



# THE SISTERS OF SILENCE

**Title (Formal/Base):** The Silent Sisterhood of the Great Tithe

**Banner Imperialis:** The Divisio Investigates of the Divisio and Adeptus Astra Telepathica

**Magisterium:** Lex Majoris Psykana (authority within accorded duty subject to the review only of the Lords Imperial of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica and the Offices of the Imperial Household).

**Cognomen (Informal):** The Sisters of Silence, the Witch-Seekers, the Pale Scourge, the Soulless Ones, the Null Maidens, the Eyrine, the Daughters of the Abyss

**Domains (Legal Remit):** Wherever the shadow of the Emperor falls.

**Domains (Vassalage):** The Somnus Citadel (Luna, headquarters), the Magadan Orbital Construct (Fortress Anchorage of the Black Ships, Sol System), Cold Alpha (Prison Fortress, Titan orbit, Sol System), Star One/Silent Harbour/Taceant Astra (code designations believed to be Segmentum Solar planetary systems given over to the secure processing of the Great Tithe, location unknown/prohibited).

*'As a child on Gehenna, I remember the stories of the white maidens; terrifying ghosts that would come in the night to steal away the witch-born and children who had done terrible wrongs. It was said that they could find the wicked no matter how deep in the hive they sank or to what forgotten spire they climbed. As I grew, I came to believe such things were no more than superstition, but now that I am an officer of the Great Crusade, bloodied upon the battlefields of a score of worlds, I have come to find that my childhood fears were true, and quite valid.'*

*The Memoires of Lt. Colonel Gudrun Ceax (Rt.)  
227<sup>th</sup> Gehennan Rifles*

Across the great Imperium of Mankind, the Sisters of Silence are figures of mystery and fear. They have entered the folklore and superstitions of thousands of Compliant human worlds, despite the efforts of the Imperium's iterators to stamp out such folly, and it is easy to understand why. Riding the dark void between the stars upon the dreaded Black Ships, the Silent Sisterhood are the enforcers of the Great Tithe, known by some as the 'Psyker Cull' and the 'Hunt That Never Ends'. Each one of them is an anathema, a soulless thing that inspires dread wherever they walk. They harvest those humans with the psyker's 'gift', child or adult; whether given up by their kin and government freely, or stalked and trapped to the very ends of their world, there is no hiding place from the Sisters of Silence, no argument that can sway them, and no turning them aside. By the writ of the Emperor they come and go like ghosts between the stars, and strike like the reaper of myth against any who would seek to thwart them.

## THE HUNT THAT NEVER ENDS

It is rightly said that the Sisters of Silence—to give them their most common official designation—are one of most secretive and mysterious of all the Orders of the Emperor's servants. They are a covert organisation that has served as the militant arm of the Divisio and Adeptus of the Astra Telepathica since its foundation, and within whose ranks and titles they are known, at least in formal documentation, as the 'Divisio Investigates'—a rather obscure phrase which covers up a shrouded world into which very few have ever had the power or the authority to look within. Though markedly different in nature and origin, they share much in common in this regard with the Legio Custodes, particularly in the reach of their legal authority, which where their duties are concerned is effectively inviolate over all the myriad powers and principalities of the wider Imperium and its hundreds of thousands of human inhabited worlds. Markedly also, the Silent Sisterhood has the right and duty to walk freely within the inner sancta of the Imperial Vaults, the sovereign and sole domain of the Emperor and His Household at the behest and licence of the Master of Mankind. It is a right they share only with the Legio Custodes.

The duties of the Silent Sisterhood are complex and manifold, but at their core they are warrior-investigators, hunters and gaolers. Their charge is to seek out, apprehend and

process psykers from the human population of the ever-expanding Imperium, and return them to the Divisio Astra Telepathica for assessment and disposition. As part of this never-ending task, their duty is also to hunt down renegade psykers and destroy those who are deemed too dangerous to live. This is a perilous task well beyond the abilities of any merely human law enforcement or military force, but it is made possible, indeed in some cases seamless, in its execution not simply by the martial prowess of the Sisterhood itself, but crucially by their fundamental nature as Psychic Nulls.

## The Daughters of Anathema

The most singular thing about the Order is that each and every one within its ranks is an 'Untouchable', a rare sub-set of humanity who cast no shadow in the Warp, and whose minds are immune to psychic assault and an anathema to those with psychic powers. Their mere proximity is enough to cause psykers discomfort and pain, and in truth they will even sow fear in the hearts of those whose minds are without the psyker's gift, no matter how strong willed they may be. It is a simple and irresistible reaction to the fundamental 'wrongness' of the Untouchable or as it is often put more melodramatically, a body without a soul. This curious and macabre phenomena goes beyond simple absence, as one might feel disturbed by a mannequin or automata which apes humanity but remains unalive—instead it is an observably preternatural effect which seems to strike deep against the fundamental unconscious perceptions of all living beings as something malignant and contrary to the natural order of existence. There appears to be perceptible degrees of this effect which vary from individual to individual, with some Untouchables 'stronger' in the phenomena than others, and it is from the strongest of these that the Sisters of Silence are drawn.

It is also noteworthy in fact to the extent that the disturbance caused by an Untouchable is evident not only to humanity, but also all other lifeforms and xenos species encountered to some greater or lesser extent. There are in proof of this many recorded incidences of the unsettling effects of human

Psychic Nulls being enough even to unnerve the blind brutal savagery of rampaging Orks, while to the Eldar xenofom, psychically attuned as their race is, the presence of a human Untouchable is a thing of acute existential horror.

The most potent and perhaps shocking power of the Psychic Null however is that which makes them the perfect hunters and slayers of psykers; Untouchables such as the Sisters of Silence are almost impossible to affect with Empyrean powers. Their minds cannot be taken over, their perceptions cannot be altered and their bodies cannot be possessed. Even the cruder but more direct manipulations of the environment or ambient energy by the psyker such as conjured fire or the hurling of debris by telekinetic force is lessened and sometimes negated outright by the Untouchable's proximity. With Psychic Nulls such as the Sisters of Silence, specifically chosen for the 'strength' of their gift, it is the case that their minds are not simply absent or inert to a psyker's mental perception, but howling abysses of darkness that not only negate psychic force directed at them, but actively interfere with the flow of the Warp around them. The profoundly phobic reaction they engender extends to both human and xenos psykers as well as entities and creatures of the Empyrean, their mere presence a debilitating toxin.

Further, there are those among the Sisterhood who through arcane training and practice, and whose nature has never been revealed to outsiders, are able to develop their 'null' abilities further until they are actively disruptive enough to make any use of psychic power in their presence extremely hazardous. These Sisters are honed into the 'Oblivion Knights', and within their Order they are the foundation stone of an elite force specially tasked not with the day-to-day enforcement of the Great Tithe, but the destruction of alpha-level rogue psykers and the ceaseless training for battles of this deadly kind.



## THE ASTRA TELEPATHICA, THE ASTRONOMICAN AND THE GREAT TITHE

Before expanding the Great Crusade to the stars beyond Sol, the Emperor first ordered the construction of the Astronomican on Terra. Huge numbers of Tech-Priests were brought from Mars to oversee the project and the majority of the Terran population was drafted to construct the towering machine-building or support this labour. At the time, the Astronomican was the single largest artifice on Terra, and the sole purpose of this colossal endeavour was that the entire device was merely a focus through which the Emperor could direct His fathomless psychic energies to generate a partly self-sustaining signal (although few involved were aware of this fact). The psychic navigational beam which the Astronomican generated was able to cut through the Warp and those attuned to its unique frequencies and modulations, the Navigators, were able to use it as a beacon and pole star when plotting journeys through the Immaterium. By this the Warp could be travelled at speeds and with a margin of safety that had been unprecedented—although risk of course could never be fully mitigated—and this was an incalculable boon to both the Great Crusade and the fledgling interstellar domain it was creating. Such was its effect that even then some referred to it as the 'Divine Light', or the 'Emperor's Light', often without fully realising the literal truth of those words.

In addition to this invaluable beacon among the stars, the Imperium would not have been made possible without the creation and continuation of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica. This special corps of inter-stellar communicators was created by the Emperor during the final months of the conquest of Ancient Terra, as the Emperor had foreseen their absolute future need. For the most part the Emperor did not favour the use of psychic talents in others; as a psyker Himself, albeit one of unprecedented power and control, He was well aware of the dangers inherent in contact with the Warp. Furthermore, the Age of Strife on Old Earth had its own 'witch-kings' and possessed psykers to attest to those dangers, some of whom the Emperor had personally slain. However, He was

able to identify those who were strong enough and so with some prudence, certain psykers were employed in a variety of specialised roles within the Imperium, and the astropaths were to be such an exception, being needed not in their hundreds, but tens of thousands. It was to feed this need that the Great Tithe was first envisioned.

### The Astropaths

An astropath is an 'astro-telepath', an individual capable of communicating with others of their kind over vast interstellar distances through phantasmal visions, empathic transmission and vision allegory rather than through words. This is an essential talent as the inhabited worlds of Mankind are many light years apart in physical terms and the only practical way for the Imperium to maintain any semblance of unity is by such communication, however temperamental it may be. All astropaths undergo a special process that moulds their powers and at the same time strengthens them against psychic danger. This is called the 'Soul Binding' ritual, which shapes the mind and cerebral structure of the subject with the Emperor's own psychokinetic force as a potter shapes wet clay. Unfortunately not all candidates survive this ritual—some are driven insane, and all have their personalities altered to some degree. The raw energy of the Emperor's will also has another effect. So powerful are the forces involved that many of the more delicate sensory nerves can be damaged, especially the optic nerves. Consequently, almost all astropaths are blind, whilst many also lack a sense of smell, touch or hearing, a stigmata which sets them as a breed apart even as their sacrifice binds the Imperium together.

### The Great Tithe

In order to fuel and provide manpower for the creation of the Adeptus Astra Telepathica, a vast and intricate organisation was created, the Divisio Astra Telepathica, and many of the resources gained by the initial conquests of the Great Crusade were diverted to its establishment. It was vast in scope and its key function was to execute one of the fundamental goals the Emperor

Himself had set for the Great Crusade; the marshalling and regulation of all human psykers across the ever expanding worlds of the Imperium. This seemingly incomprehensible task required hundreds of thousands of functionaries and technicians, billions of tonnes of raw materials to construct specialised facilities, and most significantly, an absolute concentration of a body of psyker lore on a scale perhaps unknown before in humanity's long history.

While the astropaths remained the major focus of the Divisio, within the Great Tithe's shadow grew scores of sub-organisations: administrative blocs, logistical corpus, dedicated techno-cults and arcane academic faculties, all shrouded in deep secrecy to maintain their absolute security. These included most notably the chambers of the Scholastica Psykana, an institution of bound and bonded psykers who were deemed strong and stable enough to induct and train others of their own kind into the Imperium's service. Suborned to them were new organisations such as the fledgling Primaris battle psyker programmes, the training of the mentally conditioned truthsayers of the Administratum, and much that went unseen.

Above all of these sub-groups and of vast practical importance was the League of Black Ships, a dedicated fleet of specialised, purpose-built interstellar craft, their masters and crew fashioned to carry out the harvest of humanity. From the start however, it was clear that the Divisio would also need its own militant wing specialised not only in conducting the Great Tithe of psykers the Emperor had decreed, but in combating the very evils the tithe sought to prevent directly. The onus of this dread task fell upon the newly-formed Divisio Investigates.

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE DIVISIO INVESTIGATES

As surprising as it may be, evidence suggests, at least upon the surface, that the Silent Sisterhood as it now stands was not part of the initial pattern of the Imperium's forces laid down by the Master of Mankind. There are those however who contest this, and claim that what became the Silent Sisterhood long dwelt in the shadows awaiting their time. It is doubtless true regardless of this that a number of so-called Untouchables did serve under the banners of Unification, but evidence suggests that understandably perhaps they did so at a remove both from the Emperor Himself, and His aide and minister, Malcador, then vizier to the Lord of Lightning, the both of them being psykers of prodigious strength, with He who was to be Emperor the greatest psyker humanity has ever known. These 'soulless' servants were, according to such rumours that persist from those times, in the nature of covert agents and assassins, and few in number, rather than a distinct militant Order. In fact, the only analogue in Ancient Terran history for the Sisters of Silence, as they are now known, can be found in the Akashic records of an entirely different age and hue; the darkly famed 'Hollow Ones' who served the Unspeakable King—himself by some legends a Psychic Null—in the terrible lost centuries of Terra's Age of Strife before the coming of the Emperor.

### The First Harvests

During the Unification Wars, there had been many terrible threats born of psyker-witchery and warp entity possession encountered during the pacification, but these had been fought head on and overmastered by the power of the Emperor and the raw might of His warriors, but in the latter case at a terrible and disproportionate cost in lives. As the Great Crusade began to leave the confines of the Sol System and the first waves of the newly created League of Black Ships followed in their wake, where the Great Tithe was concerned initially, newly founded paramilitary investigation and enforcer cadres were employed to minister it on the ground, commanded by a cabal of loyal Primaris level psykers drawn from the Scholastica Psykana—this was the first incarnation of the Divisio Investigates—and to Terra directly they returned their harvest.

Though by all accounts well led and ably armed and armoured, this new militant Order's track record was not one of unalloyed success as the size of the Imperium rose to

encompass first dozens, then scores, then hundreds of inhabited star systems, and the strain quickly began to show. It was swiftly apparent in fact as the years passed that mortal losses among the Divisio's armed forces, incidences of psychological breakdown and bloody tragedy involving them were far too frequent to be borne. Such records that exist available to the auspices of the Terran Council indicate that it was known at the time that a better solution to the problem of the apprehension and control of psykers was clearly needed, but with the Great Crusade still in its infancy, its future configurations were not yet set and much was in flux, and many of the Emperor's purposes had not yet been made plain or found their final form. It is also said that at this time, a number of radical solutions were put before the consideration of the Emperor and His counsellors, but before a ruling was made, matters came to a head with the Cataclysm of Pentacanaes.

### A Plague of Madness

A largely impoverished but relatively societally stable Sol pattern hive world, mere weeks in distance from Terra by the tides of the Empyrean, Pentacanaes had been both an early and an easily acquired bauble for the Great Crusade. Struggling to barely maintain an industrial technological base, its only advantage was as a fleet anchorage, and the only resource it offered the Imperium was its vast human population which ran into the tens of billions of lives.

Under an Imperial governorship which displaced a squalid mess of rival competing petty kings and confederations that had held the planet beforehand, Pentacanaes had grown first into a frontier outpost, then into a port-of-call, with hundreds of Imperialis Auxilia regiments temporarily stationed there before mustering and redeployment to the front lines. During this period, many of the native population's ablest and fittest youths also took up the call of the Great Crusade, thus stripping the world of its best and brightest to form departing regiments of its own. The end result was a planet in a steady, slow rot from within. Vice and petty corruption bred in the shadows of the vast landing yards and barracks complexes, while in the hive sinks and deep-core slum falls, bypassed by the wealth that had come to the world's upper castes and bled of hope and prospect, dark beliefs and strange cults began to fester despite the best efforts of locally posted iterators of the Imperial Truth and enforcement purges to stamp them out. Eventually, intelligence reached the

Imperial governor of a particularly dangerous doomsday cult, calling itself the 'Final Banquet', having taken root in a desolate slum sector known as the Distempora. The cult violently resisted any attempts to destroy it and it was reliably rumoured to be led by a 'holy family' with the power to 'work miracles'. The League of Black Ships was duly informed, and when next one of the tithe vessels arrived in Pentacanaes' orbit, a quintet of heavily armed gun-cutters was dispatched to descend into the Distempora sector carrying a strong Divisio Investigates force to end the cult and seize its leadership, who were judged in absentia doubtlessly to be rogue psykers. It is not known precisely what happened next, but the gun-cutters and their crews were never heard from again, and within hours all of Distempora was riven with a cataclysm of hideous and unreasoning bloodshed. This spread like wildfire and a few hours later, all of Pentacanaes' southern hemisphere was ablaze and stricken with an unending tide of riot, savagery and slaughter. It was clear that some form of psychic force had been unleashed on Pentacanaes, taking the shape of a plague of madness which had seized perhaps fully one in four of the living as it slowly expanded out from the Distempora sector like a spreading stain. Those it claimed became monsters, inhuman things bent upon the perpetration of atrocity and wild destruction.

A state of emergency was declared and units of the Imperialis Auxilia barracked on Pentacanaes were activated and moved to form a cordon around the affected sectors, but even they could not hold, and worse, soon many of their own ranks began to succumb to the madness. The Imperial governor of Pentacanaes was also a victim, shot down by his bodyguards as he attempted to end the lives of his own children as the madness took him. Authority now fell to the highest ranking Imperial officer in orbit, the master of the same Black Ship that had triggered the massacre: Captain Gigan D'antès. Elements of the VI<sup>th</sup> Legion—not yet known as the Space Wolves—had been alerted and were inbound from Terra, but their arrival would not be for days and Gigan D'antès judged that Pentacanaes did not have that long. Even the desperate measure of targeted lance strikes and orbital barrages could not halt the spread of the anarchy across the world, and wherever Captain D'antès looked, all was in disarray. No force already in combat could hold long against whatever psyker-born madness afflicted that damned world. No force, he noted with surprise, except for one.



The Daughters of the Crow was what the manifest of the stationed Imperialis Auxilia named them, or more formally the 5<sup>th</sup> '9-13' Indentured Irregular Infantry Regiment. They were a primarily female-culturally phenotype (techno-barbarian) force from an obscure feral world in the southern reaches of the Segmentum Solar, so obscure in fact it lacked a proper name in the records, only the designation of '9-13.' Recently raised and folded into the Great Crusade, landing only weeks previously for muster, the regiment had not yet seen active service, but the sparse records available showed a number of ill-defined complaints raised against the regiment by those who had been barracked alongside it; numerous fractious incidents were logged and discipline masters had been frequently sent out in force to break up trouble between the 9-13'ers and others. Sent in with the rest of the Auxilia as the tide of madness had spread, the small regiment had not only held against the onslaught, it had driven back the afflicted horde, and not one of its fighters had suffered psychic contamination. Not one.

To Gigan D'antès, versed in the lore of the Scholastica Psykana, there could only be a single answer; the Daughters of the Crow—or at least a very significant proportion of them—were Untouchables. It was unprecedented and doubtless something that needed later investigation, but for now they offered a lifeline to a world besieged by madness. Swiftly organising such air support as he could, and using Black Ship pilots where possible to add resilience against the growing psychic storm, Gigan paved the way for the Daughters of the Crow, gambling all and airlifting the entire regiment, reinforced and up-armed in any way possible, and blasted them a landing zone into the very heart of the nightmare, the depths of the Distempora sector. Here they gave battle to the transfigured horrors that had been unleashed from the gestalt minds of the 'holy family' of the cult—gave battle and slew them. The effect was akin to extinguishing a fire by hurling an explosive into its midst. A psychic shockwave roared across the planet. Many of the afflicted mercifully simply died, their hearts stopped and their brains sundered as some great parasitic link was severed. Others who were less fortunate became catatonic, but still more raved on, now simply truly mad rather than the puppets of some malign force. The spreading stain of madness however had been cut off at its source, and now mere anarchy and disaster reigned, where dark purpose had previously ruled all.



It would take the arrival of the VI<sup>th</sup> Legion to bring Pentacanaes back to heel, and in the aftermath a billion dead were accounted for and half a world left a burned out shell. By then the survivors of the Daughters of the Crow were long gone within the hold of D'antès' Black Ship, while far off across the Segmentum Solar, it is said that scores of other Black Ships appeared in the skies of the obscure planet designated '9-13' and in their passing left a world half emptied.

**The Birth of Silence**

The events of the Cataclysm of Pentacanaes stand in blessed isolation in the Imperium's record as regards the origins of the Sisters of Silence, and it seems certain to many observers that '9-13' and its bounty of Untouchables are to all evidence the core upon which the remade Divisio Investigates

was formed. Or so it seems. There are some at this point in time who doubt the veracity of this account, or at least its significance. That the account exists at all in the chronicles of the Great Crusade is suspect to the minds of other observers, when so much else around the Silent Sisterhood is shrouded in secrecy. Others merely contest that the historical account has been doctored. Certainly, Lord Militant Luca Kulga a century later in his treatises, *Notable Battles of the Segmentum Solar*, was recorded as speculating that the whole Pentacanaes affair was arranged; a kind of bloody experiment—a field test whose results were bought at the deliberate sacrifice of a billion lives. If this is the case, then by whom—the lords of the Divisio Telepathica, or the Emperor directly? If so, then the answer becomes immediately unknowable.

Some insist that the origins of the Silent Sisterhood go even further back, either in the mind of the Emperor, or some lost agency of the Dark Age of Technology, that they awaited perhaps only a critical mass of Untouchables to act, or at least to operate in the open. Regardless, within an unknown exact number of years, but no greater than four decades into the Great Crusade, the Divisio Investigates became synonymous with a new militant Order, that of the Sisters of Silence. Unique in the Imperium's service, this Order comprised human Psychic Nulls, all female, thousands strong and beholden to none but the Emperor. The Great Tithe now included direct action to reinforce their numbers in the harvest of worlds, garnering Untouchable female children just as it did the psyker-marked. Structured in isolation and with the ironclad rule of

discipline, this militant arm of the Divisio Astra Telepathica operated with remorseless efficiency and under an unassailable vow of silence and secrecy, a distinction which gave them a ready common name to those of the Imperium's authorities with whom they dealt, and to the Imperium through which they began to pass ghostlike upon their dark harvest, they became objects of fear and awe.

Exactly where and how the Sisters of Silence came into being remains but one mystery among many where they are concerned, and that the shadow of some techno-barbarian culture is part of their bloodline seems clear, but from whence exactly it came not even the wisest of Imperial military historiographs can state with clarity. But as a postscript to the official account of the Cataclysm of Pentacanaes, it can be said for a fact that the

hive world endures; although it is a ravaged, half-empty domain of gloom and ashes now, steeped in old tragedy and long since left behind as the Imperium has expanded across the galaxy. As for the world designated '9-13', no such sphere is listed in the Cartographica Imperialis—the numeric is simply missing from its lists.

**THE WITCH-SEEKERS AND THEIR WORKS**

The Silent Sisterhood as an organisation is one of singular reach and secrecy. Its exact numbers are unknown save to the Emperor, for though it remains nominally part of the Divisio Astra Telepathica, it has long become interwoven with the will and direct agency of the Emperor Himself. For while the Legio Custodes guard the Master of Mankind directly, the Sisters of Silence have become pivotal to the carrying out of the Emperor's



great and secret works. By the later Great Crusade, the Sisters of Silence certainly numbered in their tens of thousands, though this force was widely dispersed, and the Sisterhood's Untouchables now crewed and commanded the vessels of the League of Black Ships. In addition, they maintained a strong presence both on Terra itself as well as notably at their Luna headquarters, the Somnus Citadel—a facility handed over by the ancient Selenite cults—and the Magadan Orbital Construct—the fortified orbital anchorage station utilised by the League of Black Ships in the Sol System to deliver their cargo, and forbidden to all others. It is also taken as fact that much of the initial sifting and processing of the Great Tithe takes place not in the Sol System but elsewhere on several isolated and otherwise prohibited star systems nearby—an understandable change from the tithe's early days given the sheer scale of the operation as the Imperium has expanded and the potential security risks involved in so many untrained psykers being concentrated in a single area. These Divisio Astra Telepathica administered star systems are only known to other arms of the Imperium as vague and shifting code designations, but here the Silent Sisters alone hold sway and what numbers, facilities and resources they possess in these sovereign domains, none save they and the Emperor knows. In fact, such is the shroud of secrecy surrounding the Great Tithe that only the Navigators of the League of Black Ships know the location of these processing worlds and various Black Ship anchorages, collection-node stations and outposts scattered across the Imperium, and their lives are led in sealed biome-crucibles, prisoning homes which auto-incinerate all within should their seals ever be compromised; such is the priceless wealth in human potential of the Great Tithe judged and guarded.

### The Vow of Tranquillity

Secrecy is more than just the watchword and the method of the Silent Sisterhood; it is core to their very being. After their training is complete and their induction to the Sisterhood is confirmed, a process which begins when they are taken up in childhood, the final step on the path of the Order is the Vow of Tranquillity; a solemn dedication to their duty unto death which manifests outwardly as the vow of silence which gives the Divisio Investigates its more common title. From this point onwards no Sister of Silence utters a single spoken word for the rest of their lives, not even under duress of pain, be it the stroke of a blade or impact of a bullet, such is their stoic resolve. No secret can or ever shall pass from the keeping of the Sisters of Silence, and no word of remission or clemency from them is ever given. Further symbolic of this absolute vow is the portcullis-style armoured gorget they wear as part of their panoply of war, which, often in combination with a death's-head skull, has become identified with the Order in the iconography of the Imperium.

Communication within the Sisters of Silence takes the medium of a complex series of physical sign language forms, ranging from highly efficient and abrupt tactical cants designed for the battlefield, detailed forms geared to the ready and precise expression of strategic concepts and actions, to hugely complex and mimetically sophisticated systems intended to deal with philosophical and technical abstracts. This latter range is needed because the Sisters of Silence

remain an organisation dedicated not only to the ministration of the Great Tithe but also to investigation, pursuit, inquiry and judgement. They also possess and must express when needed an unmatched and encyclopaedic knowledge of the psyker and the Empyrean, which they alone, owing to their Psyker Null status, are uniquely safe in keeping. Communication outside their ranks is usually facilitated by one of two sources. Firstly, through the involvement of selected apprentice-acolytes of the Sisterhood, themselves Untouchables and warriors in training of various ages, who act as intermediaries, known as the 'Proloquors', and secondly through a number of technolinguis systems which allow the symbolic-structure of the Sisters' sign-forms to be rendered machine-readable at great speed, and if needed in extremis, outputted as vox-signal via servo-automata. The Silent Sisterhood maintains fluency in numerous other forms of gestural and non-verbal linguistic communication such as Legiones Astartes battle-sign of various types, voidsys and graph-binarc for conversing with other military forces of the Imperium directly when the need arises.

### The Art of War of the Silent Sisterhood

Beyond their unique abilities as Psychic Nulls, the Sisters of Silence are also a highly trained and relentless paramilitary force, ably equipped to their task and skilled in overcoming any opposition they may encounter in their sworn duty, be it deluded bystanders, mind-ridden soldiers, hordes of psychically-puppeted corpses or even armed cults sat at the heart of a world's ruling caste. The Sisters of Silence are as remorseless, dedicated and as formidably skilled as any human fighting force of the Imperium, while the cold darkness of their minds makes them a more terrible foe than any to the witch, the rogue psyker and the Warp-touched.

Given their particular duties, their training and tactical bias focuses on close-quarters combat, short-ranged, high-intensity warfare which often sees them fighting from a position of numeric inferiority and on unfamiliar ground, and their skill in such conditions is supreme. Fear is alien to them, their conditioning and experiences exposing them to horrors against which even a veteran of the dark frontiers of the Great Crusade could not easily endure. Glory and honour—as these things are generally understood—are of little value to the Sisters of Silence, theirs is a higher calling and only

the attainment of their goals has meaning to them. Given this, stealth, covert surveillance and torture are all tried and tested weapons in their repertoire to be used when needed, and they know well the value of mystery, shock, awe and terror in their work. They will readily invoke their Emperor-given authority to use and discard any intermediaries and agencies of the Imperium as they require, and 'collateral' destruction in pursuit of their targets is judged as a thing to be avoided as a matter of course, but irrelevant in cases of necessity.

Beyond their extreme training and coldly rational tactical discipline, there is also something that has been quite deliberately invoked of the barbaric and the arcane about the Sisters of Silence as a militant Order. This is not simply to provoke fear in others, although clearly this effect is ably achieved, but also it lends them a distinct and singular entity, as well as a murderous intensity in combat seldom encountered beyond the Imperium's superhuman fighting forces such as the Legiones Astartes. This deliberate element of feral barbarism finds its expression in many forms, ranging from the totem-like names chosen to designate their tactical sub-units during deployment, to the aesthetic design of their ornate battle gear, which is styled to invoke imagery of the warriors of ages past but match the function of the finest power armour, to their manes of long hair, said to remain unshorn unless the Sister has a sworn quarry escape them.

### THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SILENT SISTERHOOD

The Divisio Investigates is an organisation more akin in structure to the fusion of an agency of legal enforcement and a secret society or secular military Order of old. As with so much that surrounds those who orbit close to the centre of the Emperor's work, its ways and dispositions are all but impenetrable to outsiders beyond certain open ranks and divisions observable by those who are called to fight alongside them.

A complete accounting of the Sisters of Silence's ranks is then impossible, but the simple extrapolation of logic from the notional size of the League of Black Ships required at the minimum for the Great Tithe to function, as it assuredly does, places the Sisters of Silence at tens of thousands of active Witch-seekers. The high command of the Order outwardly comprises three high offices and individuals that were known to the hierarchy of the Imperium at the time of the outbreak of the Horus Heresy, though doubtless there were others that went unknown outside of the Sisterhood itself.

Most famed of these is the rank of Knight-Commander; the most senior field officer of the Silent Sisterhood. This title was held by one of the most sinisterly renowned warriors in the Imperium—Jenetia Krole, known also by popular myth as the 'Soulless Queen'. Of equal importance to the execution of the Great Tithe is the rank of the Mistress of the Black Ships, and in effect, the grand admiral of the Divisio Investigates' fleet; this was held by Varonika Sulath. Lastly is the Nemesis Praxia, Ebon Naroda; she who was high guardian of the compiled lore and estates temporal of the Divisio Investigates, and ultimately responsible for the training of its acolytes.



Other ranks within the organisation progress through that of Acolyte —of the First, Second and Third rank— more informally known as ‘Sisters-in-waiting’, who have not yet formally been initiated into the Order. Further ranks of the Sisterhood proper were referred to with melodramatic flourish as the ‘Null Maidens’ by the remembrancers of the Great Crusade. These are structured both in terms of seniority and tactical disposition, ranking in order: Seeker, Prosecutor, and with Vigilator as the most senior of the three. Other specialist units such as the Pursuers, the Aquilae Astra and Questora, accounting for cyber-beast handlers, pilots and void crew, and Investigators/Enforcers respectively branch off these.

Above this level, the Order’s hierarchy bifurcated to outside eyes into two distinct groups: the Chamber of Oblivion and the Chamber of Judgement. The first is an elite militant sub-faction comprising the most powerful Psychic Nulls and most martially skilled of Vigilators, and from its ranks of Oblivion Knights and Knights-Centura—the battlefield commanders of the Order are taken. The latter chamber is if anything more feared. It comprises the dreaded Silent Judges of the Excrutiatius, whose task is to weigh the actions of the guilty and innocent when it comes to those concealing psykers from the tithe, and where matters are not clear regards those believed to be psykers, to determine the presence of the psyker’s gift, and where it is found, to pass judgement on whether the accused should be taken by the tithe, or executed as a danger to humanity.

#### Panoply of War

In terms of armament and equipment, the Divisio Investigates is particularly well served, and second only perhaps to the Legio Custodes in the scope and customisation of its arsenal. It has long maintained myriad different weapons and tactical systems suited to its needs, from patterns of the Terran bolter—a weapon more commonly associated with the Space Marine Legions—manufactured for use by unaugmented humans, to the exquisitely fashioned and utterly lethal executioner’s power blades carried by its Vigilators. The Divisio Investigates also has access to large stockpiles of advanced and specialised weapons such as las-borer alchem needlers that can render a target comatose for capture as readily as slay them, and with them a poisons cabinet whose contents have been drawn from across a thousand worlds. Though the Sisters of Silence have access to the multitude of the Imperium’s STC designs, which they have

often relied on in their duty, during the late Great Crusade these were largely replaced in the field with unique patterns of grav-repulsor craft outfitted with sophisticated covert operations and stealth systems better suited to their needs. Besides this, the Order has access to certain far more arcane technologies all but unguessed at outside the Divisio Astra Telepathica; most prominently psi-negation and disruption weaponry whispered to have been created for them by the hand of the Emperor Himself.

#### The Black Ships

The League of Black Ships itself cannot also go unremarked in any overview of the power of the Silent Sisterhood. It is a fleet of uniquely designed void craft of considerable size and power, most being variants of more commonly known long-range cruiser and battlecruiser designs. They are heavily armed, well-defended, rigged for extended operations and above all equipped with systems that allow them to go unnoticed by signal and auspex scan if needed. Just how many there are is a matter of conjecture, but this figure by the end of the Great Crusade certainly ranged into the hundreds, if not thousands. They are a shadow upon the

stars of the Imperium, coming and going all but unseen, even as the wars of the Heresy unfolded, bound to no purpose or authority but their own. Just as secret are the location and capacity of many of the orbital ship forges and docks which serviced them. The vessels are also highly automated, reducing the need for human crew who might be imperilled by their cargo, and allowing for voyages of long duration without resupply when needed. They are by their nature a hell for any psyker taken on board as their structure is interlaced with systems to block out and resist the psyker’s connection to the Empyrean, as well as numerous cells for internment, punishment and interrogation, and cryo-crypts and stasis chambers for the storage of the most dangerous subjects. The largest and most powerful Black Ships also carry limited supplies of Exterminatus class weaponry—usually planet-mantle breaking cyclonic torpedoes and rare vortex warheads rather than bio-weapons for reasons of intended outcome. This enables them to enact world-kill protocols or the more confined if no less absolute annihilation of an area if a rogue psyker crisis threatens a catastrophic warp breach on a world’s surface, though such incidents are thankfully rare.

#### THE PARIAH GENE

The exact biological source—as it is believed to be—which creates in a human being the state of Psychic Null, the so-called ‘Pariah gene’, has proven an elusive and ephemeral subject of study, and in testing no single ‘gene’ at all. Such attempts to exploit or isolate it when pursued by both the Imperial Archotechnologist Corps and the Mechanicum during the Great Crusade’s early years courted disaster, and as a result the Emperor decreed a general moratorium upon the study of the biological basis of the Psyker Null phenomena, affecting all but His own direct experimentation should He wish it. What remains of those extant studies indicates that most attempts to synthesise, propagate or even weaponise the Psychic Null were tragic failures or worse. Despite all this evidence, shadowed accounts of certain Clades of the Officio Assassinorum and the dread and obscure Ordo Sinister also contain evidence of the Emperor’s own ‘engineered’ use of the Psychic Null in warfare. To others however, the mystery of the Pariah gene, if it truly exists, remains out of reach.

So many unanswered questions revolve around this most arcane and dangerous of topics. Foremost are those which centre around theories of how the Pariah gene came about: was it perhaps the result of xenos tampering of the human genome or some strange and terrible experiment of the Dark Age of Technology? Or, as the wildest theories state, is it some perverse evolutionary development against the Warp-riven cosmos itself? There is also the observation that no Space Marine, or Custodian Guard for that matter, has ever been recorded as being a Psychic Null. This factor weighs the evidence of some scholars that within the Space Marine gene-seed itself is perhaps a shadow of the Emperor’s own genetic material and a sliver of His own psychic power crucial to its process and success. If this is the case, it would be wholly an anathema to the Pariah gene and likely simply kill its implanted subject. It can only be speculated that if even a single Legion of Psychic Null Legiones Astartes had been possible, how very different history may have been—just as without the involvement of the Sisters of Silence in the war and the Emperor’s great work, Horus’ treachery may well have ended in his triumph upon the broken throne of Terra.

## VIGILATOR ALMATRA CRAVARE

#### FROST SPIDER VIGILATOR CADRE

17<sup>TH</sup> DOMINION OF THE SILENT SISTERHOOD  
OF THE GREAT TITHE

#### PROSPERINE CENSURE FORCE

Archetypal of the Sisters of Silence present in the Censure Force despatched to Prospero from Terra, Almatra Cravare was a veteran of the Great Tithe, and such extant records that survive from the Somnus Citadel on Luna indicate that she had more than two decades of service in the League of Black Ships. As a Vigilator—one of the Execution blade-equipped close combat elite of the Silent Sisterhood—it was her task and the task of cadres like hers to close rapidly in combat with enemy psykers and dispose of them with the bloody certainty of a power blade strike, preferably one inflicting a decapitating blow. While they relied not only upon their power as Psychic Nulls, but also their skill and speed as well as the protection of their advanced armour to defend them from harm in such close assaults, to serve as a Vigilator was still to invite peril and death, but this was an honour that the Silent Sisterhood’s ranks aspired to above all. The risk of such service was never more evident than upon the deadly, reality-warped battlefields of Prospero. Amid the fury of the darkest hours of the Battle of Tizca, the selfless sacrifice of the Vigilator cadres was perhaps the deciding factor in many sectors of the battle, allowing their comrades both of the Custodian Guard and the Space Wolves to close with the foe without being swept aside on a tide of warp-conjured horror. Almatra Cravare stands as a testament to this, fighting on despite bolter and shrapnel wounds which should have felled an unaugmented human being several times over, she gave up her life only after plunging her blade through the torso of Magister Gul Hadrastep of the Thousand Sons Order of Ruin, disrupting the skein of psychic energy with which he drove on the psi-automata at his command, allowing them to be overcome.



Vratine Armour Pauldron Iconography



