A LICHT IN THE DARKNESS

During the Indomitus Crusade, Torchbearer task forces were assigned the duty of furnishing Space Marine Chapters with Primaris technologies. They are amongst the most clandestine and important enactors of Roboute Guilliman's grand strategy.



FORMATION OF THE FIRST TORCHBEARERS

The creation of the first Primaris Space Marines by Archmagos Cawl was nothing short of a miracle in the eyes of many among Terra's halls of power. In an age when Mankind stood closer to the precipice of extinction than perhaps at any other time in ten thousand years, Cawl's technological genius provided an opportunity for the Imperium not only to survive but also to strike back against the numberless legions of heretics and xenos that assailed the Emperor's realm. The Archmagos' design and manufacture of the advanced weapons, armour and war engines with which the Adeptus Astartes would wage war in this dark epoch were visionary. Yet such strength meant nothing if those in most need of it were beyond reach. What use is a newly crafted blade hung above a smith's forge when the questing knight fights empty handed?

The task of deploying tens of thousands of Space Marines, fully matured with all of Cawl's genetic bio-science, fell for the most part to many of the initial task forces and battle groups of the Indomitus Crusade. But such a burden was never their primary objective. Where the fleets' scheduled mission to throw back the onslaught of invaders and usurpers took them into contact with established Chapters, their armadas would deliver intakes of Primaris Space Marines, already blooded on the dangerous journey. Thus did Guilliman's own vast forces from Fleet Primus supply what became known as the Primarch's Gift to the Space Wolves and the Blood Angels, amongst many notable others. So too did elements of Fleet Tertius reinforce the Verydian Hawks and the Hammers of Dhrex, while Fleet Secundus delivered to the Selenarchs the strength with which to retake the Garredes Cluster.

From the very inception of the Indomitus Crusade, Guilliman understood that many successors to his and his brothers' genetic legacy would never be reached with such coincidental logistics. So the Primarch formed specialised fleets that would seek out those Chapters that might not be contacted by the Indomitus Crusade for many years, if at all. These smaller naval formations were initially identified only through ciphers and cryptological ident runes. In time, these and their successors who followed their lead became known – at least among those few aware of their presence – as the Torchbearers.

The Torchbearer fleets are tasked with searching the warand warp-ravaged Imperium for specific brotherhoods of the Adeptus Astartes. It was intended that each Torchbearer fleet would be assigned a single, definitive target, though there are authorised exceptions and mission improvisations that cause some to contact more

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than one in a single expedition. Torchbearer fleets are designed to seek out many of those Chapters whose home world lies beyond the Cicatrix Maledictum, those who are known to be stretched most thinly and in danger of being ground into extinction, those whose home world no recent record can even locate and those whose crusading, isolationist or nomadic modus operandi mean their current location is uncertain.

A Torchbearer fleet would take on its infinitely precious cargo at one of a number of shadowy operations hubs in the Sol System or in certain neighbouring sub-sectors. The majority of these fleets embark strike forces of fully matured Space Marines bearing the specialist organs and genetic markers devised by Cawl, alongside armoured containers of weaponry and carefully laden squadrons of battle tanks. Differing fleets carry varying amounts of these physical specimens and materiel, but all Torchbearer fleets carry sealed canisters shrouded in wards and wreathed in anti-empyric stasis loops. Inside are cryogenically preserved genetic material and tissue samples, along with thrice-blessed crystalline wafers. These encrypted data wafers store the arcane methods by which to use these biological specimens. This is the most precious knowledge, the means by which the Chapter would create Primaris Space Marines for themselves. Depending on where a particular Torchbearer fleet is laden and which specific Chapter it has been assigned to locate, the nature and complexity of the technological and arcane wards around these canisters could vary widely. Embedded also in a shrine-tended cogitator core, utterly divorced from any ship systems, are the encrypted engrams that would enable the Chapter's Techmarines, vehicle crew and battle-brothers to maintain and operate additional marks and patterns of wargear and armoured vehicles. A senior Apothecary from the recipient Chapter would often co-monitor the transfer of this data closely, as it would form a key component of future hypnoindoctrination procedures.

'Lieutenant, inform the captains of the Cardinal Taris XI and the Bullshock they will turn about and hold off those Aeldari phantom-ships. Remind them only the cargo in our hold matters. Then thank them and block their transmission.'

- Admiral Shand, Battlefleet Solar, Commander of the **Torchbearer Fleet Imperator Judicium**

The safe delivery of this genetic and technological knowledge is the primary overriding imperative for the Torchbearer fleets, and the majority of their duties are inextricably linked to this goal. As a secondary imperative, many are also tasked with gaining an understanding of what lies beyond the Great Rift (if anything) and with finding a way through. The smaller size of Torchbearer fleets enables them to more easily gather intelligence without drawing attention either from local authorities or roving fleets of enemies. The stability of warp channels, the integrity of a system and its society, the presence (or lack) of enemy and allied assets, the alteration of established stellar phenomena – all of these



and more fill the databanks of the Torchbearer ships. When it comes time to call an end to their mission, whether successful or not, the fleet's commander would return to a designated system. There, in addition to a rigorous debriefing and a thorough purification of the ships and crews in body and spirit, any intelligence gathered is passed through a series of psycho-osmotic screenings before being passed to Guilliman's priesthood of the Logisticarum.

COMMAND AND COMMISSIONING

The task forces and battle groups of the Indomitus Crusade bear to war immense and often extremely varied armies capable of subduing entire systems and even sub-sectors. By contrast, the armed forces of Torchbearer fleets are commonly more compact, elite and focused. The Emperor's bodyguards of the Adeptus Custodes are found amongst the majority of them. Of all the Custodians' shield hosts, the Emissaries Imperatus are the most commonly represented, although Custodians belonging to other shield hosts are not unknown. The presence of the Adeptus Custodes serves to enforce the receipt of the Gift and is seen by some Chapters as a guarantee of its bonafide or even divine nature.

The Adeptus Mechanicus maintains a widespread Tech-Priest presence aboard Torchbearer ships, though there are relatively few martial or zealous followers compared to the retinues of Tech-Priests Dominus who accompany crusade fleets. The expertise of numerous creeds of Tech-Priests is essential to the safety of the Gift throughout transit and the successful transfer of their priceless cargo should the mission be successful. Many

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'This is a gift from the Emperor to his chosen instruments of death. Pray be mindful, Chapter Master, of your honour-bound duty before you repeat your refusal.'

- Shield-Captain Graentis, Shield Host of the Emissaries Imperatus, Commander of the Torchbearer Task Force Aggarmenus

Torchbearer task forces are joined by an Inquisitor and their retinue. Some of these investigators oversee security and sequestration protocols of the sensitive technology. Others provide local knowledge of the systems the fleets travel through, their reputation and clearances helping to secure passage through suspicious planetary governments. Astra Militarum forces do not often see service with the Torchbearers. Those that do are typically elite special forces such as Tempestus Scions. Otherwise, they are hardy veterans skilled in defending against boarding actions, the requisitioned retinue of some senior officer, or perhaps a regiment whose past dealing with the Chapter might engender some goodwill towards the unusual Gift. Other forces known - at least to the Logisticarum and certain Inquisitors – to travel within or alongside a Torchbearer fleet are cadres of Sisters of Silence, demi-brotherhoods of Grey Knights, Adepta Sororitas missions as well as Rogue Traders and their diverse, colourful retinues. Sleek warships, redirected from their usual commissions to serve Torchbearer fleets, often carry small armies of experienced Navis Imperialis

boarding parties, many of whose members are brutal, void-born veterans.

The Torchbearer fleets comprise small numbers of fast, powerful and resilient ships. They typically boast more than enough firepower to dissuade piratical raiders from attacking. They require the belligerent muscle to break out of enemy encirclements and the speed to outpace more dangerous fleets. The Office of the Paternoval Envoy selects expert and adaptable Navigators under a discreet accord Guilliman brokered with the Paternova himself. Specialist local knowledge of the warp in those regions the fleet passes through is no longer the boon it once was – having become more unpredictable – and only those Navigators able to guide ships through the most hazardous warp storms and rift quakes are sequestered for Torchbearer service.

Command of a Torchbearer fleet is commonly vested in the highest ranking officer aboard. Usually, this would be the senior Custodian, though some fleets are commanded by a sinister Sister of Silence, the lordly Noble of a Knight household or the ranking Navis Imperialis officer. Among the Adeptus Astartes being transported by the fleet to their intended Chapter, their senior officers offer advice and tactical expertise, usually only taking up a commanding position during rare battles the fleet becomes embroiled in. On occasion, some fleets are accompanied by small contingents of Space Marines hailing from Chapters other than that sought out. These are often representatives from brotherhoods known to have established ties with their target, and they act as a way of reassuring their allies once found.

THE MISSION BEFORE ALL

Torchbearer fleets could spend months or years seeking the Space Marine Chapter whose future they are entrusted with. The tormented state of the warp makes any interstellar travel a deadly proposition, even within the Imperium Sanctus. The successful conclusion to a fleet's mission comprises the identification and location of the Chapter, the safe arrival of the precious cargo at their home world and the peaceful handover of the Primarch's Gift before returning via the same dangerous tides and undertaking a new mission. Yet so much hangs in the balance, and catastrophic failures blight many Chapters' legacies.

With the desperation, greed and warmongering furore that permeates the galaxy, especially beyond the Great Rift where the Emperor's Light is still only a memory, even the superlative warriors of the Space Marines face frequent annihilation. A Torchbearer fleet that has the fortune to find the Chapter they have searched for may have come upon them in what might be the Space Marines' last gasp. The targeted Adeptus Astartes might be deployed in Chapter strength to one particular war zone where their foes have swelled in numbers and threaten the Space Marines with extinction, or their home world itself may be under invasion. In such circumstances, the Torchbearers' own forces do not hesitate to commit to the fray, allying their full resources to the defence of the Chapter. Should

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NAMING CONVENTIONS

Roboute Guilliman was conscious of the dangers of prescribing a standardised naming convention for the **Torchbearer fleets. Many unorthodox fleets** dispatched on sealed orders with the highest clearance risk drawing unwelcome attention if they also bear patterns in their fleet identity signals. He thus left each fleet commander to determine his or her own signifier. Many of these shadowy flotillas acquire names born of the commander's inspirational faith in their endeavour, such as Task Force Hopelight and the Beacon Angelis Task Force. Some bear the name or title of their commander. The Mahj of Cironis' Fleet was led by the ruling Noble of House Th'arkone, a Knight household hailing from the rad-blasted world of Cironis. Task Force Aggarmenus, meanwhile, was formed from the twenty-third name inscribed inside the golden armour of its commanding Shield-Captain Graentis.

Others brazenly identify their target Chapter. **Torchbearer Task Force White Sentinels did not know** when they launched whether the eponymous Chapter survived due to their affinity for dangerous close assaults. The task force became unavoidably engaged in a number of fierce void battles against Aeldari Corsairs, Heretic Astartes raiders and bands of greenskin privateers. Their commander, Admiral al Pre'golsa, inflicted such stinging defeats upon all he came across that the fleet's name came to be feared by pirates across the Karenna sub-sector. When he finally encountered the doggedly surviving White Sentinels, al Pre'golsa had inadvertently secured a deadly new reputation for them as expert naval tacticians to be avoided in void combat at all costs. Torchbearer fleets built around a core of Adeptus Mechanicus vessels typically include alpha-numeric sigils alongside more prosaic elements, while those captained by especially zealous commanders may be named for specific miracles, saintly heroes or holy worlds.

the Space Marines fall in battle, or if the Torchbearers arrive to find evidence that the Chapter was in fact long since destroyed, the fleet's specialists would endeavour to re-found the brotherhood. The Space Marines intended to reinforce their Chapter would establish themselves on the fallen Chapter world if safe, or they would select a new one. The Torchbearer ships would often serve as the Chapter's initial fleet, enabling them to undertake early missions while helping to set up communications with nearby forge worlds that would continue to supply the nascent Chapter.

'We cannot help the Bedenite Fusiliers, Captain. If the Emperor decrees that they fall resisting the Tyranids, then that is their duty. I have another. Now, seal off that damned Astropath from broadcasting to the bridge; I will not have that Bedenite colonel's weeping distracting my flag officers.'

Count-Commander Torustan Hin-Brahey,
 Commander of the Illuminated Right Task Force

The successful reinforcement or re-founding of Space Marine Chapters is not always the outcome for the Torchbearer fleets. The task forces find some Chapters, embattled but surviving, and yet who dare to query or even refuse the technology. Some may fear a loss of independence, even the erosion of their identity. Many Chapters are deeply suspicious when confronted by unknown warriors claiming to share their genetic lineage, a Gift seemingly offered by a Primarch – a figure of legend – whose influence and power reflects unknown intentions. Their duty as defenders of Mankind, and the technology's status as being ultimately from the hand of the Emperor, is impressed upon such wayward Chapters. The Torchbearers may brand those who steadfastly maintain their refusal as heretics and then take on the mantle of the Chapter's executioners. Other Chapters may already be so far down the dark path of heresy that the fleet does not

enter into any dialogue with them. Accompanying forces of Grey Knights or Sisters of Silence may deploy in strength to exterminate such stains upon the Imperium's roll of honour. In either case, the pristine genetic material held in suspension may be deemed to be tainted somehow and may never be used to found a Chapter.

Most disheartening of all outcomes for a Torchbearer fleet is being unable to find the Chapter at all. The galaxy is unthinkably immense, and it is almost impossible to find worlds or fleets unless one knows already where to locate them. Finding such information, thanks to the Imperium's byzantine bureaucracy, is already difficult, though Guilliman ensured that his Torchbearer fleets have the most trustworthy reports available and are barred from few datasources. Some Chapters are known only by a name and the region of space they guard. Some might have become little more than legend, their deeds known only by an account of a single battle – perhaps centuries or millennia ago – whose location is uncertain. Some may have relocated to a different home world, the notification either never having been made or else buried in a sealed office, slowly fossilising beneath the weight of centuries of paperwork. There have also been Torchbearer missions where the outcome itself was not certain. The Gladius Ad Umbra Fleet could not locate the Lions Azure in the Afqal sub-sector, but they did unexpectedly contact the Wardens of the Philae. The Wardens' history over the last three millennia so closely matched the fleet's records of the Lions Azure that the commander could not be certain if they were one and the same or not. Conversely, there have been narrowly avoided catastrophes involving the genetic material for one Chapter nearly being handed over to another founded under the same name and near identical heraldry. Such errors could have long-lasting and horrific consequences for a Chapter if it mixed its own carefully maintained genetic material with that of another Chapter from a different lineage. The resulting Chapter might never be stable, risking insanity, psychosis and mutation, its warriors' forms as roiling as the rift that splits the galaxy.

THE HUNT FOR MHORWEN

Having travelled across the galaxy in search of the Knights of Mhorwen, Custodian Demetriad and Arcanalyst Coparnos finally discover a clue to their whereabouts. But as with all things, such secrets come at a cost.

he thudding of rock hammers and the screech of industrial drills echoed from scattered megaliths that were tens of metres tall. Most were halfburied in the slowly rotting remnants of some old civilisation. Dark sand had piled up over decades, the blocks' tips peeking above a moraine of detritus - piles of masonry fragments, dunes of particulates and torn rebar. The massive blocks stood or lay for more than half a mile around the site of operations where teams of dust-caked servitors worked monotonously at a crumbling mound of plascrete and metal.

To the untrained observer, the cyclopean blocks might have been perceived as ritualistic standing stones, scattered and worn after the action of erosion and tectonic activity. Arcanalyst Phra-Mu Coparnos knew better. The Tech-Priest could read what the pattern should have looked like, his augmented cogitation able to unravel time and perceive these blocks in their proper place. He mentally rearranged them, reconstructing them in his imagination. They were shards of a forge temple, a glorious edifice of knowledge, left in ruin. Coparnos was filled with a mix of unpleasant emotions over the destruction of the holy site, and he struggled to purge them as he mulled over the scope of his mission.

Go forth into the dark and find them, the Primarch told us. The lost, the self-sequestered, even the fallen. And so we come to this dead forge to find just one Chapter of the Omnissiah's Angels of Death, that we might grant them the Gift. Yet none were here to help his most devout servants.

'Do you believe this to be the site after all, Tech-Priest?', asked a giant from behind Coparnos.

Coparnos turned, registering the golden armour and ivory robes of Custodian Regh Thalian Demetriad. Coparnos' upper body swivelled to face the imposing warrior before drive units and mechanical limbs beneath the Tech-Priest's lower robes followed suit. Coparnos' frame lengthened – servos whirring and heavy, rubberised robes creaking – bringing his hooded head up to the warrior's height. In place of a face, metal sutures, hissing microvents, gurgling tubes and a riveted vox grill unsettlingly offset from where a mouth should be – gave Coparnos a visage that was almost entirely mechanical.

'Arcanalyst is my order's preferred form of address, Custodian. However, in answer: affirmative. The data my info-flocks have absorbed have allowed me to accurately assess this site's original layout. Before whatever catastrophe occurred here, there is a high probability that this was indeed the Archivolt Quranos.'

'You said the same thing about the three other sites,' Demetriad said sternly. 'It is the search for the Knights of Mhorwen that occupies us to the exclusion of all else. I do not wish to waste another three sidereal days in turning up wrecked artefacts of no use to us, not when there remain more tangible options to locate the Chapter. My Emissaries and Vhorlia's Sisters are not here to safeguard a treasure hunt.'

Coparnos emitted an irritated burst of static as he made to reply when a sharp whine and the crash of falling stone interrupted him.

Coparnos and Demetriad rushed to the site, where clouds of dust billowed and falling debris still rattled. One of the servitors lay crushed beneath a slab of plascrete. As the dust cleared, a hole left by the slab became visible. Some two metres inside, Coparnos saw a flat panel of dull bronze set in a framework larger than Demetriad. Angular inscriptions ran in rigid rows around the panel's perimeter, and in the centre was a triad of access ports surrounded by the unmistakable cog shape of the Machine Cult.



'This is it,' whispered Coparnos, his normally strident, reproduced voice couched in reverence.

'Delta-2, Rhovan-7, Vhorlia, converge on my signal,' Demetriad communicated over the encrypted vox network.

Coparnos reached out tentatively with three mechadendrites that emerged from folds in his robes.

'The Archivolt's outer sanctum,' he breathed. 'Beyond it lies this forge world's repository of ancient data-stacks. If the location of the Knights of Mhorwen is recorded



anywhere, it is inside here, at the core.'

It had been hours since they opened the bronze portal to the outer sanctum with surprising ease, but after that it became more difficult. They had found a strange tunnel network of half-collapsed passages. Sheared power couplings spat sparks of emerald energy, the power still flowing after all these years. Coolant ducts had flooded some sections with a frigid mist. Rare chemicals and electrical fields combined to create microclimates that engulfed whole strata – freezing air, arid heat or humid regions where the tunnels were slick with oozing moisture. The web of passages was being reconnoitred by Demetriad's Custodes and Vhorlia's Sisters of Silence, while Coparnos had since found another portal, one much more difficult to open.

Motes of light chased each other like rivulets of mercury droplets over the stratified walls that created a hexagonal chamber. Coparnos ran his lumen-bearing mechadendrites like feelers over three groups of data-ports placed equidistantly around a circular portal before him. From this point, two tunnels led away into darkness, feeding deeper into the archive's labyrinth, while a third way lay barred by this circular barrier. Its iris of acid-etched rhulia steel so far remained steadfastly sealed. The portal reflected his lumens' glare onto the forms of the Tech-Priest's Skitarii, stood in a perfect deltoid formation behind him, and the handful of Silent Sisters and Custodians guarding their flanks.

'What is the delay, Tech-Priest?' asked Demetriad.

'I am ... attempting ... what I believe to have been a process designed for three individuals to carry out at once. My cogitation output ... needs to be both three and one. The locks not only control the portal. They are also ... exquisitely connected to the data-murals around us.'

'Can you access the information stored in them from here?' Demetriad asked.



'Yes, it is breathtaking. Although, of course, it is of purely sacred significance, this info-iconography. We ... we must penetrate to the core for the information we seek ...'

A rumbling vibration ran through every surface. With a smooth motion, the iris of the portal cycled open. A stale draught emerged from the circular doorway, a black passageway leading on from it. Coparnos shivered as he carefully extracted his mechadendrites from the locking mechanisms. He swayed, grasping the doorway as he moved to enter.

'What is it, Tech-Priest?' Demetriad asked, moving swiftly past the ranks of Skitarii to enter the passage alongside Coparnos.

'I estimate it is nothing of concern, Custodian. My periphery data-strands contacted some fringe code. It is likely some sacerdotal programme fragments disturbed by my entry protocols. Their ... "shape", if you will, was unusual. Come, the core lies this way.'

The passage opened out into a broad avenue lined with rows of hexagonal columns. The illumination from the warriors' lumens lessened as it barely reached the receding walls. Demetriad instructed one of his Custodians to follow while the Tech-Priest ordered half of his Skitarii to form a defensive cordon around the circular portal. The rest followed him, small units breaking off to hold position as they penetrated deeper to ensure an unbroken data tether link was maintained. Coparnos estimated that the sanctity of the Archivolt's core was made pure by veils of dense data streams that could obfuscate communication.

What could be seen of the walls in the gloom reared up into a dark space above, their upper limit invisible. Unlit alcoves and open shafts dotted the walls' base, but the rest of their surface was a complex configuration of system ports, arcane displays and layers of data-slabs. The data-slabs *were* the walls, piled one on the other. The walls resembled a cliff face, with dribbling oils running down their flanks like the outflow of hidden streams above and loops of ribbed cabling hanging like vines.

Coparnos and his remaining Skitarii kept pace with the long strides of Demetriad. The Tech-Priest saw the Sisters of Silence as they spread out further, darting around the

columns, disappearing and reappearing as they probed pools of shadow. He detected the ticking of slowly turning cogs, the clank and groan of immense gear systems far above and the occasional rattle of cogitators.

'I am relieved to detect increasing signs of the Omnissiah's Motive Force,' said Coparnos. He paused occasionally, gazing in wonder around him or listening intently before hurrying on.

'There is something amiss that I cannot qualify as yet. I do not know the extent of this archive's defences. We must be on our guard. If the destruction on the surface was the result of invasion, it is possible the Archivolt's keepers had time to starve the data-slabs at the periphery. That would have been the logical measure to preserve the more sacred vaults deeper inside.'

'And that, then, could have caused the programme fragments you sensed,' Demetriad concluded. 'What implications does that have for our search?'

'This world was in full communion with Mars before its silence. But only extracts of its records were submitted to the Red Planet. Only a suggestion lies there of this world's

contact with the Knights of Mhorwen. Here, in this hallowed vault, will be the full records. If the Archivolt's keepers were successful, those records will be uncorrupted and accurate.'

'It is not certain that the magi of this forge world would have known the exact location of the Knights' home world,' the Custodian countered.

'Of course. But there may be analyses of battles in which this world fought with the Knights. Transactions of materiel to the Chapter, the astropathic signatures of their Librarians, the energy fluctuations of their ships – all of this evidence should allow us to trace the Chapter. Or perhaps to discover its fate.'

Coparnos heard a swift rattle on the column behind them. He spun around. A fang-filled mouth the size of his quaternary palm darted forward at head height. Suddenly Vhorlia was in front of him, lancing her sword blade forward. Inches from Coparnos' impassive mask, the blade skewered the maw's owner to the column. Vhorlia withdrew her greatblade and shed the creature from it with a deft flick. Another metallic scrabbling came from behind, and Coparnos flinched as Demetriad loomed over him. The Custodian rammed his guardian blade down next to the Tech-Priest, piercing the body of another biomechanical hybrid.

The creatures' steel fangs dripped oily residue, their bodies a crumpled mass of flesh and bionic limbs the size of a felinx. Coparnos reached for one augmented corpse with a mechadendrite. The creature twitched, reaching up silvery filaments from rents in its body to meet the Tech-Priest's own tendril. Coparnos instinctively recoiled in horror, blurting a loud binharic imprecation.

Coparnos glanced up as Vhorlia made a swift and complicated gesture to Demetriad before the Custodian translated the message.

'These things are emerging from the shafts and alcoves in the walls. Vhorlia says there are more and recommends haste. Tech-Priest, where is the information? Quickly!'

Coparnos' data-tether came alive with reports from Skitarii farther back. They were under attack and engaging defensive protocols. He could hear the distant rattle of radium carbines firing. Coparnos re-evaluated his situation, sending out binharic commands to his forces. His guardian Skitarii protectively coalesced around their master.

'This way, Custodian,' he advised. 'We are not far from the core, just keep these abominations from me!'

Coparnos led them all at greater speed. The darkness grew deeper as the immense space opened up farther around them. The tick and clank of overhead machinery quickly grew louder, now discernible as the scrape of iron talons on metal columns. Amalgams of flesh and soiled bionics sprang from the shadow to either side of



Coparnos' Skitarii or dropped from above. The soft whirr of anti-grav engines accompanied flocks of winged cybercreatures. The Skitarii fired on the move, bursts of shot slicing through the lithe bodies. Vhorlia's Silent Sisters darted along the Skitarii's flanks, cleaving apart the constructs with sweeps of their blades or blasting them to pieces with precision bolter shots. Demetriad and his companion fought apart, crushing feral automata underfoot, splintering flitting attackers with boltfire and scything down others with blade thrusts.

Coparnos detected a growing, bass hum and the smell of ozone ahead. He recognised the fluctuations of a great power reservoir.

'That's it, the core!' Coparnos shouted.

The column-lined avenue began to angle downwards, and Coparnos saw the central access array, lit by the lumens of his advancing bodyguard. Gathered around the hub machinery was a crowd of servitors, dozens of them. The majority were desiccated and withered, their remaining flesh pale and taut. They turned as one, heading straight for Coparnos and the warriors around him.

The Skitarii opened fire on Coparnos' command, cutting down several servitors in a flurry of radfire that tore apart ancient bionics and lacerated grey flesh. Without halting, the surviving servitors clambered over their fallen peers as more emerged from the shadows. Demetriad stormed into them, his thunderous charge sending six flying before his guardian spear crackled into life. He tore a path through the mindless thralls, Coparnos in his wake. The Tech-Priest received data-packets from the Skitarii units fighting far behind him. He shouted to Demetriad.

'Custodian! More of the feral automata have broken through my perimeter guard. The servo-constructs are heading this way. I must reach the central access array!'

'Follow me, Tech-Priest. Stay close. I will carve a path,' Demetriad called over his shoulder.

When they reached the hub machinery, Demetriad spun around, pushing Coparnos behind him and facing the cyber-constructs. Coparnos sped through the Canticle of Awakening, interspersing his chants with blurts of apology to the machine spirits for such disrespectful haste. He connected with the central archive database before being struck by the truth of what was happening.

Whoever had invaded the forge world had not allowed the Archivolt to escape unscathed. A corrupted code had seeped into its systems, melding with the core and spreading to every connected system. The protocols had expanded, taking over automated defences. They had co-opted the servitors and created new constructs from any viable matter in reach, from stray vermin to the archive's keepers. Coparnos inwardly screamed at such sacrilege.

Through the sensors slaved to the core, the Tech-Priest perceived his warriors fighting and dying. He heard

Demetriad giving orders, detected the storm of firepower being unleashed around him and felt the spark leave one Skitarii after another. He felt the loss of control as several Skitarii were dragged down, bludgeoned with industrial tools. Coparnos saw the same silver filaments he had witnessed in the feral constructs snaking out of the servitors, plunging into his warriors and corrupting their cybernetics.

Coparnos mentally raced through the holy strata of the core system, feeling the unwholesome presence encroaching on his data-self. He erected cycling walls of protective protocols and guardian systems, thrusting the malicious influence back as he tracked down the information he sought.

'Tech-Priest, do you have it? We have to go!' Demetriad's roar sounded distant to Coparnos.

I know it's here, we can find them. Just nanoseconds more!

'Tech-Priest, we need the data!'

The corruption is adapting too rapidly. It's jumping my protocol defences. Wait, Mhorwen, there ...!

'Arcanalyst!'

Coparnos screamed as he brutally tore his snaking connectors away from the hub, collapsing after he did so. His disengagement hadn't been quick enough. He could feel the corruption overwriting his mind. Invasive filaments wormed their way up his mechadendrites, digging into flesh and bionics alike. He desperately tried to pull them out, but his strength was failing. Coparnos reached for an artificer-wrought data censer from his robes and thrust it towards Demetriad.

'Take it! Get away, find them!' Coparnos gasped.

Through his dimming optics, Coparnos perceived the Custodian turn and pause. He knew Demetriad could see his augmentations warping; he could feel the profane sensation of heretekal possession. The Custodian grabbed the proffered data censer, lunging away and motioning to others out of Coparnos' line of sight. Coparnos' vox and audio sensors failed. As he ceased to exist, he beheld a silent tableau of a handful of figures fighting their way towards the exit.

Omnissiah, guide them. Light their way, I beg you.



TORCHBEARERS CRUSADE FORCE

Though made up of many different units from several different factions, a Torchbearer fleet is, nonetheless, a formidable fighting force. Here we present new rules for fielding a Torchbearers Crusade force on the field of battle.

Torchbearers Crusade force functions a little differently to a normal Crusade force. Upon creation, the army will be striking out across the galaxy in an effort to find the Space Marine Chapter or Chapters that they have been tasked with reinforcing. The Imperium exists on a massive scale, and trying to locate the whereabouts of such a comparably small entity during the confusion of the Cicatrix Maledictum is not an easy undertaking. This period is called the Search phase, and it will see players hunting down clues and information to aid them in their quest to find their charges.

Once a player's Torchbearers force has found their loyalist brethren, they enter what is called the Bonding phase. During this part of the campaign, their army is joined by units from the Chapter they are aiding, and the two fight side by side. During this period, the Torchbearer fleet will grow more confident in the continued loyalty of the Space Marines that they are about to reinforce, and the necessary bonds between the new Primaris battle-brothers and the Firstborn can be formed, ultimately allowing the Greyshields to be absorbed into their new Chapter.

SEARCH PHASE

At the start of the **Search** phase:

- Select one Adeptus Astartes Chapter to reinforce and note it down on your Order of Battle.
- Start a Search Points tally for your Crusade force.

When creating a Torchbearers Order of Battle for the first time, and when adding units to it during the **Search** phase of your Crusade campaign, you can only include the following:

- ADEPTUS MECHANICUS units
- ADEPTUS CUSTODES units
- ADEPTUS ASTARTES PRIMARIS units with the GREYSHIELDS Chapter keyword

Each time a unit is added to a Torchbearers Order of Battle, that unit gains the **TORCHBEARERS** keyword.

CHAPTER TACTIC

GREYSHIELDS units have the following Chapter Tactic and are not considered to be the successor of any Chapter:

Blooded Reinforcements:

- Add 1 to the Leadership characteristic of models with this tactic.
- Each time a unit with this tactic is selected to shoot or fight, you can re-roll one hit roll when resolving that unit's attacks.

MUSTERING A TORCHBEARERS ARMY

- A TORCHBEARERS Detachment is one that only includes models with the TORCHBEARERS keyword.
- A TORCHBEARERS Detachment counts as an ADEPTUS MECHANICUS, ADEPTUS CUSTODES and ADEPTUS ASTARTES Detachment for the purpose of any Detachment abilities your army gains (e.g. Stratagems you can use).
- When mustering your army:
 - In order to include any ADEPTUS
 MECHANICUS units that do not have the
 Troops Battlefield Role, your army must
 contain at least one ADEPTUS MECHANICUS
 Troops unit.
 - In order to include any **ADEPTUS CUSTODES** units that do not have the Troops Battlefield Role, your army must contain at least one **ADEPTUS CUSTODES** Troops unit.
 - In order to include any **ADEPTUS ASTARTES** units that do not have the Troops Battlefield Role, your army must contain at least one **ADEPTUS ASTARTES** Troops unit.
- The inclusion of a TORCHBEARERS unit in your army does not prevent any units in your army from using any rules that require every model in your army to have a particular keyword.
- While in a TORCHBEARERS Detachment, ADEPTUS
 ASTARTES units, and all the models in them, can
 still gain a Chapter Tactic, regardless of what other
 units may be in that Detachment.

AGENDAS

If your Crusade army includes any **TORCHBEARERS** units, you can select one Agenda from the Torchbearers Agendas, listed below. This is a new category of Agendas, and it follows all the normal rules for Agendas (for example, when you select Agendas, you cannot choose more than one from each category).

Augury Data

Torchbearers Agenda

Torchbearer fleets send out scry-probes, intel nodes and data harvesting automata to locate their target Chapter. The self-terminating augury data they reap is invaluable to their search, and if any of these nodes are damaged, they must be secured and retrieved before the data is lost.

If you selected this Agenda, then after both sides have finished deploying, your opponent must set up one objective marker anywhere on the battlefield that is not within 9" of any battlefield edge. This objective marker represents a **Decaying Intel Node**, but it does not count as an objective marker for any rules purposes other than for this Agenda.

At the end of each battle round, if you control the **Decaying Intel Node**, your Crusade force gains 1 Search Point.

At the end of the battle, you can select one unit from your army that was within range of the **Decaying Intel Node** for one or more battle rounds while you controlled it. That unit gains 2 experience points.

Emissary Down

Torchbearers Agenda

An emissary dispatched by the Torchbearer fleet to gauge the target Chapter's response is clinging to life in a crashed scout craft. The emissary's detailed knowledge of the Chapter to be reinforced must be secured by safely extracting the warrior.

If you selected this Agenda, then after both sides have finished deploying, set up one objective marker in the centre of the battlefield. This objective marker represents a **Crash Survivor**, but it does not count as an objective marker for any rules purposes other than for this Agenda.

At the end of the battle, if you control the **Crash Survivor**:

- Your Crusade force gains D6 Search Points.
- Select one unit from your army within range of the **Crash Survivor**. That unit gains 3 experience points.

Machine Spirit Scripture-logs

Torchbearers Agenda

The energy signature of a barely functioning Servitor has been detected, one separated from the Chapter the fleet is searching for. If the fleet's Tech-Priests can retrieve it, they may be able to crack its machine spirit's encrypted scripture-logs for details on the Chapter's location.

If you selected this Agenda, then after both sides have finished deploying, your opponent must set up one objective marker anywhere on the battlefield that is not within 3" of any battlefield edge and not within 6" of either player's deployment zone. This objective marker represents a **Damaged Servitor**, but it does not count as an objective marker for any rules purposes other than for this Agenda.

ADEPTUS MECHANICUS CHARACTER units from your army can attempt the following action:

'Harvest Scripture-Logs (Action): At the end of your Movement phase, one ADEPTUS MECHANICUS CHARACTER unit from your army that is within range of the Damaged Servitor can start to perform this action. This action is completed at the end of the turn. When this action is completed roll one D6: on a 2+, your Crusade force gains D6 Search Points and the Damaged Servitor is removed from the battlefield. If an ADEPTUS MECHANICUS CHARACTER unit successfully performs this action, it gains 5 experience points.'

Directive Primus

Torchbearers Agenda

Personal glory and honour must be sacrificed by Torchbearer fleets in pursuance of their true directive: finding the Chapter in need of reinforcement. The fleet's forces are focused on locating clues of the Chapter's passing in this region above all else.

If you selected this Agenda, at the end of the battle, do not select a unit for Marked for Greatness. Instead, if you won the battle, your Crusade force gains 4 Search Points; otherwise, your Crusade force gains 1 Search Point.



REQUISITIONS

If your Crusade force includes any **TORCHBEARERS** units and is in the **Search** phase, you can spend Requisition points (RPs) on any of the following Requisitions in addition to those presented in the *Warhammer 40,000 Core Book*.

SCOUR THE AREA

[3RP] CONVERGENCE OF SIGNS

[3RP]

When a Torchbearer fleet's sensors uncover a wealth of potential traces, the fleet's entire resources are bent towards scouring the region for every hint of the Chapter's whereabouts.

Purchase this Requisition at any time. Double the number of Search Points you receive from your next battle.



The fleet's commander believes they are nearing the end of their search. Disparate clues and data suggest that they are closing in on the Chapter at long last.

Purchase this Requisition at any time, if your Crusade force has at least 15 Search Points. Roll one D6 and consult the table below to see if your force has found the Adeptus Astartes Chapter that they have been sent to reinforce:

SEARCH POINTS ACCRUED	CHAPTER FOUND		
27+	2+		
24-26	3+		
21-23	4+		
18-20	5+		
15-17	6+		

If your Crusade force successfully finds the Chapter, it moves to the **Bonding** phase, and its Supply Limit is increased by 15.



BONDING PHASE

During the **Bonding** phase, in addition to the units that you can add to it during the **Search** phase, you can also add **ADEPTUS ASTARTES** units (excluding **PRIMARIS** units) to your Order of Battle, so long as they are drawn from the Chapter that you are reinforcing.

BATTLE-BROTHERS

After having fought enough battles, the Greyshields will have become more close-knit with their new brethren and will be better able to coordinate with them. When entering the **Bonding** phase, or when adding a new **GREYSHIELDS** unit to your Crusade force while in the **Bonding** phase, start a Battle-brothers tally for each **GREYSHIELDS** unit in your Crusade force that does not already have one. Each time that unit fights in a battle alongside a friendly **ADEPTUS ASTARTES** model that does not have the **PRIMARIS** keyword, at the end of the battle, add 1 to that unit's Battle-brothers tally.

REQUISITIONS

If your Crusade force includes any **TORCHBEARERS** units and is in the **Bonding** phase, you can spend Requisition points (RPs) on any of the following Requisitions in addition to those presented in the *Warhammer 40,000 Core Book*.

INDUCTION

[3RP]

The experienced Space Marines delivered by the Torchbearer fleet have formed strong bonds with the battle-brothers of their Chapter. They have fought shoulder to shoulder with their new-found kin and have become integrated into the Chapter's battle rites and warrior traditions.

Purchase this Requisition at any time. Select any number of **GREYSHIELDS** units that have the required number of Battle-brothers points, as shown in the table below

UNIT	BATTLE-BROTHERS POINTS NEEDED		
CHARACTER unit	5		
Any other unit	3		

Those units have their **GREYSHIELDS** keyword replaced with that of the Chapter that you are reinforcing, and they are considered to be drawn from that Chapter for the purpose of which Chapter Tactic they gain and any other rules. Replace all instances of the **GREYSHIELDS** keyword on their datasheets with the Chapter keyword of the Chapter that you have reinforced.

Once five or more units have been inducted into the reinforced Chapter in this manner, you are able to add **ADEPTUS ASTARTES PRIMARIS** units to your Order of Battle that are drawn from the Chapter that you have reinforced.



BATTLE TRAITS

When a **TORCHBEARERS** unit gains a Battle Trait, you can use one of the tables below instead of one of the tables in the *Warhammer 40,000 Core Book* to determine what Battle Trait the unit has gained. To do so, roll one D6 and consult the appropriate table, or choose a Battle Trait from the appropriate table that tells the best

narrative for your unit. All the normal rules for Battle Traits apply (e.g. a unit cannot have the same Battle Trait more than once). As with any Battle Honour, make a note on the unit's Crusade card when it gains a Battle Trait and increase its Crusade points accordingly, as described in the *Warhammer 40,000 Core Book*.

ADEPTUS CUSTODES CHARACTER UNITS

D6 TRAIT

Martial Exemplar

The incredible prowess of this Custodian, and his status amongst the Emperor's personal guard, inspire even the vaunted Space Marines to greater heroism.

1-3
In your Command phase, select one friendly ADEPTUS
ASTARTES CORE unit within 6" of this model. Until the
start of your next Command phase, each time a model in
that unit makes a melee attack, you can re-roll the hit roll.

Fearless Fleetwarden

The light of battle seems to shine from this hero as he leads the fleet's warriors into the charge, his allies inspired to follow his lead into the darkest fight.

After this model makes a charge move, until the end of the phase, this model gains the following ability:

'Fearless Fleetwarden: While a friendly TORCHBEARERS unit is within 12" of this model, each time that unit declares a charge, if that charge targets any units that are within Engagement Range of this model, you can re-roll the charge roll.'

ADEPTUS ASTARTES CHARACTER UNITS

D6 TRAIT

Tactical Coordination

Augmented by this experienced warrior's tactical firing solutions, individualistic guardians of the Golden Throne unleash their firepower in coordinated salvoes of disciplined extermination.

In your Command phase, select one friendly ADEPTUS
CUSTODES INFANTRY unit within 3" of this model. Until the
start of your next Command phase, instead of following the
normal rules for Rapid Fire weapons, models in that unit
shooting guardian spears or castellan axes make double
the number of attacks if any of the following apply:

- The shooting model's target is within half the weapon's range
- he shooting model is INFANTRY and its unit Remained Stationary in your previous Movement phase.
- The shooting model is a **TERMINATOR** or **BIKER**.

Unity of Purpose

The unflinching resolve of the Adeptus Astartes is legendary, and this warrior's mere presence inspires an unshakeable faith in the Torchbearers' endeavour.

4-6

In your Command phase, select one friendly **TORCHBEARERS** unit within 3" of this model. Until the start of your next Command phase, each time a Combat Attrition test is taken for that unit, ignore any or all modifiers.



ADEPTUS MECHANICUS TECH-PRIEST UNITS

D6 TRAIT

Master of Munitions

A tech-savant with access to the Imperium's arcane ordnance and rare, martial machinery, this servant of the Omnissiah provides the fleet with the wargear it needs to complete its long search.

Once per battle round, if this model is on the battlefield when you use an Adeptus Astartes Wargear Stratagem or Adeptus Custodes Wargear Stratagem, reduce the CP cost of that Stratagem by 1CP. Note that the CP cost is only reduced by 1CP for that use of the Stratagem; any future usages of it cost the normal amount of CPs.

Primogineer Mechanicum

Steeped in the hidden mysteries of the Imperium's armoured assets, the Tech-Priest uses their resources and arcane knowledge to safeguard the machine spirits of the mightiest war engines.

If this model is part of your Crusade army, and if it was not destroyed during the battle, then at the end of the battle you can ignore one failed Out of Action test taken for an **ADEPTUS ASTARTES VEHICLE** or **ADEPTUS CUSTODES VEHICLE** unit – that test is treated as having been passed instead.



ARTIFICER RELICS

A **TORCHBEARERS INFANTRY CHARACTER** can be given one of the following Artificer Relics instead of one of the ones presented in the *Warhammer 40,000 Core Book*.

Stalker Helm

Elements of this artificer-wrought sensor-net are thought to date back to the Dark Age of Technology. Data stacks deep below Mars' surface record that it has been fitted into the helmets or wired into the face masks of the greatest hunters of every age. Within its node-lattice, sigil-etched lens arrays and auto-blessed ocular scanners allow the wearer to analyse their prey's every movement, detect their frailties and predict the fatal misstep that seals their doom.

- Each time you select a target for a ranged weapon the bearer is equipped with, you can ignore the Look Out, Sir rule.
- Each time the bearer makes a ranged attack, add 1 to that attack's hit roll and add 1 to that attack's wound roll.

Blade of Bonding

Fashioned by a dozen master artisans in reverent similitude of the legendary blade of the Emperor, this finely balanced sword was designed to be taken by a Torchbearer fleet into the darkness. At the mission's end, should the fleet find the Chapter they sought, this sword is to be gifted to their commander. It symbolises the Chapter's reforging, alloying advanced power field technology and nano-razor regeneration alongside traditional artifice that recalls the heroes of legend.

ADEPTUS ASTARTES model with a power sword, master-crafted power sword, relic blade, xenophase blade or executioner relic blade only. This Relic replaces the model's power sword, master-crafted power sword, relic blade, xenophase blade or executioner relic blade and has the following profile:

	RANGE	TYPE	S	AP	D
Blade of Bonding	Melee	Melee	+2	-5	2

Abilities: Each time an attack is made with this weapon, an unmodified wound roll of 6 inflicts 2 mortal wounds in addition to any normal damage.

Helix-pattern Narthecium

This surgical multi-tool is an enhanced version of the equipment commonly used by the healers of the Adeptus Astartes. Fitted with multi-spectral analysers, cocktails of bio-engineered nerve-stimms and flesh catalysts, as well as cortical augurs and fulcrite-toothed nanosaws to shear through the toughest armour, the bearer is able to drag even mortally wounded brothers back from the brink of death.

APOTHECARY or SANGUINARY PRIEST model only. Once per game, in your Command phase, the bearer can use this Relic. If it does, select one friendly ADEPTUS ASTARTES INFANTRY or ADEPTUS ASTARTES BIKER unit within 3" of the bearer. Until the start of your next Command phase, each time a model in that unit would lose a wound, roll one D6: on a 5+, that wound is not lost.

ANTIQUITY RELICS

A **TORCHBEARERS INFANTRY CHARACTER** of Heroic rank can be given one of the following Antiquity Relics instead of one of the ones presented in the *Warhammer* 40,000 Core Book. Add 1 to a unit's total Crusade points for each Antiquity Relic it has – this is in addition to the +1 from gaining a Battle Honour, for a total of +2.

Orb of Cleansing

First gifted to the commander of the Torchbearers task force assigned to locate the Silver Phoenixes Chapter, this arcane sphere is able to push back malignant energies. In the darkest regions beyond the Cicatrix Maledictum, its pulsating waves of purity have been seen to cloud psykers' control of their powers and even burn away the minds of witch-spawn.

Once per battle, at the end of your Movement phase, the bearer can unleash this Relic. If it does:

- Roll one D6 for each enemy **PSYKER** unit within 12": on a 2-3, that enemy unit suffers 1 mortal wound; on a 4-5, it suffers D3 mortal wounds; on a 6, it suffers 3 mortal wounds.
- Until the start of your next Movement phase, the bearer gains the following ability:
 'Nimbus of Null Fields (Aura): While a PSYKER unit is within 12" of this model, subtract 1 from Psychic tests taken for that unit.'

EMISSARIES IMPERATUS

The Emissaries Imperatus are amongst the most powerful of the Emperor's guardians. Formerly tasked with delivering the Emperor's word to the corners of the galaxy, many joined Roboute Guilliman's Torchbearer fleets at the inception of the Indomitus Crusade.

he model used for this painting guide is a
Custodian Warden, which helps show off the
traditional white robes of the Emissaries
Imperatus. The model was undercoated using
Retributor Armour Spray, then basecoated with a thin coat
of Retributor Armour paint to ensure smooth coverage over
all the armour panels. A useful tip at this stage is to paint

all the metalwork to completion, as it makes up the majority of the model. Make sure you shake your gold paints really well, because metallic paints contain metal flakes that can sink to the bottom of the pot between uses.

While this miniature has been painted using layers and highlights, you could just as easily drybrush the gold

BATTLE READY

Using the stages to the right, this Custodian Warden is now ready for the battlefield. You could easily field an army painted to this standard.



GOLD ARMOUR



RED ARMOUR



WHITE CLOTH







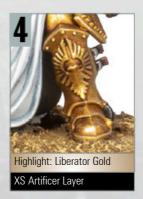
Wash: Russ Grey & Lahmian Medium 1:4 M Shade

PARADE READY

With a few extra
highlights to each
area of the model,
the Battle Ready
model has been
made Parade Ready.
Enemies of the
Emperor, may your
deaths be swift!



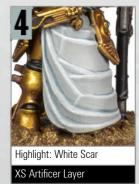












armour for very quick and effective results. When you're done painting all the gold, make sure to wash out your water pot. Otherwise you're likely to end up with sparkly bits in your other colours, and no Custodian wants to go into battle with sparkly white robes!

TOP TIP

With white areas on a model, don't paint the basecoat as pure white. Instead, use a light grey as the basecoat and highlight it with white. Not only will this look more realistic, it will also stop the white areas overpowering the rest of the model. This Custodian Warden's robes were shaded with Russ Grey, which provides a cool, blue tone to the model and works well alongside the other blue spot colours. Brown works well if you're after a warmer-toned white.



SO MUCH GOLD!

After a few more painting tips for the Adeptus Custodes? Well, the Warhammer TV YouTube channel has several guides that might be of interest. There are guides for gold-armoured warriors, black-armoured ones (the mysterious Shadowkeepers) and vehicles. Check out some of the Space Marines and Stormcast Eternals painting guides for alternative colour scheme ideas.

PAINTING LEXICON

Basecoat: A wellapplied basecoat makes for a strong foundation for later stages. If using a Base paint, thin the paint with a little water and apply several coats for even coverage. If using a Contrast paint, it can be applied directly to the miniature

Wash: A wash is an easy way to bring out details and textures on a model. Shade paints are designed for this, though Contrast paints thinned with Contrast Medium also work well. When you apply a wash, most of it will run into the recesses, but some will dry over the whole area, creating all-over shading.

Recess Wash:

Sometimes you will want to focus a wash in the recesses, leaving the surface colour as it is. For these focused washes, use a smaller brush and carefully apply the wash directly into the recesses.

Layer: Layering helps bring out the detail on a model. A layer is applied all over the area you're painting except in the recesses. Layer paints are ideal, as are Base paints thinned with water.

Highlight: Highlights represent light falling on a raised edge and help define an area of your model. Highlights are applied like a Layer but only to the very edge of the area.

Drybrush: Drybrushing captures raised details and creates natural highlights quickly. To drybrush, load a brush with paint and then wipe most of it off on a paper towel, then flick the almost dry bristles across the model to catch the raised areas.

Glaze: A glaze is a very thin wash applied to an area to tint the colour or to help blend two colours together. Layer and Shade paints thinned with Lahmian Medium are ideal for this technique.

WEAPON CASING



POWER BLADE



LEATHER GAUNTLETS



SILVER DETAILS



EYES AND GEMSTONES































