



## **CORSAIR - THE FACE OF THE VOID**

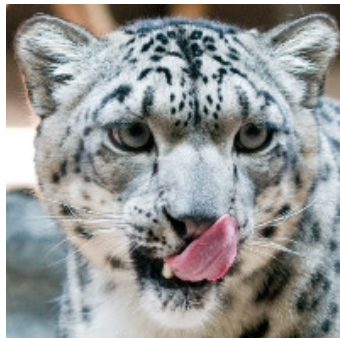
A Rogue Trader audio drama (2018)

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**LIST OF CHARACTERS:**

- \* Athene Santiago - Rogue Trader Captain;
- \* Ophidis – enigmatic Aeldari ranger;
- \* Konnor – Pilot, Imperial Naval Academy washout;
- \* Icaylian – Navigator;
- \* Kyteal – dour Engine Seer;
- \* Nintheater – Servitor;
- \* Grimen Rugan – leader of the Marauders;
- \* Dhokar – Necron Cryptek;
- \* Ballatine – Tetrarch Queen ;
- \* Shipmaster of the Sunless warship

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**CHAPTER 01**

Athene Santiago: “They are here, quadrant nine, dropping through the axis. Keep us on the target, mage”.

Konnor: “Aye, Captain! He’s tricky though and we don’t have a lot room to maneuver inside this asteroid field”

Athene Santiago: “Results, not excuses, Konnor! Engine Seer, do you hear me down there? I want more velocity<sup>1</sup>”.

Kyteal: “You always do. It is my pain and my burden to be chained forever to this scrap hulk you call a starship”.

Athene Santiago: “I will shoot you in that excuse in your face if you don’t do you damn job, Kyteal. More speed, now!”

Kyteal: “I step back, Captain Santiago, your grasp of nuances of the Omnissiah’s holy technology...”

Athene Santiago (interrupting): “Oh, navigator, how close is the target to this system’s Mandeville point? Icaylian, I am talking to you...”

Icaylian: “Forgive, forgive! Icaylian was so engrossed<sup>2</sup> in the colors of the space. Target vessel, identity Notoma will be able to enter the Immaterium if it successfully traverses the debris zone in quad nine. Likelihood is high”.

Athene Santiago: “That is not an acceptable outcome. Ophidis, those Aeldari ranger eyes of yours are better than mine. How far?”

Ophidis: "He is within weapon's range, but not optimal distance. We can bracket<sup>3</sup> the target with energy bolts, frighten him a little".

Athene Santiago: "Do it! Bow las-cannons, fire for affect".

Ophidis: "As you wish".

(starship unleashing three energy bolts)

Konnor: "No hits, but it pyred his hair. He's changing course, going deeper into the field".

Athene Santiago: "Oh no, you are not getting away".

Servitor: "Attention! Corsair's drive manifold now showing additional power available".

Athene Santiago: "Thank you, Nintheater. It seems the Mechanicus is good for something. Root it to the helm".

Konnor: "Mam, that field is filled with lumps of rock the size of..."

Athene Santiago (interrupting): "And I want you to steer us through it at maximum speed, yes! Was my order unclear?"

Konnor: "With all due respect, Captain, the Corsair handles a lot differently from the flyers I trained on".

Athene Santiago: "I have the utmost confidence in you. Now bring me that ship".

Konnor: "Thanks then, I could use some help from your servitor".

Athene Santiago: "Nintheater, assist the helmsman<sup>4</sup> with course projections".

Servitor: "Complying..."

Ophidis: "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Athene Santiago: "You are questioning me too? We've chased these pirates halfway across the Zeist sector and this is the first time we've laid our guns on them. I don't intend to waste the opportunity".

Icaylian: "How much their bounty must be worth? Riches, yes?"

Athene Santiago: "I'll admit the purse is heavier than that of our usual quantity".

Servitor: "Warning, incoming asteroid mass, vector three".

Ophidis (sarcastic): "Oh, remind me again where you recruited this pilot?"

Athene Santiago: "The Imperial Navy's loss is our gain. We are closing the distance, stay on them".

Konnor: "Aspect change on the target, he is going hard to port".

Ophidis: "Bringing his broad side to bear on us, if he uses those missile batteries".

Athene Santiago: "You had to say it..."

Servitor: "Notoma has released a full weapon spread, impact in ten seconds".

Athene Santiago: "Evasive action!"

Konnor: "Evasive, aye".

Servitor: "Impact in five seconds".

Icaylian: "They missed".

Athene Santiago: "He wasn't aiming at the Corsair".

Ophidis: "The asteroid above us?"

Servitor: "Impact..."

Konnor: "We'll be torn apart in the shockwave".

Athene Santiago: "Engine Seer, all power to the void shields".

Kyteal: "Oh, now she wishes to speak to me".

Servitor: "Brace for collision".

(collision and explosions)

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Athene Santiago (coughing while walking across the bridge): "Somebody give me a damage report".

Ophidis: "Athene, are you injured?"

Athene Santiago: "I am all right. Throne and blood, that bastard is clever".

Konnor: "We are still in one piece with a lot of dents though".

Kyteal: "Despite my dearest hopes that did not kill it. All systems still function sadly".

Athene Santiago: "I want that accursed ship".

Icaylian: "The quarry5 is extending its lead, Captain Santiago. Icaylian expresses dismay. We will not catch the Notoma now".

Konnor: "Wait, I am reading something strange here, an energy build upon the scryscope".

Ophidis: "Activate the hololith, show the tactical plot".

Servitor: "Target vessel is losing power, non-Euclidean dimensional effects detected".

Konnor: "What did he say?"

Athene Santiago: "Some kind of malfunction".

Icaylian: "It has... gone".

Konnor: "Did it escape into the warp?"

Icaylian: "Not possible. We are too distant from the Mandeville point for such a translation".

Athene Santiago: "Sensors, scry for any debris, an aura cloud, something?"

Konnor: "Captain, there is nothing out there, but rocks".

Athene Santiago: "A starship doesn't just vanish, mage".

Icaylian: "It has... returned".

Servitor: "Confirming, target vessel Notoma is power inert. Life readings are inconclusive. Hull integrity severely compromised".

Konnor: "A second ago he left us eating his iron wake. Now he is dead in space. This is too strange".

Ophidis: "Strange is what the galaxy is made of, helmsman. The crew must have tried to use some kind of countermeasures against us and it backfired".

Athene Santiago: "He's adrift, we are not. We will thank the God-Emperor later for granting us this minor miracle at ship's chapel. Prepare the boarding pod for immediate launch. I want a marauder team with me. Have them draw weapons and atmosphere gear".

Ophidis: "You are going over there yourself?"

Athene Santiago: "Those abhuman pirates put a dent in my damn ship. Of course, I am going over. You there, bring me my hell pistol and shock cutlass<sup>6</sup>, the good one".

Ophidis: "I will accompany you then".

Athene Santiago: "I expected no less. Mage, you too and summon Kyteal as well. We may require the adept's skills".

Konnor: "Why me?"

Athene Santiago: "I need someone to pilot the boarding pod. You are proving to be capable. Follow".

Icaylian: "Captain? That vessel is wrong. Icaylian is very disturbed"

Athene Santiago (approaching Icaylian): "You sense something? In all the time you've been on my crew you have never steered me wrong. Speak your mind"

Icaylian: "The words cannot be said. Be careful, dearest Captain. Do not let it take you".

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(closing hatch)

Servitor: "Hatch is closed. Marauder squad secured. Ready for capsule deployment".

Konnor: "Corsair, aye. Boarding party acknowledges. Kite is loose".

(boarding pod taking leave)

Konnor: "I have the target in sight, approaching from the starboard<sup>7</sup> side. No running beacons visible, no interior illumination. If I didn't know better, I'd say this wasn't the same ship, but I can see the name on the hull, well more or less. The letters are barely visible, looks like deep range radiation burns".

Servitor: "Breaches detected on all levels. Proceed with caution".

Konnor: "Yet I see that... I don't understand, the Notoma looks like some ancient derelict<sup>8</sup> now, barely space-worthy. What in Terra's name happened to this thing?"

Athene Santiago: "Mage, less talk. Find me a way into the cargo decks".

Konnor: "Yes, mam. There's an intact section after the missile battery. Taking us in".

(boarding pod docking Notoma)

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Athene Santiago: "Marauders, forward! Weapons free".

Marauders: "Aye, aye, Captain".

Ophidis: "There is still breathable air in this section for the moment".

Athene Santiago: "Ophidis makes a good point, everyone keep their atmosphere gear to hand. If there is a sudden decompression we'll all be dead in seconds without it".

Kyteal: "Not I... I, praise the Omnissiah, have the luxury of being immune to the vacuum of space".

Athene Santiago: "But not the tip of my cutlass which I will insert in one of your charging ports if you annoy me".

Kyteal: "Yes, my Captain, my penance<sup>9</sup>".

Athene Santiago: "All right, we've done this a dozen times. Break into sweep teams, search the ship. You, men, head towards the bow, the rest of us will venture aft<sup>10</sup>".

Marauders: "Aye, Captain".

Konnor: "Should I stay with the pod?"

Ophidis: "If you want to remain alone on a derelict pirate warship filled with unknown threats, then feel free to do so".

Konnor: "What exactly are you, Ophidis? I know rogue trader crews get some leeway<sup>11</sup> in dealing with xenos, but I never expected to see an Aeldari outcast working alongside humans".

Ophidis: "If you live long enough you may see many uncommon things".

Konnor: "Was that a threat? Is he threatening me?"

Kyteal: "So hard to tell. It speaks in such vagaries<sup>12</sup>, except you are great Captain, of course".

Athene Santiago: "You males can't stand around for more than a minute without arguing".

Kyteal: "I had my reproductive organs replaced with a bioprocessor, so to be technically correct, which is the best kind of correct, I am no more male".

Ophidis (yawning): "Fascinating as ever, Engine Seer. Can we concentrate on the situation at hand?"

Konnor: "Fair point, I mean if we had a mark of Exitus, we could have destroyed the Notoma from range with a lance barrage".

Kyteal: "You have been deliberately vague about the specifics of the warrant, Captain. As we are now fully committed to this, perhaps, you

could elucidate<sup>13</sup>. Are we searching for a specific target? One of the brigand<sup>14</sup> crew?"

Athene Santiago: "No, the warrant is for something they stole. I have an image on this pict-slate. See? This container is valuable to someone so we are here to recover it. Apparently the Notoma's crew stole the thing from our currier in the Felsbar system".

Konnor: "So we are pirating the pirates".

Ophidis: "How ironic".

Kyteal: "What is inside the box?"

Athene Santiago: "I don't know and I don't care, but I do know how much the warrant is worth and I do care about earning enough throne geld to keep the Corsair up and running for the next three years. Are we clear?"

Ophidis: "Come, the cargo bay is this way".

Konnor: "How are you so sure of that?"

Ophidis (taking leave): "This is not the first time I've boarded a mon-keigh vessel. Your craft is so drearily<sup>15</sup> similar in design".

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Icaylian (very nervous): "This is wrong... This is wrong... Icaylian can hear the stars weeping. They look down and see this is not right. We should leave this place, plot the course, see the path, go and never return".

Servitor: "Captain Santiago's orders are firm on this matter".

Icaylian: "Do not presume to speak to me, drooling<sup>16</sup> mind-wipe brainless thing. You cannot know what Icaylian knows. Why does she keep you by her side? You are a worthless relic and affront<sup>17</sup> to the rest of us. What purpose do you serve that any machine slave could not fulfill?"

Servitor: "This unit... has a duty..."

Icaylian: "Too much noise here. Serenity must be sought. Icaylian will return to secure chambers. This is wrong... This is wrong... This is wrong..."

(Icaylian walking away)

Servitor: "This unit obeys".

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Athene Santiago: "Ophidis, what do you see?"

Ophidis: "Beware the decking under foot. In many places it is more rust than metal. How your kind can put such craft as this into space never ceases to amaze me".

Kyteal: "You keep looking at the creature".

Konnor: "What?"

Kyteal: "Santiago's xenos pet. The Aeldari. It is interesting I suppose, to see one close at hand and not trying to murder you".

Konnor: "She gives him... it... the freedom at this ship. How's that allowed?"

Kyteal: "The ranger serves her as a bodyguard of sorts. He is quite adept at killing. Understand, the Zeist sector is a very long way from Holy Terra. You will find there's much that happens out here which is unseen by the eye of the Imperial court".

Konnor: "I keep thinking I should try to shoot him, that's what I was taught in basic training".

Kyteal: "The pilot we had before you thought so too. She provoked the xenos and it cut her down with that unholy shuriken gun".

Konnor: "Santiago let that happen?"

Kyteal: "Shocking. Do you regret signing aboard the Corsair now?"

Konnor: "No, it's not like I had a lot of choice".

(weird noise to the right)

Athene Santiago: "What was that?"

Ophidis: "Something moving in the darkness".

Konnor: "Is it one of the marauder crew?"

Athene Santiago: "They are twenty decks distant from us by now".

Kyteal: "Fixing optics to compensate. These walls exhibit radically different patterns of decay".

Konnor: "Look here, this is hip grade plasteel, but it crumbles like sand".

Athene Santiago: "This ship is aged. It's decaying like it is tens of thousands of years old".

Konnor: "No, I reviewed the Notoma's thread log. It was built in M41 at the shipyards on Foss. It's barely two centuries out of space dock; it's practically newly-minted".

Kyteal: "Not anymore".

(distant noise)

Athene Santiago: "Who's out there? Identify yourselves. I am Captain Athene Santiago of the Corsair. I have a letter of mark and a warrant of intent..."

Ophidis (interrupting): "Your words mean nothing to them".

Konnor: "What in Terra's name are they?"

Kyteal: "These are bariad of displaced morphing resonance echoes of what remains of the crew".

Konnor: "Some are solid, others I can see right through".

Kyteal: "Revenants, I believe the gutter parlance<sup>18</sup> for them is warp wraiths".

Konnor: "How do we fight an apparition<sup>19</sup>?"

Athene Santiago (starting to fire): "Like this".

Ophidis: "Shoot, mage, if they touch you, you will become like them".

Konnor: "Damn it, Kyteal, get out of the way".

Kyteal: "Gladly".

Athene Santiago: "More of them, coming out of the walls. To me, full back".

Ophidis: "This vessel became unanchored in the river of time. This is the price that has been paid".

Kyteal: "I would like to leave now".

Athene Santiago: "Keep firing".

Konnor: "How many are there?"

Ophidis: "The whole crew I will surmise<sup>20</sup>. We can go no further, this corridor is a dead end".

Kyteal: "No, there is a hatch here. The seals are corroded, but I can open it".

Athene Santiago: "Then do so with a lack, Engine Seer".

Konnor: "They are retreating... Oh, we drew them off".

Ophidis: "Did we? This doesn't feel like a victory".

Konnor: "If you say so. I'll be just grateful we scared them away. The Emperor protects".

Ophidis: "Something scared them away and it wasn't your Emperor".

Athene Santiago: "Ignore, Ophidis, mage. He doesn't understand faith, all the human need for optimism".

Ophidis: "In the Aeldari tongue our word for that state means one who is wildly deluded<sup>21</sup>".

(hatch opening with a low-droned hiss)

Athene Santiago: "The secondary cargo bay. This looks promising. Our prize will be in here".

(the crew going down the hatch)

Kyteal: "Do not feel the need to thank me. It was a duly encrypted deadlock that most adepts would have taken hours to deal with... Hello? Yes? (angrily cursing) Oh, zero-one-one-one-zero-zero-one-one-one-zero".

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Athene Santiago: "Spread out and find the container. Mage, take the adept and check over there".

Konnor: "Mam".

Ophidis (sniffing the air): "That odor, I know it".

Athene Santiago: "Explain".

Ophidis: "And give it shape? No. Keep close to me, Captain. You have insisted on defying logic to come to this death hulk, now do as I say. Stay out of harm's way".

Athene Santiago: "When have you ever known me to do that?"

Ophidis: "You are either courting<sup>22</sup> death or deliberately making it difficult for me to fulfill my pledge<sup>23</sup>".

Athene Santiago: "I freed you from that oath a dozen times over. The only thing keeping you here is you".

Ophidis: "You labor under a misconception. You are not the one who decides how and when the price is paid".

Kyteal: "Oh, Captain! I think we may have your treasure".

Konnor: "Someone was very determined to lash<sup>24</sup> this thing down. It doesn't take this many chains to secure a container pod".

Kyteal: "I expected something more impressive. Help me remove the restraints".

Athene Santiago: "That's the box, I recognize the livery".

Kyteal: "Yes, but there are no binaric identifiers on it, no bill of lading<sup>25</sup>. Almost as if one wanted it to be non-descript and forgettable".

Ophidis: "The lid<sup>26</sup>, it's cold like the kiss of space".

Athene Santiago: "Bring it. I'll vox the marauders, tell them to meet us back at the capsule".

(distant noise)

Ophidis (in Aeldari): "Eka zahn, lass hehn... Get behind me!"

Konnor: "It's coming this way".

Athene Santiago: "There, the crimson eyes in the shadows".

Distant Voice: "Enemies... Enemies, before me..."

Kyteal: "Oh ,no..."

Konnor: "Is that..."

Athene Santiago: "An Adeptus Astartes, a Space Marine..."

Space Marine (starting to shoot): "Xenos filth, witch-kin, weakling scum. You shall perish for what you have done to me".

Ophidis: "Run!"

Athene Santiago: "Get to the corridor! Mage, don't leave the box behind"

Konnor: "Where did it come from and why is it shooting at us?"

Kyteal: "Feel free to stop and ask..."

Ophidis: "Through here".

Space Marine: "You will die screaming, xenos scum".

Athene Santiago: "Kyteal, close that damned hatch".

Kyteal: "Wish she got that with the understanding".

(hatch closing)

(Space Marine trying to slam through the door)

Kyteal: "This barrier will not halt him, estimate breakthrough in sixty seconds or less".

Ophidis: "Keep moving".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Santiago to all marauders, drop what you are doing and run for the capsule. We won't wait for you. What in the Emperor's name is a bloody Adeptus Astartes doing aboard this wreck?"

Ophidis: "I have no answer for you..."

Konnor (scared): "A Space Marine... Oh, throne... I mean I've never seen one before, just pictures, but it... it was a huge and that gun..."

Kyteal: "They are angels of death and combat. If my fear response simulator was at full gain I imagine I would be fouling<sup>27</sup> myself at this moment".

Konnor: "He wanted to kill us because of the box".

Ophidis: "They do not need a reason".

Konnor: "I couldn't see a Chapter sigil. Was he one of ours or... or one of... theirs?"

Athene Santiago: "A legionary in service of the Ruinous Powers? Is that what I caylian sensed?"

Konnor: "Chaos?"

Athene Santiago (angrily): "Do not utter that word!"

Kyteal: "After due consideration I think the many and varied mysteries of the starship Notoma would be best examined at our leisure on board the Corsair, preferably light years away from here".

Konnor: "Yes, what he said..."

Athene Santiago: "The boarding pod, get the box loaded".

(Space marine finally slamming the door open)

Space Marine: "Enemies!"

Ophidis: "Athene, get in the capsule!"

Athene Santiago: "I am not leaving you here".

Ophidis: "I would hope not, give me your hell pistol".

Athene Santiago (giving the gun): "Have you lost your mind, ranger?"

Ophidis (starting to shoot): "Possibly, I blame your influence".

Kyteal: "Why is the xenos firing at the walls? Oh, wait!!!"

Konnor: "Hull breach!"

Space Marine (roaring): "Curse you!"

Athene Santiago: "Ophidis, I've got you".

Konnor: "Pull him in! Close the hatch".

(hatch closing behind Ophidis)

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Icaylian (nervous): "Has the fear proven real? Has it? Icaylian should have stopped her from going".

Servitor (entering the room): "Navigator!"

Icaylian: "Do not enter my chambers without request if you value your existence, helot28".

Servitor: "The Captain ordered me to monitor you".

Icaylian: "Did she now?"

(distant explosions)

Servitor: "Warning scry sensors reading catastrophic failure of vessel Notoma's structural integrity. Hull collapse in progress".

Icaylian: "No, Icaylian cannot see".

Servitor: "The Notoma is breaking up. Scanning for boarding capsule".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Corsair, do you hear us? This is the Captain, answer!"

Icaylian: "By the God-Emperor sight! They are alive!"

Servitor: "Confirmed, tracking capsule now. Commencing recovery protocols".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Corsair, stand by to bring the ship about. We are not staying here a moment longer".

Icaylian: "Captain, it gladdens Icaylian to know you did not perish this day. What... what did you see over there?"

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Death clad in ceramite and steel, dispatched or so I hope".

Servitor: "Tevers attached, bringing in the capsule now".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "We are secure".

Servitor: "Geller fields to full strength!"

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Light the warp drives and make space. Navigator, set up course!"

Icaylian: "What heading?"

Athene Santiago (over vox): "The Nagan hub, maximum speed".

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(Athene entering the cargo compartment)

Grimen Rugan: "Captain!"

Athene Santiago: "At ease, Grimen Rugan, anything to report?"

Grimen Rugan: "No, milady. I've been in here watching the box for hours like you told me and it ain't done nothing".

Ophidis: "Stand down for the moment. You'll be summoned back, when you are needed".

Grimen Rugan: "Captain?"

Athene Santiago: "You heard him. Go up to the mess<sup>29</sup> and ask cook to give you a mug of recaf. Passing through the warp isn't easy on any of us and I want you alert when you return".

Grimen Rugan: "I am on, that's true enough"

(hatch closing behind the Marauder)

Ophidis: "He looked to you before obeying that order. After all this time, after everything I've done your crew still hates me".

Athene Santiago: "It's a sliding scale. Some of them might actually admit to respecting you, if they were sure the Inquisition wouldn't hear them say so".

Ophidis: "Is the box safe in here?"

Athene Santiago: "This is the compartment I use to contraband. Scan proof, triple-armored, that should be enough".

Ophidis: "Everyone is wondering what it contains".

Athene Santiago: "Everyone can mind their own business. We get to the trading hub, we cash this thing in for the bounty and we are gone. Make it someone else's problem".

Ophidis: "You always hide your fear very well, that's why they follow you".

Athene Santiago: "I am not afraid. I am alive, one card outplays the other".

Konnor (over vox): "Attention all hands, this is flight bridge, standby for translation. We are dropping out of warp in ten seconds".

Ophidis: "That Adeptus Astartes on the Notoma..."

Athene Santiago: "I keep asking myself how it got there? Where did it come from? It could only have boarded when the ship was... wherever it disappeared to".

Ophidis: "You understand that I did not kill it. Their kind are very hard to destroy, I know this from experience".

Athene Santiago: "I don't plan on going back to Velco bell to make sure. Like I said, someone else's problem now".

Ophidis: "For the sake of sanity we will agree to pretend that it is true".

Athene Santiago: "Indeed. I only hope for one thing".

Ophidis: "And that is?"

Athene Santiago: "This box better be worth the effort. Don't worry, ranger, soon this will be a bad memory. We'll have coin enough to make the crew happy. Maybe I will even grant them a little shore leave<sup>30</sup> on some pleasure moon".

Ophidis: "You think fate will show the Corsair her smile?"

Athene Santiago: "We are about due, don't you think?"

Konnor (over vox): "Captain, this is mage. We have a problem. You need to go here right now".

Ophidis: "Then again..."

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Athene Santiago (entering the bridge): "Report! What is so... important?"

Ophidis: "It appears the Nagan hub is busy".

Konnor: "There's the entire Imperial Navy flotilla over there. Destroyers and frigates, even a battle cruiser. They've got all the transport and cargo barges under their guns".

Athene Santiago: "What are they doing here? Nagan is a civilian deep space trading outpost and a minor one at that".

Icaylian: "Icaylian has communed with sibling navigators on other vessels. They say this fleet arrived eight rotations past and took up blockade positions".

Konnor: "I know these warships. the Sunless, Accord of Blades, Falcon's Talon".

Athene Santiago: "All under the direct command of the sector governess".

Ophidis: "The ships are screening the zone around the station, conducting boarding operations".

Servitor: "Incoming vox transmission from the Sunless, broadcast in the clear".

The Sunless: "Attention all craft intending to dock with the Nagan hub. By the order of the Tetrarch Queen Bellatine, governess and high authority of the Zeist sector your vessels are now subject to search and seizure<sup>31</sup> by the Imperium".

Konnor: "By the Throne..."

The Sunless: "Power down your systems and submit to the directives of all sanctioned representatives of her majesty and Holy Terra. Failure to obey will be considered admission of criminality and shall be dealt with using maximum force".

Icaylian: "If they board Corsair there will be many difficult questions to answer".

Ophidis: "It is not words we should be afraid of".

Servitor: "Detecting multiple vox responses on several channels".

Athene Santiago: "The other civilian ships approach. Nagan isn't known for attracting law-abiding clientele<sup>32</sup>. Every frater out there is a freebooter<sup>33</sup> or a smuggler<sup>34</sup> of some kind".

The Sunless: "In addition any crew with the information of the whereabouts of a privateer<sup>35</sup> vessel known as the Notoma should make themselves known immediately. Assistance will be rewarded. Hindrance<sup>36</sup> will be punished. May the God-Emperor illuminate us all".

Athene Santiago: "Ah, now things become clear".

Konnor: "We need to get out of here before we attract their attention. I can bring us about, find a stealth course that will get us away from them".

Ophidis: "They will fire on us if we attempt to flee".

Konnor: "They'll board us, execute you and excoriate<sup>37</sup> the rest of us if we don't".

Servitor: "Warning, fusion drive ignition detected".

Athene Santiago: "That barge up ahead, the big shinlong tanker... It's breaking formation".

Ophidis: "What is he doing?"

Icaylian: "Panicking, xenos. It is a human thing".

The Sunless: "Tanker transit vessel Red Frame, cut your drives and stem too. This will be our only warning".

Ophidis: "He is trying to run the blockade".

Servitor: "Warship Sunless is targeting the tanker".

Athene Santiago: "Those fools... They had to..."

(Sunless unleashing barrage at the tanker)

Konnor: "This is our chance, Captain. We have to go now while the explosion is fogging their scry-sensors".

Athene Santiago: "Do it! Engine Seer!"

Kyteal: "What fridge terror do you have for us now, milady?!"

Athene Santiago: "Bring the ship to full stealth! As mush speed as you can master with minimum energy output!"

Kyteal: "Ah, so we are running away again! How typical".

Athene Santiago: "Just get it done".

(Corsair igniting its engines)

Ophidis: "It seems to be working, no sign of pursuit".

Athene Santiago: "Fate shows us her smile, but she reminds us she has fangs".

Konnor: "Captain, if we can't dock at Nagan, where shall we go? There isn't other trading hub within this system"

Athene Santiago: "Concentrate on getting us away undetected, helm. I'll give you a course when I am ready. Ophidis, Nintheater, join me in the observation down".

\* \* \*

Grimen Rugan: "Watch the box, she says! Stay alert, she says. Meantime she's got us all a mother's breath away from being in a clink<sup>38</sup>".

(weird noise)

Grimen Rugan: "Who said that? Who's there?"

Weird Metallic Voice: "Free... me..."

Grimen Rugan: “Right, I’ll find whatever one of you, keck eating runts<sup>39</sup>, is messing me about and you’ll take a sheave. I mean it”.

Weird Metallic Voice: “Free... me... organic... now...”

Grimen Rugan: “I... I... Box... That light...”

\* \* \*

Athene Santiago: “We have a problem”.

Ophidis: “Your capacity for understatement remains undiminished, Captain. The message from the warship, the mention of the pirate vessel by name. There is little doubt that what they want, is in your contraband store”.

Servitor: “That compartment is secure”.

Ophidis: “Hm, the helot does not understand. Your servile<sup>40</sup> thinks we are safe from them”.

Athene Santiago: “Oh this light forsaken bounty has become a poisoned chalice”.

Ophidis: “Under what name was the document issued?”

Servitor: “Checking. Error condition, warrant identity was withheld”.

Athene Santiago: “Only someone wealthy and powerful could do that. A person with the ability to manipulate the Imperium’s bureaucracy is dangerous indeed”.

Ophidis: “Yes, and I doubt the lives of a rogue trader’s crew would be significant to them. Just ask those aboard the Red Flame. Observe the stars beyond the dome, know that anyone of them could be a warship on its way to do the same to the Corsair. You must have suspected. What possessed you to take on such a mission?”

Athene Santiago: “How can you ask me that Ophidis? There are six cargo modules along the keel of my ship and every one of them is empty. My crew is months beyond their last purse living on their Captain’s promises and the stigma<sup>41</sup> that shrouds my reputation means I must take the tasks I can get, not the ones I want. I need that reward”.

Ophidis: “Enough to incur<sup>42</sup> the wrath of the Imperial Navy? If they gather their wits and track us from Nagan, you will be declared criminal in absentia<sup>43</sup>, and the next bounty issued will be for this ship”.

Athene Santiago: "I say the quicker we complete the job and get paid, the better off we'll be".

Ophidis: "Oh, Nintheater, calculate hypothetical which option is the most survivable? Continuing this mission or abandoning it?"

Servitor: "Risk analysis result is clear. Recommend dumping contents of secure compartment, erase all mention of bounty and encounter with Notoma from Corsair's logs".

Ophidis: "If whichever potent and careless soul desires that box, discovers we have it, they will not be gentle taking in it from us. Listen to the machine's slave, Captain. It understands now".

\* \* \*

Weird Metallic Voice (repeating): "Open it! Open it! Open it! Open it!"

Grimen Rugan: "Those lights... They are in my head... I can't stop myself".

Weird Metallic Voice: "Yes! Free me! Open the box! Open the box!"

Grimen Rugan: "That light, that voice! (screaming) What... What is it???"

Weird Metallic Voice: "Open the box!!!"

Grimen Rugan (grabbing the chains and screaming): "Don't make me! No, no!!!"

(Grimen Rugan opening the box and unleashing a hysterical final scream)

Weird Metallic Voice (laughing): "Beware! I live! Ahahahahah!"

\* \* \*

(beeping sound)

Athene Santiago: "What in Throne's name?"

Servitor: "Anomalous energy detected!"

Ophidis: "An attack?"

Athene Santiago: "That didn't feel like a weapon hit! Something else?"

Ophidis: "I see no ships out there".

Servitor: "Energy discharge confined to inner hull spaces".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "This is the Captain, by the Emperor's tears, mage, what are you doing?"

Konnor (over vox): "It's not me, mam! The servitors are registering a massive power spike on the lower decks".

Ophidis (setting on a run): “The box!”

Athene Santiago: “Ophidis, come back!”

(door closing behind Ophidis)

Athene Santiago: “Bloody xenos fool!”

Servitor: “Attention, additional detections. Anomaly is propagating<sup>44</sup> through the ship”.

Athene Santiago: “Analyze, give me something I can make sense of”.

Servitor: “This unit cannot comply... This unit does not comprehend... A chrono error detected...”

Athene Santiago: “God-Emperor, protect us! What have we brought on board? Mage, alert Kyteal, tell him to repel borders at the keel. I am on my way to the bridge”.

\* \* \*

Grimen Rugan: “By all the stars, what are you?”

Dhokar: “I am the face of the void! I am Dhokar, Cryptek of the unkillable dynasty, Necrontyr and deathless one. I summon my kindred, come to me across the schemes of time. Bring the emerald fire”.

(door opening)

Ophidis (entering the cargo compartment): “No! No!”

Grimen Rugan (mumbling): “It made me open the box! That metal skull... The light... It’s in my head...”

Ophidis: “My soul be blighted! A Necron”

Dhokar: “I have no more need of you, organic!”

Grimen Rugan (screaming): “No! No! Nooooo!”

Ophidis: “Khaine’s fire! It’s opening a portal!”

Dhokar: “Come, kindred, scarab child, Akemphlight, warriors. There is flesh to be made ashes, life force to extinguish. There are eons of retribution yet to be taken”.

Ophidis (over vox): “Athene!”

\* \* \*

Ophidis (over vox): “Bridge, do you hear me?”

Athene Santiago (over vox): “I am here. Ophidis, report!”

Ophidis (over vox): "Rugan is dead. The thing within the box, it is the skull of a Necron chronomancer, a time weaver".

Icaylian: "Ruin and demise! It will kill us all"

Konnor: "Is that what happened to the pirate ship? It must have time-slipped them!"

Ophidis (over vox): "It's opening portals to... more of them... (white noise)"

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Ophidis, answer me!"

Servitor: "Warning! Energy discharges detected!"

Konnor: "Where?"

Servitor: "Cargo modules, hydroponicum, flight bridge..."

Konnor: "The bridge?"

(scarabs emerging over the bridge)

Icaylian: "Behind you!"

Konnor: "What are they?"

Athene Santiago: "Scarabs! Destroy them!"

(gunfight raging over the bridge, one of the crew members screaming in horror)

Icaylian (shooting): "Ah! Ah! You will not touch Icaylian, creature!"

Athene Santiago: "Keep firing!"

Konnor: "Captain, the controls! If we hit them..."

Athene Santiago: "Shoot, you fool! We fight or die!"

(silence returning to the bridge)

Konnor: "Did we get them all?"

Athene Santiago: "This is not over yet".

Icaylian: "Icaylian's robes are soiled with the oiled blood of those monstrosities".

Konnor: "So now we know what happened to the Notoma. We have to get that thing off this ship before it throws us a million years into the past as well. I don't want to end up like those wraiths we saw".

Athene Santiago: "The living skull of a Necron. No wonder it is so greatly desired, it is a relic of untold power".

Icaylian: "Many would give much to possess it. The value of the bounty suddenly becomes clear".

Athene Santiago: "Aye, but no reward is worth dying for. Nintheater, use internal scans to find me the Aeadari, where is he now?"

Servitor: "Complying, scry scan inconclusive. Ophidis was last detected moving through the cargo modules. All Necron anomalies are now converging<sup>45</sup> on that location".

Athene Santiago: "Is he alive?"

Servitor: "Status unknown".

Konnor: "Your orders, Captain?"

Athene Santiago: "If those things get out into this sector, it will be carnage<sup>46</sup>. We must be ready to destroy the ship".

Icaylian: "Icaylian is not enthused by that scenario".

Athene Santiago: "Neither am I. Navigator, you will prepare a warp jump calculation ready to initiate on my command".

Icaylian: "To where, milady?"

Athene Santiago: "Just be ready to take us into the Immaterium. Nintheater, you with me".

Servitor: "Complying".

Konnor: "Captain, you go down there, those machines will end you".

Athene Santiago: "That is a very real possibility, but we need to keep this... chronomancer distracted. We will gain the upper hand. If you do not hear from me within ten minutes, coax<sup>47</sup> the ship's machine spirit to overload the reactor, then get everyone into the savior pods and launch them, clear?"

Konnor (grimly): "Clear".

Icaylian: "Clear".

Athene Santiago: "May the God-Emperor watch over us".

(Athene and Servitor leaving the bridge)

\* \* \*

(battle raging around Kyteal and Ophidis)

Kyteal: "Shoot them, you idiots! Command: seek and destroy those aberrations<sup>48</sup>! If they get past us to the engine core, we are doomed"

Ophidis: "Do you not wish to take a closer look, machine to machine, all kindred in your metal?"

Kyteal: "I am nothing like them. I ain't a mindless automaton, I have a soul".

Ophidis: "I thought your kind had that removed at birth".

Kyteal (angrily): "This is your fault, xenos! You have brought this fate upon us".

Ophidis: "Oh how am I to blame? I did not take that bounty".

Kyteal: "You are a terrible influence on her. All xenos are corrupting forces, that is a fact".

Ophidis: "As you wish, big lad then, the death you ask for so often may come sooner than you expected".

Kyteal: "Never, I will choose my moment to vex it. My life cycle ends when I deem it, not before".

Ophidis: "Oh, if only that was so. The Cryptek... he followed me here".

Kyteal: "It appears to have assembled a temporary body from pieces of our vessel".

Dhokar: "Akemphlight, consume them!"

Kyteal: "Their own devices are relentless".

Ophidis: "Nothing is unkillable, adept. Give me cover fire. It is time for me to see, if fate will smile again".

Kyteal: "You are insane, Aeldari!"

Dhokar: "You again! Run, coward, while you still can! Run, run!"

Ophidis: "Not today!"

Athene Santiago: "Ophidis, look out!"

Ophidis: "Captain, you shouldn't be here".

Servitor: "Firing on designated target!"

(Servitor unleashing a salvo of gunfire upon the Cryptek)

(explosion)

Dhokar (angrily): "You will pay for that, organic wretch!"

Ophidis: "Captain, get down!"

Athene Santiago (screaming): "Noooooo!"

\* \* \*

Icaylian: "Icaylian has computed the required warp translation. Commencement ready. Konnor?"

Konnor: "What is it?"

Icaylian: "If we launch the savior pods, someone will need to..."

Konnor: "To remain behind to oversee the ejection sequence. Yes, you want to toss a coin for it?"

Icaylian: "No, Icaylian is very afraid".

Konnor: "Konnor is too".

Icaylian: "Yes, Icaylian sees the colors of your aura".

Konnor: "You do?"

Icaylian: "Icaylian sees much about Konnor mage".

Konnor (after a pause): "Warp drive spinning up to full power. You'd better get back to your chambers, navigator".

Icaylian: "And so we challenge destiny once more".

(Icaylian walking away)

\* \* \*

Ophidis (in the distance): "Captain!!!"

Athene Santiago (regaining consciousness): "Ophidis? Kyteal?"

Dhokar: "Their existence ends in moments. The passage of time will be millennia for you, suspended in agony. I will cut you open with fragments of your own past, weakling prey thing".

Athene Santiago: "Release... me!"

Dhokar: "Every instance of your life is mine to devour. What are you made of?"

(flashback, child laughing)

Female Voice: "There's nothing to be done, daughter, don't you see?"

Athene Santiago: "Mother? These are my... memories?"

Male Voice: "My beautiful Athene, my princess. I cannot forget, you made me so proud, child".

(flashback, marching soldiers)

Athene Santiago: "Father?"

Voices (accusing): "Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!"

Athene Santiago (moaning): "Get out... of my... mind!"

Dhokar: "That weapon..."

Athene Santiago: "I defy you..."

(Athene shooting at Dhokar, then moaning and struggling to break free of mind control)

(sounds coming back to normal, distant screams of a horrified soldier)

Kyteal: "She is free of it".

Ophidis: "Get her into cover".

Kyteal: "How did you..."

Athene Santiago: "My father gave me this pistol. He always told me it was unique".

Dhokar: "You only delay the inevitable. Come to me, kindred, Dhokar summons you".

(more portals opening)

Ophidis: "It will flood the ship with those soulless things. Captain, we must abandon the Corsair. If we remain here, death will claim us all".

Athene Santiago: "Not yet! (over vox) Navigator! Raise the Geller fields and take us into the warp".

Icaylian (over vox): "Aye, Captain! Towards what destination?"

Athene Santiago: "Nowhere!"

(warp engines igniting, Corsair taking a warp jump)

\* \* \*

Kyteal: "What madness is this? You've cursed us adrift in unreality".

Dhokar: "A desperate ploy, it will not save you".

Ophidis: "The Cryptek has conjured an army".

Dhokar: "Surrender, organics! I vow your end will be swift. Your harvest will anoint my rebirth".

Servitor: "We cannot survive against so many".

Athene Santiago: "Yes, but I've seen the ashen wasteland of a Necron tomb world. I know what they leave behind. I will not doom countless planets to the same fate. Engine Seer, deactivate all keel clamps, initiate cargo module release sequence".

Kyteal: "Now you have finally lost your reason?"

Ophidis: "The module will pass through the Geller field. It will be ejected straight into the madness of the warp, consumed by the raw power of unbridled Chaos".

Athene Santiago: "Yes, obey my command!"

Kyteal: "I always knew I would meet my end on this damnable ship".

Athene Santiago: "I do not intend to die today".

Dhokar: "No, stop! Do not..."

Servitor: "Sequence active! Twenty seconds to complete release".

Athene Santiago: "Get to the airlock, go! Go!"

Ophidis (running): "The module is decompressing".

Kyteal (running): "Oh this feels familiar!"

Dhokar: "You will not escape us, flesh-born".

Athene Santiago (running): "Don't... look... back! Get through the hatch!"

Servitor (running): "They are coming after us. Multiple targets".

Ophidis (running): "Captain, come on! Kyteal, secure the door".

Kyteal (running): "With pleasure".

Dhokar: "Weakling organics, we cannot be stopped! You have no victory, this is not our destruction. We will hunt you and flay you souls from your living forms. We will..."

(siren going out)

Dhokar: "What is this? Do not dare touch me, void beasts... Aaaaaaaaaa!!!"

(Dhokar screaming from pain)

(demons attacking the Necron and his scarab retinue, shredding them to pieces)

\* \* \*

Athene Santiago: "Look through the portal! It's working!"

Kyteal: "And now what, dear Captain? The Corsair is in the middle of a protein elemental force of pure madness and you have just offered it a meal"

Ophidis: "The predators of the warp will come for us, once they've had annihilated the Necrons".

Athene Santiago: "Aye and the Corsair's Geller field will not be able to withstand a concentrated attack. (over vox) Bridge, this is Santiago".

Konnor (over vox): "Oh, you are still alive?"

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Where is Icaylan?"

Konnor (over vox): "The navigator's in chambers, Captain, in the depths of a transit fuke. I think Icaylan is trying to hold us stable in the warp currents".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "I need you to go in there, break the trance".

Konnor (over vox): "But... I can't... I'd be exposed to raw psychic power".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "There's no other way. By the time we get to the engine core to shut down the drives, the warp spawn outside the ship will be through our shields".

Konnor (over vox): "Throne and blood! They are swarming all around us".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Do as I command. Take you knife, stab the navigator".

Konnor (over vox): "The shock could kill her".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "The shock will break the navigator's psychic link and it should throw us out of the warp".

Konnor (over vox): "Should?"

Athene Santiago (commanding, over vox): "This is our only chance. Do it, Konnor!"

\* \* \*

Icaylan (meditating): "I am the eye of the storm. I am the calm of the sun. I am the road that unfolds. I am the hand that guides the tiller<sup>51</sup>".

Konnor (entering the chamber): "Ouch, I must not... can't look... must... look away from... the third eye (unsheathing his blade) Icaylan, I'm sorry".

Icaylian: "I am the fate of the unknown. I am the scent of the flower. I am the day that begins..."

(Konnor stabbing Icaylian)

Icaylian: "Ah!"

(horrible screaming and roaring voices)

\* \* \*

Ophidis (entering the chamber): "Oh no, oh no, I think..."

(Icaylian moaning)

Ophidis: "Someone get a Medicae up here!"

Kyteal: "Did it work?"

Athene Santiago: "It worked. We've reverted to normal space and let the Necrons to the predations<sup>52</sup> of the warp spawn".

Konnor (angrily): "What did you make me do?"

Ophidis: "She made you save all our lives. Now put the knife away".

Servitor: "Checking... The navigator is damaged, but the wound is recoverable".

Athene Santiago: "See to it".

Servitor: "Complying".

Konnor (angrily): "You almost made me a murderer".

Kyteal: "Things could be worse".

Athene Santiago: "Your actions saved more lives, than you know. Icaylian will understand".

Ophidis: "Damage reports are rising from all decks, many dead by the hands of the Necrons. But the machines are gone".

Kyteal: "We actually have something to thank the Ruinous Powers for".

Athene Santiago (angrily): "Kyteal, I won't have such words uttered aboard my ship, do you hear? You will atone at the shrine when this is done. I will have no more talk of Chaos".

Kyteal: "I humbly beg your forgiveness".

Ophidis: "The hololith... There's another ship out there".

Konnor: "That shouldn't be. We reverted in the middle of the deep space, light years from the nearest star lane".

(intensifying beeping sounds)

Kyteal: "Reading multiple detections. They seem to be very interested in us".

Servitor: "Incoming vox transmission".

The Sunless (over vox): "Attention, rogue trader Corsair. This is the warship Sunless. By command of the Tetrarch Queen Balletine, governess and the high authority of the Zeist sector, you are ordered to comply with the following. Your Captain will embark on a shuttle craft and transfer immediately to this vessel. Failure to obey will be seen as tacit<sup>53</sup> acknowledgement of criminality and punished accordingly".

Servitor: "We are being targeted by multiple lance batteries".

Kyteal: "Usually I like it when I am proven correct, not so much today".

Athene Santiago: "Mage, you have the console. Take care of my ship while I'm gone. Kyteal, have the servitors ready my shuttle".

Ophidis: "I will attend".

Athene Santiago: "I don't need you with me. Nintheater will be enough".

Servitor: "Complying".

Ophidis: "I do not care what you want. I have my pledge".

Athene Santiago: "Then on your own head be it".

\* \* \*

Athene Santiago (entering the chamber of the Sunless): "Be on your guard".

Ophidis: "Always".

Servitor: "Acknowledged".

Ophidis: "This vessel, so ornate, such needless complexity. It is vast compared to the Corsair. Your ship could birth inside this dock with space to spare".

Servitor: "The Sunless is a Retribution class vessel. It currently carries the flag of the Tetrarch Queen".

Athene Santiago: "She's here, on this ship?"

Servitor: "Confirmed".

Ophidis: "Is that a note of fear in your voice? We have just survived the predations of the Necron Cryptek and the denizens of the warp, but some aging dowager<sup>54</sup> monarch fills you with dread?"

Athene Santiago: "You don't know what she is capable of. They say the Zeist sector used to have a thousand treasure worlds within it, now there are barely two hundred barely worthy of the name. The others fell prey to the Queen's mercurial<sup>55</sup> temper".

(approaching footsteps)

Sunless' Captain: "You are Captain Santiago?"

Athene Santiago: "I am by the grace of Terra and the God-Emperor's warrant".

Sunless' Captain: "Indeed and what is this? Have you brought the xenos as a gift?"

Ophidis: "Hardly".

Sunless' Captain: "It speaks, oh! Ahahaha, how amusing. Perhaps that will be a reason enough not to kill it for sullying<sup>56</sup> my vessel with its presence".

Ophidis: "You may make the attempt".

Sunless' Captain: "What did it say?"

Athene Santiago: "Sir, I am here as ordered. What do you want of me? My vessel requires urgent attention and I..."

Sunless' Captain (interrupting): "In other circumstances that scow<sup>57</sup> of yours would be beneath my attentions, Santiago. But her majesty deems you of note and I serve at her pleasure. You are to be granted an audience".

Athene Santiago: "May I ask why?"

Sunless' Captain: "No. You will surrender your weapons and make sure your lackeys understand that any threatening behavior will see them gunned down where they stand".

Athene Santiago: "Very well".

Sunless' Captain: "A word of warning, Santiago. Take care, the moods of the Tetrarch Queen can change like solar winds. Follow me".

\* \* \*

(Athene entering her majesty's reception room)

Sunless' Captain: "Presenting Captain Santiago of the rogue trader Corsair and her... staff".

Tetrarch Queen: "Come closer, child".

Athene Santiago: "Remain here with the servitor".

Ophidis: "Very well".

Athene Santiago (approaching the Queen): "Your majesty, how may I serve the Imperium?"

Tetrarch Queen: "You do serve the Imperium, don't you? A rogue trader, such a colorful term I've always thought. It hides so many shades beneath the name".

Athene Santiago: "Indeed".

Tetrarch Queen: "Your sorts are the tip of the spear. Adventurers, scouts, pathfinders and trailblazers<sup>58</sup>. The kind of men and women that stories are written about, aye? A less charitable<sup>59</sup> observer might call you something else though... Pirate, brigand, smuggler, traitor and I have little time for those sort of people in my realm, Captain. Those who consort<sup>60</sup> with the wrong kind, who lie about who they are and where they came from, those I take grave issue with".

Athene Santiago (hesitant): "I... I am a loyal daughter of the God-Emperor of mankind".

Tetrarch Queen: "In its own way that is true. Look at me, child. Look at me and kneel".

Athene Santiago (kneeling): "Yes, your majesty".

Tetrarch Queen: "I am not what you expected, am I?"

Athene Santiago: "No, milady. I was told you were five hundred years old, but..."

Tetrarch Queen: "I could almost be another (laughing). A thousand juvenate treatments and mech-implants can do wonders for the length of one's life. And you know what I have learned during those centuries? (accusing) I know when I am looking at a liar".

Athene Santiago: "I do not understand".

Tetrarch Queen: "Stop it or else I will believe you think me a fool and then I will become murderous. I will gut you before rangers can take a single

step. Yes, Aeldari, I see you. You have come far down the path of an outcast to find yourself here, I think”.

Ophidis: “What do you know of me, mon-keigh?”

Tetrarch Queen: “More, than you realize. Feka li danann, lisara narann”.

Ophidis (shocked): “You speak my tongue?”

Tetrarch Queen: “I have many talents, something else that has kept me alive for a long time”.

Athene Santiago: “If you have an accusation to make, your majesty... Then with all due respect I would ask you to do so”

Tetrarch Queen: “There, that’s what I wanted to see. The steel beneath the silk. Very good, tell me why you fled my blockade at Nagan hub”.

Athene Santiago: “The Aeldari, he is useful to me. I did not want some overzealous guardsman shooting him”.

Tetrarch Queen: “A partial truth to obscure the greater omission. You lose a point. Tell me why you took the Notoma bounty from the bondsmen on Ross’s Folly”.

Athene Santiago: “I needed the money”.

Tetrarch Queen: “A complete truth, point restored. And you found her, didn’t you? The Notoma? My shipmaster thought the same, but we discovered only a spray of ancient wreckage, strange time-distorted fragments”

Athene Santiago: “The ship is gone”.

Tetrarch Queen: “But not the prize?”

Ophidis: “The Queen sets the blind bounty for the pirate ship”.

Tetrarch Queen: “He’s clever, this one, for a xenos”.

Athene Santiago: “That’s what the blockade was about... You didn’t want to wait”.

Tetrarch Queen: “I do get more impatient more often these days. I know it’s so d?class? of me. Where is the item?”

Athene Santiago: “It was one of your carriers the pirates plundered at Felsbar, yes? And the box, you know what was inside. You know what it can do”.

Tetrarch Queen: "Of course I do. It's my property, very expensive to acquire, more so to find a stasis box capable of preventing it from phasing out. Now give it to me and I will consider letting you live".

Athene Santiago: "I can't, it's gone".

Tetrarch Queen: "Don't play games with me".

Athene Santiago: "Look at me, milady. Am I lying?"

Tetrarch Queen: "No".

Athene Santiago: "I let the warp take your precious Necron skull. The chronomancer is scattered to the Immaterium and the galaxy is better for it".

Tetrarch Queen: "I am disappointed".

Athene Santiago: "You know there are other stories about you, your majesty? Rumors spoken by drunken sorts steeped in rancid amasec. They say the Tetrarch Queen has a weakness for artifacts of xenos origin".

Ophidis: "Captain, be wary".

Athene Santiago: "They say she is obsessed with them, collects them even, but no one seriously believes them, because that would be a death sentence. It would be heresy".

Tetrarch Queen: "Oh do grow up!"

Athene Santiago: "If that were true, if someone had proof, would not the Imperial Inquisition have done something about it? Punished such a gross transgression?"

Tetrarch Queen (laughing): "Is that a threat?"

Athene Santiago: "I don't have what you want, so do your worst. At least I will die knowing I have honor".

Tetrarch Queen: "Honor? You think that matters? I will tell you what matters, Athene Dolorosa Santiago de Sylvian. Yes, I know your full and true name, Captain. I know who you are and who you were. I know where that machine slave of yours came from. I know all of it, because that is what matters, child. Knowledge! And today I lost a piece of it because of your idiocy, so now you owe me".

Athene Santiago: "What do you mean?"

Tetrarch Queen: "I should leave you to the void and burn your vessel, but I do so hate to waste potential. I hereby restrict the starship Corsair's letter

of mark to the Zeist sector and no other. You and your crew may not leave my dominions until I deem otherwise. You are free to go about your business within those borders, but from this day on I control you. When I call, you will come. When I command, you will obey. This shall be done until such time as I decide your debt is repaid”.

Athene Santiago: “You can’t...”

Tetrarch Queen (infuriated): “It is done. Now get out of my sight”.

\* \* \*

Konnor: “So the Tetrarch Queen just... let us off with a warning?”

Athene Santiago: “Let’s say that is what happened and leave it there. Set a course, mage, back to Nagan hub. I imagine it will be quiet now. Icaylian, are you well enough to get us there?”

Icaylian (talking with visible pain): “Icaylian is able, Captain, if you will promise me no blades will meet my flesh again”.

Konnor: “I said I was sorry”.

Athene Santiago: “The blame falls to me. I am Captain, I gave the command. I will understand if you wish to leave us, but no, I would not have ordered it if there were another option”.

Icaylian: “No, Icaylian will remain. Icaylian comprehends”.

(Athene and Ophidis walking away from the crew)

Ophidis: “A state I wish I could share. It is remarkable that mage is still alive and sane. Exposure to the navigator’s third eye should have destroyed his mind”.

Athene Santiago: “It seems the God-Emperor’s light shone upon him this day”.

Ophidis: “That is one explanation”.

Athene Santiago: “Ophidis, you will not speak of what was said aboard the Sunless. That is my direct command”.

Ophidis: “You will not be able to keep the queen’s edict a secret forever”.

Athene Santiago: “If I had not acceded<sup>63</sup> to her wishes, everyone on this ship would have suffered. She would have exposed them all, every misdeed and lost soul, every failure or mistake. I could not allow that. No one else needs to know, not yet”.

Ophidis: "And the other matter she spoke of?"

Athene Santiago: "I have never asked you why you chose the path of an outcast. Don't ask me about that".

Ophidis: "Very well, we will each guard our secrets and let us hope they do not poison us".

Athene Santiago: "I imagine we will dead long before they have a chance to bite. (over vox) Engine Seer, report!"

Kyteal (over vox): "This hateful wreck of a vessel continues to vex me, Captain. It is torture to a son of Mars, raw torture".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "I will pretend I care if you tell me are we ready to engage the drives".

Kyteal (over vox): "Against all reason we are, although I cannot mount for what will happen out of that. Perhaps, the Necrons left behind some burny gifts for us. We could all vaporize in a ball of plasma at any moment".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "Very cheering, is Nintheater down there with you? I need him on the flight bridge"

Kyteal (over vox): "Your machine slave was heading down to the secure compartment last time I laid optics upon it".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "No matter, prepare to make space for Nagan hub. We have thrones to earn and foes yet to fight".

\* \* \*

Servitor: "Close cargo bay hatch and seal. Sensing, sensing... Something is here. Something is... still... here. I am drawn to it. This unit is drawn to it. I do not understand. A chrono temporal effect has damaged... Re... Repaired damaged cortical memory relays... I am this unit is... remembering... something".

Athene Santiago (over vox): "All hands, this the Captain. Secure for warp and may the God-Emperor have mercy on our souls".

Servitor: "Captain... Captain Santiago... Athene... her name is Athene... She is... She is... I know. Memory, memory error! Must correct!"

Dhokar: "I live..."

Servitor: "Negative, negative, memory error. Must correct, review and erase. Erase memory, setting one hour delete data. Delete! I must not know. I cannot... forget".

(warp engines igniting)