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They were gathered in an old Cult Mechanicus temple, where the faithful had once kneeled in binaric worship of the Ommissiah. Unlike most of the surroundings, it was largely intact, with a cogged dais surrounded by wide concentric pews. Not much else remained of the settlement, forgotten like the world itself after the evacuation. Rubble littered the surface now, following decades of unending, unexplained tectonics that tore apart most of the crust and lead to the planet's quarantined status. There was only a smattering of orbital beacons to broadcast warnings, serving only to help those below conduct illicit business without unwanted attention. Not that business was going smoothly.

"This is becoming a waste of my time." The large man's words were strong, muffled by his smooth obsidian mask but still loud enough to cut through the atonal notes drifting through the temple. He gestured at the assorted xenotech laying on the dais, ensuring the thick slabs of alien synth-tissue running along his sleeveless arms were clearly visible. "Common trinkets, all of them. Not worth the Edge Syndicate's interest."

The two individuals facing him shifted in their thick coveralls, blue marks on their wrists showing their Cerulean Pact affiliation. Their masks were dark shells worn over their heads, which did little to hide their nervousness. "Of course, Trader Arlz," the first said. "Merely to whet the appetite. We proffer true wonders now."

"And keep that one in my sight." Arlz pointed to a figure hunched several pews away behind the pair. "She's not Faceless."

"She is harmless," the Pacter replied. "A survivor we found during our excavations, shattered in mind. M'olles helps tend the machines, with no thoughts other than for that and her songs."

The target of their conversation did not look up, concentrating on her battered armonica. She continued coaxing wavering tones with leathery fingers, the spinning Desoleum glass glowing softly in the dimness surrounding her. Handcrafted brass articulations rotated a variety of lenses into the machines filling her empty eye sockets, moving in time with the plaintive tune.

The other Pacter reached down—slowly—for a bundle of rough fabrics, placing it on the remaining empty space on the dais. A gloved hand pulled away the material to reveal the collection of metallic objects within. Each glowed with pulsing lines of emerald, around shapes that defied clear purpose. The armonica's trembling melody grew more discordant throughout the temple, as if to reflect the inhuman nature of the items on display.

Arlz lifted up one of the artefacts, a tapered disc that created reflections of green runic patterns on his mask. "Yes, this is exactly why I came," he said. "Nicely done, M'olles."

The Pacters whirled to face a pair of laspistols. "Our Inquisitor wishes words with you," M'olles calmly stated. The armonica continued playing behind her, a brasswork device mimicking her fingers. Arlz tore out metal batons concealed in the slabs of false tissue along his arms, and slammed the backs of the traders' heads.

"I got your cue. So what are these?" Arlz asked, stripping the Pacters of their weapons. Unmasked, his dark face was smooth and marred only by a faded electoo of the Luftius fleet over one eye.

"Anathema relics, predating our species. Strixin had me investigate after his beacon-leech detected a landing. These two found them in a vault brought to the surface in a recent upheaval." Her lenses spun like buzzing insects as she examined another of the glowing devices. "He is concerned items like these are becoming less rare and more dangerous. I share his worry, but the chance to study them and what else might be buried here is quite...exciting."

She made to bind their stirring captives, but stopped. The music had slowed, the last notes fading to stillness like flies in sap.

"M'olles." Arlz's voice was soft but insistent. "Look." A garish, angular figure had emerged from the darkness at the far walls of the temple, drawing an elegant blade writhing with energy. It wore a smiling ivory mask, but its mocking gaze held no warmth.

Shards of colours danced around the creature as it silently moved closer, spectral fragments melding and then refracting into bizarrely hued patterns. Arlz's eyes began to water from the alien optics, but he quickly drew his own power sword and snapped off a fast autopistol shot. M'olles dove behind the dais, firing a wild lasbolt while pulling the glowing xenos devices down with her.

The creature easily avoided their attacks and made a twisting leap, punching one of the Pacters with a spike extending from its fist before alighting on a far pew. Here it paused, a smear of colours, as the trader screamed out blood and then grew still.

Arlz glanced at the remaining Pacter and tossed over his other sword. "Die on your feet at least!" he shouted. "The laughing ones don't take prisoners!" The Pacter grabbed the blade out of the air and executed a fine parry against what would have been a decapitating strike. The battle then really commenced.

They fought well together against the alien, though its sword still drew more blood than theirs. The figure's sleek form was a kaleidoscopic tangle of lights, coalescing together in moments of blurred pigments before bursting apart as it attacked. It was impossible to focus on it, ensuring a constant pressure that kept them on the defensive. The only constant was the mocking grin.

It finally drove them apart and was gracefully lunging at Arlz's chestplate for the kill, when there was harsh, tearing sound and a spray of jade energy. The creature collapsed in mid-leap, half its body a crumbling ruin of ruptured tissue and torn bone.

"Ah, so that is what that does." M'olles held one of the relics, viridescent light still dripping from a conical protrusion on one side. "It seems others are also interested in what was uncovered here," she said, stroking the xenos device. "Such wonderful toys."

"Lucky shot," Arlz muttered. He turned and walked towards the Pacter. "So, now what do we do with you?"

"Down!" Arlz dropped at the Pacter's cry. The trader's sword flew through the air and into the alien rising behind him, its spiked fist ready to attack. The creature toppled backwards, the grinning mask impaled on the long metal and leaking crimson tears.

Arlz looked thoughtfully at the Pacter, then at M'olles. "That was good. Kept level, and fought well to boot. Might even have some good connections. What do you think Strixin would say?"

"I vouch for her," M'olles replied. "I worked with Rhia for these months, and she is worthy despite her current...vocation. I was far worse, you recall." She looked at the Pacter, and pointed at the alien corpse. "This is the true fight. There are only two sides—living or dead. We must be xenosfuge, or be extinct. Your choice."

"Well then," Arlz smoothly continued to the Pacter, "are you interested in something even more dangerous than just dealing in utterly proscribed and deadly alien artefacts?"

Rhia slowly pulled off her helmet, and ran a hand through tangled ashen hair. "Or...?" she said, staring at them both with a steady gaze. "I don't have any real choice here, do I."

Arlz laughed and took a pull from a flask of aralesque. "The Emperor always gives a choice. Just rarely a good one. You'll get used to that if Strixin takes you on as an Acolyte." He regathered the other xenos relics into their bundle. "Let's get to work."

INTRODUCTION

“There is no end to the abomination of the alien. Do not allow any guise of sentience to stay your hand—there can be no hesitation when the survival of humanity as a species is at stake.”

—Inquisitor Kartize, Ordo Xenos

One of the first, terrible truths humans discovered when they ventured beyond Terra and into the stars is that they were not alone. Wherever Mankind went, it encountered the alien. Some civilisations were long dead, having fallen to self-destructive hubris, natural disasters, internecine wars, or external predations. Others, though, were very much alive, and myths from the Dark Age of Technology speak of the terrifying first encounters with alien races. As humanity resurged into the galaxy in the 30th Millennium, the Emperor led His armies across the galaxy to reconquer the stars against the alien—perhaps the first and greatest danger to the nascent Imperium. Endless blood and ichor were shed in eradicating species after species.

Not all aliens could be eliminated, however, and many continue to threaten Mankind over the millennia. The brutal Orks, enigmatic Eldar, and others have resisted the Emperor’s decree that humanity must rule the stars. New alien races are discovered each day as well, several of which have become new, worrisome threats to the Imperium. The relics and arcane devices of long-extinct species can also still contaminate humanity. Even worse, some foolishly dare to employ alien services or use inhuman technology, despite the dangers of giving aid to the Imperium’s sworn foes.

It is a hostile galaxy in which Mankind faces inhuman enemies from all sides; in the Askellon Sector itself, the plague of the alien is ever-present despite countless Wars of Purgation. It falls to the Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos and their Acolytes to stand against these enemies without, a threat that is perhaps the clearest danger to humanity and its dominance over the galaxy. Failure would mean consigning Mankind to become yet another species fallen and forgotten.

ENEMIES WITHOUT explores these alien threats to Mankind within the Askellon Sector, and is divided into three chapters:

CHAPTER I: XENOS

Aliens have menaced Askellon with enslavement and conquest from the time of its first troubled settlements. This chapter delves into the histories of the aliens lurking within the sector and the actions of the Ordo Xenos in combatting their presence, as well as the often secretive nature of Inquisitors of this faction and the Acolytes chosen to serve them.

CHAPTER II: TO SCORN THE ALIEN

In this chapter, players gain new options to craft Acolytes ready to face the alien threat, along with potent new weapons, vehicles, and talents. Acolytes also learn of the horrid xenos relics of Askellon, and find new rules for Explications to better research and gain power against these threats. For those Acolytes of Radical leanings, new assets including alien mercenaries are available to aid in defending Mankind.

CHAPTER III: THE PROMISE OF XENOCIDE

The book concludes with Askellian worlds imperilled by the alien, with rules for using each as a new Acolyte home world. It also includes an examination of the alien masters of the webway: the Eldar. Game Masters gain investigation templates to craft new adventures involving each world and alien race, plus guidance for running alien NPCs and Ordo Xenos themed adventures, developing Warp and space travel events, and generating new alien threats.



CHAPTER I: XENOS

The Imperium rules over a dominion spanning millions of worlds. This claim is not without contention, for there are innumerable other species seeking its destruction and the enslavement or eradication of humanity. Some alien races might only wish to peaceably co-exist with Mankind, or merely occupy their handful of worlds. For the Imperium, there can be no peace with the alien. War is constant across its borders and within its systems against inhuman raiders and xenos conquerers. For thousands of years, though, it has survived and only become more firmly enthroned in its galactic supremacy.

Despite its self-proclaimed manifested destiny to rule over the galaxy, humanity has seen horrifying glimmers that it is perhaps only a lesser player on the galactic stage. Scholars of forbidden histories and those who dare learn of xenos lore have found evidence of civilisations that could have crushed the Imperium with a thought, and wars in the heavens so titanic that the fabled Great Heresy was but a minor skirmish in comparison. Of many such races there are only shattered ruins, burnt out stars, and planetary debris to indicate they existed, with some galactic scars so vast that they have always been assumed to be disasters of unknown but natural origin. Only a very few know better, and have the strength of will to understand the full nature of the alien threat and the power to fight to see that humanity does not join the list of races consigned to extinction. They are the Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos.

Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos have taken on the duty of protecting Mankind from the threats posed by the enemy without. This can include alien races actively warring against the Imperium and those attempting to subvert and destroy it through less overt means. This threat also includes the dangers from races long dead, or thought extinct—for even normal concepts such as death may not hold meaning when dealing with inhuman physiologies and mentalities. These Inquisitors know a glowing bauble unearthed from an alien tomb, a mere trinket that a hive noble might display to his peers in social gatherings, might be as deadly a menace as an invasion of Ork marauders. There is no end to the threat that the alien can pose, even from those who have been extinct for longer than man has walked upright.

This chapter examines the Ordo Xenos and its activities within the Askellon Sector, as well as legends and myths of the sector concerning the Ordo Xenos and its agents. It illuminates what it means to be a member of the Ordo Xenos, the beliefs and actions of such Inquisitors, and thus how those Inquisitors (both Puritan and Radical) might direct their Acolytes to operate. It also delves deeper into events related to the xenos threat in Askellon, including the occluded origins of the Vaxi Atrocity and several alien-tinged aftermath incidents, the forbidden—yet thriving—Faceless Trade in illicit xenos items, and the many alien menaces within Askellon that threaten its already-tenuous continued existence.

ENEMIES WITHOUT NUMBER

"If you can confront the xenos, look upon the xenos, even think upon the xenos, without revulsion, then you are as damned as they."

—Inquisitor Loffengar, Ordo Xenos

The alien is everywhere. In those reaches of the galaxy where humanity has yet to push its frontiers, the alien lurks in wait to destroy it. Where the Imperium has torn worlds from the grip of the alien and made them its own, its enemies move to avenge themselves and take those planets back. Even in the Imperium's heartlands, the subtle touch of inhuman infiltrators can end lives and doom worlds that thought they were safe beneath the Emperor's Light.

To some, this has been a secret whose revelation comes as a terrible shock. Some have guessed it for themselves, and some have been taught it by bitter, scarring experience. It is a truth that Imperial propagandists bury under an avalanche of comforting misinformation. The sermons, lesson-books, sanctioned pict-shows, and carefully planted street-corner tales create a picture of a galaxy under unshakeable Imperial control, quaking from the thunderous tread of a human race in the final stages of its march to divinely-ordained domination. Out beyond the Imperium's borders are tiny pockets of misshapen and contemptible things barely worth dignifying with the word "enemy," still in existence only through the blind good fortune of being low on the Imperium's list of upstart vermin to be exterminated.

But the truth is that final human dominion is not the glorious historical inevitability that Imperial mythmakers peddle. The path to dominance runs two ways. The place the Emperor carved for His people erodes a little every day, and must be cut anew into a contested galaxy full of predatory foes.

Nor is the threat of the alien confined to unmapped reaches of Wilderness Space, safely beyond the Imperium's fortified borders or buffer-zone of hardscrabble frontier colonies. The Imperium is not a monolith but a patchwork, frayed and moth-eaten, riddled with gaps and holes. Every pocket of space that has fallen out of contact after the last Warp storm, every backwater world mapped a millennium ago and then allowed to lapse into carta obscura by an Adeptus Administratum too busy to remember its existence, and every stubborn holdout where the Imperial advance snagged and failed to take hold shelter xenos enclaves deep within Imperial borders, corruptions that must be investigated and extirpated.

The simple existence of such species is blight enough on the galaxy; that aliens such as the Ork, Eldar, or Tyranid actually make war with humanity is an unconscionable insult. But as grand as the spectacle is of an Imperial crusade trampling a xenos infestation into oblivion, the alien is an enemy which often defies a straight military response. The alien threat vector can be every bit as subtle and insidious as the seeping corruption of the Warp or the invisible gnawing of heretical thought.

Such threats are everywhere. Far to the galactic South, upstart alien empires send their ambassadors and traders to infiltrate the permeable borders of the Imperium, weakening the resolve of loyal citizens with soft words, decadent ideas, and beguiling technologies. Foul races flower along the Imperium's most vital

BRONISLAW CZEVAK

Czevak has become arguably the Imperium's foremost expert on the Eldar, culminating a long lifetime's study with an extended period living aboard a craftworld and becoming one of a handful of humans admitted to the Black Library by the enigmatic Harlequins. That achievement made him a target of the Chaos sorcerer Ahriman, who captured the ageing Inquisitor to wring the Library's location from him. Czevak's fate is not known for sure, but tales are surfacing of a strangely rejuvenated Czevak reappearing to his former Acolytes from the Eldar webway, which he can somehow navigate and from which he continues his machinations against Chaos and Eldar both.

trade routes, slipping their contagions into the fleets that provide each sector's lifeblood, corrupting whole worlds as surely as their biology corrupts the beauty of the human form. Other alien, more insidious migrations flit through inhabited systems like a swarm of bad dreams, leaving insanity in their wake.

The threat need not even be so active. Even the remnant of an alien presence can bring disaster. A tiny animal smuggled into human domains as a curiosity for a noble's menagerie could bring plagues, contamination, or ecosystem-wrecking infestations. What a salvager takes for a harmless lamp could be a Necron transdimensional portal node, awaiting a final keystroke before plunging a world into unfathomable terrors.

The xenos threat is ever-present, protean, and unrelenting. The duty of the Ordo Xenos is to be all of those things in return.



STANDING WATCH AGAINST THE DARK

"To wrest human souls from the grip of the Daemon; to defeat the temptation within our own hearts and minds... There is a grace and a grandeur to the work of the Malleus and Hereticus. But the Ordo Xenos? It has no more gravitas than hacking away weeds in one's garden."

"By all means pursue your grace, grandeur, and gravitas then, sir. And in your prayers tonight, ask that your temptation to those things be lifted from your weak and sinning mind, so that you might feel some humility in the presence of those who ensure your garden remains safe to parade all your fine qualities in."

—Apocryphal exchange between Inquisitors Byphon and Merrinus

The foes of the Ordo Xenos come in all the bewildering variety that a galactic diversity of ecosystems can provide, from strange artefacts and bestial infestations to entire civilisations of inhuman sophistication and malevolence. To battle them, an Ordo Xenos Inquisitor must command an equally bewildering array of lore, skills, and disciplines. He must be ready to put seemingly unconnected fields of knowledge to use and improvise weapons and defences against creatures whose technology or biology are utterly alien to the last enemy he faced, or indeed to anything the Imperium has encountered before. The particular nature of its foes and this work has led the Ordo Xenos to evolve in distinctive ways.

The unbreakable will of a Daemonhunter makes no difference to an enemy that is biological, not supernatural, while the unshakable faith of a Witch Hunter cannot cower an alien. Even the cultural and political power of the Ordos might be of little use in some far-flung world of inhuman monsters. To an Ordo Malleus Inquisitor, defeating his enemy is a profound trial of personal willpower; to an Ordo Hereticus Inquisitor, it is an exercise in moral righteousness and faith. To an Ordo Xenos Inquisitor, it can often be an effort in biology, logistics, and tactics, however esoterically they might have to be applied. His armoury is his skills, wits, and knowledge more than simply his iron fortitude.

THE WORK OF THE ORDO XENOS

"To slay is to pray, they tell us. So check your ammo and draw your blades, my friends, because these inhuman scum are about to help us glorify Him-on-Earth. First volley, FIRE!"

—Acolyte Benguarre Kess, during the Perikal Scouring

The word Inquisitor tends to evoke two images in the popular imagination of the Imperium's citizenry. There is the grand and terrifying incarnation of the Emperor's merciless authority, enthroned above a column of Acolytes and soldiers while the flammers roar and the execution pyres blaze. There is also the silent, all-seeing eye in the shadows, whose gaze sees every wrong and marks sinners for punishment. Like his colleagues, every Ordo Xenos Inquisitor must be prepared to work as covertly or overtly as his mission requires.

LEADING IN THE LIGHT

The Imperium's favoured way to greet a xenos species is at the point of a gun, and Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos often find themselves at the spearhead of the mighty Imperial military machine, in a war they instigated or one whose balance their skills are helping to tip. Any Imperial army on an alien front might find at least one Ordo Xenos Inquisitor attached to its command; where the war is against an unusual or unfamiliar species it could even be an entire conclave, with definite ideas about military priorities and objectives as well as useful knowledge and advice.

Within Imperial borders, the Ordo Xenos takes command of the constant purges and cleansings of alien enemies infiltrating and infesting the body of the Imperium. One of the most infamous of such foes are the Genestealers, who bring a contamination that passes down through generations and endangers the populations of worlds. Such infestations are such a deadly threat because these aliens work actively and cunningly to hide it, spread it, and defend it. Once such a contamination has a foothold, the Ordo Xenos is sure to be at the head of the Imperium's response, marshalling and arming the untainted forces of the planet and purging the threat with as much ferocity as any of their Ordo Hereticus comrades.

Less sophisticated foes can be no less pernicious if not met with force of arms. The Ordo Xenos may find itself battling swarming predators that run wild over an Imperial world unless they are stamped out, plagues or parasites carried back from frontier settlements into populous centres unprepared to handle them, or seemingly non-sentient beasts taken as trophies or livestock that are far more than they appear.

Confrontations such as these are reminders that the calling of the Inquisition requires its followers to be all things, taking on a martial role as well as carrying out investigation and judgement. While not every Inquisitor has the martial prowess to stand on the front line when battle is joined, every Inquisitor must ensure that he and his Acolytes can protect themselves when inevitably the battle comes to them.

The ultimate expression of the Ordo Xenos' martial work comes not from its Inquisitors but in the post-human form of the Deathwatch, the secret Chapter drawn from across the ranks of the Adeptus Astartes. The Deathwatch's oaths of founding bind it specifically to the battle against the alien, and its warriors are some of the deadliest specialists the human race is able to field. They come to the Deathwatch skilled and hardened from experience in their own Chapter, and their Kill-teams combine that expertise with potent and specialised weaponry and marry it to the combined knowledge of the Inquisition.

The insistence of ambitious Inquisitors notwithstanding, the Deathwatch are allies of the Inquisition rather than its servants. They have their own orders and oaths to fulfil, their own fortresses to garrison while watching for potential incursions, and their own masters to answer to. But they are the Ordo Xenos' last sanction before Exterminatus itself, the most potent military weapon that its Inquisitors can wield. The sombre black livery of the Deathwatch by an Inquisitor's side is a chilling sign of the magnitude of the threat that has arisen, and of what is at stake when battle is joined.



MOVING IN THE SHADOWS

It is a mournful fact that not all adversaries in the battle against the alien are aliens themselves. Misguided or actively treacherous humans provide plenty of work for the Ordo Xenos: whether acting from ignorance, delusion, or malice, their deeds must be brought to light and cut down.

The simplest misstep to take is the handling of xenos artefacts, whether referred to as “Faceless Trading,” “the Void Market,” or any other nickname that tries to sweeten the reality. Whether it is a loyal trooper ripping an odd-shaped souvenir from an enemy corpse, a scholar bringing home a carving from some long-dead city, or a smuggler sneaking a crate of incomprehensible alien devices back from the frontier to sell to rich collectors, one of the banes of the Ordo Xenos’s work is the endless ignorant masses who are drawn to, rather than repulsed by, the works of inhuman hands. Worse still, there is no reliable way to know which of these artefacts is a harmless trinket and which can doom a world by its mere presence.

Such activity is mostly banal and easily policed, the points of vulnerability easily identified. The Ordo Xenos keeps watch over shipping routes and colony stations, and has eyes in the Departamento Munitorum, the Chartist Fleets, and the various academic, trading, or surveying guilds whose activities might expose them to temptation. Many Ordo Xenos Inquisitors retain networks of spies, informants, and data-thieves to ensure they receive word of anything suspicious, while others prefer to descend upon their suspects for very public sweeps, audits, and trials, providing forcible reminders of the consequences of over-familiarity with the alien.

More difficult and dangerous are those who fully understand their crime and its consequences, and actively work to hide it. Traders who pander to misguided appetites for alien artefacts or specimens acquire immense profits. Such profits can be both in simple wealth and in influence and favours from those they supply, as these often noble personages dare not allow their illicit transactions to come to light.

Rooting out and destroying such perverted enterprises is one of the most demanding and dangerous tasks of the Ordo Xenos. Simply grasping one thread of the operation can take months or years of work by dedicated undercover Acolytes and other agents who endanger their lives and take mortal risks as they impersonate wealthy buyers or unscrupulous collaborators. Once the extent of the operation is known, Inquisitors and their Acolytes can move with lightning speed to end their investigation, using their own ruthless operatives and often drawing on the sector’s battlefleet and the Adeptus Arbitres to ensure that none of their targets escape. Once the network has been purged, its treacherous agents either dead or yielding up their secrets to the Inquisition’s interrogators, the restless eye of the Ordo Xenos moves on.

Rarer, but more troubling to the right-thinking servants of the Ordo Xenos, are humans who directly traffic with aliens themselves. These are far further between, and usually easier to identify. There are relatively few places in the Imperium where sentient aliens directly interact with humans outside of battlefields in the first place, and the crudity of cross-species communication means that in most cases the terms of the transaction will be base and obvious so that there is no room for misunderstanding. The most common trade is some form of Imperial goods—raw materials, foodstuffs, fuel, or even weapons—bartered for services.

Some overconfident planetary lords think they can enlist a Kroot hunting pack or Eldar Ranger to spy or skirmish for them, or even a mob of Ork Freebooterz to make war for them. Others think they can get away with bringing in xenos muscle for mines or farms, particularly aliens whose biology lets them work harder and longer in punishing environments. Then there are the cowards who think they can spare their part of space from war by placating a nearby alien enclave with trade or tribute, or ship captains who buy off alien corsairs for safe passage. All are answerable to the merciless attention of the Ordo Xenos.

The most troubling of all human wrongdoing in the Ordo Xenos’ remit are xenophile cults and their heretical delusions. Simple material gain is no excuse to seek out alien contact, but it is a reason most Inquisitors can understand. But there is little understanding of what makes Emperor-fearing men and women seize on inhuman fantasy and elevate it above their fellow humans. The Ordo Xenos has stamped out cabals who thought they could follow the shadowy interstellar paths of some alien race on strange pilgrimages to transcendent knowledge, heretical cells that had built their own religions around a fleeting brush with Eldar raiders, and feral tribes who fought for possession of a wrecked Necron head that they believed would return to life when held by the chosen prophet.

INQUISITOR KRYPTMAN

Kryptman has been the Imperium's staunchest defender against the Tyranid Hive Fleets since he discovered the very first accounts of their arrival on Tyran itself and became one of the great heroes of the Tyrannic Wars. Many say the arrival of Hive Fleet Leviathan pushed Kryptman to the point of madness. The tipping point for many of his fellow Inquisitors came when Kryptman attempted to cripple Hive Fleet Leviathan's advance by using repeated Exterminatus orders to scorch away any source of sustenance from the swarm's path, costing scores of worlds and untold billions of Imperial lives. For this he was expelled from the Inquisition and vanished, although rumour says he continues his struggle with the Tyranids outside the Imperium and in secret.

ILLUMINATING THE TRUTH

Detailed research on its foes is one of the most powerful weapons for the Ordo Xenos. These topics might range from knowing how to tweak a certain toxin to be especially deadly to one breed of alien but harmless to humans, to understanding the life-cycle of a xenos beast that might betray its presence in the teeming hive-city it has vanished into, to knowing how to play different tribes of marauding aliens off against one another, or even to something as simple as the weak point in an enemy's anatomy that is especially vulnerable to a bolt shell. All are assets beyond price when human lives are at stake.

It is not unusual or shameful for Ordo Xenos Inquisitors to consider themselves researchers as much as detectives, spies, or combatants. Not only do they make full use of the formidable intelligence-gathering powers all Inquisitors wield, but they often go beyond them. They have sponsored the establishment of research stations dedicated to observation, vivisection, and psychometry of xenos specimens, and expeditions intended specifically to gather samples and data. Whole libraries of biological and xeno-anthropological data have been founded, packed with treatises and field reports, and pored over by adepts and savants looking for new weapons or insights. The ruins of dead civilisations are routinely sealed away from prying eyes so that Inquisitors can strip them of any insights or knowledge that might help them to doom yet more alien civilisations to oblivion in their own turn.

The researches of the Ordo Xenos are by no means an exercise in gentle scholarship, however. Observations about how aliens fight—and how they kill—must be carefully verified if they are to be of use. Weapons intended to kill the alien in turn must be tested and proven before they can be trusted to work in the most dreaded and critical of battles.

On the Radical fringe there are Inquisitors who study the xenos by associating with them, willingly keeping their company, adopting their ways, and even becoming their students. Other Inquisitors would condemn such laxity, insistent that it can only lead to the softening of their determination to war upon the alien, and the intellectual drift into treachery against their own species. Such matters are maddeningly convoluted, and have opened deep schisms between Inquisitors within the Ordo Xenos itself.

PURITANS AND RADICALS


"My old master had a verse in his Book of Hours that said you are not fit for Inquisition until you truly know how to hate. That's half right. The longer I serve, the more I think that we're not fit for Inquisition until we truly know how to hate our fellow Inquisitors."

—Inquisitor Myctosa, Ordo Xenos

"One way, many means" could be said to encapsulate the Inquisition, and one of the many things that sets it apart from the other great organisations of the Imperium is that it allows its members free rein in how they carry out their vocation. Most unusual of all, such freedom is not simply methodological but doctrinal. One of the Inquisition's greatest strengths and deadliest weaknesses is the freedom of Inquisitors to arrive at their own concept of their calling.

This makes the Inquisition a fearsomely adaptable opponent, capable of adopting any tactic or paradigm and flowing toward an enemy's weaknesses like water finding the crack in a dam wall. But that freedom is bestowed upon men and women raised in the stultifying intellectual conformity of Imperial society and often possessing extreme, or at least eccentric, personalities. Peer beneath the millennia of secrecy and mystique, and the Inquisition is a deeply riven and turbulent organisation whose powerful members can turn on each other every bit as eagery and ferociously as they hunt down their putative enemies.





The most common ideological spectrum along which “Puritan” and “Radical” Inquisitors are ranged is that of willingness to use the enemy’s methods and devices against itself. Some Inquisitors might find no issue with employing a weapon customised by the alien Jokaero, while others insist that to fight for Mankind, only those weapons men have crafted should be used. Many might find great amusement in seeing Orks cut open by one of their crude choppas, but sterner minds would only see the beginning of a slide towards tolerance for the alien.

The use of actual living alien agents (or, Throne forbid, allies) is a darker shade of grey. Interrogating a captured alien is uncontroversial, as is manipulating them with ruses or lies designed to expose weaknesses, set them fighting one another, or lead them into traps. Hiring or recruiting a xenos agent, as some Radicals are rumoured to do, is markedly more dubious amongst many Inquisitors, even if it was done with deliberate planning to ensure the alien did not survive the mission. At the far end of the Radical spectrum are those who engage with aliens as equals, the infamous few who admit, even boast, of studying among the Eldar or wandering with Kroot packs. Such individuals must pick their company carefully when they return to their fellow humans, for some of their peers would cut them down in a fury as soon as their deeds were out in the open.

If the furthest outliers of Radicalism presume to treat sentient aliens like equals, engaging with them on non-hostile terms and even forswearing humanity’s unique birthright in favour of coexistence, then the other extreme, the Ordo Xenos’ most diehard Puritans, are those who deny the innocence of any life but that which sprang from Holy Terra. A malicious and sentient enemy of humanity such as an Eldar Reaver? A ravaging interstellar threat like a Tyranid swarm? A dangerous predator like the Catachan Devil? A domestic beast like a grox? A simple crop like the Hydraphur daggerfruit or even the alien grasses of Chogoris or Attila? Abomination. Blight. All of it.

It is easy to dismiss such zealous Puritans as fanatics who dogmatically refuse any dealings in thought or deed with the alien, lest it contaminate their core humanity. But although they mostly admit, with varying degrees of grace, that there are greater dangers out in the dark and the banal uncleanness beneath their feet may not have its turn under the flamer during their lifetimes, when their fanaticism goes unchecked they can be as dangerous as the most xenophilic Radical. The Ordo Xenos does not like to speak of the massacres, terrible famines, or demented extinction attempts carried out by Puritans from its ranks who finally crossed the line into the maddest and most uncompromising extreme of their calling, but it knows that such maniacal excess is not beyond its members, and it must be ever vigilant.

BECOMING AN ACOLYTE

"It's a question I hear often. How can there be so many of them out there, allowed to spread so far and grow so strong? Why did the Emperor allow it? Why doesn't He stop it?" Well, who says He's not stopping it? By whose will is it that you're standing here, now, with a hand ready to take up a weapon? Think!"

—Inquisitor Iaktobal, Ordo Xenos

No one human can fight the darkness alone. It is sinful arrogance to think otherwise. Whether he employs a household staff of armourers, doctors, and librarians, leads a small personal team of elite agents on scrupulously planned espionage missions, or marches through hive cities at the head of thousands-strong processions of servants, every Inquisitor must at some point put his trust in his Acolytes, recruited to guard his back, extend his reach, and expand his pool of skills.

An Inquisitor delving through Imperial society in search of a xenotech smuggler may often have need of the kind of covert agents for which the Inquisition is famous. Deep-cover informants and data-harvesting operations can be supplemented with savants, calculi, and investigators seconded from the world's Adeptus Arbites garrison. An Inquisitor would not hesitate to plunder that garrison, and the world's standing militias, for troops when soldiers are called for.

Like Inquisitors across the Ordos, those of the Ordo Xenos recruit Acolytes for force of arms. Adeptus Astra Militarum veterans are popular recruits, especially those who have survived campaigns against the particular enemies an Inquisitor expects to be facing. In contrast to the Inquisition's daemonic enemies, xenos species can be effectively fought with experience, and soldiers who have faced a particular foe are likely hardened to its terrors. The deference that military commanders show to an Inquisitor who joins them to fight against the alien often turns to frustrated despair as that Inquisitor departs after the fighting with their unit's most capable and experienced warriors in tow.

Just as Ordo Hereticus Inquisitors must collect Acolytes skilled in navigating the politics and subcultures of human worlds, the Ordo Xenos must recruit agents skilled in surviving alien ones. The Ordo Xenos provides plenty of work for hunters and rangers from feral or frontier worlds, ingrained with the particular resourcefulness that hostile planetary conditions require, and often talented at hunting and bringing down dangerous quarry, skills that an alien-hunting Inquisitor can readily adapt.

The Tech-Priests and others sanctioned adepts from the Adeptus Mechanicus are often highly valued as Acolytes for Inquisitors of the Ordo Xenos. These Inquisitors are aware of the need to expand and refine humanity's knowledge of its xenos enemies, and in this the devotees of the Machine God are their natural allies. The Adeptus Mechanicus has always held fiercely to its independence, though, and only brave or foolhardy Inquisitors would test the boundaries of the Machine Cult's power by trying to simply dragoon a Tech-Priest into service. Typically, unless an emergency has thrown them together, such Acolytes must be recruited with diplomacy and more than a little guile. Canny Inquisitors can work to build up lasting alliances with the Cult Mechanicus all across their area of operations, so that they have that organisation's unique skills to draw on at short notice.

EMIL DARKHAMMER

Inquisitor Darkhammer is a Puritan of the dourest Monodominant stripe, a zealot intent on scouring every scrap of alien life from the stars by the bluntest and most brutal methods possible. He has over thirty Exterminatus orders to his name, leading to horrified denunciations of Darkhammer as being more dangerous to humanity than the aliens he fights. Most recently he burned the world of Cavlock to deny a xenotech artefact to his rival Helynna Valeria, an action that finally earned him an Excommunicate Traitoris decree at her hand. Darkhammer pursues his calling undaunted, insisting that destroying the alien vindicates any number of human deaths.

More easily recruitable are often the scribes and scholars of the Imperium's surveying fleets and datavaults, where previously gathered lore concerning the alien might reside. Such Acolytes can bring a wider scope of expertise, often with direct experience across many worlds.

As well as recruiting Acolytes for their physical abilities or particular skill sets, Inquisitors may take on recruits shaped by alien contact in particular ways that meet their particular needs and temperaments. Those Inquisitors who work to end every investigation with an extermination have particular uses for the death world natives, who are accustomed to a daily battle for survival and who have been trained from birth to see any unfamiliar life form as an implacable threat. Some Ordo Xenos Puritans have the habit of recruiting the survivors of alien incursions, for example, sometimes to an almost ghoulish extent of picking through refugee ships or massacre sites for potential Acolytes. Many Inquisitors consider consuming hatred and a drive for revenge to be more than acceptable substitutes for battle prowess or combat instruction. Such hatred is abundant in the Adepta Sororitas, of course, and the Ordo Xenos often takes on individual Sisters as Acolytes for their zealous fervour as well as their superior training.

For those of a more flexible, even Radical bent, recruits from the fringes of Imperial society are often more likely to fit with the Inquisitor's agendas. While Puritans hold strict beliefs on the sanctity of the human form, Radicals are known to recruit mutants whose biological quirks can give them an edge infiltrating or combating alien threats. Rogue Trader crews can also provide skilled, experienced, and resourceful Acolytes, often with knowledge and experience of alien interaction that is very hard to find in more conventional Imperial recruits. For those Inquisitors who wish to employ and reward such experience, it can be well worth the work of drawing such adventurers away from their famously freewheeling and independent-minded masters.

Some Radicals go even further, recruiting confirmed hereteks and xenophiles who have likely dabbled in alien technologies or immersed themselves in xenos languages and cultures, even living within their societies. Such inside experience makes these rogue elements invaluable to Radicals, even as they would earn a death sentence at the hands of more Puritanically-minded Inquisitors.

XENOS IN ASKELLON

"There are no strangers here, only enemies we have not slain yet."

—Inquisitor Sarrow Gorn, the Scourge of Abboth V

The Imperium of Mankind is beset at every quarter by xenos strains that would deny the Emperor's right to dominion over the stars, and this fact is as true in the cursed Askellon Sector as it is anywhere else. The alien is a threat to the very soul of humanity, which the preachers of the Imperial Creed never allow their flocks to grow complacent about. The sermons and teachings of the confessors and saints warn that contact with the non-human is amongst the very worst kinds of blasphemy, and to deliberately seek out and consort with the alien is to invite death or excommunication from the bosom of Mankind and the eternal damnation of the soul.

Despite what the preachers tell the masses, however, contact between humanity and various alien species does in fact occur, and on a far larger scale than most would give credit for. There are Inquisitors in Askellon who would seek out the knowledge of ancient alien civilisations, in particular the Eldar, determined that the Imperium avoid mistakes that have damned entire galactic empires. Rogue Traders are granted specific writ to have truck with alien races, at least so long as they are beyond the borders of the Imperium. Many such men and women consider the Askellon Sector to be such a place, if not in name then in fact, and so openly deal with aliens such as the mercenary Kroot. Many Rogue Traders have also sought out writs of trade to operate within the sector as well, seeking out riches in the many still-unexplored regions between established systems.

HELYNNA VALERIA

Valeria is a Radical Inquisitor through and through, for whom there is no line that cannot be crossed if she judges it necessary to her work. Her lifelong devotion to acquiring xenos lore and technology was to have culminated in the recovery of the ancient device known as the Dimensional Forge from beneath the Imperial world of Cavlock, until her Puritanical enemy Emil Darkhammer subjected the world to Exterminatus to deny her the prize. Valeria has excommunicated and condemned Darkhammer, and now pursues her vendetta against him across the Imperium, her higher calling collapsing into the simple desire for revenge.

There are also some who exist on the very edge of sectors who have always looked not towards distant capitals or even towards the impossibly far away Terra, but whose faces are turned outwards toward the black voids. On frontier worlds and outcast enclaves, those only dimly aware of the rule of Terra and its vassals or who wilfully deny such authority coexist with all manner of minor xenos filth, often simply to survive. To merely know of such alien trading is often to invite death at the hands of the Inquisition, or others. To dare to know even greater details of the many alien interactions within the Imperium is beyond the ken of most humans.

In the Askellon Sector, there are but a handful of known xenos strains active, even as the bones of countless others long passed fester in the ground beneath the Imperium's feet. The masses are kept fearful and paranoid of the very existence of species other than humanity, and in truth the vast majority never have cause or reason to interact with an alien, unless they are called to make war on them. Others are all too aware of their existence and interact with them in a variety of ways, to a myriad of ends. In truth, few in the sector are aware of such things, for while knowledge is power, for many it is a burden, or else a death sentence.



THE PERNICIOUS ELДАР

Of the various strains of xenos active in the Askellon Sector, the Eldar and their various sub-strains are one of the most visible, to those who know where to look, at least. Many reasons have been posited as to why this might be so, with some of the most learned of savants committing their entire careers to further study into the matter. Over the millennia, a range of theories have risen to explain their continued presence and interest in the sector, with some theories being proved wrong or passing out of favour to be replaced with others as evidence shifts. Over recent years, much of the debate at the rarefied level of Inquisitorial circles has revolved around why the Eldar appear to have chosen to remain in a region of space so clearly and drastically afflicted by the Warp when, as a space-faring people, they need not do so. It has been noted again and again that the Eldar are, if anything, becoming ever more active in the region. As the Pandaemonium grows in turbulence, so the Eldar appear to grow more restless, even—so some have claimed—desperate, in their activities. These actions can vary greatly, but it has been noted how the Eldar frequently launch small, stealthy raids against key targets either just before, or just after, an increase in Warp storm activity. Sometimes they are clearly seeking to evacuate some object or some being, or to investigate what effects the Warp incursion might have inflicted on a world or region. Often, however, the Eldar have attacked seemingly at random, often with the apparent aim of dissuading human activity in an area they clearly regard as exclusive to themselves.

There are several different types of Eldar active in Askellian space, perhaps most numerous of which are the forces of Craftworld Miandrothe. The existence of this gigantic, star-going ark is almost entirely unknown in the sector's ranks of humanity, although its presence is suspected by a very small number of Inquisitors, in particular those of the Ordo Xenos. Only a handful of humans are aware of its actual existence, and many innocents have unwittingly gone to the grave to maintain this carefully guarded secret. Others, however, may yet have ascertained by study or observation that the Eldar maintain a strong and decisive presence in a region of space many humans would dearly love to abandon. What such agents intend to do with this information remains a mystery, and for many a deep cause for concern.

Far less predictable even than the mysterious activities of the Craftworld Eldar are those of the Corsairs of the so-called Dusk Vipers clan. These wild-hearted warriors range far and wide across the Askellon Sector and presumably beyond, utilising Warp routes and portals entirely unknown to human Navigators to strike from the least predictable quarter. The activities of these pirates and outcasts vary from outright and wanton raiding for resources to attacks that can only be described as sporting hunts. Those Inquisitors with any real knowledge of Eldar Corsairs know that they represent not a general type but a spectrum, and that each band, even each Corsair, can be wildly different from the next and motivated by entirely different drives. Some align themselves to their craftworld cousins and can act in a highly noble manner, while others are barely discernible from the raiders of Commorragh and are wicked, cruel, and intent only on inflicting pain and suffering on what they regard as lesser races.

Those vile Eldar that live within the shadows of the webway, known to xenos scholars as the Dark Eldar, are themselves active in the Askellon Sector, though their attacks are even less predictable than those of their craftworld and Corsair kin. This particular strain of the Eldar species is known by Ordo Xenos adepts to raid along a string of outlying systems within Askellian space, and all evidence shows they have been doing so as far back as records are kept. In particular, Dark Eldar raiders have plagued the outlying frontier systems rimward of the Thule Sub-Sector for many generations. Most attacks have been limited to small-scale, targeted slave raids on the less populated worlds, and to the once-per-century incursions against the densely populated hive world of Hulee V. Unlike attacks by their craftworld or Corsair cousins, attacks by the Dark Eldar in Askellon tend to be launched towards a single, simple objective—the taking of slaves to be dragged back to the bleak pits of Commorragh. In the main, the Lords of Askellon have remained aloof and largely uncaring of the fate of these unfortunates, unless tithes and quotas should happen to be affected—in which case largely ineffectual precautionary patrols are often all they can do to deter them.