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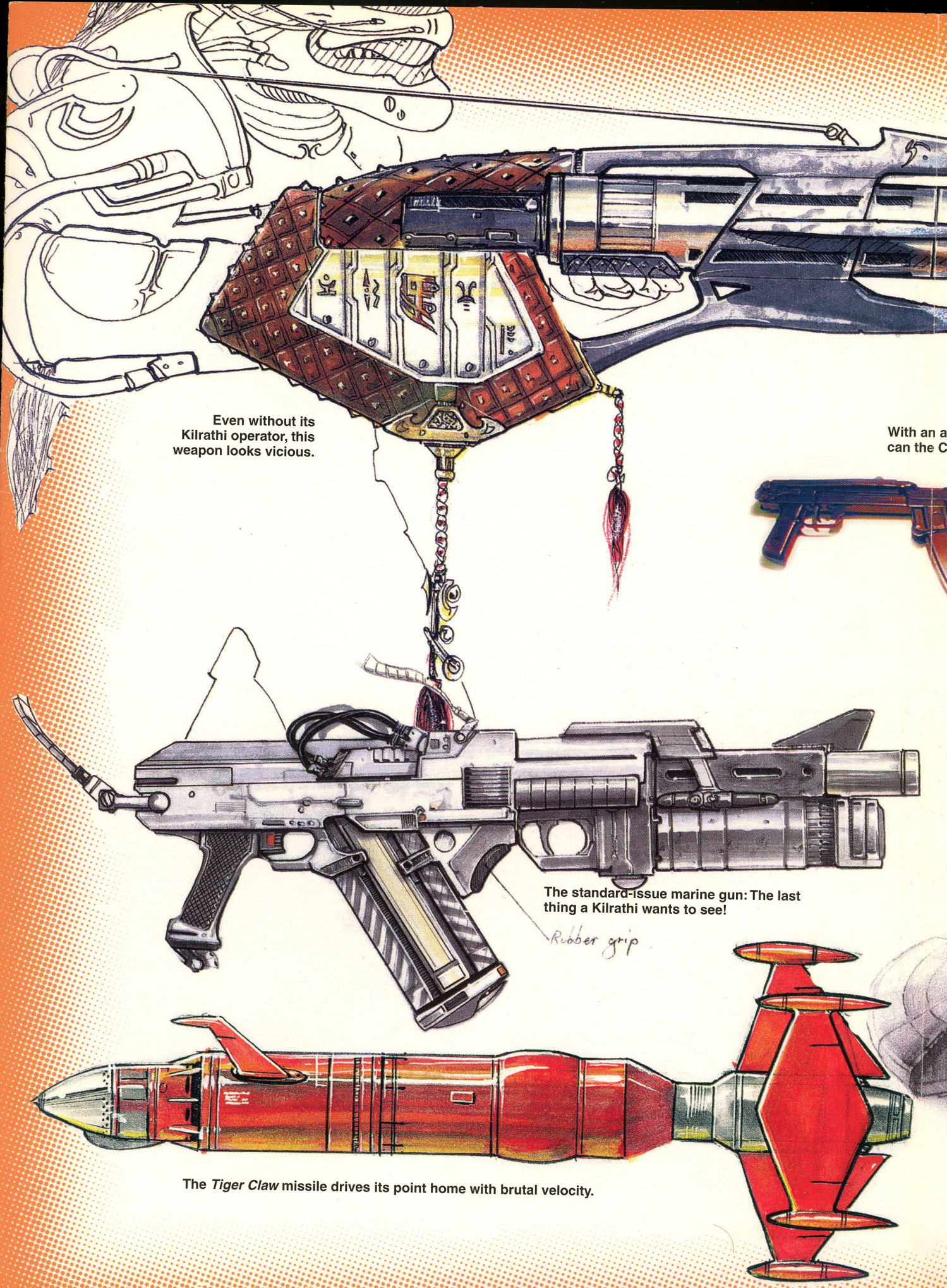

Even without its Kilrathi operator, this weapon looks vicious.

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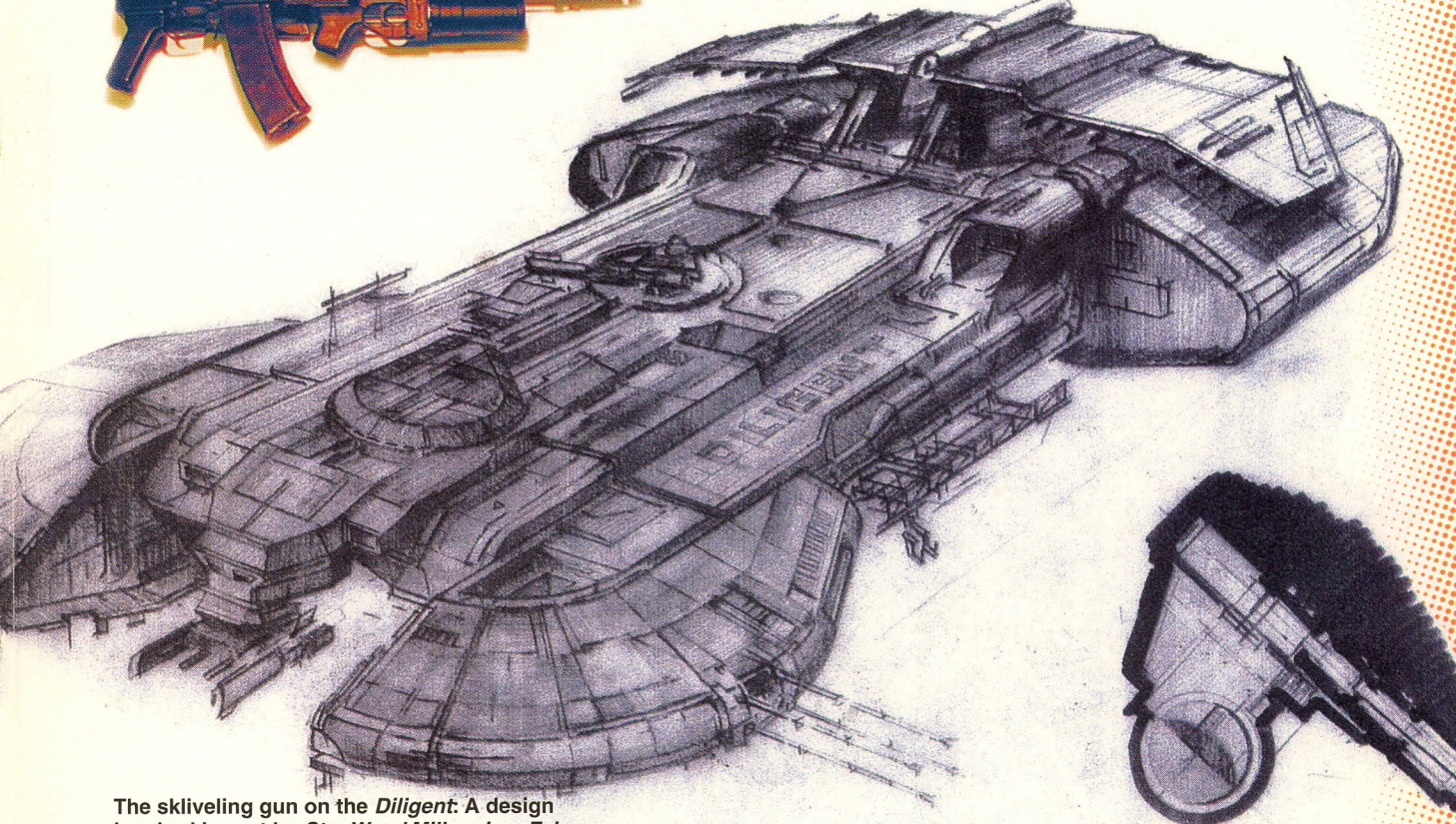
The standard-issue marine gun: The last thing a Kilrathi wants to see!

The *Tiger Claw* missile drives its point home with brutal velocity.

THE ART OF WING COMMANDER WEAPONS

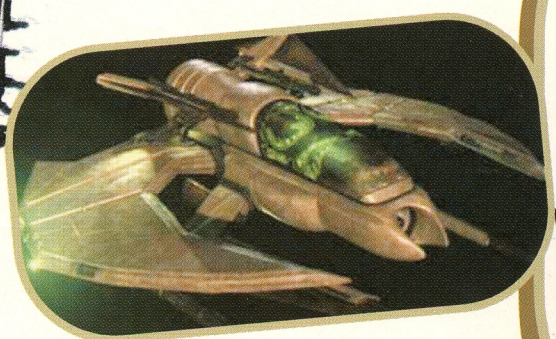
n arsenal this formidable, how
e Confederation forces lose?

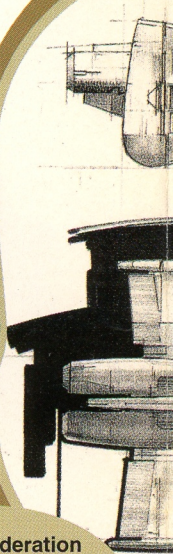


The skliveling gun on the *Diligent*: A design inspired in part by *Star Wars' Millennium Falcon*.

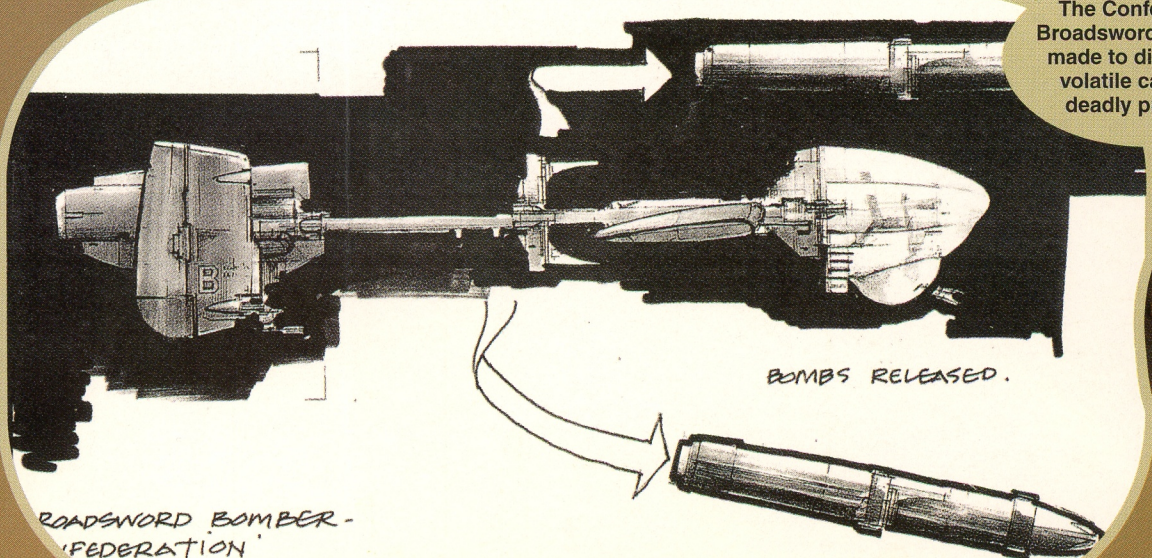
The vicious Kilrathi Dralthi looks as wicked and ruthless as its feline architects.

THE ART

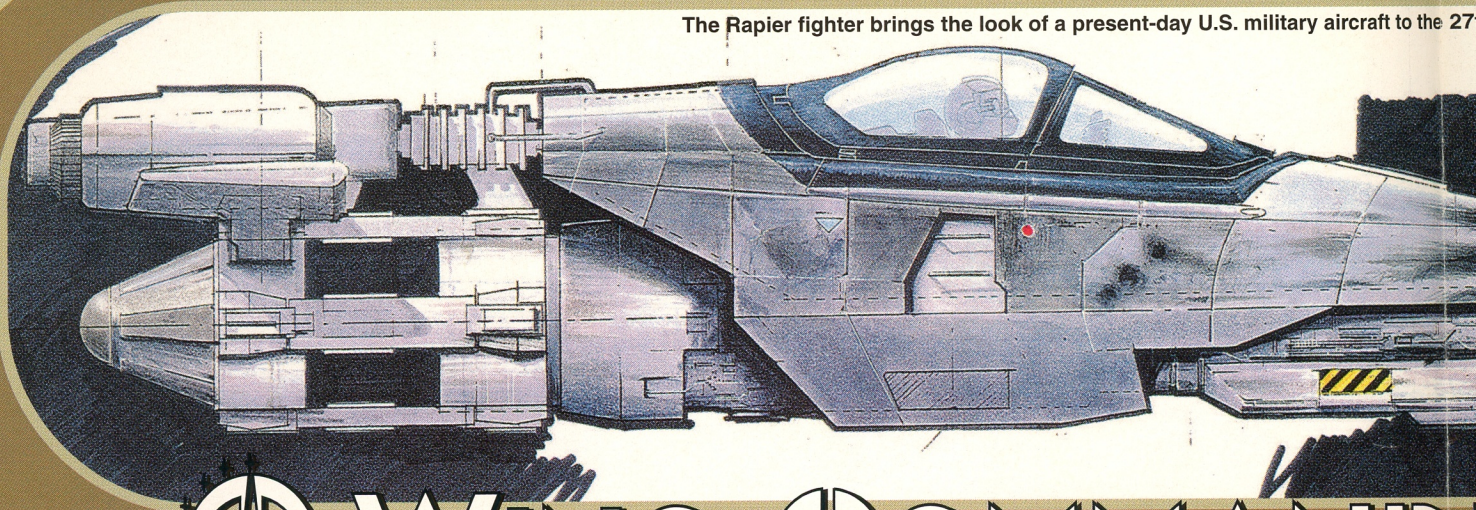




The Confederation Broadsword Bomber is made to dispense its volatile cargo with deadly precision.

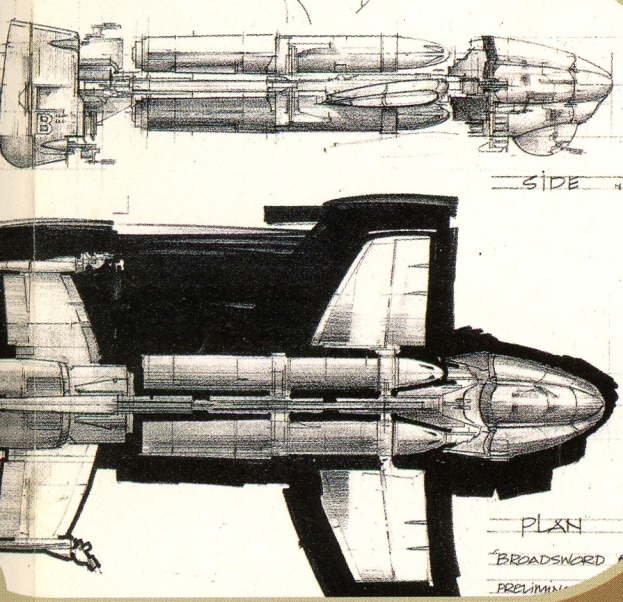


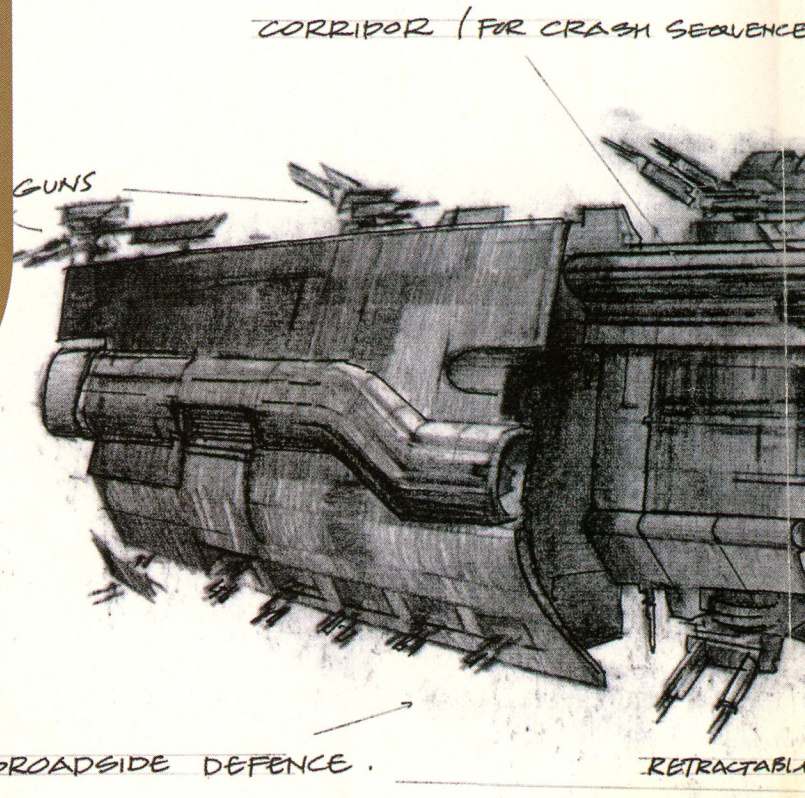
The Rapier fighter brings the look of a present-day U.S. military aircraft to the 27



RT OF WING COMMAND

When these leviathan Kilrathi Destroyers threaten Earth, it's no wonder the planet's hopes seem slim.





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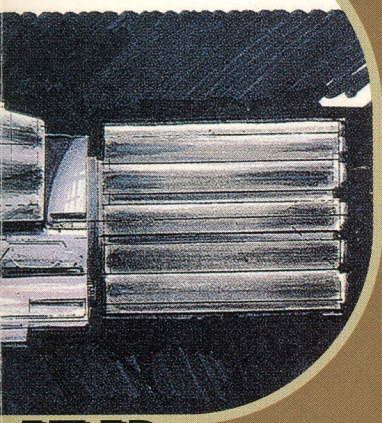
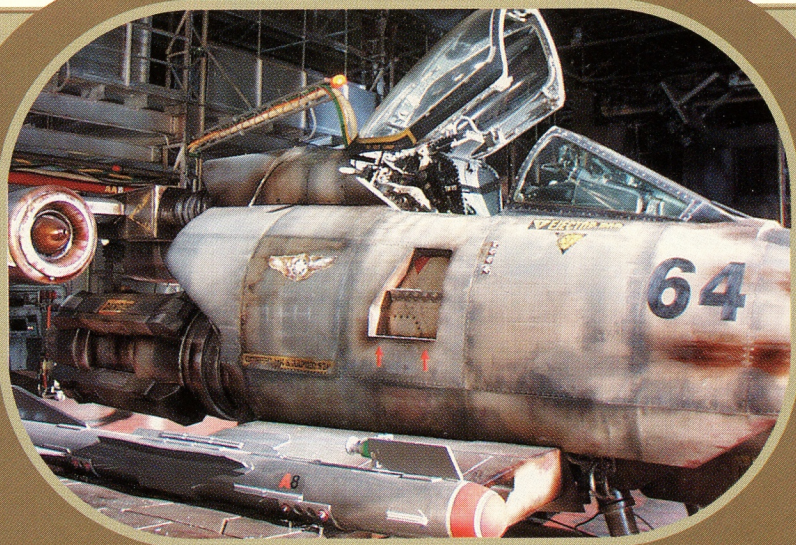
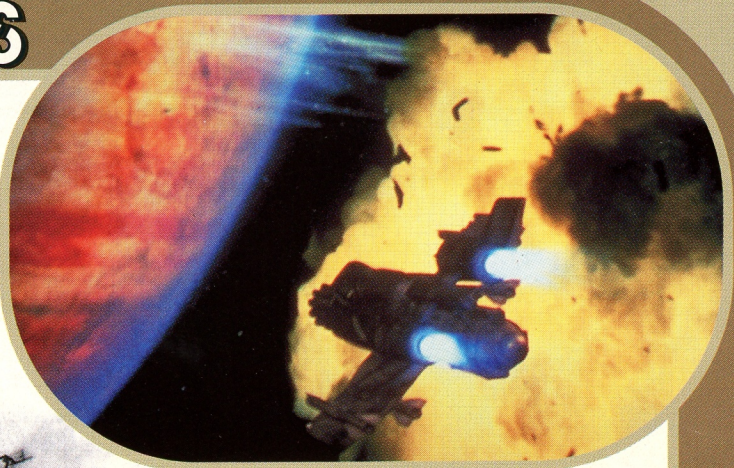
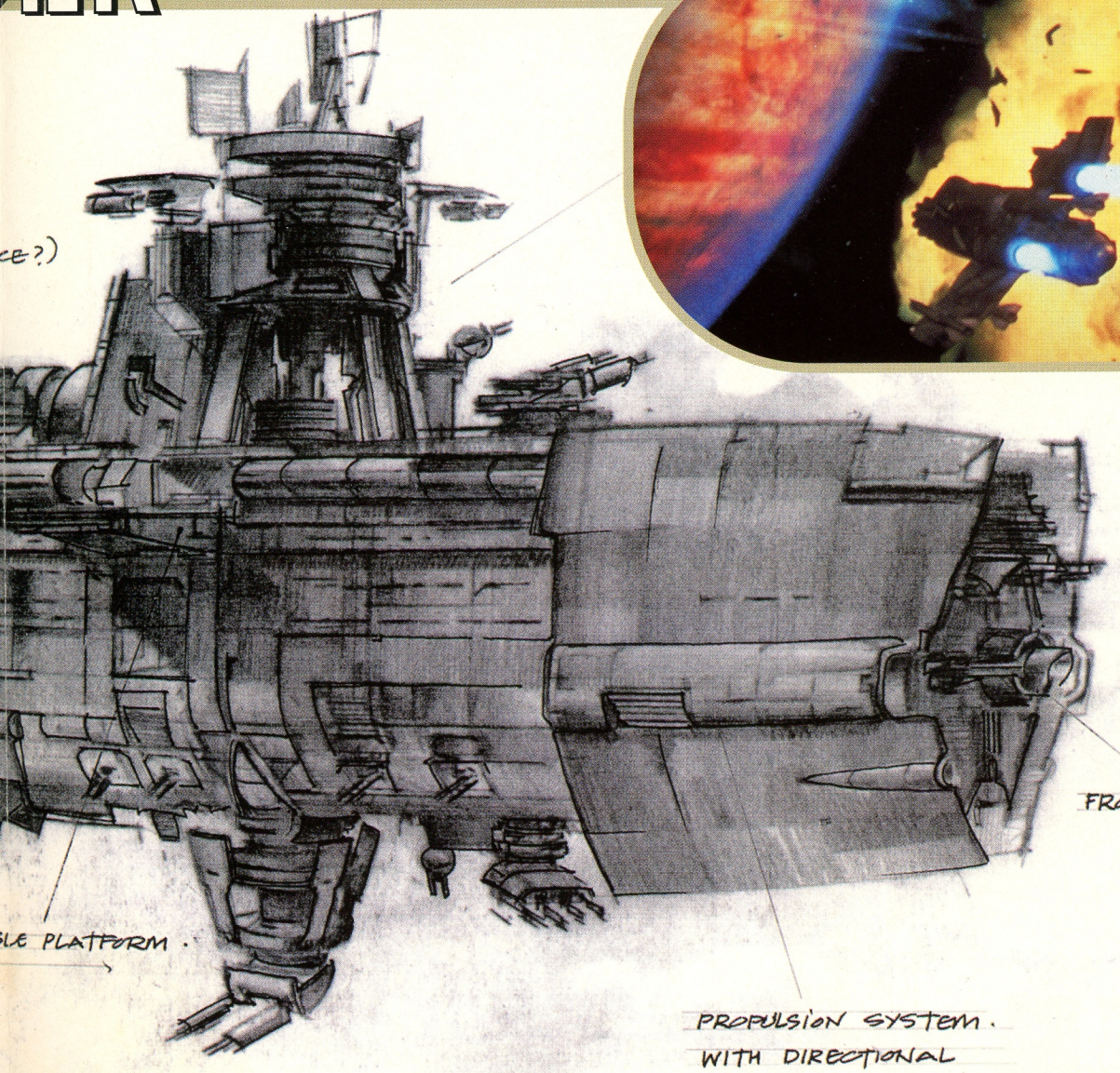




In an outer space dogfight, the Rapiers are quick, maneuverable, and a fierce foe, as the Kilrathi enemy knows too well.

ER SPACESHIPS





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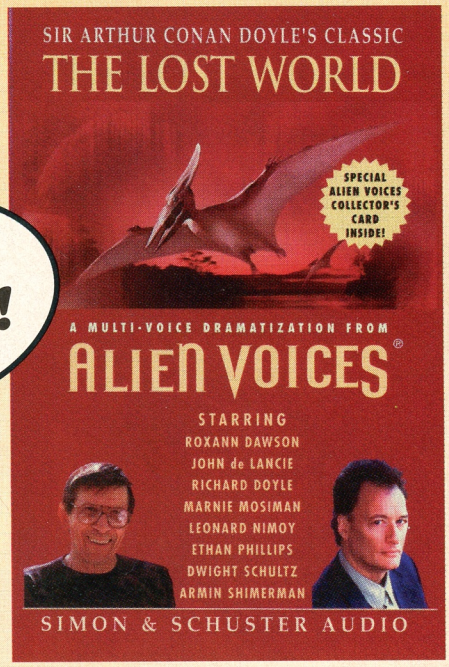

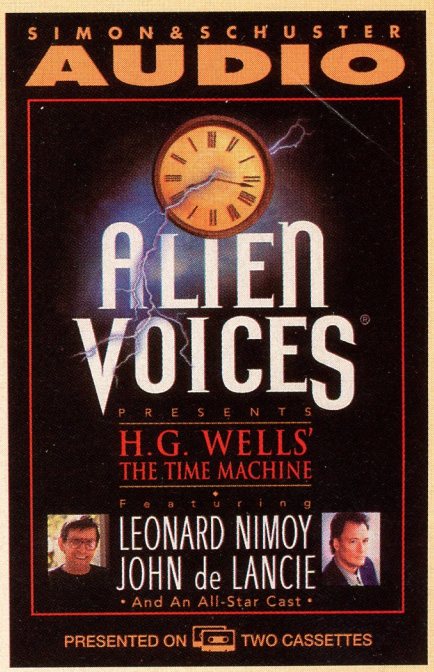

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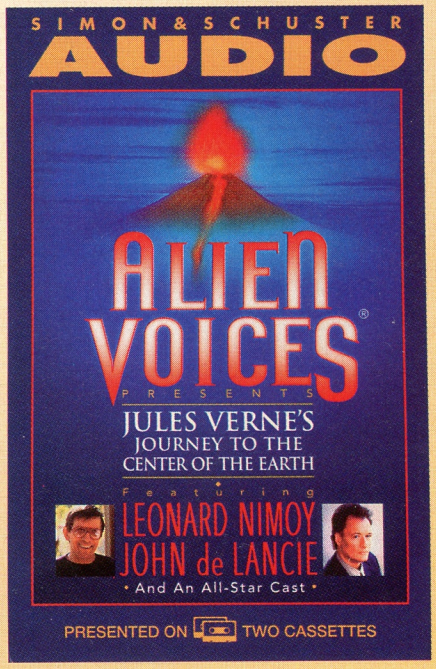

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12 THE STORY
18 FREDDIE PRINZE JR. (BLAIR)
24 MATTHEW LILLARD (MANIAC)
28 SAFFRON BURROWS (DEVERAUX)
32 GINNY HOLDER (FORBES)
34 THE VETERAN WARRIORS
36 CREATOR/DIRECTOR CHRIS ROBERTS
42 PRODUCER TODD MOYER
46 PRODUCTION DESIGNER PETER LAMONT
52 FX SUPERVISOR CHRIS BROWN
56 CO-FX SUPERVISOR TOM DADRAS
60 FX PRODUCER ERIC STRAUSS
64 THE KILRATHI

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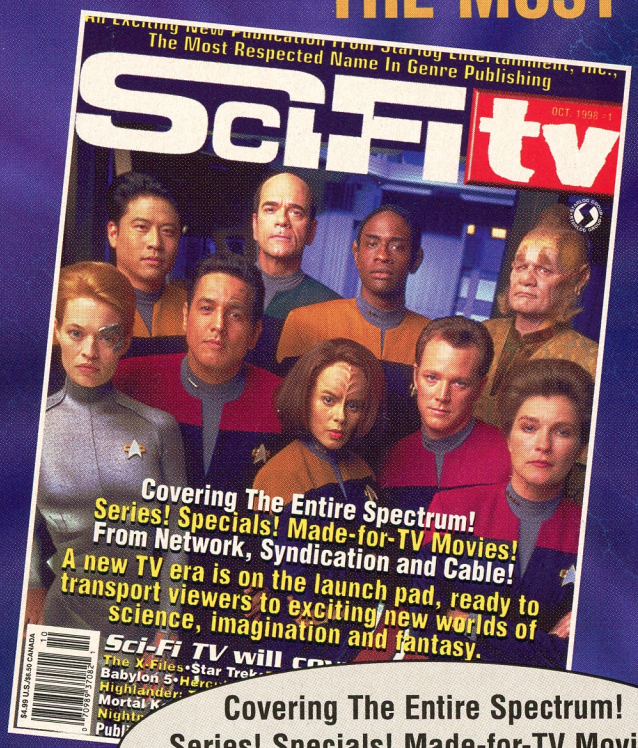

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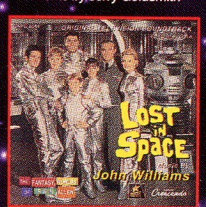

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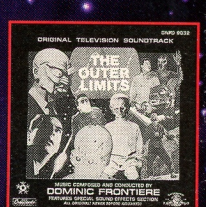

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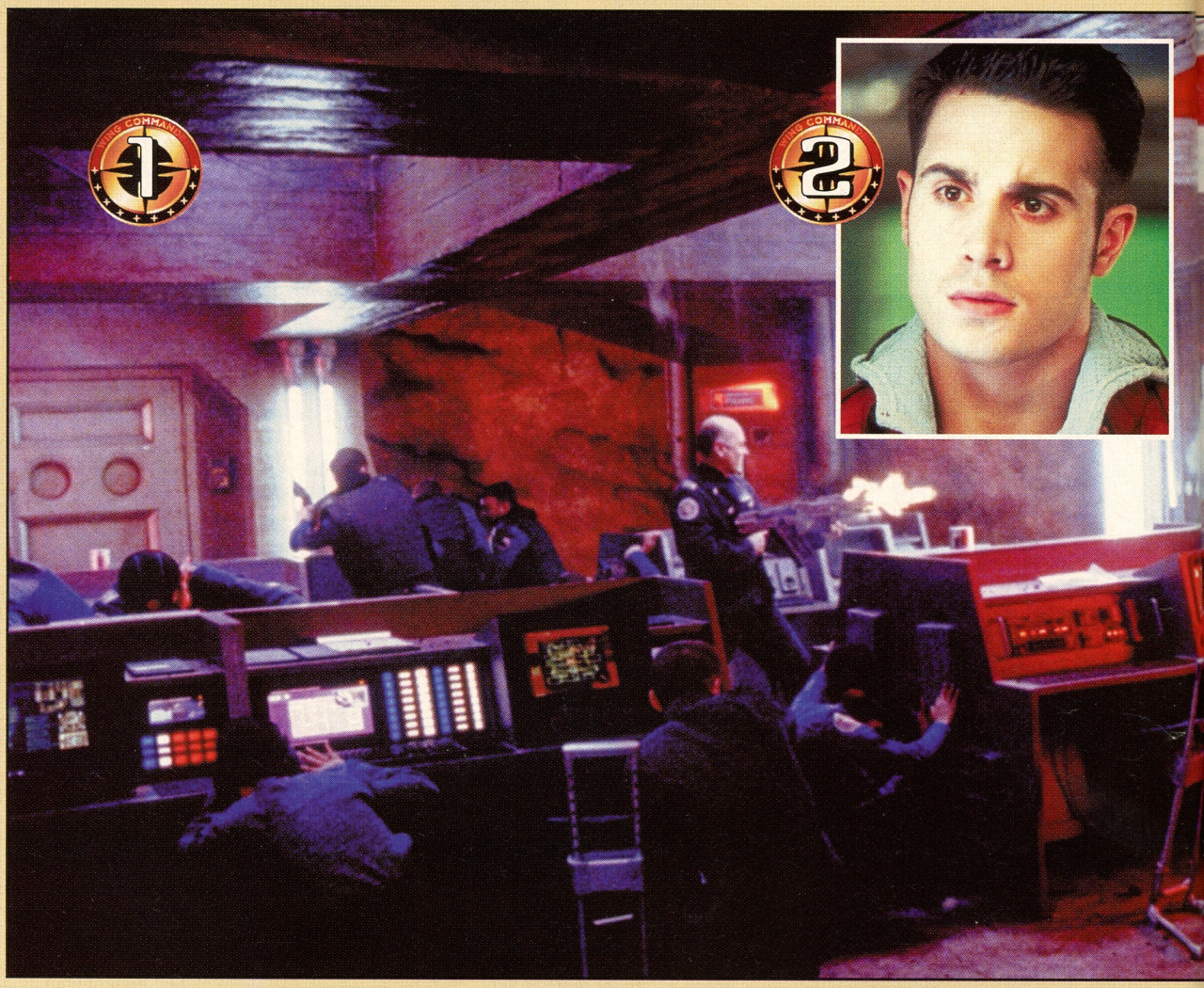
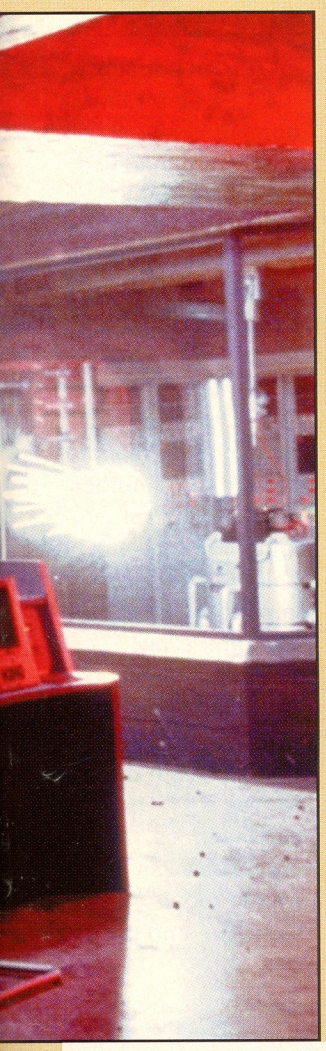
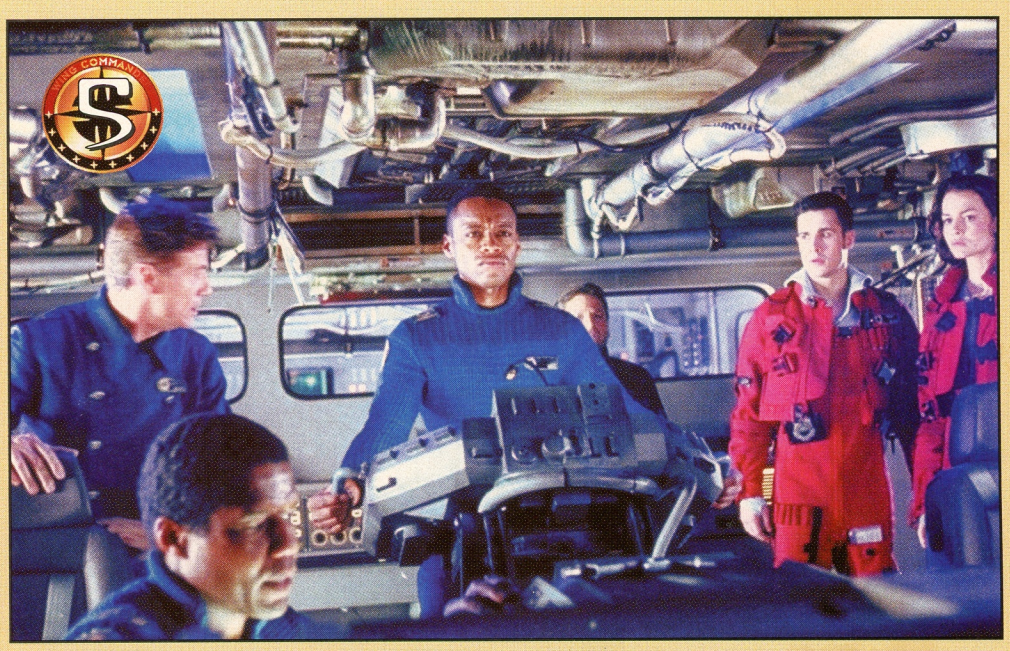
So join Knight, Bishop, Hunter & the other pilots of the 88th Fighter Wing and enter the battle. Don't wait—Earth is counting on you. Join the contest today!

WING COMMANDER







1. When the alien Kilrathi destroy a human colony and steal a NAVCOM jump point computer, the Confederation's mission is clear: Determine the Kilrathi plan of attack!

2. Admiral Tolwyn (David Warner) orders young pilot Chris Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr., pictured) to deliver an encoded chip regarding the attack to the carrier *Tiger Claw*.

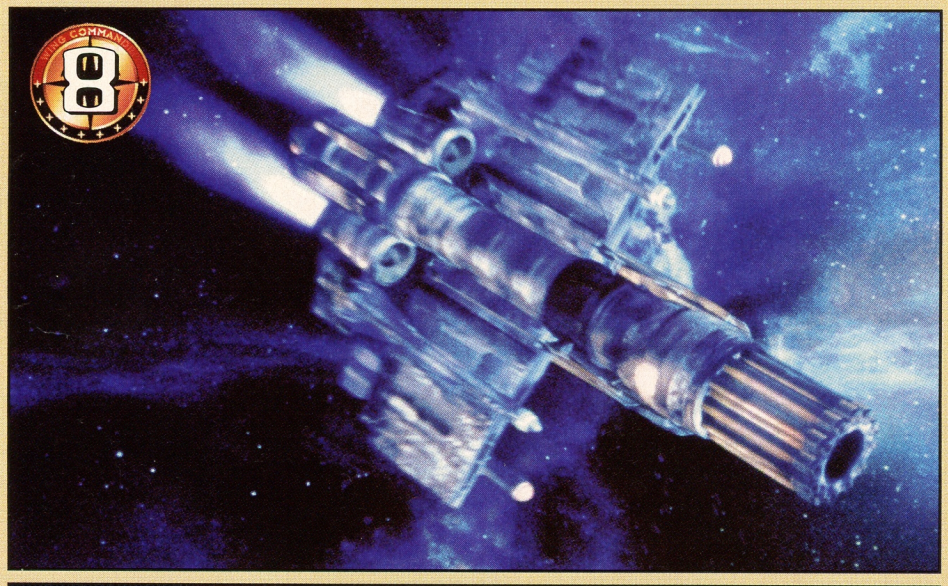
3. To put Blair in touch with his Pilgrim gift for feeling space-time, *Diligent* captain Paladin (Tchéky Karyo) orders him into a dangerous jump point near Scylla, a neutron star—

4. —Which Blair successfully navigates, proving his abilities and reducing by months their travel time to the *Tiger Claw*.

5. On the *Tiger Claw*, Blair meets Pilgrim-hating First Officer Gerald (Jürgen Prochnow), icy "Angel" Deveraux (Saffron Burrows) and Captain Sansky (David Suchet, not pictured).

6. Love is in the stars. Maniac (Matt Lillard) does some fancy flying to impress Rosie Forbes (Ginny Holder).

7. An encounter with a Kilrathi communications ship, combined with a faint message transmitted from the *Tiger Claw,* equals betrayal to Blair and Deveraux.



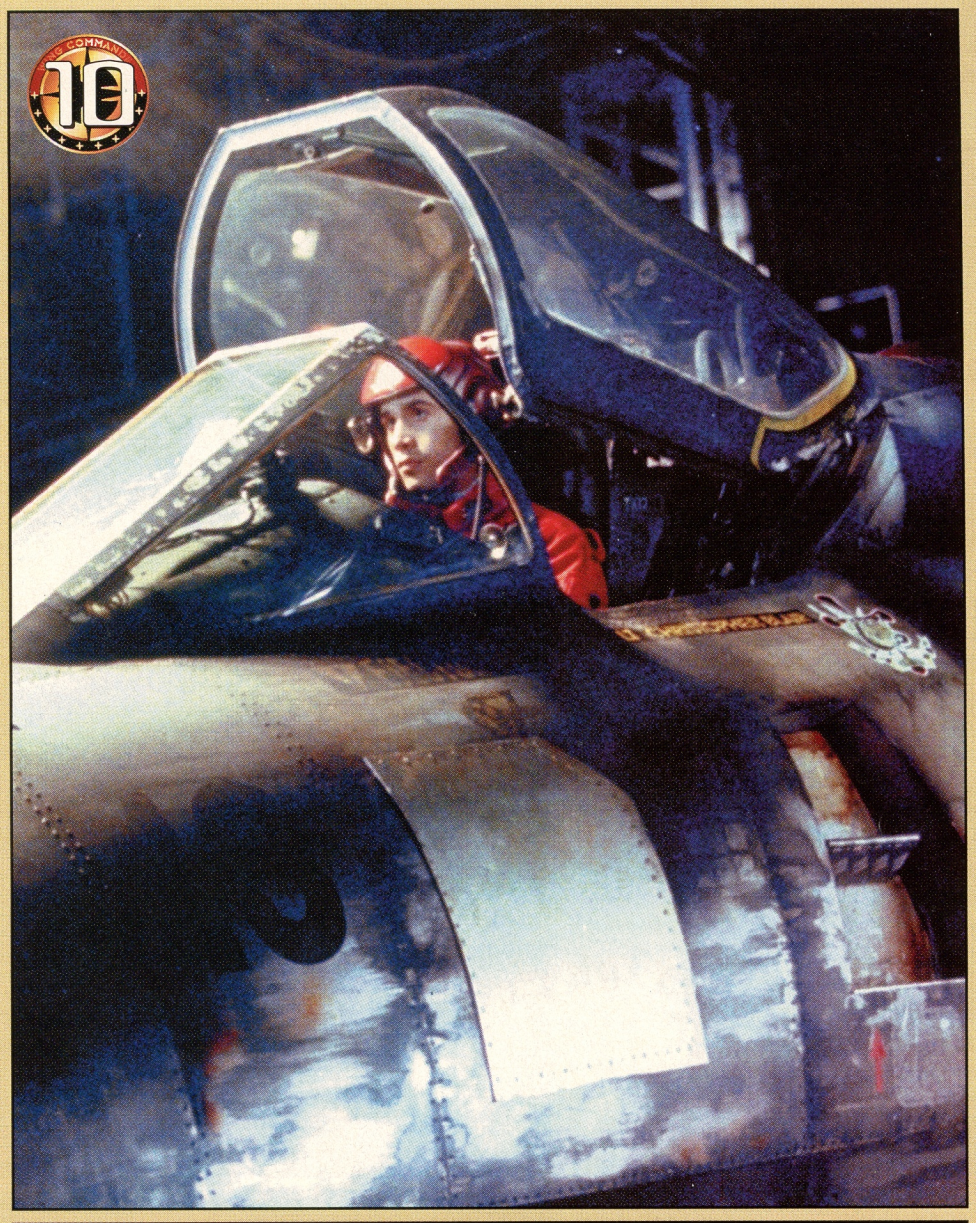
8. Gerald blames Blair for exposing them to the Kilrathi. Another follow-up patrol finds nothing—but points to an impending attack on the *Tiger Claw*!

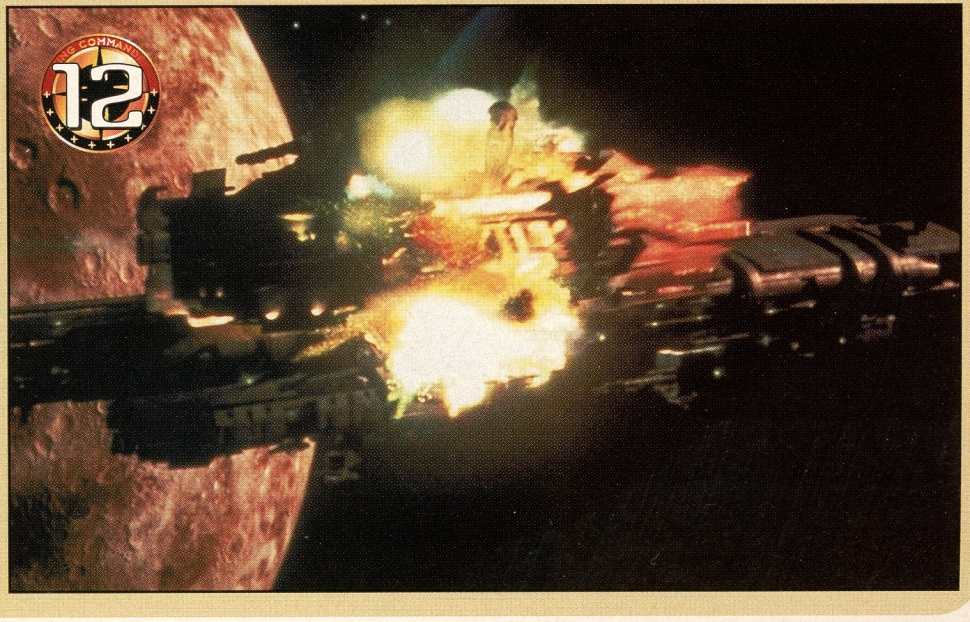
9. After a severe attack, and Forbes' death due to Maniac's carelessness, the *Tiger Claw* lies in wait to repair damage—and plan.

10. A Kilrathi ship raid unearths needed power cells and the stolen NAVCOM device. It also stirs up old feelings of bigotry in Gerald, who attacks Blair.

11. Although goaded by the Pilgrim traitor to kill Gerald, Blair turns the tables and wounds the traitor instead. Aboard the *Tiger Claw*, they find the turncoat is Sansky.

12. With the NAVCOM back, everything depends on Blair, and his sensitivity with time and space, to draw the Kilrathi Dreadnought into Scylla—and oblivion.





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In *Wing Commander*, Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) carries a big gun, and uses it to euthanize the film's feline antagonists, the Kilrathi.

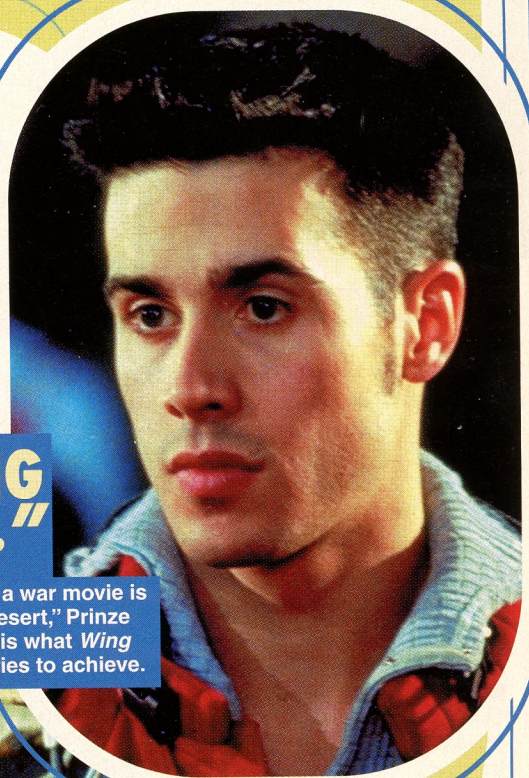
Freddie Prinze Jr.

By BILL FLORENCE

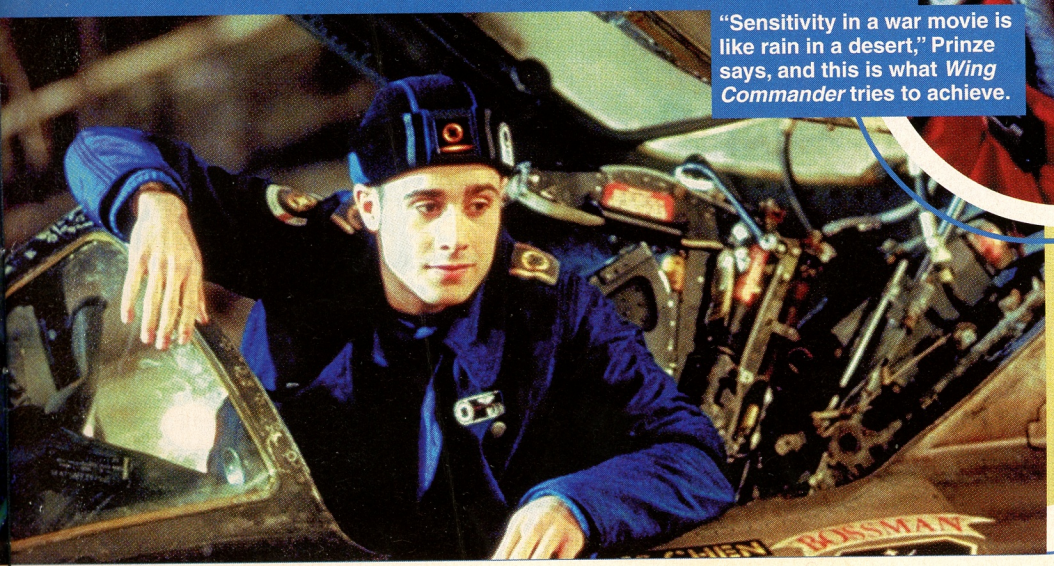
It didn't take long for Freddie Prinze Jr. to commit to *Wing Commander*, as he found himself stunned—and hooked—from the script's first passage.

"That scene read like what you learn about Pearl Harbor in high school," says Prinze. "All these people were just doing their thing, having fun at this asteroid 'worldlet paradise' station called Pegasus. Then suddenly, the people look up and see little lights outside the glass dome getting bigger and bigger. Finally, they realize the lights are missiles. The missiles hit the station's dome, and a spider web crack starts to go out over the glass until it explodes, and all the atmosphere gets ripped out into space. It was one of the *greatest* opening scenes I've ever read."

"I WANTED TO MAKE WING COMMANDER SO BAD."



"Sensitivity in a war movie is like rain in a desert," Prinze says, and this is what *Wing Commander* tries to achieve.



A veteran of indie favorites like *The House of Yes*, Prinze rocketed to mainstream success with *I Know What You Did Last Summer* before landing the role of Blair.

A World War II movie in outer space, *Wing Commander* shows the personal side of combat.

Prinze kept reading, and by the time he finished, he knew this film had to include him. "This is science fiction, but it's also a war movie," he says. "The whole script reads like those World War II movies; like *The Big Red One*, because it's all about the characters and how the younger ones come in so cocky but are completely jaded by the end. So much happens to them in such a short period of time, because it's war and people are dying every day all around them. They're affected so powerfully. The entire *Wing Commander* film is character-driven. Some people handle the war well, and others don't. Some people get a rush and want more action. Some are a little more timid. Some become more human. There's a traitor, but you don't know who the traitor is, and it's hell trying to figure him or her out. At the same time, the characters have to watch their own asses so they don't get killed. To see all that on paper, and to capture that even better on film, is a really rare thing. It was an amazing story that I *had* to be a part of."

Although the movie utilizes the first *Wing Commander* simulation game's storyline, Prinze didn't immediately recognize the script's connection to Chris Roberts' revolutionary computer game. "I recognized the title, but I still wasn't sure until I saw the name 'Christopher Blair' in the script. Then it hit me," says the actor, one of the game's biggest fans. "I didn't know what to expect at first, though. I didn't know if they were going to stay true to the game, or if it was going to go way off. But Chris kept the movie extremely true to the game, because it's *his* movie. The characters are the same, their arcs are the same, and the war is the same. It's a tight movie, man, really tight."

"I would have done the movie for free if they would have told me I would have an action figure made of me," says the enthusiastic Prinze.

Prinze could barely contain his excitement about landing this role, though he auditioned for Blair like a pro. "I went in and read, and I went big and strong," he recalls. "I really identified with the character. Chris and I busted out two scenes that we thought were really good ones. We worked the scenes a couple different ways, and then they gave my material to Fox. A week later, they came to me with an offer. I was all over it. I wanted to make *Wing Commander* so bad, because I'm the coolest character in the world in this movie.

"Blair is a normal human with an altered mind because he's half-Pilgrim. He can navigate his way through black holes and quasars without a navigational computer," Prinze explains. "The Pilgrims were a race of brilliant space navigators. They're human, but they lived in space so long that they underwent a genetic change. Pilgrims aren't well liked, because they tried to secede from the Confederation, like in the Civil War, and the Confederation kicked their asses. The movie is set 60 years later. So Blair is a half-Pilgrim on this Confederation ship, and when the others find out, there's conflict. But Blair doesn't know anything about the Pilgrims. He doesn't even know he has this gift, because he doesn't know the gift exists; the government shut down all information regarding the Pilgrims. Blair has been dealing with this crap his whole life, and he doesn't even know what it's about. As the movie goes on, he learns through the wisdom of this guy Paladin [Tchéky Karyo], who's like a father figure. Paladin knows about the Pilgrims because he has fought with them and against them, and he has been in space so many years. He helps Blair discover who he is, so it's not really about a Pilgrim thing anymore—it's about living your life."

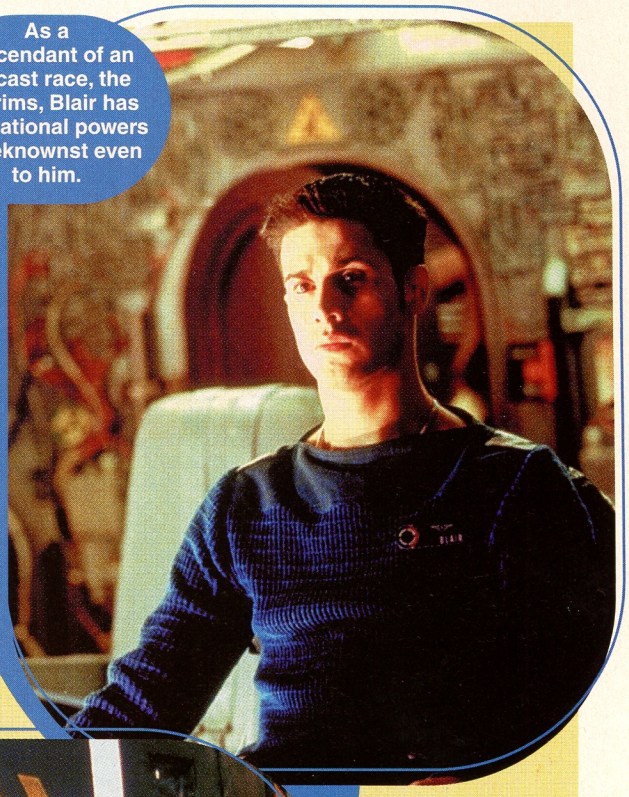
Reporting to the set in Luxembourg, Prinze began a 52-day shoot that amounted to a dream come true. The sets, in particular, amazed him. "Peter Lamont was our production designer, and he won an Academy Award for *Titanic*. He designed a full-scale model of our flight deck, so it was like a *real* flight deck. All our jets were full size, too. Matt Lillard and I would walk on the set every day and say, 'Oh my God, everything we

touch in here is in the movie.' It's a trip to see something like that daily, to be at work every single day and not have anything around that looks normal to you. That was the world that our characters lived in. There was nothing on the set from 1998! Everything was like 2560."

Soon after reporting for duty, the principal cast members got the opportunity to offer their feedback on the script, thus helping shape the final shooting draft. But Prinze didn't find much he wanted to change. "I always worry with science fiction and action movies that the script will be the soft part of the film," he admits. "But the thing that made me want to make this movie was the script. Chris was a first-time director, and it was his passion to make this film. He spent so much effort on making it a great script. When I read it, I was inspired. The *Wing Commander* script was an actor's script with an actual story."

Still, being given the opportunity to voice his opinion and make meaningful changes to the script impressed Prinze. "Early on, I had spent the most time with Chris, because we had a common love of video games and stuff. So I went to him with a few notes and ideas. Chris really responded to that. When everybody else saw that Chris was open and that he was all about collaboration, not a one-man show, they started to come forward. Matt expressed his ideas about Maniac, and so on. We all went in and collaborated and shared ideas. Chris, Matt, Saffron Burrows, Tchéky, Ginny Holder, myself—we all stripped away the ideas that didn't work, until we found the best way to tell the truth of this film. And everybody agreed. There wasn't anybody saying, 'Uh, I don't know about that, I'm feeling kind of weird about that one.' Everybody agreed with the lines they had, with the character arcs, the scene structure, everything. I love working like that."

In one case, Prinze helped retool a scene between best friends Blair and Maniac, in which Maniac tells Blair to make friends and stop shutting people out, because he won't always be there to watch Blair's back for him. Explains Prinze: "Matt and I wanted that scene to be like two brothers, not just two guys in the Navy together. Maniac is like the big brother telling the little brother that he can't always be there to take care of him, so he has to lose this attitude with the whole Pilgrim thing. The scene was there, but it was a matter of shading it and coloring it the right way, and making it just a little bit tighter. We made the characters more sensitive and more personal toward each other. With Chris' help, we made Maniac's lines a little more like things Matt would really say. Blair is cold at first, and then he sees where his friend is coming from. And Blair teaches Maniac a lesson by the scene's end. It ended up being really touching, which is great in a film like *Wing Commander.* Sensitivity in a war movie is like rain in a desert."



As a descendant of an outcast race, the Pilgrims, Blair has navigational powers unbeknownst even to him.

That look of anguish on Blair's face is no act. Performing this scene of flight deck rescue with Matt Lillard put pressure on Prinze's bad shoulder.

Luxembourg in the winter, however, is anything but desert-like. The cold weather and the flu bug that hit the production couldn't keep Prinze from enjoying time spent on and off the set with his fellow cast members. "I was so pleased when I saw the actors they chose to be in this movie," he says. "David Suchet, Tchéky Karyo, Jürgen Prochnow. These are well-respected actors playing the 'old school' guys who have been in space for so long. They know their stuff and they take care of it. And the young crew, Saffron, Matt and the rest of us, we worked as hard as we could. You have to make a choice to be brilliant, and you do that every morning when you work with people who feel the same way. Ginny Holder [Forbes] came

"IT WAS AN AMAZING STORY THAT I HAD TO BE A PART OF."

in with so much attitude for her character. Forbes is this hard chick with major spunk, a total adrenaline junky. Ginny had all that, but she has this English class that she brought to the role, too. Her attitude rocked—you just wanted to be around her."

Prinze and the others frequently went out to dinner together, and Lillard in particular became a close friend. "We all hung out," Prinze says. "Everybody got along. We all had the same views on acting and doing it like it used to be done, when actors were like a family. Like any other job, to succeed, you come together and work as a team. Interacting with the other actors in every sense, not just in scenes together, was great."

Not so great was hanging on flight deck wires for a scene in which Blair is nearly sucked out into space. "I did all my own stunts except one, and that's hard," Prinze concedes. "For the flight deck scene, they had me hanging on two sets of wires, one holding me up in the air and the other pulling me toward the crack in the door. I dislocated my shoulder a while back, and I've had surgery on it, so it's *not* the most healthy part of my body. Of course, the shot was framed up so that I had to grab this handle in the floor with my bad shoulder. Everything else was pulling against that. I was *really* in pain as I yelled to Maniac to rescue me."

The space suits made life difficult, too. According to Prinze, the suits were designed to mimic real space suits so well that oxygen had to be pumped in for the actors. "The costume designer took the job literally," Prinze notes dryly. "Sometimes I would be moving around so much in a scene that the oxygen hose would come unplugged. At the scene's end, I would be gasping for air, because I really *couldn't* breathe. They would take the helmet off me and I would gasp for breath. Inside the suit, it was like 115 degrees. My gloves were a half inch too big for my hands, and when I would take them off, all the finger tips would be full of sweat. I weighed about 170 pounds when I left for Luxembourg, and I came back weighing like 152 pounds. Our weapons were *real* AK 47s that had been refitted to look like futuristic guns, and I had no idea these guns were so heavy. It was crazy, but I had a great time."

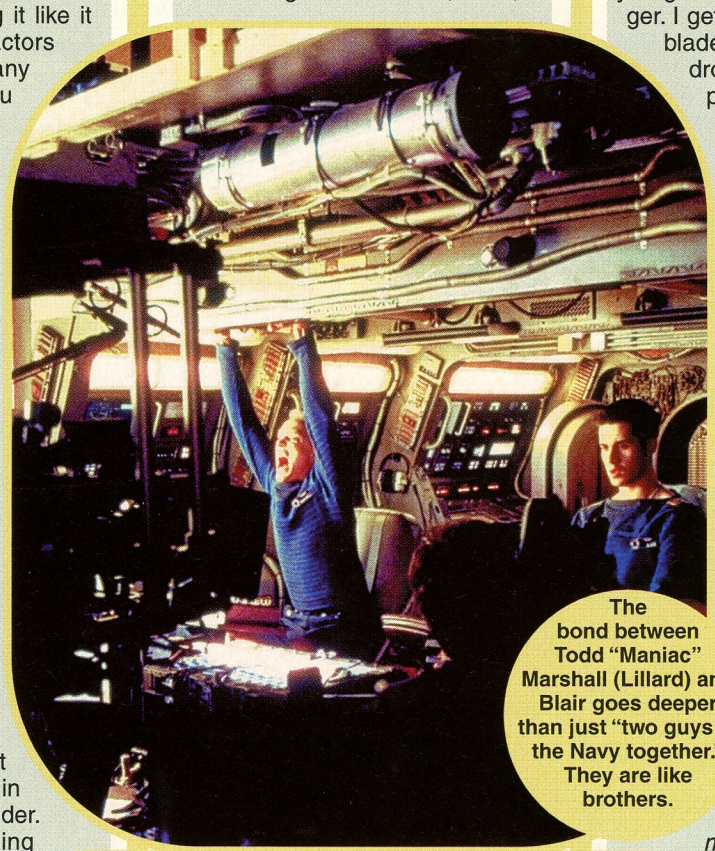
Prinze admits the film's alien menace, the eight-foot-tall cat-like Kilrathi (portrayed by actors in suits wearing animatronic heads), spooked him. "These things are so sick, man, the whole face moves! Every part of the head is controlled by remote control. It's the best animatronics I've ever seen, and I've seen *every* SF movie made. The lips, the teeth, the nose, the eyebrows, the forehead, the cheeks, the eyes, the ears...everything moves. When it opens its mouth, its ears go back. It is so sick, it's frightening! I did not want to look at them before I did any scenes with them. I wanted to be surprised, and I was. I was *intimidated*. I had seen clay models and pictures, but I didn't know they would look that good.

"I have a scene where this Kilrathi grabs me," Prinze continues. "I'm in the Kilrathi ship, walking down a corridor, and I turn around because I hear something. This thing comes and grabs me right by the throat and lifts me above its head. So now I'm 10 feet in the air, looking down, and I see this alien face just screaming at me. The alien is about to gut me with these claws that shoot out of its hand. The only way I can get out of this is by using my Pilgrim cross, which is a little dagger. I get my cross out, take out the blade and gut this thing, and it drops me. Green blood comes pouring out of it. The Kilrathi are huge and they can kick ass, unless of course you're Chris Blair with a little blade, and you get lucky."

Prinze has been lucky of late, too. He landed a role opposite Jennifer Love Hewitt and Sarah Michelle Gellar in the blockbuster *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, and he reprised that role in the sequel. He also counts *House of Yes* and *To Gillian on her 37th Birthday* among his big-screen credits. He scored at the box office early this year with *She's All That*, a teen romantic comedy co-starring Rachael Leigh Cook. The hit film, which confirmed Prinze as a movie star to watch, also teams him with his *Wing Commander* buddy Lillard.

But none of those other films resulted in an action figure toy modeled after the actor. *Wing Commander* lays sole claim to that honor. "That's the *greatest* part of the whole deal," he says earnestly. "I would have done the movie for *free* if they would have told me I would have an action figure made of me. The action figure guy will be way buffer than me, way better looking, with a chiseled jaw and double biceps, and that's supposed to be me. Kids will play with that and be like, 'Yeah, man, Freddie's buff!' But I'm skinny. I'm a stick."

Told of Lillard's plan to hand out his action figure toy to future girl friends, Freddie Prinze Jr. laughs and replies, "I don't know if my girl friend plays with action figures. I would rather she played with me."



The bond between Todd "Maniac" Marshall (Lillard) and Blair goes deeper than just "two guys in the Navy together." They are like brothers.

"THIS IS SCIENCE FICTION, BUT IT'S ALSO A WAR MOVIE."

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Wing Commander's reckless pilot Todd "Maniac" Marshall (Matt Lillard) flies from the hip, until his risk-taking leads to tragedy.

Matthew Lillard

BY BILL FLORENCE

Matthew Lillard approached the *Wing Commander* project with energy and intensity befitting his character, Todd "Maniac" Marshall, the brash young pilot who enjoys showing off as much as blowing up Kilrathi fighters.

"Being in this movie is a dream," says Lillard, who achieved a new level of stardom as the hyper-kinetic Stuart in Wes Craven's *Scream*. "I grew up in the *Star Wars* generation and played with *Star Wars* action figures. So, for me to be in a space action movie like *Wing Commander*, and play a hero that helps save the universe...it just doesn't get *any* better."

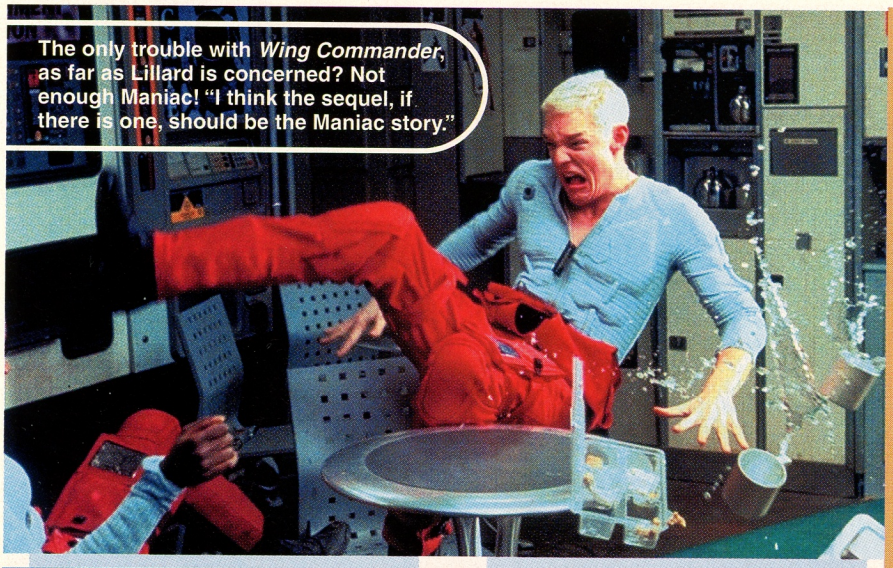
Lillard has made a reputation for himself as an actor who plays roles both large and emotionally-charged. "Sometimes you really identify with a character, which is how I felt about Maniac," he says. "It was something I *really* wanted to do. Many times you go in and meet with the director, but you're not dying to do the part; if it happens, great, but if it does not, *c'est la vie*. With this part, I read it and instantly fell in love with it." But Lillard, 28, hesitates to claim too many similarities with Maniac. "There was definitely something inside me that identified with the character, but do I wake up every day feeling like Todd 'Maniac' Marshall? No."

Lillard sees Maniac as a "crazy, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants action figure. He loves the fact that he's out there to save the universe. He lives on adrenaline. He's best friends with Blair [Freddie Prinze Jr.], his counterpart. They're yin and yang. Blair is confronted with these racist ideas because he's a Pilgrim, and Maniac stands by his side, helping him get through that. I'm his confidant, his right hand man. Everything Blair does is calculated and specific, whereas Maniac is impulsive. That's how Maniac gets his moniker. It was a blast of a part, because he gets to be funny and bigger than life."

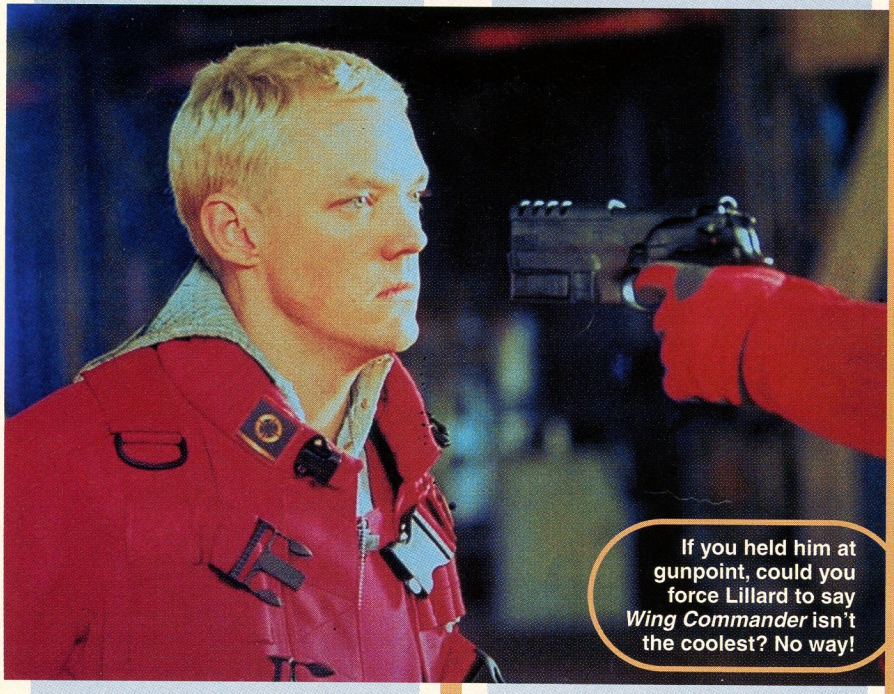
Maniac and Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) are best friends in the film, and, off-screen, so are the two actors.

There are a few crucial scenes, however, which pull Maniac back down to Earth. His antics at the controls of his Rapier lead to the death of his girl friend and fellow pilot Rosie Forbes (Ginny Holder). The actor says his greatest challenge was making Maniac wildly crazy and yet still grounded in reality, so that his reaction to Forbes' death was believable. "Some of Maniac's actions have life or death consequences. For me as an actor, to play Maniac as this charged-up kind of action figure guy who's out there flying from the hip, and still have some real emotional substance—that was hard. But it was also why I took the role. As Maniac, I got to do everything. Maniac is funny, he's a hero, he saves Blair, he loses his girl friend. So I ran the gamut of the emotional spectrum. The scene where I lose Forbes—that's the stuff you *want* to do as an actor. It was exhilarating, and it made the whole paycheck worthwhile. That's my favorite scene, followed by the scene where I save Blair from being sucked into space on the flight deck.

"BEING IN THIS MOVIE IS A DREAM."



The only trouble with *Wing Commander*, as far as Lillard is concerned? Not enough Maniac! "I think the sequel, if there is one, should be the Maniac story."



If you held him at gunpoint, could you force Lillard to say *Wing Commander* isn't the coolest? No way!

The challenge throughout was to balance the humor in the role with a heightened emotional spectrum."

Wing Commander's international cast (including the English David Warner, German Jürgen Prochnow and French Turk Tchéky Karyo) assembled in the tiny European nation of Luxembourg for principal photography, creating a lasting impression on Lillard and the other actors. "We all came off jet lag and started getting to know each other," he says. "Chris Roberts and the producers realized there would be more than just Americans in space in the future. That's true even today. So the film has a huge ensemble of multinational actors: English, French, German, American. There's a hodgepodge of actions and sounds coming out of people's mouths, which is really cool. We had long days in Luxembourg, but we all got along really well."

Lillard also enjoyed working with Holder, who made her starring feature debut in *Wing Commander*. "She's a wonderful actress and a beautiful woman. Forbes is just as crazy as Maniac, which is why they get along so well. They have a mutual attraction through adrenaline."

As for Prinze, *Wing Commander*'s lead, Lillard says the two became best friends and remain so today. "We were inseparable over there. Freddie and I ate sushi at a place called Neo Tokyo every other day for two-and-a-half months! We had one day off every week, Sundays, and we usually went to see a movie together."

The other six days of each week were typically spent working long hours on the film's two soundstages. Lillard, who had just come off a string of roles in a handful of independent films, found his endurance challenged. "Going to Luxembourg and doing 30 takes of scenes when you're physically exhausted is hard. It's a long time to be away from home, too. But I had a great time, just the same."

Like Prinze, Lillard was familiar with the *Wing Commander* computer game long before he got the role of Maniac, and had even played the revolutionary game on his Sony Playstation. "It's a great game!" he exclaims. "I hadn't realized it actually changed the way the entire gaming world played, though. Before *Wing Commander*, you played for highest score. When the first generation of *Wing Commander* came around, it was in essence a revolution—play for the characters and the storyline. That's why [creator/director] Chris Roberts is such a visionary. He integrated his two favorite things: video games and movies."

But moviegoers who have never played the game will still be able to connect with the film, Lillard insists. "The movie is based *loosely* on the game, not directly. The characters are the same. But you don't have to know the game at all to enjoy the movie. In that sense, it's like a *Star Trek* film. You don't have to be a *Trek* fan to love the *Star Trek* movies."

As creator of the *Wing Commander* Universe, Roberts knew his characters inside and out, which Lillard considered a boon to the cast. "He was able to lead us and take us on the journey of our characters," Lillard reports. "Chris knew the arcs of all the characters and their relationships with each other. I felt I could trust him implicitly."

The actor trusted his instincts—and got a little help from popular genre film composer James Horner—when it came to shooting the extensive space battle scenes. "I played with *Star Wars* action figures until I was 21," Lillard laughs, "so I have this imagination that's entirely too active anyway. Dress me up like a space cadet and stick me in a cockpit, and I'm saving the universe. It was great! I had my Walkman on, and I played some Horner soundtrack music and got pumped up. They threw me around in a gimbal, a contraption that

"DO I WAKE UP EVERY DAY FEELING LIKE TODD 'MANIAC' MARSHALL? NO."

actually moves the cockpit. And these cockpits were designed from World War II fighter jets. They bought the real front chassis of eight WWII fighters and dressed them up as our jets. So I'm in a *real* cockpit, wearing a flight suit, and they strap me down. They start moving me around at high speed, and I'm getting nauseous. Then they flash lights in my eyes, and I've got James Horner going in my ears. I really feel like I'm saving the universe! Using my imagination was never a problem for me."

Nor were the yellow-eyed, eight-foot-tall Kilrathi aliens a problem for Lillard or his maniacal alter-ego. "They're awesome aliens, but they're not super-effective enemies, because they're going for universal domination. Plus, they need to breathe this green mist; they're incapable of traveling outside their confined areas unless they're in big space suits. We kick their asses. They're *pigs*. Give me 12 Kilrathi and I'll take 'em out," he says, lapsing into his *Wing Commander* persona.

The epic nature and youth-appeal of Roberts' space adventure meant, of course, a set of action figure toys modeled after the cast. Faced with the plastic immortalization of his own mug, Lillard's reaction is immediate. "I can't wait! I'm just as excited about that as having a STARLOG special magazine devoted to the movie! The two things together are ingenious. It's *so* cool. I'm going to buy hundreds of the dolls and keep handing them out to all my future girl friends," he quips.

Although best known for his role in *Scream*, Lillard recently appeared as a body-pierced hockey player in the comedy film *Senseless*. He has also appeared in *Serial Mom*, *Mad Love*, *Hackers*, ABC's *The Devil's Child* and HBO's *If These Walls Could Talk*. Shortly after filming *Wing Commander*, he landed a role in the new high school comedy feature *She's All That*, starring his friend Prinze.

"I hope that some day, someone will think of me and say, 'Oh yeah, that guy from *Wing Commander*,' " he says, contemplating the drawbacks of his *Scream* recognition. "I've done many other movies, and I hope another one hits as big or bigger than *Scream*. *Scream* changed my life, and it was a great movie, but I'm waiting for my *next* great movie to come along. I hope that's *Wing Commander*."

While he doesn't actively seek out SF projects, the genre strongly appeals to him. "One of the best books I ever read was Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*," he says. "My favorite SF movie is probably *The Last Starfighter*. And I play *Dungeons & Dragons* to this day."

Lillard doesn't like talking about sequels prematurely, but he admits he would enjoy assuming the role of Maniac for an encore. "I would love to work with Freddie and Saffron Burrows and Chris again, but right now, all I really want is for people to get on board with this movie. I'm excited about it. It's a good, solid film. Chris tried something different with *Wing Commander*. He made a space movie that's character-driven, as opposed to being a string of big action sequences. *Wing Commander* is not about action, it's about characters and plot.

"So go enjoy the movie, and if you like *Wing Commander*, tell everyone. If you don't," Matthew Lillard adds with a mischievous chuckle, "that's OK—just be quiet."

The grizzled pilot Paladin (Tchéky Karyo) plays grim counterpoint to Maniac's ebullient antics.

"I played with *Star Wars* action figures until I was 21," Lillard confesses, so summoning the imagination to play Maniac wasn't a problem.

With icy calm, Lieutenant Commander Jeanette "Angel" Deveraux (Saffron Burrows) faces down rabid Kilrathi invaders in *Wing Commander.*

Saffron Burrows

By BILL FLORENCE

In *Wing Commander*, Lt. Commander Jeanette "Angel" Deveraux is a beautiful brunette whose cool demeanor shields her from the horrors of war. And while Saffron Burrows fits the physical description of her character, the similarities end there.

"I liked the challenge of playing someone who is *quite* unlike me," the young English actress says of her alter-ego. "Deveraux is someone burdened with many responsibilities in the war zone, which is an environment that's unknown to me. She is very closed, hard, cold and determined, but deep down she fears passion—she fears living. Playing her was a great experience."

Deveraux, a wing commander aboard the *Tiger Claw* carrier, leads Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.), Maniac (Matt Lillard), Rosie Forbes (Ginny Holder), Hunter (Richard Dillane) and other fighter pilots into battle against the catlike Kilrathi aliens. Having lost her parents in the war when she was a child, Deveraux is hard-edged but hurting inside. Her behavior on the eve of battle proved particularly interesting to Burrows. "[Creator/director] Chris Roberts was inspired by projects like *Das Boot* and that question of what takes place just *before* you go into battle," she says. "What do you do with those last few hours? There is extreme hedonism that occurs, and also extreme fear. Do people choose to live life to the fullest up until those last few moments before they might die, revealing certain things about themselves? Or do they shut down their emotions? These were issues that appealed to me in *Wing Commander*."

Initially, Burrows didn't know much about the *Wing Commander* legacy. But merely mentioning the name of her new project to others produced excited responses. "People seemed to know an awful lot about it," she recalls. "I am not a computer game junkie—not at all. But I learned Chris had developed this amazing thing, and I caught up with his history. He's a highly intelligent young man who created this wondrous computer game."

What if Burrows could meet Deveraux in real life—would she like the brooding wing commander? "I don't know if 'like' would be the right word," admits the actress with a chuckle. "I would find her interesting and quite complex. She's a bit of a troubled woman."

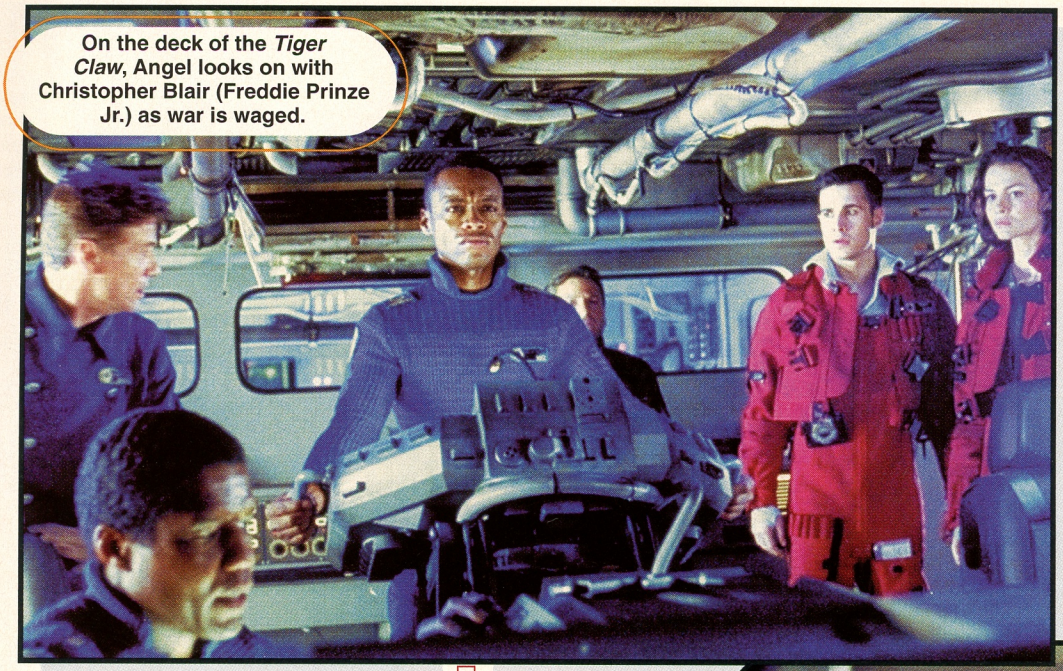
Deveraux's refusal to acknowledge the deaths of pilots who have served under her command is a survival instinct, according to Burrows. "It's not necessarily very human, but you must become numbed to a certain extent when you see people die whom you care about. Their deaths have a numbing effect on you after a period of time. It's about fear, really. Deveraux has grown up within a war, so the war has been her whole life. She really hasn't known anything other than war."

Combat has certainly left Deveraux with few gentle human graces—she's no "mother hen" figure to her squad of pilots. "Nope. She's not dishing out the soup at the end of a day's work. She is respected, and she is definitely seen as formidable, someone you don't mess around with. I like the fact that she's a woman in a position of power for once, who doesn't have to behave badly. I also like the fact that she becomes a little more human during the film."

Burrows sees the script's Confederation, Kilrathi and Pilgrims (those who have lost touch with their heritage and turned against humankind) as conflicting "tribes in space." The Kilrathi believe the stars are their destiny and will stop at nothing to eradicate the human race.

"It's a thinly disguised parallel to so-called eth-

"DEEP DOWN SHE FEARS PASSION—SHE FEARS LIVING."



On the deck of the *Tiger Claw*, Angel looks on with Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) as war is waged.

"Wednesday night is the night in Luxembourg to go out," she adds. "That was strange. So we would all go out on Wednesdays, and the rest of the week would be a little bit weary. There were lots of pubs, including an Irish pub where they had soccer on TV, and I ended up watching a lot of soccer during my free time. It's quite obscure being in this Irish pub in this little corner of Europe, watching English football. Wherever you are in the world, when you're making a film, you always find a place to congregate."

nic cleansing," Burrows opines. "*Wing Commander* shows the kind of hatred that can be fueled by racism. The Kilrathi want to destroy everyone [who aren't of their kind]. Well, we can't really turn the other cheek at that point. There are all these different personalities in a very confined, claustrophobic space. Freddie and Matt play two young pilot recruits who are brought on board the *Tiger Claw* to help us fight the Kilrathi. These two have all kinds of ideas and a fresh young attitude, and combined with the others in Angel's unit, plus the commanders—that brings about interesting situations and relationships."

A particularly interesting and complex relationship is the one between Deveraux and Blair. At first, the two clash antagonistically, but later a strong bond develops between them. "It's an on-going, evolving relationship," notes Burrows. "In the beginning, her intelligence and wisdom is pitted against Blair's youth and cockiness. Then they develop a respect for each other and start to care about each other, and they also kind of dig each other, too. There are a lot of different elements in that relationship, and it evolves through the course of the film."

Working with Prinze was a joy for Burrows. "Freddie is a lovely man. He's incredibly wise for someone so young, or for someone of any age. He has great integrity, and he's a generous worker. He always gives you exactly what you need, in terms of energy."

Speaking of energy, the most highly-energized cast member on the *Wing Commander* set may well have been Lillard, whom Burrows thoroughly enjoyed. "It was quite noisy on the set when Matt was around," she laughs. "Matt is hilarious. He has this wonderful warm-up he does just before a take, where we all have to slap each other's hands, give each other the thumbs-up sign, then touch fists and stuff. It showed that we all supported each other."

Outfitted in body armor, with a steely spirit to match, Deveraux proves that no giant, slavering cat is a match for a woman with a cause.

Burrows and fellow Brit Holder became good friends off the set. "Ginny and I would go sit in the sauna together when we weren't working," recalls Burrows. "We had a great time. We're both Londoners, so it was wonderful having her there."

Shooting *Wing Commander* in Luxembourg helped everyone, especially the younger cast members, get to know each other well and unite as a team. "I liked us all being in the same place. When one shoots in one's own city, sometimes you don't actually get to know people very well. You all go home at the end of the day to separate places," Burrows reflects. "But on *Wing Commander*, we were all in the same hotel, and we fooled around together.

Back on the set, the presence of veteran actors David Suchet and Jürgen Prochnow was especially inspiring for Burrows. "I've loved watching David since I was a child, especially in British dramas. He always has a twinkle in his eye, which he brings to work with him every day, making the work far easier and less stressful. Both he and Jürgen are experienced, respected actors with great humility. They're not legends in their own minds."

The most difficult aspect of working on *Wing Commander*, Burrows says,

"WHAT TAKES PLACE JUST BEFORE YOU GO INTO BATTLE? WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THOSE LAST FEW HOURS?"

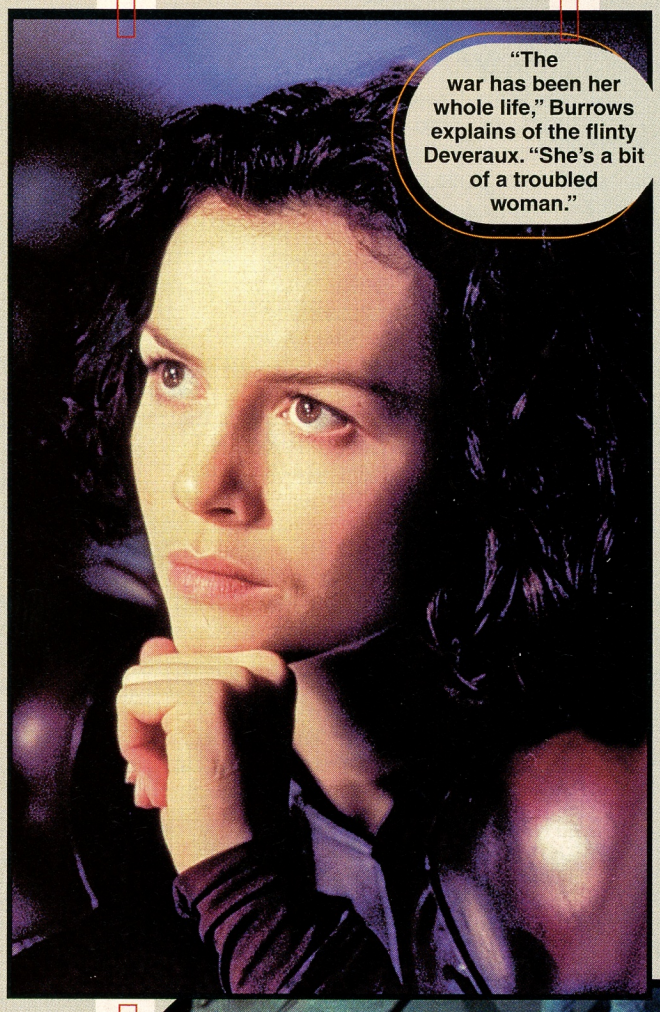
was not any particular scene or action, although the intensely physical nature of the role was challenging. Rather, she found the hardest part of the project was accepting the notion that someone as young as Deveraux would command the kind of respect the character does in the film. It's a situation the actress repeated in her next movie, *Deep Blue Sea*, in which she plays a marine biologist on the verge of making a great medical discovery—possibly with horrible results. "There's *definitely* a similarity between the two roles," Burrows agrees. "Initially, that idea of [bearing this] great respect was a bit daunting, but once I found it in Deveraux and convinced myself of it, it was quite rewarding."

On the other hand, Burrows had the most fun while sitting in her Rapier cockpit for the film's many space battle sequences. Like her co-stars, Burrows donned headphones and played music during shooting. Unlike Lillard, whose space battle music of choice were the works of prolific SF film composer James Horner, Burrows grooved in her Rapier to the sounds of rapper Puff Daddy. "I loved sitting in that cockpit," she says. "Freddie would be in the cockpit next to mine, with a green screen behind us, and we would both put Puff Daddy on the headphones. Once we were installed in the bloody cockpit, we didn't want to get out, because getting in there was such a procedure. So we would pretty much stay there all day, with the whole flight outfit on. Chris would give us his notes through the headphones, and then between takes, while they were setting up lighting changes and such, we would have rap music. We found hip-hop was the best thing for the flying sequences. Then we would just keep the rap going during our takes. It was Freddie's idea, but we all ended up doing it."

Wing Commander is Burrows' first foray into science fiction. Most of her previous acting roles were problematic women in " 'kitchen sink' dramas," as she puts it. Burrows started her career on stage at age 17, and since then she has appeared in such films as *In the Name of the Father* (1993), *Circle of Friends* (1995) and *The Matchmaker* (1997). In addition to *Deep Blue Sea*, Burrows recently completed filming *The Loss of Sexual Innocence* (due in theaters this March), in which she plays twins separated at birth—one grows up Italian, the other British.

"I like stories about people," she says. "That's why I wanted to do *Wing Commander*. I saw that it was still about people. I liked the movie's emphasis on the characters and their diversity. Also, the film's style is wonderfully realistic—the sets are battered and lived in. I liked that as well."

As for the action figure toy that will almost certainly be made of Angel Deveraux, Saffron Burrows concedes she's a little embarrassed. "It's quite a scream, isn't it? It will be fantastic for all my young relatives at Christmas, I suppose. To be honest, I'm quietly thrilled. But it couldn't be more camp, could it?"



"The war has been her whole life," Burrows explains of the flinty Deveraux. "She's a bit of a troubled woman."

In a tale of warring tribes, Deveraux fights to keep the Kilrathi version of Manifest Destiny from eradicating the human race.

"SITTING IN THE COCKPIT WAS LIKE BEING ON A RIDE AT THE FAIRGROUNDS."

Ginny Holder flies into intergalactic warfare as fearless pilot Rosie Forbes.

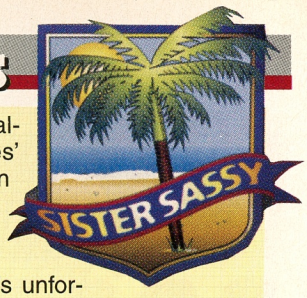
Ginny Holder

By BILL FLORENCE

Every military squadron has at least one resident hot-shot fighter pilot, and on the Confederation carrier *Tiger Claw*, that pilot is Rosie Forbes. She has brains, beauty, confidence and a warrior's soul—attributes that jumped from the pages of the *Wing Commander* script and captivated British actress Ginny Holder.

"Sometimes you pick up a script and you get excited," says Holder, whose enthusiasm for the project is still abundant months after portraying Forbes. "When I read it, I knew I could do the part quite easily. I thought the script, and Forbes in particular, was fantastic. She's a fighter pilot, she's feisty, she's good at what she does, and she has a bit of an attitude. She isn't weepy, she's strong and ambitious. It's not every day that you get a character with *all* those qualities."

Despite her strong affinity for the character, the 28-year-old actress didn't get the job immediately. The casting process, she explains, was long and torturous, especially since *Wing Commander* would be her first big break. "I auditioned for the part of Forbes in December 1997, and then I went off to America for a three-week Christmas holiday," Holder recalls. "I didn't hear anything during those long three weeks, and I got so wrapped up in it that I couldn't really enjoy my holiday. I couldn't stop thinking how perfect the part was for me. When I got back [to England], I



rang my agent and asked if he had heard anything yet. He said no, but he speculated that maybe they thought I was a bit too sophisticated for the role."

A few weeks later, while helping out at her friend's public relations company, Holder was called back by the film's casting agency. "This was around noon, and I had to be there at 3 p.m.," she remembers. "So I had to go home, get changed, go through my lines and get over to the casting agency. They did the same thing the following day, and it was maddening. Finally, they said they would let me know in a few days. During those days, my boy friend drove me around London, but I was like a zombie. I couldn't speak, I couldn't do anything. My mother said, 'Ginny, just go out and have a good time. Enjoy yourself.' But I *couldn't*.

"Finally, I got a phone call around midnight one night, and I thought it was probably friends from London. So I let it go to the answering machine. My boy friend checked the message and said to me calmly, 'Ginny, I think you should listen to this.' It was my agent saying I had gotten the job. I couldn't believe it. I rang my Mom and woke her up out of bed to tell her. The next thing I knew, I was in Luxembourg. It was mind-blowing."

Most of Holder's work in the movie involves Forbes' interaction with Todd "Maniac" Marshall (Matt Lillard), who arrives on the *Tiger Claw* fresh-faced and overconfident. "He's not quite as skilled in the cockpit as Forbes, but there's something about his energy that excites her. Plus, he's the new bloke on the ship, and that makes him interesting."

Lillard, Holder affirms, made her feel at ease right away. "He's great. Matt is a really nice, generous guy, and so easy to work with. That's not always the case, especially when you have to do intimate scenes together. But he was cool."

The "intimate scene," though certainly not X-rated, gave Holder the jitters initially, although she was pleased to find it an easy shoot. "The first five minutes were tough, where I stripped down to my T-shirt and boxer shorts," she admits with a chuckle. "I was really nervous, but then I relaxed into it, and it was fine. We stayed dressed, so it's not like it was really difficult. Everyone was there: the director, cameraman, lighting people and so on. It was bizarre, because I felt myself going into a cold sweat when we started to rehearse the scene. But after the initial shock, it was easy."

A more difficult task was pretending that the cockpit rigged on a stage gimbal was actually the futuristic Rapier fighter that she piloted through space. "Sitting in the cockpit was like being on a ride at the fairgrounds, because it moves around, but it was hard for me to make it look like I was really flying a plane. I remember someone said to me, 'Ginny, you're not in an arcade.' But [director] Chris Roberts was kind about it. He told me that guys practice this sort of thing all their lives. They get together and mess about, whether it's computer games or whatever. Girls don't really do this. After we talked, it became much easier.

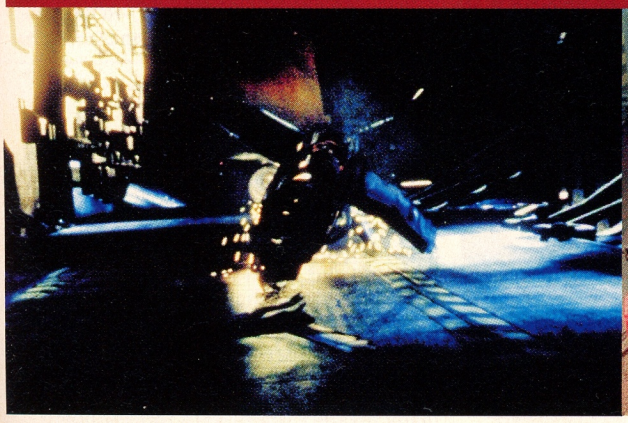
"Plus, the people working on the fighter plane sequences—the animation and computer effects people—got together with us at the beginning and showed us how things would look. So we had a reference. I could always chat with the special FX guys and say, 'How does this work?' On top of all that, you just have to use your imagination."

Holder's first major film role ends in her character's death, and the actress found this an exciting opportunity to stretch her talents. "Forbes' death was an interesting scene to do," Ginnie Holder reflects. "It's unfortunate what happens to her, especially because it was purely by accident. She's trying to cover Maniac in her Rapier, and she doesn't get out of the way in time. She's trying to land her plane, which is clearly out of control. It's like battling with the inevitable fact that you're going to die. After her plane is damaged, Forbes knows she's going to die. So, staring death in the face, she tries to put on a brave front. She acts like everything is fine, everything is cool, and she jokes around. I played it with a mixture of control, humor and the fear of dying. Her ship crashes, and there's nothing she can do. She doesn't contact anyone, because she knows they have to get on with the battle. She doesn't come apart emotionally."

A self-avowed *Star Trek: Voyager* fan, Holder says she would love to do more SF films—though it's unlikely her character would return in a potential sequel to *Wing Commander*. "SF is exciting. I love things where you can be physical and employ a lot of action, and fight for a cause.

"Because this was my first major part in a movie, the overall experience was quite *terrifying* at the time," Ginny Holder concludes. "It was so much bigger than anything I had ever done. I've done a lot of television work, but *Wing Commander* was just massive. When I think about it and discuss it with people now, I'm still very excited about the whole thing, which I suppose is because I enjoyed it so much. The next part I get in a big feature film will be slightly less overwhelming, but still a lot of fun."

"STARING DEATH IN THE FACE, SHE TRIES TO PUT ON A BRAVE FRONT."



Amidst the war, there is tragedy—as Forbes' ship crashes while trying to land on the *Tiger Claw*.

Holder enjoyed working with her fellow star warriors to make *Wing Commander* a movie reality.

VETERAN WARRIORS

TCHÉKY KARYO (PALADIN)

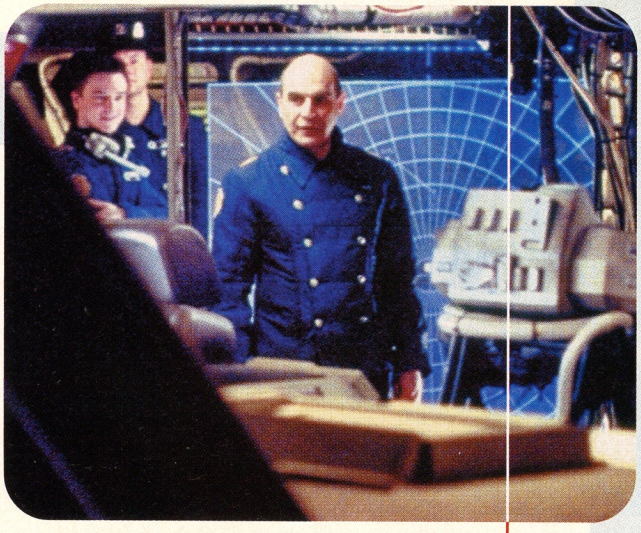
Captain of the *Diligent*, James Taggart, a.k.a. Paladin, is a rugged merchant, with more than his share of secrets, who helps Lt. Chris Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) not only to complete his mission, but also to appreciate his Pilgrim heritage. Paladin alter-ego Tchéky Karyo, who has appeared in such adventurous films as *GoldenEye*, *La Femme Nikita* and HBO's TV mini-series *From the Earth to the Moon*, lauds creator/director Chris Roberts' work: "He knows his domain very well."

JÜRGEN PROCHNOW (FIRST OFFICER GERALD)

With credits ranging from *Seventh Sign* and *In the Mouth of Madness* to *The Keep*, *Judge Dredd* and *Dune*, Jürgen Prochnow is clearly comfortable to otherworldly settings. Although two roles, namely his groundbreaking performance in *Das Boot* and his stint as Xavier Shondi in *Privateer 2: The Darkening*, made the actor an ideal choice to play First Officer Gerald, the stiffnecked veteran of the Pilgrim Wars with an ax to grind, or bury in half-Pilgrim Blair's back.

DAVID WARNER (ADMIRAL TOLWYN)

"It's not often an actor gets a chance to play in a certain kind of movie," says David Warner, who won the role of Tolwyn after Malcolm McDowell, the CD-ROM's original admiral, passed on it in favor of some island work. And Warner is no stranger to far-flung adventure. The genre pro has not only essayed evil in *Time Bandits*, and *Time After Time* (co-starring with McDowell), but has also lost his head to ultimate evil in *The Omen*. He has seen space action, too, from *Babylon 5* to *Star Trek VI*, and the CD-ROM game, *Privateer 2: The Darkening*.



DAVID SUCHET (CAPTAIN SANSKY)

Although David Suchet's no genre vet, his interest in playing Sansky, *Wing Commander*'s contrary *Tiger Claw* captain, is understandable. "How can any actor resist the opportunity to just lose the mind and fly off into space?" he asks. That's not to say that Suchet hasn't had brushes with the fantastic, namely in *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan*, *Harry and the Hendersons* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It is probably Suchet's many mystery roles—he's forever noted as Hercule Poirot—that enhance Sansky's enigmatic edge.

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DIRECTING WING COMMANDER

The creator of the vastly popular *Wing Commander* games, director Chris Roberts (center) ushers his opus onto the big screen.

chris roberts

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Chris Roberts has a gift for cinematic storytelling, so it seems not only natural, but inevitable, that his star fighter game series *Wing Commander* should find itself translated into a big-screen adventure. "My two big passions have *always* been movies and games," says Roberts. "When I created the first *Wing Commander*, I tried to take what I loved about science fiction movies like *Star Wars* and combine it with the first-person visceral thrill of a game. It was one of the first times that anyone had created a cinematic game, and it worked out really well."

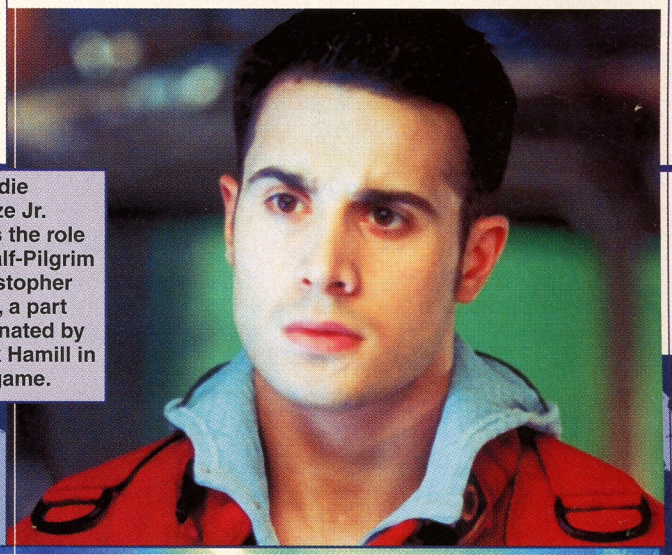
The *Wing Commander* games recount humanity's ongoing struggle to stave off an invasion by hostile, cat-like Kilrathi. Players pilot various weapons-laden ships and complete assorted missions throughout a particular story arc. Turning that into a film was a challenge for Roberts, but the cinematic style of his fighter simulator certainly made the job easier. "The games all had story and characters, and always seemed very adaptable to features," he says. "They were modeled on movies, but they were movies that you played. They were also three-act pieces, so it's a bit different than something like *Mortal Kombat*, which has characters and a setting, but not much of a story.

"I think the biggest challenge is taking this to the next level on the big screen, but trying to keep as much of the coolness of the game universe as possible. I was trying to be faithful to the original material. It was something that I wanted to do when I first started with *Wing Commander*, and as the games became more and more successful, it seemed like it would be an easier film to sell. As I was doing *Wing Commander III*, the first one to use live actors, I decided that I next wanted to make a *Wing Commander* film."

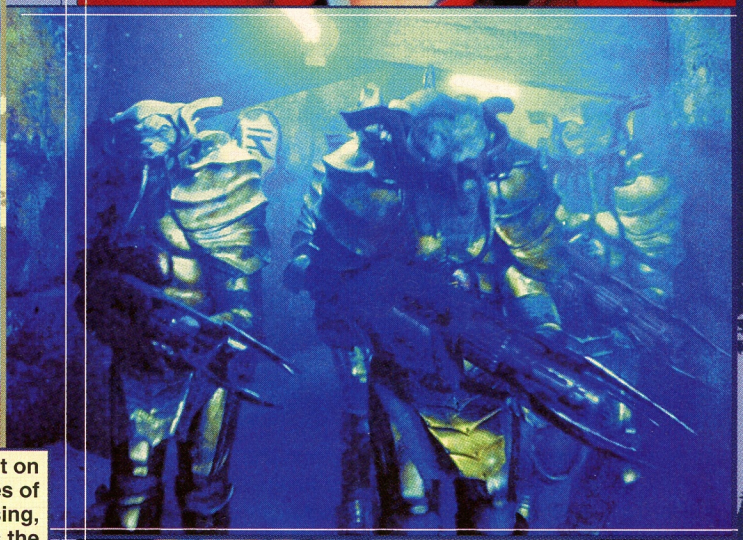
Roberts finished *Wing Commander IV*, formed his own company (Digital Anvil) and eventually, armed with a script, set up a production deal. He learned some valuable filmmaking lessons while working on *Wing Commander*—most notably the costs of maintaining his creative control. "Getting *any* kind of film made is amazing," says Roberts. "There were a million road blocks to making *Wing Commander*, compounded by the fact that I wanted to direct it and have my company do the FX. It would probably have been easier to launch the production or find a bigger budget if I had said, 'Get someone else to direct.' But it was the kind of thing I had been wanting to do for a long time, and I didn't want to step away from it.

"I had invested a lot of my time in it, and I was pretty passionate about it. I would rather make something that isn't an

"PERSONALLY, I DON'T SEE ENOUGH MOVIES WITH SPACESHIPS BLOWING UP!"



Freddie Prinze Jr. dons the role of half-Pilgrim Christopher Blair, a part originated by Mark Hamill in the game.



The savage Kilrathi assault on Earth carries untertones of present-day ethnic cleansing, but Roberts says this is the film's only real "message."

Roberts initially designed Blair as a prototypical hero, and he modeled Maniac (Matt Lillard) on an extra-ebullient friend. In the film, both characters gain depth.

"IF YOU CREATE A UNIVERSE PEOPLE LIKE, THEY'LL WANT TO SPEND TIME IN IT."

Blair's Rapier enters the Charybdis jump point.

$80 million science fiction movie if it's closer to my vision."

Wing Commander's outer space setting draws on World War II themes, but the game itself is anything but retro—it's on the techno vanguard. "That's one of the fun things about the game series," notes Roberts. "Every two years, the technology comes along to totally re-invent the playing field, and so you get to go back and retool and re-explore everything so that it doesn't get old.

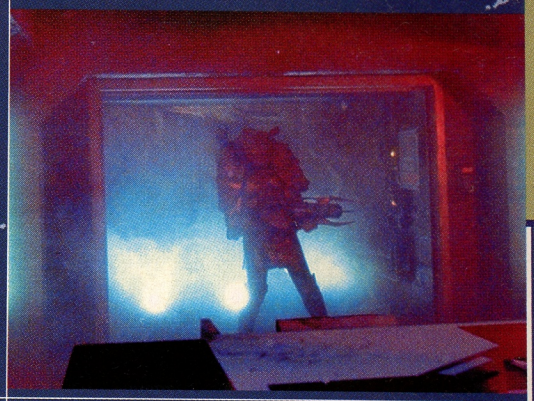
"World War II was the inspiration when I started working on *Wing Commander*. I always loved the war in the Pacific between the Japanese and the Americans. Being out in space was very much like fleet combat in the Pacific Theater, because of the large expanses of ocean [or space] dotted with small islands [or planets]. I kind of based the Kilrathi on the Japanese military, making them a driven, warrior race with a Bushido code, and I based the Confederation on the Americans."

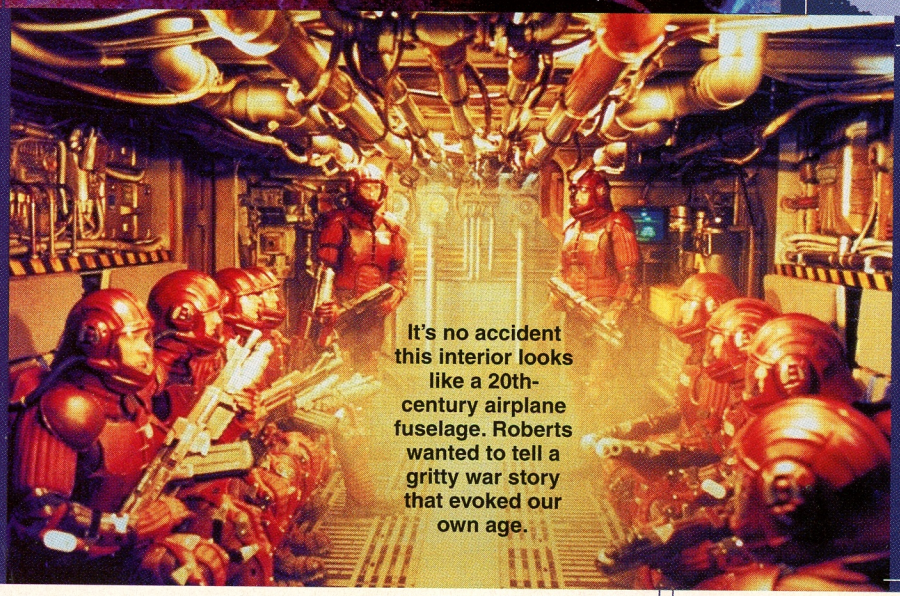
Wing Commander's SF slant, however, afforded Roberts some freedoms which he would not have had were he just making a contemporary war film. "The great thing about setting *Wing Commander* in space as opposed to doing a historical simulation of WWII air combat was that I could concentrate on all the cool stuff," Roberts says. "The *Wing Commander* games took all the fun of dogfighting and got rid of the boring material, so when I chose to make it into a movie, I went back to those roots. What happened with the game series over time was that we presented things very cinematically. The people you flew with were real characters and had personalities, and those personalities were also reflected in the *way* they flew. So, it didn't feel like a cold computer game—you started thinking about all these characters as *people*."

Indeed, *Wing Commander* isn't just about taking a fighter out of space dock and blowing alien enemies into space dust—it's about relationships, like the bond between the estranged Pilgrim Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) and his superior, Commander Paladin (Tchéky Karyo)—two key characters from the games whose relationship is further explored in the film. "It's one of those father-surrogate son deals," Roberts explains. "When I was originally doing the game, I always saw Paladin as Sean Connery in gruff *Highlander* mode. That was always in the game, part of how Paladin came across as a fatherly figure. That develops a little more in the movie, because we have

The marines pool their strength for a good cause—Blair is on the other end of that cable!

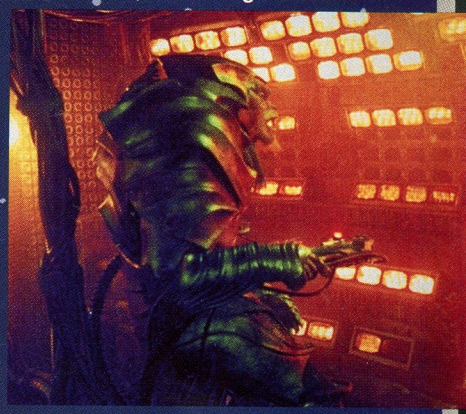
No enclave is safe from an encroaching Kilrathi attack.





It's no accident this interior looks like a 20th-century airplane fuselage. Roberts wanted to tell a gritty war story that evoked our own age.

Based on the 1940s Japanese military, the Kilrathi are "a driven, warrior race with a Bushido code," according to Roberts.



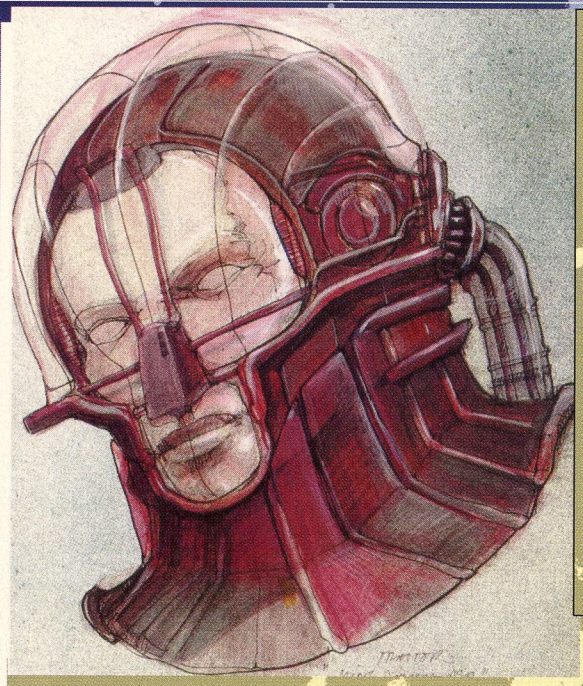
this whole element of Pilgrims which isn't in the game, and a bit of history. It gives it more shading and depth."

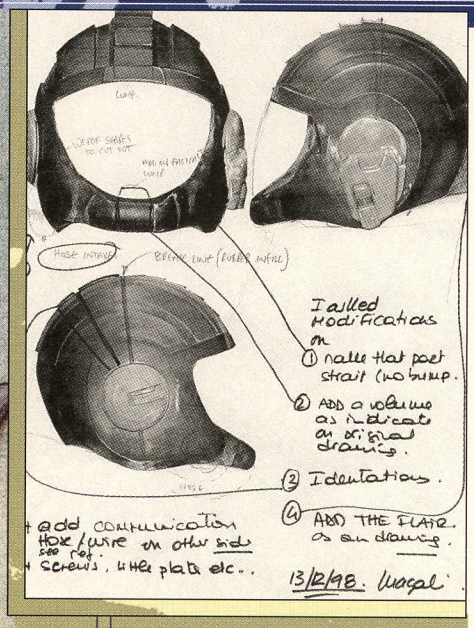
The friendship between Blair and Todd "Maniac" Marshall (Matt Lillard) is also explored further, says the director, who notes that they are two of the games' strongest characters. "When I first did the game, Blair was always just a straight hero. All the other Wingmen were characters I based on people I had known. One friend had always been a bit of a blowhard in a nice way—you don't get angry at him, you just roll your eyes at his antics. That was the Maniac character. It evolved from there, and he became one of the game's strongest personalities. When it came to the movie, I thought he would make the transition nicely. You've got Blair, who is more introverted, but obviously our hero, and then Maniac's this over-the-top loud buddy of his, but underneath it all he's actually a pretty good guy. They play off each other well."

Wing Commander also has its share of romance, such as the charged connection between Maniac and Rosie Forbes (Ginny Holder), and between Blair and Jeanette "Angel" Deveraux (Saffron Burrows), who is also Blair's superior. Blair's and Deveraux's troubled pasts lend further complexity to their relationship in the film. "Deveraux is a Wing Commander, and she must make some very hard decisions in that role," says Roberts. "She might have to make a life-or-death decision about a friend of hers. And that's tough, so she tends to shut herself off from other people. And Blair, with his Pilgrim heritage, tends to shut people off because of all the grief he receives over that. These are two people with their shields up who are breaking down those barriers—something that's always interesting in a movie."

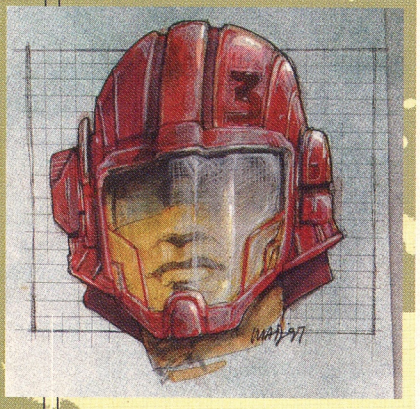
All human struggles must be put aside once the klaxons wail and the Kilrathi attack. Roberts wanted to familiarize his cast with military life, but, unlike such films as *Platoon*, *Saving Private Ryan* and *Starship Troopers*, he used a very civilized medium for his introduction. "I *didn't* send the actors off to boot camp," laughs Roberts. "I picked out a bunch of war movies that I thought would be good for them to watch, and also got some documentary footage of carrier landings and combat. I had them watch things like *Midway* and *Tora! Tora! Tora!*"

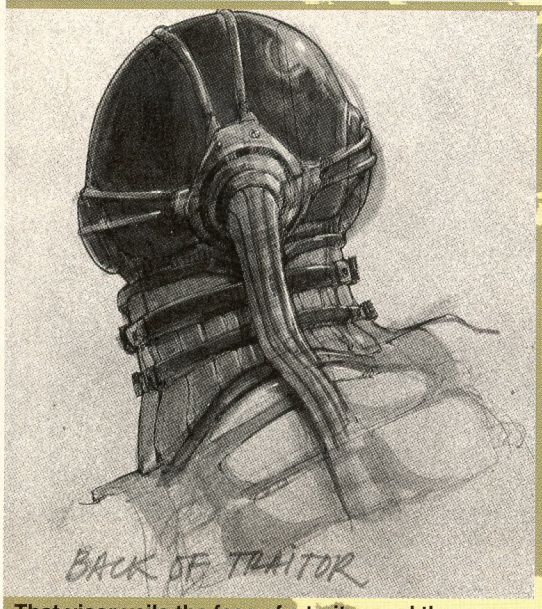
Roberts couldn't be more pleased with his character scenes, which turned out to be an almost effortless directing stint. "I got some character interaction between Blair and Maniac, or Blair and Deveraux," Roberts explains. "At the end of the shoot, I got in this crunch because some of the action scenes had taken longer than expected. I was a bit worried, because I *really* wanted to get these character scenes. I thought they were important to the story. We rehearsed them the day before, and I ended up shooting three scenes in a





The trappings of war, 27th-century style: The marine space helmet in artist's renderings.





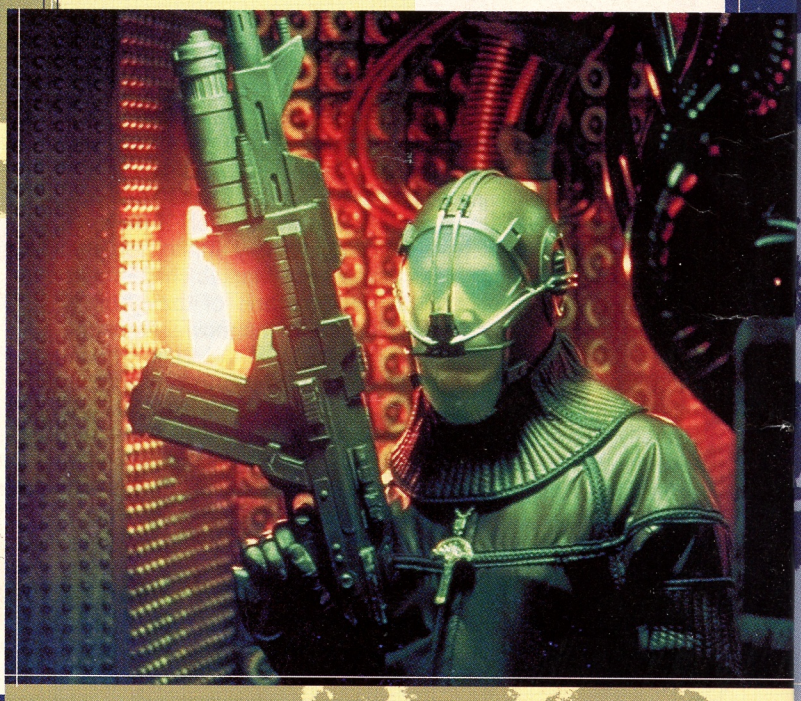
That visor veils the face of a traitor, and the cross around his neck (in photo below right) marks him as...a Pilgrim!

The film's key creative personnel include such talents as cinematographer Thierry (*The Fifth Element*) Arbogast and production designer Peter (*Titanic*) Lamont. Roberts maintains that he still had a big hand in designing the movie. "As director, you have a pretty strong sway in your film. Most directors come into a picture with their own clear vision," says Roberts. "If you're smart, you'll find department heads who share that vision. You hire a production designer because you can't design the production yourself, but you hopefully hire someone who resonates with your vision.

"When I first met with Peter, I pitched him my 'World War II/*Das Boot* in space' story and the look that I wanted—almost a retro-science fiction look that was evocative of WWII ships and planes. He totally responded to that, and once he signed on, his supervising art director showed up with a stack of books like *Jane's Fighting Ships*, and started going, 'We'll take this ship and do this to it. As a director, they just bring designs in to you, and

day, which was a really good rate, getting the performances that I wanted. If you gave me a lot more money, I wouldn't have shot it *any* differently."

Harder to shoot—not surprisingly, according to Roberts—were *Wing Commander*'s explosive action scenes. "For the past two games, we had shot a huge amount of live-action, but it was mostly dialogue and conversation, because the action was always handled by the game," he says. "So shooting the action scenes was difficult, because it was really the first time I had ever shot action. The first time you do it, it's a little difficult. You don't really have a frame of reference. You're not sure if you're getting the right stuff, getting too much or not enough. It was also a challenge because we weren't really flowing with cash, so we had to be careful about what the shots were going to be. We couldn't afford to mess around."



more often than not, it looks great. But the biggest thing I do is set the tone, and that applies to costumes and everything else, so that there is a cohesive feel to the movie."

The *Wing Commander* mythos combines aspects of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and elements from writers like Robert Heinlein, in addition to a boundless pool of SF lore. It's an ideal setting for Roberts, who admits he just can't get enough of a good space opera. "I'm a fan of 'hard' science fiction, and personally, I don't see enough movies with spaceships blowing up! That's kind of what *Wing Commander* is. If that's your gig, you'll want to see it. It's like a gritty war movie set in space. I felt that *Starship Troopers* was a bit too glossy or campy, and I wanted something a bit *rawer*. That's what *Wing Commander* was meant to be."

Roberts wasn't worried that too many special FX might overwhelm the story; he had his film's price tag, and his own good sense, to guide him. "That's always a problem for filmmakers," he admits. "But I have the advantage of *not* having a huge budget here. I did feel like *Lost in Space* had more FX than it needed, and there was gratuitous use of FX in places that didn't really add to the story. But my budget limits me. Ask me when I'm doing a much more expensive movie, and I'll probably have a different answer. But I go by the adage of 'less is more.'

"For instance, I feel like you have to have context. You don't know what a spectacular effect is if *every* single shot is a spectacular effect. In a Jerry Bruckheimer film [like *Armageddon*], every moment is bigger than the last. It's like listening to music really loud. You don't have any context for it being loud anymore because you don't have any quiet!"

Given the games' popularity, the *Wing Commander* film already has a built-in fan base. Roberts' fully-realized universe is a big hit with gaming fans, and that, he hopes, should translate into box office sales. "There are people on the Web who have ongoing role-playing games in the *Wing Commander* Universe, and there are *Wing Commander* novels," says Roberts. "I guess it just goes to show that if you create a universe people like, they'll want to spend time in it."

Wing Commander will certainly appeal to the die-hard Kilrathi-killers, but Roberts expects it will also draw plenty of non-*Wing Commander* fans as well. "When I make a game, I'm not even thinking about the millions of game players. I just try to make something that I like and want to play," he says. "It's the same here. I was really just trying to make a movie that I would like to see."

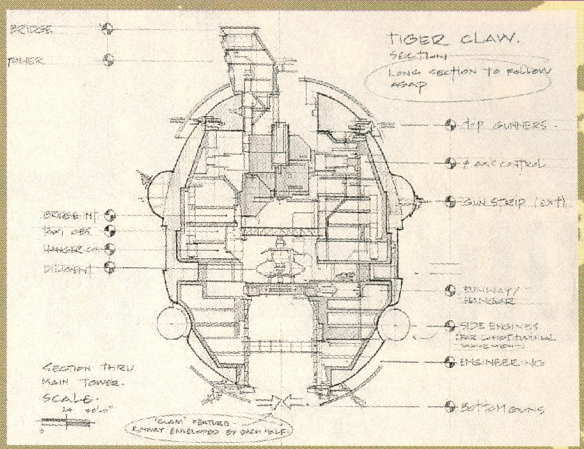
"MY TWO BIG PASSIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MOVIES AND GAMES."

Is there a message in *Wing Commander*? Perhaps, but director Roberts' primary purpose is to entertain. "There's nothing overt, but there may be a few messages—I'm not sure they were there intentionally. There's a whole thing to do with Pilgrims, and a pretty overt anti-racist message in it. Other than that, it's more meant to be a movie about future war and how these young pilots deal with it, and rise above adversity to win the day."

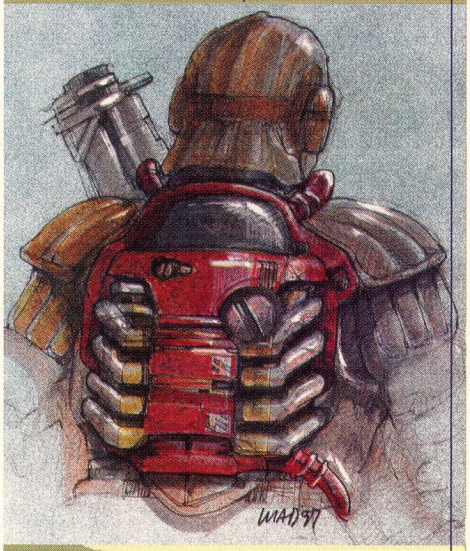
Roberts also views the combination of science fiction's speculative freedom and war's visceral action as a winning recipe for excitement. "I love science fiction as a genre, because you get to see a place or a time that you don't see every day," he observes. "You do whatever you want because there are no rules, just like you've been opened up into someone else's imagination. War itself is a very compelling subject matter, because it has drama, emotion, love, loss. So if you combine those two elements, I think you have a pretty powerful concoction. And it's a little safer, too, because if you're looking at a futuristic set-up, it's maybe not quite as raw as watching *Saving Private Ryan*, where you really *wouldn't* have liked to have been one of those poor guys on Omaha Beach. It's a little more black and white. In this genre, you can say, 'These are the bad guys and these are the good guys.' "

And what of *Wing Commander II—The Movie*? Considering all the *Wing Commander* games on the market, there is plenty of material for a sequel, but Roberts thinks he would like to take a different tack on another film. "There are a fair amount of rich storylines to be mined from the games, but I haven't really sat down and thought about that next time. I got in the rut of doing too many games, rolling right on to the next one, and sometimes it's nice to stretch your chops," says Roberts. "I would like to do something that's more adventure or sword-fighting based, a swashbuckler or fantasy story."

Roberts has more invested in *Wing Commander* than your average director. But given his games' success, it's easy to believe him when he says that *Wing Commander* has something in it for everyone. "If you love science fiction, and you like battles in space, you *must* see this film!" Chris Roberts enthuses. "Short of the next *Star Wars*, this is going to have the best stuff you've seen. That alone is going to make it worth the price of admission. We have a fun story and some great acting, and I hope that *Wing Commander* has a little more intelligence than you're used to seeing in science fiction movies."



With naval aircraft carriers as its template, the *Tiger Claw* is designed to patrol the vast ocean of outer space.



This combat pack holds all that a well-outfitted space warrior could need in the midst of a scrimmage!

PRODUCING WING COMMANDER

Todd Moyer

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

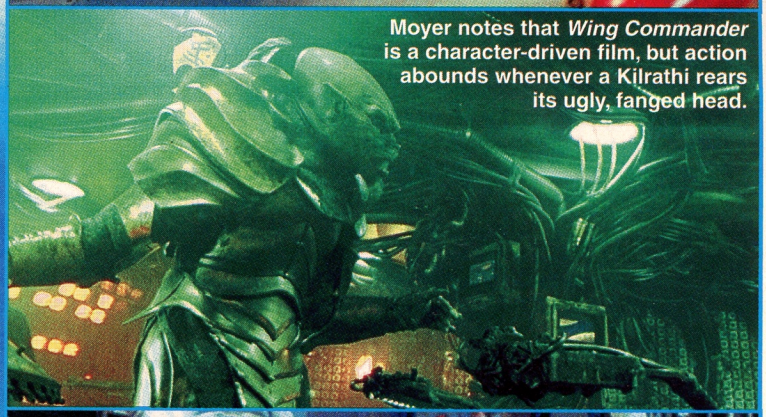
"IT'S REALLY A WAR FILM!"

Producer Todd Moyer's genre film credits are impressive, so it's no wonder that turning the space combat game *Wing Commander* into a movie sounded to him like the ideal project—especially since this will be his first solo production effort. "I had always been involved with a certain type of film," explains Moyer. "*Wing Commander* is the type of movie I like and know how to make. I'm starting my own company after splitting with my partner at Dark Horse, where we did comic book movies. This is *exactly* the type of movie I'm known for around town."

And just what are Moyer's other credits? As executive vice-president and producer for Dark Horse Entertainment, Moyer oversaw production of the company's first three—all genre—features: *The Mask*, *Timecop* and *Barb Wire*, as well as co-producing *Virus* for Universal. When he left Dark Horse, Moyer set his sights on making *Wing Commander*—and making this cinematic adventure his way.

"I wanted to make a movie outside of the studio system," says the producer. "I wanted to raise all the money so I could be in control of the process as much as possible. *Wing Commander* was the perfect project."

Producer Todd Moyer made *Wing Commander* his way—which meant eschewing big name stars and casting "cool young actors" like Freddie Prinze Jr.



Moyer notes that *Wing Commander* is a character-driven film, but action abounds whenever a Kilrathi rears its ugly, fanged head.

Shooting in the tiny country of Luxembourg, says Moyer, made such sets as the monstrous flight deck less expensive to construct.

In addition to fresh faces, *Wing Commander* also features grizzled screen veterans like Tchéky Karyo (pictured), Jürgen Prochnow and David Warner.

Game designer Chris Roberts certainly knows these cool cats better than anyone, which is one reason why Moyer was glad to have him direct.

Moyer began his star-crossed odyssey when he met the game's creator and film director Chris Roberts. "I met Chris when ICM [International Creative Management, the talent agency] introduced us. I thought the script he presented was really good. We hit it off, and I told him I would find a way to make the movie. We started production 10 months after we met, which is pretty amazing."

Wing Commander was a natural film property, and Moyer realized that his genre experience would be indispensable on this movie. Moyer also wanted to make a quality genre film at a fraction of what it would cost to produce it in America. "I liked the story, and I knew that I can get franchised properties made," says Moyer. "*Wing Commander* is also a challenge for me because I wanted to make the kind of movie that would cost $50 million in the U.S. for a much more reasonable price."

In addition to stretching his one-man production muscles, Moyer also wanted the chance to work with Roberts in his new role as director. Fortunately, transforming a game like *Wing Commander* into a movie, even for a first-time director and fledgling solo producer, was much easier than expected. "It may be a different medium, but *Wing Commander* is a *very* cinematic game," says the producer. "It is completely the antithesis of *Mortal Kombat*, because it's character-driven. *Wing Commander* has characters that you care about. There's a plot and a story that really works—it isn't just about people attacking each other. I'm not interested in the 'beating up' genre."

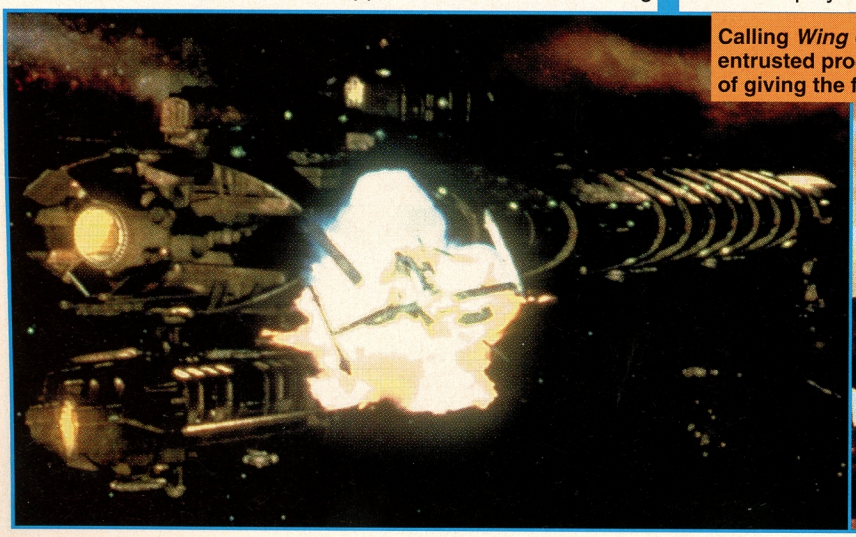
Leaving nothing to chance, Moyer assembled a team of experienced professionals to support Roberts in his directing debut. "For Chris, it isn't that big of a jump to go from the game to directing the movie, and I made sure that we had the best people we could possibly find to surround Chris as he was directing his first feature film," he says. "We got people like Peter Lamont—A-plus level department heads. That was something that I insisted upon with the director. In order to let Chris focus on directing as much as possible, you need to surround him with real quality people. Otherwise, there are too many other things to do."

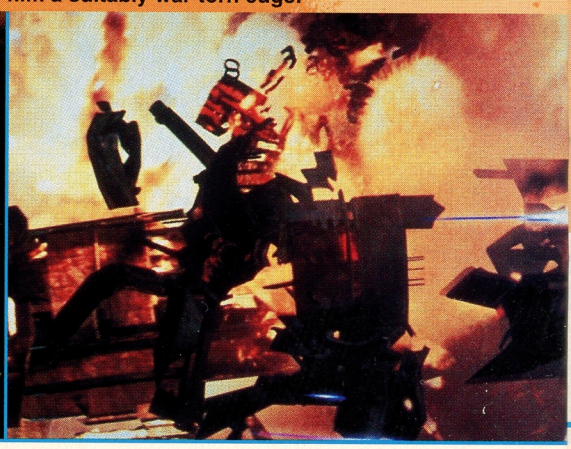
The tiny country of Luxembourg proved an effective home base for the *Wing Commander* film, affording numerous perks and resources to the production. "There was a big tax benefit," Moyer explains, "and I got a lot more for my money. For example, we wanted an enormous facility for the flight deck, bigger than any of the soundstages that we had. Well, we found an abandoned gun factory, and used the existing space as the flight deck."

After the eight-week shooting schedule, Moyer came to enjoy working in Luxembourg, which is opening itself up to more film production. "I'll be making another film there shortly. It's a great place to work," says Moyer.

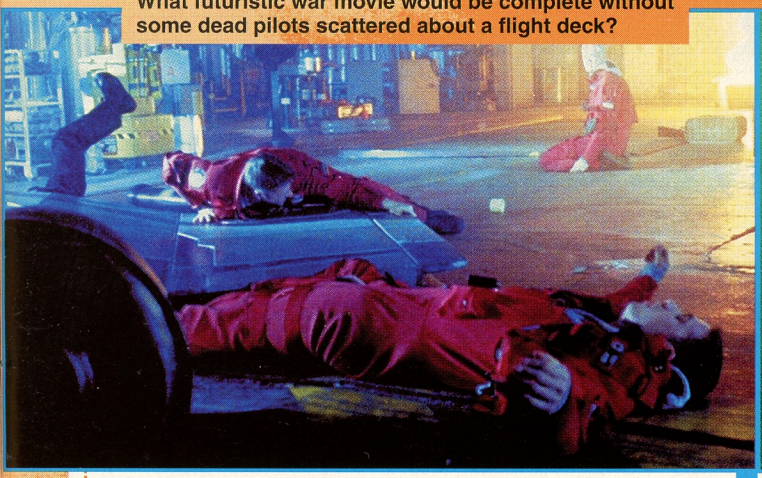
Casting the movie is always an exciting process, and Moyer explains that Freddie Prinze Jr. and the rest of *Wing Commander*'s young ensemble made the prospect even more thrilling. "We looked at many different people, but Freddie was great as Blair," says Moyer. "The whole cast came together because they were the best people for the roles, and Fox actively assisted us in casting the movie. We've put together an ideal call sheet for today's movies. It appears people aren't as interested in big stars. That's not what's driving the marketplace. Cool young actors drive the marketplace. Star Power *doesn't* guarantee an opening. People are very excited about Freddie and Matt Lillard and Saffron Burrows."

The younger stars are balanced by an experienced group of older actors including David Suchet, Jürgen Prochnow, Tchéky Karyo and David Warner. They were deliberately cast, according to Moyer, to provide some contrast to the younger actors. "That was the whole point of having these older actors," Moyer explains. "We wanted to have really strong performances in those roles. It was a conscious decision to employ real quality actors in the older roles, because





Calling *Wing Commander* "*Das Boot* in space," Moyer entrusted production designer Peter Lamont with the task of giving the film a suitably war-torn edge.



What futuristic war movie would be complete without some dead pilots scattered about a flight deck?

Director of photography Thierry Arbogast was pivotal in refining *Wing Commander*'s look—from the colorful Confederation ship sets, to the bilious Kilrathi interiors.

they play really well off the young actors.

"Jürgen Prochnow was deliberately chosen as an homage to *Das Boot*. Our movie is *Das Boot* in space, design-wise, it really is meant to be that—it's *Das Boot* meets *Top Gun*. So we put in Prochnow. The fun part is that David Suchet always plays the good guy and Prochnow always plays the villain. We got both of them to do *Wing Commander*, and I think it works very well."

The producer notes that they didn't use actors from the CD-ROM games, in part because they wanted to establish a new, fresh approach to the *Wing Commander* film, and also because the CD-ROM cast, which includes Mark Hamill and Tom Wilson, were too mature to convincingly appear as the film's younger counterparts. "When you make movies from comics, it's similar to making movies based on CD-ROM games," says Moyer. "You want to take the elements that work for the movie and start fresh. I consciously made the decision that we would keep some characters, and keep the world, but

"WING COMMANDER HAS CHARACTERS THAT YOU CARE ABOUT."

I wanted a totally new, fresh approach for the big screen."

Production designer Lamont, who won an Academy Award for his work on *Titanic*, needed little direction to come up with ideal *Wing Commander* designs, says Moyer, noting that Lamont remained completely faithful to their conception. "The vision that we had been talking about of *Das Boot* in space—we said it to Peter *once*. He came back two weeks later with incredible initial concept drawings of the ships. The designs are really going for that stylistically, no holds barred."

Though he is enthusiastic about all of the *Wing Commander* sets, the producer admits that his favorite is probably the flight deck, simply because it is so impressive. "It's the immense scope, with all the Rapiers sitting on the flight deck—it's just a tremendous set," says Moyer.

The most technically difficult scene in *Wing Commander*, according to the producer, is the "time slice" sequence. Used to depict a ship slipping through a time-space portal—the "jump point" from one part of the galaxy to another. This sophisticated effect makes its screen debut in *Wing Commander*. "We have updated something that was done, I believe rather poorly, in *Lost in Space*. When the actors jump through holes in space, like a black hole or quasar, the actors freeze and we use this rig to do 180 still frames going around a frozen object. It's very cool."

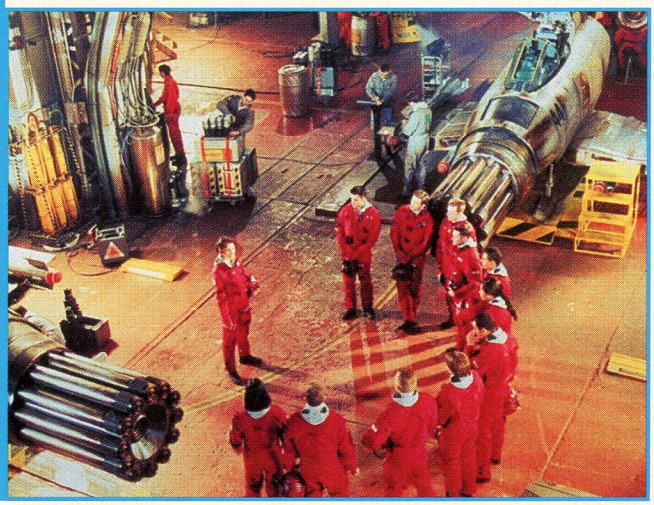
Equally impressive are *Wing Commander*'s various spaceships, many of which are fashioned after old fighters and WWII vessels. Moyers praises them, and their designers. "I was thrilled with our spaceships," says Moyer. "I'm very pleased and proud of the designers' work. That was an ongoing process. They come up with the designs and we keep on working with them to get something we like.

"My job is not to go in there and tell designers how to do their jobs," he says. "I look at it and make some suggestions and the rest falls under the director's purview. My job is getting the cast right, getting the script right. Doing a movie like this is like forming a company that you build up and dismantle at the end. It's a very labor-intensive job."

Director of photography Thierry Arbogast, acclaimed for his work on *The Fifth Element* among many other films, helped perfect the "war movie" style. "We have different lighting arrangements for different settings in *Wing Commander*, like battle sequences, and Thierry went with Chris Roberts' style," says Moyer. "It helps us to integrate the colorful look of our CGI work with the live action work seamlessly." The producer also praises costume designer Magali Guidasci for her contributions, and in particular, the spacesuits that she developed. "It's a very interesting design style and it works.

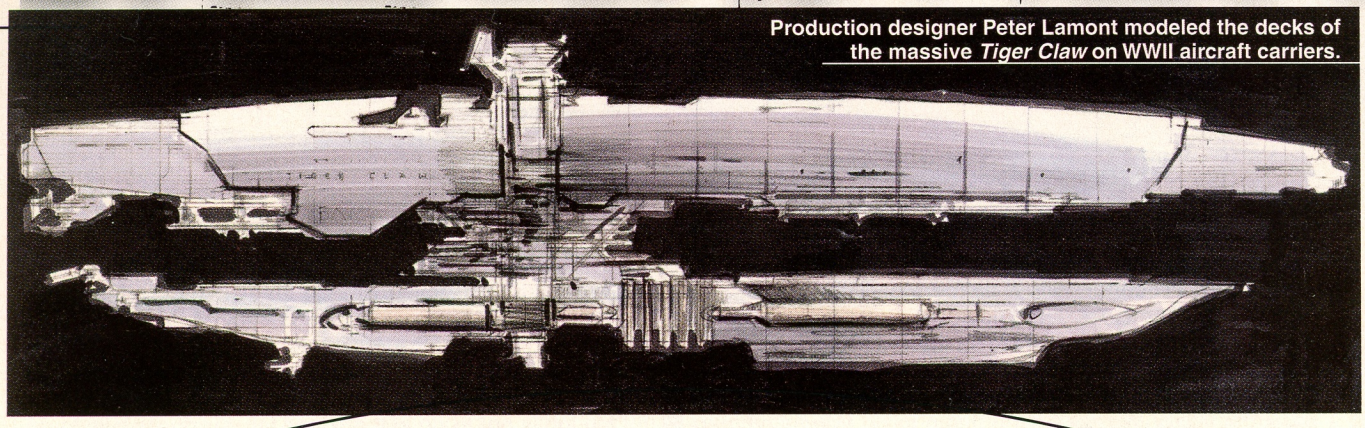
"We got incredible people," he adds. "We had people beyond the level that we really should have for this budget."

The producer hopes the time is right for a futuristic war movie like *Wing Commander*, asserting that it is like *nothing* audiences have ever seen. "I don't think I've ever seen a film like our movie," says Todd Moyer. "This isn't *Starship Troopers*. The beginning battle is Pearl Harbor and the end battle is the Battle of Midway. It's really a war film!"

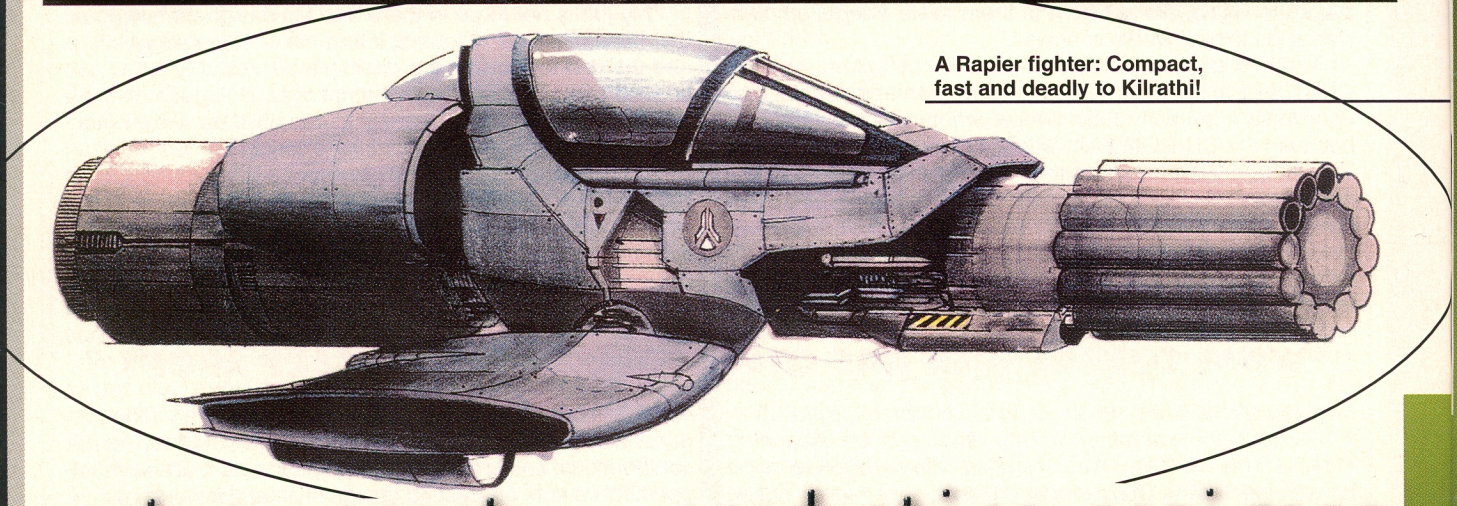


Atten-*shun*! Moyer remarks that *Wing Commander* may be a unique visual experience. "I don't think I've ever seen a film like our movie."

Designing Wing Commander

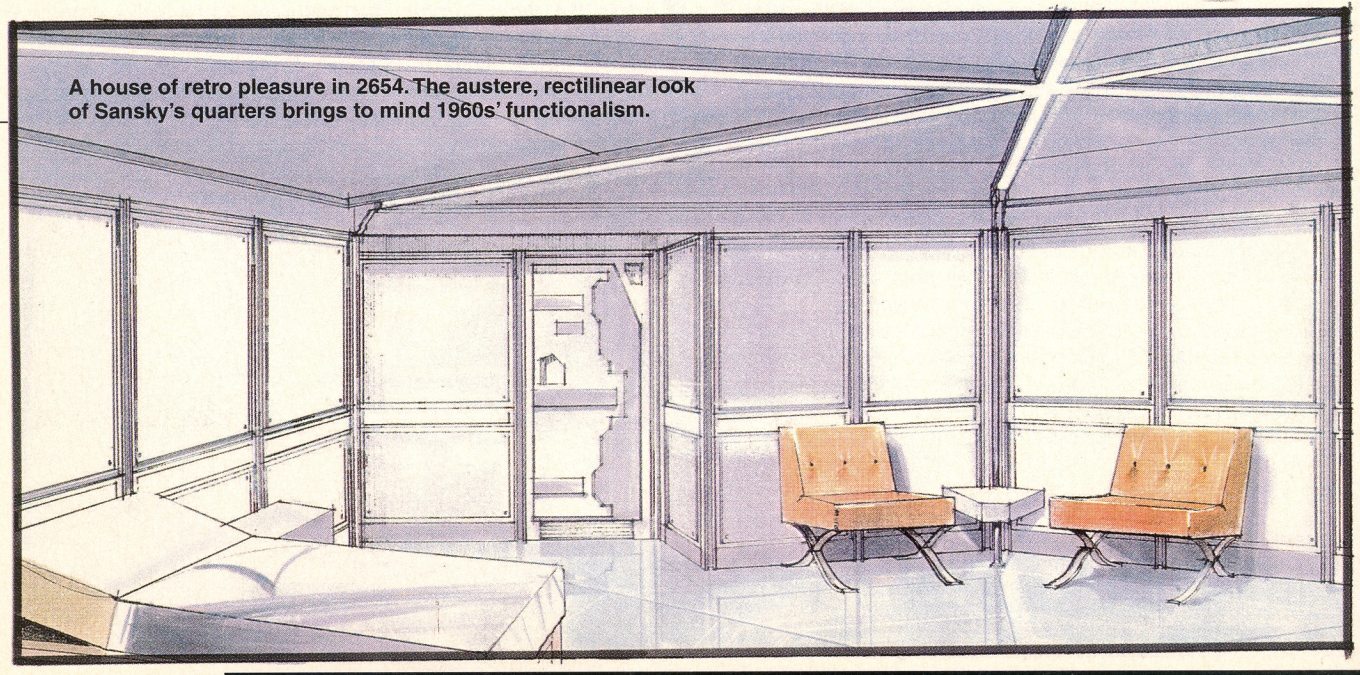


Production designer Peter Lamont modeled the decks of the massive *Tiger Claw* on WWII aircraft carriers.



A Rapier fighter: Compact, fast and deadly to Kilrathi!

peter Lamont — production designer



A house of retro pleasure in 2654. The austere, rectilinear look of Sansky's quarters brings to mind 1960s' functionalism.

"THESE HUGE SPACESHIPS ARE, IN EFFECT, BATTLESHIPS AND AIRCRAFT CARRIERS."

By JOE NAZZARO

When it comes to designing films on an epic scale, Peter Lamont is an expert. Whether it's the bleak, militaristic future of *ALIENS*, the globe-trotting glamour of *True Lies* and James Bond or the lavish historic spectacle of *Titanic*, Lamont has established himself as one of the most dynamic and sought-after production designers working today.

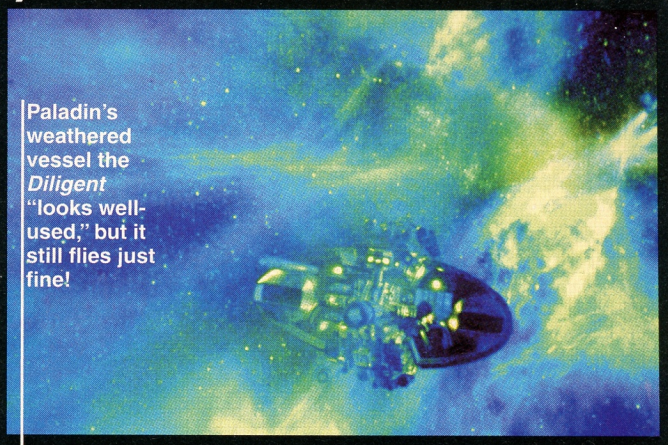
Not surprisingly, when the makers of *Wing Commander* needed someone to visualize their futuristic space war movie, they contacted Lamont. It couldn't have come at a better time for the designer, who had just completed his work on *Titanic* and was looking to do something significantly different next. "My agent called," notes Lamont, "and said she had gotten a call from Chris Roberts, who had designed the *Wing Commander* games. He was going to be in London and wanted to see if I would be interested in designing their picture.

"I went up one Sunday evening to meet Chris. We spoke for a couple of hours, and we hit it off. He could see where I was going [with *Wing Commander*]. Obviously the money wasn't the same as it was for *Titanic* or a Bond picture, but I felt with a little expertise and some help from my friends, perhaps we could do it."

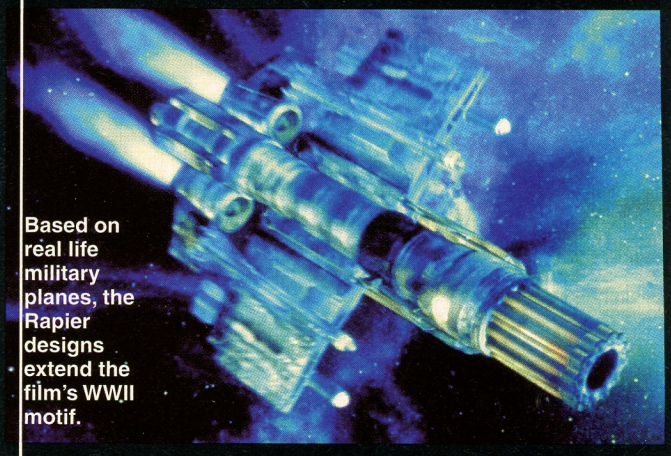
Lamont started pre-production work at England's Pinewood Studios. "We knew it was going to be shot in Luxembourg, but we were setting it up at Pinewood, and that helped enormously. I brought in my colleague Charles Lee—my supervising art director on my last two or three pictures—from America, and we went to Luxembourg to examine the facility. It was small for our needs, so we came back and planned out how we could attack this thing."

They began by ignoring most of the standard SF conventions in favor of creating a retro-futuristic look inspired by classic war films. "Chris' idea was that though the Kilrathi-Confederation conflict takes place in 2664, it closely resembles the American-Japanese war [that WWII theater of operations] brought up to date in space, with the Kilrathi as the Japanese and the Confederation as the Americans. These huge spaceships are, in effect, battleships and aircraft carriers. The bridges, especially the big bridges of the *Tiger Claw*, were modeled after aircraft carrier bridges, though with slight differences."

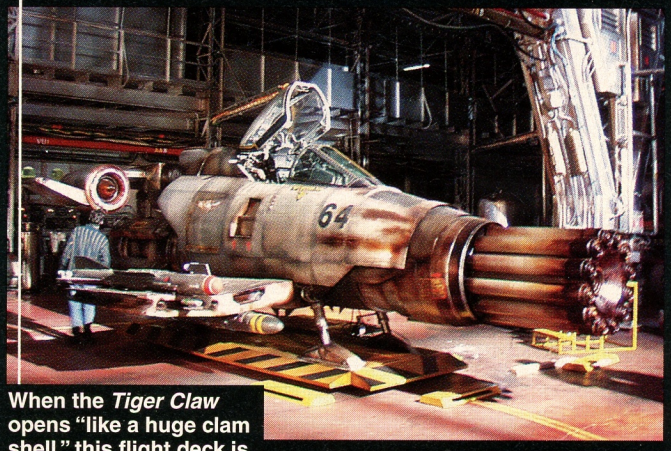
Besides the retro-look, Lamont further distanced himself from conventional SF by *not* looking to previous genre films as inspirations. "You tend to recall what other



Paladin's weathered vessel the *Diligent* "looks well-used," but it still flies just fine!

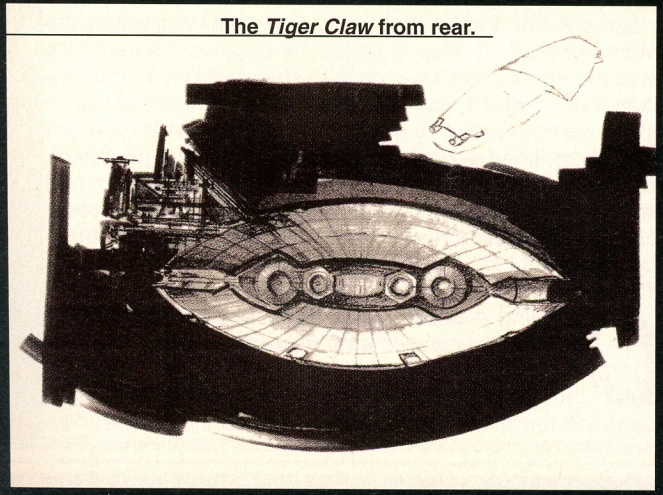


Based on real life military planes, the Rapier designs extend the film's WWII motif.

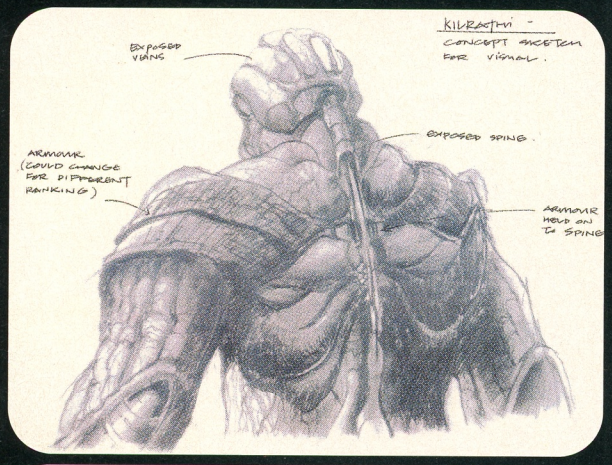


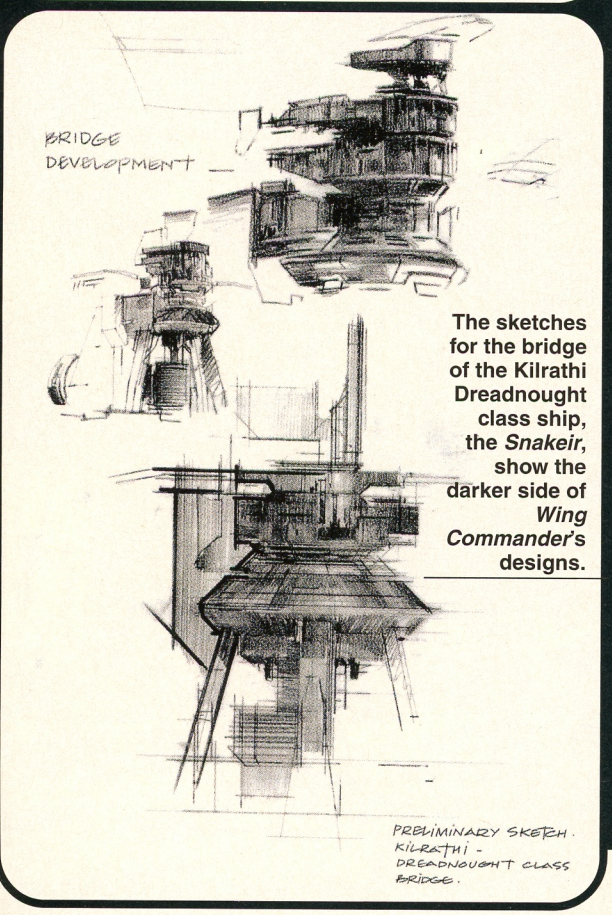
When the *Tiger Claw* opens "like a huge clam shell," this flight deck is revealed to swallow up and disgorge Rapiers.

The *Tiger Claw* from rear.



Is this how Morris the cat would look on steroids? The menacing Kilrathi give cuddly kitties a whole new image.





The sketches for the bridge of the Kilrathi Dreadnought class ship, the *Snakeir*, show the darker side of *Wing Commander*'s designs.

people have done, like the Imperial Star Destroyer opening in *Star Wars*—there will never be an original shot like that again, so we were very careful to keep away from what anybody else had done. We wanted to be completely different. It's easy to think, 'Oh yeah, this is a great idea!' but suddenly you find you've picked up on one of the *Star Wars* things. We obviously had all these books in the office, and I've got all these pictures at home, but I tried to keep away from them as much as possible.

"One of the things I did—and many people thought I was absolutely balmy to do it—was I kept all the ceilings very low and crowded with pipes and other things. If you saw the junk we bought from the plastics people, scrap merchants, all over, it was amazing. The property fellow did a great job with the piping, so when you look through a view finder, you get that almost claustrophobic effect. We *didn't* want the *U.S.S. Enterprise*—that big, open, modernistic bridge—we wanted to keep it highly functional and in line with science fiction, but with the flavor of various battleship bridges. The controls are obviously far different; we brought them up to date."

Unlike the *Wing Commander* CD-ROMs, which filmed actors before a blue screen and added sets via CGI during post-production, the *Wing Commander* film used real sets significantly more often. "Chris scored on his CD-ROMs," notes Lamont, "because he filmed the live action along with a skeletal set in real time, and had the rest [generated later through CGI]. We wanted to shoot with more complete sets because of the demands of film. Post-production can be quite critical, especially with digital FX, and it's better to see your shots today than to wait for them down the line, when you could be doing things then that you *can't* do live."

Lamont used many tricks he had learned on other films to build the various ship interiors, creating richly detailed sets on a relatively modest budget. At one point, he even fell back on a bit of cinematic sleight-of-hand used in a certain doomed ocean liner film to add some titanic dimension to *Wing Commander*'s spaceships. "A couple of concept artists and I came up with some ideas for the *Tiger Claw*'s appearance. It doesn't have an exposed flight deck, for example. It's like a huge clam shell that opens up to launch and receive Rapiers. We did have a bit of a problem in Luxembourg as we didn't really have the width to fully extend our flight deck, so we shot half the frame and then flopped it, doubling the deck's size in effect."

Space was limited in Luxembourg, but Lamont continuously tried to push the size of his sets. "When we did the *Tiger Claw* bridge, I made it big enough that we would always shoot within the confines of the set. We were widening walls, and we had an artist who did some great nebulae translights for us. They could be lit from behind and they looked pretty wonderful. We tried as much as possible to not use green screen, although sometimes we obviously did have to use it. Also, when we did the *Tiger Claw*'s flight deck, we used this strange old factory that had been all cleared out. There were these huge stanchions that held the roof up, so we used a lot of dressing [to cover them up]. The prop people did a wonderful job transforming this place from a factory into a functioning flight deck."

The designer also came up with an ingenious idea for building the Rapier fighters, with a little conventional assistance. "I have a friend who's in the aircraft disposal business," Lamont explains, "and he acquired 10 Lightning aircraft for us. We were fortunate enough to pick them up cheaply. The complete cockpits, the ejector seats, the controls—everything was there. The Lightnings became the model for our Rapier fighters."

Lamont discovered that using real planes reduced the amount of work needed to refine the Rapiers' interiors. "It's very time-consuming if you have to start creating instrumentation, but we had these 10 Lightnings, so we just cut one in half so we could actually get into the cockpit. When you see six of them lined up with their canopies raised, they look wonderful. The people from Digital Anvil came over and carefully measured and photographed them, so they could get the textures and the shadows right when they started to do their digital FX."

Creating different looking quarters for each of the *Tiger Claw* crew members was easier to manage, as the same sets were recycled several times during the course of filming. "Again, I was well-rehearsed for this from doing *ALIENS*," notes Lamont. "We

did Ripley's suite on Gateway all in a modular form, and I remember Jim Cameron saying to me, 'We've always talked about money, so [if you had more], what would you do differently?' and I said the concept was absolutely perfect—the only thing I might have spent more money on, if I had had it, was to use different trims, just those little details that make a thing look a little better. On the *Tiger Claw*, we designed several cabins, and again, I made them in a modular style, so by swapping things, you could add and subtract and make the same cabin look entirely different."

Providing a sharp contrast to *Wing Commander*'s more militaristic vessels is the ramshackle ship named the *Diligent*. "It's a merchantman vessel, the one that Paladin [Tchéky Karyo] commands. We were trying to give it an almost *Millennium Falcon* look, but on a smaller scale. I wanted the whole thing to look functional, as if it had been up there for ages and was well-used. When you create these interiors, it's very easy to make them look too plain, and I wanted them to look highly detailed. There was a ridiculous galley [on the *Diligent*], so we had gotten part of an old aircraft galley, which had all those aluminum things and seats in the background, and that gave the galley a bit of authenticity. It looks well-used, rather than being brand new, and once the digital work is put in, it really works. We just did a little bit of the *Diligent* exterior, and the digital boys did a great job with the rest. When you start to zoom in from afar and you see the ship coming towards you, and then you go straight through the front view port into the interior, it's quite amazing."

In addition to the Confederation ships, Lamont also had to come up with a design concept for the alien Kilrathi, *Wing Commander*'s cat-like antagonists. "As the plot evolved, they became more bionic, or bio-mechanical, though not as much as H.R. Giger's stuff. These were different creatures, not oxygen breathers; they lived in an atmosphere of green mist. Their controls aren't screens but long slits of moving lights which look almost cat-like."

Although the word "bio-mechanical" has been used over the years to describe countless *ALIEN* knock-offs, Lamont was careful not to fall into that trap with the Kilrathi sets. "Look at Giger's work, like the early *ALIEN*, and you'll find a lot of repetition [in other films]. We wanted to keep away from that. These ship interiors looked almost like entrails, and the set decorators had a great time creating it."

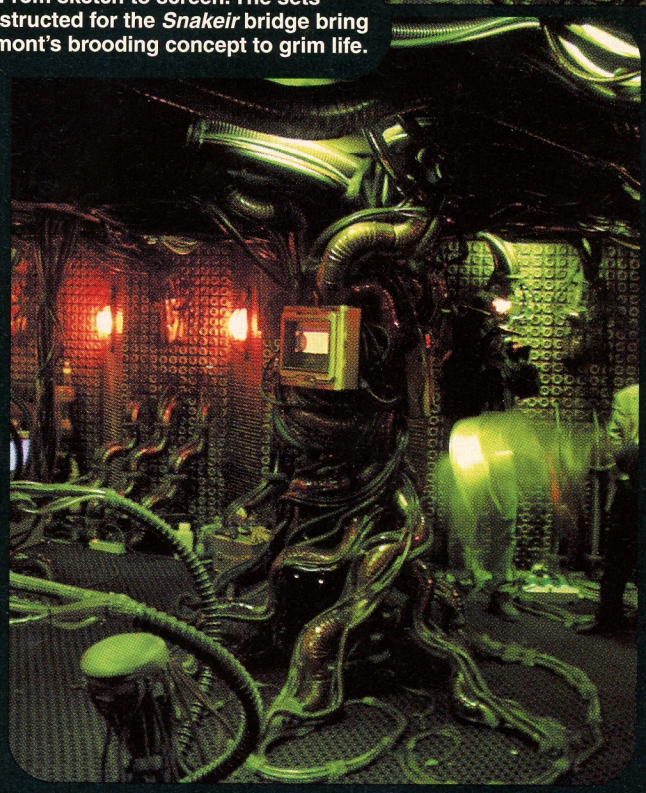
So many different sets were required over the course of shooting, and one of Lamont's biggest logistical challenges was planning which sets were needed when and juggling his studio space to accommodate them. "The big problem was trying to build, shoot and strike on the one set. Sometimes, we had two or three units shooting at the same time because it was such a demanding schedule, but it worked pretty well."

With his work on the futuristic world of the Confederation now finished, Peter Lamont has returned to the latest James Bond adventure, *The World Is Not Enough*. Looking back at *Wing Commander*, the Oscar-winning designer is very pleased with the way it has turned out. "Many of these pictures go to Luxembourg because it's a reasonably cheap place to work, and there are tax incentives, but my whole premise for working on the picture was to do the *best* job that I can. I think we got a look they didn't expect.

"I liked the people, and I like Chris very much. Hopefully, he'll do another picture and I can help him again. *Wing Commander* has a fresh look. That's what I like about this job, but every job is different and you tackle each in a different way."

"MY WHOLE PREMISE FOR WORKING ON THE PICTURE WAS TO DO THE BEST JOB THAT I CAN."

From sketch to screen. The sets constructed for the *Snakeir* bridge bring Lamont's brooding concept to grim life.



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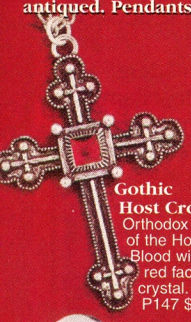
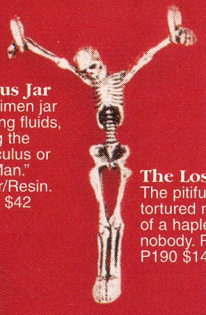


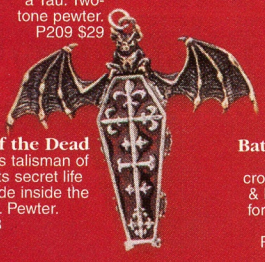
Gothic Host Cross
Orthodox cross of the Holy Blood with ruby red faceted crystal. Pewter. P147 $35

Humunculus Jar
Caged specimen jar of preserving fluids, containing the Humumculus or "Little Man." Pewter/Resin. P219 $42



The Lost Soul
The pitiful tortured remains of a hapless nobody. Pewter. P190 $14

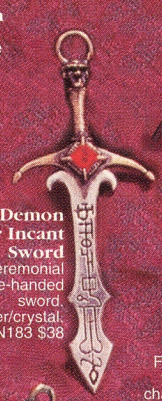
Tau Coffin
Gothic horror in the form of a Tau. Two-tone pewter. P209 $29



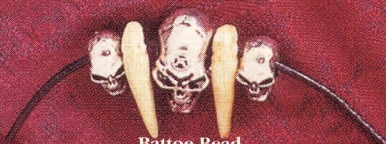
Ankh of the Dead
Vampyre's talisman of eternity, its secret life blood blade inside the scabbard. Pewter. P221 $38

Batscale Cross
Ornate gothic cross with purple & black crystals, formed of a host of silver bats. Pewter/crystal. P214 $22

Osirian Power Ankh
Large polished pewter ankh mounting backbone of Osiris. N199 $42

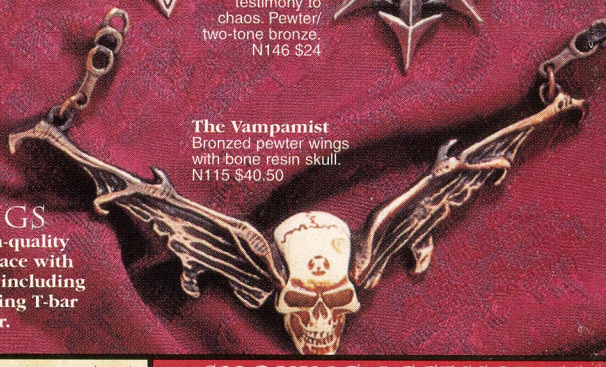


Demon Killer Incant Sword
Ceremonial double-handed sword. Pewter/crystal. N183 $38



Battoe Bead
Trophies of the predator and slaughterer. Pewter/resin. N143 $26

Chaostar
Forged metal testimony to chaos. Pewter/two-tone bronze. N146 $24



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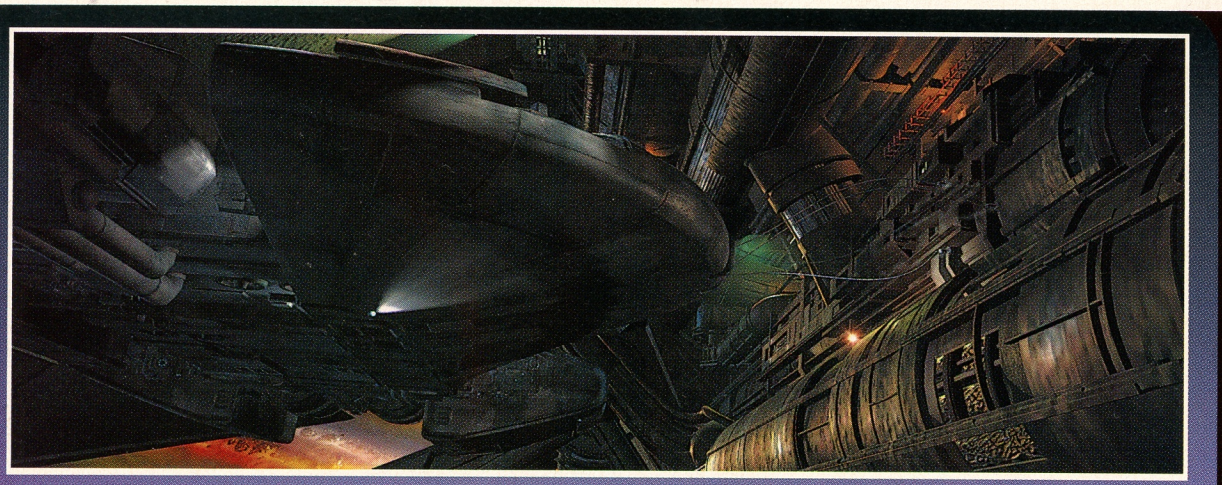


CHRIS BROWN—visual FX supervisor

Visual FX Supervisor Chris Brown goes digital over *Wing Commander*'s explosive action. It's all CGI!

By JOE NAZZARO

One of the biggest challenges with any special FX-intensive science fiction film is to make sure all the elements are available from the production phase for assembly during post-production. On *Wing Commander*, much of that responsibility fell to visual FX supervisor Chris Brown. Not only was Brown on hand throughout principal photography in Luxembourg, he also acted as the film's second unit director, which meant he was able to make sure that his visual FX team would have all the elements they needed to put together their elaborate cinematic jigsaw puzzle.

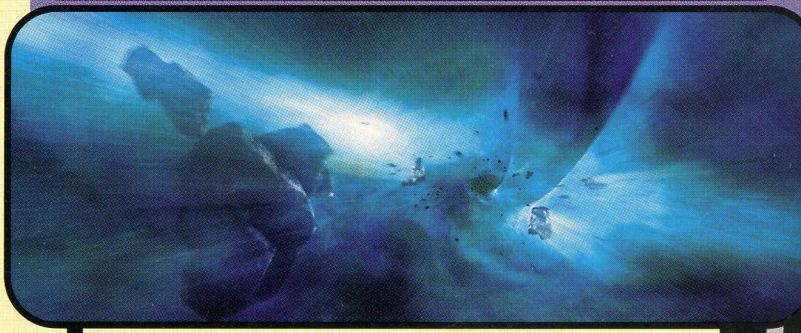
"With so many of my past movies," explains Brown, "we were given elements that somebody else had shot for us, and we had to fix those elements. So in this instance, I shot all of those elements and then took them to the guys saying, 'OK, I'm sorry about this part here, but this part works!' I could finally tune in to where we were going, which was good because the guys had prepared animatics of all the dogfight sequences before we started shooting, so by the time we actually got on stage and I put the actors up in the cockpit, I knew where we needed to cut, how long the shot needed to last and how wide we could go."

Having made the bold decision to go fully digital with the *Wing Commander* FX, Brown quickly concedes that overcoming certain obstacles was a challenge. Chief among them were the CGI pyrotechnics, which, if poorly handled, can quickly destroy a film's illusion of reality. "There were definitely things that I was concerned about going into the project, until we stumbled onto a great treasure trove of digital pyro files. We had planned to do a pyro shoot specifically for this film, but because the pyros we found through this one CD-ROM were working so well, we opted to *not* do it. One of our R & D artists, Rodney Burnett, worked and manipulated the pyros. He did a wonderful job, so we opted to not shoot a practical pyro. I was so pleased by that, because it's one of the issues that you're always concerned with when you decide to go fully digital, and not many people go fully digital right now. I've been talking with people who are still convinced that model shoots are the way to go. But we developed a look and a style in conjunction with director/creator Chris Roberts that really helped us surmount the digital look problem.

"The most common comment I get when we show people the work is, 'Wow, that model looks spectacular! You guys did a really nice job,' and I say, 'Well, it is a model, but it's a *digital* model.' They say, 'No way. It *can't* be!' and I promise you,

The *Tiger Claw* floats above Earth's atmosphere, as a riveting computer-animated battle prepares to unfold.

Digital Anvil's animators worked until the last moment to create stunning graphics like these.



I'm not saying it to fake you out—it was done digitally. People are still convinced that some of the work we did is model work, so that's why we're really pushing it, because I'm excited about being able to dispense with many of the conventions that straightforward model shooting forces you to follow."

According to Brown, a conscious decision was made to give *Wing Commander* a fast-moving, dynamic look. "We have ships that fly right into your face or above and below camera," he says. "We racked so tight into some of these spacecraft, and you could never do that with a standard model shoot because of problems with the marionette rig or the motion control camera magazine not allowing you to get as tight as you wanted. Those problems all disappeared when we made the full digital choice.

"Also to that end, we studied a lot of aerial photography, and actually, the biggest influence for us was *Top Gun*, believe it or not, which has some absolutely fantastic aerial dogfight photography. What we did was really incorporate that into our early animatic art, our digital storyboarding level, so that the camera is *not* always perfectly on line with the model. In fact, what we tried to do with the animatic work was we have the camera constantly catching up with the digital models, so it really has that *human* quality to the camera work."

In addition to his initial duties as the film's visual FX supervisor, Brown was also given the formidable task of overseeing the second unit, which ended up responsible for 380 set-ups, an impressive number, especially when compared to the 640 main unit set-ups. "I did all of the principals in the cockpits for all of the dogfight sequences, so it was very involved. Chris and I had talked about it beforehand, but neither of us figured out how much work there would be to do.

"Chris really wanted to do all of the cockpit work with the four principals himself, and I don't blame him, but when we started to realize just how big the show had become, he

Pilot Christopher Blair (Freddie Prinze Jr.) gets set for space battle, but a motion control-based simulator will do the flying for him.

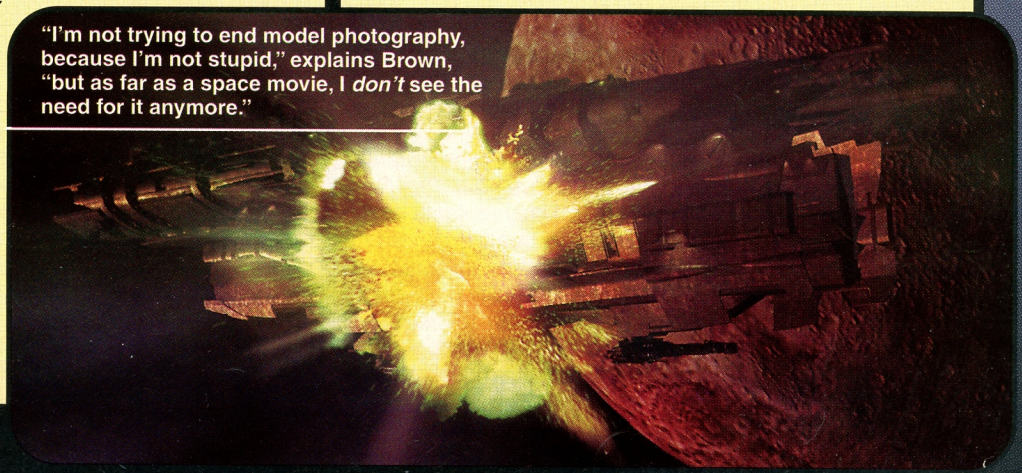
said, 'We had better get in there and start shooting that.' So I willingly said absolutely. Otherwise, I had planned on just doing some minor plate work and element work for him, but he was very gracious in letting me take control of it, and we're both really pleased with the results. We had a 48-day shoot, and I started doing pick-ups and inserts as early as the second week, and then I just ran for the rest of the show."

Like any good second-unit director, Brown knew that his shots would have to match Roberts' main unit scenes, so when all the elements were finally combined, the resulting film would be seamless in tone and style. "By the time we got to the cockpit work, we were already about three to four weeks in, which was good. Chris also had had a nice rehearsal period with the cast, so when they came on to my set, these guys had their characters down. That really made a big difference in continuity. When they came in and hopped in the cockpit, I would take them on a quick joy ride, because the motion control-based simulator we used was just fantastic. It was the same one used for the taxi cab in *The Fifth Element* and the guys who were running it were just terrific. The cast really got into the whole feeling of flying and manipulating these jets, and it really worked out well for us."

Faced with the daunting task of finishing 300 visual FX shots, the animators at Digital Anvil were literally working right down to the wire. "A little less than halfway through, we started to get worried about the time constraints, and we still had about three sequences that had not even been started since the original animatics. We started to ask, 'OK, what are the money sequences in the film?' so we sat down and decided that. Also, I had worked with most of these guys now for three or four projects, and what they did at the very end of the film just blew me away. The quality on the last few sequences absolutely matched the quality of the film's beginning sequences. It was just pure effort. These guys are nothing but complete professionals, and obviously everyone has such pride in their work. When we started to see the final product, we were stunned. It wasn't that we didn't think they could do it, but it was just so good to see that effort going in there."

Brown's personal highlights from *Wing Commander* include, needless to say, some of the most smashing scenes in the film. "As far as I'm concerned, it's the dogfight sequences," he unhesitatingly declares. "Those are the sequences that I spent the most time working out with Chris and Tom Dadras. We were *really* striving for this combat, hand-held camera look. I'm so pleased with the way that stuff worked. I think that's what audiences are going to react to the most. The work feels dynamic. It feels like you're in there. What's ironic is that the video games are all loosely based on flight simulators and that kind of feel—and even though we didn't claim they were our biggest influences—they ended up being very big influences for us."

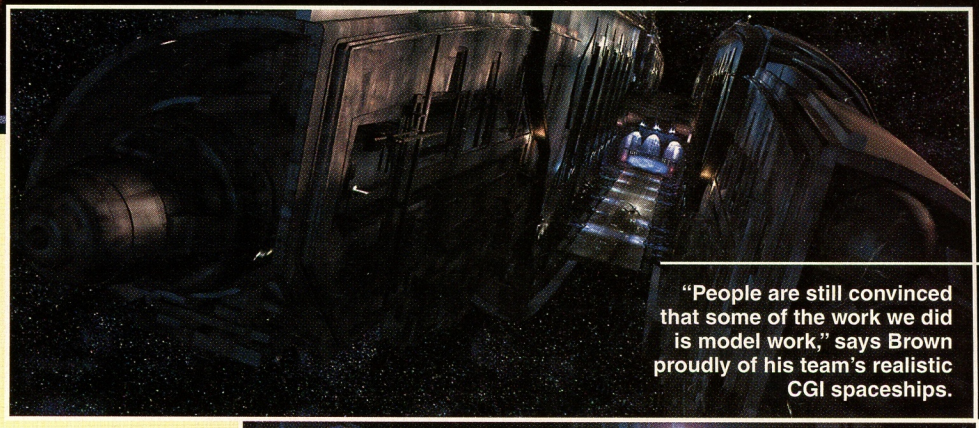
From a technical perspective, Brown hopes that *Wing Commander* will finally demonstrate to the industry that digital FX have come of age. "We've been talking with a director who worked on all three original *Star Wars* films as well as *The Phantom Menace*, and he was convinced that model photography was the *only* way to go. But once he saw the work we had done on *Wing Commander*, he immediately said, 'Forget models, we're going to go fully digital on all these projects.' So being able to convince a hard-liner like that, to me, that's a step in the right direction. Full digi-



"I'm not trying to end model photography, because I'm not stupid," explains Brown, "but as far as a space movie, I *don't* see the need for it anymore."

Digital pyrotechnic shots—like this one of the destruction of a Kilrathi Dreadnought—posed the most difficult challenge for the FX team.

"WE WERE REALLY STRIVING FOR THIS COMBAT, HAND-HELD CAMERA LOOK."



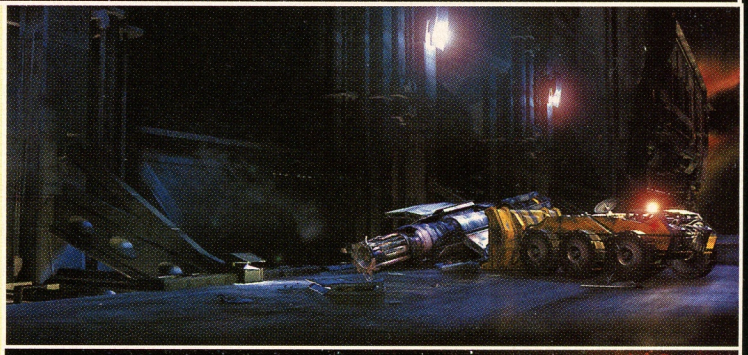
"People are still convinced that some of the work we did is model work," says Brown proudly of his team's realistic CGI spaceships.

tal work *is* the way to go."

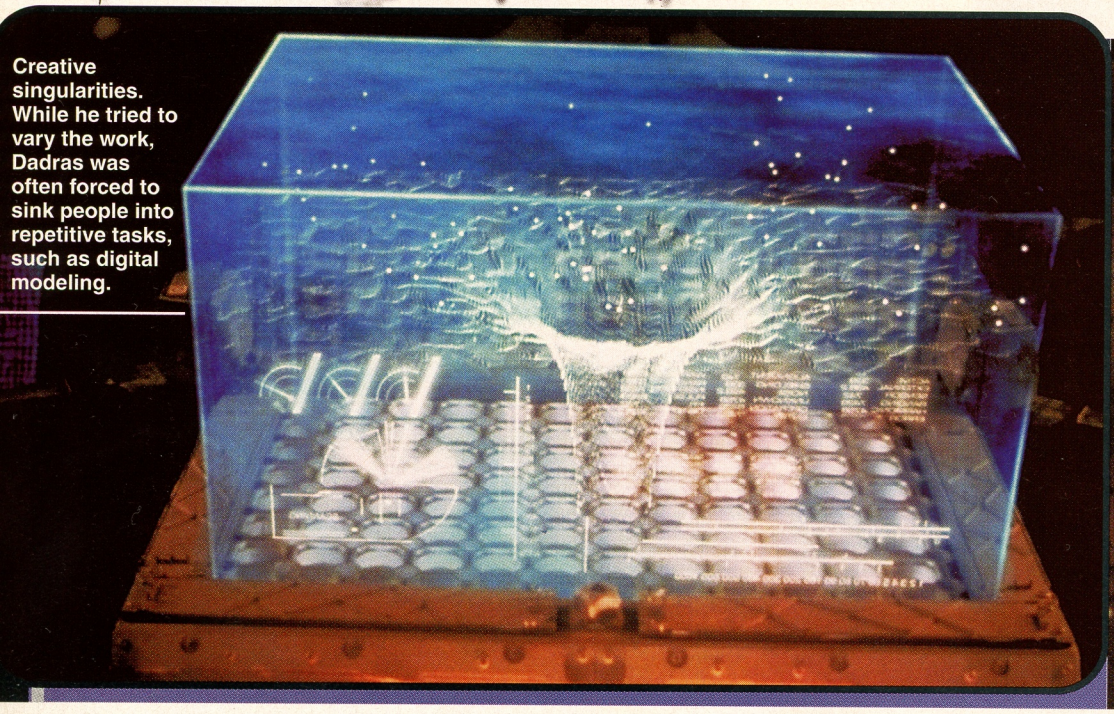
The FX maestro has no illusions about CGI's supremacy, however, or its place in the industry. "I'm not trying to end model photography, because I'm not stupid and I know that it definitely has its place in certain work, but as far as a space movie, I *don't* see the need for it anymore. I'm very pleased with the quality and the look that we got."

Despite the number of big-budget space operas unleashed in recent years, Chris Brown believes that *Wing Commander* will still offer moviegoers some interesting surprises. "It's hard to put your finger on it, but the thing the public never really understands is that projects are done at various budgets. Ours is done on a very *minuscule* budget compared to what an FX movie is normally done for, but unfortunately the audience never gets to really know the cost or time it takes to get these movies done unless they research it or are fascinated by that information. What happens is that we go up against $80 million movies, and it's almost unfair to try and compare a low-budget SF film against high-budget SF.

"I'm pleased that we have a really high-quality look to this film for the money that we had. There's a good-looking digital style to this film. We have great aerial combat sequences, and a pretty convincing story, so those are the things that will keep the film in theaters."



VISUALIZING WING COMMANDER



Creative singularities. While he tried to vary the work, Dadras was often forced to sink people into repetitive tasks, such as digital modeling.

TOM DADRAS—CO-VISUAL FX SUPERVISOR

By JOE NAZZARO

When Tom Dadras first signed on to the *Wing Commander* visual FX team, he had no idea that his duties would increase so dramatically. "Basically, as time went on, more responsibility fell into my lap," Dadras explains, "which is how my credit ended up being upgraded. I started out on the project as digital FX supervisor with Chris Brown as visual FX supervisor. We were both planning to be on set just focusing on the visual FX. But Chris ended up taking on the responsibility of second unit director as well, so that definitely took over much of his time, in addition to whatever green screen or visual FX needs were part of second unit.

"I took over the supervision of the first unit, making sure the green screens were all shot properly, that there was minimal if any green spill which would make it more difficult to composite. I looked at what was being shot to determine what could be a potential problem down the road. I also flagged everything we were going to need later on, because once everything was wrapped up and done, it would be difficult to get another plate or an additional element added."

Long before shooting began on *Wing Commander*, Dadras and the FX team had already done research and development work on the project, as well as creating "animatics" which would eventually be used as guides for the digital sequences. "A great amount of early development work went into how certain things looked," Dadras notes, "whether it was the heads-up displays or the thermal imaging POV devices—when the good guys are on the alien ship, they have this special thermal imager which we ended up not using. We were trying everything out, and at the same time, the art department in Pinewood Studios was designing all the sets and ships. They would create designs, sketches, drawings and kit-like mini-models, send them over to us, and then our modelers would build very time-consuming, texture-rich digital models."

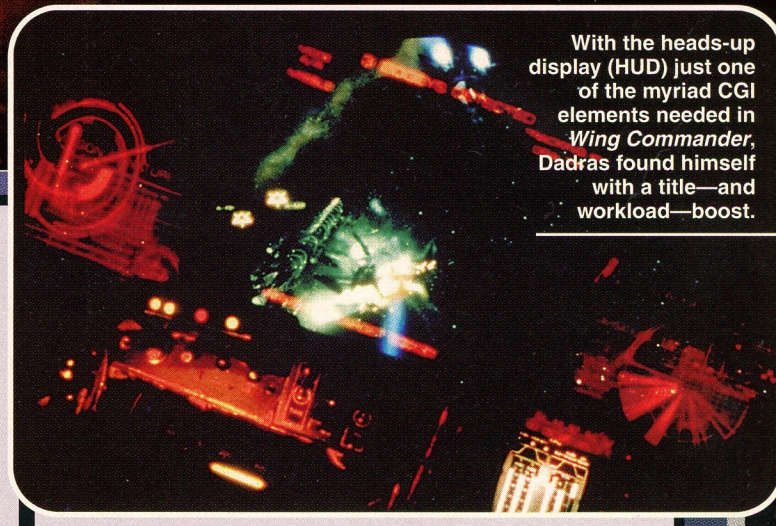
One of *Wing Commander*'s greatest CGI challenges was creating big budget FX with half the money and design staff—but this shot hints at the Digital Anvil team's success.

Dadras was on hand through principal photography in Luxembourg, collecting all the technical information for Digital Anvil's CGI animators—from lens sizes to tilt angles to distance of camera travel. He was also in almost constant contact with the Texas shop. "There was a time difference there, so it was a little bit difficult, but it ended up working because Chris Brown began focusing on second unit much more. I ended up taking on more of the visual FX supervising responsibilities on the main unit.

"Typically, I would spend at least half my time focusing on what was going on back in Austin. That was very difficult," he admits, "because all three of us—the director [Chris Roberts], Chris Brown and I—were buried with work in Luxembourg. We couldn't give 100 percent of our attention to the work being done in Austin.

"We had 12-hour shoot days, six days a week, plus we

The Charybdis jump point lies ahead of the *Tiger Claw*, compliments of Co-Visual FX Supervisor Tom Dadras and his team's innovative CGI work.



With the heads-up display (HUD) just one of the myriad CGI elements needed in *Wing Commander*, Dadras found himself with a title—and workload—boost.

would typically end up going through dailies after everybody else had left. Most of the time, after the shoot day or during our lunch break, we would go through daily animatics tapes from Texas, and try to respond with comments so they could proceed."

The project took a big step, however, by making the film's effects all-digital—especially since its relatively modest budget limited the number of 3-D artists the production could hire. "It was very difficult," says Dadras, "because either approach was problematic. We couldn't say, 'OK, each person gets 10 or 15 shots, and you guys will do *everything* in each shot.' Likewise, we couldn't have a match-move department or a lighting department; we really couldn't departmentalize things because we didn't have enough people. We could have used a whole crew of people just doing animatics or animation, but we couldn't just dedicate people to that, because the same people doing animatics were also doing five other tasks.

"A place like ILM can afford to do the factory approach, because they have enough people for a modeling department, a match-move department, a compositing department—they have enough people to set each person to the same task, and that's very efficient in the sense that the people working on specific tasks become very good at them."

Early on, Dadras realized that the only way to streamline production would be a hybrid approach, where several animators under the leadership of a "sequence supervisor" would pool their respective talents to fashion a single FX sequence.

"We used an approach on smaller projects at Boss Film where each person got a shot or several shots and they worked on those shots, pretty much doing everything in that shot, which is obviously difficult, because each person needs to be good at *everything*. But there are also certain advantages in that each person knows everything that's

Dadras admits he was fortunate to hire designers he had worked with in the past, otherwise such shots as this jump point sequence "would have been very difficult."

going on his shot, and you don't have the same shot going through 10 or 20 people's hands with nobody really knowing what's going on in it."

In addition to that loose hierarchy, artists with specialized skills would often be asked to concentrate within a particular area. "Some people did spend most of their time doing modeling on the film," says Dadras, "because that's what their strong point was, and we really needed them to do that because they were good at it.

"I really don't like to say, 'OK, you're good at modeling, so you're going to do modeling for the rest of your life.' Unfortunately, the people who were best at modeling—who you want to reward—you end up rewarding by giving them more modeling, which they don't necessarily want to do because they want to have a hand in other areas as well. It's almost not fair to them. It's difficult when you're trying to get a huge job done and keep everybody happy at the same time. I realized we would have to do a hybrid approach to the project and not really pin it down either way."

The *Wing Commander* FX team started out with a small core of people, but quickly grew with the addition of several animators brought in from Los Angeles. "We started with five to 10 artists," Dadras explains, "and within the first six months, grew to 15 or 16 and finally ended up with 19 3-D artists. We also had a couple of 2-D artists that were helping us composite shots, and an assistant artist who was very talented who was helping many things along. Out of those 19 artists, five of them were also sequence supervisors, so they not only had to do a lot of work themselves, they each also needed to be leading a sequence or two through completion, so much of their time was being used up supervising other people, rather than doing hands-on work."

Needless to say, creating around 300 digital FX shots with a team of less than 20 artists was a difficult undertaking, but other obstacles also had to be overcome. "Obviously, doing an all-digital movie was one issue we had to contend with, and then had to add the 'Oh my gosh!' element to the whole thing. We made the decision early on to use new Maya software to do the modeling animation, so we were basically leaping off a cliff in the sense that we decided to stick with first-generation software. We were using Maya 1.0, and as good as any software is developed or de-bugged, there are always *some* problems. That added another level of suspense to the whole thing as we ran into snags along the way and had to figure out how to work around them.

"On top of that, we had to set up a film unit from scratch. It wasn't like we were already an established company in Texas doing movies, and this was just another movie we were doing. Chris Brown, [visual FX producer] Eric Strauss and I went down to Texas and were lucky enough to hire many people that we had worked with at Boss Film Studios, which had closed down. So we already knew them and knew their strengths and abilities. A lot of very talented people who had been at Boss hadn't landed permanent jobs yet, so we were able to take advantage of that. Otherwise it would have been very difficult.

"We were basically able to put together a crew—there was an existing crew down there, working at Digital Anvil—but we had to quadruple the size of that crew and gear up as far as machines, networking and file servers, all of which hadn't been put through the full test of doing a film project."

Spatial distortions. Dadras, overworked and holed up in Luxembourg, still managed to devote about half his time to the Austin, Texas staff—and produce stellar shots.

Despite the various technical problems, Dadras is still pleased with the way *Wing Commander*'s FX turned out. "Looking back, there are a large number of really good-looking shots in the movie, and as I said, I would be willing to hold them up to the visual FX community and be happy to show them off and let anybody challenge them if they don't look really good. There are several shots that come to mind that I think look amazing, and are a good example of what we could achieve if we had even a little more time to work on things. There are many shots that we just weren't able to take all the way to that next level of excellence that I was pushing to do, but in the end, it was realistically a limited budget and limited human resources to spend on those shots."

In the end, Tom Dadras hopes *Wing Commander* will

"YOU IN THE AUDIENCE SHOULD NEVER EVEN THINK THAT IT'S A MODEL."

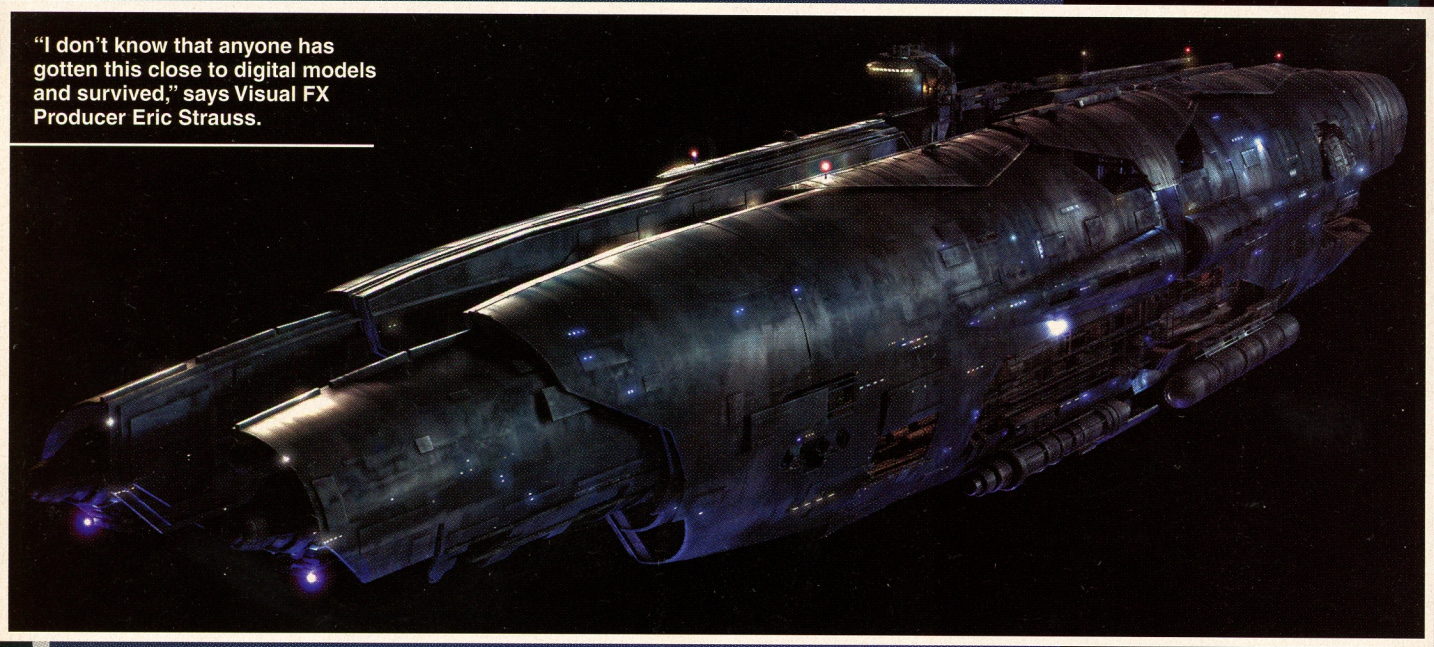
The detail of *Wing Commander*'s CGI work—as in this *Tiger Claw* shot—equals that of any physical model, notes Dadras: "Let anybody challenge them."

Even the hybrid design approach was sorely tested when it was decided to do *all* space FX via CGI—right down to the explosions.

show that an ambitious genre project can be done entirely with digital FX. "It has been a mantra in the industry," he explains, "that physical models look better up close. That's a problem with digital models, which is why people really haven't gone digital yet, and many times, when you're deciding whether or not to do a shot digitally or with physical models, it usually depends on how close you get. On a lot of shows I did at Boss, we did digital models for things that were in the distance and physical models for close-ups. People are not really spending a lot of time on the digital models since, up close, they don't really work. But with any movie you go to, you in the audience should *never* even think that it's a model.

"My hope is that people are going to theaters to see a good movie—not just to see an FX movie. In which case, you're there trying to help support the story. Hopefully, it never crosses their minds that your spaceship—digital or model—is fake or phony."

VISUALIZING WING COMMANDER



"I don't know that anyone has gotten this close to digital models and survived," says Visual FX Producer Eric Strauss.

ERIC STRAUSS — VISUAL FX PRODUCER

By JOE NAZZARO

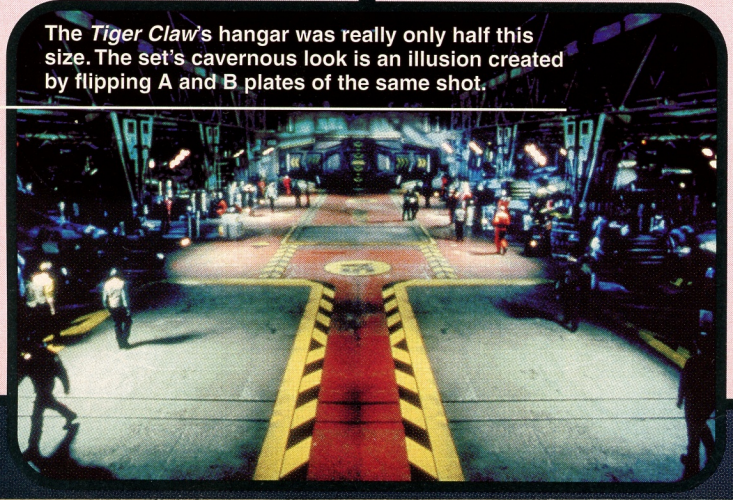
Eric Strauss, *Wing Commander*'s visual FX producer, freely admits he knew virtually nothing about the game series upon which the film was based. "That was kind of amusing to the German press," Strauss laughingly recalls. "We were in Luxembourg doing some of the shooting, and got trapped into an interview with a bunch of the German gaming press. Their first question was, 'Have all of you guys played the video games?' and we looked at them and said, 'Actually, we've never even *seen* them; we have no idea what they look like,' and the interview went downhill from there."

That said, Strauss insists the original *Wing Commander* games are an entity unto themselves. "One of [creator/director] Chris Roberts' concepts from the outset of this film was to make it look *very* different from the games. It was supposed to be an entirely *separate* thing, so we weren't too concerned about matching looks or ships. The main bad guys, the Kilrathi, look totally different from the Kilrathi in the games. Production designer Peter Lamont and his staff worked with Chris to come up with the preliminary designs for the ships. They were going for a retro, World War II Naval style, so that's the way a lot of the stuff ended up."

While Strauss was supervising the film's CGI FX from the Digital Anvil offices in Texas, visual FX supervisor Chris Brown and co-visual FX supervisor Tom Dadras were on hand in Luxembourg for principal photography. "The nice part about that was it took only a phone call to inform us that something had changed, or that Chris liked or didn't like something.

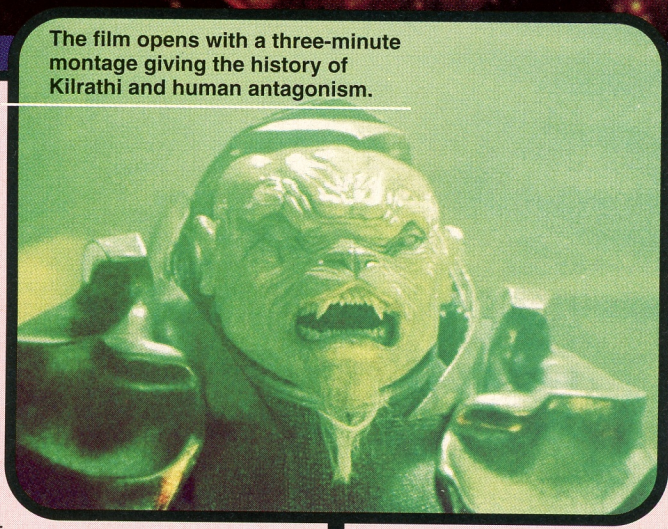
"We had a great deal of freedom in terms of being able to adapt to things that the director decided to change, just because we had such direct access to Chris. One unique feature of this film was that, because Chris was the president of the company we were working for, and Chris' Digital Anvil was the production company for this feature, we essentially had *unlimited* access to him, which is unusual for FX movies. Usually, you're a vendor, so you have to call the production company to see if the director can schedule his time between the sound dailies and his hair appointment."

One of the biggest challenges in creating visual FX entirely within the digital realm was insuring that the computer-generated ships were in a sense covered by a thick layer of reality. "It comes out for the



The *Tiger Claw*'s hangar was really only half this size. The set's cavernous look is an illusion created by flipping A and B plates of the same shot.

Thanks to Strauss, the CGI explosion this Rapier is fleeing looks like it might really have the power to singe.



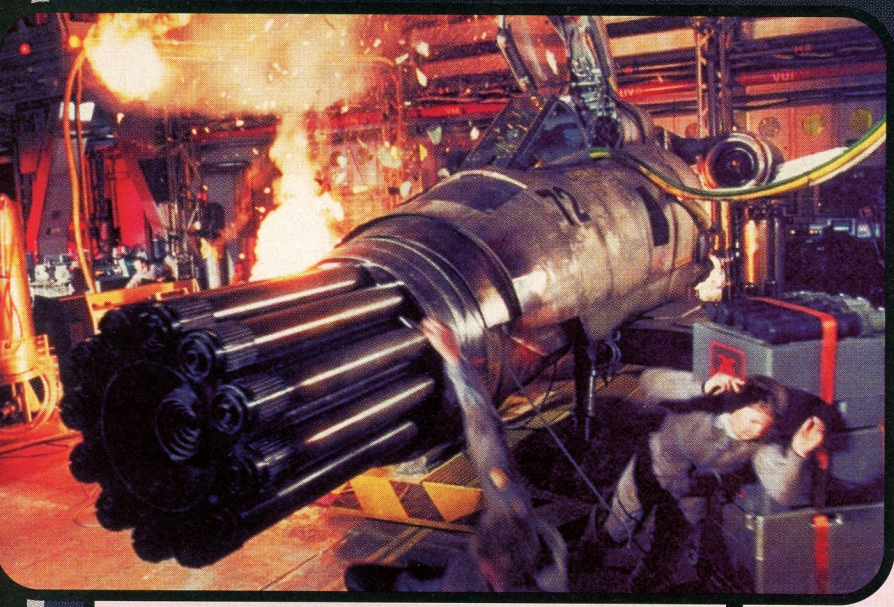
The film opens with a three-minute montage giving the history of Kilrathi and human antagonism.

most part in the texturing, which is something we spent a lot of time on, trying to get the digital texture maps to look good. We took a lot of reference material from the sets to map proper textures on things, particularly for our main fighter the Rapier—they actually built full-size mock-up versions of it. While we were in Luxembourg, we took really flat-lit detail archival-type photos of the entire ship 360 degrees around, actually using the physical mock-up as the basis for the digital model's texture [mapping] so they match identically.

"We're most proud of the Rapiers because of the level of detail. We sent a modeler over to Luxembourg to measure the full-size mock-up, so the digital model was actually scaled off of it. Every single part on the mock-up is also on the model."

Strauss had the intensely technical job of working without miniatures, but still rendering computer-generated models with the same level of detail and subtlety of lighting as the real thing. "There's a lot of stuff in this film which is stock standard visual FX movie work. There are things you can't get away from, particularly when you're flying around fighter planes and blowing them up, but the eye-popping work comes from how close we get to these models, and the freedom we have to fly around and over them and have them fly under us. We're doing classical visual FX gags which go all the way back to *Star Wars*—like when the Star Destroyer comes over your head and the whole building shakes—but the difference here is the level of detail that we have and its digital nature.

"I don't know that anyone has gotten this close to digital



Not even the interior of the *Tiger Claw* is safe from Kilrathi violence, or the FX team's pyrotechnics.

We were very happy to push the envelope in terms of the way outer space looks, because it does have different hues and tones to it, which we tried to emulate as best we could."

While *Wing Commander*'s visual FX team generally took the hi-tech approach with the film, they also employed a classic visual trick or two. "They only built half of the *Tiger Claw* fighter bay set in an old Luxembourg gun factory," says Strauss, "since the space wasn't large enough to accommodate what they really wanted to show, which was this massive hangar bay. So we ended up doing a classic optical split, but doing it digitally, where we shot A and B plates, flipped all the lettering, and then shot separate passes to vary the movement of people on either side of the split, and then married the two plates together. So, you actually have different action going on on either side of the split. We did many things like that."

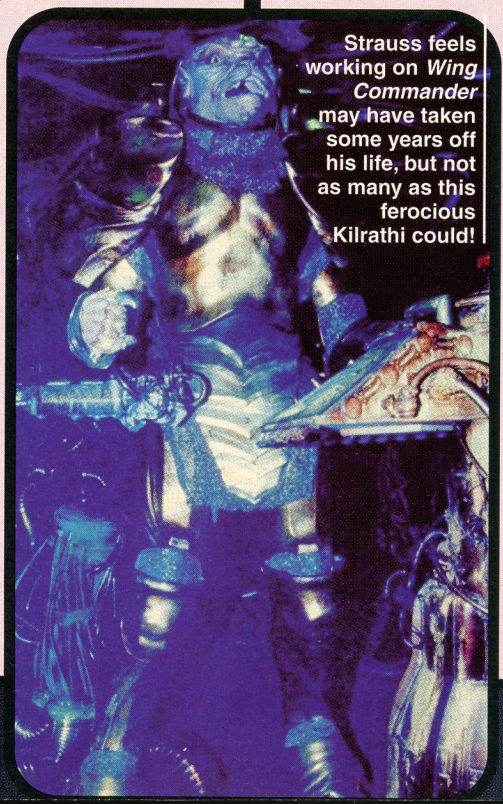
All told, the digital artists created 300 visual FX shots for *Wing Commander*, many of them running several minutes in length. "We have a couple shots in the movie which are in four-digit frame numbers, which was absolutely terrifying for us," claims Strauss. "The opening montage, which is about three minutes long, came from a comment from Fox that it would probably help people's understanding of the plot, which is rather complex, [if there was a prologue]. We did this long montage explaining the pre-history [of the human/Kilrathi conflict]. It starts on a matte, which is an old star chart. We focus in on an element of the chart and then match-dissolve from the digital element into a massive 1700-frame digital shot.

"The first five minutes of this movie is visual FX, and it was one of the more impressive things we've done. It's the sweeping, open, grand shot of the film, where you see the universe and stars, then there's a fly-over this naval base—it's just huge. I think the shot ended up around five or six thousand frames, which is almost five minutes of real time, so that's a big chunk."

Strauss and his FX team spent lots of time creating complex digital texture maps to give CGI ships like this image of the *Diligent* a patina of reality.

models and survived, but the shots look tremendous, especially with the particle work we used to really sell the damage in the explosions. We have a lot of in-your-face kind of action, which is hard to do in the miniature world. Trying to get pyro explosions to look proper scale is an incredible pain in the ass, but we did very well. We have all this high, fast combat stuff, where things are blowing up. We're flying through debris and asteroids, and it's very active, kinetic FX. That's really the most eye-catching thing about it."

Another eye-catching aspect of *Wing Commander* is its highly saturated color palette, which extends to the FX sequences. "Director of photography Thierry Arbogast did a lot of shooting in colored light, so on the bridge set, everything is bathed in red or blue depending on the situation, and our backgrounds, the digital elements and the scene's lights match that. We have a very colorful atmosphere—lots of nebulas and things bathed in different colors of light.



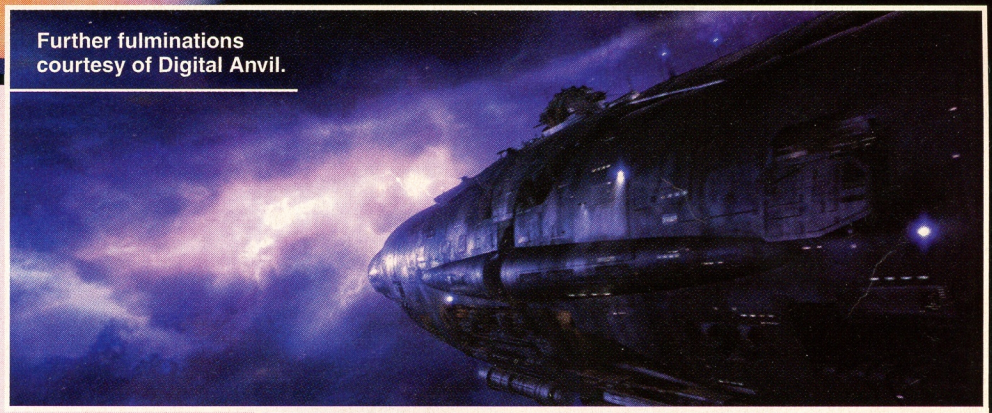
Strauss feels working on *Wing Commander* may have taken some years off his life, but not as many as this ferocious Kilrathi could!

With the movie's extensive visual FX finally completed, Strauss is hard-pressed to elaborate on the lessons he'll take from this experience. "Actually, I think it has taken a couple of years *off* my life," he jokes. "As the visual FX producer, what I came away with was a much better understanding of the way to organize a show. The ability to manage the animators in such a way that I could have both element creation and individual shot creation happening simultaneously was a good thing. Animators always want to hang onto their shots, otherwise they have nothing to show on their reel, so everybody wants to complete their own shots from start to finish. This movie *did not* allow us that kind of flexibility. The time line would have been three years if I had done it on a

Fireworks galore ravage the massive Kilrathi Dreadnought's hull.

"WE'RE FLYING THROUGH DEBRIS AND ASTEROIDS, AND IT'S VERY ACTIVE, KINETIC FX."

Further fulminations courtesy of Digital Anvil.

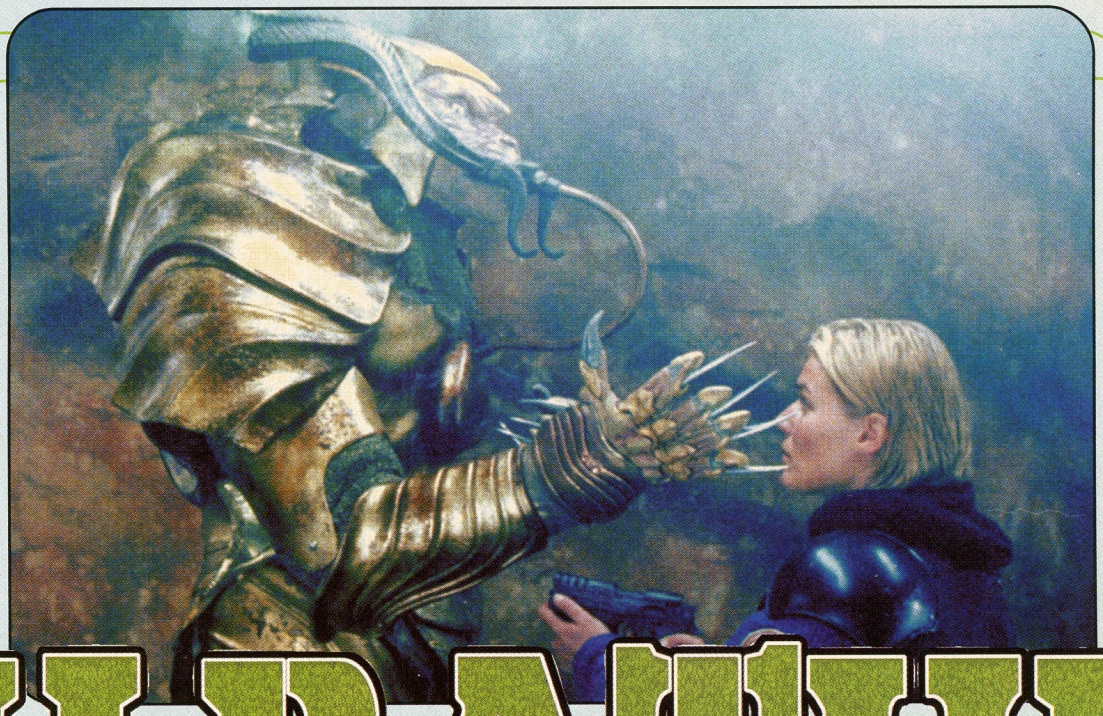


shot-per-person basis. I did give them the ability to do that by having them assigned as supervisors for the shot. They were allowed to control that particular shot in all its aspects, but didn't necessarily have to *create* all of it. That organizational structure was the most successful thing we created here, just with the sheer volume of work we had to do and the number of people who had to do it. We should have had at least twice the amount of animators. With any visual FX house, whether it was Boss, Dreamquest or wherever, it would have been a staff of 40, which is what we originally estimated it would take to do this film. The first budget and manpower pass we did on this, we said, 'OK, 40 people and this job will get done nicely.' We only got half that, but we still produced a really tremendous product."

As *Wing Commander* makes its way to the big screen, Eric Strauss looks forward to the response, not only from moviegoers but also from the visual FX community in particular. "Everybody on the supervisory staff has high hopes for the film, especially now, because obviously the last things out the door were several of our huge climactic shots. We generated a really good product—and I don't mean to be quantifying this in terms of the staff and our situation—because the people we brought in to do this movie are consummate professionals. They're A-list animators who've been working in the business for a long time. We set out to create an A-list visual FX movie, and I think we've done that."

Wing Commander's Kilrathi represent the latest in alien menaces: Intelligent, physically powerful, disturbingly predatory. Pictured is a Kilrathi fighter.

THE



Eight foot tall, razor-clawed Kilrathi warrior vs. petite, pistol-packing human female—any bets on the winner?

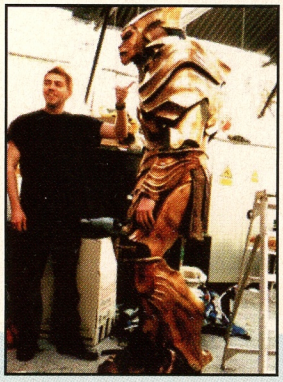
KILRATHI

That toothy Kilrathi grin is compliments of Animated Extras, who made the radio-controlled and highly-expressive animatronic heads. This is a Kilrathi pilot.

Though the Kilrathi resemble furry felines in the *Wing Commander* CD-ROM games, the movie opted for a less hirsute look.

Only a toxic, green atmosphere could breed such lethal terrors as the Kilrathi. But only six weeks of Animated Extras' intensive labor could bring them to life.

This is a Kilrathi general. And here's a suggestion: When a Kilrathi snarls like this, shoot first, and ask questions *never*.



Unlike *Wing Commander*'s spaceship sequences, which are exclusively CGI, the Kilrathi were realized through live-action costumed operators.

The battle goes to the humans—but not the war. With aliens as tenaciously nasty as these, there could just be a *Wing Commander II*.

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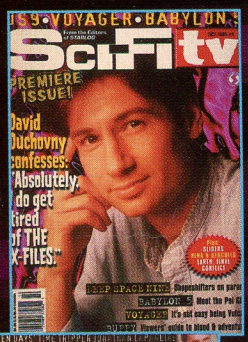

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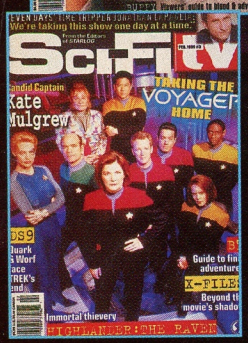

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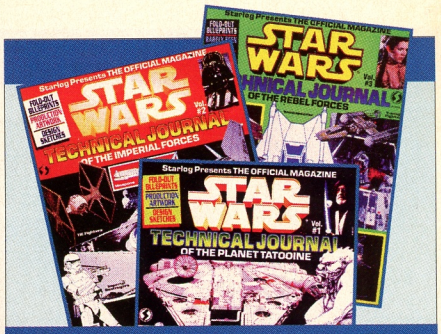

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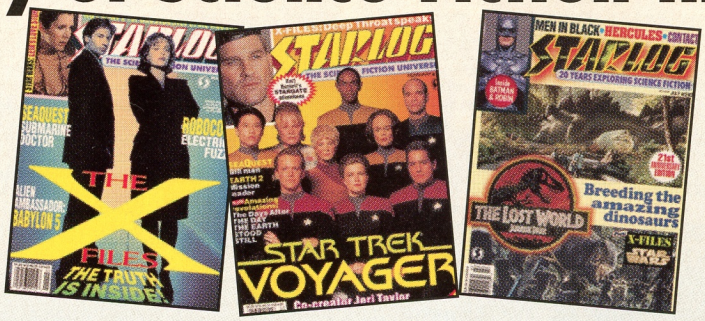

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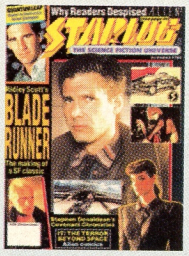

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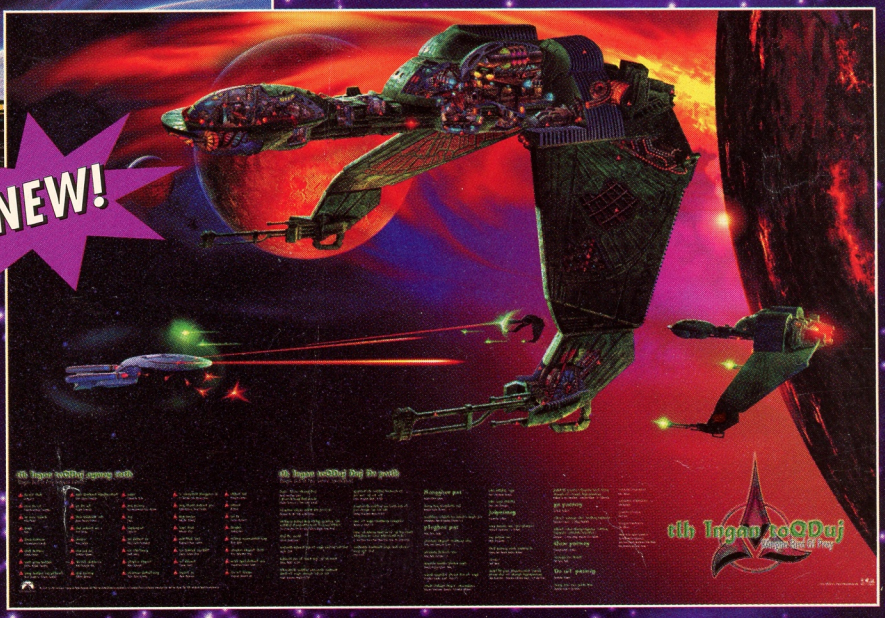

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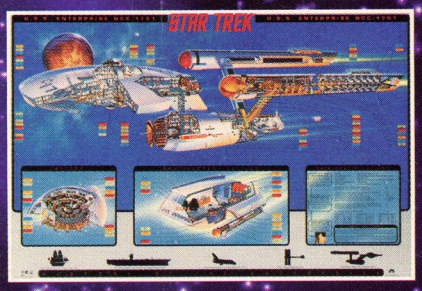

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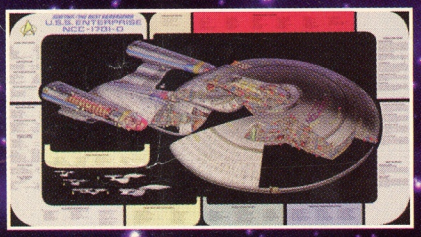

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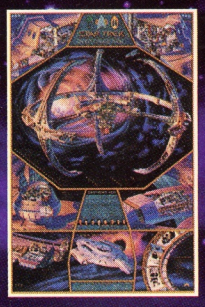

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