

JUMP POINT

A ROBERTS SPACE INDUSTRIES PUBLICATION ISSUE 05.01

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GREETINGS, CITIZENS!

This is our fiftieth issue, and I thought I'd take a few minutes to talk about **Jump Point** itself.

"Greetings Citizens!" wasn't my idea – it was part of the original draft that I was handed when I first started this gig – but I liked it and kept it. (Being an editor, I added the missing comma.) On the other hand, I chose the image above, beginning with the second issue. It is taken from Ryan Church's conception of the Bengal carrier bridge (our featured ship in that issue), and it conveys my sense of what this page represents in each issue: the "command deck" of the magazine.

Determining the issue title isn't a science, but I would hesitate to call it art. The first issue was named by someone (Ben? Chris? Sandi?) before I even realized that each issue would have a name: "Mayan End of the World Edition." (Remember when that was a thing?) More often than not, I find myself in the last day or two staring into space, trying to come up with a phrase that best sums up the issue. For this month, with a WIP about the Razor, a Portfolio about a race that the Razor competes in, and a Galactic Guide featuring the current location for that race, I took the easy choice and titled it "The Razor's Edge." (I could have named the issue after the race itself, but "Koa e Ko'ia" just doesn't have the same familiar ring.)

This editorial is another element that doesn't get done till the last minute. I generally wait until everything else is pretty much locked in, then sit back and ponder what I can discuss about the issue, about *Star Citizen*, or even



about life itself that doesn't pretty much duplicate anything I've said before. After 49 issues, that starts to narrow down the options. :)

Along with a bit of Behind the Scenes reminiscing, this issue has everything you've come to expect from **JP**: the aforementioned Work In Progress article on the Razor, a Portfolio on the Xi'An annual race that is now open to Human competitors, a Galactic Guide on Hadur System (where the race is being held this time), and the start of "Drifters," a new story by Dave Haddock ... which in itself is a connection back to that very first issue. Dave also wrote "Whisperer in the Dark" for **Jump Point** 01-01, and I'm excited to have him back in the saddle with this new slice of life (and death) taken from the 'verse.

But before I let you go to read this issue, one more note. In our Behind the Scenes discussion, Ben asked a question I hadn't considered before – what is my absolute favorite article? Read the discussion to get all of our answers, but I discovered something interesting as I pulled the pages for the various favorite articles (to use them as illustrations): the five articles listed covered all four years of **Jump Point's** life. I choose to believe that that shows we've maintained a level of quality and consistency throughout the time. You, of course, are free to disagree. :)

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

David

David.Ladyman@cloudimperiumgames.com

EDITOR: DAVID LADYMAN, INCAN MONKEY GOD STUDIOS
ROVING CORRESPONDENT: BEN LESNICK
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COVER, PAGE 45: ALEKSANDRAS AKSTINAS
PAGE 3, 28, 29, 30: STAFF ARTISTS
PAGE 31: ALEKSANDRAS AKSTINAS
PAGE 45: ALEKSANDRAS AKSTINAS



FROM THE HIGHPOINT

MISC Razor



WORK IN PROGRESS

Design Doc

"The MISC Razor is the first to use distinctly Xi'An engine and thruster technology to produce an elegant vehicle capable of keeping up with the M50 and the Mustang."

Keywords: elegant / fast / reliable looking / soft shapes with hard edges

Max Crew	1
Length	11m
Width	3.9m (front) 7.9m (rear)
Height	2.4 (with landing gear)
Cargo Capacity	0
Ejection Seat	Yes
Landing Gear	Skids
Take-Off Method	VTOL

Base Loadout

Item Categories	Competition, Civilian
Computers	1 (Small)
Coolers	2 (Small)
Counter Measures	2 (Small)
Fuel Tanks	1 Small Fuel Tank 1 Small Quantum Fuel Tank
Fuel Intakes	2 Fuel Intakes
Fuel Ports	1
Gravity Generator	N/A
Life Support	1 (Small)
Modular Rooms	N/A
Jump Drive	1 (Medium)
Quantum Drive	
Battery	
Power Plant	1 (Small Competition C)
Radar	1 (Small)
Shield Emitters	
Shield Generator	1 (Small Competition C)
Thrusters	12 (Fixed) 2 (Main)
Turrets	N/A
Mounts	2 x S2
Missiles	2 x S1 BEHR Marksman missiles
Weapons	2 x S2 KLWE Laser repeaters
Ammo Box	
Armor	Light
Seats	1
Stations (inc Seats)	1
Landing System	3 skids

Aims

- MISCs entry into racing and the Murray Cup
 - Japanese sports car styling
 - Obvious Xi'An influence, especially on the engines

Aesthetic

- Take inspiration from Japanese sports cars and racers and infuse it with Xi'An engine tech

Approximate Statistics

Length - Should be a small ship, comparable in size to the other racing ships, but much closer to the smaller M50. Length/width measurement can be interchangeable (wider than it is long, or vice versa).

Mass - 11000~ kg
This is dependent on the final length of the ship, but should be another lightweight fighter similarly to the M50 and 350R.

Crew - 1 (For one crew member only.)

Engines - 2+ (Current racers have 2 engines, but the amount can be variable depending on the ship concept and aesthetic.)

Thrusters - 12 Fixed (4 top, 4 bottom and 4 on the sides. Fixed thrusters offer more immediate response than gim-balled ones and so would be favourable on a highly ma-noeuvrable racer.)

Power Plants - 1 x Small (Matches the size of the current racers to keep them competitive.)

Weapon Hardpoints - 2 x S2 Energy Weapons, 1 x S1 Mis-sile Rack (Proper pass needed. Some light weapons to afford some amount of protection when out in the 'verse, but is not intended to be the hardest hitting of the racing ships.)

Shield Generators - 2 x Small (Racers vary between having one and three small shields. Two would give it some reason-able protection without making it too tough.)

Armour - Light (Relates to ship HP; very light armour, not meant to withstand attacks but instead to remain light-weight.)



WORK IN PROGRESS

Metrics & Templates

Animation Templates

- Seat template
 - Any single seater fighter cockpit (Gladius, M50, etc.)
- Enter/exit animation for the seat
 - Fighter ladder enter/exit (again Gladius or M50 would be a great fit)

Ship Components

Components that need to fit inside the ship and be accessible from the exterior:

- *Power Plants* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.75m x 0.5m)
- *Shield Generators* – 2 Small (0.5m x 0.75m x 0.5m)
- *Avionics* – 1 Small (0.75m x 0.5m x 0.375m)
- *Coolers* – 2 Small (0.5m x 0.75m x 0.25m)

- *Jump Drives* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.75m x 0.5m)
- *Quantum Drives* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.75m x 0.5m)
- *Life Supports* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.5m x 0.25m)
- *Radars* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.5m x 0.25m)
- *Scanners* – 1 Small (0.5m x 0.5m x 0.25m)
- *Fuel Tanks* – 2 Small (0.5m x 1m x 0.5m)

Notes

Unstable at Speed

The Racer is the fastest straight line racing ship available, but at maximum speeds it suffers issues with stability. IFCS helps to correct stability issues at top speed for this ship.

M50 Competitor

Competitor to the M50, but trades off some agility for a little extra straight line speed and power.



WORK IN PROGRESS

INTERNAL COMPONENTS SCALE REFERENCE



Paul Jones, Art Director, F42: Three proposed directions:

Config 1: aerodynamic, soft MISC shapes blended with high tech Xi'An splitter/wings/spoilers or areas defining a unique shape

Config 2: aerodynamic, soft MISC shapes / integrated engines with curves / Xi'An tech intake and exhaust visible

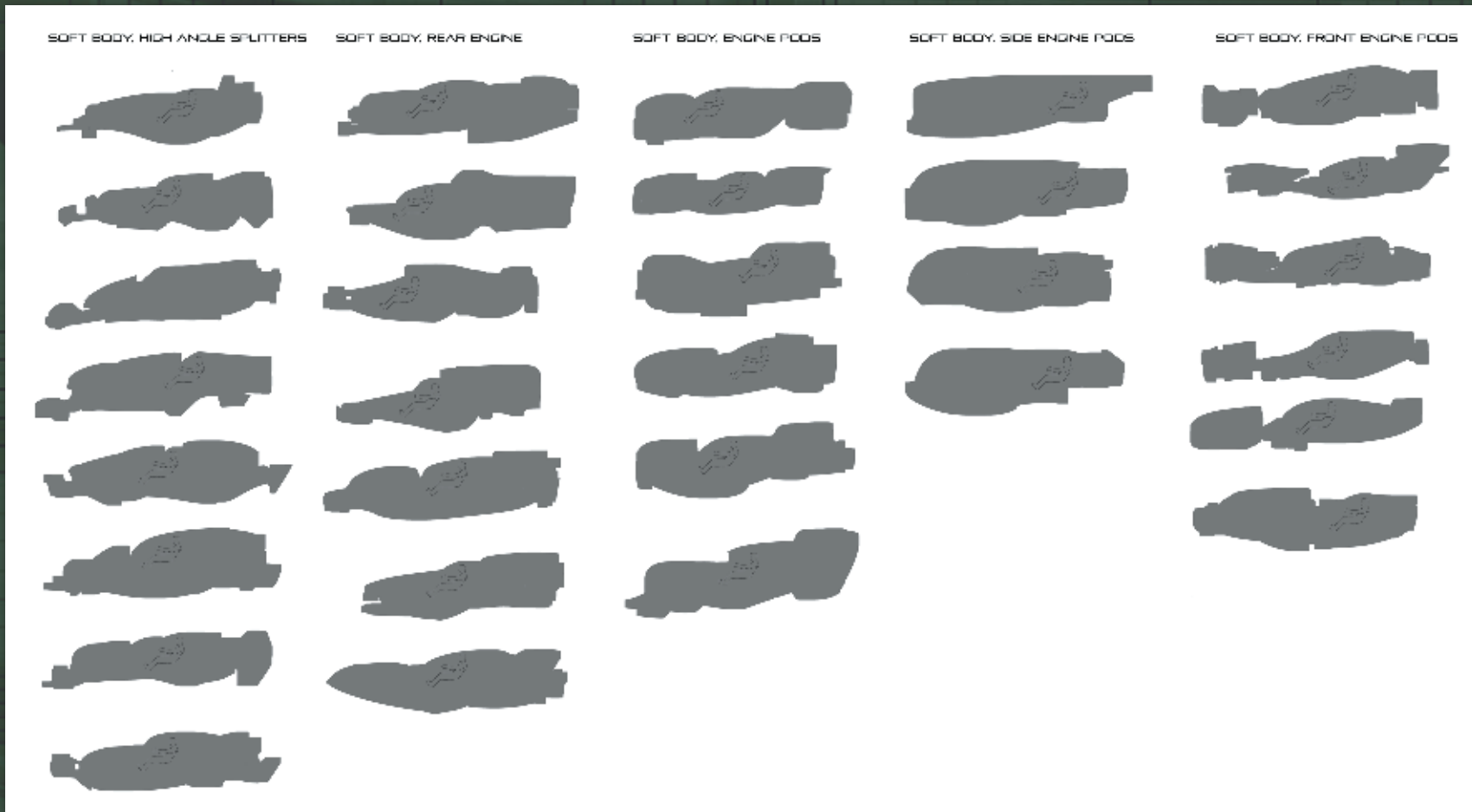
Config 3: aerodynamic, soft MISC shapes / engines are outriggers (front engine pods?) / some sort of exposed Xi'An tech power plant / F1 type struts

Jort van Welbergen, Concept Artist, F42: I've been busy with tons of sketches and ideas the past couple days and have learned a new Sub-D workflow in Fusion360 which I think is going to help out great for the rest of the design project.

Attached to this email are the sketches that I felt best incorporated the MISC aesthetic, following the three configs you specified earlier.



WORK IN PROGRESS



Paul J: The good news: I'm glad you have got some new skills for Fusion, however the bad news is that I think most of these are off target by quite a margin. Could be the style of simplified models you have done or maybe the super blobby shapes but this isn't what I was expecting. I'll try and make it easier but it's a little difficult me not being in the office – this LA time is doing my head in!

Like with all things they can be interpreted in different ways; often with ship concepts we have to hit the reset button after first try, but it's a process and it does get us some way along to figuring out what we don't want – so don't feel it's wasted work per se.

Let's go back to the start. Give me a version of Config. 02 – 4 engines on F1 type struts, take the engine model from the Xi'An Scout (MISC uses Xi'An tech) and model some softer cowling around it. For the body, soft tension in the surfaces but they still read as an aggressive shape when combined. Give me something like this: block out a basic shape in 3D (4 engines, cockpit, spoiler) and then 2D paint in shapes, add some racing graphics, some split lines, some tech and hey presto – we'll have one version to bounce around. Then we'll move on to the others if necessary.

Jort vW: I am not really sure how the Formula 1 reference is relevant to MISC, could you maybe elaborate? I had a conversation with Nate about the MISC style and he told me it was more about bulbous shapes, like the '50s race cars. I think there are still good options of combining this with Xi'An looking spoilers and flaps and engines but these would always be added later on anyway.

Paul J: The design brief is exactly that, some ideas from design; they don't define the look. I'm pushing

slightly away from the bulbous look for an updated feel of what we have for MISC.

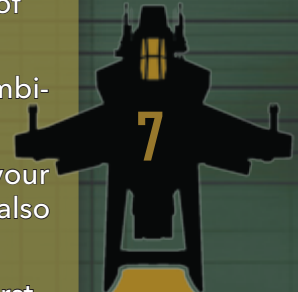
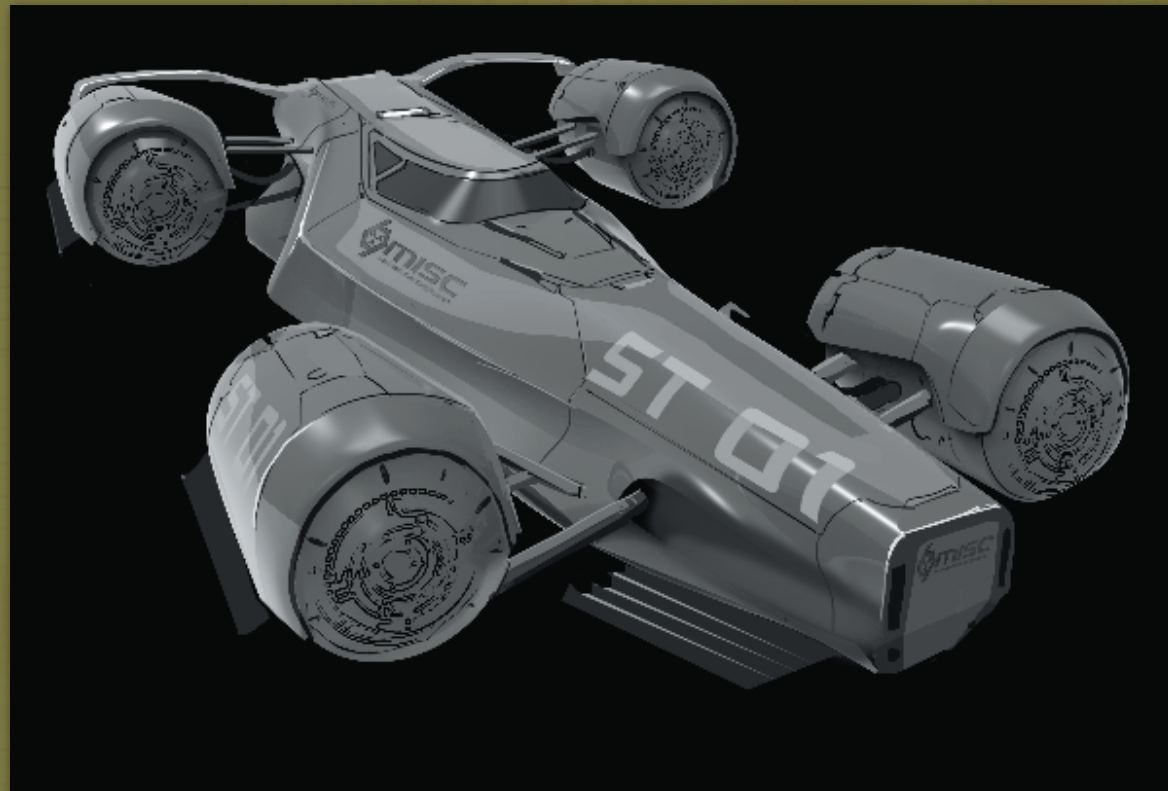
I'll confirm with Chris what he wants, so there isn't any ambiguity.

Jort vW: Here is a new, more finished, sketch based on your feedback. Still tried to keep it as MISC as possible while also going for an F1 vibe.

Hope this is more like the quality you were after on the first round. Will work up some more sketches next.

Paul J: I spoke to CR. The concept in the style of F1 cars is more the direction he wants to go out of all the options. I'll go over this with you in person to explain the thinking and cover ideas I'd like to see.

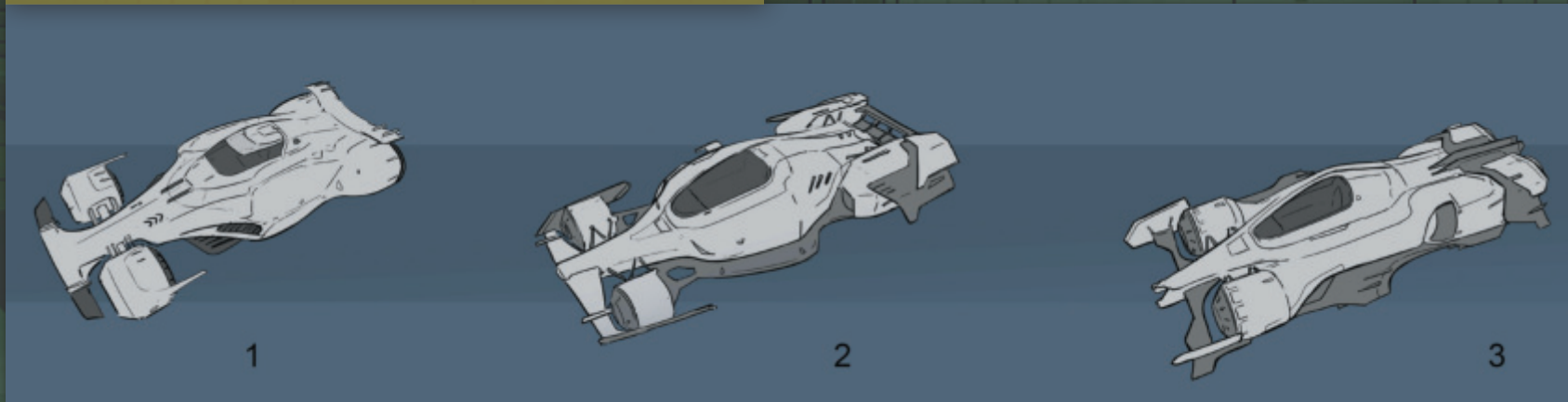
This will also save us some time with the dialing in, so not worried about missing day or two.



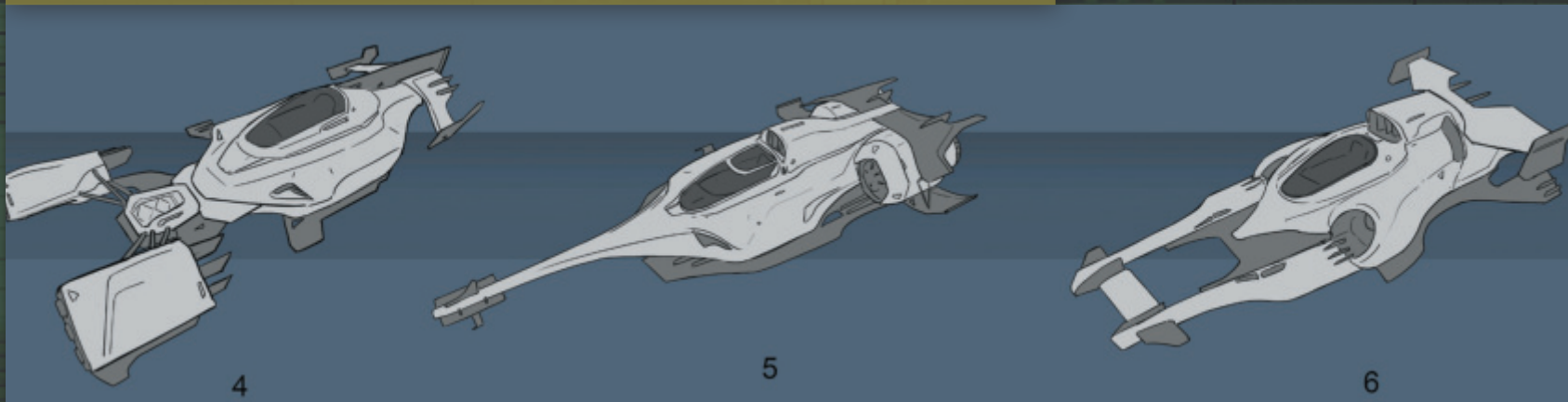
WORK IN PROGRESS



Jort vW: Here are 3 sketches more focused on F1 styling.



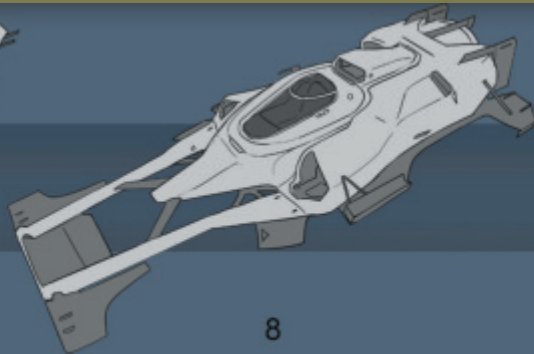
Jort vW: Here are 3 further sketches, exploring more exotic layouts and shapes.



Jort vW: Finished another 4 sketches today. [7-10] Will do the off-set and another couple of the long nose versions next.



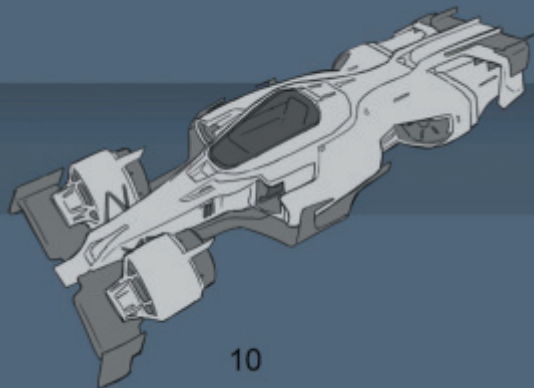
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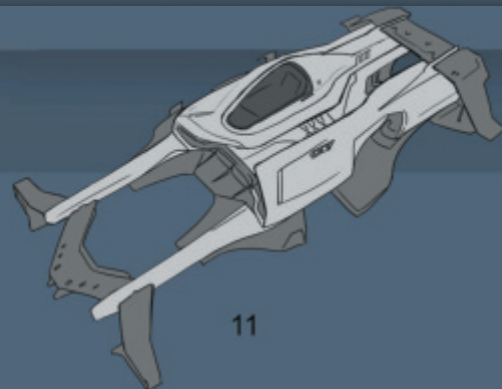
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9



10



11



12



13



14

Paul J: Sweet stuff, keep cracking on – then we'll review, then get CR direction, then we can talk some more about where to push and investigate before going to 3D.

Once we have solid 2D solved it will make it faster in the 3D stage.

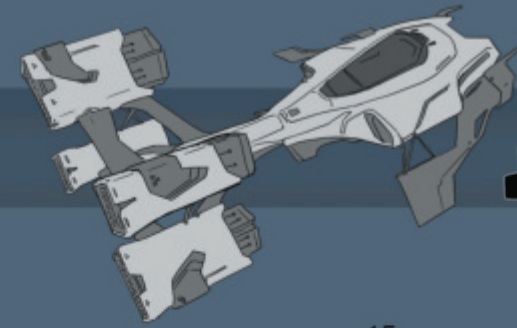
Jort vW: Here's another 4 from last Friday, just cleaned up the last one's lines. [11-14]



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Jort vW: Here's another 3 [15-17], didn't get to finish the 4th today so I'll drop that in tomorrow morning. Kinda like the offset one. What do you think?

Paul J: Heh, cool - offset one is interesting for sure! What's left to do? I'd like to get these in front of CR.



15



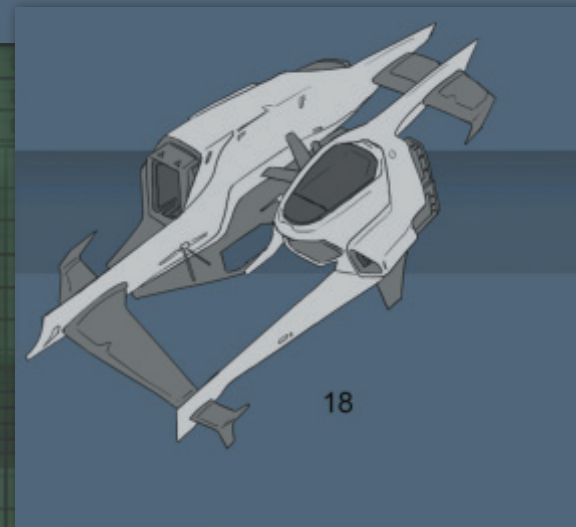
16



17

Jort vW: Added the nr. 18 sketch and made it more like a formal concept sheet. Is there anything you'd like me to add before we put it on Shotgun?

Paul J: Nope - all super sweet, I'll get it on Shotgun.



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WORK IN PROGRESS



Paul J: [Shotgun Post for Review] MISC Racer. Chris, based off your initial direction we've been looking at configurations. At this stage it would be good to pick one and then go forward with an underside sketch, then 3D. We'll look more closely at styling, curves, tech in the next stage. Currently this is pushing more towards a heavy Xi'An influence, which makes more sense for a racer from MISC. Art by Jort.

Chris Roberts: 9, 11, 12, 16 are the ones I would be interested in exploring some more. Kind of intrigued by 17, but it feels more pod racer, not straight space racer.

Paul J: Well, 3 of the 4 you picked out are the single nose version. We'll go with the best parts of these and create a reverse view and also a colour/decal pass; once approved we can move into 3D.

Benjamin Parr, Production Assistant, F42: Just to confirm – we discussed possible Reliant-style thrusters for the MISC Racer in the scrum.

Tech Design has said that the Racer should have fixed thrusters. It makes sense due to all the other racers having fixed thrusters.

Jort vW: Ben, we'll need a cockpit fitting for the MISC Racer from Tech Design – screens and layout and stuff. Can you take care of that, please? :D

Ben P: It's all in the design brief.

It's stated as using the cockpit and screen layout for the Starfarer.

Karl Jones, Lead Designer, F42: I'm about to leave, but here's a couple of WIP images that we can discuss tomorrow. [on next page]

Jort vW: Thanks so much for getting this out so quickly.



WORK IN PROGRESS

MINIMUM STATION DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS

SHIP	SEAT	NUMBER	SCREEN TYPE	SCREEN RATIO	WITHIN ARMS REACH	VISIBLE IN DEFAULT VIEW	PRIORITY TIER
MISC RACER	1 PILOT	1	2D Multifunction Display	4:3	x		1
		2	2D Multifunction Display	4:3	x		2
		3	3D Radar	1:1		x	1
		4	3D Annunciator Panel	BESPOKE		x	1
		5	3D Support Screen	1:1 or 16:9 or 9:16		x	1
		6	3D Support Screen	1:1 or 16:9 or 9:16		x	1

A RACER PROBABLY ONLY "NEEDS" ONE MFD, SO WE COULD LOSE ONE OF THESE IF WE NEED TO.

SEAT DISPLAYS AND UI GUIDELINES FOR ART

More information, including screen sizes (not just ratios) can be found here -

<https://h3b.com/forums/index.php?showthread.php?p=458001>

ADDITIONAL SCREENS

Additional screens 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

SHIP UI SPEC

STATION 1 - PILOT

MFD FUNCTIONS

POWER

WEAPONS

SHIELDS



EXISTING IMAGERY



CURRENT M50 UI FOR REFERENCE

NOTE - EXAMPLE LAYOUT ONLY

This layout is for example purposes only. Art can lay out the displays however they see fit, providing the rules on the 'MINIMUM STATION DISPLAY REQUIREMENTS' table are adhered to.



WORK IN PROGRESS

Jort vW: Awaiting Paul's feedback on this, but I'm personally not a big fan of screens on the ceiling. The M50 setup doesn't really allow for any attachments point and either way it will obstruct players' vision quite a bit where it's not necessary with most layouts. :)

Otherwise looks good to me!

Paul J: Yeah – would like to remove the top stuff and have it all racing car style.

Karl J: Cool, I'll move them down.

In fact, draw over the image and let me know where you'd like stuff.

What ratio d'you want the Support Screens? They can

be 16:9, 9:16 or 1:1.

Jort vW: Again awaiting Paul's feedback on this, but this is what I think would work nicely as a balanced set-up. Not sure if the sizes are correct, though.

Karl J: OK, so those Support Screens can be 1:1, but that Annunciator will have to move into the default view (the red box). Directly below the radar? Basically it needs to be visible during regular gameplay.

Karl J: Latest ...

Zane, any thought on the Annunciator?

Zane Bien, User Interface Designer: Just updated the FOV on that page.



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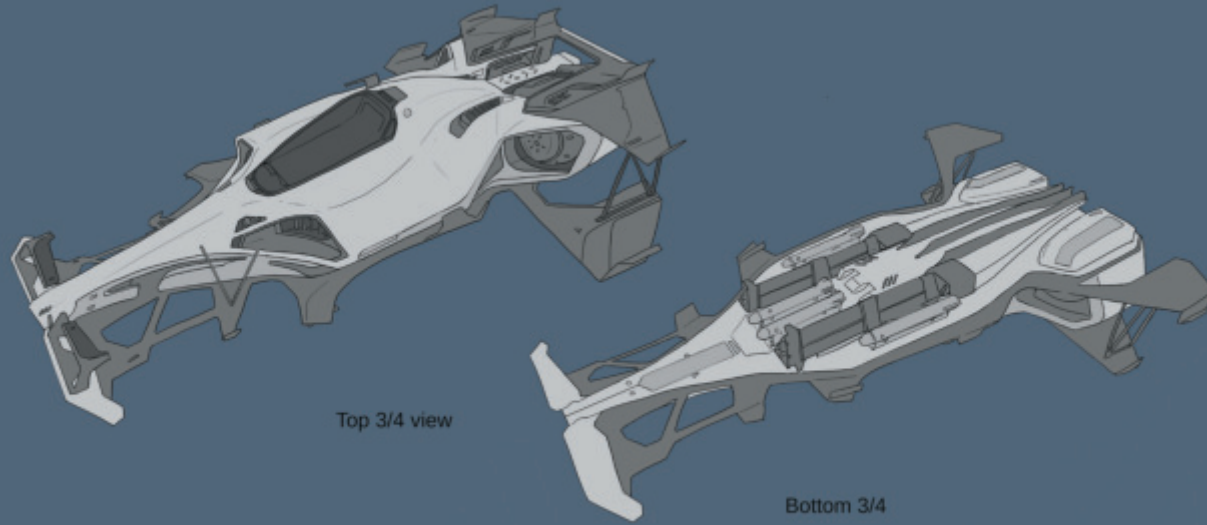
Jort vW: Here is the revised concept of the bottom, hope this works a lot better. :)

Corentin, does this layout work for Tech Design?

Corentin Billemont, Junior Technical Designer, F42:

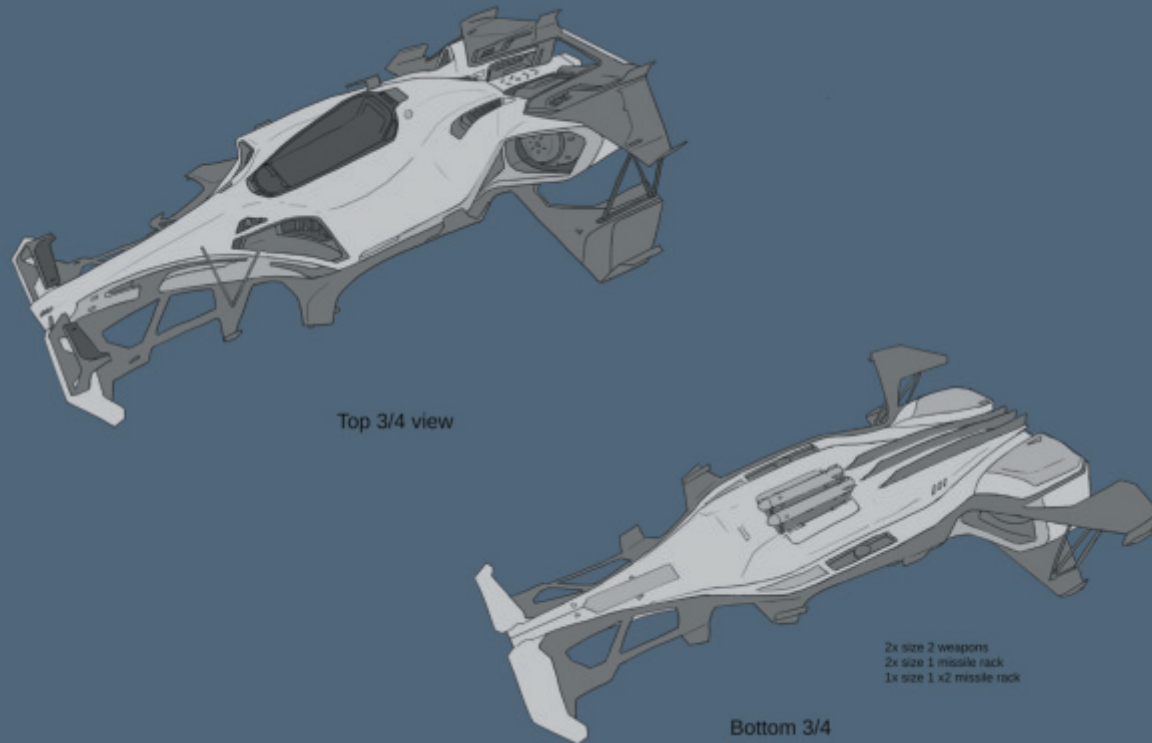
Seems fine to me (both for guns and components)!

There should only be two missiles max though, but could be either center or on the side like shown there.



Top 3/4 view

Bottom 3/4



Top 3/4 view

Bottom 3/4

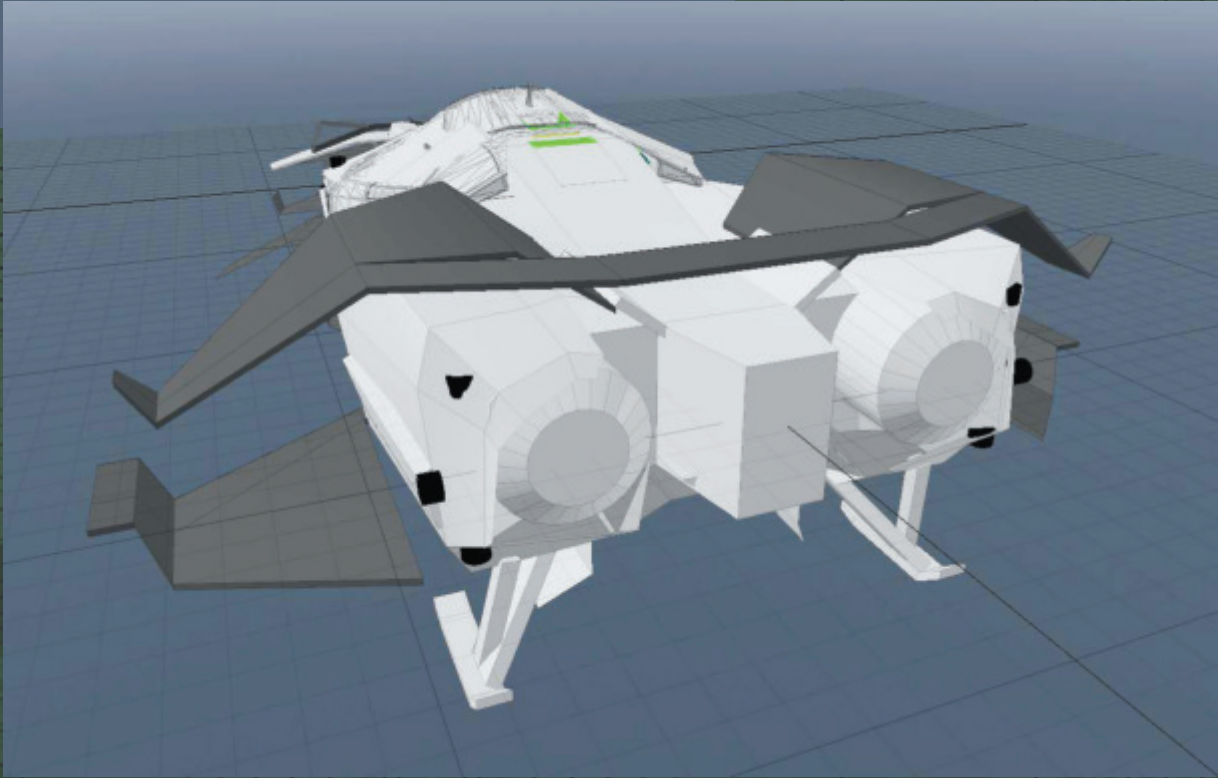
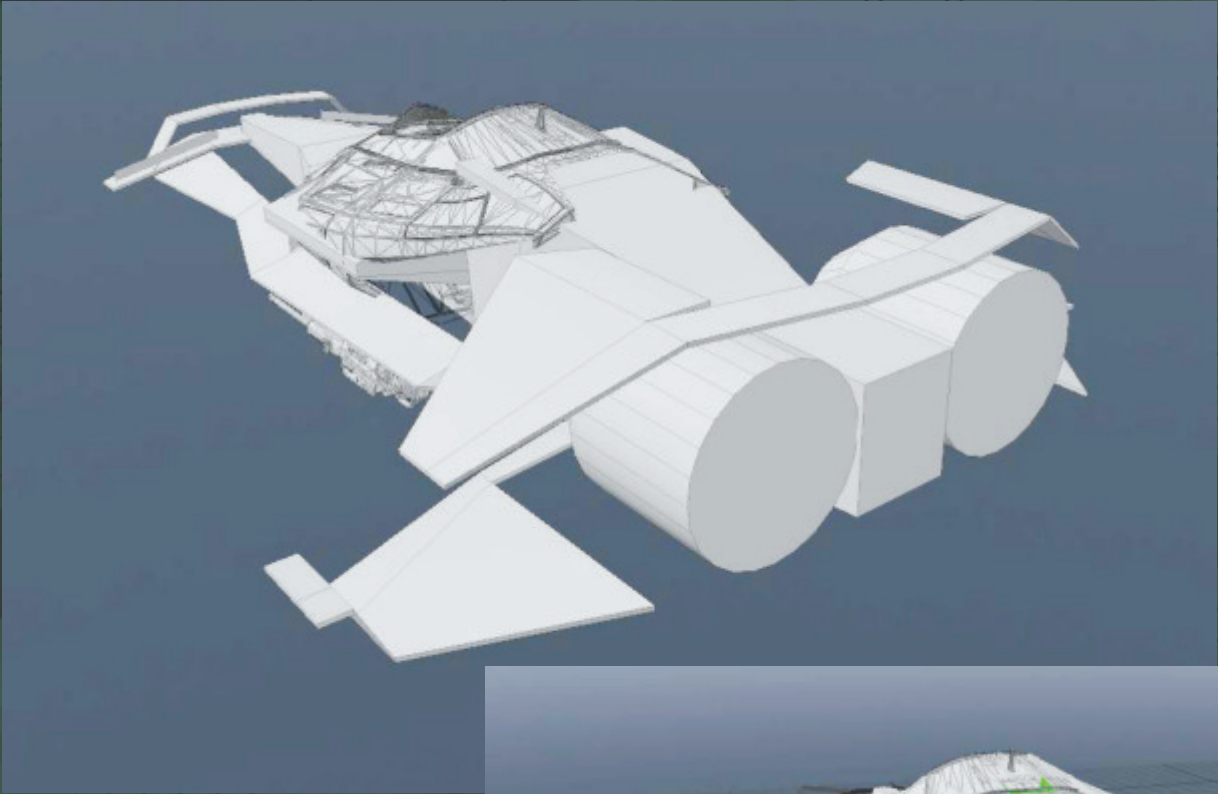
2x size 2 weapons
2x size 1 missile rack
1x size 1 x2 missile rack

Jort vW: I updated the underside according to your feedback.

Simplified the shapes, echoing the rhythm on the top-side. Will work on the rear view next. [see next page]



WORK IN PROGRESS



WORK IN PROGRESS

Jort vW: Here are some rear end options.

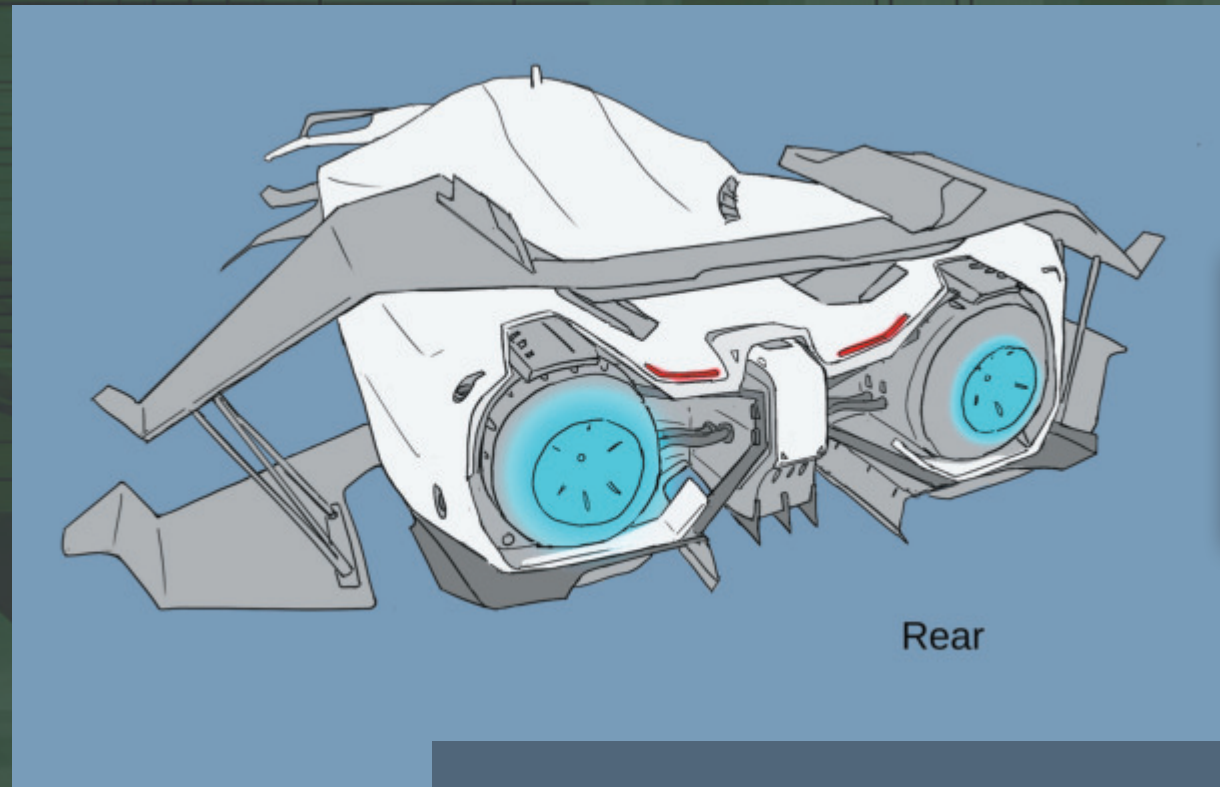
Paul J: Cool stuff. I've comped some of them together, see if you can get me a version like this where we make more of a structural feature and more layering.



WORK IN PROGRESS



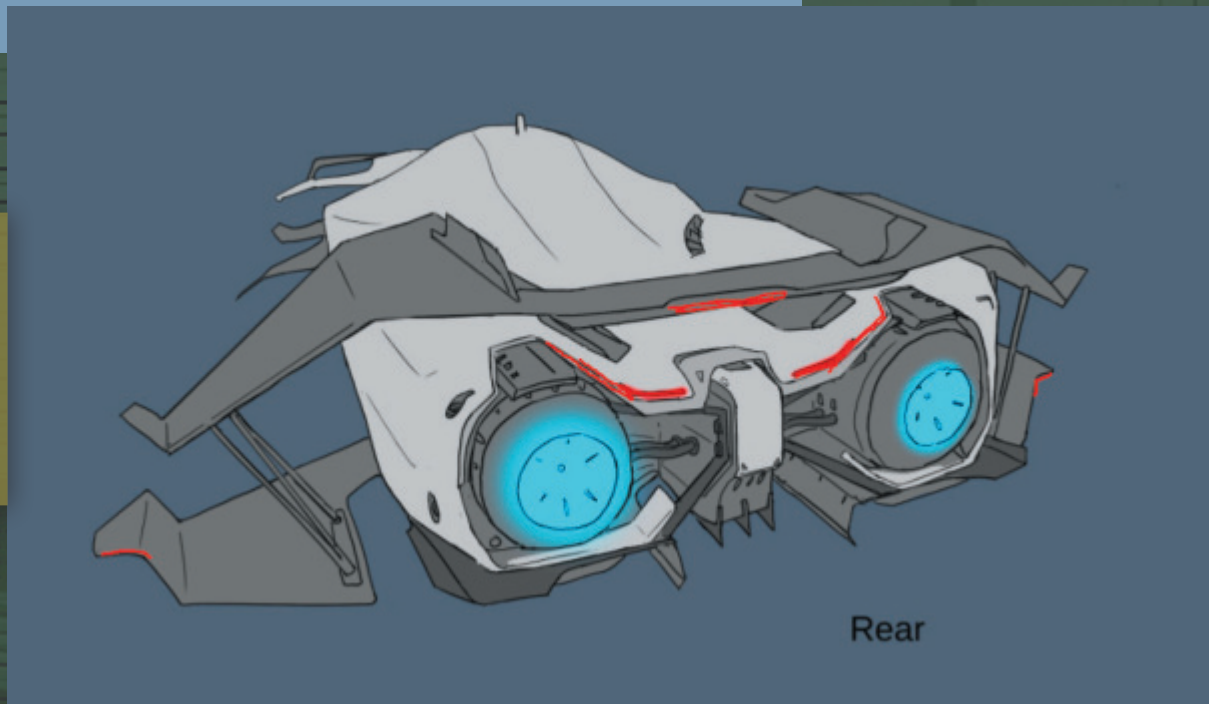
WORK IN PROGRESS



Jort vW: Here's a revision based on your feedback. Also added some cheesy colors for the engine exhausts and tail lights.

Hope this one works a bit better with the depth.

Paul J: Cool stuff, diggin' it. Think you can go a bit braver on the 'brake' lights. And engine needs more glowy bling detail.



Jort vW: Here are some livery sketches I did this morning. Also added feedback to the rear section.

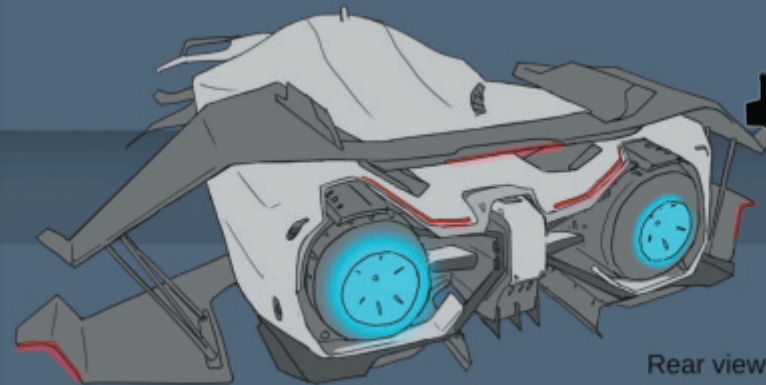
Was thinking of getting the bigger shapes/colors down first and add the logos/decals after.

Paul J: [Shotgun post for Review] MISC Racer progress. Ready to move to 3D, this is using the M50 entry method, it also has guns that fold out underneath, some colour/livery ideas for future consideration. Will add more detail when we move to 3D.

Paul J: All look good, go ahead and add some numbers and some advertising. Can you mail them too, save me tracking them down later for **Jump Point**.

I see you got Halloween in there too (no. 10).

Jort vW: I felt inspired hahaha. I'll mail em. ;)



WORK IN PROGRESS



Jort vW: With the rear end design done, I guess the next step is to start working on the final concept model?

Paul J: Almost! Give me a few colour schemes today and then I can post a final image showing top, underside, rear view and colour ideas to Shotgun and then we can go to 3D.

Jort vW: I'll focus on Colors and Graphics today, then!

Paul J: Kewl

Jort vW: Would you happen to know which companies and logos I can use?

Paul J: MISC, Behring, any of the ship components manufacturers.

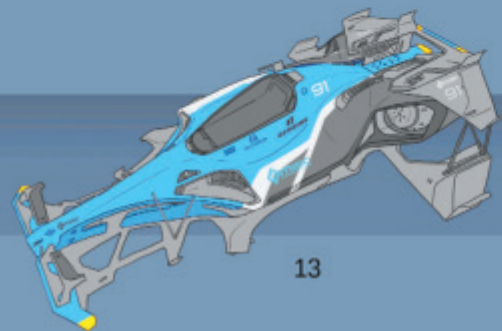
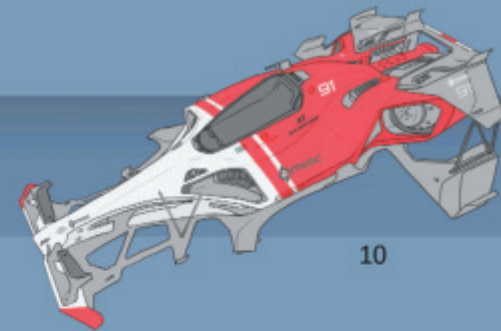
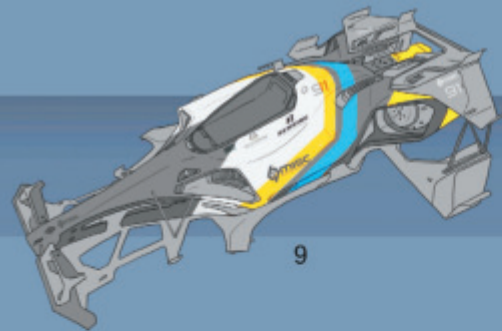
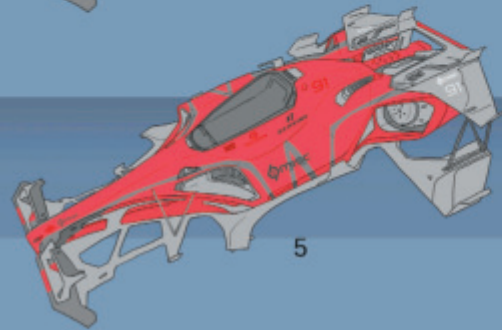
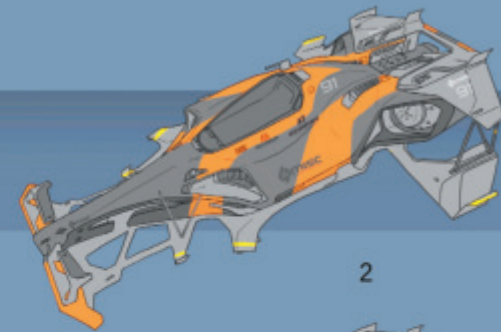
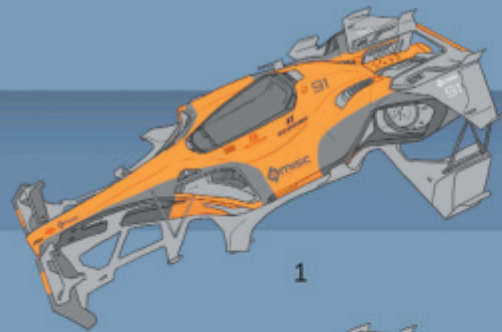
Paul J: The fuel company would be Cry-Astro.

Jort vW: Awesome! cheers!

Paul J: Oh, forgot one thing. You had some wires connecting the engines at the back to the central feature, it seemed too low tech.

Jort vW: I can make some more high tech cables, more interesting shapes. Or would you like me to remove them all together?

Paul J: You could probably have it housed so it's more sleek.



WORKING PROGRESS

Jort vW: I can maybe even put some extra brake lights on there.

Paul J: You can try, but it may be a bit much.

Jort vW: Hmm, yea fair enough.

Paul J: Looking at colours now. Some sweet stuff.

Jort vW: Want me to work up any specific one of those liveries with all the logos as well?

Paul J: Yeah, they are all cool in one way or another, go ahead and throw a number plate on them with a bit of branding.

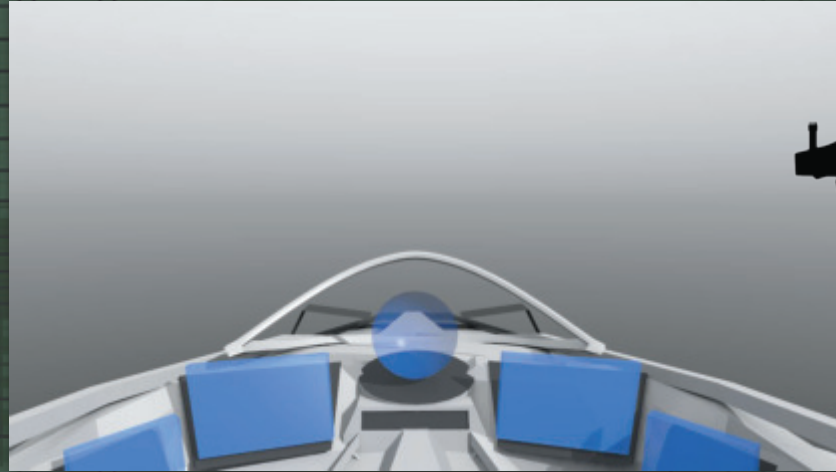
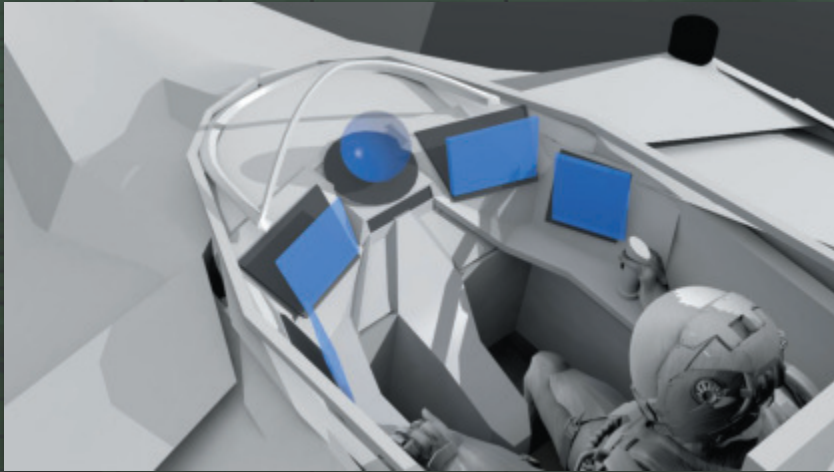
Jort vW: Here are the numbered and decaled livery options.

Think the design looks rather awesome with all the decals, if I may say so. Can't wait to get started on that sexy 3D. :D

Paul J: Need a Harley Davidson version!

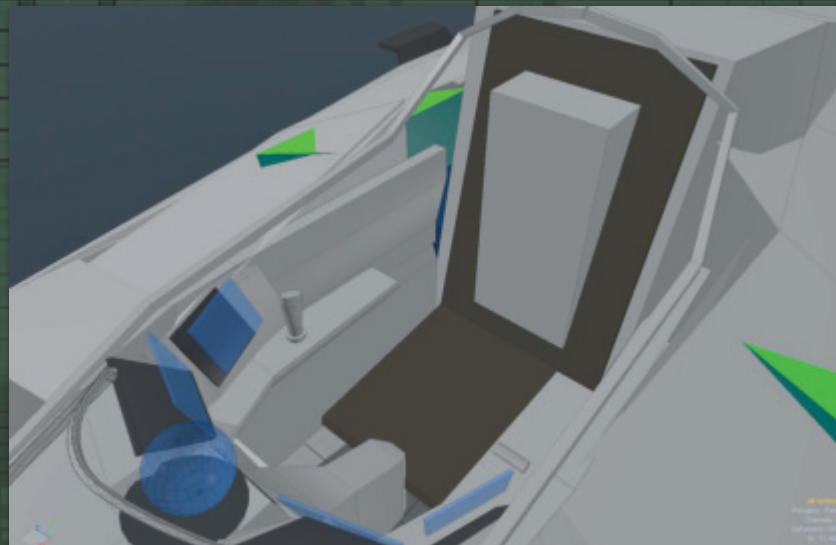
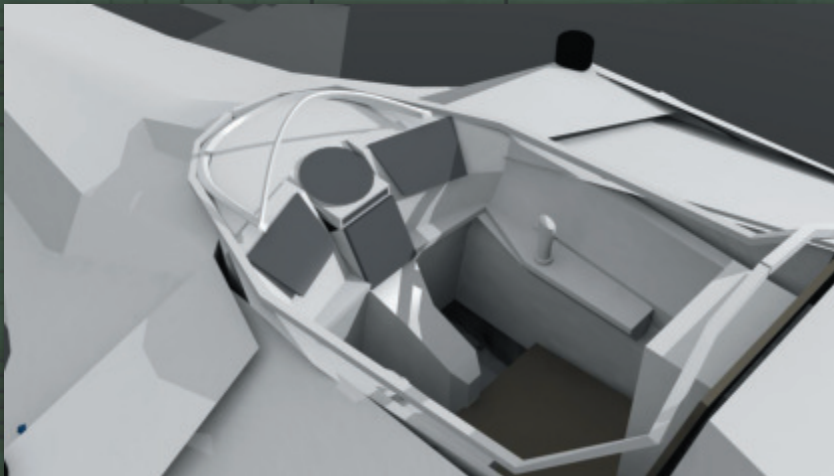


WORKING PROGRESS



WORKING IN PROGRESS

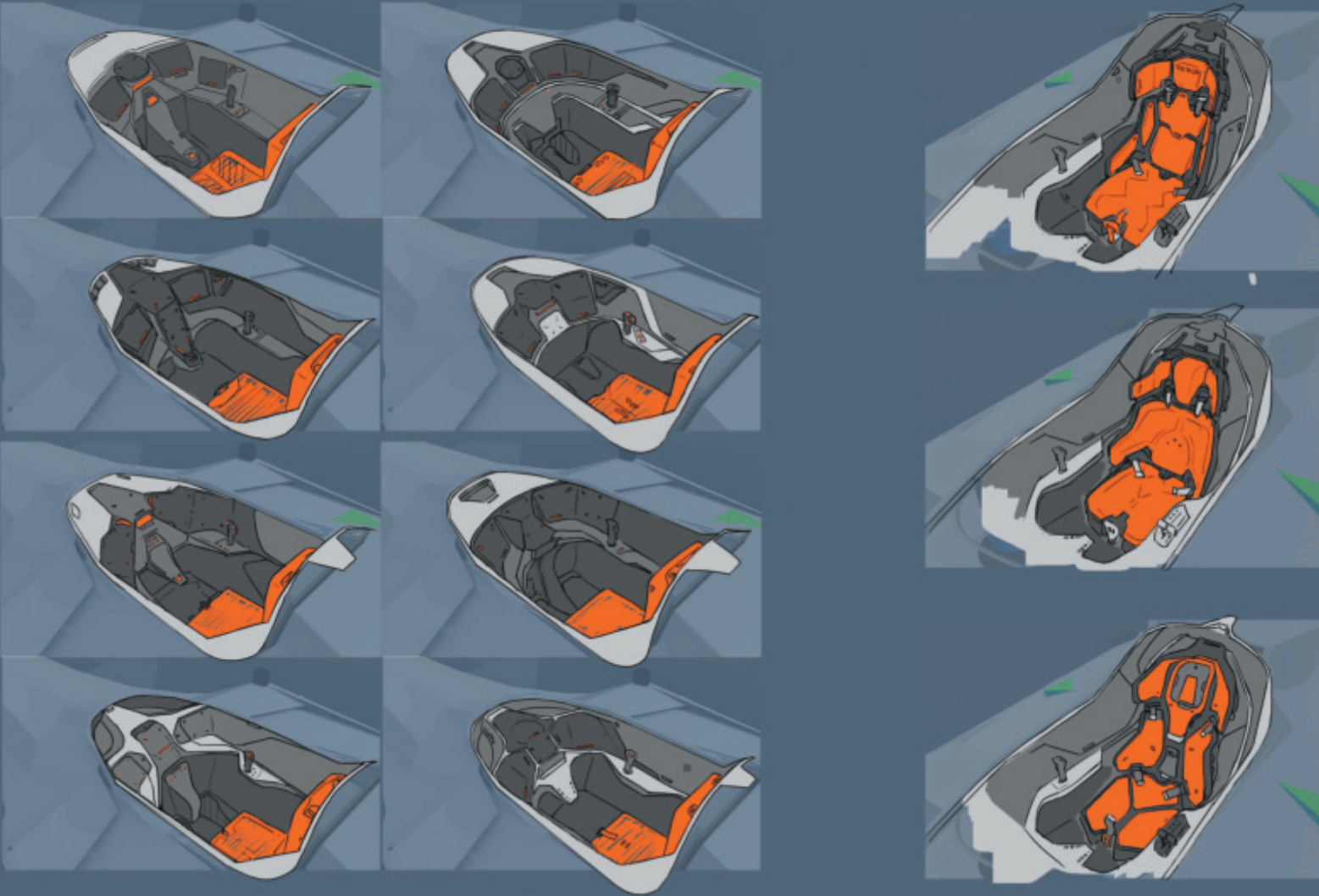
Jort vW: Here are some interior layouts I have been working on for the MISC Racer. *[this page and next page]*



MISC RACER THUMBNAILS

Round: 3rd
Manufacturer: MISC

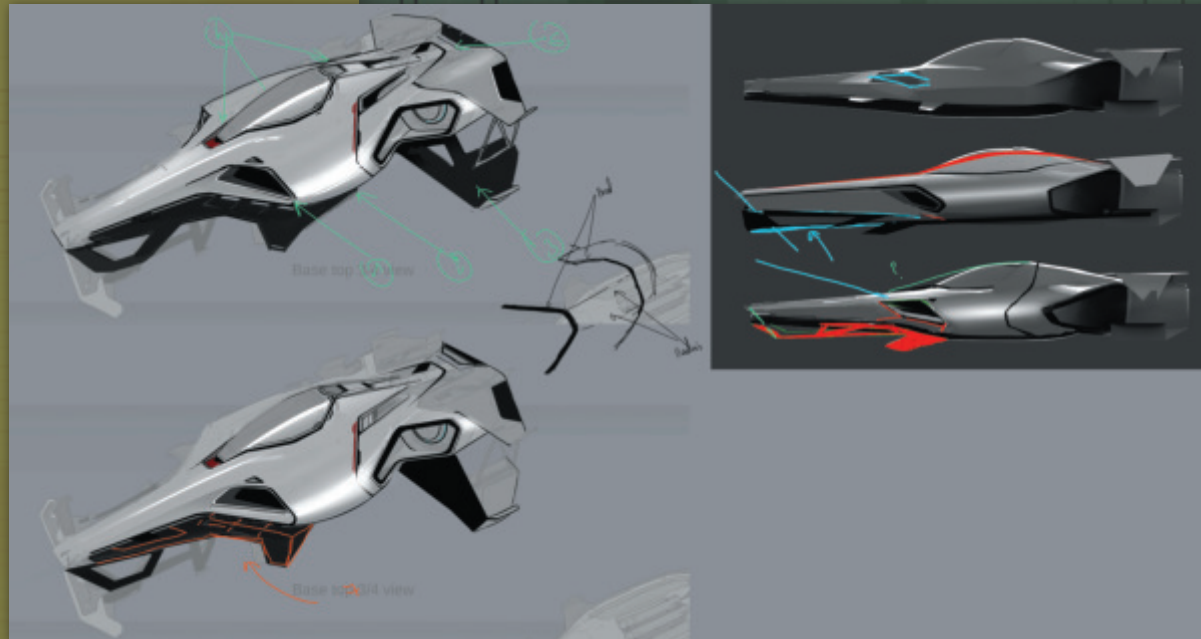
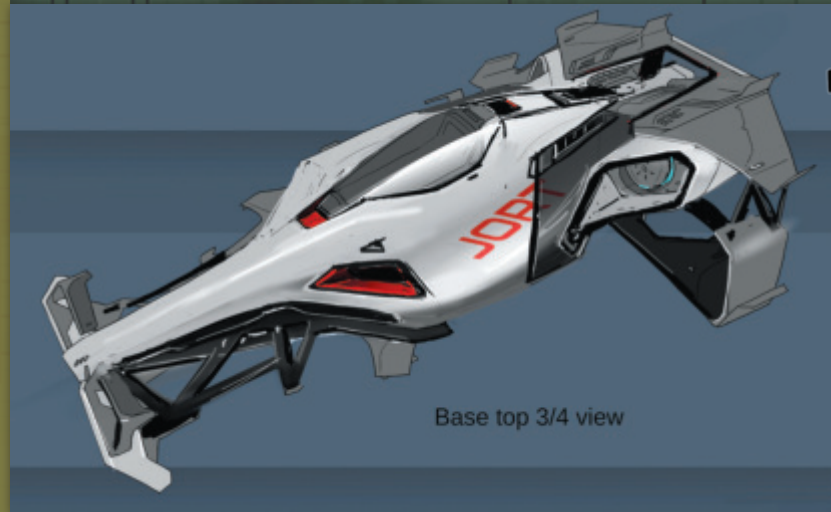
Artist: Jort van Welbergen



WORK IN PROGRESS

Paul J: Some notes I typed up yesterday:

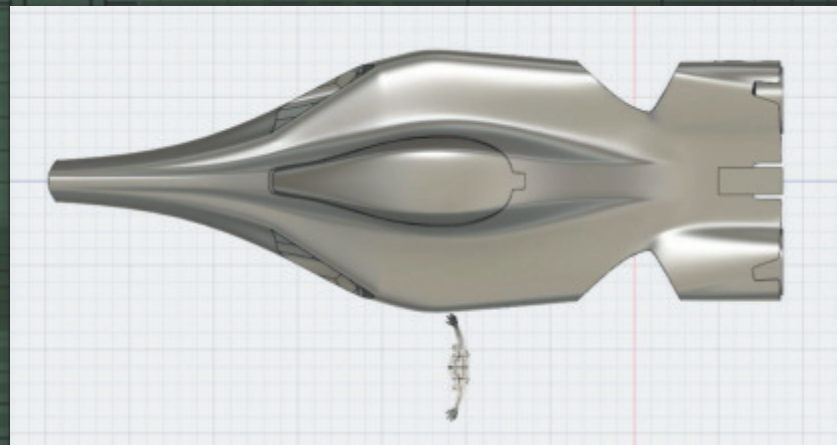
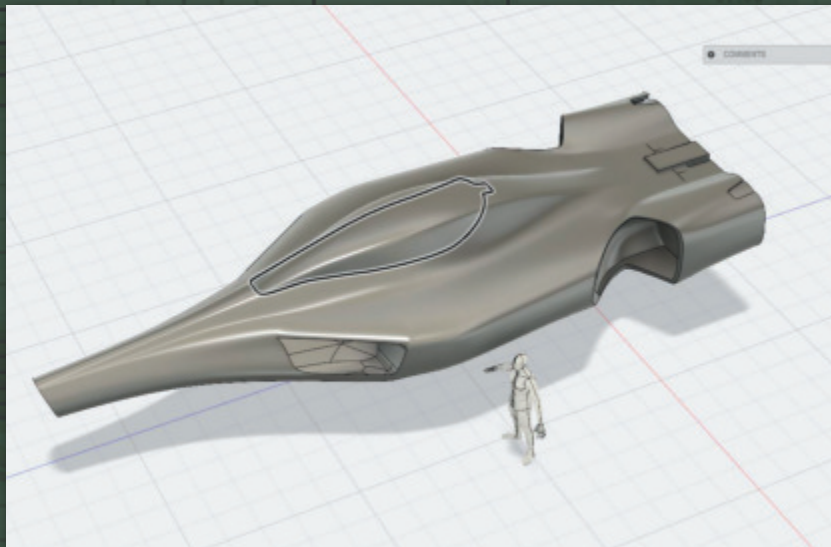
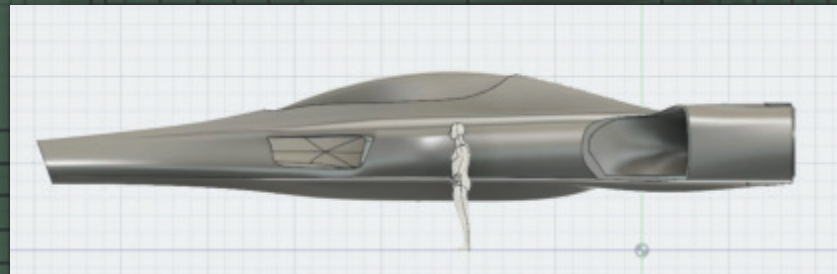
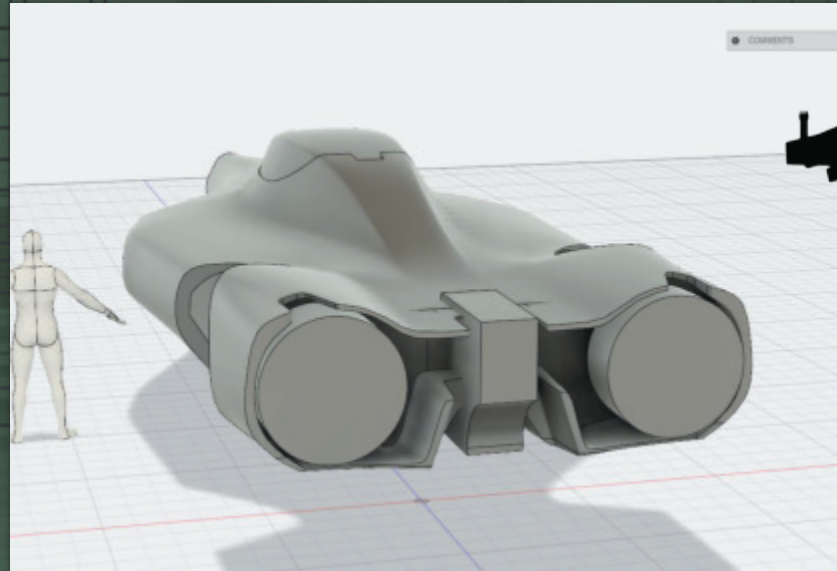
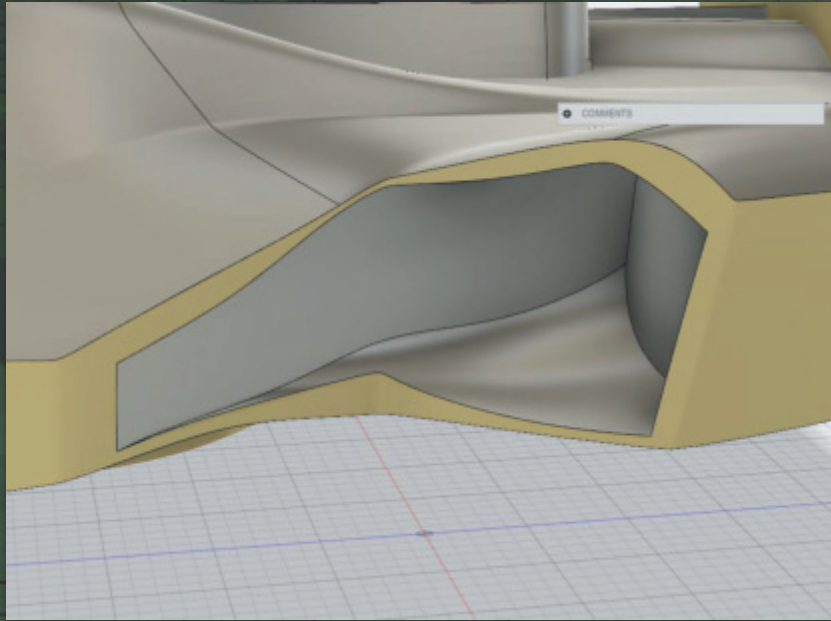
1. Solve the side profile, tweak proportions to make racier.
2. Solve how the splitter interacts with the body. Is it the middle or does it drop down (F1 moustache) and then feed into the air scoops?
3. Fix up 3D model compound curves and vent shapes. Currently they are all slightly out of shape or slightly in the wrong place, this is all adding up to a ship that looks 'off' compared to the 2D sketches.
4. Like the multilayered splitter GS added.
5. Control surfaces – ailerons.
6. Cockpit shape I like, with the tighter radius on the glass and the nose extending past the cockpit.
7. Bulked up rear spoiler so less flimsy.
8. Slanted front nose, slight slanted rear wing and improved side profile all lend to a racier shape.
9. Prefer Jort's rear spoiler; GS has gone too 85x.
10. Like the rear cockpit overhang (discuss).
11. Engines to be works of art, complex compared to cleaner body.
12. Can the canopy open if hinged from the front?
13. Interior, would be cool to get some of the Xi'An triangles cut into the dashboard or sandblasted for gloss/matte contrast.



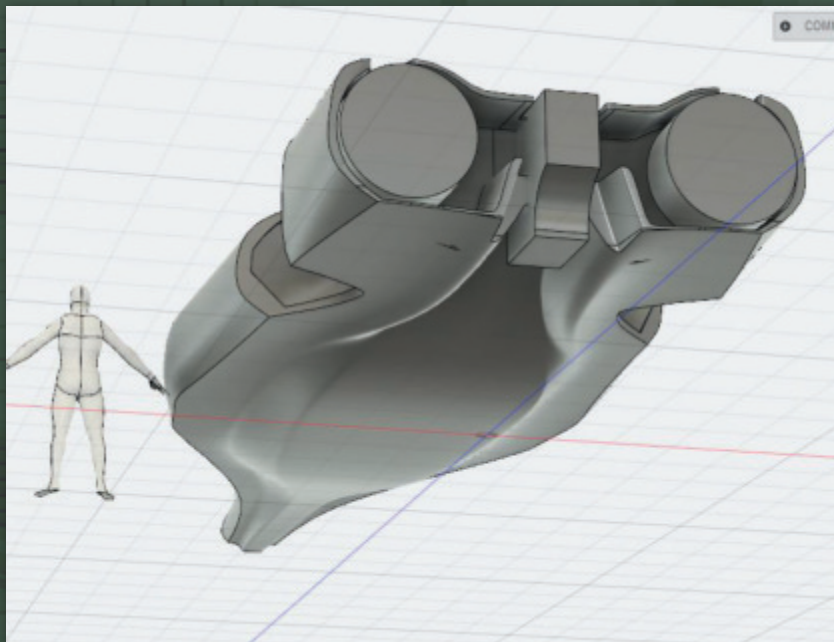
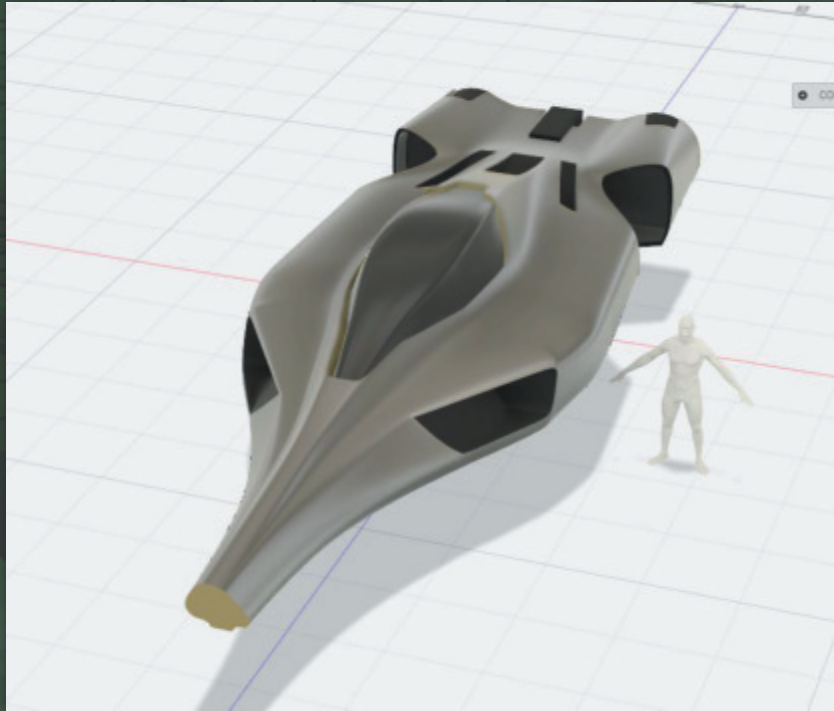
WORK IN PROGRESS

Jort vW: Finished up the body in Fusion.

Added cut-ins at the back as well, would love to sign those off with you tomorrow if possible so I can jump into Modo and start wrapping things up. *[this page and next page]*



WORK IN PROGRESS

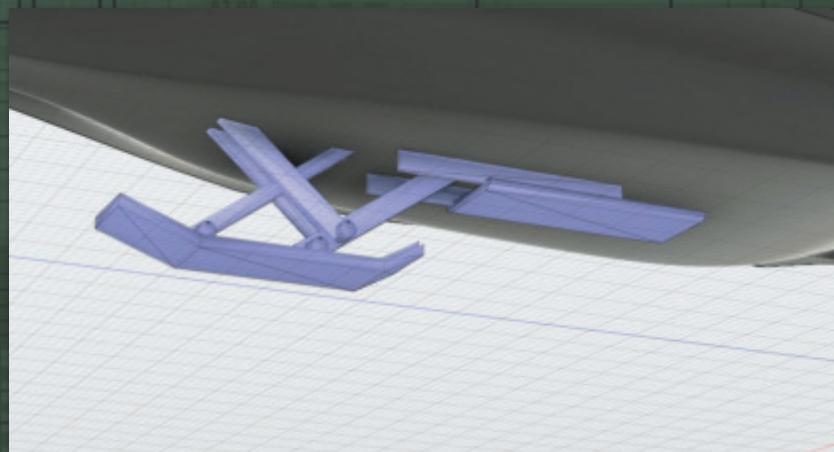


We asked Jort about his tools, some of which were new to us. His reply:

Modo is a relatively new (8 years) polygonal modelling tool that I learned polygonal modelling in. It's a little easier and more straightforward to learn than say Maya or Max. I use it mainly to blockout quick things here and there. I also used it for the final models of the splitters/spoilers and interior.

Sketchup I used for building the landing gear. I use it a lot on architectural stuff usually and also on dynamic mechanical stuff.

Fusion360 is a CAD based software that is great for props and product design. It also has a bunch of tools otherwise only found in Autodesk Alias, the car manufacturer tool, that made it perfect to tackle a car-design like problem like the MISC Razor. I used it to design the body shell, getting all the curves and reflections to work the way I wanted to. I also used it for the engines both front and rear.

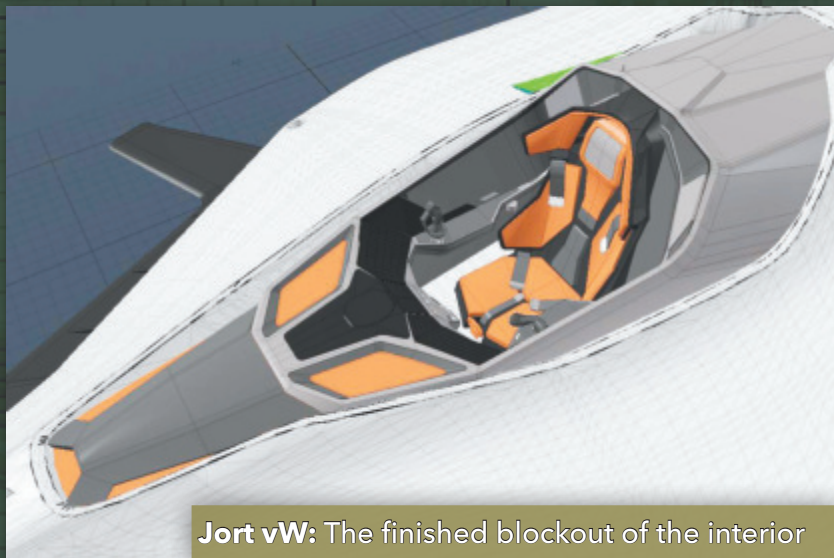


WORKING IN PROGRESS

Jort vW: The early blockout in MODO before I did anything CAD



Jort vW: The finished 3d blockout in MODO



Jort vW: The finished blockout of the interior

Jort vW: Here are the struts at the front – with or without, basically.

Paul J: I would like a subtle pinching.

Jort vW: cool



WORK IN PROGRESS

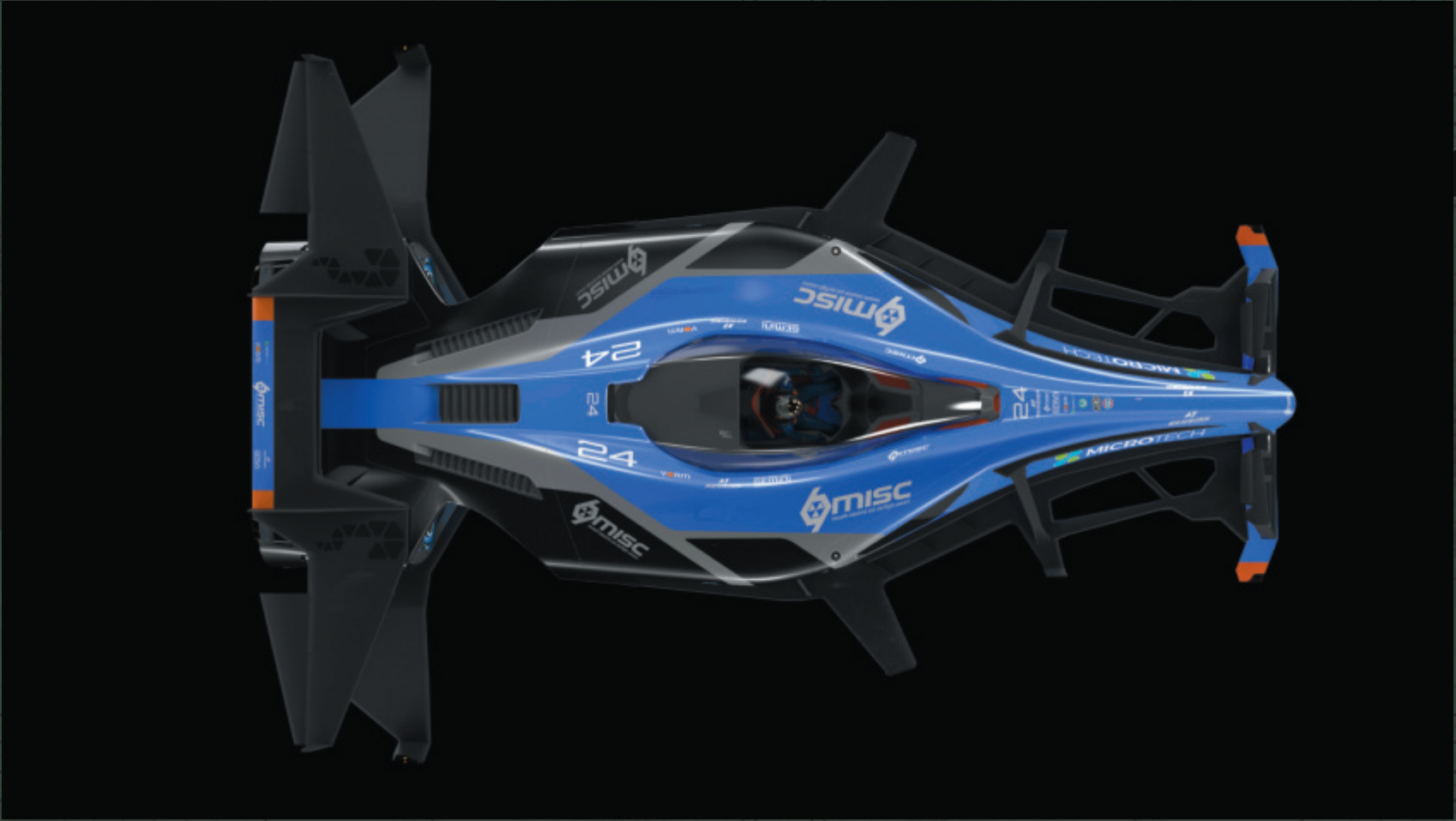
Jort vW: 360° test



Jort vW: Orange test



WORK IN PROGRESS



WORKING IN PROGRESS



WORKING IN PROGRESS



WIRKUNGRICHES



KOA E KO'IA TROPHY

Koa e Ko'ia

Exhausted yet intensely focused pilots speed their ships towards a checkpoint. Once there, their flight logs receive the coordinates for the next destination. The pilots check their scans, and then pick a route before blasting off into the blackness of space. For the Xi'An pilots who step up to the challenge of the Koa e Ko'ia, this is their life for the next 200-250 hours.

The Koa e Ko'ia is an epic endurance race that's wildly popular among the Xi'An. Although the race has been contested in various systems across the Xi'An Empire for centuries, it has only recently come to Human attention when it appeared in the former Perry Line System of Hadur. One day, in 2881, previously open sectors of the system were suddenly off limits, and remained that way for the next week and a half (Standard Time). Famed *Terra Gazette* travel journalist Jan Sharrock happened to be in-system at that time. After being diverted off her intended course, she landed at a nearby space station to find groups of Xi'An gathered around wallscreens in rapt attention. She had to find out why.



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Sharrock wrote, "I'd gone up to a shop owner to buy a Sur-luk, but he was more interested in the serene images of Xi'An pilots and their ships than serving me a drink. When I asked what he was watching, he mumbled a Xi'An word I was unfamiliar with, but which roughly translates to 'holy, distance race'."

Sharrock spent the following days on the space station. She learned everything she could about the Koa e Ko'ia, interviewed observers, and witnessed an incredible finish that had three racers speeding toward one last checkpoint as time expired. The subsequent articles produced from Sharrock's writings generated great interest from xenophiles and ship enthusiasts who were intrigued by the ex-

treme length of the race. Her travelogues lead to a sharp spike in Human visitors to Hadur System, fueled by their interest in learning more about the Koa e Ko'ia.

Despite not hosting the sporting endurance event since 2881, Hadur is still seen by Humanity as the home of the race. Canny Xi'An vendors play into this perception by keeping their store shelves stocked with Koa e Ko'ia trinkets. MISC, who has a special lend-lease agreement with the Xi'An, has persistently advocated for bringing the race back to Hadur to capitalize on Human interest. Following years of debate, the Xi'An government decided to return the race to Hadur in 2947, and even establish a special division specifically for Humans to compete in.

The Spiritual Sport

The basics of the Koa e Ko'ia are easy to understand. Though lengthy, the race is contained to one system. A number of Xi'An-controlled systems are certified to host the race, but the only such system Humanity has access to is Hadur.

Before each race, various checkpoints and destinations are chosen by a governing body within the Xi'An government. Participants do not know the specifics of the course until the race begins. Once under way, racers receive coordinates to the first checkpoint. Only when that checkpoint is reached do they receive the coordinates for the next one. The race proceeds thusly with the pilots only knowing what their very next destination will be. The racer who reaches the most checkpoints at the end of the set period, which can vary anywhere between 200-250 standard Earth hours, is named the winner. If two or more ships pass the same number of checkpoints, it triggers tie-breaker conditions too lengthy and detailed to succinctly describe here.

When racers receive the coordinates for the next checkpoint they are also provided with the location of waystations located between the two. Pilots must coordinate with their crews about when and where to meet for rest, repair and refuel. This communication is key, and more complicated than most expect, since teams must plan with enough flexibility to allow the crew time to reach the proper waystation and prepare for the racer's landing. Unprepared pit crews have been the downfall of more than one racer over the race's history.

At its heart, the Koa e Ko'ia is an endurance test for both a ship and its pilot. The race's extraordinary length tests the concentration and fortitude of Xi'An pilots. As ectotherms, the Xi'An can lower their metabolism while inactive to reduce their need for sustenance. Yet, doing so while achieving rapid focus when high stress situations occur requires intense training and carries a toll both mentally and physically. Xi'An racers train to overcome these roadblocks, and if done successfully, the lowered metabolism,



combined with intense concentration, leads to a euphoric state that has been described as deeply spiritual. Winners of the Koa e Ko'ia are believed to have transcended into an advanced spiritual state to achieve their victory, and are treated as cultural celebrities thereafter.

The race also tests the speed, agility and reliability of the participating ships by incorporating unique features of each system in which it takes place. For Hadur, this has included a number of checkpoints hidden within the system's asteroid belt that require careful and precise navigation to reach, and one located on the sunward side

of tidally locked Hadur I, testing the ship's ability to handle extreme temperatures.

The race must also include both space and atmospheric flight. According to race experts, this is where Hadur's 2947 Koa e Ko'ia course is unique. Its atmospheric flight will occur somewhere over Hadur II and Hadur III, which are both being terraformed. The uncertain atmospheric conditions make picking an entry point extremely important, as flying into a high-density pocket not only increases drag on the ship but could even damage it.

The Human Factor

Following decades of increased Human interest, the Xi'An have decided to allow other species to participate in Hadur's Koa e Ko'ia. The process to implement this change took even longer, as the race's extensive rule book had to be modified to accommodate the many differences between species. According to Daniel Gordon, who hopes to qualify with his Mustang Beta, "the race's real endurance test is getting through the rule book."

Until race officials understand how the Human body reacts to the stresses of the race, independent medical examiners will be assigned to each Human team to track the pilot's vital signs. If the medical examiners determine the pilot's health or safety is in danger, they will have the authority to force them to stop at the nearest waystation for further evaluation and could even remove them from the race.

After years of advocating for the race's return to Hadur, MISC will be one of the major sponsors of the system's 2947 Koa e Ko'ia. MISC spokesperson Federica Zabel believes the race will be another step towards improved Human and Xi'An relations. "The Koa e Ko'ia represents the perfect opportunity to bring the Xi'An and UEE Empires

closer together," Zabel said at the press conference announcing the race. "We believe our shared love of pushing finely crafted and tuned spaceships to the extreme can be a gateway for both species to better understand each other."

It's also bound to bring MISC a surge of publicity. According to reports, MISC has spent years training and funding teams exclusively for this race. One of those pilots, Brian Blitz, claims that certain aspects of the MISC Razor were even designed with the Koa e Ko'ia in mind. "The more I've trained for the race, the more a lot of these design choices just make sense. From the layout of the cockpit to the ease of being able to swap out components, I fully believe the design of this ship already gives me a leg up."

MISC appears determined to ensure that a Razor places first in the Human division of Hadur's Koa e Ko'ia. Whether or not MISC gets the outcome it wants, of course, is yet to be determined. Regardless of the winner, if the race proves to be a success, there are rumors the Xi'An would consider making Hadur's Koa e Ko'ia a regular event. That outcome would be a victory for race fans across the galaxy.



JUMP POINT



A ROBERTS SPACE INDUSTRIES PUBLICATION

ISSUE 05.01

50TH ISSUE

*Fifty issues and still going strong – it's sometimes hard to realize that we've been publishing **Jump Point** for over four years. This month, those of us who put together **JP** every month took a few minutes to imitate Scrooge – a look back, a look at what we're doing now, and even a look into the possible future for everyone's favorite official magazine about Star Citizen.*

*The crew includes **Lead Writer Dave Haddock**, **Editor David Ladyman**, **Director of Community Engagement Ben Le-snick**, **Senior Writer Will Weissbaum** and **Associate Writer Adam Wieser**.*

Ben L: Let's start with the obvious one: how did you become involved with Chris Roberts and *Star Citizen*?

David L: Yeah, let's start with the obvious. I was hired by Origin Systems in 1991, just after *Wing Commander I* was released. I was Publications Manager, so my team created the manuals and guide books for every product Origin made,

including all the remaining *Wing Commanders*, over the next six years. At some point, we were introduced, but I have no memory of it ... I'm sure I was struck with awe.

How about you, Ben? Do I trump you on length of time with Chris?

Ben L: You absolutely do. I was a *Wing Commander* fan from the start and ran the big community site in the '90s ... but I didn't meet Chris until he was working on finishing up the movie at Digital Anvil. We corresponded over the years and when he started coming up with his plan for *Star Citizen* he asked for my advice ... and here I still am several years later!

David L: Of course, I had about a twenty-year gap between the movie (My company, IMGS, did an official book about the movie) and getting back with him for SC. I suspect Ben and Dave have both worked longer with him than I have.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Dave H: I interned at Chris' production company and ended up working on a movie called *Outlander* and was able to be a part of that for a couple years, helping out in a variety of capacities.

David L: (*Outlander* was released in 2008.)

How about Will and Adam? Had you met Chris before hiring on? Do you have any exciting tales about first meeting him?

Will W: The first time I met Chris was because in the previous LA studio my first desk was right outside of his office.

David L: What did you know about Cloud Imperium when you first interviewed to work here?

Will W: To the shock and horror of many, I actually had never played any of Chris's game until I started here. I was familiar with the kickstarter, but didn't know too much. I was blown away by what I saw when I first hopped onto the RSI website and started reading the fiction that Dave had been doing.

David L: Yeah, Dave's fiction (before he got too busy to keep writing stories) is really compelling. I'm looking forward to what he gives us in the story that is beginning this issue.

Will W: (I have played *Wing Commander* since!)

Adam W: And I worked at Chris's film production company years ago. That's where we first met. I also got to work on *Outlander*, though my part of that process wasn't nearly as cool or memorable as Dave's.

Dave H: But you got to stay warm.

David L: Adam! Dave hardly ever tells us what he did with the movie. Perhaps you can shed some light on that?

Adam W: He got to be on set. While I was stuck in our LA office.

He got to hang with Ron Perlman. I fielded phone calls.

Will W: I believe Dave was Ron Perlman's body double.

David L: I'm starting to understand why Dave rarely goes into detail.

Dave H: I had a bunch of different jobs on it over the course of the production. I was initially an Office PA for the concept phase, then behind-the-scenes videographer during the production, then a director's assistant, helped out the VFX coordinator and editor and was a general PA for the editing/post phase.

Will W: All while looking up to the stars and dreaming.

David L: I had figured you were involved with the script, or something more closely related to the lore (etc.) that you're working on now. You are a man of many hats. In fact, let's take this smooth segue into how each of us got started with CIG. Who was first – Ben or Dave?

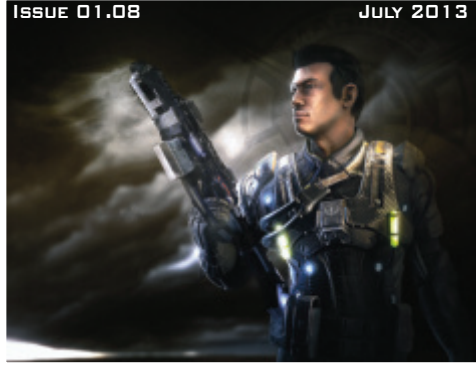
Ben L: I believe Dave was first!

Dave H: I think we were about the same time.

Ben L: Chris contacted me for advice about the community side of things as he was planning for the crowdfunding campaign, and we sort of naturally got to talking about how the game would work and the details of the universe. I know I met Dave on one of the first couple of conference calls I was on. (I was living and working in Maryland and thought I was just helping Chris out ... I didn't really expect this to become a job.)

David L: Why were you on that call, Dave? What had Chris asked you to do at that point?





BEHIND THE SCENES

Dave H: Chris had called me to check out the demo that would ultimately be the one he showed at GDC. He was still working crazy hours to pull it together, but had wanted to talk to me about doing some writing for it. He'd expressed an interest in moving away from dedicated game writers, as he wanted it to feel a bit more cinematic, so at that point, I would just head over to try and get a sense of what he was envisioning for the universe and from that we started talking out the rough framework of the universe.

After talking about the initial themes he wanted to explore and overarching tone, we started creating the key historical events that would shape and define the 'current era' of the game. Those would go on to become the time capsules.

David L: Sounds like with both of you, conversations gradually evolved into full-time (more than full-time) employment.

Will W: How soon after the project started did the idea for **Jump Point** come online?

AND WHO NAMED IT???

David L: **Jump Point** was actually a thing (and named) before I got involved. Ben? Dave?

Ben L: Towards the end of the original campaign, we were getting inundated with people who wanted to know how they could keep following the project and how they could keep supporting us. Chris and Sandi came up with the idea of the subscription program that would generate all sorts of community content and pay for itself (and help the game!) without taking away from what folks had pledged to make development happen.

We sat down and worked out a series of perks that you would receive if you chose to subscribe. The **Jump Point**

name was part of my original pitch for things we could do (though at the time it was supposed to be a 4-8 page newsletter).

David L: Yeah, few things are small in the 'verse, and **Jump Point** isn't one of them.

Ben L: If we're honest, the next thing that happened is that we forgot about **Jump Point** entirely. The campaign ended at the end of November and we were suddenly looking for offices and hiring developers and managing a million things at once.

I say we forgot, but of course Chris remembered ... and a couple weeks in he mentioned that we really needed to get something out before the year ended.

We quick put together an outline of what **Jump Point** could be ... and realized we hadn't hired anyone who could really put it together yet. There was a 'first try' issue that our videographer at the time put together, which was a good start, but it wasn't the magazine look Chris was going for. Which I believe is where you came in!

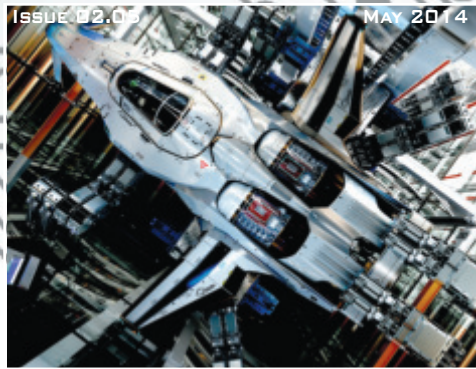
David L: The rumor is that it we promised a 2-4 page newsletter that I turned into a 24-page publication, but I'm looking at that first mock-up, and it was already 14 pages, before I got my hands on it. I was finishing off another project, just after midnight, when Chris sent an email asking me if was interested. He needed the first issue 36 hours later ...

I was at the GDC Austin kickoff in October, so I knew something was happening, but I hadn't paid it too much attention since then. But with only a day and a half to get it done, I made sure Quick and Dirty would suffice for that first issue, and then committed.

Will W: And we've been going strong since!



BEHIND THE SCENES



BEHIND THE SCENES



ORIGINAL “NEWSLETTER” DRAFT (LEFT) AND FIRST ACTUAL COVER (RIGHT)

Will W: So, usually an issue begins life when Ben and David sit down to figure out what is coming down the pipe development-wise, yes?

Dave H: Yes. Usually we’ll do a kickoff to try and plan out a couple of issues in advance. We usually look at what ships have been recently released or discussed or what major events have been happening in and around the company that the backers might be interested to learn more about.

Usually there’s a theme for each issue, which we (the Lore team) will generate content to support, such as the Portfolio and Galactic Guide.

David L: Yes, the first meeting is between Ben and me. We (he) sets the Work In Progress and Behind the Scenes articles, and we speculate a bit on what might be good Portfolio and Galactic Guide subjects, but those last two are determined by Lore.

Ben L: Sometimes the theme holds up better than others, but we at least imagine one at that first meeting.

Will W: Like for this month the WIP feature is going to be on the MISC Razor, so I know we sat down and tried to figure out what system and portfolio would be a good match for that topic.

Ben L: We also try to plan two months out at a time so we always have an outline to review the next time we meet.

Dave H: Right. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t.

The serial story tends to operate on its own timeline, since they can range from three to five issues long.

David L: Early days, Ben and Dave did most of the writing of the Portfolio and Galactic Guide articles. More recently, the Lore team has done the writing of both of those and also the short story in the back.

Will W: Whereas the shows often feature stuff in progress, **Jump Point** is great because it gives the dev team an opportunity to reflect. On the lore side I know we enjoy having the chance to really dive into a solar system and our various companies. While we have a ton of high-level notes, a lot of details emerge when we put together the pieces for **JP**.

Ben L: Question for all – what’s your favorite piece you’ve worked on for **Jump Point**?

David L: You do realize we’re talking 250 articles, don’t you? My *one* favorite?

Ben L: Your very favorite.

David L: Well, the Behind the Scenes article where Rob Irving discussed pirating in SC has to be in there, if only because he put on a hat, eye-patch and stuffed parrot for the pictures. (01-12, November 2013)



BEHIND THE SCENES

ISSUE 03.01 JANUARY 2015



ISSUE 03.05 MAY 2015



ISSUE 03.09 SEPTEMBER 2015



ISSUE 03.02 FEBRUARY 2015



ISSUE 03.06 JUNE 2015



ISSUE 03.10 OCTOBER 2015



ISSUE 03.03 MARCH 2015



ISSUE 03.07 JULY 2015



ISSUE 03.11 NOVEMBER 2015



ISSUE 03.04 APRIL 2015



ISSUE 03.08 AUGUST 2015



ISSUE 03.12 DECEMBER 2015



BEHIND THE SCENES



Will W: It might be because it's so recent, but I had a blast working on the *Lost Squad* episode. (04-09/12, September-December 2016)

David L: Yeah, that was neat. I don't know how similar to your work on S42 scripts that was, but

it was definitely different from our normal stories.

Ben L: Mine was the 'Original Systems' article we did to give a backstory for AC (the in-universe game Arena Commander). It was all a parody of Origin Systems' history that was full of obscure jokes that maybe made one in a million backers smile ... but it was so much fun to put together. (02-03, March 2014)



David L: I'll also mention the Behind the Scenes we did with QA, where they described all their favorite bugs. The hangar buggy flying in space and the space crab that crept into the hangar to reach the aquarium are still memorable. (03-01, January 2015)



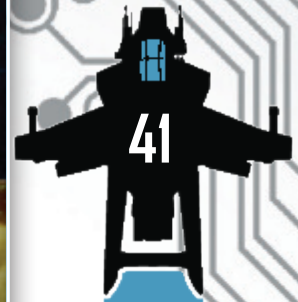
"Different from our normal stories" reminded me ... the article that got the most feedback, first very negative and then trending positive, was the first chapter of "The Knowledge of Good and Evil." It was a story by Allen Russell, who is also a backer, written in the voice of a street rat who hadn't exactly learned Standard speech as a young kid. Her speech highlighted how removed she was from normal society, but that also made it really difficult to understand, particularly for our non-native English readers. Fortunately, as she grew up, each following chapter was easier to read. (02-09/12, September-December 2014)

Ben L: That's one of those situations where I understand the feedback, but the concept is too fun to not do it. It's probably frustrating to get as your monthly story but very worthwhile when you look back at the whole thing.



Adam W: It's hard to pinpoint one particular piece that was my favorite, but the response to the Horus Galactic Guide was great. People really responded to the story of Marie Sante and are excited to try and figure out what happened to her. (04-01, January 2016)

David L: It's really neat when we can plant hooks in JP, that will eventually be developed in the game.



Will W: We have a forum going with suggestions from the subscribers on topics, but I know from being behind the scenes that there are often other considerations that come into play when picking subjects. Can you shed some insight on why we wind up going with the features we do?

Ben L: There are a number of factors that go into it. A big one is the fact that **Jump Point** has a hard date every month, while on the development side we don't ship a patch until it's ready ... so it's often hard to schedule, say, a **Jump Point** that's about Star Marine when we don't know that Star Marine will be ready in time for the issue.

That's a big part of why we focus on the ship development process so often – we almost always have a hard date to match. It also frees a lot of developer resources, because instead of re-interviewing everyone we can refer back to their comments on Shotgun (our internal art review tool) and build a 'how it happened' story without using as much of their valuable time.

David L: Unfortunately, most of the articles that people suggest can't be written yet, because the game hasn't developed to that point. For WIP and Behind the Scenes, we focus on recent developments, both in-game elements (ships, LZs and so forth for WIP) and game mechanics and teamwork (Behind the Scenes).

That's a lot like how you select topics for the lore articles, isn't it? That, and relating it to the issue's theme.

Will W: Usually the big challenge for us is making sure that the connections we create are organic. For this month's issue we had already covered the obvious connections in previous issues – MISC, MISC's headquarters in Rihlah, and Centauri – so we started to think about ways the ship could be used.

When we were designing the Razor we had discussed how the Xi'An influence would separate it from previous racers and had started discussing how the Xi'An might prize different aspects over pure speed. So we brought the idea of that race forward and decided that Hadur would be a great system for the setting.

Ben L: Some of our ships started off as tiny references in **Jump Point**. I am (too much of) a fan of the 'list three familiar things and one from left field' sort of thing that shows up in a lot of pulpy sci-fi ... so we would intentionally work in references to several ships you know and then one that was just now being imagined. (I believe the Hull series started that way, among others.)

Will W: I think Buccaneer was initially a reference in the Drake Portfolio.

David L: Sitting in my cubbyhole, I usually don't realize when we've done that – you mention a ship, and I just assume it's a thing, not realizing that I've witnessed the birth of yet another facet of the game.

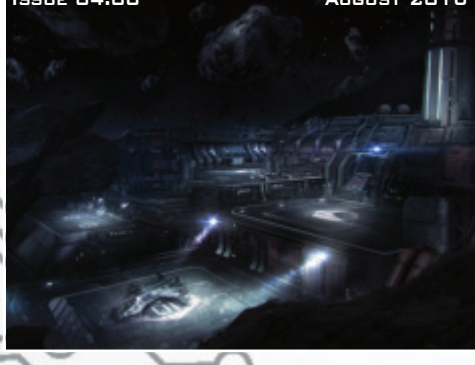
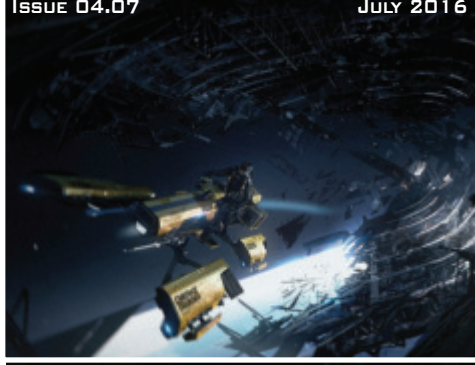
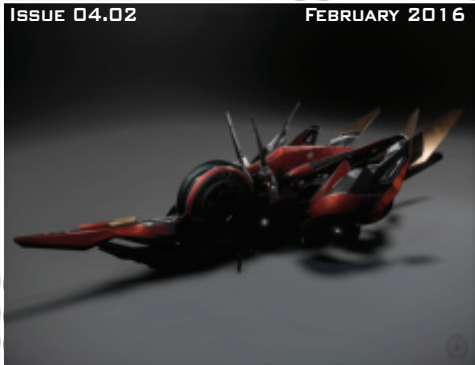
Will W: Adam's recent story, *Instrument of Surrender*, had a lot of Tevarin tidbits that started some fun discussions with Design. (04-05/08, May-August, 2016)

Ben L: There have certainly been times where **Jump Point** has known what our next ship was going to be before anyone else who actually works here. :)

Will W: So, just another example of how Design feeds Lore feeds Design.



BEHIND THE SCENES



BEHIND THE SCENES

David L: The fiction tends to stretch the envelope. Writers, especially contract writers, nearly always want to include elements that haven't actually been determined for the game. Alien races – physical appearance, attitudes, speech – are among the most popular material that authors want to include.

We finally put together a list of elements that we didn't want to explore in our fiction until Lore and Design could nail them down.

Ben L: It's appropriate, though – our community is a big part of the development process whether they like it or not. Only reasonable to let them in so early!

Will W: It's why none of the stories contain pizza recipes.

David L: I keep wanting to run the pizza article, but y'all can't get the list of ingredients settled.

We also have to be a bit careful about revealing surprises. For example, there are plot developments in *S42* that would be spoiled by an article that described them ahead of time. We try to give you the whole story in **JP**, but not at the cost of spoiling your enjoyment when you play the game.

Ben L: Where do you see **Jump Point** after the persistent universe launches?

Will W: Since the plan for *Star Citizen* is to keep adding new content all the time, I think there will always be a place for the deep dives that **Jump Point** features.

Dave H: Yeah, plus once the thing's out we can actually reflect on things that we can't talk about now.

Will W: I also have a dream about a feature story that

builds off things players have done in game.

For example, when two orgs have just had a big fight, we could have a tale that is based off that.

David L: A new ongoing feature, or an occasional entry in the short stories?

Will W: Don't try to pin down my dreams!

Ben L: I think from the day I picked up the original *Wing Commander* I've been dreaming about 'what if you could subscribe to *Claw Marks*' ... I would love to see **Jump Point** become more of an in-universe document someday. Not a promise, but certainly something that's on my mind.

David L: I want to keep it going as long as we can make it interesting for our players (and especially our subscribers). We will never make everyone happy with every article, but as long as it's interesting to write about and interesting to read, I think we're accomplishing our objective.

Any last words?

Will W: Special thanks to the amazing artists who contribute so much to every issue!

David L: Yes – as much as I would like people to enjoy **JP** for the articles, I know it's the pictures that are the primary draw for some.

Ben L: I will thank the community for giving us the freedom to do the magazine the way we do ... and also ask them: what do YOU want to see as **Jump Point** continues?

Adam W: Thanks to everyone for reading, subscribing and making **JP** possible!

Dave H: We hope people keep enjoying it.



HADUR SYSTEM



After centuries of cold war and tense diplomacy with the Xi'An empire, there are few places where interspecies relations have thawed more than in the Hadur System. This former no man's land has, in recent times, transformed into a symbol of cooperation and new hope for all who desire lasting peace between our species.

Humanity's first view of the system came from Teesa Morrison's flight footage as she traversed the Baker-Hadur jump point in 2531. What started as an exuberant accounting of her initial findings of a main sequence class F star, anchoring four planets, turned into sheer panic when she ran into a Xi'An military unit escorting a mining team to the belt. Familiar with the Xi'An from the press coverage of the Pallas incident the year prior, Morrison and her crew fled immediately. The Xi'An military ships followed closely behind, but did not open fire. Morrison later re-

marked that she believed the Xi'An were tracking them to try to learn where the Human ship had come from. While her crew debated the risk of giving away the location of a Human jump to potential enemies, in the end they decided to return to Baker to report their encounter as soon as possible.

Within a day of receiving the report, a Naval fleet moved into position to guard the jump point, but it was another fifteen days before the first Xi'An scout emerged into Human space. It is likely that war would have broken out then and there if not for the presence of numerous members of the press who had come to cover the situation after Morrison's footage leaked to the news orgs. With the entire UPE watching, the Navy favored caution, and the Xi'An ship was allowed to leave.

IIIIHIIIIHVVVH

Over the next several years, there were several cautious expeditions into the system from Baker. While there were still occasional run-ins with the Xi'An, it was clear that they had no permanent settlements in the system and it was surmised that they had only recently discovered it themselves. Due to the seemingly plentiful bounty of unclaimed resources, a few daring individuals and corporations rushed to begin mining the belt, but the prospect of civilians flying freely alongside alien ships was deemed a disaster waiting to happen.

In 2542, UPE High Naval Commander Jianna Perry proposed that all Xi'An-connected systems be placed under Navy control to provide a buffer to protect the rest of the UPE if and when their alien neighbors decided to attack. After much deliberation, the Tribunal approved the plan and the Perry Line was born. The system Morrison had discovered was renamed Hadur to bring it in line with the military's gods of war designations for border systems (following the pattern started with Horus's name). Corporations who had begun investing in the system were incensed and a drawn-out legal battle for reparations would plague the UPE until Ivar Messer took power and dismissed the suit.

HEARD IN THE WIND

"We cannot expect to keep our homes safe if we leave the front door wide open. We must secure and protect the border or we shall wake up to find that the Xi'An have already made themselves welcome."

*- High Naval Commander Jianna Perry,
Address to UPE Tribunal, 2542*

"Though many people of our Empire may feel that the resources in Hadur should be claimed by us rather than given to the Xi'An, I contend that if they ever wish for Humanity to find a peaceful way to exist in this universe they should promptly begin to get over it."

- Ambassador Coen, private comm to Imperator Toi, 2792

TRAVEL WARNING Since there is heavy Human traffic in the system, it is important for visitors to remember that Xi'An law governs Hadur. Minor infractions in UEE space, like tagging with graffiti, can often carry a heavier punishment here. Make sure to familiarize yourself before making the jump, to avoid awkward misunderstandings.

A FRESH START

For the century and a half that followed, all traffic in Hadur comprised a melange of military patrols, spy satellites, scan drones and mine layers as both sides sought to defend their respective empires along the Perry Line. Even though tensions continued to grow over the years as the Messers used xenophobic-fueled fear as a means of control, war never came. Finally in 2789, Senator Akari was able to strike a peace treaty with the ruler of the Xi'An, Emperor Kray.

In the negotiations that followed after the Messer Regime's eventual collapse, it was decided that the Perry Line systems would be evenly divided. Control of Hadur was slated to be given to the Xi'An and on July 5th, 2793, the pact was signed, making that designation official.

Though peace had been declared, many believed that both sides viewed the truce as tenuous at best. As such, the Xi'An slated Hadur as a prison system where law-breakers were forced to work hard labor in mines until their debts to society were paid. Hadur was not unique in this. Similar strategies were seen in all the Xi'An transitional systems: Indra housed a major shipping hub, Pallas was used for research, and Virtus was given to a crime syndicate. If war ever actually occurred, all four would suffer only minimal Xi'An casualties.

Then in 2942, in a surprise announcement after decades of the system seeing only minimal Human trade and traffic, ArcCorp revealed that they had procured a contract



EMPIRE

with the Xi'An government to assist in the terraforming of Hadur II and Hadur III. In the agreement, ArcCorp would be responsible for providing resources to the massive project, while the Xi'An would be overseeing operations of the technically complicated process. The decision has caused some to wonder why the Xi'An are relying on Human resources for the project instead of bringing in supplies from Ayr'Ka or Pallas. Though there has yet been no official answer, in the years since striking the deal, millions of tons of raw materials have been delivered through Baker, along with a significant and growing Human workforce. It is also not yet clear what usage for which the Xi'An will designate the worlds, as per their custom once the terraforming is complete. The rumor is that it will be a factory system, since ArcCorp has experience with that owing to their own planet being modeled on the Xi'An style.

The last few years have marked a boom time for Hadur. A myriad of stations have been built as a steady stream of transport ships enter and exit the system every day. From the recent large investment in infrastructure, to the expansive contract with ArcCorp, to even the introduction of a Human division in the famed Xi'An Koa e Ko'ia endurance race being held in Hadur, it seems that Emperor Kray and his people are more and more looking at Humanity as a true ally.

HADUR I

A complex on the dark side of this tidally locked, rocky planet was rumored to house a max security labor camp, where the permanent night was said to have a placating effect on Xi'An interred here. It is believed that many of these prisoners have now been drafted to assist in some of the more dangerous tasks needed for the terraforming process.

HADUR II & III

Both terrestrial planets are currently undergoing terraforming through a joint effort by the Xi'An government and ArcCorp. While there is still some time before the planets will be habitable, there has been significant progress and just recently, the burgeoning atmosphere of Hadur III was flooded by a violet hued gas giving it a memorable appearance. The project has been deemed by those in the terraforming industry as an extremely complicated venture, and many financial analysts surmise that this close relationship with the Xi'An will give ArcCorp an advantage in the field for years to come.

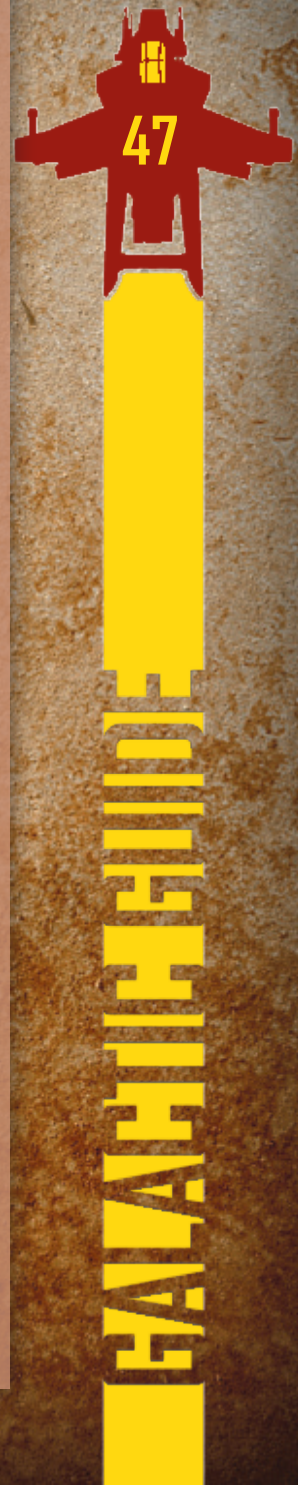
Like other former Perry Line systems, an interesting blend of cultures has begun to develop on the stations in planetary orbit, where Human and Xi'An have started heavily interacting. Many race enthusiasts are expected to make the journey out to the main ArcCorp station above Hadur II to watch the upcoming Koa e Ko'ia as the pilots will be flying a difficult course that includes the tumultuous still-forming atmosphere.

HADUR BELT ALPHA

Mined by forced labor for decades, it has recently begun to be mined in commercial quantities as more and more resources are needed for the ongoing terraforming projects.

HADUR IV

Since this most distant planet has few resources, it was set aside by the Xi'An to house many of the vice stations that offer services and distractions to the workforce here.





DRIFTERS

BY DAVE HADDOCK

CHRONICLES

Episode 1

Helluva time for the a/c to cut out, Reynolds thought as he stared through the scuffed cockpit glass and cued the comm.

“You need to take a second and think real hard about what you’re doing here.” His fingers tapped anxiously on the flight stick, and he could already feel the sweat forming under his suit.

About five minutes ago, an EMP tripped his Retaliator, the *Echo Calling*, out of quantum. Five ships – a Freelancer and

a bunch of fighters that looked patched together with tape, glue and bad intentions – waited in an attack pattern. The ambush had surprised him. They’d scouted this route for weeks to try and avoid this possibility. What had surprised the ambushers was that the *Echo* still had guns and shields. Nickels had finally gotten around to installing that backup power plant, so although *Echo*’s engines were affected by the EMP, they were more than equipped to mix it up. That little fact gave their attackers pause.

“Cap! Two more contacts, aft side, drifting thirty degrees down,” Nickels yelled from his terminal.

“Power down your weapons, disengage your cargo and drift,” said their spokesman over the comms. From the appearance of the cockpit in the background, he looked to be flying their beat-up Freelancer. Probably their leader . . . or the one who wore the communal balls for this week. Reynolds didn’t recognize him, but whoever this was knew everything important about the *Echo*, in particular what they were transporting.

“Listen to me,” Reynolds leaned into his camera. “Say you take us in a rush, you know who you’re stealing from. That kinda trouble? That doesn’t just go away.”

Spokesman hesitated. It was just a flicker where the façade of toughness dropped. Just a flicker, but Reynolds survived noticing things like that.

“Detach your cargo and leave.” The façade was back in full effect.

“Not gonna happen.” Reynolds glanced at his screens. Maybe a minute ’til engines were back online. He flipped to the *Echo*’s internal communication network. “How we looking, people?”

* * *

In the top turret, O’Neil stared in horror at the circling ships. It took him a second to realize that Reynolds’ question included him.

“Top turret up,” he managed to stammer out. Sweat rolled down his face and into his eyes. He instinctively tried to wipe it away, but his hand kept banging off the faceplate of his suit. He blinked hard as he listened to Reynolds argue with whoever was on the other side of the guns leveled at him.

“Don’t be stupid, man. You ain’t gotta die here today,” the Freelancer captain said.

“With what you’ve got?” Reynolds fired back.

“Fly away. Just fly away . . .” O’Neil mumbled to himself. His hands started to tremble.

* * *

“Bottom turret’s set, Cap, whenever you wanna light these bitches up,” Frears replied over the comm as he calmly cycled through the ships in his field of fire.

“What I’ve got is five on one. You do the math,” the Freelancer captain replied. This guy wasn’t giving up.

“What you’ve got is a glorified tug and a bunch of shit fighters.”

Frears chuckled. Whoever these morons were, they were used to pushovers who’d drop their cargo at the first sign of trouble. *They picked the wrong crew this time.*

That’s when he noticed a smudge on the back of his helmet, stowed down by his feet. He took his eyes off the idiots outside to have a closer look. A smudge of engine grease. *Son of a bitch*, he thought. Nickels must have tried it on. Ever since he’d shelled out the credits for the new CDS suit, the crew’d been hovering like vultures.

* * *

Back in the cockpit of the *Echo*, Reynolds got reports from the rest of the stations. Engines were cycling and should be up in thirty. This Freelancer captain obviously didn’t want a fight or he would’ve opened fire by now. Reynolds just needed enough time to get mobile. Once they were moving, they could weather anything thrown against them long enough to get out of there.

“This is the last time I’m gonna ask. You know what we want.” The Freelancer captain managed to muster all the menace he could.

“You’re repeating yourself,” Reynolds responded. His eyes were locked on his readout, watching the engine’s power meter climb, waiting for just enough power to start moving.

“They’re heating up missiles!” Nickels shouted suddenly.



CHRONICLES

One of the old, beat-up 300s had drawn a lock. Reynolds muttered. They were out of time.

O'Neil's turret was already swinging towards it.

"Wait—" the Freelancer captain tried.

That's when it all popped off.

* * *

Space lit up with the exchange of lasers and bullets. The first exchange was devastating. The *Echo* was mangled from the storm of incoming fire, but its shields and thick armor managed to weather the mortal strikes of the initial assault. With the Retaliator's return fire, the 300 was the first to go, immediately sliced apart from O'Neil's turret fire.

The Freelancer launched a full spread of missiles. The *Echo's* engines suddenly flared to life and the massive bomber dove and deployed countermeasures. The turrets focused fire on the Freelancer, chewing down the shields and punching a series of shots through the cockpit before it could react.

The *Echo* tumbled and twisted, swarmed by fighters undeterred by the loss of their fearless leader. Laser fire sprayed from its turrets, spinning through space like a beautifully lethal pirouette until a rocket punched through weakened shields and annihilated the *Echo's* cockpit. The Tali's beautiful evasion turned into a death spiral and the fighters pounced for the kill. The last remaining turret killed the final fighter moments before an explosion ripped the *Echo* in half.

Then, silence. The massive fragments of spaceship quietly drifted in place. Occasional secondary explosions from areas of the ships still pressurized went off, ejecting the final volumes of oxygen and flame into space.

And with that, space was still again.

* * *

A point of light, initially indistinguishable from a star, slowly began to grow in size, eventually drawing close enough to be recognizable as a ship. Critics had famously called the 2918 Constellation 'the one misstep in RSI's proud lineage' and it was tough for many to argue. The hull plating on the nacelles was often sized incorrectly, creating odd gaps where the glow of the engine would seep out. This 2918 Connie was somehow still flying, although by the sight of it, it wasn't for the universe's lack of trying to kill it.

The ship slowly drifted towards the sprawling battlefield. Retro thrusters gently pulsed to bring it to a halt.

Magdalena "Mags" McCann stood from the nav station on the deck and stepped to the front of the ob window. Dressed in pajamas, a bathrobe and space boots (she hated cold feet), she swizzled her spoon around her bowl, hunting out some lingering RumblePops cereal hiding in the murky depths of sugary milk. Kennelworth's "Where We Go" blasted over the bridge's tinny speakers.

Mags looked over the vast destruction, crunched the last RumblePop in her mouth and grinned.

"Sweet."

* * *

Inside the *Harlequin*, Kennelworth's singular brand of gut-bucket rock wasn't restricted to the bridge. It was being pumped throughout the ship for everyone's benefit. While the outside of the battered Connie looked rough, the inside was even worse. Random frayed wires dangled from exposed paneling, bonded together with gum and tape. A particularly gaping hole in the wall had a circle drawn around it with "Don't Touch" written helpfully nearby. Inside the hole, something sparked sporadically.

The music abruptly disappeared from the intercom. Mags cleared her throat.

"Hey, everybody. Sorry to bug you . . ."



CHRONICLES

Inside one of the sleeping berths, Honan Yao picked through a bag of discarded CO2 vials, looking for one that had a little bit of charge left. He plugged any potential candidates into his hypo to check the level, but nothing.

“I know things have been a little rough since I took over.” Mags’ voice echoed from the tiny wall speaker. Yao was too focused on his search to care. His mind started to drift to alternative injection methods in case this ended up being a bust. None of the solutions were ideal, but desperate times . . .

He finally tossed the bag aside. He contemplated going to engineering, but he’d have to get up. Then it hit him . . .

Yao went into another compartment and pulled out his old medical field kit.

Success. At least for one hit. His adrenaline started to surge as he quickly popped the small vial of ink-black liquid into the hypo.

“The past few weeks, we’ve —” Yao shut off the speaker and settled back. When the WiDoW hit his system, it was like falling down a chasm of warm pillows.

And he welcomed it because he could forget now.

* * *

Like the rest of the ship, the cargo hold had seen better days. The vast open space was just that, vast and open. Only one container actually had any salvage in it, but, even for salvage, it was just junk.

Kel picked through it all the same. He methodically moved through each piece, studying every millimeter for structural integrity, potential for spare parts, and elemental composition. The Banu had been trained at one of the best Mining Soulis in the Protectorate. The Essosouli himself had even commented on Kel’s astute observational skills and claimed that Kel had the potential to ascend to Mastery level within the Guild.

When the *Harlequin*’s previous captain had purchased him from the Souli, he was a little disappointed to interrupt his advanced studies, but he wasn’t about to miss out on traveling with actual Humans.

He extracted a busted lamp from the container and studied the frayed wires coming out of it.

“Anyway, I’ve got something that might make it all better. Come on up to the bridge.”

Kel’s eyes lit up. He gently laid the lamp down (would need to be completely rebuilt internally, but structure had aesthetically attractive appearance) and bounced up to the bridge.

* * *

A battery slapped into a small holdout pistol. The handgrip hummed momentarily as the heater cycled the power and the ammo counter rose. Trin “Dropshot” Liska tucked the pistol in her waistband and walked over to her locker. A small, dense woman in her early thirties, every moment of struggle in her life was etched into every scowl on her face and into every tattoo on her body. So even at a glance, it was obvious she’d been through some shit.

She pulled out the heavy ballistic cannon from the top shelf. The word ‘Diplomacy’ had been scratched into the barrel. She checked the breach then sifted through the magazines on the shelf until she found a fully loaded one, slammed it and racked a round.

Her brother, Ozzy, watched from his perch on the railing in the engine room. His leg bounced rapidly, the only outward sign of any emotion. Equally vacantly angry, he shared the same litany of scars and tattoos as his sister. They both shared pack tats of the Souther Titans, a ragtag gang that supposedly started as an offshoot of the Tooth & Nails on Spider, but to many, it sounded like bull. Ozzy only had three bleeding scar tattoos (indicating three years of “rob-bin’ and ramblin’”), while Trin had eight.



CHRONICLES

He did, unfortunately for him, have QuarterDeck homemade tattoos that his sister did not.

Mags' voice barely overpowered the loud whine of the ship's massive engine.

"Yeah, so exciting times. I'll see you guys up here."

Trin looked at her brother. He jumped off the rail as she tossed him another pistol and they made their way up.

* * *

Mags studied the readout on the terminal, carefully tagging and prioritizing the debris fragments. Kel stood up at the front window, excitedly calling out what he was seeing.

The door to the bridge hissed open. With a quick glance back, Mags saw Trin perch up on the wall.

"Hey Trin, is Doc on his way up?" she asked while punching some tags.

"There! There!" Kel exclaimed, pointing out some debris. "Energy cells. Very minimal wear. Fresh. Very fresh."

Trin glanced at the front window. The wrecked 300 was currently front and center outside.

"What's going on?" she finally asked.

"We got ourselves a payday." Mags could barely contain her excitement as she tagged some more fragments on her terminal. Trin glared at the back of her head. Ozzy moved over to the other side of the bridge, his pistol held loose at his side.

"Yeah? Anything like the last one?" Trin replied.

"Look, I apologized for that, okay?"

"Apologies don't pad my account."

"My fence swore he could move . . ." Mags spun the captain's chair to face her as she spoke. Her sentence drifted off when she saw both Trin and Ozzy perched up. She

looked back and forth between the two. Ozzy kept the pistol out of sight, but hiding his hand was just as obvious.

"What's going on, Trin?"

"What's it look like?" Trin fired back.

"It looks like you're in the same place you stood right before we tossed Malcolm out of the airlock."

"Great memory," Trin said, chuckling. She scratched an itch on her lip with the hand holding Diplomacy.

"Guys, seriously. I've only been in charge, for what, like two months?" Mags settled back in the chair and casually glanced at a screen. Internally, her mind scrambled for some kind of out. Last thing she wanted to do was escalate this situation unnecessarily; she'd seen Dropshot waste too many people. Kel, unfortunately, was too preoccupied gaping out the window to be much help. "You gotta give me a chance."

"Before Malcolm touched void, you said things'd be different." Trin stepped forward as she spoke. "That's what *you* told us. Lower profile, bigger score."

"Run silent and smart was what she said, sis." Ozzy finally decided to chime in.

"Thanks, Oz. You know how my memory goes when I'm upset." She turned back to Mags. "Point is, shit ain't changed." There was a nasty, tense silence . . . except for:

"XT-20 fuselage. No. Bad condition. Look at the scorch. Unusable." Kel droned in the background before finally turning around. "I wouldn't . . ."

That's when he finally realized what was up. Ozzy moved the pistol into sight, so the Banu didn't get any ideas. Trin cleared her throat.

"Anyway, here we are, still scraping away with nothing to show for it."



CHRONICLES

“Doc can’t even keep an honest high anymore,” Ozzy muttered. Trin shook her head, severely disappointed.

“Okay. Fair enough.” Mags slowly rose, her hands up. “We can work out your issues and move forward.”

Trin smiled.

“Yeah . . .” She stepped forward, raising her gun.

“Wait!” Kel shouted as he lurched forward, keeping his hands out as well. Trin stopped. Mags slowly opened her eyes and looked around, pleasantly surprised that the pair had actually listened to the Banu. Kel waited a few moments and carefully considered his words before speaking. Finally:

“I know I only the ship slave —”

Mags slumped.

“You’re not our slave, Kel,” she said with a sigh.

“Yes, yes,” Kel waved her off and continued. “Captain Mag much better than Old Captain. She want money like us. Old Captain like money too and we like money.”

“Huh?” Ozzy mumbled as he glanced at Trin.

“But Captain Mag listen to us. Old Captain never talk to us. Just yell.” Kel moved forward as he spoke, almost pleading with Trin. “Captain Mag help Trin Liska. Old Captain not go to hell world to get Ozzy Liska. Captain Mag did.”

Mags gave a little nod in agreement. She almost missed all of Kel’s little speech, trying to figure out if she still had a pistol stashed on the bridge. [Back when Malcolm was running the show, she never felt safe being more than three steps away from a weapon.]

“We need to trust Captain,” Kel said finally. He walked over to Mags. “We trust in her and good things will come.”

Then he patted her on the forehead. Mags wriggled out of the way. Three weeks ago while docked up on a transfer

station, Kel had seen a father gently pat his daughter on the head before letting her run off to play and had been doing it ever since.

It was sweet . . . but kinda annoying.

The important thing was that it seemed to be working on Trin. She hadn’t shot Mags, so that was already a victory. Ozzy glanced at Trin, looking for the go-ahead to start shooting. Trin glanced out the front window at the fractured 300.

“So that’s the big news? A fighter?”

Mags made a big show of keeping her hands in view while she reached over to the flight stick. She gently angled the ship down, revealing the sea of wreckage: the Retaliator, the Freelancer, and the rest of the fighters.

That sight gave Trin and Ozzy pause as they gaped at the vast destruction. They stared silently for a few moments, but didn’t lower their guns.

“So . . .” Mags finally said. “Can we get to work?”

* * *

The *Harlequin’s* hold was bursting with activity. The floor screeched open to reveal the cockpit of the Merlin embedded underneath. Trin ran some final system checks on the snub and topped off the fuel. Ozzy entered pulling on the final pieces of his flight suit as he approached the open cockpit. He popped his helmet on and slipped into the cockpit.

“Let’s go, let’s go. We gotta start cutting before anyone else stumbles onto this,” Mags’ voice carried over the tinny intercom.

Ozzy banged the cockpit laminate twice to signal he was set. The floor panels shrieked closed until the Merlin was out of sight. Trin cued the comm.

“Bird’s flying.”



CHRONICLES

She made her way over to the storage locker with the other EVA suits. Kel was already suited up and carefully triple-checking his tools.

Trin pulled her suit out of the bin and slammed it onto the floor. She gave a quick once over for tears or punctures before she started pulling it on.

“How are you looking, Kel?”

“Fully prepared, Trin Liska.” Kel carefully and expertly replaced each tool in the field kit. “Tools are ready.”

Trin sealed her suit and slung a shotgun.

“Mine too.”

* * *

Back on the bridge, Mags was still in the captain’s chair. Ever since the interrupted mutiny, she’d kept herself busy positioning the *Harlequin* for easy deployment and reclaiming of salvage. She watched Ozzy’s ship quietly fly to the edge of the wreckage field and begin a wide sweep.

Without warning, her stomach bottomed out. That moment of pause while looking at the distant Merlin was enough to let the gravity of the situation she’d narrowly avoided come crashing down.

She doubled over in the chair and tried to catch her breath. This was far from the first time she’d had a gun in her face, but there was something about this time . . . there was a finality, like her luck had finally run out, that chilled her.

Maybe she could run. Wait until Trin had stepped off, then just run. Ozzy was a great pilot, but he probably couldn’t take on the *Harlequin* and survive. Worst case, she could batter him enough to get away. That’d mean she’d probably have to leave Kel, which seemed unfair. Doc . . . she wasn’t sure how he’d react . . .

“Hey,” a sleepy voice said.

Mags pulled herself together and turned back to the panel as Yao shuffled onto the bridge and slumped into one of the seats.

“Doc . . .” she brought up another scan window on her terminal and tried to look busy. “You missed an interesting discussion.”

“When was that?” Yao asked with a yawn.

“A couple hours ago,” Mags glanced at him, unsure if he was messing with her. He looked genuinely ignorant. “I called you, called everybody.”

“Right . . .” he snapped his fingers and nodded. “That was today?”

“Yeah . . .”

“That’s cool,” Yao tapped his fingers on his terminal window, waking it from sleep. They danced across the screen, deftly selecting a series of folders and programs. An episode of *Last Squad* started playing. “What’d you all talk about?”

“Shooting me or throwing me out of an airlock. Maybe both, I don’t know.”

“Oh yeah. Trin was pretty pissed.”

“You knew?”

“Sure.”

“Thanks for the heads up, Doc.”

“Come on, Mags. Trin’s not that good at hiding her emotions.” He settled back in his seat, perfectly content that the issue had been resolved.

“I also found us a job,” she finally offered up.

“Cool. Where?” He said lazily. He was too fixated on the spec show.

“Here . . .” she looked at Yao. He hadn’t taken his eyes off the show. “We’re doing it.”



CHRONICLES

Yao nodded and gave a thumbs up.

The comm from the airlock chirped.

“Exiting airlock now,” Trin said. Mags could hear Kel excitedly talking in the background.

“Copy that. We got you.”

Mags shut down the comm. Trin sounded back to normal, like the incident earlier had never happened. Mags knew that this job would have to pay out and she’d need to line up something quick right after. Otherwise, she’d be right back in the same situation. In the meantime, she guessed she should probably start stashing guns around the ship again.

Yao started gently snoring.

* * *

Trin and Kel stepped off into the void. Some people were weirded out by the moment when gravity disappears. For them, gravity was security. A tether that kept you in place. The lack never bothered Trin. She was always amused hearing people yammer on about it. It was a conversation she’d end up having whenever she’d go planetside. It actually just occurred to her that she’d never had the conversation while on a station. Maybe once somebody got on solid ground, they started reflecting. She didn’t get it.

Trin didn’t have that kind of fear. It wasn’t out of some innate toughness, it was an awareness that space was constantly trying to kill you. That was just something you either accepted or not. Trin had spent too much of her life trying to figure out who else was trying to kill her. Even in the best of her days running with the Titans, she had to deal with bounty hunters, Advocacy, not to mention her own crew, to even start worrying about space. That, she could always depend on.

The massive hull of the Retaliator had worked itself into a pretty hefty spin. Boarding it, much less salvaging it, would be next to impossible unless they slowed it down.

Trin adjusted her pack and started matching the rotation speed of the wreck. She pulsed the EVA thrusters to push herself closer and closer until she was able to get a hand on it. Trin pulled herself onto the hull and activated her mag boots to lock on. She dug one of her custom portable remote thrusters out of her case and activated the magnetic seal to attach it to the blasted metal.

Kel was hard at work at the other end of the debris doing the same thing. When complete, he waved Trin down and gave an enthusiastic thumbs up.

“You can just use comms, Kel.”

“Apologize, Trin Liska.” He quickly replied and gave another enthusiastic thumbs up.

Trin brought up her mobi and connected to the interface that controlled the remote thrusters. She’d built these back in her breaching days and although they had a limited amount of fuel, they had some power to them. They did have a tendency to explode though.

She sustained the thrusters against the roll and eventually the Tali slowed down. When it finally stopped, Kel broke out his salvaging kit and cracked it open.

“You all good here, Kel?”

“Good, yes, okay.”

“I’ll check the hold,” she said as she unslung her shotgun.

“Good, okay.”

Trin pulled her shotgun, racked a charge, then disappeared through a gaping hole in the side.

Kel watched a piece of a turret slowly float past. A pair of hands still gripped the firing sticks. Kel stared curiously at them for a moment, then fired up the cutting torch and got to work.

* * *



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The halls of the Retaliator were a shattered maze of twisted metal. Trin gently floated through the passageways, sweeping the shotgun back and forth. Based on the destruction, there was no way anything could've survived in here, but she wasn't taking any chances.

She moved forward, meter by meter, checking corners and ready for anything. She drifted back to her days with the Titans. While they dabbled in all sorts of mischief, their prime focus was chopping ships. As the main breacher in the pack, it was her job to board disabled ships, kill any survivors and then do enough repairs to get it flying.

This one definitely wasn't flying anywhere ever again. She passed some crew lockers and opened each one. Nothing but spare jumpsuits.

"Of course . . ." she muttered to herself.

Up ahead, the hallway bent to the left. There should be a bulkhead and then a door to the cargo section. Trin was hoping that whatever kicked off this fight was worth it. As she neared the bend, her flashlight picked up a form in the next compartment of the ship.

She kept her weapon trained on it and set up a firing position behind the doorframe. Upon closer inspection, it was most likely Human. The EVA suit it had on was spotless, like one of those new CDS ones. She cued the comms on her suit.

"Gen comms. Any survivors in Retaliator? Identify yourself."

The form just floated there. No movement.

Trin grabbed a floating scrap of metal and flung it at the body. It tapped off the leg.

Still nothing.

She put a round in its back. The blast spun the body around, revealing the pale, frozen face of one of the gunners. Seemed he wasn't able to get his helmet on before the vacuum got him.

"Find somebody?" Mags chirped over the comms.

"Nope," Trin replied as she pumped another round into her shotgun and pushed forward. She swept the corpse off to the side to reveal a small entry panel leading to the cargo hold. Interestingly, the panel was wired into some kind of backup power.

"Oh, hello." Trin slung the shotgun and dug through a pouch for an interface cable. Once her mobiGlas and the door connected, she booted up the Knockout program to run a preset hacking protocol. After several seconds of digital negotiation, the panel turned green. The door expelled some trapped atmo as it started to slide open.

Trin had her shotgun up and braced before the door opened. She kicked off the floor and floated into the Tali's cargo hold. One sweep of the flashlight was all she needed to discover a very unpleasant truth.

It was empty.

"Because of course it is . . ." Trin safetied her shotgun and slung it before cueing her comm. "Tali's clear."

Trin turned to exit when she caught a glimpse of something tumbling in the darkness. She pulled a flashlight to have a look. It was a lockbox, like one of those military footlockers she'd seen on those spec shows.

She snared it and checked its locks, but couldn't open them. A small access panel revealed another digital interface with a keypad. Trin reattached her mobi and kicked off another hack. As she waited, she examined the lockbox a little closer. Thing looked solid, like it could take an explosive solid. All very good signs about what could be inside.

She glanced down at her mobiGlas. The hacking program was still trying to hack the password. Suddenly, her mobi went dead.

"Son of a bitch."

* * *



Back aboard the *Harlequin*, everyone was gathered around the mysterious box. The hold was already full with choice parts of the various ships, expertly broken down and arranged by Kel. Trin was arranging her tools to do a thorough examination of the box while Mags paced in the background. From the look of determination on Trin's face, clearly the box's challenge had been accepted.

"Admit it. It has to be something valuable," Mags said nervously as she walked. "I'm not crazy, right?"

"Very exciting, Captain Mags. Yes," Kel said as he watched Trin attach a terminal to the lockbox's control panel.

"To be clear though, you didn't see any clues as to what's inside?" Mags' nerves started to get the better of her. "I mean, we don't think it's like chemical weapons, right? Or like a virus?"

"Titanium weave case very good to protect, but not rated for biological containment. If a deadly virus, Humans would be dead by now," Kel responded cheerfully.

"Could you two shut up?" Trin snapped as she sifted through unfiltered code on her screen.

"Sure, sorry," Mags said and forced herself to sit down.

"Yes, apologize." Kel approached Trin and patted her on the forehead. Trin didn't bother to swat his hand away.

Twenty more minutes of waiting passed. Trin tried every trick in her vast and well-proven book. Each time, the lockbox didn't budge.

"Screw it. Kel, grab your drills."

The Banu raced off excitedly.

* * *

Hours later, the lockbox was sitting on the table of the common area. Various tools had been used and discarded around it. The surface of the box had been carved up like

some kind of mechanical autopsy in an attempt to bypass the lock without damaging whatever was inside. Yao had migrated back to his berth, occasionally watching the show.

Mags entered from the hold wearing an EVA suit. Once inside, she pulled the helmet off and wiped the sweat off her face. Ozzy was still in the hold arranging the crates, also decked out in EVA gear.

"Got another batch of scrap inside," she said in between guzzles of water. She glanced at Yao. "Anything?"

"Nope," he murmured and sipped on his tea.

Mags headed to the hold and started peeling off the EVA suit.

"All right, Kel," Trin mumbled as she sifted through the security panel's programming. "Try reattaching that power cell."

Kel pulled a hardwired battery with a pair of exposed leads and surgically placed them alongside the existing power system.

The lock clicked. Trin and Kel looked at each other. A grin spread across Trin's face.

"Was that what I thought it was?" Mags yelled from the other room. Heavy footsteps clomped closer before she suddenly appeared in the doorway.

Kel started cleaning his tools and returning them to their cases. Trin unlatched the case. She glanced at the faces around the room then flipped the lid open . . .

It was a rock. Roughly the size of a Human head. Some iridescent flecks of violet in there, but just a rock. Ozzy quietly drifted into the room to see what the commotion was about.

"What is that?" Yao murmured as he tried to peer from his bed.



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"Looks like a rock to me," Ozzy replied and walked to his berth.

"That's what I thought." Yao puffed his pillow and settled back.

Trin didn't say anything, simply stood and walked out of the room.

"No, no, no!" Mags rushed forward and dropped down beside the case. "You don't go through all that trouble for an ordinary rock."

Mags carefully picked it up and peered at it closer. In the light, the violet flecks danced a bit brighter.

"Kel, you got your scanner?"

The Banu passed her a hand scanner from his kit. She flipped the terminal on and began scanning it. After a moment, she gasped.

Ozzy looked over.

"What . . ."

Mags bursts into a half smile, half laugh, like she couldn't decide which to commit to, and turned the scanner to Kel. He immediately started clapping.

"Speak!" Ozzy yelled. "What the hell is it?"

Mags laid the rock back in the box and went to her mobiGlas. A Galactapedia entry appeared on everyone's wrist.

"It's called eriesium. In its refined state, they think it can act as a power source, but Humans haven't really been able to study it."

"What it worth?" Trin's voice came from the doorway.

"Very rare," Kel chimed in.

"Answer the question." Trin didn't break her gaze on Mags.

"Last I heard, it was about 80,000." Mags could barely form the words.

"Not really impressed."

"An ounce." Mags ran her fingers over the contours of the stone. "Eighty grand an ounce."

That got everyone's attention. They looked at each other in silence until Trin finally blurted what was on everyone's mind.

"We're rich."

* * *

Wardlow Reclamation was a dead-end junkyard in the ass end of nowhere. The ratty carpet in the waiting room had been eaten by whatever bugs had infested the place. There wasn't a picture on the wall taken this century. Interestingly enough, it had won a customer service award in 2921 from some publication that was probably now long out of business. The award had been printed and displayed in a homemade frame near the front counter.

Mags had been staring at it for ten minutes when an idea occurred to her.

Trin sat across from her, equally bored.

They'd touched down the *Harlequin* a few hours ago to offload the scrap from the ships. The owner and his crew was slowly picking through everything and putting together an appraisal. The eriesium had been transferred to the standard-issue lockbox Trin was using for a footrest.

"Gotta admit, Mags," Trin said with a stretch. "This is just the jolt we need to turn things around. Sell this off for some quick Creds and be on our way."

The plan had been to save the eriesium until the appraisal was done, so it wouldn't throw off the estimate. However, Mags was now considering another option.

"What if we didn't?"

Trin shut her eyes and groaned.



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"Now. I mean. We bide our time, find the right kind of buyer. Look where we are," Mags pointed out the customer service award. "You think we're gonna get a fraction of what it's worth here? They can't afford it and we're cheating ourselves by off-loading it to the first shithole we come to."

"Don't . . . don't do this." Trin rubbed her temples to alleviate the sudden migraine that was forming. "For like a day, I had forgotten about throwing you out of an airlock."

"Yeah, but imagine if you could throw me out of your *own* airlock," Mags replied with a grin. "That's the kind of money we're talking about here."

A door behind the counter opened and the squat, sweaty owner stomped inside. He smacked at a keatfly buzzing near his head as he turned on the terminal at the counter. The system began to sync with his mobi. The owner was sifting through the list when he was seized by a fit of wet coughs.

He fumbled an inhaler out of his pocket and took a hit. The coughing didn't subside. He shook the inhaler and tried again. No luck.

"Bevin," he yelled out the open door in between coughs. "Bevin! Send someone to Kel-To. I need more medicine."

The fit finally ended. The owner spit something viscous onto the floor and looked at Mags and Trin.

"Yeah, okay. Assessed your scrap. You got anything else?"

Mags looked at Trin, who was glaring back. Trin finally relented and sank back in her seat. Mags jumped up and moved to the counter.

"Check the list, payout's at the bottom," The owner turned the terminal to face her. "Hit Accept to accept."

"Yeah, sure. Looks good."

The owner looked at her.

"Then hit Accept."

"Right, sorry." She hit the button. The scrapyard owner sniffled and printed a transfer receipt.

Trin grabbed the lockbox and started to head to the door. The owner noticed it for the first time.

"What's in there?"

"Four broken teeth," Trin replied without missing a beat.

Mags and Trin stepped outside into the baking sun. The smell of oil and scorched metal filled the air. The *Harlequin* was waiting on one of the nearby pads. All the crates of scrap had been offloaded and stacked neatly for processing. Seeing his crewmates emerge from the office, Kel waved goodbye to the landing pad crew, who look a little befuddled.

"I hate how happy you are about walking away from money," Trin muttered.

"Wrong, Trin. I'm happy because we're walking *towards* real money."

"Do you even know how to sell this off?"

"I do not, but we'll figure it out." Mags took the lockbox from Trin to carry it the rest of the way to the ship. Just as they hit the ramp . . .

"Hey!"

Mags and Trin turned back to see the group that Kel had just left.

"What's this shit about you owning a slave?"

Mags and Trin exchange a weary glance.

"He's not a slave," was all Mags could muster. The landing crew start to advance. "Dammit . . ."

Mags slapped the button for the ramp. The ramp didn't move. The landing crew broke into a sprint when they realized what she was trying to do.



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She hit it harder and the ramp suddenly began to rise into the ship. The first landing crewmen arrived a nanosecond too late. Muffled sounds of rocks being pelted at the hull emanated through the hold. Kel's head appeared in the doorway.

"Sell good?"

* * *

The scrapyard owner finished balancing the figures for the day's transactions. The sun was about to set. As dreadful as the day was for his sickness, the cold of the night was even worse. He felt the slight tickle at the back of his throat that would precipitate another coughing fit.

"Bevin! Did someone get my damn medicine?" he yelled into the intercom. There was no response.

The owner pushed himself out of his seat and shuffled outside. He shielded his eyes from the setting sun.

"Bevin, do you think it would actually be possible for somebody to do something when I tell you to?"

When the owner lowered his hand, he froze. His entire staff, fourteen people, were dead, executed with casual precision around the scrapyard. He saw Bevin among them.

The owner stumbled back, raced inside the office and slammed the door. He turned and leaned heavily against the door. His heart pounded and brought on another coughing fit.

He didn't even notice the two people now in his waiting room. A man and a woman, wearing pristine, unmarked combat armor and holding silenced weapons.

"Hi." The man spoke first. The owner nearly hit the ceiling. He feebly put his hands up and started blubbing.

"You recently acquired salvage of a Retaliator."

The owner didn't speak words, just noises. The man put a bullet through his thigh. He dropped to the ground.

"Yes! Yes!" The owner finally reclaimed the power of speech.

"Who sold it to you?" the man asked as he crossed the room and placed the still hot barrel of the pistol to the owner's temple. "And be specific."

"Came in earlier today. Some old beater of a ship. Two women. Human. Never seen 'em before." The owner keyed something on his mobi. The woman studied the incoming data while the man kept his focus on the owner.

"These two didn't happen to have a lockbox with them, did they?"

"Yeah, I mean, yes. They did," the owner said in between coughs. "Wouldn't sell it."

"These women give a name?"

"Just the reg on the ship."

"Yeah, those are fake," The woman said without looking up from her mobi. The man looked at the owner and sighed.

"Wait —"

Bang. The man stood and wiped blood spatter off the barrel.

"We have anything solid to go on?" he asked finally.

"Just this." She held out her wrist.

There was a security cam still of Mags and Trin sitting in the waiting room. The man looked at them closely. He punched in on one of Trin's Souther Titan tattoos.

"Let's go."

To be continued



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