as much hearsay and unlikely speculation regarding these creatures (if they are indeed distinct organisms, or simply part of their host-vessels) as there is fact. Regardless, given the scattered distribution of Tyranid elements throughout our galaxy, and their inexplicable ability to act in concert, it seems likely the Norn Queens themselves are simply nodules in the colossal, disembodied consciousness that is the hive.

If we are to have any hopes of standing against this threat, it strikes me that psychic research – suggesting the possibility of some disruptive psionic influence – has the greatest hope of success.

Yours,

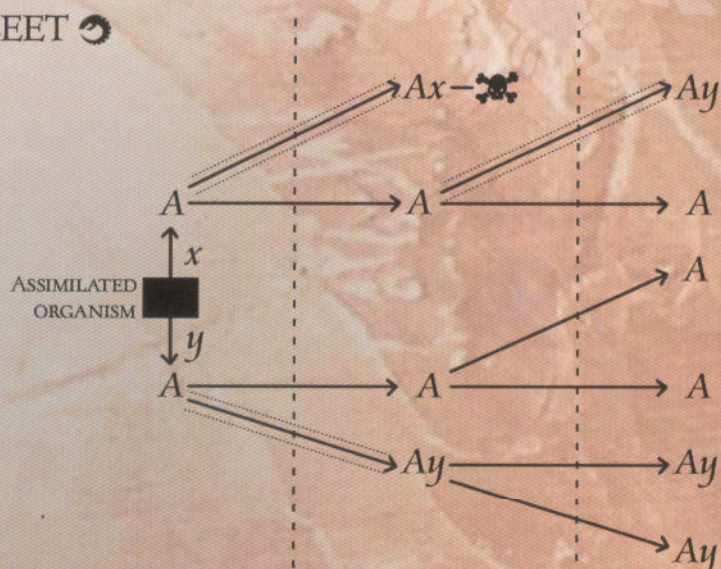
Taemhahk L'Beri

Genetor Primaris Taemhahk L'Beri.

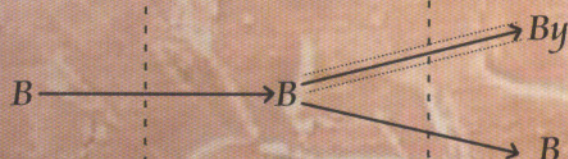


TYRANID GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

FLEET 



FLEET 



KEY

—————→
GENERAL
TRANSITION:
(INC.RE-ABSORPTION
+ MULTIPLICATION)

-----→
GENERAL
TRANSITION:
WITH GENETIC
ADAPTION



Illustration Number 65

1ST GENERATION

2ND GENERATION

3RD GENERATION

ADMINISTRATUM KRYPTOGRAMETER:0008892
INQUISITIONCLASSIFIED:00912
KRYPTODESTR:INFOSELE99332
KRYPTO:CLASSIFIED:0232



'My brothers, do not make the mistake of thinking yourselves *prepared*.

'I have stared into the face of our ruin, and it is *not* a face. It is a mouth.

'A mouth containing a billion teeth, and each tooth is a living thing, and each living thing is a horror built only to kill, and when the mouth closes it shall not be to honour the supreme Emperor, or sue for peace, or discuss terms. It shall be to swallow our Imperium whole.

'We call them Tyranids as if they're a *race*; another xenos clan to be faced-down and cleansed. In the face of horror we cling to our sciences, our labels, little realising they do nothing but drown us.

'We'd do better to call them a disease. There is no better analogy.

'I've seen the hive ships, brothers. Barbed horrors scuttling forth to kill, bloated vermin writhing back to be absorbed, their bellies full. I've seen the forests picked-clean of life. I've seen the biofleets draining the waters of teeming worlds, the vortex mouths guzzling the prairies. I've seen the shadows moving in the warp, the tentacles stretching out of the darkness beyond the Eastern Rim.

'This is the End of Times, brothers. Death approaches, and it is not at the hands of a ravening horde nor an army of contemptible aliens. Our enemy is a single intellect. A single gestalt consciousness, more ancient than we can conceive, more massive than we can measure, a single mind that has not one body, but a trillion. An all-seeing eye that has no shape and no form. How can we fight such a thing?

'I will tell you: Until the last breath.

'If we can but delay that great maw from closing around us, then we have achieved what countless Empires, countless worlds, countless galaxies, have not.

'I say this not to terrify you. I say it simply so you understand, simply so you do not waste your time with such luxuries as hope.

'There is no hope. The Great Devourer is upon us.

'Let us see how long we may restrain her jaw.'

-Inquisitor Kryptman, addressing the Congressium Xenos, 992.M41

Dispatch: MACRAGGE
Receipt: SAFAUR INQUIS
Astrothetic Duct: ~ CLASSIFIED ~

Report follows. Subject: MEGAFUNA/MICROFUNA

During the assault of the xenos invasion-fleet (Codename: BEHEMOTH) upon the ULTRAMAR system (745.M41), extensive notes were amassed. Despite receipt of intelligence from Magos VARNAK, compiled during first-contact of TYRANID mena upon TYRAN PRIMUS, our Chapter's observations have formed the basis of all subsequent research: a fitting testament the brothers who lost their lives in its accumulation.

We understand from your missive that you are attempting to centralise information regarding the xenos threat, and although you do not specify it – we envisage a hub of collected knowledge into which all parties threatened by the TYRANID scourge may freely delve. I have consulted with Librarian Primus Tigurius, who applauds this effort but is cautious of 'serving Inquisitorial intrigue'. Please confirm that this freely-available resource is your intention and we shall endeavour to open our records further to your scrutiny.

As to your request for information regarding observations of MEGAFUNA and MICROFUNA amongst the invading swarms, I am pleased to offer the personal testimonies of two individuals present at our homeworld's great tragedy. May their words aid you in your good works.

– Graema Nielus, Serf-Obediator, Librarian Olympus, MacGragg

MEGAFUNA

Personal testimony: Sergeant Agrivanus, Ninth Company U

On the fifth day, there was a break in the assault. A series of spores impacted behind the enemy lines, bigger than anything so far, splintering the ice and shaking the ground. For three hours we heard nothing but scuttling and scraping from the craters. Captain Sinon postulated the arrival of some sort of artillery – it made sense, given their losses – and regrouped our devastators to a ridge alongside the plateau, better to pick-off whatever emerged. We failed to foresee their speed.

Nowadays we have names for them – Hierophants, Exocrines, Trygons, Hierodules – but at that early stage we saw simply colossal terrors; constructions of bone and muscle that stood as tall as any mechanic Titan, lashing tentacles and spine-tipped hooks scissoring the air. Their assault swept all before it, and far from the ponderousness one would expect from beings of such enormity, their viciousness and speed easily equalled that of their tinier brethren.

Acting on advice from our Brothers in the second company, who had noted a surge of incohesion among the swarm when larger organisms were destroyed, we concentrated our fire upon the biggest of the brutes. Alas, even its eventual destruction – a calamitous event that splintered the very rock it tumbled upon – could not halt the encroaching horde. We learnt a valuable lesson in that single, costly strike; the size of an organism does not equate with its intelligence, nor its capacity for sustaining the focus of troops around it. The tyrannids are not so foolish as to parade their greatest weaknesses within the most targetable bodies.

MICROFUNA

Personal testimony: Apothecary Samieles, Fifth Company U

The wake of the aliens' defeat was hardly a time of celebration. Our entire first company lay slaughtered and our vessels would bear the scars of the confrontation for centuries to come. In the silence that followed, I busied myself collecting the progenoid seed from the bodies of my fallen Brothers. I was thus alone upon the corpse-strewn expanse when I began to encounter examples of minute Tyranid specimens, unseen amongst the mêlée. Most numerous were the Rippers: parasitic vermin that, I observed, guzzled anything organic within their grasp, visibly growing obese before slithering off to await retrieval. In the absence of the hive fleet (decimated and fleeing, at that point) they lay in great heaps, bodies ruptured and bloated. It was my pleasure to cleanse them with a thrice-blessed flamer.

More troubling still were the great varieties of lice-like organisms infesting the bodies of the dead xenos. Whilst I might speculate as to their function (symbiotic cleaning parasites), the notion of uncleanness remained with me for some time. Given their predilection for variety and adaptation, it would be no great surprise to learn the Tyranid filth had taken to microscopic infestations. The enemy who presents itself with claws and teeth may, after all, be joyously purged. But the enemy that lurks within one's blood?

I have read the reports of rebellion upon Ichar IV, and the theories regarding the assimilation of Tyranid biology into human flesh. Such grotesquery merely serves to underscore the lesson we Ultramarines learnt upon Macragge: one underestimates the Tyranids at one's own peril.



AUGER INSR:99905 COLOU:999250952

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 63, 10TH/20TH
LABORATORY

Sweet Emperor, let it be over! The pitiful shrieks as he killed them.

Oh, I know they were hardly willing captives. Hardly creatures to be adored, but they are... were perfect. Doesn't he *understand*? Doesn't he see why I cherished them so?

[sobbing]

Time is running out. I begin to understand my own actions' I-like an equation surrendering its solution. I've been delaying without even knowing it. I've been holding the bastard Inquisitor back.

Anything to stop him killing the thing in cell 1.

But now the Tyranids are dead, and only the *Troglodydium* in cell 7 stands in his way, and then cell 1. The centre of the spiral.

[pause]

Will the vessel above deliver me before then? Does it contain... Throne, dare I hope? Does it contain my master's allies? Come to save the remnants of his tattered research from the hateful Sasham?

[sigh]

Time is running out.

Sweet Emperor, spare me this butchery, I beg you.



Sketch of Carnifex



Primacii: Claviculum Matrii
Selected excerpts –

THE SKYMOTHER WILL ENDURE. Always.

She hurls her seeds before her, harbingers of her arrival, couriers of her celestial design. She sows. She spawns.

A man, then, or woman, accepts the Kiss of the Purii... He or she is 'contagii', favoured with the flesh seed. Still human, yet simplified. Distilled by the desire to serve.

The host breeds. He takes a woman, or she takes a man. Their child is not human.

The sons and daughters of the contagii are the maelignaci, and those of the first generation are animals. They are the Skymother's engines of war and vessels of multiplication, lumbering and moronic, executing their orders without callousness nor cruelty. Their existences are brief, filled by the exigence of combat and breeding. They burn brightly, and are gone.

Their children, hybrids of the second generation, are the truest of predators. The whimsy of the lineage is manifest – a culture of unique specimen and unpredictable bearing, with no two alike. They can be selectively bred, their parents studded like livestock to exploit speed, strength, aggression. These are the virtues of the second children.

And the third generation. The truest of hybrids. These are the children in whom the defences of the human genotype are all but overcome. The Mother's fleshgift may operate to whatever design it chooses, spared the erratic successes and failures of eugenic inconsistency. Their bodies are carefully formed, their minds developed, their spirits strong. They are the praetorians of the Mother's will.

Their children are the Primacii: scions of the fourth generation. In their biology, the lineage reaches its zenith, withdrawing its eccentricities, working its labile craft upon the mind, the soul, the anima. They, who have tasted sentience and promised its heady gifts to the service of her godhead, are truly the most blessed of her children.

And at last, in the dawn of the fifth generation, and all those thereafter, the Purii are spawned anew, and the cycle begins afresh.

The above text was taken – in fragments – from a volume of such perceived sensitivity that it carries an Inquisitorial restriction. Finding a copy has been a truly exhausting challenge – moreso even than hiring the foolhardy mercenaries who captured my Tyranid specimens in the first place – but its importance cannot be overstated. It purports to be the work of a genuine Genestealer Magus (a psychically-active human/Tyranid hybrid, the existence of which has never been satisfyingly proven), languishing in the captivity of the famed Inquisitor Agmar. Composing his memoirs (under duress, one imagines), this obscene creature describes at length the process by which the Tyranid swarm destabilises the military infrastructure of planets it has yet to reach, easing the path of the ravenous fleets.

If the author is to be believed, central to this process is the multiplication of Genestealer hybrids (the various types of which are described in the above excerpt). Whilst the nomenclature used by the volume's author is certainly specific to his own world (the high-gothic corruptions of phrases such as 'purii' – used here to describe purestrain Genestealers; 'primacii', 'contagii' and so-on), we can cautiously assume the system of infestation is a universal technique.

Put simply, a single human individual (or, troublingly, a member of another race?) is infected by a purestrain Genestealer: implanting a tiny embryonic organism in their bodies which, over time, alters the victim's genetic code and reduces him/her to a catatonic state of total obedience. When this individual reproduces, a generational process of hybridisation is kick-started, in which aspects of human and Tyranid biology are combined. The ultimate product of this sequence is a complete generation of highly intelligent, highly-psychic individuals who can pass for human, but are utterly subservient to the whims of the Genestealer who began the process (by now elevated to the role of 'Patriarch': an



obese and psychically bloated monstrosity). These Magi are the ruling class of a secret hybrid society, typically steeped in manufactured ceremony and heretical worship, and are inevitably driven to acts of espionage, subterfuge and – eventually – open rebellion. Their children are purestrain Genestealers, and in this fashion whole worlds can be seen overrun beneath the noses of their ignorant governors: great swathes of the population infected by the genestealer's 'kiss'. Most notably, throughout all of this, the Patriarch is unwittingly generating a powerful psychic signal, which (as a few brave scholars have speculated) acts as a homing beacon to the Tyranid hive-fleets. Hybrid societies, typically forming sectarian groups, inevitably come complete with an insane prophecy regarding the arrival of the holy 'Sky-mother', 'Star Lords', or similar insuring that they do everything in their power to aid the arrival of the Tyranid swarm, never considering they hasten to their own dooms. The hive fleets, after all, are not renowned for their discrimination.

The authenticity of the *Claviculum Matrii* volume is impossible to prove. Whether the details contained therein are case-specific, ludicrously imprecise or terrifyingly accurate, the fact remains that the Tyranid race has a string to its bow that few would dare to credit. As long as the Swarm is represented as some single-minded, clumsy bogeyman, relentless and stupid in its hunger, we shall never be able to fully accept the sickening truth: the Tyranids have a found way to get under our skin – the perfect harmonisation of human and xeno. That the galaxy may equally harbour hybrids that exploit the strengths of other races – the psychic power of the Eldar, the durability of the Orks, etc – is but one more terrifying consideration linked intrinsically to the alien scourge.

– Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.695.799.M4



Classified

VOCAL-RECODING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 63, 16TH/20TH
LABORATORY

[laughter]

The Great Devourer – stabbed in its guts!

[laughter]

It's the Ripper... That's the key! Down inside all the others, under their bulging organs, hiding-away. The same!

[laughter, fading]

[pause]

The Ripper. Yes. It's a living *sac*. Nothing more or less. And it's the *same* sac, curled up inside all the other organisms. Like a lowest common denominator. Like a shared ancestry. A way to disseminate nourishment – a simple organ, common to every specimen, given life of its own.

The Tyranids don't have a genetic 'base'. We know that. They're all so different, so varied... You make a weapon to kill one, or a poison to burn its flesh – how do you know it'll work on the others? It won't! They'll adapt, find a *way*.

But the Ripper's common to them all. A link. A-an origin!

Maybe it was the first. Who knows? Maybe it was the first creature the swarm ever absorbed. So perfect and pure it's never been changed. An alien prophet, A genetic commandment! An algebraic '*x*' from some distant galaxy.

[pause]

[Quiet] Let us say... Let us say we could form a toxin. Some... some viral horror, to waste away the Ripper's flesh... Given the time... Given the resources to do so, could we bring the beasts to ruin?

[pause]

[angry] Listen to me! Plotting the downfall of a mighty biology. Are they not *perfect*, these Tyranids? Are they not angels of a genetic *god*?

Oh, Emperor... I... I'm sorry! I d-didn't mean it!

[pause]

Is it heresy, to be so moved by that which is evil? Lord-on-the-Throne, don't you see that I have found their weaknesses? That I've slaughtered and sliced them all week long?

Have I not earned the right to love them?

[sobbing]

VOCAL-RECODING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.084.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 63, 17TH/20TH
LABORATORY

Darvus is lost to me. His ramblings no longer make sense. I fear that only a bullet in his brain will cure his insanity, and it will be an honour to oblige.

[sigh]

He says he's found a chink in the Tyranids' armour. A link 'to be exploited', he shrills, and then gapes his hopeful smile – anticipating my joy. Ha! As if I should *believe* his lies.

He tells me what I want to hear. I know that now. He sugar-coats his mundane findings in the hopes of winning my approval.

The fool.

[pause]

Is... Is this paranoia?

No, I've come to my senses at last. Gripped by such exhaustion and hunger that I barely know myself. That I barely know my own sanity! I *understand*.

We will not learn of the alien at the end of a scalpel. Their weakness lies in our knowledge. In study. In perfect, pure information, we will overcome their kind.

Tomorrow is the tenth day. Tomorrow is the day I swore to my masters I'd close this hellish place. Instead I find myself drowning in alien blood, conspired against by a mad Magos and a machine that will not obey my commands.

I *will* finish what I started. I *will* close the bestiary of Biegel, and those faceless enemies hanging above, in their silent ship will not stop me!

[pause]

Tomorrow the last specimen will die. I'll take the knowledge I've accumulated and return to my masters, the innards of the damned logic-engine ripped out. Let them judge me and my works, then. Let them judge my sanity. M-my paranoia. Let them look upon the data I've gathered, and claim that I have not served humanity well.

[pause]

I'm exhausted. I need sleep, but I dare not while there's work to be done. One final beast to kill. Not while Darvus is still awake...

He stands outside cell 1. I've seen him. He stares in at the empty room, eyes bulging, spittle hanging from his lip.

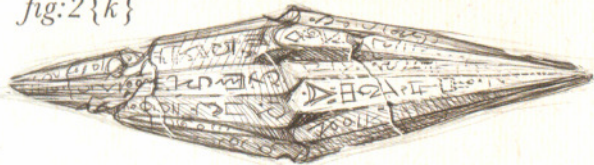
I need to escape this place. I need to gather Ralei's precious records, his files and letters and volumes, and *get out*.

I won't allow my mind to fall to Xenophilia, as Darvus's has.

Artist's impression of Rippers on the charge



fig:2{k}



{a}

{b}

{c}

{i}

{h}

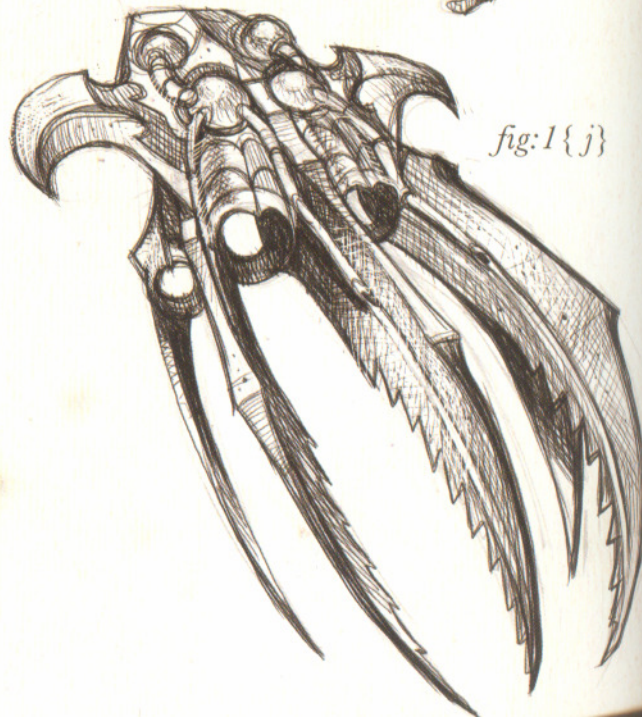
{d}

{e}

{f}

{g}

fig:1{j}



Troglydium Hrudii: 'HRUD'

58/NR/HRU

DISSECTION REPORT

Classified

SUBJECT: *Troglydium hrudii*

AGE: Unknown **GENDER:** Female

DISSECTION CONDUCTED BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #43-2-Z, INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM

DAY 64, 7TH/20TH

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS:

Subject is adult female Hrud. Designated nomenclature is unique: no xenos fauna suggesting root relationship or Hrud homeworld is known. Cause of death was asphyxia following cyanide intake. Note extreme decomposition of body. Liquefaction of upper dermis and musculature occurred immediately following death. Annotated observations to follow:

- a. Head. Endoskeleton analogous to human 'skull', albeit composed of semi-silicate resin. Evidence of unknown silicone compound throughout skeletal structure (organic cohesion to protein-strands?). Tissue liquefaction prevents study of olfactory/taste organs, though compact (singular) nasal cavity suggests relatively inefficient scent-detection. Sophisticated aural canals and inner-ear structures suggest superior hearing and balance. Ocular organs (two, broadly analogous to human eyes, albeit far larger) unaffected by physical liquefaction. No 'conical' photoreceptors (or analogues) in evidence, though massive concentration of spiral/rod stacks across retina: suggesting poor colour vision but extreme sensitivity to light. Conclusion: subject's sensory apparatus supports theory of nocturnal/subterranean existence.
- b. Dermis/tissue. Despite rapid decomposition, evidence of tissue layering suggests muscular/circulatory systems consist of dense bundles surrounding 'bone' core. All outer layers appear necrotic or artificial. Conclusion: subject's 'true' biology is deliberately buried beneath multiple layers of dead skin, artificially-introduced waste products, moulds and other organic matter: providing abundant heat (as bacterial 'composting' occurs), dermal protection (uppermost layers act as naturally absorptive 'armour'), and toxic/poisonous wastes [see c.].
- c. Large silicate 'scales' form armoured pads, coated in dense strata of fungal, bacterial, viral and unknown structures. *Spec:* subject diverts all harmful or toxic products of dermal decomposition to these foundations, from where fluids of various lethality can be channelled directly to upper limbs [see e.].
- d. Bodily cavity. Total tissue liquefaction prevents study of organs. For spinal vertebrae see h.
- e. Manipulatory limb. Endoskeletal structures [see f., h.] suggest quadrilateral digit-arrangement: opposite 'fingers' negate requirement for opposable thumb, suggesting extreme dexterity. Organic tubules (*cf: capillaries*) connect digits to poison-scales [see c.]. 'Fingertips' represent sole part of subject's biology where 'true' dermis is exposed, without decomposing matter forming sheath.
- f. Endoskeletal structure. Subject's body contains few supportive 'bones', comprising instead multiple interlinked vertebrae-structures (*cf: human spine*), within muscular column. Conclusion: all parts of the subject's body – limbs, fingers, neck, spine – are prehensile, allowing unrestricted movement. Characteristic of subterranean existence.
- g. Reproductive systems. Tissue liquefaction prevents study. Evidence of womblike formation suspended upon rudimentary 'tail'.
- h. Spinal column. Central bodily structure: vertebrae-analogues provide total freedom of movement. Evidence of 'locking' positions (muscular contractions create unbroken bony column). Conclusion: subject's prehensile structure does not prevent bodily support – during inactivity 'bones' interlock to create load-bearing structure.
- i. Bionic limb. Imperial issue. Scavenged?
- j. **DETAIL:** Inorganic implement/weapon (confiscated at time of capture). Triple-bladed 'claw' structure with concealed toxin-channels. *Spec:* scavenged Dark Eldar artefact?
- k. **DETAIL:** Unknown crystalline/silicate prism (confiscated at time of capture). Internal character-glyphs suggest recording/file/book analogue? Purpose unknown.

GENERAL OBSERVATION:

Subject represents an organism superbly adapted to troglodytic and nocturnal habitat. Evidence of salvaged materials (alongside reports of subject-capture, [see *Librium files*]) suggests a highly-specialised parasitic scavenger. A coincidental similarity of endoskeletal structures between the subject and other 'classic' races ('vertebrae' analogue is common to Ork, Eldar, Tau, Kroot, etc) is difficult to countenance.

SIGNED:

Magos Biologis Sharle Darvus

Ing Brehm Sasham



VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.086.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 64, 10TH/20TH
LIBRARY

The last day. The last dissection. How I yearn to be away from this place.

[pause]

It would be a difficult thing to leave Ralei's - no... My library.

[pause]

The last dissection is done, and now I have one last hunt through these records. I almost wish there was more time.

I've seized an hour's sleep and even real meat, *real* food. It felt like nothing less than paradise.

[sigh]

The inquisitorial vessel above us says nothing. Nor can I contact the *Perduco Astrus*. I suppose I must pray that come this evening, when I go aboard my shuttle and leave this benighted place burning, my ship will retrieve me.

What other option have I?

[pause]

[quiet] Heh... How curious it was, to watch Darvus with his last alien.

During his grisly work it's like he dons a suit of sanity, discarding his fractured mindstate, only to reaffix it when the slicing's done. And the stink! A rotting body, oozing and putrid on his table. If that's the bedfellow of a xenophile, Darvus can keep his heresy.

[pause]

Tonight it ends. I will kill the Magos, take what records I can carry, and leave.

Let me make the most of this wondrous, wicked library whilst I can.

FILE ACCESS 2333-196-1

EMPEROR-CLASS VESSEL: PATERNUS GLORIEM
TESTIMONY OF INDENTURED CREWMAN SELEBOR
MATTHIAS
(UNDER INTERROGATION 0.257.790.M41)

'Weird, seeing one for real. You work anytime down 'mong the ratings and you used get to hearing about the bendies. But seeing one for real...

'We all know the stories of strange creatures living in the gaps between decks. Little knock-knock noises in the night. It's like a joke. If something goes missing - hey, the bendies got it. Some poor bastard never shows-up for loading-duty - no mystery, the bendies got him.

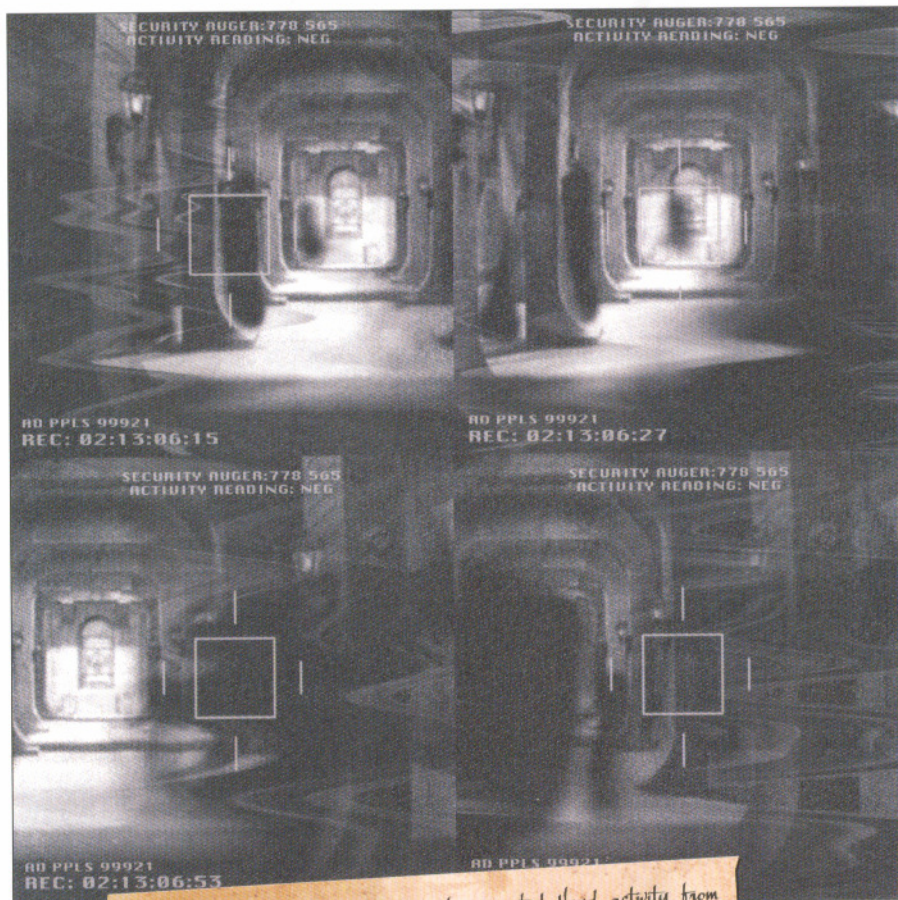
'Only no one really believes it.

'One late shift I'm loading in the Gen-room when right infronta me it stepped out of the smoke like a ghost, cloaked and hunched, hands bent back on themselves. It shimmered, like it was messing with my brain, trying to convince me it weren't even there. It didn't fool me.

'I gave it a smash round the ear with my shovel. Went down like a sack of sand. Before I know it there's all these big lads with guns chucking nets on the beast, shouting blue murder. Great, I thought someone's caught a bendy and I helped. There'll be a reward in this!

'Except I've been locked up here ever since, and no one's bothered to tell me why, and now I got the likes of you askin' questions. I don't mean to seem impert'nent sir, but what's so bloody secr-'

INTERVIEW TERMINATED



Internal security auger images of suspected fluid activity from the corridor inside the Divine Sanctuary battle cruiser.

My Dear Rafael,

I've been anticipating your correspondence for some time. You have quite the reputation for radicalism, my friend, and were it not for my own interest in the field of xenology I would have hesitated to contact you. The influence of the sanctimonious Conclave Conservati has never been stronger, and defying them is a sure way to wind up dead. They've let it be known – politely, of course – that you're a heretic and xenophile of the worst kind, and anyone caught fraternising with you will be regarded as the same.

Two years ago, in the course of investigating tunnels beneath the hive on Aggavaria, I stumbled upon a deranged man. Such was his countenance and malnutrition I barely recognised him as human. He spoke little low-gothic and so shattered was his mind that little of what he said made sense, but piece-by-piece, I assembled a view of his woes.

He was separated from his mother at six, and all his knowledge of human contact predated that event. For the remainder of his life he had been a zanhad – a sort of slave-cum-pet to his captors: the Hrud. As fortune had it, our arrival within their tunnels coincided with the tribe's 'poh-ha': a mass migration (to where we never discovered) triggered by population growth.

With the aid of certain interrogatory encouragements, the man was able to compile an impression of his captors.

The Hrud are a secretive race of subterranean scavengers, whose juuntak – tunnel-cities – invariably spring-up near the greatest centres of human population. Such groups rarely maintain contact – lacking the means to do so – though as a race they demonstrate an unparalleled fastidiousness in the field of record-keeping: compiling vast stores of historical, cultural and technical information. Fiercely tribal, they are expert salvagers of technology and can easily assemble a mongrel collection of weapons and devices from whatever resources they have at their disposal. Better still, their bodies are perfectly adapted to life as opportunistic predators; they can synthesize a staggering array of different poisons and can slip silently through even the narrowest of tunnels. Stranger yet, our captive described to us the *ssaak* – or 'see mist' – at which we envisaged some ingenious distorlien field, biologically generated, to confound the eyes of any enemy. No wonder the 'shadow creepers' of legend are nearly invisible.

It seems that when the population of a single tribe reaches a particular level of saturation, a number of members schism by stowing away in the spaces of transports and spacehulks to form new tribes in some distant place, taking with them the amassed knowledge of the Raheed – the 'mass-tribe'. Entire nomadic nations have flourished in the spaces between decks of Imperial vessels, and with their formidable recall, our captive's former slavers would often recount the wanderings of their forbears for days on end. In his stilled testimonies, our prisoner painted a picture of creatures to whom ancestry and family-lies were all important, defying the blinkered 'filthy scavenger' impression our scholars would have us believe.

Hrud religion is a peculiar subject. Where other races invariably regard their deities with a subconscious distance, the clarity of Hrud mass-memory makes it likely that their legends are – if not real – then at least based upon real events. They have it that at the dawn of time their race was created by a pantheon of benevolent gods (the *Slah-haii*, or 'most ancient'), who intended them to bask in the sun and be fruitful. All this changed when the deities entered a ruinous war with the *Yaam-khoh* ('mirror devils'), and were variously slain, crippled or forced to flee. According to the Hrud, only one of their Gods remained: *Qah* – 'he who lingers'. This solitary godhead, recognising the danger his beloved children were in, changed the Hrud into the nocturnal scavengers we knew today. Curiously, around 500,000 years ago, *Qah* disappeared: informing the Hrud that he had great works to attend, and that they would be reunited at the time of *Raheed-skoh*: when the tribes come together for the last battle against the *Yaam-khoh*.

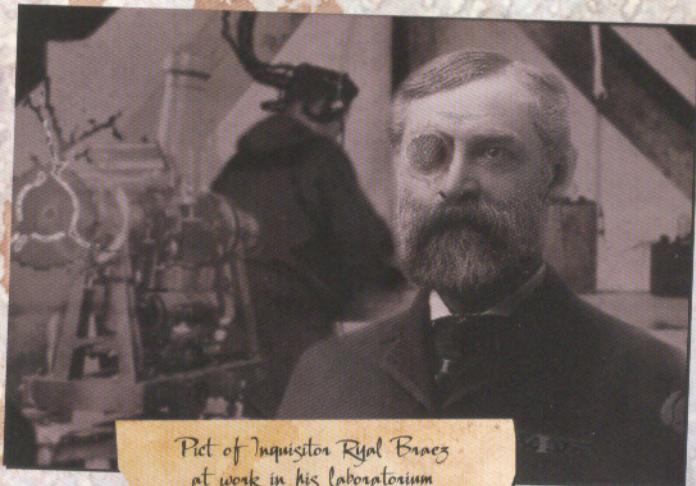
Given that our own Sacred Humanity has been master of the space-lanes for a relatively short period by the Hrud's ancient reckoning, we must draw the conclusion that these parasitic tribes have been lurking in the shadows of the galaxy for far longer than we have credited. One detail remains unaccountable within this context: when questioned upon his birthworld and his devotion to the holy Emperor, our raving captive simply threw back his head and laughed – refusing to discuss the thing which is long-past. To hear him speak, it was as if he sincerely believed all humans to be the slaves of his xenos masters, and the age of the Imperium was nothing but a distant memory.

Our captive died within two months. His body had adapted to the poisonous emanations of his slavers, and their absence left him in a state of toxic shock.

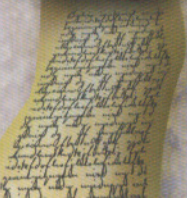
I pray to the throne that my knowledge aids you in your quest, though it answers not the most pressing question of all. What are the Hrud, and from where did they arise? Emperor preserve.

Braez

Inquisitor Rygal Braez



Pict of Inquisitor Rygal Braez
at work in his laboratorium



The Hrud are a living enigma. Before even I came to have one in my possession - the result of a fortuitous incident aboard the Paternus Gloriam and the lucky placement of my mercantile associates - my quest for knowledge uncovered a single detail over and over again: nobody doubted that the Hrud existed, but nobody knew much about them. Rumours abounded of secret societies beneath cities, within the engine-stacks of Imperial vessels and between tiers of the most ancient hives; but in the absence of evidence all had been reduced to half-serious tales of bogeymen to scare infants.

Even when my captive was lodged within the bestiary, Darvus and I could discern little more. At the time of writing this, the Hrud specimen has been with us eleven years and we know as little of it now as we did when first it arrived. Physically it is impossible to study: the ragged cloak it habitually wears conceals its true form, and what little it reveals of itself is a shifting, misshapen morass of decomposing filth. More curious still, the creature has some ineffable ability to confound the eye. I don't know how. I don't know if it's a physical ability, or some curious property of the chemicals it produces, or simply a trick of the light, but even in a cell without shadows, it's able to conceal itself: a truly disturbing optical effect.

The specimen never speaks nor seeks to communicate. Had it not been for the testimony of my old friend Inquisitor Braez, who replied to my hopeful correspondence during my last trip to Safaur, the Hrud enigma would remain as impenetrable as ever. As it is, Braez has spurred me into a frenzy of activity, and I write this ledger-entry having just returned from Aggavaria, where (he claims) he found his human slave. The tunnels beneath the hive are long-since deserted, but their size astonished me. No doubt I wandered blithely past hidden wonders and unseen cities in the dark,

but what I did find - a series of glyphs and pictograms inscribed upon a tunnel wall - has given me more than enough food for thought.

Given the testimony of Braez's prisoner, I have no hesitation in speculating that the figures scribbled thereon are those same ancient gods his Hrud captors recalled. What troubles me most is not the inherent heresy of this pantheon, but their remarkable likenesses to the gods of other races. Here we see a horned hunter, there a red-handed figure, a laughing jester and a hammer-wielding artisan. Such demagogues recur again and again in the myths and legends of a number of races. Is there synchronicity in the worship of these ancient deities? And - more worryingly - is there some truth to their existence?

From that horrific, heretical speculation there follows another question. Braez's testimony speaks of a single god who lingered behind, who deserted the Hrud fully half a million years ago, with promises of a 'great work'. What event of colossal significance was underway at that time? As with so much concerning the Hrud and all their xenogen cousins, it is unlikely we shall ever know.

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.997.801.M41

++WIDEBEAM BULLETIN

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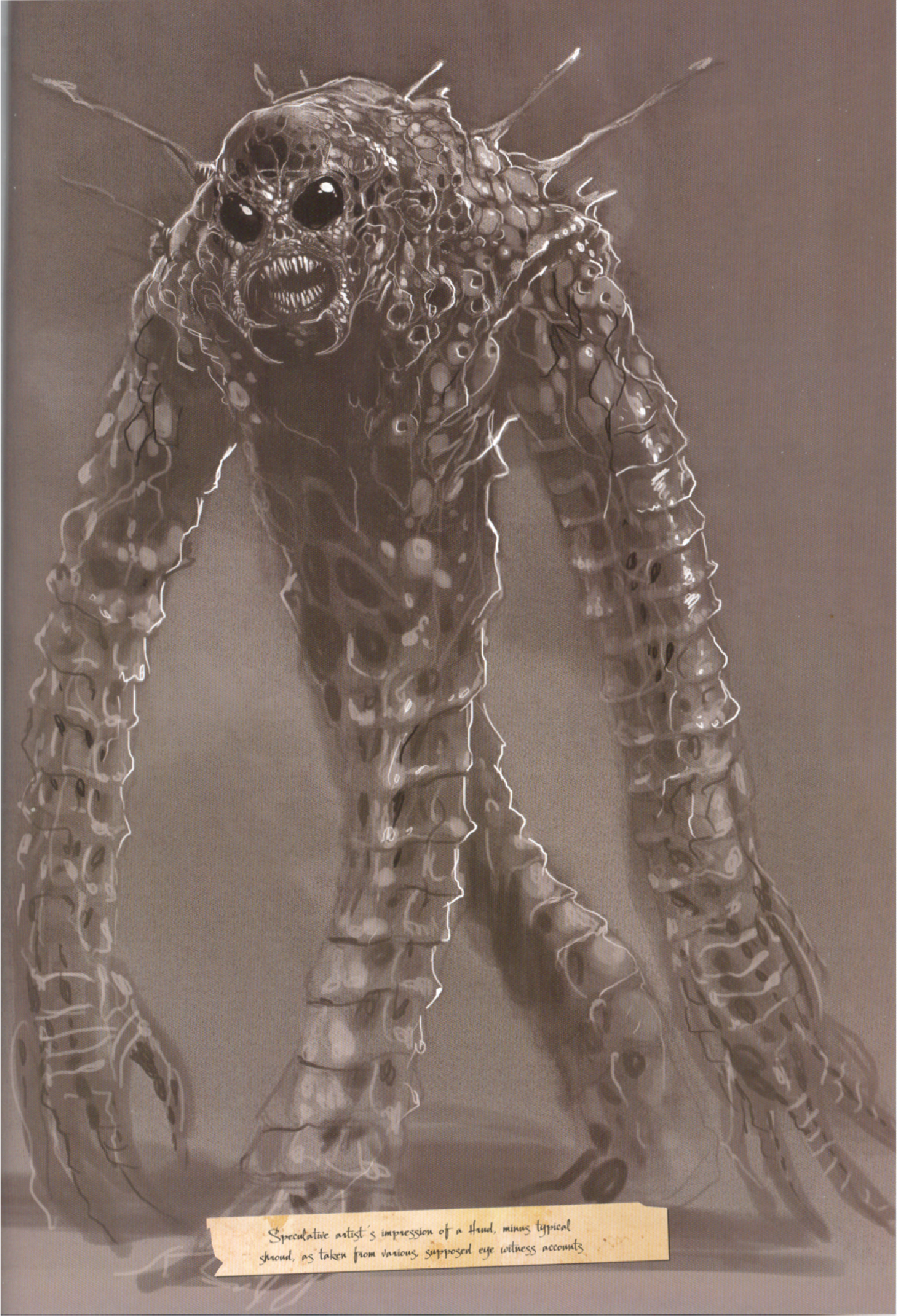
++ALL OPERATIVES, ORDO XENOS++

++ATTEND:++

++WE OF THE CONGRESS XENOS SERVE NOTICE THAT ON THIS DAY, 0.506.800.M41, INQUISITOR RYAL BRAEZ HAS BEEN JUDGED EXCOMMUNICATORIS AND XENOPHILE IN TRIAL BEFORE A COUNCIL OF HIS PEERS. HE IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH. SO PERISH ALL ENEMIES OF THE TRUE EMPEROR, AND HIS MOST HOLY INQUISITION.++

++AVE IMPERATOR++

+++END+++



Speculative artist's impression of a Haud, minus typical
shroud, as taken from various, supposed eye witness accounts.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.086.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 64, 14TH/20TH
LIBRARY

Enough.

Ralei goes too far. All this *filth* about false gods! He dares to think them real? What would he have us believe, with his talk of engineered races and common bonds? That there's some shared heritage? Some galactic destiny *other* than mankind's dominion?

I'll not read another word.

[pause]

I've been down to the basement to see what new mischief Darvus has been up to. I half expected to find him slumped beyond the door to cell 1, as ever, but no. He was in the Kroot's cell, standing over the body festering inside, knife in hand, a sliver of meat hanging from his lips.

No wonder the hunger never got to him. He's been eating the dead.

[pause]

It's one profanity too far. Through all this work, the hints and signs of communion have grown. Talk of genetic absorption. Digestion of flesh. Human hybrids. *Knowing the alien*. It infuses all that I've seen and studied. It infects me.

It ends now. The last beast is dead. The last notes are loaded onto the logic engine. Let this recording be my last. I go now to do what I should have done the very instant I arrived here: to give Darvus his traitor's death, to burn this edifice to the ground, and to leave this forsaken place behind.

[alarms, klaxons, shouts]
What's—
+++SYSTEM FAILURE+++

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 64, 15TH/20TH
LABORATORY

+++SYSTEM ONLINE+++
+++RECORDING UNDERWAY+++

—and just sit here t-talking to myself, hahaha, as if nothing's happened, and...

[pause]

Wait. The lights are back on. The recorder's running. The power's back.

[laughter]

The power's back on!

It's been, what? An hour? The ground shook. Everything went off. Computers, lights, *everything*.

Ha-ha! Funny. The first thing I thought was that the treasures will get free.

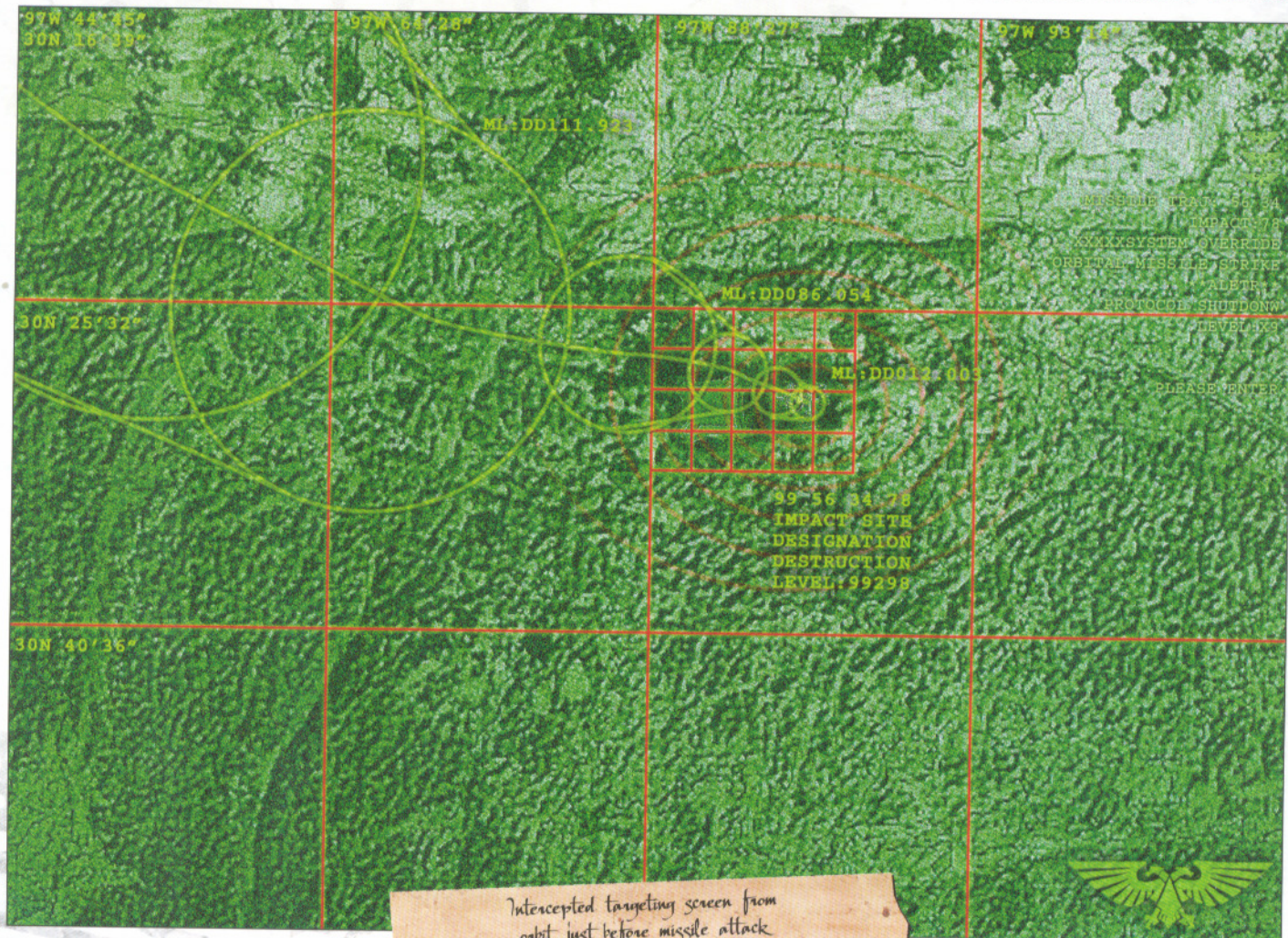
[laughter, becomes sobbing]

But they are all dead. Only the thing in cell 1, and that would never leave.

[pause]

We've been blasted. I went upstairs to see what it was all about. Sasham was running around and howling.

An orbital strike, he says. A blast from the Inquisitorial Vessel. The shockwave knocked out the



Intercepted targeting screen from
orbit, just before missile attack

Classified

systems and the servitors were scuttling around, patching things up.

It wasn't until we went on the roof that we saw what they'd shot at.

It's almost funny.

They've destroyed the pompous bastard's shuttle. They've stranded him here.

There's so much still to do. So many artefacts and specimens awaiting inspection. How long will this reprieve last?

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.086.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, 15TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM

We are surrounded.

I see them on the monitors. Stormtroopers, bearing the insignia of the inquisition.

They must have deployed in the colony-village. There's nowhere else the shuttle could have landed. A-are they in league with the settlers? Emperor's ghost, they must have told been: the Kroot, the Lictor...

Why did they fire on us? Why have they destroyed my shuttle? I offered them every assurance. And now the colonists will have poured their poison and the soldiers – the fools – must think me the worst form of traitor.

They see me just as I saw Rolei.

What to do? What to do?

I've tried calling out to them. Reduced to standing on the wall, crying out into the forests. But the sun's already setting and from the shadows between the trees there came no reply other than bullets. They shot at me!

[pause]

I can see no way to resolve this peacefully.

Have I fallen so far from grace – and all in the course of ten days – that troopers who should bow at my presence instead take up their guns and seek my death?

Darvus clatters about in his basement, humming and giggling. Emperor alone knows what he's doing.

I was going to kill him, before. Now the very idea fills me with horror. My lords, I would not relish a lonely death, bottled-up inside this tainted hellhole.

[pause]

There must be some way to make them see that I'm no xenophile like Rolei.

There *must* be.



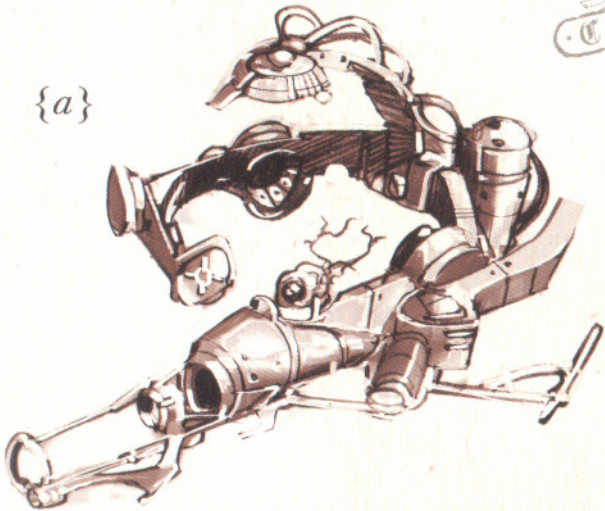
Arco-stylus drone study: Inquisitorial stormtroopers deploy beyond Facility Walls.
[Note: study remains incomplete following ballistic damage to drone apparatus]

Classified

MISCELLANY

00/AA/MIS

{a}



Xenarch Conduction Spine

{b}



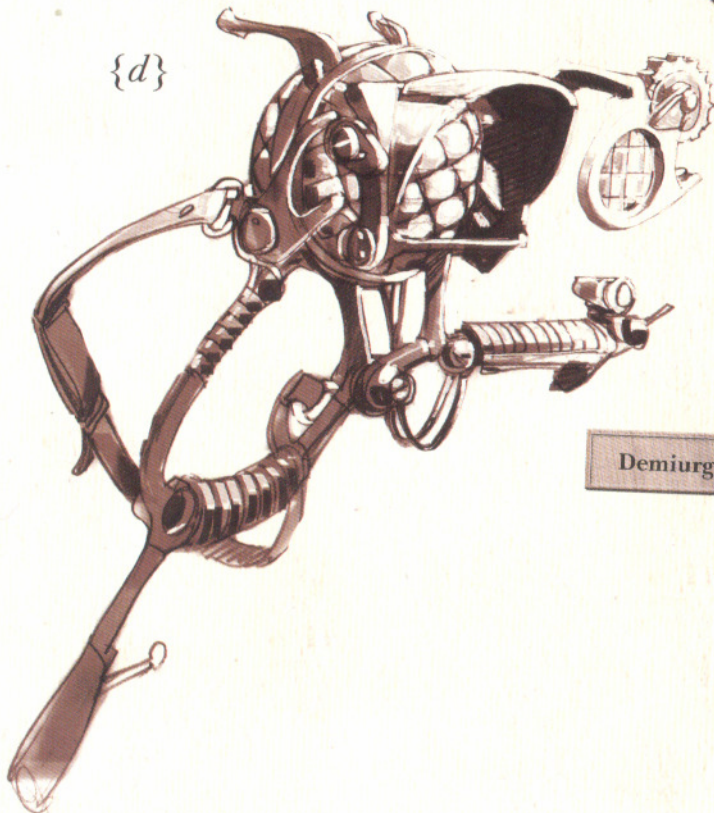
Nekulli Whisperlance

{c}



K'Nib

{d}



Demiurg Survey Glass

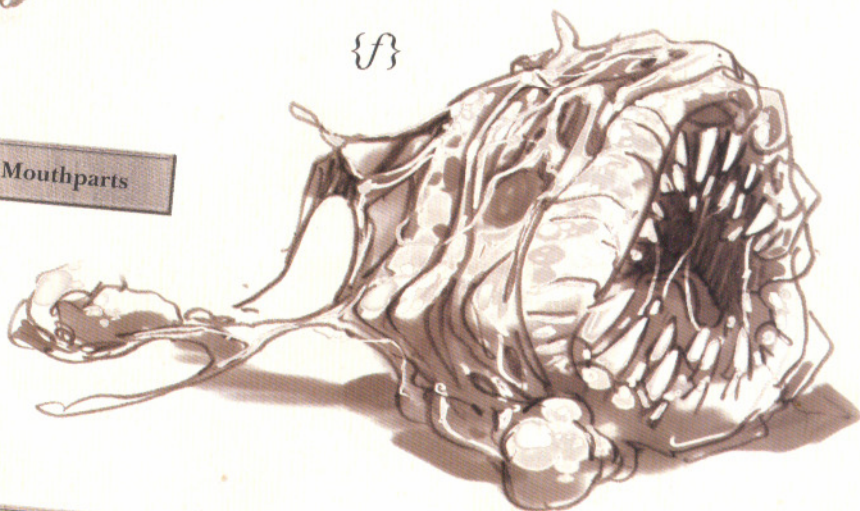
{e}



Viskeon Foetus-Limb

{f}

Drugh Mouthparts



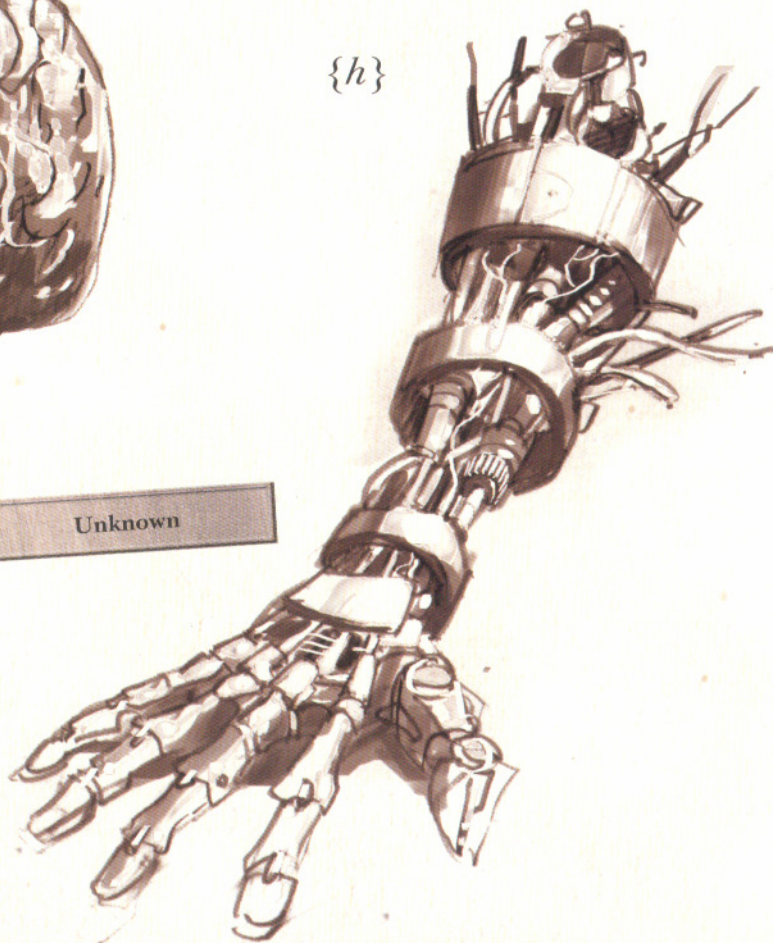
{g}

Wyrdsquig



{h}

Unknown



ARTEFACT STUDIES

Classified

OBSERVATIONS TAKEN BY MAGOS BIOLOGIS SHARLE DARVUS

ATTENDING: SERVITOR #43-2-Z

DAY 65, 17TH/20TH

SUBJECT IMPRESSIONS:

Artefact collection comprises items gathered by Inquisitor Ralei during operations throughout the Imperium. In each case the inquisitor has affixed a label stating the suspected origins of the artefact, along with his own – often cryptic – notes. These are embedded within the following report where relevant. Annotated Observations to follow.

- Unknown implement labelled XENARCH CONDUCTION SPINE. Imperial records suggest Xenarch empire to Galactic north – isolationist, warp-worshipping, rumoured to generate biological electro/plasma. Ralei's note reads: FOCUS/DISCHARGE OF BIO-CURRENT. Spec: a weapon to focus naturally produced energy into a discharged beam? Communicative tool? Artefact is unknown alloy with complex components. Attached organic structure (dessicated) suggests ocular organ (human eye analogous). Conclusion: whatever its intended effect, implement appears to focus and direct energy directly from Xenarch biology.
- Unknown implement labelled NEKULLI WHISPERLANCE. No records of Nekulli race available. High likelihood of implement's use as weapon: toothed-edge reveals traces of organic powder (spec: dessicated blood), and fluted barrel end suggests ballistic function. Implement combines ferrous exterior with multi-chambered silicate structure. Highly complex system of valves, reeds and resonant chambers suggests musical/aural function. Spec: a combined combat/pacification weapon. Perhaps Nekulli biology supports its use as a resonator?
- Unknown armour/clothing/implement labelled K'NIB. Unknown material. Spec: power-fist analogous? Imperial records make passing reference to 'festering clawed fiends of K'Nib'. No other information available. Ralei's notes read simply: LIMB: FIFTH OF TEN.
- Labelled DEMIURG SURVEY GLASS. Extreme intricacy. Multiple working parts. Material unknown – crystalline metal? Despite manipulation of controls no apparent effect. Spec: No power? No insertion/interface socket in evidence – remotely powered? DEMIURG recognised as defensively-hostile xenos 654.M41, Borbirteq Council. Ralei's notes: 'PENETRATIVE VISUAL TOOL. MINERAL-DETECTION: 2KM DEPTH.' Conclusion: extreme degree of technological sophistication. Non-militaristic.
- Preserved (formaldehyde) organic structure. Labelled VISKEON FOETUS-LIMB. Scant Imperial records suggest Viskeon race faces extinction following absorption of unnamed homeworld by Tyranids. Despite preservation, cellular structure has decomposed. Outward impressions suggest an adult upper limb (arm/hand analogous), severed with clean laser/monofilament. Regenerative growth in initial stages: an unformed VISKEON FOETUS has developed.
- Preserved bony structure, labelled DRUGH MOUTHPARTS. Drugh are unrepresented in Imperial records. Ralei's notes suggest large 'larval' invertebrate with advanced psionic capability. So called mouthparts feature inwardly bevelled outer surfaces, suggesting expellation not ingestion. Duel defecation/consumption organ?
- Preserved organism. Labelled WYRDSQUIG. Cellular structure combines animal and fungal metabolic systems: suggesting ORKOID ancestry. Primary physical examination suggests close genetic links to *Orkus ravenati* – gnasher squig – although presence of massive, densely-packed neural lobes is incongruous. RALEI's notes: 'MUTANT RAVENATI SQUIG. RARE OCCURRENCE IN WILD. EMPLOYED BY ORKUS NEGRA AS "PSIONIC BOMB": CATASTROPHIC TELEPATHIC SHOCKWAVE AT MOMENT OF DEATH'.
- Unknown artificial artefact. Unlabelled. Structure is analogous to human hand. Compositional tests confirm metal alloy exterior comprises unknown materials f

The Metal Lives.

The Metal Lives. The Metal Lives. The Metal Lives.

The Metal Lives

The Metal Lives

The Metal Lives

Ref to attached sketch. I found this stone tablet on the surface of Torakal IV - an Eldar 'exodite' community - a day before its destruction at the hands of the Tarantulas Space Marines, conducting an exterminatus campaign. This drawing is the only record of its existence, and with the aid of xenolinguists I have since deciphered its pictographic 'tale'. The story is followed from the bottom upwards, and is told in four distinct tiers. The top of the tablet (and a possible fifth tier) was missing at the time of my study. The account can be related as follows:

Lowest tier. A series of enigmatic figures, each with its own runic and pictorial identity (Gods? Warp-entities?) gather together. Iconic flames (or winds?) link them to the second tier, suggesting an element of narrative causality: the first begets the second. Thus, the figures depicted at the foot of the tablet could be speculated to be creating those of the second tier.

Second tier. A host of iconised creatures, seemingly being created by the shadowy figures below. Note certain recognisable features as well as a myriad of unknown others.

Third tier. A violent conflict, seemingly between the ancient 'creators' of the first tier and a mysterious enemy, represented here by a featureless face and a complex runic description. We must assume, given their positioning between opposing forces, that the races of Tier 2 are a fundamental part of this war. At either edge of the tablet the shadowy figures are seen fleeing from the spatial borders of the monolith, defeated by the skull-faced enemy.

Fourth tier: partially missing. My calculus logi presented a dozen alternative meanings for this section, but suggested it is most likely that the two boxed panels, connected as they are by those same 'fire/wind' strands to Tier 1, represent members of the shadowy 'creators' who survived the war. The boxes would seem to suggest they are instead

imprisoned (either by their enemies, or within the physical forms they have adopted). The first is characterised by a split masque, laughing and crying at the same instant, upon a webbed background. The second appears to show a clawed, bloody hand, but has been defaced or deliberately fractured by a violent rending of the stone. There is also evidence of a third boxed panel - lost along with the final tier.

I have since scoured the records of the Librium Xenos and the Archivati of Terra for information upon the missing fragment, but have discovered nothing.

- Inquisitor Maturin Ralei, 6.652.785.M41

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.087.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, 18TH/20TH
LIBRARY

I'm helpless. Damn this waiting.

My lords, a short while ago I noticed a parchment poking from beneath Ralei's ledger. How long it's been there, folded tightly and drowned in dust, I can't say. Ralei's affixed notes make no great claims of the drawing's importance but I sense otherwise.

[sigh]

I include the drawing here as an example of the inexplicability of xenology, and leave it to you to explain the sense of dread it fills me with.

I have the missing fragment! Sketched in secret from the library of the Conclave Conservati itself. What hypocrisy is this? They snarl and scoff at the idea of xenology yet hoard its greatest treasures for themselves?

My Calculus Logi tells me the scope of possibilities defies a simple definition to this fifth tier, but I feel sure I can decipher the pictograms myself. I have spent my life learning of the xenos infesting our Imperium. Their legends are code-books to the histories of the galaxy, and here is the final piece to the puzzle.

No wonder the Conclave have resisted its exposure. They'll kill me if they discover I have it.

6.087.803.M41



Stone tablet of xeno origin, the top section is missing

Classified

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.087.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, 19TH/20TH
LIBRARY

I don't know what to think or say.
Ralei must be lying, or mistaken. The Conclave would never horde such tainted artefacts. He's... He's trying to trick me.
[pause]
Except he's dead. He never knew I'd come here.
[ragged breath]
As for the drawing, it's a fake. The whole thing. Wicked xenos lies.
It must be.
I took it to Darvus. I just wanted him to see, to tell me it was all a lie.
It's no good. He sits in his lab slicing his own arm with a bloodied scalpel.
The knowledge. I must focus on that.
Let my life be snuffed, let my sanity shatter, but I beg, don't let it be for nothing. There must be a way to preserve it.
I can't let it go to waste.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, 19TH/20TH
LABORATORY

The metal lives. The metal lives.
[sounds of cutting; grunts of pain]
The metal lives. The metal lives.
I...
I must let it out.

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.087.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, 20TH/20TH
CONTROL ROOM

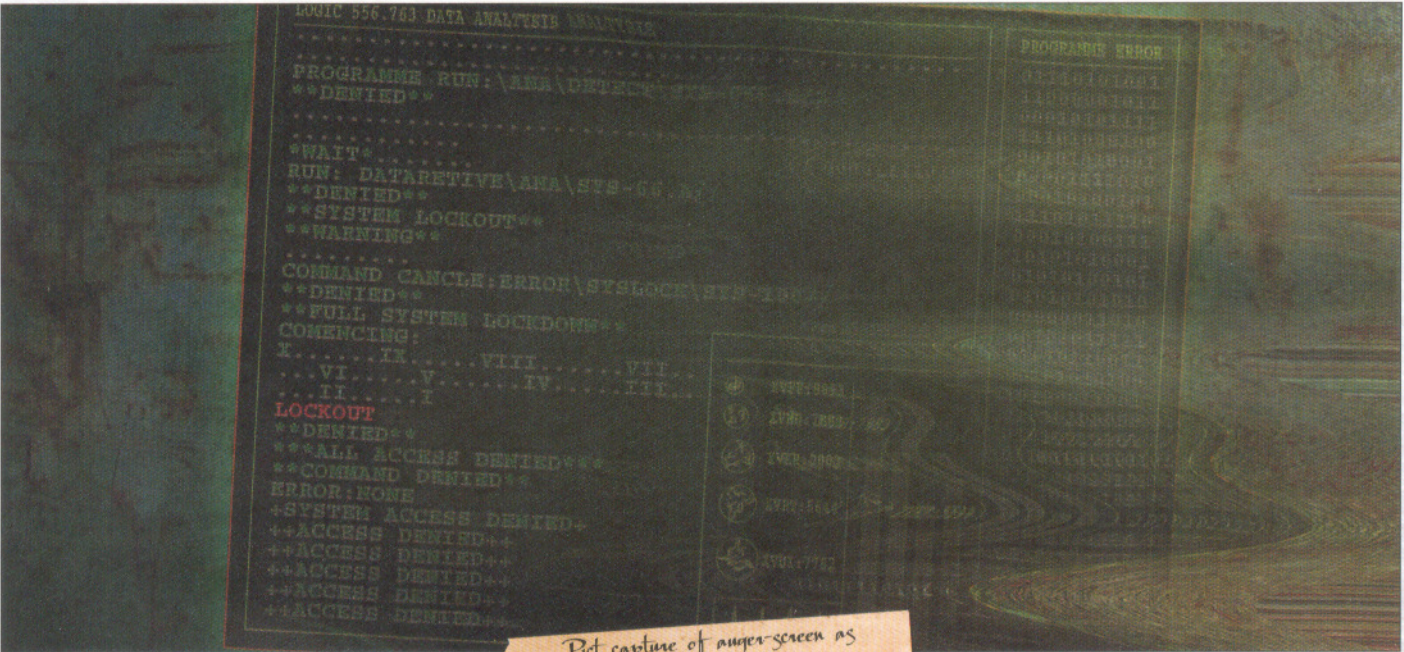
Will it work? I don't know. It's my last hope.
My lords, I have consorted with xenophilia and now my enemies gather at the gate. If I die here today, know this: I have done my duty. The alien scum are dead. The knowledge I have accrued – both xenological and heretical – is more than enough to damn Ralei's memory forever.

I have copied it.
I seared a replica onto the mind of a servitor. Unarmed, it can do what I cannot; it can walk out of the facility and take my findings to the troops. Let them see that I have no malice towards them. Let them see that I have done nothing but obey orders.
[pause]
There. I watch it now on the Security Augers. My vessel of deliverance, stepping out into the night. It holds its hands above its head. The troops advance out from the trees. They're nervous, of course.

They gather around it. They question it. My delivery is at hand, and not a single life was lost—
[loud explosion, off]
Oh no... No, no, no...
How could this...
The servitor detonated. The troops are... Emperor's tears... The blood!
[gunfire, explosions, off]
The servitors have opened fire again. I did not command them. What devilry is this?
[switches being manipulated]
No!

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 65, MIDNIGHT.
LABORATORY

It's time.
[explosions, rumbling, off]
The spiral completes. The centre cannot hold.
Ruin is at hand.
Yes, it is time.
[pause]
Time to open cell 1.



Pic capture of auger-screen as system denies inquisitorial access



Arco-stylus pict: Dawus opens cell .1

VOCAL-RECORDING FILE

INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:

DATE IMPERIAL: 6.087.805.M41

DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 66, 1ST/20TH

CONTROL ROOM.

The bestiary has become an asylum. Nothing works. Nothing responds!

Where's Darvus?

[alarms, gunfire, off]

The logic engine festers in its place. Damnable thing! I'd destroy it if it weren't my only guardian. The stormtroopers gather outside. Servitors wander about, chattering and clattering, racing to perform tasks that I – their *master* – didn't set.

[pause]

My beautiful library. When they storm the walls, will it burn?

[alarms, gunfire, off]

What can I do?

[gunfire, off]

[door opening, closing]

Now the building is possessed. Doors that open and shut without command. Heaters and fans spilling cables from burst innards. Will the main gate betray me, too? Will the

servitor-gunners fall silent and allow my killers inside? Will the logic engine allow its records to be lost?

Curse the day we placed our fates in the hands of a machine.

My lords, do you hear me? Are you listening to this, weeks after my death, safe and fat in your Conclave chambers? Listen to me! How can you see terror in biology, in the miracles of life that teem across our galaxy? How can you *hate* that which you do not understand – this alien 'menace' – yet embrace the machines you understand even less?

Who released the Kroot that slaughtered my astropath? Who unleashed the Tyranid monstrosity upon the crowd below? Who prevented me from contacting the vessel above, and sealed my doom? Who has strewn my path with obstacles and fatal traps since my arrival? *Who?*

The bestiary. The building itself. The warp-damned logic-engine.

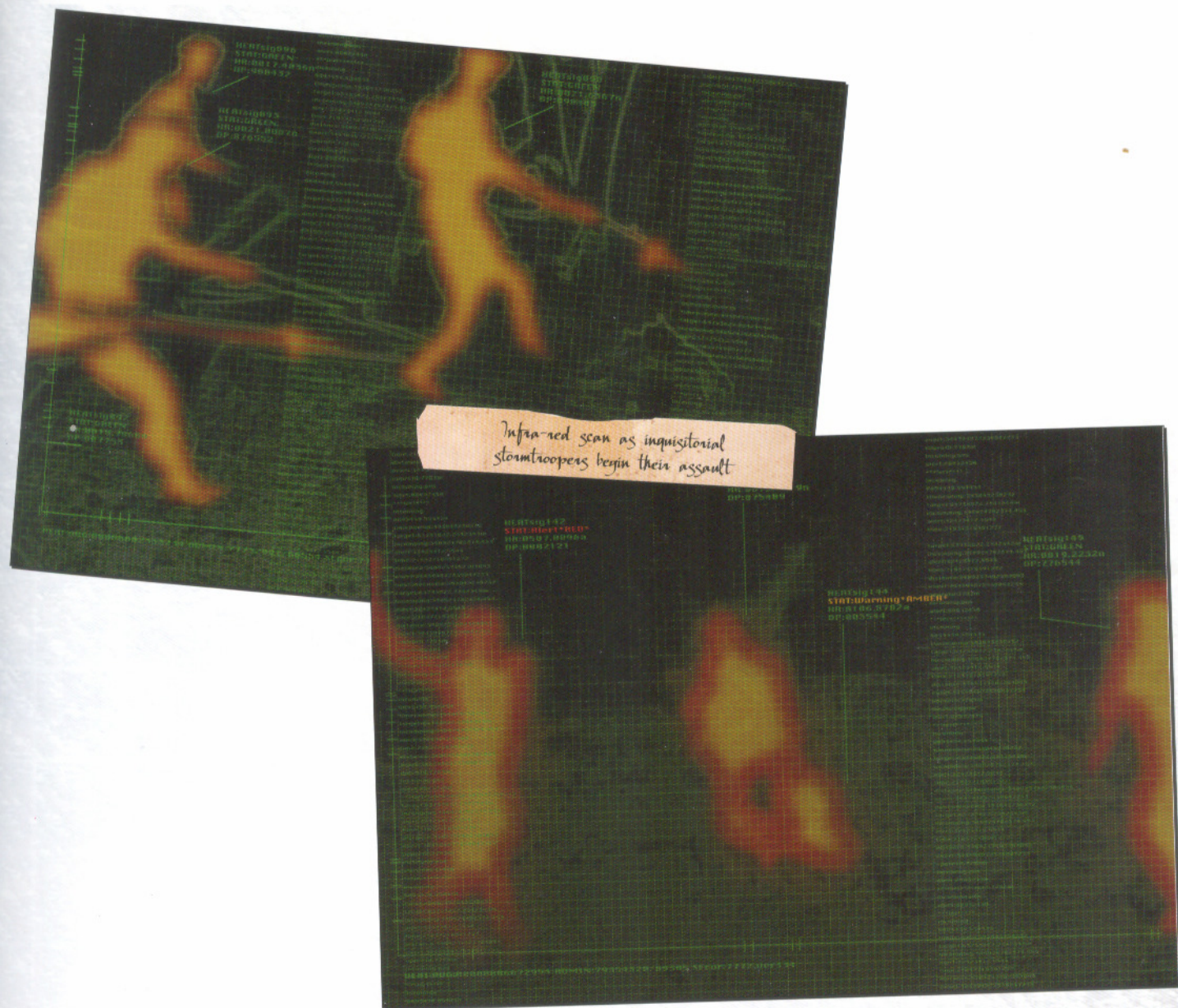
There's a ghost inside this machine, and we who shudder and draw back in contempt from knowledge of the alien, we've been directing our hatred in the wrong direction.

It's the machines. That's where the *true* terror lurks.

[gunfire, screams, explosions, off]

They're coming.

Infrared scan as inquisitorial stormtroopers begin their assault



**VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
MAGOS BIOLOGIS DARVUS:
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 66, 1ST/20TH
LABORATORY**

He has returned.

With a divine army, he's come back for me.

My lord, I *knew* you wouldn't forget me.

[voices, whispering, off]

I...

I must go now.

Ave...

Ave *xenologica*.

I go to the stars.

**VOCAL-RECORDING FILE
INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM:
DATE IMPERIAL: 6.087.805.M41
DATE BIEGEL LOCAL: DAY 66, 1ST/20TH
CONTROL ROOM**

[crackling, hissing, off]

Terra's bones, what's that noise?

Where's Darvus? It sounds like it's coming from the cells below. I can hear—

[door opens]

Who's there?

[footsteps]

S-sweet Emperor, how did you get in here? Who are y—

[footsteps]

I know you. I recognise you. You're dead. You're *dead*!

[footsteps]

Don't come any closer! I'll—

[gunshot]

Image of unknown vessel
rising from the hestary

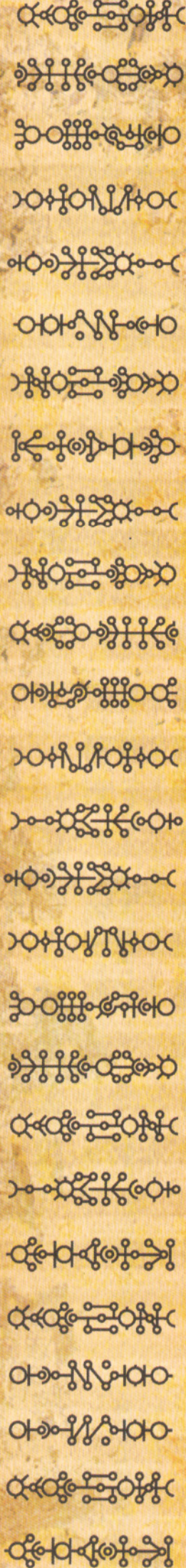


—INTERCEPTED TRANSMISSIONS—

++GROUND ASSAULT TEAM TO MISSION
CONTROL (ABOARD UMBRARIUS INQUIS)++
++UNKNOWN STRUCTURE HAS EMERGED
FROM FACILITY CORE++
++WHAT ORDERS?++
++UMBRARIUS INQUIS TO ASSAULT TEAM++
++PLEASE SPECIFY++
++WHAT NATURE 'UNKNOWN STRUC-
TURE'?++
++THREAT/VEHICULAR/ETC++
++STRUCTURE'S PURPOSE UNKNOWN++
++ROUGHLY PYRAMIDIC++
++VAST SIZE
++GREEN ILLUMINATION FROM INTERI-
OR++
++WHAT ORDERS?+++
++ADVISE HASTE++
++STRUCTURE IS AERIALY MOBILE++
++CLEAR THE AREA++
++BE ADVISED. GROUND ASSAULT CANNOT
CLEAR AREA++
++FOREST COVER TOO DENSE FOR RAPID
RETREAT++
++BE ADVISED! BE ADVISED++
++ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT UNDERWAY++
++EMPEROR PRESERVE++



Classified



TRANSCRIBED DIALOGUE:

MANUAL RECORDING - LOGIC ENGINE 12##/43155F

LOCATION: CONTROL ROOM.

SUBJECTS: #1 INQUISITOR BREHM SASHAM (INEAT), #2 [DENIED-DENIED-DENIED-DENIED-DENIED-DENIED-DENIED-DENIED] (reassigned des. 'UNKNOWN')

SASHAM: W-what have... What have you done to me?

UNKNOWN: A muscle-relaxant. It would be unwise to struggle.

SASHAM: What do you want? I don't understand.

UNKNOWN: Oh, come now. Haven't you worked it out?

[pause]

We've played you, little man. We've pulled your strings. We've brought you here and watched you dance.

SASHAM: You didn't bring me. My masters sent me to-

UNKNOWN: No. Wrong. / sent you. A simple transmission. A few stolen authorisations.

[pause]

SASHAM: You faked my orders? But...

UNKNOWN: It was Darvus who forced my hand. For fifteen years I've kept him. My little pet. His mind was so distorted I could feed him what lies I chose. He thought he served his Imperium. He thought he toiled for the good of mankind. The poor fool.

SASHAM: Who are you?

UNKNOWN: For fifteen years he's tended and observed whatever alien filth we brought him. We didn't foresee his... attachment. It became necessary to introduce a *new element*. Something to hasten his dissections.

SASHAM: [quiet] Who are you?

UNKNOWN: Understand, little man, we know nothing of flesh. We discarded the frailties of biology an aeon ago.

SASHAM: What 'we'? Who are you talking a-

UNKNOWN: And now we've awoken to find our heritage soiled. Sullied by the mongrel progeny of our most ancient foes. Our master has a mind to know his enemies, little man, and Darvus - this brilliant, broken mind - he was our instrument of study.

SASHAM: You... You're making no *sense*.

UNKNOWN: So we waited. We filled the cells of the bestiary. We gathered what knowledge we could. Then, when our lord's whim dictated, we brought *you* here. We slaughtered your warp-talker. We spread rumour and discontent. We pricked and hurried you. We *played* you.

SASHAM: [angry] Why? Why, damn you? What could be so important that you spin this web?

UNKNOWN: Hah. Tell me: as you trawled through the records we created, as you struggled to divine weaknesses in those creatures whose existences held you so entranced, did you not stop to think what records might relate to your own kind?



Did you not stop to wonder that some other hand – some other *reader* – might not be considering your *own* frailty?

SASHAM: I...

UNKNOWN: You have been used. Our master is a most talented deceiver. You have struggled and raged against the mysteries surrounding you, and not once did you divine the true question.

SASHAM: What question?

UNKNOWN: What is your *own* weakness?

SASHAM: *[quiet moan]*

UNKNOWN: The answer is knowledge. Even trapped in your cage of prejudice, how *quickly* the texts seduced you. How quickly all else faded. It is a weakness our master can use. It is a weakness you shall regret revealing.

SASHAM: Warp take you! Enough riddles, who *are* you?

[pause]

UNKNOWN: Dear Sasham, it's taken me a century to insinuate my way into your inquisition. There are few of my kind capable. Most are mindless, *pure*, undistracted by personality. But there are those of us who remember. Lords and ladies of another age, converted and purified but not *cleansed* of memory. I remember the frailty of emotion, the weakness of the flesh, the imperfection of mortality.

[pause]

Hiding amongst your kind was no challenge at all. In my bearing, in my diaries, in my notes, I have *been* Inquisitor Ralei. Am I not a convincing counterfeit?

[pause]

You want to know who I am, yes? Yes. Let me show you.

[sound of tearing, ripping]

SASHAM: O-oh... Oh throne... Your face... It's...

UNKNOWN: It's *not* my face.

SASHAM: Oh no... Oh no... This isn't real...

UNKNOWN: Now you will come with us. We've spent the last four days delivering threats – on your behalf – to the forces who came to find you. I daresay they are eager to gain entry. It's a shame we must disappoint them.

[door opens]

[multiple footsteps, entering]

SASHAM: N-no, make them stay away. Stay away!

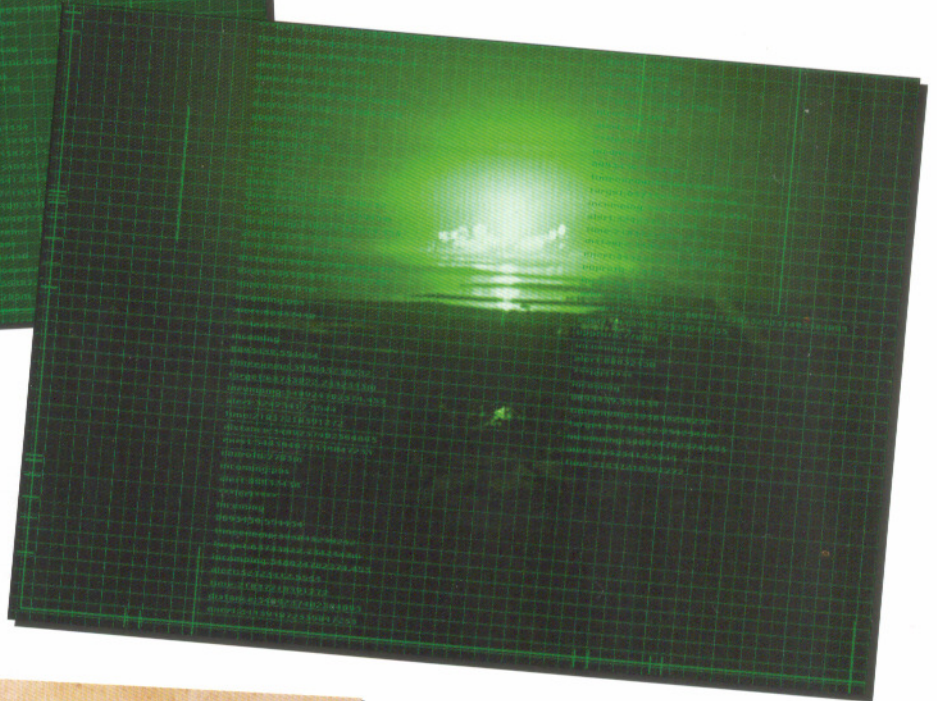
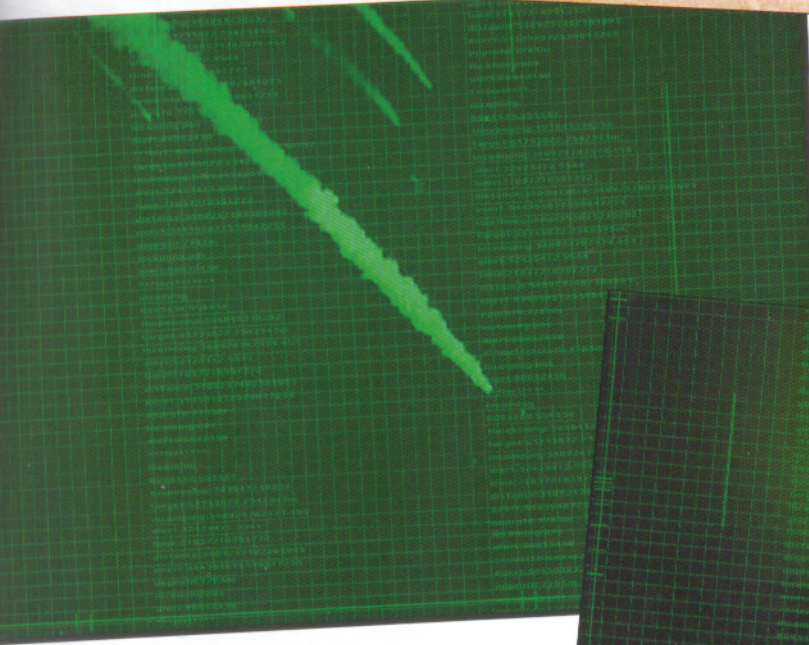
UNKNOWN: *[to Sasham]* Little man, the master has it in mind to observe one more dissection. Our poor friend Darvus has grown weary of slaughter. Perhaps it would be a kindness to leave you alive, yes? So he can enjoy his work?

[footsteps]

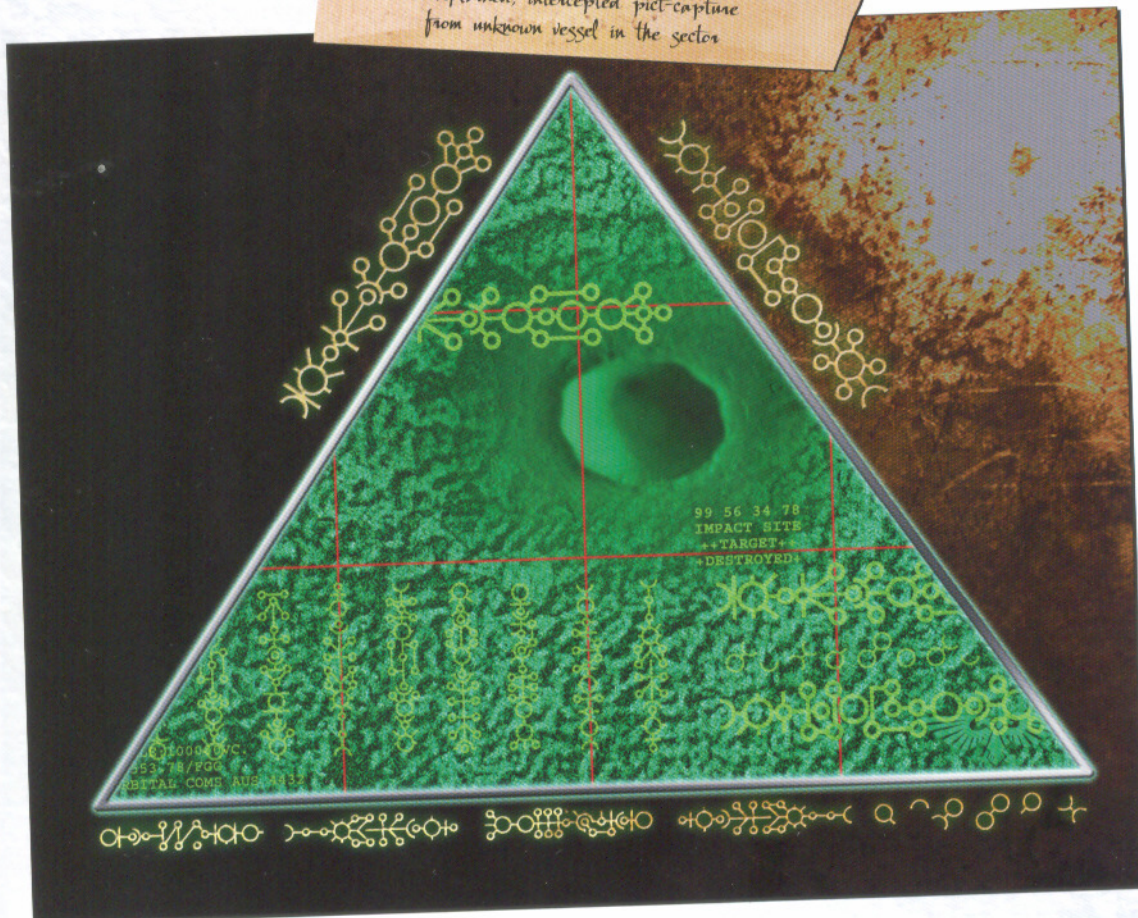
[screams]

++RECORDING TERMINATED++

Picts taken by the 2nd ground assault team as they watch the incoming orbital strike and the resultant explosion



Unexplained, intercepted pict-capture from unknown vessel in the sector



and Acting on the Ordo's commands we've been waiting in orbit for five days. On the second day we started receiving threats from the facility on the surface: garbled snippets of text containing heretical and violent dogma. In talks between Inquisitor Paltens, Flag Lieutenant Quatar and myself it was decided we should deploy a small force of stormtroopers to observe the facility. They landed within the settlement nearby and immediately began relaying to us the settlers' tales of rampaging xenos creatures.

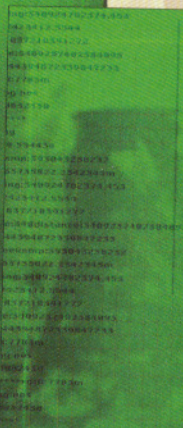
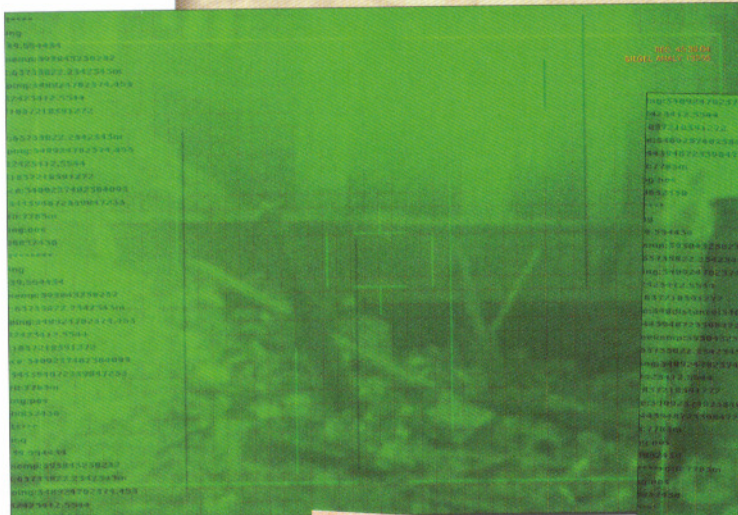
Inquisitor Paltens ordered a general advance. After a brief siege, and no break in the threatening transmissions, it was decided to employ orbital force.

To the best of my knowledge we wiped out the entire place, and whatever iniquity was being conducted therein.

Viddiem Parla,
Captain, Umbrarius Inquis.
In Report to the Congressium Kinos



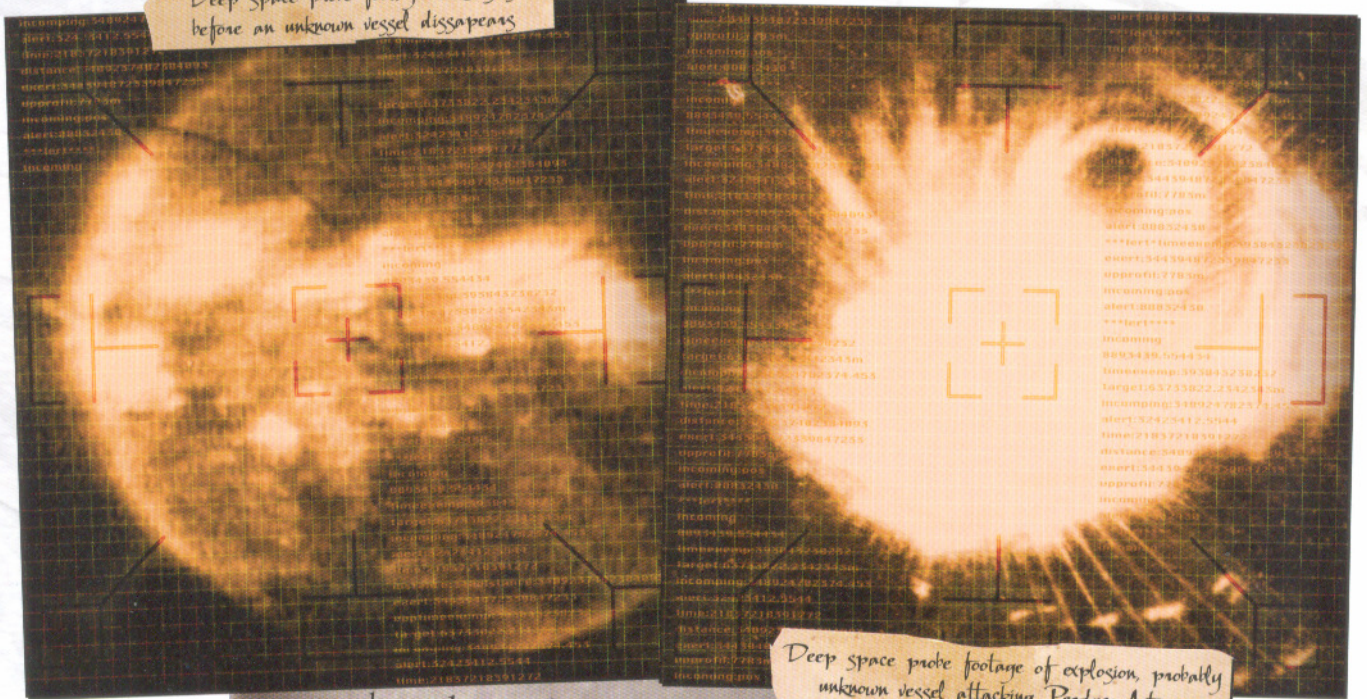
It's a bloody mess down here, sir. Whole forest's burning. A few scraps of ferro-crete - or something like it - and that's all. There's one room almost untouched - all stone shelves and scroll-racks - but there's nothing on them. Funny thing: even looking at these ruins, this place doesn't look like it was designed by men.



Picts from the impact site, taken by inquisitorial investigation squad: 0445v, clearly showing the unusual architecture found in the ruins of the Bestiary

Classified

Deep space probe footage taken just before an unknown vessel disappears



Deep space probe footage of explosion, probably unknown vessel attacking Perduco Astrus

we have detected the suspected presence of unidentified xenos craft at outer limits of Biegel system. Debris-field in vicinity yields evidence of annihilated Imperial Vessel (probable I.D: Perduco Astrus). Alien craft disappeared before pursuit was executed, no other information available.

later concluded the presence of xenobiological materials could not be considered proof-positive of heretical acts by Inquisitors Sasham and Ralei; both of whom remain unaccounted for.

Representatives of the supposedly untouchable Conclave Conservatii have since vanished, suggesting a level of corruption beyond any we had formerly considered.

not sure what scurrilous radicalism you're insinuating, Balteus, but our records demonstrate beyond doubt we haven't contacted Sasham for months. Whoever sent the gullible little reprobate to Biegel, it certainly wasn't us.

I suggest you check your facts before leaping to conclusions. It's often the case that the answers you're seeking are right in front of your face.

Gründvald

Lord Inquisitor Gründvald,
Congressium Xenos

‘Know thine enemy,
You are known to him already.’

Sermon Primaris, The Ordo Xenos

Classified



Simon Spurrier has been writing since an early age, successfully having his work published first in the form of

comics and latterly in prose fiction. Since earning a degree in Film Production and a bursary to attend the inaugural Screenwriting class of the National Academy of Writing, he has become a frequent contributor to titles such as *2000AD*, the *Warhammer Comic* and the *Judge Dredd Magazine*. His prose work includes short stories for *Inferno!* magazine and several novels. *Xenology* is his first background book.

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*‘Know thine enemy.
You are known to him already.’*

Sermon Primaris, The Ordo Xenos

