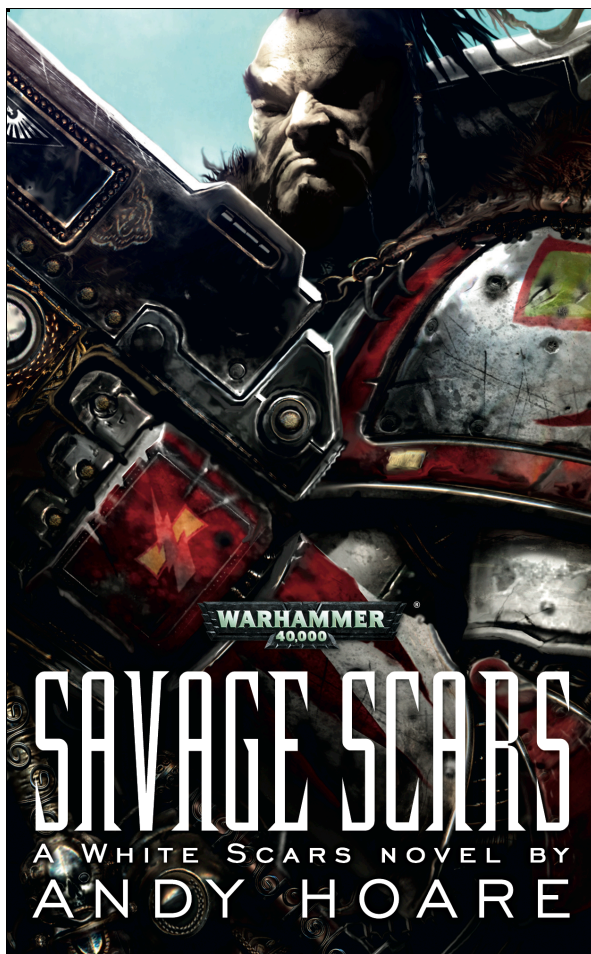


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# SAVAGE SCARS

## *A White Scars novel*

*By Andy Hoare*

The forces of the Greater Good have established a stranglehold on the planet Dal'yth, and the time has come for the Imperium to move against the tau. The White Scars Space Marines lead the ground assault against the aliens, launching into combat with speed and fury, shedding blood as they gain ground against their enemies. Meanwhile, the members of the Crusade Council are determined to pursue their own agendas, and their politicking and back-stabbing will place the entire war effort in jeopardy. But little do they know that Inquisitor Grand has more extreme measures in mind to end the war, and the White Scars must achieve victory quickly or the cost to Dal'yth will be devastating.

### **About the Author**

Andy Hoare worked for eight years in Games Workshop's design studio, producing and developing new game rules and background material. Now working freelance writing novels, roleplaying game material and gaming-related magazine articles, Andy lives in Nottingham with his partner Sarah.

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THE GLADIUS PIOUS stalked ponderously away, its huge armoured feet uncaring of the destruction wrought in their passing amongst the plantations and farm buildings. Princeps Atild had informed Sarik that the Warhound had been ordered to reinforce another of the spearheads. The Iron Hands had encountered heavy resistance in sub-sector delta twelve, while the spearhead Sarik led had made far better progress once it had broken through sector beta nine.

Sarik's Rhino ploughed onwards along the road towards the distant city of Gel'bryn, the column heading westwards as it penetrated ever deeper into alien territory.

According to Sarik's command terminal, the city was still some fifty kilometres away. His force was the furthest forwards, a fact that stirred fierce warrior pride in Sarik's heart, even though the White Scars made up only one part of the spearhead he commanded. The column, consisting of three squads from Sarik's own Chapter, two from the Ultramarines and three from the Scythes of the Emperor, plus supporting Predator tanks and Whirlwind missile tanks, had sustained multiple casualties and three deaths as it had pushed onwards. The fallen had been evacuated by Thunderhawk gunship, and the composite Space Marine company was travelling through a sector almost entirely given over to agriculture.

‘All squads,’ Sarik said into the vox-net. ‘Remain vigilant for ambushers. Maintain overwatch on all arcs.’ The terrain was closing in again, the crops and plantations offering ample hiding places for the spotters that had directed the tau grav-tanks to fire so effectively on the Warhound.

‘Lead,’ Sarik transmitted to the Ultramarines Rhino travelling ahead of his own. ‘Watch your forward sinister. There’s cover there the enemy might use.’

The Rhino’s Ultramarines tank commander swung his pintle-mount storm bolter in the direction Sarik had indicated, covering the dense stand of fruit trees as the vehicle rumbled by.

The Ultramarines carrier cleared the trees and the column wound its way past a cluster of what appeared to be abandoned agricultural machines. Sarik studied the machines as his Rhino ground past, studying their pristine white, gracefully rounded forms and considering for a moment whether he should order them destroyed in case the enemy should use them as weapons.

Even as Sarik decided the machines were no threat, the air was split by a hissing roar. Sarik recognised the sound of a fusion reaction boiling the air up ahead, and shouted from his open hatch: ‘Ambush! Pattern Nova!’

A sharp explosion split the air and the lead Rhino shuddered to a halt, its left track splaying outwards as its armoured flank was flash-melted to white hot slag. The Rhino veered right as flames belched from its left-side traction unit, shedding the track entirely.

Sarik hauled himself from the top hatch of his Rhino and vaulted over its side, bolt pistol drawn in one hand and chainsword in the other before his armoured boots had even touched the ground. The rear hatch slammed

down and his squad emerged, each brother taking position to cover a different arc with his boltgun.

Last out was Brother Qaja, his plasma cannon tracking back and forth as he came to kneel beside Sarik. The battle-brother had been patched up following the injuries he had sustained at the sensor pylon, but Sarik had been told by his force's Apothecary that the warrior would need heavy cybernetic augment-treatments when Operation Pluto was concluded.

'Target, brother-sergeant?' Qaja said as he swept the land ahead with his heavy weapon. 'Do you see them?'

'I see nothing, brother. Get the squads dispersed,' he said, before running forwards towards the lead Rhino, which was now almost entirely engulfed in flames as the melted armour on its flank began to solidify. None of the Ultramarines riding inside had yet disembarked.

As Sarik reached the rear end of the carrier, a secondary explosion burst from its foredeck. It was the pintle-mount's ready ammo cooking off, telling Sarik that the damage was far greater than was visible from the outside.

'Sergeant Arcan!' Sarik bellowed over the roar of the flames. 'Sergeant, do you hear me?' When no answer came, he sheathed his bolt pistol and chainsword and moved right up to the rear hatch.

'Can anyone hear me?' he bellowed. Again, no answer. There was only one thing for it. Flexing his armoured gauntlets, Sarik fed power to their fibre-bundle actuators to bolster his own, already formidable strength. He reached an arm out to either side of the hatch, locking the armoured shells covering his fingers to provide an anchor. After a final deep breath, Sarik hauled on the rear door with every ounce of his strength. The carrier's armour was designed to be proof against the many and

deadly threats it would face whilst fighting across the numerous battlefields of the 41st Millennium, and was not so easily beaten. Sarik took a second deep breath and bled more power from the fusion core at his back to his armour's actuators. Warning tones sounded as the armour's war spirit protested its mistreatment, then the hatch buckled at either side and Sarik hauled one more time.

With a roar, Sarik tore the rear hatch from its mounting and flung the metal down. A dense cloud of greasy black smoke billowed out to engulf him and Sarik's genetically enhanced senses filtered and analysed the taste and scents assaulting him. The strongest was burning flesh.

'Apothecary!' Sarik bellowed before diving inside the stricken carrier. In a moment the smoke had begun to clear and Sarik's eyes, well capable of operating in darkness, beheld a tragic sight.

The blast that had struck the Rhino's flank had burned a concentrated jet of nucleonic fire into the passenger compartment. Sergeant Arcan had been standing in the open rooftop cupola, and his entire lower body had been seared to atoms, its upper half still slumped in the hatch. The three battle-brothers nearest the wound in the side of their vehicle must have been boiled alive inside their armour, which had been melted into a hideously deformed parody of its former shape.

A movement caught Sarik's eye as an Ultramarine stirred. A second fusion blast sounded from somewhere outside, and Sarik heard running footsteps approaching from behind; the Apothecary, he hoped.

'Help is on the way, brother,' Sarik told the Space Marine, whose once deep blue armour had been reduced to scorched black by the titanic energies unleashed inside the vehicle. 'Hold on, and have faith.' Another

secondary explosion sounded from the forward area of the troop bay as more ammunition detonated, showering the sergeant with micro-shrapnel. He reached forwards and grabbed the nearest Ultramarine by the shoulder plates, hauling the stunned warrior from the open rear hatch as the Apothecary joined him.

The Space Marine medic added his strength to the effort, and the wounded Ultramarine was dragged clear by their combined efforts. In another minute, the two warriors had pulled another three clear, and more Space Marines had arrived to aid the rescue effort.

‘Do what you can, brother,’ Sarik told the Apothecary before rushing back to join Brother Qaja.

‘Status,’ Sarik said.

‘Squads are deployed as per Pattern Nova,’ Qaja said.

‘Enemy?’

‘None located, brother-sergeant,’ Qaja said, not taking his eyes from the terrain as he spoke.

‘None?’ Sarik growled. ‘These xenos and their trickery...’

A third fusion blast roared through the air, burning a searing orange wound across the flank of one of the Whirlwind missile tanks further down the column. The blast was hard to track, twisting and distorting the air as it was boiled by nucleonic forces. Nevertheless, Sarik got an idea of the origin point.

The only problem was, he could see nothing there. A ripe Chogoran curse escaped his lips as he scowled at the thought of yet more alien technology at work against his Space Marines.

‘All squads,’ Sarik growled into the vox-net. ‘Suppressive fire, delta nine, two hundred metres, wide.’

Every battle-brother deployed on the column’s left flank opened fire at the kill zone. The air was filled with



hundreds of mass-reactive bolts, the crops in the target area ripped to shreds as the ground was pounded by exploding rounds.

‘Cease fire!’ Sarik called out, watching intently for signs of movement in the kill zone. ‘Just wait...’

Then the sound of some kind of rotary gatling weapon powering up came from further down the column and an instant later a storm of blue energy bolts sprayed towards the Space Marines. Most struck the sides of the sturdy Rhino transports without inflicting any damage, but a battle-brother of the Scythes of the Emperor was thrown violently backwards as a bolt struck his shoulder plate. The warrior was unharmed, but he was forced to discard the wrecked shoulder guard and jettison the arm section as he stood to regain his position in the firing line.

‘Tau infantry,’ Sarik said. ‘But they’re using the same stealth devices we’ve seen in their elite flyers.’

‘Orders, brother-sergeant?’ Qaja said.

Sarik scowled as he scanned the surrounding terrain. It was dominated by low rises and depressions, a patchwork of crop fields and fruit plantations receding into the distance. The rise and fall of the land reminded him of the Baatarn Lowlands, an area his nomadic tribe had passed through when he was a child. His uncle, the tribe’s seersman, had told him a tale of the mist-spirits said to haunt the place...

‘Smoke...’ Sarik muttered.

‘Brother-sergeant?’

‘Did you ever hear the tale of how the Tuvahks defeated the Kagayaga at Baatarn?’ Sarik said, a sly grin forming on his face.

‘Of course, brother-sergeant,’ Qaja replied. ‘Codicier Qan’karro related it at the last Feast of Skies. I don’t see what—’

‘All squad leaders,’ Sarik said into the vox-net. ‘Have one of your men gather smoke grenades from the Rhino launchers and stand by.’

Another burst of blue bolts sprayed through towards the Space Marines, this time from further down the column still.

‘They’re circling us like blood-sharks on a wounded mooncalf,’ Qaja said through gritted teeth.

Within thirty seconds the squad leaders had all reported back over the vox-net that they were armed with smoke grenades taken from the multi-barrelled launchers at the front of each carrier. ‘How did the King of the Tuvahks escape the Kagayaga, brother?’ Sarik said, a feral light gleaming in his eyes.

‘He...’ Qaja said, before realisation dawned. ‘He smoked them out, brother-sergeant.’

‘All squads, deploy smoke grenades. Wide dispersion, fifty metres. Now!’

As one, the battle-brothers of each squad armed with the smoke grenades hurled them forwards. Upon striking the ground, each grenade detonated, creating an instant cloud of white smoke that billowed out from the impact point. Within seconds, a wide area fifty metres in front of the column’s left flank was enshrouded in drifting banks of smoke.

‘What now, brother-sergeant?’ Qaja said.

‘Wait and see, brother,’ Sarik said. ‘All squads, maintain overwatch. Look for movement in the smoke.’

Quiet settled the length of column as the Space Marines on its left flank focussed their attentions on the drifting smoke. Clipped exchanges went back and forth between the squad leaders as they coordinated their arcs, ensuring that every quadrant was covered.

‘Contact!’ a battle-brother from a Scythes of the Emperor Devastator squad on the extreme end of the line reported. ‘Zeta nine, transient.’

‘Hold your fire,’ Sarik ordered. ‘What did you see?’

‘Movement, brother-sergeant,’ the Space Marine said. ‘A parting of the smoke, but nothing solid.’

‘Your vigilance does you honour, brother,’ Sarik replied. ‘Stand by. Qaja, you have the squad.’

Sarik moved swiftly along the column, exchanging brief words with the squad leaders as he passed them. As he reached the Scythes of the Emperor Devastator squad, its sergeant indicated the battle-brother he had spoken to.

‘Show me.’

The warrior lowered his heavy bolter, resting its gaping barrel across his knee, and pointed into the drifting smoke bank with his free hand. ‘There, brother-sergeant. The smoke parted for a moment, as if something were about to emerge.’

‘But nothing did.’

‘Contact!’ another of the Scythes of the Emperor hissed, bringing his missile launcher to bear on a point to the squad’s extreme left. Sarik saw it too.

‘They’re working their way around us,’ Sarik said. ‘All squads. Ten round fusillade, fifty metres, delta quad, on my mark.’

As the squad leaders signalled their acknowledgements and ordered their firing lines ready to enact Sarik’s direction, the sergeant looked to the next squad along, a Scythes of the Emperor tactical squad. Clapping a hand on the shoulder of the Devastators’ sergeant, he said ‘Remain on station.’ Then turning to the sergeant of the tactical squad, he said, ‘Sergeant, I need five men.’

The squad leader selected five of his warriors and with a curt gesture sent them over to Sarik. ‘Brothers, remove

your helmets. Our foes are hidden to our sight, but not to our other senses. With me!’

As the five Scythes stowed their helmets at their belts, Sarik turned and was off, running towards the roiling bank of smoke. He crossed the fifty metres and plunged into the mists, halting the instant his vision was swallowed up by featureless white. A moment later, he heard the Scythes move in behind him and likewise halt. Even at a range of two metres, the warriors were barely visible. It was only their black armour that made them stand out at all, while Sarik’s white armour would make him all but invisible even at that close range.

Sarik took a deep draught of the air, slightly overemphasising the action so that the other Space Marines would hear it and follow his example. To Sarik’s enhanced senses, the air tasted overwhelmingly of garlic, though in reality that was the phosphorus employed in the smoke grenades. Sarik sensed his multi-lung implant engage as it protected his kidneys from the toxic effects of the chemical smoke. Taking another deep breath, he mentally filtered out the strong odour of garlic, and detected something else, something sharp, like bleach.

‘Ozone?’ one of the Scythes of the Emperor whispered at Sarik’s side.

‘Indeed,’ Sarik whispered back. ‘Some sort of energy field. Follow me.’

Sarik rose and commenced a stooped run, breathing steadily as he followed the sharp scent. As he moved, the smell grew in intensity, until his suspicions were confirmed. The tau were nearby, and the energy fields they were using to shield their movements were giving off the sharp smell of ozone as they reacted with the atmosphere.

Sarik halted, and was joined a moment later by the five Scythes of the Emperor.

‘Follow my lead,’ he hissed as low as possible. ‘And stay close and quiet.’

Then he was up again, the Scythes close behind. The smell of ozone grew almost overpowering and Sarik could sense he was almost upon his prey. Then the mist parted as if something just larger than a man was walking through it, and Sarik dived forwards headlong.

Sarik’s dive was arrested in mid air as he slammed into something invisible. The unseen form must have been substantially armoured, for the impact almost took the breath from Sarik’s lungs. He went down, the invisible opponent beneath him, and felt the figure thrashing wildly as it fought to escape.

The dark shadows of the Scythes of the Emperor passed by, and Sarik knew they too were engaging more unseen enemies. None made a sound.

Sarik made a fist and punched down hard towards the smoke-shrouded ground. His fist stopped half a metre from the ground, striking a hard surface. A muffled grunt sounded, confirming that the tau warrior was clad in some form of hard, but not invulnerable armour. Guessing where its head was, he made a grab, and found its neck, clamping his fist around it.

Sarik used his free hand to draw his combat knife. The enemy struggled all the more, and something blunt slammed into Sarik’s left shoulder plate. It could only have been a weapon, for a moment later Sarik heard the universal sound of ammunition being chambered. Knowing he had but seconds to prevent the enemy from firing its weapon and at best giving his presence away and at worst blowing his head clean from his shoulders,

Sarik plunged the monomolecular-edged blade towards where he judged the enemy's chest must be.

The blade struck solid armour, but Sarik brought it downwards until it found yielding flesh. With a brutal upwards thrust, Sarik plunged the knife deep inside the enemy's innards, feeling the tau shudder and thrash as he did so.

Then hot, purple blood spilled out of the invisible wound, staining Sarik's forearm. He withdrew the blade, and a shower of blue sparks, accompanied by the overpowering stink of ozone, erupted in front of him. He stood, and before his very eyes, his enemy faded into existence.

The warrior was wearing an armoured suit of matt black. The armour covered most, but not all of its body, and Sarik saw that his knife had found the soft joint between thigh and groin armour plate. The warrior's right arm carried a blunt, tube-shaped heavy weapon, and at its back was a device that Sarik judged to be the generator that powered its stealth field.

A series of muffled grunts and impacts told Sarik that the Scythes had encountered, and violently neutralised, more of the enemy stealth troopers. He listened until all had gone quiet again, and a moment later the five Space Marines reappeared.

'There are more of them, brother-sergeant. At least twenty, to the north.'

'Did they hear you?'

'Yes. They are inbound.'

'Good,' Sarik said, assuming a prone position on the ground. The smoke was beginning to clear. 'You might want to take cover, brothers.'

The Scythes of the Emperor took position beside the White Scar, and the six warriors concentrated on the

smoky depths where the enemy lay. 'Come on then...' Sarik whispered.

Then he saw it. The smoke parted as at least a dozen figures ghosted towards the Space Marines.

Sarik opened the vox-channel. 'Mark!'

The air erupted and the ground was churned as bolt-rounds hammered in from the Space Marine gun line. Heavy bolters added their throaty roar to the sharp staccato of the boltguns and the smoke banks sizzled as balls of plasma lanced through. Though un-aimed, the fusillade could not help but strike the foe. Sparks flew as rounds struck invisible bodies over and over again. Then the tau attempted desperately to return fire and a stream of blue energy bolts spat out from the invisible heavy weapons. But the tables were turned; the tau could not see their targets, and they were cut down before Sarik's eyes. As each fell, their shattered forms resolved, broken armour and body parts scattered across the ground.

The return fire died away, and within seconds ceased as the surviving tau retreated in the face of the Space Marines' overwhelming fusillade.

'Brother-sergeant,' a voice cut in over the vox-net. 'Estimated fifty contacts, closing in behind us.'

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