



WARHAMMER
40,000

A GREY KNIGHTS AUDIO DRAMA

TRUE NAME

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At first, Gared wasn't sure he had heard a whisper. It was too quiet, below the range detectable by his Lyman's Ear. He was sure of this. He had not heard it. And yet it was insistent, stabbing into his consciousness like an assassin's stiletto.

I know you.

The Grey Knights Epistolary jerked his head up as Justicar Styer appeared at the doorway to his meditation cell.

'Your pardon, brother,' Styer said. 'I did not intend to startle you.'

'You didn't, justicar. But did you say something a moment ago?'

'I did not.'

'You heard nothing as you approached?'

'No.' Styer's expression darkened. His stance shifted, ready to take arms against an intruder. 'What did you hear?'

'A voice. Inaudible, it seems, but I heard it.'

'Is there a presence aboard?'

'I don't think so. What I sensed was very faint.'

'Even faint is ominous.'

'Agreed.' Neither the squad nor the strike cruiser Tyndaris were in a strong position. The struggle against orks and daemons in the Sanctus Reach had been punishing. The ship's engines had only just become operational again. The Grey Knights were drained. In orbit over Squire's Rest, aboard the Inquisition vessel Scouring Light, they had fought Ku'gath, the Plaguefather. It had been no small matter to banish the greater daemon from the materium. They had, in the end, incapacitated Ku'gath long enough for him to be caught in the cataclysmic

explosion of the Scouring Light's warp drive. The Grey Knights had teleported to the Tyndaris moments before the blast. Gared, piloting the Dreadknight, had poured much of his essence into the blow that had injured the material form of the daemon. He felt that the state of the Tyndaris reflected his own condition. He was healing in body and spirit, but he had a long way to go.

'Do you believe an attack is under way or imminent?' Styer asked.

Gared hesitated. In the silence between Styer's question and his response, the whisper without sound came again. I know you. A bit stronger. More insistent. It reached deeper into his being. It was hooked. It was clawed.

'Yes,' Gared said. 'It is under way.' There was another sound too, a distant buzz that at first he thought was a damaged cogitator. 'Brother justicar, do you still sense nothing?'

'No. You did just now?'

Gared nodded. 'It seems I am the target.'

'Who is our enemy?'

'I cannot tell yet.' But the shape of the whisper was familiar. Gared had encountered it before, he was sure, but in another form.

'You have sacrificed a great deal,' said Styer, 'but there is no rest for you yet.'

'I will not waver in my duty.'

'I know you won't. However, circumstances compel me to give orders that may well make your struggle a more difficult one. We must leave the Sanctus Reach. The Tyndaris cannot survive a second encounter with a major ork fleet, and the augurs have detected a large number of ships on course for Squire's Rest. We have also received word from Titan. Our intervention is required at Korzun. A brother is in need of aid.'

'Are we warp-worthy?'

'Shipmaster Saalfrank believes we are. Barely.'

‘There is some doubt about the Geller field?’

‘There is.’

Gared took that in. If there were any weaknesses in the field, the ship and those aboard would be vulnerable to attack by warp entities while they were in the immaterium. If it failed altogether... He shrugged the speculation away. Nothing changed his duty or his will to fight. ‘Consider me forewarned, brother justicar,’ he said. ‘I am prepared.’

‘If you are being attacked, should you be alone?’

‘The foe is weak for the moment. Meditation will reinforce my defences.’

‘Very well. I will be on the bridge,’ Styer said, and left.

Gared faced the depths of his cell once more. He gazed at the shrine that occupied the back wall. He concentrated on the golden skull at the centre, the icon of death that was the symbol of strength. He began to build a psychic wall. The whisperer would not find him an easy prey.

He had barely begun when an image erupted in his mind. The attack was less in the content of the image than in its force. He stood on the surface of a planet, rocky, the vegetation sparse and brown. Four moons hung in the sky, turning night into a rich, deep twilight. He was at the bottom of a gorge. A wind keened, cold and leeching to his memory senses. To his left, a dark river rushed, shouting over rocks. Everything about the vision felt true. Yet the perspective was wrong. He was too low to the ground. It was over a metre closer than he was used to seeing it.

Gared winced. This was a memory. As vivid as if he had stood in that place an hour ago. But it was a memory without context, disconnected from any other. He did not know what world this was.

He had no memory of the memory.

Yet its truth was as undeniable as the walls of the Tyndaris.

He pushed the image from the forefront of his mind. It resisted. He pushed harder, disciplining his attention, training his focus on the present, on the needs

of battle, because it was clear the engagement had begun.

I know you, the whispers said. Stronger, clearer, as if fed by the taste of his mind. More familiar. Your path is marked. Your end is known. Your actions have determined them.

He grasped the hilt of his Nemesis force sword. He drew it. It crackled with energy, hungry for a foe. He knew the voice now. It was distorted, rotten, buzzing with the wings of flies, but he recognized it. The voice was his own. The enemy said it knew him. It was not lying. Somehow, it was using portions of himself in its attack.

The threat had progressed from distant and vague to extreme in a matter of minutes.

Gared left his cell and pounded down the halls of the Tyndaris, making for the bridge. He had thought to use solitude to construct his psychic fortress. That had been a mistake. He should not be alone. The attack was too insidious. He might not be able to trust his perceptions.

The whispers pursued him, tightening their grip, gathering definition, his voice becoming more and more deeply woven into the tapestry of attack.

What do you hope to accomplish? Your actions bring us closer.

He paused, rooted to the spot by the insinuation. Every action the Grey Knights had taken in the Sanctus Reach had contributed to the unleashing of Ku'gath. Their arrival had precipitated the daemonic incursion they had come to defeat. Styer had vowed to find opportunity instead of fatalism before this dark truth. If incursions were inevitable, then the Grey Knights must shape the circumstances to their advantage. Was the same thing happening again?

He couldn't know. There were no Prognosticators to consult.

But the whispers were trying to hold him back. So he defied them and ran on.

The voice reacted with outrage. It scraped at him. It threatened. It laughed.

You run to your end. I will skin your corpse. It will be a trophy to your failure. Your soul will be a feast of gifts.

Gifts? Gared thought. The phrasing of the threat was odd. It was distinctive. It meant something.

I know you. The refrain was relentless. I know you. I know you.

The whispers grew stronger still. They multiplied. In their hunger to defeat him, they entwined with one another. They became a carpet of worms writhing over his mind. The rotting clamour shouted down his awareness of his surroundings, and he reached the bridge with little sense of his journey there. He had the impression of having lost fragments of time, but how many he couldn't say. What work of the enemy took place then? No warp spawn had entered the ship. He hadn't become a conduit. The attack had another purpose, then. It was breaking away pieces of his identity.

The activity on the bridge was urgent, the jump into the warp imminent. Warning tocsins cut through the whispers. The sight of his battle-brothers in the strategium, where they stood with Inquisitor Hadrianna Furia overlooking the bridge, was a call to strength and clarity. The silver-grey of their armour was a beacon, the colour of sanctity, of truth. A flying buttress supported the lectern projecting over the bridge. Styer was there, his hands gripping the iron, aquila-shaped frame of the lectern. He leaned over it, looking down at Gared. 'Brother-Epistolary?' he said.

'The attack is intensifying,' Gared said. He centred his gaze on the justicar. The whispers squirmed and crackled at the periphery of his vision. They burrowed into his perception of the real like carrion working their way towards the centre of a corpse. Inside his head, they were the crash of dark waves and the hiss of serpents.

'And still on you alone,' Styer said.

'For now. It mimics some of the symptoms of possession.'

'Then this force doesn't realize the nature of its foe,' Styer announced, and the rest of the squad stepped forward as one, drawing their Nemesis force weapons.

Was that true? Gared wondered. No Grey Knight had ever been possessed. He was in complete control of his thoughts and actions now. But the creation of the symptom seemed designed to introduce doubt like an infection into the spiritual health of the Grey Knights. The attempt would fail. Styer was right about that.

But the attempt itself was so specific. ‘I think the enemy knows very well who we are,’ he said.

I know you, the voice snarled before he could continue. The voice that was ever more recognizably his, but transformed by decay into a leprous parody. The sense of being confronted by a splintered, diseased version of himself was so strong it dealt a psychic wound. He winced. Epistolary Gared of the Grey Knights, the whisper said, I know you. I know your soul. I know what you have forgotten.

The image that had invaded his mind before rose again. The gorge, the river, the rocks, the wind, the moons. It was not a hallucination. He still knew where he was. But all he could think about was this landscape, this unfamiliar location that imposed itself upon him as if it were as known to him as Titan itself.

‘Gared!’ Styer called to him. He looked up, realizing that he had lost time again. He did not know how long Styer had been speaking.

‘Brother justicar,’ he acknowledged.

‘You appeared to be in a trance.’

‘The attacks are more concerted.’

‘My lord,’ Shipmaster Bruno Saalfrank said, ‘we are ready for the jump.’

Styer held his gaze on Gared. ‘The severity of the assault has increased the closer we have come to the Mandeville point.’

‘It has,’ Gared said. ‘There may be no correlation.’

‘Shipmaster,’ Styer said, ‘is our Geller field disabled?’

‘No, lord, it is weakened. I cannot answer for its stability, but we are in the path of the ork fleet. We will be within their range in a few moments.’

‘Make the jump, brother justicar,’ Gared said. ‘There is no choice.’ He pushed the alien memory away once more.

‘Do it,’ Styer ordered.

A shield came down over the bridge's oculus as the Tyndaris's warp drive engaged. With a shriek heard in the soul and in the mind, a wound tore open in the void. The strike cruiser plunged into the immaterium. Gared knew the Geller field was breached before the warnings sounded. The whispers exulted. He sensed the hunger of warp entities as they reached for the ship and found their means of ingress.

'IncurSION in the landing bay,' Saalfrank shouted.

Gared joined his brothers as the squad rushed from the bridge.

'You will be fighting two battles at once,' Styer said to him. 'Is this wise?'

'It is a single battle,' Gared replied. 'The attack on me was but the first stage of the attack.'

'If not two battles, then two fronts,' said Styer. 'Perhaps if you remained on the bridge and marshalled your forces against the one...'

'I belong here,' Gared said. 'Having my energies split is preferable to splitting the strength of the squad.' As he spoke, he sensed that his words were only a portion of a much larger truth. He was right to stay with the squad, though for reasons he could not yet discern.

As they neared the landing bay, the nature of the enemy became more clear. The corridors of the Tyndaris resounded with the hollow tolling of a bell. Gared felt each peal in the depths of his bones. The timbre was deep and strong, yet it buzzed around the edges, much as the whispers' echo of his voice did, as if the clapper unleashed a cloud of insects with every swing.

The Grey Knights reached the doors to the bay. From behind them came a slow, arrhythmic chanting. The voices were liquid, slurring, and muffled as if their tongues were coated in fungus.

'We have heard such chanting very recently,' Styer said.

'Plaguebearers,' said Gared. The daemons had infested the Scouring Light. The chant then had been different. They had been repeating the name of the plague being sought by Ku'gath. Now there was anger. The hymn was a call to vengeance. 'Their master has unfinished business with us,' he said.

‘Then we know whose voice you are hearing.’

‘We do.’ Your soul will be a feast of gifts, the voice had said. Gifts. Plagues.

If Ku’gath was attacking him from the warp, using Gared’s own voice to wear him down, then Gared found purpose in identifying his enemy. But also concern. ‘Justicar,’ Gared said, ‘The daemon is deploying weapons he didn’t use on the Scouring Light. They are specific. He has called me by name. He is using at least some degree of truth against me.’

‘How has he come by this knowledge?’

Gared thought back to the fight against the Plaguefather. He relived the moment of his greatest blow and saw what had happened. ‘So much of my psychic essence went into the wound I dealt the daemon...’

‘That some of it was stolen,’ Styer finished.

‘The daemon knows me, brother justicar. He knows me very well.’

Better than you think, the whispers promised. Better than you can imagine. Better than you do, ignorant puppet.

‘And now we are in the warp with a breached Geller field,’ said Styer. He rested his gauntlet over the stud that would open the landing bay doors. The chanting on the other side was growing louder. ‘What is your plan to counter the attack?’

‘He cannot control my will,’ Gared said, firm in belief and resolve. ‘I will ignore his insinuations...’

You think so? his distorted voice mocked.

‘We should begin,’ Gared spoke through the rising clamour in his head, ‘by purging our vessel of the abominations that have dared taint it with their presence.’

‘Well said, Brother-Epistolary.’

Styer hit the stud. The door rumbled upward. The Grey Knights charged through and it slammed down behind them, sealing the bay from the rest of the ship.

Across the vast space, the daemons surged forward. Scattered about were the remains of the human crew assigned to the bay. Some of the bodies had partially liquefied as they bubbled and foamed with disease. The others had become the material clay used by the daemons to manifest themselves on the Tyndaris. The plaguebearers' jaws gaped with a slobbering joy. Their pendulous bodies swayed from side to side as they advanced, heavy feet leaving a trail of glistening pestilence behind them. When they saw Gared, they raised heavy, pitted blades as if in celebration. Their chant adopted a tone of welcome.

Some of them uttered his name.

Gared snarled his disgust and raced ahead of Styer. Caution evaporated. 'Filth!' he shouted. 'You shall not speak my name.' He thrust his left hand forward. From each finger came a bolt of warp lightning. The psychic energy seared the daemons. The plaguebearer in a direct line from Gared was enveloped in a shroud of eldritch fire. It fell, the obscene matter of its being losing coherence as it burned.

On either side of Gared, his battle-brothers stormed into the fray, Nemesis weapons flashing with holy energy. Swords and halberds savaged daemonflesh. Styer brought his hammer down on the head of one plaguebearer with such force that its single horn shattered into dust and the skull imploded. The deck was slick with ichor and the hissing, disintegrating slime of fallen daemons.

Gared reached out with lightning once more. The urge was strong to tear open a rift and banish the whole of the unclean host at a stroke. In the depths of his anger, he still had enough presence of mind not to attempt such a dangerous attack while the Tyndaris sailed the immaterium. Its defences were uncertain and creating a further passage to the warp might backfire, unleashing a much greater horde. So Gared struck with the energy bolts that burned the air with his wrath. He reached deep into the warp. Its power was close at hand, its infinite potential within his grasp. Ku'gath was using a portion of Gared's self against him, and he was turning the essence of the daemons against them.

The lightning blazed from his fingers with incandescent fury. He hit five daemons at once. The plaguebearers writhed as the purifying energy shrivelled them to ash. While at the edges of his vision, his brothers rent the daemons asunder, the crackling bolts continued to flow from Gared's hand. They linked him to the smoking remains of the foe.

You think you know yourself, the whisper mocked.

Memories cascaded through his mind. Vivid, precise and true. Unbidden, unwanted, answering to another's will, moving backward in time. Gared saw himself in the Dreadknight, striding through the battle-ruined halls of the Scouring Light. Then he was alone in the vault on Squire's Rest, opening the tomb of Major-General Luter Mehnert and finding the signs of the bonewrack plague. Then he was on Angriff Primus, locked in battle and unable to help at the moment the daemons killed Brother Morholt. One after another, moments in time preserved in every detail, each present for less than an instant before the next one appeared. He was buried by an avalanche of his past. The memories reached farther and farther. He was a novitiate on Titan, performing the Rituals of Detestation. That the Plaguefather had access to that memory, to the rites that armoured a Grey Knight's soul against the daemoniac, horrified him.

His grip on the warp began to slip.

The memories kept coming. Older yet, still as precise, but more and more alien. The landscape with the four moons appeared before his mind's eye again, and now he understood its import. Ku'gath had excavated his deep past. The daemon had found his lost memories of the time before his transformation into a Grey Knight.

The Plaguefather had spoken true. He knew what was forgotten. He could rifle memories of which Gared had no consciousness.

Triumph in the whispers of the daemon, in the voice that was his and was not, the voice that was a lie constructed from deep truths: See how well I know you. Your past is my material. My material is your plague. I will shape the disease of your soul.

More and more memories, of hunting on that hostile world, of people he no longer knew, of events that had meant something to the mortal who had become Epistolary Gared of the Grey Knights. Memories perfectly specific in sight and sound, yet so utterly alien that they belonged to another entity.

In a terrible sense, they did now.

His focus stuttered. His grip on the warp slipped a little more. The moment of weakness was enough. The power of the immaterium turned on him, coiling

back like a serpent. The energy bolts still flashed from his hand, linking him to the incinerated daemons. A vengeful will travelled back up the link. As Gared tried to shake himself free of the memories, he saw the danger reaching for him.

Between his second lightning strike and Ku'gath's countermove, less than a second of objective time transpired. With his consciousness already so entwined with the warp where time slipped, fragmented and twisted around itself, it seemed to Gared that he had an age to recognize how he had fallen into the trap.

The landing bay of the Tyndaris vanished. Gared's psychic being fell into the warp. The experience was global; none of his senses registered any awareness of the materium. He moved through the warp as embodied as a daemon in the materium. He was armoured, carrying his weapons. His self was complete, and it was coherent.

But reality was neither.

He flew, and then he walked. There was land beneath his feet, and then there was squirming void. Vortex and storm surrounded him. He saw things that merely pretended to be colours. Sounds clawed at his eyes. Sights slithered across his tongue. At first he perceived nothing but the chaotic and the random. Then a foul parody of order began to assert itself. The ground became more consistent, though it had the soft, sucking quality of a marsh. Gared looked up and there was a sky. Great, dark clouds scudded over it. They changed direction with sudden, jerking movements, colliding and merging with each other. They were not clouds, Gared now saw. They were swarms of millions upon millions of insects.

The realm took on definition. It gathered an identity: it became a garden, and it became disease. There was a profusion of blooms. The growths were stone, and they were sinew, and they thrust into being with the exuberance of sin, only to rot away into bubbling froth. They were eaten by more growths, and these were devoured by still other diseases in the midst of their feasting. Gared's legs sank almost to his knees in a mire of putrefying meat and twitching parasites. Pallid ropes, neither root nor worm, tangled around his boots. Gared took a breath, and the air was thick as clotted blood. Insect legs scuttled down his throat, and insect wings whined in his lungs, and insect stingers stabbed at the back of his eyes. The garden hissed, gurgled and buzzed. It was a riot of plenty, a cauldron of endless proliferation.

The garden pressed close around Gared. He could see only a few metres through the density of manifested disease. Everywhere he looked was the flow and rise and fall of putrid life. There were no paths, and yet the landscape had a direction. There was an undertow, pulling everything towards a centre. An instinct Gared could not name told him that somewhere, at a distance that was both infinite and far too close, a mansion awaited. If he drew near enough to catch sight of it he would be swept inside, and then he would be lost.

‘You will not enter Father Nurgle’s house, kin of Thawn. You are mine, Gared.’ Ku’gath’s own voice: the thunder of sepsis that had taunted and cursed the Grey Knights on the Scouring Light. It had shed the disguise of Gared’s tones, but it used his name as a weapon.

The voice bounced in from all directions. It oozed up from the mire, fell with the swarms from the sky and insinuated itself between the growths on a foetid wind. Gared had no target, but fired his wrist-mounted storm bolter straight ahead. On the Tyndaris, did his body raise and fire the real weapon? He didn’t know. But if his psychic being manifested his bolter here, he would use it, and hurl the purity it represented against the unholy essences. The shells blasted apart a wall of festering thorns that rattled like bones.

Ku’gath laughed. The sound was a ratcheting, wet cough. It triggered a rain of dead flies. ‘What do you hope to do? I know you so well. Do you know me so little? Will you destroy me here? Is that the shape of your hope? Tell me, Gared, and I will grant you the gift of your perfect plague.’

Gared said nothing. He kept moving through bog and dying abominations. He advanced because that was an act of defiance. He would not be still and wait for the daemon to come to him. As the words swirled around him, he searched for their speaker. And when Ku’gath spoke his name, he caught a glimpse of the daemon. The form was faint, a suggestion of huge movement to his left behind the tentacles of the garden.

‘Will you know me?’ Gared shouted. ‘Then you will fear me!’ He raised his blade and lunged through the growths towards the daemon.

Ku’gath laughed again, and the flies descended again, blanketing Gared in the soft hail of their deaths. The mire reached up his flanks, sprouting tumours with teeth. They ground against ceramite. ‘Will you destroy me? Will you presume so

much in the Father's realm? Will you, Gared?'

When the Plaguefather spoke Gared's name again, the attack began. The memories came at Gared, but this time not from within. Here in the warp, they had a material existence – the very stuff of which the immaterium was woven. They blasted through the corrupted thickets, and a twisting, horizontal funnel slammed into Gared's chestplate. It threw him backwards and he landed on his back. The marsh swallowed him, closing over his head as he started to drown in visions of his past rotted by doubt and loss.

He struggled to his feet, snarling. He started forward again, and when another blast came at him, he was braced. He summoned a shield. It was turbulence, warp-matter stripped of its toxic identity, disorder raised against chaos. The memory stream smashed into it, stopped, and then spread itself wide. It surrounded Gared and closed in hard. His shield imploded. His past, selected, filtered and repurposed until it was a disease, ate into the coherence of his being. His armour began to blister. Every misjudgement, every regret and every fallen brother clawed at him, eroding and suppressing all other thoughts, all other conceptions of his past. The centre of the plague was the memories of before, the forgotten realities that were now in the hands of Ku'gath. Truths that Gared could not deny but did not know battered him.

His armour cracked. His flesh began to dissolve.

'Do you see?' Ku'gath taunted. 'I know you. I know your name. I know your name.'

The repetition was a boast. Its diseased glee opened Gared's eyes to its special importance to the daemon. Naming was power. A daemon's true name was its greatest vulnerability. True names were key weapons in the Grey Knights' arsenal. And Ku'gath believed he knew Gared's true name.

The memories ate deeper. Gared felt his identity begin to fray. The immaterial flesh of his face erupted in running sores.

He must not let the daemon define him. And he could not defeat the memories through denial. Turning from them only gave them more power. He had to find the weakness. He had to find the error, fight the Plaguefather by locating the lie that must lurk at the core of the truths that were taking him apart.

Another blast hit him. He was without shield, but he staggered forward into the assault. He took in the memories. They were all strange now. They were all from before his transformation. They were poison and ripped at him with truth and confusion. Ku'gath knew what they meant, but he did not. That former self had ceased to be.

And there was his answer.

'You do not know me!' he shouted. He raised his sword, and focused on the light of the blade. I am the right hand of the Emperor, he thought. I am his sword. 'The past is dead. Those truths are dead.' The light of the sword grew brighter, fuelled by the greater, living truth. The brotherhood of the Grey Knights was where his identity resided. What he had been was not who he was. The past was a shed skin. 'I am the instrument of the Emperor's will!' No part of himself that was not devoted to that one goal had been cut away when he had donned his sacred armour.

The sword was blazing. Gared reached out with his soul beyond the foul garden. He reached for his brothers. And he found them reaching back. The collective psychic force of the squad sought him. This was no miracle. This was what it meant to be numbered among the Grey Knights.

This was his true self.

The truth barred forever to the understanding of the likes of Ku'gath.

The light of Gared's blade was blinding. It tore through the festering, clinging darkness that enveloped him. He slashed forward, and the sword channelled the purging fire of his untainted identity. A wound of fire and will cut through the garden of plague. Gared became the light, became the incarnation of his holy mission, and nothing beyond that mission was real.

The Plaguefather roared in pain and outrage.

There was nothing but the light.

And then Gared was in the landing bay of the Tyndaris once more. He had fallen to one knee, but he was still upright. He was surrounded by his brothers. The psychic unity of the squad gave him strength, and with a groan, he stood.

Burns and the impact craters of shells marred the deck. But the plaguebearers were gone.

Before Gared could ask, Styer said, 'The ship is secure.'

'Good.' His voice rasped. He was drained. His psychic battle had drawn upon many of his physical reserves. 'My thanks, brothers. I had need of your strength.'

'The battle is concluded, then?' Styer asked.

'The battle, yes. The struggle, though, is not.'

The whispers were silenced. But at the far edge of his awareness, Gared felt the scabbling of a vengeful will seeking a new purchase. Ku'gath had sought to define his identity and failed. But the Plaguefather still possessed dangerous knowledge, and he had Gared in his sights. Ku'gath was untiring.

No matter. So was Gared's faith.