

Bal-Sagoth, And Lo, When The Imperium Marches

[Chapter 1: The Voyage of the Sorcerer]

The war between the Imperium and the allied Vyrgothian Kingdoms had raged for years. Beginning as minor disputes over border territories, the conflict had swiftly escalated into a full-scale bloody war, a vast series of epic campaigns, fervently perpetuated by the Emperor Koord and the Over-King of Vyrgothia, both eager to smite their traditional ancestral foes and to win great glory and the adulation of their people by seizing victory in battle. Recent months had seen the forces of the Imperium display a staggering degree of tactical mastery and battle prowess, contemptuously crushing the Vyrgothian armies in a series of great battles, 'til at last, following the slaughterous Rout of the Fields of Kai-Vorg, The Empire's finest fighting force, the famed and far-feared Legion of the Ebon Tiger, stood unopposed not five day's march from mighty Gul-Kothoth, the greatest and most ancient fortress-city in all the Vyrgothian kingdoms. The Legion of the Ebon Tiger could not easily count their numerous and resounding victories, and their commander, the legendary warlord Baalthus Vane, made it clear to the Emperor that he was eager to press on deep into the enemy's lands and seize the prize which awaited him; the siege and capture of ancient Gul-Kothoth! And yet the Emperor Koord did not order the Legion to march, for disturbing information had of late been relayed to him by his spies in the Vyrgothian Royal Court... Dire rumours abounded that the Vyrgothian mages had at last discovered the ancient arcane rites which would unlock the aeons-fettered power of the dread Obsidian Crown, a fearsome mystical artefact countless thousands of years old, a black-jewelled circlet believed once to have been borne upon the immortal brow of the legendary Shadow-King himself! And it was written in legend, that should the ancient spells of might entwining the artefact be reawakened, then incredible near limitless ruinous power would thus be bestowed upon any army carrying the Crown into battle... Had the mages of Vyrgothia truly ascertained the time-lost conjurations required to empower the Obsidian Crown, hidden for centuries deep within the marble vaults of its ebon citadel? Eager to know the truth, the Emperor dispatched his most powerful sorcerer across the great Inland Sea to the Court of the Over-King, under the pretence of offering the terms for the Vyrgothian surrender. He was bade use all his sorcerous skills to discover the truth... a truth soon made clear by the disdainful refusal of the Imperium's terms, and the grimly fearsome message given the sorcerer by Vyrgothia's Master Wizard, with which to return to the Emperor: "And lo, when the Imperium marches against Gul-Kothoth, then dark sorceries shall enshroud the Citadel of the Obsidian Crown..."

[The Wizards of Vyrgothia:]

Darkly bejewelled circlet of night,
Crown of the Elder King,
Unfettered at last the Trinity of Might,
The sceptre, the sword, and the ring.

[The Sorcerer:]

I stand upon the oaken planks of this great ship, (the splendid flagship of the Imperium's navies)
Gazing at moon-gleam dancing on the vast, dark sea...
(And in my mind I behold) black crystals gleaming... ensorcellment!
I am enthralled by this nighted spell...
For I know that the slumbering sorceries
Of the Shadow-King's crown shall soon be reawakened...
And as I return to my emperor (shackled to such woefully grim tidings),
My spirit is borne upon the leathern wings of a great sorrow...

[Chapter 2: The March of the Imperium]

[The Emperor:]

Call forth the Ogre-Mage of the Black Lake
And the Swordmaster of Kyrman'ku,
Let them speak the Words Which Unfetter...
Enshrined for countless centuries, within its darksome citadel,
Five score and ten against the Tiger, (curse) the black crown of the
Shadow-King!

By all the dark gods, I swear I'll not be dethroned!
A seething forest of blackened blades,
A churning sea of ebon war-chariots,
A searing storm of flaming shafts,
All this havoc and more shall I unleash against my foe...
Into battle! The Legion shall march... the fall of Gul-Kothoth is nigh!

The Legion of the Ebon Tiger... six thousand elite warriors of the Imperium, the pride of the Emperor's forces... Bolstered by heavy cavalry, and a squadron of deadly scythed chariots... further reinforced by the Imperial Frontier Army of one hundred thousand highly trained spearmen and archers... and never has this force met its match in battle or siege...

[Baalthus Vane:]

Our banner flies ever glorious, undefeated we stand, steeped in victory.
The Iron Phalanx, six thousand strong, our ever-honed blades, the Tiger's gleaming claws.
Pride of the Empire, Scourge of the Vraii,
Masters at Turonium, and Kai-Vorg.
Smiters of the Southern Host, Routers of the Horde, Bane of the Over-King, we march to war!

And so, the Emperor himself rides to rendezvous with Baalthus Vane, accompanied by his sorcerous aide. The Legion of the Ebon Tiger reaches Gul-Kothoth at dusk on the fifth day of their march from the fields of Kai-Vorg, halting upon the great arid plain which stretches before the city, the huge dust cloud sent up by their massed arrival obscuring the dying embers of the setting sun. As the vast army begins to make camp, arraying their splendid tents and banners, and assembling their gargantuan siege-wagons, the Emperor stands gazing at the huge brooding walls and colossal cyclopean gates of the city-fortress before him, vowing that a torrent of red slaughter shall befall Gul-Kothoth, regardless of any sorcerous trinkets the Vyrgothians may possess, and that the Over-King shall pay dearly for his sublime arrogance. And twelve leagues distant, an army of five score and ten, bearing the Obsidian Crown, approaches the city...

[To be continued in Chapter 3: The Wizards Do Battle]

[Lyrics: Byron]

[Music: Jonny and Chris Maudling]