



HEART OF DECAY (2017)

Written by Ben Counter

Performed by John Banks, Matthew Hunt and Toby Longworth.

Scripted by Reverend

List of characters:

- * Vidarna – Captain of the Relictors;
- * Achaon – Apothecary of the Relictors;
- * Gallectus Urba – Traitor Astartes of the Death Guard.

(Vidarna approaching Achaon)

Achaon: “Captain Vidarna, well met”.

Vidarna: “Well met. Is there any change with the prisoner, Apothecary?”

Achaon: “His life signs are abnormal, but they are steady. I am glad we brought him in uninjured. Who knows what I would find there if I had to operate?”

Vidarna: “You may still have to get him on the slab¹, Achaon. There is no telling how far I will have to go”.

Achaon: “You are doing this alone?”

Vidarna: “It’s the only way, brother. Open the cell”.

(cell door opening with a hiss)

(Vidarna slowly entering the chamber)

Urba (ironically): “Oh, happiest of days! I finally have a visitor!”

(Vidarna approaching the prisoner)

Vidarna: “In good spirits, I see?”

Urba: “Of course. Why must Relictors be so morose² all the time? Always so humorless, so grim”.

Vidarna: “I see nothing too joyous in your current position, Urba”.

Urba: “So you know my name? Wonders upon wonders!”

Vidarna: “We know a great deal about you, Gallectus Urba of the Death Guard Legion. The Relictors make something of a specialty of uncovering that which is hidden. The deeds of the Death Guard are recorded in the Libris Morturus Eternum. It is thought lost but we have a copy in our librarium. Your name is written there. So you see when we set our sights on learning a secret, we learn it”.

Urba: “So we are to engage in a battle of wits? (laughing) Oh, what fun! So just what secret is it you desire to learn from me? The names

of your fellow Space Marines whose lives I have taken over the millennia? The worlds full of innocents compelled³ to death and madness by our campaigns? Or the glimpses of glorious Nurgle I was granted for my service to the Plague God? Do you wish to hear of that, brother?"

Vidarna: "I am not your brother".

Urba: "Now have I hit a nerve? (sarcastically) A million apologies for my trespass⁴. How was I to know that such a simple word as 'brother' would cause you such distress⁵? Does it disgust you, brother, to think that you and I are so much the same?"

Vidarna: "You were taken when your space ship was crippled⁶ by our strike cruiser and boarded. My battle brother Salturis was lost. You killed him".

Urba: "So that was his name? How hot his blood was when I set it free with a stroke of my blade. I shall hold the sight of him dying as a most precious memory for the rest of my days".

Vidarna: "And just how many of those days do you think you have left?"

Urba: "And so we come to the threats. You are going to kill me? Is that right? Perhaps inflict sufferings without number if I do not speak? How sad for you that it is a waste of your time. I was created to know no fear just like you, brother. The infliction of pain is merely a reminder of the blessed decay that courses through me. The spectacle of death takes me one step closer to uniting with all things that rot in the great cauldron of the Grandfather. No, brother, I care not how many days I have left or how they will be filled. (emotionally, almost crying) I have spent ten thousand years in service to my god! There is nothing left in this universe to threaten me".

Vidarna (interrupting calmly): "Your spacecraft, the 'Bubonicus'. It was in transit towards the region of the Ghoul Stars. You were headed there with some urgency. Just you, a crew of servitors and a cargo of fresh bodies from the reaping of Kathana. Where were you headed and what you were going to do when you got there?"

Urba: "Ahhhh... So now the rules of our game are set. You want to know what I am going to do with the corpses. Then as a token⁷ of my

sportsmanship⁸ I will give you that. The blessed of Kathana were raw materials for experimentation”.

Vidarna: “Experimentation into what?”

Urba (laughing out loud): “No! No! No, brother... Do you think I would give up on our game so easily? We have barely started. No, there must be a give and a take, Captain. You are a Captain of the Relictors, are you not? Such an exalted⁹ personage I must be to deserve interrogation by one such as you. No, for every morsel¹⁰ I parcel out¹¹ you must pay me back in kind. That is the game we will play”.

Vidarna: “Perhaps, you have misunderstood your position here. You are imprisoned in our fortress-monastery. There is no way out. A whole Chapter of Space Marines bars your way. If you cannot convince me otherwise, I will have you transported to the generatorium reactor for incineration¹²”.

Urba (as if disappointed): “But then our game would be over. Nobody would win”.

Vidarna: “Then what will you give me, Death Guard?”

Urba: “I will give you the greatest blessing any living thing will ever receive – the true understanding of decay”.

Vidarna (starting to walk away): “Heh, not good enough, Urba”.

Urba (sarcastically): “Oh, no.... You are leaving me... Such a shame, I was beginning to enjoy your company”.

Vidarna (opening the door): “I hope your god listens, for you are running out of time to pray”.

Urba: “Hurry back soon, brother”.

(door closing behind Vidarna)

Achaon: “Well, that went as expected. He really thinks of this as a game?”

Vidarna: “Or he is just stalling for time. (taking a breath to think things over) Let him stew for a while. Before I go back in, I would have you take a gene-seed sample. Perhaps you can analyze it and tell us a little more about what we are dealing with”.

Achaon: “Not a task I’d relish¹³, Captain, but it shall be done”.

* * *

Urba: "Now, what is this? A new playmate?"

Achaon: "Do not bother struggling against your restraints. They will hold. With luck this will definitely hurt".

(Achaon trying to take Death Guard's gene sample)

Urba: "Ahhhh! Pain, the herald of Grandfather Nurgle's approach. Our cowardly bodies use it to tell us when we are undergoing harm, but to one who understands it is an omen of joy. It is with pain that our body loses the shackles of its form. I pity you so, little Apothecary, that you are still imprisoned in your crude and rigid body. If only you could understand the blessings Grandfather Nurgle gives. If only you could be free".

Achaon: "If only you could be quiet".

(drilling noises)

Urba (moaning from pleasure): "Ahhhh! Pain! Like the homecoming of an old friend. Ohhhh, how I missed you. Ohhhh, finally could have pain, the herald of the alteration of flesh. Pain, the sacred catalyst".

(Urba screaming and starting to mutate, his voices turning to demonic growl)

Urba (in two voices): "Won't you join in the fun? My... new... playmate..."

Achaon (horrified): "What abominable..."

(Urba grabbing Achaon by the throat)

Urba (in two voices): "You might be a Space Marine, but you are still human. You still have to breathe".

(Achaon falling to the ground, releasing himself from the grasp)

Achaon: "Isolation protocol! Activate the quarantine fields!"

(quarantine sirens going out)

Urba (giggling in two voices): "Ahahahahaha!"

(Achaon running away from the chamber)

* * *

Vidarna: "Report, Apothecary".

Achaon: "He mutated eight hours ago as soon as I was close enough to make the incision for the gene-seed. Biomass is up 40%. New organs, massively altered skeletal structure. I would say all the tentacles are the most normal part of it. His life signs are haywire15. I

cannot even tell if he has a heartbeat anymore. He is still changing, even now. What do you plan to do, Captain?"

Vidarna: "Carry on. We have our orders".

Achaon: "You are coming in?"

Vidarna: "It is the only way. Open the door".

Achaon: "Captain Vidarna, I... I took too greater risk. I could have been killed. All the Chapter has invested in me would have been lost".

Vidarna: "It is done, brother Achaon. We will deal with that when we are done with our task".

Achaon: "Yes, Captain".

(door opening, Vidarna entering the chamber)

Urba (growling): "Good day, Captain. I am glad you have returned. I so enjoyed our conversation".

Vidarna: "So now I see what you truly are, a foul and corrupted thing".

Urba (growling): "I know! Isn't it wonderful? Your Apothecary friend didn't appreciate it either. He severed one of my pseudopods¹⁶. Luckily I grew it back. Thus do the unenlightened react when they see the truth of Nurgle".

Vidarna: "Then tell me! If you are so desperate to educate me in the ways of your god, speak!"

Urba (growling): "And you would listen, Captain?"

Vidarna: "Call it a test of faith. If I can hear your poisoned words and resist them then I become stronger in my convictions that all your kind must be destroyed. On the other hand of your words corrupt me, then I am hardly fit to call myself a Space Marine of the Relictors".

Urba (growling): "But, brother, you are already corrupt. That is the first of the Grandfather's truths. Every cell in your body decays with every moment. Even as we speak you are rotting away, for what is the only force that holds everything in its grasp? Decay. Every living thing, even the stars themselves, will one day rot. Even a Space Marine with all the artificial strength of his Primarch will eventually slough off¹⁷ his flesh and putrefy¹⁸ to nothing".

Vidarna: "And you will not?"

Urba: "Oh, I will rot, Captain! But there in lies the gift of Nurgle, for while decay makes you weak, it makes me strong. I command the decay within my body. I mould¹⁹ it to my will. It becomes the strength to spread the wisdom of Nurgle to those who will see it and to crush those who will not. When we are born, when we fight and strive, when we die... When the galaxy itself darkens and is extinguished, decay is the only constant. Decay is existence, Captain. And when you master your decay, you master your universe".

Vidarna: "Yes... Yes... And to master it I must become like you".

Urba (angrily): "If you are lucky..."

Vidarna: "And how did your mission to the Ghoul Stars help you with all of this?"

Urba: "The Death Guard are foremost²⁰ in their worship of Grandfather Nurgle and the Grandfather does so love for his children to find their own concoctions²¹ with which to infect all those potential worshippers out there. Of course, doing so requires the raw materials. The unbelievers of Kathana were blessed in death as they never were in life to serve as such raw materials".

Vidarna: "Where were you taking them?"

Urba: "No, No, No! Our game has only just begun. You give a little, I reciprocate²². You learn of the Grandfather's gift, I give you just a little information in return. Have you not been paying attention, Captain?"

Vidarna: "Very well, what must I do to get to the next stage of your game?"

Urba: "Your task is easy now. Just wait, just... just... a little... longer".
(Urba continuing to mutate with a groan)

Urba: "Yes... Yes... I can feel it... All Nurgle's little children blow within me... All their teaming billions... They need to be born to be free, to infect".

(quarantine sirens going off once again)

Achaon (over vox): "Captain, the cogitators just detected a massive infectious bacterial spike²³".

Urba: “The game is done, Captain. The Grandfather wins. He always wins”.

(Urba breaking the restraints and setting himself free)

Vidarna: “He’s free!”

Achaon (over vox): “Captain, get out of there!”

(Vidarna trying to take Urba down, several bolter rounds)

(Urba groaning and breaking the cell’s wall)

(Achaon running towards Vidarna)

Achaon: “Captain, are you harmed?”

Vidarna (regaining his breath): “No. Throne alive, he tore right through the wall. Which way is he headed?”

Achaon: “The bio-scanners have him making for the chapel”.

Vidarna (regaining his breath): “Then... we must... stop him”.

Achaon: “Can you bring him down?”

Vidarna: “Before he mutated I would wager²⁴ ‘yes’ but now... Well... There is only one way to answer that”.

Achaon: “What do we do if he escapes?”

Vidarna: “We pray, brother”.

* * *

Urba: “So this is what passes for a holy place? So cold and sterile, so dead. And the statue of your beloved Emperor has seen better days. Do you see how even a lifeless stone decays? How even the face of the Emperor gives way to rot?”

Vidarna (approaching): “The statue is from the Ecclesiarchal palace, salvaged from the fires of the Age of Apostasy²⁵. It has weathered²⁶ thousands of years and it will be standing here when you and I are gone. Not everything rots away”.

Urba: “The image of Grandfather Nurgle would banish all this gloom. He would gaze down upon his congregation²⁷ with laughter in his eyes. If you could but understand the blessings of Nurgle, my brother, you would clamber²⁸ at the gates of his cathedral”.

Vidarna: “I will stand by my Emperor if the alternative is becoming like you”.

Urba: “But you will become like me, Captain. Have you still not seen it? Look upon what the Grandfather has hatched within me”.

(Urba's body erupting, exposing innards and unleashing swarms of flies)

Urba: "See these organs so beautifully distended²⁹. Here lies the Grandfather's most beautiful gift. Have the Relictors written in their annals of the glory of Nurgle's rot? A disease so virulent³⁰, a simple spore will take its claim and thereafter transform the blessed recipient into a devotee of Nurgle infected in mind and body. Beautiful, transformed, free".

Vidarna (unsheathing his blade): "Not here, Urba. This ends now".

Urba (laughing): "Ahahahaha, such a pretty power sword you carry, Captain. A shame that every limb you lop off³¹ will just grow back".

Vidarna: "Then I'll have to take your head".

Urba (disappointed): "Oh, brother Captain, do you still not understand? It does not matter what happens to me now. Our little game was played to give the Nurgle's rot within me the time to mutate into a strain³² that can infect the gene-seed of the Relictors. Even now its spores crawl through your fortress-monastery. Every one of your battle brothers is already infected".

Vidarna (charging): "Blasphemer! I will anoint³³ this place with your blood".

Urba: "Can you hear that, Captain? The Grandfather laughs at your impotent anger. Do you truly believe one of the Death Guard would let himself be taken alive? Do you think you really had me imprisoned when I could have walked out at any moment? Now that Nurgle's rot has flowered within me, I have already won".

(Urba's skin cracking)

Urba: "I need no power blade, brother. A sword of bone will strike as keen³⁴".

(Vidarna and Urba clashing swords)

Urba (while fencing): "You are strong, Captain. You will serve us well. Grandfather loves his little children. Grandfather loves his little pets".

Vidarna: "Your god will never be welcome here".

(beeping sound)

Urba: "A frag grenade? How clever!"

(explosion going off)

Urba (moaning): "I cannot die. I cannot be stopped. I am the plague incarnate".

Vidarna: "Achaon, now!"

Achaon (making a sedative injection): "If you are a plague, we are the cure".

Vidarna: "Inject him again!"

Achaon: "The dose will be lethal".

Vidarna: "Not for him, now do it!"

(Achaon making a second injection)

Urba (moaning): "I am... I am the plague... I cannot... Cannot die..."

* * *

Achaon: "Hm, stable. Brain waves are normalizing. He is coming round".

Vidarna: "Are the restraints holding?"

Achaon: "It's solid ceramite, Captain. He is not getting out".

Vidarna: "Then this is your realm, Apothecary. Continue!"

(Urba slowly regaining consciousness)

Urba (awaking and almost whispering): "What is this place? Where am I?"

Achaon: "You are in our Apothecarion. We brought you here after sedation. You needed a hefty³⁵ dose, enough to kill several Space Marines, but it calmed you down... in the end".

Urba (calmly): "What have you done to me?"

Achaon: "You are in the sarcophagus of a Dreadnaught that once housed a great champion of our Chapter. He was lost in battle and his Dreadnaught was damaged beyond repair. But we salvaged it knowing we could put it to good use. It turns out the sarcophagus is perfect for sealing in a living creature while rendering him immobile and conscious".

Urba (calmly): "Then you have taken your revenge on me, but it does not matter. Your whole Chapter is infected with Nurgle's rot. Every one of your battle brothers will waste away and rise again as devotees of Grandfather Nurgle And you will march into the laboratory vats³⁶ of Helackrox Prime, eager fodder³⁷ for our experiments".

Achaon: "So... Helackrox Prime was your destination".

Urba (calmly): "It matters not. This entire fortress-monastery is infected".

Achaon: "You are not in our fortress-monastery".

Urba (surprised): "What?"

Achaon: "You asked if we really thought a Death Guard would ever be taken alive if he did not want to be. Did you really think we would bring you to our fortress-monastery? To the heart of our Chapter? No, Urba, you are on board the 'Solemn³⁸ Sanctity'. It was scuppered³⁹ from our fleet three hundred years ago and has been adrift ever since. When the Relictors heard of the strain of Nurgle's rot created to infect Space Marines, we fitted it out as a space bound laboratory and set about acquiring a sample of the virus, which thanks to you we have".

Urba: "But you are infected, you and your Captain".

Achaon (grimly): "Indeed we are, but now we have waited for you to incubate the mutated strain. You are imprisoned and we have a constant source of the disease to examine and experiment upon. If we are successful, we can cure ourselves, if not – others will follow and continue our work".

Urba: "But you will turn into a servant of Nurgle. You will beg for the Grandfather's blessing".

Achaon: "Then we will be executed by our brethren. We accepted that sacrifice when we were assigned to this mission. And how could I ever turn down the chance to examine a living breathing member of the Death Guard? My curiosity got the better of me. I never thought I would get an opportunity like this. Furthermore our fellow Chapters do not always agree with our methods. A cure for Nurgle's rot will do no harm at all to our standing in their eyes. I have much to thank you for, Urba of the Death Guard. And I will have plenty of time to do it".

(Achaon starting to lock the sarcophagus)

Urba (groaning): "What are you doing, lackey of the corpse-god?"

Achaon: "My procedures require you to remain conscious, but immobile. With your body temperature lowered the sarcophagus's systems will leave your mind free to wander. I understand it is quite

the transcendent⁴⁰ experience to be severed from the world, but denied oblivion. Your world will be the confines of your own diseased mind. Perhaps you will find your god in there, but I doubt it, brother".
(Urba screaming as the sarcophagus closes)