

SAGITTARIUS EYE

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US and THEM

WHO ARE THE REAL ENEMY?

FEATURING: UTOPIA • CO-PAWLOT • DISTANT WORLDS 2 • JAQUES
SPACE MUSIC • CRUSADER • UNKNOWN PERMITS • TOP PILOT

NEW!
COMIC

GNOSIS - STRANDED

CHIEF EDITOR	SOUVARINE
ART EDITOR	LEXMOLOCH
EDITORS	ADURNIS, MICHAEL DARKMOOR, MINI_WATTO
SENIOR DESIGNER	MCNICHOLL
LAYOUT DESIGNERS	DONALD DUCK, LEXMOLOCH, MCNICHOLL
WRITERS	ADURNIS, BLUECRASH, BUANZOX, ICARUS MARU, J C WARREN, MCNICHOLL, MICHAEL DARKMOOR, MINI_WATTO, THE_THARGOID, SOUVARINE
FRONT COVER ART	IAN BARISTAN
BACK COVER ART	RUBBERNUKE
SENIOR ARTIST	IAN BARISTAN
ARTISTS	IAN BARISTAN, RUBBERNUKE, TOCOSO
PROOFREADERS	MILLSTONEBARN, VERTICALBLANK
PHOTOGRAPHERS	DASEXORCIST, JOKERGOD2000, NICKWEB85, ORANGEPHEONIX, SEBASTIAN WEHMEYER, STARFOX, ZEROAXIS, WDX
WEBSITE DESIGN	147LOCH
OFFICE MANAGER	CRAIG UCHUU
PODCAST	ADURNIS

THANKS TO:

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Editorial

Michael Darkmoor

With the last month's attack on our offices still weighing on our minds, our losses continue to feel like fresh wounds in our hearts...

One year ago, an interview with Allitnil, humanity's most well-travelled explorer, filled our pages. This month, amidst tales of solo trips to the edge of our galaxy and how plans for much larger expeditions develop, we reflect on stories from that older issue: our first encounters with the Thargoids and vague prophecies of the End of Days. Amidst speculation concerning Aegis and wonder at our lack of understanding for any other sentient creatures, they arrived.

For all of their previously indifferent violence, the Thargoids have taken an acute notice of us due to our persistence over this last year, drawing upon larger and more sophisticated means to deal with this pesky evolutionary influence called Humanity. They have both incredibly beautiful and frighteningly deadly technologies which we, in our youth as a species, barely understand.

Exploring the duality of our relationship with these entities, we interview two opposing mainstream factions – not to determine which of them is right, but to relate their stories so that we may all learn from them.

Ever searching for balance, we try to see all sides and share that perspective for others to appreciate. Humanity's search for identity relies on just such insights as these. We are still but children: experimenting, tasting, grasping at the future and deciding what fate to choose for ourselves. We speculate on why we cannot go to places we can clearly see ahead of us and on those shadowy organizations we perceive as pulling us up short.

Our pursuit of a path into tomorrow also includes emulation of those older, ancient races we find along the way, and in this humans have become extremely adept. As humanity experiments with digital immortality, will knowing how the Guardians' history played out further our own evolution? How does one type of immortality compare to another? The tale of our longest-living citizen might be able to shed some light.

Perhaps as a species, our strength is in our ability to take these many roads concurrently and compare them. From our diversity, a way to reconcile our differences through a common past, or alternately, a wedge to drive away and separate beyond any reconciliation. To aim for the former, humanity uses its art and music to communicate our common emotional ideals. In this issue, for the first time, we review a new and uplifting musical collection inspired by the lives of interstellar pilots as well as present a short illustrated story relating to more tragic current events.

Those of us who have recently lost friends or family members well understand the need to keep moving forward, even as difficult as that may seem sometimes. With all the myriad directions we, as a species, travel, there is but one thing to remember: *forward* is just the direction one happens to be facing when taking those next steps into the future.



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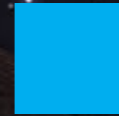
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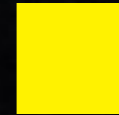
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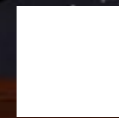
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UTOPIA:

PARADISE AMONG THE STARS?

When the late Simguru Rishi Antal spoke, all who listened were drawn in. The man's words were compelling, spoken with a powerful blend of intellectualism and fanaticism. He spoke of a better Galaxy, one in which humanity's intellect and innovation will create a perfect paradise for every man, woman, and child. From nothing, under his leadership, Utopia grew into an organization with a membership of billions, including many of the Galaxy's most prestigious scientists and philosophers.

His son, Simguru Pranav Antal, is just as compelling. He has pushed further and further to advance his father's mission, such that Utopian membership numbers more than ninety billion strong. Besides his powerful message, his most valuable asset is the assortment of Pilots Federation Commanders who spread his word across the Bubble, working to realise that future paradise.

"We're building a better universe, but there's no place in that world for people like us"

That said, there are many conflicting reports concerning how close to, or rather how far from, the utopian ideal the collective's operations are actually being taken. Rumours abound that dissenting voices within the commune are silenced – often brutally – by the Simguru and his supporters.



The Structure of Utopia

Rishi Antal was a man with a vision. In a society full to the brim with corruption, selfishness, and suffering, he believed that technology could serve as a means to rise above all of humanity's flaws. He began the commune on his own, with no apparent help from the powers-that-be, and through his message brought about shockingly fast growth in the systems he influenced.

When he passed away and his son Pranav took up his title, many believed the commune would inevitably fall apart. Pranav, however, was able to build upon what his father had begun, and expanded Utopia's reach to several more star systems. In less than two generations, the commune has now become a force to be reckoned with, and thanks to its allied Commanders it continues to expand. The premise of this society is simple: through innovation, all human needs can be met, and 'base' desires and impulses can be replaced with elevated, 'enlightened' ones.

In order to create this paradise, Utopian society has been divided into strata. According to Commander DR_Katz, Utopia is not strictly a 'caste' system, but does bear some resemblance to that mode of organization. Social positions include: Enforcers, Dreamers, Redeemed, Citizens, Dissidents, Civilians, and Gurus. Civilians are non-Utopian members who nonetheless fall under the Utopian sphere of influence, but these other strata must conform to a rigid code of piety and good conduct in order to maintain their citizenship. Citizens who violate these standards become Dissidents and are treated harshly until they can redeem themselves.

While this means of segregating members of society may seem backwards and harsh, it's worth mentioning that, unlike well-known cults of the past, Utopians are not insular. They invite all interested parties to their compounds to freely study the advanced technologies they have developed years ahead of their Federal and Imperial counterparts.

That said, there are whispers of foul play and coercion on the part of the Simguru's forces. Several anonymous Utopian citizens have spoken to Gal-Net about people who question or disagree with the Simguru and are then summarily imprisoned and allegedly tortured. Of course, Utopia's official spokespeople always dispute these allegations as unfounded and 'unenlightened'.

Far more interesting are the motivations and intentions of the power behind Antal's dialogue: the independent Commanders allied to his cause.

Seekers of Utopia

Utopian technology is truly awe-inspiring, some of the most advanced that humanity has to offer. When one has some of the greatest minds in the Galaxy working for them, taking great leaps in theory and practice whilst searching for complete technological mastery, truly impressive results can be achieved. Their recent advances in digital mind mapping may eventually lead to a form of immortality akin to that of the Guardian Progressives. One of their currently employed technological innovations is a secure communications network used by Utopian operatives to interact with one another, allowing them to coordinate their efforts and discuss the latest Galactic news amongst themselves.

Thanks to some fortunate connections, this correspondent managed to get onto the network. A strange digital space, it is a combination of technologies akin to the 'Holo-me' multicrew system combined with text-based communication. Utopians and guests of the network such as myself all move about in this virtual space, communicating freely — at least, as freely as the controlling Enforcers allow. We asked to interview some of the prominent members of this community and immediately an Enforcer and overseer by the name of Cmdr *Hawk* corrected us, pointing out that they had no leaders as such, though they admitted that it was “probably true to say that [those considered Utopians or Enforcers] were slightly more equal than others.” Upon providing our credentials, we were given access to a separate press room, as well as a (slightly ominous) promise that we would, by the end of our interactions there, “end up pledged to Antal... To know us is to love us,” according to a smiling Cmdr *Hawk*.

This 'Enforcers-only' space was a very casual sort of sphere, with conversation one might expect among typical pilots. Pilots mentioned going pants-less when working for Antal, for example, and being rewarded for their efforts to advance the cause in units of engine decarbonizer to drink (according to Commander KwahteN, “the bittering agent [manufacturers] added to it in order to stop certain pilots from drinking it is an acquired taste”).

As power representatives, these Commanders spoke fondly of their organization as being a smaller one — they are the few who have pledged their support to Pranav Antal, and as such enjoy more flexibility and the freedom to go off and “think outside the Bubble.”

Even though Zemina Torval is technically the smallest power in sheer number of systems controlled, these Utopians keenly feel the stress, as well as the



How can a group without clearly defined leadership coordinate anything?

unity, of being an underdog. According to Cmdr NAI, their size also allows them to feel closer as a group — “mad as hatters sometimes, but close.”

That is not to say they cannot have a much larger impact when desired. As Cmdr *Hawk* told us, “Last time someone had a pop at [us], [we] fortified every system in three days.” With fewer systems than most to protect, they can protect those systems much more efficiently.

Ex-monarch Cmdr Bashy, a recently deposed ‘leader’ of the group, had this to add:

I think Utopia differs functionally from the vast majority of other groups. In my opinion, this is due to our decentralised control ethos. Ideas fly and become generally adopted because people are inspired by them, not because of who proposes them. We could be seen as a paradox, or a chimera. How can a group without clearly defined leadership coordinate anything? Surely, that just leads to disorganised chaos? But... look at our record of unprecedented feats of organisation and focused effort. Outsiders tend to assume this means there must really be a controlling dictatorial force behind the scenes. I find this saddening, as it suggests people have forgotten the strengths of decentralised power systems. They allow individual talents to shine where they are brightest; and when people act, it is because they are committed to an idea, not because they are shackled to orders like so many others.

The enforcers also spoke at length about their own identities as Utopians, a label they described as ‘universally-applied’ to them. “All of us can really relate to the term ‘Utopian,’” Cmdr *Hawk* said thoughtfully. “Probably because it’s undefined and means something important to each of us, but to each of us something different... What seems to unite us is the tolerances of those differences, supporting each others’ search when needed, and defending a ‘home’.”

Cmdr KwahteN chimed in, saying, “I think our group is kinda like a bumblebee — it shouldn’t be able to work, and yet it does. I like to credit this a lot on our respecting one another’s skill sets and also checking our egos at the door. While we don’t necessarily have leadership (apart from Simguru Antal, of course), we do respect the OG [sic] and the experts. Those who don’t get along... Well, they don’t last long.”

On the other hand, other Enforcers had more practical concerns on their minds. “For me, Utopia is about trying to build a perfect society,” said Cmdr Xargo (who went by the self-proclaimed title of ‘the Mass Murderer’). “We use drastic means to achieve that, so there’s always that philosophical question about whether the



end justifies the means... for us, or at least for me, the answer is clear: 'Yes.'

"We're building a better universe, but there's no place in that world for people like us," Cmdr *Hawk* added, seeming to echo the sentiment.

Xargo picked up on the other Enforcer's mention of that 'better universe': "If I had to say what the end goal is, I'd say to reach a perfect harmony where we wouldn't need any violence to maintain the perfect society; but currently, we are still far away from that. The interesting question is, if that's ever reached, is that the end of Utopia? I mean, if you think that, by definition, Utopia is something that can never be



■ The Enforcer Cannons are special multicannons exclusively available to those pledged to Pranav Antal.

...this is generally seen as brainwashing, but we see it as a spectrum of support services...

reached." This thoughtful, philosophical exploration between the members of the group seemed to be one of the trademarks of every Utopian in the space, if somewhat unexpected by this correspondent.

Of course, the question of dissidents had to be raised. What happens to people who disagree with the Simguru's mission, or deviate from the whole? Commander Chalkie was able to 'enlighten' the uninformed on this point. "What with space being fairly large, it's not surprising that distant individuals and groups can veer off the path of Utopian enlightenment," he acknowledged. "This can be quite gradual, and not really a deliberate act. Once misconceptions have taken hold, it's easy to falsely extrapolate

causes and motivations which are, in fact, far from the truth of Utopia. We call these people 'dissidents'. Dissidents are identified and gathered together in the distant systems and then conveyed to our headquarters in Polevnic for re-education.

Chalkie shrugged. "Outside of Utopia this is generally seen as brainwashing, but we see it as a spectrum of support services ranging from tea, quiche and a sympathetic ear, through group sessions and lectures, and at the far end of the spectrum there is being invited for a chat with Enforcer Zaan." He smirked. "You probably don't want to have a 'chat' with Enforcer Zaan."

Utopian Goals

While the Utopian enforcers are a friendly, jovial bunch (if very cavalier about mass-murder and the torture of dissidents in the name of a future Utopia), they represent a significant force in the Galaxy. When asked about their future plans, the ex-monarch Cmdr Bashy was very cagey. He said, "We have some very exciting news about our long term goals coming soon. We aren't ready to say yet what method or form the goals will take... What we can say is that it is expected to be a major milestone in the history of Utopia."

Already, they have made significant strides in empowering the Utopian faction in their controlled systems. According to one Utopian exile – or 'anticitizen' – Cmdr Rubbernuke, currently an artist with *Sagittarius Eye*: "My goal while at Utopia was to align all of the control systems so they were friendly. That was achieved, and Utopia was the first of the powers to do so." He also revealed that the Utopians "...were the first group to expand outside the Bubble with Taku-rua, Maia and Peregrina," something discussed by others as well. "Pranav has a taste for doing wacky stuff," said Rubbernuke with a grin.

Though they may be dismissed as 'hippies' or 'cult members,' the pilots of Utopia are a force to be reckoned with. Just like those aligned with the Federation, Empire, or any other powerful faction, they are willing to fight and die for what they believe. This reporter's interactions with them revealed a certain 'devil-may-care' attitude, which was interesting for members of a society with such strict ideals. Commanders interested in maintaining a finger on the pulse of the Galactic status quo would do well to monitor the forces of Utopia, for they may very well have a heavy influence on events to come.



Utopia: Paradise Among the Stars?

Text: Adurnis

Art: Rubbernuke

Images: WDX, OrangePhoenix, StarFox

Design: McNicholl



Co-Pawlot name:
Stan

Commander's name:
Buur

Co-Pawlots

This is Cmdr Buur's near constant co-pawlot, Stan. Stan often helps 'navigate'. Here he is, 'helping' with flight operations by sprawling across the Commander's control console.

Do you have a Co-Pawlot you'd like to share with the Galaxy?

Head to sagittarius-eye.com/submissions/ and let us know! Include a picture, your Co-Pawlot's role aboard and a sentence or two about them.

Photo: Buur, OrangePheonix Design: LexMoloch

The **ELITE RACERS:** **UNDERGROUND** *Racing Club*

Within the shadowy underbelly of interstellar trade an exciting sport has blossomed. Created by two simple convoy traders in December of 3300, the Elite Racers club had been a well-kept secret until *SAGi* attended an installation race in the Kappa Fornacis system. This reporter was taken aback by the level of skill and danger involved.

We were inclined to join in and put our skills to the test, but remained, perhaps sensibly, with the spectators outside of the station to view the action from a safe distance. We witnessed pilot, ship, and equipment functioning in perfect harmony together during a contest of both speed and talent.

This highly dangerous and expensive sport has its roots in the Sol system, but has spread out to other systems

as well, including Turbo, Nevermore, DK Leonis, Branglal, Deciat, Epsilon Indi, Kushen, and Slink's Eye. These all have one special feature in common for which race officials search. Each has a number of small planets and moons speckled throughout, adorned with hidden canyons, cutting serpentine hollows through awe-inspiring landscapes. Within the depths of these chasms, the stone and ice are transformed into dangerous race tracks and grand stadiums.

The Elite Racers specialise in 'normal space' racing — eschewing the use of hyperspace jumps, unlike the Buckyball Racing Club's which take in great distances across the Galaxy. Their races are high-octane, competitive affairs, full of adrenaline and the roar of afterburners. They have created five events in which Commanders can compete.



Surface Racing

Canyons become narrow, dangerous race tracks where pilots push the limits of technology and skill. The scenery is wonderful – unless you happen to misjudge a turn – with planets and stars looming around every corner, and the night races add a degree of both fun and danger. It may not be the most publicly-supported event they run, but there's something special about surface racing, and many prefer it to the more technical events. Maybe it's the simplicity of the canyons and the thrill of pitching machine against geography.

Stadium Racing

This is a combat and fighter pilot discipline, held in large settlements on inhabited planets. The high-rise structures with their giant digital billboards are used as gates and markers along a very tight and technical course within the walls of the settlement. Timing is crucial as the pilots rip through the tight turns and thread the needles at nearly every corner. The Eagle is the ship of choice due to its peerless manoeuvrability. When observing one of these races, one wonders whether the local security services have been quietly incentivised to look the other way.

Zero Gravity

Known around the Bubble as Station Racing, 'Zero Gravity' events transform boring Orbis space stations into electrifying race tracks. The pilots start deep within the station and fly full-throttle through the mail slot; several ships are always damaged during the first attempt. From there they fly two laps around the station, circling the smaller two-kilometer ring each lap, and re-enter the station during the first and second lap, the second entry being the finish line. This simple-sounding race is challenging and addictive.

SRV Rally

The Racers also compete in Vodel Surface Recon Vehicles (SRVs), across two events. The SRV Rally is a long-distance endurance race that can be accomplished alone or in a group. The length of the courses ranges from 40 km to 200 km, and the amount of time it takes to complete depends upon the Commander's skill and the terrain. Ice planets add a higher level of difficulty.

This event is a throwback to the ancient Baja Rally held on Planet Earth during the late twenty-first century. The logistical problems the Baja racers faced are similar to those faced by the present-day rally racers on uninhabited planets, as there is no infrastructure available for refueling or repair. We commend the Elite Racers for keeping this event alive.

SRV Cross

Like the SRV Rally this is conducted on the surface, with the difference that the vehicles race through planetary outposts and settlements rather than across barren landscapes, making this event much more technically challenging. It is organised into heats and a short 'bracket' system is implemented for regulation events.

When sixteen to twenty four racers are participating, four or more wings will be formed and races will be run wing by wing. The winner of each wing ascends to the next heat until there are only four racers remaining. These four will go on to compete for the three podium places: first, second and third.

I feel the need...

We at *Sagittarius Eye* love to champion the mad antics of the less earnest members of the Pilots Federation. The Elite Racers have something peaceful to offer humanity in these warlike times, but something no less thrilling than combat.

In our dealings with them, we were won over by their commitment to fun. Like the Buckyball Racing Club, they purvey a particular brand of collaborative good times, their niche being real-time, local, normal-space racing instead of transgalactic time trials.

The times we live in necessarily elevate those skilled in ship-to-ship combat to the heights of celebrity. But screaming down a canyon at four hundred metres per second, wingtips nearly brushing your rivals, and fighting the forces of physics to beat them to victory is no less demanding or skilful... and for some, perhaps, a bit more fun!



Elite Racers: The Underground Racing Club

Text: J. C. Warren

Images: OrangePheonix, Nickweb85

Design: McNicholl

STRETCH THOSE
ACHING LEGS

COME AND FLY

IN A DIFFERENT

KIND OF ATMOSPHERE

Art: ToCoSo



US *and* THEM WHO ARE THE REAL ENEMY?

One of the most surprising movements in the last few months has been the emergence of cogent resistance to the idea that humanity is at war and the Thargoids are the antagonists. Are the Thargoids misunderstood friends or unforgivable mortal enemies?

There has been no shortage in 3304 of crackpot extremists who insist on the Thargoids' innocence over the roar of burning stations. But there have also been more thoughtful voices, quietly questioning the narrative that the likes of Aden Tanner and Zachary Hudson have been propagating. What if the Thargoids are running from something themselves? What if they are merely responding to a greater aggression on our side?

It is well-documented that — at least initially — the starports attacked were those harbouring Aegis bases. Aegis, the cross-power initiative seeking to provide a muscular response to perceived alien aggression, is ideologically similar to the disgraced Intergalactic Naval Research Arm (INRA) — the outfit widely held responsible for Thargoid genocide in the mid-32nd Century.

The Pilots Federation enjoys a unique perspective on the 'war'. While it is not our homes burning and not our habitation rings melted away, we see the damage the Thargoids cause as we traverse the stars. Members of the Pilots Federation have been more animated in their responses to the Thargoid threat than most members of our society — and many would argue, are more capable of a response. They have coalesced around two schools of thought, epitomised by two groups.

The Anti-Xeno Initiative (AXI) emerged shortly after the fall of The Oracle station in the Pleiades star cluster. Their founder, Commander Gluttony Fang, was one of the first to document the station as it lay in ruin following the attack by Thargoids. The group formed as effective anti-xeno (AX) weapons became available, through Aegis, and works to support independent pilots wishing to engage in combat with aliens.

For them, according to Commander 100.rub, a leader, it's "primarily about defending systems and preventing loss of lives." This uncontroversial ambition doesn't accurately reflect the perception the AXI has earned, however — its members are renowned 'Thargoid Hunters', who celebrate their 'kills' in triumphant holovids and whose top scorers are lionised. They have come to glorify killing in the same way the early Pilots Federation did by the creation of the Elite ranking system.

Hate Aegis, Love Thargoids (HALT) emerged somewhat later. Reports emerged that a Commander TruffleShuffle was interdicting ships carrying anti-xeno weapons and attacking them, citing the 'Far God' as his inspiration. Despite he and his acolytes being swiftly written off as crackpots, HALT has coalesced as a remarkably consistent and disciplined force in recent months.

“ Innocent people do not deserve to die or lose their homes just because some activists want to ‘give peace a chance’.

Find something you can agree on

Even if the groups' nominal *raison d'être* are diametrically opposed, they are surprisingly in chorus with regard to one topic. "[Aegis] is the one to have brought the Thargoid apocalypse to humanity," asserts TruffleShuffle. "Thargoids are not hostile — they disabled our ships temporarily and scanned us, then let us be. Aegis took the antagonistic route."

The AXI also distance themselves from the cross-power initiative, telling *Sagittarius Eye* that they are in no way affiliated with Aegis and have not been associated with them for most of 3304. Cmdr Gluttony Fang considers it possible that the Thargoids are merely acting instinctively, and that Aegis may be responsible for instigating the conflict. AXI has even joined with other groups in combined operations, such as Expose Resist Rise, whose stated goal is to rid the galaxy of Aegis.

The air around Aegis is undeniably fishy. It is often observed that the Thargoids target those systems where it has or had a significant presence — perhaps because the aliens somehow know that Aegis represents the arrowhead of human resistance; perhaps because they associate them with the INRA.

And what of the notorious transmitters?

Both HALT and the AXI believe Aegis itself is directing the aliens towards specific targets using human-made devices, which are placed suspiciously near stations that later come under attack. "The attacks on the incursion systems are a misdemeanour, a lure by Aegis with their transmitters," says TruffleShuffle. "If HALT can stop [Aegis] from planting those transmitters, we are all for it," 100.rub of the AXI commented.

However, even within the AXI the thinking on these devices varies. "Maybe whoever is behind the transmitters is also on the trail of whatever it is the Thargoids are looking for," Commander Synoxys muses, "and is using the transmitters to hinder the Thargoids' progress."

The enemy of my enemy

Dislike of Aden Tanner appears to be where the agreement between HALT and AXI ends, however. Both groups have a sworn enemy. For the AXI, it's the Thargoids. For HALT, it's the AXI.

HALT have been known to attack any commander found to have anti-xeno or Guardian technology installed in their ships, even going so far as to fire upon those being *targeted* by alien ships. Whilst they do engage other humans, they purport to have rules of engagement to nullify asymmetrical scenarios against "Alien Killers". One such rule is to only engage with equal forces, ensuring that a solo alien hunter would never

be intentionally interdicted by a wing of HALT pilots. HALT members consider any ship outfitted with anti-Thargoid weaponry as hostile. In most cases, they warn the offending pilot to depart the area before engaging. Naturally, their targets are often the AXI. "If they want to take down Aegis, they should attack Aegis, not the people who are defending the innocent," complains 100.rub.

The AXI aren't taking the attacks lying down. Gluttony Fang continues to be an outspoken opponent of Thargoid sympathisers, maintaining that they are criminals guilty of treason against the entire human race. He has spearheaded the creation of a special division within AXI to "specifically combat the emergence of human opposition to the AXI cause."

Humans killing humans, over Thargoids.

What about the bugs themselves?

The theory of many AXI Commanders is that there is something much larger and more horrifying than the Thargoids pushing them into our space. While this theory isn't overburdened with evidence, it could be posited as reason enough to try coexisting with these adversaries.

For most AXI pilots, though, the damage has already been done. Many believe that the Thargoids gave up any chance of living in harmony with humanity when they launched their first attacks on human settlements. "Innocent people do not deserve to die or lose their homes just because some activists want to 'give peace a chance,'" insists Synoxys. "The enemy is the alien menace, not fellow man."



The two groups have been in sporadic conflict for months now, wherever a Thargoid attack seems imminent on a human settlement. "We always [fight them] in human space, where Thargoids have no right to be," says 100.rub.

The key, it seems, is why the Thargoids are here at all. On this, there are surprising consistencies between the groups' thinking. Commander St1nkfist of HALT believes the Thargoids are reacting to humanity pushing into systems previously seeded by them millenia ago. "As usual, humanity thinks it's the top dog with rights only applying to them", he said. Gluttony Fang, too, often contemplates whether the Thargoids are just revisiting the planets they seeded (a practice the Guardians documented). 100.rub observes that they tend to target only systems containing ammonia worlds. "They see those systems as their own, and humanity as weeds that grow on them."

The Real Problem

Humans have fought and killed each other for tens of thousands of years for far less valid reasons than the ones separating the AXI and HALT.

On one hand, there is a group that defends humanity from a menace that threatens the lives of humans in entire solar systems. This isn't an existential threat — humanity numbers into the trillions, and the dead so far number in the thousands — but it is a scale of threat we as a species haven't faced before.

According to some, a single human life taken at the hands — or claws — of an alien race automatically sets that race on an unalterable path to extinction with no hope of compromise. While there may be individuals in AXI endorsing this extreme position, most feel it is a sacred duty to protect the interests of humanity only where the two species come into conflict.



Those on the other side of the coin see these beings as mostly benign, but becoming less so due to human activities. They would try to understand rather than destroy these sentients. There is evidence to support this claim: Thargoid weapon systems have improved significantly over the last year since that first station attack, when humans began their hunt. HALT believes that the only way to prevent further misunderstanding and escalation is to have humanity stop the concentrated violence from their side.

The Thargoids are unlikely to go extinct any time soon. Nor will humanity. As unrealistic as the idea is of stopping all Thargoid/human confrontation, the basic premise of understanding the adversary enough to find some small island of common ground is compelling.

Whether the Thargoids are searching for something or not, it seems they're being manipulated. The mysterious transmitters found near attacked stations need to be fully investigated and addressed.

The fact that these skirmishes tend to result in even better weapons and tactics on both sides with relatively few losses to each species might be an indicator of something much larger at work. Perhaps preparing both groups for a greater challenge ahead, as if in some cosmic game of chess.

As to that simple question whether Thargoids are friend or foe: perhaps another label more accurately describes us all.

Pawns?

Us and Them: Who Are The Real Enemy?

Text: Icarus Maru, Michael Darkmoor, Souvarine

Images: OrangePheonix

Title Art: ToCoSo, Ian Baristan

Design: LexMoloch

• Distant Worlds 2 • Engineering an Expedition

Part 2

With several months to go before the launch of Distant Worlds 2 (DW2), the signup and registration process is ongoing and the initial route planning is complete. There is a sense in and around FleetComm Headquarters that things are coming together. ▶



“ We have several large scale science and exploration-based projects in the works that we intend to incorporate into the event.

We talked earlier this summer with Qohen Leth about the registration process and the reasons for opening the sign-ups for the expedition so early. For our next look into the planning process, we went in search of the mastermind of the endeavor, Erimus Kamzel. We find him engrossed in nailing down the final waypoints.

Early registration gave us time to look at what kind of roles Commanders were most interested in, and as a consequence we got an early understanding of what sort of events and projects we needed to incorporate into DW2 to get the best results from those roles.

Distant Worlds 3302 (DW 3302) began in the Pallaeni system with around 1,300 participants and covered a route travelling over 81,500 light years, finally arriving at Beagle Point on the far side of the Galaxy. Over the four month expedition, crews stopped at twenty three waypoints, gathering to trade news or interesting finds and to provide support and camaraderie for one another over the long journey.

Whilst the differences between the two excursions might seem negligible at first glance, Erimus explains that there is much more going on under the surface, with a great many more people involved this time around:

DW2 is probably going to be one of the most ambitious community-created events so far undertaken. We understand that it's going to be the largest expeditionary event ever, with over 3,100 Commanders currently signed up. Primarily, [the difference] is the idea of providing logistical support for large carriers and megaships using in situ materials. Additionally, we hope to have at the core of DW2 a community goal that further facilitates the need for miners and prospectors to take on pivotal roles during the journey.

Prospectors played a significant part during DW 3302. These 'Resource Acquisition Teams' (RATs) scouted in advance of the main fleet for concentrations of materials used to synthesise the FSD range boosting fuel nicknamed 'jumponium'. Their early work documenting the planetary geology of the Galaxy is something that the organizers of DW2 hope to expand upon.

We have several large scale science and exploration-based projects in the works that we intend to incorporate into the event. These include a continuation of the Galactic Mapping Project, as well as other efforts like The Scientific Surveyor Project, the Trans-Galactic Metallicity Survey, and The Geology Project.

While the Galactic Mapping Project is well known in Pilots Federation circles, The Scientific Surveyor Project is a new effort intended to catalog a wealth of statistics on star systems and worlds visited during the voyage. It will take some of its data from the Trans-Galactic Metallicity Survey, led by Commander Satsuma – which is working to advance our theories on galaxy formation by comparison to real world observations – and The Geology Project, led by

“...we got quite a few requests from explorers volunteering to help look for and scout out interesting waypoints for the expedition.”



Commander MadRaptor, which documents types and locations of volcanism found in the Milky Way. Additionally, the science and resource acquisition teams will be on the lookout for rumored 'environmental space anomalies' which have been reported but remain, as yet, unverified.

To get a jump on things, Erimus created a series of regional maps back in April this year, and asked interested explorers to help search these areas for possible waypoints. The 'Scouting Event', as it was referred to, ended on 1st September and comprised thirty volunteers who found fifty possible sites along the paths to and from Beagle Point. Erimus says:

When we announced DW2, we got quite a few requests from explorers volunteering to help look for and scout out interesting waypoints for the expedition. We had a rough idea of what regions the DW2 expedition would pass through. Although only a few of these will be selected as official waypoints on the itinerary, some of the others will become optional 'places to visit' during the expedition.

With the journey expected to cover well over 200,000 light years in the round trip to and from Beagle Point, it is estimated that there will be around fifteen major waypoints along the outward bound leg. For those familiar with the original Distant Worlds, perhaps as many as five of those stops will be used again in covering that first 75,000 light years. Erimus explains that the route back will be somewhat longer.

The journey home will cover a further 125,000 light years, as we'll be skirting the far outer rim of the Silentium region for a considerable distance.

“ The journey home will cover a further 125,000 light years

As many as twenty other waypoints along the edge of the Galaxy will be required for the trip home. The selection process for these is specific, as Erimus explains:

They needed to be along the approximate route and not too far off the path we intend to travel. Secondly, we asked scouts to look for visually interesting locations; worlds within or close to nebulae, planetary nebula systems, black hole or neutron star systems with interesting planetary bodies. These could be anything such as giant stars or supergiants with close orbiting worlds, potato (or Plutonian) worlds, ice worlds with striking features, and geologically active locations (geysers or fumarole sites). And lastly, we took into consideration the possibility that mining may be required, and therefore interesting resource gathering sites should also be included in the waypoint selection process. For example, systems that included ringed neutron stars, ringed Earth-like worlds, ringed stars or proto-stars, worlds with perpetually illuminated ring systems, or any other interesting or unusual mining locations.

Over the next couple of months, the submitted sites will be visited and evaluated to ensure they meet the requirements and are not too far off the intended path. Whilst there is no typical characteristic for every waypoint, the diversity of sites selected will be in keeping with those of the original Distant Worlds.

Ideally, there should be as large a variety of locations as possible: visually, geologically, and hopefully scientifically too. On Distant Worlds 3302 we were blessed with some fantastically diverse locations acting as waypoints and base camps and we'd like to emulate or better that for DW2 ... There will hopefully be opportunities for large scale industry and resource-gathering events.

Once the list of waypoints becomes official, the route map is expected to be posted publicly with the expedition itinerary to follow soon after. Confirmation from the Pilots Federation on funding for both the megaship and the community goal has yet to be received, but it is anticipated that the final version of the itinerary will be provided later this year.

For more information on Distant Worlds 2 as well as regular updates on the progress of the expedition, visit [the page on the Pilots Federation Forum](#).



“ On Distant Worlds 3302 we were blessed with some fantastically diverse locations ... we'd like to better that for DW2.

*Distant Worlds 2:
Engineering an Expedition - Part 2*

Text: Michael Darkmoor

Images: Zer0axis, StarFox, DasExorcist

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: FleetComm Discord, Erimus Kamzel, Dr. Kaii, Frontier Forums



COVERING EVERY ANGLE

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The Mystery Of the Unknown Permits

It is common knowledge that certain areas of the Galaxy are inaccessible with no way of obtaining the associated permit. This leads many to pose the question: why are they locked?

Nobody knows how to obtain the mysterious permits required to visit these systems. Some of the best-known areas are near the Bubble, like the Regor, Col 70 and Cone sectors — the latter of which was much-covered in the news last month. There are also individual systems famous for their unknown permit locks, such as Polaris.

The Col 70 Sector

Sometimes known as the 'Col 70 Wall' due to the large volume of space it envelops, this is a region that divides the Bubble and the Pleiades sector from areas such as Barnard's Loop and the Orion Nebula. Exploration of the region can be strenuous and time consuming, as one is forced to go around these areas. Numerous pilots have wandered into Barnard's Loop while exploring the fringes of the sector, usually without an exit plan and only the one asteroid base in PMD2009 48 to make use of.

“ Numerous pilots have wandered into Barnard's Loop while exploring the fringes of the sector, usually without an exit plan



Regor Sector
Regor Sector

“ Speculation has led many to believe that the mystery of the Guardians could be tied to the Regor Sector...

The Regor Sector

This is a region of space located next to the Bubble which cannot be navigated by the ship's computer. All attempts to fly there meet with failure, and explorers often have to plot around it. It is not known why frame shift drives refuse to allow access, but speculation has led many to believe that the mystery of the Guardians could be tied to the Regor Sector, due to the region's proximity to the Guardian ruins. The Regor Sector was also one of the first locked sectors to be discovered by pioneer explorers.





■ Companion to early travellers

Polaris

Polaris — also known as the ‘North Star’ — was used as a fixed reference in the heavens by navigators on the seas of ancient Earth. For an unknown reason it has been locked for longer than anyone seems to remember (covered in an earlier issue of this magazine). Any attempts to jump to this system are met with a unique message: “A jump lock to this system has been denied.”

It is a mystery why Polaris was locked in the first place, however conspiracy theorists suggest that it could contain Thargoid technology hidden away by the INRA. Rumours abound that they are said to have satellites monitoring Thargoid ships and a hypothesized ‘portal’ in the system.

It is also speculated that there could be human activity in the system: conjectures range from unethical scientific experiments to secret military activities.

“...popular conspiracy theories suggest that it could contain Thargoid technology hidden away by the INRA.”

HIP 22460

HIP 22460, much like Polaris, requires a permit. This system, however, is listed as a Federation Corporate High Tech system controlled by the Pleiades Resource Enterprise. Word has it that the megaship *Overlook* resides within. Similarly to Polaris, some theorise that there is a Thargoid base or other technology located in the system.

“It may never be known what is happening within these blocked-off areas of space.”



■ Explorers are eager to reach behind the permits

A JUMP LOCK TO THIS SYSTEM HAS BEEN DENIED.

What is really going on?

It may never be known what is happening within these blocked-off areas of space. It is possible, however, that one day they may be opened up. It may be the fabled Raxxla itself in the Polaris system, or in any one of the many permit-locked systems out there. We may never truly know what goes on in these places, at least not until the locks are either lifted or circumnavigated. Until then, the speculation and mystery concerning these systems will no doubt continue.

The Mystery of the Unknown Permits

Text: Icarus Maru

Images: OrangePheonix, StarFox

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: Node, Lyrae

THE GALAXY'S TOP PILOT

BEAGLE AND BACK WITH INARA'S NO. 1 RANKED COMMANDER



Pilots Federation-rated Elite in four disciplines, including CQC Arena, Commander JOKERGOD2000 is something of a high achiever. He is an Admiral in the Federation Auxiliary Navy, a King in service of the Empire, and holds the number one honoured spot in Inara's ranks. This month, SAGi caught up with the Galaxy's top performer at the culmination of his greatest journey.

The Pilots Federation has ranked you Elite in trade, exploration and combat. What drives you?

I like to be the best in everything I do. And yes, I climbed to the number one spot in Inara rankings of independent pilots, too. I'm not proud of the insider trading, or the killing I did to increase my net worth. I am proud of being the best.

In the Arena, where I am known for flying the Imperial Fighter, gaining the Elite title from the Pilots Federation was just another notch at the time. When I am not melting the hulls off of other Commanders in the CQC arena I'm in my lovable Anaconda. She's the one I call Rainmaker.

65,590 is a large number. Why did you make the trip to Beagle Point?

Believe it or not, ninety percent of the reason for the trip was to get the 65,590 ly from my starting system on my ship's log. Since I was a kid, looking up at the stars, I wanted to go to Beagle Point. 65,590 ly from my birth system near Sol, I travelled past Beagle Point in a ship that many started calling the JumpAconda.

#	CMDR	COMBAT	TRADE	EXPLORATION	CQC
1.	Jokergod2000	Elite	Elite	Elite	Elite

How do you feel, being as far away from your problems as it's possible to be?

It would feel good, but I wasn't running from any problems. I carry top ranks in the Empire and Federation. As a King and Admiral, I find the President will talk to me directly. President Hudson hasn't gained a lot of my confidence though — his policy of reducing taxes may have helped him gain support in the election, but his 'freedom at any cost' is too Machiavellian for this veteran. I miss Jasmina Halsey.

Did I mention amassing over a hundred billion credits? With my rank and bank balance, I don't have any problems. Whoever said you couldn't buy happiness didn't know where to shop. My wife fancies french toast soaked in the rare yolk of Aepyornis Eggs. You would think the yolk would be bigger, inside a three-meter egg — but it's what she fancies with her Ethgreze Tea. Our whole house is stocked with rare trade goods. Not too hard to come by when you buy them by the ton, for Christmas gifts to friends.

A lot of voyagers with the itch to see the stars engineer ships to take them further and quicker. Getting the credits together for the parts came from blood money. Out of all the ships in my dock, this JumpAconda explorer took the most engineering. A lot of science for power management is required to fly it, with its 327.7 ly boosted range.

Once I could properly fit her with the Guardian frame shift drive (FSD) tech, I took the JumpAconda out of storage, and loaded up repair limpets, the surface recon vehicle (SRV), ammo and fuel. I logged into a program called Neutron Router to assist in my plotting.

Where did you set off?

I began in Sol for some nostalgic reasons. I have a lot of love for the music and movies out of that system — more Earth culture than Mars. I felt the Mars stuff had too many political undertones. Wish I could have lived in the pre-Mars era. There really was an innocence that we don't have today. Imagine, if your only real worry was global warming! I can't help but grin whenever thinking about it.

I needed to do one flight test before my voyage out. I landed on Mercury to test what I like to call 'lowish-gravity landing', because my stripped-down 5D thrusters and 1D power distributor could make landing tricky without the ability to boost out of a flight error.

You know the joke: "If at first you don't succeed, don't sky-dive." Landing without boosters is like that. Everyone says escape pods can be trusted. But, there aren't many Commanders coming out of planet-impacted escape pods without some type of head injury. You can damage your whole body, but a hard bump to the head changes a man forever. Landing tests complete, I fired up the FSD and headed to Jackson's Lighthouse.



“ I like to be the best in everything I do. ”



Only two jumps and warning lights were going off. My vintage flight control was the root of the problem. Buttons wanting to double-tap — not something you want to do when locked into scooping the tail of a neutron star! These old refurbished Anacondas are workhorses that need a lot of care. I should have spent extra money on a better flight stick for this heap.

Warning lights flashing, I was forced into an emergency stop. I reacted quickly, shutting off non-essential loads to get enough power to turn on the auto field maintenance unit (AFMU), repairing my canopy while fighting to find the exit point. I made it out with only 20% hull damage.

My powerplant took a beating, though. In the back of my head I heard the fictional Montgomery 'Scotty' Scott shouting, "I'm giving her all she's got, captain!" He was a 'dour Scot' who could handle anything.

Swinging by Jaques Station for repairs, I made mental notes on mistakes not to make twice — just like in my early days as a pilot. I sold off all of my cargo racks because I thought AFMUs were a better thing to fill your hull with.

This module swap almost cost me my ship, and my life.



This module swap almost cost me my ship, and my life.



JOKERGOD2000 aboard one of his ships



His favourite Anaconda, Rainmaker

What happened?

I'll get to that. I had reached Colonia in my JumpAconda, and Beagle Point didn't seem that far beyond.

It was a hell of a slog, with only my ship's Earth movies to keep me company. I was suffering the beginnings of 'space madness' without major incidents to distract my mind from the 'honk-and-scan' repetition that comes with distance exploration. But other than a few 90+% FSD malfunctions causing a bit of premature powerplant wear, nothing needed attention.

An unexpected tourist beacon popped on my navigation screen: Memorial to Zy, Zylo, Zylophone. After traveling all this way, figured I would satisfy some curiosity. I low-waked into the beacon and started to scan, totally forgetting to throttle back when I dropped out.

My 518 ton Anaconda was no match for the mighty tourist beacon; it was like the Titanic dragging across an iceberg. I hit the 'all stop' button, and surveyed the 50% loss of hull the beacon had ripped from my ship.

The collision dragged me back into reality, in a very sobering way. I immediately started to mitigate the damage. Fortunately, I had a plan for all possible eventualities. And this plan involved synthesizing hull repair limpets! Sliding over to the right panel and selecting hull repair limpets, I suddenly realised the error I had made.

The AFMU for cargo swap?

Yep. While it's true AFMU units with zero weight can be activated as needed, and therefore might seem more useful than empty cargo racks, at least one cargo rack is required to hold the limpets you synthesize.

Ahh... So you couldn't hold any limpets, despite having ample AFMUs.

Bingo. I was on my own with half an Anaconda left to get me home. I imagined my hull leaking blood the color of the HR 7221 Wheat. My ship had taken an awful beating.

So I did what any other Commander would do: I landed on the closest planet I could find and took a photo. I'd like to think it was better than the typical 'Asp in front of something' we are forced to look at in all those explorer journals. But I guess everyone thinks their ship is unique and different, because it is theirs.

I squeezed the trigger on my camera, keeping the sparks from my damaged ship out of the frame, hiding the shame and folly of the beacon impact. My next ship hull will be made out of the beacon's metal. It is a mystery how they withstand the damage.

Anyway, OEVASY SG-Y DO was only a handful of jumps from Beagle, and after the long haul from Sol, it was the quickest part of the journey. Despite having more than a 78 ly effective jump range I had to synthesize an FSD boost to make the jump.

Finally arriving at the furthest point from Sol, I did the same routine as before: land on a low-G planet and take a photo. I was amazed how dim the Milky Way had become. I knew light traveled slow, and I was effectively looking into the past. My trip home will put me back in time, before the light I was viewing from the stars today.

My wife told me not to think too hard on the science part. She said her dad told her "there are entire mental institutions filled with people who think too much."

And with that, I thought: 'Huh, I guess I go back now?'



The Galaxy's Top Pilot

Text: Bluecrash

Images: Sebastian Wehmeyer, JOKERGOD2000, OrangePheonix, Zer0axis

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: JOKERGOD2000

THE NEUTRON HIGHWAY

IT'S NO GAME

TAKE YOUR CHANCES
RIDE YOUR LUCK
JUST BE PREPARED
BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE OUT THERE

NO ONE'S GONNA HOLD YOUR HAND

ALLIANCE

CRUSADER



3 304 has proven to be a productive year for Lakon Spaceways. After straying into new territory by releasing the Alliance Chieftain, a medium-sized heavy fighter, they capitalised on the successes of their endeavour with the release of the Alliance Challenger — a heavy gun platform. Now, appearing to adhere to the age-old philosophy that good things come in threes, the Alliance Crusader has been released a short time after its announcement. Can the final third of the trio live up to the success of its siblings?

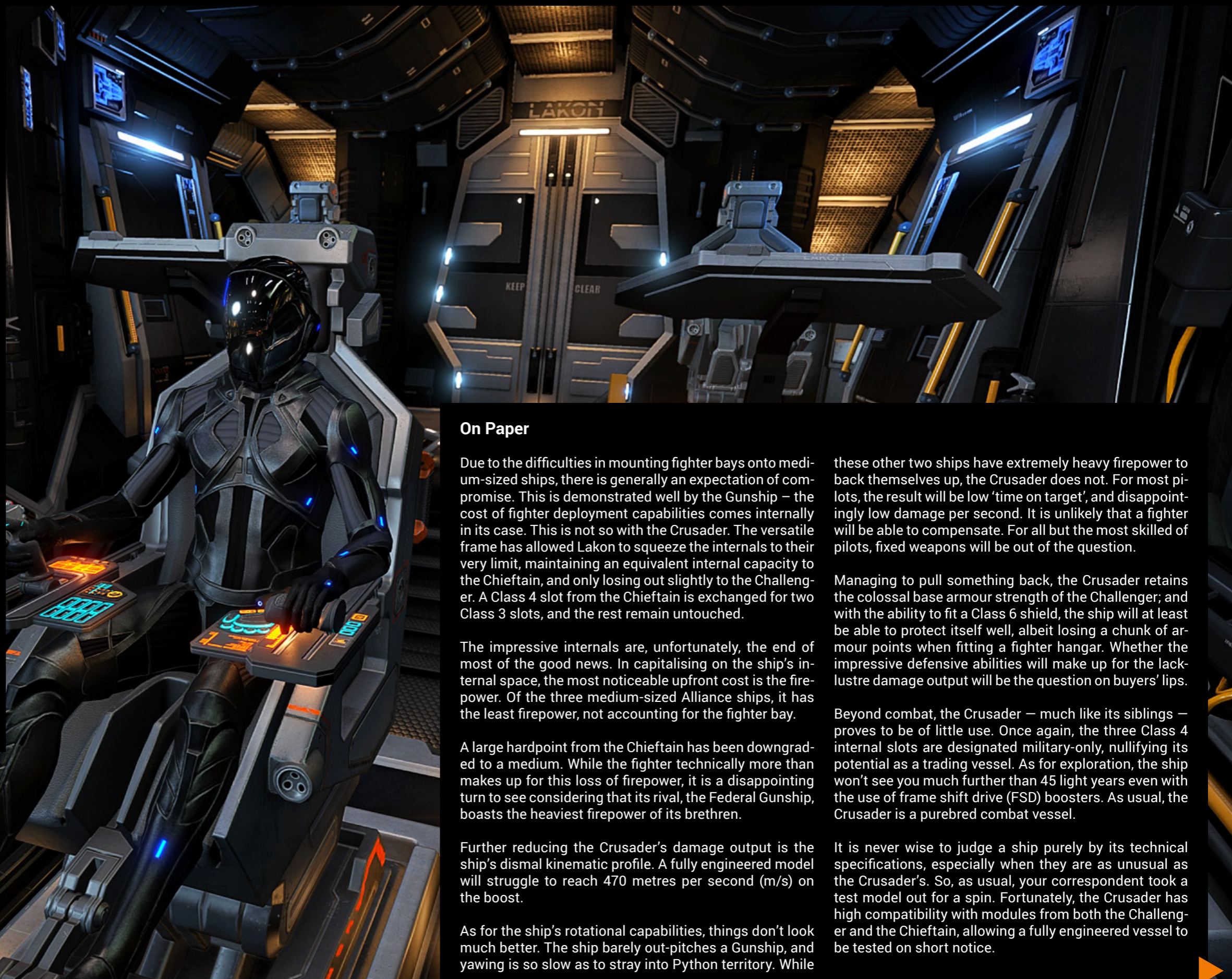
If You Didn't Break It Last Time, Change It Even More?

In developing the Alliance Challenger, Lakon realised that the key to success in ship development is to build on that with which you have already succeeded. A lesson learnt, and proudly demonstrated, by Core Dynamics a couple of years ago with the development and release of the Federal Assault Ship and Federal Gunship. By modifying the basic chassis of the Federal Dropship, Core Dynamics was able to quickly and cheaply produce two effective new combat vessels.

It makes sense then, that rumour mills were murmuring of the Alliance's answer to the Federal Gunship. The Chieftain bears many similarities to the beloved Federal Assault Ship as an agile heavy fighter. The Challenger on the other hand is much like a Dropship, being more heavily equipped at the cost of some kinematic capabilities. The only piece missing is the Gunship equivalent; a heavily armed ship capable of deploying a fighter.

Now, just a few months after the initial release of the Chieftain, comes the Alliance Crusader. With the ability to mount a fighter bay, the rumours have been proven right: it seems Lakon do have an answer to the Gunship. With high bars to reach set by the Chieftain and Challenger, it's time to take a closer look.

While the ship has significant potential in the hands of a crew of three, its performance otherwise is sub-par.



On Paper

Due to the difficulties in mounting fighter bays onto medium-sized ships, there is generally an expectation of compromise. This is demonstrated well by the Gunship – the cost of fighter deployment capabilities comes internally in its case. This is not so with the Crusader. The versatile frame has allowed Lakon to squeeze the internals to their very limit, maintaining an equivalent internal capacity to the Chieftain, and only losing out slightly to the Challenger. A Class 4 slot from the Chieftain is exchanged for two Class 3 slots, and the rest remain untouched.

The impressive internals are, unfortunately, the end of most of the good news. In capitalising on the ship's internal space, the most noticeable upfront cost is the firepower. Of the three medium-sized Alliance ships, it has the least firepower, not accounting for the fighter bay.

A large hardpoint from the Chieftain has been downgraded to a medium. While the fighter technically more than makes up for this loss of firepower, it is a disappointing turn to see considering that its rival, the Federal Gunship, boasts the heaviest firepower of its brethren.

Further reducing the Crusader's damage output is the ship's dismal kinematic profile. A fully engineered model will struggle to reach 470 metres per second (m/s) on the boost.

As for the ship's rotational capabilities, things don't look much better. The ship barely out-pitches a Gunship, and yawing is so slow as to stray into Python territory. While

these other two ships have extremely heavy firepower to back themselves up, the Crusader does not. For most pilots, the result will be low 'time on target', and disappointingly low damage per second. It is unlikely that a fighter will be able to compensate. For all but the most skilled of pilots, fixed weapons will be out of the question.

Managing to pull something back, the Crusader retains the colossal base armour strength of the Challenger; and with the ability to fit a Class 6 shield, the ship will at least be able to protect itself well, albeit losing a chunk of armour points when fitting a fighter hangar. Whether the impressive defensive abilities will make up for the lacklustre damage output will be the question on buyers' lips.

Beyond combat, the Crusader – much like its siblings – proves to be of little use. Once again, the three Class 4 internal slots are designated military-only, nullifying its potential as a trading vessel. As for exploration, the ship won't see you much further than 45 light years even with the use of frame shift drive (FSD) boosters. As usual, the Crusader is a purebred combat vessel.

It is never wise to judge a ship purely by its technical specifications, especially when they are as unusual as the Crusader's. So, as usual, your correspondent took a test model out for a spin. Fortunately, the Crusader has high compatibility with modules from both the Challenger and the Chieftain, allowing a fully engineered vessel to be tested on short notice.

CRUSADER



Power Plant
 Thrusters
 Frame Shift Drive
 Life Support
 Power Distributor
 Sensors
 Fuel Tank



Class 6
 Class 5
 Class 3
 Class 2
 Class 4 (military)



Hardpoints
 Large
 Medium
 Small
 Utility



Outfitting

Based on existing knowledge of how similar ships handle, the Crusader was given a loadout of five overcharged multicannons, with a mixture of incendiary, corrosive, and oversized rounds, maximising the weapons' effectiveness against a range of different damage resistances. Occupying the medium hardpoint was a feedback cascade railgun, in order to disrupt enemy shield cell operation.

Also, a carefully chosen variant of fighter was loaded into the Crusader's hangar. Specifically, the Aegis F variant of the Taipan. The reason for selecting this particular model, along with the high damage per second (DPS), is the usefulness of its point defence. One of the most common causes of fighter destruction is seeker missiles, a threat heavily reduced by its defensive loadout. This also provides a degree of missile protection for the Crusader itself, as the fighter rarely strays too far away from its mothership. Railguns also prove a significant threat, but the bulkiness of the Taipan compared with the Gu-97 or the F63 gives it more survivability.

The flight model is reminiscent of a Gunship and sees a similar benefit from disabling flight assist.

In the Flesh

Immediately upon seeing the ship, one notices its heavy resemblance to the Chieftain. While the Challenger employed significant alterations to the basic frame, such changes are absent from the Crusader. The only major change to the ship's appearance is the addition of a rear spoiler, a seemingly popular choice among manufacturers nowadays. What purpose this serves is unclear, as no mainstream manufacturer has yet installed atmospheric avionics software into commercial ship models.

In the cockpit, familiarity oozes from every panel. Lakon have employed their usual reassuring style here. Of note is the addition of an extra crew seat, allowing two crew members to join the pilot in both the fighter pilot and gunner roles. Given the disappointment in some technical specifications, this is an advantage that prospective buyers should put heavy consideration into. If one will not frequently have crewmates available, the ship's potential is dramatically reduced.

Upon taking off, it becomes clear that the Chieftain resemblance is very much superficial. The responses to moving the flight stick are sluggish at best, and the top speed is woefully low. The flight model is reminiscent of a Gunship and sees a similar benefit from disabling flight assist. Doing so allows drifting strafe runs to be achieved with relative ease, and correctly-timed boosting can allow the ship to perform better in more dangerous environments such as asteroid fields. Bounty hunters should note, however, that hunting in a resource extraction site (RES) remains a particularly dangerous endeavour, and a keen eye must be kept on the scanner to avoid straying into the rocks.

A RES was indeed the first destination for the Crusader's field test. With just one crewmate, at the controls of the Taipan, the aim of the test was to accurately simulate the experience of the average bounty hunter.

A Real Test Arrives

A wanted Anaconda with two Vultures in wing is a challenge for any combat ship. Their total combined bounty was almost half a million credits, and with all three ships ranked at dangerous or above, this would prove a worthy test for the Crusader.

Due to the agility of the Vultures, the decision was made to target the Anaconda first. Opening up the multicannons while the fighter laid down fire, the entire wing quickly turned on the Crusader. Though the Class 6 bi-weave shield provides decent protection, it was no match for the wing's combined firepower, collapsing quickly after engagement. With shields down, the Anaconda let loose salvos of seeker missiles in an attempt to rip apart the hull and weapons of the Crusader. This strategy was foiled by the point defence of the fighter, whose pilot had been instructed to stick close to the mothership.

After 'cascading' two of the Anaconda's shield cells its shield could resist the multicannons no longer, and finally collapsed. With the Crusader having already lost a worrying 18% of its armour integrity, your correspondent was relieved when precise targeting of the Anaconda's power plant lead to a lucky break. The ship's reactor exploded before the hull integrity fell below 60%.

Danger however was far from past, as the pair of Vultures continued their vicious assault. After destroying two fighters and continuously managing to evade having their shield cells 'cascaded' due to the Crusader's low manoeuvrability, the dangerous decision was made to bring the fight into the heart of the asteroid field. The clustering of rocks meant that the Vultures' ability to circle would be hindered. Eventually, one of the bandits had a high-speed impact with a particularly large asteroid, destroying it instantly. With only one target remaining, employment of boosted strafe runs allowed enough damage to be laid down to finish the fight.

The victory came at a great cost: the fight had reduced the Crusader's armour integrity by almost 30% and caused significant damage to the module reinforcements. Some stray missiles that made it through the point defence managed to damage two of the multicannons to the point of frequent malfunction and had cracked the cockpit canopy; a weakness inherited with the frame. With more wings of pirates arriving in the RES an early exit was made, the crew no longer trusting in the Crusader's ability to survive in the long term.

Of note is the addition of an extra crew seat, allowing two crew members to join the pilot.

Anti-Xeno Capabilities

Originally, the intention was to test the Crusader in the field against one of the weaker variants of Thargoid interceptor. However, due to the less-than-stellar performance in the RES, it was deemed too dangerous without heavy backup, which wasn't available.

Thargoid vessels are notoriously agile and they boast extreme damage output through a variety of offensive means. When engaging them, it is advised to bring heavy firepower and a lot of defence. Due to the poor manoeuvrability of the Crusader and its low level of firepower, it is likely the ship would struggle against the interceptor-class Thargoid ships. A more suitable choice for AX operations would be the Challenger, with its superior agility and more versatile and powerful hardpoint loadout.

Verdict

The Crusader is a perplexing development of its class. While the ship has significant potential in the hands of a crew of three, its performance otherwise is sub-par. In adding the ability to deploy a fighter, significant compromises have been made in both firepower and agility. While on paper the fighter provides a hefty damage buff, the inability to maintain damage output from the ship itself combined with the weaker set of hardpoints will generally cause a net loss of offensive capability.

In the hands of experienced pilots skilfully disabling flight-assist, and the right weapon loadout, the ship has more potential, but the skill barrier for this is quite high and doesn't provide a huge reward. Including a fighter hangar also decreases the hull integrity compared with a Chieftain or Challenger, further reducing survivability. The ship clearly is aimed at those with a lot of combat experience, and perhaps provides a cheaper alternative than the Gunship for those confident enough to fly it.

While the Crusader is therefore not suitable for most pilots, it is clear Lakon is willing to experiment with its technology and to produce more niche ships than previous entries. Whether after this third development they will continue to work with this overall successful chassis, or even on combat vessels at all, remains to be seen – but the rumour mills remain quiet for now.

Alliance Crusader

Text: Mini_Watto

Images: OrangePheonix, SebastianWehmeyer, StarFox

Design: McNicholl

The Life of Cyborg War Hero Bartender Jaques

One of the more eccentric members of the spacefaring community, not content to own a fleet of ships or set up an engineering base, Jaques has retrofitted a space station to explore the Galaxy. His remarkable life created the cyborg we know and love today.

Centuries ago, Jaques was entirely human. He lived in the Federation, was down on his luck, out of work and on the Federal employment assistance program. In those times you had to work hard to avoid the draft, as Federal-Imperial relations were much more hostile than they are today.

Jaques failed the initial medical required by Federal mandate, but rather than send him back to society, they transformed him into a cyborg and drafted him into the 'Quinentis fourteens'. This, at the time, was a pioneering medical and engineering procedure. Most people who underwent cybernetic enhancement suffered from numerous undesirable side effects and disfigurements. However, Jaques' procedure was relatively successful, and he was sent to join the war effort.



After a number of sorties in service of the Federal Navy, Jaques was captured behind enemy lines at the Battle of Hell's Gate over 300 years ago. Despite the Valhalla Treaty, which protects prisoners of war from mistreatment and requires their human rights to be observed by the capturing power, Jaques and his compatriots were interrogated and essentially taken apart by the Imperial engineers and surgeons.

Imperial engineering was significantly less advanced than that of Federal Navy at the time, just as the Federation lacked the ability to perform the magnificent feats of genetic manipulation that the Imperial surgeons had mastered. The testament to these procedures were the Manipulates that the Empire used during hostilities against the Federation: genetically altered soldiers that were smarter, faster, stronger, and more capable of surviving hazardous terrains and environments.

The Imperial engineer-surgeons did however manage to reassemble Jaques. They fixed most of the damage he had sustained during the battle where he was captured, with some superficial additions.

Some fifty years later, Jaques was scheduled to be part of a prisoner of war exchange. The paranoia surrounding the opposing powers' duplicity made the Federal generals uneasy once they discovered that Imperial surgeons had been tinkering underneath Jaques' hardware. They were concerned that a dangerous plague or disease could have been implanted inside him. Due to his extended lifespan, quarantine wouldn't be sufficient, so he was left in Imperial hands for the duration of the war.

Jaques was captured behind enemy lines at the Battle of Hell's Gate over 300 years ago.

Once the Governor's peace had been negotiated and had settled in the Core Worlds, all that stood between Jaques and his freedom was negotiating a price with the Federal Navy, relieving him of any contract. Jaques was top of the line military tech: as one of the first successful military cyborgs a hefty price tag was assigned for his release. The Imperial Navy had their say in the matter, demanding he pay for their upgrades and repairs! His freedom was bought with hefty debt.

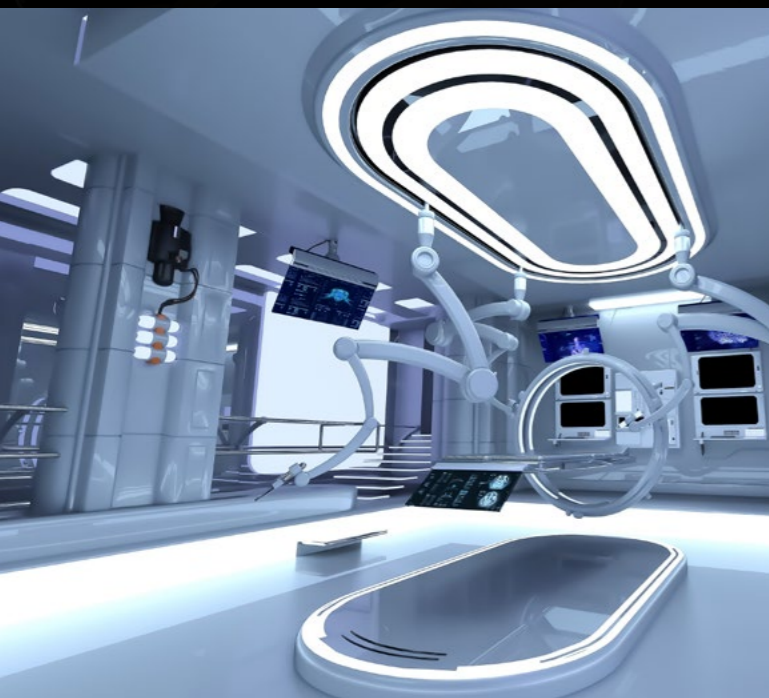
Two years after Jaques left the prisoner of war camp, a nasty disease manifested itself within his organics. The source of the sickness was unclear, but the potential for it to have been implanted by the Empire was very real. Physicians rectified the problem, but the personal cost to Jaques was significant.

It took over a hundred years for him to work off his debts

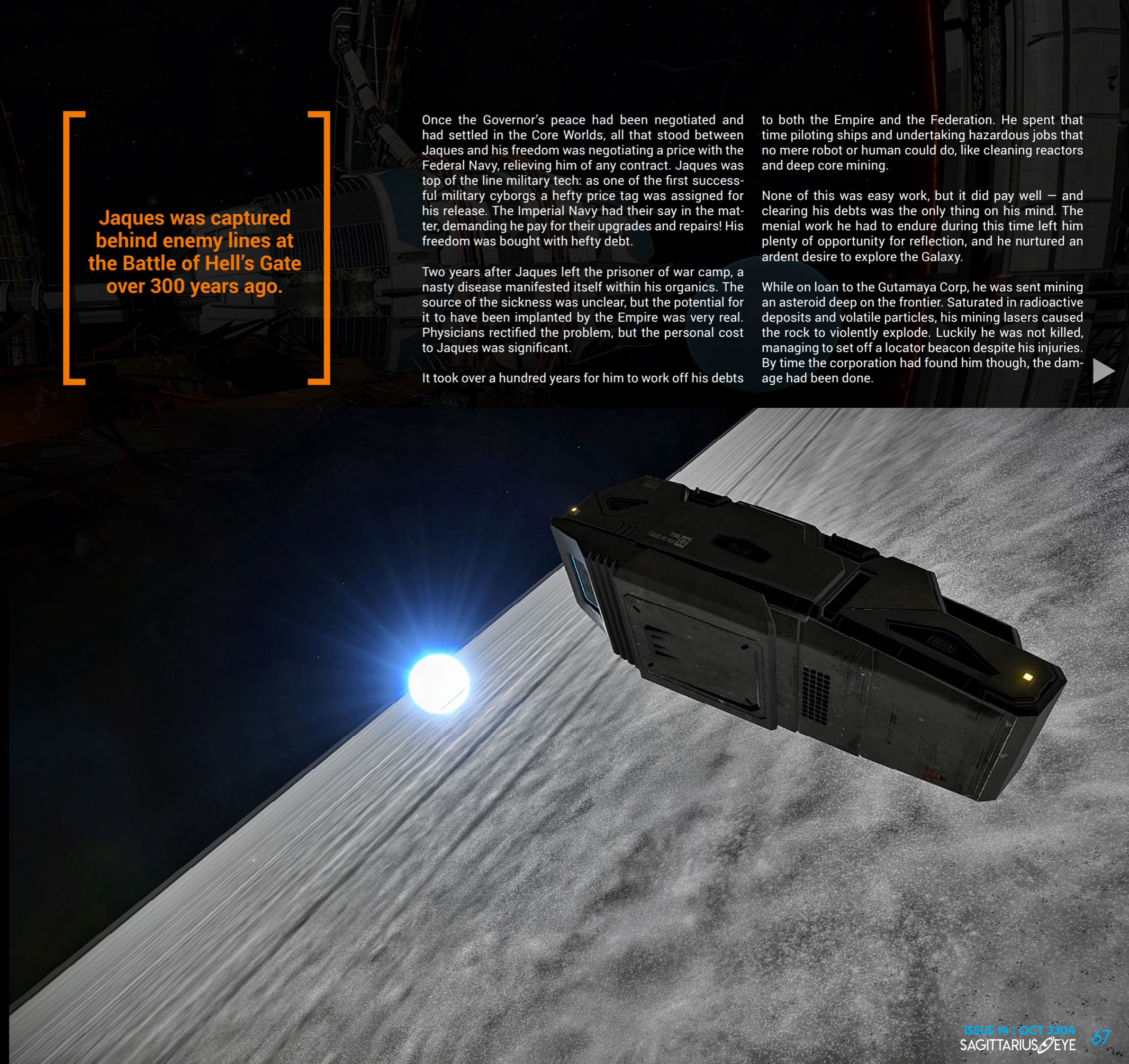
to both the Empire and the Federation. He spent that time piloting ships and undertaking hazardous jobs that no mere robot or human could do, like cleaning reactors and deep core mining.

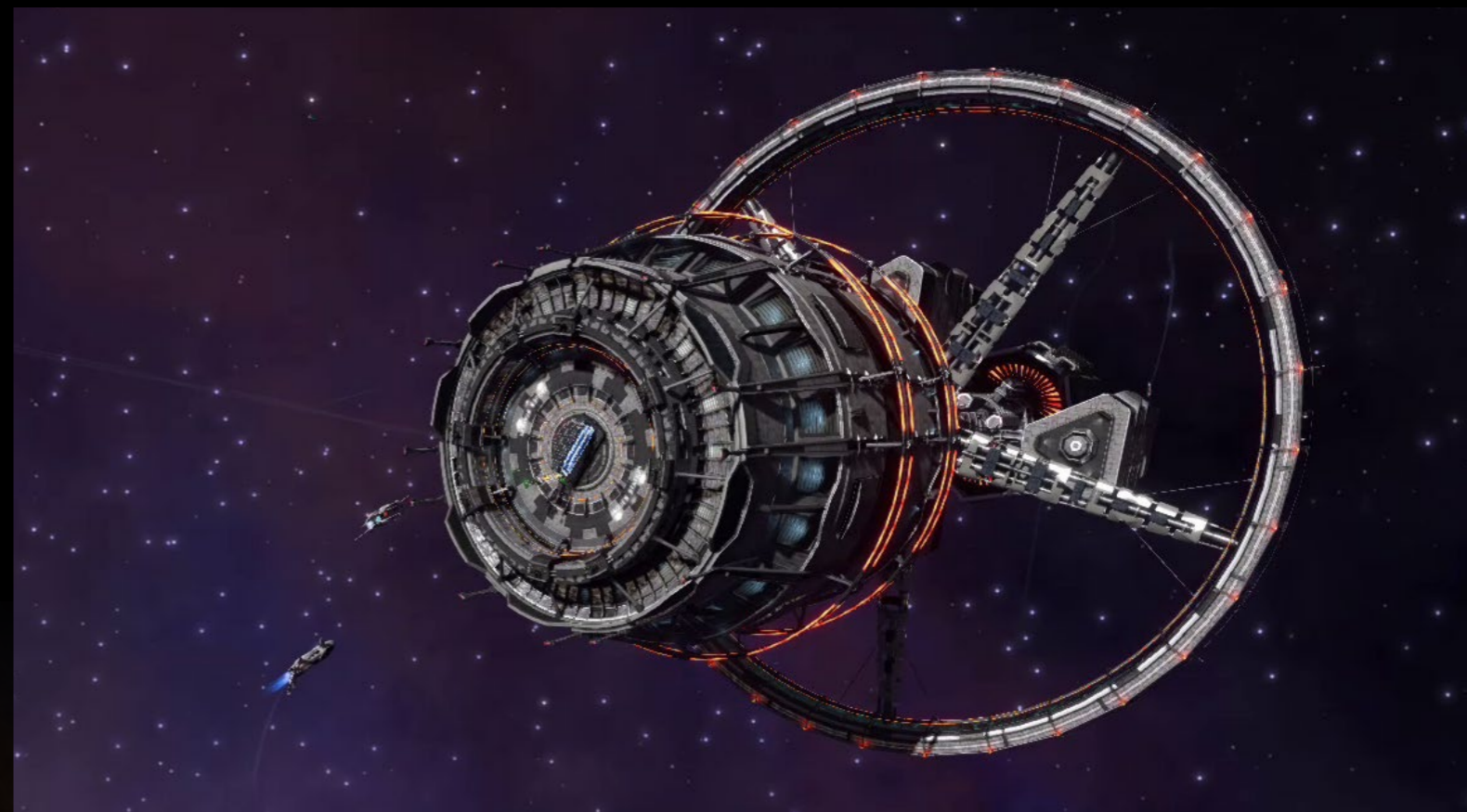
None of this was easy work, but it did pay well — and clearing his debts was the only thing on his mind. The menial work he had to endure during this time left him plenty of opportunity for reflection, and he nurtured an ardent desire to explore the Galaxy.

While on loan to the Gutamaya Corp, he was sent mining an asteroid deep on the frontier. Saturated in radioactive deposits and volatile particles, his mining lasers caused the rock to violently explode. Luckily he was not killed, managing to set off a locator beacon despite his injuries. By time the corporation had found him though, the damage had been done.



■ The Imperial engineer-surgeons' operating theatre.





The accident caused Jaques to lose the use of both his legs. Moreover, he couldn't simply install new legs — due to radiation-related damage to parts of his brain, he wouldn't be able to walk.

One may wonder why, after all this, a battle-hardened Federal Navy cyborg chose to settle on Peters Base, in the Empire. He is recorded to have said:

“That’s the place to go in the Empire if you need anything mechanical — and returning to the Federation wasn’t an option still. The best mechanics in the Empire in those days inhabited Topaz in Facece, and it was the only place with decent engineers.”

When plans were drawn up for a new orbital station

located around Topaz in the Facece system, he asked to be included in the project. To his surprise, he was offered a post manning a bar on the new settlement.

He began his career as a bartender by steadily saving his paycheck, maintaining one of the most unusual bars in any orbital station. The lifestyle suited him — always a social character, he had been forced to spend a great deal of his existence alone. The bar enabled him to be with people again, even if only serving them.

Three hundred years have passed since Jaques was first employed in that bar — which is a lot of time to save up. Not only has he bought the bar, but the station itself. As soon as he was able, he fitted the station with a hyper-drive module so that he might explore the Galaxy.

Not only has he bought the bar, but the station itself.

When the station upgrades were finished, Jaques put out an advertisement on GalNet calling adventurers and explorers to join him on the exploration journey of a lifetime. That journey lasted forty-two years.

In 3302 he decided to attempt what he saw as the ultimate journey. He wanted to take his station as far as it could go: a jump some 65,000 light years to Beagle Point, at the time the furthest reachable system from Sol.

Well, I've been wandering the Galaxy for over forty years now, and the truth is that after a while, travel starts to lose its allure. You've got to remember, I've been alive for several centuries. The things that used to excite you just sort of ... lose their spark. I thought a long-distance leap might rekindle my enthusiasm.



■ The Facece system, with New America in the background.

Jaques appealed to the Galactic community to assist him by supplying the essential fuels for the epic journey.

However, during the appeal a number of Thargoid Sensors were smuggled onto the station, causing widespread malfunctions. Nevertheless, Jaques was determined that the jump go ahead. When the time came for the jump to Beagle Point, the station vanished without a trace.

After a period of silence, a broken message was received from the missing starport:

"... witch-space ... drive engines ... station infrastructure intact but ... we are ..."

Commanders waiting on the arrival of Jaques at Beagle Point reported no sign of him. After several days of tense waiting, the search for Jaques Station began.

On the 28th June 3302, the lone pilot Commander Cly found Jaques station, entirely by chance, in a nebula in the EOL PROU RST D3-94 system, almost 22,000 light years from Sol. It seems through Thargoid Sensor interference the station suffered a series of misjumps entering witch-space, appearing in several unknown systems before landing abruptly in the nebula.

Jaques Station was heavily damaged on exiting the jump, and a community effort over several weeks enabled the station to be partially repaired so that it could function again. Cargo holds full of meta-alloys, power generators, tantalum, structural regulators and energy grid assemblies were delivered in separate campaigns throughout the summer of 3302.

The plight of Jaques Station captured the imaginations of the exploration community in a way that has not been seen since the Distant Worlds expedition of spring

3302. Hundreds of independent pilots saw in the distant, stranded station the opportunity for an entirely new settlement, far from the Bubble.

Over the following two years, an extraordinary effort has been made to colonise and equip the region with supplies, colonists, stations and equipment. It is now known as Colonia, and Jaques Station is now the centre of a second human Bubble nearly half way between Sol and Beagle Point.

Jaques' Bar — located in Jaques Station, formerly 80 DD-D 774-CE-2 and formerly to that, Peters Base of Facece — had a metal track running through it enabling him to move around, performing his duties. The bar has long since been retrofitted to better serve Jaques as the owner of the station, but a small liquor cabinet is still present for distinguished guests.

War hero, cyborg, and now pioneer — it is unlikely we've heard the last from this most remarkable of bartenders.

Cyborg War Hero Bartender: The Life of Jaques

Text: The_thargoid

Images: OrangePheonix

Jaques Art: Ian Baristan

Design: LexMoloch

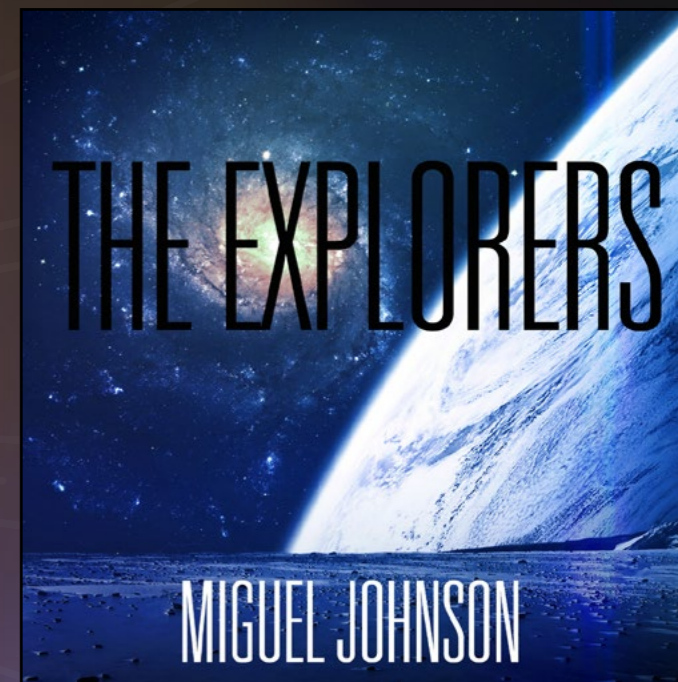
JUST YOU
YOUR STICK
THE WIND
AND THE
CHALLENGE

Art: ToCoSo



ELITE RACERS

THE EXPLORERS



The *Explorers* is the third full-length recorded album from Miguel Johnson, a Commander and composer. Its twenty-two largely-instrumental tracks are inspired by the deep space travels of itinerant starship pilots.

Entirely self-taught, Johnson's work is impressive in its range and scope. Given the specificity of this album's inspiration, one of the most striking things about it is its variety: Johnson is clearly confident marshalling a wide range of styles and sounds. If there's one unifying feature of *The Explorers*, it is a breathlessly filmic, cinematographic quality that permeates every track. It could easily find its place as the soundtrack of a high-budget holovid.

The titles for each track give experienced pilots an idea of what to expect. The threatening, jarring dissonance of *Alien Planet* will be reminiscent of any trip to one of the mysterious Thargoid structures, while *The Guardians'* pulsing, tribal urgency perfectly captures the feeling of stepping on the undisturbed ground of a long-dead, exotic people.

If *The Explorers* were a holovid soundtrack, this reviewer's favourite track, titled *Dark Passenger*, would accompany the scene in which the disillusioned hero stalks moodily in the rain, mulling over his mistakes. The wails of the traditional electric guitar, thick with reverb, are hauntingly lonely.

Some tracks shudder with orchestral majesty, like *Colonia* and *Jump Scan Scoop Jump*, while others tiptoe across piano keys with haunting delicacy, such as *Longer Way To Go*. You have to be in the mood for the quieter tracks.

Whilst music written about exploration might seem, at first glance, niche to some, *The Explorers* is a full and compelling gamut of styles and moods well worth your time, making all your interstellar travels feel like part of an epic space opera.



GALNOTE

Your Life, Your Theme

<https://migueljohnson.bandcamp.com/album/the-explorers>

G N O S T R A N D E D

STORY & ART: JAYCE REVEUR
ALL IMAGES SUPPLIED BY THE
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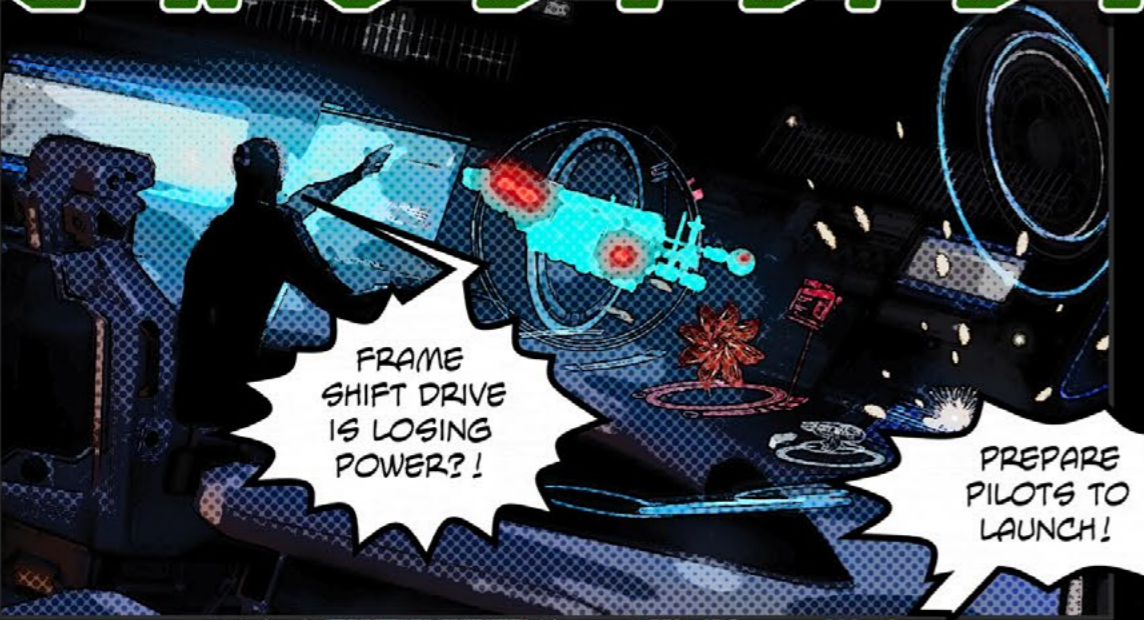


issue
#1

YOU
READY FOR
SOME
ACTION?



IT SOUNDS
LIKE HELL UP
THERE MAX!

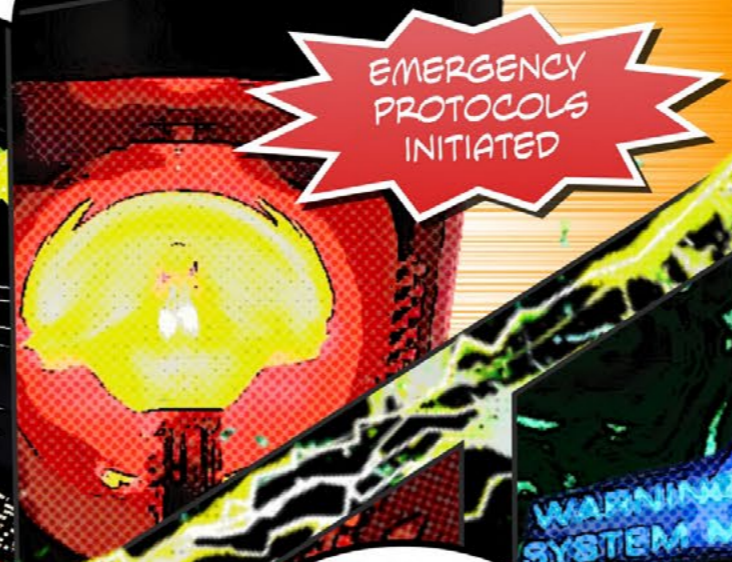


FRAME
SHIFT DRIVE
IS LOSING
POWER?!

PREPARE
PILOTS TO
LAUNCH!

I JUST
SAW THAT
SURGE HIT!
ARE YOU
OKAY?

CANOPY BREACH
DETECTED



EMERGENCY
PROTOCOLS
INITIATED

WARNING! UNKNOWN
SYSTEM MALFUNCTION

ZZZAP

DONT
FORGET TO RUN
COLD AND DUMP
YOUR ALLOYS
MAX... I'LL TAKE
THE HEAT!

IT WAS OVER BEFORE IT EVEN
BEGAN...

...AS IF THE
GODS
THEMSELVES
HAD CAST US
TO THE
STORM



MAX! I MADE IT OUT
BUT...

HELL DIDNT EVEN BEGIN
TO DESCRIBE IT

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DREAMING THE JINME



THERE ARE NO SIDES.
ONLY HUMANITY.