

WING COMMANDER V & BEYOND

by

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The Big Picture

This is an effort to create a story that will propel the *Wing Commander* series into a new generation. While encompassing the points that the team identified as being significant building blocks for the ongoing success of the franchise, it also attempts to open up the drama/action to an increasingly broader audience.

The challenge is to build upon our past successes and at the same time strengthen our appeal to a worldwide mass audience who haven't yet discovered the thrill of the *Wing Commander* franchise. Although this is, necessarily, a military story in a military setting with military characters, some 'Hollywood' story elements are deliberately introduced. The idea is to help justify a business model where millions of dollars are spent on development / interactive movies by creating intriguing characters and action that our core audience AND customers outside our usual demographics can all identify with.

At heart this is a character-driven adventure. The generic action heroes and stock villains are pushed gently aside to make room for more realistic, three-dimensional heroes and villains...a couple of them civilians. The framework of a new war is established—a war that will soon become a large-scale, operatic conflict with an enemy even more intractable and compelling than the Kilrathi.

Yet the Kilrathi and Blair and other long-standing fixtures of the *Wing Commander* universe are not merely tossed aside and forgotten. An effort has been made to phase out the tired elements of the series with as much grace as possible, while simultaneously beefing up the heart of the story with a bold, new hero and stronger female leads. Not one, but *two* new Alien races are introduced—one of which forms the heart of the core *WC* series and the other of which will fuel ancillary titles.

This story, therefore, is simultaneously designed to carry over into many other potential *Wing Commander* properties, including the *WC5*, *WC6* and *WC7* sequels, plus potential spin-offs such as *Maniac Missions* and a *WC Ground Strategy Game*.

We're at a time of transition and great possibility—both in terms of the *Wing Commander* storylines and for those of us who make the games. Hopefully this story will prove to be a step in the right direction.

NOTE: Only a small number of potential missions and branch points are described in this story. This is deliberate. Once the backbone of a strong, compelling drama is in place, then the design team will begin refining the material and making informed decisions about missions, branch points, loadouts, etc. that will influence further iterations of the story.

WING COMMANDER

V

A New Frontier

Teaser...

The slumbers of a SQUADRON of CONFED NAVY PILOTS in their bunks are suddenly disturbed by the menacing growl of a Battle Stations' Klaxon. Led by the devilishly handsome young 1st LT. NICK SHERIDAN, the PILOTS scramble at double-time through the carrier, race to the flight deck, dive into their fighters and are ripping through the twinkling blackness of space in record time.

From the cockpit of his own fighter, MAJOR ALEXANDER NADEL, the fiftyish CAG, barely has time to announce a surprise attack by UNKNOWN ALIEN FIGHTERS before the enemy is upon them. 1st Lt. Sheridan (the Player/Character) hurriedly organizes his forces and fends off the seeming suicide attack.

Chuckling delightedly at having roused his pilots in the middle of the night, Major Nadel announces that the "exercise was a success", all the 'enemy' drones were destroyed and it's high time to get back to the ship.

Grousing aloud about the lack of any real enemy to fight in this post-Galactic War time of peace and prosperity, 1st Lt. Sheridan orders his pilots to return to the *TCS Leviathan*—a raggedy ass carrier just one small step above space junk.

Act One

Back on board the *Leviathan*, a handful of CIVILIAN VISITORS from a nearby Border Worlds capital planet have been roused by the action, among them the patrician Confederation Chancellor of Defense, LASZLO OLIVER—a career politician who never served in the military, but who's endlessly fascinated by all the high-tech "toys of warfare." Also present is the politician's world-weary, 15 year-old son, THORN OLIVER, a bright kid who affects a certain disdain for his father, Confederation politics and the crew of the carrier.

In addition to his other duties, Sheridan has drawn the peacetime slag task of chaperoning the Chancellor, his son and the other VISITORS around the ship. With one of his Wingmen in tow—2nd LT. HOLLIS TRISSLER, a solidly built Black pilot who's as caring and sympathetic on the inside as he is imposing on the outside—Sheridan walks the VISITORS through the space carrier, describing the various personnel and facilities.

Realizing that Chancellor Oliver doesn't have a clue, Sheridan delights in making up absurd descriptions of several areas of the ship. The way Sheridan figures it, he's got nothing to lose even if he pisses off the Chancellor. With his 3-year hitch in the Confed Navy coming to end in less than a month and without ever

Doesn't compel me.

Hollis this is a player

having served in combat, Sheridan's more than a little disenchanted with the service and is looking forward to one of those high-paying civilian jobs as a shuttle pilot for a mineral exploration company. Young Thorn, realizing that Sheridan is yanking his father's chain, takes a liking to the pilot and opens up to him slightly.

Suddenly the Klaxon blares and Battle Stations are called again. At the Chancellor's insistence, 1st Lt. Sheridan escorts the VISITORS to the Bridge to watch what they assume is another drill. But CAPT. MANFRED WILLINGHAUS tersely explains that there's a criminal disturbance in a neighboring Border Worlds sector that must be suppressed immediately.

An organized crime syndicate with ties to a certain LEV ARRIS [vid, *Privateer II: The Darkening*] has taken over a Naval Shipyard and are in the process of stealing a dozen advanced fighters. In contrast to Major Nadel's easy-going rapport with his troops, the German-born Capt. Willinghaus is a humorless, no-nonsense officer. As Capt. Willinghaus orders the *Leviathan* to the rendezvous point, Sheridan rejoins his fellow pilots.

In the tense moments before their first combat mission, we meet a couple of Sheridan's other Wingmen, including GNAT FOREST, a diminutive young woman whose flying skills border on magical, and RONALD PHELAN, known universally by his callsign, "THE GEEK"—a technical wizard who knows every system on every plane inside and out, but who has a much tougher time relating to other people.

As 1st Lt. Sheridan hands out the Air-Tasking Orders to his fellow pilots, he has a reassuring word for each one. Sheridan is a dashing young man of great pent-up energies in constant search of adventure. Yet he's also very much the reluctant hero. He wants excitement...not death—either for himself or his comrades. In contrast to the All-American heroism of Christopher Blair, Nick Sheridan is more of a rogue, a man who often pretends to look out only for #1, while in reality caring deeply about those around him. He's cut more in the Indiana Jones mold. Instead of glory, though, he's motivated—or at least *thinks* he's motivated—by money. He'll learn what he's really made of over the course of this and subsequent stories.

Suddenly the moment's at hand and the fighters are away—weapons hot, tensions high and years of training on the line. 1st Lt. Sheridan leads the way into the dangerous situation at the Naval Shipyard, managing to knock out the opposition and blockade the entrance while Terran Space Marines dropped from the *Leviathan* retake the facility. In a follow-up mission, Sheridan & Co. go after a trio of escaped fighters, tracking them down on the far side of the planet and dispatching them like old pros.

However, the pilots' celebration back on the ship is short-lived. Capt. Willinghaus has received a messenger drone from forward Confed HQ in Border Worlds Sector Three. It seems that a research vessel, the *TCS Enigma*, operating in the vicinity of the distant planet LB-40, has sent a Distress Signal. Chancellor of Defense Oliver has had enough excitement on his visit and demands to be returned home before the *Leviathan* answers the emergency call. Yet even though the Chancellor is his boss, Capt. Willinghaus refuses to put the scientists on the *Enigma* in further jeopardy and orders the *Leviathan* to immediately set a course for LB-40, promising only that the Chancellor and the other VISITORS will be off-loaded at the earliest convenient moment.

Word of the Captain's gutsy decision spreads through the ship. Another of 1st Lt. Sheridan's fellow pilots, LUCINDA SAMMS, an attractive and fiery native of one of the Border Worlds systems, applauds the opportunity for further action—especially since LB-40 has long been rumored as a way station for an unidentified Alien species.

Thorn Oliver begins to hang out with the pilots more and more, especially Sheridan, who practically becomes an older brother to the teenager. Thorn had never really given much thought to what he wanted to do with his life and now he has a burning passion for becoming a pilot and kicking ass across the universe. Sheridan strongly attempts to dissuade him from the idea. The kid should stay in school, have a normal life, maybe go into politics like his old man. Play it safe. "There's nothing worth dying for anymore," Sheridan tells him.

The *Leviathan* now reaches the dull orange planet of LB-40, yet finds no sign of the *Enigma* or any of her passengers. As the carrier swings closer to the surface of the planet, the crew on the Bridge glimpses what at first appears to be a sliver of light hanging in space. Then the carrier swings around and the aspect angle of the sliver of light changes, revealing the bright circular outlines of an uncharted jump point—dead ahead!

Capt. Willinghaus orchestrates a desperate effort to avoid the unexpected jump point, but the ship's forward momentum is too great. The space carrier shudders painfully as she's yanked to one side and then the other by the powerful forces surrounding the jump point. Then, with a terrible flash of light, the *Leviathan* is gone!

There's nothing left but the silence of deep space.

On board the carrier, the scene is utter chaos—with crewmembers and supplies being tossed around like rag dolls in the mouth of a rabid Doberman. After a long, decisive moment, the shaking stops. They've made it through! But where, exactly, are they?

The ship's FEMALE COMM OFFICER takes a series of readings and the best she can come up with is, "We're exactly...one thousand light years from nowhere."

And if that wasn't bad enough, the *Leviathan* now skirts around a bright green, unidentified planet in their path and comes face-to-face with a massive—and obviously ALIEN—carrier group! There must be 200 or more ships in this enormous space flotilla. It's an awesome and chilling sight.

Capt. Willinghaus tries to maneuver the carrier back through the jump point, but Chancellor Oliver pulls rank and directs him to scramble the fighters to run interference while the carrier gets away. Capt. Willinghaus refuses, since any fighters that somehow emerged from the onslaught of the gigantic Alien armada would likely perish trying to re-enter the jump point.

During the argument, precious moments are lost and a pair of Alien gunships now slip behind the *Leviathan* and cut off access to the jump point. They're trapped! Yet, bizarrely, the Alien fleet isn't attacking. They clearly notice the Confed carrier, but make no move to fire on her. The *Leviathan* has no choice but to continue forward and try to discover new jump points that'll take them home.

Tension is extraordinarily high as the raggedy ass carrier cruises right past the noses of the tremendous Alien fleet, passing a couple of hundred ships—any two or three of which could easily turn them into charred space debris. Still, both sides hold their fire. The Comm Officer's repeated attempts to communicate a peaceful message to the Alien ships are met by a menacing silence. Only when the *Leviathan* is a few thousand clicks away does one of the Alien battleships, trailed by a squadron of Alien fighters, suddenly break away and engage them.

Capt. Willinghaus orders the engine room to haul ass, while down on the Flight Deck every available pilot is scrambled. When Thorn says he wishes he were flying on the mission, Sheridan shakes his head and says he has half a mind to live through this hopeless mission just to come back and knock some sense into the boy.

As the *Leviathan* continues to put distance between herself and the body of the Alien carrier group, the Alien battleship and fighters continue the hunt. It's as if the Alien fleet didn't think one shabby little carrier merited too much expenditure of ordnance. In any case, a tough battle ensues and, surprisingly, Sheridan and his fellow pilots manage to eliminate the fighters and cripple the battleship.

Major Nadel is convinced more Alien ships will soon be sent their way. While he recalls his fighters, Capt. Willinghaus demonstrates that even though he's a tough son-of-a-bitch, he knows how to protect his crew. He negotiates the *Leviathan* over an asteroid field, then through the wide radiation belts surrounding a double-moon. He heaves the carrier to directly between the two monstrous chunks of moon rock—where it should be virtually undetectable on any known radar system.

Spencer's
diff to believe

The carrier and its crew are safe...for the moment. But sooner or later they're gonna have to come out of hiding, and then it'll just be a matter of time before they're discovered and crushed. Home never seemed so far away.

Act Two

On board the carrier, the hours drip by like melted wax. While Major Nadel and Capt. Willinghaus huddle together to find a way out of their predicament and Chancellor of Defense Oliver storms through the ship, ranting and raving at everyone who crosses his path, Thorn Oliver hangs out with the pilots. He asks about the celebrated Christopher Blair, the pilot who single-handedly ended the Galactic War and who dealt so effectively with the recent Border Worlds disturbances. 1st Lt. Sheridan regrets that he's never met the man, that bum assignments kept him out of both conflicts and away from all the action. The gorgeous Lucinda Samms intimates that she met Blair once...and it was an unforgettable night! Sheridan promises Thorn that if—make that, when—they get back home, he'll personally take Thorn to meet Blair. The teenager is ecstatic!

Meanwhile, Nadel and Willinghaus have charted a possible series of jump points that will get them out of this mess. Sheridan is called in and given an opportunity to "volunteer" for the dangerous, yet important, assignment of scouting a nearby jump point to determine if it's being guarded by this new Alien menace. Sheridan doesn't want the job. Major Nadel begins suggesting other pilots in the squadron to lead the possible suicide mission and only as 1st Lt. Sheridan vetoes each one in turn does he come to realize that he's far and away the best candidate to lead the mission. Reluctantly, he accepts.

In a dramatic scene in the Briefing Room, Sheridan in turn asks for one volunteer to fly as his Wingman. Every single pilot steps forward. In the end, he selects Gnat Forest to fly alongside him. We get the impression that there's a history between Sheridan and Gnat, some sort of lingering sexual underpinnings to their relationship. But, as Sheridan points out, the only thing that matters now is living through this mission.

During the tense flight, Sheridan and Gnat observe radio silence, signaling each other through the cockpits of their fighters. After looping way around to disguise their point of origin and fending off a pair of outlying Alien fighters, they arrive at the jump point and find it unguarded. However, on the return trip, they pick up a Confed Distress Signal from the surface of a large red planet in the vicinity of their double-moon hideout. Sheridan and Gnat have to battle past a couple of tenacious Alien fighters to report their discovery.

Upon authenticating that the signal's from survivors of the *Enigma*, the crew of the space carrier leap into action. The contingent of tough-as-nails SPACE MARINES are loaded into Drop Ships and launched towards the planet under heavy fighter escort. A single Alien carrier and her fighters are also swooping down on the planet and the going gets tough. In a series of grueling missions, 1st Lt. Sheridan and his Wingmen clear a path for the exfiltration of the scientists. Although the Space Marines are ultimately successful, their mission is offset by devastating losses—including the death of their Commanding Officer.

The mood on the *Leviathan* is alternately somber and hopeful as the small band of rescued SCIENTISTS are ushered on board while the carrier races for the jump point—which they reach just a couple of clicks ahead of a swarm of Alien gunships. Oddly, only a single Alien destroyer follows them through the jump point. Although the action is intense, the *Leviathan's* fighters, led especially by the unflappable 1st Lt. Sheridan—manages to knock out the destroyer.

As the Confed carrier travels the circuitous route through numerous jump points back to her home sector in the Border Worlds, Sheridan and his fellow Wingmen have tons of questions for the SCIENTISTS. Sheridan is especially interested in the stunningly intelligent and equally attractive DR. TESS CHRISTIAN, a nuclear

Nice, John...

Samms interesting

capt pleasured
who met
these "aliens"

geophysicist from the *Enigma*. Tess Christian seems to share Sheridan's interest and tries to tell him about her research work—but, like the others, he's more eager to learn about this new Alien species. Who are they? What are they called? What do they look like? What do they want?

Tess Christian has only vague answers to these pressing questions. None of the scientists really got a look at the Aliens—it was all shadows and noise. The *Enigma* was boarded violently. Several of the scientists, including Dr. Christian, jumped into an emergency pod and escaped. They found refuge on the inhospitable surface of the planet from which they were rescued by Space Marines some 27 hours later. The only concrete fact they picked up was that the Aliens seemed to call themselves the "Uu'Manze."

A few more jump points, a few hundred light years later, and the *Leviathan* is on the last leg of its voyage home. It's been quite a little adventure for Sheridan and the other green pilots on board, not to mention Chancellor Oliver and his mischievous, clever son.

And it's been especially dramatic for Dr. Tess Christian—whom Sheridan spends every free moment trying to help...uh, readjust after her ordeal. And she's certainly an engaging young woman, with an unbridled curiosity about the carrier, the fighters and the complex weapons systems. It's everything Sheridan can do to distract Thorn long enough to have a free moment with Tess. The only awkward instances are when she asks, more than once, if she'll be taken directly to Earth. It takes Sheridan some time to explain to her that at least half the crew has never even been to Earth and she'll have to find another way home.

Finally arriving back at the forward Confed HQ in Border Worlds Sector Three, the *Leviathan* is given a Hero's Welcome. Chancellor Oliver singles out Nick Sheridan for special praise for his brave actions in the cockpit and for having kept an eye on the usually troublesome Thorn.

Sheridan is taken directly by Chancellor Oliver to meet VICE ADMIRAL MARABU SHENGE, a great bear of a man, a larger-than-life officer in the tradition of Patton and Schwarzkopf. He's a man who distracts himself with chess and ancient history, yet isn't averse to drawing his sidearm and firing rounds into the wall during meetings that aren't going his way. Along with Major Nadel and Capt. Willinghaus, 1st Lt. Sheridan endures a grilling about the huge Uu'Manze space armada and then has an opportunity to watch a master strategist at work.

On his broad holo-war table, Vice Admiral Shenge remotely aligns the holo-pieces of the Uu'Manze carrier group and explains in detail his strategy for responding with an overwhelming show of force. Shenge doesn't know anything about these Aliens or their intentions, but he'll be damned if civilian scientists will be terrorized and his troops fired upon without a response.

Vice Admiral Shenge's J-3, a Kilrathi named BARR N'YURUS, now announces a visitor. In strides COL. TODD "MANIAC" MARSHALL, as cocky and disrespectful as ever, yet also obviously proud that his talents are finally being acknowledged by Confed Brass. Shenge brings the Colonel up to speed on the Alien menace, then offers him the job of leading the Air Wing on Shenge's flagship carrier, the *TCS Eagle*. Maniac accepts eagerly and maintains, naturally, there's no better candidate for the job anywhere in the universe.

While Chancellor Oliver, Vice Admiral Shenge and Capt. Willinghaus withdraw to make arrangements for the rapid deployment of the Confed Expeditionary Fleet, Major Nadel has a piece of business to attend to—he promotes Sheridan to full Lieutenant and awards him the Bronze Star for valor in action. Lt. Sheridan, in turn, has a request. He gestures at Thorn Oliver—who's been uncharacteristically silent during all this—and says the teenager's deepest wish is to meet Col. Christopher Blair.

Although Maniac is clearly exacerbated that his old nemesis continues to draw so much glory, he makes an effort to restrain himself. He patiently explains to Thorn that Blair is now merely a Senior Flight Instructor at the Confed's Space Academy on Hilthros. In other words, Maniac continues, Blair's pretty much been put out to pasture. But Thorn doesn't back down from his wish and Maniac grudgingly agrees to accompany Lt. Sheridan and Thorn to the Academy to meet the "great Christopher Blair."

During the shuttle flight to Hilthros, Sheridan and Maniac get to know each other. Maniac, typically, describes Blair's infamous exploits as "lucky." When Sheridan mentions he's leaving the service in three weeks time, Maniac earnestly suggests he reconsider. At the same time, though, Maniac mentions that if Sheridan's serious about becoming a civilian pilot he should apply at the REGIS Mineral Exploration Co., who are said to pay the best wages in the biz. In an aside to Thorn, Maniac half-jokingly admits that with Blair effectively out of the way, he wants to discourage any new hotshots like Sheridan from coming along to steal his thunder.

Upon arrival at the Terran Space Academy, Sheridan, Maniac and Thorn find the place in a saddened uproar. Just hours earlier, during a routine training mission with a new pilot, Christopher's Blair's fighter was clipped by the student's plane. The subsequent combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) party found only traces of space debris. CSAR Command has concluded that both fighters were unquestionably destroyed.

Col. Christopher "Maverick" Blair, one of the great heroes of the Confederation and the top ace in naval history, is dead.

HOWEVER...we cut to Blair's fighter—which is crippled and out-of-control, drifting helplessly in deep space—and detect movement from the helmeted pilot. Blair's still alive! Just then, a large, somewhat amorphous blob of metal comes into view. It is, we soon learn, an Alien spaceship—but a species quite unlike the Uu'Manze who are presently menacing the Confederation. A spaceport opens on top of the ungainly ship and Blair's fighter is tractor-beamed inside.

On the Bridge of the spaceship, we glimpse a pair of DRAXXANS—a spidery, mechanical species with limbs that appeared to be made from poured metal. [NOTE: LIVE-ACTION MINIATURES.] Their metallic faces are at once terrifying and strangely child-like. In a deep, mechanized voice, one of the DRAXXANS gloats: "We got one!" The floating hive of a spaceship at once fires its engines and swoops away.

[NOTE: the mystery of Blair's fate and the secret behind the spidery race called the Draxxon will be revealed in Wing Commander: Maniac Missions and continued in the subsequent Wing Commander: Ground Strategy Game.]

The shuttle trip to forward Confed HQ in Border Worlds Sector Three is somber indeed, with Maniac revealing a morose, sentimental side that surprises even himself. Perhaps out of defensiveness, he snaps out of his doldrums and begins taunting Lt. Sheridan in much the same way he so often did to Blair. Yet Sheridan doesn't take the bait and distracts himself by trying to cheer up the broken-hearted Thorn.

Forward Confed HQ is now a hive of activity. Not since the Galactic War have so many Confederation carriers, battleships, destroyers and other sleek ships of war been gathered in one place. Vice Admiral Shenge conducts what amounts to a Master Class in naval strategy for his top officers. His understanding of naval warfare and history is impressive indeed and his brief lecture highlights the beauty of the great carrier battles of yesteryear and the simple genius behind his strategy for triumph in a few days time.

After saying his good-byes to young Thorn and promising to exchange holo-mail with him, Lt. Sheridan rejoins his comrades on the *TCS Leviathan*. He catches up with his pilots various exploits during their brief leave—especially the Geek's story about having been thrown out of an exclusive restaurant for eating all the exotic fish in their aquarium. Shrugging, the Geek says he was hungry and the service was slow.

Lt. Sheridan is intrigued to discover that Dr. Tess Christian has been posted to the *Leviathan*. Although he feigns detachment upon seeing her, it's clear he's attracted to this ravishing young woman. While Dr. Christian assists the additional SCIENTISTS who will study the previously unknown Alien Civilization of the Uu'Manze, Sheridan reports for the arrival of the replacement commander for the ship's contingent of Confed Space Marines—CAPT. ARIA SHERIDAN.

Christopher

Lt. Sheridan is both delighted and annoyed to be reunited with his statuesque sister. While Nick Sheridan is aloof, seemingly reluctant to put himself in danger and gives the appearance of only looking out himself, Capt. Aria Sheridan is a gung-ho, hard-charging and highly professional soldier, carrying on the long, noble traditions of the Marine Corps with an irrepressible passion. The strapping and athletic Aria loves her brother and will more than once bail him out of tough spots with rival crewmembers, yet she also bristles at his eagerness to leave the service and return to civilian life. She's a lifer and proud of it.

The assembled Confed fleet hauls ass and soon gathers around the jump point near LB-40. In a briefing aboard the flagship *Eagle*, Vice Admiral Shenge explains that he's certainly not going to send the entire convoy through the jump point into what could be a terrible ambush. The *Leviathan*, with a dozen destroyers backing her up, will penetrate the jump point and establish a sort of beachhead. Precisely 10 minutes later, the second wave of the fleet will follow.

Sheridan pipes up that he'd just as soon hang out and guard the rear, but Capt. Willinghaus explains that they're the only ones who've seen the Uu'Manze fleet and know its deployment. Besides, Shenge interjects, this isn't a goddamn debating society, it's the Confederation Navy and orders are orders. Right after the meeting, Col. Maniac Marshall confronts Sheridan and says he's counting on the younger pilot to do some serious damage and soften up the enemy so that Maniac can come in and get a bit of glory for himself.

On the Flight Deck, Sheridan is passing out the Air-Tasking Orders to his pilots and giving them final advice on their tough mission when he hears a ruckus from the vicinity of his new Mongoose Light Fighter. He rushes over to find a sheepish Thorn Oliver tucked inside the cockpit—a 27-century stowaway! Sheridan's not at all pleased to see him, especially since the *Leviathan's* chances for survival are only slightly better than a snowball on a bonfire.

Sheridan makes a desperate, last-second effort to get Thorn shuttled back to the rear of the fleet, but the carrier's already started its jump drive sequence. He leaves Thorn in the care of Tess Christian and straps himself into his Mongoose fighter.

The *Leviathan* bursts through the jump point amidst the swarming Confed destroyers. Lt. Sheridan and his pilots—including his current Wingman Hollis Trissler—launch into the fracas. From the start, the battle is draining and chaotic. In every direction there's noise and flak and exploding ordnance and confusion. Lt. Sheridan's fighter is rocked by the devastating firepower of the constantly firing destroyers. But he can't see who they're shooting at.

Nearly shouting to make himself heard over the din of the radio, Sheridan orders Trissler to stay close as they search for the nearest enemy. At last he locates a target and is about to direct Trissler to attack when there's a tremendous explosion and his Wingman spins out of control, the victim of a space mine.

After yelling for CSAR to pick up the ejected pilot, Sheridan continues on alone. He takes on five Uu'Manze fighters in succession, each one more difficult than the one before. He barely reacts when his onboard computer notifies him that he's just become the 121st single-mission ACE in Confed history. His ship is hit with a glancing missile and a piece of shrapnel ricochets through the cockpit, wounding him in the arm. He's angry now. He doesn't need this shit. He just wants to make it home in one piece. Pumped with adrenaline and desperate for survival, Sheridan locates an Uu'Manze light carrier and marshals the other pilots in his squadron for an attack.

To their surprise, the carrier seems virtually undefended and, after a couple of solid missile salvos, it implodes...almost too quickly. As they scout the area, hunting for additional targets, Sheridan finally realizes that the massive carrier fleet of the Uu'Manze is completely gone. In its place was only token resistance.

By now the second huge wave of the Confed fleet has entered the fracas—and likewise discovers there's no one to fight. But the lingering tension of expected battle gets the best of a few pilots, who inadvertently unload their ordnance into their fellow pilots.

Vice Admiral Shenge explodes in rage during the debriefing on the *Eagle*. He's furious about the Friendly Fire casualties and also threatens to court-martial Capt. Willinghaus, Major Nadel, Lt. Sheridan and the whole damn crew of the *Leviathan* for exaggerating the size of the Uu'Manze threat. He's never seen a bigger group of cowards—calling out a substantial portion of the Confed fleet to attack one measly little carrier. They must've been snorting space dust during their previous mission.

When Capt. Willinghaus nervously mentions the holo-videos that were shown to Shenge and his staff revealing the enormity of the Uu'Manze fleet and also mentions Chancellor of Defense Oliver's corroborating statements, Shenge practically charges Willinghaus with insubordination. Shenge orders every damn officer on every damn ship in the fleet to do whatever it takes to find this mythical alien fleet and do it NOW!

After a brief ceremony during which Major Nadel awards Sheridan a Silver Star for achieving Ace status in a single mission, Sheridan runs into his peeved sister, Aria. She's eager for an opportunity to fight and intimates that her brother led them on a wild-goose chase just to save his own ass. Not even trying to defend himself, Lt. Sheridan goes off in search of Thorn. He feels bad about snapping at him earlier; he was just worried about the kid's safety. When he doesn't immediately locate him, Sheridan enlists his pilots to help in the search. The flyboys comb the massive carrier from top to bottom, finding no sign of him...or, oddly enough, Tess Christian.

A worried Lt. Sheridan finally learns from the Comm Officer that Thorn has just left with Dr. Christian in a transport shuttle. Although relieved, Sheridan wants to know who authorized their departure. The Comm Officer regards him quizzically as she points out his own signature on the order. Even stranger, the shuttle didn't follow its flight plan towards the rear of the fleet, but went exactly in the other direction...deeper into Uu'Manze territory.

Sheridan rushes to Major Nadel and requests permission to pursue the transport and escort it back to safety. Major Nadel refuses the request. Maniac, however, has learned of the event and pipes in via holo-conference. As commander of the Air Wing, the Colonel overrules Major Nadel on the grounds that the son of their Chancellor of Defense is in jeopardy and could be a potentially devastating hostage if he fell into enemy hands. There almost seems to be a glint of menace in Maniac's tone—as if he wouldn't be too distressed if this new hotshot, Lt. Sheridan, didn't make it back alive. Yet after signing off, Maniac privately worries that he's sending a good man to his doom.

Refusing to allow any Wingmen to come along, Sheridan straps himself into his fighter and gives chase—straight into Uu'Manze territory. During the tense flight, he skirts a space minefield...where a single wrong move could be his last. He travels outside of radio contact range with the Confed fleet, then drops his reserve fuel tank and continues deeper into space, painfully aware that his chances of returning are diminishing by the second.

On the far side of a nebula cloud, Sheridan finally gets a lock on the much-slower Confed transport shuttle. He communicates with Dr. Tess Christian, who's shocked to realize that in all the confusion she's flown the wrong way. Just as Sheridan tells Tess to hold her position, her radio fritzes out. On the radar, Sheridan watches with dismay as the transport is swallowed up by a much larger object.

On full afterburners, Lt. Sheridan roars past a green and seemingly populated planet, and find himself face-to-face with a gargantuan Uu'Manze flagship carrier. In his dinky fighter, low on fuel, there's little he can do—especially when an entire squadron of Uu'Manze fighters scramble and intercept him. He's caught!

While the fighters escort him towards the carrier, Sheridan tries to get a look at the Uu'Manze in their cockpits, but their dark helmets hide all trace of features. The best he can determine is that they appear reasonably humanoid in shape.

THIS IS GONE
KID OR FUCK

The Flight Deck of the Alien flagship carrier typifies the dirty, Industrial-Revolution-meets-I.M.-Pei style of Uu'Manze design and architecture. Descending from his fighter, Lt. Nick Sheridan gets his first look at the Aliens. They are achingly thin creatures with taunt skin and oversize eyes—a distaff version of the hauntingly consistent renderings of aliens from the late 20th century. It seems Whitley Strieber and the thousands of others who claimed to have been abducted by similar aliens were right after all.

Sheridan is dragged by a pair of these Uu'Manze GUARDS through iron corridors flanked by gawking ALIENS and then deposited in an Interrogation Hall, where Tess Christian and Thorn Oliver are already being held prisoner. Tess is in tears, saying it's all her fault, that she was so afraid that Thorn would be killed that she took the impetuous step of trying to bring him to safety...and messed everything up. Now she's certain they really ARE gonna die. Thorn tries to put on a brave face, although it's clear that he's on the verge of giving up hope.

With great fanfare, the leader of the Uu'Manze arrives in the Interrogation Hall. He's larger than the other Uu'Manze, and his skin is mottled, suggesting advanced age. He tersely introduces himself as RAN'OI and demands to know why his peaceful civilization is under attack by the odd-looking creatures before him. When Sheridan makes a wisecrack about the Uu'Manze's own odd appearance, a pair of GUARDS strike him down, leaving him writhing painfully on the floor.

Ran'Oi says his people have been keeping an eye on the Terran Confederation for years and years. It was always their fear that once the war with the Kilrathi ended, the Terrans would continue to expand their horizons and would one day attempt to subjugate the Uu'Manze as they so have so many other cultures. That, Ran'Oi says fiercely, will never happen. Although non-militaristic by nature, the Uu'Manze have built up considerable defenses and intend to be left alone—by force if necessary. Deflecting Sheridan's and Tess Christian's further attempts to question him about the Uu'Manze, Ran'Oi cuts to the chase. The sentence for aggression against the Uu'Manze is death...to be carried out within 12 Terran hours.

The trio are dragged down into the bowels of the ship and imprisoned in a foreboding Dungeon of iron walls and exposed girders. Sheridan gamely tells Thorn and Dr. Christian that he'll think of something to win their freedom...but even *he* doesn't have a clue how he'll do it.

Meanwhile, the doors to the Interrogation Hall burst open and in strides a strapping man who reeks of arrogance and danger. In notable contrast to the Aliens cowering before him, PHILLIP RICKMAN is obviously a human being, although his clothes more closely resemble perverse take-offs on 20th-century fashions than the futuristic, 27th-century garb we're used to seeing on Terrans. His HUMAN GUARDS now knock several Aliens aside as Rickman approaches Ran'Oi and all but pats the smaller creature on the head for a job well done.

Things, Rickman says, are working out exactly according to plan. When Ran'Oi tries to interject a comment, Rickman cuts him off immediately. There's no doubt who's in charge here.

Down in the festering dungeon, a cluster of UU'MANZE GUARDS burst in and drag away a screaming Thorn Oliver. Sheridan lashes out, overcoming two of the Guards before he's beaten into unconsciousness by the others. When he awakens, his head is in Tess Christian's lap. They comfort each other as best they can considering their grim circumstances...and end up kissing passionately. Tess says her dying wish is to see Earth one last time—and, of course, Sheridan promises that he'll save her and take her there come hell or high water. Their intimacy is interrupted by the return of Thorn, who has a hollow, defeated look in his eyes.

As Thorn slumps in a corner, Dr. Christian in turn is hauled away by the Uu'Manze GUARDS—again despite Sheridan's best efforts to intervene. Sheridan briefly comforts the boy, then changes tactics and orders him to snap out of it. He peppers Thorn with accusations that he's given up, that he's gonna let a misguided mutant species get the better of him. Sheridan's tirade has the intended effect, as Thorn angrily responds that he's never, ever gonna give up. Thorn works himself into a frenzy, ready to kick some

Handwritten notes on the right margin:

- PHILLIP RICKMAN
- DR. CHRISTIAN
- THORN OLIVER
- DR. CHRISTIAN
- PHILLIP RICKMAN

Uu'Manze ass. Sheridan smiles. This is good. Now maybe Thorn can make himself useful. Because Sheridan has a plan. They huddle together.

Meanwhile back in the Interrogation Hall, Phillip Rickman holds court. It becomes plain from the proceedings that the Uu'Manze are merely props; all the central participants in Rickman's twisted plans—whatever they may be—are people. A BOMBER PILOT is dragged in and accused of fraternizing with the Uu'Manze. Rickman goes off on him. This is a serious crime, threatening hundreds of years of painstaking preparation. Besides that, Rickman maintains, it's just plain sick. Who would want to mate with these little lizardlike creatures? Ran'Oi and the other Uu'Manze in the Hall say nothing.

The sentence, to be sure, is death. However the fiftyish Bomber Pilot pleads for mercy. He's given his entire life in service to the cause. Couldn't he be merely exiled to the nearby penal planet for the remainder of days? Rickman chuckles, saying he feels charitable today, and grants the request. However, as the grateful Bomber Pilot is led away, Rickman draws his weapon and blows a basketball-sized hole right through him. Rickman instructs his GUARDS to dump his body on the penal planet...as a warning to others.

Rickman's ADJUTANT approaches and announces that his mate is here to see him. Rickman brightens, showing a debonair side we haven't seen before. And in comes...Dr. Tess Christian!

Phillip Rickman takes Tess in his arms and they lick tongues—their version of a kiss, one supposes. Then Tess berates Rickman for allowing Lt. Sheridan to come here. He should have been turned away or, preferably, blown out of the sky. Rickman patiently tries to explain that he knows what he's doing. Far from being a hindrance, Sheridan seems like he might just be the man to inadvertently further their plans. Having mollified his mate for now, Rickman embraces her again warmly and says she'll receive further instructions soon.

When the dungeon doors are opened to return Tess Christian, Thorn and Sheridan are ready. They pounce on the Uu'Manze GUARDS and, after a brief struggle, relieve them of their weapons. Tess practically smothers Sheridan with gratitude. Sheridan tosses her a weapon and instructs her to watch their rear.

The trio race through the iron corridors of the Uu'Manze carrier, splattering a few UU'MANZE GUARDS on the way, but generally meeting little resistance. They find their way to the Flight Deck, formulate a quick plan and then storm the Confed Transport Shuttle. As a SQUAD of human and Alien GUARDS take up positions to block their exit, Sheridan wheels the Shuttle around and flies further into the carrier. The surprised Guards race after him. Then Sheridan abruptly turns the Shuttle back around again, catching the Guards unprepared, and rockets out into space.

Sheridan jukes and jives the Shuttle, avoiding the plasma cannon fire from the carrier's turrets, and soon has them in the clear. Tess Christian warmly—very warmly—thanks Sheridan for rescuing her. Thorn pipes up that he helped too, at which Tess gives him a little kiss, causing the youngster to blush deeply.

Something's troubling Lt. Sheridan, though. Their escape seemed...almost too easy. Thorn remarks that they haven't quite escaped just yet, and urgently points out two Uu'Manze fighters screaming towards them. Sheridan uses every last ounce of his flying skills to keep the fighters from getting a missile lock on the unarmed Transport. But at last one of the Aliens succeeds and it looks like the end has finally come.

At that very moment a sole Confederation fighter shows up and blasts the Uu'Manze fighters into space dust. Col. Maniac Marshall checks in from the cockpit of his high-tech Vampire and casually congratulates himself for saving their asses. He points out that he doesn't care about Sheridan and only did it because of the lady and the boy. Sheridan good-naturedly shoots back that he could've taken care of the fighters himself. What was Sheridan gonna do, Maniac asks, ram them or something?

In a debriefing with Vice Admiral Shenge, Sheridan & Co. describe the Uu'Manze race and their apparent defensive intentions. Maniac, for one, isn't buying it. The Uu'Manze are clearly on a crusade of some sort

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and should be stopped with extreme prejudice. Shenge disagrees. A diplomatic solution may still be found, but it will be backed up by force. Shenge orders the massed Confed fleet to take positions near the Uu'Manze flagship carrier and the seemingly populated planet nearby.

Sgt. Aria Sheridan tracks down her brother and congratulates him warmly. She was wrong about him. He's a real soldier after all. Embarrassed by her praise, Sheridan claims to have done it only to pad his resume and earn more money in a civilian job when he leaves his commission in two weeks time.

The Confed armada barrels down on the most recent position of the Uu'Manze flagship carrier and the inhabited planet in the vicinity. After several unsuccessful bids to contact the Aliens, Shenge and his top OFFICERS finally receive a communiqué from the supposed Uu'Manze leader, Ran'Oi—asking them to withdraw immediately or risk being fired upon. Shenge turns on the charm, emphasizing that the Confederation wants only to establish diplomatic relations with this interesting new culture. The Vice Admiral ultimately persuades the reluctant Ran'Oi to agree to a meeting...which leads to more bickering about the location until Shenge and agrees to meet the Alien leader on his own turf.

Shenge's shuttle—under a fighter escort led by Lt. Sheridan and two Wingmen on one side and Maniac and his two Wingman on the other—is 3/4 of the way to the Alien carrier when the Uu'Manze suddenly unload with everything they've got. Within moments the Shuttle is badly damaged and barely manages to limp back to the *Leviathan*.

The battle is joined by both sides. Maniac and Sheridan hold off the first wave of the ambush. Fighters launch continuously from Confed carriers, while most of the Uu'Manze aircraft originate from the nearby planet. Major Nadel joins the fracas and accompanies Sheridan's squadron towards the surface of the planet where they endure a series of tough missions, with heavy attrition on both sides. During a brief, between-mission lull, Gnat Forest points out that for a supposedly peace-loving civilization the Uu'Manze are some pretty devastating fighters.

While Sheridan & Co. at last achieve air superiority in the low-orbit skies over the Uu'Manze planet, a portion of the Confed armada flanks around and catches the Alien flagship carrier by surprise—obliterating it totally. The air battle winds down, with only scattered pockets of Uu'Manze resistance remaining.

Maniac isn't the only one to suggest there's something screwy going on. Sgt. Aria Sheridan returns from her Marines' first landing on the surface of the planet and reports that it seems to be nothing more than a penal colony. No trace of cities or civilized infrastructure was found. Even so, the ground fighting remains intense and they haven't yet liberated any prisoners. Now Capt. Willinghaus poses the obvious question—what happened to the rest of the Uu'Manze fleet? All too soon, the answer becomes painfully clear...

A bloodied BORDERWORLDS PILOT shows up with a dire message. The Confederation, it seems, has been duped. While they were tilting at windmills here, the main part of the Alien fleet swung far around them and broke through the jump point back at LB-40. Shenge left a defensive force to guard the jump point, but they weren't prepared for such overwhelming numbers. At present, the entire Uu'Manze fleet is blasting their way through the Border World's on a direct course for planet Earth!

Shenge orders the fleet into emergency action. Splitting the armada into three separate sections, he directs his OFFICERS to chase down the Uu'Manze fleet and converge on a computer-projected coordinate nine hours hence.

En route, an innocent question by Thorn Oliver leads to dire repercussions. The teenager's pretty much been adopted as the pilots' mascot and has a free run on the *Leviathan*—provided he stays out of everybody's way. (In any case, the action remains too critical to spare any personnel or craft to ferry him home.) On the Bridge, Thorn asks the Comm Officer what the *TCS Enigma*, the original research vessel that led to all the trouble, was doing near LB-40 in the first place. He's just curious what they were looking for.

The Comm Officer tells him that whatever it was is classified. Yet she later calls up the ship's documents and pokes around, soon discovering there was no Dr. Tess Christian among the passengers. In fact, none of the names given by the rescued scientists are found in the *Enigma's* records. She goes off to confront Tess Christian with this information. And the next time anybody hears from the Comm Officer is when Capt. Willinghaus is informed that she was found hanging in her cell—an apparent suicide.

Finally, at the precise moment, the three segments of the Confed fleet reunite at the assigned coordinates—and find themselves breathing down the backsides of the main Uu'Manze armada. The ensuing naval engagement is a huge, complex thing of beauty. Vice Admiral Shenge skillfully directs an aeronautical symphony of destruction, while Lt. Sheridan and his Wingmen play a deadly 1st violin, executing some of the most crucial strikes of the campaign.

The enormous carrier battle spills through two Borderworlds Sections and spans numerous missions before the enemy is finally vanquished. The surviving Uu'Manze ships break ranks, each scattering in a different direction.

Act Three

In a final debriefing, Vice Admiral Shenge mumbles a few words of praise to his OFFICERS, then says he has some numbing news. During one of the climactic battles, an Uu'Manze fighter crashed into a supply ship. When CSAR Command examined the wreckage, they found...a human pilot!

That can only mean one thing. Confed Intel has sadly concluded that the Uu'Manze must've enslaved a distant Borderworlds planet populated by humans and forced them to fight their ugly little war for them. The Uu'Manze are cowards of the first magnitude, Shenge rails. The Confederation intends to remain on high alert and continue searching for that planet in an effort to free the remaining humans.

In a separate ceremony back on the *Leviathan*, Maniac is present as Major Nadel awards campaign medals to Lt. Sheridan and his valiant Wingmen. Even Thorn is given a medal in honor of his moral support and bravery. It's about the proudest moment in the kid's life.

Maniac takes Lt. Sheridan aside and makes a pitch for the younger pilot to join him in tracking down the remnants of the Uu'Manze and kicking their asses from one side of the universe to the other. Sheridan says he's had his fill of adventure. After taking care of some personal business, he's gonna look up that REGIS Mineral Exploration Co. that Maniac told him about and start raking in the big bucks. Well, Maniac says, you deserve it. They wish each other good luck in their respective endeavors.

Two weeks later, Nick Sheridan receives his discharge papers at Forward Confed HQ in Borderworlds Sector Three. Aria Sheridan is there, disappointed that her brother's a civilian again...and then she hits him up for a little loan since he's gonna be Mr. Moneybags before long.

Sheridan rushes to the waiting Jumbo Civilian Transport back to Earth. He treks through the ship and finds his plush cabin and plops down on the bed. Moments later, the bathroom door opens and out comes a sultry Tess Christian, wearing a revealing outfit and a big grin. Sheridan's excited about taking her to Earth for a little R&R. Little does he know!

THE END

WING COMMANDER MANIAC MISSIONS

Teaser...

En route to Earth, the Civilian Transport in which Lt. Nick Sheridan (ret.) and his girlfriend Dr. Tess Christian are riding is waylaid by the second Alien menace, the Draxxan. Sheridan helps defend the ship and personally kills the ranking Draxxan COMMANDER, but the spider-like aliens get away with many hostages, including Dr. Tess Christian.

Although deeply saddened by this reversal of fortune, there's little Sheridan can do other than report the events to his new friend Maniac and let the Confed Navy track her down. Following Maniac's advice, Sheridan hires on at REGIS Mineral Exploration Company. Before long, he's making a good living—too good of a living.

After dealing with a wayward Uu'Manze convoy, Col. Todd "Maniac" Marshall (Player/Character) drops in on Nick Sheridan to find out how he's doing. When Sheridan reports some bizarre happenings at REGIS, including possible shipments to the Draxxan, Maniac levels with him. REGIS has been under suspicion for some time and Maniac sent Sheridan there more or less as a plant.

Together, Maniac and Sheridan follow a trail of evidence establishing that REGIS indeed is supplying this potential enemy with a liquid metal known as Thermex—which is both a fuel and a building material for the aggressive race of mechanical spiders known as Draxxan.

Maniac leads Sheridan and a small party of Wingmen in what amounts to a BUG HUNT—seeking and destroying as many Draxxan as possible. They fight their way to the Draxxan's military HQ and, after hundreds of additional kills—finally take out the Draxxan QUEEN. Maniac then discovers the fate of his old friend Christopher Blair: he was eaten alive by the Queen. It seems the Draxxan, among their many shortcomings, have a weakness for human flesh.

Near the end, Maniac is on the verge of rescuing Dr. Tess Christian when a raiding party of Uu'Manze—led by the notorious Phillip Rickman—shows up. Maniac and Sheridan meet Rickman face-to-face for the first time...and it's not pretty.

They finally realize that, in fact, Rickman and his fellow humans are controlling the Uu'Manze, not the other way around. Sheridan, however, continues to believe that Tess is an innocent bystander, a research scientist who's gotten in way over her head in some sticky situations. In the end, Rickman & Tess Christian escape, leaving Maniac mortally wounded.

WING COMMANDER VI

The Dark Face of Evil

Determined to rescue Dr. Tess Christian once and for all, Nick Sheridan re-enlists in the Confed Navy and is assigned to a new carrier. While Maniac recuperates from his injuries at a Space Hospital, Sheridan leads the charge against the relentless Uu'Manze.

Phillip Rickman plays a central role as the villain in this story. It's finally revealed that many centuries earlier a succession of humans were kidnapped from Earth and brought to an Alien homeworld for experimentation. The humans interbred and grew in numbers. Eventually, as human beings are wont to do, they escaped their confinement and began plotting to take over the culture that had enslaved them.

By the 23rd century, the humans had achieved dominance over the aliens—to the extent that they named them after themselves...Uu'Manze (Humans.) The humans' primary motivation was to return to planet Earth, to a world they felt had abandoned them. Several centuries of military build-up culminated in the offensive orchestrated by Phillip Rickman.

Realizing that they underestimated the sheer size of the Confederation forces, the Uu'Manze wage a protracted and largely successful guerrilla campaign aimed at diminishing Confed materiel. Midway through the story, Nick Sheridan at last discovers that his supposed true love, Tess Christian, is the mate of his bitterest enemy. He's not a happy camper after that and at times lets his emotions get the better of him in fighting back against the Uu'Manze.

WING COMMANDER VI

The Homecoming

Flush with success in the edgy battle of attrition against the Confederation, Phillip Rickman engineers another all-out push towards Earth. Major Nick Sheridan must rise to the occasion and pull out every stop in order to win the day. Fortunately, he has the help of some old friends.

WING COMMANDER GROUND ASSAULT

The Player begins as a young Marine fresh from bootcamp and joins Sgt. Aria Sheridan in her battle against the Draxxan. When she's killed fairly early in the campaign, the Player must take charge and pursue the Draxxan across the universe—exterminating them once and for all.

Follow-up intelligence confirms that the defeated N'Zarai task groups have only pulled back to the Kilrathi frontier to regroup, and that more ships seem to be arriving there each day. It is believed the aliens will form a base of operations there, and they will almost certainly be back.

In force.