

DataNet Collection 1.0

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The DataNet

Somewhere between military secrecy, corporate shilling, and pirate anarchy lies the truth. The discovery and dissemination of such truths is the primary mission of the DataNet. Undercover DataNet “commando journalists” study press releases, track ship and troop movements, and even launch covert data raids to find the secrets of the various human factions. This information is inserted into existing data networks, acting like an old Earth computer virus. DataNet is the only unbiased news outlet available since Earth’s destruction.

The DataNet is about delivering the truth, not serving deceit or propaganda.

DataNet node: 1982_1225.2: Samaritan

The DataNet is the only unbiased news outlet available to the survivors since Earth’s destruction. Check here regularly for stories sifted from the DataNet. We also look forward to hearing personally from any “commando journalists” out there. Send in your own report or give us your commentary to any existing report. Send your e-mail to AIEvent@Microsoft.com and put DataNet in the subject line.

We've received our first DataNet update from "inside sources" in the DataNet. Read about what was found and see why the DataNet serves us all!

File: 8172/22.31_77

Report filed by: "Bad Karma"

The following internal memo was snagged in a data sift by "friends" of the DataNet:

To: Jonathan Markham
From: Mercedes Kelleher
Subject: DataNet -- [Material Classified]

Jonathan:

I have recently finished reviewing the last security report update, and I am pleased your investigation is beginning to provide us with some useful information. Nevertheless -- and I cannot stress this enough -- we cannot rest until we discover the source of these leaks. DataNet is becoming rather a problem. The public has begun to believe their misinformation and even respect them for their "guerrilla journalism." This must stop. We must make the undermining of their credibility one of our most important PR goals. If we cannot put an end to them soon, we may find that we never can.

To that end, the Board has authorized me to give you additional computer access and military resources for your investigation. You now may expand your searches into the encrypted mails sent in the last two years. We have reason to believe that our leak may have used the internal GigaCorp mail system to forward some of the memos and other restricted information that DataNet published during that time. Proceed with haste. We have got to contain this now before our security is further compromised. You are also authorized to commandeer personnel from computer R & D to assist you.

Let me make this clear: I want the leak found and DataNet shut down. Immediately. There is no telling what they will publish next. Both our futures depend on ensuring that certain things are never made public.

>>Blastoff: node: 67172.9182_182: I wonder what Ms. Kelleher will think when she sees this? I'm sure it'll make her sleep even less soundly than she already does. Heavy the head that wears the crown, they say. I guess that's as true of corporate CEOs as it was of medieval monarchs. Too bad for she can't just chop off our heads. That'd be much simpler than rifling through the private mail of her employees and probably a lot more effective.

>>DixieRebel: node: 981289.89127_2: How about the folks working the DataNet? Any word on how this might affect the DataNet update schedule?

>>Bad Karma [node restricted]: We're not going anywhere. DataNet is here to stay and there's nothing GigaCorp -- or the Iron Coalition, or anyone else -- can do about it. Kelleher and her pet bulldog Markham ain't gonna to shut me down. If we have the ability to intercept and publish an internal memo like this, do you really think they're even close to finding out how we do it? Sorry, Mercedes, but you're going to have to try harder. I know you're used to getting your way. This isn't one of those times.

DataNet File: 4141/11.21_25: "The Iron Coalition makes their statement about where they stand and why. Will anyone stand with them?"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

The following is the full text of a press release from the Central Command of the Coalition:

The Iron Coalition has faithfully served humanity in war and peace for a century. Coalition forces are responsible for safeguarding humanity's interests, preventing disasters, and making the solar system a safer place. They do this by finding peaceful solutions to disputes, addressing the root causes of human suffering, and when required, using direct military action.

The Coalition's pride as a fighting force has always been our personnel; they are the engine that propels it. More than ever, the Coalition must attract, train, and motivate the most competent and dedicated people so that its forces continue to be persuasive in peace and invincible in war. The Coalition assures humanity's security by equipping, training, and caring for its personnel and enabling them to reach their full potential. Their physical, moral, and mental competence gives the Coalition the strength, confidence, and will to fight and win battles anywhere and under any circumstances.

The solar system is a dangerous place full of greedy individuals and criminal interests whose influence unduly increases human suffering. These forces foster an environment of extremism and the drive to acquire weapons of mass destruction. They also fuel an irrepressible human demand for freedom, which the Coalition shares. The threats to peace and stability are numerous and complex, and the Iron Coalition stands ready to face them.

The Coalition is prepared to take a leadership role in humanity's struggles. This is what makes the Coalition different from those who oppose it. The Coalition takes those who join its ranks and grows them into the leaders of tomorrow. The Coalition will continue to develop these leaders through study and field experience. Coalition soldiers give humanity a corps of leaders with an unmatched work ethic, a strong set of values, courage, responsibility, and a dedication to duty.

In providing this service to humanity, the Iron Coalition is and will remain a values-based organization where loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and courage are the cornerstone of all the Coalition has done and will do in the future. Coalition soldiers, who exemplify these values, are the best in the solar system. These brave men and women voluntarily forego comfort and wealth, face hardship and sacrifice, and confront danger and sometimes death in defense of humanity. Humanity owes them its unwavering support.

>>**Gunner_9: node: 6712.129_29:** Man, that's some of the most longwinded, patriotic drumbeatin' propaganda I've ever read.

>>**SkyRanger: node 81273.12.3.7_2:** I liked the part about "preventing disasters." They did a bang-up job protecting Earth.

>>**SteelRat_89: node 812.238.948_18:** Amen. Given their track record, I think I'd feel safer with them not "protecting" me.

>>**Gunner_9: node: 6712.129_29:** At the same time, I sure as hell don't want to be facing them down either. IC arguments are generally solved with assault cannons.

DataNet File: 2222/11.1341: "Mars Government Considers Banning GigaCorp"

Report filed by: "Wise Rabbit"

One of the hottest rumors in the solar system is a proposed ban of GigaCorp on Free Mars. DataNet has yet to learn whether this rumor is more than just that. None of our regular sources have been able to confirm or deny it. However, we have been able to obtain several other equally interesting tidbits that may shed further light on the matter at hand.

History lesson: Mars was recognized as an independent state when contract laborers revolted against -- guess who? -- GigaCorp in the 21st century. GigaCorp has never forgotten that. They've tried for decades to regain the preeminent position that they once held on the Red Planet, but to no avail. The Martians are surly folks and they don't kowtow to anyone, least of all their old masters.

Or do they? Another rumor has it that our old friend Brigadier General Derek Fisk has been looking for someplace for the Coalition to put down roots. Space stations are nice and all, but they're very vulnerable to attacks and Fisk knows it. Mars would be nice place to set up shop -- close to the asteroid belt as well as other strategic locales. It's possible Fisk and the Martians could strike a deal and leave GigaCorp out in the cold.

As much as the Martians would like it, they need GigaCorp as much as anyone does. Sure, they don't have to be their lapdogs or anything, but they couldn't survive without GigaCorp products and services. Even Fisk couldn't make up for that kind of loss.

So what's really going on? Consider this. There's been an upswing in anti-GigaCorp violence on Mars in the past few weeks. There have also been reports of various Martian officials speaking out against the poor product distribution network on Mars. Now this latest rumor. Looks to me like Mars might be trying to cow GigaCorp into cutting a deal with them. Mars might not be able to survive without GigaCorp, but the corporation certainly couldn't survive without Mars. Besides, the bad PR would send Kelleher into conniptions. She'd have to act fast to contain this before it got out of hand.

Which may be just what the Martians want. If so, it's a dangerous game that has the potential to tick off both the Coalition and GigaCorp. Unless they've got an ace up their sleeve, I'd think twice before doing something as foolish as this.

On the other hand, maybe the rumors are completely untrue. More information when it's available.

>>**FreeBird_1652: node: 1992.2912_1823.2:** It's probably just a rumor. Every couple months, some Belter shoots off his mouth about kicking the corporations right offa' Mars (or Luna, or Io, etc. etc.) but it isn't anything more than smoke.

>>**Marvin_M: node 887_1823.0001:** Smoke or not, GigaCorp forces in the Martian free ports are pulling out. There's also a GigaCorp cruiser that's been patrolling the area picking up strays. Looks like they're playing it cautious for once.

DataNet File: 5616/78.09_29: "Deep Space Disaster! Was it human error? Highly doubtful with three Coalition ships destroyed in only 2 months."

Report filed by: "Cassandra"

An Iron Coalition supply ship, the St. Bernard, exploded on its way to meet another Coalition ship, the Vimy at Mars. Preliminary investigation of the wreckage suggests the St. Bernard suffered an uncontrolled fusion reaction within its maneuver drives. No cause for this reaction has been determined.

This is the third Coalition ship to explode mysteriously on the Mars run in the last two months. In each case, the vessel seems to have destroyed itself. Until the explosion, there was regular communication with Coalition outposts. There were likewise no signs of any hostile ships in the area. All of the wreckage collected to date shows no indication that anti-ship weapons were used against it.

Coalition investigators are baffled by this. Edward Coyne, a spokesperson for Brigadier General Fisk's Office, had this to say. "At the present time, we assume that some sort of human error was responsible for the loss of these vessels. Each of the ships lost was of a different class and design. We have found no obvious correlation between these events other than the location of their destruction." Coyne was unwilling to speculate about a possible connection between the location of the ships and their fates. "It would be irresponsible to speculate about the cause of the St. Bernard's destruction until the investigation is completed. As to its relationship to the other vessels lost recently, I'm afraid I cannot comment on that."

Coyne did say that the Coalition expects its investigation to be completed within the week. He promised that any information uncovered would be released at that time.

>>Fireball_99: node 8319.78_18: Three ships in two months? That can't make Fisk very happy -- especially when they haven't a clue what's causing it. The Coalition might not be willing to speculate on a connection, but several of my contacts were.

One of them suggested the Coalition's been testing out a new form of maneuver drive in its efforts to stay one step ahead of GigaCorp. This contact went on to say the drive is highly unstable and prone to accidents. I don't buy it myself. Fisk may be a fascist, but he's not one to risk the lives of his troops like this.

Another contact says he's heard there's a traitor inside the Coalition. This traitor is on the payroll of GigaCorp and sabotaged the ships on orders from Kelleher. Again, it just doesn't seem right. I'm sure there are traitors within the Coalition -- Fisk's too much of a prig for there not to be -- but this doesn't seem like the kind of thing a traitor would do. It's too small and hasn't really hurt the Coalition. I don't know about Kelleher, but I wouldn't pay for this.

My last contact says someone else is to blame. She wouldn't say who. She just told me to keep my eyes peeled and warned me a lot of weird stuff is going down in the Belt. I'd hardly call that reliable information, but it makes more sense than anything else I've heard so far.

DataNet File: 6440/92.31_12: "High Ranking Iron Coalition Calls It Quits!"

Report filed by: "Cassandra"

From Luna today, Colonel Geoffrey Hildesheim confirmed that he would indeed be retiring, after thirty years of service to the Iron Coalition. Hildesheim is a member of Brigadier General Derek Fisk's staff and reportedly a longtime friend of the general. The move came as something of a surprise to many, but Hildesheim's statement made it clear that the colonel had "been considering this move for several months."

The statement provided few details. Hildesheim tendered his resignation yesterday and the supreme commander of Coalition forces accepted it. Hildesheim will remain a member of Fisk's staff until a suitable replacement can be found. Many believe that Fisk will appoint his aide, Major Robert Terrance, to the position, perhaps even promoting him as well. Others do not believe this likely, favoring the master strategist Lieutenant Colonel Cheung San-Chih.

Fisk has always proven unpredictable in choosing his staff members, however. Fisk seems to have a knack for finding the right people for the job, whether or not they are well known to outsiders or not. Major Terrance -- Fisk's primary aide-de-camp -- was an unknown quantity before Fisk recruited him after the destruction of Earth. It is quite possible that he may choose yet another unknown to fill Hildesheim's place.

The retirement of such a high-ranking Coalition member renews interest in whether Fisk himself will call it quits after so many years as a soldier. Fisk has always refrained from answering such questions in the past and that's unlikely to change anytime soon.

>>Sherlock_8: node 98119/29.201_2: Fisk will outlive them all. He's tough as nails and in great shape for a man his age. I don't know why the mainstream media fixates on this question. It's not important. What they should be looking at is the fact that there's a power vacuum in Fisk's inner circle. With Hildesheim gone, someone's got to step in to take his place. Who will it be?

>>NightWolf: node 1154.3.6_29: Terrance, maybe? Though I suspect Fisk wants him to stay where he is. He's more useful as head of intelligence.

>>SunTzu_9014: node 8913.44.71.2: Cheung is another possibility. Of course, he's not popular with a lot of his peers and many suspect his motives. On the other hand, he's a brilliant strategist and the kind of guy Fisk could use at the top.

>>NightWolf: node 1154.3.6_29: If Terrance doesn't get the slot, my money is on someone we never heard of. Fisk's a crafty old guy. The Coalition could use some new blood anyway.

DataNet File: 205462/11.23_904: "GigaCorp Begins Manufacturing New Ship Tech"

A recent sift of a GigaCorp data vault revealed a new product just coming off the GigaCorp assembly lines. The following is an intercepted memorandum to GigaCorp manufacturing facilities throughout the GC network:

To: All Department Heads and Subsidiaries
From: CEO Mercedes Kelleher
Subject: Final approval/Project "Katana"

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Katana Advanced Interceptor project is greenlighted, effective immediately. Please coordinate with all subsidiaries, so that we can leverage off the existing technical components developed with RacerCo. and StarPower.

Security on the Katana project is no longer a priority; at this stage, I expect the first run of production models to be completed in one week, with distribution to core emplacements within three weeks.

R&D department heads are to have simulator trainers completed in 5 days, Earth time. As soon as sim models are complete, all pilots are to begin supplemental training against Iron Coalition sims. Training missions to come from Colonel Markham's office.

Publicity departments are to develop propaganda material featuring the Katana for dissemination through open sources. Psych-ops division has determined that this is an excellent opportunity to chip away at IC morale. Any publicity material should show the Katana is victorious in actions against IC-style warcraft.

As the Aladdin system is heating up, the Katana MUST be ready and deployed in this core site as quickly as possible. These deadlines must be met, or our He3 harvesting operation in that contested region will likely be lost.

Failure is not an option.

-Kelleher

>>**Harbinger_99: node 912_91293/8812.2:** "Failure is not an option." Heh. That Kelleher is one warm lady, huh?

>>**Aristotle_Blue: node 7723_55.22.9:** Anybody catch the reference to the "Psych-ops" division? Good God: they have interrogators and psychological warfare divisions. Spooky.

>>**StarMerc_8: node 818_99924.5.2.2221:** She's got a point, though. The Aladdin situation could become very ugly. Any edge would be useful.

>>**LadyDancer: node 1881_2992.29:** That must be one hell of an He3 deposit. If I had an IC strike force moving against a fixed emplacement, I'd consider gettin' out of Dodge ASAP.

>>**StarMerc_8: node: 818_99924.5.2.2221:** That better be a hell of a ship. It looks nice, but -- for their sake -- I hope it'll be tough enough to screen against a battlegroup like the one near Aladdin.

>>**Harbinger_99: node 912_91293/8812.2:** It sure looks cool.

>>**StarMerc_8: node: 818_99924.5.2.2221:** Of course it does. I flew some GigaCorp fighters during the campaign against Crimson Shield. It looked like "death from above." Flew like a cow.

>>**SemperFi_9191: node: [error; node concealed]:** Hoo-rah! Let 'em put up whatever they want. We'll swat 'em down like bugs. SEMPER FI!!!

>>**LadyDancer: node 181_2992.29:** Sheesh. Jarheads.

DataNet File: 50891/12.25_904: "GigaCorp and Iron Coalition Clash at Aladdin; Non-Combatant Casualties Reported"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

Sketchy reports of a battle between GigaCorp and Iron Coalition skirmish lines have been reported through the Martian Free Press. Though some reports indicate that this is a full-fledged engagement, this has not been confirmed. Onsite intelligence is not available, as both GigaCorp and Iron Coalition intelligence agencies have stepped up anti-surveillance operations.

One rumor has been confirmed, however. Initial reports -- denied by GigaCorp and Iron Coalition representatives -- state that an independent mining ship, the Hermes, was destroyed after straying through the disputed Aleph.

The following statement, from a Belter enclave near Epsilon Indi, was delivered to Martian, Lunar, and independent news agencies less than an hour ago:

***From: Ragnarok Independent Prospectors, Ltd.
Today, at 1900 hours local time, the non-combatant vessel Hermes, a RIP, Ltd. vessel captained by Capt. Augustus Riley, was destroyed by clashing military forces near the so-called "Aladdin" system (officially designated GC-109).***

Though several crewmembers were able to "rip-cord" to safety, several crewmembers -- including Captain Riley -- are missing, presumed dead.

This communiqué is directed at both sides of this escalating conflict: If Riley and his crew have been recovered, they must be returned, unharmed, to Hastur Station, Epsilon Indi. They are civilians, not military personnel.

Until further notice, the Hastur Station free port is now off limits to GigaCorp and Iron Coalition personnel. This policy will be rescinded upon the safe return of the surviving Hermes crew.

***Orion Sholes
Cofounder, Ragnarok Independent Prospectors, Ltd.***

>>**StarMerc_8: node 818_99924.5.2.2221:** Aw, man. This is getting uglier every time I log on.

>>**Harbinger_99: node 912_91293/8812.2:** I'll say. Anybody got anything solid about the battle?

>>**Palmetto_X: node 001992_2881.282:** Yup. Finished the image scrub from my run-in with IC ships a while back. There were two cruisers -- the Lincoln and the Robert E. Lee -- and two new destroyers. I only managed to snag an ID on one of them, the Odysseus.

>>**AlphaMale: node 8182.28281.8_828:** No way. That's Fisk's flagship, isn't it?

>>**Einstein_101: node 240.29_99.919:** Hard to say. He moves around. It's possible that the IC deployed the Odysseus just to spook GigaCorp troops.

>>**Samaritan: [node restricted]:** I'm trying to get harder intelligence on the battle. But chances are, by the time we get any kind of info, it'll be old news.

DataNet File: 7732/92.19_2: "Iron Coalition Releases Aladdin Statement"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

Iron Coalition leader Brigadier General Derek Fisk issued the following statement today: The commander of United Nations Forces regrets to announce the deaths of 15 crewmembers of the independent merchant and prospecting vessel Hermes. The following individuals have been positively identified:

- Captain Augustus Riley
- First Officer Helen Grey
- Second Officer Marcus Kane
- Flight Officer Shelly Staples
- Flight Officer Vernon Weller
- Flight Officer Jacob Toombs

The remaining crew has not been positively identified; inquiries can be directed to Coalition temporary headquarters at comm-node 1029_9291.11.001.

While Coalition forces regret these casualties, it must be stressed that the Hermes had no flight plan or Coalition-recognized registration information. As such, it could only be considered hostile when it entered the "Aladdin" theater of operations.

Independent traders, prospectors, and other spacecraft operators are again encouraged to register their vehicles and flight certification with Coalition forces so such tragic accidents can be avoided in the future.

>>SunBlade_7: node 009.66.25.12.63: I can't believe Coalition arrogance here! They blew up a civilian craft and are claiming it's just procedure? Unbelievable...

>>SyntaxError_1: node 910.94.20_912: I can believe it. Probably wasn't anything more than an automated response. In fact, I'll bet it wasn't even a pilot that pulled the trigger; it was probably a computer.

>>Blake_111: node 000.01.20.30_2: Hey, I've worked for Riley, and he was no saint. He was a smuggler, a thief, and a spy. Chances are, he was on somebody's payroll when he was smoked by IC forces.

>>SunBlade 7: node 009.66.25.12.63: That's a bold statement, Blake. Care to back it up?

>>Blake_111: node 000.01.20.30_2: Sure. Riley could pilot through an asteroid belt with his eyes closed. I don't believe for a minute that he would just "accidentally" stray through the wrong Aleph at the wrong time.

>>ThrillSeeker_Red: node 777.18_9828: So what was he doing there?

>>Blake_111: node 000.01.20.30_2: Could be anything. If I had to venture a guess, I'd say he was hired by GigaCorp to scout out the battleground that the Iron Coalition was throwing together.

DataNet File: 7999/10.301.2_1: "Belter Attack Disrupts Aladdin Campaign"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

A Belter strike force, commanded by Orion Sholes, launched a surprise attack on Iron Coalition forces near the "Aladdin" system. The attack comes in response to an Iron Coalition statement claiming responsibility for the destruction of the Hermes, a Belter prospector ship owned by Sholes and his associates.

The Belter attack force -- which consisted of a handful of smaller capital ships and at least 30 fighters and bombers -- struck without warning, destroying at least 10 Iron Coalition fighters that were deployed against nearby GigaCorp anti-starfighter emplacements.

Sholes' flagship, the Sky Raptor, inflicted severe damage against the Odysseus, reportedly the Iron Coalition command ship, and preferred craft of General Fisk, the IC leader.

As a result of the Belter attack and the damage it inflicted on the Odysseus, GigaCorp forces were able to launch a counter-offensive, forcing a retreat. The current whereabouts of the Coalition forces is not known.

GigaCorp forces were jubilant. Mercedes Kelleher, current CEO of GigaCorp, made a rare public appearance, broadcasting a real-time transmission to her forces.

The following is a transcript of the broadcast:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please."

"It is my pleasure to announce that, as of 0400 Earth-Time today, Iron Coalition forces have withdrawn from the region around the Aladdin colony. I commend you all for your loyalty and bravery."

"I would like to extend additional commendations to the brave pilots of our new wing of Katana-class interceptors. In their final engagement, they scored an impressive 70 percent kill ratio, with only three casualties. A job well done."

"You have prevailed against a numerically superior enemy and defending your -- our -- livelihood. Again, you have my thanks."

>>Blastoff: node: 67171.9192: Impressive kill ratio. I wonder how much of that is truth, and how much PR.

>>KillRaven_44: node: 962.3984_2: Pretty accurate. I managed to snag some holofootage of the battle. The IC boys took a real pounding.

DataNet File: 98128/99.29_11: "Pirate Raid Smashes Hastur Station"

Report filed by: "Balthazar"

GigaCorp spokesman Miguel Sanchez announced today that rescue operations at Hastur Station have been launched, in the aftermath of a pirate raid that decimated the facility. According to GigaCorp sources, feared pirate "Black Hand" Lennox struck the Hastur Station free port to capture He3, food, and air.

Casualties are estimated to be in the thousands, and hundreds are dead. Preliminary reports indicate that Lennox's forces deliberately targeted housing domes and other non-combatant targets to force surrender.

Ironically, Hastur Station co-founder Orion Sholes recently declared the port off-limits to GigaCorp personnel, in light of the destruction of the independent freighter Hermes. (Sholes is co-founder of the trading company that owns the Hermes.)

"Mr. Sholes' statements are understandable," Sanchez said. "But we can't stand by and let innocent civilians -- our customers -- suffer and die in the wake of this atrocity. Perhaps this will help Sholes and his confederates realize that GigaCorp had nothing to do with the destruction of the Hermes."

Sholes could not be reached for comment.

>>Nightengale: node 703_92.991.214: Of course he couldn't be reached. He's probably out hunting for Lennox. Those two have been scrapping ever since "Belters" became a commonly used term.

>>NightHunter_J: node 009_11.3.441.32: It's interesting that GigaCorp was quick to jump on the "we didn't do it" bandwagon. It's not their style to act as humanitarians.

>>Longbow_3: node 622.41.5.901: I bet they actually sponsored the attack, to make sure that Belter forces -- particularly Sholes and his crew -- don't start interfering in the fight at Aladdin. Kelleher has her hands full with the Iron Coalition.

>>StarMerc_8: node 818_99924.5.2.2221: Wouldn't surprise me. It's just the kind of sneaky ploy that GigaCorp Psych-ops teams excel at.

DataNet File: 3182/21.11_15: "GigaCorp Delays BioWear"

Report filed by: "Inquisitor"

The following memorandum was just released through GigaCorp media channels:

GigaCorp announced today that its anticipated BioWear line of personal accessories would be delayed for at least another six months, after saboteurs compromised its research and development facility. Corporate security forces detected a significant data theft late yesterday and moved quickly to contain it. At this time it is uncertain the extent of the theft or whether any other aspects of the BioWear research has been compromised.

In keeping with long-standing corporate policy, GigaCorp chose to forego public release of the line until safety concerns had been eliminated. GigaCorp spokesperson, Miguel Sanchez, explained it this way:

"BioWear is a completely new technology, one that will change the way people think about things like their clothing, their chronometers -- almost anything they wear on their bodies. We think the public is going to love it. As with any new technology, however, we want to be sure that it's safe and reliable. This unfortunate incident of sabotage has raised some doubts, so we thought it best to delay the release date rather than risk selling a potentially hazardous product."

BioWear is the brainchild of Dr. Sylwia Kujawa, the researcher responsible for other popular GigaCorp lines like NatWear and OmniComp. BioWear builds on the success of Dr. Kujawa's other efforts by using a specialized genetic matrix developed by GigaCorp. BioWear products will "format" themselves according to the wishes of their wearer, providing personalized comfort as well as a variety of programmable features. BioWear thus gives its wearer total control over a variety of functions, making it vastly more flexible than anything else on the market.

"We're sure the public will appreciate that GigaCorp has placed such control in its hands. We believe it's what the public has always wanted, but, until now, the technology just didn't exist. Now it does and GigaCorp will be proud to make it available once we can be certain that the saboteurs did not contaminate our initial offerings." Sanchez added. "The only thing GigaCorp cares more about than quality is safety and we assure you BioWear will not be released until we are confident of that."

>>Joker_64: node: 4125.2812.38_2: Who do they think they're kidding? I'll give GigaCorp this -- they're smooth. They can spin even the worst news into good PR. In the case of BioWear, we're talking the worst. You see, those "saboteurs" didn't steal anything except data from the clinical trials for BioWear. As if I needed to say it, BioWear is far from safe. For some reason, the poor saps they got to test this stuff weren't all that impressed with its "flexibility" or the "total control" it gave them. Right now, I expect that those who are still alive would just as soon regain control over their nervous systems as be the talk of the town in their BioWear duds.

>>Helium_3: node 8127.29_281: I'm not sure what GigaCorp thought they'd gain with BioWear, but you can be sure I won't be buying any of it when -- and if -- it ever hits the streets.

DataNet File: 9017/1.90_41: "GigaCorp Rebounds from Loss"

Report filed by: "Inquisitor"

The following memorandum was released through GigaCorp media channels this afternoon:

Despite a slight dip in profits earlier in the year, GigaCorp has again shown record profits in all of its key divisions. The Bureau of Statistics confirmed that GigaCorp's earnings increased last quarter by three percent as did its market share. The latter statistic is all the more remarkable because GigaCorp is already the largest corporation within human space.

"We're very pleased," Corporate spokesperson Miguel Sanchez admitted. "Why shouldn't we be? GigaCorp has always been committed to producing high quality, low cost products for the public. Clearly, the public knows what it wants and what it wants are GigaCorp products."

Asked how such an incredible turnaround was possible, Sanchez was quick to answer. "CEO Mercedes Kelleher is a genius. There's no question about that. Since she took over the corporation, GigaCorp has grown by leaps and bounds. She's a woman with vision and determination. How else can you explain such rapid growth despite Earth's destruction? If there's a person who can ensure a golden future for mankind, it's Mercedes Kelleher."

Mercedes Kelleher became chief executive officer of GigaCorp in 2140. She reorganized the company to deal with the loss of Earth and the production facilities there. Her tenure has been one of the most profitable in the corporation's history, and there is little reason to assume it will end anytime soon.

>>EventHorizon_3: node 612.1283_290: Looks to me like Kelleher might be fending off a power struggle in GigaCorp. Why else would they put off a puff piece like this one? GigaCorp CEOs never used to advertise their accomplishments like this in the old days. I bet she's trying to shore up further support within the Board of Directors and is using the corp's recent successes to bolster her image. Doesn't make much sense otherwise.

>>AlephHopper: node 842.3923.4_1: Of course, a lot of stuff about Kelleher doesn't make sense. No question about it -- she's a force to be reckoned with. Anyone who can keep Colonel Markham on such a short leash has got to be. Still, I've got to wonder about her. No CEO since Longstreet himself has ever had such control over GigaCorp, so why'd she feel the need to release a propaganda piece like this?

>>DeepSix: node 812731.3287_281: Maybe she's just paranoid. She's got a right to be. Even Longstreet found himself the victim of a palace coup. Then again, maybe there's something else going on here. You never can be too sure with GigaCorp.

DataNet File: 1969/10.23_23: "Fisk Gets a Makeover"

Report filed by: "Wise Rabbit"

The Iron Coalition is known for many things, but the purple prose of its press packages isn't one of them. Yet, that's just what greeted the public recently, as the Coalition Information Office issued a package of data, text, and video entitled, "The Crucible of Freedom: The Life of Derek Fisk." Clearly designed as a public relations tool, "The Crucible of Freedom" purports to provide "hitherto unknown details of the early life and career of Brigadier General Derek Fisk" in addition to "insights into his lifelong struggle against the enemies of liberty."

Surprisingly, the package does fulfill at least some of its promises. Included among its seemingly countless contents are several intriguing "candid interviews" with Fisk in which he speaks eloquently about his family and early life as a Marine. These interviews are strangely compelling and reveal a side of Fisk few get to see. Watching them it's almost possible to forget that what you're viewing is highly manipulative propaganda. Almost. The bulk of the package is made up of less-than subtle pieces in which Fisk -- resplendent in his Marine dress uniform -- addresses his troops while stirring synthesized music plays in the background.

When asked why this package had been released, Fisk's lieutenant, Major Robert Terrence, stated, "There's been a lot of misinformation disseminated about the General, much of it by GigaCorp. We wanted to show there's more to this man than most people realize. Yes, he's a soldier, but that doesn't mean he isn't a human being as well. Listening to some of the stories you see circulated in the media -- and I'm including DataNet here as well -- you'd think otherwise. The General isn't an ogre. In fact, he's quite easy to get along with once you know him. This package was released to facilitate just that."

Fisk himself was unavailable for comment.

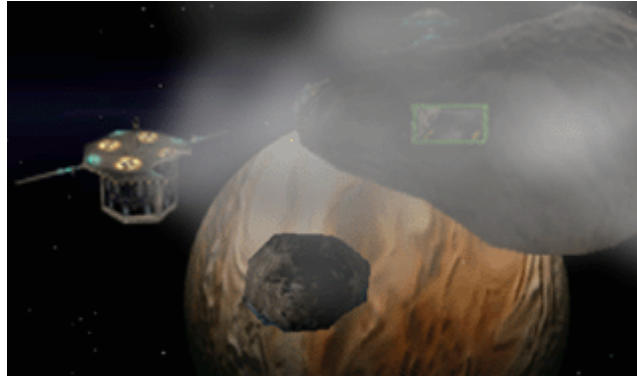
>>ArlenF: node: 1982_1225.2: Can you believe that? Fisk's just an ordinary guy like you or me? He probably sleeps in his uniform. They can make all the inspirational vids they want; it's not going to change anyone's mind about Fisk or the Coalition.

>>Artemis_D: node 1969_19976.102: You might be right. What gets me is why the Coalition thought to do this at all. Who is it intended to impress? I can tell you one thing: the Belters aren't going to buy into this anymore than you or I would. To be honest, I can't imagine why Fisk would even allow such foolishness in the first place.

>>ArlenF: node: 1982_1225.2: Maybe the old man's losing it or something. I don't know. The whole thing smells awfully fishy. If you ask me -- and lots of people do -- there's more going on here than meets the eye. I wouldn't be surprised if something else is going on here. Keep your eyes and ears open, Artemis. We may be in for some interesting times.

DataNet File: 27280/2829.42_33: "Iron Coalition Targets GigaCorp's Belt Operations"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"



For the last three weeks, there have been reports that the Iron Coalition was planning a major operation. Until recently, there wasn't any proof. That proof came in the form of a surgical strike on an He3 mining facility within GigaCorp's sphere of control. The strike came as a complete surprise both to outside observers and to GigaCorp. Coalition vessels attacked swiftly, clearly intending to avoid heavy casualties while at the same time damaging the facility's ability to extract He3. Preliminary reports from the installation -- which are sketchy because of a GigaCorp-imposed media blackout -- suggest the Coalition achieved its objective.

Lieutenant Colonel Leung San-Chih, the Coalition's master tactician, appeared at a brief press conference to explain its actions. "The Coalition has long placed a high premium on human life. Facilities can be replaced, but people cannot. Consequently, we've developed a number of new attack plans designed to limit casualties, focusing instead on our objective. We believe this latest strike proves not only the effectiveness of these plans but their wisdom as well."

Despite his openness about the philosophy behind the attack, Colonel Leung was less forthcoming with details of why such an attack occurred at all. "The Coalition has its reasons." He explained cryptically. "I'm afraid I can't say much more than that at this time. However, I ask the public to consider the fact that General Fisk would not have ordered such an action if he didn't believe it to be vital."

GigaCorp spokesperson Miguel Sanchez was less than enthusiastic about Colonel Leung's reticence. "That's the best the Coalition can do?" he asked rhetorically. "They just send in several squadrons to devastate an important -- and legal, I might add -- mining facility and then crow about how they're 'caring people' who don't want to harm innocent lives. The fact is the Coalition's running scared. They fear the success of our Coloni-Care program will cost their militaristic cause in the end. Well, they've got one thing right. If they think GigaCorp will take this without a response, they're quite mistaken."

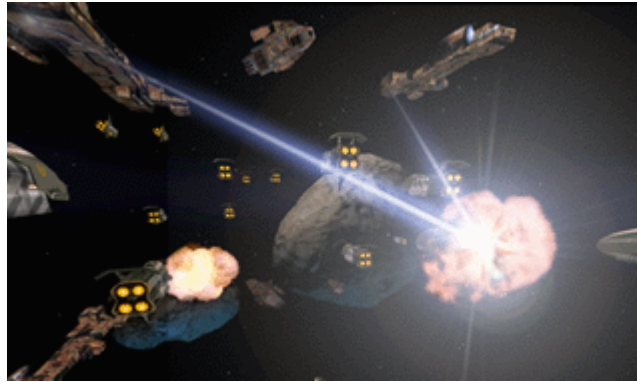
>> **KhanMan : node : 183278 _ 12 . 5** : At last some normalcy! For a while there I was beginning to think Fisk believed his own press package and become some model of thoughtful discretion.

>> **Nixon74 : node : 82370 _ 22 . 3** : Amen to that. I'm a lover not a fighter, but I can't help but be gratified the Big Boys have gone at each other again. The whole idea of cooperation between the Coalition and GigaCorp just frightened me more than I can say. As long as they're concentrating on each other, they'll leave the little guy alone.

>> **KhanMan : node : 183278 _ 12 . 5** : Let's hope so anyway. The only thing that scares me more than cooperation is the idea of one of them winning the shebang. Then, where'd that leave us?

DataNet File: 26940/94872.3_21: "GigaCorp Suffers Another Setback"

Report filed by: "Bad Karma"



As if things couldn't get worse for GigaCorp, the Belters have decided they're not too interested in Coloni-Care. In fact, they're not too interested in GigaCorp at all. Following the corporation's recent announcement of a support package for beleaguered colonies, vessels carrying the promised supplies have become a common sight -- but on Belter turf. GigaCorp had explicitly avoided sending any transports into the Belt. Rumor had it that they thought it too risky. Unless they received a specific request from someone in the Belt, they weren't going to press the issue.

That was the state of things for weeks. Then, without warning, things changed. No one's sure why, but sources inside GigaCorp suggest that CEO Mercedes Kelleher ordered the change in policy. These same sources say Coloni-Care hasn't been the success she'd hoped -- which is to say, she hasn't swayed the Belters to trust GigaCorp any more than they trust the Coalition. It also seems Kelleher's got a lot riding on Coloni-Care. It's her baby and she stands to lose some serious face if it flops.

So, when a small fleet of GigaCorp transports entered the Belt recently, it's a safe bet they did so on Kelleher's own orders. GigaCorp claims -- and we've no reason to disbelieve them -- the transports carried only building materials, food, and data. "They weren't a threat to anyone." Miguel Sanchez, the corporation's spokesperson explained. "They were intended as a gesture of goodwill, a show of GigaCorp's intentions toward the Belters."

Looks like some Belters thought otherwise. A large group of Belter vessels lay in wait for the transports. Once they entered the Belt, the Belters attacked en masse, destroying not only the transports but their escort vessels as well. "It was a slaughter." Sanchez added. "These raiders attacked without mercy and didn't show the slightest bit of concern for the loss of human life. It's a real tragedy." Nevertheless, Sanchez stated GigaCorp would continue its attempts to bring aid to any who require it.

Belter personality Orion Sholes lent his voice to those decrying the attack. "It doesn't make any sense to me. Sure, we don't like GigaCorp but we're not cold-blooded murderers. We don't launch these kinds of attacks. It's not the Belter way." However, outside observers have begun to wonder if perhaps "the Belter way" is changing, and similar actions can be expected in the future.

>> **Nixon74 : node : 181178 _ 12 . 1** : I can't believe it. Why would they do this?

>> **PierreOT : node : 801127 _ 67 . 7** : Come on, wake up. You've obviously been duped by Sholes one too many times. The Belters are a mean bunch of hombres. You don't survive in their world unless you're willing to cut a few throats. Sholes may be all nice and avuncular, but a lot of his cronies aren't. I wouldn't be surprised if he was behind it all himself.

>> **Nixon74 : node : 181178 _ 12 . 1** : But why? What's to be gained by ticking off GigaCorp?

>> **PierreOT : node : 801127 _ 67 . 7** : Respect. Maybe now GigaCorp will realize they can't push around the Belters.

Report filed by: "Bad Karma"



GigaCorp stunned business analysts recently with the announcement of its "Coloni-Care program." The program -- which will begin in two month's time -- offers assistance to colonial outposts in the form of free building materials and technical support, as well as oxygen recycling systems and other essentials of life. The program is unique in that GigaCorp explicitly asks nothing of any colony that signs up for the program. This is a notable change from similar programs in the past that operated on a strictly profit-driven basis.

Corporate spokesperson Miguel Sanchez explained the change in policy this way: "Coloni-Care is GigaCorp's way of saying "thank you" to the millions of colonists who've supported us over the decades, especially during the recent years of crisis. As you know, the colonies -- both within the solar system and elsewhere -- account for a significant portion of GigaCorp's consumer base. Without them and their unprecedented support for our product lines, GigaCorp wouldn't be the business it is today. Coloni-Care is just a small token of our gratitude, but I can assure you it won't be the last."

Another intriguing element of Coloni-Care is that its benefits are available to those living on Mars and on the Belt, regions generally ignored in previous initiatives of this sort. Sanchez conceded the novelty of this approach. "GigaCorp feels that the needs of Mars and the Belt have been ignored in the past, simply because of their higher populations compared to other colonial regions. Such neglect is not only shortsighted, but foolish as well. It's in the best interests of everyone to ensure a good quality of life for humans beings -- wherever they may live."

The Iron Coalition was quick to criticize the program. Major Robert Terrence called Coloni-Care "a cheap ploy to curry favor with colonists and Belters." Sanchez dismissed Terrence's statements easily. "The Coalition should talk. Has anyone seen "The Crucible of Freedom"?"

>> **Bongo_Boy23 : node : 9707_501.6** : Don't get me wrong. I'm no GigaCorp shill, but maybe there's some truth to what Sanchez is saying. Maybe GigaCorp really is just trying to help us all out. God knows we could use it these days. There's a lot of really weird stuff going down on the frontier -- missing ships, mysterious attacks. Anything that'll offset that is a welcome change.

>> **Bad Karma [node restricted]**: I hear you. There is a lot of weird stuff going on. That doesn't mean GigaCorp cares one bit about us. They're just looking for leverage with the Belters. They need allies as much as the Coalition does and they'll do anything to get them. Mark my words. Coloni-Care spells big trouble -- bigger even than GigaCorp probably realizes.

DataNet File: 4103/132.0011_08: "Orion Sholes Speaks Out"

Report filed by: "Shade"

The Belters have no universally acknowledged leader. The closest they possess is the jovial Orion Sholes, a trader whom the media relies upon to provide insights into the Belter mindset. Although he fervently denies that his opinions carry any weight with his fellows, Sholes has never refrained from speaking his mind, as he did recently on the subject of recent public relations efforts by both GigaCorp and the Iron Coalition. "I'm not sure who they think they're fooling," he said. "Most people have already made up their minds about them. No amount of propoganda or promises of free building materials is going to get folks to flock to the banner of either GigaCorp or the Coalition. What really puzzles me is that neither side has realized this by now."

When asked what he meant by this, Sholes was quite forthcoming. "Can't you see it? Look at it this way. Have either GigaCorp or the Coalition succeeded in gaining further influence among undecided colonists? The Belters? Of course not. By now, it's pretty clear where both of them stand and that doesn't appeal to many people. Unless one or the other of them changes their ways, they can make as many public relations efforts they want and it won't matter one bit."

"And change isn't something that comes easy to them. I mean, when was the last time they showed any original thinking? It'd take something mighty impressive to change them, but that's just what they need. A solid kick to the pants would do them both wonders. Of course, you and I both know that ain't going to happen in our lifetimes. And so here we are, trapped in this never-ending battle between the Coalition and GigaCorp with the rest of us right smack in the middle."

As always, Sholes was quick to point out that he doesn't speak for all Belters. "Sure, some of them agree with me, but a lot of them don't. That's the way with these things. Just because I speak my mind doesn't make my opinion any more valid than anyone else's."

>> **Peeps : node : 12567_432.6** : Speaking of people who never change. My God, doesn't Sholes ever get tired of this same song and dance. We all know he speaks for a lot of Belters, whatever he says to the contrary. Can't he just admit that and move on? It'd save me from having to hear him say the same thing over and over.

>> **Uber_Mensch : node : 3112_252.4** : As always, you spend too much time concentrating on the messenger and not enough on the message. Sholes might be a glory hound, but he's right. The Coalition and GigaCorp are dinosaurs. They've got to seriously change their ways or they'll be left in the dust. Makes you wonder how they managed to survive as long as they did.

>> **Gunslinger Blue : node : 49189_291.902** : I'll tell you how: GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS.

DataNet File: 29628/51584.15_16: "IC Quarantines Battle Site"

Report filed by: "Bobcat"

Citing violation of U.N. law in regard to the recent Belter ambush of GigaCorp "Coloni-Care" transports, the Iron Coalition has moved a task force into the region with the stated intent of stopping further conflict. To this end, the Coalition has declared the battle site off limits to any non-Coalition vessel.

The Coalition forces came across several Belter scavenger vessels upon entering the region. In keeping with their new Belter-tolerant policy, the Coalition forces did not destroy these vessels, but they did search some of the ships and recover any previously collected salvage. They then escorted the Belters out of the region without compensation for either the fuel or salvage.

Rumors abound that Coalition forces came across another group of ships in the region. The most reliable information on these mystery ships comes from the last Belter scavenger to be evicted from the area, the ITR Wilson. Gun-camera shots from the ITR Wilson, when enhanced, revealed heavy damage to the Coalition Frigate Argent apparently inflicted by fighter-scale craft.

When asked to comment about the images, Major Robert Terrence dismissed them as "cheap fabrications." He added that the Coalition presence in the region was no more than a peacekeeping operation. No GigaCorp vessels have been reported entering the battle area, although there is still doubt as to whether all the GigaCorp vessels were destroyed during the original battle with the Belters.

>> **Investor_97 : node : 2419_883.5** : Chalk up another victory for Fisk's extermination squads. As if a Belter ambush wasn't enough, the Coalition decides absolutely none of GigaCorp's goodwill ships, supplies, or people can be allowed to live. At least the Gigas we able to do some damage before they were overwhelmed.

>> **Salvag_JunkE : [error node unlisted]** : I think you're a little premature in your analysis, Investor. I was on the Wilson, and that Frigate had taken damage unlike anything, and I mean anything, GigaCorp can do. I don't care what Kelleher or Sanchez say about their new interceptor, no guns I've seen could deal out so much damage from a fighter.

DataNet File: 347/8227.46_8: "GigaCorp Expansion into Asteroid Belt"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

GigaCorp has offered their "Coloni-Care" program to any and all colonial outposts completely free of charge. Many have asked during these past two months since the announcement what truly is the price we'd have to pay for the "Coloni-Care." Now it appears the price is nothing more than the blood of the Belter's themselves.

The first "Coloni-Care" transports made their runs to some of the more desperate Colonists struggling along the outer edges of the Belt. Even though Sholes has stated that these "frontier patriots" are completely able to decide for themselves who to trust, the Belters were there to watch the festivities and witness the GigaCorp transports firsthand. It was only a matter of time before GigaCorp made its own interests known.

Two separate GigaCorp divisions, GigaStock and GigaThrust, entered the outer edges of the Asteroid Belt, supposedly in the 400 and 600 Sectors. They immediately began to construct facilities to gather and mine the local heavy He3 deposits reported in the sectors. The Belters were evidently not going to allow the GigaCorp faction to set up shop in the Belt even though the closest Belter faction, the Free Loaders, were over in the 100 Sectors.

From what we have been able to determine, through repeated assaults, the GigaCorp have gained a sufficient foothold along the outer edge of the Belt. Corporate spokesperson Miguel Sanchez stated, "Once our first transports reached the first colonies requesting our assistance, they immediately came under attack from Belter forces. Basically, the Belters are forcing their rule on any and all in the Belter -- whether they want it or not.' When asked if it was truly the heavy He3 deposits reported in the outer edges of the Belt that drove GigaCorp to invade, Sanchez ignored the question.

"That's a complete load of vacuum -- and you all know it," was the only response from Orion Sholes.

I was able to confirm that conflicts did happen between GigaCorp and Belter factions from independent monitoring stations although who actually started it has yet to be determined -- and may never be known.



We were able to get a long-distance image of a Belter bomber in its death throes. Verifying the bomber means the Belters were definitely ready -- and in force for GigaCorp.

>> **Slime_Breathe : node : 4555_902 . 6** : The GigaCorp was there for one thing. He3 -- He3 -- He3. He who controls the Helium3 controls our future.

>> **Bad Karma [node restricted]**: And the Belters were there just to say to the Coloni-Care transports -- Come on, get some O2! The Belters were going to take down the GigaCorp transports -- whether the GigaCorp had forces there or not to defend themselves.

>> **Slime_Breathe : node : 4555_902.6** : Still upset about the heavy stock beating your GigaCorp stock took the day the Earth went down? Get over it and may be you'll be able to see GigaCorp for what they really are.

DataNet File: 349/4520.82_2: "Orion's Chain is Rattled"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

The recently restless GigaCorp security forces struck out again yesterday, attacking the Iron Coalition quarantine fleet. The quarantine area is roughly adjacent to Orion's Chain, though further to the solar side of the belt. Iron Coalition forces in the region had been recently reinforced due to the increased GigaCorp activity. The Coalition forces had also begun to tighten base and checkpoint security, causing longer delays for Belter traders.

One of the Belter ships that was stopped at a Coalition checkpoint witnessed the beginning of the battle. While the CTU Ganges' reports have not been confirmed, they state that several GigaCorp destroyers and around a dozen GigaCorp fighters emerged from deep within the Belts and began to open fire on the Iron Coalition Outpost Hibernia. According to the Ganges' gun-camera footage, at least two GigaCorp destroyers and five fighter craft were destroyed by Iron Coalition forces. These included the cruiser **Zukhov** and the repaired **Argent**. Iron Coalition losses, as viewed from the tape, were only a few fighter-class ships.

After the Ganges' report was filed, several other Belter ships in or near the quarantine zone reported sightings of deep-space skirmishes. Major Robert Terrance released a statement denouncing GigaCorp for this unprovoked attack.

Terrence further claimed that eight GigaCorp capital class ships were destroyed in the engagements. GigaCorp spokesman Miguel Sanchez called the attacks "reprisals for earlier Iron Coalition crimes" and claimed victory, noting an apparent Iron Coalition retreat from the area.

So far as can be told, Sanchez has much to gloat about. As of 08:00 this morning, the Iron Coalition has begun dismantling its bases and moving its personnel outside of the belt. Further low-level skirmishes have been reported in the area, but it seems as though GigaCorp has out bullied the Iron Coalition.

>>Specter_32:node:9125_301.12: I wouldn't count the IC out yet. From all the rumors I've heard, the IC gave much better than it got. I can only wonder if Fisk has some other plan in mind.

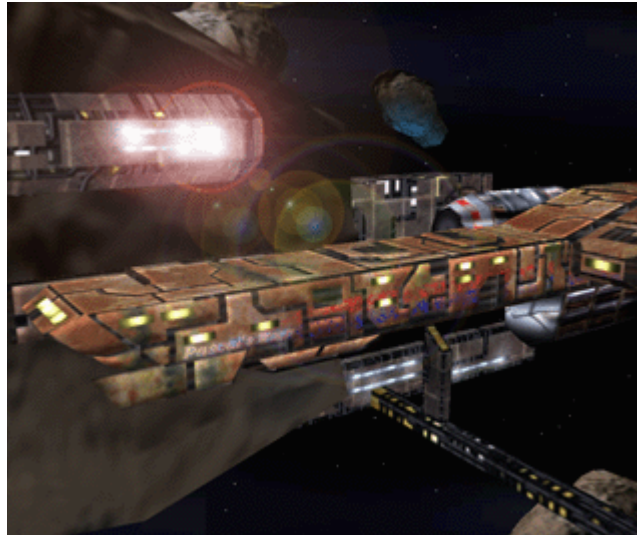
>>Great_Ganglion:node:2122_753.37: Are you kidding me? The IC has been finally humbled! I'll tell you this; the IC didn't have to dismantle some of those bases, GigaCorp already did that for 'em. That's one more power out of the belt, and hopefully the rest won't be too far behind.

>>VelvetGauntlet:node:4003_18.4: I agree with Specter. Fisk probably just brought his troops out of the danger zone to think up a new plan. First this business with the unidentified ships attacking the Argent, now GigaCorp aggression, I think Fisk just plain old lost his nerve.

>>BraveheartII/node [UNKNOWN]: Ha! Great_Ganglion got it right, it's about time the "Iron Fist" got a little dented! I'm no GigaCorp lackey, but I'm glad to see someone push those Iron boys around. GO Giga!

DataNet File: 2385/2999.39_1: "Belter Vessels Missing"

Report filed by: "Doc"



In what is sure to cause further tensions between GigaCorp and the Belters, three Belter vessels disappeared recently -- all of them operating beyond the Asteroid Belt itself. The three vessels, Erstwhile, Timbuktu, and Pascal's Wager, had no specific connection to one another besides their common endeavor of seeking out He3 deposits in the outer solar system. The captain of Pascal's Wager, Lenora Simms, was well known in Belter circles for her uncanny ability to find new sources of He3. Over the course of the past few months, Captain Simms discovered five new sources of valuable He3, making her both a favorite of her fellow Belters and a rather wealthy woman.

Not surprisingly, many Belters suspect foul play. "GigaCorp's never had much of a liking for us," explained Louie Elias, a prospector who knew Simms. "They consider us "claim jumpers" and have done everything they could to steal our finds. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if they were behind these disappearances." Another Belter, who asked to remain anonymous, agreed. "I find it more than a little suspicious. I mean, first GigaCorp's freighters get pasted by some Belters. Then, they announce a plan to explore the outer system. Now this. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to put these pieces together."

Of course, GigaCorp has offered a different view of these events:

"I can assure you," stated Miguel Sanchez, "that GigaCorp had nothing to do with these disappearances. We at GigaCorp mourn the loss of life as deeply as anyone. Yet, these are increasingly dangerous times and those who -- like Simms -- attempt to go their own way without any thought to the consequences may come to bad ends. It's unfortunate but true. That's why GigaCorp has always believed in cooperation. It's Coloni-Care program is just that and we again extend its benefits to any and all who need it."

The Iron Coalition did not issue a formal statement on the disappearances. However, Major Robert Terrence did suggest the Coalition had taken note of them and would add them to its growing list of missing vessels.

>> **DixieRebel : node : 2998_22.3** : Those liars! Elias is right. GigaCorp's the villain of this story. They've got a motive and the means.

>> **Blastoff : node : 3736_320.5** : True, but that doesn't mean they're the ones behind it.

>> **DixieRebel : node : 2998_22.3** : How can you say that?

>> **Blastoff : node : 3736_320.5** : Look, man, I'd love to nail this one on GigaCorp as much as the next guy, but something tells me there's more here than we're seeing. The Corp's been spending too much time trying to look like a nice guy to blow it with something as blatant as this. In fact, it looks like a set-up to me. Maybe some else is trying to make them look bad. I wonder who that could be?

DataNet File: 32190/128.3_7: "Has an Unidentified Vessel Been Spotted?"

Report filed by: "Inquisitor"



Recorded sighting near Faltour aleph -- who'se ship is it?

UFO sightings were a rare -- if widely discussed -- phenomenon of pre-spaceflight Earth. Since then, they've faded from the public imagination, gone the way of fairies and elves.

Or have they?

There have been increasing reports of mysterious vessels encountered beyond the Sol system Aleph. Most of these reports have come from independent operators and Belters, people whose credibility is less than stellar, to say the least. And that's all they've ever been -- reports. Nothing substantial has ever been brought forward to corroborate these traveler's tales. In fact, there's not that much in the tales themselves. The bulk of them consist of variations on "I was traveling beyond the Aleph when I saw this weird-looking ship out of the corner of my eye." Naturally, these people are always traveling alone and can never provide anything but the sketchiest of details, most of which contradict one another.

So what should we make of these reports? Without solid evidence, it's hard to say. Maybe there's some truth to them. After all, both GigaCorp and the Coalition are probably developing all sorts of experimental vessels. These people might have caught glimpse of one of them. The wide distribution of the Belters throughout space means there might be all sorts of outposts hidden away here and there. Who knows what they're up to? It's as plausible as any other theory and makes a lot more sense than something genuinely unknown.

Whatever the truth, these reports do serve one good purpose at least. They alert us to high level of paranoia and fear to be found among us. The tensions between various factions, the recent spate of disappearances, and the threat of renewed fighting. All of these elements have put us at the edge of our collective seats. We're concerned and it shows. Even if they're really aren't any mystery ships out there, the fact that some of us are ready to believe there are is a cause for concern.

Watch the skies. More details when -- and if -- they're available.

>>**FreeBird: node: 675_19.2:** I knew someone who saw one of those mystery vessels. Just like Inquisitor said, he was traveling alone beyond the Aleph and that's when he saw it. It was small and fast -- faster than anything he'd ever seen before. He only saw the thing for a split second and he didn't get a really good look. But that doesn't mean he was crazy. The universe is too big not to hide a few mysteries still.

>>**Procurator: node: 38631_11.5:** There are mysteries, all right, but I don't think we need little green men to explain them away. The Corp and the Coalition are secretive enough, thank you very much. If there's anything funny going on beyond the Aleph, I think we should set our sights firmly on them.

DataNet File: 1274/1008.28_09: "GigaCorp Turns Outward"

Report filed by: "Jacques LeRock"



In the last fiscal year, GigaCorp has launched a number of new initiatives, all of them designed to bring a fresh face to the megacorporation. The latest is the "Trans-Jovian Project" or TJP. The expressed goal of TJP is "to explore and develop the worlds of our solar system beyond the Asteroid Belt." As spokesperson Miguel Sanchez explained at length, "GigaCorp is committed to going wherever it must to provide the best and most useful products to consumers. Our researchers have long believed the outer solar system to be rich in resources needed by the advanced civilization in which we live today. TJP is designed to give GigaCorp the tools it needs to continue serving the consumer as it has for so long."

Despite the bombast of Sanchez's statements, there is good reason to believe the outer solar system is rich in a number of valuable resources -- including He3. Doubtless, GigaCorp hopes to gain access to this largely unexplored region so as to gain a stranglehold over it. The large part of humanity's exploration in its own home has been restricted to the inner solar system. A few expeditions have gone beyond the Asteroid Belt, but these are exceptions rather than the rule. The discovery of the Aleph -- and the worlds beyond it -- diverted attention elsewhere for the longest time. Only now is mankind beginning to reconsider its own outer worlds and GigaCorp is leading the charge to do so.

"GigaCorp has always prided itself on being at the forefront of all forms of innovation," Sanchez stated. "TJP is yet further proof of that. GigaCorp intends to use its vast resources for the betterment of humanity. When many people mourn the loss of the adventuring spirit that characterized our ancestors, GigaCorp has decided to lead the way once more. We are only as small as our dreams and GigaCorp has large dreams for itself and for all of us."

>> **Me1097 : node : 1009_11.2** : Who writes this stuff? Is it just me or are things getting decidedly goofier over the last few months. I'm not sure I can take it much longer.

>> **RedQueen : node : 2845_229.6** : It's no worse than it's ever been. Self-congratulatory hokum is par for the course, my friend. These days, everybody engages in it. Hell, even the Belters engage in it. What do you think Orion Sholes is all about anyway? Image is everything and GigaCorp's just trying to paint itself as the vanguard of a new golden age. I don't blame them for trying. But with all those ships disappearing, I've got to question their judgment -- unless they know more about it than they're telling

>> **MoebiusLoop : node : 8127_8288.2** : Interesting question it raises, though: what is GigaCorp REALLY up to? First it was the "Coloni-Care" nonsense. Now an exploratory mission -- sounds like GigaCorp is attempting to sell itself as an old-style government. Business as usual.

DataNet File: 211/7137.44_4: "Kelleher Makes Rare Appearance"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

GigaCorp's CEO, Mercedes Kelleher, is a reclusive figure who rarely appears in public. Although she's guided the megacorporation since shortly after the destruction of Earth, few outside GigaCorp have ever had occasion to hear her speak, let alone see her in person. That all changed recently, when the "iron fist of commerce" made a rare public appearance after the conclusion of a board of directors meeting.

Showing visible signs of anxiety, Kelleher spoke at an impromptu press conference. "I would like to once more extend GigaCorp's hand in friendship to any and all who would receive it in kind. The times in which we live are dangerous ones and no one can survive them alone. GigaCorp's board of directors has again authorized me to extend our Coloni-Care program to everyone -- including the Belters. GigaCorp would like to make good on its promise to strengthen human colonies and outposts wherever they may be."

Kelleher's words halted to rumors that GigaCorp's board had put an end to the much-vaunted Coloni-Care program. Sources within the corporation revealed to DataNet that there was considerable resistance to the idea of assisting the colonies without any expectation of immediate return. This latest announcement by Kelleher makes it clear that, whatever may have been happening behind the scenes, she remains firmly in charge of the corporation.

Kelleher's meteoric rise to become CEO of GigaCorp has long been a subject of much speculation. Virtually unknown before the destruction of Earth, Kelleher has proven to be a formidable leader. While she has suffered a number of setbacks in the past -- the delay of the GenGel product line being a good example -- she has always managed to regain her footing and lead GigaCorp to further profits. This surprise public appearance would seem to suggest she's done it yet again.

>> **Martia : node : 5613_11.6** : He's got that right. That woman's got more lives than a dozen cats. I thought the Coloni-Care fiasco would be the end of her for sure. The board of directors is a skittish thing. They don't like to take unnecessary chances and that's exactly what Coloni-Care probably looked like to them.

>> **Arthur_Agamemnone : node : 1631_1.0** : It's still a big risk, but it looks like a risk the board is willing to back -- for now anyway. Kelleher's not perfect; she makes mistakes. Yet she always manages to turn her weakness into a strength. If she can't do that with Coloni-Care, I think we may finally be rid of her. Of course, what are the odds Coloni-Care will fail? I'll bet she's got Markham working overtime to make sure there's not a repeat of that Belter attack. But a guy can dream, can't he?

DataNet File: 0937/7625_03: "Iron Coalition Launch Organized Training Facilities"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

Through reports we've all seen about recent skirmishes in the Belt, the Iron Coalition and GigaCorp have gained a strong foothold within Belter's territory. Now apparently the Iron Coalition is attempting to gather the remaining undecided colonies and even the Belters themselves in a stance against the entrenched GigaCorp factions.

Major Robert Terrence, General Fisk's chief aide, states, " We have launched three Flight Academy arenas. These are to help all new pilots and colonists who have found their backs against the rock and no choice but to fight against GigaCorp aggression. These arenas allow only pilots of Novice ranking to fly and improve their skills without pilots such as the legendary *Kevdude_SF* making a Newbie slaughter of them. We call on all Indies, all GigaCorp and Belter's pilots, of new ranking to put the conflicts of days gone by behind us and to cooperate and move forward to the future that can only come from all of humanity joining together as one."

Major Terrence went on to say that these arenas, utilizing old, obsolete and battle-damaged structures, will allow all new pilots to get a taste of combat without getting "their keisters handed to them in a basket -- thus evening the battlefield and allowing no single element to get the edge over another."

The DataNet nodes immediately lit up with comments from all factions on this stunning development.

>>Heartbeat_33391: node: 5456.927.34_08: Whoa! Newbie Arenas -- may be too little, too late for some. The Newbie Slaughter took place a while ago, especially in those Belt conflicts. I heard some kids were thrown into ships without even a launch lesson and expected to defend their home turfs. Where are they now? Floating amidst the rocks and sucking nothing but vacuum!

>>RedPlanet_20123: node: 5126.281.21_18: I just can't believe that the Iron Coalition expects me to swallow such bull! Joining together as one -- yeah, as one of the IC! No way!

>>O2Owhy_54991: node: 9856.1834_97: Well, I'm looking forward to it! I had *Kevdude_SF* hand me my head on the platter. With these arenas only open to Newbies and no rankings to watch, chances are I can get a hand on piloting a bomber properly before being kicked out of an airlock in my pod.

>>Slaphapper_07543: node: 2341.2100_36: Exactly! Go for it! Learn and earn it -- just don't swallow the IC bull that comes with it!

DataNet File: 100/81271.12_2: "Sholes Rebukes The Coalition"

Report filed by: "Dog Face Joe"

Orion Sholes again spoke to the media, commenting upon the Iron Coalition's recent attack against a GigaCorp facility in the Asteroid Belt as well as creation of the Iron Coalition Training Academies.

"As you know," he explained, "We Belters are an independent-minded people. We don't like regulations that unfairly limit us. Neither do we like interference in our territory by outsiders -- especially outsiders as militarily powerful as the Coalition. In this instance, I speak not just for myself but also for many other Belters. We take grave exception to the Coalition's recent actions in the Belt and ask them to refrain from them in the future." Sholes clarified his position further. "We have no grudge against the Coalition or against GigaCorp. The two of them can beat each other senseless for all I care. They just can't do it in the Belt -- or they'll face more of the kind of behavior GigaCorp recently got a taste of."

That final warning struck both the Belter community and outsiders as unusual. Sholes has always avoided violence and threats, preferring to use his personal charm to win over his adversaries. Furthermore, he is on record as having condemned the recent attack by Belter forces against several GigaCorp transports. This change in his demeanor is noteworthy, as is the response of the Coalition. Major Robert Terrence stated that, "the Coalition is used to this sort of posturing by the Belters. We understand their position, but cannot share it. Wherever there is a threat to human security, the Coalition will be ready to meet that threat."

GigaCorp's response was much more muted. "We share Sholes' concern," admitted corporate spokesperson Miguel Sanchez. "The Coalition has a long history of overstepping its bounds. This unprovoked attack against our facility is a prime example of this kind of errant behavior. At the same time, we must make it clear that GigaCorp will continue to operate wherever we must to further our research and better serve the consumer."

>>Jack124: node: 6711_16.6: Who'd have thought it? Sholes finally grew a backbone -- and he claims to speak for someone other than himself. This is a red-letter day indeed!

>>Balthazar_Jones: node: 1631_1.0: Quite a change indeed. I wonder what brought it on?

>>Jack124: node: 6711_16.6: Maybe he really is concerned about the Coalition muscling in on the Belters' territory. Or maybe the Belters have got something to hide and don't want anyone nosing around too much. These days, nothing would surprise me.

DataNet File: 8129/03.303.7_5: "Is Coloni-Care Program a Sham?"

Report filed by "Anonymous Source"

Raids on GigaCorp "Coloni-Care" transports have been increasing as of late. They have even reportedly been happening outside the belt by Belter freedom forces. Numerous Belter factions are apparently obliterating the seemingly unarmed transports. Are the Belters indeed the bloodthirsty mass murderers as GigaCorp claims or is there something else?

Upon further investigation of what seems to be a senseless slaughter of GigaCorp personnel, I have uncovered a startling fact. I received an encoded transmission from a Belter Freedom Fighter stating that he may have something I would be interested in. I was invited aboard a Belter Frigate named the *Martini*. The commander of the *Martini*, J.A.Wolf, escorted me to the vessel's cargo bay, which was full of GigaCorp-marked Coloni-Care transport crates. Upon further investigation of the crates, most of which were construction material and O2 processing nodes, I discovered a few that contained weapons and military-grade ship building materials.

It appears that GigaCorp has a hidden agenda supplying the colonies with weapons and GigaCorp ship building material. Perhaps these building supplies are not exactly for free.

After a complete search of the Belter's ship, I then asked J.A. Wolf to comment on his raid and GigaCorp's reasoning behind supplying the colonies with the weapons and shipbuilding materials. Wolf merely laughed and said, "Nothing is for free everything has its price especially as far as GigaCorp is concerned. It is obvious in return for building supplies the colony would have to manufacture GigaCorp ships. GigaCorp is simply giving these needy colonies no choice. Let this be a clear message to GigaCorp. If they continue to infringe on the freedom of the colonies, we will continue to raid their transports."

>>Samaritan: node: 67171.9192: We all figured something like this was probably happening -- but without a true source, who do we really believe? This could just be a Belter-lover doing a PR bid.

>>KillRaven_22: node: 922.0832_2: But this is GigaCorp -- and there has to be a price whenever they're involved.

>>Samaritan: node: 67171.9192: Probably true, but let's not take this story at face value if the writer doesn't have the guts to back up with his or her ID. Are they afraid that some GigaCorp wolf will swallow them whole?

DataNet File: 4277/11.992.3_4: "BIOS Assault Iron Coalition Lunar Facilities"

Report filed by "Samaritan"

Through sources controlling long-range sensors in near-Lunar orbits, I've been able to piece together the recent action that took place between two apparent BIOS factions and two lunar-based Iron Coalition forces.

What is amazing is that this is the furthest in-system the BIOS have ventured in their quest for genetic conquest. What is even more astounding is the force and size of the BIOS forces that hit the I.C factions.

The I.C Thrusters and I.C Vapors vigorously attempted to hold the BIOS factions at arms length but to no avail. Within 76 minutes, both Iron Coalition units were decimated -- but not without a vigilant fight.

The IC Thrusters were the first to fall by the wayside, about 50 minutes after hostilities were initiated. We were able to confirm 56 kills by the Thrusters with only 51 ejections and 10 deaths on their side. Both *Rabid_Otaku* and *Grazio1* were able to snare 4 kills each. Even *Iron_Lee* scouted as quickly as possible with 9 alephs spotted in his swift scouting pass. But it wasn't enough as enemy bombers got through early and decimated their structures.

The I.C Vapors were the next to fall after 76 minutes. We were also able confirm 56 kills accomplished by this team but they suffered 88 ejects and 11 deaths. The belief is that the BIOS focused more on the Thrusters in early battle else the results may have been different. *Xeth*, *Fragtzack*, *jerukhan*, *KGJV* and *mCyrus* each got 4 kills and *Tidan1* got 2 base kills. *Rage15* did a beautiful job of scouting the enemy locations with 6 alephs located -- but, again, enemy bombers were able to push through and slam into the Vapor's bases.

Finally it was down to the two BIOS factions. From ejection pod beacons, we've been able to determine the 2 factions were *DNA strand 12xc* and *DNA strand Vce3*. In their fierceness to gather the gene structures they so desire, they exploded into conflict over the each other's war treasures.

DNA Vce3 garnered 101 kills, while suffering 33 deaths and 155 ejections. *Cobol-Enchanter* achieved 8 kills, and *Gepatto*, 6kills. *Antipater_*, *Hunterseekr* and *PabloExtreme* each grabbed 5 kills. Where *Vce3* really shined was with their bomber crews: *Spliine* tagged 5 bases and *insane_chill* took out 4. Even *Black Viper_BS* trashed 3 enemy miners to help the *DNA Vce3* last as long as they did.

The *Vce3* did pull in 20 base kills to keep their chances alive but it was the *DNA 12cx* that took out 25 bases and captured victory this day. The team acquired 201 kills while only ejecting 107 times themselves. *Neoplasmosis*, a name to fear in Allegiance space, eradicated 17 enemies in the 1-hour-and-18-minute firefight. *BigDelite@Alleg*, with uncanny precision at the bomber controls, took out 7 bases.

If the BIOS continue to wreak havoc in the inner-system such as this, it is only a matter of time before Lunar I.C Headquarters falls to the BIOS -- and then what's next? Mars?

DataNet File: 9812/04.753.6_8: "GigaCorp Attacks on Belt Brought to Grinding Halt"

Report filed by "Samaritan"

On May 29th, 2150, the Belters finally drew a line in space, telling the GigaCorp that they were not welcome -- and then proceeded to prevent GigaCorp from crossing the line into what the Belters feel is their "home turf".

Twice, the prominent GigaCorp faction, the *Falcons*, established a foothold on the edge of the Asteroid Belt but was decimated each time. Here's what I've been able to determine from long-range detection sensors and radio buoys afloat in the inner system:

First Assault

The *GC Falcons* tried valiantly to get bombers through and make a dent on the Belter factions but to no avail. Pilots such as *DrakeReborn* and *CrazySheep1* each garnered 7 kills but the Falcons couldn't establish a strong enough foothold as The *Reveres* pounded the *Falcon* bases to oblivion. After an hour and 12 minutes, it was over for the *Falcons*.

The *Reveres* and the *Steamers*, in an apparent disagreement over salvage rights, fought each other for another 4 minutes, as they had been trashing each other throughout the battle with GigaCorp already.

The *Steamers* gathered 35 kills with pilots such as *unforgivun* taking 7 and *UNS_Haze* taking 6 but The *Reveres* were too strong with their successful bomber runs.

The *Reveres* grabbed 102 kills and also took out 16 bases and even captured 2 of them. *Sarumen* is a legend in the making with 22 kills in the one conflict while *AKAvenger* and *ErMaC318* took 15 and 14 respectively. *Fossil@Alleg* led the charge on bomber attacks smashing 7 enemy bases to oblivion.

I thought with the beating the GigaCorp took in their first assault that they wouldn't be back but the GigaCorp are persistent if nothing else.

Second Assault

The second conflict lasted nearly two hours as the battles raged through sectors in the Belt. The GigaCorp *Falcons*, refreshed with newly trained recruits and battle-hardened veterans, took the battle again to the Belters. *BraveheartII* took out 8 enemy pilots while *Bifasaurus_Rex* took out 6 but it was only a matter of time -- 90 minutes to be exact.

Again, the remaining Belter factions took to each other over He3 and salvage rights. For another 15 minutes they fought tooth-and-nail. *Theodred* took 8 kills for The *Reveres* this time, but it wasn't enough.

The *Steamers* rolled over The *Reveres* grabbing 112 kills and taking out 23 enemy bases. *Snelson5* eliminated 21 kills and *deadeyes0* took 13. *TC_Dagger* destroyed 9 bases with some outstanding bomber piloting and good fighter escorts.

Where does this leave the Belters and GigaCorp now? Will the GigaCorp re-evaluate their intentions toward Mars and refocus on the Belt or is this just a one-time incident? We'll have to wait and see how events unfold over the coming week.

DataNet File: 72396/12014.4_22: "GigaCorp Opens New Factories"

Report filed by: "Bobcat"

In a move that can only add more tension to the already volatile belt, especially given the latest conflicts, GigaCorp has announced the grand opening of its *New Concorde Armaments Works*. This factory, built on a colony platform just outside the belt, will manufacture fighters and other small craft. Miguel Sanchez has stated these new ships will be used for defensive purposes by the colonies and their GigaSecurity contractors.

The opening of this new factory has raised many concerns about the legitimacy of GigaCorp's "Coloni-Care" program. The New Concorde factory was built by one of the few colonies that bought into Coloni-Care support. The construction of this factory has caused many rumors to spread among the Belters of a secret GigaCorp plot to arm themselves with fighters produced in neutral colonies.

These rumors seem to have at least some substance, as many Belters are reporting GigaCorp forces they have skirmished with often contain fighters with New Concorde factory serial numbers. In a surprising move, the Iron Coalition has made no move to punish GigaCorp for this latest action. As Major Terrence put it, "The Iron Coalition will remain vigilant against threats to humanity and will not take action against the legitimate business of the private sector." Some sources have hypothesized that this apparent reversal in Coalition policy is due to the recent pressure on the Coalition by GigaCorp threats, and the policy reversal is nothing more than a measure to gain time and regroup.

Sources closer to Fisk tell a different story. Recently, there has been a general outcry in the belt against Iron Coalition intrusion. Orion Shoals has spoken out against the Coalition forces in the belt, and pilot training schools setup by the Coalition in the belt have received less than enthusiastic patrons. These sources report Fisk thinks the Belters are "getting their just deserts" from the renewed GigaCorp expansion.

>>RedHED:node:0332_497.64: I dunno which is better, Giga and IC fighting all over our turf, or having the IC pull out and leave us at the mercy of those Giga pennypinchers. I for one don't like either, but I'd rather the IC bust Giga a couple right about now so I could get on with my trading.

>>Ace_422:node:1097_848.31: That's exactly what the IC wants us to think. I say it's better we've got one enemy now, and can take them down without having the IC always step in and let Giga take a refresher. We'll deal with the IC in due time, but right now I'm looking forward to bustin' up some of those bee-utiful new Giga fighters.

>>RedHED:node:0332_497.64: Heh. I think you'll be singing a different tune when you've got Giga interceptors all over your tail in a week or two.

>>JumpinJoe43:node:5130_132.02: I've talked to some of the boys down on the Fear's Point colony where the factory was built, and they've indicated it wasn't their choice to have the factory. The way they tell it, Giga hooked up Fear's Point to a lifeline of supplies, then threatened to take the supplies away if the colonists didn't build the factory. Now, these boys were never too buddy-buddy with GigaCorp, but this makes me think that this factory ain't all smiles and flowers, y'know?

>>Ace_422:node:1097_848.31: And that's the type of bullying I'm gonna go avenge on a coupla of those hotshot Gigas.

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

Samaritan: *We here at DataNet have an exclusive for all you freedom fighters out there -- an exclusive interview with the commander of both battles during the "Coloni-Care" scuffles that took place earlier this past week. His name is Captain Justin "ErMaC318" Emerson. ErMaC318, thanks for agreeing to this interview.*

ErMaC: My pleasure, I needed some rest after that furball on Monday.

S: *Can you tell us a little about yourself?*

E: Well, I've been flying ships since I was a young'n, and I suppose commanding just came naturally to me. I been sort of a freelancer for the last several years, just hopping between Belter trading rings and helping them out when I can.

S: *When did you hear about GigaCorp "Coloni-Care" program?*

E: Well, I been talking to the folk down at Fear's Point for a long time, and they was all ecstatic about the G.C. program because they thought it was a really great deal. Turns out that this week they had to pay the piper.

S: *Did you think that outright hostilities between the Belters and GigaCorp forces would actually come to pass?*

E: I knew it was gonna happen sometime, but I never thought it would be this brutal. GigaCorp really got their tails kicked, and I know li'l' Miss Mercedes Keller ain't too pleased with her troops right about now.

S: *Can you describe what transpired on Monday?*

E: Well, come this week the tensions about GigaCorp's colony program finally reached the breaking point when they tried to force the colonies over in the 22nd belt sector (just nigh twenty thousand clicks or so from Okanagon) to build one of them factories that their "Coloni-Care" program had been really set up to facilitate. I don't care what the official PR mumbo-jumbo is outta GC's marketing department, but I seen with my own eyes those transports carrying raw materials to build them new GC fighters, and I ain't gonna stand for it. So when I heard that the GC Falcons or whatever ya want to call them had taken over some asteroids near the 22nd, I put my foot down.

I took a quick ride over to The Reveres HQ in that area (they're one of the local trading groups) when I heard they were planning on takin' the fight to those GC dogs and kicking their arses outta our space. I had plenty of command experience against those IC fascists, but I'd never taken the GigaCorp forces on headfirst like I did that Monday.

Anyways, so about sixteen hundred hours or so, GC started makin' their move against us, and I grabbed the commander's seat. I knew I had some great pilots under me, some of the fiercest fighters I'd ever seen in the Belt, 'specially that Fossil boy -- man, that kid will wale on any poor bastard that gets in his way, I tell you what. But anyhow, I found out that the Reveres hadn't done any sorta proper scouting around that sector of space so I went into the conflict blind as an Interceptor -- not a good way to start a battle.

Well bout three minutes into it we had scouted most of the sectors near us when we end up meetin' some fellow traders, going by the name of the Steamers. They was nice folk, but they seemed kinda adversarial in the beginning but we pretty much ended up ignoring each other since we both just wanted GC outta our space. Turns out that GC was kinda in between us, which made the unconscious decision not to attack each other even easier.

Anyways, we got a hold o' Destroyers real quick-like, cause I knew that them flaky GigaCorp bases would get chewed up by those new MIRV missiles that we hijacked off an IC Destroyer a week or so back. We went on a major rampage and took out most of the GC bases near us, and finally after a half hour or so we took the fight to them with a Teleport Probe drop in their sector (great work by a pilot going by Javan) and then we basically blew 'em outta existence. They put up a dang good fight but their Heavy Interceptors were no match for my team's Caps.

After beatin' them, though, then the Steamers come in and try to run us outta the sector! I was hoping that it wouldn't come down to this, but even amongst the Belters there are inner conflicts, which are always about money. Anyways, it didn't take us long to end the conflict, because Javan plopped another probe in their sector and we nailed them good.

S: Apparently there was a second conflict that took place later that day.

E: Yea, GC got back into the action fairly shortly.

I felt kinda sorry for the Steamers, so after the furball had cleared up I went and sent help to 'em. I even flew over there myself, but when I got there they were all in a tussle about something. Apparently the GC Falcons had sent in reinforcements, but they were too late to save the previous regiment. Now they were lookin' for revenge, and had grabbed another sector and were getting ready to beat up on us. Well, the Steamers acted real nice to me, they didn't seem to be too mad at me for blowin' up some of their bases (kinda surprising to me), and since I still wanted GC to run back home with their tails between their legs, I decided to help them out.

Around twenty hundred hours, GC was on the move again, and I used the same tactic against them and it went like clockwork. These Steamer folk are mighty tough, and we managed to knock off the GC troops pretty darn quick. But unfortunately I had to take out the remainders of the Reveres forces, since they were threatening to take us out over the salvage rights. You could say the two conflicts were almost identical other than which Belter side stayed behind afterwards, although the second time I knew what the sector layout was like and I used that to my advantage.

S: How long do you think it will be before GigaCorp returns?

E: Oh they'll be back soon, but since I know that GC's goons'll be reading this, I just want to send them a message. I lost some good men out there on Monday, some men who gave their lives for freedom. Don't you ever think that their deaths will not go unpunished. If I ever see G.C. try to jump our territory again, they'll pay bigtime. Live Free or Die, my friends -- Long Live The Raven!

Also, be sure to check in with me at **PlanetAllegiance!**

S: Thanks for your time and trusting me through an open-node link-up to talk to me. We'll be tracking the ongoing GigaCorp movements through the Belt and now into Mars as well and continue to try to bring the real story to all who are interested in truth and freedom.

DataNet File: 81722/8889.6_05: "GigaCorp Increases the Pressure"

Report filed by: "Bobcat"

The past week has seen some momentous events. The hitherto quiet BIOS came from the shadows to threaten the Iron Coalition Lunar Headquarters. More incredible, however, were the Belters stunning victories in the face of overwhelming GigaCorp numbers. Unfortunately for the brave Belters, "overwhelming" is soon becoming the most used adjective for GigaCorp forces in the Belt.

Although many of the first-run GigaCorp fighters from the New Concorde factory were destroyed in the battles around the 22nd Belt Sector, it has become very soon apparent that the factory had not yet been fully implemented. Eyewitness trader reports have told of up to five new fighters and interceptors completed each day at New Concorde. With the added production from GigaCorp's Martian factories, GigaCorp Security Forces will soon be the largest unified military force ever seen.

These unwelcome projections have caused much worry among the other major players in this newest round of fighting. Major Robert Terrence of the Iron Coalition had announced yet another apparent policy reversal. In his latest press conference, he stated: "The Iron Coalition was amenable to the New Concorde factory on the condition that it was to be used for commercial purposes. However, GigaCorp has been proven to be exploiting the Fear's Point colony to aggrandize its own forces. The Iron Coalition cannot just stand back and watch these colonists be violated."

Various leaders among the Belters have expressed outrage at GigaCorp and even Orion Shoals was induced to comment that, if the factory were not closed he'd: " -- repossess Fear's Point from those Giga [censored] -- " Even more startling, traders on the far side of the Belt have reported increased frequency of BIOS sightings.

>>CraterFacedJAKE:node:2153_037.28: I've got real life experience with these new waves of Giga fighters. I was offa asteroid a2047 when my mining operation was jumped by no less than 20 of the buggers. Well, my escorts and me fought them off for more'n ten minutes before they shot us all out. If it weren't for the Cruiser Wolfhead coming along right that minute, we woulda been toast. Even when the Wolfhead came, more and more a' those Gigas kept coming until the Wolfhead killed around 50 of them. It was quite'a fight.

>>AirHED:node:0332_497.64: Sounds pretty rough out there. Hey, whatever happened to that guy Ace who was braggin' about killin' Gigas all over the place?

>>Medic491:node:4110_911.22: I picked up that guy yesterday. Got swarmed by GC scouts, he had to punch out before taking down even one. That's not the end, though. One of the Gigas punctured his pod, so he won't be boasting anymore.

>>CraterFacedJAKE:node:2153_037.28: Gawd, looks like the belt is becoming a lot more dangerous place.

DataNet File: 1347/3892.26_7: "Iron Coalition and GigaCorp Sign Secret Truce?"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

I wouldn't believe it but then we have seen the impossible in the past 10 years. Who would of thought that we would live to see our beloved Earth as just a lifeless smoldering hulk, now spiraling in its orbital dance of death for eternity? At this point, I'm willing to believe in little green men from outer alephs and even the I.C. And G.C. becoming a Big GIC to further their own ends.

From surveying several Data_node long-range transmissions from last week, that's what appears to have happened in an organized attack on both Jupiter and Saturn BIOS factional bases.

The *I.C. Bulldogs* and *G.C. Rapiers* both launched strikes at two prominent BIOS factions recently discovered in near-orbits of both worlds. Even though each side has some nominal forces secretly built at the start, the *Rapiers* were the first to feel the bite of battle. The next stage in BIOS development was evidently one of the GC's goals as the squadron that fought them the most was the BIOS faction named *Beta G1s*, a new military breed of BIOS. After an hour and 10 minutes, the *Rapiers* fell to the bite of BIOS. The *Rapiers* did account for their presence, scoring 77 kills with 29 kills and 129 ejections. With only 4 base kills to their credit, though, it was only a matter of time before they fell -- even with pilots such as *BigDelite@Alleg* and *ZigOZag* getting 6 and 5 kills respectively. *Regarion* did grab 2 base kills but -- it was not enough to stop the BIOS onslaught.

The Iron Coalition *Bulldogs* fought valiantly while the BIOS factions began fighting between themselves in attempts to gather the floating specimens available for their gene research. The *DNA Beta G1s* and *Alpha Xvs* were a close match, even with the steady hand of *Kevdude_SF* commanding the Alphas, but *Gunjove* and *Malphigian* with 4 and 3 base captures each brought the battle to a quicker end than it deserved. *Malphigian* also took 10 kills as well in the defeat of the Alphas. Some 15 minutes after the GigaCorp were defeated, the Alphas were destroyed.

Now a valiant battle persisted between the *DNA Beta G1s* and the *Bulldogs*. The large map gave the BIOS the advantage with their build times and advanced structures but the constant whittling from the *Rapiers* and Alphas diminished the advantage. The *Bulldogs* had a dozen pilots that brought home over 10 kills: *KaptainKyle* -- 11, *ErMaC318* -- 18, *Xineon* -- 10, *GUNS22* -- 12, *super_tbiza* -- 13, *Theodred* -- 19, *Mufatu* -- 12, *Crazy_Bolek* -- 12, *EdF* -- 11, *_Phoenix_* -- 13, *Miserablism* -- 10 and *KrakPenguin* -- 11. With 152 kills and only 54 ejections between them all, these are the types of stats that take home victory. Then add in players like *bain4* who decimated 12 enemy bases and victory is all but ensured!

The *Beta G1s* took out a hundred ships in the ongoing saga but then the *Bulldogs* erased 249 ships from the heavens! With 28 bases destroyed total, at 1 hour and 43 minutes after the start, the *Bulldogs* took home the laurels of victory.

With two BIOS factions eradicated, the *GC Rapiers* finished and the I.C victorious, how will this impact the ongoing Mars initiative in the GigaCorp camp? Will the BIOS be pushed back further or will they retaliate? Did the I.C. and G.C. truly cooperate or was it just a matter of coincidence? I'll continue to dredge up whatever information I can through data-sniffers in the Data_nodes and let you know as soon as I find out.

>>**Dr_Dread: node: 3086_102.87:** The I.C and G.C. teaming up? Fisk wouldn't stand for it!

>>**Peeps [node restricted]:** I agree. I think that the I.C or G.C. got some good intelligence on the other and decided that there would be a good diversion when they attacked. Too bad it didn't work out for the G.C. -- sarcasm, if you needed to know.

>>**Dr_Dread: node: 3086_102.87:** I'm not sure. With the G.C focused on Belters and now the indies of Mars and the I.C dealing with some internal struggles, maybe Fisk asked for the diversion with their cooperation.

>>**Peeps [node restricted]:** Yeah -- and I think that the BIOS are only looking out for my best interest. Go suck some vacuum, Dread, you're WAY outta touch with reality.

DataNet File: 4371/93.489.2_6: "Victories Posted by BIOS and Belters"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

The open aggression in the warring factions continues to twist and turn with each passing day. First came the reports of the BIOS assaulting the outer rim of the Belt. Three separate though smaller BIOS factions attacked the *Red Raven*, *Slappers*, and the *1776'ers*. The very next day, the Belters, still feeling the sting of recent GigaCorp aggression, took the unprecedented move of a deep-space strike at GigaCorp Central 0 in near Earth orbit.

In the first conflict, the BIOS were composed of DNA-coded sapiens of *Alpha Cv*, *Beta X1* and *Gamma R1*. From ejection-pod buoy signatures, we've been able to tally the results from the battle. The BIOS did decimate the 3 Belter squads but not without suffering losses of their own. *Gepatto*, *CB_ShadowHawk* and *DBZ_Goku13* brought in 12, 18 and 25 kills respectively for the BIOS factions. What is amazing is that *DBZ_Goku13* only had 1 ejection and no deaths the entire conflict. It makes one wonder if truly the BIOS solution is the right solution when one sees results such as these. I am just kidding, of course. *Tranj*, *syuker*, and *Falnyx@Alleg* brought in 10, 12 and 8 kills for the Belters.

After an hour and 10 minutes, the *1776'ers* were destroyed. The *Slappers* held out for another hour as did the fabled *Red Ravens*, but the bombing runs of the BIOS factions were too deadly. After 2 ½ hours, it was over. The Belters threw everything they had at the Bio but the advanced technology and deadly bomber assaults destroyed the rock-strewn havens of Belters through the outer rim.

With the reinforcements suffered in the outer rim, it was all the more incredible when within 24 hours, the Belters launched a heavy assault on GigaCorp Central 0 in near-Earth orbit. Over 20 pilots represented each faction in the ongoing onslaught. The battle was very even-handed but what made the difference was the strategy each team took for victory. The GigaCorp attempted to launch bombers and take any Belter facility as they built them. The G.C. were able to take out 5 with pilots such as *DBZ_Goku13* taking out 3 of them but the Belters, with blood in their eye and only seeking death, went for kills.

After sending 60 GigaCorp pilots into the vacuum over Earth, the G.C. called an end to the hostilities and took their remaining forces elsewhere through the Aleph network.

BIOS and Belters have further changed the geo-political environment in the inner system. With some much bloodletting, something is going to give in the near future -- it has to!

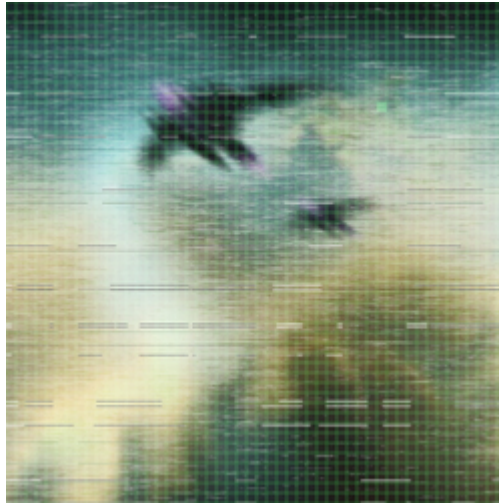
>>Raven012: node: 54489.0922: The Ravens now shall spread their wings and claim their rightful place in the inner-system. No longer shall we tolerate any meddling from the IC or GC.

>>Profiteer99: node: 9622.7384_2: But how about them BIOS? Kicked your butts into the inner-system! Nowhere else to go, GigaCorp Meat -- but down.

DataNet File: 6445/87.256.2_1: "ALERT! UNKNOWN CRAFT ATTACK OUTER SYSTEM!"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

At 5:12 PM SCT (Solar Central Time), an unknown assault force attacked an outlying BIOS facility in Alpha-Centauri. Though there have been no reports from the extremely secretive BIOS, data_nodes were able to detect a flurry of comm_nodal activity in the outer system as apparently BIOS ships were rushed to the area.



Bobcat, an extremely valuable DataNet reporter, was able to sift the above image from BIOS comm_nodal traffic that apparently shows the attacking craft leaving after their attack.

Can this truly be our first encounter with "little green men"? Many of us have felt it was only a matter of time as we explored further and further outwards through the alephs. With the past 10 years, we have been focused completely inwards on the pain and suffering of the demise of Earth and with our own inner-conflict. Maybe the confrontation of an alien presence will help us do what we have not been able to do on our own -- join together.

Through the years, we have all heard of ships mysteriously disappearing in the bleakness of space, to never be heard of again. Now here is what appears to be actual proof, as the telemetry and propulsion system of the enemy craft are something no human has ever seen before. Or at least, seen and survived to tell about it.

One final thought -- if this isn't some covert force of the Iron Coalition or the GigaCorp -- then why did the alien presence decide now is the time to show themselves? What has happened or is about to happen that makes them feel it is okay to chance being seen by us? And why is our first contact with them a hostile one? Did the BIOS attack them first and the alien race is truly a peaceful civilization just protecting themselves or is this alien presence truly a hostile one? So many questions and only time -- and more encounters with the new race -- will provide the answers.

>>**Squirrel^Nut: node: 54489.0922:** Sweet mother of all universal goodness! This is it! This is the only the beginning. Whoever -- or whatever -- they are, these beings are just testing our perimeters and seeing how we'll react. To not react and join together -- is just to die. We must NOW join all together and find the source of this alien presence -- and let them know that we are here to stay.

>>**Barf-O-Matic: node: 9622.7384_2:** Alien presence, my left lobe! It's nuthin' but a secret GigaCorp faction under deep cover trying to pull the wool over all our eyes. Only way I'm going to believe in any stinkin' "alien presence" is if the little suckers land on my forehead, knock twice and wear little placecards. Give me a break!

>>**Preacherbabe99: node: 3225.47209_1:** When they're knocking on your head, it will be with a technology that will make you wet your knickers! This universe wasn't made for just you and me. Someone else is out there -- and they may not be taking to kindly to us running through their space -- even if accidentally!

DataNet File: 48534/3285.2_97: "Resurgent Iron Coalition Threatens BIOS"

Report filed by: "Bobcat"

Two weeks ago, daring BIOS forces carried out a successful strike in near-Lunar space, threatening the Iron Coalition's Lunar Headquarters at Leonov Station. The BIOS also began pushing into the belt, crushing the fragmented Belter forces they came across. This week, the Iron Coalition seemed to say enough is enough and began a strong push into Saturn orbit.

The 3rd Iron Coalition Battle Group, made up of the Iron Coalition *Bulldog* and *Thruster* squadrons, was the spearhead of the Iron Coalition offensive. Both squadrons have posted impressive victories over BIOS forces, as well as intervening GigaCorp and Belter forces, in the past week.

The Iron Coalition *Bulldogs* began the drive by taking advantage of the chaos created by the destruction of a G.C. squadron in near-Lunar space by two BIOS units. After the GigaCorp squadron was destroyed, the *Bulldogs* fell upon the superior BIOS forces using a combination of surprise and strategy to decimate the BIOS.

The *Thrusters* wasted no time in exploiting the breathing room created by the *Bulldog* victory. In heavy fighting on the edge of the belt, the *Thrusters* not only destroyed the BIOS bridgehead in the Inner System, but also damaged GigaCorp security forces and independent Belter fighters.

Although these recent Iron Coalition gains have made many independent Belters worried about the possibility of Iron Coalition ascendancy, Orion Shoals has contacted DataNet to express his confident opinion: "The BIOS will probably push them back when the deal is handled with whatever these possibly new creatures found out along the rim."

GigaCorp security contractors currently employed by colonists point out that the Iron Coalition has taken heavy losses in their campaign, and establishing a blockade around Saturn will probably stretch their forces to the limit. When asked the purpose of the renewed drive, Major Robert Terrence stated: "The BIOS forces have become a threat to the peace and order maintained in the Inner System by the United Nations Forces under General Fisk. Our move simply reestablished this peace for the benefit of the citizens of the Inner System."

>>**Spunky_Kid404:node: 4210_887.13:** Whas this bull Terrence is givin' us about "peace and order" in da Inner System? Peace and fascism, seems to me. Well, whateva the I.C.s gonna do in the future, I for one am glad they took them BIOS creeps outta the belt. I like fighting an enemy that'll kill ya, not make ya into a zombie.

>>**BIGpoppa:node: 2813_210.89:** I dunno Spunky, seems like it's just goin from bad to worse. At least before we had everyone fightin everyone, and no one paid too much attention to us traders. But now, it looks like the I.C.'s finally gonna have time to track me down for all my parkin' violations, and I's don't like that at all.

>>**PiLoT911:node: 7325_964.75:** Hey hey hey! I think we're all fogettin about Giga! They just opened a new factory for Shoals' Sake! I heard one a'dose Giga security contractors tellin' my buddy that da time is right for Giga to bust out, what with all them I.C. squadrons flung all over the place. I think we's gonna see Fisk get shamed once again real soon.

>>**BIGpoppa:node: 2813_210.89:** I certainly hope so!

>>**Spunky_Kid404: node:4210_887.13:** I dunno you guys, peace and quiet tradin' are startin' to look real good to me right now, no matter how it gets here.

DataNet File: 87112/5095.4_17: "Alien Craft Attack Shadow Sectors"

Report filed by: "Samaritan"

At 4:42 SCT on June 14th, mankind's wonderment and fears of the universe became a reality when Iron Coalition forces in the Shadow sectors sighted alien craft. These craft made no mystery about their intentions as they immediately began their attack upon the Iron Coalition forces.

Although the details are sketchy, the insectoid-looking craft fought for 45 minutes with Iron Coalition craft. Throughout the attack, transmissions were broadcast to all craft. Though Iron Coalition forces have only begun to try to decipher the alien transmission, data-sifts on the IC nodes show that they believe the "alien race believe they are not only the creators of the universe that abounds -- but also the destined race to which the universe belongs." The religious aspect of the alien's message is not lost on us, the remnants of a once-proud and united human race of Earth.

With each passing day, I hope for the solution, the destiny we have in the stars -- a reason as to why we have been stranded in the black void. Now we encounter a truly alien race -- and it appears that they have destiny in hand -- and we may just be momentary pause in their path. Can we join together and stand united to this alien presence -- or will we fall, fragmented and in disarray, to the marching hooves of war?

>>Starpuke_55:node: 3331_082.56: Man, lighten up, Samaritan. You're starting to sound like some apocalyptic prophet wearing your sandwich board telling us that THE END IS NEAR! The end is near -- for any alien slime that tries to kick me off my rock. Bring it on, long-john!

>>O2Ohmy:node: 29822_339.89: I think Samaritan is just voicing worries and concerns that we've all had with the destruction of Earth. We've always wanted to believe in the "greater purpose". What is it? To just be food, or worse, for these aliens that apparently want to move through our territory. We must look awful weak to them right now -- a prime target for expansion!

DataNet File: 87112/2674.6_27: "Aftermath of Preliminary BIOS/Rixian Contact"

Report filed by: "KronkiteNOW". Defeat of BIOS forces.

Last week, the arrival of the Rixian Unity seemed to herald a new ally against the Iron Coalition. The June 14th attack on Coalition craft left little doubt of this in many minds. Almost two weeks later, and details of yet another faction's disturbing contact with the Rixians are coming to light.

MuzakMan, alias call-name for a young Belter pilot, sent in the following account:

"We went out in response to an intercepted BIOS transmission. Seemed they'd managed to contact the Rixians -- wanted to parlay, I reckon. Captain Westray himself sent us. Kind of *be a fly-on-the-wall* sorta thing, for the ol' 129th.

"Parlay took place way out near the Rings o' Saturn. We approached slow enough -- keep a low signature profile, of course. By the time we reached the edge of the section, though, it was already over.

"All of a sudden, and we're coasting through a whole minefield of these little ruby crystals. Guy on my wing calls over, asking what the heck they were. Blood, I told him. Frozen droplets -- kinda thing happens like that when a fella gets splattered out in space.

"Sure enough, we stumbled onto the edge of a battlefield. Still smoking. The Rixians had all left by that point. And the BIOS? Not much left at all. We found a shattered escape pod, still broadcasting its automated: *I need a pick-up!* signal. Lotta ruby crystals, so to speak, around that, too.

"Now, I'm not much a fan of the BIOS, that's for sure. But it's a pretty low deal to blast any man in his pod. Guess the Rixians didn't much like what the BIOS had to offer. Any case, they didn't even leave much to salvage."

Similar reports of the apparent BIOS massacre at the hands of the Rixians have trickled through the DataNet. No one had contacted any of the aliens directly, but many sources offered their own bytes of downloaded transmissions, with apparently Rixian voices speaking of *conquest* and *the Code*. Those who offered information on the physical battlefield itself mentioned evidence of strong energy scoring of BIOS ships, and yet not the remains of a single missile that wasn't BIOS in origin.

Will the outcome of all future meetings with the Rixian Unity be as inevitable?

>>**MotesArt:node: 98997_06.16:** A new enemy of the Iron Coalition *and* BIOS? Minus the beer, sounds like Belter heaven to me! And just who the heck is this KronkiteNOW anyways?

>>**Aunt_Sam: 98437_87_87:** Gloom and doom! Gloom and doom! A buncha aliens blind-siding a peace delegation don't scare me! Let's see them take on a unit prepared to fight! Then we'll see who bleeds all over space!

>>**Starkiller: 34769_54_65:** An inevitable outcome? KronkiteNOW may know how write a line of tabloid copy, but he doesn't know much about us pilots. If anything, the Rixian Unity will only give man a chance to prove his valor yet again.

DataNet File: 873243/2137.6_28: "All Faction Broadcast"

Report filed by: "I, Horus". Transcript of the Rixian open recruitment call.

The following transcript is from a broadcast message sent out just before midnight, June 27th. The broadcast was sent as an open transmission to all faction channels.

A message of greeting to the unenlightened:

For generations untold, you have toiled under the dictatorship of one regime or another. Today, those regimes go by the names of: GigaCorp, the Iron Coalition, the BIOS.

We come to offer you freedom from all such oppression. And -- the chance to enlighten yourself from the oppression of all mortal concerns.

Join with us! Follow the Code -- the Rixian Unity can guide you along the true path towards ultimate salvation. At the same time, embrace the chance to strike down your former oppressors.

Issa Rix personally offers you a place in the Unity. All are welcome. Join us -- for the sake of your mortal soul.

Issa Rix -- of the Rixian Unity

It would seem that the Rixians have taken a *join us or suffer the consequences* stance. After both the Iron Coalition and BIOS forces' devastating run-ins with the Rixian Unity, all factions have been gearing up to take on this new power. The Rixians have certainly come, and not in peace.

At the same time it must be noted that defections have already begun -- most notably from the BIOS camp. Yet, are these BIOS really after true spiritual enlightenment, unattainable through their genetic engineering? Or merely acting the part, as insurgent agents infiltrating an enemy camp, as they have been known to do so well in the past?

>>Pig_in_Space: 784368_54.26: That's right, baby! The oppressive Iron Coalition? I still have yet to see my *April* paystub!! If the Unity pays anything like cash in hand -- that's where the merc action's at!

>>Aunt_Sam: 37633_54.65: Join up with the little green men? Only damn fools or outright traitors -- traitors to ALL mankind -- would consider that! Any human flying one a their ships can expect some extra sweet sugar from Aunt_Sam!

DataNet File: 26060500/0118.6_29: "BIOS/Belters Defeat Rixians"

Report filed by: "KronkiteNOW". First Defeat of the Rixian Unity.

In what has already been widely broadcast over all faction transmissions, the combined forces of BIOS and Belter pilots met the Rixian Unity last night -- and won!

When the Rixians first appeared in the system several weeks ago, scholars and scientists rejoiced. Here, at long last, was the first concrete proof of alien life. The Rixians themselves broadcast vague messages of peace and spiritual enlightenment. All too quickly, though, it became clear that Rixian philosophy meant: *join us or die*, and Rixian warships quickly dispatched Iron Coalition and BIOS parties sent to meet them.

However, hope for the fate of mankind has clearly rekindled. BIOS and Belter forces, aligning in secret, last night met and defeated a Rixian fleet. Information sent to DataNet reveal that the BIOS unit, *DNA Mega Rzx1*, did the most to ensure victory. BIOS pilot, *Braveheart II* alone chalked up 21 Rixian kills, with his partner, *TC_AgentSmith*, claiming an additional 20 kills himself. *Cy72's* bombing runs succeeded in scoring 5 base kills.

The Belters, though not as prominent, helped with their part as well. Most notably, *ryjamsan* defeated 6 Rixian pilots and *_SRM_snake* supplied 2 base kills.

However important, the victory was not won lightly. Some BIOS and Belter pilots were forced to eject upward of eleven times. And the Rixians themselves proved more than capable, with the likes of *Ahaneon@Alleg* scoring 18 kills and *NB_CLINT30* scoring 16.

While the victory is still being celebrated, more issues are raised. One Rixian unit has been defeated in combat -- how will the rest of the Unity respond? And an earlier broadcast from the aliens, an open call for recruits, did not fall on entirely deaf ears; already many, especially BIOS pilots, have answered the call. These BIOS defections have also succeeded in drawing concern among the other factions. After yesterday's battle, in unlikely fashion, the BIOS and Belters agreed to leave the field in continued truce. For the Belters, they had their pick of Rixian craft to salvage. And the BIOS left, apparently content to collect the remains of Rixian pilots for research. Or, as some speculate, is all this merely an attempt to add Rixian genes to their own?

>>Starkiller: 34769_54_65: Yes, as has been predicted, mankind has emerged triumphant. For those who stay true to their factions, there should be no reason to fear the Rixian Unity as a whole. Perhaps this whole episode can one day serve to bring all factions of man back together again.

>>MotesArt:node: 98997_06.16: Not as prominent? Who the -- KronkiteNOW better get his ^%&ing facts straight about the true heroes of the battle -- the Belters! And what about that Rixian call to arms! They didn't even mention us! Haven't we proven ourselves worthy enough to be an oppressive regime too?

>>Dolbec Gri: 0010_10_01_1010: unity unity unity follow the code follow your leader Issa Rix unity unity unity follow the code follow your leader Issa Rix

DataNet File: 26060500/1028.6_30: "The Rixian Unity Strikes Back"

Report filed by: "KronkiteNOW". Rixians gain revenge against BIOS.

After the first major defeat of the Rixians, the alien Unity managed to marshal its forces to defeat an attack force of approximately 30 BIOS pilots. The hour-long battle took place last night in an undisclosed sector of space near the rings of Saturn.

The BIOS, characteristically silent in regards to DataNet postings, provided no information. However, Belter pilots, aware of the battle and sent in afterwards to salvage wreckage, did provide the Net with some clues to the battle. MuzakMan, one such Belter pilot with the salvage team, had this to say:

"The Rix mighta won, but not easy! Looked like about 50 of their ships got destroyed out there. Still no sign of any Rix missiles either, unless we just don't know what they look like . . . plenty of their new-fangled gun pods, though. Saw them suckers in action the last time us Belters took on the Rix. Them pods drop, and start shooting the holy heck outta everything in sight!"

Transmissions broadcast during the battle revealed call-names for several prominent Rixian pilots. These included *fromern*, a Rix pilot claiming 8 kills, and *Iceman_JG*, with 2 base kills. On the BIOS side, the call-names *haije* and *Common Cheetah* appeared, each with 9 kills apiece.

Neither MuzakMan, nor any of the other Belters, made reference to current theories of BIOS involvement with the Rixian. Many have speculated that BIOS pilots have answered the Rixian open call for recruitment in order to infiltrate the alien ranks to steal both technological secrets -- and Rixian genes. Perhaps, then, the BIOS attack last night was meant to test the ability of the insurgent BIOS agents to weaken the Rixians in battle; if this is the case, the heavy loss of 50 Rixian ships would seem to indicate BIOS success.

Transmissions also reveal that the BIOS pilots left the battle in the later stages, rather than be fight to the death. The Rixians may have won last night's battle, but was it merely against a probing BIOS attack? Sources indicate a major event occurring some time in the very near future -- an event to include not only the BIOS and Belters against the Rixian, but the re-appearance of Iron Coalition and GigaCorp forces.

>>Aunt_Sam: 98437_87_87: Leave it to the BIOS to play dirty little tricks instead a stand up and fight fair! I could rack up 50 kills myself if the other pilots were all BIOS losers -- or camp following Belter scavengers! That's right, reporter-man: get ready for the Coalition!!

>>Issa's Arm_201: 10_001_101_10: Issa Rix will destroy all non-believers. Follow the Code.

>>Luner-C Child: 76488_65.325: I've seen the BIOS and I've seen the Rix: between them, I'd rather not see a combination of the two! Straight man-genes: yessiree, that's the way to be.

>>Issa's Arm_87: 10_001_111_01: Follow the Code.

Milk Run

by Eric S Trautmann

"Nothing ever happens on these runs, Captain," muttered Flight Officer Jackson. "I thought space would be . . . I dunno . . . more . . ."

"More like the holos?" Captain Harlan "Doc" Ramsey snorted. "Life ain't a docudrama, kid. If you want excitement, sign up for military service. There's plenty of shooting off to these days. That ought to be a hell of an adventure."

"I've considered it, sir. Cargo runs from Earth to Mars to Luna and back again isn't exactly the kind of space career I was hoping for."

"Then consider this, Flight Officer Jackson," Ramsey snapped, making his junior officer wince. "Consider catching a Belter rocket in the air tank and suffocating to death. Consider a munitions malfunction that holes your suit and boils you alive. Consider being forced to kill a dozen people that are trying to kill you, just for the air in your tanks."

"Adventures aren't fun or entertaining for the people that live them, Jackson."

As Jackson blushed, Ramsey reflected -- for the hundredth time since the cargo vessel lifted off -- that he just didn't understand the younger generation's attitude about space service. Jackson endlessly bitched about the shuttle's condition (it wasn't a military craft, sure, but it was well-maintained and reliable), the food (standard space rations), and even, most baffling to Ramsey, the boredom. Ramsey never found space boring. Space would find all sorts of ways to kill you, he believed. The minute you stop respecting her, she cuts your umbilical, or lobs a micro-meteor through your hull, or throws at all any of a million other everyday hazards which, when added together, meant that anything less than perfection was deadly.

Shaking his head ruefully, he keyed the long-range communications array. "GigaCorp Transit Vessel *Theta-1199*, requesting approach corridor Baker for Lunar orbit."

After a brief pause, Ramsey frowned. Keying the comm array controls again, he spoke more loudly: "Luna Control, do you read? This is *1199*, requesting approach corridor Baker. If I miss my window, these supplies won't get to Mars on time and we'll all catch hell."

A burst of static provided the only response. *Damned peculiar*, Ramsey thought. *Maybe their comm array is out of alignment.*

"Jackson, see if there's a lunarsat we can bounce a signal off to get through this interference," Ramsey ordered, splitting his attention between his guidance controls and the comm system. The distance before he missed his approach window was rapidly dwindling.

"Sir, piggybacking a signal like you ordered is a violation of company protocols. Someone could intercept the transmission," Jackson replied nervously. "We could get in serious trouble."

"I thought you wanted some adventure. Do it."

"Complying," the junior officer grunted, clearly unhappy. A moment later, Jackson muttered, "Nothing yet sir. It's probably just a misaligned comm array or a defective transmitter module. Nothing ever happens on these milk runs."

Ramsey remained silent. Something just felt . . . wrong. "Try and raise them again, Jackson. I don't care who I have to talk to; I need to know if we have our orbital corridor or not. I don't particularly want to play chicken with another cargo rig, do you?"

Jackson flipped some switches, fine-tuning the frequency transmitter settings. "Sir, I'm getting something. It's faint and pretty distorted . . . but it sounds like they heard us and are trying to respond."

"Let's hear it."

Static burst from the main speakers, followed by a howl of feedback. Suddenly the distortion cleared dramatically, allowing Ramsey and Jackson to hear: "Transport *GCT-1199*: this is Luna Control. We've had some kind of meteor shower. Primary comm is down; long-range detection gear is down. Repeat: traffic control is down! I don't know if you can hear me, but break off. Dammit, break off now! Head for open space! Get out of the orbital corridor!" Static again drowned out the signal.

Ramsey and Jackson pulled themselves to their seats, as fast as zero-g would allow.

"Seal your suit, Jackson. Move it!" Ramsey yelled, slamming shut his own suit seals and belting himself in. As soon as he saw that the younger officer was secured, he flipped open the cover to the manual flight controls, and began to roll the ship out of its flight path, vectoring up from the lunar surface.

Ramsey worked frantically, rolling his craft and applying thrust, pushing the engines for all they were worth. Double-checking his course, he began mentally re-computing fuel consumption figures (an ability that had earned him his nickname, "Doc" Ramsey), and grunted with satisfaction; the diversion shouldn't blow their rendezvous window by more than a single orbit. The shuttle had power for four more orbits, if needed.

"Collision alert!" Jackson yelled, sending a data feed to Ramsey's terminal. On his screen, half a dozen cargo shuttles -- some from GigaCorp, some not -- were converging near *1199*'s position. Before Ramsey could react, two of the shuttles collided, venting atmosphere and tumbling out of control. One of the unfortunate vessels spun off toward the sky, but the other slammed into a nearby craft, exploding spectacularly as the fuel cells ignited.

Reacting by instinct, Ramsey dropped the shuttle's nose, plunging below the debris scattering slowly towards the lunar surface. "Jackson," he yelled, "Reestablish contact with someone on the surface and get a military rescue ship out here. And find out what the hell's going on!"

As Jackson worked at the comm terminal, Ramsey began to inch the shuttle back toward high orbit. Cresting a ridge of lunar mountains -- the Bradley Massif, if Ramsey recalled correctly -- both pilots blanched.

Just appearing over the horizon was the largest asteroid that either spacers had ever seen, streaking at high velocity toward Luna.

Cursing, Ramsey slammed the throttle wide open, and the rumble of the ship's engines rattled the deckplates, drowning out the incessant beeps and chimes of the instrument systems. As the shuttle banked, Ramsey caught a glimpse of the sharp-etched, craggy surface of the asteroid passing scant meters from his craft.

In seconds, the rock was past, and Ramsey spun the ship, trying to track its vector. "Sweet Jesus, somebody's in for a bad day," he muttered to himself. "Must be a stray from the mining belt."

Checking his data, he tried to plot the impact site for the asteroid, praying that it would miss Luna. None of the lunar colonies would withstand such an impact; the death toll would be enormous. Tasking the computer to plot the asteroid's course, he began to mentally calculate where it would hit.

Breathing a sigh of relief, he turned to Jackson, his breath rasping. "I think it's gonna miss Luna. It'll be close, but it won't hit."

The computer pinged, displaying the results of its calculations.

Ramsey's relief faded as he read the data scrolling across the screen. He looked up, staring at the asteroid through the viewport.

"Oh, God."

The asteroid was heading straight toward Earth.

* * *

It took a very short time, for such a monumental disaster. There were only perhaps a few hours to raise a warning. With primary communications on Luna cut by pieces of debris from the passing asteroid, only a few Earth-based observatories knew what was coming.

Before the people on the ground could do more than panic, the asteroid hit.

It impacted in the Pacific Ocean, vaporizing uncountable millions of gallons of water on contact. When the mantle cracked under the blow, lava burst forth, freed from its subterranean confinement. The remaining seawater poured into the impact fissure, where the lava boiled it away.

The atmosphere was converted -- almost instantaneously -- into superheated steam. Millions died as the air literally boiled them where they stood.

Millions more were killed by the earthquakes and tidal waves that swept over the planet.

Dust, steam and debris were flung miles into the air, choking the planet off from the Sun.

In a heartbeat, the Earth died.

* * *

Ramsey stared in mute horror, watching the flames and devastation ripple across the surface of the planet. Jackson quietly wept, as Ramsey thought bitterly, *You wanted adventure, kid. You got it.*

Culture Shock

by James David Maliszewski

General Derek Fisk put his feet up on the table in front of him and stretched. It had been a long day and he was looking forward to some well-deserved rest. His mind slowly drifted off to other places, other times. It seemed so long ago since he had attended the Academy on Earth. Yet, the things he learned there and the friends he had made remained with him for over forty years. Those were good times and sometimes Fisk missed them.

Not that he was given to nostalgia, mind you. Derek Fisk didn't consider the past a better time, merely a different one. So many things had happened in the past twenty years -- the destruction of Earth, the ascendancy of GigaCorp, the discovery of the Alephs -- the universe hardly seemed the same anymore.

Even the Iron Coalition wasn't the same. Where once it had simply been a military force, an agent of the UN's will, it was now practically a government unto itself. The loss of Earth meant the Coalition had to set its own policies and determine its own destiny. Yet, that wasn't enough for Fisk. The Coalition had to expand, to adapt, to become something even greater than it was. To do any less was to hand the fate of humanity over to GigaCorp and that was something Derek Fisk was simply unwilling to do.

No, he thought, humanity was better than that. GigaCorp couldn't possibly fulfill the deepest longings of mankind, especially in the aftermath of the asteroid disaster. What humanity needed was a guiding vision and the discipline to achieve that vision. The Coalition offered that, he thought, but would the human race be willing to accept it?

Lost in these thoughts, he hardly heard the chime at his cabin door. Stirring himself from his reverie, Fisk straightened up quickly and cleared his head. He walked to the door and opened it. Standing outside was Major Robert Terrence. Still dressed in his deep blue duty uniform and carrying his omnipresent hand computer, the young officer stood at attention in the ship's corridor.

"Still up at this hour?" Fisk asked, genuinely surprised that even his aide hadn't gone to bed by now.

"Yes, sir," he offered. "I've been going over the latest intelligence reports about the Belters and a couple of things have been bothering me. May I?" He gestured toward Fisk's living area with his hand.

Fisk nodded and moved aside, allowing the younger man to enter his spartan cabin. Fisk wasn't a sentimental man and kept few mementos. His living space contained only the essentials and nothing more. With space at a premium -- even on the Coalition's flagship -- Fisk thought it best to lead by example.

Terrence moved toward a chair and waited for the General to offer it to him. Once he had done so, he sat down and immediately began to access his hand computer. Fisk shook his head mildly. He'd never have stomached intelligence work. It was such dreary work when compared with leading men into battle. All the same, he was glad he had Terrence at his side. Whatever Fisk may have thought of the "new age" that was dawning, the Coalition would need a dozen more officers like Terrence. Unfortunately, there was only one Robert Terrence.

Fisk sat down across from his aide and asked, "So, what's on your mind?"

"As I said, sir, I've been going over these reports and, to be blunt, I'm not sure that you're going to like the conclusions I've come to."

"Why do you say so?"

"Well, these Belters are extremely independent. They're not really a faction at all -- at least not as you might conventionally conceive of such a thing. They're more like . . . anarchy personified."

Fisk heaved a sigh. This was indeed disappointing. He had asked Terrence to examine the latest intelligence analysis of the Belters in hopes of finding an opening, something that might enable the Coalition to reach out to them. In the ongoing battle against GigaCorp, the Coalition needed all the allies it could find. Fisk had hoped that the Belters might be among them.

“Could you elaborate a bit, please? I’m not sure I follow you.”

Terrence seemed ill at ease. He hesitated for a moment before saying, “They’re not a military force, sir. They don’t think like one or act like one. More importantly, they have no interest in becoming one. They’re more or less content to face GigaCorp alone.”

“You mean they’re rejecting my -- I mean, the Coalition’s help?” Fisk was flabbergasted.

Terrence smiled slightly at Fisk’s slip and then answered, “Not at all, sir. I think it’s more accurate to say that they don’t want our help. The Belters view us with a great deal of suspicion. Many of them consider us only slightly better than GigaCorp. Others consider us just as bad. You’ve got remember that these people value freedom above all else. They --”

“Freedom?” Fisk cried out. “They’re confusing license with freedom. They’re not the same. Freedom comes with responsibilities. Freedom requires discipline. These Belters don’t look to me as if they even deserve freedom.”

Major Terrence wasn’t sure what to say next. He had served with General Fisk long enough to know when the older man was upset, even if he wouldn’t admit it. Fisk was a proud man who viewed the Iron Coalition as an extension of himself. To reject it -- to want nothing to do with it -- was hard for him to take.

Yet, Terrence also knew that Fisk was a flexible man, one willing to take chances when necessary. Fisk didn’t enjoy abandoning accepted procedure; he would do so only if required. He may have viewed the Coalition as part of himself, but he never placed his own wishes above those of his men. Terrence knew this too and decided to be frank with his superior.

Looking up from his hand computer, Terrence said, “Sir, we need the Belters. Without them, our fight with GigaCorp will only drag on longer.”

Fisk grimaced and fell back into his chair. “This is another one of those times, isn’t it, Robert?”

“I’m afraid so, sir.”

“Damn.” Fisk whispered. “You know I hate this sort of thing.”

“Yes, sir.”

Fisk then stood up and shook his head slightly. “Alright, then,” he began, “give me a few hours to gather my thoughts. Come back around,” he looked at his chronometer, “06:30 hours. You can help me draft a new offer to the Belters -- something more amenable to their way of doing thing.”

The older man was visibly pained to say these words.

“Very good, sir.” Terrence replied, standing up from his own chair. He quickly turned on his heels and made a path for the door.

Before he could reach it, Fisk stopped him, saying, “You know, I’m going to need your help on this one. I don’t enjoy having to throw the principles I’ve lived my life by out the airlock just to appease a band of ruffians and pirates.”

Terrence smiled. "Of course, sir, but you're not throwing your principles away, you know."

"Really? It sure feels like I am."

"Well, you're not. If anything, you're sticking to them."

Fisk just stood there silently.

As if on cue, the younger man explained. "Fidelity, sir. That's what the Coalition is all about. We're just loyal servants of humanity. It's not our place to decide how people should live their lives or what they should believe in. We're here to protect them -- whatever they choose for themselves. To do otherwise *would* make us no better than GigaCorp."

Fisk remained silent. For a moment, Terrence worried that perhaps he had stepped out of line.

"Make that 07:00, Major. We could both use the sleep." Fisk smiled.

"Yes, sir."

Plumbing Problems

by James David Maliszewski

Mercedes Kelleher fidgeted slightly in her leather chair. She never enjoyed board meetings, especially when they dragged on as long as this one had. GigaCorp earnings since last quarter were slightly down... and the board wanted her to account for it.

"If you'll reference screen 34 of my report," she began, "you'll see that I've outlined several factors that have contributed to our current fiscal downturn. I don't expect any of these factors to last much longer beyond the end of the year -- if that.

"If you reference screen 40, you'll also see that I've outlined other factors that I think will guarantee an increase over the coming year."

Kelleher then scanned the conference room to see the reaction of the board. Most of them had their heads down, staring into their view screens. They nodded and harrumphed and made noises whose meaning she couldn't quite ascertain. With each passing second, she hated this meeting more and more. When would it end?

An older woman with dark skin and a head of white hair -- she'd probably been with GigaCorp since the turn of the century -- was the first to look up from her screen and speak.

"What about BioWear?" she asked. "I don't see anything in the report about it. At the beginning of the year, you assured us that it was not only on schedule, but that it'd increase earnings before the year's end. That doesn't seem to have happened."

There was a murmur at the table as heads started nodding again.

Kelleher smiled coldly. "You're correct, of course. I stand behind my initial assessment of the profitability of Dr. Kujawa's work, however. Having seen her latest reports, I think we may have another GenGel on our hands here."

The white-haired woman didn't miss a beat. "Then, why didn't you include this in your report? Why doesn't marketing have any idea what's going on? If you intend for this line to be ready to go before the year's end, the board has to be kept informed."

Kelleher smiled again and melted back into her chair. She loved that chair. It was one of considerable value, one of the few items to come from Earth before the disaster, and it was comfortable beyond belief. Kelleher often took solace in its leathery arms when challenged by the board. Those who didn't know her might see it as a sign of weakness, of buckling under the pressures of questioning. Perhaps it was.

But not this time. She had a ready answer for the board. Kelleher sat up straight and turned her attention to a man standing at the back of the room.

"Colonel Markham." She said. "Would you kindly step forward?"

The man strode forward with heavy regulated steps. His boots rang solidly on the polished floor of the boardroom. He wore a gray paramilitary uniform, unadorned except for the insignia placing him with GigaCorp's security forces. He also wore a blank expression that revealed nothing about his interior state of mind. By all appearances, he appeared the stereotypical military man -- a stock character from a bad holo-vid.

When Markham reached the front of the room, he stood at attention beside Kelleher, saying nothing. His briefly scanned the assembled executives before he turned his full attention to GigaCorp's CEO.

“You should remember Colonel Markham from his success against the Coalition last month. Since then, as you’re aware, we’ve had a few public relations *setbacks*.”

There was some grumbling from the board members. Most of it was inaudible, but Kelleher could distinctly hear the word ‘DataNet’ mentioned on more than one occasion.

“Yes, DataNet.” She said with contempt. The words almost seemed like acid in her mouth “It’s become more than a nuisance lately. It is the reason for our delay in launching Dr. Kujawa’s latest project.

“That’s why I have assigned Colonel Markham to handle this matter. He’s shown a remarkable ability to get things done. I suspect he’ll be able to take care of DataNet easily enough. But perhaps I should let him speak for himself.”

She then turned to face the man who loomed above her chair like a vulture. “Colonel, would you be so kind?”

Markham eased his posture at her request, releasing his stiffened back and revealing a slight paunch. He was nevertheless in good shape for a man his age, but he no longer seemed quite as formidable as he did only moments before. He now looked like an aging sports hero on whom time had taken its toll – unbowed by declining.

“Be pleased to, ma’am.” Markham responded in his clipped accent. He addressed the board. “Two days ago, intruders succeeded in overcoming security measures at our genetics division. These same intruders hacked into GigaCorp computers and retrieved data relating to the BioWear project.

“As you know, the stolen data included footage of last month’s trials and their... unfortunate results. Late last night, the footage and associated data was released to the public via DataNet. Since that time, I have begun an extensive investigation to determine precisely how these intruders managed to not only breach our security but also gain access to encrypted files.”

A stern-faced bald man at the end of the table asked, “And what have you ascertained, Colonel?”

Markham looked down at Kelleher, who nodded her head to him and sighed.

“From what I’ve uncovered so far, it appears that we have a leak within GigaCorp -- probably someone highly placed within the company. How else could the intruders have been able to obtain the data they did?”

There were muted gasps throughout the boardroom. Even the bald man looked disturbed. This was not good news and Kelleher didn’t relish what was about to come next.

“Shouldn’t we do something, then?” one of the other executives asked. “We’ve got to put a lid on this ASAP. If DataNet’s version of events goes unchallenged, the BioWear line is dead. We’ll never be able to recoup our investment.”

That thought seemed to disturb even more members of the board. Being accused of unsafe testing practices was one thing. Losing millions in investment capital was something else entirely.

“Just give it to Miguel.” The white-haired woman ventured. “Have PR cook up something and go live with it. The public will eat it up. They always do.”

Kelleher stood up, pushing back her chair in the process. With Colonel Markham at her side, she began to slowly walk around the table.

“No, that’s not enough. This is too big. We’ve got to do more than get Miguel to do his “José Average” routine. We’ve got to contain this fast and that requires something special from PR. Plus, there’s still the

question of the source of the leak itself. Even if we manage to put a good spin on BioWear, we've got to make sure this kind of thing doesn't get away from us again. DataNet's becoming too effective for my liking."

The board simply sat in their seats, spellbound as the pair circled them. Some of them seemed concerned, while others looked impatient. Kelleher made her way around the table and back to her seat. She stood there at the head of the table, with Markham at her side.

"To that end," she explained, "I've given Colonel Markham authorization to begin a more extensive investigation into this matter. I want to be sure there are no more leaks. His office will be in contact with all of you shortly."

"But you can't possibly mean --" the white-haired woman protested.

"Oh, I most certainly do." Kelleher countered. "I told you the leak was high level. The Colonel and I suspect that one of you is its source. We intend to find out which one."

A smile cracked across Markham's craggy face for the first time since the meeting began. Kelleher sat down at last and pulled her chair closer to the table.

"I expect full cooperation with security's investigation. Please don't disappoint me. In the meantime, get PR to work on something better than their usual tripe. Miguel will need to work overtime to pull this one off."