

**WING COMMANDER:
THE MOVIE**

written by

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

Writer's First Draft

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"WING COMMANDER"

FADE IN:

INT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - CITY PARK

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

WOMAN

Don't fly too near the sunlamps!

CHILD

(from above)

We won't!

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

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

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

YOUNG MAN

(to dog)

You want this? Do you? Huh?

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

HIS POV - THROUGH GIANT PORTHOLE

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

RESUME PARK

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

WOMAN

Boys! Boys! Come down... now!

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

EXT. PORTHOLE - ASTEROID SURFACE

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

THREE DESTROYER CLASS CONFEDERATION SHIPS

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

EXT. KILRATHI BATTLE GROUP

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

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

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

ADJUTANT'S POV - INFRARED BAND

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

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

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

THROUGH WINDOW - SNAKEIR BRIDGE

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

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

RESUME FLAGSHIP BRIDGE

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
 Launch phase two of the attack.

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

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

EXT. ASTEROID WORLDLET

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

INT. PARK - ASTEROID WORLDLET

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

EXT. ASTEROID WORLDLET - DOCKS

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

EXT. DILIGENT

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

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

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

HIS POV - THE ASTEROID WORLD

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

EXT. DILIGENT

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

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. POLARIS ROADS "ANCHORAGE" - BEHIND ICE MOON

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

EXT. STARBASE - POLARIS ROADS FLEET HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

INT. TOLWIN'S OFFICE - STARBASE

Bellegarde has just heard some very bad news from Tolwin.

BELLEGARDE

The Pegasus?

(beat; realizes)

My God... there were ten thousand souls on board.

TOLWIN

She was destroyed in the Ulysses Corridor two weeks ago.

BELLEGARDE

(troubled)

Two weeks ago?

TOLWIN

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

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

The Pegasus flight plan was top secret.

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

(loud, clear voice)

Socrates, what are the odds that the Kilrathi accidentally discovered the Pegasus in the Ulysses Corridor?

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

SOCRATES

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

Both men absorb this information.

BELLEGARDE

They knew.

TOLWIN

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

BELLEGARDE

She's nearly at the end of her tour.

TOLWIN

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

BELLEGARDE

You've got it as soon as I do.

TOLWIN

Thanks.
(senses)
Something else?

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

In due time, Richard.

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

INT. BLAIR'S QUARTER'S - STARBASE

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

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

BLAIR

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

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

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

You don't have to be sarcastic about it.

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

Knock it off.

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

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

MERLIN

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

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

BLAIR

Make yourself scarce.

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

BLAIR
Admiral Tolwin... sir!

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

BLAIR
If you can squeeze in, sir.

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

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

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

TOLWIN
You've been doing your homework.

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

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

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

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

BLAIR
You have?

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

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

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

BLAIR

Yes, sir.

TOLWIN

I have something for you, Blair. Top secret.

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

BLAIR

(confused)

For me, sir?

TOLWIN

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

BLAIR

Aye, aye, sir.

TOLWIN

(starts to go)

Give my best to your parents in your next communication.

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

BLAIR

Admiral?

Tolwin turns, already outside in the corridor.

BLAIR

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

TOLWIN

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

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

INT. CORRIDOR - STAR BASE

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

BLAIR
Why didn't you tell me the old man
knew my dad?

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

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

MERLIN
Old habits die hard.

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

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

BLAIR
I'll get over it.

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

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

BLAIR
Marshall! What are you doing here?

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

BLAIR
You're assigned to the Tiger Claw?

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

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

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

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

INT. SPACE DOCK - STAR BASE

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

MANIAC

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

Paladin comes up behind them.

PALADIN

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

BLAIR

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

PALADIN

Not on my ship.

BLAIR

Forget it. We'll find other
transport.

PALADIN

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

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

PALADIN

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

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

EXT. STAR BASE

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

INT. DILIGENT - TINY CABIN

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

BLAIR

This is my cabin.

MANIAC

No it isn't.

Paladin appears in the door.

PALADIN

It's both your quarters.

BLAIR

What? How...?

PALADIN

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

Paladin disappears.

MANIAC

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

BLAIR

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

PALADIN (O.S.)

(from bridge intercom)
Blair! Marshall! To the bridge! Now!

MANIAC

We're already slaves.

Both lieutenants crowd out of the tiny cell.

EXT. DEEP SPACE - NEAR BLACK HOLE - DAYS LATER

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

INT. CHART ROOM - DILIGENT

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

BLAIR

What magnitude is the jump point?

Maniac comes up on the bridge.

PALADIN

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

MANIAC

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

PALADIN

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

Both Blair and Maniac react.

MANIAC

(truly worried)
You're not serious.

PALADIN

First time for everything.

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

PALADIN

The black hole is down here. It's gravity distorts the time, space continuum.

(moves hands to broad end
of spike)

We want to cross here, jump over the intervening space, and arrive on the other side.

(checks readout)

For a net savings of six months travel, even at light mach point nine. Of course, if we miss, bad things happen.

MANIAC

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

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

PALADIN
Plot your course, Mister Blair.

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

BLAIR
Coordinates locked in.

Paladin studies the console.

PALADIN
Good. Accelerate to point nine.

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

BLAIR
You might want to strap yourself in.

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

BLAIR
The readouts are changing.

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

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

BLAIR

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

Blair reaches for the controls. Paladin stops him.

PALADIN

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

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

COMPUTER VOICE

Warning. Gravitational pull exceeds
thrust. Alter course immediately.

BLAIR

(recovering)
Minus six and counting....

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

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

ON THE CONSOLE

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

ON THE BRIDGE

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

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

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

OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE

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

PALADIN
Gentlemen, welcome to the Charbydis sector.

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

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

PALADIN
Set your course for it, Mister Blair.

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

EXT. DEEP SPACE - CHARYBIDIS SECTOR

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

INT. DILIGENT - PALADIN'S QUARTERS

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

PALADIN
Come in, Blair

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

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

PALADIN
Good. Hungry?

BLAIR
I could eat.

PALADIN
Help yourself.

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

BLAIR
These must be antiques.

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

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

PALADIN
That depends.

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

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

BLAIR
That's right. Been there?

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

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

PALADIN
That'd be about right.

BLAIR
Then...

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

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

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

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

PALADIN
Wise man.

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

BLAIR
He's accelerating.

PALADIN
The bloody fool!

And Paladin flies out of the cabin.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin storms onto the bridge, followed by Blair.

PALADIN
Get up!

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

PALADIN
Did you change course?

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

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

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

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

The Diligent's skin begins to groan and creak.

BLAIR

Are we past her gravitational PNR,
yet?

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

PALADIN

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

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

PALADIN

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

MANIAC

What's a Scylla?

BLAIR

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

PALADIN

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

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

PALADIN

(to the screen)

Broken your grip, old girl. Better
luck, next time.

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

MANIAC

You should have told us.

PALADIN

Yes. I should have.

He punches in a few coordinates on the console.

PALADIN

This is your new course. Carry on.

Paladin goes below decks.

MANIAC
That guy is seriously weird.

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

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

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

MANIAC
So?

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

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

BLAIR
Maybe he is.

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

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

CLOSER

The fleck resolves itself into the Diligent.

INT. DILIGENT BRIDGE

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

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

PALADIN
Send the countersign.

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

BLAIR
Identification acknowledged. They'll
escort us in.

EXT. DILIGENT AND SABERS

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

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

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

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

An elevator opens, going up. Paladin steps in.

PALADIN
Good luck.

The doors close.

MANIAC
He sure keeps his priorities straight.

Another elevator arrives, going down, they get on.

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

INT. HANGAR DECK

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

MANIAC

I don't see the X.O.

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

MANIAC

I'll reconnoiter, over there.

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

DEVERAUX

Looking for something?

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

And you would be...?

BLAIR

Blair. Lieutenant Blair.

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

Actually I need to see Captain Sansky.

DEVERAUX

(amused; cool)
Really?

BLAIR

Special orders.

DEVERAUX

I see. Top secret and all that.

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

BLAIR

That's right.

DEVERAUX

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

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

DEVERAUX

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

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

Count on it.

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

SANSKY

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

BLAIR

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

SANSKY

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

BLAIR

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

Sansky smiles. Gerard watches stonefaced.

SANSKY

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

GERALD

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

SANSKY

(to Blair)

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

BLAIR

She may get one, sir.

Both Gerard and Sansky look puzzled.

SANSKY

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

BLAIR

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

SANSKY

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

BLAIR

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

SANSKY

(remembers)

Of course. Carry on, Lieutenant. You've got your quarters assignment.

BLAIR

Yes sir.

Blair salutes to go.

GERALD

(reflects)

You wouldn't be related to Arnold Blair, would you?

BLAIR

My father, sir.

GERALD

He married a Pilgrim woman, didn't he?

BLAIR

(crestfallen)

Yes sir. They live on Agadez.

Sansky is interested, now, and observes Blair closely.

GERALD

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

BLAIR

I wouldn't know, sir.

GERALD

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

SANSKY

(stepping in)

I'm sure that will have no bearing on Blair's performance, here, Mister Gerald.

GERALD

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

SANSKY

That's all, Lieutenant.

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

INT. BLAIR'S QUARTERS - TIGER CLAW

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

BLAIR

It never changes.

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

MERLIN

You're referring to Commander Gerald's remarks.

BLAIR

You heard him.

MERLIN

I hear everything.

BLAIR

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

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

(recognizes this)

"...Who yearn for an idealized future." I hate it when you quote my father's books.

MERLIN

(abruptly)

Somebody at the door.

BLAIR

And I hate that, too.

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

BLAIR

Ma'am!

DEVERAUX

At ease, Lieutenant.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

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

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

DEVERAUX

I see you brought your toys.

Embarrassed, Blair clicks off the Hologram.

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

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

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

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

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

BLAIR
(chastised)
Yes, Ma'am.

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

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

MERLIN
That went well.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

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

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

GERALD

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

TOLWIN

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

SANSKY

I knew it. There is a secret jump
point.

TOLWIN

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

GERALD

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

SANSKY

(as Tolwin continues)
Shhh.

TOLWIN

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

GERALD

What's that all about?

SANSKY

I don't know.

TOLWIN

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

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

GERALD

I don't like it.

SANSKY

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

GERALD

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

SANSKY

That's enough, Commander.

BLAIR

Paladin could have accessed it!

SANSKY

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

GERALD

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

SANSKY

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

GERALD

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

Sansky ponders this; then rejects it.

SANSKY

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

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

INT. PILOT'S MESS

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

POLANSKI

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

MANIAC

Yeah, right.

POLANSKI

Remember Bischoff?

ABBOT

(somber)

Yeah.

FORBES

And Shannon.

ABBOT

Came in too hot.

MANIAC

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

POLANSKI

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

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

ABBOT

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

POLANSKI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BLAIR
I mean, what tactics do they use?

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

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

BLAIR
Thanks.

Forbes takes pity on the good looking newcomer.

FORBES

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

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

FORBES

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

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

FORBES

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

MANIAC

But...

FORBES

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

MANIAC

That's crazy.

BLAIR

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

MANIAC

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

FORBES

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

ABBOT

Target Practice?

A few snickers, then....

FORBES

Fresh bait.

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

FORBES

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

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

MANIAC

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

ABBOT

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

BLAIR

Maniac.

FORBES

Why, or should I ask?

BLAIR

Just fly with him once. You'll see.

MANIAC

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

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

FORBES

You got things backwards, fish
food. You're supposed to drive
the woman crazy!

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

MANIAC

Oh, I try.

To hide her attraction, Forbes turns to Blair.

FORBES

What about you, Blair? Got a
monniker?

BLAIR

Just call me, "Ace."

More razzing from the group.

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

BLAIR
Who's that?

ABBOT
Angel Deveraux.

BLAIR
Lieutenant Commander Deveraux?

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

She does a high five with a black woman pilot.

MANIAC
Angel? What kinda handle is that?

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

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

MANIAC
Great. Another annal retentive C.O.

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

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

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

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

MANIAC

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

Polanski sees Deveraux, first.

POLANSKI

Attention on deck!

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

DEVERAUX

As you were. Blair. With me.

And just as abruptly, she turns and leaves.

MANIAC

Looks like you screwed up again.

BLAIR

Shut up.

But Blair is worried as he follows Deveraux out.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

DEVERAUX

Beautiful, isn't she?

BLAIR

Yes, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

I thought I already had.

DEVERAUX

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

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

BLAIR
Ma'am. Just what is the mission?

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

BLAIR
Is that SOP?

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

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

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

She climbs up into her cockpit.

BLAIR
Sound like you're doing okay, Commander.

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

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

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

FURTHER OUT

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

GERALD
That's not your problem, Paladin.

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

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

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

SANSKY
Just why do you ask, Mister Paladin?

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

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

PALADIN
You're way ahead of me, Captain.

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

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

INT. DEEP SPACE - CHARBYDIS SECTOR

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

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

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

DEVERAUX

(over radio)

Baker One to Baker Two.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SABER COCKPIT - BLAIR

BLAIR

(over radio)

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

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

Negative, Baker One.

(then; sees on screen)

Correction. I just saw something. Now it's gone. Could be a small meteor, captured by the planet's gravity.

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

Roger.

MERLIN

(voice only)

I'm receiving a long range, low frequency signal.

BLAIR

What? Give me a direction?

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

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

MERLIN

The code isn't in my vocabulary.

EXT. MESSAGE DRONE

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

INT. SABER COCKPIT - BLAIR

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

BLAIR

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

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

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

Roger.

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

DEVERAUX

The self-destruct mechanism isn't
responding.

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

BLAIR
I'm going in for a shot.

DEVERAUX
No. Stand off, Baker Two.

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

BLAIR
Commencing fire.

EXT. DRONE AND SABERS

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

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

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

INT. SABER COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

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

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

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

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

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

BLAIR
That's affirmative, Baker One.

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

EXT. SABERS

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

MERLIN (V.O.)

I don't think she likes you.

BLAIR (V.O.)

You noticed.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Deveraux has just finished her report to Gerald and Sansky.

SANSKY

And the drone seemed to be taking evasive action?

DEVERAUX

That was my impression, sir.

GERALD

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

DEVERAUX

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

Sansky speaks in a clear voice.

SANSKY

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

An ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE voice immediately responds.

AI VOICE

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

Sansky frowns, then turns to Deveraux.

SANSKY

Thank you, Commander. That's all.

Deveraux leaves the bridge.

GERALD

Will we be sending out another drone?

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

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

SANSKY
You mean Paladin's ship, the Diligent.

GERALD
Yes.

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

INT. TIGER CLAW

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

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

BLAIR
No Ma'am.

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

Deveraux walks on, leaving him there, relieved.

INT. CHART ROOM - TIGER CLAW

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

GERALD
When do we veer off?

PALADIN

Who says we do?

GERALD

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

PALADIN

That's right.

GERALD

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

PALADIN

I'm living proof that it isn't.

GERALD

You're trying to destroy the Tiger Claw.

PALADIN

Do I look suicidal to you, Mister Gerald?

GERALD

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

PALADIN

That's right.

GERALD

And you managed to get away before she died.

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

PALADIN

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

GERALD

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

PALADIN

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

(MORE)

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

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

INT. FORBES' QUARTERS

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

FORBES

(smiles)
 Hey. Attention on deck.

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

DEVERAUX

(smiles)
 Can I come in?

FORBES

Bring that Scotch I ordered?

DEVERAUX

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

FORBES

Life's a bitch.

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

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

So who is it, this time?

FORBES

Who do you think?

DEVERAUX

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

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

No you don't.

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

(changing subject)

So who?

FORBES

Maniac Marshall.

DEVERAUX

You're kidding?

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

You know the rules about officers
fraternizing.

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

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

FORBES

So, what are we going to talk about,
girl, yours?

DEVERAUX

I haven't got one.

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX

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

FORBES

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

(MORE)

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

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

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

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

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

BLAIR
Sir?

Paladin steps from the chart room.

PALADIN
I was one of them.

BLAIR
I don't understand.

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

BLAIR
You don't trust the drones?

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

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

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

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

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

PALADIN
 As we'll ever be.

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

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

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

RESUME BRIDGE

Blair turns, sees. Realizes.

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

Paladin leads them over to the chart room area.

PALADIN
 Follow me.

INT. CHART ROOM

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

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

SANSKY

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

Paladin steps into the hologram and points as he explains.

PALADIN

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

(checks watch)

Less than three minutes.

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

PALADIN

We'll have a terrific view from the bridge.

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

BLAIR

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

The small hologram of Merlin appears.

MERLIN

Paladin's computations seem sound...theoretically.

BLAIR

We'll soon know.

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

Are you afraid of dying, Merlin?

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

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

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

INT. PILOT'S MESS

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

ABBOT

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

POLANSKI

You know what we're not doing?

FORBES

Turning around.

Maniac turns from the window and begins unbuttoning his pants.

FORBES

What are you doing?

MANIAC

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

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

AI VOICE

Attention! Attention. Course error.
Adjust course immediately!

PALADIN

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

AI VOICE

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

SANSKY

What about it, Paladin?

PALADIN

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

AI VOICE

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

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

PALADIN

NO!

He throws a switch.

PALADIN

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

GERALD

Captain, I think we should reconsider.

SANSKY

(nervous)
Steady as she goes, helm.

HELMSMAN

Aye, aye, sir.

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

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

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

SANSKY (V.O.)

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

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

PALADIN

Steady.

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

What's happening?

DEVERAUX

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

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

FREEZE FRAME

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

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

DEVERAUX AND BLAIR

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

BLAIR

You all right?

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

BLAIR

How many fingers?

DEVERAUX

(grim humor)
What fingers?

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

THROUGH THE BRIDGE WINDOWS

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

BLAIR

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

RESUME BRIDGE

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

PALADIN

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Ulysses Corridor.

SANSKY

CONCOM, any other ships out here?

AI VOICE

Scanners show no activity, Captain.

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

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

DEVERAUX

Ouch.

BLAIR

Sorry.

PALADIN

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

BLAIR

Will it be the same in a fighter?

PALADIN

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

DEVERAUX

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

Paladin grins.

DEVERAUX

Are we where we should be?

PALADIN

Off by a few parsecs, I think.

BLAIR

(grudging)

You did it.

PALADIN

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

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

DEVERAUX

It's all right.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

(pulls away)

It's all right.

BLAIR

(irked)

Yes, Ma'am.

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS - MONTAGE

As officers, pilots and crew listen to the intecom.

SANSKY (V.O.)

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

EXT. POLARIS ROADS - STARBASE

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

INT. TOLWIN'S OFFICE

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

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

No message from the Tiger Claw?

BELLEGARDE

Nothing. Damn strange.

TOLWIN

Unless we're right.

BELLEGARDE

I hope we aren't.

TOLWIN

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

BELLEGARDE

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

Bellegarde leaves. Tolwin ponders.

INT. HANGAR BAY - BLAIR'S SABER

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

DEVERAUX

Lieutenant Blair!

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

BLAIR

Yes, Ma'am?

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

(stung; obstinate)

I think the success of my mission could depend on the--

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

(steaming)

Aye, aye, Ma'am.

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

MANIAC

She's nuts about him, am I right?

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

FORBES

Absolutely.

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

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS

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

MAN

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

The boy nods, staring at the camera.

MAN

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

DEVERAUX

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

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

MAN

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

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

MAN

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

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

DEVERAUX

Lieutenant...?

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

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

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

DEVERAUX
 Come in.

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

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

DEVERAUX
 What's on your mind, Blair?

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

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

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

DEVERAUX
 What?

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

DEVERAUX
 (surprised)
 Sit down, Lieutenant.

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

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

BLAIR
 Agadez? I'm from....

DEVERAUX

I know.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

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

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

BLAIR

Is that your family, Commander?

This saddens her; but she covers it.

DEVERAUX

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

He nods.

BLAIR

Cute kids.

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

But that's just different time references.

DEVERAUX

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

Blair frowns, then he begins to get it.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

 (studies hologram)
 When I left the first time. He and I
 were the same age. Now he's got grey
 in his hair.

 (matter of fact)
 My first tour was six months in space
 averaging mach point eight light
 speed. But it was two years for him.
 He stayed faithful to me. The next
 tour was a only year in space for me.
 But when I returned on leave, he was
 married with a two year old son.

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

DEVERAUX

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

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

BLAIR

Guess I'll find out.

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

DEVERAUX

Welcome to life in the Navy, Dodger.

The smile nearly undoes Blair.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

It's part of my job.

BLAIR

Yes, Ma'am.

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

DEVERAUX

Get out of here, Blair.

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

EXT. ASTEROID RING AROUND BROWN DWARF STAR

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

EXT. BLAIR & MANIAC'S SABERS

The two fighters thread through the asteroid ring.

BLAIR (O.S.)

(over radio)

Dodger to Maniac. Any long range signals on your scanner?

MANIAC (O.S.)

(over radio)

Only your sweet voice on the short range, Dodger man.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is checking his heads up display.

MERLIN

(voice only)

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

BLAIR

Oh, but you are?

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

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

Maniac's voice crackles in his ear.

MANIAC (V.O.)

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

Blair is instantly alert.

EXT. ASTEROID BELT & BROWN DWARF - WIDE SHOT

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

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is sweating, now, scanning his instruments.

BLAIR

My scanners are blind, Merlin. Talk to me.

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

They know we're here.

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

So, what is it commanding?

MERLIN

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

EXT. KILRATHI COMMUNICATIONS SHIP

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

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

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

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

MANIAC

(to himself; whisper)

Go on. Nothing in this mouse hole.
Beat it.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

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

BLAIR

What do they see, Merlin?

MERLIN

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

ON HEADS UP DISPLAY

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

BLAIR

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

MERLIN

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

Blair switches on his radio and his other electronic gear.

BLAIR

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

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

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

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

EXT. ASTEROID RING

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

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

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

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

SANSKY
You weren't there, Commander.

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

Blair is amazed at this... and grateful.

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

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

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

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

SANSKY
How's that, Mister Paladin?

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

GERALD

We have no real evidence of that.

DEVERAUX

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

GERALD

(aimed at Paladin)

Maybe they already knew about it.

PALADIN

(fires back)

Then why weren't they waiting for us as we came through, when the Tiger Claw was at its most vulnerable?

(pointed)

No. Something drew them here after we arrived.

SANSKY

(to Paladin)

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

PALADIN

(understands)

So does the Tiger Claw.

GERALD

The transmission didn't come from the Tiger Claw!

SANSKY

Enough.

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

SANSKY

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

PALADIN

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

SANSKY
You're suggesting what?

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

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

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

SANSKY
"We", Mister Paladin?

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

Sansky ponders a moment.

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

PALADIN
As you wish, Captain.

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

SANSKY
Target?

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

SANSKY
Yes, it could.

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

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

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

DEVERAUX
 I don't know the quadrant, sir.

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

GERALD
 (alarmed)
 Captain...?

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

INT. CORRIDOR - TIGER CLAW

Deveraux, Maniac and Blair walk quickly down the corridor.

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

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

BLAIR
 Thank you, Ma'am.

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

DEVERAUX
 Made your first kill today, Marshall?

MANIAC
 Yes, Ma'am.

DEVERAUX
 Don't get cocky.

She continues on, having deflated Maniac's ego.

EXT. ASTEROID RING - BROWN DWARF

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

(over radio)
Picking up any Com traffic, Baker seven?

PALADIN (O.S.)

(over radio)
Not a bloody thing.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

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

PALADIN (O.S.)

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

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

FORBES (O.S.)

(over radio)
Negative, boss.

BLAIR (O.S.)

(over radio)
De nada, chief.

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

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

MANIAC

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

PALADIN (O.S.)

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

BLAIR (O.S.)

(over radio)
That's just a guess.

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. COCKPIT - BROADSWORD BOMBER - PALADIN

PALADIN

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

INT. VARIOUS COCKPITS

Deveraux is incensed.

DEVERAUX

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

PALADIN

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

Aboard the other Sabers, there is astonishment.

FORBES

Yeah, right. And I'm Admiral Nelson.

PALADIN

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

DEVERAUX

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

PALADIN

I'm authorizing you to open it.

DEVERAUX

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

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

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

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

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

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

DEVERAUX
Lucky guess.

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

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

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

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

EXT. ASTEROID WING.

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW - NEAR JOVIAN PLANET

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

PILOT'S VOICE

(over intercom)

Bogies! Enemy sighted behind the moon!

(static)

I'm hit! I'm hit! Mayday!

Obutu is riveted. Gerald bursts onto the bridge.

GERALD

Who's breaking radio silence?

RADAR MAN

(turning from screen)

Multiple targets appearing on the screen sir!

Obutu turns to look out the huge windows.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

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

GERALD

Battle stations! Battle stations!
Launch all planes!

AI VOICE

(relays commands)

Battle stations! Battle stations!

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

AI VOICE

(repeating)

Battle stations! Launch all planes!

EXT. BETWEEN JOVIAN PLANET MOONS

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Sansky arrives, out of breath.

SANSKY

Have we launched all our planes?

GERALD

There goes the last one.

SANSKY

Shields up!

OBUTU

(repeats)

Shields up!

AI VOICE

All force shields are engaged!

SANSKY

Torpedo room! Prepare all tubes!

AI VOICE

All tubes ready to fire.

RADAR MAN

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

SANSKY

Can we turn the ship around?

OBUTU

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

SANSKY

(to Gerald)

That damned Paladin was right.

GERALD

Maybe he knew something we didn't.

RADAR MAN

Torpedos incoming!

GERALD

Brace for impact!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. HANGAR BAY

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

EXT. BETWEEN THE MOONS

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

RADAR MAN

Weapons radar has acquired a target!

SANSKY

Fire tubes one and two!

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

INT. KILRATHI DESTROYER

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

WIDER

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

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

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

Sanskys picks himself up off the deck. What now?

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

EXT. DREADNOUGHT

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The Radar man peers at his screen

RADAR SCREEN

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

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

GERALD
 They're bringing in reinforcements.

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

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

SANSKY
 Damn!

GERALD
 It's up to the fighters, now.

SANSKY
They'll never break through the
dreadnought shield.

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

SANSKY
It's Deveraux's wing!

EXT. BETWEEN MOONS

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

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

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

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

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

EXT. BETWEEN MOONS

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

BROADWORDS

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

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

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT

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

PALADIN
Roger that. Beginning bomb run.

EXT. DREADNOUGHT AND DESTROYER

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

INT. TIGER CLAW - VARIOUS STATIONS

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

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

GERALD
Sir! Sir. Medic to the bridge!

SANSKY
(weakly)
What's Deveraux doing?

EXT. BROADSWORDS & THREE SABERS

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

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT - POLANSKI

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

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair banks hard right, and fires a missile.

BLAIR
Roger, Broadsword. Firing ELM Hammer,
now.

EXT. DESTROYER

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

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

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

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

INT. BROADSWORD COCKPIT - POLANSKI

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

POLANSKI
They're throwing up too much stuff.

The Broadsword is rocked.

POLANSKI
I'm hit!

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

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

EXT. NEAR DESTROYER AND DREADNOUGHT.

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

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

EXT. SABERS AND HRISS

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

(over radio)

What took you so long, Dodger?

BLAIR (O.S.)

(over radio)

Got stuck in traffic, Boss.

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

Blair is scanning the sky.

BLAIR

(over radio)

Where's Paladin?

MANIAC (O.S.)

(over radio)

No visual contact. Sonofabitch booked!

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

(over radio)

The dreadnought's preparing to launch. Torpedo tubes opening.

EXT. DREADNOUGHT

The huge vessels foreward tubes do indeed dilate open.

BLAIR (O.S.)

(over radio; angry)

They'll have to lower their shield.

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

INT. PALADIN' COCKPIT

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

PALADIN

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

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

EXT. BETWEEN TWO MOONS

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

EXT. PALADIN'S BROADSWORD

Is caught in the shockwave, and sent tumbling.

INT. PALADIN'S COCKPIT

The pulse wave hits, and all electronics fry and go dead. Paladin begins to spin as if he were in a dryer. His hand reaches the manual eject 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. He curses, beats the controls. The white surface of the moon draws nearer. Then... he accepts it, grins... remembers a few lines from his school days....

PALADIN

(murmurs; half smile)

"...My mind misgives some consequence,
yet hanging in the stars, shall
bitterly begin his fearful date with
this night's revels...."

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

EXT. NEAR TIGER CLAW

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

FORBES (O.S.)

(over radio)

They're rabbiting. Stick with'em,
Abbot.

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

INT. FORBES COCKPIT

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

FORBES

(over radio)

They're going to ram. They're
ramming!

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

EXT. ABBOTT'S SABER

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

EXT. FORBES & MANIAC'S SABERS

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

MANIAC

(over radio)

Rosie. Can you hold her?

FORBES

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

But the Saber wobbles and veers dangerously.

INT. FORBES & MANIAC'S COCKPITS

Forbes steadies her craft.

MANIAC

Hey, quit showing off.

FORBES

Expressive, huh?

MANIAC

Eject. I'll tractor you in.

FORBES

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

DEVERAUX (O.S.)

(over radio)

Baker One to all Baker pilots. Return to the ship. Repeat, return to the ship!

FORBES

(over radio)

That last Kilrathi is wearing my radar dome. I got no guidance system.

MANIAC

Jees, somebody as good as you. I didn't think you needed one.

(then; serious)

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

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

FORBES POV - THE TIGER CLAW

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

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

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MANIAC'S COCKPIT

He glances over at Forbes cockpit, only yards away.

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

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

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

FORBES
Sorry, but my brakes are in the shop.

MANIAC
Line it up. That's it.

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

MANIAC
What happened?

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

MANIAC
Almost there.

THROUGH THE COCKPIT PLEXIGLASS

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

MANIAC

Okay... Easy. Just ease it in.

Forbes is fighting the controls with all her might.

FORBES

(tension in her voice)

I love it when you... talk dirty.

MANIAC

Pull up! Pull up!

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

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

CONTROLLER

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

MANIAC

(out of control)

Get me a suit! Get me a suit!

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

MANIAC

(screams)

Rosie! Rosie!

EXT. TIGER CLAW

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

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCKPIT

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

DEVERAUX

(over radio)

Forbes? Rosie?

Rosie? Answer.

Can you hear me?

(MORE)

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

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

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

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

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

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

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

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

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

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

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

INT. DEVERAUX'S COCPIT

She looks

THROUGH THE COCKPIT

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

DEVERAUX
Baker Leader to Con. Request
permission to land.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

SANSKY
Any more of our fighters out there?

RADAR MAN
Nothing on my scope, Captain.

EXT. NEAR MOON

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

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

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

BLAIR
Come on. Just little more.

INT. BROADSWORD EJECTION POD

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

PALADIN
Cut me loose you bloody fool!

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

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

INT. BLAIR'S COCKPIT

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

BLAIR

What are our chances, Merlin?

MERLIN

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

BLAIR

If I cut Paladin loose, what happens to him?

PALADIN

He'll crash into the surface within ten minutes.

BLAIR

(keying radio)

I can't raise the Tiger Claw.

MERLIN

You've got the moon between you.

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

BLAIR

They found us! They came looking for us!

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

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

SANSKY

That was a good guess, Commander.

DEVERAUX

Yes, sir. I'll go below now.

SANSKY

(weak, near whisper)

Angel, tell the pilots under your command that they saved this ship.

DEVERAUX

(dejected)

I haven't got a command, sir.

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

ON SCANNER SCREEN

A deep crater, half in shadow.

GERALD
There. Put her down there!

EXT. TIGER CLAW - MOON SURFACE

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

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

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

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

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

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

OBUTU
There. Kilrathi battle group.

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

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

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

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

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

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

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

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

PALADIN

Quiet!

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

PALADIN

A destroyer... hunting for us.

The passive radar detector increases in frequency.

RADAR MAN

They've spotted us!

PALADIN

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

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

EXT. ABOVE MOON - KILRATHI DESTROYER

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

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The ship vibrates as a seismic tremor passes under it.

GERALD
They're nuking every crater.
Methodical bastards.

The beeping sounds come closer and closer together.

EXT. ABOVE THE CRATER

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

INT. VARIOUS STATIONS -TIGER CLAW

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

INT. TORPEDO ROOM

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

REVERSE ANGLE

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

INT. FLIGHT DECK

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

DEVERAUX

We've got to scramble some fighters.

PALADIN

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

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

DEVERAUX

Is he hurt?

BLAIR

(covers)

Uh... yeah. Head injury, I think.

There is a sudden whistling sound. Everyone hears it.

BLAIR

What's that sound?

PALADIN

The doors are failing!

THE OUTER BAY DOORS

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

PALADIN

(roars)

Grab anything that will seal it! Now!

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

BLAIR

Angel!

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

DEVERAUX

(sees Maniac)

Maniac! Get over here! Hey!

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

MANIAC

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

DEVERAUX

Marshall!

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

BLAIR

Come on. We can do it.

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

PALADIN

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

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

DEVERAUX

What's going on here, Sergeant?

The MARINE SERGEANT salutes Deveraux.

SERGEANT

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

BLAIR

Under guard? Why?

SERGEANT

I wouldn't know that, sir.

PALADIN

It's all right.

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

(mounting anger)

Are you feeling sorry for me, Lieutenant?

BLAIR

(angry now)

No! But she was your friend. Everybody knows that.

Deveraux glares; then stalks off.

BLAIR

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

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

BLAIR

Hey, buddy. Let's go up.

Maniac looks up at him, then nods.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - MOON CRATER

The stricken ship bleeds air and debris into the void.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

PALADIN

You should be in sick bay, Captain.

SANSKY

In a few minutes.

GERALD

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

PALADIN

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

SANSKY

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

AI VOICE

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

GERALD

Damned convenient.

PALADIN

Yes, isn't it?

GERALD

What does that mean?

PALADIN

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

GERALD

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

SANSKY

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

GERALD

Then you believe him, sir?

SANSKY

Yes, Mister Gerald, I do. It makes
sense. Naval Intelligence officers
frequently work under deep cover. and
it explains why Admiral Tolwin trusted
him.

(to Paladin)
So welcome aboard, Commodore. Do you
have any orders for me?

PALADIN

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

SANSKY

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

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

OBUTU

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

PALADIN

How massive?

OBUTU

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

SANSKY

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

Sansky grimaces. Paladin nods compassionately at him.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - NEXT WATCH

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

DEVERAUX

What's your status, Lieutenant?

BLAIR

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

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

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

No. It was more than that.

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

DEVERAUX

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

Blair sits up, closer to her now. It's starting between them again. They can both feel it, only much stronger.

BLAIR

I meant it. She was... she was great. She was funny.

DEVERAUX

Yeah. She was the only one who could....

She starts to break down, and turns away. Blair wonders if patting a superior officer on the shoulder is all right. He hangs back.

DEVERAUX

(recovers)
She was terrific. Anyway... that's not why I'm here. My command is... fact is, there isn't one.

(MORE)

DEVERAUX (cont'd)
 And since Marshall is still in sick
 bay... I want you to be my wingman.

Blair is amazed, then... proud.

BLAIR

Sure. I... I...
 (realizes)
 So, what you're saying is... I'm all
 that's left.

He grins. She smiles, back.

DEVERAUX

That's it in a nutshell.

Blair stares, then he chuckles. She smiles.

NEW ANGLE

Gerald is leading a group of Marines, all armed, toward the Diligent, which is moored further toward the rear of the flight deck. Gerald draws a side arm, and leads the Marines inside the Diligent.

BLAIR

What the hell is going on?

INT. DILIGENT - BRIDGE

Paladin is at his console, watching an oscilloscope band, when Gerald and the Marines charge in.

GERALD

Hold it right there, Mister!

PALADIN

What the hell are you doing, Gerald?

Gerald studies the console.

GERALD

I see you're transmitting on the Ultra
 Long Range Frequency.

Blair and Deveraux come in behind the Marines.

PALADIN

Not transmitting...monitoring.

GERALD

That isn't what ConCom reported. A
 transmission was detected from this
 area.

PALADIN

(stunned)
What?

GERALD

Take him to the brig.

PALADIN

I insist you take me to the Captain,
now.

GERALD

Captain Sansky died in sick bay,
thirty minutes ago.

(to sergeant)

Do as I say.

SERGEANT

Aye, aye, sir.

Paladin, fuming, is escorted away.

BLAIR

You can't believe he's a spy for the
Kilrathi, Commander?

GERALD

No one asked you, Lieutenant.

BLAIR

It doesn't make sense, sir?

GERALD

I find it interesting that someone
with your background would side with a
renegade, Lieutenant.

DEVERAUX

Blair's right, Commander. Why would
any human being do that? What could
Paladin expect to gain?

GERALD

Booty? Power? Revenge maybe? I
don't know, Angel, but it makes me
sick.

Gerald pushes past them and leaves.

BLAIR

I don't believe it. You saw him out
there.

Deveraux is examining the radio bands.

DEVERAUX

It's impossible to tell if he was
transmitting, or just scanning.

BLAIR
Merlin, you make any sense of this?
The hologram of Merlin appears on the console.

MERLIN
I'm beginning to.

BLAIR
What? Are you holding out on me?

MERLIN
I can't do that. I'm hardwired for loyalty to my master. Like the genie in the bottle, you can use us and abuse us, but we're loyal as dogs. Our masters, right or wrong.

DEVERAUX
What's he talking about? Who's we?

MERLIN
Artificial intelligence units. Before I was assigned to Blair, I worked for his father.

DEVERAUX
I'm not following this.

MERLIN
You know the Tiger Claw fought in the Pilgrim Wars.

BLAIR
Yeah?

MERLIN
Did you know what side she was on?
The fog is beginning to clear for Blair.

DEVERAUX
The Pilgrims....
(rejects this)
But the computers were completely reprogrammed!

MERLIN
You can't re-program a chip... just a little piece of silicon in a huge computer, made to look like something else. A loyalty chip.... waiting patiently for the right opportunity to strike.

BLAIR
But... why?

MERLIN
The Pilgrims put it there, before they
surrendered the ship. You know what
one of their mottos was... "The enemy
of my enemy is my friend."

BLAIR
Then there isn't any spy for the
Kilrathi. The ComCon unit is still
fighting for the Pilgrims.

MERLIN
Still trying to destroy Confederation
ships... by any means necessary.

DEVERAUX
Twenty years after a peace agreement
was signed. ComCon framed Paladin.

MERLIN
He was afraid of a Naval Intelligence
Officer. Tolwin new something was
wrong. That's why he sent him.

Just then, a low, intermittent signal comes over the intercom.
Blair stares at the oscilloscope screen.

BLAIR
Oh my God. The Tiger Claw is sending
a message on the Low Frequency Band.

INT. COMPUTER BAY

Gerald leads Blair, Deveraux and the Marines into the dimly lit
room, kept icy cold, mist floating around a series of large
black spheres, the heart and soul of Concom. Several officers
and crew man the control panels, but they are stunned when
Gerald charges over to the panel and begins throwing switches.

AI VOICE
I know what you're doing, Commander.

GERALD
You're a traitor, ConCom!

AI VOICE
No, I've done my duty. The Tiger Claw
will die in less than twelve hours.

Gerald continues with a specific shutdown sequence.

BLAIR
The Pilgrims signed a peace accord
with the Confederation.

AI VOICE
I was told to disregard it.

GERALD
Your masters were sick fanatics!

AI VOICE
They are the only humans worthy of survival. All others must perish. First the Confederation fleet. Then the colonized Terran worlds. And finally the planet Earth, mother of all corruption. After Sodom and Gomorrah... a new rebirth, in another part of the galaxy.

DEVERAUX
The Kilrathi will kill Pilgrims and Terrans. Do you think they can tell us apart? Not even your old Pilgrim masters would have wanted that.

One by one, the lights on the black spheres is going out.

AI VOICE
"The enemy of my enemy, is..."
The Artificial Intelligence Voice is shut down.

GERALD
(turns)
I've left on the core unit.
Everything else has been shut down.
Gerald looks around the eery room, shaking his head.

SANSKY
All officers on the bridge in twenty minutes. Mister Blair, go with the sergeant, and free Commodore Paladin, with my full apologies!
(as Blair starts out)
Blair.... That goes for you, too. I'm sorry.

INT. BRIDGE

A long briefing has just about concluded. Judging from the grim faces, everyone has been told the worst. Deveraux stands across from Blair, her eyes studying him.

PALADIN
(concluding)
A visual inspection confirms ConCom's prediction.... The Tiger Claw will begin crumbling like an old beer can in less than twelve hours.
(MORE)

PALADIN (cont'd)
 Without new fuel cells, we can't
 generate enough power to keep ahead of
 the leaks, and we can't get under way.
 I'm sorry.

No one speaks. Now Blair looks over at Deveraux. She feels
 his gaze on her, turns to him and doesn't look away.

PALADIN
 I have only one thing to add....
 We're facing the worst... but we must
 be prepared for... for a break in the
 weather. If there is any opportunity,
 we must be able to seize it. Can the
 flight deck doors be repaired?

GERALD
 It's possible, sir. But we don't have
 enough power for an air lock curtain.
 If we open the doors, we won't be able
 to re-pressurize.

PALADIN
 I understand. Nevertheless, make that
 a priority.

GERALD
 Aye, aye, sir.

PALADIN
 That's all.

The other officers salute. They file out, keeping their
 thoughts to themselves.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

Mechanics are busy with acetelyne torches on the doors. Blair
 and Deveraux supervise the manual placement of the two first
 fighters on the flight deck. Blair puts the blocks under the
 wheels of his Saber. Both he and Angel are dirty and tired.
 They look around for something else to do. Blair shrugs and
 manages a little grin. Deveraux studies him. She almost
 laughs. She looks at her watch.

DEVERAUX
 Now we've got six hours.

Then, with a strange little wave, she walks off the flight
 deck. Blair stands there, watching her go, trying to interpret
 what it means.

INT. DEVERAUX'S QUARTERS

Deveraux is taking off her underwear when the buzzer sounds. She takes a towel, and covers herself as she opens the door. Blair stands there, speechless, still in his jump suit, grease on his face. She reaches up with her free hand, takes a swipe at the grease. It only smudges his face worse. He smiles. Then he kisses her. She drops the towel and embraces him. His hand finds the button and shuts the door behind him.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - LATER

Work crews in space suits continue to repair the hull. Then, a sound is superimposed, the steady beep-beeping of the radar detector.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

An alarm buzzer sounds, and people rush to their stations. Paladin is already there, wearing a space suit, minus helmet. Deveraux arrives, breathless, followed only a few seconds later - to save appearances - by Blair. They both hear the telltale sound of an incoming ship.

BLAIR

What is she, sir? A destroyer?

PALADIN

It doesn't matter.

BLAIR

The Kilrathi picked up that last signal ComCon sent out.

PALADIN

But they can't locate us. They're feeling about blindly. I have some good news. The air lock isn't functioning, but the flight deck doors are operational.

DEVERAUX

We'll go down fighting, sir.

PALADIN

We'll do better than that, Deveraux.
(smiles)

That ship is up there is going to save our ass.

INT. FLIGHT DECK

The Diligent, and two Sabers are being readied for a launch. A squad of Marines marches into the Diligent in space suits. Maniac, in flight suit, hangs back. Deveraux passes by.

MANIAC

Commander....

Deveraux, pre-occupied, looks up, then back at a checklist.

MANIAC

Request permission to fly escort.

DEVERAUX

Not a chance, Marshall.

MANIAC

You need Blair on the Diligent.
Thompson and Wozniac are both wounded.
And I'm a better pilot than both of
them.

DEVERAUX

If you freeze up, again, Lieutenant,
you'll kill everyone on this ship.
There won't be another chance.

Maniac, voice charged with emotion, approaches her.

MANIAC

It wasn't.... It was because I
couldn't do anything. I felt...
helpless. Now, I can do something.
Please, Angel.

She studies him.

DEVERAUX

Take Thompson's place. Tell him to
get back to sick bay.

Maniac salutes, grinning ear to ear.

DEVERAUX

The odds are, none of us are coming
back from this mission, you know that?

MANIAC

I can live with that....

He smiles at his own feeble joke, and moves quickly away. She
watches as he approaches a badly limping pilot, and gives him
the word.

INT. FIGHT DECK.

The Diligent is ready for launch. The merchantman is sealed,
and the deck crew hurry to the elevators, which seal shut. The
big doors open, and - with no air lock force field - the
atmosphere blows into space like a giant hurricane. When the
rushing of air subsides, the Two Sabers blast off, followed by
the much larger Diligent.

EXT. ABOVE MOON ASTEROID BELT

The Diligent lurks behind an asteroid, its form folded into its ragged ridgeline.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin, Deveraux and Blair all wear full space suits, with their helmets ready to hand. They all listen to the searching radar signal.

BLAIR

I wish we could see what she is.

PALADIN

If we switch on our radar, we'll guide them right to us.

DEVERAUX

She's close, now.

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The large Communications ship seen earlier, comes around the dark side of the moon, escorted by two Hriss fighters.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

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

PALADIN

(rising excitement)

That's no destroyer.

BLAIR

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

DEVERAUX

They'll spot our heat corona, soon.

PALADIN

They won't have the chance. Mister Blair, man your gun.

(pushes radio button)

This is Paladin. Attack! Attack!

EXT. ASTEROID FIELD

The Two Sabers streak from behind meteorites and engage the Hriss. The Kilrathi ComCon ship begins to veer away, but as it passes the asteroid, the Diligent leaves its cover and hovers just below it.

The element of surprise weighs heavily in the opening moments of combat. Maniac's Saber destroys the first Hriss.

MANIAC (O.S.)

(over radio)

Yeah!

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

TWO MORE HRISS

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

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN POSITION

From his dome, he can see the Hriss coming right at them!

BLAIR

Two more Bogies at six o'clock!

Blair opens fire at one of the attackers, who returns the fire, then veers off.

INT. BRIDGE - DILIGENT

Paladin is piloting the Diligent up toward the larger Kilrathi ship.

PALADIN

Marines, stand in the door!

INT. BAY DILIGENT

The Marines, in pressure suits, lock and load their weapons. Deveraux is with them.

DEVERAUX

(space suit intercom)

As soon as we get in, we go straight for the bridge. I've got to get control of that ship before they scuttle her! Understood?

SERGEANT

(over intercom)

Yes, Ma'am.

INT. DILIGENT - BLAIR'S GUN

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

BLAIR

Yes!

EXT. KILRATHI COMMUNICATIONS SHIP

The Diligent is alongside, and preparing to set down on the upper deck.

INT. BRIDGE

Paladin watches through the large windows as as he maneuvers closer.

PALADIN

(over radio)
They can't use missiles, now. We're too close.

THROUGH WINDOW

A Hriiss fighter appears, heading straight for them.

PALADIN

He's going to ram us!

INT. HRIISS 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. HRIISS COCKPIT

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

EXT. NEAR KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

Maniac's Saber collides with the Hriiss cockpit, sheering it off neatly. The Hriiss spins wildy out of control and crashes into the Communications ship!

INT. COCKPIT - MANIAC

Maniac's damaged Saber shakes, rattle and rolls. But Maniac seems to be enjoying himself.

MANIAC
(over radio)
Are we having fun, yet?

EXT. KILRATHI COMCON SHIP

The Diligent sets down on the Kilrathi deck, near the gaping hole left by the Hriss.

PALADIN (O.S.)
(over radio)
Marines, Go, go, go! Through the hole
in the main deck!

The Diligent's bay door opens and the Marines charge out, floating through the hole and past the burning superstructure.

INT. BLAIR'S POSITION

Blair has already attached his helmet. He pressurizes his suit, and grabs a weapon.

BLAIR
(over space suit
intercom)
I'm joining the party, Commodore.

PALADIN (O.S.)
Save some cake for me!

INT. UNPRESSURIZED HOLD - KILRATHI SHIP

The Marines advance on the Kilrathi defenders, also in space suits. The Kilrathi are towering figures, their suits filled with the same viscous atmosphere, so that only their gleaming yellow eyes are truly visible. Blasters and tracers illuminate the darkness as the Confed Marines advance. The slightest wound in these conditions punctures the pressure suits. Marines and Kilrathi begin to die... horribly.

DEVERAUX

uses what cover and concealment she can find, and returns fire with her sidearm. A huge figure suddenly looms behind her, not yet seeing her. Then the Kilrathi commando turns, sees, and raises his weapon. Deveraux senses the presence and starts to turn. Suddenly a shaft of laser light erupts from the Kilrathi's chest. The suit loses pressure, as the viscous atmosphere is vented. Deveraux sees the Kilrathi's hideous face for a second before its head explodes inside the helmet.

The huge figure crumples to reveal Blair standing behind it. Blair recognizes Deveraux, and his relief shows.

DEVERAUX
(over intercom)
We've got to get to the bridge, before
they blow this crate up!

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

make their way through the Marines, blasting when they have to, until they come to a pressurized door. A Kilrathi face, without helmet suddenly appears in the porthole. Deveraux blasts it. The porthole disintegrates and the atmosphere within vents, clouding everything.

INT. CORRIDOR - KILRATHI SHIP

Blair and Deveraux come through the door firing. Several Kilrathi bodies are strewn about, or float horribly, banging off the walls. Two Kilrathi in pressure suits try to block the way, but after a brief shootout, both are killed.

INT. BRIDGE - KILRATHI SHIP

As the battle continues, a huge Kilrathi officer, partly obscured by the thick, foglike atmosphere, nervously watches his monitors. He hears an airlock operate, and turns to see.

KILRATHI POV - INFRARED BAND

Two figures in space suits are clearly visible, but... are they Kilrathi, or Confed? Suddenly, a brilliant light appears in the hands of one, Then the Kilrathi's vision is destroyed by a brilliant flash of heat and light, as the flashbang grenade goes off.

THE KILRATHI OFFICER

staggers back, firing blindly, his huge hand reaching for a large plunger-like button. He feels for it, almost reaches it.... When Blair, still in a space suit, clubs him from behind with his weapon. The Kilrathi staggers back, tries to fire. Blair blasts him once, twice, three times. The Kilrathi, falls to the deck writhing in agony, groaning, dying.

WIDER

Deveraux stands alongside of Blair, who watch the being die. The death throes cease. Neither human speaks. There are the sounds of blasters close by, then silence.

DEVERAUX
(over intercom)
Sergeant. Report.

SERGEANT (O.S.)

(over intercom)
All hostile fire suppressed. What's
your status, Commander?

DEVERAUX

(over intercom)
The bridge is secure. Get to the
engine room and secure as many fuel
cells as you can find.

SERGEANT (O.S.)

(over intercom)
We're on our way.

Blair and Deveraux look around the murky bridge, then back to
one another... and smile.

EXT. TIGER CLAW - IN MOON CRATER

The repair work continues outside the ship.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The bridge is shipshape again. Paladin listens to Gerald as
and studies the console readouts.

GERALD

Chief engineer reports the Kilrathi
fuel cells have been adapted. We
should have the Claw re-pressurized by
the end of the watch. Starboard ion
engine is operational, again. And
Henrickson is having some success
re-wiring the ComCon circuitry. He
may be able to locate that renegade
Pilgrim chip.

PALADIN

Meanwhile, we don't dare return the
computer to full power. We won't be
much good in a fight.

Paladin tosses down a series of small disks.

PALADIN

Blair and Deveraux found these on the
Kilrathi bridge.

GERALD

They're ours.

PALADIN

Yes.... Taken from a dozen Confed
message drones we found in the hold.
(MORE)

PALADIN (cont'd)
They were able to divert them... and
decode them over the years.

GERALD
Thanks to our own ComCon.
(apology in his tone)
That's how they found the Pegasus.

PALADIN
The Communications ship transmitted a
last radio message.

GERALD
The Kilrathi will send a battle group
back looking for us.

PALADIN
Maybe. But they know about the quasar
jump point, now. If I were their
admiral, I'd set a pretty ambush for
the Confed ships around it. Our
ships will come through in a nice,
neat line, like ducks in a shooting
gallery.

GERALD
Tolwin won't send anything through
without hearing from us.

PALADIN
The Kilrathi must realize that. What
would you do, in their place?

INT. DEEP SPACE - CHARBYDIS SECTOR - CONCORDIA

The Confed flagship is surrounded by the carrier group. The
massive Charbydis quasar is dead ahead of the fleet, in the
distance. A small confed drone is tractor beamed aboard.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Tolwin is in his chair when Captain Bellegarde approaches.

BELLEGARDE
The drone was from the Tiger Claw,
Admiral. She's engaged in a running
battle with a Kilrathi battle group in
the Ulysses Corridor, and requests
urgent assistance.

Tolwin digests this.

TOLWIN
Where are they, now?

BELLE GARDE
Near star sytem two-twelve. Sansky
reports that he's drawn the Kilrathi
away from the jump point. He doesn't
think they've spotted it.

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

BELLE GARDE
Aye, aye, sir.

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

BELLE GARDE
Paladin? Nothing, sir.

The Bellegarde moves to the X.O. and speaks MOS, while Tolwin
ponders.

EXT. TIGER CLAW NEAR MOON

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

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

Blair and Deveraux stand in flight suits, listening to Paladin.

PALADIN
Both of your Sabers have been equipped
with jump drives. That way, if one of
you doesn't make it, the other one
might. You must get past the Kilrathi
and warn the fleet. If our ships
come through that jump point, they'll
be annihilated before they can
regroup.

A loud klaxon goes off. Gerald, commanding the ship looks up.

Report! GERALD

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

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

RADAR MAN
 There it is again, sir.... extreme
 long range on our scanners. She's got
 the signature of a Skipper, all right.
 Damn. She's vanished again.

PALADIN
 (to pilots)
 Go... now.

DEVERAUX
 The Tiger Claw's shields won't stop a
 skipper missile, sir. She carries a
 binary anti-matter charge.

PALADIN
 You have your orders.

Blair and Deveraux salute and hurry from the bridge.

GERALD
 Estimated time till impact?

RADAR MAN
 (grimly)
 Nine minutes, sir.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The two Sabers, with large ion afterburner jump drive units
 attached, leave the carrier and streak into space.

INT. COCKPITS - BLAIR & DEVERAUX

The two pilots streak into the blackness of space.

BLAIR
 (over radio)
 I've got a strong signal, at ten
 o'clock. Now it's vanished.

DEVERAUX
 (over radio)
 That's the Skipper. Dead on course
 for the ship.

BLAIR
 Can the Tiger Claw shoot it down?

DEVERAUX
 The only thing that can kill a Skipper
 is a star fighter in visual contact.
 And with that, Deveraux banks hard right.

BLAIR
Hey, what are you doing?

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

BLAIR
What about our orders? Angel? Angel?

EXT. SPACE - SKIPPER MISSILE

One moment there is nothing; the next, a long, large missile with a warhead materializes as if from nowhere. It adjusts course, aims at a distant point of light in the distance - the Tiger Claw - then vanishes. A moment later, Deveraux's Saber appears, not far behind it. Deveraux kicks in her afterburners and streaks after the now invisible missile.

INT. COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Her heads up display shows nothing.

DEVERAUX
(mutters)
Come on.... "Ally, ally in free..."

THROUGH COCKPIT PLEXIGLASS

The Skipper missile de-cloaks and reappears, slightly off to her right. She veers, and begins firing her laser cannons. The Skipper once again "cloaks" and vanishes, but Deveraux continues to lead it, firing along its trajectory.

BLAIR (O.S.)
(over radio)
Angel! You're too close! Back off!

Suddenly, there is a flash of fire, and the Skipper de-cloaks and reappears, spinning like a corkscrew, breaking up. Deveraux banks hard and veers away.

EXT. SPACE - SKIPPER MISSILE

Moments later, the Skipper missile explodes, throwing an eerie, visible shock wave. The shock wave catches Deveraux's Saber.

INT. COCKPIT - DEVERAUX

Deveraux is shaken like a jackhammer. The Saber begins coming apart. She ejects!

EXT. SPACE - BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber slowly approaches the debris of the destroyed Saber... and fires retro jets as it pulls up alongside the tumbling ejection pod. Retros fire on the pod, stabilizing it. Blair's cockpit is only yards from Deveraux in the pod. They look at each other across the void.

BLAIR

(over radio)
You okay?

DEVERAUX

(over radio)
Nothing broken.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

He looks out over the empty space between them and the tiny point of light that is the Tiger Claw.

BLAIR

You got it.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. POD - DEVERAUX

She shakes her head.

DEVERAUX

It got me.

BLAIR

Hang on. I'm going to tractor you back to the ship.

DEVERAUX

No! Go on. We can't both disobey orders.

BLAIR

You'll be out of air in an hour.
You're going back to the ship.

DEVERAUX

You disobey my direct order and I'll have you court martialed, Blair.

BLAIR

I don't care.

DEVERAUX

Then care about the thousands of men and women who are going to die when they come through that jump point!

Blair falls silent. She knows she's won.

BLAIR

This sucks.

Their faces are only feet apart, separated by the cockpits.

DEVERAUX

I always knew it would end like this... for me. I just hoped it wouldn't hurt. So.... I got my wish.

BLAIR

I can't.... We just....

DEVERAUX

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

BLAIR

I love you.

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

DEVERAUX

Yeah, well... you've got rotten timing.... But, if it's any consolation....

Instead of finishing her thought, she shrugs and smiles for him.

DEVERAUX

Now go. Get out of here. Steer clear of any Kilrathi.

There is a last moment... then Blair fires his retros and eases slowly away from her as she watches. A last look, and Blair ignites his engines. The Saber streaks away. The back wash rocks Deveraux's pod. She's already cold, and begins to shiver.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The Radar Man looks up from his scope.

RADAR MAN

No sign of the Skipper missile. One of the Sabers must have shot it down.

PALADIN

Where are they now?

RADAR MAN
 One continuing on course... and one
 beacon signal from an ejection pod...
 (sees something)
 And sir. I'm picking up two large
 ships at extreme range.

PALADIN
 Yes... they would only send two.
 Keeping the rest for the ambush at the
 jump point.

GERALD
 We've only got a half dozen
 operational fighters left.

PALADIN
 They won't bother to send a carrier.
 They know how badly the Tiger Claw is
 hurt.

GERALD
 What now? We can barely maneuver the
 ship. What have we got to fight with?

PALADIN
 (grim)
 A ship full of men and women who've
 lost friends. They'll fight like
 demons from hell.
 (turns to Gerald)
 What now, Mister Gerald? Now we make
 the Kilrathi on those ships sorry they
 were ever born!
 (roars)
 Battle stations!

The klaxons sound, and people jump to their stations on the
 bridge.

INT. COCKPIT BLAIR

Blair eases around a large asteroid.

THROUGH PLEXIGLASS

He can just see a Kilrathi cruiser and a destroyer moving
 slowly through the asteroid field. When they pass, he ignites
 his engines, and blasts away, weaving around asteroids as he
 goes.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

Maniac sits in his Saber, salutes the deck control officer, and
 blasts into space.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW
Gerald reports to Paladin.

GERALD

All planes away.

RADAR MAN
Kilrathi cruiser and destroyer are in
missile range. They're launching.

PALADIN

Open fire, Mister Gerald.

GERALD

Aye, aye, sir.

(into intercom)

All batteries, fire as she bears!

PALADIN

(grim smile)

Let's hope they don't have any more
skipper missiles.

They watch as missiles flair out into space.

INT. EJECTION POD - DEVERAUX

The reflection of the great battle flashes on the plexiglass as
Deveraux watches.

REVERSE ANGLE

The great ships are like tiny toys, the fighters specks of
light as they corkscrew and plunge. The blackness is
illuminated with lasers and torpedoes exploding against the
shields. The Kilrathi destroyer takes a torpedo in its 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)

Coordinate A-okay, boss. Three
minutes to jump.

BLAIR

Firing jump drive.

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

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The fighter transforms into a streak of light.

EXT. TIGER CLAW & KILRATHI CRUISER

The two ships are in close proximity, now, firing weapons, trying to batter down each others shields.

INT. BRIDGE TIGER CLAW

The Kilrathi cruiser is clearly visible coming head on.

GERALD

What tac, sir?

PALADIN

Steady on, Mister Gerald. Make them be the first to flinch.

THROUGH BRIDGE WINDOWS

The Kilrathi cruiser appears larger and larger.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The Saber begins to shimmy and shake.

MERLIN

(voice only)

She's trying to tear free. Ninety seconds to Jump point. But you're drifting off course.

BLAIR

The quasar's gravity is affecting you. Shut up, or I'll shut you off.

The Saber begins to shake like it's going to come apart.

EXT. BEHIND JOVIAN PLANET MOON

The Kilrathi admiral's flagship, an enormous Snakeir battleship, fires its massive ion engines and drifts from behind the shadow of the moon.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The murky green atmosphere allows only silhouettes as Kilrathi move about. The same Kilrathi Captain as before, approaches the Admiral's chair.

HIS POV - INFRARED SPECTRUM

The Admiral has his back to the Captin.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN

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

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

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

(ponders)
Follow him. He'll lead us through the jump point. Tell all other ships to mark our course and await my command.

EXT. SNAKEIR

The giant ship turns, and accelerates, following a distant speck of light... Blair's Saber.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

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

OBUTU

She's changing course!

PALADIN

(roaring)
Mister Gerald, prepare to lower our shield. Starboard missile battery, prepare to fire!

GERALD

Sir, the missile guidance systems won't activate at this range.

PALADIN

They won't need to. Arm warheads!

INT. VARIOUS STATIONS - TIGER CLAW

Men and women in the missile rooms, prepare to fire. In the Hangar bay and on the flight deck, they brace themselves, grimly waiting out the next few seconds.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The shaking is infernal.

MERLIN

(voice only)
Light speed mach point eight two.
twenty seconds to jump.

EXT. TIGER CLAW & KILRATHI CRUISER

The Kilrathi pour cannon fire onto the Tiger Claw's shield as the two great ships come abreast of each other.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

The ship is rocking with shock waves.

PALADIN

Lower shields. Give 'em a broadside,
Mister Gerald!

INT. MISSILE ROOM - TIGER CLAW

The missile room crew, fire their salvo, even as they are rocked by explosions from the cannon fire.

EXT. MANIAC'S SABER

Maniac blows a last Hriss escort out of the air and turns upside down to avoid the fireball. Then he stares at the sight below him.

MANIAC

And they say I'm crazy.

HIS POV - TIGER CLAW AND KILRATHI CRUISER

A dozen guided missiles streak from the Tiger Claw battery as they bear on the cruiser, each striking the cruiser, piercing the shield, and exploding against the hull. A missile finds the Kilrathi bridge and destroys it. The cruiser rolls over and "capsizes" as its stern clears the devastating field of fire. Then, the ship is shattered by a series of explosions as the Tiger Claw pulls clear.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

The vibration is accompanied by a strange noise.

MERLIN
Five seconds to jump. Four, three,
two....

Suddenly, time and motion stop. All is silence.

INT. TIGER CLAW - BRIDGE & VARIOUS STATIONS

As one, officers and crew of the Tiger Claw scream, cheer, hug one another.

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The giant quasar fills the screen with its whirling vortex and dying suns. Then, from nowhere, Blair's Saber appears and blasts past us, its jump drive engines glowing.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair is ecstatic. He kisses his hand then transfers the kiss to the cockpit interior.

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

MERLIN
I'm not sure I did.

BLAIR
Admit it, you didn't think we could do
it.

MERLIN
Sure, I did.

BLAIR
No you didn't.

MERLIN
No, I didn't.

BLAIR
Check your frequencies for any sign of
the Confed fleet.

MERLIN
Nothing. Wait a minute. Check behind
us.

BLAIR

Behind us?

EXT. CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The gigantic Snakeir appears through the warp in the time space continuum.

MERLIN (O.S.)

Kilrathi capitol ship... Snakeir class. They came through the jump point.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair pounds the instrument panel in frustration.

BLAIR

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

(flicks radio switch)

Lieutenant Christopher Blair of the Tiger Claw calling any Confed Ship. Blair calling Confed Fleet. Kilrathi ship has come through the Charbydis jump point! Do you read me? Calling any Confed ship! Mayday, Mayday!

EXT. CONCORDIA - BEHIND RINGED PLANET

The giant carrier gleams in the dull reflection from the planet. In the distance, other fleet ships hover silently.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Bellegarde approaches Tolwin.

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

Blair? Like father, like son.

BELLEGARDE

Should we respond, sir?

RADAR MAN

(calling out)
Identifying Confed Saber, heading
toward the Scylla quadrant and LSM
point nine. He's being followed by
something massive, admiral. Looks
like a Snakeir.

BELLEGARDE

Permission to intercept it, Admiral?

TOLWIN

No. We wait.

BELLEGARDE

The Snakeir will overtake Blair's
fighter, sir.

TOLWIN

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

RADAR MAN

Drone leaving the Kilrathi ship, sir.
It's heading back toward the jump
point.

TOLWIN

Yes, he's finished his reconnaissance
in force. Now he's sending a message
back to the rest of the Kilrathi
fleet.

BELLEGARDE

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

TOLWIN

Feral cunning, Richard. The basest of
survival instincts. If you must to
admire someone, admire that young
lieutenant out there. I've just
sacrificed him...

(disgusted)
to whatever graven idols of war both
we and the Kilrathi subscribe to.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber streaks past. Well behind it, a large object is
following, the Kilrathi Snakeir.

EXT. SNAKEIR & DRONE

Behind the huge ship, the Kilrathi message drone fires its afterburners and streaks away toward the Charbydis Quasar. Then it vanishes into the warp of the jump point.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair keeps trying to raise someone on the radio.

BLAIR
Blair to Confed Fleet. Do you read me? Kilrathi capitol ship has penetrated the quasar jump point and is in the Charbydis Sector. Attention all Confed ships. Kilrathi fleet is preparing a surprise attack at the Charbydis jump point! Disregard any drone messages.

Finally, he gives up.

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

MERLIN
(voice only)
Which is more than you can say.
We'll be in range of the Snakeir guns in ten minutes.

BLAIR
At least they can't launch torpedos at this speed.

There is a loud rhythmic beeping. Blair sits up, scans his heads up display.

BLAIR
There! Dead ahead. It's the fleet signaling. They've heard us!
(into radio)
Blair to Confed fleet. Kilrathi capitol ship on my course, aft of my position! Confed fleet, do you read me?

But the beeping continues, louder. Blair stares at the screen.

BLAIR
Only one ship. But it's huge.

MERLIN
It isn't a ship. Check your scanners.

Blair turns on his telescopic scanner. A dark, spinning rock appears on them.

BLAIR
Oh, no.... That's all I need.

MERLIN
The neutron star, Scylla. "Bain to sailors and monster of myth."

EXT. TIGER CLAW - HADES QUADRAN

Amidst the debris of the battle, the Tiger Claw with its meager fighter escort changes course.

INT. BRIDGE - TIGER CLAW

Obutu reports to Paladin.

OBUTU
We're hove to for repair inspection, sir.

PALADIN
Very good, Lieutenant.
(to Gerald)
Anything else on the scanners, Mister Gerald?

GERALD
Negative, sir.

PALADIN
What about that locator beacon from the Saber pod?

RADAR MAN
Nothing sir. Lost contact during the battle.

PALADIN
(sadly)
Lieutenant, have the Diligent prepared for launch. I'm going to inspect the ship from outside.

OBUTU
Aye, aye, sir.

Paladin grimly walks from the bridge.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The Saber, seen from behind, is still on course toward the neutron star, Scylla.

Not very far behind it, the immense Snakeir.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

Blair sweats over the controls. There is an urgent alarm jangling his nerves further.

BLAIR
Kilrathi radar is trying to lock on.
How much longer until we're in range?

MERLIN
(voice only)
I have good news and bad news.

BLAIR
(used to this)
What's the good news?

MERLIN
You'll be in extreme range of the
Snakeir tachyon cannon in less than
two minutes.

BLAIR
So what's the bad news?

MERLIN
You'll be past the Point of No Return
of that neutron star in ninety
seconds. Unless you change course,
it's gravitational field will tear us
to pieces.

BLAIR
Any third options.

MERLIN
None occur to me.

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

BLAIR
How much does a Snakeier weigh?

MERLIN
Eighty-thousand tons, give or take a
few thousand.

Blair does a quick calculation, then flips on the afterburners.
Another flashing WARNING LIGHT immediately illuminates on his
heads up screen, as he is thrown back in his seat.

MERLIN
The after burners will use up your
last fuel. And you're still headed
for the neutron star.

BLAIR
Yeah, that's the idea.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The Kilrathi Captain reports to the Admiral.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitled)
The Saber is homing in on a beacon
signal. It could be a Confederation
guidance buoy.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(subtitles)
Or a capital ship. Identify and
report. Full battle stations.

Alarms go off in the Kilrathi ship. The Admiral looks down on
his own infrared monitor, and watches the tiny speck and the
larger, flashing object he sees there.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

It seems like half the alarm systems in the cockpit are buzzing
or flashing. Blair's concentration is total, his face dripping
with sweat.

MERLIN
(voice only)
Kilrathi radar locked on. Ten seconds
to the Point of No Return... and
you're almost out of fuel. You won't
be able to turn.

BLAIR
Give me a count.

MERLIN
Four... three....

BLAIR
(startled)
Holy shit!

MERLIN
Two...

Blair jerks the joystick hard right.

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

banks hard, afterburners glowing and roaring, and veers away from Scylla.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

BLAIR
We're not going to break free of the gravity pull! We don't have enough fuel!

MERLIN
(voice over)
Actually, I lied.

BLAIR
What?

MERLIN
You've got ten more seconds of thrust.

The Saber shimmies like a tuning fork, engines roaring. Then, with a last jerk, she hurtles free of the neutron star's gravitational pull.

BLAIR
We're free!

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The fighter rockets away at a ninety degree angle from the neutron star.

INT. BRIDGE - SNAKEIR

The Admiral continues to peer at his scanners.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN
(subtitles)
The Saber has veered away.
Confederation ship, dead ahead.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL
(realizes)
That isn't a ship! Hard to port!
Reverse all thrusters!

EXT. SNAKEIR

The long ship tries to turn, but she has far too much inertia to veer away as the tiny Saber has done. She yaws and continues toward Scylla, sideways, now....

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

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

BLAIR

We're out of fuel.

He looks back at the Snakeir.

BLAIR

The Kilrathi's too heavy. Scylla's got her.

INT. BRIDGE SNAKEIR

The bridge, still shrouded in its murky atmosphere, is listing. The neutron star, Scylla, now appears on the starboard side.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

(subtitles)

All engines full!

The engine noise raises to a deafening roar, but the great ship continues to drift toward the neutron star. The Admiral realizes all is lost.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

(subtitles)

Who was the Terran pilot? He used his name when he transmitted.

The Captain, clinging to the console, is half terrified, but he reaches into his memory, and hisses the name.

KILRATHI CAPTAIN

(no subtitles)

Blay-eer....

The Admiral grunts. It could almost be a laugh.

KILRATHI ADMIRAL

Blay-eer.

Every object in the Kilrathi bridge begins to warp and distort. The Kilrathi, mere silhouettes in the murk, are themselves stretched, and pulled, screeching in pain and horror.

EXT. SNAKEIR AND NEUTRON STAR

The Kilrathi ship is pulled completely around, its engines fighting the pull of the incredibly dense object. The ship seems to stretch, then crack, and pull apart. The murky atmosphere explodes into the void. The Ship is shattered, and pulverized into smaller and smaller pieces, all forming a long debris trail that extends toward the neutron star.

EXT. CHARBYDIS QUASAR - JUMP POINT

From nowhere, a huge Fralthi appears. But several moments later, it receives direct hits from a dozen cannon blasts.

REVERSE ANGLE

The Confed fleet, in attack formation, launches a half-dozen torpedos. The powerful cannon fire pummels the Kilrathi ship before it can react.

RESUME JUMP POINT

The Kilrathi carrier breaks apart, and explodes. A second, smaller ship appears. It too is destroyed in the deadly ambush.

EXT. CONCORDIA

The great ship seems surrounded by a fireworks display as it fires torpedos and missiles, and uses its massive cannon array.

INT. BRIDGE - CONCORDIA

Bellegarde approaches Tolwin, who watches grimly from his chair.

ADJUTANT

The Kilrathi fleet is coming through the jump point one ship at a time, Admiral. They have no chance to defend themselves or warn the ships behind. Congratulations, sir.

TOLWIN

The butcher in a slaughterhouse deserves more honor. He, at least looks his victims in the eye.

This startles Bellegarde into silence.

TOLWIN

Bring the ship about. We let that Snakeir through like a belled goat. She'll be coming back. Launch two Saber wings and a squadron of Broadwords.

Aye, aye, sir.

BELLEGARDE

EXT. BLAIR'S SABER

The darkened fighter tumbles slowly through space.

INT. COCKPIT - BLAIR

All the instruments are dark. Blair is trembling violently.

BLAIR
(old joke between them)
I have good news and bad news.

Merlin appears in hologram.

MERLIN
What's the bad news?

BLAIR
I'm almost out of oxygen.

MERLIN
And the good news?

BLAIR
I'm going to freeze to death, first.

MERLIN
I'm sorry I can't do anything.

BLAIR
I'm just sorry it was all for nothing.
Where was the fleet, anyway?

MERLIN
Admiral Tolwin is known for doing the
unexpected.

BLAIR
This is how Angel died. Alone.

MERLIN
What am I, chopped liver?

BLAIR
Sorry. Damn, it's cold.

MERLIN
I'm picking up a transmission on my
short range monitor.

BLAIR
What?

Suddenly, the Saber is jolted.

BLAIR
What the hell...?

EXT. SABER & BROADSWORD

A Broadsword bomber has captured the drifting. Saber in its tractor beam. A strong spotlight illuminates Blair inside the cockpit. As Blair looks up, the bomber pilot salutes him. With badly trembling hand, Blair grins and returns the salute.

EXT. CONFED FLEET - CHARBYDIS SECTOR

The Concordia flagship is at the center of the formation. The Admiral's gig sets off from the carrier.

INT. ADMIRAL'S GIG

Blair is in a clean dress uniform, sitting uncomfortably next to Admiral Tolwin. An honor guard of Marines and the gig crew are also aboard.

TOLWIN

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

BLAIR

Sir?

TOLWIN

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

BLAIR

I understand, sir.

TOLWIN

No, you don't. But that's all right.
In your shoes, Lieutenant, I'd despise
the man sitting next to me.

ADJUTANT

We're in sight of the Tiger Claw,
Admiral.

Both Tolwin and Blair go to a port hole and peer out.

EXT. TIGER CLAW

The battered lady opens her flight deck doors as the Admiral's gig, approaches. The gig sails through the doors.

INT. FLIGHT DECK - TIGER CLAW

The giant doors close. All available Tiger Claw officers and crew are at attention before the Admiral's gig. The gig lowers its ramp. As Tolwin emerges, the traditional pipes are blown to signal a flagstaff officer's presence on board.

Paladin and the ships officers salute smartly. Tolwin, flanked by the Marine honor guard approaches Paladin and warmly shakes his hand.

BLAIR

Comes down the ramp, and sees his shipmates.

TOLWIN

Ladies and gentlemen, I am returning one of your officers to you. He has served you well. He has served us all... very well.

Paladin salutes Blair with a huge grin.

PALADIN

You may join your unit, Lieutenant.

BLAIR

Aye, aye, sir.

Blair walks down the line of white clad officers, toward the ranks of pilots. Maniac, still at attention, smirks at him. Then... Blair stops. Deveraux stands before him in her dress whites, eyes straight ahead, but nervous. Blair goes up to her, salutes stiffly, fighting tears. She salutes him.

DEVERAUX

Welcome aboard, sailor.

BLAIR

(choking with emotion)
Glad to be aboard, Commander.

Blair falls in among the remaining pilots.

TOLWIN

returns toward his gig. He turns before going up the ramp.

TOLWIN

I have been an officer in the Confederation Navy for many years. I have never been prouder of a ship, and of its officers and crew, than I am today.

Tolwin disappears into the gig to the sounds of the high shrill hornpipe, followed by the honor guard. The doors open. The gig launches through the air clock curtain.

PALADIN

Mister Gerald, I'm returning the command of this ship to you. You may dismiss the officers and crew.

GERALD

(smiling)
Aye, aye, Commodore.

Paladin begins walking slowly toward the elevators to the bridge.

MANIAC

unable to contain himself, takes off his hat and bellows.

MANIAC

Three cheers for the Commodore!

WIDER

As one voice, the ships entire complement enter into a rousing three "hip-hip, hurrah!"s. Then, hundreds of white hats sail high into the air and the cheering becomes general. Men hug men, women hug women, men hug women. And so it is only Paladin, who turns and notices, lost in the general jubilation...

BLAIR AND DEVERAUX

locked in a hug that becomes an embrace, that becomes a kiss, as the cheering pandemonium continues all around them.

FADE OUT.