



THE PRICE
OF FREEDOM™



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Text excerpted from the initial chapters of
Wing Commander: The Price of Freedom
by William Forstchen and Ben Ohlander
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Major Tom Vale toggled his navigation plot to the Nephele system and smiled in satisfaction as the system diagram appeared on his heads-up display. The convoy, made up of three small freighters and his escort of four Hellcats, would arrive at the jump point late, but well within acceptable parameters. Unless, of course, one of the old transports blew another engine. That kind of delay would kick his entire schedule into a cocked hat.

He traced his finger along the patrol route. His Hellcats had to escort the convoy to the jump point, but the patrol legs through the system could be trimmed if he needed to make up time. He leaned back in his seat, glad he'd solved the toughest problem he was likely to face all day.

The circuit was a typical Nephele milk-run — long and boring. He had survived twelve years of fighter combat against the Kilrathi, and two more of rough-and-tumble peace on the frontiers. The command of patrol squadron on a third-rate system was the perfect assignment for him to coast out his career and retire.

He grinned happily. He was entitled to be bored, he even enjoyed it. He made it a point to complain regularly to the personnel office, however. The rear echelon bastards at Central Casting would have collective apoplexy if they thought an officer was happy in an assignment.

The section's leading element, made up of Tiger and her wingman, Darter, pushed ahead of the convoy's main body. One fighter remained above each flank of the leading transport, ready to intercept targets closing on the convoy from the front. He glanced back at his own wingman. Slash kept loose station on his port side, behind and below the civilian ships.

He opened the squadron's common channel and cleared his throat. "Fuel check," he said.

"Eighty-three percent," replied Tiger.

"Seventy-two," from Darter.

"Eighty-six," answered Slash.

Vale, nodded, satisfied. Wingmen usually used more fuel than their primaries, and Tiger had been keeping Darter busy. He remained cynically amused that his ability to bring fuel home found such high praise in his Officer's Efficiency Reports. His superiors, all combat veterans whom he felt should have known better, wrote more on his OERs about his ability to husband scarce resources than they did about how well he trained his squadron or led it in combat.

The Kilrathi War was less than two years over, and it seemed to him that the navy was already busy forgetting everything it had learned in three decades of conflict.

He knew he really shouldn't have been surprised at how quickly the emphases had changed after the war. Fleet construction provided jobs, and could be justified to a Senate intent upon rebuilding the Confederation's shattered economy. Military supply, combat readiness budgets, and training funds didn't contribute as visibly to local employment and could be easily, and often, pared. The result was that an officer who could save money was more competitive for promotion than one who could save lives. It was a truism that hadn't changed in centuries. Unfortunately.

DETAILED INFORMATION

**ON AVAILABLE ORDNANCE IS IN THE
README.TXT FILE, THE ORIGIN WEB
SITE (WWW.EA.COM/ORIGIN.HTML) AND
IN ORIGIN'S OFFICIAL GUIDE TO WING
COMMANDER IV (IN STORES 12•95).
THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THIS
MANUAL, YOU WILL FIND BRIEF
EXPLANATORY SKETCHES.**

Tiger's voice crackled across his radio as she instructed their resident rookie on the finer points of leg-patrols, the "burn-and-turns" that were the daily bread for a system defense squadron. Marlena had done wonders in bringing the squadron's newest member up to speed in such a short time. He was glad he'd gone out on the limb for her. Her mouth had hopelessly damaged her prospects for promotion, even during the war.

He listened to her issue brief instructions to Darter, then made gentle corrections as the rookie attempted to execute them. Her usual sarcasm vanished as she worked with the younger pilot. He grinned. He hadn't expected her to be such a strong trainer. He made a mental note to add a line of praise to the "Comments" section of Tiger's OER. A kind word from him in the "plays well with others" section might be enough to convince a board that she was ready to put on captain's pips. Otherwise, she would be dismissed at year's end for "excessive time in grade."

Darter, the rookie, had a fine hand, good instincts, and a reasonably good eye for deflection shooting. He would be a fine asset to the squadron once his training was complete. His attitude needed work, however. The kid had visions of daring missions from strike carriers dancing in his head. The reality of duty on a backwater like Nephele was hard for him to bear, especially as a lone "newbee" in an outfit full of jaded veterans.

Vale knew the kid chafed at not having been born early enough to "do his bit" in the war against the Kilrathi. He reminded Vale of all the young hotshots whose dreams of glory all too often ended in an empty casket shot into space. Their "glory" usually turned out to be a name engraved on a beer glass in a pilots' bar, and a medal mailed home in lieu of a casket.

His tactical plot chirped, drawing him away from his maunderings. The *Ashiri Maru* was drifting. Again. He selected the '*Maru*'s channel from the comm menu.

"Aces leader to *Ashiri Maru*," he said, hoping his voice didn't betray his irritation. His comm-screen flickered, the channel menu replaced by the *Ashiri*'s master, a hatchet-faced woman he knew only as Frost. "Now what d'ya want?" she asked in a sullen, exasperated voice. Her expression made it quite plain that he'd interrupted her in the middle of a critical ship's operation. He guessed from the filth he saw on the bulkhead behind her that cleaning wasn't a high priority on her ship.

"Adjust course to conform to the convoy's movements," he said. He thought he sounded a bit imperious, even to his own ears. He tried to soften his tone.

"You're drifting again. I told you before that we can't protect you if you wander too far."

"An' as I've tole' you, General," she replied, scratching her armpit, "what you goin' to protect us from? There ain't nothin' here in Neph', 'ceptin you an' us. I doan' know why you war-boys keep harrasin' honest folks. The fight'n's over, right?"

Vale sighed. The *A. Maru's* master stared defiantly back at him. It was times like this that he actually missed the war. Then he could have invoked the Emergency Decrees for failing to comply with military authorities and blown the smirking bitch into next week if she so much as looked at him cross-eyed. Martial law, he mused, had its good points.

He was still trying to frame a civil answer to her when Darter cut into the channel. "Darter to Knave." Vale smiled indulgently at the kid's excited voice. "I got something on my scanner. One red pippier ... wait, it's gone now."

Vale frowned at his tactical display. A free comet or garbage sack shouldn't have vanished like that. Vale guessed the boy was jumping at shadows.



BANSHEE

HEAVY FIGHTER

Moderately Low Mass

High Velocity

Good Acceleration

Weapons

Leech(1)

Scatter.....(1)

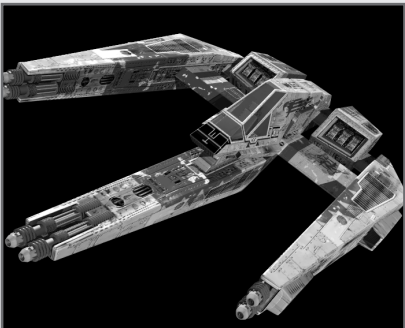
Laser(4)

Missiles

Four 2-slot hardpoints

(Light)

Missile Decoys 16



"Roger, Darter," he replied, "maintain surveillance. Call me if you get a repeat." He tapped his control yoke in thought. Darter was ahead of the transports and on the port side, with Tiger to starboard. It was barely possible that Darter might read a scanner signal that was just out of Tiger's range.

He switched channels to Marlina's frequency. "Knave to Tiger."

Tiger's face appeared in his screen, her head moving back and forth as she scanned the area around her. "I know what you're going to ask, Boss," she said. "No, I didn't see it." She paused a moment. "Do you want him to intercept? It'd be good practice."

Vale considered it. "No, we'd best not. Fuel allocation's been cut once this quarter already. We need the gas more than he needs the practice."

Tiger's face clouded. "Parsimonious bastards. The ink wasn't even dry on the treaty before they cut the budget."

Vale said nothing. He agreed with her, but wasn't about to let himself get caught criticizing his bosses on an open channel. There were far too many unemployed majors flying barstools for him to have any illusions about his indispensability. "Keep an eye on it," he said, "it was probably sensor artifact or a spurious contact, but you never know."

"Roger," Tiger replied.

He tried to ignore the sense that something was wrong. Darter's contact troubled him. The kid's scanners were new, in good shape, and decently maintained. Anomalies weren't unusual, of course, and there was a lot of junk floating around to give a momentary reflection, but something just didn't seem right. Nephele was as predictable and as boring as mess-hall eggs. Odd events just didn't happen there.

Vale shook his head. The kid had gotten worked up over nothing, and was now making the whole flight jittery. It was probably nothing.

The pilot waited patiently under while the convoy appeared on his long range scanner. He counted seven craft, just as he had been told to expect. They were late, a fact that disturbed his sense of order, but which had no relevance on the outcome.


He checked his Kilrathi-style cloaking device. It was working, rendering him invisible to both their scanners and the naked eye.

He waited for the ships to wander into visual range. Four early-model Hellcats hovered in a sloppy formation about their three charges. He frowned slightly. He had expected better escorting tactics from Confederation pilots. The Fleet had let things slide since the peace.

He smoothed his facial features, mastering his expression and his feelings. Emotion impaired judgment and efficiency. He struggled to purge himself of all feeling — the better to do what was needful. When he cued his wingman’s frequency, his voice was as cold and still as a winter morning.

"Seether to Drakes," he said. "The old man was right. Targets sighted. Let’s do it." He checked the raiders’ coded transponders to ensure all four ships were in their correct positions. Two hung off of each bow of the convoy, for now matching their course and speed with the freighters like sharks after a school of fish. He sent his wingman the preset code to attack, then goosed his throttle and aimed for the convoy. "Remember," he said, "no survivors."

He checked his ship’s status, then switched his ready ordnance to an IFF missile. It was a "fire-and-forget" weapon, one that required no further attention from the pilot once it was launched. The missile would lock on a target’s electronic signature, then would follow it until it ran out of fuel or hit.



HELLCAT V

MEDIUM FIGHTER

Moderately Low Mass

Medium Velocity

Good Acceleration

Weapons

Ion.....(2)


Particle(2)

Missiles

Two 3-slot hardpoints

(Medium & Light)

Missile Decoys24



Drake Two dropped out of cloak to his right, firing a dumb-fire missile as he bored in on the first transport. The dumb-fire was a powerful, unguided rocket that probably wouldn't get a firepower kill on the freighter, but would certainly shake it up.

He followed Two's lead, dropping his own cloak as a Hellcat grew in his sights. The Confederation fighters exploded into action, scattering like startled quail as the lead element of Drake flight appeared literally out of nowhere and ripped through the center of the formation. Drake Two broke hard to the right and opened up on the leading pair with his tachyon cannon, riffling shots around the Confed fighters. The Hellcat on the convoy's starboard bow heeled sharply over, accelerating away in a complicated corkscrew maneuver.

Seether smiled grimly to himself, his mask of indifference slipping. The Hellcat pilots were better than their formation flying had suggested. He licked his dry, thin lips. *Good, he thought, my people could use some live-target practice.*

Vale was just about to order Darter back to the convoy when he caught a glimpse of movement out of the corner of his eye.

He was just turning his head towards it when a single red dot appeared on his tactical display, flickering into existence on the convoy's starboard bow. A second red pipper appeared, this one to port. It took him a moment to realize the significance of the red dots as ... enemy. "Tally-ho!" he yelled, cueing the squadron's general circuit. "Bandits! Vector one-zero-one degrees and three-three-zero, Z plus forty. Tiger section, break and attack!"

"I copy, Knave," Tiger replied, "we'll take the bandit on the left." Vale saw her accelerate towards her target. Darter followed a second later, angling back towards his wing slot from his advanced position in front of the convoy.

He caught quick acknowledgments from Slash and Tiger, then a beat later from Darter as each reported weapons readiness. He knew that doctrine called for aggressive intercept as far from the vulnerable transports as possible. He just wished he'd had more time to intercept.

Vale hauled his own control yoke to the right, nearly standing the nimble fighter on its tail as he hit his afterburners and turned to attack. Slash turned smoothly with him, the plume of his afterburner glowing whitely as he matched his burn to Vale's.

"Tally-ho, boss. I designate Target One." Tiger said, her voice calm. "Range, six thousand kilometers to target. Accelerating to eight-hundred KPS." The raider, at first glance a heavy fighter, opened up with twin columns of fire. Tiger spiked her craft into evasive maneuvers that took her past the raider and out of its gunline. She pirouetted neatly and arced in on the raider's flank, her guns blazing.

Vale turned his own attention towards the bandit who'd angled towards the rear of the convoy. The enemy's red pipper glowed and swelled as he turned towards it. He goosed his afterburner, inhaling as the increased thrust pressed him back into his chair. He was glad his inertial dampers appeared to be functioning well — he'd have been thrown around the inside of the cockpit without them. His lasers and ion cannon weren't nearly as heavy as the raiders'; he could only hope that he had a speed and maneuver advantage that would balance the scales.

He had a quick glimpse of Tiger trading fire with the first bandit, while Darter now maneuvered to the flank.

The missile alarm chimed in his ear, its dopplered pitch warning him of a lock-on. A yellow dot appeared on his scanner and quickly accelerated towards him. "Damn," he said, then cued his radio. "Slash, Evasive. Then break and attack."



AVENGER

TORPEDO BOMBER

- High Mass
- Medium Velocity
- Low Acceleration
- Weapons
 - Stormfire(1)
 - Leech(1)
 - Ion.....(2)
 - Photon.....(2)
- Missiles
 - Four 1-slot hardpoints,
two 4-slot hardpoints
(Light, Med & Heavy)
- Missile Decoys24



He rammed the throttle forward as Slash broke away, leaving behind him a string of missile decoys. Vale kicked in his afterburner and hauled his control yoke down and left as he fought to open as much room between himself and his wingman as he could. The missile ignored the chaff and Slash to lock onto him. He cursed under his breath.

The two trailing transports loomed in front of him, their drive plumes brightening as they accelerated to the best of their ability. He flashed between them, hoping their mass would throw off the missile. He craned his head around and saw it closing rapidly, its lock-on intact. He banked and cut back, using the left-hand transport as the pivot for his tight parabolic turn. He snapped out of the turn, his course reversed. He dropped chaff pod after chaff pod, hoping the signal simulators would lure the missile away from him. The warhead yawed after the first and detonated.

Vale looked frantically around. The leading freighter bloomed fire along one flank, the result, he thought, of a missile or rocket attack. A torpedo would have reduced the little ship to free atoms. He checked his tactical display and saw one intruder arcing in towards the hindmost transport. Slash whipped and saw-bucked in the distance, apparently locked in his own dance with a missile. *This guy is good, Vale thought, he's taken us both out of play long enough to get in close to the freighters.*

Tiger and Darter were tied up with the second bandit and were in no position to help, leaving him with no option except to go one-on-one. He hoped to stay out of the raider's front arc and its big guns. He angled his Hellcat towards the raider and hit his throttle. His fighter jumped forward, the acceleration pressing him back in his seat in spite of the inertial dampers.

The intruder turned slightly as Vale closed, affording him his first good, long look. The thing was sleek and completely black, except for a pair of glowing, top-mounted Bussard intakes, suggesting a jump capability. It looked ultra state-of-the-art to him, utterly lethal and unlike any design he had seen. It sure as hell didn't look Kilrathi.

He pushed his throttle back, cutting out his afterburner and slowing his head-long charge to better target his weapons. He fired his ion cannon at range, more for his own morale than from any real hope of inflicting damage.

The enemy ignored his pinpricks to fire quad energy weapons at the transport. The bolts punched through its flimsy screens and hulled it deeply. The freighter's single defensive turret answered, a pathetic single stream of laser beams to answer its mortal wound. He sent the transport a quick interrogative.

The ship's master answered at once, his face appearing on a jumping, static-filled screen. Vale saw drifting smoke behind him. "We're here," the *Elgin Dailey's* master said, "Y'all just keep it that way. Drives are intact. We'll hold station." His face faded as Vale saw a secondary explosion mushroom out of the transport's side. He suspected the *Dailey* was in more trouble than it let on.

The raider turned on him, snake-quick, and fired. Four beams of lambent energy crossed close in front of his prow, brightening the inside of the cockpit with reflected energy. A single bolt plowed into his forward phase shield, wiping it out and chewing up his frontal armor. His damage board showed a stabilizer hit. He punched his throttle to the stops and hauled back on his stick as he scrambled to get away from the enemy fighter. He poured on the coal, trying to escape as bolt after bolt passed close by. His rear shields weakened but held as the near misses ripped past.

He brought his Hellcat around, trying to cut across the heavier fighter's vector and accelerate away before the black ship could follow. The raider tumbled in space, its nose turning to track Vale's Hellcat. He saw a bright red flare and closed his eyes. He opened them to see Darter arcing in from his upper right, his lasers and ion cannon slashing at the raider.



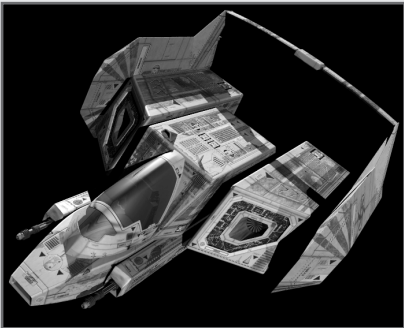
VINDICATOR
MEDIUM FIGHTER

Light Mass
Medium Velocity
High Acceleration
Weapons

Laser(2)
Tachyon(2)
Vulcan(1)

Missiles
Three 2-slot hardpoints
(Medium)
Three 1-slot hardpoints
(Heavy)

Missile Decoys.....24



The black ship continued to rotate in space, turning now to follow Darter. Vale kicked his own ship into a sharp arc and pivoted back to fire on the raider. He kept the deflection shots going, turning his own Hellcat to keep black ship under fire. The deflection angles changing too quickly for either his AI to predict or him to track. He missed with most of his shots.

Darter's shots slowed, the quad fire having drained his capacitors. "I'm outa' here," the kid shouted into his mike. Vale picked up the gist of the message through the feedback as Darter poured fuel into his afterburners. The black rolled, then fired into Darter's rear quarter, slewing the little ship around.

"Damage?" he asked as Darter cleared the raider's guns.

"Transmitting," the kid replied, sounding very subdued. The schematic of Darter's fighter solidified on his screen. He saw that the kid's afterburner, rear armor, and stabilization systems had been hit. One more solid hit and Darter would be history.

Vale looked across the convoy in time to see a raider pinion Tiger's fighter, catching her on its bright beams like a pushpin through a butterfly. Vale watched her ship stagger under twinned hammer blows as the cannon stripped the Hellcat of its phase shields, armor, and skin. Pieces began to spall and burn.

Vale heard her scream, a long, drawn out wail of fear and agony that abruptly ceased as the black ship fired again, this time with all its weaponry.

The black ship did a victory roll as it flashed past the expanding debris cloud that marked the remains of Tiger's ship, then began to close on the convoy. Vale glanced around, realizing too late that he'd lost track of the second raider.

"Keep your eyes open," he said to Darter, "th' other one's still out there."

Slash cut his drives, auto-slid, then boosted after the black ship that had killed Tiger. The Confederation pilot pulled his Hellcat into a tight inside loop, trying to flip up and descend on the larger ship's vulnerable back. The raider was ready. It shifted, linking the two ships with multiple columns of firepower. Slash's Hellcat, immolated on the beams, detonated.

Vale realized as he looked in vain for a life pod from Slash's ship that resistance was futile. The convoy was lost. It was time to salvage what he could, in this case a young pilot who didn't deserve to die. "Darter," he said harshly, "disengage. Get home and make a full report. Intelligence'll need to know what we saw here."

The other Hellcat slowly turned away. Vale felt ice in his guts as he saw the two black ships slashing in towards the transports. He rammed his throttles to the stops, punching his ship towards the convoy. A tiny voice inside his head screamed at him to disengage, to run for home, to live. He gritted his teeth and bored in to attack.

His target fired its missiles, volleying them all off in a single salvo against the *Elgin Dailey*. The weapons bloomed in explosion after explosion as they punched into the *Dailey's* guts. Vale watched the stricken ship slew out of formation and angle away. A massive explosion rocked the transport, blowing off the front section containing the bridge and the life bubble. It tumbled alongside the remainder of the ship, still spewing gas and debris.

Vale checked his scanner and saw Darter running flat out for home. Vale's chest tightened as he saw one of the black ships flicker into existence behind the rookie. The raider accelerated and fired a missile. Darter dodged and weaved, trying to avoid the warhead. His maneuvering cost him enough forward speed for the fighter behind him to close. The black ship fired.

High Mass (highest of all ships currently in use)

Low Velocity (lowest-current)

Extremely Low Acceleration

Weapons

Ion(2)

Plasma(2)

Particle gun rear(2)

Mass Driver.....(turret)

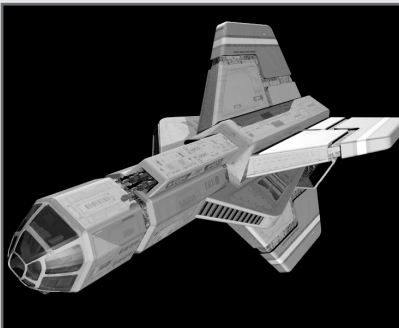
Missiles

Four 2-slot hardpoints,
two 1-slot hardpoints
(Light, Med & Heavy)

Missile Decoys24



LONG BOW
TORPEDO BOMBER



"Hail, Mary, full of grace" Vale heard Darter whisper as the bloom engulfed the back half of the light ship. The multiple impacts span Darter to his right, killing his drives and snapping him end over end. The Confederation pilot's prayer turned into a long scream that ended only when the ship exploded. Vale saw the rookie never had a chance to eject.

He turned his attention back to the two raiders closing on the transports. He fired on the closest, switching to lasers and plinking at the heavier ship from long range. The raider ignored the fire while it poured shots into the third transport, the *Red's Gamble*. The raider walked hits up the freighter's defenseless spine.

The *Gamble* burned brightly, its cargo outgassing and oxidizing through the holes punched in its hull by the raiders' cannon. Vale saw flames licking out into open space, an indicator of the intensity of the inferno within.

The second raider bored in on the *Gamble* and fired, hitting the stricken transport with both tachyon beams and a heavier weapon that ate whole sections of the freighter. The transport detonated a moment later, one moment coasting in open space with bright jewels of flame winking along its sides and the next vanishing in an actinic flare. The detached, clinical part of Vale's mind noted that the ship's reactor core must have detonated.

A fourth black ship dropped out of cloak on his right flank, firing as it closed the range. His Hellcat rocked under the black fighters' hits. Vale slashed his control yoke back and forth, frantically trying to dodge the converging weapons streams. He felt his drives fail.

He glanced down at his display. System after system glowed red. The eject warning flashed. He reached down between his legs, groping for the yellow-painted eject bar. The ship heeled to one side, hit by another salvo. He glanced up. The raider loomed close, its weapons pointed at his cockpit. It fired from point blank range, twin bolts of violent energy that blanked out the ship behind. Vale felt a brief pain, then nothing.

Seether felt the adrenalin drain away as he squeezed his trigger and saw the last Hellcat disintegrate into atoms. The pilot, with squadron leader's markings on his fighter's tail assembly, had been passably good. He would have felt a more enduring respect for his opponent, except the Confed pilot was dead. He had no respect for the dead. Death was the ultimate failure, and he could not abide failure.

Drake Three's face appeared on his comm-screen. "Target area sterile," she said, "no signals and no pods. The last transport is attempting Mayday." She glanced downward a moment. "Jamming successful."

Seether nodded and cut her off. "Drake One to Drake flight — stand by for test procedure." He brought his ship around in a tight arc and began his attack run on the sole remaining transport. The pig-boat wallowed from side to side, trying to evade his ship. He narrowed his eyes as he closed on the ship. "I'm lighting the 'FlashPak'." He flipped the safety cover off a special firing button and poised his thumb over it.

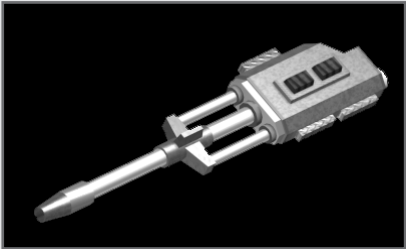
The transport filled his forward view, growing larger and larger until he could see the rusted surface details. The transport's single gun sputtered at him ineffectually.

He held his attack run to the last possible instant, then mashed the firing key. He immediately felt the difference in the ship as the thin, convex disc was ejected from his bay. Small thrusters located along its edge gave it ballistic stabilization as it spun and latched onto the transport's hull.

WEAPONS

LASER

- PenetrationVery Low
- EnergyVery Low
- RangeHigh
- Refire DelayVery Low



Seether pulled the control yoke back, kicking in his maneuvering thrusters as he swept in a tight turn around the waist of the transport. He emerged above the disc just as it began to vibrate and shimmer. The whole transport visibly shook as surface components ruptured and detached under the strain imposed by the disc. He held his position as the *Ashiri Maru* shook and rumbled. A violent flash of oxygen and explosive fuels burst out of the hole in the ship's hull and exploded. A second fireball, then a third emerged as the ship's interior spaces detonated in sequence. The final blast loomed over the stricken ship's side like a malevolent flower. When it faded, only the *Ashiri Maru's* outer hull remained, a charred and scorched husk.

Seether recorded the ship's death on his gun camera. He chuckled, the sound like dice rolling in a cup as he cued Drake Two's channel. "I'd call that a successful 'test,' wouldn't you?" He didn't wait for a response. He reoriented his ship towards the hulk and launched a conventional grappling mine. He watched the weapon tumbling towards the wreck a moment, then hit his "All Call" as he ghosted in after the falling mine.

"Seether to Drakes. Come about to course three-one-zero, Z minus twenty and stand by."

The mine hit the hulk and detonated. Seether whipped his ship around in time to catch the blast on his rear shields, just as he hit his afterburners. He let the blast propel him forward, accelerating him towards his waiting wingmates. The adrenaline faded, leaving him cold. He used the mine-drop and afterburner trick to test himself, probing himself for fear the way he might test a loose tooth with his tongue. He prodded himself, and was satisfied with the results. No fear.

"Cloak on my command," he ordered. "Now."

The four unmarked black fighters vanished, leaving behind only the hulks and the dead.

II

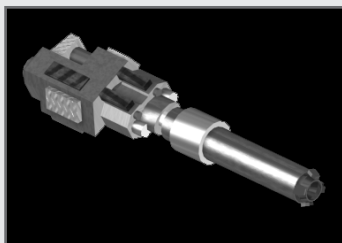
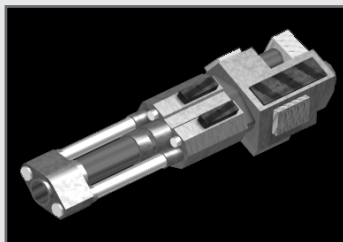
James Taggart, Assembly Master of the Confederation Senate, retired Brigadier, and ex-spy, looked up at the vaulted ceiling of the Hall of the Great Assembly. The Great Hall's acoustics had been designed to allow a speaker to address the highest galleries without electronic amplification. The acoustics also concentrated all the sound in the room down on the dais.

The Senate was in full cry. Eminent men and women from across the Confederation shouted and gestured at each other, each trying to be heard above the din. News services from a half dozen affiliated worlds aimed pin-mikes at their representatives. Lobbyists and flesh-pressers of a dozen stripes worked the aisles, hob-nobbing with the legislators who allocated power, and more importantly, money. Taggart found the whole show cynically amusing, very pathetic, and utterly fascinating.

It occurred to him that he had come a long way since the war. Then, as "Paladin," he had plugged along in silent obscurity, spying and doing one classi-

MASS DRIVER CANNON

PenetrationModerate
EnergyVery Low
RangeVery Low
Refire DelayHigh



PHOTON CANNON

Penetration.....Low
Energy.....Moderate
Range.....High
Refire DelayHigh

fied operation after another for king and country. He would have vanished into obscurity had it not been for Admiral Tolwyn and his spectacular failure with Operation Behemoth.

Taggart had put his own scheme together, code-named Temblor Bomb. Colonel Blair had gotten lucky over Kilrah, dropping The Bomb and knocking Kilrah out of the war and Taggart into the limelight. Taggart had come away as the "the man who saved humanity," especially as Blair had fled the public's adoration.

He laughed as he recalled how little time it had taken before the deal-makers and the image-shapers came snooping after him. They'd helped him ride the rising tide of his fame to the Senate, then to the Master's Chair. It was an almost unprecedented honor for a freshman senator, especially as he'd refused to open his black bag of tricks to engineer his promotion. His election had been done openly and honestly, and it was one of his proudest moments.

Taggart glanced at his watch. The time for unstructured debate had finally ended. He took the heavy wooden gavel and began to tap the handle against the clapper. The sound, electronically enhanced, thumped out across the floor, warning the senators that it was time to bring their remarks to a close. He kept politely tapping for several minutes, then reversed the hammer in his hand. The second sweep crossed the hour. Now he could get serious. He raised the gavel to shoulder level and brought it down hard.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The heavy wood struck the clapper, resonating throughout the chamber. The nearest senators actually winced as the thrumming washed over them. Taggart continued to pound the gavel until the sound diminished enough for him to be heard.

"Order," he demanded, "order."

The Senate quieted, the last diehards sitting only as Taggart threatened to whack the gavel again.

"You will all have the opportunity to voice your opinions on what has occurred on our Border Worlds frontier," he said soothingly. *Damn, Paladin*, he thought to himself, *you really are becoming a politician. When did dead pilots and ambushed ships become an "occurrence"?* He gritted his teeth, projecting a false smile before he continued. "But we will first hear from the Commander of the Strategic Readiness Agency. Admiral Tolwyn has graciously agreed to appear before us and provide us with his preliminary assessment of the raids." He half turned towards his guest. "Admiral Tolwyn."

Admiral Geoffrey Tolwyn stepped up to the podium, resplendent in his dress uniform. Taggart noted that the admiral had worn all of his decorations, gilding his chest in gold, silver, and bronze. It was an impressive show, at least to the rubes in the cheap seats.

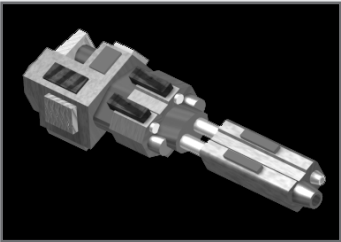
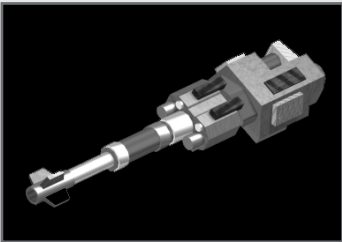
Taggart suspected that Tolwyn's star had fallen enough after his pet project, Operation Behemoth, had failed for the admiral to feel he had to resort to cheap theatrics to make his point. Taggart believed that Tolwyn had rebounded nicely, and was again ascendant, but apparently the admiral was taking no chances. *Why else, Taggart thought, would he pin on every gew-gaw and widget he'd been awarded since being commissioned?*

Taggart watched the admiral step up to the podium and look out onto the ranks of assembled notables. Tolwyn's gaze seemed coolly appraising, as though taking the senators' measure. His expression grew grave as he pulled a thin sheaf of papers out of his tunic and spread them out on the lectern.

It occurred to Taggart, as he watched Tolwyn, that the admiral was the best politician of all of them. How else could the man — who'd nearly been cashiered after the Behemoth debacle — bounce back to run the Strategic

PARTICLE CANNON

PenetrationModerate
EnergyLow
Range.....Moderate
Refire DelayModerate



TACHYON GUN

Penetration.....Very High
Energy.....High
RangeLow
Refire DelayLow

Readiness Agency as his personal fiefdom? The man was a survivor, with more lives than a cat.

Admiral Tolwyn cleared his throat and began. "Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly: as the Commander of the SRA, I am charged with many duties. Foremost among these is the protection of the frontiers of our galaxy."

He looked down briefly. Taggart noticed that while Tolwyn had notes, he hardly referred to them. It was also clear that Tolwyn had mastered political speech making, using the slightly stiff, overblown rhetoric that was all the rage with the log-rolling set. The Tolwyn of old would neither have been so polite to what he considered mealy-mouthed civilians nor would he have stooped to talk to them in their own language.

"Unfortunately," the admiral continued, "I don't have any answers. The attacks have left no survivors and precious little evidence. Confed Intel has given it their best shot, and to date, has come up empty."

Taggart knew the last to be a subtle dig at himself. His own service was Intel, and semi-independent of the Fleet. Paladin had kept it that way, in spite of Tolwyn's attempts to absorb the uniformed element of the intelligence community.

"We have," Tolwyn continued, spreading his palms humbly, "absolutely no proof of who is doing this."

The Senate erupted in chaos. Many senators had constituents who were affected, owned ship lines, or wanted to put in a plug for "law and order" on general principles. Some blamed pirates while others accused the Border Worlds militia of treachery. Other, darker theories, of navy conspiracies and secret Kilrathi attacks, were bandied about. Taggart banged his gavel.

Tolwyn raised his hand — and the room quieted, much to Taggart's concealed irritation. He wished he commanded as much respect from the legislators. He recalled, to his sour amusement, that he had until he had become one of them.

Tolwyn gave Taggart a wintery side-long look. "Well, I'm sure we all have our little theories" He rolled his eyes slightly, allowing Taggart to see that his contempt for civilians was intact. "But let me tell you," he said, raising one index finger for emphasis, "that while it is a mystery now, it will not be one for long." Taggart wondered if Tolwyn was going to give some inkling of his plan.

The admiral instead humbly lowered his eyes, a gesture Taggart knew to be pure artifice. "As most of you know, I've spent a lot of time on the frontier, both fighting the Kilrathi, and in building the peace. The Border Worlds are a wild lot — full of rogues, privateers, and the Border Worlders themselves." His

voice took on disapproving tones. "Their society encourages independence and initiative rather than obedience to authority."

Taggart looked at Tolwyn, contemplating the admiral with hooded eyes. Tolwyn had just disclaimed knowing who the culprits were, and now was steering the senators towards the Border Worlds. He wondered what agenda the admiral had tucked up his gold-braided sleeve.

One senator leapt to his feet, interrupting both Tolwyn's speech and Taggart's line of thought. Taggart glanced at the man, whom he really thought should be old enough to know better. "Scoundrels!" the senator thundered, pounding his hand on his desk for effect. "That's what they are! They should be punished for what they've done!"

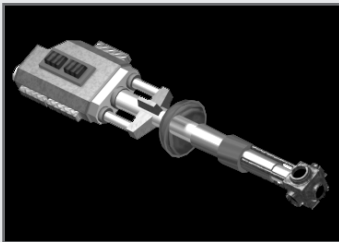
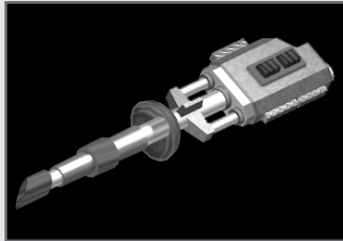
Another backbencher, unwilling to be outdone, also stood. "They're hoodlums! Rebels who're preyin' on innocent ships!" Taggart saw they were playing to the cameras and dismissed them.

Tolwyn didn't. He shook his head sadly. "Let me remind you, Senators, that during the long war with the Kilrathi, the Border Worlds were a strong ally."

Another senator jumped up to interrupt. "And now they're attackin' us!"

ION CANNON

PenetrationLow
EnergyModerate
Range.....High
Refire DelayLow



SCATTER GUN

Penetration.....Very High
EnergyHigh
Range.....High
Refire DelayHigh

Taggart sighed. *It must be the full moon*, he thought. *They seemed, after just the tiniest bit of nudging from Tolwyn, to be ready to blame the Border Worlders on general principles, much less on hard evidence.* He looked up into the galleries, relieved to see that while many faces were hard with anger, many others looked contemplative and skeptical.

Tolwyn, again the voice of reason, continued. "Do not allow lust for revenge to cloud your thinking" He gave Taggart another sidelong glance and a tiny, wintery smile. "We mustn't forget who our friends are."

Many of the senators present nodded assent, agreeing with the admiral's sentiments and missing the by-play on the dais.

Taggart had no doubt whatsoever that the admiral had just put a shot across his bows. Counter-intelligence had actually been Admiral Richard's bailiwick and not his, but the hard truth remained the same. Counter Intel had failed to catch the Kilrathi renegade, Hobbes, before he'd betrayed his human allies and returned to his own kind. That lapse had cost Tolwyn his precious Behemoth and his shot at ending the war. Tolwyn had made no secret of the fact he thought Paladin might have sabotaged his pet project.

"However," Tolwyn said, his voice hardening as he delivered what Taggart thought would be his real pitch, "we must also keep in mind that during the war, certain social and political changes were taking place along the frontiers." He paused. "We don't know what is going on inside the Border Worlds themselves. We don't know if these raids may reflect a change within the Border Worlds governments, random elements on the frontier itself, or if these're just random terrorism events or common piracy." He paused. "Until we get hard evidence, however, we must assume that the Border Worlds are as they have always been ..." he paused, showing the slightest hint of skepticism, "our friends."

Terrorism, Taggart thought, *is many things, but it is never "random."* And it was common knowledge that the Border Worlds had refused to release the carriers acquired from Earth until long after the Kilrathi had begun their assault. The frowns he saw in the gallery suggested that he wasn't the only senator to make that connection. He smiled slightly, amused at Tolwyn's ability to play both sides of the aisle.

Tolwyn grasped the podium with both hands, taking physical control of it as he thrust his head aggressively forward. "I don't know who is doing this," he said, slowly and distinctly, letting the moment build, "but I shall find out. And then ... I will see to it that it stops."

The senators clapped and cheered. Taggart banged his gavel repeatedly, trying to restore order. He waited until the clamor had reduced to a buzz, then looked down at Tolwyn. Tolwyn had played the body masterfully, gathering the senators in and building his case. Any legislator challenging Tolwyn's position would be seen as coddling the Border Worlds or condoning the attacks. No one wanted to be put in that position with so many cameras about.

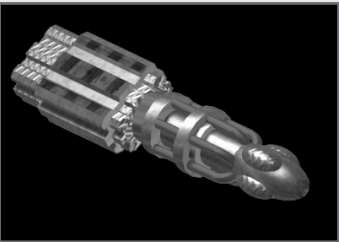
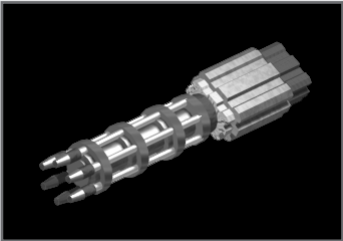
Taggart saw he had two choices; he could tack with Tolwyn's gale, or be blown by it. The decision wasn't especially difficult. He put on what he called his "political face," the bland, friendly expression everyone in the Hall wore.

"Admiral," he began, trying to match Tolwyn's presence. His own style was more folksy, and didn't lend itself well to this type of occasion. "... our relations with the Border Worlders have been damaged by these, um, incidents. They've claimed to suffer from attacks similar to ours, and share similar concerns. Tensions between our government and the Border Worlds are high and we want this situation defused as quickly as possible. Time is of the essence."

Tolwyn nodded gravely. "I shall assume personal control of the investigation." He raised his voice. "And I shall use all of the forces at my disposal to find the perpetrators ... and defuse them." He grinned then, a shark's smile.

STORMFIRE GUN

PenetrationVery High
EnergyHigh
RangeVery High
Refire Delay.....Very Low



PLASMA GUN

Penetration.....Very High
EnergyVery High
RangeLow
Refire DelayModerate

Taggart swallowed at the thought of Tolwyn's fleet carriers deploying to the frontier, and how the Border Worlds were likely to respond to that. He tried to think of a way to put some back-pressure on what was happening, to slow the tides of the moment. He opened his mouth to suggest a more low-key response, then glanced up, uncomfortably aware all of the vid-cams in the Hall were pointed at him. "The Assembly looks forward to the results of your investigation," he said lamely. He tried to change the spin of Tolwyn's victory, to make his commission investigative, rather than active. "We shall decide a course of action within, ah ... a fortnight of your completed report."

Tolwyn made a show of gracious acceptance. Taggart knew Tolwyn had gotten what he wanted, and now could afford to be gracious. Tolwyn turned slightly. Taggart was certain he did it to be better seen by the cameras. He raised his voice slightly, enunciating clearly for the journalists. "Thank you, Paladin," the admiral said, "I accept your vote of confidence on behalf of the Strategic Readiness Agency, and we shall endeavor to match your timetable for action."

"Two weeks," Taggart said, convinced Tolwyn was playing him. He searched for some sign of smugness or victory in the admiral's eyes, and saw nothing. Tolwyn's expression remained cool and still.

The admiral gave him another small smile. "Two weeks."

Taggart shook his head fractionally as Tolwyn turned back to the lectern. He had just been backed into agreeing to a fortnight's unspecified operations with unspecified forces along a potentially explosive frontier. He just hoped that Tolwyn knew what the hell he was doing. For all their sakes.

III

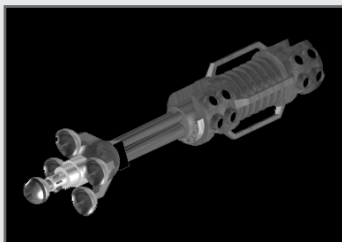
Christopher Blair picked up his wrench and counted to ten. His knuckles still throbbed from where he'd bashed them while trying to open the aerator pump's access cover. Sweat rolled down his face, soaking his shirt and dripping into the pump's guts. He rubbed the back of his hand across his forehead, then pinched his fingers together on the bridge of his nose to try and wipe away the stinging stuff.

He looked up at the thin blue sky and Nephele Prime. Prime was an insignificant main sequence yellow G-type star on the edge of nowhere. Nephele II was tucked just on the inside of the "green band," the range of distances that a planet could occupy that would support human life.

Two barely fit the criteria, resulting in a biosphere only marginally adaptable for human beings. The planet's principle exports were sand and rare earths, with just enough agriculture to provide the locals with some vegetables.

LEECH GUN

PenetrationVery High
EnergyVery High
RangeLow
Refire DelayVery High



FISSION CANNON

PenetrationVery High
EnergyVery High
RangeVery High
Refire DelayVery High

Blair had picked the place for its isolation. Most of the locals emigrated to the place for solitude, which had fit in well with Blair's plans. His nearest neighbors were a monastic group of Zen Buddhists, whose hobbies appeared to be meditating and leaving him alone.

The long lines of sight had been the hardest thing for him to get used to on Two. The ability to see all the way to the horizon was something that just wasn't possible on a carrier deck. It had taken him a long time to decide he liked having room to stretch his elbows.

Nephele also offered air that hadn't been through a 'fresher, water that didn't have a chemical aftertaste, and unrecycled food. It was paradise, compared to the Fleet. Or so he told himself. Daily.

He looked down at his salt-crusted watch. It was only nine a.m., local time, but the temperature was already up over 42 degrees centigrade. He suspected that it would top 45 before noon. That conclusion took very little deductive reasoning. Two topped 45 degrees every day.

The blazing heat drew his attention back to the task at hand. The broken pump was supposed to draw water from the aquifer deep below the farmstead and up into porous pipes below ground. The water would then be forced into the soil around the plants, giving them the precious liquid they needed to survive in Two's desert regions. Losing either the pump or suction in the well shaft would require repriming the system, a costly and difficult prospect. Meanwhile, his plants would broil in the brutal sun.

He applied the spanner to a broken solenoid, removing it in only twice the time the manual said it should take. He replaced it, dropping the new part in the sand and bashing his hand. He finally got the access panel closed. The pump hummed and clicked to itself as it ran its internal diagnostics program, then flashed "system ready" on a tiny screen.

Blair crossed his fingers and hit the starter button. The machine began to shake and rattle as the old solar-powered engine tried to turn over. "Come on, you old piece of" he said, then stopped as the pump rumbled to life. He exhaled in relief, then dropped his head in frustration as it died.

He checked the diagnostics. The display read "system fault."

"No kidding," he grumbled. He took the wrench and attacked the solenoid again, tightening and loosening it in its socket to try and get a better contact. He hit the starter again. The machine flared to life, sputtered, and died.

Blair sighed in frustration and looked across the hectare or so of crops that surrounded him. The plants would be wilted by nightfall if he couldn't get water to them, and surface irrigation was out of the question. Water pumped onto the plants during the day would either evaporate at once or would act as a lens, concentrating the sunlight and searing the vegetation even more. He needed to get the pump operational, and soon, or his crop was finished.

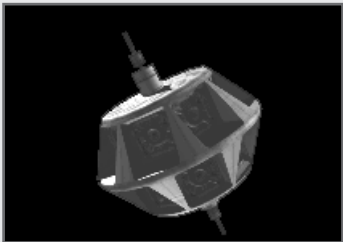
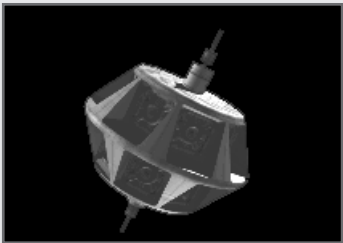
He thought he'd done well to eke as much life out of the desert as he had, and with virtually no experience. It had seemed like such a good idea at the time ... to spend his days creating life rather than destroying it. The process, though, had proven to be full of heartache and physical pain. He couldn't decide if he was proud of his accomplishment or sorry he'd ever begun it.

He knelt beside the aerator again and began to work the wrench into the sole-noid's socket. He thought that perhaps the new part was bad. He hadn't thought to bench test it before he tried to install it. He cursed. It wouldn't have been the first time the Farm Bureau had sent him a new part that arrived broken.

He gave the engine a third try. It sputtered and died. This time a sound like a gulp came from the inside of the machine as it failed. Blair swore sulfurously as the display flashed "system integrity lost — pipe pressure failure." He had

MINE

Weight.....Light
Penetration.....Very Low
SpeedVery Low



Acceleration.....Very Low
ManeuverabilityLow
DurationLow
Lock TimeNone

no choice now but to have the pump reprimed. He'd lose a significant portion of his crops before that happened.

He threw the wrench down with an oath and stalked off towards the run-down looking house, noticing for the dozenth time that the place needed a new coat of paint. He wasn't especially disposed to do much more than recognize that the need existed. His domestic urges didn't include painting, especially in Neph's blistering heat. The notion of contracting a job like that locally was laughable. Not that he could afford the job, even if he could cozen someone into doing it.

He stepped around the clutter on the steps and went inside to make the repair call. The house's main room was cluttered rather than dirty, with memorabilia covering every horizontal surface. The walls had no decoration other than old two-dees of comrades (many long dead), his framed citations and promotions, and curios picked up during twenty years of war. The room looked, he mused tiredly, like a display from a military museum. Which, in a way, it was.

He stepped over to the fridge plugged in next to his easy chair, reached in, and grabbed a beer can. He pressed the icy-cold plastic against his sweaty forehead, sighing in relief at the feel of the container against his heated skin. He glanced around, looking for his holo-comm controller. It was, for the moment, lost. He decided he wasn't particularly in the mood to look for it. The Farm Bureau could wait. *God knows*, he thought, *they're going to make me wait, once I call.*

He plopped into his chair, surrounded by a litter of magazines, books, and a trash bin half full of dead beer cans and food cartons.

The remote control for the holo-box was still sitting on the chair's arm. He picked it up and idly turned on the 'box. The news channel appeared to be carrying a feed from Earth. He checked the caption on the bottom of the screen. It was a delayed telecast from the Assembly Hall on Earth, and only two days old. He raised his eyebrows in surprise. The short delay suggested that the news must be really hot. Nephele was so far from Earth that what tapes they got were usually ten days old at the earliest. He settled back in his chair and opened his beer, interested in what the government had to say.

He cued the sound. The announcer's voice came from multiple speakers that were supposed to have been set into the walls but were instead scattered around the floor. "... and we've been told," her earnest, young voice said from off-camera, "that Admiral Tolwyn himself will be addressing this session of the Assembly on behalf of the Strategic Readiness Agency. Assembly Master Taggart's office has informed us that the nature of Admiral Tolwyn's remarks is

not yet ready for release. We've heard from "highly-placed sources" that the admiral's address will deal with the raids on Confederation shipping, likely by Border Worlds forces. Back to you, Miguel."

Blair took a slug of beer and belched as the pundits took over, trying to predict what Tolwyn would say. The camera zoomed back in on Taggart, who looked faintly bored. *Paladin's done well for himself*, Blair thought. Taggart's moustache and hair were still more dark than gray and the smile lines around his eyes had grown a little deeper. Blair decided that life as a politician agreed with him.

Taggart glanced at his watch and started banging his gavel, trying to bring the floor to order. Blair noticed that he wasn't having much luck at first. The room finally quieted, and Blair listened as Taggart introduced Tolwyn. Blair laughed again. Paladin had appeared to have lost his accent. He'd always suspected Taggart's thick, Scottish brogue had been a put on. A spy with a burr just didn't fit Blair's image of a secret agent.

Blair's laughter died as the admiral stepped up to the podium, his dress uniform aglitter with awards and decorations. The sight of Tolwyn stirred mixed emotions in Blair. The admiral had at one time thought Blair to be a turncoat, or, worse yet, incompetent, as a result of the loss of the *Tiger's Claw*. Blair had

PILUM
FRIEND OR FOE

WeightMedium
Penetration.....Very Low
Speed.....Low



AccelerationModerate
Maneuverability High
DurationLow
Lock TimeNone

since proven otherwise, mostly by accomplishing more than his fair share of Tolwyn's suicidal missions.

Blair considered Tolwyn's reputation for risk taking with other people's lives to understate the facts. The admiral's willingness to sacrifice anyone or anything to achieve his objectives had long been lauded in the popular press. He was "the man who got things done."

Blair had often been placed in the position of being one of those sacrificed, a singular honor he had rarely appreciated. He'd always managed to come back. Many of his friends, also flying on Tolwyn's orders, hadn't been so lucky. Tolwyn had won more than he'd lost, the butcher's bills notwithstanding. Tolwyn, so far as Blair knew, had never expressed remorse for those who'd died pursuing his schemes.

He listened, unimpressed, as Tolwyn laid out his case for mounting a major expedition to the frontier. There hadn't been much going on since the Kilrathi War, and Tolwyn was doubtless looking for some action. He laughed. The old war-horse was trying to find an excuse to get out and ride his carriers.

The news reports had indicated that the raids hadn't been more than a pinprick. Tolwyn's reaction seemed to him to be more akin to smashing grasshoppers with a sledgehammer than a military operation, unless the press was downplaying the real situation. He shrugged. He laughed out loud as Tolwyn maneuvered the Senate into anointing him with a strike force. If Tolwyn wanted to chase pirates with a battle fleet, then that was fine with Blair.

The only part of the situation that disturbed him was Paladin's surrender. Taggart appeared to be Tolwyn's loudest cheerleader, helping to write the admiral a blank check for his private little war. Blair wondered how that boded for the future. The military, through the Admiralty courts and martial law, had usurped much civilian authority in the name of protecting humanity from the Kilrathi. Blair had watched the government use one pretext after another to slow the transition back to complete civilian rule. Blair had been skeptical that Paladin, as a former military man, would do his part to restore the civilian government's prerogatives. This abdication seemed to confirm his assessment.

A chiming sounded from the depths of the room's clutter, drawing him from his ruminations. He stood, drained off his brew, and began sorting through the piles in the main room, in search of the comm-unit's remote control. He regretted the passing effort he'd made at tidying up the clutter. He'd only

managed to move the piles around enough to lose track of most of his personal possessions.

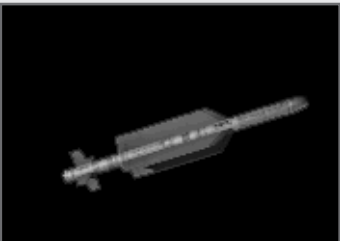
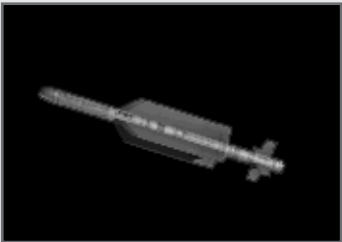
He rooted through end-table drawers and among the seat cushions, through piles of dirty clothes, stacks of books and magazines, and piles of printouts. The comm-unit buzzed again, giving him a vector to zero in on it. He found the holo-comm box hidden under an article discussing more efficient planting strategies, and a thick pile of newsfaxes.

He checked the unit, his eyebrows climbing in surprise at the flashing light. He read the display. "Incoming — planet." He turned the unit over, trying to re-familiarize himself with the device. He couldn't remember if this was the second or third message he'd received since he'd bought the place, but he hadn't had enough mail for him to bother learning how the unit worked. He pressed one button on the side of the box. The room darkened while a section of wall slid back to reveal a holo-tank.

Rachel Coriolis' face appeared, blurred and scratchy from a hundred play-backs. "Chris," her sad voice said, "I can't do this anymore. I can't spend my life on a backwater, and I can't stand the way you've crawled into that bottle." She took a deep breath, on the edge of tears. "You won't let me help you, and

**SPICULUM IMAGE
RECOGNITION**

WeightMedium
PenetrationLow
SpeedModerate



Acceleration.....Low
Maneuverability High
Duration.....Low
Lock Time.....Low

I can't live this way." She looked down. The play back fuzzed her voice into a scratchy whisper. "Chris ... I love you, but ... goodbye" Her image faded as the old chip lost resolution.

"Damn," Blair said, under his breath, "I thought I erased that." He squinted at the controller again, then hit another button.

The signal jumped and flickered, then settled down to reveal Todd Marshall grinning at him from the tank. Blair groaned.

"Same to you, old buddy," Marshall said sarcastically, glancing around the part of the room he could see through Blair's pickup. "Nice place you got there. I like the style — early bachelor." He looked at Blair again. "I hope you put the goats outside before you go to bed."

Blair kept his expression still. "Hello, Maniac." He glanced at Marshall's shoulder pips, pleased that he was still a major. "Sorry about your promotion." He didn't try very hard to hide the insincerity in his voice.

The Fleet had apparently decided that it was a bad idea to give a colonelcy to a pilot whose callsign described his state of mind. Blair, for once, agreed wholeheartedly with the arm-chair warriors. Maniac had abandoned far too many wingmen for Blair to want to entrust a squadron to him.

Marshall's face twisted in a sardonic expression that Blair had come to loathe. "Yeah, well, now that the amateurs have taken over, it's getting harder for us professionals to get ahead. I was 'sposed to get a squadron."

Blair kept his face still, unwilling to give Marshall an opening. He checked the source code of the call, confirming it as on-planet. "What brings you this far out?"

"I was just passin' through," Maniac said, his voice thick with sarcasm, "and I smelled pigs. So I said to my self "I wonder what the Scourge of Kilrah is doing these days? So I dropped by." His smile turned unfriendly. "You know, Chief, most washed up fighter-jocks take on honorable occupations, like drinking or whoring." He paused. "But, farming, that's disgraceful." He chuckled.

Blair, unamused, placed his thumb over the "disconnect" button and held it up where Marshall could see it. "If this is a social call, Maniac," he said, "then I'm through being sociable."

Maniac raised one hand, his expression turning serious. "Listen, hotshot, you gotta meet me at the star port. I'll be in the canteen. We have to talk."

"We're talking now," Blair answered.

Maniac shook his head. "Not good enough. The channel could be monitored. This is important, too important to leak." He paused. "Look, a lot of lives are on the line here. It's vital I see you." He grinned. "So, see if you can fit me into your busy schedule, ok?"

Blair thought a moment, then nodded. "All, right. I'll hear you out." He paused. "This had better not be a game."

The holo faded in a burst of static, leaving Blair in the darkened, slightly musty room. He sat long into the morning, thinking. He eventually stood and walked out onto the porch where he looked out onto his crops a long moment. He turned his back on them and went inside to pack.

LEECH

Weight.....Light
Penetration-na-
Speed.....Low



AccelerationModerate
Maneuverability High
Duration.....Low
Lock TimeModerate



Blair stepped down the shuttle's ramp, pleased that he had been able to book a last minute hop on the intercontinental. A gust of brutally hot air seeped around the mating collar that connected the walkway to the atmospheric shuttle's side. He walked down the walkway and into an icy blast of air conditioning. He shivered in the sudden heat change, gratified that while Two's starport lacked for virtually every amenity, it had a landing dock and collar for smaller ships. He was certain that otherwise he would have melted crossing the starport's concrete ramp. He decided that he was going to have to get a cold drink inside him before he suffered heat stroke.

The starport was located on Two's equator, where ships could take advantage of the planet's rotational velocity to boost into space. Blair's home was in the much more reasonable southern latitudes where asphalt didn't slag and run. He made it a point of going to the 'port as little as possible, to avoid the heat.

He rapidly concluded that the starport hadn't improved much since the last time he had been there. Dust, dirt, and grime covered everything. He walked up the access ramp from the shuttle and passed a small, dust-caked window that faced the small field. He paused a moment to look out the thick plexiglass.

Small freighters lined one side of the field, their structures wavering in the rising thermals. Three landing circles, their concrete basins lashed and battered by the drive streams of dozens of ships, marked the area where the outbound ships staged for departure. A pair of closed lift-trucks loaded cargo onto a dirty and smoke-streaked short-haul atmospheric transport that squatted near the 'port's sole runway. The hulks of a half-dozen abandoned spacecraft lay cluttered on the far side of the field.

The shuttle lifted up to ground level behind him, raised by the small elevator that served the passenger area. It rolled slowly towards the departure area. He gave some thought as to how he planned to get back home, once he'd heard Maniac's pitch, then realized he didn't really care. He was here, and that was enough. He turned away from the window, threw his flight bag over his shoulder, and walked towards the concourse.

The inside of Two's starport had been built around a commercial area, with several offices for local freight lines, a broker, few tired-looking shops, and several restaurants and bars. The whole place was done in lively pastels that both lightened the gloomy surroundings and showed dirt. The floor was carpeted in some kind of tough, age-spotted commercial fiber that had worn through in spots.

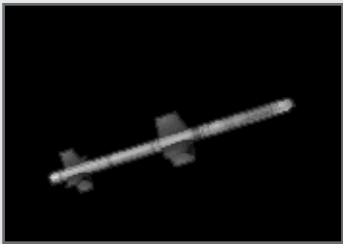
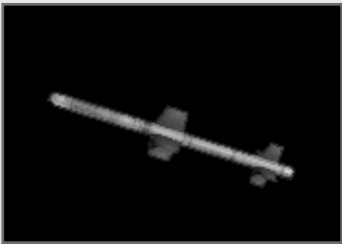
He angled for the canteen, certain it hadn't been moved. Pilots hung out in spacer bars, usually located within spitting distance of the starport's front gate, if not on the premises. Two made it easier by packing most of its facilities in close together, to reduce the amount of air they would have to chill.

The canteen was a dive located along the far wall of a tiny plaza built off the main drag. It appeared to share space with a pawnshop and what he guessed was either a brothel or a hotel, if not both. He slung his bag more tightly over his shoulder, crossed to the canteen, and entered.

He entered the outer alcove and was immediately struck by the din of the noisy crowd within. He glanced up and saw a clock displaying the local time. Eleven-thirty, and the place was already packed. He checked his bag in a rented locker and pocketed the key before he entered the main bar. His rough

**JAVELIN HEAT
SEEKER**

Weight.....Light
PenetrationLow
SpeedModerate



Acceleration.....Moderate
Maneuverability High
Duration.....Very Low
Lock Time.....Moderate

plan was to do a quick recce and find a good table before Maniac entered. A sign saying "No weapons allowed" flashed on and off over the door.

He stepped through the inner batwing doors and glanced around. The place had been a pilot's hangout during the war, catering to the long haul patrols and transit-jockeys ferrying fighters out to the frontier. The walls were decorated with two-dee renderings of war-craft throughout the ages, from primitive prop-driven aircraft to state-of-the-art fighters and bombers. Bric-a-brac and pilot memorabilia were scattered about on shelves. Models hung from the low ceiling, scattered between the ceiling fans and disco lights.

The place had always seemed contrived to Blair. Two had never had enough of a military presence to support a pilot's bar, so it had to depend on transients.

Blair glanced around the main bar, looking for Maniac. The bar was filled to overflowing with the flotsam of a half-dozen races and a hundred planets. Pimps and whores of every possible color and gender plied their trades next to homeless vets begging for a handout or a drink. Several spacers in the shiny boots and creased flight suits of one of the inter-system liners swapped lies and swilled drinks with a pair of Confed pilots in rumpled flightsuits. The next table had a woman with a tattooed face and green hair who fed cherries from the bar to a spider monkey perched on her shoulder. Blair watched the animal a moment, uncertain if its bright blue hair was a mutation or a dye job.

Men and women, many in remnants of Confederation uniforms — mostly identifiable as Kilrathi War veterans by their decorations and badges — littered the small round tables that surrounded the central area. Many drank or were drunk, while others played cards or dominoes. They shared the bored, listless expressions that Blair had come to associate with people who had no place to be and nothing much to do. Drug dealers worked the corners of the bar, plying the drunk or stoned with their wares, and occasionally rolling the comatose. Money changers and card-sharps sized up the rubes and each other. It was as motley a collection of human flotsam as Blair had seen in a long time.

Terrans stood cheek by jowl with aliens, Border Worlders, and mixed races, all talking at once — jabbering, negotiating, arguing, fighting, and drinking. The noise, the activity, and the odors of sweat, oil, and vomit clogged his senses.

He recovered some of his poise and worked his way a little deeper into the closely packed mass, enough that he could pick up snippets of the conversations around him. Everyone was looking to score — whether it was money, stolen property, sex, power, or off-planet. They all had some need they wanted met, and were willing, often frantic, to trade.

He moved into the center of the room, shifting his ID plate and credit chips into his front pockets. That wouldn't stop a sneak thief from picking them, but it would make it more difficult. He looked around the room, searching for Maniac.

He shook his head, tiring of the game. Too much had changed since he'd retired to his farm for him to be comfortable with the situation. He made for the bar, seeking a safe haven while he pondered his next move. He placed his elbows on the cheap, wood-grained plastic bar top, then snagged the barkeep's attention.

"Hell's Kitchen."

The bartender registered mild surprise. "I haven't served one of those since the war!"

When it arrived, Blair looked at the amber colored liquid. He took a careful sniff, then wrinkled his nose at the smell of raw alcohol. He lifted the glass and took a careful sip, his first whiskey since Rachel had left. He coughed slightly as it burned a track down his throat. The stuff may have been rotgut, but it was better than the hootch produced by many ships' stills and far superior to the stuff he'd brought with him.

He cleared his throat. "How much?" he asked, indicating the glass.

TORPEDO

Weight.....Heavy

PenetrationVery High

SpeedVery Low



Acceleration.....Very Low

ManeuverabilityLow

DurationLow

Lock TimeVery High

"One point two," the bartender replied, "standard credits only. None of that Border Worlds' trash." He looked at Blair examining the glass. "It's cheap at the price."

"It'd be cheap at any price," Blair replied sourly. He handed his credit chip to the bartender. The bartender ran the charge, then looked up at Blair hopefully. "A tip?"

Blair thought a moment. "Don't go outside without a coat."

That bartender returned his credit chip and walked away, a sour look on his face.

Blair was just turning around to scan the bar again, when someone bumped into him, spilling part of his drink on his hand. He quickly held the glass away from his clothing while he turned his head to curse at his jostler. The profanity died on his lips. A grizzled veteran, wearing the scraps of what had once been Confederation crew coveralls, looked up at him with rheumy eyes. He reeked of cheap whiskey and other, less savory odors.

The veteran wiped the back of one dirty hand across his mouth and tried to focus on Blair. "Hey, kid," the man said, "can you spare a vet a drink?"

Blair glanced over the man's coveralls. The patches had been removed at some point, leaving dark shapes where they had protected the material beneath from fading. Blair thought he recognized some of the shapes. "Were you a flier?"

The veteran drew himself up in pride and met Blair's eye. "Yep," he said, "started out as a turret gunner on a Broadsword. Got m'self a field commission as a pilot and flew 'em."

"What happened?" Blair asked.

The man sighed, exhaling a stench into Blair's face. "I din't have no college, so I lost m' commission in the 'reduction in forces' when the war ended." He shrugged, his face a mix of pain and humiliation. "I flew off the ole *Liberty* for nineteen years. I was a plank-owner, been on her since her commissionin'. That shoulda' counted for sometin', ya know?" He glanced away and his shoulders slumped. "Poor girl — the *Liberty*, I mean. She fought hard an' did her part, ya know, then got broken up for scrap. It was like she was nuthin'."

Blair nodded sympathetically. "Yeah, it's hell." The vet gave Blair a hard look. "I was on the *Concordia*," Blair supplied, "so I know all about losing a ship."

The vet dipped his head in agreement, accepting Blair as a member of the club. "Say, you don't know of any spacers takin' on crew, do ya?"

Blair shook his head. "Sorry. Why don't you go down to the hiring hall?"

The vet shrugged. "There's nuthin' there. The Cats got awful good at goin' after our transport in th' tail end of the war, and with th' loss of the shipyards on Earth and the scale-down after, there ain't been a whole lot of constructin'. What slots there are got captains and majors scramblin' for third mate's jobs." He looked morose. "It's bad, especially for a RIF'ed lieutenant like me."

"Yeah," Blair agreed.

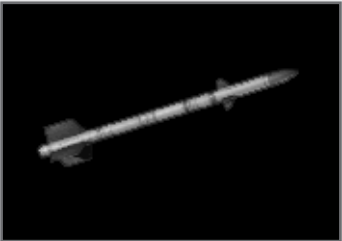
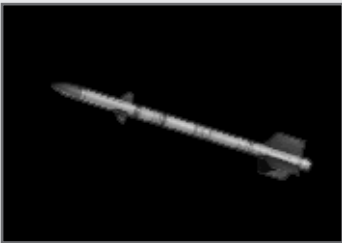
"Ya know," the vet continued, "we fought awful hard and awful long to win th' war, an' for what? There's still Cats out there, makin' trouble, an' pirates, an' whatnot. Nuthin's goin' like it should. It's like we lost th' war, too." He looked down meaningfully at Blair's drink. "You can't get a decent glass o' whiskey," he pointed at the amber liquid. "Just bilge-waste."

Blair opened his mouth to speak, only to have the vet run over him. "Prices of everything been goin' up. It's like everthing's fallin' apart."

That's because it is, Blair thought. The war had gone on so long it had achieved a life of its own. He hadn't realized until after he had retired and had to live on the civilian economy just how much of it had become geared to support the war effort. That, coupled with the devastation of the Kilrathi attack on the home worlds, the sheer expense of the war, and the loss of the cream of human gener-

DUMBFIRE MISSILE

Weight.....Light
PenetrationModerate
Speed.....Very High



Acceleration.....Very High
Maneuverability.....None
DurationVery Low
Lock Time.....None

ations had drained off what few resources were available to maintain the economic infrastructure. Without the steady injections of military spending to sustain the economy, it had slipped into recession, then depression.

The vet was looking at Blair intently. "Look, buddy, if I'm bothering you"

"No," Blair replied, "sorry. I was thinking of ... old friends. Comrades, you know?" It was the safest answer that came to mind.

The vet nodded, drawing his sleeve across his mouth again. "I didn't mean to ramble on," he said, "it's just — you spend you're whole life workin' for somethin', workin' for victory, ya know. Then we got it — an' then what? They throw us all out, tell us we gotta find jobs — like there was any to be found. An' they tells that *now* we gotta contribute, ya know." His face turned bitter. "Like we haven't been."

"Well," Blair replied, shrugging his shoulders, "I don't think anyone ever planned on what would happen if we won. I think we were so focused on just surviving that we never stopped to think about what would happen the day after peace broke out." He ground his teeth. *Maybe we should have though, he thought, we got a little taste of this during the truce. But then we had Earth's industry and the Inner Colonies to carry some of the weight.*

The vet cleared his throat. "Um," he said, "about that drink ...?"

"Sure," Blair said. He reached into his pocket for some folding money and saw Maniac through the crowd. The major looked as he always did, intense, and never more so than when he was putting the moves on a woman.

Blair thought a moment, then peeled off a five credit note. It was little enough, but would get the vet a decent meal and a shower, if not a room. He pressed the money into the startled man's hands.

The vet tried to refuse it. "No," Blair said, "Take it. One survivor to another."

The veteran frowned and reluctantly accepted the largess. "Thanks, buddy," he said. He looked at Blair a long moment. "Sorry, I din't catch your name."

Blair smiled grimly. "Smith," he said, lying. His own name carried too much for fame for him to use it casually. He stepped quickly away from the bar, looking for where Maniac had disappeared through the crowd with the girl. It took only a few steps to see where Maniac had drawn her. He could tell from her expression that she didn't seem overly impressed with his line of approach. He laughed to himself. *If I get there in time, he thought as he walked towards the pilot, I may be able to do my civic duty and keep him from crashing and burning.*

Blair was just about to tap Marshall on the shoulder when the pilot leaned forward towards the woman. "So, baby, whad'ya say. I got us a room."

The woman pursed her lips as though she'd bitten a lemon. Blair whistled in sympathetic pain as she slapped him hard across the face and stormed away. Blair stood there, a knowing smile on his face, as Maniac turned towards him. Todd Marshall rubbed his cheek ruefully.

"It's amazin' how unpatriotic women get as soon as a war stops," Manic said cheerfully, "all I did was offer to let her keep my morale up for me."

"As I recall," Blair replied dryly, "that line didn't work any better *during* the war."

Maniac gave Blair his trademark smug grin. "You never know 'til you try." He shrugged and tipped his chin towards the bar. "Who was the bum?"

Blair made a sour face. "Bomber pilot. Got caught in the RIF. No real prospects, so he hangs out here, cadging drinks."

Maniac nodded. "The RIF took out more good folks than the Cats did." He shrugged. "Things're tough, especially for the bastards who put it all on the line an' now got nothin'."

Blair looked back at the bar, his mood introspective. "You know, Maniac, when I was a kid, space was the place to be. It meant opportunity. The colonies were growing exponentially, the economy was good, and even the war was an exciting thing — fighting aliens for humanity. Now, it's like we've lost something. Space is like everywhere else, just another junkyard."

Maniac stared at him, as startled as if Blair had begun spouting Kilrathi mating-poetry. "Colonel," he said, placing enough stress on Blair's rank to be borderline insubordinate, "are you sure you ain't been on that farm too long?"

Blair wasn't in the mood to banter. "The farm's a peaceful life, Major. Quiet. Serene. Stable. Zen Buddhists next door. You wouldn't like it."

Maniac laughed, harsh and mean. "I've always said you'd go soft. I just didn't expect your head to go first."

"So," Blair said, "what's this important matter you wanted to discuss?"

"Colonel Christopher Blair," Marshall Todd said. "In the name of the Confederation Space Force Reserves and by the authority of emergency decree 394A, it is my duty to inform you that you have been recalled to active service in grade of full colonel, with all the pay and benefits accruing and blah, blah, blah." He punctuated his announcement with a malicious grin and a flash of his usual humor. "Have a nice day."

GAME DEVELOPMENT

<i>Executive Producer</i>	Chris Roberts
<i>Game Producers</i>	Mark Day, Dallas Snell
<i>Associate Producers</i>	David Downing, Adam Foshko
<i>Game Director</i>	Anthony Morone
<i>Lead Programmer</i>	Frank Roan
<i>Programmer, Gameflow Coordinator</i>	Jason Hughes
<i>Additional Programming</i>	Peter Shelus
<i>Movie Compression & Playback</i>	Jason Yenawine
<i>Programming Intern</i>	Daniel Yee

DESIGN

<i>Mission Design & Implementation</i>	Ben Potter, Jeff Shelton, Scott Shelton
<i>Original Story Concept</i>	Chris Douglas
<i>Additional Data Implementation</i>	Chuck Karpiak, Steve Powers, Charles Hartigan

AUDIO

<i>Audio Coordinator</i>	Martin Galway
<i>Original Score</i>	George Oldziey
<i>Interactive Sound Design</i>	Stretch Williams
<i>Additional Interactive Sound Design</i>	Nenad Vugrinec
<i>Interactive Music</i>	George Oldziey
<i>Music Recording</i>	George Oldziey, Stretch Williams
<i>Musicians</i>	Paul Baker (Saxophone), Stretch Williams (Guitar)
<i>Dialog Casting/Recording/Editing</i>	Jay Mahavier, Stretch Williams
<i>Additional Dialog Casting/Recording/Editing</i>	Randy Buck, Jason Cobb

ART

<i>Production Designer</i>	Chris Douglas
<i>Art Director</i>	Jeffrey "JC" Combs
<i>3-D Animators</i>	Rodney Brunet, Jeffrey "JC" Combs, Chris Douglas, Mark Leon, Dean McCall, Sean Murphy, Chris Olivia, Beth Foster Pugh, Pauline Saab, Mark Vearrier
<i>Additional 3-D Animators</i>	Jennifer Ayers, Paul Steed
<i>RealSpace 3-D Modellers</i>	Dean McCall, Brennan Priest
<i>Additional Artists</i>	Jeff Harris, Damon Waldrip
<i>3-D Software provided by</i>	Alias Research
<i>Graphics Hardware provided by</i>	Silicon Graphics

PRODUCT SUPPORT

<i>QA Project Leader</i>	Anthony L. Sommers
<i>Assistant Project Leaders</i>	J. Allen Brack, Todd Wachhaus
<i>QA Team</i>	Cinco Barnes, Nathan Batiste, John Darsnek, Christopher D. Errett, Kenny Hott, Kevin Melton, Myque Ouellette, Kent Raffray, Carlus Wesley
<i>Hardware Lab Tech</i>	Brett J. Bonner
<i>Translations Liaison</i>	Andy Bruncke
<i>Product Support Supervisor</i>	Marie Williams
<i>Hardware Lab Supervisor</i>	Brian Wachhaus
<i>Director of Studio Services</i>	Kay Gilmore

ADMINISTRATIVE

<i>Finance</i>	Mike Grajeda, Dominique Iyer
<i>Executive Assistant</i>	Madeleine Fox
<i>Resource Coordinator</i>	Weston Giunta
<i>Network Administrators</i>	Dave Reeves, Mark Rizzo
<i>Senior Technician</i>	Rick McNeeley
<i>Unix Administrator</i>	Christopher Alexander North-Keys
<i>Director of Development Services</i>	Sean Kelley
<i>Director of Marketing</i>	Jennie Evans
<i>Product Manager</i>	Galen Svanas
<i>Assistant Product Manager</i>	Patrick Bradshaw
<i>Media Relations</i>	David Swofford, Teresa Potts, Richard Steinberg
<i>Unit Publicist</i>	Michaels & Wolfe, Inc.
<i>Travel Coordination</i>	Madeleine Fox, Barrington Smith
<i>Subtitles</i>	Madeleine Fox, Ana Moreno, Jörg Neumman

TRANSLATION

<i>Translations Manager</i>	Kirsten Vaughan
<i>German Translation</i>	Frank Dietz, Stefan Kolo, Jörg Neumann
<i>German Documentation</i>	Anja Rumbarger
<i>German Testing</i>	Jörg Neumann, Kai Lebert, Stephan Lips, Roman Traycey
<i>German Dubbing Studio</i>	FFS GmbH, Munich
<i>French Translations</i>	Peter Bert, Dominique Poumeyrol-Jumeau
<i>French Documentation</i>	Isabelle Rice
<i>French Testing</i>	Jean-Luc Chabrier, Lemuel Haham, Didier Jumeau, Daniel Taillefer
<i>French Dubbing Studio</i>	Studio Lincoln, Paris

GAME MATERIALS

<i>Writing</i>	Tuesday Frase, Kevin Schlipper, Melissa Tyler
<i>Additional Fiction</i>	William R. Forstchen, Ben Ohlander
<i>Packaging</i>	Trey Hermann
<i>Poster Art</i>	Sam Yeates
<i>Promotional Materials</i>	Jennifer Davis
<i>Advertising</i>	Al Carnley
<i>Documentation Layout</i>	Catherine Cantieri, Al Carnley, Tim Norland
<i>Editing</i>	David Ladyman
<i>The Readme.txt File</i>	Anthony L. Sommers, J. Allen Brack, Todd Wachhaus, Christopher D. Errett

FILM PRODUCTION

<i>Executive Producer / Director</i>	Chris Roberts
<i>Producer</i>	Mark Day
<i>Associate Producer</i>	Adam Foshko
<i>Co-Producer</i>	Donna Burkons
<i>Screenplay</i>	Terry Borst, Frank De Palma
<i>Line Producer</i>	Maryann Fabian
<i>Casting Director</i>	Mike Fenton
<i>Assistant Casting Director</i>	Julie Ashton-Barson

Casting Assistant	Rachel Davies
1st Assistant Director	Harry Jarvis
2nd Assistant Director	Tia Ardran
2nd 2nd Assistant Director	John Bratton
Production Coordinator	James A. Capp
Assistant Production Coordinator	Ray Cobo
Set Production Assistants	Wendy Palmer, Andrea Netze
Production Assistants	Shaun O'Banion, Gary Sims, Orion Walker
Assistant to Mr. Hamill	Tracee Sabato
Assistant to Mr. Roberts	Barrington Smith
Mark Hamill's Stand-In	Emidio Antonio
Director of Photography	Eric Goldstein
1st Camera Assistant	Tom Ryan
2nd Camera Assistant	Tony Nagy
Additional 2nd Camera Assistant	Daisy Smith
Loader	Amy Abrams
Gaffer / General Foreman	Joey Brown
Best Boy / Chief Lighting Technician	Corey Bibb
Best Boy Grip / 2nd Company Grip	Sandy Bloom
Key Grip / 1st Company Grip	Billy Bosson
Dolly Grip / Crab Dolly Grip	Michael Flaningam
Grips	Liz Bolden, Marc Polanski, Robert Reid, Kevin Ball
Apprentice Grip	Erik Wolford
Electrical Lighting Technicians	Uriel Uribe, Anthony Guzman, Andrew Glover, Ngoli Nyirenda, Douglas Blagg, John Massaro, Thoma Reavis, Daisuke Miyake, Don Chong, Eric Kramer
Ultimatte Operator	Bob Kertesz
Tap Operator	Greg Noyes
Still Photographer	Joel Sussman
Sound Mixer	Walt Martin
Boom Operator	Bill Ratcliff
Script Supervisor	Kate Lewis
Storyboard Artists	Marc Baird, Alex Hill
Production Designers	Cherie Baker, Chris Douglas
Computer Graphics Art Director	Jeffrey "JC" Combs
Art Department Coordinator	Ann Giselle-Spiegler
Set Designers	Chris Gorak, James O'Donnell, Bryan Lane
Model Builder	Robin Schneider
Set Decorator	Carrie Perzan
Leadman	Richard D. Wright
Set Dresser	John Grevera, James Dean, Ara Darakjian
On-Set Dresser	Tom Waisanen
Costume Designer	Karen Mann
Costumer	Kristen Saints
Wardrobe Supervisor	Carol Quiroz

Set Costumer.....Joel Berlin
Costumer.....Dana Loats, Anita Brown, Tammy Surber
Costume InternJoya Flores, Staci Riesenbeck, Pauletteuris
Key HairLana Sharpe
Assistant HairGloria Ponce
Hair StylistShastie Sharpe
Key Makeup.....Bill Myer
Assistant Make-up.....Kim Miner

KILRATHI CREATURE TEAM

MelekChris Bergschneider
Suit Technician #1Jeff Farley
Suit Technician #2.....Jo Ann Bloomfield
PuppeteerBud McGrew
Puppeteer AssistantMike Newman
Kilrathi ProstheticsObscure Artifacts, Inc
Property MasterMark Anderson
Assistant PropertyLori A. Noyes
Special Effects.....Studio Art & Technology

SETS & STUNTS

Stunt CoordinatorRocky Capella
Construction CoordinatorMike Clark
Assistant Construction CoordinatorJenny Ayala
General ForemanKeith Cox
Construction ForemanWade Robinson
Welder / ConstructionMichael J. Cohen
StandbySteve Degroodt
Prop MakerMorgan Flaherty
Carpenters / Prop MakersPaul T. Contreras, Martin Duncan, Gordan E. Holmes II,
 Tyler Dupuy, Ray Baron, Max K. Bozeman, Sean A. Duggan, David Nute, Steven Doss,
 Scott Miller, Robert A.Masini, David Wheeler, Timothy Walsh, Martin Duncan,
 Timothy Gruse, Frank Palazzo, Casey Wheeler, Karl Koebe, David Campbell,
 Gregory Campbell, Thomas Wages, Rex Cassano, Ronnie Montgomery

Lead Scenic / Head Painter.....Dave Robinson
Scenic ArtistsChris Kelly, Paul Manchester, Luz
Head DecoratorChris Kelly
DecoratorsSteve Degroodt, Luz
Painters / DecoratorsBrian Lynk, Peter George, Frank Oliveri, Gary Mark,
 Guillermo Tello, Mick Ritchason, Martin Ortiz, Jaime Casillas
LaborersCesar Ayala, Rick Fine, Juan Rave, Daniel R. Parker,
 Jason Greenwood, David Kitchen, Dennis Winters, Ruben Delgado, April Duncan

2ND UNIT

2nd Unit DirectorsMark Day, Adam Foshko
ConsultantJim Rosenthal
Video AssistantDan Devaney
Video InternChuck Hatigan

<i>1st Utility</i>	David Weinreb
<i>2nd Utility</i>	Jennifer Lear
<i>1st Assistant Director</i>	Louis Milito
<i>2nd Assistant Director</i>	Brett Boydston
<i>Script Supervisor</i>	Judith Saunders
<i>Set Production Assistant</i>	Curtis Myer, Carol Gronner
<i>Gaffer</i>	Reginald F. Lake
<i>Best Boy Electrician</i>	Sherman Fulton
<i>Electrician</i>	Van Johnson
<i>Key Grip</i>	Irv Katz
<i>Best Boy Grip</i>	Dave Boden
<i>Grips</i>	Mark Combs, Jim Nieuwenhuis
<i>Sound</i>	Wolf Seeberg
<i>Medics</i>	Christina Hershey, Suzanne Kunkel, Justin Birchfiel
<i>Craft Service</i>	Julie Iles
<i>Sound Stages provided by</i>	Ren Mar Studios, Hollywood, California, USA

BUSINESS OFFICE

<i>Production Accountant</i>	Laurie Woken
<i>Assistant Production Accountant</i>	Julie La Prath
<i>Business / Legal Affairs</i>	Carol Contes, Leslie Abel

POST-PRODUCTION

<i>Post-Production Director</i>	Phil Gessert
<i>Visual Effects Supervisor</i>	Steve Moore
<i>Visual Effects Coordinator</i>	Jeffery "JC" Combs
<i>Post-Production Coordinator</i>	David Downing

POST-PRODUCTION — PICTURE

<i>Avid Editor</i>	Phil Gessert
<i>Assistant Editor</i>	Jay Mahavier
<i>Post-Production Assistant</i>	Jim Capp
<i>Video Processing Facility</i>	EA Media Lab
<i>Video Processing & Digitization</i>	Jeni Day
<i>Video Technician</i>	Michael Marsh
<i>Digital Compositing and On Line</i>	Western Images, Inc
<i>Facility Producer</i>	Todd Lindo
<i>Technical Director</i>	Jerry Castro
<i>Telecine Colorists</i>	Jim Barrett, Gary Coates
<i>D-1 Online Editors</i>	Greg Gilmore, Mark Sorensen
<i>Compositing Artist</i>	Orin Green
<i>Rotoscoping Artists</i>	Danielle Ciccarelli, Ali Laventhol
<i>Visual Effects</i>	Post Logic, Inc
<i>Post Logic Producer</i>	Leslie Sorrentino
<i>Visual Effects Composer</i>	Robby Vignato
<i>Telecine Colorist</i>	Mike Eaves
<i>Telecine Assistant</i>	Mario Barrera

D-1 Online EditorBob Blue
D-1 Assistants.....Ko Maruyama, Shane Harris
Digital Non-Linear Editing System.....AVID Technology, TEXTSOUND
Film to Tape Transfers byDeluxe Video

POST-PRODUCTION — SOUND

Origin Systems

Sound DirectorMartin Galway
Post Production Producer.....Stretch Williams
Sound EditorStretch Williams
Additional Sound EditingRandy Buck, Jason Cobb
Additional Dialogue Recording.....Randy Buck, Jason Cobb

Electronic Arts San Mateo

Director of Film Audio Post-ProductionMurray Allen
Dubbing MixersTony Berkeley, Ken Felton
Dialogue EditingTony Berkeley, Ken Felton
Foley EditingTony Berkeley, Ken Felton
Music Editing.....Tony Berkeley, Ken Felton
Supervising Sound Effects EditorTony Berkeley
Sound Effects EditorsKen Felton, Marc Farly
Sound Designers.....Tony Berkeley, Marc Farly, Ken Felton
Special Kilrathi Vocal Effects.....Tom Seufert
Foley & ADR Services provided by.....Post Sound Corp.
ADR Mixer.....John Reiner C.A.S.
Foley MixerRichard Duarte
Foley ArtistsMargie O'Malley, Marnie Moore
Foley EditorDave Nelson

CAST

Col. Christopher BlairMark Hamill
Admiral Tolwyn.....Malcolm McDowell
Maj. James "Paladin" Taggart.....John Rhys-Davies
Capt. William Eisen.....Jason Bernard
Maj. Todd "Maniac" MarshallTom Wilson
Seether.....Robert Rusler
2nd Lt. Troy "Catscratch" Carter.....Mark Dacascos
1st Lt. Velina SosaHolly Gagnier
Lt. Winston "Vagabond" Chang.....Francois Chau
Col. Jacob "Hawk" ManleyChris Mulkey
Col. Tamara "Panther" Farnsworth.....Elizabeth Barones
Lt. Col. Gash DekkerJeremy Roberts
Chief Tech Robert "Pliers" Sykes.....Richard Riehle
Vice-Admiral Daniel WolfordPeter Jason
Captain Hugh PaulsenJohn Spencer
2nd Lt. Drew NaismithWilliams Youmans
Dr. BrodyJessica Tuck

<i>Voice of Melek</i>	Barry Dennen	<i>Shuttle Pilot</i>	Dylan Haggerty
<i>News Anchor</i>	Barbara Niven	<i>Confed Marine</i>	Derik Hixon
<i>Confed Redshirt #1</i>	Richard Garon	<i>Border Worlds Lt.</i>	Carl Banks
<i>Confed Redshirt #2</i>	Chris Conrad	<i>Bluepoint Traffic Control</i>	Todd Covert
<i>Confed Redshirt #3</i>	Casper Van Dien	<i>Helmsperson</i>	Beverley Castaldo
<i>Confed Redshirt #4</i>	Suzanne Ircha	<i>Circle V Comm. Specialist</i>	Saxon Trainer
<i>Telamon Female Comm Officer</i>	Kirsten Moore	<i>B.W.S. Carrier Officer #1</i>	Allen Cutler
<i>Telamon Citizen</i>	Joel Polis	<i>B.W.S. Carrier Officer #2</i>	Joe Fiske
<i>Telamon Doctor</i>	Michael Cavanaugh	<i>Confed Pilot</i>	Michael Wachtel
<i>Canteen Bartender</i>	Dylan Bruno	<i>Vagabond Double</i>	Peter Lai
<i>Canteen Vet</i>	Peter Marquardt	<i>Com Base Guard #1</i>	Tim Meridith
<i>Canteen Man</i>	Dean Tarrolly	<i>Com Base Guard #2</i>	Dan Bell
<i>Border Worlds Pilot #1</i>	Mauricio Mendoza	<i>Com Base Guard #3</i>	Scott McElroy
<i>Border Worlds Pilot #2</i>	Lester Barrie	<i>Tolwyn Double</i>	Randy Hall
<i>Border Worlds Pilot #3</i>	Walt Goggins	<i>Convoy Comm. Officer</i>	Morgan Englund
<i>Vesuvius Helmsman</i>	Aaron Kuhr	<i>Pirate</i>	Todd Kimsey
<i>Vesuvius Comm. Officer</i>	Wanda Acuna	<i>Melek</i>	Chris Bergschneider
<i>Transport Pilot</i>	Jane A. Rogers	<i>Generic Cap #1</i>	Charles Esten
<i>Senator #1</i>	Dean Sommers	<i>Generic Cap #2</i>	Michael Haplin
<i>Senator #2</i>	Ed Bernard	<i>Generic Cap #3</i>	Cookie Carosella
<i>Senator #3</i>	Roger Mercurio	<i>Generic Cap #4</i>	Jeffrey Arbaugh
<i>Senator #4</i>	Shirlee Reed	<i>Slapping Woman</i>	Kirsten Maryott

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