

## Bal-Sagoth

# "The Obsidian Crown Unbound"

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[Episode IX: The Legions of the Imperium Storm the Cloud-Capped Palisades of Gul-Kothoth]

[Chapter 11: The Siege Begins]

And so the mighty and resplendent armies of the Imperium assembled before the towering cyclopean walls of ancient Gul-Kothoth.

It was some time before the billowing dust cloud raised by the massed arrival of the vast imperial host settled, ultimately dissipating as the shadows of dusk descended.

With nightfall, the imperial army's countless torches, braziers and cookfires illuminated the dark plain before the fortress like a coruscating sea, painting the stygian heavens the colour of flame.

And the high summer's night passed swiftly.

At length, the dawn approached tentatively, and with the first signs of the newborn sun etching its promise upon the skies, the martial preparations commenced in earnest.

A brief perfunctory exchange between the Imperial Herald and the fortification's Watch Commander held no surprises, and the Emperor's banner was duly driven into the seared earth before Gul-Kothoth with a chilling finality.

Vast siege engines and powerful ballistae were hauled inexorably into position, alongside a battery of katapelte and petrobolos.

The one hundred thousand strong Imperial Frontier Army, having planted their regimented blazons into the arid soil, waited with a disciplined patience born of never having met defeat in pitched battle or siege, the dreaded Imperial War-Leopards straining noisily against their iron-link leashes to the rear of the cohorts of conscripts and auxiliaries.

The pitiless Iron Phalanx and their Lord Militant Commander had assumed position at the head of the army's Alpha Wing, polished swords, spears and poll-axes reflecting the glow from the myriad torches and braziers which still burned about the Imperial Host. And behind them were drawn of the legendary Legion of the Ebon Tiger, Pride of the Emperor, the infantry

and cavalry famed throughout the Great Northern Continent, personal regiment of the feared general Baalthus Vane.

True to their martial reputation, the six thousand strong Legion were inscrutable in their jet black armour, their sable banner billowing in the chill breeze which skittered over the plain.

And finally, astride his azure-shaffroned warhorse and surrounded by his elite guard, the silvern-armoured Emperor Koord himself studied the precipitous gates with a disdainful scrutiny.

At the Emperor's right hand was the renowned Swordmaster of Kyrman'ku, an eastern bladesman of preternatural skill and the most revered and expensive mercenary in the Imperium.

At his left, the infamous Ogre-Mage of the Black Lake brooded silently, swathed in a stygian cloak and fuliginous cowl and exuding an aura of implacable malevolence, which unnerved even the bravest of the Imperial troops.

The Emperor had deemed the services of these two nefarious renegades pivotal to the execution of the Final Campaign, for they alone had knowledge of the mysterious arcane rite known as The Words Which Unfetter.

And, behind their titanic time-worn palisades, the defenders of Gul-Kothoth beheld this awesome force ranged against them and shuddered, not with fear, but with an awful and night-cold anticipation.

[The Emperor Koord:]

General Vane, we begin the final siege of this campaign with the rising of the sun.

The war which has raged for decades, shall finally be decided here, before the hoary walls of ageless Gul-Kothoth.

The Imperium's last and most glorious victory is at hand.

The procrastinating sybarites of the bureaucracy have been threatened and bribed into compliance over this venture.

This more than anything else is why I have deigned to grace this final battle with my Imperial presence, even against the advice of the Grand Vizier and the sage counsel of the Seers.

[Baalthus Vane:]

You shall enjoy watching the Ebon Tiger bloody its claws, sire.

Our victory here is assured.

[The Emperor Koord:]

You should not call your falcons before the hunt is done, my loyal servitor.

Overconfidence is but one of the many foes a general must face upon the field of war.

Today, the precepts and maxims of the Imperium shall be tested, and we shall see whether the velvet glove of diplomacy or the iron gauntlet of conquest has proved the more effective tool.

[Baalthus Vane:]

The days of the feudal suzerainties are long gone, my liege.

The Imperial Military Council is the only entity fit to govern the dominions.

The fall of Vyrgothia shall today render the truth of the Imperial Mandate self evident.

[The Emperor Koord:]

And yet I am vexed, for as you well know, the sorcerous emissary I dispatched to the Court of the Over-King has warned that the Vyrgothians may have recovered one of the artifacts comprising the fabled Trinity of Might

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