

# CREDITS

PRODUCED BY  
Tim Huckelbery

DEVELOPMENT AND WRITING  
Max Brooke, Kendall Butner, Tim Cox,  
Robert Dempsey, Matt Eustace, Jordan Goldfarb,  
Lee Gunby, Andy Hoare, Mark Latham, and Joe Sleboda

EDITING AND PROOFREADING  
Jim Jacobson and David Johnson

MANAGING RPG PRODUCER  
Chris Gerber

GRAPHIC DESIGN  
Taylor Ingvarsson & Rory McCormack

GRAPHIC DESIGN MANAGER  
Brian Schomburg

COVER ART  
Mathias Kollros

INTERIOR ART  
Jacob Ateienza, John Blanche, Alex Boca, Matt Bradbury,  
JB Casacop, Jon Cave, Victor P. Corbella, Anna Christenson,  
Mauro Dal Bo, Dave Gallagher, Ilich Henriquez,  
Imaginary FS Pte Ltd, Taylor Ingvarsson, Clint Langley,  
Igor Kieryluk, Mathias Kollros, Kekai Kotaki, Slawomir Maniak,  
Ameen Naksewee, Alexander Ovchinnikov, Michael Rookard,  
Christian Schwager, Stephen Somers, Raymond Swanland,  
Wibben, Ben Zweifel, and the Games Workshop Design Studio

MANAGING ART DIRECTOR  
Andy Christensen

ART DIRECTION  
John Taillon

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT  
Eric Knight

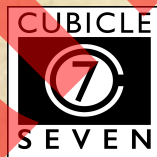
EXECUTIVE GAME DESIGNER  
Corey Konieczka

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER  
Michael Hurley

PUBLISHER  
Christian T. Petersen

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR PLAYTESTERS  
"Abertay Roleplaying Society" Ciaran O'Sullivan with  
Tom Marcham, Lawrence Keohane, Max Davidson and  
Jody "Victrous" Simpson; "The Fort Meade Gamers"  
CS Barnhart with Darian Anderson, Joshua Balog,  
Eric Hein, Robert Stenberg, Brien Vorhees, Kelly Warren;  
"Gaming Insomniacs" Joshua Tufts with Earl McRae,  
Alex Moon, Mike Murphy, Chris Brett, Mike Dotson, and  
Steve Riley; "The Librarians" Pim Mauve with Gerlof Woudstra,  
Keesjan Kleef, Jan-Cees Voogd, Joris Voogd; "Memento Mori"  
Jordan Millward with Keri Harthoorn, Kyle Harthoorn-Burton,  
Malcolm Spence, Kieren Smith, and Julia Smith

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Unit 6, Block 3, City North  
Business Campus,  
Gormanstown, Co. Meath  
K32 DP60.

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Edric sat quietly in the dim light, carving out a new stake. He didn't like Snope's World, and that was before the deaths. Its smell of wet ashes was even stronger to him here in this damp, collapsed hovel. The youth dared but a small candle, just enough light to see his knife and the wood. With each cut, Edric focused his hate for one final duty to the Emperor.

Edric had a witch to kill.

They had come to Snope's World on Her orders. No one knew her real name, so they took to creating ones. Davan solemnly called her The Lady, almost in the same tones he used for the many saints in his prayers. Canto laughingly named her She Who Gives Orders. Edric would never have thought an adept of the Machine Cult capable of humour, but Lhal also used the phrase. Though perhaps she meant it literally.

Edric hadn't settled on a name yet, but then she had only plucked him from his avenging solitude of witch hunting a short time ago. He was sure it would come soon, though, in the same way he was always certain of his righteous mission.

All knew better than to use her title, of course, even him. She operated from the shadows, using Acolytes such as themselves. The fewer who knew of her the better—especially here on a world that seemed to thrive on devious acts and veiled conspiracies.

They were far from Hive Saturna and the glittering Platinal Palace, though, in a refurbished Meldorian hab that their targeted sect used in furtive gatherings. The sect lay at the end of a trail that started with a hive implosion and a screeching cry heard by Astropaths across the Asphodel Depths. Whispers and intimations pointed to aged tomes and bloodstained parchments, kept hidden under the group's habtop lair. Items of horrible power, power enough to crush mountains, in the hands of fops eager for new amusements. All was to be ended tonight, as per Her command.

Newly purloined clothing and ivory masks helped them blend in with the similarly garbed members. Canto provided the final flourish with a pilfered turquoise orchid, the secret sign for entry at the tower level. Once in, it was then simple to slide away and begin hunting through the quiet corridors below the merriment.

Their footsteps seemed to echo loudly along the poorly lit passages. Two levels down, Lhal finally paused them at one door.

"Here," she whispered, holding up her auspex. "A much greater power flow is within." She gave the slab of metal a soft push and it creaked open, spilling strong light out into the hallway.

Outlined against the light crouched a masked figure at the end of the corridor. With a sudden lurch, it stood and dashed away.

Davan didn't need to give orders. Canto was already sprinting after the retreating form. Lhal was right behind him, her power blades drawn and glowing. Davan grabbed Edric and pulled him into the chamber. "Fast now. We won't have much time."

Inside, elegant glow-globes hovered above gilded pedestals. Each sphere illuminated a single open book, oddly shaped relic, or unfurled scroll. Cables ran along the pedestals like nesting snakes.

They moved quickly amongst the artefacts, searching for true signs of the Ruinous Powers. The slightest hint would be enough to condemn those above. Even if unaware of what they had unleashed or what powers they had used, these sinners would pay. Witches, all of them, and Edric looked forward to the flames.

Each item revealed some new blasphemy, but no Warp-taint. There was little time, even if their friends took care of the furtive observer. It seemed forever before Edric himself found it.

"Here." His voice trembled as he called, his eyes watering painfully at the symbols in the opened tome before him. "These glyphs, the marks inside them. This is no fake. This is damnation."

Davan didn't hesitate. "Alert the others. We burn this room and then we burn everyone else here."

Edric clicked his micro-bead. "Canto. Lhal. We found it." There was no reply. "It's real. Get clear." He tried to keep the rising panic out of his voice. "Don't come for us—get out now!"

He heard footsteps behind him and whirled, almost firing before he recognised Canto's mask. "Praise the Throne," he said, relieved at the sight. "You didn't respond, and we..."

Davan's voice was low and cold. "That's not him."

A thin, gloved hand came up, lifting away the bone-white ceramic to reveal Canto's grinning face, marred only by blood trickling from around his eyes. "Ah, you see right through me," he said in a musical voice, lips unmoving as he uttered the words. "She has truly trained you well."

Another hand came up, peeling away that face to show another one below, arrogant and lined with crimson rivulets. "She always speaks highly of her pawns whenever we have our little chats," he said, pouting at the remains of Canto's face. "I had so hoped, though, that she would be here personally this time."

Edric broke out of his shock and fired, but the autopistol hits were like rain on a Chimera's hull. A casual slap from one gloved hand pitched the youth into Davan, throwing them both aside.

The tall, perfectly groomed figure advanced on them, delicately licking the blood from his lips. Azure tendrils flared around his shoulders, and similar flames danced around his eyes. Edric knew his enemy now. "Witch!" he shouted as a curse, even as elongated, grasping fingers reached for his skull.

A blast of cold energy tore the fingers away and cast the tall enemy against one of the pedestals, dropping him hard.

Edric looked towards the source of the blast. His comrade, his mentor, his friend—whose hands were now wreathed in curls of amethyst flames. Witchfire. Edric almost collapsed. "No..."

"Yes," Davan said, mournful and sad but still forceful. "I was about to leave the Ecclesiarchy and end myself when The Lady found me and gave me a way to atone for my sin." He marched forwards resolutely, thick violet fires growing up his arms. "Run now, Edric. Tell her..."

"Tell her what, little witch?" the now-standing figure taunted. "That you will never finish your penance?" He smiled wide. "Or that you knew she is just like you, also blessed by the Warp?"

The unnatural fires exploded around Davan and his foe, and Edric was hurled through a wall to the marshes below. He could only stagger away as the entire structure erupted in witchfire, purples and blues fighting for dominance as they rose into the night sky. Those final, laughing words echoed in his mind as he faltered in his steps, finally collapsing into the soft, wet ground.

There. The stake was ready, sharp and filled with all the hate he could channel into the blessed Thaurian hardwood. He could almost feel it glow in the faint candlelight.

Three days had passed before he found a coded parchment in one of the backup spots, detailing the time and place for extraction. It said she would be there, in person. He couldn't wait to see her.

He still didn't know her real name. He never would. But now Edric finally knew what to call her.

*Heretic.*

# INTRODUCTION

*“Our enemies prowl in the shadows of shining cathedrals. They scuttle in the darkness of dank underhives. They lurk in the corners of gilded palaces. They even dare to stand openly, hiding behind false faces and honeyed words. They are everywhere that men live and breathe—and so we must always be ready to face them with fire and the Emperor’s wrath!”*

—from the Epistles of Inquisitor Kharkov

Though the rapacious alien and the vile Daemon have ended entire worlds and devoured countless souls, many hold that these are lesser threats to the survival of Mankind when compared to those that come from within the Imperium itself. Such enemies represent the foulest of treacheries: deviant cultists, grotesque mutants, unnatural witches, and others who were once human, but have betrayed Mankind and their Emperor through their actions if not their very existence.

Cults exist throughout the Imperium, and often begin as benign gatherings devoted to religious study, martial training, medicae practices, and other worthy pursuits. All too often, however, they become twisted, and turn to darker pursuits and unholy powers. Quests for ancient knowledge grow maniacal, and necessitate appeals to the God of Fate. Mastery of the sword becomes all, and soon only the Blood God is worthy of respect. Surgical preservations delve too deeply into the nature of flesh, and the appreciative Plague Lord bestows gifts on his new children. Obsessions themselves grow until no excess is unthinkable, and the Dark Prince lasciviously welcomes his eager supplicants. Cults grow and spread in their devotion to the Ruinous Powers, befouling habs, hives, and even whole worlds with their taint, until rebellion and worse erupt from these ghastly beliefs and practices.

Mutants are common within cults, their inner corruption revealed through misshapen forms. Such deviance might once have been considered mere genetic damage, but in these terrible days, all know that the taint of the Ruinous Powers is the cause. Each bestial hide, each tentacled growth, each glowing eye-stalk can only indicate Chaos contorting flesh into new, hideous shapes. Mutants betray Mankind by debasing the form of man itself, and are rightly rejected by human society.

Other, more dangerous mutants hide their deformities inside their skulls and dare touch the Warp with their minds. Psykers are useful to the Imperium, but are also the most dreadful of threats. Those not shackled and properly trained are vulnerable to the predations of ravenous Warp-entities, and can grant these foul hosts unfettered access to material space. Reality itself suffers irreparable harm in these instances, and entire worlds can be plunged into the Realms of Chaos, never to return. Better that witches be caught and burned than be free to damn themselves and others to such fates.

These menaces can be found in every setting and on every planet that humanity inhabits. This is especially true in the Askellon Sector, a region that weeps with the echoes of ancient betrayals. Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus—those entrusted with standing against such enemies—and their servant Acolytes find no end to heretics, mutants, and witches in these ancient worlds. For so long as men and women exist, there will always be enemies within.

ENEMIES WITHIN examines these threats and how they relate to the Askellon Sector, and is divided into three chapters:

## CHAPTER I: HERETICUS

The history of the Ordo Hereticus within Askellon is a long one, with tales of psyker eruptions, mutant uprisings, and other heresies across the millennia. This chapter offers greater details of this history and the secretive legends concerning Ordo Hereticus activities throughout Askellian space, including the terrible Vaxi Atrocity that nearly destroyed the sector.

## CHAPTER II: FURY AND FIRE

This chapter features many new player options, especially for crafting Acolytes through the use of new home worlds, backgrounds, and roles, as well as the Sister of Battle elite advance. Players also discover new weapons, talents, and psychic powers to support their Acolytes as they struggle against heresy. Acolytes can even launch their own independent Inquests rather than await their master’s directives, and seek out Radical assets should they wish to use such possibly heretical forces themselves.

## CHAPTER III: ROOTS OF HERESY

The final chapter explores Askellian planets and the heretical cults festering on each, offering players new possible home worlds and Game Masters new Hereticus-themed locations and adventure ideas. GMs can also use the cult and plot generators with the other support materials to craft new adversaries and twists for Acolytes seeking to root out and destroy Askellon’s enemies within.





## CHAPTER I: HERETICUS

Beset on all sides, humanity fights a battle for its very existence. It is the province of the Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus—the Witch Hunters—to protect Mankind from what they consider its greatest threat: betrayal from within. This is a burden from which these grim wardens cannot flinch. They know that a moment of weakness, of remorse over their own terrible actions, or even the failure to act at all can cost humanity dearly. It is better to incinerate an entire population than to allow a single heretic to live, planting the seeds of Chaos that could grow to damn entire systems. To defy a Witch Hunter's will is to risk incurring his blazing wrath, and very few wish to find out just how fiercely that wrath can burn.

Few welcome the arrival of Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus. They know that the presence of Witch Hunters usually also means purifying flames to cleanse any hint of heresy from the planet. Those who do rejoice can often find themselves on the pyres as well, for no one is fully free of corruption in the eyes of zealous Inquisitors. As zealousness is often a watchword for Ordo Hereticus Inquisitors, it is not uncommon for their departure to leave bonfires of heretics, mutants, and, of course, witches so immense as to be seen from orbiting ships.

Few individuals within the Imperium are more powerful or more essential than the Witch Hunters of the Ordo Hereticus, and though all are equal in title, they are by no means identical. Differences in philosophy and tactics define the emphasis of their approach to the mission of saving humanity from itself. Though all have ultimately only one task, the enormous variety of opinions on both the most pressing threats and the best methods to combat those threats often leads to animosity and disagreement. Because each Inquisitor has ultimate personal authority, the right to employ that authority in any way he or she sees fit, and the power to back up that authority, arguments between members of the Ordo Hereticus can be highly contentious and often violent.

It falls to the Ordo Hereticus to defend against the threats that arise from those around them. Tolerance for their fellow man is not a quality for which most, if any, Witch Hunters are known, given the nature of their enemy. Decisiveness, action, resolve, authority, certitude, suspicion—these are the hallmarks of Inquisitors. These traits give power to will, and by the will of Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus, all things are possible—perhaps even the preservation of Mankind against impossible odds.



# SECRETS OF FIRE

*"My flamer can never grow cold so long as a heretic draws breath."*

—Inquisitor Po, Ordo Hereticus

None can say for certain what specific incident, if any, prompted the Emperor to charge the first Inquisitors with their never-ending mission to secure Mankind's right to exist among the stars. From that point forth, though, Inquisitors became the left hand of the Emperor, guarding against the plots of xenos, the predations of the creatures of the Warp, and the treachery of those within Mankind itself—all so that no peril could ever threaten to extinguish Mankind's light from the universe.

Nothing more than this can be said in any definitive way. The very act of seeking knowledge is considered by many to be a sign of possible corruption, for what more does a man need to know, other than that he lives to serve the Emperor? Still, there are those who pursue the truth, or at least what they believe to be the truth, delving into the shadowy history of the Inquisition. Legends, myths, and dark fables abound, all offering differing explanations of its origins. All of these tales claim to be the incontrovertible truth, and yet nearly all of them offer different, utterly incompatible stories. Most cannot even agree on the identities of those first Inquisitors, let alone what words were spoken to them or other such details. Further confounding those who seek ancient knowledge is the existence of individuals who work tirelessly from within the ranks of the Inquisition to strike all traces of truth from what records might remain. None but actual Inquisitors could ever be entrusted with such powerful knowledge, and few Inquisitors would even allow others of their rank to know these ancient secrets.

This secrecy is a common guiding principle for many Inquisitors. A trail that does not exist cannot be followed, and often the only evidence that an Inquisitor has operated in a sector is a disturbing void of information. This can take the form of missing records, datavaults, or even entire populations. Burning a book and burning a world both can accomplish the same thing, the latter perhaps differing only in scale. If flames are required to turn the truth to ash, the Inquisitor must strike the match—no matter how all-consuming the blaze.

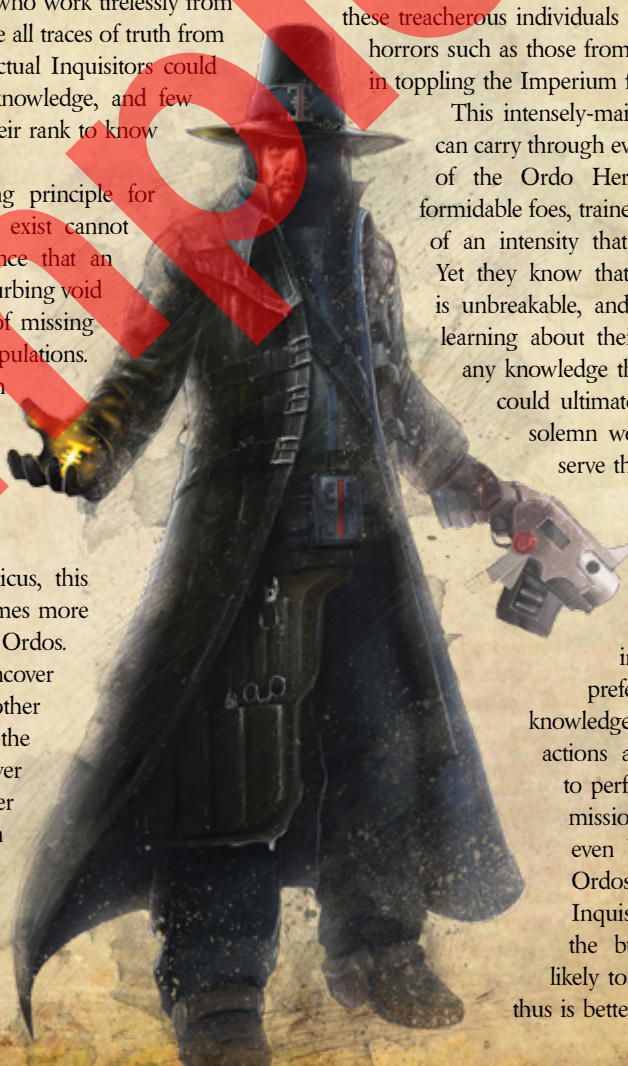
For Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus, this need to remain in the shadows is sometimes more important than it is for those from other Ordos. One of the main ways in which they uncover internal threats is to keep watch on the other organisations of the Imperium, such as the Ecclesiarchy, with the greatest levels of power and influence. There is great risk whenever power is consolidated in the hands of an unquestioned few. Fear of reprisal keeps many would-be traitors from attempting heresy, but secretive watching can reveal even greater plots, and ensure even more heretics reach the pyre.

## GIDEON LORR

*Inquisitor Lorr has an uncompromising and simple directive towards any who display psychic abilities: death. Across the Segmentum Pacificus, he has overseen the execution of countless psykers, including Sanctioned Astropaths and even Navigators in his quest to eradicate any who even remotely utilise the Warp. Lorr has witnessed first-hand the terrors of daemoniac incursion, and would rather see all psykers dead than allow a single Daemon access to real space. Often described as the ultimate Puritan, many suspect his actions are sure to bring retribution from other Inquisitors, as his purge could possibly cripple interstellar travel and communications within the Imperium.*

Perhaps nothing in Imperial history illustrates this internal threat as well as the period known as the Age of Apostasy. During this time, the ideological and political struggle between the Ecclesiarchy and the Administratum weakened both to the point where Goge Vandire, a delusional and power-mad High Lord of the Imperium, was able to seize near-absolute control of both organisations. Through a series of covert dealings, political manoeuvrings, and assassinations, he became both High Lord and Ecclesiarch, combining the authority of both in one man—and it was nearly the ruin of the Imperium. Those who dare ponder such things believe that the Ordo Hereticus came into being as a protection against actions and malign influences such as those of Vandire. Mankind must always guard against the rise of these treacherous individuals and their hidden agendas, lest horrors such as those from the Age of Apostasy succeed in toppling the Imperium from within.

This intensely-maintained ignorance of the past can carry through even for Inquisitors and servants of the Ordo Hereticus itself. Inquisitors are formidable foes, trained to resist probing and torture of an intensity that would shatter lesser minds. Yet they know that no will save the Emperor's is unbreakable, and thus these Inquisitors avoid learning about their own history, knowing that any knowledge they may be forced to give up could ultimately be used to undo all their solemn work. The lesser Acolytes who serve these Inquisitors are, of course, much weaker than their masters, and it is incredibly rare for Inquisitors to trust an Acolyte with any meaningful or dangerous information. These Inquisitors prefer instead to keep their servants' knowledge limited to the details of the actions and duties they are expected to perform in service to their Lords' missions. Many Acolytes might not even be aware of the existence of Ordos, let alone the one that their Inquisitor follows. A mind free of the burden of knowledge is less likely to wander and to question, and thus is better able to serve.



# TRAITORS TO MANKIND

*"Fools! They dare call me heretic, when I have seen true power!"*

—Ulrika du Garnet, First OverSeer of the Sisters of Primal Vision

The Inquisition is not a formal, hierarchical organisation. The powers given to Inquisitors by the mandate of the Emperor make it impossible for any regimented structure or system of ranks and classes to function effectively. Inquisitors are thus free to execute their duties as they see fit, leading to the forging of individuals of unequalled autonomy. What they believe must be done is indeed just that, and none can gainsay them. There is no deciding mechanism to say that one approach is correct and another is invalid. Only the results matter against the terrible foes of Mankind.

The foes of the Ordo Hereticus are exclusively members of humanity itself—the same faction which Inquisitors seek to save. Unlike aliens or Daemons that plot the downfall of man more openly, heretics within the ranks of humanity operate in secret, to rot the fruit from within before any can detect the stench. These enemies often seek positions of power and influence within the mind and body of the Imperium, such as the many offices of the Adeptus Terra itself. Particularly bold heretics may even attempt to infiltrate and poison the very soul of the Imperium—the Ecclesiarchy. Foes such as these are pawns of Chaos, whether they know it or not, and traitors to their species.

Worse yet, these traitors can be found everywhere. All men and women have within them the seed of corruption, of false action, of betrayal. Even those who do not mean to stray or sin may do so through laziness, greed, or even simply by living. Mutants and psykers may profess love of the Emperor, but their very existence can lead others to question the path upon which man is set. Even those who burn their own flesh working in the forges on Mars, or hurl themselves into the breach to stem the tide of a xenos invasion, may one day give in to the temptation to ease their own pain. No one is above reproach. No one is innocent. No one can be trusted.

For Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus, trust is scorned as a weakness that causes men to ignore the growing seeds of heresy in those around them. The only thing that can be trusted is that all men can be corrupted, and any man can fall. Traitors are everywhere and can be anyone. No promise or oath guarantees loyalty; the Emperor and all of Mankind paid dearly to learn these truths. These Inquisitors are entrusted with ensuring that the terrible price in blood and souls never needs to be paid again.

It is their mission to root out those who know themselves to be evil, but also those who are so weak that they allow themselves to be tricked into betraying their own kind. These ingrates and fools are the worst of the worst, betrayers who must be dragged screaming from the dank cellars of their own villainy and ignorance, vigorously interrogated, and ultimately purged. Others simply seek greater power for themselves and care not if the cost is the future of Mankind. Regardless of the egotistical delusion or vile pettiness that drives them, all of these men are traitors to their kind who must be excised from the body of the Imperium. The Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus know that wretches such as these are far more dangerous in the long run than any daemonic summoning or marauding Ork fleet.



Some traitors have slipped so slowly from the Emperor's light that they are unaware they tread in darkness. What might begin as a commander's desire to reward each of his platoon's victories with a celebratory feast may alter over time into an orgy of consumption that serves to venerate Slaanesh. The light of a Witch Hunter's torch is sure to show the commander and his platoon the error of their ways. Some heretics are so consumed with their own mad plots that they do not even consider the consequences of their actions, or perhaps are so deluded that they believe they could not possibly be found out. Misguided, mad, or mistaken, it makes no difference to the Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus—all must be eradicated for their treachery.

It is a mission that can never end. A heretic might be a mere human, inconsequential when compared to alien armies or daemonic incursions against reality itself, but where there is one heretic, more soon congregate, like flies to a corpse. Many fear that the presence of mutants of body or mind instils similar corruption within others, and fears often become truths when belief is strong enough. Numbers become power, and power unchecked can overturn hives, topple the rightful rule, and taint entire worlds with the stench of Chaos. Only through the fierce, unrelenting pursuit of even the slightest of heretics can these threats be quelled before entire worlds must be burnt to the crust to prevent their spread.

Those in high offices or other positions of great power within the Imperium can try to deflect inquest through intimidation and threats of imprisonment or worse. Clandestine heretics might attempt to keep their treacherous machinations safely hidden away until it was too late to stop them. Horrid mutants and unholy witches can gather together to plot against the societies that rightly hate them. These and other traitors to Mankind are exposed by the blazing light of discovery that the Witch Hunters shine into their darkened souls, and no power is great enough, nor office high enough, to extinguish this flame.

# BURNING MILLIONS TO SAVE BILLIONS

*“Rejoice! Your deaths ensure your planet survives.”*

—Heard during the Night of Tall Flames

No matter the particulars of their chosen methods, it is impossible to argue against the importance and impact of the work of Inquisitors. They have doubtless saved untold numbers of human lives on numerous occasions. The actions of the Witch Hunters, however, are perhaps the most horrific of any Ordo. Most men could not contemplate, let alone execute, what they would deem as necessary. The greatest Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus are often those who have tortured and killed more of their fellow men than others would see over the course of entire lifetimes, and yet in each case the toll was worth exacting. The misery and deaths of so many are nothing when weighed against the numbers that are saved.

This is not to say that Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus necessarily enjoy putting their fellow man to the torch, even if they do derive great satisfaction in executing their role. They know that their actions are necessary. The suffering of one individual today may quicken the compliance of many others, and thus may save billions of humans tomorrow. One man’s hellish agony is inconsequential compared to the survival of Mankind, and therefore those who follow the Ordo Hereticus must be prepared to create an inferno that others within the Imperium would find unthinkable. Such is the will necessary to be an Inquisitor.

The hearts of the Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus must be also hardened, so that they might survive the threat of betrayal and heresy of other men. The face they see in the mirror is that of their foe—a constant reminder that while the heretic’s visage may be familiar, his eyes are those of a cold, soulless stranger who has tossed aside his birthright as a human. This is one of the many reasons why these Inquisitors are often stern and grim in prosecuting their duties, their determination absolute and allowing for no weakness. There is little reason to hate the alien or the Daemon, for such are anathema to Mankind by their very nature. The heretic, the mutant, and the witch have turned from the Emperor. For such traitors as these, the Ordo Hereticus can only show hatred and fire, the latter perhaps its favoured weapon against its enemies.

Given that the enemies within are, or once were, human, fire serves as an excellent weapon of terror. Immolation is a horrific form of death, unlike the clean lasgun round or power blade cut. To burn the heretic is to impose the Emperor’s Wrath upon the foul mutant or screaming witch in a highly visible manner. This can stay fixed in the minds of all who witness it, and perhaps keep many others from straying. Humans instinctively fear fire, where the alien or Daemon might care little about these purifying flames. These cleansing flames also leave nothing behind—no corrupted flesh, no Warp-tainted minds, no unholy texts, nothing but ash. Where the Ordo Xenos might wish to study a slain alien to discover new ways of exterminating its species, there is no need to study the mutant and witch who have found their proper fate.

As many of the Ordo Hereticus work closely with the Ecclesiarchy, which also favours flame-based weapons, it is also common for them to share weaponry and combat tactics—though in many cases, such tactics consist of burning every soul they encounter, lest any heretics escape. Often the mere hint of an imminent fiery pogrom is enough to frighten heretics into rash action or unprepared movement, enough to ensure their careful plans are laid to waste and they meet the fires they dreaded. Inquisitors, even with Acolytes to aid them, cannot be everywhere, but the fear of their righteous flames can be anywhere that threats to Mankind exist.

The threats from the heretic, mutant, and witch must be uncovered and eradicated with the greatest of zeal and efficiency, for they can quickly grow amidst unprotected societies. Witch Hunters cannot allow bureaucracy, politics, ego, or stubbornness to impede their course of action. Though their unrelenting demand for obedience may push others to harbour resentment, they must not be distracted or delayed by the protestations of those bent to their will. Their mandate from the Emperor gives them the right to put the torch to any who resist, leaving behind only the scorched remains of the reticent to remind others of their authority. This must be so, for without the boundless powers of the Ordo Hereticus, traitors could divert attention from themselves by hiding behind their offices and titles. Fear must be one of the greatest weapons in their arsenal, and this fear must strike at the heart of even those whose authority seems unquestionable. Only Witch Hunters have the requisite power to generate this fear and wield it against the enemies within.

# A PYRE FOR EVERY HERETIC

*"You are my master no longer. I call thee Heretic!"*

—Inquisitor Geoffrey Pan, former Acolyte

Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus have as many different viewpoints on the best ways to shield Mankind from seemingly inevitable doom as there are Inquisitors themselves. Though they pursue a common goal, they are far from united in their thoughts on how it might best be achieved. They are divided by methodology and philosophy, with no one approach carrying any more weight or truth than any other. This diversity of views serves the Ordo Hereticus well, for if no two traitors betray Mankind in exactly the same way, then no one tactic is likely to stop them all.

Still, the differences can lead to conflict between Inquisitors—especially those with opposing Radical and Puritan stances. For a sternly Puritan Witch Hunter, even the slightest compromise is unacceptable. To traffic at all with mutants or psykers is to invite damnation upon himself and to betray the very purpose for which he was given power and authority. He would rather a thousand humans die than employ the sorcery of a non-sanctioned witch to save a single one of them. Even the Navigators who guide his ship safely through the Warp are not to be trusted. A fervently Radical Inquisitor of the Ordo Hereticus, however, sees no path that he must leave unexplored. He would gladly recruit a hundred mutants and unleash their corrupted forms upon a den of heretics, if such an action would save a thousand human lives.

There are many different factions of Inquisitors, some of which have more appeal to Radical Witch Hunters, some to Puritans, and some to those who occupy a middle ground. The Recongregators, for instance, believe that the Imperium itself is no longer effective in its current state, and is a detriment to the survival of humanity. Radical Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus who believe strongly in this concept do more than just keep a close watch on the Adeptus Terra—they actively work to turn it to ash so that it might be reborn like a phoenix, pure and with renewed purpose. Other, less stringent Witch Hunters among the Recongregators might act differently. These could prefer to keep the Imperium itself structured roughly the same, but wish to clean out the decayed flesh of old leadership, and reinvigorate it with individuals of their choosing. Recongregator Witch Hunters all agree, though, that the root of the problem lies with the heretics and traitors who have allowed the Imperium itself to become more important than the humans it serves. It is this belief that unifies them all, on some level at least, as members of the faction.

The Ordo Hereticus, with all the differing approaches that its individual Inquisitors employ, is not without its mechanisms for cooperation. In times of great need, an Inquisitor can call for the assembly of a conclave of his fellows in order to defeat a threat to Mankind. In some instances, this may happen when the enemy is so vast that a single Witch Hunter and his Acolytes would be spread too thinly to counter the actions of the foe. In other cases, the danger may begin with human traitors, but expand to incorporate enemies of a nature more effectively countered by the Ordo Malleus or Ordo Xenos. The Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus are proud, strong, and fiercely independent, but few would allow ego to doom their charges, and thus they make use of a conclave in order to better protect Mankind.

Conclaves can also be called to settle differences between Inquisitors, from philosophical disputes to violent affairs of honour to blood debts. There are even times when one Inquisitor has cause to suspect that another has fallen into heresy. Since it is the purview of the Ordo Hereticus to uncover plots and corruption within the hearts of other men, it is most often Witch Hunters who level these accusations of heresy against their fellows. Regardless of the Ordo of the accuser, he can call for the traitor to be excommunicated—a judgement known as Excommunicate Traitoris. This is not an action that is taken lightly, and can usually only be adjudicated by a conclave. The thread that is common to all conclaves is the need for quick, decisive action that allows individual Witch Hunters to return to their grim business of saving Mankind, each in his own way.



# TO BE AN ACOLYTE

"Burn the mutants! Kill them all!"

—Hassex the Manyhanded, Mutant Acolyte

As far-reaching and unquestioned as an Inquisitor's powers are and effective as his methods may be, there are limits to what he can accomplish alone. Fortunately, an accomplished Inquisitor is also proficient at securing the aid of exceptional individuals who can help save Mankind from extinction, whether these recruits know this is their task or not. Acolytes are often selected based on some unique talent or personality trait that the Inquisitor feels he can use, such as skills in deception or the mastery of a unique weapon.

A Witch Hunter might look for certain talents in his Acolytes more strongly than Inquisitors from other Ordos, given the nature of his enemies: other humans, and creatures that were once human. Acolytes must at all times be ready to deal with certain aspects of human interaction, such as seeing through deceptive guises and interrogating captives, and including being able to kill without mercy when needed.

Such an Inquisitor might commonly seek those with no qualms whatsoever in dealing with his enemies, from misshapen mutants to reality-altering witches to traitorous cultists, in a terminal manner. Watching over their fellow humans, rooting out the evils that they do, and when necessary eradicating them from the Emperor's Sight is often a horrific task. Cold-hearted killers, perhaps ones even eager to share death as directed, are prime assets. His Acolytes must have full conviction of his cause to slay even the seemingly innocent, trusting in their master's admonishments of unseen heresy or hidden mutation. Worse, they might be complicit or even instrumental in burning hives or worlds, and must have the strength of will to not buckle under the terrible knowledge of their actions.

He can also desire other, non-lethal skills in his Acolytes for interaction with human society, the home of his enemies. The ability to slip undetected into secured manses or downhive hovels is prized. Acolytes with connections both high and low are valuable in ferreting out cults and applying leverage, if needed, to learn their secrets. Others who are skilled at deception and applying personal charm can ingratiate themselves with the fallen. Only the foolish would claim to be able to understand the alien, or fathom the mind of a Daemon, but to think like the heretic while retaining complete devotion to the Inquisitor's path is invaluable.

As his Acolytes are humans, they can also be used to infiltrate the many cults festering wherever they go in human societies. These roles are often fraught with peril, but even if the Acolytes used in this way sometimes perish as a result of their actions, they have served their purpose.



Sometimes Acolytes can even provide useful services without any awareness of their true purpose. A Witch Hunter, knowing how overtly his agents typically act, might dispatch them to a known area of heresy simply to draw attention so that he might move about undetected, or use another warband to surreptitiously penetrate a furtive sect.

Some traits, though, might damn an Acolyte even before he joins a warband, or abruptly cut short his service. The taint of mutation could lead to early, permanent retirement, no matter how many years of faithful actions he had performed before his flesh became twisted. Similarly, an eruption of witch-powers could bring immediate flames, lest his unholy gifts draw the attention of the Ruinous Powers. Even a Radical Inquisitor of the Ordo Hereticus might have no tolerance for Acolytes mutated in this way, and could consider a swift death a merciful ending.

An Inquisitor's location in the spectrum of Radical or Puritan methodology is thus often critical in his choice of Acolytes. A strongly Puritan-leaning Inquisitor would find it nearly impossible to resist killing a mutant on sight, let alone ever consider keeping one as an Acolyte. Any association with such debased humans is unacceptable tolerance for corruption, and the strongest of standards must always be kept when such creatures are the enemy. A Radical Witch Hunter, by comparison, may tolerate or even actively recruit mutants and psykers, as he believes they can be of use to him, even acting as bait to draw out more of their foul kind.

In the end, Acolytes, though valuable, always know they are disposable assets. An Inquisitor might not hesitate to knowingly send one of them into a dank corridor to be eviscerated by ambushing traitors, should it help him gather information needed to ensure the cult is fully destroyed. He might even sacrifice entire warbands against a terrifying Alpha-level psyker, if it buys him enough time to call upon greater forces to burn this witch. Acolytes who can survive these and similar encounters and recognise what it means to truly defend Mankind, though, might one day prove worthy of becoming Inquisitors themselves.

## FYODOR KARAMAZOV

*Karamazov has travelled across the Imperium atop his Throne of Judgement, a walking mechanical cathedral containing servitors to record sessions as well as carry out the invariable sentence of guilt upon all he judges. While others might act in secret, he instead often leads entire armies to descend upon worlds he finds wavering from the grand destiny the Emperor set forth. For this Inquisitor, there is no defence or mercy in his court; even the innocent are guilty of wasting his valuable time and are set aflame with the many witches and traitors he always discovers.*

## A SECTOR OF LIES

"I fear we have only begun to uncover the sins of deceit and betrayal buried in this wretched sector. With each sin the so-called Lords of Askellon enact, the Warp draws ever closer and its terrible fate grows ever more likely"

—Intercepted vox transmission, attributed to Lord Dyrulli

The Askellon Sector is a forlorn region steeped in treachery, a taint that countless men and women of the Ordo Hereticus have sought to cleanse throughout the long millennia. Unlike some regions, in particular the nearby troubled sector of Calixis, Askellon has never been host to an institutionalised Inquisitorial presence established by the concerted efforts of determined Inquisitors or their Acolytes. Thus, the sector's myriad sins have never been properly scrutinised, documented, or called to account. Indeed, the last occasion such an organised effort was attempted led to the catastrophic Vaxi Atrocity, a shame that many still bear generations later on behalf of the fallen.

Each Inquisitor to have pursued the calling of the Ordo Hereticus in the Askellon Sector has sought to uncover the true nature of the region, and learn something of its history and the events that have driven its masters ever closer to the abyss. Some claim that Lord Dyrulli, a highly-placed Arch-Savant, came closer than any to uncovering a rotten kernel, but he was discovered, and what knowledge he had amassed was burned on the pyres or scattered to the irradiated winds. Since Dyrulli, others have tried to retrieve but a portion of his works, but little more than singed fragments of once-weighty tomes have been recovered.

## THE DYRULLIN APOCRYPHA

"Clearly the scribblings of a once-great mind, lost to insanity. Unworthy of attention."

—Lannseen Faal XI, Curator Primax, Grand Repository of Juno

How many Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus have laid down their lives to uncover the sins of Askellon is a figure unlikely to be fully tallied, for since the Vaxi Atrocity few operate there openly or in wide coalition. Some, however, have managed to uncover secrets as tantalising as they are horrifying, including a handful of pages from Dyrulli's lost writings—parts of his extensive *Marginalia on the Apocrypha Askellios*. Indeed, it appears that he somehow gained access to volumes of the *Apocrypha* no one believed still existed. While many of these fragments are held to be little more than the fevered ramblings of a mind long surrendered to madness, others hold that they must surely contain at least a portion of the truth. To this day, his collected writings on the subject of the manifold sins of Askellon are known as the *Dyrullin Apocrypha*, forming as they do an addendum to, or lost volume of, the *Apocrypha Askellios*.

Few have access to this mythical tome, for scant copies were printed, and the majority of these are sealed away in heavily guarded vaults. It is said that only a handful remain within Askellon itself, for most were burned along with Dyrulli and his circle. Outside of the sector, one copy was reputed to have been locked beneath the Tricorn Palace, the centre of power of the Calixian Inquisition. Persistent rumours claim that at least one copy was delivered to Terra in the hands of Dyrulli's most beloved surviving disciple, though for what purpose has never been determined.



## INQUISITOR TYRUS

One of the most fervent followers of the Monodominant faction, Tyrus' power-armoured form has left untold thousands burning in his wake. The Inquisitor particularly abhors witches of any type. This includes alien psykers, and he readily attacks xenos forces if he suspects they use Warp-powers, or any he suspects of harbouring such deviant beings. Tyrus is fond of ancient trials and ordeals to establish guilt, believing that it is the Emperor that brings final judgement on his captives. He also actively watches over his fellow Inquisitors, and can be as terrifying to those he finds to be heretic as he is to any witch he captures.

## THE LOST EPISTLES OF SAINT VALERIUS

*"Mine eyes hath looked upon the face of the holy one, and seen naught but decay and duplicity. He who the masses of that region adore so fervently I saw for a traitor, and a foe of all that was once good and wholesome. I name that sainted one thrice. Traitor. Traitor. Traitor. Though they will burn me for it, I shall never recant."*

—Extract from the *Dyrullin Apocrypha* on the 17<sup>th</sup> Epistle of Saint Valerius

Saint Valerius is a much-venerated figure within the Askellon Sector, his gaunt, stern likeness carved into a thousand stone edifices and rendered in faded stained glass the length and breadth of the region. The saint is regarded as the saviour of Askellon, an intercessory figure said to watch over its people and its masters and to provide protection in time of need. Numerous legends relate a wide array of tales regarding the early life and miracles of Saint Valerius, and while most vary widely in events, dates, and scope, all describe the saint rallying the people of Askellon against some overwhelming outside force. In some versions, the invaders are ravaging xenos from the voids beyond the sector's trailing margins, at other times hideous creatures coalesced from the raw stuff of the Pandaemonium itself. One variation holds that the saint was originally a great general who served in the wars of the opening years of the Age of Imperium, returning to Askellon to find it overrun by those who had renounced their oaths to humanity and sought to enslave the sector's worlds.

Dyrulli's *Marginalia on the Apocrypha Askellios* contains an extensive addendum to these legends, any single sentence of which would have guaranteed his execution had they been exposed. In his commentary, Dyrulli related a dark truth he had purchased at high price indeed from a broker of painful facts in the back sinks of Port Aquila. Saint Valerius, so the pedlar claimed, was a traitor, and his rallying call was heeded not by those who served the Emperor, but by their foes. The Imperium had come to punish the Lords of Askellon for siding against Terra in some calamitous matter he would not name, and Valerius had called upon the people to resist their punishment. Dyrulli himself makes no certain claims of the truth of the broker's words, but claimed the man was to be trusted beyond all others in such matters. If true, the single most venerated figure in the entire sector is a traitor, whose act of defiance was not against invaders or enslavers, but against the righteous servants of the Emperor of Man.

## THE UNSEEN LORDS OF ASKELLON

*"The Masters of the stars are to us as xenos overlords, stellar vampyres suckling on the blood of a once-pure people, and in doing so tainting that blood with their own crimes. They came here, I am certain, fleeing from some crime too distant and too terrible to relate. I know not the nature of that crime, but I am certain the void itself recoils at their presence, and where the void draws back, the beyond rushes in, and each of us are doomed to share their hell."*

—Johas Zadok, *Beyond Perdition*, Chapter XX, Verse VII

The name of Johas Zadok is one familiar to many of those who study the forbidden texts that seem to breed in Askellon. To the Inquisitors of the Ordo Hereticus, Zadok is a highly contentious figure, not because his words were lies, but because they were almost certainly true, albeit representing a truth of the least palatable kind. Over a career estimated to have lasted half a century and more, Johas Zadok is known to have penned at least three dozen missives recounting a staggering range of theories regarding the masters of the sector and their dark histories. He was a collector of conspiracies and a pedlar of paranoia, from whose auto-quill flowed a nigh continuous stream of the most far-ranging and detailed ideas. Most who have come into contact with Zadok's rambling tomes have dismissed them out of hand as blatant nonsense, while those with a vested interest in the sector have blanched that he might know and reveal so much. Those serving the Ordo Hereticus who have read extracts from the tomes have seen in them tantalising glimpses of a truth they always suspected lay just beyond their reach, and ever sought to learn more.

Dyrulli's opinion on the writings of Johas Zadok seems to be that he represented one of the most dangerous, yet potentially most useful men in the sector. Dyrulli committed extensive resources to finding him, yet whether he ever did remains a matter of great mystery. It appears that Zadok's writings bred some manner of cult, the broad form of which appears to be hagiographic in nature. Some claimed that Zadok himself had nothing to do with the cult that sprung up around him, and that it represented no more than a cadre of self-selected dilettantes addicted to the thrill of forbidden knowledge. Some operating in the sector have recorded encounters with fringe elements of this cult, invariably during investigations into the highest echelons of the sector's ruling elite. These individuals have at times proved willing to assist an Acolyte in his investigations, though only ever on the strictest of terms, the principal being complete anonymity. Invariably, the investigation has been at such a crucial juncture—or else reached such a dead end—that the agent has agreed to the stranger's terms and accepted the aid. Such help often consists of little more than an uttered name or location, just enough to open up the investigation once more. The Cult of Zadok appears to harbour a need to expose some apocalyptic truth regarding the masters of the Askellon Sector, yet is evidently cautious about doing so in too drastic a fashion, preferring to chip away at the mighty edifice one small stone at a time. What might happen to them, their foes, and the Acolytes of an Ordo Hereticus Inquisitor nearby when that structure reaches its inevitable failure point remains to be seen.

## THE LOST FAMILIA

*“And upon that fair and fulsome land the Scion set his seal, and his kin marched out under the light of a wholesome sun. Only later, when twelve and seven generations had passed, did the strangers come, and the sky was covered with blood and the seas turned solid and the kin of the Scions lost.”*

—Fragment of the *Apocrypha Askellios* recovered from the funeral pyre of Lord Dyrulli

The Administratum codifies Knight worlds as planets autonomous from the Imperium and host to one or more Knight Houses. These ancient institutions consist of noble bloodlines pre-dating the Imperium by many thousands of years, most having settled their home world in the far distant and all but forgotten Dark Age of Technology. The scions of the Knight worlds are oath-sworn to protect their subjects from the numerous threats that assail them, and they do so mounted in towering suits of Knight Armours, smaller than, but distantly akin to, the mighty god-engines of the Adeptus Titanicus.

The Askellon Sector is known to host but only few dozen Knight Houses, but there are some that say it was once home to many more. Perhaps one of the original colony arks or an offshoot that populated the Founding Worlds of Askellon set down on a planet so hazardous to life that the colonists called upon the Standard Template Construct systems with which they were equipped to aid them, and this led to the creation of the first Knights of that world. If so, this world must have been beyond the current borders of the sector, or else fallen so thoroughly that no trace of it remains today.

Dyrulli, however, is known to have an altogether different theory on this matter. In his *Marginalia on the Apocrypha Askellios*, Dyrulli ponders whether one of the region's Knight worlds might have already been established when the colony arks arrived, representing a still-earlier phase of humanity's expansion into the stars. Perhaps, Dyrulli theorises in his notes, the already-established Knights warred with the colonists, or conversely, perhaps they shunned the settlers, recognising something in them they wished to have no truck with. If this is true, so Dyrulli continues, that original and impossibly ancient Knight world might exist yet, hidden in the darkness along the fringes of the sector.

Dyrulli is thought to have sponsored several missions into the trailing void to locate some evidence of the presence of this lost Knight world. His intentions in doing so were mixed. At least in part, he hoped that if they lived still, the Knights might have been witness to, and maintained records of the founding of the Askellon Sector, and be able to shed light on certain of its darkest secrets. In addition, a Knight world would make a potent ally indeed should Dyrulli's masters in the Ordo Hereticus ever find themselves in dire enough need to call upon them. There are no records if he was successful, or if he was able to call for aid when he fell. Some tales relate that his pleas were heard, but rejected as being unworthy of Knightly attention. Only an extensive and perilous investigation is likely to uncover even a shred of the truth.

## THE SENDITE PARATEXT

*“And at length the end shall come, and blood shed long ago shall be shed once more. The sin of the Lords shall be washed away in the blood of the seventy-seven worlds, and the others shall feast for all time.”*

—Transcription on parchment fragment, found amongst the belongings of a slain Dyrullian disciple

Those of the Ecclesiarchy and the Inquisition who make it their mission to study the staggeringly diverse sects and denominations of the Imperial Creed know that of the many variations in doctrine, a predominant belief present in numerous permutations across the entire Imperium is that of the end times. Since the earliest days of the Age of Imperium, those that preached the divinity of the Emperor also preached that all would soon end. Not a century has passed, not a millennium has been marked, without a hundred thousand worlds erupting in apocalyptic fury, as frothing demagogues preach the imminent end unless the people submit themselves to the Emperor's judgement.

This overarching doctrine of the end times is as dominant in the Askellon Sector as it is in a hundred other regions, but it has been noted that there, it has a peculiar characteristic. In many other sectors, Imperial sermons proclaim that the end can be averted if the faithful rise in common cause against the numerous foes of Mankind, for all other ways they are worthless. In Askellon, such teachings take on a different tone, for they are invariably preached—or more often written—in secret, and it is not the common multitudes that are blamed for the coming end, but often the highest-born nobles ruling the sector. For obvious reasons, this creed is rarely openly practised, unless the preacher is anticipating repression and intends to spark a violent uprising. The Lords of Askellon, like those of any other region, do not take kindly to such shows of sedition and discontent.

Though voiced behind closed doors or written in secret tomes, these sermons—collectively known as the Sendite—all accuse the ruling nobility of the Askellon Sector of being the cause of the Warp storms that plague it so, and which, all agree, will one day bring about its end and the death of every soul on all its worlds. The particular crime of which the nobles are accused varies widely, from decadence and faithlessness to an unspeakable blasphemy committed many generations ago.

Lord Dyrulli encountered the whole range of these doctrines during his missions within the sector, but it is known that he came to focus most intently upon those that claimed the nobles were harbouring some secret stain, a taint that remained upon them into the current era. Furthermore, he traced the rise and fall of such sermons and correlated them with increases in Warp storm activity. After years of study, he reached the conclusion that the sermons were correct, and that whatever the true nature of the accusations, the nobles were somehow complicit in the rise and enduring fury of the Pandaemonium across Askellon.

Dyrulli's studies of this matter reached a conclusion that he went to some effort to warn his masters about. Though the secret sermons might be correct, with each came the increased likelihood of a general uprising erupting across the sector. This, he theorised, might cleanse the region of the tainted nobility, but such a concentration in time and space of such bloodshed and anguish would surely echo through the Warp and cause the storms to swallow the sector for all time.