

# **Once a Cadian, Always a Cadian**

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## Once a Cadian, Always a Cadian

‘Why didn’t you just shoot him?’ asked Commissar Rembault looking down at the prisoner.

‘Uh, we did shoot him ma’am,’ said Sergeant Demin scratching his forehead. “*Take no prisoners*” is our company motto, right after “*Cadia Stands!*” But apparently, he just didn’t die.’

The dishevelled prisoner sat on the red sand with his arms bound in front of him. His xenos designed armour was a dark red colour; while his underbody suit was the same shade of red as the sand. His close cropped hair and scruffy beard were also red; and his age appeared to be somewhere in the vicinity of thirty-five to forty-five years of age. Dried red blood covered the whole right side of his face and neck. An ample supply of red mud and sand finished off his attire.

‘Hmm, what’s your name soldier?’ asked the commissar getting down on her haunches.

No reply.

‘Tabac stick?’ asked the commissar offering the prisoner one of the nicotine laced cylinders.

‘No ma’am. Don’t smoke,’ replied the prisoner.

‘Whoa, that’s the most he’s spoken since we captured him!’ exclaimed Demin.

‘I’ll ask again, what’s your name?’ said the commissar lighting the tabac stick for herself.

‘Sergeant First Class Rokken A. Tamaguchi. Ident number 456-789-22010,’ he replied looking at the commissar with his one good eye, the other having been glued shut by dried blood.

‘Unit sergeant?’

The prisoner took in a breath, coughed, and grunted out, ‘2nd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, of the 7th Mu’gulath Bay Regiment.’

‘I guess it takes a commissar to get these traitors to talk uh, ma’am?’ said the sergeant.

The prisoner turned and glared up at the sergeant with his one good eye.

‘Got a problem heretic? Want a boot up your arse?’ shouted Demin getting ready to kick the prisoner.

‘Hold on sergeant!’ shouted the commissar with the tabac stick still between her teeth. Getting up, she shooed away the small crowd of guardsmen who were gathered around the prisoner. Then pulling the sergeant aside she asked,

‘So, Sergeant tell me *What-the-Throne* is going on here?’

The sergeant straightened his back and looking off into the desert said, ‘There was a firefight. We over ran their position. Shot all the survivors, including the wounded. Then two hours later this heretic here...’ Demin pointed at the prisoner, ‘...Comes staggering out of the pile of dead bodies holding his head in his hands. He’s gibber jabbering away in that Blue-fish talk, “*Tiki-tak ching-chang-chong oola-la-la!*” So we gave him a rifle butt to the stomach, bound his hands, and sat his traitorous backside on the ground.’

‘Did you interrogate him?’

‘We tried. But he just wouldn’t answer. So we gave up figuring he didn’t speak any Low Gothic.’

‘Alright before we do anything else, let’s get him cleaned up and have the apothecary medic look at his wounds,’ said the commissar waving over the medic. ‘You said he was shot, does he still have any open wounds?’

‘No, ma’am. He’s just got a one big old scratch that runs around the top of his head...’ answered Demin catching a helmet tossed to him by another guardsmen. ‘...Here’s his helmet. See the bolter round entered just left of centre; but then it was deflected around his head, and exited the same hole it made coming in. Bet he’s got a helluva headache right now!’

‘Get me Lieutenant Mahin, and post a guard so that no one “accidentality” shoots the prisoner,’ said the commissar taking a long drag on the tabac stick. ‘He’s a curiosity. And I want to find out what’s his story is.’

‘Yes ma’am.’

The traitor Sergeant Tamaguchi now found himself stripped of his body armour, and sitting on a large ammunition crate under a camouflaged awning. Cleaned up, and sporting a new head bandage, he sat there with his hands still bound, staring up at Commissar Rembault, Lieutenant Mahin, and Colour Sergeant Ugabe.

‘Cup of recaf sergeant?’ asked the pale skinned Lieutenant Mahin offering him a canteen cup.

‘Thank you ma’am, that would be much appreciated,’ said Tamaguchi taking the cup from her with his bound hands. ‘Use to hate this stuff, but most of the time it was the only thing we had to drink.’ Taking a small sip the traitor sergeant immediately spat it out saying, ‘Meaning no disrespect ma’am, but I can’t drink that!’

There was some irate noises coming from the Cadian officers; but then the commissar took a sip from the sergeant’s cup. She too spit it out exclaiming, ‘*Belch, that’s awful!* If somebody’s pissed in the recaf pot, I’m executing them on the spot!’

There was general disavowing of responsibility until Private Koch, the platoon’s vox operator, explained that the recaf was left over from earlier in that morning. She then vehemently denied pissing in the pot.

‘Go get my kit bag Koch and dig out my tanna box, then brew us up a fresh pot.’ The voxcast operator then dutifully went off on her assigned task, relieved at her sudden stay of execution.

‘So, Sergeant First Class Tamaguchi, what’s your story?’ asked the commissar. ‘I want to know how a Cadian veteran came to fight for the T’au Empire.’

The eyes of the heretical sergeant grew so large, that they looked like two green marbles. He blew out a long breath and asked, ‘*Whew...* how did you know I was Cadian?’

The commissar came up from behind the prisoner; and asked the apothecary medic Private Crumb, to pull down the top of the sergeant's underbody suit. The commissar then pulled up the left sleeve of his under shirt, to reveal an aquila tattoo with the words: "818TH REGT. CADIA".

'*Oh, yeah the tattoo.* Guess I've had it so long that I forget that it's there,' he said with an apologetic smirk. But then screwing up his face he asked, 'Hey, wait a raik'or! How'd you even know I had a Cadian tattoo commissar?'

'I didn't. There's just something about you that said to me, "*He's Cadian*".'

'Sergeant, all of us have similar tattoos on our left shoulders. Only ours read: "1012TH REGT. CADIA," said the black skinned Sergeant Ugabe. 'So, why are you fighting for the Bluies?'

'Yes, what's your story sergeant?' asked the Lieutenant Mahin.

'Well, since I'm going to die anyway, guess there's no reason to keep it a secret.' Tamaguchi then rolled his shoulders, cracked his neck, and stretched his back. And settling down comfortably as he could on the ammo crate; began his story. 'I'm from the region of New Oz on the big island of Kakapoi in the southern hemisphere of Cadia prime. Joined the White Shields at fourteen, and the Interior Guard at twenty-one. At twenty-five I was conscripted into the Imperial levy, and that's when I joined the 818th regiment. My first tour was on the Mylar campaign against the Tyranids. *Not an experience I'd wish on my worst enemy!* Then we were sent to support the Black Templars on the Solemnus Crusade against the Orks. *Don't like Astartes and never will!* Finally, our regiment was one of those sent on the Second Agrellan Campaign...*Oh, thank you very much.*'

Tamaguchi gratefully took the cup of tanna from Private Koch, and dropping a cube of sucrose into it, stirred the beverage with a one calloused finger. 'Hmm, that's real good tanna...Oh, yeah Mu'gulath Bay. That's what I call it anyway, because now it's my home. When we hit the world that you call Agrellan, it sure seemed like Lord General Troskzer knew what the hell he was doing. Those first weeks

of the campaign we certainly had the Bluies on the run.’ The sergeant shook his head and then took another sip of tanna.

‘It really did look like we were going to take the whole planet. What with the Imperial Navy fighters cleansing the sky of Tau aircraft; and with Magos Arcotholitis and his Cog Boys messing with the Bluie’s high-tech stuff. And it didn’t hurt that the Astartes were hitting them at all their weak points. It just felt like we couldn’t loose. *Where any of you there? I don’t remember the 1012th being there?*’

All the Cadian officers shook their heads. ‘The 1012th wasn’t formed until after the Agrellan Campaign,’ said the lieutenant.

‘Oh. Umm...so, the 818th was part of General Graisch’s Second Spearhead in the centre of the assault. And we pushed right up to the outskirts of the Agrellan Hive Prime. But...’ Tamaguchi stopped to take another sip of tanna.

‘...That’s when the renegade warlord Farsight dropped in. And after that, the whole campaign went right into the shitter! It was like going from day to night at the snap of your fingers. One moment we’re winning; and the next moment, we’ve got our backs to the walls fighting for our lives. The 818th found ourselves in a fighting retreat all the way back to the landing zones. But then things got well *disconcerting*...or at least worrisome. First Kor'sarro Khan pulled out his 3rd company of White Scars after they got mauled by Commander Shadowsun. By the way the White Scars lost their entire 5th company led by Kubla Altai. Killed down to the last space marine. It’s said they were annihilated by Commander Amethyst Blade, the sister of Farsight; and that their standard now hangs in Farsight’s palace on Viro’los. *Betcha won’t read that in any official chapter history!* Afterwards Captain Shrike pulled out the Raven Guard, followed by Arcotholitis yanking out his Cog Boys. Then the Inq pulled up stakes soon after that. *What? You didn’t know the Inquisition was on Agrellan?* Who was going to sort out the few loyal citizens from all those traitors, if not the Inquisition?’

‘But then something happened that got all of us in the 818th worried. When the first Imperial Navy transport arrived, Lord General Troskzer and his staff got on board....’

At this hearing the Cadian officers all shuffled about looking angry.

‘As we *all know*, the Cadian tradition is that the commander is the *last one* to leave the field of battle. And whether you are a lowly lieutenant, or a high-ranking general; every guardsmen under your command is suppose to be off world, before you ever take a step up the loading ramp,’ said Tamaguchi finishing off his tanna.

‘Don’t believe you sergeant. Lord General Troskzer was one of the most respected commanders of Cadia,’ said Lieutenant Mahin getting in Tamaguchi’s face. ‘He would’ve never left his command behind!’

‘Were you there lieutenant?’ he replied standing up to face her. ‘Well, I was! And I can tell you, *as Cadia Stands*, that I saw with my own eyes, that sonofabitch walk up the ramp!’

‘*As Cadia Stands?* Who the hell are you traitor so invoke Cadia!’ shouted the lieutenant punching Tamaguchi several times in the face.

Sergeant Ugabe stepped in between the two, grabbing her commander by both arms saying, ‘Ma’am! Lieutenant, don’t let the traitor provoke you! We’re Cadians and not a bunch of dumb-as-frak Catachans. Let the Jungle Babies fall for that kind of bait, not us!’

Lieutenant Mahin calmed down a bit, as the Commissar pushed Tamaguchi back on the ammo crate saying, ‘Sit your traitorous ass down and finish your story heretic!’ Then as Koch poured Tamaguchi another cup of tanna; she patted her holster and whispered, ‘*I’ve still got a bolter round with your name on it!*’

Tamaguchi ground his teeth; but not looking much for wear for his encounter with the lieutenant, took a large drink of his tanna and said, ‘Begging the lieutenant’s pardon, but the Lord General *was* the first to leave Agrellan! And as I said, it got us mighty worried. Then things started to look like they were

suppose to, when the navy began evacuating General Starkzhan's Eastern Spearhead. So we started to relax a bit. Meanwhile, the Tau held off their attacks; which started to get us worried again. It just didn't make any sense for them to suddenly stop? Well, the navy was almost finished evacuating the Eastern Spearhead; when they started evacuating the Western Spearhead. Then it happened...' Tamaguchi paused for effect. '...The evacuations stopped altogether. And all contact with the navy ceased. It was like they were pulling out of the system without even telling us. Which in fact is what happened. They pulled out and left us stranded on Agrellan!'

'So, we've heard,' said Rembault tossing the sergeant a small white package.

Tamaguchi looked down and fingering the package said, 'The Tau declared a cease fire and sent over envoys to discuss the situation. They told us what we already had figured out, that Admiral Hawke had pulled out the fleet, and abandoned us plantside. General Graisch said the Tau were giving us basically three options; we could join the T'au Empire and either join their armed forces; or become settlers there on Mu'gulath Bay. Otherwise, if we wanted to stay loyal, we could be transported to a world close to Imperium controlled space. It took us only a day, but every man and woman of the 818th voted to join T'au Empire! Some wanted to be settlers, and some us want to fight for the Greater Good; but none of us wanted to try and go back. Not after what they'd done to us...'

Tamaguchi's face went blank and he stared off into the distance; it was if he were looking at something a thousand kilometres away. '...Admiral Hawke's fleet suddenly arrived back at Mu'gulath Bay. And we didn't need the Tau to tell us what *that* meant. We knew he wasn't there to do a rescue; but instead he was there to execute *exterminatus*. The Tau evacuated us so quickly and efficiently, it was scary how fast it was. They pulled us all in around Lo'vasht'au; which is their name for Agrellan Hive Prime. But they couldn't rescue all the civilians...'

The traitor sergeant turned pale and his eyes filled with tears. 'We could see beyond the city's energy shields the denotations of the cyclonic torpedoes...The wall of rolling fire as it swept over the



planet...as it swept up and over the energy shield. I saw with my own damn eyes both tau'faan and humans being incinerated by the blast...the fires killed every thing that breathed, every tree, every animal, and every person...it killed all of them! And after it was all over, and the fires had gone out; the sky was black and earth was nothing but grey ash...' Tamaguchi looked down at the package in his hands, '...I still have nightmares about it.'

'Thank you sergeant for the emotion filled story of the last hours of Agrellan,' said the commissar putting a boot on the ammo crate. She leaned over and looked at him with an intense gaze in her brown eyes, 'So now we know *how* you came to be in the T'au Empire. But you still haven't told us *why* you're fighting for the Bluies?'

'Damn desert sand!' said Tamaguchi rubbing his eyes with both palms. 'Makes my eyes water.' Now holding up the package in his hands he read out loud, 'Biscuits, Emperor's Birthday, Qty 2.' And tearing open the package, he popped a cookie into his mouth saying, 'Hmm...fruit flavoured. My favourite!'

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Just then a soldier standing on the top of Chimera yelled down, 'Lieutenant, there's a column of dust from unknown vehicles headed our way!'

The lieutenant scrambled up the side of the APC, and standing next to the soldier lifted her binocs to her eyes.

'They'll be Orks lieutenant!' yelled Tamaguchi up to Lieutenant Mahin.

'Sure they're not Bluies sergeant?'

'Alright, I may be a traitorous former Cadian; but I bet you a whole case of these biscuits here, that they're Orks!'

After all lieutenant, when have you ever seen Tau or Gue'vesa skimmers kicking up that much dust? Why we fly high enough off the ground to avoid that,' said Tamaguchi looking at Sergeant Ugabe.

'The heretic's right ma'am. They ain't Tau,' yelled Ugabe up to lieutenant.

'Well they ain't Guard either!' she shouted back.

'It'll be a Big Mek and his mob coming to loot the battle site. Damn Orks can smell a battle two thousand clicks away; and still manage to be there five raik'ors after it's over,' shouted Tamaguchi. But then looking over at Ugabe he said, 'I'm surprised they haven't gotten here sooner?'

'Who are you trying kid traitor? There aren't any Orks on Kupa V!' shouted the lieutenant.

'No Orks? Seriously? How long have you been on this planet lieutenant? They're aren't enough Greenskins to be a real threat, but enough to be a nuisance!' Then looking at both the commissar and the colour sergeant he said, 'You really haven't had a run in with Orks before this?'

Commissar Rembault looked at Tamaguchi, and then over at Ugabe. And pushing back her tall peaked cap, yelled up to the lieutenant, 'Lieutenant Mahim, there *are* Orks on Kupa V.'

'Is that so commissar? And when was I going to be informed of this?' yelled the lieutenant looking over the side of the Chimera.

'You should have been briefed about it before you arrived planetside,' said Rembault.

'Sorry ladies for interrupting, but while the two of you are going all yackity-smackity on the subject of Orks. They're getting closer!' said the traitor Tamaguchi.

'Actually, they've stopped,' shouted the soldier from atop the Chimera. The soldier was looking through a large tripod mounted omniscope. 'They seem confused as to where to go. They're arguing and pointing in different directions.'

'Step aside Private Kircher,' said the lieutenant stepping up to the omniscope.

'What did you see private?' asked Tamaguchi moving to the side of the APC.

‘One large truck, an eight wheeled job with large cranes and gear. Four to six buggies, and maybe dozen or so bikes and wartrucks.’

‘Did you see a Boss pole with crossed wrenches, or a crossed hammer and wrench?’

‘There was a crossed hammer and wrench on the front of the truck,’ answered the soldier.

Tamaguchi and Ugabe both looked at each other. The colour sergeant yelled up to the lieutenant, ‘He’s right ma’am it’s a Big Mek.’

‘Pack up the omiscope private, we’re moving out,’ said Mahin climbing down from the Chimera.

‘No!’ yelled Ugabe and Tamaguchi in unison.

‘I said we move out colour sergeant, and so we’re moving out!’ growled the lieutenant.

‘Ma’am, you’re going to kick up a lot of dust; which means the Orks can track your movement,’ said Tamaguchi. ‘And their buggies and trucks are fast as hell. Now maybe your scout cars and bikes can out run them; but your two Chimeras can’t. Besides every vehicle you have is a high value prize for a Big Mek, Chimeras, Tauros, and a Venator, *Brings in a lotz a teef dey doz!*’.

‘Lieutenant, the traitor is right. We can’t out run them,’ added Ugabe.

‘Then what the hell are we going to do then *Sergeant Heretic?*’ asked the exasperated lieutenant.

Everyone looked at Tamaguchi, who seeing he was now the centre of attention, offered up his bound hands. Ugabe looked at the lieutenant, who looked at the commissar. Rembault nodded her head, and the colour sergeant cut Tamaguchi’s bindings.

Rubbing his wrists and looking at the Lieutenant Mahin he said, ‘First off, a Big Mek isn’t looking for a fight. He just wants to loot and scoot. Especially, since they’ll be other Big Meks on their way. Which leads me to my first recommendation lieutenant. Call in an air strike.’

‘I am not going to call the navy...’

‘Ma’am let me finish! Navy Thunderbolts won’t be here in time for this mob; but they’ll be here in time for the next two or three that follow. Because if one Big Mek can smell a battle, then you can be

damn well sure that others have too. But remember that none of these Big Meks really want a fight; and they'll turn and run if there's any serious threat. And a couple of Thunderbolts are going to be just that kind of threat. Which will give your platoon time to pull out and get away.'

'I can't argue with that ma'am...' responded the veteran colour sergeant Ugabe nodding her head. '...Not from my experience with Orks anyway.'

'Sergeant Ugabe?!' said the lieutenant frowning.

'Well, it's exactly what I would've suggested we do ma'am.'

'I'll authorise calling in air support,' said the commissar turning to Ugabe.

'I'll get right on it then commissar,' she said signalling over the voxcast operator.

The lieutenant glared at the commissar but said nothing. She turned back to Tamaguchi, 'So what's next?'

'We set up an ambush. And if you don't mind using some xenos tactics, I recommend a Kau'yon, or *Patient Hunter* style ambush.' Tamaguchi then turned around and pointed out where two low ridge lines came together. 'There were the ridge lines converge at that narrow gap. Place half of your platoon on the north ridge side, and one half on the south ridge. Then pull your scout cars, and one of the Chimeras back behind the ridge lines. Now a proper Kau'yon operation requires "bait". So set the other Chimera at about seventy-five to fifty tor'leks out from the gap...*excuse me*. Make that seventy-five to fifty *metres* out from the gap. Crew the Chimera with just enough guardsmen to man the weapons. And then drape a couple of my dead vesas over the Chimera....'

'Dead what?' asked the commissar. There was a general look of "what-the-frak?" on everyone's faces.

'Uh, use the dead bodies of my team mates...is what I meant to say. They'll add to the realism,' answered an annoyed Tamaguchi.

'Lieutenant the Orks are on the move again!' shouted the soldier on top of the Chimera.

‘Patient Hunter it is then!’ said the lieutenant. ‘I’ll take the southern ridge with one heavy weapon team, I suggest Sergeant Ugabe that you take the northern ridge with the other team.’

‘Sounds good ma’am, but who’s going to command the “Bait”?’ asked Ugabe.

‘I will.’

Everyone looked over at Tamaguchi. ‘That is if you’ll trust a traitor with it,’ he said looking as ready and fit for command as ever.

‘And who is going to watch you Sergeant Heretic?’ sneered Lieutenant Mahin.

‘I will lieutenant; because I still have a bolter round with his name on it,’ answered Commissar Rembault smiling at Tamaguchi.

‘I’m good with that,’ said Tamaguchi looking over at the commissar. Turning back to the lieutenant he asked, ‘May I get my weapons and gear ma’am?’

‘Sure thing Sergeant Heretic,’ she answered looking at the commissar. And has he ran off she asked,

‘Are you really sure about letting this heretic do this?’

‘*By-the-Red-Sash* Lieutenant, he’s never going to be that far from my bolter. I promise you,’ she replied lighting another tabac stick.

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Tamaguchi was scrounging around the pile of traitor equipment when he came upon a helmet. Gently picking it up, he brushed the sand off the name plate and said to himself, ‘*Nuni’qy Alexios h’ta’lissera anda.*’ Then he continued to look for his armour, lasrifle and other equipment. The sergeant was still arming himself, when the commissar arrived with a group guardsmen.

‘Are you ready Sergeant Heretic? Because believe or not, I’ve got volunteers for you. Ten to be exact.’

‘Only need eight commissar. Six for the mounted las rifles, one driver, and one gunner. And I’ll take the commander’s position in the turret,’ responded Tamaguchi standing up.

‘So you’re taking the commander’s position?’ asked Rembault turning her head to one side.

Tamaguchi got up close to the commissar, and looking down at the ground whispered, ‘*Commissar, it’d be a lot easier to watch me from inside the turret. If I’m in the Chimera, I could easily slip out the back hatch before you’d...you know...got a shot off?*’

The commissar turned her face to the sergeant, and staring at him whispered back, ‘*Shite sergeant, that just makes so much damn sense! Why didn’t I think of it?*’

Tamaguchi made a quizzical face and replied, ‘You were rounding up volunteers?’

‘You’re in the turret with me then heretic, but I’ll have my bolt pistol in your gut the whole time!’ Then over her shoulder she shouted, ‘Abdulov, Frucelli, Gildmann, Kircher, Lankenua, Rollo, Timocescu, and Ugula – step up. Nabiyeu and van der Kemp we won’t need you!’ The Commissar stepped away from Tamaguchi saying, ‘They’re all yours Sergeant Heretic.’

The group of eight Cadian soldiers stood solid and ready before the traitor sergeant. There were no smiles or jocular comments from any of them. But Tamaguchi could see the doubt and resentment in their eyes at having to serve with a traitor. But being every bit the veteran Cadian platoon sergeant that he was; he returned their doubtful looks with his own confident and commanding gaze.

Hoisting his lasrifle onto his shoulder; and with his helmet under his arm, he belted out, ‘Listen up Cadians, I’m First Sergeant Rokk A. Tamaguchi and I’m in charge of this detail. Do what I say, when I say it, and you’ll get out of this one alive. Don’t do what I say and you’ll die. That’s how it works. Now the commissar calls me Sergeant Heretic; but you can call me Sergeant Rokk. That’s a lot easier to remember than Tamaguchi, and you won’t mess it up. So, here’s the first thing I want to know; why did any of you volunteer to serve with a traitor on a suicide mission? Someone? Anyone?’

There followed a long cold silence; but then a tall young Cadian said, ‘Sergeant Rokk, I’m Lance Corporal Rollo. And for the record we didn’t volunteer.’

‘Alright, fair enough, but just so you know, *I did*. So here’s the deal, we’re going to be the bait in an ambush. First thing we’ll do, once we’re mounted up in the Chimera, is to head out to about fifty to seventy-five metres out from the centre of those two ridge lines. There we’re going to wait until the Orks ride up on us. Then, we’ll let them dismount and clamber all over us. At that point, the lieutenant is going to bring down hell on them. Now, you may ask why it is we’re in the Chimera. Now that’s a fair question. And the reason is to prevent some nasty little Grot from driving off with it! And besides that, we’re going to bring down some hell of our own. Well that’s it. Any questions?’

‘How many Orks?’ asked Rollo.

‘It’ll be a small mob, just a Big Mek and his crew of Spanna Boys.’

‘We’re in then,’ replied Rollo nodding his head. There followed a number of nods and grunts of ascent from the rest of the Cadians.

‘Whose our driver? Whose our hull gunner?’ yelled Tamaguchi.

Two hands shot up.

‘Ugula – you’re the driver? Alright go ahead and get in! Abdulov – you’re our hull gunner? Get to your weapon!’ he shouted at the two women. Then to the Rollo he said, ‘You’re the captain of the fire team. Take your five and get them squared away. I’ll take the commander’s seat in the turret. Saddle up Bait Squad!’

Everyone piled into the Chimera with Sergeant Rokk and the commissar coming in last.

‘Ah, the smell of a Chimera!’ said the sergeant wrinkling his nose. ‘How could I ever forget that pungent aroma of oil, grease, and body odour, all mingled together and stewed inside an iron box?’

Then to Rollo he asked, ‘This is your fire team Lance Corporal?’

‘Yes sergeant.’

‘Let me familiarize myself, on the toroq side it’s you, Gildmann, and Lankenua, correct? And on the juntas side... it’s Frucelli, Kircher, and...Timocescu?’

‘Sergeant Rokk, on the *right* side it’s myself, Gildmann, and Lankenua. On the *left* side it’s Frucelli, Kircher, and Timocescu.’

‘That’s correct lance corporal, right side...and left side!’ said Tamaguchi smiling painfully. ‘After you commissar...’ he said. But then looking around he didn’t see the commissar. So sticking his head into the square access hole of the turret ring he shouted. ‘Wait, did you already get in the commander’s seat?’

‘Yes Sergeant Heretic, now get your arse up here in the gunner’s position,’ she yelled down to him.

Just then the Chimera lurched forward and began churning up the red desert sand. Tamaguchi managed to pull and twist himself up into the gunner’s position. And sitting down behind the twin heavy bolters; he first looked over at Rembault, and then down at the bolt pistol in his ribs.

‘You did want to operate the bolters didn’t you?’ she asked coyly.

‘Yeah, well I did actually.’ Then he said, ‘I see you’re wearing a comlink headset commissar. Where’s the access?’

‘Right there sergeant,’ smiled the commissar pointing at the voxcaster set behind him. ‘The Alpha channel is for the driver and gunner. Beta channel is for the hull compartment, which will be Lance Corporal Rollo. Charlie channel is for the whole vehicle. Delta channel is for the other vehicles, the scout cars and alike. The Epsilon channel is for the lieutenant. Foxtrot channel is the for turret alone. Do you need a headset?’

‘No, I got one right here,’ he said pulling out a wire from his helmet and plugging it into the voxcaster set.

‘Your helmet has an Imperial Guard wire harness?!’



‘Oh yeah, we still use a lot of Guard vehicles. Though this is the first time I’ve ever had to use a set.’ Then flipping the channel to Beta channel he tapped his comlink on the side of his helmet and said,

<<Comm check. Lance Corporal Rollo this Sergeant Rokk, can you read me?>>

<<Rollo here. Can read you just fine Sergeant Rokk.>>

Then flipping the channel to Alpha channel he said to the driver, <<Comm check. Ugula can you read me?>>

<<Yes sergeant.>>

<<Good. Now make a left turn and head for the body pile. We need to pick up a couple of my deceased vesas...I mean dead *team mates*.>>

‘What the hell are you doing sergeant?’ said Rembault. ‘You’re not in charge here!’

‘The hell I’m not commissar!’ he said leaning heavily into her bolter. ‘It’s *my* squad, *my* responsibility, and *my* command! And as long as we’re the bait, *I’m in charge!*’ He said putting his face so close to hers that their noses touched.

The commissar didn’t blink, but grimaced from the pain of having the hand holding the bolt pistol, mashed up against her cuirass. ‘Understand commissar?’

In cramped confines of the turret everything changed in a flash. Rembault yanked her pistol free and struck him in the face with it. He grabbed her by the throat and shoved her head against the bulkhead. She punched and gouged at his face; while he grabbed the hand that held the pistol.

‘Commissar Rembault, I ain’t afraid to die! So go ahead and...pop one off! The round might kill us both...and maybe a few loyal Cadians as well!’ he said finally twisting the pistol out of her hand.

<<Sergeant we’re here,>> buzzed Ugula.

<<Thanks private.>> Then flipping the channel switch he said, <<Lance Corporal, there’s two bodies out there marked with white cloths tied to their hands. You and your team jump out and get those

bodies up on the vehicle. I'll be there to help.>> He turned to the commissar and with blood running from his left eye and mouth asked, 'Well?'

She said nothing, but stared at him with visible bruising around her throat. She was still silent when he handed back her bolt pistol. Cracking open the double hatch Tamaguchi said, 'And one more thing commissar; while you're in my Chimera. *Put on a gorram helmet!*'

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The body of the female traitor was tied down on the front between the driver's hatch and the bolter. The male traitor was laid out on the back of the turret. Tamaguchi and Rollo were securing the female on the front, when Ugula asked from her open hatch, 'Who was this soldier? She looks like she was very pretty, was she your sweetie?'

Tamaguchi furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head saying, 'No private, she wasn't my "sweetie". My ta'lissera vesa Megan was a Sapphite.'

'Uh?'

'C'mon private you know what that means. She liked girls instead of boys. Finished Rollo?'

'Yes Sergeant,' said the lance corporal.

'Oh, wait Abdulov has something to say to you....'

'Later private. Button it up now,' said Tamaguchi hammering on the hull.

Scrambling up the front the sergeant dropped down into the turret. He plugged into the voxcaster set and asked, 'What's our status commissar?'

'Still waiting. The Orks seem to be lost again.'

<<Everyone this is Sergeant Rokk. We're going to move into position now. Are we all mounted up Rollo?>>

<<All in Sergeant Rokk.>>

<<Let's roll Ugula.>>

The Bait Chimera turned and headed up the draw to where the gap was in the two ridge lines. As they neared the gap, they came upon the two Tauros scout cars and the six wheeled Venator carrying twin-linked lascannons. All three were hidden behind a deep cut in a sand bank. Tamaguchi yelled from the turret, 'Is that you Sergeant Demin?!'

'Yeah, it's me Sergeant Heretic!' yelled Denim from the Venator.

'Great hiding place! Kick some Greenskin ass today sergeant!' yelled back Tamaguchi.

'You too!' shouted back Demin.

Now rolling through the gap to approximately one-hundred metres, Tamaguchi ordered a halt.

'What's the word commissar?'

'They're driving around in circles now,' said Rembault shaking her head.

'Well, then I'm taking this time to familiarize the team with Ork tactics and counter measures. Oh, and the helmet commissar,' said Tamaguchi tapping his own xenos headgear.

Rembault frowned but made no effort to put on a helmet.

Tamaguchi started to crawl out of the turret, but as he got down on the floor, Abdulov the gunner said, 'Please Sergeant Rokk, I need to tell you something!'

'Private, spit it out because it's damn uncomfortable laying on my back, squeezed underneath two heavy bolters.' 'I think...*no, I know*...that I'm the one that shot you.'

Tamaguchi blinked twice and rubbed his face, 'Well, thanks for the information private...'

'I'm sorry Sergeant Rokk!'

The sergeant let out a sigh and said, 'Private Abdulov, it seems to me that if you can't take take down a fat assed traitor like myself. Then you probably need to go to the range, and get re-qualified on the M-38 Godwyn heavy bolter.'

‘Oh. Alright then.’

Ugula snickered in her sleeve and Abdulov asked, ‘What are you laughing at?’

‘Private, she’s laughing because it’s a joke,’ he said sliding out of the turret.

\*\*

Inside of the Chimera troop compartment, Sergeant Tamaguchi crouched down with the rest of the fire team.

‘Are we in a “hurry up and wait” situation Sergeant Rokk?’ asked Rollo laughing.

‘Well, yeah kinda,’ said Tamaguchi. But then he noticed the smiles on all their faces. ‘Hey, what’s with all the shit-eating-grins?!’

‘We heard you and the commissar having a discussion about who’s in command,’ said the olive skinned Private Frucelli. ‘And we appreciate you letting her know what’s what.’

‘Sergeant Rokk, it’s an insult to even have a commissar assigned to a Cadian unit,’ grunted Rollo. ‘Frak, no Cadian ever runs! And after five thousand years or more of loyal service to the Imperium; shoving a commissar down our throats shouldn’t even be a consideration!’

‘Yeah, I agree,’ said the sergeant taking his lasrifle down of the bulkhead. ‘I take it your unit haven’t had much experience fighting Orks?’

All six shook their heads.

‘Now, I don’t know how much time we have before they get here; but I’ll share a few tips with you in the time we have.’

Tamaguchi stood at the front of the compartment; and giving his weapon a shake, popped the attached bayonet into place. There was an immediate eruption of hollering and clapping at this event.

‘Once a Cadian, always a Cadian!’ shouted the young guardsmen Kircher.

‘Hold your enthusiasm there private! I haven’t even started yet,’ said Tamaguchi with a big smile.

All eyes were now on the sergeant.

‘First things first, about Ork shooting. As an old Rough Rider master sergeant once said to me, “*Orks always miss, until they don’t. Then they hit you right between the eyes.*” Meaning, that just because you can walk around all day in the middle of an Ork fire fight and not get hit. Doesn’t mean you’re safe. Eventually, you’re going to catch of those one-chance-in-sixty rounds; and when you do, it’ll be a KIA. So the lesson is *always-stay-in-cover!*’ Got it?’

There was a vigorous nodding of heads.

‘Fighting Orks, the important stuff. Orks only have one goal in life, and that’s to fight you hand-to-hand. Shooting is fun, but it’s not what they live for. So, whether you’re storming a position, or defending one, do this...’ Tamguchi set his rifle and bayonet and shouted, “*Hey Greenskin eat my bayonet!*”

‘Do that, and I guarantee you they’ll drop their firearms! And when they do, light’em up!’ he said bringing his lasfrifle up to the firing position. Looking at the six guardsmen Tamaguchi noticed not just a little scepticism in their eyes.

‘What, don’t believe me? Well, I’ve spent years fighting Orks, and I’m still here!’

‘Do they *always* drop their firearms,’ asked female guardsman Timocescu.

‘Yes, because they really want to have a go at you! However, they don’t always drop their firearms, sometimes they they throw ’em at you!’ he said laughing. And leaning forward he pointed to a scar above his right eye. ‘Once I pulled that trick on a Storm Boy; and he threw his slugga at me. It nearly knocked me out. But a couple of my mates took him down for me.’

‘What about Gretchin?’ asked Rollo.

‘Shoot’em! Grots don’t want to fight, so they’ll shoot you, if you try that trick on them. *Always-shoot-Grots*. Remember that!’ said Tamaguchi folding up his bayonet. ‘Grots are a sneaky lot. But you

can't blame them for it; because if you had to hang out with big nasty Orks all day, you'd get sneaky too. Anyway shoot them as soon as you see them. And don't ignore them just 'cuz they're small. If you see a dead Grot in front of you, shoot him anyway! They're known for playing dead, and then jumping up and shooting you in the back as you pass.'

'And Nobz?' asked Kircher.

'I was getting to them private, but that's a good question,' said the sergeant securing his lasrifle. 'It depends on the Nob. If he's got really big choppa, a chain sword, or a chain axe; then you can play that same trick on him. If, however, he's got himself a fancy big shoota with lots of gold, and a big ammo belt wrapped around his chest. Then just shoot the hell out of him! A Nob like that loves to shoot, otherwise he wouldn't have spent so many "teef" on a slick looking big shoota!'

'Last thing I want to tell you is, whether you're shooting at Orks, or fighting them hand-to-hand, your targets are the following: head, neck, and centre chest. Hitting them any where else will just annoy them. And that's because Orks just don't feel pain; and blood loss doesn't seem to matter to them either. Meaning, if you cut off an Ork's arm, he's just as likely to beat you to death with it! So, remember *head, neck, and centre chest!*'

Plugging into the voxcom Tamaguchi contacted the commissar, <<Where are they now commissar>> Then unplugging he said, 'They've just sent out scouts; but in Ork fashion, not in our direction.' Now looking down the troop compartment Tamaguchi asked Kircher, 'Private how old are you?'

'Nineteen sergeant.'

'Nineteen? What the hell are you doing here?!' And turning to Rollo he asked, 'Shouldn't he be in the White Shields instead of here?'

'Things are different now Sergeant Rokk.'

'How are things different now lance corporal?'

‘Well ever since...*you know...*’ answered Rollo looking confused.

‘Know what Rollo? What the hell are you saying?’ asked the sergeant getting in his face.

‘Cadia fell,’ came the melancholy reply.

‘The hell it did!’ shouted Tamaguchi shoving the lance corporal against the bulkhead.

‘Commissar Rembault!’ yelled Rollo.

‘It’s true it did!’; ‘He’s telling the truth Sergeant Rökk!’; ‘Cadia did fall sergeant!’ yelled the other guardsmen.

Letting go of Rollo, the sergeant yelled up into the turret, ‘Get down here right now commissar!’

‘Right away!’ she said wiggling her way out of the turret. But then hit her head on the access hole, ‘*Ow!*’

‘They’re all telling me that Cadia fell. Is that true Commissar?’

‘What? You didn’t know about Cadia? Well, it’s true sergeant,’ said Rembault with her hand on her forehead.

‘Cadia fell during Abaddon’s last Black Crusade. First the pylons shattered, then the planet exploded, and finally the Warp over took the Cadian Gate. Cadia, as you knew sergeant it, is gone forever.’

Tamaguchi turned to Rollo and in a low voice said, ‘*Sorry Lance Corporal. I apologize for putting my hands on you.*’ Then he walked to the back of the Chimera, hit the rear hatch release, and stumbled off down the ramp.

‘Sergeant Rökk, are you alright?’ yelled private Kircher.

Tamaguchi stepped off two or three metres into the desert, and pulling off his helmet, just stood there staring off into the red desert. Rollo and Rembault followed him down the ramp. But the commissar motioned for the lance corporal to stop and wait. They watched as the sergeant first dropped his helmet, and then fell to his knees. He began to pound the sand with both fists, as he screamed over

and over again. He drove one fist after another into the red sand, screaming incoherently, until at last he stopped. Panting and sweating hard, he curled up into a ball sobbing.

‘Sergeant Rokk the Orks are on their way,’ said the commissar.

‘We have to go sergeant,’ pleaded the lance corporal.

Staggering to his feet, he wiped this face on his sleeve; and snatching up his helmet, strode past the two of them yelling, ‘Rollo toss a couple of smoke grenades under the vehicle, doesn’t matter what colour!’ And stepping up the ramp he yelled over his shoulder, ‘And commissar put on a gorram frakking helmet!’

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Throwing the commissar a crewman’s half-helmet pointed with his thumb up the turret, ‘Take your seat Commissar Rembault!’ She nodded, and hastily putting on the helmet, crawled up into the turret. Turning around the sergeant yelled, ‘This is it Bait Squad, look alive!’ But then thumping his chest he bellowed, ‘As Cadia Stands!’

‘As Cadia Stands!’ roared back the guardsmen.

He pulled himself up into his seat behind the bolters, secured his helmet, plugged into the voxcaster, and threw the switch to Alpha channel.

<<Ugula start the engine, and just let it idle.>>

<<Yes sergeant.>>

‘Sergeant Tamaguchi one moment please!’ said Rembault switching off the Alpha channel. ‘*Are-you-alright?* Should we get the lance corporal up here?’

Tamaguchi sat at the heavy bolters breathing hard, his face red and tear stained. Without turning his head he said, ‘Commissar Rembault in the last week I’ve lost my entire company. Today, I lost the last



of my ta'lissera, some of whom I've known since I was a White Shield on Cadia. And just now, I learned that my homeworld is gone...' He screamed, '...HELL NO I'M NOT ALRIGHT!'

Rembault slipped her arm under his arm and took her hand in his; and Tamaguchi seemed to breathe easier. Then something strange happened. He closed his eyes and leaned back against his seat. His breathing became calm, and his face slowly returned to a natural colour. A peaceful countenance now came over his face; and Rembault could feel his hand relax in hers. Watching him closely, the commissar wasn't sure if he mightn't be uttering some kind of prayer or chant. In another minute he was a serene and calm as a statue.

Breathing softly he looked at her from the corner of his eye and said, 'Commissar, if I didn't know any better, I'd say you were sweet on me?'

'Bullocks!' she said jerking her hand away. 'When this is over, I'm still executing your traitorous arse!'

'Fair enough...' he said turning around to flip both of their comlinks to Charlie channel. <<...I wasn't looking for a stay of execution anyway.>>

<<Pbfft! The hell you aren't heretic!>>

<<To be honest commissar, you're not half bad looking. As my old man would've said, "*you're built like a brick shithouse!*">>

<<What the frak...>> she said spinning around.

<<Hee-hee-hee. Ha-ha-ha.>>

<<Who's that laughing? Did you put us on Charlie channel?>> said Rembault reaching for the vocaster. But Tamaguchi blocked her hand laughing, <<Or should I've said a "*brick chicken coup*" instead?>>

<<Hee-hee-hee.>>

<<Damn it who's laughing?>>

<<Abdulov here. That's a compliment ma'am. It means you're built real solid.>>

<<This is Ugula ma'am. Cadian men like their women with some meat on their bones.>>

<<She's right ma'am...>> said Rollo. <<...Cadian men love it when we can say, "baby got back!">>

<<With those wide shoulders and wide hips commissar, I don't know how you even manage to fit into your uniform, let alone that commander's seat?>> said Tamaguchi.

Uproariously laughter rang through the Chimera; but Tamaguchi then yelled over the comlink, <<Focus up Bait Squad! This is it, we can see their dust from here!>> He paused, <<Final weapons check and then safety's off. One last thing, no Orks on top of the vehicle or behind it! Some of the Spanna Boys carry acetylene torches, that can cut through a hatch faster than you can say "Holy Terra". So, wait for the command to fire, unless they're trying to get on top, or around the back. Then don't wait, just open up. Got it?>>

<<Yes Sergeant Rokk!>> they replied.

<<As Cadia Stands!>> he shouted.

<<As Cadia Stands!>> came back the collective shout.

Turning off Charlie channel, he turned to the Commissar Rembault; and said with a grin, 'Sorry about that Commissar; but our boys and girls needed loosing up before an engagement. So my taking the piss out of you, was just to give them a laugh. Bet the drill abbots didn't teach you that at the Schola Progenium?!'

<<Umpf!...>> she muttered looking at him sideways.

Tamaguchi now switched to Alpha channel, <<Ugula be ready to gun this Chimera when I give the command.>>

<<Yes sergeant,>> replied Ugula.

<<Abdulov, if the Big Mek gets in close, my bolters won't have enough depression to hit him. So, it'll be up to you to take him down. Aim centre chest and keep firing, but be kind to your bolter's machine Spirit. So don't loose your cool and jam your bolter, alright private?>>

<<Yes sergeant,>> answered Abdulov.

<<Besides his fat green ass will be lot easier to hit than my traitorous ass was.>>

<<Hee-hee... Yes, sergeant,>> snorted Abdulov.

Switching off his comlink, he turned to the commissar and said, 'Rembault if you weren't such a nicotine fiend, I might've taken you out for bottle of grog sometime...'

'Hold up...' she said frowning. '...Lieutenant Mahin is asking how you're doing?' And putting a hand to her comlink she said, <<...The Sergeant's fine now ma'am. He's just learned about Cadia was all. Over... Yes I will ma'am. Over and out.>>

'Commissar, not so fast, I wanted to talk to her!' said Tamaguchi switching his link to Epsilon channel.

<<Lieutenant Mahin, this Sergeant Tamaguchi of Bait Squad here, over.>>

<<Lieutant Mahin here. You still with us Sergeant Heretic? Over,>> she said.

<<Yes, ma'am. I just needed a mental hygiene moment was all. When you open fire, we're going to pull back. So whatever you do, please don't track us! Being tracked in the middle of a mob of Orks is the last thing we need. Over.>>

<<Will do sergeant, over.>>

<<And one more thing, don't drop a mortar round on top of us either. It's not going to penetrate, but it'll sure give us all a bad headache, and maybe a concussion or two. Over.>>

<<We'll try not to Sergeant Heretic. Over and out.>>

<<Bait Squad over and out.>>

Tamaguchi flipped open both bolters, and checked the ammunition boxes and the feeds on the ammunition belts. Closing up the bolters, he then cocked each of them; and then braced himself against the shoulder rests. Finally, he adjusted the periscopic sights. The commissar cinched up her helmet and adjusted her commander's periscope.

'Switch me to Charlie channel commissar,' asked Tamaguchi with his face in the sights.

'Switching you to Charlie channel. Also we're both now on Foxtrot channel,' she replied putting her face in the commander's periscope.

'Acknowledged.'

Now they waited.

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A column of pink dust rose up from the north-west and was moving fast in their direction. The first things to appear out of the dust were the bikes and wartrakks. Like fiery ejecta from a volcano the vehicles shot forwards leaving roiling trails of dust and black exhaust. The occasional flash of chrome or blue flame being the only indication that it was a vehicle. Then came the buggies scurrying across the sand like metal roaches. They careened and bounced along on bloated spiked tires. Each one carrying either a flamer, big shoota, or rokket launcher. The Ork bikers and gun crews now waved their arms and gunned their engines to signal they'd sighted the Chimera. Behind the light vehicles came the Big Trukk, that was swallowed up whole inside a wall of pink dust. Only the tops of its twin cranes visible above the huge dust cloud. The wartrakks and bikes shot past the Bait Chimera on both sides, then turned and made continuous wide circles around it. The buggies banged about, crashing into one another and then ricocheting off again; before piling in around the Chimera. Then the cloud of dust from the trukkk hit the Chimera, and everything went dark.

The Lance Corporal Rollo could be heard on the comlink calming down an over panicky private, probably Kircher. Tamaguchi let him handle it and kept his focus on the sights. Finally the dust cloud swept by and the giant Ork vehicle emerged into view. It was immense, and stood on eight giant tires, each one four metres high and two metres wide. In front the huge chrome grill was and marked with the Big Mek's personal Hammer and Wrench sigil. To the right was the driver's cupola, a tiny box tucked underneath the upper platform. Inside of which was stuffed an overly large Ork driver, who grinned manically as he steered. The upper platform was wide enough to land a Marauder bomber, and carried two large cranes, and a number other grabber claws, smaller cranes, and wenches. And towering above all that was a kind of pulpit or mini-tower. From which could be seen the Big Mek shouting directions through some kind of orkish amplification system. *'Bzzz...crackle...bzzz...thump, thump...Is diz fing on? It iz? Awright 'ere we goez...Gizzle, Grap, Funk, Grunt, Bunk and Gimpy, gitz down dere and take a look at it!'*

From somewhere under the driver's cupola there opened a hatch, and a small rusty ladder dropped down. Six dust covered Grots climbed down and made for the Bait Squad Chimera. The six small figures all wore bandannas and goggles, and each carried some kind of wrench, hammer, or large screw driver. They cautiously approached the APC, with one stopping in front; while the other's spread out along the sides and back. The one who stayed in the front wore an Imperial Guard helmet with holes cut out for his ears. He pulled down his bandanna and sniffed the air; and then pulling up his goggles, looked the Chimea over carefully. He looked up, down, and underneath. He scratched his chin and then shook his head.

<<I think one of them is climbing up the rear hatch!>> screamed a private.

<<Keep it down! Stay focused!>> answered Rollo.

<<Check the rear commissar,>> said Tamaguchi on the Foxtrot channel.

<<Dust is in the way. Wait there's a Grot is on the top hatch! Uh...now it's gone?>>

<<Bait Squad, keep focused. Grots aren't the threat. They're just giving us a once over,>> said Tamaguchi.

The Grots reassembled back at the front. The one with the helmet now pulled out a megavox, and putting it to his mouth blasted out, '*Bzzz...eeezz...One Kymera. Gubbins is still runnin'. Big shootas is good. Turret is good. Still got its trakks...bzzz...crackle. Oh, yeah and dere's two dead 'umies up top. W'at else youse wanta know?...bzzz...crackle.'*

*'Eeezzz...Dat's good!...bzzz.'*

The Big Mek hung up his mic, pulled some levers and yanked some controls; and his armoured pulpit suddenly spun around to face backwards. Then in a weird and totally impossible Orkish way, it moved forward, and then began to descend to the ground. Large linked chains clanked, cogs turned, and a chugging motor spewed out grey exhaust. The pulpit touched earth with a jerk; and throwing open the cage door, the Big Mek and his two Spanna Boyz, stepped out. By this time the Grots had all shuffled away from the Chimera; but still kept looking over their shoulders at it.

Big Mek Cogteef was bigger than a Nob, but wasn't quite yet the size of a Warboss. He wore kustom welding goggles, thick ceramite armoured gloves, and carried a tall combi fixa and chain ax. On his massive shoulders he carried a kustom force field generator. Its several power elements having been cobbled together from Eldar, Tau, and Imperial equipment. Three tall insulated bushings surrounded Cogteff with a constant corona of pulsating blue electricity. The Big Mek waved his gloved fingers about with gleeful delight shouting, 'It's a Kymera! A Warboss will giv a load teef for a fully funkshunal Kymera. Hur-hur-hur! *Oh, wot itz it now Funk?'*

The helmeted Grot scrambled up to Cogteef; and cringing and bowing before him said, 'Don't fink it's safe boss! Dem 'umies waz tied down to the Kymera! And it weren't burnin', it were smokie grenades!' And holding up a spent grenade he said, 'See, it's still warm!'

Cogteef flipped up the cover on his welding goggles, and looked down at Funk. Then taking the used grenade, bounced it off Funk's helmet with an angry pitch. 'Wot, haz yoz gone all bonker now?! So some 'umie frew a smokie bomb, wot of it? And dem 'umies wotz iz tied on der, dey waz fightin' fer da Bluies. So, maybe da Guard Boyz wot put'em der as tropheetz, eh?'

'It ain't roight boss! I'm tellin' ya it's a trap!' pleaded Funk pointing to the Chimera. 'It's a trap I'm tellin' ya!'

Cogteef kicked Funk in the stomach; which sent him flying back towards the Chimera. 'Stupid git!' And shaking his fist at the Grot he shouted, 'Jost for dat I'm maken' yoze drive it up da ramp! And if yoze drive if off da edge, I'm stompin' ya flat!' Then to one of his Spanna Boyz he said, 'Alright, Gear 'Ead. Go an' cut open da hatch, so we can git dis Kymera loaded up!'

'Sure fing, boss,' said Gear'ead pulling down his welding goggles and lighting his acetylene torch. Cogteef now signalled to his crew atop the Big Truk; and a wide ramp slowly began to extend out from the platform. He turned back around and strode up to the Chimera. And salivating at the sight he shouted, 'If we'ze can git away wif dis boyz, den we'll all be drinkin' fungus beer tonite!'

<<Light'em up Bait Squad! Light'em up!>> shouted Sergeant Tamaguchi.

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Tamaguchi's twin bolters hammered the Big Truk driver, the rounds blasting the cupola until it blew apart. Abdulov's bolter hit the Big Mek and Spanna Boy both in the chest. The Spanna Boy's acetylene tank exploded in a ball of orange flame that the tore the Ork in half. The Big Mek's took a full burst to the chest, but he was still standing. Cogteef grabbed for his kustom mega blasta; but a round penetrated the weapon and it too exploded. A ball of blue plasma enveloped his arm, taking it off at the

shoulder, and searing the flesh on the right side of his face. Screaming he turned and ran back towards the truck. Mortar rounds began falling all around; while lascannon rounds, probably from the Venator, blew apart a buggy. Red stubber rounds and green las rounds cut down bikers and buggy crews alike.

Tamaguchi now swung the turret to the right and opened up on the grill of the Big Truck. He fired burst after burst into the Big Truck's engine; and jets of white steam now shot off in all directions, as great chunks of chrome were blown off the grill. The ever disciplined gunner, he fired until the rounds ignited the fuel and oil lines, and orange flames blew out from underneath the truck. Internal explosions rocked the Ork vehicle as waves of thick black smoke rolled out from the engine compartment. The Big Truck then juddered, its wheels shook, and then it began to back away slowly. Unfortunately, Big Mek Cogteef was a better mek than his contemporaries. He had given his truck another driver's position, and an additional set of drive engines. He had also provided them with more than a little "dakka".

So, to this incredible sight there was added an outpouring of fire from the upper platform. Twin linked Big shootas fired away, Rokkets arched their way towards the ridge lines; while Zzap gunz hurled bolts of energy in every direction, including toward the Bait squad's Chimera. A blinding blue flash streaked by the right side of the Chimera, exploding as it hit the ground.

<<Get us out of here Ugula now!>> shouted Tamaguchi.

The Chimera began to back away, when there came a tremendous explosion from the Big Truck. Unlike the haphazard and undisciplined fire of the Orks; the Cadian's could put a round on target. A large explosion now rocked the Big Truck, and a huge piece of the platform was hoisted high into the air. There followed a tremendous ball of flame entwined with an oily mushroom cloud that shot straight up into the sky. It would be later learned that Sergeant Demin's Venator had got in a well placed shot. Its twin lascannons having ignited a promethium tank underneath the Big Truck.

Numberless Grots now poured out of the burning hulk. Like rats from a sinking ship, they dropped out of every crevasse, hole, and hatch. The Grots scurried after escaping Spanna Boyz who tore off in



their buggies, bikes and wartrakks. They grabbed for anything that moved; but most just got a boot to the face for their troubles. Bolter and shoota rounds bounced off the Chimera as the mob of Orks sped off into the desert, disappearing into clouds of red-pink dust. Just then as a spray of bolter round hit the APC, and a tail-tale clang was heard through out the vehicle.

<<Sergeant Rokk, we've been tracked!>> shouted Ugula.

<<Hold up Ugula! Let's not run out our track...>> shouted Tamaguchi. And coming to a halt, the Chimera sat there, as more explosions rocked the Big Trukk. Tamaguchi swung the turret around laying down fire on the remaining Grots and Orks, as they scrambled trying to get away. Abdulov kept up her fire as the two Tauros Scout cars and the other Chimera rolled up to add their fire to the mayhem.

Then without warning, Big Mek Cogteef suddenly reappeared. Mork and Gork must have been smiling on him; because he was still alive, either that or they just having a good laugh at his expense. Cogteef was now running back and forth in the middle of all the shooting, leaving his own trail of greasy black smoke. Abdulov was still firing, when he crossed into her line of fire, and a bolter round exploded Cogteef's kustom force field. Great arcing blue sparks shot into the air; as the generator ripped apart, and engulfed Cogteef in a geyser of blue electrical fire. Dropping to the ground, Cogteef now flailed about, until at last he expired. He lay there burning on a pyre of his own orky tecknologuee; his skeletal remains visible throughout his immolation.

<<Sergeant, the lieutenant is ordering a cease fire!>> said Rembault on the Foxtrot channel.

<<Bait squad, cease fire! Cease fire!>> shouted Tamaguchi.

The sergeant cleared the turret's bolters, and then dropped down into the hull compartment. There he found Kircher holding a bandage to Timocescu's face.

'What happened?' asked Tamaguchi.

'A bolter round hit the gun mount and a piece of spawl hit her in the face,' said Rollo.

'Imz goodz serzgeant,' mumbled Timocescu.

‘Sliced up your face, eh? Just keep the bandage on it till the medic gets here. The rest of you outside, we’ve been tracked.’ Turning to Kircher he said, ‘Tell the commissar to call her a medic.’ Grabbing his lasrifle off the bulkhead he said, ‘Everyone keep sharp, there’s sure to be other Big Meks headed our way.’

Outside of the Chimera the world was nothing but heat and fire. The Big Trukk was an inferno, sending a massive column of black smoke skyward. Shoota rounds and rokkets cooked off in the intense heat; making Tamaguchi stay low as he rounded the corner of the APC. Just then Sergeant Demin rolled up behind the Chimera in his Venator, ‘What happened Sergeant Heretic?’ he yelled. ‘You get tracked?’

‘Yeah, it was friendly fire though...’ replied Tamaguchi making his way over to Demin. ‘Hey, this flaming truk is going to bring in other Big Meks. So, we need to think about changing up our tactics, until we can get this Chimera rolling again.’

‘What do ya got in mind?’

As the two talked, the second Chimera rolled in front of the Bait squad Chimera. Meanwhile, the medic Private Crumb, arrived on the back seat of a scout bike. Rollo took charge of the repair detail, standing on top of the Chimera to direct the operation. As the lance corporal, Kircher, and Lankenua flipped over the sand guards on the top track; cables were being pulled out from the second Chimera; and then attached to the track. The second Chimera then slowly pulled the track up and over onto the rollers.

Meanwhile Tamaguchi and Demin stood on top of the Venator looking past the burning Big Trukk.

‘...Down that shallow gully or wadi is where we want them to come up. See?’ said Tamaguchi pointing.

‘Yeah, yeah I see,’ replied Demin.

‘And that will funnel them straight down the barrels of your Venator’s lascannons.’

‘Brilliant!’ said Demin laughing. Then looking at Tamaguchi he said, ‘Once a Cadian, always a Cadian, uh Sergeant Heretic?’

‘Sergeant Demin, that’s the second time I’ve heard that today,’ he laughed back. ‘So, maybe it’s true?’

‘I’ll get on the vox and tell the lieutenant what we came up with...’ said Demin squatting down and asking for the mic from his driver, as Tamaguchi jumped down to the ground. He was almost to the Chimera when Demin shouted out, ‘Sergeant Heretic, we’re shite out of time!’

‘What?’

‘Lieutenant says there’s two Big Mek mobs headed our way, and they’re coming in hot! Get your people back into the Chimera. Thankfully the Lieutenant is going to try and do what we asked.’

‘Thanks, sergeant,’ he answered. Now running over to the Chimera, Tamaguchi pulled a Tau comlink antenna from his belt, and plugged it into the right side of his helmet.

‘We have Greenskins inbound. Everyone back in except for Rollo, Gildmann and Kircher. You three keep working on the track. Who’s the best here with a heavy bolter?’

‘I am!’ said Frucelli.

‘Then climb in and take over the hull bolter. Tell Abdulov she’s now in the turret with the commissar...Let’s move! Go! Go! Go!’

As the others piled into the Chimera, the sergeant screamed, ‘Private Timocescu what the hell are you still doing here?’

‘Meesa skawwth!’ she mumbled back at him with a fresh bandage on her face.

‘Never mind just get in...Frucelli where the hell are you going? Go around front! Around front! Go!’

Scout cars and scout bikes kicked up the pink dust as they repositioned themselves; and as the second Chimera spun around to take a position about thirty yards to the left of the Bait Chimera.

Sergeant Demin tucked his Venator back into the cut off in the sand; but then bored sighted his lascannons down the wadi.

‘Abdulov don’t argue with her! Get in the frakken turret! Damn it Ugula, make room for her to climb in the hatch will’ya! They’re almost here!’ yelled Tamaguchi.’

The sergeant now stood in front of the Chimera with his hand on his comlink antenna, <<Testing... testing...>>

<<Are you trying to contact me Sergeant Heretic? Over,>> said the commissar from the open turret hatch.

<<Yeah, it’s me commissar. Is Abdulov up there yet? She’s taking my place at the bolters. Over.>>

<<Yes, finally! Sergeant Heretic I’m suppose to be watching you... *Wait*, how are you able to broadcast without a voxcaster? Over.>>

<<Don’t worry Commissar Rembault, you can still shoot me later. Well, that’s because in fact I do have a voxcaster. But it’s a piece of abominable xenos technology, called a TDRAV. That’s a tactical dielectric resonator antenna vane, over.>>

Rollo was starting to hammer the link pin into the two pieces of joined track; while Kircher and Gildmann held the lower piece of track in place, using a breaker bar with a buggy tire for a fulcrum. Seeing this Tamaguchi jumped in to give a hand with the bar.

<<*Ugh...*The antenna allows for transmission and reception across the full spectrum of radio waves...*Erg...**Do you need us to give you some slack Rollo? ...Okay...*Plus it out ranges all of your standard IG voxcasters...*Have we got it in yet? ...Over.>>*

The commissar stared down at him frowning and shaking her head. <<We’ve got incoming mobs sergeant! Two or three maybe. Over.>>

Two columns of pink dust were speeding towards the wreck of the Big Truk and Bait Squad. The two columns twisted, merged together, and then separated again. Yellow and purple tracer rounds flew

back and forth in between the two columns; and the red sand flew from exploding stikk bombs and rokkets.

‘Holy Mother of the Emperor, the Big Mek’s are fighting each other already! And if we don’t get the hell back in the Chimera, we’re gonna get stuck in middle of them!’ shouted Tamaguchi letting go of the breaker bar. Then to Rembault he shouted, <<Button up commissar, they’re almost here!>>

But that wasn’t necessary as she’d already slammed shut the hatch; and the next moment, Abdulov opened up with the twin bolters. Frucelli too opened up with the hull bolter; and the track repair team and the sergeant, dropped to the ground. Meanwhile, the second Chimera, and the teams on both ridges all opened up on the Ork mobs.

Down range the two columns of dust now merged into a single large column, from which emerged two competing mobs that fired upon each other as they spewed dust and flame. Bikes and buggies veered into one another to shoot and strike at their opponent. Lieutenant Mahin, following the suggestion of Tamaguchi and Demin, now opened up with her mortars and heavy bolters on either side of the wadi. Which had the desired affect of funnelling the Big Mek trukks down into the wadi. That was except for both mob’s bikes and buggies. The two mobs were too busy firing on one another to notice the incoming mortar and heavy bolter fire; and so drove straight into it. Ork bikes were thrown sky high by exploding mortar rounds; while buggies were torn apart by rockets and heavy bolter fire. The bikes and buggies that followed slammed into the wreckage, launching themselves into the air, or doing spectacular flaming roll-overs. The carnage was unbelievable, but still the warring mobs kept coming on.

And up the wadi there now came the two Big Meks, their blazing trukks battling it out for supremacy in the race to reach the Big Trukk. A monstrous black trukkk bearing a horned bull’s head on its grill, sideswiped a smaller but taller yellow trukkk with a leering crescent moon over its cab. This sent

the smaller truck careening up and over the wadi edge; and straight into the falling mortars. The larger black truck then roared ahead, only to meet destruction at the hands of Sergeant Demin's twin lascannons. The truck exploded into a ball of orange fire, tumbling end over end down the wadi. Large panels of its armoured body flying off, along with dismembered pieces of Ork bodies. The wreckage finally coming to rest near the burning Big Truck. The smaller yellow truck, having survived its encounter with mortar rounds and bolter fire, now blew past the wreck of its rival. While Orks on yellow bikes and in yellow buggies barrelled past the Chimera.

'Under the Chimera! Get under the Chimera!' yelled Tamaguchi.

Gildmann and Kircher dropped the breaker bar and dove in under the vehicle. Rollo however, dropped down next to the hull on the right side. Tamaguchi managed to get under the hull, just as Abdulov hammered a yellow buggy heading straight for the Chimera. The buggy blew apart, but still slammed into the front of the Chimera; before rolling over the right side, and skidding to a stop upside down. The guardsmen were showered with dirt, debris, and a cloud of dust.

'Rollo! Rollo! Are you okay?' yelled Tamaguchi through the track bogies.

'Yeah, sergeant I'm okay. I'll make it, but I caught some shrapnel!' coughed Rollo.

The ground around the Chimera was now a hell of belching engine exhaust, clouds of dust, screaming Orks, and deafening explosions. Stikk bombs, shoota rounds, and the occasional squig flew in every direction; as the battling mobs swept in and out, around the wreck of the Big Truck. Mortar rounds dropped into the broiling clouds of dust; while heavy bolter and stubber rounds slammed into the edges of the melee.

'We gotta move. We can't stay here. Rollo do you still have the hammer?'

'Yes sergeant!'

'Kircher, Gildmann get to ready to hit the breaker bar!' Then hitting his comlink antenna he said,

<<Cease fire Frucelli! Cease fire! We need to fix the track. Over.>>

<<Yes, Sergeant Rokk! Over.>>

The hull mounted bolter fell silent and Tamaguchi yelled, 'Get to the track. Go! Go!'

The four then crawled out, and while Kircher and Gildmann set themselves to the breaker bar, Rollo hammered, and Tamaguchi stood overwatch. From out of the swirling dust, a big Ork suddenly appeared on a tricked out yellow bike; and heading straight for the sergeant, fired a burst of shoota rounds. The yellow tracer rounds sang as they flew past the sergeant. But one round did hit its mark, only to then ricochet off of his xenos cuirass. Tamaguchi flinched but stood his ground; and then let loose with a fusillade of pale gold lasrounds. The beams of coherent light instantly struck the Ork centre chest, neck, and face. Each round piercing right through armour, flesh, and helmet as if they were clay. The Ork went over backwards, the bike went down, and then slid past the chimera in a swirl of dust and smoke.

Rollo continued to hammer the pin, but there were even more Orks. A black dragsta buggy with red flames circled around the Chimera. A laughing Ork in a red helmet sprayed the team with his twin big shootas; while another Ork lobbed tiny squigs in their direction. The rounds pinged and thwanged against the hull of the Chimera; but again, the traitor sergeant stood and returned fire. And as a squig slammed against the hull with a wet splat, he let loose with another cascade of gold lasrifle fire. This gave the Ork with the red helmet a crater for a face; and he fell from the dragsta as if in slow motion.

Then Abdulov found her target, and the engine of the black dragsta disintegrated into a mass of flying fragments. It now spun out of control, and slammed simultaneously into two yellow bikes and a yellow buggy. The ensuing fireball consumed all four vehicles and their Orky crews.

Rollo made three more strikes with the hammer and was finished; but the ground around the Chimera was now an open melee of fighting Orks. Sergeant Tamaguchi let fly with burst after burst of lasrounds, joined now by Kircher, Gildmann, and Rollo. From the other side of the Chimera came more

green lasrounds, and Tamaguchi turned to see privates Lankenua and Timocescu adding to the weight of fire.

‘What the hell are the two of you doing out here? Get back in the Chimera!’ he yelled.

‘The commissar ordered us out!’ yelled Lankenua.

<<Ugula drop the hatch, we’re done!>> ordered Tamaguchi waving the others toward the back; but the weight of the Ork attacks kept them from falling back.

To the right, Orks in yellow came running and firing their sluggas at the track repair team. The repair team set their rifles for the charge and shouted insults at the Greenskins. The young private Kircher yelled, ‘Die you fat squigs!’

And true to form, all the four Orks each dropped their sluggas, and grabbed for their choppas. Rollo, Kircher, and Gildmann then cut them down in a blaze of green las fire.

‘It worked Sergeant Rokk! It worked!’ they yelled.

‘Of course it did, look to your left!’ yelled back Tamaguchi diving for the ground.

Out of the swirling dust a big Spanna Boy on a nasty looking black trike headed straight for the team, his twin big shootas spitting out purple tracers. The rounds caught all three of the team, Rollo took a round in the thigh, Gildmann in the chest, and Kircher across the chest and pauldrons.

Unfortunately, for this wannabe Big Mek, he then drove straight into the line of fire of Frucelli’s hull mounted bolter. And the last moments of his brief green life, were spent seeing himself and his trike, being cut in half.

<<Open her up, we’ve got wounded!>> shouted Tamaguchi.

The rear hatch dropped open; and while Lankenua and Timocescu covered them, Kircher and Tamaguchi dragged Gildmann and Rollo into the vehicle.

‘Are you okay there Kircher? Can you take a look at Gildmann?’ asked Tamaguchi examining Rollo.



‘Banged up a bit sergeant, but I’m good to go!’ said Kircher missing his left pauldron, and with a big gouge running across his cuirass.

‘Don’t lie to me! Are you in pain?’ he asked looking up at the private.

‘My shoulder hurts, but I can still move it.’

‘Alright...’ said Tamaguchi. Then looking at Rollo he said, ‘*Holy Mother of the Emperor!* What the hell happened to you Rollo?! You’re cut up so bad you should be dead!’

Rollo had a shoota round go clean through his left thigh, which luckily hadn’t hit the bone; but he had multiple lacerations all over his body. And there was one big cut that ran down almost the whole length of his right leg. Rollo was pale and sweating, and his pulse was rapid.

‘Did that crash with the buggy to this to you? And why didn’t you tell me?’ asked the sergeant wiping down his wounds with an antiseptic wipe.

‘I had a job...to do...Sergeant,’ gasped Rollo.

‘The frak you did! Playing hero nearly got you killed. You know what the definition of a hero is lance corporal? *The one who usually dies first!*’

‘Aaagh...I’m okay!’ shouted the dark skinned Gildmann trying to stand up. ‘I’ll make it...just got the wind knocked out of me!’ But then Gildmann had a coughing fit and laid back down. There were visible bruises on the right side of his chest.

‘Keep down, you’ve probably got a broken rib or two! Kircher grab his canteen, and then come over here and help me wipe down Rollo!’

Tamaguchi now took a small aerosol bottle from his belt and began giving each of Rollo’s wounds a spritz. Then to Kircher he said, ‘Keep wiping the wounds down while I spray.’

The battle still raged outside the Chimera, and Bait Squad’s two guardswomen Timocescu and Lankenua, kept up a fierce fusillade to hold back the raging Greenskins.

‘Got your lasrifle Kircher?’ said the sergeant tearing open a small red packet and emptying it into a canteen.

‘KIA Sergeant Rokk. A round went through the receiver,’ replied the young private.

‘Take my helmet and rifle then,’ said Tamaguchi. Tossing the canteen to Gildmann he ordered,

‘Drink it all down private!’

‘I have a helmet sergeant...’ complained Kircher.

‘Don’t argue! Take my helmet and rifle and get out there and help the others!’ shouted Tamaguchi tearing open another red packet and squeezing in to Rollo’s canteen.

Private Kircher grabbed the rifle and slapped on the sergeant’s helmet; which was tad too big, but he scrambled down the ramp. Tamaguchi gave the canteen Rollo also ordering him to, ‘Drink it all down private.’

There was a tremendous explosion that pounded the Chimera; and tossed, Kircher, Lankenua, and Timocescu all back into the vehicle. Tamaguchi shielding Rollo with his body, looked over at Kircher still clutching his lasrifle; and yelled, ‘What the hell did you do private?! You only had my rifle for like thirty seconds!’

‘Bomb squig sergeant!’ answered the private with the xenos helmet squashed down over his eyes.

‘Everyone get in! Everyone get in!’ yelled the Sergeant. And closing the doors, he ordered Ugula,

<<Get us out of here now!>>

Ugula spun the Chimera around on its axis and gunned the engine. Abdulov and Frucelli fired burst after burst under the keen direction of Commissar Rembault. Outside the scout cars and the other Chimera now pulled around to assist in leading the Bait Squad Chimera out of the melee of Ork mobs. The red sand churned and the cloud of red dust roiled as the Guard vehicles burst out into the open ground. But escape was not to be.

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The Bad Moon Big Mek decided that he'd had, "Enuf o'dem 'umies messin' wif his stuff"; and rammed his giant Mektrukkk straight into the side of the Bait Chimera. Its huge dozer blade heaving the armoured personnel carrier a dozen centimetres off the ground. Abdulov now began a gunnery duel with the Grots manning the big shoota turrets. Meanwhile, the Bait Squad was tossed into a tumble on the opposite side of the hull.

<<Shit what is it now commissar?>> said an exasperated Sergeant Tamaguchi.

<<This Big Mek rammed us with his Wartrukk, or whatever-the-hell-you-call-it! But we're too close for their cannon to hit us! But we're not moving because our ride side track is off the ground.>>

<<*Holy Mother of the Emperor!*>> exclaimed Tamaguchi.

<<What's your plan Sergeant Heretic?>>

<<I'll get back to you when I have one commissar,>> he said pulling the comlink antenna off of his right ear. Looking at the squad as he said, 'She'll be yelling for an answer, and I need time to think.'

'What's up?' asked Rollo now back on his feet and looking healthy.

'We've been rammed by a Big Mek's trukkk, and can't move 'cause we've got a trak in the air,' he answered. He then reached into his web gear and pulled out more small packets. He tossed a small blue packet to Kircher and Gildmann.

'They're analgesics for the pain, so suck'em down quick.' Then to Rollo he asked, 'How's your pain level lance corporal super soldier?'

'Pain, but no bleeding!' he laughed. 'How much time do need to make a plan Sergeant Rokk?'

'None. I've already got one,' he answered throwing him a small blue packet. Then tossing each one of the squad a small red packet he said, 'This is the last of my j'hal nectar. Tear it open and suck it all down. Squeeze every drop of it into your mouth. Afterwards that I'll tell you my plan.'

'What is this...' started Kircher; but stopped when he saw Tamaguchi's "*Are-you-serious-private?*" look. The sergeant waited for each of them finish their j'hal packets.

‘Wow!’ said Lankenua going all wide eyed.

‘Now I feel good!’ said Gildmann beaming.

‘Are these stims?’ asked Rollo. ‘Is it the same stuff you put in my canteen?’

‘Not stims, it’s just j’hal nectar. Its full of electrolytes, vitamins, and nutrients. We use it for rehydration and as a food substitute. Now here’s my plan, are you ready?’

All five nodded their heads.

‘We’re going to take the fight to the Big Mek and his boyz. Orks expect Astartes to charge them; but not your average Guardsman. So grab every grenade you can lay your hands on. Frag grenades. Stun grenades. Smoke grenades. Willy Pete. Do you have white phosphorous grenades Rollo?’

‘All out sergeant.’

Tamaguchi then looked over his shoulder at the front bulkhead and asked, ‘Lance Corporal, whose chainsword is that?’

‘It was Sergeant Dalwini’s, but she was killed this morning,’ said Rollo. ‘Go ahead and take it if you want.’

‘Thanks. I need something for close combat now that Kircher there has my Hellgun.

‘Hellgun? Oh m-my, that’s why it punches like a lascannon!’ said Kircher looking at his lasrifle in reverence.

‘Alright, put in the newest power packs you’ve got, or keep it what you have, if that’s all you’ve got.’ As he waited for them to swap out power packs he asked, ‘Does everyone know how to overcharge their lasrifles?’

There was no reply except for knowing looks.

‘Don’t all answer at once. It’s not like we’ve got all day.’

‘All of us do sergeant,’ said Lankenua. ‘But we’d never do that unless...’ She stopped in mid-sentence.

‘Unless what? It was life or death? Sounds like we’re pretty much there private.’ Then he added, ‘Set the variable for las strength just *past* its highest setting. Do it now!’

Rollo adjusted his lasrifle first, and then assisted the others in adjusting theirs; while Tamaguchi helped Kircher with the Hellgun.

‘The earth caste don’t like you messing with their stuff, any more than the Cog Boys do. But I know the access codes!’ he said giving Kircher a wink. But when he finished he said, ‘What am I going to do for a helmet? And no private, my helmet has to stay with you.’

‘There’s another crew helmet Sergeant Rokk,’ said Rollo tossing him the helmet.

‘Hmm, that’ll work!’ he said reattaching the comlink antenna and donning the half-helmet. He then pulled out a pair of ice blue ballistic glasses; and putting them on said, ‘Someone open the rear hatch just a crack.’

Timocescu hit the hatch release twice; which made a narrow gap between it and the hull. Tamaguchi pulled a fist sized metallic ball from a pouch; twisted it in the middle, and then as he tossed out the gap said, ‘Pathfinder recon drone.’

At that moment there was a commotion at the front, as the commissar dropped down into the hull compartment. ‘What the frak going on Sergeant Heretic? We can’t move, Frucelli is clean out of ammo, and Abdulov as three more bursts before she’s out. Meanwhile, the Bad Moon mob has finished wiping the floor with the Goffs, and are now surrounding us! So, what’s your plan?’

‘Hmm...I see the scout cars and the second Chimera are doing a good job of keeping away Team Yellow,’ said Tamaguchi looking at the images projected onto the HUD of his glasses. ‘But where’s Sergeant Demin and his Venator? And why did the Big Mek stop after he rammed us?’

‘What the frak are you doing Heretic?’ asked the commissar.

‘Getting a feed from his recon bot I suppose commissar?’ said Gildmann shrugging.

‘It’s my abominable xenos technology again commissar. You’d better not ask about it, lest you be corrupted and fall into heresy.’

‘So, what the frak is...’

‘Commissar Rembault it would help if you first told me why the Big Mek stopped?’ said Tamaguchi turning to stare at her through his blue lenses.

‘The Big Mek can’t move either. He was trying to flip us over; when Sergeant Demin tracked him. But then the lascannons overheated; and now Demin has to wait before trying another shot. But even then he still can’t, because we’re too close to the truck.’

‘Thanks commissar. See, how simple that was?’ he said lifting the glasses off his face. Giving her a hard look he said, ‘The plan is to storm the Mektrukk. Are you in?’

Commissar Rembault started to say, ‘*Are you out of your fraking mind...*’ But then looked at the squad of determined Cadians crammed in all about her and stopped.

‘Having second thoughts commissar? Not getting squeamish about some, glorious-heroics-dying-for-the-Emperor-I-have-but-one-life-to-live-my-faith-is-my-armour-the-will-of-the-Emperor-protects-us kind of stuff are you commissar?’ asked Tamaguchi.

‘No! And there’s no reason to blaspheme either Sergeant Heretic!’ replied the commissar. ‘I’m in!’

‘Good. So here are the teams. Gildmann, Kircher, and Timocescu you’re with me. Our object is to get to the rear of the Mektrukk. And we’ll tie up as many of the Spanna Boyz and destroy everything we can along the way. Rollo and Lankenua you’re with the commissar. And your only objective will be the gun turret. Now the commissar probably knows it better than any of us, so do whatever she says...’

‘Gun turret?!’ blurted out Kircher.

‘Don’t interrupt!’ shouted the sergeant. ‘...And take the turret out anyway you can. Everyone got that?’

All gave affirmative nods.

‘We’re going out the top hatch, and then over the dozer blade to the Mektrukk. Are those shoota turrets knocked out yet commissar?’

Kircher started in again, but Rollo threw a hand over his mouth.

‘Yes, but be careful, there still might be Grots lurking near them. Also, there are Grots with big shootas aiming through the dozer blade. They can’t elevate their shootas to hit you, but I wouldn’t ignore them either.’

‘Much appreciated commissar. I was going to ask you about them. We’ll drop a couple grenades on them on our way in.’

‘You’re going in first sergeant? If you are, then let my team take them out when we rush the trukk.’

‘Good idea! Alright is everyone ready?’

‘Wait, wait sergeant, let me get back in the turret first! And do you want Abdulov to give you covering fire?’

‘No, have her hold her last rounds to cover our retreat. Who commands the second Chimera?’

‘Sergeant Uhlmann. I’ll have her lay down some cover fire for us then.’

‘Another good idea! We’ll wait till you’re in the turret before we dismount. Then I want you to give us the “go” signal. You’ve got the best view of the situation from up there anyhow.’

‘Affirmative Sergeant Heretic. Good luck everyone,’ she said before climbing back into the turret.

‘Everyone ready? Know what you’re doing?’ asked Tamaguchi readying his pulse pistol and chainsword.

‘Sergeant Rokk, exactly *what am I doing?*’ asked Kircher pushing Rollo’s hand away.

‘Your the point private. I’ll follow you, while Gildmann and Timocescu cover the flanks. Now Kircher don’t aim the Hellgun, just point and spray. It’ll be just like firing a multi-laser; because you’ll be pumping out so much coherent light, that you’ll mow down anything that gets in your way! *Just point and spray, got it?*’

‘Yes Sergeant Rokk.’

‘Ready?’ said Tamaguchi as he stood at the bench ready to heave open the hatch.

‘Ready!’ answered Bait Squad.

‘As Cadia Stands!’ he shouted and heaved open the top hatch.

‘As Cadia Stands!’ yelled every member of Bait Squad.

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The hatch flew open and Bait Squad spilled out onto the opened hatch. Outside was filled with the sound of hammering bolters and the thumping shootas. Smoke from the burning Big Trukk mingled with the smoke of burning buggies and bikes; which made everything stink of promethium.

‘Ready Bait Squad!’ yelled Tamaguchi flattening himself on the top of the hatch. The rest of his squad lay flat waiting for the commissar’s signal. Yellow shoota rounds zinged over their heads; while the occasional tiny squig splattered against the hull like an over ripe melon.

Commissar Rembault threw up the turret hatch, and then slid down the side of the open turret, and over the dead body of Tamaguchi’s friend. Now wearing her commissar’s peaked hat, she dropped down next to Tamaguchi on the hatch.

‘In another minute Sergeant Uhlmann and the scout cars are going to open up on the Mektrukk, and when they go silent, you’ll move. Got it?’ she shouted.

‘Yes, commissar!’ shouted back Tamaguchi. But then yelled, ‘Where the hell is your helmet commissar?’

‘In the turret where it belongs Sergeant Heretic! I’m in the field, so now I’m in full uniform.’

‘Hope you don’t catch a round to the head commissar!’ he replied shaking his head.



The Mektrukk was a frightening piece of orky *inginenuitee* and *teknologiee*, it was a sunburst yellow monstrosity that rose out of the red sand like an ancient armoured cruiser. It had a dozer blade like a wide wall, crenelated with jagged metal teeth; and had two big shootas poking out through the blade. However, both were now fully blocked by the hull of the Chimera. Directly behind the dozer blade was the ship's "prow", that sported two twin-shoota turrets, both of which now defunct and burning. In the middle of the Mektrukk was an armoured citadel that bristled with shoota turrets, rokket launchers, and at least one burna. The "bridge" with its wide set of vision slits sat in the centre of this citadel; and on top of it sat the main gunz turret. And behind the citadel were two large smoke stacks that belched smoke and fire.

Uhlmann, in the second Chimera, turned her twin-linked bolters on the Yellow Monster, raking it from bow to stern. The scout cars, weaving in and around the two locked vehicles, now turned their stubber fire towards the Orky landship. The Spanna Boyz tried to return fire, but a rokket launcher exploded, while others were cut down at their shootas. Meanwhile those crowded in on the prow dove for cover; but then the Guard gunfire went silent.

'Ready Sergeant Heretic?' yelled the commissar.

'Ready Commissar!' he yelled back.

'Go!' she shouted.

'Follow me!' shouted Sergeant Tamaguchi standing up and leaping over the dozer blade. Kircher was beside him on his left; with Timocescu and Gildmann following right behind him. The Spanna Boyz, Meks, and Grots on the prow, were cautiously raising their heads, when Kircher opened up with the Hellgun. A continuous spray of golden lasrounds scythed down every Ork on the prow. Decapitated heads and severed limbs flying off in all directions. Some of the Spanna Boyz were cut completely in half; while the Meks found their chests eviscerated down to their spines. Tamaguchi fired at a

Spanna Boy with a Big Shoota on the upper deck, exploding his head with a single blue-white pulse round.

A Bad Moon Squigbuggy came along side on the right, and Timocescu opened up on with fusillade of green lasrounds. She cut down the driver, gunner, and assistant gunner in a single burst. She also managed to detonate a squig in its launcher; which started a chain reaction of exploding squigs. One squig after another exploding, throwing either bile, burning promethium, or shrapnel everywhere. The resulting fire and explosion flipped the buggy completely end-over-end. Bits of frame, engine and tires flying in every direction. One bloated tire flying so high that it easily cleared the gun turret.

On the other side Gildmann dropped to a knee, and in only two bursts, swept away three Bad Moon bikers. Their bodies were sliced in half, in the same instant their bike's engines were blown apart, or their promethium tanks exploded. All that was left was a speeding mass of burning wreckage.

Commissar Rembault now shouted, 'For the Emperor!' and leapt forward. On either side of her Rollo and Lankenua were shouting, 'For the Emperor!'

They crossed over the dozer blades heading for the gunz turret. But as they leapt, they dropped frag grenades into the laps of the Grots manning the big shootas. The explosions went off harmlessly behind the commissar and the two guardsman. Rembault then led then along the right side of the Mektrukk, passing Timocescu as the buggy tire cleared the turret. The team reached a fixed ladder just below the bridge; and as they climbed up it, above and below them Orks were firing. But luckily nothing came their way. They reached the level of the bridge, where they then had to switch another ladder leading to the turret. It was at this point where Tamaguchi's team assaulted the bridge.

Kircher stood on top of a shoota turret screaming at the top of his lungs; as he fired a continuous stream of lasrounds directly into the bridge's open armoured windows. At the same time Gildmann and Timocescu lobbed grenades through the same widows. Meanwhile, Tamaguchi picked off any survivors as they fled the bridge. A blinded Ork missing both his arms fell out of the door of the bridge, and was

quickly dispatched by a single pulse round to the head. A Grot leapt through the open door and went flying over the side; but a pulse round splattered him like an insect on a windscreen.

Another Ork missing both his right arm and right leg exploded, when Kircher turned the Hellgun on him shouting, 'Die! Die! Die you green skinned piece of ambull shite! Die! Die!'

'Kircher, we gotta move! To the rear everyone! Head towards the rear!' urged Tamaguchi.

'Arggh!' shouted Kircher and spun around aiming the Hellgun at the sergeant.

'Kircher not at me!' he shouted batting the barrel away. 'We gotta move private!'

And with that Tamaguchi grabbed Kircher by the collar and led them down the left side of the Mektrukk. They fired through every vision slit and armoured window they came upon. And threw grenades down every exhaust vent, ventilation shaft, or gun turret they encountered. Soon smoke and flame was pouring out from all over the Mektrukk.

'No grenades! And don't shoot indiscriminately! We don't want to blow ourselves up!' said Rembault looking down the ladder at Lankenua and Rollo. And with one hand on the ladder and her bolt pistol in the other she yelled, 'On my mark, go!'

In usual Orky fashion, health and safety precautions were the last thing on the minds of the gunz crew. The Spanna Boy in charge was too busy looking through his orky periscope, and shouting orders to his beleaguered Grot crew, to ever think of closing either of the turret doors. And the poor Grots were too busy running around in circles trying to follow their boss's crazed instructions; since once an order was given, he immediately countermanded it. Soon, however, their weary bones would be laid to rest forever.

Lankenua and Rollo each hung on the side of the turret by one hand; and opened fire when the commissar yelled loudly, 'Oi!'

The Spanna Boy spun around, and was literally sliced into pieces from the waist up, by the two lasrifles. The commissar hanging from the turret door, now spun around to pick off individual Grots with her bolt pistol. In ten seconds it was all over; and the dismembered Spanna Boy and his six departed Grots were strewn all about the turret floor.

‘Go, go, go!’ yelled the commissar dropping from the turret. Rollo and Lankenua followed soon after her.

Tamaguchi and his team reached the prow at the same time Rembault and her team reached it. The two teams then rushed back over the dozer blade; while the sergeant and commissar brought up the rear. Tamaguchi looked at Rembault and nodded; and the two turned to leap back over the dozer blade. Then a wide hatch at the front of the citadel burst open, and out stepped the Bad Moon Big Mek and his mob of Lootas and Flazgitz. He clanked forward in his yellow meganob armour with kustom force field. Swinging a two-handed, twin bladed chain axe he pointed at Rembault, and yelled, ‘Komissar so it waz youse wot wrecked my Mektrukk, eh?!’ But then pointing at Tamaguchi said, ‘You an’ whoeva dat guy iz!’

The sergeant and the commissar both dropped down low, as bolts of energy and high calibre fire flew in their direction. Kircher and the teams answered with their own hail of gold and green lasfire. But the intense wall of las fire only bounced off the glowing energy field. Then Kircher screamed like a madman and let fly with a concentrated fusillade aimed directly at the Big Mek. The energy field turned a rainbow of colours and buckled. But then exploded when Rollo threw his overheating lasrifle at it. The combination blast of the exploding lasrifle and the collapsing energy shield, smashed the Flazgitz and Spanna Boyz flat against the deck. Unperturbed by either the loss of his support crew, or his kustom force field, the Big Mek came on swinging his axe. ‘Youse gonna pay wif yer teef fer my Mektrukk!’

‘We gotta rush him Commissar. Are you with me?’ yelled Tamaguchi to Rembault with his face on the deck.

‘Did that bolter round crack your skull Rokk?’ she yelled back with her face also on the deck.

‘I’m going in anyway!’ he shouted, and getting up, rushed forward.

‘Shite!’ she yelled and rushed after him.

Getting in close enough to swing at the Big Mek, Tamaguchi saw his chainaxe merely spark against the iron jaw of the Meganob armour. The Big Mek yelled in fury at the small human; but got truly enraged when the pulse pistol began making holes in his armour. Finally, in desperation the Big Mek shoved the sergeant back with one armoured hand. And Tamaguchi flew backwards slipping half-off the prow. But Rembault stood up and fired point blank with her bolt pistol into the Ork’s face. Most shots were again deflected off the iron jaw; but one round took out the Big Mek’s augmented left eye. The Big Mek in yelled utter rage, and his armour shook and rattled, sending off sparks and smoke. And with an armoured back hand swept Commissar Rembault off her feet, and back against the dozer blade.

Kircher was now the only one left firing, as the other’s lasrifles had begun to overheat. A stream of gold lasrounds now splashed against the Ork’s armour. Many finding purchase, as sparks flew, or pieces of armour plate began to crack and fall off. The cascade of golden lasrounds suddenly stopped, as the Hellgun’s earth caste designed fail-safe kicked in. But this was all the time Tamaguchi needed, and scrambling to his feet, he rushed the Big Mek once more.

‘Wot you again? Dis is getting’ annoyin’!’ roared the Big Mek and swung the his two-handed chainax. The screaming ork weapon slammed into Tamaguchi’s chest and knocked him over the side.

‘Dat’ll show ya!’ yelled the Big Mek in triumph.

But his victory was short lived when Abdulov’s twin-linked heavy bolters opened up on him. Without the protection of his kustom force field, and with all the damage already done to his Meganob armour, he was finally done in. And so with all the mechanicals of his armour smoking; and with his

hydraulics catching fire, he toppled backwards onto the prow. Fire and smoke enveloped him, as the Megtrukk itself now exploded in a ball of fire, smoke, and flying metal.

Seeing the untimely demise of their boss, the Bad Moon Spanna Boyz and Grots came to the sudden realization that they were all now independent contractors or Freebootaz. As such they took the opportunity to look for employment elsewhere; and so tore off into the desert on every bike, buggy, or wartrakk that could still move under its own power.

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Tamaguchi woke up to find himself propped up against the side of Bait Squad's Chimera. Looking around he could see both the burning Mektrukk and the Big Truk off in the distance. Sitting on the ground to his right was Commissar Rembault; and all around him were the other members of Bait Squad. He looked down at his cuirass, which was sliced open from his right shoulder down to his hip. He peeled back the pieces of the armour and the torn underbody suit; and saw a long red laceration in the same place where the chainaxe had cut his armour.

'Damn, I did it again...I looked death in the eye twice in one day and lived! DAMN I DID IT TWICE IN ONE DAY!' he yelled; but then coughed when he felt the pain in his chest.

There was a collective shout from all of Bait Squad; and they all moved in to shake his hand, or put a hand on his chest.

'So did we all make it? Or did we loose anybody...Abdulov, Ugula, Timocescu, Rollo, Lankenua, Gildmann, and Kircher...' he said. 'Wait where's Frucelli?'

'Right here Sergeant Rokk,' said Frucelli standing to Tamaguchi's immediate left.

'Good, we're all here then!' But then looking over at the commissar said, 'Looks like you're here too Commissar Rembault. What did that Ork do to you, pimp slap ya?'

The commissar's cuirass had a big dent right across the middle; and although scarred and bruised, the commissar was very much alive.

'Go frak yourself Sergeant Heretic!' she replied smiling at him through bruised lips.

'Love you too dear,' he said.

Now looking over at the Private Kircher he said, 'Going a little crazy there with the Hellgun weren't we private? And what's with the, "*Die you fat squig!*" What the hell was that all about?'

'I don't know Sergeant Rokk. I think maybe it was the j'hal that got me going,' said Kircher looking embarrassed.

'So, you think it was the j'hal, uh? Private that won't fly; because a single packet of concentrated j'hal nectar, ain't got the stimulant a single cup of recaf does. It's all in your head Kircher.'

Kircher looked sheepish and just shrugged his shoulders.

'Good work there private. Don't let anyone take that away from you!'

Kircher beamed a big smile at the sergeant.

Then to Abdulov he said, 'Private you shot down two Big Meks in one engagement. You understand the rest of your career; you'll probably never have another day like this one? Putting you in for the *Silver Skull Imperialis*. That'll sure make up for not shooting my fat traitorous ass now doesn't it?'

'Yes, Sergeant Rokk,' she said laughing.

'Lance Corporal, front and centre!' said Tamaguchi loudly.

Rollo removed his helmet and took a knee in front of the sergeant. He looked as solemn and sober as if he was standing before at a Lord High General.

'Lance Corporal Rollo, I'll be speaking to Lieutenant Mahin about your actions today. If I were writing the citation, it would probably read something like, "*While he and his track repair team were under fire from the enemy, Lance Corporal Rollo led the repair of the damaged Chimera transport. And although being injured by the collision of an Ork buggy; and suffering a severe loss of blood, he still*

*continued with the repairs. Finishing the said repair, he then took up his lasrifle and met the enemy with both lasfire and bayonet. It is thereby recommended that the Lance Corporal Rollo be given the Medallion Crimson for his extraordinary bravery and steadfastness in combat while wounded. Also, that he be promoted to the rank of sergeant in the Astra Militarum of Cadia.*” Well, that’s how it would read if I were writing it anyway.’

The stalwart Rollo then bent his head and let loose with a stream of tears. His whole body shook as he looked up at Tamaguchi and said, ‘I didn’t think I was going to make it Sergeant Rokk, but I just couldn’t let you down!’

The sergeant motioned for him to come closer, and putting his hand on his neck said, ‘That’s alright Lance Corporal Rollo, you can relax it’s all over now.’

The rest of Bait Squad then piled in around Rollo; and even Rembault leaned over to put a hand on Rollo’s shoulder.

‘Now for the two of you Gildmann and Timocescu, I’m recommending that you receive the *Medallion Crimson Minoris*, for the both of you fighting while being wounded. And for all of you in Bait Squad, I’m recommending the *Ribbon Intrinsic*. Hope the Lieutenant will make it happen for all of you.’

Just then the sky was rent with the thunderous roar of two Imperial Navy Thunderbolts passing over head. A minute later, two more Thunderbolts passed over head. Ten seconds later the buzzing rattle of autocannons and explosions from missiles could be heard in the distance. Meanwhile, the rest of the platoon now came down from the ridge lines. Scout bikes and scout cars piled high with guardsmen now made their way to the battle site.

‘Well you’ll be getting home safe tonight that’s for sure,’ said Tamaguchi to his squad. ‘All y’all now go see if the lieutenant needs you to do anything.’



The squad gave their nods or grunts of acknowledgement and went to check on the Chimera, or to help with the wounded brought down on the scout cars.

‘Private Kircher you stay with Sergeant Heretic. I’m going to head over and meet the lieutenant who’s coming our way,’ said the commissar.

Kircher nodded as he helped her get up, but then stayed with the sergeant.

‘Uh, I think this is yours Sergeant Rokk,’ said Kircher handing the sergeant a broken metallic ball.

‘Ah, my recon drone...,’ he said looking at the big hole in the tiny drone. Then he asked, ‘What’s your first name private?’

‘Max. It’s short for Maximilian,’ said Kircher sitting down next to the sergeant. ‘Uh, sergeant, I wasn’t going to shoot you, you know. Back there on the Mektrukk I mean.’

‘I know that Max,’ said the sergeant now looking through his medi kit.

Kircher sat there fidgeting with the Hellgun; until he finally got up enough courage to ask, ‘Sergeant Rokk, why did I have to wear the helmet when I had the Hellgun?’

‘Oh, that’s a military secret private,’ said Tamaguchi looking around. ‘Here give me the helmet, and I’ll show you how it works. Now try to take a shot at the wreck over there.’

‘But it over heated sergeant...’ said Kircher handing him the helmet.

‘Trust me it’s cooled off by now...Just go ahead and try it.’

Kircher aimed at the wreck of a yellow buggy and squeezed the trigger, but nothing happened. He looked at the Hellgun and asked, ‘Did I have the safety on?’

‘No, you just weren’t wearing the helmet is all,’ he said as he plopped the helmet on Kircher’s head.

‘Go ahead, and try it again.’

This time there was mass of golden-white lasrounds from the Hellgun that blew a chunk of metal off the buggy.

‘Whoa, how does it do that?’

‘A signal from the helmet tells the rifle that...uh, it tells the rifle’s *machine spirit*, that a friendly is holding the weapon. And that allows the Hellgun to fire. *But don’t go telling anybody that!*’

‘Sure thing Sergeant Rokk,’ said Kircher handing over the rifle and helmet.

Sergeant Tamaguchi took the items, but then looked at Kircher and said, ‘Don’t do it private.’

‘Do what?’

‘Don’t play stupid with me Max. You heard me. *Don’t-do-it!*’

‘What, I don’t understand...’

Tamaguchi looked all around and in a low voice said, ‘*Don’t desert. I know you’re thinking about it.*’

‘How’d you know?!’ asked Kircher going all wide eyed. ‘Are you like a psyker?’

‘No Max! I’ve just been a sergeant for a long time. And I can read people, especially privates, really well.’

‘But I want to serve in your command Sergeant Rokk!’

‘Well, if you do what I say, you will Max.’

Tamaguchi leaned forward to pull open his underbody suit. And as he wiped down the cut across his chest he said, ‘*Nobody likes a deserter Max. But, in your next engagement do this. Stay low, and if your unit pulls out, then hang back. Then before you stand up yell out loud, “I surrender and I am asking for asylum!” Whether they’re Tau firewarriors or Gue’vesa soldiers, they’ll understand that. So that’s what you do, stay low, hang back, yell out that you want to surrender, and then ask for asylum. You got that?*’

‘Yes, Sergeant Rokk! Hang back, stay low, yell out surrender, and ask for asylum. But how will I get to you?’

‘Just ask for First Sergeant Rokk A. Tamaguchi; and they’ll get you to my regiment. Beside, I’ll put out the word that a Private Maximilian Kircher is looking for asylum. And that he wants to join the 7th Mu’gulath Bay regiment.’

‘Thanks Sergeant Rokk!’

'You're welcome private,' said Tamaguchi spraying tissue re-builder across the laceration on his chest. And then said, 'Damn I'm ready to eat! I don't know about you private, but I'm hungry.'

Standing up Tamaguchi looked around the scene before him, the Big Trukk and the Mektrukk still burned, though the Big Trukk's fire still produced the most intense smoke. The second Chimera was now an aid station; with Private Crumb treating the wounded that were coming in. Out to the horizon the Thunderbolts were still circling, hitting the occasional Ork buggy or trukkk that they'd missed. The Venator now rolled up to Tamaguchi with the body of a Guardsman wrapped in canvas and strapped into the passenger side seat. The soaked canvas dripping blood onto the ground as it stopped. Sergeant Demin stepped off the back of the damaged six wheeled vehicle; and pulling off his helmet revealed a bandage that covered the whole left side of his face.

Looking exhausted he glanced over at Tamaguchi and asked, 'How many did you loose Sergeant?'

'Nobody, but we got chewed up pretty well. Out of the ten of us, eight were wounded, including myself and the commissar.'

'Corporal Kornuta and I were both wounded. But I lost Private Sanchez.' Demin pointed to the Venator and said, 'Before we even knew it a punk-ass Grot, on a punk-ass wartrakk, with a punk-ass rokket launcher, rolled up on us out of nowhere. And frak-it-all-to-hell he didn't even hit us! Instead, he slammed the rokket into the dirt next to the Venator; but the shrapnel still took out the left lascannon power cables, and ripped up the side of my face. Kornuta got a piece of shrapnel too; but sonofabitch, if a piece didn't cut Sanchez right across the throat. She bled out before we could even break out a bandage.'

'Damn Sergeant Demin, I'm sorry to hear that,' replied Tamaguchi.

'Yeah, well losing someone in your command is always a bitch. What the hell am I saying, you *know* what that's like?!

'Yeah, I do. But you and your team sure did some fine shooting today Sergeant Demin.'

‘Thanks Sergeant Tamaguchi. Hey, what the hell happened to you?’ said Demin staring at the torn underbody suit.

‘Caught a chainaxe across the chest, but the damned xenos nanocrystalline armour saved my life again!’

‘What’s that like, twice in one day?’

‘Yep!’ smiled Tamaguchi.

The sergeant now watched Demin and Kornuta help another soldier remove the body of Sanchez from the Venator. He was still watching when Lieutenant Mahin and Colour Sergeant Ugabe stepped up next to him. He turned and saluted the lieutenant.

‘A moment of your time Sergeant Tamaguchi?’ asked Mahin returning his salute.

‘Certainly ma’am,’ he replied. The three of them strode a little ways from the Venator.

‘Sergeant Tamaguchi, I wanted to let you know that Commissar Rembault has given me your recommendations for awards and citations for Bait Squad. And I will do my best to see them fulfilled; and had you still been a member of the Cadian Guard, I would’ve been putting you in for one too sergeant.’

‘Well thank you ma’am,’ he said nodding to her; but then asked, ‘May I point out lieutenant, that you just called me Tamaguchi?’

‘I did. I guess it’s because to me it’s a matter of, *Once a Cadian, Always a Cadian*. I really don’t think you could have done what you did today; if you hadn’t of been raised and trained on Cadia. So, have you given any thought sergeant to returning to the bosom of the God Emperor?’

‘Hmm...I would be lying if I said I hadn’t Lieutenant Mahin; and I’ll give it some serious thought,’ he said smiling warmly at the lieutenant. ‘That reminds me, please put Private Kircher in for a citation. At the last minute he took out a bomb squig headed for the open doors of the Chimera, while wounded

were being treated inside. He also helped take down that Bad Moon Big Mek. I would be grateful if you did that for me lieutenant.'

'Have you got all of that Sergeant Ugabe?' asked the lieutenant of her colour sergeant.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Alright, the sergeant here has a thing or two to say to you Sergeant Tamaguchi. And let me say right now, that she speaks for the both of us.'

'Oh,' he replied taken aback.

'Sergeant Tamaguchi, as it turns out you were right about the Orks, and right about the ambush. And it turns out you were right about... ' Ugabe paused as Thunderbolts flew low over head wagging the wings at the Guardsmen below. '*...And as it turns out calling in the Navy for close air support!*' she yelled over the sound of the roaring aircraft. 'But what the lieutenant and I want to say is, we're proud to have had you under our command. And we both, would have been proud to serve under your command.'

Tamaguchi gulped and blushing a bright pink, looked at both the lieutenant and the sergeant saying, 'Sergeant Ugabe, that's the *Soldier's Compliment*. I don't know if what I did today could ever warrant such respect.'

'Well, we both think you do Sergeant,' said Ugabe and Mahin both saluting the sergeant.

Tamaguchi was flummoxed at this, and only hesitantly saluted back. The two Cadians then each shook his hand.

'Sergeant Tamaguchi, I hope you make up your mind about rejoining the Imperium, as we're heading out of the area shortly. But if you don't, I wouldn't want to hang around here too long; because I'm sure the will be Orks heading back here soon.'

'Absolutely ma'am,' he replied. Then noticing that Sergeant Demin was standing to one side asked,

'Sergeant, is there something I can do for you?'

Demin walked over and handed him a Gue'vesa helmet saying, 'Here, I was going to keep it as a souvenir, but then I thought you'd want to keep it.'

Tamaguchi took the helmet and noticed his name written at the back in Low Gothic and Tau'sia. And then turning it around to the front, saw the bolter hole just left of centre. He then placed his own helmet on his head, being careful get the comlink antenna attached correctly. 'Thank you sergeant.'

Tamaguchi shook everyone's hand and then headed back to Bait Squad's Chimera. He yelled over to Rollo who was cutting away the bodies of his two late Gue'vesa companions.

'Lance Corporal leave both bodies on top, and then drive me back to the body pile.'

'Sure Sergeant Rokk, but what are you doing?'

'I have one more duty to perform Rollo,' he said pulling a shovel off the side of the Chimera.

'Sure thing sergeant, it would be an honour,' he replied nodding to Tamaguchi.

Bait squad then helped get both bodies secured on the top of Chimera. Tamaguchi threw the extra helmet, his broken cuirass, and the shovel on top with the bodies; and then put a boot on the track to start the climb up top.

'Sergeant Heretic, you and I still have business to conduct!' someone shouted.

Tamaguchi turned around and to see Commissar Rembault with her bolter drawn, and her other hand on the chainsword.

'Are we really doing this commissar?' he asked slumping down with his back to the Chimera. He motioned to Rollo for the shovel; and taking it from him then walked slowly up to the commissar.

Rembault responded by firing up the chainsword and aiming her bolter at him.

'What the frak commissar? After everything that happened to day, you still don't trust me? Do you think I'm about to attack you or something?' he said pushing the shovel blade into the ground.

She stood looking at him with her eyes half hidden by the bill of her peaked hat. Minus her cuirass, the gold braid of her jacket and her red sash now glowed in the afternoon light. Her chest heaved up and

down as she took aim at the sergeant. ‘Sergeant you and I fought well today. All of Bait Squad fought well today. And that’s a memory I will carry with me the rest of my life; but First Sergeant Rokken A. Tamaguchi you are still a deserter...’

Tamaguchi lifted the shovel to his shoulders and took a step forward.

‘...Your are a traitor...’ she said re-centering her aim on the sergeant.

He took another step.

‘...And a heretic.’

‘Commissar he saved your life today!’ screamed Lankenua as the sergeant took another step.

‘...Yes, private he did. And I saved his life too.’

‘Commissar, you have your duty to perform for the Emperor. But I have one last duty to perform to myself,’ he held the shovel in both hands, offering it to the commissar. ‘One last duty to my command, and to my mates. Please, let me bury them before you execute me? Hell, I’ll even dig my own grave for you,’ he said looking tired and sore.

‘Sorry Rokk, but my duty to the Emperor trumps everything. But, I’ll let Bait Squad give you and yours, an honourable burial...’

‘The hell you will!’ said Tamaguchi flicking the shovel off his shoulder so fast, that he slapped the bolt pistol right out of her hand. However, Rembault was still quick with the chainsword, and swung it at Tamaguchi’s head. But he struck with the shovel the inside her elbow, which stopping her arm mid-strike. Rembault lost her grip on the chainsword, and the centrifugal force caused it to tear itself away from her hand. Spinning out of control, the chainsword hit the ground, and shot dirt and rocks into the air. The sergeant then struck her full force with the flat of the shovel and Rembault went down hard.

‘Frak commissar...’ panted Tamaguchi. ‘...How many times do I have to tell you. *Wear-your-frakking-gorramhelmet!*’

And with that he stumbled backwards, just managing to prop himself up with the shovel.

‘Shoot her!’ someone screamed.

Tamaguchi looked up to see nearly everyone in Bait Squad was aiming their lasrifles at Rembault. Then looking around, he could see the lieutenant and colour sergeant were rushing forward with drawn pistols; accompanied by other armed Cadian guardsmen. Rollo jumped down off the Chimera and running up to the commissar, put a lasrifle in her face.

Abdulov snatched up the commissar’s bolt pistol and handed it to Tamaguchi.

‘I’m not going to do that private,’ he said waving away the bolter.

‘Go ahead and shoot her!’ yelled Rollo.

‘Why don’t you shoot her?’ yelled Abdulov.

‘I don’t know...*The Greater Good?*’

You’d have thought the sergeant had gut punched the entire platoon when he said those words. But the affect on them was just the same – stunned silence.

‘C’mon somebody give me a hand with her?!’ said Tamaguchi getting down to pull up the commissar. Slowly, one-at-a-time, Bait Squad came back to life. Kircher and Frucelli came to help Tamaguchi carry her off to the second Chimera.

‘Why?’ asked Rollo stepping in the help.

‘Rollo...everybody, she was just doing her job!’ yelled Tamaguchi. ‘If she didn’t do it, she’d just end up shot; but now that’s the best she can hope for...’ said Tamaguchi easing the unconscious Rembault down on to the tarp. Private Crumb examined her head and neck; while another private tried to revive her with an ammonia capsule.

‘...Worse case scenario they’ll strip her of her red sash, flog her, and then send her to a penal battalion. And believe you me, if you’ve ever seen a penal battalion, you’ll know it’s a fate worse than death.’



‘Everyone, there’s nothing more to see here. Pack up your gear and get ready to mount up. We’re leaving in fifteen!’ shouted Lieutenant Mahin. Turning to Tamaguchi she said, ‘No more worries sergeant, we’ll take her into custody.’

‘Not a problem, but let me be sure she’s okay first,’ he answered her.

Rembault rolled her eyes side-to-side and her head bobbed back and forth. Then the ammonia kicked in, and she gagged; and then pushing the medic’s hand away, she gasped for air.

‘Frak sergeant, why didn’t you just kill me? Why this?’ said the commissar.

‘Gorram commissar, you and I fought side-by-side today! Bait Squad couldn’t have done it without you. Hell, I couldn’t have done it without you! There was no good reason to kill you, for you just doing your job, now was there?’

Crumb helped her sit up and then began wiping away the blood on the right side of her face. ‘You should have still shot me Sergeant Tamaguchi.’

‘Here suck one of these down. It’ll help with the swelling and the pain,’ he said handing her a small blue packet.

‘Yeech, that’s awful!’ she said twisting up her face.

Tamaguchi sat down next to the commissar and taking out a small black disk from his left cargo pocket said to her, ‘You know earlier today you asked me why I fought for the Tau; and I didn’t give you an answer. I guess it’s time I did.’

She looked at him confused, and as the medic started to bandage her head said, ‘I think it’s too late for that...’

‘Nah, we got a few minutes yet. And besides, if you’re going to stand before a firing squad, I least owe you an answer.’ Tamaguchi looked around and watched the Cadians gathering up their equipment and packing it away in the scout cars and on the Chimeras.

‘You know I could you tell all about the Greater Good; and how it fulfils the promise of the Emperor: liberty, equality, fraternity. Or I could talk to you about the freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Hell, I could go on for hours about the right of self-determination, self-governance, and representative democracy. And especially about the classless society that has no “betters” or “inferiors”; where all are equal under the law. You know I could talk about all of that; but let me *show you*, the four reasons why I fight for the Tau.’

Tamaguchi shook the disk four times, and then gently rubbed his fingers over it once or twice. There appeared hovering over the disk, a hologram of a woman with two young boys. All three waved and blew kisses at the viewer; while their lips silently said, “*Love you dad!*”

‘Now I said there were four reasons, but my daughter was still in her mother’s tummy, when they made this for me. So, these four are why I fight for the T’au Empire. As you can see, it puts a lie to all that crap about forced sterilizations, deportations, and genocide. That’s all just Gue’la propaganda anyway. My children will all grow up with clean air, clean water, healthy food, free education, and free healthcare. And what’s more, they’ll learn that all sentient life is sacred. And that there is no such thing as a “filthy xenos”. And they’ll learn that there is nothing to fear from those who are different from them.’

Tamaguchi stopped and putting a hand on Rembault’s knee and said to her, ‘To live without fear is probably the single greatest gift the Tau have given us.’ Then looking up, he saw that all of Bait Squad and half the platoon, were standing there hanging on his every word. Blinking a couple of times, he smiled, scratched his head and said, ‘Well, that’s all I’ve got.’

‘You’ve said more than enough sergeant,’ said Commissar Rembault smiling while lighting a tabac stick. ‘Now, I really do have to shoot you.’

‘But you won’t commissar. Once the private here binds your hands, you’re getting in the Chimera,’ said Colour Sergeant Ugabe yanking the tabac stick from her mouth. And while tossing it away she asked, ‘Can I give you a lift Sergeant Tamaguchi?’

‘Sure, you can take me and my mates back to the body pile, I still have that last duty to perform.’

‘Mount up then sergeant.’

The platoon finished loading up, but heading back to the body pile. Rollo and the rest of Bait Squad wanted to stay and help bury Tamaguchi’s platoon; but had to settle with helping remove the bodies of his friends from the top of the Chimera. Then there was shaking of hands all around with Bait Squad. Rollo was confused and sad. Kircher was sad but beaming with pride. Abdulov and Ugula had to fight back the tears. And the rest just kept their heads down, trying to keep their sadness from showing.

‘Good job everyone. I’m proud to have had you with me today,’ said Tamaguchi. He watched them walk up the ramp into the Chimera; when Kircher suddenly turned around and blurted out, ‘Sergeant Roky, what is the Greater Good?’

Tamaguchi furrowed his red eyebrows, and scratching his neck said, ‘You picked a helluva time to ask me that private!’ Then looking at the ground for a moment he said, ‘I’ll give it to you in five words:

*“I am, because we are.”*

‘Uh?’

‘Just let that roll around in your head Max...like for the rest of your life.’

And with that Abdulov grabbed Kircher by the sleeve and pulled him into the Chimera. And whole column started to roll past Tamaguchi; but the last scout car containing Lieutenant Mahin stopped in front of him. She waved him over and he saluted, ‘Yes, lieutenant?’

‘You can give me back that shovel Sergeant Tamaguchi, I don’t think you really need it do you?’ she asked returning the salute. ‘The Navy Thunderbolts are pulling out since they spotted three inbound Barracudas. And right behind them are a couple of Devilfish and a Piranha heading our way. Bet your

Tau *vesas* know exactly where you are don't they? And I'd bet you've been in contact with them the whole time haven't you?" she said pointing to his comlink antenna.

'Hmm...that sounds about right ma'am,' he said with a half-smile. Then stowing away the shovel in the scout car he said, 'Honestly, lieutenant they were never far away to begin with.'

'Take care sergeant,' said the lieutenant.

'You too ma'am,' he said as the scout car pulled away.

Tamaguchi watched as the column headed through the gap in the ridge line, and then turned north-east in the direction of the Gue'la main force. Now looking towards the west, the evening sky was rent with the roar a triple flight of AX-5-2 fighters. An incoming voice transmission came across his comlink. <<Sar'jent Ta'ma'gu'chi. Sar'jent Ta'ma'gu'chi. Kor'Ui'T'au Nersuu'hui noh ta Sar'jent Ta'ma'gu'chi....>>

<<Gue'vesa'vre Sar'jent Ta'ma'gu'chi noh ta.>>

<<Tau'va'ea Gue'vesa'vre!>>

<<Tau'va'ea Kor'ui!>>

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