
Reference – History of Warhammer 40k

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The Company, the Game

Back in the 1970s, as role-playing games began to flourish behind the flagship *Dungeons & Dragons*, a company called Games Workshop released a product line called Citadel Miniatures. They published fantasy figures such as orcs, elves, and goblins but also starting branching out beyond things covered by *Dungeons & Dragons*. In 1983, a new tabletop wargame was released to utilize all these miniatures in mass combat—the game was called *Warhammer*. In the same year, a small advertisement was released for some future science fiction rules called *Rogue Trader*. It took years to come to fruition, and *Warhammer* become a big success during that time. To capitalize on the success of *Warhammer* and *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* (WFRP), the sci-fi line was renamed *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader* and released in 1987.

In the 20+ years since, the subtitle was dropped and *Warhammer 40,000* (also called *Warhammer 40k*) became a tabletop wargame phenomena. Thousands of players around the world discovered the excitement of warring orks, eldar, space marines, and more! Games Workshop (<http://www.games-workshop.com>) maintains stores around the world selling *Warhammer 40,000* models and terrain.

Now, the *Warhammer 40,000* world comes to role-playing games. Partnering with Fantasy Flight Games (<http://www.fantasyflightgames.com>), Games Workshop saw the release of *Dark Heresy* in 2007, the first in a series of *Warhammer 40,000 Role Play* products. This focused on the servants of the Inquisition and their hunt for heretics. In 2009, *Rogue Trader* was released and focuses on merchant houses searching for opportunity and profit on the fringes of the galaxy.

Thus, *Rogue Trader*, even though a new RPG, is placed in a rich setting with over two decades of development, creation, and revision.

Imperium of Man

It is the 41st millennium of man (38,000 years from present day), and humankind has long traveled among the stars via the dangerous warp, moving at faster than light speeds. Mankind has been to one side of the galaxy to the other, settling thousands upon thousands of planets among hostile and deadly xenos (alien) races. Over the thousands and thousands of years, the population of man soured to untold trillions. Throughout it all, man followed the immortal Emperor, the first and most powerful psyker.

In the 31st millennium, the Emperor's most trusted companion, Horus, rebelled and led millions into heresy. Horus was eventually defeated, the noble space marines divided into factions, and the Emperor critically injured. To save his life, his followers attached him to the Golden Throne, a mechanical device sustaining his life at the cost of millions of others' lives daily. For over 10,000 years, the Emperor has sat unmoving on the Golden Throne, his expansive psyker mind unfettered in the warp fighting the daemons of Chaos and protecting mankind. It is said only due to his agonizing, undying vigilance does man continue to exist in the hostile universe. Thus, men revere him as God-Emperor, Him on Earth, lord of the Golden Throne on Holy Terra.

The Emperor's Golden Throne is maintained by the Adeptus Mechanicus, the tech-priests of Mars. The tech-priests worship the Omnissiah, the Machine God. Seekers of knowledge, they believe in replacing their own fragile flesh with mechanical substitutes to become closer to the Omnissiah.

Yesterday's Technology, Today

Although man has succeeded in spanning the galaxy, somewhere he lost his inventiveness. Mankind uses advanced technology, but the designs have not changed in thousands of years. In fact, many buildings and starships are simply expanded or repaired and have been in service for hundreds or more years. Across thousands of worlds, the same plans are used to construct copies of the same vehicles, weapons, and more. Technology is as much religion as science, with every mechanical device believed to possess a machine spirit. The tech-priests preach that a machine's spirit must be appeased lest the device fail. Therefore, a mechanic's toolkit will include tools, lubricants, prayer scrolls, and holy incense, among other things.

At some point, mankind learned to meld machinery and flesh. This is seen in two main capacities. First is the creation of servitors, human bodies lobotomized and automated with mechanical devices. Servitors help pilot ships, work as heavy lifters, and even function as combat drones. Second is human augmentation. Damaged limbs are often replaced with mechanical devices. The bionic and cybernetics of man are both incredibly advanced and disturbingly crude. A common implant is the mechadendrite, a shoulder-mounted tentacle limb.

Architecture resembles baroque, gothic, or Victorian, with sweeping arches, extensive ornamentation, and oppressive grandeur. Skulls (real skulls) are a common decoration due to the ample supply. Most human buildings and clothing has some sort of skull or skull motif.

Oppression

With the Emperor “indisposed”, it is up to the twelve High Lords of Terra to rule the empire. The Adeptus Terra, or Priesthood of Earth, comprise the administrators and governors who control all of mankind. The Administratum handle administrative functions, while the Adeptus Arbites are the law enforcers. The mysterious Adeptus Astra Telepathica trains psykers for service in the empire, specifically training Astropaths, who use their psychic power to communicate across the void to planets all over the empire. The fearsome Adeptus Astartes, the Space Marines, are genetically enhanced superhumans who enforce the military will of the empire. The Emperor is guarded by the Adeptus Custodes. The Adeptus Mechanicus are the technicians and protectors of knowledge. The Adeptus Ministorum, also known as the Ecclesiarchy, is devoted to the worship of the God-Emperor.

The tendrils of the empire are felt across the galaxy in the form of taxes, tithes, armies, and administrators. Many planets pay taxes up to 90% of the entire planet's production to Holy Terra. Planetary governors are responsible for collecting the taxes and command their own Planetary Defense Force (PDF). A governor ignoring his duties to the empire may be visited by the Officio Assassinorum, the office of assassins.

Of course, the most feared arm of the Imperium of Man is the Inquisition, a group of men and women seeking out heretics, psykers, and threats to the throne. No one is above the scrutiny of an Inquisitor, not even the High Lords of Terra. These witch-hunters are terrifying agents of Him on Earth and are obeyed without question.

Over the thousands of years of human existence, and exposure to thousands of planets, conditions, toxins, and environments, mutation is a common and serious problem to the human condition. Mutation is widely regarded as a deviance to be suppressed or scourged. Over time, new species of human have evolved as well, known as abhumans. These millions are rarely as highly regarded as pure humans, but they often serve in military functions (except the Space Marines).

The Whole Wide Worlds

Since there are so many humans in the galaxy, and they have been there so long, there are countless planets inhabited by humans. Their level of technology varies from bronze age to modern. Some have forgotten their ties to Holy Terra entirely. The expanse of humanity is so vast, there are no charts or records that accurately reflect all of the planets with human habitation. The Administratum classifies most planets by their most common features or exports.

Hive World

These planets are so densely populated, they have miles and miles of buildings one atop the other in what is called a hive. They are havens of mining and industry and are home to billions. Importing fresh water and food is a priority.

Agri-World

These planets primarily produce foodstuffs from crops, hydroponics, animal fodder, or animal husbandry. Population can be extremely high or as small as a single outpost.

Civilized World

The most common category, the inhabitants don't necessarily have to be “civil” to outsiders.

Dead World

A dead world once held life or intelligent life but no longer does. From time to time, the Imperium destroys a world through Exterminatus. This is a common response to ork or tyrannid infestation.

Death World

A death world may teem with life, it is just an environment so hostile mankind cannot easily establish a population. The planet can be toxic, suffer extreme weather, or be inhabited with deadly flora or fauna.

Feudal World

The humans on a feudal world are around the black powder age of technology. They may have been isolated for centuries due to warp storms, devastated by global catastrophe or otherwise thrown into these dark ages.

Forge World

The domain of the Adeptus Mechanicus, these are global factories responsible for supply of arms and armour to the Imperium's combat forces.

Xenos

Man is not alone. There are uncounted alien, hostile, or dangerous organisms in the universe. Some have small populations, others have world-spanning empires. The Imperium teaches the supremacy of man and that dealing with xenos leads to heresy and corruption. Thus, most xenos are killed on sight.

Here are some of the most infamous or numerous of man's xenos enemies.

Eldar

The eldar are an ancient and fey humanoid race that may have been the dominant species in the galaxy at one time, however, they fell into worship of dark gods of Chaos. They are still an advanced and dangerous species best handled with caution. A faction, the Dark Eldar, are sadistic pirates, torturers, and soul-eaters.

Kroot

These avian humanoids are aggressive and bizarre. They are able to alter their DNA by consuming other creatures. Thus, as they battle a race, they become more and more like the very race they are fighting against. They hire out as mercenaries in order to collect more genetic material to consume.

Necrons and C'tan

Long dormant, the Necrons are millions of years old and appear as skeletal metal humanoids. They are aggressive to all known life. They are incredibly hardy and difficult to kill. They obey the C'tan, or "star gods", an ancient, malevolent race of pure consuming evil. Only four C'tan are known to remain: The Night Bringer, The Deceiver, The Void Dragon, and The Outsider. The Void Dragon is said to be imprisoned on Mars and may actually be the Ommissiah.

Orks

Orks are a ferocious, brutal green-skinned race of warriors. They are believed to be bio-engineered by ancient races and are the most numerous and dominant known species. They grow from spores and are almost impossible to eradicate once they make contact with a planet. Orks follow whichever ork is "bigga" and live to conduct raging, bloody "waaagh!"

Tau

The Tau are a young race that has made incredible advances in technology in recent years and have formed their own small empire. They, as a race, believe the principle of the Greater Good, which is the drive to make the future better and easier for the Tau race. Thus, they have an ingrained drive to improve themselves and expand their empire.

Tyranids

One of the few known extragalactic races, the tyranids are not a single species but an organism that absorbs genetic code and recombines it to form millions of servant entities. A tyranid Hive Fleet moves from planet to planet absorbing its genetics and leaving a barren lifeless ball of rock. Most planets infested by a Hive Fleet are left to die or destroyed by Exterminatus. Tyranids generally appear as some combination of insect, crustacean, and reptile. They are derisively called "bugs."

Rogue Traders

A rogue trader is an individual who is granted a special warrant of trade from Holy Terra empowering them to represent the interests of man in and beyond the realm of the Imperium. Rogue traders are opportunistic merchants who seek profit through legitimate (or otherwise) means. They explore new regions, conquer planets, establish trade routes, interact with xenos, and otherwise bring new funding and resources under the banner of man.

A rogue trader is an extremely powerful individual in command of his own ship and crew. However, no rogue trader can be an expert in everything. His allies and retinue are extremely important to his continued success. Whether it be an arch-militant, an astropath, a missionary, a navigator, or other expert, the individuals are vital resources to the rogue trader's domain.

In the *Rogue Trader* game, one player takes the role of a rogue trader, and the others take on the roles of his expert retinue. As a team, they seek out fame and fortune in the name of the Empire, and exploit every opportunity to increase profit.