

OUR MARTYRED LADY



PART 3 – FAITH ENDURES (2019)

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Scripted by Reverend

LIST OF CHARACTERS:

- * Inquisitor Katarinya Greyfax
- * Celestine, the Living Saint
- * Marshal Gardhelm
- * Custodian Longinus
- * Demon Prince
- * Sabrina, canoness of the Order of Our Martyred Lady
- * sisters Resunda, Lesia

Servitor: "Severe navigation anomaly warning! Brace for warp turbulence".

Gardhelm: "As I warned the San Leor is wholly enveloped by warp storms. Did you think this is the first time Emperor's servants strive to breach the storm, Inquisitor Greyfax? The crusades of the Black Templars have attempted several times to bring the shrine world of San Leor back under the Imperial control"

Greyfax: "So it seems, Marshal Gardhelm. Even so we have solid evidence that cardinal Kultza dispatched troop ships to the system. He would have known about the storm so he must also have known of some way through it".

(Celestine entering the chambers)

Gardhelm: "Sister Celestine, what news from the Order of Our Martyred Lady?"

Celestine: "The fleet from the Convent Sanctorum is beset¹, unable to penetrate the storms".

Greyfax: "Celestine, this is where sister Sabrina was lost as she made pilgrimage to San Leor. Is there anything you remember of the incident that might show us some way through".

Celestine: "I know nothing more of sister Sabrina's fate than is recorded at Ophelia and no doubt those records are well-known to the Inquisition".

Greyfax: "The cardinal has been turned by the infernal powers. Perhaps he was privy to some darker means to gain passage through the warp storms. If he possessed undisclosed psychic powers, is it possible that others of sorcerous ability traveled with the fleet and bargained a way through?"

Gardhelm: "I reviewed your assessment of the cardinal's forces, Inquisitor, to gain some insight of the likely foes we will face here, as well as his planetary defense troops. You mentioned that he had access to storm troopers of the Tempestus Scions".

Greyfax: "That is correct. They are trained by Schola Progenium and so were likely corrupted by allies of Kultza. What of it?"

Gardhelm: "The cardinal was a false servant. How far has the corruption stretched through the Ecclesiarchy and the Atromesta sector? The navigators, the astropaths, the Department Munitorum even? Our strength would better be deployed combating the threat at its source rather than trying to gain entry to a system lost for a century".

Greyfax: "A battle for a future day, Marshal".

(Gardhelm gasping)

Greyfax: "The link is not Atromesta, it is Ophelia VII. Thankfully there is nothing in my investigation to suggest that Ecclesiarch Deacis is complicit in any darker plot, simply encouraged by others including cardinal Kultza. The cardinal's attempts to keep our attention on Ophelia VII were intended to mask his own activities, most pertinent² of which was dispatching troops to this system several months ago".

(Longinus entering the chamber)

Gardhelm: "Ah, Centurion Longinus! I hope you are already aware of the situation".

Longinus: "I am".

Gardhelm: "What is your intent?"

Longinus: "We cannot long remain on station at the edge of this storm. The more time we spend here, the greater the danger we will be swept away or worse".

Gardhelm: "I am willing to attempt the transition if you desire it, Inquisitor. Even if we are successful, we are likely to lose ships in the process, either destroyed or scattered across the warp tides".

Greyfax: "Not for the moment, Marshal. We shall wait for the rest of the fleet to arrive. If we are to break through to San Leor we must do it with our full strength, not a handful of ships at a time. I will consult with my texts and try to think of some way to breach the storms".

Longinus: "Our foes are in league with the powers of the warp. I don't think it will too long before we draw their gaze. It would be too much to suppose that your friends from the Aeldari craft worlds could borrow us a route to San Leor as they helped you escape from the wrath of the Despoiler".

Greyfax: "They are no friends of mine, allies of temporary convenience, nothing more".

Celestine: "I would not wish to deal any more with the Aeldari, Centurion. We have ills and enemies enough at present".

Longinus: "Then let's hope you find something in those texts before we are attacked again as we were when we departed Terra. I don't think we could resist such assaults for long in the heart of a warp storm".

Greyfax: "I shall be in my chambers trying to find a solution if anyone has any suggestions".

(Greyfax leaving the chambers)

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Longinus: "Greyfax! I want to speak with you".

Greyfax: "You have until I reach my chambers on the deck below. Be sure it is a worthwhile use of my time, Centurion Longinus".

Longinus: "During the three weeks since we left Ophelia VII I have been analyzing the reports you passed to me regarding recent events. My thanks for providing this intelligence".

Greyfax: "You have shown me what the Custodians are capable of, Centurion. And you are perhaps the only Imperial organization I trust without question".

Longinus: "Do you not trust your own Inquisition?"

Greyfax: "Certainly not. Inquisitors constantly walk the edge of the precipice³ staring down into depths that would break the souls of lesser folk. A few jump in. We must always be watchful, but the Custodians, your kind, were made by the Emperor himself to be loyal. You can no more turn on him than carve out your own lungs".

Longinus: "I am grateful for your confidence, Inquisitor, and your indulgence⁴. I believe the link you have drawn between Ophelia VII and our destination San Leor is credible if a little tenuous⁵. The involvement of cardinal Kultza in the second attempted assassination of the Ecclesiarch and sending ships to the San Leor system is worthy of investigation".

Greyfax: "So glad, that you approve".

Longinus: "However I don't see a link between Kultza and the explosion that destroyed the cathedral of the Emperor's ascension on Terra. If the intent of the assassin was to slay Deacis before he announced the dissolution of the Decree Passive it would be in contradiction to Kultza's public and private support of raising a new Frateris Templars force. I can't reconcile⁶ the renegade cardinal's actions to the events on Terra".

Greyfax: "It is a dichotomy⁷, yes. I cannot do anything more than speculate, but I detected both the assassin and the cardinal thinking of a phrase before they died. The eight-turned god".

Longinus: "So you said".

Greyfax: "From what Kyrillos has told me, Kultza was well placed to succeed Deacis if anything went amiss, particularly as nearly all of the Terra's Synod was wiped out at the same time as Deacis would have died".

Longinus: "What of it?"

Greyfax: "I would say that the original intention was for Kultza to become Ecclesiarch after Deacis and enact the revocation of the Decree Passive. It would seem as though he was following his predecessor's wishes and deflect attention whilst giving him access to High Lords of Terra".

Longinus: "A chilling thought. A man with the powers that Kultza possessed to be able to influence the minds of others and remove the memory of it. It would have been a terrible threat to the Senatorum Imperialis. We can be thankful his plot has been thwarted".

Greyfax: "Not yet thwarted though the man is dead. I am not convinced that he was the prime instigator. There is still the matter of San Leor. I cannot see the pattern that connects them all yet, but I am sure it exists".

Longinus: "I admit I'd hoped for other more insight given that we currently accompany a crusade of Black Templars, twenty companies of battle sisters and the warships to carry them. A large force sitting idle maybe just what the enemy wants. Has it occurred to you that the intelligence regarding San Leor might be a falsehood intended to lead your attention away from Ophelia VII?"

Greyfax: "That would mean Kultza or whoever he is working with or for thought that he might be compromised and so prepared a false trail beforehand detailing the fleet leaving for San Leor. I have encountered some complex plots in my time, but such convolutions⁸ seem not only unnecessary but highly unlikely".

Longinus: "But then perhaps I might suggest another scenario. Kultza dispatched loyal troops to San Leor in the hope of reclaiming the system for the Ecclesiarchy thus cementing his attempt to become Ecclesiarch. He did after all order their departure before the assassination attempt on Terra".

Greyfax: "In his last thoughts Kultza wondered if I knew about San Leor. It was his first concern upon seeing me. Whatever his intent the answers will be found at San Leor and given that the system been wrapped for decades by a warp storm I am not prepared to go into battle there under strength. I am beginning to think that I do not have your full confidence, Centurion".

Longinus: "As you said some Inquisitors stare into the abyss, others fall in. I am concerned that your entanglement⁹ with the Living Saint affects your judgment".

(Greyfax keying the door)

Greyfax: "Fortunately your concerns matter little, Custodian. Do not mistake my relationship with Celestine for friendship. The opposite is true, I do not trust her, nor these visions she claims the Emperor sends her. Surely you do not share this misguided faith in your master's godhood".

(Greyfax opening the door)

Longinus: "I've been a member of the Hetaeron Guard three times in my long service, three times as one of Companions of the Emperor. My armor is blackened from proximity to the emanations of the Golden Throne and we changed the guard every hundred years, such is the psychic pressure that pounds upon our minds for the duration. A few have their thoughts burned out entirely by the experience. Over my long life I have spent three hundred years in the direct presence of the Emperor and I will tell you that there is a broad gulf between psychically powerful and deity. But I do not know where I would draw the line, nor which side of it I will place the Master of Mankind".

Greyfax: "You would call him God Emperor?"

Longinus: "I speak not of theology, Inquisitor, but personal bias¹⁰. You are suspicious of their faith and so you are damning of everything the Ecclesiarchy does".

Greyfax: "I am an Inquisitor of the Ordo Hereticus. It is my purpose to scrutinize¹¹ the Imperial church".

Longinus: "It is more than that. You dislike and distrust sister Celestine so you extend your suspicion to all that is around her. If you find some corruption at San Leor, a darkness in the hearts of the Adepta Sororitas, the birthplace of the sisterhood, you will confirm your doubts about the Living Saint. When an Inquisitor expects heresy, then he'll always find it one way or another".

Greyfax: "An Inquisitor has the right to define heresy, a true threat to the Emperor and the Imperium. If you attempt to interfere with my mission, I will not hesitate in condemning you also".

Longinus: "Be careful, Inquisitor. Your list of allies grows short".

Greyfax (closing the door behind her): "Ah".

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Greyfax (moaning while sleeping): "... abomination... oh... corruption... your reckoning is overdue... no... you corrupted me... as you did Valeria"

(Trazyn laughing in the distance)

(Greyfax waking up with a sigh)

Greyfax: "Damn warp dreams!"

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(Celestine recollecting the events on Cadia during her sleep)

(Demon-Prince Urkanthos laughing)

Imperial Guardsman: Die, abomination!"

(Urkanthos killing the assailant with ease)

Urkanthos (laughing hysterically): “Ahahahha, the corpse bride...”

Celestine (flying over the battlefield): “Your hour is done, beast!”

(Urkanthos laughing)

Urkanthos: “Ahahaha, it has only just begun! You are nothing, the echo of a false god. I will break you in half and set your skull upon Khorne’s throne”.

(Celestine charging with a sword)

(Urkanthos crying)

Urkanthos: “I am the scourge¹² master of the Black Fleet, the right hand of the Despoiler. You cannot match me alone”.

(Demon charging)

Genevieve: “Celestine!”

Eleanor: “Celestine!”

Celestine: “I am not alone and your hour is done!”

(Celestine and Urkanthos clashing sword and talons)

(angelic singing)

(buzzing sound awaking Celestine)

Greyfax (behind the door): “Celestine!”

Celestine (yawning): “Open door!”

(door opening)

Celestine: “Greyfax?”

Greyfax: “You did not answer your vox”.

Celestine (standing from her bed and yawning): “I was... Eh... resting”.

Greyfax: “You look disturbed, Celestine. Was it another vision?”

Celestine: “Not the future, but a memory. Warp dreams recalling when my faith raised my sisters from the realm of the dead”.

Greyfax: “The one killed on Cadia? Genevieve and Eleanor?”

Celestine: “My Geminae Superia. The Demon Prince would have slain me as well had they not been returned by the will of the God Emperor. It was their faith in life that burned in their souls that allowed them to return”.

Greyfax: “There are other dark powers that play with life and death”.

Celestine (sighing): “Ah, and we have been brought back to the place where it all started, the mother world of the sisterhood, San Leor. This is where the daughters of the Emperor first chose to take up blade and a gun in praise of the Master of Mankind. The first of the Sisters of Battle”.

Greyfax: "But do not forget the twisted road that led from that time to the founding of the Orders Militant. It took a tyrant to create you, a heretic that wore the dual crowns of Ecclesiarch and Master of the Administratum, plucked your predecessors from obscurity and raised them up to an army".

Celestine: "He tricked them with technology they had never seen, pretending he could perform miracles. Vandire tried to corrupt them, but the Emperor would not have his daughters turned against him. It was through the Emperor's strength and the blade of a sister that Vandire was overthrown".

Greyfax: "Many are the deceptions of the enemy, Celestine. Like Kultza, the most dangerous ones hide right before us".

Celestine: "Yes, we must remain vigilant to the possibility that such manipulation might occur again. I am a Living Saint and answer to the God Emperor's will, not any human agency. The sisterhood must look to me as an example, to stay aloof¹³ from the politics of the Ecclesiarchy and true to the ideals of the daughters of the Emperor. I am the blade of the God Emperor and his foes shall fall before us".

Greyfax: "Which brings me to the reason for my visit. I have asked to meet with Longinus and Gardhelm. I know how to reach San Leor".

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Gardhelm: "Inquisitor, you said you had a way we could break through the storm around San Leor".

Greyfax: "Perhaps, Marshal. Longinus, you reminded me of an instant that occurred as we left Sol. We were beset by demonic attacks swirling the warp around us".

Longinus: "I remember, Celestine acted as a focus for the navigators creating a beacon for them to follow".

Greyfax: "Sister Celestine, can you make a way to San Leor?"

Celestine: "I might be able to, Katarinya. Ophelia teams with billions of the faithful connecting to a less populous world like San Leor might not be possible. That said, San Leor is the mother world of the sisterhood steeped¹⁴ in the souls of my predecessors and the spirit of the God Emperor".

Gardhelm: "It sounds like you would risk my whole crusade on a slender hope".

Celestine: "Not hope, Marshal, faith. I do not know if I can open a way but it is our duty to explore every option. I do not believe the Emperor has guided us here just to be thwarted by a storm".

Black Templar (over vox): "Marshal, we have arrival confirmation from the Majestic Light".

Gardhelm: "Acknowledged. That's the last of the battle sisters' ships, just one of mine left to arrive".

Longinus: "Let me get this right. We are going to attempt a forced breach of the storm?"

Greyfax: "You saw what was possible when we departed for Ophelia VII".

Longinus: "Hm..."

Celestine: "The faith of the Battle Sisters that have come from the Order of Our Martyred Lady will help. Marshal, would you and your warriors be willing to join me in prayer?"

Gardhelm: "We may share your faith in the God Emperor, but we are not servants of the Ecclesiarchy. We follow our own code".

Celestine: "Your faith in the God Emperor is all I need, Marshal, and your trust".

Gardhelm (sighing and tapping his fingers over the table): "Hm... Very well... You shall have it".

Celestine: "We will have to establish a fleet wide vox link and I will require a chamber from which to address the faithful".

Longinus: "How is this going to work in practice?"

Celestine: "We shall call upon the God Emperor to part the storms that bar entry to San Leor. When they have broken I shall give the word and the fleet will simultaneously engage their warp engines to jump back to real space".

Black Templar (over vox): "Navigators report, Marshal".

Gardhelm: "Yes?"

Black Templar (over vox): "Detecting ship's wake aft15, Marshal. Probably, the Sword of Reckoning, also a counter-cyclonic movement has developed in the warp storm ahead".

Gardhelm: "Elaborate!"

Black Templar (over vox): "Part of the warp storm seems to detaching to move towards us".

Gardhelm: "Acknowledged. By the Throne, it feels like we are pushing against a constant tide of misfortune".

Celestine: "The righteous path is never straight nor even, Marshal".

Greyfax: "We cannot afford to be drawn into the warp storm. It is time to make the attempt or withdraw".

Longinus: "I see a mass transition through an unstable warp breach. That is definitely a plan".

Greyfax: "You have an alternative, Centurion?"

Longinus: "Not yet".

Gardhelm: "You may use my personal chapel, sister Celestine".

Celestine: "An honor for which you have my deepest thanks. I shall begin our preparations. Can all be in order in one hour?"

Gardhelm: "It shall be".

(Gardhelm and Greyfax leaving)

Gardhelm: "Do you really think she has the power to part this demonic veil?"

Greyfax: "Why ask me? You are the one that claims to have faith".

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Greyfax (entering her chambers): "Servitor, enforce communication silence and bar entry protocols for the next thirty minutes".

Servitor: "As commanded, Inquisitor".

Greyfax (taking a seat): "Time to find out exactly what is guarding this world. Blessed or not Celestine must not be distracted for an instant. She has strength and courage but she is not untouchable. And if you really are a divinity, our Emperor, I would be grateful if you saw fit to enact a miracle on our behalf". Show yourselves".

(weird noises)

Greyfax: "Geller field is intact. Let us see what is beyond".

(Greyfax using her psyker abilities)

(Greyfax swimming in the ocean of Immaterium)

(thunder and lightning)

(distant demonic laughter)

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(Celestine and Gardhelm treading towards the chapel)

Celestine: "Thank you, Marshal Gardhelm".

Gardhelm: "The fleet wide vox link is ready at your word, sister Celestine. My brethren are gathered in preparation for your prayer".

Celestine: "Good, please activate the vox now".

(Celestine and Gardhelm entering the chapel)

Celestine: "Through us the will of the God Emperor will be done".

Gardhelm: "Our faith is his blade".

Celestine: "And I shall wield it in his name. Let us first spend a moment to praise the Emperor for guiding us to this place. Without the light of Astronomicon to pierce the veil of the warp humanity would be stranded amid the darkness of the stars. It is through his sacrifice and will that the void is tamed".

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "We pray for those souls given unto the Emperor that this light may burn bright across the galaxy. As we pray for all of those who labor beneath his gaze and give off their lives to his wars so that we can overcome a host of sinful foes".

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "We pray for those that raise gun and blade in defense of the Emperor's realm for in them is the Emperor's strength given life, his purpose given vitality".

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

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Voices (in the distance): "Praise the Emperor".

Greyfax: "I see you, denizen! I feel your formless breath upon my neck. This world does not belong to you. I am no navigator, but I am also not blind. Show yourself!"

(thunder crackling)

Greater Demon (erupting in laughter): "Hahaha! This world is ours! We took it! It belongs to us!"

Greyfax: "You cannot bar the righteous!"

Greater Demon (erupting in laughter): "Hahaha! You have a puppet of the corpse god. This is a prison for the righteous. Hahaha!"

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Celestine: "We give thanks to the Emperor for giving us his strength so that we might fight in his name and for bringing us to the foe that we shall smite them in his name".

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "From him springs our faith, into us pours his resolve¹⁷. Through us his will is done. Without him we are nothing".

Gardhelm: "We are nothing. Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "We call upon the God Emperor of Terra to heed us know. We ask that the hawk of the sun turn his immortal gaze upon us. We pray for the Master of Mankind to lead us on the path of the righteous!"

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "We stand before you, lord of the Golden Throne, to strike where you would have us strike. The enemy's ways confound¹⁸ us. Their strength tests us. Yet we shall be greater with your might gifted upon us".

Gardhelm: "Praise the Emperor".

Celestine: "I am the edge of the blade. I am the cut that ends foes. I am the wrath that topples¹⁹ armies. Sisters of the Martyred Lady, brothers of the Black Templars, will you fight with me?"

Gardhelm: "Yes!"

Celestine: "I feel your faith, brothers! But it must be stronger! You are sons of Dorn, the warriors of Sigismund! You call yourselves champions of the Emperor. He calls upon you now to lend me your wrath, lend me your hate, lend me your fire. Praise him!"

Black Templars (in one voice): "Praise the Emperor!"

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Black Templars (in the distance): "Praise the Emperor".

Greater Demon: "Is that your plan, mortal? You will pray away my host?"

Greyfax: "The warp is a place of fear and hope, dread and faith. In here a word can wound, a thought can kill. Tell me, demon, why do you desire San Leor so much?"

Greater Demon: "I see your thoughts, mortal. This is nigh, you cannot hide your true self from me. Why do you throw your life in defense of a charade of a church? When the temples of the false Emperor have been broken open, Terra will fall. You think to hold us back. You have no faith".

Greyfax: "But I do have power. For me they are the same. You are a conjuration²⁰, a passing figment²¹ of interconnecting energies that believes it is alive. In all ways that matter you do not even exist".

Greater Demon: "Ah, stupid mortal. I will tear your soul from your body".

(thunder crackling)

(Demon screaming from pain)

Greyfax: "Who needs faith, when they have the Geller field?"

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Celestine: "I can feel the heat of you burning wrath. I am the holy flames that will see us through this web of deception".

Black Templar: "Burn the unholy!"

Celestine: "The chorus of the God Emperor sings in my ears! Speak the righteous words, sing the praises, defy the darkness!"

Black Templars (in one voice): "We are the way! We are the light!"

Celestine (unsheathing her blade): "The veil parts before us! Imperator Dominatus!"

Black Templars (in one voice): "Imperator Dominatus!"

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Voice (in the distance): "Imperator Dominatus!"

(warp storm dissolving)

Greater Demon: "Impossible... You will still pay, mortal. What you seek within these walls of pain is not what you will find. Death and despair await you".

Greyfax: "I am an Inquisitor. Death and despair are my trail to follow".

Greater Demon: "Good, step closer to your doom, mortal! The eight-turned god will send the blue flame to cleanse you once again. I shall AAAAAAAAAA!"

(demon prince screaming from pain)

Celestine (over vox): "The breach is made. I do not know how long it will last. All vessels, engage warp engines and translate".

(demonic screams fading)

(Greyfax breathing hard and trying to regain her breath)

Greyfax: "It... worked... Perhaps, she is blessed... All that remains is to see if we can get out again".

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Servitor: "Translation complete".

(siren going off)

Servitor: "Proximity warning, celestial planetoid. Proximity warning, multiple stellar craft".

Gardhelm: "Blood of Terra, we've dropped directly into orbit. Helm22, full stop! Weapons, prepare all arms. Signals, contact the fleet and send assembly coordinates".

Black Templars (in one voice): "Aye, Marshal!"

Greyfax (approaching): "What is happening, Marshal Gardhelm?"

Gardhelm: "Breaching the storm has brought us straight into orbit over San Leor, Inquisitor. The other fleet ships are translating nearby".

(siren going off)

Servitor: "Proximity warning, multiple unidentified stellar craft".

Gardhelm: "Unidentified? Enemy ships already in orbit! Weapons, calculate targeting solutions".

Black Templar: "The scans do not show warships, Marshal. These rings for merchant transports, lightly armed warp frigates".

Gardhelm: "Merchant transports? They must be the ships Cardinal Kultza sent".

Greyfax: "Yes, he commandeered several non-naval vessels from fleets operating across his diocese23".

Black Templar: "Marshal, we are detecting energy spikes from the surface. Communication's net is still active. Vox fragments and passive energy debris suggest ongoing conflict".

Servitor: "Broadcast intercepted. Cryptography category: unknown. Legiones Astartes configurations identified".

Greyfax: "Legiones Astartes configuration, what does that mean?"

Gardhelm: "Someone on San Leor is using vox cyphers that haven't been in protocol since the breakup of the Space Marine legions".

Greyfax: "Ten thousand years old? Heretic Astartes? I think Kultza's Frateris Templars was something very different".

Gardhelm: "Signals incoming from the rest of the fleet. All ships have safely transitioned. Sound general quarters".

(siren going off)

Longinus (over vox): "This is Centurion Longinus. I have run the transmission you detected through my apocryfax. It has identified them as originating from the Alpha Legion. Traitor operatives are in this system and on the surface. I suggest immediate offensive action before they react to our arrival".

Greyfax: "I concur, but be wary²⁴. The warp storm is more than just a barrier to the system. I believe it is sustaining infernal forces on the surface. Proceed with personal sanctity protocols".

Gardhelm: "The Black Templars will lead the attack. Sensor arrays are pinpointing the greatest concentration of the enemy. A drop attack should cripple²⁵ their command structure in one blow".

Longinus (over vox): "I agree".

Gardhelm: "Full drop attack will be under way in ten minutes".

Longinus (over vox): "Understood".

Gardhelm: "Will you be joining us, Inquisitor Greyfax?"

Greyfax: "I shall be right at your side, Marshal Gardhelm".

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(Greyfax and Gardhelm in a Thunderhawk)

Gardhelm: "We'll be making a forced landing in twenty minutes, Inquisitor. Scans confirm only one armed vessel amongst the traitor fleet. I have strike cruisers moving to seize or destroy the enemy transports".

Greyfax: "Good, we need to take as much intact as possible to find out how far this malignancy has spread".

Gardhelm: "The battle sisters will be creating perimeter sights around our drop to protect against counter-attack. We should be able to eliminate the enemy swiftly without distraction".

Greyfax: "If there is a demonic presence on San Leor, that will be unlikely".

Black Templar: "Entering upper atmosphere in twenty seconds".

Gardhelm: "We are not inexperienced in fighting the infernal hosts, Inquisitor. My warriors were part of Primarch Guilliman's Indomitus Crusade when it came to Ophelia. We found the world gripped by immortal fiends but we freed the shrines from their grasp and banished them back to the warp. San Leor will be no different".

Greyfax: "I hope your confidence is justified, Marshal".

Gardhelm: "It is. I am receiving a vox signal from my ship. Records show that our landing site is close to the original shrine of the daughters of the Emperor. It was where the sisterhood was created. Perhaps the honor of the first attack should be passed to the Order of Our Martyred Lady".

Greyfax: "We are mid-combat drop. I think we should keep the plan already in place, Marshal".

Black Templar: "Planet fall in approximately eighteen minutes".

Gardhelm: "You seem pensive²⁶, Inquisitor. I rate our chances of success highly. The enemy had very little time to prepare and we attack on the night side of the world with an overwhelming strike force. Every advantage is ours".

Greyfax: "Apart from knowing exactly what we are fighting".

Gardhelm: "Well, perhaps you should remain on the gunship during the attack. I can't spare warriors to ensure your safety".

Greyfax: "Your concern is misplaced".

Gardhelm: "My squads are highly trained and experienced, raised and equipped for swift and deadly attack. As an Inquisitor your expertise lies elsewhere. There is no shame in that".

Greyfax: "You will not find me a burden. I fought Abaddon the Despoiler on Cadia".

Gardhelm: "Ah, my apologies, Inquisitor Greyfax. I give you my salute. You are a true hero of the Imperium. I am honored to fight in this battle and would be proud to die with you at my side".

Greyfax: "I appreciate the sentiment, Marshal Gardhelm, but let us do all we can to ensure that it is the heretics that die today".

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Celestine: "We have been granted a unique privilege in the history of the sisterhood. The most terrible foe has laid claim to our birthplace and we have been granted the honor of arresting it from them. In this holiest of causes there can be no relent²⁷, no hesitation, no mercy. We shall be divine retribution, the personification of the Emperor's wrath".

(gunships unleashing fire)

Celestine: "Hear now, as the enemy feels the first wrath of our gunners? Soon we shall tread upon holy soil and bring justice with bolter and blade. Remember above all things that the Emperor is with us. Ready your war gear and armor your minds for we may face a foe not of the mortal realm. There is no temptation worth damnation. There is no distraction from our purity of purpose. There is no god but the Emperor".

Sisters of Battle (in unison): "No god, but the Emperor!"

Celestine: "Look to your sisters for strength and feel as one in your faith. We are bound by the love of the Emperor and our love for the Emperor. Look upon me and know in your hearts that service is its own reward. Death is not the end. There is no vain sacrifice if you give your life for the Emperor. Slay in his name and die with pride and honor if you are called".

Sisters of Battle (in unison): "For the Emperor!"

Celestine: "Now, sisters, take forth your holy rage and purge the unclean!"

(disembarkation begins)

Celestine: "Into glory, into history! For the sisterhood and the God Emperor!!!"

Sisters of Battle (in unison, charging the enemy): "For the God Emperor!"

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Gardhelm (over vox): "Savior Four, attack run on the east flank. Hammer of Justice and Pious Crusader, I want suppressive fire on those heavy weapons in the ruins to the right. Squad Stale, Herald, Till and Alma, hold on position at one hundred meters".

Longinus (over vox): "This is Longinus. Approaches from the west are secured, resistance minimal. Mostly poorly armed and untrained. Where are the corrupted Tempestus Scions and Alpha legionaries?"

Greyfax (over vox): "They are not against us".

(Astartes gunships crushing the buildings on San Leor with heavy fire)

Celestine (over vox): "Cease fire, Marshal! This is the Templum Sorrowitas, the shrine of the daughters of the Emperor. You are bombarding one of our most sacred sites".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Stones and mortar²⁸, sister Celestine, nothing more. In battle we carry our temples with us".

Celestine (over vox): "You fire upon ground as holy as Terra, Gardhelm. A company of battle sisters will clear the ruins. Call off your gunship".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Very well. If you wish to trade your lives for old stones, I won't interfere. All commands, target anti-personnel weapons only. Supporting fire for the Sisters of Battle".

Greyfax (over vox): "These steps lead into the main sanctuary, but the gates are closed. Why are the renegades not using the cover of the sanctum? (using psyker abilities) There are still Imperial forces still holding the central temple, we must break through to them".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Battlegroup Prime, gather on my position for main assault!"

Celestine (over vox): "Watch your fire to the east".

Longinus (over vox): "Our real-trained militia have been transmitting frantically²⁹ for the last minute. My ship detected an answering signal. Expect enemy reinforcements imminently".

Gardhelm (over vox): "I want targeted orbital surveys on our position".

Black Templar (over vox): "Already scanning, Marshal. We have high density of energy returns from the west, armored column. Detecting surging cyphered vox transmissions".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Alpha Legion heretics, incoming fast. Centurion, can you hold the flank?"

Longinus (over vox): "If you spare me a gunship or two, Marshal".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Agreed, Savior Two and Savior Three, field command passed to Centurion Longinus. Attend on station immediately".

Celestine (over vox): "I can see them from up here, ten armored vehicles, three of them Rhino transports. Another thirty of forty heretics following on foot, corrupted Walkers supporting them".

Greyfax (mumbling): "Anything... is strong... Cadia... Oh! Oh!"

Gardhelm (over vox): "Inquisitor, what is wrong?"

Greyfax (over vox): "They are coming!"

Gardhelm (over vox): "The counterattack can be contained, Inquisitor".

Greyfax (over vox): "The veil splits".

(demonic horde entering the mortal realm)

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Celestine (slashing one of the demons): "Back to the abyss that spawned you! Sister Valienta, behind you!"

(Valienta killing another roaring demon)

Celestine: "Fight hard, my sisters! We have been delivered to this battle by the will of the God Emperor! See the fiends that would despoil our heritage and give praise that it is you who's chosen to defend our holy temple. Your faith shall be their undoing, your ire shall be their doom".

Longinus (over vox): "The Alpha legionaries have broken off".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Withdraw the perimeter, we need you closer".

Longinus (over vox): "Agreed. What is the condition of Inquisitor Greyfax?"

Gardhelm (over vox): "Still unconscious! Squad Hegemon is protecting her".

(demons roaring)

Celestine (over vox): "Our landing site is almost overrun, Marshal. If we do not hold in the east there is no clear ground for the battle sisters craft to land".

Gardhelm (over vox): "You are not thinking of leaving us, are you, sister?"

Longinus (over vox): "More reinforcements, armored skimmer-craft, Astra Militarum markings. Now we know who these Tempestus Scions are. The enemy tanks are pushing towards southern end of the battle sisters' line. If they extend any further we'll be too weak to hold against the heretic storm troopers".

Celestine (over vox): "We must give up the landing field and move companies to the south".

Longinus (over vox): "If we do that we have no means of getting back to orbit".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Why is everyone so concerned about leaving?"

Longinus (over vox): "If you believe the Emperor has a plan for you, I would think it would be something better than dying here for no reason".

Celestine (over vox): "These foes are here with a purpose and we are here to thwart them. If to do so we must sacrifice ourselves, then that is what shall be done".

Gardhelm (over vox): "A sentiment I can agree with, sister. All units, hold at all costs. Slay with gladness in your hearts! Of every heretic purged add once less to block the light of the Emperor. No pity, no remorse, no fear!!!"

Longinus (over vox): "I would rather you withdrew".

(temple bells chiming)

Celestine (over vox): "Look to the great tower of the temple! It burns with the pale flame of purity".

Longinus (over vox): "And sets a fire in the hearts of the demons. See them flee back to the warp!"

Gardhelm (over vox): "And someone at the main steps! The doors are moving!"

(main temple doors opening)

Celestine (over vox): "The battle sisters, they must have been holding the shrine for all of this time".

Gardhelm (over vox): "A century and more? How?"

Longinus (over vox): "The warp storm would have twisted time as well as space. Perhaps for them it is only a matter of days or weeks since the attacks began. I am going to lead a counterattack against these Alpha legionaries. Without their demonic allies they are in a precarious³¹ position".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Cut them down with glee³², Centurion!"

Sabrina (over vox): "Attention, warriors of the Emperor! The blessing of the bells of absolution will not hold for long. Call back your troopships and return to orbit. If you remain on San Leor, you will be trapped in this unending battle".

Celestine (over vox): "And who commands the garrison of San Leor to give such an order?"

Sabrina (over vox): "I am sister Sabrina, canoness of the Order of Our Martyred Lady, abbess elect of the Convent Sanctorum".

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Sabrina: "You can put her down here. Sister Resunda is a sister hospitalier. She will care for the Inquisitor".

Celestine: "I cannot believe that you are still here, abbess Sabrina".

Sabrina: "Canoness, I was never confirmed as abbess. My pilgrimage to this shrine was... interrupted".

Gardhelm: "That was more than a century ago".

Sabrina: "It was? It has not seemed that long. When the demons come, our chronometers fail. Perhaps time has flowed strangely on San Leor since the warp storm took us".

(temple bells chiming, debris falling from the dome)

Celestine: "How have you survived for so long against such a testing foe?"

Gardhelm: "The archives rated the garrison of 100 battle sisters and your escort numbered 200 more. I see almost that complement³³ holding this temple. I have great respect for the fighting potential of the Adepta Sorrowitas but I find your survival unlikely".

Sabrina: "It is our faith that has sustained us".

Gardhelm: "It's good that your morale..."

Sabrina (interrupting): "No, it is our pure faith that has kept the demons at bay. This is the shrine of Saint Alicia, she that took the head of Goge Vandire, the first of the new sisterhood. The bells that tolled, the bells of absolution, were blessed by Saint Sebastian Thor. This whole world is sacred. Despite the storm that rages in the warp it is agony to the conjurations of the dark powers to set foot on San Leor. This temple remains impenetrable to the demons while any of true faith hold it against them".

Celestine: "The living reinforcements from cardinal Kultza must have been intended to break the siege".

Gardhelm: "So the Emperor did guide us here for a purpose, to purge these mortal followers of darkness and free San Leor?"

Sabrina: "I do not understand what you are saying, but..."

(Greyfax regaining conscience)

Celestine: "Katarinya!"

Greyfax: "We... are inside the shrine?"

Gardhelm: "The battle has abated³⁴ for the time being at least. Let me help you".

Greyfax (standing up): "Oh... You are sister Sabrina? The canonesse that was lost?"

Sabrina: "How could you know? Have we met?"

Greyfax: "When the demons tore through the barrier of the warp it triggered my psychic awareness. The power that flooded my thoughts was too much, but as I lay overwhelmed and paralyzed I felt your soul emanating from the shrine".

Sabrina: "Yes, I am the focus for my sisters. Through me their prayer and dedication is channeled".

Celestine: "A true leader of the Adepta Sorrowitas".

Gardhelm: "Centurion Longinus is coordinating the defense with my sergeants and the canonessees, but we need a plan of attack. We have the advantage for the moment. We should hunt down the traitor legionaries and Kultza's soldiers while their inhuman allies are regrouping in the warp".

Celestine: "We risk losing the landing site again. If the demons return whilst the pursuit is under way..."

Sabrina: "Your reinforcement is welcome, but I cannot expect you to stay".

Greyfax: "No, we will stay a while. Marshal Gardhelm is correct. We should use this opportunity to crush Kultza's forces and the Alpha Legion allies, then you will be able to withdraw".

Sabrina: "You have not heard what I said. I cannot leave. If the temple is abandoned, there will be nothing to keep the demons at bay".

Celestine: "All the while the storm rages you are at risk, sister".

Sabrina: "If we have been here for one hundred years already, a few more are of no consequence".

Greyfax: "It could be forever. The whole galaxy is riven by the Cicatrix Maledictum. This warp storm may never abate".

Sabrina: "Then I pray to the God Emperor for a long life. We cannot allow San Leor to fall".

Gardhelm: "I understand it is an important symbol to the sisterhood, but it would be folly³⁵ to waste your life defending these ancient stones. The Emperor needs every able warrior fighting the greater war".

Sabrina: "And that is what we are doing here. It is not just sentiment that we fight for. The demons need possession of the Templum Sorrowitas though I do not know exactly why. They taunt me with this fact, try to break my will with threats that the Ecclesiarchy will fall when I fall. Little do they understand that this promise only strengthens our resolve".

Celestine: "I know well the burden of duty. I pray to the God Emperor that you bear it for a long time".

(debris falling from the dome)

Gardhelm: "I believe we have our mission parameters. The Black Templars and Sisters of Battle will combine to eradicate the mortal enemy and then we must depart and trust to you to hold the shrine indefinitely".

Greyfax: "We shall keep a closer watch on the surrounding systems to ensure the traitors don't make further attempts of reinforcement while the storm persists".

Sabrina: "And I shall give thanks to the God Emperor every day for that vigil".

* * *

Longinus (over vox): "This is Centurion Longinus, enemy forces have mustered 36 two points: one north and the other westward of the shrine. Orbital survey indicates that they will be ready to attack again within thirty minutes".

Gardhelm (over vox): "Acknowledged. If we are to counterattack it should be now".

Greyfax: "I sense that the warp echoes of the bells of absolution have all but faded. The demons will return soon and we shall be embroiled in bitter fighting again".

Gardhelm: "Sister Sabrina, could you ring the bells for us again?"

Sabrina: "If that were so simple, we should toll the bells incessantly. The power of the cleansing bell is only restored by prayer and sacrifice".

Greyfax: "Yes, I felt the strength of that power in my unconscious thoughts. Your faith as you call it robs the demons of their energy by creating a null space in the warp around San Leor. Your hate ripples through the warp cleansing it briefly".

Sabrina: "Do the details matter? It harms the demons that is all we need to know".

Greyfax: "No, it may also be your way free of this place. Do not sound the bells unless you absolutely must. I think that if you hold out long enough, the accumulated power will be great enough to break the storm if allowed to reach its full potential".

Sabrina: "And how would we know when is time?"

Greyfax: "If sister Celestine is to be believed, the Emperor will send you a sign. Otherwise, I would wait until I had no other choice".

Longinus (over vox): "Auspex returns show that the enemy is maneuvering to the south trying to outflank".

Gardhelm: "We need to launch our attack swiftly. The enemies are readying for their own assault".

Greyfax: "I have reconsidered my opinion. We cannot risk being trapped on San Leor when the demons return in full force. Their strength is linked to the intensity of the storm. While they are cowered, we may be able to break out again without too much effort. If we wait..."

Gardhelm (interrupting): "We can't abandon sister Sabrina without a fight".

Sabrina: "Trust me, Marshal, it is relief enough that our pride will be known beyond San Leor. The casualties you have already caused may well have already swung the fight in our favor".

Greyfax: "When I delved³⁷ into the warp, I sensed something of the demon's intent. Sabrina is right. They are determined to take the shrine, but it is not their sole focus. One of them said: when the temples of the false Emperor have been broken open, Terra will fall".

Sabrina: "Multiple temples. San Leor is only one part of their infernal scheme".

Celestine: "They intend to topple the Ecclesiarchy. One shrine world at a time... Ophelia VII must be another target".

Gardhelm: "We will stop their second attempt to domination just as we halted the first".

Sabrina: "What do you mean by that?"

Celestine: "When the Great Rift engulfed the system, Ophelia was beset by an incursion³⁸ of the dark powers. Servants of the forbidden gods enslaved the worlds of our sisterhood under the lead of the creature called the Tyrant of the Blue Flame".

Gardhelm: "With the aid of the Primarch we shattered its unholy legions, but the fiend itself escaped retribution".

Sabrina: "Primarch?"

Greyfax: "A far longer conversation than we have time for now. The previous attack was linked to the conjuring of the Great Rift itself, one of the many ritual assaults that weakened the barrier between our realm and the warp. If the servants of the forbidden powers are defiling sites of great faith, Ophelia VII would indeed be a rich target".

Celestine: "And before the coming of the Tyrant of the Blue Flame there was growing strife on Ophelia VII. The attack was heralded by months of unrest. I think we have fooled ourselves into thinking it must be either San Leor or Ophelia".

Greyfax: "I concur. The assassination attempt on Terra, the attack on the Ecclesiarch by Kultza's followers, perhaps even the whole plot around abandoning the Decree Absolute might be intended to destabilize the system".

Celestine: "You speak of these events in mere political terms, but for me the range of the attack is far more obvious. These assaults are not on the Ecclesiarchy, but are attempts to undermine the foundations of our faith. They intend to not only disrupt the running of the Adeptus Ministorum, but to breach the same wards of virtue around Ophelia that protect San Leor".

Gardhelm: "As a prelude to renew demonic attack".

Longinus (over vox): "We cannot risk remaining at San Leor. If this supposition proves true, the alpha level event in the cathedral of ascension might not have been solely targeted at Deacis".

Greyfax: "What do you mean, Centurion?"

Longinus (over vox): “Many of the faithful conduct pilgrimage to Ophelia VII before attempting to travel to Terra. The crisis of faith on both the Throne world and the Synod Ministra’s capital might ripple along the entirety of the pilgrimage pathways”.

Greyfax: “It could extend the Cicatrix Maledictum to crack open reality”.

Longinus (over vox): “And bring the Great Rift into the Segmentum Solar to isolate Terra itself”.

Celestine: “God Emperor, preserve us!”

Greyfax: “If we fail, the resulting cataclysm could block out the Astronomicon entirely. It would destroy the Imperium”.

* * *

Sabrina: “Sister Celestine!”

Celestine: “Sister Sabrina! How can I help?”

Sabrina: “I have heard the Ecclesiarch Deaces abandoned the Decree Passive”.

Celestine: “That is right. We do not know how, but the announcement is tied to these events in some way”.

Sabrina: “Was I replaced?”

Celestine: “I do not understand the question”.

Sabrina: “Has another sister been chosen as abbess of the Convent Sanctorum?”

Celestine: “No, by time it seemed certain you had been lost, the first tumult³⁹ of the Great Rift had started. Ophelia was beset for years by a demonic tide before it was freed. There has been no occasion for a replacement to be named and with San Leor cut off any nominee would not have been able to complete the pilgrimage. Why do you ask?”

Sabrina: “I fear that in part my absence has allowed this calamity⁴⁰ to grow. Had I been instated as abbess I would have put more pressure on the Synod Ministra not to confirm Deacis’s plan to revoke the Decree Passive”.

Celestine: “No blame could be set upon you for these events”.

Sabrina: “Oh, I am not speaking of blame, but practicality. The Orders Militant, Hospitalier, Dialogis and Famulus are powerful forces within the Imperium and even more so within the structure of the Ecclesiarchy. With no abbess of the Convent Sanctorum to act as their representative I suspect their opinion has become more muted. You cannot allow that to continue”.

Celestine: “I am a soldier, Sabrina, not a politician”.

Sabrina: “Ah, and you think I was not?”

Celestine: “Of course, I do not”.

Sabrina: “You are something far greater than a politician or even a leader. You are a symbol, Celestine. You are a Living Saint, the embodiment of the Emperor’s divinity. Your word carries weight and I know that it has been silenced of late”.

Celestine: "How can you be certain of that?"

Sabrina: "Because I know that you would allow nothing to threaten the sisterhood".

Celestine: "You speak of the sisterhood and the Ecclesiarchy as different things".

Sabrina: "Of course they are".

Celestine: "Do you accept Deacis the 23rd as head of the Adeptus Ministorum?"

Sabrina: "I do. He is the head of our church. That does not make him commander of the Adepta Sorrowitas, Celestine, and this is where he is in error to revoke the Decree Passive".

Celestine: "How so?"

Sabrina: "The sisterhood has twin leaders: the abbess of the Convent Sanctorum on Ophelia VII and the Convent Prioris on Terra. How long has it been since the holy prioress of Terra sat on the Senatorum Imperialis? Only three have done so since our founding four thousand years ago. Yet cardinals by the score have sat beside the Ecclesiarch among the High Lords of Terra".

Celestine: "I do not desire power, sister".

Lesia: "Canoness, we must withdraw and close the main gates".

Sabrina: "Thank you, sister Lesia. The Emperor granted power to you all the same, Celestine. Remember, that even as Deacis is the embodiment of the Ecclesiarchy to a million worlds, you are an embodiment of faith to the countless armies that fight under the God Emperor's banner. If Deacis creates a new Frateris Templars he is usurping the power bestowed to you, moving against the will of the God Emperor".

Celestine: "I had not... Oh... It is still too much, to expect the church to move to the word of a Battle Sister against the desire of the Ecclesiarch".

Sabrina: "Oh, your humility⁴¹ does you credit, Celestine. Much like the first of us became prioress of Terra, revered Palmira of the Order of the Holy Word, it was she that first traveled to San Leor, to seek benediction⁴² and purpose before taking the title upon herself succeeding as head of the orders after the death of holy Alicia Dominica".

Celestine: "She was rightfully reluctant⁴³, fearful of aggrandizing⁴⁴ herself above the sisterhood".

Sabrina: "But she took the title all the same, as you must assume the role for which the Emperor has prepared you. A holy warrior, not from the Imperial Guard, but from the sisterhood. The Imperium is on the verge of ruin, threatened in a way not even ten thousand years".

Lesia: "Canoness, the temple must be sealed now!"

Sabrina: "Yet four thousand years ago the Age of Apostasy⁴⁵ nearly claimed us. The Imperial church was riven with schism and terrible genocides were wrought in the name of the corrupted Ecclesiarch. The first Sister of Battle Saint Alicia led us from those times in the company of Black Templars, inquisitors and tech-priests of Mars".

Celestine: "I have kept the company of such folk in recent times".

Sabrina: "And I see no surer sign of what you are meant to do".

Celestine: "I do not, but I will pray for guidance".

Sabrina: "I am sure the God Emperor will make known his plans for you. Until then be wary of the commands of priests".

* * *

Gardhelm: "Savior One is the last Thunderhawk. We embark now. Sister Sabrina, we will cover your withdrawal into the Templum Sorrowitas".

Sabrina (over vox): "Your offer is noble, Marshal Gardhelm, but I must decline. My sisters and I will provide cover fire while you embark. Tactically it is the most sensible approach".

Greyfax: "The abbess is correct. We need to leave quickly. I feel the veil between worlds thinning once more. The demons will return soon".

Gardhelm: "Oh, very well. Squads Galliard and Gardhelm, convergent46 fire with sister Sabrina's command and fall back to embark on Savior One".

Celestine: "Your names will be inscribed in the rolls of the saints".

Sabrina (over vox): "We are the God Emperor's fury. Our blades shall sing our prayers to him".

Celestine: "May the God Emperor guide you to your redemption, revered sister".

Sabrina (over vox): "Inquisitor Greyfax, you made a mistake. My title is canoness. I was not confirmed as abbess".

Greyfax: "You will be on your return. If I live I will ensure it. It is time the Convent Sanctorum had a head once more, even if she may take a while until she again leads her holy orders".

Sabrina (over vox): "Oh, this is unexpected. You have my thanks, Inquisitor".

Greyfax: "It is deserved and appropriate, sister".

Longinus: "Our allies of the Battle Sisters are aboard their transports. Hurry, I see the blue armor of foes getting closer".

(demons entering the mortal realm)

Greyfax: "Foulness returns, the demons are back".

Gardhelm: "Full speed to orbit. Weapons, respond".

(gunships unleashing salvos of gunfire)

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Celestine (over vox): "Sabrina?"

Sabrina (over vox): "Yes, sister".

Celestine (over vox): "San Leor will be freed. We will return. I swear by the God Emperor. Fight well! For the Emperor!"

(angelic singing)

(demons roaring)