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ASSAULT ON BLACK REACH

The Novel

A Warhammer 40,000 novel

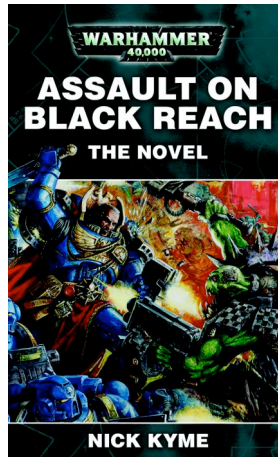
By Nick Kyme

In the dark future of the 41st millennium, mankind fights a desperate battle for survival amongst the stars. Foremost among its protectors are the Space Marines, genetically engineered superhumans, trained to be the ultimate warriors. And of all the Space Marines, it is the noble and courageous Ultramarines who best embody the warrior ideal.

When the planet of Black Reach is invaded by a mighty ork horde, the Ultramarines must act fast.

If the orks gain a foothold in the system, they could spread, and threaten the entire sector. As the Ultramarines attack in all their righteous fury, the scene is set for a classic battle – one hundred Space Marines versus fifty thousand orks!

This novel tells the tale of how the 2nd Company of the Ultramarines, commanded by Captain Sicarius, prosecuted war against the greenskin invaders and their warlord Zanzag. It is the perfect companion to Warhammer 40,000 *Assault on Black Reach*, and the ideal introduction to the world of Black Library fiction.



The following is an excerpt from *Assault on Black Reach: The Novel* by Nick Kyme.

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PALE LIGHT LIMNED the interior of the drop pod. The doors slammed open seconds later as the vessel opened like a gunmetal bloom, venting steam, its hull still smouldering. The ochre sands of Black Reach had been scorched to glass with the intense heat radiation of the drop pod's arrival. It crunched underfoot as Scipio and his nine Astartes came out, bolters singing.

The drop pod's deathwind missile launcher armaments jolted with explosive recoil, a percussive chorus to the steady throb of bolter fire. A kill-zone of slain orks was forged around the landing site in seconds from the punitive barrage.

It bought a few moments' grace for Scipio to see the cauldron of battle.

They had descended into the eye of the storm. Ahead of them, some five hundred metres or more, the north wall of Ghospora Hive loomed like a black bulkhead cliff. It was some eight kilometres across and stretched eighty kilometres high into Black Reach's pollutant-laden upper atmosphere. Gunports, bunkers and battle-towers bristling with cannon and long-range sensor arrays hugged the extremities of the hive city like space debris clinging to the hull of a dead starship. Smoke billowed from the wrecked defences and fires raged unchecked along partially destroyed sections of the outer bastion wall. It was here at the forefront of the greenskin assault where the Imperial Guard Sable Gunners were making their last stand. Scipio's enhanced vision, cycling through its various filters to

ascertain the optimum visual spectrum, and augmented by the technology within his battle helm, detected the heat signatures from several heavy weapon emplacements.

The native soldiery of Black Reach were dug in around bunkers and entrenchments crested with razor wire. Even from a distance, Scipio could tell it was a thin line. Officers barked orders down the length of the fracturing wall, charred banners rose and fell. Men died in their droves.

A veritable sea of greenskins surrounded them, stretching for kilometres across and back in a dark mass. The thrashing ocean of aliens lapped at the meagre bulwarks of Ghospora Hive, threatening to overwhelm them. Ramshackle battle tanks and crudely-fashioned trucks festooned with cannon, rockets and other ordnance bounded madly alongside thronging mobs of green-skinned orks, decked in thick battle armour hammered with additional metal plates and daubed in crude glyphs. Diminutive gretchin capered in the wake of their larger cousins, swathed in little more than rags, brandishing over-sized pistols or scraps of battlefield debris to use as improvised weapons.

Hulking mechanical constructs, the bastardised greenskin equivalent of Space Marine dreadnoughts, lumbered in the midst of the horde in clusters, rending with claws and razor-saws or loosing staccato bursts of automatic fire and errant missile salvos.

Though broken up and battered from the strike cruiser bombardment – with thousands slain in the initial barrage, and some fleeing in terror or cowering beneath what little battlefield cover there was – it was still a vast horde. And it stood between Scipio and his objective.

‘Thunderbolts form up on me, fire-pattern omega,’ he said, unleashing his bolt pistol’s wrath into the rearguard of the greenskin ranks as the Space Marines started to move forwards. A splinter of the horde, now evidently aware of the Ultramarines’ arrival, had broken off from the rest and swarmed towards the drop pods.

Orks were huge, slab-muscled monsters. Sloping brows and broad chins, jutting with thick yellow tusks, gave them a distinctly

porcine appearance. They were beasts, and lived only for battle. Survival of the strongest was their only creed, and one they demonstrated to brutal effect.

Scipio formed the tip of a spear, as his battle-brothers moved into formation around him. At one flank, Brother Garrik braced his missile launcher. Dropping to one knee for stability, he fired. A heavy whoosh of expelling incendiary blasted over Scipio's head and an ork truck careening towards the squad was immolated in a ball of flame.

'One for the Thunderbolts!' yelled Garrik, his voice grainy through the comm-feed of Scipio's helmet.

The conflagration spread, belching oily smoke and devouring any orks and gretchin in its path, but the greenskin splinter mob was undeterred.

Scipio's bolt pistol jolted in his armoured grasp, exploding apart an onrushing ork's skull. The beast ran on headless for a few more seconds in a macabre display of tenacity before it slumped and fell.

A gout of promethium spewed from Brother Hekor's flamer on the right flank, engulfing a swathe of belligerent greenskins. Some barrelled on through the intense heat, their bodies alight. Bursts of sporadic but controlled bolter fire put them down before they could get close.

At the edge of his peripheral vision, Scipio saw other squads moving up alongside him, adopting similar assault formations as they made their approach. But this was just an advance force, fighting an initial sortie to secure the landing zone and gain a foothold on the killing field – the real battle was still to come.

Several war-bikes and thickly armoured buggies bounced along with the splinter mob, belt-fed heavy cannons barking, ammo cases cascading like brass rain onto their flatbeds. The motorcade of greenskin vehicles picked up speed, smoke gushing from exhausts, spits of flame bursting from the overcharged engines.

A whistling contrail from a krak missile weaved over Scipio's shoulder and took out one of the buggies, blasting apart its front axle and upending the machine onto its roof. The roll-bar capitulated

instantly, crushing the goggled driver and the orks on the flatbed. A rolling firestorm then engulfed the buggy and its crew as the fuel canister went up and burned them all to ash.

Scipio commended Brother Garrik for his fine shooting over the comm-feed.

Further explosions rippled down the makeshift ork line as bikes and buggies were ripped apart by bursts of heavy bolter fire or skewered on lances of las or blasts of promethium.

Extending a chopping arm, Scipio took out one of the bikers as it sped past him. He felt the greenskin's neck snap as he made contact. The bike slewed into a skid, ramming into another and the two vehicles exploded together in a fiery wreck.

The motorised vanguard was down. The Ultramarines' squads had been efficient in its destruction and were yet to take a casualty. Now they'd meet the splinter horde up close.

Through the carnage, solid shot pranging off his pauldrons and greaves as the orks sought to retaliate against the Astartes' fire superiority, Scipio saw the mob leader.

The massive brute bellowed at its warriors, spittle flying from its maw. Crudely stitched scars laced its face like patchwork, and metal rings and bones punctured the thick flesh of its ears, lips and brow. It wore a fur-trimmed helmet, crested by a pair of horns. An interlocking hauberk of riveted iron plates bulged with the musculature of its immense body.

The beast howled with rage as it charged at Scipio, brandishing a blood-slicked cleaver in challenge and squeezing off desultory rounds from a fat pistol. More greenskins flanked it, some pitched from their feet or staggered by bolter fire as the rest of the Thunderbolts tried to slay them from a distance. The brutish creatures bellowed in exultation of the fight to come. They wouldn't have to wait long.

Scipio thumbed the activation rune of his chainsword, and with a throaty roar the weapon churned to life.

'For Sicarius and the primarch!' he cried, and prepared to meet his foe.

About the Author

Nick Kyme hails from Grimsby, a small town on the east coast of England. Nick moved to Nottingham in 2003 to work on White Dwarf magazine as a Layout Designer. Since then, he has made the switch to the Black Library's hallowed halls as an editor and has been involved in a multitude of diverse projects. His writing credits include several published short stories, background books and novels.

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