

SAGITTARIUS EYE

JUL 3307

ISSUE

38

FEATURING IN THIS ISSUE:

**THE HULL SEALS ■ ASSAULT RIFLES ■ COLONIA CRUISES
SHIP-LAUNCHED FIGHTERS ■ THE THARGOID HOMEWORLD**



SAGITTARIUS EYE

ISSUE 38

EDITORS LEE LOCKHART, MACK WINSTON, SOUVARINE, VERTICALBLANK

ART EDITOR LEXMOLOCH

HEAD OF PHOTOGRAPHY ORANGEPHEONIX

DESIGNERS DONALD DUCK, LEXMOLOCH, MCNICHOLL, NICKWEB85

WRITERS ARIRI, MACK WINSTON, OSASHES, RENDAK SORO, SOUVARINE

FRONT COVER ART DMC_RULEZ

BACK COVER ART NICKWEB85

ADDITIONAL ART IAN BARISTAN, TOCOSO

PROOFREADERS MILLSTONEBARN, VERTICALBLANK

PHOTOGRAPHERS EXORCIST, MASKIME, NICKWEB85, ORANGEPHEONIX,

PSYREN FARSEER, SIRRUF, TWOSPOONS

WEBSITE DESIGN 147LOCH

THANKS TO: DREBIN OMEGA, ETRÉ ANGER, LCU NO FOOL LIKE ONE, MELSOM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

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It's estimated that we humans have existed in our modern biological form for a little over two million years, our origin coinciding roughly with the disappearance of the Guardians, whose remains were discovered just a few years ago. The vast majority of those two million years were spent with virtually no technology

in the modern sense, until roughly two-and-a-half thousand years ago, when steam power was harnessed at scale for the first time. At that point, human technological development became exponential.

Within a hundred years, the first aircraft flew. About fifty years later, the first artificial satellite, *Sputnik 1*, was launched. Ten years after that, humans walked on another celestial body for the first time. While it would be some time before the enormous challenges of leaving the Sol system became overcome, overcome they were, and now humanity inhabits on the order of 20,000 star systems.

Despite our burgeoning technology and galactic spread, the one thing that hasn't really changed over the last two million years is our tribal nature: the need to keep *us* ahead of *them*.

Much of our technological effort has been poured into weaponry with which to express this tribal nature, and now, with the Odyssey era, we bring the fight from outer space down to the surface. We may express our tribal nature now with greater complexity, and make more elaborate excuses for it, but it's fortunate that we are no longer bent on mutual nuclear annihilation while confined to a single planet.

Nevertheless, Pilots' Federation commanders will need to defend themselves when on foot. This month's edition of *Sagittarius Eye* focuses on assault rifles: a good option for any commander. 





Photo: pSyren | Farseeer

SAGITTARIUS EYE

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SCIENCE

The Thargoid homeworld





INTERVIEW:

THE HULL SEALS



Since their founding in 3305, the Hull Seals have quietly become part of the galactic furniture. The service they provide has saved countless lives, and has provided something of a safety net for deep space explorers. This month, we get to know the galaxy's favourite deep space marine mammals.





Hey there. What's your role with the Hull Seals, and when did you join the group?

Hey there! My name is Drebin Omega. I am one of the admins of the Hull Seals.

I actually joined the Hull Seals way back when we were still the fleet mechanics for the Distant Worlds 2 expedition. I designed our logo and about 95% of the art resources used by our organisation, and I am also the person behind our merchandising, media and community outreach departments!

Is the Hull Seals a hierarchical organisation? Does it have a 'leader'?

Our administrators are the collective leaders behind the Hull Seals. Rixxan, MiddleNate, Akastus and myself each have our specialties that come together to form what I like to think is a nicely rounded group of leaders, doing our very best to help keep the galaxy repaired!

Rixxan is our tech specialist, he along with our intrepid 'cyberseals' created and run all of our emergency response systems. These systems are essential to the repairs the Hull Seals provide, allowing us to quickly and easily dispatch Seals wherever they may be needed. MiddleNate helps run the day to day needs of the Seals, helping solve daily issues that arise in our Discord, from maintenance to helping mediate discourse. An accountant by trade, Akastus helps with a lot of our fiscal responsibilities and, along with Rixxan, helps make sure our servers are kept funded and running to help all the commanders we can!

How and when was it founded?

We actually began as the fleet mechanics of the Distant Worlds 2 expedition. We were tasked with maintaining the fleet of explorers in case of any hull damage or accidents along the way. The Hull Seals name was born of a brainstorming session had by the fleet mechanics at the time; Commander Freyar suggested the name 'the Hull Seals' and it proved so popular with everyone it just stuck. Soon after, Seals began submitting artwork for potential logos and my art proved to be most popular. The Hull Seals then had a name and branding for its members to be able to rally behind – not to mention a source of endless puns!

How many repairs have you carried out now?

As of this interview, we are proud to say we have had 1,411 successful rescues! Including our 'Code Black' rescues, which involve helping save commanders with breached canopies by guiding them to the safety of a station's atmosphere (even to the extent of helping commanders find and scoop up synthesis materials to

supply their life support) and our 'Code Blue' rescues, which involve guiding commanders stuck in the exclusion zones of white dwarf and neutron stars to safety. We also work alongside our sister organisation the Kingfishers, who specialise in SRV rescue and retrieval.

“ From their terrible exclusion zones to their difficulty to scoop from, and with the lousy boost compared to neutrons, white dwarf stars are just not worth touching.

What has been your busiest period since your founding?

That would have been during Distant Worlds 2. Specific tourist spots turned out to be particularly dangerous for commanders that hadn't experienced such dangers as extreme gravity and difficult exclusion zones. We also had one tourist spot that would spawn pirate ships that would attack DW2 explorers with cargo; this particular situation helped create our 'walrus' armed Seals.

Are there any particular regions of space which are damage 'black spots'?

White dwarf stars. We can't stress enough how much commanders need to keep away from these ghastly galactic entities. From their terrible exclusion zones to their difficulty to scoop from, and with the lousy boost compared to neutrons, they are just not worth touching. Keep away from white dwarf scooping!

While I am at it, may I use this time to alert your readers to the importance of keeping a collection of iron and nickel raw material at hand. Please, we urge you to stock up on iron and nickel! These common and easily found raw materials can be used to synthesise life support refills in case of canopy breaches.

What's the typical process for a Hull Seals call-out?

A commander should visit HullSeals.space and hit the big green 'Request a Repair' button. This also works if you have a stuck SRV and need a Kingfisher.

Once a commander has filled out the rescue form provided they will then be connected with one of our extremely capable dispatchers, who will then find you a Seal (or Kingfisher) to help out!

How many Hull Seals are there now?

We currently have 155 fully-trained Seals (and Kingfishers), prepared to help in most if not all situations that could trouble a commander out in the black. From patching hulls to things as simple as reboot-repairs, the Seals (and Kingfishers) are here to help!

Where are the Hull Seals based?

The Hull Seals (a lot like real seals) tend to just show up and cover a system in blubber. Despite our nomadic nature, we are in the process of looking for a system we can call our own. Additionally, the DSSA-attached HSRC *Limpet's Call* (in Phroi Bluae QI-T e3-3454) is our official Hull Seal fleet carrier, so be sure to stop by sometime.

Are there any particular ships or builds that are particularly popular amongst Seals?

Anacondas, Kraits and Dolphins tend to be the most popular ships flown by our rapid responders, although anything with a large-enough repair limpet controller and long jump range is fine.

“ We often meet up when we are not flinging limpets at damaged hulls.

Do you organise meet-ups for members, or are the Hull Seals strictly a service provider rather than a group?

The Hull Seals are a close community of passionate individuals with a myriad of shared interests. We often meet up when we are not flinging limpets at damaged hulls. I, for one, have been known to compete with other Seals in racing sims. We also occasionally host movie nights and regular Stellaris sessions; we entertain a small Pokémon fandom, and one Seal is a particularly huge fan of wargaming. Some Seals of ours are avid D&D roleplayers that meet up frequently. Some of our Seals have even met up in person!

Do you ever fail rescues?

We do, and we all really feel for the commanders we are unable to help. (The term 'Drebin's Lament' was coined for the sorrow felt when we lose a commander.) While the Seals try their absolute hardest to successfully complete cases, some cases inevitably fail. These failed cases, despite their harrowing nature, do help make successful cases all the sweeter.

What's the most daring rescue or repair the Seals have pulled off?

It would have to be our longest-distance rescue to date, a whopping 57,000 light years travelled to rescue a commander in distress. These kinds of rescues are rare but are a real sign of the commitment to our duty of care in the galaxy. Next would be our 'Code Black' and 'Code Blue' rescues. These adrenaline-fueled races against the clock to save commanders who are on emergency life support test every Seal's fortitude, skill and talent dealing with high-stress and risky situations. Now, granted, not every rescue can be as epic or glorious as some of our most illustrious rescues, but it is seeing a helped commander go on their way and knowing you have helped someone in need that, I think, beats any daring rescue any day of the week.

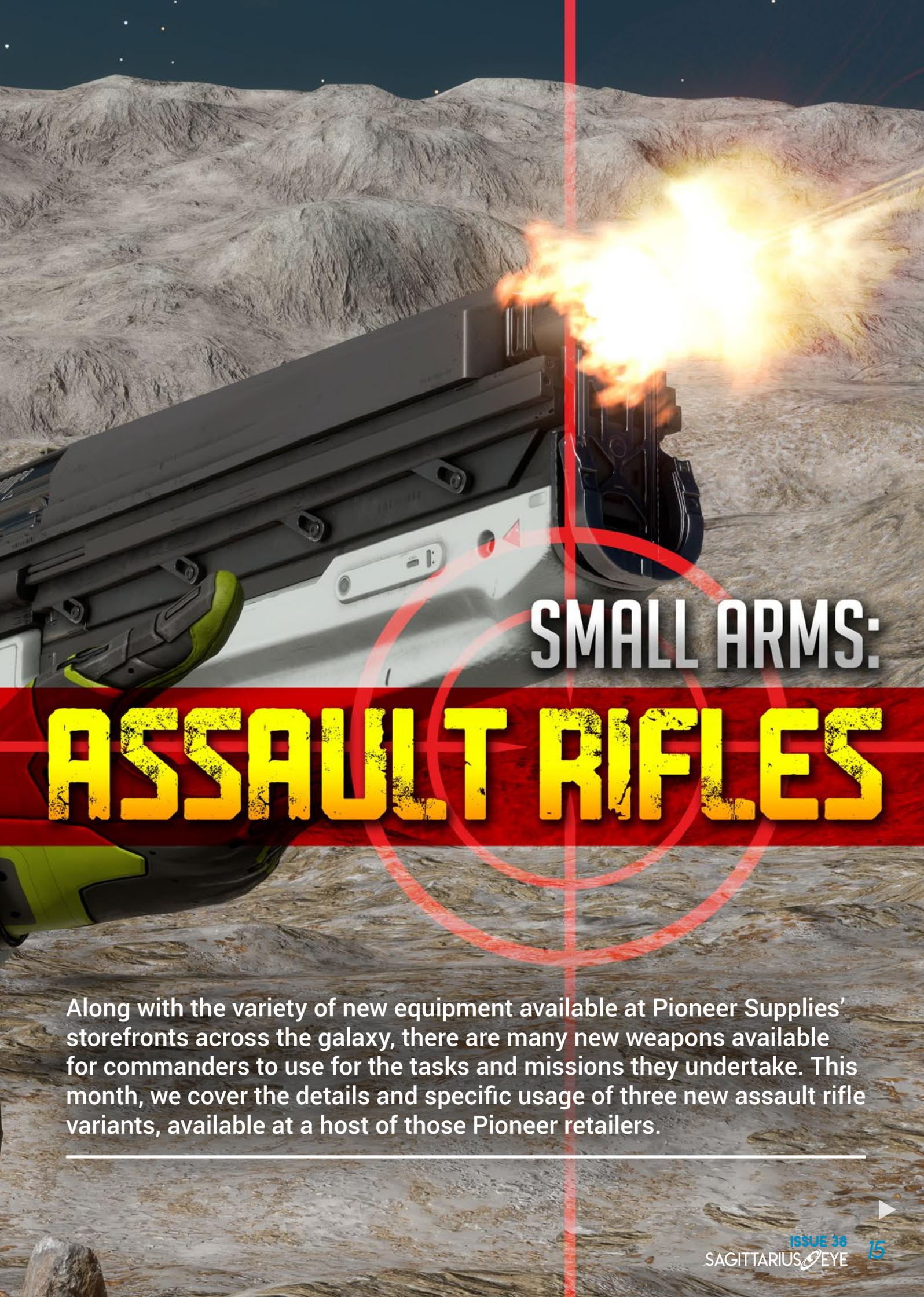
Do you have any big plans for the future you can tell us about?

As I mentioned, we are currently trying to find an appropriate home system for the Seals, which proves to be something all of the Seals have really been enjoying! Maybe a faction might be in the stars for the Seals in the future.

Thanks for your time, and see you out in the black! 







SMALL ARMS:

ASSAULT RIFLES

Along with the variety of new equipment available at Pioneer Supplies' storefronts across the galaxy, there are many new weapons available for commanders to use for the tasks and missions they undertake. This month, we cover the details and specific usage of three new assault rifle variants, available at a host of those Pioneer retailers.

THE KARMA AR 50



Designed and manufactured by Kinematic Armaments, this is a powerful mid-range automatic rifle. It fires high-velocity projectiles which inflict kinetic damage on its targets. The AR-50 has a stylish and tactical design with a bull-pup profile that houses the magazine at the rear of the weapon — tucked into the stock. It has a short barrel that is apparently designed for urban combat within the confines of planetary settlements or other close to mid-range engagement areas.

The Karma AR-50 has a base magazine size of 40 rounds, with a base reserve ammunition capacity of 200. This provides plenty of ammunition for sustained use over a long engagement. The AR-50's reload time falls in the middle of its class, with reduced benefit from reload speed engineering modifications compared to its plasma counterpart, but more so than a laser assault rifle.

The Karma AR-50's effective range is similar to its assault rifle counterparts, proving to be exceptionally lethal at medium ranges, but it suffers from a low rate of fire at close range and a mildly obnoxious firing pattern spread at long range. Greater range engineering does help with this weapon's effectiveness at both long and medium ranges, as the firing pattern spread does tighten once upgraded. Increased magazine capacity is also a good choice, as it enables the AR-50 to disperse suppressing fire down range for much longer.

The AR-50, like any kinetic weapon, is best used against targets without shields. Use another weapon, or a shield disruptor grenade, to remove opponents' shields, then blast through the enemies' armour with the AR-50.

Combined-weapon tactics are the name of the game for proper usage of this weapon, but if used smartly, the AR-50 can be used to inflict reliable and consistent damage and suppressing fire against multiple targets.

Smart engineering and a good aim from the user will allow the Karma AR-50 to stand as the strongest overall platform for purely kinetic damage at medium to long ranges. If targets' shields are down the AR-50 will make quick work of them, all while allowing the user to stay at safe engagement distances and retain various options for cover. In ground-based conflict zones, specifically, this longer-range tactic can be very effective for pushing back enemy lines or for providing cover for control points and other pinch points on the battlefield.



MAGAZINE
SIZE

40



RESERVE
CAPACITY

200



EFFECTIVE
RANGE (m)

50

The AR-50, like any kinetic weapon, is best used against targets without shields.



THE TK APHELION



The TK Aphelion is Takada's premier handheld laser platform, and the largest handheld weapon designed by the manufacturer. It has a sleek, narrow design that resembles that of a ship manufactured by Gutamaya. With a tight stock and fully-guarded grip leading up to a side-mounted magazine housing, the TK Aphelion looks and feels much more ergonomic than a typical firearm. Frontward, past the magazine housing, the TK Aphelion has an adjustable angled grip — providing even more control and ergonomic function, leading up to a vertical two-pronged fork which houses the mirror/lens assembly for the laser matrix.

The TK Aphelion is designed as a burst fire weapon. However, it is automatic in the sense that as long as the trigger is held, burst fire continues on repeat until the magazine is drained. This rifle has a firing pattern spread similar to its Kinematics counterpart; however, it suffers slightly less at longer ranges due to the near-instant shot speed of laser fire. This makes the TK Aphelion strong against enemy shields at medium ranges, and even quite effective at long range. However, it is outclassed in raw damage output and effectiveness at close ranges by its SMG counterpart.

The TK Aphelion, much like the Karma AR-50, benefits greatly from 'greater range' engineering. The tightened spread and increased effective range make this a best-in-class weapon for providing damage at medium and long ranges purely against shields. 'Higher accuracy' engineering compounds this, and provides additional benefits in reducing the firing pattern spread. The TK Aphelion has a relatively quick base reload speed, so 'reload speed' engineering can be beneficial but isn't necessary to make the weapon effective.

With a base magazine size of only 25 rounds and a reserve ammo capacity of only 150 rounds, the TK Aphelion will benefit greatly from 'magazine size' engineering and 'increased ammo capacity' engineering in the user's suit. This will allow the user to apply anti-shield damage for longer, and specifically allow the user to remove the shields of multiple targets at once. Though outshone in purely close-quarters engagements by its SMG counterpart the TK Eclipse, the TK Aphelion is an effective tool at removing targets' shields at medium and long ranges. Paired with smart tactical use and a suit with sufficient mobility, the TK Aphelion can be a potent tool on the battlefield.



MAGAZINE
SIZE

25



RESERVE
CAPACITY

150



EFFECTIVE
RANGE (m)

70



THE MANTICORE OPPRESSOR

The Manticore Oppressor, much like the rest of Manticore's arsenal, has an aggressive aesthetic. With a light stock to a barrel surrounded by a hard-edged, angular shroud, the weapon almost looks more like a melee weapon than a firearm. The factory Oppressor has a small holo sight mounted atop the upper shroud and a magazine housing that doubles up as an angled forward grip. This is a weapon that perfectly combines an intimidating-looking chassis with well-engineered control design, making it another interesting and useful choice for ground-based combat.

The Oppressor is an automatic plasma rifle, firing projectiles of superheated matter downrange at a modest but consistent firing rate. Like other plasma weapons, the Oppressor suffers from a low projectile travel speed, making proper leading of moving targets extremely important. However, when a user lands his fire on target, the Oppressor dishes out absolutely devastating damage that is equally effective against shields as it is against armour. This makes the rifle a powerful tool for general use and incredibly strong when wielded by a skilled marksman.

The Manticore Oppressor benefits greatly from 'magazine size' and 'reload speed' engineering. Typically, the Oppressor is best used at closer ranges than its kinetic and laser assault rifle counterparts. This is due to the fact that, at closer ranges, its slow projectile speed can be more easily accounted for. However, once a user has become intimately familiar with the weapon and become used to leading targets, the Oppressor can be used at similar ranges to the other assault rifles to devastating effect.

The Oppressor is one of the best weapons available for laying down suppressing fire. Its slow-moving plasma remains airborne for longer after the shooter has

ceased firing than the shots of a non-plasma weapon do, making suppression effective for longer. 'Greater range' engineering can also be applied to the Oppressor to allow it to lay down this suppressing fire from even longer ranges, or even from the top of distant buildings.

The stock Oppressor, however, suffers from a low rate of fire. This is made up by the fact that each plasma round can inflict high damage. It also allows the Oppressor to have the most controllable recoil in the assault rifle class. Stability engineering can further add to this and provide even tamer recoil, but it's not a necessity.

All in all, the Manticore Oppressor is an interesting choice in the assault rifle category. It has a use-case for nearly every engagement, providing damage to both shields and armour. However, it requires much more practice and finesse to achieve optimal combat performance, which may put some commanders off. If one takes the time to master the Oppressor, though, they will have the ability to lay down ruinous suppressing fire and apply massive damage to targets who expose themselves.



MAGAZINE
SIZE

50



RESERVE
CAPACITY

300



EFFECTIVE
RANGE (m)

35

A character in futuristic, black and orange armor is shown in a dynamic, crouching pose, firing a plasma weapon. The weapon's muzzle is glowing with a bright purple and pink plasma effect. The character is wearing a helmet with a visor and has various mechanical components on their armor. The background is a dark, industrial interior with metallic walls and panels. A yellow vertical bar is positioned to the left of the text.

Like other plasma weapons, the Oppressor suffers from a low projectile travel speed.

TACTICS AND USES

In ground-based conflict zones, when using assault rifles, commanders should attempt to stay at range. The assault rifle class of weapons provide great consistent damage at range, but will be outshone in raw damage output up close. So assault rifles should be used tactically to push enemy lines and apply damage while keeping within cover as often as possible. Assault rifle reloads typically take longer than close-range weapons, so ducking into cover during reloads should be considered mandatory. Assault rifles are the best tool for providing suppressing fire during conflict zones, and as such, should be used commonly for this task. Providing suppressing fire and keeping your enemies pinned down will allow your allies to push in and secure kills and objectives.

For many of the legal and not-so-legal missions available for commanders to take on, assault rifles are also a great choice of firearm. Targets can be stalked and set up in advance, allowing the user to attain smart points of cover before an engagement begins. Using range tactically when setting up to begin an engagement is key to succeeding with assault rifles. These strategies will allow a commander to get in, get the objective, and get out — while staying out of danger.

When using a Dominator suit, two of these assault rifles can be used in tandem to devastating effect.

WEAPON OF CHOICE



The three assault rifle variants offered by Pioneer Supplies are all interesting choices and have specific use-cases where they outshine one another. However, keep in mind that when using a Dominator suit, two of these assault rifles can be used in tandem to devastating effect. Each weapon pairs nicely with either alternative, providing multiple damage types while maintaining medium- and long-range effectiveness. Each of these firearms, however, operate very differently, so considerable target practice is suggested when first becoming accustomed to any of them.

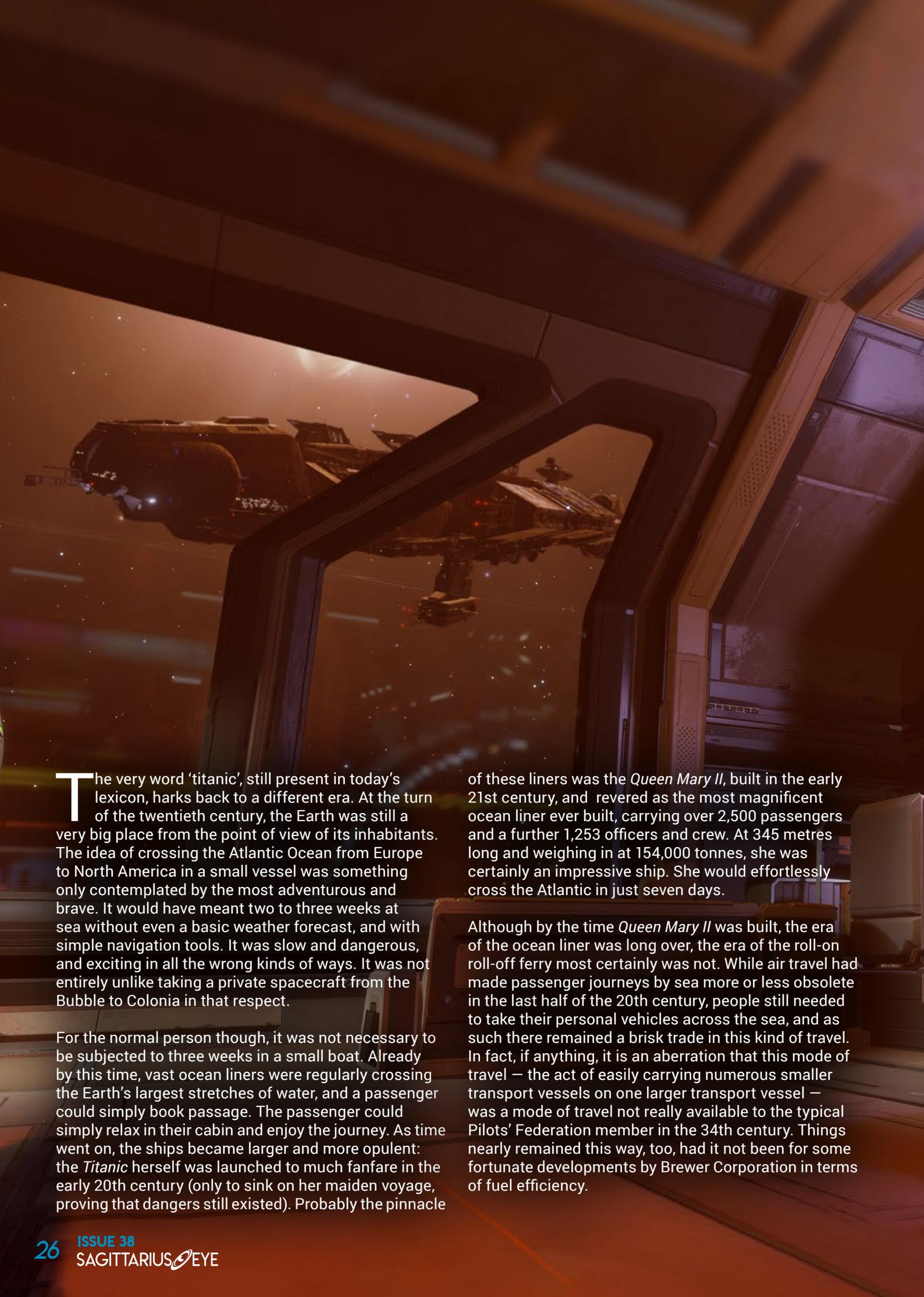
Kinematics, Takada and Manticore provide us with three unique and deadly choices in the assault rifle category. This reporter truly can not pick a favourite out of the three. Each weapon has a specific niche, but still provides enough flexibility for general use and effectiveness in most combat situations. If you're able, take the time to purchase each of these assault rifle variants and find what suits your marksman style and personal needs. With some target practice and smart tactics, you will be dominating the battlefield in no time. Maintain that trigger discipline, commanders! 



FLYING ★ THE FLEET ★

It was only a year ago that the Brewer Corporation finally made available for sale the fleet carrier. It must be said that the reaction of many Pilots' Federation members in the run-up to this event was lukewarm, to say the least. The amount of negativity expressed, while not unprecedented, was palpable. On the other hand, commanders who really wanted a fleet carrier did not complain in the Pilots' Federation forums and instead got on with the job. The diamond mines were alive with activity, buzzing with Type-9s, Imperial Cutters and Anacondas, strip-mining the rings of Borann 2A. Actions speak louder than words, and when Brewer Corp. opened its doors to sales, these titanic machines were literally flying off the assembly line and into the hands of their eager owners — to the extent that some carrier management systems actually became full. Before Brewer Corporation had even started selling these vessels, the Fleet Carriers Owner Club had already been created, its membership burgeoning.





The very word 'titanic', still present in today's lexicon, harks back to a different era. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Earth was still a very big place from the point of view of its inhabitants. The idea of crossing the Atlantic Ocean from Europe to North America in a small vessel was something only contemplated by the most adventurous and brave. It would have meant two to three weeks at sea without even a basic weather forecast, and with simple navigation tools. It was slow and dangerous, and exciting in all the wrong kinds of ways. It was not entirely unlike taking a private spacecraft from the Bubble to Colonia in that respect.

For the normal person though, it was not necessary to be subjected to three weeks in a small boat. Already by this time, vast ocean liners were regularly crossing the Earth's largest stretches of water, and a passenger could simply book passage. The passenger could simply relax in their cabin and enjoy the journey. As time went on, the ships became larger and more opulent: the *Titanic* herself was launched to much fanfare in the early 20th century (only to sink on her maiden voyage, proving that dangers still existed). Probably the pinnacle

of these liners was the *Queen Mary II*, built in the early 21st century, and revered as the most magnificent ocean liner ever built, carrying over 2,500 passengers and a further 1,253 officers and crew. At 345 metres long and weighing in at 154,000 tonnes, she was certainly an impressive ship. She would effortlessly cross the Atlantic in just seven days.

Although by the time *Queen Mary II* was built, the era of the ocean liner was long over, the era of the roll-on roll-off ferry most certainly was not. While air travel had made passenger journeys by sea more or less obsolete in the last half of the 20th century, people still needed to take their personal vehicles across the sea, and as such there remained a brisk trade in this kind of travel. In fact, if anything, it is an aberration that this mode of travel – the act of easily carrying numerous smaller transport vessels on one larger transport vessel – was a mode of travel not really available to the typical Pilots' Federation member in the 34th century. Things nearly remained this way, too, had it not been for some fortunate developments by Brewer Corporation in terms of fuel efficiency.

Departures

FLIGHT	TIME	DESTINATION
ORION	06:45	COLONIA
SAG-28	06:52	MILLESE
SAG-11	07:12	BEAGLE POINT
ROCCO-5	10:35	COLONIA
SPYFA-3	12:03	HEART'S SOUL
GT-3221	12:12	EXPLORERS ANCHORAGE
EX-ORCI	16:55	COLONIA
ST-OUT	18:00	COLONIA
HEATHS-C	18:28	HORSEHEAD
DOL-32	18:30	COLONIA
COL-26	19:36	COLONIA
W-ARBU	21:33	SYNDEE GT-H B43-1
CKS	22:49	***CLASSIFIED***
HA-MAU		



Galactic crossings

When originally revealed by the Brewer Corp., it was announced that the fleet carrier could be fitted with a shipyard, capable of carrying not just the owner's fleet but the fleets of any commander invited to board. To the majority, this would be a means of 'projecting power': the use of a fleet carrier to support conflict zones. This was especially the case where a conflict zone had no convenient space station where the pilot could re-arm and repair.

Very quickly, however, a new and more peaceful use of the fleet carrier emerged. Harking back to the twentieth century ocean liner, a fleet carrier could take passengers and their ships to distant places such as Colonia, Sagittarius A*, the Formidine Rift and even Beagle Point. There are many pilots who have never been to such places, even though every spacecraft available to Pilots' Federation members is capable of any of these journeys. It takes a significant commitment to fly these distances, and there are dangers: not just the dangers of a botched neutron star boost, but of space madness. The article *The Deadly Tour* in issue 27 of this magazine (coincidentally the same issue that covered the launch of the fleet carrier) makes some of these dangers abundantly clear.

So why not just book a cabin and relax, while the fleet carrier takes the strain? Today, the Fleet Carrier Owners Club is a place where fleet carrier owners advertise their journeys. It is as simple as looking at the right Discord channel – for example 'Bubble to Colonia' – to see journeys being advertised. For popular routes like this there are often four fleet carrier journeys each week. Typically, between the Bubble and Colonia – today's equivalent of that old transatlantic crossing between the Old and New Worlds – the journey will take two days. Some journeys are slightly longer, involving some sightseeing detours for the passengers. Others may have a list of advertised stops, such as the Colonia Connection Highway, in order to pick up and drop off at these intermediate points.





“

A major part of such a journey by fleet carrier is the loading and management of vast quantities of tritium fuel.



VY CANIS MASKIMIS II
FLEET CARRIER
HIP 17481 SYSTEM
NONE
NONE

The journey

This writer decided to take an out-and-back trip on one such vessel. The *Alan Mathison Turing*, a Nautilus-class carrier, was advertising a return trip to Colonia, launching from the orbit of Panem in Kappa Fornacis and ultimately arriving in Centralis in the Colonia nebula.

The journey was advertised on the Fleet Carrier Owner's Club, for both an outward (Bubble to Colonia) and return journey two weeks later. The journey in both cases would take around two days, with an intermediate rest stop ('overnight') at Sacaqawea Space Port (Skaudai CH-B d14-34). There were also some shorter scheduled stops: on the northbound journey Attenborough's Watch and Vihara Gate, and on the southbound journey Polo Harbour, Eudaemon Anchorage and Hillary Depot.

In charge of this operation is a woman named Ruby Villareal, with the job title 'Deck Officer'. A slender woman in her late fifties who is no stranger to running megaships, she told us:

"My job here amongst other things is to ensure the smooth running of the journey, to ensure the route is plotted correctly, and jumps are made without delay. In short, the captain and owner of this vessel delegates to me the responsibilities for the day to day running of the ship, and managing each hyperspace transit. We allocate twenty two minutes per jump; this includes the warm-up and cool-down time at the end of each jump, and provide predictable timings, so we can give an accurate timetable to the traveller."



It's not the same with all of the fleet carriers on the Bubble to Colonia run. Many give no more than an estimate, such as "probably late on Tuesday, perhaps Wednesday", as an arrival time. The *Alan Mathison Turing*, by contrast, was advertising departure, stop-off and arrival times to the minute. Sure enough, we left the orbit of Panem on time (much to the chagrin of Cmdr Frédéclair, who was only 100m away when the pads locked down. He eventually caught up at Attenborough's Watch in a hastily refitted Diamondback Explorer). The company slogan is "If you're late, we won't wait!"

Indeed, the crew of the carrier has created something called the 'working timetable', or WTT for short. This provided in minute detail the entire flight plan; every jump, every passing point, and all timed right down to the minute. Villareal told us:

"The WTT is very important to us. It lists not just the times, but the expected fuel usage and remaining fuel load at each point, and is kept updated as the journey continues. The route is initially created by using the Spanish Fleet Carrier Route Plotter. We take that information, list all the waypoints in the WTT, and add the timings. As the journey progresses, we record actual passing times and actual fuel usage to make sure there's no surprises."

Responsible for fuel loading on the *Alan Mathison Turing* is Ellery Townsend. Like Villareal, she has years of experience of megaship operations but joined the crew of this fleet carrier, seeking work with a Pilots' Federation member-run operation, after leaving a long life of being a small cog in some giant corporation's machine. "I wanted something a little less predictable," she said.

A major part of such a journey by fleet carrier is the loading and management of vast quantities of tritium fuel. Management of fuel is, in principle, a simple job, but it does require care and consideration — and a considerable sum of money. With an adequate reserve for possible diversions, a trip from the Bubble to Colonia and back requires a quite eye-watering quantity of fuel: over five thousand tonnes in each direction. Townsend told us:

"On this journey, we carry nearly twelve thousand tonnes of tritium. Mining it is far too slow, so buying it is really the only way. Before the journey, we sent our fuel tender — an Imperial Cutter — on runs to the cheapest stations with a good supply of fuel. You've got to strike a balance: price versus availability. There are some very cheap places for fuel but if they've only got twenty tonnes of the stuff, it's just no much use. Unless it's very cheap, we ignore stations without large landing pads, too. We'd prefer to fill a 728-tonne Cutter with each visit to get it over quickly, as time really is money in this business. We don't want to carry too much, either; the carrier operates more efficiently with a lighter load of fuel, and we don't want to have to try and refuel at Colonia since fuel availability is so poor there."

For this journey, the carrier took on 12,000 tonnes of fuel; plenty to get to Colonia and back, and also have some spare in case of diversions. No fleet carrier owner advertising a passenger journey wants to have



to call the Fuel Rats — it would be *terribly* embarrassing. For practical purposes, the *Alan Mathison Turing* would have paid around 41,000 credits per tonne, resulting in a fuel cost of just under half a billion credits, and around 450 million credits-worth actually used once the trip was complete. “It’s good that the Brewer Corporation managed to improve the fuel economy of these things”, Townsend added. “During testing, the fuel burn was four times higher than it is today. That would make a trip like this impractical”.

Observing the fuelling operation brought home one of the shortcomings of Brewer Corporation’s largest vessel. As we neared our first stop, Attenborough’s Watch, it was quite clear that despite the vast quantities of fuel on board, there’s no plumbing to move it from storage in the hold to the main fuel tank. “Yes, we have to use the fuel tender during the journey. We load the Cutter up with 728 tonnes of fuel, and manually transfer it to the tank. It’s a job that needs doing several times during the journey,” Townsend said, as this correspondent observed the rather clumsy operation that somehow has managed to resist automation efforts.

Sure enough, just as Villareal’s working timetable predicted, we arrived at Attenborough’s Watch right on time. Departure wasn’t quite so smooth as there was unexpected congestion at Bleia Dryiae IL-W c18-10, forcing the carrier to make a slight diversion. “These things happen”, Villareal said, while her crew manually replotted the route via a nearby star system. It had no material impact on our journey, save for a note in the WTT; the remainder of the journey to Sacaqawea Space Port. “Alight here for the Collection of Wonders” was the public announcement as we neared the system, which was rather archaically referred to as the ‘overnight stop’ in the journey’s advertising literature.



“ The *Alan Mathison Turing* was advertising departure, stop-off and arrival times to the minute.



The arrivals hall

The next day we set off once again, exactly to the minute, at 10:00 UTC. Our arrival time was predicted to be 21:55 in Colonia, with a three hour stop at Vihara Gate to allow passengers to board and depart, or just to have dinner while viewing the spectacular sight of the ringed Earth-like world below. "We chose the stop points in this journey quite carefully," explained Villareal, "to give our passengers an opportunity to see some of the best sights between here and Colonia".

This is undoubtedly the case with the Kashyapa system, in which we would find ourselves during the latter part of the journey. The ringed Earth-like world is indeed a beautiful sight and quite rare, having a surface gravity of exactly 1G. It is also close to a region of space rich in nebulae known as the Festival Grounds, as well as some notable star systems such as Eoch Flyuae Supernova Remnant and the system nicknamed 'Gleshpoint'. This famous system contains a black hole and no fewer than four neutron stars, two of which are in a close binary orbit. It's certainly a good point for the explorer to hop off – nicely refreshed from allowing the fleet carrier to take them all the way out here.

It was when leaving Vihara Gate that the journey hit its second snag: a fault with one of the carrier's computer server systems that delayed our departure by seven minutes. "This is why the working timetable has one minute's worth of slop at each waypoint," Villareal remarked. "It allows us to make up time should we hit any minor problems along the way". Indeed, this was the case. Despite the late start, we arrived exactly on time in the Centralis system in the Colonia nebula. The crew watched as dozens of ships disembarked, all heading to different parts of this young outpost of humanity in deep space.

So really, there are now no excuses. A year ago many would never contemplate a journey to Colonia; but with up to four carriers a week heading in each direction, Colonia has become a lot more accessible to even the least adventurous commander. There's plenty to do and see out there now, so why not take a couple of weeks vacation to see the beautiful deep hues of the Colonia Nebula and its dense star field? Not to mention visiting the famous Jaques Station, or the infamous Robardin Rock. Perhaps once again we can recapture the romantic age of the ocean liner, but this time, plying the vast gulf of space between humanity's birthplace and its most recent outposts. 



With up to four carriers a week heading in each direction, Colonia has become a lot more accessible to even the least adventurous commander.



SHIP LAUNCHED

WHICH ONE IS THE RIGHT FOR ME?

FIGHTERS

Many mercenaries and freelancers have asked themselves the same questions at one point: do I want a ship-launched fighter? If so, which one should I use?

These small combat ships, launched from the fighter hangar of an applicable mothership, are flown by a pilot using telepresence. This pilot can be a hired gun with combat certification or a commander — either the host pilot or another crew member.

Depending on who is behind the stick and which kind of fighter they're flying, these mini hardpoints with thrusters can be quite an asset, and can turn the tide of a battle. This month, we'll learn about the variety of ship-launched fighters (SLFs) available to commanders and which one is right for them.

F63 Condor

The F63 Condor is the superiority fighter of choice for the Federal Navy. With 25 points of armour integrity and 25 megajoules (MJ) of shield strength, it sits in the middle of our line-up for defence. While its defence specs may only be moderate, it has great speed in a straight line. With a top cruising speed of about 320 metres per second (m/s) and a boost speed of 536 m/s in all but one variant, it can easily outrun most pursuers.

The Condor can fit one utility mount and two hardpoints, and is the only one of the three human-tech fighters that can wield multicannons, in addition to the standard plasma repeaters and laser weapons that the other fighters can sport.

This makes the F63 Condor especially appealing to commanders who fight with only energy weapons on the mothership. While this may help reduce or even eliminate the need for ammunition — which can quickly dry up in long, intense battles — it does mean enemy hulls take much less damage than they would with kinetic projectiles, which is where the Condor steps in. With its all-around performance and up to 42 damage per second, along with chaff launchers to confuse enemy tracking systems, it can tear into armour on behalf of the mothership.

For a new combat pilot, or even an experienced mercenary looking for a balanced vessel that isn't a glass cannon and handles comfortably, the Condor is a great choice.



These mini hardpoints with thrusters can be quite an asset, and can turn the tide of a battle.







GUTAMAYA



Gu-97

However, a more skilled and serious hand may prefer the Gu-97, Gutamaya's fighter for the Empire. Being 20% to 40% more manoeuvrable than the Condor, it can be difficult to locate, let alone track and destroy with its small, agile footprint. Keep in mind, SLFs are already small enough to fit inside ships, but the Gu-97 is comparable to a hang glider from before the 21st century: a wide wing with room in the centre for a pilot; along with a couple of weapons and some well-placed accent lighting. It is designed by Gutamaya, after all.

While the top and boost speeds of 312 m/s and 540 m/s respectively

may not seem impressive at first, especially when you consider the bare minimum 15 armour health and 15 MJ of shield strength, the fragility makes you appreciate the development of telepresence, its acceleration is breathtaking. Even with a hardened commander's insensitivity to harsh ship acceleration, one can feel their torso get thrown back against the seat when the thrusters kick in – and that's before you trigger the afterburners.

It can be fitted with beam lasers, pulse lasers, and plasma repeaters; only the first two can be gimballed. The Aegis F variant, with two fixed pulse lasers and a point defence

turret to combat homing missiles and mines, can deal 44 DPS with relative ease.

The Gu-97 Imperial Fighter is hard to control and can quickly start flying itself without the right temperament, but is an exceptionally agile hunter in steady hands. Collisions can mean a dizzying loss of control, leaving the fighter nothing more than a sitting duck for several seconds. It can even result in the loss of the whole vehicle outright; but with enough practice, a pilot can avoid collisions and projectiles too – no foresight required.



Taipan

At the opposite end of the spectrum to the Imperial high-speed combat-rated laser scalpel sits the fighter adopted by the Alliance Defence Force: Falcon DeLacy's Taipan. With 45 armour strength and 30 MJ of shield strength, it boasts much more durability than its counterparts – but at the cost of speed. Four of the seven variants can cruise and boost to 263 and 544 m/s respectively, with a few of

them being able to go a tad faster, but responsiveness is lacking. With pitch, roll, and yaw rates being around 40, 88, and 18 degrees per second, the Gu-97 could fly circles around it with its nearly doubled turning speed.

That said, there is a reason the Alliance makes this their fighter of choice: its increased durability allows it to tank hits and stay in the fight longer than the Condor and Gu-97. In addition, the Taipan is the only SLF capable of being fitted with anti-xeno weaponry, in the form of AX multicannons. At the cost of a utility mount, it can do 55 DPS and cruise at just under 280 m/s, boosting to 577 m/s.

While many don't use SLFs to combat the alien threat directly, they still have use within the anti-xeno arena. In the event that an AX pilot using an Imperial Cutter or Federal Corvette decides to try one out, they should keep in mind that the Taipan can still outmanoeuvre a Basilisk and has decent firing range if you can lead your shots.

Also of note for the Taipan is its advanced cooling system: the rear wings change formation from a V-shape to a parallel one to increase radiator efficiency. There is a minor loss of manoeuvrability while it is in this changed state, but it does allow for more weapons fire and engine boosting before the heat alarms go off.

The Taipan is another great option for combat pilots, especially for novices looking to claim bounties in a resource extraction site. Its survivability also means one would need to rebuild it less often, which would make it a great choice for size 5 fighter bays. This works well with medium ships with energy weaponry, as the AX1 F variant is capable of significant kinetic damage and can still get close to its opponent.



“ The Taipan's increased durability allows it to tank hits and stay in the fight longer than the Condor and Gu-97.

Human-Guardian fighters

Ram Tah, the engineer based in Meene, designed his own line-up of fighters combining human and Guardian technology. Sacrificing the utility mount, all three of them feature three hardpoint slots, with varying levels of armour, shields, manoeuvrability, and firepower. These are the newest of the fighters, having been put into service from August 3304, and are most effective in an anti-xeno role.



XG7 Trident

The first commercially viable of the three, the Trident is an all-round craft: speed, turning rate, and armour capability just shy of the Condor, Gu-97, and Taipan respectively; dealing 8 absolute damage per shot. While it does the least damage to the three, the Trident can fire for long periods of time and stay relatively cool, assisting in its ability to outmanoeuvre an attacking Thargoid. With 30 MJ of shields but just 10 armour integrity, it is weak once shields fall.

This also allows it to burn off caustic acid from Thargoid weapon fire almost instantly.



XG8 Javelin

The XG8 Javelin, with three fixed shard cannons, packs quite a punch. It can do up to 133 damage per shot, but can require setting off the proximity alarms to achieve, getting in very close to the alien menace. While similar in flight performance and durability to the Trident, the Javelin's shard cannons have a slower fire rate, finite ammo capacity, and reload relatively slowly. It does have use in accelerating the decay of Thargoid shields after a heart is destroyed, or for exerting the heart in the first place. An experienced hand may need to handle this fighter to stay close enough to deal damage efficiently.

XG9 Lance

The XG9 Lance, the direct successor to the Javelin, features Gauss focus cannons in its slots. Having the exact same performance as the other two of Ram Tah's fighters, it is similarly easy to handle, but more forgiving than the Javelin since it has high-velocity gauss weaponry. Capable of 94 damage per shot within optimal range — which should be relatively easy to maintain for even less-experienced AX pilots — with a moderate fire rate. Sustained high-power fire does make it fly hot, allowing Thargoid Interceptors to detect it more easily, but this also allows it to burn off caustic acid

from Thargoid weapon fire almost instantly. It does less damage towards shields, but that's almost a non-factor considering Thargoid Interceptors only have shields for a few minutes after a heart is destroyed, and Scouts have barely any to begin with. Being equipped with the weaponry that has been most effective against Interceptors for years, it is the most-favoured SLF among anti-xeno pilots. For those whose aim is true and can manage their heat generation well enough to avoid cooking this gorgeous fighter from the inside-out, the XG9 Lance is highly recommended.



So which is right for me?

In summary, the ship-launched fighter that's right for you comes down to where it's being used, who's flying it, and personal preference. Many CQC combatants (a competition mainly fought between SLFs) swear by the F63 Condor, and it's the first ship available to new contestants; but in the field it isn't as overwhelmingly popular. For hired pilots below Expert rank, we recommend using the Condor or Taipan with gimballed weapons, but for commanders it depends on skill and preference.

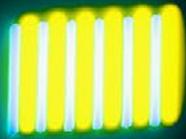
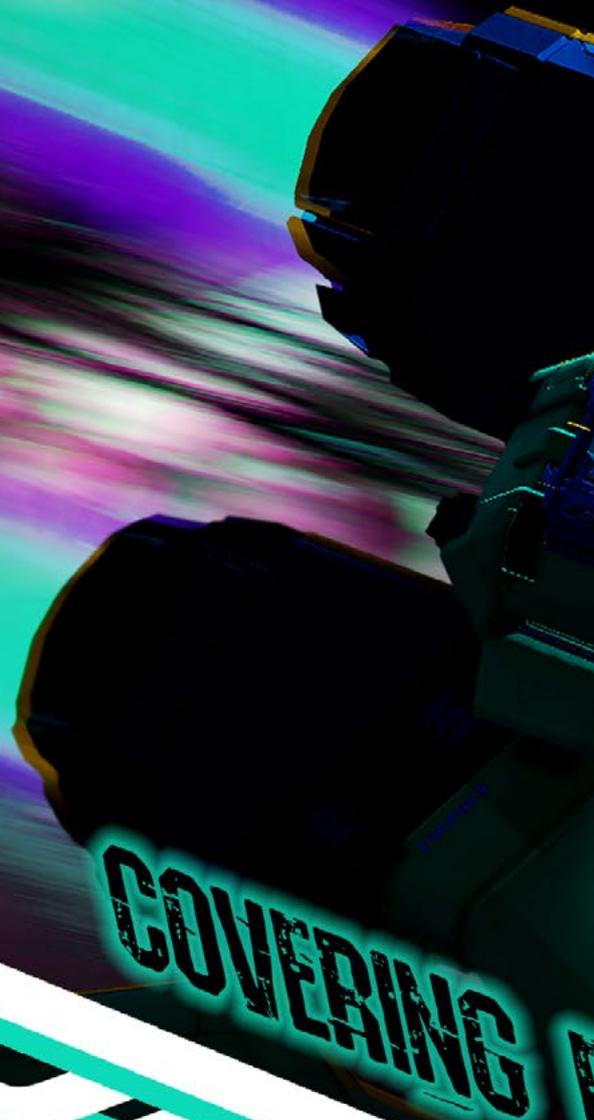
The Gu-97 can spin out of control easily, but avoid enemy fire with ease and elegance. Of the XG fighters, the Lance is the most practical for Interceptor combat. Like the AX1 F Taipan, it can be effective outside its intended use case, dealing considerable damage to human ship armour.

Since SLFs are cheap to outfit and restock, it's worth trying them all and seeing which you feel is right for you. Ultimately, the wings you fly with are your choice, and all of them are capable in the right hands. 

SHIP-LAUNCHED FIGHTERS: WHICH ONE IS RIGHT FOR ME?

WORDS ARIRI PHOTOGRAPHY EXORCIST, NICKWEB85, ORANGEPHEONIX, TWOSPOONS

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EVERY
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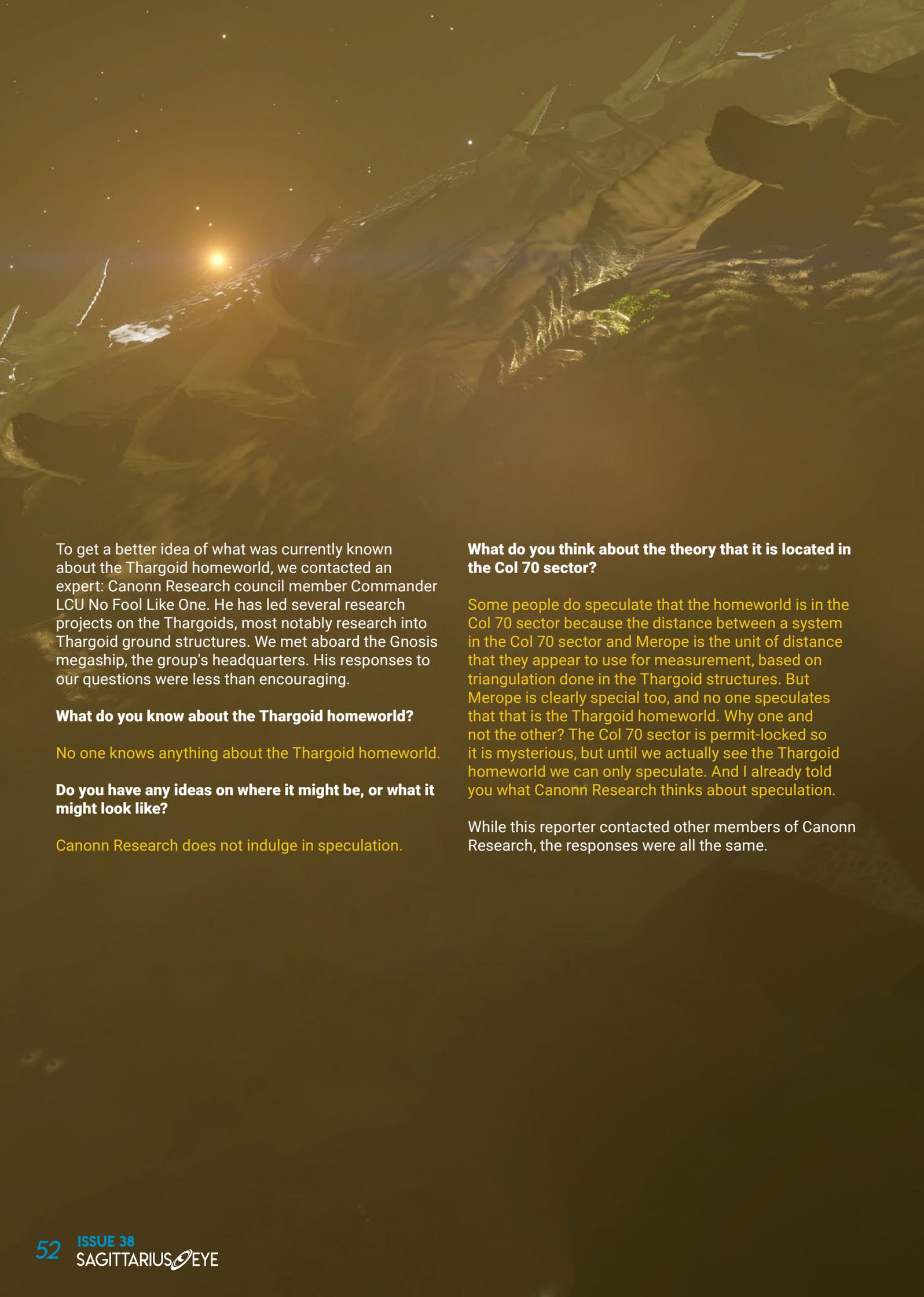




“Merope is clearly special too, and no one speculates that that is the Thargoid homeworld. Why one and not the other?”

THE THARGOID HOMEWORLD

Ever since the reappearance of the Thargoids on the 5th of January 3303 people have wondered: where did they come from? Numerous theories for the location of a hypothesised ‘homeworld’ have been proposed, most of them centring around the Col 70 Sector. This month, we delve into where the Thargoids might have come from.



To get a better idea of what was currently known about the Thargoid homeworld, we contacted an expert: Canonn Research council member Commander LCU No Fool Like One. He has led several research projects on the Thargoids, most notably research into Thargoid ground structures. We met aboard the Gnosis megaship, the group's headquarters. His responses to our questions were less than encouraging.

What do you know about the Thargoid homeworld?

No one knows anything about the Thargoid homeworld.

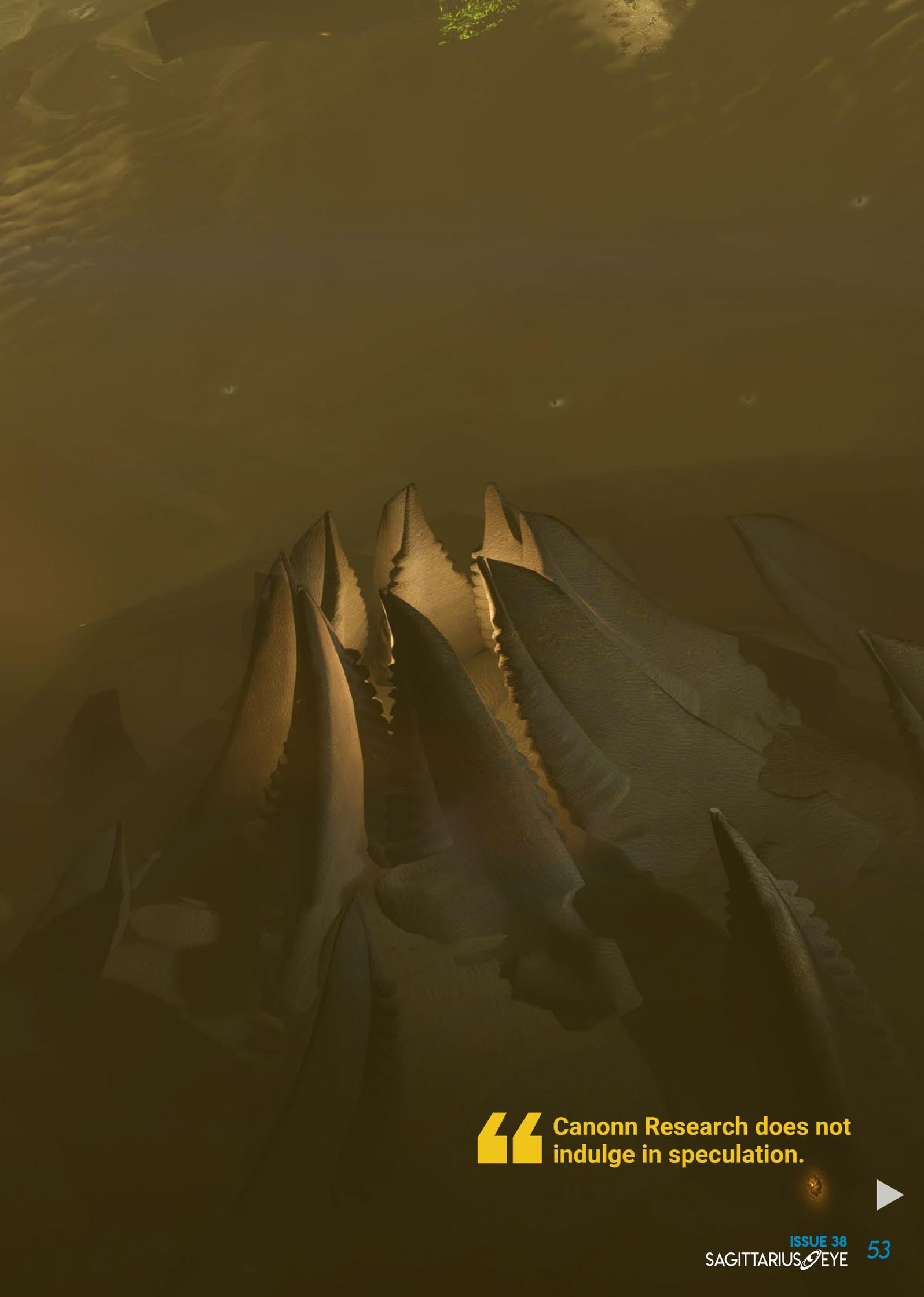
Do you have any ideas on where it might be, or what it might look like?

Canonn Research does not indulge in speculation.

What do you think about the theory that it is located in the Col 70 sector?

Some people do speculate that the homeworld is in the Col 70 sector because the distance between a system in the Col 70 sector and Merope is the unit of distance that they appear to use for measurement, based on triangulation done in the Thargoid structures. But Merope is clearly special too, and no one speculates that that is the Thargoid homeworld. Why one and not the other? The Col 70 sector is permit-locked so it is mysterious, but until we actually see the Thargoid homeworld we can only speculate. And I already told you what Canonn Research thinks about speculation.

While this reporter contacted other members of Canonn Research, the responses were all the same.



“ **Canonn Research does not
indulge in speculation.** ”



On the 29th of June 3303, Canonn published an article detailing the research into the 'Thargoid Device'. These strange machines are found at Thargoid ground sites and perform several functions, most of which are not fully understood. One function that has been interpreted, however, is a spectrogram produced by activating the device and analysing the resulting audio burst.

The spectrogram is hugely important to our knowledge of Thargoids. It has four circles, representing systems, and a variety of annotations. By using the bottom system (the location of that particular site), the system on the left (which has been identified as Merope based on the planets inside the circle), and the system on the right, it is possible to triangulate the system at the top, which always contains another Thargoid site. The right-hand system is Col 70 Sector FY-N C21-3, which had to be identified by trial and error due to the fact that it is permit-locked.

Unlike the Canonn Research scientists, *Sagittarius Eye* is not afraid of a little speculation. The 'constants' in the starmap — Merope and Col 70 Sector FY-N C21-3 — are the clearest clue we have to where the Thargoid homeworld might be. We can probably rule Merope out; the system has been thoroughly explored by humanity. Why link to this system and Col 70 Sector FY-N C21-3? It's possible that Merope is a beachhead of sorts; the Thargoids' first or most important outpost in the Pleiades cluster. This would explain the 'shell' of Thargoid Sensors surrounding the system, as well as why it appears to be the centre of Thargoid activity in the region. The linked system in Col 70 could perhaps be another equally-important beachhead or staging post; or perhaps the homeworld itself. Distances between important settlements have historically been used as units of measure in Earth's history, too. The fact that Merope is not the Thargoid homeworld doesn't rule out the possibility that the system in the Col 70 sector is.

In addition to this, we can look at the distribution of Thargoid activity in the Milky Way. Thargoid 'barnacles' — the biomechanical mining machines that are the source of meta-alloys — are found in 'seeded' nebulae in an area of the Milky Way relatively close to the Bubble: the California, Pleiades, Coalsack and Witch Head nebulae. So far they have not been found further afield. This suggests that — unless the entire local region of the Milky Way is itself a beachhead for a much more wide-ranging species — the Thargoid homeworld, if it exists, is relatively close to the Bubble.

Whether or not Col 70 Sector FY-N C21-3 is the homeworld, it is clearly an important system. The Pilots' Federation certainly thinks so, as they have it permit-locked.

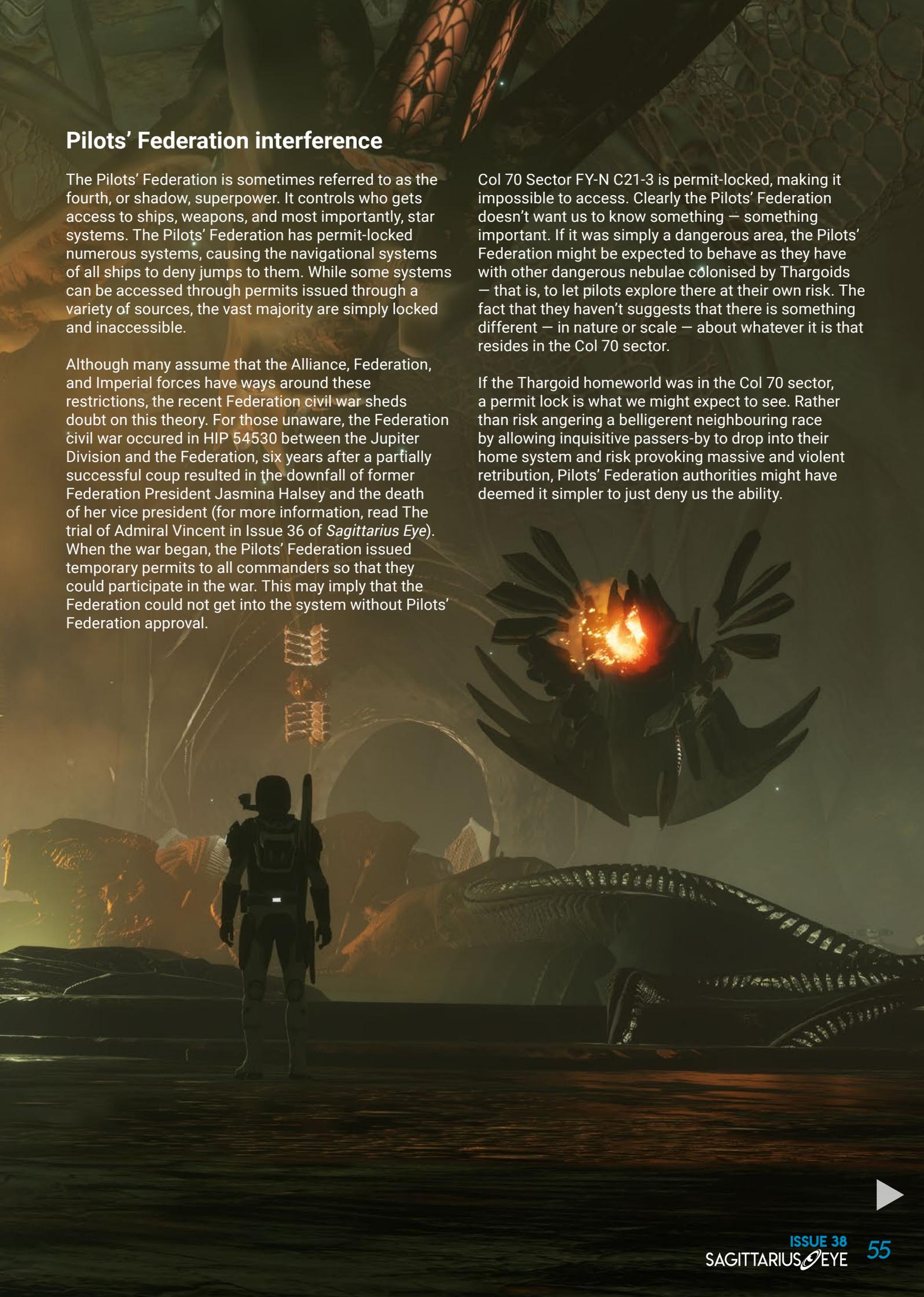
Pilots' Federation interference

The Pilots' Federation is sometimes referred to as the fourth, or shadow, superpower. It controls who gets access to ships, weapons, and most importantly, star systems. The Pilots' Federation has permit-locked numerous systems, causing the navigational systems of all ships to deny jumps to them. While some systems can be accessed through permits issued through a variety of sources, the vast majority are simply locked and inaccessible.

Although many assume that the Alliance, Federation, and Imperial forces have ways around these restrictions, the recent Federation civil war sheds doubt on this theory. For those unaware, the Federation civil war occurred in HIP 54530 between the Jupiter Division and the Federation, six years after a partially successful coup resulted in the downfall of former Federation President Jasmina Halsey and the death of her vice president (for more information, read *The trial of Admiral Vincent* in Issue 36 of *Sagittarius Eye*). When the war began, the Pilots' Federation issued temporary permits to all commanders so that they could participate in the war. This may imply that the Federation could not get into the system without Pilots' Federation approval.

Col 70 Sector FY-N C21-3 is permit-locked, making it impossible to access. Clearly the Pilots' Federation doesn't want us to know something – something important. If it was simply a dangerous area, the Pilots' Federation might be expected to behave as they have with other dangerous nebulae colonised by Thargoids – that is, to let pilots explore there at their own risk. The fact that they haven't suggests that there is something different – in nature or scale – about whatever it is that resides in the Col 70 sector.

If the Thargoid homeworld was in the Col 70 sector, a permit lock is what we might expect to see. Rather than risk angering a belligerent neighbouring race by allowing inquisitive passers-by to drop into their home system and risk provoking massive and violent retribution, Pilots' Federation authorities might have deemed it simpler to just deny us the ability.



Assuming that the Thargoids do have a homeworld, and that it is in the Milky Way and not another galaxy or even plane of existence, there are some things we can assume about it.



The characteristics of the Thargoid homeworld

What might the Thargoid homeworld be like? The little information that is publicly available about Thargoids yields some interesting clues. We know they are a hive species, with a sentient 'queen' and many less intelligent 'drones'. We know their physiology is insectile, and that the number eight appears to be significant to them in some way. We know that they prefer ammonia-based atmospheres, and that their chemistry is based on ammonia rather than water. This means that they can tolerate much, much lower temperatures than humans, as well as — to some extent — the radiation of space.

In addition to this, we have the Thargoids' behaviour to analyse. Thargoid Probes are often found in close orbit around ammonia worlds. Why do the aliens study these planets, and not water-based atmospheric worlds? There could be many reasons why Thargoids might take particular interest in these, but one possibility is that they are monitoring and evaluating potential colonisation sites.

What does this tell us about the Thargoid homeworld? The scientific record of Thargoid research is closely guarded, but it's safe to assume that, if the Thargoids have a homeworld at all, it is probably an ammonia world. The 'drones' are roughly the size of a human being, which might indicate that they evolved on a planet of roughly comparable gravity to Earth's (unless of course they were engineered).

With little information about Thargoid culture, it is possible that even the search for a Thargoid homeworld is futile. They may not even understand the concept of a homeworld! Perhaps they came from witchspace, or maybe their homeworld was destroyed aeons ago.

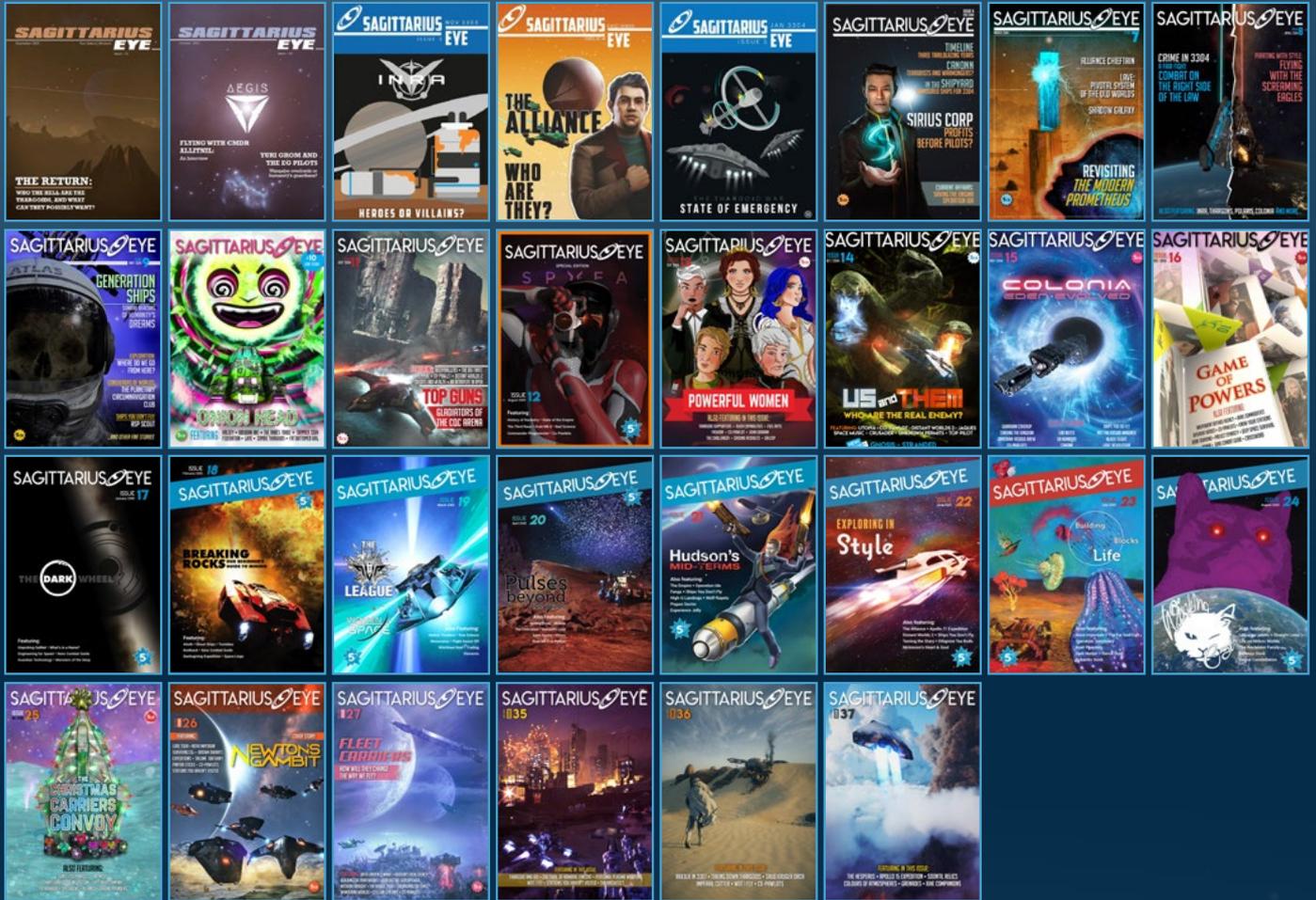
The witchspace theory, in particular, is worth considering; Thargoids appear to have a much deeper understanding of witchspace than we do, and are able to do things with it that are currently beyond us. For example, they are able to 'hyperdict' human ships while in hyperspace as simply as we interdict one another in supercruise. In addition, the tantalising glimpses occasionally recorded of the witchspace 'hole' that departing Thargoid Interceptors disappear into suggests a plane of space very unlike our own experience of hyperspace. It is possible that this shadowy plane is where the alien race comes from, or where they live.

Conclusions about the Thargoid homeworld

Assuming that the Thargoids do have a homeworld, and that it is in the Milky Way and not another galaxy or even plane of existence, there are some things we can assume about it. It is likely in the Col 70 sector or another permit-locked sector relatively close by (astronomically speaking), as the distribution of Thargoid activity in our part of the Milky Way suggests. It is also likely a rocky ammonia world, with gravity somewhere around that of Earth.

Sadly, that's where the relatively firm ground descends into the mire of supposition. The only people who might be able to shed more light than this are the Pilots' Federation themselves; and as of yet, they're not saying. 

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