

DARK HERESY™

DAMNED CITIES™



ROLEPLAYING IN THE GRIM
DARKNESS OF THE 4¹ST MILLENNIUM

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INTRODUCTION

"The death of a wanted heretic is only the beginning of our holy task, not the end. For the heretic can be found, can be killed—but in his wake, he may scatter ten thousand seeds in the fertile soil of human weakness that grow to strangle the future."

—Lord Inquisitor Caidin, Eulogies Vol. VI

DAMNED CITIES is part of the Haarlock Legacy Campaign for the **DARK HERESY** roleplaying game. This adventure features a number of different game styles, from survival horror, to intrigue, to investigation and desperate action. **DAMNED CITIES** can be played on its own without difficulty, but is intended to form the second installment of the modular Haarlock Legacy Campaign arc, and its use as part of this campaign should only serve to deepen and improve the experience both for players and the GM.

GAME MASTER'S BRIEFING

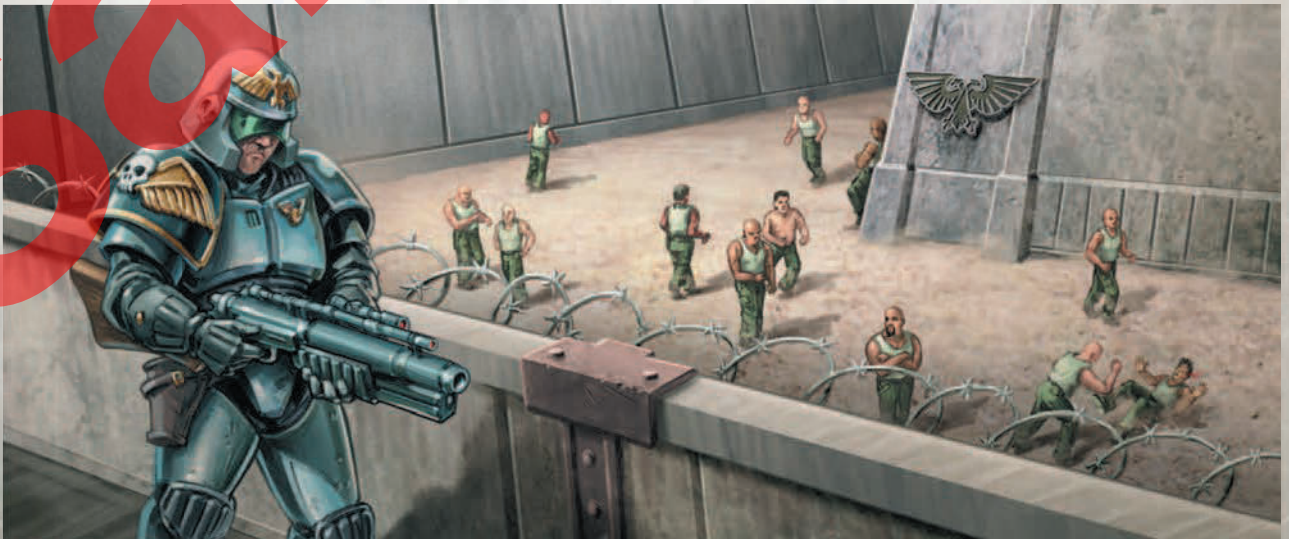
DAMNED CITIES is a murder-mystery adventure set against the darkness of the blighted world of Sinophia and in the decaying and corrupt city of Sinophia Magna amidst its viperous rivalries and festering hatreds. It brings the Acolytes face to face with murder, spite, greed, treachery, and warp-spawned horror, and ultimately reveals the lengths that the late Erasmus Haarlock was willing to go to achieve his terrible ends.

In format, the adventure itself is not precisely linear, but rather unfolding events depend on the course the Acolytes take against a backdrop of a steady escalation of the intrigues transpiring on Sinophia. Set against an increasing civil unrest

and infighting caused by long-simmering tensions and brought almost to the boiling point by the very mysterious murders they are investigating, the Acolytes are free to pursue their own investigations based on the clues they uncover and the suspicions they form. Because of this fluid situation, the GM is required to respond to the players' decisions and shape the unfolding story and its outcomes accordingly. **DAMNED CITIES** in no small part has been designed with this in mind, and also features a detailed gazetteer of the city and world where the action is set, detailed background and character descriptions to help in this regard, as well as advice on running mysteries and open-ended investigations in your games.

DAMNED CITIES opens with the Acolytes assigned (or suddenly being reassigned—see page 33) to investigate a series of gruesome murders in the city of Sinophia Magna. These killings have malefic overtones, and their consequences for the world are far-ranging enough to provoke direct Inquisitorial involvement into what would normally be a local matter. Once their investigation gets under way, the Acolytes rapidly find themselves in an invidious position in which to attempt to carry out their mission. Although officially sanctioned, they are effectively friendless and unaligned to any particular faction. This situation is compounded by the rapidly escalating cold war between Sinophia's criminal underworld, its decadent nobility, and their corrupt agencies of control. Against this dark background of social unrest, urban decay, and growing turmoil, the Acolytes must steer a path between clashing factions to solve the mystery behind the killings, their cause and culprits—whilst the true power behind the murders gets ever closer to its goal.

Can the Acolytes save the damned cities? It's up to their actions and skills to decide.



THE STRUCTURE OF THE ADVENTURE

The ongoing events in Sinophia, the mysterious deaths, the tensions between the factions, and the daemon's ongoing quest to recover the mirror shards all have an impetus and attendant consequences of their own. Left to progress on their own, these events unleash the daemon in the mirror and herald the city of Sinophia Magna's collapse into bitter civil war and massacre.

The catalyst for change is the team of Acolytes, whose interventions and actions have the opportunity to solve the mystery, defeat the daemon, and avert the impending civil war.

The three broad parts of the adventure are formed as follows:

PART I: DEATH IN SINOPHIA MAGNA

The Acolytes arrive on Sinophia in response to reports of strange and brutal deaths. Upon arrival, they are plunged into the mystery of what and who is killing members of Sinophia Magna's nobility and underworld. As the mystery deepens, the Acolytes come face to face with the true nature of the horrific murderers stalking the city.

PART II: BLIND ENEMIES

As the Acolytes discover more of the malign forces and motive behind the murders, they find themselves in the middle of a rapidly escalating war between the city's criminal Undertow and cruel Sanctum Enforcers. The Acolytes must choose who to ally with and who to cast as enemies as the daemon's plans grow closer to fruition and the Acolytes are targeted for destruction.

PART III: THROUGH THE SHATTERED MIRROR

The treachery of Precinct Marshal Skarmen is revealed. The Acolytes may decide to stop the daemon's designs—no matter the cost—or to set it free by their own hands as the price of knowledge. Which will the Acolytes choose?

PLOT OVERVIEW

DAMNED CITIES is a murder-mystery, successful investigation into which uncovers a complicated malefic conspiracy by a trapped daemonic entity to free itself from bondage by re-assembling the broken mirror into which it was bound. Much of what follows—the adventure's plot and the schemes of the antagonists involved—exists to obscure these facts. That's the mystery part, after all. But for the GM who needs to know these things with clarity, the following is presented in bullet-point format about what is really going on, in order of occurrence.

USING THIS ADVENTURE

DAMNED CITIES is intended to take four to six play sessions to complete, and whilst there is some serious combat involved, investigation and involvement with the plot is far more important for success than simply how high a level the characters are. As such, **DAMNED CITIES** can be scaled to accommodate a group of between two and six Acolytes of any level of experience with some modification to the encounters, mainly by reducing the number of Risen the Acolytes must face if they are less experienced and by the inclusion of Spectre Cell 17 as additional antagonists for particularly strong Acolyte groups.

The adventure is largely location- and event-based, but the Acolytes' actions should have definite effects on the way that things evolve, and the GM is actively encouraged to add new encounters, intrigues, and NPCs, as well as modify or ignore the ones presented here as he sees fit. Bearing this in mind, the GM may also need to keep his players focused on discovering what is going on and nudge them back on course when they go too far astray.

Whilst the adventure can easily be scaled up or down by modifying the number of enemies to fit the group's capabilities, **DAMNED CITIES** is optimised for a group of Rank 4 Acolytes.

- Centuries ago, at the outset of his fratricidal campaign to murder his kinfolk, the infamous Rogue Trader Erasmus Haarlock summoned and bound a daemon in a pair of mirrors in Sinophia Magna (the capital city of the planet Sinophia) in order to question it.
- When he was done, Haarlock shattered one of the mirrors, imprisoning the daemon in torment to await his return.
- After Haarlock disappeared, the Folly (the tower in which the mirrors were held) fell into disuse and was looted, and the pieces of the shattered mirror were dispersed into other hands throughout Sinophia Magna in ignorance of their true nature. The artifacts entered into legend as arcane trinkets said to be able to foretell the future.
- Within the last year, the tower of the Folly was taken over by the beleaguered Adeptus Arbites detachment on Sinophia as their headquarters.
- At an ill-omened hour (see sidebar on page 21), all across the Calixis sector, domains and forgotten sins of the Haarlock line stirred in their slumbers. The daemon, its trapped soul and consciousness inhabiting the second un-broken mirror within a hidden chamber of the tower, awoke.
- Unable to leave the mirror or wield its full power, the daemon was, however, able to work on the vengeful dreams and deep-seated bitterness of Colchis Skarmen, the Arbites precinct marshal. The daemon slowly crushed his will into serving as the its malefic agent.

- From this point onward, the daemon and Skarmen have plotted to retrieve the broken shards of the shattered mirror, so that by re-assembling it, the daemon could free itself and escape before Haarlock returns from the void beyond.
- Using the warp-animated corpses of murder victims as their agents, Skarmen and the daemon have located and reclaimed many of the missing pieces of the shattered mirror, brutally slaughtering their former owners and any witnesses to conceal the theft and its true motives.
- As many of those who held mirror fragments were either members of Sinophia's decadent and jaded ruling class or powerful members of its criminal underworld, their unexpected and savage murders have upset the delicate balance of power between the two groups, leading the city to the precipice of civil war between the dissolute nobility and the powerful criminal underworld.
- As Skarmen schemes to recover the final pieces of the mirror and the city reaches boiling point, the Acolytes arrive. The Acolytes are called to investigate the savage murders and become an unexpected complication for all those involved.

Events after this point depend largely on how the Acolytes' actions and investigations proceed. On arriving in Sinophia Magna, the Acolytes are thrust quite literally into the middle of things, and although they have official sanction to conduct their inquiries, they receive little active help from the authorities and short shrift from everyone else. Depending on how they choose to proceed, the Acolytes encounter the various factions in contest for control of the city, each with their own vested interests and desires; whether these groups become allies or enemies entirely depends on what the Acolytes themselves do. At the root of it all is a concealed chain of evidence that points back to the shards of mirror and ultimately to Skarmen and the daemon. It is the Acolytes' task to discover this and thwart Skarmen before it is too late.

ACTION AND REACTION

Because Skarmen (the head of the Arbites) is in fact the culprit behind the killings, the villain of this adventure is in a unique position to gauge the success of his opposition. Should the Acolytes prove rapidly successful in discovering what is really going on, Skarmen can and should try to throw them off the scent with false leads, slow down or deny them official assistance, or set one or more of the city's factions against them. However, he is mindful of exposing his guilt, and he must be circumspect and always weigh the risk of discovery. His ultimate sanction is to act directly against them via the warp-tainted Risen, although he only does this when sorely pressed or when the unfolding events of the adventure reach a fever pitch (as represented in Part III).

MYSTERY, MURDER, AND THE GM

"The universe is so consumed by darkness that seeing the greater shadow of pattern and cause is a gift given only to the mad."

—Inquisitor Lord Caidin, in conversation with Cassilda Cognos

DAMNED CITIES is a mystery adventure in which the Acolytes work to discover the secret behind the murders that are occurring, eventually revealing the truth and confronting the hidden cause of events—hopefully averting a civil war in the process. This kind of adventure can be a challenge to a Game Master, particularly if he is relatively new to the twists and turns used in this kind of game, and so this brief section offers some advice about to handle mysteries in **DARK HERESY** in general and **DAMNED CITIES** in particular.

THE PATH OF THE ADVENTURE

As with many investigation- and interaction-based adventures, there is no exact "right" or "wrong" way for **DAMNED CITIES** to be played, and no single path to the successful resolution of the mystery at its heart. This said, some approaches are more effective than others in engaging with the plot, and indeed Acolytes who are too quick to "kick in the door" or anger too many of the city's factions at once are likely to—and indeed should—meet unpleasant consequences to their actions. Likewise, Acolytes who are too trusting—particularly of the local authorities and Skarmen in particular—might well rue the day they did so. However, Sinophia Magna should be presented as the dark and treacherous place that it is. "Trust no one" is an adage to live by for **DARK HERESY** Acolytes and should serve as a fair warning on a snake-pit of a world like Sinophia.

Open adventures such as **DAMNED CITIES** are designed to reward clever, imaginative, and involved players. Unravelling secret plots, pursuing the truth behind strange events, and uncovering dark conspiracies in this fashion are some of the core themes of **DARK HERESY**. However, care has been taken to add in action, some desperate violence, and horror as well. A mixture of combative and more cerebral characters should each have more than a fair chance to shine as the adventure progresses, and both brains, charisma, and brawn are likely to be needed for the Acolytes to come out on top.