

DARK HERESY

DEAD STARS™



ROLEPLAYING IN THE GRIM
DARKNESS OF THE 4¹ST MILLENNIUM

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INTRODUCTION

*“And now the veil rent and the key turned,
Of bloody gyre flowing wide and lamented stars murdered cold,
What rough beast, its hour come round at last, draws near to
be born...”*

—Attributed to *The lost apocrypha of Yyat Darktongue*

DEAD STARS is the final part of the Haarlock Legacy campaign. Set amid the haunted icy world of Mara, a gate to nightmares past, present, and future awaits and the Haarlock Legacy’s deadly mystery is finally revealed in full. The fate of the Calixis Sector rests on the shoulders of the Acolytes.

The third part of a trilogy, **DEAD STARS** could conceivably be run on its own with any party of sufficiently experienced Acolytes. However, it is far better served as the climax of the Haarlock Legacy Campaign. If this is the case, the player-characters will have played in either (or preferably both) **TATTERED FATES** and **DAMNED CITIES**. Additionally, they might have played the Legacy’s ‘prologue’ adventure, *The House of Dust and Ash*, which can be found in the supplement **DISCIPLES OF THE DARK GODS** as well as any additional Legacy-related adventures of the GM’s devising.

Although connected with its predecessors by its subject matter (the dark mystery of the Haarlock Legacy itself), and featuring returning elements and adversaries from the Trilogy’s past adventures, **DEAD STARS** offers a departure in storyline and style of play for this deadly climax. While the previous Legacy adventures have been largely based in or around a single location and have featured a focus on survival and intrigue, **DEAD STARS** is instead an odyssey in the classical sense; a journey into the dark beyond, following Haarlock’s footsteps, and a murderous race against others who would do the same.

The adventure begins with the Acolytes being placed in charge of an inquisitorial mission to the forbidden world of Mara, an ill-storied place of nightmarish fear and slumbering horror, in search of the final answer to the mystery of the Haarlock Legacy. Once on Mara, they quickly realise that they are not alone, but are instead part of a race against ruthless enemies who are also in search of the Legacy. After a battle in orbit, they must make planetfall on Mara in less than desirable circumstances and then make their way into the icy depths of Mara’s hell-haunted and abandoned mining station. There, they must locate the Blind Tesseract, a malevolent nexus of reality, nightmare, past and future that forms Mara’s dark heart. From here, the Acolytes must confront doorways to many different realities before finding the one through which Haarlock himself stepped and from which he may yet return—A doorway that leads to the infamous world of Dusk, to an audience with its legendary Hag, and to a terrible decision they must make as the Tyrant Star rises.

Can the Acolytes survive travelling Haarlock’s path? And if they can, can they prevent the traveller’s return? Should they even try? It is for them to decide.



PLAYING FOR KEEPS

The purpose of **DEAD STARS** is to serve as a powerful climax to the Haarlock Legacy campaign. In the grim darkness of the 41st millennium, that epic quality must be met with an equally powerful set of threats and challenges to confront the player-characters. Dangers that would kill a lesser person abound, and character fatalities (not to mention maiming, insanity, soul stealing and other unmentionable fates) are a very definite possibility. This is right and proper; the Acolytes are by now senior servants in the Inquisition and are no doubt marked for ascension in the service of the Holy Ordos should they prove successful.

DARK HERESY is, after all, a game of dark investigation and horror. Without risk, threat, and tension, the rewards of completing a campaign with these themes are unsatisfying at best. While casually wiping out the player-characters is just as undesirable, it is left to the GM’s judgement where to draw the line. **DEAD STARS** offers both an arsenal of potential threats and a few ‘get out of gaol’ cards as well. First, the Acolytes have some assistance on hand in the form of the Maccabian Janissaries (see page 20).

In addition to providing the Acolytes with some extra manpower and fire support, these elite troopers can also be used as sacrificial lambs if needs be. If the Acolytes manage to keep one or two alive, they can also be used as last minutes substitutes for a player-character whose Acolyte has come to an untimely end. Similarly, a rogue member of the Amaranthine Syndicate (see page 66), or even one of the Dusk natives (see page 67) can act as a stand-in if needs be in order to keep one or more of the players involved to the end.

MARA, DUSK, AND POINTS ELSEWHERE

While running this adventure, the GM should keep in mind that the backdrop against which it is set changes radically at several different stages.

From the confines of the warship *Sigillite's Word* to the icy wastes of Mara's surface; from the nightmarish darkened tunnels of the station mine to the dark and steamy swamps of Dusk, each location should be unique, jarring and sharp in the player's minds.

To ensure that each of these exist firmly as separate and striking, a GM should achieve both a sense of something shocking and unusual. He should strive for a feel of vast distance and travel, and help achieve a sense that something far removed from the run-of-the-mill inquisitorial investigation is going on, even for the events of the Haarlock Legacy!

In order to help the GM in this, detailed descriptions and 'read aloud' text has been included to get things started in each of the relevant sections.

TIME, THE WARP, PARADOX, AND NIGHTMARE

DEAD STARS deliberately blurs the line between reality and unreality, past and possible future and the mind-churning horrors of the warp beyond. Hopefully, both Mara's reputation and the events of past Legacy adventures have prepared the Acolytes for this somewhat. Haarlock's fascination with clockwork, with literally capturing and turning back time; his indomitable will and readiness to risk anything; his bitter vengeance; his mastery of alien technology and occult lore; even the fact that where Haarlock has walked, the dead do not seem to rest easy; none of these should be much of a surprise to the Acolytes. The concepts of reckless, ruthless and nearly unlimited power, of Haarlock 'knowing things man was not meant to know,' and the horrors that surround him should all be familiar to the Acolytes and emphasised during play. The reason for this is simple: Haarlock's potential return should be a cause for excitement and quite likely dread for the PCs, as the consequences of such are shattering and on their heads should they fail to do what must be done. As to just what that is, is for them to decide.

USING THIS ADVENTURE

DEAD STARS is intended to take five to seven play sessions to complete and has been deliberately designed as a deadly and highly challenging adventure for four to six player-characters of around 7th or 8th Rank. It features a number of powerful opponents, a nerve-racking series of events in a number of locales, and a wide variety of ways to die! However, it also provides the PCs with some front-loaded help in the form of extra gear, and with backup in the shape of a platoon of troops to assist them. If the group has more than six Acolytes, or are of higher Rank than suggested, the GM should adjust the lethality and threat level of the combat encounters and rival factions accordingly.

DEAD STARS can be scaled to accommodate a group of fewer than four, or less experienced PCs, but this involves some work on the GM's part, particularly in order to reduce the lethality and the somewhat unforgiving nature of some of the encounters contained within. One potential solution is to simply have fewer combative encounters, and leave out the 'higher end' threats such as the Slaught Harvesters from the Blasted City encounter in the Blind Tesseract (see page 50). However, it is recommended that the GM not strip away too much as this lessens both the impact and the enormity of the danger **DEAD STARS** is meant to represent.

As with other parts of the Haarlock Legacy trilogy, the GM is actively encouraged to add new encounters, intrigues, and NPCs to **DEAD STARS** as they see fit, as well as to modify or ignore the ones presented here if it better fits his game. As the culmination of the Haarlock Legacy campaign, the effects and impact of what transpires here should be directly tied to the player-characters' own experiences, triumphs, and tragedies from previous games.

This means that **DEAD STARS** requires a little more work on the GM's part ahead of time in order to suitably expand on what is presented here with the GM's campaign. This is easily done by adding in familiar events and themes, not to mention old enemies from the Acolytes' past adventures. The rewards of doing so should be a truly memorable and very personal climax to the Legacy campaign. This can also serve as an excellent springboard for the Acolytes to continue on to higher things in the Inquisition's service or perhaps to pursue unanswered questions beyond the stars of Imperial space.



WHAT THE ACOLYTES COULD AND SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE LEGACY

Based on their previous adventures, there are a number of facts or theories the PCs might have regarding Haarlock, the Legacy, and their reasons for being on Mara. Much of this information is expanded upon during the course of this adventure and in Appendix III (see pages 68-72). For the sake of clarity, the most important and prominent of these are listed here:

VITAL INFORMATION

ABOUT THE LEGACY

The Acolytes should know the following information about the Haarlock Legacy by now, preferably through their own experiences, investigations and deductions. If any of these facts are not in the Acolytes' possession for some reason (or they have not fully realised their significance), they should be reiterated in their briefing during the adventure's prologue.

- Erasmus Haarlock was an infamous Rogue Trader of frightening power who hunted down and exterminated the surviving members of his bloodline in a bloody purge more than a century and a half ago.
- In the years after the destruction of his family, Haarlock pursued an obsessive and secret quest that remained unknown to outsiders; a quest that took him to both his family's ancient domains and the far-flung reaches of deep space, leading him to become one of the most shadowy and powerful figures in the Calixis Sector in the process.
- After not returning from some secret voyage for many years, he was finally declared lost more than a century ago in 703.M41. Without an heir, his Legacy—both in terms of his domains and his family's Rogue Trader warrant, a thing alone worth a hive world's ransom—fell into the interminable wranglings of the Chancellery Court on Solomon and was never resolved. In the century since then, Haarlock's estates and property within the Calixis Sector either were appropriated, fell into ruin, or were shunned, and Erasmus Haarlock became a figure of dark legend.
- At an ill-omened hour around a year and a half ago all across the Calixis Sector, past domains, devices and forgotten sins of the Haarlock line stirred in their slumber. In doing so they unleashed a chain of mysterious, unnatural and deadly events. These matters and their often bloody consequences drew the attention of the Holy Ordos of the Inquisition, as well as a number of dark factions and cults, to what became known as the 'Haarlock Legacy' and what it portended.
- Through analysis of the evidence of the Legacy's strange happenings and the involvement of the Acolytes, the Holy Ordos has learned that the final key to unlocking the mystery of Haarlock Legacy is an utterly forbidden locale known as the Blind Tesseract. This place, hidden deep beneath the ice of Mara was Haarlock's last destination, where he is believed to have 'gone beyond' and from where he will soon return.

DEATH OF ACOLYTES AND REPLACEMENTS

DEAD STARS is a particularly dangerous adventure for many Acolytes, and it is likely that many Acolytes will burn Fate Points along the way. Some Acolytes may indeed be slain. In this case, the Game Master has a number of options for the player to bring a new character into the adventure.

OPTION 1: THE DARK PACT

The bleak surface of Mara, the haunted world of Dusk, and the interior of the Blind Tesseract are all locations where the barrier between the warp and the material world is thin. It is thus likely that some denizen of the warp may be willing to offer a dying Acolyte a way to return to life—indeed, perhaps even to a hale and vibrant level of health that itself may be suspect. Naturally, many Acolytes may not be willing to accept “No, really, I’m fine!” as an explanation in these cases...

OPTION 2: THE MACCABIAN JANISSARIES

The Janissaries provide a number of options for the Game Master in **DEAD STARS**, and one important example is as a source of new characters should an Acolyte be slain. A Guardsman character is a natural fit, but almost any Career could be represented as a member of the Janissaries. In addition, the two named Sergeants (Childres and Makrade) are also good options for a new player character.

OPTION 3: INQUISITOR HERROD'S RETINUE

Inquisitor Herrod has brought his own set of Acolytes and retainers along on his investigation of the Haarlock Legacy. It would be very easy for a new character to have come from this retinue and subsequently separated or dispatched by Herrod's own orders to accompany the player characters.

OPTION 4: THE TIDES OF TIME

The alternate future that the Acolytes encounter in Part III (see pages 50-51) is a very interesting alternative source for a replacement player character. Naturally, the GM should think carefully before allowing a character to time-travel back from that alternate future, and the dark shroud of that future's fate will no doubt add plenty of Insanity and Corruption Points. It could even be an alternate future version of one of the existing Acolytes themselves!

OTHER CLUES AND LORE ABOUT THE LEGACY

The following represents information the Acolytes could have gleaned about Haarlock and the Legacy depending on how successful they have been and the adventures they have undertaken. All offer useful insights and pieces of the puzzle, but none are vital alone.

The Haarlock Warrant is ancient; awarded to the line following the dark days of the Age of Apostasy. During centuries past, Erasmus's ancestors were involved in what