



CALIXIAN SECRETS

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CHAPTER XII: CALIXIAN SECRETS

The Calixis sector has its fair share of dark and terrible secrets. The most iconic is Komus, the Tyrant star. Not far behind in infamy is lost Rogue Trader Erasmus Haarlock and his legacy. The vile xenos known as the Slaughter is another iconic threat for the Calixis sector. The list is much, much longer of course. This chapter only has room to mention those three, plus introduce a few additional ones that can be made to tie in with the three existing ones.

KOMUS, THE TYRANT STAR

The Tyrant Star, also known as Komus, is an uncategorised stellar anomaly found in the vicinity of the Calixis sector of the Segmentum Obscurus. Komus appears as a black dwarf star whose arrival in the sky of a world is seen as an imminent herald of catastrophe, while the existence of the Tyrant Star is itself part of a wider prophecy called the *Hereticus Tenebrae* (the Shadow Heresy) that is of great interest to the Imperial Inquisition. Unravelling this prophecy and the role of the Tyrant Star may be crucial to preventing a cataclysm that will consume not only the worlds of the Calixis Sector but perhaps the entire Imperium of Man.

THE NATURE OF THE TYRANT STAR

The nature of the Tyrant star is something every Dark Heresy GM has to think about sooner or later (most start thinking about it sooner). The question becomes especially relevant if the PC are actually going to be directly investigating stuff that relates to the Tyrant Star. But even if they aren't the Tyrant Star is so iconic for Calixis that most GMs will want to drop a few hints and leads here and there.

If you're going to include something in a roleplaying game as a GM it's usually a prerequisite to have at least a rough idea of what it is. You can always expand and tweak things a bit if it becomes an important part of your game, but you need to have some sort of general idea what it before you include it.

Unfortunately BL/FFG never did provide any answers, just questions, hints, and vague rumours. Basically they didn't want to say what the Tyrant Star is, just that it's something dark and dangerous. Its true nature is up to each individual GM to decide. Which has the advantage of not revealing anything you potential players. The down side is that it gives nothing to the potential GM.

Herein you can find several ideas for the nature of the Tyrant star. Pick the one (you can of course still make up your own!) that you think fits before for your group. The rest you can ignore – or scavenge them for ideas for red herrings, misguided fools, and insane diviners.

KOMUS AS THE GREAT UNKNOWABLE

Komus is – literally – unknowable. Try as you might you can never understand what it is. The moment your theories start to make sense is the moment you realize that you've been wrong all along. The only constants that the Tyrant Star brings to the table are widespread fear, descent into savage madness, and dark revelry. As long as those emotional states are part of human nature the Tyrant Star will endure. And as long as there are people seeking to know its nature it will haunt us.

Under this option Haarlock can still be the herald of Komus – at least in his own insane mind. When Haarlock used the Blind Tesseract to 'enter' the Tyrant star he may have gone somewhere bodily, but he also finally gave in to insanity and corruption. Whatever is allowed to return is completely deranged and utterly monstrous (it's up to the GM to decide how readily apparent his transformation is, perhaps he looks pretty normal and can feign sanity – for a while).

The actual Black Sun manifestation can be thought of as reaction to the search for the nature of the unknowable. In essence that which cannot be known takes steps to make sure it remains an unsolvable enigma. Sometimes that requires widespread madness and the death of worlds. It is a process that will continue for as long as there is a single human who knows of the Shadow Heresy and seeks to learn more. And the closer these seekers seem to get the worse the manifestations will become.

As a GM it's your job to first lead the players in one direction (the other 'truths' presented here fit perfectly in that regard). Then, as they think they've figured something out, you present even stronger evidence to the contrary. Only when they become well and truly unsettled (having at least 60 IP, but preferably many more, plus at least a handful of CP) can you let them catch a glimpse of what the Tyrant Star truly is – which inevitably results in the Acolyte going irrevocably insane, twisting into a monstrous form, and turning into an NPC. It is even possible to use this as the end game for an entire campaign: As the players finally gaze too loon and too deep into the abyss they finally understand. Finally understand that there really are things that can't be explained, that there are things man is not meant to know, and that because of their quest for knowledge an entire world of men will be their funeral pyre.

Another option is letting you players get an inkling of the madness and death awaits. Let them understand enough to abort their quest and retain their sanity. Perhaps to realize that the only way to avert the doom that is coming is to stop everyone else that is trying to uncover the 'truth' about the Tyrant Star. Since the Inquisitors of the Tyrantine Cabal are unlikely to listen (not all of them anyway) this could lead to a full-blown Inquisition War – kill the Cabal to save the Sector!

Warning! This option can be a frustrating option for some players. Ten sessions of hard work and painstaking investigation are suddenly revealed to be a wild goose chase. And repeat. Until the final reward is revealed – madness and bodily corruption! For other players it can be very exciting to pursue the ultimate unknowable mystery. Make sure you know your players before you throw this one at them.

KOMUS AS MALAL

Komus is the ancient Chaos power Malal. He is the dark god of vengeance, bestiality, and madness. Long ago he was destroyed or imprisoned by the other Powers, not least because his favoured modus operandi is to attack his fellow gods. For a long time he has waited and plotted. When the stars are right (which could be any day now) Malal will return and madness and destruction will follow in his wake (if will be as if the Tyrant Star manifested over a thousand worlds).

In this version infamous Rogue Trader Erasmus Haarlock is nothing more than Malal's favoured servant. Long did Malal labour to create a vessel through which he could act, showing his mortal agent that in the end you cannot change destiny, but you can certainly have your revenge afterwards. When Erasmus Haarlock finally realized he could not have back that which he had lost, he willingly submitted to the dark and glorious power of the Vengeful One. Now he exists as a Daemon Prince of Malal. If allowed to return he'll labour to see to his master's inevitable return.

The Black Sun manifestations are glimpses of what awaits. Mere shadow mirages of the full might of Malal. If he is restored to power and vigour (with or without Haarlock's aid) the Black Sun manifestation will blot out ten thousand suns, affecting a much larger territory than just the Calixis sector. Malal's true prey may be Chaos, but you can be sure there will be a huge amount of Imperial collateral as he is restored to power. And afterwards there is bound to be more trouble. As a Chaos power Malal and his followers aren't too picky about their victims!

KOMUS AS BALPHOMAEI

Komus is actually Balphomael, the Horned Darkness, the arch-daemon that is mentioned in Disciples of the Dark Gods. Something far greater and more malevolent than even a Daemon Prince Balphomael isn't quite as powerful as the four great chaos powers. Or maybe he is. Not out in the wider galaxy perhaps, but in the Calixis region. And now he seeks to merge the warp and reality into one soupy mix, creating a warp anomaly second to none. Only there will be only one lord and master here: Himself.

This approach is somewhat less radical than the Malal option as it doesn't involve the (re)creating of a new Chaos power, just an insanely powerful daemon with delusions of grandeur. To the Acolytes the difference is largely academic; most of that which is listed under Malal applies to the Horned Darkness setup.

The only major difference is that Haarlock (still a Daemon prince) serves Balphomael out a misguided hope that the daemon can somehow restore his loved ones (a hope made even more insane by the fact that Haarlock is himself an abomination).

The Black Sun manifestations are glimpses of what is to come, just as with the Malal setup. You may want to adjust the dark revels that take place under the light of Komus in a more Chaotic direction – there is more outright cult activity, sacrifices to Balphomael, that sort of thing. The Acolytes could also find clues that point towards cults of Balphomael trying to summon the Black Sun, indicating a link between the two (Malal has no such cults).

KOMUS AS A C'TAN

Komus is actually a C'tan. Not just a shard or a combination of shard, but a whole one from back in the elder days, trapped or exiled in a nonstandard manner (either by the Necrons or their enemies, the Old Ones). The most obvious choice is C'tan the one known as the Outsider, but other options are also possible. After all the C'tan of old were as powerful as any gods that have ever existed.

Haarlock is the Herald of the trapped C'tan. When he used the Blind Tesseract to enter Komus he was made an offer he could not refuse – and was remade after the fashion of the Necrons and is now effectively a Necron Overlord with all the fell power and soullessness that entails. If he gets out he'll start waking the slumbering Necrons that lie hidden on countless worlds throughout the segmentum, enslaving them to his will and thereby the will of the C'tan. It's no coincidence that this happens in the Calixis sector. After all the Segmentum Obscurus was not just the home of the fallen Eldar Empire, it was also, very long ago, the heartland of the Necron dominion. The Eldar have an inkling of what awaits and therefore shun the sector.

Manifestations of the Black Sun in the past have been attempts by the trapped C'tan to revive dormant tomb worlds. So far the C'tan hasn't succeeded – either its call has gone unheeded or the Tomb Worlds it has visited have long since failed. The madness and destruction that follows in the wake of these manifestations are just the side effects of a dark and powerful god impinging upon the material universe.

KOMUS AS A YU'VATH ARTEFACT

Komus is a relic of the destroyed Yu'vath species (or alternatively another horrific warp-infused xenos species of the GM's own devising). It is their greatest creation – and their greatest disappointment. The final solution to the encroaching Imperium. A weapon so powerful that it could ravage entire star systems with impunity. But the weapon never became fully operational for reasons that were beyond even the ken of the Yu'vath leaders.

Haarlock learned of the artefact and devised a means to make it fully operational and bound to his will. Unfortunately the means by which he entered Komus meant he would be trapped, necessitating an elaborate scheme to manipulate his future descendants to release him. If he's allowed to return Haarlock will initiate a massive cataclysm across the sector, an orgy of vengeful destruction. Or if the GM prefers Haarlock may have retrained an inkling of his sanity and decide to set himself up as the undisputed ruler of the sector, with the dread power of Komus to back him up.

Either setup might involve the Acolytes embarking on a final mission to try to eliminate Haarlock. This will be very difficult. As the master of Komus Haarlock is infused with the unclean power of the warp – and he's not afraid to use it. Even should he fall Komus remains and there is always the danger of someone else mastering its secrets...

Earlier Manifestations of the Black Sun are the artefact flickering to life from time to time, apparently without rhyme or reason, before going idle again and disappearing from the physical universe.

KOMUS AS THE SINS OF AGES PAST

Komus is a relic from the Dark Age of Technology. It is the result of dark and unholy technology run wild, a machine of terrible sentience and nearly limitless power. It was created by man, and if set loose it will be the destroyer of mankind.

The setup is pretty much the same as with Komus as a Yu'vath artefact, only there is less warp power involved and rather more 'pure' techno-wizardry. Alternatively it could be humanity's final push into warp-science, making it the same as the Yu'vath artefact, only with mankind as its creator.

Haarlock sought it out, found it, and believe he could master it. Instead he was taken by the machine and transformed into the ultimate expression of mankind's technological insanities – an android being of unprecedented power, including the ability to corrupt and control not only machine-based intelligences and semi-intelligences (servitors and cogitators), but bio-based sentience (i.e. human brains) as well. He's being sent back to pave the way for the Machine's eventual return. First it must be restored to full working order, which will require the corruption of the Lathes Mechanicus amongst others.

Manifestations of the Black Sun are instances of the Machine flickering to life and utilizing its immense invasive power to invade and alter the minds (and to a certain degree the genes) of life-forms within its range.

KOMUS AS A HIVE FLEET

Komus is the ultimate expression of the collective power of the Tyranid Hive Mind. The end has come. Not just for the Imperium of Man, but for the entire galaxy. All the Hive Fleets encountered thus far are but parts of a greater whole; Jormungandr, the galaxy-spanning Great Devourer that has slowly crept like an unseen shadow across the Halo Stars. The Hive Fleets known by the Imperium are but little tendrils, glimpses of the doom that awaits all life. Soon (on the galactic timescale) Jormungandr's coils will be everywhere, touching upon every Imperial sector and more. There will be no battle lines, only chaos and confusion before the final silence. When all are dead the Tyranids will move on to the next galaxy, only to return in a few billion years when the galaxy is again awash with life.

When Haarlock at long last understood what it was that the galaxy faced and that all hope was lost his mind gave in completely. In his madness he used the Blind Tesseract to physically seek out Jormungandr and offered up his body and mind for the greater glory of the Hive. The Hive Mind accepted his offer, remade him in its image, and now seeks to return him to Calixis – where he'll serve as the ultimate Tyranid agent, infiltrating the Imperium and spreading his invisible gene-spores among the rich and the powerful.

Earlier manifestations of the Black Sun are nothing more than the ultimate Hive Mind touching upon the galaxy. Think of it as a sort of scouting activity, not in the physical sense (which usually includes genestealers, lictors, and whatnot) but psychically. Humans are of course utterly incapable of interpreting something as utterly alien and grand, so their feeble minds see it as a sort of eclipse followed by a descent into bestiality.

HAARLOCK LEGACY

Long ago, back in early M36, there lived a Free Captain Mordecai Haarlock in what was then the Jericho sector. This Mordecai was very rich and powerful, with ships and holdings across the sector and beyond. He got royally screwed over by the Jericho sector's Over-Governor, losing his entire fortune – and some say his family as well. He proceeded to escape with a single powerful ship – the Spear of Destiny – and began playing the vengeful bastard game.

Then came the Age of Apostasy. During which this Haarlock also proved a useful chap to Sebastian Thor's faction during the big ruckus that forever changed the Ministorum. As a reward from the victors he got a carte blanche Rogue Trader charter in 395.M36, effectively allowing him to go anywhere and do (almost) anything without fear of reprisal. Evil tongues claimed it also had the advantage of effectively getting rid of the somewhat troublesome Mordecai. At any rate Mordecai disappeared from the Jericho Sector and from Imperial records shortly thereafter.

Centuries later his great-grandson Solomon Haarlock used the same ship to chart the Calyx Expanse (largely coterminous with the Calixis Sector, which of course didn't exist back then) during an epic thirteen-year voyage 723-736.M36. By some accounts Solomon strayed into the Koronus Expanse as well, but this has never been firmly established. Solomon subsequently hands in his reports and his charts to the Adeptus Terra and is amply rewarded by receiving indefinite rights to the Solomon (named in his own honour) system, a particularly rich and pleasant garden world in the same region of space.

Solomon founded a legendary Rogue Trader dynasty and from his homeworld sent out many expeditions into the Calyx Expanse and the territories beyond. In the late 7th Century M41 the patriarch of the Haarlock clan died without naming an heir (as was their tradition) and infighting began. One Erasmus Haarlock lost his wife and only daughter during the fighting. He swore bloody vengeance upon his kin, vowing to kill every single one of them. Although not before tormenting them in every conceivable and unconceivable way, as to repay some of the pain they had inflicted upon him. Since the vast majority of his kin had never done him any harm this was quite excessive. A rather strong indication that Erasmus wasn't quite like the rest of us (i.e. has was driven mad by the loss of his beloved ones).

Erasmus proceeded with his plan, wiping out not only his closest relatives, but every single human that he thought was connected to the line of the Haarlocks. The killing led him far afield, to dread Mandragora and beyond, into the Koronus Expanse, and the Powers know where else. As he murdered and tortured his way across the Segmentum he also concocted a new grand scheme – to bring back his dead wife and only child. He turned his back on the Imperium and left his domain to rot (by now he was the only Haarlock left and thus the ruler of the Haarlock clan and the owner of the great Haarlock estates).

Erasmus was last seen in 703.M41 when he boarded the Spear of Destiny and (presumably) set a course for the Koronus Expanse (the ship was reputedly seen at Port Warder, but not record of it arriving at Footfall exists).

HAARLOCK'S QUEST

Erasmus left no stone unturned in his quest for knowledge, and no lore was too dark and terrible for him to learn. Of the many years he spent, all the places he visited, and the bargains he made we know little. But regardless of his efforts he didn't meet with much success. Death it seems is not so easily cheated.

Eventually he became convinced that the only way to return his loved ones to life was to travel through time to actually prevent their deaths from happening in the first place. That no such thing had ever been done before by any man did not deter Erasmus. He set about this new task with singular determination, using the blasphemous lore he had gathered and the resources at his disposal (quite extensive, him being a Rogue Trader with a venerable battlecruiser at his disposal) he created many strange devices.

Deep beneath the surface of the abandoned icy world of Mara (in the Hazeroth Abyss) he found what he was looking for. A place where the barrier between the Warp and reality didn't apply as strongly as elsewhere. Here and there, now and then, life and death, awaking and dreaming, sanity and insanity, it all becomes blurred on Mara.

Here he built the Clockwork Auger, which allowed him to gaze across the millennia. But all it did was add to his torment by forcing him to rewatch that fateful moment when his family died. He then built the Blind Tesseract – or rather he devised and built a way to harness its power.

The Tesseract allowed Haarlock not only to watch past, present, and future but to actually go there. But try as he might he could never change the actual event. It either played out as before or as variations over a theme, or he was seemingly successful only to have them die before his eyes in a million other ways. Not what he was after.

Haarlock sought out the (darkly) fabled Dusk Hag (on the planet Dusk of course) and demanded that she answer his question: How to fulfil his heart's desire? She told him his family already held that answer. Ever since the day that Tanis has died they had known, but failed to understand. If Haarlock was to succeed he must understand the riddle of the Tyrant Star and seek it out. Only then would his heart's desire be fulfilled.

Erasmus then came to the (somewhat erroneous) conclusion that he had thus far lacked sufficient power to change the past. His method was sound he believed, but he needed to take the process to the next level. He needed the power of Komus, the Tyrant Star, to fuel his expeditions. Only then would he be able to truly change the past in a meaningful manner. That was what the old hag had alluded to. If he suspected something was amiss he put it out of his mind – he had come too far, sacrificed too much to turn back. So he fired up the Tesseract and went into Komus...

Truth be told Erasmus Haarlock was no longer even remotely sane. Had he been he might have taken a moment to consider the manner in which the Tyrant Star had first 'illuminated' the Haarlock clan. The construction of the Widower and the Steel clock had come as a result. From both constructs Erasmus had learned a lot. Could it be that it was not Erasmus searching for Komus, but Komus leading him on? But if so, to what purpose?

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

To understand why Erasmus quest was doomed from the onset one must first understand the nature of time. Time is one of the most orderly constant in the universe. It is not absolute, however, as all manner of divination and time manipulation by psychic power can attest. It is also not entirely impossible to travel in time – just exceedingly difficult, fraught with danger, and prone to backfire in unexpected ways.

The past is not set in stone. It is much like the future in fact, hard to pin down, infinitely mutable. This is entirely counter-intuitive to most people. What has happened surely cannot be changed since we have no way of affecting what has transpired (barring time travel, but let's leave that out for now) in the past. Yes – and no. While we cannot actively go back to change something we also cannot be sure exactly what transpired. That is right: The past cannot be known in absolute detail. There is always some degree of uncertainty involved. And the more distant the event, the greater the uncertainty. Not to mention events that we didn't actually witness ourselves, but were told about or read about in ancient scrolls. Chances are the actual events were nothing like what we believe – but we'll never know, so whatever we believe is as close to the truth as we'll ever come.

The only things we can be relatively sure about are the here and now. Our immediate, perceivable surroundings at this very moment in time. Even here there is room for errors, for our perception can be quite fallible at times. Just ask ten people that just witnessed the same event – chances are you'll get ten slightly different stories. It gets worse if the situation was confusing or the ten people come from very different backgrounds.

This goes to show that we cannot with absolute certainty be sure what is going on right here, right now. And as has already been mentioned it gets radically worse the more distant the past event becomes. In a sense we can only say something about the *likelihood* of something having transpired in the past, based on what we observe here and now. Chances are also that alternate explanations exist, that the past may have unfolded in a different fashion and yet still produce the universe we seen around us today.

Not so for Haarlock. The defining moment of his life was that even that took the life of his loved one. It was a memory so strong and clear that it defined him and drove him to do what he did. It was the singular even from which there could be no escape for as long as he remained Erasmus. No amount of trickery or tampering with time could undo the fact that Erasmus knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt, what had transpired that day. The longer and harder he searched, the more insanely obsessed he became, the more set in stone did this particular event in the past become.

In this regard Erasmus Haarlock was his own worst enemy, the obstacle he could never hope to overcome. Unfortunately for him this was a concept he could never come to grips with. His obsession was such that he could never contemplate anything but trying harder, going another extra mile, sacrificing something more. If he could have turned it around, let the memories slip and his focus go then perhaps his time travelling efforts could have prevailed. But then he would never have found the means in the first place, so either way his quest was doomed before it began.

HAARLOCK, HERALD OF KOMUS

Erasmus Haarlock sought out the Tyrant Star and actually found it. After that he was a man no more, but something else entirely. He ceased to be Erasmus the Traveller and became the Herald of Komus instead.

His heart's desire had been indeed been fulfilled, just as the Hag had foretold. By giving himself up to Komus he had gotten over the loss of his wife and daughter, thus freeing them from the iron grip that his memory of their death held over them. The price he paid to the Hag: He will never know their fate – nor does he care anymore.

With the old Erasmus well and truly gone his loved ones were perhaps not immediately restored to life, but at least they were free. Free to meet their fates, whatever that may be. Perhaps that fate is not to die after all. Perhaps Erasmus' efforts finally paid off. Or maybe their fate is to be reborn or remade in some fashion. Whatever their fate they will never be together again, for Erasmus is gone now.

THE FIRST AND LAST OF HIS LINE

Erasmus Haarlock is said to be the First and Last of his line. The last bit isn't too difficult to understand; after all he did murder every single blood relative and then he himself went nuts and disappeared, then turned into the Herald of Komus. So there won't be any more Haarlocks after Erasmus, even if he returns (with that background he's not settling down to father little Haarlocks).

The 'first' bit requires some additional explaining to make sense. There are two somewhat different ways of explaining it. One involves some radical time travel and paradoxes. The other involves darkness and the passing on of sin from one generation to the next. Pick the one you like best.

Sins of the fathers: Mordecai Haarlock is the original recipient of the Haarlock charter, getting it handed to him by none other than Sebastian Thor back in M36. Turns out he wasn't so pious after all – or maybe his downward spiral began after. He dabbled into the dark and forbidden arts – Chaos lore, xenos artefacts, you name it. The legacy he left behind for his descendants wasn't just a voidship and a Charter, but something far darker and more insidious. A taint of the blood that forever doomed the Haarlock line. To delve into that which is forbidden (for good reason) and to fall more easily to the curse of madness. Presumably there were Haarlocks before Mordecai – he had a mother and a father like all men. So he's not literally 'the first'. But he is the first to fall into darkness. It is with him the taint gets into the family and the madness begins.

Time travel: Erasmus Haarlock is literally both the first and the last of his line. When Erasmus reaches the end of the line (by using the Blind Tesseract) he experiences many pasts and possible futures. He eventually comes to understand that he, Erasmus, is actually also Mordecai, the first Haarlock. This represents something of a dilemma in that that by traveling in time Erasmus actually started the chain of events that would lead to the death of his loved ones. But perhaps he figured better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all. If you use this assumption Erasmus started out with nothing but a new name (Mordecai) and built his trade empire from the ground up down in Jericho.

SPIDERS AND CLOCKWORK

Mordecai Haarlock used a golden spider clutching the Aquila as his symbol. The spider has been the symbol of the clan of the Haarlocks ever since. Quite fitting since the Haarlocks have always been secretive, manipulative, and somewhat homicidal. If you went with the time travel option Erasmus is making sure the Haarlocks end up in Calixis and discovered the Tyrant Star – it's the only way he can be sure he'll be born, fall in love, get a daughter, and harness the power of the Tyrant Star (only the next time he'll make sure his loved ones do not die). The fascination with clockwork devices is a more recent development, but it was begun well before Erasmus' time. It came as a result of the death of Tanis, a world in the Hazeroth Abyss in 709.M40. A hereto unnamed Haarlock (we'll call him **Jerome**) was there to witness the event. He lived, but was a man changed after being bathed in the radiance of the Black Sun. Jerome went to Quaddis, murdered his way into the position of Planetary Regent and subsequently built the Widower to protect his interests and the Steel Clock to keep track of future conjunctions of the Tyrant Star. Erasmus learned a lot of what he needed to know from these two devices, paving the way for such things as the Gilded Widow, the Clockwork Auger, and eventually the mechanism that controlled the Blind Tesseract.

If you went with the dark taint option much of the same holds true, but with one important exception. Mordecai had an encounter with the Tyrant Star back in his day. That was what turned his mind and began the taint. Under this option the Haarlock clan's fascination with clockwork devices (specifically the semi-insane and borderline warp-tainted ones) go way back. You can have the Widower and/or the Steel Clock be far older artefacts. Made by Mordecai himself. Jerome can still play a part. As the first Haarlock since Mordecai that witnessed the Black Sun first hand.

FROM BEYOND 'THE GRAVE'

In keeping with the spider symbology the Haarlocks have a way of influencing things even after their deaths or disappearances. It started with Mordecai who definitely set up his pieces as to influence the way his line progressed. And Erasmus set in motion many events – such as the House of Dust and Ash incident – to control the development of history even after he had left the sector behind. It can be assumed that their ability to exert control from beyond the grave is linked to their mad clockwork mechanisms, malefic more, vast resources, and an unprecedented understanding of past, present, and future. If you can get your players to say stuff like 'how could Haarlock have foreseen this?' or 'surely he can't be dead, he's just hiding and directing everything from the shadows' you know you're doing it right.

Relatedly Erasmus could not care less about his estate. Or so it seemed to the peers of the Calixis sector. In reality Haarlock had left behind detailed instructions with some of his most trusted servants as to how they were to proceed in his absence. The House of Dust and Ash incident was a carefully orchestrated event that spanned centuries, made to draw in and eliminate any stray survivors (however distant) of the Haarlock line that might yet live. At the same time that very event (and others like it) was designed to draw attention to Haarlock, as to urge suitable candidates to seek out the Blind Tesseract and pave the way for Erasmus Haarlock's return since he cannot get back from Komus unaided.

USING THE PUBLISHED ADVENTURES

Assuming you want to make the Haarlock Legacy the linchpin of your campaign and run it as written (plus whatever additions you'd like to make of your own devising) there is no 'One Right Way' to play out the four published scenarios. You can run any of HoDaA, TF and DC as the first scenario. Or you can go for the alternate solution presented here. It's not necessarily a better way, but it is interesting enough to deserve a mention.

Prior adventures and interludes: If your PCs start out at Rank 1 they are useless mooks that hardly deserve to be called Acolytes. Maybe Acolytes in training, but that's about it. If these guys are to save the entire sector it stands to reason they should have some skill and experience. So start by running a few basic scenarios to let them get to know the setting, the rules, and how to work together. Then hit them with the first Haarlock scenario when you feel they are ready. Unless you plan on handing out loads of XP for everything you'll probably need to put in some interlude adventures as well, which will only help accentuate the importance of the 'real' missions. It's also best to let the story develop over the course of at least a few years – in M41 things take time – so be liberal with narrative downtime between missions.

Damned Cities: Normally the second main part Damned Cities actually makes for a good introductory adventure with investigation, interaction, action, and some nice foreshadowing of what is to come. With minimal effort it can be a balanced and interesting adventure for relatively junior Acolytes (say Rank 3-4) that requires absolutely zero prior knowledge of the Haarlock legacy. Actually the storm over Haarlock's Folly that triggers the daemon's actions can well be the trigger that kicks off Erasmus' endgame. Assuming you've run a couple of other adventures already to set the scene this could well be the first 'real' mission the Acolytes undertake for their Inquisitor. Not only do they get to travel to another world on his behalf, but they are to investigate something of personal significance for their master. Significant enough that he personally briefs them and underlines the importance of the mission. Let him confide in them that he suspects sorcerous or malefic involvement (they're in the Inquisition after all) and that he urges them to be both extremely cautious and thorough. No need to mention Haarlock yet, since the Inquisition doesn't yet know that Haarlock's legacy has begun to stir.

House of Dust and Ash: Knowing something of Haarlock and his legacy makes it much easier to become emotionally invested in this adventure. It's a relatively short adventure, but it can easily be expanded into a full-blown instalment. Just add a few interesting NPCs going to the auction aboard the same ship as the PCs, then add a little murder and mayhem on board, plus an external attack by wrecker ships (local savage scavengers). Well inside there is no reason not to add even more colourful characters and exiting/weird items. You could even stick in one or two people from Calixis' Most Wanted (I personally used Tobias Belasco to good effect once). Finally let Inquisitor Herrod from Dead Stars preside over the auction for maximum foreshadowing (he must be presumed dead after the scenario). Expand upon the action inside by making it a running battle in pitch black with the Children of the Kingdom running amok. The PCs will need to find allies to stay alive – and get out before the bell tolls. Run that way it's an excellent adventure for experienced (say Rank 5-6) Acolytes.

Tattered Fates: Losing all their stuff will hurt more of veteran Acolytes, which is why it happens late in their careers. At the same time the Haarlock angle will make it more palatable – getting screwed don't feel as bad when it's the big bad villain that's doing it to you. Rather than making players feel helpless AND snubbed it will motivate them to work harder to get their revenge. The Red Cages part can be expanded a bit. First pit the Acolytes against an array of opponents in the pit, letting Jackal Mask and Heron Mask be present from time to time. This will personify their anger and make them all the more eager to find these villains (but Heron Mask's aid might make them a little more positive towards him). Inquisitor Karkalla should ideally be replaced with the Acolyte's own Inquisitor (or one of his close allies if the GM peers). Make sure the players know that they can trust no-one up in the city – the scenario works best with the PCs undercover and paranoid. If they want to get back at Jackal Mask – let them find him and deal with him. It shouldn't be easy, but it should be possible. If they follow this path also let them get back some of their choicer equipment. Plus if they interrogate Jackal (also difficult) he can share some of his misgivings about Heron with them, foreshadowing what is to come. Do feel free to play up the power of the Pilgrims of Hayte, and especially Heron. When it becomes apparent that things aren't going according to plan Heron will flee unless the PCs do something terribly clever (allowing him to return in Dead Stars). For high-ranking Acolytes (Rank 7+).

Dead Stars: Obviously the last instalment however you look at it. Can be run pretty much as written. Players should ideally be very high rank (at least Rank 8, but preferably low-Ascended). Because let's face it, the fate of the sector isn't something you leave in the hands of amateurs. If the players' Inquisitor died in TF it even makes half sense for the Acolytes (at this stage at least one should be an Interrogator) to be on their own with the fate of the sector weighing heavily on them. If he's alive he should come with them – or alternatively the Conclave could send someone else to direct and aid the players. Alternatively you can make a PC into a full Inquisitor if there is a worth candidate. At any rate the PC should have the best support the Conclave can muster (without running the players' shine of course).

Final confrontation: The conclusion of the Haarlock legacy can feel a bit unsatisfactory. You do get the choice of stopping Haarlock or allowing him to return. This can be important in and of itself, particularly if the GM has alluded to the fact that bad things will happen even if Haarlock is stopped (in some regards it might actually be worse!). By now the PCs probably have a reason to dislike Haarlock quite a bit. Plus duty pretty much demand they put an end to his shenanigans. So the bet is they decide to stop him. This is where it gets a bit lame...a well-placed grenade is suggested as the culminating moment of this epic storyline! It is suggested that if players want to stop Haarlock's return they'll have an epic fight on their hands. Depending on which nature of the Tyrant star the GM has picked Haarlocks support can differ a bit – if you've picked the Hive Mind opting there will be Tyranids galore, if you've picked the C'tan there will be Necrons, and so on. Don't be afraid to hammer players down to their last fate points, but keep them in fighting shape. As they struggle desperately to knock out the door while fighting these nasty critters they must also contend with a partially returned Haarlock that steps forth to battle the Acolytes. Same applies here; if you went with the Malal option Haarlock will be a weakened Daemon Prince for example. The fight should be really desperate. It's not the time to save Fate Points. Dead Acolytes are acceptable. When now they manage to close the door and ruin Haarlock's return they'll feel a real sense of accomplishment and have an inkling of the true nature – and might – of Komus. It doesn't get much better than that. If they decide to let him return make sure they feel their choice matters, let them know what Komus is and what awaits the sector – for good and for bad (mostly the latter).