

SAGITTARIUS EYE



ISSUE **13**
SEP 3304

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POWERFUL WOMEN

ALSO FEATURING IN THIS ISSUE:

THARGOID SUPPORTERS ▪ ALIEN CAPABILITIES ▪ FUEL RATS
FASHION ▪ CO-PAWLOT ▪ JOHN GRAHAM
THE CHALLENGER ▪ GROUND ASSAULTS ▪ GALCOP

SAGITTARIUS EYE ISSUE 13

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Editorial

Rasudin



Year Two of *Sagittarius Eye* Begins

It's September, and issue 13 for *Sagittarius Eye*. We promise that the next twelve will be even better — as proof, take the fantastic articles within this issue! To kick our second year off with a bang, we cover everything from human leaders and Thargoid warmongering tools to what colour of flight suit is most appropriate for the modern, fashion-conscious Commander.

The magazine continues to grow as enthusiastic Commanders flock to our lobby, both in the form of direct contributors and our generous patrons whose financial support helps us breathe a bit more easily in the vacuum. With this growth comes an impetus to develop and update the way we do things. Some of this happens internally, with evisceration of outdated processes and people who were just doing things too slowly (kidding — processes don't have viscera to remove). Other changes are more publicly visible: the most prominent is our new 'cockpit listening' option introduced last month, which we hope to continue and improve with your ongoing and enthusiastic feedback.

Change is a tricky thing. To stay rooted in the past, refusing to explore new possibilities, is to wither and die. But to charge blindly into the future without learning the lessons of history is dangerous and foolhardy. In our lineup this month, we have tried to strike a balance between honouring the past achievements of valourous Commanders and preparing our readers for the future.

We interview the Fuel Rats about their emergence into the Galaxy, explore the histories of a few illustrious figures, and review the achievements of one of humanity's most important organizations, GalCop. At the same time, we discuss the enigmatic motivations of Thargoid allies, and continue our review of the Alliance's most recently developed ships.

You see, constructing a firm foundation for a magazine is important, but that premise is useless if not expanded upon. The human story is one of continual advancement and our publication is a microcosm of that narrative. We must include diverse and interesting stories, adopt new forms of distribution for our content, and not be afraid to take risks on projects that may, in the end, fail. To do anything less is a disservice to our loyal readers.

It is a privilege for us to share our stories and articles as you take time from your busy lives to read about— or listen to — this marvelous galaxy we live in. We push forward, keeping in mind what has gone before. With your trust and support, as well as our amazing partnership with the SVPFA and our incredible patrons, there is no limit to the heights we can attain in this ongoing journey.

Fly safe, Commanders, but fly boldly. *Sagittarius Eye* will be right there alongside.

Addendum

On the 29th of August 3304, our office on Lave Station was targeted in a politically motivated attack by a group calling themselves the 'Alchemy Den'. Our printing equipment was utterly destroyed and the explosion structurally damaged the building beyond repair.

We currently have no reason to believe that 'Alchemy Den' bore our magazine specific ill will, and we assume that we were targeted to maximise attention.

Tragically, our well-known editor Rasudin was in the print room at the time of the attack. Despite heroic efforts by Lave Security and the emergency services, he could not be revived after being recovered from the debris.

It is no overstatement to say that Rasudin's commitment to the search for truth was formidable. He will be greatly missed as a inimitable colleague, journalist, and friend.

Misguided efforts to place principles above lives are precisely what a vibrant free press exists to expose. *Sagittarius Eye* will continue, unbowed, to vocally denounce violence and tyranny in all their guises.

o7, Commander.

Souvarine
Chief Editor



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Sympathy for the DEVIL

Thargoid
Supporters

In January 3303, the first pilot was ripped out of hyperspace and scanned by a huge, octagonal, unknown ship. Throughout that year, speculation about the aliens' intentions was rampant amongst commentators and Commanders alike. In fact, the first issue of *Sagittarius Eye* explored this question.



■ Sanchez Class Science Vessel ZIG-097 adrift in Pleiades Sector IR-W D1-55

Many people predicted that the Thargoids would prove to be hostile, but nearly as many expressed reservations. Rumours told of two 'dynasties' of Thargoids, one more hostile than the other. Many others simply didn't believe that the aliens wished to harm us at all, or had any reason to do so. Commander Allitnil, a well-known Pilots Federation explorer, summed up the feelings of many at the time:

I like to think we can cooperate peacefully, but fear that dark forces – politicians and rogue Commanders who wish to create an 'us and them' scenario to amass their own personal power – will push us into conflict.

In late 3303, the Thargoid attacks on stations began with the fall of The Oracle in the Pleiades star cluster. For most observers, this resolved the 'friend or foe' question.

Even today, pockets of suspicion still exist about the superpowers' knowledge of and dealings with the Thargoids.

Pilots Federation member Camilo Mundaca told us:

The first time they hyperdicted me and just stared, it was creepy, but I thought, 'They can't be that bad if they just stare at you'. Then the attacks began, and they attacked me. I lost 60 million credits to insurance claims, a Cutter, and my crew member, Tim..."

Paranoid? That's What They're Saying About Me?

However, not everyone sees the situation as so cut-and-dried. Even today, pockets of suspicion still exist about the superpowers' knowledge of and dealings with the Thargoids. Whilst researching this article, *Sagittarius Eye* discovered that while sympathy for the aliens themselves was rare, general disquiet about the state of the war – and the multinational Aegis Initiative in particular – persists.

Commander Julian McCoy of the Black Star Coalition is a well-known xenobiologist who is no stranger to controversy. He suggests there are "networks of like-minded individuals who have worked to disrupt Aegis," the tri-superpower taskforce set up to coordinate humanity's defence. McCoy denies that humanity is 'at war' at all:

The superpowers and whoever is manipulating them (Aegis included) are all trying to present that narrative to the Galaxy, but it's simply not true. If this were a war, we would be massacred – stations would be in tiny pieces, not just crippled.

He points out that station damage is "carefully targeted", and that the Thargoids cripple reactors and rip open storage pods – perhaps to retrieve "what's been stolen from them."

This general mistrust of Aegis' war narrative isn't confined to fringe groups, either. Commander DeadMeatGF responded to a SAGi poll, telling us:

I don't consider myself pro-Thargoid per se, but I am suspicious about the information we are being fed. I distrust Aegis and have concerns about their agenda... My main concerns are that I have never seen evidence of a Thargoid shooting first. Personally, I have been hyperdicted and scanned, but never attacked...

McCoy and those who share his thinking aren't Thargoid sympathisers, it's worth noting. They see Thargoids as a threat, but not the main antagonist in this story of war.

"There's no real enemy, it's not all black and white," McCoy said. "There are a lot of influences at work, and we can't

point the finger at one in particular. Thargoids are part of the problem, not the sole issue." DeadMeatGF notes that "...Aegis are very keen to point Pilots Federation members at the Thargoids but are never there themselves to fight... It smacks of subterfuge and manipulation, and for those reasons I am more suspicious of Aegis than I am of the Thargoids."

It Takes All Sorts


Then there are those who aren't looking for evidence. The Far God cult, a fringe sect believed to worship the Thargoids, is currently under investigation by the Federal Intelligence Service following allegations that they are in contact with the aliens. They have received plenty of coverage so far in 3304 for their extreme beliefs, which many see as extremely provocative in light of the many thousands of deaths since the alien incursion began.

Thargoids cripple reactors and rip open storage pods — perhaps to retrieve "what's been stolen from them."

'Hate Aegis, Love Thargoids' (HALT) are a little-publicised Pilots Federation group who share many of the Far God cult's beliefs. We spoke to them to find out whether their beliefs had changed since the 'invasion.'

"We are stealing systems [the Thargoids] previously claimed," Commander St1nkfist of HALT told us. "They were here long before us, and will be here long after," added Commander Skye.

Systems that the (Aegis-operated) Eagle Eye system identify as targets are publicly broadcast to Pilots Federation members, who swarm to them to destroy the Thargoid Scouts that congregate there. "Aegis seems to be luring Thargoid incursions to specific systems at their whim," said St1nkfist. Members of HALT target these pilots and attempt to 'dissuade' them, according to a strict code of conduct.



“...I am more suspicious of Aegis than I am of the Thargoids.”

“High-waking them (forcing them to jump to another star) out of the system is our primary goal,” explained Commander TruffleShuffle, HALT’s leader. They are keen to emphasise that they are not ‘murderhobos’, as itinerant pilot-killers are sometimes called, and only target those ships flown by Pilots Federation members carrying ‘stolen’ Thargoid artefacts or Aegis-designed anti-Thargoid weaponry.

They make exceptions for ships carrying Thargoid objects in the interests of science. “I know two Commanders who used to carry Thargoid cargo. I never attacked them because they were conducting communication research,” TruffleShuffle explained.

The Truth Is Often Stranger

We embarked upon this article expecting to unearth a titillating clutch of fruitcakes, clinging to entertaining but far-fetched beliefs in the face of incontrovertible evidence. To our surprise, we’ve discovered that those who think the Thargoids are more than just interstellar bogeymen are more numerous and more consistent in their opinions than we could have imagined.

There are several key questions we can’t avoid when it comes to the war. Why do we never see anyone engage the Thargoids who isn’t a member of the Pilots Federation? Why does the much-touted Thargoid Link direct us to *human-made* transmitters in target systems? Who placed those transmitters there — and do they serve any purpose beyond (apparently) luring Thargoid Scouts?

It’s beyond the scope of this article to begin to answer these questions, but we encourage readers to keep a more open mind than this correspondent had when he first approached the topic.

Commander Justin Hill, in response to our poll, perhaps spoke for many when he summed up the general sense of unease:

...I don't know enough about them to make a judgement yet, and I don't think any of us do. The human race is no different... we're forever shooting first and asking questions afterwards, much like we're doing to the Thargoids.

Sympathy for the Devil: Thargoid Supporters

Text: Souvarine

Images: lolair Uaine, SebastianWehmeyer, OrangePheonix

Design: LexMoloch

Thanks to: Julian McCoy, Allitnil, DeadMeatGF, Justin Hill, HALT, Buanzox

Commanding Your Clothing

3304 is shaping up to be a great year for fashion, with the release of a variety of different clothes on the commodities markets around the Bubble. Even in these troubled times, we must be comfortable in what we wear, whilst remembering that a little bit of colour and style can improve our mood and reflect well in social and professional engagements.

A vast array of flight suits, jackets, trousers, and even make-up and eyewear can be purchased to draw attention to your accomplishments from other envious Commanders – and these items are now more accessible than ever.

While walking about the loading docks at The Oracle last week, your correspondent's attention was drawn to a pair of Commanders clad in dark, subdued clothing, unlike the bright and exuberant flight suits often paraded by independent pilots in the loading bay and local drinking establishments. We discovered that one of these fashionable individuals was a young explorer named Commander Smyorin, and the other the brilliant scientist and xenobiologist Zion Pierce. Your correspondent briefly interviewed the pair about their chosen attire.

"I love Imperial fashion, you know. The long, flowing gowns, delicate fabrics, beautiful designs. It's so graceful, and you feel about a foot taller too. They don't love me, though," explained Commander Smyorin. "What happens when you spend all of your time on your own in a pressurised tin can and have to do all the grunt work for yourself? Well, I do what I can, but after too many tears from exposed bolts and struts, I tend to wear sleeveless clothes now. What's left is still long and flowing, though – you get too hot when fuel scooping to want anything too tight or warm.

"As for patterns or bright colours? Forget about it. I wish I could pull it off, but when you're a couple of weeks out of dock, all you need is one bad day with a sealant gun or a coolant leak and it's all ruined.

"I hate it, but most of my clothes are plain and gray now – it's just easier that way."



■ Cmdr Smyorin



■ Cmdr Zion_Pierce

Zion Pierce, familiar with the difficulties of marrying function and style, admitted, “These clothes might look a little dark and plain, but it’s a deliberate choice. If things go down, then they’re a tactical advantage: plain enough to not draw attention and dark enough that I can move around unnoticed.”

Not only are dark colours practical when you are out in the black – Zion managed to make them look stylish. Her outfit was quite fitted, despite built-in flexibility around the joints to enable movement, and her boots were stylish but also the perfect shape to clip into the pedals of a ship. However, fine pleats running up her coat and two subtle white panels stitched into the right side were a nod towards Imperial flair.

But what is ‘Imperial flair’? Citizens of the Empire are an image-conscious people who take pride in their appearance. Extravagantly detailed and finely-cut clothing is a common sight in Imperial society. The extravagance of dress denotes an individual’s place in society, so wealthy individuals tend to quietly compete in pomp.

By contrast, Federal citizens are normally more practical in appearance, adhering to a professional style and muted, businesslike tones. Austere grey suits are the order of the day amongst the business and political class, regardless of social station.

■ Federation style: straight lines and muted colours



■ Alliance style: utilitarian, favouring relaxed, comfortable clothes

■ Imperial style: big on embellishment and ornamentation



Worlds collide

In the build-up to what was expected to be the spectacular wedding of Federal Ambassador Jordan Rochester and Princess Aisling Duval, speculation was rampant about the competing influences of Imperial flair and Federal function. Would the bride and groom favour the elegance and ostentation of the upper echelons of Imperial couture, or would they instead prefer the clean lines and tasteful utilitarianism that define Federal chic?

Ultimately, spectators Galaxy-wide were disappointed, as the bride and groom decided to cancel the wedding. However sources inside the wedding planning team suggest that the pair had opted for a lavish but distinct fusion of styles, creating a spectacular synthesis that was uniquely their own. An un-Federal flourish on the Ambassador’s attire here, decidedly subdued millinery for an Imperial grande dame there; through careful and thoughtful coordination, we have been told, they intended to pull off a style that paid homage to both cultures.

This is why the prospective joining of an Imperial Princess and a Federal Ambassador marked such a significant moment in the modern history of clothing and fashion. Had the wedding gone ahead, it would have transcended the widest political divide in our civilisation, instead focusing only on the occasion. Colour and class embraced in a crossover of fashion, no doubt creating new trends that may have persisted long into the future.

Instead, designers across the Galaxy who had been preparing ranges of new styles of haute couture to reflect the fusion of styles expected to have been on display, have found it necessary to sell these ranges at a much reduced price. There are now many bargains to be had for fashionistas on any budget. After searching the Bubble, SAGi researchers have found some of the best deals for our readers. Head over to Braun Orbital in Imeutsu or Carleson Terminal in Abroin and get some great factory-floor prices on commodity clothing – a bargain at just 100 credits at the time of writing.

Remember – life is too short not to look good. Even if you are lucky enough to have a ready supply of progenitor cells, our clothes make a huge difference in how we interact with and come across to those we bump into along the spaceways.

Commanding Your Clothing

Text: Jessica Sonnet

Images: Malic_VR, Smyorin, StarFox

Design: McNicholl



Co-Pawlots

Co-Pawlot name: **Jasmine**
Commander's name: **Ky Vatta**
Designation: **Morale Officer**

When Commander Ky Vatta first docked at Tartarus Point in Momus Reach, little did she know that her life was about to change forever. A delivery contract for a litter of Momus Bog Spaniel pups came up, and one of them was still looking for a home.

Jasmine quickly settled in and is now an invaluable member of the crew, specialising in tracking and navigation.

She has also helped Commander Vatta identify some security shortcomings, by breaking into the cargo bay and scarfing down a consignment of Deuringas Truffles. 🐾

■ Jasmine playing with her Ocellus drone toy on an exotic world discovered in their travels



Co-Pawlot

Text and image: Ky Vatta

Design: LexMoloch

WHEN YOU NEED TO FLY
BUT YOU WANT TO DREAM
NOTHING COMPARES



GUTAMAYA
IMPERIAL COURIER

POWERFUL WOMEN

*The Other Half
of the Story*

Though women make up half the population of the Bubble, and hold a good chunk of its power, the average Commander wouldn't know that from GalNet and other media publications. Besides the antics of Imperial darling Aisling Duval, whose delicate features make for excellent holo-viewing, female leaders are largely ignored in the public sphere. Even the current Emperor, Arissa Lavigny-Duval, receives a good deal less coverage than she should.

In the interest of offering Commanders a more complete perspective on political power in the Galaxy, in this piece we explore the lives and careers of humanity's current female leaders.



At The Top

Emperor Arissa Lavigny-Duval may be the most powerful woman in the Galaxy (at least officially). Thanks to legislation put in place by her father, Hengist Duval, she became the first female Emperor following his passing in 3301. Although in popularity she is arguably outstripped by her niece, Aisling Duval, she holds far more power and has defeated her politically many times, including in the fight for Imperial succession.

Arisa was always a princess by birth, even before revealing her relationship to Hengist, but did not rest on that title: rather, she pushed hard throughout her life, becoming known for being willing to confront tough issues and root out corruption.

She took power in a highly divisive era for the Empire. With her father struck down by a terrorist attack on the day of his wedding, and the organization responsible still threatening her legitimacy, she quickly took the reins and led her people in securing the Empire's security.

Lavigny-Duval has proven to be an exceptional leader, performing all the requisite duties of an Imperial ruler with poise, while holding a firm line against the posturing of Zachary Hudson and the Federation. While the Empire is, by all appearances, the smaller and weaker of these two Galactic superpowers, one would not know it by the way Lavigny-Duval conducts herself in political affairs. To all the Galaxy, she appears fearless, confident, and incorruptible. She is also unafraid to share political power in pursuit of longer-term goals, offering much autonomy to her former rival, Admiral Denton Patreus.

Arisa Lavigny-Duval may hold the Imperial Throne, but Aisling Duval holds the Empire's heart.

Her closest counterpart on the side of the Federation is Felicia Winters, former Acting President and current Shadow President. Winters was thrust into the role of Acting President when President Jasmina Halsey went missing during a presidential tour. The former Vice President having been recently assassinated, Winters stepped up admirably at short notice.

It was perhaps inevitable that she would lose the presidential election to Zachary Hudson, the Liberal Party having been held responsible for many painful blunders in recent memory.

If nothing else, Winters is an excellent representative of Federal Liberal values. She has always espoused the difficult choice if it means coming to the aid of those in need, a moral stance that has earned her the respect of many formerly sceptical voters. She has also been blessed by circumstance: Hudson's aggressive posturing against the Empire hasn't pleased all voters in recent years, especially as the Thargoids advance ever closer to the Bubble's center. In these uncertain times, she has consistently pushed for unity between the Federation and Empire, soothing egos and lending aid in the middle of crises. Though she holds far less political power than Hudson, she may have done more good for the Bubble's masses than the President.

■ The 'prismatic princess', Aisling Duval



The Playmakers

Lavigny-Duval and Winters are powerful women in the Bubble, but there are two more female political leaders worth examining. While Princess Aisling Duval is the more popular, Senator Zemina Torval likely wields more power, though she prefers to conduct her affairs from the shadows. Ex-President Jasmina Halsey is also worthy of mention, although she has suffered quite a fall from grace since her disappearance and apparent bout of insanity following months in an escape pod.

The face and signature blue hair of 'The People's Princess' are familiar to nearly every Commander. She is mostly known for her theatrical political antics: her high-profile relationship with then-Senator Denton Patreus, her anti-slavery organization 'Stop Slavery Stupid' (now merged with Universal Liberty to create the new joint organization 'Unchain'), and her recently-cancelled marriage to Federal Ambassador Jordan Rochester – apparently arranged without consulting her aunt and Emperor, who might have advised her against the disastrous event. She frequently appears on lightweight chat shows, choosing to avoid controversial topics in favour of entertainment value.

While Aisling appears superficial, she is said by those who know her to be good-hearted and earnest, with an acknowledged cunning that comes with being surrounded by competent advisors. It is not for nothing that she is known as 'The People's Princess': she is the definition of a populist, her policy positions swaying to and fro with the attitudes of the masses.

Some argue that it was probably best for the Empire that her claim on the throne was not strong enough to overcome her aunt's, given the enormously difficult political developments of the last several years. That said, she is also underestimated in the public eye, and many see her as merely a silly Imperial pin-up girl. There is guile and awareness to her political maneuverings: she recognises that the most effective way for a woman to enter the spotlight is to be in relationships with powerful men, and her public good-heartedness has won her many supporters in the Galactic community. It is no coincidence that she is by far the woman most covered by the Galactic media. Arissa Lavigny-Duval may hold the Imperial Throne, but Aisling Duval holds the Empire's heart. She may have taken a hit to her popularity last month with the cancellation of her wedding, but she is more than sly enough to work her way back into the public's good graces.

One of the least-known yet most powerful women in the Bubble, Senator Zemina Torval has always been something of a shadowy operator. She is bluntly practical and incredibly savvy: one of her most public operations was a competition between her 'Imperial Slavers Association' and Aisling Duval's 'Stop Slavery Stupid'. Torval bet Duval that she would gather more unregulated slaves to be re-indentured as Imperial slaves than Aisling would gather Imperial slaves to be emancipated, and she did just that, receiving over twice the number delivered to Aisling.

As a condition of her victory, Torval mandated that Aisling travel with a retinue of Imperial Slaves for at least one

■ Women make up a proportion of the finest engineers, L-R: (top) Tiana Fortune, Lori Jameson, Liz Ryder, Felicity Farseer, (bottom) Selene Jean, Hera Tani, Elvira Martuuk and Didi Vatermann





■ Jasmina Halsey has become advisor to Edmund Mahon

year. Unfortunately for her strategy, she underestimated Aisling's control of the media, which appeared to completely forget about the bet following Torval's victory. She publicly speaks out against many of Aisling's views, pointing out the practicality of the Empire's system of regulated slavery and the foolishness of Aisling's antics. Most recently, she admonished Aisling for her engagement to a Federal Ambassador, calling it an "attention-seeking PR stunt" — and this it could well have been.

The vast majority of Senator Torval's machinations do not make the news, but are very successful. She has amassed mind-boggling personal wealth as the primary shareowner of Mastopolos Mining, which makes massive profits thanks to its use of slaves. Impartial on the slavery issue, Torval is not. What she is, though, is popular, at least among her supporters: she has relied on her massive fortune to reduce taxation rates in systems she controls to zero, a policy that has paid off in spades. Whether people living under Torval are actually better off is difficult to say, but they seem to think so — which in politics is more important.

In some ways, she has more freedom than the Emperor: for while Lavigny-Duval must bear the burden of leadership, Torval is free to look after her interests, political and otherwise.

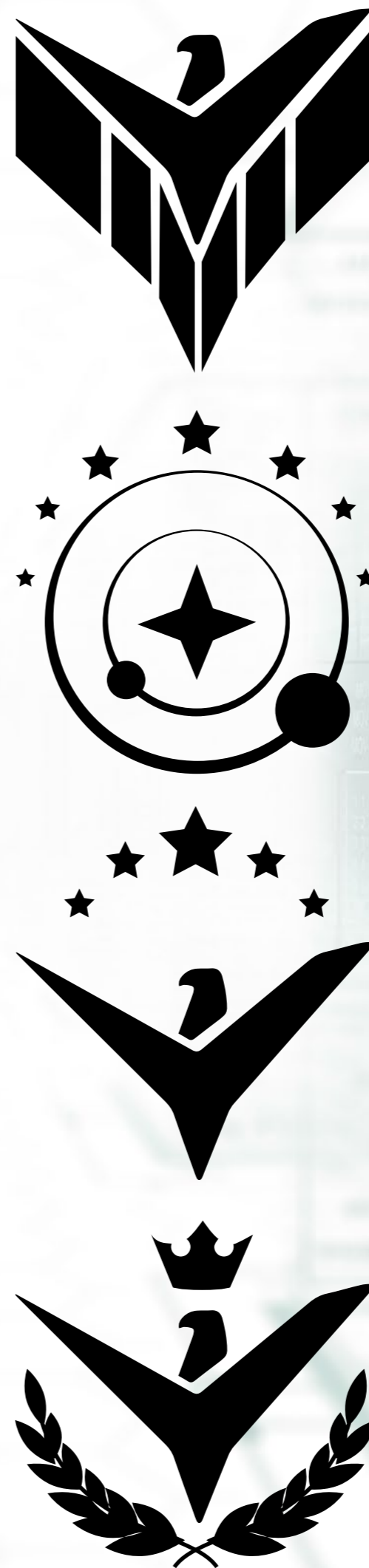
Jasmina Halsey was once a powerful figure within the Federation, but her aggressive policies made her enemies from within the Liberal Party and led, in part, to her downfall. Now an advisor to the Alliance, she still holds some sway, though the majority of what political power

It is frankly stunning that after more than a thousand years, the ratio of female-to-male leadership and power is still so very imbalanced.

there is in the Alliance belongs to Prime Minister Edmund Mahon. Most other political power in the Bubble, in fact, belongs to men, from Sirius Corporation CEO Li Yong-Rui to notorious pirate Archon Delaine.

Outside of these political leaders, perhaps the most well-known female figures are some of the reclusive 'engineers': Felicity Farseer, Hera Tani, Didi Vatermann, Selene Jean, Liz Ryder, Tiana Fortune, Elvira Martuuk, and Lori Jameson. These women do outstanding engineering work for Commanders across the Bubble, yet their work has caught little public attention. Unlike prominent male engineers such as Ram Tah and Ishmael Palin, whose studies of alien cultures have featured prominently in GalNet, few female engineers are ever mentioned in the media.

One notable exception is Lori Jameson, who was roped into the current furore around the terrorist organization known as the League of Reparation. Jameson felt compelled to speak out against the League's murders of distant descendants of officers in the INRA, ostensibly as retribution for its fatal betrayal of her great-grandfather, the legendary John Jameson.



What Keeps Women Out of Power?

For centuries, the masses of humanity have debated what might be responsible for the imbalance of power between men and women. When societal birth rates declined to stable levels at the turn of the third millennium, gender roles began to recede in importance, and a need for female representation in powerful positions began to become more and more pressing. It is frankly stunning that after more than a thousand years, the ratio of female-to-male leadership and power is still so very imbalanced. Female leaders in positions of Galactic power trail male leaders at a rate of four-to-seven, and, with the exception of the People's Princess, receive far less coverage in the media.

What are the reasons for this lack of progress? Perhaps part of the answer lies in the apparent stagnation of human society: there has been little to no advancement in political and social power structures since humanity still resided solely on Earth, and some would argue that we have even regressed. Wars and slavery are commonplace, and corruption runs rampant through the Federation and Empire alike. In the light of this stagnation, it is perhaps unsurprising that female leadership is not as sought after as it should be.

That said, this can only partially excuse this Galactic power imbalance. Cultural gender roles remain in play because every member of our cultures, male and female alike, chooses to reinforce and support them. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle. Women who are physically attractive and publicly flirtatious, like Aisling Duval, find the media descending upon them in a frenzy, while women who quietly work for the good of society, like Felicia Winters, fade into the background.

In this era where starfaring pilots hold more power than ever before, it may fall upon them to up-end this imbalance: to support female leaders, to value their actions above their public appearance, and call out the injustices of those who elevate unworthy men above worthy women. What female leaders we have do incredible work in Galactic society. If they were on a level playing field with their male counterparts, what new heights could humanity achieve?

Powerful Women: The Other Half of the Story

Text: Rasudin

Images: McNicholl, Rubbernuke, StarFox

Design: McNicholl



Working a little Mischief!

The Fuel Rats' bar looks a bit run-down, but comfortably so. On one wall, a huge slate leaderboard shows names and numbers written in chalk. The top three names — Commanders Termite Altair, Falcon JSDF and Dystopia — are all well above 1,000 rescues apiece.



Little mistakes turn into big mistakes.



On an adjacent side of the room, a somewhat smaller comms panel scrolls through the current #Ratchat information. Both walls give the room a functionality that complements the obvious recreational qualities.

Around the rest of the area are autographed pictures of ships and people, many signed with a simple “thank you,” or similar expressions of praise and gratitude.

The regular bartender, Commander Alec Turner (one of the longest-serving, although no longer active, Fuel Rats), busies himself in front of an impressive assortment of alcohol, keeping Commander Surly Badger’s cup of strong black coffee topped off and warm.

“Yup, that’s fine,” says Badger as Turner shows him the pot.

Commander Surly Badger looks tired and rubs his hand over what one might call a ‘mohawk’ coiffure, highlighting the iron-grey-and-white colours of the bristles. One

eye is bleached and scarred; the other seems gentle and thoughtful, though slightly bleary.

“I haven’t been doing much with the Rats lately,” he admits.

Whilst public records show he is more than comfortably well-off, Badger maintains a look on the edge of down-and-out, wearing an old leather bomber jacket over his pilot’s jumpsuit. On the shoulders, there is a small Fuel Rats patch along with one for Hutton Truckers and another for some paramilitary unit called ‘Led Zeppelin’. A gold pin on his lapel reads ‘M/V Longshot’ atop a small but very detailed rendering of an Asp Explorer.

One of the funny things about running out of fuel... it doesn't matter if you're in the middle of the Bubble and really close to an inhabited star, or if you're on the other side of the Galaxy - you're out of fuel and you're just as dead if we don't get to you in time.

History has a way...

In their early days, the Fuel Rats were an eclectic lot from every sort of person humanity had to offer. They all saw a need for a rescue service staffed by professionals who could get the job done. One of the few dissention points among the group was whether or not they should provide their services for a fee. Some were concerned about what they could get for each rescue, or whether there should even be any additional charges to clients to recoup the cost for all the time and effort already expended.

Not a fan of rules or bureaucracy, Cmdr Badger, in an epic Pilots Federation forum post, sliced through all of the rhetoric with simple and direct precision, creating the Fuel Rat’s Code of Conduct in the process:

1. WE HAVE FUEL.
2. YOU DON'T.
3. ANY QUESTIONS?

The avoidance of rules and bureaucracy seems to have influenced the 'Mischief's' political life as well. When asked about the apparent gulf between the Rats' service to their fellow humans and supposedly self-serving anarchist politics, Badger downplays the conflict between the two:

Well, 'anarchy' isn't chaos — it's just a lack of formal leadership and hierarchy. We're self-organizing based on our 'Doctrine of Individual Excellence', which basically says that each Fuel Rat is expected to act in a way most consistent with rescuing people and being really, really good at it. We sometimes have people join who think 'anarchy' means a lack of responsibility, but that's almost exactly the opposite of the situation. We expect everyone to figure out what to do and to do their best, so we don't have leaders or anything like that.

He continues with a wry smile: "I came up with that idea because I was lazy. I didn't want to run an organization, and the kind of people who make great Fuel Rats aren't the kind of people who like being told what to do. It seemed to me that the only way to do things was to avoid getting heavy on the hierarchy and just focus on doing awesome rescues. It also helps with staffing: we've got Alliance, Imperials, pirates, bounty hunters, traders, and explorers — everyone pulls in the same direction and there's no conflict at all."

An loud cough emanates from behind the bar. Alec Turner studiously polishes a glass.

"Well, OK, we had one Rat who was a pirate. He rescued a big fat T-9 and then escorted the guy to a nearby station. The next time the T-9 came out, it was fully fuelled, see, so it was fair game." Badger makes a face. "Things get interesting in the Fuel Rats."

Once the idea for the group was born, there was the question of how they would carry out each rescue. Together, running simulated rescues and documenting everything, the group began to refine the procedures required to consistently make safe recoveries of floundering ships.

The very first rescue attempt was also the Fuel Rats' first success. On the 9th June 3301, Commander Anuranium traveled in supercruise over 0.15 light years

■ T10 stranded close to a Brown Dwarf star

to assist a disabled Python which had run out of fuel well short of its destination. The episode served to define how the group would report on their attempts in every detail from that point on, asking the same questions each time: What happened? What did we do well? What was done poorly? What lessons were learned?

The very next day, a second rescue — this time by Cmdr Rusticolus — continued the trend, adding to the knowledge base of the entire Mischief.

Not every attempt was successful. Accurate triangulation of the client's position used to be (and still is, at times) a huge obstacle, even for seasoned veterans. This problem is occasionally compounded by significant increases in the number of new pilots — such as was seen around December 3302 — and can make things that much more difficult with the Rats' limited resources.

Badger rubs his face thoughtfully. "What happens is, because a handful of Rats get assigned to each rescue, it's very dramatic and important for the client, as well as for those Rats and maybe the dispatcher. I'm not kidding

when I say 'dramatic' — we'd have guys spend a day in the command chair jumping as fast as they could to get to a client, and then they're suddenly dealing with that client's oxygen clock winding down, and they're trying to find them in a star system in the middle of noplac. It's intense.

"Dispatching gets hairy, too. We used to do it all manually, and that meant a dispatcher on comms might be coordinating two or three simultaneous rescues. The guys who run dispatch are some amazingly cool characters."

A technique for triangulation perfected by the Fuel Rats — estimating the client's distance along a vector from the jump-in point of a star — would position a number of them along the probable path of the stranded ship so at least one of them could drop down directly into normal space once an accurate position was determined, all in the hope that it was before the client ran out of time.

“ Even with updated Pilots Federation navigation software... the Rats stay busy, averaging around forty rescues each and every day. ”

Badger recounts a memorable example. A Fuel Rat was sent out to rescue a stricken Anaconda stranded deep in the gravity well of a planet. With its orbit rapidly decaying, there was only a very small window of opportunity in which to find, catch up to, and refuel the falling ship — in this case, physics rather than oxygen was the more pressing issue.

Another technique, termed 'sundiving' by its practitioners, was also developed through necessity by the Mischief. Imagine trying to find a stranded client who is nearly out of oxygen and overheating somewhere in the

hot plasma of a star's corona. The rescuer has to jump into the system, fly directly into the inferno, find the client, fuel them and then make sure they both escape — all before the client runs out of breath or either ship burns up from excessive heat damage. Dramatic, indeed!

Treating every rescue attempt as both a demonstration of expertise as well as a learning experience for the entire Mischief has driven the high overall success rate and their soaring reputation. They have been going strong since their inception, reaching an incredible milestone of 40,000 rescues in March 3304. With a few exceptions, the Rats have consistently maintained a daily average save rate of well over 90%. These rescues have ranged across the entire Galaxy — with at least one of them well beyond the Galaxy's edge! The Fuel Rats' reputation for professionalism is hard-earned and well deserved.

While sitting with Badger, he recounts one significant incident that boosted the Fuel Rats' early fame:

Some of the rescues have included gigantic amounts of exploration data. One of our early ones was code-named Operation Neospike. The client was an explorer who had suffered so much heat damage that it had disabled his fuel scoop. We figured the only way to get him home was to set up a bucket brigade. A lot of guys chipped in to bring him in. I happened to be exploring near the area and flew hard and fast... got there in time to fire a single limpet. We try to make sure we have redundant coverage, for safety reasons, but redundancy means some people don't get as much of the glory as they probably should.

Over the years, Fuel Rats have been ambushed, held hostage, and even hunted and killed in the line of this voluntary duty. Could 'glory' make this all worthwhile, or is there something else involved here? Badger reaches for the cup, sipping before answering:

The rewards are all intangible.

Team spirit, glory, the thrill of success — that's pretty much it. We get to learn that we're pretty good pilots. The problems the Fuel Rats are dealing with are logistics, navigation and time. It's a complex situation, and it's a good feeling to be able to help someone out.

For sure, it's not about the money. We make huge runs and don't stop to explore. We fly expensive ships and spend lots of time in the command chair, just so we can fire a limpet at some guy, wave, and fly off. The rewards are all intangible.

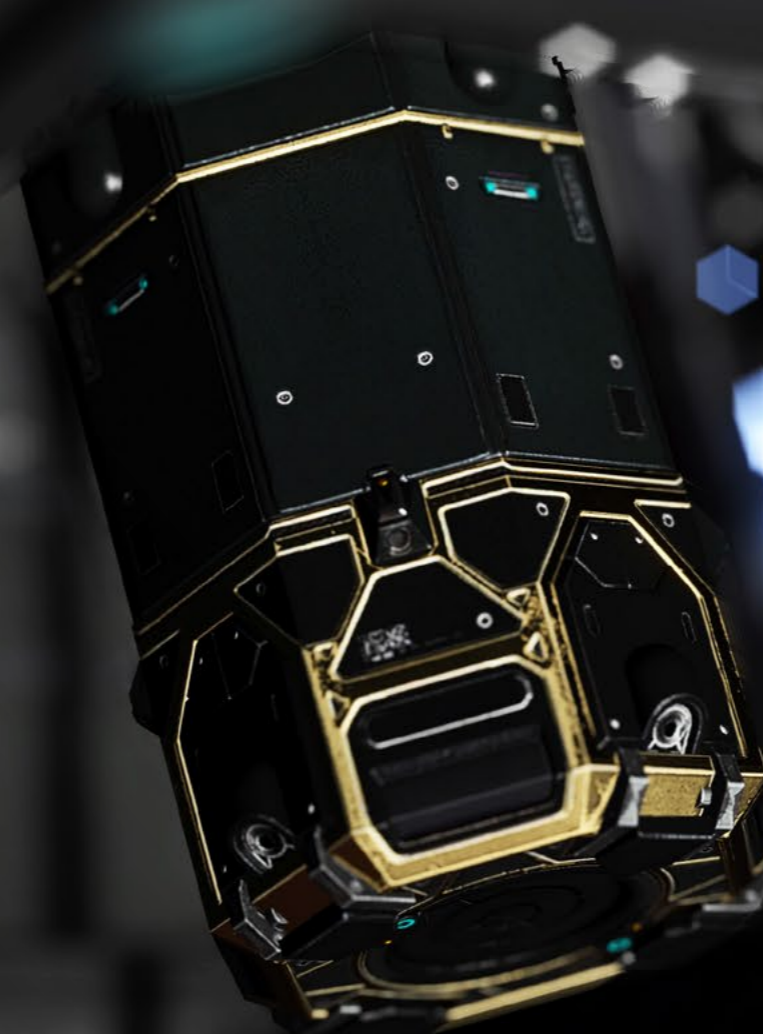
Even with updated Pilots Federation navigation software that allows pilots to avoid unscoopable star types, the Rats stay busy, averaging around forty rescues each day. During the thirty day period between the 26th June and the 25th July 3303, that average climbed to over 100 individual rescues per day, spiking on the 8th July with 157 attempts in just that 24 hour period. Training, new navigation software and safety of flight systems all contribute to reduce the number of incidents, but there still seems to be a never ending need for the service.

"Little mistakes turn into big mistakes," Surly Badger says with a shrug. "About a year ago, I kitted my 'Conda out for mining and was making a run from Atlantis down to Jura for heavy metals. I'd been bounty-hunting with it, and I messed up the load-out. When I left Atlantis, I had a nagging feeling I'd forgotten something — maybe cream for my coffee, eh?"

He smiles. "But, no, I'd forgotten my fuel scoop. So, I had to go into #Ratchat and say 'Ratsignal; be advised, this is not a drill.' There were a lot of snickers, but they rescued me pretty quickly."

Alec comes by and refills Badger's coffee again, chuckling at the memory.

Most likely it's new pilots who haven't really figured out how to navigate yet, or sometimes it's pilots that do an emergency jump to dodge pirates. When you have pirates shooting at you, you may just jump a long, hard jump and you don't have time to check what's on the other side. Nowadays, the jump display tells you, but that was added into the newer software for exactly this reason.



■ Standard fuel limpet

“ One of the funny things about running out of fuel... it doesn't matter if you're in the Bubble or... on the other side of the Galaxy — you're just as dead if we don't get to you in time. ”

As for the guys that do it... The Fuel Rats are the best bunch of pilots I've ever had the honor to know. There's never been a second of doubt concerning our mission in any of our minds — though I've heard some of them express a bit of consternation at having to explain to a spouse that they're stuck in the command chair for 24-plus hours because they're rescuing someone.

He gives a dry chuckle.

When it comes down to questions about his plans for the future, Badger says he's just taking it a day at a time.

I'm mostly retired now, watching my bar tab and waistline grow. I'm sure the urge to explore will hit me again, and then I'll be out there in the deep zones once more. If certain events... er... ever catch up to me, I'll probably be out there deeper and faster, and with a lot less warning.

He stands up and flexes his arms stiffly. "I've got to stow that coffee now; I'll be right back," he says, shambling toward the restroom.

About five minutes later, Alec Turner comes by to collect the empty coffee cup, and grimaces at the unpaid charges.

"He run off on you?"

He shakes his head and sighs, "Badger always does that."

Smiling, *Sagittarius Eye* picks up the tab. It is the very least we can do.

Working a Little Mischief

Text: Michael Darkmoor

Images: OrangePheonix, ZerOaxis

Design: McNicholl

MAKE YOUR MARK

EVERY ROCK

EVERY STONE

EVERY MINE

EVERY VEIN

IT COMES WITH THE
TERRITORY

Tactical Considerations



Take it to the GROUND



At some point in most freelance contractors' careers, they will be required to perform a base assault. In this guide, we introduce the concept and show newcomers how it's done. After all, nothing sharpens the senses like hearing the engines whine as they strain against gravity, while avoiding incoming ground fire.



It's not easy, but nothing worth doing ever is...

Planetary incursion is not for everyone and presents a unique set of challenges. Not only will the operation start close to a planetary surface, it may require engaging targets both in the air and on the ground. Often the final part of a mission will require the use of a surface recon vehicle (SRV) to insert a remote patch into a comms array, sabotage a power generator, or locate specific cargo canisters from a supply dump.

Most importantly there needs to be an understanding that whatever the exact parameters of the mission, you will be undertaking a hostile action against a faction's facilities, and that means that, somewhere, there will be a price on your head.

“...this little ship can be a real monster.”

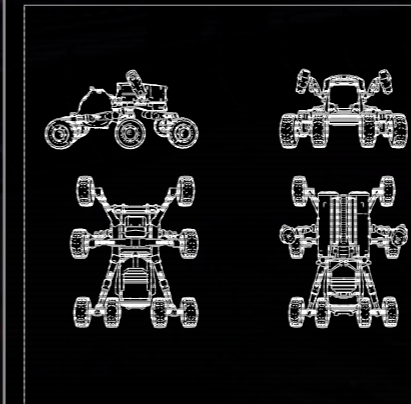


The Mission

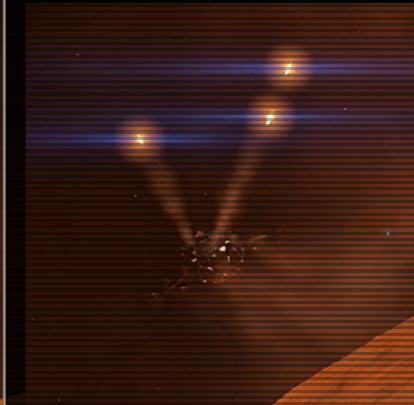
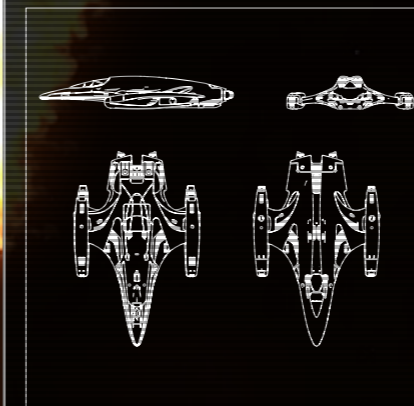
As with all missions, it's essential to read the brief before accepting it. Know where to go and whose jurisdiction you're about to violate. Taking on base defenses usually results in a bounty, so care must be taken in selecting missions aimed at friendly factions — unless that is your intent!

The term 'planetary incursion' covers a wide variety of mission profiles, but the basic principles are all similar. First, locate the target site and make a successful approach before putting the SRV on the dirt to finish out the contract. After the ground phase, it's time to bug out and return to base to claim the reward.

Resistance should be expected. Initially, the target base may not be hostile, but the moment the defence perimeter is crossed things can only get hotter. Only in very rare occasions will a site have no active defence perimeter at all, allowing completion of the assigned mission without issue.



“...somewhere, there will be a price on your head.



Outfitting Your Ship

Almost any ship can be used for planetary incursion operations. Many prefer a small, fast, agile craft, but even a Federal Corvette can work.

The 'go to' ship for this sort of mission profile is, for many, the Imperial Courier. It's light, fast, and agile enough that even at low altitude it can swing the nose around quickly to help the sensors locate your target. Being fast, it gets to the ground quickly, and it carries heavy shielding to protect from anti-air ground fire. With enhanced drives and engineering this little ship can be a real monster.

If the Imperial Courier is out of your budget, or you don't hold the Imperial Navy Auxillary rank to acquire it, the Cobra Mk III is a viable alternative and even the humble Eagle makes for an inexpensive option.

At its most basic, planetary incursion requires the delivery of an SRV to the target site. So your ship must be equipped with a planetary vehicle hangar and an SRV. If the mission involves the salvaging of cargo canisters, ensure your ship has a cargo bay of sufficient size. Many surface bases have salvageable cargo simply lying about that can be picked up for additional credits — though be sure that mission-critical cargo goes in first.

Although not strictly required, it's a good idea to have an advanced discovery scanner (ADS) installed. This device is a big time saver. If not carrying one, a scan of the Navigation Beacon orbiting the main star in the system will help in locating the target. The ADS will provide this information upon completion of its scan, speeding up the process.

If there is an expectation of significant resistance, such as might meet a strike on a military target, then dumb-fire missiles are the go-to option. Ground targets do not resolve in most ships' sensor suites until very close and cannot be locked upon, so guided and direct fire weapons are of limited value. Stock examples of these weapons are also restricted in range to about 3km. At that range, it is almost impossible to accurately make out small ground targets. Taking out specific targets means getting close — and that is not a good position to be in when facing anti-air defences.

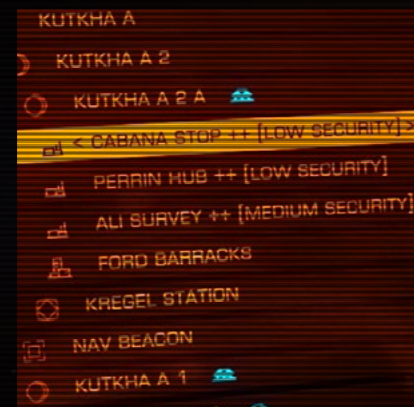
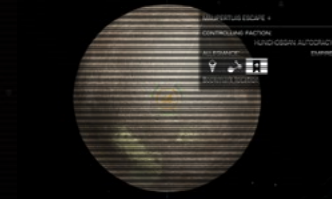
'Fire and forget' weapons, like the humble dumb-fire, have several distinct advantages. From a firing position higher up the gravity well you can easily out-range any expected ground defences, and dumb-fires are usually effective out to nearly 5km. They are explosive weapons that detonate to spread over a greater area than most ordnance, causing damage to anything in range of the blast. This is great for clearing nests of skimmers.

Locating the Target

Often, illegal or military-type operations will be carried out against 'known' targets, usually a base or an outpost. These facilities exist at recorded locations registered with Universal Cartographics, meaning there is rarely any uncertainty about where to find them.

Unregistered targets require a little more effort. Upon arrival, there are two ways to identify which planetary body the target is on. The first and quickest is to use the ADS. If this isn't available, scanning the local Navigation Beacon will obtain the location. However, this is only an approximate location, and a planet or moon makes for a large search area to cover.

Once your ship enters orbit, the ship's sensor suite will determine the initial search location. As you close the distance, this position will be refined to pinpoint the exact position. It may mean piloting through a number of tight turns to keep the sensors fixed on the scan point. This can be dangerous at low altitude or in proximity to a high-gravity body.



Resistance is not futile

There will be occasions where no resistance is encountered: you can drive in, do the mission and drive out. However, these are rare. While military facilities will offer the heaviest resistance, even a humble supply cache will usually sport a few skimmers.

With a bit of practice, any Vodel SRV is more than capable of dealing with multiple hostile skimmers. Learning how to use terrain features to cover the approach and to limit returning fields of fire whilst eliminating the most dangerous threats quickly are the key skills required.

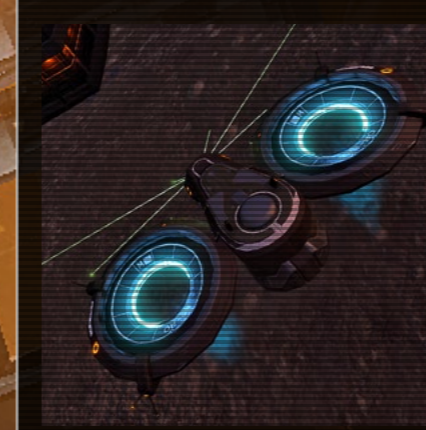
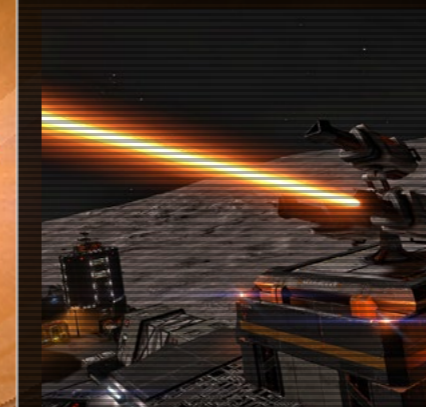
There are two types of defence turrets: surface-to-air and anti-vehicle. Aiming to destroy the anti-vehicle turrets first makes the most sense as they have a high rate of fire and can cause significant damage to an SRV if not neutralised swiftly.

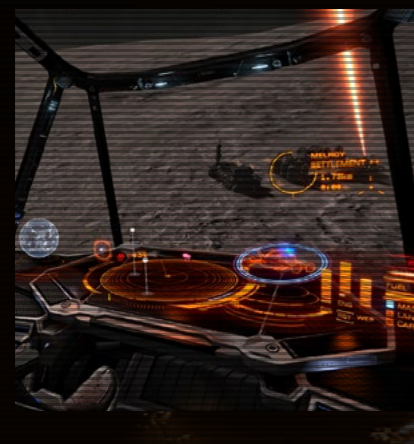
Surface-to-air defences pack a hard punch but are designed for ships, and cannot target the small SRV. These can be left for last, but don't forget about them! The moment a hostile ship launches, these weapons will try to bring it down.

Skimmers come in three basic variants. The suicidal Stingers are just flying bombs that will attempt to crash into a hostile target and detonate. These are more of psychological threat than a physical one as they do not take much to kill – lightweight, unshielded, and outfitted with poor guidance systems, they will often detonate due to a terrain collision on approach.

Seekers are the most common type of skimmer encountered, often operating in packs of two or more. These twin-engine attack craft are lightly shielded, with a lightweight hull and only a single weapon. Concentrated fire will quickly bring them down at close range. At longer range they are harder to hit, and in packs they become far more dangerous. It may be more effective to use 'hit and fade' tactics, picking them off one at a time in order to allow the SRV's shields to recover before taking on another one.

The final type of skimmer is the Colossus. Usually only encountered near military installations, these will give you very stiff resistance. They carry heavy shielding, multiple turret weapons and missiles, making them one of the more dangerous flyers and a significant gun platform capable of also damaging smaller ships. If encountering more than one of these monsters it's worth considering clearing out the nest with dumb-fire missiles from high above.






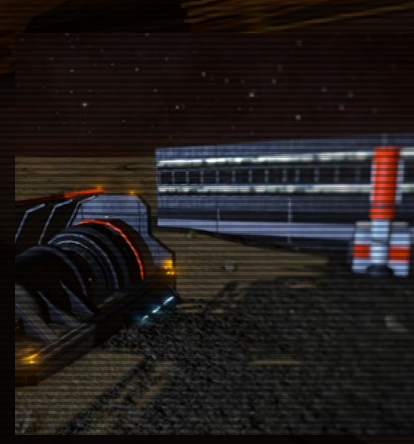
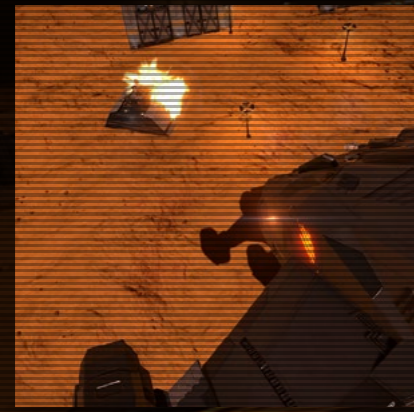
The Approach

The type of target will determine the best approach. If flying a search grid, the angle of approach will be low. Usually, this will place the ship a couple of kilometers from the base and under 1km in altitude. Assuming no hostility, a low and slow pass over the base is recommended, followed by touching down in a hollow or behind a surface feature that limits the lines of fire from the base.

It is important not to land so close to the base that the SRV cannot deploy its turret due to its auto-retract safety feature. Most ships will deploy the SRV facing towards the rear, so flying over the base and landing some distance on the other side will provide the best position for quick access to the vehicle bay in case things get out of hand.

Against a registered target, there is another option: pitching down during the glide approach to near vertical will bring the ship out of glide a good distance above the target. There, it will be beyond the range of surface-to-air defences and still have gravity to assist with any required change in momentum. From a vertical approach, throttling back will allow time to view the layout of the entire base.

As ground targets become visible, use dumb-fire missiles to destroy them well before coming into range of any return fire. This is the optimal position for skimmer destruction missions; from here resistance can be eliminated. At this point, it is good to be aware that some military installations' defenses will not stay down for long. They will quickly restore function to damaged turrets. Hit and run is the order of the day! 



“ Hit and run is the order of the day!

Tactical Considerations: Take it to the Ground

Text: McNicholl

Images: OrangePheonix, Twospoons77, Donald Duck

Design: Donald Duck

THE ALLIANCE CHALLENGER



In late February, Lakon Spaceways made an unexpected and impressive entrance into the combat ship scene. The Alliance Chieftain made waves with a revolutionary combat model, allowing it to compete with industry stalwarts such as Core Dynamics' Federal Assault Ship and Zorgon Peterson's Fer-de-Lance.

Now, turning their attention to heavier combat ships, Lakon has released the Alliance Challenger.

How does it hold up to its competitors?

If It Ain't Broke, Change It Slightly

Lakon, building on a strong foundation, has continued working with the basic chassis of the Chieftain. This is clear from the ship's outward appearance, though a few notable changes have been made. The forward engine nacelles have been removed, being replaced with simple control surfaces. To make up for the missing nacelles, two rear engines have been installed.

While this rearrangement of thrusters has cost the ship some forward thrust and manoeuvrability, it has allowed the frame to accommodate more firepower. One of the large hardpoints from the Chieftain's frame has been replaced with two medium hardpoints, not only boosting the overall firepower but also the versatility of potential loadouts. The ship also keeps the four utility mounts of the Chieftain.

Internally, Lakon has also made changes. While the core internals remain untouched, the optional internals have seen significant improvement. A second Class 6 compartment replaces the Class 5, and the Class 4 slot has been divided into two Class 3 slots. This represents an increase of efficiency and capacity, allowing the ship to support more and larger internal modules.

Defensively, the ship is similar to the Chieftain. The base shield strength is almost identical, with only a very slight increase of capacity. However, the expanded optional internals combined with the increased base armour strength make for enormous hull resilience beneath the shields. Alternatively, shield cell banks can also be fitted in the versatile internals, bolstering the capabilities of a high-capacity shield.

Conversely, the Challenger lacks versatility in career paths other than combat. While its jump range is certainly adequate for a combat vessel, a fully stripped down and engineered model struggles to make 40 light years without assistance from the new Guardian frame shift drive boosters.

As for cargo capacity, the ship suffers from the same weakness as the Chieftain. With three Class 4 slots designated as military internals, the maximum cargo capacity is choked to a mere 152 tonnes unshielded.

On paper then, the Alliance Challenger is to the Chieftain as the Federal Dropship is to the Assault Ship: increased firepower and internals at the cost of speed and manoeuvrability, with its primary focus on combat. Such a role has proven itself to be useful in the Federal Navy, so it is understandable that the Alliance expand into this territory with its increasing arsenal of new ships.

Interior

As with the Chieftain, Lakon's excellent build quality has also found its way into the Challenger, which can be seen when investigating the interior of the ship. A company famous for its trading vessels has twice proven its ability to translate its engineering prowess into the combat arena. The cockpit, also like the Chieftain, sports a second seat for a crew member when a gunner is required.

The cockpit is of classic Lakon style, with a wide field of view achieved by mounting it far forward on the frame. This, however, creates the same weakness suffered by the Chieftain, with the cockpit being vulnerable to attack.

In the Field

Beyond the technical specifications, a proper field test is the only way to get to know a new ship. To that end, the ship was taken bounty hunting in a hazardous resource extraction site (RES), and then into a conflict zone. While a RES is an excellent way to experiment with a ship's damage output, the chaotic environment found in most warzones is a good test of survivability.

A standard engineered combat loadout was used for the test. For weaponry, six overcharged multi-cannons were equipped. To balance damage types, the three Class 1 multi-cannons were modified to fire incendiary ammunition, converting their damage from kinetic to thermal. The remaining Class 2 hardpoint was filled with a feedback cascade railgun in order to disrupt enemy shield cell operation.

Defensively, the ship was given a hybrid bi-weave build. The numerous large internal slots allowed over 4,000 armour integrity to be achieved, underneath a high-resistance bi-weave shield. The high regeneration rate of a bi-weave allows the user to briefly withdraw from combat to allow it to recover. It also punishes enemies who are unable to consistently lay down fire, quickly regenerating lost megajoules (MJ) if they miss their mark.

Before beginning the bounty hunt in the RES, the flight model was put to the test. Despite losing some manoeuvrability compared to the Chieftain, the ship still retains impressive kinematic capabilities. While the speed is slightly below 500 metres per second, the pitch rate is almost as fast as a Fer-de-Lance (FDL), and its yaw rate is significantly higher. Combining this with a roll rate matching the FDLs, the Challenger has excellent agility compared to its Federal Dropship counterpart. Considering its impressive firepower and formidable defences, these excellent statistics can make the ship lethal in experienced hands. If the pilot is capable, the ship can function excellently with fixed weaponry.

As expected, the ship's performance in the RES was outstanding. In short engagements, the Challenger's seven hardpoints make quick work of most hostiles. The incendiary multicannons accelerated the depletion of enemy shields. Once shields were out of the way, bulkheads stood little chance when under the corrosive shell effect from the large multicannon.

Between the engagements the shield's rapid regeneration meant that the next fight could be started quickly without having to wait for it to recover. Only a few engagements with larger wings and ships caused the shield to collapse, and even in such cases they reformed with only minor hull damage being taken. The ship's excellent manoeuvrability also allowed evasive flying while the shield was collapsed. By the time the weapons finally ran out of ammunition the armour integrity was still over 90%.

“ Despite losing some manoeuvrability compared to the Chieftain, the ship still retains impressive kinematic capabilities. ”

After rearming and repairing, the next test was to take the ship into a conflict zone. A conflict zone is a better test of a ship's endurance than a RES, as fights no longer consist of numerous small engagements, but rather one long battle.

Under these conditions the Challenger still performed well, though the weaknesses of a bi-weave shield became more apparent. With the ship taking much more consistent fire, fewer chances to regenerate MJ were available. This meant that the shield collapsed and reformed dozens of times throughout the test, causing the bulkheads to take a large amount of damage.

More reliance on armour also revealed another of the Challenger's weaknesses. While the close clustering of the hardpoints provided excellent convergence, missiles were able to cause significant damage to the weaponry, causing numerous malfunctions and even disabling one multi-cannon entirely. Additionally, the canopy cracked significantly after being subjected to heavy weapons fire.

The ship, however, survived the test, leaving with about 50% armour integrity when ammunition was depleted. Despite its few shortcomings, it is clear that the Challenger boasts excellent endurance, with the bulkheads holding strong in the face of overwhelming force.

Lakon has taken its experience from armouring its trade vessels and applied it successfully to its combat ships.

Anti-Thargoid Capabilities

With the Thargoid threat at the forefront of today's news, many pilots seek vessels capable of going toe-to-toe with the alien vessels. With contemporary shield technology proving ineffective at repelling Thargoid weaponry, the best vessels for fighting them are those with the most resilient bulkheads. The Challenger, therefore, proves a worthy choice for such activities. The ship's respectable jump range also allows it to easily respond to new Thargoid sightings quickly.

Thargoid ships are famously agile, and the Challenger's excellent manoeuvrability allows this threat to be somewhat nullified. When fighting a Thargoid vessel it is important to keep oneself in a position where escape is always an option. The Challenger's evasiveness ensures this.

Further adding to its arsenal, the Challenger's hardpoints are superbly diverse in their ability to utilise anti-xeno (AX) weapons. This though is in part due to the recent release of Class 3 Guardian weaponry — also buffing the Chieftain's AX abilities. The three Class 1 hardpoints prove themselves useful dealing with the Thargoids' shield technology.

Final Verdict

The Challenger has built well on the success of the Chieftain by modifying the design for a new role. As a workhorse combat ship with considerable firepower and versatile internals, it proves itself a worthy adversary – and in many ways superior – to the competing Federal Dropship. While many favour the higher speed of heavy fighter vessels, the Challenger fills the niche of a manoeuvrable and defensive gun platform. At the very reasonable price of 30 million credits, it will no doubt prove popular among bounty hunters, mercenaries, and Thargoid hunters in the near future.

“ With this excellent combat ship, the Chieftain and now the Crusader, the Alliance is starting to look competitive with the two older superpowers.”

The Alliance Challenger

Text: Mini_Watto

Images: OrangePhoenix, LexMoloch

Design: LexMoloch

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ALIEN CAPABILITIES

THARGOID WAR MACHINE

The Thargoids, once considered a myth — a dark secret only spoken about by space-mad retired pilots and navy outcasts — returned to the known Galaxy in January last year. What are they? What can they do to us? How are their ships so different? In this article, we review what we know about the Thargoids in order to help pilots out there in the black defending civilization.

■ The most recently-encountered Thargoid variant, designated the 'Hydra', is instantly recognisable due to its sharp 'wing' tips.



Thargoid Scouts

The first of these, the Marauder class – rumoured to be prevalent during the first Thargoid war – is an octagonal ship comparable in size with a modern-day Lakon Type 6.

Noted scientist Cmdr Arithon has made observations on the vessels' behaviour and technical specifications, which have been released into the public domain.

Warning: these ships are highly aggressive and will shoot on sight. It is, however, quite interesting to know that they aren't as technologically advanced as the Interceptors, as regular weapons can damage and destroy these highly manoeuvrable scouts.

The second iteration of the scout is the Regenerator type, which seems to act as a support vessel for other scouts in its vicinity via 'pulses'. Not much information is available on these ships: they are similar in appearance to the Marauder and bathed in a glowing green/turquoise aura. Pilots of the Anti-Xeno Initiative (AXI) and the cooperative pilot group the Hive recommend eliminating these targets first when engaging multiple hostiles.

The third iteration is the Berserker. This variant hits hard for a scout and is usually accompanied by other Marauders and/or Regenerators. It looks similar to the Marauder, but emits a pulse that increases damage output from scout craft.

The fourth and final iteration of the Thargoid scout is the Inciter. These ships attack with caustic missiles. Decontamination limpets are vital if you end up dealing with this type of scout, and it is prudent to understand that these types are always encountered with an Interceptor.

Thargoid Interceptors

The four known types of Thargoid Interceptor have been designated 'Cyclops', 'Basilisk', 'Medusa' and 'Hydra', in order of increasing ferocity. These ships and their accompanying Thargon swarm are extremely dangerous and should not be engaged unless you are with experienced combat veterans. The danger that these ships pose to individual pilots venturing into conflicted territories cannot be stressed enough. While Commanders have destroyed Cyclopes and Basilisks alone, it is a rare achievement.

The Cyclops was the first variant of Thargoid to be seen since 3151, and is significantly more powerful than a group of Marauders. Initially the Cyclops tended only to interact with human ships travelling through hyperspace, by pulling their target out mid-jump – colloquially termed 'hyperdiction'. This left the unsuspecting pilot far away from any assistance, and their ship's systems were nullified by an inhibitor pulse which also deactivated the heads-up display. The Cyclops would then scan the immobilised ship and move away. Latterly, hyperdictions have not been so peaceful if the ship in question is carrying Thargoid or Guardian

technology. Commanders who do so, and who do not wish to engage, are advised to carry the recently developed Shutdown Field Neutraliser module, using it if the Thargoid begins to glow cyan, while evading and high-waking out as per their regular training.

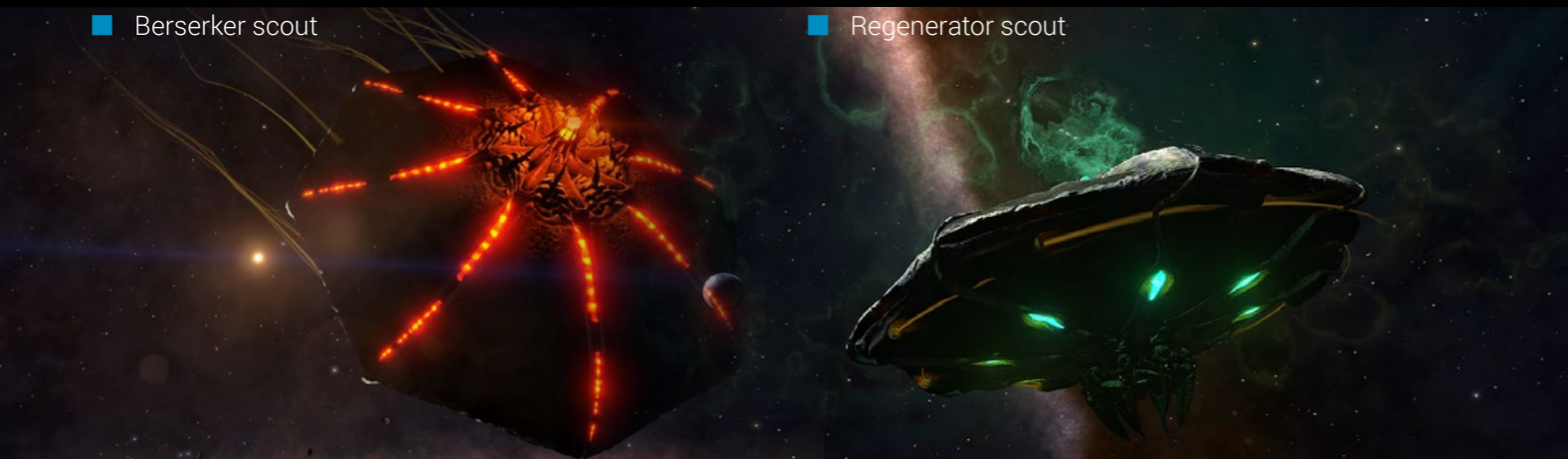
Thargoid Interceptors are very fast, reaching speeds of around 550 metres per second (m/s). A human pilot would generally need to avail themselves of Ishmael Palin's engineering facility in Maia to achieve comparable speeds.

Interceptors' weapons systems are complex, with an energy pulse that penetrates human shields and damages the hull, combined with an 'Arc Lightning' weapon that will eviscerate both shields and hull. They are also equipped with caustic missiles. Detonating on impact, these missiles will degrade a ship's integrity: a single missile can destroy a ship given enough time. Decontamination limpets can stop this degradation, as will docking for repairs. Failing that, experienced pilots have halted the degradation by overheating their ship beyond 150% of nominal tolerance. This may cause some minor damage to integrity, but much less than leaving caustic damage unchecked.

Each variant of the Thargoid Interceptor is equipped with the same technology. However, each iteration is more powerful than the last – with noticeable increases in both offensive and defensive capability for each class.

■ Berserker scout

■ Regenerator scout



“...in prolonged battles between human and Thargoid ships, the balance generally tips toward the Thargoid as time goes on...”



Defensively, the Interceptors have no fewer than four core organs which must be attacked. The Cyclops has four 'hearts' which must be destroyed in order to incapacitate the vessel, whilst the Basilisk has five and the Medusa six.

On the offensive side, each Interceptor variant comes with an attached swarm of Thargon drones, the number increasing from 32 for a Cyclops, to 64 for a Basilisk, 96 for a Medusa, and 128 for a Hydra.

Thargons (discussed in a previous issue) are small autonomous swarm weapons, which circle the Interceptor and attack those who open fire or exhibit what they

consider hostile intent. They will also reliably attack human vessels carrying Thargoid technology in their cargo hold.

In addition to the weapons they carry, the Thargons can also function as small guided missiles, ramming into unshielded ships and causing critical damage. Thargons have been a major issue for Commanders instigating confrontations with Thargoids, as their high speed and inertia-less movement means they are tricky to hit even if you do have a remote release flak launcher equipped. Hired crew flying specialised anti-xeno (AX) ship-launched fighters can be very effective against the swarm – once they have gained sufficient experience in less hazardous scenarios.

■ Thargon swarm



We have noted during our research that in prolonged battles between human and Thargoid ships, the balance generally tips toward the Thargoid as time goes on, as their degradation technology and ability to heal gradually come into effect.

Thargoid Technology

This was first encountered in the form of Unknown Artefacts, later determined to be Thargoid Sensors, which were initially found being secretly transported around systems in the Bubble by Federal convoys. Later it was discovered that these artefacts can be found floating in space between 130 and 150 light years around Merope, in the Pleiades.

These artefacts were very puzzling when first encountered, as when a ship entered their vicinity they would scan it and emit a coded signal. This was later decoded and shown to vary depending on the ship class that was scanned. Further studies revealed that the artefact had broadcast a geometric representation of the ship it was scanning, in a very rudimentary form known as a 'wireframe model'. Canonn Research Group said:

Thargoid sensors broadcast a complex audio signal. Part of the signal has been decoded. It is a highly stylized Morse code transmission consisting of blocks of six letters. When each pair of letters is taken as coordinates and each block is interpreted as a triangle the resulting diagram is a primitive drawing of the just-scanned (i.e. your) ship.

Once collected and stored, unless in a corrosion-resistant cargo rack, the sensor will begin to corrode its host's systems. These objects are highly toxic and should only be handled by experienced personnel. If ejected into normal space, the sensor will orient itself towards Merope, the system of the first Barnacle to be discovered (more on this later).

These sensors were the first of a number of Thargoid devices to have been discovered within the vicinity of the human Bubble. Another, the Thargoid Probe, is easily recognised, and its specifications are now documented in every ship's computer systems:

Only recently discovered, these mysterious artefacts are believed to be probes, but of unknown origin. Their physical appearance makes them likely to be related to the unknown artefacts discovered in 3301. Such mystery only serves to make these objects more widely sought after by wealthy individuals and organisations alike, no matter that their unidentified status automatically prohibits them from being sold on any legal market.

Thargoid Probes were also sighted in the custody of military ships close to the Sirius system and orbiting ammonia worlds in the Pleiades. This raises questions – such as to why they were being transported and where they were being taken to – which are beyond the scope of this article.

Thargoid Probes are curious devices and possess the same toxicity and corrosive features as Thargoid Sensors. When scanned, the probe will emit a pulse that physically nudges your ship away from it. It is unknown whether this is a demonstration of technological prowess or simply a deterrent against approaching. The pulse is followed by a sound-encoded image, the nature of which is still being investigated by many organisations.

The Thargoid Sensor and Probe make up the two of the three devices of Thargoid origin which can be used to interact with a Thargoid superstructure, and operate the as yet-unidentified machine within.

The third device, the Thargoid Link, has only recently been discovered and, along with the Thargoid superstructures in which they are typically found, has been the subject of intense research by a number of independent Commanders and notable organisations such as Canonn Research over the past year.

Thargoid Links have proven to be of particular interest to the Galactic community since it was discovered that they can be used to locate new Thargoid superstructures.

Thargoid Barnacles

These interesting organic growths can be visited in the Pleiades and the California Nebula, and are the source of the meta-alloy commodity. They seem to be of Thargoid origin, as Thargoid interceptors have been observed scanning and collecting matter from 'ripe' barnacles, presumably for their own manufacturing processes. These structures can vary in size from just one or two, to huge 'farms' of barnacles, such as those observed in the Hyades Sector AQ-Y d81 system, planet C 2, latitude 9.2924, longitude -153.9815.

Meta-alloys

This alien material is described by scientists as follows:

Meta-alloys have a complex lattice structure with large internal voids. They are cellular in nature, and formed organically. Meta-alloys are noted for their incredible strength – being much stronger than foamed aluminium, for example. Many elements form the structure, so technically they are alloys, but the composition is different in different parts of the cell walls for strength. Surprisingly, they are good thermal insulators and have a high melting point, but once they are melted they lose all their special properties and become a conventional alloy. They are easily machined, but as yet cannot be manufactured, only found in space. They

are associated with recently discovered alien entities nicknamed 'Large Barnacles' by interstellar explorers. These appear to be common in certain parts of space, although no-one is certain why. These materials have been heralded as the next step in materials technology. They are ultra-light and stronger and more versatile than most commercially available alloys.

This information is readily available once at Darnielle's Progress in the Maia system, where one can purchase the commodity in limited amounts.

Thargoid Scavengers

Scavengers are found operating in and around Thargoid Superstructures and in the Barnacle forests. These drones seem to be autonomous and perform repair or maintenance tasks. They can be seen removing substances from the Thargoid superstructures, and scanning egg-like structures around them. We can only assume that they operate with a purpose designed by their creators.

These drones can become hostile if fired upon or damaged. Although they are hardly indestructible, if a number of them are aggravated then they can damage a surface recon vehicle (SRV).

■ Thargoid Sensor



Thargoid Superstructures

These numerous alien structures are nested in planets around the Galaxy and can be found using cryptanalysis on the information obtained from accessing Thargoid devices. Curiously, on approach, the structure is seen to be enveloped in ammonia, with scavengers all around removing something from the outside and disposing of it elsewhere. These structures house a device that, once activated with a Thargoid Link, Probe, and Sensor in the correct receptors, displays a helical pattern much like the depiction of a galaxy but not matching the barred

spiral structure of the Milky Way. The Galaxy's greatest minds currently are at work trying to solve this puzzle.

One key advantage that present-day Commanders of the Pilots Federation enjoy over those acting in the last Thargoid war is a greatly enhanced ability to communicate in real time across the Galaxy and band together. *Sagittarius Eye* is just one example of that. Let us hope that such cooperation can tip the balance in the current war.

“ These structures house a device that... displays a helical pattern much like the depiction of a galaxy... ”

*Alien Capabilities:
Thargoid War Machine*

Text: The_thargoid

Images: OrangePheonix, Nickweb85, SebastianWehmeyer

Design: LexMoloch

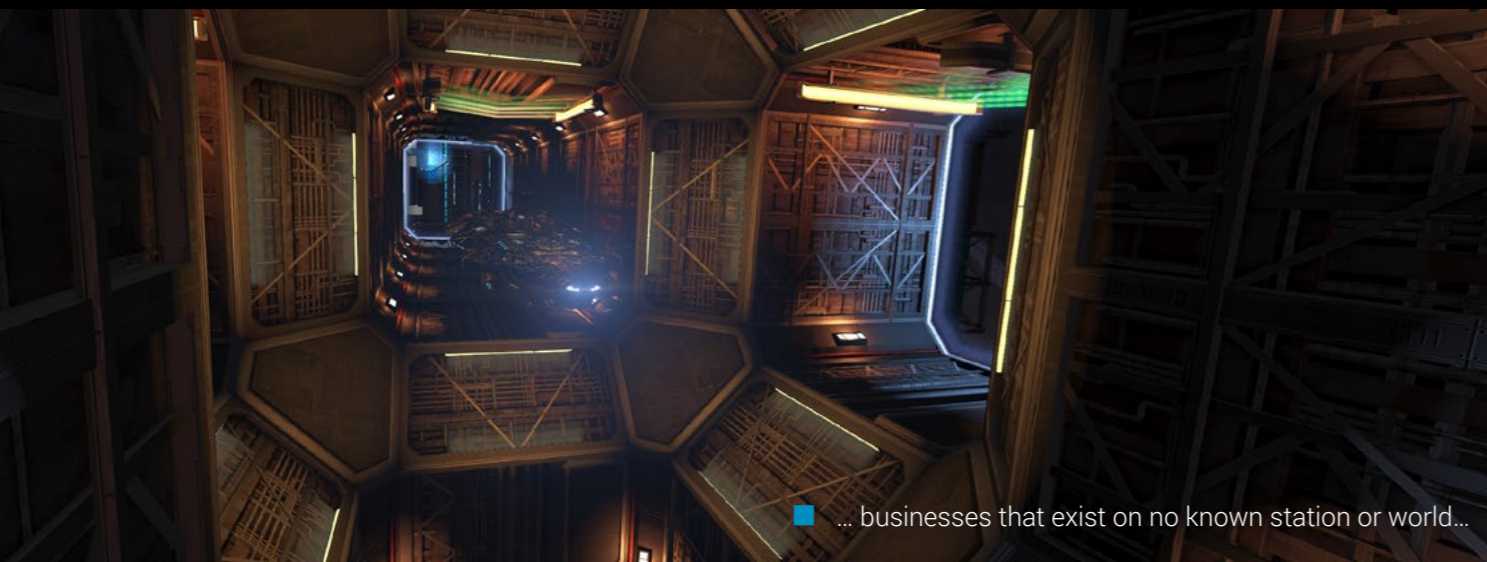
“...the kind of ordinary face
you wouldn't remember
unless you tried very hard.”

The Strange History of 'JOHN GRAHAM'

Conspiracy theories abound across the Galaxy relating to all manner of strange occurrences, from missing generation ships to alien artefacts recovered from the ruins of ancient civilisations. Our explorers and scientists find answers to these mysteries, but often those answers provoke even more questions in our quest for understanding. Occasionally, those questions arise from somewhere closer to home. Such is the case with **John Graham**.



■ The name 'John Graham' has been linked to shady business deals...



■ ... businesses that exist on no known station or world...

“ A detailed check of the archive records reveals that there is no picture of the man on file. This is a strange anomaly for such a public figure.



■ ... the Lave revolution of 3265...



■ ... and *The Secret Lives of Spacers*, a popular entertainment program.

The name seems to be a common one and, tracing back through our available records, one that originated on Earth. Both parts are anglicised – the first name is Biblical in origin, and the second comes from the phrase 'Gray Home'.

Our Investigation

There is certainly something gray about the instances of 'John Graham' that appear in more recent historical records. According to the Lavian Historical Archive, John Graham was the name of the Federal Ambassador to the system during the revolution of 3265. His assassination occurred just prior to the coup and was the source of considerable tension for the next thirty years.

A detailed check of the archive records reveals that there is no picture of the man on file. This is a strange anomaly for such a public figure.

Another 'John Graham' appeared in security camera footage thirty years later from an asteroid base called The Hollows. This individual was involved in the attempted apprehension of a wanted criminal known as Angel Rose of Slough Orbital.

A 'John Graham' also served as a bartender in New Boracay; a 'Commander John Graham' was noted as a spy,

betraying humanity in the Farack System by selling military defence secrets. Another 'Commander John Graham' was recorded as an Imperial pilot who was a participant in a battle in the Psi Octantis system. Yet another entry has him registered as an independent.

Strangely, the Elite Federation of Pilots has no photograph of any of these people – an omission your correspondent has not seen in their records before.

We do have an image of 'Arch-Priest John Graham', a leader of a cult during or before the Maledict virus outbreak on Yorville. The picture is old and of low resolution, but the man's brown hair and unassuming features, beneath his priestly robe and cowl, can be made out. It is the kind of ordinary face you wouldn't remember unless you tried very hard.

A second, similar face appears on the business registration documents of 'The John Graham Corporation,' or 'JGC', situated on Madison Station. Comparing these images led us to think that they are of the same person. How could one man lead such different lives?

We tried to find Madison Station, but it doesn't appear to be in Universal Cartographics' records. Further inquiries found no such company in existence. The sprawling commercial city that the marketing material mentions must either be a fake or now under different management.

Stranger and stranger...

We do have an extensive holo-vid archive of the interstellar documentary presenter, John Graham. His exposé series *The Secret Lives of Spacers* was fairly popular on Federation channels a couple of decades ago. The images of this man are almost identical to those found elsewhere – brown hair, unassuming facial features – however, this John Graham is much more verbose than any of his previous incarnations. Looking through his published background, there is no indication that he was a clone, and it would be highly unlikely an individual could achieve minor celebrity status if he were manufactured in that way. It might be possible that this John Graham sold his DNA print to a commercial factory, but that would not account for the earlier mentions of him as Federal ambassador. Even if this were the case, if it had been revealed the ensuing scandal would have ruined Graham's career in either field.

Conclusions

It is possible that there is no connection between these people. 'John Graham' could just be a common name. After all, there are a variety of very popular names from Earth appearing on multiple records of individuals throughout colonised space.

That said, the similarity of the man's picture in some instances and the strange omissions of his face from a variety of other sources we found do make the situation mysterious. Could 'John Graham' be a spy, or a clone? An artificial intelligence in human form, hidden in plain sight? Or even a Thargoid plant inserted into our society – a 'bug in skin,' as it were?

We will be continuing our investigations. If you spot any further people called John Graham in your travels, please report them to *Sagittarius Eye*. And if you are John Graham, please contact us. We would be very interested in asking you some questions...

The Strange History of John Graham

Text: Allen Stroud

Images: pSyren Farseer, OrangePheonix, Donald Duck

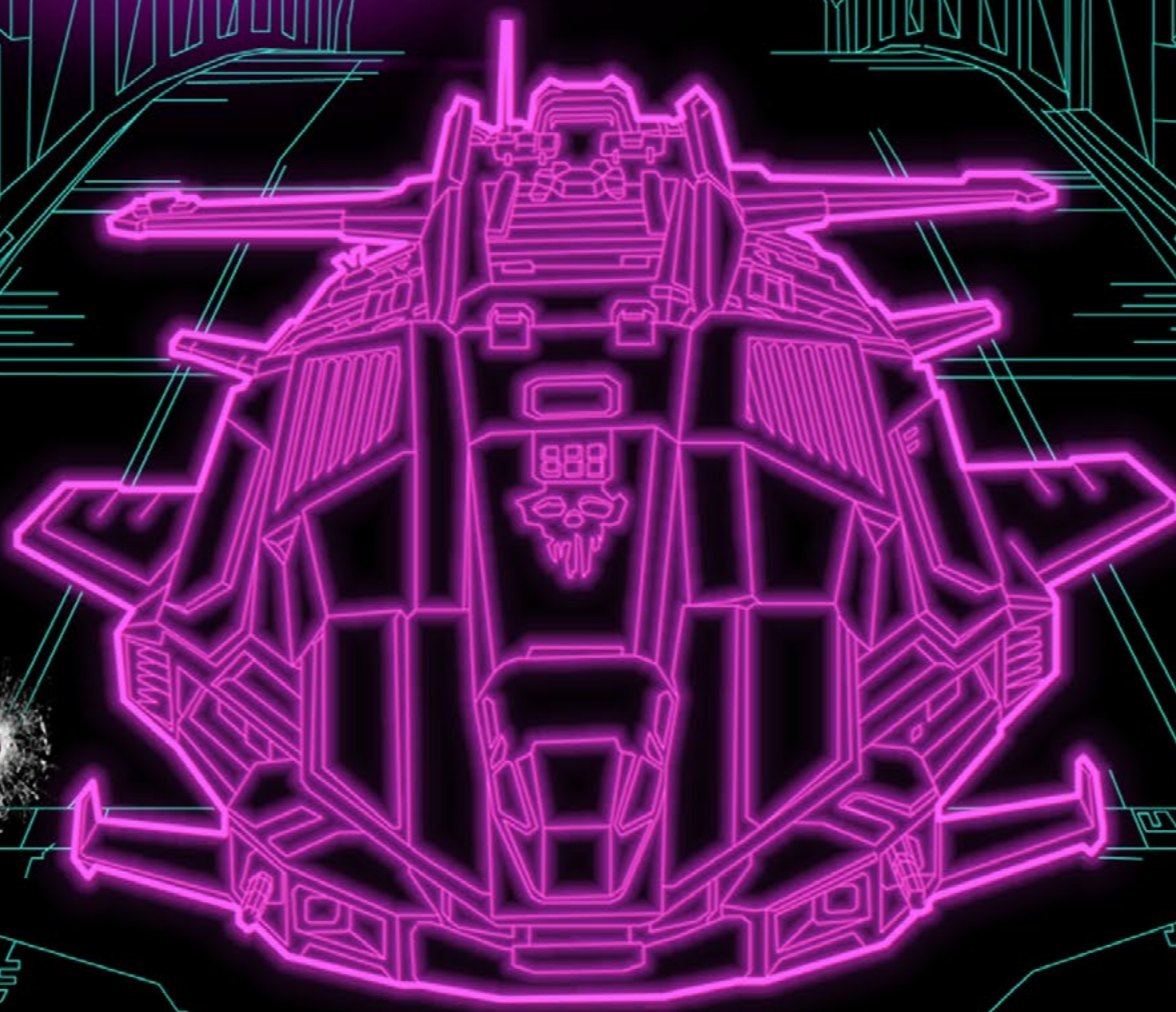
Design: Donald Duck

ISSUE 13 | SEP 3304
SAGITTARIUS EYE



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GALCOP

The Galactic Cooperative

And the Rise of the Independent Pilot

GalCop is a household name in today's Galaxy. Most people know it as the broad union of Pilots Federation factions that has been in the news periodically for the last few years. Those with longer memories know that the name has a richer historical heritage — one that is bound up with the emergence of today's political landscape, and the phenomenon of the independent pilot itself.



The Success of Free Trade

The Old Worlds Coalition was a union of colonies in the core systems that banded together in the last years of the 25th Century. The militia was composed of private merchant ships, ill-prepared for battle, whose pilots lacked the skill or will to fight. During a massive Imperial insurgency in 2498, the Coalition was forced to disband its navy and focus solely on trade and exploration.

Serendipitously, one consequence of the Imperial mandate was the blossoming prosperity of the Old Worlds after becoming the chief producers of hydrogen fuel in the region. As time went on, popularity of Coalition policies began to decline among the citizens in the 27th Century, and in 2690 the colonists of Riedquat seized power from the Coalition-backed off-world government.

The colonists, though, had no real plan for power and Riedquat descended into an anarchy that would last for centuries. The revolution forced Coalition officials to begin making more permissive decrees to prevent additional uprisings.

After years of negotiation, restructuring and legislation, the finished product was the official charter under the first Galactic Cooperative Chief Executive Officer, Hahris Moersven. The Galactic Cooperative of Worlds was officially established in August of 2696.

The core tenets of GalCop were the preservation of member worlds' economic and political independence, minimal membership requirements, free trade, and mutual defence. In contrast to the Federation's and Empire's policies, GalCop employed cooperation and peace to encourage expansion.

However, GalCop's leadership would eventually adopt an isolationist policy that tried to restrict trade routes only

to member worlds. This was quickly condemned by the Federation and the Empire, as these protectionist policies had the potential to destabilise the entire Galactic economy. Despite several warnings from the Empire, GalCop continued to operate in this manner.

Four years into Moersven's administration, GalCop moved its capital to the Lave system and built administrative facilities on both Planet Lave and Lave Station. That same year a space flight training centre was created in the system for citizens of the Cooperative's member worlds in order to operate a new line of ships designed specifically for independent pilots. These were manufactured by Whatt & Pritney and would replace the slower, larger vessels operated by corporations. Its premier ship, the Python, was approved and cleared by GalCop for sale to the public in 2700, and the multi-role platform revolutionized space travel and spurred the rise of the independent pilot.

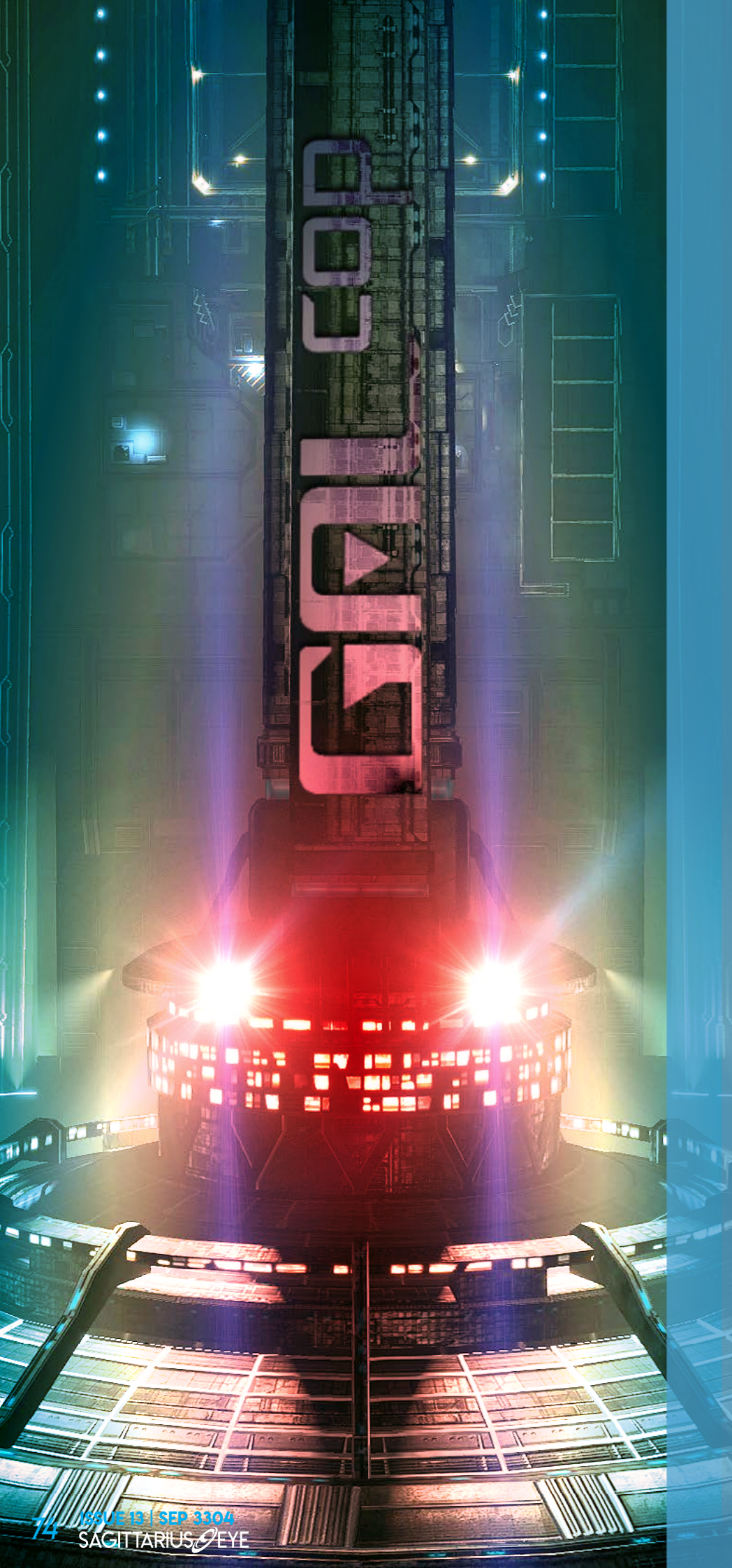
Alien technology is introduced

Beginning in the 2810s, humans and Thargoids began crossing paths within GalCop territory. Initially, GalCop pilots reported disappearances and hyperdrive malfunctions within its borders and near the Pleiades Nebula, only to have their accounts dismissed as 'unfortunate accidents'.

Then, in 2849, an image was leaked in the Lave system showing the wreckage of a ship and a section of mottled hull bearing the word fragment "THARG". With that, the Galactic media coined the term 'Thargoid' as a name for the possible alien life form. Unfortunately, no physical evidence ever materialized supporting the existence of Thargoids, and the idea drifted into the fog of myth and legend. There would not be another, similar attack for two hundred and seventy six years.

“ The Galactic Cooperative of Worlds was officially established in August of 2696. ”





It was in 3125 when two independent pilots discovered two debris fields after their ships were pulled unexpectedly into normal space while transiting to another system. Both survived the interdiction from hyperspace and the subsequent assault by octagonal ships, claiming that an unknown type of laser weapon was used. They chose to refer to their attackers as 'Thargoids' in reference to the 29th Century incident.

After a top-secret report was leaked within the core systems, it became apparent that the Federation's leadership believed that colonists in the Veliaze system had somehow crossed paths with a swarm of Thargoids and had engaged them out of fear – which, in turn, forced the retaliatory strikes.

This would prove a defining moment for GalCop. Its leadership made the decision to work with the Federation in an effort to defend human space from the Thargoids. Both Federal and GalCop Navy forces flew combat missions inside vulnerable systems, which meant that GalCop had to reassign scores of trade vessels to fulfil its military commitment. Hundreds of missions were flown and hundreds of ships were destroyed. Many of the pilots were never recovered.

Allegedly, the capture of a Thargoid spacecraft allowed GalCop's scientists to reverse-engineer the alien drive technology and produce a revolutionary new hyperdrive that far exceeded those previously used for space travel. While this history is disputed, some say this was the precursor to the 'frame shift drive' (FSD), early models of which were on the market by the 3270s, although the

term was not applied commercially until the launch of the Sirius model in 3298 AD.

This innovation allowed for massive human expansion and was of great benefit to independent traders and explorers. Eventually, the technology fell into the hands of the Sirius Corporation, and its engineers significantly upgraded the FSD, selling it to anyone with enough credits.

An interstellar superpower retreats

Fortunately, because of the overwhelming military operation and the INRA's use of its biological mycoid weapon, the Thargoid aggression came to an end in the 32nd Century as the alien menace withdrew from human space.

Data collected from the Megaship *GCS Sarasvati* shows the original war ending some time in the year 3151. During the drawdown, GalCop created a network of deep space monitoring stations – one of which was the *GCS Sarasvati* herself – as a first line of defence against a Thargoid resurgence. The program, known as "Project Equinox", became a logistical nightmare and its cost increased significantly over time. By the end of 3155, members of the program were calling on the leadership to re-deploy the ships in an effort to reduce the expense.

Nearly two decades later in 3172, burdened by massive debt following the war, GalCop and its membership had become fractured. GalCop CEO Simone Hendry had no choice but to shut down Project Equinox on August 16th of that year.

“ GalCop created a network of deep space monitoring stations – one of which was the *GCS Sarasvati* herself.





“ GalCop’s four hundred-year existence was a seminal period in human history that we would do well to remember.”



As the program was being dismantled, mission commander Dr. Cassandra Lockhart discovered that the Thargoids had begun rebuilding their war machine. Unfortunately, GalCop’s leadership never studied her full report as they busied themselves with dismantling the INRA.

By 3170, GalCop had been reduced to only eleven member worlds, all located within the Old Worlds region. The once awe-inspiring interstellar superpower had diminished to the original tiny patch of populated space that had been occupied by the Old Worlds Coalition in 2483.

In a bid to keep the power afloat, Hendry sold off the majority of GalCop’s assets to the Federation and Empire in exchange for access to their trade routes, but it did little to stop the slide into debt and isolation. On August 19th 3174, amid revolution on Lave, the Galactic Cooperative of Worlds’ charter was finally rescinded.

The first GalCop’s existence was a significant period of human history, demonstrating an ambitious and successful exercise in the power of free trade and mutual defence. Its spiritual successor, the Alliance of Independent Systems, was created in 3230 and bears many of the features of its predecessor.

We have much to thank GalCop for: ushering in one of the three great superpowers of today’s Galaxy, defending humanity against the Thargoids, and making possible our own way of life as independent pilots. Its four hundred-year existence was a seminal period in human history that we would do well to remember.

The Galactic Cooperative and the Rise of the Independent Pilot

Text: J. C. Warren

Images: OrangePheonix, Nickweb85, SebastianWehmeyer

Last page art: DMC_Rulez [left], Frontier Developments [right]

Design: LexMoloch

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