

It is the 41st Millennium. For more than a hundred centuries the Emperor of Mankind has sat immobile on the Golden Throne of Earth. He is the master of mankind by the will of the gods and master of a million worlds by the might of His inexhaustible armies. He is a rotting carcass writhing invisibly with power from the Dark Age of Technology. He is the Carrion Lord of the vast Imperium of Man for whom a thousand souls are sacrificed every day so that He may never truly die.

Yet even in His deathless state, the Emperor continues His eternal vigilance. Mighty battlefleets cross the daemon-infested miasma of the Warp, the only route between distant stars, their way lit by the Astronomican, the psychic manifestation of the Emperor's will. Vast armies give battle in His name on uncounted worlds. Greatest amongst His soldiers are the Adeptus Astartes, the Space Marines, bio-engineered super-warriors. Their comrades in arms are legion: the Imperial Guard and countless planetary defence forces, the ever-vigilant Inquisition and the Tech-priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus to name only a few. But for all their multitudes, they are barely enough to hold off the ever-present threat to humanity from aliens, heretics, mutants – and far, far worse.

To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions. It is to live in the cruelest and most bloody regime imaginable. These are the tales of those times. Forget the power of technology and science, for so much has been forgotten, never to be relearned. Forget the promise of progress and understanding, for in the grim dark future there is only war. There is no peace amongst the stars, only an eternity of carnage and slaughter, and the laughter of thirsting gods.

The Milky Way Galaxy, more commonly known as the "Milky Way," or just "the galaxy," is the galaxy that Mankind calls home and in which the Imperium of Man and all of the other starfaring intelligent species known to Humanity are located. The Milky Way is a barred spiral galaxy that is part of the Local Group of galaxies.

It is one of hundreds of billions of galaxies in the observable universe. Its name is a translation of the Latin term *Via Lactea*, in turn translated from the Greek *Galaxias*, referring to the pale band of light formed by stars in the galactic plane as seen in the night skies of Holy Terra.

Some sources hold that, strictly speaking, the term "Milky Way" should refer exclusively to the band of light that the galaxy forms in the Terran night sky and the skies of many other settled planets, while the galaxy should receive the full name "Milky Way Galaxy," or alternatively "the galaxy." However, it is unclear how widespread this convention is, and the term "Milky Way" is routinely used in either context.

The stellar disk of the Milky Way Galaxy is approximately 100,000 light-years in diameter, and is considered to be, on average, about 1,000 light years thick. It is estimated to contain at least 200 billion stars and possibly up to 400 billion stars with an estimated average of 300 billion, the exact figure depending on the number of very low-mass, or dwarf stars. This can be compared to the one trillion stars of the neighbouring Andromeda Galaxy.