

URSun'S TEETH

A Warhammer novel by Graham McNeill

RETIRED GENERAL KASPAR von Velten returns to the frozen city of Kislev to continue his duties as the Emperor's ambassador to the court of Tsarina Katarin. With the massed hordes of Chaos marching towards the strategic rock formation known as Ursun's Teeth, the combined armies of the Empire and Kislev must ride out to meet them in battle. But with the outbreak of plague and a string of assassinations, it becomes clear that a Chaos agent is operating within the city and Kaspar must foil them before they bring the defences tumbling down.



Hailing from Scotland, Graham McNeill narrowly escaped a career in surveying to join Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 development team, working on the Tau, Necrons, Chaos Space Marines, Daemonhunters and Witch Hunters codexes. As well as four previous novels, he has also written a host of short stories for *Inferno!* and is planning to severely curtail his free time by writing even more. He shares a house with a life-size cardboard cut-out of Buffy who keeps watch on the place when he's away and offers advice about how best to kill daemons.

Ursun's Teeth can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

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from URSUN'S TEETH

THE ENTIRETY OF the embassy guards stood to attention outside the iron fence, ready to march to the city gates and join the Urszebya pulk. None of them were obliged to join the pulk, but upon returning to the embassy the previous evening, Kaspar had been met by a determined Leopold Dietz, who had spoken of his men's desire to march north with the ambassador. They had sworn an oath when they accepted the posting to Kislev to protect the ambassador's life, and they could not very well do that by remaining in the city, could they?

Kaspar had proudly accepted their offer and in turn allowed Leopold Dietz the honour of carrying the ambassador's banner. They had shaken hands, and together, his guards and Knights Panther awaited the order to march. The knights were glorious, their armour polished to a mirror sheen and their purple and gold gonfalon raised high by Valdhaas. Their mounts were fresh and clean, their caparisons bright and colourful. It was an honour to command such fine warriors.

He himself wore a practical quilted jerkin in the gold and black of Nuln with an unadorned breastplate, vambrace and cuissart. His clothes were fresh and practical, for at least a ten day march lay ahead of the Urszebya pulk before it would reach the valley of Ursun's Teeth. Wrapped in a red, gold and black pashmina of thick furs, Sofia was quiet as he tightened Magnus's saddle cinch. Her auburn hair hung

loose around her shoulders and she wore an expression of barely-controlled anxiety.

'In Kislev it is customary to mourn those who ride to war as already dead,' she said as Kaspar finished preparing his horse.

'I'd heard that,' said Kaspar. 'A rather morbid practice I had always thought.'

Sofia nodded. 'Yes, so that's why I am not going to do it. I will pray for your return with each morning.'

'Thank you, that means a lot to me, Sofia,' said Kaspar, taking her hand.

She dropped her head and said, 'We never had any time, did we?'

'No, we didn't,' agreed Kaspar sadly. 'But when we defeat the High Zar's army, I will return for you.'

'You truly believe you can defeat him?' asked Sofia.

'Yes, I do,' lied Kaspar.

The lie came hard to him, but he could see the need for hope in her eyes and though it went against everything he believed in, he told it rather than spoil this last moment.

Sofia nodded and the relief in her eyes made Kaspar want to weep.

She reached up and unclasped her pendant, taking Kaspar's hand and placing it in his upturned palm.

She had worn it at the Tzarina's victory dinner, a smooth blue stone wrapped in a web of silver wire, and Kaspar was touched by the simple affection of the gesture.

'Keep it next to your heart,' she said.

'I will, thank you,' he promised. He wanted to say more, but could not think of anything that would not sound trite or overly melodramatic.

He could see Sofia was on the verge of tears and ached to take her in his arms and tell her that he would be fine, that he would come back and see what they might have together, but could not force the words to come.

Instead he simply embraced her and said, 'I will see you in my dreams.'

She nodded and wiped her eyes on the hem of her pashmina as Kaspar turned and climbed into the saddle.

As he lifted the reins, Sofia said, 'Promise you will come back to me.'

'I promise,' he said, though he wondered if this was a promise he could keep.

Sofia smiled sadly and stepped back as he rode through the gate to the head of the Knights Panther. He saluted in proud respect to the warriors assembled around him.

He raised his arm and signalled the advance, turning for one last look at Sofia, but she was nowhere to be seen, the door to the embassy already closed behind her.

THE TRIP NORTHWARD into the oblast was much easier than the last time Kaspar had made such a journey. Winter was in retreat, though snow still lay deep on the ground and the wind cut though even the thickest furs. The Urszebya pulk made good time through the wilderness, wild Ungol horsemen riding far ahead of the soldiers, scouting for any signs of the High Zar's army.

They marched through the vast expanse of the oblast, the sky a wondrous, stark blue and the hardy steppe grass providing patches of colour amid the patchy whiteness of the landscape. The sense of a land coming to life was palpable, thought Kaspar, as though it had lain dormant through the long, dark months of winter and was now waking to flaunt its savage beauty. This was wild country, saturated with a sense of ancient passions and primal emotions, and, coming from this untamed land, Kaspar found it easy to imagine how the Kislevites had become the people they were.

Over the course of their march, Kaspar had made a point of getting to know the officers who would be serving under him, needing to know their strengths, their weaknesses and their character. They were men of quality, men with the look of eagles, who he would be proud to fight alongside when the time came. They had fought two major battles recently and were hungry for more.

EVERY NIGHT AS the pulk camped, Kaspar went round the fires of the soldiers, telling them tall tales of his previous battles

and sharing food and drink with them. It was exhausting work, but his men had to know him, to get a sense for the man whose orders might well send them to their deaths.

On the morning of the twelfth day of march, as winter's last gasp of snow began to fall, the outriders brought word of Cyenwulf's army. If they were to be believed, and Kaspar had no reason to doubt their word, the High Zar was less than two days from the mouth of the valley.

A nervous anticipation spread throughout the pulk as word of their foe spread, but on his nightly tour of the army, Kaspar was pleased to note the quiet courage his soldiers displayed. These men had fought and defeated the armies of the dreaded northmen before, and they would do so again. Kaspar told them he was proud of them and that the storytellers of Altdorf would tell tales of them for hundreds of years.

The snow continued to fall throughout the day and as the sun climbed to its zenith the Urszebya pulk reached the valley of its name. The land hereabouts was harsher than the steppe and in the distance through the snow, Kaspar could see twin scarps of rock rising sharply from the ground, forming a wide cut in the landscape.

A deepening valley sloped into the steppe, its sides steep and composed of a dark, striated rock. Distant cheers filtered back to him from the vanguard as they reached the valley mouth and Kaspar's gaze was drawn up to the summit of the valley sides.

Though still many miles away, Kaspar could see a jagged black spike of rock, the first of the tall menhirs that ran the length of the valley and gave it its name.

Urszebya. Ursun's Teeth.

The rugged beauty of the land was stunning and Kaspar knew he had never seen anything quite like it. But his wonder at its splendour was touched with regret for he knew that this was the last time he would look upon the valley in this way.

Today it was beautiful, but tomorrow it would be a hateful blood-soaked battlefield.

THE SKY WAS turning to a bruised purple as Kaspar and Kurt Bremen made their way to the billowing, sky-blue pavilion of the Ice Queen.

Despite the bitter cold and lightly falling snow, the Tzarina's guards who surrounded the giant tent were bare chested, displaying no outward signs of any discomfort. They collected weapons from every man who entered the pavilion, taking no chances with their queen's safety after the attack at the Winter Palace.

Kaspar surrendered his pistols and sword and Bremen unbuckled his sword belt. A giant warrior with long daggers sheathed through the skin of his pectoral muscles and a tall coxcomb of stiffened hair pulled back the pavilion's opening to allow them entry.

Inside, Empire officers and Kislevite boyarin were gathered around a roaring firepit where another of the Tzarina's guards turned a roasting boar on a long spit. Sweet-smelling smoke was vented through a central hole in the roof of the pavilion, and the crackling aroma of roasting meat made Kaspar's mouth water.

Tables and chairs formed of rippling waves of ice rose up from the ground and the supports for the pavilion were tall columns of fluted snow. The Tzarina sat on her golden throne, regal in a sparkling gown of icy cream. Despite the rigours of a twelve day march, the Ice Queen looked as immaculate as ever, and Kaspar wondered how much effort it took her to maintain such appearances.

But as he looked at the adoring faces of her boyarin, he knew it was not mere vanity that made her appear so ostentatious, but necessity. To her subjects, the Ice Queen was a beloved figure of aloof, regal majesty and to see her in anything less than the most delicate finery would be an anathema to them.

Clemenz Spitzaner and his coterie of staff stood as close as they were able to the Ice Queen, and Kaspar nodded in acknowledgement to his fellow general. Spitzaner bowed stiffly, still unhappy with Kaspar's presence, but having enough presence of mind not to create any kind of fuss about it.

Kaspar greeted his fellow Stirland officers and accepted a glass of Estalian brandy from a passing servant. He sipped the brandy, enjoying its fiery warmth in his belly.

'This is a civilised way to fight a war,' he said, raising his glass to Kurt Bremen.

The knight nodded and poured himself a glass of water from a jug shaped from sparkling ice. Boyarin of all description milled around the tent, helping themselves to meat cut from the boar and making loud boasts of the glory they would earn on the morrow. Kaspar saw the Tilean, Albertalli, across the fire and raised his glass in salute.

The mercenary general smiled broadly and raised his own glass, making his way around the fire to stand beside Kaspar and Bremen.

'General von Velten,' he said. 'It is good to see you again. It fill me with hope to know a man of your reputation fights alongside us.'

'My compliments to you, general,' replied Kaspar. 'I have heard good things about your soldiers while marching here. They say your men held the line at Krasicyno for five hours against the Kurgans.'

Albertalli smiled modestly. 'Actually, it more like three, but, yes, my soldiers are good boys, fight hard and well. They will do same tomorrow, count on that.'

'I will,' promised Kaspar. 'We will have need of warriors who can stand fast in the face of such brutality as the High Zar will unleash.'

'Yes,' agreed Albertalli, 'It will be grim work tomorrow.'

'Isn't it always?' said Kaspar as the Ice Queen rose from her throne and began circling the firepit. Conversations died away and all eyes turned to face her as she spoke.

'Kislev is land and land is Kislev,' she said.

'Kislev is land and land is Kislev,' repeated the assembled boyarin.

The Ice Queen smiled and said, 'Look about you, my friends. Look at the faces of the men around you and remember them. Remember them. Tomorrow these will be the men who you will be fighting alongside and upon whom all our fates

depend. For we are about a great and terrible business now. I can feel the ebb and flow of the land beneath me and it cries out against the touch of Chaos. If we fail here, then the land we hold dear will pass away, never to return, and all that we once knew will be destroyed.'

Every man in the pavilion was silent as the Ice Queen passed, the crackle of sizzling fat as it dripped into the fire the only sound that disturbed the silence. The chill of the Ice Queen's passing prickled Kaspar's skin as she spoke once more.

'Tomorrow we stand before a foe many times our number. The High Zar brings warriors drunk on slaughter and victory, monsters from our worst nightmares and a creature from the dawn of the world. I have felt its every tread on the land and now it comes here to destroy us all. And make no mistake, without your courage and strength, it will succeed.

'The strength of Kislev lies in you all. The land has called you all here and it is here that you will put that strength to the test in defiance of Chaos. There is power in this land and tomorrow it will run in all of your veins. Use it well.'

'We will, my queen,' said a Kislevite boyarin solemnly.

Clemenz Spitzaner spoke next, saying, 'Tomorrow we will march out from this valley and together we will destroy this barbarian,' and raising his glass in a toast. Heavy silence greeted his words and the Ice Queen turned to face the Empire general.

'General Spitzaner,' she said. 'I think you must have misunderstood me. March from the valley? No, we will not be marching anywhere, we will make our stand right here at the end of the valley.'

'What?' spluttered Spitzaner. 'Your majesty, I would counsel against such a stratagem.'

'It is too late for any other plan, General Spitzaner. The decision has been made.'

Kaspar frowned, seeing that some of the boyarin were equally unsettled at the prospect of fighting within the rocky valley. He stepped forward and said. 'Your majesty, I think General Spitzaner's belief that we would fight the High Zar on the steppe is shared by a great many of us. While it is true that this

valley has a number of tactical advantages, it has one flaw that perhaps you have not been made aware of.'

'Not aware of, General von Velten?' said the Ice Queen. 'Then pray enlighten me.'

'There is only one way in or out of this valley,' said Kaspar. 'If we are defeated, there is nowhere to retreat to. We would be destroyed to a man.'

'Then we must endeavour not to be defeated, yes?'

'Of course, but the fact remains that we might be.'

'Do you trust me, General von Velten?'

'It is not a matter of trust, it—'

'It is *all* about trust, Kaspar von Velten. You of all people should know that.'

Kaspar felt her icy gaze upon him and realised that she was right. In battle, everything came down to moments of trust. Trust in the steel of the man next to you, trust that the officers beneath you carry out their orders, trust that the courage of the army will hold and trust that those who commanded knew what they were doing. This was such a moment, and Kaspar willingly surrendered to what the Ice Queen planned, feeling her acceptance of his trust as a cold, but not unpleasant shiver.

'Very well,' he said solemnly, 'if the Ice Queen of Kislev wishes to make her stand here, then the army of Stirland will do so as well. We will not fail you.'

The Ice Queen smiled and said, 'I have faith in you, General von Velten. Thank you.'

Kaspar bowed as General Spitzaner said, 'Your majesty, please. Regardless of what Herr von Velten says, I have grave doubts concerning this plan.'

'General Spitzaner,' said the Ice Queen. 'The decision has been made and there is no other way. We will fight together or we will be destroyed. It is that simple.'

Kaspar could see Spitzaner was angry at having been so manoeuvred, but to his credit, he knew not to cast further doubt on the Tzarina's plan in front of brother officers.

He bowed stiffly and said, 'Then the army of Talabecland will be proud to fight alongside you.'

'Thank you, General Spitzaner,' said the Ice Queen, as a servant handed her an icy glass of brandy.

'To victory!' she shouted, draining the brandy and hurling the glass into the fire.

Every man in the pavilion bellowed the same words and threw their glasses into the fire. Flames shot high into the air, mirroring the passion burning in their warrior hearts.

'Death or glory,' said Kurt Bremen offering Kaspar his hand in the warrior's grip, wrist to wrist.

'Death or glory,' agreed Kaspar, taking Bremen's hand. 'Is of no matter...'

*Can Kaspar von Velten help the combined forces
of Kislev and the Empire prevail over the hoards of
Chaos? Find out in:
Ursun's Teeth*

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A Warhammer Novel

Unused to the power struggles and politics at court, retired Imperial general Kaspar von Velten is sent to Kislev as ambassador to the court of Tsarina Katarin. As winter draws in, can Kaspar re-forge the fragile alliance between the Empire and Kislev and prepare its troops for war before the hordes of Chaos arrive?



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