SAGITTARIUS EYE

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ISSUE 36

FEATURING IN THIS ISSUE:

RAXXLA IN 3307 ▪ TAKING DOWN THARGOIDS ▪ SAUD KRUGER ORCA
IMPERIAL CUTTER ▪ WOT I FLY ▪ CO-PAWLOTS

SAGITTARIUS EYE

ISSUE 36

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EDITORIAL

Mack Winston

The galaxy's most enduring mystery is undoubtedly the legend of Raxxla. It has spawned all kinds of conjecture over the centuries, some of which has been exhaustively covered by this publication in past issues. This month, we take a look at what Raxxla is believed to be, and investigate some of the principal adherents to the legend. All of them court controversy, and in many cases these conspiracy-minded organisations are written off by most of the galaxy as nothing more than groups of crackpot cultists. As ever, history repeats itself. Cults, mysteries, myths and conspiracies grow with great tenacity, despite the relentless march of our technology and our ever-increasing understanding of the universe.

Turning to technology, there has been some consternation in the pilot community about software changes in the Pilots' Federation upcoming Odyssey release. Controversially, the software changed the handling of the SRV that was so loved by the racing community, and we're delighted to report that the Pilots' Federation listened to the feedback, rolled back the changes, and have assured us that we will be able to continue to drive the SRV as we did before. Similarly, there are also concerns that changes are being made to the functions available on the galaxy map which will make certain kinds of exploration impossible. The alpha version of the new software does not allow a pilot to select a star system without creating a route to it. As the router assumes full fuel, and applies the penalty of a full fuel mass, it makes it impossible to jump to stars with specially calculated fuel loads, making endeavours such as the epic journey of the *Endurance*, which we covered in SAGI #28, impossible. While we applaud the Pilots' Federation for rolling back the SRV changes, we urge them to ensure no galactic mapping functionality is removed. Hopefully, by the time we go to print, this matter will be settled.

Photo: _pSyren_Farseer_

CORRECTION

Last issue we reported that The Protectors, a pilot faction in the Coalsack Nebula, were struggling against what they saw as Alliance tyranny (Issue 35, *Stations You Haven't Visited: Bering Port*). The Protectors are in fact now supporters of and working with the Alliance. Sorry.

CONTENTS

ISSUE 36

EXPLORATION

08

Raxxla in 3307:
the search continues

INTERVIEW

14

How do they do it?
Taking down Thargoids with the AXI

FEATURE

24

Co-pawlots:
Jose

Photo: _pSyren_Farseer

26

SHIPS

The Saud Kruger Orca:
underrated and underutilised

30

SHIPS

Basking shark:
the Imperial Cutter

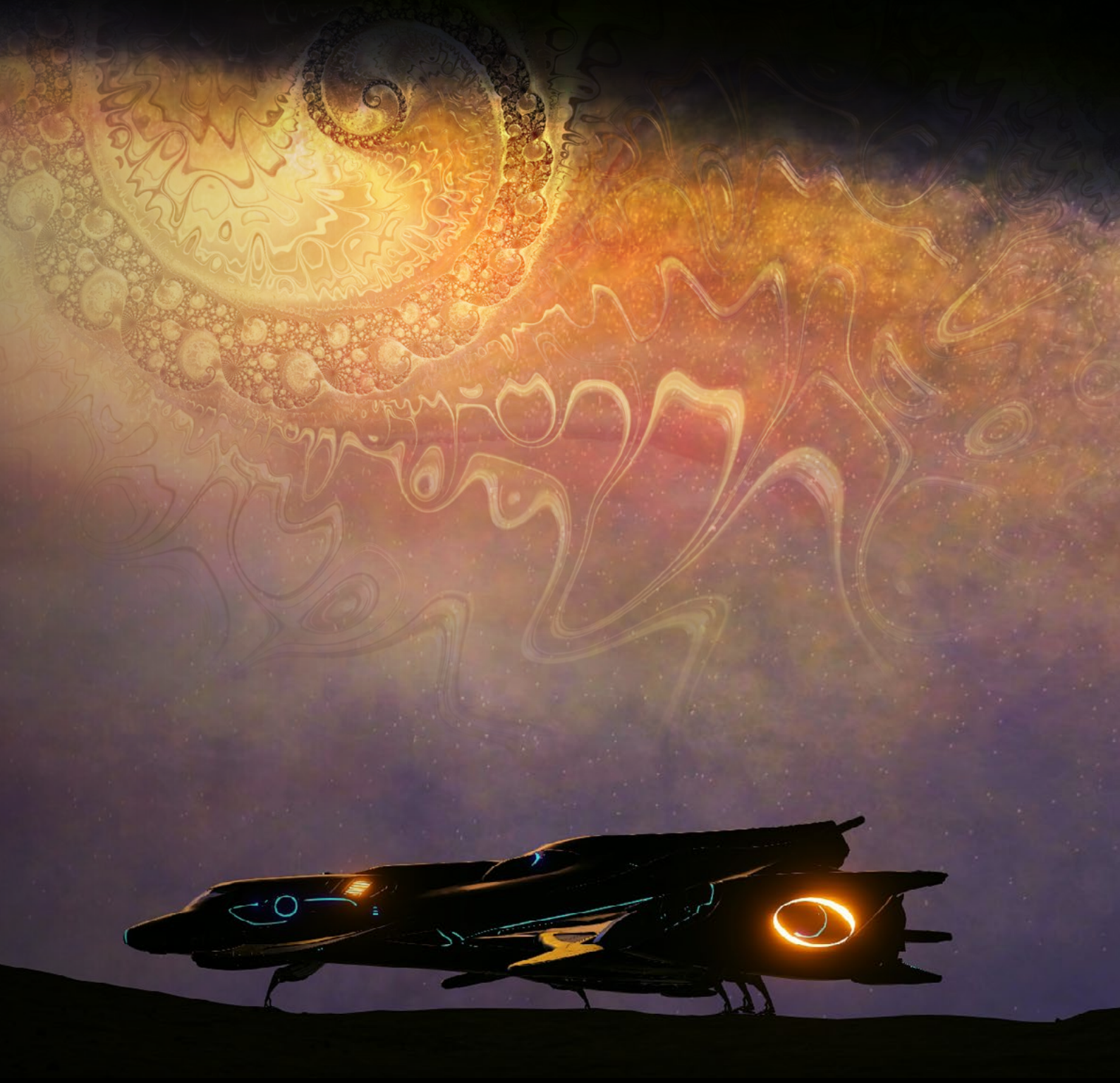
38

SHIPS

Wot I fly:
Arf

RAXXLA IN 3307: THE SEARCH CONTINUES

The legend of Raxxla has captured the public's imagination since as early as 2296, and intrepid explorers still search for it. Every starport has a believer who will be happy to tell you their version of the legend — whether you want to hear it or not. While it is a famous story, many are unaware of all that it entails — and the lengths that groups have gone to search for it. Many wonder how much closer we are to finding it, just over a thousand years since its first written mention.



While there are many different stories about what Raxxla is, the general consensus is that it is the location of a device with incredible power. 'Raxxla hunters' claim that this device, known as the Omphalos Rift, is a gateway to other universes or galaxies.

While this is the most popular story, it is also perhaps the most unlikely. The legend of a mystical device with the power to open gateways to other dimensions is incredibly similar to one of a children's story, *Princess Astrophel and the Swirling Stars*. This may be one of the reasons why Raxxla is so widely considered to be a myth; however, believers contend that the author had special knowledge of Raxxla and included clues for other adherents.

It is truly fascinating how popular this legend is. While often scorned, as it was in its first recorded reference in 2296, every explorer this writer has spoken to has revealed that they looked for Raxxla at least once. In fact, every starport has someone proclaiming their belief in Raxxla to anyone who will listen.

Interview with a Raxxla hunter

Commander X8785 is one such self-professed "loyal servant to the Far God". We interviewed him in the Coriolis station Salk Hub in the Flousop system. It was not difficult to find him, given that he was passing around flyers with dozens of variations of the same image, yelling about how it was "the Face of the Hive Queen".

You said you're a loyal servant to the Far God. Who are they?

The Far God is the all-knowing power that is responsible for our existence. The Queen is our saviour. The Far God is the Thargoid Queen, my Queen. However it's my belief that the way to Raxxla is to stop attacking the Thargoids and to seek salvation. In the bases — I call them hive chapels — is where I had this revelation. I spend most of my time in them and that's where I noticed her in the dark. In the shadows was my Queen. She greeted me. Only when I chose to believe could I see her.

What do you think Raxxla is?

It's a device, gateway, or planet, or maybe all three, that leads to another dimension or galaxy. I think my Queen wants us to see that human nature — xenophobic tendencies — are the true threat to all life. At the same time I think we have a choice, but from what I found I think she is telling us something.

Do you worship all Thargoids, or just the Queen?

They all are one with my Queen so I don't attack my Thargoid kin, but I only see the Queen as divine. The different Thargoids seem to have ranks, so I view them as servants. But that does not mean they are worthless. Just like we are servants to our own powers in the Bubble. Gathering resources, fighting, dying, and killing for a central power or figure.

What do you believe that you have discovered, and is this your greatest discovery so far?

> **We need to start acting like ancient archaeologists and treat the Thargoid bases like pyramids, full of clues.**

I believe I have seen the face of the Queen in a Thargoid structure, and have a couple of different theories. Maybe it's a clue to Raxxla. Maybe it's a doorway to the Thargoid homeworld. Maybe it's a puzzle piece. Maybe we need to get four commanders to activate four different Thargoid bases at the same time, or the whole community to activate the 200+ bases. We need to start acting like ancient archaeologists and treat the Thargoid bases like pyramids, full of clues.

What do you have to say to people who doubt the existence of Raxxla and consider the worship of the Queen a cult?

What would I say? I would say believe. Just believe. The galaxy, the entire universe is incredible. Don't restrict yourself to what seems possible and what can be proven. Believe in Raxxla.

Although your correspondent did not believe a word that X8785 said, his was certainly a useful perspective that will hopefully be helpful to readers new to the legend of Raxxla. The Hive Queen that X8785 spoke of is worshipped by the Far God cult, which made news a few years ago during the height of the Thargoid war. Many of their hive chapels were destroyed and the members of the cult were severely persecuted. Even now the Far God cult has a bad reputation, often being accused of siding with the enemy. More on them below.

Clues to Raxxla

Many explorers, including the commander we interviewed, eventually decide that they've found 'it': the clue that will lead them to Raxxla. While no definitive evidence has truly been found, there are several common rumours that some hunters swear by and use to guide their expeditions.

The first rumour is that a commander jumped into the system, scanned, and then jumped out. This is one of the most pervasive and least reliable rumours out there, and boils down to half-remembered quotes that nobody seems able to verify.

The second rumour is a bit more credible, although no more evidence-based. It claims that the system containing Raxxla is within the range of an unmodified Cobra Mk III. This makes a bit more sense: given that it would have to have been discovered by someone hundreds of years ago with limited access to technology, it follows that Raxxla wouldn't be at the sorts of extreme distances that explorers routinely reach today. However, there is still no real evidence to support this.

The third is a collection of different stories, concerning all manner of things from the Formidine Rift to the Delphi system. Essentially, whenever there is something unexplained or strange, someone will leap up and shout "Raxxla!" While there are interesting connections between many mysteries and the Raxxla legend, nothing substantial has been found. Even a Raxxla hunter admitted to us that "the list of what we know is quite short."

Organisations associated with Raxxla

There are too many organisations with connections to Raxxla to cover in depth in this article, so we will just go over the big ones: the Far God cult, the Children of Raxxla, and the Dark Wheel.

The Far God cult is persecuted for supporting the Thargoids even as the death toll from the human-Thargoid war reaches well into the millions. It is one of the most well-known groups associated with the Raxxla legend. As explained by X8785, the Cult believes that the Far God will lead it to Raxxla. Their beliefs are understandably attacked by those who have lost loved ones to the Thargoid swarm.

The Children of Raxxla were led by Commander Salomé, a controversial figure who was framed for the attempted assasination of Denton Patreus. It is the largest Pilots' Federation group dedicated to the search for Raxxla. They were the main investigators of the Formidine Rift mystery in 3302, which is now believed by many to be completely unrelated to Raxxla. They also helped harbour Salomé, who died attempting to expose the Club to the galaxy. For readers who aren't aware, the Club is a secret organisation believed by many, including this reporter, to actively interfere with galactic affairs. Ever since Salomé's death, exposing them has been the Children of Raxxla's main mission.

The Dark Wheel is the most legendary of Raxxla hunting groups. The version that exists in 3307 and operates out of Shinrarta Dezhra is derided by Raxxla hunters, who claim that they are not the 'real' Dark Wheel of legend. The 'real' Dark Wheel is said to orbit the eighth moon of a mysterious gas giant. While, according to the legends, they never found Raxxla, they did find a world named Soontill which was full of Thargoid treasures (some of which can be found in the Ngurii system). Nevertheless, Shinrarta Dezhra's Dark Wheel is supported by many; including the Pilots' Federation initiative Turning the Wheel, which maintains that the group holds the key to Raxxla's whereabouts.

If it's out there, why hasn't anyone found it yet?

Criticism of the legend

For as many believers as the legend has, there are just as many detractors. One commonly heard argument is: "If it's out there, why hasn't anyone found it yet?" Secrets don't stay secrets for hundreds of years once they are revealed to exist. However, Raxxla hunters often respond along the lines of: "Someone has found it, they just haven't told anyone."

Another commonly-made point is that after hundreds of years of searching, there is still not a single strand of evidence or verifiable clue pointing towards the existence of Raxxla. Even the most popular version is incredibly similar to the plot of a children's book. These too are reasonable arguments. It seems to boil down to faith; after all these years, you have to either believe or not. If someone truly believes, with no evidence, there is no convincing them otherwise. By the same token, if someone doubts the legend they will never come to believe it.

Although this reporter thinks that the legend of Raxxla is just a conspiracy theory, there *are* some serious unanswered questions. For example, whenever the hunters find a promising lead, why does it always point to a permit-locked system? Part of it could be that some hunters will find a permit-locked system and simply make up clues claiming that they are connected; but this writer has read some very interesting and persuasive reports on mysteries related to permit-locked systems.

While there is arguably no real merit to the stories of Raxxla, there must be *something* out there. Something huge. So many have died on the trail to Raxxla, so many more have disappeared, that there must be *something* that the superpowers, or the Pilots' Federation, or perhaps even the mysterious Club don't want us to find.

It is likely that we will never know whether Raxxla exists. But the galaxy is huge and has many mysteries waiting to be discovered just beneath the surface. Every day there is a new discovery: from a black hole to a secret Imperial prison for Neo-Marlinists. Who knows what we will find next? Keep searching, commanders, and fly safe.

RAXXLA IN 3307: THE SEARCH CONTINUES
WORDS RENDAK SORO PHOTOGRAPHY _PSYREN_FARSEER, ZEROAXIS DESIGN LEXMOLOCH
THANKS TO X8785

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

TAKING DOWN THARGOIDS WITH THE AXI

In Issue 35 we covered the history of the Thargoid conflict and the emergence of the Anti-Xeno Initiative. This month, we delve into their (frankly frightening) achievement ranks, and the secrets to achieving them.

Led by Commander Gluttony Fang since November 3303, the Anti-Xeno Initiative (AXI) remains the largest fleet of commanders dedicated to keeping the Thargoids in check. They sometimes defend against full-scale assaults on multiple fronts, as on New Year's Eve of 3306. Their community awards particularly impressive anti-xeno feats with special awards and accolades — feats which are absolutely staggering to those unfamiliar with the AXI's tactics.

In this issue we take a look at some of these achievements, as well as speak to some of the AXI's top pilots to find out how they do it.

The ranks

AXI uses accolades to incite friendly competition between its commanders, challenging them to improve.

By avoiding damage during an engagement altogether, one can earn the **100% Club** accolade. To earn this, on-board footage of a pilot killing a Basilisk or a harder variant without using limpets must be provided. Similarly, **Soaring Sleipnir** (appropriately themed after Odin's steed) requires a pilot to solo a Medusa or harder without a heads-up display, or even from a camera drone if one dares. These ranks — along with **Apollo's Wrath** and **Sole Survivor** for defeating a Cyclops and Basilisk alone respectively — are among the first a pilot can expect to earn on the front lines. The top-ranked pilots say these milestones were difficult at the time.

> *"The hardest award for me to earn was 'Herculean Conqueror': killing a Hydra solo. I believe when someone has mastered the techniques needed to solo a Hydra, all challenges become more achievable."*
> - Gluttony Fang

An AXI pilot can achieve many ranks depending on difficulty, situation, environment, and whether or not they were flying solo during the fight. At the time of writing there are nine standard ranks, five of which must be completed alone. In addition, there are eight 'challenge' ranks, like the aforementioned **100% Club** and **Soaring Sleipnir**, and five of them explicitly state they must be earned by a solo pilot. **Annihilator** is arguably one of the most difficult to achieve, requiring a pilot to "complete a full run of an AX conflict zone solo, including killing the Hydra." In a wing of three others, this correspondent took an average of two and a half hours to complete a full AX conflict zone run (doing it as part of a wing like this earns the **Defender** rank), usually requiring a repair and rearm in between waves. For the lone pilot looking to achieve this, a repair and rearm trip is not possible.

This show of stamina clearly demonstrates the incredible skill and patience the AXI pilots have built up over their careers. One wrong move, or running out of one synthesis material, can result in an early demise. Of the many commanders who've tried, only about 100 have endured the many hours of onslaught and emerged to tell the tale.

Thargoids generally behave very predictably, allowing the trained eye to anticipate their moves.

The AX conflict zone is currently the only way to engage in a fight with multiple Interceptors at once

THE AXI'S PROGRESSION RANKS

QUADRIVIAL VESTIGE
Teamwork makes the dream work.

Kill any Interceptor variant in a wing of three or four people.

CYCLOPEAN DUO
Low start, high goals.

Kill a Cyclops variant Interceptor in a wing of exactly two people.

APOLLO'S WRATH
The first step towards mastery of AX combat.

Kill a Cyclops variant Interceptor solo.

TWAIN TALONS
The first proper challenge for a wing.

Kill a Basilisk variant Interceptor in a wing of exactly two people.

SOLE SURVIVOR
A major step up in difficulty.

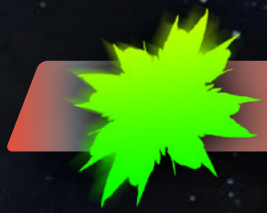
Kill a Basilisk variant Interceptor solo.

OSSIFIED DYAD
Less is also not always more.

Kill a Medusa variant Interceptor in a wing of exactly two people.

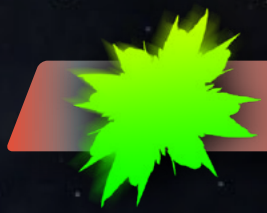
SERPENT'S NEMESIS
The penultimate step towards mastery of solo AX combat.

Kill a Medusa variant Interceptor solo.



HERCULEAN WARRIOR
Getting closer to the top.

Kill a Hydra variant Interceptor in a wing of exactly two people.



HERCULEAN CONQUEROR
Not for the faint of heart.

Kill a Hydra variant Interceptor solo.

THE AXI'S NOTORIOUS CHALLENGE RANKS

ACE

For those who go beyond. Based on the Vanguard system, every point earned beyond the ship requirement goes towards the Ace Leaderboard. The top ten commanders on this leaderboard will hold the 'Ace' rank. This is a competitive system; you can lose this rank should someone push you out of the top ten.

CADUCEUS' GLINT

Achieving peak performance, awarded to the top pilot of each speedrunning leaderboard category (Small, Medium, Large / Basilisk, Medusa, Hydra)

SNAKE EATER

Doing it the old way. Kill a Basilisk (or harder) variant Interceptor solo, without using any guardian technology. No Gauss, no guardian module reinforcements, no nothing. Use of ship-launched fighters, advanced multi-cannons/missiles, and standard/premium synthesis is also prohibited.

SOARING SLEIPNIR

Lose the heads-up display (HUD), gain skill. Kill a Medusa (or harder) variant Interceptor solo, with your ship's HUD turned off or using the external camera throughout the entire fight.

100% CLUB

Float like a butterfly, sting like a Gauss cannon. Kill a Basilisk (or harder) variant Interceptor solo, without taking any damage (your ship's user interface has to show 100% integrity). Use of repair and decontamination limpets is forbidden.

VANGUARD

For those who push the boundaries of the possible. Refine your skills to near perfection and achieve a kill fit for the Vanguard Scoring System. This will require you to choose a ship and kill enough Thargoids in a single fight to earn a score equal to, or greater than, the requirement for that specific ship. To be considered, your kill must be submitted through a special form.

MYRMIDON

Fast and furious, awarded to pilots who can achieve a solo Medusa kill in under one of the following time requirements: twenty-four minutes in a small ship, twelve minutes in a medium ship, six minutes in a large ship.

Intelligence-gathering is a process of trial and error.

without setup, which typically necessitates the assistance of another commander. Clearing one alone is a formidable achievement. Requiring extreme rigour and a battle-hardened will, taking on this extraordinary challenge will test if one has the skills necessary to earn **Vanguard** status, denoted as "For those who push the boundaries of the possible". Just being eligible for this requires the achievement of four other ranks.

So how do AXI veterans win fights solo? By taking any advantages they can get and knowing exactly when to use them. An anti-xeno pilot needs a sharp eye and a quick mind to take on a Thargoid, especially when flying solo. This comes down to two things: knowledge, and practice. First, knowledge.

The importance of information

Given the technological edge Thargoids have over humankind when it comes to communication and organisation — for instance, trailing humans in witch-space and 'hyperdicting' them at will — you may wonder how it's possible to achieve victory at all. The Thargoid Interceptor, the most dangerous alien threat yet faced, is far more lethal than a Thargoid Scout and stronger than any single ship built by humanity. Even megaships have succumbed to the might of Interceptors — not that more than one is needed to devastate a human spacecraft. Moreover they are extremely resilient, even against humanity's more powerful weapons, as their hull regeneration and armour toughness make conventional weapons nearly useless against them.

The solution? Intel.

> *"The Thargoids utilise a hive-mind-like social structure where individualism likely does not exist — at least nowhere to the extent of human civilisation. Therefore they will likely never develop policies similar to those humans might conceive, since they are incapable of being empathetic to those not in their hive-mind or one like it."*
> - Gluttony Fang

Key to many monumental turnarounds in warfare, military intelligence ('intel') and its manipulation remain among mankind's greatest tools. Intelligence-gathering is a process of trial and error. Just as nearly any ciphertext is decipherable, given time, even the most cryptic and inscrutable enemy can be understood.

Over the years, the AXI have observed how Thargoid Interceptors behave and devised numerous tactics to counter them: strategies based largely on pattern recognition. From the loss of the first heart always resulting in a lightning attack if the Interceptor can detect the attacker, to how they emit a shutdown field after the second-to-last heart is destroyed (referred to as a 'heart attack'), Thargoids exhibit predictable behaviours which can be learned.

One of their greatest weaknesses, for such powerful biomechanical creatures, is their inherent blindness outside the infra-red range; a sensor array limitation which anti-xeno pilots regularly exploit to avoid detection by 'going cold'. Their other big weakness is that Interceptors generally behave very predictably, allowing the trained eye to anticipate their moves and determine the best next action — which can be a deciding factor in who dies and who doesn't.

Making our own advantages

Once you've learned the Thargoids' patterns and know what they are and aren't capable of — as well as what your ship is capable of — it's time to put that knowledge to use. The AXI have devised several ingenious tactics for beating the bugs.

Out of Lakon's range of ships purpose-built for Thargoid combat, the Chieftain is the preferred model — next to the equally-capable Krait Mk II — and can be potent in the right hands. In the cockpit of the Alliance Chieftain, AXI commanders outmanoeuvre aliens in open space using a technique called 'cold orbiting'.

A Thargoid's main cannon cannot reliably target a ship below 20% heat and with sufficient lateral velocity — ie sufficient speed perpendicular to the direction the Thargoid is facing (and keep in mind it will always try to match your orbital plane). Constant adjustments and mastery of manoeuvring with flight assist off are necessary to counter this.

> *"Cold orbiting will allow you to face even the toughest of Thargoid Interceptors and emerge victorious... Interceptors cannot effectively track a target that is cold and has a high lateral velocity."*
> - Katie Byrne, AXI

A commander with some experience in large ship combat could very well take on a Cyclops and win through brute force, but a level of precision is still required, as a combatant must first exert the heart and then destroy it while the Interceptor's regenerative capabilities are limited. This is the only way to inflict permanent damage to an Interceptor; for this, Guardian gauss cannons are the weapon of choice, offering both high damage per second and hitscan precision for targeting the relatively small individual hearts.

Moving up from the Cyclops, the easiest Thargoid ship to take down (apart from Scouts) is likely the Basilisk, with more hearts and 530 metres per second max speed. This boost in top speed is an outlier among the current lineup of Interceptors: the Medusa and Hydra have more hearts, health, and strength, but the same top speed as the Cyclops (450 m/s). However, this trend is non-linear. The Hydra is *much* harder to take down than the Medusa, especially solo. Nonetheless, all of them are killable — given enough time.

As the top AXI pilots know well, resource management is a necessity for synthesising ammunition when fighting solo or in long engagements of any kind. Even if a commander lands every shot at the optimal distance, killing a Hydra requires a minimum of three basic reloads-worth of shots (plus the initial supply). Although the gauss cannons do a lot of damage (and hence are the favoured weapon among anti-xeno combatants), Thargoid resilience is still much greater than that of any human ship.

Waiting out the Interceptor's shield, which eventually decays over time, is a favoured tactic among veterans after a heart is destroyed, and many use at least one thermally-vented beam laser to speed up the degradation. This saves on ammo and allows one to stay within the three kilometre 'sphere of death', as Katie Byrne refers to it, with cold orbiting.

The best pilots will even bait out a lightning attack to delay shield generation if they so desire. Ramming is even a valid tactic for exerting a heart, and it has its place among the numerous strategies one can learn.

A Thargoid Interceptor's main cannon cannot reliably target a ship below 20% heat and with sufficient lateral velocity.

ANTI-XENO CONFLICT ZONE-SPECIFIC RANKS

EXTERMINATOR
One man army.

Complete a run of an AX conflict zone, excluding the Hydra at the end, alone. Leaving for refuel/repair/restock is prohibited.

DEFENDER
Protecting the innocent.

Complete a full run of an AX conflict zone, from beginning to end, including killing the Hydra at the end, in a wing of up to four people. Leaving for refuel/repair/restock is allowed, as long as you are in the instance for all of the progression milestones.

ANNIHILATOR
You gotta be kidding me.

Complete a full run of an AX conflict zone solo, including killing the Hydra at the end.

HARDPOINT 04

It is even possible to sustain no damage at all through cold orbiting, as a Thargon swarm *can* be outmanoeuvred or simply destroyed from a distance. Katie Byrne, who prefers the Chieftain for its agility, regularly employs two thermal vent beam lasers, forgoing the utility of a flak cannon entirely. She has killed three Hydras in a row without using flak, which illustrates how uniquely tailored each ship is to its veteran pilot's combat style. Gluttony Fang, for example, has two styles of combat: one involving more conventional methods, taking more fire in the process (referred to as 'slugging it out' by many); and the other with consistent shieldless cold orbiting and usage of bypass mechanics.

"I fight as a sort of 'brawler,'" Cmdr Darth_Vader told us. "I regularly use my Federal Corvette in combat, which has a lower speed but higher hull strength since I run shieldless — despite what our repository recommends — meaning I fly very close to the 'goids and therefore am prone to lightning attacks, but the Corvette can tank it well."

We asked a couple of the AXI's top pilots what the single hardest thing about AX solo combat is.

> *"Patience. No matter how skilled or practised an AX pilot is, knowing how to recover from an inevitable setback in the middle of combat is essential to emerging victorious."*
> - Gluttony Fang

> *"Situational awareness. In AX combat you have to complete multiple tasks concurrently — like synthesising, rebooting, orbiting, repairing, etc — and if you are not aware of where the Interceptor or swarm is and what state they are in at all times, then you waste precious time and reduce your chance of victory."*
> - Darth_Vader

They're doing their part

AXI pilots continually use pattern recognition and efficient strategy, which has allowed them to emerge victorious over countless encounters with Thargoids — from cold orbiting and 'burning off' caustic damage, to keeping a Thargoid shield down by inducing a lightning attack.

As an organisation with years of experience in xeno-slaying, the AXI is short of expert pilots who have honed their craft. It's a great place to learn and improve AX combat, and their knowledge base is an extensive resource for all pilots — including raw data, guides, tactics, and more. If you think you've got what it takes, they invite you to seek them out.

AXI uses accolades to incite friendly competition between its commanders, challenging them to improve.

Co-Pawlots

COMMANDER NAME ORANGEPHEONIX

CO-PAWLOT NAME JOSE

> **I often flew with one hand as I was forced to give her much-loved belly rubs.**

Josephine was affectionately known as 'Jose'. She was a rescue cat, discovered in a plastic bag and finding her forever home in OrangePheonix's ship's cockpit. She lived to the ripe old age of eighteen and was a fully active in-ship cat, right up to the end.

"Jose was a cat with attitude," OrangePheonix said. "She would not tolerate any other animal. Despite being small in size, she would furiously scare off dogs four times larger than her. She loved spicy foods like chilli, curry and her favourite: tandoori chicken. She refused to eat wet cat food.

"Jose would always lie beside me during my late-night flying, but demanded that I put her cover out beside me before lying down. She absolutely adored hyperspace and often stared out the canopy as we traversed witchspace.

"I often flew with one hand as I was forced to give her much-loved belly rubs. This affection made her stare off into space as she clawed the air. Often when she wanted attention, she would beeline to the joystick and rub her head on it, knowing I would give her a clap to keep us from crashing.

"Jose was with me in nearly all my explorations and has seen most of the best spots in the galaxy first-hand. Her favourite phenomena were neutron stars.

"She was a much loved member of our family and we are all very heartbroken with her sudden loss."

If you have a co-pawlot you'd like to share with the galaxy, let us know: editor@sagittarius-eye.com.

CO-PAWLOTS
DESIGN MCNICHOLL THANKS TO ORANGEPHEONIX

WHEN YOU NEED TO FLY
BUT YOU WANT TO DREAM
NOTHING COMPARES

Art: ToCoSo

GUTAMAYA

IMPERIAL COURIER

THE SAUD KRUGER ORCA

UNDERRATED AND UNDERUTILISED

If comfort is what you're looking for, then Saud Kruger has delivered.

Agility, speed, flashiness — given this cursory description, what ship comes to mind? We'd bet it's not a passenger liner, much less one with a large hull.

The Orca, engineered and manufactured by Saud Kruger, is known for its elegant, stylised design and, like other Saud Kruger passenger liner models, has a reputation for form over all else. While this may be true in some regard, the Orca is proficient in much more than simply hauling wealthy passengers around the Milky Way. Those who shrug off this vessel as "just another cruise ship" would be remiss. We're here to take a look at what the Orca truly is capable of.

Let's first examine the attribute that initially defines not only the Orca, but all Saud Kruger vessels — and that, of course, is luxurious design. Much like the Gutamaya designs, Saud Kruger vessels (and the Orca in particular) emit an aura of 'spare no expense'. From the clean lines, soft curves and massive viewing windows, the Orca appears as a cross between a passenger liner and a five-star hotel in space. Polished metal inlets, sleek framing and glossy paneling adorn the entirety of the vessel, giving it a heavily stylised appearance.

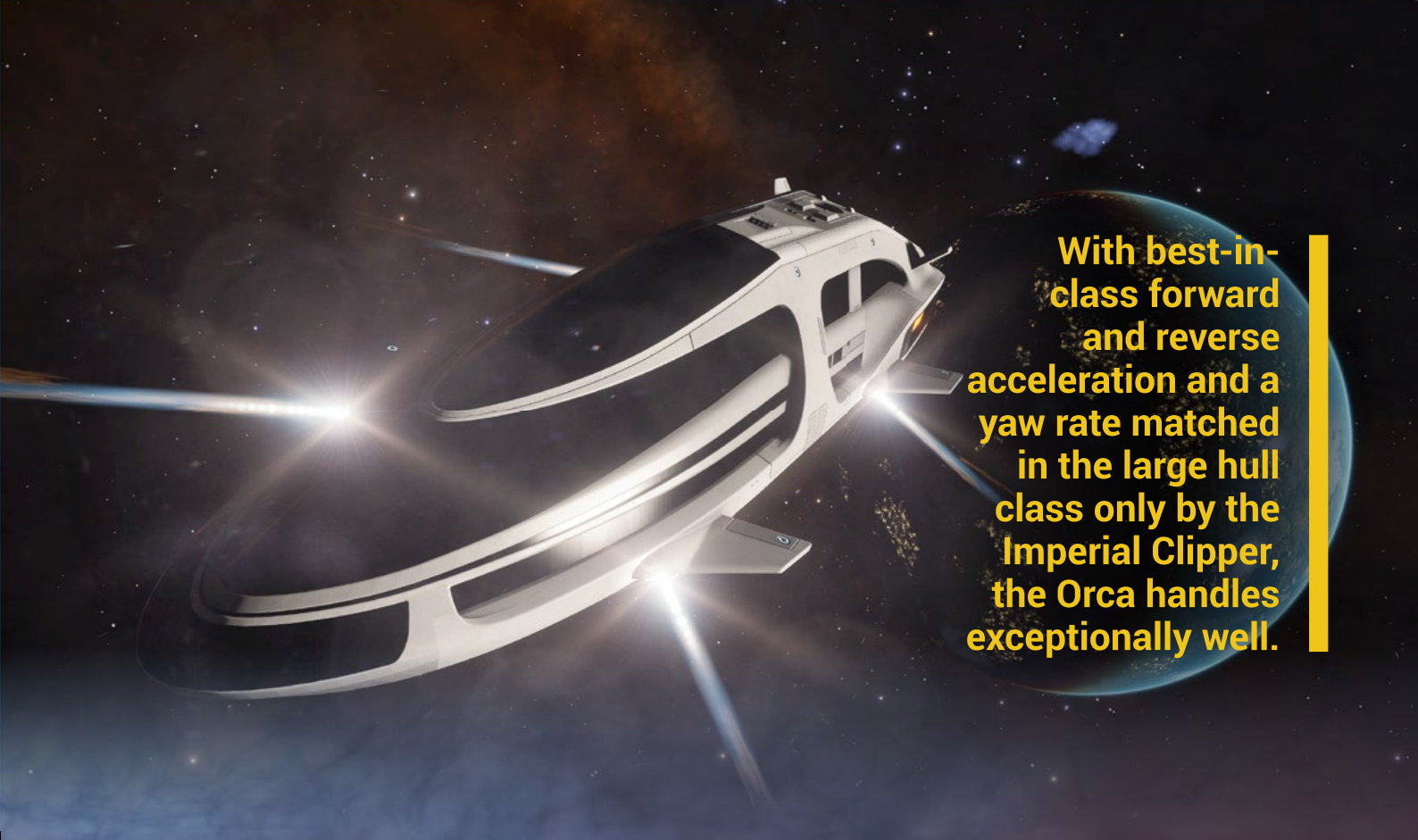
The Orca's interior continues along these lines, with polished flooring and curved walls with lucent recesses. It embraces clean curves and posh low-lighting. Even the pilot's dash is a smooth array of curved panelling and gently-lit recesses. If comfort is what you're looking for, then Saud Kruger has delivered. Even the famed Gutamaya designers could learn a thing or two from the Orca's interior. A commander could ask for no more easement when out exploring in the black, gliding across planetary surfaces, or simply taxiing across the bubble.

On first glance at the Orca manoeuvrability is not something that springs to mind, but the Orca is actually incredibly nimble — especially for its size. With best-in-class forward and reverse acceleration and a yaw rate matched in the large hull class only by the Imperial Clipper, the Orca handles exceptionally well. On paper, it even outclasses many medium-sized ships in raw agility.

The Orca's only weakness when it comes to manoeuvring is the fact that it is a tad drifty. This is mostly due to its relatively low thruster acceleration rate paired with high mass. The Orca's drifty nature, though, can be completely overcome with smart cargo scoop boosting alongside proper lateral and vertical thruster control. This is aided by the fact that a fully-engineered Orca is capable of perma-boosting; that is, being able (with full pips to engines) to repeatedly boost and never fully drain the engine capacitor. Perma-boosting, if properly utilised, can virtually negate drift and keep the Orca precisely on course.

Breakneck speed is another quality that might not immediately come to mind when the average pilot considers the Orca. However, this ship is anything but slow. Clocking in at a whopping top speed of 642 meters per second (with fully-engineered grade 5 dirty drag drives), the Orca absolutely screams — all while maintaining an almost unfair amount of mass overhead. This, paired with its excellent manoeuvrability, makes the Orca arguably the best large hull for forays into the territory of extreme piloting. Hooning through canyons and around stations and outposts is not only possible, but actually quite easy. With its large mass, the Orca's snappy controls are naturally dampened to provide smooth and predictable attitude and directional changes. The "seatbelt ding" (as it is commonly known) when a boost is engaged only adds to the beguilement and thrill.

If speed and agility aren't enough, it is also worth noting that the Orca has all the makings of a luxurious exploration vessel. When engineered, the Orca can attain a jump range of well over 50 light years, more than enough for the dedicated explorer to cruise the Milky Way. In addition, the Orca is roomy enough to accommodate all sorts of engineering additions, including all the tools a commander might need out in the black.



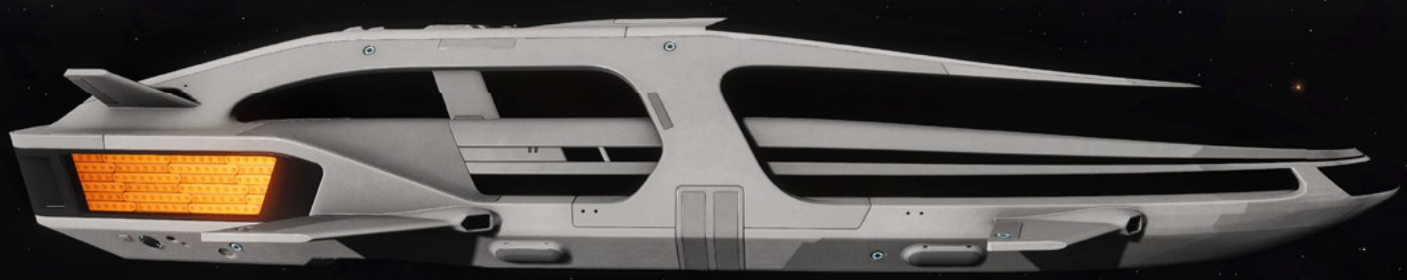
With best-in-class forward and reverse acceleration and a yaw rate matched in the large hull class only by the Imperial Clipper, the Orca handles exceptionally well.

If the Orca has a weakness, it is diversity in combat. Carrying only one large and two medium hardpoints, the Orca has a limited firepower capacity. These hardpoints, though, do have excellent placement on the belly of the hull, with exceptional convergence.

The Orca's real and specifically viable combat role comes in the form of ramming. With its incredible speed and numerous internal compartments, the Orca can be kitted out with incredible shielding and hull reinforcements, and be quite literally used as a battering ram. This combat tactic, when paired with strategically beneficial weapons, can make the Orca much more deadly than one might suppose. Those who underestimate a skilled combatant piloting this vessel may quickly find themselves in dire straits.

Finally, we must address the use-case that the Orca was originally designed for — ferrying passengers. The Orca's big brother, the Beluga Liner, is commonly touted as one of the premier passenger haulers. We would point out that though the Orca absolutely cannot haul as many passengers, it can haul them faster and farther, being capable of a much higher jump range than the Beluga, in addition to being vastly more nimble and arguably more fun to pilot. The Orca is also an excellent compromise in terms of passenger capacity versus agility for use in station rescue operations. The Orca can quickly and efficiently get in and out of a burning station, while the Beluga is a liability that can easily get stuck in the mail slot.

The Orca is a unique hull with a sleek style that sets it apart even from its sisters, the Dolphin and the Beluga. Though somewhat drifty, the Orca is impressively quick and great fun to pilot. Its capabilities extend much further than most commanders might realise, and it can perform a multitude of tasks — not only effectively, but impressively. We at *Sagittarius Eye* highly recommend you give the Orca a chance — and possibly some engineering attention. You may just find a new love.



BASKING SHARK

THE IMPERIAL CUTTER

This month, we get fully acquainted with one of the biggest and most glamorous vessels available to pilots: the Imperial Cutter from Gutamaya. One of the 'Big Three' — the Anaconda and Corvette being the other two — how does this ship hold up?

The Empire is renowned for its showiness. Say what you might about the Duval dynasty, there is no denying it: they know exactly where the line between classy glamour and vulgar ostentatiousness lies, and go right up to that line without ever making the error of crossing over it. Gutamaya are no different in this respect. They know how to be stylish without being crass, and at the same time, build a solid, functional ship — or so their smooth marketing people would have us believe.

Gutamaya began marketing the Imperial Cutter relatively recently, on December 15th 3301. When pictures of the ship were first released it received a lukewarm reception from pilots, who largely were of the opinion that it was just a slightly scaled up Clipper. This notion was quickly dispelled once commanders could get their hands on one, and see the ship first hand. Only select commanders, of course; from launch and to this day, only wealthy pilots who have reached the rank of Duke with the Imperial Navy may buy one.

The big question: given the amount of effort required to not only reach Duke but also earn the billion credits or so to actually fit out the ship in a way that makes it truly shine, is it worth it?

Day trading

A little-known fact is that the Cutter was internally codenamed the 'Imperial Trader' before receiving its final name, and this is indeed a fitting description of the ship, at the time of writing having the largest cargo capacity of any ship available to Pilots' Federation members. It has slightly more cargo capacity than Lakon's big trader, the Type-9 Heavy, with a maximum capacity of 794 tonnes versus the Type-9's 790. It would be very easy to argue that, to gain just an extra four tonnes, having to achieve the rank of Duke and spend 214 million credits on the cheapest, most stripped-down Imperial Cutter versus the 82 million credits on the Lakon Type-9 makes Lakon the easy choice. The reality is, though, that no trader wishing to live longer than a day or two flies a shieldless ship full of valuable cargo; to do so is to not fly a ship, but to fly the coffin in which you'll be cremated. The trader is going to want strong shields and a strong hull.

This is where the Cutter really shows its strength. Without sacrificing any cargo space, the trader can fit two class five military modules — that is, shield cell banks, module reinforcement packages and hull reinforcement packages — which can of course be engineered. Immediately, the Cutter has become far stronger than its Lakon competition. The next thing to consider is shields, and the Cutter's defensive capability just continues to race ahead of the Lakon competition. Fitting a basic A-rated class six shield to the Cutter will give it 438 megajoules (MJ) of absolute shield protection, while the same-sized shield generator in Lakon's Type-9 will only give 206MJ — less than half the amount.

Shield and hull strength are not the only consideration of the commander who doesn't want to be ganked during a Pilots' Federation community goal. Speed also greatly helps when wanting to get away from a ruthless killer. With basic unengineered A-rated thrusters, the Cutter will bravely run away at 364 metres per second (m/s) under boost, while the Lakon Type-9 has to make do with a rather more pedestrian 228m/s boost speed and an altogether rather disappointing 148m/s normal top speed. Engineer the thrusters on the Imperial Cutter, and you can see boost speeds exceeding 500m/s, rapidly leaving the poor Type-9 pilot in the dust with their engineered maximum boost of around 320m/s.

The Cutter gains truly impressive shield strength once engineered, especially if you curry favour with Aisling Duval and obtain a prismatic shield generator. With a class six prismatic and shield boosters, a practical build for trading can easily give almost 1,900MJ of absolute shield strength, while still having utility mounts left over for heatsinks, chaff and point defence. Not to mention the hull, which now has an absolute strength of over 2,500 — giving ample protection in the unlikely event a pirate manages to get the shields down. The Type-9 by comparison musters about 1,000MJ of shields and a little over 2,200 hull points. Of course you could argue that the Type-9 in this configuration is good enough, but the Cutter has one more

ace up its sleeve: mass lock factor.

If interdicted by a pilot with malintent, the trader rarely actually wants to leave the star system they are in, but usually it is a fate they must accept. Jumping to another system ('high waking', as it is colloquially known) is a more or less guaranteed escape mechanism so long as your shields hold and your adversary does not have containment missiles (the feared 'Grom bombs', after their supplier, Yuri Grom). The problem with this escape tactic is that to complete your trade you're going to have to jump back and run the gauntlet all over again. For ships like the Lakon Type-9, the high wake escape is often the only one available due to mass lock factor (MLF). Unfortunately for the Type-9, it has quite a low MLF of just sixteen. It often comes as a surprise to commanders just what will mass lock the Type-9: even a Krait Mk II can do it, and the Krait is a fearsome adversary for the Type-9. The Type-9 owner is forced to jump to another system.

The pilot of the Imperial Cutter, on the other hand, has more options. Not only do they have stronger shields and a more robust hull, and much quicker boost speed, but the only ship that mass locks a Cutter is another Cutter. The cunning trader also has quite a few tricks up their sleeve to prevent chain interdictions, so jumping back into supercruise — with its much shorter FSD charge time — becomes a practical option. You don't have to waste time starting out again from the jump point, and you can get your trade done much more quickly. In addition, the Cutter owner gets to enjoy the sense of schadenfreude that comes from frustrating a would-be pirate or ganker.

The other option the Cutter has which the competition doesn't is an ability to fight back.

The other option the Cutter has which the competition doesn't is an ability to fight back. This writer has often enjoyed watching the shields fail permanently on the pirate who didn't reckon with the reverberating cascade torpedoes fitted to the Cutter's three largest hard points. Long-range super penetrator rail guns are then just a courtesy detail.

Manic miner

Another area where the Imperial Cutter shines is (ironically for such a glamorous ship) mining. Many of the things that make it such a good trading ship also make it an excellent miner.

For the commander who wants to mine their way to a fleet carrier, being able to haul away hundreds of tonnes of refined minerals from the asteroid rings while still having strong shields is what makes this ship so adept at this job. It doesn't hurt that the Cutter has many hard points, so all the various pieces of mining equipment (mining lasers, seismic charge launchers and abrasion blasters) can all be fitted at the same time with no compromises. You can also fit enough collection limpet controllers such that you end up with what looks like a swarm of locusts voraciously devouring the fruits of the asteroid belt.

The Cutter does suffer a little in the asteroid fields from its tendency to 'slide' in turns, with the ever-present risk of ramming an asteroid; but on the other hand, engineered prismatic shields suffice where turning ability fails.

An exploration Cutter may be strong, but it's certainly not immortal.

Basking in deep space

This writer's first experience with the Imperial Cutter was to participate in the four-month, 110,000 light year Minerva Centaurus Expedition. As such, the Cutter was put through its exploration paces on an epic journey.

The Cutter really shines as a trader, but its drawbacks become apparent with exploration. Explorers using large ships tend to use the Anaconda for a very good reason: its enormous jump range. Unfortunately, on this metric, the Cutter compares woefully. A typical exploration fit on the Cutter will get you about 43 light years of jump range, if you want a ship with any level of robustness. The Anaconda, by contrast, will easily jump 64 light years when similarly fitted (and much further still, for the daring commander willing to fly a ship with the hull strength of a wet paper bag).

Any Anaconda owner will tell you that while the ship has excellent jump range, it has very poor supercruise handling. Unfortunately, the Cutter is really no better in this regard. The only real metric on which the Cutter beats the Anaconda is in normal-space handling, with its stronger thrusters. This does help with survivability in cases where a pilot has misjudged their descent rate and needs a quick boost to avoid an excessively heavy landing… Although it did not prevent this writer from taking the Remlok Ride of Shame one time after misjudging a landing on the return leg of Distant Worlds 2. An exploration Cutter may be strong, but it's certainly not immortal.

Of course, the Cutter has style in spades, so if you want to show off to your fellow explorers, photographs of an Imperial Cutter in front of things is certainly a change from an Asp in front of things. However, the Cutter has strong competition on that point. Saud Kruger's Beluga Liner is arguably every bit as comfortable as the Cutter, and every bit as glamorous; and not only that, the Beluga can jump further and handles markedly better in supercruise. What may give the Cutter the edge in this regard is its better ability to shed heat, and the class eight fuel scoop reducing the time required lingering close to a star's exclusion zone. Perhaps this advantage is why slightly more commanders flew an Imperial Cutter on the Distant Worlds 2 expedition compared to the Beluga, with some 312 Cutters in the fleet versus 276 Belugas. Of course, both were thoroughly eclipsed by the almost 4,000 Anacondas on the same expedition. Glamour might look good in pictures, but it certainly doesn't help speed your journey to Beagle Point.

The lateral and vertical thrusters are woefully inadequate for such a heavy ship, and this becomes even more apparent with flight assist off.

Cutting down the competition

On the combat side, anyone who has been to a conflict zone involving an Imperial faction could not have failed to notice the presence of one or two Imperial Cutters in the mix. As already noted, the ship can be fitted out with incredibly strong shields and hull, and it's also bristling with hard points, and has great straight line speed. So surely the Cutter will excel in combat?

The answer to this is "not really". The Cutter does alright in combat, but despite looking good on paper, it is hamstrung in two important areas: a Cutter, once it starts going in a certain direction, is very unwilling to change direction; and the convergence on the outermost hard points is terrible. The Cutter's excellent main thruster speed, which as we've noted can easily exceed 500m/s and is certainly the best in class, comes at the expense of thruster strength. The lateral and vertical thrusters are woefully inadequate for such a heavy ship, and this becomes even more apparent with flight assist off. The pitch, yaw and roll rates aren't much to write home about, either. The direct competitor to the Cutter in the combat sphere would be the Federal Corvette, and without a doubt the Corvette wins on all maneuverability metrics with the exception of raw speed.

The scale of difference is easily seen when one compares the numbers: in the throttle 'blue zone' the Cutter will complete 360 degrees of pitch in twenty seconds, but the Corvette will do the same in just under thirteen seconds. In roll, a Cutter will complete a full roll in eight seconds, but the Corvette will do the same in just under five. In lateral thrust, the Cutter has a 0-100 time of just under seventeen seconds, but the Corvette will do the same in just under eleven seconds.

Therefore, it's not entirely surprising that even the dyed-in-the-wool Imperial commanders of the East India Company somehow find themselves flying Federal Corvettes during their conflicts, rather than the homegrown Imperial Cutter. It probably doesn't hurt that the Federal competition has one more huge hardpoint than the Cutter.

Verdict

Without a doubt, Gutamaya's flagship is indeed highly capable and reasonably flexible. While it's beaten by other ships in its class in terms of combat capability and exploration, nothing really holds a candle to this ship when it comes to trading and mining. While beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, few would argue that there is a large ship available with the style and sleek lines of this ship. But all this style comes at a high cost: the need to curry sufficient favour with the Empire to be awarded the rank of Duke, and the billion or so credits needed to fully fit out this impressive vessel.

Wot I Fly...

Wot I Fly is a semi-regular feature in which we invite commanders to share their love for ships with us. From quirky variants of classic hulls to hyper-specialised builds, we delve into the amazing things pilots have done with their vessels. This month it's Arf, also known as Starbuck CMDR.

What do you fly?

I fly the Chieftain. The best ship in the galaxy ;)

Which of your ships is your favourite, and why?

The Chieftain — because she is perfect. *swoons*

What's the most creative ship build you have?

Ahhh not my build, but I LOVE the Flak Mamba — so much fun in res sites, makes very short work of the space sausages (Anacondas).

Do you prefer specialised builds or generalists?

I am pretty lazy, so generalised builds normally!

Is there a hull you think is underrated by pilots?

Possibly the Vulture — for commanders just starting out bounty hunting, this ship is incredible. But often I feel people bypass it and save for the bigger ships. But that ship is like a catherine wheel of death; it's so maneuverable!

Is there a ship project you have your sights on next, or are currently working on? Either an upgrade to what you're currently flying or a new hull you're eyeing up?

I do want to engineer my Chieftain to be a Thargoid slayer; currently she is stock. However I now also own a Corvette and the urge to make her the ultimate death plank in the galaxy (as far as resource extraction sites go) is strong.

Thanks for your time!

If you'd like to be featured in a future Wot I Fly, email us at editor@sagittarius-eye.com.

FEATURING:

ARF

STARBUCK CMDR

> The Chieftain - she is perfect. *swoons*

WOT I FLY: ARF

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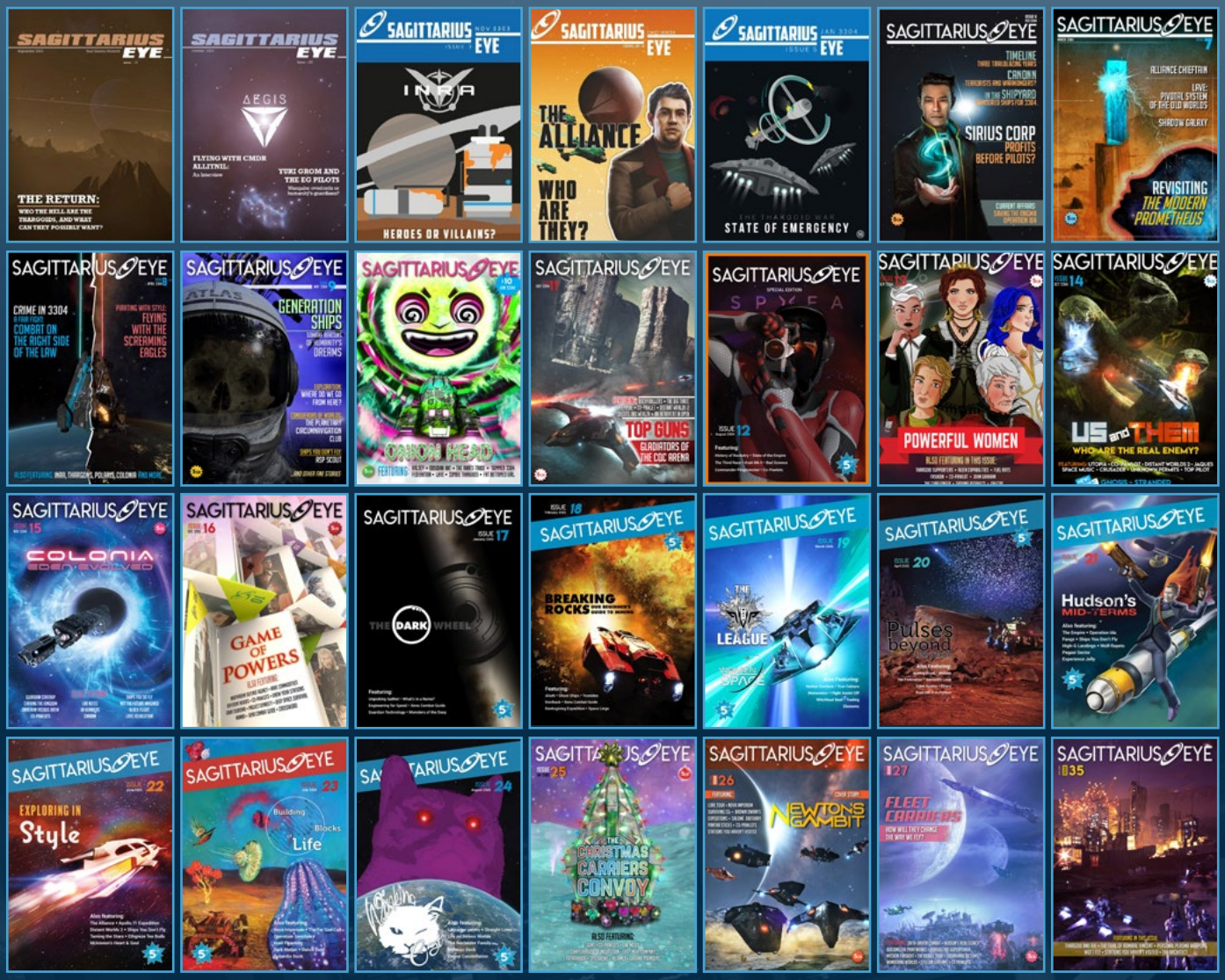

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