

SPACE PIRATES



FLEET SUPPLEMENT FOR WAR ROCKET

A Brief History of Space Piracy

1949 – Ivan Dmitriev founds Core Scientific, a company dedicated to cutting-edge research and development of revolutionary technologies. He is a close and personal friend of famed inventor Jules Greenstone. Dmitriev is a brilliant scientist and ruthless businessman. He views the creation of the Northstar by rival Simon Archer as a bribe-filled scandal and vows to create a project that is unmatched in its scope and impact.

1976 – After decades of work, Ivan Dmitriev unveils the Destiny. It is a rocket of staggering complexity and brilliant design. The crew of Destiny, with Dmitriev on-board, launches through a worm hole to start a new colony. Dmitriev is no fool, and assumes he will not be able to return through the worm hole the same way he entered. Instead, he has prepared the Destiny to settle on a newly discovered planetary system. The Destiny is launched into worm hole Delta 2311 and the rocket is never seen again.

2021 – The first act of space piracy occurs when an Andean Bastion pilot mutinies with his one-man attack rocket. He steals a few key supplies and escapes from the defense force. Several pilots take similar action and go rouge. Atomic rockets are almost completely self-sustaining and have a power source that is nearly infinite in life. It is easy to escape from the view of fleets and survive in a hidden pocket in the universe using the rocket as a power source. Rogues form small but powerful

pirate bands and survive by raiding unsuspecting settlers and outposts. Governments react by adding intricate fail-safes and homing beacons to rockets and by policing outposts.

2036 – On Mars, one of the most notorious bands of pirates is captured by the New Sedona Defense Force. It is quickly discovered that the pirates were being secretly funded by the Venus Polar Settlement. Venus Polar was using the bootie from their secret pirates to build their own defense force. Using pirates allowed them to fight with their neighbors without being suspected. In an act of reprisal, a coalition of colonists attacks Venus Polar, killing its leader in action.

2047 – Jean Luc Dablon first publishes his masterpiece, called *The Ladder*. In this massive volume, Dablon proposes the first workable anarchic political process. The work concludes with a proposed Human Law. This is a code of ethics that establishes a way to maintain a loose human governmental process. Human Law is quickly referred to as the Pirate Code by the governments of the known universe as it is a system of rules that allows for autonomous governments to self form.

The Pirate Code revolutionizes the organization of the various bands of outlaws. The code proves to be a very effective and easily implemented set of laws. The complex rules and bureaucracy required to run governments are not needed using the Pirate Code. Of course, the code is brutal and unforgiving.



Pirates are not a sentimental group and weakness of any kind is not forgiven. Reward is only given to those who are the most productive, either by their wits or by their weapons.

Pirates build many successful colonies and are often too strong to be directly assaulted. Some pirate colonies are successful enough to produce their own rockets in small quantities, but most pirates thrive through the old-fashioned techniques of looting and pillaging. Often, pirate governments are hard to distinguish from traditional governments and are formed around racial or philosophical underpinnings. At the core of most pirate groups is the idea that each individual is independent and free to act as they see fit.

2297 – After over 300 years of isolation, the Core Scientific Destiny expedition is discovered. A small but well-armed Imperial exploratory detachment stumbles upon the planet Destiny. In typical Imperial fashion, the detachment threatens the planet, telling them to surrender to the Empire or face destruction. In a show of force that staggers the known universe, the Imperial detachment is rendered immediately powerless and captured completely intact. The inhabitants of the planet Destiny are the direct descendants of the Destiny rocket crew that discovered the planet and settled on its surface. These survivors had to overcome the harshest of conditions. Over the centuries they have developed new technologies and used genetic manipulation to improve their fitness to the harsh planet's environment. As a result of this long isolation, they are now completely dependent on their planet for survival. They call themselves the Complex, which evokes the interconnectedness of the people with their planet.

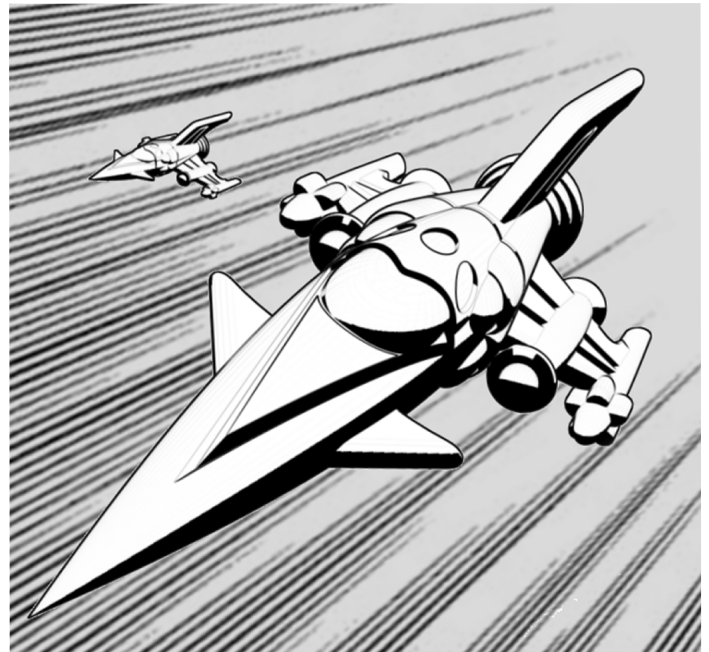
Within a few years, the full might of the Complex technology is presented to the universe. By reworking the worm-hole technology of the captured Imperial rockets, a fully developed war rocket product line is offered for sale. The governments of the known universe have been pondering an attack on the Complex, but after this display of industrial might, they all hesitate to act. An unknown technology is at work on the planet Destiny and only a fool would act too aggressively.

The Complex sends out a universal advertisement for their line of rockets. They are rugged and dependable. At their heart is the Boson generator, an invention of Ivan Dmitriev himself. The Boson generator does carry some side effects, which the Complex fully explain to their potential customers. Over the centuries, the Complex have altered their own genetic structure to avoid the harmful effects of a Boson field. For normal humans, exposure to the Boson field is toxic and leads to symptoms of delusion after extended exposure. For some, long-term exposure leads to incurable insanity known as space madness. The richest pirate lords equip

their crews with special protective suits to ward off the effects of Boson radiation, but some pirate lords prefer their crews to be crazed.

The Complex soon adopt a commercial organization called Core-Complex, which blends its original name with its new reality. Core-Complex Technologies is the division responsible for rockets, mining equipment, harvesting machinery, etc. Core-Complex Genetics is the division that provides new plant and animal strains that increase harvests and provide stable genetics under harsh conditions. The Complex uses its newfound wealth to increase its defenses and ensure its survival. So far, the Complex shows no interested in conquering others. They appear to be using their wealth to secure their own survival against an attack from others.

2319 – Pirates embrace their newfound supplier. Prior to the introduction of Core-Complex rockets, only a handful of pirates had large fleets since independent rocket production was limited and stolen rockets were hard to find. With the addition of the Core-Complex Industrial product line, the Pirates are now forming vast and powerful fleets. At the core of their organization is the Pirate Code, which is a well-known legal system developed over many decades. The security of the various galactic governments is at risk now that the pirates have vast and powerful tools at their disposal.



Movement

Corsair Movement (Pirate)

This movement type is used by the Space Pirates. Their rockets can start their movement with a very sharp turn before sweeping forward.

- Each speed point can be used for one inch of movement in the forward direction
- Use two speed points for each rotation up to 60 degrees (one hex face).
- Each rotation must be followed by at least four inches of movement before you can rotate again.
- You may start any move with one free rotation (one hex face)

- You may pay for a second rotation at the start of any move (one additional hex face)
- You may start each movement phase with a rotation, even if you ended your last turn with a rotation.

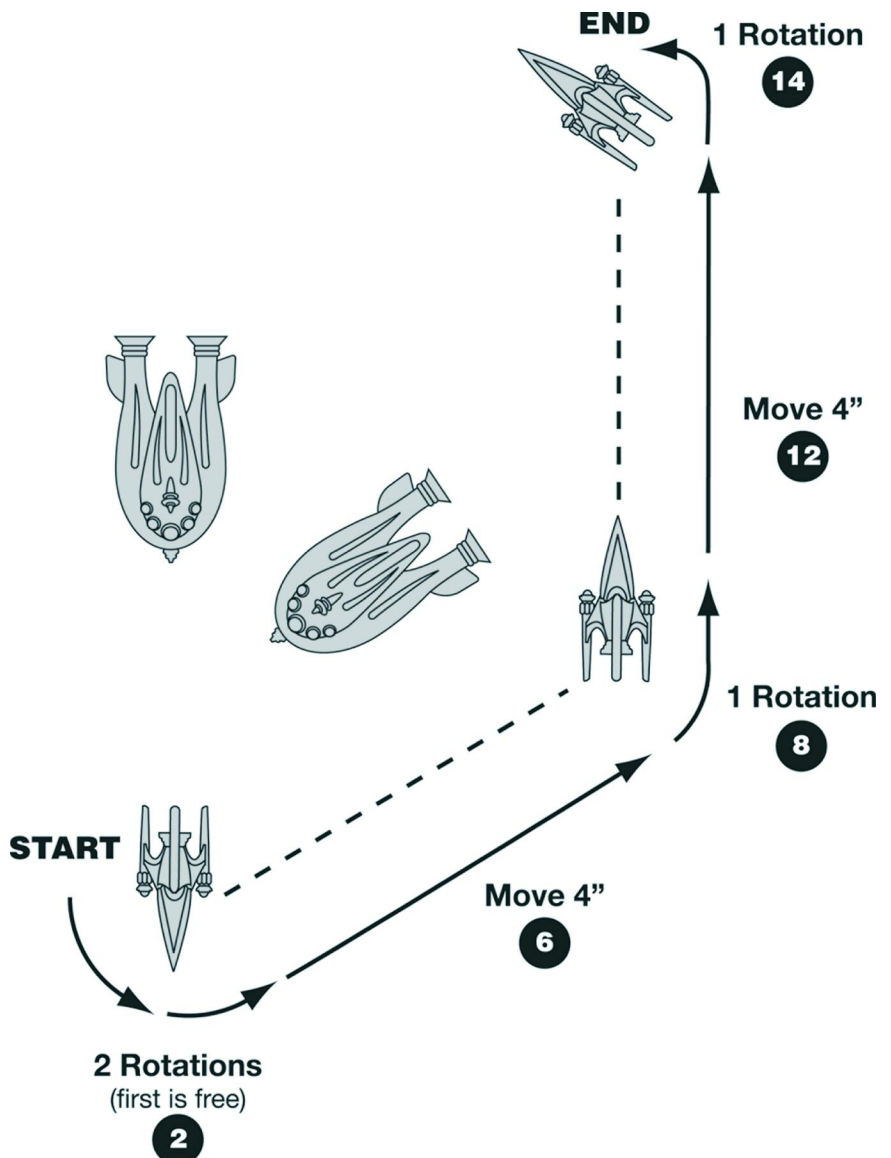


Example of a speed 14 rocket using corsair movement making an evasive move:

In the illustration to the right, two Valkeeri Class II rockets move in to attack a lone Space Pirate Class I rocket. However, the Class I still has to activate since its movement is faster than the Valkeeri Class II rockets (Valkeeri = speed 10; Space Pirate = speed 14). The Space Pirate Class I rocket uses corsair movement, which means it gets a free rotation at the beginning of its movement. It can also pay for a second rotation and then proceed to alternate 4-inch moves and rotations. The player moves his Space Pirate Class I rocket by starting with a free rotation and follows up with a combination of rotations (2 speed points each) and 4-inch movements (4 speed points each). The running speed-point totals are indicated in black circles.

Hint:

Corsair movement is identical to Thruster movement with the addition of a free rotation at the beginning of the movement.



Pirate Fleet Construction Rules

Pirates build their fleets with the standard Space Pirate faction rockets list below. However, pirates are experts at using stolen or borrowed technology. Therefore, pirates may also include rockets from other factions. The cost is higher for these added types since they are more costly to service and pilot. The more different types purchased, the higher the incremental cost.

- Pay an extra **two points** to purchase any rocket type from another faction. You may purchase more than one rocket of the same fleet and class for the same price. (For example, adding a Class I Galacteer rocket will cost 12 points for each rocket. This is the standard 10-point cost plus the additional 2-point penalty).

- Pay an extra **four points** for a second unique rocket type from another faction. Once you have purchased one rocket from another faction, your second added rocket has a higher penalty cost. For example, adding an initial Class I Galacteer rocket will cost 12 points for each rocket, and

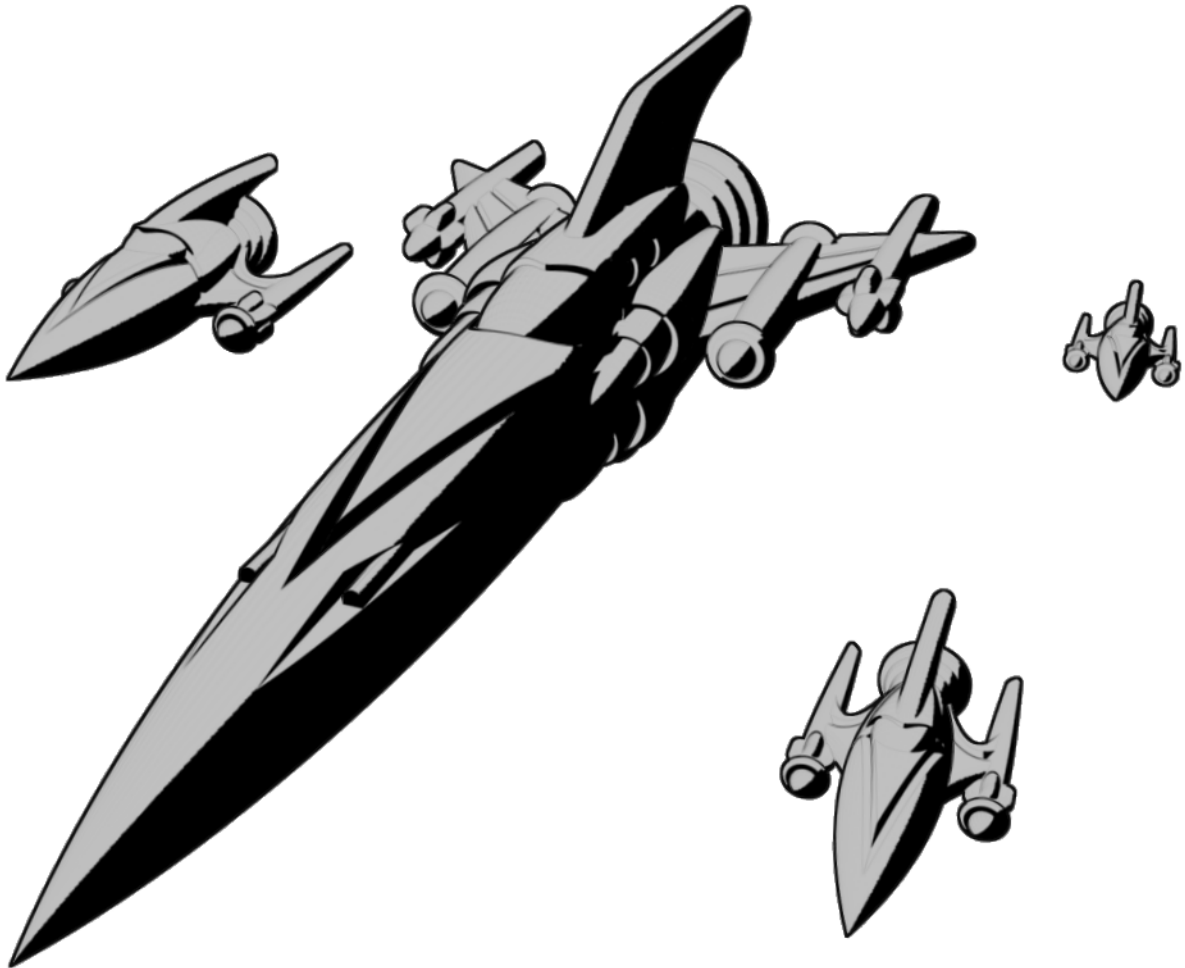
adding a further Class II Zenithian rocket will cost 19 points for each rocket. This is the standard 15 point cost plus an additional 4-point penalty.

- For further rocket types from other factions, the penalty increases by 2 points for each additional type (i.e., Pay a 6-point penalty for each rocket of a third type, 8 points for a fourth type, etc.)

NOTE: It is legal for a Space Pirate fleet to be composed completely of rockets from non-pirate rocket types. However, a fleet of this type will obviously cost more to construct.



Pirate Captain says,
“Using rockets from other forces can be very effective, but they are difficult to capture and cost more to maintain.”



Space Pirate Fleet List

(Use Corsair Movement)

Independent industrial conglomerates have been building and selling rockets to the highest bidder for centuries. The universe is vast and there are many who want to buy rockets for their own purposes. The most common of these independent builders is Core-Complex Industrial. Their well-built machines don't have too many luxuries. However, few rockets can boast having a greater firing arc supplied by the tried and true Boson rays.

Boson generators are unique to the Core-Complex rockets and have some well-known side effects. Often, extended exposure to Boson fields causes an array of maladies generally referred to as space madness. A lifetime of exposure can have significant lasting effects. For many pirates, space madness is a small price to pay for access to a powerful intergalactic rocket.

A Boson-charged weapon has a distinct advantage over other weapons since it has a unique wide angle guidance mechanism. Many hapless pilots have been blasted by a Boson weapon when they thought they were flying well out of range of a pirate rocket.

CLASS I (10 points)

Speed: 14

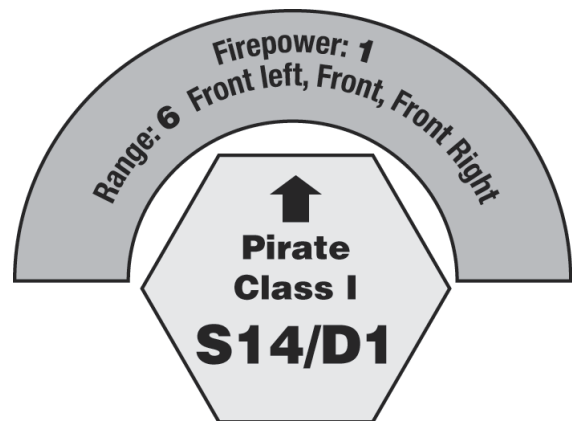
Defense: 1

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 6, Front Left, Front, Front Right

Designation: XR-100

Nickname: Dagger

The Dagger Class I rocket produced by Core-Complex Industrial has a significant advantage over other rockets of its class. Its Boson-powered weapons have a full 180-degree firing arc. Since the Boson rocket motor produces enormous boosts of lateral acceleration, the Dagger can keep any opponent in its weapon sights.



CLASS II (15 Points)

Speed: 10

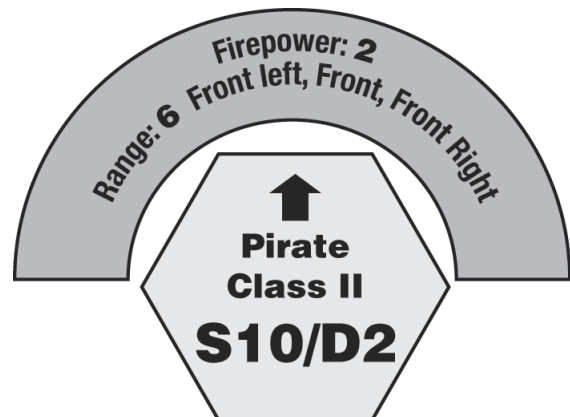
Defense: 2

Weapon: Firepower 2, Range 6, Front Left, Front, Front Right

Designation: XR-200

Nickname: Stiletto

One of Core-Complex's most popular designs is the XR-200 Stiletto. As with all their designs, a Boson generator is the main power source. This workhorse rocket has an improved defensive screen and more powerful weapons. Despite its lower speed, it can still keep enemies in its sights due to its 180-degree firing arc.



Space Pirate Fleet List

CLASS III (25 Points)

Speed: 8

Defense: 3

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Front, Front Left

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Front, Front Right

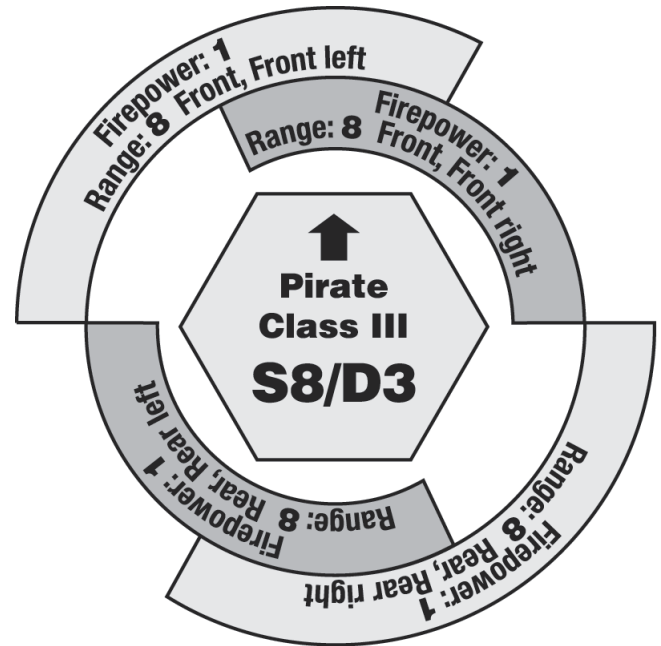
Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Rear, Rear Left

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Rear, Rear Right

Designation: XR-500

Nickname: Rapier

Using a combination of corsair movement and four Boson weapon pods, the Rapier XR-500 will always be able to find its target. This machine boasts one of the best firepower-to-cost ratios in the known universe and is a common rocket found in pirate fleets. The Rapier is equipped with an upgraded Boson generator that is more stable than the lower Core-Complex models.



CLASS IV (30 Points)

Speed: 6

Defense: 4

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Front

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Front, Front Left

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Front, Front Right

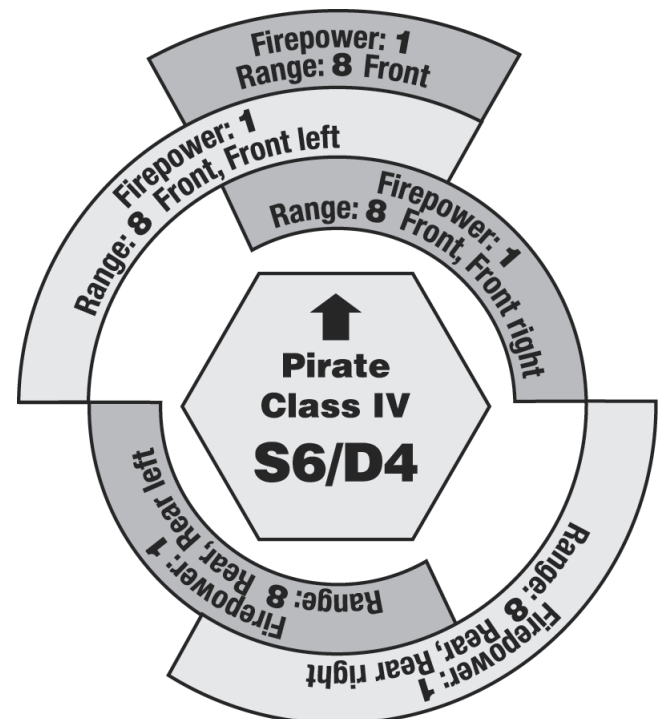
Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Rear, Rear Left

Weapon: Firepower 1, Range 8, Rear, Rear Right

Designation: XR-1000

Nickname: Cutlass

The large crew and cargo capacity as well as the outstanding Boson field shielding of the Core-Complex XR-1000 Cutlass make this machine a highly-desirable rocket. Even rogue Imperial princes and human warlords have been known to purchase this rocket for their home fleets. It is a dependable, safe and steady working rocket. The Cutlass possesses Boson-negation technology, which prevents the space madness caused by extended use of other Core-Complex rockets.



Space Pirate Customizations

Crew Customizations

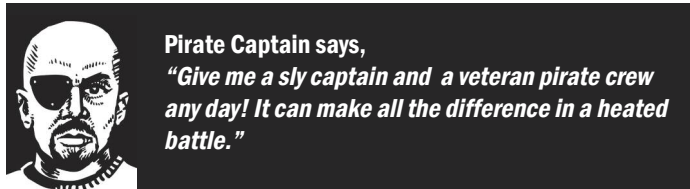
Sly Captain (+2 points/model)

A rocket with a Sly Captain can choose when to activate against an opponent with a rocket of identical speed. In normal play, rockets of the same speed determine who activates first by rolling dice. This roll-off will still be used for the rockets in play, but the rockets with a Sly Captain may choose to activate before or after all rockets of the same speed. If two opposing rockets both have Sly Captains then the roll-off determines the rocket that gets to choose initiative first.

Pirate Crew (+3 points/model)

Highly trained and specialized Space Pirate marines are often used to assault enemy rockets. These troops are critical to engaging an enemy when the goal is to steal, not simply destroy.

- Add 20% to board a rocket.
- Add 10% to special action rolls during boarding as



described by scenario.

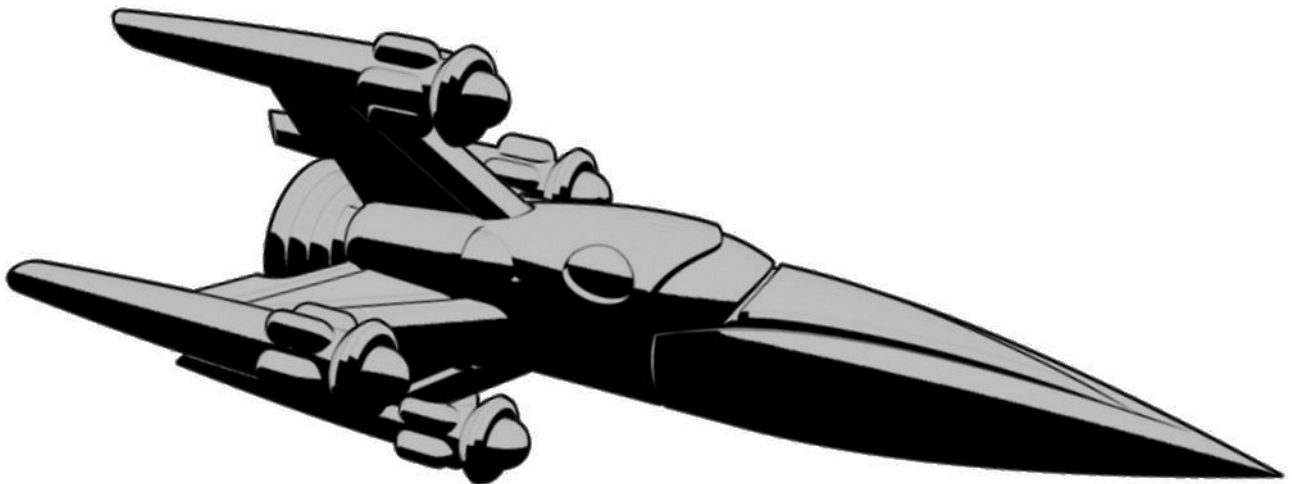
Equipment Customizations

Asteroid Talons (+2 points/model)

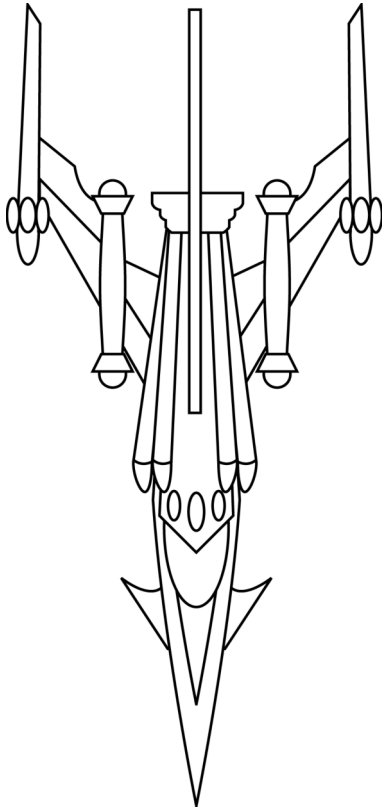
Rockets equipped with Asteroid Talons may attach themselves to asteroids. At the start of the game, these rockets may be placed hidden in any asteroid field on the table. Mark the location secretly on paper. At any time the controlling player wishes, the rocket may reveal itself and act on its appropriate activation point. The hidden rocket may be placed on the edge of an asteroid field so it is not affected by the field as it enters play.

Tangle Web (+2 points/model)

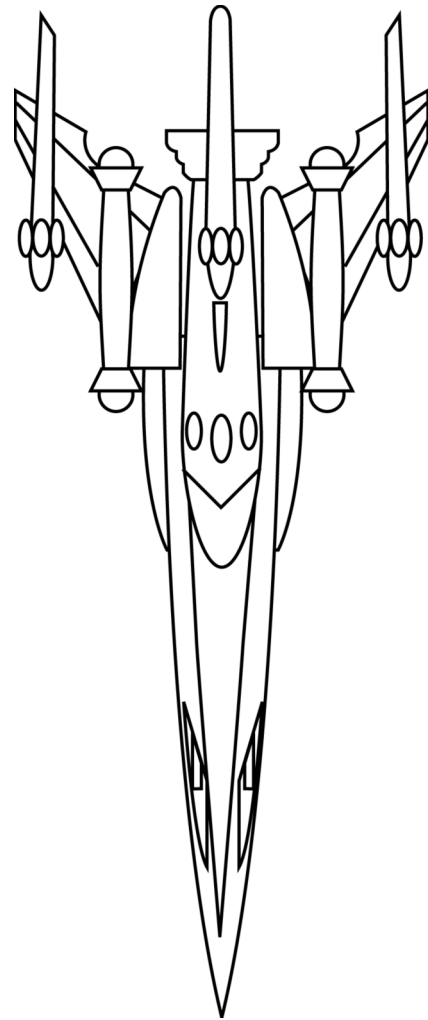
A Tangle Web is an advanced weapon that fires a massive discharge of electric energy. The tangle web may be used instead of the ship's normal prow weapon. The weapon has a +1 to hit with a range of 6. However it will not stun or damage a ship. Instead, if the value (with the +1) is enough to score a stun or better, then the enemy ship is entangled. The entangled rocket can attempt a rotation move or weapons fire by scoring a 6+ on a D10 roll. A roll of 1-5 results in the rocket failing to fire the weapon. In the case of a rotation move, it instead moves the minimum distance that is required before another rotation could be attempted. For rockets that require no speed points to rotate (such as Zenithians) no rotation is allowed for the turn if the 6+ roll is failed. The Tangle Web remains until the rocket rolls an 8+ when making an action attempt.



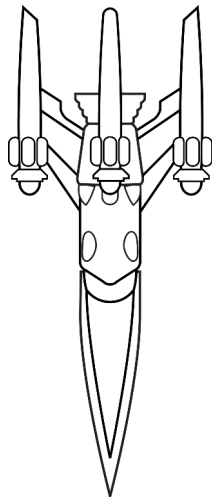
Fleet Recognition: Space Pirates



**Rapier
(Class III)**



**Cutlass
(Class IV)**



**Stiletto
(Class II)**



**Dagger
(Class I)**

Squadrons of Infamy

The Void Hawks



The Void Hawks, and their pirate lord, Dirk Black, are among the most infamous pirates in the galaxy. Rumor is that Black served as a Galacteer until he left in disgrace, but since his real identity is unknown, the Galacteers can neither confirm nor deny this.

Black has a reputation for being cunning in battle, but not without mercy. Those who have surrendered have lived to tell the tale, being set adrift in life pods or within hailing distance of space stations. The location of the Void Hawks' base is unknown, but their hunting grounds span across human space and even to the stars of the Valkeeri.

Black is a master of surprise. The Void Hawks often use captured rockets, sending out distress signals and then preying upon the would-be rescuers. The rockets of the Void Hawks are painted black with white accents, and bear the historic emblem of the Jolly Roger. Void Hawks are often equipped with asteroid talons, allowing them to attach to asteroids, undetected until freighter vessels stray near. A favored weapon is the Tangle Web, which can debilitate a rocket, making it unable to remain in formation or convoys, and thus easier to board and capture. The Void Hawks also favor disruptor beams and ultra atomic engines for added speed.

Void Hawks Stalking Flight (150 Points)

- Five Galacteer Class I Rockets - 12 pts. each (60 total)
- Two Pirate Class II Rockets with Asteroid Talons -17 pts. each (34 total)
- Two Pirate Class III Rockets with Ultra Atomics - 28 pts. each (56 total)

The Stinger Squadron



When the Empire conquered the planet Hivelar, Jack Hornet was in deep space on a test run of the planet's new Core-Complex rockets. He returned to find his planet enslaved. Jack knew his small squadron wasn't going to be enough to tackle the Empire's fleet around his planet, so he contacted the Galacteers for help. They told him his planet was too far away to stage a successful operation. That's when Hornet took matters into his own hands.

Hornet has taken his squadron rogue. They prey on commercial ships, salvage battlefields, and even hire themselves out as mercenaries. With each new payday, Hornet's dreams of building a big enough fleet to drive the Imperials out of Hivelar space get one step closer to reality.

If you see the black and yellow of the Stinger Squadron on the battlefield, pray that it's because your side hired them. Squads can be recognized by the stylized black stinger painted on each rocket. The number of barbs illustrates how many victorious battles the pilot has fought. Only the newest recruits have an empty stinger, and they don't stay that way for long. Hornet hires only the best.

Stinger Assault Group (149 Points)

- One Pirate Class I Rocket with Sly Captain -12 pts. each (12 total)
- One Pirate Class I Rocket with fixed weapon -13 pts. each (13 total)
- Four Pirate Class I Rocket -10 pts. each (40 total)
- Two Pirate Class II Rocket -15 pts. each (30 total)
- Two Imperial Class III Rocket- 27 pts. each (54 total)





The Nebulion Corsairs

The Nebulions are a predatory species of bipedal felines resembling the hunting cats of Old Earth. They possess fierce claws, bushy manes, and a threatening countenance enhanced by mouths lined with sharp fangs. They are a proud race, intent on displaying their noble character by any means available, often regaling themselves in bright, flamboyant attire, and arranging their manes in elaborate dreadlocks. Apart from this vanity, little else is understood of the Nebulions, including their planet of origin or even what drives their violent attacks. Pouncing from cloudy nebulas on unsuspecting prey, they slaughter simply for the joy of the kill. It is speculated the hunt may represent ritualized behavior that determines their complex social hierarchy.

Admiral Galomba Blackmane is an enormous specimen of his race. He is older than most, but none are more cunning or ruthless. Boasting over a hundred successful raids on both Galacteer and Imperial space, he commands an impressive fleet from aboard his ship, the "Pride of Galomba." He gained brash notoriety for boldly attacking the Fangs of Tiamat and even the Death Claw Company of the Valkeeri. His fellow pirate captains are undyingly loyal to their garish and gregarious admiral.

Blackmane's Corsairs appear both devious and lurid, painted in a space nebula camouflage scheme that manages to be both utilitarian and brazenly bold. They often equip their rockets with armored hulls and extra turreted and fixed weapons, preferring to swoop in close for their kills.

Blackmane Destroyer Group (150 Points)

- Five Pirate Class I –10 pts. each (50 total)
- Two Pirate Class II –15 pts. each (30 total)
- One Pirate Class III with Armored Hull & Pirate Crew – 32 pts. each (32 total)
- One Pirate Class IV with Armored Hull & Turreted Weapon – pts. each (38 total)

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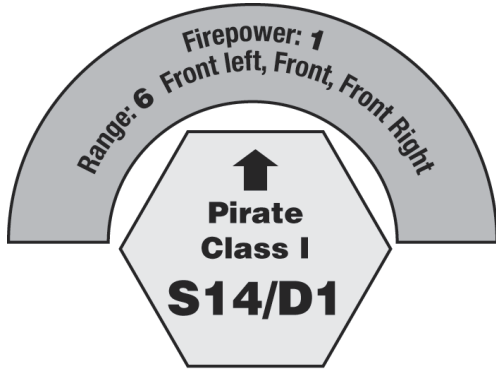


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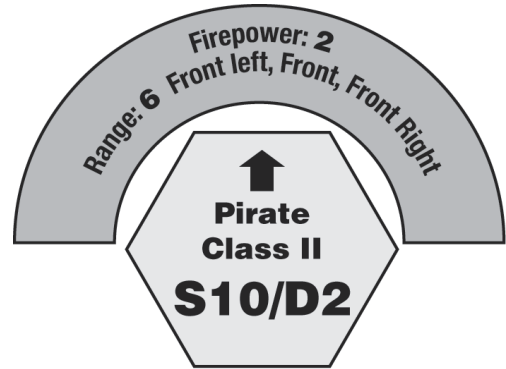
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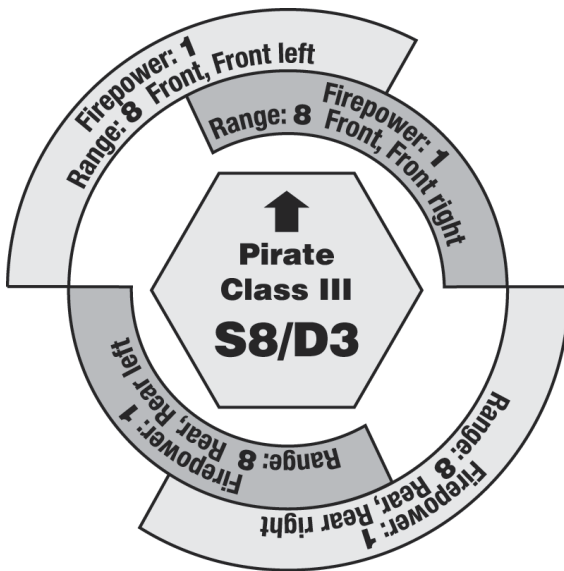
Space Pirate Fleet Reference Sheet



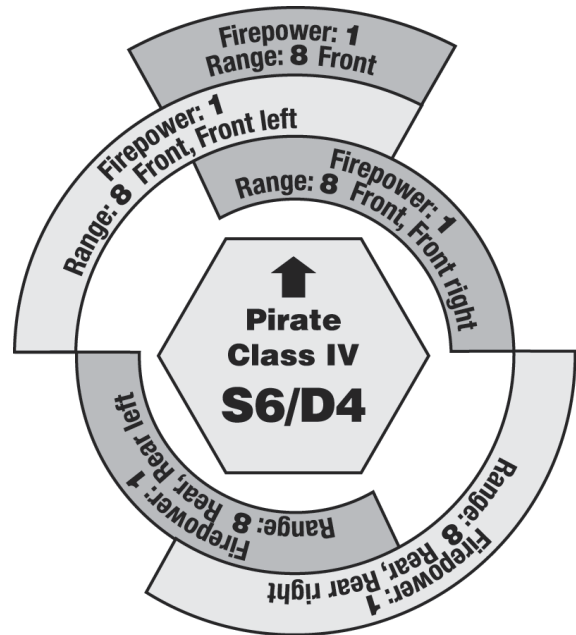
Space Pirate Class I



Space Pirate Class II



Space Pirate Class III



Space Pirate Class IV

Sharkey

A Space Pirate Tale by John Douma

PART 1

As Sharkey slowly opened his eyes, he peered across the lagoon at a gentle sunrise. The morning breeze was just starting to grow warm and the light was composed of streaming orange and yellow. Birds could be heard across the beach squawking over a morsel that was discovered in the brightening sands. Waves lapped upon the shore.

It took Sharkey a few moments before he remembered where he was. The three-dimensional display monitor produced a nearly perfect image of the sunrise and was almost as large as the entire wall of his bedroom. The recently installed temperature system and wind generator created a nearly perfect experience. In the confusion of waking, Sharkey momentarily believed he was on Stanton Beach back home. A smell system would complete the entire illusion, but Sharkey was a little short on the credits needed for this final touch.

Instead of making Sharkey homesick, the illusion comforted him and he woke up rather pleased. After all, the real Stanton Beach was not nearly so serene and would be crowded with people trying to witness the actual sunrise. Sharkey almost never missed home and this fact surprised him. Perhaps he was always a bit of an outsider. All that Sharkey felt was vague anxiety when he pondered the last few years of his life.

Back home he had been training to pilot the famous Comet rocket for the Galacteer "Delta Squadron." All he ever wanted was to fly rockets and his skill had advanced him into the Comet pilot program. Comets are the fastest rockets in the known universe and only the most skilled pilots are able to fly them. One misjudgment and a Comet can go wildly out of control. Sharkey was a good pilot up until the accident. Since he was now fitted with a synthetic leg, he was no longer eligible to fly the swift and deadly rocket. According to Galacteer Command, only "the fittest" can fly the Comet. Even though he was a better pilot than most, the bureaucrats would never let him fly the Comet again. If Sharkey was going to fly for the Galacteers, it would be on a slow-moving escort rocket or a ponderous tanker.

This great disappointment had driven Sharkey to despair. All the grief counseling in the cosmos was not enough to keep him away from the machine that he loved. And somehow, Commander Drayton knew this. Drayton introduced himself to Sharkey in a pub on the Near Shore complex. It is clear now that Drayton was a recruiter for the Evenstar Pirate Conglomerate, but at the time he simply felt like an old friend.

Eventually, Drayton had convinced Sharkey to join the Evenstar Pirate fleet on Grenactula. Sharkey felt nothing but gratitude for the wily Drayton even now, just hours before the raid. Flying the Comet was his destiny, and he would do it for the pirates if he could not do it for the Galacteers. Sharkey had a unique talent, which was a very valuable commodity to the leaders of Evenstar. Most pirate fleets were comprised of the sturdy rockets produced and sold by Core-Complex Industrial. They made fine machines, but nothing was as fast as the Comet. Evenstar commanders knew that adding a few Comets to a battle could make all the difference. It should have been no surprise to Sharkey that the Pirate Conglomerate recruited him.

As he woke he glanced across his private flat. Not all pirates had such a comfortable suite and he enjoyed his space. It was far better than the crowded dormitory complexes that dotted the surface of Grenactula. And then he gazed upon his new guest. At first she startled him even as she simply slept on his couch. But then the memories of the last few days became clear in his sleepy brain. Sharkey had "acquired" Tranya on the last raid of Station 2B34. Of course, "Station 2B34" was not the real name of the station. This was simply the pirate code for the target. Pirates seldom used the real names for their targets. This helped to prevent excessive sentimentality, which would harm the mission. But somehow, Sharkey was still a bit sentimental.

He chuckled softly as he recalled his foolhardy rescue of Tranya. She had hastily donned an emergency space suit and was floating helplessly amongst the wreckage of the damaged station. Sharkey noticed her lifeforce signature on his rocket's instruments. Risking a deadly collision with hurtling wreckage, he piloted his Comet to her location and pulled her aboard. She barely slipped her 7-foot-tall frame into the emergency jump seat. By saving her life, he could claim her as his "property," according to the pirate code, and thus, he had a roommate.

Sharkey was surprised at Tranya's behavior over the past week and she was probably just as surprised. Sharkey was a bit unusual as pirates go. Most pirates had been raised up as children under the pirate code and would never think to save an off-worlder. Perhaps his upbringing under the protection of the Galacteers had made him a different sort of person. He could not suffer to watch a meaningless death and he saved her as a simple reflex.

Tranya had been sleeping on Sharkey's couch for the last few days. The two of them had established a crude way of



communicating and she had started making herself at home. Her initial fear that she would be turned into a work slave must have diminished after the second or third day. Now she was simply confused as to her fate or even the choices she might have.

Usually the off-worlders are not welcome amongst other races. Their unusual appearance and history disturb most humans. Their ancestors were among the first to travel into space. Space travel was different hundreds of years ago and settling on newly discovered planets was very harsh. It was common for early explorers to intentionally modify the genetics of their children. Few children survived the early settling period, so adults did everything possible to ensure children's survival. In the case of Tranya, her ancestors must have lived on a hot, dry and bright world. Her appearance was a striking reminder of this. Perhaps she was one of the desert people from the Rouge-Star colony on the planet Murcuse 7.

As Tranya started to rise, her sleep disturbed by the fighting birds, her pale white skin became visible to Sharkey. The color was not pink and translucent like the fair skin of an unmodified human. It was more reminiscent of a clean white sheet of fine paper. Her skin color provided a very high degree of protection from solar radiation. Off-worlders of this color typically had to survive on planets with multiple stars and close star orbits. But, Tranya's white skin, pale lips, and flaxen hair were not her most striking feature; it was her eyes. While the centers of her eyes were a very familiar shade of blue, the sclera of her eyes was colored black. The familiar white color had been replaced by black to protect them from radiation and to perform better under strong light.

Looking into Tranya's eyes was like looking into a deep black mirror. You could see a full image of your face reflected across their surface. Sharkey found the experience to be rather disturbing. Still, he found her company to be quite welcome. He had plenty of food credits and felt almost proud that he could offer his new guest a place to sleep and a good diet.

However, he couldn't help but feel puzzled when he looked at her sitting on the red couch. What would she do? What should he do? This is not something he learned about back home. He pulled out some breakfast from the pantry and the two of them ate a quiet meal. Sharkey had instructed her that he was going on a mission this morning and that he would be gone several days. She would be safe in his flat and there was plenty to eat and good entertainment on the monitor. He encouraged her to learn to improve her language skills. He hoped she would at least be able to speak one of the more common languages. Sharkey found her typical speech to be entirely foreign, so communication was very difficult.

As Sharkey finished dressing and loading his gear, he waved goodbye to Tranya. She waved back and then quickly

turned up the light output of the flat to a blinding level. Sharkey felt like a cooking turkey when she did this and he was happy to leave her to revel in the bright hot light.

He made his way down to the lift as the first claxon rang. The Galacteers had trained him to be punctual and his pirate superiors found this to be a very admirable trait. He arrived in the hall along with dozens of other pilots and marines. Most of the mission was made up of human men and women. The Evenstar clan had long been led by humans, so they were the most common race found on Granactula. Other races could be found in the clan and many were indeed welcome, just as long as they were sworn to the code.

Once the misfit crowd settled down, Wing Commander Gifford addressed them. "Fellows... today we will embark on an organized raid with a planned duration of three days. Do NOT risk your health and safety by scrimping on your survival gear or rations. Now, I am not going to provide more detail on this mission than I have to by code, but... I am obliged by this same sacred code to properly equip my warriors. We are traveling to a planet with a native sentient life form. This life form is not well-known, but we are certain there are risks. Be VERY cautious and remain as secretive as possible. For my comrades on 'Blue Flight,' I can tell you that you must remain calm and alert. As you have been previously briefed, you will start a fire that must look natural. We believe this fire will draw the natives away from our intended target. This distraction will be much less effective if the fire looks like it is purposely created. As for the 'Red Flight,' you know your orders. You are the senior team on this mission and you must not fail! Now fellows... to your rockets and I will join you for our victory celebration in three days!"

Sharkey dashed to his customized Comet model YS-1 atomic rocket and felt relief that he was part of "Blue Flight." All he had to do was sneak into some kind of swamp and start a fire. He had no idea what "Red Flight" would be up to. It was none of his business. As the ancient pirate code indicated, any warrior could be given a secret mission as long as the loot was shared according to experience and the warriors shared in an equivalent risk. There must be plenty of risk in starting this fire because Starkey was going to easily earn enough credits to buy his smell-generation system after this sortie.

PART 2

Sharkey lived to fly ... the Comet rocket soared quickly through the stratosphere. Sharkey could barely contain his thrill. His machine was in fine order and few pirates flew as well as he did. He was tempted to fly a few hot-dog loops then quickly remembered that this was a real mission and there was no time for fun. Sharkey plunged his Comet into the worm hole



and he strangely couldn't help but think of Tranya. Thoughts raced through his mind as he snapped across the void of space. Why did he save her? Were there other pirates who would have acted the same way? Was there a place for compassion in this strange new society? Perhaps he was as much of a loner on Granactula as he was on Earth.

Soon all of Sharkey's concerns drifted away as he was captivated by the unmatched thrill of piloting his Comet. Stars streaked across the canopy as Sharkey sliced out of the worm hole. The trip of thousands of light years took only a few moments. His "Blue Flight" cautiously dropped to the planet's surface. The flight was quiet as they approached the lush green world. There was chatter on the comm as "Blue Flight" descended into the dark swamp. Quickly, the warriors exited their craft and set the dry tree limbs ablaze with hand torches. The torches gave the appearance of a natural fire, which was common on the planet. They had been told not to use weapons or other devices that would cause energy emissions and detectable noise. The swamp was covered with a dense collection of trees and the warriors trampled through thick dark mud. An amazing variety of insects buzzed by as the fires started to crackle. Some of the flying creatures appeared to be very large, but they could only be seen at a distance. Sharkey remained very cautious while some of the pirates enjoyed the destruction they were creating.

"Burn a swamp and get paid. This is the job for me!" shouted one of the big armored men. Compared to most of their missions, this seemed like an easy task. Sharkey was just too new to this business to enjoy anything. He was content to let the marines have their fun. He found it curious that this was what marines did when they were told to be cautious. The job appeared to be going quite well and the dry trees lit on fire quickly; soon the fire was being spread by the wind. A vast forest of leafless trees stretched off as far as the eye could see. Giant pods that hung from the trees launched clouds of spores into the air as the fires scorched their trunks. The trees made a howling sound, like the scream of a great animal, as the flames crawled up the trunks. The skies grew dark from smoke and spores; the flying creatures were agitated. Some of those creatures appeared to be moving closer and Starkey kept a close eye on them.

A boisterous marine stomped through the muck and lit more trees on fire, one after the next. Sharkey noticed something strange. The marine suddenly stood erect and still. The soldier gripped his hands to his helmet, and collapsed on the ground with an agonizing scream! Another marine yelled, "He's been hit!" The rest of the marines quickly dashed for cover and searched for the enemy. They were confused and shocked. The squad leader shouted, "It's the bird things! Open fire!" Raygun beams streaked through the blackening sky and the giant birds were struck one after the next. Marines rushed to their downed comrade and started to drag him out of the

mud. Panic ensued as the marine squad leader tried to rally his troopers and secure the area.

A lone marine corporal was the only one who knew what was going on. "Mothmen!" he shouted. "The flying creatures are Mothmen! Keep covered and withdraw to the rockets!"

Sharkey dashed back to the Comet. He leaped into the cockpit and fired up the power. He had heard stories of the Mothmen. He recalled them from a lesson about alien beings back in the Academy. Little was known about these mysterious creatures, but they were somehow able to command the forces of nature itself. The weapons being used against the marines must have been some kind of high-frequency mind disruptor.

His orders were to escort the "Blue Flight" marines to the landing zone and provide fire support. Getting the fire started was the main objective and his duty had been fulfilled. If any trouble broke out on the planet's surface, he was to return to the rendezvous point. Since the secret fire has been detected by the Mothmen, it was every-man-for-himself. This order was clear and Sharkey knew the attack certainly qualified as trouble. A Comet pilot was not a marine, and his duty was to pilot his rocket ... and not be killed by Mothmen.

Hurling through space, Sharkey's mind drifted as he programmed the worm-hole generator. Why were they so easily detected on the planet's surface? Did the commanders of this mission know they would be spotted by the Mothmen? Sharkey realized he was wise to be cautious while on the planet's surface. Pirates follow a code, but this code allowed for a great many secrets. As his Comet slid into the glowing worm-hole opening, his thoughts drifted back to an image of a tall off-worlder sunning herself in his apartment ... It was time to go home.

