

## Other Military Forces

The Order of the Gryphon is not alone out there on the field of organised conflict, as you may well expect. Pretty much every Dominion has a standing army, the Five Churches have their militant wing - even the damn wizards have got themselves the **Vaes Inquisitat**.

Every soldier needs to earn their keep and cut their teeth somewhere, and the first step to winning a conflict is knowing your enemy.

The Order recruits its Oathsworn from across the board, garnering specialists and professionals from all walks of life. While I'll discuss the standing armies of each Dominion at the end of *Quint's* doubtless-insightful *Gazetteers*, and the *Knights Militant* following the overview of the Churches, there are a few other forces which don't neatly fit into those boxes. Most of these are mercenary forces, sell-swords practising across the Dominions (especially in Croxin, damn them. Like bloody children, they are) but there are one or two more iniquitous bastards out there you should probably know about too.

To that end, I've prepared a brief summary of some of the major players out there that you may encounter - or hell, even have been recruited from. Read, learn, and remember - a soldier's best weapon is his wits. Keep them sharp.

*Oathsworn Captain Zannit Basticore,  
Order of the Gryphon*

## **The Raven Corps**

The Raven Corps were started 40 years ago in Scarrow by Raven Patriarch Darrion Vock, which makes them one of the longest-surviving mercenary organisations still in current service. One of the reasons for that, perhaps, is the extremely unorthodox method in which they operate.

When an employer hires the Raven Corps, they pay in units of four: one senior necromancer (a Raven Father); two junior necromancers (Raven Brothers) and one heavy infantry bodyguard (a Raven Son). Under the watchful auspices of the Raven Father, the cell proceed to recruit preliminary "soldiers" and then use those troops against their designated enemy, replacing any losses from the ranks of the fallen of either side.

Understandably, the Raven Corps are a feared bunch, and often the sight of their trademark ragged black cloaks and banner is enough to turn a battle - especially against conscript troops or inexperienced militia. It goes without saying that the Raven Corps are all sanctioned necromancers under the enforcements of the College of Enlightenment, and police their own ranks rigorously.

There is another defining quirk about the Raven Corps which set them apart from the average disciple of Shadow magics. When they were first formed, Vock decided that the reason necromancers - and those with an Affinity for Shadow in general - were disliked was not because of their practises but because of their secretive nature and unhealthy attitude. After all magic is magic is magic, but good company counts for everything. To that end, Vock insists that all of his Corps be terrifying on the field of battle, and entertaining off it.

This makes the Raven Corps a damn good laugh to get drunk with. It's even better when the cell in question are, by nature, surly miserable bastards trying desperately hard to not be. My recommendation? Spring for a round of Kemri Firewine, challenge them to a drinking contest, then call the Raven Father a corpse-poking swill-prick. Now *that's* a way to end an evening!

## Günter's Shield

Günter's Shield are a relatively new addition to the mercenary roster, born out of the constant bickering and manoeuvring of the city-states of Croxin. Founded by a Scarrowite (as so many of these rag-bag organisations are) named Günter Ragnaldsson, Günter's Shield specialise in defensive fighting. They are particularly at home defending sieges, and while their units are never particularly manoeuvrable, they do have some of the finest heavy infantry available for the discerning warlord-to-be.

They had a well-publicised rivalry with a group called the Fist of Destiny, who specialised in breaking sieges. Many times, the Shield would hold a place and the Fist would try to take it, with the commanders of both taking bets on who would crack first. This all ended badly when the leader of the Fist - a monkey-toucher named Finnegan - tried to rig the deck, by betting on himself to lose then surrendering. While he won enough money to pay off his mountainous debts, he also got executed for being a piss-taking prick by his unimpressed employer, who got wind of the scam. The Fist disbanded, with some of them joining up with the Shield to replace their losses, and the rest either retiring or spreading out amongst the other smaller groups around.

There's a moral there, somewhere.

## The Gloaming Cut

Ah, the Gloaming Cut. One of the finest and prestigious mercenary companies currently on the field, the Gloaming Cut are the only extant independent military force dating from the inception of the Order of the Gryphon, and indeed many former Gloaming Cut mercenaries find themselves taking the Oaths and Vows of the Gryphon when their time in the field runs out.

A large organisation, based in Chasco but recruiting from all Dominions - and indeed even recruiting Shifted warriors - forces of the Cut can be rented in sizes from single, specialised operatives through to the whole battalion. Retired Cut officers are also still in demand, acting as drill sergeants, tacticians-for-hire, security consultants and the like.

Due to their size, the Cut own and operate the Citadel Gloaming - a vast fortress-monastery in the Cairnwreck Mountains, only a few miles from the borders of the Shifting, where new recruits may test their mettle against the twisted beasts which predate across the boundaries.

Outside of the Order, the Cut are some of the best and baddest you'll run up against, and we in the Order do like to try to poach their brightest stars, leading to a friendly rivalry between us. Still, if your back's to the wall and you've got the funds, the Cut are the best you'll find outside of your Oathsworn brethren.

## **Mistborn Marauders**

The Mistborn Marauders are what Harkin's Heroes wishes they could be. While they do recruit some normal folk, the vast bulk of the Marauders are made up of Shifted soldiers, who have been "volunteered" for military service, and had their contracts bought out by the Marauder's upper echelon.

The leader of the Marauders is an un-Shifted human who calls herself Lady Shimmer. No-one knows if she is a true noble-born, but the sheer amount of money and influence she throws around would lend credence to that idea. Also, the nobles tend to be a bit touchy about that sort of thing, and if she wasn't a Lady, I suspect she'd have been messily executed by now.

The Marauders are organised according to speciality, and tend to be grouped by race. They generally operate in squads of between five and ten soldiers, backed up by a squad mage. At present, following a mid-conflict betrayal by the no-longer extant group called Fugue State, the Marauders are holed up in the city-state of Kumm licking their wounds and recruiting new members.

## The Fifth

Some of the Dominions have a nasty habit of conscript soldiers. It's a bloody terrible idea, because if you force a man to fight you've no guarantee of his loyalty. That said, it remains a popular pass-time, especially in places like Scarrow and Chasco, where they're fighting a battle every day against the Shifted menace.

About ten years ago, a conscript battalion - the Fifth Conscripts, if you can imagine the creativity of that - fought a long retreat against a surge of Shifted horrors bursting out from the lost fiefdom of Darkeil. Their commander got himself snuffed early on, and the Fifth found themselves under the leadership of a junior officer called Sigrid Ash. Well, old Sigrid wouldn't let the Fifth flee, as many wanted to, and instead impressed on them the torment that'd be visited on the innocent peasants and serfs if they fled and left the beasties to run rampant.

Fuelled by guilt - and probably a fair old bit of bloodlust - the Fifth decided to stay and defend the line after all. It took three weeks for them to be relieved, and in that time they'd taken over 50% casualties. However, the tide was repulsed and many hundreds of lives saved. As a reward, the Jarl granted them all their freedom, then offered them a permanent retainer. Now, a serious criminal or a freshly Shifted citizen has a choice - death, conscription, or a place in the Fifth. Most choose the Fifth, making this once of the largest (if ill-trained) independent forces out there.

## Harkin's Heroes

If ever there were an ill-named bunch of misanthropes, the foul degenerates calling themselves "Harkin's Heroes" must surely fit the bill. Named after a fallen Shifted "martyr" named Harkin Bass, they have rapidly made a name for themselves by committing acts of horror across the Seven Dominions.

Speaking purely from an ideological point of view, there can be some sympathy for the "Heroes". Entirely composed of Shifted refugees and criminals, their final aim is for equality for all people, be they Shifted or not; for Shifted people to have granted back to them the rights they enjoyed before they lost their souls and physical wholesomeness; and that is a laudable goal, one supposes.

Alas, the methods they use to achieve such an end is more self-destructive than any perceived iniquities - they commit acts of aggression and disruption against the established hegemony; they forcefully and intentionally expose innocent people to the Shifting in order to warp their forms and will; and repeatedly commit acts of economic sabotage, causing disharmony across the land at a time when stability is clearly needed.

It goes without saying, that proven membership - or even affiliation with - Harkin's Heroes is an offence punishable by summary execution. Hell, if I find out, I'll do it myself. Scum.