



SWIFT RESOLUTION

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How green. Colonel Jalla Kolm peered down at the planet from the tertiary observation deck of a Lunar-class cruiser. *His Hasteful Wrath* was delivering her new regiment, as instruments of the God-Emperor's will, to their first posting.

Squire's Rest. She had read up after receiving her assignment, of course. One did not earn the honour and privilege of leading the reconstituted Ninth Cadian Armoured without making a habit of due diligence.

It was technically an agri world, but rather than being run with the usual ruthless efficiency, it served as a retirement community for the Astra Militarum's finest and fewest: officers who lived to an age impressive enough, and with a record accomplished enough, that the Emperor granted them a reward other than His mercy. It was a place of great green plains and gently rolling hills, with a few black-stoned mountain ranges jutting up throughout.

Squire's Rest had been a beautiful, comfortable world, troubled by only sporadic xenos raiding.

But then the Red Waaagh! had crashed over it and dashed against nearby Alaric Prime. Officially, as the triumphant preachers announced, the Waaagh! was broken, the system saved, the filthy xenos cleansed. Kolm knew better. Just as Squire's Rest was only *technically* an agri world, it had only *technically* been made safe. Ignored orks turned from nuisance infestation to planetary threat.

The regiments aboard *His Hasteful Wrath* were here to finish the job before it got any worse. Looking down from so far away, it was easy to imagine the world as peaceful. Kolm's mind wandered to Cadia's lush greenery. Her memory was teased by the redolent, verdant smell of the Vasani Moors. It was a scent she had not found anywhere else. Not since her last visit, fresh from the Whiteshields and commissioned to the Interior Guard. Before the Fall.

'Terribly green, indeed,' Kolm said softly, not quite meaning to speak aloud.

'Yes, ma'am, altogether too green,' her adjutant, Major Lankyn, said from behind her. 'But we will remedy that!'

His features were appropriately stern, his salt-and-pepper moustache perfectly regulation length. Lankyn was reliable to the point of predictability. Kolm cleared her throat.

'Regimental disposition?' she asked, as though her mind had been purely on business all along. She was well aware of her youth compared to Lankyn's near-fifty years. Her promotions since transfer had come swiftly, and it was her duty to show they had not come unearned. She needed Major Lankyn himself to see it, perhaps most of all. There weren't enough Cadians left to let resentment fester.

'Unloaded, now reloading, ma'am. Delays.' Her Cadian Ninth Armoured had a great deal that needed to be loaded aboard *His Hasteful Wrath*'s landers. 'Mechanical issues, I'm told.'

'Better they find a shuttle malfunction now than on our way down,' she reminded him. Lander troubles were a terror to those who belonged with their boots, or treads, on the ground. 'Here's hoping we can land with some alacrity once it's fixed, though. Sooner started, sooner finished.'

Kolm looked back down at Squire's Rest. She would see the 'beautiful' world as it was soon enough – the smoke and the blood, not just greenery. She knew what a world at war looked like; they did not stay beautiful for long. Ask Armageddon. Ask Cadia.

'High command has ordered a thorough resolution to this affair,' she said. 'We shall have our work cut out for us.'

'That we shall, colonel, and more,' said Commissar Andris Rafe. He strode their way, black leather storm coat spreading behind him like the shadowed wings of an ill-omened bird of myth. His age was nearer to Lankyn's fifty than Kolm's thirty, and he was fresh off a decade's assignment with a feral regiment that had left him scarred and tattooed in equal measure. As Cadian as any, he had earned the right to rotate back to a Cadian regiment, and Kolm was glad to have him.

'I've just received word from Captain Sylvestroe and War-Marshal Trevinska,' he continued. 'A general recall has been sounded, fleet and Militarum alike. Trouble elsewhere. The other regiments are no longer making ready for disembarkation, but returning to their bays to be disarmed for warp travel.'

'The *other* regiments?' Kolm noted with a raised eyebrow.

'Answering entreaties from the planetary government and already half-aboard our shuttles, *we* are still deploying.' Rafe was a man who relished a challenge, but Kolm could tell the commissar understood the weight of his words. His scarred features were grim beneath his distinctive peaked cap. 'Alone.'

The quiet that followed reminded Kolm of the silence that invariably filled the air just after a commissarial execution – a special sort of hush that lasted until the body and the bolter shell hit the floor.

'Well then, gentlemen, to work.' Rather than merely waiting for that silence to end, Colonel Kolm took the responsibility herself, leading them to the shuttle bays and their loading regiment. 'If we are all that stands in the way of *His Hasteful Wrath* obeying a recall, we must move with speed. And if we are all that will stand between Squire's Rest and the green tide of Zagboss Krakthunda,

we must move with certainty, as well.'

Colonel Kolm stood in her command tent hours later, on the surface of Squire's Rest. Somewhere far overhead, their massive landers were lumbering back across the sky. Empty.

'Our situation is as follows,' she began. Around her stood all her officers but the most junior, who busied themselves outside arraying and inspecting the regiment. She had not spread the details of their new orders throughout the ranks prior to planetfall – the news would have helped neither their morale nor their speed.

'The fleet has been recalled, and with it our support. Neither the Valhallans nor the Mordians will be joining us. We of the Ninth Armoured are alone on Squire's Rest until further notice, with no idea when that further notice, much less reinforcement, may arrive.'

Her voice was grim, but then so was the situation. It was difficult, if not impossible, for the machine spirits of an armoured column to keep up with swarming foot troops, for auspexes and viewports to track the threats of oncoming infantry. Tanks without troopers were as vulnerable as troopers without tanks.

And everyone in the galaxy knew that the orks invariably brought *both*, in numbers. The regiments had been coordinating a balanced, unified response to the greenskins of Waaagh! Krakthunda. But now...

She saw the seriousness, the precariousness, of their strategic position reflected back at her in the grim visages of her company commanders. They understood.

'Per *Tactica Imperium* writings, the prudent move is to fortify and preserve what productivity remains nearby.' Major Lankyn gestured vaguely in the direction of 'nearby'. Their command bunker was in the planetary capital, Ascra, the largest city on-planet. It would do.

Kolm shook her head slightly.

'You are correct, major, that the statistically favourable action for the longest term would be fortification. That does not matter, though. The God-Emperor blessed this regiment with armour, and we shall use it. We are not here to hold a position, to cling by humanity's fingernails to some tiny corner of a planet as it fills with xenos. Our orders are not to surrender a world that we might survive. The Ninth are ordered to cleanse Squire's Rest, and we will.'

Or die trying.

Kolm held the older man's gaze for only the first part of her announcement; she didn't want to give the appearance of rubbing it in, of making it personal. Her decision hadn't been made rashly, and now that it was made, it needed to be followed.

She looked to her other officers as she continued. All were lit from below by the harsh green of her holo-vid display, and she occasionally punctuated a sentence by pressing a button, prompting runes of obeisance along with streams of data or a fresh map to display.

'Engineer Ahsa-Suhar has liaised with the planetary defence militia's tech-priests and been apprised of local resupply capabilities.' Kolm glanced to the looming, augmented woman, whose robes, the red of the Priesthood of Mars, clashed with the rest of the regiment's fatigues. 'They are... imperfect. They have civilian transports with minimal armament. Essentially nothing for offence. We will use them to re-establish supply transfers from otherwise-isolated population centres, allowing us to redistribute ammunition, fuel, and other materiel as needed. A fraction of our forces will accompany them, punch them through and keep them safe.'

'Indeed we shall. And blessing their engines, all the while.' Ahsa-Suhar's cyber-optics gleamed eagerly, mechadendrites stirring like a cat's tail, adjusting her balance a hundred times a second. Kolm was eager to see how fast the engineer could urge their machine spirits across these plains.

'Commissar Rafe has conferred with the planetary defence militia's leadership.' Kolm inclined her head slightly. 'He has explained that we will largely leave security operations to them. They have the training, equipment, and inclination to hold walls. *We* will attack. The greenskins have taken enough of Squire's Rest. It is time Squire's Rest took it back.'

The commissar gave her a sharp nod and a sharper smile. She could hear him eagerly clenching his power fist, its servos whining quietly. Kolm's map flickered and shifted to show the continent proper. The terrain *was* the objective. It was a sprawling affair, and most of it xenos-claimed.

'How do you eat an ambull?' The colonel offered up one of the Astra Militarum's oldest jokes. None rose to the bait, so she answered her own rhetorical question. 'With faith, a heavy flamer, and one bite at a time.'

That was how they would retake this world. She gave it just a moment for a few to smile ruefully and a few others to groan, before pressing on.

'After establishing resupply, we seize the initiative and begin in earnest. We will strike here. Our first bite.' Kolm's fingers danced and her holo-table zoomed in response. 'A regional agri-supply maintenance depot. These hold fuel, feed, mega-harvester parts, and more. The xenos have been claiming them, raising one banner or another, greenskin infighting. We'll settle it by taking it back from them and establishing our own forward base.'

The holo-map flickered.

'From there, we do it again. A steady cadence of reconnoitre, raid, and recovery. We will set the pace, and not let up. We will find

where the xenos nests and builds, and we will dig him from those places. Then we will do it again. Bite after bite.'

As she spoke methodically, the map updated.

'Squire's Rest appeared to have been won, ladies and gentlemen, but it is not appearances I am concerned with,' she reminded them. 'We will roll up our sleeves, dirty our hands, and clear it. Root and stem, we will pull the greenskins from this place and put them to the torch.'

'Questions?' she asked, and was pleased to receive none. She was more pleased with the grim smiles she saw, faces turned hard as statues by the cool light of the holo-table, eyes sharp and ready.

'The Emperor protects, Cadia stands...' she began.

'The Ninth charges!' the answer was barked back to her by one and all.

'The Ninth charges,' Kolm growled months later, giving voice to her resolve, matching the snarl of her chainsword's whirring blade.

Her plasteel-toed boots thumped against the roof of *Loyalty's Haven*, a Chimera. Squire's Rest's grasslands blurred by beneath them as their convoy raced and fought. Once-green fields were churned black with oily mud, smouldering here and there and dotted with smoking ruins. The whole world was a former battlefield, now.

Kolm used the Chimera's momentum to add to her own as she charged and struck at a looming ork boarder. The beast lost its gun-hand with her first swing, her chainsword hacking brutally through the ork's wrist. It bellowed and swung its oversized cleaver at her, but sparks flew as she deflected the blow. Then the creature's furious backhand was parried high and wide.

Kolm punched out with her bolt pistol and fired twice, feeling the recoil shudder up her arm and rattle her bones. Cones of gore sprayed from the xenos' back as the rounds exploded within its meaty torso and blew out the other side. The ork was enraged, roaring at her instead of stumbling or looking down in shock; the things were too stupid to know when they were dead, and too angry to accept it when they found out.

A textbook-flawless overhand stroke of her chainsword answered its toothy shout. The blade dug in so deeply, and the corpse was so heavy, that the falling brute nearly took it from her hands. She had to stomp on its split skull and reverse the teeth to drag her weapon free.

A shadow loomed behind her. She spun, pistol leading the way, chainsword angled for a sideways chop, before she saw who it was.

'Fine day for a drive, colonel,' Commissar Rafe shouted with a fierce smile; he'd been watching her back as she recovered her chainsword.

'Fine day for a fight, commissar,' she called back, trying to be heard over the roaring engines and staccato gunfire of the Ninth and the ork abominations all around.

'Aren't they all?' Rafe lifted his laspistol and fired three rounds into a burly ork that emerged from the rear of a greenskin truck. The xenos' red eyes widened in rage and it angrily raised its own oversized ballistic contraption. Rafe's power fist crackled as he hauled his arm back for a swing.

Kolm finished the ork with a decisive bolt pistol shot, taking most of its head off.

'Some are better than others,' she said, daring a smile.

The two of them took in the state of the fight. The Ninth were winning. Their Hippogriff armoured fighting vehicles had all but won it, alone. Their battle cannons and lascannons offered firepower and range the ork vehicles couldn't hope to match, and the Cadians at their controls were ruthlessly accurate. As the Hippogriffs got closer, it had brought their Castigator gatling cannons and meltas into range as well. Shortly thereafter their Chimeras' heavy flamers had contributed, and all of it was accentuated by the tooth-rattling thrum of bolter and stubber fire.

What vicious, lucky orks had survived to close fighting were being swiftly and messily outmatched. Another success. Another minor warband had been scouted and struck, another bite taken from the Zagboss Krakthunda ambull. What had started the day as a swarm of ork marauders was down to a handful – surrounded, outgunned and outmatched, soon to be thoroughly destroyed by Cadian armour and courage.

Here and there the Ninth's deep-green plating was slashed and striped with swathes of white or red. Paint, if nothing else, they had in great supply. The troopers marked kills, ringed cannon barrels as badges of honour, and scribbled phrases that brought luck and resolve. A few of the locals said there was a xenos superstition that the red paint gave the Militarum vehicles an edge in speed. Kolm paid it all no mind. Rafe had not discouraged it, and the decorations were good for morale.

A few final deaths, one last explosion, and the day was won.

Kolm stood atop the racing Chimera, squinting hard against the wind, and raised her chainsword triumphantly, roaring with her engine. The Ninth responded with cheers of approval, waved weapons, and shots fired into the air – Commissar Rafe pretended not to notice the wasted munitions.

These were the tip of the spear, the roughest troopers on the planet. They were a bloodstained, grass-stained, smoke-stained bunch, and had more than a few ork trophies hanging from their belts or lashed to the hoods of their armour.

Kolm didn't care about appearances; she cared about results.

'The Ninth charges!' Kolm shouted from her tank's cupola months later.

Their most recent forward post was under counter-attack, not a day after they'd taken it. The latest depot barely had walls to hold, so the Ninth were pleased to serve as a rolling fortress rather than relying on static defences. Their assembled line rushed forward to outgun and outmatch the oncoming wave of xenos vehicles and brutes.

Less of the Ninth's armour bore the eager red paint here than in the fast assault companies that prowled the grasslands. These were heavier vehicles, nobler, and their crews a bit more level-headed. Major Lankyn didn't entirely approve of the wildness their outriders showed, nor the 'sloppiness' of their uniforms. Her adjutant commanded from a fine Rogal Dorn, *Defiance's Golden Fist*, and regulation identification stripes were all that marred the tank's green armour. He ran a tighter ship, ironically, than their regimental commissar. Throne knew his personal crew lived up to his example. They were as crisp and efficient as any Cadian might hope to be.

Colonel Kolm's trusty Leman Russ, *Unwavering*, was neither as pretty nor as large, but it got the job done. She had been given opportunities aplenty to take a prouder saddle – a Dorn, or even one of their super-heavies, if she chose – but she demurred. *Unwavering* was lucky, it was familiar, and she knew its machine spirit like an old friend. The Russ had carried her from driver to commander, then from lieutenant all the way to colonel. It was home. It was *hers*. Her crew felt the same. Their hair may have been wild compared to Lankyn's hand-picked, buzz-cut bunch, but they knew their business, their commander, and the rhythm of a tank battle. And, by the Golden Throne, they knew how to work a demolisher cannon like nobody's business.

Rolling at speed, engine howling, on the charge against a target moving just as fast, her gunner claimed another kill. It had been a veritable mountain of steel filled with green flesh – no humble truck – until the demolisher shell hit it dead-on and sparked not one but two secondary explosions.

'That one looked important!' Kolm's driver, Niems Wheskin, called out across *Unwavering's* internal vox approvingly.

'It *did* seem pretty full!' Synd Ekhter, her gunner, crowed back.

The colonel smacked the hilt of her power sword – a gift from the planetary governor a week back, or had it been a month? – against her Russ' armoured hide, then pointed with it, refocusing them. *Unwavering* churned ahead even faster, her brave steed's engines redlining, matching her aggression.

In her peripheral vision, she saw Lankyn's Rogal Dorn fall just a hair behind. They were still abreast enough to be in formation, still holding a line that was anchored by super-heavies, the most dangerous machines in the regiment. Far to the left rolled the massive *Praetorian's Mercy*, and off to her right *Acta Non Verba*. The Ninth were a crashing wave of armour, a unified front. They were still Cadians.

But... She smiled into the wind, shouting a new heading for her gunner to angle and a new target to find... *But for a moment, we'd been racing. Lankyn will deny it, Throne bless him, but it happened.*

'Brace!' she shouted. A heartbeat later, impact.

Kolm grinned savagely as the Ninth's massive line of good Cadian steel met the ragged mob of cobbled-together xenos armour, with predictable results. All that was left was the slaughter. The day turned to a storm of fire and steel, until naught remained of this little warboss' band but stained scrap metal.

Another bite.

'The Ninth will charge!' Kolm leaned over the side of her Sentinel, squinting down against the glare of a mechadendrite welder. Her tone carried an undeniable edge of impatience.

Here in the rugged foothills, only walkers moved well. The Ninth's Sentinel corps had long stalked this transitional zone, traversing the uneven ground of alternating stone, mud and grass better than any set of treads or tyres could, and more swiftly than any boots. Today, for the hammer blow against one of Krakthunda's armoured lieutenants, their colonel joined them in a commandeered Sentinel... one that had just taken serious damage to its hydraulics.

'And when the Ommissiah wills it, so will you.' Asha-Suhar didn't look up from her repair work. Her primary servo-arm reached up to grasp Kolm's Sentinel, either to keep her from leaving or in an enginseer's attempt at a friend's reassuring gesture – Kolm wasn't sure which. Asha-Suhar worked methodically and without fear, as unbothered by ork fire as she would be by rainfall. *Less* bothered, in fact.

The xenos walkers were awkward, clumsy things bristling with ungainly weapon pods and saw-bladed arms. Their crude plates of armour were decorated with painted-on skulls and had rows of jagged steel teeth snarling menacingly beneath mismatched headlights and lenses. They carried thick slabs of armour and a mad array of ballistic and energy weapons, but most of them were already scarred by the day's fighting.

The Ninth's walker corps had speed and firepower both, and used them as well as any shock trooper infantry. Moving together in fire teams that split into pairs as the fight demanded, their Sentinels hit the xenos with lascannons and missiles, dazzling with lances of plasma and shrieking bursts of multi-laser fire. Uniforms, trophies, and exuberant war paint be damned, they were well drilled, and killed like it. They fought like Kasrkin, fire and manoeuvre writ large.

And here I sit, neither firing nor manoeuvring. Scowling, Kolm dropped through her armoured hatch and back into her seat to check on her overheated plasma cannon. The relic weapon was still cooling and sulking, machine spirit chastising her by way of the console displays as sternly as Asha-Suhar was from outside.

The incoming fire abated for a moment. Kolm knew that meant the frustrated orks were about to charge. Her knuckles turned white on the control yoke.

Never ones to back down from a challenge, but especially not when their superior firepower had so thinned the xenos herd, the Cadians obliged. And so – as their colonel had predicted – the Ninth counter-charged. Except her. Until...

‘Go thee forth!’ Asha-Suhar’s primary servo-arm *clang-clanged* against Kolm’s plating from behind and below. ‘And smite. Blessed by Mars!’

Finally! Kolm’s engine surged and she lurched forward just in time to crash headlong into a mad ork hybrid of tank and xenos. All up and down the line, combat was in full swing.

Snapping power claws sparred with howling chainsaw blades in showers of sparks. The battlefield was filled with the sounds of screaming steel as it was rent asunder, punctuated here and there by more terribly human screams when armour gave way and a blade found flesh and blood. The orks fought hard, as always.

The tide had already turned, though, the day had long been decided. The Ninth understood initiative and aggression, and they had numbers on their side. They knew the only good ork was a dead one.

The enemy smashed into her again, and one power-clawed arm reached up to rake and gouge against her armoured side. When its ungainly limb scraped back into view, Kolm was shocked to find it had wrenched her hunter-killer missile free and was preparing to bash her with it like a club. The colonel kicked herself clear, rightly trusting her repaired leg completely. The ork machine cart-wheeled its arms but fell on its back. She lunged down at it, Sentinel chainsaw filling the air with sparks as it carved through thick iron, the weight of her walker pressing the screaming blade down and in methodically.

Kolm straightened after her grisly work, scanned the battlefield, and... *there!* She thumbed a switch near her primary trigger and her plasma cannon’s machine spirit began to seethe.

She settled her sights on the enemy walker with the most impressive horns attached, the most ridiculous guns, and the most little greenskins clambering all over it. It *had* to be the leader of this walker-band! Kolm squeezed her trigger and sent a dazzling blast of superheated plasma punching through ork armour and, judging by the impressive fireball, directly into a fuel tank.

Headless, the warband broke.

A good thing. Kolm hissed as warning runes lit up across her console and emergency waste heat flooded the cockpit. *A very good thing.*

Kolm hauled herself hurriedly up through the top hatch to half-escape the klaxons and the scalding steam. She shucked off her helmet to watch.

The Sentinels with the biggest guns gave chase, coursing after the ramshackle walkers. Their fury was guided by lines of autocannon tracer fire from lighter Sentinels. The Cadians vented their frustration by tearing through thin rear armour with powerful plasma and lascannon shots.

The Ninth’s remaining Sentinels, those with flamers and multi-lasers better suited to meat than metal, used their guns, their feet and their already bloodstained chainsaws to make sure that the pried-open ork walkers were thoroughly empty.

Some drew sidearms and fired from their cockpits for practice and sport. Others, the Ninth’s most eager, grabbed carbines and dismounted to chase after wretched xenos, fighting on foot.

Kolm took a drink of too-hot water from her canteen, then splashed some over her aching head. After a brief pause, she poured the rest over the side of her Sentinel to hiss and flash-steam against its glowing main gun.

‘Another battle.’ Enginseer Asha-Suhar stood beside her as though the offering had summoned her. She rubbed two mecha-dendrites together as her sensors took in the field, looking like a labourer cracking their knuckles before getting to work. Though the tech-priest had machine spirits to placate or put out of their misery, there was no mistaking the approval in her tone. ‘Another success!’

‘Another bite from the ambull.’ The colonel nodded. ‘Another step closer to finishing this.’

The Ninth fought, alone and non-stop, for nearly two years. It showed. Even Lankyn’s cadre were sporting beards now, though they still kept their spines Cadian-straight and the major’s own facial hair never grew beyond regulations. The Ninth had begun the campaign a reconstituted regiment, spirits untested but eager. The survivors were something more blood-soaked and ragged. There was a primal instinct fed by feeling the wind in your hair as you raced across open ground with a gun in your hand, something undeniably satisfying about beating the greenskins at their own bloody game.

They had lost troopers, but never lost momentum. The tide was turning. Few of Krakthunda’s leadership remained, and fewer still of his depots and scrap heaps. The Cadians were running lean and hard, and fought as they had always trained, but better, fiercer, faster.

Kolm pretended not to notice the trophies, the oil smeared over fair Cadian skin to keep the sun and flies off, the way a few shots

rang out after cease-fire orders – civility was reserved for civilised foes. Commissar Rafe had been among feral-worlders for long enough not to chastise them for it, so Kolm certainly wouldn't.

She didn't care if they let their hair grow, if they shaved their heads, or anything in between. She didn't care if they got drunk on blood and speed, so long as they stayed sober enough to shoot straight.

The Ninth didn't serve the Emperor through sharp creases in their trousers and well-polished boots. They served Him by killing His enemies in accordance with the orders of high command. Praise the Golden Throne and pass the ammunition, Kolm and the Ninth were winning this bloody war.

'How very... green.' Lieutenant Colonel Sabestien Hinsone sneered beneath his small, sharp, neatly trimmed moustache. He looked out from beneath his peaked cap with hooded eyes, taking in the wildly varying shades of uniform worn by the bloody mob that waited at the foot of his Tetrarch landing craft.

Marching down the massive ramp on either side of him were paired columns of the fighting men and women – the *professionals* – of his Cadian 1,667th.

Awaiting them were a rabble who looked like distant relations of the orks they were here to finally put a proper end to. They stood or squatted, leaned or posed against Astra Militarum vehicles that looked more renegade than regulation. The piratical force wore the tattered remains of fatigues. Many men and women alike wore flak armour without a shirt beneath it, or had civilian clothing mingled with Militarum-issued garb. War paint abounded. Grooming standards seemed non-existent. Nearly all carried brutish trophies of some sort, and scavenged or scrap-modified melee weapons.

Throne protect us, that one seems to have found a commissar's storm coat! The disgusted colonel shook his head. Hinsone's own 1,667th were in crisp Cadian green, head to toe. They showed their pride through well-shined boots, crisp lines, hair cut close to the scalp, and an all-around uniformity that was the entire point of *uniforms*.

'Our intelligence seems to have been inaccurate.' Sabestien raised his voice to be heard over the murmur of the waiting rabble, the revving of their engines, and the comfortably predictable footfalls of his marching columns of shock troopers. He spoke slowly to make sure the rabble understood him. 'I was given to believe we were relieving Cadians.'

'Reinforcing, not relieving.' A sun-darkened woman glanced up at him, standing atop the hood of a Hippogriff. Paint brush in hand, she was touching up some graffiti scrawled along the AFV's battle cannon.

'Excuse me?' Hinsone raised both eyebrows, incredulous.

'You're excused.' She finished her work – an *AVE IMPERATOR* in stark white against the Hippogriff's long barrel – and looked his way. A long stalk of grass hung from her mouth and she chewed on it thoughtfully as he tried to decide how offended to be.

'I am Lieutenant Colonel Sabestien Hinsone,' he began, 'of the Cadian One Thousand, Six Hundred and Sixty-Seventh Shock Troo–'

'And I'm Colonel Jalla Kolm,' the woman said with a matter-of-fact nod. Then, as though priming a grenade, she added, 'Cadian Ninth Armoured.'

'The Ninth charges!' Every grizzled trooper in earshot shouted it in full-throated unison. Sabestien was mortified to see a few of his troopers startled out of step. He trusted his junior officers to take note for later punishment.

This creature is a... colonel? Hinsone gawked. There was no mistaking her accent, though. Kasr Vasan, for sure. *And a Cadian?*

'Let me tell you how things work on Squire's Rest, and what you can do for us.' Kolm hopped down and stood, hands on hips, to look him over.

'But first, let me ask you, *lieutenant* colonel...' She acknowledged his rank only after looking pointedly at his collar, as though to make sure he knew it was his rank she respected, not him as a person. And still, she emphasised that he was her junior.

'Do you know how to eat an ambull?'

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Russell “Rusty” Zimmerman is a grizzled merc with a keyboard, a writer-for-hire slinging words for whoever pays his bloody price. He’s been particularly prolific in the Shadowrun and BattleTech universes, and is excited to be [redacted] for [redacted]. He lives in NYC with his lovely wife. For Black Library he has written the short stories ‘Seven Ships’ and ‘Resounding’, and he is currently writing more.

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