



WARHAMMER
40,000

THE LORDS OF BORSIS

L J GOULDING



It is the 41st millennium. For more than a hundred centuries the Emperor has sat immobile on the Golden Throne of Earth. He is the master of mankind by the will of the gods, and master of a million worlds by the might of his inexhaustible armies. He is a rotting carcass writhing invisibly with power from the Dark Age of Technology. He is the Carrion Lord of the Imperium for whom a thousand souls are sacrificed every day, so that he may never truly die.

Yet even in his deathless state, the Emperor continues his eternal vigilance. Mighty battlefleets cross the daemon-infested miasma of the warp, the only route between distant stars, their way lit by the Astronomican, the psychic manifestation of the Emperor's will. Vast armies give battle in his name on uncounted worlds. Greatest amongst His soldiers are the Adeptus Astartes, the Space Marines, bio-engineered super-warriors. Their comrades in arms are legion: the Astra Militarum and countless planetary defence forces, the ever-vigilant Inquisition and the tech-priests of the Adeptus Mechanicus to name only

a few. But for all their multitudes, they are barely enough to hold off the ever-present threat from aliens, heretics, mutants – and worse.

To be a man in such times is to be one amongst untold billions. It is to live in the cruellest and most bloody regime imaginable. These are the tales of those times. Forget the power of technology and science, for so much has been forgotten, never to be re-learned. Forget the promise of progress and understanding, for in the grim dark future there is only war. There is no peace amongst the stars, only an eternity of carnage and slaughter, and the laughter of thirsting gods.

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There was one thing for which Turakhin was renowned above all else and - much to the dismay of those that called him overlord – it was not his military acumen. From his throne at the head of the grand hall, he would regularly preside over the greatest and most lavish banquets that any on the seventeen worlds of the Bor Enclave could ever hope to witness.

Wines from Harapti flowed freely from ewers carried by robed servants, while others bore platters laden with spiced fruit and aromatic roasted meats. Guests were anointed with sacred oils as they seated themselves - lords and delegates from across the sector, who were then treated to harmless displays of technomagick and rousing recitations of the ancient sagas performed in flawless pentatonic harmony by Turakhin's troubador-minstrels. Fragrant incense burned in golden braziers, wafting scented smoke into the upper reaches of the hall where the quantum-flambeaux flickered silently overhead.

Not since the days of the old gods had such epicurean pleasures been known.

Or so it was said. Few of those now present had any memory of those times, and those that did were rather more preoccupied with other matters.

Amontar, rightful lord and ruler of the world of Xanderat, could not take his eyes from the goblet that sat upon the table before Turakhin. It was carved in shimmering crystal that caught the light, refracting and casting it through the wine like a hundred miniature rainbows. In any other household, it would have been a priceless treasure, but to the Overlord of Borsis it was simply one amongst thirty-five identical pieces that he used when entertaining his royal court, and he appeared to pay it no mind.

'Khetmes,' Turakhin muttered, fixing the noble seated opposite Amontar with an inquisitive squint. 'You look as though you have something to say.'

The exalted Nemesor Khetmes, bedecked in his warlike finery, stared coldly back. His fellow lords shifted uncomfortably in their seats - though the confrontation had been expected, this was far from the manner in which they had proposed that the matter be broached. As usual, the characteristically forthright Khetmes lacked the subtlety and sagacity required for proper courtly business.

'My lord, the hospitality you have afforded us is admirable. But we do not feel that now is the time for feasting and celebration. There are more pressing matters at hand.'

From his seat at the overlord's right hand, Turakhin's vizier and chief advisor Heqiroth stood and noted the interruption upon a lavish vellum-slate.

'The great and mighty Turakhin, regent of the Magadha dynasty and master of Borsis, recognises Nemesor-designate Khetmes, conqueror of the Ferandu Trinary.'

With an air of mild disinterest, Turakhin plucked the goblet from the table and peered disapprovingly into it. 'And what would these pressing matters be, nemesor?'

Amontar froze. He watched the overlord languidly swirl the wine around the bowl of the goblet, though his attention was clearly already drifting.

Khetmes rose, the woven electrum scales of his cloak clattering from his chair. 'Alien incursion, lord. The foulest creatures threaten our borders, most likely sponsored by the blood-witches or the damnable eldar, and yet you do nothing.'

He swept his arms wide, gesturing into the unseen heavens with his sceptre of office and silencing the troubadours and the idle chatter of the overlord's other guests. Heqiroth continued to scribble upon the slate as Khetmes spoke.

'The Kurg Reach has fallen. Xirec too. Our ancient domains are being picked clean by these ignorant upstarts, and yet you would have the Magadha dynasty remain quiet and isolated. How much longer do you really think it will be before the Bor Enclave attracts the notice of the alien invaders?'

Turakhin shook his head. 'Nonsense. Impossible. You start at shadows, Khetmes. The great war is long over, and these barely-sentient brutes will never truly threaten us. They are too parochial, too close-minded - they squat on the periphery of our domain without any understanding of our eternal majesty. With all the grand armies at our command, Magadha has nothing to fear from them.'

Khetmes continued to glower, but Turakhin merely raised the goblet to him, before taking a deep sniff of the wine's bouquet.

'Have I ever told you,' he began afresh, 'of the Quad-sultans of Obe? Theirs was a fascinating culture, though hopelessly doomed from the very beginning, you see. It is said that they believed themselves to be the pinnacle of sentience, and raised monuments to their artistic glories across a dozen worlds...'

Drink. Drink it, you old fool. Amontar felt his impatience getting the better of him, and released his grip on the edge of the table as Turakhin rambled on. He glanced around warily at the overlord's lychguard, suddenly convinced that he had somehow attracted their notice. He tried to get the attention of the servant that he had bribed, though the imbecile only stared vacantly ahead with the wine ewer still gripped in his cold hands.

'Enough!' cried Khetmes, drawing his ceremonial voidblade and plunging it into the polished surface of the table.

Halted mid-sentence, Turakhin stared at him with wide eyes. His praetorian judicator, Metzoi, stepped forward with his hand upon the hilt of his sword, already gauging Khetmes's stance, likely support and possible escape routes.

The nemesor was unfazed, and remained defiant even as his peers began to

edge away from him.

'You are weak, my lord. You have no vision for our people, or the future of our dynasty. You would be content to spin us tales of your past glories from now until the suns grow cold, but I will not stand for it any longer.' He shucked off his cloak to an attendant groom, and pointed with his sceptre. 'I won the Bor Enclave for you, and if you will not defend it then I will take it back.'

Outraged, Turakhin threw his goblet to the floor where it shattered across the smooth marble. Heqiroth raised his voice to the hall. 'These are bold words, exalted nemesor. What is your purpose here?'

Amontar watched the poisoned wine trickling into the cracks between the flagstones, though he felt little regret - it seemed that his lost opportunity to act against the overlord was about to be replaced by a formal leadership challenge from Khetmes. An unexpected development, though not an unwelcome one.

Besides, eliminating the nemesor later on would be even easier.

Khetmes took up his long warscythe and began to pace around the table towards the throne, scattering servants and noble guests before him. 'Overlord Turakhin, I find you wanting in the leadership of Magadha and the Bor Enclave. As such, by the ancient forms of martiality I challenge you to single combat. Let justice be decided by—'

He never finished speaking his challenge.

One moment, Judicator Metzoi was standing ready behind Turakhin; the next, he was behind Khetmes with his sword blade extended. Life faded from the nemesor's eyes, and his severed head crashed onto the banqueting table, coming to rest upon a silver platter.

The symbolism appeared to please Turakhin. He clapped his hands together and laughed gleefully as Khetmes's body toppled to the floor.

'Well done, Metzoi - oh, well done indeed!' he cackled. 'You've saved me the trouble of having to reclaim the title of nemesor from him, one day. A most agreeable tum of events. Most agreeable.'

The judicator sheathed his blade once more, and gave the overlord a short bow.

Amontar gazed in horror at the slack, gaping death mask of Nemesor Khetmes before him. Several of the other delegates retired from the table at the sight, even as Heqiroth urged the troubadours to strike up once more.

'Praise be,' the vizier cried exultantly. 'Fortune favours our noble regent! Let it be known that the vile traitor Khetmes is hereby stripped of all rank and title, and his household condemned to dimensional exile. So shall be the fate of all who dare conspire against the great and mighty Turakhin of Magadha!'

After the feast, when the flambeaux were extinguished and the hall had fallen at last to silence, the remaining lords of Borsis met in the gloomy galleries beyond.

Uluszekh, the self-styled Tyrant of Ghyr, was skulking beneath an idealised statue of Yggra'nya; once the patron deity of Borsis, the c'tan was depicted in the classical style, bound up with symbolic restraints that held his legendary power in check.

'You choose an auspicious hiding place, "tyrant",' hissed Amontar as he approached. 'Do you cower in the shadow of the Shaper as a symbol of your desire to remould this world in your own image, too?'

'I'm not hiding,' Uluszekh snapped.

'Of course you're not. For, undoubtedly, you have nothing to fear from our great overlord's guardians, or that ghoul Metzoi.' Amontar drew up beside him, casting a quick glance in each direction to be sure that he had not been followed. 'Khetmes, he was easy prey, but you... *you* they would think twice about striking down as nothing more than an example to the rest of us.'

Before Uluszekh could reply, the two of them both started at the sound of another hushed voice in the shadows.

'Are you brain-dead? Quieten your words, both of you!'

Wrapped up as though against the chill in his coarsely woven robes, Hixos emerged from the gloom like a neurotic phantom. He pulled back his hood to reveal a gleaming, bare pate, and waved his two alien thralls away with almost skeletal fingers.

'The overlord's lychguard prowl these corridors even as we speak...'

Amontar sneered. 'You have brought the slave-lord into our confidences, Uluszekh? You have precious few allies among the court, true, but I never dreamed that you would stoop so low as this.' He glanced sidelong at Hixos, making a show of his disdain. 'Hail to thee, Hixos of Naravekhi. I would offer my hand, but I fear that I would never then be clean of the alien stench that clings to you.'

'Be still!' Uluszekh growled in frustration. 'You know that Hixos has ever been our ally, and while his Legions are few, his slaves have leave to walk the darker places of the palace where we cannot. Such gifts are not to be overlooked in our enterprises.'

Cautiously, Amontar regarded the two miserable thralls skulking in the wan light of the main gallery - they were malnourished, sallow things with heavy collars about their necks. 'I don't like the look of them. How can we be sure that these primitive beasts will even be capable of playing any part in our intrigue, or

that they won't slit our throats while we sleep?'

Hixos grinned. It was a toothy, unpleasant sight.

'My lords, I make it my business to invest in only the finest stock. Though they may appear as little more than shaved apes, these creatures are intelligent enough to do as they are told. They are strong and capable, and have been vetted - they are not mind-singers.'

He rubbed his neck, thoughtfully.

'And besides, I have slept enough to last me a score of lifetimes.'

In spite of himself, Amontar chuckled.

Uluszekh inclined his head. 'Something amuses you, friend?'

'No. It is nothing. Recently I fancied that I had forgotten what true, restful sleep was, that is all.'

Hixos grinned again. 'Spending too long concocting your lethal poisons, no doubt. Although, it is my understanding that we have yet to see any evidence of your professed skill? You should take care not to confuse your exit-dose with your sleeping draught, my lord Amontar...'

'How dare—'

Uluszekh raised his hands. 'Friends, be still. It was merely bad luck that delivered Turakhin from Amontar's lethal attentions this night - the overlord's fit of pique was a variable that we could not hope to have predicted.'

Hixos nodded. 'Just so. My apologies, lord Amontar. I spoke out of turn.'

Aye, you simpering bastard, *Amontar thought*. I'll see you cold and froth-lipped on the floor of your chambers too, when this is all done.

'Then let us be about it,' Uluszekh went on. 'I bring news - great news, indeed, for our gathering. Khetmes and his household are gone, but still our numbers grow! There are others who would join our noble efforts to remove the imbecile Turakhin from the throne of Borsis.'

Amontar felt something like panic stirring in his chest.

'Uluszekh, you fool - who have you been blabbing to? You cannot just talk about these things openly. The forms of intrigue are not so carefully enshrined as the forms of martiality in the secret wars among the nobility. There are procedures, double-blind intermediary channels to protect—'

'Peace, friend. It was the other parties that approached me.'

Hixos leaned forward. 'Who? Who approached you?'

The Tyrant of Ghyr steepled his fingers. 'Why, none other than the high magister himself.'

Amontar gaped.

'Overseer Ruadzhe?'

He caught himself as his fellow conspirators made to hush his outburst, and

continued almost in a stage whisper that seemed to carry further than usual in the empty gallery.

'The regent's own cryptek - are you mad? It's bound to be a trap. You've doomed us all!'

Even Hixos seemed perturbed by this revelation. The slave-lord took a staggered step backwards, tugging his hood back over his skull. 'I am inclined to agree. This was ill-advised.'

'Calm yourselves,' Uluszekh insisted. 'Ruadzhe has a well-placed sponsor in this endeavour.'

Hixos blinked. 'Better placed than the high magister to the regent? Pray tell, who else—'

'I believe that Lord Uluszekh is referring to *me*.'

Amontar spun to face the newcomer, an envenomed blade flashing into his hand from the folds of his robe. Neither he nor Hixos could believe their eyes.

Vizier Heqiroth stood awkwardly at the edge of the gallery, half-swathed in the darkness beneath a set of luxurious hanging drapes. Aside from his simple loincloth and a ceremonially decorated breastplate and headdress, his lean form was bare, and he picked nervously at the large red gemstone mounted symbolically over his heart. This milksop was no warrior, no cunning leader of the Immortal Legions - that much was clear to Amontar.

He gestured with his dagger. 'This is insanity, Uluszekh. We must kill him now, before he takes word back to Turakhin. Or Metzoi.'

Heqiroth put up his hands in alarm.

'My lords, I beg you - let me be part of your conspiracy. I have diverted the lychguard patrols away from this meeting as a sign of good faith, and there is no one here in the palace who can get you closer to the regent than I.'

Uluszekh moved between Amontar and the vizier. 'He speaks truthfully, friends. Tell them, Heqiroth - tell them what you told me. Why should they trust you as I do?'

Heqiroth edged forward, a beseeching look about him.

'My dynasty was subsumed by Magadha during the last war. I and all scions of the once-mighty Nephrekh dynasty were bound up into the regent's own Legions, in exchange for his protection against the alien usurpers. But we weren't to know that he was nothing more than a paper prince, a bumbling coward. It was Khetmes who won our battles and guarded the borders of the enclave as Turakhin's designated war-leader, and now that he is gone I am left in a most precarious position - if my involvement in the nemesor's attempted coup is discovered, then—'

His meaning was clear. Amontar lowered his blade.

'Khetmes bargained outside of our gathering for his own gain in the succession?' Hixos muttered. 'Maybe he wasn't as ignorant as we thought.'

Amontar fixed Heqiroth with a level glare. 'The nemesor is gone, and with him our best hope of a martial challenge to the overlord's rule. Turakhin hides behind Judicator Metzoi - he and his praetorians are sworn to uphold the ancient codes, and to protect the throne of Borsis.'

'Yes, yes,' the vizier gasped, the tension quite visible in his trembling hands. 'Metzoi is a singular foe, and I doubt that any of you could best him... with all due respect, of course. It was for this reason that I enlisted the help of Overseer Ruadzhe.'

At the mention of the cryptek's name, Uluszekh became more animated.

'You see, friends? Our parallel intrigues meet in the middle. The high magister has procured an ancient device, a tesseract labyrinth of infinite complexity with which we might banish Metzoi long enough for our own households to storm the palace. With Hixos's slaves to open the gates from within and lead our warriors along the secret routes, our superior numbers will enable us to depose Turakhin. He will have no choice but to hand over the regency of the Bor Enclave to one of us!'

There it is, *Amontar mused to himself*. And I'm sure I know which one of us you intend it to be, "friend".

'It is agreed, then,' he said out loud. 'With Metzoi imprisoned within the labyrinth, Heqiroth will bring Turakhin to an agreed place and we can strike freely.' Turning to face the vizier, he narrowed his eyes. 'And if you think to betray us, we need only point to your involvement in Khetmes's treachery and you will simply disappear... along with the rest of your Nephrekh rabble.'

Heqiroth nodded quickly, his gaze kept low.

'How soon can the plan be put into action?' asked Uluszekh.

Hixos curled his claw-like fingers into a fist.

'My thralls can be ready to move by the next dual-sunset.'

Alarm bells rang throughout the palace, though for whose benefit they were intended was a mystery. If, indeed, the witless multitudes that served the Magadha dynasty understood the great political upheaval that was about to begin across the Bor Enclave, they seemed not to care.

There was an old adage that Amontar couldn't exactly recall - something about the lower orders and their fascination with unimportant matters. As he led his own honour guard along the grand avenue to Turakhin's throne room with handfuls of dim-eyed commoners regarding them vacantly as they passed, he

supposed that such wisdom might have felt particularly poignant.

Not to worry. He would include it in his victorious address to the people, perhaps as a sly barb at their expense.

Hixos's thralls had proven as good as the slave-lord's word. They had deactivated the great shield generators that protected the palace district, allowing Uluszekh's Doom Scythe wings to strafe the outer defences before the ground troops moved in. Ghost Arks had moved slowly through the streets of the capital, their grim clarions heralding the imminent end of the overlord's reign as the confederate Legions advanced.

Open war was not an elegant affair, but it was permitted under the forms of martiality as a symbolic show of force. In these things, the old ways mattered a great deal - whether by duellist, general or diplomat, the conflicts between the noble households had always been settled in just such a manner, since the earliest days of the Triarchy.

Following their thrall guide, Uluszekh and a cohort of his Immortals emerged from the immense hypaethral structure in the precinct beyond the grand avenue. The Tyrant of Ghyr was clearly not accustomed to walking into battle unseen and unchallenged, but with victory so close at hand he was also clearly quite willing to endure the indignity of it. He hailed Amontar as the two parties met.

'Greetings, friends. Fate smiles upon our enterprise, does it not?'

With his dagger concealed behind his back, Amontar nodded respectfully. If he could have forced a smile, then he would have.

'Indeed. We encountered little resistance - the vizier held true to his promises.'

A flash of heavy beam-weapon fire lit up the skyline, somewhere off towards the equatorial generator sinks where the fighting still apparently raged on.

Uluszekh gestured to the great throne room doors. 'Will you lead the way?'

Amontar snorted. *What kind of fool do you take me for*, he thought, but managed to be far more diplomatic in his response.

'It would be unseemly for either of us to be seen to enter first, under the circumstances.'

The Tyrant nodded. 'Together, then. We have nothing to fear from the regent any longer.'

Their warriors drew back the vast, graven doors on heavy iron chains, and the two lords strode into the throne room side by side. Flanked by their household guard, they were a sight that could have driven even a phaeron to surrender.

But the throne was empty.

No lychguard stood sentinel over the grand dais, no Immortal cohorts were arrayed to repel them.

Somewhat confused, Uluszekh directed his warriors to spread out through the

chamber's expanse. 'Perhaps he—'

Laughter echoed from above them. Amontar's eyes snapped up to the shrouded galleries, where Turakhin lounged against a golden balustrade as though he might be casually taking in a mummies' performance.

We are betrayed. Damn you, Hixos.

'My lords,' the regent cackled, 'surely you can't be looking for me, with all your warriors in tow? You look very small from where I am standing.'

From the shadows in the arched recesses of the throne room, the unmistakable, bulky silhouettes of the praetorians emerged - Metzoi's entire battalion, by the look of it. Their staffs and particle casters were trained and ready.

Amontar whirled around, realising too late that they were completely surrounded.

Turakhin made a grand flourish. 'As you can see, your pitiful coup has failed.'

A short, plaintive cry drew Amontar's attention to the alcove behind the main dais - Judicator Metzoi shoved a bedraggled looking Hixos into the light with the pommel of his sword. The slave-lord fell to his knees, his eyes beseeching his fellow conspirators for some kind of deliverance. Three of his alien thralls lay dead, their throats cut.

'Forgive me, my friends...' he mumbled. 'We were discovered.'

Turakhin was joined at the balustrade by Heqiroth. Uluszekh sagged at the sight, even as his staff was taken from him.

'You see?' Amontar spat. 'I warned you. I warned you both! We should not have trusted the vizier.'

The regent and his advisor made their way down the black marble staircase to the throne room floor, watching as the confederate troops were led away. Turakhin continued to laugh.

'Good, loyal Heqiroth - there is little that escapes his ear in courtly matters. You should not have underestimated him so, or maybe one of you would be sitting upon the throne of Borsis at this very moment.' He drew up next to Uluszekh, running a mocking finger down the captured lord's cold cheekbone. 'If you could stop plotting against one another for long enough, of course...'

Heqiroth stood just behind his master, fixing them with a piercing stare. His gaze now spoke of a resolve and intensity that Amontar would scarcely have guessed him to possess.

'It was simple enough to win their confidence. They knew that a covert intrigue would never be sanctioned by the judicator, after the fact. They needed to abide by the forms of martiality, if they wanted to seize the throne from you.'

His eyes seemed to sparkle at the thought.

'In fact, my lord regent - there is something else.'

Turakhin did not turn to face him. 'Oh yes? Present what you have, good Heqiroth. Though there is little that can further compound the misery that will soon be heaped upon these traitors...'

Heqiroth retrieved something from a pouch at his belt. 'It is a modest token, from Overseer Ruadzhe. He bid me reveal it to you only when the conspiracy was unmasked.'

The vizier placed it in Turakhin's open hand. The overlord looked down, as did Amontar.

It was a small, black pyramidal object. Its smooth inner surfaces seemed visible, moving and spiralling, whirling through infinite fractal loops, drawing the eye inwards... ever inwards, *down into the darkness of an unknowable and eternal void and never should a sentient—
mind witness such horror such horror such hor—*

Amontar let out a shriek, tearing his gaze away from the tesseract and sprawling to the floor. White flashes crazed his vision, hot needles of agony searing into his mental processes as he broke the contact.

Turakhin was not so fortunate.

His eyes wide and fixed upon the stygian depths, he simply vanished into the space between moments. The unassuming artefact dropped to the floor, clattering against the marble and letting out a faint, dying wheeze of quantum impossibility.

Uluszekh and Hixos stared. Amontar shook his head to clear the afterimages of his brush with oblivion, but he could only stare too.

Stooping to retrieve the tesseract labyrinth, Heqiroth turned to regard Amontar where he lay on the polished marble. The red gemstone at his breast seemed to pulse with an inner fire, and he hissed in delight.

'I should thank you, really,' said the former vizier. 'You were the perfect distraction while I made my final preparations. The lie wrapped in half a truth is so much easier to believe.'

Amontar rose shakily. He could not feel his own heartbeat.

Heqiroth turned to the dais where Metzoi still stood. 'Judicator Metzoi, appointed representative of the Triarch and praetorian guardian of Borsis - the forms of martiality have been obeyed. I stand victorious over the deposed regent, with fully two-thirds of his legions loyal to me and all conspirators against the throne brought out into the open. Will you honour my claim?'

Disbelief and outrage fought for dominance in Amontar's breast. Unthinking, his fingers fell to the grip of his concealed dagger.

'You will never sit upon the throne of Borsis!' he cried, and rammed the

envenomed blade between Heqiroth's ribs, up to the hilt. It stuck fast.

There was a moment of awkward silence in the grand chamber.

Heqiroth glanced down at Amontar's blade, then to Amontar himself.

Then he turned back to the judicator.

'As you can see, the Magadha dynasty is plagued by madness. They fight amongst themselves, and are unfit to rule the Bor Enclave any longer. Noble Nephrekh will rise to relieve them of the regency, by your leave, and purge the alien menace that threatens our borders.'

He stepped away, and Amontar numbly released his grip on the knife.

'It is you who are mad, vizier!' he gasped. 'The judicator battalions are sworn to protect the overlord. You have falsely imprisoned their master!' Desperately, he pointed at Heqiroth. 'Kill him! Kill this usurper!'

The praetorians remained unmoving. Heqiroth spoke quietly, almost as an aside to Amontar and no one else.

'Do not embarrass yourself further. The judicator protects this world, not the regent.'

Amontar stumbled away, unable to process what he was hearing. He looked at Uluszekh with fresh eyes; where before had stood his sworn ally and rival for the throne, he now saw only a ghastly, tottering revenant of dark metal.

Heqiroth addressed the judicator once more. 'I ask again, will you honour my claim?'

Metzoi cast his inscrutable gaze over the assembled warriors, lords and praetorians. He looked down at the dead alien thralls at his feet, and then to the empty throne.

When he spoke, his voice was deep and resonant.

'The forms of martiality have been obeyed. The Triarch praetorians will honour your claim, Heqiroth of the Nephrekh dynasty. Take this world to war.'

Heqiroth laughed his triumph, long and loud.

Tugging Amontar's dagger from his ribs and letting it slip from his fingers, he took slow, deliberate steps towards the throne, and savoured each one. Standing before the ancient seat of power within the Bor Enclave, he gestured to the Magadha - no, Nephrekh - guards.

'Activate the holosphere.'

Amontar winced as energy pulsed through the conduits at the base of the throne, casting Heqiroth's skeletal form in a pale under-light that made him appear even more sinister. Hixos, still on his knees upon the dais, buried his face in his hands, lest his shame be caught in the glare of the new regent's vainglory.

Heqiroth laughed again, and snapped around to face the holospheric field.

'Loyal citizens of Borsis - your overlord is no more. I, Heqiroth of Nephrekh,

have cast out the weakling Turakhin, and I stand before you now as the validated regent of the Bor Enclave!

Across the world, vast projection cones would be relaying his words to every mausoleum, necropolis and monument district. The mindless commoners and drone-warriors of the Legions would find their eyes drawn irresistibly to the great, lambent figure that now addressed them from the dark skies.

None could fail to hear the commands of Overlord Heqiroth.

'There is a creeping evil at the borders of our domain, and I would see it eliminated once and for all before it challenges the eternal supremacy of the necrontyr race. We shall halt the advance of the alien vermin, and kick over every rock until we have driven them into extinction.'

As one, the praetorians around the throne room began to beat a fist upon their golden breastplates - a ponderous, fearful rhythm that underpinned Heqiroth's words. Cowed by the rising sound, Uluszekh tried to catch Amontar's eye, but the Lord of Xanderat found that he could no longer bear the sight of him for even a moment.

Heqiroth continued. 'Even though the subsumed Legions of Nephrekh are fewer in number than they once were, Borsis is far from helpless. The Triarch praetorians have kept a great secret upon this world, and now is the time to unleash its true power. We have not had need of such destructive weaponry since the days of the War in Heaven, but the necessary modifications will be made...'

As he spoke, his fingers strayed to the red gemstone mounted where his heart should have been. It pulsed in time with the praetorians' beating, and Amontar caught the faintest impression of a shimmering, quicksilver shape at its centre.

It was moving. Writhing. Yearning to be free.

Still illuminated by the hazy glow of the holosphere, Heqiroth noted Amontar's gaze and transfixed him with a fearsome, malignant stare. In that moment, there seemed no end to the depths of his hatred.

'Judicator Metzoi,' he hissed. 'Prepare the World Engine.'