



THE DEATH GUARD

Numeration: The XIVth Legion

Primogenitor: Mortarion the Reaper

Cognomen: (Prior) The Dusk Raiders

Observed Strategic Tendencies: Heavy Infantry Assault, Attritional Warfare, Hazard/Death Zone Warfare, Xenos Eradication and Purgation operations.

Noteworthy Domains: Barbarus [Home World]. No others known.

Allegiance: *Traitoris Perdita*

Of all the Space Marine Legions raised by the Emperor as part of his nascent Legiones Astartes, few had beginnings so glorious and yet ends as tragic and nightmarish as would befall the Death Guard. Once a byword for resilience and unshakable courage, whose warriors served the overthrow of alien tyrants and warlords on more than a hundred worlds, and at whose hands scores of xenos races met their destruction, horror was to overtake them. The Death Guard were to become the very thing they once fought so tirelessly against: inhuman, unrecognisable and soulless monsters of the dark—the very stuff of nightmares. This treatise however does not yet concern itself with the terrible fate of the Death Guard, but rather what came before it, and in particular the influence of their Primarch, the enigmatic and macabre

Mortarion, which in hindsight may well have encompassed both his Legion's genesis and its doom.

ORIGINS: THE WARLORDS OF DUSK

It is a curiosity of note that of the eight Space Marine Legions who were to turn on their brothers, four of them had once held to identities, traditions and names other than those they claimed when they put their blades in the service of the traitor Horus. In this they were almost unique in doing so in the ranks of the Legions—recalling to some the wisdom of the ancient Terran proverb: *“A coat turned once, may be easily turned again”*. While the truth is no doubt far more complex than mere proverb might suggest, it is however salutary to realise that each of these changed Legions: the War Hounds,

the Imperial Heralds, the Dusk Raiders and lastly and most infamously the Luna Wolves, were to turn their coats and remake themselves, not on mere whim, but at the direct behest of their Primarch and in closer imitation of them. In none perhaps was this change more marked and more visceral in nature than the transformation of the Dusk Raiders into the Death Guard.

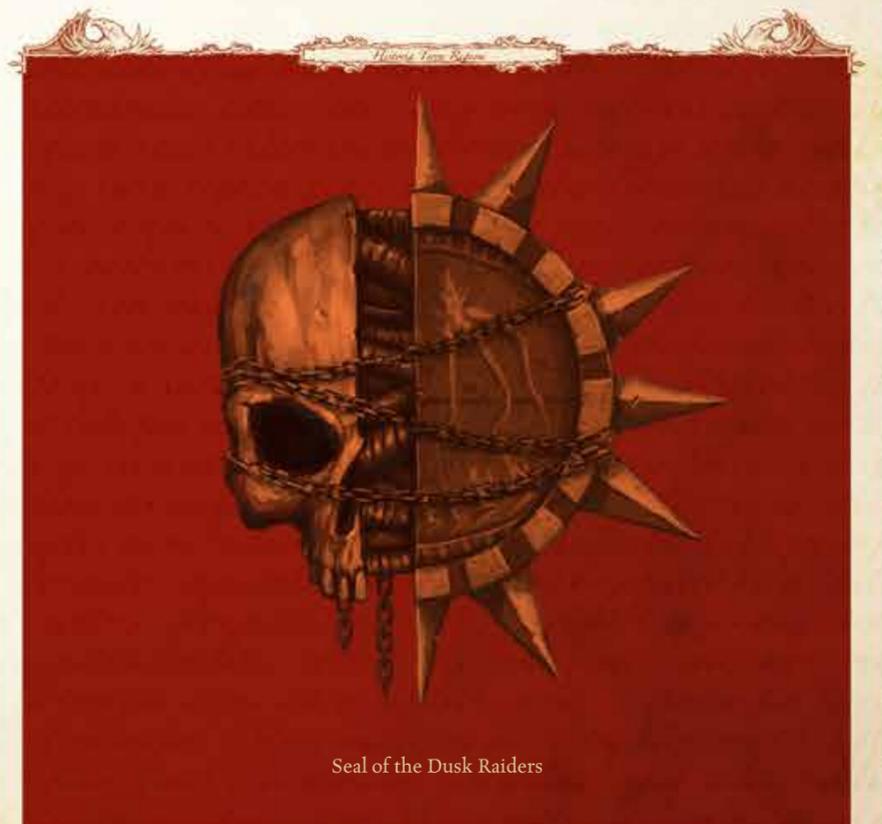
The story of the Dusk Raiders begins in the earliest days of the Unification Wars. The base stock for the majority of the initially raised Legions came from Terra, and in the case of the XIVth Legion the main bulk of the gene-recruits used were drawn from the ancient and warlike clans of Old Albia. Indeed such was the suitability of this stock for induction to the ranks of the Space Marines, recruits drawn from Old Albia's towering, soot-blackened Castram-cities were also to be found in the ranks of the founding VIIIth and Xth Legions, although to a lesser degree than the XIVth who were by blood and culture shaped by the traditions of the warlords of Albia as well as the hand of the Emperor.

The recruitment of the sons of Albia served two purposes for the new-born Imperium. Firstly, and most importantly, it drew off the cream of whole generations of strength from a Terran realm, now friend and ally but never fully trusted. For Old Albia, towering amid the northern Atlan wilderness, had once been not only a feared enemy whose legend stalked the Age of Strife, but once was also a true rival for control of the destiny of Man. By taking its brightest and best into the Legions and the other growing Imperial organisations marked for war amid the stars, the Emperor ensured they could never threaten unification from within. Secondly it subsumed into the Emperor's forces all the martial traditions and bloodlines that had for centuries held much of Terra under their cruel grasp and eventually overcome the Panpacific Empire under the rule of the Unspeakable King—such a breed of relentless warlords and soldier-scientists was a valuable resource that the Emperor was loathe to waste. The warlord clans of Old Albia did not readily bend the knee to the Emperor however, having by then finally thrown off the tyranny of the last descendants of the Unspeakable King they refused to have another master in their place. Instead the Albians met the Emperor's Thunder Regiments with their own battalions of steam-belching proto-dreadnoughts and armoured Ironside soldiers. In battle after battle the forces of Unification were held in check although at shattering cost for the Albians, who would not give in despite the onslaught.

Admiring the martial temper and indomitable courage of the foe, the Emperor called a ceasefire and sought victory over the warlord clans by negotiation, knowing that to crush them by force alone would entail a grinding bloodbath that would only serve to decimate his own forces and gain him nothing but a handful of ashes as a prize of war.

Thus it was that despite the contrary advice of his human counsellors and generals, for whom the warriors of Old Albia had held an almost superstitious fear born of generations, the Emperor pursued peace. Going before them, it is said, unarmed and clothed in white and crimson, the Emperor spoke to the warlords' parliament and laid before them his vision of a future Mankind reunited and ascendant, of tyrants toppled and nightmares slain. He offered them glory among the stars and most importantly redemption for many hundreds of years of kin-slaying and bloodshed. The warlords of Old Albia—to the shock of many—accepted. In doing so the Albian clans became among the Unification's most zealous supporters, although still untrusted by many, lending their warriors and war machines to the Emperor's cause, and secrets long kept were offered up to the Emperor's eyes alone. Most importantly for the future of humanity, they sacrificed their sons to become Space Marines.

The XIVth Legion quickly developed in the use of tactics and methods of warfare that their Ironside forebears would have found utterly familiar, matched with a stoic temperament and gene-crafted aptitude which few doubted was the Emperor's design all along. Operating in the role of heavy infantry, they were experts at survival and endurance, and quickly gained a reputation among the other newly-forged Legions as relentless and disciplined fighters. In defence they were stubborn and indefatigable—able to stand unwaveringly against the heaviest fire and hold their position against all comers to the last living body and bolt shell if needed. In attack they systematically destroyed a given target, crashing upon an enemy in wave after wave of armoured bodies, excelling in close range fire-fights and bloody attrition. Their grey and unadorned power armour began to carry the symbols of rank and decoration, now modified that once formed the armorial imagery of the Ironsides of Old Albia, and most tellingly their right vambraces, gauntlets and shoulder plates were painted the deep crimson of drying blood, now symbolising the red right hand of the Emperor's justice where once it had proclaimed the murderous reach of the Unspeakable King.



Seal of the Dusk Raiders

As the XIVth Legion fought in the last battles of Terran unification and the first battles of the Great Crusade off-world, they were given the epithet of 'Dusk Raiders' by those they fought and took it for their own. This name was a consequence of their use of the ancient Albian tactic of conducting major ground attacks at fall of night when the shift of light confused an enemy's watch, and gathering darkness would shadow an advance across open ground. Such was the reputation they garnered in fact, that foes given an ultimatum of attack by the Dusk Raiders would often waver in their resolve, their soldiers panic and desert their bastions or throw down their arms and flee at the coming of darkness. As relentless as they were in attack, the Dusk Raiders were known to be honourable opponents as well, who would hold to bargains struck for early surrender and honour symbols of truce. When such terms lapsed however and the die was cast for destruction, it was just as widely known that nothing would stay the Legion's hand. Such honourable terms only extended to human foes worthy to be brought into the fold of Imperial Compliance however—to the degenerate, the mutant and the alien, no mercy was given.

So matters continued, and for more than eight decades the Dusk Raiders fought

on unwavering in the service of the Great Crusade. Still fatherless during this time as other Legions gained their Primarchs until only a handful remained to be discovered, this 'orphan' status further bred a self-reliance and a quiet, stubborn pride in the Dusk Raiders' self-forged character, and the martial triumphs of the XIVth Legion were many and enviable. Their reunification with their Primarch though, when it finally came, was not to be the happy event that many had long hoped for, but instead it was to be a pall that fell across the Legion, and under its shadow the Dusk Raiders were broken down and remade, and only the Death Guard remained.

THE STYGIAN SCROLLS OF LACKLAND THORN

Of all the worlds upon which the Primarchs were scattered, few were as terrible or forlorn a place as damned Barbarus. Very little can be said for certain about this remote and baleful planet, or the young Primarch's formative years spent there as it appears even at the time of Mortarion's finding the truth was carefully edited and obscured by the hand of the Emperor himself. What was found on Barbarus was perhaps too much for public consumption, or held too many truths deemed too dangerous for wider humanity—or even the warriors of the other Legions to know. What consistent information can be gleaned now of Barbarus and the Death

Guard Primarch's story have a single source—the so-called *Stygian Scrolls* of Lackland Thorn. Thorn was a famed if disreputable figure himself, a historian attached to the Crusade Fleet that breached the dark nebula that surrounded Barbarus. Thorn was a polymath—highly skilled as a xeno-translator, antiquarian and poet, but whose vision was a morbid one, and whose works unsettled as much as they illuminated. His own place in the legend of the Great Crusade was sealed as he disappeared soon after his *magnum opus* was completed. On Barbarus he was to find the apotheosis of his dark art in recording the story of Mortarion for posterity, and his resulted works, the *Stygian Scrolls*, became part of the Death Guard's culture; a copy of which was presented to each Space Marine of the Legion upon their formal investiture into its ranks. Outside of the Death Guard Legion, the work was widely suppressed and held to be a baleful and sinister thing, too nightmarish to be anything but a dark allegory. This opinion was a false one.

The world on which the young Mortarion fell was the very epitome of the terrors which had befallen Man during the long night of the Age of Strife—a domain of savage, alien overlords who ruled over an entrapped and preyed upon human population as cruel and terrible gods.

Even Barbarus' planetary ecology was a sinister and lethal contrivance so strange and singular as to be likely engineered by its masters both to sustain them and serve as a means of control in its own right. It was a dim, craggy, mountain-crowned world of primordial swamps and twisted forests. Barbarus' colossal mountain heights were perpetually shrouded in poisonous fogs, choking miasmas and punctured by acid rains strong enough to strip flesh from bone in moments, while the valleys far below were a realm of perpetual gloom where the light of the system's ancient and swollen sun barely shone, and night was an umbral darkness as impenetrable as a sealed grave. It was in the lowland forests and swamps that Barbarus' feral human inhabitants clung to life in isolated villages and holdfasts fortified as best they could against the coming of the night. Theirs were lives of perpetual terror and hardship, whose every waking moment and troubled hour of sleep lay under the shadow of the knowledge that unseen above them, their monstrous overlords in their fog-bound keeps and shrouded towers waited to feast.

The true name of Barbarus' xenos masters has been stricken from the record, and not even Thorn dared enunciate it in his writings, but the evidence of their foul appetites and hideous strength is well established. Giants they were, thrice the height of a man and bedecked in rusted armour, these gaunt and horrific petty gods were beings whose sciences and necromantic lore had long ago conquered death save by great violence, and who filled their eternities with intrigues and conflict among their own kind played out with unimaginable inventive malignity. The foot soldiers of their feuds and internecine wars were an endless parade of nightmares: hordes of wire-stitched walking dead, tormented, half-mad shape-shifting predators and membrane-winged golems. Their champions were more horrific yet, plasm-mounds of acid-dripping amorphous tissue whose thousand screaming mouths begged incessantly for death, and countless others fiendish creations beyond sane description—all carved and cut from the living flesh of Mankind. To their charnel lords the feral humans were not even slaves, but merely meat hanging in a larder waiting to be plucked forth for the feast.

The *Stygian Scrolls* tell that it was the greatest of these carrion-crow overlords, who after one such 'reaping' of a human crop strode well-pleased amid the massacre he had wrought upon one of the largest of settlements and was struck suddenly as the silence of the

dead was riven with the sound of an infant's cry. Drawn on and on he was through the sea of corpses and into the poison fogs where at last he found a child, pale and hungry, but alive where no such life should have been possible. The overlord contemplated this white and helpless thing, clearly human but to its alien senses clearly so much more, and considered whether to end its existence at a scythe-stroke, but did not. For the overlord, like all his kind, was neither truly dead nor fully alive and in this infant he saw a prize he could never have otherwise had—a son and heir. Amid the carrion and battle wreckage he named the child 'Mortarion'—that which is born of death.

Testing the child Primarch's limits, his monstrous adopted father gauged the extent to which Mortarion could endure the increasing toxicity of the heights of Barbarus, the overlord building a stone keep to be the boy's prison and his training ground at the furthest extent of Mortarion's tolerance, and establishing his own black manse yet further up within the heights above where the vapours would have been death, even to a Primarch. In this shelter and prison combined, bounded by weeping stone walls and spiked-iron battlements set to keep out his 'father's' enemies, the young Mortarion grew to adolescence in a sunless world where the very air was poison. Surrounded by the carrion comfort of an open tomb and with misbegotten horrors for his servants, the ancient inhuman monster that had claimed him became his only tutor. Here he was trained to be a living weapon, to fight, to command and to kill, and what other secrets of that nameless and terrible race that had held Barbarus in its sway for countless generations he learned it is impossible to say.

The young Mortarion is said to have devoured every fragment of information he could lay his hands on, from battle doctrine to arcana, machine-lore to vivisection surgery, and proved an apt pupil. Already mighty and a deadly fighter, Mortarion was soon put by his master to more active tests of his abilities, for the vendettas and wars of the charnel overlords were incessant and merciless, and soon he joined his master in battle and in the reappings, a faithful warrior at the towering giant's side. Time passed and Mortarion grew swiftly, his superhuman strength and intellect flowering even in the lightless and deathly environs into which he had been led by unkind fate, while his burgeoning mind was soon wont to ask questions his adopted father was ill-disposed to answer truthfully.

Increasingly Mortarion's curiosity was drawn to the fragile creatures huddled behind their paltry defences in the valleys far below, the creatures whose corpses provided them with base materials for the overlords' armies and other forms of amusement. His master, seeing the danger, denied Mortarion further access to the valleys below but this only fuelled the maturing Primarch's obsession, and when finally Mortarion escaped his home and slipped away into the darkness, it was to the sound of the curses hurled down from the miasma above by a father betrayed, promising him death should he ever return. Alas that history would prove that the charnel overlord who had raised and sheltered him was not to be the last 'father' who would have cause to curse Mortarion's disloyalty as a son.

Alone and without the toxic fog that followed the overlords when they descended from the heights, the taste of the air itself was a revelation to the young Primarch, as was the aroma of life, the sound of human speech and laughter untainted by the brackish vapour of rot or the echo of madness. He found immediately the truth he had feared, that he was kin to these who the masters preyed upon—not the masters themselves; his life had been a lie. Mortarion vowed at that moment, consumed by cold rage, to bring justice to the overlords for the countless generations of horror and sin they had perpetrated on his kind—he would bring them death.

Gaining the trust of Barbarus' feral human inhabitants was no simple task for Mortarion however, for no matter the kinship he knew he had to them, to the people of Barbarus he was as much a monster as any they had seen. For the Primarch towered over them as his charnel lord had over him, his flesh was gaunt and pale and his black eyes hollow and haunted from the waking nightmare he had thus far lived. To be shunned and outcast stung him deeply, but Mortarion bided his time, using his great strength and wits to aid the people as he could, raising walls and working the fields tirelessly to harvest in the settlement's meagre crops, knowing the time to prove himself would come. Then, one night as darkness fell, the monsters came. A lesser overlord and his shambling revenants descended upon the settlement that Mortarion was shadowing to carry off all that could not flee for their master's playthings.

NAME: BARBARUS
 CLASSIFICATION: LEGIONES ASTARTES HOME WORLD
 [FERAL/DEATH WORLD]

SYSTEM DATA: [CLASSIFIED AGEISINE/BLACK]
 STELLAR GRID: 21-VX-0707/Ω
 SEGMENTUM: TEMPESTUS/EXTREMIS

NOTATION: HAZARDOUS-TOXIC/PRIMEVAL-TEMPERATE [CLASSIFIED AGEISINE/BLACK], [CLASSIFIED AGEISINE/BLACK], [CLASSIFIED AGEISINE/BLACK]
 ++[FIEFDOM OF THE DEATH GUARD LEGION]++
 ++[ACCESS TO SYSTEM FORBIDDEN BY THE ORDINANCE OF THE IMPERIAL WAR COUNCIL]++
 ++[DISPENSATION IN THE PURVIEW OF THE XIVth LEGION]++

With grim determination the settlers tried as best they could to fight off the encircling creatures, but knew they were doomed, for this fate had played itself out so many times before, and with no better arms than crude iron blades and burning torches they could do little more than prolong the struggle before they were taken. Into the fray came Mortarion, wielding above his head the great two-handed harvest scythe he had made for himself, its blade's span equal to the height of a man. He tore through the ranks of the unliving like a hurricane and put the shocked overlord to flight. Retreating swiftly into the toxic fog that had been his kind's surest defence against the humans since time immemorial, the *Stygian Scrolls* record that the alien's distorted features were still grinning as Mortarion plunged through the poisonous mists undeterred and hacked off the overlord's head, the first of his kind to fall in battle by human hands in generations—he would not be the last.

Mortarion's victory had bought disbelieving adulation from the human settlers, and he

became to them a taciturn, remorseless prophet who promised them freedom from the terrors that had held them and above all justice and revenge. He went among them teaching war-craft and industry enough to aid in their own defence, and leading them in battle wherever he went as relentless as death itself. Soon across the benighted world of Barbarus Mortarion's legend spread and the rebellion began in earnest, and where once the 'reapings' had been one-sided massacres, now were true battles fought, and increasingly they were battles the feral humans, hardy and grim as they were, often won. But just as often was true vengeance denied the humans, as the defeated overlords would retreat into the fogs whenever danger threatened, for so-long lived were they that they were jealous of their near-immortality and would seldom risk personal destruction at the hands of their vengeful 'playthings'. This was particularly the case if Mortarion took to the field, as he had already become a feared anathema to the charnel creatures. It is possible that if they had put aside their own internal strife the charnel overlords

might still have crushed the rebellion acting as one, but their hatred and distrust of each other, rendered to the keenness of a razor's edge over millennia, was stronger it seems than even their outrage and fear at the rebellion and its instigator.

With the dark powers of Barbarus retreated behind the impenetrable bulwark of the poisonous mists, Mortarion saw that victory and justice could only be attained by taking the fight to them—his people needed to be able to attack the creatures above, not merely defend against their depredations. In order to make this dream of bloody vengeance real, Mortarion recruited an army from the toughest, most driven warriors from Barbarus' feral humans and trained and drilled them relentlessly. He had them clad head-to-foot in crude iron plate forged by holdfast blacksmiths turned armourers, and armed them with heavy, hacking blades and wide-mawed blackpowder guns of his own devising. To this panoply he added crude respirator gear, the fruits of his own formidable intellect

and the efforts of the ferals' finest artificers. So were the first Death Guard born. With his army at his command the next time a charnel lord descended from the poisoned heights with its horde of surgically created horrors and tentacle-dragging flesh-hulks, they were met by Mortarion and his newly dubbed 'Death Guard' in savage battle. The force swiftly checked and then broke their enemy, slaying the charnel overlord and destroying his misbegotten army of monsters as they attempted to retreat back into the toxic fog above.

The tide of fate on Barbarus had truly turned at last, but for decades the war carried on, the charnel overlords and their issue were first forestalled, then one by one isolated and systematically destroyed. Every few years improvements in the Death Guards' breather masks and just what his feral soldiers could endure meant that the humans' counter-attacks could be pressed ever higher and another domain of nightmare besieged, burned out and toppled. Decades after Mortarion first came down from his adopted

father's domain only the great charnel lord who had once named himself Mortarion's father remained, inviolate in his black and fetid manse atop the highest peak of Barbarus. Here the poisoned fogs ate through respirator masks and killed in mere moments, and even Mortarion's Primarch physiology could not endure long.

Frustrated and denied, Mortarion's world once again began to unexpectedly spin from his control, as on his return from one such unsuccessful and costly assault on the heights he found his place as saviour suddenly usurped by a shining new benefactor who had come from the stars to deliver the people—the Emperor had come to Barbarus. The *Stygian Scrolls* record what appears to be an edited and inconsistent account of Mortarion's dealings with his creator, but it is apparent that the early meetings did not go well, and Mortarion was resentful both of the intervention and the Emperor's offer of aid in slaying the last and most powerful charnel overlord he had once called father. It seems discord and

malcontent were the tenor of the reunion, and that matters soon came to a head. A pact was struck that if Mortarion could defeat the last charnel overlord unaided and by his own hand, then the Emperor agreed to leave both him and Barbarus alone and pass on. However, if the bitter Primarch could not make good on his word, then the Emperor would do what he could not, then Barbarus would become part of the Imperium and Mortarion would swear his total fealty and obedience to him. Over the protests of his first Death Guard, the hostile and wroth Mortarion made good on his word and ventured into the heights alone, resolved perhaps to die if he could not endure to reach his goal. Soon he passed the smashed ruins that had once been his home and upwards he went, through the black and caustic fog to the overlord of Barbarus' bleak manse. At this murderous height the respirator the Primarch wore perished, its air-hoses rotted away and every step was ever more torturous as his flesh blistered and the tissues of his lungs and throat began to liquefy and slough away, choking him. Finally within sight of



his goal, Mortarion sank to his knees and with fading sight he witnessed the inhuman overlord he once called father coming down for him in the mists to fulfil his promise. Then from the poison fog a second, shining figure came. It was the Emperor, who struck down the charnel overlord with his burning blade. Thus was Barbarus delivered and Mortarion saved. So was Barbarus doomed to future history's judgement and Mortarion damned never to have his vengeance, bound by oath to the service of a new father.

A MOURNFUL UNITY

True to his oath, Mortarion bent his knee to his new-found father as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to do so, although his final act of defiance on Barbarus would leave scars upon him both physical and mental that would never fully heal. A skilled warlord in his own right, he was immediately given command of the XIVth Legion which carried his genetic inheritance, and did so on his own terms. Gathering them before him, a grim and spectral figure robed and bearing the great black scythe that had once belonged to his nightmarish foster-father, it must have seemed to the Terran-born Dusk Raiders that an ancient, graven image of the Grim Reaper had come before them as their new master. His words were simple and delivered in a harsh whisper that never the less carried to each and every one: *"You are my unbroken blades, my Death Guard. By your hand shall justice be delivered, and doom shall stalk a thousand worlds."*

By this simple decree the Dusk Raiders were no more, and the records and annals from that day forward would carry this new name as one to strike fear into the hearts of Mankind—the Death Guard. In the decades that followed the renamed XIVth fought tirelessly in the service of the Great Crusade, never relenting in battle beneath their Primarch's gaze they pursued the liberation of Mankind with a fervour the Great Crusade had never known. Their restless fleet ploughed the cold void from one campaign to the next, resupplying on the move, never pausing but to make war. They did not garrison, they did not build—they only tore down and slew, coldly, determinately and with the inexorable progress of a contagion or a tsunami wave, and worlds fell before them.

Over time Mortarion shaped the creed and practice of the Death Guard, his beliefs in many ways forming a natural extension of their own, beliefs and doctrine becoming ever more refined and extreme. At the heart of them was the unshakable determination that Mankind should be free of oppression and terror. Such freedom could only be won in the Primarch's mind by destroying those that would shackle and devour us. This was a war to be fought without mercy or limit, without restraint or relenting. The battle for the human future was one that could only be won by enduring any hardship, no matter how terrible, and not shirking from any act, no matter how savage in pursuit of victory. This single end—the liberation of humanity to Mortarion's creed, justified any means.

Decades of endless battle changed the Death Guard, and over time the Terran influences on the Legion became less and less apparent, with the panoply and traditions of the Dusk Raiders and the Officio Militaris erased in favour of Barbarus' bleak creed of war. The bare ivory-grey unpainted ceramite that Mortarion had favoured for the Legion's powered armour became increasingly less adorned, save for new murky-jade markings set to echo the corrosive-resistant swamp mud applied to coat the iron plates of the human warriors that had once served the

Primarch of Barbarus, and shorn of older heraldry and Terran influence. The martial stratifications of Old Earth's warmasters were done away with too, and eventually the Legion's Librarius was disbanded thanks to Mortarion's hatred of witchery such as that the hated charnel masters of Barbarus had once wielded.

The Death Guard cared little for emblems of rank—except where needed for battlefield recognition. Nor for badges of honour or trinkets to commemorate deeds of valour—instead the closest the Space Marines of the Death Guard came to such decoration on their armour, be they from an enemy's blade or bullet, or the corrosive stains of an environment none but the Death Guard could have endured. So long as the armour plate itself was not compromised such damage was left to adorn the Death Guard as a statement that there was nothing they could not endure, adding to the Legion's increasingly sinister appearance and deepening reputation among their fellow warriors.

As fresh intakes of new Space Marines came in from Barbarus, the surviving core of Terran blood became a minority as the Great Crusade burned on across the stars, the Death Guard at the forefront of the fighting in the most hellish war-zones imaginable. Although second perhaps in their father's eyes, the Terran contingent remained stubborn in the ranks, hardened veterans and a force to be reckoned with in the Legion—until the treachery of Isstvan III where Mortarion moved quickly to rid himself of these warriors who had served their macabre master faithfully despite any misgivings they may have had. Their stalwart resolve to defy death and endure would see these loyalist Death Guard stand against the onslaught of those who they once called brother on Isstvan III and extract a bloody toll on the traitor, and it would be one of their number Garro (of whom much has been written elsewhere), who with his fellows would break free of the Arch-enemy's trap and bring word to Terra of the Warmaster's treachery.

The Inheritance of Barbarus

Under Mortarion's direct command the XIVth Legion changed with rapid and edifying speed, it was as one iterator put it: *"a final catalyst was added to some alchemical mixture, effecting a violent change, transforming them into something at once dramatically different but somehow preordained, even expected."*

Their Primarch's mere presence seemed to augment and amplify characteristics that had always been present in the Dusk Raiders to new and unseen extremes, while other aspects of the Legion's established nature fell away like a shed skin. The newly christened Death Guard were remorseless, relentless and resilient. They were a tide of steel and ceramite that crashed upon a foe heedless of casualties or loss, utterly unstoppable in assault and near-indestructible in defence. Mortarion's hand and mind was at work everywhere remaking his Legion, from changing tactical doctrines to equipment procurement and, some say, behind the selection of candidates and changing practices in the Legion's Apothecarion—where he gained the latter knowledge to interfere is best left unconsidered.

A full description of what happened in the early days of Mortarion's command of the Legion remains unrecorded or deliberately obscured. The prevailing conditions on Barbarus and the foul beings that once ruled there were kept from the Imperium's wider knowledge and those who had seen the truth fell silent or, like Lackland Thorn, simply disappeared. It is believed that elements of the xenos overlords' progeny still stalked the planet's fog-shrouded mountains and deep swamps, and there were whispers that its people would have been better euthanised or displaced to a 'cleaner' world for the sake of the sanity of future generations. Mortarion would have none of this—Barbarus now belonged to its people, he declared, bought and paid for by generations of blood and terror, and its strongest sons would now serve as recruits for his new Death Guard. As for the purely human Death Guard that had once fought for him against the overlords of Barbarus, many now became the masters of that world and a dread aristocracy they soon became, while the youngest and strongest took full or partial conversion into the Legion's Astartes, heedless of the high fatality rate



that late induction carried with it—deemed a small enough price to pay to continue in the service of Mortarion their saviour.

Attrition rates within the Death Guard Legion on active service were frighteningly high despite their legendary resilience. Indeed for many years of the Great Crusade only the World Eaters and Iron Warriors Legions were on occasion recorded to have spent more lives proportionately to their strength in pursuit of the Imperium's conquests. With new recruitment at issue, Barbarus itself in a short span of years became little more than a factory of sorts to produce new recruits for the Death Guard Legion, and intake from other sources of recruitment to which the Legion had title

dwindled to a mere handful—unless the pressure of fatalities in the field proved too great. Mortarion's resistance to the use of bloodstock other than that of Barbarus wavered only because of the need to keep his Legion's strength battleworthy in his eyes. Recruitment solely from Barbarus was however aided by the high suitability of the planet's hardy feral population to the conversion process. Long had the humans there suffered, and only the strong survived while the demands of unknown generations on the poisonous world had left its children uncommonly resistant to contagion and toxins—a factor the Legion's gene-seed would amplify to unheard of levels.

UNIT AND FORMATION STRUCTURE WITHIN THE LEGION

Before they were united with their Primarch, the Dusk Raiders conformed very closely to the standard raiment of arms and organisational patterns laid out for the early Legions by the *Officio Militaris*. The XIVth Legion is noted in record in this period as maintaining a rounded capacity for multiple modes of warfare, although with some bias to heavy assault formations and attritional engagements, as evidenced by the particular use of close-ranged weaponry among its specialised units. With Mortarion as its master much within the Legion, including its arts of warfare, changed dramatically over time. He was at his heart an infantryman, and in his Death Guard he saw the chance to perfect the principle of the utilitarian warrior on foot who could go anywhere, fight on any ground and destroy any enemy through resilience, resolve and implacable aggression. As part of this doctrine squad formations were not largely static as with most Legions but were formed, reformed and ordered as needed. To this end a Death Guard Legionary was trained to be equally adept at any infantry role he might be called on to perform on the battlefield rather than fighting in a particular role, acting as a Tactical Marine in one battle, a support weapons operator in another and so on, with only Techmarines and other highly specialised occupations remaining separate.

At its most fundamental level the Death Guard Legion was organized around the principle of equipping individual Space Marines as well as possible, so that they could endure and prevail against any foe encountered, and operate for extended periods without resupply or support if needed. This was a dogma espoused by Mortarion which was readily embraced by the wider Legion, as it built on the independence and surety with which the Dusk Raiders had always fought. Bolter, melta and flamer were now the trinity of weapons around which their wargear was based, keeping supply needs to a minimum. Other types of ranged weapons were deployed sparingly only as the tactical situation or nature of the enemy demanded. Each Death Guard also carried a close combat blade as well—broad trench daggers, warscythes and the heavy slashing *Kukra* of Barbarus, forged of dense black ceramsteel, these brutal and efficient weapons soon became a hallmark of the Legion. This reliance on simple but effective tools of war was an outward manifestation of the cardinal belief held by the Legion that the

Space Marine himself was the greatest of all weapons at the Imperium's disposal—a tireless engine of war before which any enemy would eventually succumb, or as Mortarion put it to his Legion: *"One man can murder a world given sufficient time and the fortitude to wield the blade again and again and again until death's work is done."*

The Death Guard relied almost exclusively on its infantry to provide its strategic strength, with the bulk of tactical support firepower coming from heavily armed support squads, and latterly with considerable numbers of Terminators and Dreadnoughts—a tradition begun by the Dusk Raiders, providing reinforcement and assault spearheads where needed. This focus was also one of the reasons the Death Guard Legion developed a particularly admirable record in fighting to clear space hulks of alien infestation and for their ability to destroy fortifications and citadels from within. While the Death Guard did maintain and utilise field armour, support vehicles and transports (as Mortarion would not allow his forces to be circumvented, cut-off or left wanting for their lack), these were not given any primacy in the Legion's tactical doctrine. The only exceptions to this were dedicated siege units such as the Vindicator which was fielded in disproportionately high numbers by the Legion, alongside squadrons of Fellblade super-heavies and Land Raider Spartans in mass warfare. It was notable in hindsight—and would prove to be a telling factor on Isstvan III—that a proportionately high number of Death Guard Legion war machine crews were of Terran blood by the time of the Heresy, while the heaviest infantry strike units, particularly the Legion's sizable core of Terminator armour-equipped shock troops, were of Barbarus stock.

LEGION COMMAND HIERARCHY

When the new-found Primarch was given command of his Legion, his fellow Primarchs and the Lords Militant of the Imperium no doubt waited with some expectation to see what manner of warrior this macabre addition to the ranks of the Emperor's sons would prove. The answer came in a perhaps unexpected form as Mortarion proved himself within the span of a very few battles to be one of the finest field commanders the Great Crusade had ever seen, ever at the forefront of his forces smashing down foes. The mysterious Primarch had an uncanny sense for the tide of a battle's turning, and where and when forces under

his command—sometimes removed by thousands of miles from his own position—should hold ground or advance to brutal effect—so well did he perceive the ebb and flow of war. Many of his contemporaries, and indeed commentators, since have underestimated Mortarion's razor-sharp intelligence and flare for organisational simplicity and efficiency. These factors, coupled with the ability to inspire a fanatical loyalty in those of Barbarus blood who viewed him as no less than a near-divine saviour, allowed Mortarion to remake his Legion as a single instrument of his will. Of all of the Legions, it was said of the Death Guard that they were but one entity with a single purpose and one body.

Obedience and order in the ranks of the Death Guard was absolute and expected, and a clear and unbroken chain of command ran like blood in the Legion's veins. Legionaries were extensions of their sergeants' will, sergeants their captain's, and captains their commander's, and through them all were instruments of Mortarion, body and soul. Few other ranks or divisions of formal organisation existed, except in very specialized, often technical, roles and each member of the Legion knew their place and the seniority and tasks of those around them without recourse to heraldry and symbol. All conformed to Mortarion's decree without rancour or dissent, and rivalries and internal strife were observed by outsiders to be few, particularly in comparison to more notably fractious Legions such as the Night Lords or Space Wolves. When an officer died in battle, his successor stepped into his place swiftly and decisively without need for orders or discussion, and so the Legion's chain of command was seamless even under the heaviest losses, contributing to the Death Guard's reputation for endurance in war.

The overall Legion Mortarion had re-ordered into seven 'Great Companies' of considerably larger size than standard Legion organisational structures would mandate—the number seven and its derivations seeming to hold occult and ritual significance both to Mortarion and the culture of his blighted world of adoption. Notionally each company was to hold some 70,000 Space Marines, the desired strength of the Death Guard Legion's number then some 490,000 Legiones Astartes—although in reality nothing approaching this number was ever achieved. Attrition and bloodshed, as well as the constraints of time and resources,

Fearful Weapons

It is of note that the Death Guard under Mortarion quickly became associated with the use of alchem and radiation weaponry to a greater extent than any other Legion, further darkening their reputation with their battle-brothers. Simply put, the use of toxic gas, crawl-burning Phosphex and contaminated rad-shells did not rankle their Legion's honour as it did for some, while Mortarion himself was a master of such weapons and student of the most horrific arts of war, and had no compunction in their use against any that threatened humanity. Furthermore while Space Marine physiology was engineered to be resilient to such poisons and taints, the Death Guard were more so. Exposure to a pathogen or toxin that would kill an unprotected human in seconds might only inconvenience or impair a member of the Legiones Astartes, but to a Death Guard, it often did nothing at all. This led the XIVth Legion to be more and more frequently deployed into battle in warzones where hellish and lethal conditions—be they atomic, bacteriological or chemical in nature—were present, and in which they would then excel. The Great Crusade was, after all, launched to conquer worlds not destroy them, unless there was no alternative, but in such warzones, already hopelessly contaminated and unsuited for human life, the usual caveats and protocols restricting the use of contaminate weapons by the Emperor's command did not often apply. This resulted in a kind of self-fulfilling fate for the Legion, as they were ever more associated with the most nightmarish of wars and in them the use of the most terrible weapons.

A timbre of horror and charnel taint seemed to adhere to the Death Guard then, long before the Heresy was born, and they came to be to some extent shunned and suspected by their fellow Legions in a way the Dusk Raiders had never been, although in truth how much this was to do with their sinister Primarch rather than the Legion itself is debatable. Mortarion himself kept little company with his fellow Primarchs, save for Horus and Curze upon occasion, beings perhaps in some way more likened to himself than the rest, and by others such as Perturabo and Lion El'Jonson he was actively shunned. It is said by some sources that long before he actively betrayed his second father, Mortarion and his Death Guard came under suspicion to the extent that watchful Corax and the resolute Guilliman had separately brought their misgivings to the Emperor in person as to both the Death Guard's operations and just where its macabre and secretive master's loyalties lay. If this is true then the Emperor dismissed their concerns as unfounded, and in this he was tragically mistaken and the dark destiny of the XIVth Legion and its Primarch prefigured.

were to see the Legion never reach this number but the figure remains, if nothing else, a measure of Mortarion's ambition.

Elite units, favoured or chosen warriors singled out from the rest, and sub-formations within the Death Guard Legion were also noticeably lacking in comparison to other Legions, with only a few exceptions – the most notable of which were known as the Deathshroud. Singled out by Mortarion they were veteran warriors, chosen for their skill-at-arms, fearlessness and their proven endurance, and were often selected from Death Guard who had survived where their comrades had fallen, often quite literally having been left the 'last man' from an assault force or particularly bloody defence. The Deathshroud formed Mortarion's silent bodyguard, and in peace or war it was said that at least two of their number remained within forty-nine paces of their Primarch at any time.

WAR DISPOSITION

Unlike some Legions whose operations were often diffused into separate commands, taskforces and campaigns, the Death Guard were accustomed to fight as one. So it was that the XIVth Legion came to the Isstvan system with its almost complete strength, the most accurate of which placed it at approximately 95,000 Space Marines, 70 capital vessels and perhaps three times that number of smaller escort and assault craft.

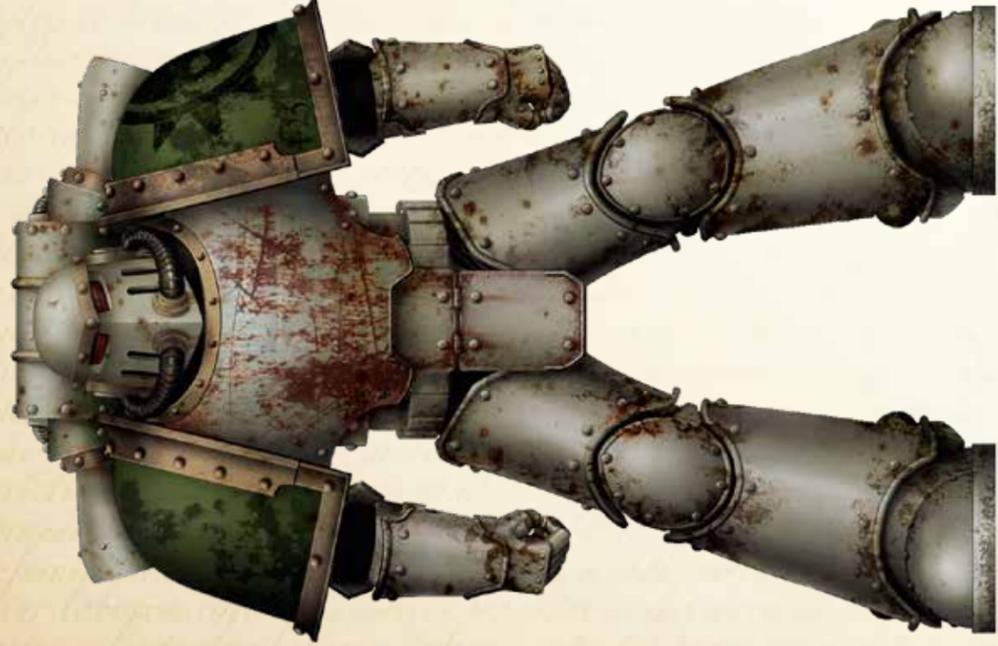
For some considerable time before the betrayal the Death Guard Legion had fought beside the Sons of Horus in the galactic north, either attacking targets of extreme environmental hazard alongside specialized units, or often joining in open battle to form an unbreakable anvil against which the forces of fellow Legions caught and smashed the foe.

Deployed to the surface of Isstvan III it is believed were a little under a third of the Legion's forces, comprising the principal elements of its 2nd, 5th and 7th Great Companies, as well as a detachment of Legion Fellblades and siege gear. This numbered not only the bulk of the Death Guard's Terran blood but many others besides, forming an effective fighting force to retake the rebel world. It is not known if these non-Terran elements were also distrusted by their master Mortarion to follow him in revolt against the Emperor, or merely deemed a necessary sacrifice as part of the Warmaster's plan.

Given the observed nature of the Legion it is then all the more shocking perhaps that despite their unity of purpose and the unflinching loyalty of his Death Guard, that it seems apparent that Mortarion simply did not trust some within his ranks, particularly those of Terran stock, and so conspired in their merciless destruction at Isstvan III. So was Mortarion's betrayal felt the most keenly

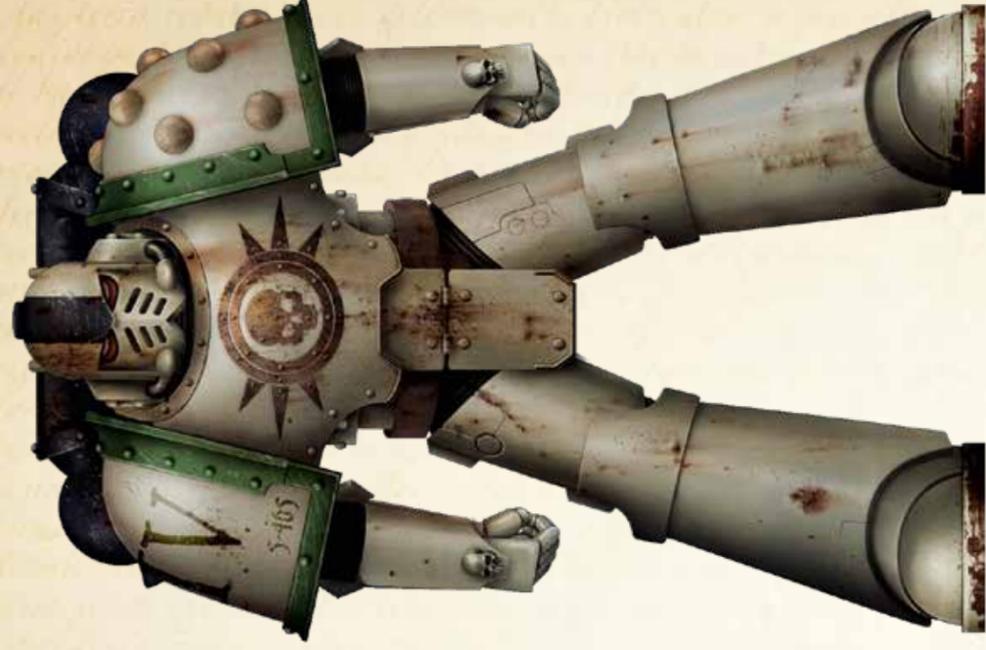
and bitterly by those he cast down, a loyalty scorned that turned into burning hatred of their former master. Ironically it was also Mortarion's doctrine of endurance and self-sufficiency, and the Legion's experiences fighting on the deadliest of battlefields that allowed the betrayed Death Guard to respond swiftly and effectively to their plight and danger—for in proportion it appears more of them survived the initial viral bombardment of Isstvan III than any other Legion force stranded there, and it was their dogged resistance and will to fight despite the odds which allowed them to prove such a thorn in the traitors' side.





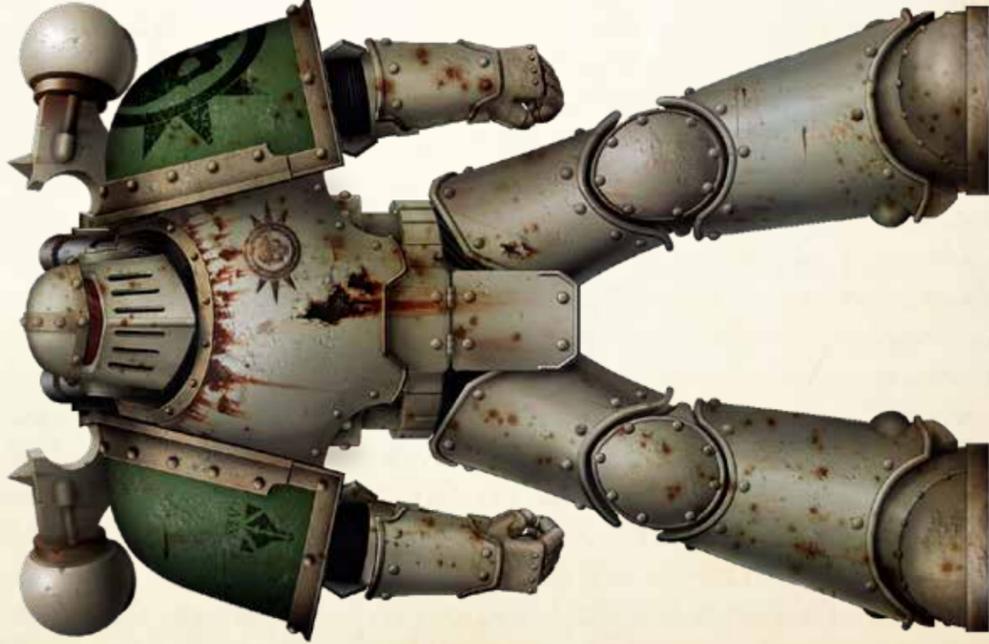
Unknown Death Guard Legionary [Pict-capture Istsvan III Atrocity]

This Death Guard Legionary epitomises his Legion's panoply and appearance during this period. Note: Limited use of iconography and heraldry: Maintenance of superficial armour damage sustained on active service as a badge of honour. Modified 'Iron' Pattern armour with enhanced life-support systems.



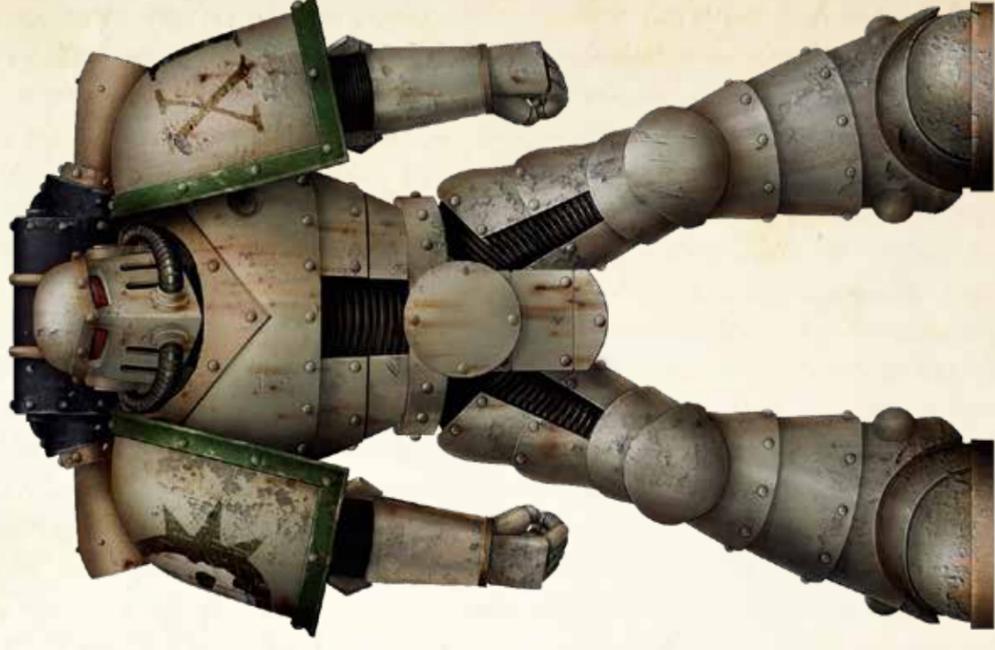
Death Guard Sergeant Sorruk Vasha [Pict-capture Istsvan III Atrocity]

Vasha was a Tactical squad sergeant of the Death Guard 4th Great Company, he took part in the initial assault wave sent against the rebels of Istsvan III, and owing to damage sustained by his power armour during the battle, perished to the ravages of the life-eater virus. Note: Later Legion issue 'Maximus' pattern power armour with additional molecular bonding studs used to reinforce left shoulder armour for enhanced protection in fire-sweep assaults.



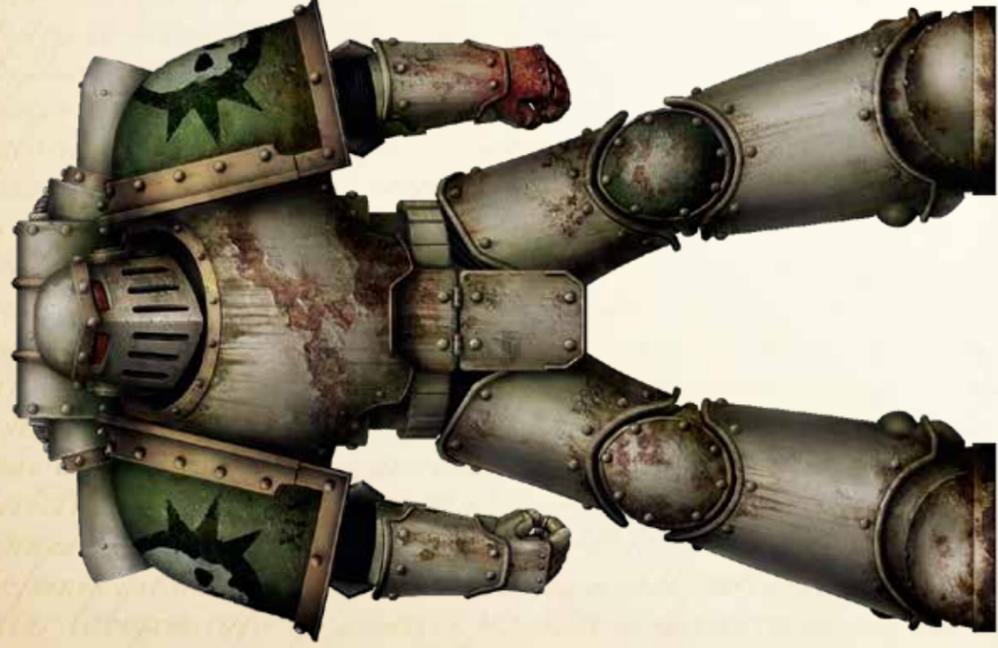
Death Guard Legionary Caipha Morang [Pict-capture Istsvan III Atrocity]

Morang was a Legionary assigned to the 24th Breacher squad of the 2nd Great Company of the Death Guard Legion, and fought with the traitors on Istsvan III. Note: 'Iron' pattern power armour utilising a prototype Anvilus pattern backpack unit – this variant has enhanced stabilising thruster vents to aid in void operations, but inferior rad-shielding.



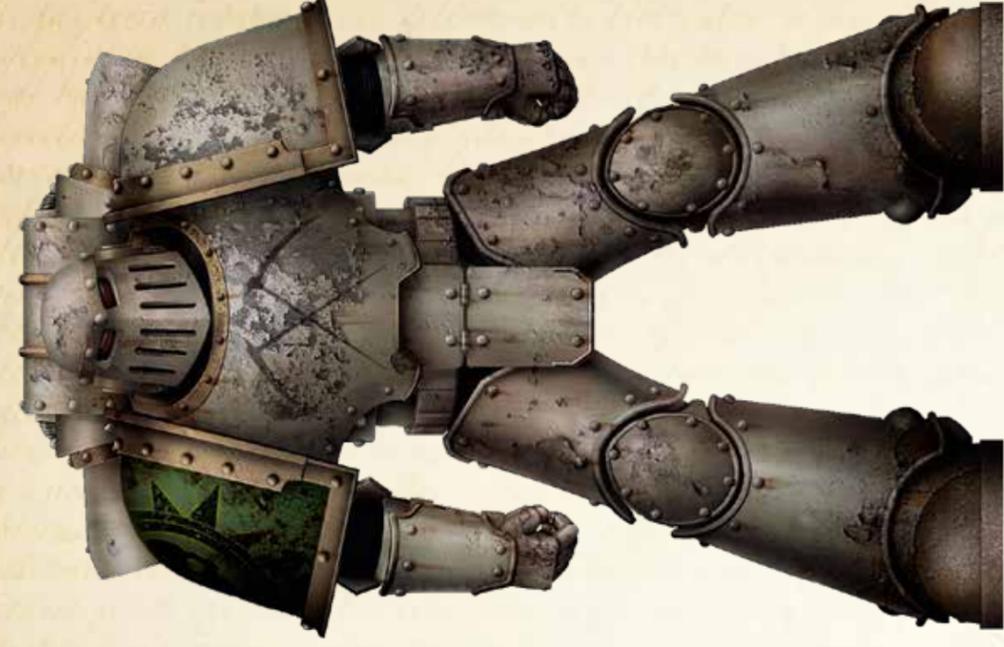
Unknown Death Guard Legionary [Pict-capture Galaspar Assault Force]

This warrior depicts early-pattern Death Guard appearance and panoply. Note: Modified 'Crusade' Pattern armour with enhanced breathing apparatus incorporated into reinforced helm.



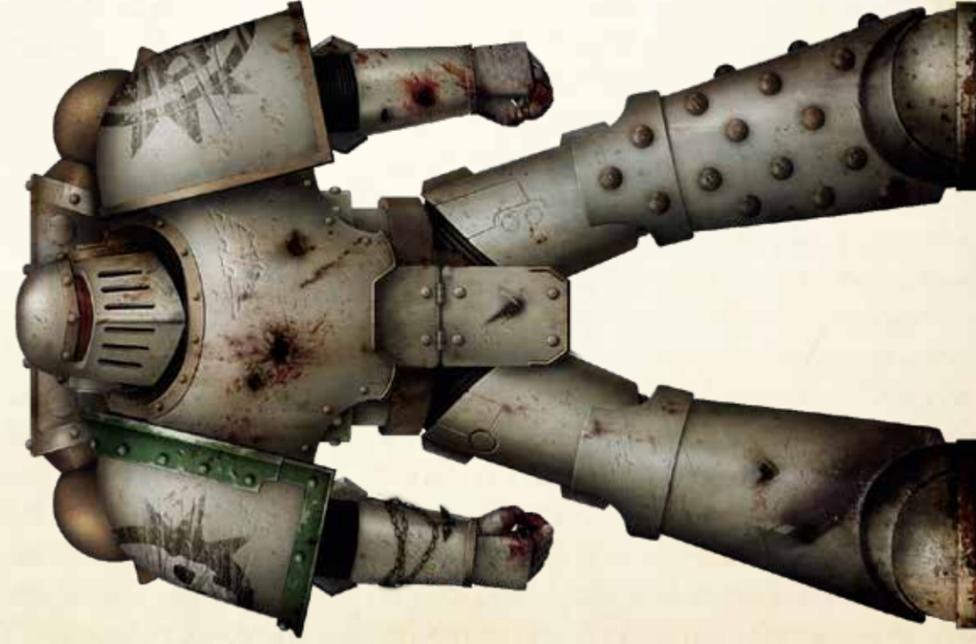
Unknown Death Guard Legionary. [Pict-capture Issvvan III Atrocity]

Believed to have been a member of the 7th Great Company, (although markings of rank and role are sparse), this Legionary Space Marine was part of the traitor onslaught that encircled and exterminated the Loyalist forces in the northern zone redoubts. Note: Corroded damage to torso plate (likely to have been caused originally by an Ork cutting-torch weapon); Heavy 'Iron' pattern armour in extensive use by the Death Guard Legion owing to its suitability for attrition warfare.



Death Guard Sergeant Taragth Sune [Pict-capture Assault on Grhendal's Moon]

Sune was a noted veteran of his Legion, having distinguished himself in action in the Battle of Grhendal's Moon against the tainted Lithovac chem-mutants, slaying their witch-mother using a damaged bracing spar as a weapon. He fought with the traitors to purge Issvvan III and was elevated afterwards to the rank of Centurion. Note: Crossed scythes emblem denoting the personal commendation of his Primarch Mortarion.



Loyalist Death Guard Legionary Kaleb Molor [Pict-capture Issvvan III Atrocity]

Kaleb Molor fought as part of a resistance group under the command of Crysos Morturg and was valiantly slain in battle against the traitor forces of the World Eaters Legion. Note: 'Maximus' pattern armour repaired with scavenged components from the Issvvan III battlefield; Defaced Legion Heraldry: Image of the Imperial Aquila incised by hand on breastplate.



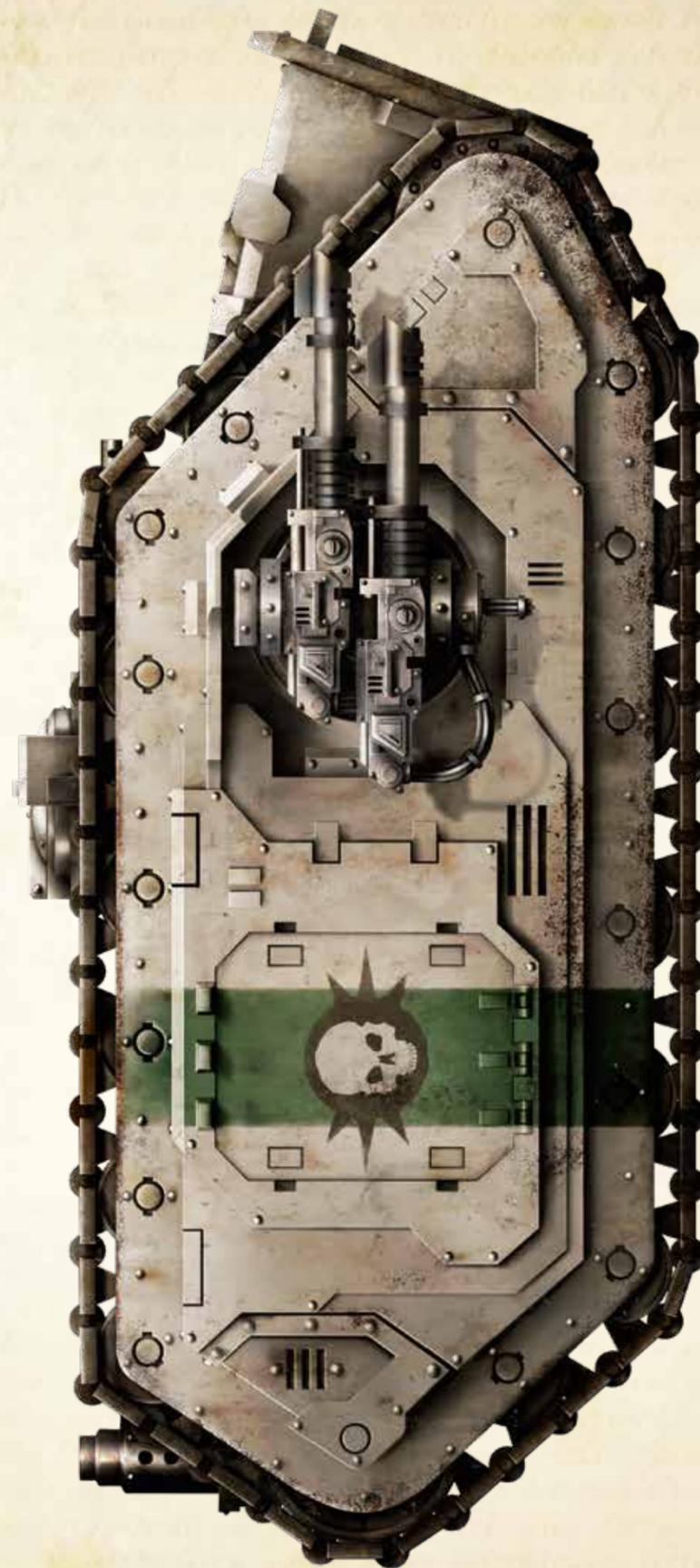
Historical Record: Dusk Raiders Tactical Space Marine
[Pict-capture 3rd Trans-Solar Crusade]

Original panoply and heraldry of the Dusk Raiders Legion. Note: Base pattern Legiones Astartes power armour (retroactively designated as 'Crusade' pattern) in storm grey with crimson accent; Aquila Imperialis honour designating Legion's campaign role in the latter Unification Wars.



Death Guard Dreadnought Ancient Skorrvall, known also as the 'Bitterblood' [Pict-capture Istvan III Atrocity]

A native of Barbarus from that world's first intake into the Death Guard Legion, Skorrvall was known as a darkly-tempered warrior and a survivor against the odds. Rising to the honoured rank of Standard Bearer of the 19th Chapter of the 1st Great Company, he was mortally wounded in battle with the Eldar at Neverlight and interred in a Dreadnought frame. Fighting with the Traitors in Mortarion's Vanguard at Istvan III he killed indiscriminately during the 'Veil of Grief' incident and was badly damaged by cannon-fire but survived to later take part in the massacre at Istvan V. Notes: Contemptor Pattern Dreadnought chassis: Commander of the Death Guard 7th Dreadnought Talon.



Death Guard Legion Spartan Heavy Assault Transport [Pict-capture Istvan III Atrocity]

The Spartan is a development of the powerful Land Raider design, with increased size, payload capacity and firepower. Note: This example is from the Legion Strategic Reserve armoury and is equipped with standard quad-lascannon sponsons as primary armament: It was standard practice within the Death Guard Legion to use only numeric designation for their vehicles rather than name them as was practice in many Legions.

