



Pirates

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I suppose you've already heard all the rumors. Heck, by now I guess you're learning this stuff in school. Don't believe a word of it; I was there, I know the truth. My name is Peter Kreigan, and it's time you learned the *real* story behind the Omega Conflict. Picture this, kiddos. We've only folded our way a few systems from Sol, and already we've got troubles. Not me; me and the gang have been cleaning up since... gee, I guess it was almost 20 years before the war when we were founded. But anyways, the suits back on Earth are in big trouble. They've been having a time controlling their colonies, trying to keep everything under the control of old Terra Firma. Problem is, you can't, at least not back then. Space is big, mate, bigger than any amount of ships can possibly patrol. They'll be pirates forever, but back then things were especially bad. Only a few real capital ships back then, the old Redeemers and a few of the older refitted colony ships. Most of the patrols around planets were done in fighters, little suckers no bigger than a mass transit car. To make matters worse, the big brass on Earth had to dismantle all the AIs running the colonization program. This was after Geneva, you understand, so I guess they were spooked by the things. Doesn't matter, me and boys were cleaning up. The sensors on the tugs back then were just dreadful, so sometimes we'd get in visual range before they'd see us. If the cops or the Navy tried to bring us in, we'd blow their fighters and be out of there before the bigger ships could get close.

There was honor back then, not like now. We'd give the ships time to get to the escape pods, donate some of our goods to the families of any spacers we had to waste. We were like a big family back then, us spacers. Only a few of us around, not like you guys today. How many freighter captains do you know by name? Can you even remember the names of any of the ships you've knocked over? 'Course not. Damn punks. But anyways, this honor was the start of the troubles. For all your faults, you pirates today know the tricks. Don't organize, don't centralize; keep 'em guessing, but still have a structure you can call on. Us, we thought that the Navy couldn't touch us, so we organized more than we should. Got our claws in some of the fringe colonies, funneled money into the bureaucrats back home.

Stupid, really. For all our bluster we didn't have a tenth of the ships of the Navy proper, we just wanted to feel big, I guess. Now the law doesn't take too kindly to our kind of thing, so they start busting us. Send out moles into our ranks, start moving the big goods in convoys. All that does is piss us off. We start getting meaner, go after the convoys with packs of our own. Now, my wife Barbara, Barbara Dascher back then, hits on an idea. The colonies aren't too pleased with Earth, so we just push 'em a little. None of this revolution bull that the government is pushing into the history lessons; we just made them stop accepting anything from mother Earth, blow up a few military targets, and funnel us some of the profits from the confiscated goods.

First thing we hit was the Terran Alliance Senate. We arranged it so they just happened to be taking a tour of the outer colonies, and later so their ship just happened to be filled to the gills with

Detonex. Sent every last one of 'em to an early grave, that's for sure. Military is in complete disarray, most of the top dogs holding positions in the senate, so a bunch of kids get tossed the keys to shiny new ships, without a clue as to how to use 'em. Heck, we'd planned our little political move so that the folks on Earth didn't even know their leaders were gone until nearly a week after we blew the Senate to kingdom come. Mad as hell, once they got around our electronics blackout of the inner systems.

As you can imagine, Earth jumps like a nervous freighter captain with a Mastiff on his tail. Sends out its big fleets, the ones they had patrolling the belt after the miners' strike ('68? '69? One of those years), but they aren't used to interplanetary stuff, the big guns. We just knew how to organize is all. Most of us didn't really want a full war with Earth; we couldn't handle all of Earth's billions with a few colonies and a lot of nerve. But we could handle the fleets. To secure a planet you have to spread out, send ships to the far corners. And with the sensors and lack of real space weapons back then, we could just pick 'em off, one or two at a time, while they went to take over some of the far flung colonies. What got us in the end were the full engagements. Never mind what they say about me and that fleet on Io, when we went up against concentrated force, we either ran or got blasted to the four winds. Money was a problem too; you see, we were the colonies' protectors, and if we went around busting their shipping like back in the old days, we would've lost all our support. So really, all Earth had to do was wait, and keep their fleets together.

But they didn't wait. They went after the colonies, hard. Not really their fault, the little colonies, but they went after 'em anyway. Not atomics, they weren't that stupid, but they don't call it "Omega" for nothing. Pissed off a lot of people, you understand. Now the folks in the Navy weren't sitting on their duffs, these kids who got promotions years earlier than they expected. Most of the new captains weren't worth the cargo space it took to send them back to their families in boxes, but one of these new kids, a Colonel who got his stars during this whole affair, jumps the gun on us pretty good. I'll give it to ya, the man was smart. General O'Flaherty, that was the man's name. We had assembled a fleet around Chisholm, holding off the Navy buggers with our own capital ships, taking it slow, when O'Flaherty sneaks his way onto one of our motherships with a shuttle pod full of marines, and takes out our entire fleet from the inside, using small taskforces to undermine our security, opens the way for the Navy to drop some ground-pounders, takes Chisholm while the rest of us stare, mouths hangin' down to our knees.

After that, we were desperate for funds, guns, ships, anything to keep us in space. The colonies realized they were licked, traded their supplies for peace. Then, most of the real guys we needed, the scientists and the old money, were just disgusted with the whole affair. Some of 'em just packed up and left. Took most of the colony ships still not converted for war, a good million souls, and left for the fold routes that the Navy had discovered while mucking about up around the galactic northern border, testing something. Shady guys, wouldn't give you the time of day without the right security clearance. So these disgusted brains take off, leave the rest of us in a lurch, that's for sure. 'Course, some of them were Earthers including that rat bastard O'Flaherty, so it wasn't all bad. But life's ironic, isn't it. They take off for parts unknown, and then the star they're orbiting novas. Never heard from them again.

Earth, of course, is still going after us, but by this point we'd already lost. No industrial base to speak of without the resources planetside and we just didn't have the money or the guns to hold them back. Most of the "conflict" you keep hearing about was just us running our tails off, while the big military guys from Earth spaced a few of the louder (stupider, really) voices in the "rebellion". Boy, would their faces be red if they knew that my old lady (God rest her soul) thought of the idea just so we could pick off the smaller colonies without resistance. The sum and total of this entire crazy venture is a good many souls meeting the Old Man, Barbara and me getting' hitched on the spur of the moment (We had just won that big battle on Io, after catching General Hobbs with his pants down. Good story, I'll tell you later.), and us... err... business men, getting pushed back further into the frontier. Most of the rough and tumble people had snuck aboard that expedition to the north... Procyon Expedition I think, and of course we haven't seen hide nor hair of any of them. Some good folks, too, like my brother-in-law, Benny Dascher, captain of the old "Ace of Diamonds". Good ship, good man. Does that answer your questions? Yes, yes, I know. I'm just a crazy old man; don't know anything about real piracy. Punks. You'll get your comeuppance too, one day. Sensors are top notch these days; weapons we would've killed for in the old days are sold on the street. Don't think you're invincible; you'll just open the door for old Mr. Universe to pull some crazy stunt. Take Earth. They put us down like rabid dogs, but lot of good it did them. Hell, you might say us pirates, weakening the Navy as we did, are the reason the old place went down so fast. Not that I'm complaining, but the targets were sure a lot softer in the old days, without all these new faces.