

The Armoury

'We do not intend to spend this campaign fighting ghosts.'

- From a report on Faction Paradox, filed by the 79th Sontaran Assault Corps.

Despite its talent for irritating and/ or appalling the other Great Houses, at heart Faction Paradox is a bloodline in itself, and like all bloodlines tends to think of its own House as being a single entity: a thousand-year-old process, in which each individual is merely a servant of the family line. As a result, when new members are recruited from the lesser species it's common for the Faction to think of them as tools, as weapons, as extensions of the Faction itself rather than as actual people. When the Faction uses technology, that technology's often biological in nature, designed to "upgrade" agents into more efficient tools.

It's perhaps unwise to think of the Sontarans as a 'species', as such. A homunculus breed, hatched by the million and engineered for full-engagement warfare, the Sontaran military machine is regarded by many time-active cultures as an 'occupational hazard': a force of nature rather than a race, compelled by duty and genetics to acquire new technologies for its endless war effort. It should be remembered, however, that with the backing of a higher power even the crudest of breeds can become something quite different...The principal weapon of any Faction recruit is the side-arm which he or she has bound to him or her during the initiation process, but to understand what this means it's first necessary to explain the relationship between Faction Paradox and what might be called shadowplay.

Shadows are an important part of the Faction's culture: perhaps it's only to be expected, given the family's obsession with carnival-style stagecraft. It's a belief of the Faction, for example, that the state of a member's shadow deteriorates with exposure to the rituals/ procedures of time-control. Though trained Faction agents have the ability to move from one point in history to another without much difficulty, each time the process is used the traveller's shadow is thought to become slightly weaker, until the time comes where a veteran agent could lose it altogether.

Again, it's difficult to justify this belief in terms of conventional science. The implication seems to be that the more an agent exposes him/ herself to the rituals of Paradox, the less real he or she becomes, until eventually the universe itself will forget that he/ she exists and not even bother to apply the usual physics of light and shade (it's hard not to think of the old vampire legends here, the idea that vampires don't cast reflections because they're somehow less than natural). Once again, it has to be remembered that the techniques of Faction Paradox are based on the principle that a perceived universe is easier to manipulate than any actual universe. Whatever the scientific reality, the fact that members believe the continuum itself to be turning its back on them says a lot about the way they see themselves.

The point is that in the lore of the Faction, the shadow's a symbol of the greatest importance. Losing your shadow is, at least for new recruits, a concept not unlike the medieval fear of losing your soul. Yet this belief has led to the development of a very specific technology, or possibly a very specific kind of ritual, practised by Faction Paradox but not by any other House: shadow-weaponry. On full initiation a new recruit always goes through a ceremony of binding, or armament ritual, in which a weapon of his or her choice is somehow attached to his or her own biology (a ceremony which has, incidentally, never been witnessed by anyone outside the "family"). The effect of this ritual is unclear, but opponents of Faction Paradox have discovered to their cost that after the binding, the Faction's agents are in some way able to use their shadows as if they were weapons in their own right.

There's a certain logic to this, at least within the Faction's own philosophy. The shadow is an extension of the self; in a sense, it's the link between the physical body and the mysteries of the time-control rituals ergo, this shadow-tool is the best weapon an agent can possess.

The Faction has other armaments at its disposal, of course, most of them far more conventional. However, agents in the field (i.e. the outside universe) usually operate under cover, and as a rule don't travel with heavy weaponry. Only those stationed inside the Eleven-Day Empire are generally found wearing the Faction's distinctive combat armour, distinctive because each suit is wrought out of the skeleton of a being slightly larger than the wearer, the bones held in position by self-repairing sealant and laced with bio-mechanical systems designed to directly link the armour to its user. Naturally, the suits are built for combat in a wide range of environments, and therefore provide the wearer with both air and pressure-protection. The decision to use bone as the basis for the suits was partly an aesthetic one - the Faction once again flying in the face of good taste - and partly to do with the ritualistic nature of all its hardware: there is, according to Paradox lore, great totemic power stored in the bones of dead giants. (For more on the nature of these giants, see the notes on the Yssgaroth in the History section.)

Faction Paradox has little interest in the timeships used by the other Houses, although the Eleven-Day Empire does control a small fleet of powerful, skeletal warships - presumably built from the bones of even greater giants - permanently manned by large, well-trained crews. Six of these vessels are currently known to exist, on the scale of universal politics a force far too small to threaten the status quo. The Eleven-Day Empire itself is theoretically protected by smaller airborne craft, but it's considered unlikely that the capital will ever really find itself under attack, and the craft are mainly used for training purposes by the Faction's military wing. So far, the only "threats" to the city have come from those few time-active vehicles which have strayed into the Faction's territory by mistake-although many in the Parliament feel that it's only a matter of time before one of the Great Houses notices the presence of such a major Faction powerbase, and tries to do something about it.

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