

SAGITTARIUS EYE

ISSUE **16**
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GAME OF POWERS

ALSO FEATURING:

INDEPENDENT DEFENCE AGENCY • RARE COMMODITIES
DIFFERENT HEROES • CO-PAWLOTS • KNOW YOUR STATIONS
GRAN TOURISMO • PROJECT DYNASTY • DEEP SPACE SURVIVAL
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Editorial

Michael Darkmoor

Every so often, a few pieces of information come to light that don't quite fit into the set picture of the Galaxy we create in our minds. Sometimes, our vision gets clouded due to our inability to process all we see before us. It takes painstaking research, attention to detail, and exceptional drive to consolidate the high-energy neutron stream of data the universe produces into something that is logically consistent and understandable. Fortunately, some of the finest researchers and writers available in our Galaxy have made the commitment to provide you, our much-appreciated readers, their insights and stories.

One of the many problems any news agency must overcome is the unfortunate truth that not all information is available to everyone in the data stream of general human consciousness. Much of it is compartmentalised from the masses and this tends to surprise us when it finally emerges into the public eye. Many organisations, including the major powers, rely on a wealth of hidden knowledge to elevate themselves or deceive their adversaries in order to gain territory, personal advantage, or economic influence.

On the other hand, as we continue to add to our specific knowledge of beings like the Thargoids and the Guardians, there seem to be so many little tidbits floating about that it might require a dedicated specialist, singularly devoted to a concentrated course of study, to understand it all.

In this month's issue, we try to tease out a portion of the underlying 'big picture' by taking what is popularly known and summarising some of the important segments. Then, with a dash of the unusual to add a little colour, a dab of logical leaping for flavour, and a sprinkle of visual artistry from our photography and design teams, we hope to raise new questions leading to further discoveries.

Perhaps these new queries will uncover still hidden pieces of the puzzle or, for those already known, help narrow down their positions and relationships in that 'big picture'.

Here you will find handy guides to Thargoid combat and to the different types of space station. You'll find investigations into what is known about the galactic powers and certain secret projects meant to continue the legacy of humanity. We share information on the newest ships and how our viewpoint changes as we progress through the Galaxy. For fun and for the vacation-minded, we have a piece on tourist destinations and a rather cryptic crossword conceived by the devious minds of our very own Commanders Mini_Watto and Alec Turner.

Be it gaps in our knowledge or pieces that don't quite fit correctly into the puzzle, the clues are out there to decipher, to discover, to understand. We only have to find them.

Thank you again, dear reader, for taking this journey with us.



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Too bad for the Federation.



BRINGING TO AN UNDISCOVERED GALAXY

Getting a start as an independent commander is one of the most daunting challenges anyone can face. The learning curve is quite steep and very few ever make it to the prestigious heights of Pilots Federation Elite. For a fresh-faced pilot straight out of flight school, with only a thousand credits and a Sidewinder Mk I to their name, the Galaxy seems an unfriendly and — ultimately for many — deadly place. One commander-led organization is out to change all of that: the Independent Defence Agency.



“ They are a small but growing militia of fifty commanders who are out to make a big difference.”

It's the kind of organization that makes the average cynic or anarchist's blood boil. Their business is making the Galaxy a better place. That's it. There are no ulterior motives, no subtle schemes for getting rich off of tax breaks, and no ties to the notorious 'Club' — at least, none that this correspondent was able to track down when he was given access to their communications network for an interview.

The network itself is an illustration of their altruistic mission: several channels with helpful information for new members, with the majority of the remainder designed either to assemble groups or to enable audio comms — in fact, this correspondent counted more voice channels than

text channels, something he's never seen anywhere else. According to their public statements they are a small but growing militia of fifty commanders who are out to make a big difference.

To determine whether the group lived up to its lofty ideals, your correspondent interviewed several of its prominent leaders: Commanders Leo Jaleo, Minty, MrWackyGuy, and Araly. Each of these was either involved in the creation of the group or joined shortly thereafter to facilitate its growth.

The start of the IDA

What are the main goals of the Independent Defense Agency?

MRWACKYGUY: The general and overall purpose of the IDA is to protect human civilisation throughout the Bubble. This includes the more conspicuous objectives such as fighting Thargoids and terrorists, but also things such as training other pilots.

We train pilots to become proficient in combat, and also [offer them a broader] understanding of the Galaxy. We can't exactly force someone to be friendly and thoughtful (as that would be counterproductive by nature), but we can at least try to leave a good impression and hope that they will, in turn, help others in the name of the IDA.

Treating people impartially without favouritism or discrimination is one of the core values of this group and is something that I believe in strongly as our leader. Everyone deserves a chance or two. This is why, whether as a small faction controlling a few systems or as a superpower, the IDA is (and will be) about helping people both directly and indirectly... by providing a structure that enables fairness within the population.

MINTY: We have a simple yet challenging mission: to make human-occupied space a safer place to live. Whether you are a trader, explorer, or miner; an Imperial, Federal, or Alliance pilot or anything in between, we are willing and able to help.

That's quite an ambitious set of goals, and seems very countercultural no matter where you're coming from. How did an organization like this get started?

MINTY: The IDA began as the brainchild of Cmdr Spacefood. His clear vision of making space a better place led him to advertise on the Pilots Federation recruitment boards for like-minded individuals to come together and help defend traders at community goals. It wasn't long before a small group of us were helping out moving between trading events all across the Bubble. It became quickly clear that we could offer our assistance both to new commanders just jumping into their first Sidewinders as well as veteran pilots looking to try a career change.

“ It's the kind of organization that makes the average cynic's or anarchist's blood boil. ”

MRWACKYGUY: We grew slowly at first, but due to a successful campaign we saw a massive influx of new members. We were unable to control [the organization as it expanded]; the core of the group became overwhelmed and many of the founders left. When I say we weren't able to control it, I mean that the group was going in a direction we didn't like, and we couldn't organise anything in our capacity at that time.

In response, we overhauled the group, changing the name and adding important additions to our core values. We also added an 'Evaluation' process and removed many members who did not fit in with us. This is what formed the IDA as we know it today.

ARALY: If I remember correctly, I joined the group as Wacky was searching for people to recreate it, and I helped... the other first members in welcoming people, building a new network, and constructing a new community.

LEO JALEO: For me, it began after [my ship was destroyed during] a community goal and I found a leaflet whilst recovering in the hospital wing. Then, after passing the assessment with Admiral Minty, he referred me to our captains, Nugstar and Riddled, who took me under their wing. They taught me everything I now know about combat and engineering, and now I'm sharing that knowledge with other commanders as a captain myself after many, many years.

In reaching this point, what are some of the challenges that the IDA have faced and continue to face?

MINTY: As with any community looking to improve the conditions of the Bubble, we can attract the attention of some pilots who like things the way they are. That is to say, they don't take it too kindly when we help those who would otherwise fall prey to one of their schemes.

We also take frequent excursions into Thargoid-occupied territory to try and keep back the alien menace. This can bring its own challenges, from finding equipment to effectively combat them, to finding commanders willing to risk their ships and their lives. We are looking to develop a quick reaction force (QRF) that can, at a moment's notice, deploy to any current event in the Galaxy and provide aid. However, the logistics behind this is a challenge in itself. On a (more humorous) note, we often get mistaken for Operation IDA (pronounced Eye-Da) — they are great people with whom we have open communications. They are dedicated to restoring space stations back to glory if a Thargoid attack breaks through, so our paths are similar — but we are also different in many ways!

LEO JALEO: Attacks from gankers and griefers [when patrolling community goals], and also infiltrators trying to provoke confusion and division in our group.

Another challenge is the creation of a quick response force because of our lack of numbers; as a school for new commanders, we always need more teachers to keep up with student demand.

Another challenge is, as Minty said, the constant confusion between us and Operation IDA.

MRWACKYGUY: The IDA faces difficult challenges all the time. Personally, I was recently struggling to find a good balance between my leadership of the IDA and other, [out-of-the-cockpit] activities. Due to being a full-time university student, I had to take a leave of absence. This meant I had to give up my position as the general officer commanding (GOC). I will return as the GOC in mid-December.

On a broader sense, one of the most difficult challenges we are facing as a group is the expansion of our minor faction.

“ Treating people impartially without favouritism or discrimination is one of the core values of this group and is something that I believe in strongly as our leader. - MrWackyguy

With that in mind, what has the IDA accomplished, and what do you hope to accomplish in the future?

MINTY: The IDA have conducted many successful patrols in and around high traffic trading routes. We don't necessarily have to destroy all commanders who threaten those who are not able to defend themselves. Sometimes, we just run interference and interdict them in fast-moving fighters, which stops them from getting the chance to interdict traders.

Personally I believe our greatest achievement is the transfer of knowledge. We have a number of in-house experts in

many fields, including anti-xeno tactics, combat and even some who understand the Bubble's broader political game and can teach people how to use it to their advantage. As that ancient Earth saying goes, 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime'.

MRWACKYGUY: The IDA has accomplished a fair amount already. We are in control of several systems and have a proud and successful group of agents. Looking into the far future, we hope to one day be able to stand not only as independent, but as clear rivals to other superpowers. By doing this, I personally believe several things: First, having another superpower will obviously split the population (as a superpower needs a lot of manpower), which will weaken the power of the current superpowers, bringing more balance to scales of power. Second, it will introduce a healthy competition, forcing the current superpowers to stay on their toes – [few things are] worse than a lazy or decrepit superpower. Third, it will provide safety, massive opportunities and diplomatic change for those who do not fit in with the other superpowers.

“ I believe our greatest achievement is the transfer of knowledge.” - Minty

Thank you for your time, gentlemen. You've certainly made us feel welcome! For readers who may be interested in getting in touch with your group, what do you feel makes the IDA special or unique as a community?

MRWACKYGUY: The IDA is friendly and welcoming. We train and help our agents in a way that suits them. We can be fun and light-hearted, but we also don't tolerate the toxic behaviour which is often seen in other communities.

LEO JALEO: We are independent from the superpowers, and our agents are skilful, brave, bold and highly-qualified after passing through our school.

MINTY: That's an easy question to answer: the many commanders that we have flying under the IDA banner [are what make us unique]. Without them, our community is just another one of many. We have some of the most dedicated and kind-hearted pilots this side of Sol, and the effort and enthusiasm they put in to upholding our mission is exemplary.

Fly safe, commanders! We look forward to hearing about your work in the future.

In times as difficult and tumultuous as these, it's comforting to know that there are commanders out there who have dedicated their time to helping those who just need that step up, that helping hand during a pivotal time in their careers to propel them to greatness. It's a difficult task, and hardly the most prestigious one, but perhaps the most rewarding missions of all are ones which don't affect your credit balance, but bring humanity itself just another, small step forward towards a safe and civilized Galaxy.

Are you a member of a Pilots Federation group that has a story to tell? Get in touch for a chance to be featured in these pages: editor@sagittarius-eye.com

*The Independent Defence Agency:
Bringing Civility to an Uncivilized Galaxy*

Text: Adurnis

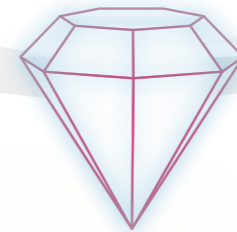
Images: Elitedeadbeat, F1rools22, Hvacker, OrangePheonix

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: Araly, Leo Jaleo, Minty, MrWackyGuy

SHAN'S CHARIS ORCHID

RARE COMMODITIES SPOTLIGHT



Text: Allen Stroud
Images: Petra Keßler
Design: LexMoloch

The journey to Baird Gateway in the Arque system can be long and tedious. The Arque system is deep in Federation territory, and any self-respecting commodity connoisseur is quickly irritated by the gaudy corporate signage and all the malnourished hawkers in their sponsored jumpsuits hanging around the markets.

However, Arque itself is an Alliance enclave and, apart from a few tricky political moments in the last few years, has managed to maintain its position as such, relatively unscathed.

Being a green dot in a sea of red can be very conducive to trade and Arque has certainly benefited from being that little green dot. Merchants from all over human-controlled space have been through here in the last few years, and one of the rare commodities they've uncovered is Shan's Charis Orchid, so named after the first pilot who found it, Commander Shanaeri, and her young daughter, who sadly passed away.

When you reach Baird Gateway, it is worth getting out of your ship and walking down to the station market. These days, most pilots access everything from their on-board console, but the experience on this particular station is worth it.

As you turn the corner into the merchant quarter, the fragrance of orchids hits you like a wave. The Charis is a delicate and short-lived bloom, so the local suppliers have to constantly refresh the station's stocks. Transport freezing technology is said to be able to preserve the plant for its consumers, but locals state that the process is far from perfect and leaves the plant no more than a memory of what it was before. Catching the orchid fresh, in those first few days of flowering, is all-important for the experience. One that if you have the chance to appreciate, you will never forget.

The scent of Shan's Charis Orchid is unlike others of the *Orchidaceae* family. The flower is not an overpowering assault that drives away as many customers as it entices. Instead, there is something honest and fresh about the bouquet. You are aware that you are in the presence of a living being that is requesting your attention, drawing your eye and your interest. The floral display on the trade stands is not necessarily the most vibrant and colourful you'll see, but the image of it lingers, as does the smell, inviting you to smile, laugh and think back to the good times in your life. When you experience this, it is easy to see why there is such a demand for these orchids amongst the upper echelons of the Empire.

Trade in Shan's Charis Orchids is a profitable enterprise but taking the opportunity to sample the merchandise is not something to miss.

Different

HEROES


Laser fire pierces the blackness of space. You yank the flight stick and your freighter veers away from the oncoming Vulture. A moment later, the viewscreen erupts into conflict as the cavalry arrives: friends who you've never met, joining the fight to help in response to your distress call.

As you bank and turn, you catch a glimpse of your rescuer's cockpit and the figure behind the controls.

What do these heroes look like?

These days, pretty similar by all accounts. Slim build, good skin, choice of well-trimmed haircut and a diverse selection of ethnicities. All the pilots you see in space are a handsome and beautiful bunch. Sure, some of them keep a scar or two for added intimidation value or to remember some angsty background drama, but any other signs of having a face or a body that looks lived in can be smoothed away. All for just a few credits, or a little of your time.

Looking around, individuals benefiting from the same technological innovations in medical science can be found everywhere in interstellar society. Station workers, planetary transport crews, outpost security troopers, miners, pirates, assassins, thieves and countless more. The whole lot of them have instant access to organ prints and limb prints if ever they have the need. With super accurate genetic records and advanced cloning available in every space station, surgical procedures are quick and post-op rejection is minimal.



All sounds great, right?

But there's another side to consider.

The next generation of commanders and pilots are looking up at the stars right now, dreaming about what they want to be when they grow up. When they watch the holo-vids or play their total immersion sims, they see all of these beautiful, handsome people, having adventures. The most popular entertainment doesn't show you the boring bits; those tedious hours breaking rocks in the asteroid belt or sitting outside an outpost waiting for docking permission. By doing so, they give people a glimpse into a glamorous and unreal life of excitement and perfection.

When you don't look perfect for whatever reason, maybe that perfect world seems like it's somewhere you can't go. Maybe, because of the scar on your lip or the three fingers you weren't born with, you're somehow different. The people you see aren't people like you, people you can identify with and aspire to be some day.

On some planets, the technology we take for granted isn't as widely available. Quick fix surgery or a genetic correction for a hereditary condition might not be possible. People out on the frontiers make do with what they can, just like our ancestors did. Generations of colonists, scratching out a living in the dirt. They are brave and tough, probably a whole lot braver and tougher than the holo-actors they watch and dream about.

For others whose conditions remain incurable despite our best efforts, the adventures of the beautiful people portray a society that people outside of the margin never

seem to be a part of. We don't see anybody but the attractive bland, when in reality, anyone can be a pilot, and a damn good one at that.

All it needs is an understanding of your limitations and a plan to address them.

Commander Johanna Meister of Quiness was an Elite ranked pilot — combat ranked Elite, according to the Pilots Federation, with hardly a mark registered in exploration or trading. She had cerebral palsy, and she was the finest pilot of her generation, with a mission kill ratio higher than any of her peers.

One of her most notable achievements is the defeat of *The Silver Comet* in single combat.

"Make peace with life, make good of ails, make done all wins and fails, before you follow into shadows The Silver Comet's trail." — Darren Grey

A silver ship, shaped like an arrowhead, that plagued human controlled space for more than a hundred years. Some claimed it was flown by successive generations of the same family, others that the comet was piloted by a secret cadre of genetically engineered pilots who could pull incredibly high gravity manoeuvres without being driven unconscious. Perhaps all the legends were true, perhaps none of them were; but on that day, in that fight, the legend met its match in Johanna Meister and became her final registered kill on her way to becoming

Elite.

According to GalNet, She was last seen in the Alioth system back at the start of 3301.

The record of the rest of Meister's adventure can be found in the archives of the Pilots Federation and in the popular publication, *Tales from the Frontier*. But her story is bigger than the sum of its parts. She suffered discrimination for her condition, but mentioning that isn't a plea for sympathy — just acknowledgement of reality and what people deal with every day.

There are a thousand or more Meisters out there in deep space, living real lives of adventure that are just as exciting and brave as any other. We don't see enough of them; or perhaps we do, but we don't choose to look outside the printed variations.

We need all sorts of different heroes. Our descendants need them too. People whose deeds are worthy of our respect and acknowledgement. People who we can dream of being, who are like us, before all the artificial polish — people who are real, lived in, damaged, resilient, stronger and better for being all those things.

Look out for those people next time you're being rescued, or the next time you're reading about the adventures of the brave out there in the black.

Different Heroes

Text: Allen Stroud

Images: OrangePheonix, McNicholl

Design: McNicholl

Image: Go'Gen
Design: McNicholl



Commander name: **Go'Gen**

Co-Pawlot name: **Meetzek**

Ranked Competent in chasing limpets, Meetzek behaves like a Trumble sometimes – blocking the Commander's HUD.

Do you have a Co-Pawlot you'd like to share with the Galaxy? Hop on to www.sagittarius-eye.com/submissions/ and let us know! Include a picture, your Co-Pawlot's role aboard and a sentence or two about them.



Co-Pawlots

RACE HARD

live on the edge
every breath, every boost, every turn



don't hold back, trust your flow, believe in miracles

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

ELITE RACERS



KNOW YOUR STATIONS!

Space stations are undeniably the most important structures for space travellers aside from their ships. They provide the services to repair, refuel, and rearm so as to keep alive in the black, and they serve as hubs at which we can trade, accept contracts, take on passengers, sell exploration data, and cash in bounties. Pilots aside, space stations provide homes for millions of people and are fully-formed cities among the stars. The different station types can seem similar on first glance, but with this quick summary, any pilot can learn to distinguish them.

Text: Icarus Maru | **Images:** Sirruf | **Design:** LexMoloch

The most common large space cities are based on three archetypal designs: Coriolis, Ocellus, and Orbis. These structures commonly orbit planets. Their modular construction means that their appearance can vary somewhat; industrial hubs tend to feature large storage or manufacturing modules, whereas wealthier cities tend to feature more and wider habitation rings. The width of these allows the spin of the station to generate a centrifugal force often close or equal to 1g (the surface gravity of Earth). Nearer the axis of the rotating station this centrifugal effect drops off, and in the central docking bay it can be as little as 0.1g — allowing relatively light equipment to handle loads of several tons with ease.

Coriolis

The most easily recognizable type, these cuboctahedron starports are the largest in terms of volume enclosed. Variants exist with augmentations like the colloquially-named 'noob hammers': long arms that extend for kilometres out into space and have high-G facilities at their ends. Coriolis ports offer nine large pads, eighteen medium pads, and fifteen small pads for ships to dock. Well-known Coriolis stations include Lave Station, Ohm City, and Titan's Daughter — one of the first stations to be attacked by Thargoids. The inverted skyscrapers which dot the wide trenches on their exterior offer superior views and comfortable centrifugal 'gravity' for those lucky enough to live there.

Ocellus

This type can be recognised by the spherical main habitation module, which has a diameter of 3 km compared to a Coriolis station's 4 km, but the same number of small, medium, and large pads. The ancillary ring has a diameter of 4 km. The rotation produces a comfortable centrifugal force of 0.7g at the equator of the spherical module, and 1.0g on the ring. Obsidian Orbital in Maia is a famous example.

Orbis

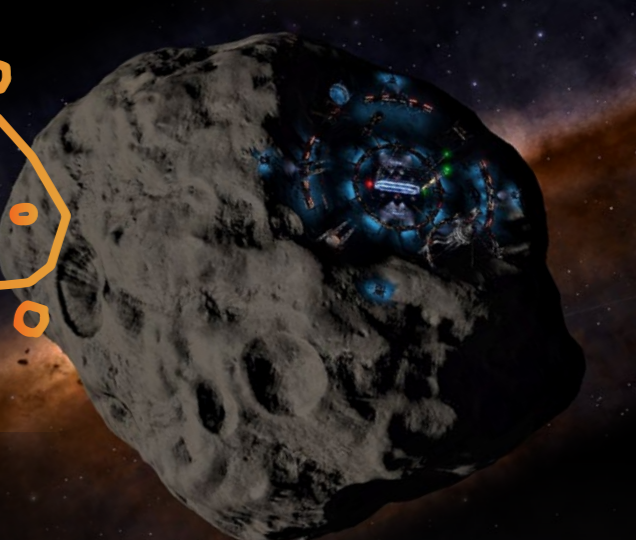
This is the largest starport type, with the larger habitation ring having a diameter of 8 km. Consequently it rotates more slowly than the others, with a period of 120 seconds. It is readily recognised by the stocky arms attaching the larger habitation ring to the cylindrical docking module. Well-known stations of this type include Jaques Station in Colonia, Jameson Memorial, and The Oracle, the very first station to be attacked by Thargoids.

Asteroid Base

This type of station isn't a starport like those above, in that it is hollowed out of an asteroid rather than constructed independently in space. It has a rotation period of 300 seconds and has six large, eight medium, and four small pads. These bases are often used as tourist stops in nebulae both near to and far from the Bubble, or as regional industrial or mining hubs. The exact dimensions of these stations are not consistent as the asteroids vary in size.

Outpost

These are the smallest type of station and have varying sizes, just like the asteroid bases. They have no large pads, one medium pad, and from two to four small pads. They do not rotate at all, and so are zero gravity. They vary greatly in appearance and construction, and come in several variants such as industrial, scientific, criminal, or commercial. They can be recognised by their asymmetric, modular design and much smaller size.



GAME OF POWERS

The tensions between the eleven recognised most powerful people in the Galaxy – which some call ‘power play’ – form a high-stakes background to ordinary pilots’ lives amongst the stars. But this grand space opera is largely separate: few people who aren’t intimately involved in the machinations of the powers even know who is ‘winning’.

Over the last few months, *Sagittarius Eye* has gotten up close and personal with each of the eleven powers’ communities to find out what is really going on, and what life is like for those who fly under their banners.

“Twelve more kills in HR 7766.”

The pilot’s holo-image shimmers as she delivers her grisly update. Record-keepers dutifully scribble down the results. The statistical models shift ever so slightly, their projections updating in real time as the battle evolves.

The atmosphere at the headquarters of the Praetorian Curiate Assembly (PCA) is business-as-usual.

Manipulating the outcomes of wars, elections and expansions is mundane for them. Using sophisticated tools, they update their objectives nearly daily to ensure that their activities support their own goals, those of Admiral Denton Patreus and, ultimately, the Empire as a whole.

Your correspondent's field reports are far more modest than that of the previous commander. Not much of a combat pilot, his forays against President Hudson's military strikes have probably not dramatically altered the PCA's projections, but his hosts have been gracious enough not to point this out.

The PCA is a Pilots Federation group dedicated to manipulating system-wide politics, as well as supporting the Admiral. It is typical within the spectrum of 'power play' groups in that it has its own modest governmental purview within a handful of systems, while it still pledges fealty and support to a larger 'power'.

The leaders have been welcoming, and their headquarters certainly appears to be humming with activity. But Commander Misaniovent, the group's leader, admits that energy is sapping throughout the Patreus community. It's not just Patreus – in our eight-week investigation, SAGi discovered a patchwork of passionate pilots, grimly holding their communities together in the face of mass disillusion.

First things first... Who the hell is winning?

Most pilots will be familiar with the 'Galactic Powers' tab on our ships' interfaces, in which GalNet aggregates several crude metrics to come up with a simple ranking for the eleven recognised most powerful individuals in the Galaxy. However, the truth is more complex, and when our researchers asked the eight or nine senior leaders of each of the powers who was 'in the lead', we were often greeted with bemusement.

"It really depends on how you measure it," explained Commander Martin Schou, a leading supporter of Alliance Prime Minister Edmund Mahon, who has enjoyed the pole position in the rankings for much of the last three years. "If you look at [the rankings] naïvely, it is clearly Edmund Mahon. No other power has managed to control even 90 systems, let alone 128."

There are other considerations, however. "Apart from the stats, which clearly show Mahon in the lead, it is also interesting to see

which power can expand into space contested by other powers most effectively. The front-runner has changed several times," commented Commander Apis_Levitans, a senior advisor to Senator Zemina Torval.

This ability to snatch desired territory from other powers seems to be praised more highly than simple rankings amongst the commanders we spoke to. Commander Al Tarf, a spokesperson for Yuri Grom, told us: "It all depends on the definition of victory in this endless 'game of powers'. As I understand it, all results here are temporal, and only certain events can have a distinctive winner." Commander Withnail, a leader of the Kumo Crew, concurs: "Winning is not about a number. Statistics are meaningless – it is how you go about your business that matters."

Commander Puchuchoni, Undermining Director for Felicia Winters, asserts that "If we focus on (positive) growth instead, I would say we [Felicia Winters] are a pretty strong candidate, but we are not the biggest power, so that is not reliable either. If we are talking in terms of [number of active pilots] and merit output, then maybe Aisling is the strongest right now, but their power lacks organisation and cohesion. You can see there are several powers that excel at some tasks or have superior qualities, but there is not a definite winner."

However, even using more nuanced

measures, a picture starts to emerge: one in which some powers are more able than others to mobilise pilots towards concerted goals, achieve specific objectives and overcome hurdles in the face of opposition. Commander Noxa, a stalwart of Arissa Lavigny-Duval's forces, explains:

Any power, given enough [pilot] support and sound tactical strategy, can change the long-term balance of power, provided their HQ is situated in a healthy region of space. Winters has spent the last year or more adding to their pilot base and using their merits well. They've gone from a small deficit economy to a large surplus economy in that time, mostly by reaping the rewards from Imperial losses.

It's the sort of sustained action that can only happen through power play - when you have large groups of disciplined, skilful and coordinated commanders trying to out-fight and out-think each other.

Commander Dangerzone, a senior advisor to Denton Patreus, sums up this point of view: "I don't think any team wins – the challenge of power play is to ensure a thriving, strong power. Two examples are the strength of Aisling Duval as a power who operates in deficit, and Felicia Winters, a power with a strong economy and a dedicated community to back them up."

Something to fly for

Many pilots long for a cause to fight for, to give them some direction amongst the stars beyond simply upgrading their ship. Pledging to a power provides that. The communities created for these causes share thrilling moments.

"Our first expansion attempt into Arnemil, while unsuccessful, proved to be a fun experience," a leader of Federal United Command told us. "Another notable event was the recent raid by our own Federal Viper division. Events like this are what make this community wonderful to

be a part of." Commander Withnail of the Kumo Crew remembers that "Operation Davy Jones and the subsequent Pegasi Pirate War offensive by the Empire was a great time for our power. We weathered the storm and avoided collapse." Meanwhile, the leaders of Pranav Antal's Utopia recall an episode when "Utopia openly challenged Patreus commanders for a battle of Kenna. This was done in mutual understanding that the expansion hostilities would stay confined within the system of Kenna, and so it happened. [It] was an epic week of PvP [pilot versus pilot combat]."

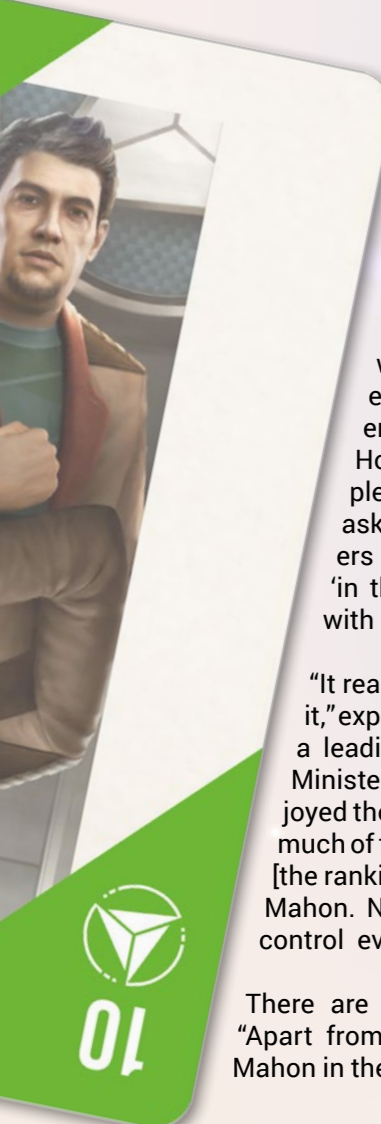
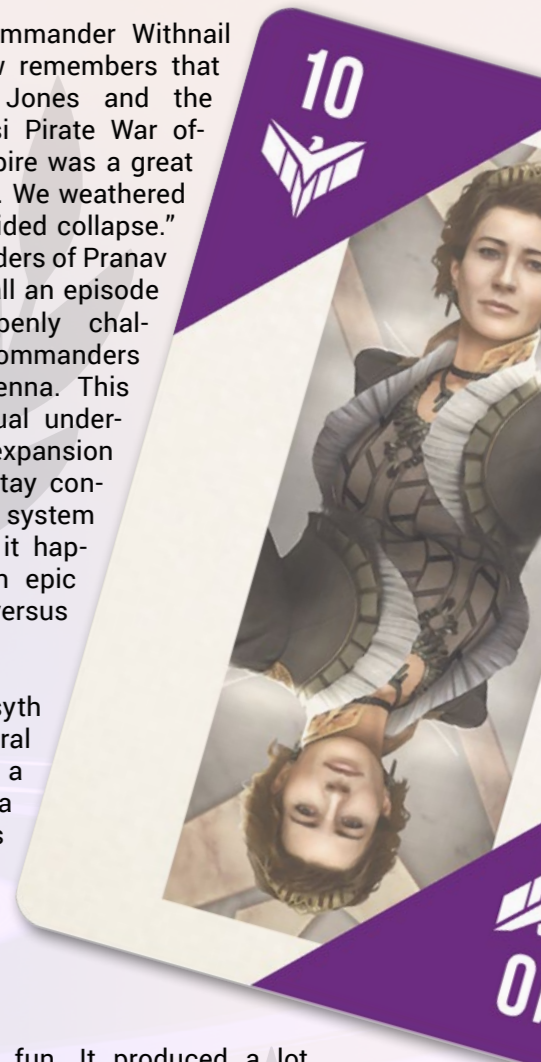
Commander Foursyth of Federal Liberal Command, and a supporter of Felicia Winters, sums up these stories well when recalling an episode called 'Operation Shattered Prism'.

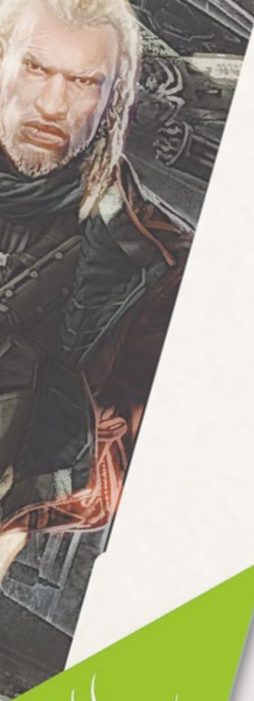
"...it was massive fun. It produced a lot of really great large-scale fleet battles and wing-vs-wing skirmishes... It's the sort of sustained action that can only happen through power play - when you have large groups of disciplined, skilful and coordinated commanders trying to out-fight and out-think each other. It was power play at its best."

A play of many acts

The events, victories, retreats and conquests amongst the powers often go uncommented upon in Galactic media – a situation this magazine would like to remedy – but that's not to say they don't occur.

"Originally Arissa Lavigny-Duval (ALD) and Zachary Hudson seemed unstoppable," explains Martin Schou. "However, since both ALD and Hudson were effectively trapped between other powers' territory, they ended up slowing down, and an early change to calculations of overheads meant that the strategy that Mahon had been pursuing from the start was automatically the best one for the economy, and since then, everyone has basically been fighting for second place."





01

The biggest shifts have been few and dramatic. “The rise to power of Yuri Grom [and] the formation of the large power alliances, Federal United Command (FUC) and ZYADA [an awkward shorthand for ‘Zemina, Yuri, Aisling, Denton and Arissa’], have been very impactful,” says Commander Sun, one of Aisling Duval’s inner circle.

The picture is certainly one of a clutch of main dealmaking powers, and a tail of ‘also-rans’. It seems that Hudson, Winters, ALD, Aisling Duval and Yuri Grom have dictated the pace of change most of the time in recent years, with the smaller powers succeeding by largely staying under the radar, pursuing harmless goals or cultivating protective alliances. Martin continues:

It seems like the biggest powers are currently Aisling Duval, Edmund Mahon and Felicia Winters, but they could just have more highly active commanders... Li Yong-Rui managed to become a fairly large power in terms of territory after a while, but a combination of betrayal from peace agreements signatories and massive sabotage and consequent turmoil has put Li Yong-Rui in a precarious situation where he is mostly alive because the saboteurs are doing other things. Antal managed to make the best of an awkward position in space, and has to the best of my knowledge managed to stay out of larger conflicts with anyone and are also keeping sabotage at a minimum.

However, this picture shifts depending on whom you ask. Withnail of the Kumo Crew asserts that they have “not seen anyone from the Empire in a long time. Antal have sloped off to the fridge in search of fresh quiche, but we all know they really lust after Kumoburger patties. Sirius are quiet as usual. The new ‘power’ is mysteriously absent, even when we visit their capital system. One day, we might see one [of their pilots].”

“Grom commanders are probably the rarest ‘species’ of commander, yet they seem capable of hauling and acquiring

combat merits at a greater pace than any other power without being seen across the entire Grom bubble,” comments VampyreGTX, of Zachary Hudson’s staff, wryly.

Different flavours

In principle, territory under the control of each of the powers should have distinct attributes. “Aisling Duval is strong against Communist, Cooperative and Confederate governments. None of these come in Imperial varieties, hence Aisling Duval’s territory in the Empire has become largely Independent-governed space rather than Imperial governed space,” explains Sun – a counterintuitive state of affairs for a Royal scion.

There is similar regional flavour in Pranav Antal’s territory. “Those who dissent so far as to earn bounties are keenly sought out, and the size of those bounties reflects that by being typically twice what you find elsewhere,” explain the Utopian leaders. “Highly ranked Utopians receive a further doubling of their bounty payouts in tribute to their dedication. Bounty hunters prosper in Utopia!”

As well as these regional disparities in prices for services, there are also differences in trade. “Torval control systems open the supply of Imperial Slaves,” points out Apis_Levitans. “We’d been installing dictatorships into government throughout [Torval’s] realm, which means large zones of space with some of the most liberal laws on prohibition for commodity trading,” adds Justinian Octavius, senior advisor to Zemina Torval. “If you want to trade narcotics and you are in Torval space, there is probably a system nearby.”

But do casual pilots notice this?

“It affects the local governments’ activities a lot,” explains Sun. “So for casual pilots who are part of a minor faction, there is a strong influence. Another area is combat. Often powers will create blockades of key systems and this will affect casual commanders too.”

Foursyth explains how this might work. “We, of course, have a dedicated group of pilots on call to defend our folks hauling through Rhea. It leads to some excellent mass combat action sometimes – multiple wings interdicting each other while haulers try to sneak through the barrage...”

“Casual pilots are often unaware of how they may be casually trampling all over a perfectly groomed garden,” the Utopian leaders point out. “This can create conflict unwittingly, and in less peaceful parts of the Galaxy it undoubtedly results in reported cases of ‘mindless ganking.’”

But here the crossover appears to end. “As far as we can tell, none of Mahon’s [territory] effects work,” sighs Martin Schou.

“I think that, unfortunately, there’s very little crossover,” muses Dangerzone. “There are some instances where a power’s actions directly affect a number of pilots, but this is the exception rather than the norm.” “Besides the obvious discounts in Sirius Corp. space and some other perks like bonuses for bounties or discounts for weapons, I reckon the effect we have on casual pilots is rather negligible,” agrees Puchuchoni.

It’s just no fun starting an aggressive campaign against another power when they’re already fighting their own 5C.

This is, it seems, the nub. Power play is a ‘black box’ to casual pilots, because – beyond regional discounts and differences in certain service payouts – none of the grand shifts in the landscape of power affect or even make themselves known to them.

Martin Schou eloquently illustrates the problem. “ALD had control of Beta Hydri for a while. That’s a founding member of the Federation, home to the Federation shipyard and permit-locked behind Federation rank – but there wasn’t a peep about it anywhere. You would think the Empire would hail it as a massive propaganda victory and that the Federation would denounce it as an act of war, but there was nothing – nothing at all.”

Foul play

When talk turns to the future, the powers’ leaders become despondent. Each foresees different events unfolding over the next twelve months, but none are optimistic. “I cannot say I see a bright future ahead of us,” says Puchuchoni glumly – all the more striking as their power (Winters) has enjoyed a string of recent successes. Why the pessimism?

“I foresee the collapse of most powers’ communities,” asserts Martin Schou. “We are already seeing powers

completely overrun by saboteurs.”

Withnail suggests that “soon Patreus will become a shrivelled husk while Mahon is fattened by unknown saboteurs. LYR will face numerous shareholder revolts and Pranav Antal may not offend someone. Other than that, not much will happen for a very long time thanks to a lack of support from the people behind the Pilots Federation.”

“It is clear as day that we all should work on our internal intelligence to counteract espionage and, most importantly, sabotage in our ranks,” asserts Al Tarf. “Right now sabotage delivers the most devastating results. There are currently no effective ways to confront it. This should be priority number one for everyone.”

Sun also foresees a “decay of the smaller powers. Most of this will be due to the inability to withstand the onslaught of fifth column (5C) activities.”

The trend is striking: Nearly every power interviewed, including the two objectively most successful, were emphatic: internal sabotage is killing their communities and, if unchecked, will kill independent pilots’ involvement with the Great Powers.



The Unstoppable Fifth Column

Sabotage in a power play context involves pledging to a power you wish to damage, then working against their interests from within.

"I suspect that almost all power play organizers would agree that the saboteurs, or '5th columnists', are the ones winning," says Noxa. "It has been a huge problem with Aisling Duval for a very long time," agrees Sun.

"Simply put, they are trolls, and trolls only give up if they can be and are ignored, which is something current political mechanisms do not allow for," sighs Martin Schou. "The saboteurs are free to move around between powers, so once a power has been hit hard enough, they can jump to another power and help their brethren there. Powers are constantly losing commanders because it has stopped being fun."

"We have to contend with it every week. It is the greatest threat we face," say the Utopians. "[It] wastes tens of millions of credits in prep supplies every week," agrees VampyreGTX.

Not even the front runners are immune. Martin Schou explains:

To put the power of the saboteurs into perspective – for a very long time, the largest preparation battle in power play resulted in around 300,000 merits being delivered to the same system by two different powers. Mahon's saboteurs are willing and able to put 350,000 and more into a single massively loss-making system to push it onto us... That typically means they're moving 350k+ merits into a single preparation sabotage system, 50k+ into an expansion system and 250k+ merits into fortifications. That means they are spending upwards of 7 billion credits every single cycle just to sabotage Mahon from the inside, and we're not the only power constantly subjected to this sabotage.

Foursyth, of the Winters brigade, tells us that she "...has a significant problem with 5C, but at the moment [they] are mostly on top of it. [It's] terrible... There is absolutely no fun in beating an enemy when they're also under assault

from 5C. They are by far the largest threat to power play at the moment."

The same is true for the Emperor, Noxa tells us, but adds that "Torval has seen the worst of it for the past year. Of course, the fifth column has also been using Torval to damage the other Imperials... there is very little we can do about it."

Not the collapse mechanic we had in mind

The situation with Zemina Torval has been utterly overlooked by the Galactic media, but it is perhaps one of the most important things to have happened to the upper echelons of Imperial society since the accession of the Emperor. Zemina Torval has, in essence, collapsed as a power.

We'd go to bed, everything sorted – then we'd wake up and 20-40,000 merits had been dumped into a system that wrecked us, and more often than not, Patreus [as well]. That's organised.

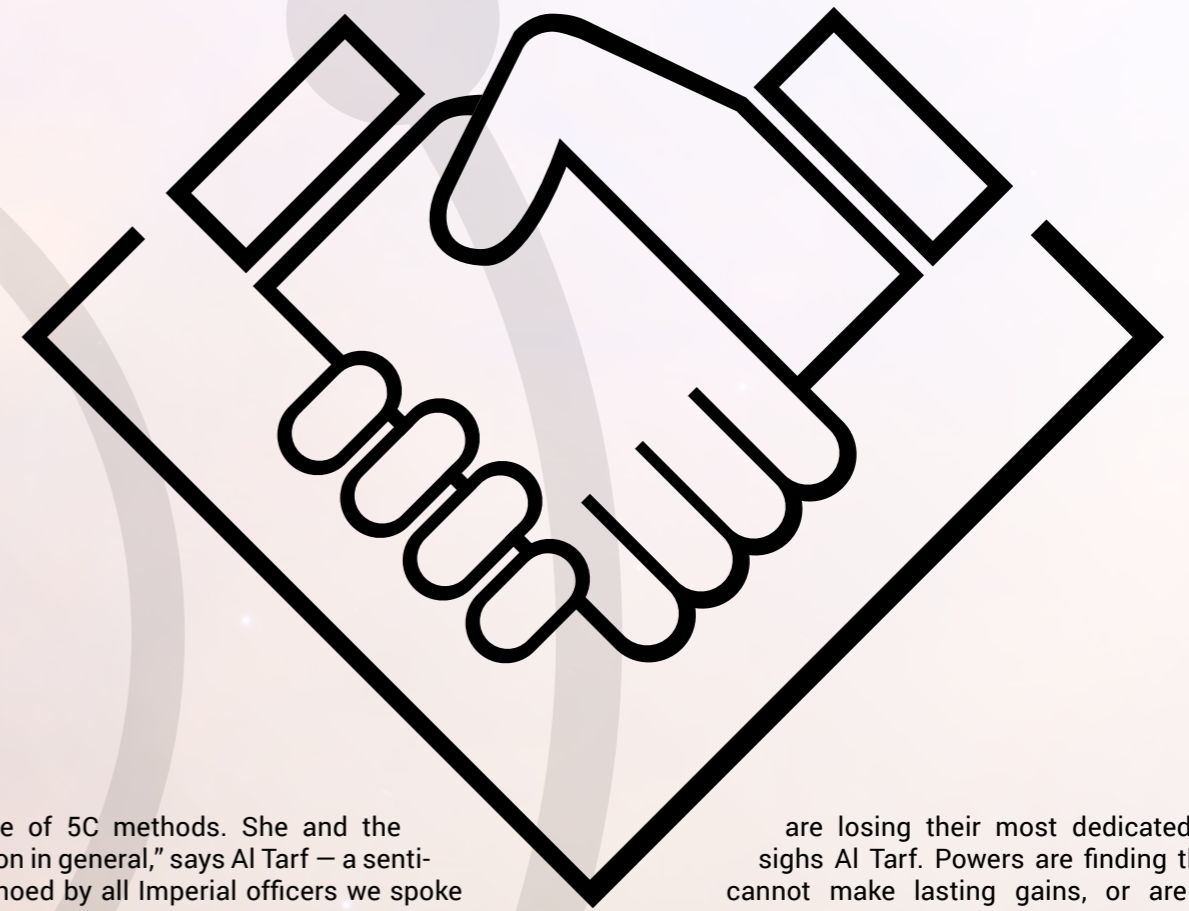
Apis_Levitans explains: "Overall, Senator Torval's business' decline has been gradual and a long time in the making... I would give 5C credit for being the ultimate reason."

Justinian Octavius agrees. "Ultimately, even our once most-committed commanders [were] one by one demoralised at an enemy, the 5C, who could destroy our economy with 100% immunity from being intercepted and stopped in combat."

This is obviously a tremendous blow for the Empire, but more importantly, represents the destruction of a community.

Cui bono?

Who are the saboteurs working on behalf of? This is beyond the scope of this article, but the question of 'who benefits?' is probably indicative. "My deep impression is that Felicia Winters has made the



most use of 5C methods. She and the Federation in general," says Al Tarf – a sentiment echoed by all Imperial officers we spoke to.

It is certainly noticeable that Imperial powers have suffered more than most from sabotage, and that Winters has disproportionately gained from that; but it is also true that Winters has made more gains in general in recent months, widely recognised to be the fruits of superior organisation and drive. Several within the Federation point just as emphatically to Yuri Grom himself as the culprit.

"Aisling... has benefited greatly from the 5th column tactics in Torval, having received nearly 160 [Command Capital, a kind of numerical measure of influence among the powers] back to her economy following the turmoil of Torval and loss of her systems that contested Aisling systems," points out VampyreGTX.

Is it naive to accuse any one power of sabotage? Are the saboteurs even a cohesive force?

"Oh yes," insists Justinian Octavius. "We'd go to bed, everything sorted – then we'd wake up and 20-40,000 merits had been dumped into a system that wrecked us, and more often than not, Patreus [as well]. That's organised."

Where do we go from here?

"I think the most noticeable thing in power play generally is the constant decrease of overall activity. Certain things and methods are making people frustrated, and power leaders

are losing their most dedicated pilots," sighs Al Tarf. Powers are finding that they cannot make lasting gains, or are "losing things they've been fighting long and hard for, only to fight for them long and hard again. I can compare it to the ancient Earth's history of the First World War." "A lot of commanders burn out quickly, and seem to retire to a life planetside," agrees VampyreGTX.

"With the absence of a viable collapse mechanic in the great game of power play, there is no dynamism and no reason to push hard anymore," explains Withnail. "The density and proximity of the powers, combined with fifth column activity, have resulted in legitimate aggressive activities being pointless. The powers have reached their limit and stagnation has set in."

The pace of change is "definitely decelerating," says Sun. "The ever-increasing conflicts against 5C are sapping the energy of several powers."

"To a large extent, power play has been fairly stagnant for close to two years, because we've run out of profitable places to expand into," says Martin Schou. "However, saboteurs have been pushing huge amounts of massive [loss-making systems] onto most powers, so the territory has technically expanded but not in a good way. Before too long, it will start decelerating quickly as more powers will start to crumble."

"It's just no fun starting an aggressive campaign against another power when they're already fighting their own 5C," says Foursyth.

The quiche-chompers in Utopia agree. "With powers convulsing and flailing about with crazy expansions that only hurt them, for most powers it is primarily survival in the face of 5C plague."

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Dangerous Games

Our investigation into the groups of pilots who fly for the galactic powers has been the largest single editorial project this magazine has undertaken — a glance at the credits at the end of this article will reveal just how many people have lent their time and experiences. However, the consensus is striking.

Power play is dying, haemorrhaging commanders faster than they can be replaced, after they become utterly disillusioned by the Sisyphean task of repelling the efforts of sabotage. One small power has already collapsed, and even the most optimistic and successful of those left foresee it happening again soon.

But these communities are also some of the most organised, passionate and fraternal we've come across. "I can honestly say the teamwork and community that Lyr has is responsible for creating the most positive and helpful group of [pilots] I've ever encountered," says Commander Trog, Sirius board member. The sheer adrenaline that power play at its best delivers is unmatched by anything else independent pilots can spend their time doing.

The sense that something *has* to change permeated every interaction we had with these pilots. The question is whether their communities can hold together long enough to see it.

"We have been guarding a river for over three years now," sums up Apis_Levitans. "It had floods and droughts, more of the latter, recently. Now it seems there is a dam upstream, but I have not seen it, nor seen what lies beyond."

This article was informed by in-depth interviews with the leaders of the main recognised Pilots Federation groups affiliated with each power, carried out over September and October 3304.

Game of Powers

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Research: Alec Turner, Baz, Diacarb, Downslide, Dr. Anwid, Icarus Maru, Ulon, Zack J White

Thanks to: Al Tarf, Apis_Levitans, Bird, Chalkie, Dangerzone, Enrico, Foursyth, Hawk, Justinian Octavius, k3z1a, Lingus, Lucienn, Noxa, Martin Schou, Misanoivent, Puchuchoni, Ronnie Kane, Sun, Trog, VampyreGTX, Withnail, Xargo

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GRAN tourismo

There is a subset of exploration that garners little attention from the galactic community: tourism.

Ever since the Pilots Federation began to license their members to provide tourism services in late 3302, there has been a lack of an official database for destinations that commanders could use. This has led to a few pilots taking matters into their own hands. We had the chance to sit down with the leader of this project, Commander Lucienn.



“ Each beacon is uniquely numbered, which makes them ripe for collecting.

Upon entering his apartment, it is immediately apparent that database projects are his passion. Several dataslates display his work, much of it still in progress, and binders strewn about on the desk look likely to contain legacy information, yet to be digitised. Clearly, this form of benign madness holds Lucienn firmly within its grip. SAGi wondered how someone might fall into such a pursuit.

Before I began working on the tourist database, I was working on several similar projects within Sirius Gov, a group that furthers Li Yong-Rui's and Sirius' control of human space. The key one I was most proud of was the Sirius Survey, a manually collated list of stations in each Sirius system which provide certain ships at a discount.

I loved hunting down rare ships within Sirius space and providing the locations so that others could get whichever ship they wanted at the 15% Sirius discount - the cheapest consistent discount that commanders can find.

What made you transition from working for the powers to something more universal, like the tourism database?

After some other large-scale exploration projects started to collect shipyard information directly from commanders' ships when they docked, there was no longer a need for a project like the Sirius Survey. At that point, I spent some time trying to find another overlooked aspect of the Galaxy that could be catalogued and explored – naturally [that] brought me to tourist beacons, which seemed to get very little attention from the general community. Each beacon is uniquely numbered, which makes them ripe for collecting; as a bonus, they provide valuable lore on the Galaxy and the rich history of it.

What purpose will the database serve?

With the release of the Codex, I feel like many people will be introduced to history in ways they didn't previously experience. As a result, they may have questions that could be answered with the information provided within the tourist beacons, or they may want to seek out the sites of famous events.

For that, I want readers to know that the beacon database is intended for everyone's use in whichever way they deem fit; a pilgrimage to all Imperial battlegrounds, say, or a checklist to see if they've gotten every tourist beacon added to their Codex. So far the main usage of it seems to be for helping users identify which tourist contracts are worthwhile to take on. Another niche feature is providing a set of locations where there is persistent and easily-findable volcanism for mineral collection.

What can our readers do to help?

I'm hoping that with the addition of the Codex, tourist beacons will be given more attention by the galactic community and hunts will be mounted to find some of the beacons that haven't yet been documented. I've spent considerable time combing numerous channels to collect information and hints about where new beacons could be [located]. At this point, our strongest leads are from a lengthy list of beacons that have been suggested at some point or another to the Pilots Federation for inclusion. Only a small subset of these have actually made it out into the black.

If people want to help, there's a list of potential sites included in the database and the information is open to comments from anyone. Furthermore, I can be found lurking in a large number of chat servers and am open to pings and communication at any time!

“ There's also plenty of excitement and learning opportunity in following others' footsteps.

With the new exploration tools available to explorers, it is likely we will see more pilots than ever looking to pass the frontier and leave their mark on the Galaxy. Is there anything you'd like to say to these intrepid pilots?

To the new explorers joining the trade, I want to say that not all exploration needs to be to new frontiers. There's certainly a thrill in finding a new planet that breaks a record, or seeing a beautiful site and knowing you're the first person to touch down there. However, there's also plenty of excitement and learning opportunity in following others' footsteps; in exploring a path that's already been carved out to see where it goes, and why.

Tourist beacons offer plenty of this, even if you don't want to bring passengers along with you for the extra funding! They can also serve as waypoints for a longer expedition, and there's likely to be plenty to see just off the beaten path.

And finally, before we take up too much more of your time, what if one or more of our readers should happen to stumble across a good place for a potential tourist beacon?

If readers and explorers find a new location that they think is fit for a tourist beacon, they can be submitted to the [official tourist beacon submission thread](#) on the Pilots Federation forum.

Gran Turismo

Text: Lexic Meise

Images: OrangePheonix, Zer0axis

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: Lucienn

Project Dynasty: The Formidine Rift Mystery

Project Dynasty was perhaps one of mankind's most desperate and darkest endeavours, and it spawned some of its most compelling mysteries. Born of fear and villainy, the three expeditions produced very little for us to use in the event of a full Thargoid invasion of inhabited space.

Now we have to consider the possibility that the Club had ulterior motives: perhaps to locate the fabled planet Raxxla. Was the Thargoid civil war a simple cover story and are we in the process of answering a much higher calling? Join us as we recap a most interesting sequence of events...

The Dynasty Expedition

The mysterious Dynasty Expedition began with the placement of beacons in star systems that have habitable planets. The logic appears to have been to secure a safe refuge for the human race in the event of a Thargoid invasion or some other apocalyptic event in the Bubble. The top-secret project was initiated by a cabal known only as 'the Club' in 3270. Earth-like worlds far beyond the Bubble were to be identified and marked, and for reasons unknown, three galactic regions were hand-picked for exploration: the Scutum-Sagittarii Conflux, Hawking's Gap, and the Formidine Rift.

The abandoned sites

In each region are four outposts referred to as sites Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta, all small and notably unaffiliated. It seems that the most inhospitable planets were chosen for these enigmatic encampments, but the fact that they are abandoned and mostly useless prompts questions.

If you take a look around, especially on the occupied planets in the Hawking's Gap region, you'll notice that the terrain does not allow for any type of expansion without the use of costly supportive struts. There are Earth-like worlds within proximity of all twelve sites, which begs the simple question: if someone was serious about building a safe haven for the human race, why not place the sites on a planet capable of sustaining life? The abandoned sites serve absolutely no purpose but are clues to the conspiracy mentioned by the individual known only as 'Rebecca' in the voice log she uploaded to the megaship *Zurara*.

The *Zurara*

The void of the Formidine Rift boasts some of the most treacherous sub-regions in the Galaxy, referred to by explorers as "graveyards" and "no-man's land" because they have swallowed an uncountable number of ships. The megaship *Zurara* is the most well-known casualty and is linked to this dark and infamous mystery. She is in orbit of the planet Syreadiae JX-F c0 1, her crew all dead.

According to the voice logs, the payload specialists sabotaged the ship's main reactor before committing suicide. The lone survivor of the attack – the crew member who uploaded the voice log – must have been terrified once he realized he'd been used, and that he and the crew were being murdered for reasons unknown. They were told there was something bad out there, that it was haunted by ghosts. Now, what could that be: Thargoids, Guardians, or even a door to another dimension?

Senator Kahina Tijani Loren and Rebecca

During the year 3302, two important players and opponents of Project Dynasty met in the Tionisla system at a well-known ship cemetery. A shadowy woman known only as 'Rebecca', who had cut all her ties to the Club, was to meet a former Imperial senator to receive certain exploration data she'd requested two years earlier.

Her Cobra was entombed at the boneyard, hiding a beacon on board which transmitted an encrypted message. It was received by numerous relay posts in the Tionisla system and was eventually decoded: "The vain queen rides a giraffe that remembers her daughter's hero." Most people believe that the 'vain queen' refers to Cassiopeia, the 'giraffe' refers to Camelopardalis and the 'hero' refers to Perseus. All those constellations are in the direction of the Formidine Rift as viewed from Sol.

Unfortunately, before the exploration data could change hands, a Federal black ops unit employed by the Club



■ Megaship *Zurara*

swarmed the Cobra. Rebecca was killed, but Kahina Tijani Loren (also known as Commander Salomé) escaped with Rebecca's files.

Salomé was subsequently hunted down, captured and placed on trial. She was found guilty — implausibly, in the view of many — of attempting to assassinate Admiral Patreus and sentenced to life imprisonment at Koontz Asylum in the Daibo system. While being transported to the penitentiary, the convoy was attacked by unknown forces. Salomé was believed to be among those who perished.

On April 8th of the following year, a signal was received at an Imperial listening post. It contained information regarding a rally point and was connected to Salomé: she was alive. Her bounty was increased to 5 million credits and those of her cohorts set at 2 million each.


On April 29th, 3303, Salomé, Raan Corsen, Tsu Annabelle Singh, and Yuki Nakamura set out on a fateful journey from 46 Eridani to Tionisla to deliver an important message. Commander Salomé did not finish the journey. She was interdicted by the killer Commander Besieger who destroyed her Imperial Clipper *Seven Veils*, and she died in the blast.

Salomé's three associates survived, however, and finished the journey by jumping to the Teorge system. The truth about Project Dynasty, the Club's callous machinations and the appalling methods employed to achieve their goals was finally broadcast to the Galaxy.

Imagine what was going through Salomé's mind when she saw Besieger firing on her. *Seven Veils* had been severely damaged by hostile ships during the 600 light years she'd travelled; her weapons had been disabled,

her frame shift drive was malfunctioning, and she had completely expended her FSD injection materials. She knew she was sacrificing her life; but also that she was only one of many to do so.

The Club and their plan will be judged by history. In the end, the creation of frame shift drives that allow interstellar travel in seconds rather than days has rendered it obsolete; humanity is seeded all over the Galaxy, so even were the Bubble to burn, it is unlikely that humanity would die out. But the Machiavellian logic employed by the Club still resonates. And what's more, they're still out there.

One of humanity's enemies we know: they look like flowers, and they attack our homes. The other looks like us and attacks our humanity. Both are still at large. 

“ The three expeditions produced very little for us to use in the event of a full Thargoid invasion of inhabited space.

*Project Dynasty:
The Formidine Rift Mystery*

Text: J.C. Warren

Images: pSyren_Farseer, SIRRUF, Zer0axis


Design: LexMoloch



THE ART OF DEEP SPACE SURVIVAL

Over the last hundred thousand years or so, humans have evolved their curiosity to explore their surroundings: the desire to take the chance of crossing that mountain pass, that raging river, that empty and desolate vacuum. And, really, it is all a matter of perspective. What was once unknown becomes known and perhaps even a standard for ourselves and others to achieve or surpass.

But if it is all about the perspective, how does that idea change, or better yet, change us, over time? ▶



“Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere.” - Carl Sagan

I'm an Explorer now!

As with any career choice, explorers start out with some mild trepidation over the vagueness of their goals and cautious excitement concerning those first impending steps away from the civilization that cradled them. In the early days of the frame shift drive (FSD), the idea of getting away from the pressures of civilization likely drove many to just choose a direction and go. With jump ranges much less than today's, making the commitment to “get out of Dodge” was not an easy one, nor trivial in its execution.

The first person to ever explore anything didn't suddenly come to the epiphany “I am going to be an explorer now!” and then walk out of their cave, naked and weaponless, in some random direction without any further preparation (and if they did, we can confidently assume that those genes are no longer with us in 3304). There is always a bit of planning first. Answering questions such as:

What shall I take with me on my trip? Equipment? Food? Fuel? White socks or blue?

Those same questions apply to the blackness of space – though perhaps with a bit more rigour involved.

In truth, every ship with an FSD currently sold is capable of becoming a decent exploration vessel, especially with all the recent advances in jump range. Synthesised FSD boosts, engineering, Guardian technology, and the ability to use neutron overcharging to quadruple the normal range have already enhanced our drives far beyond what we previously thought possible. But it wasn't always that way.

Just a few short years ago, the jump ranges for unengineered, exploration-focussed loadouts ranged from the Sidewinder at 21 ly to the Anaconda at nearly 42 ly. The Fer-de-Lance, maxing at 20 ly, wasn't even considered viable for deep space back then. But today, with a little engineering and a Guardian FSD booster, a 'Ferdy' can reach a very comfortable 41+ ly. Add some Jumponium or a scoop of 'neutron juice' and that can easily increase to nearly 170 ly.

The basic outfitting of any exploration ship really only requires two things: a fuel scoop and a Class A FSD. Adding modules allows the journey to be more than just a Sunday drive, but may also decrease the maximum jump range. Ship-launched fighter bays for larger ships and SRV bays for surface excursions both help to broaden the discovery envelope and also offer a change of perspective. For those who need or want to use the Neutron Highway, an auto-field maintenance unit is a must, but only because that path guarantees FSD degradation. The rest is really up to the individual.

Never seen that before

There is a process which most explorers go through once they step outside familiar space.

First is the desire to show off everything interesting that they've found on their journey. Pictures, videos, and blogs start flowing from the traveller's subspace feed as they encounter a multitude of new stars, nebulae and habitable worlds along their path. Some are rushed and mediocre, whilst others are very good indeed. Whatever the quality, this is one of the most universal stages of space travel and gives everyone else out there a familiar insight into a similar, but different perspective.

New capabilities in our system survey technology offer other ways to 'be the first' such as mapping the rings and surfaces of these rare finds. This one advancement now allows us to quickly find all of the many planetary and spatial anomalies from orbit instead of spending


endless hours flying inverted over the surface while performing exhaustive visual inspections. Now, within our sensors' view are the ancient ruins of extinguished civilizations and perhaps, even those more recently inhabited. The eternal recurring question of "where to next?", once answered by a simple push of a button to initiate that next hyperspace jump, is changing to: "Should I stay, or should I go?"

“ I think the majority of explorers are lone wolves at heart.” - Erimus Kamzel

Sanity and solitude

At some stage in their personal narrative, every explorer eventually has an epiphany of some sort. This is commonly the dawning realisation that (to paraphrase): "Space is BIG... I mean really, really gigantically, mind-bogglingly, humongously large!" And we, by comparison... are not!

This revelation manifests itself in a number of interesting and contradictory ways. Some react with ennui, whilst others acquire a sense of urgency. There are those who believe that somehow streamlining the process enough will enable them to see the whole universe before they die; almost as if the extraordinary effort to somehow make it back to civilisation quickly to register their claims will result in some special form of virtual immortality. Dead, but remembered.



“Competent pilots have checklists, and follow them religiously.”

“Ah... can I go home, now?”

This could also be the point at which a bit of homesickness sets in. During the early days of FSD travel, depending on the individual tolerance for, and distance from, home, this could compound an already unstable situation. Today, in most cases, a trip back to the Bubble quickly relieves the symptoms. However, for those whose goal is still farther out into the black, it can lead to even greater, sometimes fatal, psychological pressures if not dealt with properly.

As telepresence has expanded beyond the corporate boardroom and onto our multi-crewed ships, lonely pilots can now receive visitors and companions when they most need emotional support. There are also therapists who make long-distance ship calls to help remind those longing for home that this, too, shall pass.

Space Madness 101

An entire book could be devoted to space madness and still only scratch the surface of the nearly infinite ways we can all go a little bit loopy. Increases in jump ranges, event-organised meetups and the moderating effects of telepresence have all been seen to significantly reduce the number of reported fatalities and lost ships associated with this condition, but on their own, they can not completely prevent it from happening.

As another part of the process, this phase tends to see the individual display one or more of the following symptoms: greed, boredom, fatigue, feelings of euphoria, invincibility, and/or hopelessness (among others).

As with all repetitive actions over a long period of time, we tend to get very proficient with a little practice. As we do so, our skills eventually plateau, where improvements become incrementally smaller for the time invested. In trying to maintain the continuous effort, boredom and fatigue can set in.

Feelings of euphoria and invincibility when out in the black 20,000 light years ‘from the corner of No and Where’ tend to strike when seeing progress toward a goal or major milestone. Making it to a boundary, a specific area or through a particularly sparse and challenging region of space gives us a sense of accomplishment. It can be that ‘Top of the World’ moment which makes us think: “Nobody’s gonna catch me, now!”

Unfortunately, the moment is usually transitory, lasting as long as it takes to realise that the journey is only partially complete. There is still that next waypoint, the follow-on goal, and the return trip to consider.

Greed, on the other hand, keeps us doing things when perhaps we no longer should. A visit to the Neutron Fields, for instance, is a relatively easy way to generate credits. Jumping from one dead star to another and failing to notice the fuel load, though, might be the ‘one little mistake’ that rapidly becomes a big one. There are tales of past explorers who, upon entering the fields, got fatally distracted by the potential earnings, lost their way or jumped into places they could not return from.

While the boost a good neutron scoop gives is pretty motivating, the lack of control whilst ‘surfing the stream’ has been known to panic those with less experience. Everyone should be aware that dropping into normal space whilst in the stream will turn a slightly scary day into a really bad one very quickly. The distraction that a few extra credits provides might be the determining factor between arriving at a service station with 30% hull and not arriving at all.

The perception of hopelessness hits when all of the options have been exhausted, apparently leaving only one final decision between extremes. Usually, this appears as a binary choice: 'press on or use the Remlok', only a choice insofar as the former appears unendurable while the latter seems quicker, easier, and less emotionally challenging. Moving on requires work. The Remlok, on the other hand, means not having to worry about all that other stuff any more.

Even so, help can come from unexpected quarters. Cmdr Macedonica's now-famous farewell post *End of the Road* on the Pilots Federation forums motivated Cmdr Chiggy vonRichtofen not only to propose a solution, but also to implement it in person, in a spectacular rescue mission that captured the attention of the Galaxy and even moved the Pilots Federation to deploy a Tourist Beacon at the scene of the rescue.

“ Little mistakes turn into big mistakes.” - Surly Badger

Pushing yourself into vacuum and an early shipwreck

Let's face it, accidents happen.


Whether by complacency, distraction, or equipment failure, unexpected problems will occur on any long journey. Most of the time these are insignificant: some minor hull damage or a hit to a module for instance. Since AFMU ammo and repair limpets can be synthesised, having the appropriate modules onboard can ease one's mind. It only really becomes a problem as we keep racking up light years — and mistakes.

No one knows who the first interstellar explorer was that suddenly decided "I'll just freshen up this cocktail!" after initiating a jump sequence, only to come back to the pilot's chair and find their ship overheating in the target star's corona. It is guaranteed that it's happened to a great many more since then, though. Competent pilots have checklists, and follow them religiously.

Greed, boredom and euphoria can all contribute their share of harm by helping us to take unnecessary chances in an effort to 'get the tag' or even just to get the blood pumping. Various versions of the story about 'shooting the gap' — say between that class O and its close-orbiting neutron star companion — nearly all end with significant damage to the ship and the pilot's ego. At least the ones we hear about, that is. Add the optional high-G planetary landing and a max-range 'fumes jump' or three and the risks increase exponentially.

Even titans must rest. Fatigue is that fateful modifier that promotes falling asleep at the controls, making those unusual decisions, or letting distraction override common sense. Thoughts of "I'm never going to make it back" when looking at 3% hull and another 32 Klys to the nearest station make for a very tough perspective. The task ahead seems daunting, even impossible; whilst the alternative sets us free from the pressures of trying.

The old saying 'sleep on it' can help. A fresh mind, looking at all of the available options for a pilot stuck out in the unknown, might come to the conclusion that it's more epic to be remembered for trying to make it back than to be completely forgotten for giving up on such a challenge.



“ Knowing there might not be another human for thousands of light years is something I’m very comfortable with.” - Allitnil

Resolve - onward home!

While not everyone will be in such dire straits, they should all be able to appreciate this phase of the exploration process. After all, the time spent in the command chair brings with it an efficiency to our actions. Some urgency may still linger, but the limits once thought to exist have broadened with our experience.

Returning home, we examine and contemplate our journey, with a perspective stripped of tension, danger and adrenaline. Many begin by asking themselves "What have I done?", "What have I learned?" and: "Is that all there is?" or "Do I ever want to do that again?"

There are as many answers to these questions as there are people in the Galaxy. It is in our nature to push the boundaries. It is fortunate that our equipment has some redundancy built in to accommodate our recklessness and forgive our distractions. It gives us all a chance to explore from as many different perspectives as possible.

It is what makes living out in the black another of humanity's highest forms of art.

The Art of Deep Space Survival

Text: Michael Darkmoor

Images: OHMEGA.SEVEN, Zer0Axis, A Scrubby

Design: Donald Duck

Thanks to: Allitnil, Erimus Kamzel, Frontier Forums, Surly Badger

MAMBA



 **ZORGON**
PETERSON

Zorgon Peterson is a company primarily known for one ship: the Fer-de-Lance. A formidable stalwart in the combat world, it boasts a mixture of advantages possessed by no other ship in the heavy fighter class: strong shielding, agility, and firepower. With the recent unexpected announcement of the Mamba, many speculate that this is all about to change. Who better to challenge the king of heavy fighters than its own manufacturer? Join us as we take an exclusive first look at one of the year's most anticipated ships.



The latest trend

Zorgon appears to have been taking very close note of what its competitors have been up to. It has realised that the most recent developments in the field have come from manufacturers modifying existing ships. The Alliance Challenger, the Federal Assault Ship, and the upcoming Krait Phantom, to name just a few, are all modifications of existing spacecraft chassis.

It was to be expected that when it finally produced a new ship model, it would be building on the success of the Fer-de-Lance (FDL). A legendary vessel, the FDL is the definition of the modern heavy fighter. Speed, manoeuvrability, and impressive shielding all make the vessel unmatched in the field. While the Mamba is no simple chassis variant, there are clear nods to its venerable sibling throughout. Evolving from a racing design prototype with some significant chassis modifications, hull lightening, and hardpoint rearrangement, Zorgon Peterson has produced a vessel designed to reach extreme speeds while retaining combat dominance.



Designed to reach extreme speeds while retaining combat dominance.

On Paper

Zorgon's tinkering has come at a slight cost internally. One of the FDL's Class 4 optional internals has been downgraded to a Class 3. To compensate, the Class 1 has been upgraded to Class 2, though this is still a net downgrade. This is primarily due to the odd chassis modifications, accommodating the ship's new hardpoints.

Speaking of which, the Mamba is now the second medium-pad ship capable of mounting a Class 4 hardpoint. In addition to this, the four Class 2 hardpoints of its older sibling have become two Class 3s and two Class 1s. The result is an atypical weapon loadout somewhat lacking in utility.

One of the most important features is that the ship retains the six utility mounts of the FDL. These allow great diversity in its shield build while retaining useful tools like heat sinks and chaff launchers. Not only does this make up for the lack of optional internals, it is, in this writer's view, the sole reason for the FDL's long-standing domination of the class. By retaining this, the Mamba shows excellent potential on paper.

Moving on to the ship's main selling point — it is extremely fast. While a completely stock model may not feel that quick, a little outfitting and engineering to strip weight will allow the ship to comfortably exceed 640 m/s while boosting. While this beefing-up of rear thrusters has cost some manoeuvrability, such speed is a powerful advantage in many situations.

The ship seems to be purebred for combat. With pitiful internals and a low base jump range, the idea of using the Mamba for trade or exploration purposes is unappealing. Undoubtedly though there will always be some explorers who take the most illogical vessels on great journeys for no other reason than "why not?" As the Mamba is such an attractive ship, this is even more likely.

As with all our reviews, first-hand experience with vessels plays a key part in formulating verdicts. *Sagittarius Eye* was lucky enough to be able to customise, fly, and even field test a Mamba in combat before it went on sale to the general public. Keeping in mind that some technical specifications may change prior to release, let's dive right into that experience.



“ The Mamba proves a more specialised beast to tame.

In the Flesh

Before one even steps into the ship's cockpit, the Mamba makes one hell of an impression. Its lightweight chassis manifests in a split-nose hull, with extra weight removed from the rear of the ship as well. The ship is quite clearly intended to be as close as possible to the idea of a seat with thrusters strapped to it. The result is a highly aggressive and imposing physique, with a no-nonsense attitude to the task at hand: speed.

Stepping inside, a highly functional but attractive cockpit sits atop the stylish hull. Gone is the off-centre layout of the FDL; this ship has two centre-line seats. Should crew be available, it will be possible for them to man the ship's turrets and missile launchers.

Prior to the flight test, this correspondent had made sure to have available as many engineered modules to hand as possible. Various weapons, utility modules, and a set of high-performance dirty drive thrusters were all

installed in the Mamba as soon as our test model arrived. The ship boasts high compatibility with modules from its sister ship, the FDL, and as such may present itself as an attractive sidegrade to those experienced with the famous fighter.

For the combat test, the ship was fitted with undersized Class 3 prismatic shielding, Class 4 and Class 5 shield cell banks, and a plasma accelerator, fragment cannons, and railguns for weaponry.

Merely touching the vertical thruster controls immediately demonstrated the capability of this ship. With a low growl, the vertical and lateral thrusters lined the ship up with the mailslot with ease. A gentle push of the throttle results in quite the forward force, and after leaving the docking bay the ship was able to reach maximum speed in seconds.

Already displaying impressive vertical and lateral control,

it is with boosting where the Mamba shows off its key strength. In full combat fit, with military grade armour, prismatic shielding, engineered weaponry and shield boosters, the speed capped out a hair under 600 m/s. While pulling the flight stick showed a relatively disappointing turning rate, good use of boosting can somewhat make up for this deficiency.

Bounty Hunting

In the limited time available for ship testing, the obvious proving ground for the Mamba was a resource extraction site. The FDL made its fame as the first choice ship of the rich bounty hunter, combining luxury with ruthless offensive capabilities. Can the Mamba also prove itself worthy?

In a word: yes. In more words: yes, but not quite so simply. While the FDL is designed to be pilotable by even the most modestly skilled of commanders, the Mamba proves a more specialised beast to tame. Whilst the ship

entered into multiple engagements, the most telling was with a pair of Federal Assault Ships (FAS).

The FAS is a ship notable for its extreme manoeuvrability. Even the average stock build of the FAS is able to turn at an impressive rate, putting pressure on the most seasoned of bounty hunters. Combined with its versatile hardpoints (two large, two medium) it is a match for many a commander.

Opening the engagement with the plasma accelerator, the Mamba was able to quickly close the gap before the enemy could even react, letting loose volleys of fragment cannons and collapsing one of their shields. A good start, thanks primarily to the impressive hardpoints and high speed.

This first strike revealed a drawback: weapon convergence. Both Class 3 hardpoints are mounted at the very edge of the ship. This means that their projectiles can



“ The idea of using the Mamba for trade or exploration purposes is unappealing.”

have a hard time meeting the same target if that target is close, especially face-on when profiles are typically smaller. The small hardpoints also suffer this issue, though to a lesser extent. Given that some weapons experience fewer issues with convergence than others, careful weapon choice is in order.

Pulling up after the first pass, it was easy to feel what the Mamba lacks in manoeuvrability. The turn was notably slower than it would've been in most other heavy fighter vessels. The closest comparison that comes to mind for the turn rates is the Federal Dropship. While it cannot turn like the FDL, the low capacitor draw of boosting allows the ship to remain competitive, in addition to its strong lateral and vertical thrusters.

Letting off the rails on the return trip, the ship's heat started to spike, and letting off a plasma shot immediately after sent the heat over 110% of safe limit. Throughout the test, it was clear that the ship suffers from overheating issues, most likely due to the thruster layout. Despite this, it was not too difficult to lay down enough fire to destroy most enemies, but it is important to keep an eye on

the thermal indicator if heat damage is to be minimised.

The rest of the engagement consisted mostly of the Mamba blasting them at high speed then taking a wide trajectory around to hit again. The ship lacks the agility to brawl like others in its class but is able to use its speed to temporarily disengage and avoid tight turning dogfights.

The potential drawbacks highlighted by the test were the weapons' convergence and the heat issues. Less experienced pilots may struggle with these problems, particularly if using higher thermal load weaponry, such as plasma accelerators. Other pilots in the testing group for the ship often employed beam lasers engineered for thermal venting, allowing the weapons to cool the ship.

AX Capabilities

While we were not able to field test the Mamba against any Thargoid vessels, we were able to speak with Commander Painbeaver of the Anti-Xeno Initiative, who had tested the Mamba firsthand.

My conclusion is: for a pro pilot, for whom combining heatsink spam with alternating gauss [cannon] fire is not something extraordinary, [flight assist] off Mamba can be a refreshing experience because of its speed and overall insanely powerful thrusters. But for everyone else the FDL would be a better choice because of better convergence, more DPS [damage per second], slightly more shields and no such heat problems. [The Mamba is] a very viable ship up to Medusa for both FA on and off styles of combat, but for Hydra even a pro pilot would probably be better with an FDL.

Verdict

The Mamba is undoubtedly an impressive showing of Zorgon's technological capabilities. By combining heavy firepower with ferocious speed, Zorgon has created an attractive new ingredient for any destructive recipes that combat pilots may want to try. While there are some issues to get used to, most notably the thermal problems, they are unlikely to dissuade experienced fighter pilots attracted by the unique vessel. Whether newer pilots will be interested in the ship is another issue, however. With its somewhat higher skill requirement than ships in the same class, it may prove less popular than Zorgon hopes.

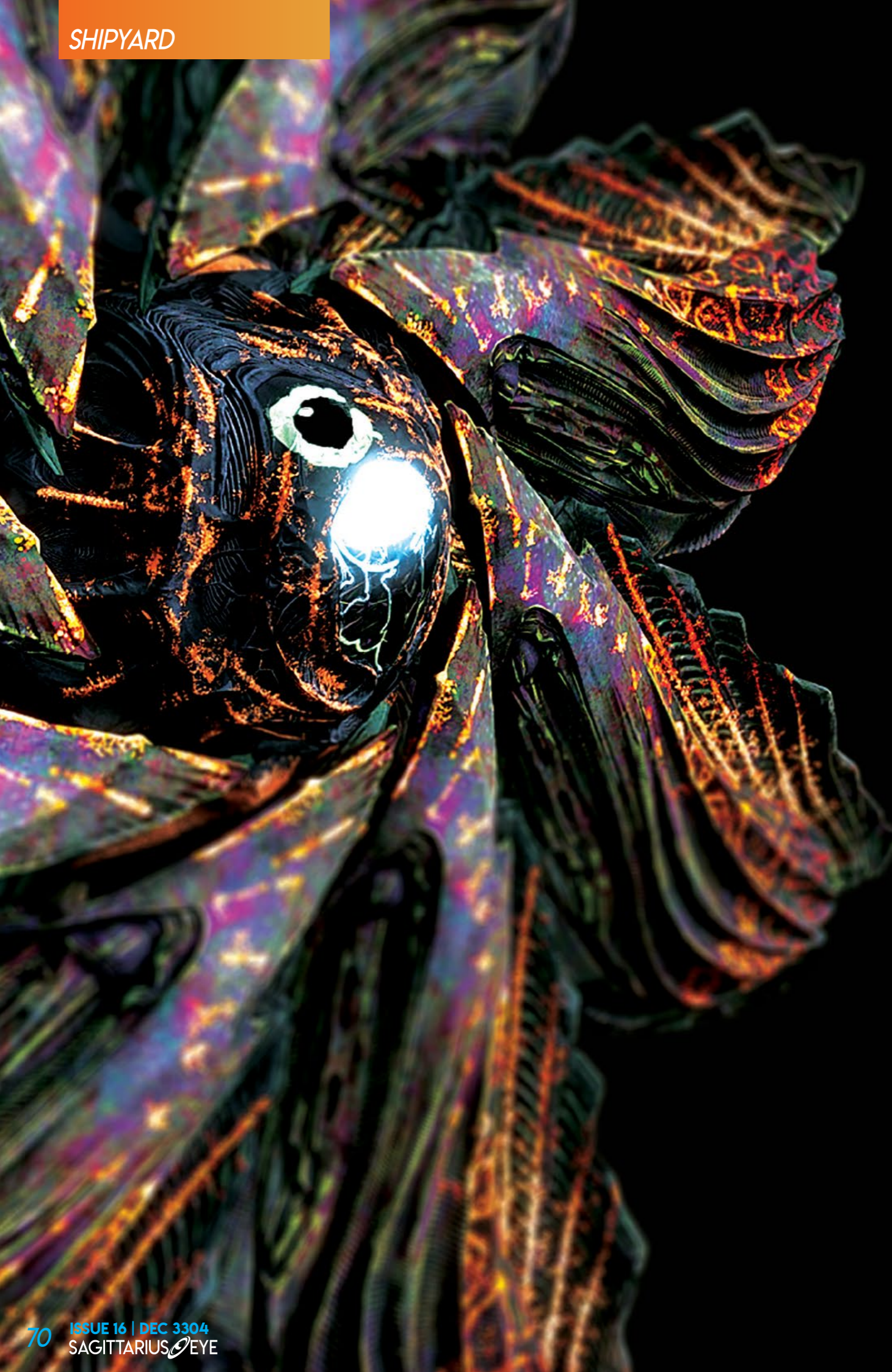
Mamba

Text: Mini_Watto

Images: Zer0axis, Pexels

Design: LexMoloch

Thanks to: Painbeaver



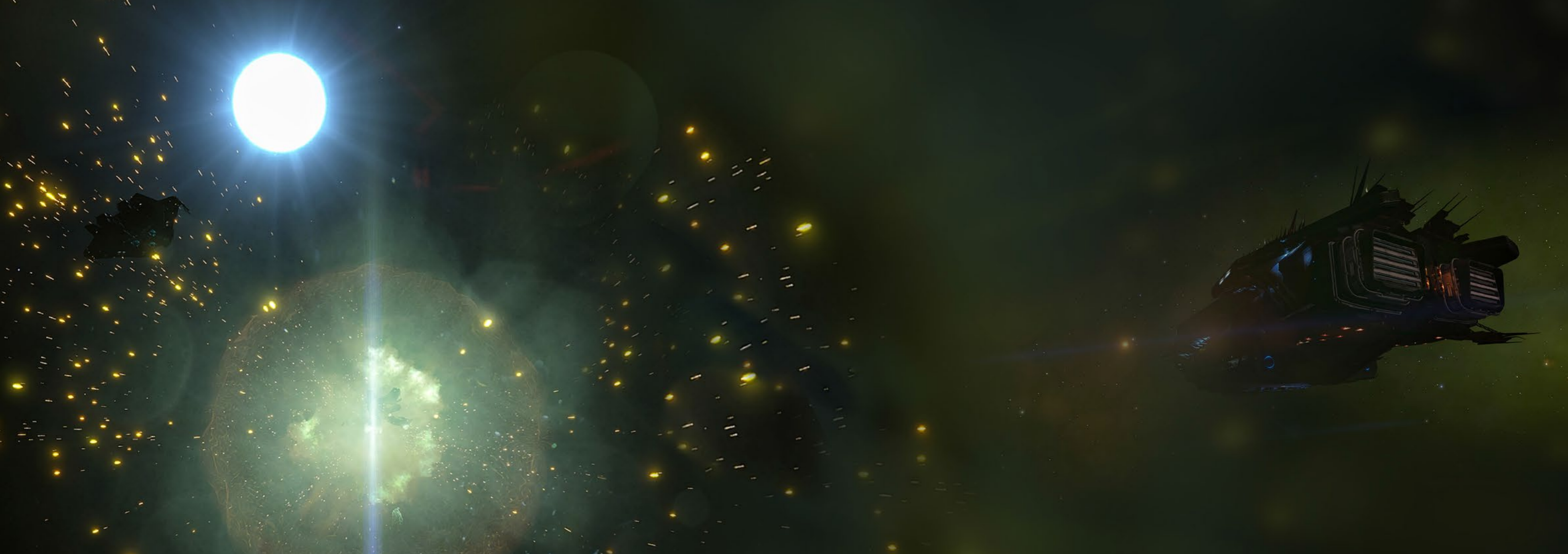
XENO

COMBAT
GUIDE

SURVIVAL

With the Thargoids threatening our home systems, it's important for all pilots to be as able to defend themselves as possible. In a new series, we consult the experts to bring you the ultimate guide to anti-xeno combat.

In this first article, we examine weapons, shields and hull.



The Best Weapons

One of the first and most important things to realise is the ineffectiveness of most of our standard weapons technology against these aliens. Thargoid Interceptors are immune to conventional weaponry and since these large vessels pose the greatest threat, it is important to choose armaments wisely.

There are two effective sets of weapon technologies capable of damaging and destroying Thargoid vessels: human-developed anti-xeno (AX) weapons, and Guardian hybrid technology. With this in mind, your correspondent contacted the Anti-Xeno Initiative (AXI, covered in a previous issue) for advice.

AXI Commanders Painbeaver and GluttonyFang both agree that the Guardian gauss cannon — similar to a railgun — is undoubtedly the best anti-Thargoid weapon. Although the gauss cannon produces significant amounts of heat, Aranionros Stormrage concludes that this heat build-up is completely independent of the power plant used on the ship, the power distributor being the determining factor. Weapon-focused engineering of the distributor massively reduces overall heat build-up by providing a larger and faster-regenerating pool of power for the weapon cooling systems.

The Guardian shard cannon — similar to a human fragment cannon — is a good all-round support weapon, ac-

The Guardian gauss cannon... is undoubtedly the best anti-Thargoid weapon.

According to veteran AX pilot Painbeaver. A full loadout of shard cannons is only recommended for the seasoned pilot, however, due to the difficulty of use against the well-protected Thargoid 'hearts'. For the less experienced, this weapon is much like a shotgun and is put to use as a secondary weapon to blast away the 'panic shield' that an Interceptor deploys whenever a heart is destroyed.

Several members of the panel mentioned that the remote flak launcher is essential for any AX combat pilot when engaging the swarms of Thargons (small fighter-like craft) deployed by an interceptor. The remote flak launcher takes a bit of practice, but once a pilot has

achieved some proficiency it becomes a very effective weapon against the Thargon swarms.

The trick, the panel agreed, is to "let the swarm fly into your flak projectiles". One of the easiest ways to achieve this is to boost in any direction, turn FA off, flip 180° and blast the Thargons while they approach. For best effects and greatest damage to the swarm, it is important to make sure that all three markers light up before releasing the trigger.

With the exception of the remote flak launcher, the panel concurs that Guardian weaponry is, in every aspect, superior to the human developed anti-xeno weapons available on the market. Whilst human weapons may not be as useful for the larger Thargoid ships, some are still very effective against the smaller, more agile Thargoid Scouts. According to Synoxys:

Turreted Class 3 AX multicannons are the most efficient weapon system [available] for destroying scouts. They have limited ammo, but the speed at which they kill scouts is unrivalled and requires minimal effort to achieve peak efficiency.

"Seeker missiles can be used to quickly and efficiently destroy Thargoid caustic missiles," he adds. However, the panel did caveat this by mentioning that missile

racks quickly run out of ammunition, which is expensive in both time and materials to synthesise. Given the caustic missiles' top velocity of only 350 m/s, simply boosting away faster than the missiles travel is the simplest solution that frees another hardpoint for something more useful.

The experts talked about other weapons and utilities, saying that railguns and plasma accelerators are good only for knocking out the 'panic shield'. While point defence is useful, it is worth noting that it will attempt to destroy flak rounds fired from any nearby AX vessels which are not in the same wing. This has led to AXI leadership recommending it to be left in the hangar if group operations are envisaged. Electronic countermeasures, according to Aranionros Stormrage, have been field tested and confirmed to be completely useless against both Thargoid and Thargon missiles.

In short, the Guardian gauss cannon should be the primary weapon of any anti-xeno ship. Supported by the Guardian shard cannon and a remote flak launcher, they maximise a ship's potential offensive capability. If there are any spare hardpoints it may be worthwhile to equip a long-range, thermally vented beam laser, which will help disperse any heat generated by the gauss cannon while also providing a bit of additional damage to the Thargoid shields.

Shields & Shield Cell Banks

The consensus is that bi-weave shields are particularly useful for fast, manoeuvrable small and medium ships due to their quick recharge rate. "Once you have completed an attack run you can back off, kiting your ship to a safe distance from the pursuing Thargoid until the shields are recharged," says Cmdr Shwinky.

The bi-weave shields should be engineered with the reinforced shield upgrade blueprint and the faster-recharge experimental effect, to increase the effective power while mitigating the recharge penalty from the upgrade. For pilots deploying low heat and flight-assist-off tactics, Shwinky suggests a non-standard use of the power distributor:

700 MJ is the reliable amount of shielding so that a Medusa can be engaged with no pips to systems; [enough to have the] heart exerted... killed and escape without my shields ever dropping... unless I make some major error during the attack run.

For pilots deploying other tactics, Painbeaver suggests:

I would recommend 1300-1400 MJ of shields for the same task. In the case of the Federal Assault Ship, I had only 664 MJ for the main bi-weave shield and each attack run used two SCBs that were giving an additional 644 MJ to the shield.

For less manoeuvrable ships, prismatic shields are highly recommended. If these are not available, Class A shield generators can suffice. These, again, should employ the reinforced engineering upgrade, but with the experimental high-capacity effect in order to maximise shield capacity. If using a multi-role ship with shields engineered for damage resistance, these shields may still be effective if the power rating is high enough, but it is good to remember that the damage resistance itself is completely bypassed by all Thargoid weaponry.

Both shield cell banks and shield boosters are very useful in keeping the shields online. Shield cells can be standard or engineered, with some of our panel preferring the specialised upgrade. Shield boosters, on the other hand, should be modified exclusively with the heavy duty blueprint and the super-capacitor experimental modification.

Another exceptionally useful tactic for maintaining a healthy shield during a confrontation with the aliens is called the 'The Regular Reboot'. Painbeaver explains:

Distract the Thargoid using a [ship launched fighter] and fly to a safe distance, around 8 km. If you are not receiving any damage and your speed is below 50 m/s, reboot your ship's systems. By the end of the reboot your shields will be 50% replenished.

Ship Armour

If the shields go down, having the resilience to withstand the full brunt of alien weaponry while moving out of range is a life-saver. Personal choices in tactics dictate how a specific ship should be outfitted, as we see when comparing two of our experts' recommendations. For Synoxys, light and fast is the way to go:

If you are building an extremely lightweight ship, particularly one that relies on the enhanced performance thruster module for its speed, you want to keep the weight down. In this case, [additional] armour is not recommended, as the extra weight will greatly decrease your speed.

Guardian weaponry is superior to the human-developed AX weapons.

In such cases, he recommends using the heavy duty armour and deep plating modifications on the standard lightweight alloy hull that comes stock on all ships.

Where speed is less important, higher integrity is all that stands between the pilot's chair and cold vacuum. Shwinky told us:

All that matters is hull integrity because resistances are useless against Thargoids. Because of this, military grade, reactive, and mirrored are all equal to each other. Military grade [becomes] the best option because it is by far the cheapest.

In next month's issue, we cover fine-tuning your module choices, and reveal the ships favoured by the experts in the fight against the Thargoids.

Xeno Combat Guide: Survival

Text: G-Dubya, Michael Darkmoor

Images: OrangePheonix

Design: McNicholl

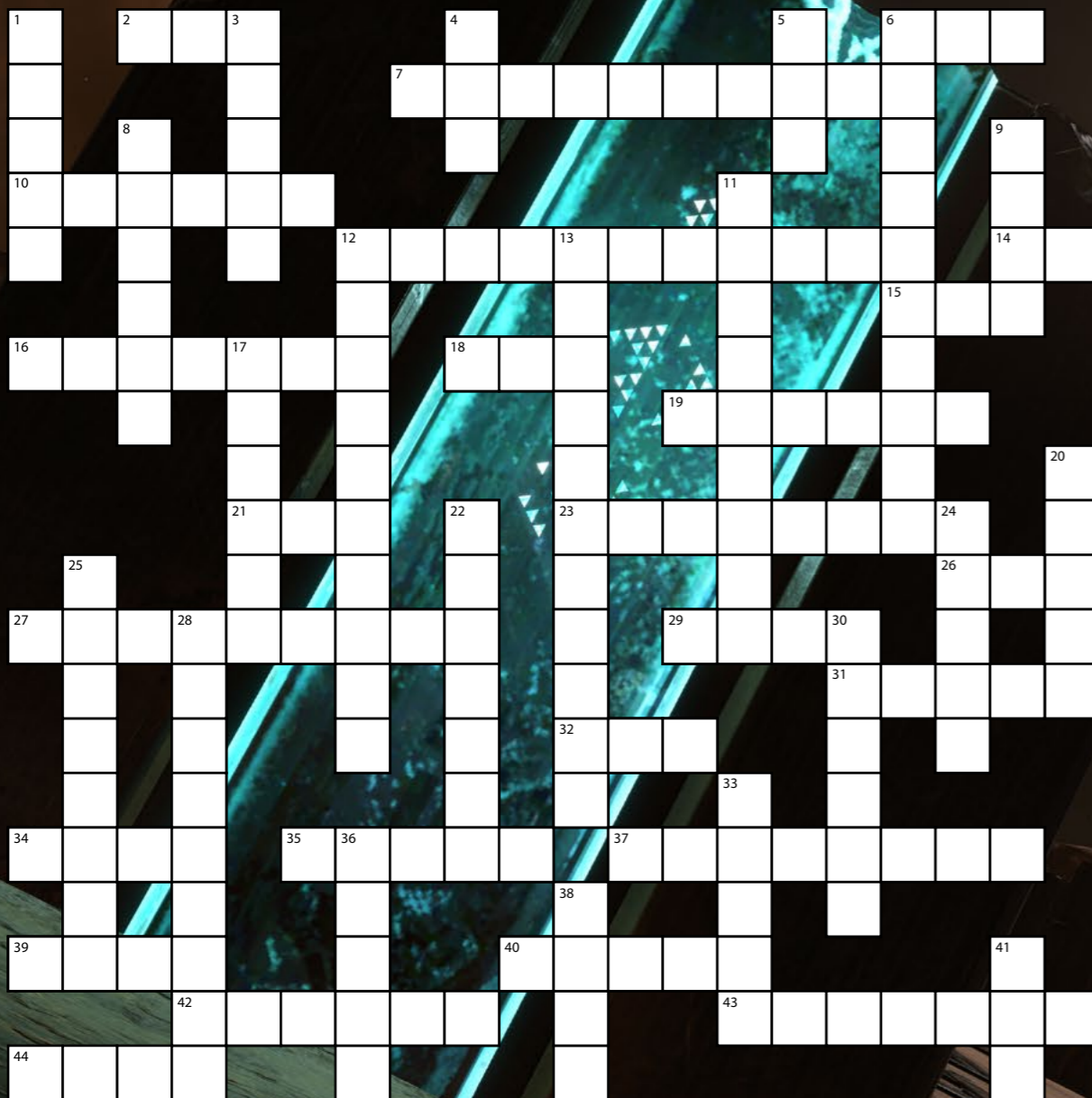
Thanks to: Aranionros Stormrage, GluttonyFang, Painbeaver, Shwinky, Synoxys



SAGi TEASERS

How's your lateral thrust?

Try your hand at our first cryptic crossword, inspired by pilots' experiences amongst the stars.



Across:

- [2] Terrorist organisation, the beginnings of supremely devious conspiracy (1,1,1)
- [6] PvP pilots will kill with one, or just fondle without one (1,1,1)
- [7] 'twas exotic but decayed into nasty pollutant (5,5)
- [10] Steamship goes around old world delivering illegal goods (6)
- [12] Spinning compass in a cavern points to elements (4,7)
- [14] Energy stored in jam jar (2)
- [15] Terse greeting from a ship used by explorers (3)
- [16] Breakdown services power rodent (4,3)
- [18] Power diversion begins exhausting noxious gasses (3)
- [19] Worth recognition (6)
- [21] Try 3447 for starters (1,1,1)
- [23] Confused in ring at PvP practice (8)
- [26] 6 trillion miles away and I love you really (3)
- [27] Racer's stag party divided by unknown character (9)
- [29] Something that allows refuelling initially (4)
- [31] Starport sphere exists in third person (5)
- [32] Mysterious broadcast looks like ancient boat (1,1,1)
- [34] Grin wildly where we find resource extraction sites (4)
- [35] Sector returns in familiar lane (5)
- [37] Invader cut up this dragon with lost tails (8)
- [39] Turbulent rain reveals origins of deadly virus (4)
- [40] Modern fighter would need a lot to match Arthurian Knight (5)
- [42] Let a short Imperial in to make this versatile device (6)
- [43] Chicken, one in odd transition metal (7)
- [44] Radio station (4)

Down:

- [1] Endless and confusing upsell of laser weaponry (5)
- [3] Imperial system puts child before elected official initially (5)
- [4] Home star alone endlessly (3)
- [5] Transit device fused oddly (1,1,1)
- [6] Deafen trio composed to oppose the Empire (10)
- [8] News tangle! (6)
- [9] Huge leap! Kangaroo loses the Queen! (4)
- [11] Intercept cider tint modification (9)
- [12] A gap between words or worlds, sounds like a decision is needed (10)
- [13] A guitar sits alone at the centre of the Galaxy (11)
- [17] Idler confused unknown in Zaonce (6)
- [20] Paint Egyptian God (5)
- [22] Mixing ion cola is a new frontier (7)
- [24] Old boy in short Scottish valley describes a world (5)
- [25] Alien protector (8)
- [28] Hear line dance before trouble sounds, drink (6,3)
- [30] After theft, one moves to distant star system (6)
- [33] Sounds like he does nothing until we see this light (5)
- [36] Spool up for extra shame (5)
- [38] Highs and lows of a rousing aftermath (4)
- [41] Engineer's system also known as ROT 10 (3)

When you think you've worked out every clue, send your solutions in to editor@sagittarius-eye.com. One correct entrant will be drawn at random, and will win a very rare official 'Frontier' paintjob for the Krait Mk II!

All management decisions are final.

No entries from SAGi staff, their families, pets, sentient AI, or Thargoids will be considered.

The solution will be provided in next month's issue!

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