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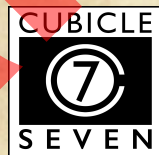
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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5	The Daemonology Disciplines.....	54
Chapter I: Malleus		To Scourge the Daemon.....	60
Protecting Souls.....	7	Daemonhosts.....	62
In the Service of the Hammer.....	8	Daemonic Possession and Exorcism.....	68
Puritans and Radicals.....	10	Dark Pacts.....	72
To be an Acolyte.....	12	Chapter III: Terrors from the Immaterium	
Sector of the Damned.....	13	A Sector Cursed from Beyond.....	77
Enemies of the Askellian Daemonhunters.....	17	Kul.....	78
The Vaxian Sundering.....	21	Nexum.....	83
Chapter II: The War for Souls		Ossuar.....	89
Banishing Daemons.....	25	<i>The Emperor's Song</i>	95
New Home World: Daemon World.....	26	Tuchulcha.....	99
New Home World: Penal Colony.....	28	The Daemonicon Askellios.....	104
New Home World: Quarantine World.....	30	Warriors of Blood: The Pantheon of Khorne.....	105
New Background: Exorcised.....	32	Weavers of Fate: The Pantheon of Tzeentch.....	111
New Role: Crusader.....	34	Bringers of Decay: The Pantheon of Nurgle.....	117
New Elite Advance: Astropath.....	36	Masters of Excess: The Pantheon of Slaanesh.....	121
New Reinforcement Characters.....	38	Daemon Princes.....	127
Daemonifuge.....	40	Using Daemonic NPCs.....	132
Daemonic Remnants.....	48	The Warp and Realspace.....	136
Daemon Weapons.....	50	Malleus Investigations.....	139
		Designing Malleus Adventures.....	139
		Malleus Clues and Leads.....	142



You are sure this is the room? Where the Daemon's trail began?" Isen droned from the vox-grill covering his lower jaw. The Tech-Priest displayed a worn auspex showing nothing but the glowing emerald icons representing the three Acolytes, even as his primary mechadendrite continued to shine a wide-beam stabligh around the dark interior.

Nasi ignored him and the auspex. Her eyes followed the beam in search of targets, twin bolt pistols still smoking from the final clash that got them into Lord Kotromahn's inner demesne.

Their initial search of the lavish state room had uncovered only a pair of eviscerated servants amidst torn furniture; after what the trio had witnessed earlier, no one batted an eye at the corpses. The room itself seemed just as dead, unlit like the rest of this level of Hive Desoleum and quiet save for the soft liquid sounds of a silverfall curtain along one wall.

Sophronia turned, though, and glared at the red-robed Tech-Priest. "As much as can be," she snarled, golden fire quickly forming a corona around her grey-haired head. "The Warp doesn't allow for the precious 'certainty' you worship." She caught herself, and gave a long sigh. "My apologies, Isen," she said, pulling the flames back within her. "It's been a trying day."

That was an understatement, Nasi thought, but kept silent. They were all in bad shape after fighting through a hive gone mad.

"Your intent was perhaps to insult, but your statement is still accurate." Isen's mechanical voice continued, calm as ever. "As is your reflection on recent events. We are indeed less than optimal."

"Quite." Sophronia even managed a slight smile. "But yes, the Warp spoor is oldest in this room. Whatever emerged and went downhive began its rampage from within this room."

Nasi decided they needed more light, and tossed a glowglobe onto a tall cabinet. Now the disarray was more apparent, a tiny echo of the devastation that had ripped through Desoleum in just hours. The slaughter-filled eruptions alone might have been ignored if it were not for the other reports their Inquisitor intercepted. Shrines dissolving into amethyst ooze, oath-cogs deforming into obscene shapes, icons growing teeth and biting their bearers—and these were just from within upper levels within the Apex itself.

Luckily (for whom, Nasi was not certain), the warband had been still in the hive following up a lead on the arch-heretek Somnius Halbrel. The local Sanctionaries were at a loss, but Isen had quickly connected the curving vertical path of the reports. Inquisitor Karlzan commandeered a squad of Arbitrators to follow the trail downwards, where the instances were freshest. The three Acolytes had gone upwards, following the trail of deaths and worse.

As they moved uphive, each new level revealed new horrors, nightmares of flayed skin, barbed flesh, and melded bones. The worst, though, were the crazed hivers still alive, and the excessive force needed to bring them down. The further up they went, though, the drier the blood and the colder the bodies. Now they were at the origin of it all, if Sophronia's Warp-senses were true. Thousands dead, ten times that ruined. All from a single Daemon.

"Interesting. So this is her parlour," Isen noted. They all looked as he indicated the huge portrait dominating one wall. Lady Cassia Kotromahn, infamous first daughter of one of Hive Desoluem's rulers, as perfect, elegant, and deadly as the xenos blade held in one velvet-gloved hand. Even they had heard the hive tales of her many duels. She never lost, she never repeated the intricate scars she sliced into her opponents, and she always ensured each new scar she left was more memorable than the last.

Nasi turned and found herself staring at the silverfall curtain. She hadn't seen one of these rare archaeotech devices since she'd abandoned her own Apex life here for downhive excitement and then service to Karlzan. It was entrancing as it flowed like soft fabric, and even more so as she thought of the elaborate power fields needed to liquify and guide the metal. *Wait a second. Power?*

"Power's dead on this level," she said worriedly. "How is this silverfall still working?" Her reflection in the liquid mirror stared back at her, then suddenly broken into a smile and shifted into a face Nasi had only seen once before, moments ago. On a portrait.

Nothing human could have emerged intact from the terrible stress of the power fields driving the silverfall, and nothing human did. Its purple-hued flesh flexed under thin strips of cloth that dripped like magenta rivers, and twisting horns tangled with amethyst masses of hair that swayed as if underwater. One hand was a huge serrated claw, while the other melded with the xenos blade, the flesh gnawing along the alien material and the weeping gems along the hilt. The liquid silverfall metal stretched around it as it sinuously came forth, as if repelled by the unnatural flesh.

"Playthings," it said, each syllable rippling through the air like a lash. "I saw you from within. How nice of you to come to me."

Any other day, the Acolytes might have collapsed or run, but not today, not after what they had faced earlier. Sophronia brought her arms up, weaving auric flames into a protective shield. Nasi and Isen fired as one, her heavy pistols and his massive hand cannon disgorging chunks of rubbery flesh with each hit.

The creature only laughed, a horrid melody that tore at their ears. It moved in a blur, and an arc of the blade sent Isen's arm sparking to the floor, still gripping his gun. A powerful backhand from its clawed arm hurled Nasi and Sophronia into a far wall.

Nasi raised herself up, dazedly seeing the scene reflected in the silverfall curtain, but then noticed there was something missing. "In the mirror..." she uttered. "The thing casts no reflection!"

"She is elsewhere," the creature said, gliding forward and smiling again with too many daggered teeth. "My own reflection emerged from my favourite silverfall for my ultimate duel. We were perfection together, and such was our dance that my Prince gifted me with a new form to enter the mirrored lands. I, in turn, gifted my new sister with a hive to dance with." It made ready to leap.

"Not dancing any more." The words came from the doorway. Inquisitor Evangelyne Karlzan's normally impeccable attire was a ruin, revealing cracked and ichor-stained power armour, but her thrice-blessed power sword still gleamed its purity. Her voice was hoarse, and Nasi knew it must have come from the draining rites of daemonic banishment. That their Inquisitor was here, though, and another Daemon was not, made Nasi believe for the first time today they might actually live through this.

"My thanks, Acolytes, for leaving the trail of bodies," Karlzan continued. "It always makes it easier to find you."

The creature spat something that burned into the floor, its perfect face growing contorted. "I know of you, lackey-pet," it hissed. "They whisper of you within the mirror. Yours will be a very slow, very exquisite end."

"Brave words, little Daemon," Nasi said strongly, surprising herself—and Karlzan, she imagined—with the conviction. She saw Isen remove the hand cannon from his severed arm to ready it, and Sophronia glow with the Emperor's Light. Her Inquisitor strode to her side, power sword crackling with energy, and Nasi drew her chainsword. "Last duel for you. Nobody messes with my hive."

INTRODUCTION

"They are beyond comprehension, beyond mortal flesh, beyond even time and mortality. They are beyond many things, but never my hate!"

—Inquisitor Lias du Ortise, Ordo Malleus

There is perhaps no more horrid foe to humanity than the Daemon, for it is the bane of all that lives. The Daemon is not merely a heretic to be hunted and killed, or an alien to be captured and eradicated. Each is the creation of one of the four terrible Gods of Chaos, brought into existence to carry out the commands of its lord, though perhaps the worst are those who were once mortals and were elevated to daemonhood as the ultimate reward for their service. No matter the form it takes or the methods it uses, it is a creature of lies and pain, whose very existence is anathema to reality itself.

Mortal minds cannot process the aberrance of a Daemon's nature, for it is utterly unnatural. It reaches back to primordial nightmares that predate humanity's sentience, a visceral response to something that should not share the same reality as living beings. Reason falls to madness when faced with such a creature, and even the staunchest of warriors collapses to trembling knees with sanity forever shattered.

These dangers also come from the very place each Daemon is birthed: the Realm of Chaos, where raw emotions swirl in maelstroms of power and assume mockeries of sentience. It is a restless domain, with terrible Warp Storms that consume entire systems and plunge worlds into morasses of madness. Souls are taken in such places, or through infernal bargains and base conquest. For this is what makes the threat of the Daemon so terrible to humanity: that it is not sanity or body, but to the soul.

It is the duty of Inquisitors of the Ordo Malleus and their Acolytes to stand against these threats from beyond. Unlike the battles against human heretics or alien species, theirs is a war that must be waged in secrecy. Mankind uses the Warp both for travel and communication, but widespread knowledge of its true nature and the ravenous beings that dwell within would plunge systems into anarchy and surely destroy the Imperium. It is also a war that can never truly end, for these foes exist outside of time and rational existence. Even so, those who fight against such threats know their efforts are utterly essential not just for Mankind's survival, but the survival of reality itself.

Enemies Beyond reveals more of the secrets of the Ruinous Powers and their actions within the Askellon Sector, and is divided into three chapters:

CHAPTER I: MALLEUS

The Warp and those who dwell within it have long been a part of Askellian history, dating to before Mankind arrived in this region of space, but growing ever more intertwined with the Pandaemonium's raging fury across the millennia. In this chapter, players can learn more of the nature of Daemons and their realms, and how these creatures seek to devour all of reality. It also illuminates the activities of Ordo Malleus Inquisitors and their Acolytes within the sector, including the hidden quest to uncover the secrets that tie the origins of Askellon to the raging Warp Storm known as the Pandaemonium.

CHAPTER II: THE WAR FOR SOULS

The struggle against the denizens of the Warp ever requires new fighters, and in this chapter players find new options for creating Acolytes as part of this war, from new character creation options to new talents and psychic powers. They can wield new weaponry and armour, or even discover some of the terrible Daemonic Remnants that are the basis of many dark myths throughout the Askellon Sector. Players can even learn the secrets of creating Daemonhosts, conducting exorcisms, brokering Dark Pacts, and other means of fighting the Enemies Beyond—often with tools that would brand their characters as foul a threat as any Daemon.

CHAPTER III: TERRORS FROM THE IMMATERIUM

The Ruinous Powers extend their foul touch upon worlds across Askellian space, and this concluding chapter examines several locations and the daemonic terrors they face, along with new player options to create Acolytes hailing from each. The four daemonic pantheons are also covered, including their roles across the sector's history and the Daemons who wage their war for souls. Game Masters also gain support for running Ordo Malleus themed adventures, representing the taint of the Warp during encounters, developing clues linked to the Warp and its horrid creatures, and even creating new Daemon Princes to act as supreme threats for characters fighting the Enemies Beyond.





CHAPTER I: MALLEUS

If the Ordo Xenos guards the body of humanity from the invading threat of the alien, and the Ordo Hereticus guards humanity's mind from its own false, weak, and seditious thoughts, then the Ordo Malleus has the hard and heavy task of defending the Imperium's soul. A soul is a terrifyingly fragile thing to protect, and an elusive thing to fight over. Strengthen the body and educate the mind, yes, but fortifying the soul against damnation is no simple matter of exercising it like a muscle, schooling it in a new skill, or inuring it to a mundane toxin. No human has the strength to engage with the Warp and keep his soul intact, and the Inquisition has learned through bitter experience that allowing oneself to believe otherwise is one of the most dangerous forms of hubris. Charlatans, traitors, and deluded optimists claim otherwise, but their inevitable failures bring worse consequences than simple disappointment, exposing not only themselves but uncounted loyal Imperial subjects to catastrophe.

The only way to keep humanity from the slide into damnation is to barricade any Warp contamination away, seal and quarantine it, and to burn away all trace of contact should the quarantine ever slip. Through battle, banishment, and destruction the Inquisitors of the Ordo Malleus and their Acolytes work to keep the Daemon at bay, and where it appears, their unflinching duty is to purify the point of contact and scour away any remaining spiritual pollution.

Such a defence is out of the question for Inquisitors themselves, who must seek out and confront the incursion of the Warp in order to spare the species as a whole. Inquisitors deny the Warp a hold on themselves with will, faith, and dogma, walling off the human weaknesses through which corruption finds its way into them. Even so, to take up the seal of the Hammer is an implicit acceptance of the possibility, some say the certainty, of madness and spiritual destruction.

This is the damning paradox of the Inquisition. The Ordo Malleus is pledged to defend humanity's soul even as they must cut themselves off from humanity itself, taking on a dread responsibility that stains their own hands red with the blood of their fellow humans for the rest of their lives.

Every Inquisitor must find his own answer. Some take refuge in unthinking enactment of their duty, sealing away conscience with all their other weaknesses; some try to reason their way through it and weaken themselves on the poisoned fruit of doubt and guilt. Others deny the paradox's necessity, believing they can find a way to carry out their work without paying the cost in blood and spirit. Such naive thoughts are often the first steps on the twisting downward path into Radicalism and destruction.

PROTECTING SOULS

"I can see you, you know. No, not that clammy plug of flesh you're imprisoned in. I see you. The light that the meat can't hide. I look at you and I see the moment it ignited and made you. I see the moment when it gutters out. And I will taste it, little thing, and I will adore it, and oh, are you weeping? What a dear little will-o-the-wisp you are!"

—The Daemonhost Morthelio,
during the shriving of the Black Ship *Sharema Requii*

The psyker strain has grown stronger with every generation in the Imperium's ten-thousand-year existence. The human soul glows in the Warp like a bonfire-spark, but the psyker burns bright as a star—or perhaps the beacon-light marking an open door. For the mind of a psyker pushes open a pinhole link into the Warp, offering the predators of the Realms of Chaos not only a vulnerable essence to feed on but a crack into reality through which they can manifest.

The Warp is an endless, blasting sea of power, entropy, will, contradiction, and emotion. Its extremes are marked by the four great god-storms known as the Ruinous Powers. These Chaos Gods—Khorne, Tzeentch, Nurgle, and Slaanesh—are locked in endless conflict throughout their timeless existences. They war on each other not only with their own essential natures and powers but through their servant creations, little bundles of coherent will and purpose tied off from their masters and sent out to do their bidding. At their crudest, these simple creations act on instincts barely more sophisticated than those of a plant turning toward the sun, or one amoeba enclosing another. At their most sophisticated, they are warlords and princes of their hellish dimension, imbued with intellect, knowledge, and raw power to match any hero or demigod of human mythology. These are the Daemons of Chaos.

Daemons do not confine their constant war to the Sea of Souls. Crucially, they are able to enter material reality, granting their parent god a way to extend its will into the mortal world and there attack, entangle, degrade, and defile its inhabitants.

This is the relationship of the Daemon to the mortal, that of predator, conqueror, and an implacable spiritual threat, capable of not just murdering a mortal body but corrupting its mind and consuming its soul. They are more alien than the most exotic of xenos, birthed in a reality that is infinitely malleable not by crude force but by will, imagination, and emotion. Daemons experience space, time, and causality in ways incomprehensible to material creatures. To humans, the Warp is a sanity-shredding entropic delirium; to Daemons, our universe is a parched, suffocating coffin, desirous only because of the souls to be devoured within.

The fluid existence of Daemons is both their greatest strength and their most devastating weakness. They can wrap around human minds like a tenacious parasite, shaping themselves to the worst terrors or most hidden desires of their prey. But their exquisite sensitivity to human emotion and thought also makes them vulnerable. Abstract concepts like "faith" and "meaning" can injure or repel Daemons like a weapon, or bind them the way physical laws bind mortals. Many rituals and wards use the vulnerability of Daemons to pattern and belief as a tool to master them or a bulwark against them. Such techniques are full of physical and spiritual danger, but they are the foundation of humanity's defences when the denizens of Chaos invade.

BURROWING WORMS IN THE FLESH OF THE REAL

Daemons enter the mortal world where the order of reality is disrupted and the madness of the Sea of Souls wells up like a hidden aquifer through broken ground. Just as that water might soften the earth into marsh, the Warp seeps through threadbare reality to create strange, haunted places where the grip of physics slips and phantasms awaken in the corner of the eye. Such soft places are unsafe, certainly, but they pale beside the hell of an open Warp rift.

Where a rift forms, the Immaterium comes boiling through into reality like a geyser struck from the living rock. Rifts can form spontaneously, as fierce Warp storms just beyond the material veil tear their way through reality for a time. Such rifts are more common in the empty gloom between systems, where the distant gravity wells of stars and planets are less able to keep the fabric of space pressed into place. They can also be opened "naturally," if such a word can apply, by great calamities that unite millions or billions of living minds in rage, rapture, or anguish, churning the Immaterium into a frenzy that splits reality.

On the other hand, the breach can be as small as a single mind. Human psykers create a circuit between their material body and the bright flare of the soul anchored to it. While they use that power to distort reality around them to potent and miraculous effect, it is only a matter of time before it betrays them. Powerful psykers eventually pull enough Immaterial power through their minds that reality erodes like a breached seawall, condemning themselves to an agonising death as body and mind burst and the Daemons pour through. Weaker psykers face a more insidious but just as frightening danger, a soft contamination seeping through the fault line in their minds, gradually dissolving their own thoughts and personalities, emptying their bodies out into vessels ripe for daemonic possession.

INQUISITOR QUIXOS

The tale of Inquisitor Quixos is the quintessential tragedy of Inquisition, the fall of a great hero into the trap of hubris, corruption, treachery, and damnation. A great champion and protector of humanity in his prime, it was Quixos' cursed fate to be wounded by a Daemon that left a fragment of itself near his heart, slowly twisting him from within. Quixos did not resist the change but chose to embrace it, foolishly believing that he could channel and master the power leaking into him.

By the time Inquisitor Gregor Eisenhorn tracked him to his lair, Quixos was corrupted beyond physical recognition, surrounded by insane psykers and pet abominations he had bound into Daemonhosts and even into the sword he carried. He had lost all sight of his calling, spreading treachery within the Inquisition and committing atrocities such as the Spatian Gate disaster to further his aim of accumulating psykers and Warp-tainted artefacts. And yet even at the moment of his execution, Quixos insisted to Inquisitor Eisenhorn that he alone was on the right path, able to turn the Warp back on itself and save the Imperium.



IN THE SERVICE OF THE HAMMER

“My oath of service will be the death of me. If I do not give up my life in battle, then to become worthy I must become something that means the death of the man I am now. I have seen that change in my mistress, and it haunts me. And my fear of it is what shows me I am still unfit to carry on her work.”

–Jerren Oberzin, Acolyte to Inquisitor Diala Endenvarr

It is bad enough that unrestrained psykers and raw natural disaster can birth a daemonic invasion, but the Ordo Malleus must also combat the most heinous crime against humanity, and against all mortal life: the deliberate conjuration of Daemons. The heretics who indulge in such works take advantage of existing weaknesses, seeking out foul shrines in Warp-haunted places or subjecting psykers to bloody torments to force open their connection with the Immaterium. But there are also ways to create such weaknesses and faults, exploiting the Warp’s ability to be shaped by will and pattern. Carefully ritualised acts honed over millennia of arcane studies focus mundane obscenities and atrocities into a battering ram against reality. A simple murder might cause a brief flurry in the Warp; a homicidal betrayal by a trusted friend, carried out at the culmination of a long period of ritualised torment, including patterns and fetishes that hold meaning for the Ruinous Powers, reverberates through the Warp like a thunderclap.

Once it manifests in the material realm, a Daemon’s days as a physical entity are numbered. However it resembles flesh, blood, bone, or armour, it is simply a knot of force, a pattern pressed into reality and filled with energy bled from the Warp. The Daemon instantly starts to dissipate in the lifeless environment of real space like an ice carving melting in the blazing sun, soon to weaken and soak back into the Immaterium if it cannot sustain itself somehow. A creature of Chaos must seek out more power from the Warp to prolong its material existence, so as to more fully accomplish its creator-god’s desires. Thus an apparently unstoppable daemonic invasion may suddenly pause in its conquests to engage in unhallowed ceremonies or create specially-defiled places.

With lengthy manifestations so hard to maintain, the possession of a living host offers an alternative foothold. Once again, the Daemon exploits the nature of humans as a psychically-gifted species: except for the soulless Untouchables, even the bluntest of human minds generates a small spark in the Warp and so hosts a tiny flicker of soul. In possession, the Daemon overwhelms that spark and replaces it with its own foul light.

Possession offers the Daemon a solid form, one which does not require an exhausting labour of will to continue existing outside of the Warp. Even with such a home, however, its position is still precarious. Human vessels are a fine fit, but the Daemon is still an intruder, and given enough time its power distorts, degrades, and consumes its stolen body. A Daemon relying on possession to remain in reality must take care not to break its vessels and may have to possess human after human to survive. The creators of Daemonhosts, meanwhile, often deliberately restrain their foul creations from using their full power, trying to keep the mortal and daemonic halves of their servant in some kind of equilibrium.

In theory, the remit of the Ordo Malleus is simple. Wherever the Daemon seeks entry to reality, deny it; wherever the Daemon sets foot in reality, destroy it; wherever the Daemon leaves a trace of itself in reality, obliterate it. In practice, this war is maddening, thankless, and never-ending. Even its victories are often as cruel to the Imperial servants who win them as to the enemies they vanquish.

The saying that knowledge is power has never been truer than of the daemonic. The other Ordos confront humans with different beliefs or aliens with different biology, but the Ordo Malleus battles an enemy from a different reality defined by utterly foreign and unnatural laws. Part of that difference is that knowledge of the daemonic is not a neutral thing: it is active, animate, and works on the minds and souls of those who study it. But while there are stories of staunchly Puritanical Inquisitors who try to maintain a safe ignorance by filtering knowledge of the enemy through data engines and expendable servants, the fact remains that without understanding the unique powers and weaknesses of the Enemy Beyond, the war against the Daemon is doomed to fail.

The Ordo Malleus works to expand its knowledge in many ways. The most basic is to comb through the vast accumulated history of the Imperium, picking out evidence from humanity’s millennia of experience against this enemy. This is still not a simple task. The Imperium’s obsession with documentation has created insane quantities of records and archives, whole landmasses and even planets being given over to storing them. At the same time, it is shockingly callous about burning gigantic datavaults and executing regiments of scribes and clerks to suppress the most trivially inconvenient facts. Neglect, incompetence, and the simple inertia of the vast Adeptus Administratum bureaucracy also compounds the damage wrought by malice and active error, but still there are many gems of data to be found amidst crumbling mountains of parchment, dataslates, and scrolls.

Inquisitorial agents also study the sites of incursions. Even when a daemonic manifestation has gone, there is valuable information to gain from forensic analysis, psychometry, and possibly from the ravings of victims and witnesses before they are released into the Emperor’s Grace. Inquisitors and their Acolytes even travel outside the Imperium’s borders on such missions, drawing information from xenos relics, degenerate human cultures, or strange quasi-natural Warp-signs. Most perilously of all, some are drawn into acquiring and studying works of outright heresy, obscene treatises created not as a guide to combating the daemonic but as a tool for Warpcraft.

The Ordo Malleus puts this knowledge to use by creating weapons and techniques to employ in battle. The creation of such specialised equipment is challenging without some knowledge of its eventual use, so the Ordo Malleus struggles to commission equipment from Imperial sources—there is much lore it does not even entrust to the Adeptus Mechanicus, or only parcel out in fragments too small to reveal their true purpose. As a result, the Ordo Malleus has become expert at creating its own wargear, and secretive forges produce force weapons, Warp-deflecting Aegis Suits, and other devices to combat the daemonic threat. Meanwhile, its Inquisitors labour under the burden of their sanity-stretching knowledge to better understand how to thwart, repel, and banish their enemies.

Open battle with the Daemon is the final calling of the Ordo Malleus, and every last one of its Inquisitors must be prepared to sacrifice life, soul, and sanity in confrontation with the Warp if needed. Because they cannot trust or educate any outside the Ordo Malleus on the true threat they face, many Daemonhunters specialise in combating their foes face to face—either on their own, or leading a force of the Ordo Malleus' Chamber Militant, the Grey Knights.

A GREAT AND TERRIBLE BURDEN

Knowledge of the Daemon is infection, not information. It does not remain passive in a human mind, but gnaws at its carrier's thoughts and desires, and tries to spread itself to new hosts. To those who do not understand this, the Ordo Malleus' brutal suppression of such knowledge seems barbaric; to those who do, it is a necessary sin which sits heavy with those who act as the Emperor's Will.

After an incursion has been vanquished and all the Warp's mortal vessels and instruments have burned, the Ordo Malleus must carry out the sombre work of concealment, cauterising Imperial society at the contact point. Any who witnessed the manifestation of daemonic forces with enough clarity to understand what they were seeing are granted the Emperor's Mercy. Those further removed—they who saw the aftermath, or only a scrap of the manifestation that they cannot understand or explain—may well be rounded up and killed alongside the closer witnesses, but such sentences have been known to be commuted. Inquisitors may also eliminate those who try to protect or comfort any survivors.

Valued assets such as Space Marines or Officio Assassinorum agents (or possibly novice Acolytes not prepared for such truths) might be mind-wiped, although the fierce debates about how effective this is are unlikely to ever end, for while the mind may not remember, the soul can never forget. Harsh as this is, the archives of the Ordo Malleus record too many times when soft-heartedness undid an Inquisitor, a hive, or an entire world. Whether it is a single round through the skull of a pleading witness, or the Exterminatus of a world of billions, those of the Ordo Malleus must be prepared to drench their hands in blood.

PURITANS AND RADICALS

"I am familiar with the arguments. They utterly appal me. Radical thought is heretical."

—Attributed to Inquisitor Gregor Eisenhorn
(in his younger years)

It is the oldest and most fundamental temptation of the Inquisitor: to harness the psyker, enslave the Daemon, use the power flowing from the Warp as a weapon against the very entities who manifest from that power. The feud between Puritan dogma and Radical experimentation has defined the Inquisition since its inception. Treatises and debates on the matter could fill a whole planet of libraries—indeed, somewhere in the Imperium it undoubtedly has.

The work of the Ordo Malleus distils the temptation to Radicalism into an almost mythic clarity, making every aspect of it brighter and more vivid: the impossibly high stakes, the grandeur of the power and success it offers, the horror of the consequences of failure. All this comes during a lifelong war against an enemy whose merest touch is enough to taint human judgement and subtly distort the moral compass. Small wonder, then, that even Inquisitors who fiercely cling to the Puritan path can end up unbalanced at best, or obsessive and deranged extremists at worst.

Few Inquisitors fling themselves headlong into Radicalism at the outset of their careers—neither the Ordo Malleus or the Inquisition as a whole could have survived without learning how to police its new and aspiring members. While some cunning Radicals have succeeded in advancing their equally far-gone protégés to become Inquisitors themselves, by and large the Ordos have kept their new members within stable and orthodox bounds. A taste for Radical thought is more likely to develop as part of the work of the Inquisition itself.

Even setting aside the poor souls who fall victim to daemonic weaponry (such as the tragic and infamous wounding of Inquisitor Quixos), the Daemon is cunning and protean, able by its nature to flow into shape around its adversary's mind. Anger, pride, ambition, despair, vengeance—all offer cracks through which wonderful enticements are glimpsed. Some see the power to destroy the enemy with its own energies. Others feel the pride saying that those who succumbed and fell were weak, that this time it will be different, that they are only taking a small step and are still in control. The Daemon needs only the slow turn of morality, so that simple knowledge and curiosity seem innocent, free of consequence or moral dimension; even the lure of noble self-sacrifice is a deadly weapon, when fanned into false and selfish fantasies of heroic martyrdom.

THE TAXONOMY OF RADICALISM

Inquisitors' careers are as unique as their often-extreme personalities, but the trajectory into Radicalism within the Ordo Malleus tends to follow broadly recognisable stages, even if only in hindsight as a fallen Inquisitor's colleagues pick over the evidence of his life.

A very common first step is simply the acquisition of knowledge. The virtuous pursuit of the small, clean, and ignorant mind is a luxury that Inquisitors must set aside before they assume their position—all must know their enemy. It is a rare Inquisitor who can stick to the narrowest reading of that saying, learning only the broadest generalities, having Acolytes strip each new observation of context so that a growing body of knowledge cannot bewitch their minds with the promise of secrets. Most Inquisitors find it essential to their calling to know daemonic marks and names, and to study infamous case histories and treatises.

Often, it does not stop there, for it is a basic human urge to understand, to fit experiences into the framework of a known and knowable world. Once an Inquisitor has witnessed the transformative power of the daemonic at first hand, there comes the terrible instinct to try to make sense of it, reduce the unknowable blasphemy of the Warp to something that sits within a sane worldview. During this search for understanding, the first drops of forbidden knowledge feel very right. They seem to recast the enemy into something rational and controllable, even as that enemy's influence begins to distort the Inquisitor's judgement and rot his mind.

When knowledge is power, the short step from acquiring such lore to using it seems perfectly rational. If an Inquisitor would not balk at using a Daemon's true name to drive it back into the Immaterium (and very few would), then employing slightly more esoteric divining practices to discover that true name would seem a small and sensible compromise. When that research also uncovers a way to foresee the Daemon's next manifestation, then how many members of an organisation that prides itself on ruthless pragmatism for a higher cause would decide that the end justifies these means? With this, the steps begin to lead downward.

GREGOR EISENHORN


One of the most famous Inquisitors currently active and one of the most controversial, Eisenhorn began his career in the Ordo Xenos until his encounter with the alien Warp-grimoire known as the Necroteuch brought him onto the trail of the corrupted Inquisitor Quixos. Eisenhorn pursued and unmasked the deranged Inquisitor, finally killing the traitor in single combat.

That was many years ago, however. Once respected, even lionised, Gregor Eisenhorn has himself drifted into Radicalism within the Ordo Malleus, and exists only in the fringes of Imperial society. He is known to consort freely with the Daemonhost Cherubael, an entity he once considered a mortal enemy, and is believed to have added Warpcraft to his already formidable psychic gifts. His fellow Inquisitors now wonder if his agenda, whatever it may now be, is leading him to become every bit the danger that Quixos once was.

GIDEON RAVENOR

A former Acolyte of Gregor Eisenhorn, Ravenor's body was all but destroyed in the Spatian Gate atrocity that was the catalyst for Eisenhorn's pursuit of Quixos. While his physical self was reduced to a husk of flesh cocooned in a sophisticated life-support chair, Ravenor's brilliant mind and powerful psychic gifts were untouched. He went on to a long career as an active Inquisitor, battling both daemonic manifestations and cabals of human traitors, and also became known as a philosopher, scholar, and poet. Despite his many distinctions, Ravenor has never quite escaped the shadow of his former master. While it appears that the two have parted ways and have even clashed over their growing differences, Ravenor is widely believed to still be in contact, and possibly in league, with Eisenhorn, and the deepening suspicions concerning Eisenhorn are starting to spread to his protégé as well.

After abstract knowledge comes concrete practices and forbidden artefacts. While Inquisitors of the Ordo Malleus and their Acolytes diligently study how to obliterate the creations of the Warp, inanimate as well as "living," many artefacts come into their hands that for whatever reason they cannot simply destroy. Some are made so powerfully that it is beyond the Inquisition's abilities to unmake them, while some are too dangerous to destroy—there are cases on record of such efforts going horribly wrong, freeing bound Daemons or creating rifts into the Immaterium. Such items must be kept safely sealed away. But just as with knowledge, such things eat at the memory, becoming a source of fascination. From burning books and sealing away artefacts, an Inquisitor starts to rationalise sparing Warp-tainted trappings from destruction, then keeping them for study, then secretly hiding them from his colleagues, and then adding items to his Warp-touched collections by increasingly foul means.



Inquisitors easily rationalise the collection of a heretical library, or the addition of an unhallowed device or ritual to an arsenal. Only a few are driven by extremity or drawn by their own dark thoughts into the final descending arc of Radicalism, though—actual trafficking with the creatures of the Warp. There are many known ways to trap and bind a Daemon, and the Radicals who utilise them of course defend such tactics. They point to the power it grants them to battle these enemies, even claiming a sort of symbolic justice in this. They also claim that a bound Daemon is a tiny sliver of strength stolen from the Ruinous Powers, weakening them just that little for as long as it is unable to return to the Warp and reunite with its master. Those straddling the line between Radicalism and outright heresy even say that unbound Daemons are a mixed threat, convincing themselves that Inquisitors can treat with and learn from such entities as though they were simply another kind of mortal principality. Inquisitors who reach this point, no matter how they protest their superior insight and higher goals in defence of humanity, have surely lost the last traces of their kinship to the human race and are walking into the maw of damnation.

TO BE AN ACOLYTE

"I've seen Xenos and Hereticus emblems on those who come here to take away my best and bravest, and I square my shoulders and bid my students goodbye. But seeing the hammer sigil on that seal still chills my blood. Not because I'm sending them to die. They'll all die. But I know what they will face before they die, and that is a cruel thing to know as I watch them walk out those doors."

—Mamzel Lynga Jehanne, Schola Progenium Mistress

Because the chosen enemies of the Ordo Malleus strike directly at the soul and the sanity, an Acolyte's most vital weapon is not physical or mental but moral: an ironclad will, the determination to believe nothing but the received truths of his indoctrination, and to allow the seduction of the Warp no entry. Such a simple thing, such a profound thing, but those Inquisitors who act as Daemonhunters have argued and fought over this for thousands of years.

Must faith be received as a blessing, or can it be earned? The debate is unending over whether it is best to recruit those with the requisite spiritual strength and impart the skills an Acolyte needs, or to recruit gifted experts and hammer their souls into the requisite hardness. The question might seem excruciatingly trivial, but how an Inquisitor answers it can reveal a great deal about the worldview that guides his work.

Inquisitors who take on skilled Acolytes—in the belief that strong will can be trained into them—act on a very particular belief that human nature is improvable, and that faith and fortitude are attainable. That belief seems fatally dangerous to the pessimists who believe human nature to be inherently and irredeemably weak, but their view—so the argument goes—rejects the perfectibility and nobility of the human spirit, which is to blaspheme against humanity's divinely-ordained place in creation. More practically, those who hire the capable criticise the other side for recruiting iron-willed fanatics irrespective of aptitude, leading to zealous but possibly incompetent retinues who cannot meet the rigorous demands of the Ordo Malleus, fit only to die with their mission records as clean and unmarked as their souls.

To this other side, to those who hope to teach their recruits the necessary skills, the strength to withstand the daemonic is a transcendent thing, granted as a benediction of the Emperor to those humble enough to look outside their flawed and imperfect selves. Their counter-argument holds that every heretic ever to fall to the clutches of the Warp once believed the daemonic was easy to resist, and that optimism about human improvability flies in the face of whole libraries' worth of evidence going back to the founding of the Inquisition itself. Filling a warband with adept but weak-spirited Acolytes, they say, risks not only defeat but disasters such as daemonic possessions or worse.

An Inquisitor whose primary requirement is ironclad faith might seek recruits from the crucible-like training environments of organisations such as the Adeptus Ministorum, the Adeptus Arbitus, and the Astra Militarum Officio Prefectus. Such Acolytes have the aggressive martial skills their Inquisitor so needs, but without careful balancing of recruitment, a warband can become too blunt an instrument, expert at savagery but devoid of finesse.

Inquisitors who recruit for expertise and train for spiritual fortitude could have more conventionally-balanced warbands capable of combat, scouting, espionage, and political dealing, but such groups might also rely on a solid core of Ecclesiarchy confessors, drill abbots, and indoctrination experts. Their presence is testament to the importance of steeling new Acolytes' resolve, and sometimes like-minded Inquisitors might even jointly support and share a particularly capable training cadre.

A somewhat more straightforwardly controversial issue is the recruitment of psychic Acolytes, whether to use their abilities in battle or to detect daemonic incursions too subtle for mundane methods to perceive. This cuts to the heart of the Puritan-Radical divide, with every Inquisitor drawing his own line as to what he permits. The staunchest of Puritans would refuse all compromise, tolerating no psychically-active Acolyte in their employ. Outside this zealous fringe is a far broader spectrum of Inquisitors who accept the broad Imperial consensus: that properly conditioned and monitored psykers are a form of gifted human who may be used without repercussion or blame. Inquisitorial authority is very useful for plundering psykers of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica, especially those seconded to the Astra Militarum.

The more Radical end of the spectrum draws in recruits with less care for their safety or orthodoxy, and interested only in their immediate utility. Radical Inquisitors often seek unsanctioned psykers from an outlaw life, without forcing them through the testing and conditioning of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica—if they can earn the Inquisitor's trust. Such Ordo Malleus Inquisitors might monitor esoteric cults or trawl primitive worlds for shamans and seers, looking for a flicker of genuine sensitivity that they can draw out and weaponise. Some are even reckless enough to use their rank to draw directly from the raw human cargoes of the League of Black Ships. Others actively seek out recruits who have touched the Warp and now might bear its mark—ship crews who have survived Warp storms, soldiers who have confronted daemonic force in the field, survivors from Daemon worlds, or mere Imperial citizens who have witnessed an incursion and responded to it in a manner that earns them a stay of execution. Some dark rumours even persist of Radical Inquisitors permitting—or even engineering—Warp manifestations in order to refine a particular population down to a solid core of resisters ripe for recruitment.

But even this is not the furthest extremity of Radicalism, for there is the threshold where an Inquisitor's followers are no longer human at all. These Radicals capture or even conjure Daemons to bind into physical hosts, enslaving or bargaining them into service. Only the most arrogant, desperate, or insane of Inquisitors would take a creature of the Warp under his wing in this way..but there are enough within the Ordo Malleus who are enough of all three that such practices are not likely to end.



SECTOR OF THE DAMNED

"Calling forth the Daemon is a simple thing indeed. Casting it out is the true challenge."

—Farryn Kex, Exorcist to Lord Mylack

Of all the many evils that bedevil the Askellon Sector, from cults and conspiracies to xenos infiltrations, the greatest, truly existential threat to every mortal soul residing upon its many worlds has always been Chaos. The taint of the Ruinous Powers is all-pervasive, ranging from forbidden knowledge and sorcery to the horrors that can befall a world as one rogue psyker brings about a daemonic incursion. Even these perils pale in comparison to the dire hazard for which the region was once well known, and which even now causes its name to often be erased from many Navigational archives—the Pandaemonium, the veil of the Abyss drawing across the void and swallowing the very stars with its passing. It is the gateway to the Immaterium, beyond which the four Great Gods of Chaos slaver for the very souls of humanity.

It is against the anarchic, soul-consuming backdrop of the Pandaemonium that the doom of Askellon is acted out. The storm's fell, flickering hell-light is cast across the light years and upon the surfaces of hundreds of worlds, and none can escape the taint of the beyond it brings. Regardless of the countless means by which the other enemies of Mankind would plot the sector's downfall, the machinations of the Ruinous Powers remain the direst threat.

It is the duty of the Ordo Malleus Inquisitors and their Acolytes within Askellon to resist this threat, a task that has claimed innumerable souls, both courageous and craven, and can never end. While it remains the duty of every servant of the Emperor, the task of combating the daemonic in Askellon falls to those pledged to the service of the Ordo Malleus, a calling that few escape with their mortal souls intact.





A CHAMBER DIABOLIS

For as far back as the fragmentary annals of the Askellian histories relate, Inquisitors of the Ordo Malleus maintained a sizeable presence in the region. This is hardly surprising, for the Warp storms plaguing the sector have been a concern for as long as the Imperium has ruled the region, their proximity giving rise to countless Warp-cults and psyker conspiracies with the attendant risk of daemonic incursion. For many centuries, these and other Inquisitors operated openly across the worlds of the sector, though as with all representatives of Terra, there were constant sources of friction between them and the notoriously detached nobility of the ancient sector.

To better interact with the sector rulers and the other nobles of the ancient Askellian lines, millennia ago a group of Ordo Malleus Inquisitors began referring to themselves as the Askellios Vigilant to disguise any hint of their Inquisitorial leanings (or even their true offices in many cases) when dealing with the lords who ruled Askellon. This title often became known in spires and palaces to represent what the lords thought were roving confessors or itinerant exorcists, and many of the Vigilant were respected and welcomed in the highest settings across the sector. Some of the Lords of Askellon even held them in superstitious awe, as if the lords and ladies knew that even they could not escape damnation and only the true servants of the Emperor could save their wretched souls. This only fed the growing suspicions that many of these Inquisitors held concerning the lords and the origins of the sector, and drove them to increase the levels of interaction so as to prize more of the sector's secret histories from the grip of its elite.

Thus, Ordo Malleus Inquisitors operating under the guise of the Askellios Vigilant worked to penetrate the insular circles of the Lords of Askellon, and in a far more effective manner than other Inquisitors. Those of the Ordo Hereticus often operated too bluntly to ingratiate themselves with the ancient ruling families, and those of the Ordo Xenos had more pressing matters, launching new Wars of Purgation to eradicate newly discovered species or stamp out any resurgence of existing alien empires.

As the centuries ground on, this coalesced into something approaching a formal arrangement. Agents of the Askellios Vigilant evolved to fill consular roles in the courts of numerous sector, sub-sector, and planetary rulers, as well as those of successful mercantile interests. Such roles were never fulfilled by actual Inquisitors but by their Acolytes, though several of the latter went on to attain high rank later in their careers.

In the main, these advisers were to counsel the Lords of Askellon in matters pertaining to the ebb and flow of the Pandaemonium, as well as aiding in sector administration and the rendering of tithes and the psyker cull according to the laws of the Imperium. Through a variety of means, from readings of the Emperor's Tarot to direct soundings of the turbulent Sea of Souls, the counsellors were able to offer advice on which worlds were at risk of becoming lost to the storms and which trade routes might be afflicted by its tides. At times, large sections of a world's population were evacuated on their word, while at others worlds were settled on their declaring it safe to do so.

In this role, these Acolytes became nigh indispensable to the ruling houses, and were able to carefully observe more and more of the noble lineages in ways not even the most artful of coercive interrogations would reveal. Hints concerning the origins of many of these powerful ancestries, and of the truths that had been deliberately replaced by comforting legends, were unravelled from countless generations of layered deceptions. The more that was uncovered, especially links between the founding houses and the Pandaemonium, the more they increased their efforts.

At length, these consular agents achieved a high level of integration with the intricate power structures at play within the Askellon Sector. Such integration was previously unheard of, for no other representatives from distant Terra had been able to truly penetrate the web of intrigue and mystery cloaking the ruling houses. Individual counsellors even began to marry into the lower tiers of the Askellian nobility, an achievement that had taken countless centuries.

Only two decades after the first such marriage, the entire region was turned on its head by the Vaxi Atrocity. Though it would only become apparent after years of scrutiny and investigation, the two events—the marrying of Inquisitorial operatives into the Askellian nobility and the outbreak of the Atrocity—were determined to be intimately and tragically inter-related. Despite its many centuries of indirect effort, the work of the Askellios Vigilant and the Ordo Malleus was to be undone.

TORQUEMADA COTEAZ

This infamous Inquisitor trusts no authority or judgement but his own, using his rank, ruthless will, and fearsome intelligence to build a sector-spanning army of military forces, spy rings, and material resources all personally loyal only to himself. Coteaz is a notoriously stern Puritan who burned his master for the most superficial researches into Warp manipulation, but what no one knows is that even his adamantine resolve has started to weaken. His shadowy private empire has been the work of a lifetime, and some worry that even Coteaz might be tempted with unnatural means to extend his life and service, no matter the cost to his soul.