

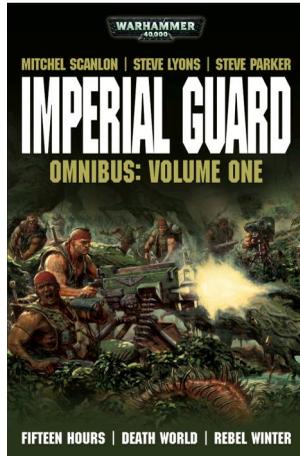
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## ***IMPERIAL GUARD OMNIBUS: VOLUME 1***

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*Trooper Larn gets a baptism of fire when his regiment is sent to Jumal IV, a world overrun by barbaric orks. Both sides are dug in and desperate, and this is war at its most deadly. With the average lifespan of a Guardsman calculated at only fifteen hours, will Larn even survive his first day?*

***Death World, by Steve Lyons***

*Their skills honed on the death world from which they hail, the Catachan jungle fighters are renowned for their toughness and savagery. Posted to the jungle world of Rogar III to fight orks, the Catachans should be in their element, but they soon find themselves facing an enemy they are totally unprepared for.*

***Rebel Winter, by Steve Parker***

*The Vostroyan Firstborn are fighting a campaign on Danik's World, quelling a rebellion. When a horde of orks also attacks, the situation turns critical. Trapped behind enemy lines, can Captain Sebastev get his men back to safety before all hell breaks loose?*

**About the Authors**

*Steve Lyons* has written novels, short stories, radio plays and comic strips for characters including the X-Men, Doctor Who, Strontium Dog and Sapphire & Steel. He has written several non-fiction books about television shows, and contributes to magazines. *Death World* is his twentieth novel.

*Steve Parker* was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland, and now lives and works in Tokyo, Japan. In 2006, his story *The Falls of Marakross* was published in the Black Library's *Tales from the Dark Millennium* anthology. His first novel, *Rebel Winter*, was published in 2007.

*Mitchel Scanlon* is a full-time novelist and comics writer. His previous credits for the Black Library include the novels *Fifteen Hours*, *Horus Heresy: Descent of Angels* the background book *The Loathsome Ratmen*, and the comics series *Tales of Hellbrandt Grimm*.

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The following is an excerpt from *IMPERIAL GUARD OMNIBUS: VOLUME 1*.

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### ***From FIFTEEN HOURS, by Mitchel Scanlon***

‘HUP TWO THREE four. Hup two three four,’ Sergeant Ferres yelled, keeping pace with the men of 3rd Platoon as they marched the dusty length of the parade ground. ‘You call that marching? I’ve seen more order and discipline in a pack of shithouse rats.’

Marching in time with the others, painfully aware of his own visibility, Larn found himself silently praying his feet kept in step. His place midway along the platoon’s left outer file put him out in plain view right under the sergeant’s eyes. The two months’ worth of basic training he had endured so far had left him with few illusions as to what happened to those who failed to live up to the sergeant’s exacting standards.

‘Keep your feet up,’ the sergeant screamed. ‘You’re not courting in the wheat fields with your cousins now, you inbreeds! You are soldiers of the Imperial Guard, Emperor help us. Put some vim into it.’ Then, seeing the platoon was nearly at the far edge of the parade ground, Ferres yelled again, his voice strident and shrill with command. ‘Platoon. About face. And march.’

Turning smartly on his heel with the others, as they resumed marching Larn found himself feeling dog-tired and exhausted. So far today, like each of the sixty days before it, Ferres had had them running training exercises since dawn. Marching, weapons drill, kit inspection, hand-to-hand training, basic survival skills: every day was a never-ending series of challenges and tests. Larn felt he had

learnt more in the last two months than he had in his entire life. Yet, no matter how much he and the rest of the platoon learned or how well they did, none of it seemed to satisfy their vengeful sergeant.

‘Hup two three four. Keep in step, damn you.’ the sergeant bellowed. ‘I’ll keep the whole damned lot of you drilling here for another two hours if that’s what it takes to make you keep to time!’

Larn did not doubt Ferres meant his threat. Over the last two months the sergeant had repeatedly shown an inclination to hand out draconian punishments for even the most minor infractions. Having been on the receiving end of such punishments more than once already, Larn had learned to dread the sergeant and his idea of discipline.

‘Company halt,’ Sergeant Ferres yelled at last, hawkish eyes watching to see if any of the Guardsmen overran their mark. Then, apparently satisfied that every man had stopped the instant they heard his order, he yelled again, loudly elongating every syllable of the command. ‘Turn to the left!’

With a clatter of clicking heels the company turned to face their sergeant. Seeing Ferres advance purposefully towards them, Larn did his best to keep his shoulders back and his spine ramrod straight, his eyes staring fixedly ahead as though gazing blindly into the middle distance. He knew enough of Sergeant Ferres’s ways by now to know that an inspection would follow immediately they had finished marching. Just as he knew Ferres would not be any kinder to the soldier who failed to pass muster now than he would to anyone whose marching did not meet his standards.

From the corner of his eye Larn saw Sergeant Ferres move to the end of the outer file of Guardsmen to begin his inspection. Moving slowly along the line to inspect each man in turn, the sergeant’s dark eyes darted swiftly up and down, scanning for any flaw in equipment, dress or manner. At times like these, no matter where in line he stood, it always felt to Larn as though it took the sergeant forever to reach him. A slow torturous eternity, spent waiting like the head of a nail to be struck by the hammer – all the time knowing that, no matter how well he had worked or what precautions he had taken, the hammer would fall regardless.

Abruptly, still three men away from Larn, the sergeant stopped to turn and face the fair-haired trooper standing in front of him. It was Trooper Leden – his favourite target. Tall and broad-shouldered, with a thick neck and big hands, Leden looked even more the farmboy than the rest of the men in the company. Even now, standing to attention under Ferres's withering glare, Leden's face was open and guileless, his mouth looking as though it could break into a warm and friendly smile at any moment.

'Your lasgun, trooper,' the sergeant said. 'Give it to me.' Then, taking the gun from Leden's outstretched hands, he checked the safety, before inspecting the rest of the gun in turn.

'What is the best way for a Guardsmen to prevent his lasgun from failing him in battle?' Ferres asked, eyes boring into Leden's face as he spoke.

'I... uh... first he should check the power pack is not empty. Then, reciting the Litany of Unjamming, he should...'

'I asked what is the best way to prevent a Guardsman's lasgun from failing him, Leden,' the sergeant said, cutting him off. 'Not how he should clear a jam after it malfunctions!'

'Umm...'

for a moment Leden seemed stymied, until his eyes lit up with sudden inspiration. 'The Guardsman should clean his lasgun every day, taking care to recite the Litany of Cleanliness as he...'

'And if, because he has failed in his duty to keep his lasgun clean, the Guardsman finds his weapon jams in the heat of battle and he cannot fix it?' the sergeant cut him off again. 'What then, Leden? How should the Guardsman proceed?'

'He should fix his bayonet to the mounting lugs on his lasgun's flash suppressor, sergeant, and use it to defend himself,' Leden replied, an edge of pride to his voice now as though he was sure he had finally answered one of his sergeant's questions correctly.

'In the heat of combat? With the enemy right on top of him? What if he doesn't have time to fix his bayonet, Leden?'

'Then, he should use his lasgun as a club, sergeant.'

'A club you say?' the sergeant asked, suddenly placing both his hands at the end of the lasgun's barrel and lifting the butt of the

weapon above his head. ‘What, he should hold his lasgun above his head as though it were a bat-stick and he was playing shreev-ball?’

‘Oh no, sergeant,’ Leden replied mildly, apparently unaware that with every word he was digging a deeper hole for himself. ‘He should hold his lasgun horizontally with his hands widely spaced as though it were a short-staff and strike the enemy with the butt.’

‘Ah, I see,’ the sergeant said, bringing the lasgun down and holding it in front of him with his hands in the positions Leden had indicated. ‘And to best disable the enemy, what target should the Guardsman aim at – the face, the chest, or the gut?’

‘The face,’ Leden said, an idiot smile on his face, while every other Guardsman in the company winced inwardly at what they knew was coming.

‘I see,’ Sergeant Ferres said, bringing the butt of the lasgun up quickly to smash Leden in the bridge of the nose. Screaming, a gout of blood geysering from his nose, Leden collapsed to his knees.

‘Get up, Leden,’ the sergeant said, tossing the lasgun back to him as Leden shakily rose to his feet once more. ‘You aren’t seriously injured. Look on it as a lesson. Perhaps next time you’ll remember to clean your lasgun more carefully. The power node on this one is so filthy, chances are it’d burn out after a few shots.’

Turning away from Leden, the sergeant resumed his inspection. Standing three men down the line, Larn felt weighed down by the expectation of impending disaster. Ferres is really on the warpath today, he thought. There’s no way he’ll let me pass muster. He’ll find something I’ve done wrong. Some little thing. He always does. Then, his heart rising in his mouth, Larn saw the sergeant pause in his slow procession down the line and turn to face him.

‘Your lasgun, trooper!’ the sergeant said. Then, as he had done with Leden before him, he checked the safety before inspecting the rest of the gun in turn. Sights, barrel, stock, holding lugs – for long seconds Ferres pored minutely over the lasgun as Larn felt sweat gathering at the back of his collar. Next, pressing the release catch Ferres pulled the power pack free to check the contacts and the cell well were clean. Then, glowering as he snapped the power pack back into place, Ferres raised his eyes to look at Larn once more.

‘Name and number!’ he barked.

‘Trooper First Class Larn, Arvin A, sergeant. Number: eight one five seven six dash three eight nine dash four seven two dash one!’

‘I see. Then, tell me, Trooper First Class Larn, Arvin A, why did you join the Guard?’

‘To defend the Imperium, sergeant. To serve the Emperor’s will. To protect humanity from the alien and the unclean.’

‘And how will you do those things, trooper?’

‘I will obey orders, sergeant. I will follow the chain of command. I will fight the Emperor’s enemies. And I will die for my Emperor, if He so wills it.’

‘What are your rights as a member of the Imperial Guard?’

‘I have no rights, sergeant. The Guardsman willingly forfeits his rights in return for the glory of fighting for the just cause of our Immortal Emperor.’

‘And why does the Guardsman willingly forfeit his rights?’

‘He forfeits them to better serve the Emperor, sergeant. The Guardsman has no need of rights – not when he is guided by the infinite wisdom of the Emperor and, through Him, by the divinely ordained command structure of the Imperial Guard.’

‘And if you should meet a man who tells you these things are wrong, Larn? If you should meet a man who claims the Guard’s command structure sometimes makes mistakes and needlessly wastes the lives of the men under its command?’

‘Then I will kill him, sergeant. That is the only way to treat with traitors and dissenters.’

‘Hnn. And if you should hear a man spout heresy, Larn, how will you persuade him of the error of his ways?’

‘I will kill him, sergeant. That is the only way to treat with the heretic.’

‘And if you should meet the xenos?’

‘I will kill it, sergeant. That is the only way to treat with the xenos.’

‘Very good, Larn,’ the sergeant said to him, tossing Larn’s lasgun back to him before turning to inspect the next man in line. ‘You’re learning. Perhaps we’ll make a Guardsman of you yet.’

***From DEATH WORLD, by Steve Lyons***

THE TREES OF ROGAR III were generally tall, thin and gnarled, but they grew close together – too close, in places, for a man to squeeze between them. Their leaves were jagged, some razor-edged – and creepers dangled from their topmost branches, bulging with poisonous pustules. The undergrowth was thick, green-brown and halfway to knee height, the occasional splash of colour thrown out in the shape of a flower or a brightly patterned thistle or patch of strangle-weed. From a distance, it looked like any jungle Lorenzo had seen. He wanted to get closer, to inspect the peculiar shapes and patterns of this jungle, to begin to learn which shapes he could trust and which spelled danger – but, for now, it was not to be.

The drop-ship had gouged a great gash out of the planet. Undergrowth had been flattened, trees felled, branches shorn. Small fires were still burning, and creepers twitched like severed limbs in their heat.

Vines checked his compass, and received a navigational fix from the troop carrier in orbit. They were ten kilometres away from the Imperial encampment, he reported, and the quickest route to it was to retrace the trail of devastation to its source. It was also the safest route – for, although Lorenzo saw several more acid spitters among the ashes, most had been burnt or decapitated. When one plant did dare stir, and cracked open its pink head, it immediately became the focus of eight lasguns, and was promptly blasted out of existence.

The Catachans proceeded cautiously to begin with, and there was little talk. Each of them knew this was the most dangerous time: their first footsteps on a new world, not knowing the threats it posed, knowing that an attack could come at any second from any quarter. In time, they would become familiar with Rogar III – those of them who survived these early days. They would learn to anticipate and counter anything it could throw at them. Then this world would be no challenge any more and, Emperor willing, they would move on to another.

Lorenzo loved this time. He loved the feeling of adrenaline pumping around his body, loved the edge it gave him.

For the moment, though, the planet was nursing its wounds, keeping its distance. He heard more birds screeching to each other, but apart from a brief flutter of wings on the edge of his vision he never saw a single one. A jungle lizard skittered away as the Catachans approached. Lorenzo estimated it to be about twenty centimetres long, but without a closer inspection he couldn't tell if it was an adult or a baby.

It was almost as if Rogar III was watching the new arrivals, sizing them up just as they were sizing up it.

Bulldog Rock was the first to order his squad to double time, and Greiss and the other sergeants followed. Not to be outdone, another squad struck up a cadence call.

A scream of engines drew his attention to the sky, and he caught a glint of red as the rays of the sinking sun struck metal. Two dropships, ascending, from a point no more than a couple of kilometres ahead. He wondered what had happened to the third, and suppressed a shudder at the thought that one platoon may not have been as fortunate as his own.

Not long after that, they came to the end of their own ship's trail – the point at which it had hit ground. Lorenzo had looked forward to entering the jungle proper, but instead he found himself at the edge of an expansive clearing. It was man-made, about two kilometres in diameter, doubtless the product of many hours of toil by Imperium troops with flamers – and yet the vegetation at the clearing's edge was already showing signs of re-growth.

Without breaking step, the Jungle Fighters made for a huddle of prefabricated buildings in the clearing's centre, now little more than shadows in the twilight. As they reached it, the sergeants shouted more orders, and the Catachans formed up in their squads again and fell silent. Lorenzo was aware that their noisy arrival had turned the heads of several Guardsmen who'd been standing sentry. It had also given fair warning of their approach to the commissar who now came to meet them.

He was a young, fair-haired man with pale skin and ears that protruded very noticeably. The Imperial eagle spread its wings proudly on his peaked cap, and his slight form was almost swallowed by a long, black overcoat. Fresh out of training, Lorenzo thought. Even Lieutenant Vines, not a tall man, seemed to tower over the senior officer through presence alone. Lorenzo thought he could see a sneer pulling at Vines's lips as he folded his arm into a lazy salute and announced, 'C Platoon, Third Company, Catachan XIV reporting for duty, sir.'

'Not before time, lieutenant,' said the commissar tersely. 'I assume it was your drop-ship that screamed over our heads an hour ago, and almost demolished the very camp we've been fighting to defend?' He made it sound like an accusation, as if Vines had been piloting the ship himself. Before Vines could speak, however, the commissar raised his voice to address the assembled platoon. 'My name is Mackenzie. I am in command here – and as long as you are on Rogar III, my word is the Emperor's word, is that clear?'

A few of the Catachans mumbled a derisory, 'Yes, sir.' Most of them said nothing.

Mackenzie scowled. 'Let me make this clear from the outset,' he snapped. 'I don't like deathworlders. In my experience, they are sloppy and undisciplined, with an arrogance that far outstrips their ability. The Emperor has seen fit to send you here, and I concede you may have certain expertise that will hasten a conclusion to this war. But had the decision been mine, let me tell you, I would rather have fought on with one squad from the blessed birth world than ten from Canak or Luther McIntyre or whatever hellhole it was you lot crawled out from.'

'Catachan, sir!' hollered Vines, and a proud roar swelled from the ranks of his men. If Mackenzie had expected to get a rise out of the Jungle Fighters, he was disappointed. Most of them ignored him, not quite looking at him, undermining him with a wave of indifference. Woods said something under his breath, a few men laughed, and the commissar's eyes narrowed – but he hadn't quite caught the words and couldn't pinpoint their source.

‘As you are here,’ he continued, ‘I intend to make the best of it. I’m making it my mission to whip you rabble into shape. By the time I’m finished with you, you’ll be the smartest Guardsmen in the Imperium.’

Mackenzie turned on his heel, then, and snarled in Vines’s direction, ‘Your platoon is late for my briefing, lieutenant. Ten laps round the camp perimeter, double time. Last squad back does another ten.’

‘With respect, sir...’ began Vines, the look of contempt in his eyes suggesting that respect was the last thing he wanted to show.

‘That includes you, lieutenant,’ Mackenzie barked – and he marched away stiffly, into the largest of the buildings.

Vines took a deep breath. ‘All right,’ he said, ‘you heard the man.’

The Catachans took their circuits at a leisurely pace, and with a cadence call that contained a few choice lyrics about senior officers.

### *From REBEL WINTER, by Steve Parker*

SEBASTEV LOOKED UP at the sky. The snowfall was getting heavier, but the gusting winds had eased a little. He spoke again on the company’s command channel. ‘Ready yourselves, Firstborn.’

Lasgun charge packs were drawn from pockets all along the trench, and clicked into place under long, polished barrels.

‘Maintain fire discipline. Power settings at maximum. Choose your targets. I want redundancy minimised. Remember, all of you, that temperature, visibility and the nature of our opponent have reduced lethal range to approximately one half. Any trooper wasting bolts on long shots will immediately forfeit his rahzvod allocation. You don’t fire until I bloody well say so.’

Despite the usual groans from nearby soldiers at the thought of losing their alcohol, Sebastev knew he hardly needed to warn them. He was proud of them, his Fifth Company. Their discipline was rock solid. Most of his men were as dedicated and faithful as a

commander could have wished for, committed to a life of fighting for the honour of Vostroya and the glory of the Imperium of Man.

Faith is the armour of the soul, thought Sebastev. That's what Commissar Ixxius used to say.

Commissar Ixxius was another friend and mentor who'd been lost to the campaign. The man had been a pillar of strength to Sebastev's company after Dubrin's death. He'd been a fine speaker, too.

In scholas and academies across the Imperium, officers and commissars were taught how to tap that faith. There were entire study programs dedicated to battlefield oration, but that didn't help Sebastev, because his was a field-commission. Everything he knew about leadership had been learnt the hard way, through blood, sweat and tears shed on battlefields from here to the Eye of Terror.

For better or for worse, litanies and the like were firmly the province of Father Olov, Fifth Company's aging and slightly insane priest. Sebastev hoped that the men at least drew some strength from his insistence on fighting alongside them, shoulder-to-shoulder, in these freezing trenches or anywhere else the enemies of the Imperium dared to show themselves.

As if summoned by the thought, they showed themselves now, bellowing their challenge as they broke cover. They crashed from between the trees, a thunderous green tide of muscle-bound bodies, kicking up great sprays of snow as they raced over no-man's-land towards the Vostroyan lines.

Orks.

'Mark your targets,' ordered Sebastev. 'First volley on my order. Not one shot till we see their breath misting the air. Let them extend themselves. Grenades and mortars on dense knots only, please. I will be watching you. Your platoon leaders will be taking names.'

From the bead in his right ear, he heard his officers acknowledge.

'Sir,' said Kuritsin. 'First and Fourth Companies both report enemy charges in their sectors.'

Sebastev raised his right hand to his chest and the holy icon that lay beneath his clothes. An image, rendered in Vostroyan silver,

hung from a cord around his neck. It felt cold against his skin. It was a medallion given to him by his mother some thirty years ago on the day he'd left to begin his term in the Guard: the Insignum Sanctus Nadalya, the holy icon of the Grey Lady, Vostroya's patron saint.

He mumbled a quick prayer for the Lady's favour and drew his gleaming, handcrafted bolt pistol from its holster. 'Let's see what they're made of, eh Rits?' he said.

Lieutenant Kuritsin slammed a power pack into position on his lasgun. 'Aye, sir. On your order.'

Sebastev felt his adrenaline surge as he watched the enemy speed towards him, signalling his body's readiness for the fight. The cold lost some of its bite. His fatigue faded and all his long years of training and experience rose to the fore.

Along the trench in both directions, men made ready to fire at the tide of charging orks. 'On my mark,' Sebastev voxed to them. He raised his pistol high above his head. Out on the snowfield, the green horde swept closer.

That's it, you snot-coloured xenos scum. Keep coming. We're not going anywhere.

Bestial roars filled the air, pouring from mouths filled with jutting yellow tusks. The wall of monstrous green bodies closed with frightening speed. All too quickly, with their oversized feet eating up the distance to the Vostroyan trenches, the orks came into lethal range.

Sebastev fired a single bolt into the air and voxed the words his men were waiting for. 'Open fire!'

A searing volley of las-bolts blazed from the trenches, each shot slicing through the air with a distinctive hiss-crack. Scores of charging greenskins howled in agony and fell clutching their faces. Massive pistols and cleavers were flung aside as grotesque bodies tumbled to a lifeless heap. But for all those that fell, there were hundreds more that hadn't been blinded or crippled. They kept charging, their hideous faces grinning with bloodlust.

The Vostroyan heavy bolters opened fire, filling Sebastev's ears with deep machine chatter. Pillboxes and gun-platforms up and

down the line laced the rough ork formations with enfilading fire, sending fountains of dirt, snow and blood high into the air.

‘Fifth Company, fire at will,’ voxed Sebastev. ‘They do not get to the trenches. Do you hear? Fire at will!’

Enemy slugs, solid rounds as big as a man’s fist, bit great chunks of frozen dirt from the sandbags on the trench lip. But the greenskins, despite their obsession with battle, were notoriously bad shots. They represented a far greater threat in close combat. Sebastev had to make sure the charging mass didn’t breach the Vostroyan defences, at least not until their numbers were manageable.

‘Take those bastards down, Firstborn. The Emperor demands it!’

A knot of massive orks charged straight towards Sebastev’s section of the trench. Perhaps they’d marked him out by his white cloak, or by the gold Imperialis insignia on his hat, but it was just as likely that the monsters sought their kills at random.

Troopers to left and right opened up on the orks as they sped nearer, carving black wounds into the wall of green flesh. Lieutenant Kuritsin scored a masterful headshot that put one of the monsters straight down. But, while all this las-fire would have obliterated an army of men, the ork charge barely slowed. Las-bolts could cut and char, but they lacked the raw kinetic punch of solid rounds. The orks shrugged off anything that wasn’t crippling. The battle-lust burned bright in their red eyes.

Sebastev brought his bolt pistol to bear on a massive ork charging straight towards him. He slowed his breath, took aim, and squeezed the trigger.

The gun kicked hard, and hot blood misted the air where the monster’s head had been. The heavy body ran on, legs still pumping, muscles executing the last orders from an absent brain. Sebastev watched the headless body snag on a tangle of razor wire, ripping open with a red spray before it tumbled down into the trench.

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