

DARK MAGENTA

A brief synopsis of Ynek's 'character creation process', using one of his more well-documented characters, 'the Hive Maiden' as an example

By Kenny Gardner

Don't let my overly-wordy title scare you away. I could have gone with a more cryptic, yet eye-catching title such as 'The toad princess in the forty first millenium' or 'A royal freak', but I felt that neither of these would give the reader an accurate impression as to what this article is about. So, in the end, I opted for a less characterful, but more informative and accurate title.

As the title describes, this article was written as an attempt to give the reader an idea of how I go about creating my characters, which have often been praised for their originality and plausibility. In this article, I intend to describe an example of my creative process in action from the initial spark of inspiration right through to the finished character, complete with statistics, rules, background and a visually pleasing miniature.

In all my days of creating characters, not just Inquisitor characters, I often find that characters will create themselves. I like to call this phenomenon the 'snowball' effect, because like a snowball, you start off with something small, get it rolling and it begins to grow quite rapidly. The process seems to be quite organic, and it's possible to weave an entire character using only a couple of sentences that you have found in another character's background story relatively easily.

Allow me to explain. My first Inquisitor character was Yomassa, a kroot mercenary who had been left behind on an Imperial world after the Rend Kindred (my 40k kroot mercenary army) had departed. This kroot had later found employment as an assassin for a local crime lord, Tarvus Ardane.

Originally, Tarvus was simply included in Yomassa's background as an explanation of who he worked for, but over time, he began to become more and more of a character, until I finally decided to create a model for him and turn him into a full-blown *Inquisitor* character. Later, other characters 'snowballed' off of Tarvus, and a whole warband was born.

This 'snowball' effect is the keystone around which many of my *Inquisitor* characters have been created. Almost all of them have somehow been created from a fragment of the backstory of another character, with only a few exceptions, which tend to have been created during moments of madness, inspiration, or nightmares.

The Example: The Hive Maiden

Creating the Back-Story

The Hive Maiden was a concept which evolved very slowly in my mind over a period of months, or perhaps even years. I can't honestly say I keep track of how long it takes me to make characters. I tend to follow the principle of 'when it's done, it's done.' In the case of The Hive Maiden, it all started when I was about eighteen, and I was rather bored during my university lunch hour as none of my friends were available. So, as I would normally do under such circumstances, I sat down with a pencil and paper

and started to draw. Since I was about nine years old, I had been writing short stories based in a fictitious universe of my own devising, which over the years had become so complicated that it rivalled Tolkien. I often spent my lunchtimes at university drawing characters and creatures from this universe, and I would often use these pictures as illustrations for my stories.

On this particular occasion, I ended up drawing a bizarre cybernetic frankenstein's monster. Of course, this particular monster had its own place and significance in my fictional universe, but for several weeks, the drawing would simply remain undisturbed in the back of my notepad, all but forgotten.

Some time later, my gaming group began experimenting with the new Fantasy Flight Game *Dark Heresy*. As I predictably landed with the responsibility of coming up with a narrative campaign for the group to follow, I created



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several characters for the game, including one named Sophie Vandus. Sophie was an explicator in the service of Inquisitor Evad, who was one of my first *Inquisitor* characters. As part of Sophie's background, I mentioned that she had earned the respect of her master after "single handedly solving the mystery of the Hive Maiden of Sceleris."

At the time, I didn't think anything of this. It was just a convenient sentence that seemed to justify why Evad had developed such a respect for his acolyte, Sophie. However, this singular sentence was the first spark of what would soon become one of my favourite *Inquisitor* characters that I've created so far.

Slowly, I started to think more and more about the Maiden, and as I did so, I became more and more convinced that she would make a great *Inquisitor* antagonist. At this point, about all I really knew about her was that she was a high-born who had somehow been damned to the life of a monster.

However, over a period of weeks, more and more details started to form in my mind, ranging from her previous life as Aerin Anastasia Zukovsky, to the sort of atmosphere that I wanted her finished character to have. I wanted her dark, tragic, terrifying and horrifying. At the time I created her, the other characters in my gaming circle were all a bit vanilla, and I really wanted to push the envelope a bit with this one. I wanted to turn some heads.

So, I sat down at my computer and tried to write a background story for the Maiden that was dark, tragic, terrifying and horrifying. However, I ended up just staring at a blank word document for several hours, not really coming up with anything. I needed some more inspiration.

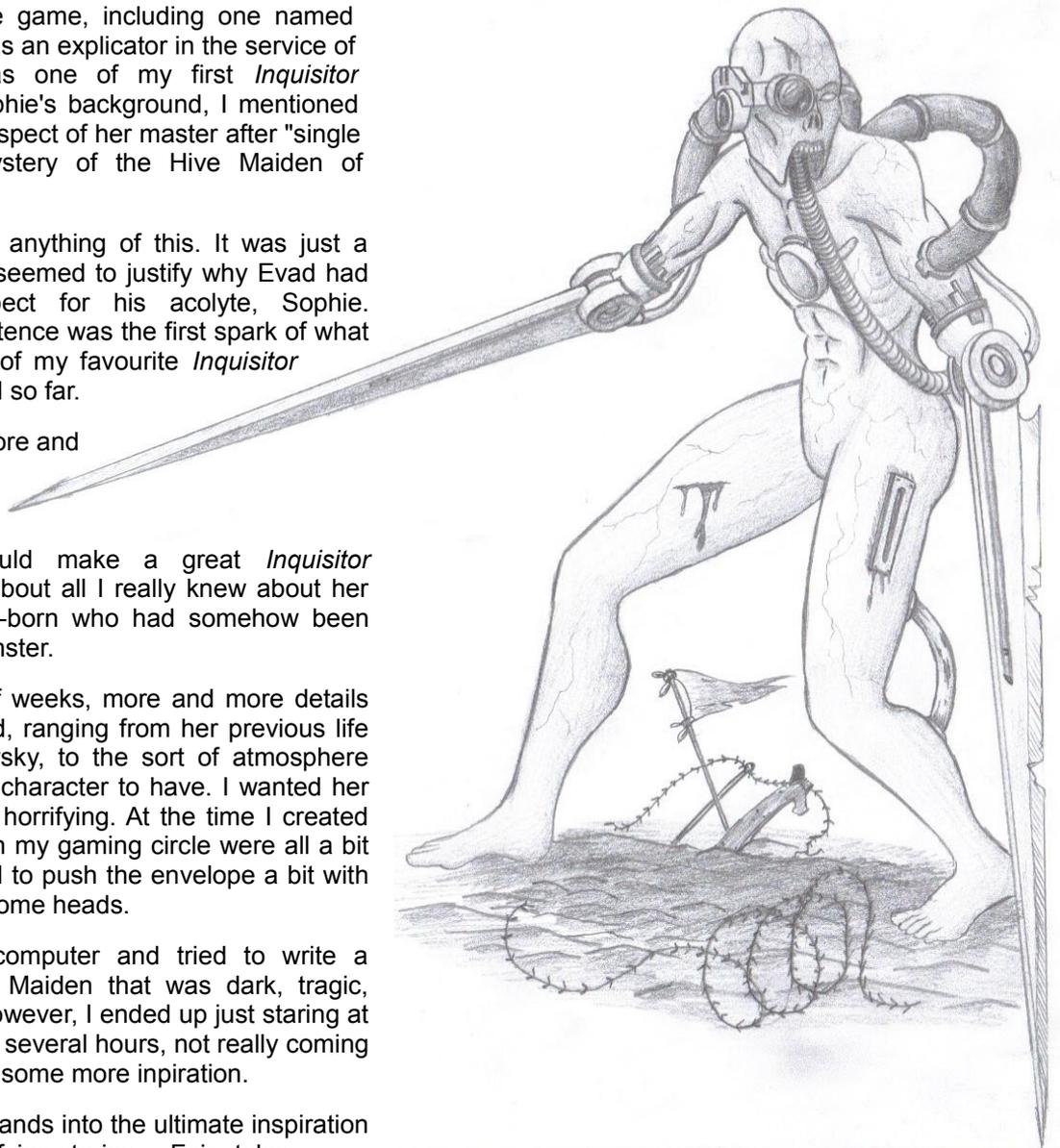
At this point, I dipped my hands into the ultimate inspiration resource for dark and horrifying stories.... Fairy tales.

There is a particular fairy tale written by the Brothers Grimm called "the toad prince." I'm sure that most of you will be familiar with this tale, but it basically boils down to a princess discovering a toad, who claims that he was actually a prince who had been turned into a toad by a wicked witch, and that if he kissed her, the spell would be broken, and he would revert to his original form. Intrigued, the princess kissed the toad. No sooner had their lips met than he turned into a handsome prince, the two of them got married, had lots of kids and lived happily ever after.

This story helped to form the Hive Maiden's story in my mind, and by inverting and borrowing certain aspects of the Brothers Grimm's story, I came up with a framework that I would use as a basis for the Hive Maiden's story.

Like the prince in the story, my character had been turned into a monster by some other external force. However, unlike the prince, there would be no breaking of the spell and no happy ending for my character. If I gave her a happy ending, it would remove the 'tragic' element that I wanted to include from the start.

I also thought that if the Maiden had previously been a high-ranking member of the Imperial elite, I could amplify her tragedy by adding a "fall from grace" element to it.



Also, if she had been beloved by her people, this tragic atmosphere would be even stronger.

At this point, I started to think about the unknown abuser who would turn Aerin Zukovsky into the Hive Maiden. Who would do such a thing to a beautiful and beloved woman? Surely only a pervert and a madman would ever think to do such a thing. At which point, I started to think about mental disease in the 41st millenium. Would they even know how to diagnose it? Would they even care about it, provided that the individual continued to function correctly in their role in society? And thus, the beginnings of General Hector Hernandez Magellan was born in my mind.

General Magellan was a seasoned officer in the Imperial Guard. He sent thousands of men to their deaths on an hourly basis, committed horrible atrocities in the name of the Emperor, and these actions had torn his soul and his mind apart. The only things that he had to console himself were his glorious victories, which he chased with savage abandon and fanaticism.

Eventually, he stopped seeing the cost of getting what he wanted. All that mattered to him was that he got the glory, and got his way. As he slipped further and further into madness, his victories became all the more impressive, but

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those who worked close to him began to worry about his mental state and tended to just steer clear of him, as they had become quite frightened of him. Over the years, female soldiers under his command began to disappear under mysterious circumstances, and rumour had it that the top brass of the Guard were covering up the general's misdeeds in an attempt to keep him in service. If he remained in service, he could provide more victories, but if he was forcibly retired due to his growing mental unhealth, whoever replaced him would surely have none of his tactical brilliance.

I chose an officer in the Imperial Guard for my 'evil witch' archetype, simply because the Imperium values war prowess over virtually all other things, and it also gave me a perfect excuse as to why Aerin's abuser was not brought to account for his crimes and also, to a lesser extent, explains why he is no longer in the vicinity. Imperial Guard officers tend to move around a lot, whilst other 'high ranking Imperial representatives', such as Ecclesiarchs, planetary governors etc. tend to remain in one place. Additionally, if an Imperial Guard officer provided exemplary results time and time again, it would probably be very unlikely that the authorities would allow him to be retired early due to mental health concerns. This is what made me decide to make General Magellan a tactical genius. Essentially, there was a 'hole' in the Hive Maiden's storyline. I needed a well-resourced, psychotic, deranged, and ruthless antagonist who for some reason or another was no longer involved with either the Maiden, or her home planet. I crafted General Magellan's character specifically to fit into that "hole".

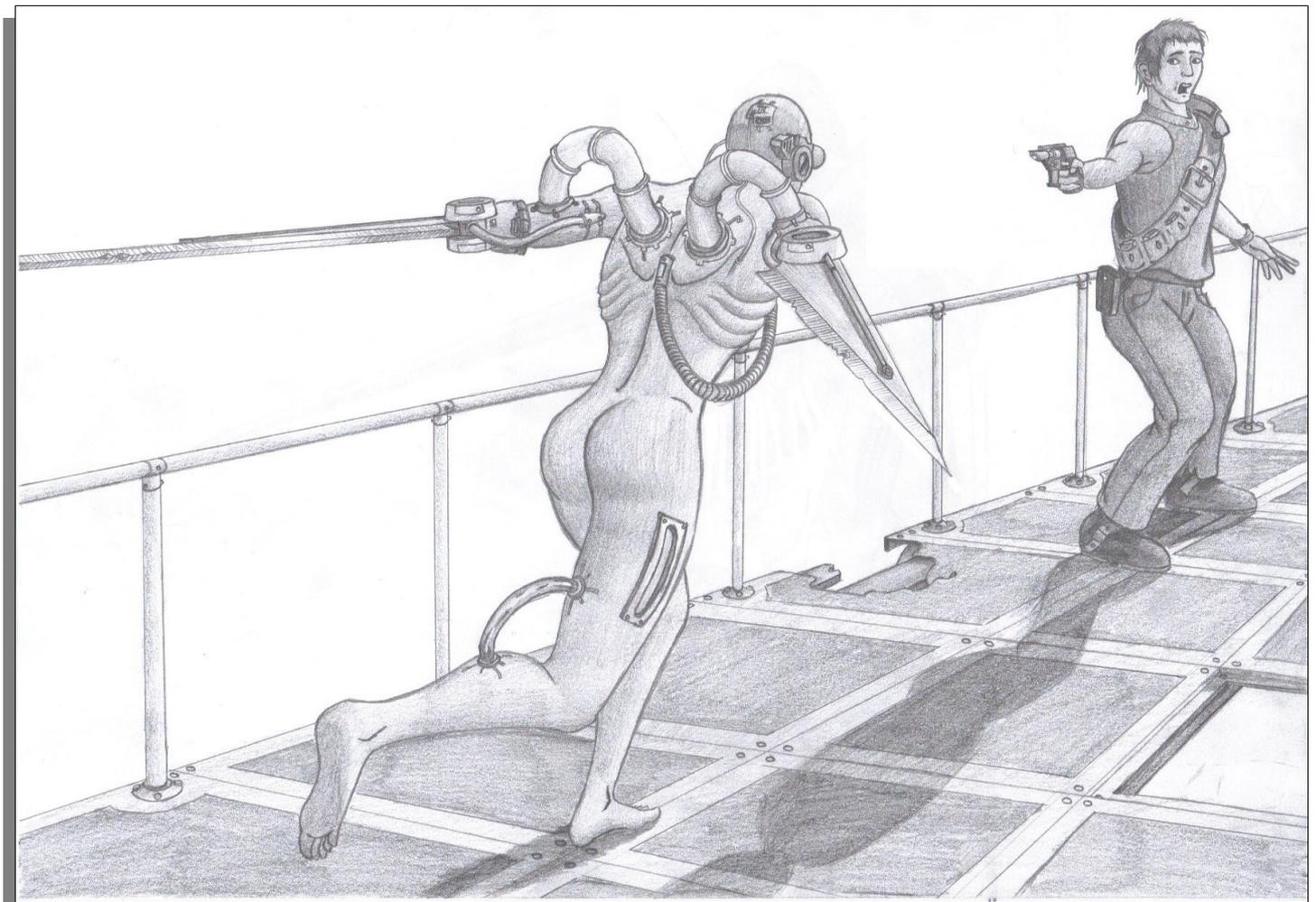
General Magellan is a perfect example of the 'snowball

effect' that I mentioned earlier in the introduction to this article. In the process of writing Aerin's background story, I've already made a good start on creating General Magellan, and if I choose to make a model and full backstory for him in the future, I'll have a very good head start.

Anyway, with General Magellan's character in place, I started to weave a story around him and Aerin to explain how Aerin's horrific transformation had taken place. I find that if you have created good characters with clear, defined personalities that are aimed in the direction that you want to take the narrative, it becomes very easy to actually write that narrative around them. After doing this, I felt that I had finally made a back-story for the Hive Maiden that was appropriately dark, horrifying and grim:

Aerin Anastasia Zukovsky was a nobewoman beloved by her people. She donated vast quantities of her personal wealth into the imperial war-chest and even sponsored several regiments of the local Imperial Guard, providing them with better living conditions and a few luxuries. She felt that the soldiers who gave their lives for the Emperor were more deserving of a little treat now and then than anyone else in the Imperium. All in all, she was thought of as being the excellent shining example that all Imperial citizens should seek to imitate.

It was this love for the armed forces that ultimately led to her undoing. Every year, Aerin held a birthday ball at her family residence in Lex Foveo, and any Imperial officers who happened to be in the area were invited. Normally, this would consist of officers who were on leave, or those who had been retired from service due to injury or age. During



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one of these birthday balls, Aerin first met General Magellan, who was on leave on the planet at the time.

In that first passing meeting, General Magellan knew that he had to have Aerin. She was an image of perfection - loyal, dutiful and beautiful, and he just knew she would make an obedient wife for him.

After the ball, General Magellan snuck off to follow Aerin to her bedchambers, where he attempted to force himself upon her.

However, when he tried to do so, Aerin leant forwards and bit the fleshy cartilage from the end of his nose. Screaming in pain, the general faltered and Aerin took the opportunity to attempt an escape. However, before she could get away, he knocked her out with a blow to the head and wrapped her up in blankets to sneak her out of the household.

As she had injured him, Magellan lost all interest in her. She had rejected him, and now, she would regret ever doing so. He carried her body out of her family residence and took her to the land-docks of Foveo, where he managed to persuade a merchant to take them to Sceleris, a lawless pit of scum and villainy where even the Arbiters didn't dare to tread. Magellan was born here, and he knew where he needed to go.

In the bowels of the nearby Sceleris hive, Osmond Malovotko ran a pit fighting league, where various cybernetically altered gladiators would fight for the amusement of vast crowds. He and General Magellan had grown up together as slaves in the mines, but they had been split up when Magellan was sold to the planetary governor, Dmitry Zavorotko, as part of a bid to settle his master's debts. He was later offered up to the Imperial Guard as part of the planet's tithes.

Magellan met with Malovotko at his pit fighting headquarters and, calling on old debts, convinced him to turn someone into a pit fighter for him. However, when Malovotko saw that the 'someone' Magellan had mentioned happened to be a member of the noble household, he was somewhat reluctant. However, Magellan had become a respected officer of the guard, and Malovotko knew better than to strike up trouble with him. Slowly, he went to work on Aerin.

As Aerin had shunned Magellan, she was to be butchered. As she refused to bear Magellan's sons, Magellan decided that she wouldn't bear anyone's. He had her reproductive organs completely removed. Similarly, as her breasts wouldn't feed his sons, they wouldn't feed anyone else's. They were also removed.

Her eyelids, lips, hair, and one eye were removed to make her less recognisable. Additionally, Magellan leaned over her bound form and bit the end off her nose and ate it, seeing that as partial payback for the injury that he had received from her. These injuries would mean that even if her family did happen to find her, they would not recognise her, and would dismiss her as just yet another mutant.

Her heart, which had refused to love Magellan was also removed and replaced with a cold steel mechanical equivalent, which was every bit as cold as she had been to him. Finally, her hands and lower jaw were also removed, so that she could never communicate to anyone what had

happened to her.

What was left was a tortured, demented creature, forever in pain of both the body and mind.

Malovotko entered her into a pit-fight the next day, putting her up against one of his best chrono-gladiators. He had initially intended the poor girl to die in this fight, but was horrified when he saw her sweeping one of her blades cleanly through her opponent's neck, killing him outright. Seconds later, the pit-guards closed in on her, but they were unable to contain her fury.

Screaming at the top of her lungs, Aerin leapt up into the crowds and began hacking her way through the spectators towards Malovotko. Her snarling face, flecked with his own blood, was the last thing that he ever saw. She turned to look for Magellan, but he had long since fled.

Now, Aerin the Hive maiden wanders the streets and tunnels of Sceleris Hive, seeking the Imperial General that condemned her to this life of pain and torment. Of course, he is long gone, but her tortured and demented mind cannot bear to accept that he is gone and all her hopes of revenge will come to nothing. As time went by, the details of Magellan's appearance began to fade from her memory, and she started to become more and more indiscriminate in her victims, simply killing everyone she met, purely on the off chance that it might be Magellan.

Modelling

Now that I knew who the Hive Maiden was, I had to come up with a physical appearance that matched the horror and darkness of her back-story.

I already knew that I wanted to sculpt her from scratch. As this would take some effort to achieve, I felt that it would encourage other people in my gaming circle to go the extra mile and put some effort into their models. I wanted to set a good example. I had already experimented with self-sculpting when I sculpted my Hrud and Schola Progenius, and through creating those models, I thought that I had learned quite a lot. I now felt suitably confident to tackle an ambitious project such as the Maiden.

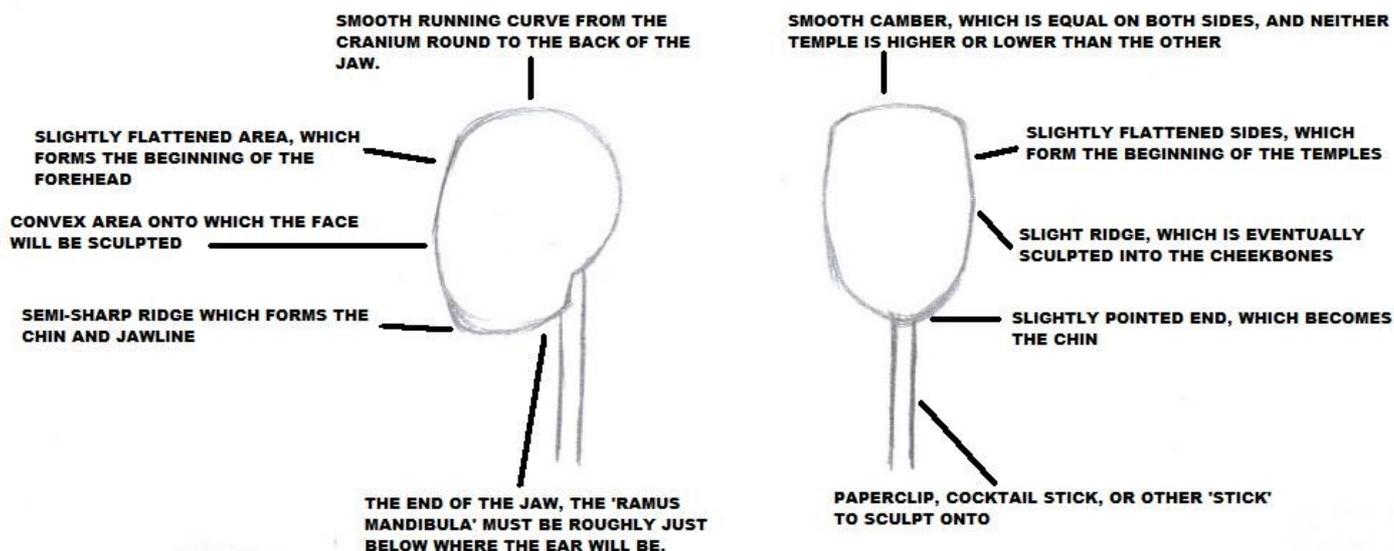
However, I had no idea what I wanted her to look like. All I really knew was that she was a mutilated, cybernetically augmented she-freak. I spent hours thinking about a possible design, until I remembered the drawing that I had done of a cyber-ghoul in the back of my university notepad. I eventually decided that a modified version of this concept would be perfect for the Maiden.

After taking a few minutes to doodle out a couple of concept drawings, I was ready to start sculpting.

First of all, I started by bending a paperclip into the shape of a pair of legs to create a basic armature. I then stabbed one end of the paperclip a champagne bottle cork, and fixed it in place with a few drops of superglue, to give me something to hold onto when I was working on the model.

I then added blobs of green stuff to the armature to bulk up the area of the thighs and calves, and then worked them into a rough shape using a games workshop sculpting tool. I then let this set before applying a final layer of green stuff over the top and then carefully shaping it with by sculpting

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tool.

When it comes to sculping, I have several unorthodox techniques which some people might consider amateurish. One of these is sculping with my hands rather than tools. To ensure a smooth finish on areas such as the legs, I lick the tip of my finger and drag it across the surface of the green stuff, slowly buffing away the toolmarks. When doing this, it's important to be gentle, because if you press too hard, you'll only leave fingerprints and turn all your hard work into a blob.

Once the legs had set, I moved on to the torso, which in retrospect, I could probably have done a lot better. (The abdominal muscles are rather crude, but her hunched pose does help to hide that rather nicely.) Of course, due to the deformities imposed on her by General Magellan, she has no breasts or reproductive organs. Therefore, I had to rely on other means to convey the sense of femininity. I thought that the easiest way to do this was to give her something of an hourglass figure, emphasising the width of her hips just to hint at the creature's former gender.

To sculpt the bionic eye, I used a fairly simple technique. I basically cut a slice from the end of a cotton bud inner tube and then pushed it into a thin sheet of green stuff (about 1-2mm thick works just dandy). This causes the green stuff to move into the tube, but it forms a dome shape, which when painted up, makes an ideal lens. This was then glued to the front of the face, and the rest of the face was

sculpted around it.

When I sculped the Maiden, I was still a bit iffy on sculping faces and hadn't quite found a technique that worked well for me.

To sculpt the Maiden's head, I first made a crude skull shape from a blob of green stuff stuck on the end of a cocktail stick.

Onto this, I gradually sculped the face, one tiny detail at a time, leaving the green stuff to cure in between since I was so paranoid about smudging my work with my fingers. It was a slow process, and on reflection, the technique that I use nowadays is far faster and more effective....

Again, start by sticking a small blob of green stuff (no larger than a few millimetres across) to the top of a cocktail stick. This will basically give your character's head something to be anchored to whilst you sculpt it. I tend to score lines into the surface of the blob just for extra purchase.

After allowing this green stuff blob to cure, apply a thick layer of green stuff all over it and start patting it with a sculpting tool until it is in the approximate shape of a human head. I have a few things that I tend to look out for when doing this, and they are illustrated in the below diagram.

After doing this, cut one horizontal line into the head at



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around eye-level (about halfway down the head on healthy, normal humans). Then, using a sculpting tool of your choice, push the top of the cut upwards to create the brows, and push the bottom parts down to create the cheekbones. At the same time, cut into the green stuff in a similar fashion about two thirds of the way down between the eye-slit and the chin. This will be the beginnings of the character's mouth. Again, using a sculpting tool, move the sides of the cut to make the mouth into the desired shape. Finally, add a thin sausage of green stuff to the centre of the head and pat it into a nose shape. I tend to leave this until after the GS from the previous stages has had a chance to cure.

The eyes are fairly simple. Just place a small blob of green stuff into the eye-socket and pat it into shape with a sculpting tool.

If your character has eyelids, now is the time to add them.

Painting

Painting the Hive Maiden was a relatively simple process. Her bionics were drybrushed with chainmail, before being given a very watered down coat of badab black wash. Other sections of her bionic implants were simply painted with tin bitz.

Her flesh is painted with vermin brown fading up to a bubonic brown/bleached bone mixture. I wanted her to look unhealthy, but I didn't want to use necrotic tones such as purples, blues or greens as I felt that these would convey a feeling of death and rot. She may have been grievously mutilated and unhealthy, but she's anything but dead. I added a little touch of skull white/blood red to the mixture for the swollen areas around her implants.

The bloodstains are scab red, very carefully applied with a half-loaded brush with just a little too much paint on it for drybrushing. This creates an appropriately messy bloodstained look.

The minor cuts and grazes on her skin are thin lines of

blood red with an even thinner line of chaos black inside them. This gives the impression that the wound has some depth, and also that the blood nearer the wound is darker, as it is beginning to clot and scab.

The bionic eye is painted in blood red, fading to skull white in the centre. This gives the impression that the eye is glowing.

Creating Statistics and Rules

When creating statistics and rules for a character, I normally start with the statline, since this forms the fundamental connection between the character and the *Inquisitor* rules.

Weapon Skill - Aerin has managed to survive for almost two decades in the pits of Sceleris Hive, and she is very unlikely to have survived so long if she hadn't become very good with a blade. Additionally, fencing is a popular pursuit amongst the upper classes, and Aerin always did have a fascination with the military and martial culture, so she may have been familiar with close-quarters combat long before her transformation. I felt that a weapon skill of around eighty four was not out of the question for her, particularly since she doesn't do much with her time these days except fight mutants, gangers and interlopers with her blades.

Ballistic Skill - Since she lacks hands, she can't even hold a weapon. I thought that a ballistic skill of zero was quite fair in this case.

Strength - Due to the extensive augmentations in her body, Aerin's strength has been boosted to levels that only the strongest of humans could hope to compete with. However, although her strength is considerable, it is not superhuman. For this reason, I decided that a strength of seventy-one was fairly acceptable.



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Toughness - Again, thanks to her extensive augmentations, Aerin's toughness has been boosted rather dramatically. I felt that a toughness in the region of 60, which puts her on a par with someone like an Imperial Guard veteran, was quite fair.

Initiative - The Hive Maiden's cybernetic augmentations probably included something for the sharpening of human reflexes, and generally speaking only the quick-witted survive in such dangerous environments. For this reason, I gave her an initiative of 65, which gives her a speed of 4. Perhaps, given her circumstances, this number should be higher, but I felt that if she were speed 5, all she would really be doing in the game is sprinting at things and chopping them up. Having a speed of 4 helps to curb this a little, and makes her a little more playable.

Willpower - Aerin has no psychic powers, and no particular special resistance to psychic powers. However, she does have a singular, indomitable will, which is completely focussed on hunting down and killing her nemesis, General Magellan. I felt that in light of this, a willpower of 50 was acceptable.

Nerve - Aerin has very little concern for her own personal safety, and perhaps even wants to die. As she is constantly in agony, the pain of a laser burn or knife wound is not going to scare her away. I felt that a nerve of 100 was not unreasonable. This means that she would only ever have a chance of failing a nerve test when there are negative modifiers to be considered.

Sagacity - Aerin was a high-born in the city of Foveo, so she probably had a very good education. She was an extremely bright young woman, and had a razor sharp wit that many found to be quite inspiring. Although she now lives as a monster in the bowels of a hive, I felt that the slow decay of her intellect would have been replaced with a sharpening of her ability to think on her feet, and to quickly assess combat situations, recognise threats and act accordingly. She may be a crazed psychotic, but she



isn't stupid. I felt that a sagacity stat of around 69 was appropriate.

Leadership - Since she cannot communicate, and she is shunned as a monster, it is unlikely that anyone would 'follow' the Hive Maiden. For this reason, her leadership value is a paltry 6.

After considering her statistics, I moved swiftly on to her equipment. Even the most cursory glance at the model will tell an observer that she has a bionic eye and a pair of implanted blades. I decided to count these as an average bionic eye with infrascopes and night-sight (Very handy for hunting in the darkness of the Scelerian tunnels) and a pair of implanted swords. (Purely on an anecdotal note, her character sheet mentions that these are actually toxin-blades, but the toxins ran out decades ago.) Additionally, she has an average bionic heart (incorporating a long-empty stim injector).

Finally, the last thing that I had to add were her skills and abilities. Furious assault was an obvious choice, since the Hive Maiden is pretty much a literal example of fury manifested in human form. Additionally, I felt that True Grit would not be out of place, since she possesses a singular will to keep fighting, knowing that one day, she would claim the skull of General Magellan. She won't allow herself to die until this task is complete.

Conclusion

So there you have it, esteemed Dark Magenta readers. What I have just described is a basic outline of my creative process from start to finish. I hope that you have enjoyed reading my nonsensical ramblings, and that I have perhaps managed to teach you something or perhaps I've even inspired you to create some innovative characters of your own. And on that self-aggrandising note, I draw this article to a close.

About the Author

Kenny Gardner is a master procrastinator who is, on occasion, known to have a good idea now and again. However, since these are such rare occurrences, and are thought to be omens of the coming apocalypse.

