

NINEFOX GAMBIT



Y O O N H A L E E

'Ninefox Gambit is an effortlessly accomplished SF novel. Yoon Ha Lee has arrived in spectacular fashion.' – Alastair Reynolds

***New York Times* Best-Selling Author – Nominated for the 2019 Hugo Award for Best Series – Winner of the 2016 Locus Award – Nominated for the Hugo, Nebula and Arthur C. Clarke Awards**

When Captain Kel Cheri of the hexarchate is disgraced for her unconventional tactics, Kel Command gives her a chance to redeem herself, by retaking the Fortress of Scattered Needles from the heretics. Cheri's career isn't the only thing at stake: if the fortress falls, the hexarchate itself might be next.

Cheri's best hope is to ally with the undead tactician Shuos Jedao. The good news is that Jedao has never lost a battle, and he may be the only one who can figure out how to successfully besiege the fortress. The bad news is that Jedao went mad in his first life and massacred two armies, one of them his own.

As the siege wears on, Cheri must decide how far she can trust Jedao – because she might be his next victim.

and I bet it's got eyes. I give you odds the Eels will call in the artillery the second they think they can get all of us. Maybe we should keep heading east."

"We can't avoid the heretics forever," Cheri said. "We're going to have to hope that formation defenses hold for us if they start lobbing shells." She addressed the company. "Formation," she said, "Pir's Fan." It had a longer name, but nobody had time for the full names on the battlefield.

Pir's Fan was one of the simpler formations. As its name suggested, it resembled a wedge. It was easiest for Cheri: she held the primary pivot at the van, and everyone adjusted their position relative to hers.

The Kel specialty was formation fighting. The combination of formation geometry and Kel discipline allowed them to channel exotic effects, from heat lances to force shields. Unfortunately, like all exotics, this ability depended on the local society's adherence to the hexarchate's high calendar. And the high calendar wasn't just a system of timekeeping. It encompassed the feasts, the remembrances with their ritual torture of heretics, the entire precarious social order.

Cheri knew the formation's effect had begun to propagate when the world shifted blue and the blacks bent gray. Pir's Fan offered protection against the weather. It was usually better to rely on the weather-eaters, but Cheri had lost any faith that they would be effective on this mission. Unfortunately, the formation wouldn't shield the unit from a direct hit. She hoped to close with the generator before that became an issue.

If the situation changed, there were other formations. The Kel infantry library included thousands, although only a hundred or so were taught as part of Lexicon Primary. You also had to allow for transition time in modulation, especially between less familiar formations. Cheri could feed her soldiers the information through the grid, but it was no substitute for drill.

The march as they swung north steadied Cheri. Here stubby succulents, too low to be credible cover, grew only to be crushed underfoot. The plants gave off a stinging fragrance that attenuated into a watery, cloying sweetness. The regional survey hadn't flagged it as a toxic. Whether the plants had any meaning to the Eels, Cheri didn't know. She would probably leave Dredge, if she left Dredge, without finding out.

Lieutenant Verab alerted her of the enemy sighting via heat pulse. Over the relay, Cheri heard a junior sergeant shouting at someone who had dropped his rifle, a recent recruit who had a talent for botching things.

The Eels' field fortifications, which commanded one of the larger hills, looked like a rough shore in a sea of dust, and their patrols carried themselves with a certain sloppiness. But the distant figures stirred in agitation: Cheri was betting they had thought themselves safe.

Of momentary interest was the Eels' banner, which was of green fire and grim shadow with a twisting motif. The Eels called themselves the Society of the Flourish,