



# BETRAYAL OF IDEALS

*Book I: Foundations of Fate*

*Blaine Lee Pardoe*

***The Great Hall  
Strana Mechty  
Clan Space  
12 June 2822***

Khan Sarah McEvedy walked around the construction site, carefully eyeing the work in progress. The Great Hall's cornerstone had been laid long ago, but progress had been slow, not due to motivation or desire, but in the detail of the craftsmanship. The stones for this structure, the seat of government for the Clans, were carved individually by hand on each one of the Pentagon worlds, then shipped to Strana Mechty. An equal number of stones from each world were to be employed in the grand structure. As she watched the stonemasons work, she wondered if she would ever see the completion of the structure.

As a team of men hoisted a block of marble up with a block and tackle, she surveyed the form of the building. Yes, it was to be a wondrous hall, a monument to the Clans and Nicholas Kerensky, the ilKhan, but at the same time it was to appear austere and even plain. How they would ever balance that mix was beyond her.

She chuckled to herself. If nothing else, it was a monument to the Clans themselves. The constant struggle to mix the ways of the past and the ways of Nicholas's vision of the future...a vision that seemed to constantly evolve and change. Andery understood that.

Adjusting her uniform jacket against the chill of the evening air, she watched the workers struggle with the block, fighting not only it but the pull of gravity, the twists of the rope, and their own muscles. Yes, this was a fitting image of the Clans, at least in the last few months. There had always been an underlying tension among her peers, the khans, the rulers of each Clan. It was borne in the competitive nature of their existence, the fact that they were pitted against each other throughout their lives. This struggle seemed more prevalent though, at least as of late. The debates in the temporary Hall of Khans, a makeshift command post left over from the time of the Great Relief, had carried a sharper edge to them. The arguments had taken on a more personal tone. McEvedy herself had been pulled into three Trials of Grievance recently with other Khans, almost unheard of a few years before.

Worse yet, she had seen alliances forming. In the past, they had been one brotherhood of warriors under Nicholas's banner.

But lately she had seen the changes. There were the huddled, whispered meetings in the hallways and back offices. There was obviously aligning of voting. "It won't be too long before we have to form a new caste—the Politicians," she had said sarcastically in one debate—one that had garnered her icy glares from some of her peers. Sarah had stayed away from any alliances, implied or otherwise. There was something distasteful about Clans working with each other against the benefit of others.

*I don't care about politics. I'm a Wolverine.* Khan McEvedy only hoped that that was going to be enough in the years to come.

Nicholas had asked her to stay a few days after the session for dinner, and she had been looking forward to it. They used to eat together all the time, before Klondike, before the loss of Andery. During the Pentagon Civil War, they had dined in tents and over bonfires as battles raged. *Those were the days, we had a cause, a purpose.* The fighting had wrapped up weeks earlier, but peace was uncomfortable for McEvedy and the other Khans. There was a chafing that came with peace. The Clans had been engineered for war.

Nicholas had been a unifying figure, despite his personality quirks. With the death of his father, Nicholas had taken on the image of the old man, he had offered hope where hope had been lost. He offered the people a future. During those dinners of years past, they had sat and talked about what the worlds would be like when the war was over. It was as if they were on a holy quest. The future was far away and was held up like the Holy Grail.

It had been like that since Andery's death for her. The future was harder to see. Part of it was that Andery had burned with a streak of independence that she admired, cherished. Another part of it was that deep in her soul, she felt that Nicholas may have played some role in his death.

Adding to some of the new stresses that the Clans were feeling was that several generations of the Warrior caste were beginning to emerge. The original Khans that Nicholas had chosen were beginning to dwindle, replaced with younger Warriors—Warriors that had not fought in the civil war. They did not have the bonds that tied the Clans together.

This was not the image that Sarah McEvedy had envisioned.

Time had changed Nicholas and the rest of them. His own cropped, salt-and-pepper hair told part of the story, the scars

on his body and neck told the rest. Nicholas had always been a dreamer, always cast in his father's shadow, always struggling to leave his own mark in the universe. He had with the formation of the Clans. Now there were no enemies to fight. Nicholas and the Khans had to face to the reality of a warrior people without a foe.

Sarah walked around the construction site and the mud built up on her boots. They became heavy, and no amount of effort seemed to shake the clay off. After a moment or two she ignored the extra weight. The construction workers, each from different Clans assigned to the building project, watched her out of the corners of their eyes. The Wolverine Khan could feel their stares. Not too many Khans bothered to come and watch the lower castes work. McEvedy felt she had an obligation to come and bear witness to the work being done. *This is where we will lead our people, it is only fitting that we come here to watch it be built.*

She made her way on the walking path down the hill to the command post that had been converted years before to the seat of government. The ramshackle buildings, a patchwork of temporary shelters, had seen better years. Contrasted to the work going on above them on the hill, they seemed like where paupers lived rather than a center of government.

She stomped hard on the paving stones to get the mud off as she entered the structure. Hanging her uniform coat up, she noticed that several of the other pegs held coats worn by other Khans. *Would they be joining us for dinner as well?* She looked at the patches on the shoulders. The Widowmakers. That would be Khan Jason Karrige. Khan McEvedy winced at the thought of Khan Karrige joining her and Nicholas for dinner. Karrige's Widowmakers were a little extreme, even by Clan standards.

The other jacket was a little smaller and more appealing. Joyce Merrell, Khan of the Snow Ravens. Her presence would be much more pleasant. While Khan Merrell was far from being an ally of McEvedy and her Wolverines, they did share the same values and she appeared to be open to new ideas and thoughts, as opposed to Karrige and his Widowmakers. Merrell was one of the shrinking number of Khans from the old days, from the beginning of the Clans.

Checking her boots, she made her way through the makeshift building as she had hundreds of times before. The hallways were crowded with couriers, clerks, administrative staff, and a handful of officers. She came to an intersection in the hall and scanned around the hustle and bustle of the structure. McEvedy spotted



Khan Karrige going over a report with a junior officer. Karrige made eye contact with her, but did not offer even a bow. *After all these years, he is still bitter over that loss in battle.* It was an incident that had taken place during the Pentagon Civil War, and while McEvedy had managed to put it behind her, Karrige had taken it personally.

She made her way into the officers' dining hall. There were a scattering of warriors from different clans, most of which only gave her a passing glance. Few Wolverine warriors were present, which was not uncommon. Her troops ate alone, as was tradition. Khan McEvedy didn't mind. Sitting with other warriors and fraternizing often led to information being passed. If her warriors wanted to eat alone, she was not going to discourage it. *If they want to think of us as arrogant, let them.*

The ilKhan's dining room was a small room off the officers' hall. It was small, unadorned, in fact, quite plain. The window gave a view of the city. Nicholas stood at parade rest looking out the window, ignoring her at first, staring out at the city. *Master of all he surveys...* From behind, the height, the shape of his almost bald head, his martial bearing; for just a moment Khan McEvedy thought it was his blessed father, Aleksandr. As Nicholas turned, the Wolverine Khan saw the few subtle differences in the face. There was more. She had known Aleksandr Kerensky, and had a cherished holoimage of her being presented a commendation by him. There was a warmth to his expression. With his son, there was none of that warmth.

He gestured to the table where the food was waiting on warming plates. "It is good to see you Khan McEvedy. I am pleased that you could join me."

Sarah waited until Nicholas sat. She had once seen someone before sit down before the ilKhan had and get dressed down for his actions, to the point of a Circle of Equals. There were quirks in Nicholas's personality, things that people didn't expect. Those that worked close to him learned to work around them. They avoided deliberately setting him off. Sarah only deliberately set him off when it was important, where the risk was worth it.

The ilKhan preferred his steak rare and did not salt or pepper the food. Again, it was one of the little twists in his personality that McEvedy noted and then attempted to ignore. These quirks were numerous, and speaking about them was all but forbidden. Little would be discussed until the main course was done—that was his way. Once Nicholas finished his steak, he paused and rested his

forearms on the edge of the table. Now, and only now, would conversation begin.

"How are my Wolverines, Sarah?" he queried.

"They are well, ilKhan," the use of the title was important. Nicholas could speak informally if he chose, but that was not a luxury for even his Khans.

"I have heard that your harvests have produced a surplus. This is welcome news given how some of your brethren have fared."

"We have indeed," she said. There was a slight pause on McEvedy's part. The harvest report information had just come to her attention three days ago. How had the ilKhan heard of it so quickly? More importantly, who else knew? "We are more than willing to share our bounty with those less fortunate, of course."

"Of course," Nicholas said, staring at his plate, pushing his whipped garlic potatoes around as if he were a sculptor. "When I heard of your fortune, I also heard that you achieved this by allowing some members of other castes to, what was the word used? 'migrate?' to your Labor Caste. Is that true Sarah, *quiaff?*"

"Affirmative," she replied slowly and carefully. So that was what this was about. It had to be the Smoke Jaguars, Widowmakers, or the Jade Falcons that were in an uproar about this. They were among the most hard-line traditionalists.

*I must find out how they learned of this and plug that leak.* She wanted to offer explanation but held off. Nicholas often was given to a tantrum, and interrupting that could be worse than the offense that triggered it in the first place. "I did not mention it before because it seemed so minor, ilKhan. It was an internal affair of my people."

"This disturbs me," Nicholas said in a calm tone, still not looking into the eyes of the Wolverine Khan. "I created the caste system with purpose, a purpose that I thought you understood. Having our people in castes removed some of the societal tensions and rifts that our forbearers dealt with. Castes remove the drive of people to attempt to better themselves through bringing civil disorder. I thought you understood that." With his last words, he cast an icy stare into McEvedy's eyes.

"I do understand," the Wolverine Khan replied. "At the same time, it was you who said that the caste system was a matter of necessity. I believe the phrase you used was, 'for the duration of the crisis

facing our people.' The civil war is over, ilKhan, we have brought peace to our people. Some of my castes were chafing, and I felt that it was necessary to allow some migration between castes to preserve civil order. I had no idea that it would bother you."

There was more to it than that. Nicholas's reforms went far beyond the caste system, and McEvedy had been struggling with keeping them in place for some time. The genetic engineering program for Warriors, for example, had been a temporary measure that had evolved into a program that appeared to be one that was not going to end. The experimental use of drugs to suppress sex drives in the Warriors to prevent the urge to procreate had been experimented with and had caused some minor incidents until the practice was cancelled. The Clans were still coming to terms with the societal changes that had been imposed years before. McEvedy had always believed that the measures were temporary, but over time, she saw that not only did Nicholas have no desire to remove them, he had other changes planned.

"It does *bother* me. It is not minor in my eyes, or those of your fellow Khans. The Wolverines are part of a larger society, Sarah. I have put such measures and changes in place in our society to prevent some of what led to our civil war and near destruction. If not for the formation of our Clans and the guides of the caste system, I would be guilty of ending one war and laying the foundation for another."

"I always assumed that there was some degree of control that each of us had over our own Clan. Khans rule their own people. I am not abolishing castes, simply allowing more flexibility than my peers."

"Neg," Nicholas said, pausing for dramatic effect. "We are one people, under one vision, my own. It is a vision that saved us from destruction. You are a Khan, but you rule at the behest of your superior." His words were like that of judge passing sentence.

"The caste system is now permanent, there is no movement between them, *quiaff*?"

Nicholas smiled, but it was not a warm, friendly grin, but one that showed hints of danger at the edges. "Aff, Khan McEvedy. I cannot have your Wolverines implement changes that would cause strife in other clans and ripples of dissent in our society as a whole. You will go back to your people—my people—and tell them the wisdom of the castes. You will reeducate them if necessary. Those individuals that you have moved from one caste to another will return to their former roles."

McEvedy shifted in her seat. "This is likely to cause strife with my people, ilKhan, those affected by these changes."

"You will deal with them. Deal with them harshly if you must. I will not create the groundwork for another civil war. We saw what happened to our original colonies when the old ways of my father were allowed to take root. *Neg!* It will not happen again." He pounded his fist on the table with his mention of Aleksandr, his father.

Khan McEvedy bowed her head slightly. "I meant no affront, ilKhan. Nor did I intend to raise your anger. I simply was doing what I could to serve my people as I thought best." It stung her emotions and memories of Andery to kowtow to Nicholas—but he *was* the ilKhan. He was a good friend, despite his tantrum.

Nicholas's temper melted away in a heartbeat. "There is no harm done, as long as matters are put back the way that they were. You will go and make this happen. Your people are part of a much broader plan, Sarah. They must not ever forget it."

"As for these Khans that did not have the integrity to bring the matter to me...if you will simply provide me their names, I would like to settle this as a Trial of Grievance." She made sure her controlled temper showed through slightly. *There is a price that someone must pay to try and taint my relationship with the ilKhan...*

Nicholas waved his hand. "There has been too much of this type of activity as of late. I believe we should let this matter rest."

"Honor must be served."

"...when it is to the benefit of our people. Waging a private war with other Khans would not be productive right now." Kerensky's word was law on such matters. McEvedy knew to let the matter go. *I had so hoped to learn the truth, who was behind this matter.* She suddenly found herself wondering with the "broader plan" was that Nicholas held for the Clans.

Sarah no longer felt hungry. She stared at the unfinished portion of her own meal and slid the plate an inch or two away from her. *Someone has been spying on my Clan and is using what they find to poison the thinking of the ilKhan against us—against me. I will find this leak and plug it...then attempt to implement Nicholas's edicts.* "ilKhan, I appreciate you coming to me as a warrior and sharing with me your thoughts. They will help me be a better lead-



er in the future. If you will excuse me, I will need to go now and make your word the rule of law."

Nicholas Kerensky rose and grasped her hand tightly. He slapped McEvedy on the shoulder, just on the Wolverine patch that she wore on her shirt. "My Wolverines have always made me proud. I know you will do what is right, Khan McEvedy."



Khan Jason Karrige of Clan Widowmaker saw Nicholas emerge. He tapped Khan Franklin Osis of the Smoke Jaguars on the arm and nodded to the ilKhan standing at the edge of the patio, apparently out to take in the evening air. The two of them knew his pattern and had been waiting for the chance to talk with him, especially when their officers had reported that Khan McEvedy had departed.

Nicholas did not acknowledge them walking up. He stared into the Strana Mechty night, drinking in the stars and the cool evening air. Khan Karrige led the small group in approaching him, straightening his uniform as he stood next to Kerensky. "Wonderful night, is it not, my ilKhan?"

Kerensky didn't look at him, but continued to stare upwards. "It is at that."

"I trust that you have resolved the matter I brought to your attention yesterday?" He spoke with a veil over his words. The matter—the Wolverines and their ignoring the caste system—had been a hotly discussed topic between them. *Has he confronted that arrogant surat McEvedy?*

Nicholas turned to face him. "Your concerns were valid, though I do not appreciate how you arrived at the information you did." His verbal barb was over the fact that Khan Karrige had placed a spy in the camp of another Clan. This was something that Nicholas had flown off the handle about during the revelation the day before; almost as much as at what the Wolverines had done. Karrige felt his face redden at the reminder of his breach of etiquette with his fellow Khans.

The ilKhan had made it clear—only he would or could authorize surveillance of a clan, anything else was dishonorable. While

Karrige knew his stance, he also was aware that many of his peers were also spying on each other and him. Nicholas continued. "I have expressed my point of view on this issue with Khan McEvedy. The matter will be resolved."

"Of course it will, ilKhan. If not for my source alone, none of us would have known of this transgression, that was my only purpose in asking," Khan Karrige replied. "As you know, this is not the first time that the Wolverines have bent the rule of your law. There was that incident with the Sea Foxes only a few short months ago." The Wolverines merchant caste had attempted to undermine the sales of commercial products, products whose production had been restricted. The imposition of production guidelines had been done by Nicholas to ensure that no one clan could gain economic advantage over the others. His was a Warrior-based society, not one driven by economics and rivalry by the lower castes. The Wolverines had violated that, resulting in Nicholas challenging McEvedy to a combat trial—one that Nicholas had won.

"If there is a point that you wish to make, I would suggest that you do so."

"Those of us here," Karrige waved his hands to the other Khans who stood a few paces behind him, "*are concerned* about the Wolverines. They seem to be having a difficult time adhering to laws and edicts that we are all bound to. Each violation positions them in a better—stronger position. While you have checked their actions, these are simply the violations that we are aware of. They could be doing more to usurp our ways of life."

There, he had planted it—doubt. Karrige stared at the ilKhan to see if the seed took root.

For a few seconds Nicholas said nothing. He turned slowly to face the small cadre of Khans. They leaned in to hear his words. "If you worry that the Wolverines are becoming too powerful, there are ways that you can counter them that are within our laws and rede. Use trials of combat to whittle away at their resources. Challenge them on the field of battle for their assets. Apply pressure to their warrior caste. This is the way of the Clans, you know this."

"We will," replied Khan Karrige. "Our fears are that, in the meantime, their rebellious nature might spread to our own lower castes. What if we all were faced with strikes or uprisings?"

Khan Osis spoke up. "My own clan has experienced trouble with our merchant caste. Having heard that the Wolverines are relaxing

their caste structure, they wanted the same treatment. I have suppressed such moves, but the risk is there. If word of this spreads, it can only create strife with our people. Our non-warrior castes risk falling into their old ways of thinking.”

Nicholas took in his words, saying nothing for a long moment. “I understand. Since the end of our civil war there has been peace but no defined enemy. Without a foe, an enemy, to face, our people might fall back on their old ways.”

“Affirmative, ilKhan. That is our concern as well,” Karrige knew that it was a lie. He had never discussed this with the other Khans. Karrige was simply following Nicholas down the verbal path he was laying out, in hopes it ended up in the same place he and the others had wanted to go. He also knew that the Wolverines had beaten most of the Khans behind him in Trials of Possession of late. They were very good warriors, perhaps too good. The traditional clan ways of dealing with the Wolverines were not working. Something more was needed, something to put the Wolverines in check for years to come.

“Tell me Khan Karrige, if you were ilKhan, what would you do against such a threat?”

Karrige found himself at a lack of words for a moment. He wanted to say, “crush the Wolverines,” but knew that the case for such action was thin and weak at best. The Wolverines had come close to a line but had not crossed it—yet. No. There had to be another way, a middle ground. “ilKhan, if it were me, I would simply step up monitoring of the Wolverines. While you do not like spies any more than I do, I prefer to think of a a monitoring service that would help us root out potential problems with our people. I would simply put measures in place to monitor and watch our brethren to ensure that they—that none of us—violate the tenets of our society.”

Nicholas crossed his arms in thought. “This would not be a spy organization, negative. This would be a security measure, correct?”

“Affirmative. Such action need not be long term. It could be covert for now, for internal security purposes. I know that some of my people would volunteer for such duty and I am sure that the other Khans—your loyal Khans—would do the same.”

The use of the words, ‘internal security,’ played into Karrige’s understanding of the ilKhan. Nicholas had mentioned on several

occasions the need for some sort of monitoring system, a department of internal security. Linking the surveillance of the Wolverines to that seemed a natural way to get past his defensiveness over the issue. "I will authorize such an action under my own direction," he said making clear that none of the small cabal of Khans were going to control this. "Simply as a temporary measure. Our 'security measure' will monitor all clans and report findings to me directly. Do you understand my words?"

"Aff, ilKhan."

"Very well then," he turned to gaze back at the stars. "For some time I have wondered if we would need some sort of internal monitoring, for our own good. This fits will with the vision I have for our people. I appreciate you coming to me, Khan Karrige – all of you. You have raised a thought that I have worried about for some time.

"We have spent a great deal to create this new society in my vision. If we are to one day fulfill our geas to return to the Inner Sphere and lift up those we left behind, our new society must hold. Returning to the old ways is something that we cannot consider. It would lead to us turning back on ourselves in civil war again. *That* will not happen. I will watch the Wolverines, and all of you, to ensure that we are not violating our very foundations."

Khan Karrige bowed his head. "I could ask for nothing more, ilKhan. We thank you." He backed way from Nicholas and allowed a faint smile to cross his face. *Yes McEvedy, you bitch, you will pay for your arrogance. It is now only a matter of time.* Other clans would rally to this cause. He would portray the Wolverines as a threat to their own power. *We can wage a series of combat trials aimed at whittling away at their power and forcing them on the defense. Even those clans that are warm to the Wolverines will be fearful of them rising to ascendancy over them.* It all seemed too easy...



***City of Bearcat***  
***Strana Mechty***  
***Clan Space***  
***13 July 2822***

Star Colonel Franklin Hallis brought his new *Pulverizer* to a stop and scampered down the rungs. The *Pulverizer* was a new model BattleMech, not like those that were left over from the civil war or that had been cobbled together from leftover parts like his last 'Mech, a *Shadow-Griffin*. The *Pulverizer* was new, a new design for a new era—and he liked it. He gave the 'Mech a broad, smiling grin as he walked across the field to the tent that had been erected. Fluttering in the breeze were two flags—that of the Wolverines and Clan Wolf.

His cropped, red hair was slick with sweat, and he swept it back to get the excess water out as he entered the tent. Khan McEvedy stood before him, giving him a nod of acknowledgement, which he saluted back. The other man, who wore a wolf-hide over his shoulders, turned and faced him.

"Star Colonel Franklin Hallis, meet Star Colonel Ferris Ward of the Wolves. He has come to Bearcat to offer us challenge."

Franklin did not salute him but shook his hand, clearly a gesture that caught Star Colonel Ward off guard. He gave Hallis a curious expression and a cocked eyebrow, unsure of what to make of the Wolverines so far. "I welcome you to the city of Bearcat and look forward to the challenge."

"I have heard about you," Ferris Ward said, crossing his arms. "They say you are a *ristar* in your clan. I look forward to testing your skill."

"I do not see myself as a rising star, but to be called such by a Wolf Warrior is high praise. I assume you have come with purpose, query affirmative?"

"Affirmative," Ward replied coolly. "I wish to issue you a formal challenge. Do you accept?"

Franklin cast a glance at his Khan, who nodded. "Of course."

"With what forces do you defend the genetics repository in Bearcat and the contents therein?"

Hallis had assumed the repository was the reason for the challenge. Bearcat was a small town with little value other than the newly completed genetics repository. The research facilities there were hardly in use, but were of great value to the Wolves. Seizing ownership of these facilities would cost the Wolverines greatly. *This is why Khan McEvedy summoned me here. Very well, let us see what mettle this Wolf has.*

"A Trial of Possession then?"

"Affirmative."

"I will defend it with myself and three other BattleMechs—one old broken lance against whatever your Wolves are willing to risk." *There, let's see how brave you really are.*

Star Colonel Ward did not flinch. "I have heard that you Wolverines were bold to the point of egotistic. Having seen that new BattleMech you are piloting and its size, I would be forced to engage you with a Star of 'Mechs, more skilled Warriors." *Just like a Wolf, throwing in a brag.* "We do not cling to the old formations or names. We are Clan."

*What does he mean by that?* Lances were acknowledged formations even if they weren't used, even by the Wolverines. *'We are Clan'? I am Clan too!* "I apologize if my historical reference to a lance caught you off guard. My people place a great deal of weight on understanding our past." He traded verbal barb with verbal barb. "I will personally lead the defense, Star Colonel. I hope that you will test yourself personally against me in this trial," Franklin said, slightly upping the ante.

"I would have it no other way. Since the end of the civil war I have spent most of my time fighting the Coyotes, Hell's Horses, and the Cloud Cobras. Even the vaunted Smoke Jaguars have shed blood and tears at my presence. A chance to add your Clan's banner to my collection, especially from a *ristar* so highly regarded, would only add to my reputation."

Franklin chuckled slightly. "Do not count yourself the victor just yet, Star Colonel Ward. I say we meet in the Newark swamps to the north of the city. Let us see if that vaunted Wolf training is up to this test."

"Indeed we shall. I will need time to arrange for bidding by my officers. Shall we do this at 1600 hours then?"

"Affirmative."

With that, Star Colonel Ward dipped his head and walked away. Khan McEvedy moved over next to her younger officer and put her hand on his shoulder. "You are to watch yourself, Franklin. These Wolves may have more going on than we know."

"What makes you say that, sir?"

Wrinkles rose on her brow as she spoke. Worry came to his Khan's face for the first time that he could remember. "This is the fifth such challenge in the last month and a half. In almost all of them the bidders came not just for the Trials, but apparently to wreak as much damage to our Clan as possible."

"Are the other Clans working against us, *quineg*?"

Khan McEvedy shrugged her shoulders. "I have only suspicions right now, nothing tangible. This Ward is known to be honorable, but at the same time he bid more force than what you field. He may be testing us or may have other motives. Watch him, and watch yourself. There may be more going on than either of us knows."

Star Colonel Franklin Hallis nodded. He glanced over at his *Pulverizer*. "My Khan, don't worry. I chose that swamp for a reason. It was where I earned my Bloodname if you remember—a place that I know well."

"Don't give them a reason to question your honor," McEvedy warned. "As of late it seems that the universe is against us. Fight with honor. Beat them soundly, Franklin. Make these Wolves question their arrogance."

Hallis nodded, plagued with thoughts that he was having for the first time. Conspiracy in the Clans? *No. It had to be a mistake. Clans don't conspire...that is not our way.* He would show them the error of their ways...one way or another.



Star Colonel Hallis angled his *Pulverizer* into the copse of trees in the swamp, leaving the outranged Wolves two hills away. He had begun the fight half an hour ago with four 'Mechs, now it was down to just him and Star Captain Trish. Her war-weary *Exterminator*

had seen service with Aleksandr Kerensky during the Liberation of Terra, though few of the components could be traced to that era. It had been rebuilt and refurbished so many times that counting no longer made sense, but rather made a MechWarrior nervous. During the Civil War it had been used by someone in her bloodline, and she had earned it in a fair Trial of Possession. She turned into the same copse of brush, breaking to his right flank.

The Wolves had fought well so far, but had paid a price for their aggressiveness. They had come at him with a full Star, and while they had inflicted damage, the cost to them had been three lighter 'Mechs. One, a *Hussar*, had gone down in the first seconds of the trial. They were fast, but not fast enough to survive long. A refit *Stinger* had lasted for two salvos with Trish until its fragile legs had given way. A Wolf Clan *Wyvern* had been the next to fall. Franklin himself had taken it down with consecutive salvos of extended-range PPC fire and some long-range missiles.

"You are running away, confirm affirmative?" came the voice of Star Colonel Ward over the communications broadband channel, broadcasting in the open. "Do you wish to concede the fight?"

"Negative," Franklin replied, grinning. Ward had been a good sport with his banter thus far. No undertone of anger or frustration in his voice. "I am simply moving to the low lands, Star Colonel."

"As you wish."

He charged up the hill in his 80-ton *Thug*. It was a hideous BattleMech, hunched over, bulky, massive arms, a lumbering giant. The *Thug* had taken a few hits, but had shrugged them off so far. It was a match for his *Pulverizer* in terms of tonnage—this would be a test of skill over weight.

Franklin switched to his command channel. "I've got the Star Colonel, you take out that *Guillotine* heading your way."

"Affirmative. Why is it that you always have all of the fun?"

"Trish, just stay on target. Fall back further on my signal."

The dull brown *Thug* slowed slightly, raising both arms as if it wanted to hug him. Star Colonel Hallis knew differently. The PPC's mounted on the arms were locking onto him. Throttling reverse and watching his rear, he moved deeper into the trees and brush, turning slightly and bringing his own PPC into pre-heat mode. The capacitors whined as they charged. He saw a flicker of light at the end of the *Thug's* weapon barrels, then saw the brilliant blue flash.



Franklin wasn't sure if one or both of the shots had hit him at first. He was sure that he had been hit, however. The *Pulverizer* lurched at the waist, reeling from the impact. His tactical display flickered for a moment, and he saw the data stream back online. Yellow lights on his right torso—a single hit.

*Taste honor, Wolf!*

Carefully aiming and locking his targeting and tracking system onto the Wolf Warrior's 'Mech outline made for a perfect called shot. The ER PPC had targeted the cockpit of the 'Mech and the azure burst of energy seemed to connect the two 'Mechs for a second. He hit just below the *Thug's* cockpit. Armor plating burned, buckled, and flew off into the air. The *Thug* seemed to teeter backwards from the assault, just as planned. Aiming for the cockpit was to get Star Colonel Ward's attention, send a little fear into him, shake him.

Franklin turned his *Pulverizer* and turned deep into the swamp at a low trot. "Trish, fall back now."

He heard a rumble of battle over the channel. "One minute, Star Colonel." Glancing out the side of his cockpit, he saw a curl of smoke rise into the air. On the other side of the hill, his wingman was busy fighting the other remaining Wolf.

"Do not dawdle," he chided.

"Negative," came back her voice through gritted teeth. "Just one more..." He heard the high-pitched whine of her medium lasers as they fired over the comm channel. Glancing at his own tactical display, it was obvious that Star Colonel Ward had regained himself and was pursuing.

*Just as I hoped.*

Juking around a massive clump of Siberian Oaks, he splashed through the muddy waters. The black water and mud seemed to try and hold his BattleMech, but he fought the pull of gravity and muck and charged through. Steam rose from his heat sinks as they hissed into the cooling waters.

A warning tone shattered his thoughts as a wave of short-range missiles tore at his rear. Two missed, but the rest of the flight hit dead on, tearing at his thin rear armor. The *Pulverizer* shuddered from the damage, but he ignored it. *I need to get deeper.*

"You cannot hope to hide in that swamp all day," Ward warned him.

"If you want to dance, Star Colonel, I shall pick the tune." He twisted his torso and fired his large laser. The green beam stabbed back at the *Thug*, this time hitting the right arm of the Wolf BattleMech just below the shoulder. It gouged a long black ugly scar that smoked as he continued to plow forward and deeper into the swamp.

Ward's *Thug* splashed into the water as well off to the left of where he entered. Hallis ignored him and struggled to keep up the pace and distance. Another wave of missiles came at him, mangling the armor on his side and torso. The rumble of their hits was distracting, but he knew the terrain. *I have to get deeper.* He came to shallower water and some clumps of ground poking up around tree roots, exposed by the shallower swamp water. He trudged forward.

"Trish, sit rep."

"I'm off on your flank. The *Guillotine* is following, but slowly. A mangled leg will do that to you."

"Stick to the plan. We will converge on your general coordinates."

The *Thug* was slowed in the swamp, not just by the muck and water, but by the fact that Star Colonel Ward was no fool. Franklin could tell that he was deliberately slowing down. He suspected a trick or a trap. *Good. Be cautious, let me get some distance between us.* The *Pulverizer* lumbered drunkenly forward, the muck clinging to his legs. Each step was labored, but he pushed forward. Activating his sensors, he checked the atmosphere. *It is somewhere around here—if I remember right.*

A rumble on his flank caught his attention. "Splash one Wolf!" Trish yelled. His tactical display showed that the *Guillotine* was no longer showing on the threat board.

"Good work." *Maybe it won't come to this after all.* "Star Colonel Ward, you are all that is left. You have fought with honor. I suggest that we bring this Trial to an end and avoid unnecessary waste."

There was a pause. "Star Colonel Hallis. I am letting you know formally that I cannot simply withdraw. I have orders. I am adding in my Star Captain's previous bid. This brings two more 'Mechs on the field." What he was doing was allowed by Clan tradition. It was an all-or-nothing move, though. Almost immediately Franklin picked up the long range sensor readings of approaching 'Mechs, a *Mercury* and a *Phoenix Hawk*. The Wolf 'Mechs were fresh. Star

Colonel Ward had sacrificed some of his honor in bringing in the lower bid. *Why are the Wolves pressing so hard for such a point-less victory?*

"Trish, head my way. You know what to scan for, query affirmative?"

"Affirmative, sir. Checking right now and heading your way. What did you do to piss off the Wolves so much?"

"I did not do anything. I think our Khan must have taken a pee in the Wolf Khan's pool though." As if to emphasize his point he turned slightly and angled his ER PPC to a weapons lock position. The *Thug* lumbered at him, his own PPC's whirring. This time he aimed at the already damaged arm, firing. He followed immediately with a spread of long-range missiles that whooshed out of the shoulder-mounted rack.

The hit on the *Thug* turned the BattleMech at the waist. Armor plating flew everywhere as the missile barrage splattered across the 'Mech. One missile hit the head of the *Thug*, dead square on the cockpit. It didn't breach, but it had to have shaken up Star Colonel Ward—two hits in the same spot in a matter of minutes. Franklin charged his *Pulverizer* into the shallows of the swamp as the PPCs fired.

One shot hit his right leg, one hit his right arm. The *Pulverizer's* warning lights flared to life. The right arm was the worse. The previous damage had taken it to a red status. Most of the armor that remained was shreds. His Wolverine insignia painted on the armor was rent and torn, burned almost completely off. There was a ringing he heard, and at first it worried him. There! The atmospheric sensors had found what he had been looking for. He identified the spot, turned slightly, and put some distance between him and the *Thug*. *Come on, Star Colonel...follow me...*

"Trish, I have a target zone."

"Me too. Enemy inbound in four."

"Get them heading this way."

"Affirmative sir."

She was engaging them in a running fight—not just one, but both. She had their attention and was drawing them toward his current position. Good. Franklin waited for his missile rack to reload. He pushed harder, onto somewhat drier terrain, more mud than

ground, and kept the distance open between him and Star Colonel Ward's *Thug*. He came over a low ridge covered with trees and brush that rose slightly out of the swamp, just barely enough to obscure the line of sight with his pursuers.

Trish's *Exterminator* emerged from behind a clump of trees. It was covered with mud and Spanish moss that it had picked up running in the swamp. Holes from missile and laser hits scarred almost every portion of her 'Mech. The *Exterminator* had held up well so far, but would not last long against two fresh pursuers. His own 'Mech was injured almost as bad. The only good news was that the enemy couldn't see or shoot them in their current position.

"You still have long-range missiles?"

"Affirmative. Two salvos left. Shoot them or lose them, as we tell the sibling companies."

"Load. Target these coordinates," he fed in a string of numbers from his tactical display. "You break right, I'll go left. Fire at the coordinates, not the enemy."

"This worked for you once, what makes you think it will again?" she chided.

"These are Wolves."

"And what are we?" she invited. It was common with the Warriors of his clan. It opened their battle cry. He toggled to the broadband channel.

"Wolverines!" The howl was almost guttural, a battle cry from the pit of his stomach.

They rushed their BattleMechs forward and came from around the brush firing as they charged. At the same time the Wolves, who had come close together, did the same. The Wolves' shots were dead on. A spray of missiles and lasers rattled and seared his *Pulverizer*, mangling his legs and torso. Trish's *Exterminator* took considerably more damage from the two 'Mechs she had engaged. It tumbled and fell the moment its missiles left the tubes. The *Exterminator* furrowed the slope of the slight rise in the ground, hissing in the cool muck and water. His tactical display told him that Trish was out of the fight.

The missiles they had fired were not at the enemy, but at the swamp itself. Two years earlier, he had learned of the pockets of



natural methane that brewed up in the swamp. The mud that they had found there was not black swamp mud, but natural tar. That section of the swamp was a fire trap in the waiting – a trap that Star Colonel Ward's force had entered.

Their own shots had set off the clouds of methane in the air. The fires had spread instantly with a thunderous, hissing blast that roared down to the tar. The missiles tore into the ground around them, opening up more pockets of the gas and igniting it instantly. The blasts almost toppled all three of the Wolves. The legs of their 'Mechs were covered with sticky tar. The *Mercury* attempted to run, but only carried the flames with it. After a few steps the heat won and the 'Mech shut down.

Ward's *Thug* didn't run, but held its position. The flames lapped up the legs of the 'Mech. The *Phoenix Hawk* fired jump jets, trying to rise out of the swamp. The jump jets simply opened more pockets of the gas, setting off minor blasts that rocked the 'Mech and toppled it into the burning tar. His short range sensors told Franklin Hallis that the Wolves were too damaged to fight, too hot to move, and risked cooking off if they stayed. Killing them would be easy.

That was not the Wolverine way.

"Star Colonel Ward," he began carefully. "Do you concede?"

The pause was not pleasing. "They told me you were good. You have proven it. This Trial is over. You Wolverines have won."

'They' who? "Thank you."

"The shame of this loss will cost me greatly with my people."

Franklin understood. He had risked much bringing in his last bid. "I understand. Taking you as a bondsman would be a violation of the protocol, as you are aware. You fought well. The fact that I alone remain standing should secure you some of that honor."

There was a pause. "I salute you, Franklin Hallis."

He allowed himself a smile. "Honor is paid with respect. I salute you as well, Ferris Ward."



"So Star Colonel Ward brought his cutdown into the fight—this is not a good sign," Khan McEvedy said in a deep tone as she obviously contemplated the information.

"We won the day," Franklin added.

McEvedy smiled. "Affirmative. You have won. I expected nothing less from you. My concern is beyond this victory, though. The fact that the Wolves were so aggressive tells me that they too are with those other Clans that seek to work against us."

"The ilKhan?"

Khan McEvedy wondered the same thing. Nicholas Kerensky was a Wolf as well as the ilKhan. Did this mean that he was behind the efforts being waged against the Wolverines? That bothered her deeply. She had known Nicholas Kerensky most of his life. McEvedy's father had been with the Star League Defense Force under Nicholas's father. The ilKhan had chosen her to lead one of his newly formed Clans during the civil war. Now she faced the prospect that the man she had devoted her life to may be conspiring against her and her people. *What have I done to deserve this betrayal?* Her thoughts drifted to Andery, if only for a second. Andery understood Nicholas best...but he was gone now.

"I do not know." *And that is what scares me.* "We have beaten off these attempts so far. Going forward I will not be so defensive, however. I believe we will offer some challenges to Clan Widowmakers' holdings on Dagda. Let them feel some of our fury on our terms. I grow tired of playing defense. It is time to let them wonder what our next actions are."

"Very well, sir."

"There is more I need to ask of you, Star Colonel," the Wolverine Khan said plainly. "Someone has been spying on our Clan from within. I learned of this through recent conversations. I have no idea if this surveillance is limited, or part of a much broader plan. I have had our communications personnel monitor all outgoing HPG transmissions, and we discovered a clever cipher being used. We now know who is spying on us. I want you to apprehend this man and interrogate him. Learn what he knows. I want to know what Clans are working against us and what their ultimate intent is. Find a way to turn this to our advantage."

"Sir," Franklin was clearly shaken at the idea that Clansmen would spy on a fellow Clansman—especially his own clan. "Perhaps this is a matter best handled by those more skilled in such areas."

"Negative," McEvedy replied. "You are one of my most trusted warriors, Franklin. I know that this is distasteful, but I also know that you will not let your emotions get the better of you. We must apprehend this individual and turn this to our advantage. I need you to be my eyes and ears. It is necessary that we have intelligence on those that have turned against us, no matter how distasteful I find it. I expect you to make that happen. I will make the resources available to you to ensure success. You may take Star Captain Trish with you if you desire. Beyond that, share this information with no one. Do this in such a way that those that are betraying us are unaware of your actions. Use...discretion."

"Yes sir." The younger rising star of his Clan was obviously shaken.

"In the months to come Franklin, I am going to be asking a lot of you. For now what I need you to do is to ensure the safety of our people. I am going to give you a wide latitude in regard to this. Do not fail me now. Remember, you are bound to the Wolverines. We are your heart and soul. We are your family through blood and battle."

"Yes sir. But my Khan, perhaps this is not a task a Warrior should undertake. Surely there are others that have better experience in such areas."

"Negative. There are none, none that I would trust as much as you. This is the work of a Warrior, Franklin. It requires all of the skills you have demonstrated on the battlefield. The venue of this fight is different, but do not delude yourself, it is a fight nevertheless."

"I understand."

"Excellent. Find this traitor. Do what is necessary to protect our people. Do your duty."

McEvedy walked over and tore the Clan Wolf banner off the tent. She handed it to Franklin, who stared at it silently for a few moments. Some of the Clans did not allow the taking of flag trophies, in fact the practice had been dwindling during the time of the Pentagon Wars. McEvedy still allowed it, as did the Wolves. It was a tradition. It was their heritage.

*Is our heritage all but gone? There are those that are conspiring*

*against us. The Clans were competitive, but they had never stooped to such activities. Is this the way of our future? Why Nicholas, why? What have I done to warrant this?*

**BATTLECORPS**



**Widowmaker Compound**  
**Strana Mechty**  
**Clan Space**  
**15 July 2822**

Khan Jason Karrige stared at the senior Khan of the Wolves, Jerome Winson. He felt he was holding his anger back, but the warmth on his brow told him that he was showing more expression than he had hoped. "This is most disturbing news, Khan Winson. I expected more of your Wolves."

Winson did not flinch. "None of you have faired any better against the Wolverines than we have," he said, scanning the eyes of the small group of Khans that had gathered at Karrige's behest. "Star Colonel Ferris Ward is one of our best Warriors. If he lost, it is only because that was his fate. Five Trials have been waged against the Wolverines. Five times we have failed to take our objectives."

Khan Franklin Osis of the Smoke Jaguars seemed to snarl at the assessment. "Perhaps the Wolverines have new technology that gives them an edge in battle."

Karrige heard his words and seized on them, pouncing hard and fast. "Yes, that is part of it. It is as I have told you all along...the Wolverines are becoming too strong. Your own report, Khan Winson, shows us that they have fielded a new BattleMech class that none of us have seen before. For all we know, they have made a breakthrough in genetics and are enhancing their Warriors with advantages that we can only imagine. Regardless, the Wolverines are posing a threat to us all...one we must deal with."

"I am curious," Kesar Jerricho, the Khan of the Coyote Clan, asked. "What does the ilKhan say to all of this?"

"The ilKhan knows that the Wolverines are dangerous to all of the Clans. Saying it out loud is not necessary for him, yet. It would be wrong for him to censure them at this point. We must first prove to him that they are dangerous, and unsettling the balance of our society."

"You did not really answer my question," the Coyote Khan pressed.

Karrige hated him and his Clan. *Always with the cockiness. You are new to your role of Khan, you have much to learn about your 'peers.'* "The ilKhan does not know of our direct actions. He should

not know until we have proof of the Wolverines' duplicity and their threat. He did call for the formation of an internal security agency, a 'security measure' as he calls it. I know you have all contributed resources to this 'project.' While temporary in nature, he too suspects that McEvedy and her people are dangerous. That was why he pulled resources from all of you, to place our brothers and sisters under surveillance."

"Our efforts to best the Wolverines in battle thus far have caused more damage to us than to them," Osis replied angrily. "Perhaps we should seek a change in strategy."

The Khan of the Fire Mandrills nodded. "Attempting to whittle away at the Wolverines is only making them stronger. What we need is something more aggressive but subtle, something that shows their nature."

Khan Karrige heard his words, and the realization came to him. "Perhaps you are correct. Might I suggest that the best way for us to ensure victory is to let the Wolverines harm themselves?"

"How so?" Khan Winson asked.

"We shall create an incident that forces them into overreacting to us. When they do, they will expose themselves for what they are—betrayers of the ilKhan and of our people."

"Do you have something in mind?" Osis prodded.

Karrige smiled. "Yes. It is complicated, but should be more than enough to flush out our prey."

**Wolverine Command Post**  
**Strana Mechty**  
**Clan Space**  
**12 September 2822**

The Technician was named Karl. He had been taken into the Wolverine Clan five years earlier during a Trial of Possession over a military base. A technician with a gift for logistics, he had earned the trust of his new clan and had risen to a position where he helped control the logistical flow of the entire Wolverine war machine. His security access level gave him rights to a wide range of data on the Clan as a whole—industrial output, agricultural data, everything.

He was short, somewhat overweight, balding, and unimpressive. Franklin Hallis watched him intently, and wondered how many times he had walked past him without ever noticing. A member of the lower castes, he was insignificant. There was no need to pay attention to him.

Until it had been learned that he was a spy.

Now that he saw him standing near his terminal, ignorant of the eyes upon him, Franklin felt an urge well up inside of him to kill Karl. There would be no court that could convict him. No Trial of Grievance. The spy had forsaken all of that to betray his people. *The lower caste traitor would almost be fun to strangle—but some things have to be left to Trish to deal with.* Franklin Hallis knew he could kill him with one blow. It would be seductively easy.

He held back. Killing the spy would ruin what he wanted to accomplish. The Khan had given him extraordinary leeway in dealing with Karl. He had to take action to preserve his Clan. For now, that meant that Karl would live. He would unknowingly become a source of information on those that were working against the Wolverines and a conduit to possibly push other information. Karl could teach Franklin on how to set up a network and learn about the enemies of his own people; without even being aware that he was providing the lesson.

Trish saw him as well from her vantage point and gave him a silent head-jerking gesture. She too wanted to kill the spy, she had talked about it ever since learning about his true betrayal. Franklin had held her back as well. Her energies would be useful in other ways with Karl—while at the same time giving her the outlet that

she needed for her frustration with the man. The Star Colonel nodded to his compatriot, and the two closed with the man casually.

When he caught up to him, Franklin was surprised at how small and insignificant the man was. "Are you Operator 378—Logistician known as Karl, query affirmative?"

"Affirmative, Star Colonel Hallis," the man replied. He seemed so polite. *What have we ever done to you to deserve this form of betrayal?*

"We must speak with you for a moment," he gestured to Star Captain Trish, who moved up to prevent his escape, not that he was in any physical condition to outrun a Clan Warrior.

"Is there a problem?"

"Affirmative. It is one that we will discuss in private. It is minor, I assure you." That was the only lie he allowed himself. Karl smiled and followed them out of the command post, down the hall, into the basement of the structure. The empty cinderblock room did not reveal the pain and anguish that he was going to feel as a result of his actions. When he saw a lone chair in the middle of the room, a dim single light hanging from the ceiling, Karl began to sweat. He turned to Franklin, who simply ushered him in physically into the room.

"Trish, do what you must, but keep him alive."

His wails of anguish roared down the halls despite the padding on the walls.



### ***Five Days Later***

"Your report seems complete," Khan McEvedy said as she slid the report across his desktop. It was as if the paper it was on was tainted. The contents were a blight, not just on him, but on Clan Widowmaker. "Sadly so."

Franklin was not proud of what he had done. He was less proud of what Star Captain Trish had done. "This Karl never thought it



would come to this, that we would torture him." The word 'torture' stung on his lips.

"Did he think we would put a medal on him, *quineg*?"

"Negative, sir. What he thought was that he would simply be turned over to his former Clan. He seemed surprised at our actions. The torture was kept to a minimum, despite our—desires."

The facts were plain. Karl had been made property of the Wolverines, but unlike others, he had refused to give up his loyalty to Clan Widowmaker. He had become the perfect agent for Khan Karrige, sending him everything that he could about the Wolverines. Karrige, for his part, had twisted and contorted that information even further.

There was more, and it was even more disturbing. Recently Karl had shared this information with another Wolverine lower caste member, a former Jade Falcon medical technician. There was an effort afoot to infiltrate every aspect of the Wolverines now, that much was apparent. It was something referred to as a 'security measure' and it seemed to be a secret spy agency with its sights on her Wolverines. It was a fledgling organization from what they had gathered, but its threat was clear.

The report had been explicit. There was nothing to prove Nicholas Kerensky was involved, no proverbial smoking gun. At the same time, it was obvious that only Nicholas could have created such a multi-Clan undertaking as this intelligence agency. *I have been betrayed by my peers and my leaders. All of my people have been.*

"I would have ordered Karl killed, my Khan, but I felt that the best course of action was to replace him with our own operative. We have reviewed all of the data he transmitted, and have placed tracking devices and monitors on all of the operatives that he knew of in this organization."

"You have done well in a very short period of time."

"We need to keep him alive if we are to confront the other Clans with their crimes," reminded Franklin.

Sarah's mind was elsewhere. Nicholas had betrayed her. *All of this had to have been orchestrated by the ilKhan.* She had fought beside the ilKhan in battle during the civil war. She had served him loyally. The only time she had questioned her own loyalty was with the death of Andery. Now he had turned against her. "I saw

your recommendation on the last page of the report, Franklin. Do you really feel that it is necessary?"

"I do, my Khan. Only those members of our Clan born of Wolverine blood should remain in our Clan. We should remove and expel those that we have captured as *isorla*. Purge those that are not true Wolverines. We have no way of knowing how deeply this, 'security measure' has reached into our people. While we have identified a few agents, it is always possible that others in our ranks still have loyalties to their own governments."

"Doing so would tip our hand to those that seek to work against us," Khan McEvedy said carefully.

"We could do it over time. If we became subtle about it, carefully taking out those in the most sensitive positions, it should be possible to do this without raising any ire or unwanted attention." He cleared his throat. "I know it is an extreme measure, my Khan, but it is necessary. Otherwise I would not recommend it."

"I concur. They will be abjured...fit only for the Bandit Caste. They have no voice, no place in society. They would be denied information which is the lifeblood of their spying. If we act carefully, as you said, it can be done."

"Then I have your permission, sir?"

"Affirmative. Begin at once."

Franklin rose, but McEvedy waved him to sit. "There is more. Franklin, I am stepping up our new 'Mech programs, especially the *Stag* and *Mercury II*. Having new designs in our inventory might catch some of our more aggressive adversaries off guard. I have already ordered training stepped up, with our sibling companies to produce us more Warriors. I am also having our troops execute a series of Trials for possession of arms and weapons. I fear that this may turn ugly. We are best to be prepared."

"Ships, sir. JumpShips and DropShips will be crucial if there is indeed some conspiracy against us. We do not have the edge that some Clans such as the Snow Ravens have."

"I agree. saKhan Robertson is already working on the details. I wanted you to know that what you did will help save us all. You have done well, Franklin."

He paused for a moment, obviously searching for the right word. "I will not fail you, my Khan."

“Don’t pledge to me...I will die someday, Franklin. Never fail your Clan. Remember, we are the Wolverines. Never lose that.”

**BATTLECORPS**