



KALDOR DRAIGO:
KNIGHT OF TITAN

A short story by L J Goulding



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I regret firing the shot almost as soon as I pull the trigger. The storm bolter bucks in its wrist mount, the shell streaking through the haze towards its target as the spent casing tumbles to the ground at my feet.

Seven shots remain. Seven, no matter what fresh horror or fell-spawned nightmare I might yet encounter, in the unknowable days, years or centuries that lie ahead. From the first moment that I understood what had happened to me, I had carefully conserved my already depleted ammunition, and resisted every urge to pull the trigger when my blade would avail me just as well.

I have fired precisely five shots in all that time, and I have regretted every single one.

The shell finds its mark, piercing the beast's wiry chest and detonating in a shower of too-bright red gore and un-matter. The thing's charge is halted, and it falls to one side in the storm-whipped dust with a gurgled grunt of confusion.

I kick away its brazen axe. The daemon claws and scrabbles at my armoured greaves with the last of its strength, hatred still blazing in its eyes even as its corpus begins to dissipate.

Which one was this? The Tyrant? The Overfiend? The Skulltaker? A thousand names and epithets swirl in my mind, though the endless cavalcade of the beast's daemonic kin has begun to blur in my recollections. I can remember the future, though I can no longer recall which champions of the warp I have slain and which yet elude me, in this place.

It is a shameful thing for me to admit. Our kind has always stood against the darkness, and made it our duty to know all that we could of the Great Enemy. We have made a science of superstition, following half-glimpsed signs and portents with the same conviction that men of reason once condemned them.

But now I am blinded, my preternatural senses dulled by the warp's stifling miasma.

I do not know where I am. I do not know *when* I am.

The coup de grace is inelegant. Efficient. The beast feels the cold mercy of the *Titansword*. After so long, I no longer see any worth in taunting my fallen foes. They know my name, and that is enough.

Kaldor Draigo. The Saviour of Acralem. Supreme Grand Master of the Grey Knights.

Both titles ring hollow, now – what have I saved, truly? And of whom am I the master anymore? Exiled from reality itself by my nemesis, the thrice-accursed daemon prince M'kar, I am alone. Alone in the hearth-realm of daemonkind, and the dark lords of Chaos. Alone with those who seek my destruction with every fibre of their immortal beings.

Was it hubris that brought me here? Vainglory?

Perhaps, though in the beginning it had seemed like something more noble.

Some might say that the signs were there all along, and that my destiny was... *confused* from the beginning. True enough, beyond the cautious counsel of my fellow Grand Masters – Fenrick, Kai, Mordrak – the prognosticators on Titan openly condemned my ascension to Chapter Lord. After the humbling of Mortarion at Kornovin, I stood before them in the augurium and demanded to know the reason why.

Only one of them would meet my gaze. His face lined with decrepitude beyond his transhuman years, Sighted-Brother Verus pursed his lips. I could only guess at what he saw when he looked at me.

‘You have come far, Master Draigo,’ he said, ‘but this is not your path to follow. You led the Sixth Brotherhood. Six hundred and sixty-six – the number of our Chapter, and one that has had many meanings throughout the history of mankind. Six times six, thirty-six. The total of the numbers from one to thirty-six? Six, six, six. One hundred and twenty-one primes, squared to eleven. Eleven primes in thirty-six. There is a pattern here, you see.’

I frowned, his meandering riddles lost upon me. ‘Numerology, and circular coincidence. I do not understand.’

‘Your name, according to the old divinations, is a killing word, though it was not for the daemon primarch Mortarion. Kappa, the decadive, in opposition to Mu, the twelfth. A-L, in conjunction. Mal to Kal, cancelled by the second. Delta, Omicron, Rho – the D and the R combine to a symmetry greater than the Quaestor. There is a pattern here too...’

After much deliberation and more arcane babble that I did not fully understand, I left the augurium and never returned there in person again. It

seemed that the basis of their objection was that I had been destined for something greater, and yet now I had usurped that which rightfully belonged to another. To their sight, I was a soul with two incompatible destinies, and the time would come when I would have to risk everything in order to pursue either.

And here I am.

Lost, in time and space – somewhere between reality and the universe's eternal dream-state.

The daemon's flesh hisses and fizzes in the storm winds, redolent of old blood and eternal rage. A fine rain of rust and ash falls from the kaleidoscope sky, driven to patter from my Terminator war-plate and crunching beneath my boots with every step.

It is the question that holds me here: if I embrace one destiny, who will claim the other? On the eve of a new, dark millennium, does the fate of the galaxy rest upon my shoulders, or have I already been forgotten? I am a lord with no domain, a knight with no quest, and my ultimate destiny seems always to lie just beyond my reach. The only things I can count upon are my sword and the seven shots remaining in my sidearm.

Time flows strangely within the empyrean. In the scattering of the daemon's remains, I see patterns. I see shapes and colours. I see echoes of things that are, and futures that were.

I see an old world beyond the next horizon – a world that likely never was, where sorcery blew in the very winds and a self-made god-king was all that stood against the Ruinous Powers.

Mayhap I would find the answer there, if I could find it at all.

Sheathing the *Titansword*, with my tattered cloak whipping about me, I trudge away into the storm. If my destiny will not follow, then I will go on as I always have.

Alone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

L J GOULDING has written many stories for Black Library, including 'The Great Maw', 'Last Watch' and 'The Oberwald Ripper'. By day he works as a member of Black Library's editorial team, proving that an obsessive and encyclopaedic knowledge of the Horus Heresy can be a useful thing after all. He lives in Nottingham, UK.



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