SPACE HULK

MISSIONS & BACKGROUND

THE RETURN

The sighting of a Hulk in real space is a very rare event. Most spend their time locked in the warp space vortices where they were spawned. When they manage to escape their warpspace current into human space the event is usually realised too late and the ship will have been sucked back into the warp.

The chance sighting of a Hulk, apparently inert, and travelling through realspace, was the first since the disastrous Blood Angels engagement (see page 3 of the rulebook), now over six hundred years ago. Humanity was very lucky to be alerted to the second vessel before it reached its apparent target, Maelstrom VI, an isolated terra-formation project at the very fringe of the Segmentum Obscura. As with its predecessor, the Hulk was completely dormant, radiating only on the visual spectrum.

The Hulk was spotted by the warpship Windrush, which was exploring at the very edge of the Segmentum Obscura. By a fortunate coincidence, the Windrush dropped out of warp space a mere parsec away from the vessel, easily within visual range. Its commander, Rogue Trader Borrak Vorra approached the Hulk but, fortunately for the Imperium, decided against a boarding action. Instead, he chose to return to human space, and notify Battlefleet Obscura.

++ Michaelus Raphael, Imperial Commander, Chapter of Blood Angels. Initiating report. Space Hulk boarding action. Estimated Impact -08.00.75

++ Realspace re-entry. All six barges have materialised. Displacement 25 seconds less than 0.5% parsec. Velocity displacement less than 2%. Formation perfect.

++ Boarding torpedoes launched. Initiating full retro, and on course.

++ Bless your weapons, raise prayer for your armour. Begin the litanies of hatred.

From Borra's data, the vessel was conclusively identified as a Genestealer-infested Hulk and codenamed the *Sin of Damnation*. Like its predecessor, the vessel was still dormant, relying on its near invisibility to escape detection. Because the Hulk was completely closed down, it was effectively blind, and an easy candidate for a thorough reduction by nuclear bombardment.

However, as with all Hulks, the *Sin of Damnation* was a new and unique combination of technologies. The ship's origins would span galaxies and millions of millennia. Intact, it could yield enormous value to humanity, and its Emperor. Despite the Blood Angel's earlier near-annihilation, and their negligible reduction of the Genestealers' total forces, it was decided to attempt another boarding action. By personal command of the Emperor, this honour was given to the same Chapter.

- 04.22.50

++ Command module deployed. Barges re-entering Warpspace.

++ The Blood Angels have returned. We avenge 950 dead. Time does not heal our wounds.

The Blood Angels had long since been returned to full strength. One of the oldest Legions Astartes in the Imperium, they had been formed in the first founding and played a leading role in the jihad which created the Imperium. In their ten thousand year history the one blemish on their honour was the failed attempt on the first Hulk.

The news of the Emperor's order was greeted with peeling bells, and earnest prayer. The Blood Angels had been given a second chance.

The first stage of the operation was a thorough scan. To avoid alerting the dormant Genestealers, this had to rely on less effective, passive sensors. As such a scan could only pick up details of the vessel's peripheral areas, one intrusive element was incorporated and the first invader was placed aboard. An autonomous Cyber-Altered Task (recon) Unit (C.A.T.) was teleported to the outer decks. The unit was programmed to move down into the vessel's inner levels. Here it would observe and analyse the Hulk's computer systems. These systems were expected to be activated once an intruder alert had been sounded, giving the C.A.T. an opportunity to gain vital intelligence.

The C.A.T. unit was too small to incorporate a transmitter that could be picked up from within the Hulk's metallic depths. Once the invasion commenced, and the data was gathered, the C.A.T. was programmed to return to the outer decks for retrieval.

-03.00.25

++ Holding course. Assigned impact points identified. Targetting complete. Impact pattern anticipated 99.5% accurate.

++ We are the vanguard of honour. The leading edge of one thousand marines. We bring death.

The passive scan showed the Hulk to be every bit as vast as the one attacked six hundred years earlier; if anything it was slightly bigger. As expected, it was a mix of of alien technologies, salvaged from vessels of widely varying age, size and function. Most had been disassembled and stripped. Here and there, however, wholly intact ships were incorporated into the *Sin's* surface and structure.

Most of the vessel was in empty darkness, open to the vacuum. The bulk of its vast, chaotic architecture seemed to serve no function at all. Inside was a seemingly random distribution of rooms and corridors, linking clusters of motors, cryogenic chambers, life support systems, and maintenance functions.

From analysis of the data, cross indexed from reports following the first boarding, it was estimated that the ship contained in excess of 42,000 dormant Genestealers. Even with improved tactics, the entire Chapter could not hope to destroy even a fraction of this force.

-01.23.00

++ Retro sequence complete. Impact velocity.

++ Energizing ram shields.

++ Our mission is a gift from the Emperor. Victory will redeem our forebears. We are blessed.

++ Impact.

The Marines' one hope lay in the fact that the bulk of the alien forces seemed to take some time to come out of hibernation. It was decided to launch a first wave of one hundred marines, all in full Terminator armour. Their objective was simple, either to disable the cryogenics, or to introduce lethal toxins into the chambers, killing the Genestealers as they were re-activated. Only when this was achieved would the remainder of the Chapter be sent on board.

To minimise the risk of contamination the first wave was to be launched from warp barges. These would enter real space at sub-light speeds, in close proximity to the target. Each barge would then launch a number of boarding torpedoes, each carrying two squads of marines. Once the torpedoes were launched, the barges would return to warpspace, and re-materialise a safe distance away.

The mission would be overseen by a command team in a separate module, also deployed from warpspace. The module had the capacity to evaluate all the information in-coming from the Sensoria of each Terminator armoured Marine. Orders specific to any squad or individual would be relayed directly, while the operations commander assessed the broader strategic situation, and relayed the strategic orders. The overall leader was Michealus Raphael, the Chapter's Imperial Commander.

Standing off at a distance of two parsecs were the Gothic Class Battlecruisers *Intolerance*, *Indestructability* and *Righteous Power*. Each ship carried a payload of one hundred *Hellfire* class nuclear missiles. The payload of a *Hellfire* is one hundred and twelve sub-munitions, each one with a five giga-tonne warhead. If the vanguard failed, the vessel would be fusion bombed, down to a fine powder.

+00.37.50

++ First casualties reported. Shield failures on torpedoes 3, 12. Four Squads dead on arrival. Tactical reserve re-targetted.

++ All squads advancing. No enemy activity.

++ The Emperor watches our every move. Humanity's protector is at hand.

HOW TO PLAY THE MISSIONS

Following are six Missions pitting Space Marines against the Genestealers. The Missions may be played in any order; however, as they are listed in roughly the order of difficulty, it is suggested that new players - especially new Space Marine players - tackle the early Missions before going on to the later ones.

HOW THE MISSIONS WORK

Each Mission contains the following sections:

Map

The Map shows you how to set up the board and where to place door counters prior to play (all doors begin the game closed). In addition, it displays the Space Marines' deployment area, the Stealers' entry areas, and any other special rooms or corridors.

Objectives

What each side is trying to accomplish.

Forces

What forces each side has at its disposal at the start of the game, and what reinforcements it has available.

Space Marines: For the Marines, this typically means one or two complete Squads, including full ammunition for the Flamer. A complete Marine Squad contains one Sargeant, one Flamer Marine, and three standard Marines.

Since you have to keep track of each individual Flamer's ammunition, it is a good idea to place the two piles of six Flamer markers well-separated on the table, each near to the appropriate Flamer Marine.

Stealers: The Stealer player usually begins the game with one or more Blips lurking off-board, and he receives an additional number of Blips each turn as reinforcements - usually one or two per turn.

In these Missions, the Stealers have unlimited reinforcements - as long as the game lasts, the Stealer player will get the stated number of additional Blip counters at the beginning of his turn. If all of the Blips have been drawn from the box top, take all of the converted or destroyed Blips (which are probably scattered about the table), shuffle them together, place them back into the box top, and begin drawing them again.

Deployment

This section describes how both sides deploy models.

Marines: Marine Squads typically deploy on one or two specific five-square-long corridor sections, or dispersed about the board as the Marine player wishes. Unless stated otherwise in the Mission, the Marine player may place his models in any order, facing in any direction he chooses.

Stealers: The Stealers enter play as Blips at any of the *Stealer entry areas* shown on the map diagram.

Special Rules

This describes any special rules for the Mission.

Victory

What each side needs to do to win.

MATCH PLAY

Because most games take an hour and a half or less to complete, **Space Hulk** is admirably suited for match play. We suggest that each time you try a Mission, you and your opponent play it twice - once each side. Keep track of how many turns the game takes and how many casualties occurred for both sides on a piece of scrap paper.

If one player wins both games, he gets an outright victory. If you split the games, which means that either the Stealers or Marines won both games, the player who caused the most casualties, or who succeeded in fulfilling his objectives in the shortest amount of time (depending upon the scenario's victory conditions), is the winner.

MISSION 1 : SUICIDE MISSION

As the blunt nose of the Chapter's boarding craft smashed through the steel skin of the space hulk the *Intolerance* blazed the alien vessel with a great burst of radiation. The flash of data was quickly analyzed by the onboard computers to give the Imperial forces their first detailed view of the inner layout of the space hulk. On the dark green view-screens on the bridge the skeletal passages and chambers glowed with a ghostly white light. Commander Bellisario pointed to one of the groups of glowing dots clustered around the outer levels of the hulk.

"These match up with the protuberances on the outside of the hulk," he said. "They appear to be small boarding craft, perhaps escape pods. We cannot risk any planet-side contamination - no Genestealers can be allowed to escape. It is imperative that the pods are destroyed or disabled before we launch our main attack."

Within minutes, the next wave of data from the scanners had fleshed out the three dimensional floor plan of the hulk. Wide spectra analysis revealed a fine red network of active power conduits and, more ominously, hundreds of blobs of cold blue - cryogenics champers.

Computer analysis predicted that the escape pods were all linked to a central control room situated well beyond the defensive perimeter, in the center of several larger, cryogenic clusters. Any squad moving into the area was unlikely to get out alive, but Commander Bellisario ordered a squad to attack immediately. The Space Marines could afford to delay no longer...

Objectives: The Marine player is attempting to deliver a flamer hit on the Launch Control Room. The 'Stealer player is, of course, attempting to keep the Marine player from doing this.

Forces: **Marines:** One full standard Squad. (One Sergeant, giving 2 minutes 30 seconds to move)

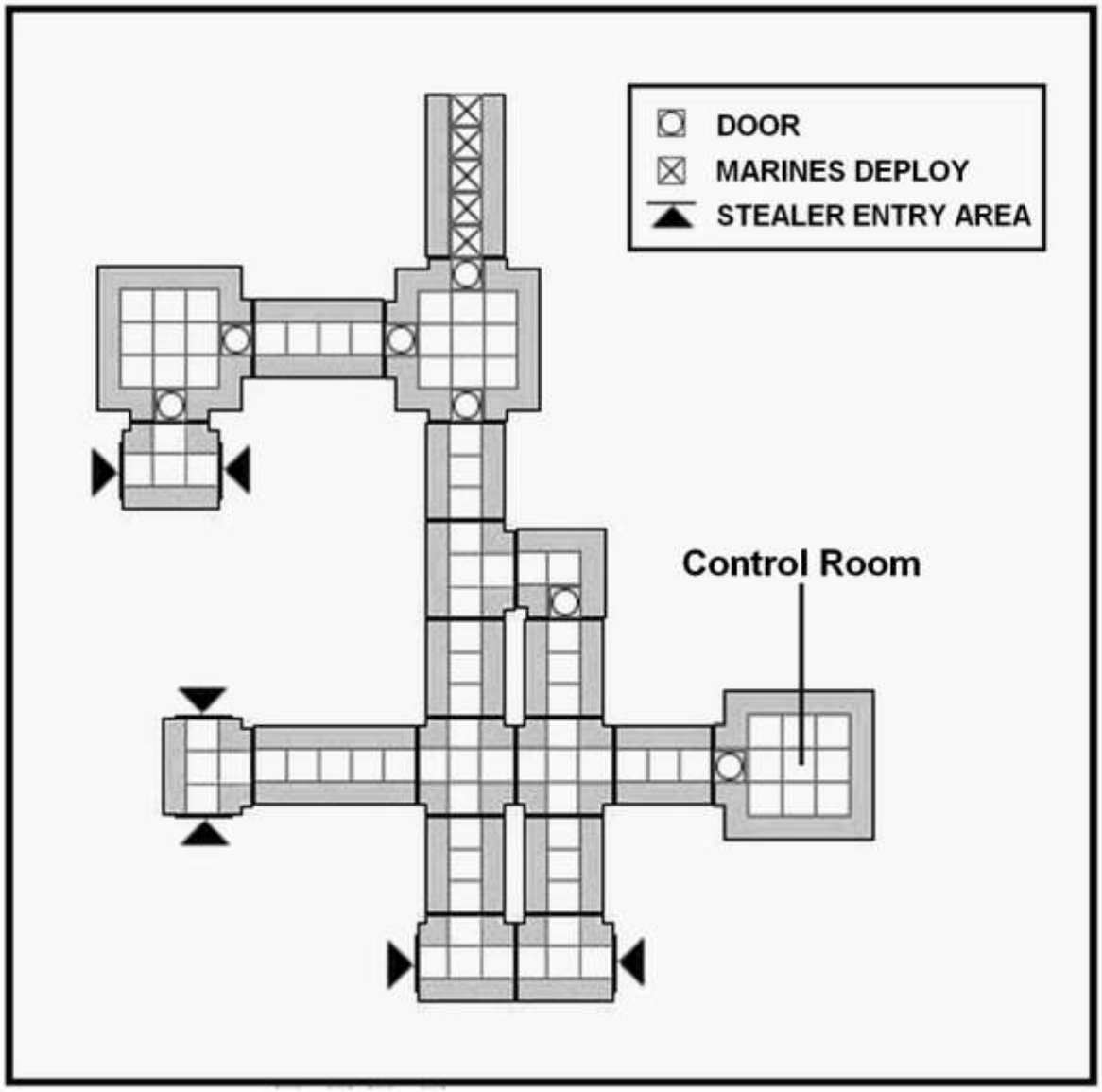
Genestealers: Begins with two Blips and receives one Blip reinforcement per turn.

Deployment: **Marines:** The squad deploys on the first five squares at the top of the map.

Genestealers: The 'Stealer player may place his starting force and subsequent reinforcements at the entry areas of his choice.

Special Rules: If it's the Marine player's first game he gets 3 minutes to move.

Victory: The Marine player wins by scoring a flamer hit on the Launch Control Room *{Room A in this map}*. The moment he scores the hit he wins and the game ends. The 'Stealer player wins when he kills the flamer Marine, or if the flamer runs out of ammo.


DOOR
MARINES DEPLOY
STEALER ENTRY AREA
Control Room

MISSION 2 : EXTERMINATE

Commander Bellisario paced across the bridge of the *Intolerance* to where the Techmarines clustered around the view screen, studying the layout of the space hulk. The Space Marines had succeeded in destroying the launch control room, but at the cost of an entire squad of Terminators. Bellisario hadn't been alive at the time of the Blood Angels' first encounter with a space hulk six hundred years ago, when the First Company had been virtually wiped out, but he felt the burden of their loss reaching out to him across the centuries. Now he hoped to avenge their deaths, and finally lay their souls at peace.

The ship's layout had been analyzed, and the likely routes for an alien advance had all been plotted. It was calculated that the first enemy attacks would be delivered from a cryogenic cluster a kilometer away from the landing area. Sealing a key junction along this route should block the route. A squad of Space Marines had been sent to the junction, 300 meters beyond the projected perimeter defenses. Here, it was hoped, they could cover the beachhead area by slowing down the rate of enemy reinforcement.

The advancing Space Marines reached the junction and spread out to check the nearby rooms for unspotted aliens. The sweep was finished with only seconds to spare. By the time the Space Marines reported the area secure, several hundred Genestealers were converging on their position. The Terminators were outnumbered by over sixty to one, and it was obvious that it was only a matter of minutes before they were wiped out.

Objectives: The Marine player is clearly doomed. It is only a matter of time before it is destroyed by the numberless forces of rampaging Genestealers. To a man, the Marines have one overriding desire: to take out as many 'Stealers as they can before they go down. The 'Stealers merely wish to destroy the Marines with minimal casualties.

Forces: **Marines:** One full standard squad

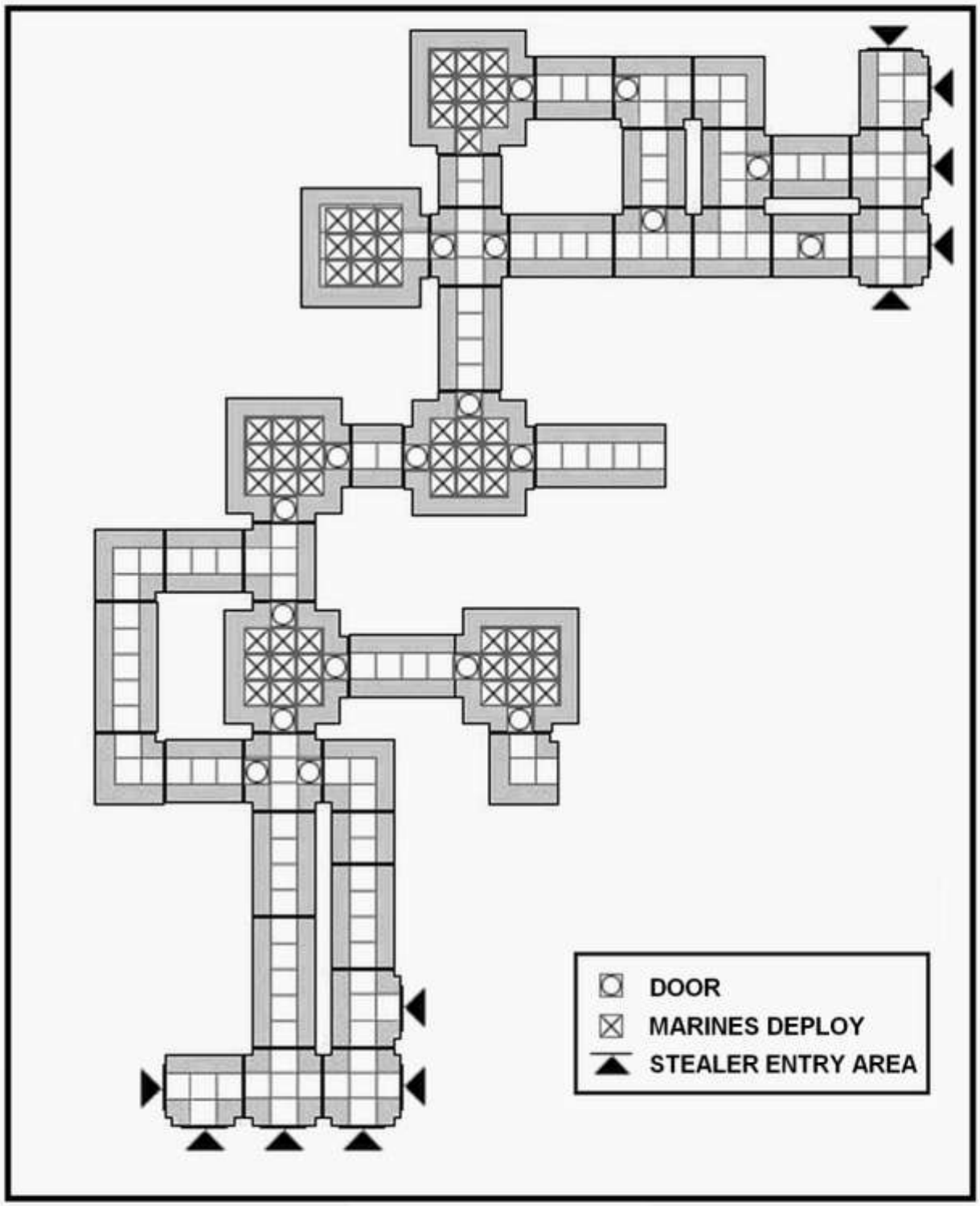
Genestealers: No starting forces, two reinforcement Blips per turn.

Deployment: The Marine squad begins dispersed. Taking turns, the Marine and the 'Stealer players place one Marine in any space, with any facing, in any of the rooms shown on the map. No two Marines may begin play in the same room. The Marine player places first.

Special Rules: Blips and 'Stealers are not allowed to lurk off-board, nor are they allowed to use an entry area that is within six spaces of a Space Marine. If, at the end of the 'Stealer player's turn, any 'Stealers or Blips are lurking off-board, they are automatically lost - alhough they doesn't count towards the Marine player's victory. In the unlikely event that the Marines manage to black all entry areas, the Marine player wins immediately.

The Marine player needs to record the number of 'Stealers he kills. Note that flamed Blips count for the number of 'Stealers they represent, but Blips lost lurking off-board are not counted at all.

Victory: The Marine player wins if he kills 30 'Stealers before his squad is destroyed, otherwise the 'Stealer player wins.


DOOR
MARINES DEPLOY
STEALER ENTRY AREA

MISSION 3 : RESCUE

As the Space Marines moved into position, a Cyber-Altered Task spy robot had crept into the hidden depths of hulk. Within seconds of connection to the hulk's computer net, the C.A.T. had amassed all the data it required on the ship's cryogenic systems, both their layout and their security.

The C.A.T. stored the information, disengaged from the net, and began working it's way back towards the outer decks. As soon as the C.A.T. started moving, it was located by the *Intolerance's* continuing wide spectra analysis.

Contact with the C.A.T. was maintained with relative ease, bur scanners revealed the Genestealers were closing in rapidly...

Objectives: The Marine player must retrieve the C.A.T and bring it safely back to the dropship.

Forces: **Marines:** Two complete standard squads.

Genestealers: No forces at start of play, three blips per turn as reinforcements.

Deployment: One squad begins in either or both of the shaded corridor sections labeled 'A' *{the right hand pair of free corridors in this map}*, the other at 'B' *{the pair of free corridors at the bottom of this map}*. One of the Marines in the 'A' section is carrying the C.A.T

Special Rules: The C.A.T.

The CAT counter takes no place in it's square, and may be passed and shot through as any empty square. If a door is closed on the square containing the CAT roll a dice to see which way the CAT is pushed.

The CAT is placed in the square with the Marine carrying it, and it gives no penalties to the Marine carrying it.

It costs 1 AP to pick up, pass or take the CAT from another Marine. For any attempt to do so roll a dice: on 1 the CAT is damaged, on 2 it is dropped and may wander around by itself, otherwise it was a successful move. If the CAT is damaged, any further damage to it will destroy it.

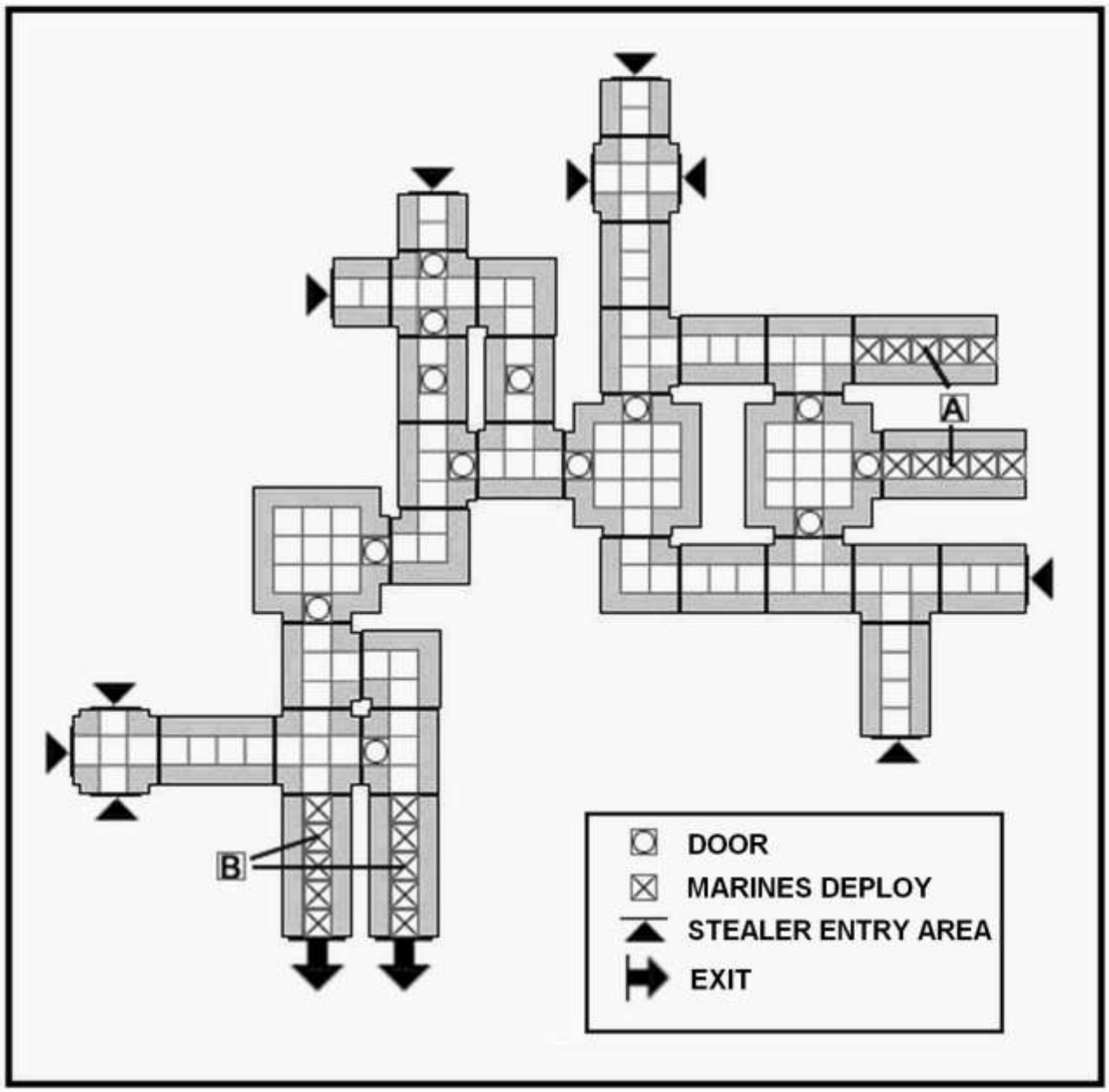
The CAT may be damaged as above or if the Space Marine who carries it engages in Close Combat.

If he wins or ties it, roll a dice with the conditions above, if he loses it the results of the dice gives: 1 the CAT is destroyed, 2-3 the CAT is damaged, 4-6 the CAT is unharmed and will wander about.

A flamer hit to the room containing the CAT destroys it. The CAT cannot be attacked, picked up or destroyed directly by a Stealer if wandering by itself.

If the CAT is on its own it will move in the Marine players end phase. Roll a dice; on 1-3 the Stealer player moves it, on 4-6 the Marine player moves it. The CAT moves up to three spaces, and pays nothing to turn. It can move to or through occupied spaces but not into closed doors or burning corridor sections. If damaged the CAT may not move.

Victory: The Marine player wins if he gets the undamaged CAT off the map through one of the corridors at 'B'. The game is a draw if a damaged CAT is taken off; otherwise the 'Stealer player wins.


A
B
DOOR
MARINES DEPLOY
STEALER ENTRY AREA
EXIT

MISSION 4 : CLEANSE AND BURN

Objectives

The Techmarine captives are being held in two rooms marked on the map. To kill the captives and protect the Chapter's gene seed the Marines must cleanse each room with a flamer shot.

Forces

Marines: Two full standard Squads.

'Stealers: No starting forces, two reinforcement Blips per turn.

Deployment

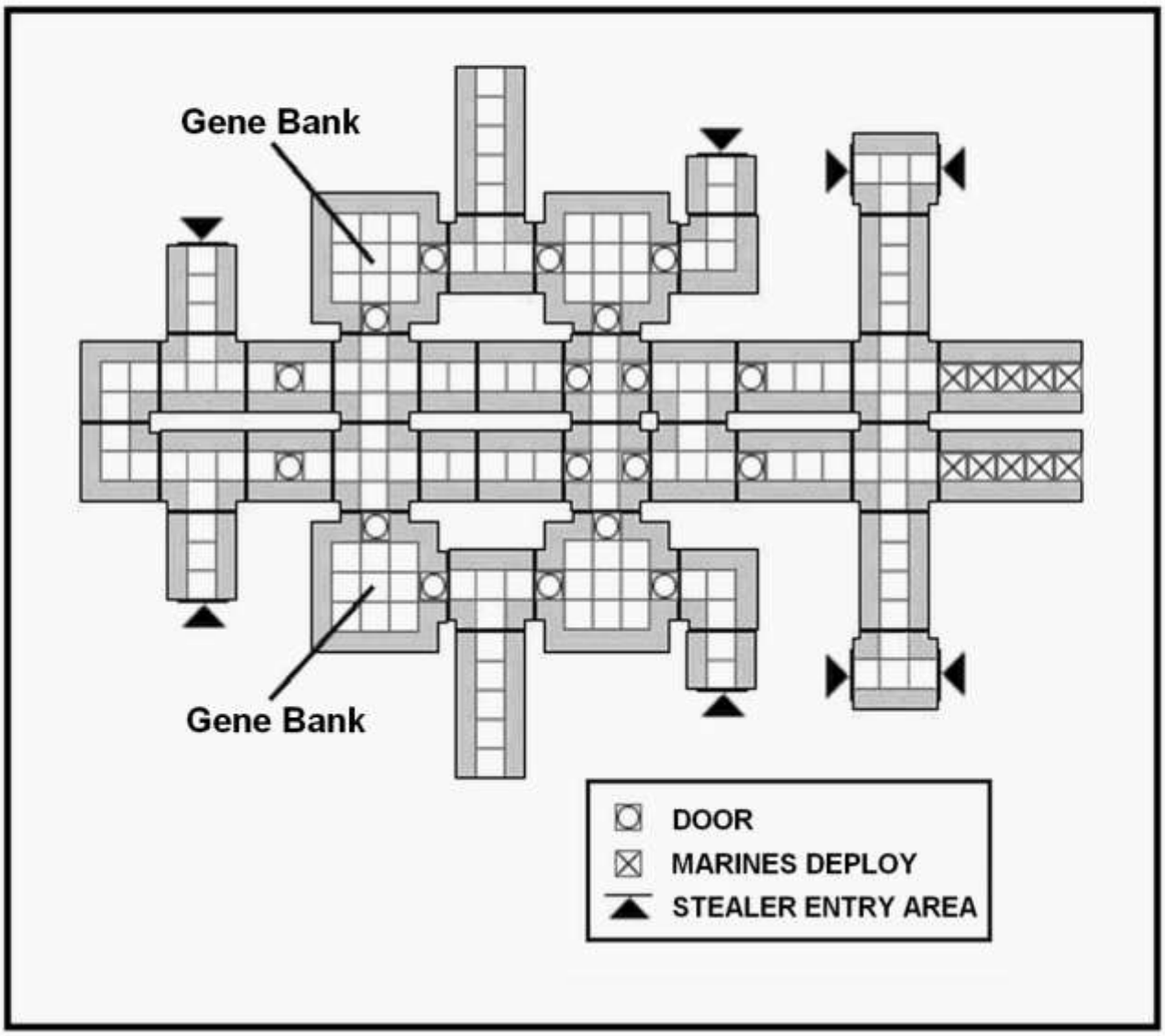
Marines: Each squad starts in one of the marked corridor sections.

Special Rules

When one of the target rooms takes a flamer hit, it is cleansed; mark the room afterwards with the flamer marker upside down.

Victory

The Marine player wins by cleansing both Gene Banks. The stealer player wins if both Flamer Marines are killed or run out of ammunition before their objective is reached.


Gene Bank
Gene Bank
DOOR
MARINES DEPLOY
STEALER ENTRY AREA

MISSION 5 : DECOYE

Objectives

The Marines are attempting to reach a nearby cryogenics cluster just to the north of the sectors shown above, both to destroy the several thousand Genestealers interned within before they can activate, and to draw off 'Stealers from the real target of the assault.

Forces

Marines: Two full standard squads.

'Stealers: The 'Stealer player begins with three Blips, and gets two reinforcement Blips per turn.

Deployment

The Marine player starts with one squad on each of the five-square sections in the middle of the map *{the five-square corridors on the right and left sides of this map}*.

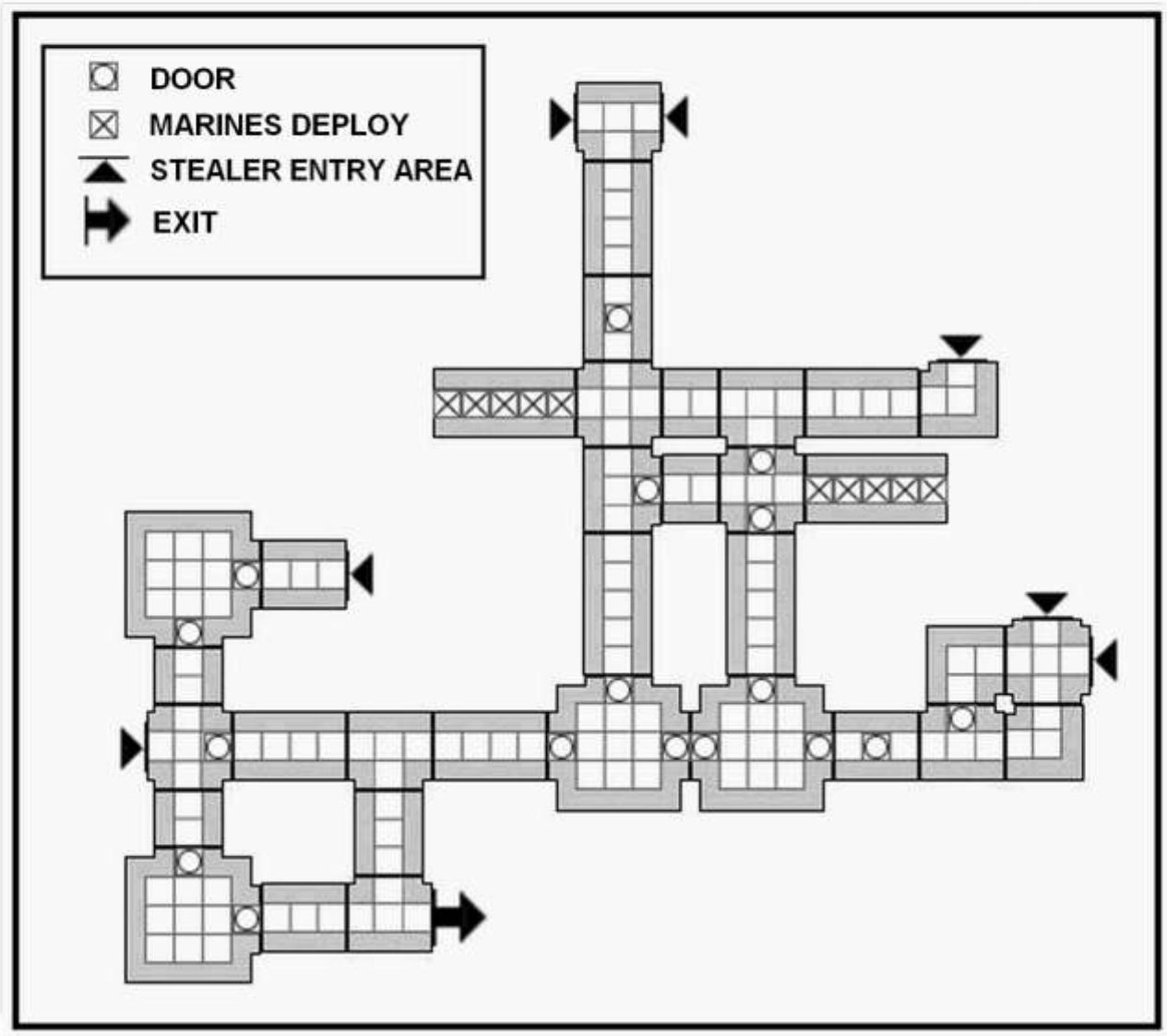
The 'Stealer player may place their starting Blips at any of the marked entry areas.

Victory

The Marine player wins by moving a total of five Marines off the map at the exit point.

Special Rules

A Marine must pay 1 AP to move off the map. Once exited he cannot return to the game.


DOOR
MARINES DEPLOY
STEALER ENTRY AREA
EXIT

MISSION 6 : DEFEND

Objectives

The Marines must defend the Duct Room *{the northernmost square room in this map}* until all of the toxins has been released into the cryogenic atmosphere circulation system. If they keep the Genestealers from destroying the fragile ducting before the toxins have been released , all the hibernating Genestealers will be destroyed.

Forces

Marines: Two complete standard squads, but the flamer Marines begin with only 4 flamer shots each.

'Stealers: The 'Stealer player begins with two Blips, and gets two reinforcement Blips per turn.

Deployment

Marines: The Marine player is allowed to set up his men anywhere on the map.

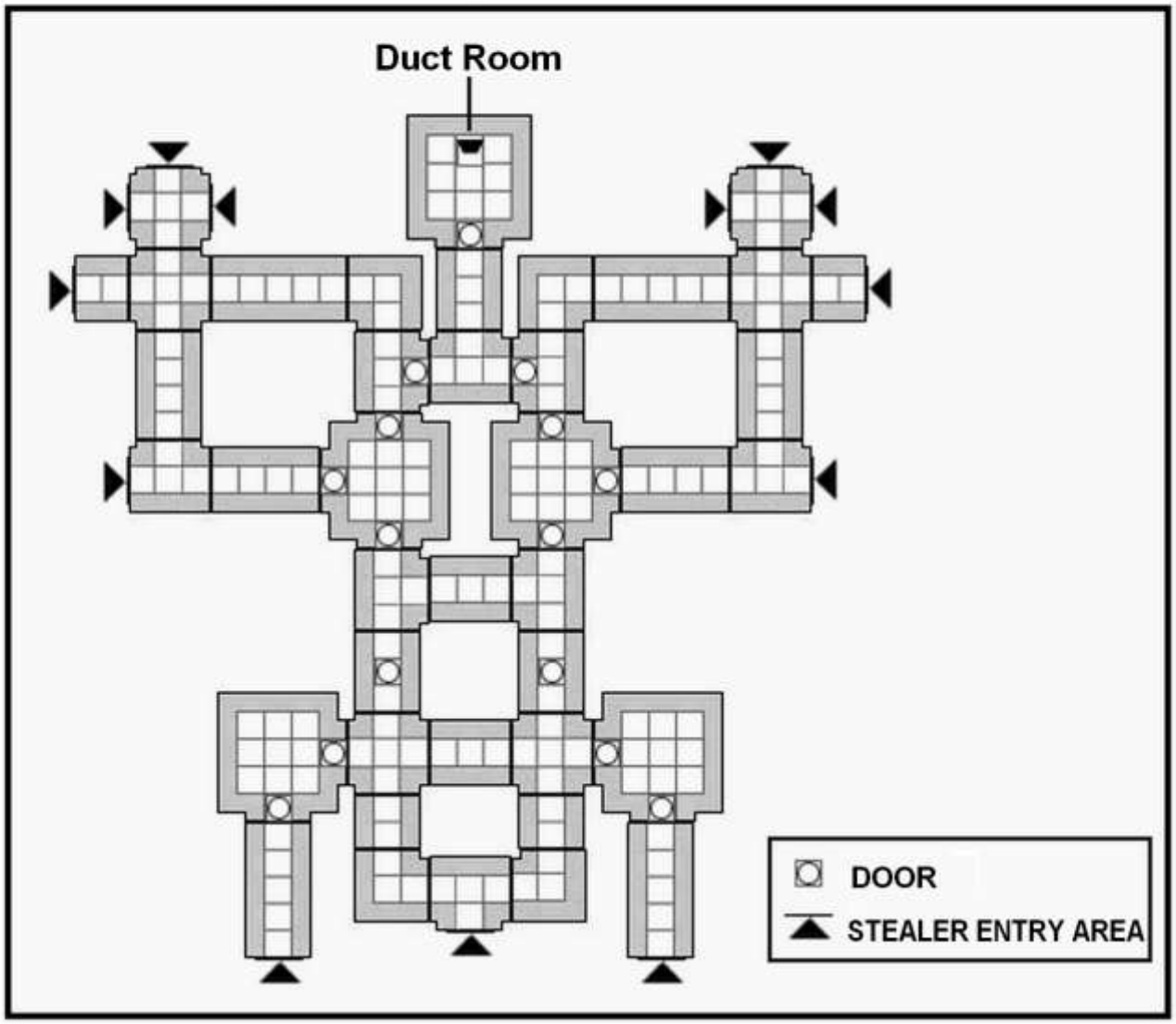
Special Rules

Duration: The Space Marines must survive for sixteen complete turns.

Flamer Limitations: Because of the danger of breaching the ducts, the flamers may not be fired into or out of the Duct Room or the adjacent corridor. If one is fired in this way the ducts are damaged and the stealer player wins immediately.

Victory

To win, a Genestealer must enter the Duct Room and attack the northern wall (the one furthest from the door) in close combat. If the Genestealer rolls a 6, it has breached the ducts and the Genestealers win. If the Marines can keep this from happening for 16 turns they win.


Duct Room
DOOR
STEALER ENTRY AREA

THE FALL OF DARVON VI

I don't know where they come from. It seems highly unlikely that they evolved naturally into what they are now - impossible, given what we know about evolution. Perhaps they are some kind of bioweapon, created millennia ago by madmen for some long-forgotten war. If so, I suspect that their creators soon came to regret their creation.

Or perhaps they come straight from the warp. Possibly the Lords of Chaos themselves cast them out because they were too unpleasant.

- Jarv Advent, Senior Xenobiologist,
Inquisitorial Institute of Proctos Minor

THE INVASION

Tantalus III was a deep space cargo hauler working the trade routes around the Chiron Cluster. Currently carrying a load of low-grade ore from the Marion belt mines to Darvon VI, *Tantalus* had been following the same route for years, and had never had any trouble - her cargo wasn't worth enough to merit the attention of any of the great Pirate consortiums working the Cluster, and she was well-armed enough to deal with the independents. Thus, her Captain was not unduly alarmed by the presence of an unknown ship at the warpgates leading to the Darvon system.

Until his First Officer told him how big it was.

"Check your instruments!" the Captain snapped.

The First Officer was sweating as he recalibrated his scanners. "Same reading, Captain. Twelve kilometers stem to stern; eight kilometers diameter at centre. Displacement -" But the Captain wasn't interested in the ship's displacement.

"That's a warship! Red alert! All crew to battle-stations!"

The bridge's lights dimmed to red and the crew moved to emergency stations. The Captain continued barking out his instructions. "Navigation! Plot an immediate course back to the Gate. I don't care where we come out, as long as we jump system fast!

"Comm, broadcast standard non-belligerency call sign on all frequencies. Monitor local channels and see if you can pick up any chatter from the ship. I want to know who she is."

"Whoever she is," the First Officer inserted grimly, "she's moving to intercept us. Accelerating at 50 Gs. We're not going to make it, Captain."

The Captain swore. "Nav, take us insystem! Give it your top acceleration - burn out the engines if you have to. Now!"

Before the Navigator could comply, a searing lance of energy darted out from the ship and sheared through *Tantalus's* shields as if they were butter.

Three weeks later, an in-system shuttle picked up a distress signal from one of *Tantalus's* lifeboats, floating in orbit around the huge gas world of Darvon VIII. There was one survivor on board, Assistant Navigator Sirval.

Sirval told his rescuers that the *Tantalus* was attacked by pirates when it entered the system. He didn't remember much after that - "When the pirates boarded us and started killing everybody, I must have gone off my head a little." The next thing he knew, he was aboard the lifeboat, alone.

The shuttle took Sirval back to Darvon VI. It towed the lifeboat back to the planet with them, the shuttle's captain planning to claim salvage rights.

Unfortunately, the shuttle's crew didn't search the lifeboat's storage bay quite thoroughly enough.

When they reached the planet, Sirval was subjected to a rigorous physical and psychological examination. The apothecaries concluded that he was not carrying any communicable diseases, the Inquisitors that he was not spiritually contaminated. He had completely blocked out the details of the pirate attack, but that was not particularly unusual. No doubt he was suffering from extreme guilt about abandoning his shipmates to their doom; survivors of disasters often blocked out memories of their ordeal to keep their sanity.

When they asked him about his future plans, Sirval said that he was giving up space travel; he wanted to settle down and raise a family. The Inquisitors nodded pityingly. The boy had obviously lost his nerve. Under the circumstances, they thought to themselves, could you blame him?

The lifeboat was to be brought down at the Carsin City spaceport. However, seconds after it entered the atmosphere, the port masters lost contact with the pilot aboard the boat. Shortly afterwards, it crash-landed about forty miles outside of town, in the middle of a dense forest. There were no survivors.

Three months later, Sirval married a young woman from Carsin City. The couple moved out of town, and began homesteading fifteen miles from the site of the lifeboat's crash. A year later, their first child was born.

THE INFILTRATION

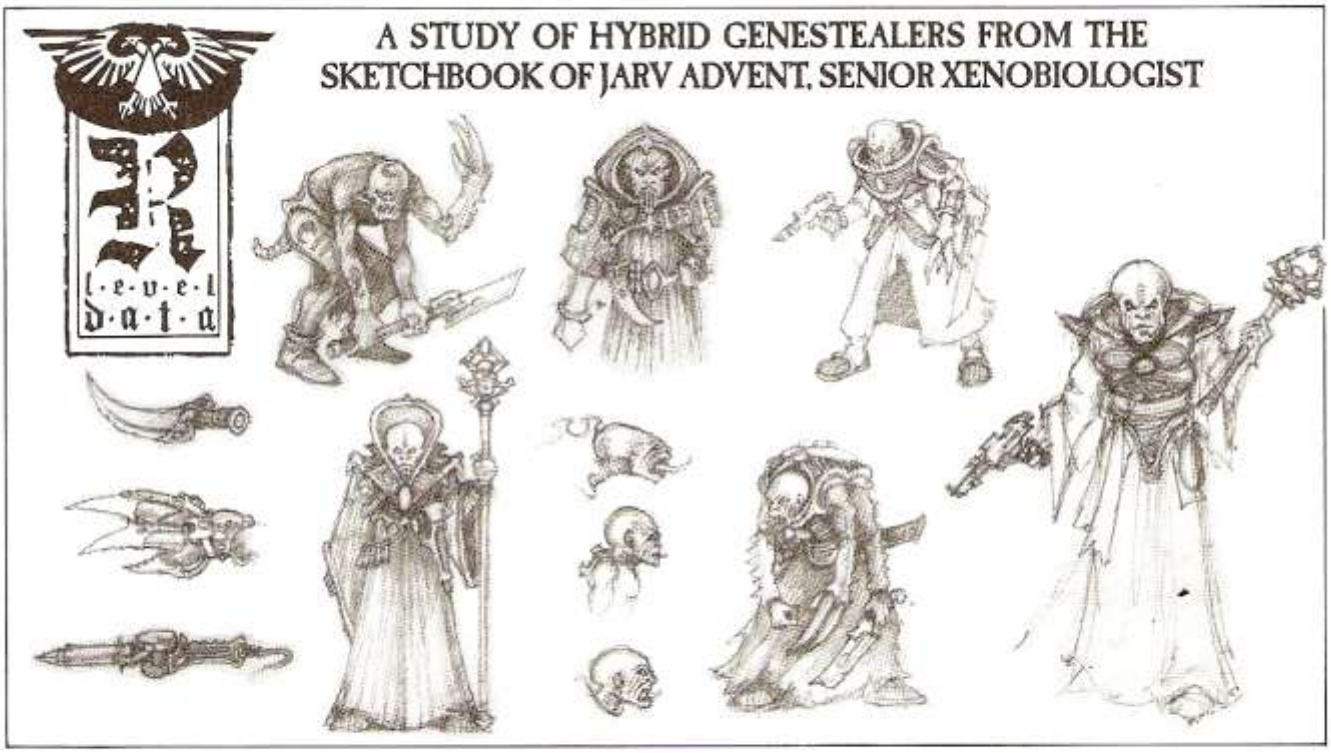
As far as we have been able to determine, Genestealers reproduce only by infecting others with their genetic pattern. They appear to entirely lack the capacity to bear their own young. As you might imagine, this characteristic makes them extremely aggressive - they must conquer new worlds to gain new breeding stock, or their entire race will perish.

To compensate for this extraordinarily complicated breeding pattern, Genestealers are highly intelligent and remarkably difficult to kill - barring accidents, all but immortal.

A child born to a man or woman who has been infected by a Genestealer is quite similar to a purebred Stealer, displaying little outward manifestation of its Human origins. From birth, if not before, it exerts a strange power over its parents, causing them to nurture and protect the monster with almost fanatical devotion. The Human/Stealer hybrid is capable of breeding only via the Genestealer method - infecting other non-Stealers with its DNA.

l·e·v·e·l
d·a·t·a

A STUDY OF HYBRID GENESTEALERS FROM THE SKETCHBOOK OF JARV ADVENT, SENIOR XENOBIOLOGIST



I suspect that there is some kind of psychic link between a Stealer, his victims, and their progeny, but this is unproven. In the Darvon VI matter, we believe that a purestrain Genestealer entered the planet, controlling the infected crewmember after the crewmember was released from custody.

In any case, those infected by Genestealers band together and, if possible, leave the mainstream of civilization altogether, forming small, discrete enclaves or covens. Outsiders are subtly or overtly discouraged from entering these havens; those who persist are themselves infected, and subsequently join the group. Though ostensibly run by Humans, I suspect that purebred Genestealers control the covens from behind the scenes.

A second generation hybrid, born of parents infected by a first generation hybrid, has more of a Human appearance. Its skin-colour begins to approximate its Human parents', losing some of the Stealer's characteristic colouring. The hybrid's head may be flatter than a pure Stealer's, closer to the normal shape of a Human's, and its clawlike appendages somewhat atrophied. If fully cloaked and accompanied by Humans to do their talking for them, some second generation hybrids are able to move among uninfected humans without being detected.

It is usually at this stage, when second generation hybrids have matured, that the coven begins active infiltration of the host planet.

The third generation hybrid may be almost entirely Human in outward appearance. It has lost one or both of the clawlike extremeties; it can walk upright; it can speak like a Human. Apparently, some third generation hybrids are not equipped with the organ which allows a Stealer to directly infect others, though they can still do so artifically, by drawing some of their blood and injecting it into a victim.

Frighteningly, this injection as often as not is voluntary. By this time, the coven is probably quite powerful, and victims willingly accept the infection during the coven's initiation rituals.

The fourth generation hybrid is all but indistinguishable from a purestrain Human and is fully capable of reproducing as a Human being. It may spawn pure-strain Humans, Human/Stealer hybrids, or pure-strain Genestealers.

So. Assume that one Genestealer lands on a planet and infects just ten Humans - an extremely conservative number. Each of those ten Humans has two children, producing twenty first generation hybrids. Each of those infects ten Humans, who each have two children. Now you have...let's see...twenty times ten times two...four hundred second generation hybrids. They each infect ten Humans, who each have two children. That's eight thousand by the third generation. By the fourth generation, there are one hundred and sixty thousand monsters on that planet.

And that's assuming that each of the creatures infects only ten Human beings. Suppose the real number is twenty? Or fifty? Or one hundred? We don't know how long these creatures live, or how fast they mature. We don't know enough about them by half.

My suggestion to you, my lords, is that once the infection spreads beyond the first generation, the planet should be fusion-bombed from deep space.

- Jarv Advent, Senior Xenobiologist, Inquisitorial Institute of Proctos Minor

Eighty years passed, and there were over two hundred thousand third and fourth generation Genestealers inhabiting Darvon VI. The Stealers had infiltrated the entire fabric of the society. In fact, the Cult of the Children, founded by Assistant Navigator Sirval, was the second most popular religion on the planet. Most of the Cultists were innocent dupes, completely unaware of the sinister origins of the Cult and its even more frightening objectives; however, innocent or not, their sheer number gave the Cult a great deal of power on the lightly-populated planet. But despite the Cult's growing strength, the local government did not recognize them as a threat.

The tenets of the Cult - modesty, industry, accession to worldly authority ("Render unto the Emperor...") - were seen by the authorities as harmless, and possibly beneficial. Though not himself infected, the Imperial Governor-General actively encouraged the Cult, believing that it was far preferrable to the other native religions, which typically urged their members to anti-social behaviour, if not active revolt against the Imperium.

The Governor-General did not begrudge the Cultists their peculiarities - if the members wished to stay in seclusion or travel about in black, voluminous robes, as long as they paid their taxes, that was their business. That the Cultists raised their children in strict seclusion was a little more difficult to accept, but the Minister of Education himself had visited the Cult-run schools, and announced that they were, on the whole, much better than State schools. In fact, the Minister was so impressed that he joined the Cult shortly after his visit.

THE REVOLT

We went to Darvon VI on a standard recruitment drive. Governor-General Mathous had regretfully informed us that he was unable to fulfill his recruitment quota, as the local religion, the Cult of the Children, forbid its members from traveling off-planet. As over forty percent of the populace belonged to the religion, the numbers of volunteers was unacceptably small.

The Governor-General requested that the Cult be allowed to pay indemnities instead of supplying soldiers to the Imperial Guard; this request was, as usual, denied. The Governor-General then informed us that the Cult had still refused to provide us with recruits; he was helpless to make them comply.

As per standard procedure, a Recruiting Centre was established well in the hinterlands, several hundred kilometres from concentrations of civilisation. Recruiting squads of Ogryns were sent from the basecamp to local villages via drop ship. The first squads were quite successful, hitting the Cult villages under cover of darkness, taking several dozen of the young men, and bringing them back to the basecamp for medical checkup and basic indoctrination.

Upon examination, it was discovered that some of the recruits were obviously mutants, bearing multiple arms, oddly-coloured skin, and other, less-obvious mutations. Recruitment was halted while we reported to our superiors and asked for further instruction. We were told to wait and do nothing, the Inquisitors were on the way.

Four days later, before the Inquisitors arrived, the Recruitment Centre was attacked. Thousands of Cultists, many bearing some degree of the multi-armed mutation, swept out of the forest, completely overwhelming the surprised pickets and the automatic defences.

How they managed to reach the Centre, I cannot say. No traces of large-scale transportation were discovered. That untrained Cultists managed to discover our location, get themselves organized and march two to three hundred kilometres in four days is frankly, astonishing. If I had not seen it, I would not believe it.

Only a few of the Cultists were armed with weapons. Most of them, particularly the most heavily-mutated, were completely unarmed. Despite this, they fought with great skill and determination, employing massive wave-assault tactics to crush our defenses. Human and Squats were no match for them in hand-to-hand combat; the Ogryns gave them more of a fight, but even they were soon overwhelmed. The Cultists' morale was extraordinary; they did not seem to take any notice of casualties.

As I'm sure you realize, the Recruitment Centre was not designed to fend off the attack of thousands of fanatics, even unarmed fanatics. When it was obvious that we were going to be destroyed, the commander of the Centre, Major Kraligos, ordered me to escape and report to you. I took five of the mutants with me, for further study. I believe the Recruitment Centre fell shortly after I left.

Once in the dropship, en route to the orbiting transport, the prisoners broke out of their confinement and attacked their guards, killing fourteen Imperial soldiers and forcing us to destroy them to survive.

Five of them killed fourteen of us. Here are their bodies. As I am sure you will notice, not one of them looks to be over sixteen years of age.

I shudder to think what it must be like on that planet today.

- Chief Medical Officer Talismon.

Within two days of the attack on the Recruitment Centre, the Cultists rose up in revolt, and fighting broke out across the entire planet. All the smaller towns and villages were overwhelmed, and Carsin City, the largest city on the planet, reported fierce house-to-house fighting as the Imperial garrison there struggled for its life.

Unfortunately for the garrison, at least two of its troopers were secret members of the Cult. They launched a stunning suicide attack against the garrison's headquarters, killing most of the high-ranking commanders and destroying its communications network. The garrison fell shortly thereafter.

The rebels quickly mastered the garrison's anti-space weaponry, forcing the Imperial transport to leave orbit and destroying all of the Imperial communications and spy satellites.

Nothing has been heard from Darvon VI since then.

Four battalions! You seek to reconquer Darvon VI with four battalions? I doubt that you could do it with forty battalions, or four hundred!

The planet is lost! Fusion-bomb it from space, I beseech you!

I see. I suppose you must learn it yourselves before you will believe.

Very well. If you insist upon this foolish attack, at least take this advice: the troops sent down to Darvon VI are dead men. Destroy the dropships after they land. Do not take them back into your transports under any circumstances. They may be - contaminated.

If this infection spreads beyond Darvon VI, I don't see how we can contain it.

My Lords, I fear for the Empire.

- Jarv Advent, Senior Xenobiologist, Inquisitorial Institute of Proctos Minor

GENESTEALERS

The edge of a solar system. Behind is the warm glow of a bright, yellow sun, surrounded by balls of green and blue and red, planets locked in the endless Newtonian dance of orbit. Ahead is darkness, broken only by pinpricks of tired white light issued years before from faraway suns, and the occasional passage of small bits of rock heading insystem to temporary warmth or firery death, or outsystem to the long journey through the cold dark night.

Suddenly, a soundless explosion. For an instant - the merest fraction of an instant - a hole opens. A hole leading to nowhere.

An impossibility issues forth.

Clad in black ice, scored by huge rents and tears, the ship appears. A nightmare of distorted physics and monstrous energy, too huge, too alien to comprehend, the ship shudders and moans as it makes the transition from nothingness to being. Outraged, reality denies the ship, but is defeated by the certitude of those aboard. A wave of new possibility ripples sullenly through the fabric of what is.

The Genestealers have come. Another solar system begins to die.

THE INVADERS

The Genestealers are the most enigmatic of races. Fierce warriors, they eschew the use of weapons in combat. Highly intelligent, they build nothing of their own, relying solely upon the technology of conquered people. Possessing an incredibly strong survival drive, they die fearlessly in battle. Vicious, destructive, they choose to conquer through seduction and infiltration rather than overt battle.

At first glance, it is difficult to believe that a cunning and malign intelligence lurks within the Genestealer's bestial exterior. A Genestealer resembles the most fearsome monsters of ancient legend, a horror of teeth, claws, and glittering savage eyes. Protected by a remarkably strong carapace, through which protrude ropes of sinewy muscle, the creature stands in a perpetual crouch atop its clawed feet. Two sets of arms descend from its massive shoulders, one equipped with fingers, the other with powerful claws. Its long, thick head is equipped with a fearsome array of fangs and an even more frightening pair of eyes.

THE SPACE HULKS

There are currents in warpspace. Spacecraft ride these currents, entering the warp at a warpgate, travelling along them for a time, then, hopefully, emerging back into our universe again at another gate. Some vessels never return. Sometimes they founder and are ripped apart by the tremendous force of warpstorms. Sometimes they miss their exit gate, and journey forever through the warp, eternal prisoners of the void, or drop back into the universe countless untold miles and endless years from their intended destination. Perhaps that's how the first Genestealers arrived in this galaxy. No one knows.

Some vessels, however, become locked in a strange current of the warp, emerging from time to time in realspace, but then later helplessly sucked back into the warp. They have no control over their destination and may travel in the warp for centuries, appearing at the same gate whence they came, or light-centuries away, only to disappear once more after several hours or days.

For some reason, according to the demented physics of the warp, more than one of these prison-ships from time to time emerge at the same gate at the same time. One vessel might be an abandoned wreck, another a new craft, complete with living crew. If possible, the crew will scavenge the wreck, perhaps binding it to their own vessel, to increase their living space, and perhaps in the vain hope that they will be able to fashion an escape vessel out of the wreck. Thus are born space hulks.

No one knows how many space hulks there are. Millions of Human vessels have been lost in the warp; countless billions more must have been lost by other races over the millennia. Most are empty piles of junk - space flotsam - some, however, contain treasures of bygone ages, the lost science of the fantastic Dark Age of Technology, or of other races, as far advanced above Humanity as we are above the insects. Thus, some seek out the spacehulks, travelling aboard them in the hope of discovering treasure, risking eternal prison for the chance of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

Some creatures, particularly Chaos Renegades, use the hulks as pirate vessels, appearing in a system, sending out smaller ships to murder and rob nearby planets or vessels, then escaping to safety in the random warpjumps of the space hulks. This is dangerous in the extreme, but Chaos Renegades do not fear danger.

The Genestealers choose to live aboard the space hulks for similar reasons to the Renegades. Ill-equipped to build and man their own vessels, the Genestealers find in the random, unforseeable movement of the hulks the perfect vessel for their infiltration of Human space. Incredibly hardy, extraordinarily long-lived, they are not deterred by the cold, vacuum, or chance of centuries of isolation. Totally without fear, they are willing to chance - if not court - death to further their aims.

THE CYCLE OF CONQUEST

The Genestealers are a warrior race. Their very physiological make-up demands that they constantly seek out new victims to conquer: if they don't, they will become extinct.

Genestealers reproduce by a method which is vastly different from Humans. There are no 'male' and 'female' Stealers; Stealers are incapable of mating with each other, and they are unable to bear their own young. Stealers reproduce by infecting other races with their genetic material.

Stealers are strong psychics. They are able to paralyse victims with their gaze, in much the same way snakes terrify their prey into immobility. If a Stealer concentrates all of his energies upon dominating its victim, only the strongest-willed can resist. Once a victim is dominated, the Stealer infects him, passing on its genetic material in an obscene parody of a kiss.

We came in through the western wall at the height of the ceremony, as the frenzied screams of pain and ecstasy reached their loudest. To the left were the cult members, about two hundred men and women in all, lying fully prostrate on the floor. To the right stood their - priests? gods? children? - I don't know what to call them. There were perhaps a dozen of the creatures, dressed for battle and arrayed about a tall, handsome man in ceremonial robes, bearing a staff of some kind.

For a long moment, no one moved. The tall man looked at me. I could *feel* his eyes burning into my mind. I was frozen with terror and... and something like *anticipation*. He smiled. I - I don't know what would have happened next, if Gorrn, my Ogryn Sergeant, hadn't torn loose a piece of the wall and thrown it at the tall man. He missed - and one of the creatures ripped Gorrn's head off for his pains - but the tall man flinched, and the spell was broken.

I ordered my men to attack. You know the rest.

- Final report of Rickkart Toll, late of the Imperial Guards.

The Genestealers' long, supple tongues are equipped with oviposters (egg-layers). When a Stealer 'kisses' a victim, the tongue pierces the victim's skin, leaving an egg behind. After a victim is infected, he is released. Whether as a by-product of the Stealer's hypnotic gaze or as a result of a hormonal secretion of the egg itself, the victim has no memory of the implantation; he sees the entire episode as a nightmare of fear, and burning eyes.

A subtle psychic link is established between the Stealer and its victim. The Stealer can influence the victim's thoughts and actions without the victim realizing that he is being manipulated. The Stealer uses this power to give its victim one overwhelming desire: to mate and have children.

Because of the damage to the victim's genetic structure, though he mates with his own kind, his children will be hybrids: part victim race, part Genestealer. Until the fourth generation, the hybrids are sterile, able to procreate only via the Genestealer method.

The first generation hybrid closely resembles a purestrain Genestealer. From birth, if not before, it has the Stealer's strong psychic ability; this, in concert with the natural paternal/maternal instincts in all parents, blinds its parents to the child's monstrousness, keeping them from destroying the monster at birth. They nurture and cherish the young hybrid, and will go to great lengths to protect it from harm.

When the first generation hybrid matures, it will infect others, who will in turn produce second generation hybrids. With each passing generation, the hybrids look more and more like their parent race, and less and less like Genestealers. By about the fourth generation, they are all but indistinguishable from purestrain members of their parent race, to the extent that they are able to mate in the same fashion as uninfected members of their species. Some of their children will be hybrids, some purestrain members of the victim race - some will be purestrain Genestealers. All of the descendants of a purestrain Genestealer tend to naturally band together into an extended 'family', usually under the control of the original Stealer itself.

STEALERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Despite being equipped with hands, purestrain Genestealers are not tool-users; they build nothing for themselves. Their sophisticated and subtle brains, which allow them to infiltrate and psychically dominate other species, are quite incapable of understanding the complexities of the lever or the wheel - or the spear, or the gun. When they fight, they fight as animals, using their bare teeth and claws to rend their opponents to bits.

Not so the hybrids. First generation Stealers are almost as limited technologically as purestrain Stealers. Later generations however, are capable of understanding and using technology. A third or fourth generation Stealer can build and operate sophisticated equipment, and it can wield weapons. However, even the later hybrids are not technological innovators; they are limited by the capabilities of their parents. If their parents lack sophisticated manipulatory digits, so will the hybrids; if the planet never achieved spaceflight, the hybrids are unlikely to do so.

When Stealers embark upon space hulks, they take third and fourth generation hybrids with them, to maintain the vessels and operate the lifeboats; however, the hybrids are not as hardy or long-lived as pure Stealers. If they die before the vessel reaches an inhabitable planet, the Stealers are all but helpless until new victims decide to enter the hulk on their own.

THE INUASION OF IMPERIAL SPACE

Despite its growing weakness, the Imperium of Man is still an extremely formidable opponent. Humanity is a warrior race, like the Genestealers, and, though no match for the Genestealers in hand-to-hand combat, their ability to use sophisticated weaponry makes them deadly fighters indeed. The Imperium cannot be cowed or bargained with. The Imperial Inquisitors ruthlessly exterminate any infected planets they discover - they are not afraid to kill the innocent to ensure that all of the tainted ones are destroyed. The Inquisition keep strict silence about this threat to the Imperium, ruthlessly killing or mindwiping all who come into contact with the aliens, fearing the taint of Chaos and spiritual contamination.

As a whole, Mankind is psychically weak, but some individual Men are strong. The Emperor of Mankind is all but dying, but the Stealers have tasted his mind from afar - and they fear him, more than any being they have ever encountered.

But the Stealers have no choice. They are driven. They must conquer - or perish.

The Genestealers' plan, evolved over eons of conquest, is simple, yet very subtle. Individual Genestealers will infiltrate a large number of Imperial planets, establishing small covens amongst the disaffected populace which exist throughout Humanity. They will increase their families slowly - as slowly as their burning drive to procreate will allow - taking great pains to avoid detection. After the fourth generation hybrids are born, they will leave their planet as merchants, diplomats, traders, and even soldiers in the Imperium, to found covens on new planets.

Using their psychic powers and shrewd diplomatic skills, honed by millennia of inter-family warfare, the Stealers' covens will make alliances with other, non-Stealer covens - those created by Vampires, mad Humans, the forces of Chaos - extending their power and influence a thousandfold. When the time is right, when the Imperium is at its weakest, under some grave threat from outside, the Stealers will strike, fomenting unrest and rebellion amongst the populace across a thousand thousand Imperial worlds.

THE IMPERIUM

THE BEGINNING

More than 25 millennia ago, Mankind began the first tentative steps to the stars. Equipped both with shockingly primitive technology and a burning desire for exploration and conquest, Man slowly, blindly, made his way to the nearest systems outside his own. Generations lived and died on the long interstellar voyages; the first Humans to set foot on another planet had never seen the cool green hills of Terra, nor had their parents, nor their parents' parents.

The first colonies were completely on their own, cut off by untold miles and uncounted years from any assistance. Most colonies died alone and unlamented; a scattered few survived and prospered. And the exodus continued.

With the discovery of the *warp drive* came the great Expansion, as what was once a journey of several centuries became a journey of several days. Warp space was tricky and dangerous stuff, and not to be entered lightly. Many ships simply vanished, never to be seen again. With the discovery of the *navigator gene,* which allowed ship's pilots to make longer, more accurate warp jumps, interstellar travel became much safer, and soon Men were exploring all of the nearby stars.

Alien contact followed shortly thereafter, and, with grim inevitability, the first Alien Wars. The pattern was set.

THE DARK AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

Exploration brought new ideas, new wealth, new arrogance, and Science became God. The machines of travel and conquest achieved incredible levels of sophistication. There seemed nothing that Man couldn't do. Man himself was changing, and psychic powers, once the stuff of quack science and trashy pulp thrillers, came to be accepted, and studied.

Though few realized it at the time, the end of the Age of Technology was heralded by the appearance of psykers - humans capable of using psionic powers such as telekinesis. The trigger for this appearance has never been precisely determined, but within mere centuries psykers were recorded on almost every planet known to Man. Some went mad; uncounted millions were burnt as witches, destroyed by ignorance and fear, and, possibly, prescience. A few, those on civilized, 'enlightened' planets, were protected and nurtured, allowed to test and explore their new-found skills.

This was to prove the greatest calamity that Man has ever perpetrated upon himself in a long history of foolish arrogance and stupidity.

Untrained and ignorant of what they meddled with, the novice psykers opened the galaxy to invasion. Daemons - fell creatures in the warp, born of Chaos - attacked the minds of the unprotected psykers, and through them, gained entrance to our galaxy. Monsters walked the worlds. Ignorance and madness replaced enlightenment and technology. Aliens, sensing Man's weakness, attacked savagely, attempting to regain all that they had lost. The *Age of Strife* was born.

THE AGE OF STRIFE

For more than five thousand years, warfare wracked Mankind. Nation battled nation, planet fought planet, system laid waste system. Man fought Himself, Daemon, and Alien. The fragile bonds of Civilisation were lost. Abandoned colonies perished by the scores or reverted to barbaric savagery. Outspacers and aliens plundered and grew fat on the wreck of Humanity.

It was at this time that the mutants began to appear in great numbers. As science crumbled, terraformed worlds slowly reverted to their natural conditions; the Men on them adapted, or died. Thus were born the *abhumans* - the stocky Squats, the powerful Ogryns, the mad Beastmen, and many others.

Only the worlds where psykers were rigorously suppressed survived intact. The retrenchment of Mankind was almost total.

THE REBIRTH OF MAN

Perhaps Man's greatest strength is His ability to create heroes in time of need - the greater the peril, the greater the man. The Age of Strife, arguably the greatest peril Mankind has ever faced, brought forth the greatest man history has ever recorded - the man who would be known as the Emperor of Human Space. A shrewd diplomat, he gathered the loose fragments of Humanity into a single Empire. A brilliant soldier, he conquered those who would not join of their own volition and reclaimed the worlds lost to the Aliens. The strongest psyker the galaxy had ever seen, he drove the Daemons back into the warp from whence they came.

The Emperor is immortal. For ten thousand years he has ruled the Imperium. For ten thousand years he has ordered the lives of men. For ten thousand years he has protected Mankind from the threats which abound in this hostile universe. For ten thousand years he has sacrificed himself on the altar of Humanity's hopes for the future. For ten thousand years the Imperium has endured, established out of strife and discord, a bastion of light in the darkness.

MANEAT IMPERIUM

THE IMPERIAL HIERARCHY

THE EMPEROR

Ageless and ancient, the Emperor is the undisputed master of Humanity. Wounded during the great conflagration known as the Horus Heresy, the Emperor caused a life-support machine of incredible complexity, the Golden Throne, to be built on Terra. Once it was completed, he was placed within its confines, where he has remained ever since, ruler and prisoner, sustained by life-energy drained from millions of human psykers. His will maintains the navigation beacon known as the Astronomicon and binds Humanity together.

Throughout the Imperium, the Emperor's Will is carried out by two colossal organisations: the Inquisition and the Adeptus Terra. Tens of billions of men and women - adepts, scholars, priests, governors, soldiers and Inquisitors - exist only to serve the Emperor.

THE INQUISITION

The Inquisition is responsible for scouring the Imperium for rogue psykers, mutants, and alien threats. Answerable only to the Emperor Himself, they are also charged with weeding out the corrupt and inefficient within the Adeptus Terra. Inquisitors are granted tremendous power and independence of action: few Imperial servants would dare deny any request made by the Inquisitors.

THE ADEPTUS TERRA

The Adeptus Terra has charge of everything else within the Imperium - from the disposition of the Imperial Fleet, to the maintenance of the salt collectors on the watery world of Argon II. The Adeptus Terra is responsible for the spiritual as well as physical well-being of the Imperium; countless priests, officials, warriors, technicians, doctors and others are employed in this vast, system-spanning bureaucracy.

The Adeptus Terra is divided into many bureaucracies and departments. The most important of these are:

The Administratum
The largest single department in the Adeptus Terra. The men and women of the Administratum are responsible for most of the day-to-day governing of the Imperium; there are members of the Administratum on almost every planet in Imperial space, applying policy, levying taxes, ordering the movement of Imperial troops, and carrying out the million other details of the Imperial Will.

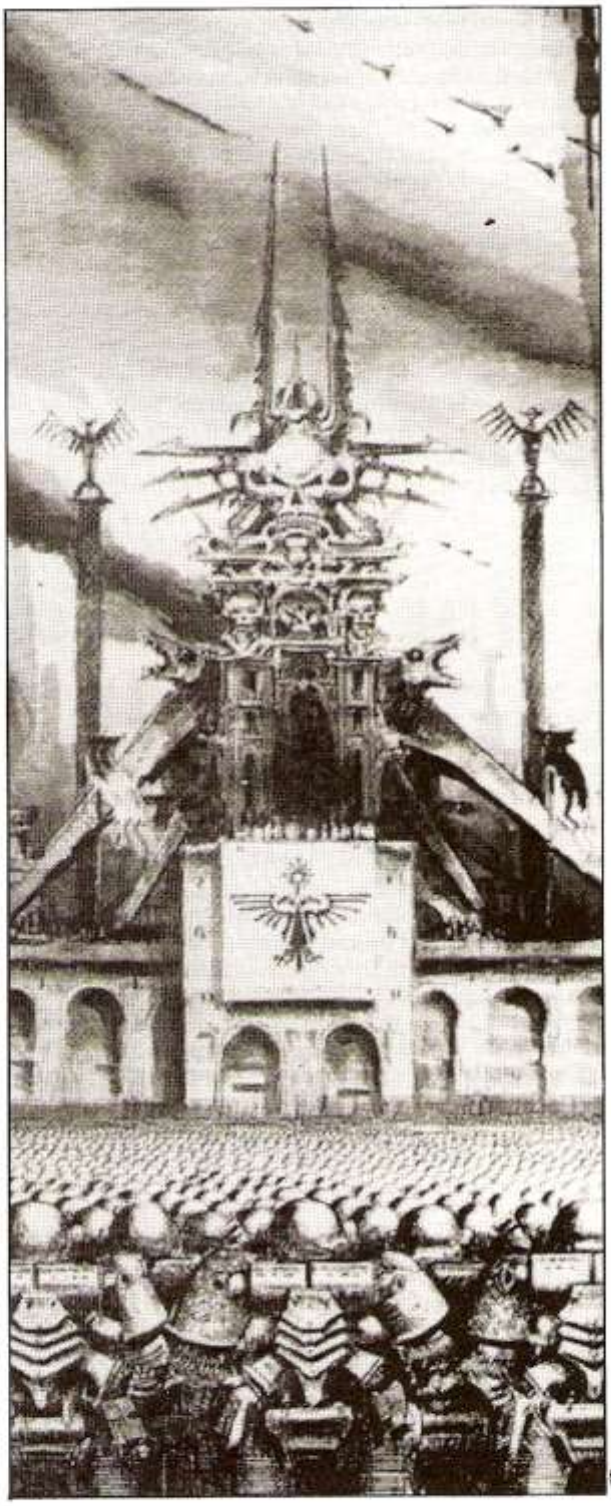
The best servants of the Administratum are appointed as Imperial Commanders. They are given charge of planets, and sometimes entire systems, to run as they see fit - providing tithes are paid and their loyalty is firm.

The Adeptus Custodes
The Emperor's personal bodyguard. An elite force, they have not left Terra since the Emperor's confinement within the Golden Throne.

The Adeptus Mechanicus
The tech-priests of the Imperium, they are responsible for the recovery of the technology lost during the Age of Strife, and the maintenance of existing technology. They also provide support to the Imperial Guard, the Fleet and for their own fighting arms, most notably the Titans of the *Collegia Titanica*.

The Adeptus Arbites
The Imperial police and justices, the enforcers of Imperial law throughout space.

The Adeptus Astra Telepathica
A cadre of powerful psykers, charged with maintaining the Astronomicon and supplying the lesser psykers to be sacrificed to the Emperor.



THE WARRIORS OF THE IMPERIUM

As befits a warrior state, the Armed Forces of the Imperium are mighty indeed - perhaps the mightiest host the galaxy has ever seen. There are four main arms in the Imperial forces: the Fleet, the Collegia Titanica, the Imperial Guard, and the Legiones Astartes.

THE FLEET

The Imperial Fleet provides both a space-going navy and transport for the Imperial Guard and Collegia Titanica. In addition, the Imperial Scout Vessels are constantly probing at the edge of the Unknown, expanding the Imperium at a tremendous rate. The Fleet controls most of the interstellar transport within the Imperium; independent private ships do exist, but these are relatively rare.

THE COLLEGIA TITANICA

A subdivision of the Adeptus Mechanicus, the Collegia Titanica controls the Imperial War Titans - huge, manlike war machines, up to one hundred feet tall. The Titans saw much service in the long-ago Horus Heracy, when Titan battled Titan for control of the Imperium. Today, most of the Imperial Titans are employed garrisoning the boundaries of the Horus Worlds, where remnants of the Traitors still exist, an ever-gnawing thorn in the Imperium's side.

THE IMPERIAL GUARD

The Imperial Guard are recruited from the elite of the countless planetary armies across the Imperium. The sheer number of regiments in the Guards staggers the imagination; it is a truly vast force, with tremendous capabilities.

THE LEGIONES ASTARTES

Though they cannot match the Imperial Guard's awesome numbers, the Space Marines of the Legiones Astartes far outstrip the Guard in terms of ferocity and savage dedication. There are one thousand Chapters of Space Marines, each of one thousand Marines - a million battle brothers.

The best one hundred Marines in each Chapter are trained in the use of *terminator armour*, fantastic battle-armour created in the Dark Ages of Technology.

If the Imperial Guard is the mailed fist of the Imperium, the Legiones Astartes is the rapier of the Imperium, and the terminator-clad Space Marines its razor-sharp point. (*See the next Chapter for more information on the Legiones Astartes.*)

THE GALAXY OF THE IMPERIUM

The galaxy contains around four hundred thousand million stars. Of these, only a fraction are orbited by planets which are habitable or within the capability of human engineering to make habitable. And of these few, fewer still have been investigated and settled by humans. This 'few,' however, numbers millions of worlds.

It is simply impossible to count the systems where humanity or one of its sub-species can be found. New worlds are constantly being colonised and added to the Imperium, in such number that even the sophisticated computers of the Adeptus Terra cannot keep track of them all. Even using faster-than-light warp drive, travel from Terra, the centre of government, to the edge of the Imperium can take literally years - by the time one arrives, the border is likely to have advanced even farther. Despite its inexorable growth, the Imperium is unlikely to ever explore the entire galaxy, let alone spread its rule to others. The galaxy is bigger than Man, and is likely to remain so.

WARP SPACE

Warp space is both the single greatest boon to Man, and the single greatest threat. The conquest of warp space is the power that binds the Imperium together, allowing spacecraft to move hundreds of thousands of light years in only a few hours. However, warp space is also the domain of Chaos, and its minions gnaw constantly at the Imperium, seeking to conquer it from without, seeking to rot it from within.

At the simplest level, warp space is a separate and complete universe, coexisting with our universe. For every point in our universe, there is a corresponding location in warp space, and the two universes are intimately connected. However, warp space is not an exact duplicate of 'real' space. Warp space exists according to its own set of physical laws: distance and time are different there. Two points that, in our reality, are tens of thousands of light-years apart, might, in warp space, be separated by mere miles, or inches. Thus, it is possible for a suitably-equipped vessel to enter warp space, travel for several hours, and re-emerge in our space light years from its starting point.

Spacecraft Navigators find their way across warp space by fixing their course on the Astronomicon, the psychic beacon of the Imperium. Maintained by the Emperor's will and consuming the energy of uncounted millions of psykers, the Astronomicon shines across reality and the warp, allowing Navigators to steer spacecraft safely through the currents of warp space.

In warp space, however, nothing may be taken for granted. It is a universe filled with cross-currents, eddies and whirlpools of power. Ships disappear, without reason, or emerge from the warp centuries after they entered it, or millions of light years from their intended destination. Warp storms flare up, blocking travel through huge reaches of the warp. These storms can last for seconds or persist for millennia, destroying or sending off-course any ships which enter them, isolating areas of real space from all but painfully-slow sublight travel. And there is always Chaos, the primal force of the warp, waiting...

ALIEN RACES AND EXTERNAL THREATS

Mankind is not the only creature to have made the leap into space. During its long history, the Imperium has encountered - and battled - a number of alien races. The most notable of the Imperium's contacts and foes are the *Eldar,* the *Orkoids,* and the Genestealers.

THE ELDAR

In physique the Eldar are the most human-like of the known alien races. Roughly man-sized in height, but slimmer, these aliens have fought Mankind in countless battles across the galaxy - and alongside Mankind in almost as many. A dangerous enemy, and almost as dangerous an ally, the Eldar's aesthetic nature and sophistication has lead them to regard Man as a foolish and dangerous upstart. On their part, Man in turn has branded the Eldar as decadent. Both opinions have something of the truth in them.

A once mighty race, most of the Eldar's planets were destroyed eons ago during the Fall of the Old Race. The surviving Eldar live on great space ships known as *craft worlds.* Few Humans have seen a craft world and lived to tell of it. The Eldar keep the number, size, and location of the craft worlds strictly secret.

THE ORKOIDS

The Orkoids comprise a number of different races which share important characteristics. Orkoids are green-skinned humanoids with brutal, cunning, and violent natures. The largest and strongest of these, known as Orks, dominate the smaller and weaker, the Gretchens. Whether the various Orkoids are all descended from one race or are a startling example of parallel evolution is unknown, though the Orks claim the latter.

As a rule, Orkoid technology is primitive and often unreliable in the extreme. The Ork technicians, called *mekaniaks,* are poor innovators, but well skilled in the art of dismantling stolen or captured machines, and designing something that works - most of the time, anyway. Ork weaponry epitomise crude technology which has been pushed to its limits, allied with a complete diseregard for operator safety. Although Humans despise Orkoid technology, most have a healthy respect for its firepower.

The Great Powers of Chaos

Through forbidden research, the Ordo Malleus have determined that their are four great Powers within the forces of Chaos - Tzeentch, the Lord of Change, Slanneesh, the Lord of Decadance, Nurgle, the Lord of Corruption, and Khorne, the Lord of Battle. Each Power has human servants working within the Imperium and across the universe. Each has a coterie of Daemons within the warp. The Powers seek the destruction of Mankind and, in that destruction, the ultimate domination of Chaos throughout this reality.

(For more information on these enigmatic and dangerous entities, see **Realm of Chaos,** *volumes I and II.)*

CHAOS

Mention has been made elsewhere of the malevolent psychic creatures which live in warp space. These beings have preyed upon psykers throughout human history, using them as gateways into the real universe. Accounts of witchcraft, possession, and daemons appear again and again in the Imperium's most secret records, along with hints of other, darker mysteries.

The Ordo Malleus

Within the Inquisition there is a secret college, the Ordo Malleus, which is devoted to combatting such phenomena. Few know of the struggle, for to know is to risk corruption and temptation. Humanity as a whole must never learn of the battle, else the Darkness would surely triumph. Ignorance is the armour of purity.

IGNIS

THE LEGIONES ASTARTES

The Legiones Astartes is the official title of the warrior organization known as the Space Marines. Its warriors are acknowledged as the most powerful and feared fighting men in the Imperium. Most of its troopers are recruited from the feral planets, where traditional warrior castes compete for the honour of becoming a 'warrior of the stars.' For true aggression and psychotic killer-instinct, however, few recruits can best the murderous followers of the city-scum that roam the darkest pits of the hive-worlds. Driven to extremes of insanity by colossal pressures of hive-world living, these merciless killers make ideal Space Marines.

Young recruits are subjected to many hours of intensive training and indoctrination. Their bodies are toughened by bio-chemicals, and their resolve is hardened by psycho-surgery. A special black carapace is merged with their natural flesh, forming a sort of identity tag as well as permanent armour. By the end of his training, the recruit has been turned into a Marine, a disciplined - or at least controllable - killer.

The basic unit of the Legiones Astartes is called a Chapter. Each Chapter is like a small army in itself, fully equipped with its own transport, non-combatant support staff, ect. Although it contains at most only a thousand fighting Marines, the Chapter has the fighting potential of many times that number of ordinary troops.

Fully recognizing their value, the Imperium does not often waste the Space Marines in stand-up brawls where sheer numbers will decide the day. Instead, they are used with surgical precision, to mount lightning raids and surprise attacks. Their reputation for cold-bloodedness and complete lack of mercy has earned them the nickname *Angels of Death.*

During the upheaval known as the Horus Heresy, when one of the Emperor's most trusted generals succumbed to the lure of Chaos and turned on his liege, the Space Marines fought with savage ferocity on both sides. Two Chapters in particular, the Imperial Fists and the Whitescars, earned great renown in the heroic defence of the Imperial palace.

CHAPTERS

The Chapters are self-contained, almost monastic communities, answerable only to the Emperor. For the vast bulk of the Space Marines, the Chapter is their world, and the only contact they have with outsiders is in battle. Tradition and ritual are of great importance within the Chapter, and the training and daily routine of a Space Marine places as much emphasis upon moral welfare and dedication to the Emperor as on physical training and combat skills.

Each Chapter has its own base, or *fortress-monastery,* where the Space Marines spend their time between battles in training and meditation. As well as barracks, training facilities, machine shops, defence systems and shuttle silos, a fortress-monastery includes a chapel for each of the Chapter's Companies, and buried deep beneath it all, catacombs where lie the Chapter's honoured dead.

ORGANISATION

Marines belonging to the same Chapter are called battle-brothers or battle-kin. Each Chapter, led by a veteran Marine with the rank of Chapter Master, comprises administrative staff, maintenance teams, transport teams, medical teams and about a thousand fighting Space Marines. The warriors are divided into fighting Squads of 5-10 troopers, each led by a Sergeant. Ten such Squads make up a Company, commanded by a Captain and usually assisted by one or more Lieutenants. Typically, one Company of up to one hundred Marines is trained in the use of Terminator armour.

WEAPONRY AND ARMOUR

Marines go into battle wearing power armour. Power armour consists of an all-enclosing protective suit, life-support system, and many other features. The natural weight and cumbersomeness of the armour is overcome by a system of electrically motivated fibre-bundles which replicate in every way the muscular movements of the wearer - so, although heavy, the wearer moves without penalty. Controls are minimal; most of the suit functions are automatic, and the suit's built-in 'thought machine' (computer) will respond to vocal commands. Though not nearly as effective as Terminator armour, power armour is an awesome battle suit in its own right.

The standard hand weapon of the Space Marines is the bolt gun, a lighter version of the storm bolter. Many Marines carry different weapons: lasguns, auto-guns, and various types of grenades being particularly popular. Marines almost always go into combat with a hand-to-hand weapon, which may range from a simple knife all the way up to an awesome chainsword. Heavy weapons the Marines favour include flamers, graviton guns, shuriken catapults, heavy plasma cannon, multi-meltas, and the like.

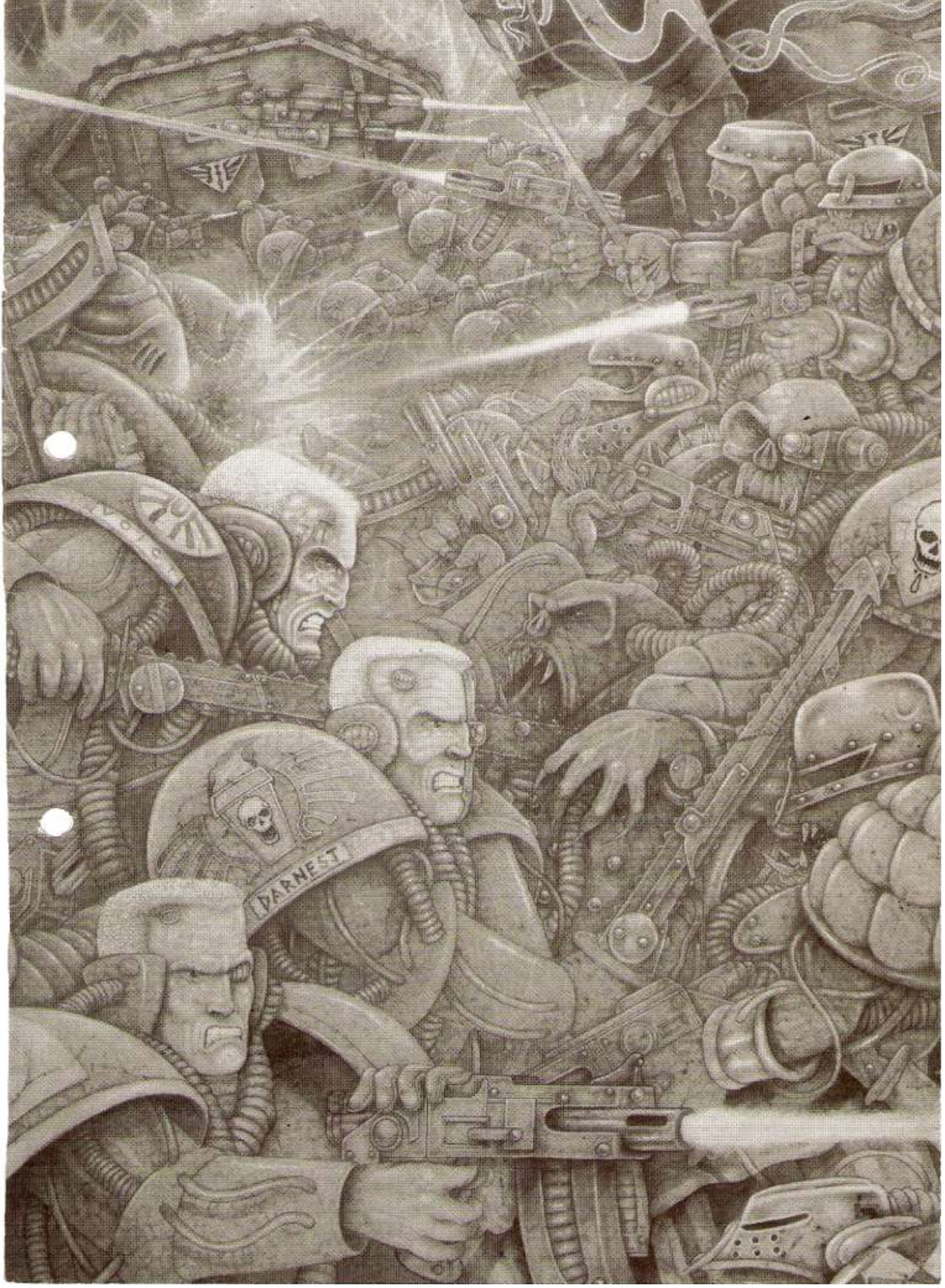
TERMINATOR ARMOUR

Also known as Tactical Dreadnought Armour, Terminator exo-armour is a development of the sealed environment suits used by spaceship crews.

Exo-armour is constructed from heavy gauge plasteel plating, forming an armoured shell that can withstand even the colossal impact of high-speed orbital micro-debris. It is the only readily available armour suitable for working inside the high-pressure casings of plasma reactor shields, or the extremely corrosive environments inside the holds of bulk chemical carriers. These same qualities, suitably enhanced by the Adeptus Mechanicus, make Terminator armour virtually invulnerable to most weapons.

Terminator suits contain their own independent power supply and life-support systems. They are heavily armed and many also carry teleport homers, bio-scanners, energy-scanners, auto-senses, suspensors and targeters for their weapons, and communicators.

Almost all Space Marine Chapters have suits of Terminator armour, and train a small number of their best Marines to use them. The suits are valuable, and often very old. Many bear scars or medallions commemorating past actions, and are treated with the reverence due to ancient relics.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