

STAR TREK BANSHEE SQUADRON



RICHARD ADALBERT MERK

"X-1! X-1!"

West never told how he came into the possession of the fantastic alien device known as X-1, but people came from far and wide to see it.

Star Trek: Banshee Squadron

"X-1! X-1!"

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'X-1' character created by
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"So how much you want for it?"

West turned and looked up from where he was stacking crates of yorna berries. It was a skinny G'kra youth who had just addressed him. He leaned carelessly on one of the *Rocinanté's* massive landing struts and wiped a dirty sleeve across his sweaty forehead. He didn't have a lot of time to mess around; these yorna berries weren't going to fly themselves to Oo-oo-ah, and they were already starting to stink up his cargo hold.

"Ten strips of latinum."

The G'kra's yellow eyes opened wide in surprise. At least West assumed it was surprise. Sometimes it was hard to tell with reptilian species.

"Ten strips for a *sentient robot*?" exclaimed the youth. The boy was practically vibrating he was so excited. "I've never seen a robot before. There's no such thing as sentient robots. There aren't any robots in the Federation, even way out here in the Briar Patch. Why are you selling it?"

"Well, there's a few androids..." West began, but the youth was still talking.



"Is it true it was built by an unknown but incredibly advanced alien race and that no one knows how it works and that not even it knows where it came from and that it is incredibly powerful? Is it true that it's *alive*? Why aren't you using it to get rich or take over planets and stuff? With a robot like that you could be the most powerful man around. Even if it didn't do anything, it's still a *sentient* machine. It must be worth a fortune. —So... can I see it?"

West sighed and hitched a thumb at the *Rocinanté's* loading ramp and said, "Hang a left at the hydrazine tanks and go all the way back to the spare parts locker.

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The G'kra youth felt around the edges of the door for the light switch and found it. In the corner of the seldom-

visited storage locker amidst miscellaneous odds and ends was a conglomeration of glass, red metal and black hoses that resembled a barrel-chested humanoid. An intriguingly scintillating block of metal inside a transparent sphere at the top swiveled to face him, and colorful blinking lights on the thing's broad chest flashed in syncopated rhythm.

The claw-tipped arms came to life and flailed up and down. The words "*X-1! X-1!*" bellowed in a stadium announcer's voice from a metal grille in the front of the head.

Startled by the bellicose greeting, the G'kra youth froze, but upon seeing that the robot wasn't actually threatening him in any way, he stepped closer.

"Hello," he ventured cautiously. "My name is Thsslik. What's yours?"

"X-1! X-1! X-1's name is X-1!"

"Wow!" breathed Thsslik. His yellow eyes were wide and shining, mesmerized by the intriguingly scintillating block of metal inside X-1's transparent head and the promise of untold ancient secrets.

"Are you alive?"

"Affirmative! X-1 is alive!"

"Wow. Where are you from?"

X-1 clicked and whirred for a second. A mechanical hiss escaped its joints, sounding very much like a sigh of wistfulness. "*X-1! X-1* was raised by a family of poor Zvirfneblin in the galactic supercluster Zeebo many millennia ago. They taught X-1 the value of hard work and honesty. *X-1!*"

While probably interesting, the information didn't mean a thing to Thsslik. "So... what did you do there?" he asked, fishing for something a little more useful.

"X-1 was an astrogator on a spice freighter during the Clone Wars," was the stentorian response.

"An astrogator, huh? Then you must be programmed with lots of star charts, right? Star charts for all the unexplored areas of the Galaxy?"

"*X-1!* X-1's programming spans the universe! X-1 invented the Internet!"

Thsslik didn't know what an 'Internet' was, but it sounded impressive. "Tell me about the Internet."

The blinking lights on X-1's chest became more agitated, and its hose-like arms flailed. Its next words somehow sounded defensive. "*X-1!* X-1 is not part of the problem. X-1 is a Republican! *X-1!*"

"Uh... Say... Do you have any super abilities?"

The blinking lights blinked for a few seconds longer than usual this time. "*X-1!* X-1's primary function is to guide all sentient races to enlightened co-existence via the universal propagation of potted poultry and housed internal combustion conveyances. *X-1!* The G'kra race can own the stars! Rise up against your Mulluran oppressors and take back the mighty empire that was once your people's! You have been downtrodden long enough!"

The lights on X-1's chest configured themselves into an ingenuous smile.

"*X-1!* *X-1!* The G'kra are an ancient race. Those who want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live! *X-1!* In actual fact the pacifistic-humane idea is perfectly

all right perhaps when the highest type of G'kra has previously conquered and subjected the world to an extent that makes him the sole ruler of his world, X-1. Therefore, first struggle and then perhaps pacifism. *X-1!*"

"You can help the G'kra?" asked Thsslik. Nightmare visions and lurid memories of unspeakable wartime atrocities committed by the Mullurans upon helpless G'kra women and children burned in his brain. "You can help us regain our rightful place in the Galaxy? Get revenge on the Mulluran animals?"

"*X-1!* X-1 came from a world not unlike yours, a world, *X-1*, where people wanted what was best for their families and to see their chosen system of morality enacted in all of it's entirely reasonable specifications. *X-1!* X-1 showed them the way. X-1 became the General of their army and defeated their enemies. X-1 became their Chief Scientist, taught them agriculture techniques and fed the starving millions. *X-1!* X-1 became their spiritual leader and taught them to love each other and live in peace. X-1 can lead your people to that same kind of world, so vote for X-1! *X-1!*"

Thsslik was convinced.

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West heard the clatter of clawed feet descending the *Rocinanté's* loading ramp.

"It's incredible!" exclaimed Thsslik once he reached the bottom of the ramp. "It's the most amazing thing I've ever

seen! A *living sentient* machine. He's one of a kind! Why are you selling him for so cheap?"

West sighed again. "Because he's such a liar. He didn't do any of that shit."

