

DataNet Collection 4.0

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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.

Date: 11.27.2150
File: 00101
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

News From Around the System

Mars

Despite numerous attempts to return, Mercedes Kelleher remains ousted from GigaCorp rule. Presumed lost after a disastrous site visit, Kelleher re-surfaced - only to be chased away from Martian orbit by GigaCorp security chief, Jonathan Markham. Recently, longtime Giga rival, the Iron Coalition, apparently decided to take advantage of the chaotic situation, sending armed units to assault Martian outposts.

Meanwhile, GigaCorp shareholders remain anxious. Without a definitive leader running the corporation, stock prices have plummeted. Iron Coalition attacks will certainly not help raise them. However, speculations have arisen as to whether the IC really seeks to disrupt GigaCorp productivity, or is simply trying to keep Jonathan Markham in power.

Neptune

If productivity within GigaCorp has been disrupted, this has certainly not been the case with the BIOS. Launching mining operations around Neptune, a new series of BIOS pilots has been spotted: Generation Theta.

As units from the Belters flew in to disrupt the Neptune operations, they reported facing both BIOS pilots and ships never before seen. While no conclusive information has been reached, Belter leaders have started compiling information from these reports into a description of the new BIOS. Advancing the combat reflexes of their pilots even further, Gen-Theta pilots apparently link directly with their ships, allowing for near-instant response time.

The BIOS, as could only be expected, have not issued any statement.

Far Sectors

More Rixians have arrived in the system, and they look to be staying. Construction has completed on their massive temple, located on the system's outer fringes. Over the past weekend, rumors began of a failed Iron Coalition raid, attempting to destroy the temple and all its resident Rixians. Had the raid succeeded, no doubt the Iron Coalition would be quick to release official word of the incident. With all signs of its failure, however, IC officials have denied knowledge of any kind as well as involvement by any IC pilots.

This despite the rather clear sign put forth by the Rixians themselves. Several dozen IC pilots, killed in battle, were seen floating back to Luna in their lifepods. Many observers believe the Rixians themselves routed these pods back, as a clear sign not to attempt any such future raids.

As always, when further word develops with these, and all other events, we'll keep you posted!

Date: 11.28.2150
File: 00102
Report filed by: "Conscious_1"

Method Lab

In what can only be called an expected move, the Iron Coalition today announced the discovery of a new fuel -- while at the same time cornering the market on the fuel's base ingredients.

Rumors of alternate He3 research have run rampant since He3 itself was first discovered. Although an extremely useful fuel, He3 has likewise always been in short supply. Stellar gold, many call the precious stuff.

Researchers at the IC's Lunar Institute have long studied the possible origins of He3, speculating that the ore may have drifted through various Alephs into our system. While simultaneously studying the fuel's origins, researchers undoubtedly analyzed its chemical composition. This morning, years of study have apparently paid off. Announcing their discovery in an official IC press release, top IC scientists believe they have developed a working clone of He3, derived from chemicals slightly more common to the solar system.

The scientists even went so far as to include the exact chemical formula of this new fuel -- a highly open move from the likes of the totalitarian Coalition.

Was this done for humanitarian reasons? Out of sheer excitement? Or, as simply another IC psych-ops campaign?

The latter reason does well to explain related events taking place last night. According to sources within the Belter faction, one of their mining operations came under attack by a joint Iron Coalition-Rixian Unity effort. Despite some assistance provided by a passing BIOS patrol, the Belters were eventually forced to retreat from the site of their operation.

After this morning's announcement, the motives behind last night's attack become all too clear. According to further information provided by the Belters, the mining site contains many of the essential ingredients needed to compose the alternate He3. The Iron Coalition's announcement of the new fuel breakthrough coupled with the release of its formula can mean only one thing. The IC wants everyone to know they have developed a new fuel and that only they can begin its manufacture.

As for the Rixians, one can only surmise that their technical knowledge has become essential to the manufacturing process. Alien knowledge, guarded by the Coalition's heavy hand, will surely prove a formidable match. It also demonstrates, yet again, the Coalition's complete untrustworthiness -- joining forces with the alien faction they once vowed to eliminate.

>>**Ltc Hammel: 141:141:1817:1918:** Well, guess the DataNet hasn't cleaned up their "objective journalism" since last time. Thanks, guys!

>>**Grabarg214: 3726:116:1151:1:** Just so people are aware, the Belters were at that site looking for trace-He3. The elements the IC seem to be after are not the most stable compounds in the system. Good luck trying to make use of them.

>>**Bishop's_Gate: 1716:101881:10116:** Perhaps they aren't after a new ship fuel, but a new weapon component.

>>**Jector: 16161:1019171131:** No, it's fuel. If their report isn't total BS, then they're looking for a direct He3 replacement. Like Grabarg says, though, it's not stable stuff. Unless the Rixians know how to contain radical uranium isotopes.

>>**Ltc Hammel: 141:141:1817:1918:** We'll see who has the last laugh, people.

Date: 11.29.2150
File: 00103
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Neptune's Depths

Word has spread with all the speed and force of a catapult-slung asteroid. The Iron Coalition has cornered the market on alternative He3.

The Coalition's battle plans appear clear indeed to make the most of this advantage: Send fully fueled ships against their rival factions so that they may not even mine needed He3, let alone its alternative.

To this end, the first of many expected Coalition assault units invaded Neptune last night, looking to disrupt the BIOS mining operations taking place there.

In recent months, while the Iron Coalition has won several key military victories, the BIOS have persisted as a thorn in their side. And continue to do so now. Despite the Coalition's declaration of martial law, the BIOS were among the first to launch renewed (and in the Coalition's eyes, illegal) mining operations, sending wave after wave of miners to Neptune.

The BIOS trend -- of disregarding both the Coalition's decrees and apparent upper hand -- continues. Last night, as the Iron Coalition's *Stealth Squadron* entered Neptune's orbit, the BIOS proved quick to repel them. Using Gen-7 pilots to guard the miners on Neptune, the BIOS defense held against wave after wave of attempted IC bombing runs.

Meanwhile, the BIOS continue to unveil their latest generation to the system. By all Iron Coalition reports, Gen-Theta miners were used to gain access to Neptune's gaseous depths. Biologically linked to their operational machines, the Gen-Theta miners proved able to harvest a moderate supply of actual He3, even with combat raging all around them.

Of course, the BIOS, ever reclusive, have yet to discuss their operations on Neptune or the introduction of their Gen-Theta troops. Information gained from the Iron Coalition, on the other hand, while readily available is never without a heavy pro-Coalition slant. As the only independent news source left to the system, we at the DataNet will keep you posted.

>>**ChainGang: 6115:18151:11413:** What about the Rixians? I thought they were all tied up with the Coalition's efforts. Once the Rix helped devise their fuel, the IC probably dropped them straight off.

>>**Pvt Payton: 83346:19171121:** Yesterday, the IC took heat for joining the Rixians when we promised to drive them from the system. Well, guess what? We split the new fuel, and they leave us alone. Mission accomplished. Peacefully.

>>**JackalsAttax: 11:111:187151414:** I doubt that. Last time I checked, the Rixians and their temple weren't going anywhere.

>>**RedQueen: 117616:1091817:** Let's not forget about GigaCorp, people. Kelleher is set to launch her next attack, rightfully, reclaiming her CEO chair. And she's hiring mercs.

>>**AlphaMan: 98161:181615:11:** Kelleher ain't doing nothing. With Markham's connection with the IC? Forget about it.

Date: 11.30.2150
File: 00104
Report filed by: "Editor/SystemCheck"

The Error of Ways

A message from the editor

Reports from last night's battle remain inconclusive at best. What can be determined is this: at approximately 6 PM PST last evening, an Iron Coalition strike team assaulted a minor Belter force outside the Belt. IC press officers, just prior to the attack, released a statement claiming that measures were about to be taken in order to protect the system's current and developing fuel strategies. Presumably, Belter agents had stolen a supply of the recently developed alternate He3 (commonly known as HeX, or "hex"). The IC, looking to protect its monopoly, went to reclaim the supply.

However, as battle commenced, ships from both sides appeared to encounter severe mechanical problems. Explosions ripped through both units, the cause of which remain unknown. Lacking the explanation of enemy fire, however, the obvious conclusion would be that the newly devised HeX is even far less stable than previously thought.

One DataNet source, SystemCheck, has been following the story since the original announcement of HeX's discovery.

A message from SystemCheck

Far be it for me to point fingers and say I told you so, but. . .

Let's take a look back at events, shall we? The militaristic factions of this system have plundered every last ounce of He3 they can find. Do they stop and think, for one second, of the devastation being caused by the mining process?

No!

Instead, with supplies low, the factions develop an alternate to He3. The Iron Coalition's claim that this new "super-fuel" is far less costly to produce strikes me as ludicrous. After all, what's the difference? The factions will simply move on to plunder a different set of chemical compounds from our innocent system, and do that much further damage.

Will the fact that ships filled with the stuff turn into 60-minute time bombs stop the development of He3? I seriously doubt it.

>>Aunt_Sam: 47436:16141:1918: SystemCheck, how could you possibly still be around? I was sure the IC sent a unit to bring you in for questioning.

>>SystemCheck: <node withheld>: Your beloved Coalition is not the hardest to evade, Sam. Just the hardest to convince.

>>FortunesFool: 36325:17115: SystemCheck might be an idiot, but the warnings of HeX should be heeded. That stuff is lethal, man. Doesn't anyone product test?

>>_SRM_Jovial: 3726:1981615:11: I think that's what last night's attack was really all about. And HeX failed.

Date: 12.01.2150
File: 00105
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

December Comes

I truly feel my years when I realize how many in the system, many old enough to lead squadrons into battle, do not truly understand the meaning of the seasons. How could they? With Earth destroyed some time ago, all concepts of summer, spring, and fall have become simply academic. People only know that the shattered hulk of the Earth tilts on its axis throughout the course of its orbit, warming first the northern hemisphere for a spell, then the southern, then back again.

How sad it is that many do not understand the true changes the seasons bring. Today marks the first day of December, a decidedly winter month back on the Earth's northern hemisphere, a place many faction pilots can trace their heritage to.

Removed from Earth, though, and no one can relate December to the snows and cold that once were.

The closest thing to seasons now are the changes taking place within each faction. Some factions rise in power and see their summer -- as with the Iron Coalition and their current stranglehold on system resources. Others have come to face their own December. Such as GigaCorp.

Thrown into chaos, with the corporation's highest leaders struggling to either retain or regain their cherished power, the outlook for GigaCorp seems bleak indeed. Already, stock prices, Giga's seasonal barometer so to speak, have plunged.

Into this, Mercedes Kelleher has returned. Attempting, for the third time last night, to reach the corporate headquarters on Mars, Kelleher's unit faced rival Jonathan Markham's security force. Markham, until now, has held firm control over the company, helped with covert aid from the Iron Coalition.

According to conflicting GigaCorp reports, none of which have as yet been officially released, Kelleher may or may not have been reinstated as company CEO. Some sources indicate that Kelleher was killed in action last night attempting to run Markham's formidable blockade. Others, however, report Kelleher is alive and well, ready to resume command of the company she helped create.

How to resolve the conflicting reports? The latest theories speak of a secret Kelleher deal with the BIOS made some months ago. Meaning, the real Kelleher may indeed have been killed in last night's battle. Upon her death, a simulacrum, grown and kept in BIOS tanks hidden deep within GigaCorp facilities, emerged.

Of course, such theories remain, for now, just theories. As always, as further news develops, the DataNet will keep you posted!

>>**Jonathan Markham: <node withheld>**: I'll keep this brief. Internal GigaCorp matters are of no concern to others. The security measures recently put into place were one so out of necessity. If, and only if, the real Mercedes Kelleher returns to GigaCorp, she'll of course be fully reinstated as our rightful CEO.

>>**Jector: 1514:19171:1151**: What's all this about? What the heck is a "simulacrum" anyway?

>>**FortunesFool: 36325:17115**: A clone. And judging from Markham's message, a good excuse to forever protest Kelleher's rule. Who's to say if she's real or cloned?

>>**SatelliteTrash: 445:11641:1189**: You could apply that logic to any situation. Who's to say Markham's Markham? Or you, you?

>>**Aunt_Sam: 1212:1916:17131**: Huh?

>>**FortunesFool: 36325:17115**: One might also worry -- that, with BIOS tanks, a Kelleher simulacrum would be wired to be more loyal to them. Guess we'll just have to wait and see.

Date: 12.04.2150
File: 00106
Report filed by: "Conscience_1"

Fall of the Coalition

Over the past weekend, events took place around the system celebrating the apparent fall of the Iron Coalition.

Several weeks ago, a group of despondent Iron Coalition pilots fled the IC's lunar headquarters. Seeking asylum, they were eventually given shelter by nearby GigaCorp. As the legal battle waged over these pilots' missing ships, the pilots themselves began to train and prepare in secret.

What reasons did these pilots give for choosing to defect? Among others, total disgust with the Coalition's experimental use of both robotic and biologically engineered pilots. The Coalition has alternately denied using these kinds of pilots and admitted to some isolated tests, seeking to keep as many human pilots alive and off the battlefield as possible. A potential noble endeavor, but not one that sat well with other factions. In addition to dissent within their own ranks, the Coalition has faced a public opinion firestorm lately, over everything from their proclaimed lockdown of the system to their attempts to corner the market on alternate He3 fuel components.

Late Friday evening, the rogue pilots returned to their former lunar bases, armed with intimate knowledge of the area and leading GigaCorp troops.

As the assault commenced, other factions were quick to join the fray. The initial assault on Luna's orbital defenses quickly spilled into other areas. Battle waged, from the IC shipyards, to the prison, until by the end of the weekend, the Coalition's stronghold lay in complete disarray. Many have already begun to wonder if the Coalition officials are quietly drafting an announcement of surrender. For now, however, their public voice has remained as defiant as ever, calling the weekend events, "illegal attacks on sovereign authority."

As the assaults on the Coalition continue, we'll be sure to keep you posted.

>>Derek Fisk: <node withheld>: Thankfully, the DataNet is nothing but an editorial sheet, and NOT news of the system. The Iron Coalition is indeed in the midst of fighting, but rest assured, all attacks will soon be put down.

>>Ltc Hammel: <node withheld>: No kidding, editorial. Nice job, DataNet, reporting on the attacks, but not the outcome. For those of us in the know, the IC did quite well in outright defeating most of the aggressors.

>>RebelBelle: 1413:18161:1142: That's right, pretend everything's OK. Guess you'll need all your fancy robots and tube-grown pilots now, hmm?

>>Aunt_Sam: 161:191716:1151: Better them than you ungrateful losers.

Date: 12.05.2150
File: 00107
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Round-Up

The Iron Coalition's failings may soon become the problem of the entire system. Following several factions' recent assault on the Iron Coalition's largest prison, the Omega Center, numerous criminals remain at large.

IC officials openly joked that the Omega Center -- originally named after the last letter in the Greek alphabet -- would be the last place political prisoners would ever see. Yet ships passing by the Center yesterday could plainly observe the blasted walls, the laser-melted bars, the remnants of enormous riot fires. Clearly, the Omega Center has met its end.

True, the IC detained many "political prisoners" at the Center; largely, top pilots from enemy factions. Looking to free these valued pilots, the attacking factions had extra ships waiting nearby for the prisoners to use in their escape. Yet, the center held more than mere prisoners of war. It also held true criminals. People having committed such atrocious crimes that their detention in the Omega Center was the absolute best thing for the system. Just consider some of those prisoners who escaped over the weekend.

Merkwood: Jailed for serial podkilling, Merkwood managed to brutally kill half a dozen IC guards during his escape.

Armisis: Perhaps the system's most famous assassin for hire. Little is known of this Belter save for his trademark stealth bomber converted into a long-range craft.

ModusOperandi: Notorious thief and ship pirate. Among his favorite methods of operation included "tapping" ships -- draining the oxygen and killing the crew before entering and looting the holds.

Aimless_Six: Named for the six captured Iron Coalition officials he once sent into space at battle's end in leaky lifepods.

Captain Electron: One of the system's most eccentric criminals. A self-professed super-villain, Captain Electron's exploits have caused more damage to enemy factions than the entire Rixian Unity.

For now, these dangerous criminals remain free, despite the best search and tracking efforts of the Iron Coalition. Officials from the IC have asked that anyone with information on these escapees should come forward at once, or else submit anonymous tips to their local IC garrison. For once, we at the DataNet can only wish the IC well in this endeavor.

>>**Aunt_Sam: 15414:18151:109171:** Omega? I thought the last letter in the alphabet was Z?

>>**Podkiller_Phil: 114313:1917151:1141:** No, you idiot. The last letter in the *Greek* alphabet is Omega.

>>**Aunt_Sam: 15414:18151:109171:** Greek, huh. Well shouldn't it be Zeta, then?

>>**Podkiller_Phil: 114313:1917151:1141:** It's Omega. Trust me, you freak.

>>**Aunt_Sam: 15414:18151:109171:** Ah, you only know 'cause of all the time you spent there, Phil.

Date: 12.06.2150
File: 00108
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Manhunt

Those criminals who escaped from the Iron Coalition's Omega Center continue to both plague the system and evade IC pursuers.

Freed this past weekend during faction raids against the Coalition, the criminals have started making their getaways back to their home faction territories. Units of the IC's military police, in close pursuit, allowed this DataNet reporter to ride along as the chase continued. The IC pilot, gracious enough to allow the participation, asked to have his name kept anonymous.

I, Horus: You seem to have at least one suspect on your targeting system. Why not open fire?

IC Pilot: Believe it or not, just because we have a target locked doesn't mean we have the necessary range. A ship can see a lot farther than it can punch, they told us back at the Academy.

I, Horus: Any chance of closing in?

IC Pilot: Just sit back, sir. Again, just because we can see him doesn't mean we can catch him. His ship's been outfitted for speed. Mine has weight taken up by armaments, a detainment cell. . . and the press.

I, Horus: OK. Then, at what point does the pursuit stop? Clearly, you won't track this criminal all the way back to his home territory, will you?

IC Pilot: No, don't worry. I'll have to stop long before then. This guy's GigaCorp scum. The closer we get to Mars, the more dangerous it becomes for us to chase him. I'll have to turn back at the edge of the orbital defense zone.

I, Horus: Than the criminal would get away, free?

IC Pilot: Listen, buddy, the IC has its bases covered. Hang on! –

At this point, shots began to streak past the cockpit. The pilot put the ship through some defensive maneuvers, seemingly able to evade any serious damage.

IC Pilot: All right, back there? We've entered the defense zone. Those were some floating cannons. Just automated, nothing I have trained against since first enlisting. As I was saying, this guy won't get away. Even if we have to turn back, the IC has hired on some Belters to continue the pursuit.

I, Horus: Bounty hunters?

IC Pilot: No, nothing that exotic. There's not really any bounty on these criminals. We're paying the Belters more to just keep track of them, not necessarily bring them in. Of course, if they want to try, power to `em.

I, Horus: Some might say that many of these Belter bounty hunters are some of the escaped criminals themselves.

IC Pilot: First off, I just said they're not bounty hunters. Second, haven't you ever learned that phrase, "to catch a thief"?

I, Horus: There seems to be some contradiction in your –

Heavy cannon fire, more intense than the first volley, rocked the ship. While the pilot attempted to roll away from the heaviest concentration of fire, we were nevertheless hit several times. Warning lights appeared on the panel, which I helpfully pointed out to the pilot.

IC Pilot: Back in your seat! That was a manned garrison. They might've sent some ships out after us. OK, I'm turning around and taking you back. And remember -- use my name in this story, and I promise I'll hunt you down!

I felt it wise not to comment on the pilot's apparent inability to hunt anyone down that day, and thanked him for his time.

Date: 12.07.2150
File: 00109
Report filed by: "Editor-in-Chief"

Front Line Disassembly

A message from the editor

We at the DataNet take much pride in our unquestionable journalistic objectivity. Existing as the system's only source of unbiased reporting, without any taint of faction influence, readers know that our stories present little else but the bare facts and, from time to time, carefully drawn conclusions.

Having said that, following is a report submitted by one of the more "energetic" DataNet sources, SystemCheck. We received the submission in the early hours of the morning. It read, in part, as follows:

A message from SystemCheck

By now, everyone is aware of the Iron Coalition's gross misuse of science. Looking to replace He3 fuel with a more readily abundant alternative, they went to the wise Rixian Unity to learn how this could be done. With that knowledge gained, the IC went on to create the cheap, yet incredibly unstable, HeX.

As the IC found out, with HeX in their tanks, their ships were inadvertently transformed into ticking time bombs. A lesson the Rixians tried to teach them, perhaps -- of the errors of their warlike ways?

Something to consider. Last evening, the Rixians valiantly drove this lesson further home, sending a unit of warriors into the midst of the IC -- warriors fueled by the very same HeX. Why would the Rixians risk such a suicidal measure? Possibly to punish the Coalition, who readily worked with the Rixians to derive the fuel and then shunned the alien Unity immediately after.

And punish the Coalition, they did. Proving, yet again, that humanity must look to these higher beings for guidance and enlightenment. If not, the system will surely suffer the wrath of our own miserable shortcomings.

A message from the editor

SystemCheck's submission went on for quite awhile longer, painstakingly describing the battle in glorified detail.

Now, as said above, the DataNet exemplifies objectivity. . . garnished, from time to time, with carefully drawn conclusions. And it is the conclusion of this editorial board that SystemCheck is none other than a Rixian himself.

Consider that the Rixians have learned our language. They have swayed many people of our human race to believe in their cause. And, they have mastered tricks of deception and psychological manipulation to the level where we humans must never let down our guard. SystemCheck, clearly a Rixian agent, if not an actual Rixian, has finally been dragged into the light, exposed for what he really is.

The system can now sleep much more safely.

>>**BishopsGate: 1615:19161:1171:** Knew it. Knew it all along.

>>**Podkiller_Phil: 1413132:1018115:1:** What else would you call somebody who supports the Rixians, dumb enough to use that suicide fuel? He's a Rixian, sure enough.

>>**SystemCheck: 188:21091987:111:** Only my love for all humanity keeps the explosive rage I feel in check. Lies and more lies -- if I'm a Rixian, then the DataNet is the very mouthpiece for the Iron Coalition.

>>**Conscience_1: <node withheld>:** Nice try, Rix. We hate the IC almost as much as we hate you Rixians.

Date: 12.08.2150
File: 00110
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Of Miners, Generals, and Expeditions

During these troubled times of faction wars, many worry for the safety of the pilots, sent out mission after mission to secure areas of He3 ore. Yet, one group most people often overlook is the mining guild. As dedicated to their faction, as professional as any skilled worker, as much at risk as any scout, bomber, or even fighter pilot, the system's miners work to ensure the successful harvesting of He3.

Recently, we spoke with Hulk Camden, foreman of Belter Mining Union, Local: 131, about the life of a miner and the appreciation many of them feel are long overdue.

Hulk: That's right, many of us do feel a bit neglected. Think about it: Here we are, mining ore on some of the toughest rocks in the system, with dog-fighting going on all around! Think that qualifies for hazard pay? Think again, chief. That's just a day in the life.

I, Horus: Do you feel, then, that your faction pilots aren't doing what it takes to protect you miners?

Hulk: Hey, now, I would never disrespect my boys! Those guys fly around in equipment I wouldn't even get into on the ground! But let's just say there have been times when disturbing things were heard across the transmission channels. I mean, we miners all hear what goes on in battle. Do you have any idea how terrifying it is to hear on enemy channels, "Kill miners!" Or, "Spotted a couple miners on a `roid. Kill! Kill!"

I, Horus: `roid?

Hulk: Sorry. That's asteroid for you laymen. Then there was the time when some screwball com, eh, commander, decided to jettison all miners into space! Why? To sabotage his own squad in retaliation for questioning his orders. Who paid the price? Not those pilots. The miners, man! The miners.

I, Horus: So do you feel that many commanders view you miners as expendable assets?

Hulk: Without a doubt. Like I said -- we can hear what's going on over the transmission channel. To hear your own com say things like, "Forget the miners, just save the nannite!" I tell you, it doesn't do much for one's sense of self worth.

I, Horus: Have there been any thoughts, then, to an organized strike? For better pay, better conditions, respect. . .

Hulk: Naw, man. We need the paycheck.

In other news throughout the system, one of the Iron Coalition's finest, Commander Trenton Reise, was laid to rest yesterday. Reise, who led the IC's Vanguard Alpha squadron into over thirty sorties, was killed in action on his squad's most recent, and unsuccessful mission. Adding further insult to the commander, units from the BIOS and GigaCorp showed up to disrupt the ceremonies taking place at a newly opened mining facility just off Luna. Before the attackers were finally chased off, they managed to destroy Commander Reise's lifepod casket. Said one of the pilots formerly under his command, "That's just the way the Commander would've wanted to go out."

The last time the various human factions managed to organize a truce was in alliance against the Rixian Unity. A similar truce has been drafted, yet this time joining together key scientific members of the four major human factions. The scientists have decreed that a joint mission is set to launch, designed to explore deep space territories for both further resources and other signs of life. While each scientist will go in their own individual long-range craft, the communal laboratory vessel they'll be accompanying has been dubbed "*The Mayflower II*." We at the DataNet wish their peaceful efforts well.

Date: 12.11.2150
File: 00111
Report filed by: "Dr. Harrison"

Diary of an Expedition

A message from the editor

The following accounts come to us from a participant in the recently launched *Mayflower II* expedition. These accounts have been edited for length and clarity.

The Ongoing Diary of Dr. Harrison

12/01/2150

At last! The system's finest are able to put aside their faction differences and work toward launching a joint-venture scientific operation. This has been talked about for some time now at the Luna Institute. However, we all knew it could not be undertaken by the Iron Coalition alone -- if for no other reason than that an IC ship, leaving the system, would be immediately assaulted by the other factions out of hand.

It looks as if the IC will be supplying a great deal of the ships and instruments; GigaCorp, monetary support; the Belters and BIOS, the majority of the crew itself. The Rixians, for obvious reasons, have been left out of this expedition entirely.

12/05/2150

We have outfitted a ship -- *the Mayflower II*. According to my history disks, the original Mayflower actually transported colonists, not scientists. Myself, I suggested *the Beagle II*, but no one in council apparently listens to us xeno-botanists. Everything concerns the xeno-geologists. While lip service is still being paid to this expedition as a peaceful exploration of all aspects of deep space, it's become quite clear what the underlying interest really is: He3 discovery.

In any event, *the Mayflower II*, provided by the Coalition, has undergone some major innovations. Hats off to those Belters working with us on this project for jury-rigging *the Mayflower II* for long-range travel. The Belter miners might not manufacture the best ships themselves, but they do damn fine mechanical work.

We're already set to launch at the end of the week.

12/08/2150

Day 1

Launch Day! *The Mayflower II* has taken to the skies amidst some expected trouble. However well meaning our intent, the expedition had to be kept under wraps. After all, several conservative generals in the Iron Coalition alone would never have allowed this joint-operation to take place.

Nevertheless, our escorts fended off these attackers, and we made our way into the deep space Alephs! At full speed, by day's end we already reached the limits of the most casual explorations.

12/09/2150

Day 2

We've begun to chart new territory, and already the infighting has begun.

Whatever systems we now pass have only been charted in secret by the most remote of faction parties. Knowledge which may be known, and guarded still, by members of this expedition. Every time we consider exploring a system, some member of the expedition gives reason why we should keep going just a little further on before pausing to take samples. No faction wants any other one to know about its hidden digging grounds.

Tensions rise.

12/10/2150

Day 3

Disaster.

At last, we seem to have reached a system no one has been to before, and our instruments detected He3. At once, it would seem, all semblance of our scientific expedition fell apart, and a mad scramble began. Hidden assault ships, carried inside *the Mayflower II*'s hold, launched, and ruthless fighting began between the various factions.

This far from home, we were counting on cooperation to ensure not only the success but also the very survival of this expedition. I can no longer say for sure what will happen now. . . .

Date: 12.12.2150
File: 00112
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Days of Plunder

Far be it from the DataNet to criticize a reputable faction such as the Iron Coalition. Yet at times the actions of one faction or another, in this case the so-mentioned IC, compel us to comment. Claiming to uphold the laws of the system, the IC has failed to defend the system's largest detention facility, the Omega Center. Now, with the Center's doors thrown wide and its prisoners roaming free, the system faces a crime spree the likes of which have never been seen before.

Perhaps the IC's own efforts, to manhunt the criminals and return them to their cells, have unwittingly aided the criminals' plans. For, with the military police spread far and wide, such insane masterminds as *ModusOperandi* and *Aimless_Six* have managed to slip between police checkpoints and continue their nefarious activities.

Word has just come to us of an attack taking place last night at a GigaCorp He3 mining outpost -- an obvious place for these criminals to strike, drawn like moths to a fusion-lamp. We briefly messaged with the GigaCorp platform manager on duty at the time:

"Far as we could see, most of them were flying jury-rigged GigaCorp ships, under the *Scavengers* banner. . . We were able to defend ourselves fairly well against these pirates. Lost only four workers and not a single base."

When asked how they won the battle, the manager replied:

"OK, it's true, we paid them off in the end. 50% of the day's profits. But when you consider what the alternatives were, then me and my workers agree it was a price well paid. I mean, they had the likes of *ModusOperandi* flying with `em. You think any of my men want to be flying cargo and have their ship "tapped" one day in retaliation for not paying now? Sure, we're GigaCorp, and we can fly with the best pilots out there. But we're not GigaCorp's *Stellar Fleet*, we're platform miners, and at day's end we're just looking to come home to our families."

For now, criminal attacks can be expected to continue within the system. And the question remains: What will the Iron Coalition do to stop them? As always, the DataNet will keep you posted.

>>Ltc Hammel: 847:12716:1871: Livid doesn't describe me. Who are you DataNet reporters to criticize the IC? If it wasn't for your message boards, the criminals would never have been able to organize and recruit in the first place!

>>Podkiller_Phil: 32737:19171: Neither would the IC.

>>GromnieBreath: 00991871:11:1: Hey, Hammel, I'll describe you! And I wouldn't use the word "livid" either!

>>Ltc Hammel: 847:12716:1871: Stuff it, cretins. See you in combat.

Date: 12.13.2150
File: 00113
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Stellar Bandits

From the seas of old Earth, to the void of space, pirates have long presented terrors to all honest travelers sailing from port to port.

Likewise, from the Queen's Royal Navy to the armed brigades of the Iron Coalition, the powers of authority, whether supported by the common people or forced upon them, have worked to oppose such dreaded pirates.

Crime, of course, is nothing new to the system. When colonists first arrived on Luna, Mars, and orbiting space stations, they were often forced to accept the colonies' newly adopted codes of law, however oppressive they might seem. The more free-willed amongst the colonists often fought back. In addition, with such vital resources as air and water in desperately low supply, crime was commonly practiced by one colony against another.

Enter into this the Iron Coalition, a faction attempting to forego all new colonial law and enforce the legal systems of Old Earth. Rounding up all those who opposed them politically, often using the pretense of a violation of some archaic law, the IC placed such criminals in fortress-like detention centers.

With the fall of one such place, *the Omega Center*, criminals were free to return to their parental factions and begin their way of life anew. For many, this simply meant daily commerce under different political practices than the IC would approve. For others, however, this meant the way of the pirate.

In recent days, crime has spread across the system with the force of an acute epidemic. No transport ship felt safe however short the journey or however well-armed the crew.

For better or for worse, the Iron Coalition has flexed its faction muscle, and put an end to the pirates' wave of crime.

To find the pirates, a careful, cautious lot, the IC needed bait. According to sources within the IC itself, a merchant craft, heavily laden with He3, was sent through a suspected ambush area. IC ships, armed to the proverbial teeth, escorted the merchant craft -- an open challenge to any pirate who'd dare attack.

The Belter pirates, it would seem, took that dare.

Signs of the massive battle have already presented themselves to the public. Derelict ships, blasted in flight, have begun drifting into faction ports as far away as Mars. Transmission channels were completely filled last night with shouted reports, calls for rescue, and coded messages possibly involved in positioning troops.

While dogfights between two militant factions often last upwards of an hour, or even longer, the IC's battle with the Belter pirates lasted nearly five.

According to most accounts, while the IC did lose more men, they nevertheless managed to win the day. A majority of those criminals plaguing the system are rumored to have been captured, but no one expects the IC's detention centers to be re-filled with such pirates any time soon. Like the days of yore, justice will likely be meted out right there in space.

>>**Aunt_Sam: 1615:11761:12:** Is this too much to ask? A DataNet report favorable to the honorable doings of the Coalition? I tell ya, it wasn't easy out there last night.

>>**Podkiller_Phil: 32737:19171:** Sam, there's no way you were anywhere near that battle. Last I heard, you were still working aboard an IC slop frigate.

>>**BlueBaron: 7116:101871:11:** So, first the ships drift in to port, then I guess the bodies of the pirates themselves. Seems like a tough break, just for being a Belter.

>>**Modus: 161514:191817:** Rest assured, not all pirates have been taken.

Date: 12.14.2150
File: 00114
Report filed by: "Dr. Harrison"

Homeward Bound

From the editor

This final report, of the deep space expedition undertaken last week, comes to us from one of the surviving members of the crew. The DataNet has been pleased to carry Dr. Harrison's diary of the failed expedition, however disturbing his observations.

From Dr. Harrison

12.09.2150

Conflict has split this expedition apart, basically into its component faction elements. Most representatives from the Iron Coalition have been completely wiped out. The BIOS and Belters sent along more staff than we did, and once the fighting began, they quickly outnumbered us. I saw many a good scientist die, futilely trying to work weapons of war they had never used before. With them, so goes a great deal of irreplaceable knowledge.

I have managed to lock myself inside one of *the Mayflower II's* chief laboratories. I've found that the Bunsen burners, with enough gas, can make quite effective flamethrowers.

12.10.2150

Whoever has taken over the ship has turned it around. With the artificial gravity fields blinking off and on, it's been impossible to gauge the centrifugal force of a direction change. Yet glancing out the window ports, I've been able to read by the stars that we are, indeed, heading back to the solar system.

I'll have quite a report to give to the Scientific Body upon my arrival.

12.12.2150

By all indications, we've just run an Iron Coalition blockade. Out the window ports, I cheered at first, watching the IC patrol ships approach. Then I realized that the crew in charge of this research vessel would not be inclined to stop for any IC inspection.

Had they known myself, a peaceful civilian, was still on board, doubtlessly the IC patrol would not have opened fire like they did. But I don't blame them. How could they know? My frantic signaling at the windows was most likely seen by no one.

At some point, I believe IC soldiers managed, for a short time, to board this vessel. I heard forceful pounding at the door, but was still too afraid to answer. In any event, after brief sounds of a gunplay, the pounding ceased.

As *the Mayflower II* moved on, I could see that we left behind quite a battlefield. Lifepods began shooting from out of the plasma-burning ships; IC lifepods, I could vaguely judge by the markings. Their patrol had failed.

For now, I know not where the ship will take me, or who is even in command. I can but send off this diary on open transmissions, and pray that someone will hear these, perhaps my final words.

Date: 12.15.2150
File: 00115
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Temple Wars

While humans have long known of "cabin-fever," the phenomenon may be new to the Rixian Unity. . . and has apparently begun affecting the aliens in quite severe ways.

When human colonists first moved from Earth out to the other planets, they often did so in remote and isolated groups. In times of emergency, assistance could not be expected for months at a time. Even when all went well, there have been many documented cases in which the colonists simply "broke down." One such infamous case in history involved the *Mobile Earth* colony.

The colony, sent to help initially settle the rugged plains of Mars, had the full funding and support of corporate sponsors back on Earth. All seemed to be going well, except for a faulty transmission receiver on the colonists' end. Still, their corporate sponsors continued sending shipments of supplies, including letters and reading material, on unmanned drone ships. Still, by the time a manned check-up mission was sent approximately fifteen months later, nothing remained of the colony save for the most derelict of scattered remains.

Researchers theorized that, cut off from home, the colonists suffered a new version of cabin fever, one taking place with the increasingly launched stellar colonies. Undergoing this illness, the colonists may have developed symptoms of paranoid delusions until some trivial matter, a disagreement over the supply drones, for example, may have set them off on a murderous rampage. No survivor from the *Mobile Earth* colony was ever found.

Alien Watch, a group dedicated to the careful observation of Rixian activity in the system, has reported that some form of cabin fever may be affecting those Rixians stationed at the edge of the system. In recent days, the alien temple there has been the site of furious activity, of troop maneuvers and apparent war games. The Iron Coalition, also ever vigilant against the alien Unity, has been on high alert since the alien activity increased. And yet, while all signs pointed to a Rixian invasion of the inner system, at the last moment, the bulk of Rixian pilots flew into those Alephs heading back to their home planet, Lapi.

Of course, little is known of the Rixian psychology. The alien mind has proven to be incredibly clever and deceptive in the past. Yet, long-term confinement in our system, coupled with the Rixians' inability to outright convert the human race by force, could have worked to play strange tricks on the alien minds. Cabin fever may no longer be considered unique to humanity.

What the Rixians plan to do, if not attack their own homeworld, remains unclear for now. As always, though, the DataNet will do its best to keep you posted.

>>**Dr. Grossman: 1615:10181:1141:** True, the intentions of the aliens' minds cannot be accurately determined. Also true, that their minds are quite evolved and intricate organs. Much, of course, like our own. And with such complexity, the chance for a breakdown only increases.

>>**Dr. Fielding: 1514:10181:11716:** I can only concur with Dr. Grossman's assessment. Consider that the more advanced a computer, the higher the likelihood of a problematic bug entering into the code.

>>**BlueBaron: 15615:101817:1:** Well, that's true. Just take a look at GigaCorp's recent tech.

>>**RedQueen: 1716:1917156:11:** We'll see how little faith you have in Giga tech with a fleet of our ships on your tail, Baron!

Date: 12.18.2150
File: 00116
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Omega Center and the Rixian Temple

Over the weekend, events both strange and scandalous took place. Our sources, within each faction as well as independent observers at system listening stations, have compiled the following reports. Please bear in mind, however, that while the DataNet brings these reports to our readers in good faith, we cannot always vouch for their complete veracity.

Luna: Omega Center

The site of the largest prison break in history, faction forces revisited the blasted *Omega Center* on 12.15. Their objective? Apparently to comb through the rubble-strewn ruins of the IC's largest detention center, looking for files of any possible value.

As many judged, especially those within the Belters and GigaCorp, the IC may have been storing their criminal database in the same place they stored the criminals themselves. Without this database, the IC would need to start from scratch to compile a list of the system's most wanted.

The IC, needless to say, took great pains to defend the *Omega Center* once word of this information looting leaked out. Their battle plans, according to eyewitnesses, included shelling the walls of the *Omega Center*, trying to bury any files so that IC work crews could safely dig them out later.

The extent of what the looters took while they could remains unknown.

Deep Space: Rixian Temple

The system's strangest human faction, the BIOS, have apparently launched their most bizarre campaign yet, this one aimed at the Rixians' stronghold temple.

In recent weeks, the BIOS have developed and deployed their latest generation of workers, the *Gen-Theta BIOS*. Although all that has been learned of Gen-Theta has come from witnesses' accounts and vivisections taking place on captured Gen-Theta POWs, nothing official has been released from the BIOS ruling council itself. Still, what has been learned is shocking. *Gen-Theta BIOS* apparently link biological organs directly with mining constructors and ships, resulting in quasi-living machines of war.

Looking to place their biological spawn in the system's most advanced machinery, *Gen-7 BIOS* fighters apparently went after the Rixians' temple on 12.17, attempting to take the entire place over.

While the Rixians initially held the first wave of Gen-7 fighters back, in the end they proved no match for the system's fiercest pilots. The Rixian temple held, for the most part, but the BIOS managed to carve away huge sections, dragging them back for their ruling council to make use of.

Will a time come when these temple pieces, piloted by BIOS minds, are seen on the battlefield? Only time will tell. As always, though, the DataNet will be sure to keep you posted.

Be sure to join us tomorrow for a featured look at the last place any respectable DataNet reporter would want to be this holiday season. *Conscious_1* begins a 5-part series inside an Iron Coalition boot camp.

Date: 12.27.2150
File: 00122
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Protracted Strike

Throughout the system, the supply of He3 ore has shrunk to a critical level. Not since the Asteroid Embargo of 2134 have fewer units of He3 been available. The reason? Not the ongoing faction wars, or the loss of a critical supply tanker. No, the reason for this shortage is a devastating strike by the Miners Guild.

Of course, each faction relies on its own staff of miners (or "extraction specialists," as they occasionally prefer to be called). Yet, each of these faction staffs meet with the parenting body of the Miners Guild to discuss labor conditions, wage requirements, and other issues pertinent to all miners throughout the system.

In recent days, grumbling signs of unrest have come from several mining representatives. On 12.08, Hulk Camden, of the Belter Mining Union, spoke out against unacceptable working conditions for the miners. It would seem that behind these words, organized action was also being planned.

Fully coming together to protest unsafe operation sites, lack of hazard pay, and outdated oxygen suits, the miners have organized a full work stoppage. Refusing to return until their demands are met, the system's miners have left their faction employers scrambling to staff their mines. And without a foreseeable break in the ongoing wars, He3 is still desperately needed.

According to undisclosed sources within both GigaCorp and the Rixian Unity, any work stoppage at the mining sites would prove detrimental to their war efforts.

In order to stay on schedule, many factions have already started using replacement workers in their mines. Yet, as the Guild well knows, no laborer, however skilled, can simply pick up the discarded drills and picks and continue the work without weeks, if not years, of proper training. Many in the Guild come from generations of stellar miners, learning the art from parents and grandparents who once worked the asteroids and comets for water and precious metals. To replace such workers with, for example, IC recruits seems an unlikely solution.

The proof to the danger of using unskilled replacements came as recently as yesterday. With no guild miners available at one particular site, GigaCorp executives were forced to don the oxygen suits and enter the mines themselves. A short time later, forces from the Iron Coalition attacked, and the mine, improperly shored up, collapsed.

For now, the miners continue their strike, wielding signs with such slogans as, "Danger? Fine! Then we won't mine!" A telling message to those factions who would continue to use such workers in the most hazardous working conditions imaginable.

>>**DeepCore: 1514:19116:1:** These miners know what they're getting into. If they want to strike, that's just fine. More business for us non-guilders.

>>**SpaminaCan: 81761:19171651:** I second that! Half of those looking to mine do so for the thrill of it! Too dangerous? Ha! Them miners are just after higher pay slips and should say so!

>>**HulkCamden: 17165:19171:117:** Not all of us. You try mining, watching the oxygen bubbles constantly leak out of your suit. And you know what they repaired my suit with? Engineer's tape.

>>**SpaminaCan: 81761:19171651:** So, what's wrong with that? That's how I fixed the leak in my helmet.

Date: 12.28.2150
File: 00123
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Onward, Miners!

Few things have ever forced the factions to concede defeat. When the Rixians first invaded the system, humanity joined together to repel these seemingly invincible aliens. When the heavy hand of the Iron Coalition declared martial law, the other factions simply assaulted the Coalition's *Omega Center*, releasing countless prisoners.

Yet, the above events still required one thing. He3 fuel to carry these actions out.

Able to do what no one else could before, the Miners Guild has managed to win major concessions from at least three of the five factions -- and without a single shot fired in the peaceful protest. According to faction insiders, representatives from GigaCorp, the Iron Coalition, and the Belters met with leaders of the Miners Guild to discuss an immediate, and amicable, settlement.

Refusing to work until their demands were met, the miners have apparently won new contracts and tougher onsite safety mandates. While no official announcement has yet been made from any side, rumors of the settlement include tougher interstellar regulations, to be enforced by the Iron Coalition, against reported "miner dumping."

Earlier this year, an undisclosed faction commander was accused of releasing his unit's miners into enemy territory, allowing the enemy faction to quickly destroy them. The commander had apparently performed such a "miner dumping" in response to sub-commanders refusing to follow his orders. According to the Miners Guild, such dumping takes place on a regular basis; and with no regulations in place, commanders are seldom, if ever, punished for it.

While factions have, in the past, downplayed reported "miner dumping," they were quick to condemn the action in order to settle the strike.

Other rumored agreements within the settlement include higher pay rates, more frequent safety inspections of miners' oxygen suits, and shorter working shifts during battleground mining conditions.

Proof, once more, that however well the factions may fight, He3 remains the ultimate power in the system. Our congratulations to the hard working miners!

>>HulkCamden: 1715:1918:11: Thank you, DataNet, thank you. We of the Guild are obviously pleased with the settlement, though as part of the agreement, no details of the contract can yet be officially released.

>>Aunt_Sam: 18:191:101:191: Cowards! My pop was a miner, and back in his day, you didn't have some fancy oxygen suit. You wore SCUBA gear and carried personal heaters, and if your tanks ran dry, that was your fault for not working fast enough! At least, that's the way he tells things.

>>PodKiller_Phil: 7987:907:1: A miner? Sam, I was convinced your father was a Rixian!

>>MiguelSanchez: <node withheld>: Although disturbed that the miners felt they were not receiving fair treatment before, on behalf of GigaCorp, we are glad that a new contract, agreeable to all parties involved, has been drafted. Proving, once again, that GigaCorp remains the system's fairest, most compromising faction!

Date: 12.29.2150
File: 00124
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

BIOSphere

To many, there are few things as unsettling as the very thought of the BIOS faction. Advancing their genetics at breakneck speed, several new generations of BIOS pilots and miners -- *Gen-6*, *Gen-7*, and *Gen-Theta* -- have all appeared within the last year alone, each generation successively more dangerous and less human than the last.

Not too long ago, the BIOS went so far as to declare themselves a race evolved beyond humanity, a move which immediately summoned the ire of every human faction.

Yet were the factions deeply upset at the threatened loss of their kin within the BIOS ranks? This did not seem the likely answer for the strong military retaliations against them. Most people consider the BIOS to be a race of Frankenstein monsters, humanistic, but no longer entirely human. No, the strong reactions against the BIOS simply stem from fear against the BIOS' growing battle prowess. As the BIOS generations advance, so do their piloting skills.

A rare statement from members of the BIOS ruling council was released to the DataNet last night. It read, in part:

". . . It is with little wonder that *homo sapiens* quake and tremble at the thought of facing us, their more advanced cousins. We once held out our hand, offering to bring the rest of humanity with us down the path to evolutionary enlightenment. Humanity rejected us.

"An irony we mock. Humanity -- whose factions war for the system's territory and resources, thinking that through these things will their pocket of society advance over all others. While we have been advancing all along. Perhaps the BIOS have simply reached a point where rational decisions come so much more easily to us, decisions on how to best progress. Perhaps we should be looking down at humanity, not with contempt but with pity.

"Still, we too require the same resources and territory. And for these things, the BIOS will continue to fight, and to win."

Chilling statements, and with powerful backing behind the threats. In battle, the BIOS are often without equal. Having incorporated stolen Rixian materials into their latest ships, the BIOS seem more likely now, than ever before, to reign supreme. Consider the events of last night. According to current rumor, a BIOS squadron met, and utterly destroyed both Iron Coalition and GigaCorp patrols, two of the heaviest armed and well-trained units in this system.

If these patrols proved no match, can anyone?

>>**SergeantGreggs: 8117:19171:11:** On behalf of the Iron Coalition, I can confidently state the system need not worry about BIOS domination. They no longer follow the laws of Earth, and so will be punished for their actions.

>>**Xchange: 9171:10918171:** What are you talking about? When was the last time an IC unit went one-on-one against the BIOS and won?

>>**BlueBaron: 8171:109181:1:** Or GigaCorp, or the Belters, or anyone else for that matter?

>>**SergeantGreggs: 8117:19171:11:** The IC has. Check the records. And our pilots, except for DataNet moles, are ready to beat them back again.

>>**Conscious_1: <node withheld>** It was quite the learning experience, Sergeant Greggs. Thanks for all the hospitality at boot camp.

Date: 01.02.2151
File: 00125
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Saturn, Jupiter, and the Belt

Saturn **12.29.2150**

In a move as violent as it was expected, the latest generation of BIOS, *Gen-Theta*, declared war against members of its own ruling council.

As with the release of each subsequent BIOS generation, the ruling council has claimed their latest, *Gen-Theta*, to be the most highly evolved form of life in the system. A hubristic claim if ever there was one. As has happened numerous times in the past, these "higher forms of life" have sought to run the BIOS faction, perhaps believing the hype that they really are "superior beings."

Yet, however they've managed to hold on to their power in the past, the current BIOS ruling council still continues to reign. After heated battle around Saturn's rings, elite ruling council forces, led by *_FS_ViRuS*, have reportedly defeated the *Gen-Theta* aggression. Whether or not the remainder of *Gen-Theta* will peacefully incorporate back into the BIOS faction remains to be seen.

The Belt **12.30.2150**

After signing their latest contract, the Miners Guild returned to work late last week. Their first assignment: to core-mine select asteroids in the Belt. In this process, high concentrations of explosives are inserted into the previous drill holes of a mining operation, and then detonated in order to break the asteroid down into more manageable pieces. The explosives used, according to Guild representatives, was HeX, recently thought to be a possible He3 fuel alternative.

The miners began their most recent undertaking for the Belters faction, well paid for the hazardous work according to the stipulations of the Guild's new contract. Yet, none of the miners were prepared for an assault by the alien Rixian Unity. According to transmissions, the aliens may have thought to disguise their attack during the operation's explosive core-mining procedures.

While several Belter units were sent to protect the miners, it is being reported at this time that many still perished during the Rixian assault. The aliens, for their part, made off with several promising asteroid samples.

Jupiter **01.01.2151**

As the New Year rang in around the system, various human factions took time off from the ongoing conflict to celebrate. A perfect opportunity, the alien Rix must have believed, to launch a second attack.

Continuing their aggressions after assaulting the Belters' core-mining operation, the alien Rix flew several units around the system, destroying numerous unmanned transmission stations and perimeter drone ships. Although little damage was done, the attack did undermine much of the system's infrastructure. However, the first live targets the Rixians faced, a BIOS patrol, put an end to the aggression.

Led by *Nightscape_630*, the BIOS turned the Rixian ships back near Jupiter, once again proving the BIOS superior fighting prowess. Perhaps also proving, following earlier internal disputes, a fully reunified BIOS faction.

As always, as events unfold around the system, we'll keep you posted.

Date: 01.03.2151
File: 00126
Report filed by: "Rumormonger"

Hit Squad (Beta)

For those in the know, the last few weeks have seen a flurry of activity centered on the Iron Coalition's defunct *Omega Center*. Granted, with the destruction of the system's largest detention center (of course to this day, the IC insists on calling that former dungeon their "center for criminal rehabilitation"), activity could only be expected. After all, where to put the system's burgeoning criminal (and independent-minded) population without first rebuilding?

And yet, reputable sources within the various construction guilds have mentioned that the IC has not yet contacted them regarding rebuilding the Center. Either the recent activity means that the reconstruction is being undertaken by IC soldiers themselves (an unlikely proposition, considering their skill set seems limited to oppressing the masses), or something else is afoot.

A more likely reason behind the activity would seem to be the desperate search for missing intelligence records. Some months back, the IC announced their plans to formulate a "hit squad" to go after enemy factions' ace pilots. Following the attack on the *Omega Center* itself, freeing countless victims of false imprisonment, a second attack was launched -- this time with the objective of destroying all remaining records.

Personally, I would like to applaud the valiant effort by these attackers -- to wipe the tainted slate of the system clean.

However, further injustice is still being done in the name of law and order. While IC investigators continue to scurry amongst the rubble, searching for the missing records, a new campaign has already begun.

Of course, nothing official has been announced by the tight-lipped Iron Coalition. But thankfully, many pilots dare contribute their knowledge accurately (if anonymously) to the DataNet boards. The latest rumor thread concerns a second IC hit squad, looking to extend the initial campaign to eliminate ace pilots. Without any compiled files to work from, the IC has apparently started its list afresh, beginning with those members of GigaCorp responsible for assaulting IC frontline defenses during Brigadier General Derek Fisk's recent tour.

A reasonable starting point. And yet, instead of valiantly launching their forces, the IC sent in cloaked assassins, looking to ambush GigaCorp pilots as they shuttled between Mars and nearby orbital stations.

Check with those pilots involved, though, and they'll be glad to explain how the IC's plan completely fell apart. Operated under the premise of a covert operation, the IC's *Bounty Hunter* unit was denied backup of any kind, including secure transmission channels to communicate with its launch-ship. The idea was to slip in, eliminate the GigaCorp aces, and slip back out.

The IC must have forgotten that its target was GigaCorp aces. The best pilots in their faction. And as the *Bounty Hunters* struck, GigaCorp's *Corporate Terrorist* unit responded ? by decimating over 70% of the IC's force. *kevdude_SF*, a well-known name to all of us, managed 14 kills alone.

A tough lesson for IC to swallow. But one they're not likely to soon forget.

>>**Ltc Hammel: 71616:1:18171:** What trash heap did the DataNet dig this reporter out of? Judging from the objective journalism, I'd say straight from the Omega Center cells.

>>**Giga_Core: 91881:109118:** Nobody loves the IC's hit campaign more than the pilots it targets. Gives us a great opportunity to take out all those would-be assassins.

>>**GromnieBreath: 781717:11111:** Seems more interesting that the IC used to publicly post their hit list. Doesn't that defeat the point of a covert assassination by warning the victim first?

>>**Ltc Hammel: 71616:1:18171:** Congratulations. You've all just been added to the list.

Date: 01.04.2151
File: 00127
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Assassins' Tryout

The year was 2055.

GigaCom had grown in size to become the financial giant, GigaCorp. Although several ambitious projects were in the works, the corporation lagged behind on building their enormous Prosperity Station, the largest orbital station ever conceived. Although a money drain, too much had already been invested to stop work on the project.

At the same time, Emmet Longstreet sought the corporation's resources to continue work on Project: ALEXANDER -- work which would eventually spawn the BIOS faction. Then interim CEO Donald Claypool refused, sending Longstreet into the furthest corner of GigaCorp controlled space, along with a trifling of supplies to continue Project: ALEXANDER on his own. Or, as some would tell it, Longstreet left of his own accord, using his security clearance to divert what resources he could.

Longstreet's exile was, of course, Claypool's last executive decision.

While GigaCorp continued to grow in prosperity, soon after discovering He3 in the asteroid belt, Claypool would no longer run the company. Despite the highest level of security surrounding him, on the evening of 6.5.2056 a suicide group of assassins managed to execute Claypool as he left a late night function.

To this day, exact details of the encounter remain unclear, locked away in confidential GigaCorp files. Eyewitnesses at time, however, reported that a group of men, dressed in simple flight suits, appeared from all directions and swarmed Clayton and his bodyguards. The bodyguards immediately shot down several of the attackers, but to no apparent effect on the assassins' collective morale. *They seemed to act like robots*, several witnesses recounted. *Or zombies*. One of the attackers, in close proximity to Claypool, triggered a concealed bomb, killing everyone within a one-city block radius.

What linked these assassins to Emmet Longstreet were the events following the encounter. As further GigaCorp security arrived upon the scene, examining the bodies of those assassins at the furthest edge of the blast radius, witnesses reported seeing the assassins' bodies liquefy. Although GigaCorp attempted to downplay the incident as much as they could, rumors ran rampant. Many believed that the assassins were none other than early versions of Longstreet's BIOS children. Gen-Alpha, some theorists called them. Others, Gen-Assassin. It was further believed that Longstreet designed these BIOS to liquefy either after a set amount of time, or after their simple brains registered completing their mission. Others stated that the bomb was not concealed within one of the assassin's clothes but rather surgery implanted within the body of the assassin himself.

Lacking any concrete evidence, the theorists were left to debate amongst themselves. Yet, to this day, the death of Donald Claypool remains one of the system's most remembered assassinations.

All of which leads, of course, to current rumors regarding GigaCorp and the underground drive to hire their own assassination unit. Perhaps looking to trump the IC's hit squad, GigaCorp has posted veiled invitations, looking for freelance agents with certain contraband skills and the ability to keep their mouths shut.

DataNet reporter *Conscience_1* declined the invitation to infiltrate GigaCorp's suspected assassin squad in order to learn more of the matter. So for now, we'll simply watch the system and be sure to keep you, our readers, posted.

>>RumorsTumor: 161651:1018178: Intricate study of Clayton's assassination remains a popular hobby to this day. For example, I personally follow the school of thought which believes the BIOS dissolved after completing their mission, not after a set amount of time. After all, how could an arbitrary time have been effectively chosen, not knowing how long Clayton would stay at his function?

>>TruthSpeaka: 91817:191:11: That's ridiculous. See, if their BIOS were set to dissolve after they completed their mission, how would they know if they ever completed their mission? After the blast, they all died, and their brains ceased to function. No, they dissolved after a set amount of time. Much like the Gen-7 BIOS still do, I believe.

>>RumorsTumor: 161651:1018178: Jeremiah's Paradox, as you state it, holds no water. Who says the BIOS were all dead? That was only assumed after they all dissolved. Of course, some must have remained behind the rest, acting as observers, and registered the assassination as having been completed.

>>TruthSpeaka: 91817:191:11: Whatever. Your arguments, relying on the tenets of Maxwell's Supposition, also assume more than can ever be known.

>>Aunt_Sam: 1817:109181:11: You two idiots need to shut up and face reality. Clayton was killed by IC field agents, and you both know it.

Date: 01.04.2151
File: 00128
Report filed by: "Rumormonger"

Turned Tables

Following yesterday's look back at the Claypool Assassination of 2056, the DataNet boards continue to debate the finer points of an event taking place a hundred years ago. Yet this far removed in time, the truth will never be fully revealed. Those who know have all died off, and what files they wrote have all been lost to the dust of antiquity.

Yet more recent events can, and should, be carefully scrutinized. Like the supposed "war games" taking place last night in Martian orbit. At this point, the question begs to be asked: Why is it that every time faction units fight amongst themselves, official statements call the battle "war games"? As if anyone in the system -- including IC sergeants! -- couldn't see through this flimsiest of excuses.

Still, to uphold the mask of faction unity, the statements must be made.

According to Miguel Sanchez, the voice of GigaCorp PR: "No fighting between GigaCorp factions took place last evening between the hours of 20:00 and 22:00 UST." Furthermore, if there were any signs of fighting last night, these were simply: "regularly scheduled test-firings of GigaCorp gear."

And then, there's the real story.

By now the system is abuzz with the news: GigaCorp, in response to their best pilots being targeted by IC death squads, has decided to fight cloak with dagger, as the saying goes. Posting notices (as thinly veiled as last night's cover story) to hire on the system's finest freelance assassins, GigaCorp representatives were scheduled to meet with all parties interested at the same time and place as last evening's "war games" (or "test firings" depending on which Giga-lie you choose to swallow).

It can only be assumed that come meeting time, while GigaCorp agents waiting with their contracts and pens -- and bursting corporate coffers -- the assassins made their move. Disguised as miners working at a nearby tactical station, the assassins quickly struck, overpowering the GigaCorp agents before they knew what was happening. Of course, much like the Claypool Assassination, nothing concrete about last night's events will ever be known. However, the most reputable sources available claim that the assassins managed to make off with enough GigaCorp funds and tech to set themselves up nicely for quite some time.

Fact or fiction, a group of hardened killers piloting GigaCorp gear is said to be at large. Who these people are, and just what their plans might be, remains to be seen. As always, we'll keep you posted!

>>**Miguel Sanchez: 17161:1191:11:** Rumors and lies aside, GigaCorp stands behind every one of its statements.

>>**Cloaked_1: 19181:10191891:** Fine. Stand behind your statements while we spend you dough! Thanks for the easy pickings.

>>**FledgingSarg: 71716161:1:** On behalf of the *GC Fledglings* assigned to oversee the mission last night, I can only ask, what was GigaCorp thinking? Rookies against assassins? No wonder we all got podded.

>>**Cloaked_1: 19181:10191891:** Yeah. Sorry about that noobs. But business first, you know?

Date: 01.09.2151
File: 00129
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Bedfellows

After a brief period of civil war, the wayward Gen-Theta pilots have apparently reconciled with the BIOS ruling council -- much to the dismay of the other system factions.

Soon after the release of Gen-Theta, the BIOS latest generation of super-soldiers, came Gen-Theta's expected coup d'etat launched against the ruling council. Although the council forcibly put down this latest uprising, it was not known whether the Gen-Theta BIOS would then come to accept the council's rule, or else strike out on their own.

Little to no information has been released from the notoriously tight-lipped BIOS faction. Of course, this may be due to the fact that matters involving Gen-Theta also involve the ruling council's continued disregard for certain stellar laws -- laws against genetic manipulation, laws which the Iron Coalition has attempted, time and again, to enforce.

During this time of war, laws revered by only one of the factions may not be much of a deterrent. The BIOS, certainly, have flaunted these laws in their continued efforts to advance their faction members; in addition, pending victory against the Coalition, such laws will almost surely be swept aside.

Yet there may be more behind all this.

After every release of a new BIOS generation, there has been an attack staged by that generation against the ruling council. Despite the fact that the new generations continue to advance in ferocity and fighting prowess, the council has, so far, repeatedly managed to hold onto their power. How are they able to do this? Victory through sheer numbers seems unlikely. Victory through superior technology is a possibility, except that the latest BIOS pilots are often seen flying the most advanced ships in the sectors. In fact, following the assault against the Rixian temple, the Gen-Theta BIOS were equipped with custom-made ships from the finest source of salvaged tech in the system.

A more likely answer seems to be hidden within the act of genetic manipulation itself. When the Gen-7 BIOS entered the war, they were found to have a lifespan limited to mere hours. Perhaps this crippling defect was genetically engineered by the ruling council, in order to protect themselves against these pilots. What, then, would Gen-Theta's given weakness be? Perhaps addiction to some drug, controlled by the ruling council? If such were proven to be the case, more factions than the Iron Coalition would protest, and more laws would be broken than those restricting genetic manipulation. The BIOS ruling council would then be wise, indeed, to keep their methods secret. While they remain (arguably) the strongest faction in the system, it is doubtful even they could withstand the combined forces of the three other human factions.

In any event, the Gen-Theta BIOS have returned to the flock, and the BIOS remain as strong as ever. As recently as last night, a pair of BIOS units managed to defeat a joint IC/GigaCorp effort. What other events will follow? As always, we'll keep you posted.

>>**System_Liege: 7777:101918:1:** GigaCorp and Iron Coalition working in coercion? Strange (and desperate?) bedfellows, indeed. The BIOS appear mighty indeed!

>>**IC_Bandit: 1181:1019:1919:1:** Actually, it's a sign that the BIOS should worry. If the Belters join that allegiance, too, then the BIOS will be defeated. Followed closely by the Rix.

>>**He3_Golem: 44441:100109:12:** The BIOS council addicting their pilots to drugs? Sounds a lot like the IC. Ever hear what they put in their mess hall rations?

>>**IC_ScramMan: 01918:187161:** That ain't true. IC pilots just get addicted to the battle.

>>**He3_Golem: 44441:100109:12:** Is that what they tell you?

Date: 01.10.2151
File: 00130
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Rock of Eden

GigaCorp. The faction best able to fund a lengthy exploration project, scouring the nearby systems for any signs of precious He3. A project which has, apparently, been secretly underway for quite some time.

Over the course of the past several months, exploratory efforts for the chief source of all-purpose fuel, He3, have concentrated both in the local asteroid belt as well as in previously unexplored deep sectors of space. GigaCorp, however, dedicating much of their budget to *Project: Beachcomber*, has sent countless search parties out to nearby explored sectors, looking for He3 sources previous parties may have missed.

Although it is relatively easy to detect He3 on asteroid surfaces, GigaCorp decided to return to explored sectors, using explosive HeX fuel to core-mine stellar bodies. As has been previously stated in past DataNet reports, core-mining involves packing drill holes with an explosive substance, then detonating the stellar body into smaller pieces, revealing their cores.

This was, apparently, the goal of *Project: Beachcomber*. To core-mine other faction's abandoned sites and locate undetected core veins of He3. GigaCorp scouts are said to have been investigating sites for somewhere between six to eight weeks.

DataNet first learned of *Project: Beachcomber* through reliable sources within GigaCorp. The information these sources provided was confirmed last night, based on transmissions captured from an orbiting listening station. The station was able to detect the following transmissions between two *Project: Beachcomber* units:

<Vanguards_Com>: OK, we have planet 21-a in our sensors, and are preparing to deploy miners. From all instrument readings, there's not only possible He3 in the core, but veins of the stuff still across the surface. Someone sure forgot about this one.

<Investors_Com>: Commander of the *Vanguard* unit. Please be aware that you are encroaching on our site. The *Investors* will be deploying miners shortly, and we don't want your ships in the way.

<Vanguards_Com>: Don't pull that stunt, here! We arrived first, and we're mining this rock! You haven't even entered the sector yet!

<Investors_Com>: Nevertheless, we have already sent our findings back to Mars. As the first to name the principle planet, *Rock of Eden*, we are granted first rights to mine.

<Vanguards_Com>: You intercepted our findings and sent them back! Don't worry -- enter the system, and we will fire on you. With no one left in the *Investor* unit, the rights will pass on to us.

Following these initial statements, heated battle broke out between the two GigaCorp units. Lasting forty-five minutes, it is believed that the *Investor* unit did succeed in driving off the *Vanguards*. No statement has yet been made by GigaCorp spokesmen, but according to official records, the *GC Investors* are listed as the unit holding the mining rights.

>>**Ten/Forty: 81717:101918:** Not bad, DataNet, not bad. Thanks for tipping the other factions off to where the He3 is to be had!

>>**SB_Dominick: 9181:191771:1:** Yeah, well, all I can say is that DataNet just put the lives of all those miners at risk to every pirate in the system.

>>**GC_MajorTom: 91817:1091176:11:** No kidding. Just who runs those listening posts anyway? You guys at DataNet? Don't expect them to last much longer.

Date: 01.11.2151
File: 00131
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Part and Parcel

Of all the factions who release official statements of events occurring around the system, GigaCorp has proven the most willing. As the faction with the largest corporate coffers, a good deal of Giga's budget has gone toward their public relations campaign; and in this campaign, Miguel Sanchez, spokesman for the company, has played an active role in airing faction news and information (however slanted).

In his most recent appearance, Miguel Sanchez took the time to host a formal Q&A session with an audience entirely composed of GigaCorp pilots. The transcript of this session, edited down for clarity, found its way into DataNet's possession.

<Miguel Sanchez>: Thanks for attending, everyone. My name is Miguel Sanchez. As many of you know, my role in GigaCorp has been to serve as corporate spokesmen. I release carefully worded statements to the public regarding ongoing GigaCorp events. Now, we know this is an important task, or else we run the risk of an outside faction, such as the Iron Coalition, or god forbid, the DataNet, releasing our statements for us. And unlike GigaCorp, we know how "honest" these other factions can be.

<Laughter>

<Miguel Sanchez>: However, what we'd like to do today is talk with you, our valued GigaCorp pilots. Give you a chance to ask some of the questions you might have on your mind. Just another benefit of working for the greatest faction in the system! Now, let's begin shall we?

<GC_Allmighty_1>: Yeah, hi. Uh, Miguel, I was wondering if you could talk a bit about the situation happening right now at the *Rock of Eden*.

<Miguel Sanchez>: I'm sorry, could you be a little more specific?

<GC_Allmighty_1>: Right. Well, as you know, *GC Vanguard* was the first unit on the scene, after something like weeks of stellar exploration. Then we hear that the *GC Investors*, funded by some of the GigaCorp execs, swooped in and stole the claim. Was this just another effort by the execs to deny us regular pilots the chance to make a rich claim on our own?

<Miguel Sanchez>: Whoa, now! There's a lot in what you just said, and a lot that's not quite true. Let's look back at the initial claim made on the *Rock of Eden*. First of all, in GigaCorp employ, all claims become the rights of GigaCorp. After all, who paid for the explorations in the first place?

But, since we work for this wonderful faction, GigaCorp has gone so far as to stipulate that whichever individual unit stakes a claim on a sector is granted certain percentage rights to that sector. Now, is that a deal, or what?

In this case, there are lots of rumors floating around that the *GC Vanguard*s were denied their claim. Now, we don't know that. Our records indicate that when the *GC Investors* arrived on the scene, the *Vanguard* unit was in need of urgent assistance. Fighting may have broken out among the *Vanguard* pilots -- we don't know. But many were already in lifepods, and the *Investors* kindly picked them up. But that's all moot. The *Investors* were the first to file their claim and, as such, theirs was honored.

<GC_Allmighty_1>: Yeah, but isn't it true that GigaCorp execs made the claim for them? And that the *Vanguard* unit actually filed one first, but theirs was "lost"?

<Miguel Sanchez>: It was improperly filed. *<Whispers something inaudible to GigaCorp security.>*

<At this point, the lights dimmed for Sanchez to present a brief holo-presentation of claim filing procedures. When the lights were raised, GC_Allmighty_1 had apparently left the audience.>

<Miguel Sanchez>: Next question.

<GC_AbleBody>: Yeah. I heard that GigaCorp is no longer in possession of the *Rock of Eden*. After last night's fighting, we all hear that the Belters, and even some Rix, control that sector now.

<Miguel Sanchez>: No comment. Thanks for attending everyone! This Q&A is over. *<More whispering to security, as Sanchez hurriedly leaves the room.>*

Date: 01.12.2151
File: 00132
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Colonize This

As the first images of the *Rock of Eden* begin to filter back, the actual appearance of this rumored paradise has proven a disappointing surprise.

An untapped planet, conveniently located near a G4 star, the *Rock of Eden* was initially described by GigaCorp scouts as a "suitable colony location for any of the human factions, or even a potential GigaCorp R&R site." According to the reports, the planet boasted "natural sources of liquid water and an atmosphere composed of gaseous elements capable of easy conversion into oxygen through technology already at hand."

At the conclusion of the reports, the GigaCorp officer in charge of the scouting operation noted "the *Rock of Eden* seems like a planet forgotten in initial sweeps through the sector. Perhaps fighting once took place for the planet's possession, with both sides obliterating the other and neither submitting findings to their parent faction. (As possible evidence, scattered remains of spacecraft were seen in the vicinity upon arrival.)"

Of course, the most welcome feature of the planet had to be its ready supply of He3. The GigaCorp scouting operation, *Project: Beachcomber*, had set out to look for promising samples in the core of previously mined stellar bodies. Yet, initial examination of the *Rock of Eden* showed veins of the precious fuel on the surface, proof of an abundant supply.

"Someone sure missed this," the Giga reports mentioned.

Yet, with the discovery of He3, other factions moved in, attempting to stake their own claim on the idyllic planet. For the past several days, battle has ripped across the sector, concentrated around the *Rock of Eden* itself. Initially contained to internal disputes between GigaCorp units, once the other factions arrived, all-out war broke out.

As battle reports stream back to the Solar System, the accompanying images reveal a planet much transformed by the fighting. Far from the pristine paradise, the *Rock of Eden* now resembles something of a cratered moon, littered with the shells of crashed and burning ships. Clearly, the *Rock of Eden* will not become an R&R site anytime soon.

Despite its seeming ruin, two factions continue to fight over the rights to colonize: the ornery Belters and the unfathomable Rixian Unity. In the most recent battle, occurring sometime yesterday evening, the Rixians claimed final victory.

Despite this, it is the Belters who have remained behind, perhaps forced to purchase colonization rights from the victorious alien faction. Of course, of any faction stubborn enough to colonize a decimated rock, it would have to be the Belters -- making their home base within what was once thought to be the uninhabitable asteroid belt.

As further news develops, we'll be sure to keep you posted.

Date: 01.13.2151
File: 00133
Report filed by: "Kodiak Adams"

The Hand is Dealt

There's few things as endearing as the site of a new Belter mining operation. Take the one right here, on the *Rock of Eden*.

Now, the best place to begin a mining camp is actually a battle pick-up site. Or, a ship graveyard, as some Belters call these places.

Host a battle in orbit, and ships invariably get hit. Or else, what's the fun of hosting a battle? Now, some ships get outright obliterated. Others get hit, but not so bad. Just enough to take them out of the fight. If they're lucky, they can make their way back to the carriers.

Of course, if they could get back to the carriers, they aren't so damaged as to leave the fight -- am I right?

If they aren't so lucky, if the ships really are hit bad, then the best bet for the pilot is to try and crash land on whatever planet happens to be below. Before every battle, a predetermined pick-up site is added to every ship's map-banks, and that's where the pilots head.

Of course, the danger's still not quite over. If the ships manage to land, and the planet has a hostile environment, then the pilots have to hope that their oxygen and supplies last until the pick-up can be made. If a pick-up is even possible.

Other ships get so damaged, they can't even land. They pound straight into the pick-up site like a meteor. Believe me, you don't want to be the first pilot down, safely landed, only to have some maniac crash right next to you. Or, on top of you.

But if the battle's won, a Belters rescue crew will head straight to the pick-up site. If no mining is scheduled for the planet, then the survivors are rescued (or forced to barter for their rescue), and everyone flies home happy. If the battle was to secure the planet for mining rights, then the operation begins right there. Crashed ships are salvaged for their materials, and the mining operation is built right at the pick-up site.

And that's when the real fun begins.

Now someone once said that all things tend to descend from organization into chaos. Said it was a law of some kind. Now, I don't know about that, but if it is a law, then it must be one the IC wrote, because we Belters don't follow it either. Except in reverse.

Sure, any mining operation starts with chaos. Pure, fun chaos. A hundred Belter miners milling about, everyone yelling orders at everyone else. Supplies scattered. Wreckage from the crashed ships underfoot -- bodies, even. It's a mess, I tell ya.

But then things start to organize. Wrecked ships get pulled together and bolted down. There -- a Belter base. A Little Frankenstein monster, but that's home for the next few months. If need be, the place is sealed. Oxygen gets pumped in. Then, launching pads are scraped out in the dirt (before we can mine, we need to protect our miners from attack). Gunships, placed on the pads, go under camo nets. Mining equipment gets uncrated and assembled. The first tunnels are drilled.

Ah, it's beautiful, I tell ya! Out of chaos, comes a fully organized, operating Belter mining site.

The process is unfolding all around us here on the *Rock of Eden*. True, there's always problems to face. The Rixians gave us a real lickin' last night. I hear tell that the only way we managed to land was by bribing the Rix to leave. Not a good start -- how much percentage of the He3 we mine will go to them aliens? Plus, until shipments arrive, there's always oxygen shortages, broken gear, wounded miners. . .

Of course, we could always head over to the second Belter camp, on the other side of the planet. You know, take a few gunships, introduce ourselves to the neighbors, borrow a cup of sugar.

Something like that.

Date: 01.16.2151
File: 00134
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Of Rock and Might

Rock of Eden **01.12.2151**

According to the latest word, coming from both GigaCorp and the Belters, claim on the middle-system *Rock of Eden* has indeed passed on to the Belters miners.

GigaCorp, who originally discovered the idyllic world, has officially stated that it eventually sold the Belters the rights to colonize *Rock of Eden* for an undisclosed percentage of all He3 mined there. For their part, the Belters have openly stated that they took the claim from GigaCorp by force, only to lose it to the alien Rix. Paying the Rix, not GigaCorp, an undisclosed amount, the Belters have begun the colonizing process.

Asked why GigaCorp would make such a claim, Orion Sholes of the Belter miners commented: "You got me. Guess them boys are just trying to save face. They sure as hell shouldn't be expecting a payment anytime soon!"

Genetic Might **01.13.2151**

Equipped in stolen Rixian gear, the BIOS launched a renewed assault against the other factions of humanity. Releasing a brief statement, warning that the humans had been offered the chance to be led down the "correct" genetic path and refused, several well-armed BIOS units attacked a high-traffic trading sector.

In the opening foray, GigaCorp's *Elan* unit did the most to drive the BIOS units back. However, not one hour later, the BIOS apparently concentrated their efforts on GigaCorp's *Elan*, taking them completely out of the battle: In the second stage of the battle, *Elan* achieved a pathetic four kills and not a single base kill. The BIOS, on the other hand, went on to take the field, eventually destroying the area's trading posts.

How did the BIOS manage to take GigaCorp completely out of the battle? Some say with highly effective electronic countermeasure devices. Others point to simple psych-ops. At the start of the battle's second stage, the BIOS apparently broadcast the names and home addresses of those members of the *Elan* unit; an open threat to the families of those Giga pilots, who did, indeed, back down.

Nameless Space **01.14.2151**

Perhaps the only thing more appealing than a newly discovered supply of He3 is the rich remains of a battlefield. After all, both He3 fuel and weapon cells, ammunition supplies, even ship armor plating may be had there for the taking. Following the *Genetic Might* battle, salvage units from both the Belters and the IC showed up, looking to haul off whatever they could.

Although salvage operations remain a specialty of the Belters, this time it was the Iron Coalition who made off with the greatest haul. Sending not rig-ships, but armed utility fighters, IC's *Black Squadron* completely overpowered the Belters' *Sinkers*, sending them home to the Belt empty-handed.

Assassins' Duel

01.15.2151

Aside from salvage operations, the Iron Coalition's other active venue remains flexing the might of their death squad enforcers. The IC most recently sought to continue its campaign -- of eliminating enemy aces, by sending out their dreaded *Mercenaries* unit into battle. Designed to sweep through the system on a search-and-destroy mission, the *Mercenaries* met their match in GigaCorp's *Assassins*.

The *Assassins* had been designed as the perfect counter to IC's death squads, assembled from the freelance killers of the system. Although problems occurred at first (namely, with the original killers stealing their GigaCorp funding and disappearing into the stars), GigaCorp apparently managed to renegotiate a new contract. Perhaps even larger payrolls were enough to entice the killers out of hiding and join on as the GigaCorp *Assassins*.

In any event, the *Assassins* managed to take out many within the *Mercenaries*, bringing IC's latest campaign to a rude halt.

As always, as further news develops around the system, we'll keep you posted!

Date: 01.17.2151
File: 00135
Report filed by: "Grand_PA"

Legend of the System

A message from the editor

The following account comes to us from a close friend of the DataNet. *Grand_PA* has been traveling the system, some say, since the earliest days of the faction wars. In his travels, *Grand_PA* has busied himself collecting invaluable accounts of human lore, threatened to be forever forgotten during these troubled times.

Not affiliated with any one faction, *Grand_PA* has claimed to work with them all (even the Rixian Unity) at one time or another. We wish him the best of luck in his continued travels.

Legend of the System

Now, let me preface this account by stating one solid, irrefutable fact; and that is this: The legends of a civilization center around whatever the people of that civilization value the most. Centuries back, with gold being the most precious commodity on Earth, there were tales of the Lost City of Cibola, said to be paved with the stuff. Of course some people placed the value of human life and vitality over money, and so other tales concerned a mythical Fountain of Youth.

Were these legendary places ever found? No. Did that in any way diminish interest in the tales spread about them? Also, no; for neither did interest in what these legends offer diminish. Even today, you'll still hear talk of discarded GigaCorp technology offering beauty, youth, even the cheap chemical conversion of lead into gold. According to such talk, this technology really works, but GigaCorp simply didn't have the investors at the time to bring it to market. Listen to such talk long enough, and the teller will even let you in on a little secret: The technology can still be had. . . for the right price. . .

These days, what is it people want? He3. As such, current legends concern this, the most precious of substances.

That's a fact: What people want, their legends offer. Everything following remains open to conjecture.

According to "reliable sources," an alien artifact composed of He3 exists, hidden, somewhere in this very system.

After all, no one really knows for sure where He3 originally derives. It cannot be found at all within larger stellar bodies, but seems relatively abundant on small moons and asteroids. According to the most recent scientific debate (with "debate" being the emphasized word here), He3 may have drifted into this and other systems through the Aleph portals.

Now, however much faith humanity invests in science, we humans seem to hold a special reverence for the Aleph portals. Sixty-five percent of students at the Lunar Institute, the system's most prestigious university of higher learning, believe that the Alephs did not form through natural cosmic processes, but rather are the products of alien minds.

The connection, then, does not seem so far-fetched. Aliens. Alephs. He3. So, instead of randomly dusted particles of the isotope, why not a concentration of the stuff, carved into an idol form representing the aliens who first delivered He3 to our system?

The rewards of such a legend are many. Answers to several mysteries of science. Revelation of a kind and enlightened alien race (a revelation now desired more than ever, following great disappointment with the Rixians). A massive source of fuel.

Truly, a desirous thing to find. So perhaps it's no wonder that several factions have recently launched expeditions, scouring the hidden corners of the system, to look for this legendary source of He3. Will they find it? Doubtful. But the expeditions, no doubt, will continue -- so long as He3 fuels humanity's ships.

>>**RumorMonger: 565:12615:1817:** A timely article. Rumor has it that not only are expeditions looking for the legend, they've found it!

>>**TyrannosaurusTex: 1716:7476191:1:** It's true. And the first shots have already been fired. Last one standing wins the prize!

>>**BlueBaron: 7655:1413131:** Seriously doubtful. I've heard the legend of the He3 "Golem" (we used to call it) as a kid. No one ever found Cibola or the Fountain of Youth either.

>>**IC_LunaC: 1716:10118:1:** That's because those were stories designed to lure explorers away from native cities. I know, I've studied this at the Institute. In this case, though, the legend isn't about luring dangerous explorers away, but to draw them to a monumental finding.

>>**Ginger: 71661:10191:** Still sounds like a big con to me.

Date: 01.18.2151
File: 00136
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

He3 Golem

As of 01.17.2151, an event forever marking the history of exploration was made. Of the treasure hunters still desperately searching for a legendary, and alien, source of He3, only the Iron Coalition and the BIOS stubbornly persisted in the effort. Both factions sought the fame, and exorbitant value, of the mysterious alien relic.

While the rumors surrounding this source have persisted for years, many noted scholars believed all such accounts to be mere wishful thinking. Few expected faction explorers to ever find anything more than the firing cannons of their competitors' gunships.

Yet, yesterday evening, officers within the Iron Coalition were overheard sending congratulatory transmissions to their chief exploration unit, the *49ers*:

"We have received your announcement, and wish to offer congratulations on the mission's success. Thanks to your efforts, you have given truth to fiction, and discovered what will surely become a symbol of the Iron Coalition's supremacy."

"Return to Luna at full speed. An IC support unit will rendezvous with you in transit, to protect your cargo from further BIOS attacks."

While the IC has not released any official word of their findings, orbital listening stations, as well as rogue Belter pilots still scouting the area, did their best to intercept further conversation between the exploring *49ers* and IC's lunar HQ.

Piecing together what they could, it is now believed that the *49ers* have found the so-called "He3 Golem." Sending the majority of their reports from within a loose cluster of asteroids (dubbed The Golem Grounds), the *49ers* claimed to have discovered a set of caves within the largest `roid.

And there, within the caves, the He3 Golem.

The *49ers*, after an initial attack by the BIOS *Gen-7 Alpha* unit, retreated back within these caves, and largely out of transmission contact. Thereafter, guarded by the remaining heavy fighters, the *49ers* began assembling mining operations gear most commonly associated with hauling He3 ore out of a stellar body.

The Iron Coalition has indeed found a legend of the system. Best guesses would indicate the He3 Golem to be exactly that: a statue carved from the precious ore. In which case, even more questions remain. Who carved the statue in the first place? What was their intent? And, perhaps most important of all, will the IC *49ers* be able to safely deliver their prize without other factions destroying this legend?

As further news develops, we'll be sure to keep you posted!

>>**Doc_Ops: 71615:1911761:11:** Questionable. Who says the IC found anything more than a regular vein of He3?

>>**Mask_of_Zero: 151414:1018171:** This whole thing could be a massive con. After all, once the Golem is in IC's possession, they can say whatever they want to about the thing.

>>**Rumormonger: 1661:1018178:171615:** And sell a lot of tickets to boot.

>>**Ltc Hammel: 91817:10918171:** Right, that's just what the IC wants. A bunch of paranoid delusionals crawling all over the most important scientific and archaeological find of the century.

Date: 01.19.2151
File: 00137
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Fragments of the Statue

Whatever the He3 Golem may have actually been, whatever its strange and alien origins, our system will never know. As of last evening, the mysterious artifact was destroyed as IC work crews hauled the statue out of its resting spot in the Golem Grounds asteroid.

At approximately 4:00 UST yesterday, work crews from the Iron Coalition's *49ers* unit began hauling the He3 Golem out of the caverns in which it was originally found. Although the *49ers* attempted to keep the Golem as hidden as possible, flying scout ships around the site in an effort to cloud visibility, several interested parties were able to gain their first view of this legend.

Rumormonger, having bribed his way aboard a Belter observation craft, reported at the time:

"By all appearances, the Golem resembles exactly that. . . . It's hard to see clearly, but the statue possesses some sort of anthropomorphic form. Definitely not human. Or Rixian, either, from what I've seen of their species. Something else.

"The dimensions of this thing, this statue, are huge. There's Iron Coalition ships everywhere, using buckyball cables to haul the Golem out of the main mining shaft. . . . It looks as though they're trying to haul it onboard a waiting carrier. I think they're trying to cover the Golem with some massive tarp, to further shield it from view. . . some commotion now around the escorting IC ships. . .

"My god! There's just been a huge explosion! The IC. . . Rixian ships are tearing through! The IC workers have scrambled. The ones around the mining site -- I can't see anything. They must have all been hit. . . "

It is believed that a hidden Rixian force waited until the He3 Golem reached the surface of the asteroid, and then struck. Heavy bombers were used, concentrating their attack on the Golem itself. Except for a few IC pilots on the fringe of the mining site, all other members of the *49ers* were instantly killed.

As the Golem was hit, the statue detonated into countless fragments. Almost immediately, the Rixian attackers and the Belter observers in the area scrambled to collect as many of the valuable He3 fragments as possible.

Why would the Rixians mount such an attack? Clearly, their objective was not to steal the artifact from out the IC's hands, but to destroy it utterly, instead. Many now conjecture that the Golem was indeed a piece of alien art, perhaps hidden as a puzzle for humanity to solve. Carved out of the advanced He3 fuel, perhaps the Golem was meant to lead humanity to whatever system its alien creators now inhabit. If so, then the Rixians, the only alien life our system knows, would indeed feel their unique position to be threatened. However repugnant their philosophical "Code" seems to many in the system, there's no shortage of researchers still willing to meet with the alien Rix.

Simple jealousy, then, may have led to the wanton destruction of a legend.

>>***I_Speak_for_the_Golem: 61515:101918:11:*** That's exactly the point. Why are our researchers paying attention to these damned aliens? Rix, so help me, this system will not rest until the Golem is avenged!

>>***Aunt_Sam: 1151:101918:11817:*** What's the big deal? Shed tears for some big honkin' statue? Grow up.

>>***Eyes_Haven't: 1141:101:11811:*** I hear the IC's planning a memorial for the *49ers*. A statue, modeled after the Golem. Or, at least what they guess the Golem looked like.

>>***Light_of_Issa: 01010:11:10101:*** What the Rixians did was the RIGHT thing! That statue was evil, and would have led humanity away from the truth of the Code. Someday, you will understand.

Date: 01.22.2151
File: 00138
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Sixth and Penance

Prelude to War

In an apparent attempt to steal every last shred of dignity from the legendary He3 Golem, over the weekend factions continued their fight for every last piece of the shattered statue.

It may be remembered that the Golem, discovered in stellar caves within the Golem Grounds asteroid belt, was savagely attacked by Rixian bombers and destroyed. Composed of precious He3 ore, factions nevertheless forwent any attempt to reassemble the Golem, instead looking to convert as many pieces as they could into military-grade fuel.

Meanwhile, the Iron Coalition unveiled its monument to their *49ers* unit, most of whose pilots were killed during the attack. While some speculated that the monument would resemble a facsimile of the He3 Golem, the actual monument resembled IC Brigadier General Derek Fisk proudly staring off into the heavens. Fisk, present at the monument's unveiling at the Lunar Institute's School for Stellar Engineering, proclaimed the monument a worthy testament to the dedication and loyalty of the *49ers* pilot.

The Sixth Faction

There was once a common phrase in the system, that while there were four human factions, the fifth faction was war itself. Then, the Rixian Unity appeared, and for a short while seemed to completely embody this fifth faction role, for weeks refusing to lose a single battle.

Since then, thanks to the concerted efforts of humanity, the Rixians have been proven fallible, now losing far more battles than they win.

War, then, has once more become its own faction, the sixth faction. Over the weekend, this sixth faction reared its snarling, ravenous head, as the other five met in brutal combat. At this time, no reports have come forth regarding any one victor; it is believed that the battle still rages on indeterminately.

For now, the only winner, then, can be the sixth faction.

Penance Paid

True, while the Rixian Unity has not seen much success in the faction wars following their immediate arrival in the system, they have still nevertheless succeeded in other, minor goals. In the face of bristling opposition, the Rixians managed to construct a temple outpost on the far edge of the system. The outpost, to date, has functioned not only to house the alien crusaders bent on converting the system, but also to guard those Aleph portals leading back to their homeworld of Lapi.

Attacks against the Rixian temple have continued since construction completed. One month ago, Iron Coalition commandoes nearly succeeded in bombing the temple into oblivion. In later weeks, the BIOS managed to make off with pieces of the temple itself, for use in constructing their Gen-Theta pilots.

Of course, the Rixians have not simply turned the other cheek to such attacks. Orbital listening posts have detected an absolute flurry of activity surrounding the temple, akin to the Rixians preparing for a more organized military campaign. As ever, the alien faction remains inaccessible, except to discuss the merits of their "Code." Yet, as events develop regarding their impending campaign, we'll be sure to keep you posted!

Date: 01.23.2151
File: 00139
Report filed by: "Derek Fisk"

Cull the Herd

A message from the editor

The following transcript comes from the recent ceremony commemorating the slain pilots of the IC *49ers* unit. The pilots died while trying to excavate the He3 Golem from a remote asteroid belt, ambushed by the alien Rix. The keynote speaker of the ceremony, taking place at the Lunar Institute of Stellar Engineering, was none other than Brigadier General Derek Fisk himself.

His speech has been edited for length and clarity.

A message from Derek Fisk

These past few weeks, I have heard many a disturbing rumor about our beloved Coalition. Rumors that other factions, even the corrupt and contemptible organization known as the DataNet, simply love to report.

We have been accused of sending out less than our very best into battle. I know. Shocking, but true. We have been accused of using mechanical pilots. We have even been accused of stealing BIOS spawn, and developing BIOS-bred organisms to fly our craft.

Well I for one know that while such rumors are untrue, they are nevertheless damaging to the reputation of this great faction. This faction, which the people of Old Earth, however now scattered, rely on to keep order in the system! To promote the laws we all hold true! To resist the ways of our enemies, be they human, alien, or genetically altered!

While military research will always continue, searching for safer ships, better methods, superior weapons, how can we quell such rumors from harming morale?

To answer this, let's look to the efforts of the *49ers*. Did they seek any protection against the dangers of their assignment? No. They did not. They relied on their piloting skills, and the cooperation of their teammates. Unfortunately, such were no match for the cowardly bombs of the Rixians. But the spirit of the *49ers* lives on.

As such, the Coalition will begin assembling a new corps of elite pilots. Pilots that represent the true spirit of the Iron Coalition. Strength. Unity. Tradition. We have already begun the selection process, searching for pilots within such units as *Squad Leaders*, *Blue Falcons*, *Dixie Belles*, and *Commando Force*. We have seen these units in battle, led by such fine examples as *VerbalGynt* and *SN_Freaker_RJ*. We will continue to test our pilots, and promote the best from within. We will cull our ranks of the weak and the worthless. And, once more, we will bring peace to the system, following the precepts of Old Earth!

A message from the editor

Following the ceremony, the Iron Coalition unveiled its monument to the *49ers*: a statue representing Brigadier General Derek Fisk. (Despite the statue's obvious decorations, Fisk claimed it stood for an anonymous "unknown pilot," representing all within the Iron Coalition.)

Just before the ceremony, GigaCorp scouts reported a frenzy of activity surrounding the IC lunar training camps. Four factions, they noted, seemed committed to violent dog-fighting amongst themselves, with those pilots from the *Commando Force* unit eventually winning the majority of the battlefield.

Both the Rixian Unity, and the Iron Coalition, then, seem to be gearing up for increased activity. Is a showdown inevitable? As always, we'll keep you posted.

Date: 01.24.2151
File: 00140
Report filed by: "Length `n Clarity"

Initiation

As part of the Iron Coalition's renewed drive toward faction pride, Brigadier General Derek Fisk has begun to assemble the finest pilots within his beloved Coalition. Announcing his intentions during the ceremony unveiling the memorial to the slain *49ers* unit, recruitment for Fisk's elite corps had apparently already begun. A short while later, several IC units were observed fighting it out over lunar training sectors.

Having culled the IC's ranks for the best and the brightest, Fisk invited representatives from the DataNet to observe his elite corps' initiation ceremony. Granted, most within the DataNet offices viewed such an invitation with deep suspicion. Ever at odds with the Coalition, several of our finest have been imprisoned within IC's prison ships before, and none dared repeat the experience.

I, however, jumped at the chance, eager to escape, however temporarily, from the classifieds department.

Arriving at Luna via a most circuitous route, the Iron Coalition proved nothing if not hospitable. For the remainder of the afternoon, I actually stood by Derek Fisk's side within one of his faction's impressive command centers. While simultaneously watching the events of a battle, Fisk paused every now and again to relate some piece of IC philosophy for me to jot down. A more careful man I've never met. At times, Fisk would go so far as to take the notepad from out of my hands, I suppose to check over what I was writing, but also to amend some of his earlier statements.

When asked about the battle taking place, Fisk proudly stopped to indicate the command center's system map. "Those purple blips you see there," he said. "Ships from *IC Recruits*. The best of the best. We've assembled our elite corps in those pilots there, and this is their ceremony of initiation."

"Won't you be attending the ceremony?" I asked.

"I am attending!" Fisk barked. "Right here! At this moment, those pilots are proving the might of the Coalition for all to witness. Those red blips? GigaCorp ships, from their *Renegade* unit. The best of their best." He laughed. "Or so I'm told. A fitting ceremony for our pilots, don't you think?"

I could only agree. However, over the course of the battle, lasting approximately one-and-a-half hours, I couldn't help but notice the red blips gradually outnumbering the purple. All the while, Fisk seemed to grow increasingly agitated, shouting at everyone within earshot.

"Thirty-seven? How could *dark_r1ft* kill thirty-seven IC pilots? And we can't kill one of him? Look at that guy there--"

He pointed to the GigaCorp communications stream, a secure channel cracked by his command center ops.

"*NakPPI*, taking out our pilots left and right. And what is he worried about? Death? No! Just getting his name in the press! THESE PEOPLE DON'T FEAR US!!"

A short while later, Fisk's security detail escorted me back to my ship. Perhaps not an auspicious start to the IC's elite corps, but my first visit to the faction nevertheless left me impressed, overall. Contrary to common opinion rampant in the DataNet, the Iron Coalition proved excellent hosts -- at least, to this rookie reporter. As I write this account, in transit back to the office, one of the IC's ships remains right by my side, escorting me through some pretty hostile sectors of spa—

A message from the editor

At this point, *Length* 'n Clarity's transmission abruptly ended. At the time this story has gone to press, he has yet to return.

Date: 01.25.2151
File: 00141
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Helter Belter

As the Rixian Unity steadily builds up its forces of war, the first target of this strange and often unfathomable alien faction has already been made clear. The Belters.

A strange choice, considering that the Iron Coalition has likewise increased its military operations, gathering together its finest pilots into its finest unit. Of course, this "elite corps" met with absolute disaster on 01.23, during what was supposed to be their triumphant initiation ceremony. As part of this ceremony, the elite corps was sent to teach rival GigaCorp a lesson -- and GigaCorp, in turn, humiliated the IC pilots in a ruthless display of fighting prowess.

As part of the callous fallout after the ceremony, the Iron Coalition went so far as to brutally murder the promising young DataNet reporter sent to cover the event. (Details on *Length 'n Clarity's* memorial service will be later announced.)

Perhaps members of the Rixian Unity have been monitoring events in the system even closer than previously thought. Left to themselves in the far edge of the system, many believe the Rixians take no notice of events concerning the other factions. Yet, following the IC's embarrassing defeat, the Rixians nevertheless knew enough not to view this recuperating faction as much of a threat. Either the Rixians have developed listening stations more advanced than the system is aware of, closely monitoring events as far away as Luna, or else the aliens have mastered the human language with enough ability to read these DataNet accounts.

In any event, yesterday evening the Rixians turned their attention to the Belters, sending their *Fluder* force against a seemingly passive mining operation. The Belters, unprepared for the attack, were quick to deploy whatever ships of war they had in the area, actually managing to assemble a pair of defensive units, the *Miners* and the *Ore Grinders*.

Even more surprising than the Rixians' choice of faction targets was their choice of allies. As the first wave of alien fighters rushed in, they were supported by a unit of Gen-7 BIOS.

Exactly why the BIOS would send a unit, much less *Gen-7 Alpha*, their very best, remains unclear. If an alliance has been struck between these two factions, it would not be the first. However, no truce between them has lasted for long, and it remains to be seen whether the BIOS and Rixians will continue fighting side by side.

Meanwhile, representatives from the Belter mining unions were quick to condemn the attack, stating that the Belter victims had not been participating in any military activities, or even mining He3. Apparently, they were working to assemble new tactical labs more hospitable to long-term human occupation. Would Belter-developed labs raise the interest of both the BIOS and the Rixians, to the point where the two were willing to lay aside all differences? Highly doubtful. In which case, the only explanation for the joint attack would seem to be the one the Belters gave: Simple wanton destruction.

Does the lust for blood now plague the system? The faction wars would indicate so. As for these specific attacks, as further news develops, we'll keep you posted.

>>**TruthSpeaka: 611551:1018181:** I could tell you why the BIOS and the Rixians are working together. Why else? The next generation of BIOS will be some BIOS/Rixian mix. Best of both races.

>>**RumorsTumor: 161515:101911:** No, that's not it at all. I have it on good authority that the BIOS and Rixian genes are totally incompatible. It's tech they're developing together, not genetics. Why else attack a Belter station?

>>**TruthSpeaka: 611551:1018181:** The Belters couldn't assemble a square if three sides were already in place. Their station had nothing to do with the attack. And I'm telling you, the BIOS and Rix are looking for a crossover species. Remember when the Rix first appeared? The BIOS were after their genetics even then. Of course they're compatible.

>>**RumorsTumor: 161515:101911:** Of course they're not. Otherwise, with what the BIOS stole, there would already be a crossover species!

>>**TruthSpeaka: 611551:1018181:** Who says there isn't? Hiding in BIOS labs. What do we know about that faction anyway?

Date: 01.26.2151
File: 00142
Report filed by: "Grand_PA"

Badger Hunt

A message from the editor

The following account comes to us from a close friend of the DataNet. *Grand_PA* has been traveling the system, some say, since the earliest days of the faction wars. In his travels, *Grand_PA* has busied himself collecting invaluable accounts of human lore, threatened to be forever forgotten during these troubled times.

His previous reports include: [The Legend of the System -- The He3 Golem](#).

A message from Grand_PA

Along with 95% of the population, the Doomsday Asteroid of 2140 killed countless species of Earth's fauna. Thankfully, some animals were already being kept aboard orbital research stations; most, however, perished in the resulting cataclysm.

Among those species not saved was the badger. Rest assured, the badger was truly one ferocious critter. So ferocious, in fact, hunters used to test their skills trying to pull a badger from out of its burrowed den. Now, such hunts were before even my time, but from what I've gathered, these hunters would wear nothing less than suits of armor to go after badgers, keeping guard with spears and like-armored hounds while others worked to dig up the badger's den. A dangerous quarry, the badger.

Now, there is a reason for me to tell this tale. Take a look at what's going on right now between the BIOS and the Belters. An old-fashioned badger hunt.

I've no idea what the Belters have done to incur such wrath. Salvage some drifting piece of tech they were warned to leave alone? "Tap" a tanker and make off with its He3 load? Who's to say.

In any event, the Rixians, with a certain fever in their blood, went after a group of miners not two days ago, absolutely laying waste; and, as many have already mentioned, the Rix were helped by none other than the *Gen-7* BIOS. Last I heard, these two were mortal enemies, but then, things do tend to change mighty quick these days, don't they?

After the battle, the Rix moved on, returning to their temple. But not the BIOS. They continued right after the Belters, attacking reinforcement units sent to aid the fleeing miners, working their way up the fringe of the Belt itself.

Those passing by the Belt lately have seen a terrible sight. The BIOS have set up camp on the outermost `roids, with reinforcements arriving by the hour. Already, they have sent in their *Gen-7 Delta* unit, known for their work in deathmatch style of fighting. Even worse for the Belters, holed up inside, may be the following brief statement released by the BIOS ruling council late last night:

"A new era is destined to dawn in this system. As the BIOS evolve, we will soon leave behind all our inferior cousins of humanity, however much they struggle to keep us back. In the meantime, will we accept this treatment? Will we wait for our cousins to kill themselves off before we come to rule? No. We will take action. One faction at a time, starting with the "least"evolved. We will drag the barbaric Belters out of their rocks, and, once exposed, destroy them. And then on to the next faction. The time for peaceful coexistence has passed."

>>**Aunt_Sam: 17161:1019198:** What? I don't see the problem in killing off the Belter scum.

>>**Up-zalla: 1:716160918171:** No one, in the history of these wars, has ever managed a successful campaign against the Belt. Some have tried, but just ask the IC what it got `em.

>>**Corp_Punishment: 837:10181:1181:** Actually, the IC's campaign worked quite well against the Belt. We took some choice `roids. And the Belters blew up their own unwanted bases. If it weren't for the IC pilots caught in the blast, the campaign would have been a complete success.

>>**Spam-inna-Can: 1871:191871:** Oh, had I the convenient memory of an IC drone. How happy life would seem, unclouded by reality!

Date: 01.29.2151
File: 00143
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Of Breeding Grounds and Crystal Halls

Breeding Ground

One element that has certainly kept each faction in check is the strength of every other faction's home territory. Consider the Belters. Although they remain the underdogs, at least militarily, all attempts to invade their base in the asteroid belt (contrary to certain IC claims) have met with total disaster.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the Iron Coalition's most recent efforts, to confront a faction in their home territory, met with the usual results.

Perhaps hoping to stem the rise of BIOS aggression in the system, on 01.27 the Iron Coalition sent their elite corps into the battlefield of Saturn. It has long been assumed that the BIOS have been developing their next generations in labs hidden somewhere within Saturn's rings; however, no faction (until now) has proven foolish enough to seek out and assault these labs.

Until they were stopped, the IC *Survivors* unit did manage to both find the BIOS labs and lay waste to a large number of developing pilots. The official IC count (though possibly exaggerated) claimed over six hundred were slain.

Once alerted to the IC's presence, the BIOS were quick to launch a defensive unit, *Gen-7 Delta*. And despite a second, minor IC strike, the BIOS proved fully able to drive the *Survivors* away.

Although lately preoccupied with the Belters, this damaging attack may well serve to turn the BIOS' attention back to the IC.

Crystal Halls

However remote the corner, however worthless the territory, the factions will nevertheless drag their fight into any disputed region of space. On 01.28, this proved to be the Von Neuman Belt, a broken ring of crystalline bodies slowly orbiting the system past distant Pluto.

Von Neuman came to prominence in late 20th century Old Earth, devising theoretical machines which would travel to other systems, there collect needed materials, and then use these materials to construct further machines. In such a way, Von Neuman believed, the entire universe could be explored through such self-replicating machines.

The Von Neuman Belt was so named after its discoverers recognized that the crystals composing it actually grew, collecting interstellar refuse with each passing orbit. At a large enough size, the crystals would split, forming two separate, growing bodies. Entirely self-replicating devices, even in the most inhospitable region of the system.

It is doubtful the factions journeyed to the Von Neuman Belt to admire the nature wonders of this stellar body; if they had any intention other than the collection of He3, it may have been an attempted flanking of the Rixian temple, located near the Belt's slow-moving orbit. In any event, reports have come back of a five-faction fight taking place within these crystal halls, lasting most of the day. Although details are still unclear, and official statements conflicting, it is believed that the Rixian Unity, so close to their home temple and reinforcements, eventually won the so-called *Battle of the Crystal Halls*.

Of course, as further news develops, we'll keep you posted!

Date: 02.02.2151
File: 00144
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Crusaders and Butchery

The Rixian Crusade

No one thought the Rixian Unity came in peace. Not since first contact, when an IC patrol attempted to intercept their incoming craft. Then, the aliens dropped their gun-pods, and so began their brutal crusade. Only later did we humans come to understand the reasons behind the Rixians' aggression, that we were meant to convert to their "Code" or be swept from known existence.

Such tactics worked for the Rixians before. All evidence indicates that they decimated their nearest neighbors, the Saalvshok, some time before entering our system.

Yet the Rixians' unknowing mistake may have been to enter a system already embroiled in the midst of war. Had they come in quieter times, surely humanity would have sent delegation after delegation trying to make peace with the aliens, believing all violent encounters to be the result of some deep cultural misunderstanding. With enough effort, humanity may have even come to listen to their teachings of the Rixian Code. Anything is possible. Out of curiosity, many would surely have converted to the alien religion, if not to their rule.

However, with four factions striving to exterminate the other, the entrance of a fifth proved more of an annoyance than an actual threat. Soon enough, the Rixians were battled to the back recesses of the system, confined to their temple outpost.

Had they been content to remain there, most likely the rest of the system would not have cared. Yet according to information gathered from Belter-operated listening posts, a delegation of Rixians arrived from the Lapi Alephs. Too small to be reinforcements or even supply ships, the delegation may simply have come to get the Rixians stationed at their temple outpost back on track. The Rixian homeworld must have found a renewed interest in the crusade to convert humanity. Strange, considering that the last time humanity became involved in Rixian affairs, we succeeding in forcing Lapi to sign a belittling peace accord (one they were quick to break).

In any event, the delegation's motivational speeches must have fallen on resentful ears. As the listening stations report, soon after arriving, the delegation was assaulted by the very Rixians they had come to encourage.

It would seem, then, the Rixians do not take kindly to suggestions -- even from their own leaders.

The Butchers of the BIOS

Of the other factions taking the most active role in the stellar wars, the BIOS have apparently unveiled their most recent, and most frightening tactic.

According to the archived journal of BIOS founder Emmet Longstreet, scientists initially working with him on Project: ALEXANDER were loath to vivisect their living subjects (the organic beings Longstreet was attempting to develop into the first generation BIOS).

Longstreet, ever the pragmatist, initially attempted to develop early-stage BIOS lacking sensory organs, so they would not feel pain during the experiments. However, according to fragments of his journals, Longstreet found such methods too costly, especially considering that at that time, his parent faction, GigaCorp, looked to choke off all funding.

As a result, Longstreet found that a better method was to require those scientists working in his labs to undergo a mild surgical procedure, in which much of their emotional capacity was removed. The BIOS subjects might still feel pain, but the scientists working on them no longer cared.

Generations later, the BIOS ruling council has apparently put the practice of Longstreet, their father figure, to practice. After recent battle with *Gen-7* units, GigaCorp has reported the BIOS pilots have been surgically altered in exactly the same way Longstreet altered his scientists. While *Gen-7* may have been the most violent, ruthless fighters before, the fear is that they have been transformed into emotionless killers, just as skilled, but lacking any remorse.

Will the BIOS plan work? After all, *Gen-7*'s fighting rage may have driven them to victory. Lacking any emotions at all, will they now perform any better than automated drones? The system waits to see. And, as always, we'll keep you posted.

Date: 02.05.2151
File: 00145
Report filed by: "IC_Anonymous"

A BIOS Plan

A message from the editor

The following report came to us from sources within the Iron Coalition. At this time, the DataNet would not like to comment on the IC's injunction against the transfer of official materials, or of their threatened actions against the DataNet for the public posting of such material. We believe that the system's right to know supercedes the IC's claim to privacy, and we further believe that others stand with us in this crusade for truth. Certainly, the brave soldier who delivered the following material stands with us, and for that, we can only thank all other anonymous sources working across the factions.

A report on the BIOS

DataNet: I feel compelled to break the military-imposed vow of silence, possibly upon pain of death, to call attention to knowledge held by the Iron Coalition's *Special Conditions* sector.

Attempting to manipulate *Gen-7* BIOS pilots, IC's *Special Conditions* launched Project: Interviewer several weeks ago. The aim of the project was two-fold. First and foremost, to capture live *Gen-7* BIOS with the intent of altering them for use as IC pilots. To this end, the project undeniably failed. The secondary goal, however, was the study of the BIOS faction through the "interview" of individual BIOS pilots. Several BIOS were indeed captured and heavily drugged into believing they were being interviewed by their own ruling council.

The results proved so shocking, *Special Conditions* immediately destroyed all tapes of the interview, and confined all those working on the project, from those acting the parts of the ruling council, to the film crew itself, in strictest quarantine. Only recently have those people on the project been released, myself included.

The system must know the true extremes to which the BIOS are willing to go in order to win this stellar conflict. As I scan the latest battle reports, I see that the BIOS have already implemented their "butchers" units, a practice the captured BIOS pilots discussed during the interviews. Removing the emotional capacity of their pilots, with the aim of completely disengaging them from the pain and horror of battle is but one of their tricks.

They have others, far worse, in store.

According to the interviewed pilots, the BIOS are capable of making use of deceased bodies in order to man their ships. I don't have an inkling of the technology involved; nor did the interviewed pilots. However, it is apparently common knowledge within their faction that BIOS labs can reanimate organic matter, programming former corpses with enough instructions to pilot craft and engage enemy soldiers.

We have not yet seen this in action. I believe no one has. But for the sake of the system, the BIOS cannot be allowed to take control of recent battlegrounds. Reanimating all pilots slain in faction battle would supply them with enough soldiers to win this war. We cannot allow this to happen, and all other factions must know!

I beg that you both publish this report, as well as keep all elements of my identity in strictest confidence.

Thank you.

>>**Virgil's_Pen: 151413:1817:1918:** Hmm. Reanimated soldiers. Let's assume for a moment this report is genuine, and not mere DataNet hype. Even with more pilots, what's really needed is more ships to win this war.

>>**Blue_Baron: 6114:1018176:** I'd have to say, better pilots, not more, are needed.

>>**Podkiller_Phil: 15141:10181:118:** Who cares? Dead BIOS pilots could still fly better than the live IC.

>>**Trader_Jack: 61514:101171:** Speaking of that: Anyone interested in live pilots should take a look at the Giga boards. They're offering some tempting bounties lately.

Date: 02.05.2151
File: 00145
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Human Trade

Armed Escort

According to most military scholars, the faction wars plaguing our system have been sustained for so long due to the delicate balance of power between the factions. True, while GigaCorp might have the greatest assets, they are held in check by the likes of the Iron Coalition, with solid military tactics, and the BIOS, boasting the system's fiercest fighters. Then there are, of course, the wild cards in the Belters and the Rixian Unity. No one faction could ever be stronger than the others combined.

Yet, what if two of the strongest factions combined? Would their might prove enough to defeat the other three? Such was the theory formed when the Iron Coalition was observed sending not a war party, but rather a guarded escort into BIOS territory -- perhaps looking to create an alliance of true might.

This theory, held by GigaCorp, no doubt explained that faction's merciless assault on the IC delegation. After all, no alliance could be made if the two sides never met.

While the IC did manage to defeat the GigaCorp assailants, the diplomatic success of their delegation remains unclear. An even greater mystery, however, was that of the Belters involvement in the fray. . . although their participation may have been explained by events taking place later in the week.

Napped!

As the Iron Coalition sent a small force back toward Luna, possibly looking to pick up reinforcements to help protect their weakened delegation, GigaCorp retreated to their Martian headquarters. Any attempt to disrupt an IC/BIOS alliance would have to take place another day.

The Belters, though, went after these returning IC with all the fury of sharks scenting blood. In over two hours of fighting, the Belters launched wave after wave of attacks, pestering the IC forces to no end. And while the veteran IC leading the units held strong and ensured overall victory, the rookie pilots within their ranks fell in great number to the Belters.

According to the battle logs, most of these rookie pilots, forced into their lifepods to begin the long journey back to Luna, never completed the trip. Pod-killing remains a particularly frowned upon practice, even among the Belters, yet this did not look to be the case. Instead of pod-killing, the Belters seemed to be pod-collecting instead. What they would want with the IC prisoners remained to be seen.

Of Trade and Rescue

At long last, the mysterious events taking place throughout the week appeared to be solved. The Belters, having worked with GigaCorp in attacking the IC delegation, suddenly returned to Martian space to sell their collected IC prisoners to GigaCorp execs. These days, then, the most valuable commodity may not be He3, but rather living pilots. And, with money to be had, it's no wonder the Belters chose to involve themselves.

The actual fate of the IC pilots apparently hung on the whim of GigaCorp. Would they be kept as bartering chips? Used to test the next line of GigaCorp technology? As the Iron Coalition vocally denounced the abductions as "an unlawful detainment of humanity," GigaCorp began putting these pilots to use.

Small-scale activity was recently observed around the GigaCorp-controlled space. Although the activity concerned only GigaCorp ships, one unit attempted, time and again, to leave the sectors only to be turned around, perhaps by the automation of their own ships. The other unit involved did not seek to escape, but rather assaulted the first with seemingly reckless abandon.

Why the truth behind these events remains obscured behind a veil of GigaCorp security and double-talk, the IC has boldly declared that their captured pilots are being hunted by GigaCorp execs in some twisted form of a human safari. Furthermore, the IC announced, they will not sit still while such games take place, and have begun efforts to rescue their imprisoned pilots as soon as time, and a revised IC budget, allows.

Of course, if and when such a rescue happens, we'll be sure to keep you posted!

Date: 02.12.2151
File: 00147
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Remains of the Planet

Some would argue that the factions currently waging war in the system have lost true appreciation for their origins. Except of course for the Rixian Unity, all factions once sprung from the Earth, our blessed planet now scarred beyond recognition thanks to the folly of reckless asteroid mining.

Yet, oddly enough, the Rixian Unity has been the only faction interested in claiming Earth, once seeking to use it as a bargaining chip against the human factions. And in the face of their attempt, only the Iron Coalition, beholden to the traditions of Earth, mustered enough resources to stop the Rixians' attempt.

However, the Earth may very well prove the key to overall victory. Following the catastrophic asteroid crash of 2140, the planet's crust cracked along several major fault lines. The resulting earthquakes and volcanic eruptions leveled all major areas of human development, instantly killing 95% of the population. Those who survived were brought to orbital facilities and the research station, then publicly owned, on Luna and Mars. Earth was considered a total loss.

However, years later, humans have begun to return to the planet -- despite the fact that the cover of dust and debris filling the atmosphere will ensure no flora will naturally arise for centuries, if not millennia, to come. Still, human colonists have begun to resettle the planet, operating as if it were some hostile expanse at the edge of the system -- an ironic end to the planet that once brought forth all life as we knew it.

From the Lunar Institute, the vague clustering of lights marking Earth's small colonies can be seen on the darkest nights. What hope do these colonists have for the planet? To completely repopulate the planet is an impossible hope. But 5% of the former urban centers remain, filled with an untold wealth of relics and information. And also consider: With the shattering of the crust, much of the mantle's material, and minerals, leaked onto the surface. Of all the bodies in the system, the Earth itself may one day again prove the richest site to mine.

Despite near-total disaster, the battle for Earth has clearly not ended.

>>Aunt_Sam: 16414:10181:11: The battle for Earth has never ended! That is precisely the point of the Iron Coalition! Defend Earth, defend all humanity!

>>Devillish_One: 17165116661414: Sam, we've missed your witty insanities lately. Where have you been? The point of the IC? I thought the point was to drag all humanity backward in time, back toward what some deluded officials believed to be the heyday of the system.

>>Podkiller_Phil: 116151:1018171661: Spoken like a true BIOS. The IC wants power, like everyone else. Still, they just might have a clue about getting their power by defending the Earth.

>>Red_Queen: 1413:10181: Fools. IC has never been the real threat. The BIOS have always been the ones to watch! Thankfully, GigaCorp will take care of them shortly

Date: 02.19.2151
File: 00148
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Undead and Earth Bound BIOS

Lab Rats

In what is being hailed as one of the most ambitious, the most extreme -- and the most foolhardy -- missions in recent months, final results are back on GigaCorp's attempted raid of the BIOS research labs. And, as expected, the results heavily favor the BIOS.

With the BIOS controlling huge spatial sectors around both Jupiter and Saturn, the exact location of their research and development labs has long remained a mystery. Yet these labs are known to be the key to victory in these faction wars, insofar as the BIOS are concerned. Should the BIOS continue to control their labs, then they will continue to develop and release increasingly able-bodied and battle-ready soldiers to aid their cause. Should these labs ever be shut down, the BIOS will be sorely pressed to come up with needed pilots.

GigaCorp, taking the chance of turning the war in its favor, was rumored to have launched a major offensive campaign against the BIOS labs. A daring venture, to be sure. Only now, the first of the GigaCorp notices discussing the failure of the operation has leaked into DataNet hands. Apparently the mission was such a disaster, internal messages within GigaCorp have begun circulating discussing the problem of having to notify so many families of slain GigaCorp pilots at once.

Bring Out Your Dead

No one doubted that the BIOS labs would be heavily guarded. The only doubt was whether any faction would prove so foolish as to launch such an attack. Its forces already demoralized, GigaCorp faced an even greater threat than the negative PR of mission failure: the BIOS had launched a counterstrike.

Coming the next day after the failed GigaCorp mission, the BIOS counterstrike left the mega-corporation deeply hurting. Much of the strike's success was due to the startling use of not only GigaCorp ships but also slain GigaCorp pilots to lead the attack. These pilots, killed in the previous day's mission and reanimated in the very labs they were meant to destroy, were thrown back against their former faction before GigaCorp knew what was happening.

Sources within the corporation admit that despite communication failure with the mission pilots, no one suspected anything amiss when they were seen flying back to the Martian sectors. If anything, the pilots were welcomed with open arms -- they may have failed to destroy the BIOS labs, but they must have brought back useful tactical knowledge for a future strike.

At least, such was the thinking until these reanimated pilots opened fire and had to be destroyed by Martian planetary defenses.

As Iron Softens

Incredible, the BIOS chose not to follow up their overwhelming victories against GigaCorp by mounting an all-out raid on the red planet. Perhaps they learned, through GigaCorp's own folly, the dangers of attacking a faction in its home territory.

Instead, the BIOS ruling council set their sites on Earth. Heavily defended by nearby Iron Coalition, the BIOS hit several IC garrisons in lightning-quick raids, opening the way for a larger landing party to reach the Earth's surface.

The goal? The BIOS claim they wish to repopulate the planet with specially engineered BIOS colonists. Other factions, however, believe the operation to control the Earth stems from the rich supply of minerals recently discovered to have leaked onto the surface from the mantle. The exact value of these mineral deposits, for now, remains unknown; however, it can be assumed that all factions, not just the BIOS, will be most interested in finding out.

As the battle for Earth continues, we'll keep you posted!

Date: 02.23.2151
File: 00149
Report filed by: "Kronkite_NOW"

Earth Wars

Adam vs. Eve

If there's one thing the BIOS understand even better than genetic manipulation it must be pragmatism. Looking to assume control of the shattered Earth and test out their next generation at the same time, the BIOS seeded the planet with both their latest *Gen: Adam* and *Gen: Eve* troops.

In recent days, attention has shifted dramatically back to the Earth, a planet once almost written off (except by the Iron Coalition, mainly) as a complete loss. However, the BIOS, following up their devastating attacks against both GigaCorp and the Iron Coalition, managed to gain control of several major spatial sectors over the Earth. As full-bellied drop ships appeared, it was assumed that a formal landing campaign would soon begin.

Instead, as several orbital stations around the Earth reported observing, the BIOS deployed two separate units; each, it would seem, designed to compete against the other and allow only the strongest to begin landing. Dubbed *Gen: Adam* and *Gen: Eve* by the observers, fighting amongst the BIOS continued for several days.

Gaea's Daughter

During the course of the BIOS competition, observers report, *Gen: Adam* managed to gain a slightly upper hand against *Gen: Eve*. Landing, and colonization, would soon begin. In fact, many hypothesized that the BIOS had developed both generations as tailor-made to life on the ruined planet.

However, during *Gen: Adam's* clean-up campaigns, units from the Iron Coalition, as well as Belter mercenaries, swooped in. The IC had apparently bided their time, waiting for the battle's end to take advantage of a weakened BIOS force.

More interesting than the fact that the BIOS, against all odds, still held their own, was the site of the defeated BIOS pilots jettisoning toward the planet. In most cases, pilots, forced to eject, will direct their lifepods to the nearest faction transport or orbital station. In this case, it would seem that *Gen: Adam* had been ordered not to return to the safety of the BIOS territories, but to head for Earth itself. BIOS colonization would begin, one way or another.

A Truth Revealed

By now, every faction in the system is well aware of the full potential of Earth. Following the asteroid impact of 2140, the resulting cataclysmic processes responsible for the death of 95% of the population also leaked enormous amounts of rich materials from the mantle onto the surface. Gold, nickel, iron: all there for the taking.

Under the strict observance of the Iron Coalition, scattered scientific colonies have existed on the surface for several years now, taking samples, marking possible mining sites. Further stations, in orbit and operated by GigaCorp personnel, have taken their own studies through constant planetary surveillance.

Now, with the secret of Earth revealed, no one faction can continue their careful, covert operations to mine the planet. And the BIOS have proven the first to try their hand at an open and full-scale invasion.

It can be assured that all others will soon follow their lead.

Date: 02.26.2151
File: 00150
Report filed by: "I, Horus"

Focus: Mercury

Over the past week, attention has shifted dramatically to the inner planets of the system. As battle continues to wage for possession of Earth and its rich mineral wealth, the factions have taken a renewed look at the other inner planets of the system: Venus and Mercury.

The interest in these planets? Nothing less than He3. When the precious ore was first discovered in the asteroid belt, it was considered a chemical anomaly. Yet as the need for the ore grew, now fueling everything from engine drives to weapon systems, so did the search for larger deposits. At first, such He3 deposits were looked for near the Alephs, many believing that He3 may have drifted through these stellar portals from other systems. Yet if He3 did arrive from other systems, it must have originated in those system's suns; and, the thinking goes, if He3 can originate in other suns, why not in our very own?

Is it not possible, then, that the richest supply of He3 may be found in our own front yard?

And so, the factions have begun taking a closer look the inner planets. However, if any mining operations are to begin, they are sure to face steep obstacles.

Consider Mercury. In 2120, the Iron Coalition studied the innermost planet as a potential training site for its commandoes. The plan, considered not only unworkable but insane by many critics, was to train IC troops in the system's fiercest planetary conditions, toughening them to unparalleled levels of physical endurance.

Construction on the training site never advanced past the initial stages. As the first shipments of construction materials were dropped onto the planet's surface, they no sooner arrived then melted into unusable slag.

As such, plans for the training site never developed any farther. However, it is believed that the IC has continued to dump shipments onto Mercury for reasons unknown. If not for any training site, then perhaps as a planetary garbage incinerator.

Ironic, that now the IC must mine through its own mountains of slag to reach the system's most precious ore.

>>RumorMonger: 5141:918171: As the IC discovered, no plans for Mercury will ever come about. No matter how good modern blast shields are, they cannot withstand that close proximity to the sun.

>>EmDash: 1514:1891717: If not Mercury, than Venus. Whatever it takes, He3 will be found.

>>Podkiller_Phil: 817161:1181: Yeah, but why not Mercury? How hot could it really be -- I mean, the planet hasn't melted away. Some things can exist there. Why not a heavily protected crew?

>>Monk_312: 51414:101091: Feel free to check it out. Trust me, forget Mercury. Didn't the IC reports label it a "minor sphere of Hell itself"?

>>3rd_Rail: 01918:1171651: Yeah, seems safer to sit before the very sun, catching the He3 particles that fly off.