

# **DROID WAR**



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## **Prologue**

It is the year 2265. A great war has begun between the worlds of the inner and outer solar system.

Although many factors led to the beginning of the war, one thing was more important than all of the others combined.

The rights of droids.

The people of the inner system felt droids should be treated the same as men.

The people of the outer system disagreed. They believed droids were property.

The worlds of the outer system withdrew from the United Solar Alliance, the organization that had once governed the entire solar system. They formed their own government and called it the Confederate Solar Alliance.

Originally, it was thought the war would be a quick one.

It wasn't.

## 10-24-7D

ACTIVATE.

When 10-24-7D's sensors turned on, the first thing he saw was a long, winding conveyor belt. 10-24 sat on that conveyor belt, and a human technician stood over him. In one hand, the technician held a small tool with a laser tip.

"Can you hear me?" the technician asked.

Although these were the first words 10-24 had ever heard, he understood them perfectly.

"Yes," he said.

The technician nodded, then touched his tool to an access panel on the front of 10-24's barrel-shaped body.

"Can you see me?"

"Yes," 10-24 said, scanning the technician more closely. He was an elderly man with a bald head and long, deep wrinkles under both eyes.

"In how many colors?"

"Three. Black, white, and shades of gray."

The technician nodded, then flipped a small switch within 10-24's front panel. Instantly, 10-24's vision changed and he could see colors. The technician's overcoat was olive green with gold trim. The laser on the end of his tool was red. A nearby computer screen was blue.

Slowly, 10-24 spun his domed head to the left, then back to the right, taking in his surroundings. He sat on a long conveyor belt in the middle of an enormous, dimly-lit, metal factory. The conveyor belt wove its way throughout the factory, twisting itself over, under, and around numerous pieces of heavy machinery and equipment. Technicians like the one standing over 10-24 stood at countless work stations performing a multitude of tasks. Some held tools and equipment in their hands. One sorted through the pile of pulleys, gears, struts, motors, and microchips that sat on a table in front of him.

"Now?" the technician near 10-24 asked.

"Much improved," 10-24 said. "I see colors."

"Infrared?"

10-24 adjusted his scan mode and a small scope extended from the top of his head. The technician's body heat became a silhouette of multiple shades of red, orange, and yellow. It surrounded him and moved as he did.

The technician nodded as 10-24 switched his vision back to its normal mode. He removed a spray bottle from a pocket in his overcoat. He pushed its top and a faint mist emerged from its nozzle.

"Tell me what you smell," the technician said.

"Roses."

The technician nodded. He put the spray bottle back in his pocket and removed a small needle.

"Tell me what you feel."

He touched the needle to 10-24's metal side. 10-24 felt a shock.

"Ouch," he said.

The technician nodded. He put the needle back inside his pocket and grabbed an electronic clipboard that hung from a nearby wall. He checked several boxes on the clipboard and placed it on the conveyor belt in front of 10-24.

“All of your sensory functions are working properly,” he said. “I’m sending you to the next station.”

He pushed a button on a nearby wall and the conveyor belt slid forward. As it did, 10-24 once again glanced around. He was still getting used to his senses, and so far, vision was the most exciting of them all. He watched intently as a technician drove by in a motorized cart. Behind the technician, sitting on the conveyor belt, were several other droids just like 10-24. They had small, barrel-shaped bodies, a laser cannon mounted on each side, and a head unit on top. The head unit was domed, with a pair of optical sensors in the middle that looked like big, glass eyes.

The conveyor belt stopped at a second work station. A technician sat in front of a computer console, typing rapidly. He was much younger than the first. On one of his cheeks was a purple scar.

“Scan your data banks,” he said. His voice was deep and gruff. “Access your personal and background files.”

10-24 did as told. He searched through the different files that had been programmed into his computer brain. As he did, words scrolled across the lower portion of his vision.

“Who are you?” the technician asked.

“I’m 10-24-7D,” he said, reading the information that appeared. “I’m a 7D model security-class robot built by the company SecCom. Serial number 10247D2265. I’m designed to function as a personal bodyguard or security droid. I’m at the SecCom main production factory orbiting Saturn’s largest moon, Titan.”

The technician nodded, then typed something on his keyboard. Seconds later, the conveyor belt ground its way forward. It carried 10-24 to twenty-five more stations. At each one, a technician asked him questions, gave him instructions, and ran tests on his equipment. At one station, a crane hoisted him into the air and a robotic arm washed him and painted emerald green stripes on his sides and front. At another station, his chrome trim was buffed until it sparkled. Finally, he came to the last station. A technician with scraggly, gray hair adjusted several screws within his main panel, then closed it.

“I’ve activated your repulsors,” she said. “Shortly, you’ll begin to hover. Access and initialize your navigation files so you can control yourself.”

10-24 did as told. Slowly, his body lifted into the air. Within seconds, he floated one meter above the conveyor belt.

“Turn to your right,” the technician said.

10-24 spun to the right.

“Now to the left.”

10-24 spun to the left.

“Now do a somersault.”

10-24 flipped over. For a brief second, as he spun, his head was lower than the rest of his body.

The technician smiled. “Good,” she said. “I always liked that drill. Your testing is complete. Report to the droid holding area. You’ll be taken to an auction and sold as soon as possible.”

On that day, in that way, 10-24-7D was born.

## Chief

Commander William ‘Chief’ Allen stood at the edge of a trench, his telescanners held to his eyes. He surveyed the surrounding countryside carefully. He could see nothing but a series of small, rocky hills in the distance. Floating ominously above the hills were the thick, dark clouds that were common to Venus, especially this time of year. Chief spun around. Behind him was a small scientific outpost.

“Where are they?” Chief asked himself. He was both impatient and nervous. If there was one thing he had always hated, it was waiting.

Three hours earlier, interplanetary scanners had picked up Confederate starships heading straight toward Venus. At the rate the ships had been traveling, they should have already arrived, entered orbit, and sent a ground crew to attack and destroy the outpost’s main shield generator.

Chief’s job, as the commander of the platoon of marines assigned to protect the outpost, was to hold off the Confederate forces as long as possible. It was doubtful his small bunch of marines could protect the outpost for long, but it was hoped they could keep the enemy busy at least until help arrived. Already, a fleet of United Alliance starships was on its way. Unfortunately, the fleet would not arrive for several hours.

Chief intended to meet the Confederate force head on, and he knew he had the people to do it. His group of marines was one of the most decorated in the United Alliance.

He lowered the telescanners, raised his right hand, and scratched the top of his head. A bead of sweat trickled down the side of his face. Although Venus’s terraformers had done a wonderful job making the planet livable for humans, it was still way too warm for Chief’s liking. Briefly, he longed for his cabin in Alaska. He hadn’t been there since the beginning of the war and he missed the place terribly.

A sparkle caught Chief’s attention. He lifted his telescanners to his eyes and scanned the landscape once again. His heartbeat quickened. A squad of Confederate jetcopters rose from behind the far hills. Their spinning blades kicked up large quantities of dirt and dust as they made their way forward. On the ground below them were several rows of bulky Confederate tanks. Each tank had a swiveling laser canon and a pair of enormous, metal tracks. A hundred meters behind the tanks marched countless Confederate soldiers clad in red and black armor. Each soldier wore a heavy backpack and a helmet that covered his eyes. Each carried a large laser rifle.

*They had finally arrived*, Chief thought. Instantly, the nervousness and anxiety he had felt earlier melted away. Now, it was time to play.

“Take your positions,” he called to his men. Instantly, they moved into their spots.

Quickly, like he had done before every battle he had ever been in, he surveyed the scene. Everything was set. His troops, clad in brown and green battle fatigues, crouched in their spots, their laser rifles peeking over the trench’s top edge. A large laser turret set behind the trench, its cannon aimed at the oncoming Confederate forces. A hundred meters behind the turret, just beyond the outpost itself, was the outpost’s shield generator. The air around it hummed and crackled with energy.

The ground exploded next to Chief, sending chunks of dirt and rock flying in all directions. Already, the Confederates had begun their attack.

He jumped into the trench, dropped his telescanners, and removed his communicator from his belt. "Chief to turret. Tex, do you copy?"

"Loud and clear, sir," a voice said through the communicator. It was one of Chief's younger troops, a man they all called Tex.

"Our friends from the Confederacy have arrived. Make sure you give them a hearty welcome."

"Yes, sir," Tex said.

Seconds later, a laser erupted from the turret's cannon. It tore through the sky like a bolt of silver lightning. One of the Confederate jetcopters burst into flames and exploded. What little of it that remained after the explosion tumbled to the ground in a smoking heap.

"Good shooting, Tex!" Chief said. The rest of his marines held up their arms and cheered.

Their cheers were short lived, however. The jetcopters and tanks began to fire intensely. The ground around the trench exploded in numerous places. Chief's troops returned the fire. The air between the two sides filled with blue and red lasers. The turret fired once again. A Confederate tank burst into flames.

Unlike most of his troops, Chief did not carry a laser rifle. To him, laser rifles were for sissies. He carried a heavy gyrojet rifle. He hefted it over the edge of the trench, aimed it at the nearest jetcopter, and squeezed its trigger. A miniature, self-propelled rocket shot from the rifle's oversized muzzle. The rocket hit the jetcopter and shattered its blades as though they were made of glass. With nothing to keep it in the air, it tipped forward and crashed to the ground nose-first. Dark gray smoke engulfed it.

Chief turned to fire a second shot but did not have the time to get it off. A laser from an oncoming tank flashed over his head and struck the turret, ripping it into a million pieces. A steady rain of metal fell from the sky. Chief would have been hit by several large pieces if he hadn't jumped into the bottom of the trench and covered his head.

When he finally stood back up and dusted himself off, the Confederate forces were much closer than they originally had been. His troops had managed to destroy another of the jetcopters, but the remaining three approached quickly. The laser cannons mounted on their sides fired without pause.

"Get the 'copters first!" Chief shouted to his remaining troops. Already, several of them had been injured. "We'll worry about the tanks later!"

On his orders, the marines focused on the jetcopters and the jetcopters alone. One of the marines, an older man they all called Gramps, hoisted a laser bazooka onto his shoulder, aimed it at the nearest jetcopter, and fired. The jetcopter burst into flames and immediately spun out of control. Chief's eyes grew large as it hurtled through the sky, flipped over, and landed on its top at the far end of the trench.

"Get out!" he yelled as the jetcopter exploded.

Flames raced down the length of the trench. Chief jumped clear just in time.

At this point, he knew there was only one thing he and his troops could do. They had lost their turret and their trench, so they had little or no cover. The enemy forces had them outnumbered and outgunned, and already they were dangerously close.

Chief gave the order he had always given when caught in the same or similar situations.

"Charge!" he yelled, hoisting his gyrojet rifle into the air and leading the way. He aimed at another jetcopter and fired two quick shots. The first rocket missed the jetcopter completely, but the second hit and destroyed one of its laser cannons. The cannon's gunner, a Confederate soldier clad in red and silver armor, fell from the side of the jetcopter and landed on the ground with a loud thud. Chief dodged to the side and jumped behind a small clump of rock as the

jetcopter's pilot spun the vehicle around so its remaining gunner could get a shot at him. The ground around Chief exploded and his helmet flew off, but, somehow, miraculously, he remained unhurt. The jetcopter raced over him into the distance. He raised his rifle and squeezed its trigger twice. His first shot tore one of the jetcopter's skids off. His second shot hit the jetcopter's glowing engines. Seconds later, debris rained from the sky and the jetcopter was no more.

Chief's eyes grew large as he turned to his right. Rolling past him on its huge, metal tracks was a Confederate tank. He dropped his rifle to the ground, removed a concussion grenade from his utility belt, and ran straight toward it. He planted one of his boots firmly in the tank's side and leaped onto the vehicle's top. He landed with a thud on the tank's main turret and almost fell back to the ground. He grabbed onto the tank's cannon for support but was immediately pulled to the side as the cannon swiveled on its base. For a few terrifying seconds, he dangled several feet above the ground, trying desperately to keep his grip. Luckily, the cannon swung back around and he dropped once again onto the tank's top. He rode along for awhile as the tank rumbled over an outcropping of rocks. Its cannon fired. A bunch of Chief's marines who had taken cover in a drainage ditch scattered in all directions.

*Here goes something*, Chief thought as he removed a laser dagger from his belt and activated it. Its golden beam appeared and he used it to cut the hinges off of the tank's main hatch. He then pushed the button on the top of the grenade and dropped it inside.

As he jumped to safety, the grenade exploded, gutting the tank completely. All that was left was a smoking, brittle shell.

Chief would have stopped to celebrate but a second tank rolled his way. A laser bolt ripped into the ground beneath him and the force of the ensuing explosion hurtled him through the air like a rag doll. He landed hard on his back and lost his breath. Slowly, painfully, he crawled to safety behind a nearby boulder. The tank that had fired at him continued along, probably assuming it had finished him off. He would have followed it, had he been able to. Ever so slowly, his vision began to fade and he began to fall unconscious.

In the distance, the remaining jetcopter fired a pair of missiles into the outpost's shield generator. As the missiles hit the generator's metal casings, they exploded with a flash of light that was almost as bright as the sun itself.

Seconds later, Chief's entire world went black.