

*Starship Command II*TM

Introduction

Starship Command II provides two new races, new ships, new weapons, and new special cards to make your original Starship Command game even more exciting. This supplement requires Starship Command; it is not a complete game unto itself.

Components

New Cards — Specials (Battle Cards)

Communication Interception (4)

Gremlins (2)

Master Tactician (1)

Stolen Technology (1)

Tactical Advantage (1)

Additional Cards (Battle Cards)

Phasers (17)

Torpedo (7)

Plasma (6)

Deflectors (8)

Evasive Maneuvers (4)

Racial Advantages (4)

Reinforcements (4)

Damage Control (3)

Damage Control 2 (2)

Ships

Fostonian 24

Dawgorak 24

Confederation 8

Ritillian 8

Shilton 8

Packton 8

Fighter Squadrons (36)

Playing the game and setup

Most of Starship Command II's play and set up is the same as the original Starship Command game. Some of the new cards may vary some actions during the game, but the general order of play does not change. All battle cards from this game are shuffled into the Battle Deck. For the Basic game the ship cards from Starship Command II are shuffled in with the ship cards from Starship Command.

Fighter Squadrons

Fighter Squadrons are used in conjunction with carriers and are not used by themselves. Fighter cards ARE NOT mixed in with the Battle Deck or the Ship Deck but put aside. See the carrier rules for further details.

New Racial Advantages

Dawgoraks: Weapon Neutralization

The Dawgoraks' Racial Advantage is used to disable an enemy ship's weapon systems. This is done by placing the Racial Advantage card on any enemy ship. Once this card is placed on an enemy ship that ship cannot fire any of its weapons. A damage control card or the Miracle Worker is necessary to repair any ship affected by this. Both cards are then discarded. This ability may not be used on fighters and does affect a carrier's ability to launch or retrieve fighters.

Fostonians: Absorption Web

The Fostonians' Racial Advantage is played when one of their ships is attacked. When the Racial Advantage is played it may absorb one incoming damage card of a given type attacking a ship. This counts as playing a defense card for that ship. The defender may choose what type of weapon is absorbed (Phaser, Torpedo, or Plasma), but must draw randomly from the cards of that type played against the ship. The drawn card is then placed into the defender's hand and may be used on that player's next (or subsequent) turn if he has a ship that can fire that type of weapon. The Racial Advantages card is discarded.

Carriers

Carriers are played the same way other ships are, except that they may carry fighters (see next section).

A carrier initially carries a set number of fighter squadrons (this number is printed on the card). When a player gets a carrier (either at the beginning of the game or by reinforcement) he is then randomly dealt the number of fighter squadrons listed on the ship card from the stack of fighters previously set aside. These fighter cards are placed face down under the carrier until they are launched. Any carrier that is destroyed while the fighter squadrons are still on the carrier lose all those fighter squadrons and the player that destroyed the carrier gets the value of both the carrier and all of the fighter squadrons on board at that time.

If a carrier is crippled while fighters are on board, half of these fighters (round up) are lost, chosen randomly. If the carrier is repaired so that it is no longer crippled, the fighters stay destroyed. If the Miracle Worker is played immediately after the carrier takes the crippling damage and removes enough damage so that the carrier is no longer crippled, then the fighters are not destroyed.

Launching Fighter Squadrons

To launch a fighter squadron(s) simply pick one or more of the fighter squadron cards and turn it (them) over next to the carrier. Next, you may place a damage card from your battle hand and place it under each just-launched fighter **FACE DOWN** (This card is no longer part of your hand and will be replaced at the end of your turn). This card may be ANY damage card (Phasers 1,2,3,4; Plasma or Torpedo). The fighter is now considered launched, and if paired with a damage card is considered loaded. On the player's next turn he simply picks an enemy ship that he wishes to attack and in the Designate Attack Phase says the fighter squadron is attacking that ship. In the Total Damage Phase he reveals the damage card and the ship takes the designated amount of damage. After the fighter squadron has made its attack

it may, on the next turn, return to the carrier and land, (fighter squadrons cannot land on any carrier that is crippled) by placing the fighter squadron face down under the carrier. At this time any fighter that is damaged may be repaired on the player's next turn with a Damage Control card. Fighters may NOT play Boarding Parties or be boarded or play Racial Advantages. Any carrier that is cloaked and launches fighters immediately becomes uncloaked.

Defending Against and Attacking Fighter Squadrons

Once a fighter squadron has been launched it can be fired upon by any other player on their turn but ONLY with Phasers. Fighter squadrons take damage just as any other ships would and can play Evasive Maneuvers, but not Deflectors. Fighter squadrons do not have any shields and take damage directly to their structure — once that is gone the fighter squadron is destroyed.

Any ship that is attacked by a fighter squadrons may not use Evasive Maneuvers, Warp, or Weapon Absorption, but may use Deflectors to try and stop the attack. This will only be successful if the fighter squadron is carrying a Phaser card. (Deflectors do not stop Plasma or Torpedoes).

Fighters Defending Ships (Dogfighting)

Fighter squadrons may be deployed to protect ships in a player's fleet from enemy fighters. They must be armed with a phaser card in order to fire on another player's fighter squadrons. When another player's fighters attempt to fire on a player's fleet, the defending player's fighters (launched on a previous turn) may dogfight the incoming attacking fighters. If a dogfight occurs, attacking and defending fighters first fire and resolve damage simultaneously upon each other before any attacking fighters are allowed to fire at other ships. (Attacking fighters must also be armed with phaser cards to fire at other fighters.)

Reinforcements for Carriers

A Reinforcements card may be used to replenish a Carrier with fighter squadrons instead of drawing a new ship from the ship deck. This allows a player to fill a carrier up to its carrying capacity listed on the ship. This includes any fighters that may already be launched. Example if a carrier can hold three fighter squadrons and two have been destroyed and one is in flight then a player may use the Reinforcements card to add two fighter squadrons to the carrier. These fighters appear like any other reinforcements — they do not start on the carrier. They may appear armed, taking battle cards from the player's hand.

New Special Cards

Gremlins

This card negates any non-special card (phasers, torpedoes, plasma, deflectors, evasive maneuvers, etc.) except Damage Control and Reinforcements played. Gremlins and the card it is played against are simply discarded. Does not affect ship cards. Does not count as a defense if used to stop a weapon from firing. It may be countered by the Miracle Worker.

Communication Interception

This card may negate one Reinforcements card. It is played when another player plays a Reinforcements card, negating that reinforcement (it never arrives). If more than one Communication Interception is played then they are resolved clockwise around the table. This card also stops the Master Tactician (see below); play it as soon as the Master Tactician is played. It may also be used to counter another Communication Interception. It also counters Tactical Advantage.

Master Tactician

This card may only be played during the player's turn. It allows the player to take the next turn immediately following his current one. Player must play this card before drawing new cards at the end of his current turn. This card is countered by Communication Interception.

Tactical Advantage

This card will end the game when played. Card does not need to be played when drawn, and can be held by the player that drew it as long as desired. Once the card is played all other players will have one last turn, ending with the player that played the card.

Players may want to set this card aside when dealing out the initial battle hands, shuffling it back into the deck after determining who goes first. This card is countered by Communication Interception.

Stolen Technology

This allows a ship to use another race's racial advantage. Must be played with a Racial Advantages card. There is no direct counter for this card, but the Racial Advantages card played in conjunction with the Stolen Technology card may be countered by Gremlins.

Example: this card (along with a Racial Advantages card) would let a Ritillian ship cloak.

Counters to Special Cards

Gremlins by Miracle Worker

Communication Interception by Communication Interception

Master Tactician by Communication Interception

Tactical Advantage by Communication Interception

Stolen Technology by nothing (but see description)

The New Races

The Fostonians

The Fostonians originally supported the Shiltons. It is known that the Shiltons gained some of their shield technology from the Fostonians, but what the Fostonians gained from the Shiltons is still unknown. It has been speculated that the Shiltons took advantage of the Fostonians, but then there is speculation that they are still secretly allied. Whatever the case, it is now known that these Koala bear-like creatures have openly entered the war. Since the Confederation's first contact with this "new" race, the Fostonians have shown themselves to be excellent in the art of diplomacy. The Fostonians themselves have also proven to be proficient fighters. Though their projectile technology is not overly powerful, they do have most advanced defenses of all the known races.

The Dawgoraks

Whether it be running arms to the Shiltons and Ritillians, strip-mining a system, or disabling an offending Battleship, the Dawgoraks are a well-known conglomeration of merchants and traders that inhabit their own corner of the galactic arm.

The name Dawgs (dogs) as they are often called, is a bit of a misnomer as the Dawgoraks are a conglomerate of several races that have agreed to work together for mutual benefit. Only one of them could be considered dog-like, but the name stuck.

Until recently, the Dawgoraks eschewed military confrontation, arming their ships with a weapon that would temporarily disable other ships' sensors, making them unable to fire effectively. With the discovery of the rich resources of the disputed area, the Dawgoraks have been forced to seek a military solution as all diplomatic ones have failed.

While not known to be generally hostile, Dawg ships will fight if forced to.

Optional Rules

Optional Rules can add more fun and flavor to the game, but it may alter game balance. Use at your own risk. These rules may be used for tournaments and for campaign games.

Ranks

Ships may be set up in two distinct ranks — front and rear. Ships in the front are treated normally as far as combat is concerned. Ships in the rear are set behind all of the other ships in the fleet. This is referred to as screening. A ship that is screened cannot be fired on by other players nor can that ship fire upon any other ship while it is screened. A carrier may launch fighter squadrons while in the rear (see next section).

Once the front rank is gone, all ships that were in the rear are immediately considered to be in the front.

A ship may move up to the front rank just by announcing that it is doing so and moving the ship card up to that area on the table, but it may not fire until the player's next turn (this includes fighters).

Launching fighters from the rear rank works much the same as in the standard game. After a player announces that a fighter is being launched and is loaded, the fighter must move to the front rank before the fighter may attack.

(It takes a minimum of 3 turns for a fighter to make a complete attack run when launched from the rear rank. 1st turn: launch/ 2nd turn: travel to front rank / 3rd turn: attack the target).

A fighter may change ranks and then land on a carrier in the same turn.

Generic Deflectors

Using this rule deflectors may stop **ANY** single weapon fired upon a ship. Attacks are declared as normal, but all the cards in a volley fired at a ship are put together. The defender then plays a deflector and removes any card from the volley. Whatever card is removed is deflected. This applies to defending against fighters as well.

Note: This will make combats less bloody.

Example: Two phasers (a type 2 and type 4), a plasma, and a torpedo are fired at a ship. These four cards are placed on the defending ship and the defender is told that there are two phasers, a plasma, and a torpedo in the volley. The defender is not told which cards are of what type — he must pick blindly if he plays a Deflector as his defense.

Experimental Rules

They seemed like a good idea at the time

Do not use these rules for tournament play.

Packton Racial Advantage

Instead of the All Out Attack Racial Advantage use the following:

Superior Targeting Systems: Packton scanner and sensor technology is superior to that of the other races. The Packton racial advantage allows the Packton to double the damage of a weapon card that is fired at the target. The Racial Advantages card is played as a normal weapon, is declared as such, and is placed in the volley that is attacking a ship. Note: The Racial Advantages card must be declared as a weapon that is actually fired. If more than one weapon of that type is fired, it is considered to be with the highest damage card of that weapon type. If the weapon it is declared as strikes its target, the weapon's damage is then doubled for purposes of seeing if the ship is destroyed. If the ship is not destroyed by this extra damage then the Racial Advantages card has no effect and is placed in the discard pile.

If a Deflector is played, and the card randomly drawn is the one that the racial advantage would have doubled, then the Racial Advantages card is discarded with out any extra effect. If the Racial Advantages card is drawn then draw again.

Example: A player fires a volley of two plasma and two phasers at an enemy ship. He has a Packton ship firing part of the volley so includes a racial advantage in the volley and declares it as "two phasers and three plasma." If the larger of the two normal plasma is stopped then the racial advantage has no effect. If the larger plasma hits then its damage is temporarily doubled. If this doesn't destroy the ship then the extra damage is ignored.

Boarding Party Mobilization

Using this optional rule allows for a boarding party card(s) to be played upon ships in your fleet. The boarding party card remains on top of that ship. The card can then be used to defend that ship, but only that ship. The boarding party card can still be used to capture another ship, as a normal boarding party. The mobilized boarding party no longer counts as a card in your hand, and thus can free a space for an extra card. Note that this optional rule is only applicable for boarding party cards, and the Ritillian racial advantage may not be used in this manner. Also, if a ship with a mobilized boarding party is destroyed, then that boarding party is destroyed as well.

Assault Ships

This rule increases the power and importance of assault ships. Any Boarding Party card played from an assault ship counts as two boarding parties (a Ritillian racial advantage would count as three boarding parties!). This advantage can only be used for an offensive assault — that is capturing an enemy ship — and defending the assault ship itself. If using the Boarding Party Mobilization optional rule, then only a Boarding Party that is played from the attacker's hand, or from a mobilized assault ship counts as two boarding parties.

Battleships

Due to the vast amounts of personnel on board a battleship is very difficult to capture. A non-crippled battleship has an automatic defense equivalent to one boarding party against enemy boarding parties. Therefore, at least two boarding parties are necessary to capture a non-crippled battleship. Boarding parties are otherwise played normally when attacking and defending a battleship. Ritillian battleships have a defense of one boarding party — not two (same as the other races) when using this rule.

Multiple Attacks

Larger ships not only have larger but also more weapons than smaller ships. Therefore, allow Heavy Cruisers to fire up to two phasers per turn and Battleships to fire up to two phasers and two missiles (torpedoes and/or plasma) per turn.

Kamikaze Assault

This is declared at the same time as ships leaving battle. However, instead of leaving the battle the ship rams an enemy ship. The ship to be rammed is declared at the same time as the kamikaze attack. At the beginning of the attacker's next turn the kamikaze ship collides with the enemy ship. This causes damage equivalent to the ramming ship's original Structure to both ships. If the kamikaze ship is destroyed, no player receives any points for this ship. Designating attacks comes after the kamikaze assault is resolved. Due to the internal disruption of the collision, the kamikaze-ing ship, if it survives the collision, may not fire on the turn it rams another ship. Note that either ship may be destroyed before the attacker's next turn, thus preventing the kamikaze assault. The ship that is being rammed may not use Evasive Maneuvers to avoid being hit.

Suicide Assault

This is the same as a Kamikaze Assault with a slight twist — the ship plays a Self Destruct card when it rams the other ship. The suicide ship is destroyed. Damage from a suicide ship is equal to twice its original Structure.

Interceptors

In addition to loading fighters with phaser cards to fire at other fighters, an unloaded fighter may fire phaser 1 cards at other fighters only.

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More stuff we might do someday

Galactic Empire – Conquer the galaxy in this massive board game depicting over a hundred stars. Set in the Starship Command universe. Interstellar combat as well as planetary bombardment and assaults.

Netware (aka Piracy) – Steal all the software you can! But be careful, the Feds don't like this sort of thing.

Starship Command III: The Ground Assault – Planetary combat up close and personal.

Maze Wars – This introductory game is fast-paced fun for the whole family!

Necromancer – summon up undead legions to do your bidding while sending the other guy's Zombies back to where they belong.

Red Scare – Everyone's a Commie, except you of course.

Exploration – Dr. Livingston, I presume? See Africa and return to tell about it, if you can.

Computer versions of the above and even a few other titles are also in the works. Who knows what else will arise from the Inferno

Designers' Notes

Starship Command came about through the desire to find a fast-paced ship combat game that was fun. We had played Battleline's (now Avalon Hill's) Naval War forever and had found it quite enjoyable. But we wanted more. When 3W released Modern Naval Battles we jumped on it immediately and played several times before we decided it was a disappointment. The chrome was great, but the action die determined all too often who won the game, and it dragged on seemingly forever. Michael Russell decided he could do better and Starship Command was born. Starship combat had yet to be covered in a card game (that we knew of at the time), so he chose to make it the central focus of the system.

Starship Command went through over two years of fanatical development and playtesting. The rules were written and rewritten several times before we were finished, and the game has held up incredibly well since its initial release in February 1992. The four of us who designed Starship Command had over 40 years combined gaming experience. The oldest of us was then 26

The first edition was a disaster as far as production was concerned. If a book is ever published on how not to produce a game, we will no doubt be the primary case study. Never, ever think that a commercial game of this size can be produced for under \$10,000 and done right. We tried to do it for under \$2,000 and wound up with a physical disaster of the first magnitude as far as the cards were concerned. Friends became ex-friends and we moved on.

Still, what few reviews we got were incredibly positive. Scott Haring's *The Gamer*, never one to mince words, gave us a B+ despite the atrocious physical quality. *Vortex* was equally positive. Sadly, neither of these two publications is around any more.

We barely broke even on the first batch. While we've been told that this was a bloody miracle as far first games go, it was enough to kill us off for a while — we had to make money and we couldn't with what the printer had left us.

People who played the game liked it enough that despite only selling about 150 copies of the first edition, we had enough interest generated to keep up a tournament at the Strategicon game conventions in Los Angeles. Fortunately enough for us, this group included one individual willing to invest in the company, Nick Cortinas. He approached Russell about it, not the other way around. We were flabbergasted. Not wanting to stare too long into the proverbial horse's mouth, we immediately got together the second edition just in time for Origins '94.

Several cosmetic changes were made for the second edition. The most important was the ship cards were completely redesigned and the ship art computer generated. The rules were revised for clarity and readability and the cover art was redone. The card backs were redesigned, although we tried to get the stylized logo to print out and couldn't do it at any of the graphics places we tried. Several ships were renamed and few were modified.

This time we did it right. Cortinas is also a manager in a print shop, so he was invaluable in getting the production done right. The results speak for themselves. Still, this print run was only 1,250 copies. By the time you read this, the next print run of the original game should be just about done.

Originally Russell hoped to use FASA's adaptation of the Star Trek™ universe as the setting for his game. When it became apparent this would be impossible, he developed a whole new galaxy to set his game in. Michael Fryer designed the Packtons to finish out the four races included in the original set.

As we playtested, the final set of features coalesced and we spent the last year before the release of the first edition getting those features to work to perfection. We put on the back burner all the neat ideas we came up with, intending to use them later. That later is now.

When we did the original Starship Command we had two design axioms we stuck to: Keep It Simple and No Dice (as in no dice are required to play this game, period). In this expansion we did pretty well in keeping with the first one and easily kept the second one. This required two complete rewrites of the rules and over 40 revisions. Rules development is not pretty.

With this expansion the game gets a bit bloodier, so we fiddled around with Plasma deflectors, Photon deflectors, and double deflectors. This added too many cards for too little results, so we junked them and introduced the Generic Deflectors (which had been used briefly during the playtesting of the original design). We didn't even have to add or change any cards. Of course, deflectors work fine just stopping phasers, but if you feel things are a bit too bloody with the new cards then by all means use this rule.

Carriers and fighters are a staple of science fiction shoot-em-up-in-space flicks. We *HAD* to add these. It wasn't easy, but we're pleased with the results.

Ranks were designed originally with the assault ship rules in mind, but found again to be too much effort for too little effect. However, when we came up with carriers, ranks made possible a myriad of strategies that weren't available otherwise without them, so we stuck them back in as a standard rule. This proved to annoy several playtesters who felt the game lost the "beer and pretzels" feel it had before. We finally compromised and made it an optional rule.

We had a lot of complaints about that we didn't have enough Reinforcement cards in the original game. We added four more here, but we also added a counter; Communication Interception.

Gremlins are our version of Murphy's Law in space.

Tactical Advantage was added to speed the game up and keep people from abusing the fact that the deck was about to run out. Now you can never be sure when the battle is going to end.

The Dawgoraks and the Fostonians were designed by Eric M. Aldrich I and Steven Seacord, respectively.

We hope you enjoy this expansion. We put a lot of work into it. Hopefully you will feel it paid off.

And if you think it looks easy, YOU try thinking up the names of 24 different types of wild cats.

Thanks again,

Eric, Mike, and Steve

ADMIRAL FUZZY
& THE ZORCHWEILER INCIDENT
A story by Kristin Ahlgren

Admiral Fuzzy, commander of the Fostonian fleet, paced the bridge of his ship. Ranged before him was an entire squadron. By their markings they were Zorchweilers, the marines of the Dawgorak fleet. Zorchweilers were known for their determination to allow as many souls as possible to experience the afterlife. They were tough, mean and, unfortunately, not stupid.

"Are you ready down there?" queried the Admiral into the com. "Yes, sir," replied First Lieutenant Stuff Cheek.

"Then all we can do is wait and hope this works."

The mood on the bridge was tense. The officers rocked nervously. The small ensign watched his scanner. "They're deploying into the Z-attack formation, sir."

"Good. That's the standard formation. Ensign, enter the Plan A maneuvers and prepare for high speed." The Admiral call into the com, "Lieutenant, is the cloaking device settled?"

"Yes sir, but I still don't understand what. . ."

"Never mind Lieutenant. Just prepare to transport it to Plan A coordinates on my command."

The ensign interrupted. "They're moving in and arming weapons."

"Lieutenant, activate and transport device, NOW!"

There was a moment of silence that seemed much longer. Then a crowd of voices . . .

"The Zorchweilers - they're altering formation - firing on the device. Sir - what's going on?"

Admiral Fuzzy smiled (as far as it is possible for a Fostonian to smile). "Ensign execute flight plan, NOW." As the ship pulled away, the Admiral was very pleased indeed. His intelligence service was correct.

Later the Admiral sat in his office with Senior Advisor Slow-Gait. The older bear was chewing cud and contemplating Fuzzy. "You look insufferably pleased with yourself."

"We were right, my friend. The Dawgoraks have the ability to track the operation of the Shiltons' cloaking device."

"It was still a very large risk you took."

"How so? They can track but they cannot penetrate. They must assume a superior force behind the cloak, especially in a combat zone and so took the only appropriate action. Besides running away, of course. But I rather doubted they'd take that option."

Slow-Gait wuffed his nose. "I suppose you are right. But you have tipped our hand none the less. They will wonder how we knew to try this."

The Admiral leaned back. "We'll cross that branch when we come to it."

LATER, ABOARD A FLAGSHIP OF THE DAWGORAK FLEET:

A very nervous lieutenant waited outside the office of his new commanding officer. Colonel Rex was rumored to eat unprepared junior officers. This was only a rumor - he hoped. The captain who had entered the office previously emerged, apparently unscathed, and gestured for the lieutenant to enter. He did so, trying not to hold his breath.

"Lieut. Spot reporting for duty, sir."

"At ease Lieutenant, at ease. You have read the report?"

"Yes sir! It states that at 23:00 hours yesterday in Redball sector 5 coordinates 23/42/42, which is in the militarized zone, a Fostonian. . ."

"Thank you, Lieutenant. I read the report before I sent for you."

"Of course, sir. I would never presume that you had not, sir. Let me just say, sir, that. . ."

"Sit, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant sat.

The colonel continued, "I don't care very much that the Zorchweilers were made to look foolish. I do care that the damned bugbears have apparent knowledge of our latest technical advance."

"I don't know how that could have happened, sir. Our security systems are the best in the known galaxy. . ."

The colonel just looked at Spot who sank a little lower in his chair.

"Find out what happened. You're new to this command but I've had adequate reports of you from previous superiors. Give me an answer and see that it doesn't happen again. Do well on this and you can stay on my staff. Drop the bird and you're back chasing the stick for the quartermaster. Any questions?"

"What are my limitations in this investigation?"

"There are none. Surprise me. Dismissed."

Spot retired to his room after his meeting with the colonel. He turned on his personal terminal.

"Like, ohmigod, it's you. Where have you been? I am having the most grociferous day without you. Let's go to the mall."

The computer had researched a new personality. Again.

"All right, I give up. Where is this one from?"

"Some backwater Confederation planet about 2 light ages ago. I found a whole dialect tape from some historian's doctoral dissertation. It's called Foundations and Origins of the Post-Modern Global Order. Real ancient history. Shall I continue?"

"NO. That sounds worse than the Fostonian slang you had last time. I need you to do some real work. Get me the standard data on our security systems surrounding scientific research at the top secret level and above. Then put a call out to Fred, remind him that he owes me a favor and get the real stuff on the same topic. Beep me when you're ready."

"If I do this will you help me work on my impersonation of Colonel Rex?"

"Only if you really want me court-martialed."

— SIGH —

The computer shut itself down and Spot had a chance to think in peace. The security had to be tight. But somehow there was a leak. How could a bunch of fuzzy cud-chewers get into a Dawgorak system? Even a Zorchweiler system?

ABOARD THE FOSTONIAN SHIP:

The intercom sounded, interrupting Admiral Fuzzy's game of Confederation-style chess with Slow-Gait. It was Ensign Jump. "We're being hailed by an unidentifiable ship, sir. Whoever is onboard is demanding to speak to you."

"I'm on my way, Ensign."

Slow-Gait was worried. "Who or what do you suppose it is? Unknown ships don't just turn up in occupied space, especially in combat zones."

"We'll find out, won't we? This could be fun."

"You've always had an unfortunate sense of humor, Fuzzy."

The Admiral reached the bridge and looked at the forward view screen. There was the ship. He'd never seen anything like it before. He looked over to First Lieutenant Stuff-Cheek who was trying without success to match the ship on the scanner with the known outlines in the computer. "Damn these blurry reproductions," he thought. "We can send a Fostonian into the depths of the galaxy and we still can't get good graphics." He turned to the ensign. "Do we still have an open communications link?"

"Yes sir. But whoever is out there must have been in space too long."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen."

And there was silence as the bridge was filled with truly awful. . .singing.

It was a very vulgar song, popular with Shilton fighter pilots, about alcoholic beverages, walls and 'the girl with the long, long tail'.

Admiral Fuzzy was dumbfounded. "Turn that off!" Ensign Jump obeyed. "That person is obviously a few pods shy of a load. Do we have a fix on his ship type? His probable armament?"

"Negative on the ship type but scanners show no active weaponry."

"Right. Do scanners show any apparent malfunction with the ship?"

"No sir."

"Right. Then we're leaving him right where he is. Helm, prepare to increase speed. . ."

From no apparent source, the voice returned. "Okay, but you'll be sorry. The Dawgoraks are looking for you guys. Sure you don't want to talk to me?"

Admiral Fuzzy looked around the bridge. "How's he doing that?"

"I don't know sir. I. . ."

"How are you doing that?" The Admiral felt foolish shouting at what should be an inoperative comlink. There was silence. A musical tone sounded. A calm female voice spoke. "If you would like to make a call please hang up and try again."

The Fostonians looked at each other in confusion.

There was a burst of static followed by an outburst of "(hugely obscene Packton insult deleted by censor)" coming clearly over the comlink.

The original voice returned. "Sorry about that. I got my lines crossed. Now. . ."

"Who are you?"

"You can call me Fred. Now, about the Dawgoraks. . ."

The Admiral was firm. "I have no interest in discussing anything with you. You obviously fell out of one too many trees in your youth."

"I know about the cloaking device incident. The Dawgoraks are coming for you. They're very close. If you don't talk to me you're going to be reduced to space dust by an entire subdivision of their fleet. Come over to my ship, you personally, and we can discuss terms."

"If you think I'm coming over there alone. . ."

"I'm alone here so bring as many of your people as you need to feel secure, but I'm only bargaining with you." And the voice of Fred was gone.

"Well", said Fuzzy. "It looks like this will be even more fun than I thought. As an escort I'll take.

"Me sir." As one every officer on the bridge, including Slow-Gait, stepped forward to volunteer.

"This is very touching, however I will take the on-duty security team. I can't take all the ranking officers of the ship into unknown territory leaving the engineer in command here. Where do you think you're serving? The Confederation?"

ABOARD THE "SHIP OF FREDS"

The Admiral waited patiently. The security team shuffled nervously. The room was small for them all, built apparently on a human scale. There were several of those things the Confederation humans called "chairs" as well as a large table. There were two doors the one through which the party had arrived and one on the opposite side of the table. Just as the waiting verged on nerve-wracking Fred appeared. He was an average-sized male human with a thin face and glasses. Fuzzy didn't find him threatening-yet.

"I'll keep this simple. I have been engaged to discover your source of information within the Dawgorak military. My usual sources have failed me. Therefore I want you to tell me how you had access to top secret Dawgorak military research.

Fuzzy was stunned. Then he started to laugh. "Just like that? I can't believe I wasted. . . Never mind." He switched on his communicator. The signal was blocked. Fuzzy got up to leave.

"Don't bother, the doors only unlock on my voice command."

"You can't force me to tell you anything. Nothing you could try to do to me. . ."

"I won't do anything to you. I'll just let you watch the Dawgs, who should be here momentarily since I gave them your exact co-ordinates, destroy your crew. Tell me your source and I'll call off the attack. Otherwise I'll be happy to drop you at the nearest Fostonian outpost when it's all over.

"They'll leave. To save all those lives my second will take the ship away. Those are the standing orders.

"I don't believe those orders apply to heads of fleets."

The two locked eyes for a moment. "Very well", said Fuzzy, "but I'm not going to let you have the satisfaction of the answer. Send me directly to the Dawgorak command ship and send my security team back."

"Doesn't matter to me, leaf-breath. I still get paid whether you have a death wish or not."

Fuzzy turned to his followers. "I hope you understand this is a true emergency situation."

ABOARD THE DAWGORAK COMMAND SHIP

Lt. Spot nervously buckled his collar. He couldn't believe his luck. Admiral Fuzzy of the Fostonian Fleet coming here to personally surrender vital security information. He'd be promoted for sure. He headed for the transporter room. Lt. Spot arrived just in time to see his "promotion" activate a small button on his communicator and be transported away again.

"What happened?" barked Spot.

"That must have been a locator device, sir. It allowed his ship to find him and transport him back.

"Right," growled Spot. "Those Fostonians are meat."

BACK AT THE FOSTONIAN RANCH

"I'm very pleased," beamed Admiral Fuzzy. "I'm glad you understood my hint regarding the emergency situation homing signal. Now, what is the battle situation?"

The view from the bridge was grim. Several Dawgorak assault ships and two heavy cruisers were ranged before them with a carrier lurking behind the front line.

"Raise the shields and prepare phasers and torpedoes," the admiral ordered.

"Already done, sir."

"Ensign Jump, scan for the largest incoming torpedo and attempt to capture it with the absorption field.

"Yes sir."

"Remember, we are fighting for an opening to run, we cannot defeat this force. Lt. Snuffle, send a distress call to the nearest allied receiver and see if we can get any. . ." The first Dawgorak volley rocked the ship. ". . .help. Take evasive maneuvers on the next volley and return fire. Did we catch anything Jump?"

"Not this time sir. The carrier has launched two fighters and they are moving in."

"Attack those with phasers when they come in range."

The first Fostonian volley fired. A torpedo hit the first assault ship but the ship's deflectors neatly turned the phaser fire. The second Dawg volley completely missed as the Fostonian ship danced from side to side.

Admiral Fuzzy laughed as the volley passed harmlessly by. "Space dust, my hinder end. Not this cycle. Ready another volley and target those fighters."

Meanwhile the Dawgs were seeing something strange on their scanners:

"I'm tracking the operation of four Shilton cloaking devices sir."

Lt. Spot laughed. "They're trying that same trick again. Ignore the devices and concentrate fire on the ship we can see."

"But sir. . ."

"Do as I say, Private."

"But sir. . ."

"Don't contradict me, Private."

"But sir they're uncloaking and those are Shilton battleships."

Admiral Fuzzy watched with pleasure as the Dawgoraks turned tail and ran. This really was his lucky cycle. "Don't chase them," he sent to the Shilton leader, "It's more fun to see them run away."

Capt. Claw was unhappy, he had hoped to add some kills to his record but he knew the terms of the treaty. "Very well," he hissed, "it's your choice. Just be careful how and when you call us again."

And so it goes. Everyone lives to fight another day. This time.