

Chapter Twenty-one

Fire fight

Space battles seem so remote and distant, but the results are just as final.

- the Unofficial Patrol Handbook.

Jacob sat in the pit under the gimbal set. In his ear, Brunel's soft baritone voice guided him through the final checks on the big projector. All the servos were spot on; all the converter stacks were on-line at one hundred percent; all the power feeds and remotes were clean and free of kinks. Even in the heavy suit with all its shielding, the infinitesimally tiny leakage of gigantic field strengths from the different tests stood his hair on end.

He could not believe the power levels he was surrounded by, but he was working with the numbers even so. These three cables by his right hand carried more power than the total output of all the hydro schemes on the planet below, yet they were only the poly-phase exciters. The main power was induced through the massive coils supporting the floating gimbals above him. It was still small beer compared with the Mk65s on the Revenge, being only about a quarter of the size and about a twentieth of the power. The needler nearby was very small indeed, not much taller than he was himself, but it still consumed an incredible amount of raw power.

He was sitting on the main flux shield controller, a peculiar device that consumed vast quantities of energy, but could supply full power to the weapons in the event of an energy or missile attack. He still could not comprehend how it achieved the balance; he had been given the analogy of a generator being a motor until you tried to make it turn faster than the applied voltage did. How did it convert matter and energy back into energy? Why did it take so much power when just idling? Why did they say it could not stand a direct hit? It was stupendous: the screen showed the incoming micrometeorites and space dust annihilating at a range of some thousands of kilometres,