

Into the Void

By Melissa Roddis

Another blast shook the ship, throwing the crew from their feet.

'Evade!' the Corsair prince yelled, rocking in his seat as the *Lance of Asuryan* took another hit.

In the viewing portal before him Estelar watched the vast battle unfolding, as two ornate battleships picked off the smaller craft of his fleet like sharks preying on a shoal of fish. The prows of the hostile vessels were grossly decorated in purple and golden hues - the unmistakable artifice of Slaaneshi worshippers.

Lances of energy scored the pitch black void, turning empty space into a crosshatch of searing light. Small fires blossomed along the dark buttresses of the great warships, but their attackers showed no sign of abating.

A ball of flame erupted nearby as *Tempest's Fury* exploded in a shower of glittering debris.

'Amharoc is relying on us to make this rendezvous,' his Void Dreamer said in his ear, as if the captain wasn't already aware of their mission.

'She goes by another name now,' Estelar replied.

'Whatever name she goes by won't matter if we get cut to ribbons out here in the void,' his advisor pointed out.

Although they were greater in number, his band of pirate vessels were no match for the armour and firepower of the vast Slaaneshi ships.

'Bring me Tasar,' Estelar ordered. 'Today, the Corsairs must do what they do best.'

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In the chaos of the unfolding battle, the two arrow-shaped boarding vessels slipped out of the *Lance's* bay, unnoticed. Emitting a spread of sensor-baffling noise, they cut across the void and vanished into the shadow of the Slaaneshi flagship. The first headed towards the prow, attaching itself to the Leviathan like a parasitical insect.

'We have a lock, Baron,' the pilot said as, with a gentle jolt, the Corsair ship latched onto the enemy's hull with its boarding clamp.

'Start cutting. We don't have much time,' Baron Tasar instructed, standing at the hatchway with pistols ready.

Sparks flew as the monomolecular cutting blade scorched through the dark hull, until a round entranceway had been carved out.

'With me,' Tasar said to his assembled reavers, stepping through the boarding tube and into the enemy stronghold.

The Corsairs stalked along the dimly lit corridors of the enemy flagship. The interior was even more repellent than the outer hull, decorated with cruel spikes and obscene carvings. Incoherent shouts echoed from all around, and Tasar couldn't determine if they were cries of agony or exaltation - or both.

Now and then the great cruiser shivered as a Corsair vessel made its mark, almost as if the ship itself took pleasure in its pain. Still, it was like gnats trying to penetrate the hide of a saurian beast. The Corsairs could never win this battle through firepower alone.

A light flared in the corridor up ahead, revealing a group of power-armoured Heretic Astartes, each bearing the sigil of the Emperor's Children. None were wearing helmets, their faces hideously etched with vivid red scars.

The reavers concealed themselves in the shadows until the Space Marines were almost upon them, then leapt out, curved blades glinting. On an even footing, the augmented warriors would have easily despatched the lightly armoured Aeldari, but they had not come here expecting a fight. Swords flashed red in the darkness as the Heretic Astartes fell, new wounds added to their ruined faces.

'This way,' Tasar instructed, trusting his instincts to tell him where they should go. He had spent his whole life on void-ships and, although he had never been on one like this, all ships have a certain logic to them. He was beginning to enjoy himself when a deafening klaxon sounded, an agonising wail that forced the Aeldari to clamp their hands over their ears. Their presence had been discovered.

'Let's move,' Tasar signalled psychically, breaking into a run. All stealth forgotten, the others followed him at pace, snapping off shots at foes attempting to

intercept them. Some of the Corsairs were cut down, but most were too swift for the bulky Heretic Astartes to catch. As they neared the bridge, the stomp of armoured feet heralded the arrival of a large squad of Chaos Space Marines behind them. Tasar raised his shimmer shield just in time to deflect a thunderous round of sonic weaponry, as his reavers stormed onto the ship's control deck.

Arrayed against them were two dozen Chaos Space Marines, including the one clearly in charge of this vessel, whose armour was more hideously adorned than the rest. Diving behind control consoles, the Corsairs evaded the first wave of fire, but then the Noise Marines following them burst into the chamber, their weapons unleashing an ear-splitting cacophony. Five reavers perished instantly, dropping to the floor with blood running from their ears. The others returned with their weapons, spitting forth a hurricane of monomolecular blades. One of the Noise Marines fell, torn apart as if devoured by a million tiny insects.

There were too many foes arrayed against the reavers now, though, and Tasar knew their time was almost up.

'Do not fear,' he said aloud. 'Death comes for us all.'

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The second Corsair boarding ship didn't follow the same route as the first. Instead, it latched itself to the underbelly of the Slaaneshi beast, releasing a small group of dark figures into the shadowy halls. Speeding soundlessly through the ship, they met little resistance, as almost the entire ship's complement was recklessly hastening to join the foray on the bridge - just as Tasar had predicted. When the Corsairs reached the ship's vulnerable inner workings, they planted hundreds of small opalescent spheres, concealing them beneath tangles of cable and ostentatious decoration. Then, as quickly as they had come, they were gone. Nothing more than ghosts.

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The bridge was a storm of fire, with consoles bursting into flames as they were torn apart by explosive rounds, and nests of cables still live and sparking, snaking across the floor. More reavers fell as the Chaos Space Marines amassed on their intruders, revelling in their wanton slaughter.

A low, loud rumble reverberated through the ship. Then, the shaking began, much more violent than any caused by the small Corsair ships in the void. Sections of the hull cracked and splintered, crashing down on the bewildered Chaos Space Marines. A fire swelled onto the bridge, consuming many of the Heretic Astartes, who writhed on the floor as they burned. The reavers opened fire again, taking every advantage of their reprieve. Their exit clear, they left the bridge in chaos, jets of flame bursting from broken fuel pipes to consume those left alive.

Tasar led his band back into the maze of corridors, where pandemonium had broken out. Part of the ceiling had caved in, a twisted girder skewering one Heretic Astartes through the abdomen. Others lay buried in rubble, their faces distorted in rapturous agony. Tasar surveyed them with distaste.

A clamour caught his attention, and he turned to see a gaggle of human cultists pushing their way through the debris towards the escape pods. He was about to order their execution when something about the heretics made him pause. They were human, and yet they weren't quite human. They had all the appearance of the ape-like creatures, and yet...

He started as he saw a strange figure join them. With skin so pale it was ghost-like, it floated out of the flames as if riding the rolling smoke. A Haemonculus of Commorragh.

Tasar barely had time to question what a covenite was doing on a Heretic Astartes warship before he felt the ship buckle once more, entering its dying throes. He looked back down the corridor, but could see nothing now but smoke and ash. A trick of the mind, he concluded, and led his reavers back to their boarding craft.

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On the bridge of the Lance of Asuryan, Prince Estelar allowed himself a grim smile. The largest of the Slaaneshi warships was listing dangerously, fire spouting from its buttresses. As it broke apart, it crashed into its sister ship, whose prow splintered away, scattering dozens of bodies into the void.

'Resume course,' he said, and the swift Corsair vessels sped away, leaving nothing but death in their wake.