



Central Hegemony Intelligence Headquarters

Commander Michael Howell office,  
Cycle 201, day 121

//transcription begin:

Lieutenant Victor Pallier: Commander, you wanted to see me?

Commander Michael Howell: I received your message, I believe that you have some new intel about those pirates attacks.

Lt: Actually, it isn't "new" intel, but my assistant Ensign Lynda Gomez dug up some interesting data from our archives. That's why I asked her to come along.

Cmd: Ensign.

Ensign Lynda Gomez: Sir!

Cmd: Okay, tell me everything.

Lt: Firstly I have the final report of the week, we lost three more convoys. Two fast transit freight groups, and a heavily escorted super-freighter full of emergency supplies for the epidemic on Mallar II.

Cmd: Dammit, the press is going to assassinate us... Again.

Lt: I fear so. One of the frigates from the fast transit group made it back though, we know who attacked. I've sent the data to the Navy and they should take care of them next week. However the other two convoys completely disappeared, like the previous ones.

Cmd: Mmh, this is bad, but not surprising I guess. You said you dug up something?

Ens: Hum, yes. I mean, Lt Pallier had compared this month's data with the previous piracy outbreak from two years ago, and was unable to find any pattern. He asked me to recheck it because I have just been assigned here and he thought he might have a biased viewpoint that blinded him to the obvious. Turns out there indeed is little similarity between the two: Back then it was three bands of pirates that worked together to attack several freighter groups in a row in a single location, moving on right before we sent the navy to clear the path. But this time, single convoys are disappearing without a trace all over our zone, but the following ones travel normally.

Cmd: ...

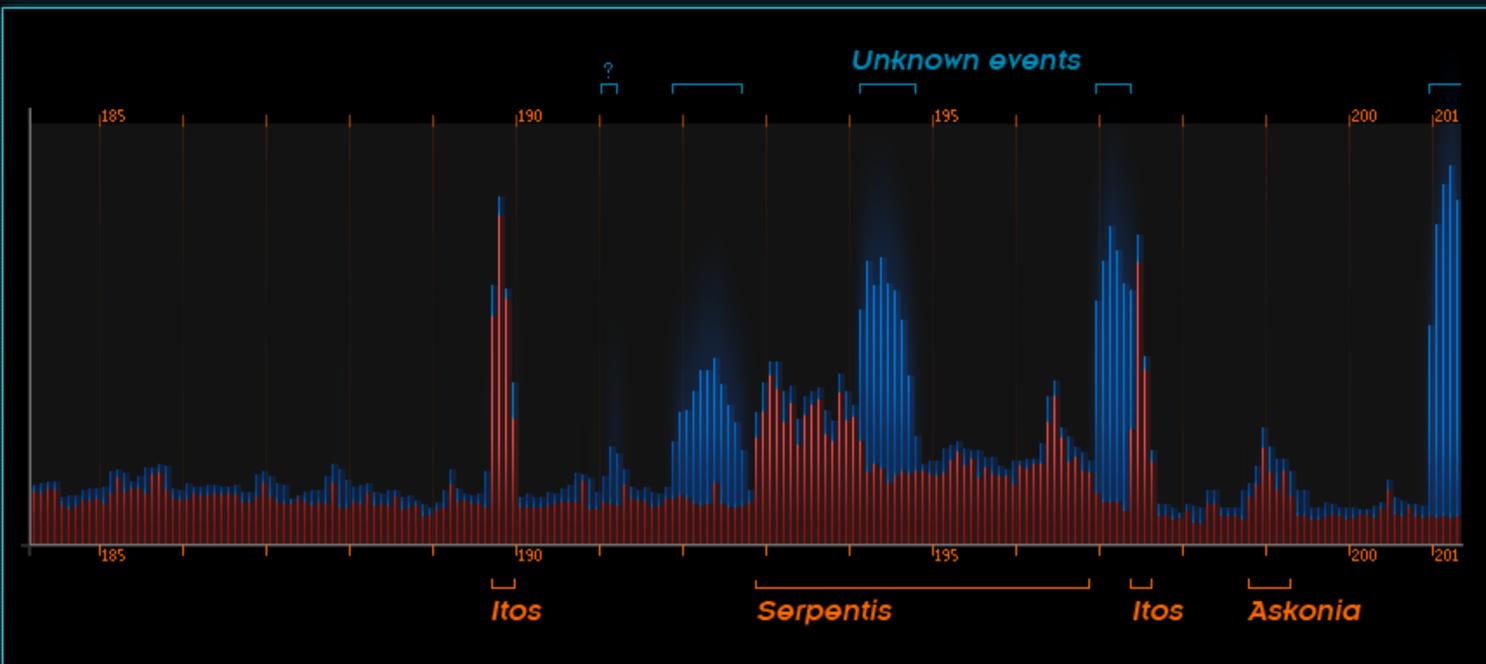
Ens: But since it was not the same as in 199, I looked before that and well I found similarities with the losses of 197. And before that too.

Cmd: Good, but if I recall, you said you looked into the previous disappearances?

Lt: I did sir, but your predecessor flagged the 197 case as "solved" and it does not appear in our database, only in the archives. After Ensign Gomez found something I read the report of 197, and sir, there is something fishy in that file. Commander Gustav wrote that the attacks were the handiwork of the "Rock Busters". The band has been obliterated shortly after, but the inspectors could not find a trace of our ships in their hideout. Since the attacks ceased, Gustav declared they already sold the loot and filed the case. I guess he really didn't wanted to lose his golden retirement.

Cmd: Figures, I hated the guy... Anyway, tell me what you found.

Ens: Yes sir, if you look at this graph you'll see a compilation of our freight losses over the past twenty cycles. I have highlighted in blue the convoys that completely vanished.



Cmd: So there is a pattern. When you say vanished what do you mean exactly?

Lt: No surviving escort, no ransom, no wreckage, no reappearance under pirate colors, no crew sold as slaves, no matching numbers in the junkyard catalogs...

Cmd: Okay I get it, you looked everywhere. Good. But you are telling me that someone is attacking our ships every few cycles and we know nothing about who?

Ens: Well, this chart show the losses of the Diktat too, since our trade lines are so intertwined. As for the others, our "neutral" traders that visit Tri-Tachyon space report that they are taking losses too. It's harder to tell about the Ludii, but it seems that their escorts are heavier than usual.

Lt: Yes, we don't know who is behind this, but they sure are busy and care not about the flag's color.

Cmd: \*sigh\* I wonder if I would have preferred some covert-ops from the Tri-Tachyon, at least then we would have something to feed the navy with, instead of them blaming us for doing nothing.

Lt: Er, maybe there is something else. If we assume the same group is behind all the major streaks of disappearances, we can draw several conclusions: each time they attack a larger area, each time for a shorter period, each time after a longer break. If I dare extrapolate, I'd say that they are giving each attack their all then retreating before being caught, and then taking time to rebuild their strength for the next wave. Also they seem to favor ships that ferry basic daily goods, which could suggest they are unable sustain themselves. While it is a bit soon to tell, there seems to be an epicenter to the attacks.

Cmd: Ah! Now this is interesting.

Lt: Yes sir, but it is very early to tell for sure. Not every ship that vanished was their doing, so we first need to rule out as many cases as possible.

Cmd: Good, I'll make sure the classified archives are open to you. Mmh, while I would prefer to catch them now, looking at the graph I'd say the attacks will end soon...

Lt: Yes, that's my thought too.

Cmd: Then it leaves us some time to prepare for the next attack. I'll redact orders for the creation of a special cell dedicated to these disappearances, You will take it's head.

Lt: Yes sir, thank you sir... If I may?

Cmd: Yes?

Lt: Ensign Gomez is only temporarily assigned to intelligence, before her ship comes back from patrol. She has done a very good job in these few days and I'd like to keep her in this assignment.

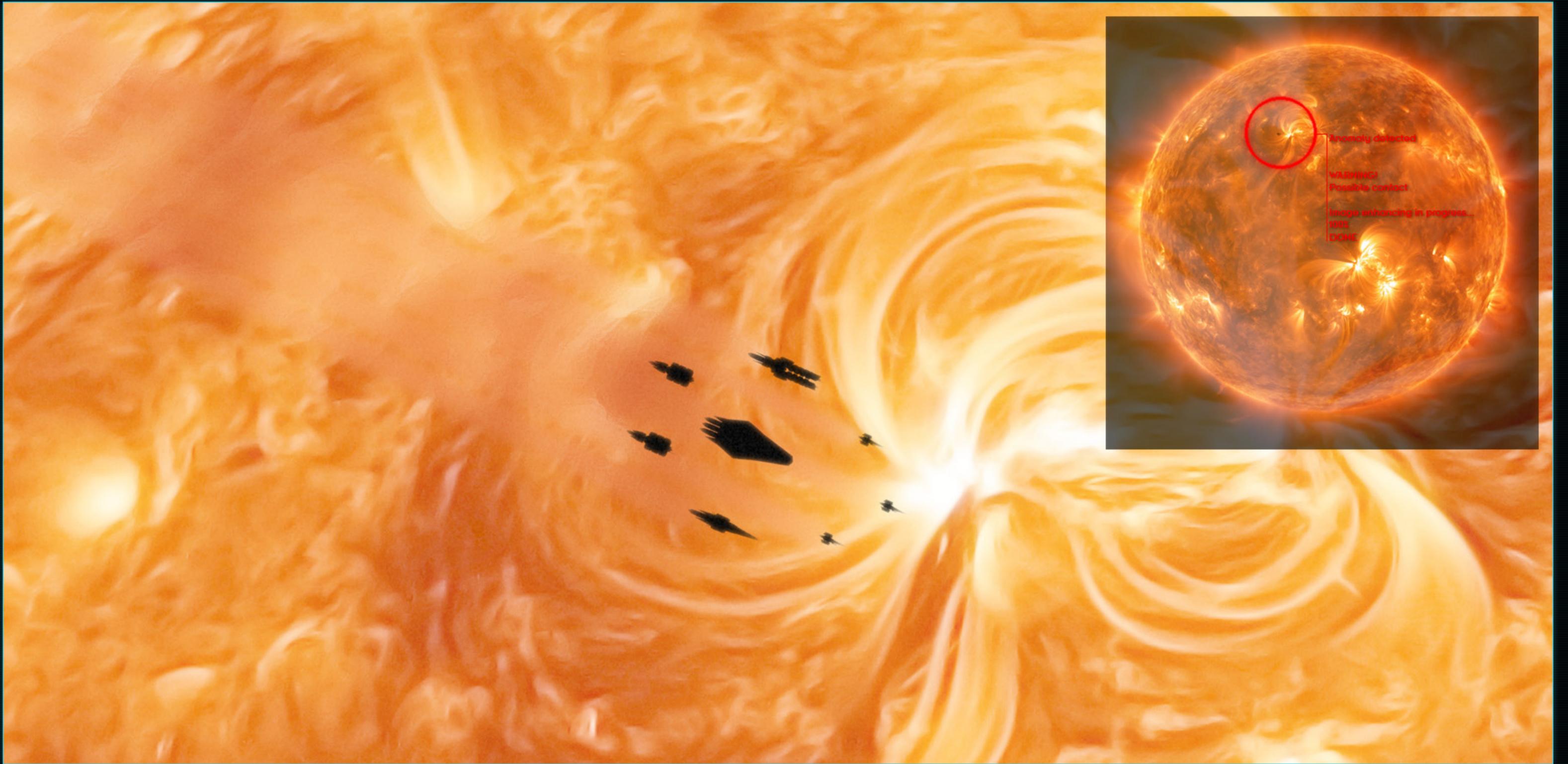
Cmd: Sure, I'll send a memo to the resources department, and by the way, good work ensign.

Ens: Thank you, sir.

Cmd: Great, now I have to see the admiralty. I wont promise them anything, but if I can tell them off-the-books that we might have a lead, they probably will give us a bit of breathing room. For now continue your digging, you should receive your new orders in a couple of days. Dismissed!

Lt + Ens: Yes sir!

//end of transcription



Priority Data Burst

Valis B routine patrol, CPT A. Nilhard 157th recon Squadron  
DATE: 204.324

to: Commander Michael Howell  
from: Lieutenant Victor Pallier  
subject: Inspection of suspicious wreckage near Valis B

204.342

Inspection team arrival on-site

- three (3) main wreckage sites dispersed in the system
- debris indicates probable presence of a fourth (4) vessel during the incident
- all wreckage is extremely damaged
- preliminary assessment indicates probable pirate origin for three (3) of them

204.344

Recovery of the main wreckage complete

- three (3) ships confirmed propriety of pirate cartel
- one (1) possible independent
- ballistic analysis inconclusive
- fifteen (15) bodies recovered
- missing crew estimate: seventy five (75)

204.347

Orbital analysis complete

- incident occurred six (6) weeks ago
- no sign of the opposing force
- no sign of missing crew

Beginning additional searches along possible drift vectors

204.350

Distress signal detected

204.351

One (1) space suit recovered

- deceased crew member
- male approx. thirty five (35) cycles old
- death caused by asphyxia after space suit ran out of air
- one (1) boarding sidearm
- one (1) suit repair kit (outdated)
- two (2) food rations (empty)
- one (1) video recorder (damaged)

[TOP PRIORITY] commencing video recorder data recovery

204.352

Superficial recovery complete

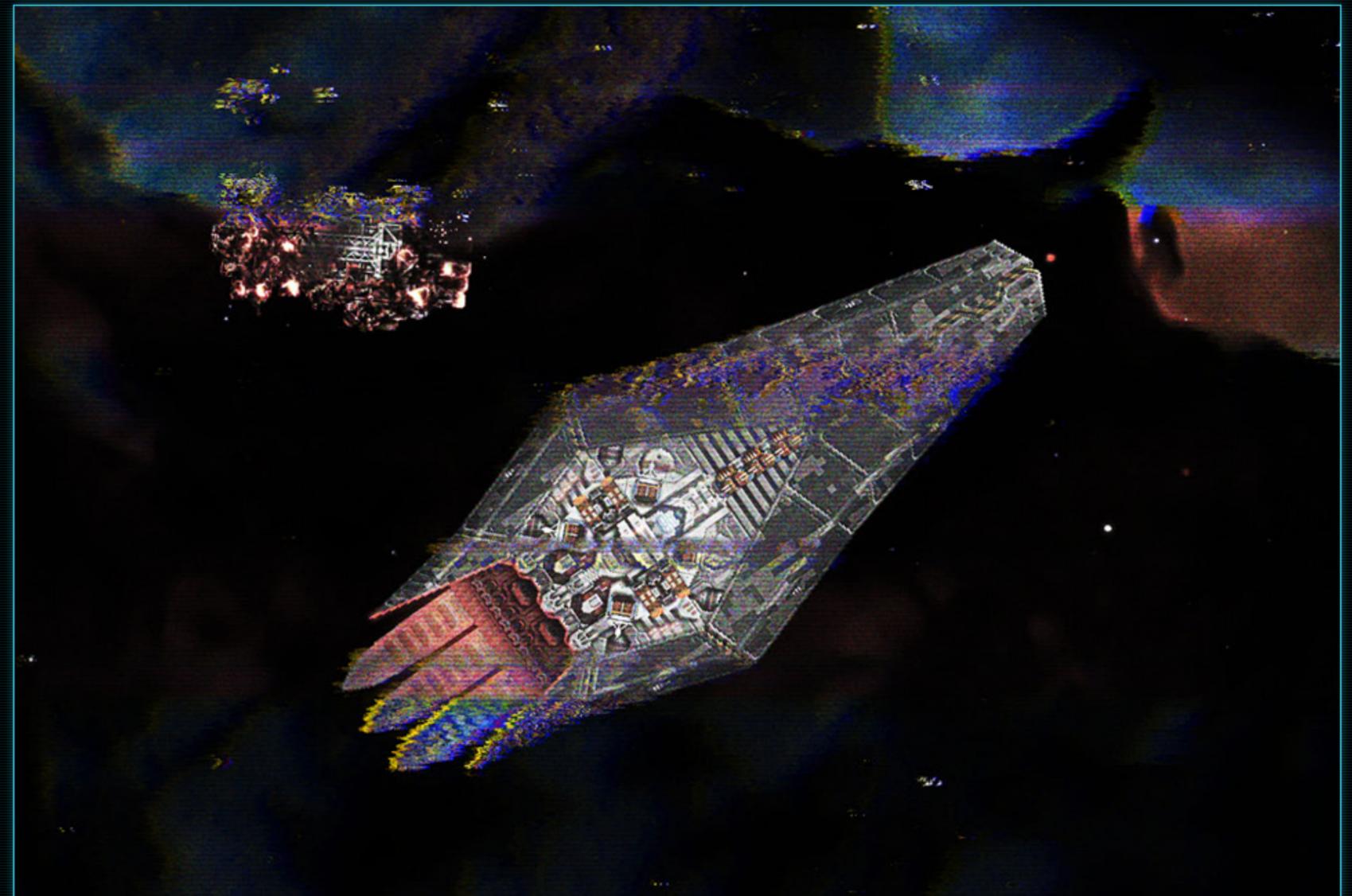
- data extremely damaged due to prolonged radiation exposure
- partial video recovery successful

sending video recorder to HQ for further analysis

Personal note:

This is it commander, we finally have some data about them! We have several clips each a few seconds long but the quality is extremely low. We are returning at max burn with everything we found, but in the meantime, here's an appetizer... ETA 7 days.

[ATTACHMENT]



Date: 205.061

Vidcom emitter: Head of "Probes And Remote Detection System Center", Mark Daniel

Vidcom receiver: Head of Skoll Inspection Team, Lieutenant Victor Pallier

"Sir, one of the probes sent back a positive result. As ordered we started a large recon operation in the systems near the coordinates you sent us. For several weeks there was nothing to report but some unmapped resource rich asteroids fields. However four days ago we received an image of an unknown contact in the system 06-wz46 [see attachment]. We programmed the probe for a second operation but by that time the contact had vanished. All data collected has been sent to your office. I'm at your disposal for further instructions."

[ATTACHMENT]



*Location: Transit to [Unknown] (select for HS coordinates)*

*Date: Cycle 205, day 14*

*Personal archive: Lieutenant Victor Pallier*

*Subject: week 201 SKOLL investigation report*

205.14.17

After more than three cycles of investing, I think we are finally homing in on those unknown pirates (I can't wrap my head around calling them Skoll, but CMD Howell loves that name). They are getting bolder, or desperate, because we managed to finally catch some suspicious fleet movements. Those intense probe launches cost a lot, and if this one turns out to be a cold trail I'll probably have to answer some difficult questions, but I'm confident it is one of their convoys we are pursuing.

205.18.11

They may have been perfectly aware of our presence: the moment we accelerated to intercept them before they jumped into an uncharted system they greatly increased their speed too. Fortunately they seem to be slowed down by two super-freighters. It may be a close call but we should catch them just before they reach the wormhole.

205.18.20

We did not manage to catch them all, not by a wide margin. Their escort pulled some impressive moves and I'm starting to understand why we had so much trouble catching them. They are so fast no convoy could ever escape them. Not very sturdy though. Since most of the light freighters managed to jump in I'm sure they know we are coming. We can't give them time to organize a serious defense. We are just getting some emergency repairs done and we then jump immediately. We jump blind, but we jump in force, all weapons hot and ready for anything and everything.

*The missions "Hot Trail" and "Spring Trap" happens then.*

**[ARCHIVE END]**

No reports have been filed by LT Victor Pallier (MIS 065-165-95-9969) for the past six (6) months, this archive has been automatically closed. For further information please refer to the head of the Archive Office.

*Acting Lieutenant Lynda Gomez*

*Exert from personal mails*

205.64

"... Today I'm taking over Lieutenant Pallier's duty as Chief inspector in the Skoll pirates investigation, still under the supervision of Commander Howell. Though we seldom met in the past three and a half cycles he trusted the lieutenant and, well, Victor trusted me if I can say so myself. Officially he is still MIA, but since no ship from his reinforced squadron came back in two months, it's unlikely any of them ever will. I saw some eyes widening when the team received the official notice. I know many think I'm too young for such a promotion, but even so they cannot deny I'm the one best suited for that position..."

205.68

"... The issue when you have a chief inspector using a squadron freely to find some hidden pirate hideout is that you never know where they went. Sure the lieutenant left some note about the general direction he was about to take, but that region is littered with empty systems. What more? At least three stars went nova in a relatively recent past, making the whole cluster a mess of hot gasses and dust nebulae. Victor could ask for massive probes scans, but I cannot afford making the same move. They never returned much useful data and are way too costly, especially when it is the newest inspector asking for that..."

205.75

"... I need the angle of an expert on this idea: if you were to strip a shuttle of all cargo capacity, all life support, all armor, basically reducing it to an engine with some fuel tanks and an autopilot, would it fit in a civilian freighter launch bay? Since the attacked convoys seem unable to flee from those pirates, maybe a small unmanned drone launched early enough might be able to manage to escape. Actually if that is possible, it might be a good idea to equip all fleets with them! We would never loose another ship without knowing what had occurred..."

205.97

"... We just received the same info, this is hard to believe! Sure the station was isolated, but nobody found out before the next resupply Atlas arrived. The kind of weapons used is a complete mystery, but the shot sure was precise: it must have hit the command and detection module precisely, and took out the entire military ring with it. The civilian habs are intact, but apparently there was nobody there anymore. Not dead, just... Vanished. Here is a picture from our data burst, this is highly classified so don't post it anywhere, I trust you on this!..."

[ATTACHMENT]



*From: Commander Michael Howell, head of division 2 of the H.I.S.  
To: Acting Lieutenant Lynda Gomez, head of Skoll investigation team  
Date: 205.141  
Subject: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Skoll Investigation*

Message:

Sending a second squadron your way, that's all I can spare right now. Good hunting.  
CMD Howell

Previous Message:

*Date: 205.135  
Commander,*

As discussed before, we sent light divisions to inspect all the stars around Research Station Taran-tula. Engineering managed to build an automated message shuttle for all the carriers, and at least one of those was assigned to each group. They were ordered to avoid engaging any unknown contacts and come back to report, as they would certainly be outnumbered. Commodore A'Holia and I agree that we cannot afford to lose ships every time we send them to gather intelligence anymore. I would have preferred not to split them that much, or at least send larger ships, but then it would have taken three months just to correctly scan each star in a three light years radius.

Two weeks later, eight hours ago, Captain Lana Itano's message shuttle came back. She had detected some suspicious activity around her division in the Alatar system. She brought her ships to extreme detection range to get at least a useful sensor picture then sent her shuttle our way. She included a note explaining that she intended to shake them off.

I immediately sent all remaining light forces to support or rescue them, they should arrive on site in 36 hours. We then assembled a heavy recon force from the cruisers and destroyers present here, plus a hospital ship and a mobile repair gantry. This slower force will depart for Alatar if Cpt Itano is more than eight hours late. I intend to be on board to try to get a firsthand look on the location.

As for the shuttle's data, it shows four ships signatures, plus a fighters screen. It is impossible to pinpoint their affiliation, we did recognize several ship classes but they are from pretty much every manufacturer in the Sector. My interpretation, shared by Commodore A'Holia, is that they are distorting their emissions to imitate the signature of other ships.

Given how elusive the Skolls have been, I think we should assume this force is of their origin, and they are always trying to mimic other ship signatures. Though one corollary of this assumption is that they should always try to fake the signature of smaller vessels, to avoid detection as much as possible and make enemy captains under-estimate their forces. The problem is that one of those four ships had the energy signature of an Onslaught, that would mean there is at least a large ship in that system.

A-LT Lynda Gomez

Video report transcript  
Alatar system, 3rd planet, moon  
205.148  
Ground inspection team, Engineer Nikolas Leyeiv,

*//transcription begin:*

[N. Leyeiv]: ... Is it on? Oh right, hum Lieutenant Gomez, Engineer Leyeiv. I am supervising the inspection on the crash site. We arrived only a few hours ago but there are some developments you may want to know about sooner than later.

Firstly, the object landed very recently. The atmosphere is moderately thick but there was no dust on the object, and it was still slightly hotter than the environment to boot. I think it has been here for less than a week. We know nothing yet about its velocity at impact or its orbit before, but we certainly cannot rule out the possibility that it is a debris from the battle with Cpt... What's her name?

[out of screen]: Itano.

[N.L.]: Right, Itano. Anyway, that is certainly a possibility. Well, more than that because the probability of an unknown object unrelated to that battle to land here within the interval of a few days is... We could say that technically it is not zero but nothing more. The second and maybe more important point is that it is not a ship... Hard to believe given the size of the object, but it's a weapon. The barrel of a weapon to be precise. I won't speculate on the size of the complete system, but it's huge. Even a TPC is nowhere near that large.

As you are very well aware, this is the first time we can inspect Skoll material up close. Assuming this is a piece of their ship that is. The atmosphere from this moon probably prevented them from getting it back, or destroying it from orbit. We already have learned a lot about their technology:

The nature of the projectile is unknown but we can assume it does not contact the barrel itself. There are massive super-conducting electromagnets along the length of the barrel, but they do not seem intended to be used for accelerating the projectile, only to aim it.

We also took some materiel samples of the hull and while the final analysis isn't complete I can already say that it is roughly as sturdy as civilian anti-meteor armor, but for a quarter of the weight and a much fainter radiation reflection. This is really an interesting alloy, very high-end.

And that puzzles me to be honest, because the most sensitive parts have a different coating. The second armor piece is much less impressive. Still a bit lighter than our own alloys, but far from the same performance at the same weight. Same goes for the technological sample we retrieved. Some are very advanced, like their miniature electronic circuits, they should burn instantly from the heat, or they would if built from our materials. Other systems are on the other hand very inefficient.

The remains of a few bodies have been recovered. I say remains because the impact must have been pretty violent. They have been sent to the fleet for autopsy.

Unlike what I said before we landed, we may be able to unearth the object, and maybe even get it into orbit. I didn't anticipate such lightweight materials. We will need another atmospheric ship for that though, because the size makes it unwieldy to transport, I... I'm repeating myself, but this is something to behold! Luke, attach the landing footage to this will you, the LT will want to see it.

[out of screen]: \*inaudible\*

[N.L.]: Right, okay, I'll send you a formal report tonight. Our night that is, in eight hours when it is going to be too dark to work efficiently even with flood lights. Okay, you can cut the re..."

//end of transcription

[ATTACHMENT]



*Engineer Nikolas Leyeiv,  
GT-ho7d crashed object recovery, final report exert:*

Local day 6; standard day 26:  
The night team finished unearthing the bottom of the object.

6.00: The lift procedure was activated.

6.05: The HNI Optimum, Valkyrie class, took off with several hundred mono-wires attaching her to the object. A second ship, the HNI Désirée, Hermes class shuttle, was to stabilize it during the ascent.

6.15: The Optimum gave full thrust for a few seconds and lifted the object up to 15 meters. A team checked to ensure all wires were properly strung up, and the load balanced between the two ships.

6.45: The team finished asserting the correct conditions for lift off.

6.50: The area was cleared and the Optimum, followed closely by the Désirée, started the ascension at roughly 50m/s.

7.15: After clearing the thick of the atmosphere the ships engaged full thrust to reach orbit.

7.17: With the sudden acceleration, some wires began to oscillate.

7.17: The vibration of the wires started to resonate with the object's own vibrations. The oscillations rapidly gained in amplitude.

7.18: The oscillations were now strong enough to be felt by the crew of the Désirée. The ship was pulled up and down 0.1 meters two times per second.

7.19: The oscillations could now be felt by the crew of the Optimum. The Désirée was undergoing a 0.5 meter long oscillation. This was still in the operational parameters of the wires, but very uncomfortable for the crew and could easily lead to mechanical failures.

7.19: In an attempt to reduce the stress of the cables, thus changing the frequency of the oscillations and nullify the resonance with the object, the Désirée's pilot approached slightly closer to the Optimum. While it instantly had the desired effect on the Désirée's wires, it transferred a significant portion of the load to the Optimum, and gave the object a slight swing.

7.20: The captain of the Optimum informs the Désirée's pilot that his ship is getting much stronger vibrations and asks him to take back its position. Then they were to slightly reduce the thrust and reach orbit on a slower, less stressful trajectory.

7.20: The Désirée got back into position, at the same time the object was at the peak of its swing. As it went back it suddenly pulled the Désirée with it towards the Optimum. The Désirée's cables were no longer lifting any weight and the tension was brutally transmitted to the Optimum's attachment points.

7.20: Several wires snapped on the Optimum, changing its angle of attack, and the object started to spin in addition to its swing. The Désirée's pilot managed to recover the control of his shuttle and tried to get back in position with the Optimum. At the same time the Optimum ordered to cut the thrust by 75% to help stabilize the object.

7.21: Still unaware of the orders given by the captain of the Optimum, the Désirée's pilot flew past it, avoiding the collision by mere meters. The two ships were now pulling the object in opposite directions.

7.21: The object underwent a catastrophic mechanical failure between the bulkheads 64 and 65. This was likely due to a previous weakness caused by the crash. The rear part, approximately one third of the object, was attached to the Désirée. The front to the Optimum. Several more wires ruptured, but enough resisted that none of the parts fell.

7.22: Now lightened from a third of the load, the Optimum could resume the ascension of the planned flight profile. The Désirée however was badly overloaded and falling.

7.33: The Désirée managed to slow the object's speed to 30m/s on a vertical trajectory.

7.37: The Optimum reached orbit, and was quickly joined by the fleet's landing shuttles to help him bring the object within formation.

7.41: The Désirée pilot primes the maneuvering jets of his ship to break the speed of the object when close to the ground.

7.43: The Désirée fires up its maneuvering jets, slowing the descent speed to a mere 9m/s, 57 meters from the ground.

7.43: Engine number seven of the shuttle overheated causing an explosion. The two adjacent engines were damaged but continued to function at roughly 50% capacity. Due to the imbalance, the Désirée started to take some lateral speed.

7.44: The payload technician has been lightly injured during the use of the maneuvering jets, but his assistant releases the object 10 meters from the ground, before the assembly takes on too much horizontal speed.

7.44: The jets shut down, the shuttle engines suffer a complete failure at the same time. The Désirée starts to fall only slowed down by the attitude thrusters.

7.44: The Désirée impacted the ground at 17m/s, 36 meters from the object. Nobody is further injured.

12.45: After a thorough inspection, the Optimum received flight clearance. It descends toward the second part of the object.

14.10: The Optimum is attached to the second part of the object.

14.57: The Optimum started a second ascent with the smaller part of the object. This ascent proceeds without incident.

15.42: The Optimum joined the fleet with the second part of the object. After unloading the payload it will proceed to evacuate the excavation site.

16.21: The lift procedure is officially terminated.

*Personal notes:*

All debris from the rupture of the object have been recovered. It is interesting to note that the object now being smaller will be possible to transport it in two standard freighter cargo holds rather than having to unload half of the Atlas' containers.

**[PRIORITY MESSAGE]**

205.174.18

Lieutenant Gomez,

Commodore A'Holia sends her compliments and asks you to join her in the briefing room as soon as possible. Sensors have picked up something lurking around the fleet.

205.174.18

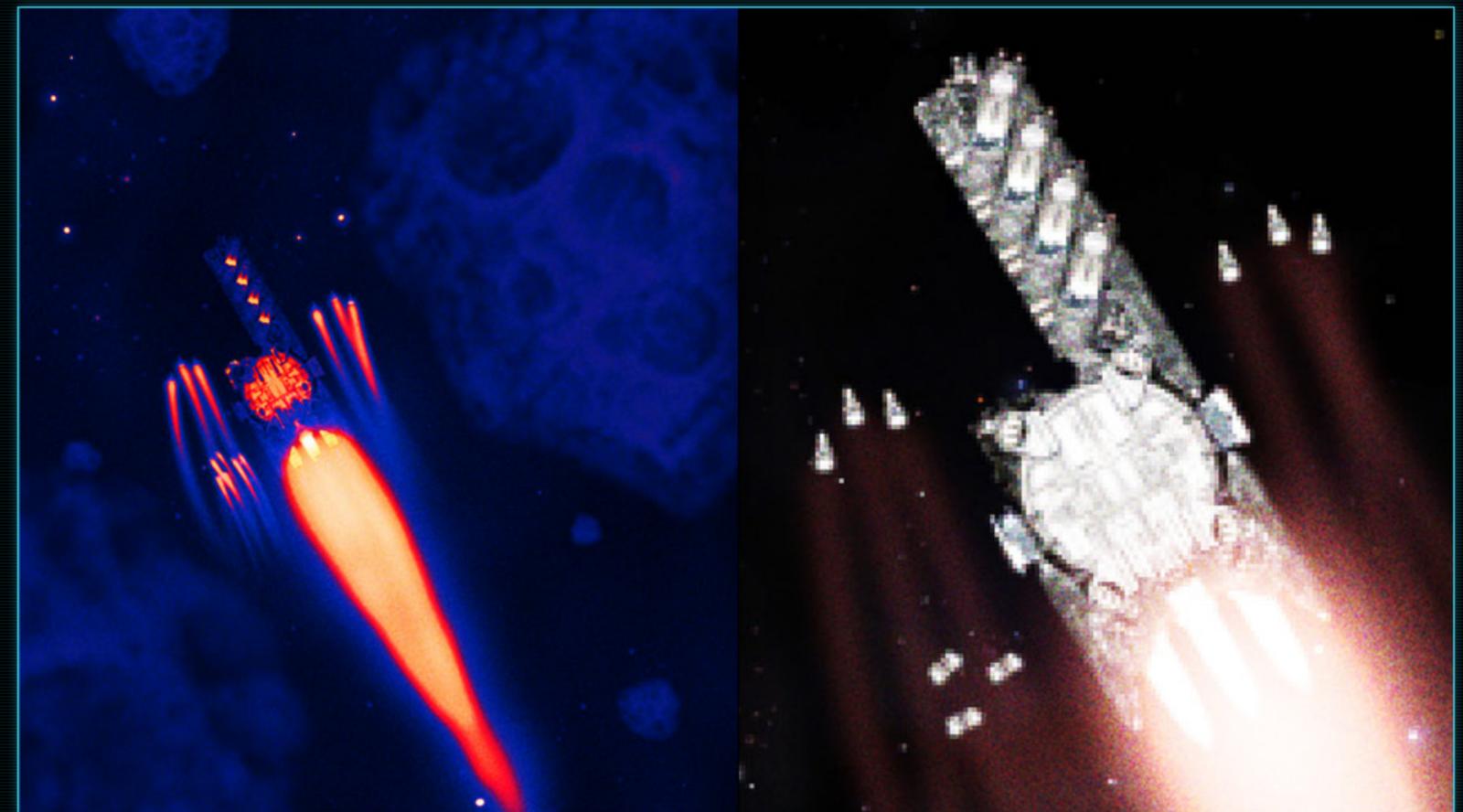
*Briefing Room Transcript*

//transcription begin:

[Lieutenant Gomez enters the briefing room]

[Comodore A'Holia] Great, you're here. We are waiting for Commander Nillan to arrive from Tactical once they finish their primary analysis. Please, take a seat: Captain Athos was sharing his thoughts on the unknown contact.

[Captain Athos] Yes, I believed you received the same data as us, but maybe you lacked had time to inspect it closely.



[Captain Athos] To get the obvious out of the way, this is certainly a carrier escorted by three wings of small craft. The thermal imagery suggests four flight decks on the starboard side, and we estimate its size to be roughly the same as a Conquest-class battle-cruiser. As we suspected it is distorting its emissions: The energy signature was resembling an Onslaught which clearly is not the case. I think we can safely assume that this is the ship detected by Captain Itano and that took out her division along with Captain Shawn's ships. And... That's pretty much it. I won't suggest more stretched hypothesis, not before we get the analysis from Tactical.

[CDR A'Holia] Thank you, any thoughts? You are much more familiar with these "Skolls" than us and we sure could use some enlightenment.

[LT Gomez] Not yet, but I do have a question: if this is the best image we have, I suppose we lost their sight in the asteroid field?

[CPT Athos] Yes, we were extremely lucky to observe them between the rocks in the first place. Their emissions actually scatter significantly in this dense field: We knew they were somewhere nearby for some time. On the other hand it prevents us from pin-pointing their location. Well, at least they shouldn't be able to take us completely by surprise if they come close.

[LT Gomez] I see. Is it just me or is the shape of this ship odd? I mean, clearly it is not balanced on its center of thrust, and with the large chunk we salvaged on the moon...

[CPT Athos] *(laugh)* Actually that is one of the stretched hypotheses though I would prefer to wait for the confirmation by Tactical. Commander Nillan shouldn't be long now.

[LT Gomez] Seems reasonable. Also, Captain Itano reported four ships, there could be three frigates or destroyers nearby too.

[CDR A'Holia] Indeed, and we can not assume this is their entire fighter complement, more could be docked or simply not visible.

[LT Gomez] That too.

[Intercom] Comodore A'Holia, Commander Nillan is here.

[CDR A'Holia] Just in time, let him in!

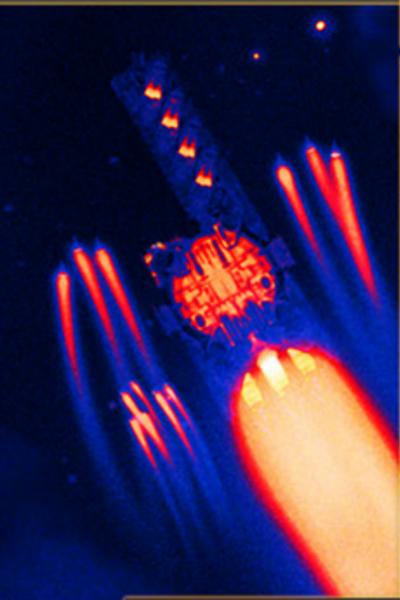
*[CMD Nillian enters the briefing room]*

[CDR A'Holia] Take a seat, as you can imagine we are all quite eager to see what you have to show.

[CMD Nillian] I sure am! Here's the preliminary Holographic Analysis, while a bit rough given the time we had I doubt the final one will be that much better.

# HIGH-CONTRAST ANALYSIS

Thermal camera



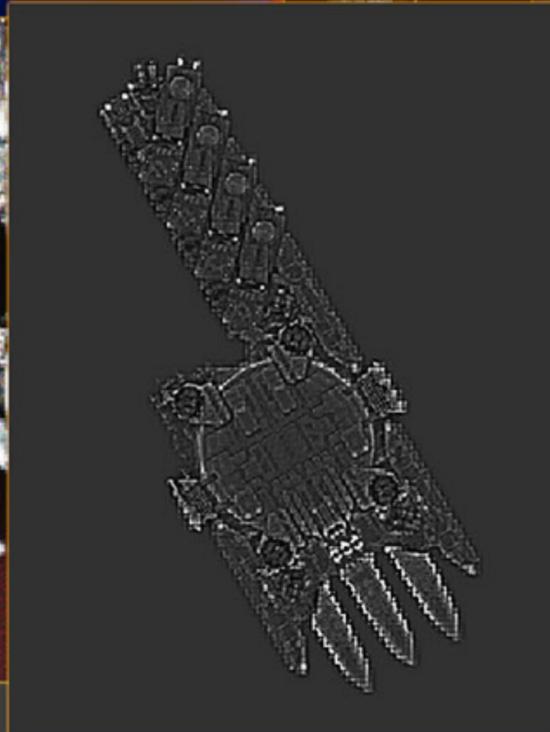
GT-ho7d crashed object



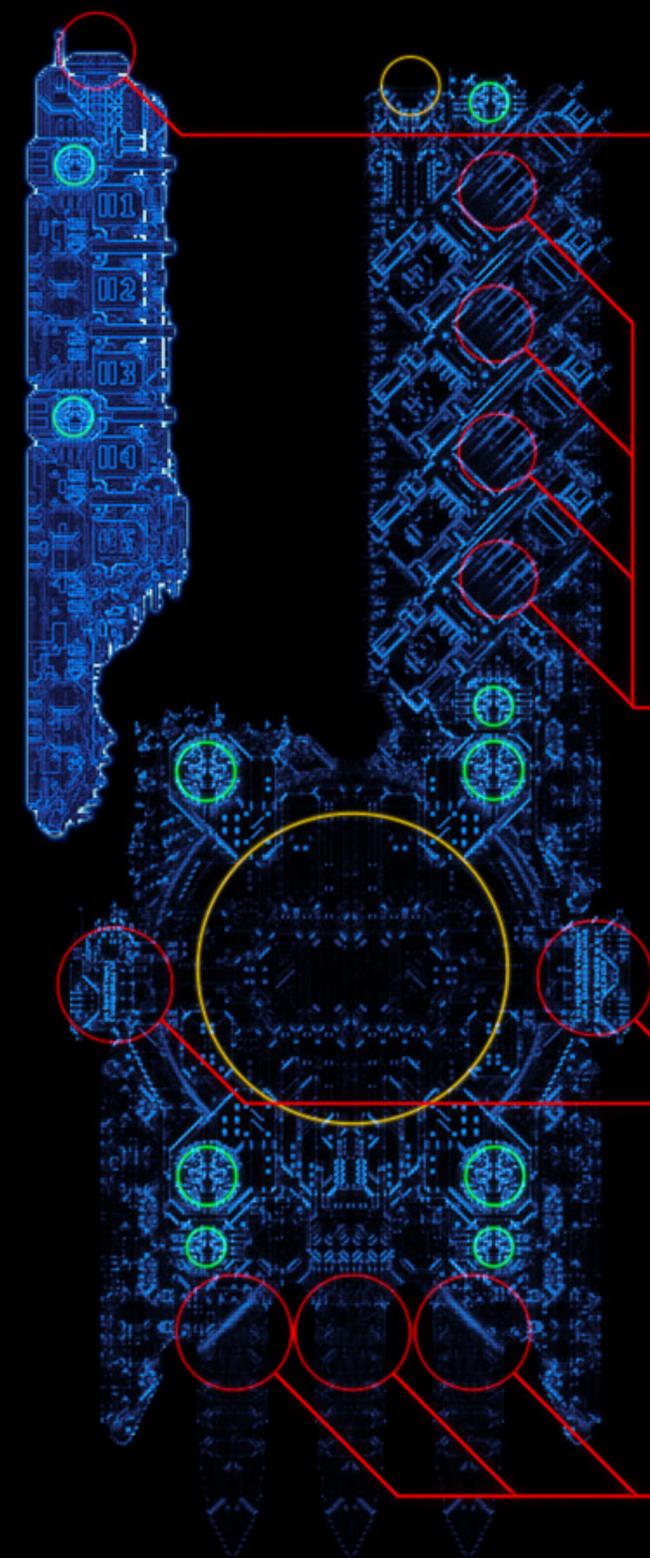
Initial



H-C analysis original file



# HOLOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS



Main Weapon System

Secondary Weapons

Possible Weapons

Flight-Decks

Command Centers

Propulsion System

[CMD Nillian] The evident conclusion is that the object recovered and this ship share too many similarities to be just a coincidence. We believe your hypothesis is right and this is one single ship that broke during the battle with Captain Itano. We also strongly suspect this is the weapon, or at least the same type, that drilled a hole in Research Station Tarantula two months ago.

[CDR A'Holia] A four decked carrier with long range artillery? That could be a very powerful opponent, if it has enough maneuverability to bring that huge gun to bear.

[LT Gomez] Engineer Leyeiv's report suggests they are much lighter than what their size would suggest. This ship could have the agility of a heavy cruiser.

[CPT Athos] And the sneak peak we had showed they are very fast too. Besides, they wouldn't have built it if it wasn't practical.

[CDR A'Holia] At least without its main weapon this ship is seriously diminished. I don't see that many weapon emplacements, and I doubt that is built for front-line combat.

[CMD Nillian] Commodore, are you thinking about attacking them?

[CDR A'Holia] Well, we have four civilian ships with very precious cargo, eight frigates, two destroyers, and a cruiser. On the other hand they have one damaged carrier with at least three wings, and maybe three other ships, probably frigates. I think we should ask ourselves if attacking them wouldn't be worth it. Especially after they yet again killed hundreds of our comrades!

[CMD Nillian] I am not sure, we can't bring the civies into battle, but if we split our forces and those three ships do show up, we could end up in a very bad situation. Or they could simply send all their fighters past us to sink the Atlas along with the recovered weapon and we would lose almost everything we gathered here.

[LT Gomez] I concur, this is a taking a huge risk when we finally got our hands on something tangible.

[CDR A'Holia] You too LT? Of all people here I thought you'd be the first to insist on attacking them. You've been hunting them for cycles, they even killed your superior officer and maybe a hundred thousand people since they started attacking everyone in the Sector. Surely you want some payback for once?

[LT Gomez] Before going any further, I think I should share a new piece of information I received this morning. I asked for a second round of tests before redacting a report but you should know this before committing to a bold strategy. I asked Medical to run some tests on the bodies recovered in the object, to try and determine if some of them are known criminals or came from specific families. It turned out we knew two of them: Marc Gonagal, first class Ensign in the Hegemony Navy, "died" during 196 in one of the convoys destroyed by the Skoll pirates. Ola Idonea, civilian bio-engineer, "died" during 192 in one of the earliest suspected Skoll attacks. They are not killing everyone Commodore, they are abducting people, there could be hundreds of prisoners on that ship!

### [CIC TRANSCRIPT]

[CDR A'Holia] Commodore, military head of the squadron.

[CPT Athos] Captain of the HNS Vigor, Dominator class cruiser.

[CMD Nillian] Commander, Tactical officer and second to CPT Athos.

[LT Ho] Lieutenant, Head of Detection.

[LT Gomez] Lieutenant, head of the Skoll inspection team.

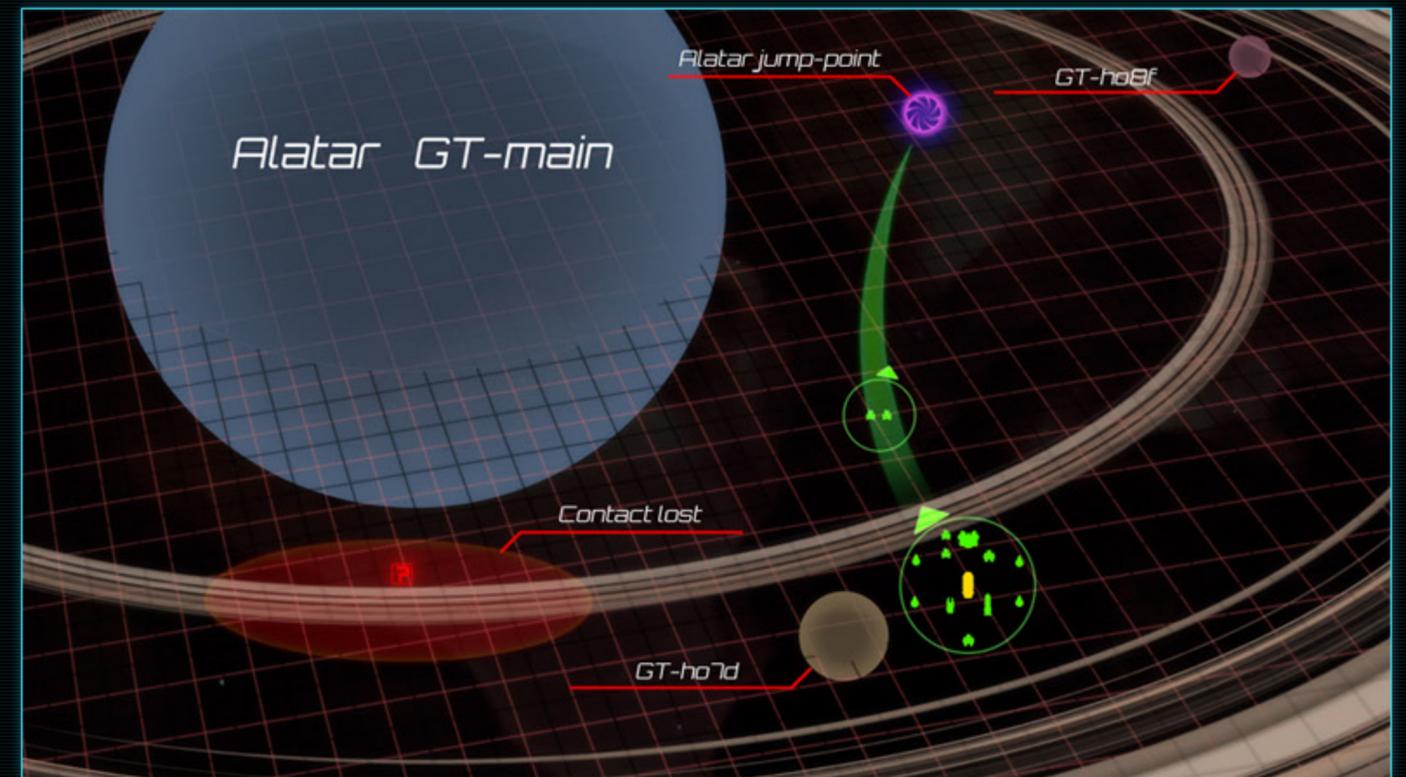
205.175.06.50

[CDR A'Holia]: Okay everyone, I'm still not liking it but LT Gomez and CPT Athos made very good arguments in favor of a tactical retreat. So lets do this right: The Atlas is the prize, I don't want even a micro-meteorite to scratch its hull.

Tactical, I want two Hounds in front to clear the path and makes sure there isn't any nasty surprises ahead. The rest of the fleet in spherical formation around the civies. The Vigor takes point, with the Dominion as support. The Argos takes the rear. The rest of the frigates cover all four sides. We don't have a fighter screen but they have some so everyone keep your PD weapons ready. These bastards are sneaky and you can bet they won't let us leave with their tech without a fight.

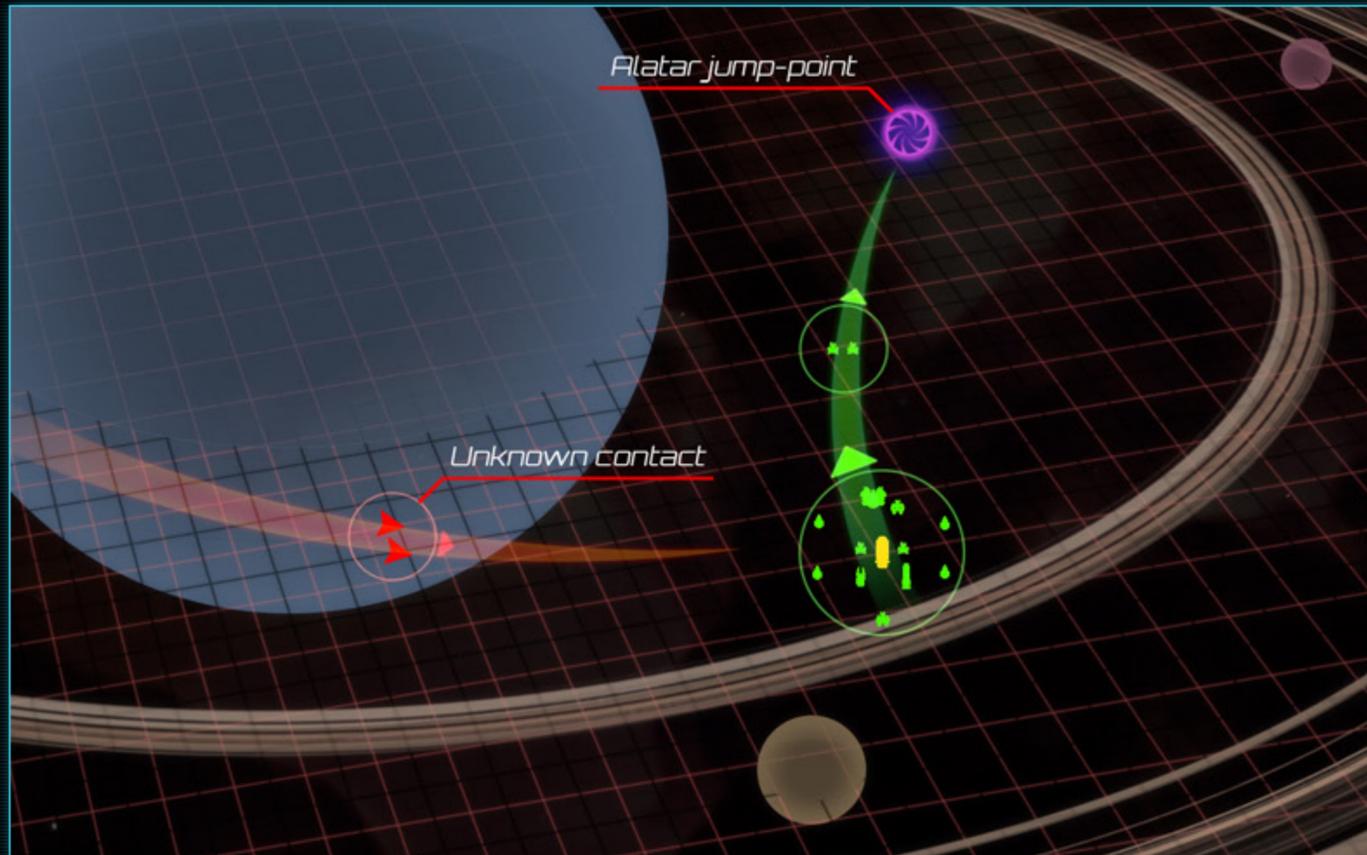
Navigation, I want a nice trajectory that places us far above the rings. I insist: stay clear of the asteroid field. It will leave them time to adapt to our vector, but I want to force them out of their cover if they want to engage us.

Detection, send a pair of probes to the area where we lost the signal of the enemy force, with a bit of luck we might be able to catch their emissions when they fire up their engines again. We are not seeking a fight, but if these Skolls come for one I'll be more than happy to oblige.



205.175.07.25

[CMD Nillian]: Commodore, Detection reports two unknown contacts on our nine per eleven. They are coming fast. Their orbit is very elliptical and there is no way they can slow down enough to maintain contact. I think they intend to fly through our formation and deal as much damage as they can. With their speed we won't be able to maneuver quickly enough to maintain our shields between our ships and them. I suggest we tighten up the formation and try to form a single protective wall with all the ships' shields.



[LT Gomez]: Ma'am, we can't rule out the possibility of a suicide attack. In that case such tight formation could lead to catastrophic chain reaction if they collide with one of our ships.

[CDR A'Holia]: Mmh, indeed, we can't take that risk. Then the obvious action would be to disperse the formation, and maintain at least one military ship between them and the civilians on both their approach and escape vectors. How much time do we have?

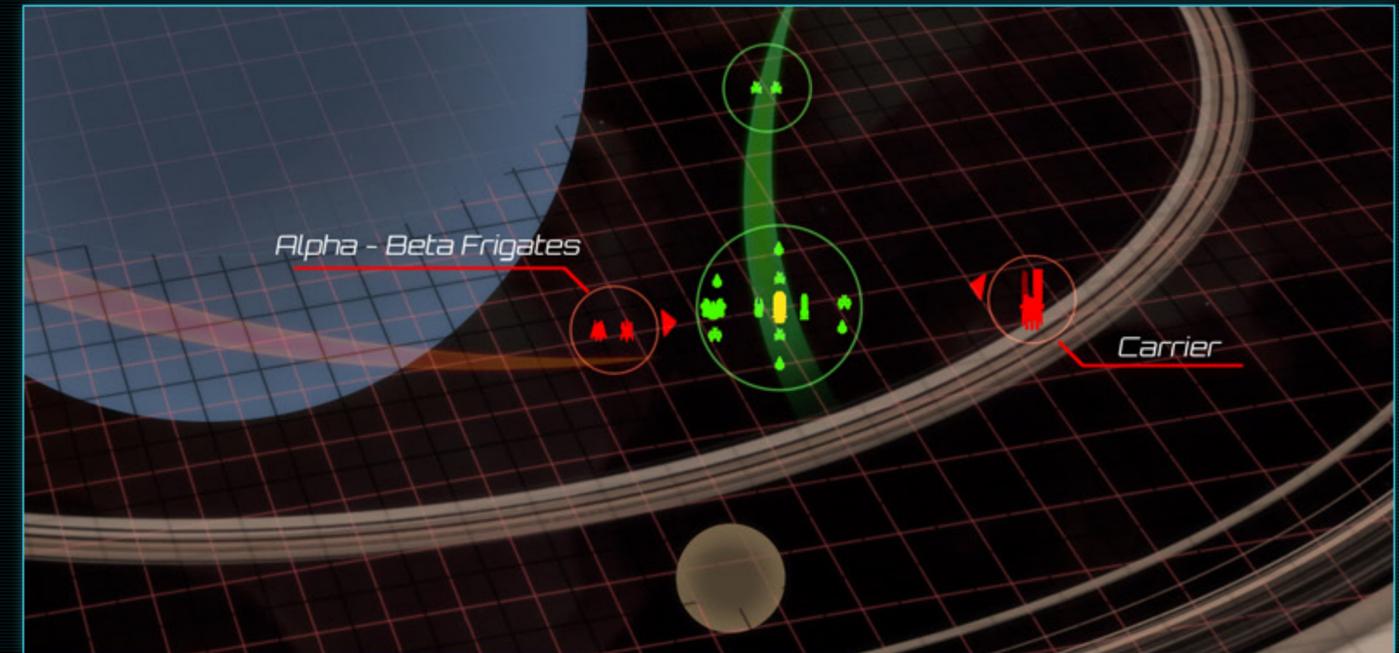
[LT Ho]: 13 minutes.

[CDR A'Holia]: Good, transmit the new formation to all ships then. And assign the Vigor to protect the Atlas.

[CMD Nillian]: Yes ma'am.

205.175.07.29

[CMD Nillian]: New bogey, four per ten and leaving the asteroid field. It must be the carrier!



[CDR A'Holia]: On the other side? Damn they are stealthy! Could the first contacts be decoys?

[CMD Nillian]: I doubt it: we are getting a better signal from those, their energy signatures are close to those of a Vigilance and Hound class frigates but we know they are not. They might be different ships, but it is highly improbable that they are anything other than two frigates.

[CDR A'Holia]: Then the carrier moved too late: that is way too far to provide support fire for the frigates when they reach us.

[CPT Athos]: I don't know, we have not seen their fighters yet.

[LT Gomez]: Also, assuming they have roughly twice the acceleration of a Lasher, where will they be once cancelling their relative velocity to us?

[LT Ho]: One second... Less than ten thousand SU from the carrier if they decelerate at one point seven times the acceleration of a Lasher after their fly-by.

[CMD Nillian]: That's some nice maneuver!

[CDR A'Holia]: Indeed, though that is assuming they survive this fly-by... I don't like it! Their commander must be good, and as you said Athos, we have not seen their fighters yet. Maintain the formation for now, but I want to be informed the moment Detection reports even the shadiest possible contact.

205.175.7.33

[CDR A'Holia]: Okay, I want all guns on full continuous fire on those two frigates as soon as they are in range. Launch one volley from our Pilum pods but reserve the torpedoes of the other ships, they likely won't help much against such fast targets. They will enter and leave effective range in less than seven seconds so I want all firing solutions locked only ten seconds before they reach it. They will also penetrate our formation so beware of any friendly fire! All ships acknowledge reception of these orders.

205.175.7.37

[CDR A'Holia]: Here they come, let's do this right, they cannot be allowed to survive this fly-by under...

[LT Ho!]: Incoming missile! Multiple missiles hits on the Argos and the Smoothbore, they are coming from our four!

[CDR A'Holia]: Don't break the formation! On our four? Are we in range of the Carrier?

[CMD Nillian]: I don't know but if we are, their missiles have an incredible endurance. We never saw them coming, it is like they fired up their engines only when... The frigates are entering range!

[CPT Athos]: Launching missiles, guns armed.

[CMD Nillian]: They aren't firing at our shields, they may try to hit our rear!

[CPT Athos]: Two hits on target alpha, it's engines are malfunctioning.

[CMD Nillian]: What the hell? The other one just flew through the entire missile volley and doesn't seem fazed at all! Its shield just expanded for a second and soaked up the damaged like it was nothing...

[LT Ho!]: Incoming fire from the targets, four hits on our shield, three misses.

[CMD Nillian]: New missile hits on the Argos, the Smoothbore is sinking.

[CDR A'Holia]: Move the Pollen to support the Argos and turn us around. I want to hit those bastards hard as they try to escape!

[CPT Athos]: Concentrate fire on target Beta, we must prevent it from withdrawing and support the carrier.

[CMD Nillian]: One more hit on target alpha, this one won't get home without help. Beta is getting away but lost some feathers...

[LT Ho!]: FIGHTERS! FIGHTERS! There were fighters following the frigates! OUR ENGINES ARE EXPOSED!

[LT Gomez]: They must have hidden themselves in their shadows.

[CDR A'Holia]: It wasn't a suicide attack, bring all ships closer to each other, our PD is too dispersed to defend against a fighter attack!

[CPT Athos]: We are taking hits! Engines malfunctions, we are out of control!

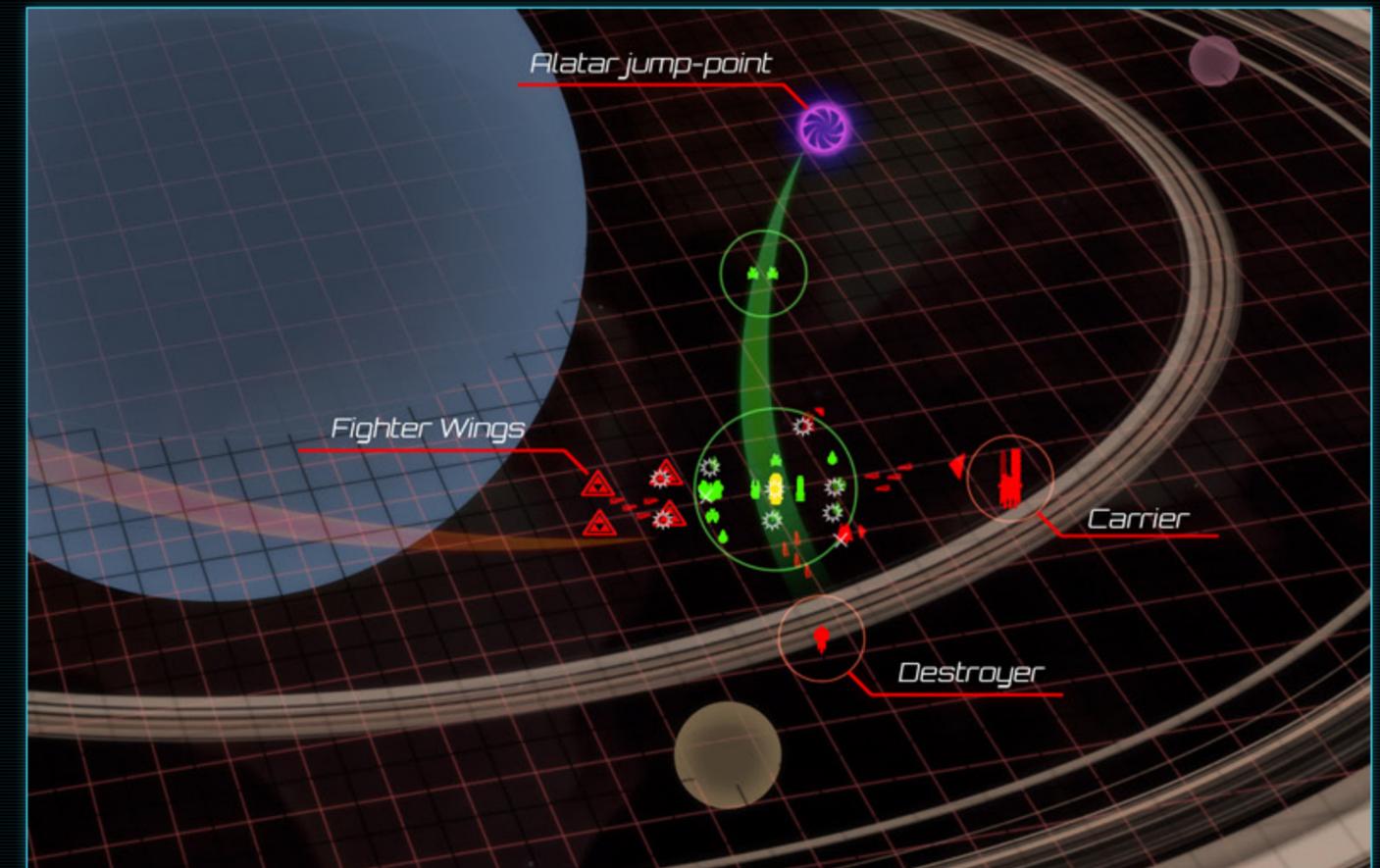
[LT Ho!]: New volley of missiles from the carrier! Wait, there are also missiles in a ballistic flight path between the fighters!

[CMD Nillian]: The Jason is hit, the Cassandra is sinking.

[CPT Athos]: There is another group of fighters approaching behind.

[LT Ho!]: New contact, nine per eight! Looks like a destroyer and... OH SHIT Torpedoes incoming, I repeat three incoming torpedoes, they are targeting the Atlas!

[CDR A'Holia]: All ships, all PD, destroy those torpedoes!



[CPT Athos]: Acknowledged. Comm, tell the Dominion to move there and support the Atlas!

[CMD Nillian]: What the hell? Laser heads! These are laser head torpedoes, the Atlas is hit!

[LT Ho]: The destroyer is firing again. Three more torpedoes incoming!

[CMD Nillian]: Already? What kind of ship is that?

[CPT Athos]: Our engines are still not operational, we can't help them.

[CMD Nillian]: Multiple hits on the Atlas, it is sinking...

[LT Ho]: Launch detected. Three torpedoes again... Targeting the Atlas? They are trying to vaporize it.

[CDR A'Holia]: DAMMIT!

[CPT Athos]: The remaining fighters are leaving our engagement range. They have suffered heavy losses.

[CMD Nillian]: The Dominion is getting in position... Firing PD... Two hits, only one torpedo detonated.

[LT Ho]: The carrier is interrupting the chase. And... Yes, the destroyer is disengaging too, it will regroup with the carrier.

205.175.8.02

[CDR A'Holia]: What is the status of the Civies!?

[CMD Nillian]: The Valkyrie was not targeted, the Tarsus took one shot on its armor that was intended for another ship but it is all right. The Atlas however is a complete loss. The recovered object is mostly destroyed and we probably will never even be able to get it out of the cargo-hold after such a pounding.

[LT Gomez]: The Valkyrie being intact does not surprise me, it is obviously a hospital ship, I don't think they would attack that.

[CDR A'Holia]: LT, I know your opinion of these Skoll has changed recently, but until proven otherwise they are bloodthirsty pirates in my book! If the Valkyrie has been ignored then it was for the same reason as the Tarsus: it is not a threat and can be intercepted at will if they defeat us. Now what about the rest?

[CMD Nillian]: The Vigor took some hits to the engine section, our acceleration is roughly limited by 40% and we will have trouble turning starboard. That also prevent us from using our burn-drive. Other than that she is at full combat capacity. Between the Enforcers, the Argos is very damaged. It first took several hits from those long range missiles and then one of the fighters crashed into its engines, we lack the equipment to bring it back to combat ready. The Dominion however never even got hit once. For the frigates,

we lost the Smoothbore. The Jason is beyond our repair capacity, and finally the Dallas took a nasty volley of fighter rockets to the side but can still fight. Other than these, the rest of the fleet only took superficial armor damage. Medical reports 92 dead, 47 seriously wounded, 132 lightly wounded and still able to work. 22 are still missing.

[CDR A'Holia]: And the enemy?

[CMD Nillian]: Target Alpha is certainly out of combat. We lost sight of it shortly after its engines failed, but that is probably a bad sign for them. The last images we got showed a cloud of debris and no atmosphere escaping the breaches. Beta however escaped after taking only one major hit. It clearly suffered during the engagement, but it might still be able to support the carrier. Of their twelve fighters, we took out six for sure. The confusion prevents confirming the destruction of four others, and they were all damaged to some extent.

[CDR A'Holia]: That is not very good... Not for a fully prepared force expecting an attack.

[CPT Athos]: You mean they completely outsmarted us and we got beaten because of that?

[CDR A'Holia]: Not really, even knowing their capacities, I don't think we would have done anything differently. They just used their equipment and forces to the best of their potential, and maximized their chances to achieve a very specific objective. One thing is certain, I'll NEVER underestimate them again.

[CMD Nillian]: I have to admit LT, when I first read your briefings about the Skolls, I thought they were greatly exaggerated.

[LT Gomez]: I've been surprised by them too. But we can see their hardware isn't really better than ours. Very different yes, and maybe we lack the right tools to defend against their tech, but it is not better. On the other hand if all their officers are as good as this one, they are far, far above your average pirate!

[CDR A'Holia]: Indeed. Okay, while they are leaving us a bit of time to catch our breath, I want all search and rescue operations finished within two hours. In the meantime, try to restore the Vigor's propulsion and...

[Communication incoming]

[CDR A'Holia]: Yes?

[LT Ho]: Commodore, Detection here, the Skolls are moving toward us, and the carrier just launched two new wings. They are much larger, probably bombers.

The mission "All In" occurs then.