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HUNT FOR VOLDORIUS

ANDY HOARE



HUNT FOR VOLDORIUS

A Space Marine Battles novel

By Andy Hoare

Captain Kor'sarro Khan of the White Scars is petitioned by his Chapter Master to hunt down and destroy the daemon prince Voldorius, a warleader of the renegade Alpha Legion, thus ending his reign of terror across the stars. Hunting the beast doggedly for over a decade, Kor'sarro finally brings Voldorius to battle on Quintus, a world that has totally given itself over to the Alpha Legion. Together with their Raven Guard allies, the White Scars must fight an entire planet if they are to slay the daemon prince.

About the Author

Raised by wild guinea pigs in the lawless Home Counties, Andy came to work for Games Workshop in 2001 as a Games Developer in the Nottingham-based Design Studio. Although he has held 'proper jobs' in the past, he much prefers writing gaming supplements, and, now, novels.



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EVEN AS KOR'SARRO powered his roaring bike, Moondrakkan, down the Thunderhawk's ramp, Hunters Two, Four and Five were touching down nearby. Screaming retro jets vaporised the ice, before the mighty gunships settled upon hissing, flexing landing struts. Hunter One, Kor'sarro's command platform, was a conventional Thunderhawk specially modified to carry the Command squad's beloved bikes. Hunter Five was likewise modified, and carried the task force's other two bike-mounted squads. The other ships, including the missing Hunter Three, were transporters, and carried between the three vessels four Rhino-borne Tactical squads, two Rhino-borne Devastator squads and three jump pack-equipped Assault squads. A pair of Rhino transport vehicles was cradled below each transporter, their engines growling as if in anticipation of churning up the frozen plain.

As the two transporters settled, the sturdy arms holding the Rhinos in place released, and, accompanied by the angry hiss of hydraulics, retracted upwards. Almost in unison, the launch jets of both transporters fired up again, and both lifted perfectly vertically, leaving a pair of Rhinos on the ground beneath each. In a moment, all four Thunderhawks had cleared the landing zone, streaking away to establish a holding pattern until called upon.

'All units,' Kor'sarro spoke into his helmet vox-link as he slewed Moondrakkan to a halt. 'Converge on me.'

Behind him, the five bike-mounted warriors of Kor'sarro's Command squad formed up. These men were his brothers, for they had travelled by his side for the last decade, never wavering in the hunt for Voldorius. Kor'sarro's company champion, Brother Jhogai, removed his helmet having brought his growling mount to a halt, and took in a great lungful of the freezing air. Beside him, Brother Yeku bore the standard of the 3rd Company, an honoured banner adorned with the lightning-strike symbol of the White Scars Chapter, and topped with a fluttering mane of black horsehair. Apothecary Khagus halted his bike beside the standard bearer, and behind him came Brothers Temu and Kergis.

'Is there any word?' Kor'sarro addressed Brother Temu, knowing the warrior would understand his meaning.

'There is none, my khan,' Temu replied. 'Lord of Heavens reports heavy atmospheric sensor interference, but assures us they will keep up their sweeps until Hunter Three's fate is known.'

'Understood,' Kor'sarro replied, forcing his concern for his brethren to the back of his mind, for all of his attention would be needed in the coming attack. It was only moments before the entire strike force would be assembled before him, ready to move out upon his word.

Following his company champion's example, Kor'sarro reached up and unlatched his helmet. As he lifted it clear, the cold air struck his scarred face. Even through the cold, he could taste the underlying chemical pollution caused by the activities at the promethium plant – it did not take the enhanced senses of a Space Marine to detect it. Squinting against the breeze, Kor'sarro regarded his force with fiercely burning pride.

Four Rhino transports, set down in pairs by Hunters Two and Four, idled. Each one carried a ten-man Tactical squad. With the loss of Hunter Three, two more vehicles were missing, and the absence of the heavy weapons of the Devastator squads they had carried might well be felt in the coming battle. Twenty more Space Marines stood nearby, each equipped with a bulky jump pack, marking them out as the 3rd Company's Assault squads. A third Assault Squad had been carried on the missing Hunter Three. Lastly, two squads of White Scars bikers had formed up to either side of the Rhinos having been set down from the modified troop bay of Hunter Five, their engines growling and the cold air shimmering around their exhausts.

The sight of his warriors stirred fierce pride in Kor'sarro's savage heart. These men were the sons of the steppes of Chogoris, the windswept home world of the White Scars Chapter. They were born of the nomadic tribes that lived, fought and died across the trackless plains. They were hunters one and all, born in the saddle and had none become a White Scar, each would have been a king of a noble tribe. These men of the 3rd Company had earned Kor'sarro's trust and loyalty a thousand times over. They had shared with him every peril and every horror the galaxy could conjure.

This last decade, they had followed him in the hunt for one of the Chapter's most hated enemies, indeed, one of the Imperium's most despised sinners. The daemon prince Voldorius – Kor'sarro spat as he conjured the name of his foe – would be run to ground by these men, and by the hand of the Master of the Hunt, would be slain.

Savouring the moment for a few seconds more, Kor'sarro filled his lungs with air. Then, raising

Moonfang, his ancient and revered blade, high above him, he uttered the war cry that his men had heard a thousand times before, on a thousand battlefields, before a thousand victories.

‘For the Khan, and for the Emperor!’

The cry was echoed in the throats of four score warriors. Kor’sarro opened Moondrakkan’s throttle, its engine roaring deafeningly in the manner of its namesake. The bikes of Kor’sarro’s Command squad and of the other two groups of riders took up the savage cry, and were followed an instant later by the deeper, throaty roar of the Rhinos. Then the Assault squads gunned their jump packs to a high-pitched scream, putting Kor’sarro in mind of the deadly avian predators of Chogoris. With the roar of the proud, noble tribesmen of his home world, Kor’sarro span Moondrakkan around to face the distant refinery, and opened the throttle fully.

Moondrakkan leapt forwards, Kor’sarro’s long cloak billowing in the cold air behind him. Without turning to look, he knew that his warriors were following, and instead focussed on the objective. The outer defence line was only two kilometres distant, and the inner line another two beyond that. Another kilometre past the inner trench line lay the outer edges of the refinery itself and beyond that, Kor’sarro’s foe, the target of his ten-year hunt. Kor’sarro’s attack plan was simple and audacious, and entirely in keeping with the martial heritage of his people. If the bastions of the inner defence line were so heavily armed that the Thunderhawks could not penetrate to the refinery, then his warriors would ride those defences down, smashing them aside in an unstoppable assault none could withstand.

But Kor'sarro's attack would not be the maddened charge of an unreasoning berserker, for the White Scars were well schooled in the subtleties of the arts of war. The strike force would break into three bodies as it closed on the outer line. One would mount a feint against one length of the trench line, drawing in reinforcements from nearby sectors. Only when Kor'sarro was sure the enemy had taken the bait would the second body strike at the weakest section. Even as that group was consolidating its victory and the first breaking off, the third body would be racing towards the inner fortifications, and the process would be repeated.

The strike force was well-practised in such assaults, for their people had been undertaking similar actions since time immemorial. As Moondrakkan closed on the outer line and the cold air whipped up Kor'sarro's long, braided, black moustaches, he was put in mind of his first ever charge against an enemy. He had been barely in his twelfth summer, yet considered a man by his people. That day he had spilled his first blood, claimed his first life and earned his first honour scar. Many more had been traced across his craggy face since becoming a Space Marine. He prayed that more still might be added, yet in truth, only one counted. The scar earned by the death of Voldorius.

A missile streaked past, billowing an ugly black contrail, and Kor'sarro snapped back to the present. He traced the trail back to a concealed gun pit dug hastily into the snow nearby, and veered Moondrakkan towards it before the firer had a chance to load a second projectile.

Moondrakkan's front wheel hit the spoil pile in front of the pit, and Kor'sarro hauled back on the handlebars, gunning the engine as he did so. The bike launched into

the air above the pit, and in an instant, Kor'sarro had drawn his bolt pistol. In the two seconds in which the bike was airborne, the Master of the Hunt located his target, a refinery worker bedecked in filthy brown rubberised overalls and wearing an insect-like gas mask, drew a bead on the man's weapon, and pulled the trigger.

Moondrakkan slammed to the frozen ground on the far side of the gun pit, kicking up a spray of ice. Kor'sarro heard the crack of the bolt as it struck the freshly-loaded missile launcher, followed an instant later by a sharp detonation as it, and the launcher's ammunition, exploded. Stealing a glance behind him, Kor'sarro grinned savagely at the destruction he had wrought: the firer and the dozen or so other enemy warriors taking shelter in the pit lay scattered about, body parts strewn across the reddened snow for metres in all directions.

Turning his head back around, Kor'sarro saw that he was rapidly closing on the outer defence line. He scanned the fortifications, and immediately located the point where the feint attack should be aimed.

'Taura,' Kor'sarro addressed the sergeant of one of the Tactical squads over the vox-net. 'Noon, as the ram-hound strikes.'

The sergeant's confirmation came back over the net and two of the armoured Rhino transports peeled away from the body of attackers and arrowed for the point Kor'sarro had indicated in the battle-cant of his Chapter. As the squat transports ground up the frozen plain, one of the Assault squads screamed overhead, the ten Space Marines diving upon the enemy position with chainswords whirring angrily. The sounds of battle were audible over the vox-net, Kor'sarro keeping the channel open for a moment to gauge the intensity of the fight.

There was little he could do to influence the outcome now, however, as more pressing concerns presented themselves.

Hauling on Moondrakkan's handlebars, Kor'sarro led the remainder of the strike force in a wide sweep, away from the point where Sergeant Taura's units were engaged. The White Scars made expert use of every scrap of cover, especially the man-high crystal formations studded about the plain. In minutes, the force was barrelling towards what Kor'sarro judged to be a less well-defended length of the trench line.

'Enemy reinforcements committed,' Kor'sarro heard Sergeant Taura call over the vox-net, the transmission punctuated with the sound of chainswords cleaving flesh and bolt pistols firing at point-blank range. Good, thought Kor'sarro: now is the time.

'Second wave,' Kor'sarro bellowed, for he had no need of the vox to give this order. 'With me!'

A savage war cry went up behind him as Kor'sarro steered Moondrakkan for the defence line. Knowing that the enemy had drawn off defenders in an attempt to repel Sergeant Taura's feint, he led his force directly down upon their foe, while the last third held back.

The White Scars' charge ate up the last hundred metres in seconds, and only at the last instant did the few defenders still manning this section of the line open fire. Kor'sarro and his Command squad leapt over the trench as he had done before, and upon striking the ground on the other side, slewed their mounts around. The stunned defenders were caught entirely off guard, few even having turned before they were cut down in a storm of bolt pistol fire.

Stowing his pistol, Kor'sarro drew Moonfang, and ignited its blade, its entire length crackling with barely

contained energies. The dozen defenders not slain in the opening fusillade rose from the trench and threw themselves at Kor'sarro and his men, who as one leapt from their bikes to counter-charge. The melee was brief, the defenders not standing a chance against the superhuman Space Marines, but Kor'sarro was surprised by the vigour of the attack.

Though not disciplined or veteran troops, the defenders were fired up by a hatred that granted them the strength to face the White Scars, however brief and futile the effort. Only the lies of the Great Enemy could motivate such men as these, and he detected the unmistakable, bitter taint of blasphemy in the air. How tight was the grip of Voldorius on this place, and on these men? He would soon find out.

Even as Moonfang cleaved the last of the traitors in two, spilling the man's innards across the debris-strewn trench, the last body of the strike force was moving forwards. Two more armoured transports ground across the trench nearby, their tracks crushing defenders to a bloody pulp as a squad of Assault Marines soared overhead. Taking stock of the situation, Kor'sarro activated his vox-link.

'Taura,' he called to the leader of the first wave. 'Report.'

There was a brief pause before the sergeant's voice filled the channel, the background static laced with the screaming of chainswords as they cut through armour and flesh. 'Heavy resistance, my khan, and mounting. I have three wounded, but no ineffectives. Standing by.'

'Understood,' Kor'sarro replied, before switching back to battle-cant. 'The north wind turns.'

'The wind turns at moonrise,' the sergeant replied, his voice drowned out for a moment by gunfire.

Satisfied that Sergeant Taura's force would soon have extricated itself from the fighting, Kor'sarro swung into Moondrakkan's saddle and consulted the tactical slate mounted above the handlebars. Icons representing the units of the strike force winked green, and the enemy defence lines were etched in red, the data provided by the augurs of the Lord of Heavens in orbit high above. Three of those icons represented the constituent parts of the third wave, which was bearing down on the inner trench line. Even as Kor'sarro prepared to move out, he heard the unmistakable sound of heavy cannon fire, followed a moment later by a rumbling explosion. In the distance, he saw a mighty cloud rise, and knew that the third wave had encountered heavy resistance.

'Patha,' Kor'sarro addressed the leader of the third wave. 'What is your status?'

The vox-channel churned with interference, and a second explosion blossomed in the distance. Then Sergeant Patha's voice cut in. 'Repeat, coming under fire from a heavy-calibre battle cannon mounted in the bastion to our fore. I have two badly wounded, one ineffective, over.'

Rising in Moondrakkan's saddle, Kor'sarro squinted towards the inner defence line. Against the glare reflected by the frozen plain, he could see the bastion of which Sergeant Patha spoke. As he watched, a low turret at the bastion's top swivelled, the barrel tracking one of Patha's Rhino transports. Before Kor'sarro could voice a warning, the cannon fired, the heavy shell impacting the ice scant metres from the carrier. As the projectile detonated, the rear of the vehicle was thrown several metres into the air, before it crashed down again. Incredibly, the Rhino continued on its course towards the gun tower.

The air all around was rapidly filling with gunfire, evidence, if any were needed, that the enemy were reacting to the White Scars' attack. The strike force had been fortunate so far. Perhaps the defenders had not believed they would return and mount a ground attack so soon after determining the full extent of the air defence net. They would pay for their mistake, Kor'sarro swore, but only if the White Scars pressed home the attack for all they were worth, right now.

'All commands!' Kor'sarro bellowed over the roar of battle. 'Engage that tower!'

Launching Moondrakkan forwards, Kor'sarro was joined by his Command squad and the two other squads of White Scars bikers. The vox-link was filled with terse battle-cant as the third wave closed on the bastion, the battle cannon continuing to bracket the Rhinos even as the Assault Marines dived towards it from on high. For a moment, he considered calling on the Thunderhawks to engage it with their hellstrike missiles, but could not risk the gunships being struck by the defenders' heavy air defences again. To lose one Thunderhawk was bad enough, but to lose another would be unforgivable.

Kor'sarro sped across the plain, bikers to either side, Assault Marines overhead and Rhinos grinding onwards in his wake. He caught sight of Sergeant Taura, his helmet gone and a bloody gash cut across the warrior's forehead speaking of the ferocity of the resistance the feint attack had met. The turret on the bastion turned, this time in the direction of Kor'sarro's combined first and second wave. Imbeciles, he thought, seeing that the gunners were too ill disciplined or inexperienced to continue their fire against the immediate threat, and were instead turning their weapon upon the larger foe. Despite the obvious danger, Kor'sarro was grateful for the brief

respite the gunners' mistake would give Sergeant Patha and his men.

'Heads down and keep going,' Kor'sarro bellowed over the combined roar of the bikes, jump packs and Rhinos. 'For Chogoris!'

His warriors echoed the war cry as the cannon opened fire. From the angle of the barrel at the moment the weapon fired, Kor'sarro knew that the shell would strike true, if more by chance than the skill of the gunners. Gritting his teeth against the inevitable, Kor'sarro lowered his head, redoubled his grip on Moondrakkan's handlebars, and sped onwards. The shell lanced towards his force and exploded on its right flank, enveloping an entire biker squad in smoke and mist. Of the nine White Scars bikes enshrouded by the rapidly expanding plume of vaporised ice and debris, only eight emerged, and several of these bore obvious damage, the riders' armour blackened and scratched. Kor'sarro doubted that the missing rider could have survived, but knew that the Rhino-mounted squad following close behind would confirm their brother's fate, and if possible retrieve his body.

The weight of incoming small-arms fire increased still further, and although poorly aimed, stray las-bolts and bullets kicked up puffs of powdery snow from the ground in front of the White Scars. Shots whistled by Kor'sarro's head and several impacted on the armoured fairing of his bike. As the distance closed, a heavy bolter opened up, the staccato rhythm filling Kor'sarro's ears. A score of heavy rounds whipped past, the gunner correcting his aim as Kor'sarro bore onwards. A shell clipped the armoured fairing, tearing a chunk away in a shower of sparks, and another glanced from Kor'sarro's right shoulder plate. The armour's auto-reactive systems

activated, dense fibre bundles compensating for the impact by moving rapidly in the opposite direction.

‘White Scars!’ Rage swelled in Kor’sarro’s breast that any traitor would dare raise a hand against the chosen of the Emperor and the Great Khan. ‘Show no mercy!’

The air was solid with the defenders’ fire, sparks flying from armoured bikes and battle-brothers alike. To Kor’sarro’s left, a biker was thrown clear as what must have been a dozen heavy bolter shells slammed into his chest plate, the sheer weight of fire throwing him backwards as his bike ploughed on before slewing to a halt. To Kor’sarro’s right, a lascannon seared a blinding line through the cold air, the blast striking one of the Rhino transports in its track nacelle. The stout vehicle ground to a halt having merely thrown a track. Despite the deep, black gash carved across its flank, the White Scars within all disembarked to continue the charge on foot.

A moment later and Kor’sarro and his warriors were closing on the beleaguered battle-brothers of the first wave, who were laying down a withering hail of suppressive bolter fire at the bastion, whilst attempting to take what cover they could against its heavy battle cannon in the midst of a low crystal outcropping.

‘Brother Kergis!’ Kor’sarro bellowed as he brought Moondrakkan to a skidding halt beside them. Seeing Brother Kergis dismount and race forwards, melta gun in hand, he leapt from Moondrakkan and pointed towards the armoured hatch of the bastion.

‘As you will, my khan,’ the Space Marine replied. Even though the man wore his helmet, Kor’sarro could well imagine the hunger for victory that he always showed in such situations. Kergis bore the scars of a

hundred hunts, and was without equal with his chosen weapon.

‘Cover us!’ Kor’sarro bellowed as every Space Marine in the strike force able to do so opened fire on the bastion. Even though few of their weapons had any chance of penetrating its thick, rockcrete construction, the torrent of fire would force the defenders to keep their heads down, and throw the aim of any who dared raise their weapons against the White Scars.

Even before the suppressive fusillade had fully opened up, Kor’sarro was dashing towards the bastion’s armoured hatch, Brother Kergis following close on his heels. The Space Marines’ covering fire took full effect, explosive bolts tearing ragged holes from the bastion’s flanks. There was no return fire from the bastion itself, but other defenders further along the line were nonetheless attempting to engage the White Scars with small-arms fire, poorly aimed shots whistling by all too close.

As the pair closed on the bastion’s hatch, Kor’sarro ducked to the right, unclipping a frag grenade from his belt. He turned as he ran the last few metres, and slammed back first into the bastion’s rockcrete wall, in time to see Brother Kergis come to a halt, brace his feet wide before the hatch and raise his weapon.

There was a timeless pause as Kergis looked to his captain, awaiting the order, as per the ancient traditions of their people. Kor’sarro nodded once, and Brother Kergis opened fire. The melta gun’s blast was preceded by a brief distortion of the air between barrel and target, before a stream of concentrated nucleonic fire streaked forth. Anything other than the highest grade of armour plating would have been vaporised in an instant, but the bastion’s hatch was built with the intention of resisting

such attacks. The hatch glowed orange, then blue, and then white as tremendous energies were absorbed and dissipated. The ground between Kergis erupted in vaporised ice. Kor'sarro felt an increase in the weight of fire all around, and saw that a company of enemy soldiers were making their way along the nearby trench lines, firing wildly as they went. He looked back to Brother Kergis, and saw a line of bullets stitch across his left arm and shoulder plate. Despite the fire, the warrior's aim never faltered as he unleashed a second blast from his weapon.

This time, the hatch's armour peeled away, falling in molten gobbets to the blackened ground. The ragged edges still glowing fierce orange, Kor'sarro pressed the detonation stud on the ready frag grenade, and tossed it into the smoking opening. He ducked back, pressing himself against the bastion's wall as Brother Kergis dived to the opposite side of the wrecked hatchway.

A moment later, the grenade detonated, razor-sharp shrapnel belching forth, followed by a great gout of flame and black smoke. Fierce warrior pride consuming him, Kor'sarro stepped before the opening and drew Moonfang, activating the ancient blade's crackling power field with a familiar flick of his thumb.

Diving into the black, smoke-wreathed interior, Kor'sarro relied on senses other than sight. His genetically enhanced body gave him a wealth of advantages over his foes, and though he could barely make out a thing through the smoke, his superior hearing, smell and even taste drew him down upon his foe. The first enemies he found were very obviously dead, their bodies torn to shreds by the fragmentation grenade.

At the base of what Kor'sarro judged by touch to be an access ladder leading upwards to the next level, he came upon a wounded enemy soldier. With a single, coldly economical motion, he broke the man's neck, ending the traitor's blasphemy in a far more merciful way than he deserved. Allowing any survivors no time to regroup, Kor'sarro reached up and hauled open the hatch at the top of the ladder, readying another frag grenade as he did so. As the hatch rose, dull, red light shone through, and an instant later a torrent of bullets was unleashed, kicking up angry sparks from the metal of the hatch. Even as one bullet ploughed a deep furrow across Kor'sarro's brow, he pressed the detonation stud, threw the grenade through the gap and slammed the hatch shut.

The explosion rocked the entire bastion, sending dust and loose debris in all directions. It must have caught an ammunition store. Kor'sarro grinned and cautiously lifted the hatch to see the damage. The bright violet-tinged light of the outside replaced the red illumination and Kor'sarro guessed that a viewing port had been blown outwards. Seeing no immediate threat, he rose through the hatch, Brother Kergis following close behind. As the smoke cleared, Kor'sarro saw that no defenders had survived the blast. Although blood was smeared across every surface and ragged parts of severed limbs were flung about, he could not tell how many of the deluded recidivists had manned the room.

Striding to the wrecked viewport, Kor'sarro looked out across the war-torn plain. His warriors had turned their weapons upon the counterattacking defenders, and were forcing them back with a fusillade of bolter fire. He judged that the enemy would soon turn and run for the outskirts of the refinery, which lay only a couple of hundred metres beyond the inner defence line. As

Brother Kergis moved in to stand beside him, Kor'sarro allowed himself a grim smile.

‘Order the warriors to mount up, brother,’ he said.
‘We have a hunt to complete.’

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