

GAZETTEER: SOLACE

"Never has a ripper prize hung before you than this world, for beneath the mask of Solace twists ever the will of Chaos..."

—Words of the Many-Eyed, Oracle of Chaos

Colonist began to settle Solace even before the Angevin Crusade had completed. Preliminary auguries and portents confirmed of the world could not wait for the end of the interminable conflict, and so colonists deemed "suitable" for this rough, unshaped world—including an exceptionally high percentage of penal colonists—were dispatched to Solace. This first wave of colonists worked under the direct supervision of Adeptus Mechanicus elements from the crusading forces. Hardy individuals were tithed from harsh worlds across what would become the Calixis Sector and Koronus Expanse and relocated to Solace; these new arrivals were promptly put to work extracting the phenomenal mineral wealth that rested beneath the world's surface.

During these early days on Solace, countless small vessels flitted back and forth between the mines and much larger craft in orbit, creating a glittering flow of lights in Solace's sky that blotted out even the stars. From orbit, the massive ships transported the fruits of their labour to forge worlds, where the ore and other materials were forged into the equipment necessary to continue the crusade to conquer the Calyx Expanse. Some religious scholars on Solace claim that, were it not for the wealth extracted from their world and the many who shed their blood to get it, the crusade might have run out of raw materials and faltered.

Of course, precise records from this period are fragmentary. The Imperial forces in the region were so focused upon prosecuting the crusade that minor details—particularly those associated with procurement—were often not properly recorded. However, the amount of raw materials extracted from the planet seems to have been truly extraordinary. Further, many of these materials seem to have been combined into

alloys that were ready for manufacturing almost immediately, requiring very little refinement. Some historians have speculated that this was simply evidence that the materials had been illegally obtained from another, undocumented Imperial asset. Other, more radical elements have argued that this could be compelling evidence that the world was once home to a sophisticated xenos species, and that the alloys were all that remained of a long-dead civilisation.

Regardless of whether or not the materials came from Solace, one factor is clear. Assignment to the mining facilities on Solace was a death sentence. Few, if any, of the tens of thousands of colonists sent into these facilities ever returned. Official Imperial records indicate that this was due to toxic elements present in the mines and a lack of faith amongst the workers.

The legends, however, are far darker. They speak of unholy terrors that lurked beneath the planet's surface. Oral histories, passed down through the generations, say that there were xenos dwelling far beneath the surface. These tales indicate that the dark things were only banished after the blessed Drusus visited the world and expunged them in the name of the God-Emperor. There are no official records of St. Drusus ever having visited Solace, but the population still reveres him as the man who cleansed their world and liberated them from terror and death at the hands of shadows and nightmares.



THE CASTUS LEVY

Solace has a long history of military service thanks to the veterans who settled it originally. All able-bodied men and women of Solace are required to perform a period of service within the planet's defensive military, known as the Castus Levy. This is typically a five-year term. Often, a large portion of this service is devoted toward maintaining planetary peace within the now tightly crowded Imperial hives. However, roughly once a generation, the Castus Levy are called upon to repel a significant xenos incursion. Solace's assets are sufficient to regularly draw the attention of the greedy, who think that it might be a world ripe for conquest. To date, none of those assaults have succeeded.

Solace has also gladly tithed full regiments to the Imperial Guard upon fourteen separate occasions. Most often drawn from the ranks of the Castus Levy, these regiments proved their devotion to the Emperor by their noble acts of sacrifice to carry on the glorious tradition of the Imperial Guard. While none of these regiments managed to assemble a particularly prestigious roll of service, none disgraced their home world.

Even among the Imperial Guard, the Castus Levy often exhibit an exceptional level of devotion to the Imperial Creed. Those who interact with them often consider them particularly pious. Some argue that this reaction may be a consequence of their uniforms as much as anything else. This is because those of the Castus Levy invariably wear a chasuble over their armour and kit, proudly displaying the iconography of their devotion upon a field of purest white.

THE FIRST HIVES

As the Angevin Crusade wound down, there were few resources to transport the surviving soldiers back to their worlds of origin. Consequently, many were simply delivered to Solace, where they were left. While a minority saw this as a just reward, permitting those who had worked so hard to enjoy the fruits of their labours of war, only a scant few of the newly retired soldiers looked upon their new lot in life as a blessing. While the soldiers now lived without the immanent certainty of a violent death, they also possessed few skills and assets with which to forge their survival. The functionaries of the Adeptus Administratum were no longer willing to provide them with clothing, food, and shelter. Instead, it was up to the soldiers themselves to make their way where and how they might.

At the conclusion of the Angevin Crusade, the Adeptus Mechanicus still had a significant number of assets active in the Solace system. Before all of the elements in the system were reassigned, however, a cunning administrator requested that the manufactorums' available capacity be put to immediate use. Taking advantage of some of the already available raw materials, the manufactorums built rudimentary settlements to house the veterans of the crusade and let them continue to serve the Imperium. While toiling upon Solace was hardly a pleasant prospect, it might have seemed less terrible than the brutal warzones of the Angevin Crusade.

Eventually, what began as a barren mining world became the home of six fully functional Imperial hives, most dedicated to further mining operations. The Adeptus Mechanicus had built facilities that housed the original colonists, and these structures gradually grew into the massive, towering spires of Solace's hives as generation upon generation built upon them.

PLANETARY LEADERSHIP

The leadership of Solace treads a dangerously narrow path. In what some factions in the Calixis Sector revile as a violation of Imperial regulations, the Planetary Governor of Solace has always been, since the early days of the colonies there, an Ecclesiarchal Cardinal. While this is not strictly in violation of the Decree Passive, the Planetary Governor is the supreme commander of the defence forces of any given world, and the Cardinal who governs Solace has always been eyed with suspicion as a result. The argument has been made, by some, that as neither the sector Lord nor an Inquisitor has chosen to take action upon this matter, the governance of Solace must be divinely ordained.

Because of the piety of its rulers, the populace of Solace has shown few deviances from the Imperial Creed over the centuries. There are remarkably few known incidents of heresy on Solace—at least until the Heretics arrive.



BEYOND THE HIVES

Even before its great hive spires and the fires of industry blackened the sky, Solace was never a world hospitable for colonisation. Its surface is harsh and largely devoid of water, and its atmosphere was only technically breathable before the fires of human industry poured countless pollutants into the air. The mineral resources beneath its surface, however, were reason enough for the Imperium to claim Solace and condemn millions to toil in vast, cavernous mines, extracting ore and other valuable materials. This worldwide ruin, however, is fertile soil for the schemes of the Heretics, for mutants and other wretched creatures quickly turned to the cause of Chaos skulk beyond the bounds of the hives and even in the dark, long-forgotten corners of these massive cities.

Outside of the all-protective enclosures built to house the miners, Solace is little more than a hellish wasteland. Its atmosphere has become even more polluted from the waste that the hives generate. The mines are no longer actively worked by anything more than a skeleton crew. The population centres are capable of producing a significant percentage of their own foodstuffs through fungal farming in long-depleted mineshafts and nutrient reclamation techniques. Still, imported food and other supplies are crucial to the survival of Solace's people (and, more importantly, to its ongoing productivity). Without the support of other worlds in the subsector, the hives of Solace would be utterly unsustainable. This makes it an ideal target for the Heretics.



When people leave the relative safety of the hives, they must contend with a dangerous atmosphere and predators who are far better evolved to deal with the dangerous conditions. Much of the world's surface is little more than barren rock that offers no shelter from the planet's scorching daytime heat. As a consequence, travel between the hives most commonly takes place via subterranean tunnels that were adapted to that purpose from the world's ancient mines.

THE SPINWARD FRONT

In recent years, the Calixis Sector has devoted an ever-increasing portion of its resources toward the ongoing war in the Spinward Front. Solace's location along a Warp route makes it a prime location for assembling goods from the subsector before they are reloaded onto transports destined for the Periphery. The fact that the hives have some manufacturing capacity only accentuates this, as many of the raw materials can be transformed into goods that are directly useful in the war effort.

As a consequence, the war effort has been a major boon for the planet. Solace's manufactorums have never been more productive, and the Adeptus Administratum has allocated far more resources than usual to the upkeep and expansion of the infrastructure on Solace as a result. Morale has also significantly improved, as the populace feels that they are acting directly in the service of the Imperium and contributing to the war against the xenos.

Such is the fervour among the Castus Levy that many of the planet's youth have even been reluctant to end their enlistment after the mandatory five years. Enough of the recruits have zealously sustained their service to the extent that the world has already contacted the Adeptus Administratum about raising a regiment, even before their next tithe is due. The wheels have already been set in motion to see that this happens quickly, ostensibly to help with the effort in the Spinward Front.

The only major danger is that this has been disruptive to many of the hives' integral processes and systems. The increased workload has begun to decrease the time that most citizens have available for worship. The sheer number of the planet's youth preparing to join the Imperial Guard could even decrease the overcrowding in some of the hives. It is too early for any certainty, but by the time the war for control of the Spinward Front concludes, Solace could be a world dramatically transformed.

RESOURCES AT HAND

With the flow of new materials to the world, Solace's storage facilities are bursting with resources. With their enthusiasm for the war effort, many of the planet's inhabitants have put themselves to the metaphoric plough such as to astound the functionaries of the Administratum. As a consequence, raw materials and manufactured goods have been produced even faster than they could be transported to the Spinward Front. With every day, additional spaces not intended for storage have had to be used to house the surplus. At their current pace, some of the living quarters in the hive cities might have to be used to hold materials destined for the soldiers in the Spinward Front.

This excess of useful materials has drawn the attention of some less pious and law-abiding parties. Criminal elements have begun to take note of these supplies and speculate on how they might be used for personal gain rather than the good of the Imperium. At least one Rogue Trader has taken advantage of this overflow to fill his holds with undocumented supplies.

As word spreads of this manufacturing and storage capacity, it is likely that elements from beyond the Imperium might take an interest. This could include both xenos and heretical threats (such as the Heretics themselves). Just as this wealth of equipment and supplies can contribute in a meaningful way to the war that the Imperium wages, they could also be used against it. While enlistment in the Castus Levy is high, Solace's defensive plans are not designed for a world as desirable as it has suddenly become. If a well-organised attack plan were implemented, Solace's security and strategic position would be in grave peril. In turn, this would place many extraordinarily useful assets at a level of tremendous risk, and would leave the Calixis Sector without many of the raw materials it relies upon to prosecute the war in the Spinward Front.

Currently, the Calixis Sector can ill afford a loss of this magnitude, but it also lacks the available resources to reallocate for improving the planet's modest defences. Vulnerable but crucial to the stability of the region, Solace lies in easy grasp of the Heretics' dark ambitions. By crippling it, they could strike a devastating blow against the hated Imperium of Man.

