

The Star League Confederacy

(Chapters 3 and 4)

By: Lou Hobbs

The Tale of The Wolverine

Magnus and Richard Carlsson walked the gardens of their family estate, barely cognizant of the beauty surrounding them. Father and Son were engrossed in a tale that spanned centuries, and displayed the worst, and sometimes best, of what Men are capable. Richard told his Father the story of Clan Wolverine: of its destruction and eventual rebirth. Most of all, Magnus would hear of a people seeking salvation and, with ever more resolution, Vengeance. The recounting would take a long time. Before the tale was done, the sun would set, and the ever-present Patrice would bring them sandwiches and coffee. This is the story that Richard told:

Almost 250 years ago, Clan Wolverine discovered a Brian Cache of unprecedented value. Contained therein, were technological secrets from the height of the Star League. Clan Wolverine used this cache for a number of years, but in a blatant example of political intrigue, was ordered to give up the cache to their greatest rival clan. The Wolverine, in an attempt to keep the treasure, invoked a trial of refusal. They lost. Still unwilling to hand over the cache, Clan Wolverine declared themselves independent. This was an action that would prove fatal. At that time, ilKhan Nicholas Kerensky was looking for an excuse to tighten the reins on the Clans. The growing power of some had caused them to become more forceful in council and less willing to accept the central authority that Kerensky wielded. Clan Wolverine's rebellion provided the ilKhan with the perfect opportunity to make an example for the rest. He claimed that Clan Wolverine had become "tainted by the old ways of lust and power." He forced the Grand Council into an immediate vote for a trial of annihilation. The vote was unanimous. Clan Wolverine was to be destroyed.

Not expecting such severity, the Wolverine desperately prepared for a fight to the death. Clan Wolf won the honor of carrying out the Grand Council's sentence. The fighting was incredibly fierce, but from nearly the start, Clan Wolf proved the more able combatant. As it quickly became clear that the Wolverines were going to be defeated, their leadership made a desperate decision. They would sacrifice themselves and most of their best warriors in order that some may escape. Throughout Wolverine space, supply depots and embarkation points were hurriedly set up. As selected small units and members of the civilian population gathered at these points, the remainder of the Wolverine unleashed their fury in suicidal attacks on the Wolf. In brutal fighting, the leaders of Clan Wolverine became almost immediate casualties. Hallis was killed by Nicholas Kerensky, himself. McEvedy was seriously wounded in the vicious counter-attack she had spearheaded. Despite her protestations, she was evacuated to an embarkation point protected by the remnants of the 331st division.

Throughout the Wolverine worlds, death became a common sight. The remaining fighters were exterminated to the last. Large segments of the population were killed in "mop up" operations. When the fighting came to end, however, the true horror was only

beginning. Over the coming months, those civilians left alive were systematically sterilized. This was not a punishment, nor was it a war. This was the planned genocide of a people.

One by one, the shocked Wolverine refugees converged their ships at the rendezvous location. When all had arrived, the fleet moved forever out of Clan space and back towards the Inner Sphere. Shaken, but glad to be alive, the survivors first took inventory of their resources. They had successfully rescued the contents of the Brian Cache, containing much Star League weaponry, equipment and data. Their combat strength, however, was seriously low. By far, the most complete unit was the 331st Division. It was decided almost immediately to merge all units into that single division and reform it under the organizational structure of the old SLDF. Although this made the 331st a full strength division, there were serious shortages in ammunition, armor, components, and internals. In addition, the refugee fleet had a great need for more general supplies. Of most concern was the lack of sufficient food and medical supplies for what could be a long interstellar journey.

As the fleet neared the Inner Sphere, crucial decisions had to be made very quickly. The most pressing was whether to rejoin the "Old World" or press outward for a new place to call home. Sarah McEvedy addressed this question to all from her sick bed. Still unable to walk from her battle wounds, she posed the question to her people:

"If we return to the Inner Sphere, will they *give* us a world which we can call our own? Would we have the strength to *take* one? What would become of us should we land on their shores as pitiful refugees? I think I know. We would be split up and sent to whatever worlds could absorb us... or we would serve as mercenaries for the Great Houses and live off the scraps of others. In either case, in less than one generation, we would surely lose our identity in that great mass of humanity, and the tale of the Wolverine would become but a minor footnote in history."

It was decided by all that they would enter the Inner Sphere for re-supply and intelligence, but would leave as soon as possible to find a new home. To re-supply, they meant of course, *to take* what they needed. Their journey back had brought them to the edge of the Draconis Combine. Their first target was a minor world called Svelvik. The Wolverine landed nearly a Regiment and completely overwhelmed the small garrison force that defended the planet. This initial raid garnered much needed food and medical supplies along with a small amount of military hardware salvaged from their defeated foe. Perhaps most important, was the acquisition of information about the Inner Sphere. By interviewing captured soldiers and reviewing reference data from libraries and schools, the Wolverine were able to learn much about Kurita and the rest of the Inner Sphere. Armed with this information, they moved on to their next target: Trondheim. This world was selected because it held a significant supply of military equipment. Trondheim was a prefecture capital and so was defended by a Regular Army unit. In this case, it was the 20th Rasalhague Regulars. In a sharply fought battle, the 331st defeated the Regulars, and quickly made off with a staggering amount of badly needed ammunition, spare parts, machine tools, repair trucks, and Mech chassis.

With much of their materiel need satisfied, the Wolverine could have headed off immediately for their new home world. The problem was, they hadn't selected one. This question had been the subject of intense debate and research among the refugee fleet. Finally, it was one of the many technicians who came up with the answer. Much of the Star League era equipment from the Brian Cache was related to weather control. Storm inhibitors and terraforming equipment made up the bulk of it. Locked within the data cores accompanying this equipment were example scenarios of various uses it could put to. One of the examples included information about a trio of barely habitable worlds in a solar system on the opposite side of the Inner Sphere. Using this as an example, the tech manual laid out a procedure for incrementally improving the conditions on each of these planets. By comparing the coordinates of this star system to the data recently acquired in the raids, it was found that these worlds were never visited, let alone colonized by the Successor States of the Inner Sphere. They lay a comfortable distance away from the far reaches of the Capellan Confederation, and quite a safe distance from the fledgling Taurian Concordat. The location of this solar system coupled with the difficult climates of its' three worlds, had left it untouched by man. It was the perfect place for the Wolverine.

Before they could embark for their new home, they were forced to acquire some things vital to their new existence. If they were to settle on worlds barely habitable by Man, they would need to bring their own seed stocks of life. They needed a rich variety of plant and animal life that they could carefully introduce into the changing ecosystems of their chosen planets.

By exhaustively searching through the data collected on Trondheim and Svelvik, they found the next target. On a world called Jarett was an agricultural university with an accompanying botanical garden. It seemed likely that this would contain all of the samples and seed stock necessary to meet their needs. Unfortunately, Jarett lay directly in the path the Wolverine had seemed to be taking. With the high alert caused by their previous raids, it seemed certain that Kuritan forces would get in their way. Deciding to move quickly, Sarah McEvedy ordered the raid. As feared, Kuritan ships discovered them and moved to reinforce Jarett. The battle was won, however, almost before it started. Wolverine Aerospace fighters caught two battalions of Kurita forces by surprise, and prevented them from dropping on the planet. The 331st faced little resistance on Jarett, and was able to thoroughly complete their mission. The university resources proved to be just what the Wolverine were looking for.

Before the Wolverine disembarked from Jarett, a number of the university staff pleaded with the 331st to be taken with them. Similar pleas had come from citizens of Trondheim. The political situation in much of the Draconis Combine was bleak. Many groups of people faced repression and violence. Daily life, for many, had deteriorated to such an extent that any escape seemed preferable to staying. While the requests on Trondheim had been refused, Sarah McEvedy immediately agreed to accept these petitioners. The value of their education and skills outweighed any other concerns.

The Wolverine fleet then departed from Jarett, with the full intention of leaving the Inner Sphere for good. They found a hiding place in an uninhabited system and stopped for a few days to make calculations and plan the circuitous route to their new home. In this downtime, Sarah had conversations with the liberated university staff, and began to fully understand the desperation these people had felt. As she contemplated the

Wolverine “exodus” fleet, she began to realize just how lopsided the people in it were. Of the 8,500 souls on her ships, fully 4500 of them were either military or the families of military personnel. Of the remaining 4,000, fully 80% of them were technicians, engineers, scientists, or heavy manufacturing workers. This left less than 10% of the colonization force as what some referred to as “just plain folks.” In any society, it was the common man who did the vast majority of working, living, and dying. These were the farmers, the businessmen, traders, craftsman, laborers, and just plain *citizens* – that were the backbone of any world. As she mulled over this problem, an idea occurred to her. Some of their new guests had claimed that what most drove them to flee were the recent events on Richmond. They had heard firsthand stories of internment camps and political “re-education” facilities being used. Many of the jailed were of the intelligentsia, but most were just regular folks who had somehow gotten in the way. A large number of the imprisoned were those arrested in a protest over a dam project that was going to leave them homeless. These citizens were jailed in a facility and labeled as “The Unproductive.”

After a hurried study of available room in the fleet, and a complete inventory of the supplies available, McEvedy’s staff assured her that they could accommodate at least 2,500 more people. This, however, was a decision Sarah felt she could not make herself. Again she threw the question out to her people. Perhaps thinking of all those Wolverine left behind to suffer, and maybe to assuage their “survivor’s guilt”, the decision to save the imprisoned of Richmond was nearly unanimous. In fact, for maybe the first time in months, members of her staff and crew seemed genuinely happy to be engaged in some other cause than mere survival. The worry that plagued McEvedy was: “what if more than 2500 want to come?” The thought of giving false hope to a large number of people and dashing that hope in front of their faces seemed almost unbearable in light of the tragedy they had just faced back home. Luckily, that was an eventuality that did not come.

The attack on Richmond was swift and overwhelming. The Wolverine fielded two full Regiments and literally brushed aside all opposition. As they entered the camps, their Kuritan refugees from Jarett explained in a general way what their options were. They fully warned the prisoners that by coming on board these ships they would be leaving the Inner Sphere forever. Most decided to come, but many stayed. In the end, the total was just shy of 2,000 souls. Most of them were families from the recently flooded region. That had no home to return to anyway.

With their cargo and passenger holds almost completely filled and their route determined, The Wolverine Exodus Fleet left the Inner Sphere forever.

The trip to the “Three Worlds”, as they came to be called, took seven months. Along the way, the liberated of Richmond and the Wolverine survivors became well acquainted. The Richmond folks were in awe of their rescuers. Never having heard of the Clans, they took in the history of Kerensky and his people with unending curiosity. For their part, the Wolverine were glad of the company. To have cheerful, almost jubilant, people among them helped greatly to assuage the pain and regret for all they lost. Unfortunately, as the Fleet grew closer to its’ objective, the health of McEvedy began to steadily deteriorate. Many openly wondered if she would live to see the new worlds she had brought them to. They needn’t have worried, though. Sarah McEvedy had no

intention of dying before she had set foot on the new home world of the Wolverine. She had one last speech to give to her people, and one last duty to fulfill.

On the 25th of October 2826, ironically one year to the day that Clan Wolf had attacked them, the Wolverine Fleet arrived at the Three Worlds system. Accompanied by her Second, Col. Robert Hallis, Sarah McEvedy was brought onto the surface of the largest planet. Obviously in great pain, she reached down to fill her fist with earth from the new world. As she held it up to her face, she took a deep breath, and whispered “home.” In a hastily planned ceremony, Hallis brought representatives from every ship to the surface. McEvedy was going to die soon, and she needed to address the Wolverine one last time. As those present looked on, and those still aboard ships watched on their monitors, Sarah spoke to her people:

“We are arrived. The time of flight has ended; the time of building has begun. This generation will have to work hard. These planets will not yield to our whims lightly, but in the end they *will* yield. With your sweat and intelligence, this desert will blossom into something magnificent. But... it is not only the world we stand on that must change. It is *we*, too. Why did we rebel against the Clans? Was it avarice? Pride, perhaps? Maybe that was part of it... but I think it was more than just that. We perceived a basic unfairness in all that society was built upon. The elevation of a minority above the great majority of people in a society is inherently unfair. In the Clans, this permanent aristocracy was based on “genetic superiority.” It is my belief that the continued subjugation of a people is not a just system, no matter what the reason. Hallis... bring it out... What you see before you are the receptacles of Clan Wolverine’s last remaining genetic heritage. Included in this supply is mine own. As I now press this button, the containers are being opened, spilling their contents into the soil of this world. As I look among you, I see horror on the faces of some. Fear not, for are we not a people of heart and mind? Can we not reproduce our greatness through natural means? Instead of relying on the crutch of genetic manipulation, why not rely on ourselves? Transfer your allegiance from that clump of biomatter... to the soil it lies in. This is our destiny now: this patch of earth, this trio of beautiful but harsh worlds. Our future lies here. It is my wish that henceforward we no longer call ourselves *Clan* Wolverine. I have stopped using that name since we first left Clan space. As far as I am concerned, we are, and perhaps always were: simply, The Wolverine. We have found our new lair, and we must build it into a fortress. Inside it, we shall heal. We shall grow strong, and perhaps someday in a far off future, we shall visit the Wolf again. Now... I am very tired. I need to rest.”

Sarah McEvedy never spoke again. She never regained consciousness after collapsing at the end of her speech. One week later, Col. Hallis, son of the previous saKhan, delivered the sad news to the Wolverine:

“Sarah McEvedy died just a few moments ago. It was hoped that she would talk to us once more and help us name the three worlds, which we now claim. Because we feared she would not, the command council has picked from those names that had been submitted. The first planet, closest to our new Sun, will be called “Nova

Circe” in honor of the place we come from. The planet farthest out will be called “New Richmond” in honor of the home many of you left behind. The planet I now stand on will be called “McEvedy”, in honor of the woman who brought us here. Sarah McEvedy will be interred in a tomb now being constructed on the site where she first touched the soil of our new home. Services will be held at noon, two days from now. That is all.”

Magnus took his son’s arm and pointed him toward the main house. “The night is getting cold, Richard. Let us return to the fire.” As they walked back, they said little. Each man was deep in thought. Finally Magnus offered, “She was a Moses to her people. She led them out of horror and to a new promised land.”

“Yes, Father. The similarity is astounding. But Moses died after only seeing the Promised Land from afar. He never got to go there. At least Sarah reached her new world. She tasted its’ air and took her last breath from it.”

Magnus climbed the steps toward the main door and turned to face his son. “I am eager to hear what became of those Three Worlds, and the people who tamed them. But I fear that for today, I am spent. Will you join me for breakfast?”

“Of course, Dad. But perhaps I should let someone else complete the story for me.” Richard smiled and asked, “How would you like to hear it from the mouth of an actual Wolverine?”

Magnus grinned and said, “That would be fascinating. There is one on Karbala now?”

“Yes, the man who recruited me. He is here to meet you. How about tomorrow afternoon at your office in the city?”

“Agreed, Son. I suppose he is here to recruit me, now.”

“Well, Dad. Let’s just say... Perhaps you will be recruiting each other.” With that, Richard grasped his father’s hand and bid him good night. Tomorrow would be an important day.

Chapter Four

Moving at good speed along the winding coastal highway, the Carlsson’s hover-car was afforded a magnificent view of New Stockholm Bay. The passengers inside, however, paid little attention to the majestic shoreline. Their car sped them towards a meeting with Robert Kharkov: Richard’s former commander in the Chaos March, an operative of the SLC, and a Wolverine. Even *that* concrete subject had temporarily slipped from their conversation. They now were discussing the more abstract idea of military command.

“Dad, it’s not that I’m saying I’m not qualified for command of the K.D.E.F., it’s just that I sometimes wonder if I am really the best choice.”

“Richard, regardless of your doubts, that was *my* decision to make, and I made it on a lot more factors than you just being my Son. First of all, you had the experience. You fought the Clans during the invasion, you got promoted to Operations and gained valuable supply, organization, and logistical expertise. You took that training and

commanded Wilson's Hussars through three successful campaigns. The fact that you are my Son, and that I trust you more than any living person, was really just the clincher."

Richard sat back in his seat and looked out the window, "I'm not going to be falsely modest. I know I am a good Commander. My record speaks for itself. I just have doubts about how I got to this point. I only got the promotion to Operations after Thor and Erik died. I'm sure it was from more of a desire to keep me alive, than any confidence in my leadership potential. Dad, you know as well as I do, that Rasalhague didn't want to see the last remaining son of Magnus Carlsson killed in action. After all, you were one of their biggest defense contractors."

"Son, I agree that is probably true. You know that I did not ask for it. I never attempted to pull any strings or exercise my influence. I will admit, however, that news of your promotion was a great relief to me."

"But it just isn't that, Dad. My recruitment by the Star League Confederacy is also suspect. I can't help but wonder if Kharkov had today in mind those 5 years ago, when he chose me to be Commander of Wilson's Hussars."

"Richard, come now, that's a little far fetched." Magnus turned in his seat to fully face his son. "Look, even if that were true, it just doesn't matter. You are a fine commander. You are more than just the sum of your military experience. Yes, you have combat credentials. Yes, you know how to supply and feed an Army. Yes, you know how to formulate a battle plan and change it to meet new circumstances. Yes, you have three successful campaigns under your belt. But there is something that is even more important. Your staff has confidence in you. They respect you. It's more than your staff though; your "men" love you. They'd follow you all the way, no matter what you ask of them. That isn't something you learn. That is a quality that is rare and priceless. You have that quality, Richard, and that is the most important reason why I chose you."

Richard took this all in, and believed it. He knew he'd had a lot of breaks along the way. But he also knew that he'd made the most of every opportunity. Maybe his father was right. *Stop questioning yourself and just get on with the job.*

"There is one more thing you have in your favor, Son - decisiveness." Magnus added. "You've never lacked that, even from when you were a child. You have always acted quickly - sometimes it was my opinion that you acted rashly"

Richard smiled, "Wolf's Dragoons, you mean?"

Magnus chuckled, "Yes, that is what I was referring to. But throughout your life, you've made gut decisions and went with them. And from what I've seen, they have all worked out pretty well. Take, for example, your plan to command the K.D.E.F. under a false identity. You just seemed to know innately that it would make things easier. You took the adversity of that PPC blast, and turned it into a tool of command. You used the scar tissue from that wound, and turned it into "Dick Bryant" - the tough talking, no-nonsense commander from the Chaos March. You avoided the pitfalls of nepotism and the inevitable criticism that would have come from being the "bosses' kid."

"Even if the choices in your life weren't always the best, you always made the best of them." I on the other hand... I have been the victim of my own indecision" With this statement, Magnus' face turned slightly red and he grew hesitant.

"What do you mean, Dad?"

"I have made an enormous blunder," Magnus blurted out. "Last night, you were very surprised when I said we would have 3 divisions on D-Day."

“Richard looked closely at his Father, “Yes, before when I had asked you, the number was always much closer to 2 divisions.”

“Yes, Son... you see, when you came into the study last night, I was in a quite an emotional state. When I saw you, I knew I had would have to tell you of your Mother’s death. When you asked me the number, I slipped and gave you the “real” number – the number that we *would* have, if I...

“If what, Dad?”

“If hadn’t *lost* 2 Regiments” Magnus admitted. “They’re on Illyria.”

As the hover-car left the coastal highway and started to wind it’s way through the city, Magnus told his son the story of the 2 lost Regiments. Since Magnus started Karbala Enterprises, he was always on the lookout for the best deals in raw materials. One of his best suppliers was the mineral rich world of Illyria. This world was the capitol of a small alliance called the Illyrian Palatinate. Although far from Karbala, Magnus was drawn to this place because of the people who lived there. Many were émigrés from Rasalhague. In fact, a number of his more distant relatives had ended up there. Illyria also boasted a small ship building industry. Always seeking to reduce costs, Magnus eventually started purchasing a small fleet of cargo ships that could bring his raw materials directly to Karbala. He set up his trading company under Illyrian registry for legal reasons. Over the years, Karbala Enterprises became the leading trade partner with the Illyrian Palatinate. After the Clan invasion, Rasalhague refugees streamed to the Palatinate. Magnus’ ships transported many of them. Karbala Enterprises provided much of the early financial support for helping Illyria provide for the refugees, at least until some of the Inner Sphere houses finally started to kick in and help.

It was shortly after the truce of Tukayyid, that Magnus began increasing production at Karbala Enterprises. After initial robust sales, when the Houses sought to replace what they lost in the war, demand began to slacken. Instead of reducing production, though, Magnus held it steady. Concerned that Rasalhague would not allow him to carry such a large inventory, he started shifting completed chassis to Illyria. The choice of Illyria was obvious. Transport was simple. He was flying regular routes there anyway to pick up mineral ores. Although usually carrying food and some manufactured goods, his ships sometimes left Karbala with less than a full cargo. It was on these occasions, that Magnus would ship a few Chassis. Over the years, he managed to store the equivalent of 2 Regiments of Mechs. It was only after Rasalhague had given him authorization to have 1 Regiment for the K.D.E.F. that Magnus stopped shipping Mechs to Illyria, and started building his Army on Karbala.

His ‘Mechs on Karbala were weaponless, and securely hidden. Magnus had acquired a sizeable estate on Illyria, positioned above a played-out silver mine. It was in the depths of this mine, that Magnus had hidden well his Regiments. Concerned with the security of the tiny state, it was Magnus who had provided some of the initial funds to hire Thor’s Arms, a Mercenary force, to help with the defense of the Palatinate. As the threat from the nearby Circinus Federation ebbed and waned, Magnus many times came close to informing Illyria of his stockpile of ‘Mechs. Each time, though, the fumbling attempts of the Federation always ended in failure. As time went by, however, it became clear that the real threat to Illyria was going to come from the neighboring Marian Hegemony. When they invaded the Lothian League, Magnus was relieved, and again decided to keep his stockpile secret. The Marian invasion of Lothian was long and

bloody, and it seemed unlikely that the Palatinate would be in any danger for quite a while. Also boosting his confidence, were the events of the late 3050's. Administrator Wick, Leader of the Illyrian Palatinate, made a public declaration that they would defend their realm against any attack. He started a massive construction program of bases likened on the Castles Brian of the Star League era. These bases would be used to stockpile supplies and house several platoons of guerrilla fighters. In addition, to augment the force of Thor's Arms they hired Cavanaugh's Cavalry, another Mercenary company, to defend Illyria. On the surface, things seemed secure in the Palatinate.

In the previous year, though, it all came apart. The Lothian resistance came to an abrupt end. The Marian Hegemony then unleashed a lightning attack on the Palatinate. Magnus assumed that they would be able to hold out for a while. He began quietly amassing the weapons components to activate his Illyrian stockpile. He did not act quickly enough. Cavanaugh's Cavalry betrayed the Palatinate, and allowed the Marian Legions to take Illyria. Thor's Arms were badly mauled and forced to retreat. Magnus' indecision had cost him his 'Mechs, and a people their freedom.

His story finished, Magnus looked away from Richard, not wanting to look his son in the eye. They had reached their destination a full 5 minutes earlier, but remained in the hover car as it sat in front of the offices of Karbala Enterprises. Finally, Richard spoke:

"Dad, we'll get back your 'Mechs. Count on it. For now, let's go inside. We have an appointment."

Less than 5 kilometers away, another meeting was taking place.

Karbala.Comstar Offices.

The Precentor Martial sipped his coffee and gazed out the window at the beauty of the bay below. Behind him, a group of five men were seated around a table, each reading from a separate monitor. One by one, they dimmed their screens and turned to face the man at the window.

The Precentor set down his cup, and addressed the group, "All are finished? Good. Let me start this off by stressing the vital importance of keeping this secret. Under no circumstances is any of this information to leave this room." He looked each man in the eyes and repeated, "under no circumstances."

After letting that sink in, he continued. "While this information is certainly sensational, to a large degree it is of yet unconfirmed. Agents in the Chaos March are now seeking to verify certain elements of the data. If, as I suspect, that all of this is true... Well then, we are faced with a great opportunity. If the Wolverine and this so-called "Star League Confederacy" are really going to be a force in the Inner Sphere, then we must determine how best to use them. It is my opinion that..."

At this point, the calm of the meeting was interrupted by a comm alarm.

"Blast it, I said we were not to be interrupted" the Precentor said to the speaker on the desk.

"Sir, we have a priority surveillance signal from your man at K.E."

"What's he got?"

"A meeting, Sir. Magnus Carlsson, Richard Carlsson, and an unknown party."

“Very well, transfer that feed into this room” With that, the Precentor took a seat and adjusted his monitor. The six men all leaned forward, as if on cue, and waited for the transmission.

The video feed started, and the Comstar men watched as Magnus and Richard Carlsson greeted Robert Kharkov:

Richard Carlsson moved quickly across the conference room and grasped the outstretched hand of his old Commander. “Sir, it is a pleasure to see you again. This is my Father, Magnus.”

Robert extended his hand and introduced himself. “Mr. Carlsson, I am Col. Robert Kharkov, Commander of the Bryant Regulars, Regional Head of the Star League Confederacy Defense Force, and Citizen of the Three Worlds. I am Wolverine.”

As they shook hands, Magnus was duly impressed. Kharkov was a powerful figure both physically and, it would seem, politically. “Please, sit down. Have you eaten? I can have something brought in.” As the men sat down, Magnus could see the admiration and respect clearly visible on his son’s face. *This man has great power over my Richard. Perhaps it is justified, but I should remain cautious*

“Oh no, I am fine. Your Scandinavian breakfasts here on Karbala are enough to last me a whole day.” Laughed Kharkov. “I am a plain-spoken man, and if it’s all right with you, I would like to get to the point. I hope you don’t think my abruptness is rude, but I trust you. I trust you because I know your Son, and through him I know you. I trust you also, because we share a goal, an intensely felt desire to engage in combat with the Wolf. Since our desires are so perfectly matched, I feel that a union between our forces could have nothing but the most beneficial effect.”

“I, too, feel there may be some potential in this relationship.” Magnus began, “but there is still much I need to know about you and the Wolverine. Richard has told me your story up to the point of the Wolverine reaching the Three Worlds, and the final act of Sarah McEvedy. I was hoping that today, you would fill me in on the rest. Of most concern to me are your activities in the Chaos March. I need to know the full extent of your ambitions, and what is the purpose of the SLC.”

Kharkov leaned back in his chair and said, “That is quite a lot of information. Perhaps we *should* have refreshments. I know I could enjoy some of that excellent Karbala coffee.”

As the coffee service was wheeled in, the men started to visibly relax. Magnus offered cigars to all, and they settled in for a long tale.

“After the death of McEvedy, those first years were hard. Of the Three Worlds, only Nova Circe was immediately habitable. It was an ocean world, much like Karbala, except that it had very little land. It was also very hot. Locked in a permanent greenhouse climate, Nova Circe had no polar ice caps. The sea level covered almost all the landmasses on that world. Plagued by almost constant storms, it was virtually impossible for us to get a foothold. We were lucky, though. There was one large island in the extreme southern hemisphere that was cool enough to live comfortably. By engaging the Star League storm inhibitors, we were able to shield this island enough to sustain agriculture. As we built more inhibitors, we gradually gained control of the planet’s weather patterns. Through this control, it was possible to reverse the greenhouse effect and begin the accumulation of ice and snow at the poles. This growing ice sheet,

gradually brought down the sea level all over Nova Circe, and freed up large tracts of good land for colonization.”

“McEvedy, though, was a much tougher nut to crack. It had a perfect temperature range for humans, enormous landmasses, and great natural resources. Everything we would need except... water. The planet was a desert, through and through. It was only at the most extreme lowest elevations that any standing water could be found. And this water was definitely undrinkable. The high concentrations of salt and minerals made it poisonous. We persevered, though. Along these tiny oases of water, we set up our water purifiers. Powered by the eternal winds of this sand swept planet, our wind generators powered the purifiers that steadily produced the water we needed for drinking, living, and agriculture. We got by on this trickle of water, while we enacted our “Grand Water Plan.” You see, there was a fourth planet in the Three Worlds system, a massive gas giant. Around this gas giant, were rings that would put Saturn to shame. These rings were made up almost exclusively of water ice. By utilizing the drives on a number of jump ships, we were able to introduce variations in the gravity field of these rings. Through subtle manipulations and years of trial and error, we were able to redirect great volumes of ice towards the planet McEvedy. To this day, the streak of glittering ice crystals that flows from the rings of Hallis to the planet McEvedy are one of the most beautiful sights in the galaxy. Like a permanent comet’s tail, the flow of water illuminates the night sky of McEvedy with reflections from this great strip. Particles of rock and minerals in this flow create a never-ending meteor shower on McEvedy. You really must see it one day. It is wondrous. After a decade of this ice flow to the upper atmosphere of McEvedy, real effects began to be seen. The relative humidity of the planet rose. About 12 years after the project started, the first rain in perhaps millions of years began to fall on the desert planet. Now the planet is filled with countless freshwater lakes and one ever-growing ocean.”

“The last planet is New Richmond. Furthest out from the Sun, it is a world covered with ice. We did nothing with this planet for almost fifty years, until a prospecting team found rich deposits of minerals and radioactive ores. From that point, we have been steadily settling this world with underground facilities and mining operations. We continue to search this rugged planet, and continue to be amazed at the richness of deposits we find.”

“Throughout the hundred years since McEvedy died, we followed her prophecy. It *was* a great time of building. Eventually, though, as we became secure in our worlds, we felt a growing sense of unease. A century had passed in the outside world, and we knew nothing about what may have happened. The military increasingly put pressure on the council to make some sort of scouting expedition to the Inner Sphere. It was in this way that a Wolverine tradition started. Singly, or in very small units, our Mechwarriors would go alone into the Inner Sphere to seek employment as mercenaries or with a great house. These Wolverine would serve and fight all over the Inner Sphere, always keeping the secret of their true origin. Many of these Mechwarriors would die in battle, but many would also return, bringing with them news, new technologies, and battle tactics. This tradition continued without change for nearly 125 years. Then came the Clan Invasion. The Three Worlds were galvanized into action. With the chance of fighting the Wolf, the youth of our worlds were afire. In those few short years, we produced hundreds of Mechwarriors that eventually fought the Clans. The Wolverine fought under nearly every

house flag or mercenary banner. I, myself, fought on Tukayyid. With the truce, we knew we had to be more in position to counter the next invasion.”

“We looked for a place in the Inner Sphere where we could gain ingress, and set up a more permanent base of operations. We wanted to be able to mobilize quickly and powerfully should the Wolf resume their attack. It was in the troubled region called the Chaos March, that we chose to enter. The complete breakdown of order, and the inability of any great house to control this region, made it the perfect place for the Wolverine to set up a base. Ironically, it was the planet “Ingress” where we first entered the politics of this shattered region. We liberated Ingress and defeated the force on Small World. It was there that I recruited Richard. We had need of established mercenary forces that we could surreptitiously control. Wilson’s Hussars was the first of these “fronts.” We next chose the world of Bryant. Not only did we want to liberate it from the pirates and bandits that controlled its people, we wanted to take it as our own. Bryant was wracked by perpetual storms. This had kept the population tiny, and it’s importance minor. Taking Bryant gave us an excellent strategic position, not only in the Chaos March, but in the Inner Sphere as well. The people of Bryant were thrilled by our activities. Not only did we destroy the lawlessness and disorder of that world, but we also tamed the storms. For the first time in centuries, the people of Bryant could start building a life on the *surface* of their world.”

“One by one, over the last five years, we have beaten back the bandits, pirates, Liao guerillas, and petty strongmen that have so terrorized this region. In doing so, we have made great allies and cemented friendships. We are now set to formalize this alliance with the announcement of the Star League Confederacy. It will include almost all the worlds that compromise the Chaos March. When this announcement is made, we will have to be ready. With luck, we will be recognized by at least Davion and the St. Ives Compact. We have worked hard in the last two years to build a relationship with those states. We fear that the Capellan Confederation, however, will react adversely to our announcement. They have grown stronger in recent years and may elect to invade. We consider this a low probability, but one we take very seriously.”

“As far as our future aims are concerned... we seek to increase our security and battle forces with every passing day. We are waiting for the Clan invasion to resume. We have a continual influx of Mechwarrior recruits from the Three Worlds. Although these young fighters are impressively trained, they lack experience. For this reason, we would not be too chagrined if Liao tries to attack us. We could use the practice. As for our diplomatic and strategic aims, we seek to guard the “backdoor” to Terra. We hope to acquire good relations with Davion and the Free Worlds League. Most importantly, we wish to have a relationship with Comstar. We feel that they have always been the best hope of the Inner Sphere. As for the Word of Blake... we feel that next to the Clans, these zealots are the greatest threat to peace and humanity. Anything we can do to thwart their activities is worth the doing.”

Kharkov had finished his long monologue, and stood up to refill his coffee mug. He turned to Magnus and said, “I think now you have our story in summary, for all the details, it would take many long nights and bottles of wine.”

Magnus stood up and joined Kharkov at the coffee cart. “I think I’ve heard enough for now.” Magnus held out his hand and said, “I am ready to seal this alliance and start our planning for fighting the Wolf.”

To Both Richard and Magnus' surprise, Robert Kharkov did not immediately grasp Magnus' hand. Instead he took a step back and said, "forgive me, but while you are both convinced, I have a few minor doubts I want to clear up. I don't wish to offend, but before I start planning the invasion of the Wolf, I want to make sure that my allies have the skills and experience necessary to accomplish the task."

With that statement, Magnus' face started to turn red, and the pace of his breathing quickened. "What the hell are you implying, Kharkov?"

"Please Mr. Carlsson, I didn't mean to sound confrontational, but your Army has no real experience. It has done nothing but train for the last four years. It has not been *blooded*.

Magnus countered, "Look, most of my officers are veterans of the Clan Invasion. Many of the Lance Captains fought the wolf, or at least saw extended service somewhere else. Our men have plenty of battle experience."

At this point, Richard interrupted, "Dad, I think Robert is right. While our men do have experience, our Army does not. We have never fought a battle as a unit, we have a conglomeration of veterans who have never fought together, leading a group of rookies that have never fought at all."

Magnus looked at his son and was wounded that he took Kharkov's side. He sat down in his chair and considered their point of view. With growing acceptance, he began to see the truth in it. With growing resolve, he decided to emulate his son, and make one of those "snap, gut decisions" that Richard was so famous for. Looking at Robert Kharkov, Magnus made a statement of resolve. "The KDEF will fight a campaign. And Soon. We will liberate the Illyrian Palatinate and wage war against the Marian Hegemony." Turning to his son, he smiled and said, "How's that for making a decision?"

Richard laughed, "Sounds like a good plan to me. I know Wick and Thor's Arms will be all for it."

Robert Kharkov, however, was confused. He certainly didn't mean to have the Carlsson's just arbitrarily decide to attack some state, just to get experience.

Magnus noticed the look of bewilderment on Kharkov's face and guessed its source. Suppressing his amusement, Magnus said, "No, Robert. I did not just pull that idea out of thin air. We have concrete reasons for liberating Illyria. Why don't we bring in lunch, you may not be hungry – but I'm famished. While we eat, I can tell you our reasons for targeting the Hegemony."

As the afternoon unfolded, Kharkov heard the story of the lost regiments and agreed that it was the perfect course of action for the KDEF. The meeting broke up finally, amid much hand shaking, and general agreement. Their alliance was all but formalized.

In the offices of Comstar, across town, the mood was also light.

The Precentor Martial was smiling. "This couldn't have worked out better had we planned it. Word of Blake has our stations in the Marian Hegemony and I, for one, would like to get them back. As for Thor's Arms and Administrator Wick, they are all on Tukayyid. They've been working for us the last three months. I think it is time we introduced ourselves to the Wolverine and the KDEF, we may have an alliance of our own to form."