



THE XANA INCURSION

"The blade of suspicion is keener yet than that of hate, for it slays friends as readily as foes. It sunders kin and rends apart those who in sane course of action would be allies as easily as those whom nature itself decrees as deadly foes. So savage a weapon it is that they who master it need fear none, save of course themselves."

The Book of the Hydra

THE EDGE OF EMPIRE

By the year 009.M31, the entire galaxy was riven by the horror of civil war. The fire that had been ignited at Isstvan had spread to consume worlds without number, while the blight of the Ruinstorm continued to howl, throwing all long-range communications awry, and warp travel over any great distance became dangerous and unpredictable at best, and all but impossible at its worst. Despite these difficulties, the war only grew more intense as thrust and counter-thrust between Loyalist and Traitor did little but create ever-greater swells of destruction and carnage without pressing either side on to ultimate victory. The galaxy burned.

In this far-spanning conflict however, not every world had chosen a side, or for that matter had such a decision been thrust upon them, either through expediency or violence. There were many worlds that through quirk of galactic geography or simple lack of strategic consequence had been spared direct conflict, while others had gone so far as to secede themselves entirely from the fighting, preferring independence or professed neutrality. Some worlds and domains however had simply done little to evidence loyalty or opposition to either cause, and into this last camp the powerful and isolated Forge World of Xana had fallen.

Occidentem Thule

The Forge World of Xana was a potent and storied example of its kind, an Ultima-II grade faculty rated as one of the most capable Forge Worlds of the Imperium, and unmatched in its region of the galaxy. It comprised a main planetary sphere, Xana II, with a number of inhabited moons and extensive mobile sub-faculties in the form of void and gas mining installations scattered throughout the debris belts and turbulent atmosphere of the macro-magnitude gas giant, Xana I, around which the Forge World orbited. Its position was on the very far tip of the galactic arm of the western fringe, granting it the title on the star charts of the Carta Imperialis as 'Occidentem Thule'—the last great port on the edge of the inter-galactic abyss. To the crews of the Imperial fleet whose long range patrols used Xana as their furthest outpost of reach, it bore another more evocative name, "*the Port of Bones*"—a reference of uncertain origin, but perhaps developed from the ossuary-white and grey-black livery of its ruling magos.

Long the subject of sinister rumour around its finding and inclusion into the Imperium during one of the darkest episodes of the

Great Crusade's early history, Xana's masters were notoriously independent and politically long-estranged from Mars. Xana's privilege was bought largely with the vast outpourings of its forges to fuel and arm the ongoing Great Crusade, and expediency was the mother of the pact which bought the Forge World into the Imperium by negotiation with the emissaries of the Emperor, rather than the full auspices of Mars. While the forges of distant Xana issued forth provender and munitions in vast quantities, it was largely left alone.

Isolation and Evasion

As the Horus Heresy suddenly and bloodily unfolded, Xana's isolation only increased and it was a situation its ruling synod of magos, known as the Vodian Consistory, did little to attempt to outwardly alleviate, choosing initially neither faction to favour, avowing, at least publicly, that the matter was an '*internal matter of the Great Crusade's military*' in which they had no direct involvement. Even before the coming of the Ruinstorm, scheduled freight convoys from Xana to ports both Loyalist and Traitor in allegiance had dwindled in frequency and were finally suspended altogether. This was despite Rogue Trader vessels, Chartist Voyagers and other far flung agencies reporting that the system appeared relatively accessible via the Epyrean, as far as it was from the fury of the great storm fronts of the Warp which had riven the galaxy's core. Repeated requests, impeachments, demands and even threats from Terra and the Warmaster were both met with the same chill response of stated regret and blank courtesy. Such regrets, conveyed this time through a courier warp-probe that forced its way to the Terran security fleet cordon two years after it had been launched in 006.M31, were cold comfort alongside its report of the complete loss through empyreal storm of an entire macro-ark convoy and its naval escort squadron out of Olmec almost within sight of Xana. It became later known to Loyalist sources via captured logs that similar condolences had been proffered in the following year to the Warmaster for a Traitor-oathed Rogue Trader fleet lost trying to reach Xana in distinctly similar circumstances.

Whether either side fully believed the explanations given for their lost fleets remains something of a moot point, as suspicions dawned that Xana was on no side in the conflict other than its own and was perhaps no longer content to merely sit aside from the conflict until a clear victor emerged. Evidence for this stance presented itself

to the intellencers of both major factions when in late 008.M30, attackers tentatively identified as being Xana-allied Taghmata forces struck the contested mining world of Guilders Grave on the edge of the Vicidax Sector, driving off the Traitor-aligned naval blockade before going on to massacre the Loyalist militia defenders and looting the surviving planetary vaults of rare metallic elements and macro-mining engines before departing again, leaving little more than ruin in their wake.

As the war went on with no clear avenue of victory in sight, both sides now looked to the increasingly bellicose and active Forge World of Xana with renewed interest. Spies and probe ships sent to skirt the edge of the system revealed clearly that dozens of macro-transport and freighters were now partially concealed in the rocky debris belt which ringed the gas giant of Xana I, and between them and the Forge World of Xana II was a constant traffic of cargo loaders and freight lighters. The conclusion drawn from this was that in their years of isolation since the war's outbreak, the forges of Xana had not been idle and evidence began to amass that a vast and well-guarded stockpile of munitions and war machines had been built up in the system, and readied as if for shipment to a client, but to what end or to whom remained unclear.

Upon learning of this development and mindful of the fate of Guilders Grave, Rogal Dorn, Praetorian of Terra, issued a communiqué to Xana via warp-courier vessel, an open proclamation declaring the Forge World of Xana Traitoris Perdita and under sentence of death. At the same time, a more covert Loyalist offer was made via intermediaries of the Sigillite for the remission of this sentence in return for its renewed absolute allegiance and the deliverance of its stockpiles of war materiel immediately to the Loyalist build-up in the Segmentum Solar.

The Warmaster, however, was to offer a more subtle and honeyed bargain.



THANATAR CLASS BATTLE-AUTOMATA NURØ-CI

TAGHMATA SCORIA, TACTICAL ARTILLERY COVENANT
THE RANGDAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

After its initial, fraught, entry into the Emperor's growing domain, the first campaign of the Great Crusade in which elements of Xana's amassed military might were to take part in was that apocalyptic clash of arms that would later pass into legend as the Rangdan Xenocides. The Battle-automata encoded Nurø-ci, the third automata of the ninth maniple in the archaic script of the Xanite enclave, is one of the few machines to survive that conflict and return to the forge-fanes of its origin. Much of the record of those battles is sealed away, but automata Nurø-ci is known to have participated in the carefully planned genocide of those xenos forces encountered by the Xanite forces at Rangda.



++Mechanicum Dominatus++

++Xana II Omnis Potentia++

++Cartographica Imperialis
Designation:
Primary Forge Domain,
Western Galactic Fringe,
Vicaidax Thule Sector,
Tithe Grade Ultima-II,++

++Patent Unknown//
Anomalous:
Ref: Age of Strife++

++WARNING TRATORIS
PERDITA++

++Aleph-Noctis Level
Authorization Required
to Proceed++



Xana-Tisiphone: Mechanicum Experimental Station and Penitentiary Colony,
Satellite orbit of Xana II,
location transplanted artificially from position as Xana V,
Inhabitation Unknown: TRATORIS PERDITA

$\gamma//184//\Omega$

$\Psi//793//\Theta$

Xana II: Sovereign Domain of the Mechanicum,
Primaris-I Grade Forge World,
Apex Class Manufactura Capacity,
Omega-VII Class Militaris Capacity,
Assayed 2.7 Billion inhabitants: TRATORIS PERDITA

$\Phi//591//\Omega$

Xana I: Macto-Magnitude Gas Giant: Typhon-Tanis Classification Storm Zone,
High Value/Hazardous Resource Extraction in Median Gas Layers

Xana I/Orbital Debris Ring Belts: High Density turbulent debris belt
enslaved by unusually focused planetary magno-gravitic forces.
Extensive ferric ore extraction industry by Mechanicum forces,
secondary concealed defensive facilities,
asteroid vaults and mortis-extremis grade void mine defences: TRATORIS PERDITA

THE XANA PARADOX

“Death has reared himself a throne, in a strange city lying alone, Hell, rising from a thousand thrones, shall do it reverence.”

Unknown poetic fragments collected in the Lexis Dramaturica
Circa M2

THE BEACON ON THE SHORE OF NIGHT
'Xana', it had been a word that conjured images of sinister mystery at the edge of the unknown since the earliest days of the Great Crusade. First recorded in rumours taken from the reports of Rogue Traders and exploratory craft sent out towards the western reaches of the galaxy as early as the 800s of M30, these early 'myths' were confused, contradictory and exaggerated in the telling. These tales told of a machine empire that spanned many worlds on one hand and of a lonely outpost—a forbidden domain which held within it the wonders and terrors of the Dark Age of Technology—on the other. Some versions of the rumours held its rulers to be cyborg lords such as the masters of Mars, while others spoke of a nightmarish cabal of dark overminds, fleshless things that should have long been dead. But despite these discrepancies, certain consistencies remained between the iterations of the story; firstly that this technological power was—or at least had once been—human and that its home was a star system on the very edge of the western galactic reach upon a world that was time and again named as 'Xana'.

The pursuit of what truth lay behind the myth of Xana became of great interest to the planners and strategists of the early decades of the Great Crusade, not least of all, it is believed, to the Fabricator-general of Mars and the Emperor Himself. To the former, the mysterious data indicated the presence of a powerful and independent Forge World, though one founded perhaps by a lost Ark Mechanicum as no records remained in the vaults of Mars as to an intentional expedition to this desolate and ill-populated region of space. As to the latter's interest, it can only be speculated upon, but it is known that probe ships were sent out into the region by the Emperor's express order. Perhaps it was merely a part of the Master of Mankind's greater interest to see the far-flung domains of humanity united, or perhaps to isolate a rival to be destroyed. It might have been that he saw Xana as a potential location where one of his lost sons might be found; we shall never now know. Deep-range empyreal explorers and expedition flotillas searched far in their quest for Xana for decades, but either did not return or came back empty handed,

save for a fresh handful of rumours and suppositions, and the myth of Xana remained just that, superseded by more pressing conflicts and tangible discoveries which drew away the Great Crusade's attention.

The tides of war and conquest would mean that the truth of Xana would remain uncovered until 843.M30 when a damaged galleass belonging to the Rogue Trader Casilida DeAniasie, having been flung far off-course after engaging in battle with Fra'al Corsairs, intercepted a trio of hulking automata warships at the edge of the inter-galactic void. Although they might have taken or destroyed her already damaged ship with little effort, these vessels instead offered aid and carried with them a message of greeting and an offer of diplomatic exchange between the 'Sovereign Forge Domain of Xana' and the Imperium of Man and its Emperor. The Xana vessels made good on their intentions by taking the stricken galleass back under tow to the Xana System itself, where it was repaired and resupplied for its journey home with exemplary speed, and the Rogue Trader herself treated with courtesy and honour in a realm that DeAniasie herself would later go on to describe as a “...*beacon on the shore of night*”—a fully-fledged Forge World, as potent as any then in the Imperium save mighty Mars itself, set in orbit around a titanic gas giant, itself beholden to a star cast alone on the edge of the great void, without constellation or neighbour for hundreds of light years. A world, if any could be said to be so, on the precipice of the abyss of the unknown.

An Uneasy Alliance
Negotiations between the Imperium and Xana soon followed upon the Rogue Trader's return, but despite the cordial tone under which they had been instigated, they were quickly beset by suspicions by many within the Imperium's camp. The first among the doubters were the emissaries of Mars. To them Xana was a troubling paradox; a recognisable Mechanicum-dogmatic and Mars-originated Forge World where one should not exist, and of whose creation they had no record. Furthermore, it was no mere hardscrabble outpost of the Machine Cult, such as Kalibbrax had been when rediscovered, nor even a

recognisable exemplar of an Ark-created domain which had maintained intermittent links to Mars such as Lucius. Instead, any cursory examination of Xana showed it as a primary Forge World of vast resource and manufacturing facility far outstripping its own needs. A Forge World whose roots were sunk deep, centuries deep perhaps, and indeed whose arts had dragged other minor planetary bodies into its near-orbit for its home world's use after its own native mines had played out. Its mature technologies and industries had produced multiple quasi-independent forge-fanes which in turn had created powerful Taghmata for their protection, and for the defence of their world pooled their resources to create a Titan Legion of a size matching the first rank of the Imperium's own classification, and that had also constructed its own void-navy, whose vessels had Warp capability. To the emissaries and assayers of Mars, who the Lords of Xana received with cordial if chill honour, these facts did not make sense. Far-flung Xana was simply too powerful, too well-established, too apparently concordant in Machine Cult doctrine for a world with no history of communion with Mars on record; the facts did not compute, Xana was a paradox. Or more simply, as one military attaché from the Court of Terra put it succinctly in his report, “...*Xana is a gift simply too perfect to be trusted; it is either our greatest good fortune in these times of war, or it is a serpent lying in wait to slay us. My mind perceives the former, but my soul warns the latter.*”

Suspensions were not allayed by the Xanites' vagueness as regarding their world's origins and activities over the years, blaming the tribulations of long distant wars and the privations of past solar storms of blistering power for their missing and incoherent records as to their own history, while their vast military capacity they explained as reaction to prior attacks by alien invaders. The Fabricator-general's ambassador demanded full access to planetary archives and forge-fane data-looms for verification, but was flatly denied; negotiations for admittance to the Imperium were under way and the Lords of Xana rejected any demands to capitulate sovereignty prematurely; they did not desire war, but nor would they submit to 'enslavement' without conflict.

Hard calculations were being run by this time by the commanders of the Great Crusade; estimations of the degree of force required to take Xana were high. Such a conquest would require the full might of at least one entire Space Marine Legion, preferably more, and that force backed with a full strength of multiple Titan Legions and hundreds of thousands of ancillary troops. This to secure victory over what would be an inevitably shattered prize. The force required to perform such a task was one the Imperium of 846.M30 was ill-equipped to spare, for looming over the stalemating negotiations was the spectre of a far larger war. That war would be the first waves of what would become afterwards known as the Rangdan Xenocides; the greatest existential threat of the Imperium's first century of existence and a conflict whose casualties and losses would be unmatched in scope until the wars of Horus Heresy itself were fought.

Under the baleful influence of this far greater threat, a deal was reached between the ambassadors of Terra and the Lords of Xana, a proposal which came with the undertone of drastic action by the Imperium should its generous offers be rejected. Under this treaty of Compliance, Xana would maintain its sovereignty as part of the greater Imperium, and notionally while falling under the rule of distant Mars, its affairs and secrets would largely remain its own so long as it obeyed the restrictions on technological development imposed on Mars itself by the Emperor. Xana in return, and its forges and fanes, would now arm the Great Crusade and serve as port for its ships, and the Imperium in turn would feed Xana with raw materials and fresh blood and schematics to enable this. The accord was sealed and ratified by the Lords of Xana and the Emperor's own writ, despite the misgivings of many and the barely concealed displeasure of the Fabricator-general.

In spite of the suspicions of many, the accord and the uneasy alliance bore fruit; the Titans of Xana, divided now into two Legions, the Legio Vulturum (known as the Gore Crows) and the Legio Kydianos (known as the Death Cry), left their world along with the Xanan void warship armada and scores of Cybernetica cohorts, and hurled themselves without relent into the fires of the Rangdan campaign. Their reinforcement of the front line was direly needed, and the Xanite forces broke their greater strength in countless battles on the edge of the Halo Stars, becoming shattered remnants of their former selves, but earned much honour

XANA II
Descriptor: Captured orbital body of Xana I (a macro-magnitude gas giant), Xana-Vicidex Star System
Classification: Forge World [Grade Primaris-I-Samek, formerly Ultima-II-Aleph]
Governmental Type: Sovereign Domain of the Cult Mechanicum [Ref: Vodian Consistory]
Population Estimate: 2.7 billion Imperial Assay/978.M30
Note: Declared Traitoris Perdita – 007.M31

Xana II is a Terrestrial type world which despite its long-term inhabitation and exploitation by the Mechanicum [See addendum-record ref/chronological dating anomaly of founding], has retained a viable, albeit reduced, biosphere and sustains native and transplanted life (including chthonic megafauna), although with high degrees of environmental toxicity.

The planet's surface comprises approximately 52% high-salinity ocean, with the remaining land mass broken up into sixteen primary formations and numerous islands and archipelagos. Prevailing topography is varied, with swamp glades near the equatorial regions giving way to areas predominately of tundra and taiga towards the polar regions.

The Mechanicum's presence on the world is notably dispersed, with only some 17% of the surface dominated by artificial structures, with the vast majority of the planet's forge-fanes, production, dormitory and storage facilities located under the planet's surface in both subterranean and sub-oceanic vaults. These distinctly located geographical forges, each of which operate under considerable autonomy, are linked by a vast sub-surface network of natural caverns, played-out mineworks and deliberately created tunnels of unknown extent and complexity. As well as Xana's mass-manufacturing and technological capability, which is unmatched on the western fringe of the Imperium, it is also of note that thanks to its tenacious biosphere, which may evidence specific evolution or artificial adaption to endure industrial toxicity, an ecology which includes extensive subterranean flora, Xana, unlike most Forge Worlds, is fully self-sufficient in agricultural need.

This sustaining factor, along with the inherently protected nature of its planetary infrastructure, makes Xana II a remarkably independent and highly defensible example of a Forge World of its magnitude, although data harvested by the Carta Imperialis survey also suggests that most of the planet's resources have been exhausted and consumed, making its manufactora dependent on off-world supply to sustain full output.

in doing so for their Forge World. More importantly, weapons and arms poured forth from Xana and were shipped directly to the Segmentum-wide battle lines of the war, providing much needed respite and fresh strength to beleaguered Imperial forces, helping to slowly turn the tide of defeat into first stalemate and eventually victory. It was a victory Xana was in no small part bled dry to achieve.

Though now diminished, Xana entered the Great Crusade's later era as still a powerful and sovereign Forge World, its independence from the direct authority of Mars and Terra, maintained not simply by the absolute adherence to the treaty under which it had entered the Imperium, but also its great distance from the Segmentum Solar and easy scrutiny. Rumours still circulated of hidden operations and deep and forbidden secrets

hidden on Xana, of heresies whispered by her Tech-Priests on the myriad battlefields on which they served, of a distance and distrust steadily growing between the Mechanicum of Xana and those of other Forge Worlds, even as the Great Crusade progressed. But compared to the oddities and macabre practises openly observed in Tech-Priesthoods the likes of the Redjak of Sarum or the Crat'mau'kora of Voss, these were subtleties lost on those outside the Omnissian Cult and its intimates.

So it was that when the Warmaster Horus rose to power after Ullanor, Xana remained a distant and almost legendary force in an Imperium grown much to encompass a galaxy on whose silent and unpopulated edge it dwelled alone, a Forge World whose magos kept no council but their own, its paradox unsolved.

THE FEATHERED MESSENGER

The first ambassador sent by Horus to Xana after Dorn's judgement was an unexpected one. Assessing perhaps correctly that an overt show of empty force would avail him nothing at this time and that a Priest of Mars would be even less welcome on Xana than one of his warlords, Horus had instead sent one of the lodge priests of Davin. Identified by Loyalist agents as one 'Unvacar Noon', an individual bedecked in strange feathered raiment and the bones of the dead, he offered the Lords of Xana more than threats and intimidation; on behalf of his master, he offered power.

Much as with Sarum and Cyclothrathe, other 'renegade' Forge Worlds distrustful of Mars that the Warmaster had enticed into his cause with the lure of petty empire building and freedom of experimentation, he offered a new treaty of alliance whose accords Xana's ruling Vodian Consistory would find more to their liking than the old. By this new pact Xana would serve his '*new Imperium*' just as it had the old, but where they had been used and bled dry callously in the past by a master who cared nothing for their power or prosperity, under Horus they would flourish and be rewarded.

Gone would be the petty restrictions of the Emperor's technological edicts —blocks put in place to avert the spectre of the terrors of Old Night— and gone would be the dead hand of Machine Cult dogma—if they so desired, so long as they offered up their weapons and war machines to the Traitors' cause with abundance. The details would prove more torturous and elaborate to finalise, but in secret an agreement was reached, even while in false faith the Lords of Xana continued to equally secretly deal with Malcador's emissaries to the contrary. So the Archmagos of the Vodian Consistory sought to play one side against the other, right to the bitter end.

FLASHPOINT

By the closing divisions of 009.M21, the bargain between Xana and the Warmaster's proxies was in its final stages of conclusion. It was, in the ancient manner, to be sealed with an exchange of gifts. Though the transfer of billions of tonnes of arms and armour would be part of Xana's fealty to Horus, these first gifts the Vodian Consistory would present would be unique and incomparable. They would be worthy of one who meant to be master of the galaxy entire; Xana would gift Horus with the power of Ordinatus.

Ulator

The Ordinatus classification held the most powerful and arcane mobile weapons platforms in the Mechanicum's arsenal. They were city-burners and fortress breakers without compare, and whether armed with magna-beam lance, matter-cyclone or rad-conflagrator, each was mounted on huge tracked reactor units for mobility and heavily shielded from attack, allowing them to traverse and survive on the most hellish battlefield. Each was a work of deadly artifice and ancient power. Much like the Titans whose firepower they often outstripped, the Ordinatus varied in scale and potency. From the truly colossal, unique and unreplicable relics of the Dark Age of Technology, the Ordinatus Primaris, such as the Mars and Endymion whose power was legendary, even compared to the god machines of the great Legio Titanicus, to the lesser but still gargantuan and deadly Ordinatus Minoris sub-classes. The Minoris were, at the height of the Great Crusade, within the reach of only the most potent Forge Worlds to construct, and only then in the most limited numbers. Such were the gifts that Xana offered; no less than three such terrifying weapons of the Ordinatus Ulator pattern, fully battle ready and armed with devastating sonic destructor weapons. These were Titan-killers, slaughterers of armies, each powerful enough to turn the tide of a battle at a stroke, and in potency far beyond any super-heavy tank and dwarfing the firepower of even the mighty Diamatine siege-guns that had fallen into the grasp of the Iron Warriors earlier in the Horus Heresy.

These Ordinatus, named *Mithrax*, *Nepothax* and *Ashurax* after Ancient Terran deities long dead of worship, were first to be demonstrated before the Warmaster's chosen emissary at the Forge World's own proving grounds on the moon of Xana-Tisiphone, then afterwards, their ceremonial handover would act as a symbolic sealing of Xana's loyalty to Horus. That this trio of mighty weapons would be given over to Horus himself to dispose of as he saw fit was both a potent asset to gift the Warmaster with, and also it might be seen as a coded barb thrust in the side of the Traitor Mechanicum Fabricator-general Kelbor Hal, who though he sat high in Horus' cause, had never himself made such a direct gift, keeping those few Ordinatus he and his satraps had at their disposal firmly under Mechanicum control. By this act Xana's lords sought perhaps to set the groundwork to become Mars' rivals in the Traitors' cause, not simply a subordinate Mechanicum force.

The Emissary of the Uncrowned King

The hand of the Warmaster in the final matter of the alliance with Xana was to be no priest of Davin alone, but one of his own warlords, one of his own blood; Raxhal Koraddon—a chieftain of the Reavers raised to captaincy for his bloody endeavours during the scouring of the Sons of Horus Legion of its Loyalists on the ash-strewn ruins of Isstvan III.

Koraddon had in the years of war that followed Isstvan III gained a fierce reputation, first during the Dropsite Massacre and later in leading a score of Dark Compliance actions for his Primarch across the northern reaches of the Segmentum Obscurus. Koraddon's ruthless and prideful reputation preceded him, as did knowledge that he was looked upon with favour by Horus, making him an honoured, if threatening choice to serve as the Warmaster's emissary in the matter. The vessel which bore him to the Xana System was no less a display of power; the Geryon class Grand Cruiser *Cicatrice Tyrannis*, taken as a prize by the Traitors during the Battle of Port Maw earlier in the war, her once white and golden hull now scorched black and pitted by the fires of untold void battles since her fall from grace. With the *Cicatrice* came an escorting squadron of eight frigates of various types and four Isos class fleet tenders. These latter vessels were small, armed, warp-capable transport ships designed to ferry vital supplies to warships in frontline service, but who bore now a far stranger and more macabre cargo; the Warmaster's gift to the Lords of Xana. Carried within these ships were hundreds of locked and armoured cargo pods, within which travelled the wreckage of Isstvan, of Momed and of Autosarat, and unknown other battlefields where the Sons of Horus had met their brother Legiones Astartes in blood and triumphed. The legacy of the dead was to be the Warmaster's gift to Xana.

Sealed in these containers were the fallen of those Legions the Sons of Horus had fought, and along with them a ruin of broken tanks and sundered war machines, shattered arms and rent armour—the charnel remains of a dozen Loyalist Legions. This was a carrion feast of technology and gene-craft priceless to the Lords of Xana; to them it was no mere detritus of battle, but a treasure store of lore and techno-arcana for those with the skill to decipher its secrets and who cared nothing for the writ of Mars, nor what the Emperor had forbidden them to study.

Unwelcome Guests

Even as the *Cicatrice Tyrannis* and her escorts entered close orbit of the immense gas giant Xana I on final approach to the Forge World itself, the auspex grid of the outer planetary system came alive with emergency signals and alarms. Perilously close to the gravity-shadow of the system's inner sphere, realspace ripped open and the brute and barbed shapes of scores of warships forced their way out of the Warp. The tracking augers and void-cogitators of Xana's sleepless defensive engine-minds swept the intruders and quickly analysed the fleet, and came to the absolute conclusions of hostility and

swung into baleful wakefulness. No fewer than five capital class vessels were identified, Imperial in origin and Loyalist in allegiance, with no effort made to hide who or what they were. At their head was a vessel immediately identified as the *Amphion*, one of the mighty Gloriana class battleships and an example of the type which often provided the flagships of the Legiones Astartes themselves, outfitted as a pure device of void-born firepower, and one of the lynchpins of the Solar fleet itself. With these capital ships came a slew of smaller escort craft and a dozen transport craft whose anomalously over-powered emissions marked them as one thing only

to the cold intellect of the machine-spirits; fire ships, loaded with warheads and volatiles designed to inflict catastrophic damage in suicide attacks against their targets. Machine-spirits conferred with magos, and with blinding speed beyond human comprehension was data analysed, checked and re-analysed, conclusions drawn and tested, re-submitted and issued as directive. This then was Dorn's judgement come at last, or at least part of it, the make-up and composition of the powerful fleet indicated a raid-in-force, not an invasion, with its target the waiting fleet of loaded macro-conveyers, protected within Xana I's debris rings.



Terra had decided that if they were not to have the bounty of Xana's forges for themselves, then none would, and calculated that the risk of deploying several potent heavy units from Terra's own defence armada was worth the reward this mission of destruction entailed.

With faultless precession, the defenders of Xana rose to meet their aggressors; squadrons of frigate-sized machine sapient hunter-killers and scores of autonomous weapons platforms rose from within the vaporous depths of Xana I's atmosphere to protect their master's wealth and spat their payloads with synchronised fury, sending hundreds of void torpedoes hurling towards their target, the plasma drives of the shark-like hunter-killers blazing in their wake. From

their own stations on allotted patrol routes across the planetary system, Xana's own interstellar warships, battle-arks and attack carriers in the main, far larger than the local defensive vessels, awoke and burned at maximum thrust to intercept the Loyalist assault force, which despite the bravery and skill of its Navigators who had dropped the force into realspace close enough to be hours rather than days distant from their intended target, still able to contest the attack before it reached its goal, or at the least close a lethal trap behind the intruders. Calculations were checked and tactical projections run and re-run thousands of times in bare seconds, secondary waves of munitions roared forth from the surface of the Forge World of Xana II itself and its own sentinel void-battle servitors —mechanical Kraken the size of

strike cruisers— broke from their steel shells like hollow moons and powered towards the fray. As the white blood cells of a human body swarm and overwhelm an invading virus, so would the war machines of Xana swarm and overwhelm this unexpected attack, no matter its power.

The False War

The news of the attack on the Xana System had inevitably reached the Sons of Horus, whose own vessel had detected the incursion from the Warp of the Imperial forces and bore witness to the apocalyptic response from Xana's defences. Koraddon demanded answers. He was met with profuse apologies for any alarm caused, and assured that the matter would be dealt with promptly and without risk to the Warmaster's delegation,

and that there would be no need to alter the planned exchange of gifts and demonstration of the Ordinatus. For Xana, both the demonstration and the impending void battle had become a necessary display of strength before their future allies in ways they had never planned, but no less vital because of this. The Vodian Consistory would not lose face before Horus.

So it was that even as the Loyalist and Mechanicum warships and torpedoes hurtled at unimaginable speeds towards each other in the void far beyond, the matter of Xana's formal alliance with the Traitor cause proceeded with much ceremony and clockwork precision. By prior arrangement the Warmaster's cargo was delivered from orbit, even as Xana II's planetary interceptor

batteries fired, cycled and fired again, sending torpedoes speeding into the night on columns of fire. The gift-cargo was landed between the barrage launches, still sealed in consignment to the landing ports of several of Xana's major forge-fanes: Tephra, Escorial and Setna, no doubt to prevent discord in the Consistory itself by dividing the spoils between the archmagos, to be released by code key transfer as the accord was formally made.

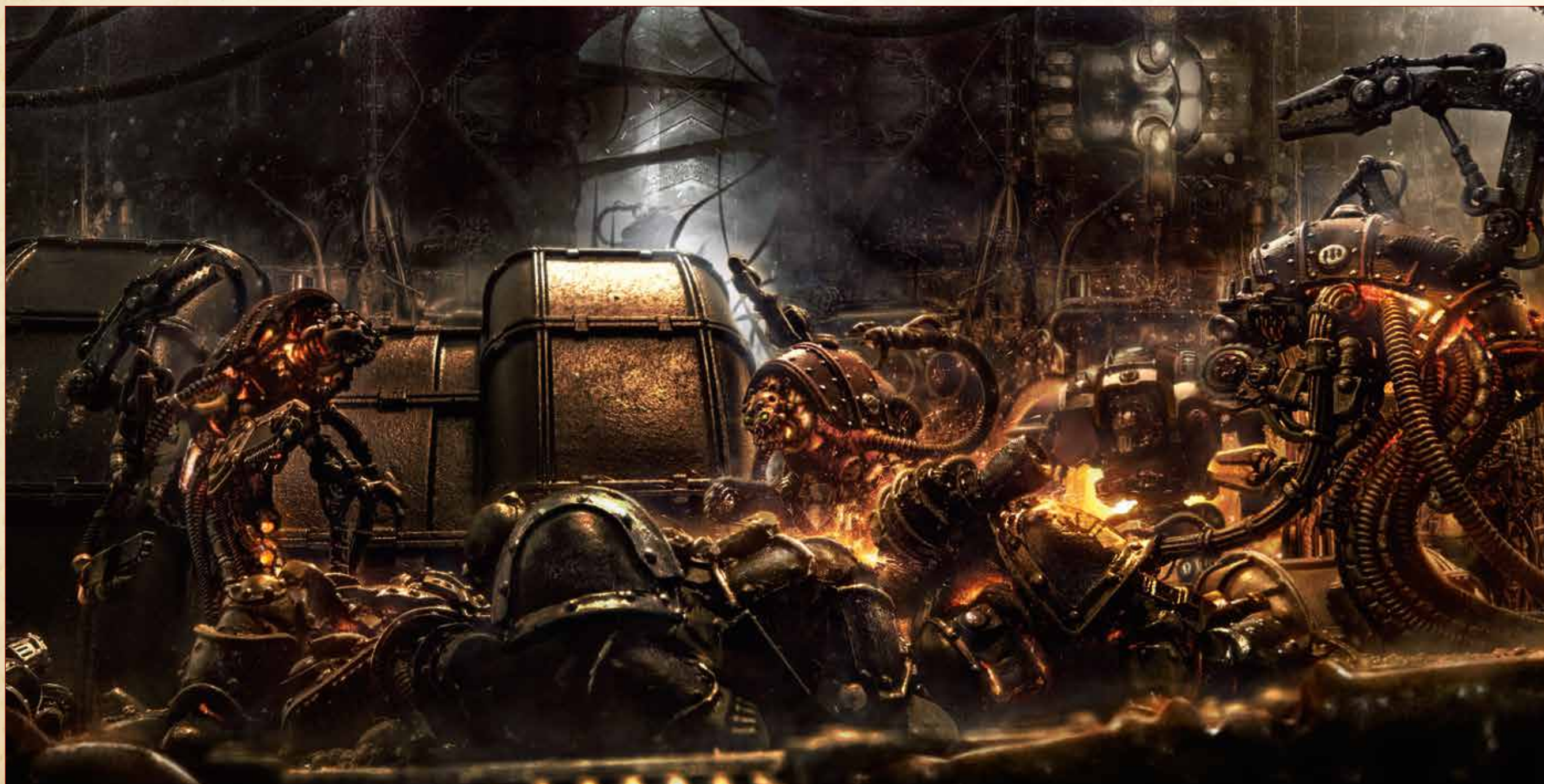
Meanwhile, the Sons of Horus warship, *Cicatrice Tyrannis*, was permitted into close orbit of the moon of Xana-Tisiphone, sheltered from the waves of fire unleashed from the Forge World itself, and Koraddon, with Unvacar Noon at his side, descended with a full company-sized honour guard of Sons of Horus to the surface via wings of

fully armed Stormbirds and assault landers; a display of force and perhaps of displeasure that could not be lost on the waiting Mechanicum delegation. Ready to meet Koraddon's party on the edge of the great proving grounds, a vast artificial battlefield outside the half-kilometre high walls of the great prison-forge of Tisiphone-Shaol, was Archmagos-Procurator Gilim Raijan, the prime arbiter of Xana's ruling Vodian Consistory and his personal covenant of magos, guardian-servitors and lexmechanics.

Such records that remain of this meeting are fragmentary and uncorroborated, and suggest a cold and tension-laden encounter between the barely contained arrogance of the Sons of Horus warlord and the chill, precise civility of the Archmagos of Xana, with the strange and macabre figure of the Davinite priest acting as intermediary. Of the impending void battle nothing was mentioned, and after the initial diplomacy and greetings were concluded, the nature of the planned demonstration was detailed.

What was presented to the Warmaster's emissaries was to be a false war of sorts, but one in which the carnage would be very real. Thousands of armed slaves and human chattel, some were abhumans, others forge serfs and adsecularis, while others were military prisoners taken in raids by the Xanites —soldiers from the Loyalist cause for the main— were unleashed onto the kilometres-wide proving grounds. Controlled by remote-denoted suicide-collars and spurred on by auto-injected chemicals where needed, this damned regiment was equipped with a panoply of weapons ranging from small arms up to and including even heavy tanks of Imperial pattern, and they had been given a simple but impossible task—to survive what was coming.

From within the armoured observation cupola of a hulking Mechanicum land crawler, flanked by a pair of Sons of Horus Mastodon carriers forming escort, would the Warmaster's emissaries and the Archmagos Raijan observe the bloody game that was to follow, inviolate behind their void shields but within the thick of the contrived battle. It was to be a thing of sheer destructive spectacle—a massacre made to order. The vast black vaulted gates of the prison-forge opened and the three monsters emerged into view, *Mithrax*, *Nepothax* and *Ashurax*, each Ordinatus fully armed and operational, and each with a coterie of Sons of Horus Techmarines on board to observe their operation first hand.



With a coded signal which promised instant death if compliance was not given, the first wave of enslaved soldiers attacked, hundreds and then thousands of infantrymen pouring across the broken, shell-pitted ground. In response, the Ordinatus spread out and deployed, advancing, forming an echelon, half-seen clusters of humming automata hovering to guard each huge war engine's flanks should anything close to endanger their mighty charges.

Like a vast ground-swarm of insects, the infantry wave surged and began to encircle the rumbling metal beasts, the Ulators' vast and baroque cannon beginning to crackle and glow with building energies of savage force, building until flares of sudden lightning arcs and shimmering surges of distorted air spat from their barrels and coils like angry ghosts. The first of the desperate attackers' weapons fire —heavy stubber rounds and unguided rockets— had only just began to patter harmlessly from the Ordinatus' all-encompassing protective power fields when at last the Ulators' sonic destructors spoke. There was a brief, blinding flash. A roaring, all-consuming silence that devoured all sound, the surface of the world itself seemed to ripple like a tortured sea and in that instant a thousand lives were snuffed out. Bodies, torn to red rags by the

all-destroying waves of sonic energy, were blasted across the battlefield as if driven by a hurricane, and beneath them three great trenches now gouged the earth to mark the unleashed blasts. Beside these furrows scores of bloodied men staggered on broken limbs, their senses devoured and minds shattered. Those fortunate to be far enough away saw the fate of their comrades and fled if they were able, or simply collapsed in shock.

The Ordinatus, implacable, rolled on, the observer column behind them in their wake, towards the ultimate goal of a shattered cityscape some nine kilometres distant; a city that had been built and rebuilt many times in the past, only to be destroyed in the testing of Xana's guns. The signal went out and the second wave was ordered in, this time a mixed force of armoured infantry and supporting armour. The attack was even more desperate, the storm that erupted across the Ordinatus' shields more violent, but the outcome was the same: an army wiped out as by the hand of an annihilating god. The signal was issued again and again and the bloody charade of war continued, now armoured forces alone, now jump troops, now battle-servitors, now a column of super-heavy tanks to test the mighty Ulators' defences to the limit. The killing went on for hours.

Fragments and Suppositions

Much of what is known to the record about the incident known as the Xana Incursion is a dossier assembled from diverse and incomplete secondary sources. These include the akashic archives of the *Amphion* recovered from her hulk after the Battle of Triton, the harvested data-looms of the Xanan exile-savant Mordifia Turul and the apocryphal appendix to the *Tears of the Gorgon*, an allegorical and now prohibited treatise associated with the {redacted} Chapter of the 3rd Founding. The primary source file of the operation, held within the Seal and Office of the Sigillite and the Divisio Sicarii, were lost during the devastation of the Siege of Terra. It is also certain that during the duration of the Wars of the Heresy, the operation was itself kept secret by the orders of the Sigillite even from Imperial High Command. As such, while there is good evidence to suggest that the real Traitor embassy had been somehow compromised, intercepted and replaced by covert Imperial forces cannot be contested, it is also highly likely that the individual masquerading as Raxhal Koraddon was in fact Endryd Haar, an outcast not of the Sons of Horus but the World Eaters Legion, who remained loyal, but the provenance of at least 1,000 Legiones Astartes accompanying him remains a matter for some conjecture.

It is the general consensus that this force, undertaking what was in effect a suicide mission with little hope of recovery or rescue even if success was achieved, was made up of veteran Legiones Astartes who, like Endryd Haar, had remained loyal, even though their parent Legions had turned Traitor. This desperate and damned force had little to lose, it can be argued, and nothing to gain save redemption in death. Just how Endryd Haar survived, as survive he did as his actions during the later Solar War are a matter of record, also remains unknown. Of equal enigma is the depth of the Dark Angels' involvement, but perhaps the most unknowable and disquieting mystery regards the Xana Incursion is the horror which erupted on Xana II after the Archmagos and the attack of the *Dark Sovereign*.

The Shadow of the Angel's Wing

While the power of the three gifts was being so emptily and murderous demonstrated on Xana-Tisiphone, in the void the opposing fleets met. Unimaginable forces of destruction were unleashed as beam lances wove tracteries of annihilating light across the void, waves of torpedoes slammed into thunderous barrages of counter-fire and atomic explosions rippled like dying stars across the firmament. The Imperium's battleships formed a conical wedge to protect their lethal entourage of fire ships from attack, their escorting frigates and destroyers darting madly around them to intercept any torpedo salvos or servitor-fighters that broke through the titanic barrages of the *Amphion* and her sisters, some paying with their lives to carry out their bloody task, interposing their own frail hulls against the fury. Slowly, Xana's fist of iron closed around the Loyalist fleet, and though scores of Mechanicum hunter-killers perished, torn to spiralling fragments by the macro-cannon and plasma cannonades of the Loyalists, and entire war-arks were sliced in half from stem to stern by the *Amphion's* prodigious giga-scale primary lances, the attacking fleet began to falter and shrink. First one of the Loyalist battleships, the *Dequenne's Fury*, fell out of formation, a burning hulk, then soon after a second, the venerable *Sceptre of Io*, spiralled out of control, the beasts of steel gnawing and coiling across her hull like ravenous ghouls, Thallax Covenants and Castellax battle-automata injected like poison into the battleship's veins as the Solar Auxilia armsmen aboard fought desperately for survival to little avail. The Loyalists' defensive shield forced open, its escort screen stripped away, the fire ships themselves began to flare brightly in their death throes. Slowly, and at great cost, the Xanite Mechanicum were winning the battle, the Loyalist fleet would never reach striking distance of the bounty ships hidden in the debris belt.

The weapons platforms in the murky stratosphere of Xana II had fallen silent at last, their munitions spent, as had the ground silos on Xana II discharged in full. In the void distant, the matter was now being decided by the brutality of a close-range void battle in which they would play no part. So it was that the Mortis-XI defensive station at the heart of the debris belt's defence network began to cycle down its systems to a defensive posture, the Tech-Priest chorus cyber-bonded to its control gyre reaching out with their djinn-sight to the dozens of weapons platforms they controlled, reporting status and correcting positional anomalies



in their deployment caused by their now reduced mass. Suddenly, their auguries screamed with a new hostile contact, a warship impossibly close, not beyond in the void of space, but beneath them in the thick atmosphere of Xana I. The Mortis-XI station died in an eruption of nothingness, vortex torpedoes ripping it out of reality in a squall of disintegrating wreckage. In its place a sable-black ship sliced out of the mirk, long and wicked as a blade, the near-seamless armour of its surface featureless save for a single crimson icon across its low prow, graven in the image of a winged sword.

The sable ship turned almost lazily in an arc towards the dozens of lumbering transports and freighters whose protection within the debris belt of Xana I was worthless now against this wolf among the flock, and she began to kill. Secondary plasma batteries and defensive lasers spat from the spent weapons platforms towards the murderous vessel but they were too little to even give her pause. On Xana II the cold minds which ruled the forge-fanes quickly identified the vessel, for

she was a unique killing engine alongside which their own forces had fought many decades before during the Rangdan wars. She was no mere Legiones Astartes strike cruiser, but a lone relic of Old Night, a thing recovered from the permafrosts of Ganymede by the Emperor's own hand. Her name was the *Dark Sovereign*, and she belonged to the 1st Legion, to the Dark Angels.

THE WRATH OF THE BETRAYED

On Xana-Tisiphone, news of the blade in the dark was shock enough to call a sudden halt even to the contrived carnage of the Ordinatus' demonstration. The macro-munitions explosions of the dying transports in the debris field of the Xana I gas giant were potent enough to be clearly visible in the skies overhead. The Warmaster's prizes were dying in flames, and Xana's void ships were simply too far away to prevent it.

On the observation deck of the hulking Mechanicum crawler, Archmagos-Procurator Gilim Raijan turned to Unvacar Noon, perhaps to offer explanation or perhaps to

entreat the Sons of Horus' own warship to attack the Dark Angels vessel, only to find Noon's features melting like wax before him. The emissary's arm flashed out, too fast even for the augmented reflexes of the Archmagos to react against, and a gilded barb sunk into his body, a roaring electroshock surge shorting out his power systems and collapsing his personal defensive shield. Raijan fell back away from his attacker as his own guardian-servitors fell on the blurring, shifting, shadow-quick assassin, but behind himself, he found the armoured bulk of Koraddon looming over him as he staggered. The verdigris-armoured warlord reached down to the fallen Archmagos and wordlessly tore off Gilim Raijan's head with his power fist in a shower of sparks and black fluids, and then pulverised his twitching metal body into scrap.

THE HOUR OF EXECUTION

The Lords of Xana had been deceived and by that deception the Loyalists' bloody stratagem had borne fruit. Some three hours after the initial exchange of fire of the engagement against the Loyalist raiding fleet led by the *Amphion*, the full forces of the Mechanicum's void defences had been drawn out and committed to the battle, Xana II's long range munitions had been expended and their warships were now locked in close-quarters fighting with the Terran battlegroup. The Xanite vessels were now simply too far away to defend their home Forge World, or more importantly, protect the huge supply fleet that lay at anchor in the Xana I debris belt, when a new Loyalist attacker, the deadly

Dark Sovereign, launched her own devastating surprise assault from within the gas giant Xana I's atmosphere.

Amid this general chaos, the sudden battle on Xana-Tisiphone went all but unnoticed as another lie was revealed, and those who had masqueraded as the Sons of Horus and the emissaries of the Warmaster revealed themselves to be cut from entirely different cloth. Legiones Astartes they were for the main, but they were not Malcador's chosen—later to be called Knights-Errant—these were the bitter fall-out of Legions who had turned traitor while they had remained resulted loyal, a decision many had already paid for in blood and sinew in battle against

those who they had once called brother. Their leader was Endryd Haar, a World Eater once, and it was he who had passed for the Sons of Horus warlord Koraddon, who it is likely that he himself had earlier slain. He and those with him had by brutal surprise attack taken over command of all three of the Ordinator Minoris intended as gifts for the Warmaster, and now with malign savagery, turned their dread power on their creators.

First, the escorting guardian-automata had been shot down and crushed by the Sons of Horus-liveried Mastodon heavy tanks that had served as Koraddon's honour guard, before the baleful power of the sonic destructors of the Ordinator had

swept nearby Xanite armour and support vehicles to oblivion. The anarchy was further accelerated when the Loyalist Techmarines compromised the local djinn command skein by interfacing with the shattered remains of the Archmagos Gilim Raijan to operate the remote release on the collars of the thousands of remaining war slaves who were to be used in the bloody demonstration of the Ordinator's power. These armed slaves, once free, fled where they could, spreading further the disorder and wild violence that had been unleashed.

The desperate bid to seize the highly prized Ordinator was only the beginning of the operation on Xana-Tisiphone. The

huge warship which had brought the supposedly Traitor delegation to Xana, the *Cicatrice Tyrannis*, dropped lower into Xana-Tisiphone's orbit, placing the shadow of the moon between her and Xana II, shielding herself from any retribution that was to follow as her crew ignored all requests to attack the *Dark Sovereign* or otherwise aid the defence against the Loyalists. The *Cicatrice Tyrannis* then commenced her own company-scale ground assault on Xana-Tisiphone, Stormbirds and Thunderhawk gunships descending as the power of the Ordinator was turned upon the cyclopean gates of the great prison-forge of Tisiphone-Shaol, sundering them.

The Fury of the Dark Sovereign

In the debris ring that orbited Xana I, a great and violent tempest was being enacted. One after another, the huge freight ships of the supply fleet, heavily laden with munitions and other volatiles, were torn apart by the fury of the Dark Angels warship's attacks or were set burning and left bleeding their disintegrating cargos into space. The macro-transport, some tens of kilometres long—never intended for war—had no arms or defences of their own enough to answer such a deadly craft as the *Dark Sovereign*, while their ungainly bulk would have made escape impossible even if they had not been caught at station by the blade-like predator ship. As the *Dark Sovereign* reaved her way through the great arc of supply vessels, cannon blazing as she went, she reached the core of the fleet, where the most valuable prize vessels were kept—brazen-hulled Mechanicum barques and stasis-vaulted dromons, now drawn up into a defensive toroid formation. Compared to the dull hulks of the macro freighters, these transports had teeth enough to answer their attacker, and as the *Dark Sovereign* plunged down amid them like a knife from the dark, the barque's co-ordinated batteries opened fire on their attacker, lancing the void with blazing streams of superheated plasma and golden beams of coherent energy.

The *Dark Sovereign*'s shields flared as the barrage found her, silhouetting the blade-like ship in a corona of light but she came on undaunted, for this was a vessel of the 1st Legion and a veteran of centuries of nightmarish war amid the dark stars. Instead of the close pass to bring her weapons to bear with maximum effect, which naval doctrine dictated and the Mechanicum's logis-cogitators had no doubt also predicted, the *Dark Sovereign* dove into the heart of the defensive formation, her guns suddenly silent, all available power directed to her shields to weather the storm of counter-fire at point-blank range. She passed her first prey at a scant few hundreds of metres and a talon of Kharybdis assault claws stabbed out from the *Dark Sovereign*'s flanks to bury themselves in the Xanite barque's hull. The Dark Angels warship rolled as she sped by and more assault claws speared into a second barque, too close and too swift to be intercepted. A squadron of Caestus assault rams broke from the *Dark Sovereign* and peeled off in the wake of the warship's blazing engines to find prey of their own as the Dark Angels ship found her final target, a long, almost crystalline void dromond, designated now the Mu-571, a singular ship which was perhaps once of



xenos origin before the Mechanicum had spidered their own steel-grey workings across its white-quartz hull. The Mu-571's own drives burned white hot as it tried to escape imminent collision, but did so in vain, the armoured belly of the *Dark Sovereign* smashed the Dromond's spine and flew on, shredding the Mu-571's void shields to nothingness and setting the ship tumbling out of control, as in its heart-chambers reality split open and the black-armoured figures of Dark Angels Terminators manifested in the lightning-crackle aftershock of their teleporter transit.

The Logic of Survival

Deep within the protected forge-fanes of Xana II, city-sized conglomerations of manufactora, vaults and hive-warrens sunk far beneath the planet's surface, the remaining magos of the Vodian Consistory communed with each other in near-frenzied pulses of data, spanning the world's sub-surface networks. With preternatural speed it can be assumed that they gathered all available information about the catastrophe that was unfolding around them; betrayal, assault, mass destruction, a war on multiple fronts in which they had been comprehensively blindsided and led into trap after trap. How they with their vast machine-augmented intelligences had been so outwitted was an impossibility to ponder later, but for now action was required if survival, the primary directive of any Forge World, was to be guaranteed.

In the face of such a shocking turn of events, paranoia now came to dominate their reasoning. Now, faced with the undisprovable possibility that even more attacking forces were on their way to besiege their Forge World, the Vodian Consistory despatched override signals of recall to their remaining war craft engaged in void battle to defend Xana II and rid it of the 'Sons of Horus' grand cruiser which lurked in orbit of its moon like a waiting assassin. Withdrawal of the fleet from pitched combat was calculated to be a costly manoeuvre, but all costs would be borne in defence of the Forge World, and even the now half-burning munitions fleet was abandoned by the cold equations of survival.

All over Xana II, weapons and scanner arrays were pointed skywards, defensive grids and void shields were realigned to defend against orbital attack, while far below, subterranean mag-lev railtrains screamed at speeds past tolerance to re-arm the planet's recently spent missile silos from auxiliary stockpiles

held deep beneath the world's seas. All of Xana had mobilised to repel an attack from the void, but this was not from where the attack came.

The Vengeance of the Fallen

At the orbital transfer ports of the greatest of Xana's forge-fanes: Tephra, Escorial and Setna, the Warmaster's gifts stood waiting; several hundred cargo containers divided between them, sealed and inert, ranging in size from metre-square STC pattern handling modules of a kind found in their billions across the Imperium, to megaton-capacity armoured void transit carriers intended to survive the rigours of interstellar travel intact. They had been thoroughly scanned by auspexes on their arrival and no sign of life or active power sources had been found within. Furthermore, echo scans had revealed mass and resonance readings, indicating the presence of just what had been promised; the broken bodies of the Legiones Astartes and their machineries of war. With this being the case, true to the diplomatic bargain that had been struck, not a single container had been yet breached or opened. What was to happen next remains a matter of contention by those who have looked back on this incident, and must be reassembled only by fragments of ancillary data, scattered pict- and vox-capture data from seized enemy archives and hearsay well after the fact, the truth perhaps dying with so many other truths in the losses incurred during the Siege of Terra where so much else was lost. But by all available evidence, the dead walked on Xana II.

Almost as one the cargo containers were broken and blasted open from within, ceramite-clad fists smashing through to grasp the air as if called forth by some unheard summons. Darkly armoured figures came forth in grim and silent advance, bearing the livery of the fallen Loyalists, of the Raven Guard and Salamanders Legions, even of the Imperial Fists and White Scars, but most bore the scorched and rent livery of the Iron Hands, of Clan-companies slaughtered wholesale on the black sands of Isstvan V, and more sinisterly also of Clan-companies that had fallen long before, during the darkest days of the Great Crusade. Of this army of the dead, there was no leader to be discerned, no command signals or command vox transmissions were recorded, only an oscillating electro-spectral field of unknown origin which seemed to pulse relentlessly from the tomb-containers from which they came. With them followed scores of Dreadnoughts from the larger cargo units, their shells as damaged and abused as the

armour and bodies alongside which they walked, but they were no less functional for it, and behind them rumbled forth half-wrecked tanks and rapier weapons platforms, humming with power and the rattle of loading shells. Those nearby automata and tech-thralls that met this sudden onslaught were overwhelmed in moments and the silent army quickly fanned out, ramshackle and here and there stumbling on broken limbs and reeling as it went, but still with deadly speed and murderous purpose. Soon alarms sounded and the defenders of Xana, their unceasing vigilance set skyward, turned to make swift counter-attack to the invaders in their midst and found themselves facing a foe of singular, suicidal ferocity.

Adsecularis techguard clades and servo-thralls barracked near the starports were the first troops to respond, but quickly proved no match for the grim tide of death pouring from the cargo containers, their bodies broken by unwavering volleys of bolter fire or simply ripped apart in hand-to-hand combat too one-sided to deserve the name. Taghmata Castellax maniples and Tech-Priest-commanded heavy weapons detachments soon reached the fray but found themselves dealing with Legiones Astartes who fought and died with cold, unyielding fury which seemed to transcend injury and death even more than the fame of the Legiones Astartes proclaimed. Dark armoured bodies shorn of limbs or severed in half by mauler cannon still dragged themselves onward to the attack, while tanks which should have been rendered inoperable thrice over by damage hauled themselves on as burning wrecks, their weapons still firing even as their own munition stores began to cook and detonate. The Xanite battle-automata were set upon by crawling phosphex and enervated by rad missiles, weakened prey before the marauding talons of Dreadnoughts which tore them limb from limb or pounded them into ruin. The vengeful fallen pressed on, there was no attempt made to secure the port facilities or to consolidate a line of battle, the army's imperative was simply to destroy, to kill and keep on killing, until they themselves were slain. By the time the Vodian Consistory, reeling from this fresh assault, realised the true danger of what was happening, it was too late. The breakout was underway and the invaders could not be contained.

Slowly but inexorably, the invading Legiones Astartes spread through the upper reaches of the forge-fanes, massacre and mayhem their only strategic goal. Savants and soldiers,

servo-thrall and battle-automata, Tech-Priest and slave; all were left slaughtered. In their wake fires burned beyond control, crawling phosphex seeped through ventilation shafts and ate hungrily at anything it touched, power transition systems were blasted and sabotaged, fuel lines set to blaze and vox towers toppled. The surface levels of the great forge-fanes of Xana began to burn.

Breakout

By the fifteenth hour after open hostilities had begun, the Xana System was awash in flame and spiralling wreckage. The remaining Xanite war fleet, which had engaged the *Amphion*'s battlegroup, was now hurtling back to Xana II. The Mechanicum fleet was now about a third only of its early strength, having sustained further heavy losses in disengaging from the Loyalist capital ships, which had used the surviving fire ships against them as they tried to withdraw. The surviving Loyalist battlegroup, including the battered but unconquered *Amphion*, did not pursue, instead taking the opportunity to disengage themselves, their own arsenals having been all but exhausted by the protracted void battle and each one having sustained great damage from the fight. In the debris belt of Xana I, now aglow with burning hulks and torn by storms of exploding munitions, the outcome for the vast arms fleet had been even more disastrous as more than two thirds of the macro-transport had been either destroyed outright or sent burning to plunge into the gravity well of the gas giant or to tumble helplessly into the void. The architects of this disaster, the *Dark Sovereign* and the Legions Astartes of the 1st Legion, were also departing for the system's edge, one of the great barques and the dromond Mu-571, now the Dark Angels' prizes, struggling to keep up with the warship's escape velocity. The fires raged also on the surface of Xana II, though now the whole Forge World had risen up against the invaders they had allowed into their midst.

Of the three great forge-fanes, only Setna had come through its attack all but intact; the invaders having penetrated as far as the vast, sub-surface galleries before being met by Setna's most bellicose guardians, a contingent of Knights of House Malinax, long veterans of war far from Xana's soil. Here the grim Legiones Astartes had been met by a score of Mechanicum-patterned Knights, and though nearly half of the Knights present had perished in countering the onslaught, the invaders had been burned and crushed in their hundreds, the fighting halting only when the last of the Space Marines had been

bodily broken beyond whatever bitter thread of life propelled it. The other two great forge-fanes of Xana had not fared so well and of the two, famed Tephra had suffered greatly, with one of its mighty reactors breached and detonated, rending several square kilometres of its heart into radioactive slag at the cost of tens of thousands of lives lost and vast resources of machinery destroyed before the invaders were finally overwhelmed through sheer weight of numbers. The damage to its sister forge-fane of Escorial was not as great, but widely diffuse, the enemy having spread to its tangled arteries of tunnel-way and gantry, and the last remnants of the invaders, though reduced to a mere handful of ruined bodies, were still causing havoc in the depths.

Matters on Xana-Tisiphone had ended in an even bloodier state, the prison-forge itself had fallen under the assault of the Loyalist Legiones Astartes under Endryd Haar's command and the firepower of the captured Ordinator, the population descending to violent anarchy and revolt which further allowed Haar's forces to ransack the weapons testing facility there before being suddenly and savagely beaten back by a counter-attack from below. The forces which assaulted them, brazen-armoured Legio Cybernetica cohorts, had slumbered deep beneath the Sheol penitentiary and was strange, hitherto unknown patterns whose almost diabolic appearance were at odds with any recorded Mechanicum pattern. Moving with unheard-of speed and predatory instinct, these battle-automata drove back the Loyalist Legiones Astartes, killing many and forcing a retreat when all that the Loyalists had gained was soon endangered, the counter-attack culminating when one of the prized Ordinator, the *Nepothax*, was assaulted and destroyed in an attempt to recapture it. Reluctantly Haar's forces withdrew, taking their surviving prizes with them and departing the planet, their ship, the *Tyrannis*, herself sustaining heavy damage in her escape, barely outrunning the returning Xanite fleet.

The Xana Incursion was over.

AFTERMATH

The operation known as the Xana Incursion remained a secret of the Age of Darkness, one more battle fought unremembered and largely unknown, although a battle stranger than most, and ever afterward it has been an engagement shrouded in sinister mystery and rumour. The great provender of Xana, a bounty that may perhaps have tipped the war for either side, had been delivered into the hands only of death, save for a select portion which it is believed the Loyalists would use to their own ends during the Titandeth and the Siege of Terra itself, although the true gains of this victory or whether they were worth the great cost it took to achieve them is a judgement none can now make. Of equal enigma was the means by which the victory was gained, and in particular the true nature of the '*army of the fallen*', which was used to such lethal effect in the seemingly suicidal attack on the Forge World itself.

Ultimately, the alliance of Xana with the Traitors' cause had not been thwarted, only delayed by years, and perhaps that was enough. The Xana which was rapidly rebuilt and re-fortified and finally began to supply the Traitors with a great perfusion of ever stranger and more savage war machines in the Horus Heresy's final years—a true example of what became known as the Dark Mechanicum—was hardly recognisable from what had gone before and charged a heavy price for its support. There are some who have gone so far as to opine that in toppling Xana's existing ruling synod, the Vodian Consistory being murderously deposed from within the Forge World's own ranks soon after the incursion, caused a far darker and more dangerous order of masters to come forth. And that they took what was left on the battlefield and used it for their own infernal ends, meant it was the Imperium's own deceit and savage weapons that gave rise to the nightmare that was to come.

DARK ANGELS LANCE-DECURION

PELAGOR MARNER, SQUAD ADJUTANT,
ELOI-7 DESPOILER SQUAD
52ND CHAPTER OF THE FIRST HOST
ORDINATION OF THE FIRE WING
THE DARK ANGELS LEGION

Pelagor Marner was a Calibanite Legionary of the Dark Angels whose chapter was based upon the famed pre-Imperium warship, the *Dark Sovereign*, and whose presence is recorded in the order of battle logs for the Sibelius Campaign of 002.M31. This was the last confirmed action of the *Dark Sovereign* prior to the Horus Heresy. The path and activities of the Dark Angels relic warship between this time and its surprise attack during the covert operation known as the Xana Incursion remain unknown to surviving Imperial records, but evidence indicates that it was not part of the marshalled Dark Angels fleet during the Thramas Crusade.

Armour and Livery: The insignia and ornamentation displayed by Lance-Decurion Pelagor Marner is highly indicative of the developed systems utilised by the Dark Angels Legion by the end of the Great Crusade. This combines elements of later Unification era Av-Am techno-coven glyphographia, early iteration *Principia Belicosa* designated iconography for the Legiones Astartes and elements of the distinctive heraldic devices of the feudal Calibanite culture. As is noted in numerous sources, this fusion 'language' of livery was employed to deliver information on a number of levels by the Legion; these layers of meaning, being largely opaque to outside eyes, and maybe only visible to certain individuals within the Dark Angels. Of further note is the armour, which is of the distinctive 'Paravane' sub-type, an idiosyncratic variant of the widely issued Mark II pattern produced by the artificers of the 1st Legion, and renowned for its enhanced void endurance and systems.



Dark Angels Legion Tactical Markings



Dark Angels Legion Icon,
Late Crusade era Common Armorial Use

UNKNOWN DARK ANGELS LEGIONARY-PRIMARIS

ASSUMED: 13TH CHAPTER OF THE THIRD HOST
TERMINATOR ASSAULT SQUAD
ORDINATION OF THE DEATHWING
THE DARK ANGELS LEGION
THE XANA INCURSION

Taken from a fragmentary vis-vox transmission recording recovered from the cortex of a fallen Xanite Mechanicum Tech-Priest at the Battle of Gaunt's Hollow in 009.M31, this image is believed to relate to the infamous Xana Incursion. Pictured in the record is a Terminator assault force engaging Thallax cohorts within the outer docking bays of a large void freighter, provisionally identified from ident-iconography as the *Thorn-Macro-878*, a former chartist High Conveyor suborned by the Xana Mechanicum faction prior to the incursion and included as part of their vast withheld fleet of supply. The identity of the Dark Angels Terminator shown in this pict-image cannot be conclusively confirmed, however from the insignia and armorial detailing, it can be ascertained that his unit is of the 13th Chapter of the Third Host; a formation not known to be assigned to the *Dark Sovereign* as a matter of course and its involvement in the incursion remains a mystery.

Armour and Livery: The individual pictured here is armoured in late-production, forge-modified Cataphractii pattern Terminator armour, with livery and insignia unique to the later deployments of the Dark Angels Legion in the era of the Great Crusade and early wars of the Horus Heresy. As well as ornate depictions of his Legion's symbol, the 'Aciarium'—the ancient Terran symbol of the angel of death of Old Night and the crossed blades of the Order of the Deathwing, the Legion's elite, also in evidence are the star of the Hexagrammaton, one of the more arcane and little understood of the Legion's core heraldic forms to outsiders, ciphered glyph forms of unknown meaning and the award of symbolic keys to this Legionary as the recognition of some onerous duty successfully discharged.



Artificer Constructed Legion Icon/Ablative Armour

BLACKSHIELD TECHMARINE

FORGE TYRANT ERUD VAHN
XANA II INFILTRATION FORCE,
CAPTURE OF THE ORDINATUS MINORIS: ASHURAX
Erud Vahn had once been counted amongst the foremost Forge-Tyrants of the Death Guard. Acknowledged grudgingly by the grim master of his Legion, Mortarion, as a master of the esoteric disciplines of alkemic warfare, Vahn had spent long years in study with the tech-adepts of Mars. With the outbreak of the Horus Heresy, Vahn found his loyalty to the Mechanicum outweighed that to his distant Primarch and declared for the Loyalist cause.

Seconded to the command of Endryd Haar for his knowledge of the more esoteric mysteries of the machine cult, Erud Vahn led the force that boarded and later seized control of the Ordinatus Minoris Ashurax. Of the twelve Techmarines of the Loyalist Legions who entered the sanctum at the heart of the Ashurax, only five would survive the attempt.

Pictured here as he appeared during the Xana II incursion, Erud Vahn's heavily modified Mark III battle plate has been stripped back to bare metal before having a crude approximation of the Sons of Horus heraldry applied to it. The markings used to mask Vahn's true allegiance are in fact those of a Sons of Horus mechanised assault detachment, rather than the emblems actually employed by the Techmarines of that Legion. Fortunately for the infiltrating force, the magi of Xana had little experience with the heraldry of the Warmaster's Legion, having had little contact with much of the Imperium other than the tithe fleets of Terra.



Crude Approximation of Cthonian Heraldry



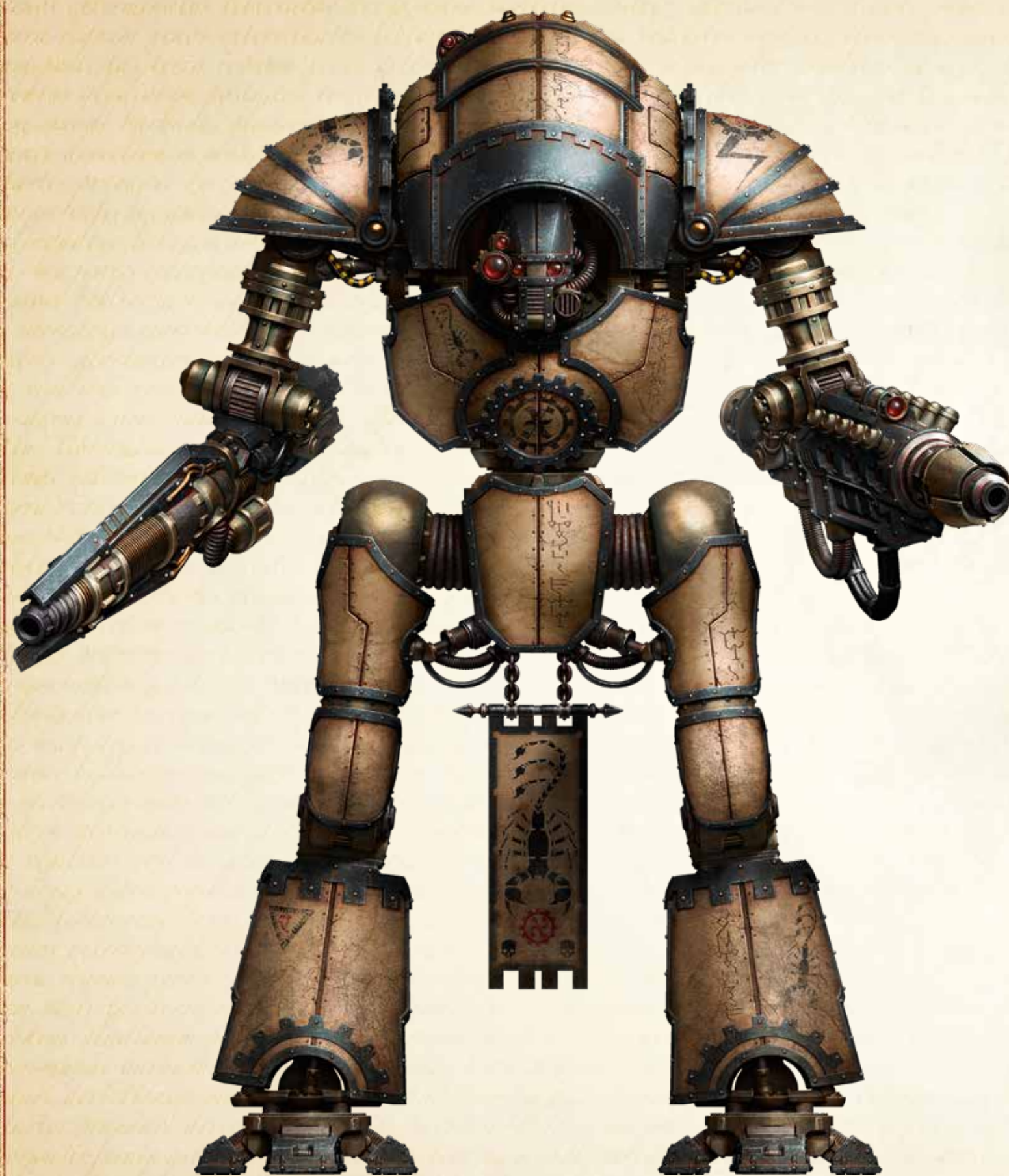
Opus Machina Insignia of the Legion Techmarines



UNIDENTIFIED CASTELLAX BATTLE-AUTOMATA

XANA II REVENANT LEGION
ASSAULT ON FORGE-FANE ESCORIAL

This pict is taken from the catalogue data presented by the Sons of Horus to the Magi of Xana, data which lists this automata as damaged beyond repair during the conflict on Istvan V. The catalogue of damage listed within the accompanying data-burst and visually depicted on the automata would indeed seem to indicate that the unit should have been incapable of any independent action, with damage to large segments of its neural cortex. Yet according to reports of the Xana II Incursion, this unit was one of several involved in the assault on the Escorial Forge-fane. The last Loyalist reports before the evacuation of Xana-Tisiphone list this automata, encoded as SVAROG-171, as still active in the sub-strata of Escorial, engaged in the mindless slaughter of any and all other motile entities it encountered.



Mechanicum Knight-Atrapos – ‘Matonari’: Pict-capture identified – the assault on Guilders Grave, leading element of attacking Knight detachment, sub-engagement; the raid on the Yellow Atoll sub-orbital transit depot in 008.M31.

HOUSE MALINAX CERASTUS KNIGHT-ATRAPOS

The raid on the world of Guilders Grave is the first known example of the Xanite Mechanicum forces conducting an aggressive military operation to their own ends, engaging both Traitor and Loyalist auxiliary forces in open battle in order to achieve their aims of looting the mining world of its resources and heavy machinery. The vanguard of the Xanite forces during this attack were several maniples of Mechanicum Knights, at least two of which have been identified as belonging to the sinister House Malinax. This was a force which the defenders of Guilders Grave could not hope to match in firepower or resilience, resulting in a complete massacre of local forces. The Knight illustrated here as part of that raid is of the rare Cerastus Atrapos subtype, a platform for a particular set of technologically arcane weaponry intended for deployment against hardened targets and heavy armour.

It is notable that the heraldry of this particular Knight lacks the degree of insignia detail and campaign honours that might be expected from such a singular war machine, indicating that it is relatively new in construction, a fact that speaks for the potency of the forges of Xana that they are able to create such sophisticated and rare engines of war, a feat few Forge Worlds could easily match.



HOUSE MALINAX KNIGHT STYRIX 'XAULHQUI'

The Knight House of Malinax was founded shortly after the incorporation of the Forge World of Xana into the Imperium as part of the re-alignment of native Xanite armed forces to better serve the Great Crusade. This would include the incorporation of the Malin-Qatlu Scion Bloodline, a regressed House which was at that stage without extant world of its own and with few remaining operable Knights. This cadre of scions was provided with fresh machines and bound by blood and oath to the Lords of Xana, and would form thenceforth part of Xana's new order of battle. Brought back from the edge of extinction, the newly patented house of Malinax would serve with distinction in the savage wars of the Rangdan Xenocides, and detachments would continue to serve alongside the Titans of the Legio Vultorum and the Taghmata Setna and Taghmata Scoria throughout the later Great Crusade.

Panoply of House Malinax: Much of the heraldic panoply of the re-formed House of Malinax was taken from the predatory megafauna that was surprisingly common on the Forge World on which they were homed. The distinctive colouration of their primary armour was in fact ritually created from the dense, silicate-rich bone plates harvested from Xana's gigantic armoured Regathok Ursids, the augmented skull of which also forms the core icon of Xana's Taghmata forces. The tripled-tailed scorpion, however, pre-dates the pact with Xana and owes its origin, the ancient sigil of the Malin-Qatlu, rendered now 'Transfigured by the Omnissiah' as the House's Xanite Sacristans have it, to a purer, more blessed form.



Mechanicum Knight Styrix – 'Xaulhqui': Pict-capture identified – the Defence of the Barbican Gate (Forge-fane of Setna – Incursion of Xana), additional ident-markers in register; the Siege of Arrian Mysteries, the Brycantia Purge, the Tyrian Suppression.



ORDINATUS MINORIS ULATOR: ASHURAX

In the days before the outbreak of the Horus Heresy, Xana II rivalled the greatest of Forge Worlds of the Imperium for their command of the arcane secrets of the Machine Cult and the sheer scale of their production capacity. Their capability to produce Ordinatus Minoris, even in a supremely limited capacity, is a feat that a mere handful of other Forge Worlds could duplicate, and one that caused a great stir among the magi of Mars—for the secrets of the manufacture of such titanic engines of war were closely guarded and whose appearance on the very edges of Imperial space where no such power should

exist proved a deeply vexing mystery. Yet as the Horus Heresy moved from a conflict limited to a few isolated worlds to total galactic warfare, the magi of Xana revealed not a single example of such devastating artifice, but three, all destined to augment the Warmaster's already potent hordes.

The few records of Xana that survived the Horus Heresy show that the Ulator class Ordinatus Minoris was the only artefact of this scale that the magi retained the required knowledge to construct, or at least the only class that has ever been known to have

been fabricated by those reclusive magi. The Ulator class Ordinatus is built around a colossal sonic destructor; a directional sonic transduction generator that was capable of sweeping a battlefield clean of enemy combatants and armour. Generating a hyper-destructive wave-pulse that resonated with force equal to the mass of the object struck, the impact of the weapon was as deadly to the mighty super-heavy tanks of the Legiones Astartes as it was to the humble infantryman of the Imperial Auxilia. This awe inspiring weapon, rivalling as it did the destructive power of the mighty God-engines of the

Legio Titanicus, was the main focus of the Ordinatus' artifice. The main structure of the vehicle itself was a reinforced tractor unit to allow the weapon to be moved into firing position and in which to mount the immense fusion reactor required to power the sonic destructor.

The example displayed here is the Ordinatus Minoris *Ashurax*, one of two Ordinatus captured by the Imperial-aligned force that raided Xana II in 007.M31. Control of the *Ashurax* was seized by a cabal of Loyalist Techmarines, of whom seven suffered fatal

neuro-cortical damage as they attempted to master the unchained machine-spirit the magi of Xana had bound to the workings of the Ordinatus. Its subsequent live-fire testing saw the decimation of those taghma the Xanite magi ordered forth to reclaim the priceless artefact.

Safely evacuated from the surface of Xana-Tisiphone, the *Ashurax* was removed to Beta-Garmon, there to rest in the hands of Loyalist tech-magi charged with its maintenance until the campaign known only as the Titandeth unfolded on that same world.

