

Rising Star

an original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE -- NIGHT

A well-worn, merchant space freighter armed with missiles and cannon descends rapidly through the stars and outer atmosphere into a two-moon illuminated night sky.

EXT. ABOVE JUNGLE MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The freighter descends toward hazy, ominous, jungle-clad mountains. The freighter brakes, slows, and cruises over the alien treetops.

It suddenly stops, hovers, and snaps on landing lights.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

As the freighter hovers nearby, Coalition LIEUTENANT GRAHAM DANTE, 25, a naive, 23rd century Midwestern all-American boy, shimmers from almost invisible to visible as he moves a hand and adjusts the resolution on his combat power suit helmet's heads-up display.

Dante brings the freighter into sharper focus.

Dante stops. He changes to match the jungle and becomes nearly invisible again.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

Floodlights snap on. They illuminate a large, heavily defended Movement base and landing pad carved out of the mountainside jungle.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT GUARD TOWERS-- NIGHT

Ragged Movement guerrillas alertly man heavy weapons from tall minaret-like guard towers.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT LANDING PAD-- NIGHT

The freighter touches down on the landing pad.

Various Movement guerrillas SHOUT orders as others come out of the buildings with carts, forklifts, dollies, etc.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Dante touches a helmet switch. His heads-up display changes. The guard towers, Movement patrols, and freighter all display as symbols.

He touches a switch again and the display shows symbols for his dozen Coalition troopers deployed to attack the base.

DANTE

Strike Force, Force Leader. Prepare
to initiate engagement.

Deployed in an arc around the base, Dante's Coalition TROOPERS shimmer into and out of visibility as they energize their weapons. In their heads up displays, target boxes glow around targets in the spaceport.

Coalition SERGEANT MICHELLE RAADER, 32, a tough as nails combat veteran senior sergeant with a hard beauty flips a communications switch.

RAADER

Raader on private channel. Hold
'em, El-tee.

DANTE

The manuals says go now!

RAADER

Wait until they get busy offloading.

As three Movement guerrillas patrol in the jungle, they catch a glimpse of Raader as she shimmers in and out of sight.

Alarmed, but unsure exactly what they saw, they creep toward the general area.

Dante nods.

DANTE

Force, Force Leader. Hold what you
got—we'll give them a little more
rope.

Raader grins, slowly shakes her head.

RAADER

(To herself)
I can't hear you nod, El-tee.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT LANDING PAD- NIGHT

The freighter's cargo hatches CREAK and hydraulics HISS as big doors open.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Dante's troopers nervously shift positions. When the troopers move, they shimmer in and out of visibility.

Raader notices friendly icons in her heads up display change colors. She shimmers in and out of visibility as she talks.

RAADER

Just stay still, yardbirds! We'll go when the El-tee says, and not until.

The Movement patrol now knows there's definitely something there. They spread out, moving cautiously, weapons now fully ready.

Raader picks up the Movement patrol on her helmet display.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Damn!

Raader switches her helmet display so it shows the offloading.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Put your backs into it, you lazy Movement bastards.

The Movement patrol moves closer to Raader.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

A forklift STALLS in the freighter's cargo door. Crates CRASH as they tumble off. The Movement guerrillas cluster around the forklift. They CURSE and gesture at the operator.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The noise distracts the Movement patrol hunting Raader. They turn their attention from the jungle to the noise.

Dante reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a vial. He shakes a piece of straw from the vial and chews on it, then replaces the vial.

DANTE

Looks good.

The Movement patrol is just fifteen-twenty feet from Raader and closing.

Raader blinks. With each blink, the icons representing the three approaching Movement each glow in order.

She wheels 180 degrees, coming into visibility as she fans the jungle with her power gun. The weapon slews onto each Movement guerrilla and pulls Raader along.

Energy bolts HISS ELECTRICALLY as they spurt from the weapon, the hot blue rays BLAST each of the three Movement guerrillas before they can react.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

The Movement guerrillas at the forklift hear the BLASTS, freeze, and go silent.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Dante rises and aims his powergun at the Movement in the spaceport.

Dante charges forward and fires his powergun.

DANTE

Move out! Follow me!

Raader wheels around to face the Movement base. She moves forward and fires her powergun.

RAADER

Let's go, slagheaps!

Dante's troopers attack forward on line, firing. Energy weapons CRACKLE and SIZZLE, grenades, missiles, and energy bolts EXPLODE on impact.

Dante leads the line, while Raader is in back. Movement guards are cut down in mid-stride. A missile grenade takes out the gaggle at the forklift.

A Movement guerrilla shoots and hits the advancing Dante with a glancing shot to the chest. The force spins Dante around and knocks him down.

An icon glows red and flashes in Raader's heads-up display. She pauses in her firing.

RAADER (CONT'D)

El-tee!? Lieutenant!?

No answer.

The Movement guerrilla peers over his weapon sights, bloodily satisfied.

Then a blue bolt streaks from the brush where Dante went down straight into the Movement and blows him apart.

Dante rises from the ground, his suit's chest armor scorched and smoking. Dante's heads-up display reads out that the armor is damaged, but functional.

DANTE

Can't live without my techno!

The Movement guerrillas' heavy weapons in the minaret towers slew to fire on Dante's advancing line, but the troopers' missile weapons blast them down.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT -- NIGHT

The Movement guerrillas give ground, dodging behind crates and into buildings. Dante's force advances into the spaceport.

Suddenly reinforced, the Movement guerrillas surge back and cut down two of Dante's force. Dante's force is pinned down.

OFFLOADED CRATES

Dante notices Empire markings on the supply crates.

The Movement guerrillas' fire increases dramatically.

RAADER

Counterattack! Get us out of here,
el-tee!

Dante desperately looks behind him. It's all open ground--a killing field. He looks left and right--no place to go there, either.

The incoming fire increases.

The crate Dante is using for cover splinters under Movement weapons fire--it's full of ammunition!

DANTE

Red team, we take the building dead
ahead! Blue team--suppressive fire--
Now!

RAADER

You heard the man! Get up and earn
your pay!

Raader stands and pours fire onto the Movement positions. Half the Coalition troopers do the same.

DANTE

Hero time! Red team--let's go!

It's do or die. Firing from the hip and SHOUTING, Dante leads Raader and three other troopers in a charge through a storm of Movement energy bolts. Movement guerrillas fall, but so does another Coalition trooper.

INT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

Dante's troopers smash their way in to the building to their front, dispatching two Movement guerrillas at point-blank range.

INT. FREIGHTER -- NIGHT

A badly wounded, bloodied Movement guerrilla crawls into the freighter's cockpit. He heaves himself into the pilot's chair and throws leavers. The freighter's engines THROB as the power spins up.

INT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT -- NIGHT

Safe for a few seconds, Dante, Raader, and their troopers catch their breath.

Incoming energy bolts shoot down a nearby hallway and burn into the walls.

Raader looks at several staircases leading up.

RAADER

Which way?

Dante looks desperately looks around.

Energy bolts glance off the walls. Dante and his troopers flatten.

Dante's heads up display shows a schematic of the building. The control center glows.

Dante points toward a stairwell

DANTE

This one! Go!

Dante leads the troopers up flights of stairs.

HALLWAY

They burst out of the stairs into a hallway. A Movement guerrilla comes out of a doorway. Dante snap-shoots and kills him.

Another Movement guerrilla peers out the doorway, then jumps back and slams the door. Dante and his men rush down the hallway and stack two on each side of the door.

Dante tries the door, but it's locked. He motions his troopers back and aims at the lock.

Raader reaches out and pushes the barrel of Dante's power gun aside. Dante steps back.

RAADER

Combat isn't like you see in the
info vids, lieutenant.

Raader adjusts her power gun and fires at the door. The entire door and the frame around it blast inwards.

Dante tosses in a grenade. It explodes, and Dante, Raader, and their men follow on the heels of the explosion, firing.

CONTROL ROOM

Two Movement guerrillas put up a feeble resistance, but are gunned down quickly.

On one wall is a large picture of Movement leader WASTAFA, late 50's, handsome, charismatic, bearded. On another wall are pictures of Coalition OFFICERS, to include Dante's, which is near the top. Most of the pictures have red X's over them.

Raader and a trooper run to the control center windows. They sight in on firing, exposed Movement guerrillas below and take them out. Another trooper sets demolition charges.

Dante looks down. Something catches his eye he reaches down and pulls up a mangled power pistol. He stares quizzically at the pistol's partially burned away markings, then glances at his own powergun, which has a Coalition symbol on it--the same as the pistol.

Dante's heads up display glows "charges set."

Dante shrugs and drops the mangled pistol. He checks the charges, then studies at the Movement control computer.

Raader turns from firing out the window. She sees Dante, then pulls PDA-like device from her power suit.

RAADER

Lieutenant!

Raader tosses the device to Dante. Dante catches it, looks quizzically at it, then nods.

He holds the device above a section of the control panel. A blue light jumps from the panel to the device. An indicator shows data transferring.

The trooper setting charges stands and backs off.

Dante's heads-up display glows "Firing sequence initiated."

The time bar in Dante's heads-up display counts down.

Raader stops firing and moves toward the door. She waves the troopers out.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Move out! Move out! Get the hell
out of here--now!

Dante concentrates the data transfer indicator--it's almost done.

The other troopers dash out of the room. Raader tugs on Dante's shoulder.

The data transfer is close, but still has more to go.

RAADER (CONT'D)

There will be another time, el-tee.

Dante reluctantly nods and presses a button on the device. The light stops.

In Dante's heads up display, the countdown hits 30. Dante reluctantly hands the device back to Raader.

Dante and Raader run out of the control room.

HALLWAY

Movement guerrillas emerge from a hallway and fire at the pair. Dante and Raader fire back as they run downstairs and toward the exit.

DOWNSTAIRS

Near the exit, three Movement guerrillas desperately charge Dante as they fire their weapons.

Dante pivots, fires his power gun and dispatches each of them in turn.

DANTE

Damn, I'm good!

A huge Movement guerrilla jumps out from behind Dante and grabs him. Dante tries to bring up his power gun, but the Movement knocks it away.

The Movement guerrilla and Dante fight hand to hand. Dante repeatedly hits the Movement guerrilla, but his blows barely phase his enemy. The Movement guerrilla's punches slam Dante around.

Dante falls, rolls, and the Movement guerrilla picks up a heavy beam to smash him. From behind, a blue bolt cuts the Movement guerrilla down.

RAADER

You're not that good. Yet.

Raader hands Dante his weapon.

RAADER (CONT'D)

That is absolutely the next-to-last time I'm getting you out of a bad fist fight, el-tee.

Dante and Raader dash for the exit. Two troopers wait there for them.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT -- NIGHT

All four fire their weapons as they dash across the open area out of the building.

INT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT CONTROL CENTER -- NIGHT

The demolitions' LED counter hits zero. They go off with a huge fireball.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

The freighter lifts off. Raader takes aim, but Dante blocks her.

DANTE

There are regulations about preventing collateral damage!

Raader pulls away from Dante. She sights in on the freighter's cockpit and fires.

The Movement control room blows out.

INT. FREIGHTER -- NIGHT

Raader's shot blasts through the cockpit and explodes.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT - NIGHT

The ship lurches and staggers in mid air.

RAADER

Learn when to break the rules,
Lieutenant.

The burning freighter lists hard and crashes down. The remaining cargo of ammunition explodes and shatters the hulk.

Dante and Raader throw themselves on the ground as the blast wave, flames, and debris shoot overhead.

Debris falls, then stops. Dante and Raader both look up. Both the control center building and the freighter are shattered and burning.

DANTE

One less load of weapons and ammo,
one less base to haul it to.

RAADER

The Movement brings in five for every one we destroy, El-tee. Been like that for all ten years of this war.

EXT. MOVEMENT SPACEPORT -- DAY

Dante stands beside a pile of rubble. He watches Coalition REGULAR TROOPS spread out over the smoking battlefield. Coalition guards herd groups of prisoners past.

Raader approaches and reports.

RAADER

The regulars are settled in. Our weapons' energy status eighty percent, cross-leveled.

DANTE

Bio casualties?

Raader scowls.

RAADER

Troopers are troopers, el-tee, bio or not.

Dante looks and sees regular Coalition troops carrying four stretchers.

Raader motions them over.

The troops set down the first stretcher. The casualty has a badly burned body armor and mangled arm and leg. Two small MEDICBOTS hum as they cluster around the casualty. One injects drugs, the second sprays a mist and inserts an IV needle.

Dante looks away.

RAADER (CONT'D)

He'll make it. Clone a new hand, stick in a new lung, bolt on a bio-mech leg, and he's good for a dozen more missions.

The next stretcher arrives. It holds a dead female trooper. Wires and metal "bones" are visible through blasted holes in the combat power suit.

The carriers set it down roughly--they almost dump the body off.

CARRIER 1

Here ya go. This one won't be doing any self-repair.

Dante looks at the body and shrugs.

Raader stands and scowls.

RAADER

Hey! Be careful with her!

CARRIER 2

No sweat, sarge, there's no bio.
It's not even human, just a techno,
just a thing. See any blood?

CARRIER 1

It can't feel nuthin'.

Carrier 2 kicks the body.

Raader pulls out her power pistol and levels it at the two carriers.

RAADER

Pick her up. Very gently.

CARRIER 2

I hauled it here. I ain't touchin'
it again.

Raader pulls a charging handle on the power pistol. The weapon HUMS as it energizes.

RAADER

Thirty seconds. Pick her up. Now!

CARRIER 1

Lieutenant, you gonna let her do
this?

Dante scowls and looks at the carriers, then looks in disgust at the dead robot, then back at Raader. He pauses, then turns to the carriers and crosses his arms.

DANTE

It's against regulations to disobey
the orders of a non-commissioned
officer, trooper. Punishable by
death. Coalition Code of Arms,
Chapter one-four point one, page two
twenty-seven.

RAADER

Twenty seconds.

The power pistol HUMS louder.

The two carriers look nervously at each other, then back at Raader's humming power pistol. They bend down and pick up the stretcher with the body.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Now set her down--very, very slowly
and very, very gently.

The two carriers, eyes glued on the power gun, gently place the stretcher on the ground. They stand up.

Raader keeps the power pistol pointed at the two.

CARRIER 2

We did what you said to it!

CARRIER 1

We put it down gently! We didn't hurt it!

RAADER

Ten seconds.

The two carriers panic and look back and forth, then at each other, then at Raader.

CARRIER 1

We didn't hurt her, sarge! Her! We put her down gently!

Raader points the power pistol skyward and pulls the trigger. A blue bolt SIZZLES as it cuts the air. She holsters the weapon.

RAADER

Never say they can't feel. They can all feel. Now get back to your damn unit.

The two carriers shuffle off, muttering. Dante walks over to Raader.

DANTE

Go easy, Sergeant Raader.

Dante motions at the dead robot.

DANTE (CONT'D)

She wasn't really alive.

Raader turns away and kneels down beside the casualty. She turns the head to one side, opens a flesh-toned compartment, and plucks a black microchip from the back of the casualty's neck.

RAADER

A history and a personality. As long as you have these and a will, you're still alive.

She takes a box from her suit pocket and places the chip in it. There are five others.

Raader stands.

Dante notices a scorched and gouged spot on the arm of Raader's powersuit.

DANTE

You're hit!

Raader turns away so that Dante cannot see the damage.

RAADER

Forget about it, el-tee.

EXT. COALITION BASE LANDING PAD -- DAY

The troop-transport Coalition skimmers carrying Dante's flight ROAR in as they return to base.

Dante and Raader look out the skimmer's side doors as they descend on the Coalition base.

EXT. COALITION SPACEPORT -- DAY

Dante's flight ROARS overhead.

Skimmer CHIEF BIRD, 54, a booze-nosed, portly soldier, sits on the back ramp the CONRAD, a combat skimmer and an awkward hybrid of armed flying patrol boat and interplanetary space ship.

Bird drinks from a booze bottle in a silver bag. He looks up half interestedly, then goes back to his drinking.

At the other end of the spaceport, pilot MO (MOLLY) MORRIS, 28, a stunning-looking hot shot fighter jockette, watches the flight go over. A pained look passes over her face. She pulls off her combat glasses and wipes away a tear, then quickly looks around, as if checking to see if anyone is looking.

EXT. MARKETPLACE -- DAY

At a backstreet market stall, SPECIALIST PLAIR, 36, haggles violently with a STREET VENDOR over an iridescent parrot in a cage. Plair is an attractive woman, but her face belies that she's a streetwise huckster who's seen too much pain and too many wounded. Her uniform is grease stained. A red cross on her sleeve marks her as a medic.

Nearby, CORPORAL WRIGHT, 22, takes a deep toke on a silver colored joint. Wright is a druggie in uniform. Once upon a time his uniform was neat and his haircut met regulations.

Dante's flight passes overhead, the ROAR drowns out all conversation.

Plair looks up, hastily tosses payment chits at the vendor, grabs the cage, and turns away. She grabs Wright and drags him along to leave.

EXT. COALITION BASE HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Coalition and Empire flags fly from separate poles--the same symbols as Dante saw on the ammunition cases and pistol.

In between the Empire and Coalition flags and on a taller pole, flies the flag of the Stellar Council.

A silver-haired, thin Coalition GENERAL DALLGAS, 55, gorilla-sized, scar faced Empire COLONEL SOVRUS, 45, in civilian clothes, and wiry Coalition CAPTAIN MARSHALL, 28, watch Dante's flight pass overhead.

The ROAR of Dante's flight subsides.

GENERAL DALLGAS
Bring them in.

EXT. COALITION BASE LANDING PAD -- DAY

Dante and Raader wearily pull off their helmets and gear as they unload the skimmer.

Sheet-covered casualties come off the skimmers on HOSPITAL MEDICBOTS--a combination of robot head and torso and motorized gurney.

Wounded female trooper JACKSON half-rises from the gurney and grabs Dante's arm.

JACKSON
Lieutenant, how're my legs?

Dante lifts the sheet--there are no legs; only stumps and one arm remains.

Raader leans over, looks under the sheet.

RAADER
Quit bellyaching, Jackson. You'll be chasing men again in no time.

The casualty struggles to set up, stretches out one arm and tries to grab Dante.

JACKSON
Tell 'em I want to be put down, Lieutenant!

Dante gently takes Jackson's hand.

DANTE
Shhh, quiet now, let the medics do their work.

JACKSON

I don't want to be a machine, I want
to be a all human--or nothing! Tell
them to put me down, Lieutenant!
Tell them!

Dante bends down closer to Jackson.

DANTE

(To Jackson)

I understand. It will be all right.
I promise.

Dante stands upright. He still holds Jackson's hand.

DANTE (CONT'D)

(To Hospital Medicbot)

Increase sedative and antidepressants.
Tag this one for bio-only
reconstruction.

Raader shakes her head disapprovingly.

MEDICBOT

Initiated--instructions noted and
will comply.

RAADER

That's eighteen months in a healer
ward! Techno parts will have her
back on the line in a week!

Dante lets go. The Medicbot wheels Jackson off. Raader
stares after them, shaking her head.

Raader turns to Dante.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Maybe you should turn in your powergun
for a bio healer's tunic.

DANTE

Been there. Combat is where the
medals are. The whole Coalition
loves an assault force hero.

RAADER

So you're after glory.

Dante stares into the distance.

DANTE

Glory's the only thing I have left.

Two medicbots go by with bodies completely covered by sheets.

Dante looks shaken. He and Raader walk slowly towards their barracks.

Dante turns to look after the casualties.

DANTE (CONT'D)

When does it get easier to deal with this part?

Raader shakes her head.

RAADER

You go on with the next mission. Sometimes you go have a drink. If you're lucky, at the end of it all you go fishing.

Raader glance down at the ground, then turns to Dante.

RAADER (CONT'D)

I thought we'd lost you back there.

Dante points to his scorched armor and grins.

DANTE

Techno is a soldier's best friend.

Raader scowls.

RAADER

A soldier's best friend is his best friend. When the mission goes to hell and the techno fails, it's your friends that'll keep you alive.

INT. DANTE'S FORCE READY ROOM -- DAY

Dante sits at a desk, entering his after-mission report on a tablet computer's touch screen.

Electronic achievement and commendation plaques cover the desk. Electronic photos of Dante in his graduating special assault school, in his academy class, and standing side by side with and receiving awards from COLONEL ELDER, 44, a huge bear of a man who towers over Dante, glow brightly.

Dante looks around. He takes out the vial of straw and takes a piece to chew on.

Dante pauses and taps the tablet computer screen controls. The tablet's screen shows great wheat fields, then fills with the picture of SARAH ELDER, 20, who's face radiates a peaceful, gentle beauty.

The picture changes to show Sarah picking a piece of straw and handing it to Dante. Dante takes the straw and chews on it.

Dante stares, his eyes soften.

Raader enters, unnoticed by Dante. She carries a bag large enough to hold a booze bottle and two glasses. She crosses the room and leans over to look at the picture.

RAADER

So the Coalition's newest rising star special assault force lieutenant has a desire other than a combat command and winning more medals. She's pretty, el-tee. Gonna marry her?

Dante clicks off the screen.

DANTE

"Special Assault Force officers must be and remain single or transfer to a support branch." Coalition Code of Arms, Chapter six point three, page ninety-seven.

Raader sets two large shot glasses on the desk.

RAADER

So you can be a hero or be happy.

DANTE

We met when I was in advanced assault force training. She was the chief instructor's niece.

Raader pours a thick blue green liquid into the glasses.

RAADER

Bet that went over real well with the head man.

DANTE

She said she wanted someone who cared about people.

Raader points to a digital plaque on Dante's desk.

RAADER

You take good care of your troops. Top of your class, right? A hero in the making. You'll get your command soon.

Dante looks away.

DANTE

Didn't matter to her. She said real heroes are those who save lives, not take them.

RAADER

Idealism doesn't go far in the face
of a powergun.

Dante stares at the far wall.

Raader takes a drink, claps Dante on the shoulder, and refills
her glass. She stares at the straw.

RAADER (CONT'D)

What's that--Novian tobacco? Pretty
strong stuff.

DALLGAS

Wheat straw from home. Artlandia.
It's a farming planet.

Raader shakes her head in amusement. She takes a drink,
then bends and touches the screen. Sarah's picture returns.

Raader shrugs.

RAADER

Breaking up is hard to do.

Dante looks at the picture, then at Raader.

Raader points to the glasses.

The ready room door swings open. Marshall and Sovrus enter.
Dante fumbles as he hastily turns off the picture and stands.
Raader takes a sip and gives them the once over.

MARSHALL

Afraid the drinks will have to wait.

SOVRUS

You have mission!

RAADER

(To Sovrus)

Empire accent. Cyrus four, am I
right?

Sovrus' face hardens.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Of course, that was back when we
were enemies. But now it's all for
one against the Movement, right?

SOVRUS

You are ordered to come with us!

Raader tenses, ready to fight.

RAADER

Not by some Andorran sea-slime
sucker's underbelly-licking two faced
lackey Cyrus Empire slag pile I'm
not!

Marshall steps forward.

MARSHALL

But you are by directive of
Headquarters, Coalition Combined
command.

Dante looks at the bottle, then back at Marshall.

DANTE

When? We smell like cheap booze.

SOVRUS

Or a cheap whore.

Raader angrily steps toward Sovrus.

RAADER

I'll rip your throat out--

Sovrus takes a step back and draws himself up to fight.
Dante and Marshall put themselves back to back between the
two.

DANTE

Assaulting civilians is punishable
by un-commendable discharge and loss
of benefits. Coalition Code of Arms,
Chapter two, page eight.

Marshall turns to his head toward Raader.

MARSHALL

Assaulting an officer gets you the
death chamber. Chapter ten.

RAADER

I don't hit officers. Even when
they deserve it.

MARSHALL

Good. He's an Empire Colonel.
(to Sovrus)
Jeopardize this mission again and my
boss will see you rot in an Empire
treason prison for violating the
treaty.

Sovrus glares at Marshall and Raader, but lowers his fists.

DANTE

Who are you?

MARSHALL

Name's Marshall. Special Assault
Force liaison to the combined Command.

(to Raader)

Can get your officer to headquarters
without starting a third Coalition-
Empire war, sergeant?

Raader relaxes, but not completely. She grins.

RAADER

I know when to follow orders.

She puts her fists down and motions for them to proceed.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Officers first, sir.

Marshall and Sovrus lead the way out.

RAADER (CONT'D)

(to Dante)

Never turn your back on an Empire
jackal.

Raader turns, grabs the her glass off the table and knocks
back the drink.

She looks at Dante, then down at his glass. Dante shakes
his head and frowns 'no'. Raader shrugs, then reaches down
and belts back Dante's drink. She wipes her mouth with the
back of her hand.

Dante and Raader follow Sovrus and Marshall.

RAADER (CONT'D)

(Loudly so Sovrus can
hear)

Did ever I tell you about the fight
on Cyrus Four, el-tee? About how
the Empire's legions turned yellow
and ran?

Sovrus's shoulders tense, but he keeps walking.

RAADER (CONT'D)

I remember the coward that led them,
too. Now what was his name?

Sovrus stops. He clenches and unclenches his fists, then
resumes walking.

INT. MOVEMENT HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Wastafa angrily watches a hologram of Dante and his team's action in the spaceport control center on a wall mounted display.

His subordinate Movement OFFICERS, ACCER, BRAK, and CKALLER, watch as they cower back and away.

He freezes the hologram and zooms in on Dante's face. He turns to look at a wall covered with pictures of Coalition officers.

Wastafa stands, walks to the wall and stares at Dante's picture.

He pulls a dagger from his jacket and viciously slices an X through the picture. He turns to his subordinates. They nod fearfully and scatter.

INT. COALITION BASE HEADQUARTERS BRIEFING ROOM -- DAY

Coalition, Empire, and Stellar council flags stand at the head of the room. Dante, Raader, Marshall, and Sovrus stand at attention. Dallgas is at the head of the room. He eyes Dante and Raader carefully.

Electronic pictures of the commanding generals, including Dallgas, are on a wall across from Dante.

Dante sneaks a look at Dallgas' picture. Underneath the picture reads "Commanding Senior General."

Dante nervously glances back at Dallgas.

Dallgas motions for them all to sit. They sit.

Dallgas sits turns to Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS

I know you, lieutenant.

Dallgas beckons to Marshall, who presses a button.

HOLOGRAM

Dante's picture and personnel file appear in a hologram. His awards for combat excellence are highlighted.

BRIEFING ROOM

RAADER

He does pretty well--for an officer.

GENERAL DALLGAS

I know you too, sergeant.

HOLOGRAM

Marshall presses another button. Raader's file appears. Dallgas looks it over.

MARSHALL

Veteran of both Empire-Coalition
Conflicts. After the Peace Treaty,
you volunteered to fight the Movement.

BRIEFING ROOM

Raader shrugs.

RAADER

Had to, sir. Two years of peace
almost killed me.

Dallgas half-smiles knowingly at Raader, then turns to Marshall and nods at him.

HOLOGRAM

A hologram displays of a two-sun solar system. One planet is highlighted.

MARSHALL

Eighteen months ago we deployed a
special unit--unit 665--to the planet
Wiarton.

The hologram changes to show skimmers making planetfall on Wiarton. The planet is mostly jungle, with great seas.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

Wiarton is officially neutral.

RAADER

Official or not, Wiarton is the damn
Movement's home planet!

Dallgas glares at Raader.

BRIEFING ROOM

Raader leans forward and looks intently at the hologram.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Does look like good fishing waters,
though.

Dallgas stands. He leans over the table, bracing himself with his hands and leaning towards Dante and Raader.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Unit 665 is now conducting their own unauthorized, maverick war. And they're winning.

DANTE

Winning is bad?

GENERAL DALLGAS

We don't need a rogue unit upsetting agreed-on, carefully-built war plans.

Raader gives a so-what shrug.

RAADER

So send in a fleet of space cruisers and take 'em out.

DALLGAS

They've improved our stealth shields. 665's base invisible unless you're on the ground.

MARSHALL

Previous teams were dispatched, but--

HOLOGRAM

The hologram changes to show a map of the planet with the routes of the two teams highlighted.

BRIEFING ROOM

Dante turns his attention to Raader

GENERAL DALLGAS

We lost contact and never heard from them again. They were some of our best.

HOLOGRAM

The hologram displays pictures of the officers who led the two missing teams. One of the pictures is of MARC KURTZ, 26, a hard faced, square-jaw handsome young Coalition officer.

BRIEFING ROOM

Dante leans forward anxiously.

DANTE

I know him! Marc Kurtz was in the Academy class ahead of me. Talk about hard core--

Raader slowly shakes her head "no."

RAADER

Units like ours, lieutenant, only bigger, better armed, and more experienced.

Raader and Dante turn to look expectantly at Dallgas.

DALLGAS

I want you to volunteer to infiltrate behind Movement lines--to go to Wiarton.

Raader shakes her head.

RAADER

General, that system's so thick with the Movement a nano-gnat couldn't get through!

Dallgas stands upright and slowly walks toward Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS

The Coalition needs you to locate 665's base--

Dallgas leans in towards Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS (CONT'D)

And the entire alliance needs you to rationalize the unit.

RAADER

Rationalize?

Dallgas nods and straightens.

GENERAL DALLGAS

The only thing preventing a third Coalition-Empire war is the alliance against the Movement. They're as strong as ever, but the alliance isn't.

Dante sits back.

DANTE

My team will need time to get ready, sir.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Not your team, lieutenant. Just you. And Sergeant Raader.

Raader whistles softly.

RAADER

Why us, General? There are a thousand other team leaders.

Dallgas turns toward Raader.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Your lieutenant is the best choice, sergeant.

Dallgas turns back towards Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS (CONT'D)

And he's the only choice.

Dallgas nods at Marshall. The hologram changes to show pictures of ELDER in combat uniform.

DANTE

Colonel Elder!

GENERAL DALLGAS

Your mentor at the Academy and then at advanced Assault School.

DANTE

Taught me everything I know about tactics.

Raader folds her arms and scowls.

RAADER

Everything out of a book.

Dallgas leans back in towards Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Colonel Elder commands unit 665.

Raader braces herself on the table.

RAADER

Holy mother of the stars!

Dante shakes his head.

DANTE

Sir, he took me into his home, believed in me, treated my like a son, I can't--

Dallgas sits down next to Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Son, I'm asking, not ordering.
(MORE)

GENERAL DALLGAS (CONT'D)

You are the only one Colonel Elder will trust. The war effort--and maybe the treaty--rests on you.

Dante looks over at Raader for guidance.

RAADER

You gotta make this call alone, el-tee.

Raader leans in close to Dante.

RAADER (CONT'D)

But remember I said never volunteer for anything?

Dante hesitates.

GENERAL DALLGAS

You care about your troopers, don't you, lieutenant?

Raader snorts.

RAADER

Sometimes too damn much.

Dallgas nods at Marshall. Marshall presses a button.

HOLOGRAM

Pictures of the dead and wounded from Dante's last mission display.

BRIEFING ROOM

Dallgas leans in closer to Dante.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Then 665 must be stopped so this doesn't go on.

Dante stares at the images, then at Elder's image, then sits up straight.

DANTE

I know I can do this!

Raader leans over close to Dante.

RAADER

You don't know what you don't know.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Well, son?

DANTE
I'll-I'll do it, sir.

Dante motions toward and stares at the images.

DANTE (CONT'D)
For them.

Dante turns to look at Raader.

DANTE (CONT'D)
But Sergeant Raader can make up her
own mind.

Dallgas turns to look at Raader. Raader shrugs.

RAADER
I go where my lieutenant goes. But
after this is over, I am going
fishing, orders or no orders.

Dallgas puts his hand on Dante's shoulder.

GENERAL DALLGAS
Thank you, lieutenant, sergeant.

Dallgas stands, crosses the room to leave. Sovrus follows.
Dallgas turns at the door.

GENERAL DALLGAS (CONT'D)
Just remember, there are more lives
on the line than you think.

All stand as Dallgas leaves the room. They return to their
seats when he's gone.

MARSHALL
Report to the spaceport at 1030 hours.
There you pick up the skimmer Conrad.

HOLOGRAM

The hologram displays a 360 degree, rotating picture of the
Conrad.

BRIEFING ROOM

Raader scowls.

RAADER
Not much firepower on those buckets.

Dante frowns in disappointment.

DANTE
Or much techno, either.

HOLOGRAM

The hologram displays technical representation of advanced personal laser cannons, missile launchers, etc.

MARSHALL

We're sending you a load of our most advanced weapons for use on the ground.

BRIEFING ROOM

Dante's eyes widen in anticipation.

DANTE

Can't fail with those!

Raader shakes her head.

RAADER

Wiarton is five days's space flight, most of it behind Movement lines. We'll need more than--

HOLOGRAM

The hologram displays a rotating, 3-D picture of a space war cruiser.

MARSHALL

The cruiser Taurus and her fighter compliment will carry you to Wiarton and remain in near orbit for fire support--

The hologram shows the Taurus' massive gun turrets and space fighters.

The hologram displays a 3-D Wiarton map.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

You'll then proceed to base Zulu Forward.

A dot glows on the map.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

Zulu Forward is a Top Secret combined Coalition-Empire operation.

The hologram zooms in to a Coalition forward base.

BRIEFING ROOM

Raader folds her arms.

RAADER

Hard to believe the Movement doesn't know about a base in their own back yard.

Marshall shoots a stern glance toward Raader.

MARSHALL

When you arrive, a reinforced assault company will be put at your disposal.

DANTE

Under my command?

Marshall nods. Raader sits back.

RAADER

Looks like you got what you wanted, el-tee.

Marshall clicks off the hologram.

MARSHALL

There's a land transport outside. It'll get you to the spaceport. Your gear is already loaded.

INT. COALITION BASE HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Dallgas, Marshall, and Sovrus watch as Dante and Raader load the land transport.

Within earshot, a grubby CIVILIAN TECHNICIAN works on a computer in the room. He notices the officers, then squats down behind the computer desk out of sight.

GENERAL DALLGAS

(To Sovrus)

Report to your government we have sent our best man to do what they've asked.

SOVRUS

I report what I see. One boy. One rusty old woman. One puny skimmer. Much more is required.

GENERAL DALLGAS

They won't fail to deliver.

SOVRUS

The two before them did. You know what a third failure means.

Dallgas turns to face Sovrus.

GENERAL DALLGAS

Two very brave soldiers are going to keep that from happening.

SOVRUS

Two very foolish soldiers, perhaps more, will lose their lives.

GENERAL DALLGAS

I noticed you did not volunteer to accompany the lieutenant.

Sovrus stomps off.

MARSHALL

Suicide mission, General? Or another sacrificial lamb?

Dallgas turns to look at Marshall.

GENERAL DALLGAS

The war against the Movement keeps us and the Empire from annihilating each other, keeps the industries of seven star systems functioning at full capacity, and keeps people like you and I employed.

MARSHALL

I thought we were trying to win against the Movement.

Dallgas turns away.

GENERAL DALLGAS

We just don't want to lose.

They leave the room. The technician rises, checks that he is alone, then pulls a communications device from his jacket. He nervously sends a message.

INT. MOVEMENT HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Wastafa receives the message on a computer display. He calls other Movement officers to read it. They all nod. One touches a display screen, which projects a holographic blueprint labelled "Spaceport."

EXT. COALITION SPACEPORT -- DAY

The land transport deposits Dante and Raader--now in their power suits and toting their gear and weapons--beside the the space warship Taurus.

The battle cruiser towers over them.

The final preparations for the Taurus' departure is controlled chaos. LOCAL LABORERS move boxes and drive loaders. Monster 4-wheel loading trucks ROAR past nearby, their trailers stacked with armored plates. Raader watches as overhead, a star fighter is swung on board.

RAADER

Old friend of mine flies one of those.
I should look her up.

They approach the Conrad. The Conrad is dwarfed by the Taurus' gaping-maw open flight deck bay doors.

Bird stands nearby. He puffs on a pipe and watches as space fighters lined up ahead of the Conrad are loaded into the flight deck.

He sees Dante and Raader approaching and gives them an almost-regulation salute.

BIRD

Orders said expect a team for transit.
Unspecified location. Where's the
rest?

RAADER

Just us, Chief.

Nearby, a trailer laden with cargo comes loose from its locking pin. Its crushing mass rolls toward Dante, Raader, and Bird, picking up speed.

Dante catches movement out of the corner of his eye.

DANTE

Look out!

Raader dodges the oncoming trailer, but Bird is frozen in place with fear. Dante shoves him out of the way, then dives out of the way of the onrushing trailer. The trailer careens by, crashing into and splintering stacked crates. Various OFFICERS and LOADING PERSONNEL run to the wreck and cluster around.

A suspicious-looking local CIVILIAN DOCK WORKER hurries away.

Dante helps a shaky Bird to his feet. Bird pulls a bottle from his pocket and takes a swig.

Dante frowns hard.

BIRD

You saved my life!

Raader shrugs.

RAADER

He's like that.

Raader reaches over and gently but firmly confiscates the bottle from Bird.

BIRD

I heard all Special Assault Force officers were natural born killers.

RAADER

This one's different.

A horn BEEPS as a beater of a land transport, overloaded with duffel bags, boxes, crates, trunks, the caged parrot, rolled up carpet, etc., dodges between loading trucks and SCREECHES to a halt alongside the Conrad. Stacked "stuff" falls and buries the transport's passenger.

Wright piles out of the driver's seat.

On the other side of the transport, Plair pulls herself from beneath the tumbled cargo.

WRIGHT

Hey Chief! Lookee what we got!

PLAIR

And look at this! Gorgeous, huh?

She rolls up her sleeve, revealing a colorful, intricate tattoo on one arm.

BIRD

You two are late. As usual.

Dante goes to the transport and checks out the load.

The caged parrot nips at his finger, but misses. Dante jerks his hand back.

PLAIR

Careful! That's a Kassitan parrot. Beautiful bird, but if she bites you, ten seconds later you puke your guts out.

Dante takes a step back.

Raader gestures at the load on the transport.

RAADER

What is all that?

Plair puts on a con artist's deadpan straight face.

PLAIR

Personal use items. Nothing more.

Dante opens a box. He pulls out a flag.

DANTE

Movement combat flags. Must be a dozen of them.

WRIGHT

There better be twenty! I paid that cheating tailor for ten.

Wright digs in the box.

PLAIR

We're gonna sell 'em to the natives.

RAADER

Might not be buying on Wiarton.

PLAIR

Wiarnton! We can't go there! Nobody comes back!

Dante shakes his head in disgust. He drops the flag back in the box. He pulls out a Movement uniform jacket and holds it up to the light--there are several burn marks and bullet-type holes.

WRIGHT

We got thirty of 'em. Taken off of a dead Movement commander after a vicious powergun fight.

DANTE

A powergun blast would have incinerated the jacket.

Plair puts her finger to her lips.

Dante wads up the jacket and tosses it onto the pile on the transport.

BIRD

Lieutenant, Sergeant, meet Corporal Wright and Specialist Plair.

Plair and Wright come to attention and salute. Dante returns it. They relax.

BIRD (CONT'D)

Good troopers--just don't play solar poker, zero-gravity dice, or any game of chance with either of them.

A heavy cargo transport loaded with pallets of advanced heavy weapons, power cells, missile tubes, etc pulls up beside the Conrad. A space navy CREW LEADER climbs down.

CREW LEADER
Skimmer Conrad? Okay, sign here.
Better get 'em on, you're next up.

Bird signs for the load. The crew leader rolls the pallets off the transporter beside the Conrad.

DANTE
My weapons packs!

Dante acts like a kid in a candy store. Raader discretely hands the bottle back to Bird.

BIRD
(To Plair and Wright)
You two get this stuff aboard.
(To Dante and Raader)
Lieutenant, sergeant, come aboard.
I'll show you where to stow your gear.

Dante still plays with his new toys.

RAADER
Go ahead, el-tee. I'll be right there.

WRIGHT
But Chief!

PLAIR
We can't fit all that military junk and our stuff too!

Dante closes up a weapons container.

DANTE
Then leave it.

Dante and Bird turn and enter the Conrad.

PLAIR
Thank you, sir! Thank you very much!
That lieutenant is all right!

RAADER
He meant leave the souvenirs. Load the weapons.

WRIGHT
But sarge!

Raader crosses to the booty-loaded transport. She sits on the hood, crosses her arms, and scowls.

Dante turns around.

DANTE

When it's all on, you get one box
off of here--one small box.

Plair and Wright reluctantly load the weapons packs onto the Conrad

Raader watches for a few seconds, then rips open a box and looks inside. She pulls out a sheer, pink nightie, then tosses it back in disgust.

A transporter stacked with black containers drives straight through the open flight deck bay doors and into the ship.

Plair and Wright watch it go by, then give each other knowing looks and nod.

Wright lifts a container, then motions to Plair. They look over at Raader.

Raader is holding the parrot. The bird repeatedly bites her hand.

Plair waits. She grins evilly to Wright.

Raader continues to hold the parrot, which continues to bite her. She smiles, strokes its feathers with her other hand, and puts in back in the cage.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Bird gives Dante the guided tour of the Conrad's crew compartment.

BIRD

--flight controls here--for both
space and on-planet.

Bird points to the shield controls.

BIRD (CONT'D)

The stealth shield's controls are
here too, finicky thing that it is.

He turns to Dante.

BIRD (CONT'D)

Confusing, lieutenant?

Dante smiles and shakes his head "no."

DANTE

I dream about techno.

Bird goes to the cargo area in the back of the skimmer. The area is loaded with the weapons containers.

BIRD

Holds ten combat loaded troopers or five metric tons of cargo. On-planet we drop the back ramp for ventilation.

Raader enters the craft and drops her bag and gear in beside Dante's.

RAADER

All loaded up. Your yardbirds took off, said they'd be back before we lifted.

Bird uses a hand-held device to scan Raader's bag. He crosses the compartment, takes readings, then picks up Raader's bag and moves it forward a few feet. He takes another reading, then nods in satisfaction and puts the hand-held device away.

BIRD

Gotta be careful--load the old girl wrong and she gets unstable quick.

Dante, Bird, and Raader exit the Conrad.

An elevator lifts the ship and slides it toward the Taurus Flight Deck.

EXT. COALITION SPACEPORT -- DAY

The Taurus' engines produce a deafening ROAR. The ship shakes to its core as it lifts and strains head-on against gravity.

Outside the spaceport, a suspicious-looking local civilian watches the Taurus rise into the sky. He takes a communications device from inside his coat and sends a message.

EXT. COALITION BASE HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Sovrus watches the Taurus rise in the sky. He pulls an Empire communication device from inside his coat and sends a message.

EXT. SPACE -- DAY

The Taurus shoots up through the atmosphere, a glowing red dot against the stars.

It glows redder, then blue, then white, then the space around it shimmers and warps. The dot itself shimmers, and is gone.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Raader helps a soused Bird down the passageway.

BIRD

Shipboard life--free booze--soft bed--
hot food. I could get used to this.

RAADER

You're too damn used to it already.

Raader casts a disapproving side glance and keeps walking.

Bird surveys the surroundings.

BIRD

War cruisers are impressive You're
not impressed?

Raader shrugs.

RAADER

I've seen a lot of war machines,
Chief. They're like people--they
all have strengths and weaknesses.

BIRD

Like your officer?

Raader looks away.

RAADER

My el-tee wants what he can't get,
and because of that he's playing the
wrong game for the wrong prize.

BIRD

Rank, medals, glory, defeating your
enemies--what's wrong with those?

Raader shakes her head.

RAADER

They won't work for my lieutenant--
although he thinks they will.

BIRD

Then what in the stars does he want?

Raader notices the an arrow labelled "Fighter deck" She stops.

RAADER

To be a hero to the one woman he can
never have.

BIRD

Hell to have a broken heart, isn't
it?

Raader lets go of Bird, who shakily stands on his own.

RAADER

Get your butt to the Conrad and sleep
it off. And no more sauce for a
while!

Raader stares at the fighter deck arrow.

RAADER (CONT'D)

I have some unfinished business to
attend to.

NT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Carved into a huge cave, the command center is part star
ship bridge, part jungle command post, and part throne room.

Elder watches a hologram of the Taurus lifting off. He nods
in satisfaction.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE-- DAY

The Taurus' CAPTAIN SUTLER, 50, silver-haired, manicured,
and full of himself, sits in his captain's chair in the middle
of the bridge.

Various OFFICERS man their duty stations, work consoles,
etc.

View screens ring the bridge. The screens display views of
space on all sides of the ship.

Dante stands in front of Sutler. Dante wears his power suit.

DANTE

But my orders say--

SUTLER

We're overdue an R and R port of
call, and that's what we're going to
do. That's an order--can you obey
orders, Lieutenant?

Dante turns away. As he does, a unit on the back of his
power suit jabs an officer in the back.

OFFICER

Ouch! Watch it!

Sutler looks Dante over disapprovingly.

SUTLER

Must you always wear your combat armor, lieutenant?

DANTE

Colonel Elder taught me that the biggest mistake was to act like there was no enemy present.

Sutler smirks.

SUTLER

Elder. What a relic.

Dante bristles. Sutler shakes his head sadly.

SUTLER (CONT'D)

Lieutenant, you're smart enough to see the future, and the ground forces aren't it.

Dante stops cold.

SUTLER (CONT'D)

If you want high-tech power, you can't do any better than this. Look at the Taurus--who would dare challenge it?

INT. MOVEMENT HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Wastafa stares at wire frame diagram hologram of the Taurus on his computer. He takes a light pen out and draws a circles around sections of the Taurus.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

In the Conrad's cargo area, Plair and Wright cram souvenirs into cargo bins.

WRIGHT

But the lieutenant and the sergeant said--

PLAIR

Sooner or later that officer is going to find that transport we drove on with no authorization, and take our stuff. What do we do then?

WRIGHT

But the load balance?

PLAIR

We'll take care of that when we load up all those supplies we won from the squids in poker.

Plair snaps a container shut. She sits down.

PLAIR (CONT'D)

You just keep working while I figure out a way to keep us from going to Wiarton.

Wright pulls a silver joint out of his pocket and offers it to Plair.

WRIGHT

This stuff really clears your head.

Plair scowls and waves him away.

INT. COALITION BASE HEADQUARTERS -- DAY

Dallgas sits at his desk, dictating into a hologram recorder.

DALLGAS

Special Orders for Commander, Zulu Forward. Upon arrival of skimmer Conrad, you will confiscate all munitions, weapons, and related systems for transfer--

INT. TAURUS FLIGHT DECK -- DAY

Raader and Morris stand intimately close to each other near a star fighter.

Morris looks deeply into Raader's eyes.

MORRIS

Wiarnton, huh? What's this Elder have that I don't have?

RAADER

My lieutenant.

Morris moves in closer and puts her arms seductively around Raader's neck.

MORRIS

So, this could be one of our last nights together--

Morris presses herself into Raader and kisses her deeply. Raader takes the kiss, then and backs off a half-step.

RAADER

If your captain caught you, he'd kill you.

Morris shrugs.

MORRIS

They can't kill me. I was born to hang.

Raader frowns, touches her helmet, and cocks her head.

RAADER

Incoming commo--intell update from Coalition Command.

Raader takes a PDA like device from her belt. She monitors the data transfer with the device.

Raader reads the screen, purses her lips, then clicks the machine off.

RAADER (CONT'D)

I have to go.

Morris reaches out and puts her hand on Raader's arm.

MORRIS

You always have to go. It's been years since we--just stay this time.

Raader turns and walks away. Morris pauses, then follows.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Morris catches up with Raader.

MORRIS

You keep leaving, just like you left before.

RAADER

I told you it wouldn't work between us. That's the way it is. I am who I am.

Raader takes a long look at Morris.

RAADER (CONT'D)

But you know how I feel.

Raader takes a step. Morris steps in front of her. Morris is near tears.

RAADER (CONT'D)

I have to find my officer.

MORRIS

You don't feel anything! You never did feel anything! You can't feel anything, can you!?

Raader steps around her and walks away. Morris stares after her. After a few steps, Raader turns back and looks at Morris.

RAADER

Never say I can't feel.

EXT. SPACE

The Taurus emerges out of warp and slows. Ahead lies the huge, bustling Maltherian orbiting space port.

Two space tugs take up positions alongside the Taurus. Tractor beams come out from the big ship and lock on the Tugs. The tugs then move the Taurus in.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

The bridge screens show three shuttles position themselves alongside the Taurus.

SUTLER

Join me in a little off-ship relaxation, lieutenant?

DANTE

I'll stay.

INT. TAURUS FLIGHT DECK -- DAY

Bird half walks, half staggers to the Conrad. He sees the hatches are open and Wright and Plair. He sneaks around to an open forward hatch and enters the skimmer.

Bird opens a container near his station. He pulls out a bottle, takes a long draw, and gives the bottle an affectionate look.

EXT. SPACE

Loaded, the shuttles pull away, picking up speed as they pick their way through crazy space traffic.

The first shuttle makes a wide, turning loop.

INT. SHUTTLE -- DAY

On board the first shuttle, the sailors are blissfully unaware.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Raader fights against a tide of sailors heading for the gangways.

BRIDGE

Sutler and most of the bridge officers line up at the door to leave.

On a viewscreen, an icon representing the first shuttle turns and accelerates toward the Taurus. Two more icons do the same. The bridge officer monitoring the screen chats with another officer and is unaware.

Dante notices. He pushes the officer out of the way and studies the screens. The icons dodge others, but they hurl toward the Taurus.

Dante stabs a button. A BUZZER SOUNDS urgently.

INT. SHUTTLE -- DAY

COCKPIT

A body in pilot's uniform lays slumped over one seat. In the seat next to him, ACCER flies the shuttle. A tattered picture of Wastafa is on the dash.

The Taurus looms larger and larger through the shuttle's forward windows.

PASSENGER AREA

In the shuttle's crammed-full passenger area, angry, scared SAILORS SHOUT as the shuttle careens.

EXT. SPACE

The first shuttle strikes the Taurus, exploding in an immense fireball. The fireball incinerates nearby small merchant craft. The force of the explosion tears a gap in the ship and rocks the Taurus.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The Taurus rocks so hard that Bird drops his bottle. It shatters on the Conrad's deck floor.

Plair and Wright jump inside the Conrad.

EXT. SPACE

The second shuttle aims dead at the flight deck, but as the Taurus rocks from the first blast, it's a near-miss. In another huge fireball, the second shuttle slams into the Taurus near enough to the deck to blow a hole in the side and buckle one flight deck door.

INT. TAURUS FLIGHT DECK -- DAY

The heat and blast wave incinerate the fighters and cargo closest to the hull, then roars in and tosses farther cargo and fighters like toys.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The blast tosses Bird, Wright, and Plair to the floor. Flames roar past the Conrad, then in a split second a freezing vacuum threatens to pull them out of the ship.

In a desperate lunge, Plair stabs a button. The Conrad's doors close agonizingly slowly as Plair, Wright, and Bird hang on and hold their breath.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

The force of the explosion tosses Raader and the passageway full of sailors to the floor. A piece of shrapnel punctures the wall. The passageway decompresses, sucking a sailor through it like hamburger.

The sailors panic and run.

Raader hits a switch on her power suit. Her helmet comes up and encloses her head.

A schematic of the ship displays on her heads-up display. It zooms to a schematic of the bridge, where a dot glows.

Raader scrambles over bodies.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

KLAXONS RING wildly. Consoles short out. Bridge officers are tossed around. Sutler holds onto the back of his chair, frozen in fear.

Dante shakes Sutler, but Sutler will not move. The Taurus rocks and tosses them both to the floor.

Another screen shows an incoming blip. Dante notices, his eyes grow wide as the blip closes.

Dante touches a button on his powersuit. He stands.

EXT. SPACE

The third shuttle closes fast on the Taurus' bridge.

INT. SHUTTLE -- DAY

PASSENGER COMPARTMENT

Sailors break through the door to the cockpit.

COCKPIT

As they break in, the shuttle's pilot lies dead in one seat. A Movement guerrilla piloting the shuttle turns his head to look at the sailors, the bridge of the Taurus dead ahead. As he does, an errant spacecraft gets in between the shuttle and the Taurus.

EXT. SPACE

The shuttle clips part of the spacecraft. The hit sends the shuttle into a spiral into the Taurus--but it's a glancing blow, not a dead center hit. Blast and flame sheet over the Taurus' outer skin, searing it, blowing off antenna and radar dishes, and peeling some of the ship's armor off.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE-- DAY

KLAXONS RING as the force smashes into the bridge, knocking the Sutler into the wall head-first.

Dante is thrown down. Debris bounces off his powersuit.

Consoles short out and spew sparks.

The bridge depressurizes. Dante watches in horror as officers gasp for air and their blood turns to ice on their skin.

Two officers pull out for emergency oxygen masks. Dante grabs one and puts it on Sutler. Another officer can't outrace the cold and lack of oxygen.

Dead and dying bridge officers are everywhere. Half the consoles are dark, shorting out, or burning. Sutler is a motionless body.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Raader pushes her way towards the bridge.

RAADER

El-tee, get the hell out of there!

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE-- DAY

Dante checks a functioning display screen. Two icons are highlighted as they make wide turns and head toward the Taurus.

DANTE

Negative. We got incoming. And no guns, no shields, and no power.

RAADER

(voice)

Never mind what you don't have, use what you do.

Dante looks desperately around the bridge. Nothing to fight with.

Wounded officers reach out for Dante to help them.

Dante searches the display screens. Most are blank or busted. One displays the damage to the Taurus. One shows the approaching icons.

One shows the tugs, still connected by the Taurus's tractor beams.

Dante looks again at the wounded. A first aid container lies within his reach.

Dante pushes aside a body, slides into a chair at a control station, and works tractor controls.

On the screen the icons grow menacingly closer to the Taurus.

On the other screen, the glowing link between the Taurus and the tugs dies out.

INT. TAURUS PASSAGEWAY -- DAY

Raader makes her way over bodies and by damage control crews toward the bridge.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE-- DAY

Dante looks at the fast approaching icons, back to the wounded, then again at the icons. Dante programs in the tractor beams.

EXT. SPACE

The gray greenish beams stab out from the Taurus and grab first one shuttle, then the other. The shaking shuttles accelerate even faster toward the Taurus.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Raader comes onto bridge. She looks at Dante, at the wounded, and back to Dante.

Dante turns his back to Raader and the wounded and works the tractor beam controls.

INT. SHUTTLE -- DAY

In the shuttle cockpit, a fanatic Movement guerrilla is at first elated--then puzzled, then panicked.

Through the cockpit windows he sees the other shuttle being drawn closer.

EXT. SPACE

The two tractor beams reach up like arms and slap the two shuttles together in a massive fireball.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Dante and Raader watch the viewscreens. The screen shows the fiery debris from two shuttles as it dissipates.

Dante stands up. Sutler moans through the oxygen mask. Dante glances over at him, then looks back at Raader.

Raader tends to the wounded.

Dante looks up. The holes seal themselves.

AIR HISSES as the bridge re-pressurizes.

Dante touches a button. His helmet opens and retracts

DANTE

Get down to engineering and get us
some power--I want engines, guns,
and shields up ASAP.

Raader bandages a wounded deck officer. She pauses and looks up.

RAADER

I don't have that expertise, el-tee,
and half the crew is gone.

DANTE

Never mind what you don't have, use
what you do.

INT. TAURUS FLIGHT DECK -- DAY

Damage control and repair crews patch the Taurus back together.

Huge sheets of armored hull plates are stacked close to the Conrad.

On top of the Conrad, Dante and Raader clear debris off the skimmer.

As she works, Raader keeps a watchful eye on Dante.

Dante stumbles and almost falls off the deck. Raader grabs him at the last second.

DANTE

I need another alertness ampule.

RAADER

You've had two more than you're supposed to. What you need is sleep.

Dante tries to shake off the fatigue.

DANTE

Gotta get this skimmer ready.

RAADER

Your job is to think clearly under pressure. Can't do that exhausted.

The interior lights dim and come back on. The Taurus shudders and GROANS.

Bird, Plair, and Wright approach the Conrad. All have grease and soot on their power suits. Wright shoves tools back into his tool kit.

With them are a bandaged Sutler and MASTER ENGINEER VASTIGANI. Vastigani carries a tablet PC under one arm.

Dante and Raader climb down to meet them. Salutes are exchanged.

SUTLER

Your incompetence at Maltheria cost me half my crew.

DANTE

I saved the ship.

SUTLER

We'll see what a board of inquiry says.

DANTE

We'll stand for one after we complete our mission on Wiarton.

SUTLER

There's not sufficient engine power to make Wiarton, much less to remain and support you.

Dante stares into space.

DANTE

No cruiser firepower--no fighters--you're telling me to abort the mission?

Sutler folds his arms.

Dante steps away from the group, pauses, then returns.

DANTE (CONT'D)

My check in with high command is in ten minutes, sir.

Dante pulls a piece of straw from inside his jacket and chews on it.

DANTE (CONT'D)

At that time, I intend to have them order you to continue.

Raader raises an eyebrow.

SUTLER

My first priority is this ship.

DANTE

More is at stake than one cruiser.

SUTLER

There are three hundred and sixteen wounded, ninety critical! They die if we go on!

Dante looks down, then raises his head to look Sutler in the eye.

DANTE

More more die if we turn back.

SUTLER

No lieutenant gives gives me orders.

DANTE

You saw the electronic signature on my orders. We go.

Dante turns back toward the Conrad.

SUTLER

I'm in command here.

Dante turns back to face Sutler. He checks his chronometer.

DANTE

Wait nine minutes and thirty seconds and you won't be.

RAADER

I'm sure the board will be very interested to hear about your security measures, sir. I can't wait to testify.

Sutler scowls.

Wright steps forward.

WRIGHT

Can't we all just get along?

Sutler scowls.

WRIGHT (CONT'D)

You can split the difference! Meet halfway!

Plair grabs and shakes him.

PLAIR

Shut up!

SUTLER

Find a way to make it through the system and I'll support you. Otherwise, we reverse course now.

Dante looks up at the Conrad.

Bird shakes his head.

BIRD

The Wiarton system is treacherous. A skimmer can't take the solar winds of two suns.

PLAIR

Guess we'll just have to call this one off, lieutenant. You need something bigger.

Wright points to his power suit.

WRIGHT

Yeah. We'd need one of these for the boat.

Raader and Dante look at each other. At the same time, both turn to stare at the stack of plates. Then they turn to stare back at each other.

PLAIR

(to Wright)
You idiot!

DANTE

Laser weld them in place--

RAADER

Use the skimmer's auxiliary power to energize temporary shields--

Bird shakes his head.

BIRD

We'd need to be halfway into the system to have a chance.

Dante extends his hand to Sutler.

DANTE

Is it a deal, sir? You take us halfway, you keep your command, I continue my mission.

SUTLER

Risky--we'd barely have enough power for engine thrust and minimal shields. You'd have a very narrow launch window.

DANTE

I'll take it.

Sutler reluctantly shakes Dante's hand.

SUTLER

(to Vastigani)

Give them what they need, and not a rivet more.

DANTE

I'll be sure to note the fleet's unflinching support in my report to the Combined Command.

Dante salutes. Sutler returns it and stomps off.

Wright, Plair, Bird, and Vastigani leave.

DANTE (CONT'D)

It's enough time.

RAADER

We need a complete tech crew, el-tee.

DANTE

We'll do with what we have.

PLAIR

Sometimes it's just not enough, lieutenant. Sometimes you have to let a dream go.

Dante looks at the Conrad, then at the pile of armored hull plates, then at Raader.

Mo Morris walks up. She carries a tool kit. Behind her are fighter pilots and TECHNICIAN with tool kits, repair equipment, etc.

MORRIS

Understand you got a little remodeling project--Sutler came by and specifically ordered us not to assist.

Morris looks left and right, then cocks her head.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

So here we are.

DANTE

So you're violating a direct order?

Morris shrugs.

MORRIS

You got a problem with that, lieutenant?

Dante imitates Morris, looks right and left and shrugs.

Dante wavers, his eyes half close.

RAADER

I need to talk to you--inside.

Dante nods. He drags himself aboard the Conrad.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante sits on a bench in the cargo area of the Conrad, holding himself up.

Raader enters.

RAADER

I didn't know you were making communications checks with Combined Command.

DANTE

I'm not. But Sutler didn't know that either. I lied--it was the only leverage I had to ensure mission success.

Raader nods her head, impressed.

Dante tries to stand.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Yeah, well, gotta go supervise--

Raader gently pushes him back down onto the bench. She holds out a small injector

RAADER
You wanted an alertness tab.

Dante takes the ampule. He uses it, then starts to waver.

DANTE
(Just about out)
You lied--

Dante passes out on the bench.

Raader puts Dante's legs on the bench and rolls him on to his back. She takes the straw from his mouth and tosses it.

RAADER
Sorry, el-tee. It was the only
leverage I had to ensure mission
success.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Elder sits in front of the controls, pondering a holographic map.

Kurtz enters and hands Elder a note.

Elder reads it, scowls, and crumples and crushes the note.

Elder nods at Kurtz, who grins evilly, then turns and leaves.

Elder shakes his head sadly.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante rests. The chronometer on his wrist counts down.

Work goes on outside the Conrad. HAMMERS RING, WELDING TORCHES HUM AND SPARK, STEEL PLATES CLUNK and RING as they're fitted into place.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante remains asleep while work progresses. Raader sits by a sleeping Dante's side and watches Dante. Dante shivers. Raader pulls a blanket over him.

The chronometer on Dante's wrist counts down to minutes.

Raader takes an ampule from her pocket, then pauses and sets it down.

RAADER
About time to meet your maker,
lieutenant. Maybe both we'll find
what we're looking for on Wiarton.

Bird enters the Conrad. He sees Raader and Dante, but says nothing.

Bird opens a compartment near his skimmer pilot console and pulls out a bottle.

Raader hears him and sits up.

Bird takes a drink.

BIRD

A good officer. And a good man.

Raader figures out Bird's meaning and turns to him.

RAADER

No, Chief, it's not about that.

BIRD

A damn shame how war keeps people apart. And wears you down.

Raader shakes her head.

RAADER

Wouldn't work even if we wanted it to.

Raader puts the ampule on Dante's arm. The injector HISSES.

The Taurus ENGINES WHINE. The ship slows with a gentle jolt. A deep ELECTRICAL HUM fills the ship.

BIRD

We're crossing into the Wiarton system-- and early, too!

Dante groans and slowly comes back to consciousness.

RAADER

(To Bird)

You didn't see anything, you understand?

BIRD

Maybe he needs to know?

Dante sits up and shakes the cobwebs from his brain.

DANTE

Know what? And don't you ever again--

Alert KLAXONS RING.

Bird turns and punches buttons on the communications console.

BIRD

Look at this.

Raader and a still-bleary Dante come to the console.

The console shows a star map display of the Wiarton system. A glowing icon represents the Taurus. Off to the top left of the Taurus icon, five other icons blink red.

Morris sticks her head in, sees the screen, then then hits a button. The screen zooms in on the hostile icons, which spread out into a cone formation.

MORRIS

Movement space legion. If we'd been
on time--

On the screen several thin red lines streak from the Movement formation towards the Taurus.

The ship rocks and tosses as the near misses explode.

DANTE

Load 'em up, Chief!

PLAIR

We're not ready! We haven't tested
the system--

DANTE

Test it during combat!

MORRIS

(To Raader)
We'll be here if you need us.

DANTE

(To Morris)
We can take care of ourselves. No
more disobeying orders.

Another near miss shakes the Taurus. The ship shakes and GROANS under the strain.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Plair checks out the communications system, laser soldering connections. Raader assists. Plair drops a laser soldering tool onto her forearm. It burns, but there is no blood.

Raader notices. Plair gives her a "yes, it's true" nod.

EXT. SPACE

A hit on the Taurus violently tosses the ship.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The blast shakes the crew. Dante watches the control console map showing the Movement ships closing and the Conrad's distance from the release point.

Bird still enters data into the computer.

DANTE

We have to go--now!

BIRD

I have to finish the procedural checks!

DANTE

Procedure will get us killed! Go now!

PLAIR

We're not close enough!

Dante touches a lever. The Conrad's HATCHES hiss as they lower and their LOCKS CLICK into place.

Plair reads her instruments. An indicator reads "stealth activated."

The Taurus flight deck doors open. The Conrad moves forward agonizingly slowly.

BIRD

Damn shell!

DANTE

Full power!

Plair grabs Dante's arm.

PLAIR

We gotta abort--won't be able to hold stealth at full engine power to thrusters!

Dante shakes her off and shoves the engine power lever forward. The Conrad shakes. Its ENGINES WHINE.

The control console map shows the Movement ships very close.

Space is visible through the Conrad's forward view ports. A nearby explosion lights up the darkness.

EXT. SPACE

The Conrad, fully visible, shoots out of the Taurus' flight deck doors.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Sutler and various officers pilot the Taurus. A monitor shows the Conrad moving away from the Taurus.

SUTLER

Hard about!

TAURUS OFFICER #4

But the ground pounders? You can't just leave them!

Sutler sets his jaw.

SUTLER

Reverse course. Prepare to enter hyperspace.

EXT. SPACE

The Conrad dodges back and forth through the concentrated fire of the Movement ships.

The Conrad fades to invisible, then pops back to visible.

INT. TAURUS FLIGHT DECK -- DAY

Morris, in her flight suit, runs towards her fighter. Other fighter pilots follow.

PILOT

Sutler will have you shot!

Morris climbs a ladder to her cockpit.

MORRIS

Raader may leave me, but I won't leave her.

Morris grabs her flight helmet and settles in to the cockpit.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Besides, I wasn't born to be shot.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

A direct hit smashes into the bridge, killing Sutler and most of his officers.

EXT. SPACE

As it retreats toward deep space, the wounded Taurus fights back against the closing Movement ships.

The Conrad fades to almost invisible, and then is gone.

A large Movement ship launches fighters that speed off in the direction of Wiarton.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The Conrad shakes gently.

BIRD
In Wiarton's gravity field.

The Conrad's lights dim, then come back on.

PLAIR
Stealth power fluctuating!

EXT. SPACE

The Conrad winks into visibility. The flight of Movement fighters banks towards the Conrad.

The Movement fighters fire at the Conrad. Energy beams streak past the skimmer. Some glance off the skimmer's shell.

The Conrad banks hard left and right. The Movement fighters continue firing, gradually getting nearer and nearer.

Energy bolts dance off the Conrad's shell, melting and blasting chunks away.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Bird pilots the skimmer. Plair and Wright man their stations. Dante watches the sensor readouts in the copilot's chair.

BIRD
This shell is doing nothing but slowing us down!

Bird turns the skimmer hard right. The Movement fighters overshoot.

WRIGHT
They're reforming for another pass!

RAADER
We need to distract them, make them think they've taken us out.

DANTE
What if we drop the shell--let em blast that?

RAADER
Not enough mass. We'd need something more.

Raader looks toward the cargo area where Dante's weapons' packs are loaded.

Dante follows her gaze. He looks heartbroken, but nods.

EXT. SPACE

The Movement fighters come screaming in. Energy bolts converge on the Conrad.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante studies the console showing the approaching fighters. He and the crew all have helmets on and closed.

DANTE

Now!

Bird stabs a button. The Conrad depressurizes as the cargo ramp opens.

EXT. SPACE

The Conrad spurts out of its shell just as the bolts from the fighters strike the shell.

Out of the open cargo bay comes the load of advanced weapons.

The shell and weapons explode in a sheet of sparks and flame.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The lights dim and the Conrad slows. Out the view port energy beams streak by. Hatch SEALS HISS as the Conrad repressurizes. The crew opens their pressure suits.

DANTE

Full stealth field. No sensors. No
commo. No shields. Minimum life
support power.

Bird, Wright, and Plair flip switches on their consoles. The interior lights dim. The BACKGROUND HUM of equipment grows softer.

An eternity of silent seconds crawls by.

WRIGHT

Think they bought it?

Raader points out the forward view port.

RAADER

Maybe.

Out the forward view port, a flight of five Movement fighters wait in the distance.

The fighters accelerate toward the Conrad.

In the cockpit of one of the fighters, Brak grins.

DANTE

Maybe not.

PLAIR

They're engaging target search and tracking systems--

EXT. SPACE

The fighters close rapidly.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Raader turns to Dante.

RAADER

El-tee, there's something I need to tell you.

Bird looks over his shoulder.

EXT. SPACE

Without warning, energy bolts streak from behind the Conrad and smash into Brak's Movement fighter, which explodes in a shower of flame. Debris bounces off the Conrad's hull.

Another Movement fighter streaks directly over the Conrad.

In the cockpit of her space fighter, Morris uses the microphone on her pilot's helmet.

MORRIS

Hey Raader, you and your officer swimming with the space fishes yet?

Spread out on both sides of her are two of the Coalition fighters remaining from the Taurus.

The Coalition fighters fire at the Movement fighters and dodge incoming energy bolts.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The crew desperately straps in as Dante helps Bird power up the Conrad.

RAADER

(Into microphone)
What took you so long?

DANTE
 (To Bird)
 Chief, get us down now!

EXT. SPACE -- DAY

Movement energy bolts burst around Morris' fighter.

MORRIS
 I said I'd always be there for you--
 you ungrateful broad.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The crew hangs on as the Conrad banks to make entry to
 Wiarnton's atmosphere.

RAADER
 (into microphone)
 Good thing there's no hangman working
 today.

EXT. SPACE

Near Morris' fighter, explosions burst closer. They force
 Morris to bank her fighter left and right to dodge them.

MORRIS
 Ain't it the truth. Take your officer
 where he needs to go; we'll cover
 you.

RAADER
 (voice)
 You now officially owe me one less
 beer.

Morris shakes her head.

MORRIS
 I'll be back for you. And I'll bring
 some company.

Morris banks left. She sends a burst of energy cannon fire
 at an approaching Movement fighter.

The Movement fighter returns fire and misses. The two zoom
 past each other and bank to come around again.

MORRIS (CONT'D)
 Tell your el-tee to send up a
 microsecond databurst and they'll
 target every gun in the fleet where
 he wants.

Morris banks her fighter hard right. A Movement fighter
 glows in her heads up display.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Now I gotta take out some trash.
Have a good fishing trip, Raader.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante, Raader, and the crew hang on as the Conrad dives steeply toward Wiarton.

RAADER

I miss you already, Molly.

Raader clicks off.

Dante looks over at Raader.

DANTE

Breaking up is never easy.

EXT. SPACE

Morris clicks off. The Movement fighter is coming head on. She pushes a hand controller forward and her fighter accelerates, pushing her back into her seat.

A vicious three on three space dogfight takes place.

The Conrad dives down and away from the fight, toward Wiarton.

In the distance behind the Conrad, too far to make out, there are one, two, three--then a fourth explosion.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante watches Wiarton loom larger and larger in the forward view port.

Bird yet again reprograms his console.

BIRD

Finally! No clumsy shell, no cross-wired makeshift shields, just a plain old skimmer and a nice, smooth, computer-guided entry and planet fall.

He presses buttons and sits back.

The Conrad pitches hard.

ALARMS SOUND.

WRIGHT

External temperature nine hundred forty Celsius and rising! Power unstable!

PLAIR
Shields and stealth malfunctioning--

DANTE
Forget the damn computer! Fly us
in!

Bird disengages the computer.

BIRD
I don't know what's wrong with this
thing, but when I figure out what it
is--

It's a white knuckle descent into and through the atmosphere. Bird fights the controls as Dante, Raader, Plair and Wright sweat it out.

INT. WIARTON MOVEMENT HEADQUARTERS -- NIGHT

On a radar-like display, a Movement guerrilla intermittently tracks an object as it enters and passes through Wiarton's atmosphere.

EXT. WIARTON -- NIGHT

A red ball of fire hurls through the night sky. The ball slows unsteadily. It slowly takes shape as the Conrad.

The Conrad comes in lower and lower, flying straight ahead, looking for a place to land. But it's coming in too fast and too hard.

The Conrad descends heavily to treetop level, then clips the tops of jungle trees. It passes over lush fields, barely a few feet off the ground. The Conrad bulls its way to a stop in a grove of trees.

INT. CONRAD -- NIGHT

Bird, Plair, and Wright perform status checks. Some instruments are dark. Others smoke, others spark.

PLAIR
Stealth shield is intermittent. It
might self repair in a few days, if
there's no more damage.

Plair tests the communications system.

PLAIR (CONT'D)
We have receive-only communications.
We can listen, but not talk. Micro-
burst data launcher will self repair
in eighteen hours.

BIRD

The auto pilot is out--but it should self-heal, even if it has to make one good system out of the pieces of two bad ones.

Dante stands and pulls his powergun from the wall rack. He checks the weapon.

Dante looks up from his powergun.

DANTE

Now that would be neat techno to have for people.

Raader turns to Plair and Wright.

RAADER

Isn't there something you two want to tell your Chief?

Wright looks puzzled, then his gaze darts around the interior. He puts on his best con artist face.

WRIGHT

Chief, you're a great pilot!

Plair picks up on the ruse.

PLAIR

And an excellent leadership example to follow!

Raader scowls in disgust.

Raader moves to the cargo area in the back of the Conrad. She shoves containers around and pulls open compartments until she finds what she wants--Plair and Wright's stash of souvenirs. She dumps boxes on the floor.

RAADER

That's why the computer couldn't compensate--this ton of trash wasn't programmed in.

DANTE

We all nearly died for a load of--

Dante's eyes grow wide. He looks at Plair and Wright.

Bird reaches into a compartment on his control console. He pulls out a bottle, unscrews the top, and takes a swig.

Dante grabs the bottle from Bird.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Drinking aboard a Coalition fighting craft is forbidden. Coalition Code or Arms, chapter eleven, page fourteen.

Dante takes a long draw out of the bottle. He hands the bottle back to Bird.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Dawn is in four hours. Have this thing fixed, and these two dealt with, by then.

PLAIR

But sir--

DANTE

We're going to find Zulu Forward-- and my command.

Dante inserts a magazine into his weapon, then opens the door to the outside.

EXT. WIARTON -- NIGHT

Dante stands guard while Raader works on the forward deck gun. Dante chews on a piece of straw.

A large, dominating jungle-clad mountain shrouded in clouds looms in the distance.

JUNGLE NIGHT SOUNDS float through the air. Dante moves in closer to Raader.

DANTE

There was something you were going to tell me when it looked like we were going to go hand-to-hand with those fighters.

Raader squirms and turns away from Dante.

RAADER

I was-- going to give you the intell update I got while we were on the Taurus.

Dante scratches his head.

DANTE

Damn odd time for that!

RAADER

Knowing your enemy is important, el-tee.

DANTE
So what was the update?

RAADER
That--we should expect Movement forces
near Wiarton.

Dante turns Raader to face him.

DANTE
You lie to ensure success of the
mission.

RAADER
Never to an officer.

Dante backs up and stands upright. He takes the straw from
his mouth.

DANTE
I'm the one who took the truth oath--
Now talk--sergeant. That's an order.

Raader angrily puts a tool down.

RAADER
Have it your own damn way, then. A
humanitarian relief contingent landed
here five months ago. Contact was
lost shortly thereafter.

Dante shrugs.

DANTE
Militarily insignificant.

RAADER
Then the contingent's leader sent a
priority databurst communication
requesting emergency medical supplies.

DANTE
And that leader would be?

RAADER
The contingent was lead by Sarah
Elder.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

It is just past dawn. Twin suns burn off the jungle mist.
The Conrad flies just over the jungle treetops.

A river valley is visible off to their left.

Wright mans the forward deck gun, Bird pilots the Conrad.
Plair is inside at the communications console.

Dante and Raader stand on the deck, scanning ahead.

Dante stares ahead blankly.

RAADER
Nothing on my scanner, what about
yours, el-tee?

Dante stares off into the distance. Raader shakes him
angrily.

DANTE
I was just thinking--

RAADER
We don't need a lovesick puppy getting
us all killed!

Raader flips up her heads up display and activates her helmet
microphone.

RAADER
Any signal from Zulu Forward? We
should be well within their sensor
and commo range.

PLAIR
(voice in Dante's
headset)
Negative, and our receivers are
working fine, we just can't transmit.

Dante gives Raader a puzzled look. Dante activates his helmet
microphone

DANTE
There ought to be all kinds of commo
coming from there--transmissions to
us, to higher, routine traffic.

Raader activates her helmet microphone.

RAADER
Check the Empire frequencies, they
run off at the mouth a lot.

PLAIR
(voice)
Nothing--no signals emitting from
Zulu Forward at all, on any frequency.

Dante gives Raader a worried look.

PLAIR (CONT'D)
(voice)
Wait--got something.
(MORE)

PLAIR (CONT'D)

Coalition distress signal. Very faint. Bearing 227 degrees, range 4400 meters.

EXT. ZULU FORWARD -- DAY

Dante and Raader inspect the remnants of Zulu Forward. The Conrad is grounded nearby. Plair and Wright man the deck guns and look out over the surroundings.

Everywhere are bodies and parts of bodies of dead Coalition and Empire soldiers, burned and blasted or riddled with bullet holes. Arrows stick out of others. One soldier is pinned against a tree by the a spear. Others were hacked to pieces.

WAREHOUSE

Dante and Raader check out a small warehouse. Coalition and Empire dead are everywhere.

One wall is blown down. They go inside.

The large room is filled with empty, broken crates and containers. All have Empire and Coalition markings.

Dante picks through the debris.

DANTE

Advanced stuff. Power gun modules. Stealth-jamming systems. Heavy weapons packs--from both sides.

Raader picks up a piece of packing material.

RAADER

All new, too. Why would they have it his far forward and still boxed up?

Raader picks through the debris. She looks out a back window. Something catches and holds her attention.

BEHIND WAREHOUSE

Behind the warehouse is a long, filled-over trench. Near the trench is a deep, circular pit.

Raader stands near the trench and takes readings on her PDA like device.

RAADER (CONT'D)

436 bodies.

DANTE

On the map, there's a village just outside the base.

RAADER

Want to bet it's empty?

Raader walks over to the circular pit. She grimaces, waves a foul smell away, and backs off.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Don't need sensors to tell me there's more down there.

She notices something shiny near the pit and picks it up. It's an insignia of rank.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Empire Senior Centurion.

Dante bends down and picks up another shiny piece of metal. It is also an insignia of rank.

DANTE

Coalition Colonel.

Dante surveys the destruction, then looks at the pit.

DANTE (CONT'D)

No Movement force did this. They don't fight this way.

Raader looks at the pit, grimaces, then tosses the officer's rank in it.

DANTE (CONT'D)

They killed them all: men, women, combatants, neutrals. Everyone.

RAADER

It's a warning: don't deal with the Empire.

DANTE

Or with the Coalition.

Dante throws the insignia into the pit. He slowly looks over at Raader.

DANTE (CONT'D)

This message wasn't meant for the Movement.

Dante stares at the ground.

COMMAND POST

Dante and Raader stand by the blasted body of a Coalition soldier near the detachment's command post.

Raader's PDA-like device indicates the body as the source of the distress signal.

The dead soldier is a partial robot. Wires and metal bones stick out of a place where a lower arm should be. Half the soldier's face is gone, revealing circuitry.

Raader kneels and rolls the body over. She turns the head to one side, revealing a small data port. Blue-green light beam goes from her PDA like device to the data port. The device reads "data transferring--transfer complete." The light stops.

Raader's device projects a hologram of the attack.

HOLOGRAM

The soldier's-viewpoint hologram shows the team in defensive positions around the command post, and repelling several charges. The soldier is hit and rolls over, but continues to fight.

Her power gun is hit and explodes. There is no more outgoing firing. Mortally wounded, she activates the distress signal and watches the enemy advance.

The attackers wear a macabre mix of camouflage, partial Coalition power suits, and robes and leather. Some of their faces and bodies are wildly painted.

In the center of the picture, a leader directs the attackers.

COMMAND POST

Dante and Raader watch the hologram.

DANTE (CONT'D)
Freeze it. Now zoom in.

HOLOGRAM

A bearded face grows on the screen until it becomes clear. The man has bizarre facial tattoos. He wears a necklace of shark-like teeth and a Coalition protective vest but is bare-chested beneath. He carries a power pistol in one hand and has a sword and an energy dagger in his equipment belt.

COMMAND POST

Dante studies the picture.

DANTE (CONT'D)
Colonel Elder. What have you become?

HOLOGRAM

The hologram goes on. A figure also wearing a Coalition protective vest, but also wearing a Coalition beret approaches. Marc Kurtz, now bearded, strangely tattooed, and with evil in his eyes, bends down to look into the camera's eye.

COMMAND POST

Dante stares at Kurtz's image.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Marc--what happened to you?

RAADER

You have a side of you that needs to save lives, el-tee. Some people have a side that needs to kill. That's the face of it.

HOLOGRAM

Kurtz takes out a power pistol and points it at the camera.

There is a blinding flash and the hologram ends.

COMMAND POST

Dante turns, hangs his head, and walks away.

Raader stops the replay and puts the device back on her belt. She bends down to the casualty. She turns the head a little, opens a flesh-toned compartment, and plucks a black microchip from the back of the casualty's neck. She takes a small box from her pocket and puts the chip in it.

Dante walks back up to Raader. He stares down at the body, then at Raader, then back down at the body. Dante reaches down with both arms, picks up the body and carefully walks away with it.

A puzzled look on her face, Raader watches. Dante carries the body about fifty yards to a green grass spot free of scorches and debris. He gently lays the body down, the takes out his power gun, charges it, and points toward the body.

Raader runs up to Dante.

RAADER (CONT'D)

You don't need to do that! There's nothing useful they can salvage!

Dante stares impassively at Raader, then fires his powergun. The blast hits a few feet from the body. Dante plays the powergun back and forth. Its beam blasts a grave-size hole.

Dante holsters his power gun.

Raader turns to Dante.

RAADER (CONT'D)

The Coalition Code of Arms doesn't
require graves for full techno
troopers.

Dante reaches around to the back of his power suit and unclips
an entrenching tool.

DANTE

Brave soldiers deserve a decent
burial, bio or no bio.

COMMAND POST

Dante and Raader stand and stare down at the grave, which is
now mounded over.

Raader, suddenly alerted, nervously looks around, searching
the jungle.

RAADER

We need to get back to the Conrad.

Dante looks shell shocked. He tries to take out a piece of
straw, but his hands shake. He fumbles and drops it.

DANTE

My command. Gone.

Raader grabs Dante by the shoulder.

RAADER

We have to go. Now!

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Raader hurries a dazed Dante back to the Conrad and back on
board. She checks the jungle out over her shoulder as she
waits for Dante as he climbs aboard.

RAADER

Move it, el-tee, move! You need to
get up there.

Dante climbs on board the Conrad, then uses his helmet heads
up display to scan the jungle.

DANTE

Sensor readings indicate negative
threat.

Raader hurriedly pulls herself up onto the Conrad.

RAADER

This place is bad news, sensors or not.

DANTE

You have to trust your techno.

Raader looks around worriedly at the jungle, then turns to Dante.

RAADER

You have to trust your gut.

Raader urgently keys her helmet microphone.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Chief, fire her up. On the double!

Bird leisurely comes on deck.

BIRD

Give the anti-gravs a minute to warm up.

Dante is numb, staring into the jungle.

DANTE

They all died because of me.

RAADER

They were dead when we made planetfall. Not your fault. Price of war.

BIRD

Now what, lieutenant? What do we do now?

Wright and Plair leave their deck guns.

PLAIR

We need to call this one off, sir.

RAADER

Get back to your weapons!

WRIGHT

Maybe we can, like, sneak up on them. It'll be easier without all those extra guys anyway.

Dante turns and lifts raises his hand, as if to strike Wright.

A powergun bolt comes out of the forest and hits Bird in the side, knocking him to the deck. More GUNFIRE follows. Power gun ENERGY BOLTS SIZZLE as they cut the air and strike the Conrad.

Raader drops to one knee and fires into the jungle.

Dante kneels by Bird as he fires.

DANTE
Medic! Plair!

Plair dodges hyper-bullets and power gun bolts and dashes to the fallen Bird.

Under fire, Plair drags Bird inside. HYPER-BULLETS SMACK into Plair's arm, but she ignores them. There is no blood.

Wright dodges and crawls to the forward deck gun. He charges the weapon and turns it on the attackers. Its bursts chew up big bites of jungle and blast Movement into the air.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

HYPER-BULLETS and ENERGY BOLTS RING and SIZZLE as they bounce off the Conrad's armor outside.

BIRD
Get me to the controls.

Plair helps Bird to his pilot's chair. She cuts away Bird's clothing near the wound. She pulls open her medic box and takes out a spray can. She then sprays Bird's side wound with a fake skin healing spray.

Bird groans.

PLAIR
You can't fly this way!

BIRD
Me and the autopilot can.

Bird takes the controls and applies power. The Conrad begins to move.

An ALARM SOUNDS. Plair jumps up to look at a console. The console shows eight blips approaching the Conrad. Plair hits an intercom switch.

PLAIR
Incoming hostiles! ETA one minute.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante fires at the attacking Movement.

Ckaller fires a power gun as he leads the charge. Dante cuts him down, but swarms of Movement charge forward.

Dante keys his helmet microphone.

DANTE

Chief, get us out of here--take the river, we'll use it for cover!

Under fire, the Conrad pulls away from the attackers.

EXT. RIVER VALLEY -- DAY

The Conrad climbs over the treetops and drops into the river valley.

The mountain looms ahead.

In the distance, the Movement skimmers bear down rapidly.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Bird sits in his pilot's chair and pilots the Conrad. Plair is down on one knee beside Bird. Her medic bag is by her side.

She moves Bird's blood-stained shirt out of the way and takes off a blood-soaked bandage. She takes out surgical tools.

PLAIR

Lean back more.

BIRD

I can't and fly her.

Bird grimaces in pain as Plair works on his wound.

BIRD (CONT'D)

Damn! I'm a man, not a busted power plant! Use a pain killer!

PLAIR

You have four in you already. I can't promise how long this will hold together.

An energy bolt streams by and explodes nearby.

BIRD

Might not need to be too long at all. Now get back out there.

PLAIR

But Chief!

Bird waves her off.

BIRD

For once in your career, follow orders. Go!

Plair goes back outside.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

The Conrad races across the tree tops, dodging left and right as energy bolts strike nearby.

Eight Movement skimmers chase the Conrad. The Movement craft fire energy weapons. Their shots are at long range and miss, but as they close the distance their fire gets more accurate.

Wastafa commands one of the skimmers.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Bird holds his side where he is wounded and grimaces. Blood oozes and slowly drips on to the floor.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Wright fires the rear deck gun. Plair assists him.

The Movement skimmers gain on the Conrad.

BIRD

They've got more flat out speed than we do!

RAADER

And heavier weapons!

EXT. RIVER VALLEY -- DAY

Bird races the Conrad up and over the tree tops and down into the narrow, twisting river valley.

The Movement skimmers follow. They continue to fire at the Conrad.

The Movement skimmers get close enough that Dante and Raader can fire their power guns. They hit one Movement skimmer and it plows into the river valley walls.

The river valley grows narrower and more twisty.

An energy burst ricochets off the Conrad's deck and hits Plair. She falls. One arm is gone at the elbow and she is wounded in the legs and torso. Her face is cut.

Raader drags her inside.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

PLAIR

How bad?

Raader applies bandages.

RAADER

Could be worse. How much bio do you have?

PLAIR

Forty percent: internal organs, one arm, face, left leg. The rest is robotistic.

Raader rips a sleeve off the remaining arm and injects Plair just below her tatoo.

RAADER

You hang in there. You'll be okay.

PLAIR

You're a lousy liar, sarge. With a lousy bedside manner besides. Get back to your officer.

Raader sets Plair's aid bag down beside Plair and goes back out. Plair uses her good arm to administer more first aid to herself.

Bird presses the skimmer to its maximum. Digital gauges glow warnings.

EXT. RIVER VALLEY -- DAY

The Conrad twists and turns down the snake-like river valley.

The valley walls close in. The trees blot out the sun and the valley grows darker.

The Conrad now runs just feet above the river.

Movement energy bolts fly by the Conrad, gouging out hunks of trees, blowing down limbs that barely miss or bounce off the Conrad.

The Movement skimmers continue to close.

The valley becomes a narrowing, dark canyon.

A Movement skimmer dodges fire from the Conrad and crashes into a canyon wall.

DANTE

Looks like we stand and fight.

Dante and Raader exchange "this is it" looks. Dante pulls out a piece of straw to chew on.

DANTE (CONT'D)

(Into microphone)

Chief, after this next bend, swing
it around so we can give 'em a
broadside.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Bird clutches his wounded side as he nods.

BIRD

Nice knowing you, lieutenant.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante and Raader trade shots with the Movement skimmers.

The Conrad banks hard around a bend in the river.

The Movement skimmers drop out of sight.

RAADER

Something I wanted to tell you--

Bird throws the Conrad into an "air skid" that brings the
skimmer broadside across the river, its left side facing the
enemy.

Dante, Raader, and Wright are all braced behind their weapons.

The skimmer with Wastafa at the controls closes in on the
Conrad. Wastafa locks an image of Dante dead center in his
sights.

DANTE

What was it?

From behind the Conrad, a cyan bolt streaks over them and
blasts Wastafa's skimmer to dust.

Raader looks over at Dante, then up, then to the other side
of the Conrad.

Dante notices and does the same.

The Movement skimmers are hovering back up the river, out of
range.

The river is dead silent.

The overhanging, gloomy trees and jungle are twisted, dark,
rotted.

The water below boils black and ugly.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The Conrad is stopped and hovers a few feet off the river.

His gaze fixed out the view port, Bird lets go of his wound, reaches into a compartment at his control console, and takes out a bottle. He takes a long draw. His gaze never leaves what he looks at outside.

Plair drags herself up to look out the Conrad's right side hatch.

PLAIR

Eternal hell and damnation!

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

First Wright, then Raader, the Dante slowly turn around and stare.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO ELDER'S BASE -- DAY

The river gorge narrows down to a canyon barely wide enough for two skimmers.

The canyon walls tower overhead. Vines, trees, and other jungle growth cover the canyon walls.

The entrance to the canyon is marked by brightly painted poles and tree trunks, shorn of leaves. Talismans, runes, and skulls are fastened to the tree trunks and limbs.

Human and animal skeletons hang upside down from tree limbs.

There are piles of human bones at the bases of trees at ground level.

Gargoyles are carved into the rocks half way up the canyon. One of them has "665" carved into his head. The "5" has been crossed out and over painted with a "6."

DANTE

I'd say we found Colonel Elder's unit.

There is movement atop the canyon. Raader uses her heads-up display. It shows numerous human figures moving about.

RAADER

Or they've found us. So much for the advantage of surprise.

Dante looks over at Raader, then waves "forward" toward the entrance.

EXT. RIVER TO ELDER'S BASE -- DAY

The Conrad moves slowly up river. Tree limbs, decorated with skulls, talismans, etc, loom down from overhead.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

As she watches the crazed scene go by out the side hatch of the Conrad, Plair binds her wounds with bandages, covering the exposed wiring and mechanical parts.

Dante and Raader use their heads up displays to scan the forces on top of the canyon.

RAADER

Passing through stealth field. I count eight multi-fire energy cannons. At least one 200-millimeter energy howitzer battery.

DANTE

Three hyperspeed missile launchers. Must be a dozen heavy autocannon systems backing them up.

RAADER

Not counting the bows and arrows and spears.

DANTE

None of them are camouflaged too well. We picked them right up.

RAADER

We were supposed to. They're all locked on to us.

EXT. RIVER VILLAGE -- DAY

The Conrad pulls into a skimmer and boat dock at the edge of a river village.

The nearby streets are deserted.

Elder waits on the dock. He is bare-chested beneath a Coalition upper body armor vest and wears his equipment belt with power gun and sword, but without war paint.

He watches as the Conrad settles in, shakes his head, then turns and slowly walks off.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

DANTE

(To Wright)

Stay here with Plair and the Chief.

RAADER

And don't let anyone on board.

DANTE

If we're not back in 48 hours, get to the canyon top and launch the communications capsule.

RAADER

Then run like hell.

Wright nods.

EXT. RIVER VILLAGE -- DAY

Dante and Raader each energize their power guns. They snap their helmets' heads up displays in place and walk down the dock.

The walk carefully down the middle of the street in the same direction Kurtz went.

The streets are still empty.

RAADER

Movement, left front! Around the corner of the building.

Raader aims her powergun.

DANTE

Don't fire! They're innocent civilians.

RAADER

There is no innocence in this place.

They keep walking.

DANTE

Movement, right rear.

RAADER

Right front. Left and left rear.

From a building to their front, several children come out and walk toward them.

A few seconds later, many more children come out, also walking toward them.

Then come young women, twenty, thirty, forty, more--

And old women, white-haired and stooped and hobbling on canes, some with their heads covered, some not.

Old men follow, thin and weathered bald, a hundred of them.

Quickly the streets are filled. The ebb of people turns into a throng, then a wave. They press in on Dante and Raader, pushing between them, pressing until both lose their legs and go down, swept under.

From beneath the children's, women's, and men's coats come clubs and sticks. They beat the prone Dante and Raader without mercy.

INT CAVE -- DAY

A bloodied, unconscious Dante is chained to a wall in a large, open cave cell. His power suit is off. His arms are chained behind his back.

There is a window cut through the rock on the far wall. Through it, Dante can see down into the river village square.

There are four posts in the square. Three of the posts have figures tied to them. It's too far for Dante to determine who is tied there.

About twenty feet to Dante's front is a large circular metal plate covering what looks to be a pit about three times the diameter of a manhole.

There is a bucket with a ladle in it well out of Dante's reach, but where he can see it.

Elder enters and walks up to Dante. Elder takes a ladle full of water from the bucket. He tosses water on Dante's face.

Dante wakens.

ELDER

I know why you have come. I did not believe they would send you.

Elder turns and walks away, then sadly turns back to Dante.

ELDER (CONT'D)

I am truly sorry they did.

Dante struggles to his feet.

DANTE

What if I told you I came on my own?

Elder smirks knowingly.

ELDER

I would say it is not ethical for one Coalition Officer to lie to another.

DANTE

Are you still a Coalition officer?

ELDER

I have thrown off their chains. I now serve soldiers in the best way I know.

DANTE

By killing them? Is that ethical?

Elder turns away.

ELDER

They came to kill me. Someone had to die. One must survive to have ethics.

DANTE

And if I told you I wished to join you?

Elder turns back to Dante, then moves to stand very close to him.

ELDER

As close as we once were, I would want to believe you, but would not.

DANTE

Try me.

The two stare each other down.

ELDER

Perhaps I shall. Perhaps you may yet be free of your chains.

Dante looks at his shackles.

ELDER (CONT'D)

Those are not the chains of which I speak.

Elder walks off.

INT. CAVE -- NIGHT

An exhausted Dante raises his head, conscious that he is being watched.

A veiled feminine face quickly darts away.

INT. CAVE -- DAY

Elder, Kurtz, and two unit 665 members enter Dante's cell. Kurtz removes a PDA-like device from his jacket, turns it on, and holds it in front of Dante.

KURTZ

You will read these. Both of them.

Dante squints at the device. He shakes his head and sits back.

Kurtz puts the device away. He pulls a metal cat 'o nine tails from inside his jacket and rolls up his sleeves.

KURTZ (CONT'D)

I'm really going to enjoy this, farm boy.

Elder reaches out and stops Kurtz. He shakes his head. He turns to one of the unit 665 members and nods. The man leaves.

Elder points out the window. Dante looks.

In the distance, he sees a unit 665 member put a powergun to one of the tied prisoner's shoulders. There is a flash of light and an arm falls to the ground.

DANTE

No!

The unit 665 member takes out a sword and hacks at a second prisoner's leg.

Elder moves close to Dante.

ELDER

The piranha flies here swarm to the smell of blood in under three minutes. They consume flesh at four cubic centimeters per hour.

Elder turns to the window.

ELDER (CONT'D)

It is a slow and horrible death for your friends.

Elder turns back to Dante.

ELDER (CONT'D)

Do you really wish to be responsible for all their suffering?

Dante strains against the chains, then falls, exhausted and beaten.

DANTE

I'll read it.

KURTZ

(to Elder)

I told you he had too much heart to
be one of us.

Kurtz storms out.

INT. CAVE -- DAY

Wright enters and approaches Dante. He carries an armful of
souvenirs. He takes a ladle of water from the bucket and
gently pours it over Dante's head.

When Dante wakens, Wright gets a second ladle full of water
and has Dante drink from it.

Dante drinks.

WRIGHT

These really are great people, el-
tee. They have this great stuff.

DANTE

You were supposed to stay with the
skimmer.

Dante motions toward the ladle. Wright gives him another
drink.

WRIGHT

Makes Saturna Ganja look real lame.
You and the sarge gotta be nicer to
them. Might give you some.

DANTE

Where's Sergeant Raader?

Dante catches sight of Sarah out the window. He cranes his
neck around Wright to see.

Wright turns, sees Sarah, then turns back to Dante.

WRIGHT

She's a real cool lady, el-tee.
Really helpful to everyone, like a
nurse. But now she's sad.

Dante strains against his chains.

DANTE

Where are the Chief and Plair?

WRIGHT

These people, they just want you and
the sarge to calm down.

DANTE

This right shackle--if you pull hard,
I might be able to break it.

WRIGHT

Can't do it, el-tee. The big guy
might get mad.

Wright reaches into his shirt.

WRIGHT (CONT'D)

But I did bring you these. Found it
in the pieces of your power suit.

Wright takes out the vial of straw. It is cracked but intact.
He stuffs it in Dante's shirt.

WRIGHT (CONT'D)

Gonna run now.

Wright holds up the souvenir shirts.

WRIGHT (CONT'D)

Got a sale to make. These people
love this stuff.

Wright walks out.

INT. CAVE -- DAY

Elder, Kurtz, and Two hulking VILLAGERS and two UNIT 665
MEMBERS enter Dante's cell.

The Unit 665 members roughly stand Dante up. They toss water
in his face to revive him.

ELDER

To join us you must be free of your
chains. You are chained to pity for
weakness. Those chains must be
broken.

Elder points out the window.

Out the cell window, Dante sees two of the three prisoners
on the posts released and taken away. A new prisoner,
struggling and yelling, is bound to one of the empty posts.

Two unit 665 guards approach the bound prisoners. They each
stand to the right of a prisoner.

Sarah runs in front of one of the men, trying to block his
Movement.

Two villagers chase after her and pull her out of the way

Each guard draws a sword, and in one motion they decapitate the prisoners. A villager gathers the two heads.

Dante struggles futilely against the chains.

ELDER (CONT'D)

You are chained to the past.

As two villagers slide the cover off the pit, a battered Plair and Raader are brought in. Raader supports the wounded Plair, who is missing part of a leg and who is barely conscious. The stump is covered in filthy bandages and her arm in is a sling, bandaged to her side.

They are led to the edge of the pit.

Kurtz extends his hand. One of the unit 665 members places a power pistol in it. Kurtz points it at Plair and fires, blowing off part of her arm. Wires and metal are visible on the stump.

Dante shrugs.

DALLGAS

A waste of good techno.

Raader struggles against her guards.

Kurtz shoots Plair again, this time in the chest. Plair She falls and tumbles into the pit.

Raader breaks free of the guards and jumps at Kurtz and Elder.

RAADER

Murderous bastard!

Elder pulls an energy dagger from his robes an stabs Raader. She falls into the pit.

Dante grimaces and yanks against his chains.

Elder sheathes the energy dagger and turns to Dante.

ELDER

And you are chained to your fear of pain. That, too, will be broken.

Kurtz grins evilly.

Kurtz and two unit 665 member and begin working Dante over. Dante grunts as the BLOWS SMACK into him.

Elder turns and leaves.

INT. CAVE -- NIGHT

A cut, bruised, and battered Dante lays on the cave floor, only partly conscious after the beating. His arms are free, but one leg is chained to the wall.

The CELL DOOR CREAKS open and closed.

A hooded female figure enters, carrying a pail. She kneels beside Dante and washes his wounds.

Dante wakens, but pretends he is still unconscious.

When the figure reaches out to wash his face, Dante grabs her by the wrist.

The woman tries to pull away, but Dante pulls himself up. He pushes her hood back to reveal the face of Sarah Elder.

Dante lets go.

Sarah reaches into her cloak and retrieves an energy bar. She gives it to Dante.

SARAH

Eat this. It will give you strength.

Dante eats as they warily eye each other.

Dante lifts up the leg chain for Sarah to see.

DANTE

You can help me.

Sarah shakes her head no.

SARAH

You came to kill. Your kind knows nothing but killing.

DANTE

Your uncle seems to know killing very well.

SARAH

He protected us so we could do our work. We were saving lives.

DANTE

He slaughtered a village full of innocent men, women, and children.

Sarah pulls away.

SARAH

Your Coalition and Empire murderers are responsible for that!

DANTE

Go look for yourself. Along the way
you'll find where your uncle left
the Coalition and Empire dead to rot
in the sun.

SARAH

Then it was the Movement. He hates
them so.

DANTE

The Movement doesn't dig mass graves.

Sarah moves in closer to Dante.

SARAH

I don't believe it! He swore to me!

DANTE

Sometimes a lie is all you have.
You say what you have to say and do
what you have to do.

SARAH

You sound like him now.

Dante's vial of straw is on the floor. He painfully reaches
out, picks it up and opens it. He takes out a piece of straw
and chews on it.

DANTE

There's some of him in all of us.
More than we realize. Even in you.

Sarah slaps Dante, then stands and storms out.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Two unit 665 guards lead Dante, his hands bound in front of
him, into Elder's command center.

A video display screen on one wall displays a large map of
Wiarton. Beside the map, a digital Chronometer counts down
from fourteen hours.

Elder stands with his back turned, studying the clock and
map.

The guards bring Dante to Elder, who turns around. Elder
backhands Dante. Blood flows from the side of Dante's mouth.

ELDER

She was gone for nearly a whole day.
Off by herself in a skimmer in country
thick with Movement.

DANTE

And traitors.

Elder backhands Dante again.

ELDER

When she came back, she did nothing but cry.

Dante smirks.

DANTE

She has a right to cry. A man she once loved has changed into someone she doesn't know.

Elder turns away.

ELDER

You give me too much credit.

DANTE

You give me too little. She came to my cell last night.

Elder turns back to Dante.

DANTE (CONT'D)

You didn't know? We were lovers once.

ELDER

Love is not an emotion a military man can afford to indulge in.

Elder turns away.

DANTE

So I've learned.

Elder slowly turns back to Dante and looks him over suspiciously.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Chains of indulgence need to be broken. I broke them. And so she cried.

Dante sits and looks over Elder's display screens. He shakes his head in sorry disgust.

ELDER

You think me a traitor?

DANTE

You just disappoint me, colonel.

ELDER

You know nothing of real treason.

DANTE

You violated Combined Command
directives--

Elder angrily moves in close to Dante

ELDER

Your Combined Command--your Empire
and the Coalition--sells the Movement
advanced techno weapons to use against
their own soldiers!

Dante shake his head angrily.

DANTE

They would never--

Elder backs off.

ELDER

It keeps the industries going, and
to keep the Empire and Coalition
from fighting each other.

Dante shakes his head in disbelief.

ELDER (CONT'D)

You were a part of it. You think
you were the first officer to bring
weapons packs to Wiarton?

DANTE

The other teams--

Elder waves at the control console. A hologram displays.

HOLOGRAM

The hologram displays the text "Coalition RESTRICTED"

The hologram shifts. Dallgas sits at his desk.

DALLGAS

--you will relieve Lieutenant Marc
Kurtz of his mission--

COMMAND CENTER

Elder waves again.

HOLOGRAM

The hologram shifts to a new image of Dallgas

DALLGAS (CONT'D)
 --Confiscate all transported armaments
 from Lieutenant Michael Nauton--

Dallgas' image shifts with each new name.

DALLGAS (CONT'D)
 --Lieutenant Marsha Aopa--Empire
 Lieutenant Xanthe Kass--Lieutenant
 Kathryn Lousa--

Dallgas image shifts again.

DALLGAS (CONT'D)
 --Lieutenant Graham Dante--

The image fast forwards.

DALLGAS (CONT'D)
 --and transfer to Movement
 representatives--

COMMAND CENTER

Elder ends the hologram. He turns to Dante.

ELDER
 Marc realized the truth. The others--
 could not overcome their chains.

DANTE
 Make your evidence public! Tell the
 Council of Stellar Governments.
 Tell the Galactic Social Court.

Elder stands and turns away.

ELDER
 After two wars, no one wants to hear
 the peace is a sham. As long as the
 they fight the Movement and not each
 other, the war goes on.

Dante stares at the floor.

DANTE
 And soldiers are sacrificed to keep
 up appearances.

Dante looks up and gazes over the command center displays.

Sarah enters the command center.

DANTE (CONT'D)
 You have plan.

Elder pushes a button. A hologram appears of Dante.

ELDER

Your messages to the Coalition and
Empire high commands were effective.

DANTE

(In hologram)

A massive Movement force is assembling
on Wiarton, aided by Empire forces--

The hologram changes to show Dante in the middle of another
message.

DANTE (CONT'D)

(In hologram)

--the Coalition is preparing a battle
force on Wiarton--in concert with
the Movement--for surprise strike to
break the treaty--

Elder turns back to Dante.

ELDER

And now--

Elder touches a button on a control panel. A display screen
shows icons indicating the two approaching battle fleets.

DANTE

Which makes me a traitor.

Elder turns to Dante and shakes his head.

ELDER

Perhaps it makes you a hero.

He turns back to the map.

ELDER (CONT'D)

When they arrive, my concealed forces
will end their charade.

DANTE

By starting a third stellar war.

Sarah runs up to Elder.

SARAH

Millions dead! Entire star systems,
whole civilizations destroyed!

She turns to Dante.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You can't think this is right!

ELDER

It is the only way.

DANTE

(To Sarah)

My ties to the past are gone.

Dante stands, walks up to Elder.

DANTE (CONT'D)

(To Elder)

You will need good soldiers. I am
the best.

Elder sizes up Dante. He reaches for Dante's shackles, then stops.

ELDER

Do not disappoint me.

INT. PIT -- DAY

At the bottom of the pit, the scorched metallic fingers of a robotistic arm open, close, and then rotate at the wrist to claw the ground.

EXT. AMBUSH POSITION 1 -- DAY

Elder, Dante, Sarah, and two guards use small land transport skimmer to travel to a position on a ridge line that looks down into a valley. The valley is full of green, pastoral fields. The small capital city, Endits, lies the center of the valley.

Elder's units prepare camouflaged positions. They sight in heavy weapons, dig foxholes, and etc.

Exhausted, slaving civilians are providing forced labor, under the guard and watch of Elder's overseers.

Elder, unseen by Dante, takes the power pistol and removes the energy unit. He discreetly points the pistol and pulls the trigger--the weapon is empty and does not fire. Elder gets out of the skimmer, but leaves the power pistol within Dante's reach.

Dante, hands still bound, slips the pistol beneath his jacket.

Elder walks Dante to a position where they can see down the valley. Dante's hands are bound. The two guards accompany them. Sarah follows.

ELDER

The Empire task force will move down
this valley from the north.

Dante looks over the view of the terrain and where the weapons are being positioned.

Dante nods. He then walks off down the ridge.

The guards draw their weapons.

GUARD #1

Halt!

Dante walks farther.

Guard #2 fires a warning shot. The energy bolt blazes into the ground near Dante. Dante nonchalantly looks over his shoulder at the scorched ground and walks on.

Elder pulls out his own power pistol.

ELDER

Go no further, lieutenant.

Dante takes two steps more. Elder levels his power pistol.

SARAH

No!

Dante stops. He takes the vial from his jacket, takes out and chews on a piece of straw. He turns to face Elder.

DANTE

Move it here.

Elder, Sarah, and the guards walk down to Dante.

DANTE (CONT'D)

This is a superior firing position.
Move that laser cannon here.

Sarah grabs Dante.

SARAH

You're helping him kill millions!

Elder looks over the position, then nods his approval.

EXT. AMBUSH POSITION 1 -- DAY

Back at Elder's land transport skimmer, Dante turns to face Elder.

Dante pulls the power pistol from inside his jacket and points it at Elder.

The two guards pull their weapons and point them at Dante.

DANTE

If I wanted to, I could end this.

Dante flips the pistol in the air and grabs it by the barrel. He hands the weapon to Elder.

Elder takes the pistol and puts it aside.

Dante holds up his shackles. Elder pulls out his power pistol. He points it at Dante, then elevates it so the energy bolt severs Dante's hand shackles.

Sarah turns her head and cries.

Dante reaches for the weapon he pointed at Elder. Elder places his hand over it.

EXT. SPACE -- NIGHT

Star fighters protect the flanks of an attack group of Coalition space warships as the fleet advances on Wiarton.

INT. PIT -- DAY

A damaged robotistic arm slowly repairs another robotistic arm.

EXT. AMBUSH POSITION 2 -- DAY

At a similar position, Elder and Dante stand and look out over the valley. The guards and Sarah are close behind.

Endits is clearly visible in the valley below.

ELDER

A reinforced Coalition Regiment will sweep up the valley and enter the fire zone here.

DANTE

Wait until they enter the town. A more concentrated target.

Sarah runs up between them.

SARAH

We must get all the people out!

DANTE

An empty town invites suspicion. The civilians stay.

Sarah can't believe what she's hearing. She turns and stalks back to their skimmer.

Dante, Elder, and the guards walk back to the skimmer. On the way, they pass a gun emplacement. Marc Kurtz, his back to Dante, oversees civilian forced laborers digging a huge firing pit. The laborers are exhausted, dirty, and emaciated.

Dante stops to watch. A laborer falls. Kurtz stomps over to the laborer and kicks him violently.

Dante walks over to the two. Elder, Sarah, and the guards follow. Sarah tire to rush forward, but Elder stops her.

The guards move in and restrain her.

DANTE (CONT'D)
 (To Kurtz)
 That will do little good.

Elder raises an eyebrow. Sarah brightens.

Kurtz turns to face Dante and sneers.

KURTZ
 Number one at the Academy--but you're
 not number one here.

DANTE
 That remains to be seen.

Dante looks down at the fallen laborer, then back at Elder.

DANTE (CONT'D)
 The well led and well taken care of
 are motivated work harder.

Kurtz sneers in disgust.

KURTZ
 You need to leave your soft-hearted
 hayseed ways behind and learn what
 terror can accomplish.

He pulls out a power pistol and points it at the fallen
 worker.

KURTZ (CONT'D)
 (To Elder)
 We have no time for the weak. I
 like to shoot one. Just one. That
 is what motivates the others to work
 harder.

SARAH
 No!

Dante takes the vial from inside his shirt, takes out a piece
 of straw, and chews on it.

DANTE
 A good technique.

Dante holds out his hand for the pistol and stares down Kurtz.

Sarah freezes in disbelief.

Kurtz looks at Elder. Elder takes out his weapon. One guard
 releases Sarah, takes out his power pistol, and aims it at
 Dante. Elder nods at Kurtz, who shakes his head in disgust.

KURTZ

You don't have the stomach. Never did.

DANTE

Bio or techno worker?

Kurtz sneers, then points to the fallen worker.

KURTZ

It would be so easy if he were a bot, wouldn't it? It would be just a game to you.

Kurtz takes a step closer to Dante.

KURTZ (CONT'D)

No loss. Just a pile of slag. Can't feel. Can't love. Can't hurt. Too easy.

Kurtz steps closer to Dante.

KURTZ (CONT'D)

But what if he's not. Or what if machines can feel?

DANTE

Bio or techno?

Kurtz shakes his head. He stares straight into Dante's eyes.

KURTZ

I'm not going to tell you, because when it comes to love or death, it doesn't matter.

Dante holds Kurtz's stare. Kurtz charges the weapon and gives it to Dante.

Dante points first points the weapon at Elder. The second guard releases Sarah and points his weapon at Dante.

KURTZ (CONT'D)

I told you he couldn't be trusted!

Dante then points the weapon at the terrified fallen worker, then smoothly and deliberately turns and points the weapon at Kurtz and fires, blowing a hole in Kurtz's chest and killing him.

Dante puts the power pistol inside his jacket and walks back to Elder.

DANTE

We have no time for weak leaders.

Dante pauses and smiles.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Although, he was right. It only takes shooting one to motivate the rest to work harder.

INT. PIT -- DAY

Two robotistic arms slowly pull their unseen owner up the side of the pit. GRAVEL CRUNCHES in the robotistic hands' grips.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER HALLWAY -- NIGHT

A unit 665 soldier stands guard outside a room. He receives a transmission in his helmet and nods. He sets an electronic control to "locked" and leaves.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER DANTE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Dante rests on a rough bunk in a small, Spartan room. He chews on a blade of straw. His eyes are open and he gazes at the ceiling.

The doors slides open and Sarah darts in. She looks behind her, left and right down the hallway, then quietly slides the door shut.

Dante turns his head to look at Sarah, but he does not get up.

Sarah puts her finger to her lips.

SARAH

Shhh! There may be sensors. He never trusts anyone.

DANTE

Wise. No soldier can defend against a traitor.

Sarah quietly crosses the room, then kneels next to Dante.

SARAH

Come with me.

Dante looks first at Sarah, then runs his gaze over the ceiling.

DANTE

I think I'm going to like it here.

Sarah looks at him quizzically.

DANTE (CONT'D)

These were Marc's quarters.

Dante sits up and gestures around the room.

DANTE (CONT'D)
These were Marc's things.

He looks hard at Sarah.

DANTE (CONT'D)
You were his, too. That's why you
stayed--even after the brutality
began.

Sarah looks down guiltily, then back up at Dante.

SARAH
He was strong, and handsome, and my
uncle believed in him as much as he
believes in you. He helped me, at
first.

Dante snorts. Sarah angrily turns on him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
And where were you? Chasing your
medals and your glory.

Sarah turns away.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Then Marc changed--and I saw the
monster in him.

DANTE
Like you see the monster in me now.

Sarah shakes your head.

SARAH
I know you. You could never be like
him, no matter how hard you try.

Sarah stands, takes his hand.

SARAH (CONT'D)
The guards, the soldiers, they're
all at some meeting of his. If we
hurry, we can make it to your ship!

DANTE
To dessert my superior officer?

SARAH
To warn the others!

Dante shakes his head no.

DANTE

The skimmer has no communications.

SARAH

The databurst transmitter works!
Your sergeant told me. That's all
we need!

Dante pulls back his hand.

DANTE

And what would Colonel Elder do to
us afterwards?

Sarah moves in close to Dante.

SARAH

We--we could run away. Like we wanted
to before.

DANTE

You wouldn't then.

Sarah's face turns angry. She pulls back.

SARAH

Neither would you.

DANTE

I had a mission then.

Sarah looks defiantly at Dante.

SARAH

So did I.

DANTE

I have one now.

SARAH

Helping him kill millions is your
mission?

DANTE

He's doing what he believes is right,
even when others tell him it's wrong.
So am I. That's what heroes do.

Dante lays back down and stretches out.

Sarah stands angrily. She turns away and stomps toward the
door. She opens the door, then turns back to Dante.

SARAH

You're no hero.

Sarah leaves.

Dante chews on his straw.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- NIGHT

Elder watches a hologram of Sarah leaving Dante and Dante on his bunk.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Elder stands facing a holographic maps display, which shows the Coalition and Empire fleets positioned in orbit around Wiarton and the unit 665 firing positions on the planet.

He uses a light pen to draw a line on the holographic map from a unit 665 gun to an Empire ship. A red box flashes around the ship, then glows softly.

Dante enters, escorted by two guards.

Elder beckons Dante forward, then turns and again faces the display.

ELDER

Your friends have arrived.

Dante surveys the display.

DANTE

Those who would sacrifice soldiers
for their own gains are not my
friends.

Elder draws a line on the holographic map from a second unit 665 gun to a Coalition ship. A red box flashes around the ship, then glows softly.

ELDER

A true soldier--a true hero--must
sometimes be ruthless in the name of
a higher cause.

DANTE

I've learned much about ruthlessness.

Elder puts the light pen down.

ELDER

Even at the academy, I worried you
were chained to your emotions.

Elder turns to Dante.

ELDER (CONT'D)

How many times did I reprimand you
for risking the mission to spare
your subordinates?

DANTE

About as many times as you commended
me for achievement.

Elder grins softly, then his face grows stern. He looks at
the hologram, then back at Dante.

ELDER

Lieutenant Kurtz was to have the
honor of planning the destruction of
the Empire and Coalition fleets.

Dante nods.

DANTE

There would be honor in defeating a
dangerous enemy.

Elder moves closer to Dante.

ELDER

Lieutenant Kurtz proved his loyalty--
and his ruthlessness--in combat.

Dante scowls.

DANTE

I saw his work at Zulu Forward.

Elder frowns and moves in very close to Dante.

ELDER

Now it is time for you to prove yours.

Elder holds out the light pen to Dante.

Dante hesitates. His glance darts back and forth from the
light pen to the hologram.

Elder sadly lowers the light pen.

ELDER (CONT'D)

I'd did so wish you had broken you
chains.

Elder beckons to the guards.

Dante raises his hand for them to wait.

Dante pulls a piece of straw from the vial, chews on it for
a few seconds, then throws it away.

Dante reaches out and takes the light pen from Elder. He
walks over to the hologram and uses the pen to assign a
targets to a 665 guns battery.

Elder folds his arms and watches closely.

Dante turns his head slightly to watch Elder out of the corner of his eye.

A chronometer on the command center wall counts down.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

The Taurus is in orbit around Wiarton. The ship is at battle stations. Morris captains the ship, various officers work consoles, etc.

The bridge's view screens display Wiarton, the Coalition fleet, the Empire fleet, and Empire forces on the ground.

MORRIS

Any signal from the lieutenant or Raader?

TAURUS OFFICER #4

No, ma'am. Only the distress beacon from that town--Endits.

Morris looks at a view screen and drums her fingers.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER HALLWAY -- DAY

A unit 665 soldier walks down the hallway. As he passes a dark door way, a robotistic hand reaches out from behind and covers his mouth.

A robotistic arm reaches around his neck. The struggling soldier is pulled inside. A few seconds later, he stops struggling. His legs are dragged into the room and out of sight.

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

The ship's bridge is a starker, grayer, no-comfort version of the Taurus' bridge. Sovrus now wears his Empire Colonel's uniform and commands the ship. Various Empire SHIP OFFICERS work consoles, etc.

SOVRUS

Order ground element to advance through the city.

EMPIRE SHIP OFFICER

It will be done.

SOVRUS

Target all weapons banks on the Coalition fleet. Full attack status.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

The bridge displays show the advancing ground forces.

MORRIS

(To Taurus Officer #4)
Get the Empire fleet on a commo
channel. Tell them one stray energy
bolt and I'll blast them to space
junk.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Sarah enters, sees the two at work, and charges up Dante.
She grabs Dante by his jacket.

SARAH

Where is the Dante I knew? The Dante
who wanted to be my hero? The Dante
who would let himself be captured
rather than gun down children?

DANTE

Do you see him here?

SARAH

I don't know who I see.

DANTE

Watch carefully.
(To guards)
Keep her back, but keep her here.
She needs to see this.

Dante turns his back on Sarah.

The guards pull Sarah back and force her into a chair in the
back of the control center.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

A ground warrior legion of Empire soldiers advances down the
valley toward Endits.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

A land combat force of Coalition soldiers advance up the
valley toward Endits.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Elder and Dante monitor the approach of the Coalition and
Empire forces.

The hologram shows the Coalition and Empire troops as they
move into the kill zones Dante has assigned.

A hologram shows the Empire and Coalition fleets in orbit
around Wiarton.

Dante turns to look at Elder. Elder nods, and Dante touches controls on a panel.

In the hologram of ships in orbit, the softly glowing boxes around the ships now flash.

A second set of flashing boxes lock onto the Taurus' bridge. The display reads "target data locked."

Elder nods again. Dante touches another control. The display reads "Stealth Cloaking = 100%"

Elder turns away to work another control. Dante turns his head slightly to look at Elder.

Dante takes out the vial of straw. He takes out a piece and chews on it. Then he slips a hand inside his jacket and grips a power pistol.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER HALLWAY -- DAY

A robotistic arm, attached to an unseen but unsteadily moving Raader, works its way down the hall. The arm's hand holds a power pistol. Raader's breathing is labored and difficult.

Raader comes to the entrance door to Elder's Command Center. The door is locked.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Elder turns to the guards and nods. The guards release Sarah, dash forward and grab Dante, immobilizing his arms.

Elder takes the power pistol from him.

ELDER
You disappoint me, lieutenant.

Elder turns back to the console and sets the power pistol aside.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER HALLWAY -- DAY

An exhausted Raader points the power pistol at the lock the door to Elder's command center. She hesitates, her arm wavers, then lowers the pistol.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER -- DAY

Elder works the controls. Dante watches, restrained by the guards. Sarah rushes Elder, but the huge man swats her away. She falls hard into a corner, bleeding.

Dante sees her hurt and struggles against his guards.

The door to the command center blows in. In steps Raader. A third of her face is gone, revealing circuitry.

The metal bones in one arm show, barely covered by her bloody, tattered uniform. Her "human" other arm is heavily bandaged. One leg shows circuitry. Bandages and wires hold the rest of her together.

RAADER

Damn, el-tee. You make a girl earn her fishing trips, don't you?

She shoots at Elder and misses, but forces him to take cover.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Officers. All alike. Ought to know better than to throw a robo-medic and a stubborn non-com in the same damn pit.

Dante's two guards let go and draw their weapons. Dante hits one and knocks him down. Raader and the other guard exchange shots. Raader kills the guard.

Elder recovers the power gun and shoots Raader, hitting her. She returns fire as she goes down.

Dante charges Elder. They struggle.

Raader can't see to shoot.

The hologram and console signal that all Empire and Coalition targets are in the kill zones. Then they signal the firing banks are locked onto the Coalition and Empire space targets.

Elder tosses Dante off and moves toward the console.

A power pistol burst hits Elder. Mortally wounded and scorched but not yet dead, he lunges toward the console.

Dante throws himself at Elder and knocks him down. Elder pulls an energy dagger from his belt, but Dante grabs Elder's arm and holds the dagger away. Elder rolls on top of Dante. The two struggle, the dagger between them and barely inches from Dante's chest.

ELDER

You were my hope.

DALLGAS

You were my hero.

Sarah grabs Elder. Elder swings the energy dagger at her, glancing off her on the forearm. Dante punches Elder. As Elder rolls off Dante, he rolls on to the energy dagger and impales himself on it.

Dante and Sarah run over to Raader. Raader is dying.

DANTE

How?

RAADER

Me and Plair got together. Literally.

She rips part of the uniform off her left shoulder, revealing Plair's tattoo.

DANTE

I didn't know--

RAADER

You didn't need to, but I kept meaning to tell you.

SARAH

We'll get you some help.

Sarah stands.

RAADER

No, ma'am. This is the last battle for us old soldiers.

(To Dante)

El-tee, you figured out how to be happy and be a hero yet?

Dante looks over at the console.

DANTE

Don't know that I have what I need to do that.

RAADER

Never mind what you don't have, use what you do.

Raader coughs.

RAADER (CONT'D)

Gotta request before I sign out, el-tee. Damn. Should say "we."

Dante leans down. Raader whispers in his ear. Dante straightens up and nods.

Dante takes Raader's hand. Raader grins and dies.

DANTE

(To Sarah)

Never say they can't feel.

Sarah looks deep into Dante's eyes.

SARAH

Not me. I wouldn't. Not ever.

Dante stands and goes to the control console. The console lights flash that all targets are well within the kill zones.

Sarah covers the area on her forearm where Elder's energy dagger burnt her.

Dante notices her holding her arm.

DANTE

You're hurt!

Sarah turns away slightly. She smiles at Dante.

SARAH

Forget about it.

Dante turns back to the console. He finds a data device and downloads data from the console. Data pulls the device and puts it in his pocket.

He puts his hands on the control console and glances up at the holograms of ships and troops in the kill zones.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

DANTE

Making it so this time you have to run away with me.

Dante flips switches. The displays read out "Warning--stealth deactivated. Warning--target lock broken. Warning--enemy sensors activated."

ALARMS SOUND.

SARAH

They could reset it--

Dante grabs Raader's power gun and hands it to Sarah. Then he take's Elder's and blasts the control console.

DANTE

Not any more.

Dante goes back to Raader. He rolls Raader over and takes out two chips from the back of her neck.

DANTE

Her history and personality. She said that as long as you have these and a will--

Sarah touches Dante's arm.

SARAH

I know.

Sarah takes the chips and puts them in Dante's pocket.

Dante reaches down and squeezes Raader's hand. Then he stands upright.

DANTE

Now we get the hell out of here.

The two run out of the command center.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Morris command the ship while her bridge officers man consoles, etc.

The view screens on the Taurus bridge now show the ambush positions and Elder's base.

MORRIS

Open direct comm channel to the Empire
Flagship.

Sovrus's face displays on the communications view screen.

The two hatefully stare at each other for several long seconds.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Do you see what I see?

SOVRUS

I see a possible trick.

MORRIS

I see my chance to kick Empire butt
slipping away.

SOVRUS

I see us settling our debts another
time.

MORRIS

Agreed.

Morris stabs a button and closes the communications channel.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

I'll see you burn in hell, too.

(To Taurus officer #4)

Lock on to that base and the firing
position nearest the Empire land
battle group.

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

Sovrus watches as the bridge crew tracks the ground targets.

SOVRUS

New targets--stationary forces nearest
the Coalition ground unit and
uncloaked firing batteries.

EXT. AMBUSH POSITION 2 -- DAY

Coalition fire from the Taurus hits the ambush position,
destroying the heavy weapons as they sight in on the advancing
Empire land forces.

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

Sovrus watches as the screens on the Empire ship display
weapons locking on to the ground target.

SOVRUS

Engage!

EXT. AMBUSH POSITION 1 -- DAY

Empire blasts hit the ambush position, destroying gun
emplacements.

INT. ELDER'S COMMAND CENTER HALLWAY -- DAY

Dante and Sarah run through the maze of hallways in Elder's
base.

Blasts rock the base, tossing Dante and Sarah against the
walls.

EXT. RIVER VILLAGE -- DAY

Dante and Sarah break out into the village. The village is
being hit with blasts from the Coalition and Empire ships.

As they run through the streets, surviving unit 665 members
shoot at Dante.

Dante fires over his shoulder and hits two, but then his
power gun is empty. He tosses it away.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante and Sarah run down the dock and onto the Conrad. Two
unit 665 members come out of the hatch. One points a power
pistol dead center at Dante's chest.

Sarah raises a power pistol, hitting the first unit member
and killing him. The second gets off a shot that grazes
Sarah's forearm, but she holds steady aim, shoots, and kills
him. The bodies topple over the side of the Conrad.

Sarah looks at the pistol in disgust and revulsion and drops
it. Dante kicks it over the side.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante pilots the Conrad through the incoming fire hitting Elder's base, dodging the blasts and falling debris.

He leans over and plugs the disk into the communications station. He presses buttons on the console.

Digital readouts display: "Micro burst data launcher engaged."

DANTE

We'll tell the Stellar Council what they wanted to hide.

He stabs a button. A digital readout displays "Data launcher fired."

Dante hits the button again. The data launcher fires again.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Now we'll hide ourselves.

He presses more buttons. A readout displays "stealth engaging."

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Bridge officers detect the skimmer. It displays on a monitor. Morris leans forward in her command chair.

MORRIS

Is that you and your officer, Raader?

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

Empire officers track the fleeing skimmer. Sovrus watches from his command chair.

EMPIRE SHIP OFFICER

Coalition skimmer attempting escape.

Sovrus nods.

SOVRUS

Lock on target.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante works the controls and flies the Conrad between blasts. An explosion rocks the ship.

A digital readout displays "Stealth malfunction."

Sarah reaches down and deftly works switches, etc.

The digital readout displays "Restarting."

Dante glances over quizzically.

Sarah looks back and shrugs innocently.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

The Conrad dodges explosions as it flees the area of Elder's base.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Bridge officers and Morris anxiously watch the view screens and sensors.

TAURUS OFFICER #4
Incoming micro burst data capsule.--
from that skimmer--Coalition encoding.

MORRIS
A post card from Raader's Lieutenant.
(To Taurus Officer #4)
Cease target tracking.

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

Bridge officers track the skimmer. Sovrus watches impassively from his chair.

"TARGET LOCK" flashes on a view screen.

Sovrus grins evilly. Payback time.

SOVRUS
Fire all cannon batteries.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

The explosions close in on the Conrad as it shimmers in and out of visibility.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

The Conrad bucks and heaves as Dante flies it through a hell of incoming fire. Sarah sits by his side.

SARAH
We don't have much hope of making it
out of here, do we?

DANTE
We'll use what we have.

Dante is absorbed in piloting the ship. Sarah glances at him, then leans over and works controls on the console. Her hands move over the controls extremely rapidly.

A console display reads "stealth engaging."

Explosions close in on the ship. Sarah turns back to Dante and presses herself close to his side.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

An Empire power ray explodes very close to the Conrad, which is no longer visible in the flame and blast

INT. EMPIRE WARSHIP BRIDGE -- DAY

Sovrus and the Empire bridge officer monitor the targeting screens. The Conrad disappears from the screens. Sovrus purses his lips in satisfaction.

INT. TAURUS BRIDGE -- DAY

Morris and the bridge officers monitor the tracking screens. The Conrad is gone from the screens. Morris sadly turns away.

MORRIS

Damn you Raader, you've left me again.
 (To Taurus Officer #4)
 Send their data to Coalition Command.
 Then send it on the Stellar Government
 Council emergency channel.

Morris takes a deep breath.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

We'll let the politicians sort this
 one out.

Morris turns her head and wipes away a tear. She shakes her head and composes herself.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Recall ground units.

EXT. WIARTON -- DAY

The jungle speeds by underneath. At first, the air is filled with smoke and there are fires below. Then there is no fire, only jungle. The jungle thins. Then comes white sand beaches, then open blue ocean water that speeds by below.

Huge, strong, gleaming fish jump out of the water.

The water parts with a slight wake, as if something unseen presses down on it from only a few feet overhead.

EXT. OVER WIARTON OCEAN -- DAY

The Conrad materializes, skimming over the ocean. The small craft is scorched and blackened. Chunks have been gouged out of its armored skin. The fore deck gun is a mangled knob.

The side hatch of the skimmer opens. First Dante, then Sarah, stick their heads out into the fresh ocean breeze. Then they pull their heads in.

The Conrad slows.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Sarah and Dante look out the view ports.

SARAH
It's beautiful.

Dante chews on a piece of straw.

DANTE
Beats the jungle.

SARAH
Will they come look for us?

Dante checks the consoles. He shakes his head.

DANTE
The fleets are taking up positions
to warp to hyperspace. They think
we're dead.

SARAH
I've never felt so alive.

Dante takes Raader's and Plair's micro chips out of his pocket.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about your friend.

DANTE
Friends. She--they, they had a last
request.

EXT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante leans out the hatch of the skimmer and looks down at the ocean. Schools of fish jump below.

Dante tosses the micro chips into the water. The fish jump around them.

Dante pulls his head back inside.

INT. CONRAD -- DAY

Dante and Sarah look in wonder out the view ports.

Sarah turns to Dante.

SARAH

Are you sure this is what you want?
Can you live without chasing glory?

DANTE

I can live without being a soldier.

Dante looks away.

DANTE (CONT'D)

I just wanted to be a hero.

Sarah takes him in her arms.

SARAH

Who says you're not?

They turn away to look out the forward view port. Sarah's right forearm is scorched from the power gun blast. Wires and metal are visible through her torn sleeve.

Dante feels the wires, looks down and sees them jutting from Sarah's sleeve.

Dante takes a half step back, stunned.

Sarah looks at him anxiously, then sadly bites her lip and looks down.

Dante takes the straw out of his mouth, steps forward, takes Sarah in his arms, and kisses her deeply.

FADE OUT

THE END