

The Great Crusade

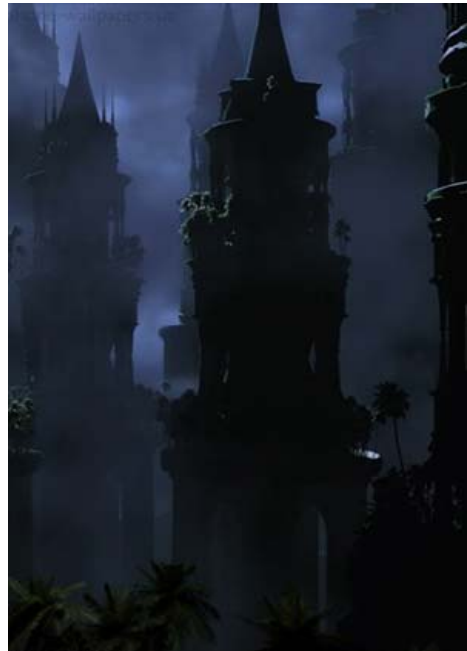
The Compliance of Gedren Prime

Campaign Setting

Blood and Ore

The Gedren system is little more than a collection of dusty mining colonies, tucked away from the predations of the myriad xenos races inhabiting the Mortense Drift. The only exception is the huge and densely populated Gedren Prime, governed by the eleven immeasurably wealthy Fief-lords who extract vast quantities of the volatile Pyrox ore to fuel the reactors of their industrial complex.

Each of the thousands of Pyrox mines throughout the system pay nominal fealty to whichever Fief-lord can currently lay claim to them, usually as the result of sudden and violent military coups which occur roughly every few months as they wage ongoing wars of conquest and attrition against their rivals. As one lord is ousted from control of a mine, his successor takes over and must begin to work the ore deposits as quickly as possible before he in turn is ousted by another. With each transition, the local labour force is subjugated to the rule of the conqueror, but little changes other than the destination of their ore shipments.



Pyrox mining is exceptionally dangerous, and it is said that the bedrock of every planet in the system is stained red with the blood of countless billions of miners who have died at the workplace. The ore itself is unstable and prone to radioactive decay, and once the process begins it devolves into ever more dangerous and explosive isotopes which react with the raw form of the mineral. However the Fief-lords of Gedren are happy to take such risks, as the harnessed energy of Pyrox has driven the wheels of their capital planet's industry for millennia and kept the noble families at the top of their brutal feudal hierarchy: in order to defend their territories, they must have more soldiers and better weaponry; therefore they must mine more Pyrox to increase their industrial output; and the easiest way to acquire more mines is to seize those of their rivals.



The workforce is, therefore, of paramount importance to the cycle of economic conquest at the heart of Gedren's society, and the dangers of constant warfare and Pyrox mining means that the mortality rate among miners and shipment handlers is almost 99 percent. Imperial envoys were at a loss to explain how such a system could continue indefinitely, until they made an alarming discovery in the northern polar region of Gedren Prime – vast medicae facilities many hundreds of kilometres across work unceasingly to churn out thousands of vat-born clones to work the mines and fill out the ranks of the Fief-lords' armies. Essentially, aside from the noble families and a few bloodlines of loyal serfs and bondsmen, the entire population of Gedren is composed of genetically altered clone labourers bred solely to perpetuate the rule of the eleven Fief-lords, and paid for with the profits of their own toil.

Knowledge is Power

At first it was difficult to understand how such a relatively lo-tech civilisation might have had access to advanced genetics facilities to rival even those of Terra itself, but the explanation fills in all the blanks in the mystery of Gedren. On one of the frozen moons of Gedren V lay a darkened vault-complex dating back to before the Age of Strife, and populated by a cadre of priests of the Martian Mechanicum. Descended directly from the ancient original crew of the small research outpost charged with investigating the properties and applications of Pyrox compounds, they had continued their solitary work down through the generations while avoiding the attentions of xenos and humans alike.

Over the course of centuries, their research ground to a halt as industrial accidents claimed more of the priesthood – the volatile Pyrox ore, even when refined and stabilised in the isolation chambers of the Mechanicum, was still as hazardous as ever. As their already small gene-pool was diminished with each loss, they reluctantly began to abandon their task and archive the remaining data.



But then, almost accidentally, the priesthood made contact with the warring barbarian factions of Gedren Prime: here was a lost human civilisation that already knew something of Pyrox mining, and which could be exploited to serve the needs of the priesthood. Seeing the greed of the burly tribal chiefs, they bartered the secrets of las weaponry, gene-manipulation and limited space flight in exchange for a stake in all future Pyrox mining throughout the system, with tithes to be paid in isotopes and stable ore so that their own research might continue once more. At the very hour of their greatest need, they had found a workforce that would be willing and able to provide all the Pyrox they could ever require in exchange for but a few of the secrets of mankind's lost technology.



Over the centuries, the Mechanicum priests had kept a watchful and custodial eye over the Gedren cloning facilities, but seemed only vaguely bemused by the greedy and warlike nature of the planet's natives. In time however, the Fief-lords lost most of the original clone hosts among the casualties of war and Pyrox mining, and second- and third-generation clones were created from those who had come before... until eventually there were no genetic humans remaining among the main population. All culture and advancement was lost to the voracious cycle of invasion and industry, yet the tithes continued to flow out to the moon base and the priests were free to continue their work safely away from the conflicts of the Fief-lords.

The Coming of the Imperium

When representatives from the expeditionary fleets of the Imperium first made contact with the inhabitants of Gedren III, the glassy-eyed miners directed them to the regional governor who in turn pointed them to the system's capital. Fief-lord Nihl Macon greeted the ambassadorial entourage with some contempt, and flatly refused to take part in any diplomatic negotiations before driving them from his palace at gunpoint in a characteristic fit of pique.

His attitude was mirrored by the other ten Fief-lords, reluctant to surrender what they considered the source of their hereditary wealth and power in the Pyrox mines, and astropathic relays soon brought word from the Emperor that the system was to be made compliant. More vessels began to arrive through the Warp as representatives from the twenty Legions Astartes began to make preparations for the invasion of the system's social, political and economic heart... Gedren Prime.