



JUMP POINT

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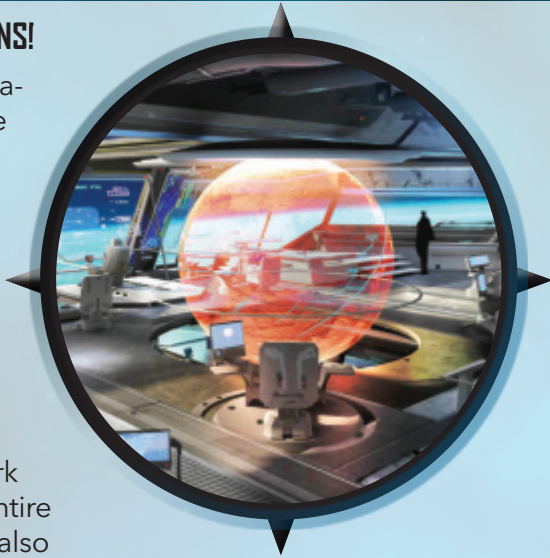
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GREETINGS, CITIZENS!

If it's July, then Gamescom must be fast approaching. And just as quickly, 3.0 is getting done and ready for release. Not that it's done already – there are still several Hull-loads of work left, but not an entire fleet. But there's also a hum throughout all four primary CIG offices and all our other sites as the Cloud Imperium rises to overwhelm the obstacles between us and completion. There is plenty of chatter on the general and dedicated Skype channels as programmers, designers, artists, testers and everyone else pitch in to identify and eliminate the most annoying bugs. I've been around long enough that I can remember when communication was much more constrained – slower and requiring many more steps to figure out what the problem actually was and who was best suited to deal with it. Today's tools are much more effective, and the communication much better, but the tasks we've set ourselves have also grown by a similar scale. And the team is large enough that the old saying, "It's not what you know that's important, but who you know," takes on a whole new meaning: getting the bug report to the right person is half the task of killing it.

For **Jump Point**, the looming deadlines mean trying to get things done ahead of time, so that I'm not distracting anyone when they're focused on a critical-path task. We'll see how well I accomplish that by whether the August **JP** actually releases on the third Friday in August (the 18th). Meanwhile, there's another event coming up, perhaps not



the scope of Gamescom, but interesting all the same. It's 'VerseCon, October 27-28 (Fri-Sat), right here in Austin. That's the same time as this year's CitizenCon, in Frankfurt – if you have a choice, by all means do CitizenCon, but most of us don't have that choice. :)

As I understand it, 'VerseCon (which is backer-created) is planned to be the largest ever Bar Citizen, combined with a viewing party for CitizenCon itself. You can find out more at:

versecon.com
www.facebook.com/VerseConTX

But enough about August and October. This month we've got the Nox WIP, short and sweet for one of our smallest but snazziest vehicles. The Nox is a Xi'an-designed single-seater space cycle, and it's gonna run circles around just about anything else it meets. Behind the Scenes, we discuss the emergent gameplay that arose from the *Star Citizen* Nox marketing campaign.

Keeping on the Xi'an theme, we also explore the Trade & Development Department, now tasked with regulating Human-alien commerce, and Pallas, a system that ended up in Xi'an hands when the peace treaty was signed.

And we've also got the final chapter in Adam Wieser's "Sid & Cyrus." Bonus points if you can tell me who the original Tomyris is without googling her. It's a fitting alias.

Hold on, it's gonna be a wild ride!

David

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COVER:	CHRIS SMITH
PAGE 23:	BEHAVIOUR
PAGE 39:	STUART JENNETT
PAGE 42:	DAVE HADDOCK



FROM THE HIGHPOINT

A CLOUD IMPERIUM GAMES PRODUCTION. A STAR CITIZEN NEWSLETTER.
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Nox



Xi'an Nox Design Brief

Aims: A small, space motorcycle for racing.

Aesthetic: Sleek and sporty – if the Dragonfly is a Harley, the Xi'an Nox is a superbike.

Current Concerns

- Top bike geometry may intersect with the player weapons when sheathed.
- The current pose shown in the concept is a new pose and will need animation support to build it out.

WORK IN PROGRESS

CONCEPT
IMAGES

X-01 ICONIC SILHOUETTE WITH A STRONG FRONT BUT MODERN IN SURFACE SHAPE LANGUAGE



X-02 SIMPLE, SHARP, POLYGONAL, AND INTEGRATED PILOT AT ITS BACK



WORKING IN PROGRESS

CONCEPT
IMAGES

X-03 LASER WEAPONS ON SIDE - LONG SHARP BOONET/HOOD - MINIMALISTIC DESIGN / LIGHT SPIRIT



X-04 VERTICAL SILHOUETTE



WORK IN PROGRESS

Concept Kickoff

Mark Hong, Associate Producer: Meeting Notes (Raw)

- Concept signed off by CR; Gary Sanchez did the concept.
- Gary took the Dragonfly and made sure it had space for all the needed components.
- Xi'an Bike will be higher tech than the Dragonfly; since it is Xi'an-focused, it took Scout into account.
- Concept is suggestive in some areas, to leave a blank page for Smith on the art side.
- Plan is to make the vehicle quickly and get it into the hangar; we will de-complicate the early stages of production on this vehicle.
- Shape is simple, monolithic.
- Character gets cocooned in the vehicle.
- Front dash has been tapered down in some images, which we should go with (as opposed to the concept images where the front dash obscures view). Also, can the character look up? The pose, covered by the back flap, seems to prevent this.
- Recessed weaponry? It doesn't need to be recessed, but if it will be, then we need to leave room for the full binding box.
- Is the loadout list complete? We've re-used metrics from the Dragonfly.
- Handgrips area is unresolved in concept. We will leave it to Chris Smith to figure it out.
- Consider the Dragonfly like a Harley and the Xi'an Bike to be the "crotch rocket."
- Start-up animations/button pressing – needed for MoCap? Bender is capturing Thursday. No, we don't need him to capture anything right now. We could put a minimal # of buttons and have the majority holographic interface. Calix to figure out front HUD/screen layout & pose ASAP.
- Calix will handle the design doc.
- Would be cool to get handguards on this vehicle.
- We should hint at an air brake for the front of the ship.
- Substructure has been broken out by Gary.
- Calix to talk to writers to get a name for this vehicle.
- Can a heavy armor fit in this? Chris S will need to investigate around this. Need to reduce the cocoon or make it bigger?
- Are gravity plates 100% necessary? We need them, but they don't need to be visible.
- Maneuvering thrusters can just be vents/slots in the back in the Xi'an blue.
- Currently we hide all player inventory when getting into a seat ... is this the final solution? CR said it was fine to do this (in a Prospector meeting that Jay was at).
- Concept art/FBX: Check Dearsley's scratch drive.
- Animate the articulated back of the vehicle to handle player movement? Calix/Randy, please follow up w/ Ash on the engineering aspect. Or could it be set up like a "flight mode"?



WORK IN PROGRESS

Key Stats (1st Pass)

Max Crew	1 Pilot	Item Categories	Civilian, Racing	Propulsion	
Length	5.5m	Default Categories	Racing C	Power Plant	1x S0
Width	1.5m	Hull		Engine	1
Height	1.5m	Armor	None	Thrusters	1x S0 (Main) 16x S0 (Joint)
Entry Method	Open-Side Canopy	Life Support	None (Flight Suit Only)	Other	
Modular Components	No	Fuel Ports	1	Coolers	1x S0
Ejection Seat	No	Seats	1	Fuel Intakes	1x S0
Variants	None	Stations (inc Seats)	1	Gravity Generator	None
Mass	1,000kg	Fuel Tank	1x S0	Battery	1x S0
Landing Gear	Skids	Light	1	Shield Emitters	1
Docking Ring	No	Audio	1	Shield Generator	1x S0
Cargo Capacity	0 SCU	Relay	0	Weapons	
Take-Off Method	VTOL	Doors	0	Counter Measures	2x
Radar Type	3D	Avionics		Hardpoints	2x S1 (Nose) 2x S1 Laser
Cargo Storage	N/A	Landing System	Hover	Cannon TBC	
Role	Racing	Computers	1x S0	Ammobox	None
		Computer Blades	TBD	Missiles	None
		Scanner	1	Special Equipment	None
		Radar	1x S0	Default Loadout	None



WORK IN PROGRESS



THRUSTER CLUSTERS

Calix Reneau, Technical Designer: I spoke with Mark Abent about the articulated back piece, and he peeked into the code for the animation controller that handles flight stick animation (when manipulating throttle, strafe, etc.). He thinks it would be ~2 hours of work to get this to support player look position, freeing us up to use the pose as pitched.

We'd need a custom-look animation for this ship, but it sounds very achievable. Just need to see if it can fit anywhere in the schedule.

Ben Lesnick, Director, Community Engagement & Content Strategy: Sure thing! Is there any material on this one available beyond the Confluence description? I want to make sure I have the right feel.

(From what's available it seems like this is sort of the Kawasaki to the Dragonfly's Harley. Feels like we'd want a really neon/plastic high tech looking brochure, and then since it transforms, a video showing how that will work ...)

Will Weissbaum, Senior Writer: For the bike name we would like to suggest:

Vostro Nox

(Vostro is the manufacturer name, Nox the bike name.)

A little about the company:

Vostro

The corporation currently in control of the Xi'an personal craft manufacturing sector, Vostro has maintained its dominance by being more willing than most of their species to set aside safety in exchange for heightened performance. Many Xi'an refuse to fly Vostro vehicles due to this, but they still hold Emperor Kray's favor, who is said to have a deep love for open canopy racing.

For the brochure, to separate it from just being a regular brochure (and having to worry about how a Xi'an brochure would look different from a Human brochure), we

thought it would be fun to have it be a racing team brochure touting how good they are in an attempt to drum up more sponsors. We could have a page with a bunch of logos listing their current sponsors, bios on their pilots, a timeline of their racing wins, etc.

Luke Davis, Producer: Indeed.

Though one thing springs to mind. We were going to use a lot of the work done on the Xi'an Khartu-al (Scout) to speed up the development of this ship. If we change to another manufacturer from AopoA, are we expecting a whole new style? Reason I ask this is because the concepts were drawn on the ideas of the Xi'an Khartu-al.

Dave Haddock, Lead Writer: That was one of our questions. We can change it to be an AopoA ship. We had specified in the portfolio that they make "light craft," but we can extend that definition to include Open Canopy ships.

Chris Roberts: So we need to make sure we have an FX (maybe material + refraction particles?) for the gravlev discs on the bottom of the Dragonfly and the Nox (where are they on the Nox?), when gravlev is active.

In addition, I think we need to work on the ground FX of both the Dragonfly and Nox – I was kind of thinking that they would have a ground FX – so not just a dust trail more in the rear, but a parting dust cloud that becomes the wake from the point where the gravlev's field would be hitting on the ground (so the FX would start a lot closer to the front of the underside of the vehicle).

As a side note we should use the same "ground wake" tech / FX for spacecraft / aircraft so when they get really low to the ground they kick up a wake of dust, snow, water ,etc.



WORK IN PROGRESS

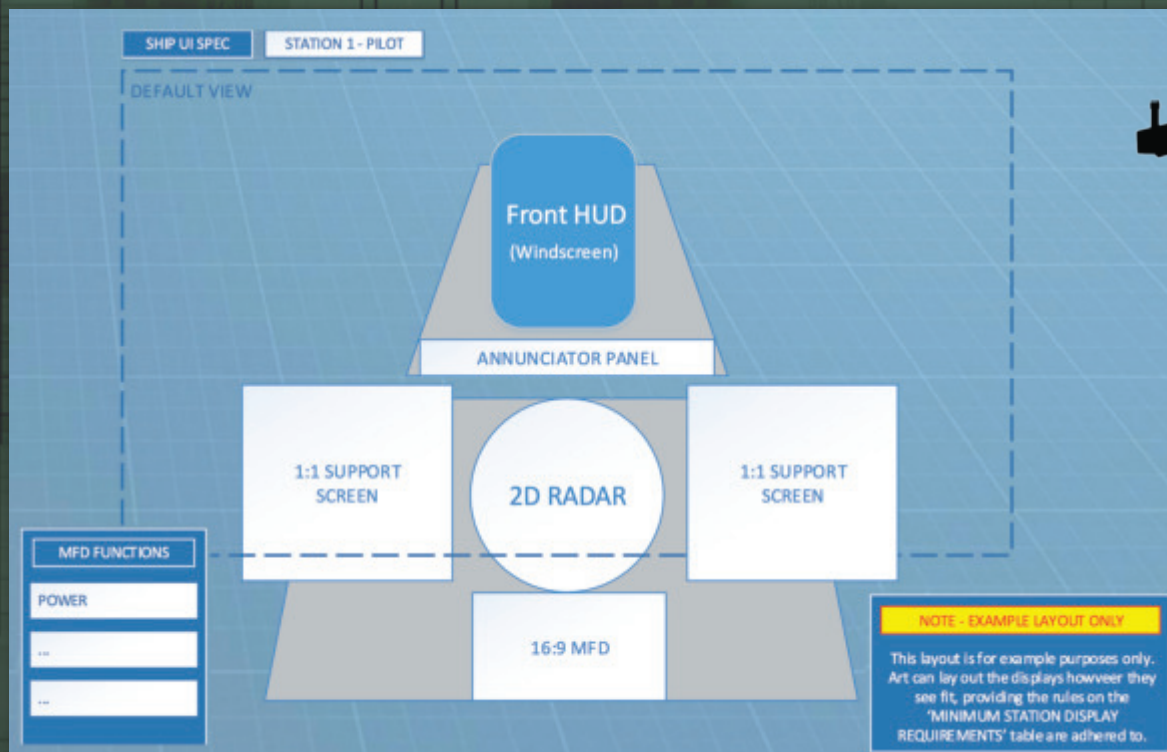
Screen Specs

Calix R: The Xi'an Nox is sleek and nimble, built for high speeds.

The pilot hugs the fuel tank and leans back to look up. The HUD holoprojecter is based on the Merlin HUD and Dragonfly HUD.

The Xi'an Nox is being built to be nearly the same as a Dragonfly. This is a short list of things to keep track of for this ship.

- Single seater
- Transforms between landing mode and flight mode
- Xi'an flight controls
- Anti-gravity plates
- Holo-projected MFDs
- No ejection
- Modified Scythe pilot position
- 2 ship weapons



WORK IN PROGRESS

SHIP UI SPEC		MINIMUM STATION DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS						
Seat		DISPLAY NUMBER	DISPLAY TYPE	DISPLAY RATIO	2D/3D	WITHIN ARMS REACH	VISIBLE IN DEFAULT VIEW	PRIORITY
1	Pilot	1	Multifunction	16:9	2D			2
		2	Radar	1:1	2D	YES	YES	1
		3	Annunciator	BESPOKE	2D	YES	YES	1
		4	Support	1:1	2D	YES	YES	1
		5	Support	1:1	2D		YES	1

ADDITIONAL SCREENS

Additional screen can be added for art reasons, but they should be either 1:1, 16:9 or 9:16 and they will be integrated into the seat system as Support Screens.

WITHIN ARMS REACH

If 'WITHIN ARMS REACH' isn't checked, the screen can still be within arm's reach, it just isn't a requirement.

VISIBLE IN DEFAULT VIEW

If 'VISIBLE IN DEFAULT VIEW' isn't checked, the screen can still be visible in the default view, it just isn't a requirement.

PRIORITY TIER KEY

1 – Essential
2 – Desired

Karl Jones, Lead Designer:

Nice.

Should we make that MFD 4:3? 4:3 is planned to house the 'lighter' functionality, with 16:9 housing the deeper (eventually).

Also, Support Screens are 1:1, 16:9 or 9:16.

If we're gonna do something outside those ratios, please check with Zane Bien, as the UI guys will have to treat it as bespoke.

Calix R: Support Screens at 1:1 would be fine by me. I'd like to make them slightly larger than the 2D radar, but otherwise there's no problem for me there. Since the MFD is completely offscreen during normal flight, I'd want it to have the deeper functionality you're talking about, if that's ok.

I'll make the change to the support screens now.

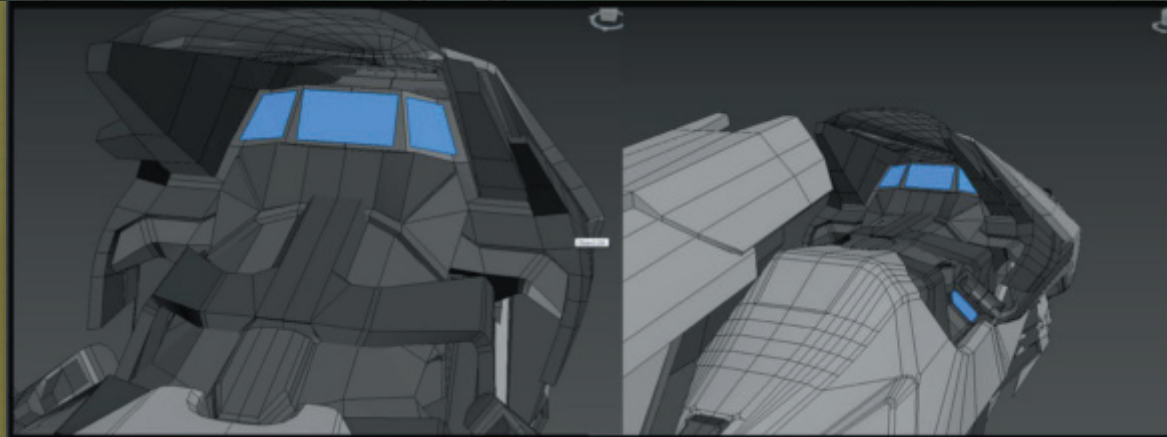
Karl J: Cool.

16:9 MFD should be ok, but I think that would be the only 16:9 at a pilot station in the game so far.

Zane, thoughts?

Chris Smith, Lead Ship Artist: Here [upper right] is an initial blackout for the screens. The middle screen is 16:9 and the side screens are almost 1:1, probably more like 3:4. Would something like this work and am I missing something? I want to avoid having standard square shapes for this bike, but as long as I can fit the ratios inside a unique shape, I should be fine, correct?

Karl J: Just regarding that 16:9. Most small ships/single-seater fighters don't have a 16:9 MFD. Systemically, there's nothing wrong with putting a 16:9 on this bike, but I'm sure a 4:3 would be sufficient and consistent with

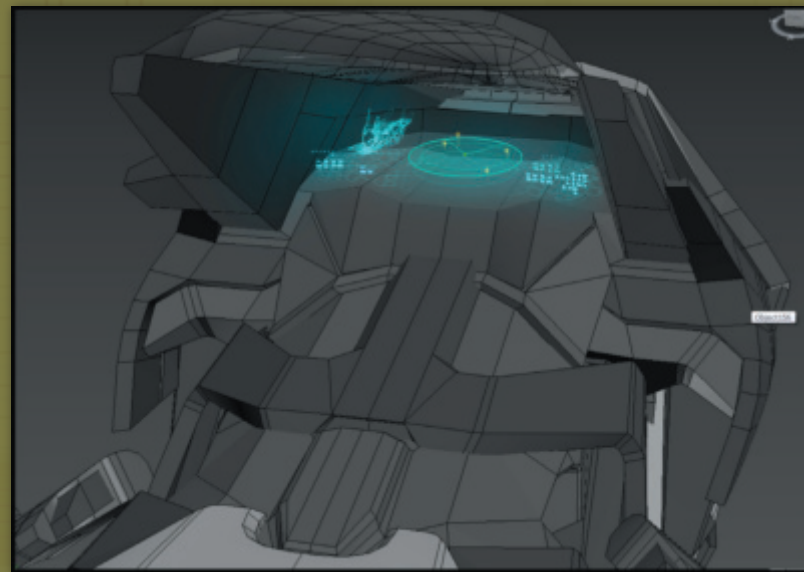


ships/vehicles of a similar size. Don't think it would need the functionality.

Up to you guys.

Also, it'd be good to see where the radar is going to go on that blackout.

Zane Bien, Global UI Creative Director: Isn't the Xi'an style holographic? You could do something like:



Karl J: ... with a 2D MFD.



WORK IN PROGRESS

Xi'an Manufacturing Technology

Xi'an Manufacturing Technology

Xi'an manufacturers will use the same layered manufacturing systems, so they can be recognized by players as the work of a specific advanced technology alien civilisation. However, the frame and materials of each layer will be different between manufacturers to get a good differentiation between them. The chassis layering system is composed of a substructure layer, then a mid layer, and then exolayers (exoskeleton layers) for cover.

Substructure (Subskeleton)

The substructural layer frame is based on nanotube technology translated to superstructure. The same with graphene technology – it is translated in different frames, depending on the manufacturer.

- Hypergraphene – different frames
- Supra Titanium chassis
- Super Lithium chassis

Intermediate Layers (Second Layer)

The second layer is like an underskin, making the transition between the sub and exo layers. It offers the possibility of playing with high-frequency elements, jewel metallic effect, or rubber variations.

- Phospho Bronze
- Rubber
- Gold
- Silver
- High frequency technical components

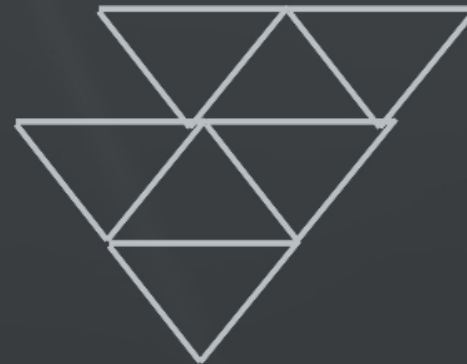
Exolayers (Exoskeleton, Exoskin)

The third layer is the skin, the cover parts for this manufacturing system. It has to reflect an alien spirit through surfaces, materials or tech.

- Polygonal design
- Patine Material
- Metallic red
- Lasercut texture/metal
- Exobones materials



MANUFACTURER 01

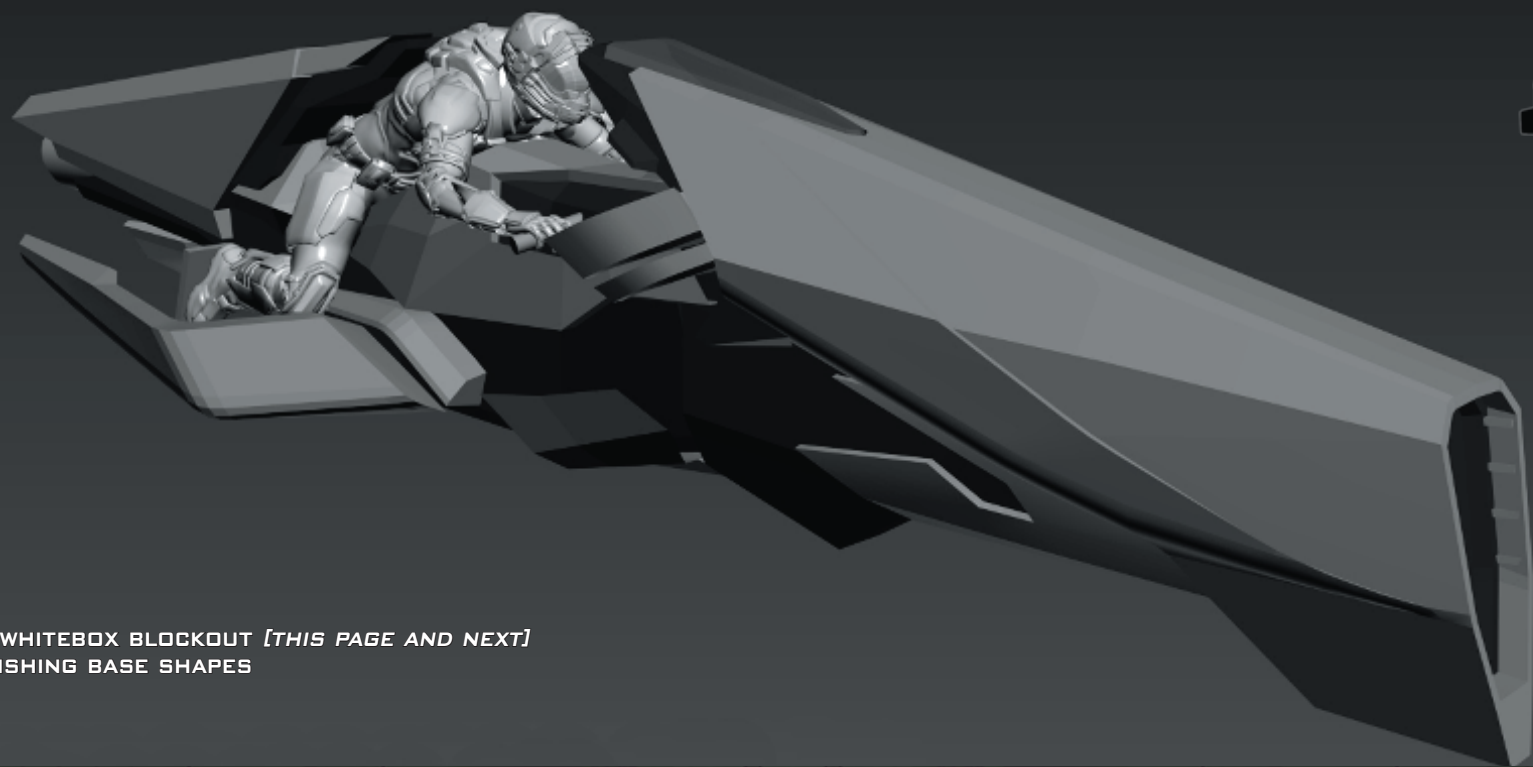


MANUFACTURER 02

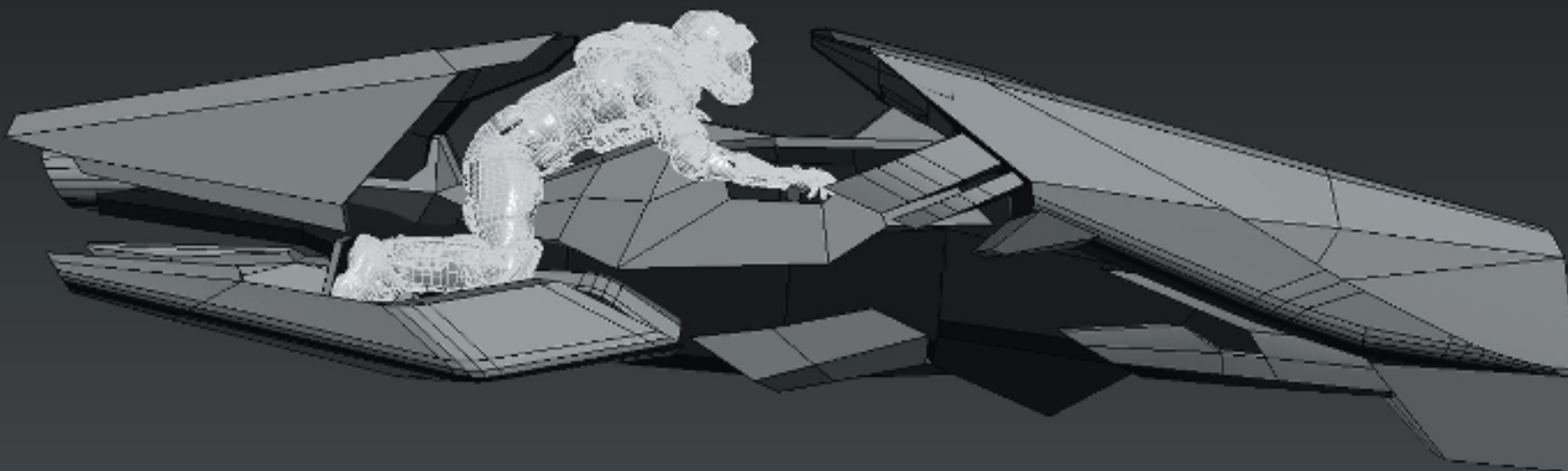
SUBSTRUCTURE EXAMPLES



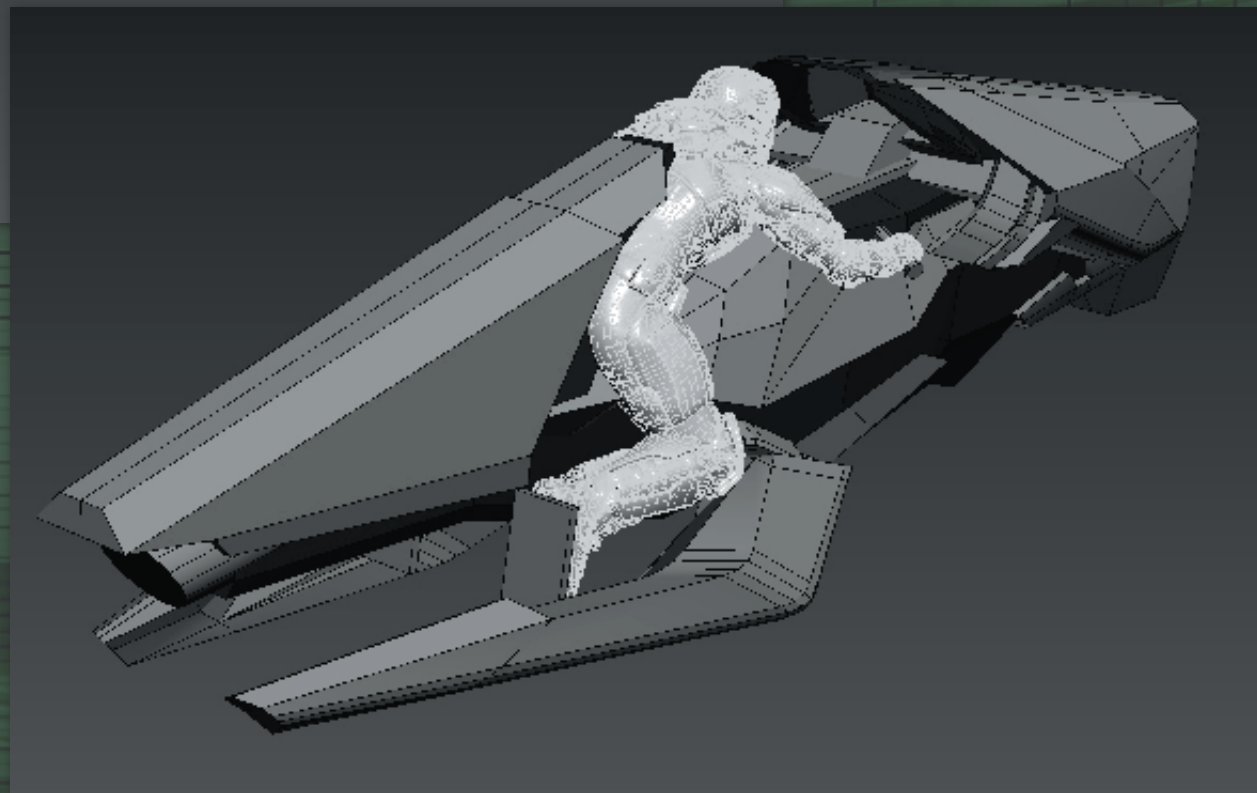
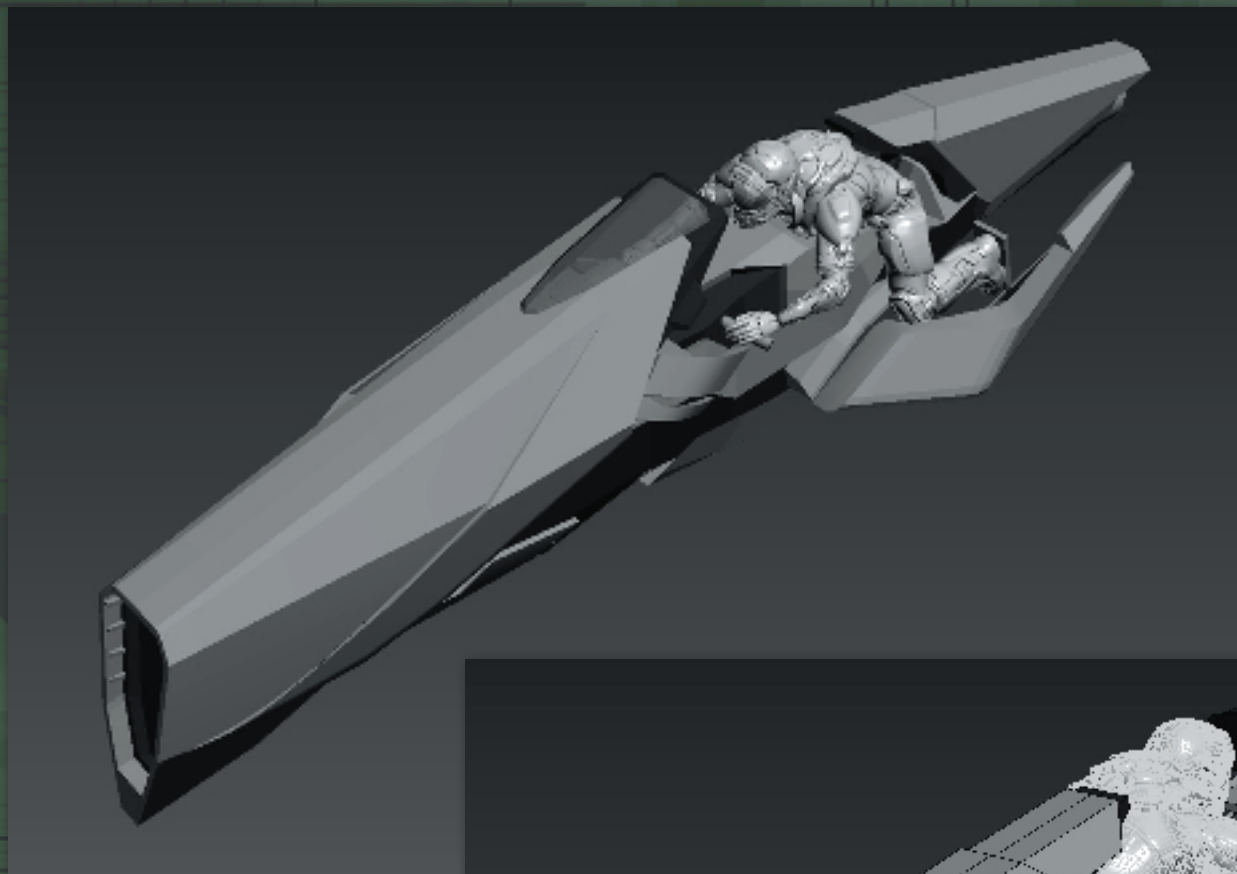
WORK IN PROGRESS



INITIAL WHITEBOX BLOCKOUT [THIS PAGE AND NEXT]
ESTABLISHING BASE SHAPES



WORK IN PROGRESS



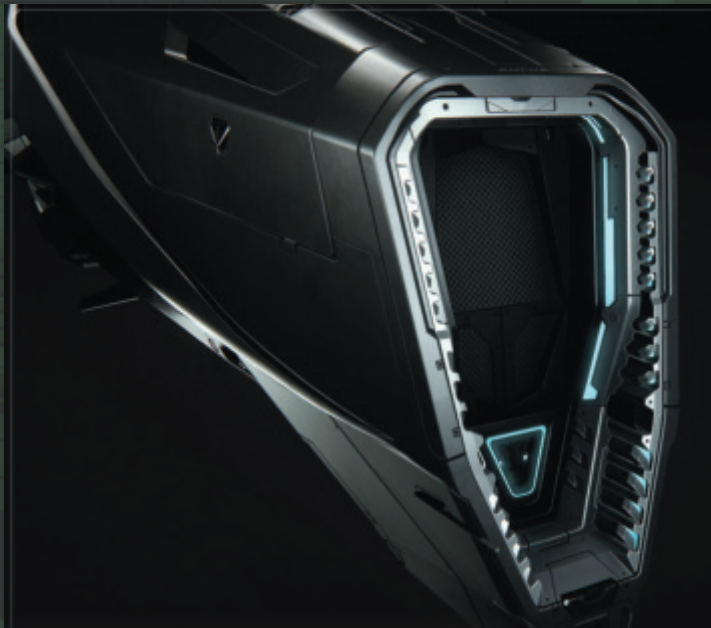
WORK IN PROGRESS



Chris S: A few progress shots of the Xi'an Bike greybox. Still have ways to go with smoothing and beginning the smart-normal process. I also started on the colors/ hue breakup.



WORK IN PROGRESS



Chris S: I've started fleshing out the nose end of the bike and adding detail.



Chris S: Testing animation to make sure it all works as intended.



WORK IN PROGRESS



Chris S: Color lookup/testing, to see what kind of colors go with it. It turns out almost all colors work well with this bike.



WORK IN PROGRESS

TUNING VERTEX ALPHA FOR DIRT/ WEAR



MATERIAL AND BREAKUP TWEAKS



Chris S: As it says, making wear and tear testing passes.



WEAR N TEAR TEST - NORMAL



WEAR N TEAR TEST - PAINTED SURFACE WITH METAL UNDER



WORKING IN PROGRESS

Chris S: Tuning the vertex alpha channel to achieve desired wear and tear effects.

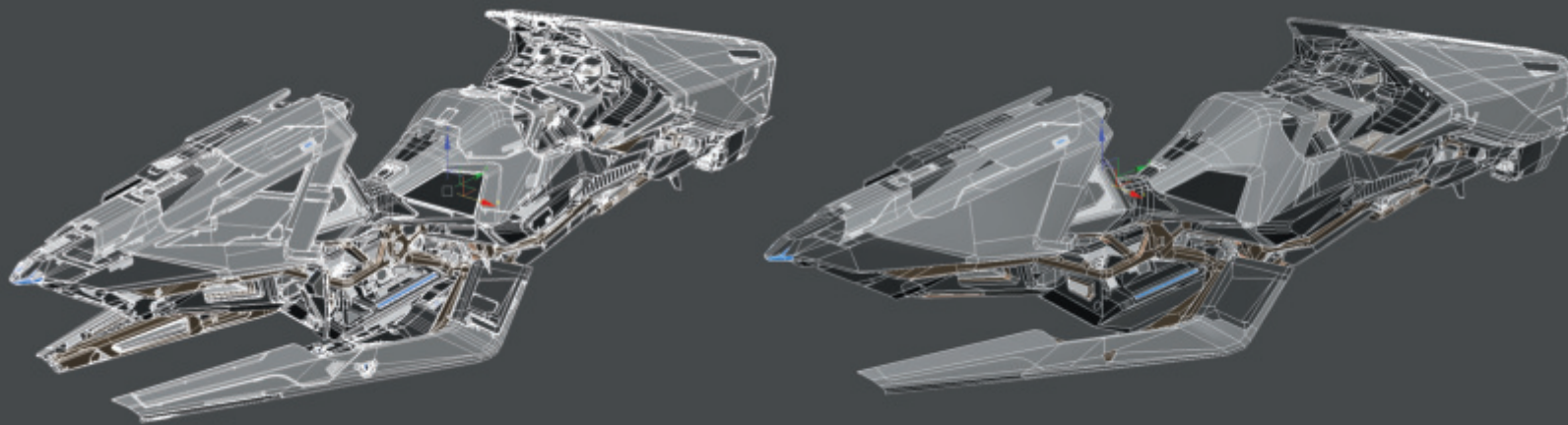


WORKING IN DARKNESS

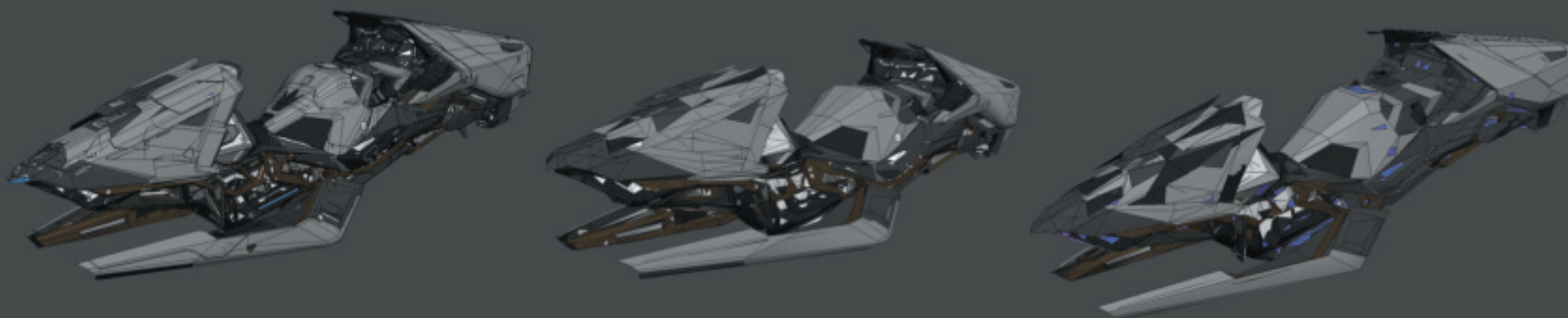
Chris S: LOD (Level of Detail) work/testing.



LOD WORK



LOD work



WORK IN PROGRESS



Michal Piatek, VFX Artist: Xi'An Nox thrusters VFX – first pass – as seen in space.

Some feedback from me: the manoeuvring thrusters are a little too long, and could do with some subtle color variation along their length.



WORK IN PROGRESS



WORKING IN PROGRESS

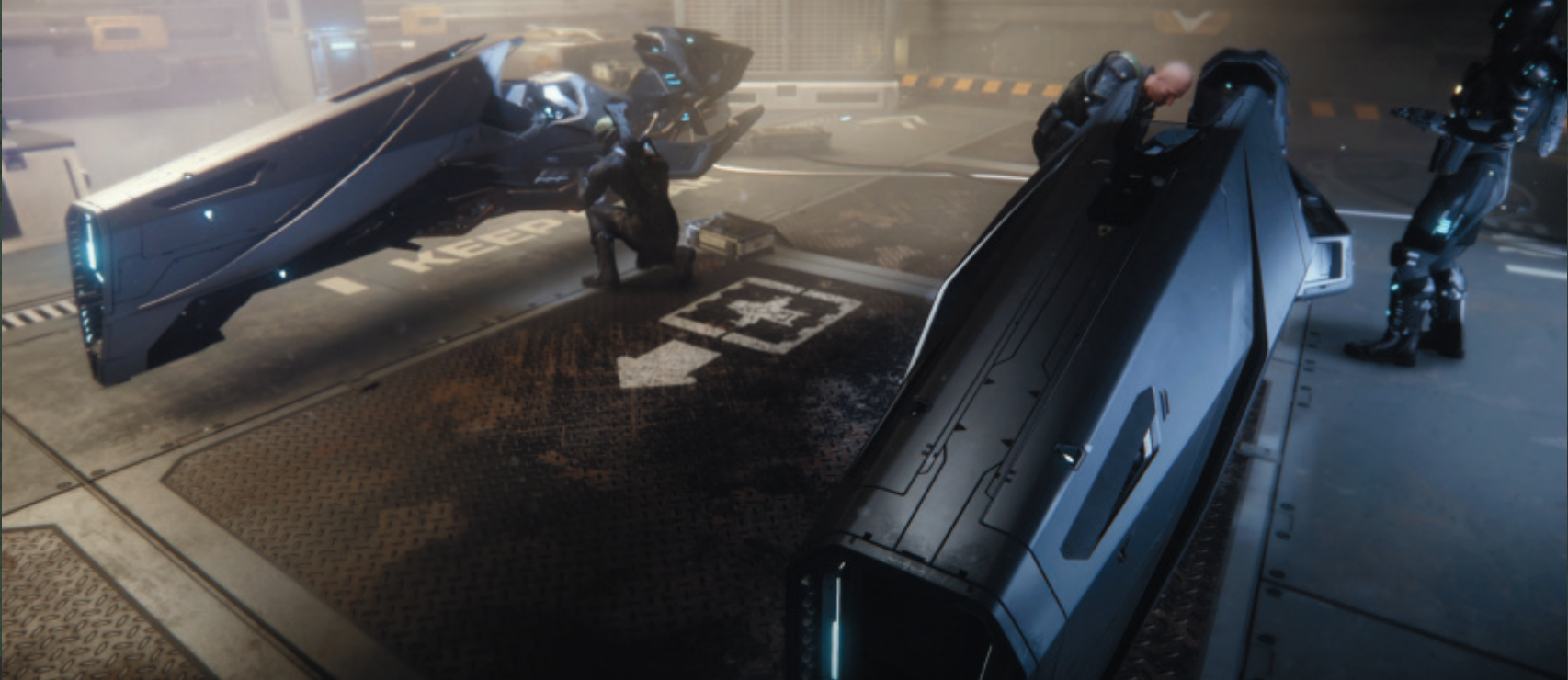
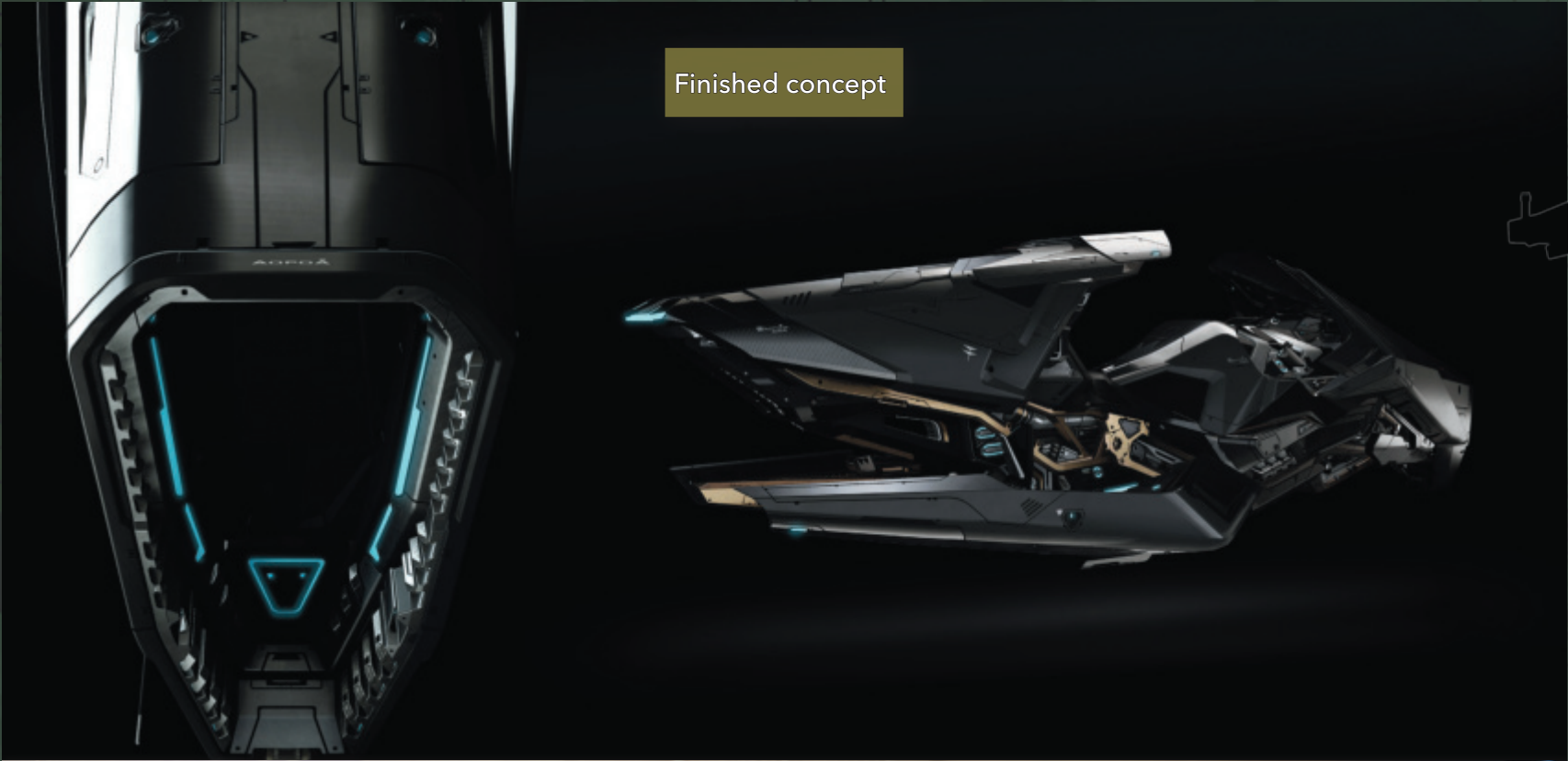


Chris R: Needs to really hug the ground. We want cool ground effects and blasting across the landscape low slung like a Super Bike. Also in turns it should have some serious lean ... 3rd-person camera should be low and aggressive, getting roughed up in its wake ...

Have we done a proper pass on the VFX? The engine FX seem pretty weak; I couldn't see any ground FX or gravlev effects / light pulsating ...

Longer term we may even want to go for a visual "tunnel vision" screen FX like you would experience going 200 mph on a Super Bike.

Finished concept



WORKING IN PROGRESS



There has been one constant throughout the history of the Empire, one that has managed to weather political changes, military actions and even interspecies wars – the sale and acquisition of commodities. It was the search for these basic raw resources and primary products that first sent explorers to the stars, and in many ways, it is what fuels the expansion of Humanity throughout the universe even today.

Every new jump point discovered, every new system uncovered, every new asteroid scan completed has the potential to unveil new sources of commodities that are vital to the continuing growth and development of Hu-

manity, so it should come as no surprise that commodity trading comprises a significant portion of the UEE's total economy. With the commodity market being of such vital importance, the government agency responsible for this has become near ubiquitous in every system of the Empire. Dating as far back as the United Nations of Earth (UNE), the Trade & Development Division supervises this staggeringly complex flow of commerce and has grown to one of largest government employers outside of the military. But many may wonder: how could such an important economic regulatory body come to be a branch of the otherwise small Customs Bureau?

UNIVERSITY

In With the Good, Out With the Bad

By 2380, the Croshaw system had been terraformed and the first settlements outside of Sol system had taken hold. Unfortunately, as Humanity's frontier expanded in the following decades, so too did its lawlessness. With entire new solar systems for pirates to hide in, Sol found itself on the receiving end of an overwhelming influx of contraband. Outlawed weapons and substances that had been close to eradication came flooding back in force now that criminals could hide their operations with relative ease in remote extra-system outposts. Major urban areas on Mars and Earth faced escalating violent crimes and a rampant drug epidemic that decimated several communities. When attempts to curtail the dire situation via more traditional policing methods failed to stymie the growing problem, the UNE ordered the Navy to establish strict checkpoints at both jump entrances leading to Sol.

Within the first months of the operation, hundreds of tonnes of contraband were seized and dozens arrested. However, despite this initial success in stemming the tide of illegal goods making their way into Sol, there were many detractors. Vehement protest came from almost every major financial sector, arguing that while the heavy patrols were netting smugglers, the searches also slowed down the regular civilian transports and haulers, strangling the flow of commerce. At the same time, civil rights groups were quick to decry the draconian measures used by the Navy in forcing vehicles to comply with the scans and searches. In one incident, heavily reported at the time, a team of researchers were forcefully subdued and dragged off their ship when they refused to open scan-resistant containers that carried light-sensitive material. And this was far from the only such reported case of routine stops escalating to violence. Many argued that a Navy trained for warfare with an enemy force was not the ideal candidate for dealing with the civilian population in this capacity.

It would all come to a head when one of the members of Intersystem Haulers United was incarcerated in a Naval prison for impeding a search. A massive strike caused the majority of jump point traffic to slow to a crawl. At the end of a week of negotiations, it was announced that control of the checkpoints would be handed off to a new government office, the Customs Bureau.

Staffed by civilian employees, it proved to be a valid compromise between security and commerce. A program was established for expedited crossings for ships with a proven track record, and complex algorithms used to intelligently select ships for more in-depth searches reduced wait times while still keeping a firm check on contraband. At the start, the Bureau may have been mostly concerned about ship traffic inbound to Sol, but after first contact with the Banu in 2438, they greatly increased their scope. Wary of what Banu ships might be carrying within their haulers, the Customs Bureau spread throughout UNE-controlled space, establishing dozens of additional checkpoints along major traffic lanes. It was this far-reaching infrastructure that positioned the Bureau to take on an even greater responsibility.

Fair Trade

As miners and harvesters rushed to farm resources from newly discovered worlds, it was only a matter of time before commodity markets would be established. When dealing with minerals, gases and grains, there is often little difference between a commodity coming from one source and the same commodity from another. This meant that rather than manufacturers purchasing what they needed from dozens of smaller operations spread across multiple systems, they could use a single marketplace to simplify and standardize their trade contracts. In addition, the financial risk of collecting the resources could be potentially mitigated through the use of futures contracts to



gather funding for their operations by pre-selling commodities at an agreed-upon price in advance of the actual procurement of the materials. It was a proven formula that had worked for centuries in Sol, but few were ready for the complications that data decay would bring.

These commodity markets swelled rapidly during their initial years of operation and it wasn't long before opportunists began trying to take advantage of nascent institutions. With the deals being struck based on knowing how much of a certain commodity was in production at any given time, there were numerous cases of manipulation. Waylaying a courier or drone even for a few minutes could result in huge financial gains. Other investors would make contracts and then work behind the scenes to ensure that the seller was unable to fill the order, triggering forfeiture payments. In 2461, the price of millet was driven to a record high briefly when falsified information was delivered to the Angeli Mercantile Exchange. As a direct result, the markets fell into chaos, and the UNE had no choice but to step in to avoid a total market crash.

The solution would once more prove to be the recently created Customs Bureau. With their detailed scans of vessels transporting cargo, they were the government agency with the most accurate picture of what commodities were being transported at any given time. The Customs Bureau created the Trade & Development Division (TDD) in 2463 to collect and collate commodity market information for distribution to all the major exchanges. Utilizing the information already being stored by the Bureau as a starting point, the TDD included production constraints, environmental factors, current market demand, and more in their analytics. At first these official numbers were enough to stabilize the market, but soon the office began to field requests to authenticate deals to verify that they matched current data. In just a decade, it came to be that many traders would not do a deal unless it was TDD bonded.

From there, it was only a short step for them to act in receivership on future contracts, regulating storage and delivery. By the turn of the 26th century, almost the entirety of commodity brokering was done through the TDD.

Further Developments

Today, there are TDD offices in almost all ports and hubs throughout the Empire. Every second, tens of thousands of commodities traders are selling and buying mind-bogglingly huge sums of raw resources. Though it is still a part of the Customs Bureau, the TDD overshadows the rest of its parent organization in size and funding, and has become a symbol of the Empire's wealth and power. For almost five centuries, TDD has been choreographing a complicated financial ballet that manages staggeringly complex price calculations, factoring reports and estimates from all over the UEE.

While not perfect – remember the outlaw tampering at the Reis TDD in 2945 that used false high prices to lure in targets, or the recent double-down glitch in Bremen that saw millions of chickens sold twice as recent examples – overall the TDD has an impressive track record. While some traders prefer to use the smaller, more variable independent markets, it is the consistency of the TDD that has made it trusted for so long. As the organization nears its quincentenary, it continues to strive to improve price indexing and minimize information lag with ever-more advanced comm drone networks. And with the recent passing of the Human-Xi'an Trade Initiative, the TDD is bracing itself to embark on a new chapter as it works closely with our Xi'an neighbors on the formation of an inter-species commission. In other words, where commodity trading is concerned, the future of the TDD is looking stronger than ever.



THE NOX CAPER: COMMUNITY TEAM



BEN LESNICK, TYLER NOLIN & JARED HUCKABY;
TYLER WITKIN (INSET)

STAR  CITIZEN
HAPPY HOUR COMMUNITY SHOW

CLOUD IMPERIUM GAMES PRESENTS A CHRIS ROBERTS GAME



AUSTIN

You know our community team for all the various ways they've found to deliver news and keep you up to date. But recently they put on new hats, as captains and crew in the Nox Caper. Let's sit down with them to see how that unfolded.

JP: *To get started, please give me your title and a brief description of what you do.*

Ben Lesnick: I'm Director of Community Engagement for Cloud Imperium Games. I wear a lot of hats, but for the purposes of this interview I help sell spaceships! Which, incidentally,

is exactly what I would have said if you'd asked me at age five what I was going to do when I grow up.

Jared Huckaby: I am Content Manager for Community Engagement. I wear the hats that Ben can't wear at any given time, but most of my focus these days is on our video and web-related content.

Tyler Witkin: Tyler Witkin here, more commonly known as Zyloh! I'm a Lead Community Manager and my responsibilities and tasks change constantly in an effort to adapt to what



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needs to be done. I spend a lot of my time focusing on our social media platforms, communicating with backers, and ... well ... whatever the day requires!

Tyler Nolin: I am Community Manager for CIG. My day is primarily spent engaging with the community and relaying feedback to the development team. I also assist Tyler Witkin with social media.

JP: *How do you sell a spaceship? Especially a spaceship that, well, only exists as pixels?*

Jared H: This is the part where we let Ben do his thing. It's a good part.

Tyler W: Let's see if he can answer without using a single pun.

JP: *Or reference to Wing Commander ...*

Jared H: No bet.

Ben L: That is a long story! Chris Roberts hit on the idea of selling ships to fund *Star Citizen's* development at the start of the crowdfunding campaign, because he wanted our supporters to feel like they had a real stake in the world they were letting us build. And I think to most of us there's no bigger fantasy than owning your own starship; commanding your own Millennium Falcon or Serenity and having adventures around distant stars.

At the very start of the project, before we had artists and processes in place, that meant we had to explain our visions for the ships. How would a Caterpillar or a Cutlass or an Aurora fit into this universe we were dreaming up?

Our job is a lot easier today, because we have incredible designers and artists who can show you exactly how a ship is going to 'work' ... so now our job is to take it a little further and add some fun and immersion, to bring these

game elements into the game world that's still expanding. To do that, we develop a sort of marketing campaign for each ship as though it were a hot commodity being sold in 2947, instead of a 2017 game asset.

JP: *So lots of "new ship smell" and so forth?*

Tyler W: #CarrackHype

Jared H: I think a lot of the process of sharing these new ships with the community is finding that hook, not only in the gameplay, but in the lore of the universe and in a player's own wish-fulfillment.

Ben L: Absolutely! One of my favorite early memories of all this was when we did the first Aurora variant, the deluxe one with leather seats. And half the office said that's crazy, no one cares that this fictional spaceship has fictional leather seats ... and the other half was so excited about the idea. We love little things like that that bring you into the *Star Citizen* 'verse.

Jared H: It's not enough that a ship "look cool" in *Star Citizen*; part of our goal with every Concept Release is to explore the relationship that ship has with every aspect of *Star Citizen*, and in many cases, what its "personality" is. Take for example something like the Terrapin or the Crucible. They may not be the sleekest or shiniest ships in the pantheon of *Star Citizen* spacecraft, but they ooze personality. You can see the adventures you'll have in each one, and part of what we do is find the ways to show that to potential backers.

JP: *Have all of the previous ship campaigns been structured as though each one was the release of a new ship model?*

Ben L: We like to look for touchstones from the real world, the same way we do with other parts of *Star Citizen* ... so



BEHIND THE SCENES

we look at how cars are sold, how planes are sold, how construction equipment is sold and so on. And we look at the culture surrounding all these things: who are the people who buy luxury cars and how do they celebrate that? What about people who fly old surplus bombers, what are their communities like? When we plan our campaigns, with brochures and commercials and web tie-ins and mini-games and social pushes and all that, we try and ground them to the familiar.

And the most important litmus test in all that is us. We're putting together campaigns that build the universe the way we would want. I think we all grew up reading Star Trek technical manuals and Star Wars RPG books and so on because we were so excited about the world building. Now that we're in charge, we want to give the same experience to *Star Citizen* backers.

I know there are people out there who don't 'get' owning or caring about a virtual spaceship, but the dozen copies of Franz Joseph's *Starfleet Technical Manual* I've worn out over the years tells me there's something there!

Jared H: One of my favorite campaigns we did was for the Genesis Starliner, which was a hard sell by any metric. With help from the Lore Team, we were able to craft a "Choose Your Own Adventure" storyline to help answer the question we all had when we first approached the ship: "what the heck are you supposed to do with this thing?" Through the story and the inserts in ATV for weeks ahead of time, we were able to showcase how the everyday Citizen can explore the universe with others aboard a Starliner, and the types of adventures they can get into outside of fighting in their own ships.

Ben L: Yeah, the Starliner was a good one. And it's not about just selling things. (Beyond how that makes the



game possible!) It's about building the world and creating an experience we want to take part in. I hope there are people who have never bought a ship beyond their starters who are still enjoying the heck out of what we put together.

The one element I remember from the Starliner campaign was that we did the air safety card like you'd find when you ride a passenger jet. That's such a Chris Roberts touch, putting thought into the smallest thing that builds immersion.

JP: What sort of adventures did you come up with for the Starliner?

Jared H: For the Starliner sale, we created a virtual spaceport, complete with over-the-comm PA announcements and a flight board that showed you a multitude of destinations, some you could afford to travel to and others you could not. Depending on which destination you picked, you got a customized boarding pass and had a trip that explored the sights and sounds of that particular destination.



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It was a way not just to explore the ship, but to explore a bit more of the *Star Citizen* universe, itself.

Tyler W: That one was so fun. I had forgotten about that until just now.

Jared H: And admittedly I'm partial to it because it was the first campaign I took lead on in 2015. =oP

I learned a lot from Ben, Turbulent and the Lore Team on that one about how this process works.

JP: *Tylers, have either of you been involved in composing previous new-ship campaigns?*

Tyler W: A lot of my role is finding ways to take the incredible ideas that Ben, Jared, Design and the Lore Team come up with, and incorporate them into exciting social media campaigns to help get people involved in the fun. Most of everything is a collaborative effort, but no one can deny that Ben is a legend when it comes to awesome ideas.

Similarly to the ship pipeline, our process is more refined than ever before. Quick shoutout to Javid for all the awesome artwork he has been doing to support these campaigns.

JP: *Moving forward to the Nox, what were the basics – what did you have to work with?*

Jared H: A super cool space bike!

Tyler W: I think we all knew the Nox was something really special. Being in Austin, I have had the opportunity to watch this thing come to life at the hands of Chris Smith. The first time I saw him working on it I said to him, "Dude, you have outdone yourself ... this thing is EPIC!"

Jared H: Tyler used the word EPIC in the first 15 minutes. Someone owes me a soda.

Ben L: Longtime backers will remember we'd been trying to get a space bike off the ground for a long time. We introduced the concept in a user poll to decide the next ship ... and it lost handily. But the idea was in the back of our minds forever, and when we started building procedural planets it became a no-brainer to do the Dragonfly. And it's one of those cases where once the idea became real and we were flying the ship around in the engine ... we immediately wanted to do more bikes. And that's where the Nox entered the picture!

So we went into the Nox with a pretty darned handsome ship design with an amazing look by Chris Smith ... so when it came time to build a campaign (which happens a few months before the actual ship sale) our biggest concern was how to do it differently than the Dragonfly. We'd done the Harley vibe, we'd done a manufacturer brochure, we'd spoken to that sort of outlaw lifestyle there ... and for the Nox we needed something different.

JP: *What were the comparables? Such as "The Nox is like X, only it doesn't have Y / only it does have Z."*

Jared H: The first thing you notice right off the bat is it doesn't have the second seat that the Dragonfly does. This is a purpose-built machine.

The second thing you notice is that it just looks fast.

Ben L: That speaks to one thing I love about *Star Citizen*. The way you pitch a new game concept to a publisher is pretty much "it's a combination of X game and Y game, with Z!" ... On *Star Citizen*, we have the freedom to say things like "it just makes sense in our fiction that there'd be two (or three or four) different bikes from different manufacturers," and that's all the reason we need to start on a design.



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BEHIND THE SCENES

JP: We carved out some of that space for the Cutlass, as well, as I recall. That brochure was inspired by a motorcycle brochure.

Ben L: I worked on a *Wing Commander* pitch for Electronic Arts once that began, "it's *Grand Theft Auto* meets *Battlefield 1942*." I still don't know what that means.

Jared H: I'd play that game, Ben.

Tyler W: It's funny, *Star Citizen* is seemingly so much about space and flight ... but the ground vehicles excite me the most. We're talking about exploring potential uncharted territory, racing, and more. Anyone ever play *Twisted Metal*? That's going to be me on my bike. ;)

JP: Sounds like you have a lot of collisions.

Tyler W: Yes. The roleplaying for the Nox was EPIC. <looks at Jared slyly> Yeah, I said epic again.

Jared H: Pirate Bane would never use the word "epic."

JP: What was the initial high concept for the Nox campaign?

Ben L: For the Nox, we looked at different kinds of real bikes and it was pretty apparent you have two distinct types: big, meaty Harley-style ones and then sleek, Japanese-style ones. So we based the Nox off the latter, and we built out lore about how it's being imported from the Xi'an for the first time, how people are starting these specific racing leagues for them and so on.

Jared H: Pirate Bane would sing an "epic" shanty about good and evil, though.

Ben L: We developed the 'material' for the sale, meaning the website, the brochure and the videos, along those lines. It's a beautiful exotic bike that looks as fast as it is.

Jared H: I told Chris Smith it was a "moral imperative" that he create a light-cycle variant of the Nox. He expertly ignored me.

Ben L: Instead of doing a 'company brochure,' we did an info booklet about a racing league. Javid, our fantastic marketing artist, put together that and also created riders club patches to bring you into the world of Nox racing. The team at Turbulent put together a website with a focus on the exotic: it has this unique feel when it scrolls, and it's covered in Xi'an imagery and text.

Jared H: The racing badges are really cool. Have we shown those to the public, yet? I don't think we have. Let's include them here.

JP: But then you went beyond that material, didn't you?

Ben L: As we were putting that all together, I hit on another part of the story that we hadn't thought about in the past: going beyond thinking about how these bikes are being marketed in 2947 to thinking about how they were physically being sold. How did all these new bikes get from Xi'an space to here?

Tyler N: I think the success of the Eclipse campaign really allowed us to be even more creative with the Nox.

Tyler W: Ahhhh yess ... the Tarp!

Actually, leave any mention of the tarp OUT of this interview, please.

Ben L: Woah, woah, woah, I think you' may have had a bit too much to drink. I don't remember any tarp ...

Jared H: What's a tarp?

Tyler W: It's a tarp!

<Admiral_Ackbar.gif>



BEHIND THE SCENES



Mayday! This is MV Golden Ticket, Terra-flagged Hull C, inbound from Xi'an space. We're under attack by pirates. Who can assist?



10:40 AM - 20 Jun 2017

Tyler N: The Eclipse campaign was all about obscurity. We experimented with “leaks” from our social media channels at weird times of the day. People really got into the theory crafting.

Jared H: When you have to stay up to 1am to play a distorted video “leak” on Twitch for 30 minutes, you know it’s a fun job.

Tyler W: Honestly, with a lot of the Eclipse material, we had a foundation of really cool stuff, but we were pulling some stuff out of nowhere last minute for fun. The Twitch broadcast, and a few others, we thought of just days before while standing in Ben’s office.

It generally goes, “HEY, what if we did ...?!” “I like it!”

Jared H: Ben is the brain.

JP: And so for the Nox ...?

Ben L: For the Nox, we wanted to tease it on our social media. So we decided to tell a story!

Everyone and his dog is familiar with the idea of an escort mission in a space sim; anyone who has played *Wing Commander*, *StarLancer*, *Freespace*, etc. has come to the aid of a lot of imperiled freighters. So we put out an SOS on the Twitter account – a Hull C was under attack.

Jared H: Once you get past the *Wing Commander* and the puns, you can find some good stuff in there.

Ben L: We figured the community would enjoy playing along. Who out there would help this freighter? Tweet back at us. And Tyler can give you the numbers, but the response was pretty extraordinary.



Comm intercept. Capn Bane in BUCC-212 tracking a fat Hull outside ECN and filled with them Nox bikes. Call out: who's with me for the kill?



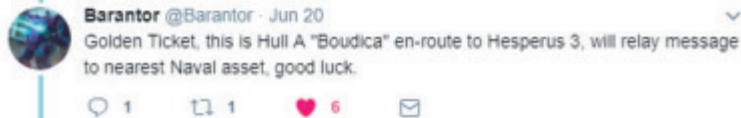
11:29 AM - 20 Jun 2017



BEHIND THE SCENES



155 81 302



1 1 6



Replying to @Barantor

Golden Ticket to Boudica, thank you for the signal boost. Hulls have to stick together!

Tyler W: Yes ... I monitor analytics daily to track what our community enjoys, and the Eclipse and Nox campaign were very well received. That's exciting and definitely motivates us to come up with immersive campaigns for the future!

Ben L: We went into it thinking we'd sort of tell our own story and have a poll: are you going to save this ship or are you going to join the pirates trying to capture it? And we'd reveal it was carrying the Noxes for the sale and so on in the span of a few tweets. But we got dozens and dozens of replies of people wanting to continue the story. And so all four of us jumped in with characters to roleplay the fight for the Nox shipment!

Tyler N: Being involved with the Nox sale was a lot of fun. We constantly brainstorm how to be engaging and keep players on their toes, but role-playing was something we hadn't done before.

Jared H: He made me Roleplay a pirate, David.

JP: *That's so out of character for you, Jared.*

Ben L: We tied it into the pre-sale for the ship ... if 'save the freighter' won, the ships would arrive early and there'd be lore about that. If the pirates had won, they'd be sold on the black market instead!



155 81 302



1 1



Replying to @Thoringers

Vector is four by thirty by sixteen out of the outer marsh jump point. 3 AU distance, mark.

10:57 AM - 20 Jun 2017



BEHIND THE SCENES

Tyler N: I think Jared enjoyed it more than he cares to admit. :P

Tyler W: I heard Jared does NOT roleplay ... but after seeing him take on Bane ... I call BS. He loved it.

Tyler N: Everyone did. We loved bringing the Community in on the fun and getting them involved. Players picked sides pretty quickly.

Tyler W: Honestly, it felt like we were breathing life and lore into *Star Citizen* as we went. I couldn't believe the level of participation we had from the community. Everyone was so into it, we could barely keep up with replies. For everyone out there that jumped in and played along, thank you! We had just as much fun as you did.

JP: *What role did each of you play?*

Ben L: I got to play Captain Burton of the MV Golden Ticket, the freighter in question. (That's a Privateer nod and a nod to our original 2012 campaign, in that order!)

Jared H: Ben was the goody two-shoes captain of a silly freighter that was delivering import Nox for sale in the UEE.

Ben L: It was great, it was engaging, and it was all spur of the moment, all of us in a Skype channel excitedly expanding the scope of the thing.

Tyler N: I was Mallard 'The Mad' Puck, working for Bane!

Jared H: I was the awesome hero-of-the-people Captain Bane that only wanted to bring exotic alien space bikes to the lower-class at affordable prices.

And sing a song or two along the way.

Ben L: It's one of those things where probably most people would sort of cringe at the idea, but *Star Citizen*

backers GET IT. A chance to roleplay in the world they're making! And I really hope it's one of those things people look back on years later and go, hey, I can't believe they did something that stupid and I was part of it, that was so much fun.

Star Citizen @RobertsSpaceInd · Jun 20
Comm intercept. Capn Bane in BUCC-212 tracking a fat Hull outside ECN and filled with them Nox bikes. Call out: who's with me for the kill?

23 31 115

Andrew Brown @NHUltracon · Jun 20
I'll bring my Caterpillar so we have a safe place to store all those lost bikes...

1

Star Citizen @RobertsSpaceInd · Jun 20
'Preciate the effort. Mores the merrier, I always say. #piratebane

1 1

Andrew Brown @NHUltracon · Jun 20
I have a sabre and 325a for escorts. Figure we can get what's ours and jump to Hex to divy it up.

1

Star Citizen @RobertsSpaceInd
Replying to @NHUltracon
Sounds like a plan. Bring speed and kit to bear on MV Golden Ticket outta Xi'An space vectored towards Terra. #piratebane

11:53 AM - 20 Jun 2017



BEHIND THE SCENES

Star Citizen @RobertsSpaceInd · Jun 20
Comm intercept. Capn Bane in BUCC-212 tracking a fat Hull outside ECN and filled with them Nox bikes. Call out: who's with me for the kill?



23 31 115

Nightrider @ThePantless · Jun 20
This is the Corvette Hot Needle of Inquiry. Craft on intercept course to the Hull-C Golden Ticket are advised to stand down or be fired upon



2 3 10

Tyler W: I was a part of the crew on Ben's ship. John "Jester" Cullen. I drank and knew things. I also got to fight Bane ... /flex

(And I kicked his ass ... jus sayin')

Jared H: If you kick my ass in a dream you better wake up and apologize for it.

Ben L: Yeah we had so much fun with the setup we decided to continue it on Spectrum just before the sale started.

We all joined #general with new accounts we'd created for the day.

My freighter captain showed up and started buying people drinks at the space bar, because he'd narrowly survived the pirate attack. With Tyler as my crewman, we were boasting about our exploits. And then Jared joined as Bane and we argued and came to blows. :)

Jared H: Bane was actually in that bar for about an hour beforehand, nursing a drink, singing songs and telling his side of things.

JP: *What were our Citizens doing, in the meantime – during the conflict and then while you were at the bar?*

Jared H: In the conflict on Twitter, Citizens declared their allegiance to Profitability or Commendability.

JP: *Profitability = Pirates?*

Jared H: Yes, sir. Evil is viable, good's unreliable!

Good may be thankable, evil is bankable!

JP: *I bet you even have a song for that.*

Jared H: Is good commendable and evil dependable?

JP: *Not saying I want to hear it.*

Tyler W: You don't.

Jared H: Well, neither did these Citizens, cause they flocked to the aid of the good Captain and his shipment of Nox.

Saps.

PIRATE BANE IS A HERO OF THE PEOPLE!

Tyler W: And a hero he shall be ... locked up in a cold cell. Meanwhile ... I've got a shiny new Nox to polish.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Jared H: While I was at the bar, some were playing along with it. Some were filling in the others who had missed the Twitter events.

JP: *What were you doing as the “votes” were rolling in, and then after they were tallied?*

Tyler N: A HERO!

Tyler W: Getting into character. Talking mad smack. :)

Jared H: There was no need for a tally. It was an overwhelming avalanche of support for goodness. The *Star Citizen* community revealed their true nature that day, and it is a rousing benevolence.

Ben L: I think we spent all day going back and forth with people. Thanking ships for coming to our rescue, docking with people to offload supplies, making emergency repairs with their help. All the stuff you’ll eventually do naturally in the ‘verse!

JP: *While Bane and company were chased off into the deep dark?*

Jared H: Yeah, we actually had Steven Kam, commonly known as Toast [also CIG Junior Counsel], as an undercover Advocacy agent in the bar on Spectrum. He captured Bane and crew and took them away.

The story was followed up on in a lore post the next week:
<https://robertspaceindustries.com/comm-link/spectrum-dispatch/15989-B0otyCall-Small-Fish>

Basically, the “canon” version of events are in that lore post. So in addition to making a fun marketing and social campaign, we actually contributed to the lore of the *Star Citizen* universe! I thought the writers were a little hard on Bane, personally.

Ben L: (They weren’t.)

Jared H: Inept Outlaw of the Year, indeed.

JP: *And are backers liking the Nox, now?*

Ben L: In a word, yes! I think that the Nox has been the most positively received ship ever.

Normally, introducing a new ship generates all kinds of debate. How does this impact the game? Why is this ship good versus bad? Why will it work, why won’t it work? And that is always beautiful, it’s people caring about our game world and how it will play and actually thinking about this stuff the same way we do.

But for the Nox, none of that. I would see entire threads where everyone loved it. I’ve never seen that with a ship reveal. Chris Smith and the rest of the team should be proud.

JP: *How about the Q&As, Jared?*

Jared H: Since the introduction of the Hull Series back in April 2015, every new concept ship reveal has had an accompanying Q&A post, where we spend a couple days collecting questions from the community, passing those on to the relevant ship designer, and providing backers with the best answers we have available at that time.



BEHIND THE SCENES

With the addition of Spectrum earlier this year, we can now allow folks to add their votes to the questions they most want to see answered. The questions included are generally a combination of those that received the most votes, similar questions that were merged into a single instance, and those we felt we could comfortably answer at that stage of a ship's life.

Ben L: The Q&As are part of the follow-up to the sale. We tend to offer a concept ship for about ten days (give or take a few days) and so we plan for ways to keep people engaged ... and in the case of the Q&As, to address their questions and concerns.

Jared H: With the Nox being so much further along than a normal concept sale, we were able to provide some very

detailed answers to the most pressing questions.

Ben L: We also work with our video department to put together a 'Ship Shape' episode for each new ship. Those show up on Around the Verse, either the day before the sale or the Thursday following. The Nox benefited from a beautiful trailer put together by Chris Smith and Nathan Dearsley!

Jared H: We also had the opportunity to have a themed Bugsmashers about the Nox that let us demonstrate the first-person perspective while flying the ship. (Which is something that always raises a lot of questions with each ship.)

Tyler W: For those who don't know Chris Smith really well, he is a motorcycle enthusiast, with bike models all over his desk. I know that having the opportunity to work on this ship was really exciting for him. Not to mention, the concept art left him a lot of freedom to really craft it from the ground up.

Or ... slightly off the ground up ... :)

Jared H: We've done a lot to improve the overall Q&A process in recent months, from reformatting the way the information is presented, to utilizing Spectrum voting, to determining which questions get asked, and to including all available art assets in one easy-to-find-resource. It's become a pretty important part of every Concept Sale, because as much as we can anticipate what questions folks will have before the sale goes live, you can always count on this community to surprise you with a thing or two they're most interested in, in every sale.

In that way, the Q&A serves not just to better inform the backers, but to inform us of the aspects that most catch their interests and imagination.



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Tyler W: Most importantly, does it fit into my Polaris?

Jared H: Nobody respond to Tyler.

JP: *So, what does the future hold? Back to calmer, more normal campaigns?*

Ben L: I would say we're emboldened to try more new things! We have the next two ships in progress right now and we just last week pitched to Chris plans for the rest of the year. I can't spoil too much, but there's a really good mix of concepts coming down the pipeline. We sometimes go through periods where the ships are all very combat focused ... but that will not be the case for 2017!

Jared H: Yeah, that was a good meeting. It's exciting to see additional variety coming to *Star Citizen* in 2017.

Including a ... gamechanger?

Ben L: Technically, all the new ships change the game in some way ... :)

Jared H: Now you sound like Toast.

Ben L: You are what you eat!

JP: *Any final words?*

Ben L: It takes a village to make a ship; we're just the goons who get to share them with you! We stand on the shoulders of Design and Art. Also, thanks to our producers here in the community engagement team, who are un-sung heroes. I may be the idea guy, but I'd be a confused mess of nothing without Ari, who manages our JIRA and makes sure what we want actually happens.



Star Citizen
@RobertsSpaceInd

The MV Golden Ticket is under attack trying to deliver the first shipment of Nox. Will you Defend the Shipment or Join the Attack?

77% Defend the Shipment

23% Join the Attack

2,553 votes • Final results

12:35 PM - 20 Jun 2017



Star Citizen
@RobertsSpaceInd

Thank you! Without your help we would've been doomed. Now these Nox can arrive on schedule. First round at G-Loc on us.



8:33 AM - 21 Jun 2017



BEHIND THE SCENES

Tyler W: I want to give a shoutout to the entire team that often goes unseen. The editors, Javid, our production staff, Turbulent, and countless others deserve a spotlight. Nothing we accomplish could be down without them. We are so fortunate to work alongside such an incredible team of passionate people.

And of course, our backers. This entire project would not be possible without the support you have shown us. o7

Tyler N: Shout out to the team for coming up with some great ideas, and the Community for allowing us to execute them. :)

Jared H: I'd like to thank Pirate Bane, who was only trying to do right by the people stuck under the oppressive might of the authoritarian UEE and their import taxes that strangle the free economy.

Tyler N: Bane, a man of the people!
A true hero.

Jared H: A man FOR the people!

JP: *A man in for 10 to 20 ...*

Jared H: We'll see ...

JP: *Thanks, guys! I think we're done.*



BEHIND THE SCENES

PALLAS SYSTEM



The Pallas System is best known as the location of first contact between Humans and the Xi'an. This unusual first encounter, which resulted in 276 Humans being taken captive by the Xi'an, is well known, but its aftermath

much less understood. The crisis also set the stage for the cold war and sowed the seeds of distrust between the species for centuries to come.

UNHINGED EXPANSION

In the early 26th century, Humanity was consumed with the prospect of discovery and expansion. Advances in scanning technology made its components much more accessible while innovators worked to refine terraforming processes, both of which led to an explosion of would-be explorers looking for the next undiscovered territory.

Humanity's rapid expansion into numerous new systems created a problem of governance. The United Nations of Earth (UNE) realized that it wasn't built to govern a multi-system expanse. This realization ultimately led to the formation of a new government to reflect the new landscape of Humanity's territory: the United Planets of Earth (UPE).

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A myriad reforms accompanied this name change. A governing tribunal consisting of a High-Secretary, High-General, and High-Advocate was created, plus new rules and regulations were implemented to manage Humanity's further expansion out to the stars. While many companies recognized and respected these new laws, others ignored them, particularly when lucrative terraforming rights hung in the balance. One such company, Gaia Planet Services, became the most infamous example of the latter.

In 2530, a navjumper named Kathryn Segovia discovered the Pallas System through Baker and decided to auction off the nav point. She cared nothing for the fame, but craved the fortune. Her preliminary scans indicated the system had mineral-rich locations and one potentially habitable planet, so she lined up bids from those who would pay the most for access – mining and terraforming conglomerates.

CORPORATE MALFEASANCE

Gaia Planet Services won the bid and raced a terraforming team into Pallas. Comms would later reveal that company executives were eager to cut any corner to offset the exorbitant price paid.

This included not officially registering the system with the UPE, or seeking the appropriate terraforming permits. Instead, they decided to get their operation up and running and then tackle the bureaucratic hurdles later. As company CEO Joseph Jules Jr. wrote in one comm, "We'd rather pay the fine then waste the time."

Foreman Charles Baxter led a team into the system and straight to Pallas III, where they began surveying the best locations for terraforming equipment. It wasn't long before strange ships swooped over the horizon and surrounded the survey teams. All 276 Humans were quickly captured and placed under guard.

This was Humanity's first encounter with the Xi'an.

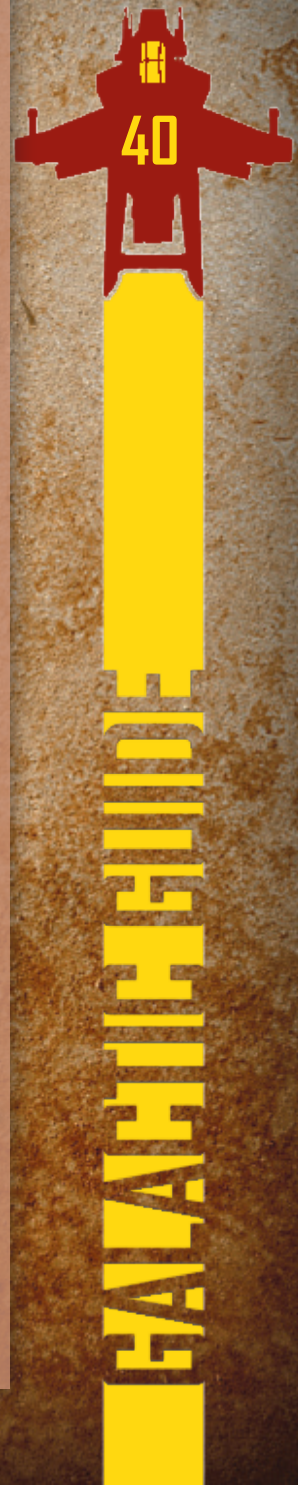
Though a language barrier separated the two species, the Xi'an quickly determined that Baxter oversaw the operation. The Xi'an surprised their prisoners by releasing Baxter as a sign of good faith. He fled to the Baker System and immediately contacted his superiors at Gaia Planet Services rather than the authorities.

Supposedly, CEO Joseph Jules Jr. argued that they should try and cut a deal with the Xi'an themselves. He was desperate to find a way to spin this debacle into a positive for the company. A handful of sycophantic executives agreed with him, but Baxter and others pushed back. The plan was a pipe dream unless the company had xeno-linguists on staff who could decipher this unknown language. Reluctantly, company executives contacted the UPE and revealed the terrible situation in which they had placed Humanity.

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The UPE's best xeno-linguist took 15 days to devise a rudimentary form of communication with the Xi'an, after which official discussions over the release of the remaining workers began. Many within the government grum-

bled at the terrible negotiating position Gaia Planet Services had left them in, while others fumed at the horrible first impression Humanity had given the Xi'an.



The ensuing few weeks were a high-wire act of diplomacy for the UPE. The Xi'an had two primary points of contention that they required to be met before releasing the hostages. The first point was quickly agreed upon; the UPE would vacate the Pallas System immediately. It was the Xi'an's second stipulation that caused great controversy. They insisted that the UPE reveal the extent of their Empire and the location of all currently known systems. UPE negotiators pushed hard not to have that last detail included, but the Xi'an were adamant about it.

As political pressure built at home to return the captives to their families, the UPE learned more about these strange new aliens. When it was revealed that they lived for hundreds of standard Earth years, negotiators grew concerned with how long the Xi'an were willing to carry on the negotiation. Many concluded that they had no other choice but to acquiesce to the Xi'an terms.

After 57 days, a deal was reached, the ordeal ended, and all hostages were eventually released unharmed, but what Humanity gave up in exchange came to define the relationship between the two species. The disparity be-

tween what the Xi'an knew about our systems versus what we knew about theirs was a major source of paranoia for Humanity following the Pallas incident. The actions taken had sown the seeds of distrust on both sides and the two species slowly backed away from the negotiating table, unsure when and where their next encounter would occur.

Despite Humanity learning the Xi'an name for the system, Hui sen Th.us'āng, during negotiations, it was not commonly used due to the difficulty many had pronouncing it. The escalating cold war pushed the UEE to give it a different name. Eventually, the UEE military assigned it the name Pallas to correlate with other Perry Line systems named after gods of war. The name has stuck ever since.

Although the Xi'an ultimately abandoned the Pallas system during the height of tension with the Messer regime, the Perry Line Pact ensured that the Pallas System would remain in Xi'an hands after the Messers were toppled. As is their custom to assign each system a specific purpose, the Xi'an now use Pallas as a scientific system to conduct research, much of which remains a mystery to the UEE as Human access to the system is highly regulated.

PALLAS I

Closest to Pallas' yellow-white G1 main-sequence star sits an iron planet. The Xi'an have mined parts of Pallas I, but vast swathes of deposits remain. Since the rest of the

system has been assigned to some scientific endeavor, it's believed that the same goes for Pallas I. As far as we know, no commercial mining occurs on the planet.

PALLAS II

This smog planet appears to be untouched by the Xi'an. However, the UEE can't be certain that research projects aren't going on beneath the planet's thick atmosphere.

TRAVEL WARNING With Pallas designated by the Xi'an as a scientific research system, visitors must take care to avoid areas deemed off-limits. Xi'an authorities will not hesitate to interdict or even destroy your ship if it ventures into a prohibited part of the system.



PALLAS III

The infamous moment of first contact between Humanity and the Xi'an took place on this terrestrial world. At the time, the Xi'an were already using it as a testbed for various geohacking and terraforming technologies. Such scientific endeavors were abandoned when the Xi'an fled the system during the cold war, only to be resumed

after tensions eased.

The specifics of these experiments are unclear. What's apparent is that several parts of the planet are filled with smoke, supposedly due to a massive underground fire. Whether this raging fire is part of a Xi'an experiment or merely a side effect is unknown.

ASTEROID BELT

When Kathryn Segovia discovered this system, she believed mining companies would kill for access to this mineral rich asteroid belt. Surprisingly, the Xi'an have deemed

it illegal to mine, so it remains relatively untouched. Some are still tempted by its vast resources, and mine it at great personal risk.

PALLAS IV

Pallas IV is a notable gas giant not for any particular astronomical properties but because the Xi'an have constructed a pressurized research station within its atmosphere.

Human scientists know very little about the station, but it obviously features technology beyond what the UEE currently has.

PALLAS V

Lacking an atmosphere or any resources of note, this small dwarf planet orbits the system's outer reaches all by its lonesome.

HEARD IN THE WIND

"Honestly, it was the most incredible and embarrassing moment in my life. Seeing those strange ships swoop down nearby just froze me, I was so in awe. I'd never seen anything quite like it. Then I remembered what we were doing there and realized we were in big trouble."

- Charles Baxter, transcript of testimony before the UPE tribunal, 2530

"To me, Pallas is the perfect example for how the Xi'an handle Humanity. We're allowed to visit the system, but they really don't want us poking around too much. Sort of like that neighbor who'll answer the door when you knock but never invite you in."

- Harry Tenny, A Complainer's Guide to the 'Verse, 2939



SID & CYRUS

by Adam Wieser



Part 3

Sid felt like she was wading through quicksand as she rushed toward her daughter. Slowed by her heavy armor, she reached Immanuelle as Cyrus released her from his embrace. Sid drew her daughter close and finally exhaled, relieved she was alive.

As the two separated, Sid looked at Immanuelle and shook her head. Nothing quite made sense. During the longest and most excruciating day of Sid's life, she thought Tomyris, the notorious leader of the Cadejos, had killed or captured her daughter, only now to discover that her little girl *was* Tomyris.

"What have you gotten yourself into?"

"I should be asking you the same thing," Immanuelle said,

looking her mother up and down. "You scared the hell outta me. Coming up in the elevator in heavy armor like that. Good thing I recognized Dad, otherwise . . ."

Immanuelle decided not to finish the sentence. She studied Sid and Cyrus, perhaps more stunned by this turn of events than them. These people weren't the mother and father she left behind in Reis. She'd never seen them like this before. Together, all geared up, they cut an imposing image.

"What are you doing here?" she began. "Hell, when's the last time either of you left Reis?"

"We thought you'd been kidnapped."

"Or killed," Cyrus added.

"Why would you think that?"

Sid took off her helmet and nodded toward Devin. His eyes went wide with recognition.

“Devin, here, wandered into the Falling Sky while I was tending bar and passed along some cryptic message from Tomyris.”

Immanuelle’s eyes narrowed, “That doesn’t make any sense.”

“That’s what I thought. So, I poured him a few drinks until he let something slip about the attack on the convoy to Behistun.”

“We had to know if you were still alive,” Cyrus said as he gently squeezed Immanuelle’s hand.

Immanuelle still couldn’t believe they were here. She’d taken precautions to keep her parents in the dark about what she was doing. The last thing she wanted was for them to worry . . . then, a realization hit her and she turned to Devin.

“Wait, why’d you go to the Falling Sky?”

“Because that’s where you told me to go.” Devin responded nervously.

“I told you that’s where I grew up going,” Immanuelle kept pressing him. “You didn’t go to the Cliff’s Edge, did you?”

Devin hesitated for a moment then shook his head.

Immanuelle’s heart sank. No wonder their reinforcements hadn’t arrived. They were still at the Cliff’s Edge waiting for word that the mission was a “Go.”

This changed everything. Without reinforcements, the spoil bank side of the mine would be unguarded, except for that turret. She turned to Devin.

“Did you at least fix the turret by the spoil banks?”

Devin shook his head.

“Damn it —”

“That’s not my fault. He shot it.”

Cyrus nodded his head with a shrug. Immanuelle turned and hurried toward the outpost. Sid and Cyrus looked at each other, then hustled after. Devin trailed behind, still dazed by everything going on.

As the outpost doors slid open, Sid scanned the operation. It had been converted into a command center. Four more Cadejos were inside, geared up for a fight.

Margo and Red didn’t even glance up from their terminals. Dee gripped a shotgun and eyeballed Sid and Cyrus. She stood near Arch, a Tevarin who took its eyes off the hologlobe and tried to get Immanuelle’s attention.

“Listen up,” Immanuelle paused until everyone was looking at her. “Cavalry isn’t coming. It’s just us.”

A nervous look rippled through the room. Even the two on the terminals looked away from their screens.

“So, let’s focus on putting up as much of a fight as we can here, but be prepared to fall back for phase two the second I make the call. That clear?”

“Crystal,” her crew answered in unison.

“Hold on a minute,” Cyrus raised his voice for Immanuelle. He got everyone’s attention though, so he seized the opportunity. “We need to get out of here. The Vucari are coming.”

“We know,” answered Immanuelle. “We lured them here.”

Cyrus stood there, dumbfounded, then turned to Sid, who looked as if she was about to erupt.

“What in the hell is going on here?” Sid finally burst out.

“It’s a long story . . .”

“Then start talking. We came a long damn way.”

“Mom, I know. I’m sorry. I never meant —”



“Sorry?” Sid steamrolled. “I don’t even know where to begin. Ten minutes ago, I was worried you might be dead. Now, you’re not only alive but Tomyris, a damn outlaw mastermind.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Let’s make it simple. Are you responsible for the attacks on those convoys?”

“Well . . . yes and no. But they weren’t attacks —”

“Don’t bullshit your mother. We saw what happened to that convoy to Behistun.”

“I’m not denying it. I’m trying to tell you that we staged it.”

“What? How?” Cyrus asked in quick succession.

“Every attack credited to the Cadejos was staged, actually,” she stated matter-of-factly. “Devin’s been using the crane to grab old vehicles out of the mine. Then we shoot at ’em, maybe even blow ’em up a bit, so they look the part and then dump what’s left into Vucari territory.”

Cyrus pressed on, still pulling the pieces together, “But it wasn’t just attacks. What about all those rumors? The ones about the Cadejos and their weird ritualistic stuff?”

“Just rumors to make the Cadejos memorable. Some people believe anything after a few drinks. Lots of rumors start with a few folks talking in dark bars, right, Mom?”

Sid was quiet. Immanuelle smirked. She knew her mom couldn’t refute that. It was her quote, after all.

“Plus,” she continued, “there had to be a reason there weren’t bodies at the sites, only wreckage and body armor.”

Sid shook her head. Secretly, she was impressed but dared not let her daughter know. At least, not until she answered the most obvious question.

“Why are you doing all this?” Sid asked.

“Because someone had to before Master Kraujas and the Vucari take over the city. The UEE obviously don’t care about us, otherwise they’d be doing something about it. He knows that. He’s more worried about other outlaw packs than anything else.”

“But, why’d it have to be you?”

“When my convoy was ambushed last year . . .” Immanuelle’s voice broke with emotion. “I laid there, half-dead and watching the Vucari just execute my friends. After it was over, I waited for somebody, anybody, to step up and take them down, but nothing happened. Told Head Office, they just cut cheap compensation checks to the families and back to business as usual. ”

“Hey,” cried Margo from the comm station. “Rua’s on the line. The Vucari are about to enter the valley.”

Immanuelle quickly composed herself, and then called out confidently, “Make sure he doesn’t do anything too risky. Looks like we’re gonna need that truck.”

“Got it.”

“Mom, Dad you gotta get outta here, now. Devin will take you back —”

“Wait, what?” Devin stammered. Everyone ignored him.

“We all go or no one goes,” stated Cyrus. Sid nodded in solidarity. A concerned look crossed their daughter’s face.

“This isn’t a joke, Dad. With our reinforcements waiting back in the Cliff’s Edge, we’re outnumbered and outgunned. This is gonna be a real fight.”

“Oh, don’t worry dear,” replied Sid. “This is far from our first.”

* * *

Rua sent the final scan then pressed the accelerator to the floor. The truck sped into the valley and turned to the



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outpost. A massive dust cloud churned behind him, proclaiming the arrival of the Vucari cavalry. They attached special brushes to their wheels that scraped the ground as they drove to kick up even more dust to feed the storm. It was a tactic they used to intimidate, and right now it was working.

The scout's jobs were to snag a few good scans, transmit them to the outpost and then lead the Vucari into the valley. He'd succeeded on the first two accounts and was in the midst of the third when the ground exploded not far from his truck.

Suddenly, sensors wailed, warning that the truck's rear shield was soaking up gunfire. Rua jerked the wheel sharply right and hit a button on the console. The truck's turret burst to life and ripped a volley of return fire at the horde.

"Margo," Rua called over comms. "They're hot on my tail coming into the valley. You guys ready?"

"Good to go."

The truck's turret, which had been firing non-stop, sputtered to a stop. The acrid smell of burnt electronics hit Rua's nostrils.

Before Rua, the valley's steep shoulders narrowed to create a natural bottleneck that would force the Vucari vehicles to collapse into a column. Rua stopped weaving and accelerated, putting as much distance between him and the Vucari as possible.

He finally passed the first set of turrets, carefully hidden in crevices on opposite sides of the valley.

"Position one cleared!"

At the outpost, Margo gave Red the signal. He activated the first set of turrets. Back in the valley, they snapped to attention and turned toward the approaching Vucari cavalry. In anticipation, Rua started counting, attempting to see exactly how far ahead he was.

When the first wave of Vucari pursuers were finally within range of the turrets, a torrent of bullets ripped through them. Some of the vehicles slammed into each other and rolled. The second wave of vehicles crashed into the unexpected roadblock, only making the mayhem worse.

A few Vucari vehicles slipped through unscathed and continued their pursuit. Rua glanced at the scanner and constantly adjusted his course, so none of them could get a clear shot at him.

"That's right, you bastards, keep coming," Rua muttered then hit his comms. "Cleared position two!"

Moments later, a second set of hidden turrets activated and unloaded on the Vucari vehicles still following. The few who survived the second assault halted their pursuit. Rua unleashed a celebratory roar and continued towards the outpost.

* * *

Through the outpost windows, Sid and Cyrus watched Rua's truck flee the mayhem behind him. A sense of uneasiness hung over both of them. Armed conflict was nothing new for these two, but they'd never felt more unprepared. They'd spent Immanuelle's whole life shielding her from this kind of world. Now they were deep in it with her, facing a fight that would've given them pause even at the height of their merc days.

"Damn it! Where is he?"

Immanuelle's outburst drew their attention to the hologlobe, which projected Rua's scans of the advancing Vucari cavalry. Arch has been studying them intently, but still hadn't found what they needed to know – exactly where in this churning cloud of dust and machinery was Master Kraujas and his tachyon cannon?

The turrets flanking the outpost were set to fire at any hostiles within range, but they had hoped to locate Master



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Kraujas' vehicle in the Vucari formation so they could focus the firepower of both turrets on him. Cutting off the head of the snake would make this entire endeavor much easier.

"Rua's almost back," called Margo, "but the truck's turret is busted."

Immanuelle glanced out the window and clocked his location.

"Hey, Dad . . ." she turned to see Cyrus already walking out the door. She hurried after him when Rua's truck came to a hard stop between the outpost and the edge of the mine.

"Who the hell's this?" Rua asked when he saw Cyrus.

"My dad."

"Your dad . . ." He shot Cyrus a wary glare. "Fine. I don't suppose you can fix a turret, old man."

"Can even do it while giving you some cover," Cyrus replied while climbing in back by the turret.

Once in, he looked up to see Sid crossing to them from the outpost. She stopped next to Immanuelle and double-tapped the armor over her heart. Cyrus responded with the same gesture, smiled and went to work.

"Did you see him?" Immanuelle asked Rua.

"Who?"

"Kraujas," she persisted. "We can't ID him on any of your scans."

One of the autonomous ground turrets flanking the outpost burst to life. Moments later, the second turret fired too. From the volume of shots, clearly, they had a lot of targets to choose from. Immanuelle knew the turrets couldn't hold back the Vucari for long.

"Devin, what's your twenty?"

"Almost there."

"Hurry, we don't have a lot of time."

Suddenly, one of the turrets flanking the outpost exploded. Sid and Immanuelle ducked down against the truck.

"How the hell?"

Then the second turret exploded as a bright flash came from the spoil banks across the mine, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of a tachyon cannon. Immanuelle and Sid looked towards it.

No wonder they couldn't find Master Kraujas on the scans. He'd sent most of his forces into the maw of their defenses, while his vehicle and a few others snuck around to the other side of the mine. Without reinforcements guarding the far side, Master Kraujas and his tachyon cannon had walked right in and taken out their defenses. With the turrets down, all they could hear were the sounds of engines approaching.

"Get outta here. Go give Devin some help!" Immanuelle yelled into the truck. Sid stepped away, as Rua spun the truck towards the hauling road that led down into the mine.

Immanuelle turned to see Sid raise her rifle. A Dragonfly careened around an outpost corner with two Vucari raising guns. Sid popped off a series of shots that punched through the pilot's chestplate. He slumped forward, nose-diving the bike into the ground. It hit hard, then fell over on its left side; eventually skidding to a stop not far from Immanuelle, who stood there stunned.

"Mom . . . you can shoot."

"See, I've got my surprises too."

Sid suddenly snapped up her rifle and fired two more shots at the bike's passenger. Immanuelle spun around to see he had pulled a pistol off his left hip, which was trapped under the Dragonfly.

"You didn't even hesitate. You just —"

"Honey, later. Right now, it might be time for phase two."



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Immanuelle hit her comms, "Outpost team, fall back."

She then started toward the lift. Sid called after her while studying her scans.

"Hold on, help me with this."

Sid beckoned Immanuelle back to the Dragonfly. The thing still purred. They might be able to use it.

Meanwhile, the outpost door opened and Dee emerged with her shotgun at the ready. She held the doorway open as the others rushed to it.

A sudden flash blinded Sid and Immanuelle. Both were blown back from the bike. When they looked up, the outpost entrance had been obliterated by a direct hit from Master Kraujas' tachyon cannon.

Sid stayed low and crawled to the other side of the bike. Immanuelle pointed to the lift. *Phase two better work*, she thought, because they'd just lost half their forces in one shot.

Immanuelle started to push herself up but Sid grabbed her, urging her to hold still. Moments later, another tachyon cannon strike lit up the outpost again, reducing a good chunk of it to rubble. A low rumble could be heard. Flashes of approaching Dragonflies and Rovers appeared through the settling dirt and debris.

"Help me get this bike up," cried Sid.

"We need to —"

"Trust me!" Sid slid her armor's massive arms under the front of the bike and waited. "Gotta do this now."

Immanuelle pushed herself up, grabbed the handlebar, and pulled.

* * *

Deep within the mine, Devin jumped in the cab of an old truck half-hidden amidst the wreckage. The truck's cab had been

ripped out and replaced with a custom console he'd designed, ship-grade diamond laminate for the cab's glass and a reinforced frame that met the standards of tanks.

He flipped a switch and the dashboard lit up. Two massive turrets slowly emerged from concealed locations on opposite sides of the mine. They were phase two, and positioned perfectly to strike vehicles weaving their way down the hauling road under the outpost.

Devin took control of one turret and set the other to automatic. He spun his turret away from the outpost and towards the spoil bank side of the mine. Devin consulted the scans and located three blips in a cluster near where the hauling road descended into the mine. The blips turned and headed his way.

The turret didn't have an ideal angle, but it'd do. Devin squeezed off a burst of shots. A torrent of bullets ripped through one of the Vucari vehicles. The other two scrambled, reversing away from the mine's edge and back into the protection of the spoil banks.

Devin couldn't tell if the vehicle he'd hit was Master Kraujas' or not, so he focused on the scans, waiting until either vehicle dared creep closer. He hit his comms.

"Got a turret on the spoil banks and took out one of the vehicles. That leaves two to go on the far side . . . anybody else out there?"

He prayed someone would respond.

* * *

On the hauling road below the outpost, Rua slid aggressively into a switchback. The momentum slammed Cyrus against the side of the truck, dropping his multi-tool. The truck drifted right up to the edge of the hauling road before finding its traction.

"We can't help if we don't survive the drive down!" Cyrus called while grabbing the dropped multi-tool. Rua eased off the accelerator and accessed group comms.



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“Rua reporting in. I’m with the old guy. We’re about a third of the way down, heading to your position.”

Rua exhaled, relieved that Devin’s turret had distracted Master Kraujas. Rua glanced in the rearview mirror to see Cyrus digging through a supply crate.

“How’s it going?”

“Looking good,” Cyrus used his multi-tool to cut a corner off a tarp that partially covered the back of the truck, and then laid it before him. He placed grenades from the supply crate in the middle of it and then folded all four corners around them.

“How much longer?”

“Gotta wait for the diagnostic to finish,” Cyrus tied a tight knot to secure the bag of grenades, then placed it at his feet.

Cyrus’ mobi pinged and he popped open the hatch to access the turret’s inner workings. Rua glanced at the truck’s scanner to see blips about to swarm the outpost. Two separated from the main force to follow them down the hauling road.

“Tangos coming our way,” reported Rua. Cyrus glanced at his scan then went to work on the turret, hoping he could fix it before it was too late.

* * *

The Dragonfly had bent its front left skid and scraped its side, but it still worked. It just now naturally drifted left. Immanuelle grasped a handle bar to steady it as Sid climbed aboard.

“I’ve got it from here,” called Sid. “Have the lift ready to go the second I get there.”

Immanuelle hurried off. Sid rotated the bike toward a pair of approaching Rovers, taking into consideration its new drift. Sid carefully climbed off the bike, but kept hold of

a handlebar. Once on the ground, her free hand popped open the saddlebag, then pulled a grenade off her armor.

Sid double checked the bike’s aim. Satisfied, she cooked the grenade and dropped it in the saddlebag. Then she gave the Dragonfly a little juice and let go.

The bike bucked hard, causing it to slice further left than expected. It drifted over the outpost rubble as the Rovers sped between the wreckage and the edge of the mine. Though the aim wasn’t true, the timing was impeccable. The grenade exploded just as the Rovers passed it, sending enough Dragonfly shrapnel into the lead vehicle to blast it onto its side. The trailing vehicle hit the brakes hard and oversteered in an attempt to avoid the wreck. It rolled over and finally came to rest upside down.

Smoke and dust swirled around the crash site. Sid couldn’t spot any survivors but didn’t have time to confirm. Instead, she tracked flashes of movement beyond the half-de-stroyed outpost, heading to the other outpost corner. She drew her rifle and backed toward the elevator shaft, barrel at the ready and aimed at the area between the outpost and edge of the mine.

Moments later, a swarm of Dragonflies spilled around it. Sid sprayed them with bullets. She pulled the pin on her last grenade and rolled it before her as they charged. She’d tossed enough of them in her merc days to know the blast radius, but she’d never had to run away from one in heavy armor before.

Sid sprinted towards the elevator but was soon drawing deep breaths that slowed her down. Suddenly, she wasn’t sure if she could make it out of the danger zone in time. Instinctively counting down the seconds until the blast, she threw herself to the ground when she reached one.

The grenade exploded. It kicked up dirt and sent the lead Dragonfly spinning wildly enough to toss its passenger into the open expanse of the mine. A large jagged piece of



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shrapnel pinged harmlessly off her armor and she was suddenly very glad she had chosen to wear the heavier suit.

Sid pulled herself up and scrambled the final few meters into the elevator. The second she was in the lift, Immanuelle started their descent. The lift dropped out of sight as the dust from the blast settled. Sid tried to catch her breath, hoping she'd done enough to keep the Vucari at bay until they reached the pit floor.

Immanuelle hit the group comms, "Immanuelle checking in. My mom and I —"

An explosion echoed through the mine outside and rocked the elevator. The turret controlled by Devin went up in a flash. Immanuelle glanced nervously at Sid. Their defenses were dwindling.

Still, Immanuelle hit group comms again, "We're coming down in the elevator. Let's get that second turret on Master Kraujas to keep him occupied. We're sitting ducks in this thing."

* * *

Devin grabbed the controls of the remaining turret and deactivated autonomous mode. He swung it towards the spoil bank side of the mine and glanced at the scanner. The two blips had separated. One remained topside, near the spoil banks. The other blip darted across the screen, a sure sign they were moving down the hauling road and into the mine.

Devin wasn't sure which blip was Master Kraujas, so he took a guess. He panned the turret to the top of the mine by the spoil banks, figuring it was a perfect perch for Master Kraujas' tachyon cannon. The turret scanned for Master Kraujas' vehicle, until a flash of light betrayed its position. Devin turned the turret toward it and fired.

* * *

Master Kraujas' tachyon blast missed the elevator car but struck the shaft higher up. Debris rained down on the elevator car, denting the reinforced roof above their heads.

Sid pulled Immanuelle close and then forced them to the floor in a corner of the elevator, using her heavy armor to shield her daughter from falling debris.

Suddenly, Sid's stomach spun and for a second it felt like she was floating. A chunk of debris had knocked the elevator's counterweight free, sending the elevator car into freefall. Even though it wasn't far from the ground, when the elevator car hit the bottom of the shaft, a shockwave of pain jolted through both Sid and Immanuelle.

For a split second, Sid thought the worst was over. Then a large chunk of debris slammed into the reinforced elevator roof and brought it down upon them. Everything went black.

* * *

Devin scanned the top side of the mine, as Master Kraujas' vehicle had again retreated into the spoil banks where it was out of the turret's range and line of fire. His intense focus on taking out Kraujas' vehicle made him forget about the other Vucari vehicle. That is, until it attacked his turret.

The turret soaked up a few more bullets as Devin arced its barrel from the top of the mine to the pit floor. The Vucari Rover raced away from its position and squeezed off another burst of shots that missed the turret.

Devin returned fire and landed a few hits, but it didn't matter. Seconds later the turret exploded from a tachyon pulse. Master Kraujas had taken advantage of the distraction to line up a perfect shot.

Devin slammed his fist into the console. He sat in the cab, completely defanged as Master Kraujas' vehicle sped down the hauling road into the mine. He drew his pistol and rested it on his lap, unsure of what to do next.

* * *

Two Vucari buggies expertly slid through the switchback behind Rua's truck. They were getting a little too close for comfort without that turret working.



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“Let’s go, let’s go!” Rua pleaded.

Cyrus completed an adjustment to the turret, rebooted the system and mentally crossed his fingers. While waiting, he raised his sniper rifle and sighted in the closest pursuer. The truck bucked as he took the shot, sending it high.

He made a few quick adjustments then grabbed the make-shift bag of grenades by his feet. Rua slowed the truck and spun it into the final switchback before the pit floor. The truck careened around the corner, then began its final descent.

Cyrus dropped the bag of grenades just after the turn, and then raised his sniper rifle. He sighted the bag and breathed deep. Dirt soon swirled into the turn as the pursuing buggies slid through it. Cyrus exhaled and took the shot.

The bag exploded and blew away the first buggy, while blinding the second with dust and debris. The blast also shaved off a section of the road, narrowing it significantly. The second buggy fell victim to this new trap and tumbled headfirst to the floor of the mine.

Cyrus checked his mobi and was relieved to see his repairs worked.

“Turret is up and running on auto. I’ll provide support with my rifle.”

“Copy that,” Rua said while spinning the truck onto the pit floor. He then hit the group comms, “Reinforcements have arrived!”

Only then did Rua realize that with both turrets down, they might be the only force left. He steered the truck behind a pile of wreckage. Then he noticed a blip on the scanner weaving its way towards them from across the pit floor. The Vucari vehicle that had distracted Devin was now searching for them.

“Rua, come in,” Immanuelle hoarsely whispered over comms.

“Where are you?”

“Not far from the elevator,” she answered, out of breath. She had just pulled Sid out of the wreckage and dragged her behind the nearest pile of scrap. Once safe, Immanuelle had stuck her mom with a medpen, bringing her back from the brink.

“Where are you?”

“Between you and the crane.” Rua replied.

“Can you double back to us?”

Sid tapped Immanuelle and motioned to the hauling road coming from the outpost. The remaining Vucari forces streamed down the road and toward the pit floor.

“. . . and we need you here fast. There’s a lotta company coming from the outpost side.”

Cyrus hopped out of the truck and circled to the driver’s side door.

“Tell ’em we’ll be there soon. Just hold this position for a second. Wanna use you as bait to get a good angle on that Vucari stalking us.”

Cyrus hustled away before Rua could respond. As Cyrus edged around a pile of wreckage, Rua hit the group comm.

“We’ll be there soon.”

“Copy that. Head toward the elevator when you can. We’ll be on your right.”

Cyrus spotted the Vucari vehicle cautiously crossing the pit floor and toward their location, its windshield already badly damaged from the earlier exchange with the turret. Cyrus hustled behind the next scrap pile and checked the angle. This was it.

He made a final few adjustments on his sniper rifle and then fired two patient shots. Before the vehicle even reacted, Cyrus changed positions and moved toward the



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truck. At his next cover point, he stopped to see the buggy drift until it slammed into a pile of scrap. Once it came to a rest, he sighted in on the vehicle to see the driver slumped over the wheel.

“Got him,” Cyrus commed to Rua. “Let’s go get my girls.”

Rua moved the truck past the edge of the scrap pile in the direction Cyrus had disappeared. Master Kraujas spotted the movement as his truck reached the pit floor. He fired and struck the pile of wreckage before Rua’s truck. The explosion sent the scrap flying and flipped the truck.

The shockwave blew Cyrus off his feet into a pile of wreckage. Around him the world faded in and out of focus.

* * *

Immanuelle heard the impact of the tachyon pulse. She glanced around the corner to see Rua’s truck roll to a stop. She looked away and shook her head, despondent.

“Cyrus!” cried Sid over group comms. The two waited for a response, but got none.

“What now?” Asked Immanuelle, unsure how they could ever escape.

“We make Kraujas pay.”

Immanuelle took a second and then nodded in agreement.

“You have a plan?”

Sid’s eyes drifted up. Immanuelle followed them to see the massive magnet dangling from the jib. “You head there and I’ll try to flush him to it.”

Immanuelle hesitated, suddenly worried that this might be the last time they saw each other. Sid had no time for sentimentality.

“Get moving.”

Immanuelle nodded and then took off towards the crane. Sid turned towards Kraujas, wishing she hadn’t used all her grenades.

* * *

Master Kraujas swept his tachyon cannon from left to right. Everything seemed still on the pit floor except for a figure slowly pulling itself from the wreckage. Master Kraujas ordered his truck forward slowly.

The truck crept toward the crash site until Master Kraujas stopped it. He released his magnetic boots and hopped out of the vehicle, intent on finding out if the wounded figure was alive enough to give him any information on the Cadejo. He wanted to ensure this was the end of them.

As Master Kraujas strode to the crash site, Sid stepped from the shadows with her rifle raised. She fired off several shots at him. They plinked off his Titan armor. Master Kraujas stopped and turned toward his attacker.

Sid released the trigger. A smile spread across Master Kraujas’ face, but fell when he saw Sid wink at him and point to something high above his head.

It was only now that Master Kraujas heard the mechanical noise. He looked up to see the crane’s jib moving a massive metal plate above his head.

Inside the crane’s cab, Immanuelle flipped the switch that activated the electromagnet. It ripped Master Kraujas off the ground. His Titan armor slammed into the magnet with incredible force.

Immanuelle turned the jib and raised the magnet as high as it could go. Then she cut the power. Master Kraujas plummeted to the ground from the great height. Not even his Titan armor could save him now.

The twisted pile of metal and flesh didn’t move.

The Vucari outlaw behind the wheel of Master Kraujas’ vehicle was too stunned by the turn of events to notice Devin sneak up on him. A headshot from his pistol took the driver



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out. Devin pulled him out of the truck, slid behind the wheel and raced to Rua's truck.

Sid was already there by Rua's side. He'd dragged himself from the wreckage, then collapsed. She checked his vitals, but it was too late.

Devin climbed out of the truck and joined her. Sid ordered him to help her check the wreckage, but neither of them could find Cyrus.

Immanuelle jogged up, euphoric from their unlikely victory. She slowed when she saw the worry on Sid's face.

"What . . ." she said slowly, then realized. "Where's Dad?"

Sid shook her head, "I don't know."

"We gotta keep looking for him."

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea," interjected Devin.

"He's right. It's too dangerous. There are still some Vucari coming. Go while you can." Sid checked the rounds on her rifle. Engines thundered from the hauling road by the outpost as they approached the pit floor.

"I'm not going anywhere." Immanuelle shot back defiantly.

"Don't argue with your mother," Cyrus' voice crackled over comms. "It doesn't end well."

They all turned to see Cyrus stumble forward from where he had landed, clutching his side. Sid and Immanuelle rushed to him. Sid fished a medpen out and treated his wounds.

The world sharpened into focus around Cyrus. The two stood over him, looking relieved.

"I'm so happy to see you . . ." started Immanuelle.

"Me too. Now, let's go," said Cyrus as he tried to stand.

Sid and Immanuelle pulled him to his feet and helped him into the truck cab. Then Sid pulled up into the cab herself and

fired it up. Immanuelle knocked on the side once she and Devin were in the back. Sid stepped on the accelerator.

Under the outpost, the lead Vucari vehicle raced around the last switchback before the pit floor, not realizing the road suddenly narrowed because of the previous blast. Its right front wheel slipped into the crater, dragging the rest of the vehicle with it.

The trailing vehicles came around the corner more cautiously and finally poured onto the pit floor. They fanned out across it, surveying the destruction. They soon discovered Master Kraujas' crushed Titan Armor and gathered around it. Leaderless, they were unsure of what they should do next.

The remaining Vucari were too stunned by the loss of their leader to notice his old truck escaping up the hauling road. Sid sped it out of the mine, past the spoil banks and onto the Platean Plain.

Immanuelle brought up her mobi and keyed in a sequence.

"What are you doing?" Asked Devin.

"Phase three," she said as she pressed the final trigger.

In response, a massive series of explosions triggered from the pit floor, collapsing the mine.

Cyrus watched the massive plume of dust rise behind them for a moment, then turned to his daughter. "Okay, starting now, no more secrets."

The End



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