

# *Ambush*

by *ROGER TSAI*

**W**ake up! Wake up! Come on—move it! Control just called. They're moving right into us. Get into positions!"

My eyes popped open. I grabbed my automatic plasma rifle and quickly crawled into position. It was still pitch dark, save the pale moonlight reflecting off the thick vegetation. We couldn't see them if they were ten feet in front of us, so we had to listen, and be very silent.

This was Ambush Duty, the idea being to try to catch the enemy off guard and blow them away. It always involved hours of sitting in the middle of nowhere in the dead of night, because the enemy didn't stick to the roads and moved at night when our aeroscouts couldn't spot them.

I listened hard. At first there was a lot of clicking and humming, sounds that occur when you pull back the inhibitor switch on a K-12 plasma rifle and let the

electromagnets in its barrel charge up. Then I heard our group leader talking with Control.

“Satellite shows fifteen moving straight into your position, Commander, about thirty feet away,” said the calm voice of a controller.

“Copy,” replied Group Leader. “Listen up,” he whispered. “They should be in our faces in a few seconds. Set K-12s to massacre mode, and—good hunting.”

I set my K-12 to massacre mode. If the trigger were to be pulled, the K-12 would unleash thousands of rounds of high-energy hydrogen plasma into the night. We all lay there, ready to pull that trigger.

Salty beads of sweat rolled down from my eyebrows and into my wide-open eyes. Every once in a while I moved my hand reluctantly from the trigger to wipe away the sweat. We had heard many tales in which the enemy had turned ambushes into massacres. I had seen troopers die in firefights before, and it wasn't very pretty. When a plasma bolt impacts on a human body, the result is horrifying. The heat and kinetic energy packed into one bolt can punch a hole in a chest, blow off a limb, or sear flesh. Most troopers who took a bolt died immediately, but some died horribly, taking a bolt in the stomach and screaming for hours until they died. It was scary to think of dying that way.

But this was also a time for heroes, a time when boys became men. I was eager to add to the twelve notches on the barrel of my gun, each one representing a confirmed kill. We never found enemy bodies—somehow they always managed to carry off their dead—but every now and then we would find bits and pieces here and there, signifying a confirmed kill.

The enemy was sneaky. Very sneaky.

Suddenly a plasma rifle opened up. Bright flashes of plasma streaked through the night, shedding eerie flickers of light. Then the sounds of more firing rifles, and all hell broke loose, for the enemy had sprung a trap.

Jackhammer-like sounds of discharging plasma rifles filled the air, the sky ablaze with flashes. Plasma bolts hit the ground and trees, pelting me with smoldering bits of dirt and vegetation.

Fear and confusion dominated my mind. I had no idea what to do. It seemed like the enemy was everywhere and I was pinned down, cut off from the rest of my group. The situation seemed entirely insane. I couldn't recognize anything through the haze of smoke and flying debris, and my ability to think was destroyed by the deafening roar of plasma rifles. All I could do was shut my eyes and lie still.

It was very likely that my entire group had already been killed, and I could do nothing. I felt so helpless; I felt like a boy.

*I should have gone to college,* I thought to myself.

Suddenly, the firing stopped. They probably thought we were all dead. It was pitch dark again, and eerily silent. I decided to try to link up with any survivors, so I crawled as quietly as possible to Benson's position.

Along the way, I called out to Benson in hushed tones, but there was no reply. When I finally reached his position, I saw what had become of him. Benson's dead body lay on its back behind a tree. At first I wasn't really sure it was Benson because part of his face had been singed, but it was. His left shoulder had been completely shot off, and his mouth was wide open in the shape of a scream. He had died most horribly.

I stared long and hard at Benson's mutilated corpse and began to shake with fury. My fear had turned to pure hatred. I would avenge the death of Benson, no matter what the cost.

The enemy would be coming at any time to kill off any survivors of their deadly trap. But this would be the time when I would spring a trap of my own! So I waited.

In a short time, I started to hear slow footsteps. They were very quiet footsteps, probably those of an enemy trying to conceal himself. I looked around and spotted him. He was crouched over, keeping a low profile, and he held a weapon forward, ready to fire on anything that moved. His silhouette slid slowly through the dark.

I raised my K-12 and aimed at him. It was still set on massacre mode, which was more than enough to kill one person. I looked at Benson's eternally frozen face and whispered, "This one's for Benson." Then I pulled hard on the trigger.

I shook violently along with the K-12 as it discharged burst after burst of its deadly plasma into the general vicinity of the enemy soldier. As I let out one long barbaric cry, the shaking stopped and the ammo counter read zero.

The area into which I had fired was leveled of all vegetation, dimly lit by burning trees and shrubs. The body of the enemy lay facedown in the dirt. It was true—vengeance was sweet. I chuckled as I strolled over to the body. I could see that I had done a very thorough job. Several gaping holes riddled the enemy's chest and both of its legs were gone. I bent down and flipped the body over to see its face. I backed off slowly,

tripping over my own feet. Then I just sat there in wide-eyed disbelief. This was the enemy?

Two figures ran through the brush and into the clearing. I couldn't have killed them even if I had the ammo. As they approached, I recognized them as the Commander and Sanchez.

"Johnson, you're alive!" the Commander said in surprise. "The enemy has retreated for some reason, I don't know why. They shot us up pretty good."

Sanchez followed with, "Hey look, Commander, Johnson got a kill, body and all. How old do you think he was? Twelve or thirteen? It's hard to tell."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Roger Tsai lives in Alexandria, Virginia, where he attends the ninth grade at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. Role-playing games, physics, and making artistic paper airplanes are his interests. A "Trekkie," he also enjoys football and wrestling.*

