

PLAYER HANDOUT I: TAKEN

Darkness has taken you, leaving you endlessly falling into an empty oblivion without sight or sound. Moments flash briefly into being and fade again: a cold iron table and bright light above you, the mocking voice of a child, the reeking stench of beasts and raw meat, weightlessness, the hammering of great machinery, and finally, fetid black water oozing beneath you and chill winds stirring foul air.

You wake slowly to find yourself paralysed in cold darkness, your voice silent and your body as limp and useless as a rag doll. You are helpless to act or speak, or even hold your thoughts together, but you can hear the ragged breathing of others in the dark telling you that you are not alone in your fate and feel the bone-deep ache in your limbs confirming that you yet live.

Sickly-green lamps flicker on in the walls, and a dozen figures appear, wading shin-deep through rank waters towards the cold platform on which you and the other tangled forms hang. They wear ragged cloaks over dark body armour, and their faces are covered by grotesque animal masks fashioned from glittering metal and stitched skin. Each mask is different, one a hound, one a serpent, another a swine, and so on, while the leader wears the gilded visage of a Jackal with crimson teeth.

Chains are released and you are dumped into the ice-cold filth of the water with the others, all equally helpless, heaped up like in a mass grave for the living. Each of you is swiftly and perfunctorily examined by the masked men like livestock in a market. The Jackal Mask barks a curt order, and he and the others back away swiftly into the darkness.

Frost creeps across the walls, and the waters beneath you grow cold as the grave, as from the darkness a human-shaped, spike-studded metal cabinet comes into view, pushed along by two stunted and misshapen figures. Another shadowed form, tall and lean, hangs back on the edge of sight behind them.

Horror is heaped upon horror as the iron cabinet opens to reveal the severed head and mutilated torso of a young woman floating within in a column of unearthly light. The woman's eyes snap open and cruel white light floods out. You feel the stabbing claws of a vile force invade your mind with its polluting touch as you and your fellow captives finally find voice enough to scream.

The force withdraws suddenly as the iron cabinet snaps shut. A silver-clawed hand rises from the darkness and indicates three captives in turn. The misshapen figures lunge forth and drag them screaming into the darkness where they are abruptly silenced.

Mercifully you are not among them.

The light fades and oblivion takes you again.

PLAYER HANDOUT II: HERON MASK'S NOTE

I cannot trust you. I can trust No One and nor should you, least of all this poor lost servant.

Your Master is betrayed as Mine was, and there are worse things waiting for us all.

Kill or Be killed—that is the way of it, there is no other truth, whether it be in these dark cages, the riotous carnival above or the jaded palaces of the wicked.

If the Widower has his way, we will all drown in the black light of hells uncounted when the hour strikes at last.

May the God-Emperor Save You or the Warp Damn You. Each as you—as we all—deserve.



The Haarlock Warrant

Rogue Traders are all but unique in Imperial culture in that they are given licence to travel freely between the stars, both within the Imperium and without. A Rogue Trader's charter gives him the right and authority to contact, trade, and make war beyond the Emperor's Light. Outside the fringes of mankind's domain, each Rogue Trader is a law unto himself.

The Haarlock warrant goes further, charging the Haarlocks to "Bring the truth of the God-Emperor of Mankind and punish the foes of man in the darkness beyond." It authorizes the raising and maintenance of a private fleet and army, going so far as to grant (with certain caveats) title to request arms, vessels, and support from the "Emperor's Servants."

In Imperial terms, this degree of power in the hands of a single individual is staggeringly rare. The value of the Haarlock warrant is almost incalculable, and many would do any deed to possess it.

Much of the four millennia history of the Haarlock line is lost, and what does remain shows a repeated wax and wane of their power as they fade in and out of Imperial history. Recently, however, Albrach Haarlock was slain at the Battle of Bitter Reach, casting his bloodline into conflict. During this, an unusual scion rose to prominence.

A nephew of Albrach Haarlock by his long-dead sister, Erasmus is recorded in the Abulon Chronicles as being without ambition, remarkable only for a sharp wit and a valuable talent for the mysteries of technoarcana and xeno-lore. He was granted the captaincy of a scout frigate, *The Spear of Destiny*. During the conflict, Erasmus was lured into a trap by Mathias Haarlock, an outcast family member who turned to the Ruinous Powers for aid. Assailed by warp fiends, Erasmus was terribly injured in the attack and lost his beloved wife and daughter. Certain sources believe this incident drove Erasmus insane.

Ten standard years passed before Erasmus appeared again, and he had become a changed man, gaunt and terrible, possessing dire weapons and incomprehensible knowledge. In less than three years, Erasmus Haarlock succeeded in hunting down and systematically destroying every rival claimant to the Haarlock Warrant. Family members, allies, contacts, and anyone that stood between him and his vengeance were all considered forfeit by Erasmus. With his rivals destroyed, Erasmus was declared the Haarlock by a convocation of Imperial authorities from Solomon, Scintilla, and Ophelia VII. In the year 703 M41, Erasmus vanished without a trace.