

Chase the Wind

By Jon Flindall

Reality split with a noise like tearing flesh. Before Lieutenant Takhar's eyes, three jagged blades pushed into existence in the enginarium room as something ripped a path into the material realm. For a moment, the White Scar's superhuman reflexes failed him, and he froze as the horror before him took shape.

Then it leapt, and he instinctively span to avoid its slashing claws. Warp Talon, he thought, as his training kicked in. The warrior wore the midnight blue of the Night Lords, and lightning crackled from the sharpened edges of his armour.

The bolt carbines of Infiltrator Squad Suzhak opened up as more of the Heretic Astartes tore their way into reality, concussive echoes ringing out in the close confines. Takhar brought his weapon to his shoulder and fired a short burst of shots at his foe as the Warp Talon closed again. Ceramite fragments flew from his target's pauldron, but the warrior was hardly slowed by the impacts. Takhar's desperate parry saved him from being gutted by the Warp Talon's charge, but momentum bore him to the deck nonetheless. Sparks flew as his foe's lightning claws carved up the plating to either side of him. He drew a combat blade and buried it between the plates that guarded the warrior's guts. As the Warp Talon convulsed, Takhar pushed the wounded attacker aside and rolled to his feet. He swung his carbine up and put two bolt rounds into the Chaos Space Marine's helm, which burst open in a crimson bloom.

Before him was a scene of horror. The warp-assassins had cut down several of Squad Suzhak, and white-armoured bodies lay torn and scattered on the deck plating. The remainder of the Infiltrators were retreating, backing down the corridor which led to the ship's primary reactor. Their guns laid down disciplined covering fire, but the Warp Talons were too fast. Before Takhar could react, another of the Night Lords warriors fired his jump pack briefly, boosting forward to impale Brother Joghun upon his jagged claws.

'Enemy assault troops on enginarium deck four, aft bulkhead sixteen,' Takhar voxed to the other White Scars forces aboard the *Warhawk*. 'Heavy casualties, avoid engaging at blade's range.'

Ignoring his own advice, the lieutenant rushed towards the fiend hunched over Brother Joghun. This enemy wore no helm, and his pallid face was set in a rictus grin as he looked up from his victim.

'Your kin make poor sport, White Scar,' the Chaos Space Marine hissed, withdrawing his claws from Joghun's torso in a welter of blood.

As Takhar roared and drew his remaining knife, he saw the dying warrior's arm twitch. Then the krak grenade in Joghun's hand detonated and the Warp Talon and his victim were lost to a blinding explosion.

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'You fought well, tuslakh. Sit down.' Jodagha Khan sat in a low chair in his personal chambers. Smoke drifted up from an incense bowl set on the table before him.

Takhar had repaired the worst of the damage to his armour, but its servos grated as he took the indicated seat. He studied his commander's face. The Master of Recruits had already worn the scars of a hundred battles when Takhar passed the Test of Tempering and joined the Chapter proper, yet the White Scars' voyage into the debris field known as the Tears of the Emperor seemed to have aged him further. Takhar understood – the ship they pursued, the hated *Nightmare of Celyx*, broadcast the tortured screams of Astropaths captured by the Night Lords in a near-constant stream. This soul-searing barrage wore at all of the sons of the Great Khan.

'You believe we are being outplayed by the traitors, Takhar,' the khan continued, staring into the glowing embers of incense.

'Three more brothers fell today, my khan. The Night Lords attack us at every turn. They send a handful of warriors against a brotherhood each time, and when we halt the next attack they flee. There is no victory!'

'You feel every cut we are dealt as if it were carved into your own skin,' Jodagha replied. 'This is good. But sometimes the hunter must push on despite his wounds.'

'Of course... but we seem no closer to finding our quarry. They lured us into this asteroid field, and now the only traces we find of their route are those they choose to show us. With Sulanhi's guidance we might have run them to ground, but alone...' Stormseer Sulanhi had been confined to his sanctorum since the White Scars' hunt began. The psychic screams of the *Nightmare of Celyx* tore at the zadyin arga's mind, and it took all of his will to hold on to consciousness.

Jodagha looked up, meeting Takhar's stare through the coiling smoke. 'Ours is not an easy path, tuskakh,' he said levelly, 'but we were not made for easy paths. I too feel our seer's absence keenly, but I know what he would say if he were with us. We are the wind, brother. These traitors think to break our will, but no one can check the wind.'

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Takhar ducked beneath the swing of the Terminator's mace, slicing at the pipes under its breastplate. He stepped back out of range of the warrior's tusked helm, covering his retreat with bursts from his bolt carbine. How many more of these ambushes could the strike force survive? The Terminator's midnight plate was barely marked by the mass-reactive bolts, and the warrior lumbered towards him, relentless. Behind it, four more of the behemoths advanced to surround him.

Stepping backwards, the lieutenant stumbled over the body of a crippled Infiltrator. The Terminator hefted its mace, and energy crackled around the weapon's head as Takhar groped for the grenades at

his belt. Then, an explosive round cracked into the Terminator's eye lens, spraying brain matter across Takhar's visor. The towering Chaos Space Marine sagged, slipping to its knees. Takhar leapt aside before it crashed to the deck, then glanced to his left down the dimly lit access corridor.

His optics allowed him to make out three Eliminators at its far end, crouched in the shadows. More fire snapped out, and another of the Night Lords fell.

'Strike, sons of Chogoris!' came Jodagha's voice as the Captain leapt from an overhead gantry to slam into a reeling Terminator. His sword flashed and blood poured from his target's torso in a flood. The Reivers of Squad Borhtal dropped with him, heavy bolt pistols barking at point-blank range. In moments the remaining Terminators had fallen, and Takhar joined in his brothers' cheers.

Jodagha Khan turned to his lieutenant. The khan's topknot was plastered to his scalp with traitors' blood, and his eyes glittered. 'These snakes thought they could outrun the wind, Takhar, but no matter how fast you run, the wind is there before you!'

