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ROLEPLAY

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WHERE FLESH FAILS, FAITH CONQUERS.



CHAPTER I: DESOLATION OF THE DEAD

The pale man shifted his corrupted flesh, shrugging off the disguising cloak needed when venturing uphive. Here, in his rusted bastion rising out of the sump waters, Ferrue Fayne was the master of the Blessed Flesh, and soon all of Desoleum. Nothing could stop his rise; it was as certain as decay itself. Not even his traitorous brother Darnis, who would dare steal a shard of the primordial relic, could forestall this.

Fayne looked deeply into the item from another world, from an age before men walked upright. There was ancient power here, enough to bring the fallen to shambling life, and summon the Grandfather's children onto this plane. Soon, he would lead dead and daemonic wonders across the hive, and transform it to a temple fit for the Plague Lord.

Within the artefact, something smiled. Soon, indeed...

Hive Desoleum is riddled with a corruption and decay that reaches into its deepest roots. As the great structures of hive society grind on and its citizens live and die by their ancient oaths, the foundations of their existence is crumbling away. The persuasive nature of the Warp, the vile influence of xenos cultures, and the reckless hatred of fellow men all work to undermine the hive. There are few places where this is felt more keenly than the hive's lower levels, where the dregs of its society scratch out a living in any way they can. These poor, desperate masses are vital to the great industries of the hive, but go largely forgotten and unnoticed by its masters, making their homes and streets the perfect place for darkness to take root.

GM BRIEFING

"Do not fear death, for should you fall, I shall raise you up again to continue our grand conquest."

—Ferrue Fayne, to a congregation of the Blessed Flesh

Desolation of the Dead is an investigation into the Carrion Guilds of Hive Desoleum, and one guild in particular that has become tainted by the influence of the Ruinous Powers. Following a trail of forbidden xenos artefacts and shadowy criminal rivalries, the Acolytes find an altogether more distressing foe far beyond normal humanity. At its heart, the adventure is the hunt for a single man: Ferrue Fayne. He is thought responsible for great havoc wrought upon his house and the inhabitants of the Gallowsway, a decaying section of lower Desoleum City dedicated to dealing with the dead. Drawn into the plot by the discovery of a Warp-infused xenos artefact, the Acolytes are presented with their first clues as to the nature of Ferrue's plans: not just stealing corpses from the Carrion Guilds, but also reanimating dead flesh and consorting with the terrible power of the Warp. Eventually, the investigation leads the Acolytes into the depths of the Underhive; here, Ferrue is conducting dark experiments and foul rituals with a mind to summoning a powerful Daemon.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The adventure takes place in a rundown section of the lower hive known as the Gallowsway. It is home to a collection of Carrion Guilds, the families responsible for dealing with the dead of much of Desoleum's impoverished. Riddled with corruption, the Gallowsway has become a thoroughfare for those wishing to pass between the city's lower hive and the lawless Underhive relatively unnoticed. It is also the hub of the lower hive's body trade, where the Carrion Guilds dispose of the thousands of corpses sent from above, the remains of those lacking oath-credits for anything better than a one way trip to the Mortuarius Factorums.

The Gallowsway is more than just a warehouse for corpses and the citizens which tend to them: it is home to thousands of souls too poor to live anywhere else except among the dead. Even by the bleak standards of the lower hive, this is a tangled web of decay and ruin, with precious little power to light its worn streets and meagre rations to feed its populace.

From this rotten foundation, true heresy has begun to fester in the form of an ambitious and tainted Carrion Guilder: Ferrue Fayne. Second son of the Fayne Charnel House, Ferrue, along with his older brother Tormus and his younger brother Darnis, all share a latent psychic gift, rumoured among the Gallowsway residences to be the result of their late mother's illicit congress with unholy powers. Nurturing their gifts, the Fayne brothers were seduced by the Warp and its promise of power, becoming part of the Callers of Sorrow, a major heretical power overseeing many Nurgle cults within the hive.

While Tormus rose to power within the Callers, eclipsing the works of his brothers, Ferrue remained in the Gallowsway and schemed. His chance for power came in the form of a xenos artefact—a strange, asymmetrical device painful to look upon, which greatly enhanced his connection to the Warp and granted him the power to animate dead flesh. With promise in this newfound power, Ferrue formed his own splinter-cult, dubbing it the Blessed Flesh.

As Ferrue's power has grown, so too have the fortunes of the Blessed Flesh, and the cult is now well-established in the Gallowsway. The cult leader has created a lucrative body trade between the lower hive and the Underhive; he steals corpses from the Carrion Guilds for his own needs, then sells their wealth and remaining organs to the Red Walk, a gang located farther downhive. Ferrue's ultimate goal is to amass an army of the animated dead, and rise up from the Underhive in the name of the Plague God, spreading ruin and death in his wake. To this end, he has been preparing for a ritual to summon a powerful Herald of Nurgle to lead his corpse army.

Unfortunately for Ferrue, his brother Darnis has complicated matters by drawing the attention of the Sanctionaries. Much in the same way that Ferrue languished in the shadow of Tormus and the Callers of Sorrow, Darnis was jealous of his older brother's power. So much was his desire for attention and power that he stole a piece of the xenos artefact and tried to animate the dead himself. The horrific results are what has drawn the Acolytes to the Gallowsway, providing the first glimpse into the danger Ferrue and the Blessed Flesh pose to Desoleum.

USING THIS ADVENTURE WITH DARK PURSUITS

This adventure can be used as a sequel to **Dark Pursuits**, the scenario found in the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook. **Dark Pursuits** deals with the trafficking of xenos artefacts within Hive Desoleum, and can easily be connected to this adventure via the xenos artefact Ferrue has acquired to enhance his power. It is likely that Ferrue has had dealing with the Trade Sable, dealers in such items, and even some of the NPCs from **Dark Pursuits**, who in turn might have passed his name onto the Acolytes. **Desolation of the Dead** also takes place in close proximity to the events in **Dark Pursuits**, and the GM can use some of the same locations if he chooses, further linking the stories together.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Desolation of the Dead is broken into three parts:

PART I: A TRIP TO THE GALLOWS

The adventure begins with the Acolytes arriving at Charnel House 17 within the Gallowsway. Their assignment is to investigate the discovery of a xenos artefact found amidst the remains of a brutal mass murder with rumours of dark powers at work. This takes them into the Carrion Guilds and the first threads of Ferrue's plots. Starting at the scene of the crime, the Acolytes discover the body of Darnis and a fragment of the xenos artefact. From this point, they have numerous clues and leads to investigate. Their immediate goals should be finding out who Darnis was, why many of the corpses at the scene of the recent murders seem to be already weeks dead, and more about the nature of the xenos artefact. The residents of the Gallowsway might be resistant at first, but there are some among them who know about the Fayne brothers and can shed light on what they might be up to. At the same time as the Acolyte's initiate their investigation, cultists sent by Ferrue begin shadowing them, trying to gauge their threat and, if possible, recover the xenos artefact. Once the Acolytes have investigated the murder, the clues should lead them to the Fayne Mortuarius, the huge factorum where the dead are processed for their useful meat, fluids, and bones. Here they meet the first true opposition from the Blessed Flesh, as well as damning evidence about Ferrue's plans.

PART II: THE RED WALK

The second part of the adventure moves the action into the Underhive and the Gantry—a rogue settlement ruled over by the Red Walk gang, and a key stop on the body trade. Having discovered evidence of the body trade in the Fayne Mortuarius, the Acolytes need to follow its trail downhive, passing through the Purity Gate. This massive structure acts as a barrier between Gantry and the Gallowsway, with Sanctionary patrols monitoring the scum who pass between the two. On the other side, they come to the town of Gantry, and the Red Walk. Vornas Crimson, leader

of the Red Walk, is ostensibly Ferrue's ally, but has little love for the cult leader; the Acolytes have a good chance here to turn him to their cause, or take him out of the struggle. The Acolyte's ultimate goal in Gantry is discovering the location of the cult's hideout, apparently somewhere in the sump-river below the town. While in Gantry, the Acolytes become targets for the Blessed Flesh cult again, as Ferrue has determined they pose a threat. This section concludes with the animated dead of the Blessed Flesh attacking the settlement, in part to eliminate the Acolytes, but also to test the capabilities of his risen forces.

PART III: A PESTILENT HEART

In the final part of the adventure, the Acolytes uncover the lair of Ferrue and the Blessed Flesh after voyaging down the dark river, and try to stop his ritual to summon a powerful Daemon. After the conflict in Gantry, and with any allies in tow, the Acolytes descend into the sump-swamp and the wild ruins of the Underhive. A perilous journey in its own right, the Acolytes must contend with rogue gangers, mutant families, and sightless horrors. The Blessed Flesh's lair is hidden in the remains of a massive archeotech construction platform, a veritable fortress rising from the toxic river. Through stealth, force, or guile, the Acolyte's must gain entrance and stop Ferrue before he can summon up a Herald of Nurgle to lead his army of animated dead.

USING INQUISITORIAL POWERS

The Acolytes might desire to take on covers to help lower their Subtlety. This can work to prevent alerting any possible suspects (such as Ferrue) of their investigations and origins. Should the Acolytes reveal themselves as Acolytes of the Inquisition, they are, to a certain extent, able to throw their weight around with the Sanctionaries and other hive authorities. However, they probably are better served by discretion; any advantage they might gain from revealing themselves is likely outweighed by the attention it draws. The adventure assumes that the Acolytes are investigating undercover and, as part of their briefing, the GM can issue them with false identities if the PCs choose to go in quietly. There are several covers that could work within the Gallowsway; the PCs could be Special Concern Officers for the Desoleum Hive Carrion Combine, City Desoleum Sanctionaries on secondment, or agents of a ration bar producer looking to test the purity of the Fayne ingredients. If they choose to maintain fake identities, they likely have an easier time talking to locals, and their enemies, such as Ferrue, should remain unaware of the true threat they pose. In the event they are unmasked or purposefully reveal themselves, the GM should impose a -20 penalty on all social tests with locals (as well as Underhivers), though they gain a +20 bonus on social tests when dealing with the Sanctionaries. In addition, if Ferrue learns they are members of the Inquisition, he quickly dispatches Blessed Flesh killers to deal with them (see page 23).

PART I: A TRIP TO THE GALLOWSWAY

"Filth runs downhive in Desoleum, and you don't get much more downhive than the Gallowsway."

—Vuris Keth, Usher of Charnel House 9

The adventure beings with the warband investigating the discovery of a xenos artefact amidst the scene of a mass murder in the Gallowsway. It was discovered by the Sanctionaries in the tangle of corpses, and their Inquisitor's many eyes and ears within Desoleum made sure this information quickly reached the Acolytes. The case could be linked to the events in **Dark Pursuits** (the adventure in Chapter XIII of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook) and the Acolytes might be pursuing it on their own initiative. They could even have been summoned at the behest of the local Sanctuaries if they have contacts with hive law enforcement, perhaps as part of that adventure.

If the group is not led by an Inquisitor personally, a directive passed down from on high from their master could begin their investigation. If the GM wishes to start the adventure in this manner, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Word has reached me of disturbing activities in Hive Desoleum's bottom reaches, where it appears the foul taint of the xenos has penetrated even to these remote levels. The Sanctioned Bondsmen enforcing hive law in this wretched area report of an unnatural item found at an unusually grisly mass killing, and I have decided to make the matter my own. You are to descend into the darkness of the Gallowsway to investigate the situation, and take whatever steps are necessary to prevent further contamination of humanity, even in these desolate depths. In the name of the Emperor, go forth to do my bidding and carry out His Will.

THE GALLOWSWAY

The Gallowsway is a dank and forgotten place perched on the under-edges of Desoleum City. Very little in the way of wealth from the hive trickles down here, nor do power, light, or food. It is home to thousands of unclaimed corpses. Sent each day from the poorer sections of the city above for disposal, they fester in monumental warehouses before being processed in the level's numerous Mortuarius Factorums. These range from executed criminals, unknown dead, and, worst of all, those that have broken their oaths. It is a foul place to live, but one that must exist lest the city become choked with its own dead. There are several locations here that the Acolytes might explore in their quest for the origins of the xenos artefact.

CHARNEL HOUSE 17

Each of the major Carrion Guild families of the Gallowsway maintains a house to store the dead before processing. They are given numerical designations rather than names, the faded numbers on their doors the only way to distinguish one rusted, corpse-filled building from another. The Fayne family maintains Charnel House 17, and it is likely the Acolytes' first stop in the Gallowsway. It bears a crumbling façade of huge faces from old

signs and tarnished reliefs arranged in a failed attempt to resemble an Ecclesiarchy temple. Within the House is a single large entry chamber, designed as a place where the House can prepare or “welcome” the bodies that choke the threshold. Beyond this are a few cluttered offices, and deep halls lined with shelves for the dead. The bodies are painted in a preservative paste to retard decay, though this only replaces the stench of rotting flesh with a deeper and more vile chemical odour.

THE DRAINS

Even though the Gallowsway contains far more dead than living, the workers too need a place to sleep and rest in their fleeting moments of downtime. The main hab block is known as the Drains, because of the constant stream of vile water that passes through it from above. Located at the end of the primary conveyor hub, it stretches towards the hive wall in a series of prefabricated containers stacked one on top of the other. Originally, these containers were used for transporting goods from the lower city in more prosperous times, but since have become ad-hoc housing. Walking the Drains at any time can be dangerous, not just because of the local thieves and thugs, but also due to its unstable construction which constantly moves or shakes as people travel across it. Flash floods can also catch travellers unawares, as torrents from above can push a container off balance and cause an entire section to come crashing down.

SCRAP MARKET

Where there are people, there is some semblance of trade and markets, even in the Gallowsway where most goods are discards from above. A thriving market in scrap and trash exists in the

shadow of the Drains, and there are avenues devoted to buying, selling, and trading rubbish of all kinds. Most of the items which make it to the scrap market are taken off the dead, the few possessions not already pilfered before they were sent down for disposal. As a result, the market deals mostly in small trinkets and tattered clothes, and these can perhaps be of use if the Acolytes wish to disguise themselves to a lesser state.

BONEYARD

There is usually little left of a body after treatment at the Mortuarius except a scant bone shards and teeth, but sometimes the workers are too lazy (or too busy) to take care of these few remains, and they are dumped into the Gallowsway. Over centuries this human refuse has built up, and by some unspoken arrangement is swept away to a far corner of the level known as the Boneyard. Filled with mounds of bone dust and splinters, the Boneyard is a mournful and eerie place, shunned by most of the locals. Some adventurous scavengers are drawn to it, though tales of terrible creatures lured from the Underhive by the stench of death are usually enough to keep most away.

PURITY GATE

It is an impossible task for the Sanctionaries to stop traffic between the lower hive and the Underhive, given the nature of lower Desoleum City and the countless ducts, vents, shafts, and lifts that link the two regions together. Within the Gallowsway, attempts have been made to keep the local gangs in check (especially the Red Walk) by creating a Purity Gate between hive and Underhive. A large imposing blockhouse, the gate straddles the main route down; all other passages are sealed off for kilometres in all directions. This is also the headquarters of the local Sanctionary forces, and where Oath-Captain Nils is based. It is only due to the presence of the Purity Gate, a relatively recent addition to this region, that the Gallowsway has any Sanctionary presence at all.

FAYNE MORTUARIUS

The Mortuarius are the factories where the dead are dealt with. Connected to the Charnel Houses (usually via long conveyor tunnels) they process the corpses, breaking them down into useful components. They are large, noisy places filled with an acrid stench and dangerous clanking, grinding machines with plenty of hazardous locations. The Fayne Mortuarius, connected to Charnel House 17 by a long, open shaft, is no different, though in recent times it has become the scene of Ferrue's crimes, and the place from which he thieves his bodies. It has also become infected with the taint of Blessed Flesh cult; in hidden and shadowed corners, the signs of the Plague God can be found, smeared onto the walls in crusted blood, pus, and filth.

INHABITANTS OF THE GALLOWSWAY

While in the Gallowsway, the Acolytes deal with a number of its residents, in addition to Oath-Captain Nils and the Blessed Flesh cultists sent to deal with them. The role that these minor NPCs play is up to the GM, and they are presented here to allow him to fill out the region as the Acolytes explore and gather clues. Most have little concrete information, and some are out-and-out false trails, but they should help the GM bring the Gallowsway to life.



LIFE AMONG THE DEAD

The Gallowsway is a miserable and vile place to visit. The Acolytes must contend not just with surly locals, but also with its inconstant lighting, failing machinery, and maze of rusted streets. The GM can reinforce the oppressive nature of the Gallowsway by working the low ceilings and refuse piles into descriptions. Illumination is also a major issue here; the feeble local lighting often fails, plunging an area into a shadowy twilight. Added to the sluggish fog which rises up from below in most places, visibility is restricted to little more than a few dozen metres. It is up to the GM to decide the lighting conditions at any particular time, but as a general rule, all Perception tests relying on vision and all ranged attacks should suffer a -10 penalty while in the Gallowsway. The GM can also use the lighting to add to the drama, such as during the confrontation with the Blessed Flesh cultists, by extinguishing the lights for a moment and allowing the cultists to launch a surprise attack.

In addition to the cramped shadowy streets, the other constant of the Gallowsway is the dripping rain. Nothing so natural as real rain (something of which few hivers would have any concept), it is the filthy liquid that constantly drizzles down from the hundreds of hive-levels above. It never ceases, and there are few places where one can take shelter from it. Everything is covered in an oily sheen, which comes to include the Acolytes after they have been there a while. There is no short term ill-effect of the rain, but the GM should feel free to bring it into play if appropriate, such as making a climb up slick rubble harder or causing open flames to sputter and die.

The Gallowsway is also defined by its people, and on first inspection they are much like the dead they deal with, slump-shouldered and stumbling about their daily lives. Most are pale and listless, and the Acolytes likely will stand out among them as they push through the crowds. The GM can illustrate this by having the minor NPCs and locals speak in weary tones, and show indifference to brutal scenes of murder and violence. Those who dwell here know the

Gallowsway is the end of the world, and most are resigned to ending their days here in dank despair.

CARRION GUILD FAMILIES

The Fayne Brothers are one of many Carrion Guild families that operate in the Gallowsway. Others close to Charnel House 17 include the Keth (Charnel House 9), Vldor (Charnel House 38), and Gyis (Charnel House 5). Vuris Keth runs House 9, an ancient man more than a little mad, and whose greatest enjoyment comes in imbibing from his personal stock of distilled embalming fluid. Eris Vldor is the middle-aged ruler of House 38, covered in gaudy jewels (she has first pick from the corpses at her House) and thick make-up, always ready to welcome guests. Finally, there is Jayir Gyis, a whip-thin man who runs House Five. Though he has little personal wealth, he does maintain a stake in the body trade with the Red Walk gangers.

SANCTIONARIES

Apart from the help they get from Oath-Captain Nils, the Acolytes can deal with other Sanctionaries and ask them questions. Hob Claymet and Ryr Teln are amongst the handful who leave the relative safety of the Purity Gate to patrol the Gallowsway; they were the ones who discovered the corpses that night. Poor specimens of humanity, driven down to the Gallowsway because they were not fit to work in the Main Hive, they are dismal at their job, spending much of their time drinking in the scrap market or intimidating the locals. Claymet, especially, has a mean streak and enjoys using his shock maul on anyone who gets in his way.

BONE-MEN AND SCRAP CARRION

Those that do not work for the Carrion Guild families survive by dealing in the junk sent from above or the pitiful possessions taken from the dead. While the scrap market is filled with these wretches, there is one man that the Acolytes might have dealings with: Cog Lostok. A fallen Apex surgeon who found his way down into the Gallowsway after a scandalous disgrace, Lostok has prolonged his life through scavenging broken and damaged cybernetics. After years of operating on his failing flesh, he has become a nightmarish mix of meat and machinery, only able to move about with the aid of his worshipful underlings. There are few things that Lostok does not know about the Gallowsway, and fewer things he cannot procure—for a price, of course.

THE DEADMAN'S KNOT

It is possible that the Acolytes do not know much about the Gallowsway and its place within the hive, beyond the fact that this is where much of the lower hive's dead are processed. They can infer that it is probably a poor and decaying place, resting as it does on the lower edge of the hive. Once the GM has set the reason for the arrival of the Acolytes, he should start the action. As they arrive in the Gallowsway, he should make a point of how far down the warband must travel to get there, and the oppressive nature of the hive at this depth. As they disembark, the Sanctionaries meet their lower hive conveyor and lead them to the scene of the crime. For more guidance on how to evoke the mood of the Gallowsway see the *Life Among the Dead* sidebar.

To set the scene, the GM can say or paraphrase the following:

Shortly after receiving your orders to investigate a tip detailing the discovery of some kind of xenos artefact discovered downhive, your warband has made the journey down from the relative civilisation of Desoleum City. Clutching your forged oath-cogs and the false identities they grant, you have watched as the one decaying level after another has slid by, each subtly worse than the one before it. As the rusting hive-lift platform shudders to a halt, the huge corroded metal doors painfully grind open to reveal your stop: the Gallowsway.

The Acolytes are met by Oath-Captain Kaytian Nils (see *Roleplaying Oath-Captain Nils* on page 8 for more details), the officer in charge of the investigation. She clutches an oily extendible tarp, which she offers to the Acolytes to keep off the waters streaming down from the decrepit ceilings high above. While she is happy to take the Acolytes directly to the crime scene, this is a good point for the GM to use her to answer any questions about

the Gallowsway as they push their way through its reeking streets, oily water dripping down on their heads. The GM can provide the basics of the Charnel Houses and the region's place within the lower sections of Desoleum City, referencing **The Gallowsway** on page 5. Nils is also able to provide some information on the local Purity Gate and the role of the Sanctionaries here, as well as her own suspicions that this might be the work of Underhivers. In either case, the journey from the primary conveyor to Charnel House 17 should paint a picture for the Acolytes of the despicable environment they have just wandered into and foreshadow some of the trials ahead.

Oath-Captain Nils leads the Acolytes to the crime scene and fills them in on the basics: there are dozens of dead in a single room, reported to have perished amidst reports of strange noises and terrible phenomena. One of the bodies is wearing a strange necklace that all find unpleasant to look upon, obviously of alien nature. Once there, she ushers the Acolytes into the central chamber of Charnel House 17. The GM can read or paraphrase the following aloud:

Entering Charnel House 17, you walk in on a scene of utter carnage. The walls are spattered with blood and visceral fluids, the ground littered with tangled limbs of mutilated bodies, the aftermath of a terrible and brutal melee. In the centre of the carnage, a single body stands out, on the top of the pile, facing upward, an odd pendant visible around his neck. The Sanctionaries at the scene are visibly unsettled, and you can hear them whispering about unnatural powers at work causing the dead to attack the living, even as they glance suspiciously in your direction.

They must now inspect the scene and discover what transpired and the ramifications that follow for the rest of the hive. The investigation in the Gallowsway starts here and eventually leads to the Fayne Mortuarius, where the Acolytes discover the existence of the Blessed Flesh cult and the extent of the corpse theft. How drawn out the GM wishes to make this section is up to him, though he can have the Acolytes explore the Gallowsway extensively as they gather enough information to point them at the Mortuarius. During this section, their only real enemies are the Blessed Flesh cultists Ferrue has dispatched to recover the xenos pendant (itself a fragment of his larger xenos artefact), though there are ample opportunities for social interaction and nefarious activities.

The dead man wearing the pendant is Darnis Fayne, Ferrue's younger brother, though his identity is not immediately apparent as he has been badly disfigured in the fight. Likewise, many of the other bodies are members of his Carrion Guild, while the rest are the remains of its decaying residents. Examining the crime scene and the bodies, the Acolytes are able to learn the following clues:

- Only some of the bodies wear oath-cogs linked to Charnel House 17.
- The man wearing the pendant (Darnis Fayne) does not wear an oath-cog (it was torn off during the combat), but he does seem to be dressed in a manner similar (though of higher quality) to the other bodies with oath-cogs.
- The pendant around Darnis's neck is clearly not natural and is always cold to the touch. It feels prickly, as if covered in tiny invisible needles.

A closer examination of the pendant with a **Routine (+20) Awareness test** reveals that it is not actually a pendant at all—there is no integrated chain nor an eyehole to thread; rather, it is looped up with twine—but looks more like a shard from some larger object.

ROLEPLAYING OATH-CAPTAIN NILS

Nils is in charge of the local Sanctionaries and the commander of the Purity Gate separating the city from the Underhive proper. A well-groomed, militaristic-looking woman, she has the hard stare and cold demeanour of an Enforcer that has seen her share of the worst the hive has to offer. Nils's main character trait is that she is a stickler for the rules, and is very inflexible when it comes to exploiting grey areas. This is something that might put her at odds with the Acolytes if they take the law into their own hands, unless they reveal their true identities. She cooperates with the Acolytes, as long as she sees them as acting in an official capacity, and offers her assistance as required. If they respect her and her men, she respects them. If they stray too far outside the law (even if they reveal themselves to be linked to the Inquisition), she could withhold aid and/or provide sub-par assistance, though never actually refuses to follow orders.

The other aspect of Nils's character which can have an impact is her hatred of the Red Walk. Having fought elements of the gang on and off for years, she has come to despise all gangers, and this gang especially. Her own personal desire is to see them destroyed, and actively works to this end if she has the chance. If she learns that the Acolytes have befriended the Red Walk, she might refuse to send aid, even to the point of sealing the Purity Gate against them. Nils would likely only send her Sanctionaries downhive to combat the cult if the Acolytes manage to disperse the Red Walk, or let the dead destroy Gantry.

A **Very Hard (–30) Psyniscience test** reveals the foul taint of the Warp on it, but **Forbidden Lore tests** do not reveal its origin, only that it does not resemble any of the marks of the Ruinous Powers.

A **Challenging (+0) Medicae test** reveals that most of the bodies seem to have been dead longer (at least a few days) than those wearing oath-cogs, and could not have fought in the attack. A **Difficult (–10) Awareness test** also turns up Darnis's badly damaged oath-cog. A **Hard (–20) Tech-Use test** can repair it to indicate his name and higher position within the Charnel House if an Acolyte is versed in Desoleum oath-cogs (otherwise, a **Routine (+20) Inquiry test** with the Sanctuaries reveals the information). If the Tech-Use test is failed, the cog can be turned over to the Sanctuaries for their analysis, and they can provide the information to the Acolytes in a later encounter at the GM's discretion.

It should become obvious that something unusual happened here, the rage and madness of the crime scene making the Acolytes feel uncomfortable the longer they linger. The pendant also has its own unsettling presence, the very thing that caught Nils's attention, and none of the other Sanctionaries go near it.

Once they have searched the scene and gathered their clues, the next step is to find the identity of the man wearing the pendant (if they did not find his oath-cog), something Nils can point out if they are unsure of the best way to discover the origins of the artefact. If they have learned his identity, they still need to learn more about him. This means taking what they know and exploring the Gallowsway looking for answers.

RUNNING THE INVESTIGATION

In each of the major encounters, there are clues that lead the Acolytes onto the next encounter and shed more light into just what is going on. These have been divided into clues that can be learnt without a test, and those that require a test to uncover. The players can discover the former through examining the location and asking questions. These clues point the Acolytes in the direction of the next encounter, but offer no additional benefits. The latter can only be found with successful tests after asking the right questions, or looking in the right places. These offer bonuses in the form of additional useful information about the locale, allies, and enemies. The GM should allow the PCs to find clues naturally, giving them time to ask questions and explore the crime scenes. Only when the PCs are finished should he possibly provide unrevealed bullet-pointed clues (Oath-Captain Nils is a good method of passing on obvious clues the PCs might miss). The GM should also reward the PCs with other clues if they come up with good theories, finely roleplay the situation, ask the right questions, or look in the right places, even if they fail their tests. Ultimately, the investigation should keep flowing, pausing only long enough for the PCs to feel that they have made a breakthrough themselves, but never too long that it becomes frustrating and the adventure stalls.

Various people and places hold clues to what Darnis was up to, and something of the origins of the pendant. Principle among these are the Carrion Guilder families, the Scrap merchants, and the Sanctionaries. If the Acolytes are unsure about the first step, Nils can suggest the Carrion Guilder families might know something about the dead man and the pendant, and they might be a good place to start.

HOUSES OF DEATH

There are three main Charnel Houses the Acolytes can visit besides the Fayne House, each with its own agendas. The GM can use these Houses to pass on some of the basic information about the Faynes to the Acolytes, but if the GM wants to further flesh out the adventure, they can also be used to add additional plots and encounters as detailed below.

Vuris Keth of Charnel House 9: Vuris is more than a little insane, and if the Acolytes want to get anything useful out of him, they will need to win an **Opposed Intelligence** test against Keth's value of 30, with the Acolytes at a -10 penalty. If successful, they are able to learn the identity of Fayne and the existence of his two brothers, but little else. The GM can use Vuris to drop other clues, throwing in things such as, "down below is where the bodies go..." or "it's in the marrow of the matter you will find the truth..." into his ramblings.

Unknown to even himself, Vuris is a latent psyker and prone to visions and insights. If the Acolytes discern this (perhaps by using a **Very Hard (-20) Psyniscience** test or similar means) they could turn him in or try to use him for their own ends.

Eris Vlador of Charnel House 38: Eris is quite happy to receive the Acolytes and will be able to tell them all about her suspicions of the Fayne Brothers. To get this information, however, they must endure a long meal with her. The GM can arrange this as either a dull social engagement or something more sinister. Eris's other main source of income is distilling drugs from the corpses her House processes, drugs she imbibes herself on occasion, and she is not above putting in the food and drinks of her guests—all to "enhance" the encounter. The GM can use any of the drugs found in Chapter V of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook, but should not endanger the lives of the Acolytes.

Jayir Gyis of Charnel House 5: Jayir is reticent in welcoming the Acolytes, but does offer information on the Fayne Brothers if asked. Unlike the others, Jayir is also involved in the corpse trade and with the Red Walk. He is an ex-Sanctionary, and if the Acolytes are using this as their disguise, he quickly sees through it. The GM should give the Acolytes a chance to get some more information from Jayir if they question him carefully and succeed on an **Opposed Charm** or **Intimidate** test against his Willpower of 35. He might tell them gangers come and take the bodies from the Mortuarius, but little more. Visiting Jayir and leaving him intact reveals the investigation to both the Red Walk and the Blessed Flesh, possibly with Jayir's suspicions about their false identities.

DETRITUS OF THE DEAD

There is little of interest to the Acolytes in the Gallowsway scrap-market, but if they talk to Cog Lostok he might be able to give them some more clues about the Faynes, or to where to find the origins of the pendant. Lostok works purely on traded goods and favours, and hints that he knows some useful things but demands fair trade for them. Charming, threatening, or trying to torture Lostok are all equally pointless, given that he is more machine than man, and has long given up his fear of death. If the Acolytes are willing to help him, he asks that they do one of the following:

- **Taking out a Rival:** One of Lostok's rivals is a Red Walk ganger called Facebiter, who brings up scrap from downhive. Facebiter and some of his friends are known to wander the area around the Drains, where Lostok thinks is best to take him out. This is a confrontation with a small group of Red Walk Gangers (see page 25), though it might cause problems later with Vornas Crimson, leader of the gang.
- **Lost in the Boneyard:** Lostok wants some scrap recovered that he has heard is somewhere in the Boneyard. This requires a good day of searching (or 1d5 hours on a successful **Challenging (+0) Awareness** or **Tech-Use** test) and a possible encounter with bonepicker scavengers (see page 24) or a possible Blessed Flesh ambush (see page 23).
- **A Bit of Chirurgery:** Lostok needs some work on his decaying body. This means either an Acolyte making a **Hard (-20) Medicae** test or donating blood and muscle (counting as one point of damage to the limb of their choice).

Lostok can tell the Acolytes about the Faynes, but also that Tormus has long since departed and Ferrue seems to be into some illicit dealings. He knows something about the existence of a corpse trade, and would suggest that if records exist, they would be in the Mortuarius offices. Regarding the artefact, he does not know where it came from, but thinks that it is probably found in one of the Mortuarius Factorums, as these kinds of things are often taken off bodies.

A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

At some point during the Acolytes' exploration of the Gallowsway, Ferrue's people make their move. Their mission is to retrieve the pendant and, if possible, recover Darnis's body. They are among the best he has, and should act accordingly, scouting out the Acolytes first and gathering information on them before deciding how best to strike. The number of cultists present in the ambush depends on the strength of the Acolytes, and the GM should refer to page 382 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook for guidelines on crafting appropriate threats. For details on the Blessed Flesh attackers, see page 23 of this book.

Ferrue's agents arrived too late to recover the body or the artefact from Charnel House 17. The Acolytes are already on the scene when they arrive, and so the cultists fall back into the shadows to plan their attack. The Blessed Flesh has members among the workers of the House and the Fayne Mortuarius, and they readily pass any information about suspicious arrivals to the assassins. This means that unless the Acolytes take great pains to keep their movements secret and limit their exposure to the Gallowsway's denizens, then the cultists should have a good idea of their numbers and armaments. If the Acolytes reveal they are working for the Inquisition (see **Using Inquisitorial Power**, page 5), the cultists call in reinforcements to bolster their forces.

Once the agents have determined the Acolytes' disposition and strength, as well as ascertained they have the artefact (something they can learn from their contacts in the Sanctionaries), they devise an ambush to recover it. They also try to recover Darnis's body, though are under orders to prioritise the artefact first, and retreat as soon as they have it. Unless the Acolytes have revealed their Inquisition connections—and as a result the larger danger this poses to the Blessed Flesh—the cultists are not concerned with killing them, just doing what is necessary to get back their master's artefact. There are a number of ways in which the cultist attack can happen, and the GM can use any of the ideas below when setting the ambush.

Hidden in Plain Sight: The cultists might attempt to attack in a crowded area at the Drains or the Scrap Market. Unless the Acolytes are especially vigilant, the cultists should be able to get close as they are dressed in common clothing. They do show subtle signs of corruption, though, and if the PCs make a **Difficult (-10) Awareness test** they can identify the cultists. If they achieve four or more DoS, the PCs can even surprise them before the attack starts. The GM can treat the crowded area as difficult terrain with abundant cover and imposing a -10 penalty on attack tests.

Disguised Threat: The cultists disguise themselves as Sanctionaries to get close to the Acolytes. They might even try to split them up by leading some away from the others before they strike. If Oath-Captain Nils is present, she likely sees through the disguise, but otherwise it will be an **Opposed test** between the Acolytes' **Awareness** and the cultists' **Stealth** skills. The GM should only allow the Acolytes' to make this test if the PCs are actively suspicious of the Sanctionaries, but even then they suffer a -10 penalty on their test unless any have a solid Desoleum background, and so would better recognise any false identities. If the situation presents itself, the GM could even have the cultists try to take the artefact without combat, trying their social skills to charm, deceive, or coerce it into their possession.

RUNNING THE BLESSED FLESH CULT

The Blessed Flesh is a splinter sect of the Callers of Sorrow, both cults dedicated to Father Nurgle. Ferrue formed the Blessed Flesh when he gained power from the xenos artefact and stepped out from his older brother's shadow. Because the artefact has granted Ferrue the power over dead flesh, he has become obsessed with that aspect of the Plague Father. Blessed Flesh cultists are usually identifiable by their self-mutilation. They commonly stick old nails, bits of metal, and bone through their bodies, and allow the surrounding flesh to become infected. The GM should play this up when the Acolytes encounter Blessed Flesh cultists, describing their puckered, red flesh around pins and blades still in their bodies, or the way they pause to lick their wounds when cut or shot. The cultists also have a foul smell of infection about them, and even when fully robed the GM can allow the Acolytes a chance to smell them on an **Ordinary (+10) Awareness test**.

Dangerous Ground: The cultists choose a spot for the ambush that gives them the advantage of high ground, good fields of fire, and an open killing ground. Unless they use disguise or crowds, or discovery forces them to fight, the attack occurs in a clear area with no cover within 12 metres. The cultists all have good cover and lines of sight, and to reach them the PCs are forced to cross difficult terrain once they have found cover, then climb 6–9 metres.

Prime locations include the Drains, where the chaotic ruins create a tangle of shadows and hiding spots, or the Boneyard, with its seas of scrap. Half the cultists offer covering fire while the others attack the Acolyte with the pendant, trying to take it. As soon as they have it, they try to make their escape. If things go badly for them (half their numbers fall), they retreat and regroup. Ideally, the Acolytes pursue, as an escaping cultist is able to convey either the artefact or useful data about the Acolytes back to Ferrue.

The GM should make the initial fight fairly quick, lasting only a few rounds until one side is obviously gaining the upper hand. If the cultists can achieve surprise, they target the Acolyte with the pendant with smoke or stun grenades. They then try to snatch it before the PCs can react, while their brethren give covering fire. If this fails, the cultists put up a bit of a fight, but once it is clear they cannot get the pendant quickly, they will retreat to regroup.

THE MORTUARIUS

The first part of the adventure concludes at the Fayne Mortuarius. Unremarkable among the other processing facilities, it differs in that below its blood-stained floors and rusting machines lurks the cult nest of the Blessed Flesh. The Acolytes have been drawn either by information gained from a captured cultist, or discovered clues that point to strange comings and goings at this location. How the Acolytes choose to tackle the Mortuarius and the resistance they encounter depends on certain factors, such as whether the cult knows they are coming and if their true identity has been revealed. It also depends on whether they have arrived with a plan, or simply came here by accident or as the result of a chase.

There are three main ways the Acolytes arrive at the Mortuarius, and these drive how the encounter plays out:

A Chance Discovery: It is possible that once the Acolytes uncover the identity of Darnis Fayne, they might decide to investigate the Mortuarius. However, unless they are very thorough, they do not find any presence of the cult as its holdings are well hidden below the main level, and its members blend in with the other workers. Treat this as an **Arduous (-40) Scrutiny test**. If the Acolytes come up with a powerful way of uncovering the cult (such as using psychic powers), the GM can have them stumble onto the cult's presence. This can in turn lead to a **Frontal Attack** (see below), unless the Acolytes have been very clandestine in their methods of inspection.

Frontal Attack: If the Acolytes enter the Mortuarius openly, either because they lack the skills at subterfuge or do not wish to use them, the cult reacts accordingly. The cultists are under orders from Ferrue to hide from any cursory inspection from Sanctionaries or the like. Unless the Acolytes know what they are looking for, or are excessively belligerent, the cult members stay out of their way. Should the Acolytes try to force their way into the Overseer's Office, or attack suspected cultists, they are met with force as the Blessed Flesh attacks. This should be a challenging fire-fight, but unless the cult knows the warband acts in the name of the Inquisition, they treat this as they would any of the other common squabbles in the Gallowsway, and only seek to drive the attacking Acolytes off.

The Stealthy Approach: If the Acolytes have kept a low profile and their cover intact, they might be able to enter the Mortuarius undetected. This means either posing as workers, perhaps coercing or replacing residents of the Drains or from one of the other Carrion Guilder Houses, or sneaking in and keeping out of sight.

THE CHASE

Whether or not the cultists claim the artefact after the attack, they try to make their escape. This leads to a chase across the Gallowsway as they make for the secret Underhive passages. If more than one cultist is alive after the ambush, they also split up to hopefully divide the Acolytes and gain a better chance at escape. If the cultists got the artefact, then in the confusion it is difficult to tell which one has it. The GM can have any PC close enough to have seen the theft (such as the Acolyte who was holding the pendant) make a **Challenging (+0) Awareness test** to work it out. Catching a cultist requires an extended **Opposed Agility test**, with the first to five DoS winning. However, once or twice during the chase, the GM should throw in some obstacles to try to slow the Acolytes down and add to the excitement.

Unstable Ground: The cultist tries to outmanoeuvre his pursuer by leading him across gantries at the Drains or through the ruins of the Boneyard. The height (at least nine metres) should make this pursuit worrisome. If the Acolyte attempts any actions (such as firing a weapon) and scores three or more DoF, he must immediately make a **Challenging (+0) Acrobatics** or **Ordinary (+10) Athletics test** or fall (see page 243 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook**).

Short Firefight: The cultist stops around a bend or behind some cover to fire off a few shots at his pursuer. Conduct a single round of combat before the cultist runs on (provided he is still able).

Human Shields: The cultist runs into a crowd of workers, trying to use them as cover. The Acolyte has a chance to take some shots. Treat the cultist as in cover, with misses of 2 or more DoF hitting bystanders.

Lost in the Rain: Running into an area of particularly heavy rain, both the Acolyte and cultist must make **Opposed Difficult (-10) Awareness tests**. The winner spots the other, and can take a single shot at his enemy before he leaves.

Unwelcome Aid: A Sanctionary spots the furious chase, but cannot distinguish cultist from Acolyte. The GM randomly determines one of the members of the chase, and has the Sanctionary take a shot at him.

Blending In: The cultist pauses in a crowd to hide. The Acolyte must make a **Difficult (-10) Awareness test** to spot him and continue the chase. Alternatively, if he fires his weapon in the air, or uses the name of the Inquisition or Sanctionaries, the crowd scatters to reveal the cultist.

The wild chase, and any combats as part of it, can depress the warband's Subtlety at the GM's discretion. If an Acolyte catches a cultist, the GM can run a few quick rounds of combat (the cultists are fanatics and fight to the death if cornered), but should go easy on the Acolyte(s) and allow him to wrap it up fairly quickly. A dead cultist provides clues pointing to the Fayne Mortuarius, while a live one provides much of the details of Ferrue's operations—though not his ultimate plans—if expertly questioned.

This is no small feat; while the upper levels of the Factorum have little in the way of security, the lower levels controlled by the cult are routinely patrolled. Here, the Acolytes should make Opposed tests against any cult patrols, using their **Deceive** and **Stealth** skills against the cultists' **Awareness**. The GM should assign difficulties to each test based on the warband's preparation, the lateness of the hour, and if their **Subtlety** has dropped low enough that it is likely the cult is aware of them.

The players can also try approaching openly as corpse-buyers or even attempt to join the cult. The Game Master should perform **Subtlety** tests (the difficulty on these tests varying with their approach and their cover story, if they have used one) to see if such methods can be successful. Badly failed tests can possibly indicate the cult is ready for them and has a trap waiting (see the **Walking Into a Trap** sidebar).

FACTORUM MORTUARIUS

The Factorum Mortuarius is a colossal structure which sprawls over many levels, connected to the Gallowsway by various tunnels and conveyors constantly moving in fresh dead and expelling their rendered remains. Workers and lowly Tech-Priests tend to the process, scuttling about the blood-soaked machinery like sluggish beetles. There are some secret ways to reach the Mortuarius, such as old vent shafts and hidden drainage ducts, but unless the Acolytes pry this information from a cultist or somehow track down ancient Administratum records of the area, they must use more direct routes. These would be along the Avenue of the Dead (which links all the Mortuarius with the centre of the Gallowsway) or the tunnel from Charnel House 17. The Mortuarius is then divided into a number of areas, each blending into the next, which the Acolytes must traverse to reach the office and any useful information.

Body Dock: The entrance to the Mortuarius is a huge chamber where the corpses are gathered, processed, and categorised before being sent to the various other areas of the factorum for disassembly and destruction. Larger than the storage racks at the Charnel House, the Dock contains thousands of bodies stacked from floor to ceiling awaiting their turn on the conveyor. Often indistinguishable from the corpses, hunched workers in ragged coveralls move among the dead, loading them onto the conveyors and checking for anything of worth they might pilfer.

Blood-Wash: The first of the processes is the Blood-Wash, where fluids are drained from the corpses and divided into useful products. As the bodies travel down the conveyors, great syringe-studded machines draw out their liquids, pumping them down a tangle of pipes and tubes dividing it by type. The machines are ancient, and so prone to clogging and jamming that they must be constantly washed with hoses from above or manually cleared. Years of clogging and the constant drip and drizzle of leaking pipes has left the whole floor of the blood-wash waste-deep in foul water, oil, and a multi-coloured cocktail of bodily fluids.

Flensing Pits: Once the bodies have been drained, a series of thrashers strip away the desiccated remains, along with clothes and any remaining possessions. Whirling blades and hacking knives take care of most of the meat, and acid sprays rinse the remnants away. Straying from the gantries over the Flensing Pits is extremely dangerous; there are pockets of air thick with acid compounds, and the savage shredding machines do not discriminate between the living and the dead.

WALKING INTO A TRAP

If the Acolytes have been unsubtle in their investigation, or any of the cultists escaped from the ambush, then the cult is probably ready for them when they reach the Mortuarius. They might lay a trap, allowing the warband to get deep into the heart of the plant before surrounding and trying to capture them. If the Acolytes put up too much resistance, however, they do not hesitate to attempt to kill them. Their favoured spot for such an ambush is the lower section of the Blood-Wash, striking while the Acolytes cross the sluice-gates and are slowed in the waist-deep waters. From here, they can fire down from the gantries and walkways while the Acolytes have little cover and are slowed. Alternatively, the cultists might use the machinery against the Acolytes, as detailed in **A Miserable Place to Die** (see page 13). Should the cult learn of the warband's true identity, they make no effort at capture and simply aim for death.

Bone Grinder: Finally, the skeletal remains are broken down to dust. The Bone Grinder is the central chamber of the Mortuarius, a cavernous dome overlooking a deep well, with sides covered in layers of grinding metal teeth. The well empties into holding vats for reclamation into a variety of products, and the chamber is forever filled with a fog of whitish powder. Workers toil here constantly, practically blind from the dust and deaf from the huge machines, and many operate the ancient machines by touch alone.

Overseer's Office: Suspended above the Bone Grinder on one edge of the dome is the Overseer's Office, from where Darnis Fayne (and his brothers before him) conducted the affairs of the Mortuarius. Now it is sealed, awaiting Ferrue's instruction as to who will take over, and still contains much in the way of incriminating evidence against the Faynes as to their operations.

PRESENCE OF THE BLESSED FLESH

Ever since the Fayne brothers embraced the worship of the Dark Gods, their Mortuarius has been held firmly in the hands of the Blessed Flesh. Ferrue uses it as his base of operations when he is not in the Underhive. Of the hundreds of workers that keep the Mortuarius running, only a handful are true cultists, and fewer still capable fighters. Even so, the majority of the workers are aware of the cult in some sense, knowing that Ferrue favours some men, and to cross them is to earn a one way trip down the Bone Grinder.

While the Acolytes are in the Mortuarius, the GM should consider anyone they encounter to be an enemy. While only a small number of these are actively hostile, the rest can raise the alarm if the Acolytes try to sneak in. There is no single area of the factorum where the cult keeps its weapons and supplies. These are hidden throughout the Mortuarius, in bolt-holes and service tunnels decked with shrines and profane graffiti. Apart from the obviously damning nature of these caches, the real information about Ferrue and his operations is locked in the Overseer's Office. If the PCs have gained useful information beforehand, this should be the objective for their attack/infiltration. If the Acolytes pay no attention to it, however, the GM can have several cultists retreat there or call out for more defenders to that location.

A MISERABLE PLACE TO DIE

The GM should have a very challenging group of cultists here, using the threat rating guidelines from page 382 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook, probably at least twice as many cultists as there are Acolytes. There can also be as many cult sympathisers as needed to get in the way, close or open doors, or operate machinery should the Acolytes be careless enough to try working their way down the conveyors. These sympathisers are effectively non-combatants, and run from any show of force but do blend in with the hundreds of normal workers. The Acolytes can gun down everyone they see, caring little for innocence, but this should result in them running out of ammunition before the real cultists attack. The cultists only move openly against the warband if the Acolytes attack them, try to get into the Overseer's Office, or have already learned for whom the cultists really work. Equally, if any of the assassins survived to report their actions, the Acolytes are deemed dangerous enough to warrant traps.

If a fight breaks out in the Mortuarius, the cultists are sure to use their greater knowledge of the factorum to their advantage, and try to turn the environment against the Acolytes. The cultists only engage in combat for a few rounds before falling back to a new position. This generally means the fight either starts in the Blood-Wash and travels to the Bone Grinder (in the case of a trap or a frontal attack by the Acolytes), or starts in the Bone Grinder and falls back to the Blood-Wash, if the Acolytes attempt to force their way into the Overseer's Office. Each location should have a group of enemies to fight, and their size means even if they are cleansed it can take two rounds just to race across each, especially if cultists are shooting at them. The GM can use the following guidelines for fighting in the Mortuarius:

Gates and Locks: As the cultists move about, sympathisers close the seals between the Mortuarius levels and raise gantries behind them. This means unless the Acolytes are right on the heels of a cultist (and even then, his friends might close a thick, rusted door on him), they might want to find another way around. Opening these requires a **Difficult (-10) Security test** to pick a lock, or an Acolyte can force it open with a **Hard (-20) Athletics test**. Each of the heavily sealed doors counts as having 5 Armour points (see page 229 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook for rules on damaging cover).

Bloodbath: Fighting in the Blood-Wash means fighting in waist-deep liquid that counts as difficult terrain. Cultists and Acolytes can hide from sight completely if they are willing to duck under the filth and hold their breath.

Razor's Edge: If Acolytes move about the Flensing Pits while not on a gantry, each turn they must make a **Routine (+20) Athletics test** or get cut by the sharp blades for 1d10 Rending damage with a Penetration of 1 to a random location. Should they get four or more DoF, they have stumbled into something more deadly and suffer 3d10 damage instead.

Death's Dust: Fighting anywhere near the Bone Grinder (and by extension the Overseer's Office) imposes a -20 on Ballistic Skill tests and a -40 on any Perception tests using hearing. Each character's visibility is restricted to 2d10 metres.

THE TRAIL BELOW...

If the Acolytes get into the Overseer's Office, and it is still relatively intact, they are able to uncover the following clues:

- Records show that Ferrue is sending a significant amount of bodies below to the town of Gantry.
- There are numerous references to someplace called the "temple," which seems to be located deeper in the Underhive.
- This temple is the main gathering area for Ferrue's cult, which he calls the Blessed Flesh.
- There are scribbled notes about a "grand test" and "wiping them out right before launching the great attack," but nothing indicating what the test is or who the target might be.
- There are also records, along with various profane scrawlings, that Ferrue has made a deal with a merchant in Gantry to secure more weapons and artefacts for his cult.

If one of the Acolytes can interrogate Ferrue's encrypted cogitator with a **Difficult (-10) Security test**, they also learn that Ferrue has extensive plans for the Gallowsway. There are notations on his maps that look like points of attack, along with alarmingly large numbers next to them which seem to indicate the forces he is committing to them.

With the information found here (or tortured out of captured cultists), the Acolytes now have uncovered enough information to know that Ferrue Fayne seems to be behind the massacre at the Charnel House and knows something about the pendant. They also know that he is overseeing a cult known as the Blessed Flesh and is actively moving bodies down into the Underhive. All of this should point them firmly in the direction of Gantry and toward the hideout of the Blessed Flesh.

EVOKING THE UNDERHIVE

The GM should try to impress upon the players the differences between the Gallowsway and the lower areas beyond. Even though the Gallowsway languishes in the shadow of Desoleum City, mired in its filth and despair, it is still a place of life and order. By comparison, once the Acolytes pass through the pressure doors of the Purity Gate, leaving its fortified walls and autocannon defences behind, they enter a truly desolate realm. No clear path guides their way nor is there reliable air or light. Things are constantly glimpses in the dark, and the ground periodically shifts and shudders as the gigatonnes above them move and settle. The Acolytes have to cross a wasteland of broken tunnels and corridors, finding ways down, through and around endless fallen obstacles. The air itself tastes different, thick with the tang of rust and rot, when it is not nearly too thin to breathe or too chokingly thick. The Acolytes have left hive and Imperial law behind, something which should become more and more obvious the deeper they delve.

PART II: THE RED WALK

"They call this the bottom of the hive. Hah! I know for a fact there is a whole lot more even farther down, some nasty rubbish below Gantry."

—Omar Endish, Purveyor of Sacrosanct Salvage

The second part of the adventure begins with the Acolytes venturing past the Purity Gate and following the body trade by the foul scent of the Blessed Flesh to its roots downhive. After attacks from the cultists and then a raid at the Mortuarius, the Acolytes should have enough clues to point them firmly in the direction of Gantry. These also point beyond, where it seems a healthy trade in corpses is ongoing. It should also be apparent by this stage that the origins of the pendant and its master are also to be found somewhere in the dark below.

Leaving the relative safety of the Gallowsway is not a step to be taken lightly, however. Oath-Captain Nils is quick to point out that once they pass through the Purity Gate they are on their own, and beyond even the dubious protection of her Sanctionaries. She also refuses any offers to join the Acolytes, unless they are willing to reveal their true identities and attempt to exert their authority.

Before the Acolytes set off, they can gather information on Gantry and the regions below the Gallowsway. Nils and numerous citizens are able to fill them in on the basics, though this can be slanted or slightly misleading, depending on who they ask and how the Acolytes have represented themselves to the populace. While neither the Oath-Captain nor the residents know much in the way of exact detail, they can give a broad overview of the town. Most know the Gantry is firmly in the hands of a fearsome Fleshcutter gang known as the Red Walk. More information on Fleshcutters can be found on page 335 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook.

Before they leave, the GM can also use Nils to remind them that this would be a good point to stock up on ammo and supplies. Thus armed, the Acolytes are now ready to venture downhive and into the unknown.

THE TOWN OF GANTRY

Gantry is the Underhive settlement closest to the Gallowsway, located about 10 hours down through the ruins past the Purity Gate. Years ago, a hive-quake collapsed the area below the Gallowsway and turned it into a twisted steel wilderness in an enormous cavern of plasteel and rock. Gang law rules here now, where miscreants and criminals gather to shelter from the righteous anger of the Sanctionaries. Though there is occasional talk of reclaiming and restoring the area, nothing has ever been done. It is a good place to buy, sell, and trade illicit goods, and Ferrue has taken to using it as a base from which to organise the trade of bodies from the Mortuarius for his own dark ends.

Suspended over a section of the Stygian Wash (a great, dank sump river that runs down into hive bottom), Gantry is home to several thousand souls. Most are members of the Red Walk, but there is also a good mix of other criminals or unfortunates that have found themselves washed up on its streets. The town itself is divided into several levels, the uppermost controlled by the Red Walk, with various other areas given over to its other enterprises.

THE TANGLE

Gantry hangs from an arch in the hive superstructure, a narrow strut of steel and cable reaching out into the void above a long drop down into the sump. The upper levels, known as the Tangle, are a wild mess of massive supports and chains, where the better-off inhabitants make their homes. The Red Walk controls this area, and its members spend much of their time enjoying the slightly fresher air and stronger light. Even a minor hive tremor or belch of escaped wind can set the whole area swaying back and forth, cables snapping against each other like gunshots. The locals have long since acclimatised to the town's rickety nature, but this should be somewhat unsettling for those newly arrived to Gantry.

RED SKY SHIP

Hanging from the very end of Gantry's extension over the sump are the remains of a ship's hull, though it is unclear whether it once plied water or void. It is painted in the Red Walk's gaudy graffiti, and is both their base of operations as well as the residence of their leader, Vornas Crimson. It has been refitted with all the luxury that the Underhive can offer, from scavenged finery to (badly) handcrafted furniture, and it passes for a palace within the town. The underside of the ship has a functioning weapon pod with a heavy bolter, which the Red Walk uses to defend the pulley-lifts connecting the town with the sump.

RUST RACEWAY

Various ramps and gangways connect the town's many levels, some hanging over the sump and others fully enclosed within its interior. The Rust Raceway is the principle ramp, running all the way down from the Tangle to the sump lifts below. Patched and decaying, it lives up to its name. In some places, travellers must step around large holes with nothing but a long fall and a messy end below them. The Red Walk use the Raceway from time to time for gambling and initiations, pitting gangers or other residents against each other in a mad dash either up or down the length of the town. Most usually end in someone falling screaming to their death, much to the amusement of the onlookers and gamblers.

ENDISH MANOR

Next to Vornas, Omar Endish is the most powerful man in Gantry. A whole section of the town, known loftily as Endish Manor, is his demesne. Though not as well appointed as the Red Sky Ship, it does offer what passes for comfort within the Underhive and is the heart of Omar's operations. The Manor contains much of the material wealth of Gantry, as Omar oversees the storage and safekeeping of goods for both himself and Vornas. Ferrue has used the Manor as a hub for the corpse trade; several of the Manor's stock rooms are given over to bodies, many of which are clearly more recent guests, given their dress and state of decomposition.

ROLEPLAYING OMAR ENDISH

The self-appointed head merchant of Gantry, Endish was around long before the arrival of the Red Walk. An ageing man with stringy grey hair and a scraggly beard, only his sharp eyes and stained (but mismatched) noble attire mark him out as someone important. Endish is first and foremost a businessman, and is always looking to make a deal. This makes him a counterpoint to the savagery and violence of Vornas, giving the Acolytes someone with whom they might reason. Though Endish knows about the body trade, he knows little of the cult, as Ferrue prefers to deal directly with Vornas. The GM can use Endish to offer the Acolytes an ally in Gantry if they openly move against Vornas, or arrive loudly claiming their intent to uncover the cult. Endish is also a survivor and good judge of which way the sump-winds are blowing. If it looks like the Acolytes are going to be victorious, he quickly changes sides to aid them. More on Omar Endish can be found on page 17.

SUMP LIFTS

The lower levels contain the poorest residences and the sump lifts, which use pulley systems to ferry scavengers down to the Stygian Wash and back again. Dark and foul, the lifts are cluttered with tonnes of rubbish pulled up from the river. The locals pick over the junk, rarely finding anything more but enough for another day's drink. Some locals even engage in sump fishing rather than risking a trip below, sending down long, hooked lines to see what they can pull up. Some are dragged into the river by their lines, a reminder of the monstrous mutant life lurking in the black waters.

SANCTIONARY GALLOWES

Gantry only has one official drinking establishment, which also passes for a trading hall for Endish, as well as a rest stop for Underhive travellers. Known as the Sanctionary Gallows, the badly decayed remains of several corpses wearing Sanctionary uniforms hang from its balcony over the sump. It has been a meeting place for Ferrue and his cultists when travelling between their hideout and the Gallows way above. New arrivals to Gantry are almost always directed to the Gallows, so that Omar and Vornas's men can observe them and decide if they are worth robbing, or are perhaps only good as fresh fodder for the body trade.

GANGS OF DOWN-BELOW

The Red Walk is a splinter gang of the Fleshcutters, a notoriously violent faction known for their love of blades and spilling blood. Vornas Crimson was a Fleshcutter and part of the Red Lions gang farther in-hive, before striking out on his own to create the Red Walk in Gantry. Taking out or absorbing the other gangs in the area, Vornas and the Red Walk have been masters of Gantry for only a few short years, though he has grand plans to extend his influence. This is, in part, why he has chosen to deal with Ferrue, even knowing that the cult leader is tainted in some way and that eventually they will turn on each other. Vornas is content for the time being to gather power selling bodies to Ferrue and providing protection for his cultists, hoping that when Ferrue makes his move on the Gallows way, Vornas will be right beside him to extend his territory.

Recently, relations between the gang and the cult have weakened as Ferrue approaches the time of his ritual, knowing that soon he will not need the gang anymore. This has resulted in gang members and payments going missing, and payments to the gang coming late. Ferrue has also deliberately left a glut of bodies stored in Gantry as part of his plans to animate them and wipe out the town as part of his trial run for the Gallowsway. Vornas thinks he is dealing with just another rival gang, and fails to appreciate the terrible danger Ferrue represents to both him and his town.

ENTERING GANTRY

After many hours of climbing through the chaos and ruin of the Underhive, the Acolytes come out into a vast chamber and a battered sign pointing the way to Gantry. The GM can read or paraphrase the following aloud as they approach the town:

Finally, the rubble-strewn tunnel you are following comes to an end, opening into a wide section of the Underhive where the ceiling is lost in the shadows above. From far below, you can hear the sluggish flow of a sump river. Up ahead in the gloom, you can make out a metallic structure, suspended over a huge chasm which crosses the cavern, flickering with feeble light.

The Acolytes have arrived in Gantry and need to decide their next step. Unless they try to sneak in, they must pass through the town's main gates where it meets the edge of the ruined cliff-face. A cadre of Red Walk gangers stand guard under a crude sign saying "No Guns!" and insist everyone give up those weapons before entering. The gangers do not care who the Acolytes are and do not ask them to identify themselves. As this is the Underhive, they certainly do not check oath-cogs, something that is done all too frequently in the hive proper. The Acolytes witness several other groups entering Gantry, all giving up their guns as a matter of routine. The GM can also have a few sump-dwellers leaving the city, reclaiming their weapons on departure.

The guards themselves carry a few guns, but mostly are armed with blades of all types, from huge swords to thin stilettos, though a twin-linked heavy stubber is mounted above the gate to further enforce their demands. If the Acolytes take exception to giving up their guns, they need to find another way in or another course of action (see the **Surrender Your Arms!** sidebar).

Once within Gantry, the gangers suggest they go to the Gallows if they want supplies and a drink, but no one stops them going wherever they want. At this point, the GM can use either the **Bloody Games** and **Following the Bodies** encounters (or both) to play out the action and their dealing with Vornas, Endish, and any Blessed Flesh members who might be present.

BLOODY GAMES

Vornas pays little mind to the Acolytes, unless they specifically seek him out or start trouble in his town. Talking to anyone reveals that Vornas and the Red Walk are in charge, and some details on the bloody nature of the gang and its leader. If the Acolytes start killing his men, or even an excessive number of average citizens, he sends a group to throw them out. Vornas himself, however, does not make an appearance unless things get really out of hand, such as wholesale slaughtering of his men. The most likely way whereby the Acolytes come into contact with Vornas is if they ask around

SURRENDER YOUR ARMS!

Vornas dislikes guns in the hands of anyone he does not trust—and he trusts very few people indeed. If the Acolytes do not want to have their guns kept in lockup while they are in Gantry, they must attempt to sneak past the gate guards, hide the guns from inspection, try to bribe a guard to let them bring one in, or try to fight their way in, which is not advisable. Sneaking in requires an **Ordinary (+10) Athletics test** to climb out along the cliff and under the town, as well as an **Opposed Challenging (+0) Stealth test** against the patrol's **Ordinary (+10) Awareness** to avoid detection.

Once in the town, the Acolytes need to avoid guards with **Ordinary (+10) Stealth tests**. Discovery at any stage means they are asked to surrender their arms. Hiding guns can only be accomplished with pistols or smaller weapons, and requires the Acolytes make a **Difficult (-10) Opposed Stealth versus Awareness test** at the gate. Bribery requires an **Opposed Challenging (+0) Charm or Deceive test** against the guard's **Willpower**—plus suitable payment. Offering weapons or gear can work towards these tests, with the reverse of the item's availability giving a bonus (a -30 Availability item would grant +30 to the test, for example). The fewer ranged weapons the PCs have at the end of their time in the Gantry, however, more exciting their final encounter becomes.

after the corpse trade. If they are subtle about it, and do not talk to any members of the Red Walk, then they learn that Vornas controls it. They can also hear that there is someone deeper downhive that he deals with; the descriptions of this individual make it clear this is probably a cult member. If they are not subtle, roughing up townfolk or loudly demanding information, they still learn these facts, but Vornas learns about them as well.

In the latter case, Vornas summons the Acolytes to the Red Sky Ship for a meeting. Alternatively, the Acolytes might seek an audience with him when they learn he is connected to the body trade. Sitting on a throne of trophy knives in his gaudy state room, Vornas amusedly asks the Acolytes what their interest in his business is. At this point, he does not consider the Acolytes a threat or even a business opportunity, and is keen to have some fun.

The GM should allow the Acolytes to make any **Charm, Intimidate**, or similar tests if they wish, but he is uninterested in anything they have to say, including that Ferrue is a Chaos worshipper. Regardless of what the Acolytes say to him, Vornas offers them a chance to prove themselves worthy of his attention, saying that he can give them the information or aid they are after if they do so. In reality, Vornas just wants some cruel enjoyment, and possibly any information they might possess about dealings uphive. He is not going to trust the Acolytes or help them, at least not until they help save his town later in the adventure.

There are three tests Vornas wants the Acolytes to complete, and the PCs must choose one of their number to complete a test unaided. Only one Acolyte can complete each test and, though the Acolytes do not know it, success or failure does not really matter to Vornas. He just wants to see blood spilled.

ROLEPLAYING VORNAS CRIMSON

Vornas Crimson is a charming psychopath, with an unhealthy love for sharp objects. Bound in scarred muscle and rattling with piercings when he moves, he only respects strength, especially prowess in hand-to-hand combat. Though he would never trust the Acolytes or fight for their cause out of anything but self-interest or payment, he could become their ally if they prove themselves to him (see **Bloody Games** on page 16). Vornas is also smarter than the average ganger, and could become a valuable aid in the Underhive and even Desoleum City if the Acolytes help his gang survive. More on Vornas Crimson can be found on page 24.

Knife Lock: A knife fight between two unarmoured foes, their arms manacled together on a heavy (1m) chain. Fighting in this fashion is hard and imposes a -10 penalty on WS tests and makes evasion impossible. This is not strictly a fight to the death, typically going until one man yields or falls unconscious. Vornas is not too upset either way, so long as the fight is a good one.

Red Run: The Acolyte must race a ganger down the Rust Raceway. This is an **Extended Opposed Agility** test with the first to ten degrees of successes winning. A runner can make life difficult for the other by trying to push him over the edge or into one of the many holes in the walkway. This costs the runner one of his successes and allows an **Opposed Agility** test, which if successful costs his opponent one success. If the opponent has no successes to spend in this way, he must make a **Difficult (-10) Athletics** test or plummet 20 metres into the noxious river below.

Tangling with Death: Another favoured sport of the Red Walk is fighting in the cables of the Tangle. This is a fight between two opponents armed only with knives, but movement through the thick metal web requires an **Ordinary (+10) Acrobatics** or **Challenging (+0) Athletics** test.

Whether or not the Acolytes win any of the tests, Vornas offers them rudimentary medical attention and a bed for the night. He puts down his heavy flagon amidst the many empties surrounding his throne, thanks them for their entertainment, and staggers away with his guards, promising to talk more with them later.

FOLLOWING THE BODIES

As well as asking about the body trade, the Acolytes can try to find out where the trafficked corpses are stored. Following one of the secret trade caravans from the Gallowsway or skulking about in Gantry, they can learn that the bodies are being taken to Endish Manor. The Manor is protected by Omar's security systems and a pair of ageing (but still dangerous) combat servitors (see page 396 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook**). If they go in during night-cycle, the Acolytes need to make both a **Challenging (+0) Stealth** test to sneak in and a **Challenging (+0) Security** test to bypass the locks and pic-casters, with failure awakening the servitors. Even once inside, every 10 minutes of game time the PCs need to make an **Opposed Ordinary (+10) Stealth** test to avoid the patrolling servitors, though the GM can allow one PC to make a test for the whole group as he gives directions and tells them when to move. Inside, they find the records of bodies arriving and going, as well as several storage lockers filled with hundreds of corpses each. While there are no records of where the bodies are going after Gantry, it seems that all movement downhive has stopped for some reason, and the corpses have begun piling up.

Alternately, the Acolytes can attempt to talk their way in by meeting Endish, who starts with a **Confident Disposition** of 40. Using either **Challenging (+0) Charm** or **Ordinary (+10) Commerce** tests, they can try to broker a deal or tempt him with a good business opportunity. The latter method does not get them a look at his records, but he is happy to talk about the body trade, and curse the corpses slowly rotting in his store rooms. If they inquire about the pendant, he confesses to perhaps having seen it before, though either a **Difficult (-10) Charm** or **Intimidate** test is required to jog his memory as to where. He describes Ferrue from one of his visits to Gantry, though does not know what Ferrue and Vornas talk about. If he is well-treated, Endish can act as an excellent source of information on Gantry. He is still unwilling to go against Vornas, as he has seen personally the screaming, blood-soaked remains the gang leader leaves of his rivals. He has many contacts and favours owed him across the region; if the Acolytes attempt physical harm on what might appear an easy target, they can find themselves attacked or harassed across Gantry. If needed, Omar Endish can be represented with a Desoleum Bondless Dealer (see page 386 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook**).





TORMUS FAYNE IN GANTRY

Tormus Fayne is Ferrue's older brother and the most successful of the three Fayne Brothers. A prominent member of the Callers of Sorrow, he has his concerns over Ferrue's dabbling in xenos items, as well as his brother's lofty ideas about attacking the hive. The latter is a venture he believes is doomed to failure, until he himself leads the effort.

While Tormus plays no direct role in this adventure, the GM can use him to foreshadow future adventures or other dealings with the Callers of Sorrow. The GM have him pose in Gantry as a merchant, where he may deal with the Acolytes, assessing their abilities and perhaps turning them to his own ends. If the Acolytes are not fully aware of Ferrue and his plans, or they have a falling out with Vornas and cannot get his information as to the location of the cult hideout, the GM can use Tormus to fill in the blanks. He is very intelligent and is careful never to place himself in harm's way or incriminate himself, but is also arrogant enough to enjoy meeting with the Acolytes face to face. At the very least, the GM can place Tormus in Gantry, perhaps even having the Acolytes rescue him from some animated dead, so when he returns later they recall his face. If the GM desires Tormus to play a larger role here, use the Preceptor character from page 404 of the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook.

DEAD RISING

After the Acolytes have been in Gantry for a day or so, Ferrue makes his move. This should be enough time for the PCs to determine that Vornas is at the heart of the body trade, and that the ganger is probably the only one who knows even vaguely where the cult's hideout is located. Having been informed that the Acolytes are poking around in Gantry, Ferrue decides to move up his plans slightly and attack the town with the animated dead. His plan was always to use this as a trial for the main attack uphive in the Gallowsway, but he can now use it to also deal with the Acolytes. Drawing on the Warp energies of the xenos artefact, he plans to send an eldritch fog to envelop the town and stir its dead to life.

In this encounter, the Acolytes need firstly to fight for their lives, and then try to save the town from destruction before it is overrun with the dead. The first they are aware of the attack is when a thick mist rises up from the sump to enshroud Gantry. Despite the wretched conditions here, such a fog is unheard of, and many in the underhive town are visibly frightened that the entire region might have begun to collapse.

The fog limits vision to about 10m, and makes sounds indistinct and hard to pinpoint. At first only a few dead stir, such as those left on the paths or the sump lifts waiting to be tipped into the waters. The Acolytes may run into a single animated corpse as it shambles out of the fog, which they should be able to overcome once they identify what it is. Things escalate from this point, with more and more screams in the fog until the Acolytes cannot be sure if it is the dead declaring their rise, or the townsfolk unfortunate enough to meet them. To save themselves and the town, there are a number of things they need to do in order to survive.

REPLACEMENT PLAYER CHARACTERS

It is possible not all of the PCs survive the attack, or will survive the final battle to follow. Gantry, however, can make for a suitable location for new characters. New PCs could perhaps be Red Walk gangers looking for revenge, fallen Tech-Priests or Chirurgeons exiled for suspect experimentations, dissolute nobles, psykers who escaped their duties above (or even Black Ship capture), Imperial Guardsmen who fled downhive after a battle in Desoleum's wastelands, or undercover Sanctionaries. The GM should allow any new characters extensive knowledge of the Underhive, making them an important (and valued) source of lore for the Acolytes as they travel downhive and for future adventures in these regions.

Lock and Load: Unless the Acolytes managed to keep their guns, they are still stored in the lockup near the entry gate. Along the way there, the GM can throw one or two dead to harass them. If they can reach the lockup, they discover several corpses savaging the guards in front of the locked door. The GM should play up the tense nature of this encounter, as one or more Acolytes bash at the door and the others try to hold back the corpses with knives and clubs. Fresh corpses can arrive as needed to ensure the Acolytes do not have an easy time of this. The Acolytes need to either pick the lock with a **Challenging (+0) Security test** or simply bash it open. The lock counts as having 3 Armour points (see page 229 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook for rules on damaging cover).

Seal the Gate: The dead have begun to enter Gantry through the main gate near the lockup. This is readily apparent to the Acolytes, as they can see more and more dead shuffling out from the fog, headed for the town. Closing the gate requires either a **Hard (-20) Athletics test** to push it closed, or a single **Hard (-20) Tech-Use test** to trigger the counter weight and bring it crashing down. If an Acolyte remembers the heavy stubber on the gate, though, this might make things easier for the warband.

Dead Storage: All of the dead in Endish Manor are now hammering on the storeroom doors in an effort to break free. In some places, they have escaped. Omar's servitors are holding them back, but only just. There are too many dead in Endish Manor for the Acolytes to fight them all. The only real options are to either seal it up or somehow destroy the floor and send the Manor dropping down into the sump. Sealing it up requires either defeating Omar's security with a **Challenging (+0) Security test**, or destroying the entrance with demolitions (the doors count as armour value 4; the floors and walls as 5). The Acolytes can even attempt to scavenge the Manor for explosives (requiring a **Difficult (-10) Awareness test**). If desired (such as if the Acolytes are wounded), the GM can arm the servitors with stronger weapons.

Clearing the Ratlines: The other place the dead are entering the town is from the sump lifts. Dozens have already climbed the pulley lines, and hundreds more are right behind them. There are five main lines to cut, each with 3 Armour points. There should be roughly one corpse for each Acolyte not actively cutting a line, but if all Acolytes chose to cut cables and not defend themselves, the dead should attack the entire party. More (1d5-1) arrive each round, but if an Acolyte mans the Red Sky Ship's heavy bolter to target the oncoming corpses, he reduces this by 2 for each degree of success from each shot.

Mopping Up: If the Acolytes manage to seal the main gate, deal with the dead in Endish Manor, and cut the ratlines, then the Red Walk gains the upper hand. In a matter of hours, the dead have been destroyed or thrown back into the sump. The GM does not need to play out these combats, assuming the Acolytes, especially if they are in possession of their firearms, do their part.

In the aftermath of the attack, Vornas meets with the Acolytes if they actively and visibly helped protect his town. Even though he still does not trust them entirely, he knows full well Ferrue is behind the attack and is keen to see the cult leader pay. He offers to guide the Acolytes to the cult hideout if they help him to exact some vengeance, a voyage taking them even further downhive to the true heart of the heresy.

ENCOUNTERS IN GANTRY

In addition to dealing with the Red Walk and Endish, before the climactic battle the GM can use any or all of the following encounters while the Acolytes are in Gantry:

Blessed Company: Most cultists have left the town, knowing of the upcoming attack, but the GM can have one or two lurking about. One the PCs can recognise them from one of the earlier fights in the Gallowsway on a **Very Hard (-30) Awareness test**. If confronted, these cultists attempt to flee. This can lead to a wild chase through Gantry, with the cultists eventually leaping to their death rather than risking capture.

Unfriendly Faces: There are many people in Gantry who would pick a fight with the Acolytes at the slightest provocation. Either townsfolk or gangers, especially in the Gallows, rise to any insult real or imagined. Fights in Gantry, though, usually only involve fists and knives, as gunfire quickly attracts Vornas's attention.

Light Fingers: Many within Gantry, especially its youth, make their living by picking pockets or looting the dead. One of the Acolytes can make an **Opposed Awareness** versus **Stealth test** to catch a pickpocket before he runs off. This could lead to a mad chase down the Rust Raceway, especially if the item stolen was a pistol or even the pendant.

Rough Games: Corpse Cards, Pin-Finger, and Fire-Gut are all common games in Gantry, and the Acolytes can engage in gambling if they wish. The GM can use **Opposed Logic tests** to win scrip (good only in Gantry), trade goods, or even information. The GM should bear in mind the locals are not above cheating or starting a fight if they are losing.

PART III: A PESTILENT HEART

"There is a glorious rot within the heart of Hive Desoleum, one that will see its great foundations crumble and falter until all is decay and ruin!"

—Ferrue Fayne, the Pestifex

In the final part of the adventure, the Acolytes are now poised to close in on the hideout of the Blessed Flesh and put an end to Ferrue and his ruinous dreams. Having dealt with the attack on Gantry and gained information about the location of the cult headquarters, they must now travel down the sump river, taking the dangerous journey deeper still into the Underhive. Before setting off, the GM should give the PCs a chance to rest and regroup, especially if some of them have been seriously injured.

Ferrue is now set to enact his plan, so the pace of events should speed up as the GM maintains a sense that there is a ticking clock overseeing unfolding events. Either Tormus or Vornas can give hints about the impending attack on the Gallowsway. If the Acolytes uncovered Ferrue's notes from the Mortuarius, then they too might be aware that the attack at Gantry was the test, and that the great attack is soon to come. Finally, as the Acolytes travel down the sump river, there should be a sense of building Warp energy, horrifying to psykers and an unpleasant skin-crawling heat to others, along with constant sightings of twitching corpses half-submerged in the sump.

VOYAGE ACROSS THE SUMP

Having discovered the location of the hideout, the Acolytes are lowered down from Gantry into the Stygian Wash, where they board one of the scrap-barges for their voyage. If they have forged an alliance with Vornas, he sends some of his gangers along to help the Acolytes. If the Acolytes have tipped their true identity to Nils (or called in favours from above her head), they might be able to get some support from the Sanctionaries at this point as well. Having backup from both groups should make for an interesting trip downhive, especially if Nils and Vornas also come along.

In either case, the GM can provide a dozen or so extra bodies to travel with them, possibly Gantry residents who feel honour-bound to aid those who saved their lives, those looking for revenge against the corpse-masters, or simply warriors insane enough to relish a proper battle. These NPCs are particularly useful for emphasising the terrible dangers of the Underhive, and the GM is encouraged to let a few fall to the lethal horrors below to keep the PCs on their toes. Nils and Vornas can become excellent allies for the Acolytes in subsequent adventures in Desoleum and should be kept alive if possible.

The voyage down the Wash should take at least a day. The others, if any, brought rations; hopefully the Acolytes did as well. This is a dimly lit, bleak region with stagnant air. The polluted waters are thick with promethium and refuse, and there is always subtle movement just outside of clear vision. To heighten the experience of travelling downhive on a sump river, the GM can run any or all of the following encounters, or even create his own encounters for the PCs to overcome.

An Uncertain Environment: An unstable section of the hive collapses nearby, sending rubble and debris in all directions. Each Acolyte must make a **Challenging (+0) Agility test** or suffer 1d10+3 Impact damage from the falling rock. If there is an Acolyte with the Survival skill, he alerts the others to the danger and grants them a +20 bonus on their tests.

Cursed and Forgotten: A group of foraging scum on their own barge attacks. They are cowardly at heart and can be scared off with a successful **Ordinary (+10) Intimidate test** or after their first casualty. Use the Dreg NPC from page 394 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook** for their rules.

Victims of the Red Walk: A small band of other gangers subsisting on the edges of the Red Walk territory watch them pass from the shore. They can be reasoned with or even recruited, unless the Acolytes have Red Walk gangers with them. If so, things quickly erupt into a fight; use the Thug profile from page 387 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook** for these fighters.

Damned Settlement: The Acolytes pass a crude township filled with wretched mutants. They are not openly hostile, but Red Walk gangers might fire upon them for sport, or Sanctionaries might demand the settlement be purged; either can cause the mutants to attack. Use the Fleshbent Mutant NPCs from page 408 of the **DARK HERESY Core Rulebook** if a combat occurs.

Monsters of the Sump: One of the great albino beasts of the sump attacks the barge. This can be almost anything as there are a myriad of nightmares infesting the deep waters. It is so large that the PCs never actually see its full form, only a tangle of tentacles that lurch toward them and the massive bulk of its body just under the murky surface. It is too large to miss with ranged attacks, and can be treated as cover with 10 Armour points; should this drop below 5, it is driven off in search of easier prey. Each round, 1d5–2 random characters must pass a **Difficult (–10) Dodge test** or suffer 1d10+2 Rending damage from the flailing limbs. Their barge is also tossed about in the attack, and at the start of each round everyone must pass a **Challenging (+0) Agility test** to stay on their feet, or fall to the slippery deck. Four or more degrees of failure means the character falls into the waters, and if not pulled up within 2 rounds, is never seen again as he is dragged into the depths. If desired, the GM can create a special creature for this encounter to further challenge the Acolytes, or use a suitable monster from any of the **DARK HERESY** supplements.

STORMING THE SUMP-FORTRESS

As the PCs' scrap-barge approaches the Blessed Flesh hideout, the GM can read or paraphrase the following aloud:

For hours, your scrap-barge has been drifting over the viscous black waters of the sump, surrounded by shadows and echoes. As you turn a corner, a colossal edifice in the sluggish water suddenly comes into view, covered in rust and decay. Even from this distance, you can make out shapes moving against feeble fires from within, and stab-lights sporadically combing the darkness. There is also something else at work here, an undefinable quality which fills you with dread even as you look up at the top reaches of the foreboding structure.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

This is the final battle against Ferrue Fayne, and the warband's chance to end his madness. The GM should try to make this battle suitably epic, with waves of cultists, animated dead, and the majestically foul Herald of Nurgle. To balance the encounter, and make sure the Acolytes are not overwhelmed but rather challenged, the GM should refer to page 382 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook to set the threat level and manage the number of adversaries. To add to the carnage without increasing the threat, the GM can also add flavour combat in the background against the Acolytes' allies, such as the Red Walk or Sanctionaries, making the fight seem larger and more dangerous.

The final fight against Ferrue and the Herald is intended to be desperate and exciting, not excessively lengthy. The GM should be careful not to overwhelm the PCs if it looks like they are struggling. To lessen the pressure, the GM can set the Herald upon their allies or, rather than disembowelling an Acolyte with its pestilent claws, throw him to a level below with non-lethal damage. Equally, Ferrue can use his powers to incapacitate the Acolytes instead of killing them, and the risen dead can be as much a hindrance to the cultists as the Acolytes, getting in the way of ranged attacks, or even mistakenly attacking cultists.

One option the GM can use to add to the horror is for Ferrue to raise any Acolytes (or their allies) who fall during the fight. These freshly dead should be only as effective as the other animated corpses, but could invoke Fear tests for their allies from seeing their comrades brought back as shambling mockeries of life.

The hideout is part of an ancient archeotech construction device, used many millennia ago in the hive's founding. Mostly heavily rusted and sunken into the sump, the ruins jut from the water at a perilous angle, giving all its floors and walkways a slanted aspect. The cult has fortified the remains with crude guard towers and weapon emplacements hanging out over the foul black water. The hideout is set over four habitable levels, with Ferrue's summoning circle built up on an old shuttle landing platform near the top. When the Acolytes arrive, Ferrue is preparing for the ritual to summon a Herald of Nurgle, a plan quickly accelerated should the cult detect the Acolytes.

There are seven groups of seven cultists within the hideout, as well as roughly the same number of corpses ready for animation, though the GM should modify these numbers as needed to achieve the desired threat threshold. How the PCs enter the fortress is up to them, though these likely fall into one of three outcomes:

Frontal Assault: Simply storming the hideout means first coming in under fire from a guard tower, and then fighting up several floors against cultists armed with autoguns. The guard tower has a heavy stubber and provides full Body cover (4 Armour points) for its gunner. The cultists fight in groups of seven on each level, using barricades (ten Armour points) for cover. They fall back if they take over 50 percent casualties, but keep firing as they retreat upwards to the summoning area.

Silent Infiltration: To sneak in, the Acolytes need to make **Opposed Challenging (+0) Stealth** tests to pass the guard towers. The vigilant guards oppose at **Challenging (+0) Awareness** tests. The Acolytes must pass through three towers to reach the upper levels. Each of these tests suffers a cumulative -10 penalty, with any failure resulting in a loud alarm being raised. This could be done in combination with the warband's allies attacking in a frontal assault (which imposes a -20 penalty to the tests the guards make).

Deception and Lies: The Acolytes could try to bluff their way in, pretending to be cultists or merchants from Gantry. This does not work if Ferrue is present, but they might be able to dock and get inside if they can pass an **Opposed Difficult (-10) Charm** or **Deceive** test against the cultists. They can also try using **Intimidate** tests at a -20 penalty, as the cultists are more frightened of Ferrue than anything the Acolytes might do to them.

Once within the hideout, the PCs can make their way to Ferrue, either fighting their way through or trying to slip past his cultists.



A DARK SUMMONING

When the Acolytes reach Ferrue, he is engaged in his summoning ritual, and the final confrontation begins. Both sides immediately roll for Initiative and begin combat. Any remaining cultists arrive in small groups that filter in as the GM needs to maintain an engaging battle. The Acolytes cannot stop the Herald from being summoned, but as Ferrue has had to rush the ritual, it does not arrive fully manifested. Even if the Acolytes manage to kill Ferrue in the first round or two of combat, the Herald still appears.

The Daemon appears at the beginning of the third round of combat, killing a cultist as it bursts into reality. Witnessing its release is a terrifying explosion of pestilent gore, and requires a test against **Fear (3)**. It is diminished by the incomplete summoning, however, and is not as powerful as it would be otherwise. Each round, the Herald must slaughter another human (this can include cultists, Acolytes, or their allies) to sustain itself. If it cannot, it takes all tests at a -10 penalty the following round and can only move or attack, but not both.

While the Herald attacks the Acolytes and their allies, Ferrue attempts to enact his xenos artefact-powered ritual to raise the dead from the chambers below. This takes him four rounds, and if he is wounded at any point during the process, it fails. Groups of cultists shield their leader, using themselves as cover. After this time, or if the ritual fails, Ferrue fights alongside the Herald and the cultists, using the full extent of his powers augmented by the xenos artefact.

If Ferrue is successful in raising the dead, they begin to awaken in small groups two rounds after the ritual is completed, adding to the chaos. The GM should feel free to adjust this timing as needed given the current state of the combat, however. As soon as Ferrue is killed or incapacitated, the dread psychic animation is broken, and the dead collapse where they stand.

CONCLUSIONS

With the destruction of the Herald and the capture or death of Ferrue, the Blessed Flesh is broken. Any survivors who escape either make their way back to the Callers of Sorrow, or flee deeper into the Underhive's darkness. The Acolytes are left in control of the xenos artefact, and have ostensibly completed their task. They may also have gained some allies for future adventures in the form of Oath-Captain Nils and Vornas Crimson, though this depends on how they treated their new acquaintances along the way.

They have learned about the existence of a greater cult of Nurgle within Desoleum from Ferrue or the notes he has left behind, and they have uncovered more of the hive's Trade Sable and the sector-wide Faceless Trade rife in the dealing of xenos artefacts. Finally, they have the xenos artefact itself, an object of obvious power as yet untapped. They are also left with questions to answer, lest another cult attempt a similar ritual with possibly even more horrendous consequences. If a more powerful artefact exists, it could animate corpses across the entire hive. Desoleum would fall in hours.

REWARDS

The Player Characters should gain 400 experience points (xp) for surviving the first two sessions, with 500 xp for the final confrontation. If Ferrue is killed before he can complete the ritual, they gain an extra 100 xp. Should they take him alive, they gain 100 xp and excellent leads on the Faceless Trade in the hive. Each Acolyte involved in banishing the Herald gains 3 Influence.

Should a player try it, he finds the pendant collected at the beginning of the adventure fits snugly into an open break in the xenos fragment Ferrue used. The player who suggests this should gain an additional 50 xp.

The players may also gain useful allies, especially in the form of Oath-Captain Nils and Vornas Crimson. Players who actively sought to recruit them as contacts should gain an extra 50 xp, and an additional 50 xp for each who is successfully developed in this way. This could lead to Peer (Sanctionaries) or Peer (Fleshcutters) talents for those who made strong impressions on these characters. Conversely, any who actively seek to destroy the Red Walk or abuse the aid of the Sanctionaries might gain the Enemy talent.

The PCs may also have made a strong impression on the townsfolk of Gantry and, if so, can use it as a downhive base of operations in the future. Should they have acted overtly and openly used their Inquisitor's name, their Subtlety should be lowered appropriately and impact their actions here and perhaps in other gang-infested locales within the hive.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

The GM can use any of the loose ends left after the confrontation with Ferrue Fayne for future adventures:

The Trade Sable: The Acolytes find evidence among Ferrue's personal effects with dozens of messages to merchants and criminals throughout Hive Desoleum and beyond. Some indicate he was actively working with the Trade Sable to get other xenos items. There are also details of additional shipments of alien artefacts as well as a small collection of similarly odd xenos trinkets, though nothing like the artefact he was using to augment his abilities. The Acolytes should be very concerned about this Faceless Trade of xenos relics through the hive and across Askellon, and actively prosecute the matter.

The Callers of Sorrow: In addition to information on the Trade Sable, captured cultists and details from Ferrue's notes indicate that the Blessed Flesh was only a splinter of a much larger cult. Even if the Acolytes do not fully realise the extent of this greater cult, the destruction of the Blessed Flesh draws the attention of the Callers of Sorrow, and it might begin actively targeting the Acolytes. Finally, the GM can include a holo-pict to be found on Ferrue's person, showing him with his two brothers. The Acolytes easily recognise Tormus Fayne if they met him in Gantry, and he is certain to become a major threat in future adventures.

Seeds of Rebellion: Even with the destruction of the Blessed Flesh, there is considerable discontent in the Gallowsway. The Red Walk continues to try to exert their influence uphive, and the Sanctionaries talk of leading an attack against what is left of Gantry. Something is sure to give, and either way there is a major battle coming. The Acolytes might attempt to broker some kind of peace, or lead one force against the other to settle things violently.

NPCs APPENDIX

The following are the major NPCs present in *Desolation of the Dead*. Where noted, the GM can use profiles from Chapter XII: *NPCs and Adversaries of the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook*.

FERRUE FAYNE, THE PESTIFEX

Obsessed with power, the middle of the Fayne brothers has latched onto using mysterious xenos artefacts to bolster his own splinter cult, the Blessed Flesh. With his younger brother dead and his elder brother Tormus seemingly ignoring him, Ferrue is ready to launch a major ritual that could bring the hive to its knees.

FERRUE FAYNE, THE PESTIFEX (MASTER) 23									
H ³ 01-10 9		WS 38		BS 30		S 35			
AR ⁴ 11-20 10		AL ⁴ 21-30 10		T ⁶ 41		AC 31		INT 42	
B ⁴ 31-70 10		PER 47		WP 52		FEL 39			
LR ⁴ 71-85 10		LL ⁴ 86-00 10		IFL 41					
HALF 3		FULL 6		CHARGE 9		RUN 18		THREAT 30	
STUB REVOLVER CLASS PISTOL									
RNG 30M		RoF S/-		DMG 1d10+3 (I)					
PEN 0		CLIP 6		RLD 2 FULL		WT 1.5 KG		AVL PL	
SPECIAL: RELIABLE									
FORCE STAFF CLASS MELEE									
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d10+7 ^{PR+SB} (E)					
PEN 6 ^{2+PR}		CLIP —		RLD —		WT 2 KG		AVL ER	
SPECIAL: FORCE									

Skills: Command (Fel) +10, Deceive (Fel) +10, Dodge (Ag) +0, Awareness (Per) +10, Psyniscience (Per) +10

Talents: Bastion of Iron Will, Deceptive, Resistance (Disease, Psychic Powers), Strong Minded

Traits: Psy Rating (4; 3 when he does not possess the xenos artefact), Touched by the Fates (2), Unnatural Toughness (2)

Psychic Powers: Endurance, Enfeeble, Life Leech, Nurgle's Rot (see the sidebar on page 25)

Gear: Xenos artefact, parchment scrolls filled with notes, flak robes

THE BLESSED FLESH

The GM should use the following NPC profiles from Chapter XII of the *DARK HERESY Core Rulebook* to represent various members of the Blessed Flesh: Contagion Demagogue (page 406), Strain Initiate (page 406), Strain Infector (page 407), and Pestilentant (page 407). Thugs and Heavies (page 387) and can also be mixed in, depending on how difficult the GM wants to make a specific encounter.

ANIMATED CORPSES

Underhive tales are already spreading about the maggot-men, though many hold them as the result of too many bottles of sump-sweat. Ferrue's minor animations having been successful, he is now ready to unleash hordes of these shambling dead across the hive starting with its lower reaches.

ANIMATED CORPSES (TROOP) 7									
H — 01-10 4		WS 25		BS —		S 33			
AR — 11-20 4		AL — 21-30 4		T — 41		AC 21		INT 04	
B — 31-70 4		PER 12		WP 15		FEL —			
LR — 71-85 4		LL — 86-00 4		IFL —					
HALF 2		FULL 4		CHARGE 6		RUN 12		THREAT 3	
RUSTED BLADES CLASS MELEE									
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d5+3 ^{SB} (R)					
PEN 0		CLIP —		RLD —		WT 1 KG		AVL PL	
SPECIAL: —									

Traits: From Beyond, Fear (1)

Gear: Tattered civilian garb



OATH-CAPTAIN KAYTIAN NILS

Tough and determined, Kaytian Nils knows her latest posting to the Gallowsway is possibly a punishment for her prosecutions against several crooked (but connected) merchants in the Main Hive. The recent mass killing is beyond her scope, though, and if she can see it resolved, it could mean a better posting—or at least a better smelling one.

OATH-CAPTAIN KAYTIAN NILS (ELITE) 12									
H ⁴ 01-10 7		WS 41		BS 44		S 33			
AR ⁴ 11-20 7		AL ⁴ 21-30 7		T 39		AG 32		INT 36	
B ⁴ 31-70 7		PER 38		WP 36		FEL 28		IFL —	
LR ⁴ 71-85 7		LL ⁴ 86-00 7							
HALF 3		FULL 6		CHARGE 9		RUN 18		THREAT 12	
SHOTGUN					CLASS BASIC				
RNG 30M		RoF S/-/-		DMG 1d10+4 (I)					
PEN 0		CLIP 8		RLD 2 FULL		WT 5 KG		AVL AV	
SPECIAL: SCATTER									
SHOCK MAUL					CLASS MELEE				
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d10+6 ^{3+SB} (I)					
PEN 0		CLIP —		RLD —		WT 2.5 KG		AVL SC	
SPECIAL: SHOCKING									

Skills: Awareness (Per) +20, Common Lore (Underworld) (Int) +10, Inquiry (Fel) +10, Interrogation (WP), Navigate (Int) +10, Scrutiny (Per) +10, Tech-Use (Int) +10

Talents: Die Hard, Disarm, Iron Jaw, Keen Intuition, Takedown

Gear: Sanctionary armoured uniform, manacles, micro-bead, respirator, detachable oath-cog (can be used as a truncheon)

Dispassionate: All skill tests made to socially interact with the Sanctionary suffer a -20 penalty.

GALLOWSWAY SANCTIONARIES

These use the Sanctioned Bondsman profile from page 385 of the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook, but these Sanctionaries can be alternatively armed with autoguns or even heavy stubbers.

GALLOWSWAY AND GANTRY DENIZENS

The GM can use Dregs (page 394), Citizens (page 392) and Thugs (page 387) from the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook as needed for the unfortunates living in of these areas. Particularly foul bonepicker scavengers can be created using the Fleshbent mutant profile on page 408.

VORNAS CRIMSON, LEADER OF THE RED WALK

Like all Fleshcutters, Vornas is enamoured of bladed weapons. His wit is equally cutting, and he relishes his rule over Gantry and the many blood sports it offers. It is slowly becoming less enthralling, however, and he feels after one final victory it might be time to move on to a fresh area.

VORNAS CRIMSON, GANG LEADER (ELITE) 13									
H ⁻ 01-10 4		WS 49		BS 33		S 36			
AR ³ 11-20 7		AL ³ 21-30 7		T 41		AG 33		INT 32	
B ⁴ 31-70 8		PER 38		WP 30		FEL 33		IFL —	
LR ³ 71-85 7		LL ³ 86-00 7							
HALF 3		FULL 6		CHARGE 9		RUN 18		THREAT 11	
BOLT PISTOL					CLASS PISTOL				
RNG 30M		RoF S/2/-		DMG 1d10+5 (X)					
PEN 4		CLIP 8		RLD 1 FULL		WT 3.5 KG		AVL VR	
SPECIAL: TEARING									
POWER SWORD					CLASS MELEE				
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d10+8 ^{5+SB} (E)					
PEN 5		CLIP —		RLD —		WT 3 KG		AVL VR	
SPECIAL: BALANCED, POWER FIELD									

Skills: Athletics (Per) +10, Charm (Fel) +10, Command (Fel) +10, Common Lore (Underworld) (Int) +20, Intimidate (S) +10

Talents: Blind Fighting, Combat Master, Halo of Command, Jaded, Precision Killer (Weapon Skill)

Gear: Scavenged stylish clothing,

mesh armour, countless blades

Battlefield Coordination: Once per round, as a Half Action, the character can make an Ordinary (+10) Command test to coordinate the efforts of his allies around him. If he succeeds in the test, a number of allies up to his Intelligence bonus (3 for this NPC) in line of sight and earshot of the character can immediately make an out-of-turn Move action (taken as a Half Action).



RED WALK GANGERS

Fleshcutters all, the members of the Red Walk live for bladed combat. Little do they know, they are about to face the greatest battle of their lives.

RED WALK GANGERS (TROOP)					6
H ⁻ 01-10 2		WS	BS	S	
AR ³ 11-20 5		44	21	33	
AL ³ 21-30 5		T	AC	INT	
B ³ 31-70 5		28	33	26	
LR ³ 71-85 5		PER	WP	FEL	
LL ³ 86-00 5		30	27	33	
		IFL	—		
HALF 3		FULL 6		CHARGE 9	RUN 18
THREAT 6					
SWORD		CLASS MELEE			
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d10+3 ^{SB} (R)	
PEN 0		CLIP —		RLD —	
WT 3 KG		AVL CM			
SPECIAL: BALANCED					

Skills: Acrobatics (Ag) +10, Intimidate (S) +10

Talents: Combat Master

Gear: Hive leathers, extra knives and blades

Crimon's Cutters: At the GM's discretion, some of these gangers can be armed with chainaxes or chainswords, the better to keep the denizens of Gantry under the scarred thumb of the Red Walk.

NURGLE'S ROT

The psyker focuses his mind on the generosity of Grandfather Nurgle, drawing forth from the Warp a great gift of disease to share with those around him. A noxious and unnatural slime splashes across all those nearby, infecting them with the galaxy's most perfect malady.

Action: Half Action

Focus Power: Difficult (-10) Willpower test

Range: 2 metres x Psy Rating

Sustained: No

Subtype: Attack

Effect: All characters within range (excluding Daemons of Nurgle and those sufficiently devoted to the Plague God) must make a Toughness test. Each target that fails the test immediately suffers 2 x PR Strength damage and 2 x PR Toughness damage. If this results in a character's death, the character is reborn after 2d5 rounds as a Plaguebearer.

AYNTHREXES, HERALD OF NURGLE

Aynthrexes hears the Warp-ripples of Ferrue's call, and eagerly looks forward to sharing Father Nurgle's delights with mortals across Hive Desoleum. With each soul he devours, he gains in pestilent strength.

AYNTHREXES, HERALD OF NURGLE (MASTER)					37
H ⁻ 01-10 14		WS	BS	S	8
AR ⁻ 11-20 14		61	33	58	
AL ⁻ 21-30 14		T ¹⁴	AC	INT	
B ⁻ 31-70 14		70	35	51	
LR ⁻ 71-85 14		PER	WP 7	FEL	
LL ⁻ 86-00 14		42	51	17	
		IFL	62		
HALF 4		FULL 8		CHARGE 12	RUN 24
THREAT 43					
BONE CLUB		CLASS MELEE			
RNG —		RoF —		DMG 1d10+17 ^{9+SB} (I)	
PEN 0		CLIP —		RLD —	
WT 18 KG		AVL UN			
SPECIAL: CORROSIVE, TOXIC (3)					

Skills: Athletics (Ag) +20, Psyniscience +20

Talents: Combat Master, Iron Jaw, Killing Strike, True Grit, Thunder Charge

Traits: Baneful Presence (20), Daemonic (4), Fear (3), From Beyond, Nauseating†, Psyker (PR 5), Size (5), Touched by the Fates (2), Unnatural Strength (3), Unnatural Toughness (3), Unnatural Willpower (2)

Psychic Powers: Enfeeble, Haemorrhage, Iron Arm, Life Leech, Nurgle's Rot (see sidebar)

Newly Summoned: Aynthrexes is fresh from the Warp, and so his power levels are lower than a fully-strengthened Herald. The GM should feel free to adjust his powers if desired to properly challenge the Acolytes and their allies.

Embodiment of Decay: Mere exposure to Aynthrexes' presence can rust and degrade even the strongest materials. While within 10 metres of the Herald, all equipment, weaponry, and armour functions as though it were Poor craftsmanship, regardless of its actual craftsmanship.

†Nauseating: A character who fails a Fear test against Aynthrexes does not roll on Table 8-11: Shock. Instead, the character is Stunned for one round per degree of failure, as he doubles over and retches uncontrollably. The character still suffers all other effects of failing a Fear test, such as possibly gaining Insanity points. If the character succeeds on the Fear test, he suffers one level of Fatigue as he contends with the bile rising in his throat.



CHAPTER II: NEMESIS

Many of the adventures in **DARK HERESY** take place in the backdrop of larger plots, of which the Acolytes might have only a fragmentary knowledge. Often, the battle between an Inquisitor and sector-wide heresies can start with a small skirmish for the Acolytes and then grow larger as the Acolytes confront higher levels of this threat. Each step should not only reveal more about the heresy, but also about the nemesis behind it. Developing fleshed-out enemies that can become recurring nemeses puts the Acolytes in a more solid setting, where actions in one adventure lead to reactions in future activities.

CRAFTING A NEMESIS

"Strutting lackeys to a long-dead corpse. I shall show them true power."

—Quelten s'Zu, before igniting the Pyre of the Failed Flesh

While a campaign can work very well in an episodic format, where the Acolytes confront an unrelated series of threats, the addition of a long-term antagonist can add a unique sense of cohesiveness to their adventures. These enemies, referred to as Nemeses, can drive the plot of a campaign with their machinations, while finally confronting them provides an extremely satisfying showdown. If the GM wishes to create a Nemesis for his players, the material below can help to guide the creation and use of a truly memorable menace.

WHO IS THE NEMESIS?

The nature and origin of the Nemesis heavily informs the details of its plans and actions. The mad whims of a Daemon present an entirely different threat than the subtle manipulations of a traitorous conspiracy or the piratical assaults of Eldar Corsairs. Fortunately for the GM, most Nemeses can be placed into one of three broad classes—the Enemy Within, the Enemy Without, and the Enemy Beyond. Although these classes contain a wide variety of possibilities, there are some unifying features that can be used to inform the creation of a Nemesis.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Traitors, heretics, and other malcontents within the Imperial structure make excellent Nemeses. The possibilities for a Nemesis of this sort are nearly limitless. Power-mad conspirators among the Imperium's elite are just as viable as low-life cultists or criminals. An entire group can even serve as a Nemesis, such as a Chaos cult with a particularly great unity of purpose.

Deciding on the origin of a human Nemesis can be as simple as selecting a branch of the Imperial Adepta, or a similar organisation, and figuring out how a rogue element within that group could operate against the Acolytes. It is even possible to have such a Nemesis serve the Imperium loyally despite his designs, but

have plans that threaten some aspect of the Acolytes' work. Such a figure does especially well as a dark mirror for the Acolytes' own deeds, and can serve to provoke questions about their auspice and the methods with which they undertake the protection of the Imperium. The epitome of this sort of Nemesis could be another Inquisitor working at odds to the Acolytes' own master, determined to protect the Imperium through means repugnant and consequences unthinkable to his peer.

Human Nemeses can also work in more unambiguously villainous roles. The servants of the Dark Gods are a classic of the *Warhammer 40,000* setting, and perhaps the archetypal example of the Enemy Within. A powerful cultist or heretic can pose a dire threat from the shadows, wielding fell sorceries or employing mutated or daemonic servitors. Such threats become magnified when presented as a widespread cult rather than a single individual, and can spread their reach into a wide variety of plots. Of course, traitors do not need to be servants of otherworldly darkness to be strong villains. Power-mongers or demagogues who threaten the stability of whole worlds for personal gain may also draw the attention of the Inquisition, and their petty selfishness can serve all the better for its simple familiarity.

THE ENEMY WITHOUT

Alien threats frequently draw Inquisitorial notice, and often require the full measure of an Inquisitor's power and influence to stamp out. However, many such enemies are not well-suited to the role of a Nemesis. Foes such as brutish Ork warbosses or ravening Ambull colonies rarely have the depth to work as long-term antagonists in a **DARK HERESY** campaign. Strength on the battlefield or as a predator does not necessarily translate into extended arcs of opposition or interesting stories. Such conflicts are usually more suited to the Imperial Guard or the Space Marines than Inquisitors and their Acolytes. For an alien menace to work as a Nemesis, it should ideally be capable of subtlety and indirect action in addition to or instead of any overt threat. GMs should try these if he feels his players would be interested in such threats, or use them to break up other encounters with surprising enemies.

Rich with Nemesis potential, the most iconic example of such an alien threat can be found in the enigmatic Eldar. The Farseers of the Eldar Craftworlds are prognosticators without peer who act ruthlessly upon any perceived threat to the future of their kind. Unravelling their schemes and prophecies, many of which are laid over multiple human generations, can make for a grand campaign. The captains of outcast Corsair fleets can serve as a more overt threat, while remaining just as elusive and cunning thanks to their mastery of the Eldar Webway. These figures are often driven by a need to prove themselves against "lesser" species, or may seek to collect and preserve relics of their ancient past—both motivations that can set them at odds with certain kinds of Inquisitor. Finally, the Dark Eldar of Commorragh are a vile and insidious menace devoted to self-gratification above all else. They reside deep within the Webway, emerging to sow terror and claim plunder or slaves. Only the will and cunning of an Inquisitor could hope to track down or thwart the leader of a Dark Eldar Cabal and bring such a terrible enemy to justice.

THE ENEMY BEYOND

The Daemons of Chaos are among the most enigmatic and deadly beings an Inquisitor can ever have cause to confront. They are born of the primal urges of sentient beings, and cannot be killed as long as there is life to feel the powerful emotions that influence the Warp. Most Daemons (as much as a term like "most" can be applied to a nigh-infinite horde from beyond reality) lack the power or initiative to manipulate events in realspace without entering it through the entreaties of a summoner or passing through an open Warp rift. However, there are Daemons of sufficient potency and cunning to twist the minds of mortal proxies and enact their mad whims on a vulnerable Imperium. These powerful Daemons can be made into truly sinister and deadly Nemeses.

A daemonic Nemesis is usually associated with one of the four Ruinous Powers, as ties to one of the primal founts of the Warp are what raise up nearly all of the mightiest of Daemons.

This fell patronage colours everything about the Daemon's actions, from its choice of pawns to its ultimate goals. Khornate Daemons seek to inspire death cults and foment slaughter. Tzeentchian Daemons lure psykers into acting as their mouthpiece with sorcerous lore, and scheme for the sake of scheming. As varied as their methods may be, all daemonic Nemeses share a few traits.



The first and most important of these is that they are naturally creatures of the Warp, and cannot manifest in realspace without the aid of powerful rites or a weakening in the boundaries of reality. As such, direct confrontation with the Acolytes is nearly impossible, and should be saved for an important climax in the story, if it occurs at all. Instead, Daemons act through those mortals they are able to contact and manipulate. Typically such contact is only possible with psykers, or through profane artefacts and sorcerous rituals, but some Daemons can appear to the mad, the mutated, or other such lost souls. These proxies are used to enact the Nemesis's plans, and may be powerful foes in their own right. However, prolonged communion with a powerful Daemon inevitably shreds their will and self-determination, reducing them to little more than husks for the Daemon's indiscriminate use. This is a key distinction between a daemonic Nemesis with mortal pawns, and a heretic Nemesis with daemonic servants or even a daemonic master. Any Daemon powerful enough to serve as a Nemesis suffers no rule but his own, and the Chaos God of which he is a part.

WHAT DOES THE NEMESIS WANT?

After the GM decides on the nature of the Nemesis for his campaign, he must determine its ultimate goals. Such motivations can vary widely, but should follow a few simple rules. The ambitions of the Nemesis should follow logically from its nature, such as a Daemon's desire to corrupt or a master criminal's avarice. Just as importantly, the aims should be something that the Acolytes inherently have a stake in opposing. This means the Nemesis's intents must be significant enough in scope or implication to draw Inquisitorial attention, and inimical to Mankind, the Inquisition, or the Acolytes personally. Finally, the purposes should be designed so that they are not easily resolved one way or the other, to allow for ongoing plot involvement. A Nemesis who wants only to claim a specific dark relic is of no use if the relic is destroyed, and is of little more use if he acquires it. If the relic is one of many he seeks in order to enable his ascension to Daemonhood or to enact some profane rite, then the Nemesis remains a viable antagonist after his initial goal is met or thwarted.

POWER

While all Nemeses are concerned with power to some extent, there are some for whom power itself is a goal rather than a means to an end. The nature of the power being sought can vary. An Imperial malcontent might scheme to increase rank or amass wealth, while a traitor could desire independent rulership over a world. For a conspiracy or cult, power might mean inducting more initiates into the fold, or it might be to champion the personal cause of a figure within their ranks. Xenos and Daemons often measure power differently than humans, but are often interested in an increased capacity to inflict their favoured form of harm on the Imperium. A Nemesis motivated by power can rarely acquire enough of the stuff to sate their needs. If the Nemesis rises in rank, acquires his treasure trove, or finds the lost artefact he sought, it is more likely to inspire him to greater desires and more insidious schemes than to lead him into a peaceful retirement with his new gains.

SURVIVAL

Although Nemeses are typically mighty and influential figures, they are not immune to fear, nor do they lack for reasons to feel it. Some Nemeses are motivated by the need to remove a perceived threat to their life or liberty. Such a Nemesis jealously protects all that is his while actively seeking to destroy those who might pose a threat. This type of plotting can take many forms, from political jockeying against hated rivals, the fight to freedom for an oppressed mutant underclass, or a deadly game of cat-and-mouse across Askellon with a mortal foe—perhaps even the Inquisitor the Acolytes serve. Living such a hunted life does not lend itself to rest, so the Nemesis is unlikely to feel safe even if the initially perceived threat is removed. If this occurs, the Nemesis's lifetime of paranoia guides it to latch onto a new threat and repeat the cycle of hunter and hunted, although perhaps with reversed roles.

DESTRUCTION

Some Nemeses are dedicated not to their own elevation or to self-preservation, but to the degradation and destruction of another. Their hate is as likely to be focused on institutions as individuals, and they often come to hate everything and everyone associated with their initial enemy. The source of such deep hatred can vary greatly, and may involve personal grudges for real or perceived wrongs, or it may spring from zealotry, fear, or some other circumstance worked into the Nemesis's very nature. The warband's Inquisitor could be the target, with the Nemesis motivated with revenge against him and those who work for him. Daemons need no other reason than their existence to seek the unmaking of mortals, while a particularly isolated Imperial world could take xenophobia to a level at which even a Puritan Inquisitor might find excessive. When confronting such Nemeses, any attempt to stay their wrath inevitably tars the Acolytes with the guilt of association.

HOW DOES THE NEMESIS OPERATE?

Once the Nemesis's nature and goals have been determined, the GM must answer what is perhaps the most important question about it. This question of operation is crucial because it determines what kind of interactions the Acolytes have with the Nemesis, and how his presence is felt throughout the campaign.

PROXIES AND PUPPETS

A Nemesis of this sort operates on the fringes of any action, concealing his involvement and intentions through multiple layers of servants. These pawns are usually aware of the nature of their service to some degree, although they may not understand the implications of their loyalty. The Acolytes might find his name coming up in a variety of seemingly unrelated investigations, and slowly uncover him as the centre of a huge conspiracy. The Nemesis's minions might believe their master to be another figure entirely, perhaps only a tier above them in the hidden power structure he commands. The Acolytes might defeat several such figureheads before being able to identify their true Nemesis, much less confront and unmask him. Even a revealed puppetmaster should remain a dangerous foe, as the need to act secretly may have hindered the more overt power of his network, giving the GM the opportunity to shift the tone of the conflict.

MANIPULATION AND DECEPTION

This Nemesis tends to act through deceived agents, using misinformation and lies to direct events as he desires while allowing his tools to believe that their own goals are being served. Many such pawns may not even be aware of the Nemesis's existence, instead acting on psychically-planted hunches or carefully altered evidence that leads them along his desired path. However, even the most brilliant manipulator leaves a trail; the GM should allow the Acolytes to encounter and identify these deceptions gradually so that they can get a sense of the Nemesis's machinations. The GM might have a particularly crafty Nemesis leave only the barest traces of involvement by acting through multiple layers of dupes, but it can also be appropriate for the Nemesis's deceptions to involve some sort of tell-tale sign or calling card, such as a lingering psychic impression or the repeated use of a specific engrammic brand.

COERCION AND SABOTAGE

Some Nemeses co-opt those loyal to others and makes them their own tools by force, blackmail, or similar means. Such a Nemesis is not as usually subtle or secretive, but may be elusive in his own way. By relying on resources outside his own power base, he can adopt a scorched earth policy to cover his tracks and cut away any loose ends. Any minion or tool that seems to threaten failure (or worse, betrayal) is inevitably targeted for removal before the Nemesis's plans can be compromised. Even where the Acolytes manage to retrieve his assets, they must contend with the possibility that whatever leverage he had on his agent may still hold. The Acolytes must decide whether to attack the Nemesis through his agents or by destroying his sources of coercion until they can force a direct confrontation. Even after defeating such a foe, they can be plagued with the question of how to appropriately deal with his agents, and whether they deserve to be dealt with in the same manner as the master they unwillingly served.

DIRECT ACTION

Although the longevity of a Nemesis can be extended significantly through maintaining the foe as an indirect or hidden threat, it is possible for a careful GM to make use of a Nemesis who is known to the Acolytes and willing to act directly to confront his enemies. Direct battles between the Nemesis and the Acolytes should remain rare even with this style of Nemesis, or they cease to feel like the climactic confrontation of a Nemesis (and the players may find each burnt point of his Fate threshold increasingly implausible after successive victories). However, the Acolytes may regularly encounter signs of his involvement, or uncover witnesses to his actions. A physically powerful or dangerous Nemesis might be tracked by the trail of bodies he leaves in his wake, or an elusive alien pirate might taunt the Acolytes by leaving messages for them recorded in the vox-net of each ship he plunders. When the Acolytes catch up with the Nemesis, the ensuing clash should be a major turning point in their conflict, leaving the Nemesis (or the Acolytes) with lasting wounds or a damaged powerbase.

CHALLENGES AND CHALLENGERS

Developing a Nemesis mechanically can be just as vital to keeping it engaging as creating and portraying it narratively. It is as important that the game mechanics of a Nemesis be as unique as his role in the story. Creating a unified Nemesis profile to cover everything from Daemons and traitors to xenos and rogue Inquisitors is an impractical effort, and every GM should create his own that best fits the Acolytes' capabilities. However, there are some general guidelines and tips that can serve to aid in creating a Nemesis.

All Nemeses are Master-level enemies as described on page 380 of the **DARK HERESY** Core Rulebook. Furthermore, all Nemeses possess the Touched By the Fates trait, although the Fate threshold of a given Nemesis can vary at the GM's discretion. Generally, a Nemesis should have a Fate threshold of at least 3 and no more than 6. This serves to allow the Nemesis to escape death or punishment enough times to raise the stakes in a long-running campaign without making him mechanically immortal. The GM should always remember that he is not obligated to burn Fate threshold to keep the Nemesis alive. Sometimes, it serves the dramatic flow of the campaign better for the Acolytes to achieve a victory at a given moment or with a particular scheme, even if the Nemesis retains a few points of Fate threshold.

The Nemesis's characteristics should generally be at least equal to those of the Acolytes in the group, if not 10 to 20 points higher (except where it is appropriate for the Nemesis to be weak, such as with the Strength of a frail schemer). Even with enhanced characteristics, the GM should generally include minions from the Nemesis's powerbase in direct conflicts, as the multiple turns of a group of Acolytes can often overpower a single potent enemy. A Nemesis is likely to have countless Troop NPCs in his retinue, as well as a selection of Elite lieutenants and possibly a Master-level ally or two. Adding several Troops (perhaps equal to twice the number of Acolytes), a few Elites (equal to or just under the number of Acolytes), or a single additional Master to the fight can serve to raise the stakes of an encounter quite a bit.

A Nemesis should also grow as the Acolytes become more powerful. As the players use experience points to strengthen their characters, so should the Game Master do the same for the Nemesis with new skills, talents, and even traits. Additional weaponry, especially if a current plot concerns the Faceless Trade or Munitorum smuggling, would not be amiss. If the Nemesis was injured in a fight, the GM should look to equip him with bionics, heretek technologies, and even xenos augmentations between adventures. A visible reminder of the damage the players caused is an excellent way to keep a Nemesis memorable, and serves to grow his own unique backstory and motivations.

SAMPLE NEMESSES

"You can fear some far-off, mythical Inquisition and what might happen in the future. Or you can look again at the chainblade at your throat, and think upon what it can do to you right now."

—Fracil Harth, Edge Syndicate negotiator

A selection of sample Nemeses infamous across Askellon is presented here; these can be used as is, or serve as the spark for creating new, unique Nemeses. They do not have concrete rules, and thus GMs can tailor them as needed for their campaign plans. Several are presented as groups or organisations, in which case the GM can invent a leader or other figurehead to represent the Nemesis group to the Acolytes.

THE INEVITABLE ORDER, HERETEK CABAL

Within the halls of the Adeptus Mechanicus, a secretive and blasphemous order of renegade Tech-Priests works to bring about the end of the Imperium. The Inevitable Order, as they call themselves, arose from a handful of Magi studying the archives of output from an ancient cogitator. The data they examined, though archaic and fragmentary, led them to conclude that the Imperium was doomed to a slow decay that could not be avoided. A fit of madness struck them then, and visions of what they called a Universal Entropic Principle mandated that they hasten the demise of Mankind along its inevitable course. In truth, they had succumbed to the lure of the Chaos God Nurgle, and their disciples, among whom they carefully disseminated their new lore, became a particularly self-deluded Chaos cult. Those who

have learned much of the Entropic Principle often find it necessary to adapt their crimson robes to conceal corroded implants and respirators that drip noxious fluids from plague-bloated lungs.

The Inevitable Order does not fight the Imperium with war, famine, pestilence, or any other overt weapon. Instead, the corrupted Tech-Priests carefully delete key knowledge from the most hallowed archives and data-stacks of the Martian Priesthood, leaving the Adeptus Mechanicus less and less able to provide the support the Imperium needs for its innumerable hive cities, machines, and engines of war. If the Order has its way, the Imperium will collapse under its own bloated weight, dying its foretold death so that the Entropic Principle might be the only thing remaining in the universe.



SCIONS OF THE SLEEPING PRINCE, APOCALYPTIC CULT

On a number of worlds throughout the Askellon Sector, ancient ruins and relics can be found that tell of some great power predating human colonisation of the local stars. Through cryptic inscriptions in forgotten tongues, and the inhuman whispering heard on the wind in certain forsaken glades, the Scions of the Sleeping Prince have heard the call of a slumbering power that once held the very stars illuminating their worlds in its thrall. They do not know the true nature of their patron power, be it alien or Daemon, but it maintains a deep hold in their psyches nonetheless.

The Scions are primarily organised only on a local or planetary level, with a handful of cells having made contact across interstellar trade routes to one or two other afflicted worlds. Despite their lack of organisation or communication, the Scions have an eerie unity of purpose, and actions taken on one world at the unconscious whim of their blasphemous god have had repercussions across the Askellon Sector—often used to great advantage by other cells. Their unholy fervour grows greater as they unearth new relics of communion, building in anticipation of the day the Sleeping Prince should wake again.

THE EDGE SYNDICATE, AGENTS OF THE FACELESS TRADE

On over a score of worlds throughout Askellon's trailing rim, the agents of the Edge Syndicate are known and feared throughout the criminal underworld as the purveyors of blasphemous wonders wrenched from alien vaults. The source of their artefacts is unknown, but those who deal with them most often believe they must have found some lost treasure world of a dead civilisation, for nearly all of their seemingly limitless merchandise shares an unsettling aesthetic. No questions are asked of the Edge Syndicate on this topic, for even beyond the normal secrecy of the Faceless Trade, they have a fell reputation.

Rumours swirl of Syndicate enforcers with grafts of long-dead xenos flesh, and other implants of twisted manufacture. The reports are fragmented and often contradictory, but no one who knows of the Edge Syndicate believes for an instant that they would hesitate to make use of their wares. The merchants and dealers they send to potential clients conceal their identities behind inhuman masks of a material like blackened porcelain, but harder than steel—as rumours might have one believe. A few rarely-whispered reports claim that these visages are not masks at all, but new faces surgically grafted to the Syndicate's representatives. The boldest rumour-mongers sometimes assert that the Syndicate are not mere merchants at all, but the frontmen for a xenos empire delivering a payload of corruption to the Imperium. Such accusations are rarely levelled more than once.

COUNT ALEKSANDER MARIUS, SECESSIONIST CONSPIRATOR

Although he is regularly found working as a mediator and diplomat in the highest courts of the Askellon Sector, Count Aleksander Marius holds no true loyalty to the Imperium. His work to stabilise Askellian trade routes and maintain planetary ties is a front through which he scouts out potential allies for a grander and more dangerous scheme. Count Marius hopes to lead a grand secession of the majority of the Askellon Sector into his own private fiefdom, or—as he puts it to his supporters—“free the Askellian worlds from the yoke of Imperial tithes.”

Several prominent planetary governors and major Administratum officials are in on his scheme, and plan to support him once he is prepared to make his move. Some of his allies suspect he has further designs than simple secession, but they dare not question him when he orates on the “Askellian destiny of ascension” with a passionate fire in his eyes.





THE ESSENTIAL GM'S REFERENCE TO DARK HERESY

A trail of corpses and forbidden xenos artefacts leads into the lawless depths far below Hive Desoleum. Vicious gangers and heretical cultists are out for blood, while the vile forces of Chaos are eager to devour fresh souls. Ready your bolter and chainsword, and enter the grim darkness of the 41st Millennium...

The DARK HERESY GAME MASTER'S KIT is a vital resource for Inquisitors and Acolytes in their defence of Mankind. Within, Game Masters gain useful guidance and advice in crafting powerful Nemeses to act as recurring antagonists in campaigns across the ancient Askellon Sector. The kit also includes a brand new adventure that continues the action from the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook, and a deluxe Game Master's Screen that puts the most commonly-used rules close at hand for easy reference.

This product includes a 32-page book and a 4-panel Game Master's screen. A copy of the DARK HERESY Core Rulebook is required to use this supplement.

