

# UNIVERSAL DIGEST

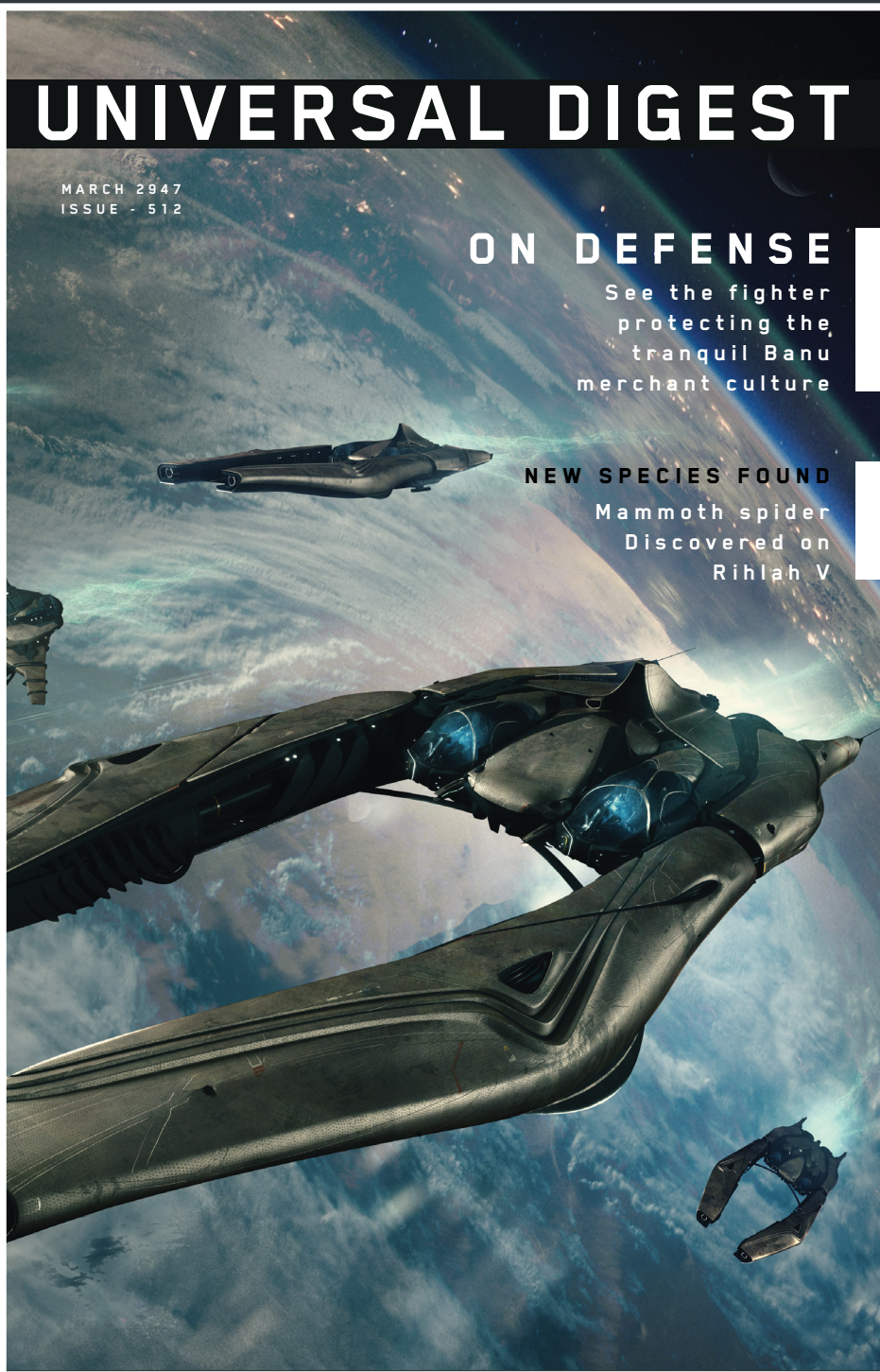
MARCH 2947  
ISSUE - 512

## ON DEFENSE

See the fighter  
protecting the  
tranquil Banu  
merchant culture

## NEW SPECIES FOUND

Mammoth spider  
Discovered on  
Rihlah V



Fasa crumbs spray from Lin Sool's mouth as he barks at his team. His reptilian hand lazily scrapes the bottom of the treat bag while he shouts, oblivious to the volume of his voice. Although Lin's tenor may deafen my human ears, his fellow Banu are not so sensitive. Cries reverberate from the various merchant stalls in the Yulin System, but to the Banu, whose species lacks an outer ear, all this clamor barely registers. Lin's joints groan as he eases onto a cargo container that's yet to be loaded. The average lifespan for the Banu ranges from forty-five to fifty-five years, so at forty-three years old, Lin is in the waning years of his life. But that life has been prosperous. The Banu define legacy by wealth accumulated over a lifetime.

**BANU ARE  
NOT TIED  
BY BLOOD;  
THE  
SOULI IS  
THEIR  
FAMILY.**

As the wealthiest Banu in the Protectorate, Lin is a living legacy. Lin pats an empty area on the shipping container. I take a seat and ask Lin how he rose from a lowly apprentice to an Essosouli, or guild master. "I saw opportunity. So took it!" he bellows. The opportunity Lin saw was the spike in raids on frontier systems like Leir. The young Lin spent his savings on his first combat ships. There was an immediate demand for Lin's security souli, or guild, and he's been in business ever since. But what will happen to Lin's souli when he's gone? Banu aren't tied by blood, rather, their souli is their family. When an Essosouli dies, so does the clan's loyalty. I pose this query to Lin and he laughs. "Replace me?" he shakes his head. "No one replace Lin!" Unfortunately for local merchants, this may be true.

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**The  
Guild  
Master**





SOULI  
TIES

TRISE SYSTEM

Curious about the evaluation souli, I traveled to Trise to find where the prolific Lin first got his start. Like all Banu children, Lin was sold to an evaluation souli shortly after birth. His time there was not only spent gaining an education, but also undergoing a series of aptitude tests to determine his strengths and weaknesses for potential future employment. At the age of six, Lin underwent the Formal Testing, the results of which are publicly posted so other souli may purchase young Banu as indentured apprentices. Lin, who placed top in his class in coordination, spatial relationships and tactics, expressed fondness for his evaluation souli. When I arrived, however, I found ramshackle remains of Lin's former guild. The closest evaluation souli was run by Essosouli Arye Hule.

Like everyone else I spoke to, Arye had never heard of the guild that evaluated Lin many years ago. Sad as it may seem, that is the way of the Banu. Their short lives and detachment to the past makes it impossible to form businesses and deals that span generations. Inside Arye's souli, I spot a young Banu tinkering with a puzzle box in the corner. I recall Lin mentioning a similar puzzle game from his childhood that was used as part of his aptitude training. It seems that while names and places may change, some Banu traditions remain the same.



ARMED &  
READY

THE DEFENDER



To many in the UEE, the Banu are not known for being combative (the Protectorate lacks a standing military). That doesn't mean the Banu don't fight. Lin's souli specializes in armed security and protection details, but by owning one of the largest Defender fleets in the Protectorate, he's able to scale his teams and stay affordable to merchants of all levels. With the UEE invading Vanduul space to the north,

Vanduul clans have increased attacks in the southern systems. Though some Banu have formed trade agreements with a few Vanduul clans, most merchant ships are still at risk from Vanduul raiders. That's where Lin's souli comes in. When asked what he would do if the Banu Protectorate hired his guild to fight, Lin quips, "Depends on the price." For the Banu, anything can be bought. Even war.

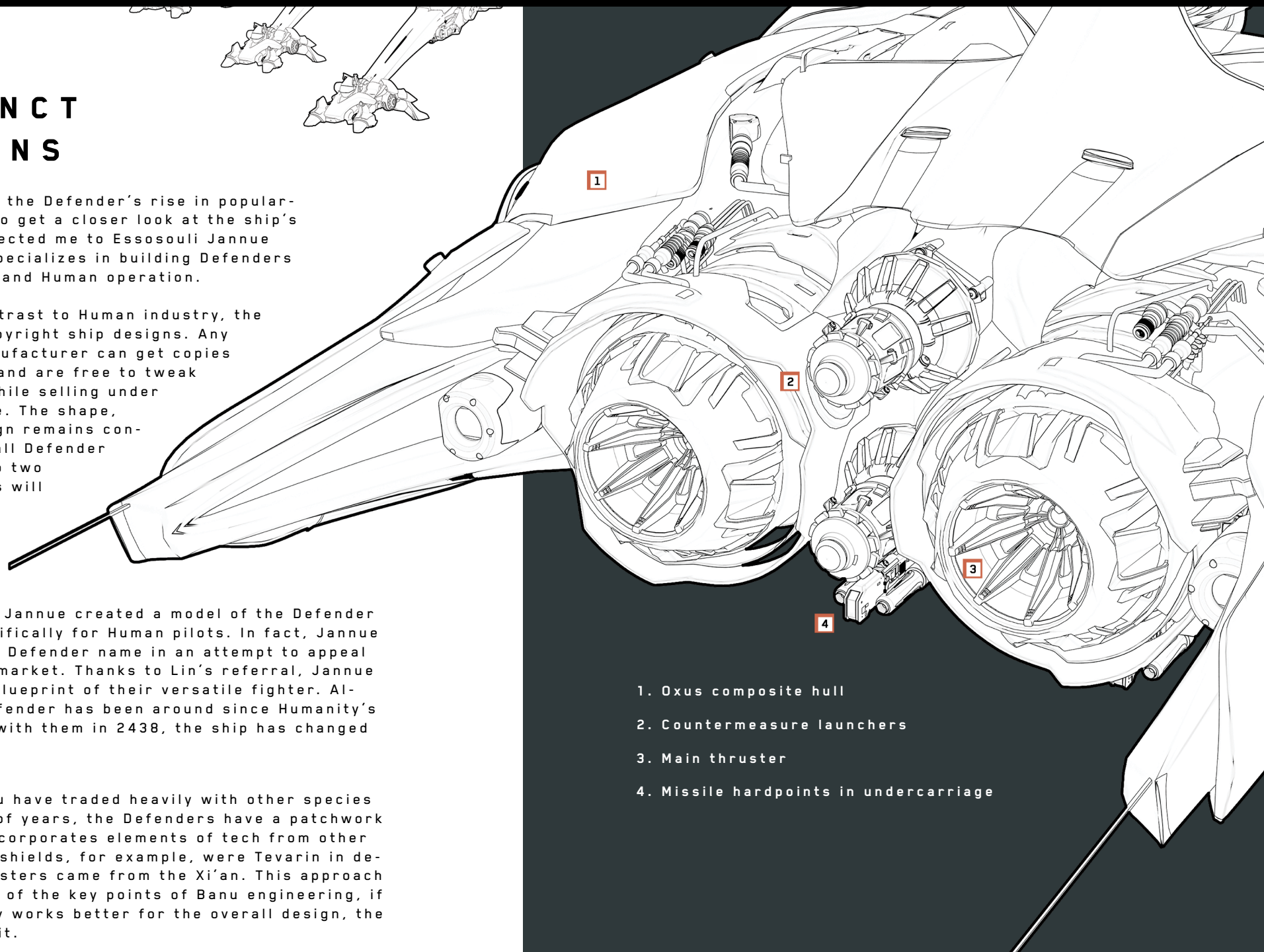
## DISTINCT DESIGNS

To understand the Defender's rise in popularity, I wanted to get a closer look at the ship's specs. Lin directed me to Essosouli Jannue Mon-Li, who specializes in building Defenders for both Banu and Human operation.

In a stark contrast to Human industry, the Banu don't copyright ship designs. Any individual manufacturer can get copies of blueprints and are free to tweak ship models while selling under the same name. The shape, hull, and design remains constant across all Defender models, but no two manufacturers will sell completely identical ships.

Case in point: Jannue created a model of the Defender designed specifically for Human pilots. In fact, Jannue originated the Defender name in an attempt to appeal to the Human market. Thanks to Lin's referral, Jannue showed me a blueprint of their versatile fighter. Although the Defender has been around since Humanity's first contact with them in 2438, the ship has changed since then.

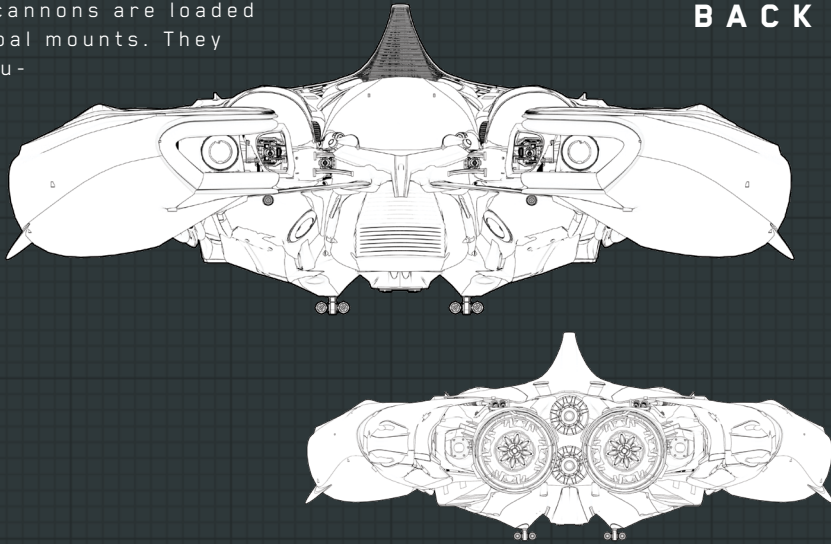
Since the Banu have traded heavily with other species for hundreds of years, the Defenders have a patchwork design that incorporates elements of tech from other cultures. The shields, for example, were Tevarin in design. The thrusters came from the Xi'an. This approach highlights one of the key points of Banu engineering, if the technology works better for the overall design, the Banu will use it.



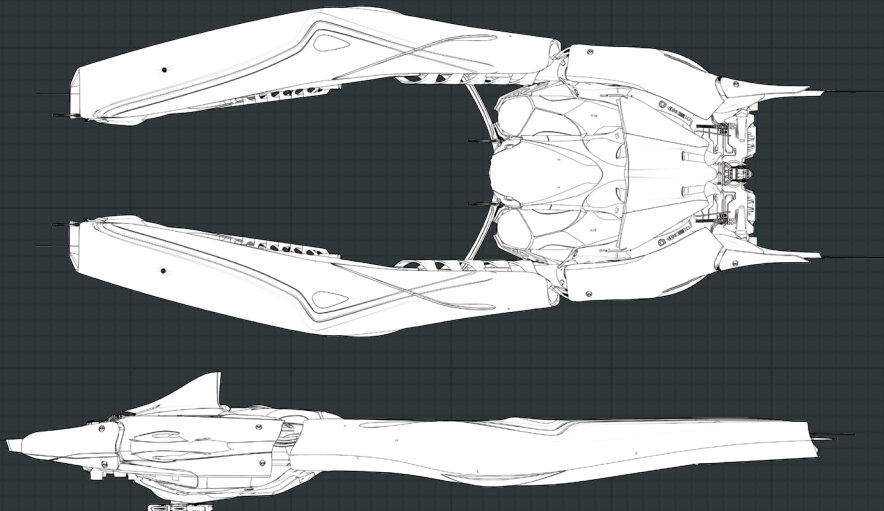
1. Oxus composite hull
2. Countermeasure launchers
3. Main thruster
4. Missile hardpoints in undercarriage

With twenty-eight meters in length and 18,000 kg of mass, the Defender is longer and sleeker than the Gladius. The four Singe tachyon cannons are loaded onto gimbal mounts. They are instrumental in fighting off raider attacks.

FRONT / BACK

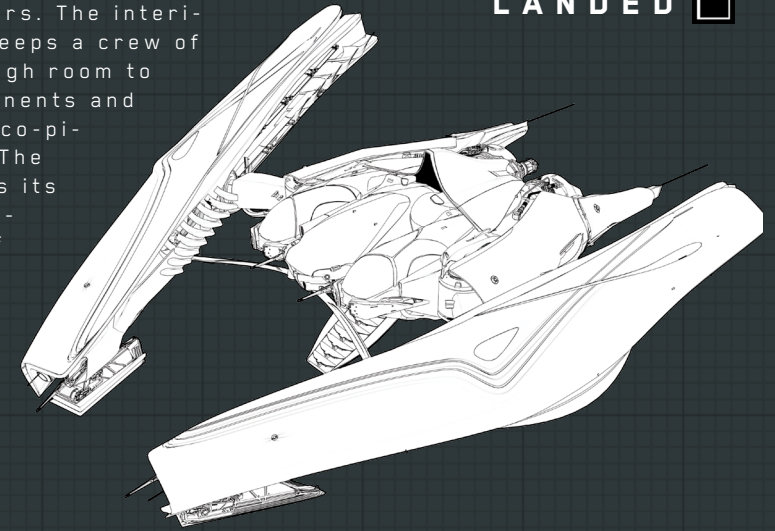


TOP / SIDE

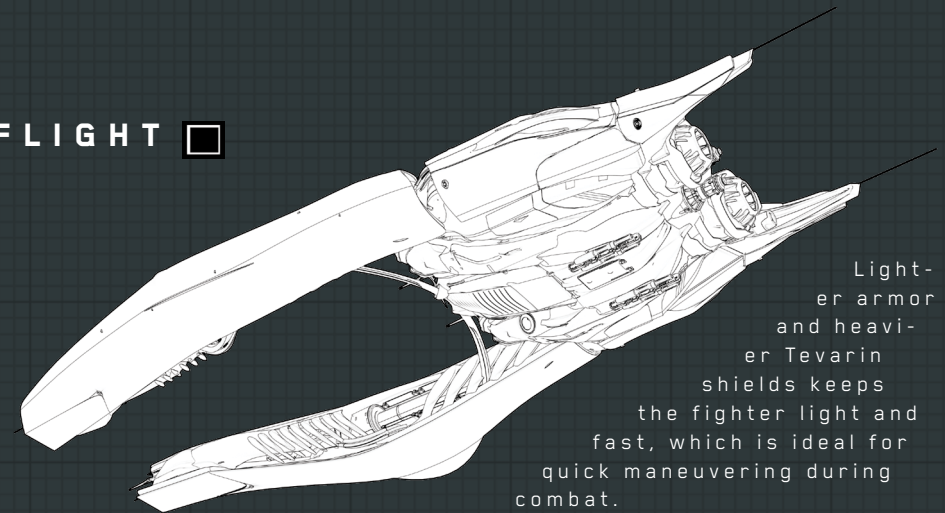


This fighter combines elegance with strength as seen in the polished design and mixed thrusters. The interior fits and sleeps a crew of two with enough room to access components and the pilot and co-pilot cockpits. The Defender does its best work acting as part of a multi-crew escort fighter for ships in need of protection, like the Banu Merchantman.

LANDED

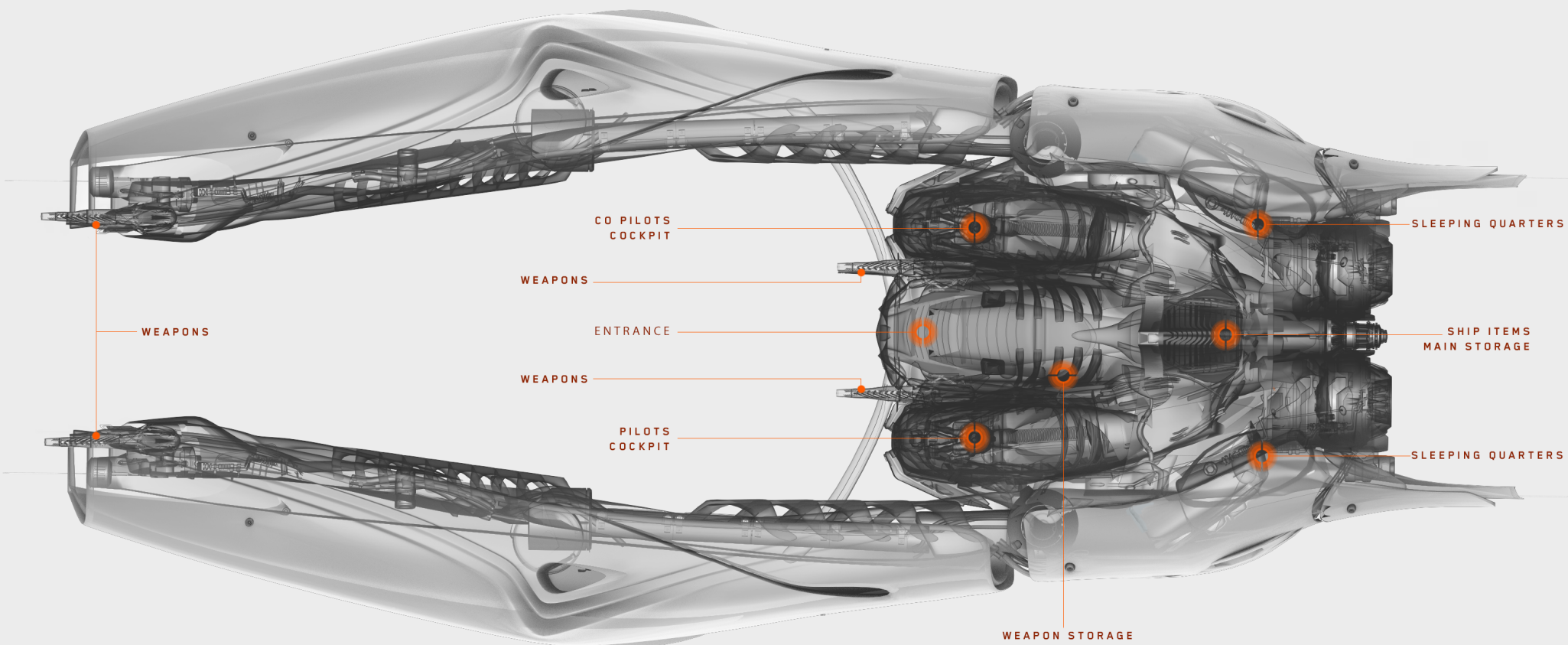


FLIGHT



Lighter armor and heavier Tevarin shields keeps the fighter light and fast, which is ideal for quick maneuvering during combat.

# DEFENDER SPECS



JOURNEY  
INSIDE

With its emphasis on combat, the Defender has minimal cargo space and small sleeping quarters. For this reason, Defenders are best flown as part of a fleet or for shorter journeys. Engines and components are shielded by cascading spinal shutters. Doors and shutters are molded into the walls to create a smooth, seamless aesthetic while still providing operator access.

When asking about the origin of the glowing stones embedded in the walls, Jannue simply shrugs and explains that he purchased them from a mineralist. While the same behavior from a Human manufacturer could easily be construed as keeping a trade secret, the Banu have no such hangups. As a culture, they don't keep historical records, believing that the present is far more important than the past.



## LINE OF FIRE

While every manufacturer claims their product is the best on the market, I wanted to verify those claims by speaking directly to a Defender pilot. So, I returned to the airfield and met with Lin's most experienced pilot, Kempo Del-Ni, and Kempo's co-pilot, Arrin Tuul.

I ask Kempo if the Defender lives up to Jannue's hype. "The Defender is swift. Deadly. All flee in terror!" Proud, he and Arrin give me a tour of the inside of their ship.

The most noticeable difference between Defenders built for the Banu and Jannue's design for Human operators is the pilot and co-pilot seats. In the Banu model, the two seats have isolated functions so responsibilities cannot be shared between pilot and co-pilot.

As with their soulis, the Banu pilots prefer to specialize in one task. Human pilots, however, prefer flexibility and an ability to assign functions as needed.



Pilot Seat

While Kempo's conviction was almost enough to convince me that this fighter is fierce in flight, I still needed to see the Defender in action. I boarded the Merchantman Lin's souli was hired to protect and set sail for Leir.

I did not need to wait long. Immediately upon exiting the jump point into Leir, our convoy is surrounded by a small raiding party of Vanduul Blades.

A chill runs down my spine at the sight of the Vanduul raiders, but the ship's captain calmly requests a comm link to the Vanduuls. "No worry," she tries to reassure the crew (and me), "I trade with Vanduul many time. No problem here."

But we clearly do have a problem when the Vanduul respond by opening fire. The floor beneath me sways as the engines take a hit. It appears the Vanduul intend on immobilizing our ship, which will make it easier for them to board and loot our cargo of ore. After they kill us, of course.

I don't have long to ponder my demise as Lin's Defenders engage the Vanduul. The Blades swivel their attention to the new threat, but their ammunition fails to penetrate the Defender's Tevarin shield in the initial clash.

The Defenders' missiles pick off the Blades; lighting up the starry sky outside the windows. As the remaining Vanduul clan hightails it out of the system, the merchant crew standing beside me bursts into cheers.

The trip concludes without further incident to the planet of Mya. Safely on the ground, I join the Merchantman captain as she thanks Kempo and the other pilots. After the skirmish, I am profoundly aware this story would have a much different ending if it weren't for the Banu Defenders by our side.

## FIERCE IN FLIGHT



Defenders In Action

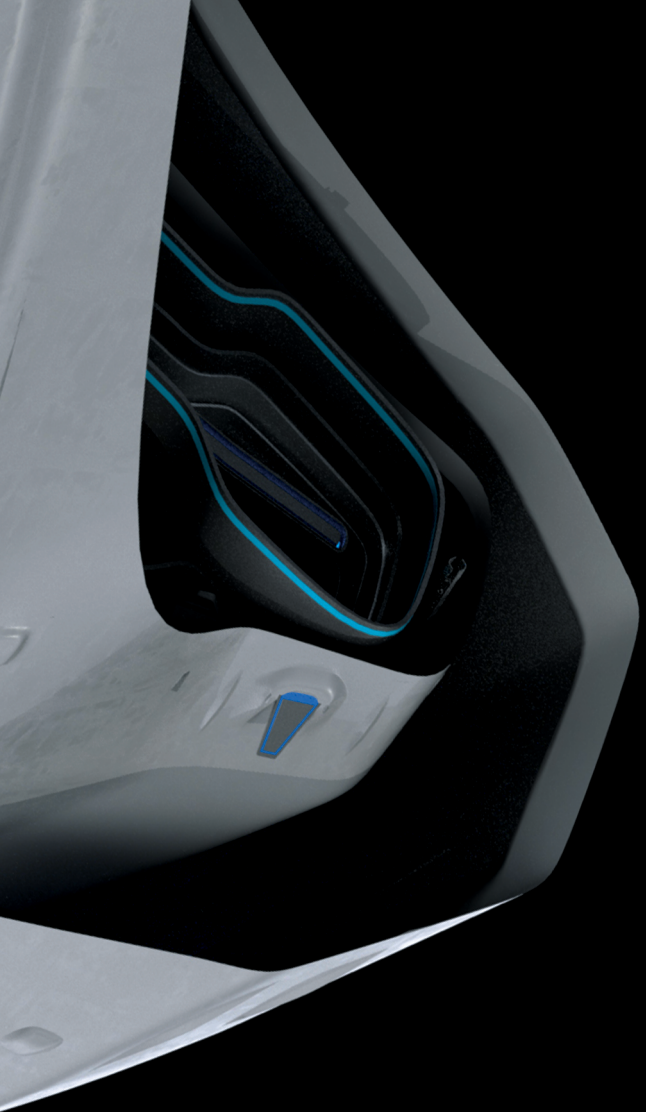


OPEN FOR  
BUSINESS

MYA MARKET

On Mya, I have my first contact with the Outsiders. The reclusive society refuses to purchase goods from Human planets, but they seem to be content trading with Banu merchants. I greet one of the Outsiders as he trades supplies for the Banu's ore, but he doesn't acknowledge my presence. I can only assume he doesn't trust a Human outside of his cult. In the skies, Lin's security team rotate patrols. Although they have little to fear from the Outsiders, the Vanduul are another matter.

On break, Kempo and his co-pilot lounge in the shade of their ship. The planetside stops are the fleet's only time to rest. Once the Banu merchants finish their deals on Mya, they'll stop at the two other planets in the Leir System before moving on. These mining planets have not been terraformed, so they're in constant need of oxygen, food, and other supplies. That makes the merchant ships who frequent them targets for raiders. Fortunately, the Merchantman has the Defender to keep these raiders at bay.



# NEXT ISSUE

Origin Jumpworks redefines  
luxury yet again.

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