

WING COMMANDER

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September 21st, 1997

**FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY**

FADE IN:

INT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - CITY BEACH.

From above, the beach looks like it could be part of a small sea-side city -- a ten acre expanse of sand and palm trees bordered by crystal blue water.

Waves lazily lap onto the beach. Off-duty SAILORS laugh and shove each other as they walk bare-footed in the sand. By a park bench, a WOMAN rubs oil onto her SAILOR BOYFRIEND's back. A SECOND GROUP OF SAILORS AND THEIR GIRLFRIENDS, all dressed in shorts and tops with tropical designs, play a game of Ultimate Frisbee further up the beach. A TALL SAILOR throws "long"...

We follow his TEAMMATE as he makes an *impossibly* high jump to catch the frisbee, revealing...

The skyline of a twenty-seventh century city, nestled against the far wall of this hollowed out island in space. Higher up, huge fusion powered sunlamps -- the source of our artificial sunlight -- are imbedded in the rough-hewn granite "roof", surrounding an enormous porthole.

SUPERIMPOSE: ULYSSES SECTOR FLEET HEADQUARTERS - TERRAN CONFEDERATION: ASTEROID WORLD "PEGASUS". MARCH 15TH. EARTH YEAR 2654. 0900 HOURS, ZULU TIME.

The view through the porthole reveals the blackness of interstellar space with a few faint stars.

RESUME BEACH --

The Teammate falls back to "earth", clutching the frisbee triumphantly, but the Tall Sailor isn't watching. He 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 BEACH --

Air raid sirens begin to wail from the towers of the city. The Sailor Boyfriend, alarmed, jumps up, grabbing his girlfriend.

She, too looks up through the porthole. We follow her gaze as we seem to rise up to meet the luminous dots that are growing bigger and brighter by the second, resolving into SEVERAL MISSILES streaking towards us...

The missiles strike the porthole and a huge explosion briefly blinds us, washing over the reinforced plexiglass and blocking our view of the stars. Several sailors lose their footing as the ground shakes violently.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Everyone seems frozen, looking up -- and for a moment it seems as the porthole survived the impact, but...

CLOSE ON PORTHOLE --

Small spider line cracks start spreading over the surface of the porthole. They multiply with a frightening speed, then...

The plexiglass SHATTERS OUTWARDS, sucking the atmosphere from the worldlet...

RESUME BEACH --

EVERYTHING is being sucked upwards...

The Sailor Boyfriend, hanging onto the park bench, is trying to desperately hold onto his girlfriend. But his grip slips and she too is sucked upwards...

EXT. ASTEROID WORLDLET

Explosions rock the surface of the asteroid world, which is covered with a lattice work of towers, gun emplacements, antennae and docks. Two monstrosly large ion engines are imbedded in the "rear" of this mobile naval base.

Confederation capital ships - Destroyers, Cruisers and several Dreadnaughts are caught helplessly in their berths as missiles and laser fire rain down on them from STRANGE, ALIEN FIGHTER CRAFT -- their shapes almost suggesting a TALON or a CLAW. They are KILRATHI ships -- humanity's mortal foe for the past twenty years of interstellar warfare. The human ships try to return fire -- A stream of tachyon canon fire rises from the surface...

But it doesn't help. For every Kilrathi ship that is destroyed, another takes its place. What few Confed fighters the worldlet can launch are instantly destroyed. The destruction is awesome and all-encompassing.

EXT. KILRATHI BATTLE GROUP

A huge alien vessel, a heavily armored "Dreadnought" class ship called a Snakeir is at the center of the battle group.

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.

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There 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 surprise is complete.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(Kilrathi; subtitled)
I can see that for myself. 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 Admiral turns back to watch through the porthole.

HUMAN VOICE
(filtered through a respirator)
Standard Operating Procedure is to activate the self-destruct on the Pegasus' CONCOM five minutes after hull breach. I hope your commandoes can get there in time.

Hearing this human voice is startling. More startling still:

A TERRAN CONFEDERATION NAVAL OFFICER --

still in uniform, wearing a clear face mask, steps through the green fog, joining the Kilrathi officers.

The Kilrathi Admiral is offended. His voice is tinny and slightly delayed as its filtered through the officer's translation device.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(English; translated)
You've done your job betraying your race. We are more than capable of doing ours.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TRAITOR

They're no more part of my race than the Sodomites were part of the divine plan. I'm doing God's will...

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

You Pilgrims baffle me.

TRAITOR

We are understood by Him...

He makes a quick SIMPLE GESTURE, balling a fist and clasping his other hand over it, close to his chest, much like a Catholic will cross himself when mentioning the Lord's name.

TRAITOR

That's all that matters.

INT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - COMMUNICATIONS COMPUTER ROOM

An explosion blows the sealed door off it's hinges, sucking the atmosphere from the room. SEVERAL KILRATHI COMMANDOES, dressed in power armor burst into the room, shooting TWO SURPRISED CONFED MARINES.

Hanging onto the main control console, an INTEL OFFICER desperately fights the pull of the escaping air as he struggles to lower the palm of his hand onto a glowing red square set in the console. Just as his hand is about to touch the panel...

His chest ERUPTS WITH A SMALL EXPLOSION, droplets of blood from the dead officer hang in the now air-less room...

The KILRATHI COMMANDER lowers his weapon. With his magnetized boots keeping him firmly fixed to the ground, the Commander strides towards a tall computer unit, full of blinking lights. He reaches down and unplugs a COMPUTER CHIP, holding it up -- like it is some kind of prize. Through his visor, his alien face almost seems to smile...

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 indeterminate age, looking more like a pirate than a merchant, keys a code into the communications computer and switches on the Diligent's "jump drive" afterburners. James Taggart, better known as PALADIN, 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 begin 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.

INT. SNAKEIR BRIDGE

KILRATHI CAPTAIN

(Kilrathi: subtitled)

A human ship is escaping. It's transmitting a Pilgrim code.

TRAITOR

Let it go.

The Kilrathi Admiral merely signals his agreement. He turns back to watch the final stages of the destruction of the Asteroid Worldlet.

EXT. DILIGENT

The space craft gains speed quickly, drawing 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. 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. 1600 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 TOLWYN, and Commodore
RICHARD BELLEGARDE.

INT. TOLWYN'S OFFICE - STARBASE

Bellegarde has just heard some very bad news from Tolwyn.

BELLEGARDE

The Pegasus?

(beat: realizes)
My God... The entire war effort could
be compromised. The road to Earth is
wide open.

TOLWYN

She was destroyed in the Ulysses
Corridor two weeks ago. Attacked by an
entire Kilrathi battle group.

BELLEGARDE

It had to be a target of opportunity...

TOLWYN

Her flight plan was top secret. Only a
few fleet officers knew it.

(loud, clear voice)
Socrates, what are the odds that the
Kilrathi accidentally discovered the
Pegasus in the Ulysses Corridor?

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

SOCRATES

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

Both men absorb this information.

BELLEGARDE

They knew. But how?

TOLWYN

That's what we have to find out... We
need a victory, Richard, or I'm afraid
there'll be no stopping the Kilrathi.

Tolwyn's ADJUTANT enters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ADJUTANT

The young Lieutenant is here, sir.

TOLWYN

Thank you. Show him in.

The Adjutant opens the door for LT. CHRISTOPHER BLAIR.

Blair is in his mid-twenties, straight out of the academy. But there's an air of rebellion about him. It's in the way he wears his uniform, the choppy haircut, and the challenging stare.

Blair enters and lazily salutes, unimpressed by all this authority.

BLAIR

Lieutenant Blair, reporting as requested, sir.

TOLWYN

At ease.

Tolwyn sizes up the man in front of him, then smiles.

TOLWYN

I can see you're your Father's son, alright.

BLAIR

Sir?

TOLWYN

We fought together. In the Pilgrim Wars. He was never impressed by Admirals either.

Tolwyn holds a SMALL MINI-DISK up. The look on his face changes, all business.

TOLWYN

I need you to give this to Captain Sansky, on the Tiger Claw...

EXT. DEEP SPACE - NEAR BLACK HOLE

The Black Hole is an impressive whirling disk of luminous gas with its trademark black center - the event horizon beyond which even light cannot escape. The well worn shape of the Diligent moves into frame.

SUPERIMPOSE: REQUISITIONED MERCHANTMAN DILIGENT: NEAR BLACK HOLE, TRIDENT SYSTEM. APRIL 4TH. 1220 HOURS, ZULU TIME.

INT. DILIGENT - TINY CABIN

Blair is sprawled out on his bunk -- as sprawled as one can be in a cabin the size of a shoe box. He's fingering a SILVER CROSS that hangs around his neck. It could be a traditional crucifix except that it ends in a DAGGER POINT.

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 personal computer (PPC), MERLIN. Merlin has a furrowed brow, a receding hairline, and paces incessantly.

MERLIN
I question Admiral Tolwyn's motives.

BLAIR
You question everything.

MERLIN
Why you? What's so top secret? Why can't they just transmit the message?

BLAIR
Did I program you to be this paranoid?

MERLIN
Have you taken a good look around this so-called 'space-craft'? It should be hauling garbage, not making jumps through warp holes.

BLAIR
Then I guess we're all going to die.

MERLIN
Would you like me to estimate the probability of just that happening?

BLAIR
I'd like you shut up.

MERLIN
Fine. Lt. Marshall's approaching the hatch.

And moments' later the HATCH OPENS and there stands TODD 'MANIAC' MARSHALL. Maniac is Blair's age and a fellow pilot, but the resemblance ends there. Where Blair seems closed-off and brooding, Maniac's an open book -- big-boned and with a slightly crazed gleam in his eye.

MANIAC
Up and at 'em, half-breed. Captain wants us on the bridge.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He glances up at Merlin, who now sits immobile, but with eyes that seem to follow you around the room, like a creepy optical illusion.

MANIAC

What's with your evil twin?

BLAIR

He's pouting.

MANIAC

Weird, man... Do you ever think about the fact that you created his personality algorithm? I mean - doesn't that make him you?

BLAIR

He was my father's PPC. The whole reprogramming thing just never seems to work out.

MANIAC

Yeah -- the sins of the father...

Blair shuts down Merlin's hologram and heads for the hatch with Maniac. But Merlin still has a voice.

MERLIN

(voice only)

Have you been putting on weight Lt. Marshall? My sensors seem to indicate...

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin is calmly charting the Diligent's course on a holographic grid model, taking up half the bridge. Blair and Maniac arrive, ducking through a small hatch-way.

PALADIN

Gentlemen... I woke up this morning feeling -- what a perfect day to fly through a black hole.

MANIAC

(relishing the thought)

Captain, I woke up feeling the same thing.

PALADIN

Alright, you Navy scrubs, ready for a real ride?

BLAIR

So how about letting a real pilot navigate this one, then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PALADIN
A real pilot? Well, then the helm's
yours.

Both Blair And Manic react.

MANIAC
(truly worried)
You're not serious. Blair's never made
a jump before. He was just joking.

PALADIN
First time for everything. If I don't
show you boys how to fly, whose going
to win the war?

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 space, time
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
spaghetti, one molecule at a time...

BLAIR
(hiding his nervousness)
Your life is in my hands, Maniac.

MANIAC
Treat it right, half-breed.

PALADIN
Plot your course, Mister Blair.

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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.

BLAIR
The readouts are changing.

PALADIN
Ignore them. The gravity from the Black Hole is slowing the computer computations. Stay on manual override 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

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....

Subconsciously, Blair pulls out his cross...

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... Blair kisses his cross... 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...

RESUME BRIDGE --

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.

Blair, embarrassed, quickly slips his cross back under his shirt. Paladin notices but doesn't say anything.

PALADIN

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.

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.

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 a half-year of hard travel from here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Paladin starts folding the star charts.

PALADIN
(changing the subject)
I couldn't help noticing you wear a Pilgrim cross...

BLAIR
Nothing I'm trying to hide. It was my Mother's. I wear it because she wants me to.

PALADIN
A Confed pilot, wearing a Pilgrim cross. Kind of a mixed message I'd say.

BLAIR
I know who I am.

PALADIN
Doesn't bother you being called a half-breed?

BLAIR
Maniac can call me what he wants, and he does... Listen, sir, if you're worried about my delicate feeling don't be. I've dealt with this half-breed shit, if you'll excuse the expression, all my life --

PALADIN
It is shit. I've been around a long time, Lieutenant and I've seen more than my fair share of prejudiced jerks. I've spent the past twenty years flying around at near light speed.

BLAIR
Twenty years? That would make you...

PALADIN
A hundred and five in planet years. You watch your friends on your home planet grow old and die... You lose all sense of home or belonging. It makes you feel like an outsider. So even though I think the Pilgrims are crazy and it was a war they had to lose, I've always felt sympathy for them -- as one outsider to another. If you know what I mean.

BLAIR
I do. But you can save your sympathy for them. I really don't need it. No offense, sir.

(CONTINUED)

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

PALADIN
The bloody fool!

And Paladin flies out of the cabin.

EXT. DEEP SPACE - CHARBYDIS 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. 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.

Merlin also springs to life, self-activating and begins pacing.

MERLIN
I told you this ship wasn't up the job. I'll run the probabilities I said. Oh, no, you said...

PALADIN
Shut that thing up, or I'll jettison it.

Merlin freezes, mute.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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

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. Merlin's holographic image VIBRATES until it's a blur. The ships' afterburners scream. Then the ship lurches free.

PALADIN

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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 son-of-a-bitch. Busting my balls.
How was I to know?

BLAIR

Come on, Maniac, you were hot-dogging --
it gets you in trouble every time.

MANIAC

He let you fly through a black hole!

Merlin finally stops vibrating and is on his knees, as if he's going to vomit.

MERLIN

The Captain's behavior is highly erratic. Very suspicious. How do you know he's actually taking us to the Tiger Claw? What if he's planning to sell us into slavery? Turn us over to the Kilrathi...

MANIAC

I never thought I'd agree with the little man in the box...

BLAIR

Paladin just saved our asses.

MANIAC

I still think it's bullshit.

Maniac storms out.

MERLIN

As I was saying...

BLAIR

You've said enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Blair clicks Merlin off.

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

Two Confederation Rapier 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 RAPIERS

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 broad beam of yellow light. The Diligent fires its boosters and eases into the flight deck. The huge doors close. The Rapiers 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 towards the elevators.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

INT. HANGAR DECK

Another huge deck, this one bustling with flight crews, and pilots. Gleaming Rapiers 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 Broadsword's belly and continues on. He stops and admires a Rapier, its cockpit open, allowing himself to daydream. He is distracted by a feminine voice behind him.

DEVERAUX

Can I help you?

He turns. JEANETTE (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 Rapier, and examining the read out it gives her.

BLAIR

Maybe when I bring one of these babies back from a mission.

DEVERAUX

And you would be...?

BLAIR

Blair. Lieutenant Blair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVERAUX
Fresh bait, huh? You need to talk to
the X.O.

BLAIR
Actually I need to see the Captain.

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. See you round?

DEVERAUX
Count on it.

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Blair salutes, 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

He thought it would get here faster on the Diligent.

SANSKY

Undoubtedly. Well, I'm glad to meet you, Lieutenant.

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. She 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 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 six months.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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
(cautious)
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.

SANSKY
(stepping in)
I'm sure the lieutenant's heredity will
have no bearing on his performance,
Mister Gerald.

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

SANSKY
That's all, Lieutenant.

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

INT. BLAIR'S QUARTERS - TIGER CLAW

The cubicle is Bigger than the one on the Diligent, 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
I'm referring to the fact that he's a
narrow minded prick.

(CONTINUED)

MERLIN

I warned you that you were being set-up.

BLAIR

I don't want to hear this. I should have never given you that Kennedy assassination chip to scan.

MERLIN

Admiral Tolwyn knew your Mother was a Pilgrim -- yet he chooses you to deliver this top-secret disc.

BLAIR

That's right. He thought I had something to prove.

MERLIN

No, no, no. He's a veteran of the Pilgrim Wars. He despises Pilgrims for trying to destroy the Confederation. If anything goes wrong on this mission, he wants a fall guy -- and that's you.

BLAIR

Stop.

MERLIN

Of course, fine. Why cast my pearls before swine? By the way, there's someone at the door.

BLAIR

I wish you'd stop that, too.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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 Blair?

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 Tolwyn appears to speak directly to Sansky and Gerald, who listen to the message.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOLWYN

(hologram)

...you are to enlist the services of a civilian scout -- James Taggart, better known as Paladin, who is currently aboard your ship.

GERALD

(startled)

That Privateer! Tolwyn's lost his mind.

TOLWYN

(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.

TOLWYN

One last thing... This entire mission will be conducted under strict radio silence. No messages, even coded, should be transmitted back to me except by drone.

GERALD

What's that all about?

SANSKY

I don't know.

TOLWYN

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 this mission. Stealth and surprise are the watchwords. Avoid any contact with the Kilrathi, unless attacked. Good luck.

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

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

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.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The Tiger Claw hangs in space, way off in the distance we
can see the Charbydis Quasar. Several Rapiers patrol the
parameter.

SUPERIMPOSE: CSS TIGER CLAW: CHARBYDIS SECTOR. APRIL 9TH.
0730 HOURS, ZULU TIME.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Blair and Deveraux, wearing their flight suits, walk
together, approaching a FULLY ARMED RAPIER that comes up
on the elevator from the hangar bay.

BLAIR
Is escorting a message drone to the
jump point 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 invented this kind of
warfare... You have to be ready for
anything... 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.

(CONTINUED)

Deveraux looks Blair straight in the eye.

DEVERAUX

And if that doesn't work, they turn and ram you. They don't care if they die. Just so they take you with them. All for the glory of Sivar.

She climbs up into her cockpit.

DEVERAUX

So I ask you -- are you ready?

BLAIR

Only one way to find out, ace.

He nods to her Rapier, which shows twenty 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.

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 -- they resolve into the message drone, bracketed by two Rapiers.

INT. RAPIER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

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

DEVERAUX

Baker One to Baker Two.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RAPIER COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair flicks his radio switch. We can see his cross, around his neck ON THE OUTSIDE of his flightsuit -- like it's his mission good luck charm.

BLAIR

Roger, Baker One. I thought we were under radio silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 getting an Ultra Low Frequency signal. The Rapier'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
Got 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 Rapiers...

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. RAPIER COCKPIT - BLAIR

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

BLAIR
The drone's malfunctioning. She's out of control.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RAPIER 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 Rapier banks left. Her gloved hand reaches down to a guarded red switch, opens it, flicks it. Nothing happens.

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 Rapier veers between her and the drone, which is snaking through the sky as if deliberately trying to shake it.

Blair clutches his cross for luck...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR
Commencing fire.

EXT. DRONE AND RAPIERS

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

BLAIR (O.S.)
Banking left!

He goes left, and Deveraux reflexively banks hard right, just before the drone explodes.

INT. RAPIER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

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

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

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

BLAIR
Sorry, Baker One. 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
(stiff)
Yes Ma'm.

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

EXT. RAPIERS

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

A patch of space appears to be to visually distorted. A beat later, a KILRATHI STEALTH SHIP cloaks in, kicks it's engines on and heads out.

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. Tolwyn 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 ULE signal was sent from another ship in our hangar bay, it wouldn't have been detected unless we were deliberately monitoring that frequency.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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. 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 -- their banter filling the mess.

BLAIR AND MANIAC --

wander into the mess.

Everyone STANDS, giving Blair AN OVATION. Hooting, cheering -- saying stuff like "Good Kill", asking questions, "Do you think can give me some pointers," -- all of this as sarcastic as hell.

Maniac loves this, joining in.

MANIAC
Gosh, little did I know that I just took a leak next to a war hero.

Three pilots in Deveraux's wing, KNIGHT, HUNTER, and FORBES, a wise-cracking BLACK WOMAN surround Blair and Maniac.

FORBES
So come on, Blair, take us through every pulse-pounding moment. You had the drone in your sights, then...

BLAIR
(aloof)
I just want to get some coffee.

The mood is immediately deflated.

Blair gets his coffee, then heads back through the hatch, pilots stepping out of his way, like he's got the plague.

FORBES
What's up with him?

(CONTINUED)

MANIAC

Give him a chance. He took a lot of
shit at the Academy that he didn't
deserve. Makes it hard for him to know
who his friends really are.

KNIGHT

Right now I'd say he doesn't have any
friends.

Maniac turns on the charm wanting to deflect the animosity
from Blair.

MANIAC

Now, me on the other hand.
(at Forbes)
I make friends wherever I go.

INT. TIGER CLAW - CORRIDOR

Blair is walking back to his quarters, when he passes
Deveraux. He comes to attention, slopping his coffee all
over himself. 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. Got that?

BLAIR

Yes 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. BLAIR'S QUARTERS - TIGER CLAW

Blair is cleaning the coffee stains from his uniform, when
Maniac enters.

MANIAC

So what's wrong with you?

BLAIR

Spilled my coffee...

MANIAC

I said you, half-breed. Those people
were trying to be your friends.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR
Yeah. I'll be one of the crew, until
they see this.

He takes his cross out from under his shirt.

BLAIR
I've been there, Maniac. I'd rather
hang out with Merlin.

MANIAC
Maybe it's time to take it off, Blair.
Put it away. This is the Big Show,
brother. Kill or be killed. You need
someone watching your back... Aw shit,
why do I bother?

BLAIR
Got me.

Blair smiles, his dark mood broken.

MANIAC
Hey, but even as a hostile anti-social
outsider, you've got to admit that
Forbes is hot.

BLAIR
Very hot.

MANIAC
Very hot indeed.

He sits down next to Blair, ready to fill him in with the
salacious details.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

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

GERALD
When do we veer off?

PALADIN
Who says we do?

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

PALADIN
That's right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 was destroyed.

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

PALADIN

I was ordered off by Admiral Wilson. He wanted a message taken back to the fleet.

GERALD

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

Having heard enough Sansky steps in...

SANSKY

(firm)

Paul, we have our orders. Until I hear otherwise from Admiral Tolwyn we'll carry them out.

(checks his watch)

The last patrol should be landing in 30 minutes. Carry on Mr. Taggart.

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The last patrol, two Rapiers -- Forbes and Maniac -- are on their final approach.

INT. RAPIER COCKPIT - FORBES

FORBES
(over radio)
We are talking statistical facts. Women can outfly and outshoot men.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. RAPIER COCKPIT - MANIAC

MANIAC
(over radio)
Shooting your mouth off, maybe...

FORBES
We do better at multitasking, we can keep track of four enemy fighters on the screens...

MANIAC
Yeah? Well can you do this?
(to Flight Boss)
This is Delta Two. Permission to land?

FLIGHT BOSS (O.S.)
(over radio)
Delta Two, you are cleared to land.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Maniac fires the afterburners on his Rapier, banking hard, he pulls into line with the flight deck, its doors open.

FORBES
(sarcastic)
Ooo! That must of been at least three g's...

Then Maniac rolls his craft UPSIDE DOWN and guns the throttle...

MANIAC
Try this...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FLIGHT CONTROL - TIGER CLAW

FLIGHT BOSS
Delta Two, you're coming in too hot.
Abort.
(a beat)
Delta Two? Do you copy? Shit!

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

An alarm barks out. Yellow clad deck personnel scramble to get out of the way of the oncoming Rapier. Which is still upside down.

FLIGHT BOSS
Delta Two. YOU ARE INVERTED!

As Maniac's ship rockets through the hanger bay doors
MANIAC'S COCKPIT --

Manic jerks his flight stick hard right.

RESUME FLIGHT DECK --

And the Rapier flips over and touches down!

MANIAC
Not any more.

The Rapier fires it's reverse thrusters and brakes. The Rapier pulls to a halt. Barely before it hits a fuel truck and DECKMASTER PETERSON, who was desperately trying to get the truck's driver to get his vehicle out of the Rapier's path.

FLIGHT BOSS
I'm going to have your wings,
Lieutenant! Just wait until your wing
leader... DELTA ONE!

And Forbes' Rapier is coming in UPSIDE DOWN TOO!

FORBES
(to Maniac)
Now what were you saying?

Forbes' Rapier does A 520 DEGREE ROLL, righting itself at the last possible moment and touching down.

FORBES
Now, that's how you do it!

Maniac is already out of his cockpit. He walks up to Forbes' ship. The Deck crew keeps their distance -- still traumatized by Maniac's and Forbes' antics.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Forbes' cockpit pops open.

MANIAC
I'm impressed.

They look at each other, sharing the adrenaline buzz. Then, they start giggling like a couple of high school kids who just played a game of chicken. Then...

FORBES
Oh shit.

She's looking past Maniac at...

DEVERAUX --

who stands on the flight deck, rigid and fuming.

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS.

Deveraux, still upset, paces. The door buzzer sounds. She opens on Forbes.

DEVERAUX
(scowling)
You don't want to be here right now.

Forbes, smiling, holds out A BOTTLE OF SCOTCH. There's a familiarity with her smile that suggests that the two are friends as well as fellow officers.

FORBES
Best you can buy on the black market.
Just for you, sir.

DEVERAUX
Trying to bribe me?

FORBES
I think I better do something.

DEVERAUX
Goddamn right. It was all I could do to keep the Flight Boss from bringing you up on charges. Christ Rosie, what the Hell were you thinking?

FORBES
I wasn't thinking. That's the point.
Maniac...

DEVERAUX
Maniac?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FORBES

Lt. Marshall wanted to push the envelope, and I was right there with him. I admit it. That kind of adrenaline rush. It's better than sex. You remember sex?

DEVERAUX

Don't start. You're walking on a very thin line.

FORBES

It will never happen again, I swear Commander. Now, will you have a drink?

DEVERAUX

Never again?

FORBES

Never. Speaking of sex, Blair's kind of cute in a sullen sort of way...

DEVERAUX

You're the seductress, not me. Just shut up and pour.

The tension goes out of the room and Forbes, relieved grabs for the glasses.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

Blair 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 looks up from the holographic chart.

PALADIN

I was one of them.

SANSKY

We're going through a jump point... a very difficult jump point.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SANSKY (cont'd)
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. I respectfully request that you choose someone else. 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.

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 stalagmite, 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 like this.

Paladin steps into the hologram and points as he explains.

PALADIN
The Ulysses Corridor... six months of hard travel using seven known jump points. By using this warp in the space time continuum, we will be there in...
(checks watch)
...less than three minutes.

(CONTINUED)

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.

The small hologram of Merlin appears.

MERLIN

If the entry trajectory is wrong, 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 special singularity. My guess... It's a fifty seven point one percent chance that we're doomed.

BLAIR

A fountain of optimism, as usual.
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.

HUNTER

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

KNIGHT

You know what we're not doing?

FORBES

Turning around.

MANIAC

The ultimate rush!

Most of the pilots stare at Maniac like he's nuts. Forbes just grins.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Sansky, Gerald, Deveraux, Blair and Paladin are on the bridge along with the various officers and noncoms.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS --

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

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HELMSMAN
Aye, aye, sir.

The alarm continues to sound throughout the ship!

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

The alarm has men and women sweating and tense. 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.

HANGER BAY --

Two members of the arming crew, Specialists JONES and OLIVIA lock down a rack of missiles.

TORPEDO ROOM --

Spaceman RODRIGUEZ, 2nd class, a young Latino crosses himself.

FLIGHT CONTROL --

The Flight Boss drains his coffee and straps himself in.

PILOT'S MESS --

Most of the pilots are holding onto their tables or fastening the seat-belts on their chairs. Except for Forbes and Maniac.

ENGINE ROOM --

Engineer DAVIES grabs onto a hand-hold and looks at his crew mates as...

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

Steady. PALADIN

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 space time 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 and women are caught, Pompeii-like, with expressions of fear or bewilderment...

A LONG, LONG TRAVELING SHOT past all these crew members. 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. They 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. 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 the jump point! We made it!

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 Rapier will hold together at the interphase... but I'm sure a real pilot like yourself will have no problem.

Paladin grins and 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR
It's still bleeding. 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 intercom.

SANSKY (V.O.)
(over intercom)
This is the captain. As most of you
have guessed, we just made one hell of
a jump.

Rodriguez kisses his St. Christopher...

SANSKY (cont'd)
Actually we've just taken a little
short cut into the Ulysses Corridor...
If you don't already know, that's where
the Pegasus Naval Base 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.

Maniac and Forbes look at each other. Action!

SANSKY (cont'd)
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.

Crew members exchange worried looks...

EXT. POLARIS ROADS - STARBASE

The fleet is massed around the starbase, fighting ships in
the vanguard. Ready for the big battle.

INT. TOLWYN'S OFFICE

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BELLE GARDE

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

TOLWYN

No message from the Tiger Claw?

BELLE GARDE

Nothing. Damn strange.

TOLWYN

Unless we're right.

BELLE GARDE

I hope we aren't.

TOLWYN

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

BELLE GARDE

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

Bellegarde leaves. Tolwyn ponders.

EXT. SNAKEIR - SOMEWHERE IN THE ULYSSES CORRIDOR

The dreadnaught, surrounded by several smaller escorts are in orbit around a planet -- The stars in the background look unfamiliar.

SUPERIMPOSE: KILRATHI BATTLE FLEET: SOMEWHERE IN THE ULYSSES CORRIDOR. APRIL 11TH. 1040 HOURS, ZULU TIME.

INT. SNAKEIR BRIDGE

The Kilrathi Admiral is on bended knee in front of a multiarmed fearsome beast-like Effigy -- The Kilrathi War God Sivar. Around the idol are the banners of the Admiral's clan - A testimony to their fallen and future glory.

The Kilrathi Captain approaches and waits respectfully. The Admiral raises his head.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN

(subtitled)

Sir, we are picking up a very faint Pilgrim signal.

The Admiral stands and looks into the shadows beyond his command chair.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

(English: delayed translation)

Your friend?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Traitor steps forward.

TRAITOR
Get a fix on the signal.

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 RAPIERS

The two fighters thread through the asteroid ring.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Maniac, any long range signals on your scanner?

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
Only your sweet voice on the short range, half-breed.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair, with his Pilgrim cross on the outside of his flight suit, is checking his heads up display, scanning for something... anything...

Suddenly Maniac's voice crackles in his ear.

MANIAC (V.O.)
(over radio)
Blair, 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 Rapiers, 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERLIN

Crosstalk between a large Kilrathi vessel and the brown dwarf down there. Can't decipher the code.

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...

WE PULL BACK To REVEAL Maniac's Rapier 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, Blair. What's your call?

Blair touches his cross for good luck...

BLAIR

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

EXT. ASTEROID RING

Two Kilrathi Dralhti fighters are closing in fast, bracketing the ConCom ship...

The two Confed Rapiers 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

The big one's shielded. I've got two more bogies coming up from the brown dwarf.

MANIAC

I got 'em. Let's engage.

BLAIR

Negative! There could be more behind the dwarf star. Let's book!

MANIAC

Spoilsport. All right. Let's go back to mama.

The two Rapiers turn, kick in their afterburners and disappear in a streak of light. The two Dralhti 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 Dralhti fighters.

GERALD

You both fired missiles. You were on a ReCon mission, yet you revealed your position to the Kilrathi.
(aimed at Blair)
Very convenient.

BLAIR

Excuse me?

GERALD

It's well documented that Pilgrims have been responsible for some of the Confed's compromised communications. And given your background, Mr. Blair...

Deveraux turns to Blair. The look on her face says volumes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVERAUX
What's he saying?

Before Blair can answer, Maniac jumps in.

MANIAC
Ma'm, what choice did we have?
They homed in on my Rapier's engine
heat. We were sitting ducks.

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

Maniac and Blair salute and leave. Paladin watches them
go, then turns to Sansky...

PALADIN
A Kilrathi ComCon ship doesn't fly
around alone either. It's a support
vessel. The Kilrathi fleet must be
nearby.

GERALD
There's a more obvious target. The
ComCon ship could be supporting a
Kilrathi outpost on the brown dwarf. We
should take it out before they can send
for help.

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

GERALD
You're a civilian scout -- not a naval
officer, Combat operations are our
concern, not yours.

PALADIN
My neck's on the line here, too.

Sansky ponders a moment.

SANSKY
The X.O.'s right. We're on our own out
here. If we don't finesse the enemy
when we can, they'll win the hand.
(to Paladin)
Chart us a course that takes us into
the rings of planet four fifteen.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SANSKY (cont'd)

Once we're in the radiation belt, the
Kilrathi scanners won't spot us.

PALADIN

As you wish, Captain.

SANSKY

Deveraux, you'll lead the raid...

But Deveraux isn't paying attention, still shaken by
Gerald's accusation towards Blair.

SANSKY

Lt. Commander?

DEVERAUX

Sir?

SANSKY

Paladin will guide you in after he's
plotted our course. That's all, people.
You have your orders.

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS

Angel, in her flight suit, is alone, spending a quiet
moment before the upcoming battle. She's watching a small
holographic post card of a MAN in his early forties, and
TWO YOUNG CHILDREN. 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 out in space. She's so far away, it
might take years for her to even get
it.

DEVERAUX

(mutters)

That's it, rub it in.

The door buzzer sounds. She hits the pause button. The
hologram freezes in place. Deveraux groans and gets off
the bunk, assuming it's Forbes.

Then her door slides open. Blair stands there in his
flight suit, looking grim. For once, she is caught
completely off guard.

BLAIR

Commander I need to talk with you.

He pushes past her, not waiting to be invited in.

DEVERAUX

You just don't barge into my...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

Here.

He tosses his Pilgrim's cross at her. She catches it.

BLAIR

That answer your questions? I'm half-Pilgrim. So, of course in Gerald's mind, I started selling out the Tiger Claw the moment I stepped on board. And judging from the look on your face, you think he's right.

DEVERAUX

(surprised)

Sit down, Lieutenant.

He angrily parks himself on her bunk. She turns the cross over in her hands

DEVERAUX

I grew up an orphan, Blair. My parents were on the S.S. United Nations.

BLAIR

(realizing)

The United Nations...

DEVERAUX

A target of opportunity, in a terrorist war. Because of the Pilgrims I have no family.

BLAIR

(indicating to the hologram)

What about him?

DEVERAUX

When I shipped out the first time. He and I were the same age. Now he's got grey in his hair, married with two children.

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

DEVERAUX

(abruptly)

I left whatever chance I had at a family to fight in this God forsaken war. And I hate everything about having to fight. But it is the right thing to do for the survival of our race. It makes me hate the enemy you have to fight, whether they are the Pilgrims or Kilrathi.

He's moved, silent. Blair stands. Their eyes meet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAIR

My dad fought for the Confederation in the Pilgrim wars because he knew it was the right thing to do. And I fight against the Kilrathi because I know it's the right thing to do. So please don't judge me because my mother's parents were Pilgrims.

She looks at Blair long and hard. Then she hands Blair his cross back.

DEVERAUX

You better let me suit up.

BLAIR

Yes, Ma'm.

Blair salutes and leaves.

EXT. ASTEROID RING - BROWN DWARF

Like Indians sneaking up on the settlers, the wing of Rapiers, accompanied by two Broadsword bombers, quietly picks its way through the debris of the asteroid rings around the brown dwarf. We can hear the pilot's radio chatter.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

Picking up any Com traffic, Baker seven?

PALADIN (O.S.)

Not a bloody thing.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

They're observing radio silence, except for short range frequencies.

PALADIN (O.S.)

Or they aren't here any more.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

Baker Two, three and four... Anything?

FORBES (O.S.)

Negative, boss.

BLAIR (O.S.)

De nada, chief.

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

Maniac is watching a cluster of blips on his HUD.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

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

FORBES (O.S.)
That's just a guess.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
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 Tolwyn.

Aboard the other Rapiers, 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?

There is a tense moment aboard every fighter in the wing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

Finally, Deveraux punches something on her computer.

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

PALADIN
Charlie Six Alpha Zebra Niner

Angel enters the letters and numbers as Paladin reads them. Her screen blinks for a moment - Then a message flashes on it; "Admiral Tolwyn, Fourth Fleet - Security access granted".

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...

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. Rapiers 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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!

The bridge light switches to an EERIE RED GLOW, as the
alarm sounds.

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Rapiers 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?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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!

INT. TORPEDO ROOM - TIGER CLAW

Rodriguez loads and locks a torpedo...

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

AI VOICE
All tubes ready to fire.

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

SANSKY
(to Gerald)
That damned Paladin was right.

GERALD
Maybe he knew something we didn't.

RADAR MAN
Torpedoes 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. Olivia and Jones scramble back to their feet.

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 Rapier 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 torpedoes SLAM INTO the weak shields of the destroyer and EXPLODE. The shock wave breaks the destroyer in half, spewing a huge gas bubble and debris into apace.

WIDER. --

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The huge torpedoes 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.

OBUTU

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

Sansky picks himself up off the deck. What now?

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Kilrathi fighters -- Dralhti and Krants -- are now just outside the shield, battling Rapiers.

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.
(over intercom)
Torpedo room report.

INT. TORPEDO ROOM - TIGER CLAW

Amid smoke and general chaos, Rodriguez grabs the com.

RODRIGUEZ
(over intercom)
Tubes three and four damaged.
autoloaders not operational.

RESUME BRIDGE --

SANSKY
Damn!

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 Rapiers and two Broadwords comes in behind the dreadnought and destroyer.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVERAUX
All right boys and girls. All Rapiers
except Maniac and Blair, engage those
Dralthi.

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

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

EXT. BETWEEN MOONS

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

BROADSWORDS --

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
Broadwords, follow me in. Maniac,
Blair. Cover us!

INT. BROADWORD 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 torpedoes, which
streak toward the damaged Tiger Claw.

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS

The torpedoes slam into the shield and send shockwaves
throughout the ship, causing major destruction. Then,
below decks, a TORPEDO PENETRATES, and EXPLODES.

ENGINE ROOM --

Men and equipment are ENGULFED IN A FIRE BALL. Engineer
Davies is 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.

OBUTU

(relaying reports)

The hull has been breached at level three. Steering loss, eighty percent.

GERALD

Sir! Sir. Medic to the bridge!

SANSKY

(weakly)

What's Deveraux doing?

EXT. BROADSWORDS & THREE RAPIERS

The Broadwords are on a bombing run. Deveraux's Rapier leads them in...

Four Kilrathi fighters -- Salthi -- move to intercept. Deveraux shoots one out of the sky with a missile! Blair gets another with his lasers...

MANIAC

Hey! Save some for me...

Maniac shoots a Salthis' wing off. It spirals into the last Kilrathi fighter, both go up in a fireball!

MANIAC

Buy one, get one free!

Cannon fire starts reaching up towards the fighters.

DEVERAUX

It's getting hot. It's up to the bombers -- let's get back out there.

The Rapiers veer off. The Broadwords continue on their bomb run.

PALADIN (O.S.)

(over radio)

Thanks for the escort

(to Knight)

Steady on course. Wait for them to launch a torpedo. They'll lower their shield just before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sky fills with laser blasts and tachyon cannon fire. The Broadwords countermeasures computer automatically activates a variety of weapons, fireballs, tiny electronically filled missiles, etc. STILL, THE BROADWORDS ARE TAKING HITS.

INT. BROADWORD COCKPIT - KNIGHT

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

KNIGHT
They're throwing up too much stuff.

The Broadword is rocked.

KNIGHT
I'm hit!

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

But there is another blast and Knight DISAPPEARS IN A FIREBALL!

EXT. NEAR DESTROYER AND DREADNOUGHT.

As Knight's Broadword disintegrates, Paladin must veer away from the fireball.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

EXT. RAPIERS AND KRANT

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
What took you so long?

BLAIR (O.S.)
Got stuck in traffic.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is scanning the sky.

BLAIR
Where's Paladin?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANIAC (O.S.)
No visual contact. Son-of-a-bitch
booked!

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

EXT. DREADNOUGHT

The huge vessels forward tubes do indeed dilate open.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(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
Baker leader, get your starcraft clear
of the pulse wave!

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

EXT. BETWEEN TWO MOONS

The Three Rapiers 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...

everything disappears in an INTENSE WHITE LIGHT. Seconds pass, the light dims, amid a HUGE EXPLOSION the Dreadnought BREAKS IN TWO and a shockwave starts spreading out, hitting the destroyer. 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 controls, 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. 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 Rapier, and the faint illumination of a tractor beam. Blair peers down at him...

BLAIR

(over radio)

We outsiders have to stick together.
Let's get you back to the Claw.

He gives Paladin a little salute. Paladin sees Blair's Pilgrim cross GLINT in the reflected sunlight.

EXT. NEAR TIGER CLAW

The remaining Kilrathi fighters break off their engagements and high tail it back toward the far side of the twin moons.

EXT. MANIAC & FORBES RAPIERS

MANIAC
Forbes, let's have some fun.

FORBES
I thought you'd never ask.

Maniac and Forbes gun their two Rapiers after the fleeing ships. Then...

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

FORBES
Maniac?

MANIAC
The night's still young. One last dance won't hurt...

EXT. FLEEING KILRATHI FIGHTERS

Suddenly two Dralathi veer around and head back, on a collision course.

INT. FORBES COCKPIT

Forbes sees the oncoming Dralathi...

FORBES
They're trying to ram! I guess they're not in a dancing mood. Spoilsports!

...and opens fire with everything she's got. The Dralathi disintegrates right in front of her.

MANIAC'S POV --

Ahead of him Maniac can see the second Dralathi coming straight at him...

MANIAC
Watch this Rosie.

And Maniac guns his Rapier right at the Dralathi...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FORBES
Shoot him... MANIAC OPEN FIRE!

But Maniac continues on a collision course. Forbes brings her Rapier in behind Maniac, trying to get a shot on the Dralthi...

FORBES
Shoot him, or I will!

MANIAC
It's all in the timing...

The Dralthi and Maniac's fighter are within seconds of colliding...

When Maniac ROLLS his fighter sideways, pulls his nose up and lets loose a volley of cannon fire into the Dralthi's cockpit! The Dralthi critically hit, JUST MISSES Maniac's ship and spirals out of control right into...

EXT. FORBES'S RAPIER

Maniac realizes, but it's too late!

MANIAC (O.S.)
(shouting)
Rosie, shit! PULL UP!

But Forbes can't react quick enough -- The Dralthi strikes the side of her ship, amid a shower of sparks.

EXT. FORBES & MANIAC'S RAPIERS

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 Rapier in until he can look into her cockpit.

MANIAC
Rosie. Can you hold her?

FORBES
I could fly this thing and cook you breakfast.

But the Rapier wobbles and veers dangerously.

INT. FORBES & MANIAC'S COCKPITS

Forbes steadies her craft.

MANIAC
Hey, quit showing off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FORBES
Impressive, huh?

MANIAC
Eject. I'll tractor you in.

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

MANIAC
Just stay with me, Rosie. We'll do it
together.

The two Rapiers 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
Jeez, 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.

FLIGHT BOSS
(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. Just like before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANIAC
Except that you're right side up.

FORBES
(almost chuckles)
I knew something was wrong!

MANIAC
Almost there.

THROUGH THE COCKPIT PLEXIGLASS --

Maniac can see the doors, widening like a giant mouth, much too fast. He glances over. Forbes Rapier 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 Rapiers appear in the door. Maniac's Rapier 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.

BLAIR RUNS AFTER HIM. In the background we can see Blair's Rapier and Paladin, being tended by a MEDIC.

BLAIR
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 Rapier.

MANIAC
(screams)
Rosie! Rosie!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

A dozen Rapiers 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' Rapier.

DEVERAUX

Forbes? Rosie? Can you hear me? Rosie?
Answer. Just key your mike, if you can.
Come on girl. Just one little click.

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

HUNTER

I've got approximately ninety seconds
of fuel left, Commander.

PILOT'S VOICE

Ditto, for me.

ANOTHER PILOT

I'm almost empty too..

Deveraux studies the wreckage. Could anyone have survived?
Finally....

DEVERAUX

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 Rapier.

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 Rapier 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 Flight Boss there. He begins waving his arms.

MANIAC

Hey! You can't do this! You can't do
this. Stop! Stop! Please!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bulldozer goes through the force field. Maniac runs after it, but...

Blair tackles him.

BLAIR
There's nothing you can do!

MANIAC
Get off me you Pilgrim son-of-a-bitch!

BLAIR
(angry)
Fine. If you hadn't pushed the envelope maybe she'd still be alive!

Blair abruptly lets Maniac go. But Maniac doesn't move -- he watches in silent horror as the bulldozer, on the other side of the force field wall, PUSHES THE RAPIER WRECKAGE OFF THE DECK. Maniac turns to Blair...

MANIAC
Maybe Gerald was right. Maybe it wasn't an accident we encountered the Kilrathi in that asteroid field. Maybe your Pilgrim blood got the better of you.

And with that he walks off.

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

The waiting Rapiers land. Deveraux's Rapier is the last one in...

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Sansky is nowhere to be seen. The remaining officers look haggard and exhausted. Gerald is looking at a panel of scanners.

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. Deveraux and Paladin arrive on the bridge. They look at each other -- where is Sansky?

OBUTU

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

GERALD

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

Gerald turns his attention to the bank of visual scanners. Everyone else also stops what they are doing...

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. The seconds feel more like years. Then...

RADAR MAN

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

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

PALADIN

Quiet!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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 another 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.

HANGER BAY --

Men and equipment are thrown about. Olivia and Jones are CRUSHED as a damaged Rapier tears free of its moorings! Fire erupts.

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. Spaceman Rodriguez punches the emergency button. The hatch door slides shut, TRAPPING RODRIGUEZ AND THE REMAINING MEN INSIDE. Rodriguez's face appears in the porthole.

REVERSE ANGLE --

On the faces of the crewmen safe on the other side of the door, as they watch Rodriguez die horribly inside.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Blair picks himself off the deck...

There is a sudden WHISTLING SOUND. Everyone hears it.

BLAIR
What's that sound?

PETERSON
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.

PETERSON
(shouting to his crew)
Grab anything that will seal it! Now!

Pilots and crewmen race into action.

MANIAC --

squats at the edge of the flight deck, watching this all with a blank expression.

BLAIR --

is running, when he sees a COMPOSITE WING OF A RAPIER next to a damaged fighter that was being repaired.

BLAIR
Someone help me!

The wing is too heavy for Blair alone. Peterson hurries over to help. It can barely be lifted by both of them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The whistling grows more ominous. Debris is flying around the flight deck, being sucked toward the crack in the doors

BLAIR

Come on. We can do it.

They haul the wing close to the doors...

The suction from the crack is so strong that the only thing keeping Blair and Peterson anchored to the floor is the weight of the wing.

MANIAC --

sees...

BLAIR --

trip over the piece of debris on the deck. He stumbles, losing his grip on the wing.

He's sucked towards the crack -- a dead-man, until he manages to grab on to a hook bolted to the deck, used to secure the fighters.

The other pilots and crew members hang back, not willing to risk their lives to save Blair.

MANIAC --

stands. Blair clings to the hook but his grip is slipping. The crew members watch, frozen in inaction.

MANIAC

You sons of bitches just going to watch him die?

Maniac is wrapping a cable that was ripped loose from it's moorings around his waist.

MANIAC

Secure this.

He hands the loop of cable over to the other pilots and starts towards Blair.

THE CRACK --

splits open even wider and the increased suction pulls Maniac off his feet. He flies towards the crack, then the cable PULLS TIGHT. It stops him from being sucked through the crack but cinches so tightly around his waist that it seems to almost cut him in two.

(CONTINUED)

77.
CONTINUED:

He swallows a scream, clutches the cable with one hand, and like a rock climber skipping across a cliff face, makes his way to Blair.

MANIAC
(choked)
Grab on!

Blair releases his grip on the hook and clings to Maniac.

MANIAC
(screaming at the crew)
Come on!

Crew members pull Maniac and Blair away from the crack.

Meanwhile Peterson and several other crew members have HOISTED THE RAPIER WING UPRIGHT. Anchoring themselves to the deck, they release it -- the tremendous force of the vacuum outside SUCKS the heavy metal wing up against the crack LIKE IT WERE A LEGO TOY. The shrieking howl becomes a slight tea kettle.

A REPAIR CREW arrives in a cart carrying two large metal bottles. They blast around the wing with a thick, viscous material which almost instantly hardens into a solid mass. The leak is sealed.

BLAIR AND MANIAC --

huddle together. Blair helps Maniac un-cinch the cable from around his waist. As the cable falls away, there's A RING OF BLOOD around Maniac's waist, where the cable has cut into him.

MANIAC
Space age liposuction, huh Pilgrim?

He falls to his knees, nearly passing out. Blair supports him.

BLAIR
Get you to sick bay, buddy.

He struggles to lift Maniac.

MANIAC
I'm sorry, man. I didn't mean it. I killed her. I pushed it too far. You had nothing to do with it.

And he passes out.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - MOON CRATER

The stricken ship bleeds air and debris into the void.

INT. SANSKY'S QUARTERS - TIGER CLAW

Sansky is propped up, very weak. IV tubes are sticking out of his arm. Gerald and Paladin are in a heated argument.

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. Mr. Taggart nearly lost his life destroying the Kilrathi dreadnought.

GERALD

But what about the ULF signals? Who sent them?

SANSKY

We have nothing concrete. It could have just been radio noise in the asteroid field, misinterpreted by Blair's PPC.

(to Paladin)

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. The ship has suffered massive damage throughout and we have almost no operational fighters left. But that's not the worst problem.

PALADIN

What is?

GERALD

(pointed)

The fuel cell area was almost completely destroyed.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GERALD (cont'd)
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.

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 Rapiers. Other crewmen try to repair the sprung door seals in the background as Blair comes out on the deck, sees Deveraux hunched under her own plane, and approaches.

BLAIR
Commander. Can I talk to you?

Deveraux emerges from under her plane. She still looks shaken from Forbes' death, but she can't let go of her stiffness towards Blair.

DEVERAUX
Sure, I've got a minute.

BLAIR
Can we stop the bullshit, please.

Deveraux is shocked to hear Blair talk so bluntly.

BLAIR
I just came to tell you I feel bad
about Forbes. It was such a stupid way
to die.

Equally shocking, Deveraux suddenly seems on the verge of tears.

DEVERAUX
Stupid doesn't describe it. It's a
total waste. And it goddamn hurts!

This is said loudly enough that the other crew members look her way. Blair wants to spare her any embarrassment.

BLAIR
Walk with me.

Deveraux nods 'yes', and they walk in silence for a moment, towards a hatchway.

DEVERAUX
I want her back, Blair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR
You need your friend, and I need mine --
so I want you to do something for me.

The walk through hatchway into...

INT. CORRIDOR - TIGER CLAW. CONTINUOUS.

It's deserted except for them.

DEVERAUX
What are you talking about?

BLAIR
Maniac... Marshall. He's a dead man, if
you don't forgive him. He loved her,
did you know that?

DEVERAUX
He had a hell of way of showing it.

BLAIR
That's right and now he's as sure as
you are that he killed Rosie. And I
know him -- he'll go over the edge --
that'll be his atonement. Maybe if you
forgive him, he can forgive himself.

DEVERAUX
Look, I know... She was as big an
adrenaline junkie as he was. She
didn't have to...

And she stops, nearing tears again.

BLAIR
That's right. Pilots like them don't
think their ever going to die. But now
Maniac knows better and that's
punishment enough to last a lifetime.

Deveraux is silent for a long beat...

DEVERAUX
I'll talk to him.

BLAIR
Thank you... If there's anything...

DEVERAUX
I know...

BLAIR
All right.

He turns to go.

(CONTINUED)

DEVERAUX

Lieutenant... Blair. Have a drink with me when we've finished the repairs. If I'm alone I'm just going to think about it.

BLAIR

I'd like that.

He starts to salute but then it turns into him touching her shoulder. Feeling awkward he drops his arm and leaves.

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. GERALD'S OFFICE - TIGER CLAW

Small and cramped, Gerald sits at his desk reviewing damage reports. Several holos of Gerald at the Naval Academy sit on his desk. He picks one up, reflecting.

A JUNIOR OFFICER enters.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Sir. You better come to the bridge.

GERALD

I'll be right there, Lieutenant.

The Junior Officer salutes and leaves. Gerald puts down the holo-pic and stands to leave...

CLOSE ON HOLO-PIC --

A younger Gerald stands proudly next to his fellow graduating class...

...and standing right next to Gerald is THE TRAITOR that we saw on the Snakeir bridge.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Paladin is already there, wearing a space suit, minus helmet. Gerald and Deveraux arrive. They hear the telltale sound of an incoming ship.

DEVERAUX

What is she? Another destroyer?

GERALD

It doesn't matter. We can't take another round of bombardment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEVERAUX
We'll go down fighting -- the air lock
isn't functioning, but we managed to
get the flight deck doors operational.
We have four Rapiers ready to go.

PALADIN
We'll do better than that, Deveraux.
(smiles)
That ship up there is going to save our
ass.

INT. MANIAC'S QUARTERS.

Klaxon bells announce the upcoming mission but Maniac
seems oblivious, lying on his bunk.

Then, his door hisses open.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)
What the hell are you doing,
Lieutenant? Suit up!

MANIAC
(expressionless)
Ma'm?

DEVERAUX
I need my best pilots out there...
She strides away, but her act of forgiveness has worked.
Maniac grabs his flight suit, his expression half way
between that crazed smile and tears.

INT. FIGHT DECK.

The Diligent, and two Rapiers are being readied for a
launch. A squad of Marines marches into the Diligent in
space suits. GERALD, in a space-suit, is among them.

INT. DILIGENT - HATCH

Paladin and Blair are supervising the boarding from inside
the Diligent's hatch. They are not happy to see Gerald
marching up the gangplank.

PALADIN
I think you're on the wrong ship,
Commander.

GERALD
If you think I'm going to let my men be
flown into combat by a rogue and a half-
breed you're sadly mistaken.

With that Gerald pushes past them. Paladin hits the switch
to seal the doors much harder than he needs to.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

The merchantman's hatch closes, 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 Rapiers 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

Gerald, Paladin, Deveraux and Blair all wear full space suits, with their helmets ready at 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.

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The large Communications ship seen earlier, comes around the dark side of the moon, escorted by two Dralhti fighters. A SMALL COMMUNICATIONS DRONE drops from the belly of the Kilrathi ship, ignites its engines and heads into space.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

PALADIN

I'm picking up an additional heat signature -- looks like a drone... The big ship should be visible any moment now...

The four officers gaze at the visual scanners, and see the Kilrathi vessels hove into view.

DEVERAUX

(rising excitement)

That's no destroyer.

BLAIR

It's the Communication ship Maniac and I came up against.

GERALD

They'll spot our heat corona, soon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PALADIN
They won't have the chance. Blair, man
the ion gun.
(pushes radio button)
This is Paladin. Attack! Attack!

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The two Rapiers streak from behind meteorites and engage the Dralhti. 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 Rapier DESTROYS THE FIRST DRALTHI.

MANIAC (O.S.)
(over radio)
Yeah!

The second Rapier is engaged in a winding, twisting dogfight. Maniac veers his fighter to engage the second Kilrathi.

TWO MORE DRALTHI --

fighters suddenly appear from around the moon, on full afterburner.

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN POSITION

From his dome, he can see the Dralhti 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
(over intercom)
Marines, stand in the door!

INT. BAY DILIGENT

The Marines, in pressure suits, lock and load their weapons.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over intercom)
As soon as you get in, go straight for
the bridge.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PALADIN (cont'd)
We've got to get control of that ship
before they scuttle her! Understood?

SERGEANT
(over intercom)
Yes, sir.

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN

A second Dralathi makes its attack run, cannons blazing.
Blair tracks him and blasts him to fragments.

BLAIR
Yes!

EXT. KILRATHI COMMUNICATIONS SHIP

The Diligent is alongside, inching closer to the upper
deck. The Diligent's docking umbilical extends...

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin, Gerald and Deveraux watch through the large
windows as Paladin maneuvers closer.

DEVERAUX
They can't use missiles, now. We're too
close.

THROUGH WINDOW --

A Dralathi fighter appears, heading straight for them.

GERALD
He's going to ram us!

INT. DRALTHI COCKPIT

The Kilrathi, in an opaque 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. DRALTHI COCKPIT

The Kilrathi turns his head to see Maniac's Rapier,
bearing down on him.

EXT. NEAR KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

Maniac's Rapier collides with the Dralhti cockpit, SHEERING IT OFF NEATLY. The Dralhti spins wildly out of control and crashes into the Communications ship!

INT. COCKPIT - MANIAC

Maniac's damaged Rapier shakes, rattle and rolls.

MANIAC
That's for you, Rosie.

EXT. KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

The Diligent's umbilical latches onto the Kilrathi ship, near the gaping hole left by the Dralhti.

INT. CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

A section of wall glows white hot, exploding inwards! Revealing the Diligent's airlock -- which depressurizes and opens. Spacesuited Confed Marines come towards us in a surreal zero-g grace, and leading the charge... Deveraux!

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN

Over the intercom we can hear the radio chatter of the battle. Blair kisses his Pilgrim cross, placing it on the outside of his suit. He attaches his helmet and grabs a weapon...

INT. CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

Blair comes through the hole. Readyng his gun, he eases out into the corridor...

To be met by a Kilrathi! But he is already dead, caught without a spacesuit when this section of the hull was breached by the spiraling Dralhti -- he floats gruesomely in the airless corridor. Relieved, Blair lowers his weapon and starts following the sounds of battle...

The inside of the Kilrathi ship is alien -- sharp angles and exposed tubes give it almost a predatory feel -- like the lair of some jungle animal. He comes to an airlock. Hitting the pressure plate he steps inside...

THROUGH AIRLOCK --

... into the green fog-like atmosphere that the Kilrathi breathe. Making it difficult to see at all -- and making the alien architecture seem even more creepy. Blair switches his suit to thermal imaging.

BLAIR'S POV (THROUGH THERMAL IMAGER) --

The same as his normal view spectrum -- except that any "hot" objects are enhanced. Blair makes his way up the corridor he comes across signs of the battle -- laser blasts on the walls, corpses -- both Kilrathi and Human. The feeling of death in the air is starting to become spooky...

BLAIR
(to Merlin)
Give me a joystick any day...

MERLIN
(voice only)
I think the bridge is up ahead. But I'm also getting strong electronic emissions to the right...

Up ahead we can see a FIRE FIGHT -- Deveraux and the marines are engaged in a heated exchange with Kilrathi warriors in battle armor -- defending a hatch way. The laser bolts and explosions are exaggerated by Blair's thermal imager...

One of the marines takes a direct hit... Deveraux pulls him out of the line of fire... Blair weighs his options, then...

...ducks down the side corridor!

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

PALADIN
(over intercom)
Blair! Blair? Answer your station...

But there is no answer. Gerald turns to Paladin.

GERALD
You should have never brought that half-breed on this mission. His orders were to stay on this ship. Stay here.

Gerald locks his helmet in position, cocks his gun and heads for the airlock. Paladin looks worried.

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

Inside a KILRATHI OFFICER prowls nervously, watching a bank of monitors which show the battle raging in the ship's corridors. He keys a code into the main console and glances at the big, RED PLUNGER LIKE DEVICE set in the center of the console.

INT. UNFAMILIAR CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

Blair moves cautiously...

A laser blast explodes just above his head! Instinctively he fires back, killing one of the KILRATHI WARRIORS waiting in ambush. He aims at the second...

CLICK! Blair's weapon jams!

The SECOND WARRIOR, sensing the helplessness of his victim, advances to enjoy his kill...

Blair desperately tries to un-jam his weapon -- to no avail. He looks up to see...

The seven foot tall Warrior, his alien face seeming to smile through his helmet, bringing the butt of his weapon down...

Struck, Blair drops his weapon and falls backwards...

The Kilrathi raises his gloved paw -- four razor like talons extend from his battle suit...

But the blow never comes... The Warrior staggers back -- a large gash can be seen across the front of his suit...

And sticking out of the Warrior's stomach is BLAIR'S PILGRIM CROSS!

The Warrior falls to the floor, dead.

Blair picks up his gun. Ejecting the power clip, he slams another one in and cocks the gun. We can hear the sound of the blaster charging.

He looks down at his cross, almost stopping to retrieve it. BUT HE DECIDES NOT TO. Blair heads out...

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

The Kilrathi Officer hears the door operate, and turns to see...

KILRATHI OFFICERS POV - INFRARED BAND

A figure in a spacesuit is clearly visible, but... is it Kilrathi, or Confed? Suddenly, the figure raises a blaster...

The Kilrathi's vision is destroyed by a brilliant flash of heat and light.

THE KILRATHI OFFICER --

staggers back, his huge paw reaching for the large plunger-like button. He feels for it, almost reaches it....

Another blast rips apart his chest, leaving a gaping hole in his ornamental armor.

WIDER --

Blair watches the being die. The death throes cease. Blair starts to look around...

INT. UNFAMILIAR CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

Gerald comes across the two dead Kilrathis... and hurries on.

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

The fog like atmosphere is preventing Blair from seeing further than a few feet in-front of his face.

He comes to a side door. He presses a pressure plate and the door slides open...

INT. COMMUNICATIONS ROOM - KILRATHI SHIP

An open CONFED COMMUNICATIONS DRONE sits in the center of the room!

By it are several message chips. Blair examines a JURY-RIGGED BOX. Center piece of this adhoc computer is the DECODING CHIP that we saw being taken from the Pegasus!

BLAIR

(to himself)

Sons of Bitches! No wonder they knew our every move...

MERLIN

(voice only)

I hate to be the one to break this, but there are extra message fragments in Kilrathi on those chips -- encrypted with an executive level code. The Tiger Claw's.

BLAIR

(realizing)

Shit!

Blair gathers up the message and decoding chips and steps out of the room...

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin hears a FAMILIAR LOW FREQUENCY THROB -- startled
he leans closer to examine some of his instruments.

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

Blair comes through the door...

GERALD (O.S.)
Found something?

Blair tries to hide the chips...

GERALD
Don't bother, Mister Blair.

Gerald has his gun leveled at Blair.

GERALD
Goddamn, how I'd like to feed you to
one of those Kilrathi out there.

The sounds of a fire-fight vibrate through the bulkhead,
MOVING CLOSER by the moment.

BLAIR
Sounds like you'll get your chance. I'm
sure they owe you a few favors.

He opens his palm, showing Gerald one of the Confed
message chips.

Gerald crosses the deck in several long deliberate
strides.

GERALD
Mr. Blair...

He smashes Blair across the side of the head with his gun,
sending him and his weapon sprawling on the deck.

GERALD
I believe you just called me traitor.

The sound of the BULKHEAD DOOR OPENING can be heard.

GERALD
Which is what I'd do if I were in your
position, you filthy Pilgrim.

Gerald drags Blair to his feet...

But a LASER BLAST SEPARATES THEM!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blair huddles behind a console. He can make out the silhouettes of several KILRATHI WARRIORS near the door. And between him and them, his gun.

GERALD (O.S.)

(shouting)

I'm on to you, Blair... You've sold out the human race. You can protest your innocence in hell.

Gerald is taking cover behind another console, returning the Kilrathi fire.

BLAIR

Those chips have encoded Kilrathi messages on them -- sealed with the Tiger Claw executive code. Who else has that access but you, Gerald? My mother may be a Pilgrim but I know which side I'm on.

The two Kilrathi's make a move for the center console... and THE RED PLUNGER. Gerald drops one...

Blair slides across the floor towards his gun...

Gerald is torn between two targets... Blair or the Kilrathi...

The Kilrathi is almost at the plunger...

Gerald realizes the danger, but his indecision has cost him...

When Blair pulls the trigger on his weapon, The Kilrathi's suit explodes from the back and he drops just short of the plunger...

Then bulkhead door opens again...

DEVERAUX

You all right in here?

It's Deveraux and the marines.

Gerald just lowers his weapon, looking at Blair. For the first time we can see a spark of respect between the two.

DEVERAUX

(to marine Sergeant)

Get to the engine room and secure as many fuel cells as you can find.

SERGEANT

Yes, Ma'm.

A group of the marines head out. Then over the radio...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PALADIN (O.S.)

(urgent)
There's a ULF signal broadcasting from the Tiger Claw. The Kilrathi will be able to get a fix on her if we don't do something.

GERALD

Only one other officer knows the executive code...

INT. SANSKY'S QUARTERS

Paladin, Gerald, Deveraux and Blair rush in, weapons drawn. Sansky is propped up in his bed, In his hand he holds SOMETHING.

GERALD

You betrayed us... and me. Why?

SANSKY

(weakly)
I tried to keep this ship out of harms way... But...

Sansky smiles ironically and clasps his hands together in the SIMPLE GESTURE that we saw the Traitor make at the beginning of the movie.

SANSKY

Forgive those that trespass against us...

But he doesn't finish the sentence, his hands fall lifelessly to his side, letting the item he was holding topple on the floor. Blair stoops over to pick it up...

CLOSE ON HOLO-PIC --

It's the same graduation scene that we saw on Gerald's desk. But this time we notice who the officer is presiding over the class... SANSKY.

INT. COMPUTER BAY.

Gerald leads Deveraux and Paladin 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.

GERALD

The bastard used his over-ride codes to lock us out of CONCOM.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GERALD (cont'd)

If we don't shut down the whole system
we'll be the largest homing beacon this
side of Polaris Roads...

Gerald finishes the sequence that shuts the down the
Comcon computer.

DEVERAUX

I don't get it. You couldn't have asked
for a better commander.

PALADIN

It never makes sense, but I've seen
this before. Pilgrim moles -- seemingly
upstanding officers -- undermining the
war effort because of some misplaced
faith in a fanatical religion.

Blair enters, out of breath.

BLAIR

Sir! We analyzed the heat signature of
the drone the Kilrathi ship launched
before we attacked. It wasn't one of
theirs...

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

Tolwyn is in his chair when Commodore Bellegarde
approaches.

BELLEGARDE

The drone was from the Tiger Claw,
Admiral. Captain Sansky reports that
they're engaged in a running battle
with a Kilrathi battle group in the
Ulysses Corridor, and requests urgent
assistance.

Tolwyn digests this.

TOLWYN

Very good. Message to all ships. Full
speed for the Charbydis jump point.
Send them the coordinates.

BELLEGARDE

Aye, aye, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOLWYN
Was there anything in my private code?
Anything from Paladin?

BELLE GARDE
Paladin? Nothing, sir.

Then Bellegarde moves to the X.O. and speaks MOS, while Tolwyn ponders.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Gerald has the bridge. Obutu walks up.

OBUTU
Chief engineer reports the Kilrathi fuel cells have been adapted. Starboard ion engine is operational, again. And Henrickson is having some success re-wiring the ComCon circuitry.

GERALD
Then we're ready to make a go of it. Helmsman, lift us out of here.

HELMSMAN
Aye, aye, sir.

EXT. TIGER CLAW NEAR MOON

The Tiger Claw, firing on one ion engine moves away from the moon crater.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Deveraux is sitting in her cockpit, looking down at Paladin on the deck. Blair's Rapier is sitting next to hers. Both fighters are firing their engines up...

PALADIN
(shouting)
Both of your Rapiers have been equipped with jump drives. 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.

The engines rev up to a DEAFENINGLY LOUD WHINE. Deveraux gives Paladin the thumbs up as her cockpit closes...

EXT. TIGER CLAW

Blair and Deveraux's fighters launch into the void...

FURTHER OUT --

Empty space... Then 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.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

A loud klaxon goes off.

GERALD

Report!

RADAR MAN

I don't know, sir. I had something, twice, but it's disappeared.

OBUTU

It could be an incoming Skipper missile. We only see it when it de-cloaks to take a radar fix.

Paladin arrives on the bridge.

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

Estimated time till impact?

RADAR MAN

Nine minutes, sir.

INT. COCKPITS - BLAIR & DEVERAUX

The two pilots streak into the blackness of space.

BLAIR

I've got a strong signal, at ten o'clock. Now it's vanished.

DEVERAUX

It's a Skipper missile. 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And with that Deveraux banks hard right.

BLAIR
Hey, what are you doing?

DEVERAUX
Stay on course, Blair. Get through that jump point!

BLAIR
What about our orders? Angel? Angel?

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

RADAR MAN
Six minutes...

OBUTU
Our shields are too weak to take a direct hit.

PALADIN
It's in Blair and Deveraux's hands now.

EXT. SPACE - SKIPPER MISSILE

The Skipper missile "cloaks" in, re-adjusts it's course one more time and then disappears...

A moment later, Deveraux's Rapier 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...

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.)
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 RAPIER.

INT. COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Deveraux is shaken like a jackhammer. The Rapier begins coming apart. She EJECTS!

EXT. SPACE - BLAIR'S RAPIER

slowly approaches the debris of the destroyed Rapier...

...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

You okay?

DEVERAUX

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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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
You've gotta go. You know that. There's nothing else you can do.

BLAIR
(choking with emotion)
You're all right, Angel. I guess you know that...

She smiles ruefully, then pulls her glove off and puts a hand up on the plexiglass.

DEVERAUX
You, too, Pilgrim.
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 Rapier 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RADAR MAN

No sign of the Skipper missile. One of the Rapiers 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.

PALADIN

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 Rapier, salutes the deck control officer, and blasts into space.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Gerald reports to Paladin.

GERALD
All planes sway.

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
STERN, 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)
Coordinates A-okay, boss. Three minutes
to jump.

(CONTINUED)

BLAIR
Firing jump drive.

He flicks a switch. There is an enormous six g jolt.

EXT. BLAIR'S RAPIER

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 Rapier begins to shimmy and shake.

MERLIN
(voice only)
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 Rapier 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 Kilrathi Captain approaches the Admiral's chair. The Traitor stands beside the Admiral.

HIS POV - INFRARED SPECTRUM

The Admiral has his back to the Captain.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN

(subtitled)

A manned Confederation fighter is approaching the quasar jump point, Admiral. We're not in position to intercept.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

(translated: to traitor)

He's going to warn the Confed fleet. The ambush is ruined.

TRAITOR

Follow him. He'll lead us through the jump point.

The Kilrathi admiral ponders. Then...

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

(subtitled)

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 Rapier.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

To the relief of everyone on the bridge, the Kilrathi cruiser veers right.

RADAR MAN

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. MISSILE ROOM - TIGER CLAW

Men and women lock and load missiles, preparing to fire.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Peterson and his crew 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 RAPIER

Maniac blows a last Krant 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's 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 devastating field of fire...

The Tiger Claw pulls clear as the Kilrathi ship is SHATTERED BY A SERIES OF EXPLOSIONS, finally disintegrating in the void.

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 Rapier appears
And blasts past us, its jump drive engines glowing.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair is ecstatic.

BLAIR
We did it! We did it! I love this baby!
She held together.

MERLIN
(voice only)
I'm not sure I did.

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 capital ship... Snakeir class.
They came through the jump point.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair pounds the instrument panel in frustration.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

I led them through it! I'm such an idiot.

Blair flicks his radio switch.

BLAIR

Lieutenant Christopher Blair of the Tiger Claw calling any Confed Ship. A Kilrathi battleship has breached the Charbydis jump point! Do you read me? 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 Tolwyn.

BELLEGARDE

Com. room reports faint message in clear from a Lieutenant Blair. He says the jump point has been breached by the Kilrathi.

TOLWYN

Blair? Like father, like son.

BELLEGARDE

Should we respond, sir?

RADAR MAN

(calling out)

Identifying Confed Rapier, heading toward the Scylla quadrant at LSM point nine. He's being followed by something massive, admiral. Looks like a Snakeir.

BELLEGARDE

Permission to intercept it, Admiral?

TOLWYN

No. We wait.

BELLEGARDE

The Snakeir will overtake Blair's fighter, sir.

TOLWYN

(angry)

I'm bloody well aware of that, Richard. All ships are to hold their positions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONCORDIA RADAR MAN
Drone leaving the Kilrathi ship, air.
It's heading back toward the jump
point.

BELLE GARDE
(gets it)
If we jump him, we'd be out of position
when the Kilrathi fleet comes
through.... Brilliant, stratagem, sir.

TOLWYN
If you must admire someone, admire that
young lieutenant out there. I've just
sacrificed him...
(disgusted)
So we can win this battle.

EXT. BLAIR'S RAPIER

The Rapier 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 capital 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!

Finally, he gives up.

BLAIR
They aren't in radio range. They'll
never see the Kilrathi coming.

MERLIN
(voice only)
I knew this was all going to end
horribly... Did I mention we'll be in
range of the Snakeir guns in ten
minutes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

At least they can't launch torpedoes 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 capital 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.

MERLIN

All we need -- the neutron star, Scylla. "Bain to sailors and monster of myth."

EXT. TIGER CLAW - HADES QUADRANT

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, Mr. Gerald?

GERALD

Negative, sir.

PALADIN

What about that locator beacon from the Rapier pod?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RADAR MAN
Nothing sir. Lost contact during the battle.

PALADIN
We've lost too many good pilots today.
Have the Diligent prepared for launch.
I'm going to look for that pod.

OBUTU
Aye, aye, sir.

Paladin grimly walks from the bridge.

EXT. BLAIR'S RAPIER

The Rapier, 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.

MERLIN
In case the alarms didn't cue you --
you'll be past the Point of No Return
of that neutron star in ninety seconds.
It's gravitational field will tear us
to pieces.

BLAIR
Solutions, Merlin! Not more problems.

MERLIN
Don't be naive.

Blair blinks hard at the scanner scope and the large, spinning object dead ahead. Then it dawns on him.

BLAIR
How much does a Snakeir weigh?

MERLIN
Two hundred 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
(alarmed)
What are you doing?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERLIN (cont'd)
The after burners will use up our last
fuel. And we're still headed for the
neutron star...

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The Kilrathi Captain reports to the Admiral.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitled)
The Rapier 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 RAPIER

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 only)
Actually, I lied.

BLAIR
What?

MERLIN
You've got ten more seconds of thrust.

The Rapier 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 RAPIER

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 Rapier has veered away.
Confederation ship, dead ahead.

TRAITOR
(realizes)
That isn't a ship!

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitles)
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 Rapier has done. She yaws
and continues toward Scylla, sideways, now....

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair's engines sputter and die. The warning lights now
becomes constant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MERLIN
(voice only)
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
(translated: to Traitor)
Who was the Terran pilot? He used his name when he transmitted.

The Traitor, clinging to the console, reaches into his memory.

TRAITOR
Blair.

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 TORPEDOES. 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 torpedoes and missiles, and uses its massive cannon array.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Bellegarde approaches Tolwyn, who watches grimly from his chair.

BELLEGARDE

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.

TOLWYN

Bring the ship about. We let that Snakeir through like a belled goat. Launch two Rapier wings and a squadron of Broadwords.

BELLEGARDE

Aye, aye, sir.

EXT. BLAIR'S RAPIER

The darkened fighter tumbles slowly through space.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

All the instruments are dark. Blair is trembling violently.

BLAIR

Hey, you were right all along.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Merlin appears in hologram.

MERLIN
I was?

BLAIR
We're doomed.

Merlin has a change of character -- a sudden burst compassion in his circuitry.

MERLIN
Don't say that. You're a fighter. So fight! We're going to make it.

BLAIR
Cold got to you Merlin? You sound downright optimistic.

MERLIN
Let's just call it intuition...

Suddenly, the Rapier is jolted.

BLAIR
What the hell...?

EXT. RAPIER & BROADSWORD

A Broadsword bomber has captured the drifting Rapier in its tractor beam.

MERLIN (O.S.)
Or a working array of scanners.

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.

DISSOLVE TO:

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 Tolwyn. An honor guard of Marines and the gig crew are also aboard.

TOLWYN
You know I sold you down the river, don't you, Lieutenant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAIR

Sir?

TOLWYN

You were a piece on the board. A small piece.

BLAIR

I understand, sir.

TOLWYN

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 Tolwyn 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 Tolwyn emerges, the traditional pipes are blown to signal a flagstaff officer's presence on board. Paladin and the ship's officers salute smartly. Tolwyn, flanked by the Marine honor guard approaches Paladin and warmly shakes his hand.

BLAIR --

Comes down the ramp, and sees his shipmates.

TOLWYN

Ladies and gentlemen, I am returning your officer 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.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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.

TOLWYN --

addresses the crew of the Tiger Claw...

TOLWYN

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.

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 and Tolwyn begin walking slowly up the ramp to the Admiral's gig.

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, hurrahs". Then, hundreds of white hats sail high into the air and the cheering becomes general. 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.