



THE BETRAYAL AT CHONDAX

"All Emperors are liars, all tyrants are thieves."

Chogorian proverb from pre-Compliance era

Chondax is not a name mentioned when scholars speak of the great turning points of the Horus Heresy. It does not resonate with the same infamy as the massacres at Isstvan or Calth, where hundreds of thousands of souls met their end, nor does it hold the strategic significance of the battles for Beta-garmon or Tallarn. Yet it is at Chondax that the course of the Horus Heresy was decided, not in fire and thunder, but in quiet, forgotten bloodshed. Here, Horus had his first setback. His first defeat. Here, both the Alpha Legion and the White Scars chose an unexpected path and defied the expectations of a galaxy at war. Here, the slaughter ended and the war began.

The Chondax incident finds its origins in the wake of the Ullanor Crusade, where the Emperor and Horus fought side by side for the last time. The vast Orkoid empire of Urlakk Urg was cast down and shattered for all time and Horus proclaimed Warmaster of all the Imperium, the Emperor's champion and commander of the Great Crusade as the Master of Mankind withdrew to Terra. Some say that this was the day Horus' heart turned cold, that the departure of his Father sparked the embers of rebellion within him. Whether such accusations hold any truth or not, it is in the wake of the world-spanning macro-Triumph that followed, a celebration of Horus' new title, that the foundations of the Heresy were undoubtedly laid.

In the ruins of the last great threat to Mankind's dominance, and the last real challenge to the Great Crusade, Horus drafted a number of orders. Regiments of the Imperial Army and Titan Legions were re-organised and redeployed at his command. Those units whose loyalty to the new Warmaster was absolute saw themselves shifted to key strategic positions, while those with little personal loyalty to Horus were posted to the most bloody of the Great Crusade's war zones. Even his brother Primarchs were not immune to these machinations, with those known as confidants of the Warmaster and those with long-held grudges against their father finding themselves granted the most opportune conquests, while those who might be considered rivals were sent to the far reaches of the galaxy. As we have already seen, the Blood Angels were removed from the seat of the Imperium, sent to distant Signus to meet their fate. The Lion, Roboute Guilliman and others still were found campaigns to wage far from the centres of Imperial power.

The Unbalanced Scales

Much of the work you now hold has been made possible by a document known as the *Unbalanced Scales*. The volume is a collection of handwritten notes, coded dispatches and picter images, all charting the Alpha Legion's course throughout the Horus Heresy. It is a cypher that lays bare the secrets of the Alpha Legion. In all probability, everything upon its pages is a lie.

The *Unbalanced Scales* is not a result of Imperial intelligence operations or my own research, it is of a rather more mysterious pedigree. It came into the possession of the Terran Archives in the years following the Traitor remnant's retreat from Terra in the final years of the Horus Heresy. No catalogue entry or scribe-adept records the exact date of its inclusion in the Archives, and only a single note regarding its arrival has been discovered. That note reads simply: *In the service of Truth* Ω. Despite this troublesome origin, the servants of Malcador, who retain much influence in the wake of their master's great sacrifice, have assured us of its veracity.

The *Unbalanced Scales* lists troop deployments, battle honours, personnel files and much more. With it, the full involvement of the Alpha Legion in the Chondax Engagement and hundreds of other battles can finally be fully documented – if its contents are to be trusted. However, considering the utter lack of other sources regarding the secretive XXth Legion, there has been little other choice. All information taken from the *Unbalanced Scales* has been verified as much as is possible through Imperium sources, though some details remain impossible to fully confirm and a number of key discrepancies remain. Yet when dealing with the XXth Legion, a force whose most feared weapon was that of lies and misinformation, I fear that there will never be a final and absolute truth regarding their activities.

Unlike some of his brothers, Jaghatai Khan, was one of the Primarchs that the new Warmaster counted as a ready ally, whose rough honesty and disdain for subterfuge put him out of suspicion as a rival to the great destiny Horus nurtured in the dark corners of his soul. The Khagan was a warrior, pure and simple; he had few ambitions of empire and many of his fellow Primarchs overlooked both his skill and the great deeds he and his Legion had performed in the name of the Great Crusade. Yet the Khagan was also staunchly loyal to the Emperor and a warrior whose oaths of loyalty would not be easily forsaken. Given the nature of the White Scars, whose reputation for self-sufficiency and obscure codes of honour was well established, any attempt to suborn them openly was as likely to make enemies of them as it was to bind them to the Warmaster's cause. Instead, Horus opted for a more subtle plan, unwilling to consign his old friend to the bloody fate he had in store for those he had deemed obstacles in his ascension.

He knew that the Khagan could neither be bribed nor intimidated, as he was a man famous for his wilful and stubborn ways, keenness to travel his own paths, and his Legion likewise kept their own ways and shunned the strictures of standard Imperium

doctrine. For the Warmaster, Jaghatai Khan could not be led, but he might be manipulated. He would not respond to either demands or to entreaties, and so he would have to be made to take the path Horus had chosen for him of his own will. To do so, Horus would need to set the stage for such a choice very carefully, lest the horse he wished tamed bolted. He would need to control every factor at play, to close off every avenue that the White Scars had, save for that path which took them to his side. They would have to be removed from the company of the other Legions and taken to a place where only that news which Horus wished them to have might reach them, and be occupied with a war that would satisfy their nomadic urges. The Warmaster had much to achieve, many traps to set and gambits to plan, and the White Scars would need to be preserved from becoming embroiled in these until they were complete.

So Horus sent the White Scars to Chondax, an uninhabited system a few short warp-jumps from Ullanor, a place of no real strategic importance and far from any well-travelled warp passages. Here they were to prosecute the last gasps of the victory at Ullanor, hunting down the remnants of Urlakk Urg's greenskin armies which had

taken refuge among the widely scattered worlds of the Chondax system. To the Khan, Horus presented these orders as a chance for war like that fought in the early days of the Great Crusade, free of Remembrancers and Terran oversight, a vast star system in which to roam and kill and laugh. He knew that Jaghatai Khan and his sons grew restless, that they felt the Great Crusade shifting and changing, becoming something more solid and regimented than it had once been, something that the White Scars were ill-suited for. He offered them a chance to live fully and free again, to make a more visible mark on the progress of the Great Crusade than that usually offered to them – a Legion that most often served as the outrider of the Great Crusade, unremarked and rarely praised. To place the last stone on the grave of Urlakk Urg's empire and be a central part of the Warmaster's triumph. Moreover, where others might have given the Khan orders, the Warmaster asked a favour from a friend. He asked for aid instead of demanding compliance, and Jaghatai Khan and his White Scars answered as they had always done, heeding the Warmaster's call.

Yet the White Scars were not the only Legion that Horus sent to Chondax. The Alpha Legion also received orders to depart for that otherwise insignificant stretch of space, but for a cause far removed from the business of the Great Crusade. Horus would need the appropriate instrument to set his trap, to bait it and, at the right moment, snap its jaws shut. In the Alpha Legion he found exactly what was needed. We do not know when Horus turned Alpharius and his followers to his cause, but given the timing of the events in Chondax, it must have occurred in 000.M31, before the end of the Great Triumph of Ullanor. Yet unlike many of the other Primarchs who were early converts to Horus' inner circle, Alpharius seems to have little cause for betrayal. Unlike Angron, he

bore no known grudge against his Father, and, unlike Mortarion, he was not known to have held open concerns regarding the policies and direction of the Imperium. Both the evidence at hand and the information found within the *Unbalanced Scales* hints at some outside force that influenced the Primarch of the XXth Legion, some cabal that saw a dark need for Horus to enact his terrible plans. Perhaps it is even possible that the inscrutable Primarch of the Alpha Legion thought he acted in the best interests of the Imperium, or sought to manipulate Horus and mitigate the damage he might cause. Perhaps he simply revelled in the sheer chaos that was about to be unleashed.

The truth is likely to remain uncertain, yet it is clear that the Horus Heresy was far more than a civil war brought on by misplaced ambition. Hidden forces both malign and secretive were manipulating the course of Mankind's future, and the events that would transpire at Chondax show the extent to which their influence stretched. This was the first year of the 31st Millennium, four years before the massacres in the Isstvan system and three years before Horus' encounter on the moon of Davin. Far before most contemporary accounts consider the madness of the Horus Heresy to have begun, and yet it seems that the actions of various malignant groups active within the Imperium had already planted the seeds of treachery within the hearts of many of the Emperor's greatest servants.

The Alpha Legion, now willingly complicit in the Warmaster's treachery, set to their task with a will. They were ordered to make haste for Chondax, to prepare that vast system for the White Scars arrival and keep them in place until the time was right. The ever secretive XXth Legion established a series of deep space stations in the void about the Chondax system, each somehow capable of intercepting and blocking astropathic communication, a feat rarely achieved with such efficacy in any other war zone of note. Some speculate on the involvement of the Word Bearers in this task, in some manipulation of the very essence of the aetheric realm by Lorgar's sons, perhaps even the first whispers of the Ruinstorm itself. Whatever its source or method, the Alpha Legion had closed off the Chondax system long before the arrival of the White Scars, seeding its worlds with hidden outposts from which they could guide the course of the campaign against the Orks, and deny a quick victory to the Khagan's Legion.

Plans within Plans

Much of the information in our possession hints that the Alpha Legion conspired not only with Horus but also with another unknown benefactor. The identity of this sponsor remains a mystery, and it is only through the actions of the Alpha Legion that we can infer their motives. The Alpha Legion were among the first Legions to join the cause of Horus' rebellion, with their involvement in the Chondax Engagement in the first years of the 31st Millennium being the earliest known of their traitorous actions. Yet it is not apparent that Horus made any concerted effort to win their loyalty. Indeed, they were often excluded from key meetings and scorned by other members of the Traitor host. As such, it seems sensible to assume that this unknown benefactor somehow coerced Alpharius into the service of the Warmaster, though what such an association might have to gain from assisting the rebellion is unknown. Few among the powerful in the Imperium reaped much reward from the utter destruction of the Horus Heresy, and most were left badly weakened in its wake. Indeed, it is the Outsider, the xenos and the outcast, who stood to benefit most from the Imperium's weakness. This is a telling fact and a chilling one. For if the Alpha Legion were indeed operating at the behest of some alien faction, who saw in the fall of the Imperium their own ascension then it is certain that those ambitions did not end with Horus' fall.

These preparations were all to set a stage for the subversion of the White Scars. Horus had no intention of causing a battle between Legions to be fought at Chondax, for unlike those later caught in the trap he was to lay at Isstvan V, he had no wish to see the White Scars broken and scattered. Horus had seen to their removal from the events he was about to set in motion. Caged at Chondax they would be unable to intervene at the burning of Prospero, for the Khagan and Magnus the Red were close allies, both outsiders to many of their brothers and both of a mystical inclination, and had he heard of his friend's peril, there was no force that could have stopped the White Scars from descending on Prospero to aid the Thousand Sons. Such a catastrophe was not to Horus' liking. His plans required the Wolves to be bloodied and the Sorcerer's sons betrayed – through such a gambit he strengthened his own hand and weakened those loyal to the Emperor. The Warmaster had merely to wait as his plans unfolded, and when the time was right, he would present Jaghatai Khan with just enough of the truth to satisfy him and lies enough to turn him to the service of the dark empire he sought to create from the corpse of the Imperium.

A STORM ON THE HORIZON (6244 STANDARD FRACTIONALS BEFORE)

When Horus set his seal to the orders that would send the White Scars to Chondax, Jaghatai Khan and a full five Hordes of the White Scars were arrayed at the Triumph Fields of Ullanor. Of the Primarchs at Ullanor, and their meetings and conduct, we have many sources – from the writings of several of the Primarchs themselves to the unnumbered accounts of Remembrancers.

where few among the great statesman of the Imperium cared to pay witness, an alliance whose import would become plain to many of the great and mighty far too late.

Horus, eager, we assume, to placate his brother and speed his departure on a task that, despite its initial gilding of honour, would likely entail some years of inglorious and arduous combat, granted the Khagan the authority to gather from among those renowned units present at Ullanor whichever he felt best suited to the task ahead. By all accounts it is a task the Khagan set to with a vigour, likely glad to be rid of the pomp and ceremony of the great Triumph. For several months, the Khagan was occupied with the marshalling of his own Legion, including the sending of dispatches to distant Hordes, and the selection of support units. In this regard, the bias of the White Scars towards a mobile style of war is much evident. Indeed, some records imply that, at first, the Khagan was reluctant to attach any non-Legion forces to his fleet. The inclusion of a mechanised cohort of the Saturnyne Rams would seem indicative of this bias, the Rams being known for their elite skills and preference for fast assault over protracted defence. Yet other choices, such as that of a detachment of the dour Charonid siege engineers, stand at odds with the Khan's usual preferences and perhaps speaks of the influence of Horus or some other adviser.

Perhaps the most curious addition to the Chondax fleet is that of a demi-vigil of the Silent Sisterhood. A small detachment had been part of the Ullanor Crusade, but had little involvement in the fighting, save for two encounters with rogue Orkoid psykers that had seen them brought to the front lines. However, the Council of Nikaea, to which the Great Khan had not been summoned, had not yet placed any restrictions on the use of battle-psykers within the Legions, and the White Scars continued to rely on their Stormseers to counter such threats. Some have opined that the reason for the inclusion of the Sisters was less because of their unique abilities and more due to the Terran-made jetbikes issued to one of their vigils, machines for which the White Scars held a noted curiosity. Others have noted the Khan's tendency to recruit advisers from the most unusual places, seeking differing perspectives from his own.

Many make little note of the Khan's presence, often choosing to focus their praise on those of his brothers more accustomed to such affairs. Yet where he does appear, it is often significant. For example, he is rarely seen away from his Legion save in the company of certain of his brothers, most often either Horus Lupercal or Magnus of Prospero. Of these meetings, during which it is assumed that Horus presented his brother with the orders to cleanse Chondax, there is no hint of displeasure or upset in the Khagan's comportment. Indeed, many accounts make much of the camaraderie between the two, especially due to its absence in the Khan's other interactions.

Of his meetings with Magnus the Red there is far less recorded, yet it is these that occupy the majority of his time away from the tasks of war and conquest. The two were bound by their status as outsiders among the more charismatic of their brothers and an unlikely alliance had sprung up between the two Legions, one of pragmatic wanderers and the other book-bound scholars. During the great parades of the Triumph, those of the White Scars present marched beside the warriors of Prospero, and in the celebrations that followed the Warmaster's appointment, the two Legions, while often forgotten by the other Legions, were ever at each other's side. It is said by those who knew him that the Khagan favoured Magnus for his honesty and willingness to speak the truth as he saw it despite the threat of censure, and while their views did not always align, his respect did not falter. During the brief sojourn of the Legions on the Triumph Fields of Ullanor, there were many bonds forged between the warriors of Chogoris and Prospero,

THE CHONDAX CLEANSING FLEET

Included here is a transcript of the original roster and writ of authority issued by the Warmaster to Jaghatai Khan for the Chondax campaign. It includes a full listing of the forces allocated to the Khan and, of particular interest to scholars of the Horus Heresy, a condensed set of the official campaign orders.

'This being a roster of those forces bound by oath to the service of the Warmaster's agent, Jaghatai Khan, named executor of his will and chief among his servants in this endeavour, known hereafter as the Chondax Crusade. By order of Horus Lupercal, Master of the XVIth Legion, The Eye of Terra, and Warmaster of the Imperium, this crusade shall devote itself to the prosecution of those goals listed here:

By means of any and all force required, to reduce all enemy strongholds and fastnesses to ruins, to harry and destroy all of his forces and to see each and every stain of his presence obliterated.

To remain at arms within the immediate vicinity of the trinary star system known as Chondax, despite provocation by the enemy or the call of allies, that the grand design of the Warmaster proceed undisturbed.

To give welcome and succour to all declared emissaries of Warmaster Horus Lupercal, and to heed those missives they bear without regard to other authority.

Let no other duty or call to arms supersede this charge, let no warrior rest till the will of the Warmaster is executed in full and his wrath spent to its uttermost extreme.

By the seal and authority of the Warmaster of the Imperium, first servant of the Emperor, on this date [769000.M31], let none hinder these warriors in the execution of their duties on pain of sanction extremis and full redress under Imperial law.'

Crusade Fleet Officer Cadre

Jaghatai Khan, Lord of the Vth Legion, Chosen Emissary of the Warmaster – Commander-in-chief of all Imperium forces assigned to the Chondax war zone.
Calistis Merovin, Knight-Centura of the Silent Sisterhood.
Argus Gygan, Stratigos of the Saturnyne host and commander of 13th Solar Auxilia cohort.

Fleet Contingent

Elements of the White Scars fleet, 472 capital ships, mainly of lighter mass and class, and approximately 600 lesser strike craft and destroyers.
Elements of the Imperial Navy, 21 capital-class craft, including seven macro-ark transport barges, and a further 30 deep range scout craft and destroyers.
A single Optima-malifax class light cruiser of the Silent Sisterhood.

Main Contingent

The Vth Legion – The White Scars
Five Hordes of the White Scars were present at the Triumph of Ullanor, with another three Hordes joining the fleet at Chondax, arriving from campaigns around the Pale Stars via the staging areas of Ryza.

In total, the White Scars force numbered approximately 67,600 Legionaries, including limited armour and other support units, representing over 60 individual Brotherhoods and over two-thirds of the entire Legion.

Unlike most Legions, the White Scars follow no numerical scheme to identify their Hordes, instead marking them only with the name of the Horde's current Noyan-khan. This idiosyncrasy, when combined with the White Scars tradition of its recruits taking a new Chogorian name to replace their old one upon gaining the rank of Legionary, makes them exceedingly difficult to accurately track.

- Krenak Noyan-khan's Horde, part of the Ullanor Crusade, primarily mounted infantry, approximately 7,900 strong.

- Asudai Noyan-khan's Horde, part of the Ullanor Crusade, including a substantial armoured contingent, approximately 7,300 strong.

- Hasik Noyan-khan's Horde, part of the Ullanor Crusade, primarily mounted infantry, approximately 9,800 strong.

- Jemulan Noyan-khan's Horde, part of the Ullanor Crusade, primarily mounted infantry, approximately 8,300 strong.

- Nogai Noyan-khan's Horde, part of the Ullanor Crusade, includes a large proportion of reconnaissance specialists, approximately 9,200 strong.

- Sangjar Noyan-khan's Horde, re-routed from the Yarath Pacification, primarily mounted infantry, approximately 8,600 strong.

- Gansukh Noyan-khan's Horde, re-routed from the Yarath Pacification, includes a large infantry contingent with many heavy weapons, approximately 7,000 strong.

- Orbaatar Noyan-khan's Horde, re-routed from the Thanatos Expedition, one of the few Hordes to include an artillery train, approximately 9,500 strong.

Imperial Army Auxiliary

- 13th Solar Auxilia Cohort – 4,000 void hoplites of the famed Saturnyne Rams regiments. The 13th was one of the few fully mechanised cohorts of the Rams.

- 42nd Seraphine Guard – 8,000 Imperialis Militia troops assigned for garrison duties.

- 8th Fane of the Charonid Sentinels – 2,000 heavily augmented siege engineers and war engines of ancient provenance.

Independent Forces

- One demi-vigil of the Silent Sisterhood – 63 Sisters militant equipped with Erinyes pattern jetbikes.

Of his own Legion, the White Scars, records from the Triumph speak little. As on many occasions, the Vth Legion appears to have slipped past the notice of many chroniclers, yet by their absences we can chart their activities and temperament in those last few months before the Chondax campaign. For many of the ceremonial parades and reviews, the White Scars were marked only by the limited numbers in which they took part. The majority of those troops present, some five full Hordes numbering around 50,000 warriors, were engaged in

scouring the wastes of Ullanor for the last defeated remnants of the foe. Those few Remembrancers who remarked upon them noted the restless aspect of the Legion and the distance between them and many of their brothers. Of all of the Legions at Ullanor, the White Scars kept mostly to themselves, with little of the camaraderie that marked the meeting of some of the other Legions.

Few preparations were needed to ready the Legion for combat. More than any other Legion, the White Scars were renowned

for their strategic mobility, with most units remaining at combat stations throughout the Triumph. Indeed, several Brotherhoods were still engaged in active combat with xenos remnants on the outer worlds of the Ullanor system. Even as the Imperial Army units were marshalling, several of the White Scars Brotherhoods had already left the system to perform preliminary reconnaissance of the Chondax system. Within a few short days, the bulk of those Legion forces were ready to leave, with two Hordes and several squadrons of warships detailed by the Khan to secure

a staging ground while the bulk of the force assembled. Unusually, the Khan did not travel with the vanguard, choosing instead to remain at Ullanor as his battlegroup gathered. What few records we have available show this time was spent in closed meetings with the Warmaster, though what was discussed has been lost to time.

Despite the speed with which the White Scars assembled their Expeditionary force, they were not the first Imperial task force to arrive in the Chondax system. The Alpha

Legion had been present at Chondax for quite some time, having received their own orders from Horus long before Jaghatai Khan received his. Preparations had been made both within the system and without, the scale of which has not been fully examined until now. A number of void stations were constructed both along the heliopause of Chondax's star and in interstellar space. These stations, known to the Alpha Legion as the Tenebrae stations, were to act as sentinels over the Chondax system, hosting an array of complex signal interception systems that, when activated, would form a complex web around the Chondax system and stop all short range communications. The documents contained within the *Unbalanced Scales* also note the inclusion of small cabals of Word Bearers on several of the stations, apparently included for their ability to manipulate the Warp in some unknown manner, effectively blocking astropathic communication.

Their preparations were not limited to out-system stations, and several worlds within the Chondax system were prepared for the arrival of the White Scars. Chondax itself, a complex and sprawling system of three suns, had been first charted centuries before by explorers and traders, and had at one point played host to several isolated communities whose descent can be traced back to ancient exiles from the Skandik cantons of Old Earth. Long since devolved into ramshackle flesh-markets for the void-reavers that plagued surrounding systems, these settlements are assumed to have been destroyed by the influx of Ork tribes fleeing the destruction wrought at Ullanor, but the charts and names they used for the worlds of the system remained in common use. The Orkish hordes, now bereft of strong leadership, predictably split into a fragmented web of warring clans soon after establishing themselves in the strongholds of their victims. Unknown to Imperial agents, but thoroughly documented by Alpha Legion headhunter teams, the main Ork groups were concentrated around the rival fortresses of Hate Spike and Vorskarr in the inner system, the great fastness of Black-blight among the many worlds of the mid-system, and the nomadic clans borne on hollow asteroids that fought an unending, cannibalistic war amongst each other in the far regions of Chondax.

Careful to avoid agitating the Ork clans that had taken root in Chondax, the Alpha Legion created a network of small, shielded redoubts across the system. Most were tiny, intended to shelter only a few dozen Alpha Legion

infiltrators, but at least two, located on the worlds of Byfrust and the moons of Phemus, were much larger. From these hidden fastnesses, each with an array of augurs and hardened communications systems, the Alpha Legion could manipulate the course of the fighting to serve their own ends. Little was left to chance. The White Scars would have scant opportunity to discover the subterfuge of their Warmaster and no sure path away from Chondax, save that which Horus and his allies allowed them. Horus had set his trap and now had but to await the arrival of his prey.

THE VEIL CLOSES (5964 STANDARD FRACTIONALS BEFORE)

Chondax had been well chosen, both by the Orks that had fled there and later by Horus when he had searched for a distraction to occupy the Khan. Its battlefields were wide and pristine, untainted by the politics and logistical concerns that had begun to dog the last years of the Great Crusade and the White Scars. Here they were free to roam the empty plains and wide ash seas at will, killing and hunting as they chose with an enemy that asked no quarter and held almost as much delight in the simple act of combat as did the White Scars themselves. Such was the wild and uncharted nature of the system, with over a dozen major worlds, that the uncounted hordes that had fled the fall of Ullanor found no shortage of boltholes.

For a merely mortal task force it would have been the work of a lifetime to clear the entire system, and the cost in lives would have been far higher than warranted by an uninhabited and strategically unimportant system. Even for such a force that Jaghatai Khan had gathered, the campaign would be a major undertaking, for Horus' orders had been absolute: while even one Ork still drew breath in Chondax, their work was not complete. That such an effort seemed excessive for the reward of reclaiming a system like Chondax did not matter, for the Khagan had sworn an oath to one he considered not just his superior, but also his friend. The Khagan's own writings imply that he considered the affair a show of force by the newly crowned Warmaster, an attempt to cement his authority and success among his fellow Primarchs by making the victory he had achieved at Ullanor absolute. Such a style of leadership was not the same as that displayed by Jaghatai Khan, who was renowned for his remote, some considered negligent, approach to leadership. The Khagan had always preferred to inspire rather than demand blind obedience.



The Hydra at War

The size and organisation of the Alpha Legion contingent assigned to the Chondax system remains difficult to fully confirm. The information provided by the *Unbalanced Scales* and other Imperium sources does not tally with the account of the White Scars present at that engagement, though it should also be noted that several of those White Scars who recorded their recollection of events have contradicted each other. Such is the nature of the Alpha Legion, given as they were to deception and trickery, that it is likely that much of the confusion was an intentional battle tactic. As such, the author has chosen to include a full listing of those forces recorded as in-system by all sources. Those assets that can only be confirmed by one of the many sources, and must therefore be considered potential errors, have been noted as such.

Alpha Legion Fleet Assets: The Alpha Legion fleet, which managed to deploy combat flotilla against multiple Legions in disparate sections of the galaxy and still maintain numerical superiority, has been shown to be vastly larger than any pre-Heresy estimates and had two distinct components at Chondax. The first of these was made up of several squadrons of small, fast destroyers. These squadrons interdicted all traffic bound for the Chondax system, and are assumed to have accounted for the destruction of over a dozen merchant craft as well as four Imperial cargo-arks, and a single Thousand Sons cruiser that escaped sanction during the assault on Prospero and sought sanctuary with the White Scars. These ships are thought to number no more than 100 vessels, all kept supplied by the Tenebrae stations and active from some point in early 001.M31.

The second deployment was on a fleet scale, comprising at least 600 capital class craft and upwards of 1,000 smaller strike craft. This second fleet was intended as a last resort, and represents the first stage of the Alpha Legion's deviation from Horus' orders – for it was obviously formed with the intention of engaging and destroying the White Scars fleet in open void war. Assembled during the years which the White Scars spent on-campaign in Chondax, it is not believed to have been on-station until mid-006.M31, at which point it took up a position in the neighbouring Angvor system. It must be noted that many accounts taken from those involved in the later combat at Chondax make plain that many of the ships fielded by the Alpha Legion were not dedicated combat vessels, but rather converted bulk haulers and other non-combat craft cleverly disguised and provided with minimal armaments. Other ships in use by the Alpha Legion, later destroyed in combat and analysed, have been positively identified as craft originally belonging to other Legions and listed as missing long before the outbreak of the Horus Heresy.

Alpha Legion Assets: Compared to the vast naval deployment made in and around the Chondax system, the number of ground troops committed by the Alpha Legion is comparatively small. Based on combat reports from the few known surface encounters and the information contained in the *Unbalanced Scales*, the total number of Alpha Legionnaires present within the Chondax system is unlikely to have exceeded 30,000. For the most part, this strength was divided into far smaller strike groups, each tasked with monitoring part of the sprawling Chondax system, though two larger hidden outposts on the fourth moon of the cold gas giant Phemus and the world of Byfrust probably held larger reserve forces. In addition to these forces, there were also small garrison cadres aboard the Tenebrae stations, but these troops were not part of the larger battle within the Chondax system. However, records indicate that several of the Tenebrae stations are noted to have included a small number of Word Bearers among their garrison. These specialist troops appear to have been linked to the Alpha Legion's efforts to keep the system isolated from warp travel and communications.

Command and Control: Even with all of the resources now available to us in the wake of Horus' defeat, it is still unknown who commanded the Alpha Legion task force at Chondax. Some after-action reports by combat veterans of the incident have claimed that Alpharius himself was present, though these accounts are often contradictory, placing him in vastly different locations at the same time. Given the Alpha Legion Primarch's fondness for misdirection, and the diversionary nature of the encounter at Chondax, it is unlikely that the Primarch himself oversaw the combat. The only other insight available is the *Unbalanced Scales*, and that source of information must be considered to be of dubious provenance, which lists the commander at Chondax only by the pseudonym of 'Desidero', likely some internal cypher with meaning among the hierarchy of the Alpha Legion.

Despite any misgivings over the orders of his Warmaster and friend, the Khan fell to the task of plotting his strategy with a will, perhaps glad to be once again at war and away from the endless parades of Ullanor and the posturings of his brother Primarchs. Chondax presented an unusual strategic challenge, for most Compliance campaigns were focused on the reduction and occupation of a single inhabited world, or the utter annihilation of several. As such the typical campaign consisted of a brief, if bloody, strike upon the enemy's concentrated

forces, destroying his ability to resist before tasking trailing Imperial Army units with the long drawn-out task of hunting down stragglers and enforcing Imperial law on the shocked survivors. Chondax, with a binary pair of giant blue stars at its heart and a third star orbiting the central pair at an immense distance, offered sixteen major targets, each of which was infested with xenos stragglers to some degree. On all of these worlds, the White Scars would need to hunt down and obliterate their foe, harry the survivors to their deaths and then consolidate their hold on the world, for of all of the xenos foes

Mankind had faced among the stars, it was the Ork that most often returned from the brink of defeat if not thoroughly purged. Once declared free of Orkish taint, each world would need a sentinel force left in place to stop the Orks fleeing from other targets from taking refuge there once again. The sheer size of the system was such that even with the large fleet contingent present, the White Scars could not easily interdict all of the dark places of Chondax, leaving them bound by honour and sworn oaths to a long drawn-out campaign of eradication.

The initial stages of the Chondax cleansing, as detailed in both the Khagan's records and the reports of the Imperium's logistics corps assigned to the fleet, were focused on seizing control of a single world in-system, which would act as the central command of the task force. From that central base, each individual target would be assigned to one or more Brotherhoods to clear and secure. This plan relied on the White Scars' skill at independent operations and decentralised command structure to conduct their mission with best speed without endangering its overall security. Those Imperial Army elements that had accompanied the fleet were to act as a specialised reserve, called in to deal with those targets that either required equipment the White Scars lacked, or that were better suited to more long-term static modes of warfare.

It was decided to use the fourth planet of the mid-system orbits, known on old charts as Kvarsir, a large open world of white salt plains, as the initial target of the fleet. Designated as Chondax Prime, and known more informally among the White Scars as the White World, this planet fitted a number of key parameters that would make it ideal as both an initial landing zone and later as a central command location. Of all of the desolate worlds of the Chondax system, it was perhaps the least inhospitable, a landscape of pristine white plains and low scrub vegetation, ideal for the kind of warfare preferred by the Vth Legion. It was also located within a reasonable real-space distance from most of the remaining targets of the sprawling Chondax system, considered important as the fleet's astropaths had noted increased aetheric turbulence in the area and had warned against unnecessary short range Warp translations. Lastly, and perhaps most confusingly to those unfamiliar with the nature of the Vth Legion, it was the site of the largest concentration of Ork forces yet found by those scout craft in-system, occupying several fortresses in both the wide plains and the remote northern mountains. Jaghatai Khan intended to descend from the heavens unlooked for and unexpected, shatter the foe's greatest strength before it could rally and then hunt down those left at his leisure.

Their plans thus set, the Vth Legion embarked for Chondax. At this point, the fleet consisted of those five Hordes present at Ullanor, perhaps 40,000 Legionaries, and the various regiments of the Imperial Army selected by the Khagan to accompany him. Departing from the great fleets that hung in orbit over Ullanor, the Khagan and his warriors went

into what might have seemed to some more like a self-imposed exile but, as is recorded in various personal logs and oaths of moment made by the White Scars, was seen by the Vth Legion as a happy release from the onerous duty of parade and review. Following one of the lesser spin-ward channels of the great Paramar warp canal, the so-called Passage of Iron that passed through the Maelstrom and ended at the great forge of Anvillus, the Chondax Crusade fleet made the realspace translation into Chondax after only a few short months of travel. Here, the Khan instructed the fleet's Navigators to exit within the Mandeville belt, a narrow area of space between the orbits of the central binary pair, and the outer third star, where ships could exit warp space uninhibited. This risky manoeuvre placed the White Scars almost on top of their target, bypassing the packs of Ork reaver barges that warred with each other in the cold outer reaches of the system.

The combined firepower of the Vth Legion's ships and those of the Imperial Navy's capital craft quickly annihilated the few crude sentinel stations and scrap-barques the Orks had placed guarding Chondax Prime and allowed the fleet to secure orbit. The only casualty reported at this stage in the fighting was the Imperial Navy light cruiser *Forsworn*, which was struck by crude boarding craft and quickly infested by Ork raiders. Though relief forces from the nearby White Scars craft *Hawkstar* and *Void-mare* were quickly mustered, it is believed that Ork forces breached the engine compartment before they could reach the stricken cruiser, and the *Forsworn* was torn apart as the reactor detonated, raining burning debris down across half a continent on the planet below. With the sudden opportunism typical of his Legion, Jaghatai Khan quickly seized on this apparent failure and crafted from it a strange kind of victory. With the debris of the *Forsworn* tearing great fiery tracks through the atmosphere and throwing great clouds of pale dirt into the skies as they struck, the Khagan ordered planetary landings to begin at once. Risking his landing craft amid the falling debris, but shielding them from both Orkoid shell-fire and observation.

Their initial target was the largest of the Ork strongholds, a fortress known as Black-blight. It was one of several old fortresses on Chondax Prime that the Orks had seized in battle when they arrived there in retreat from Ullanor, a vast tower of rust and spite, with huge smoke stacks belching forth clouds of soot-dark smoke that stained the

white plains of Chondax Prime black for kilometres around. Such orbital strikes were not a speciality of the Vth Legion. They much preferred more open styles of warfare than the brutal crucible of frontal assault and siege work, where their speed and ability as skirmishers could not be fully exploited. Faced with such a challenge, other Legions, such as the Blood Angels or World Eaters, might have unleashed the full might of their Legion in a hail of Drop Pods and descending jump troops, tactics whose ruthless effectiveness was only countered by the cost they extracted in casualties, a cost that a small Legion such as the Vth could ill afford to bear. Instead, the Khagan turned loose the Kharash.

Sometimes known as the Ebon Keshig among the Chogorian contingent of the Legion, the Kharash was one of the few units among the White Scars that routinely went to war clad in Terminator armour. Its ranks were not fixed, but instead made up of an ever-changing roster of volunteers seeking glory in battle or absolution from some perceived dishonour through service. Some outsiders have unfairly labelled the Kharash a suicide unit, but as with many of the White Scars' traditions, it confounds easy categorisation, being a position of honour and respect as much as it was one of punishment and contrition. The warriors of the Kharash, clad in black-stained Terminator plate fell upon Black-blight amid the rain of orbital debris, their Stormbird landing craft taking the brunt of the enemy's fire as larger and more ponderous craft found landing sites outside the fortifications. Within the tangled confines of the Orkish fortress, the Kharash fought a brutal hit and fade battle, striking at key defensive positions before withdrawing into the maze of corridors and bunkers behind the walls of Black-blight. Their heavy armour allowed them to endure where other units would have faltered, as little more than 1,000 White Scars brought chaos and death to the hundreds of thousands of Orks within the fortress.

As the Kharash fought, the remainder of Jaghatai Khan's five Hordes deployed upon the surface of the White World, eager to be upon the foe but ill-equipped for siege warfare. It fell to the stoic siege engineers of the Charonid Sentinels to breach the walls, the augmented warriors of Sol's cold outer reaches well outfitted for the task. With the Kharash occupying much of the Ork host's attention, the Charonid engineers encountered only scattered opposition as they laced the walls with high-yield melta

charges and other more obscure weapons, sheering away vast chunks of Black-blight's rusted defences and opening the heart of the fortress to its attackers. The Orks within, enraged by the baiting tactics employed by the warriors of the Ebon Keshig, poured forth to assault this new foe, only to find the massed ranks of the White Scars waiting for them. Now able to engage the foe on open ground, the White Scars fell upon their enemy with abandon. Squadrons of Scimitar jet bikes harried the Ork host, cutting off and isolating pockets to be destroyed by the more heavily armed infantry elements following in their wake, while Sabre strike tanks tore through the greenskins' ranks to target the few ramshackle armoured vehicles that emerged from the ruined fortress. At the head of the White Scars assault was the Khagan, Jaghatai Khan himself, a whirlwind of death and carnage in human form, inspiring his sons to feats of fearless daring and brutal valour.

The battle for Black-blight lasted a little more than six hours from its commencement. In the end, the remaining Orks fled into the vast wilderness of Chondax Prime, where an uncounted mass of their foul kin waited. This too was part of the Khagan's design, for he knew that when cornered, the Ork

became a truly ferocious enemy, one his Legion was ill-equipped to deal with, but on the open plains there was no opponent to match the White Scars in battle. Black-blight was torn down so that no Ork might take refuge there again, and the White Scars placed their encampment by its ruins. This was no fortress as might have been wrought by the Imperial Fists, no bulwark to shelter behind and tie his forces down in defence, but a war camp from which to co-ordinate and resupply the various White Scars Hordes as they prosecuted an aggressive campaign out on the wide plains of the White World. Though it would remain standing for the entirety of the years that the White Scars would remain in the Chondax system, only the auxilia troops would stay in garrison, waiting to be called upon for their specialised skills.

The Orks on Chondax Prime had spread out across the planet, still a teeming multitude beyond easy reckoning, wandering the wastes and warring amongst themselves as much as with the outriders of the White Scars. Any campaign to eradicate them would be a long endeavour, even for such ardent

hunters as the White Scars. The Khagan set a full two Hordes to the chase, with orders to herd the greenskins to the north, where a series of low mountain ranges known as the Grinders gave them an opportunity to bleed and pen the foe before his annihilation. The remainder of his troops were dispersed across the system, each assigned a world to clear spreading outwards from their position on Chondax Prime, starting with the dwarf planet Kren and the shallow seas of Shaln. In each case, their orders were simple: hound the foe, bleed him and wear down his will to resist before a final annihilation once all of his foul breed was drawn into the open and penned for the slaughter. The Khagan lingered for but a short while on the White World before leaving to join the campaign elsewhere, ever eager for new hunting grounds and unwilling, perhaps, to be bound by the drudgery of strategic command. The White Scars seemed to need little oversight – once their destinations were assigned, each detachment vanished into the void. Imperial overseers and logistical aides at the war camp on Chondax Prime heard almost nothing from them until the report of final victory on a given world.

Perhaps it was that independent nature of the White Scars operations that saw the lack of communications from outside the Chondax system go almost unnoticed in the first few years of the campaign. After the arrival of two more Hordes, diverted from war zones in the far galactic south, the White Scars and their allies received no further communications of any kind from the wider Imperium. To any other Legion, such a situation would have caused far more concern, but the Vth Legion was long used to operating far from the oversight of the Great Crusade and its distant masters. They paid little heed to the absence of demands for status reports and logistical manifests, and instead concentrated on the task before them. Some reasoned that it was the work of transitory warp storms or other phenomena that caused their astropaths to fall silent, for such events were far from unknown on the fringes of Imperium space, while others blamed the remote nature of the Chondax system, far as it was from the main thrust of the Great Crusade. Many among the Auxilia command were less sanguine in the face of such a breach of standard protocol, Stratigos Gygan made a number of official complaints regarding the matter to Jaghatai Khan himself, but the Khagan paid them little heed. He embroiled himself fully in the fighting, giving in to the release that such bloody abandon brought, an attitude that prevailed among much of the Vth Legion.

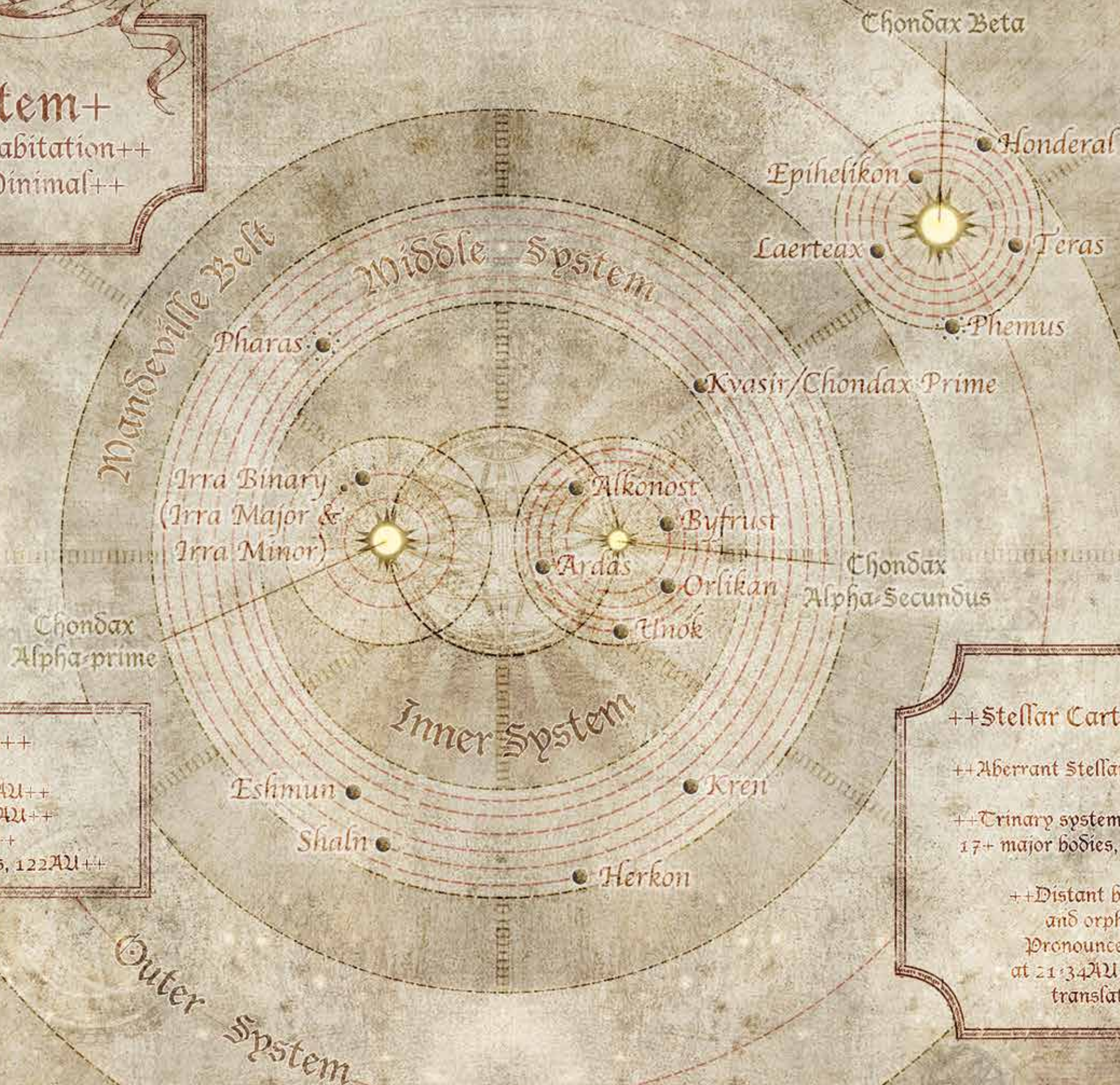
This was far from the only misery to bedevil the campaign, for as the years wore on, other odd inconsistencies began to present themselves. The Ork forces, long since fallen into the old internal strife common to the Orkoid breed, and divided into crude clan groupings after the fall of Black-blight on Chondax Prime, displayed an odd sense of strategic awareness. Wherever the divided Brotherhoods of the White Scars stood on the threshold of crushing one faction, they would continually find another threatening their flanks, forcing them to delay the final strike. Even on an interplanetary scale, the Orks seemed able to respond to shifts in the White Scars deployments long before they should have been aware of them, with warbands making sudden crossings between planets that saw White Scars Brotherhoods stymied and forced back onto the defensive. At one point, two of the Imperial Navy's macro-ark carriers were destroyed during transport operations for a battalion of the Seraphine Guard – 3,000 men-at-arms lost when a pack of crude Ork gunships somehow stumbled upon the craft during refuelling and overwhelmed the cruiser *Broken Ladder*.

Other losses plagued the campaign, as did many victories, but always there was some unknown factor at play that skewed what should have been decisive victories into pyrrhic successes. The Brotherhood of the Red Hawk, having spent the best part of a Terran-standard year harrying the Ork clans on Honderal and separating them before seeking to crush each isolated clan host, found their efforts were in vain when a series of unexpected earthquakes and subsidences forced several clans to join together with other nearby warbands. In the deserts of Eshmun, the Brotherhoods of the Coiled Serpent and the Star-shield were engaged in a running battle to drive an Orkish armoured host into a defile where the Charonid engineers had planted enough phosphex charges to annihilate the foe, only for a far smaller warband of Orks to stumble into the trap before the main force could be lured into range. Worse yet, across the system an odd sickness had taken a hold on many of the Orkish warlords and seers; many succumbing to a Warp-bred madness that the White Scars were ill-equipped to deal with. Fortunately, the Sisters of Silence accompanying the fleet were able to suppress many of these psychic outbreaks, but they were spread thin, and several White Scars forces took heavy casualties dealing with such outbreaks. At the time, most commanders placed the blame upon the crushing defeat inflicted on the Orkish race at Ullanor, but perhaps this was not the sole cause, for the Warp raged uncommonly fiercely around the stars of Chondax.

+Chondax System+

++Non-compliant, minimal habitation++

++Strategic significance: Minimal++



++Deep System Assets++

++Class 7/AK asteroid belt, 48AU++

++Class 3/OE dwarf planet, 75AU++

++[REDACTED], 103AU++

++Scattered disc, 8,000+ small objects, 122AU++

++Stellar Cartographica, Vol.III++

++Aberrant Stellar Phenomena: Chondax++

++Trinary system, coreward constellations,
17+ major bodies, ultima/I class system++

++Distant between central pair
and orphan star: 39AU,
Pronounced Mandeville belt
at 21-34AU, Mid-system Warp
translation possible++

Yet, for each such delay there stood a triumph, a glorious hunt such as those the White Scars had undertaken in the early years of the Great Crusade. On Teras, three Brotherhoods of Krenak Noyan-khan's Horde fought a running battle over four days as they pursued an Orkish host mounted on ramshackle oil-belching bikes across endless storm-wracked plains of ice. On Alkonost, Asudai Noyan-khan, with Knight-Centura Merovin at his back, fought a bloated Hain Warp-seer in the depths of the vast caverns that the Orks had infested on that world. Herkon saw the largest armoured clash in the history of the White Scars as squadrons of Sabre strike tanks, Predator battle tanks and Sicaran tanks fought alongside the Dracosans of the Saturnyne Rams against a roiling mass of scrap-behemoths. All the while the Khagan was everywhere, with word of him in battle from the Irra Binary to the moons of Phemus, tales of his prowess spurring the White Scars on despite the hardships they endured.

Despite the victories that each year brought, the inconsistencies encountered during the campaign were slowly beginning to accumulate, and a master of strategy such as Jaghatai Khan could not help but see them. As the fighting in Chondax began to draw to its inevitable conclusion, the various logs kept by the White Scars show a growing sense of unease in the Khagan and his command echelon. Seven years had passed since their arrival, seven years of fighting that had seen the Chondax system almost completely rid of the taint of the Ork. Yet still there was no word from the Imperium and no word from Horus either in support of their efforts or in condemnation of the length of their campaign. No ships from beyond Chondax had arrived, and the White Scars and their allies had depleted much of their stockpiles of munitions and other crucial supplies. Those few craft that had been sent outwards, to clear the interference of the warp storms that billowed around the edges of the Chondax system, had not returned. Where once the hunt had kept such worries from the Khagan and his sons, the Orks no longer presented enough sport to eclipse his concern. Those few logs we have from this time suggest that Jaghatai Khan knew something of import was occurring out in the Imperium. By means of some latent talent or subtle premonition, he knew that it was time for the White Scars to leave Chondax and seek answers. He had done as honour demanded and satisfied his word to Horus, his friend and Warmaster. Now, he was owed answers.

SHADOWS AND SPITE (137 STANDARD FRACTIONALS BEFORE)

For seven years, the White Scars had lost themselves in a war carefully arranged and orchestrated for the sole purpose of keeping them trapped at Chondax. The true cause of the White Scars' delay lay with the actions of the Alpha Legion. The XXth Legion had not sat idle while their erstwhile brothers fought their way across the many worlds of the Chondax system. From their hidden redoubts, they enacted a campaign of stealth with a goal to nullify any and all strategic gains made by the White Scars. Where the Orks were brought to bay, the Alpha Legion staged raids to move them free of White Scars traps. Where the Orks massed for suicidal assaults on warriors of the Vth Legion, the Alpha Legion assassinated key xenos warlords to deny the White Scars a decisive battle. Under the guise of natural events and disasters, Alpharius' sons reshaped worlds to better suit the plan they had laid for the conflict. Little by little, the White Scars were drawn out across a dozen worlds, spread out and worn down by continual warfare and, where necessary, allowed small victories to lure them on.

There were few ploys considered too extreme for the Alpha Legion infiltrators tasked with the distraction and covert dispersal of the White Scars combat units. However, the orders Alpharius had received from Horus made it plain that they were to take all measures necessary to avoid any confrontation with the Vth Legion. Horus demanded that no White Scars Legionary was to be harmed unless absolutely necessary. Yet, by comparing the records of the White Scars from the Chondax campaign and the information provided by the *Unbalanced Scales*, it would appear that even this directive was violated on a number of occasions. Most obviously, those ships dispatched by the White Scars to breach the curtain of warp storms that surrounded the system all appear to have been taken and destroyed by the Alpha Legion. What became of their crews is still unknown, though it is likely that those few that survived the Alpha Legion boarding actions were tortured for information and executed. Add to this toll a number of White Scars patrols missing in action, most likely eliminated as the result of Alpha

Legion headhunters operations. Most such incidents are likely the result of action taken to avoid detection, but others seem more indiscriminate and malign, the casual cruelty of a predator playing with its prey before the final blow.

Of these various incidents, there are two worthy of further note, not merely for their impact upon the White Scars and the Chondax campaign as a whole, but also exemplars of the depths to which the Alpha Legion was willing to descend in the furtherance of their mission. The first of these incidents occurs in the early years of the campaign, during the fighting on Shaln. Here, amid the shallow, mildly acidic seas that dominated the world, Nogai Noyan-khan led a highly successful campaign of eradication. More than any of his brother Khans, Nogai had mastered the art of stalking the Hain tribes, making full use of his hunting packs of reconnaissance Legionaries and Burkhut's Claws veterans to isolate and trap weaker portions of the Ork horde on Shaln. Such was the speed of his personal campaign that he received commendations from the Khagan himself, and spurred the other Hordes to ever greater feats with each of his own triumphs. As such, he posed a dire threat to the mission of delay given to the Alpha Legion, for should the White Scars gain too much momentum early in their drive to annihilate the Orks, it would become all but impossible to slow them by covert means. So, rather than employ more subtle methods, the Alpha Legion turned to more direct means.

At the height of the fighting on Shaln, at the battle of the great western reef where the gathered might of Nogai's Horde used a combination of hit and run strikes by jetbike-mounted Brotherhoods and adept traps and ambushes set by the Falcon's Claws, Nogai fell. His body was discovered after the battle, a posthumous victory added to his long record, and at the time his death was assumed to have come in battle with the Orks. It was in fact the work of an Alpha Legion headhunter cadre under the command of a warrior using the title *Intersector*, attacking from ambush and leaving the White Scars warrior little chance to defend himself.



WHITE SCARS CONTEMPTOR DREADNOUGHT TEGUSAI OF THE UHAAN SOLBAN

Rarely are the Dreadnoughts of the White Scars seen outside of the fortresses of Chogoris and Terra, and only for those key battles destined to shape the Legion. It was perhaps a sign of what was to come that more Dreadnoughts were present at Chondax than any other campaign of that time, a precursor of the Time of Waking that would follow in the Age of Darkness. Tegusai is shown here shortly before the revelation of the Alpha Legion's betrayal at Chondax; he would be lost on Honderal while he fought to defend the wounded as they were loaded aboard waiting Storm Eagles.

As far as can be easily verified, this may be the first instance of one of the Legion's Astartes purposefully making war on another of his kind, occurring as it did in 002.M31. This grim honour may well have been part of the Alpha Legion's purpose on Shaln, to test this new foe in preparation for some future endeavour as much as to curtail the White Scars' progress in their mission. Some among the veterans of the Falcon's Claws raised concerns over the nature of his ambush, considering it too clean and well-prepared for any Ork, and noted the lack of Orkish dead around the fallen Khan. But with no reason to suspect foul play, such concerns were ignored and the Horde withdrew from combat to perform the appropriate rituals due the death of an honoured Khan and war leader, allowing the Orks to regroup on Shaln.

Even more significant than the death of Nogai Noyan-khan was the Phemus Massacre. Though at the time many overlooked the incident, it is considered by most scholars who have studied the Chondax conflict as the turning point, the action that saw the long campaign of hidden knives come to an end.

Phemus was a cold gas giant on the very edge of the system, in orbit around the yellow tertiary star. The gas giant itself was of no strategic interest, but of its near 30 moons there were seven of sufficient size and atmospheric density to support Orkoid populations, and more significantly, but unknown to the White Scars, it was one of the largest Alpha Legion strongholds in the system. The cleansing of the moons of Phemus had been assigned to the Brotherhood of the Talon by the Khagan, some six months prior to the incident. Much of the fighting had been concentrated on the second and eighth moons, but the fourth, a small volcanic orb, was also capable of supporting a population and showed faint signs of an unknown presence.

As one of the final actions of the campaign, with much of the rest of the system declared free of the xenos taint, elements of the Brotherhood of the Talon were assigned to sweep the fourth moon. Unknown to the White Scars, Phemus IV played host to the second of the Alpha Legion's large strongholds in the greater Chondax system, a carefully constructed and heavily shielded compound buried beneath the ash and rock of that inhospitable moon. Here sheltered a full chapter of the inscrutable Alpha Legion, intended to act as a strategic reserve

The Hydra's Coils

Horus had laid his plans for Chondax and the White Scars well. He knew how best to manipulate Jaghatai Khan and his sons, and how to win them to his side. With the perfect execution of his plans for the Istvan system, for Prospero and a dozen other early conflicts, the failure of his schemes at Chondax stands out as a notable blunder. Yet, it is not one that can be laid fully at the feet of Horus, for the prime failure in this plan was the Warmaster's trust in the Alpha Legion. For reasons ultimately known only to Alpharius himself, the Alpha Legion chose to disregard several key factors of the plan. They allowed the two Legions to come to blows on a number of occasions, though attempts were made to conceal these actions; they allowed communications to be restored too early, warning the Khagan of the treachery abroad in the Imperium; and they forced an armed confrontation with the White Scars.

Of all of these failures, it is the last which is the most telling, the one thing Horus had sought to avoid, for he knew any attempt to force the Khagan and the White Scars to do as he bid would end in disaster. Yet the Alpha Legion ignored these wishes. To assume that the Alpha Legion erred from simple foolishness is laughable, especially after the careful skill with which they prosecuted the early stages of the campaign. No, this is no mere act of ill-disciplined foolishness such as might have been expected of Angron's berserkers, but a purposeful and malevolent act of betrayal. For some reason, a faction within the Alpha Legion wanted Horus' plan to fail, but not fully, not enough to end the war – just enough to prolong it and deny either side a quick victory.

in case of dire need, as well as a means to relieve the various infiltrator cadres at work throughout Chondax.

As several cadres of the Brotherhood of the Talon drew close to the hidden base, the Alpha Legion was forced into action. The White Scars, busy hunting the small bands of Orks present on Phemus IV, were unprepared for the carefully prepared ambushes that the Alpha Legion laid for them and quickly became prey themselves. A short and viciously one-sided battle erupted under the ash-laden skies of Phemus IV, one of the first to pit brother against brother in open fighting. Taken by surprise and not expecting to face an enemy akin to themselves, the White Scars quickly fell prey to the sharp knives of the Alpha Legion's experienced headhunters, though some few of the Brotherhood of the Talon managed to reach high ground and mount a brief, if ultimately doomed, defence. In the aftermath of their victory, the Alpha Legion triggered a series of landslides and lava spills to cover the traces of the battle, leaving the White Scars entombed in the ash after removing their own dead.

This was hardly the first time that the Alpha Legion had eliminated intruders, yet at this point in the long campaign the continued delays and strange occurrences had left many among the White Scars command echelons wary. For the first time a full investigation was undertaken, a Khan set to the task of discovering the fate of the Brotherhood of the Talon with surety. With the Brotherhood

of the Storm now on Phemus IV seeking answers and the Ork infestation of the greater Chondax system all but destroyed, there must have seemed to the Alpha Legion's commanders little left for them to accomplish by secrecy. Despite this, there is some uncertainty as to whether what followed was a deliberate choice on behalf of a unified Alpha Legion, or a situation forced upon them by the actions of a rogue faction within the Legion. But for whatever reason, the veil of silence that had fallen over Chondax suddenly lifted.

THE VEIL LIFTS (8 STANDARD FRACTIONALS BEFORE)

All across the Chondax system, astropaths attached to the White Scars fleet were hit by a cacophony of voices from beyond after years of silence. The effect was catastrophic, the sudden blizzard of meme-coded information overloading the desensitised psyches of those astropaths that remained at duty stations aboard the fleet. For a perilous few days, the White Scars were unable to properly transliterate the meaning of those messages they received, having only the ominous tone of the imagery involved to guide their growing unease. The first few missives to be fully deciphered did little to assuage the concerns of the Khagan and his close advisers, for though contradictory in the extreme they all spoke of civil strife in the Imperium, of Legions turned against their brothers. In the face of such an unthinkable possibility, and with no verified intelligence on the situation, the

Khagan took the fateful decision to delay any response. That such an uncharacteristic course of action was chosen, for the White Scars had ever been at their finest while they held the initiative, spoke of the deep disquiet that beset Jaghatai Khan at this time. He had been isolated for years, kept apart while events had moved far beyond his grasp. He could not know what was truth or exaggerated fiction, who was ally and who was enemy. Worse yet, his own log entries suggest that he was not sure where his own loyalties lay.

The only action taken by the gathered White Scars commanders as the Khagan wrestled with indecision, was to order a re-call of all combat assets in the greater Chondax system, summoning the Hordes back to Chondax Prime with all speed. Yet, in all of the confusion caused by the shocking news of war between brothers in the Imperium and the system wide overload of vox-networks and astropathic relays by the sheer volume of new signals, few noted that a number of outposts and detachments failed to acknowledge the recall order. Such lax discipline in strategic communications was far from unusual among the independently-minded White Scars, but here was the first signal of the Alpha Legion's dire intent. Across the system, as Jaghatai Khan wrestled with his misgivings, the White Scars came under attack.

The first such assaults came at the very edges of the Chondax system, where detached squadrons of the massive Alpha Legion fleet waiting at Angvor fell upon isolated White Scars patrols. Based on the number of craft that failed to respond to Jaghatai Khan's recall order and were later listed as missing, it can be estimated that perhaps as many as 30 capital-class craft were lost in such actions. Emblematic of these largely forgotten engagements is the ambush of the patrol group under the command of Naran Tenri-khan, lord of the cruiser *Eagle's Claws*. Consisting of four light cruisers: the *Eagle's Claws*, *Serengrel*, *Hawkstar* and the *Narsukh*, and accompanied by a small destroyer group, this was typical of the small patrols the White Scars maintained in the latter days of the cleansing campaign. Having detected unusual signals within the innermost sectors of the system, where the orbit of the stars Chondax Alpha-Prime and Chondax Alpha-Secundus clouded auspex scans, the ships had moved to investigate, expecting to find nothing more than a few crude Orkish gunships. Instead, they discovered a single White Scars cruiser along the edge of the

system's outer asteroid field. The White Scars craft was inert and quickly identified as the *Dark Moon*, a vessel thought lost during the early years of the campaign.

The White Scars craft, with no reason to suspect foul play, moved in to render aid to their apparently stricken brothers and as they closed, the *Dark Moon*, now revealed as little more than a broken hulk, detonated. The explosion, most likely the ship's reactor set to overload, tore through the patrol group, leaving the *Narsukh* crippled and the *Eagle's Claws* with hull ruptures and fires on multiple decks. At the same moment, a trio of Alpha Legion heavy cruisers emerged from cover in the debris field trailing Chondax Alpha-Secundus and opened fire on the stricken ships. Intending to distract the Alpha Legion craft from their beleaguered comrades, the *Hawkstar* and *Serengrel* sprang forward with a sudden burst of acceleration to engage the heavy cruisers at close range, the destroyers following in their wake. A high speed pass by the light cruisers did little to dissuade the heavy gunships and left the *Serengrel* trailing debris, its armour peeled back along one flank and the bilious flare of rad-leaks visible on auspex scans. The destroyers at their heels fared little better, the

torpedo strikes they managed to land savaged the front shielding of the lead cruiser, slowing its advance, but only served to see them immolated by the concentrated heavy guns of the other Alpha Legion ships.

Ignoring the two light cruisers as they powered past, the Alpha Legion ships converged on the two damaged craft, slamming a series of broadsides into the burning *Eagle's Claws*, which could reply only feebly with its few operable batteries, and launching a blizzard of boarding craft towards the hulk of the *Narsukh*. With few remaining options, the two operational White Scars cruisers came about for a second pass, concentrating on the wounded Alpha Legion craft. Passing its prey at a speed difficult for the lumbering Alpha Legion gunships to match, the *Hawkstar's* accurate gunnery managed little more than to batter the thick hull plating of the Alpha Legion ship, and in return bore the brunt of the return fire. Limping away with ragged holes across its hull and bleeding vapour, the *Hawkstar* could do little more than watch as the *Serengrel*, following its vector past the Alpha Legion ships, veered at the last moment and slammed prow first into the weakened armour of their target, locking

Tenebrae 9-50

The Tenebrae stations of the Alpha Legion are yet another facet of that secretive Legion's mystery. Constructed in secret during the last years of the Great Crusade, those few that have been discovered have shown hints of unknown technology and research projects delving into mysteries long since deemed too dangerous for unsanctioned exploration. Tenebrae 9-50 was one of several stations whose focus, at least in part, seems to have been the Chondax system, and provides another tantalising hint at the strife occurring within the Alpha Legion itself.

At roughly the same point in time as the sudden ending of the communications blackout that had bedevilled the White Scars since the beginning of the fighting within the Chondax system, Tenebrae 9-50 was utterly destroyed. It is difficult to believe that these two incidents are unconnected. More likely the Tenebrae 9-50 installation acted as a linchpin for the network of stations around Chondax that fuelled the aberrant warp storms that surrounded it and barred all communications from reaching the White Scars within. If so, then it is the destruction of Tenebrae 9-50 that delivers news of the Horus Heresy to Jaghatai Khan, and not some decision of the Alpha Legion.

This action, though ultimately beneficial to the Loyalist war effort, was not undertaken by any known Legion asset. Tenebrae station 9-50, located near the remote Octiss system a short stellar distance from Chondax, is known to us only through Alpha Legion records and the *Unbalanced Scales*, and even its ruins remain undiscovered by any Imperium force. Considering this, it seems most likely that the station was destroyed by a renegade faction within the Alpha Legion, either for reasons of its own or to covertly further the Loyalist cause. Of course, we must also consider that all of the evidence pointing towards the existence of Tenebrae 9-50, a station never recovered by Imperial forces, may be just another lie fabricated by the Alpha Legion to confuse and obscure their role in Mankind's civil war.

The Price of Victory

Seven years of war had taken its toll upon the cleansing fleet. According to those records available, the White Scars had been bled little by little across the dozens of worlds in the Chondax system, no doubt all part of the Alpha Legion's plans. By the beginning of 007.M31, they had lost perhaps 9% of their number, approximately 6,000 Legionaries, as outright casualties and another 15% were in need of medicae attention severe enough to limit their combat potential. In total, nearly 16,500 Legionaries of the White Scars were combat non-effective when the Alpha Legion chose to strike, though as they had been limited to specific, low-intensity actions, the various auxilia regiments had suffered comparatively light casualties.

Worse yet, as a result of both the sprawling nature of the system and the manipulations of the Alpha Legion, the White Scars were spread all across the greater Chondax system in detachments that were rarely larger than a few Brotherhoods. Only on the central worlds of Chondax Prime: Kren and Shaln, were they present in considerable numbers, with the majority of four Hordes between the forces present on those worlds. The auxilia regiments were also scattered about the system – on many of the minor worlds it was companies of the Seraphine Guard that stood sentinel after the White Scars had pronounced them clean of xenos taint. All of the combat assets available to Jaghatai Khan were also showing the first signs of exhausting the limited munitions and other supplies brought with them to Chondax, for over the long years of the cleansing no new supplies had arrived. With combat entering its final phase and the main strength of the enemy broken, worries over supplies had been deemed non-critical.

Fleet elements of the White Scars were similarly scattered, with the main strength of the armada present at anchor over Chondax Prime. Elsewhere, small squadrons of capital-class ships, mainly the light cruisers favoured by the Vth Legion for their speed, patrolled the isolated worldlets of Chondax and the vast asteroid field that sat at its periphery. Fortunately, the White Scars fleet assets had suffered little damage during the Great Crusade, the few encounters with Ork void craft having been conducted years before and ending decisively in favour of the Vth Legion, and were also more plentifully supplied with munitions.

both ships together in a tangle of wreckage. Though the *Serengrel's* sacrifice had crippled one of the attackers, the remaining Alpha Legion ships made short work of the *Eagle's Claws* hulk while the *Narsukh* remained silent and dead. The *Hawkstar* was forced to disengage at what speed it could still manage, hoping to lose its pursuers with a desperate dive through the outer corona of the Chondax Alpha-Secundus star, where the Alpha Legion ships presumed it to have been destroyed by the intense radiation and heat.

On the outlying planets, where the sheer size of the Chondax system left a lag of several hours in conventional vox transmissions, several of the White Scars ground detachments also came under attack. In each case, the assaults were carefully planned and cruelly executed, giving the defenders little chance to organise a defence. In almost every case, the units attacked were either annihilated within the space of a few hours or so beleaguered that they were unable to signal their distress or extract themselves from the combat zone. The Alpha Legion were careful to openly target only those units

that were isolated from support and a suitable distance from the main force on Chondax Prime, limiting their prey's options to either a quiet forgotten death or to the desperate and futile heroics that were the antithesis of White Scars doctrine.

On the outlying world of Herkon, long since proclaimed clean of xenos taint, the two Centuries of Seraphine Guard left as custodians were approached by a detachment of Legionaries in the heraldry of the White Scars, who turned their guns on the unprepared auxilia troops once inside their fortifications. This ploy of false colours was used again on Honderal and the various moons of Pharas, capitalising on the difficulty many auxilia units had in interpreting the often inscrutable heraldic devices used by the White Scars. In the steaming jungles of Epihelikon, the more disciplined soldiery of the Saturnyne Rams were less easily fooled, but failed to open fire when confronted with Legionaries in false colours, even after a challenge by sentries failed to receive the correct code responses, resulting in the regiment suffering heavy casualties

and being forced to abandon its camp for the dubious safety of the deep forest. Still unaware of the outbreak of Horus' civil war, it was unthinkable to the warriors of the Chondax fleet that some of the Legionaries Astartes might be considered enemies.

Even among the White Scars themselves such base ploys proved effective. On Irra Minor, the ice-bound companion of Irra Majoris, the Brotherhood of the Black Axe was openly approached by an Alpha Legion headhunters force, allowing what they perceived as brother Space Marines into their camp, where the Alpha Legion cohort promptly opened fire. Only by the heroic efforts of Sengur Khan who, along with a few of his veterans, mounted a suicidal counter-attack into the teeth of the enemy's fire, were any of the brothers of the Black Axe able to escape into the ice-wastes of Irra Minor, carrying the maimed body of their Khan.

Many other small garrisons, usually isolated outposts of no larger than Brotherhood size, simply vanished. The Alpha Legion had long laid their plans, knew with exacting detail the deployments of each of the White Scars detachments, had long since cracked their vox encryption and maintained every advantage of surprise. It was a testament to the skill and stubborn bravery of the White Scars that these initial attacks did not see the Legion destroyed piecemeal.

Indeed, a number of White Scars elements managed to fend off their attackers, although critically none were able to transmit more than garbled static to warn the Khagan of the treachery afoot. On Phemus IV, where a reconnaissance cadre had been left to scout for other causes for the loss of the Brotherhood of the Talon, the White Scars exhibited more caution than their brethren on other worlds. When the Alpha Legion

contingent on the planet revealed their presence, deploying a macro-beacon from their previously hidden base, they were not taken unaware. An attempt by the Alpha Legion to lure them into ambush with distress signals sent under Vth Legion code was quickly turned against the XXth Legion, with the warriors of the Falcon's Claws proving easily the equal of the Alpha Legion in a slow-paced battle of stealth and silent murder. The White Scars, fully aware of the danger presented by their foe, maintained the initiative by using their jetbikes to quickly redeploy across the lava-scarred landscape, eventually falling back as the Alpha Legion reinforced their position around the beacon.

Byfrust, one of the final targets of the cleansing campaign, was still host to a sizable force of White Scars, perhaps eight Brotherhoods and attached militia forces

that included detachments of the Charonid Sentinels and Silent Sisterhood. A glacial world where the Orks had dug vast fortified dens in the deep canyons away from the cutting winds that swept the world's surface clean, Byfrust had proved a welcome challenge for the White Scars. Their mounted Brotherhoods had been more than adept at clearing the glacial plains of Orks, but less effective at fighting in the crude tunnels beneath. They had instead relied on the formidable skills of the Charonite engineers to force the Orks to the surface, blasting shafts down with melta-charges before filling the warrens below with phosphex, after which they could be easily harried across the ice.

Having only recently ceased combat operations after the final battle, the gathered Brotherhoods, under the overall lead of Tsolmon Khan, maintained deep-range



patrols of the icy wastes, vigilant for any Hain remnants. Instead, by pure luck, the patrols stumbled across the marshalling forces of a full battalion of Alpha Legion warriors and the second of the hidden bases within the Chondax system. Unwilling to allow the advantage of surprise to be lost, the Alpha Legion loosed its own mounted squadrons in pursuit, seeking to silence any warning before they fell upon the main host of the White Scars on Byfrust. However, they could not match the warriors of the Vth Legion for speed or the peerless control they had over their mechanical mounts, and they were quickly outdistanced. Tsolmon Khan, forewarned of the host approaching, had ample time to abandon his makeshift base and escape the Alpha Legion, but in doing so he would surrender any chance of warning the Khagan of the Alpha Legion's treachery. Neither he nor his warriors would abandon their duty, and despite the approach of the far larger Alpha Legion force, they held their ground and attempted to transmit a message through the maelstrom of new signals now flooding the system.

Only on Chondax Prime were there no attacks. Here the Alpha Legion pursued a different strategy. Instead of blades and bolt shells they deployed a far more deadly weapon: lies and misinformation. For years, the White Scars had fought unaware of the great upheavals occurring in the Imperium, of the Council of Nikaea, the death of Prospero and the Dropsite Massacre. Word of these events was more devastating to the morale of the Vth Legion than any mere martial victory the Alpha Legion might have won. The Khans of the White Scars on Chondax Prime reeled at the news of civil war, of brother killing brother in the far reaches of the Imperium, of the blood-red end of the Great Crusade and all they had fought for over nearly two centuries. Some have questioned how, in these initial stages of the Chondax incident, the White Scars could have ignored all the various danger signs. The answer is simple. In the wave of shock, anger and despair that followed the news that reached them in the last few days before the Alpha Legion closed their trap, they found that all of the things that had once formed the foundation of their universe had come loose. Loyalty and duty had been cast aside, and in the wake of such a betrayal, lesser concerns fell to the wayside.

The earliest messages to reach the White Scars command staff and the troubled Khagan were the long prepared and rehearsed half-truths of Horus. They spun a

cruelly warped tale of a renegade Leman Russ bringing death to Prospero and igniting civil war, a lie so devastating for its credibility. Russ' hatred of the Sorcerer king and his world was well-known, as was his proclivity to red-handed brutality. Backing this tale was a summons from Horus himself, calling on his loyal friend Jaghatai Khan to come with all speed to his aid in putting down the rabid wolf and his traitor sons. Had this message arrived unopposed, it is likely that the White Scars would have joined Horus that day, that the Khagan would have gone to war seeking vengeance for his brother Magnus and damned the Imperium without realising his duplicity. Yet, despite all of the well-set schemes of the Warmaster, this was not the only missive to reach the White Scars Legion. Word also came from Rogal Dorn, seneschal of Terra under the Emperor's personal seal. He sent word of Horus' own betrayal at Isstvan and summoned the White Scars to Terra with all haste.

Faced with the betrayal either of a friend or of his own Father, Jaghatai Khan now held in his hand the fate of the Imperium. Should he rally to Horus, his ally and steadfast friend, then the balance of power would quickly favour the cause of the Traitors and would likely have seen Terra besieged within a year; but should he depart for Dorn and Terra, heeding the authority of the distant Emperor then the Loyalists would reclaim the advantage and Horus would see his ambitions shattered. It is impossible for us, here in the broken aftermath of the Horus Heresy, to know what impossible struggles raged within the mind of Jaghatai Khan in that fateful hour. Many of the Primarchs were brought face to face with fate in the early days of Mankind's civil war – Magnus at Prospero, Ferrus Manus at Isstvan V and Guilliman at Calth. Yet all of these had faced a threat they were trained to fight, a foe they could rage against. Jaghatai Khan had no such luxury. He was left to decide the fate of an empire on rumour and hear-say, on the half-understood dreams of astropaths.

What decision he might have made we can never know, for as the Khagan wrestled with his doubts, the Alpha Legion played the final card of their hand, making one last attempt to wrest destiny onto the course they wished for it to take. With chaos erupting across the worlds of the Chondax system, and doubt spreading through their commanders, Jaghatai Khan was finally given an enemy to face.

Bow to No One (The Chondax Engagement)

So unexpected was the Alpha Legion's arrival, that at first it went unnoticed. By the time word was passed to the Khagan, there were already 50 Alpha Legion ships in-system. Within minutes, that number had doubled, and then tripled. More and more ships appeared, translating from the Warp with an accuracy that usually required a guide beacon, and within the space of an hour, there were over 1,000 ships bearing the mark of the Hydra floating in the narrow channel of space between Chondax's central binary pair and its outer companion star. They ran the full spectrum of warships, from the slender lines of keen-prowed destroyers to the bloated heavy cruisers bristling with gun batteries. In number they far outmatched the White Scars ships – even with most of the fleet in Chondax gathered over Chondax Prime by the Khagan's recall order, they had no more than 700 vessels, and of those most were smaller, leaner craft than the Alpha Legion's warships.

The two fleets stared at each other across billions of kilometres of space, but no words were exchanged. Those ships of the White Scars that had answered the Khagan's summons took up battle formations mirroring their cousins of the Alpha Legion and still there was no communication, neither to condemn nor to coerce. So it continued for some hours, as ever more missives forced a path through the aether to the receptive minds of the Khagan's astropaths. Yet each new message only confused the issue further, some speaking in support of Terra and Dorn, and others for Horus. Each move made by the White Scars, each attempt to prompt a response from the silent Alpha Legion cordon, was mirrored by Alpharius' Legion. With the Khagan still unaware of the Alpha Legion's role in the Chondax campaign and of the conflict unfolding even as he pondered his Legion's future aboard the *Swordstorm*, neither side seemed eager to provoke a violent confrontation.

Then the storm broke with the suddenness that was the hallmark of the White Scars' campaigns. Jaghatai Khan's void fleet surged forward behind the *Swordstorm*, all-thrust at the Alpha Legion's cordon. The Khagan had not been idle while he pondered his brother Alpharius' fleet, even confronted with such a dire situation he had seen a single point of weakness in its deployment, one chance to break through the confusion

that now held his own Legion immobile and helpless. The Alpha Legion fleet attempted to shift its formation to counter the attack, massing squadrons of heavy cruisers towards what appeared a disorganised assault by the White Scars. This was the beginning of what the wild Legionaries of Chogoris called a Standard Zao, a tactic adapted from the horse-tribes that roamed that world's vast plains and one unfamiliar to the Alpha Legion. It was to prove as deadly in the void as it had on Chogoris.

The *Swordstorm* remained at the forefront of the advance, a vast warship bristling with guns, but sharp-prowed and as fast as any light cruiser, but the first craft to contact the Alpha Legion were the outlying destroyer squadrons and corvette picket lines. As they came into range of their opposites, light screening squadrons of blue-sheened voidcraft marked by the Hydra, they opened fire without warning or formal challenge. Macro cannon salvos and searing lance beams tore through the void, but the Alpha Legion were far from vulnerable. The coruscating discharge of void shields marked the first open exchange of fire between the Legions who had been sworn brothers so short a time before. Despite their defence screens, the sheer weight of fire had left several Alpha Legion picket ships as burnt out hulks, rolling silently in the void, but the remainder returned fire with equal vigour. White Scars cruisers moving up in the wake of the destroyers opened fire as soon as their gunnery officers could calculate firing solutions, but by now the Alpha Legion was more than ready and their heavier, albeit slower, ships replied in kind.

The forward squadrons of both fleets clashed, but neither side had claimed the advantage in combat, both equally matched in skill and ferocity. Both had suffered hurt, with few ships free of damage and several trailing streams of debris or infested with boarding craft, but as yet no ships of the line had fallen. Yet, despite their initial fervour, the White Scars' assault had quickly slowed, with the headlong rush quickly turning into a desultory skirmish. As the Alpha Legion began to move up their reserve squadrons, the White Scars fell into a hesitant retreat and their lines began to fold back on themselves. Worse yet, with the Alpha Legion fleet massed of significantly more craft than Jaghatai's, the veteran captains of the Alpha Legion moved to envelope the Khagan's apparently foolhardy assault. The battle in orbit hung in the balance, but the Zao had yet to fully begin.

Mandeville Points

The origins of the warp drive, that most essential marvel of Mankind's lost technology, have long since been lost. Much of the terminology and phenomena surrounding its operation is unknown even to the most learned of the tech-magi of Mars – we understand the practical uses of such arcana as *Gellar fields* and *Hohne translation apertures*, but not the origins or meaning of their peculiar titles. This is also true of the so-called *Mandeville point* of a given star system.

In the most brief and incomplete terms, a Mandeville point is an area of a given star system that is far enough from any large gravitational fields, thus allowing the stable formation of a warp drive's entry or exit point. Attempting translation to or from the Warp outside of the points increases the stresses generated within the warp engine to dangerous levels, and will likely result in the destruction of the vessel, or worse, stranding it within the Warp permanently.

For most systems, the Mandeville point is simply a certain distance from its star and any other large planetary body. With most non-critical transports, this forces chartist captains to translate into realspace at the edge of the system and move to their destination under more conventional power. Some systems, such as Chondax, feature a complex orbital structure that allows a deviation from this standard. The presence of the inner binary and distant companion star allows for a narrow Mandeville belt between their two orbits, and skilled Navigators can use such a belt to translate into the middle of the system rather than at its furthest edge. It is such a manoeuvre that the Alpha Legion conducted upon arriving in Chondax, using a positional beacon on Phemus IV to align their ships and cutting off the Khagan's fleet from the system's edge and their outlying garrisons.

Elsewhere in the greater Chondax system, the White Scars faced more desperate battles, a campaign that was a match for any other in sheer viciousness, if not in scope. A hundred small wars all fought in the space of those few days that the Khagan fought his war in the void. Chondax Prime was now all but abandoned in the wake of the evacuation, the warriors who had fought to cleanse it now battling for their lives in the void, while those detachments on distant worlds were by necessity left to secure their own means of evacuation. With no further need for secrecy, the Alpha Legion cadres hidden across the system moved to oppose their escape. Daring assaults and decapitation strikes replaced sabotage and stealth, with many smaller outposts annihilated in the opening hours of the battle, and most hard pressed to hold a defence while they struggled to join the retreat from Chondax.

On Herkon, eight Brotherhoods, nearly 10,000 warriors, marshalled to embark upon their transports as an Alpha Legion strike force of Spartan assault tanks and other armoured units bore down on their encampment. The Brotherhood of the Red Moon, with a final salute to their brothers, took to the plains on their jetbikes and heavy speeders to hold off the foe as best as they could and die in service to the Khagan. Desolate Kren had only a few small frigates still in orbit to act as transports for

more than 12,000 warriors, among which were included both Legiones Astartes and militia alike. They drew lots, not to see who would be saved, but rather for the honour of staying behind to bring the fight to the enemy. In the jungles of Epihelikon, where no White Scars vessels of any kind remained, the Alpha Legion mustered with grim confidence, expected a cowed and beaten foe to await them, only for Argus Gygan and the Saturnyne Rams alongside the Brotherhood of the Pale Serpent to break through their lines in a near-suicidal assault. The Imperial troops took control of a number of drop craft while fending off Alpha Legion counter-attacks in a desperate attempt to rejoin the fleet. Such tales of grim bravery were numerous, though we must assume that many more heroes died unremembered in the chaotic fighting.

Phemus IV, where the White Scars had first become aware of the Alpha Legion's treachery, was host to one such tale. Here the small force left to continue the investigation, now stranded with the departure of those cruisers in orbit, was locked in a deadly war of shadows and sudden fury. The Alpha Legion garrison, its hidden base now revealed and reputed to be the lair of none other than the Primarch Alpharius himself, pitted its headhunters and infiltrators against the swift riders and laughing killers of the White Scars Brotherhood of the Sable Wolf.

Ulkanor Khan, rightly suspecting the macro-beacon the Alpha Legion guarded was critical to their plans, led his bodyguard Keshig in a bold assault. Yet despite their speed and skill-at-arms, the White Scars quickly fell victim to the murderous traps of the Alpha Legion elite. Caught at bay among the lava pools and ash drifts, his Scimitar jetbike crippled and Keshig scattered, Ulkanor Khan called out his opposite, challenging the Alpha Legion commander to single combat as his warriors looked on from the shadows. Without a word Siridor Vhen, the Alpha Legion Praetor, signalled his men to open fire, cutting down the brave Khan.

On distant Byfrust, where the White Scars under the command of Tsolmon Khan could not know that their Khagan was blasting a path directly away from them, the fighting was even more grim. Tsolmon Khan's attempts to warn the Khagan of the Alpha Legion's treachery had failed, drowned out by the signals that had flooded the system, and the oncoming force of Alpharius' sons bore enough heavy firepower to quickly reduce his meagre fortifications to ruin. In the face of overwhelming odds, Tsolmon is recorded as making the following statement to the assembled White Scars and Imperial soldiery, which has since passed into legend, "Brothers, we know not from where our betrayal has come, from the Warmaster or our Emperor, and it matters not. We fight for our honour and the Khagan, not at the demand of some distant tyrant. We fight because we were born to do so, not for the ambitions of emperors. We are White Scars, we are the storm on the horizon and we bow to no one."

And the White Scars charged, laughing as they went into battle.

THE CHISEL

So sudden was the shift across the system, that few among the Alpha Legion had time to set their defences. In high orbit of Chondax Prime, where only moments before it had seemed that the White Scars fleet was on the cusp of a rout, its formation suddenly coalesced into an armoured wedge of void craft, the *Swordstorm* at its point. The final phase of the Zao had begun, precisely as the Khagan had intended. The *Swordstorm* struck the thinnest part of the Alpha Legion cordon, weakened when they had released their reserves to pursue the feigned retreat of the White Scars, brushing aside the lesser craft that sought to bar its passage. Lance beams flickered in the void and short lived goutts of flame and wreckage marked the path of the White Scars flagship, a pale dagger thrust into the belly of the Alpha Legion fleet.

In similar fashion, the warriors under the command of Tsolmon Khan on Byfrust formed a flying wedge of jetbikes, assault land speeders and light armour aimed at the heart of the Alpha Legion formation. Little expecting this subtle ferocity, the Alpha Legion were initially taken by surprise, though with warriors of the Legiones Astartes such surprise would only be momentary. Yet, this was all the opening the White Scars required. A detachment of the Golden Keshig opened a hole in the ranks of the Alpha Legion, their lances shattering ceramite and spearing through even Terminator plate. Behind them came almost every warrior Tsolmon could muster, White Scars and Imperial soldiery alike staking everything on one desperate charge. The target of the assault was the Alpha Legion commander at the centre of the attack, Malek Striga and his acolytes, in order to cut the heads from the hydra. The heavier elements of the White Scars attack slowed to engage the main body of the enemy, granting the fleetier Scimitar and Erinyes jetbikes of the White Scars and Sister of Silence the opportunity to push deeper into their formation, seeking its corrupted heart.

Amid the clash of blades and thunder of heavy guns, the outnumbered phalanx of White Scars used their speed to best advantage, cutting a path through the Alpha Legion as the azure-clad warriors tried to re-order their lines. Hurling down upon the Alpha Legion's command cadre, the jetbike-mounted warriors were met by a wall of dark, roiling warp-flame, the work of the sorcerous powers of the Alpha Legion Consul Striga and yet another sign of the Alpha Legion's descent into treachery and abomination. The White Scars faltered as Striga and his acolytes unleashed hell upon them, goutts of rancid flame and shrieking beams of impossible energy tearing holes in their phalanx and stalling the assault in its tracks. Through the hel-storm, however, came the surviving warrior maidens of the Silent Sisterhood, warp-flame recoiling from them as though alive and terrified of their presence. Immune to the dark arts of the Alpha Legion sorcerer, the Silent Sisters threw themselves at the renegade Legionaries, the acolytes falling to their blades as their psychic kine-glaives failed them.

Knight-Centura Merovin, wounded and exhausted from battle, faced Malek Striga in single combat. Though a superlative warrior in her own right, the Silent Sister could not match the sheer post-human might of the Legiones Astartes consul and was cast down, mortally wounded by the Alpha Legion warrior's force lance. As Striga prepared to deliver the final blow, Tsolmon Khan appeared through the failing psychic miasma that surrounded the pair, weakened as it was by the Knight-Centura's genetic curse, and struck him dead with his thunder hammer. With their leader slain and the White Scars rampaging through their lines, the Alpha Legion warriors sensed they had lost the initiative and began a carefully co-ordinated disengagement. Fading into the twisting glacial tunnels and redoubts so recently held by the Orks, the Alpha Legion surrendered the field, no longer willing to indulge the White Scars in open battle.

At that point, as if in answer to the desperate alarm broadcast at Tsolmon's order, a lone cruiser slid into high orbit of Byfrust. Yet this was no sleek White Scars vessel, but the blunt, efficient form of an Alpha Legion bombardment cruiser, later identified as

the *Phi-Hekator*. The Alpha Legion ship moved into geosynchronous orbit above the battlefield, its weapons batteries primed and locked onto the site of the White Scars' short-lived victory. Below, only now made aware that the Khagan and his fleet were far across the system, leaving Tsolmon and his troops with no hope of rescue or reinforcement, the last few hundred White Scars gathered, seeking out their wounded on the field that they might meet death defiantly on their feet. Tsolmon Khan himself, his fleeting success now rendered meaningless, tossed aside the corpse of Malek Striga and gathered up the fallen form of the Knight-Centura before joining his men that they might meet their fate together.

With the death of Ulkanor Khan, the situation on Phemus IV seemed equally dire, with few officers left to take command of the Brotherhood of the Sable Wolf. Indeed, the highest ranking warrior that remained was Munokhoi, known in the Vth Legion's broken gothic as the Black Hound, Kharakhor, a Moritat killer and unused to authority or grand strategy. Unlike his Khan, he had little use for honour and set out into the wastes of Phemus IV with only one objective: to kill as many of the enemy as he could before death overtook him. His braying laughter echoed among the ash dunes alongside the harsh report of his pistols as he killed, drawing the Alpha Legion to each new slaughter left in his wake, and with each victory more of his brethren joined his wild hunt. The Alpha Legion replied to such reckless fury with cold cruelty, dispatching the vigilator assassin known as the *Interfector* to eliminate the last of the White Scars.

The fighting raged sporadically across Phemus IV's harsh terrain, hit and run assault followed by ambush followed by decapitation strike in endless and varied repetition. Without the numbers to mount a direct assault upon the Alpha Legion's fortified base, Munokhoi and those White Scars reavers that followed in his wake satisfied themselves with wreaking carnage upon those patrols that ventured out. In return, the Alpha Legion enacted a series of complex entrapments, possibly to test their tactics in open combat against other Legionaries as much as they were intended to end the fighting. Due to the irregular nature of this engagement, it is difficult to fully reconstruct events. The White Scars relied heavily on their familiarity with independent operations and filed only a few after-action reports regarding their deeds. Of those we possess, most deal with records of the fallen and

The Hydra's Head

The involvement of Alpharius during the Chondax Engagement is a matter of much speculation, but little direct evidence. Considering the size of the fleet involved, many have assumed his presence at its head, though no records speak to the truth of this. Various unconfirmed reports from around the system claim his presence during the combats that broke out across Chondax, individual warriors tell of seeing him in the thick of the fighting on Epihelikon, Irra Minor, Kren and further afield. The only such sighting with any weight of evidence behind it is that noted during the fighting on Phemus IV, where multiple warriors of repute mention the presence of a warrior that matches the description of the XXth Legion's master in his most well-known panoply. However, considering Alpharius' penchant for deception and the number of other documented incidents where body doubles, clones and more esoteric forms of disguise have been employed, as well as the fact that many of these sightings place the Primarch at locations far distant at the same time, we must assume that most, if not all of them, are false. As such, this chronicle has chosen not to record the majority of them in the name of clarity, retaining only the Phemus IV encounter.

of worthy foes, often ignoring the tactical situation and details of unit dispositions. It is interesting to note that despite the severity of their situation, many conceal a grudging admiration for the canny nature of their foe, even those like the *Interfector*, whose skills at ambush and long range marksmanship laid low many of the White Scars. Some few reports even make mention of encounters with a towering figure in heavily ornamented armour wielding a spear, a figure some have assumed was Alpharius himself.

With the White Scars unable and the Alpha Legion unwilling to bring a quick end to the fighting on Phemus IV, the shadow war continued. Perhaps it would have done so interminably until the Alpha Legion decided that it had served its purpose and used their sheer numerical advantage to wipe the moon clean of their foes. What might have occurred will never be known, for as the fighting on the ground turned in the Alpha Legion's favour, the orbital battle did not. The Khagan's spearhead had shattered the lines of the Alpha Legion fleet, the *Swordstorm* brushing aside those cruisers that sought to bar its path in a storm of lance fire and short range torpedo salvos. Before the Alpha Legion could re-order their lines, the *Swordstorm* and other lead squadrons were battering a path through the weakest point of their formation, the remainder of the fleet following at flank speed.

Ships bearing the mark of the Hydra tumbled and burned in the void, hit by successive barrages from each wave of ships that passed, but cruisers marked by the Khagan's lightning bolt insignia suffered in return in their heedless charge. Worse, those of the White Scars ships that fell behind due to damage or being cut-off from the main

formation by the manoeuvring of the Alpha Legion craft, were quickly overwhelmed, blasted apart or infested with boarding craft and captured.

Despite those losses suffered, the Zao, or 'Chisel' in the sonorous Chogorian tongue, plunged onwards, cutting through the outer layers of the Alpha Legion's complex formation and into its heart, where common Imperial doctrine placed the heaviest and most powerful void craft. Ranged against the *Swordstorm* and its brethren were dozens of Alpha Legion gunships and battle-barges, each apparently heavy with grand batteries and hangar bays, outnumbering and out-massing the White Scars' spearhead substantially. We must assume that the Khagan counted on the speed and ferocity of his assault to carry the fight, for he did not intend a drawn-out fight, but merely to break through the formation before him, though it may be that the wild-blooded Primarch of the White Scars simply did not care what odds awaited him. With the Khagan in the lead, not one of the ships that followed balked at the doom that waited for them in the guns of the battleships ahead. Indeed, many of the cruisers in the second and third waves of the Chisel formation channelled power away from key defensive systems in order to accelerate and join the attack.

Whether by keen insight, or the blessing of fortune, Jaghatai Khan's attack had struck at the hidden flaw in the Alpha Legion's strategy. The *Swordstorm* and its companion ships let fly every shell, torpedo and las charge at their disposal, turning the deep void bright as day with their firepower, expecting little more than to scar the shielding of such mighty vessels with their first salvo. Instead, the barrage sowed chaos

among their foes, leaving a number of the largest craft as little more than burning hulks. While some of the enemy craft were indeed the pride of the Alpha Legion's fleet, perhaps a full third were little more than bulk freighters modified to appear as heavy cruisers and battle barges, poorly shielded and weakly armed. With the overwhelming power of the Alpha Legion fleet revealed as little more than a clever fiction, there was little to hold back the Khagan's fury. The Zao drove through the centre of the Alpha Legion fleet, the smaller craft to the rear following in the wake of the destruction wrought by those in the lead. The Khagan did not halt to give battle, even with the odds balanced between the two fleets, and instead made best speed for the far side of the system where his ships could safely make the translation to warp space.

The White Scars pushed their finely tuned sub-light drives to their limits, powering through the void on a course that would take them past Phemus and the outlying worlds before leaving the confines of Chondax's triple suns' gravity. The Alpha Legion ships had scant chance of matching such speed, and indeed showed little inclination to continue the fight, instead consolidating around the inner system with only a few small frigate squadrons shadowing the White Scars' retreat. Their orders seemed to preclude close pursuit of the Khagan, but must also have forced them to remain in Chondax, perhaps to spur Jaghatai onwards and keep him from lingering. As such, the Khagan and his fleet came at last to the battle-scarred moons of Phemus, fresh from battle but with their thirst for vengeance far from sated.

An Eagle, a Serpent and a Wolf

Upon arriving at Phemus, that bloated sentinel sat at the furthest extent of the greater Chondax system, Jaghatai Khan discovered what had become of those detachments of his sons that had been unable to respond to the recall orders. Phemus boasted 30 moons, seven of which had played host to battles during the campaign against the Hain, and of which only two of the small Brotherhoods left to watch over them had reported back as part of the recall. Of those that had remained behind, either having never received the call or were prevented from leaving by the Alpha Legion, little now remained. Only on the fourth moon where the Black Hound and the remnants of the Brotherhood of the Sable Wolf continued to fight, were there signs of survivors.

Here, with no vast fleet of enemies to restrain him and aroused to anger by the ruin wrought upon his sons, the full wrath of the Khagan fell upon the Alpha Legion. Massed squadrons of Storm Eagle gunships and other landing craft descended on the surface, bearing the Khagan's personal Keshig guard and those other elements of the Legion that could be swiftly marshalled for combat. A tide of white armour and sleek jetbikes surged across the ash wastes of Phemus IV towards the base that had previously been concealed from them, the warriors of each Brotherhood competing to keep pace with the Khagan at the forefront of the assault. The Alpha Legion sent forth a phalanx of armoured behemoths, a trio of mighty Fellblade tanks kept hidden in the depths of their base for just such a moment, to stall the Khagan's approach backed by rapier artillery and infantry cadres. The onrushing jetbike squadrons quickly enveloped the lumbering Fellblades and their support, a whirling caracole of white around a small knot of blue.

The expert riders of the Vth Legion evaded devastating cannon blasts and ploughed through hails of boltgun fire with equal aplomb, delivering pinpoint blasts from multi-meltas or swinging in close to plant melta bombs. To the rear, the survivors of the Brotherhood of the Sable Wolf, now well-acquainted with the twisting canyons of Phemus IV, fell upon the artillery train, causing much havoc as they repaid the debt of blood owed them. In short order, the Khagan's troops had surrounded, neutralised and bypassed the Alpha Legion force, pushing on to the base itself. Here the Khagan sought to find his brother, Alpharius, whom reports claimed was present on the surface, that he might answer for his actions. Yet for all his efforts, Jaghatai Khan found nothing of his brother save for ghosts and rumours. Reports spoke of Alpharius first repulsing White Scars assault troops at the lower gates, then stalking the main battlefield in the company of Alpha Legion headhunters. Drawn from skirmish to skirmish, the Khagan encountered only decoys, mistaken sightings and outright traps as the Alpha Legion artfully kept him from the main thrust of the assault.

With Jaghatai Khan and his elite distracted, the remaining Alpha Legion warriors fought a well-planned delaying action, holding intersections and fortified positions within the base as long as possible before falling back. The White Scars replied with an assault the sheer speed of which threatened to

overwhelm the defence, often outflanking the Alpha Legion positions before they could displace. When overrun, the Alpha Legion fought with calculated determination, selling their lives dearly to buy as much time as possible in the face of the White Scars' unbound ferocity. What time they bought was paid for in blood for, though distracted, the Khagan could not be ignored, and where he walked, the Alpha Legion's defences crumbled and commanders fell and the righteous fury of the White Scars reaped a heavy toll of Alpha Legion lives. This short respite, purchased by deception, holding action and sacrifice, allowed the Alpha Legion to jury rig the endo-thermic generators buried deep beneath the once-hidden fortress, setting off a chain reaction of massive explosions that began to tear the base asunder.

The fighting reached its heights as the White Scars, now trapped amidst the doom that the Alpha Legion had wrought for themselves, turned to fight free of the violent end overtaking the fortress. Bitter gunfights erupted in the crumbling inner precincts as the White Scars fought to extricate themselves from their own success, with the Alpha Legion struggling to pin them within even as their fastness collapsed around them. Here, amid the churning fortifications, Jaghatai Khan came face to face with the Alpha Legion commander, not Alpharius, but merely Praetor Siridor Vhen. Denied the confrontation with his brother that he had searched for, Jaghatai Khan gave vent to his frustration and anger, attacking Praetor Vhen. Though a mighty warrior, lacking in neither skill nor experience, the Praetor was no match for the Primarch of the Vth Legion. Even exhausted by battle and betrayal, Jaghatai Khan could have dispatched his foe in the first pass of their blades, but the Khagan chose not to, instead toying with the Alpha Legion warrior much as that azure-clad Legion had toyed with his own men. Such cruel sport gave the Khagan little satisfaction, and the master of the Vth quickly tired of it, striking a mortal blow to his opponent. There, as the fortress shuddered through its death throes and Jaghatai Khan stood over him, Siridor Vhen spoke, "*Shall I tell you of the terror we have saved you from, little Khan? You may snarl and thrash at our hands upon your leash now, but in the end you will thank us. There are fates far worse than that you race towards. Perhaps I shall tell you of the fate of Magnus, for it will please me to see you weep.*"

The Bloody Toll of Victory

Of the approximately 60,000 White Scars still combat effective during the Chondax Engagement, only a small fraction were not gathered as part of the great recall order issued by the Khagan. Of the conflicts noted here, most of which occurred in isolated garrisons and amongst units at some distance from the main host, there were perhaps less than 10,000 White Scars involved.

Despite the vague nature of the Vth Legion's logistical records, we can estimate their total casualties in combat with the Alpha Legion to be approximately 6,000 Legionaries. Of these, perhaps 2,000 perished during the void battle, either assigned to one of the craft destroyed or damaged or as crew aboard one of the strike craft squadrons engaged in the ship-to-ship actions that took place. The remaining warriors lost were all assigned to the smaller garrisons in the Chondax system that were destroyed by the Alpha Legion.

Of these last 4,000, only half of that number can be verified as killed in combat – many of their bodies were never recovered, and while it is assumed that they met their end in battle, it may be that some were taken alive by the Alpha Legion. What purpose the XXth Legion might have in taking prisoners is perhaps best left unexplored beyond the most obvious – information. The presence in the last years of the Horus Heresy of units whose operational and combat performance seems reminiscent of White Scars doctrines is most probably coincidental rather than some grim experiment with chimeric gene-seed.

The White Scars fleet sustained similarly light casualties, with a total of 30 void craft noted as absent from the last translation out-system. These include a number of craft known to have been lost before the recall order, most likely ambushed by Alpha Legion hunter-killer squadrons, as well as those craft destroyed during the execution of the so-called Chisel manoeuvre. Again, as the Khagan chose to abandon the system and make all speed to Prospero, the hulks of these ships were left to the Alpha Legion, and several of them are later noted as being seen in action. Indeed, on several occasions, the Alpha Legion are known to have employed these repaired and restored hulks as part of their Trojan horse operations in their original White Scars panoply, luring Imperium squadrons into ambush with false signals.

It is worth noting that the forces gathered at Chondax were not the full strength of the Vth Legion. A further five Hordes, approximately 30,000-40,000 Legionaries, are known to have been assigned to other duties. Some remained as the garrison of Chogoris, while others were assigned to crusades and conflicts along the furthest rim of Mankind's new domain. At least one of these Hordes is known to have declared for Horus, perhaps not knowing of Jaghatai's refusal to do so, having been fed yet more lies by Horus and his agents.

Of the Alpha Legion fleet little is known – few Imperium expeditions ventured to the remote Chondax system during the dark years of the Horus Heresy. The next loyal craft to take refuge in the system were raiding squadrons of the Shattered Legions in the waning years of 010.M31, and they reported no sign of any enemy ships or starbases.

Siridor Vhen would not speak again, for before he could utter another word he was silenced by the impact of a high velocity shell fired by an unknown marksman. Robbed of both a victory and any sense of certainty by the actions of the Alpha Legion, Jaghatai Khan was left with only unanswered questions and doubt. He had rescued those of his sons stranded on Phemus IV and extricated the Vth Legion from the Alpha Legion trap at Chondax, but he still had few facts regarding the circumstances that had set such a dire plot into motion.

Whatever satisfaction there was to be found in the visceral distraction of combat was stolen by the looming dilemma of his Legion's future. Who among his brothers did he owe loyalty to? And which of them still held any loyalty to him? What dire fate had befallen the Lord of Prospero, one of very few brothers he held as a true friend among his distant and inscrutable kin?

As he stood on the ashen surface of Phemus IV, it must have seemed that all of the Imperium had turned against the White Scars, that all of the things in which the Khagan had once placed his trust and to which he had given his loyalty had come tumbling down, just as the Alpha Legion fortress had done. A fortress of lies whose supports had been torn out from under it.



For those of the White Scars far from the side of the Khagan, any such notion of ambiguity had long since been removed from their situation. Theirs was a simple one, outnumbered and surrounded on all sides by the Alpha Legion and with little remaining hope of escape, they counted those who fought by their side as allies and all others as enemy. Such was the lesson they had been taught by the wives of Alpharius' sons – give no trust to uniforms and symbols, only to action. On Byfrust, the farthest planet in the system from Phemus, these lessons had been wrought of death and written in the blood of the fallen and few remained to witness their end. Less than 300 warriors remained in Tsolmon Khan's command out of thousands – Legiones Astartes, Silent Sisters and sentinels of the Charonid fanes all bound together by the betrayal perpetrated upon them. All waited in silence for their end as the Alpha Legion cruiser *Phi-hekator* slowly turned in orbit to bring its vast macro-lance batteries to bear upon them. Yet fate had decreed a different end, and when the sky lit up, it was not with the searing light of descending lance fire, but instead with the death throes of the *Phi-hekator* itself, struck without warning by another vessel which had emerged from Chondax Alpha-Secundus' corona.

This new arrival was barely recognisable, its hull plating melted and deformed by the extreme heat it had endured and still bearing the marks of an earlier battle, but those few scraps of heraldry that remained marked it as the *Hawkstar*. Presumed lost in an earlier battle on the far side of the smaller companion star of the Chondax system, the *Hawkstar* had circumnavigated the star Alpha-Secundus under cover of its outer corona, finally emerging near Byfrust. Its first salvo had crippled the *Phi-hekator* and triggered cascade failure across the *Hawkstar's* systems as its heat-load spiked, and while its second salvo obliterated the Alpha Legion ship before it could recover or return fire, it

The Hound and the Huntsman

The death of Siridor Vhen was not a lone incident – over the course of the final battle that took place on Phemus IV, a total of six officers were slain by an unidentified sniper. Of these, two were Alpha Legion warriors, both fallen but not killed in battle with the White Scars, while the other four were White Scars veterans and Khans. All of the killings shared the same pattern, a single banestrike round fired with breathtaking precision, its perpetrator unseen by those involved. Only a single report speaks of an identity for the killer. The testimony of Munokhoi, the Black Hound, claims it lies with the saboteur known as the *Interfector*, whom he tracked and confronted, but was unable to strike down.

Of those White Scars killed, there seemed at first little rhyme nor reason beyond the opportunistic murder of enemy assets. However, hindsight and a knowledge of events that would shortly overtake the Vth Legion grants us a different view, for all of the White Scars officers killed were known to be those most vehemently opposed to the spread of the warrior lodges within their Brotherhoods. Indeed, at least two of these officers were to be replaced with Terran-born veterans who had fought with the Legion since the days when the Vth Legion had regularly fought alongside the Warmaster and bore Horus some loyalty. This was to have dire repercussions for the White Scars, tipping the scales of the brief insurrection that would later take place over Prospero just enough for it to cause as much damage as possible to the Legion without breaking it or seeing it fall into Horus' hands. Once again, the full motivation behind the Alpha Legion's actions remains unknown.

also burned out a number of the *Hawkstar's* secondary systems. The battered White Scars cruiser settled into orbit of Byfrust, still radiating the excess heat accumulated during its voyage and the execution of the *Phi-hekator*, as it dispatched landing craft to recover the survivors below.

On the surface, Tsolmon Khan and his warriors delayed their escape to perform one last duty. Upon the icy plains of Byfrust they raised a cairn of stone and fallen ship spars, a rough and hasty monument to those who had fallen valiantly in battle as brothers. Within they interred all of the Loyalist bodies they could find, from the lowliest battle-brother of the Vth Legion or initiate of the Charonid auxilia to that of the Knight-Centura Merovin. In death all were made equal, and

those who yet lived were humbled by the courage that they had shown on the field of battle. On that crude tomb, raised on the bleak and lonely surface of a world unknown to the wise and the mighty, they inscribed no lengthy tributes nor gilded laurels, but only a few short words of praise in the flowing Korchin script of Chogoris, translated here to Low Gothic from Old Chogorian:

*Under blue heaven,
empires rise and then they fall.
Heroes cannot die.*

With the last of those warriors who had endured through the battle brought safely aboard, the *Hawkstar* rained fire down on the Alpha Legion fortress below, leaving nothing but ruins behind it when it left. Broken but

not yet willing to die, the *Hawkstar* set course away from both the vast Alpha Legion fleet and the Khagan's ships on the far side of the system, for even the lowliest of void-craft would likely have overwhelmed the battered cruiser were it to be caught by the enemy. Taking note of the Alpha Legion's own ploy, the *Hawkstar* limped out of the gravitic shadow of Chondax Alpha-Secundus to the Mandeville belt between the inner and outer systems before straining its damaged warp engines to open a passage to the outermost regions of Chondax where the Khagan and his fleet were passing the orbit of far-off Phemus.

The return of the *Hawkstar* and a few other errant ships was a small blessing among the Legion's misfortunes, and would coincide with the arrival of ill-tidings for the Khagan. A message had been received direct from the astropaths attached to the VIth Legion, the Space Wolves. Leman Russ and his warriors were hard-pressed in the Alaxxes Nebula, under attack from another fleet of Alpha Legion craft, and the Wolf Lord had sent for the Khagan to support him. The VIth Legion, just like so many of the Legions, had long neglected any ties with the White Scars. The two Legions were all but strangers to each other. Few among them could claim to have fought together in all the years of the Great Crusade, and the clumsy courtesy of his message betrayed Leman Russ' lack of regard. He deigned to call for them only when no other choice presented itself, with little concern for his brother's trials. To Jaghatai Khan and the White Scars he did not call for brothers in arms, but instead had issued a summons for a subordinate.

Despite the nature of the Wolf Lord's summons, here was a chance for revenge, for the open and straightforward battle thus far denied them, but one that asked for absolute trust in the Wolf Lord despite those accusations levelled at him by the Warmaster's previous entreaties. It seemed that few of his brothers had cared for Jaghatai Khan or the White Scars except as tools for their own ambitions. Horus wished to chain him, the Alpha Legion to leash him, and Dorn to command him – each demanded his loyalty like a resource to be haggled over. Each was keen to point out the dire consequences of ignoring their summons, with threats levelled against both his Legion and the Imperium itself, and laid the consequences at his feet. His choice would place the White Scars at the mercy of the ambitions of a faction that cared little for them, either as minions of Horus' ambition or servitors of the Emperor's inscrutable plans, or his inaction would see the doom of the Imperium.

Of all of those of the Khan's brothers that might have called upon his loyalty, he had heard nothing save dire and ominous rumours of the one which he most anxiously sought news of – Magnus the Red, Sorcerer king of Prospero and as much an outsider to those of his brothers that sought to rule the Imperium as himself. The two had ever been bonded by the disdain of many of their fellow Primarchs, not simply by loyalty to the Imperium they served but also as allies and travellers along strange paths. Now it would seem that the Imperium had turned upon the Crimson King, either in outright assault or by permitting a rogue Primarch to

dispense his own justice, Jaghatai Khan could not know the truth of it. Yet, with the return of the *Hawkstar*, the old wisdom of Chogoris loomed in his mind – *Under blue heaven, empires rise and then they fall. Heroes cannot die.* The Khagan knew where he must go.

The assembled might of the White Scars, a host upon whom the fate of the Imperium rested, turned silently in the void, aligning upon some distant star. They ran in close formation, rigged for war with guns at the ready and colours bright and clear. All across the fleet, the warriors of Chogoris prepared themselves, for the Khagan's orders had been passed throughout the armada, they went now to war, perhaps the greatest war they would ever face. There was no more confusion, no doubt left among the gathered Khans and warriors. They were no longer at bay, but loosed like an eagle to the hunt, talons extended to strike. Terra called them to its side and the Warmaster summoned them to battle, on the Khagan's word an Emperor and a Tyrant waited. But these were the White Scars, the ordu of Jaghatai, they were no man's slaves. They were on their own, as they had always been, and they would seek their own truth.

They would go to Prospero, and the Imperium would burn.

Of Emperors and Lies

In total, the void battle known to history as the Chondax Engagement had lasted a little over eight hours. The entire campaign, from the arrival of the Alpha Legion fleet to the departure of Jaghatai Khan lasted but four days. Total casualties among the two Legions involved are far lower than those of similar battles. Where the Isstvan massacres and the Battle for Calth would decimate the participants, the fighting in Chondax served only to hone the warriors of the Khagan, winnowing out the weakest and least fit. Indeed, their first real losses would come at their own hands in the space above Magnus' grave, a crucible of their own making.

For such a short incident its impact on the wider war is staggering, not for the events of the battle itself but for those tragedies it allowed to occur and the promise of salvation it left stillborn. In the Alaxxes Nebula, the Wolves of Russ were battered and kept from intervening in the wider war, though they were not destroyed as Horus had hoped. With this disaster vanished any hope that the Loyalist cause might undertake a grand counter-offensive.

With Ultramar besieged, Rogal Dorn ensconced on Terra and both the Dark Angels and Blood Angels all but vanished, few large offensive forces remained. Russ,

though often decried by his brothers as a crude and vulgar commander, was among those few of the Primarchs whose loyalty was beyond reproach, and even after the brutal losses incurred during the Prospero campaign he still commanded one of the most ferocious Legions, and was the only one with significant experience in combat with other Legion Astartes forces. Yet without the support of the White Scars, a surprise assault by the Alpha Legion left the Wolf Lord reeling and on the defensive, guaranteeing Horus a free hand in the galactic north to consolidate his power base.

But to consider the battle a victory for Horus is to fail to see how Jaghatai Khan's choice harmed the rebel cause. At best, the battle's result can be considered a pyrrhic victory for Horus' nascent rebellion, for while Jaghatai Khan's choice left the Space Wolves at the mercy of the Alpha Legion, they also removed them from Horus' camp, depriving him of a full Legion of elite warriors. Rogal Dorn, acting as the seneschal of Terra, was denied the ability to bring a quick end to the war, but so equally was Horus. Though it may be considered disloyal to write such words as these, it might have proved less destructive for the Imperium had Horus been able to press for a quick victory, sparing the worlds of Mankind from seven years of cataclysmic struggle. Jaghatai chose neither the Loyalist's nor the Traitor's path, and in so doing he saved neither himself nor the wider Imperium from any measure of pain.

To place the blame for these consequences solely at the feet of Jaghatai Khan is unfair, for his actions are to a large degree dictated by those of the Alpha Legion. Despite all of the resources spent on discovering the full plans of the Alpha Legion and their mysterious Primarch, we still know precious

The Alaxxes Nebula

Even as the Khagan battled the Alpha Legion over Chondax Prime, Leman Russ of the Space Wolves was engaged by a similar fleet bearing the mark of the Hydra at the Alaxxes Nebula. However, unlike the incident at Chondax, the Alpha Legion showed no hesitation in engaging the Space Wolves in direct battle. Their goal in this engagement seems more explicitly the destruction of the enemy without recourse to any form of coercion. Indeed, there is little to no record of any communication between Leman Russ and any commander of the Alpha Legion. By the time Leman Russ saw fit to contact his brother Primarch seeking aid, the battle is known to have gone badly for the VIth Legion, with significant losses to their fleet contingent, and with the Alpha Legion making full use of the element of surprise while unhindered by the need to suborn their foe.

The events of this battle and the Khagan's decision, which were to have their own consequences for the larger civil war, bear discussion at another juncture where proper time and consideration can be given to them. However, it is worth noting that as the fleet battle at Alaxxes occurs at roughly the same time index as the fighting at Chondax, the Alpha Legion were capable of operating a number of armada-sized fleet contingents simultaneously. Even accounting for the inclusion of a number of Q-ships and other disguised civilian craft, this was a fleet well in excess of that fielded by any other Legion. Moreover, as Legion policy, and the records of both those White Scars and Space Wolves elements that managed to board Alpha Legion craft during these engagements show, both fleets maintained a sizable Legion Astartes security force aboard the capital class vessels. This would lead us to believe that not only did the Alpha Legion's fleet exceed pre-Heresy estimations, but also their recruitment figures must have been grossly underestimated by Imperium military census counts.

The Lost and the Forsaken

The withdrawal of Jaghatai Khan and his fleet from the Chondax system marks the end of the fighting there in most conventional records. Few scholars make any further reference to the Chondax system during the years of the Horus Heresy. Indeed, even today it is considered a desolate backwater of no strategic worth. However, there were small warbands of White Scars active within the system for a number of years after the withdrawal, far longer than most accounts acknowledge.

These stubborn bands of survivors were forced to turn to hit and run warfare, relying on their speed to keep them ahead of their pursuers. Most numbered little more than a few dozen warriors and were quickly reduced to scavenging the wreckage of past battles to remain combat capable, in many ways aping the tactics of the Orks they had hunted to extinction only a short time before. Most of these holdouts were exterminated by the Alpha Legion within a few short weeks, but a few lasted much longer.

The last such group of White Scars survivors to have been rescued from Chondax was discovered in 017.M31, ten long years after the Alpha Legion had abandoned the system, by a Raven Guard patrol cruiser seeking the trail of the Traitor fleets fleeing the failed Siege of Terra. Having been trapped on Irra Minor for a decade, the warriors of the Brotherhood of the Black Axe, led by Sengur One-arm, who was known to his troops as the Iron Khan due to the patchwork augmetics that sustained him, initially assumed the Raven Guard to be a hostile force. A long, solitary war against Alpha Legion headhunters, Dark Mechanicum hunter-killer servitors and foul apparitions of the Warp had made a virtue of paranoia. It was only after a short and abortive skirmish that the XIXth Legion warriors managed to convince them of their intent. Sengur Khan and his surviving eight warriors were invited to Terra by no less a personage than Rogal Dorn to receive honours for their valour, but they instead chose to return quietly to Chogoris without fanfare.

little of the truth in this regard. Horus' orders to Alpharius at Chondax are now a matter of record, much data having fallen into the hands of the Scouring fleets in the wake of the battle for Terra, but this simply makes it clear how far the Alpha Legion diverged from his wishes. It must be asked: what did they think to gain from this betrayal?

They themselves made no attempt to benefit from its conclusion, either in terms of territory, war materiel or political power. Indeed, it is difficult to see how they might have done so, for the actions of the White Scars promoted only chaos and destruction. Is this what Alpharius sought? To prolong the war and weaken whomever might

eventually take the throne? Few within the borders of the Imperium would benefit from such an outcome, but then who is to know where Alpharius' true masters were to be found?

One other theory exists, though its credence is doubted by the scholars of this latter Imperium. That theory maintains that the Alpha Legion were not the unified force many saw them as, that within their shadowy ranks there was a hidden war taking place that sought to change the Legion's path. It is unknown who might have been able to challenge Alpharius for leadership of his own Legion, and how they would rally his own sons against him, though perhaps the Legion's penchant for secrecy and misdirection would allow a canny leader to manipulate it from within. Yet, this theory explains much regarding the strange choices of the Alpha Legion during the Chondax campaign.

This then is the legacy of the battle for Chondax. Destruction and the end of a golden age, perhaps the last golden age of Mankind. Malevolence in its purest form, a calculated and deliberate intent to cause harm and misery. We have spoken of many evils in the course of this history of the Horus Heresy, of Daemons and dark gods bent on the destruction of Man. Yet the greatest of evils, the worst malevolence, is perhaps to be found in the hearts of men.

WHITE SCARS BROTHERHOODS

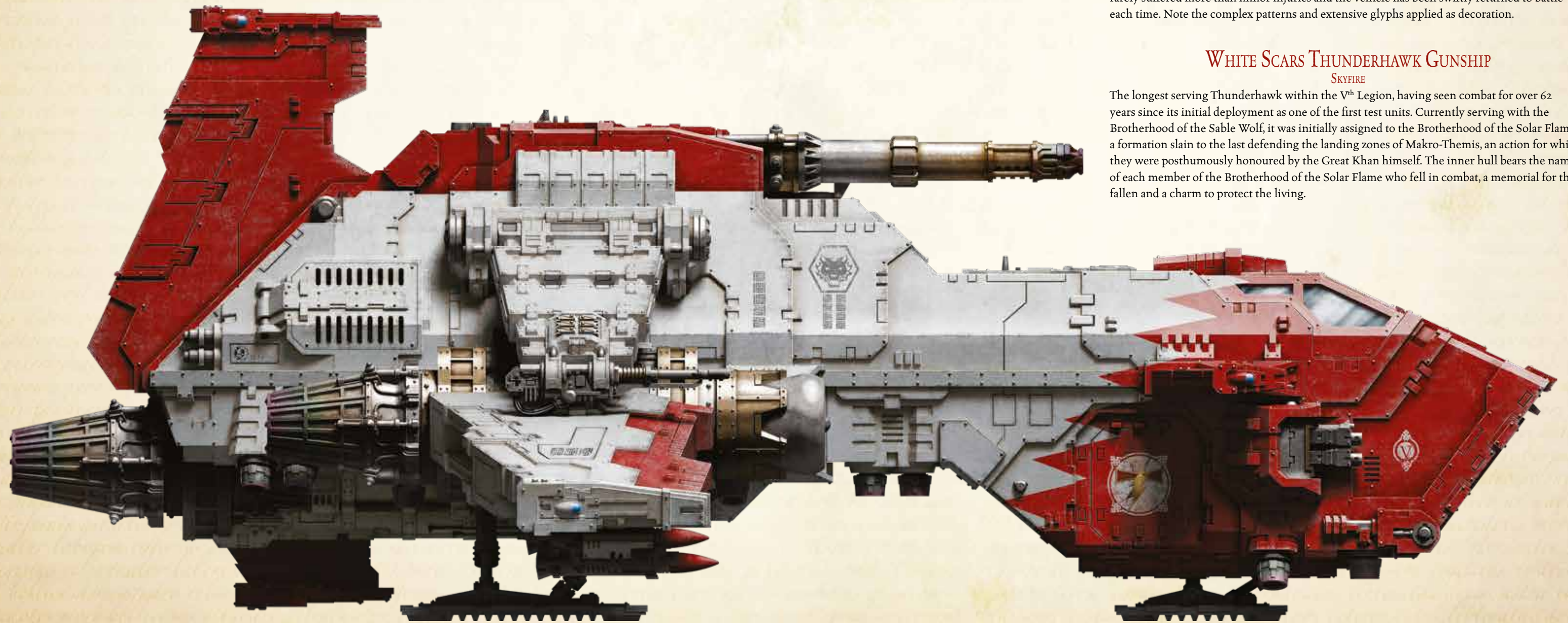
Each Brotherhood of the White Scars is a highly mobile task force unto itself, endowed with the means to transport its complement of Legiones Astartes warriors to the battlefield with a speed that was the hallmark of their Legion. As such, the White Scars were known to favour the use of aerial and contragravity vehicles of all kinds, with a noted preference for smaller craft due to the lowering maintenance requirements and greater manoeuvrability of such vehicles. Their usage of massed squadrons of Scimitar, Shamshir and Falcata class jetbikes is well known and documented, but the various Brotherhoods also made use of large numbers of Land Speeders, Fire Raptor gunships and even armoured vehicles of certain patterns.

Indeed, some Brotherhoods were even known to specialise in the use of mobile artillery, experts at the rapid displacement of batteries after the completion of a fire mission, and at providing close range support bombardments.

Among all of the Emperor's Legions, the White Scars were the most enthusiastic adopters of the newer Thunderhawk pattern gunships, smaller mass produced replacements for the ancient and vast Stormbird pattern dropships that had served the earliest incarnations of the Legiones Astartes since their departure from Terra itself. These vehicles, while less powerful and imposing than the huge Stormbirds, were more easily customised by the Gan-khan of the armoury to suit the needs of the White Scars, and far more easily maintained and

supplied on the long, solitary campaigns favoured by the Vth Legion. By the time of the Chondax campaign, most of the larger Brotherhoods of the Vth Legion had been assigned at least a single Thunderhawk, with some fielding enough to transport their entire complement into battle without recourse to more cumbersome landing craft.

Integral as they were to the mobile style of warfare and operation favoured by the White Scars, these vehicles were the focus of many of the small rituals within the Brotherhoods. Upon their armoured flanks they bore the marks of those who lived and died as warriors of the ordu of Jaghatai, serving as the shrines for the dead and fortresses for the living. Each bore a name and history the equal of any other veteran of the Legion, and many enjoyed a fame more widespread among the Legion than the warriors who crewed them.



WHITE SCARS PROTEUS LAND SPEEDER

HARROW-03

Operated by the Brotherhood of the Black Axe as part of its forward assault squadrons, this Land Speeder has been crippled in combat eight times. Despite this, the crew assigned to it has rarely suffered more than minor injuries and the vehicle has been swiftly returned to battle each time. Note the complex patterns and extensive glyphs applied as decoration.

WHITE SCARS THUNDERHAWK GUNSHIP

SKYFIRE

The longest serving Thunderhawk within the Vth Legion, having seen combat for over 62 years since its initial deployment as one of the first test units. Currently serving with the Brotherhood of the Sable Wolf, it was initially assigned to the Brotherhood of the Solar Flame, a formation slain to the last defending the landing zones of Makro-Themis, an action for which they were posthumously honoured by the Great Khan himself. The inner hull bears the names of each member of the Brotherhood of the Solar Flame who fell in combat, a memorial for the fallen and a charm to protect the living.

