



# THE WORD BEARERS

**Numeration:** The XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion

**Primogenitor:** Lorgar the Urizen, aka Lorgar Aurelian

**Cognomen:** (Prior) The Imperial Heralds, Iconoclasts (informal)

**Observed Strategic Tendencies:**

Mass Assault, Policing Actions, Gnoetic Purgation, Suppression of Ideological Revolt

**Noteworthy Domains:** Colchis, Melkeji, Ipsia, Golkoron, garrison oversight and tithing rights on fifty-three other worlds.

**Allegiance:** Traitoris Maximus

*"Faith is the soul of any army; be it vested in primitive religion or enlightened truth. It makes even the least soldier mighty, the craven is remade worthy and through its balm any hardship may be endured. Faith ennobles all of the works the soldier undertakes be they so base or vile, and imports to them the golden spark of transcendent purpose."*

Lorgar Aurelian  
Primarch of the Word Bearers

If there is a hierarchy of treachery, then the Word Bearers sit in its highest circle. Once the most devoted and rigorous of warriors, it was not enough that they fell, but they pulled their brother Legions into the abyss with them. While the treachery of others came like a storm, or the final flowering of a long buried seed, the Word Bearers' betrayal was poison distilled over long years. From their founding their devotion to the Imperium and the Great Crusade was beyond question, they were the bearers of the ideals of the Imperium, of its vision for the future of humanity. Their loyalty was never questioned, only the form of their devotion. But now their loyalty can never be seen as anything other than a mask and their fanaticism as a flaw which would undermine all they once sought to build.

**ORIGINS: THE HERALDS OF TRUTH**

Even before the Emperor's conquests spilled into the heavens, it was clear that he was not fighting a simple war of conquest, but a war of ideals. The Unification Wars, and later the Great Crusade, were intended to bring humanity's disparate and divided children together under a single enlightened rule. While the Emperor would break the forces and strongholds of those who opposed him, he was always prepared to accept fealty and service from those he defeated. If it was to be a true empire of Mankind then it would have to embrace even those who at first resisted its claim. As one battle leader in the Unification Wars remarked: *'If we kill everyone who resists us then we will reign over a kingdom of ashes'*. But with some there could never be reconciliation; unity had its limits.

Rationality and the illumination of knowledge could only lead Mankind so far; the darkness of barbarity had to be beaten back, broken and burned to light the path to the future. The adoration of gods and the proliferation of ideas and beliefs that could lead to superstition and ignorance were weeds that had to be cut away with the sword. In this way the armies of the nascent Imperium were fighting a war in the minds of the conquered as much as they were fighting a war of flesh and blood. It was this first war, the war to preserve the ideals of the Imperium that the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion was created to fight.

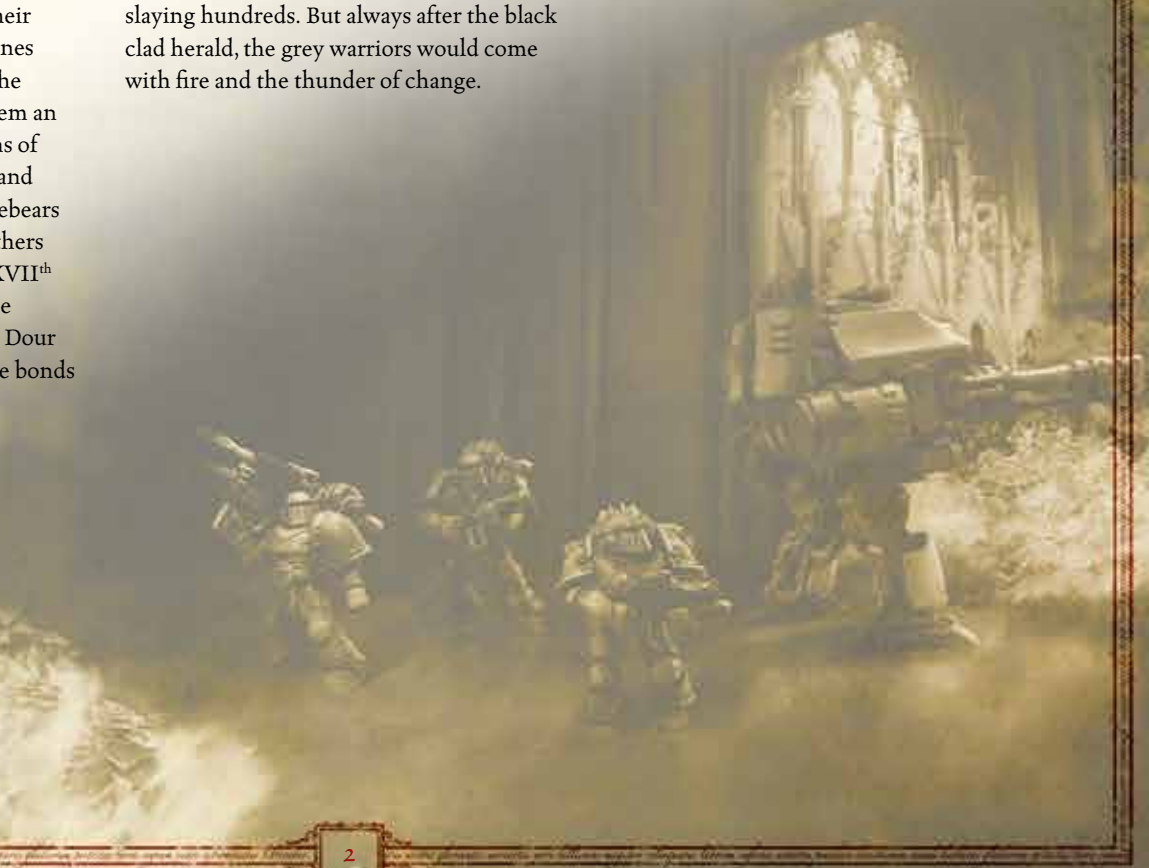
From its earliest days, the XVII<sup>th</sup> stood apart from their brother Legions in their duty and outlook. While all the Legiones Astartes fought with utter devotion, the warriors of the XVII<sup>th</sup> carried with them an air of zealotry. Recruited from the sons of exterminated foes, they were trained and raised to know the crimes of their forebears and the price of forgiveness. While others went to war with righteousness, the XVII<sup>th</sup> fought with the cold fury that only the condemned and redeemed can know. Dour and mirthless, few of them formed the bonds

with other Legions that were common during those early days. For them there was no joy in battle, nor glory in conquest. All that mattered was that their duty be done. While others might acknowledge and even respect their foes, the XVII<sup>th</sup> saw no virtue in defiance. Only once a foe was broken and bowed in repentance, could they be accepted as deserving anything but ruin.

While other Legions acquired names later in their history, the XVII<sup>th</sup> were named as the Imperial Heralds at their founding. That one amongst twenty should be singled out might imply some special favour, but in truth it was a title that spoke not to special honour, but to the Legion's place in the Emperor's purpose. Where enemies stood against the Emperor because of their belief in gods or the superstitions of Old Night, it would fall to the XVII<sup>th</sup> to deliver the Emperor's ultimatum: recant or be destroyed. To the fortresses of demagogues, and the enclaves of cults, a lone warrior of the XVII<sup>th</sup> would come. Clad in black armour, his face hidden by a skull helm and bearing the eagle-winged mace, the herald would speak of the truth offered by the Emperor and the futility of resistance. These bearers of the word and death were chosen from those who had shown supreme devotion to the Imperial Truth. Such a mantle once bestowed was never removed. Some, on seeing such a warrior would surrender, and renounce their false beliefs. Others would refuse. Many heralds would die at the hands of defiant enemies, pulled down by human hands after slaying hundreds. But always after the black clad herald, the grey warriors would come with fire and the thunder of change.

The wars waged by the Imperial Heralds were direct and functional. While other Legions fought in a manner that mirrored their nature, for the XVII<sup>th</sup> warfare was simply a tool to be applied. For them the true war existed long before a bullet was fired, and would last long after the last drop of blood had fallen. They were warriors in a war fought in the realm of belief, a war in which the truth was the only real weapon.

Once they had conquered, the Imperial Heralds would seek out works which spoke of the power of sorcery, false gods and the irrational. They emptied libraries, dividing the contents into truth and falsity. Idols and the trappings of worship would be cast down and pulled from temples and shrines. Those who had preserved the poison of false belief would be dragged to pyres made of heaped books and carved statues. All would burn together. Those who had been freed from the shackles of ignorance would be given a choice, embrace the Imperial Truth or join the pyre. Finally, the great buildings which had sheltered the lies of the past would be pulled down and reduced to dust. Only then would most of the warriors depart, leaving the saved population to their newly illuminated lives. It was a pattern they repeated across Ancient Terra, earning themselves a second name. Few spoke of the XVII<sup>th</sup> as the Imperial Heralds. To their brother Legions and the people of the newborn Imperium, they were the Iconoclasts.



### THE FIRE OF COLCHIS

Colchis was a world of old gods. It is said that religion was in the air, in the touch of the sun and the taste of dust. To its people, worship of higher powers was as much a part of them as the beating of their hearts and the crying of their children. Bound in feudal traditions it had once been a world of technology, but those days lay forgotten in Old Night. Life was easy for some and hard for others, and all the people knew the same truths that their fathers had known and their mothers had taught. That disease came and culled generations, but that these times would pass for nothing could remain unchanged. That war would come like rain and stain the land with blood, but there was always the promise of joy even when all seemed lost. All men died, and kings fell and new kings rose, but the gods remained.

When the infant Lorgar fell from the sky of Colchis, his Legion had yet to be born on Terra, and the faith of Colchis was held in the hand of a priesthood called the Covenant. Raised amongst the priesthood, Lorgar would grow to become one of the Covenant. In time he turned on those who had raised him, leading a crusade to destroy them in the name not of the old gods, but of one god, a god of gold and light who spoke to him from his dreams. When the Emperor reached Colchis, and descended

with Magnus the Red at his side, there could be no doubt in Lorgar's mind that he knelt before his god. Beside him a planet knelt and believed the same.

#### The Emperor as God

The belief that the Emperor was a god was not a new one. From the days of his first conquest, there were some who whispered that he was not of the mortal realm. Many of his conquered enemies were amongst the first to call him divine. Faced with his power and the destruction of everything they had known, they called him by ancient names, that being their only way to rationalise what had happened. Some called him an angel, others a spirit, some a demon, others placed his nature higher still. God they named him, and spoke prayers to him in the watches of the night and under the light of lost suns.

That Lorgar believed the Emperor a god is beyond doubt, and it is likely that he held this belief before he met the object of his devotion, and maintained it even after becoming a lord of a Legion charged with purging idolatry and superstition. In those first years he hid his conviction, never stating it openly but also never disavowing it. In all the records of his words in that time, of which there are many, there is endless praise for the Emperor's vision and for the course he charted for Mankind, but not one

word denouncing the specific belief that the Emperor was divine. The worship of idols, the practices of mystics, and the falseness of countless gods; all were condemned without measure, but on the nature of his lord and father, Lorgar remained silent.

It seems likely that Lorgar shared his belief with others, discussing and nursing their faith alongside his own. It might be easy given later events to say that figures such as Erebus and Kor Phaeron were his chief confidants, and perhaps they were. Others though seem equally likely to have played their part. Halik-gar, High Herald of the Legion and its commander before Lorgar's return, seems to have been converted by his gene-sire, and with him such devoted iconoclasts as Maedro Vessar and Ustun Cho. Through these and others, Lorgar began to change his Legion's soul.

Lorgar's return to the XVII<sup>th</sup> did not change the Legion's nature on the surface, the manner in which they waged war was the same but, underneath the surface, the return of their gene-father changed the Imperial Heralds in far more profound ways. The old ways of devoted service were no longer enough, devotion to an ideal was not enough, victory was not enough. The reason one fought, the fire that drove one on step by step on the path of truth, that was everything.

If victory was certain, and who could doubt it as stars and systems fell to the Emperor's Crusade in their hundreds, then the measure of true victory was not in death and blood, but in what a warrior carried within him. What one believed and the mark one left on Mankind were of the utmost importance. This sense of heightened fervour spread through the XVII<sup>th</sup> like fire, as if Lorgar's mere presence had raised his sons up into a brighter light.

One of the tangible changes that came with the return of the Primarch Lorgar was an increase in the importance of ceremony. The black clad and skull helmed heralds of the old Legion were given new authority to ensure the moral strength of their brother Legionaries. The new Chaplains would be the core of the Legion's strength, showing the way of truth through word and deed, not just to the conquered but those who held the sword. When a city burned or a people were put to death, the deed was done with the solemnity of a rite. The death notice of enemies were spoken in ritual phrases by a Chaplain, as he scattered the ashes of dead and defiant worlds over the bowed heads of warriors. New words and phrases began to enter the vocabulary of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion, words which tasted of the dust and incense of Colchis: apostle, athame, creed. Some even began to refer to dangerous and deviant modes of thought by a name which itself came from the shadows of lost creeds: heresy they called it.

The change took decades to complete. The XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion was large even before it was reunited with its Primarch and Lorgar was not fool enough to attempt such a project in one stage. The golden Primarch had a genius for speaking to men's hearts, and his campaigns to win those hearts were as subtle and thorough as those fought by the likes of Fulgrim and Guilliman on the battlefield. Bit by bit, the faith was spread from brother to brother. The Chaplains, his new vanguard of faith, subtly altered the counsel they gave their brothers. New structures of organisation sprang up beside the old military hierarchy; fraternities that seemed to have much in common with those of other Legions but, in truth, were devices for the propagation of the faith through the ranks of the XVII<sup>th</sup>. The echo of this grand, yet slow, conversion can be seen in the steps by which Lorgar would later corrupt half the Legions, and pull the Imperium into the darkness from which he had once sought to raise them.

### THE IMPERIAL TRUTH

The Imperial Truth was the rational, atheist philosophy that guided the Emperor's conquest of Terra, and the formation of the Imperium through the Great Crusade. At its heart the Imperial Truth held that the universe was rational, that knowledge defeated fear and brought freedom from the terrors of the Age of Strife. With this assertion went the denial of the irrational, the superstitious, and faith in powers and principles beyond the knowable. In the unified Terra and Imperium of Mankind, there could be no mysteries of the soul, no sorcery, no gods. Those who clung to their ignorance were cast down, their lies silenced in the pyre's roar. The terrors of the past had grown in the shadow of superstition and false belief. If the future was to survive its rebirth, it could not tolerate the delusions of the past. That there were other dimensions, alien races and mutants who wielded psychic powers was not denied, only that they were supernatural. That some might call these phenomena sorcery, or attribute them to gods, were simply the symptoms of incomplete understanding.

Of course, there was a degree to which the Imperium and the Emperor touched upon the irrational and ethereal. The new Imperium had grown from the past, and secular though it might be, much of its power and nature expressed itself in ways that had echoes of the spiritual. In practices such as the taking of Oaths of Moment, the names of the divisions of Imperial power, and the symbols of that power, the Imperium wrapped itself in the clothes of authority woven from dreams that were as old as the gods they denied.

It might seem strange that warriors who had fought to cast down gods would embrace those same beliefs, but this ignores the basic nature of the fanatic. At their core they need a cause around which to build their world. What that cause is can be changed, so long as the heat of its fire fills them. In their hearts the XVII<sup>th</sup> fell into the grasp of religion because part of them had always wanted to, part of them wanted there to be more to belief than rationality.

The second factor which allowed Lorgar to convert his Legion to the belief in the Emperor's divinity was the nature of the Great Crusade itself. Across countless fronts the Legions fought, suffered casualties and recruited anew. As this attrition mixed the old with the new, so the blood of the iconoclastic Imperial Heralds was diluted with that of Colchis and then with dozens of worlds on the bloody edge of conquest. These were sons who had never seen the light of Sol, nor known the Legion as it had been. They accepted what was taught to them because it was the only truth offered. In the case of those of Colchis, the belief in the divine was ingrained into every thought from birth.

When all was done, when the final Imperial Herald had embraced the faith, when the last of the old iconoclasts had died, then Lorgar added the final flourish of ritual to seal his victory. The Imperial Heralds would become the Word Bearers. To the rest of the Imperium, still ignorant of the

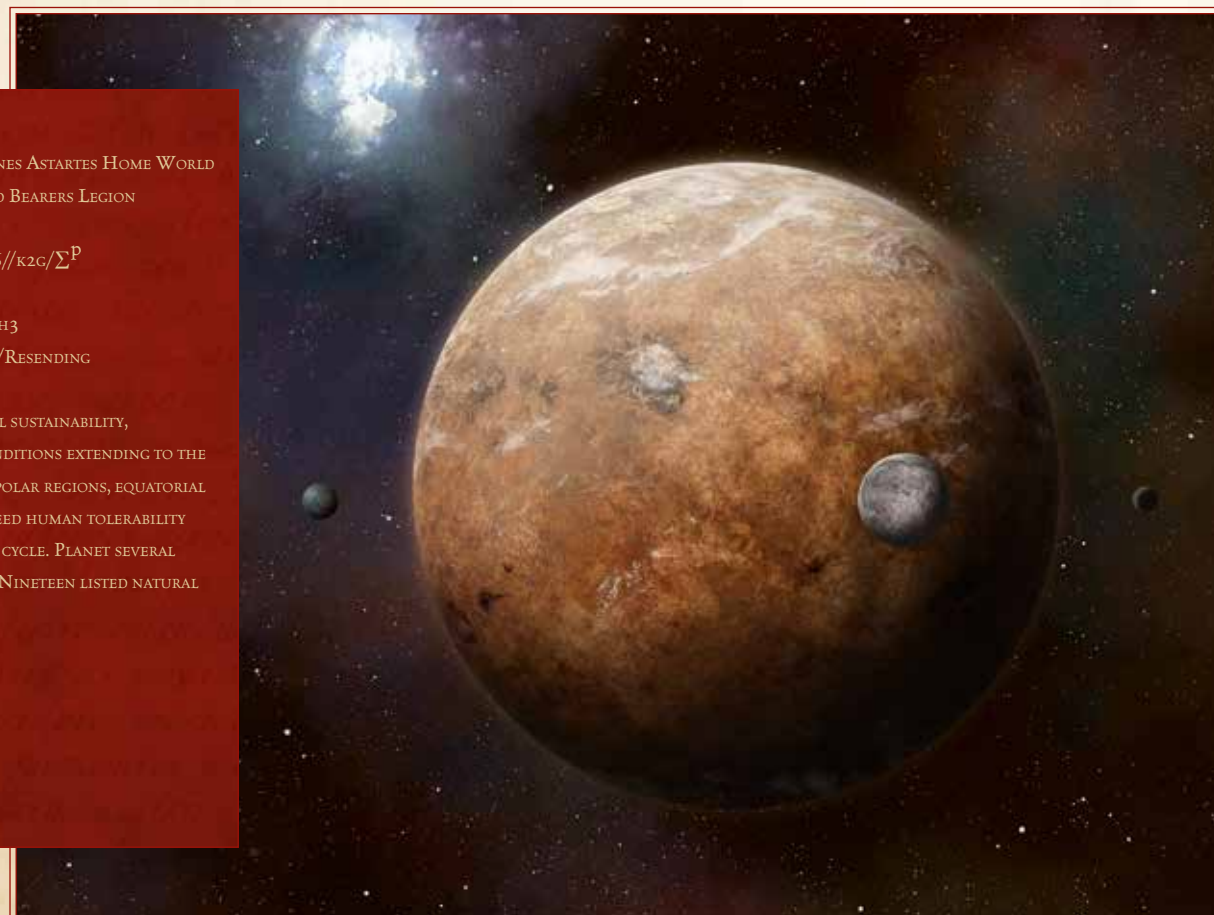
change wrought in the XVII<sup>th</sup>, the name reflected their part in bringing the Imperial Truth to all of humanity. To Lorgar it was an affirmation of his purpose: to give humanity faith in the god at its pinnacle.

#### The Arithmetic of Faith

Faith in secrecy might be sincere but, ultimately, it cannot satisfy a driven soul. With the Great Crusade reaching its zenith, Lorgar was faced with worlds brought to compliance by his Legion: broken worlds, worlds that had lived under the yoke of aliens, witches and belief in false gods, worlds that now had nothing but the cold comfort of being united with a universe that seemed to hold nothing greater than the truth they saw blowing on ash-laden winds. How could he know the truth and deny it to these worlds? At least that seems the likely path that led him to make his crusade not one of rationality but of faith.

As worlds and systems fell to the Word Bearers, they were brought to believe in the Emperor as a god. While other Legions left conquests like bloody footprints on the stars, the Word Bearers lingered. Amidst the devastation they raised temples. Chaplains and vassal preachers would go amongst the conquered to speak of the god who now reigned over them. The foundations of new cities were sunk in the embers of the old. The worlds they re-founded grew and prospered. Their people were utterly loyal to the Imperium and the Emperor; they were compliant, but they were alone in an unholy

NAME: COLCHIS  
CLASSIFICATION: LEGIONES ASTARTES HOME WORLD  
[FEUDAL WORLD] WORD BEARERS LEGION  
SYSTEM DATA: JJ10/4576//K2G/Σ<sup>P</sup>  
STELLAR-GRID: O2-Trs/JH3  
SEGMENTUM: PACIFICUS/RESENDING  
NOTATION: ARID-PARTIAL SUSTAINABILITY,  
PREVALENTLY DESERT CONDITIONS EXTENDING TO THE  
EDGE OF THE HABITABLE POLAR REGIONS, EQUATORIAL  
BELT TEMPERATURES EXCEED HUMAN TOLERABILITY  
AT ZENITH OF PLANETARY CYCLE. PLANET SEVERAL  
TERRAN MASSES IN SIZE. NINETEEN LISTED NATURAL  
SATELLITES.



land. Though they did not see it, their piety was doomed from the moment the Word Bearers brought them to it.

The rumours came first: whispers passed between forces who had fought alongside the Word Bearers. Talk began to circulate of the ritualistic practices of the XVII<sup>th</sup>, of the fervour of their zeal and devotion to the Great Crusade. Some even went as far as to wonder if the Iconoclasts of old had not succumbed to the practices they persecuted. The rumours multiplied, but if they reached the highest circles of the Imperium, they triggered no action. The Great Crusade was a war of expansion spread across the galaxy. Numberless fleets and hundreds of thousands of armies came into operation, separated by vast distances and joined only by the tenuous links of Warp travel and astrotelepathy. The sheer scale and dynamism of such an endeavour made absolute knowledge a rare commodity. The Emperor and the War Council did not have the time or means to do anything but trust that those who led the Crusade acted as the Emperor would wish. Rumour, hearsay and unkind suspicion were not enough to call the motivations of one of the Legions into question.

In the last it was not talk of belief that brought the Word Bearers' wrongs to light, but the arithmetic of conquest. Conquering worlds took time and resources, but rebuilding them and bringing them to believe in the Emperor as a god took longer again. Over the years, the Word Bearers' rate of conquest had slowed to a crawl. Where others brought dozens of worlds to compliance, the Word Bearers would claim a handful by comparison. The disparity eventually became too much to be ignored. The military bureaucracy that had grown up around the War Council sent expeditions to a cluster of worlds conquered by the Word Bearers. Was there some factor that had caused the Word Bearers greater difficulties than other Legions? The emissaries and expeditions found their answer.

The Legion had not been slowed by resistance, but because they lingered after their conquests. The rebuilding of a planet's faith took time, as did the rebuilding of cities and the raising of temples from which the faith could be maintained. And the faith gifted to the worlds they conquered was the belief that the Emperor was a god.

#### Censure

Once the truth was revealed, it was only a matter of time before the Emperor would be moved to censure the Word Bearers. The links of cause and effect are poorly recorded, but it seems that the Emperor waited for some time after the initial reports reached his court. That he sent missions to assay many more worlds conquered by the Word Bearers is known. We can only speculate as to why: perhaps he did not want to believe it of his son, perhaps he wanted to be sure, perhaps he was simply gathering information before acting. Some sources indicate that the Emperor confronted Lorgar during this time, that he even told him that if he persisted he would have to suffer the consequences. We cannot know now if this is true, too much has been forgotten, and too much more must never be remembered. What we do know is that, at last, the Emperor acted.

The Emperor rose from his endeavours and called another of his sons to his side. Roboute Guilliman, Primarch of the XIII<sup>th</sup> Legion had a reputation for careful leadership and unbending honesty. No one else witnessed what passed between the two, and Lord Guilliman refuses to this day to speak of it, but we can perhaps guess at why the Emperor chose the Ultramarines to be his tool of censure. It seems clear that the Emperor did not wish Lorgar or his sons broken, merely set back on the correct path. The XIII<sup>th</sup> Legion were a Legion with an exemplary record of victories and compliant worlds. Ultramar was even then a growing realm of hundreds of obedient and prosperous systems. Across the galaxy they had pushed back the boundaries of the Imperium with energy and a mind for what should follow in the wake of war. They were the Word Bearers' mirror and shadow, alike in so many ways and different in so many others: a living example of what the Word Bearers could be. Perhaps that was the message carried by the choice of the Ultramarines; that there was hope beyond the shame that must come. Whatever the subtleties of the message of censure, it would, however, be delivered in a manner that could leave no doubt as to its meaning.

On the planet of Khur, the Ultramarines reduced the city of Monarchia to ash. The Word Bearers had made Khur compliant, and Monarchia, its Perfect City, was the jewel in that compliance. The people of Khur cried out at the death of their city and the Word Bearers came. There, in the ashes of a city which stood for all they had believed and done, the Word Bearers knelt before their

Emperor. He was no god, and would suffer no such belief in his realm. The Emperor departed, leaving a Primarch chastised and a Legion humbled. Some may say that we can see all that would come to pass born in that moment.

#### REBIRTH

After Monarchia, the history of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion divides. One is the history of the Legion that we believed for decades after, the history of a Legion pulling itself from the pit of the past and embracing its true calling, a false history. The second is a shadow history, the true history that hid behind the mask of seeming loyalty. We can never know this true history, and what we do know of it are distorted glimpses.

On the surface, Lorgar's response to the Emperor's censure was to withdraw. For a time his Legion seems to have played little part in the Great Crusade. When they returned, it was clear that they were a changed force. Whereas before they lingered after conquests, now they drove forward with relentless momentum. Worlds burned, civilisations were made to kneel, and a trail of swift conquest stretched behind them like a bloody cloak. It is said that the Emperor was pleased that his son had understood his error and would, in time, become what he was destined to be. To every other eye, the Word Bearers seemed possessed by a penitent fury and grim resolve to burn the past. All were deceived.

That Lorgar was shaken by the shattering of his universe seems likely, but what action did it prompt? At the time some thought that the XVII<sup>th</sup> had withdrawn in shame, and that its return to the Crusade was fuelled by a wish to atone. Such a kind reading of events no longer rings true. Instead it seems likely that Lorgar's fall began after Monarchia, that the powers of the Warp reached out to him in his moment of doubt and offered him that which the Emperor had denied him: a higher power to believe in.

Who were the voices that counselled him, and the hands that guided him to damnation? Again much remains hidden, but a number of candidates seem likely. Kor Phaeron, Lorgar's surrogate father on Colchis and close advisor, seems a likely source of poison, as does First Chaplain Erebus. Both were steeped in the old faith of Colchis, a faith that was likely tainted by the powers of the Warp long before Lorgar fell from the sky. The word 'Pilgrimage' is also one of the few fragments that has emerged as linked with that time, though its precise significance can now only be guessed at. What we cannot now doubt is that the Word Bearers who re-joined the Great Crusade no longer served the Emperor.

For over four decades the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion wore a false face of loyalty and planted the seeds that would eventually bloom into civil war. The precise nature of their preparations is only open to supposition, but much can be deduced from Lorgar's character and the atrocities that would come later. First, it seems likely that the Word Bearers' renewed energy in the Great Crusade was a cover for its rapid growth in size, as well as the seeding of its new corrupting creed onto worlds. It must also have been during this time that the Legion was cleansed of dissent. The last of the old Iconoclasts, the few Terrans, and those who would not embrace the new faith must have been put quietly to the sword. The corruption of much of the apparatus of the Imperium also must have occurred in this time. So it was that when Horus finally fell, Lorgar had already prepared the ground for war.

#### THE LAST SECRET: OF DARK GODS AND DAEMONS

The Warp is the mirror of reality, a churning sea of raw psychic energy fed by the emotions of every creature who hopes, hates and dreams. It is a place of metaphor and madness, that can never be perceived or understood except through symbols and subjective interpretation. The strange powers of psykers of all kinds flow from the power of the Warp, the psyker's mind acting as a channel for the unreality of the Warp to affect reality. It is also the Warp that allows Mankind, and many other races, to travel the vast distances of space. Ships pass through the Warp, their courses guided by Navigators bred to perceive and read the tides of psychic energy. All this was known in the time of the Great Crusade, but it was only half the truth.

The gods denied by the Imperial Truth are real. Vast formations of psychic energy, storms of dark emotion, persistent notes in the symphony of existence, all descriptions fall short of the true nature of the Powers of the Warp. Powerful beyond mortal comprehension, parasitic and malign they are the ruinous powers, the pantheon of lies, the primordial annihilator. They have countless names in countless tongues, but to those who have glimpsed even a fraction of their existence, they are known as the Chaos gods.

These utterly alien entities hunger for the mortal realm, even though it is as fundamentally poisonous to their nature as air is to a creature of the deep ocean. They can extend their power into reality, can expend power to influence mortals, corrupt physical existence, even send portions of themselves to walk amongst men as Daemons, but only for a time. To truly affect reality, they must use mortal creatures of flesh and blood. To such servants they can gift powers beyond imagining, offering the coin of the impossible in exchange for eternal slavery. To many humans such an exchange may seem the only way to escape from the pain of life, or to achieve their heart's desire, and in the superstitions and beliefs of the past, the Chaos gods wait for the vain, the suffering, the wrathful and the desperate. The Imperial Truth strangled the beliefs and practises in which the Chaos gods lurked. It hid the truth because ignorance was the only way to protect Mankind.

## UNIT AND FORMATION STRUCTURE WITHIN THE LEGION

The Word Bearers followed much of the structure of the *Legiones Astartes* during their earliest incarnation. Warriors belonged to squads, squads to companies and companies to chapters. This functional structure remained largely unchanged from when the Legion was the Imperial Herald's until their overt treachery on Isstvan V. The rediscovery of their Primarch and the influx of recruits from Colchis did little to change the Legion's basic structure, rather it added layers of organisation. This second layer of organisation was concerned, not with the makeup of units on the battlefield, but with the ideology of those units.

The Word Bearers employed all the squad configurations seen across other Legions, with a tendency towards keeping the size of all units high. While other Legions might be content with or even favour, units of only a handful of warriors, the Word Bearers would typically keep its line units at a much higher strength. Squads of twenty were common across all companies and chapters, and typically took a tactical configuration. These squads formed the core of the Legion and the keystone of its philosophy of war: the aggressive advance of warriors in force.

Squads in turn belonged to companies, usually a hundred strong though sometimes larger or smaller depending on their role's nature. The Word Bearers had a tendency to dedicate companies to a particular battlefield role, designating companies as assault companies, line breaker companies, reconnaissance companies, and so on. These companies would often deploy in combination, again showing the Word Bearers' favour for massed forces and sledgehammer actions.

Companies were grouped together into chapters of between 500 and 3,000 warriors. Each chapter bore a name and sigil based on the constellations of Colchis: The Serrated Sun, The Osseous Throne, The Crescent Moon, The Weeping Hand, The Coiled Lash, The Exalted Gate, The Twisting Rune, The Scold's Bridle, The Night's Chalice—each were found within the Legion's ranks. These large formations were often the building blocks of Word Bearers campaigns. Most Crusade fleets consisted of at least one full chapter, and the largest might have several.

Although their methods of war were often workmanlike in application, they always

displayed a taste for the symbolic act. War was not just a process, it was a message, and so the Word Bearers would often include notes of the spectacular into their campaigns to make their point. A number of unique formations in their ranks echo this tendency. As an example, the Chapter of the Broken Scythe consisted of armoured artillery, siege tanks and mounted flamer squads. Their role was to level cities and strongholds in a single attack and leave nothing but scorched rubble. Also of note are the Ashen Circle. Descending from the sky on jump packs, they were the destroyers of false gods, ashen angels sent to reduce libraries and shrines to cinders with flamer and, where a truly lasting destruction was required, phosphex. Attached to chapters but standing as a circle apart, only the most dedicated could enter their ranks. Many passed through their ranks before ascending to the role of Chaplain.

It is worth noting that throughout its history, the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion made extensive use of bonded auxiliaries. In the days when the Unification Wars were blurring into the Great Crusade, the XVII<sup>th</sup> Legion would often recruit bands of militant followers from those they had conquered. This practice continued throughout the Great Crusade, and these formations were often as much mobs as they were military formations, but again their presence in many campaigns

added to the XVII<sup>th</sup>'s ability to apply overwhelming force to an enemy.

### Legion Command Hierarchy

Lorgar was both commander and spiritual father to his Legion. The hierarchy of authority within the Legion reflected this dual nature, divided between military and spirituality, between mind and heart. On the one hand, the Legion followed simple and robust lines of authority. A chapter master led each chapter, a captain each company and a sergeant each squad. It was common for a chapter master to designate one of the captains as 'sub commander' to act as his lieutenant. The second line of authority in the chapter was spiritual. The Chaplains, although nominally attached to companies and chapters, in reality were a brotherhood unto themselves. While each was a warrior, their concerns were not for the business of direct command, but for the strength of their brothers' spirits, for the clarity of their purpose and the purity of their actions. Each Chaplain fitted into their own hierarchy, with ascending tiers of knowledge and respect. High Chaplains were the ruling circle of their kind, and at their centre was the First Chaplain.

The two strands of authority within the Word Bearers often crossed and blurred. While theoretically separate, no lowly line captain

### THE GAL VORBAK

The Gal Vorbak is a title that, over time, came to refer to any of the Word Bearers who were possessed by the powers of the Warp, but those who later bore the title were a lesser breed of abomination compared to the first of the Legion's brethren who sealed their pact with darkness. The Gal Vorbak were the first of their kind; Space Marines and Daemons fused into a single being. The lords of the Left Hand believe that the Gal Vorbak formed from the survivors of the Word Bearers' first pilgrimage into the Eye of Terror. What happened to those first few cannot be known, but those who returned had taken the power of Chaos into their bodies and souls. Capable of seeming unaltered, they were able to commune with the daemonic parasites that shared their existence. In battle they could shed their veil of seeming and become true monsters, fusions of armour, bone and muscle charged with supernatural power. Marked by their crimson armour they were a revered elite amongst the Word Bearers, walking embodiments of Lorgar's true vision for his Legion.

After the Word Bearers revealed their true nature at Isstvan V, the crimson of the Gal Vorbak spread to the rest of the Legion in fits and starts, and new Gal Vorbak walked with them. These new creatures were weaker than those who first went into the Eye of Terror. Perhaps the flesh and souls they enslaved were of a lesser stock, or perhaps the powers of the Warp, having no need for kindness or to prove their worth as allies any longer, had not invested them with the power of their predecessors. Irrespective of their power or pedigree, there has been no greater defilement of the Emperor's work in creating the Space Marines than these loathsome creatures.

## WORD BEARERS LEGION: CHAPTER ICONOGRAPHY

### From the Skies of Colchis

The Word Bearers Legion was subdivided into many different Chapters, each bearing a name and icon representing one of the constellations of Colchis, the adopted home world of their Primarch Lorgar.

Shown here is a selection of icons showing some of the chapters known to have been present at the Dropsite Massacre.



**THE SERRATED SUN**  
Tactica: Tactical Drop Strikes



**THE TRI-FOLD CROWN**  
Tactica: Attritional Warfare



**THE STAR OF JUDGEMENT**  
Tactica: Scorched Earth Assaults



**THE OSSEOUS THRONE**  
Tactica: Infantry Wave Attacks



**THE BROKEN SCYTHE**  
Tactica: Infrastructure Reduction

would question the authority of a senior Chaplain. Given that the reasons for fighting were as important to the Word Bearers as victory, decisions about the course of a war or battle were often made by the Chaplains and enacted by the commanders. This blurring and fusion of the spiritual and military command was also present in Lorgar's inner circle. This group comprised the Legion's ruling council, and included both commanders and Chaplains. Even within this small group there were two who held more power and authority than any others. The names of Kor Phaeron and Erebus are now heavy with infamy, and one cannot help but wonder if the Imperium's fate would not have been different if these two had not been Lorgar's most trusted counsellors.

### War Disposition

The strength of the Word Bearers at the time of the Isstvan V Dropsite Massacre

was thought to be approximately 140,000. It is now clear that this figure was a lie. Four decades earlier, when the Legion was rebuked at Khur, it was approximately 100,000 strong. That they had made a notable increase in recruitment was clear, but far from swelling their numbers by 40,000, the Word Bearers had grown to a far greater strength. Mass recruitment from every world they conquered, and the use of rapid gene-seed implantation and hypno-indoctrination meant that by some reports their numbers might even have rivalled those of the Ultramarines. Certainly the scale of their actions during the opening phases of the war, and the casualties they suffered, indicate that few others could have approached them in size.

In addition to the surge in numbers of the Word Bearers, the number of vassal warbands and half-feral fanatics who

accompanied them reached extraordinary numbers. In the extermination phase of the Isstvan V Dropsite Massacre, one survivor estimated that a horde of 50,000 faced the Loyalist enclave of Nurin. That such forces were lost and yet more were unleashed on world after world in the years that followed shows that behind the Word Bearers themselves stood millions more willing to die at their command.

Given the actions of so called Abyss class vessels in later campaigns, it is also clear that Lorgar had increased his Legion's naval strength, possibly to levels which exceeded that of the Imperial Fists, who were thought at the time to control the largest fleet of any Legion. Such an increase in strength, and the delicacy with which it was concealed, indicates that Lorgar went into the war ready to embrace the carnage that would follow.

# WORD BEARERS LEGION COMPANY CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN NIMUR ENNAT  
COMMANDER, 5<sup>TH</sup> HEAVY ASSAULT COMPANY,  
THE SERRATED SUN CHAPTER

Sub-Captain Ennat, seen here in the heraldry of the Serrated Suns Chapter, was originally attached to the command of First Captain Kor Phaeron, a powerful if often unpopular figure within the Legion. Kor Phaeron transferred Ennat's company to the Serrated Sun Chapter to act as his eyes and ears within the chapter now that it bore Lorgar's favour.

Though part of the Serrated Sun, the 5<sup>th</sup> Company were not Gal Vorbak, and during the fighting in the Urgall Depression, they were left isolated by the Gal Vorbaks' sudden and surrounded by the Raven Guard attempting to force a breach in the Word Bearers' lines. Ennat himself was slain when a squadron of Iron Warriors' Typhon siege tanks began the Raven Guard at his position, heedless of the casualties caused among their allies.

## Panoply of War

1. **Proteus pattern power sword:** As a sign of his favour within the Word Bearers, Ennat's power sword is engraved with one of the invocations from Kor Phaeron' and Erebus' new scriptures.
2. **Phobos pattern combi-bolter:** Standard issue to most Terminator squads within the Word Bearers Legion.



1.



2.

# WORD BEARERS LEGION TACTICAL LEGIONARY

LEGIONARY APIS MERENKAR  
NIMARROS TACTICAL SQUAD, 7<sup>TH</sup> ASSAULT COMPANY,  
THE SERRATED SUNS CHAPTER

Pictured here in MkIV 'Maximus' pattern power armour, which was standard issue for the Legion at the time, Legionary Merenkar was amongst the Gal Vorbak deployed into the foothills on the Urgall Depression's right flank to oppose the Raven Guards' attempt to reach their waiting gunships. This area saw some of the battle's bloodiest fighting as Corax scythed a path through the massed ranks of the Word Bearers to clear a path for his sons.

Merenkar's unit was last sighted engaging several Raven Guard companies in a headlong charge, well ahead of nearby Word Bearers chapters. Evidence was later seized that his abandoned wargear was recovered from the battlefield by an Iron Warriors provender detachment, but no identifiable corpse was found for Merenkar or any member of his squad amongst the mounds of slain Raven Guard rent apart and strewn across the field.

## Panoply of War

1. **Tigrus pattern bolt pistol:** Many of the Gal Vorbak are evidenced to have augmented their wargear with a variety of blades and barbs for use in close combat.
2. **Tigrus pattern boltgun:** One of the most advanced patterns of boltgun currently issued to Space Marine Legions.



1.



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# WORD BEARERS TACTICAL LEGIONARY

LEGIONARY GRINDIS VAHN  
AMESHDUN TACTICAL SQUAD, 8<sup>TH</sup> TACTICAL COMPANY OF  
THE SUNDERED TOWER CHAPTER

As one of the largest and most prestigious of the Word Bearers chapters, the Sundered Tower was composed of eighteen separate companies designated as frontline tactical companies for the Legion. After the Legion's shaming on Khur and subsequent re-organisation, these companies appear to have been filled with the majority of those Terran recruits who still remained in the chapter, placed under Colchisian officers of proven fervour and set to the hazardous spearhead of the Legion's future attacks.

Legionary Vahn is a Terran veteran and one of the longest-serving and most decorated line infantry Legionaries in the Word Bearers, having served since the Unification Wars. He was member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Tactical Company of the Sundered Tower and was deployed along with his squad as part of the Orichalan Subjugation in early 05.M31. Squad Ameshdun suffered near total casualties during the final confrontation between the massed ranks of the Sundered Tower and the Orichalan's war-simulacra, and while battle reports state that Legionary Vahn, though badly injured, survived the battle, there is no record of his assignment to one of the chapter's many apothecaries for treatment or his whereabouts afterwards.

## Panoply of War

- MkII 'Crusade' pattern armour:** Long employed by the Legions during the Great Crusade, its reinforced armour makes it ideal for hazardous environments and intense short-range actions.
- Phobos pattern boltgun:** The carnage caused by the heavy .70 cal shells of Phobos pattern boltguns caused many units to retain these weapons even once more advanced patterns became available.
- Phaestos pattern flamer:** These old, but reliable, flamer units have served the Legions well since their departure from the Sol system.



I.



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3.



I.



2.



3.

# WORD BEARERS LEGION APOTHECARY

APOTHECARY BAN XISUGAL  
KIGAL MEDICAE PACT, ATTACHED TO THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DROP ASSAULT  
COMPANY, THE OSSEUS THRONE CHAPTER

The Word Bearers deployed, by the evidence of their own records later captured, almost two thousand Apothecaries to the battlefields of the Urgall Depression, a number far in excess of that indicated by standard levels.

Apothecary Xisugal, pictured here from battlefield pict-capture, and his brethren plied their bloody craft amongst the Legionaries of the 4<sup>th</sup> Word Bearers Drop Assault Company, striking into trapped and unsuspecting Loyalist Imperial Army forces in the rear echelons. Despite the units they accompanied suffering few fatalities, further pict-captures from the battlefield indicate Xisugal and his Pact all ended the engagement with their Vas 'Mortuis' and other gene-seed and casualty containment pods fully laden.

## Panoply of War

- Thunder Edge pattern chainsword:** These weapons see double service as both weapons and surgical tools.
- Umbra pattern boltgun:** The reliable Umbra pattern boltgun saw wide use amongst many Legions.
- Umbra pattern bolt pistol:** The winged skull in red, marking this weapon as one used to deliver the final peace to mortally wounded Legionaries.



# THE SERRATED SUN

Little is known of the Serrated Sun Chapter prior to the latter stages of the Word Bearers 1301<sup>st</sup> Expeditionary Fleet's 'pilgrimage'. Some fate that has remained hidden from the Imperium's records befell the chapter, but it is known to have been reduced at one time to only three active companies in number. The direct favour of Lorgar was bestowed upon the survivors, who would later become known as the Gal Vorbak, and resulted in the elevation of their leader, Argel Tal, to the post of Chapter Master of the Serrated Sun.

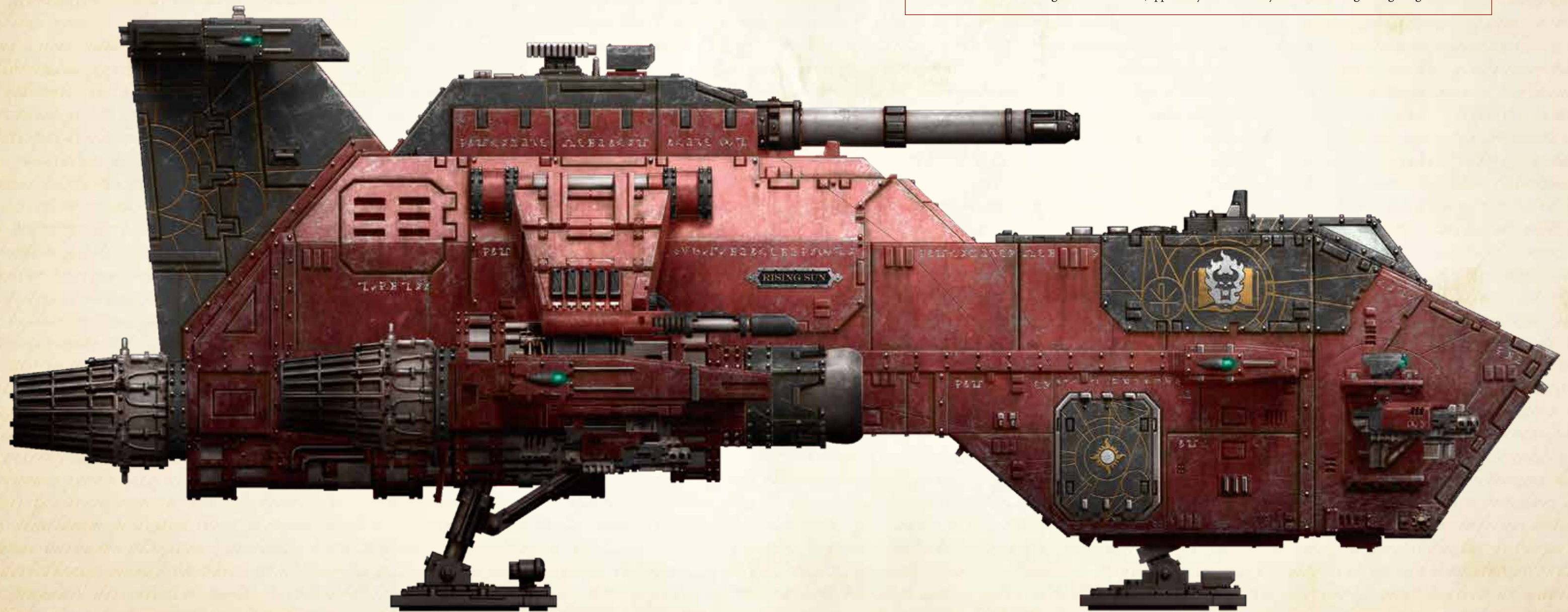
Where once the chapter had been routinely passed over for assignment of replacement troops and newly issued wargear, now the shattered companies of the Serrated Sun were the prime recipient of these resources and fresh recruits, and were set to expand far beyond their previous size.

This remade chapter was the first to be adorned with the dark crimson livery that would come to signify the Legion. By the time of the Isstvan V Dropsite Massacre,

the chapter had grown to outnumber any other chapter of the Legion, and many of the newer patterns of war machines, power armour suits and weaponry produced for the Legion were also issued first to Lorgar's newly favoured sons. MkIV 'Maximus' suits became common amongst its companies and rarer patterns of vehicles, such as the Sicaran battle tanks and Javelin attack speeders, were fielded in greater numbers than elsewhere in the Legion.



**Scimitar Pattern Jetbike:** Once assigned to Gal Vorbak Sergeant Dagotal, this jetbike was recovered undamaged after the battle, apparently abandoned by its owner during the fighting.



**Rising Sun:** This Thunderhawk Gunship, pictured here prior to the fighting on Isstvan V, was assigned as the personal transport of Argel Tal and the inner circle of the Gal Vorbak. The patterns applied to its adamantium hull are complex astrological charts used in traditional Colchisian mysticism, but the purpose of these symbols on such a war machine is unknown, save perhaps as decoration. The *Rising Sun* was destroyed during the closing stages of the Battle for Isstvan V.

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