



TRENCH + CRUSADE

Lore sampler

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v1.0

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uring the First Crusade, the armies of the Church captured the Holy City. Under the most holy of temples, the Knights Templar discovered secret vaults and, within them, an ancient demonic artefact. The Templars, blinded by greed and with weakness in their hearts, fell to their knees. They had found a new lord.

Seeing the unholy wisdom of which the artefact spoke, they began trafficking with devils and committing all manner of unspeakable rites. This was the First Heresy. The armies of the Church retreated and Jerusalem became a depraved pit where Hell and our mortal plane now bled into one.

For eight centuries the Church has waged its crusade to take back the Holy City. The landscape has been utterly devastated, criss-crossed with thousands of miles of mud, trenches and craters. The crusade is now waged with armies wielding terrifying weaponry, and both sides conjure up supernatural beings of such immense power they are nigh unstoppable. Even with such incalculable might, the armies are at a stalemate.

This is the Trench Crusade.

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A Brief & Incomplete Timeline of the Trench Crusade

[biased and likely inaccurate]

1099 – First Crusade captures Jerusalem. The Knights Templar commit the Act of Ultimate Heresy. The Gate of Hell is opened on Earth and Jerusalem is destroyed in the cataclysm.

1101 – The Year of Three Battles. Heretics, reinforced by the armies of the Third Circle of Hell, conquer most of the Levant.

1102 – The ancient city of Antioch is fortified and becomes the focal point of resistance against the forces of Hell.

1106 – Cobar becomes the First Tyrant of the Sixty-six.

1109 – The Great Sultanate of the Invincible Iron Wall of the Two Horns That Pierce the Sky is formed. In the coming decades it unifies the Islamic factions. The Great Iron Wall of Iskandar re-emerges and is fortified against the Heretics.

1117 – The legendary Seventeen Martyrs travel to the Earthly Domains of Hell to convert the Heretics. Captured, tortured and kept in a perpetual state of agony, they remain trapped within white-hot Brazen Bulls to this day.

1165 – The Old Man in the Mountain and his Hashashins defend the mountain fortress of Alamut. The castle stands to this very day, despite being besieged for hundreds of years.

1215-1306 – The Wars of Triclavianism. The Church is split and fights a fierce internal conflict. Heretic domains extend as the faithful fight against each other. Millions perish by sword and fire.

1346-1353 – Beelzebub unleashes the Black Grail. Tens of millions are infected, becoming metastatic vessels in the worst plague in the history of mankind. The Corpse Wars begin.

1429 – Living Saint Jeanne d'Arc drives the Black Grail from mainland Europe.

1477 – The City of Argos is taken by God and it is no more.

1503 – War Prophet Angelos, guided by St. Elegius, discovers the formula of Orichalcum Steel. Though extremely costly to produce, the metal proves to be effective against all missile weapons and is still used to this day.

1545 – Antioch destroyed utterly by a mysterious infernal weapon.

1573 – Sacred Order of the Dragon halts the heretic advance after the destruction of Byzantium. A million heretics impaled in the hills of Wallachia.

1595 – Walls of New Antioch completed.

1666 – The Year of Six Woes. In a surprise raid, the newly created Heretic fleet captures Gibraltar. The sea fortress becomes the Heretic base of operations against Europe. Forces of Hell gain access to the Atlantic.

1670 – Due to the constant coastal raids by the Heretic Fleet the Crown of England begins the construction of the Fortress of the White Cliffs.

1703 – Against all odds, a small force of Hebrew Knights striking from their secret fortress destroy the Templar stronghold at Acre.

1805 – Heretic fleet under the command of High Captain Ranga defeats the fleet of England in the Battle of the Bloodied Cliffs. Admiral Nelson is slain in combat.

1866 – In the utmost secrecy Heretic scientists, aided by the Demon Marbas, construct the first modern

submarines.

1870 – Launched from Gibraltar, the Heretic submarine fleets extract a heavy toll on the merchant navies. Widespread famine ensued.

1872 – Heretic forces storm the city of Rijeka. It is fortified and Heretic conquest is launched against the European mainland.

1894 – The Year of Broken Trinity. The Death Commandos simultaneously assassinate the Supreme Pontiff, the High Prophetess Aelia and the Holy Roman Emperor. The faithful are thrown into turmoil. The Heretic Legions, commanded by Hell's nobles of the Seventh Circle and a huge vanguard of tanks launch a simultaneous lightning offensive in the Levant and Europe.

1899 – Church Space Program commences.

1907 – The construction of the moving fortress of Britannia is completed.

1910 – Battle of Cordoba. A Bloody stalemate. Heretic artillery devastates the ancient city, but the Heretic forces fail to gain access to the heartlands of Hispania.

1914 – The present day. Both sides are preparing for major offensive operations. In the huge swathes of No Man's Land furious skirmishes and raids increase in intensity as the faithful and heretics vie for information, powerful relics and securing strategically important positions.







Armaments of the Trench Crusade

After raging for eight centuries, the Great War has produced a bewildering variety of weaponry, equipment and armour, and due to the power of both Heaven and Hell taking active role on the battlefields, a warband participating in the Trench Crusade often has a fascinating and exotic panoply of both ancient and modern weapons.

It was the work of the followers of St. Eligius, the patron saint of metalworkers, that allowed the weaponsmiths and armourers of the Holy See to produce steel alloys imbued with divine light, metals more malleable and harder than any normal steel. Though the cost is enormous, suits of armour can be wrought that are able to withstand a hail of bullets. This excellence of the infantry field armour remains to this day, keeping abreast with the advances of firearms and explosives.

Meanwhile the Heretic Legions have gained access to hellish metals from the twisted crucibles of Tartarus, exceeding the strength of mundane steel though often at a terrible cost, for carrying such weapons or donning an infernal suit of armour burns both the body and the soul, leaving behind festering wounds that never heal.

Thanks to these advances in metallurgy, titanic artillery pieces exceeding 300 feet are constructed in the foundries of New Antioch, while the forges of Hell turn out truly colossal machines of death of their own – the largest known piece, the dreaded Mouth of Hell measuring a staggering 666 feet in length and boasting 1666 millimetres in calibre! The massive artillery barrages pockmark no man's land, creating a hellscape on Earth between the Heretic and Faithful forces. It is over these pieces of land that the warbands of both sides travel, scouring every inch for usable weapons, holy objects of power, ammo, food, armour and more.

Due to the protection offered by modern armour, close quarter combat is frequent and brutal: trench clubs

and polearms, lead-tipped great maces and hell-forged swords are all used to deadly effect when storming enemy trenches. Enemies such as Heretic Anointed are often so heavily armoured that only concentrated effort can bring one of these survivors of the Lake of Fire down, and even then, they often have to be finished off in brutal melee combat with Misericordia daggers, looking for a chink in their unholy armour.

Those brave (or suicidal) enough wield anti-tank hammers: polearms with explosives powerful enough to tear apart even the strongest of armour. Still, the humble bolt action rifle is the workhorse of the battlefield, and most yeoman soldiery as well as Heretic legionnaires carry it. Many other weapons, though rarer, are in common use: machine guns, sniper rifles, grenades of both shrapnel and gas variety, as well as experimental anti-materiel rifles, while the Heretic forces are equipped with blades of eternally burning fire, living bullets that infect their targets and turn them into undead metastatic vessels, forever bound in servitude to the Devils, and heavy flamethrowers forged in the Iron Pits of Dis, belching the flames of the Lake of Fire where damned souls wither for all eternity.

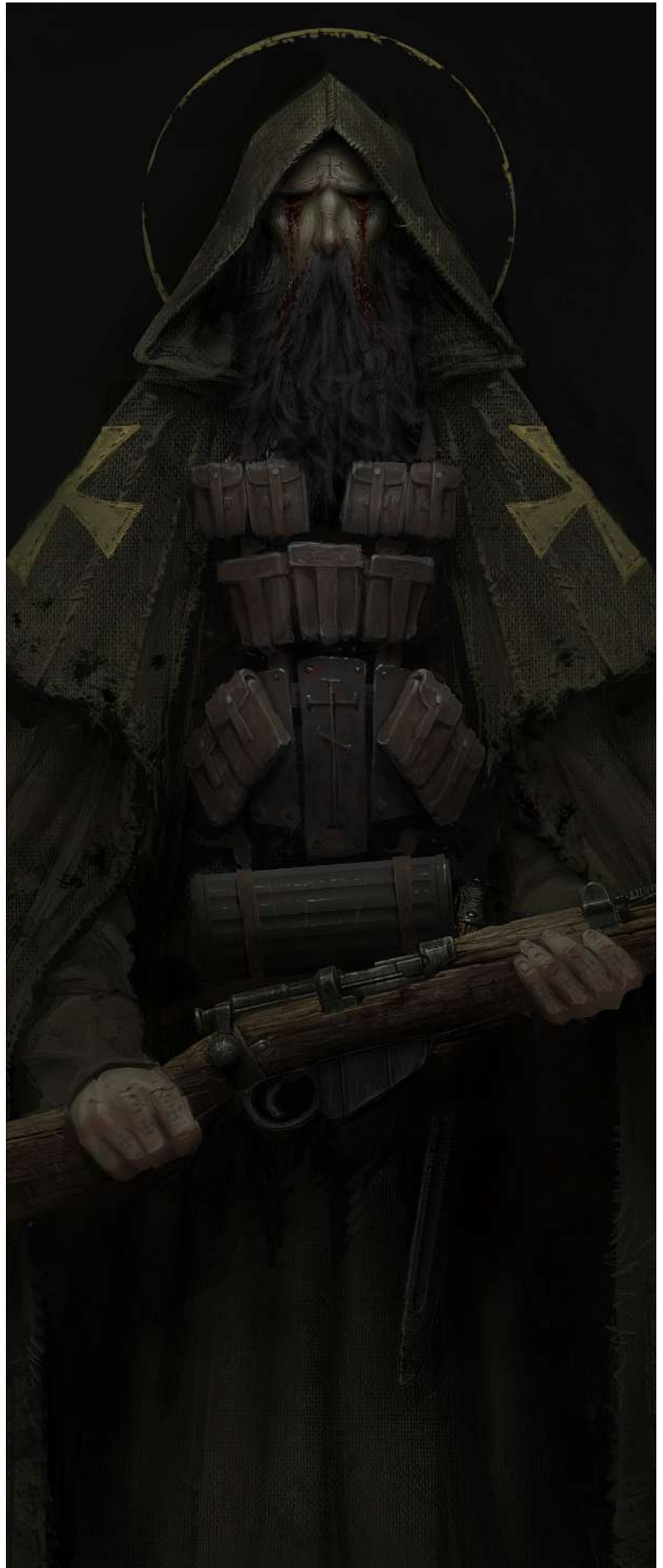
With both Infernal and Divine Powers actively at work on Earth, holy icons, symbols, cursed trinkets and unholy artefacts are carried by soldiery of all ranks. Their power is undeniable and has turned the tide of many a battle. Martyrdom Pills are taken regularly by Trench Crusaders looking to take the enemies of God down with them. They inure the faithful against pain and exhaustion but extract a brutal toll after their effect wanes. Many Trench Pilgrims wear iron capirotes that both shield their minds from the horror of the creatures of Hell, but also incorporate a gas mask in their design – a useful feature on battlefields where the use of chlorine and mustard gas, as well as more dire fumes created by the twisted chemists in the Bolgias of Inferno, is commonplace.

Elite forces have even more advanced and esoteric equipment and arms. For example, the Observers of the Synod of Strategic Prophecy wear a specially constructed helmet which allows them to hear the Voice of God, and thus allows them to perceive immediate past, present and future simultaneously to a degree. This allows them to perform martial feats unrivalled, but it comes at a cost: a living human is not meant to hear the Holy Words, and as the Voice of God never decays, they must concentrate with superhuman focus to hear what they need to pick the right course of action. Sleep is impossible with the Divine Echo ringing in their ears. Heavy sedation and use of mind-altering drugs is necessary for them to withstand the heavy burden of their battlefield role for any length of time.

The accompanying picture shows the Trench Pilgrims of the Procession of the Sacred Affliction. They are known for their zeal for close quarters combat, their icon armour and shields, which despite appearances can withstand machine gun bullets, and the millstones they carry in order to tie them around the necks of sinners before they suffocate them in the mud and blood of the No Man's Land.

“The rifle and the trench club are prepared against the day of battle: but vengeance is of the Lord.”

- Battle Psalms 17:7, New Orthodox Syncretic Bible



The Principality of New Antioch

From the Official and True annals of the Church history as told by Melchior Gessel, 1910 AD New Antioch

For three hundred years the Principality of New Antioch has stood defiantly as the focal point of the Church and the Faithful at the very edge of the shadow cast by the Gate of Hell. It is the Home of All Our Hopes, the bulwark against Heretic forces and the first line of defence against the devil's might. Should New Antioch fall, all the Levant will be lost.

War has never left this corner of the world. The ancient city of Antioch was destroyed by a mysterious demonic weapon in the year 1545, but the Faithful never gave up their positions in the ruins. Despite the lethal demonic essence emanating from the crater that was left behind, the garrison held on, even as mighty Constantinople fell to the legions of Kimaris, Marquis of Hell.

Before it was destroyed, the ancient city of Antioch was always the first line of defence to be put to test. Thus it is no wonder that in the year 1559 the Sword Congress of Vienna agreed to rebuild and fortify the city, and that a yearly tithe is to be sent to New Antioch by all the Faithful nations, though this levy is rarely in the form of coin. Instead, endless supply trains of foodstuffs, tools, ammunition, weaponry, machinery and skilled workers and engineers come from across Europa and the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the African dominions.

Keeping the supply routes open is a constant game of cat and mouse, as Heretic infiltrators and raiders harry the caravans and ships that allow the Principality to exist to this day.

Since those days New Antioch has grown to be the most important fortress-city in the world, the Sword and the Shield of Europa and Africa. All the princes of the Church and heads of the various states and domains who oppose Hell understand that it is better to fight their battles against the Heretics away from their heartlands. To this day New Antioch has withstood eight great sieges and its famed walls, with their seventy-seven

mighty towers, have never been breached. This is partly due to hundreds of anchorites, metallic battle shrines with devoted entombed within them, that are embedded into the walls, keeping a vigilant watch day and night.

More than anything else, it is the volunteers who come to serve under the Banner of Christ that ensure the continuous existence of the Principality. Thus in the streets of the city one can hear hundreds of languages and dialects. One might observe hussars of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth brushing shoulders with the last remnants of the Varangian Guard or hear the sermons of a street preacher from Eire extolling the soldiery of Ethiopia to lay down their lives for the cause. Perhaps they might even witness the Church Engineers procession taking their latest invention to be tested on the front lines.

This all happens under the watchful eyes of the Office of the Propagation of Virtue that tirelessly patrol the streets. While they are quite happy to turn a blind eye to the revelries of soldiers, they ferociously persecute even the slightest deviation from Church doctrine. The execution of heretics is a weekly spectacle that draws immense crowds.

Factories spew black smoke as newly constructed tanks roll out of the workshops. Foundries burn white-hot day and night in order to keep the artillery battalions, the pride and joy of New Antioch, at full strength. In the techno-laboratories of the city the Church toils away in creating the superhuman Communicants empowered by the cloned flesh and blood of the Redeemer. Thousands of workers give their lives in horrific accidents and overwork each year, and great statues celebrating their sacrifices stand around the city.

Despite all these preparations, it is a grim reality that New Antioch could never withstand the full onslaught of the combined Heretic forces. It is only thanks to the ferocious and bloody internal conflict amongst the

devils that has allowed the Principality to stand to this day. The Archdevils and Princes of Hell bicker and plot against each other, and only rarely does one of them gain supremacy for long enough to mount a full-scale invasion. Even though the war has stretched for centuries with decades of nervous lull between great battles, the Rulers of Hell are immortal, and to them the war has barely even started. They are beings that have existed before there was time and wish to savour the agony of the mortals who die in their millions. And thus the Great War rages on, sometimes with long years of silence followed by sudden, ferocious assaults.

As the nominal supreme commander of all the Faithful armed forces, the Duke of New Antioch is a title of unrivalled prestige and honour. But, despite swearing fealty to the Duke, in reality troops who come to do battle against Hell, from across all of Christendom, operate in units of their own, taking commands from their own leaders. It is worth noting that some soldiers renounce their citizenship and take up the cross and come to serve under Duke Constantine alone. Thus the standing army of the Principality is the greatest single fighting force the Faithful can muster, and those who serve on the walls of the Home of Hopes are rightfully proud of their livery.

In recent years the Duke has despatched small forces into No Man's Land to gather intelligence, look for







Observers

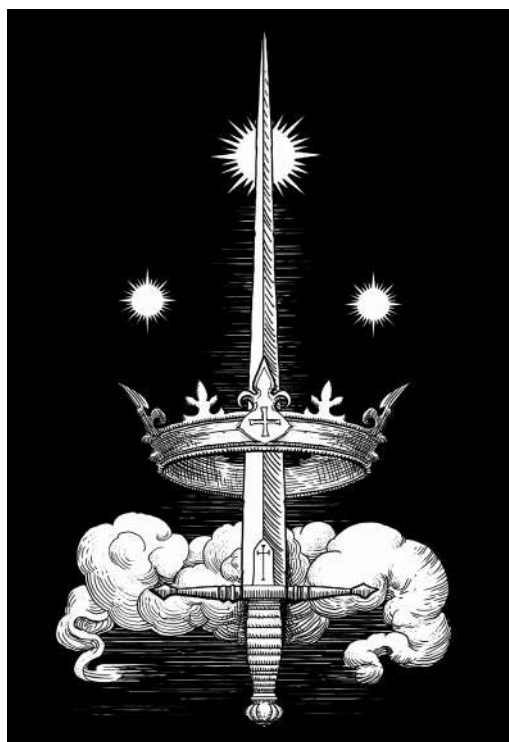
When the need is great, the Synod of Strategic Prophecy sends their famed Observers to support the war effort. This order of warrior monks lives a life of absolute solitude, sharpening their minds and bodies to make themselves living weapons in the Hand of God. Once a soldier joins the order, they very rarely leave the Temple of The Word – the only exception being when they are summoned to the battlefield, a situation where their unique abilities can decisively shift the balance in favour of the faithful. Even the slightest disturbance to their prayers or training will mean that they will not be able to commune with the Lord of All Creation. Thus the days of the Observers are spent in secluded, cloistered cells, when not practicing their martial or mental disciplines.

Observers wear a specially crafted Oculus Helmet enabling them to attune to the Voice of God. This remarkable connection grants them the capacity to simultaneously perceive the immediate past, present and future, to a degree. This allows them to perform martial feats unrivalled, but a living human is not meant to hear the Holy Words, so it comes at a cost. Since the Voice of God never decays, they must concentrate with superhuman focus to extricate the righteous guidance amidst the narrative spanning from creation's inception to the present moment. The resonance of the Divine Echo, ringing ceaselessly in their ears, renders sleep impossible. Therefore they must resort to potent sedatives and mind-altering drugs for them to endure the heavy burden of their battlefield role for any length of time.

The Observers diligently practise the recitation of the Words of God, granting them the power to issue commands to anyone they address, friend or foe. The special metal of their helmet allows them to replicate the Holy Word as closely as it is possible, compelling any creature in creation to obey them momentarily to a degree.

Though they master many weapons, the trench polearm stands as the preferred choice for Observers. This tool allows them to skilfully vault over barbed wire and drop into enemy trenches with devastating force. Guided by the omniscient words of the Almighty, they possess the ability to evade nearly any strike. With proper focus, they foresee impending attacks within the crystal of the Eye of God that is incorporated into their helmet. As such, enemies' efforts to take them down are often frustrated, since the Observer simply moves the minimum required to avoid any harm, knowing precisely where the blow of the Heretic was going to land.

However, even the slightest slip in their concentration means that they might lose the Voice of God that guides them, rendering them just as vulnerable to death as any other mortal soldier.



The Heraldry of the Synod depicts Sword and Crown, symbolising service to God through war, while the Clouds and the Stars represent Synod's mission to commune with the Lord directly.



Paladins

Since the beginning of the Great War some 800 years ago, the Faithful have faced a problem that is seemingly impossible to overcome: they are unable to take the battle to the enemy. For such is the supernatural power of the open Gate to Hell, that even approaching within sight of it is impossible for all but the most strong-willed and pious. Within the Inferno await domains of the Lost and legions of devils.

But in utmost secrecy the Church produced an answer to this quandary: The Paladin Program. Paladins are by far the greatest creations of the Mendelist Order. They are near-perfect Communicants for in their veins flows the purest blood that the Meta-Christ program has been able to produce. Paladins are warriors with such physical stature and inner holiness that, not only can they approach Jerusalem's Vale of Tears, but also enter the very Gates of Inferno and undertake missions within Hell itself – and return to tell the tale. Each is said to represent near-perfection of human form, both mind and body, though much scarred and burned from the long centuries of war they have been forced to endure for the sake of all in Creation.

Paladins reside in secluded cells within a secret wing of Castel Sant'Angelo until the hour comes and the Council of Saints sends them forth to do battle. In such time the Paladin emerges from their seclusion, they go to their arming chamber and kneel at the centre upon the mosaic of the Militant Christ the Lion. They are then armed and armoured by blinded and gelded serfs (for no impure gaze or carnal desire is to fall upon the Paladin by the servants of the Church) and briefed on their mission by one of the Cardinal-Generals. They are given the Last Rites prehumously should they fall, for there is no mission more dangerous than war within Gehenna.

Originally there were twelve Paladins, but now only nine remain. Two have fallen in battle, and it is rumoured one has turned traitor – though the Church vehemently

denies such slander upon pain of death. Despite ceaseless efforts, the Holy Mendelist Order have been unable to produce even a single new Paladin in the last three centuries.

It has proven just as difficult to replace their holy armour and weaponry. Since the destruction of the Holy City of Jerusalem it has not been possible to harvest more Golgothic tektites required for the machining process for the Paladin's armaments. Thus their elaborate suits of armour (despite the fastidious care of the Dicastery of the Service of Church Militant disciples) are much scarred, burned and corroded, and many pieces of armour have been slated to be reforged in a vain hope that even the tiniest shard of the required materials could be recovered. Thus each Paladin is forced to endure searing pain like no earthly suffering where their armour has weakened, relying on their unshakeable faith during their lonely crusades into Perdition.

Each of the nine Circles of Hell has its own foul atmosphere and deadly environment from noxious fumes to burning heat or a bitter coldness below absolute zero, requiring a specific suit of armour to withstand the infernal elements. Thus when a Paladin enters the Gates of Hell, they know they must succeed alone or die trying: no help will be forthcoming, not even from one within their own order.

Paladins are used only under the orders of the Council of Saints and even then, extremely sparingly. Each mission they undertake must bring great and tangible benefits for the Church and the overall war effort, and its long-term benefit must be determined by the Synod of Strategic Prophecy. Paladins are tasked with missions such as exterminating key nobles of Hell, destroying laboratories creating some new devastating variant of the Black Grail or interrogating devils with holy fire and the blood of the Lamb until they give up their infernal plans.

Pictured here is Gérin, Paladin of the 3rd Circle of Hell. He stands some 17 feet tall when arrayed for battle.



Trench Pilgrims

As the war rages against the minions of Hell, strange visions torment the faithful across the globe. Men and women touched by Heaven are granted visions, and Revelations are made by the messengers of God. Sisters of the Holy Orders are marked by Stigmata and take up sword and cross as instructed by the angels. Those who have transgressed seek to atone for their sins by taking as many followers of the Devil with them to the afterlife.

So they come, the mad and the maimed, the God-touched and the guilt-ridden, all gathering around Prophets and Prophetesses, forming Trench Pilgrim Processions, disorganised groups which arm themselves and follow the prophets of the Lord unto the front lines. They fight with unrivalled zeal, throwing themselves against the Heretics and arming themselves with anything they can get their hands on, from the oldest muskets to scourges and Molotov Cocktails.

Pilgrims are not officially sanctioned by the Holy See, but the Church still blesses the crusades of the faithful. Thus the Pilgrim Processions are a common sight on the battlefields, often charging across No Man's Land in suicidal assaults against the Heretics, directed by the visions of the Prophets and Prophetesses who lead them, and urged on by the whips of Castigators who are charged with instilling the Fear of God in their troops.

The bulk of the Pilgrims are men and women with little military training, but when they don the Iron Capirote of a Trench Pilgrim, they can face even a demon from the deepest Bolgias of Hell unflinchingly. Nor is death necessarily an end to their mission: sometimes the Seventh Meta-Christ will deem a fallen Pilgrim worthy and bring them back as Martyr-Penitents, warriors half-way between Heaven and Earth, able to fight once more and feel no pain from bullet or bayonet thrust.

Rarer and more dangerous are the Stigmatic Nuns: Holy

Sisters who manifest wounds to match those of the Third Meta-Christ whom the nuns venerate. They excel in close quarters combat, for each bleeding wound that they suffer makes them stronger, not weaker, as their devotion to suffering as their Lord once did gives them strength and endurance not found on mere common mortals. Armed with swords and pistols, they cross No Man's Land heedless of any danger, praying to sustain wounds for the Redeemer which in turn will transform them into the very Vengeance of the Lord.

In front of the Trench Pilgrims are driven the Ecclesiastic Prisoners: either captured enemies of the True Faith forced to make a final act of contrition or volunteer sinners seeking redemption. Each is strapped with high explosives which are detonated once they reach the enemy lines. They dash across the killing grounds, hoping to either miraculously survive the blast and escape, or take as many followers of Lucifer with them as they can, depending on their convictions.

The most puissant of Pilgrim Processions will be accompanied by a Shrine Anchorite: a metal behemoth some twelve feet tall, a living altar of war almost completely immune to any damage. The interior of the Anchorite is covered in spikes and barbed hooks so that the Monk who controls this colossus is in a constant state of torment, rejoicing in the pain so they can suffer as their Lord once did. In combat they wield Adamantine Catherine Wheels of massive proportions which they use to crush the sinners and heretics into a pulp, and then string them upon the wheel as a warning to others.

There is a bewildering number and variety of Trench Pilgrim Processions: The Penitents of Pious Revenge swear in the name of St. Olga and uses flamethrowers, burning grenades and incendiary ammunition to assail the Heretics. The Pilgrims of the Iron Path follow St. Rita of Cascia and go to battle with hammers, mauls, maces and cudgels, and hammer nails into their heads

“The skies shall darken, the ground shall open up and the screams of the damned shall echo through the ages.”

- Novae Revelationes 99:24

in the memory of the saint they venerate. The Theban Legion of Rome carries the heads of the heretics upon their standards in the memory of their patron, St. Maurice. They fight with swords and other blades, competing with each other for the number of Heretic heads they amass.

Trench Pilgrims of the Procession of the Sacred Affliction are known for their zeal for close quarters combat, their armour decorated with icons and shields adorned with the depictions of the Saints, which despite appearances can withstand machine gun bullets, and the millstones they carry in order to tie them around the necks of sinners before they suffocate them in the mud and blood of No Man's Land.



Shrine Anchorite

Shrine Anchorites are metal behemoths some twelve to fifteen feet tall, a living altar of war almost completely immune to any damage, with a diesel engine belching smoke and trumpets echoing with prayers. The interior of the Anchorite is covered in spikes and barbed hooks so that the monk pilot is in a constant state of torment, rejoicing in their pain so they can suffer as their Lord once did. The exterior is festooned with icons, holy relics and devotional prayer scrolls, each according to the traditions of the Pilgrim sect that the Anchorite serves.

The first Anchorites were built a long time ago in the fortress-monastery of Velehrad in Greater Moravia. Several hundred of these battle machines were built under the guidance of Saint Methodius, though now the craft is lost, as the monastery was destroyed by a Death Commando infiltration force of the demon Marchosias.

Later innovations of the Engineering Foundry of New Antioch created Machine Armour; a far smaller but more manoeuvrable personal protective suit based upon the Anchorite design. But the Pilgrim Processions have neither access to these marvels of modern engineering, nor do they have any desire to give up their Anchorites which act both as fearsome engines of war as well as mobile shrines that form a focal point to the prayers and devotions of the Pilgrims.

The pilot monk or nun, once installed, never leaves the Shrine Anchorite until the day they die. Once they fall in battle (or rarely of old age), their remains are reverently removed and body parts are preserved in reliquaries mounted upon the Anchorite. Thus each of these war machines is a testament to its long history of war against the forces of Hell.

In battle each Anchorite carries a great adamantine Catherine Wheel as well as an immense Bonebreaker Mace to bring the wrath of God upon the sinners, heretics and apostates. In a show of piety and atonement,

it is a common practice for Trench Pilgrims or Stigmatic Nuns volunteer to be broken on the wheel and serve in their final battle mounted upon this device of execution, as a sign of both their willingness to suffer for their sins, and for the spiritual protection their sacrifice is said to grant to the Anchorite. The Church frowns upon this custom, but Pilgrims flock to their Anchorites on the eve of any battle, hoping to be granted the honour of perishing upon the wheel.

The pictured Shrine Anchorite is a member of the Cavaleade of the Tenth Plague, a Trench Pilgrim Procession who traditionally sacrifices lambs before battle, anointing themselves in its blood to ward off the wrath of God.







Heretic Legion

A shroud of darkness blankets the world. Smoke and brimstone spews from the yawning gates of Inferno enveloping the lands, where people have abandoned God and openly wage war against His Creation. It is a grim reality that a full third of humanity has bent its knee before the idols of Hell. The main satanic military force on Earth are the Heretic Legions, raised from amongst these citizens of the damned.

Spies are sent into Hell's domains under special absolution by the Cardinal Protector. Most are caught, never to be seen again, save for some who's eternally screaming heads are returned to New Antioch, branded with bleeding runes that mock the Holy Trinity.

Yet some do make it back to the light, whispering of the horrors they have witnessed: of firstborn cast into the mouths of the burning statues of Baal and human flesh sold by the pound in dreadful markets. They speak of the great idols of the Golden Calf and rapturous men and women who prostrate themselves before them, carving layers of their own flesh in ecstatic offering. Inverted pyramids and towers plunge into the depths of these cities, built of iron and black stone. Within these pits stand sacrificial altars where weeping captives are slowly sliced to death over agonising days and weeks with wicked knives made of infernal basalt. Cathedrals to the Princes of Hell hang from great arches of volcanic stone, while condemned are crucified on hundreds of upside-down crosses.

Accounts speak of sprawling factories made of mutilated flesh and metal, their forges yielding endless munitions for the ongoing war. Guided by the teachings of Tartarus' smiths, alchemists toil over colossal weapons and armoured behemoths, wielding the forbidden secrets of their patrons' metallurgy to forge instruments of death and suffering beyond the grasp of any human engineer. Once-proud cities of Earth, where churches have been toppled and entire populations are now

dedicated towards bringing down the very Throne of Heaven.

Amongst the forsaken citizens that endure within the earthly domains of Hell, the greatest status is afforded to the soldiers fighting in the Great War. But joining the army of damnation is no easy task. Those who wish to win a place amongst the Heretic Legions must make an unholy pilgrimage to the burning bronze gates of Hell where, even from leagues away, the infernal heat sears both flesh and spirit until the pain becomes unbearable. In the Valley of Tears the great road that leads to the gate, paved as it is with wailing souls and lamentations, is littered with endless mounds of charred bodies. Many are still half-alive, writhing in agony, trapped in a grotesque twilight between life and death, their wickedness deemed insufficient. These discarded souls are doomed to writhe in agony until the Day of Judgement.

Those who make it within sight of Hell's Maw are considered worthy and are initiated into the Legions, taking unbreakable vows that chain them into darkness for all eternity, their bodies branded with the mark of the Devil Lord that has claimed them. Armouries of Hell then equip them for battle and Heretic Priests beckon forth new supplicants as dictated by the whispers of their patron arch-devils. Thus a new Heretic Legionnaire is born. They hail Archdevils as their masters and are thus damned for all eternity.

Yet there are some who push further on: to the very Gate itself and beyond. Their very flesh ignites, never to recover, but those with the blackest souls can enter Inferno itself. Amongst those the Anointed are especially revered amongst the Legions. They are the paragons of unhinged brutality – men and women of colossal vigour and unyielding devotion. Having tread the accursed path to the shores of the Lake of Eternal Flame, where the damned wither and contort in ceaseless torment, the Anointed emerge forever scarred by the embrace

of abyssal fires. The blackened and burnt flesh of the Anointed will never heal, but in exchange they are granted the right to wear Heavy Gehenna armoured suits and they gain strength to wield weapons that a normal man could barely lift. It is said that glancing into their eyes one can see the reflection of the very flames of Hell, forever etched in their vision.

Yet some who witness go even further in their depraved devotion. Suicide is a mortal sin and one eagerly embraced by many. Most cry out for devils to notice their final sacrifice in vain, as the Infernal nobles are capricious and delight in betraying their own as much as their enemies. But those with truly wicked and depraved souls are resurrected in contempt of the Redeemer, coming back as Choristers, horrific mockeries of Creation whose severed heads sing unholy hymns praising the Devil, their voices causing the ears of their enemies to bleed.

Though the vast bulk of the Heretic Legions are made of mortal humans, Hell often sends their own abhorrent progeny to reinforce their mortal foot soldiers: nightmarish War Beasts made of captured and possessed creatures and dreaded Artillery Witches who act as mobile artillery supporting lightning assaults. Thus, in this accursed theatre of war, mortals and abominations march hand in withering hand, bound by the suffering ties of damnation. The wails of tortured beasts meld with the shrieks of damned souls, while the skies rain down fiery retribution upon all who dare to oppose the Heretics' ceaseless crusade for a demented parity with their Creator.



Heretic Death Commandos

From a very early age a select group of Heretic youth are sent beyond the Gates of Hell to be raised as Death Commandos. Few are chosen, fewer return, but those who complete their training stand amongst the most elite of the Heretic Legions.

Barracked in the Seventh Circle of Inferno, they are taught the deadly arts of assassination by the damned souls of the greatest killers and murderers whose souls now reside in Hell. Here they undergo brutal training, mastering the use of all manner of weapons and poisons and they are schooled in martial skills by the personal guard of the Arch-Devil Beleth. They learn to slither as serpents through the battlefield, leaving murder in their wake.

Their specially forged Tartarus Claws are quenched in the waters of the River Styx, a source of poison more potent than any mortal venom. Many carry silenced pistols to take down targets unseen and unheard. Aside from their weapons, the Death Commandos are equipped with stealth generators that operate by diffracting light, utilising the heart of an innocent and infernal technologies that hide them from the eyes of God.

Once their training is complete, the Death Commandos emerge from the abyss as silent spectres of carnage. Of the Heretic troops fighting in the Trenches of the Great War, the Death Commandos are the most feared by the faithful.

Most infamous in the ranks are three master Death Commandos, Cain, Barabbas and Haman, who simultaneously assassinated the Supreme Pontiff, the High Prophetess Aelia and the Holy Roman Emperor in the year 1894. This threw Church forces into turmoil and allowed the Heretic Legions to launch a lightning offensive across the Levant and Europe.

The tongues of the Death Commandos are ceremonially ripped out at the end of their training. They will never speak of what they have learned and their unnerving silence adds to their sinister reputation. They communicate with each other with a complex system of inscrutable hand signals.

“We are no longer supplicating weaklings trembling before an unmerciful God. We say: Blessed are the mighty-minded, for they shall ride the whirlwinds.”

**- Ramman, the Anointed of the XXI Heretic Legion
‘Widowmakers’**



Heretic Chorister

From a young age, all Heretics are taught that god-tyrant YHWH demands obedience, but there are always brave souls who chafe at the yoke of divine oppression. In their bitter rage, these dauntless ones commit a form of ritual suicide to spit in the despot's eye, knowing they have not the strength to injure him, apart from this little rebellion.

Suicide is a Mortal Sin and sacrificing yourself to the glory of Hell is a yet greater affront to God. Some Heretics born with a gift of sonorous voice but little prospects of rising through the ranks. Those possessing a determination to excel nevertheless may pursue the dark path of becoming a Chorister.

Such supplicants go to one of the black altars of Heretic abodes at the bottom of the deep inverted pyramid temples dedicated to the greatest of Arch-devils. There they are dressed in the robes of dark devotion, lie on the altar and mutilate themselves to death by carving unholy runes into their flesh. The more wounds they can suffer before perishing, the more pleasing it is said their offering is. The most devout slice their own throats, trying to cut as deep as they can before their miserable life leaves them.

Most such wretches go to their doom in the Lake of Fire, but some are reborn as Choristers after nine days. Their corpses lurch back to their feet, and finish their grisly beheading, and lift their severed heads that begin to sing hymns they have learned in the Inferno. From their self-inflicted wounds spurts cold blood that forms diabolic symbols and changes to match the words of their unholy chorale. They head towards the front lines driven by a call no living can hear and join the Heretic warband of their choosing.

As their severed heads sing their agonising hymns, the minds of their enemies are filled with visions from the Pits of Hell, weakening both the resolve and strength

of those unfortunate enough to hear the dire song of a Chorister. Their hymns are often the first thing a fresh recruit experiences on the battlefield, as their unholy voice rolls across the trenches, proclaiming a never-ending prophecy of the final victory of Hell over Heaven.

The great Military hospice of New Antioch has a separate wing for those who have never recovered from hearing Chorister's dirge, their minds forever lost in a vision of eternal damnation, tied to their iron-frame beds, screaming of the world to come when all is covered under the darkness lit only by eternal flames.



The Cult of the Black Grail

Epidemics of typhus, malaria, typhoid, smallpox, yellow-fever, pneumonia, trench fever, Markisian disease and countless others ravage the trenches and battlefields of the Great War, but they all pale in comparison to the most dreaded of them all: the Black Grail.

Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, stands apart from the other lords of Hell, who act mainly through their mortal followers. Instead, when he periodically gains supremacy in the bitter power struggles of the archfiends, he sends forth his deadliest curse.

Infused with demonic essence from the bowels of the seventh layer of Hell, where the putrid fortress of Beelzebub stands, spews forth a torrent of demonic hell-flies, scorpions, locusts and other infernal insects. The Hellgate opens and a veritable tidal wave of foulness emerges, flowing across the land at startling speed, consuming everything and leaving indescribable horror in its wake. After nine days the insect swarm exhausts itself, devouring its own in its insatiable hunger.

The Black Grail is indiscriminate in its hatred of all living things: its infections can spread to virtually any living biological matter, which bursts forth with tumours, boils and weeping pustules. Puddles and ponds of melted flesh are left in its wake, endless mouths left screaming in their agony, for the Black Grail destroys the body but leaves the mind intact to suffer. The Scientist-Priests of the Church and the Alchemists of the Sultanate fervently look for a way to inoculate their people against this foulest of diseases, but thus far they are without success. The only answer is to burn the infected settlements with specially constructed flamethrower tanks that use holy anointing oil as the fuel for their weapons.

But if this is not done, or the countermeasures are too late, what happens next is even worse: bodies of men, horses, dogs, insects and other animals of every kind that

are infected by the Black Grail lurch to their feet, driven by a demonic will. Not living, not dead, they become vessels to spread the corruption of their master ever further, forming warbands that strive to find and infect life of any kind. They also gather things that mortals value and bring this loot as well as grisly trophies to the feet of the idols of Beelzebub they erect. Thus the Cult of the Black Grail mocks the devotions of the Faithful and their prayers.

At the head of such warbands stand the knights of the Order of the Fly: those most depraved men and women who willingly embrace the Black Grail and whose devotion Beelzebub finds sufficient. They are granted weapons, armour and equipment corrupted by the hand of the Archfiend in exchange for sacrifices brought to the altars of Beelzebub, which these warbands build wherever they go, objects of grisly horror constructed from the remains of their victims shaped into the form of monstrous flies.



Heralds of Beelzebub

The polluting effect of the Black Grail is the gift of Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies. Spread by the insects bred by his own hand in the Seventh layer of Hell, it is a tidal wave of his foulness in the form of demonic vermin, septicaemia, tainted insects, plague and impurities that pollute both body and soul.

Entire villages and towns are turned into half-living slush that bubbles on the ground, an agony of melted flesh quivering and crying at the multitudinous diseases granted by the Lord of the Flies. Those caught by the Black Grail are still aware of the horrible fate that has befallen them. Specialised units of New Antioch and the Free State of Prussia are dedicated to responding to these outbreaks with heavy flamethrower tanks using holy anointing oil as their fuel.

But some victims of the Black Grail suffer a far worse fate. They are bestowed with the black honour by being melded with hell-flies, growing into a grotesque winged insect made of bloated flesh. After this torturous metamorphosis they take to air as Heralds of Beelzebub, the winged squires and scouts of the Order of the Fly. Their vestigial human bodies are still conscious as they are slowly eaten from within to be used as fuel by the Herald, all the while their warped bodies fight for the glory of Hell against their will.

The Heralds are the vanguard in any assault of the Black Grail, and the ear-numbing drone of their wings strikes terror in any defender, breaking their focus and sapping their willpower. Heralds wield discarded weapons, contaminated with horrible worms that churn through them, which in turn infect their victims. Each diseased bullet has sentience of its own, finding even the smallest chink in any armour, burrowing into the nervous system and liquefying the internal organs from within.





Plague Knight

When the tide of Black Grail comes, many mortals cry out to Beelzebub in their despair, hoping that the Lord of the Flies would spare them in exchange for worship and servitude. But their prayers fall on deaf ears, for the Prince of Gehenna hates all Creation and only wishes to warp it into a form pleasing to him and hateful to God.

But there are few mortals, exceedingly rare, who truly share the vision of Beelzebub and wish the world to end in a putrid, parasite-infested mass, eternally writhing in the throes of the endless plagues bestowed upon them by the Black Grail. Many of them are secret and highly skilled killers, men and women whose pleasure is to murder repeatedly, plying their craft in secret, wishing one day to do it openly. From amongst such twisted individuals the most depraved are inducted into the ranks of the unholy Order of the Fly, known as Plague Knights.

When the Black Grail comes, they come out calmly and welcome the wave of corruption – not consumed by it but rather warped into a cadaver-like creature half-way between life and death. They retain sentience, intelligence and a dim memory of their past lives, making them extremely useful at leading the Black Grail into the isolated farmsteads and remote settlements that might otherwise escape the clutches of Beelzebub.

The more living creatures a Plague Knight can find and warp beyond recognition, the higher they will climb in the ranks of the Order of the Fly, and the greater the favour they will find in the eyes of Beelzebub.

Amongst their rank there are twelve Plague Knights of great renown, made in mockery of Paladins of the Church, great champions of the Fly. They dwell within Ekron, the city of Beelzebub, a place of such wilting horror that none dare to approach it, not even the mightiest of Heretic lords. But sometimes the orders of

their lord come to their ears, and then the mightiest of Plague Knights strike forth, following orders carried out by the deafening buzz of trillions of beating wings of hell-flies.







The Iron Sultanate

When the Infidels opened the thrice-cursed Gate to Jahannam, releasing the Gog and Magog upon those who believe, it seemed that all was lost and Shaitan would emerge victorious over Dunya. But the Creator of the Universe came to the aid of the Faithful, and as had been written, the great Iron Wall of Dhu al-Qarnayn manifested itself in the lands ruled by the Sultan of Rûm. A call was sent to those who believe righteously, and over the coming decades the migration of all the Faithful, second in importance only to the Hijrah of the Prophet himself, took place across Europa, Asia and Africa. Millions perished on the road and at the sea, for the Heretics and their Shaytan lords swarmed them as locusts swarm fields of ripe sesame, devouring them and building vile monuments and statues from their limbs and heads, so they could not be buried as is decreed in the Holy texts. But once all those who survived the journey had come, the mighty Gates of al-Qarnayn were closed, and the Great Sultanate of the Invincible Iron Wall of the Two Horns that pierce the Sky was formed.

The assaults of the slaves of Jahannam against the Sultanate have never ceased since that day, and each day new martyrs are mourned as they defend the Wall and confront the Heretics who have overcome its defences. But within the walls, the lost knowledge flourishes and from mosques of white marble and gold the muezzin call the faithful to pray for the success of the Sultan's army as it struggles to protect the lands within the wall, and defend the caravan trails that provide the Sultanate with vital trade goods.

The iron wall is the greatest defensive work in the world, a mighty bulwark festooned with the famed artillery of the Sultan. Azeb sharpshooters stand at ready, ever watchful for surprise attacks, and the elite Janissary regiments have barracks at set intervals near the wall so they can react to any attack at speed. During a more serious incursion a full muster of Azebs is called, the

House of Wisdom unleashes its terrifying takwin creations upon the foe, and if the need is desperate the Sultan himself comes forth and his Janissaries march with him to do battle, carrying the green flag of the Prophet before them.

Thus the protection of the Iron Wall has had an extensive influence on the Sultanate Way of war. The conscripted Azebs are experts at feigned flight and skirmish, while the loping Lions of Jabir harass the enemy flanks. All the while the superb artillery of the Sultan bombards the enemy as they make their tortuous journey across the battlefield littered with traps set by the skilled Sappers. When they reach the ranks of the faithful, the Janissaries, Sultan's elite household troops, close in and finish the enemy with their devastating counter charge led by their Iron-willed officers. Dreaded Assassins from Alamut prowl in the winds of time, striking the enemy elites and leaders, while the Alchemists of the House of Wisdom unleash devastating weapons made deadly by their elemental mastery, capable of overcoming defences of virtually any foe.

Beyond the Iron Wall forces of the Sultan operate in small, mobile companies, each with a particular mission to accomplish. They hunt down apostates that have gone to serve Shaytans, look for the relics from the time of the Prophets, or seek to recover lost treasures and books of knowledge from the ruins of the fallen Caliphates. Though an understanding between the Church and the Sultanate on being co-belligerents against Jahannam exists, the commanders of these expeditions will tolerate no interference and do not hesitate to crush those who would hinder their mission. Resentment against the infidels who unleashed Gog and Magog runs deep in the Sultanate, and matters of honour are swiftly resolved with duels to the death. Woe to those who dare to hinder the mission of Those Who Believe.

“In the name of Allah, the Compassionating, the Compassionate! Praise be to Allah, The Beneficent King, The Creator of the Universe, Lord of the Three Worlds, Who set up The Firmament without Pillars in its Stead and Who stretched out the Earth even as a Bed; and Grace, and Prayer - Blessing be upon Our Lord Mohammed, Lord of Apostolic Men, and upon His Family and Companion-Train; Prayer and Blessings Enduring and Grace Which unto The Day of Doom shall Remain!”



Janissary of the Sultanate

The janissaries are the Sultanate's elite warriors, raised from childhood in the arts of war. Captured during raids upon the desolate northern and eastern marches beyond the Iron Wall, they are subjected to rigorous martial training and indoctrination from an early age. Through spiritual and alchemical means, bound by chains unseen, their minds are carefully conditioned until they attain a complete and unwavering loyalty to the Sultan, and to him alone.

Their physical attributes are augmented by potent elixirs created by the mystic Jabirean arts. Their ornate armour is forged from the metallic formula that the alchemagi of the Sultan gleaned from the very Iron Wall that protects the Sultanate from their enemies. These soldiers are also protected by powerful talismans crafted by the blind thaumaturgists from the School of the Meteoric Omen. Armed with jezail rifles, hand mortars, yataghan blades and a devotion carved upon their very souls, the janissaries are formidable opponents indeed.

On the battlefield, Janissaries excel at storming enemy strongpoints and trenches, crushing elite formations and acting as the bodyguard for high-ranking individuals. Though the Sultan uses them sparingly beyond the Iron Wall (since they also form his personal bodyguard), some janissaries are sent to the front line to bolster the cause of the Sublime Gate. In the middle of the mud, blood and dust of the trenches, their richly decorated panoply of war creates a beautiful and frightening spectacle as they charge the enemy lines, with total conviction that Paradise awaits those who fall in righteous battle.

“Glory to the Great Sultan, the Padishah of Rûm, Commander of the Faithful, and Successor to the Prophet of the Lord of the Universe, Custodian of the Invincible Iron Wall of the Two Horns that pierce the Sky which protects us from the ravages of Gog and Magog!”



Lion of Jabir

In the fabled Sultanate of the Iron Wall, deep beneath the golden gardens of Damascus, through the Cavern of the Sleeper and past the Seven Gates of Potentiality, are the vast laboratories and metaphysical factories of the Alchemists.

Using the mysterious Jabirean process called takwin, the alchemists are able to create artificial life, and produce all manner of strange, wondrous beasts and automatons to delight the masses of the souk, and grace the gardens of the Sultan.

Deeper still, in the darkest and most secret reaches of the alchemy complex, past the Seven Hidden Gates of Actuality, are the sanctums where the art and science of takwin is honed to its most keen and deadly purpose. Here they make the dreaded Lions of Jabir.

Named after the deadly hunters of the plains, the Lions of Jabir can take many forms, not all of them leonine. Each one is a unique masterwork, and they are grown according to the skills and artistry of the Jabirean scientist that created them. The esoteric arts the alchemagi employ are learned through study of forbidden Books of Solomon, and many alchemists are killed when their experiments fail or run amok. However, the Lions are in desperate demand by the army of Sultanate, so the program continues, regardless of cost and casualties.

Creating the Lions of Jabir is extremely difficult, and there are endless variables to consider. Because of this the Lions are often malformed in some way. Though still magnificent hunters in war, their malformations often cause their existence to be one of constant physical pain and suffering. The truly tragic cases are the Lions created with human-like intelligence, who are wracked with existential dread as they realise the horror of their unnatural origins.

In battle the Lions of Jabir are deadly threats and are used as a vanguard of the host of the Sultanate. The Sultan himself has a hunting pack of seventy-seven enormous Lions of Jabir that guard him day and night, and accompany him on the battlefield. The speed and ferocity of the Lions is nearly unmatched, and some even have strange powers granted by their alchemical birth. Many have armour melded with the flesh and fashioned from alchemical metals, etched with cryptic seals and sigils, and richly embellished by the Alchemists to hide the defects in their creations.



Jabirean Alchemist

The Alchemists are the battlefield mystics and artificers of the Great Sultanate of the Iron Wall, schooled in the hidden knowledge of the legendary Smaragdine Tablet within the House of Wisdom.

Admission is open to any with will and intellect deemed sufficient, be they man or woman.

To become an Alchemist is no easy task: they undergo many trials on their path to mastery. First are the countless lessons of the newly initiated – studying the Jabirean Corpus, translating the Keys of Solomon and learning all the Fundamental Disciplines of their primaeval science. Only after seven years of study, under the watchful and exacting eyes of the High Alchemagi, is an aspirant allowed to attempt the Three Trials required for full membership in the Order.

The first trial is to create a suit of Alchemist's armour which protects against harm. This is an essential tool of their craft, festooned with the Seals of Solomon which enables them to bend the elements of Creation to their will and shields them even from the devices of Hell.

Next, they must create a takwin servant, a Homunculus creature of artificial life and intellect. If the candidate manages to follow the complex formula, as well as the intricate timing and temperature requirements, the creature will emerge after forty days of toil. It will act as the Alchemist's living tool of creation, for their hands have fine motor skills well beyond even the nimblest craftsman. Vaguely shaped like a small human, it can change the consistency of its body to an almost liquid-like slime to squeeze into alchemical chambers to do their master's bidding in extreme temperatures and in the fog of poisonous chemical fumes. Many aspirants fail here and their creation emerges from its golden celestial sphere a deformed monstrosity, filled with hatred towards its creator. It burrows itself into the Alchemist's body to consume it from within, wearing its would-be master as a skin.

The third and final test is opening their Third Eye, the key to cosmic illumination which allows them to see the building blocks of Creation and thus be able to ensure that the elements they use are in perfect balance. Those that fail their final test are horribly changed. Their Third Eye swells to nightmare proportions and melds with their original pair, driving the aspirant mad during the process of their deformation. They spend the rest of their pitiful lives screaming of the unseen horrors all around now revealed to them. Out of mercy, alchemists that fail in this way are often put down, but there are rumours of cabals of these living failures kept alive for reasons unknown.

An Alchemist that has passed all three trials is formidable indeed: a master of esoteric powers, able to control fire and ice, metal and liquid; capable of creating intricate mechanical devices and artificial life as well as weapons of calamitous potency. In exchange for the freedom to practise their arts, the Alchemists supply the Sultanate with the peerless Jabirean battle lions, and serve on the front lines where their devastating alchemical compounds melt the flesh from the bones of enemies of the Believers, dissolving through even the toughest armour.



Sultanate Assassin

They go by many names: Ghost Wolves, the Secret Knives, Subtle Vipers, the Sultan's Wrath. Whatever they are called, assassins of the sultanate instil terror in the hearts of even the most dauntless.

Assassins are a legendary order of mystic warriors, notorious the world over for their esoteric arts and ruthlessness. Atop a forbidding mountain broods the onyx fortress, Alamut the Unconquerable. Behind its shadowed walls great secrets are hoarded by the ancient magi. Some say that the founder of the Order of Assassins, Rashid ad-Din Sinan, best known as the Old man of the Mountain, still holds his court here. A preposterous rumour, naturally, since that would make him close to eight centuries old.

Though the Isma'ili Sect of Assassins is seen as heretical by many within the lands of the Iron Wall, a pact forged between Sultan and the Mountain ensures that the warbands of the believers often include one of these supreme killers in their service.

Assassins are able to bend space and time using sacred rituals and powerful hallucinogens discovered by magi of the order. With this esoteric power they prowl behind enemy lines, hunting their targets with merciless efficiency. They can seemingly appear in two places at once, strike an enemy with startling speed and then travel back in time to a moment a few heartbeats before, safe from any retaliation.

They do this in service of their Sultan, whose enemies they are charged to destroy in a form of ritual holy murder. To carry out this task, the assassins are painfully altered by many powerful unguents, chemicals and potions. They stand much taller than a normal man and are many times as fast and strong.

Though adept with all manner of weapons, assassins favour the poisoned blades forged in the unknown

depths of Alamut. These weapons are imbued with the Supreme Poison: The Milk of Manat, also known as The Cup of Death. A simple touch of these blades upon unprotected flesh is certain death, as the body of the victim turns black and rots from within over the course of several excruciating seconds.

In Cthonic chambers deep below the surface, generations of young assassins are raised, where they are fed an awful, bitter diet rich with strange toxins. Generation by generation, their tolerance grows, until the blood of these willing vessels is drawn and then smelted into a poisonous iron. The iron is forged into wicked, curving blades and deadly spells of slaying are layered into each fold of the toxic metal. Finally the red-hot blades are quenched in the venom of the pale, unnatural offspring of a basilisk and manticore. Thus the blood of the first generation of Assassins still lives to this day, growing more potent with each generation.



Azebs

The lands of the Sultanate are vast, and many armies can be raised from the multitude of the provinces, where one household in twenty is required to arm and equip a soldier to serve the ruler of those who believe. Most such soldiers are known as Azebs (meaning 'unmarried', as those with families cannot become Azebs), who serve as the light infantry on both land and the sea, as well as guarding the Great Iron Wall against the Heretic assaults. When an elite force is sent beyond the Wall to strike at the enemy or look for holy artifacts, the recruiters of the Sultan call for volunteers to join the leaders of such expeditions. Though the missions into No Man's Land are dangerous, there are always plenty of Azeb who step forward: there is fame to be won, and chance a-plenty to acquire valuable loot.

Weaponry of the Azebs varies a great deal, as they do not have access to the superb arms, armour and alchemical marvels the elite household troops of the Sultan such as janissaries and Cataphracts do. Most carry Jezzails with a distinctive curved stock. These are handmade weapons, and consequently they vary widely in their construction. Jezzails are very personal weapons, well-crafted and their distinct curved stocks are intricately decorated.

These long arms can be loaded with all manner of ammunition: fired roughened bullets, long iron nails or even alchemically treated slivers of the Great Iron Wall. This makes jezzails highly adaptable, and less dependent on easily depleted ammo.

Other weapons and equipment include curved daggers and scimitars, pistols and sappers' equipment. Armour is rare: Azebs are often used by their superiors as light skirmishers tie harass and tie down the enemies while the heavier troops close in for the kill. Their superiors see little reason to waste expensive armour on troops that fall in great numbers and are easily replaceable – Paradise awaits those who die for their faith, after all.

Many Azebs meet a terrible end in the cruel wars in the Trenches, and other return broken in mind and body, but there are always new, hot-blooded recruits willing to risk it all for the Sultan, a chance to kill the hated followers of Shaitan, and return to home as heroes with fabulous stories and glittering gold.



Düzbaşı Captain

Military expeditions over the Great Iron Wall into No Man's Land carry many risks, and their commanders are field officers known as Yüzbaşı. They are expected to lead from the front and their selection is solely on merit, with no consideration given to family pedigree or wealth. Many are promoted from the ranks of the Janissary corps.

Their bodies are enhanced by the Jabirean alchemical arts and their minds conditioned by the mystics, allowing them to face any foe unflinchingly. The downside of the mystic mental hardening is their utter disregard for pain and their cold ruthlessness on the battlefield. Casualties, both their own and those of the enemy, as well as those non-combatants who believe, are purely utilitarian to Yüzbaşı. For is it not just to send heretics to Jahannam, while the warriors who fall in battle will wake in Paradise, as has been promised?

Under the orders of a powerful pasha or emir, or even the Sultan himself, the Yüzbaşı assumes the command of an elite squad of warriors to fulfil their task, such as to reclaim holy artefacts lost during the catastrophic period when Heretics took the Levant by storm. Other times, they are told to find and eliminate powerful foes, such as Heretic nobles who were once subjects of the Sultan but have turned their backs to Allah.

Yüzbaşı are equipped with superb armour of meteoric iron, the finest carbines gilded with silver and loaded with alchemical shot, and carry kilij swords of the past heroes of Sultanate, where great deeds of old are inscribed with golden calligraphy. If they serve the Sublime Gate well, their name and glory will be etched on the blade as well to inspire future generations.

The strongest carry the dreaded hand cannons which double as deadly halberds. If they are hunters of distinction, they wear pelts of their greatest kills, such as chimeras, as cloaks, which offer protection from the

powers of Shaitan.

Success brings Yüzbaşı the favour of the Sultan and along with it honour, splendid weaponry of Damascus steel, gold dinars aplenty and access to the wondrous devices and creatures created by the Jabirean alchemists in the House of Wisdom. Hunting is a noble pursuit within the ranks of the officer corps, and artificial birds of prey and automaton hounds double as potent weapons of war and are brought along to the front to aid their masters at war.

“I am the son of many chiefs. My sword is sharp and terrible. It is the mightiest of things when the cauldron of war boils fiercely.”



Brazen Bull

“It is with artillery that the Sultan makes his arguments known.”

Due to the protection afforded by the Iron Wall, the Sultanate has always maintained excellence in artillery. However, the siege guns and heavy mortars that defend Those Who Believe on the ramparts of the Wall are far too cumbersome for small expeditionary forces. Thus in the year of the Hijrah 821, Sultan Bayezid III commissioned a new creature of war to act as living field artillery.

To fulfil this decree the Jabirean scientists of the Royal Artillery House have laboured for centuries to perfect the divine art of takwin. In their secret laboratories they performed countless experiments, learning many precious and costly lessons in the process. They have devised many things, but none more clever or ingenious than the Brazen Bull, called Boğa by the soldiery of the Sultanate.

The Brazen Bull is a monstrous being of immense power and vitality, capable of tearing even the bastard child of a devil clean in half. The Sultan's armourers equip the Bulls with heavy artillery that even the superhuman Janissaries cannot lift, let alone use in battle: flame cannons, volley guns and holy blades blessed by the Word of the Great Protector.

Encasing its mighty frame is exquisitely decorated bronze armour of thrice hardened scales, covered in talismans of protection and the Grace of the Creator. On the battlefields beyond the Iron Wall, the Brazen Bull is an awesome and terrifying sight. It is a single-minded, fearless walking bulwark, a tower and shield which the war parties of the Sultanate rally behind. Such is the power of their weapons that the very earth shakes with their pounding, disrupting the enemy advance even when they fail to slay their target.









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