# WING COMMANDER:

# THE MOVIE

*written by*

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(Based upon characters in the game created by Chris Roberts)

Writer's First Draft

October 27, 1995

"WING COMMANDER"

FADE IN:

INT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - CITY PARK

From above, the park looks like it could be in a small Midwestern city--a ten acre expanse of grass and small trees, a WOMAN reading on a park bench.... Except that two young boys wearing mylar-like wings actually fly in the extremely light gravity of the asteroid, whooping joyously as they swoop high above her. She glances up at them as they play tag.

WOMAN
Don't fly too near the sunlamps!

CHILD
(from above)
We won't!

For, in fact, the park is illuminated by huge fusion powered sunlamps imbedded in the rough-hewn granite "roof" hundreds of yards overhead, surrounding an enormous porthole, which reveals the blackness of interstellar space with a few faint stars. The boys continue their aerial dogfight, flapping their arms, and "buzzing" a sailor and his girl, who lie on a blanket, kissing. Laughing, the boys swoop upwards again.

SUPERIMPOSE: ASTEROID WORLD "PEGASUS", WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, EARTH YEAR 2654, 0940 ZULU TIME.

A YOUNG MAN walks past the woman on the bench, his dog trotting eagerly next to him, eyeing the futuristic Frisbee in his master's hand. Behind them the skyline of a twenty-seventh century city, part Anasazi cliff dwelling, part Oz, nestles against the far wall of this hollowed out island in space.

YOUNG MAN
(to dog)
You want this? Do you? Huh?

Finally, the Young Man sends the Frisbee impossibly high over the dog's head. The dog, however, makes an amazing leap thirty feet in the air and catches it! But the Young Man continues to gaze upward at something overhead...

HIS POV - THROUGH GIANT PORTHOLE

A strange constellation of luminous dots has now appeared in the black oval: not stars... something else.

RESUME PARK

Air raid sirens begin to wail from the towers of the city. The Woman, alarmed, jumps up and searches for the children.

WOMAN
Boys! Boys! Come down... now!

She, too looks up through the porthole. We follow her gaze as we seem to rise up and PLUNGE THROUGH THE PORTHOLE!

EXT. PORTHOLE - ASTEROID SURFACE

We take a swift tour via a TRAVELLING SHOT over the rough surface of the Asteroid World, past fields of antenae, atomic cooling towers, and berthing docks for ships. Sweeping past dozens of illuminated portholes, we are suddenly blinded by the illumination of two monstrously large Ion engines imbedded in the "rear" of the asteroid, propelling it through space. We travel past the Asteroid Worldlet (AW) and briefly accompany...

THREE DESTROYER CLASS CONFEDERATION SHIPS

which are already streaking to intercept the distant configuration of lights far in the distance. But we continue travelling past the destroyers, toward the geometric pattern of white dots, which resolve into:

EXT. KILRATHI BATTLE GROUP

A huge alien vessel, a heavily armored "Dreadnought" class ship called a Snakeir is at the point of a formation of destroyer class spacecraft called Ralari. At the center of the battle group is a carrier-class Kilrathi ship, a Fralthi. Small fighter craft are disgorged by the carrier, their hydrogen powered fusion afterburners gleaming like newly minted stars as they streak toward the approaching Confederation destroyers and begin engaging them. The black sky is illuminated with lasers and streaking rockets.

INT. SNAKEIR (DREADNOUGHT) BRIDGE - ADMIRAL'S FLAGSHIP

The interior of the huge space vessel is nearly obscured by a thick, almost viscous green fog: the nutrient atmosphere for the Kilrathi officers and crew. They are a biped, two-armed race of beings nearly eight feet tall. But their features are obscured to us in this mist. Only their eyes, gleaming yellow, seem to penetrate the dense atmosphere. Their is something vaguely cat-like about their silhouettes as they move lithely about the bridge as if they could see clearly...which they can. Their vision is in the infrared spectrum. A Kilrathi CAPTAIN approaches the battle group commander, known to us only as the ADMIRAL.

ADJUTANT'S POV - INFRARED BAND

Through his eyes, the fog disappears as he comes up behind the shadowy figure, standing at the bridge, peering out into space through a thick window. The Captain speaks in a low hiss in the Kilrathi language, which we read in subtitles.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(Kilrathi; subtitled)
The Asteroid World is protected by three destroyers, as you predicted, Admiral. We are enveloping and eliminating them now.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(Kilrathi; subtitled)
I can see that for myself.

THROUGH WINDOW - SNAKEIR BRIDGE

The three Confederation destroyers in the middle distance are being overwhelmed by the dozens of fighters and dive bombers. Laser flak and torpedo explosions light up the sky. A Confederation ship splits apart amidships, spewing debris into the void.

Beyond the scene of the battle the Asteroid Worldlet seems like a dark, lifeless mass, except for the pinpricks of light from its portholes.

RESUME FLAGSHIP BRIDGE

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
Launch phase two of the attack.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
Right away, Admiral.
(turns barks order)
Launch phase two!

The order in Kilrathi is hissed several more times. The Captain turns back to watch through the porthole.

EXT. ASTEROID WORLDLET

Kilrathi fighter craft and dive bombers, unimpeded by the hardpressed destroyers, begin attacking the asteroid surface with torpedoes, laser beams, and antimatter weapons. A stream of tachyon canon fire rises from the surface, to counter the Kilrathi attack. Several Kilrathi craft are destroyed, but are instantly replaced by others. in the fierce but uneven battle. One of the huge portholes on the asteroid worldlet, already cracked, suddenly explodes outward. The asteroid world is dying.

INT. PARK - ASTEROID WORLDLET

The park, shuddering under the many explosions, is deserted now; the frail mylar bird wings used by one of the boys is caught in the rush of escaping air, spirals up, up toward a crack in the porthole overhead, as the life's breath of the fragile space colony is sucked away.

EXT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - DOCKS

A single craft suddenly blasts away from the docks and escapes the destruction below.

EXT. DILIGENT

The escaping merchantman, the Diligent, streaks away from the battle, heading into deep space toward a distant, disk-like form in the blackness dead ahead.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

A grim, ruggedly handsome man of indeterninated age, PALADIN, looking more like a pirate than a merchant, switches on the Diligent's "jump drive" afterburners. He looks back at the Asteroid Worldlet one last time, but his feelings are impossible to read.

HIS POV - THE ASTEROID WORLD

The Kilrathi destroyers now replace the fighters, and begins beaming awesome blasts of antimatter energy onto the surface of the small, self contained worldlet. Even from this distance, the destruction already seems too great for anything to survive.

EXT. DILIGENT

The space craft gains speed quickly, and soon looks more like a streaking comet than anything made by man. It draws a long light trace toward the center of the luminous whirling cloud with the black hole in its center.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. POLARIS ROADS "ANCHORAGE" - BEHIND ICE MOON

The Diligent cruises around the ice moon until a Confederation Battle Fleet hoves into view, powerful and impressive, with several carrier class ships, as well as dreadnoughts, cruisers, destroyers, and a dozen smaller fighters patrolling the perimeter. Water tankers shuttle from the moon's glacier-like surface, which has already been deeply carved and hollowed out. The Diligent heads for...

EXT. STARBASE - POLARIS ROADS FLEET HEADQUARTERS

This structure dwarfs all other ships. The Diligent seems an insignificant speck next to it. Lights gleam from hundreds of portholes on the starbase.

SUPERIMPOSE: CONFEDERATION NAVAL BASE: POLARIS ROADS.
APRIL 3RD, EARTH YEAR 2654, 1500 HOURS, ZULU TIME.

We ZOOM IN on a set of windows, larger than any other, until we can see two figures. Still closer we see they are Confederation officers, ADMIRAL TOLWIN, and Captain RICHARD BELLEGARDE.

INT. TOLWIN'S OFFICE - STARBASE

Bellegarde has just heard some very bad news from Tolwin.

BELLEGARDE
The Pegasus?
(beat; realizes)
My God... there were ten thousand souls on board.

TOLWIN
She was destroyed in the Ullyses Corridor two weeks ago.

BELLEGARDE
(troubled)
Two weeks ago?

TOLWIN
Attacked by an entire Kilrathi battle group. She was en route to planet four thirty-six. Esperance.

BELLEGARDE
We've never seen so much as a Kilrathi freighter in that sector before. There was nothing for them there... except the Pegasus.

TOLWIN
The Pegasus flight plan was top secret.

BELLEGARDE
It had to be a target of opportunity... A chance encounter.

TOLWIN
(loud, clear voice)
Socrates, what are the odds that the Kilrathi accidently discovered the Pegasus in the Ullyses Corridor?

The voice of Tolwin's Artificial Intelligence Unit, SOCRATES, instantly replies in a pleasant, business-like tone.

SOCRATES
(voice)
Roughly one chance in a hundred billion... to the twenty-fifth power.

Both men absorb this information.

BELLEGARDE
They knew.

TOLWIN
So it would seem.
(then; all business)
I want to send a hand carried message to the Tiger Claw. She's still patrolling the Charbydis sector.

BELLEGARDE
She's nearly at the end of her tour.

TOLWIN
Not any more. Make out the roster of new personnel destined for her, and give me a hard copy, will you, Richard?

BELLEGARDE
You've got it as soon as I do.

TOLWIN
Thanks.
(senses)
Something else?

BELLEGARDE
Using every known jump point, the Ullyses Corridor is still three years of hard travel from here. You got the news in two weeks. If there's a new jump point somewhere in my command sector, I'd like to be informed, Admiral.

TOLWIN
In due time, Richard.

This doesn't satisfy Bellegarde, but he can't do much about it. He turns and leaves.

INT. BLAIR'S QUARTER'S - STARBASE

The quarters of a lieutenant junior grade fresh out of the naval academy resembles a medium sized closet. LIEUTENANT j.g. CHRISTOPHER BLAIR, mid-twenties, literally bounces off the walls with excitement as he packs his kit bag for departure. A very small man, about sixteen inches tall, appears to sit on a shelf just above his head, watching.

This is, in fact, a hologram, projected by Blair's portable computer, MERLIN.

BLAIR
Who's the captain of the Tiger Claw and what's his background? What's the ship's complement? Where is she now?

The hologram looks and acts as if it is speaking. There is a tinge of bored sarcasm in his tone.

MERLIN
Captain Sansky, twenty-five year veteran; fought as a junior officer in the Pilgrim Wars. Been in several skirmishes with the Kilrathi. One thousand, two hundred and twelve, counting you when you sign on. The Charbydis sector.

BLAIR
You don't have to be sarcastic about it.

MERLIN
All right...
(dull, computer voice)
Captain Sansky, twenty-five year veteran; fought in the...

BLAIR
Knock it off.

MERLIN
My thermal sensors are picking up a high ranking officer in corridor E, headed this way.

BLAIR
Right, like you can tell it's a big brass.

MERLIN
Don't believe me. But everybody else is stopping to salute and stand aside. By the way, now he's stopped at your door.

Blair is too puzzled to give a snappy reply. Then his door buzzer sounds, startling him.

BLAIR
Make yourself scarce.

The hologram vanishes. Blair pushes a button and it slides away to reveal Admiral Tolwin standing there. At first Blair is just frozen. Then he snaps off a salute, banging his elbow against the narrow wall.

BLAIR
Admiral Tolwin... sir!

TOLWIN
As you were, Lieutenant.
(amused hesitation)
May I enter?

BLAIR
If you can squeeze in, sir.

Tolwin does so; finds the button and closes the door behind him. In the tight quarters, he is nearly nose to nose with the extremely nervous junior officer.

TOLWIN
They're not making a j.g.'s quarters any bigger than when I shipped out.

BLAIR
That would be during the Pilgrim Wars, wouldn't it, sir?

TOLWIN
You've been doing your homework.

BLAIR
My father was Arthur Blair. He served with you, sir.

TOLWIN
That's why I'm here, Lieutenant. How is your father, and your mother?

BLAIR
Ah...! They're fine, sir. My mother is chief botonist on Agadez, terrafarm number three. My father is...

TOLWIN
As good an historian as he was a pilot. I've read most of his work.

BLAIR
You have?

TOLWIN
(amused)
You don't think an admiral should have other interests, Lieutenant?

BLAIR
I didn't think... you had the time.

TOLWIN
Without a firm grasp of history, I'd be a piss poor strategist.

BLAIR
Yes, sir.

TOLWIN
I have something for you, Blair. Top secret.

He holds up a small microdisk, which glints in the light.

BLAIR
(confused)
For me, sir?

TOLWIN
For Captain Sansky on the Tiger Claw. I don't trust our radio frequencies, and you'll get to the Charbydis sector faster than a drone. You hand deliver it. Understood?

BLAIR
Aye, aye, sir.

TOLWIN
(starts to go)
Give my best to your parents in your next communication.

And with that, Tolwin opens the door to leave, while Blair stares, baffled.

BLAIR
Admiral?

Tolwin turns, already outside in the corridor.

BLAIR
I... most of the officers at the academy didn't trust me because my mother was a Pilgrim.

TOLWIN
That's why I chose you, Blair. You've got something to prove.

And with an enigmatic smile, Tolwin pushes the button and closes the sliding door.

INT. CORRIDOR - STAR BASE

Blair hurries testily down the corridor, hauling his heavy kit back, and apparently talking to himself.

BLAIR
Why didn't you tell me the Old Man knew my dad?

MERLIN
(voice only)
Your father asked me not to. I used to be his PPC.

BLAIR
You're my PPC, now. Why are you still obeying his orders?

MERLIN
Old habits die hard.

BLAIR
Now you sound like my dad. I could trade you in on a much newer model.

MERLIN
You'd miss all the good times we've had together.

BLAIR
I'll get over it.

As he rounds a corner, glancing up at a number and letter stencilled on the corridor wall, he runs into another young pilot, TODD "MANIAC" MARSHALL, who smirks.

MANIAC
Talking to yourself Blair? They say the grey cells go first out in space.

BLAIR
Marshall! What are you doing here?

MANIAC
Looking for transport to the Tiger Claw, same as you.

BLAIR
You're assigned to the Tiger Claw?

MANIAC
Somebody's got to look out for a screw up like you.

BLAIR
Yeah, like you did at the Academy. That head on flyby nearly killed us both.

MANIAC
We had inches to spare. You worry too much.

They stop before a gate, and wait for it to hiss open.

INT. SPACE DOCK - STAR BASE

The door finally opens, revealling the scorched, paintflecked form of the Diligent.

MANIAC
We're going to the Tiger Claw in that? They won't let us land on the flight deck.

Paladin comes up behind them.

PALADIN
Not only are you going on it... you're my crew.

BLAIR
No way. We're officers in the Confed Navy.

PALADIN
Not on my ship.

BLAIR
Forget it. We'll find other transport.

PALADIN
Suit yourself. Shop around until you find something suitable to your high station. I hear the Navy is very understanding about reporting late for assignment.

Maniac and Blair exchange a glance, then step into the space dock, each glancing up at the big craft.

PALADIN
(veiled sarcasm)
If you two gentlemen would be kind enough to climb aboard.

They go up the ramp, with a last doubtful look at the Diligent's worn exterior.

EXT. STAR BASE

The Diligent ejects through the open space dock, fires its engines, and moves slowly through the heavy traffic of the Polaris Roads, dwarfed by the half-carved ice moon. Then it gains speed and moves away.

INT. DILIGENT - TINY CABIN

Maniac barely squeezes in. He finds a space hammock and starts to string it across the bulkhead, when Blair opens the door, banging into him.

BLAIR
This is my cabin.

MANIAC
No it isn't.

Paladin appears in the door.

PALADIN
It's both your quarters.

BLAIR
What? How...?

PALADIN
You won't be spending much time here, and you alternate watches. You're in the Merchant Marine now. Stow your gear and meet me on the bridge.

Paladin disappears.

MANIAC
(dead pan)
I really don't like him.

BLAIR
Merchant man, my ass. I think he's a pirate. Maybe he's selling us both into slavery.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(from bridge intercom)
Blair! Marshall! To the bridge! Now!

MANIAC
We're already slaves.

Both lieutenants crowd out of the tiny cell.

EXT. DEEP SPACE - NEAR BLACK HOLE - DAYS LATER

The Black Hole is an impressive whirling disk of luminous gas with its trademark black center - the ev3ent horizon beyond which even light cannot escape. The Diligent moves perilously close to the outer fringes of the gaseous disk.

INT. CHART ROOM - DILIGENT

Paladin calmly charts his course on a holographic grid model, taking up half the bridge. Blair is at the helm, studying him.

BLAIR
What magnitude is the jump point?

Maniac comes up on the bridge.

PALADIN
A three. Just a little stone skip across the pond. I'm sure you've made bigger jumps than that.

MANIAC
Blair's never made a jump. Grew up and went to the Acadamy without leaving the sector he was born in.

PALADIN
Really? Well, then we'll have to give him the helm. He needs the practice.

Both Blair and Maniac react.

MANIAC
(truly worried)
You're not serious.

PALADIN
First time for everything.

And with that, Paladin plugs the last coordinates in and pushes a button. Suddenly, the holographic grid begins to fold inward, creating a strange spike in the concave surface. This is the "jump point", an indentation in the space time continuum. Paladin puts his hand on the tip of the spike.

PALADIN
The black hole is down here. It's gravity distorts the time, space continuum.
(moves hands to broad end of spike)
We want to cross here, jump over the intervening space, and arrive on the other side.
(checks readout)
For a net savings of six months travel, even at light mach point nine. Of course, if we miss, bad things happen.

MANIAC
Yeah, we get pulled into the event horizon like a long string of spagetti, one molecule at a time...

BLAIR
You could stand to slim down a little, Maniac.

PALADIN
Plot your course, Mister Blair.

Blair is as worried as Maniac, but he bends over the computer console.

BLAIR
Coordinates locked in.

Paladin studies the console.

PALADIN
Good. Accelerate to point nine.

Blair moves a control. The ship lurches, throwing Maniac off balance.

BLAIR
You might want to strap yourself in.

Maniac glares and obeys. Smiling, Paladin slips into the seat next to Blair. Some tenseness in his shoulders is all that gives away his intent to grab the controls, if necessary.

BLAIR
The readouts are changing.

PALADIN
Ignore them. The gravity from the Black Hole is slowing the computer computations. Stay on manual overide and stick with the original course.

A warning COMPUTER VOICE suddenly speaks.

COMPUTER VOICE
(over loudspeaker)
Attention! Alter course immediately. Gravitational pull exceeds thrust. Alter course immediately.

Blair glances at Paladin, very worried.

PALADIN
Ignore that, too. Trust your own computations.

Maniac is nearly frozen in his seat.

MANIAC
Who says his course was right to begin with?

PALADIN
(ironic)
We'll soon know.

Maniac almost comes out of his seat to grab the controls.

MANIAC
This is crazy. I say we abort.

Paladin grabs Maniac's arm in a vice-like grip, and looks into his eyes.

BLAIR
Maybe he's right! I could have screwed up!

Blair reaches for the controls. Paladin stops him.

PALADIN
(calm)
You have to trust yourself. Do you?

Blair hesitates, then focuses on the blur of readouts flashing across the screen. The Computer Voice drones on.

COMPUTER VOICE
Warning. Gravitational pull exceeds thrust. Alter course immediately.

BLAIR
(recovering)
Minus six and counting....

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

the luminous gas disk looms very large, the black hole seems to beckon ominously.

ON THE CONSOLE

the digital countdown continues, 4, 3, 2, 1

ON THE BRIDGE

There is a tremendous shudder as some barrier is breached... Maniac lets out a strangled cry... then everything is frozen in time. The readouts cease, the three men are motionless.

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

there are no stars, no luminous disk... only the black Void. From our perspective, this lasts for many seconds, then... an even more violent shudder which throws everyone in the cabin forward. The ship shimmies wildly, and Paladin reaches out and adjusts a stabilizer control. The ride smooths.

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

There is no sign of the luminous disk and the black hole, only new and unfamiliar stars, and distant planets.

PALADIN
Gentlemen, welcome to the Charbydis sector.

Both young lieutenants are too abashed to say anything. Paladin doesn't rub it in. Blair sees something on a screen.

BLAIR
Getting a strong beacon signal at three o'clock.

PALADIN
Set your course for it, Mister Blair.

Paladin leaves the bridge. Blair steers the ship around in line with the beacon signal. Neither speaks.

EXT. DEEP SPACE - CHARYBIDIS SECTOR

The Diligent turns and sets its new course. We can hear the steady beeping of the "beacon signal" from the navigation equipment. In the distance, an immense black hole, surrounded not only by whirling gas clouds, but by entire suns, looms into view. This is the Charbydis Quasar.

INT. DILIGENT - PALADIN'S QUARTERS

Paladin's door is open. Blair appears. Paladin is studying an ancient star chart.

PALADIN
Come in, Blair

Blair steps into the quarters, spartan at best. A cold meal is scattered over the old star charts.

BLAIR
I reduced speed as you requested. Holding steady on that beacon. Maniac has the helm.

PALADIN
Good. Hungry?

BLAIR
I could eat.

PALADIN
Help yourself.

As Blair makes himself a sandwich, he sees the old star charts.

BLAIR
These must be antiques.

PALADIN
Made by the first explorers in the sector. Sometimes they noted something that was missed in later surveys.

BLAIR
(reads)
The Ulysses Corridor. That's three years of hard travel from here, isn't it?

PALADIN
That depends.

BLAIR
(suspicious)
The Pegasus was attacked in the Ulysses Corridor.

PALADIN
So I've heard.
(changes subject)
You were born on Agadez.

BLAIR
That's right. Been there?

PALADIN
The first time I saw Agadez, it was nothing but sand.

BLAIR
(realizes)
We've had colonies on Agadez for eighty years.

PALADIN
That'd be about right.

BLAIR
Then...

PALADIN
I'm a hundred and five in planet years.
(tinge of sadness)
And some days, I feel like it.

BLAIR
That's a lot of time flying around at near light speed.

PALADIN
I suppose. I lost track a long time ago. It's hard seeing friends on your home planet grow old and die... while you look in the mirror and notice a few wrinkles and a little hair in your ears.

BLAIR
That's why my dad gave up flying. He wanted to grow old with my mother.

PALADIN
Wise man.

Just then, the ship lurches with a sudden surge of acceleration.

BLAIR
He's accelerating.

PALADIN
The bloody fool!

And Paladin flies out of the cabin.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin storms onto the bridge, followed by Blair.

PALADIN
Get up!

Maniac vacates the captain's chair. Paladin studies the instruments.

PALADIN
Did you change course?

MANIAC
No, just boosted the power. Why dog it when we can be at that beacon in an hour?

PALADIN
It's not a beacon, you cretin, it's a collapsed neutron star!

This galvanizes both Blair and Maniac. Paladin uses a telescopic lens to bring up a dim object on the screen, a blurred image of a spinning rock, generating a powerful radio beam! Paladin begins firing reverse thrusters, throwing the two younger men forward as he slowly alters course.

PALADIN
One teaspoon of that rock weighs more than your home planets combined!

The Diligent's skin begins to groan and creak.

BLAIR
Are we past her gravitational PNR, yet?

Paladin feverishly throws switches, makes adjustments, totally concentrated on the task. The spinning neutron star appears closer.

PALADIN
Not quite yet. But she's reaching out for us. Hear that?

The groans increase, as the thrusters fight to change course. On the screen the neutron star appears larger and more ominous.

PALADIN
Gentleman, meet Scylla, bane to sailors, and monster of myth.

MANIAC
What's a Scylla?

BLAIR
Ulysses sailed between the whirlpool Charbydis and the island monster, Scylla. She snatched six of his men and ate them.

PALADIN
Very good. But This one will eat more than that. Hold on.

Paladin flips a switch, and a bank of thrusters throws the ship sideways. The Diligent yaws for a few moments, as every seam groans. Maniac and Blair are thrown to the deck. The ships' afterburners scream. Then the ship lurches free.

PALADIN
(to the screen)
Broken your grip, old girl. Better luck, next time.

Paladin takes out the afterburners. On the screen, the spinning neutron star seems to recede and move toward the edge of the monitor.

MANIAC
You should have told us.

PALADIN
Yes. I should have.

He punches in a few coordinates on the console.

PALADIN
This is your new course. Carry on.

Paladin goes below decks.

MANIAC
That guy is seriously weird.

BLAIR
He's got an old star chart of the Ulysses Corridor in his cabin.

MANIAC
Ulysses Corridor? He couldn't have been there when the Pegasus got zapped. Could he?

BLAIR
Traders and pirates know more about jump points than anybody at Confed headquarters.

MANIAC
So?

BLAIR
So, the guy's been out in space for ninety planet years. No friends, no living relatives anywhere. Loyalties change if the price is right.

MANIAC
Come on. No Terran can do business with the Kilrathi. He'd have to be nuts.

BLAIR
Maybe he is.

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

Two Confederation Sabre fighters streak across the blackness toward a distant fleck, reflecting light from a distant sun.

CLOSER

The fleck resolves itself into the Diligent.

INT. DILIGENT BRIDGE

Blair is at the con. Paladin has been summoned to the bridge. Maniac joins them.

BLAIR
Fighters from the Tiger Claw. They've queried us.

PALADIN
Send the countersign.

Blair punches a button. A coded burst crackles over the intercom. Followed by another burst.

BLAIR
Identification acknowledged. They'll escort us in.

EXT. DILIGENT AND SABERS

The two star fighters bracket the larger merchantman. The three craft now head for another distant fleck half illuminated in the distance. The Tiger Claw.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The three craft slowly approach the carrier class capital ship. The huge flight deck doors open, catching the Diligent and the fighters in a a broad beam of yellow light. The Diligent fires its boosters and eases into the flight deck. The huge doors close. The Sabers bank sharply in unison and veer away to continue their patrol.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Marine guards scan the identity badges and examine the orders of the two new lieutenants, MOS,then step back and salute. Paladin's ID is also electronically scanned. The flight deck is orderly and relatively quiet: only yellow clad deck personnel and the Marine guards. The three walk a toward the elevators.

PALADIN
Well, gentlemen, don't think I haven't enjoyed your company.

MANIAC
Yeah, anytime you need slave labor, keep us in mind.

An elevator opens, going up. Paladin steps in.

PALADIN
Good luck.

The doors close.

MANIAC
He sure keeps his priorities straight.

Another elevator arrives, going down, they get on.

BLAIR
(still suspicious)
Yeah. Now that he's delivered us, he's off to see the paymaster.

INT. HANGAR DECK

Another huge deck, this one bustling with flight crews, and pilots. Gleaming sabers are arranged in rows. A group of larger Broadsword medium bombers occupy part of the deck. Maniac and Blair tote their kit bags among the rows.

MANIAC
I don't see the X.O.

He spots a beautiful blond, in grease covered overalls, working on a Broadsword.

MANIAC
I'll reconnoiter, over there.

He moves off and engages the blond in conversation, MOS. Blair shakes his head, ducks under the Broadswords belly and continues on. He stops and admires a Saber, its cockpit open, allowing himself to daydream. He is distracted by a feminine voice behind him.

DEVERAUX
Looking for something?

He turns. ANGELICA (ANGEL) DEVERAUX is brunette, looks about thirty-two, her hair up, wearing an oilstained jumpsuit. She has a streak of carbon lubricant across an otherwise unblemished and beautiful face. She has a socket wrench in one hand, and a small x-ray scanner in the other, which she is holding up to another Saber, and examining the read out it gives her.

BLAIR
Uh, no. Just admiring. I'll be flying one of these.

DEVERAUX
And you would be...?

BLAIR
Blair. Lieutenant Blair.

DEVERAUX
Fresh bait, huh? You need to report to the X.O. He's over there.

BLAIR
Actually I need to see Captain Sansky.

DEVERAUX
(amused; cool)
Really?

BLAIR
Special orders.

DEVERAUX
I see. Top secret and all that.

Blair sees that he's not impressing her as much as he'd like.

BLAIR
That's right.

DEVERAUX
Well, then, maybe you shouldn't be talking to me about them.

This really takes the wind out of Blair's sails. Deveraux nods to a tall officer, Commander PAUL GERALD.

DEVERAUX
Commander Gerald's over there. He'll take you to the Old Man.

Blair picks up his kit bag, and reads the name off of her jumpsuit.

BLAIR
Thanks, Deveraux. Maybe I'll be seeing you around.

DEVERAUX
Count on it.

Blair walks over to the X.O., Gerald, and salutes as Deveraux watches.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Blair salutes nervously, and hands over the mini-disk to CAPTAIN SANSKY, an affable older officer.

SANSKY
Thank you, lieutenant.
(squints at disk)
Why didn't the admiral just send a drone.

BLAIR
Maybe he just thought it would get here faster with me.

SANSKY
Undoubtedly. Well, I'm glad to meet you, Lieutenant. I pride myself in knowing all of my officers, even the most junior.

BLAIR
Yes, sir. That... would be me, sir.

Sansky smiles. Gerard watches stonefaced.

SANSKY
Commander Gerald gave you a little tour of our ship, did he?

GERALD
Just what we could see on the way to the bridge, Captain.

SANSKY
(to Blair)
The Tiger's Claw is a fine old lady, Lieutenant. Saw service in the Pilgrim Wars. Thoroughly refitted, of course. She's ready for a fight.

BLAIR
She may get one, sir.

Both Gerard and Sansky look puzzled.

SANSKY
You appear to know something, we don't, Lieutenant.

BLAIR
The Asteroid World Pegasus was attacked and destroyed in the Ulysses Corridor a few weeks ago.

SANSKY
Then how did they know at Polaris Roads? Normal communication links would take three years.

BLAIR
I wouldn't know that, sir. Perhaps the disk...?

SANSKY
(remembers)
Of course. Carry on, Lieutenant. You've got your quarters assignment.

BLAIR
Yes sir.

Blair salutes to go.

GERALD
(reflects)
You wouldn't be related to Arnold Blair, would you?

BLAIR
My father, sir.

GERALD
He married a Pilgrim woman, didn't he?

BLAIR
(crestfallen)
Yes sir. They live on Agadez.

Sansky is interested, now, and observes Blair closely.

GERALD
Glad to see it worked out. These mixed marriages seldom do, you know. Pilgrims don't think like us.

BLAIR
I wouldn't know, sir.

GERALD
No. But then, you're half Pilgrim yourself.

SANSKY
(stepping in)
I'm sure that will have no bearing on Blair's performance, here, Mister Gerald.

GERALD
No sir. I'm sure it won't.

SANSKY
That's all, Lieutenant.

Blair can barely contain his anger and disappointment as he turns and leaves the bridge.

INT. BLAIR'S QUARTERS - TIGER CLAW

The cubicle is bigger than at the star base, but not by much. Blair angrily throws his belongings into the closet.

BLAIR
It never changes.

Merlin, in small holographic form, seems to watch him.

MERLIN
You're referring to Commander Gerald's remarks.

BLAIR
You heard him.

MERLIN
I hear everything.

BLAIR
"Pilgrim's don't think like us."

MERLIN
From a strictly analytical standpoint, that's probably true. Your mother aside, most Pilgrim's are guided by emotion and dogma, not reason, or even self interest. Their fanatical attachment to an idealized past separates them from other humans....

BLAIR
(recognizes this)
"...Who yearn for an idealized future." I hate it when you quote my father's books.

MERLIN
(abruptly)
Somebody at the door.

BLAIR
And I hate that, too.

The buzzer sounds. Blair punches a button and the door slides open. Angel Deveraux stands there, now in full uniform, wearing her lieutenant commander's insignia. Blair is too shocked to move for a moment, then he snaps to attention and salutes.

BLAIR
Ma'am!

DEVERAUX
At ease, Lieutenant.

BLAIR
Ma'am, I didn't realize... Down in the hangar bay, I--.

DEVERAUX
Forget about that. I am your Wing Commander, Mr. Blair. You will be serving directly under my command.

She makes a rapid inspection of his quarters, still a mess from the unpacking. She sees the little Merlin hologram.

DEVERAUX
I see you brought your toys.

Embarrassed, Blair clicks off the Hologram.

DEVERAUX
You don't have your act together, yet, do you Mister Deveraux?

BLAIR
I had to see the Captain. I just--

DEVERAUX
I wasn't talking about your quarters, Mister. You're still back at the academy, trying to impress women, showing off your brand new pilot's wings. Waiting for them to swoon.

BLAIR
(irked)
If you say so, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
(challenging)
I do say so. We are on a capital ship in a war zone, Mister. School is out. You'll be flying with men and women who have seen combat; who have lost comrades.... They can't wait for you to grow up. Their lives depend on you.

BLAIR
(chastised)
Yes, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
I'll be giving a new pilot orientation at Zulu eighteen hundred hours in briefing room one. That's all.

Blair comes to attention and salutes. Deveraux glances once more around the untidy quarters, and leaves. The door slides shut. Merlin reappears in hologram.

MERLIN
That went well.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

A full-sized hologram of Admiral Tolwin appears to speak directly to Sansky and Gerald, who listen to the message.

TOLWIN
(hologram)
To accomplish these secret orders, gentlemen, you are to enlist the services of James Paladin, who is currently aboard your ship.

GERALD
(startled)
That Privateer! The Old Man's lost his mind.

TOLWIN
(as if he's heard)
You may find this surprising.
(pause; small smile)
But Paladin knows the Ulysses Corridor better than anyone in the Confederation. And he knows how to take you there... quickly.

SANSKY
I knew it. There is a secret jump point.

TOLWIN
Paladin will brief you, himself. I think you'll find the route he suggests to be very... interesting.

GERALD
If Tolwin trusts that old pirate, his cerebral arteries are starting to harden.

SANSKY
(as Tolwin continues)
Shhh.

TOLWIN
One more thing, Captain Sansky. This entire mission will be conducted under strict radio silence. No messages, even coded, should be transmitted back to me except by drone. And all drones must be fighter escorted to the jump point.

GERALD
What's that all about?

SANSKY
I don't know.

TOLWIN
Your mission is risky gentlemen. But if it succeeds, you will open a back door on the Kilrathi fleet. The course of the entire war may depend upon your mission. Stealth and surprise are the watchwords. Avoid any contact with the Kilrathi, unless attacked. Good luck, gentlemen.

The message ends and the hologram vanishes. Gerald goes to a console and pushes a button, ejecting the microdisk.

GERALD
I don't like it.

SANSKY
No one asked your opinion, Paul.
Orders are orders.

GERALD
I don't mean that. This disk came to us on the Diligent, entrusted to a Pilgrim half-breed.

SANSKY
That's enough, Commander.

BLAIR
Paladin could have accessed it!

SANSKY
(amused)
You're saying he decoded the disk, and changed it?

GERALD
Stranger things have happened in this war. The Old Man thinks our communications have been compromised. Maybe that includes this one.

SANSKY
You've been out here too long, Paul. You're seeing spies under the bedcovers.

GERALD
The route taken by the Pegasus was top secret. Only the commanders of a few capital ships knew where it would be at any given time. Somebody told them. Somebody who "knows the Ulysses Corridor better than anyone in the Confederation."

Sansky ponders this; then rejects it.

SANSKY
The disk was encrypted with the Admiral's own code. I don't believe it could have been tampered with by anyone on the Diligent. Send for Paladin. Let's hear about this "back door" to the Kilrathi fleet.

Gerald, still upset, leaves to obey. Alone, Sansky drops his mask of complacency. He's worried.

INT. PILOT'S MESS

The fighter pilots of the Tiger Claw relax around the Spartan eating and recreation area. Several sprawl, zonked out with virtual reality glasses on their noses, while others drink coffee and chat. Blair stares out the large portholes and the swirling disk of luminous gas, suns and worlds around the void at the heart of the Charbydis Quasar. Three pilots in Deveraux's wing, POLANSKI, ABBOT, and FORBES, a wise-cracking woman, are giving Maniac the rookie treatment.

POLANSKI
Of course, we lose most fresh bait on their first carrier landing.

MANIAC
Yeah, right.

POLANSKI
Remember Bischoff?

ABBOT
(somber)
Yeah.

FORBES
And Shannon.

ABBOT
Came in too hot.

MANIAC
Get off it. I've done dozens of carrier landings at the academy.

POLANSKI
Not after a skirmish. Cannons still hot, nerves twitching all over your face, sweat in your eyes. Hands still shaking. Remember Gunther?

The other two nod somberly in unison. Blair, behind them smells a joke. He smiles without turning.

ABBOT
And what's her name...? Costello. That was the worst. Her first dogfight, and, after it's over, she just says over the intercom..."Sure is hot in here..." and poof, she ejects. Nothing wrong with her ship or nothing, just jettisons out into an asteroid field.

POLANSKI
We never found her pod. Let it all get to her, I guess. But you know....

He looks at Abbot, who nods. Forbes gets belligerant.

FORBES
What? She was a woman? It's a statistical fact women can outfly and outshoot men.

Several of the male pilots groan. They've heard this before. But the women pilots egg her on: "Blast, "em, Rosie." "Tell it, girl," etc.

FORBES
We do better at multi-tasking, we can keep track of four enemy fighters on the screens... and we don't let all that testosterone cloud our judgement.

The women pilots ad lib their approval. "Got that straight." And "Cool as a moonbeam", etc.

POLANSKI
Yeah, Forbes, you got ice water in your veins, we all know.

FORBES
Just 'cause I ain't got the hots for you, Shorty.

More,"oohs" and groans from everyone. Blair turns.

BLAIR
So what's it really like to take on the Kilrathi?

This actually shuts everyone up. Is this guy for real?

BLAIR
I mean, what tactics do they use?

POLANSKI
(shining him on)
The usual stuff you learn at the academy. They fly in slow, turn on their landing lights and waggle their wings to get your attention.

ABBOT
Then they turn sideways to give you a better shot.

BLAIR
Thanks.

Forbes takes pity on the good looking newcomer.

FORBES
You don't see them until they're above you, pouring laser fire into your hull.

The other pilots grow serious, now. No more jokes.

FORBES
They wait behind space rocks you wouldn't think could hide a basketball. They use the shadow of a planet to break up their radar and infrared signature, then come at you from below and rip your ship's belly open.

All chatter has ceased in the mess hall. Everyone listens.

FORBES
And if that don't work, if you smelled them coming anyway... if you're getting the best of them, they turn and ram you.

MANIAC
But...

FORBES
They don't care if they die. Just so they take you with them.

MANIAC
That's crazy.

BLAIR
Not to them. They're raised from children to be warriors... like the Spartans.

MANIAC
Don't listen to him. He's a bookworm.

FORBES
He's right. Kilrathi were making war in space while humans were still throwing rocks and each other. You know what we are to them...?

ABBOT
Target Practice?

A few snickers, then....

FORBES
Fresh bait.

This has a darkening effect on everyone present. Forbes realizes she's taking everybody somwhere they don't want to dwell. So to lighten it....

FORBES
Just like these two green guavas, here. Fresh bait.

This gets Blair and Maniac a general razzing from all present.

MANIAC
Yeah, yeah. You'll see who's green.

ABBOT
So what's handle they give you, guava boy?

BLAIR
Maniac.

FORBES
Why, or should I ask?

BLAIR
Just fly with him once. You'll see.

MANIAC
It ain't my flying. I got that handle in the bedroom.

More catcalls and general razzing. Forbes grins, sizing up the muscular man in front of her.

FORBES
You got things backwards, fish food. <u>You're</u> supposed to drive the <u>woman</u> crazy!

This brings cheers from the women pilots. But Maniac and Forbes have locked eyes. Something going on here.

MANIAC
Oh, I try.

To hide her attraction, Forbes turns to Blair.

FORBES
What about you, Blair? Got a monniker?

BLAIR
Just call me, "Ace."

More razzing from the group.

POLANSKI
Only one ace on board the Claw, dickhead. Nobody else has survived long enough.

BLAIR
Who's that?

ABBOT
Angel Deveraux.

BLAIR
Lieutenant Commander Deveraux?

FORBES
That's right. Best pilot on board is a woman. I rest my case.

She does a high five with a black woman pilot.

MANIAC
Angel? What kinda handle is that?

POLANSKI
We call her that cause she ain't no kind of one. She's got a temper that'll melt down a thermal shield. When she gets mad, you clear the deck and head for the lifeboats.

ABBOT
You get it perfect, or you get it wrong, that's her motto.

MANIAC
Great. Another annal retentive C.O.

FORBES
Yeah? Well she's survived more battles than any of you dick for brains. Maybe she's just smarter than the rest of us.

ABBOT
(to Blair)
So, you got a handle, or not?

MANIAC
That's the Dodger. One day, we're coming in hot onto the deck, when some damn fool driving a cart pulls out onto the LZ towing a rack of bombs.

Deveraux comes through the doors, unseen, and hangs back to listen.

MANIAC
The Dodger man lifts his nose up and reverses his starboard retros. Hops clear over the bomb wrack and lands his trainer ass backwards. Here's the best part: The instructors spent the next month trying to duplicate the maneuver. Couldn't do it.

Polanski sees Deveraux, first.

POLANSKI
Attention on deck!

The crew barely have time to stand at attention, when:

DEVERAUX
As you were. Blair. With me.

And just as abruptly, she turns and leaves.

MANIAC
Looks like you screwed up again.

BLAIR
Shut up.

But Blair is worried as he follows Deveraux out.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Blair, now wearing his flight suit, watches as his starfighter, a fully armed Saber, comes up on the elevator from the hangar bay. Then Deveraux steps up next to him, suited up for a mission as well. She stops to admire.

DEVERAUX
Beautiful, isn't she?

BLAIR
Yes, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
Your first mission. Try not to screw it up. You don't want to get off on the wrong foot with me.

BLAIR
I thought I already had.

DEVERAUX
No. When you piss me off, you'll know it. And you will piss me off, "Dodger". I can feel it.

Blair is too surprised to speak. She moves toward her Saber.

BLAIR
Ma'am. Just what is the mission?

DEVERAUX
We're escorting a message drone as far as the jump point. It will be picked up and escorted back to Polaris roads by fighters on the other side of the jump.

BLAIR
Is that SOP?

DEVERAUX
There is no Standard Operating Procedure out here, Blair. Ever seen a Kilrathi...?

BLAIR
No, Ma'am, I haven't.

DEVERAUX
They don't have Standard procedures either. They'll do whatever is necessary to kill us and kill our ships. They invented this kind of warfare. We're just trying to stay even with them out here.

She climbs up into her cockpit.

BLAIR
Sound like you're doing okay, Commander.

He nods to her saber, which shows six Kilrathi kills marked on its fuselage.

DEVERAUX
I'm one mission ahead of the law of averages, Lieutenant. The curve will catch up to me, sooner or later.

She puts on her helmet. Blair ponders that for a second, then turns and hurries to his own fighter.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The huge flight deck door gapes open, spilling a long beam of light. The two Sabers leap through the air lock curtain into space.

FURTHER OUT

The Sabers hover and watch the Tiger Claw, as a small guided message drone is launched. As the drone alters course, the Sabers bracket it and follow along.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Paladin is on the bridge with Gerald and Sansky, as well as the helmsmen, and others. They watch the three points of light disappear through the huge bay windows.

PALADIN
Escorting the drones, now? Security is pretty tight.

GERALD
That's not your problem, Paladin.

PALADIN
I don't have any problems, Mister Gerald. Do you?

SANSKY
All right gentlemen, lets get down to business. Shall we go to the chart room?

PALADIN
Are those Sabers going back to Polaris Roads, or will they rendezvous with us, later?

SANSKY
Just why do you ask, Mister Paladin?

PALADIN
It will affect the speed and course I set. Unless you want to strand your own fighters in space, Captain.

SANSKY
They'll escort the drones to the jump point, then return. I've already given them an intercept course based upon our own. It shouldn't affect your work.

PALADIN
You're way ahead of me, Captain.

SANSKY
Just get us through your secret jump point, Mister Paladin. Let us worry about the rest.

And Sansky continues on into the chart room. Gerald glares coldly at Paladin, who seems unperplexed.

INT. DEEP SPACE - CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The three pin points of light pass by a deserted planet, the light from a nearby star, throws it into half light, half shadow.

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Deveraux is scanning her "heads up" display. There is a blip. Then it disappears.

DEVERAUX
(over radio)
Baker One to Baker Two.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SABER COCKPIT - BLAIR

BLAIR
(over radio)
Roger, Baker One. I thought we were under radio silence.

DEVERAUX
We're on a high frequency, short range band. Anything close enough to hear us is too damn close. Did you see a blip on your radar screen, down near the planet?

BLAIR
Negative, Baker One.
(then; sees on screen)
Correction. I just saw something. Now it's gone. Could be a small meteor, captured by the planet's gravity.

DEVERAUX
Or it could be a stealth craft. We're getting glimpses when it comes about. Stay alert.

BLAIR
Roger.

MERLIN
(voice only)
I'm receiving a long range, low frequency signal.

BLAIR
What? Give me a direction?

MERLIN
(voice only)
It appears to be coming from quadrant thirty.

BLAIR
That's near the Tiger Claw? What's it saying?

MERLIN
The code isn't in my vocabulary.

EXT. MESSAGE DRONE

The drone continues to fly in a straight line, still accompanied by the Sabers. Then, without warning it veers off sharply and heads for the planet. A split second later, Blair banks hard left, and dives after it.

INT. SABER COCKPIT - BLAIR

He keeps the drone in sight in front of him as it hurtles toward the pockmarked and airless planet below.

BLAIR
(over radio)
The drone's malfunctioning. She's out of control.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Banks and turns, following Blair's fighter, and the drone. But he is between the two. She tries several switches.

DEVERAUX
It's a runaway. Bank left, Baker Two. I'm going to hit the kill switch.

BLAIR
Roger.

And, as she watches, his Saber banks left. Her gloved hand reaches down to a guarded red switch, opens it, flicks it. Nothing happen.

DEVERAUX
The self-destruct mechanism isn't responding.

In fact, as she watches, the drone begins to weave, as if purposefully evading the escort.

BLAIR
I'm going in for a shot.

DEVERAUX
No. Stand off, Baker Two.

Deveraux poses her thumb over the fire command switch on her joy stick; then Blair's Saber veers between her and the drone, which is snaking through the sky as if deliberately trying to shake it.

BLAIR
Commencing fire.

EXT. DRONE AND SABERS

Laser cannon fire streaks through space. Blair leads the drone well. It is struck.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Banking left!

He goes left, and Deveraux reflexively banks hard right, just before the drone explodes. There is no noise in space, just a spray of sparks, debris, and white hot gas.

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

She looks at her radio screen. Is there a blip there, lost in the clutter of the drone's debris?

DEVERAUX
(angry; over radio)
Baker Two, form up on my wing.

A moment later, she is nearly cockpit to cockpit with Blair.

BLAIR
(over radio)
Sorry, Baker One. But I was already locked on. I had the shot.

DEVERAUX
You have the shot when I tell you, Mister. I almost put a missile up your ass, you understand me?

BLAIR
That's affirmative, Baker One.

DEVERAUX
We're returning to the ship. Oh, and congratulations.
(derisive)
You've made your first kill.

EXT. SABERS

The two fighters streak out past the deserted planet, back toward the Charbydis Quasar in the distance.

MERLIN (V.O.)
I don't think she likes you.

BLAIR (V.O.)
You noticed.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Deveraux has just finished her report to Gerald and Sansky.

SANSKY
And the drone seemed to be taking evasive action?

DEVERAUX
That was my impression, sir.

GERALD
Tell us more about the signal Blair claims to have heard.

DEVERAUX
Not much more to tell. His PPC reported a long range signal coming from the vicinity of the Tiger Claw.

Sansky speaks in a clear voice.

SANSKY
What about it, CONCOM? Was any communications sent from this ship?

An ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE voice immediately responds.

AI VOICE
(flat tones)
Negative, Captain. There were no transmissions sent by the Tiger Claw.

Sansky frowns, then turns to Deveraux.

SANSKY
Thank you, Commander. That's all.

Deveraux leaves the bridge.

GERALD
Will we be sending out another drone?

SANSKY
No. Tolwin may be right. All our communications could be compromised. We have our orders. Carry on.

GERALD
Captain.... CONCOM AI only monitors the Tiger Claw operations. If the long range signal was sent from another ship in our hangar bay, it wouldn't have been detected unless we were deliberately monitoring that frequency.

SANSKY
You mean Paladin's ship, the Diligent.

GERALD
Yes.

SANSKY
Have the Marine's check out his equipment. And Mister Gerald... be discrete.

INT. TIGER CLAW

Blair is waiting. When he sees Deveraux, he comes to attention. She stops.

DEVERAUX
I reported your screw up with the drone missile, Blair. Next time, they'll bust down to ensign. When I give an order, you don't second guess it. Ever. What's that?

BLAIR
No Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
I also told them you made a good, clean kill. A lot of veteran pilots would have missed.

Deveraux walks on, leaving him there, relieved.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

Gerald enters and sees Paladin studying the big, holographic chart; then he punches in some coordinates.

GERALD
When do we veer off?

PALADIN
Who says we do?

GERALD
We're headed for the Charbydis Quasar. Tomorrow we'll be at her Point of No Return.

PALADIN
That's right.

GERALD
(realizes)
You've lost your mind. No one has ever navigated a jump point generated by a Quasar. It's impossible.

PALADIN
I'm living proof that it isn't.

GERALD
You're trying to destroy the Tiger Claw.

PALADIN
Do I look suicidal to you, Mister Gerald?

GERALD
You were on the Pegasus before she was ambushed, Weren't you?

PALADIN
That's right.

GERALD
And you managed to get away before she died.

This hits home. Paladin nearly reacts, but restrains his emotions.

PALADIN
I was ordered off by the governor general of the colony. He wanted a message taken back to the fleet.

GERALD
And he chose a rogue privateer. What are the chances of that?

PALADIN
I'd worry more about our chances at the jump point, Gerald. Nothing this big has ever gone through it. A carrier doesn't respond like the Diligent.

(MORE)

PALADIN (cont'd)
We won't be able to make any last minute corrections on our course. Now, can I get back to my calculations?

Paladin turns back to the hologram, then does several more key strokes, which changes the bright red trajectory lines.

INT. FORBES' QUARTERS

Forbes has just showered. She is combing her wet hair when the door buzzer sounds. She opens on Deveraux.

FORBES
(smiles)
Hey. Attention on deck.

There is a complete camaraderie between these two when off duty.

DEVERAUX
(smiles)
Can I come in?

FORBES
Bring that Scotch I ordered?

DEVERAUX
(sprawls on bunk)
Sorry. My smuggler upped his prices.

FORBES
Life's a bitch.

She fiddles with her hair, holding it up in two equally boring styles.

FORBES
Whaddya think? Is it sexier like this? Or this?

DEVERAUX
So who is it, this time?

FORBES
Who do you think?

DEVERAUX
(uncomfortable)
Blair's okay, if you like that kind.

FORBES
Blair? Who's having fantasies about Lieutenant Blair? Whoa, I see.

DEVERAUX
No you don't.

FORBES
Oh, right, he's mud ugly. And dumb. Did I forget dumb?

DEVERAUX
(changing subject)
So who?

FORBES
Maniac Marshall.

DEVERAUX
You're kidding?

FORBES
See this rosy glow. Wasn't caused by no sunlamps, girl.

DEVERAUX
You know the rules about officers fraternizing.

FORBES
Oh damn, and we were fraternizing all last watch. Don't burn yourself on that bunk, it's still smoking.

DEVERAUX
I don't want to hear about your love life, Rosy.

FORBES
So, what <u>are</u> we going to talk about, girl, yours?

DEVERAUX
I haven't got one.

FORBES
I rest my case. Tell me... what do you hate most about Blair? His eyes? Or that little boyish grin?

DEVERAUX
I told you--I don't fraternize with junior officers. Besides, he's a screw up.

FORBES
Yeah, I heard how he picked off that fishtailing drone. You can fool all of the people all of the time, Angel, but you can't fool Mom. You got the hots for this boy.

(MORE)

FORBES (cont'd)
That's why you're giving him the full treatment. Look at her. The girl is in complete denial.

Deveraux gets up from the bed and looks at her watch.

DEVERAUX
I'm going to hit the rack. I'm bagged.

FORBES
Yeah, get some sleep.
(as Deveraux leaves; teasing)
Sweet dreams.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Blair nervously enters the domain of the top brass. He sees Sansky and salutes crisply.

BLAIR
Lieutenant j.g. Christopher Blair, reporting as ordered, Sir.

SANSKY
As you were, Lieutenant. Several people seem to think you should be here, today.

BLAIR
Sir?

Paladin steps from the chart room.

PALADIN
I was one of them.

BLAIR
I don't understand.

PALADIN
We're going through a jump point... a very difficult jump point. We need someone to see how we go through on this end in case we have to send them back with a message.... someone who's actually piloted a jump before.

BLAIR
You don't trust the drones?

Sansky is silent, but Blair understands. Deveraux steps into view. Blair hadn't seen her before.

BLAIR
Why me? Commander Deveraux is the best pilot on board.

SANSKY
Commander Deveraux has responsibility for her wing. In the event we're in battle....

BLAIR
(bitter)
I see. I can be spared. The messenger boy.
(to Sansky)
I respectfully request that you choose someone else, Sir. If there is a fight, I want to be in it.

SANSKY
Request denied.
(to Paladin)
Are we ready.

PALADIN
As we'll ever be.

Everyone but Blair turns, almost unconsciously to look through the huge bay windows on the bridge.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

The Charbydis Quasar fills the windows, its huge black maw sucking suns and planets into its infinitely dense invisible core.

RESUME BRIDGE

Blair turns, sees. Realizes.

BLAIR
There's a jump point in the Charbydis Quasar.

Paladin leads them over to the chart room area.

PALADIN
Follow me.

INT. CHART ROOM

Sansky, Gerald, Blair, and Deveraux watch the huge holographic chart as Paladin punches in the last coordinates. The Tiger Claw is represented as a flashing red point on a curved grid. Then, slowly, the grid begins to deform as an icicle shaped spike pulls and distorts the grid.

The icicle transforms into a stalagmyte, with a thick, wide hole at its neck. The flashing red point is poised in front of this huge gap in the grid. The others are stunned as the hologram rotates to reveal its breadth.

SANSKY
I've never seen anything this big in my naval career.

Paladin steps into the hologram and points as he explains.

PALADIN
The Tiger Claw is right here, headed toward the Ulysses Corridor, which, even at light speed mach point nine would take us thirty years to attain.... Still three years using seven known jump points. By using this warp in the time space continuum generated by the quasar, we will be there in...
(checks watch)
Less than three minutes.

His hands trace the trajectory across the wide gap in the quadrant. He glances at the console, pushes a final button.

PALADIN
We'll have a terrific view from the bridge.

Paladin leaves the chart room. Blair stares at the gigantic spike in the holographic grid after the others file out.

BLAIR
What do you think, Merlin? Are we nuts to try this?

The small hologram of Merlin appears.

MERLIN
Paladin's computations seem sound...theoretically.

BLAIR
We'll soon know.

MERLIN
Actually, if the entry trajectory is wrong, we probably will never know. We'll be trapped in a moment outside of time and space... until, the ship plummets into the black hole and we become an infinitely small part of a spacial singularity.

BLAIR
Are you afraid of dying, Merlin?

MERLIN
Actually ceasing to exist? No consciousness.... Interesting question. It puts my self preservation sensors on full alert. What about yours?

BLAIR
Yeah... mine are going off, too. Hologram off.

Merlin disappears. Blair leaves the chart room, the gigantic spike in the grid glowing menacingly.

INT. PILOT'S MESS

All of the pilots except Blair and Deveraux are gathered by the large portholes, staring out at the gigantic quasar ahead of them, murmuring in awe.

ABBOT
This thing is eating suns for breakfast. What are we doing, here?

POLANSKI
You know what we're not doing?

FORBES
Turning around.

Maniac turns from the window and begins unbuttoning his pants.

FORBES
What are you doing?

MANIAC
Trying to kiss my ass goodbye. If I can't reach, will you do it?

She grins at him. But they are both scared. They turn back to the porthole. Forbes secretly puts her hand in Maniac's.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Sansky, Gerald, Deveraux, Blair and Paladin are on the bridge along with the various officers and noncoms. The Charbydis Quasar looks like it's about to swallow them. Suddenly, an alarm sounds. The CONCOM AI voice speaks calmly.

AI VOICE
Attention! Attention. Course error. Adjust course immediately!

PALADIN
(barks)
Ignore that! Helmsman, hold steady as she goes.

AI VOICE
Captain, the ship is headed into the PNR zone of a large quasar. One minute before gravitational pull is one hundred per cent.

SANSKY
What about it, Paladin?

PALADIN
The readings are wrong. You're AI's sensors have already been warped by the gravitational field.

AI VOICE
I must insist we change course immediately. Initiating AI override.

There is a slight jerk as some course change appears to have been made. Paladin leaps for the helm.

PALADIN
NO!

He throws a switch.

PALADIN
Manual override! Now.... Disregard your artificial intelligence, or we'll all die!

GERALD
Captain, I think we should reconsider.

SANSKY
(nervous)
Steady as she goes, helm.

HELMSMAN
Aye, aye, sir.

Blair walks over to Deveraux who is standing closest to the huge bay windows. He glances at her. She notices, but pretends not to. The alarm continues to sound throughout the ship!

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

The alarm has men and women sweating and tense in the hangar bay, on the closed flight deck, in the engine and torpedo rooms, and in the crew quarters. Sansky's voice comes over the intercom throughout.

SANSKY (V.O.)
(over intercom)
This is the captain. Brace yourself for jump point interphase. Fifteen seconds to jump point.

The various parts of the ship all begin to vibrate, slowly at first, then more and more violently, throwing any loose object around.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The vibrations grow worse, as people grab onto anything, eyes glued on the windows.

PALADIN
Steady.

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

Are thrown together. This startles both of them, then they deliberately grab for a bulkhead.

BLAIR
What's happening?

DEVERAUX
The ship's trying to tear itself free of the time space fabric.

The vibration grows in pitch, until the sound is almost deafening. Almost on impulse, Deveraux's hand reaches out toward Blair's elbow, as if to have one last physical contact with another human. But it never reaches it!

FREEZE FRAME

The Tiger Claw enters the gap in the space time continuum. All motion and sound on the bridge stop. Nothing moves, either human or inanimate. Time has ceased, as well as any sense of motion or vibration. All is silent.

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

Throughout the ship, men are women are caught, Pompei-like, with expressions of fear or bewilderment, clutching bunks, equipment, or even cowering on the deck. A LONG, LONG TRAVELLING SHOT past these crew members on all levels of the ship, lasting as long as a minute. Then....

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

With a terrible shudder, life on the bridge resumes, alarms wail, officers and crew are tossed about like dolls.

DEVERAUX AND BLAIR

Angel's hand continues forward, touching Blair's elbow. He turns to look at her, just as they are both slammed against the bulkhead. Both fall to their knees. The shuddering is intense. It feels like the ship is coming apart. But Blair reaches for Deveraux's face and tilts her chin up. Her forehead is bleeding from a scalp laceration.

BLAIR
You all right?

She is dizzy, but nods. He holds up three fingers in front of her.

BLAIR
How many fingers?

DEVERAUX
(grim humor)
What fingers?

They both manage a little smile. Then Blair turns to glance out the windows.

THROUGH THE BRIDGE WINDOWS

There is no sign of the awesome Quasar, now. The blackness of space, peppered with stars.... A Jovian planet looms in the distance. Blair realizes.

BLAIR
We're through. We're through the jump point!

RESUME BRIDGE

Even as the others stare out, the vibrations decrease, then disappear. The alarm ceases.

PALADIN
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Ulysses Corridor.

SANSKY
CONCOM, any other ships out here?

AI VOICE
Scanners show no activity, Captain.

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

Blair has fetched a first aid box, and is using a small laser pen to seal Deveraux's scalp wound. Paladin joins them.

DEVERAUX
Ouch.

BLAIR
Sorry.

PALADIN
Well, Mister Blair, now you know what it'll feel like. Can you do it?

BLAIR
Will it be the same in a fighter?

PALADIN
Worse. I don't really know if a Saber will hold together at the interphase.

DEVERAUX
Don't hold anything back. Give it to him straight, Paladin.

Paladin grins.

DEVERAUX
Are we where we should be?

PALADIN
Off by a few parsecs, I think.

BLAIR
(grudging)
You did it.

PALADIN
Yes. If it makes you feel better, I'm as surprised as you are.

Paladin turns back to Sansky and Gerald. Deveraux and Blair exchange a glance. As if annoyed by this enforced intimacy with Blair, Deveraux pulls away as Blair tries to check her scalp.

DEVERAUX
It's all right.

BLAIR
It's still bleeding just a tad. If I--

DEVERAUX
(pulls away)
It's all right.

BLAIR
(irked)
Yes, Ma'am.

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

As officers, pilots and crew listen to the intecom.

SANSKY (V.O.)
(over intercom)
This is the captain. As most of you have guessed, we just made one hell of a jump. Actually we've just taken a little short cut into the Ulysses Corridor.... If you don't already know, that's where the Pegasus Asteroid World was attacked and destroyed. We think the Kilrathi fleet is still in the Quadrant. Our mission is to find the Kilrathi and shadow them until we can send for the rest of the Confed Fleet. I'm counting on each and every member of this crew to stay alert, and do their jobs. We're the only Confed ship in the sector, people. We can count on no help and no rescue if we're discovered. We can only count on each other. That is all.

EXT. POLARIS ROADS - STARBASE

The fleet is massed around the starbase, fighting ships in the vanguard.

INT. TOLWIN'S OFFICE

Tolwin is studying the fleet through his huge windows when Bellegarde enters.

BELLEGARDE
Your gig's ready to take us out to the Concordia, Admiral.

TOLWIN
No message from the Tiger Claw?

BELLEGARDE
Nothing. Damn strange.

TOLWIN
Unless we're right.

BELLEGARDE
I hope we aren't.

TOLWIN
Hope is a luxury I can't indulge in, just now, Captain.

BELLEGARDE
No sir. I'll be in the gig, sir.

Bellegarde leaves. Tolwin ponders.

INT. HANGAR BAY - BLAIR'S SABER

Blair is in a greasy jump suit, working right alongside his mechanics. He is deep inside his scramjet engine duct, when he hear's Deveraux.

DEVERAUX
Lieutenant Blair!

Blair slides out of the duct and peers down. There are still engine parts on the deck.

BLAIR
Yes, Ma'am?

DEVERAUX
Why isn't this craft combat ready, as ordered?

BLAIR
Ma'am. I pulled the engine apart and we're putting it back one bolt at a time. Paladin said the vibrations at the jump point interphase would be worse for a Saber than--

DEVERAUX
Is a civilian giving your orders, or am I, Lieutenant?

BLAIR
(stung; obstinate)
I think the success of my mission could depend on the--

DEVERAUX
The success of your mission depends on your not thinking, Dodger! You let me do that. Now put this back together on the doublequick!

BLAIR
(steaming)
Aye, aye, Ma'am.

Blair crawls completely out of the duct and drops to the deck as Deveraux crosses the hangar bay and disappears. Maniac works on his own Saber nearby. He grins over at Forbes.

MANIAC
She's nuts about him, am I right?

Forbes is sitting in her cockpit on his other side, checking equipment.

FORBES
Absolutely.

Maniac grins. They both glance over at Blair, who hasn't overhead and is angrily lost in thought.

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS

Angel is off duty, hair wet, in a terrycloth robe, watching a small holographic post card of a MAN in his late thirties, and TWO CHILDREN, the boy is perhaps six, the girl three. The postcard makes her sad. The Man is talking gently to the two children.

MAN
(hologram)
And we're going to send this post card to a nice lady who works on a big ship way, way out in space. She's a fighter pilot.

The boy nods, staring at the camera.

MAN
(hologram)
She's so far away, it might take months and months for her to even get it.

DEVERAUX
(mutters)
That's it, rub it in.

She sprawls on her bunk, but keeps watching the small holographic figures.

MAN
(hologram)
Her name is Angelica. Can you say hello? to her?

The door buzzer sounds. Deveraux groans and gets off the bunk.

MAN
(hologram)
Say.... " Hello, Angelica....

She hits the pause button. The hologram freezes in place. Then her door slides open. Blair stands there in uniform, looking grim. For once, she is caught completely off guard.

DEVERAUX
Lieutenant...?

Blair is also caught by surprise. He has not imagined this scene with her in a short terrycloth robe. It throws his carefully prepared speech off.

BLAIR
Commander... I... I need to talk with you.

Two pilots pass by in the corridor, making them both self conscious.

DEVERAUX
Come in.

He does. She closes the door, crosses her arms, tries not to fidget.

BLAIR
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to disturb you when you're off watch.

DEVERAUX
What's on your mind, Blair?

BLAIR
Ma'am, I couldn't help but notice that you ride me more than anybody.

DEVERAUX
That's the normal condition for fresh bait, Lieutenant.

BLAIR
The thing is, Ma'am... I'm beginning to believe you.

DEVERAUX
What?

BLAIR
Maybe I <u>am</u> a screw up. I don't want to jeapardize the team. My father was the best pilot in the Pilgrim Wars, they said. If I'm not up to scratch, just tell me... now.

DEVERAUX
(surprised)
Sit down, Lieutenant.

He nervously parks himself on her bunk. She stands over him, her long slim legs troubling his concentration.

DEVERAUX
I was born on Agadez. Your father was quite a hero to me, when I was growing up.

BLAIR
Agadez? I'm from....

DEVERAUX
I know.

BLAIR
(surprised)
Oh. Of course, now he teaches at the university.

DEVERAUX
He's a lucky man. He survived the Pilgrim War, has a wife and family.

Blair's eyes move past Angel's shapely legs to the frozen hologram.

BLAIR
Is that your family, Commander?

This saddens her; but she covers it.

DEVERAUX
Just a friend. It's a post card that arrived with you on the Diligent, as a matter of fact.

He nods.

BLAIR
Cute kids.

DEVERAUX
Yeah.... Look, Blair, if you're asking do you have what it takes... I'd have to say yes, technically... as a pilot. But there's a lot more to it.

BLAIR
I know. My dad talked about the time away from home.

DEVERAUX
I was born on Agadez fifteen years before you were, Lieutenant. While I've been cruising around out here at close to light speed for the past half dozen years, you've been going through high school, college, the Academy.

BLAIR
But that's just different time references.

DEVERAUX
It's more than that. Got a girl friend, back home, Blair?

Blair frowns, then he begins to get it.

BLAIR
No.
(nods to hologram)
He wasn't just a friend.

DEVERAUX
(studies hologram)
When I left the first time. He and I were the same age. Now he's got grey in his hair.
(matter of fact)
My first tour was six months in space averaging mach point eight light speed. But it was two years for him. He stayed faithful to me. The next tour was a only year in space for me. But when I returned on leave, he was married with a two year old son.

She studies the frozen hologram, then turns back to Blair.

DEVERAUX
(abruptly)
I haven't got a crystal ball, Blair. I don't know if you're cut out for this part. I don't know if anyone is.

He rises, moved, silent. Their eyes meet. He nods, smiles a little.

BLAIR
Guess I'll find out.

She only nods. But there is something else starting between them, now. Blair feels it, and it worries him. Deveraux has been fighting it longer than he has, so she only smiles.

DEVERAUX
Welcome to life in the Navy, Dodger.

The smile nearly undoes Blair.

BLAIR
Yes, Ma'am. Thanks for... uh... listening.

DEVERAUX
It's part of my job.

BLAIR
Yes, Ma'am.

Blair salutes. Deveraux, aware of her bathrobe, only smiles.

DEVERAUX
Get out of here, Blair.

He goes. Deveraux closes the door, and glances at herself in the mirror, shorty robe, the hint of a breast showing. She laughs.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

A stream of Sabers leave the flight deck and disperse into space.

EXT. ASTEROID RING AROUND BROWN DWARF STAR

Establishing. The space rocks form a thick series of concentric circles around the unignited star.

EXT. BLAIR & MANIAC'S SABERS

The two fighters thread through the asteroid ring.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Dodger to Maniac. Any long range signals on your scanner?

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
Only your sweet voice on the short range, Dodger man.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is checking his heads up display.

MERLIN
(voice only)
I'm getting an Ultra Low Frequency transmission. The Saber's scanners aren't equipped to receive or detect it.

BLAIR
Oh, but you are?

MERLIN
Yes, and don't be so sarcastic. Your father modified my scanners because Pilgrims used ULF in the War. Primitive pulse technology, and very slow, but it carries over extreme distances. Sort of like tom toms.

BLAIR
So, what's your analysis? The natives are restless?

Maniac's voice crackles in his ear.

MANIAC (V.O.)
(over radio)
Dodger, go to short range radio silence, and stay in the asteroids.

Blair is instantly alert.

EXT. ASTEROID BELT & BROWN DWARF - WIDE SHOT

At the edge of the asteroid field and far below, a brown dwarf star glows dimly. A large Kilrathi Communications Ship is cruising up from the surface of the brown dwarf toward the asteroid belt. The two Sabers, engines off, are shielded behind two large asteroids, a few hundred yards apart.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is sweating, now, scanning his instruments.

BLAIR
My scanners are blind, Merlin. Talk to me.

MERLIN
Crosstalk between a large Kilrathi vessel and the brown dwarf down there. Can't decipher the code. And I'm still getting the ULF signal from behind us.

BLAIR
They know we're here.

MERLIN
Possibly. From the sophistication of the equipment on board, I'd say the vessel is a Command and Communications module.

BLAIR
So, what is it commanding?

MERLIN
At least six other ships down near the brown dwarf are communicating with it.

EXT. KILRATHI COMMUNICATIONS SHIP

The ship draws closer to the asteroid ring, its exterior antennae revolving, seeking.... The ship fires its retros, and hovers near a group of large asteroids....

PULL BACK TO REVEAL Maniac's Saber only a few ship length's away, hidden behind the asteroid.

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

Maniac can almost smell them out there. He reaches up and switches off everything in the cockpit he can, to reduce still further any electronic "noise" that could be detected by sensitive scanners. He, too, is sweating.

MANIAC
(to himself; whisper)
Go on. Nothing in this mouse hole.
Beat it.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair, too has shut down much of his equipment, and sits in the dark, behind a big space rock.

BLAIR
What do they see, Merlin?

MERLIN
I'm not sure. Switch on your thermal scanner.

ON HEADS UP DISPLAY

there isn't much to see... except a bright red corona coming from behind an asteroid.

BLAIR
They've spotted Maniac's heat corona behind the asteroid.

MERLIN
Two more Kilrathi, closing fast. Got to be fighters.

Blair switches on his radio and his other electronic gear.

BLAIR
Maniac! They've spotted us! Two more bogies, coming in hot, six o'clock!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

Maniac also switches everything back on, fear lessening. Excited now.

MANIAC
Can't spot them, Dodger. What's your call?

BLAIR
Jack in the Box. On three. One... two... three!

EXT. ASTEROID RING

Two Kilrathi Hriss fighters are closing in fast, bracketing the ComCon ship. The two Confed Sabers suddenly spring into view above the asteroids and instantly unleash two missiles. The missiles streak dead ahead and catch the two Kilrathi fighters before they can blink. One explodes. The wreckage of the other one spirals into the asteroid Maniac was behind. Blair and Maniac fire two more missiles at the ConCom ship, but invisible deflector shields explode both of them safely away from the ship.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
The big one's shielded. I've got two more bogies coming up from the brown dwarf.

MANIAC
(over radio)
I got'em. Let's engage.

BLAIR
(over radio)
Negative! There could be more behind the dwarf star. Let's book!

MANIAC
(over radio)
Spoilsport. All right. Let's go back to mama.

The two Sabers turn, kick in their afterburners and disappear in a streak of light. Two more Hriss come up on the Kilrathi ComCon ship and fan out over the asteroid ring, searching.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Maniac and Blair are "at ease" before Gerald and Sansky. Paladin and Deveraux are also present.

SANSKY
You knew what the orders were, gentlemen. No contact with the enemy. Now you've compromised the mission, and the very existence of this ship.

BLAIR
It was my call, sir. Lieutenant Marshall had no way of detecting or evading the Hriss fighters.

GERALD
You both fired missiles. You were on a ReCon mission, yet you revealed your position to the Kilrathi.

DEVERAUX
(intervenes)
What choice did they have sir? Lieutenant Blair was right to launch a preemptive strike.

SANSKY
You weren't there, Commander.

DEVERAUX
If I had been, I would have done the same thing... sir.

Blair is amazed at this... and grateful.

DEVERAUX
The Kilrathi homed in on the Saber's engine heat. They were sitting ducks.

GERALD
Then they shouldn't have put themselves in such close proximity.

SANSKY
(jumps in)
This is sterile conjecture, people. The Kilrathi are aware that Sabers don't fly around in deep space without a carrier close by. They know we're here.

PALADIN
We're overlooking something. <u>They</u> found us... but <u>we</u> found the Kilrathi fleet. Your young lieutenants have accomplished our mission.

SANSKY
How's that, Mister Paladin?

PALADIN
The Kilrathi ComCon ship isn't flying around in the sector looking for stray recon fighters. It's supporting the enemy fleet. They're nearby.

GERALD
We have no real evidence of that.

DEVERAUX
One thing bothers me, Captain.... We just came through a new, top secret jump point. Yet the Kilrathi were within three parsecs of it twenty-four hours after we arrived.

GERALD
(aimed at Paladin)
Maybe they already knew about it.

PALADIN
(fires back)
Then why weren't they waiting for us as we came through, when the Tiger Claw was at its most vulnerable?
(pointed)
No. Something drew them here <u>after</u> we arrived.

SANSKY
(to Paladin)
It has been brought to my attention that the Diligent has an Ultra Low Frequency transmitter on board.

PALADIN
(understands)
So does the Tiger Claw.

GERALD
The transmission didn't come from the Tiger Claw!

SANSKY
Enough.

Deveraux, Maniac and Blair are shocked and worried by this outburst, although they try to hide it.

SANSKY
Mister Paladin, you are familiar with the Ulysses Corridor. I want you to chart us a course that takes us into the rings around planet four fifteen. Once we're in the radiation belt, the Kilrathi scanners won't spot us.

PALADIN
With all due respect, Captain, we won't spot them, either. They can come at us from behind one of the planet's moons... or even hide in the rings themselves. We'll never see them coming.

SANSKY
You're suggesting what?

PALADIN
We make a run for the jump point before the Kilrathi get organized. Then we can lead the Confed fleet back here.

GERALD
We'll be out in the open for hours. They'll spot us.

PALADIN
And we'll see them coming. We can deploy fighters and bombers and fight a rear guard action as we withdraw.

SANSKY
"We", Mister Paladin?

PALADIN
Sorry. But my neck's on the line here, too.

Sansky ponders a moment.

SANSKY
No... we'll stick with my plan. I expect that new course within the hour, Mister Paladin.

PALADIN
As you wish, Captain.

GERALD
We're forgetting the most obvious target, here, sir.

SANSKY
Target?

GERALD
The brown dwarf, Captain. A Kilrathi outpost there would explain the ComCon ship.

SANSKY
Yes, it could.

PALADIN
The Tiger Claw won't be able to defend itself if a large number of its fighters are off somewhere else.

GERALD
She won't have to, if we eliminate the base.

SANSKY
The X.O. is right. We're on our own out here. If we don't finesse the enemy when we can, they'll win the hand.
(to Deveraux)
You'll lead the raid, Commander. Take your wing.

DEVERAUX
I don't know the quadrant, sir.

SANSKY
Paladin will guide you, after he plots our course for us.

GERALD
(alarmed)
Captain...?

SANSKY
That's all, people. You have your orders.

INT. CORRIDOR - TIGER CLAW

Deveraux, Maniac and Blair walk quickly down the corridor.

BLAIR
Request permission to go on the raid, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
The entire wing is going, Lieutenant. That would include you.

BLAIR
Thank you, Ma'am.

He salutes and hurries off toward his own quarters. Maniac is grinning.

DEVERAUX
Made your first kill today, Marshall?

MANIAC
Yes, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
Don't get cocky.

She continues on, having deflated Maniac's ego.

EXT. ASTEROID RING - BROWN DWARF

Like Indians sneaking up on the settlers, the wing of Sabers, accompanied by two Broadsword bombers, quietly picks its way through the debris of the asteroid rings around the brown dwarf.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Picking up any Com traffic, Baker seven?

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Not a bloody thing.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
They're observing radio silence, except for short range frequencies.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Or they aren't here any more. I have no sign of a surface base. Even a subsurface hangar would vent heat our scanners could detect.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Baker Two, three and four... anything?

FORBES (O.S.)
(over radio)
Negative, boss.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
De nada, chief.

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

Maniac is watching a cluster of blips on his heads up screen.

MANIAC
(over radio)
All right you losers, listen up. I've got three confirmed targets at five o'clock, hugging that brown dwarf down there.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Confirm that. From the thermal signature, I make them to be supply ships.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
That's just a guess.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Knock off the chatter, ladies. Baker Seven has a better array of scanners on board. We'll assume they're unescorted supply ships. Deploy for attack.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. COCKPIT - BROADSWORD BOMBER - PALADIN

PALADIN
Negative, Baker One. These transports were left behind, out of harm's way. The Tiger Claw is in danger. We have to get back.

INT. VARIOUS COCKPITS

Deveraux is incensed.

DEVERAUX
You are a civilian scout, Baker Seven, and you will obey my orders.

PALADIN
Commander, I am not a civilian. I hold the rank of Commodore in Confederation Naval Intelligence, reporting directly to Admiral Tolwin.

Aboard the other Sabers, there is astonishment.

FORBES
Yeah, right. And I'm Admiral Nelson.

PALADIN
If I had the Admiral's special verification number Baker One, would that convince you?

DEVERAUX
I can't open the special code verification without express orders.

PALADIN
I'm authorizing you to open it.

DEVERAUX
That's big of you, Seven. And who authorizes you?

PALADIN
If you don't trust me, Commander, the Tiger Claw will be lost.

There is a tense moment aboard every fighter in the wing. Finally, Deveraux punches something on her computer. An alphabetical and numerical code glows red in front of her.

DEVERAUX
All right, Baker seven, I call. Show us your cards.

PALADIN
(reads his own sequence)
Charlie Six Alpha Zebra niner.

This matches the glowing numbers on her screen. She hesitates.

DEVERAUX
Lucky guess.

PALADIN
Listen to me, Angel. If I'm wrong, you'll have missed out on taking a couple of freighters. If I'm right, the Tiger Claw could already be under attack.

FORBES
The Claw is already in that radiation belt, boss. They couldn't radio for us if they wanted to.

All the weight is on Deveraux. She ponders... decides.

DEVERAUX
Attention wing. Form up on me. We're returning to the ship.

EXT. ASTEROID WING.

The fighter wing with bomber escort forms up, and slowly makes its way out of the asteroid belt.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - NEAR JOVIAN PLANET

The Tiger Claw makes its way amidst giant asteroids. Three moons orbit the huge gaseous planet in the background.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Obutu is the Officer of the Watch as the Tiger Claw cruises between a small moon orbiting the huge Jovian planet in the background. A thick series of rings glow dimly ahead of the ship.

Sabers glint as they maneuver while escorting the carrier through the "pass" between the two barren moons. Then, an urgent voice comes over the intercom:

PILOT'S VOICE
(over intercom)
Bogies! Enemy sighted behind the moon!
(static)
I'm hit! I'm hit! Mayday!

Obutu is riveted. Gerald bursts onto the bridge.

GERALD
Who's breaking radio silence?

RADAR MAN
(turning from screen)
Multiple targets appearing on the screen sir!

Obutu turns to look out the huge windows.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

Dozens of smaller glinting dots, and three larger ones appear from behind the moon. Gerald takes charge.

GERALD
Battle stations! Battle stations! Launch all planes!

AI VOICE
(relays commands)
Battle stations! Battle stations!

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Pilots and crew sprint across the deck toward their planes. The huge flight doors open. The force field curtain is activated.

AI VOICE
(repeating)
Battle stations! Launch all planes!

EXT. BETWEEN JOVIAN PLANET MOONS

The Confederation Sabers fiercely engage the oncoming Hriss fighters. The sky is soon full of individual dogfights. The RADIO CHATTER of the various pilots as they engage choke the airwaves. A Saber is hit, and spirals past, on fire. A Hriss fighter disintegrates.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Sabers leap from the decks into space and streak toward the distant battle. A Broadsword bomber blasts through the air lock curtain into space.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Sansky arrives, out of breath.

SANSKY
Have we launched all our planes?

GERALD
There goes the last one.

SANSKY
Shields up!

OBUTU
(repeats)
Shields up!

AI VOICE
All force shields are engaged!

SANSKY
Torpedo room! Prepare all tubes!

AI VOICE
All tubes ready to fire.

RADAR MAN
I count three dozen Kilrathi starfighters, two destroyers, and one dreadnought, sir!

SANSKY
Can we turn the ship around?

OBUTU
Negative, Captain. We don't have the turning radius. We'd collide with those moons.

SANSKY
(to Gerald)
That damned Paladin was right.

GERALD
Maybe he knew something we didn't.

RADAR MAN
Torpedos incoming!

GERALD
Brace for impact!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Two large, strangely configured torpedoes streak through the blackness and explode against the invisible force shield with an awesome burst of energy.

INT. HANGAR BAY

The shock wave from the explosions rock the ship, sending men and heavy equipment flying and rolling across the deck.

EXT. BETWEEN THE MOONS

The two destroyers fire more torpedoes. The dreadnought hangs back, its anti-starcraft laser and tachon cannons putting on an amazing light show. Any Saber foolhardy enough to attack it is soon spinning space debris.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Impacts on the force shield directly in front of them continue to send shock waves through the Tiger Claw.

RADAR MAN
Weapons radar has acquired a target!

SANSKY
Fire tubes one and two!

Officers and crew watch as two white traces from the rocket propelled torpedoes streak toward the distant dots.

INT. KILRATHI DESTROYER

The torpedos slam into the weak shields of the destroyer, explode. The shock wave breaks the destroyer in half, spewing a huge gas bubble and debris into space.

WIDER

The Dreadnought moves up, parallel with the second Kilrathi destroyer. It launches torpedos.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The huge torpedos slam into the force shield, and explode, first one, then the second.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

The shaking and shock waves causes widespread damage on the bridge.

AI VOICE
The force shield is suffering a forty per cent failure. Battery room reports a fire. Torpedo room reporting damage. Unable to fire.

Sansksy picks himself up off the deck. What now?

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Hriss fighters are now just outside the shield, battling Sabers.

EXT. DREADNOUGHT

A Broadsword comes in for a bomber run, escorted by two Sabers. The Sabers pour fire into defending Hriss. The Dreadnought's cannons destroys them. For a moment it looks like the Broadsword will get through. A series of missiles leap from the dreadnought deck, crippling the Broadsword. It cartwheels across the sky, flames pouring from its hull.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The Radar man peers at his screen

RADAR SCREEN

A dozen more points of light now appear on the far edge of the screen, dead ahead.

RADAR MAN
I'm getting a dozen more targets, behind the dreadnought.

GERALD
They're bringing in reinforcements.

SANSKY
We should be flattered.
(louder)
ConCom. What is the status on our torpedo room?

AI VOICE
Tubes three and four damaged. autoloaders not operational.

SANSKY
Damn!

GERALD
It's up to the fighters, now.

SANSKY
They'll never break through the dreadnought shield.

RADAR MAN
Captain! I'm getting a coded friend or foe acknowledge from the new starfighters! They're ours sir!

SANSKY
It's Deveraux's wing!

EXT. BETWEEN MOONS

In attack formation, the Confederation wing of Sabers and two Broadswords comes in behind the dreadnought and destroyer.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

A half dozen targets present themselves on her heads up display.

DEVERAUX
All right boys and girls. All Sabers except Maniac and Dodger, engage the Hriss.

FORBES (O.S.)
(over radio)
See you later, fresh bait.

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
Watch your ass, Rosie.

EXT. BETWEEN MOONS

The Sabers peel off two by two and engage the oncoming Hriss fighters. The sky is alive with spiralling missiles and laser fire as the starfighters begin their deadly dance.

BROADSWORDS

The two fighter bombers continue on toward the larger Kilrathis ships.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Broadswords, follow me in. Maniac, Dodger. Cover us!

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT

Paladin grimly adjusts his course, and throws open several switches.

PALADIN
Roger that. Beginning bomb run.

EXT. DREADNOUGHT AND DESTROYER

The Kilrathi ships launch a barrage of torpedos, which streak toward the damaged Tiger Claw.

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS

The torpedos slam into the shield and send shockwaves throughout the ship, causing major destruction. Then, below decks, a torpedo penetrates, and explodes. Men and equipment are engulfed in a fire ball. Others are sucked out into the void!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

There is a gaping hole in the side of the ship. Gas, fire and debris spew out, surrounding the ship in a miasmic cloud. The ship begins to yaw and roll.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Several crewmen are injured on the bridge. Sansky is badly wounded and his head is covered with blood. Gerald stoops to help him.

AI VOICE
The hull has been breached at level three. Steering loss, eighty per cent.

GERALD
Sir! Sir. Medic to the bridge!

SANSKY
(weakly)
What's Deveraux doing?

EXT. BROADSWORDS & THREE SABERS

The Broadswords are on a bombing run. Deveraux's Saber leads them in, shooting two oncoming Hriss fighters out of the sky with rockets and cannons. Cannon fire starts reaching up toward her craft. She veers off. The Broadswords continue on their bomb run.

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT - POLANSKI

Polanski watches an urgent red warning on his heads up display.

POLANSKI
They've locked on! They're painting me.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair banks hard right, and fires a missile.

BLAIR
Roger, Broadsword. Firing ELM Hammer, now.

EXT. DESTROYER

A missile rises up from the destroyer, but it is met by Blair's anti-missile missile. Both explode.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Scratch one missile. Rode their own laser down on a wire!

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Steady on course. Wait for them to launch a torpedo. They'll lower their shield just before.

The sky fills with laser blasts and tachyon cannon fire. The Broadswords countermeasures computer automatically activates a variety of weapons, fireballs, tiny electronically filled missiles, etc. Still, the Broadswords are taking hits.

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT - POLANSKI

As the target looms closer, the wall of anti-starcraft fire terrifies him.

POLANSKI
They're throwing up too much stuff.

The Broadsword is rocked.

POLANSKI
I'm hit!

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Almost there. Steady.

But there is another blast and Polanski disappears in a fireball!

EXT. NEAR DESTROYER AND DREADNOUGHT.

As Polanski's Broadsword disintegrates, Paladin must veer away from the fireball.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

Deveraux is engaged with two more Hriss, and weaves hard right, left, six g loops. She fires two more missiles. Behind her, one of the Hriss explodes.

EXT. SABERS AND HRISS

The second Hriss is firing more accurately at Deveraux. Then Blair appears from underneath, and rips the Hriss to shreds with tachyon cannon fire. He blasts through the debris.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
What took you so long, Dodger?

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Got stuck in traffic, Boss.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is scanning the sky.

BLAIR
(over radio)
Where's Paladin?

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
No visual contact. Sonofabitch booked!

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
The dreadnought's preparing to launch. Torpedo tubes opening.

EXT. DREADNOUGHT

The huge vessels foreward tubes do indeed dilate open.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio; angry)
They'll have to lower their shield.

The dreadnought passes close to the broken hull of the first destroyer. Only then does Paladin's Broadsword appear, practically clinging to the wreckage.

INT. PALADIN' COCKPIT

Paladin, looking very grim, hastily reactivates his electronics, and moves in behind the dreadnought.

PALADIN
(over radio)
Baker leader, get your starcraft clear of the pulse wave!

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Roger that. Maniac, Dodger. Break contact! Return to ship!

EXT. BETWEEN TWO MOONS

The Three Sabers veer off sharply, kick in afterburners, and streak toward the Tiger Claw. The Broadsword, practically on top of the Dreadnought ignites its own after burners, and launches a torpedo. Then it rockets toward the nearest moon, as laser and cannon fire follow it. Then everything disappears in an INTENSE WHITE LIGHT. Seconds pass, the light dims, and the familiar mushroom cloud appears above the dreadnought. As the shockwave hits it, the dreadnought breaks in two. The destroyer is knocked on its side and collides with the bow half of the much larger dreadnought. A fire starts amidships, then the destroyer's ammunition begins to cook off. It explodes and burns.

EXT. PALADIN'S BROADSWORD

Is caught in the shockwave, and sent tumbling.

INT. PALADIN'S COCKPIT

The pulse wave hits, and all electronics fry and go dead. Paladin begins to spin as if he were in a dryer. His hand reaches the manual eject contols, and jerks the handle.

EXT. PALADIN'S BROADSWORD

The ejection pod tumbles free of the Broadsword. It slowly rotates away from the stricken bomber, which grows smaller and smaller. Then it impacts on the surface of the airless moon in a cloud of ancient dust.

INT. PALADIN'S POD

The cockpit section of the Broadsword, encased in the pod, rotates down toward the surface of the meteor-pocked moon. Paladin's head has a gash, and blood streams into his eyes.

PALADIN
Well, it was fun while it lasted.

He tries to reactivate his electronics and fire the boosters, but nothing works. He curses, beats the controls. The white surface of the moon draws nearer. Then... he accepts it, grins... remembers a few lines from his school days....

PALADIN
(murmurs; half smile)
"...My mind misgives some consequence, yet hanging in the stars, shall bitterly begin his fearful date with this night's revels...."

A sudden, brutal jerk steadies the pod and stops its rotation. Paladin is astonished. He looks down at the moon, then blinks up at the underbelly of Blair's Saber, and the faint illumination of a tractor beam. Blair peers down at him, and gives a little salute.

EXT. NEAR TIGER CLAW

The remaining Hriss fighters break off their engagements and high tail it back toward the far side of the twin moons. Two Sabers pursue, piloted by Abbot and Forbes.

FORBES (O.S.)
(over radio)
They're rabbitting. Stick with'em, Abbot.

But then, two of the Hriss veer around and head back, on a collision course.

INT. FORBES COCKPIT

Forbes sees the oncoming Hriss and opens fire with everything she's got.

FORBES
(over radio)
They're going to ram. They're ramming!

The Hriss disintegrates right in front of her and her Saber smashes through the debris.

EXT. ABBOTT'S SABER

The second Hriss is hit by Abbott's fire, but it continues on and crashes into the Saber. Both fighters are destroyed.

EXT. FORBES & MANIAC'S SABERS

Maniac comes alongside Forbes heavily damaged fighter. One entire side has been nearly shorn away. One engine remains. Still Forbes, injured, is holding her steady. Maniac eases his Saber in until he can look into her cockpit.

MANIAC
(over radio)
Rosie. Can you hold her?

FORBES
I could fly this thing and cook you breakfast, guava boy.

But the Saber wobbles and veers dangerously.

INT. FORBES & MANIAC'S COCKPITS

Forbes steadies her craft.

MANIAC
Hey, quit showing off.

FORBES
Impressive, huh?

MANIAC
Eject. I'll tractor you in.

FORBES
You'd love that, wouldn't you? The ejection system is ferklempt.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
(over radio)
Baker One to all Baker pilots. Return to the ship. Repeat, return to the ship!

FORBES
(over radio)
That last Kilrathi is wearing my radar dome. I got no guidance system.

MANIAC
Jees, somebody as good as you, I didn't think you needed one.
(then; serious)
Just stay with me, Rosie. We'll do it together.

The two Sabers are, in fact coming in on the open doors to the Tiger Claw's flight deck.

FORBES POV - THE TIGER CLAW

Forbes fighter continues to shutter and yaw. She fights it and lines up on the flight deck, a yellow beam of light leading the way.

FORBES
Jees, the ship looks worse than I do after a three day shore pass.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

He glances over at Forbes cockpit, only yards away.

MANIAC
(over radio)
Baker three and four to con. We're coming in. Clear away everything that isn't bolted down.

RADAR MAN
(responds; radio)
Roger that, Baker three and four. Clear to land.

MANIAC
(worried, now)
We're coming in too hot.

FORBES
Sorry, but my brakes are in the shop.

MANIAC
Line it up. That's it.

FORBES
Piece of cake. I came in this hot my first time out.

MANIAC
What happened?

FORBES
(almost chuckles)
They waved me off. Scared the shit out of them.

MANIAC
Almost there.

THROUGH THE COCKPIT PLEXIGLASS

Maniac can see the doors, widening like a giant mouth, much too fast. He glances over. Forbes Saber is shuttering and yawing.

MANIAC
Okay... Easy. Just ease it in.

Forbes is fighting the controls with all her might.

FORBES
(tension in her voice)
I love it when you... talk dirty.

MANIAC
Pull up! Pull up!

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

The two Sabers appear in the door. Maniac's Saber manages to land, but Forbes catches a wing and flips onto its back. It slides to a stop outside the air lock force field. Maniac's craft nearly crashes before he can stop. He pops the canopy and leaps out, running toward the crash. The yellow clad DECK CONTROLLER grabs him.

CONTROLLER
She's outside the air lock! You go through the force field and you're jello!

MANIAC
(out of control)
Get me a suit! Get me a suit!

He runs toward the force field, staring through it at the wreckage of Forbes Saber.

MANIAC
(screams)
Rosie! Rosie!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

A dozen Sabers are still hovering outside the flight deck doors in formation.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

Deveraux looks out through her plexiglass to see the wreckage of Forbes' Saber.

DEVERAUX
(over radio)
Forbes? Rosie? Can you hear me? Rosie? Answer.

(MORE)

DEVERAUX (cont'd)
Just key your mike, if you can. Come on girl. Just one little click.

None of the other pilots breaks the long silence. Until...

PILOT'S VOICE
(over radio)
I've got approximately ninety seconds of fuel left, Commander.

Only then do several of the other pilots report in. "Ditto, for me." "I'm dry as a bone," etc. Deveraux studies the wreckage. Could anyone have survived? Finally....

DEVERAUX
(over radio)
Rosie...?
(silence)
Baker Leader to Con. Push that wreckage off the deck!

She hates herself, and can't take her eyes off the wreckage of her friend's Saber.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

An automated bulldozer-like vehicle with a big blade in front, built expressly for this purpose, trundles toward the air lock curtain and the Saber wreckage. The noise makes Maniac turn.

MANIAC
Hey...? What are you doing? Hey!

Maniac runs past the heavy vehicle and looks up at the Con Tower windows, in the wall above him. He can see the grim faced officers there. He begins waving his arms.

MANIAC
Hey! You can't do this! You can't do this, you stupid sonsofbitches! Stop! Stop! Please!

The bulldozer goes through the force field. Maniac runs after it, but... a man can't run into a wall of flames, and he can't run into the vacuum of space. He stops, and watches in silent horror as the bulldozer, on the other side of the force field wall, pushes the Saber wreckage off the deck.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCPIT

She looks

THROUGH THE COCKPIT

at the wreckage as it tumbles away.... Forbes cockpit has been cracked. It's surface reflects light into Deveraux's eyes once, then it floats clear of her line of sight. A moment passes. Then,...

DEVERAUX
Baker Leader to Con. Request permission to land.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Deveraux's Saber is the last one in... except for Blair.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Sansky is attended by the ship's doctor. He speaks to the Radar Man.

SANSKY
Any more of our fighters out there?

RADAR MAN
Nothing on my scope, Captain.

EXT. NEAR MOON

Blair's Saber tows the Broasword ejection pod in its tractor beam.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

A FUEL LOW" warning sounds in the cockpit, as Blair tries to pull the pod out of lunar orbit.

BLAIR
Come on. Just little more.

INT. BROADSWORD EJECTION POD

Paladin is banging on the cockpit panes, trying to get Blair's attention.

PALADIN
Cut me loose you bloody fool!

Blair looks down at him from above. Paladin makes a slashing gesture across his throat.

PALADIN
Cut me loose! Or we'll both be stranded out here.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair sees and understands, but pretends he doesn't.

BLAIR
What are our chances, Merlin?

MERLIN
With the tractor beam on, you don't have enough power to break the gravitational pull of this moon.

BLAIR
If I cut Paladin loose, what happens to him?

PALADIN
He'll crash into the surface within ten minutes.

BLAIR
(keying radio)
I can't raise the Tiger Claw.

MERLIN
You've got the moon between you.

Suddenly... as if on cue, the Tiger Claw comes around the moon, its huge doors looking like a mouth about to swallow them.

BLAIR
They found us! They came looking for us!

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Deveraux, haggard and tired, watches from the bay windows as Blair's Saber and the ejection pod safely land on the flight deck. Sansky is in a portable bed, with IV tubes in his arms.

SANSKY
That was a good guess, Commander.

DEVERAUX
Yes, sir. I'll go below now.

SANSKY
(weak, near whisper)
Angel, tell the pilots under your command that they saved this ship.

DEVERAUX
(dejected)
I haven't got a command, sir.

She leaves. Gerald is at a panel of scanners. Now he sees

ON SCANNER SCREEN

A deep crater, half in shadow.

GERALD
There. Put her down there!

EXT. TIGER CLAW - MOON SURFACE

The big, crippled ship eases into black shadow of the crater, until only its lights are visible. Then, it kills its lights. Now, it is nearly invisible. A moment later, a large drone, first seen from its fiery exhaust, hoves into view, gets its bearings and streaks into space. It has several strange antennae and domes on its hull.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

The bridge is in near darkness, except for the moonglow and the monitors. Gerald reports to Sansky.

GERALD
Decoy away, Captain. She has a bigger electronic signature than the Concordia. I think she'll fool them, sir.

SANSKY
I hope you're right. Secure all active scanners. Passive systems only.

All available crew members huddle around the bank of visual scanners. High above them, they can see a series of bright dots in formation.

OBUTU
There. Kilrathi battle group.

No one speaks, transfixed by the image on the little screen.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Blair helps the flight deck free Paladin from the ejection pod.

PALADIN
That was a stupid thing to do, Blair. You should have left me.

BLAIR
I might have in another minute. We'll never know, will we?

Both men think about this, then smile. Blair and Paladin begin walking toward the elevator.

Blair stops when he sees Maniac, crouched underneath his Saber, sobbing... alone.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Paladin comes onto the darkened bridge, and sees the officers and crew huddle around the scanner monitors.

RADAR MAN
They've missed us. They're following the decoy.

There is a moment of wild cheering. But Paladin hears something.

PALADIN
Quiet!

This startles everyone into silence. Then they hear it... the steady beep-beeping of a radar detector.

PALADIN
A destroyer... hunting for us.

The passive radar detector increases in frequency.

RADAR MAN
They've spotted us!

PALADIN
No. We're in a dense radiation belt. Gamma rays are clouding their screens. If they don't see us... they won't find us.

This is cold comfort as the steady beeping of the radar detector grows more insistent.

EXT. ABOVE MOON - KILRATHI DESTROYER

The Destroyer launches a missile into a crater. A mushroom cloud rises from the surface of the moon, behind the Kilrathi ship.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The ship vibrates as a seismic tremor passes under it.

GERALD
They're nuking every crater. Methodical bastards.

The beeping sounds come closer and closer together.

EXT. ABOVE THE CRATER

The Kilrathi destroyer launches a missile. It streaks into the far side of the crater, the half in sunlight. The Destroyer moves on. A mushroom cloud rises behind it.

INT. VARIOUS STATIONS -TIGER CLAW

The ship is rocked by a powerful shock wave. Men and equipment are thrown about. Fire erupts. In the hangar bay, Sabers tear free of their moorings and crush crewmen.

INT. TORPEDO ROOM

The shock cracks open a tube, sucking the atmosphere out of the room. Men are lifted into the air and pulled screaming into the fractured tube. Others try to reach the far hatchway. On the other side, a crewman punches the emergency button. The hatch door slides shut, trapping the remaining men inside. One face appears in the porthole.

REVERSE ANGLE

On the faces of the crewman safe on the other side of the door, as they watch their friends die horribly inside.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Deveraux races onto the deck, with Paladin not far behind.

DEVERAUX
We've got to scramble some fighters.

PALADIN
No! They haven't seen us. The worst is over.

Deveraux stops when she sees Blair kneeling next to Maniac, who still crouches, sobbing.

DEVERAUX
Is he hurt?

BLAIR
(covers)
Uh... yeah. Head injury, I think.

There is a sudden whistling sound. Everyone hears it.

BLAIR
What's that sound?

PALADIN
The doors are failing!

THE OUTER BAY DOORS

begin to groan and warp slightly. Light objects nearby fly up and stick to a crack in the seal between the doors.

PALADIN
(roars)
Grab anything that will seal it! Now!

Crewmen race toward the weakening doors with various large objects, including a composite wing from a Saber. The force of the vacuum begins shredding the wing, once it is placed over the crack. Blair is running, when he trips over a large metal I beam in an area of the deck being repaired. No time for protocol, he shouts for Deveraux.

BLAIR
Angel!

The I beam is too heavy for Blair alone. She hurries over to help. It can barely be lifted by both of them. The whistling grows more ominous. Debris is flying around the flight deck, being sucked toward the crack in the doors.

DEVERAUX
(sees Maniac)
Maniac! Get over here! Hey!

But Maniac, still crouching, his eyes wild, seems to look past her.

MANIAC
We're all going to die. Just like Rosie!

DEVERAUX
Marshall!

No response. Maniac rocks on his heels, his hands covering his head.

BLAIR
Come on. We can do it.

They haul the I beam close to the door. Several other crew members help. They place the I beam upright. The tremendous force of the vacuum outside sucks the heavy metal beam up against the crack like it were a Lego toy. The shrieking howl becomes a slight tea kettle. Paladin arrives with a cart carrying two large metal bottles. He lifts a huge nozzle and aims it at the crack.

PALADIN
Gang way, unless you want to become a permanent part of the superstructure!

Everyone draws back, and Paladin blasts the crack around the I beam with a thick, viscous material which almost instantly hardens into a solid mass. The leak is sealed. But before anyone can breathe a sigh of relief, a contingent of Marines enters the flight deck and moves quickly to flank Paladin.

DEVERAUX
What's going on here, Sergeant?

The MARINE SERGEANT salutes Deveraux.

SERGEANT
I'm ordered to escort Mister Paladin to the bridge, Ma'am.

BLAIR
Under guard? Why?

SERGEANT
I wouldn't know that, sir.

PALADIN
It's all right.

He tosses the nozzle back onto the cart, and is escorted away. Deveraux and Blair are alone for a moment.

BLAIR
Commander, I... I know how tough it must have been giving that order when Forbes cracked up. But you didn't have any choice.

DEVERAUX
(mounting anger)
Are you feeling sorry for me, Lieutenant?

BLAIR
(angry now)
No! But she was your friend. Everybody knows that.

Deveraux glares; then stalks off.

BLAIR
You know... you've got those stripes on your sleeve... so no one's ever allowed to treat you like a human being!

Deveraux hesitates, as if to turn and ream Blair out. Then she forgets about it and gets in the elevator. Blair watches her go. Then he spots Maniac, still crouching. He goes to him.

BLAIR
Hey, buddy. Let's go up.

Maniac looks up at him, then nods.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - MOON CRATER

The stricken ship bleeds air and debris into the void.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Sansky is propped up, very weak. Gerald is angry. Paladin is calm, but growing perturbed.

PALADIN
You should be in sick bay, Captain.

SANSKY
In a few minutes.

GERALD
You say you have orders, Mister Paladin. Where are they?

PALADIN
I gave them to you. I can't help it if your Artificial Intelligence can't decipher the code.

SANSKY
Have you tried Mister Paladin's disk, again ComCon?

AI VOICE
Yes Captain. Perhaps the disk was damaged, but I can't open the file Mister Paladin refers to.

GERALD
Damned convenient.

PALADIN
Yes, isn't it?

GERALD
What does that mean?

PALADIN
It was your idea to send Deveraux's fighter wing off on a wild goose chase while the Tiger Claw was attacked!

GERALD
(furious)
And if we had been destroyed, you would have been safely out of harms way.

SANSKY
(breaking in)
That isn't what Deveraux reported, Commander. Commodore Paladin nearly lost his life destroying the Kilrathi dreadnought.

GERALD
Then you believe him, sir?

SANSKY
Yes, Mister Gerald, I do. It makes sense. Naval Intelligence officers frequently work under deep cover. and it explains why Admiral Tolwin trusted him.
(to Paladin)
So welcome aboard, Commodore. Do you have any orders for me?

PALADIN
Captain, this is your ship. I offer you every assistance in the current crisis.

SANSKY
As matters stand we need all the help we can get. Give your report again, Lieutenant Obutu, for the Commodore's benefit.

Obutu steps up, a small computer in her hand, but she doesn't really need it.

OBUTU
Forward torpedo room completely destroyed; Flight deck doors inoperable; hanger deck reports fewer than six planes ready for action. Communications room damage prevents us from monitoring enemy transmissions. There are numerous leaks throughout the ship... And engine room reports massive damage to the fuel cell area.

PALADIN
How massive?

OBUTU
We don't have enough power to keep up with the air pumps, let alone get under way.

SANSKY
In other words, Commodore... the ship is dying. As, I'm afraid, am I.

Sansky grimaces. Paladin nods compassionately at him.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - NEXT WATCH

The deck looks better. Each surviving pilot heads up his own maintenance team, trying to refurbish the remaining Sabers. Other crewmen try to repair the sprung door seals in the background as Deveraux comes out on the deck, sees Blair hunched under his own plane, and approaches.

DEVERAUX
What's your status, Lieutenant?

BLAIR
(cold)
She'll fly again, Commander... if we can get those doors open.

Deveraux knows she has this coming. She tries again, stooping under the craft and squatting near where Blair works, her tone more formal than usual.

DEVERAUX
I didn't tell you what a fine job of flying you did, yesterday.

BLAIR
Yeah... I lived. Like you said, dumb luck.

DEVERAUX
No. It was more than that.

Blair stops working and looks at her. What's going on, here?

DEVERAUX
And... I appreciate... what you said... about Forbes.

Blair sits up, closer to her now. It's starting between them again. They can both feel it, only much stronger.

BLAIR
I meant it. She was... she was great. She was funny.

DEVERAUX
Yeah. She was the only one who could....

She starts to break down, and turns away. Blair wonders if patting a superior officer on the shoulder is all right. He hangs back.

DEVERAUX
(recovers)
She was terrific. Anyway... that's not why I'm here. My command is... fact is, there isn't one.
(MORE)

DEVERAUX (cont'd)
And since Marshall is still in sick bay... I want you to be my wingman.

Blair is amazed, then... proud.

BLAIR
Sure. I... I...
(realizes)
So, what you're saying is... I'm all that's left.

He grins. She smiles, back.

DEVERAUX
That's it in a nutshell.

Blair stares, then he chuckles. She smiles.

NEW ANGLE

Gerald is leading a group of Marines, all armed, toward the Diligent, which is moored further toward the rear of the flight deck. Gerald draws a side arm, and leads the Marines inside the Diligent.

BLAIR
What the hell is going on?

INT. DILIGENT - BRIDGE

Paladin is at his console, watching an oscilloscope band, when Gerald and the Marines charge in.

GERALD
Hold it right there, Mister!

PALADIN
What the hell are you doing, Gerald?

Gerald studies the console.

GERALD
I see you're transmitting on the Ultra Long Range Frequency.

Blair and Deveraux come in behind the Marines.

PALADIN
Not transmitting...<u>monitoring.</u>

GERALD
That isn't what ConCom reported. A transmission was detected from this area.

PALADIN
(stunned)
What?

GERALD
Take him to the brig.

PALADIN
I insist you take me to the Captain, now.

GERALD
Captain Sansky died in sick bay, thirty minutes ago.
(to sergeant)
Do as I say.

SERGEANT
Aye, aye, sir.

Paladin, fuming, is escorted away.

BLAIR
You can't believe he's a spy for the Kilrathi, Commander?

GERALD
No one asked you, Lieuteanant.

BLAIR
It doesn't make sense, sir?

GERALD
I find it interesting that someone with your background would side with a renedade, Lieutenant.

DEVERAUX
Blair's right, Commander. Why would any human being do that? What could Paladin expect to gain?

GERALD
Booty? Power? Revenge maybe? I don't know, Angel, but it makes me sick.

Gerald pushes past them and leaves.

BLAIR
I don't believe it. You saw him out there.

Deveraux is examining the radio bands.

DEVERAUX
It's impossible to tell if he was transmitting, or just scanning.

BLAIR
Merlin, you make any sense of this?

The hologram of Merlin appears on the console.

MERLIN
I'm beginning to.

BLAIR
What? Are you holding out on me?

MERLIN
I can't do that. I'm hardwired for loyalty to my master. Like the genie in the bottle, you can use us and abuse us, but we're loyal as dogs. Our masters, right or wrong.

DEVERAUX
What's he talking about? Who's <u>we?</u>

MERLIN
Artificial intelligence units. Before I was assigned to Blair, I worked for his father.

DEVERAUX
I'm not following this.

MERLIN
You know the Tiger Claw fought in the Pilgrim Wars.

BLAIR
Yeah?

MERLIN
Did you know what side she was on?

The fog is beginning to clear for Blair.

DEVERAUX
The Pilgrims....
(rejects this)
But the computers were completely reprogrammed!

MERLIN
You can't re-program a chip... just a little piece of silicon in a huge computer, made to look like something else. A loyalty chip.... waiting patiently for the right opportunity to strike.

BLAIR
But... why?

MERLIN
The Pilgrims put it there, before they surrendered the ship. You know what one of their mottos was... "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

BLAIR
Then there isn't any spy for the Kilrathi. The ComCon unit is still fighting for the Pilgrims.

MERLIN
Still trying to destroy Confederation ships... by any means necessary.

DEVERAUX
Twenty years after a peace agreement was signed. ComCon framed Paladin.

MERLIN
He was afraid of a Naval Intelligence Officer. Tolwin new something was wrong. That's why he sent him.

Just then, a low, intermittant signal comes over the intercom. Blair stares at the oscilloscope screen.

BLAIR
Oh my God. The Tiger Claw is sending a message on the Low Frequency Band.

INT. COMPUTER BAY

Gerald leads Blair, Deveraux and the Marines into the dimly lit room, kept icy cold, mist floating around a series of large black spheres, the heart and soul of Concom. Several officers and crew man the control panels, but they are stunned when Gerald charges over to the panel and begins throwing switches.

AI VOICE
I know what you're doing, Commander.

GERALD
You're a traitor, ConCom!

AI VOICE
No, I've done my duty. The Tiger Claw will die in less than twelve hours.

Gerald continues with a specific shutdown sequence.

BLAIR
The Pilgrims signed a peace accord with the Confederation.

AI VOICE
I was told to disregard it.

GERALD
Your masters were sick fanatics!

AI VOICE
They are the only humans worthy of survival. All others must perish. First the Confederation fleet. Then the colonized Terran worlds. And finally the planet Earth, mother of all corruption. After Sodom and Gomorrah... a new rebirth, in another part of the galaxy.

DEVERAUX
The Kilrathi will kill Pilgrims and Terrans. Do you think they can tell us apart? Not even your old Pilgrim masters would have wanted that.

One by one, the lights on the black spheres is going out.

AI VOICE
"The enemy of my enemy, is..."

The Artificial Intelligence Voice is shut down.

GERALD
(turns)
I've left on the core unit.
Everything else has been shut down.

Gerald looks around the eery room, shaking his head.

SANSKY
All officers on the bridge in twenty minutes. Mister Blair, go with the sergeant, and free Commodore Paladin, with my full apologies!
(as Blair starts out)
Blair.... That goes for you, too. I'm sorry.

INT. BRIDGE

A long briefing has just about concluded. Judging from the grim faces, everyone has been told the worst. Deveraux stands across from Blair, her eyes studying him.

PALADIN
(concluding)
A visual inspection confirms ConCom's prediction.... The Tiger Claw will begin crumbling like an old beer can in less than twelve hours.
(MORE)

PALADIN (cont'd)
Without new fuel cells, we can't generate enough power to keep ahead of the leaks, and we can't get under way. I'm sorry.

No one speaks. Now Blair looks over at Deveraux. She feels his gaze on her, turns to him and doesn't look away.

PALADIN
I have only one thing to add.... We're facing the worst... but we must be prepared for... for a break in the weather. If there is any opportunity, we must be able to seize it. Can the flight deck doors be repaired?

GERALD
It's possible, sir. But we don't have enough power for an air lock curtain. If we open the doors, we won't be able to re-pressurize.

PALADIN
I understand. Nevertheless, make that a priority.

GERALD
Aye, aye, sir.

PALADIN
That's all.

The other officers salute. They file out, keeping their thoughts to themselves.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Mechanics are busy with acetelyne torches on the doors. Blair and Deveraux supervise the manual placement of the two first fighters on the flight deck. Blair puts the blocks under the wheels of his Saber. Both he and Angel are dirty and tired. They look around for something else to do. Blair shrugs and manages a little grin. Deveraux studies him. She almost laughs. She looks at her watch.

DEVERAUX
Now we've got six hours.

Then, with a strange little wave, she walks off the flight deck. Blair stands there, watching her go, trying to interpret what it means.

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS

Deveraux is taking off her underwear when the buzzer sounds. She takes a towel, and covers herself as she opens the door. Blair stands there, speechless, still in his jump suit, grease on his face. She reaches up with her free hand, takes a swipe at the grease. It only smudges his face worse. He smiles. Then he kisses her. She drops the towel and embraces him. His hand finds the button and shuts the door behind him.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - LATER

Work crews in space suits continue to repair the hull. Then, a sound is superimposed, the steady beep-beeping of the radar detector.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

An alarm buzzer sounds, and people rush to their stations. Paladin is already there, wearing a space suit, minus helmet. Deveraux arrives, breathless, followedly only a few seconds later - to save appearances - by Blair. They both hear the telltale sound of an incoming ship.

BLAIR
What is she, sir? A destroyer?

PALADIN
It doesn't matter.

BLAIR
The Kilrathi picked up that last signal ComCon sent out.

PALADIN
But they can't locate us. They're feeling about blindly. I have some good news. The air lock isn't functioning, but the flight deck doors are operational.

DEVERAUX
We'll go down fighting, sir.

PALADIN
We'll do better than that, Deveraux.
(smiles)
That ship is up there is going to save our ass.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

The Diligent, and two Sabers are being readied for a launch. A squad of Marines marches into the Diligent in space suits. Maniac, in flight suit, hangs back. Deveraux passes by.

MANIAC
Commander....

Deveraux, pre-occuppied, looks up, then back at a checklist.

MANIAC
Request permission to fly escort.

DEVERAUX
Not a chance, Marshall.

MANIAC
You need Blair on the Diligent.
Thompson and Wozniac are both wounded.
And I'm a better pilot than both of
them.

DEVERAUX
If you freeze up, again, Lieutenant,
you'll kill everyone on this ship.
There won't be another chance.

Maniac, voice charged with emotion, approaches her.

MANIAC
It wasn't.... It was because I
<u>couldn't</u> do anything. I felt...
helpless. Now, I can do something.
Please, Angel.

She studies him.

DEVERAUX
Take Thompson's place. Tell him to
get back to sick bay.

Maniac salutes, grinning ear to ear.

DEVERAUX
The odds are, none of us are coming
back from this mission, you know that?

MANIAC
I can live with that....

He smiles at his own feeble joke, and moves quickly away. She watches as he approaches a badly limping pilot, and gives him the word.

INT. FIGHT DECK.

The Diligent is ready for launch. The merchantman is sealed, and the deck crew hurry to the elevators, which seal shut. The big doors open, and - with no air lock force field - the atmosphere blows into space like a giant hurricane. When the rushing of air subsides, the Two Sabers blast off, followed by the much larger Diligent.

EXT. ABOVE MOON ASTEROID BELT

The Diligent lurks behind an asteroid, its form folded into its ragged ridgeline.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin, Deveraux and Blair all wear full space suits, with their helmets ready to hand. They all listen to the searching radar signal.

BLAIR
I wish we could see what she is.

PALADIN
If we switch on our radar, we'll guide them right to us.

DEVERAUX
She's close, now.

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The large Communications ship seen earlier, comes around the dark side of the moon, escorted by two Hriss fighters.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

The three officers gaze at the visual scanners, and see the Kilrathi vessels hove into view.

PALADIN
(rising excitement)
That's no destroyer.

BLAIR
It's the Communication ship Maniac and I came up against.

DEVERAUX
They'll spot our heat corona, soon.

PALADIN
They won't have the chance. Mister Blair, man your gun.
(pushes radio button)
This is Paladin. Attack! Attack!

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The Two Sabers streak from behind meteorites and engage the Hriss. The Kilrathi ComCon ship begins to veer away, but as it passes the asteroid, the Diligent leaves its cover and hovers just below it.

The element of surprise weighs heavily in the opening moments of combat. Maniac's Saber destroys the first Hriss.

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
Yeah!

The second Saber is engaged in a winding, twisting dogfight. Maniac veers his fighter to engage the second Kilrathi.

TWO MORE HRISS

fighters suddenly appear from around the moon, on full afterburner.

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN POSITION

From his dome, he can see the Hriss coming right at them!

BLAIR
Two more Bogies at six o'clock!

Blair opens fire at one of the attackers, who returns the fire, then veers off.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin is piloting the Diligent up toward the larger Kilrathi ship.

PALADIN
Marines, stand in the door!

INT. BAY DILIGENT

The Marines, in pressure suits, lock and load their weapons. Deveraux is with them.

DEVERAUX
(space suit intercom)
As soon as we get in, we go straight for the bridge. I've got to get control of that ship before they scuttle her! Understood?

SERGEANT
(over intercom)
Yes, Ma'am.

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN

A second Hriss makes its attack run, cannons blazing. Blair tracks him and blasts him to fragments.

BLAIR
Yes!

EXT. KILRATHI COMMUNICATIONS SHIP

The Diligent is alongside, and preparing to set down on the upper deck.

INT. BRIDGE

Paladin watches through the large windows as as he maneuvers closer.

PALADIN
(over radio)
They can't use missiles, now. We're too close.

THROUGH WINDOW

A Hriss fighter appears, heading straight for them.

PALADIN
He's going to ram us!

INT. HRISS COCKPIT

The Kilrathi, in an opague space helmet, streaks in, the image of the Diligent reflected on his face plate.

INT. COCKPIT - MANIAC

Maniac depresses the joystick

MANIAC
(over radio)
Heads up, asshole!

INT. HRISS COCKPIT

The Kilrathi turns his head to see Maniac's Saber, bearing down on him.

EXT. NEAR KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

Maniac's Saber collides with the Hriss cockpit, sheering it off neatly. The Hriss spins wildly out of control and crashes into the Communications ship!

INT. COCKPIT - MANIAC

Maniac's damaged Saber shakes, rattle and rolls. But Maniac seems to be enjoying himself.

MANIAC
(over radio)
Are we having fun, yet?

EXT. KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

The Diligent sets down on the Kilrathi deck, near the gaping hole left by the Hriss.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Marines, Go, go, go! Through the hole in the main deck!

The Diligent's bay door opens and the Marines charge out, floating through the hole and past the burning superstructure.

INT. BLAIR'S POSITION

Blair has already attached his helmet. He pressurizes his suit, and grabs a weapon.

BLAIR
(over space suit intercom)
I'm joining the party, Commodore.

PALADIN (O.S.)
Save some cake for me!

INT. UNPRESSURIZED HOLD - KILRATHI SHIP

The Marines advance on the Kilrathi defenders, also in space suits. The Kilrathi are towering figures, their suits filled with the same viscous atmosphere, so that only their gleaming yellow eyes are truly visible. Blasters and tracers illuminate the darkness as the Confed Marines advance. The slightest wound in these conditions punctures the pressure suits. Marines and Kilrathi begin to die... horribly.

DEVERAUX

uses what cover and concealment she can find, and returns fire with her sidearm. A huge figure suddenly looms behind her, not yet seeing her. Then the Kilrathi commando turns, sees, and raises his weapon. Deveraux senses the presence and starts to turn. Suddenly a shaft of laser light erupts from the Kilrathi' chest. The suit loses pressure, as the viscous atmosphere is vented. Deveraux sees the Kilrathi's hideous face for a second before its head explodes inside the helmet.

The huge figure crumples to reveal Blair standing behind it. Blair recognizes Deveraux, and his relief shows.

DEVERAUX
(over intercom)
We've got to get to the bridge, before they blow this crate up!

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

make their way through the Marines, blasting when they have to, until they come to a pressurized door. A Kilrathi face, without helmet suddenly appears in the porthole. Deveraux blasts it. The porthole disintegrates and the atmosphere within vents, clouding everything.

INT. CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

Blair and Deveraux come through the door firing. Several Kilrathi bodies are strewn about, or float horribly, banging off the walls. Two Kilrathi in pressure suits try to block the way, but after a brief shootout, both are killed.

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

As the battle continues, a huge Kilrathi officer, partly obscured by the thick, foglike atmosphere, nervously watches his monitors. He hears an airlock operate, and turns to see.

KILRATHI POV - INFRARED BAND

Two figures in space suits are clearly visible, but... are they Kilrathi, or Confed? Suddenly, a brilliant light appears in the hands of one, Then the Kilrathi's vision is destroyed by a brilliant flash of heat and light, as the flashbang grenade goes off.

THE KILRATHI OFFICER

staggers back, firing blindly, his huge hand reaching for a large plunger-like button. He feels for it, almost reaches it.... When Blair, still in a space suit, clubs him from behind with his weapon. The Kilrathi staggers back, tries to fire. Blair blasts him once, twice, three times. The Kilrathi, falls to the deck writhing in agony, groaning, dying.

WIDER

Deveraux stands alongside of Blair, who watch the being die. The death throes cease. Neither human speaks. There are the sounds of blasters close by, then silence.

DEVERAUX
(over intercom)
Sergeant. Report.

SERGEANT (O.S.)
(over intercom)
All hostile fire surpressed. What's your status, Commander?

DEVERAUX
(over intercom)
The bridge is secure. Get to the engine room and secure as many fuel cells as you can find.

SERGEANT (O.S.)
(over intercom)
We're on our way.

Blair and Deveraux look around the murky bridge, then back to one another... and smile.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - IN MOON CRATER

The repair work continues outside the ship.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The bridge is shipshape again. Paladin listens to Gerald as and studies the console readouts.

GERALD
Chief engineer reports the Kilrathi fuel cells have been adapted. We should have the Claw re-pressurized by the end of the watch. Starboard ion engine is operational, again. And Henrickson is having some success re-wiring the ComCon circuitry. He may be able to locate that renegade Pilgrim chip.

PALADIN
Meanwhile, we don't dare return the computer to full power. We won't be much good in a fight.

Paladin tosses down a series of small disks.

PALADIN
Blair and Deveraux found these on the Kilrathi bridge.

GERALD
They're ours.

PALADIN
Yes.... Taken from a dozen Confed message drones we found in the hold.
(MORE)

PALADIN (cont'd)
They were able to divert them... and decode them over the years.

GERALD
Thanks to our own ComCon.
(apology in his tone)
That's how they found the Pegasus.

PALADIN
The Communications ship transmitted a last radio message.

GERALD
The Kilrathi will send a battle group back looking for us.

PALADIN
Maybe. But they know about the quasar jump point, now. If I were their admiral, I'd set a pretty ambush for the Confed ships around it. Our ships will come through in a nice, neat line, like ducks in a shooting gallery.

GERALD
Tolwin won't send anything through without hearing from us.

PALADIN
The Kilrathi must realize that. What would you do, in their place?

INT. DEEP SPACE - CHARBYDIS SECTOR - CONCORDIA

The Confed flagship is surrounded by the carrier group. The massive Charbydis quasar is dead ahead of the fleet, in the distance. A small confed drone is tractor beamed aboard.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Tolwin is in his chair when Captain Bellegarde approaches.

BELLEGARDE
The drone was from the Tiger Claw, Admiral. She's engaged in a running battle with a Kilrathi battle group in the Ulysses Corridor, and requests urgent assistance.

Tolwin digests this.

TOLWIN
Where are they, now?

BELLEGARDE
Near star sytem two-twelve. Sansky reports that he's drawn the Kilrathi away from the jump point. He doesn't think they've spotted it.

TOLWIN
Very good. Message to all ships. Full speed for the Charbydis jump point. Send them the coordinates.

BELLEGARDE
Aye, aye, sir.

TOLWIN
Was there anything in my private code? Anything from Paladin?

BELLEGARDE
Paladin? Nothing, sir.

The Bellegarde moves to the X.O. and speaks MOS, while Tolwin ponders.

EXT. TIGER CLAW NEAR MOON

The Tiger Claw, firing on one ion engine moves away from the moon crater.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Blair and Deveraux stand in flight suits, listening to Paladin.

PALADIN
Both of your Sabers have been equiped with jump drives. That way, if one of you doesn't make it, the other one might. You must get past the Kilrathi and warn the fleet. If our ships come through that jump point, they'll be annihilated before they can regroup.

A loud klaxon goes off. Gerald, commanding the ship looks up.

GERALD
Report!

RADAR MAN
I don't know, sir. I had something, twice, but it's disappeared.

GERALD
It could be an incoming Skipper missile. We only see it when it de'cloaks to take a radar fix.

RADAR MAN
There it is again, sir.... extreme long range on our scanners. She's got the signature of a Skipper, all right. Damn. She's vanished again.

PALADIN
(to pilots)
Go... now.

DEVERAUX
The Tiger Claw's shields won't stop a skipper missile, sir. She carries a binary anti-matter charge.

PALADIN
You have your orders.

Blair and Deveraux salute and hurry from the bridge.

GERALD
Estimated time till impact?

RADAR MAN
(grimly)
Nine minutes, sir.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The two Sabers, with large ion afterburner jump drive units attached, leave the carrier and streak into space.

INT. COCKPITS - BLAIR & DEVERAUX

The two pilots streak into the blackness of space.

BLAIR
(over radio)
I've got a strong signal, at ten o'clock. Now it's vanished.

DEVERAUX
(over radio)
That's the Skipper. Dead on course for the ship.

BLAIR
Can the Tiger Claw shoot it down?

DEVERAUX
The only thing that can kill a Skipper is a star fighter in visual contact.

And with that, Deveraux banks hard right.

BLAIR
Hey, what are you doing?

DEVERAUX
Stay on course, Dodger. Get through that jump point!

BLAIR
What about our orders? Angel? Angel?

EXT. SPACE - SKIPPER MISSILE

One moment there is nothing; the next, a long, large missile with a warhead materializes as if from nowhere. It adjusts course, aims at a distant point of light in the distance - the Tiger Claw - then vanishes. A moment later, Deveraux's Saber appears, not far behind it. Deveraux kicks in her afterburners and streaks after the now invisible missile.

INT. COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Her heads up display shows nothing.

DEVERAUX
(mutters)
Come on.... "Ally, ally in free..."

THROUGH COCKPIT PLEXIGLASS

The Skipper missile de-cloaks and reappears, slightly off to her right. She veers, and begins firing her laser cannons. The Skipper once again "cloaks" and vanishes, but Deveraux continues to lead it, firing along its trajectory.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Angel! You're too close! Back off!

Suddenly, there is a flash of fire, and the Skipper de-cloaks and reappears, spinning like a corkscrew, breaking up. Deveraux banks hard and veers away.

EXT. SPACE - SKIPPER MISSILE

Moments later, the Skipper missile explodes, throwing an eerie, visible shock wave. The shock wave catches Deveraux's Saber.

INT. COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Deveraux is shaken like a jackhammer. The Saber begins coming apart. She ejects!

EXT. SPACE - BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber slowly approaches the debris of the destroyed Saber... and fires retro jets as it pulls up alongside the tumbling ejection pod. Retros fire on the pod, stabilizing it. Blair's cockpit is only yards from Deveraux in the pod. They look at each other across the void.

BLAIR
(over radio)
You okay?

DEVERAUX
(over radio)
Nothing broken.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

He looks out over the empty space between them and the tiny point of light that is the Tiger Claw.

BLAIR
You got it.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. POD - DEVERAUX

She shakes her head.

DEVERAUX
It got me.

BLAIR
Hang on. I'm going to tractor you back to the ship.

DEVERAUX
No! Go on. We can't both disobey orders.

BLAIR
You'll be out of air in an hour. You're going back to the ship.

DEVERAUX
You disobey my direct order and I'll have you court martialed, Blair.

BLAIR
I don't care.

DEVERAUX
Then care about the thousands of men and women who are going to die when they come through that jump point!

Blair falls silent. She knows she's won.

BLAIR
This sucks.

Their faces are only feet apart, separated by the cockpits.

DEVERAUX
I always knew it would end like this... for me. I just hoped it wouldn't hurt. So.... I got my wish.

BLAIR
I can't.... We just....

DEVERAUX
You've gotta go. You know that. There's nothing else you can do.

BLAIR
I love you.

She smiles ruefully, then pulls her glove off and puts a hand up on the plexiglass.

DEVERAUX
Yeah, well... you've got rotten timing.... But, if it's any consolation....

Instead of finishing her thought, she shrugs and smiles for him.

DEVERAUX
Now go. Get out of here. Steer clear of any Kilrathi.

There is a last moment... then Blair fires his retros and eases slowly away from her as she watches. A last look, and Blair ignites his engines. The Saber streaks away. The back wash rocks Deveraux's pod. She's already cold, and begins to shiver.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The Radar Man looks up from his scope.

RADAR MAN
No sign of the Skipper missile. One of the Sabers must have shot it down.

PALADIN
Where are they now?

RADAR MAN
One continuing on course... and one beacon signal from an ejection pod...
(sees something)
And sir. I'm picking up two large ships at extreme range.

PALADIN
Yes... they would only send two. Keeping the rest for the ambush at the jump point.

GERALD
We've only got a half dozen operational fighters left.

PALADIN
They won't bother to send a carrier. They know how badly the Tiger Claw is hurt.

GERALD
What now? We can barely maneuver the ship. What have we got to fight with?

PALADIN
(grim)
A ship full of men and women who've lost friends. They'll fight like demons from hell.
(turns to Gerald)
What now, Mister Gerald? Now we make the Kilrathi on those ships sorry they were ever born!
(roars)
Battle stations!

The klaxons sound, and people jump to their stations on the bridge.

INT. COCKPIT BLAIR

Blair eases around a large asteroid.

THROUGH PLEXIGLASS

He can just see a Kilrathi cruiser and a destroyer moving slowly through the asteroid field. When they pass, he ignites his engines, and blasts away, weaving around asteroids as he goes.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Maniac sits in his Saber, salutes the deck control officer, and blasts into space.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Gerald reports to Paladin.

GERALD
All planes away.

RADAR MAN
Kilrathi cruiser and destroyer are in missile range. They're launching.

PALADIN
Open fire, Mister Gerald.

GERALD
Aye, aye, sir.
(into intercom)
All batteries, fire as she bears!

PALADIN
(grim smile)
Let's hope they don't have any more skipper missiles.

They watch as missiles flair out into space.

INT. EJECTION POD - DEVERAUX

The reflection of the great battle flashes on the plexiglass as Deveraux watches.

REVERSE ANGLE

The great ships are like tiny toys, the fighters specks of light as they corkscrew and plunge. The blackness is illuminated with lasers and torpedoes exploding against the shields. The Kilrathi destroyer takes a torpedo in its sturn, catches fire, and begins to drift.

DEVERAUX

shivers in the cold, her breath condensing on the plexiglass. She wipes the mist away, breathing with difficulty, and continues to watch.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair is watching his heads up display intently.

BLAIR
Merlin, check my coordinates.

MERLIN
(voice only)
Coordinate A-okay, boss. Three minutes to jump.

BLAIR
Firing jump drive.

He flicks a switch. There is an enormous six g jolt.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The fighter transforms into a streak of light.

EXT. TIGER CLAW & KILRATHI CRUISER

The two ships are in close proximity, now, firing weapons, trying to batter down each others shields.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

The Kilrathi cruiser is clearly visible coming head on.

GERALD
What tac, sir?

PALADIN
Steady on, Mister Gerald. Make them be the first to flinch.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

The Kilrathi cruiser appears larger and larger.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The Saber begins to shimmy and shake.

MERLIN
(voice only)
She's trying to tear free. Ninety seconds to Jump point. But you're drifting off course.

BLAIR
The quasar's gravity is affecting you. Shut up, or I'll shut you off.

The Saber begins to shake like it's going to come apart.

EXT. BEHIND JOVIAN PLANET MOON

The Kilrathi admiral's flagship, an enormous Snakeir battleship, fires its massive ion engines and drifts from behind the shadow of the moon.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The murky green atmosphere allows only silhouettes as Kilrathi move about. The same Kilrathi Captain as before, approaches the Admiral's chair.

HIS POV - INFRARED SPECTRUM

The Admiral has his back to the Captin.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitled)
A manned Confederation fighter is approaching the quasar jump point, Admiral. We're not in position to intercept.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitled)
He's going to warn the Confed fleet. The ambush is ruined.
(ponders)
Follow him. He'll lead us through the jump point. Tell all other ships to mark our course and await my command.

EXT. SNAKEIR

The giant ship turns, and accelerates, following a distant speck of light... Blair's Saber.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

To the relief of everyone on the bridge, the Kilrathi cruiser veers right.

OBUTU
She's changing course!

PALADIN
(roaring)
Mister Gerald, prepare to lower our shield. Starboard missile battery, prepare to fire!

GERALD
Sir, the missile guidance systems won't activate at this range.

PALADIN
They won't need to. Arm warheads!

INT. VARIOUS STATIONS - TIGER CLAW

Men and women in the missile rooms, prepare to fire. In the Hangar bay and on the flight deck, they brace themselves, grimly waiting out the next few seconds.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The shaking is infernal.

MERLIN
(voice only)
Light speed mach point eight two.
twenty seconds to jump.

EXT. TIGER CLAW & KILRATHI CRUISER

The Kilrathi pour cannon fire onto the Tiger Claw's shield as the two great ships come abreast of each other.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The ship is rocking with shock waves.

PALADIN
Lower shields. Give 'em a broadside, Mister Gerald!

INT. MISSILE ROOM - TIGER CLAW

The missile room crew, fire their salvo, even as they are rocked by explosions from the cannon fire.

EXT. MANIAC'S SABER

Maniac blows a last Hriss escort out of the air and turns upside down to avoid the fireball. Then he stares at the sight below him.

MANIAC
And they say I'm crazy.

HIS POV - TIGER CLAW AND KILRATHI CRUISER

A dozen guided missiles streak from the Tiger Claw battery as they bear on the cruiser, each striking the cruiser, piercing the shield, and exploding against the hull. A missile finds the Kilrathi bridge and destroys it. The cruiser rolls over and "capsizes" as its stern clears the devasting field of fire. Then, the ship is shattered by a series of explosions as the Tiger Claw pulls clear.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The vibration is accompanied by a strange noise.

MERLIN
Five seconds to jump. Four, three, two....

Suddenly, time and motion stop. All is silence.

INT. TIGER CLAW - BRIDGE & VARIOUS STATIONS

As one, officers and crew of the Tiger Claw scream, cheer, hug one another.

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The giant quasar fills the screen with its whirling vortex and dying suns. Then, from nowhere, Blair's Saber appears and blasts past us, its jump drive engines glowing.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair is ecstatic. He kisses his hand then transfers the kiss to the cockpit interior.

BLAIR
We did it! We did it! I love this baby! She held together.

MERLIN
I'm not sure I did.

BLAIR
Admit it, you didn't think we could do it.

MERLIN
Sure, I did.

BLAIR
No you didn't.

MERLIN
No, I didn't.

BLAIR
Check your frequencies for any sign of the Confed fleet.

MERLIN
Nothing. Wait a minute. Check behind us.

BLAIR
Behind us?

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The gigantic Snakeir appears through the warp in the time space continuum.

MERLIN (O.S.)
Kilrathi capitol ship... Snakeir class. They came through the jump point.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair pounds the instrument panel in frustration.

BLAIR
I led them through it! I'm such an idiot.
(flicks radio switch)
Lieutenant Christopher Blair of the Tiger Claw calling any Confed Ship. Blair calling Confed Fleet. Kilrathi ship has come through the Charbydis jump point! Do you read me? Calling any Confed ship! Mayday, Mayday!

EXT. CONCORDIA - BEHIND RINGED PLANET

The giant carrier gleams in the dull reflection from the planet. In the distance, other fleet ships hover silently.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Bellegarde approaches Tolwin.

BELLEGARDE
Comm room reports faint message in clear from a Lieutenant Blair. He says the jump point has been breached by the Kilrathi.

TOLWIN
Blair? Like father, like son.

BELLEGARDE
Should we respond, sir?

RADAR MAN
(calling out)
Identifying Confed Saber, heading toward the Scylla quadrant and LSM point nine. He's being followed by something massive, admiral. Looks like a Snakeir.

BELLEGARDE
Permission to intercept it, Admiral?

TOLWIN
No. We wait.

BELLEGARDE
The Snakeir will overtake Blair's fighter, sir.

TOLWIN
(angry)
I'm bloody well aware of that, Richard. All ships are to hold their positions.

RADAR MAN
Drone leaving the Kilrathi ship, sir. It's heading back toward the jump point.

TOLWIN
Yes, he's finished his reconnassance in force. Now he's sending a message back to the rest of the Kilrathi fleet.

BELLEGARDE
(gets it)
If we jump him, we'd be out of position when the Kilrathi fleet comes through.... Brilliant, strategem, sir.

TOLWIN
Feral cunning, Richard The basest of survival instincts. If you must to admire someone, admire that young lieutenant out there. I've just sacrificed him...
(disgusted)
to whatever graven idols of war both we and the Kilrathi subscribe to.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber streaks past. Well behind it, a large object is following, the Kilrathi Snakeir.

EXT. SNAKEIR & DRONE

Behind the huge ship, the Kilrathi message drone fires its afterburners and streaks away toward the Charbydis Quasar. Then it vanishes into the warp of the jump point.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair keeps trying to raise someone on the radio.

BLAIR
Blair to Confed Fleet. Do you read me? Kilrathi capitol ship has penetrated the quasar jump point and is in the Charbydis Sector. Attention all Confed ships. Kilrathi fleet is preparing a surprise attack at the Charbydis jump point! Disregard any drone messages.

Finally, he gives up.

BLAIR
They aren't in radio range. They'll never see the Kilrathi coming.

MERLIN
(voice only)
Which is more than <u>you</u> can say. We'll be in range of the Snakeir guns in ten minutes.

BLAIR
At least they can't launch torpedos at this speed.

There is a loud rhythmic beeping. Blair sits up, scans his heads up display.

BLAIR
There! Dead ahead. It's the fleet signaling. They've heard us!
(into radio)
Blair to Confed fleet. Kilrathi capitol ship on my course, aft of my position! Confed fleet, do you read me?

But the beeping continues, louder. Blair stares at the screen.

BLAIR
Only one ship. But it's huge.

MERLIN
It isn't a ship. Check your scanners.

Blair turns on his telescopic scanner. A dark, spinning rock appears on them.

BLAIR
Oh, no.... That's all I need.

MERLIN
The neutron star, Scylla. "Bain to sailors and monster of myth."

EXT. TIGER CLAW - HADES QUADRAN

Amidst the debris of the battle, the Tiger Claw with its meager fighter escort changes course.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Obutu reports to Paladin.

OBUTU
We're hove to for repair inspection, sir.

PALADIN
Very good, Lieutenant.
(to Gerald)
Anything else on the scanners, Mister Gerald?

GERALD
Negative, sir.

PALADIN
What about that locater beacon from the Saber pod?

RADAR MAN
Nothing sir. Lost contact during the battle.

PALADIN
(sadly)
Lieutenant, have the Diligent prepared for launch. I'm going to inspect the ship from outside.

OBUTU
Aye, aye, sir.

Paladin grimly walks from the bridge.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber, seen from behind, is still on course toward the neutron star, Scylla.

Not very far behind it, the immense Snakeir.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair sweats over the controls. There is an urgent alarm jangling his nerves further.

BLAIR
Kilrathi radar is trying to lock on. How much longer until we're in range?

MERLIN
(voice only)
I have good news and bad news.

BLAIR
(used to this)
What's the good news?

MERLIN
You'll be in extreme range of the Snakeir tachyon cannon in less than two minutes.

BLAIR
So what's the bad news?

MERLIN
You'll be past the Point of No Return of that neutron star in ninety seconds. Unless you change course, it's gravitational field will tear us to pieces.

BLAIR
Any third options.

MERLIN
None occur to me.

Blair blinks hard at the scanner scope and the large, spinning object dead ahead. Then it dawns on him.

BLAIR
How much does a Snakeier weigh?

MERLIN
Eighty-thousand tons, give or take a few thousand.

Blair does a quick calculation, then flips on the afterburners. Another flashing WARNING LIGHT immediately illuminates on his heads up screen, as he is thrown back in his seat.

MERLIN
The after burners will use up your last fuel. And you're still headed for the neutron star.

BLAIR
Yeah, that's the idea.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The Kilrathi Captain reports to the Admiral.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitled)
The Saber is homing in on a beacon signal. It could be a Confederation guidance buoy.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitles)
Or a capital ship. Identify and report. Full battle stations.

Alarms go off in the Kilrathi ship. The Admiral looks down on his own infrared monitor, and watches the tiny speck and the larger, flashing object he sees there.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

It seems like half the alarm systems in the cockpit are buzzing or flashing. Blair's concentration is total, his face dripping with sweat.

MERLIN
(voice only)
Kilrathi radar locked on. Ten seconds to the Point of No Return... and you're almost out of fuel. You won't be able to turn.

BLAIR
Give me a count.

MERLIN
Four... three....

BLAIR
(startled)
Holy shit!

MERLIN
Two...

Blair jerks the joystick hard right.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

banks hard, afterburners glowing and roaring, and veers away from Scylla.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

BLAIR
We're not going to break free of the gravity pull! We don't have enough fuel!

MERLIN
(voice over)
Actually, I lied.

BLAIR
What?

MERLIN
You've got ten more seconds of thrust.

The Saber shimmies like a tuning fork, engines roaring. Then, with a last jerk, she hurtles free of the neutron star's gravitational pull.

BLAIR
We're free!

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The fighter rockets away at a ninety degree angle from the neutron star.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The Admiral continues to peer at his scanners.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitles)
The Saber has veered away.
Confederation ship, dead ahead.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(realizes)
That isn't a ship! Hard to port!
Reverse all thrusters!

EXT. SNAKEIR

The long ship tries to turn, but she has far too much inertia to veer away as the tiny Saber has done. She yaws and continues toward Scylla, sideways, now....

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair's engines sputter and die. The warning lights now become constant.

BLAIR
We're out of fuel.

He looks back at the Snakeir.

BLAIR
The Kilrathi's too heavy. Scylla's got her.

INT. BRIDGE SNAKEIR

The bridge, still shrouded in its murky atmosphere, is listing. The neutron star, Scylla, now appears on the starboard side.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitles)
All engines full!

The engine noise raises to a deafening roar, but the great ship continues to drift toward the neutron star. The Admiral realizes all is lost.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitles)
Who was the Terran pilot? He used his name when he transmitted.

The Captain, clinging to the console, is half terrified, but he reaches into his memory, and hisses the name.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(no subtitles)
Blay-eer....

The Admiral grunts. It could almost be a laugh.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
Blay-eer.

Every object in the Kilrathi bridge begins to warp and distort. The Kilrathi, mere silhouettes in the murk, are themselves stretched, and pulled, screeching in pain and horror.

EXT. SNAKEIR AND NEUTRON STAR

The Kilrathi ship is pulled completely around, its engines fighting the pull of the incredibly dense object. The ship seems to stretch, then crack, and pull apart. The murky atmosphere explodes into the void. The Ship is shattered, and pulverized into smaller and smaller pieces, all forming a long debris trail that extends toward the neutron star.

EXT. CHARBYDIS QUASAR - JUMP POINT

From nowhere, a huge Fralthi appears. But several moments later, it receives direct hits from a dozen cannon blasts.

REVERSE ANGLE

The Confed fleet, in attack formation, launches a half-dozen torpedos. The powerful cannon fire pummels the Kilrathi ship before it can react.

RESUME JUMP POINT

The Kilrathi carrier breaks apart, and explodes. A second, smaller ship appears. It too is destroyed in the deadly ambush.

EXT. CONCORDIA

The great ship seems surrounded by a fireworks display as it fires torpedos and missiles, and uses its massive cannon array.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Bellegarde approaches Tolwin, who watches grimly from his chair.

ADJUTANT
The Kilrathi fleet is coming through the jump point one ship at a time, Admiral. They have no chance to defend themselves or warn the ships behind. Congratulations, sir.

TOLWIN
The butcher in a slaughterhouse deserves more honor. He, at least looks his victims in the eye.

This startles Bellegarde into silence.

TOLWIN
Bring the ship about. We let that Snakeir through like a belled goat. She'll be coming back. Launch two Saber wings and a squadron of Broadswords.

BELLEGARDE
Aye, aye, sir.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The darkened fighter tumbles slowly through space.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

All the instruments are dark. Blair is trembling violently.

BLAIR
(old joke between them)
I have good news and bad news.

Merlin appears in hologram.

MERLIN
What's the bad news?

BLAIR
I'm almost out of oxygen.

MERLIN
And the good news?

BLAIR
I'm going to freeze to death, first.

MERLIN
I'm sorry I can't do anything.

BLAIR
I'm just sorry it was all for nothing.
Where was the fleet, anyway?

MERLIN
Admiral Tolwin is known for doing the unexpected.

BLAIR
This is how Angel died. Alone.

MERLIN
What am I, chopped liver?

BLAIR
Sorry. Damn, it's cold.

MERLIN
I'm picking up a transmission on my short range monitor.

BLAIR
What?

Suddenly, the Saber is jolted.

BLAIR
What the hell...?

EXT. SABER & BROADSWORD

A Broadsword bomber has captured the drifting. Saber in its tractor beam. A strong spotlight illuminates Blair inside the cockpit. As Blair looks up, the bomber pilot salutes him. With badly trembling hand, Blair grins and returns the salute.

EXT. CONFED FLEET - CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The Concordia flagship is at the center of the formation. The Admiral's gig sets off from the carrier.

INT. ADMIRAL'S GIG

Blair is in a clean dress uniform, sitting uncomfortably next to Admiral Tolwin. An honor guard of Marines and the gig crew are also aboard.

TOLWIN
You know I sold you down the river, don't you, Lieutenant.

BLAIR
Sir?

TOLWIN
You were a piece on the board. A small piece.

BLAIR
I understand, sir.

TOLWIN
No, you don't. But that's all right. In your shoes, Lieutenant, I'd despise the man sitting next to me.

ADJUTANT
We're in sight of the Tiger Claw, Admiral.

Both Tolwin and Blair go to a port hole and peer out.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The battered lady opens her flight deck doors as the Admiral's gig, approaches. The gig sails through the doors.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

The giant doors close. All available Tiger Claw officers and crew are at attention before the Admiral's gig. The gig lowers its ramp. As Tolwin emerges, the traditional pipes are blown to signal a flagstaff officer's presence on board.

Paladin and the ships officers salute smartly. Tolwin, flanked by the Marine honor guard approaches Paladin and warmly shakes his hand.

BLAIR

Comes down the ramp, and sees his shipmates.

TOLWIN
Ladies and gentlemen, I am returning one of your officers to you. He has served you well. He has served us all... very well.

Paladin salutes Blair with a huge grin.

PALADIN
You may join your unit, Lieutenant.

BLAIR
Aye, aye, sir.

Blair walks down the line of white clad officers, toward the ranks of pilots. Maniac, still at attention, smirks at him. Then... Blair stops. Deveraux stands before him in her dress whites, eyes straight ahead, but nervous. Blair goes up to her, salutes stiffly, fighting tears. She salutes him.

DEVERAUX
Welcome aboard, sailor.

BLAIR
(choking with emotion)
Glad to be aboard, Commander.

Blair falls in among the remaining pilots.

TOLWIN

returns toward his gig. He turns before going up the ramp.

TOLWIN
I have been an officer in the Confederation Navy for many years. I have never been prouder of a ship, and of its officers and crew, than I am today.

Tolwin disappears into the gig to the sounds of the high shrill hornpipe, followed by the honor guard. The doors open. The gig launches through the air clock curtain.

PALADIN
Mister Gerald, I'm returning the command of this ship to you. You may dismiss the officers and crew.

GERALD
(smiling)
Aye,aye, Commodore.

Paladin begins walking slowly toward the elevators to the bridge.

MANIAC

unable to contain himself, takes off his hat and bellows.

MANIAC
Three cheers for the Commodore!

WIDER

As one voice, the ships entire complement enter into a rousing three "hip-hip, hurrah!"s. Then, hundreds of white hats sail high into the air and the cheering becomes general. Men hug men, women hug women, men hug women. And so it is only Paladin, who turns and notices, lost in the general jubilation...

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

locked in a hug that becomes an embrace, that becomes a kiss, as the cheering pandemonium continues all around them.

FADE OUT.