

DARK HERESY™

THE BLACK SEPULCHRE™



ROLEPLAYING IN THE GRIM
DARKNESS OF THE 4^IST MILLENNIUM

CREDITS

LEAD DEVELOPER

Mack Martin

WRITTEN BY

Ben Counter

ADDITIONAL WRITING BY

Ian Hardin, Kevin Rubitsky, Sam Stewart, and Ross Watson

EDITING

Patrick Rollens

PROOFREADING

Graham Davey and David Johnson

DARK HERESY DESIGNED BY

Owen Barnes, Kate Flack, and Mike Mason

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Kevin Childress Mark Raynor

& Rory McCormack

COVER ART

Kekai Kotaki

INTERIOR ART

A.L. Ashbaugh, John Blanche, Yoann Boissonnete, Alex Boyd, Matt Bradbury, Chris Burdett, Anna Christenson, Ioan Dumi, Dave Gallagher, Zach Graves, Marcin Jukabowski, Marco Morte, Marc Lee, and Mark Smith

ART DIRECTION

Zoë Robinson

ART ADMINISTRATION

Kyle Hough

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Eric Knight

FFG LEAD GAME DESIGNER

Corey Konieczka

FFG LEAD GAME DEVELOPER

Michael Hurley

PUBLISHER

Christian T. Petersen

GAMES WORKSHOP

LICENSING MANAGER

Owen Rees

HEAD OF LICENSING

Paul Lyons

HEAD OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Alan Merrett

SPECIAL THANKS

"Bolters Solve Everything" Kevin Rubitsky with Ian Hardin, Charles May, Scott Ollenberger, Don Richardson, "Sons of a Rogue Trader" Robin Everett-McGuirl with Matt Robenhymmer, Chris Brandmeier, Nate Taylor and Adam Hargrave, "Furies for Everyone!" David R. Schumpert III Esq. with Adam Schumpert, Pierre Wagenseil, Marthinus J. Linde, David Hudock, Paul Shivery, Nathan Walters and Chris Hebert, Charles Kellner with Eve Bloom, Jacob Martasek, Jeff Rubinoff, Megan Cook and Pavel Ort, Dave Cerezo with Andrew Schneider, Dave Evensen, Gregory Sabino and Peter Burke, Michael Underwood with Aaron Bond, Andrew Fields, Jason West, John Beavers and Nathaniel Nicholson, "Dicebag Posse" Chris Stevens with Derek Keltgen, Jesser Aubart, Mike Weigt and John Schwartzbauer, Drew Peterson, Matt Root, Dennis Walter and Chrissy Monfette, Ron Devalk with Ross Watson, Sam Stewart, David Johnson, Timothy Kilgriff and Chris Pembelton



Cubicle 7 Entertainment
Ltd, Unit 6, Block 3, City
North Business Campus,
Gormanston,
Co. Meath. K32 DP60,
Ireland.

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CONTENTS

Chapter I: Death From Above

Area 1: The False Chapel.....	10
Area 2: The Hall of Ancestors.....	12
Area 3: The Menagerie.....	13
Area 4: The Courtyard.....	16
Area 5: The Mansion.....	16
Area 6: The Hall of Histories.....	16
Investigation.....	17
Troubleshooting.....	18
A Call from The Dark.....	18

Chapter II: The Haematite Cathedral

A Tale of Woe.....	20
Getting There.....	21
Unfortunate Events.....	21
Inciting Events.....	22
Home Again.....	22
Medispex Servo-skull.....	22
The Gilded Cathedral.....	24
Abbot Jurutas.....	24
The Black Sepulchre.....	24
The Librarium of Reflection.....	24
Razored Wing.....	25
Area 1: The Grounds.....	27
The Unburied Dead.....	27
Area 2: The Nave.....	28
The Cog-Key.....	28
Area 3: The Skulleria.....	29
Area 4: The Hidden Laboratory.....	29
Gustavus Hekate.....	31
Reanimated Victims.....	31
Area 5: Trophy Room.....	32
Area 6: Warrant Room.....	32
Area 7: The Scholaria.....	33
Area 8: The Chambers.....	33
Area 9: Barricaded Chamber.....	34
Area 10: The Ballroom.....	35
Area 11: Nikea's Tower.....	36
Area 12: The Librarium.....	38
Area 13: The Solarium.....	39
Area 14: Sanatorium.....	40
Area 15: Medicae Theatre.....	41
Area 16: Planetarium.....	42
Koronath's Opus.....	42
The Device.....	42
Koronath Hekate.....	43
The Belly of the Beast.....	44
Troubleshooting.....	44
Experience Points.....	44

Chapter III: The Macharian Peace

The Reveal.....	46
Area 1: Spinal Shaft.....	48
Area 2: Gear Housing.....	48
Area 3: Genatorium.....	49
Genatorium Daemons.....	49
Area 9: Princeps Tactorum.....	50
Area 4: Armoury.....	50
Area 5: Moderati Quarters.....	51
Area 8: Medicae Suite.....	51
Area 6: Bridge.....	52
Against All Odds.....	54
Troubleshooting.....	54
Experience Points.....	54

Chapter IV: Behold the Dei-Phage

Librarium Nox.....	57
Quake Cannon.....	58
Furies.....	58
On Wings of Madness.....	59
The Dei-Phage.....	59
Aftermath.....	60
What's on the Vid-File?.....	60

Chapter V: Appendix

Inquisitor's Orders #1.....	62
Maps of House Thrungg.....	63
Thrungg's Journal.....	64
Inquisitor's Orders #2.....	65
Librarium of Reflection Excerpts.....	66
Map of the Haematite Cathedral.....	68
Hadria Hekate's Diary.....	69
Koronath Hekate's Notes.....	70
DeVayne's Evidence.....	71



INTRODUCTION

"What is there, but dynasty? The stars are out of our reach. The great cities of this sector, the spires and cathedrals, they are not for us. All we have, is each other. All we have is dynasty."

—Nikaea Hekate

Black Sepulchre is the first part of The Apostasy Gambit, a Dark Heresy campaign that takes a cell of Acolytes from investigating the tragic history of a warped Cathedral to crusading against a conspiracy at the heart of one of the Imperium's most vaunted organisations. The Black Sepulchre can be played on its own, or it can form a part of the grand Apostasy Gambit campaign.

The Black Sepulchre ends with the Acolytes finding evidence of a long held secret. The nature of this secret is purposefully left ambiguous. While the adventure provides the hook into the next book in the series in the form of evidence against Arch-Cardinal Ignato, it is presented to the players as a handout available on page 71. To alter this secret so that the campaign follows a different storyline a GM must merely replace this final hand out and description.

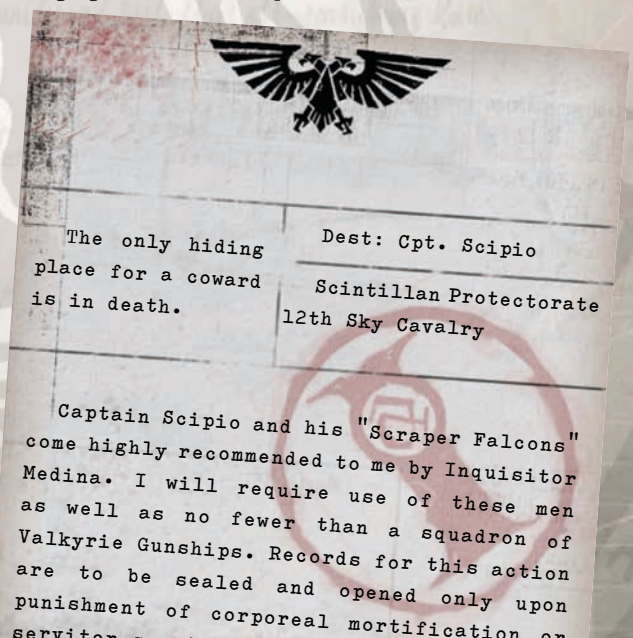


GAME MASTER'S BRIEFING

The Black Sepulchre is primarily an investigative adventure in which the Acolytes, after obtaining the hand of a Daemon Prince, investigate an ancient fortress named the Haematite Cathedral. There they find the unquiet spirits of the cathedral's former inhabitants, they who belong to the Hekate Dynasty, and delve into their tragic fates to discover the cathedral's greatest secret.

The adventure in the Haematite Cathedral is non-linear—the Acolytes can explore the cathedral and encounter its denizens in any order, and part of the challenge facing them is understanding the information they accrue on the Dynasty's grim past. The Hekate Dynasty has three stories to reveal to them, each the sad tale of a corrupted soul, but the Acolytes might uncover parts of the stories intermingled with one another. The less hostile warp apparitions can help them understand the cathedral's past, and part of the challenge for the Game Master is portraying these unfortunate creatures who are part of the Cathedral. Another challenge is ensuring that the cathedral is infused with all the atmosphere that psychic apparitions, tragedies and the corruption of Chaos can give it. The true nature of the Haematite Cathedral and what has occurred there is the real mystery in this adventure, and the task of the Acolytes is to uncover this nature piece by piece. At the same time, the location itself is both adversary and ally to the Acolytes, with the mutants and psychic echoes being simply a symptom of something larger and far fouler.

Once the adventurers delve into the cathedral's lower levels and discover its greatest secret – that it is actually the upper torso of an Imperial Titan, half-buried and condemned to lay dormant by the presence of a daemon – the adventure features more action and life-or-death moments. The daemon prince is freed, the Titan walks, and all manner of mayhem erupts before the Acolytes can decipher the terrible truth held captive for centuries. This truth is crucial to the Apostasy Gambit campaign, and introduces a new and terrible threat intent on bringing ruin and catastrophe to the entire Calixis Sector.



ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

I: DEATH FROM ABOVE

The Acolytes are thrown right into the action of an Inquisitorial assault. They are part of an attack on the Scintillan estate of Bulagor Thrungg, an idle noble who has fallen into corruption and amassed a fearsome collection of forbidden artefacts and writings. Along with special forces seconded from the Army of the Scintillan Protectorate, the Acolytes storm the estate, deal with Thrungg and his lackeys, and discover upon Thrungg the left hand of a Daemon Prince. This clue leads them to the secluded Haematite Cathedral.

II: THE HAEMATITE CATHEDRAL

The Acolytes arrive at the Haematite Cathedral. Their explorations reveal both the history of the Hekate Dynasty who lived there, and the existence of a malign force known as the Dei-Phage that influenced three Rogue Traders to become degenerate villains. After exorcising the three malevolent psychic echoes, the Acolytes come into possession of a key that allows entrance into the lower reaches of the cathedral.

III: THE MACHARIAN PEACE

The Acolytes discover the truth about the Haematite Cathedral – that it is, in fact, the upper torso of an Imperial Titan known as the Pax Macharia. The Dei-Phage summons lesser daemons to stop the Acolytes as they explore the workings of the Titan, including its plasma reactor and the chamber where its machine-spirit is stored in ancient cogitators. They communicate with the machine-spirit and learn of the Black Sepulchre, a device designed to decode evidence of corruption at the heart of the Calixian Ecclesiarchy. The Titan has been kept dormant by the Dei-Phage, which was summoned to keep it silent about a terrible secret it knows.

IV: BEHOLD A DECAYING ANGEL

At the heart of the capital of Barsapine is a holy shrine, built to prevent the Black Sepulchre from completing its task. The encryption of the evidence is a geometric cypher whose key is the stars themselves in motion. To this end the Pax Macharia breaks free of the mountainside and travels to the outskirts of the nearest city, Kephistrion Altis, so it can free the Black Sepulchre to look upon stars and decypher the ancient code. The Dei-Phage manifests and battles the Acolytes across the cathedral's rooftops, and only with its defeat can the Pax Macharia reach the city.

Once the Black Sepulchre has performed its operations, it can reveal the holo-recording that serves as damning proof of a massive conspiracy. This recording tells of the founding of a conspiracy, the Maledictor's Hand, and its head... Arch-Cardinal Ignato himself. Alas, the decrepit Black Sepulchre self-destructs, forever destroying the only proof the Acolytes have.

BACKSTORY

Several hundred years ago, the Maledictor's Hand was founded as a conspiracy of Ecclesiarchy clergymen who believed that the Calixis Sector was beyond redemption and should be cleansed through a religious catastrophe. Their aim was, and still is, to bring about such religious strife that the resulting war and upheaval will effectively destroy the sector and kill billions of its sinful inhabitants. The ceremony at which the Hand was founded was witnessed by a spy, Inquisitor Griegor DeVayne, a member of the Ordo Hereticus, charged by the Imperium with rooting out evidence against conspirators within the Imperial Church.

DeVayne fled with a holo-recording of the ceremony. He reached the *Glorious Fortune*, the vessel of the Rogue Trader Barabus Zanatov. The Inquisitor intended to marshal forces to bring against the conspiracy, but, pursued by the agents of the Maledictor's Hand, he was murdered before the ship entered the warp. Zanatov, a loyal friend to DeVayne, hid the evidence, smuggling it to Barsapine.

Knowing he could not escape the power of the Ecclesiarchy, Barabus Zanatov took the name Hekate and began work to decipher the evidence acquired by his friend. He died before his work was complete. His fortune was nearly exhausted by the task of establishing a noble dynasty and building a device capable of deciphering the proof Inquisitor DeVayne gave his life to acquire. The Black Sepulchre, however, was complete and, given its position on Barsapine, could use the stars themselves as a cypher to unlock the mysteries and expose the conspiracy.

The final deathblow to the Hekate dynasty was his discovery by the Maledictor's Hand, who stopped his Black Sepulchre from performing its duty and brought to bear a Daemon Prince known as the Dei-Phage to destroy him. Not without friends on Barsapine, the Rogue Trader Zanatov mustered his forces so that his device might have the last desperate moments it required. The Daemon Prince and his army were stopped by the Pax Macharia, an Emperor Titan. However, in one last desperate ploy, the Pax Macharia was forced to wade into the sea, forever chaining the Daemon within itself. The Titan's fate was forgotten, and over time its lower half became buried in rock and sediment, leaving its ornate upper half part of the shoreline. With the Dei-Phage maimed and the Titan badly damaged, the story would have ended if not for the ignorance of subsequent generations.

Centuries later, the waning Hekate dynasty, believing the exposed torso of the Emperor Titan to be a once-lavish abandoned cathedral, began to restore the building in a desperate attempt to rebuild their waning status. Over the years, the last heirs to the Hekate fortune moved into the building, which they knew as the Haematite Cathedral. The Dei-Phage was still present, woven into the fabric of the place, and its malign presence corrupted them to its dark purpose. The Hekates eventually destroyed themselves and the Haematite Cathedral became abandoned once more.

No part of the story was ever recorded in Imperial record and the events and cathedral itself would be forever lost if it weren't for the Dei-Phage's severed hand that eventually washed ashore on Barsapine and was sold into the underground artefact market. It found its way to Scintilla and into the hands of the apostate Bulagor Thrungg.

THEMES

The Apostasy Gambit has distinct themes that run through all three parts of the trilogy, and *The Black Sepulchre* is no exception. These themes crop up again and again, sometimes foreshadowing danger, sometimes suggesting solutions or truths to the Acolytes, and sometimes just keeping them on their toes. Game Masters should feel free to include further instances of these themes whenever they want to inject a little more foreboding and tension into proceedings.

Secrets. The climax of *The Black Sepulchre* has the Acolytes discovering a secret of shattering importance, and exposing the secrets of the Hekate dynasty is crucial to their success. Other parts of the trilogy include revealing secrets about the Ecclesiarchy, the history of the sector, and even about Saint Drusus himself. Secrets are everywhere, as are the efforts by others to prevent their discovery.

Wings and feathers. The Dei-Phage takes flight on pinions of ragged feathers, and feathers signify the beast's influence on the Haematite Cathedral. Feathers are, in turn, a symbol of the Chaos God Tzeentch, whose arcane touch is everywhere in the trilogy.

Moral corruption. Bulagor Thrunng, the Maledictor's Hand and the Hekate dynasty have all suffered moral corruption, either through deliberately abandoning morality or through the presence of Chaos.

Ill-advised alliances. The Maledictor's Hand's alliance with the Dei-Phage (and other daemons) seals its position as an enemy of mankind, while the dalliances in darkness by members of the Hekate dynasty were behind the tragedies that befell them. The Maledictor's Hand's alliances with the dark powers crop up throughout the trilogy and serve to lead them to damnation.

Desperation. The antagonists of the trilogy have made their terrible deals and decisions believing that working with the Dark Powers is the only option left to them.

USING THIS ADVENTURE

The adventure is mostly investigative, but several combat-heavy events mean that Acolytes with little experience might be overwhelmed, while those with a lot of experience and wargear might find some encounters trivial (in particular characters using the rules in *Ascension*). Options are given in the relevant sections for increasing or decreasing the challenge of combat scenes, mainly concerning the power of the Dei-Phage and its access to daemonic allies.

The adventure begins on the hive world *Scintilla* "in medias res", on board a Scintillan special forces gunship as it makes its final approach over Bulagor Thrunng's estate. This is a sudden, exhilarating action opening, similar to an action movie that throws the explosions and carnage at the audience without any delay. After the initial gunfire dies down, the Acolytes have time to ask questions, buy equipment, and generally prepare for the adventure's next section.

The adventure assumes the Acolytes are working for an Inquisitor who is a member of the Calixian Conclave. It can be used as the beginning of a new Dark Heresy campaign, in which case the GM can select an Inquisitor from the core rulebook or invent one. It can also take place during an ongoing campaign, in which case the Acolytes may need to get to *Scintilla* (where *Death From Above* is set) before the adventure begins. In fact, the location of *Death From Above* is not crucial to the plot, so little adjustment is needed to transfer the first section of the adventure elsewhere in the Calixis Sector.

The Acolytes' patron Inquisitor is not present during the events of *The Black Sepulchre* and is rarely, if ever, seen during the trilogy, so there is a great deal of flexibility regarding this character. Matters can be complicated if the patron Inquisitor is a Radical, but the plot of the adventure need not be changed if this is the case. A Radical Inquisitor might ask his Acolytes to recover and bring to him any Chaos artefacts or writings they recover, for instance, and might even give them instructions to bind any daemonic presence they find into a daemonhost or interrogate it for secrets concerning matters of the warp. The Dei-Phage must still be defeated before the Acolytes can achieve such goals, since it has been imprisoned within the *Pax Macharia* which prevents it divulging of secrets. Once the Dei-Phage's physical form has been defeated, Acolytes can attempt rituals to question or bind it according to their master's wishes.

