

JUMP POINT

ISSUE: 14 05

RSI CONSTELLATION MK V CENTAURUS

RSI SKYLARK

THE DEATH OF EVERYTHING

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By Amelia Lazouras

FROM THE COCKPIT

GREETINGS, CITIZENS!

Welcome to October's **Jump Point**! We're kicking off the issue with a double feature, getting involved in the recent RSI Celebration and the release of the all-new Connie Mk V and its baby sister ship, the Skylark. As we scoured the design boards, it was immediately clear how important this release was to the devs themselves, as many of them had worked on the previous iterations, with a couple even having had a hand in the original way back at the start of the project. It's also no secret that the Constellation is Chris Roberts' favorite *Star Citizen* ship, so the utmost care was taken throughout the whole process, as you'll see through both Behind the Scenes articles.

We also have an all-new short story from the Narrative team, which details a harrowing rescue attempt into the depths of the Hades system. A huge thank you to Amelia Lazouras for a fantastically festive story this Day of the Vara.

And thank you for flicking through this issue of **Jump Point** magazine. We'll be back in December for the last of the year, no doubt breaking down the year that was and looking into some of the exciting news from IAE 2956...

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BEHIND THE SCENES:
RSI CONSTELLATION MK V
CENTAURUS

The Roberts Space Industries Constellation has been woven into the fabric of *Star Citizen* since the game's conception, with the Mk IV Andromeda included in one of the original Kickstarter pledges at the very start of the project. So, for many, the Constellation has always been the definitive ship of the 'verse; its USS Enterprise, its Thunderbird 2, its Serenity, its Starbug...

In that capacity, the Constellation has endured the test of time, being re-outfitted to suit *Star Citizen*'s ever-evolving universe. The Constellation also set the standard for large multi-crew vehicles, with the initial Andromeda featuring crew amenities, vast amounts of storage, ample weaponry, and an on-board snub. And while the Taurus saw the frills removed to maximize storage, both the Aquila explorer and luxury Phoenix also managed to accommodate ground rovers alongside their snubs to provide a complete package for space, in-atmosphere, and planetary travel.

However, like the original Anvil Hornet and RSI Aurora, time has eventually caught up with arguably the 'verse's most iconic vessel. With the first flyable Constellation (the preceding Mk I to Mk III models are in-lore only) planned for retirement, it was time for the Ships team to kick off its replacement. As with the previously sunset vehicles, the new ship would need to embody the spirit of the original while representing the best of contemporary spaceship design. As always, it began with a brief.

BRIEF

Bringing the legendary Constellation series into a new form factor for the market in 2956.

The Constellation Mk V has the following facilities/rough layout:

- Front bridge with three crew seats (pilot + two remote gunner/co-pilot/MFD)
- Remote turrets are quad S3 weapons
- Integrated bespoke missile launchers (2x) 16x S2 missiles and custom, non-swappable PDS turret (laser Gatling)
- Entrance airlock with ground lift/side airlock
- Variants change the rear half of the ship's design
- Rear docking port for new RSI snub fighter (separate brief)

CONCEPT 1

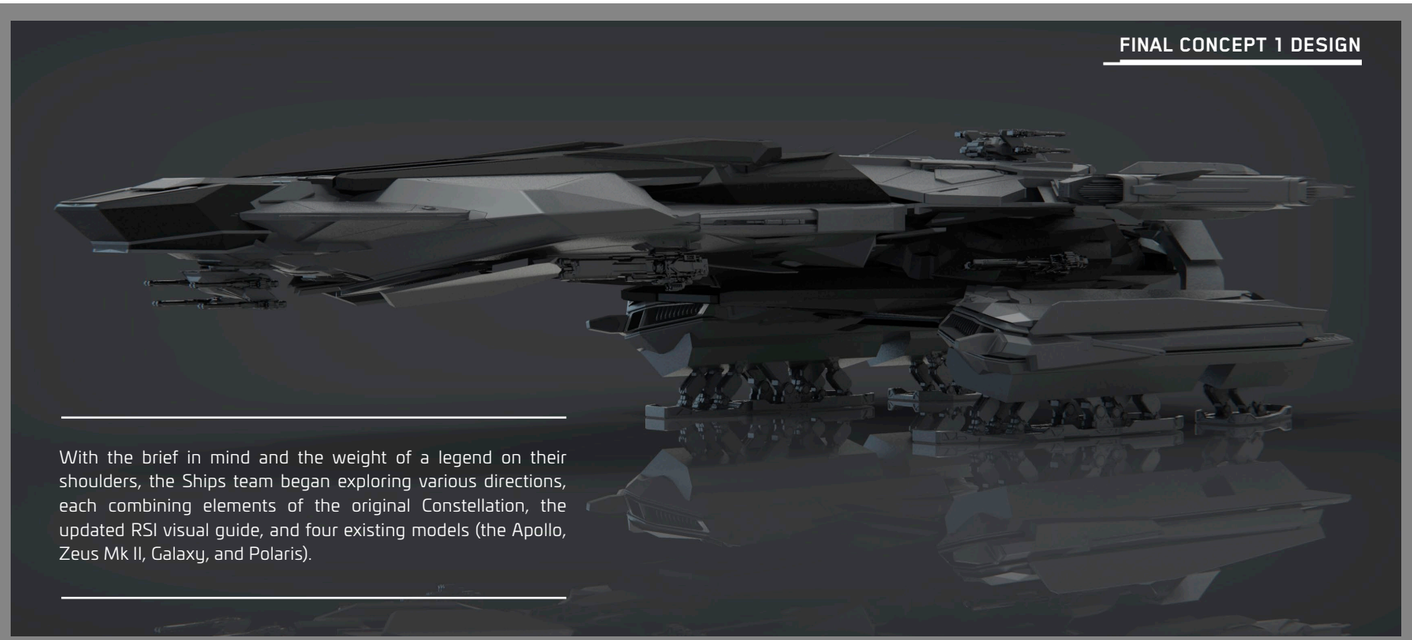


INITIAL KIT-BASH



DEVELOPMENT



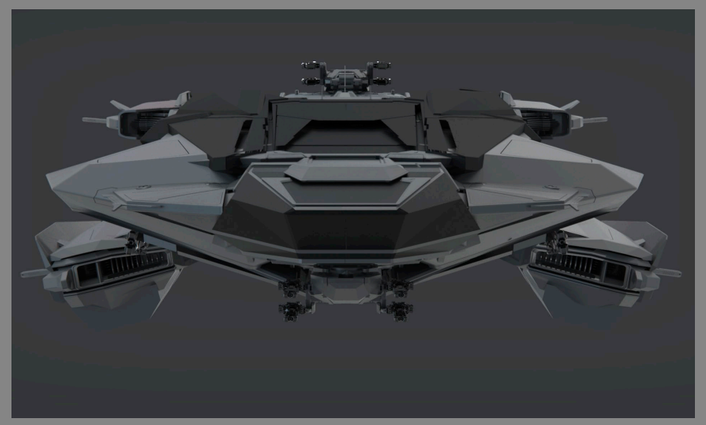


FINAL CONCEPT 1 DESIGN

With the brief in mind and the weight of a legend on their shoulders, the Ships team began exploring various directions, each combining elements of the original Constellation, the updated RSI visual guide, and four existing models (the Apollo, Zeus Mk II, Galaxy, and Polaris).







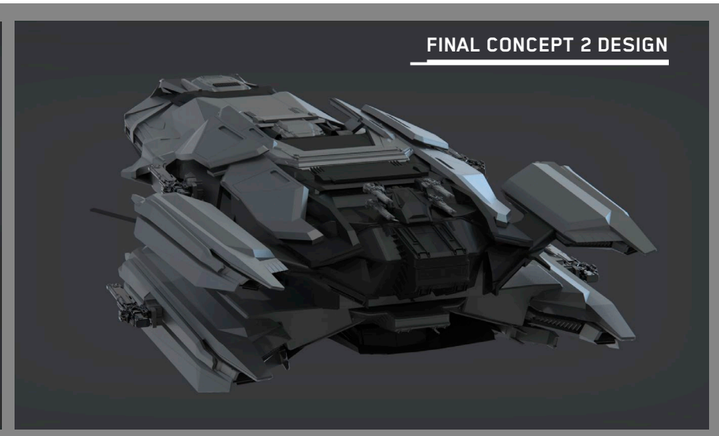


CONCEPT 2



INITIAL KIT-BASH





FINAL CONCEPT 2 DESIGN

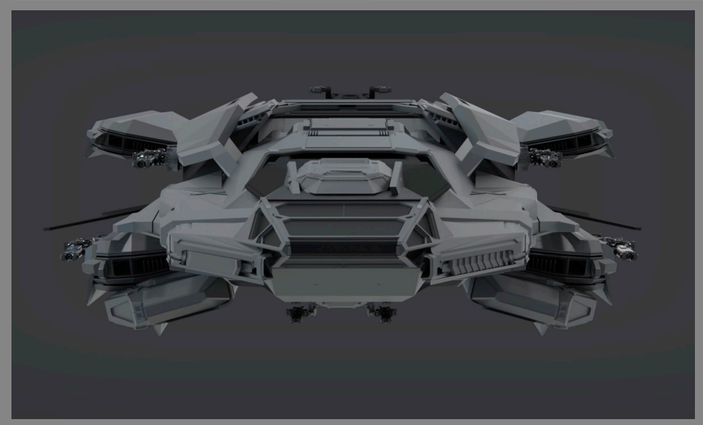


DEVELOPMENT



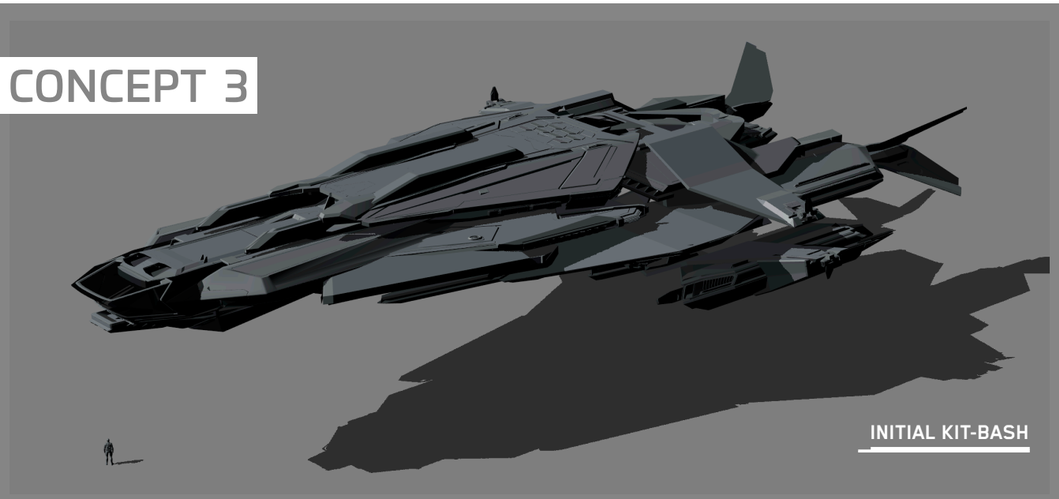
Each initial kit-bashed model was worked up into four design proposals for review.







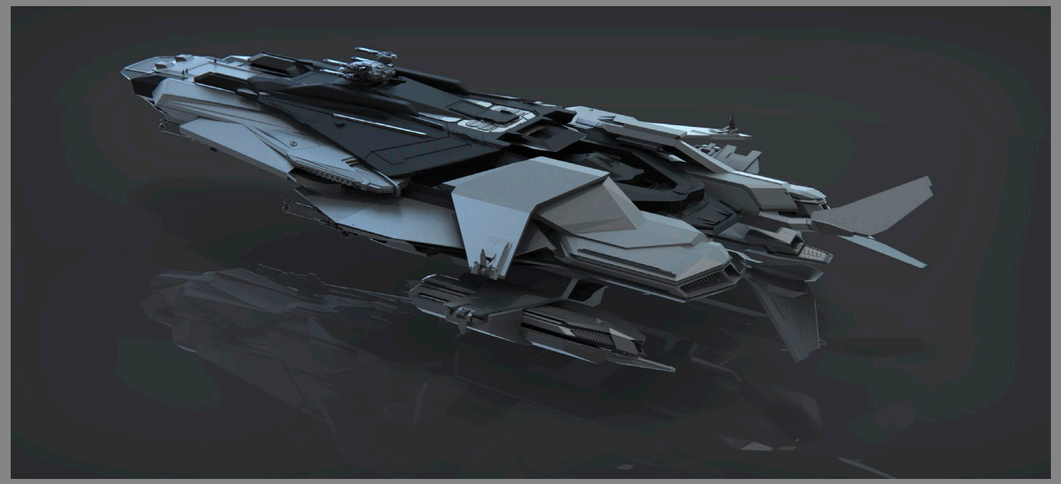
CONCEPT 3



INITIAL KIT-BASH



DEVELOPMENT



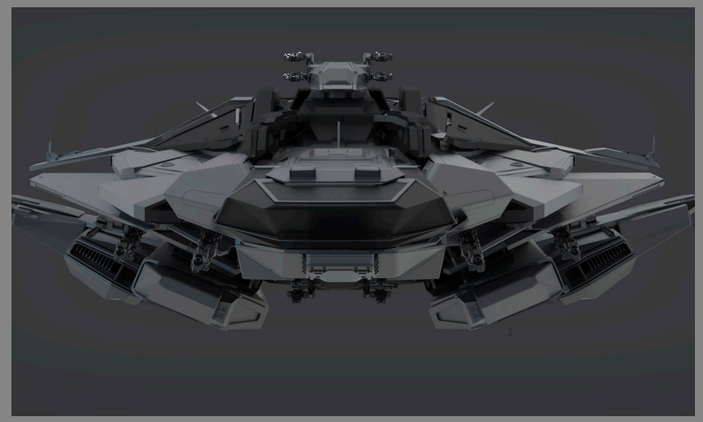


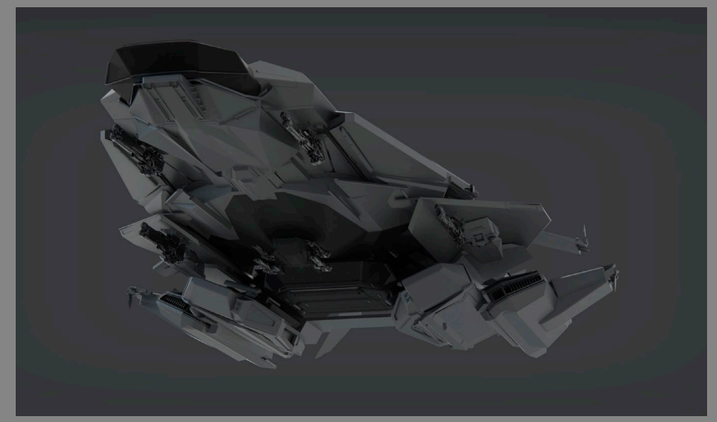
FINAL CONCEPT 3 DESIGN

Despite being influenced by various RSI ships, each retained key elements of the previous Constellation, specifically in the landing gear and overhanging cockpit.

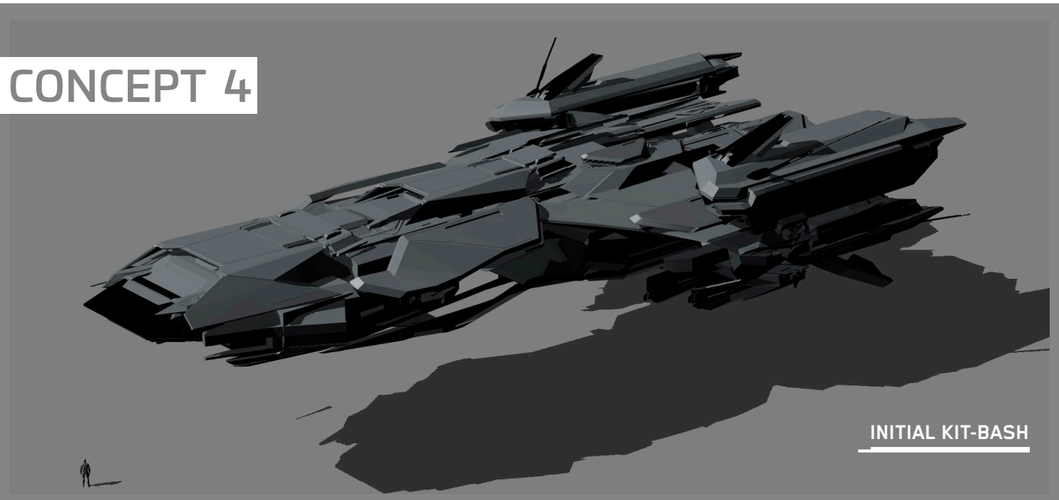




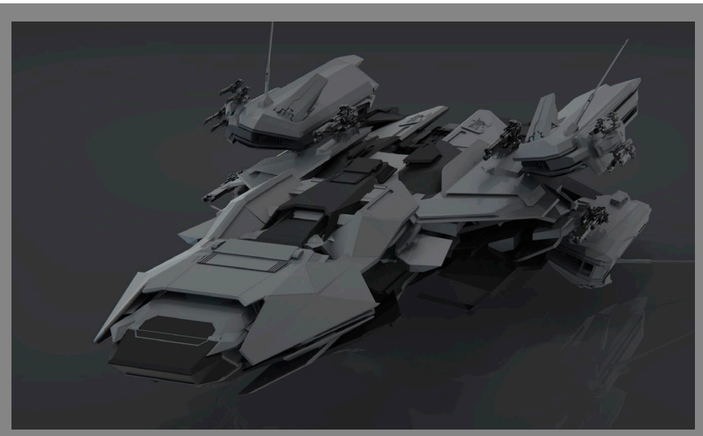




CONCEPT 4



INITIAL KIT-BASH

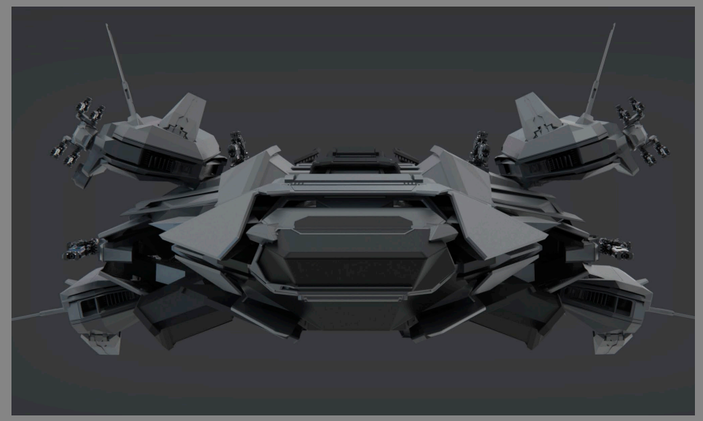




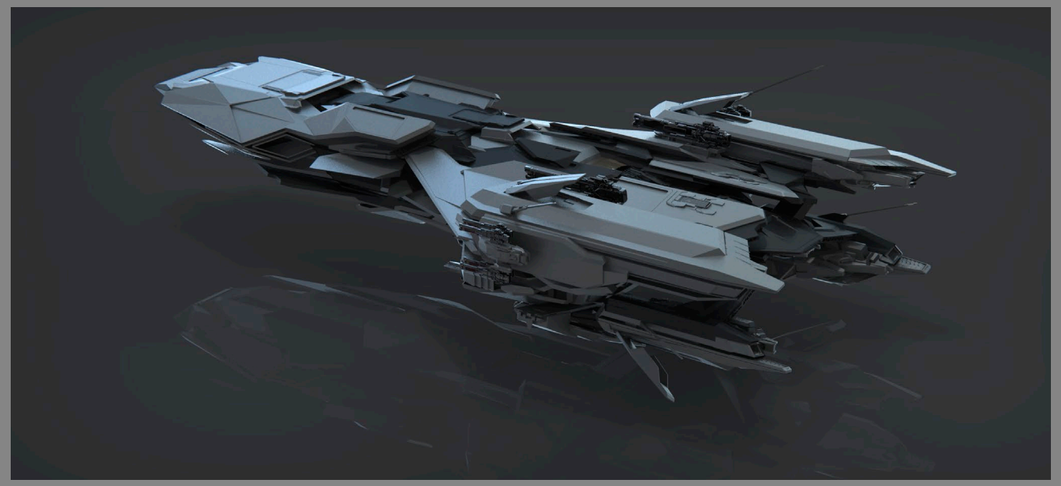
FINAL CONCEPT 4 DESIGN



DEVELOPMENT





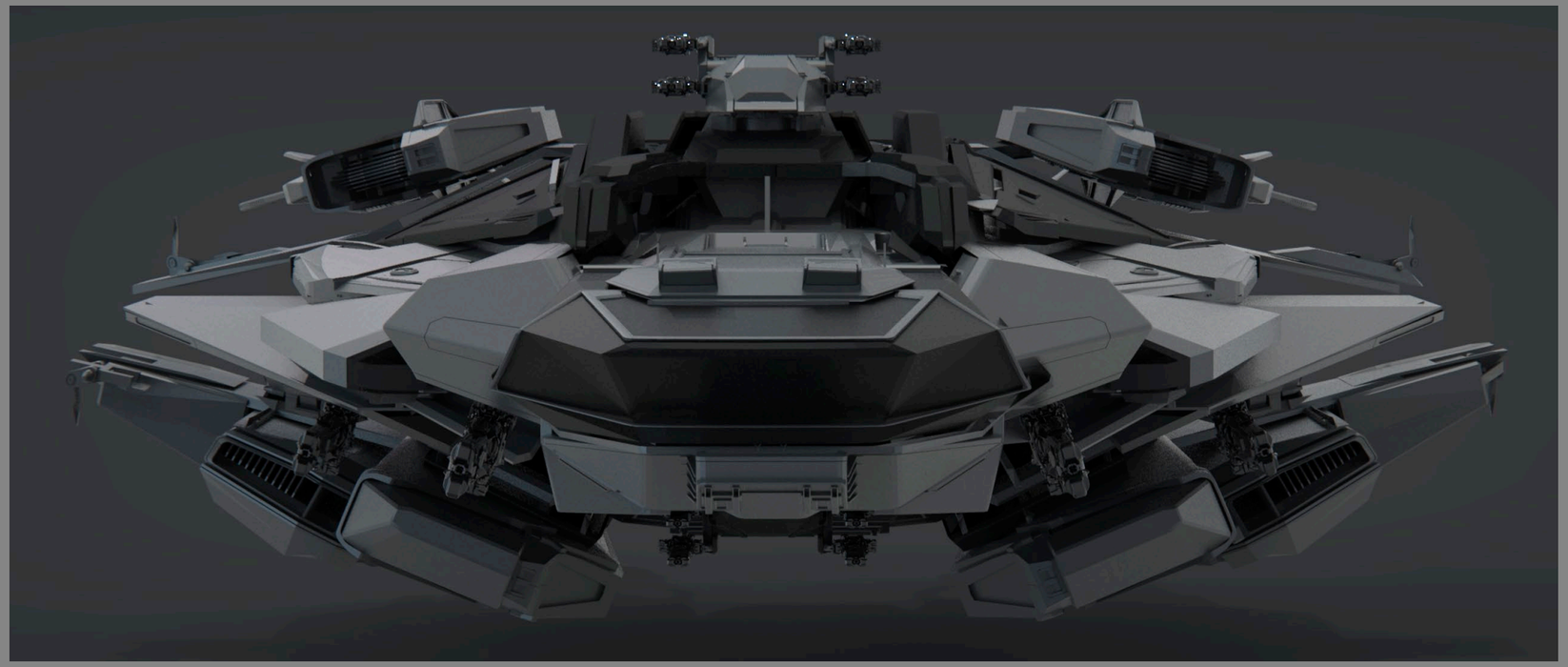




While the first three options smoothed out the overall geometry of the ship, the final model retained the slightly disjointed look between the cockpit and the rest of the ship of the original.



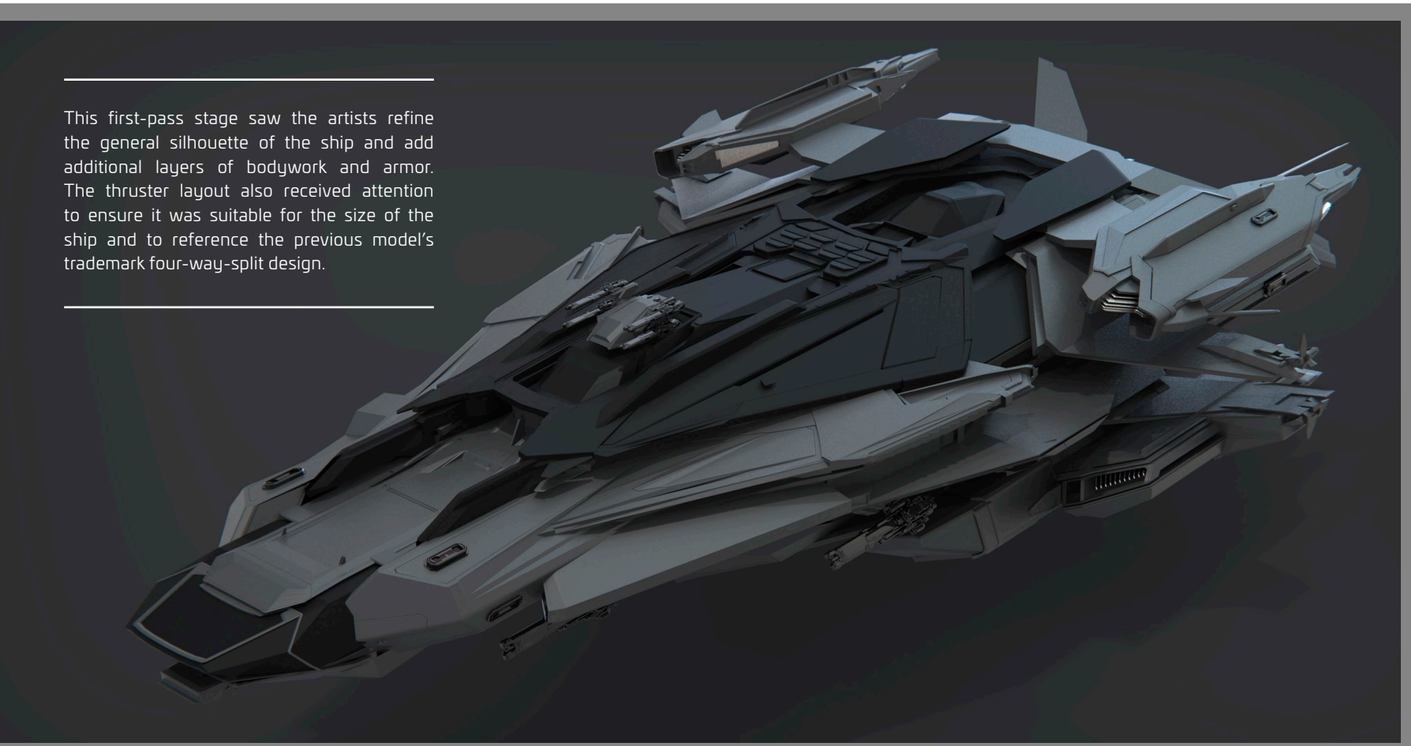
Upon review, the model combining elements of the Polaris and Zeus Mk II was chosen for further development, though elements of RSI's existing back catalogue would continue to be integrated as the concept progressed.



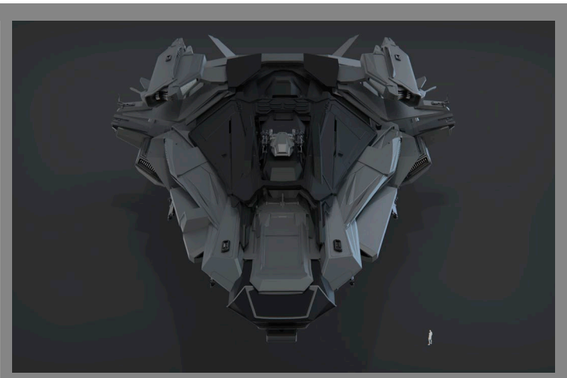




This first-pass stage saw the artists refine the general silhouette of the ship and add additional layers of bodywork and armor. The thruster layout also received attention to ensure it was suitable for the size of the ship and to reference the previous model's trademark four-way-split design.







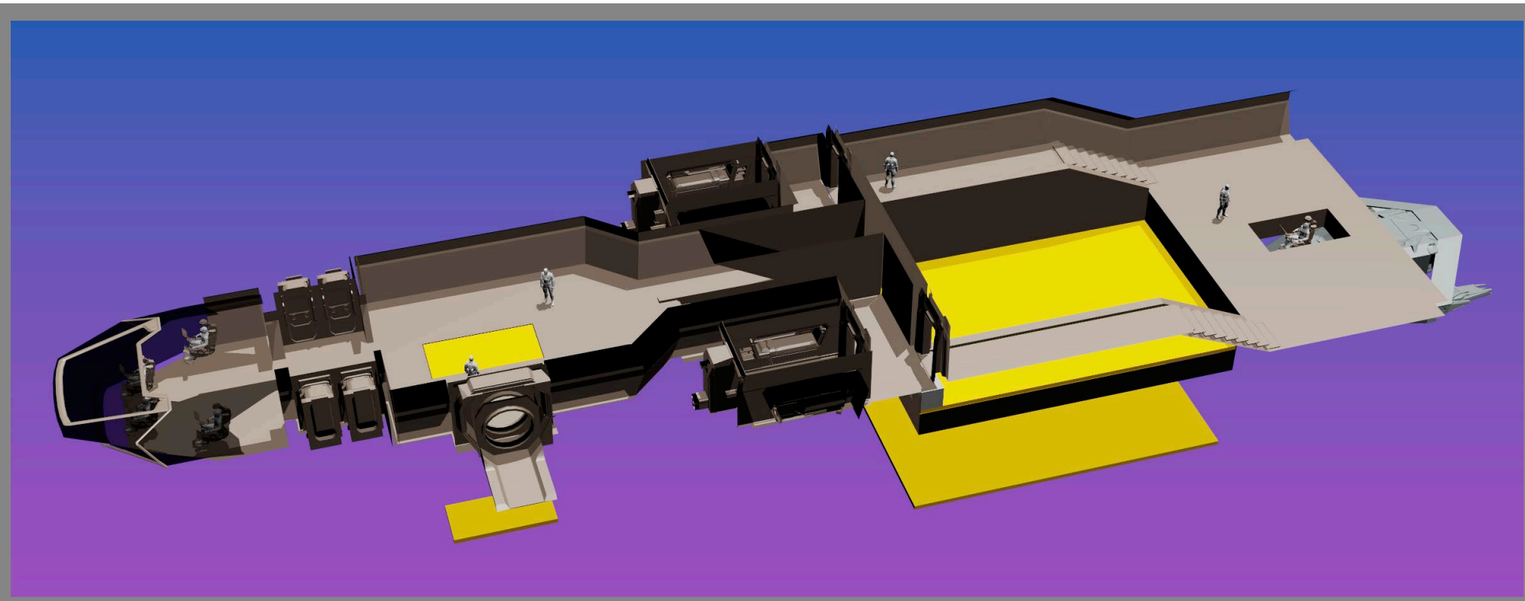


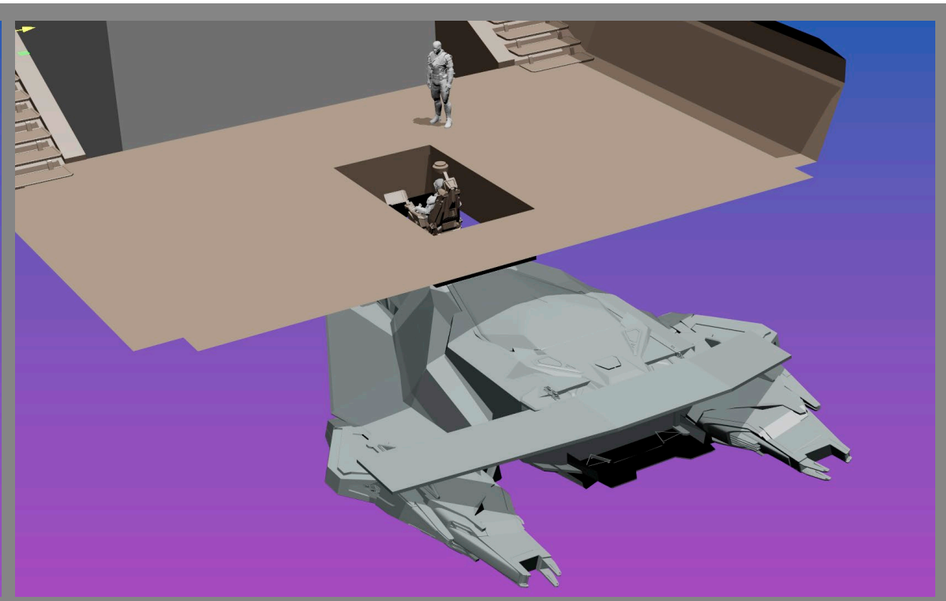


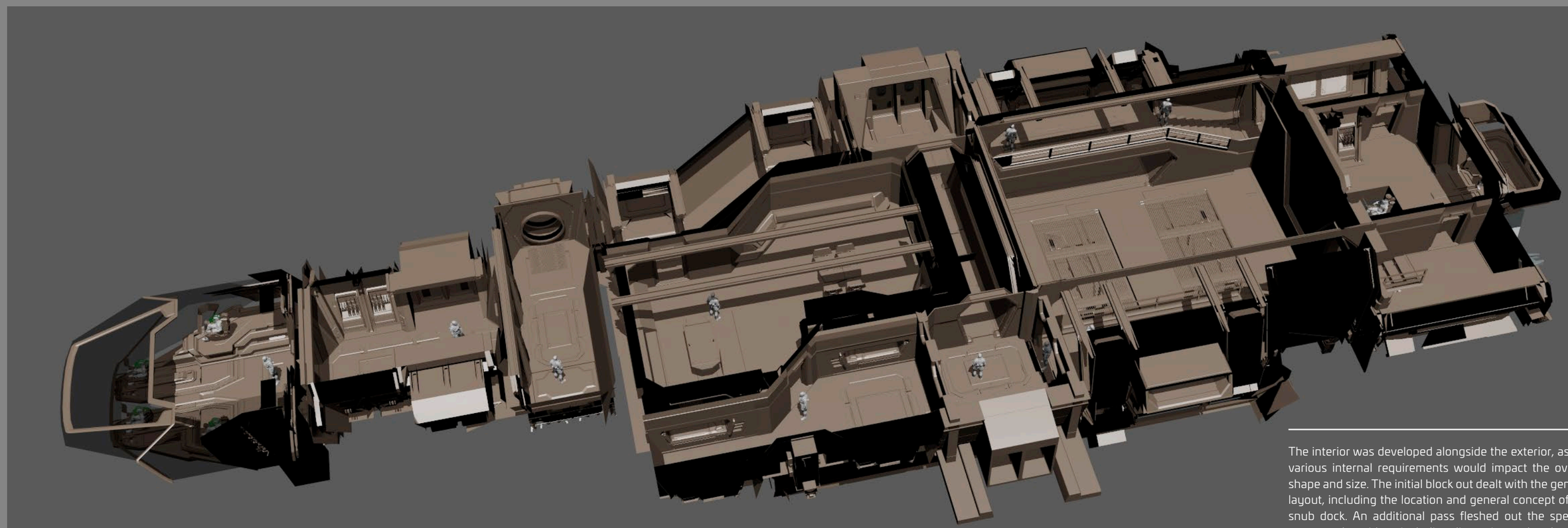






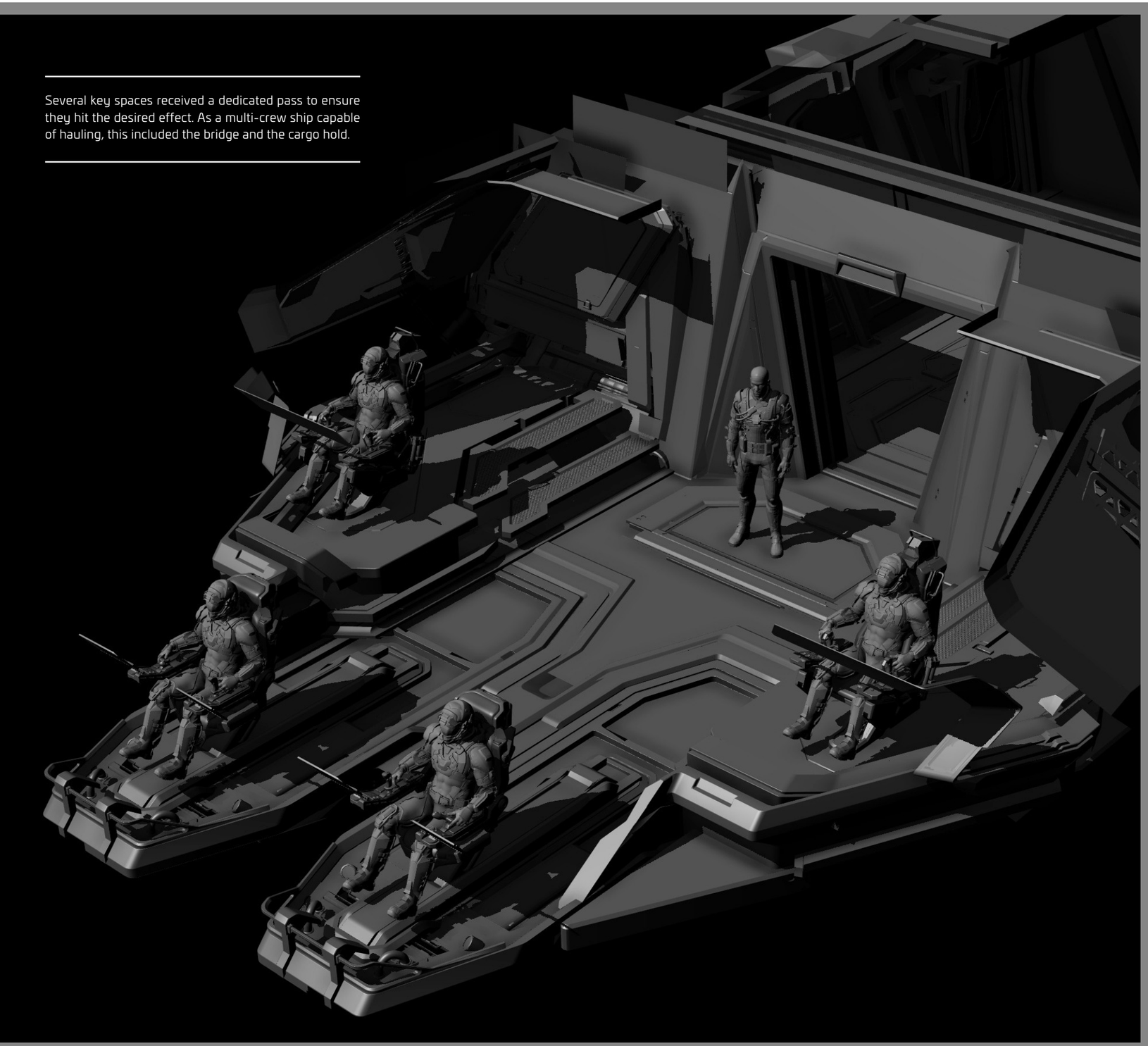


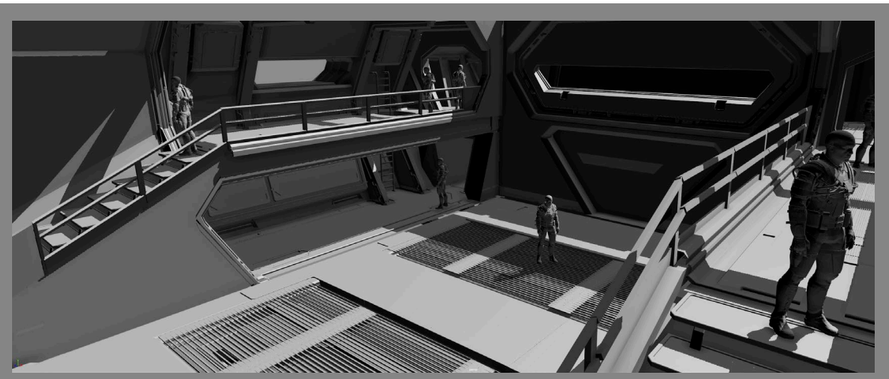


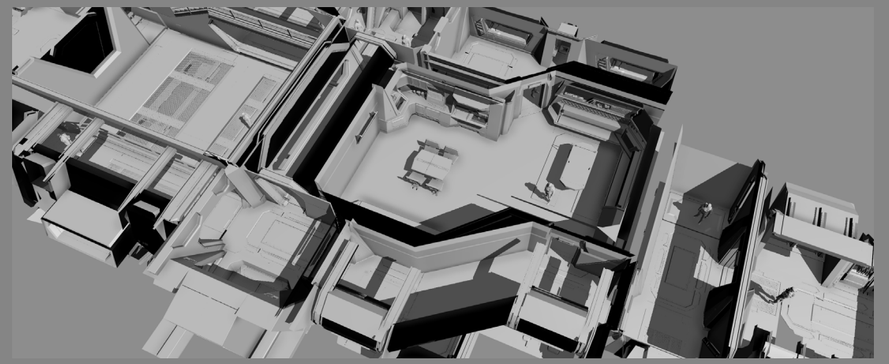


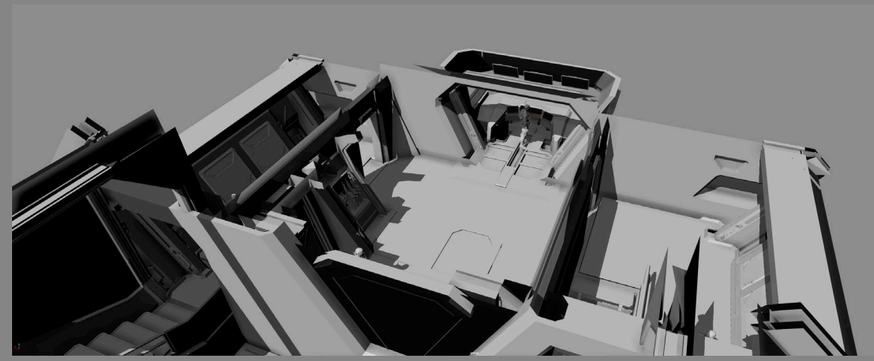
The interior was developed alongside the exterior, as the various internal requirements would impact the overall shape and size. The initial block out dealt with the general layout, including the location and general concept of the snub dock. An additional pass fleshed out the specific rooms and corridors, including dimension and scale.

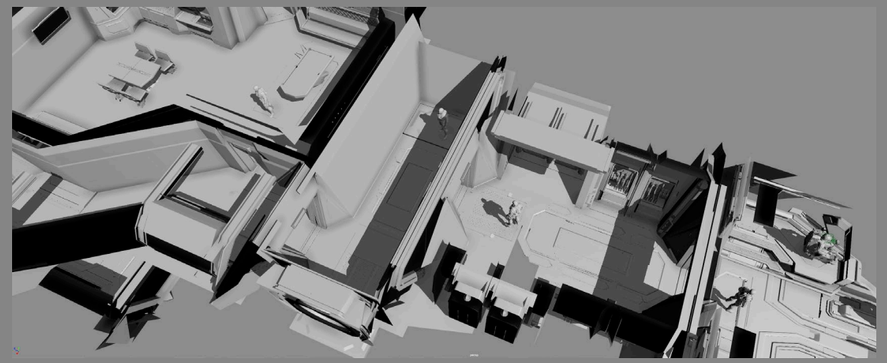
Several key spaces received a dedicated pass to ensure they hit the desired effect. As a multi-crew ship capable of hauling, this included the bridge and the cargo hold.







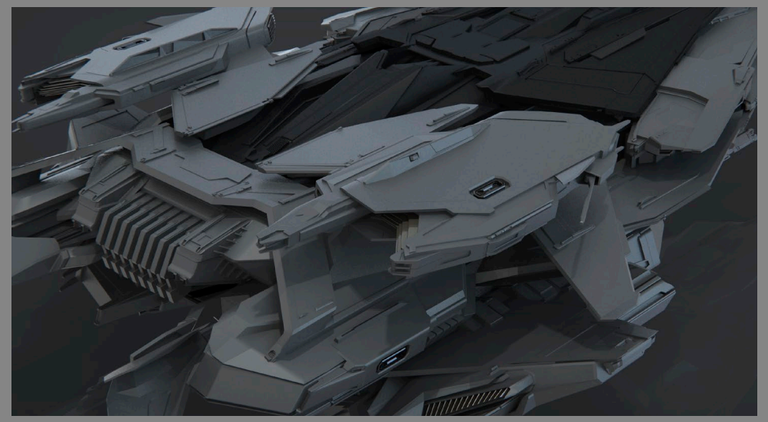


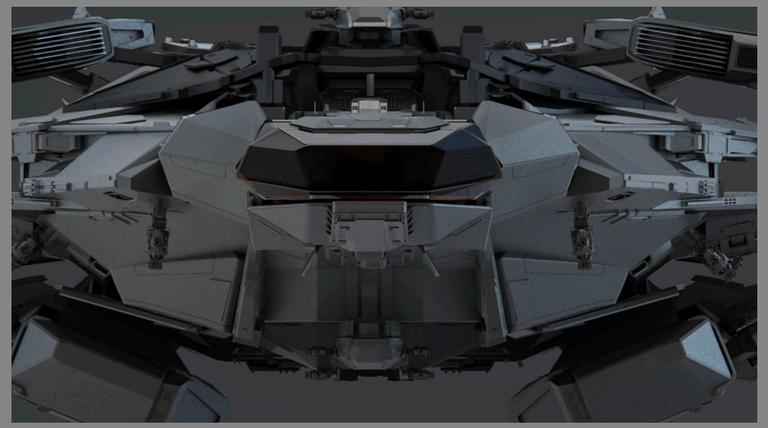






With the interior fully planned out and the exterior design and dimensions confirmed, the ship entered the second-pass stage. Here, the team added significant detail around the model in preparation for the material, lighting, and level-of-detail passes.

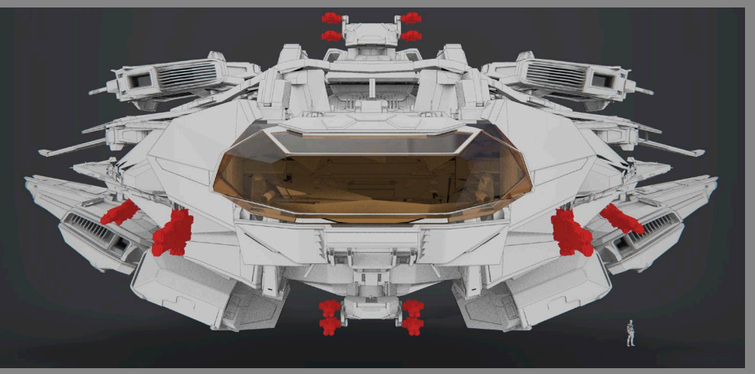


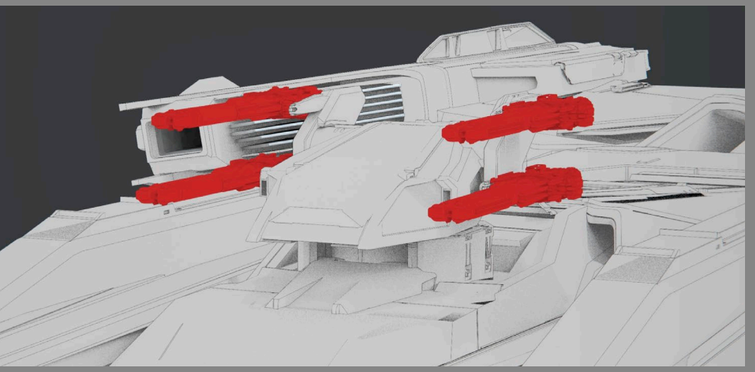


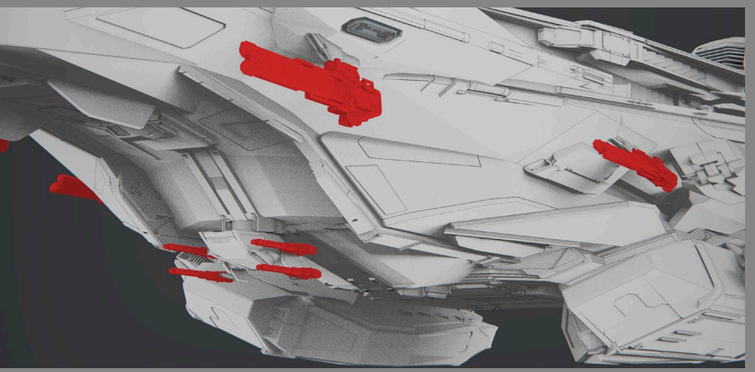


While the general weapon placement had been dealt with during the previous phases, a dedicated model was created to highlight the exact locations and to demonstrate which guns were pilot controllable and which required crew input.

The initial proposal for the ship's base paint was also submitted, featuring a blue and yellow color scheme. Although this would be changed soon after for a more discreet grey finish, the original proposed paint would be available separately at launch.







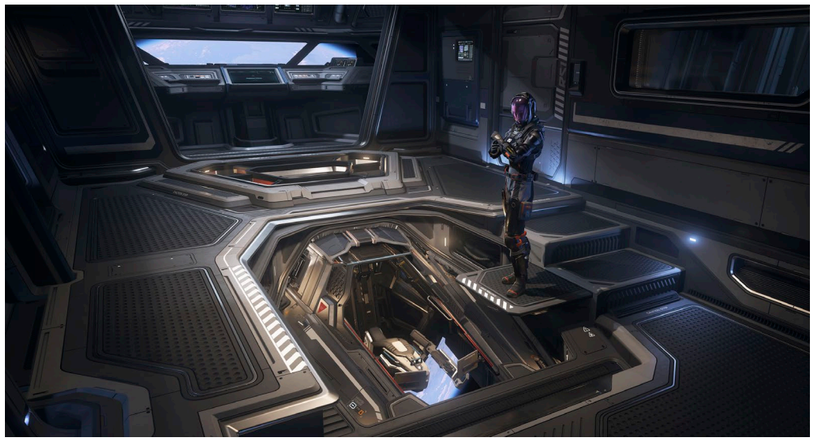




With the ship complete, it was handed to the Marketing Art team to create in-engine artwork to reveal it to the community. It also moved through the Narrative team, who officially named it the Constellation Mk V, with Chris Roberts himself giving it the new Centaurus designation.

The RSI Constellation Mk V Centaurus entered the 'verse as straight to flyable in October, 2026, continuing the legacy of the previous versions, both in-lore and with the *Star Citizen* community.











CONSTELLATION MkIV

A LEGACY IN COLOR

BEHIND THE SCENES:
RSI SKYLARK

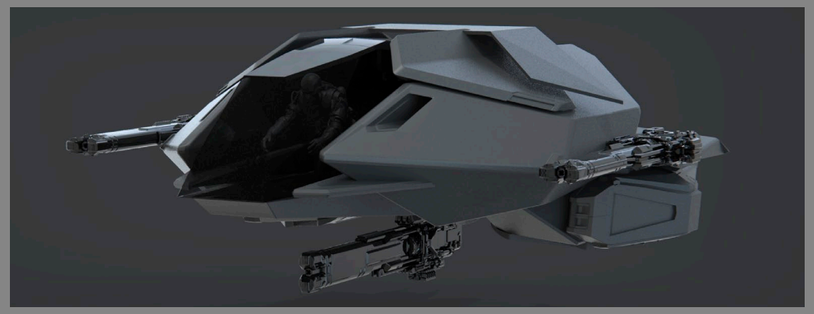
Before the development of the Constellation Mk V even began, a key element of the legacy ship had to be considered: what about the snub? While the potential was there to adopt the previous approach and utilize the latest Kruger ship, the Wolf was too big, having grown into a Light Fighter, and the most recent snub to enter the 'verse was from RSI's direct competitor, Drake. So, the only (and most fitting) option was to take the opportunity to expand RSI's lineup with an entirely new craft. The brief was provided alongside the Constellation MK V, though the initial headline did little but confirm its existence.

Additional detail was later provided, as both ships would need to be developed in tandem due to the unique docking method envisioned by the Ships team. However, this new snub would also be designed to compete with the smallest ships already in the 'verse, rather than be treated solely a component of the new Constellation.

RSI SNUB FIGHTER

- Companion ship to the RSI Constellation Mk V, capable of docking directly to that ship.
- Equivalent in role to the Mirai Fury, capable of docking directly to the Constellation Mk V, so must be enterable from the ground, EVA, and via docking, like the Merlin. Features a larger-than-normal fuel tank for extended flight times. Bespoke integrated 10x S1 missile rack.
- Dimensionally should not exceed Mirai Fury in compacted state to ensure maximum packability into other ships (4m x 6.5m x 3m), but can have a transition state to change shape when in flight.

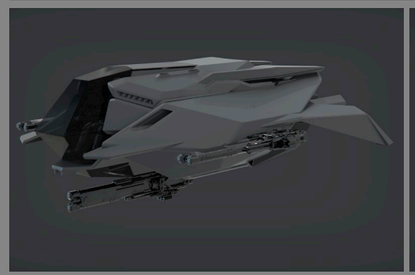
The kit-bashing stage began with the team creating six general directions, using a variety of existing cockpit and pilot configurations while ensuring the entrance was from underneath to support the planned docking approach.





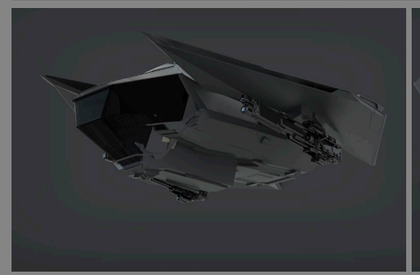
















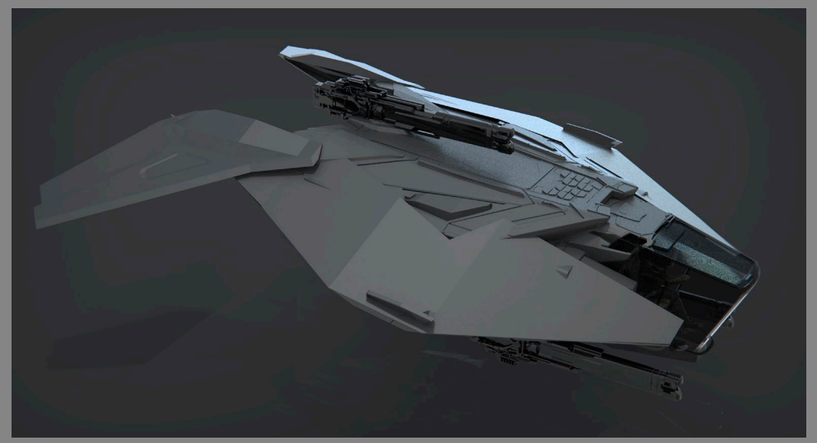












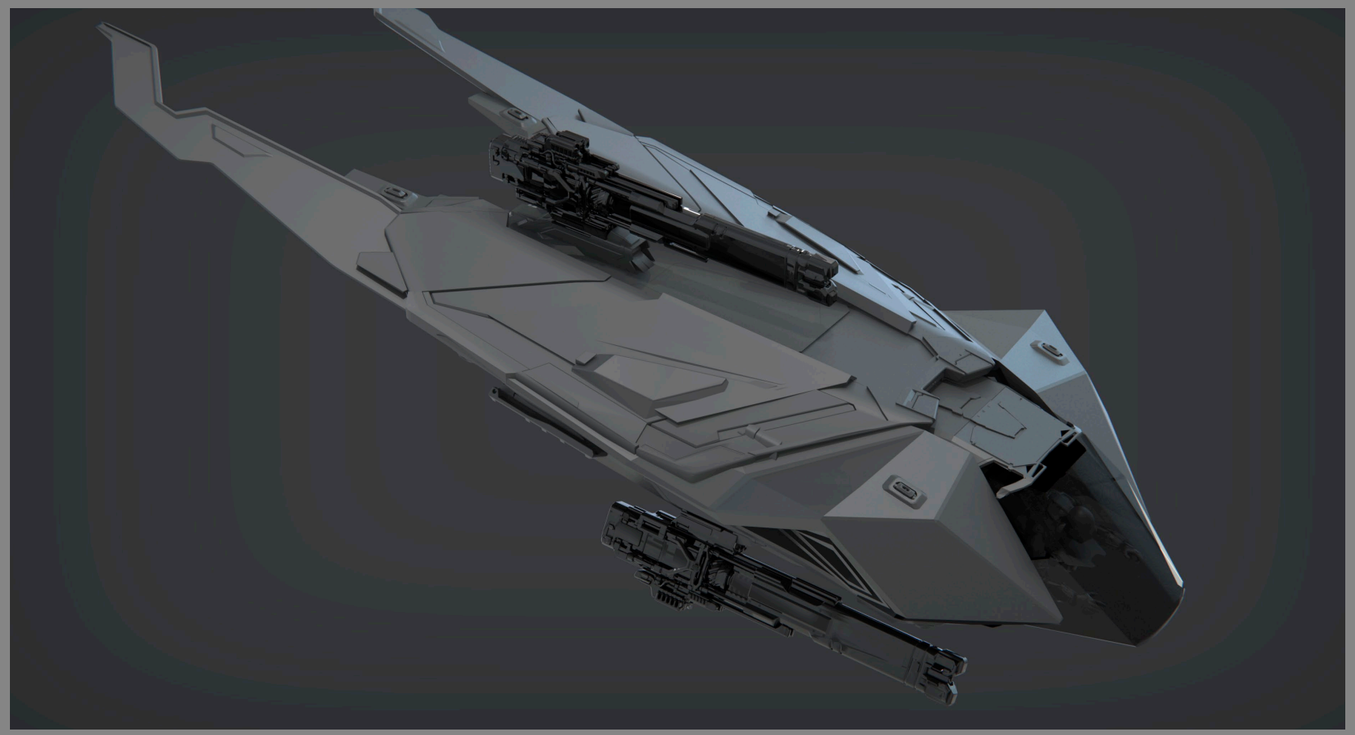




EXPLORATION 1

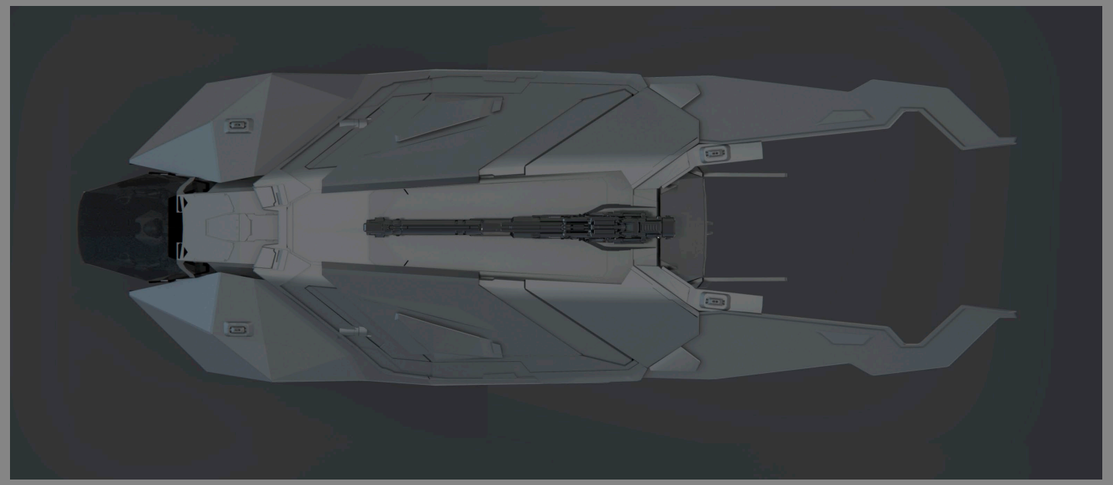


From the initial exploration, the concepts that used the bike-like Mirai Pulse pilot position were preferred, as it gave the new snub a unique cockpit layout not seen before in a full-size ship. Three models were chosen to further explore this prone-style layout.

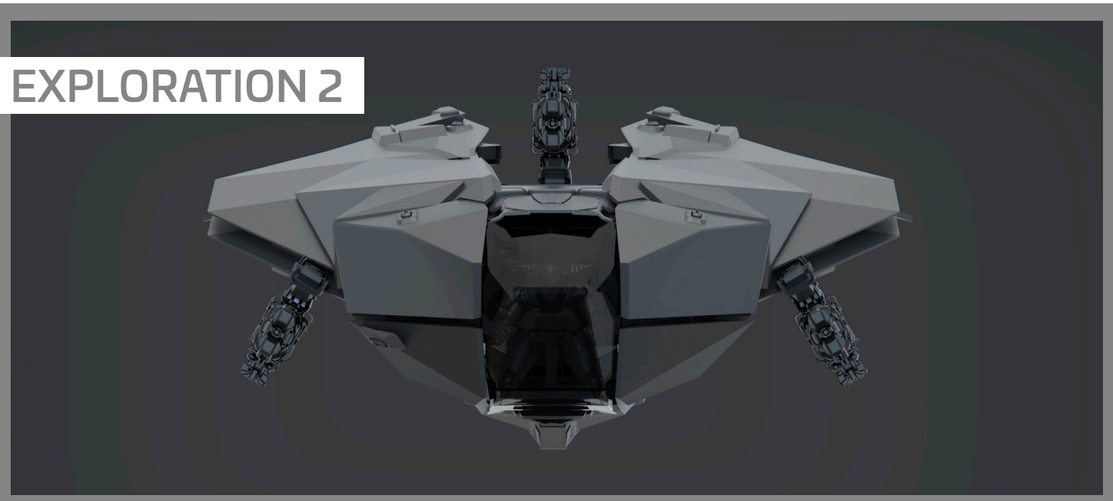


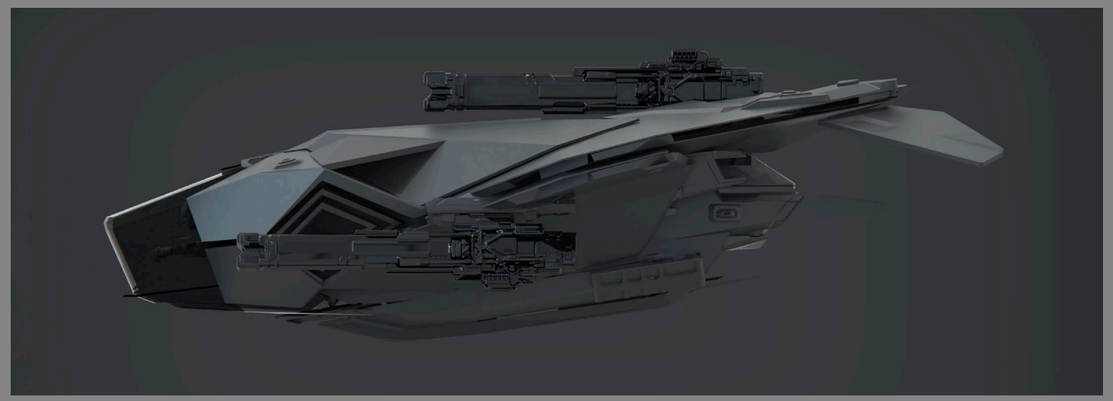






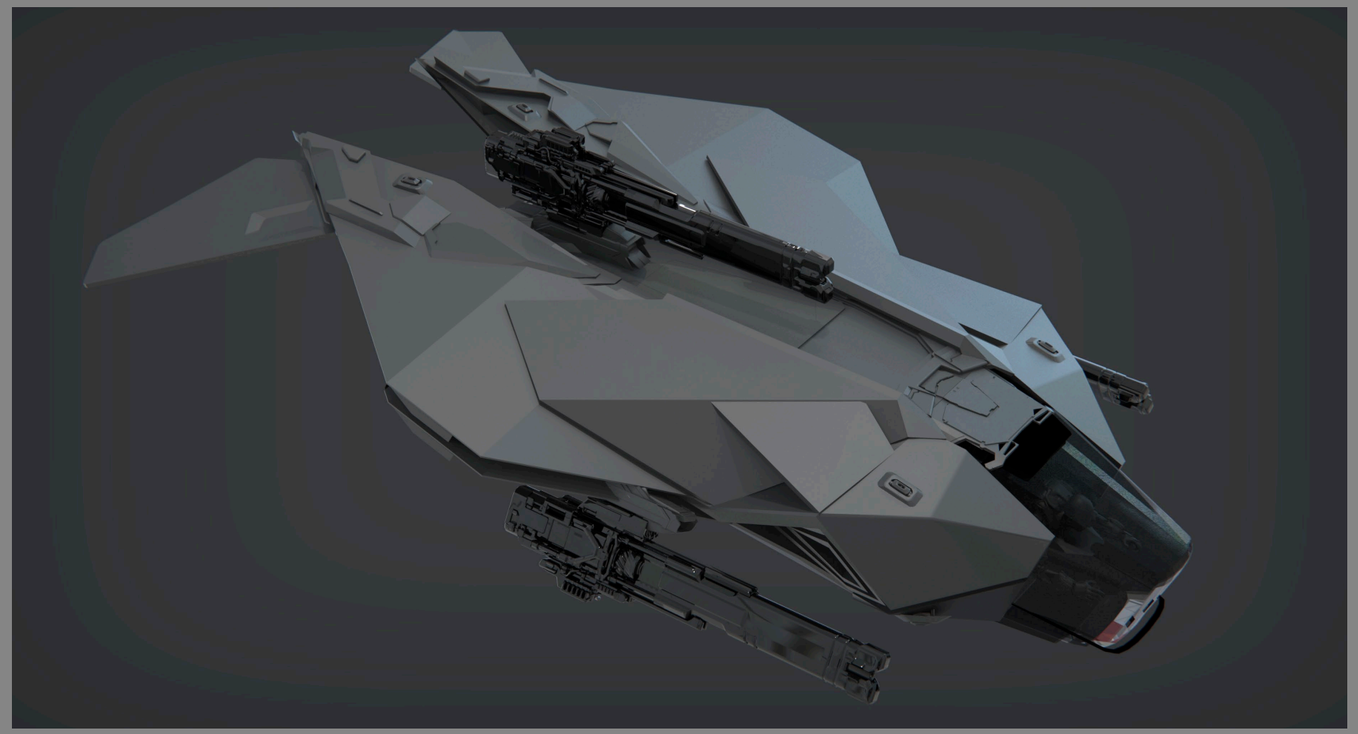
EXPLORATION 2





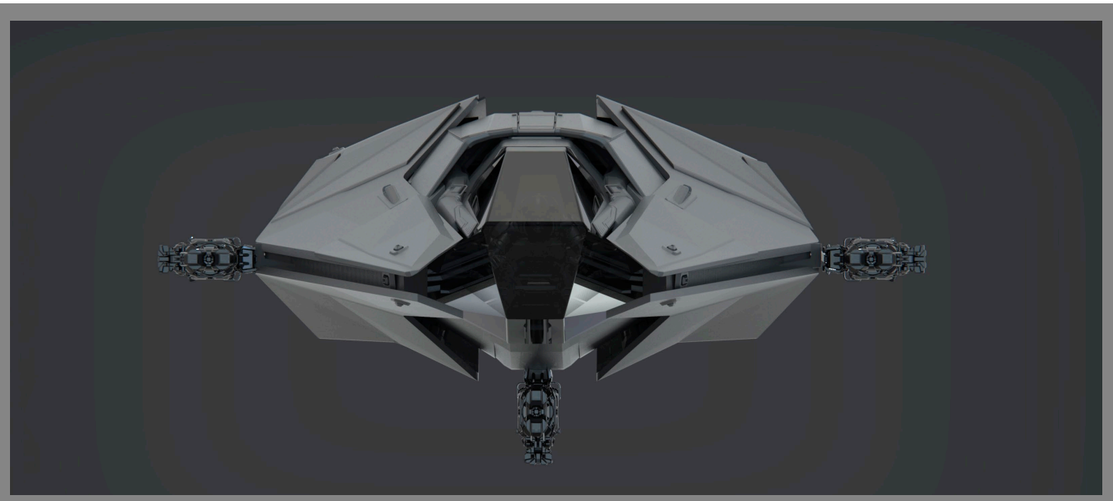


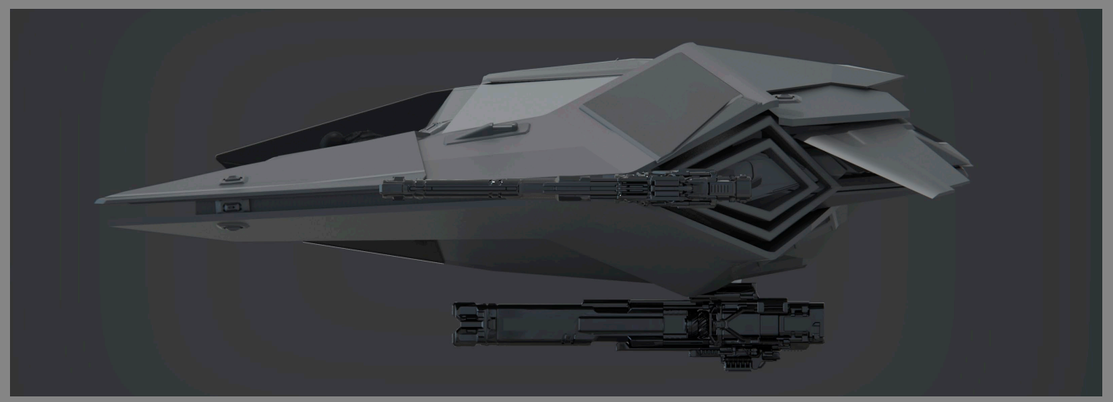




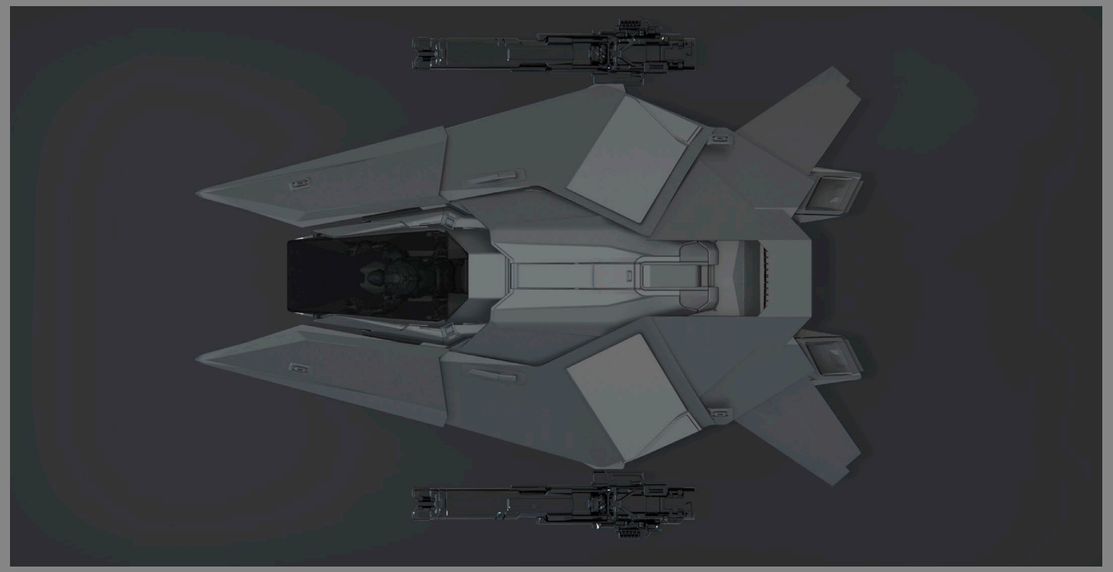
EXPLORATION 3











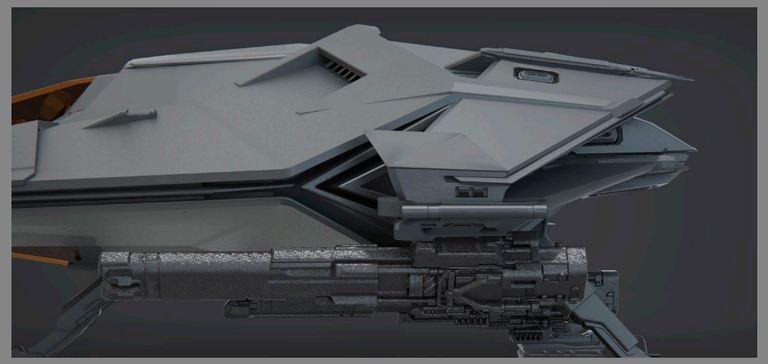


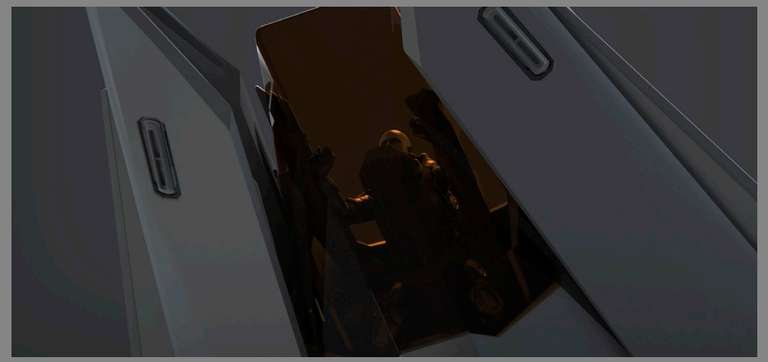
Upon review, the third design was chosen and subsequently updated following Chris Roberts' feedback, which requested more aggression in the overall shape and more movement from the wings between landed and flight modes. With the updates, the overall concept was approved.















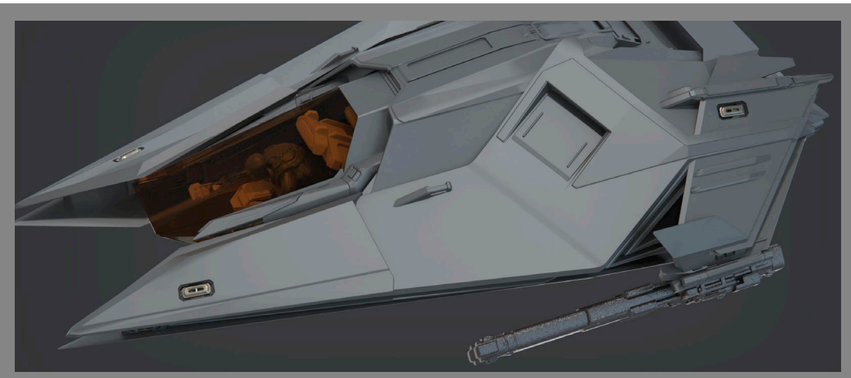


The next pass refined the design, adding the various levels of detail, geometry, and weapon designs. The armor plating was also tweaked to better reference the Constellation Mk V, which was simultaneously progressing through the ship pipeline.













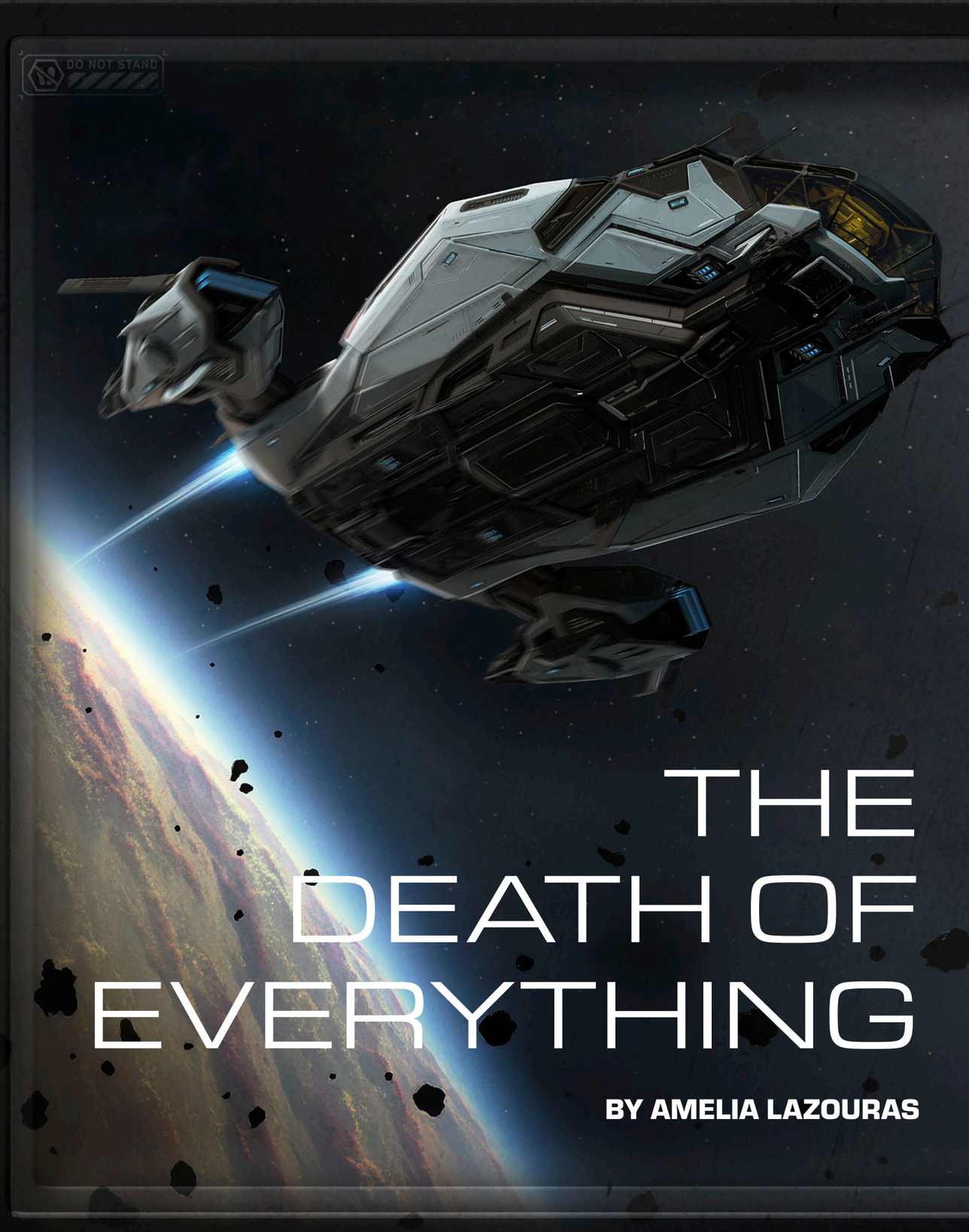


Further reference was made to the snub's mothership in the proposed base paint, which matched that of the Constellation. Like its parent ship, though, it would be toned down for launch, with the suggested blue and yellow finish available as a standalone paint.

The animations for the wing deployment were also finalized, ensuring it fit the dimensions specified in the brief.



Although launching with the Constellation Mk V Centaurus, the Skylark will be available separately at IAE 2956 as a companion option for other non-RSI ships and as a competitor to the Mirai Fury, Drake Pitbull, and diminutive Kruger ships.



THE DEATH OF EVERYTHING

BY AMELIA LAZOURAS

Over the last few months of searching, Sinead had grown familiar with her sister Marley's ship in the way a virus familiarizes itself with the body it invades. The lungs of the air filtration system, the arterial halls, steel-pipe bones. Marley, the brain as its captain, and her crew, the blood of this machine. All maintaining the health of the whole and looking at Sinead, an outsider to this mechanism, like a plague they wish to dissolve.

"Are you listening, Sinead?"

Marley's clear voice snapped her back into the room.

"I-what, sorry what did you say?"

Marley sighed, leaned back into her pilot seat and pointed to the safety sticker on the co-pilot dashboard that Sinead had been absentmindedly picking at.

"I said, 'How many times have I asked you to stop peeling my ship apart?' This ship's third hand, I'd rather not add anything else to fix."

"Oh, sorry..." Sinead muttered, attempting to re-stick the corner, though months of nervous picking had already disintegrated the adhesive.

"Girl, I'm kidding. Just leave it."

After a moment of painful silence, Marley flipped the controls to autopilot, spun her chair to face her sister and handed her a stress-ball from her dashboard.

"Look, Sinead... I know we're nearly there but--"

Sinead looked up at her sister, fingernails digging into the foam ball. She already knew what was coming.

"This lead is *good*, I swear. It's going to be him this time."

"How many times have you said that Sinead? The last three, four times have been 'good leads.' I just... he's been missing for over three months... I hate to say it, but we gotta be *realistic*, you know?"

There it was. 'Realistic'. *A sentiment for those with the privilege of never having lost someone*, Sinead thought. Marley's never been in love, never wanted kids, never even had a pet to care for.

How could she even begin to understand what I'm going through?

Marley sighed.

"Look, you know I miss Nick too, and that I'd do just about anything to make you happy again, but Sinead, I can't watch you face another disappointment if we don't find him. I love you, and I feel for you..."

The silence crept back as the two remained looking at each other. Sinead could see the possible responses dance across Marley's face; concern, anger, anxiety, and finally...

"It's a good lead."

"Okay... but please, I need you to promise me that this is the last time. For both our sakes."

"... I promise."

The women were startled by a knock at the cockpit door. It was Alice – the short, stocky and, as far as Sinead was aware, perpetually sour-faced mechanic aboard the *Historia*. She was leaning on the doorframe, arms crossed, making a special effort not to acknowledge Sinead.

"Cargo's fully secure. Ready to land when you are Captain."

"Thank you, Alice. Tell Yuto and Oscar to strap in."

Alice gave Marley a nod and left, without so much as a glance at Sinead.

Marley took the ship out of autopilot as the smog ridden planet approached and carefully descended. As the ship reached the surface of the planet, Sinead could faintly hear the *Historia's* metal skin sizzle in the acidic atmosphere. The shields flickered ever so slightly.

"Welcome to Hades III," Marley muttered under her breath, "Let's hurry this up."

*****

The environment inside the ship wasn't much better than outside. The silence was heavy as the crew busied themselves in preparation for their venture towards the shipwreck, barely visible in the distance. None of the crew spoke up, but Sinead knew what they were all thinking

What if it's not Nick? What if it is? What if he's dead? Will Sinead be able to cope no matter what happens?

Sinead began to reach for a spare spacesuit when Yuto, the crew's youngest member, sheepishly spoke up.

"Ah, hi, ma'am? I'm very sorry, I think you're, well, supposed to stay here for this part. For safety, you know..."

"Don't tell me what I can and can't handle," Sinead barked, which caused Yuto to skittishly look away.

Alice, who had just finished holstering her firearm, firmly pressed her hand on the spare suit, preventing Sinead from taking it.

“Nope, you know the drill. You stay here; we check it out.”

Sinead glowered at her.

“Not without me you won’t. Not this time.”

Yuto shifted awkwardly, but Alice stood her ground.

“Yell at me all you want, but you’re still not going. This planet’s particularly rough and, let’s be honest, we can’t have you in the way if there’s anyone here. Besides, you’ll still have Oscar onboard in case you need someone else to snap at.”

Oscar, the ship’s old, cranky co-pilot peered his head around the doorway upon hearing his name. After realizing whatever was being discussed didn’t concern him, he disappeared back to work.

“It’s not your call,” Sinead said, her hand still on the suit.

“You’re right,” said Marley as she walked past them both, fully suited up, not making eye contact with Sinead, “It’s mine.”

Sinead watched as the away team exited the airlock and quickly disappeared into the smog-filled wasteland without her, at least until Oscar shouted at her to close the hatch before she put any more unnecessary pressure on the air shield.

*****

Sinead woke with a start at the sound of the emergency hatch alarm blaring. How long had she been asleep? Her brain barely had time to catch up before she arrived at the hatch and saw the crew dragging something toward the ship. She recognized the spacesuit. She’d bought it for him the day before he left her.

Nick.

Marley’s crew hauled her husband to an open spot in the cargo bay, laid him on the floor, clumsily sliding various mining tools out the way.

Yuto sprayed them all down with decontaminant while Sinead pushed through the crowd to look at him.

“Is… is he…?”

Alice exhaled deeply as she tore her helmet from her head, shaking out her hair.

“He’s fine. Pretty dehydrated I’d guess though, fainted from the shock.”

“Any others?” chimed Oscar, who had brought bottles of water with him. Alice and Marley took theirs gratefully, but Yuto barely registered him, standing silent and terrified.

“No… well, no live ones. Yuto found ‘em, a dozen or so huddled together in the ship’s dining area.” Alice replied as Oscar tried to put a hand on Yuto’s shoulder.

Sinead had stopped listening. The thought of the many who didn’t make it didn’t even phase her. Her husband was alive, not just alive but right in front of her. Carefully, she began to remove his spacesuit to see what condition he was in. As each piece was removed, a well of dread washed over Sinead as she saw how malnourished he had become – his bones so prominent they looked at risk of shredding the skin around them.

Nick began to stir. They gathered around, trying to lift him in a sitting position. As his situation came back into focus, something seemed to click as his eyes immediately widened. The scream was worse – a piercing shriek like an animal in a trap.

Panic. That’s all Sinead could register as Marley shoved her out of the way to try to pin him down. Oscar joined her at Nick’s shoulders, with Yuto attempting to keep his legs still, all while Alice urgently shouted about where he was, telling him repeatedly, “You’re safe! You’re safe!”

With all the noise, Sinead could only catch a few words of what her husband was screaming.

“No! … get away! … not… too late… kill you! …”

She couldn’t take it anymore. Sinead couldn’t bear to see her husband so scared, so threw herself onto Yuto and pulled his arms away from her husband. Though he was bigger than both Sinead and Nick, the surprise of her attack made a hand slip, and that’s all it took for Nick to land a hard kick to Yuto’s face. Yuto staggered and fell back. The sound of his skull cracking on the corner of a Bexalite crate echoed through the hold, bringing the chaos to a screeching halt.

*****

If it weren’t for Marley remaining firm with the rest of her crew, Nick would have been thrown from the ship. Instead, he was sealed in the Captain’s Quarters, which, as the only room on board with a lockable door, acted as a makeshift prison.

“Thank you, Marley,” Sinead whispered as Alice stormed off, face red with angry tears, followed closely by Oscar.

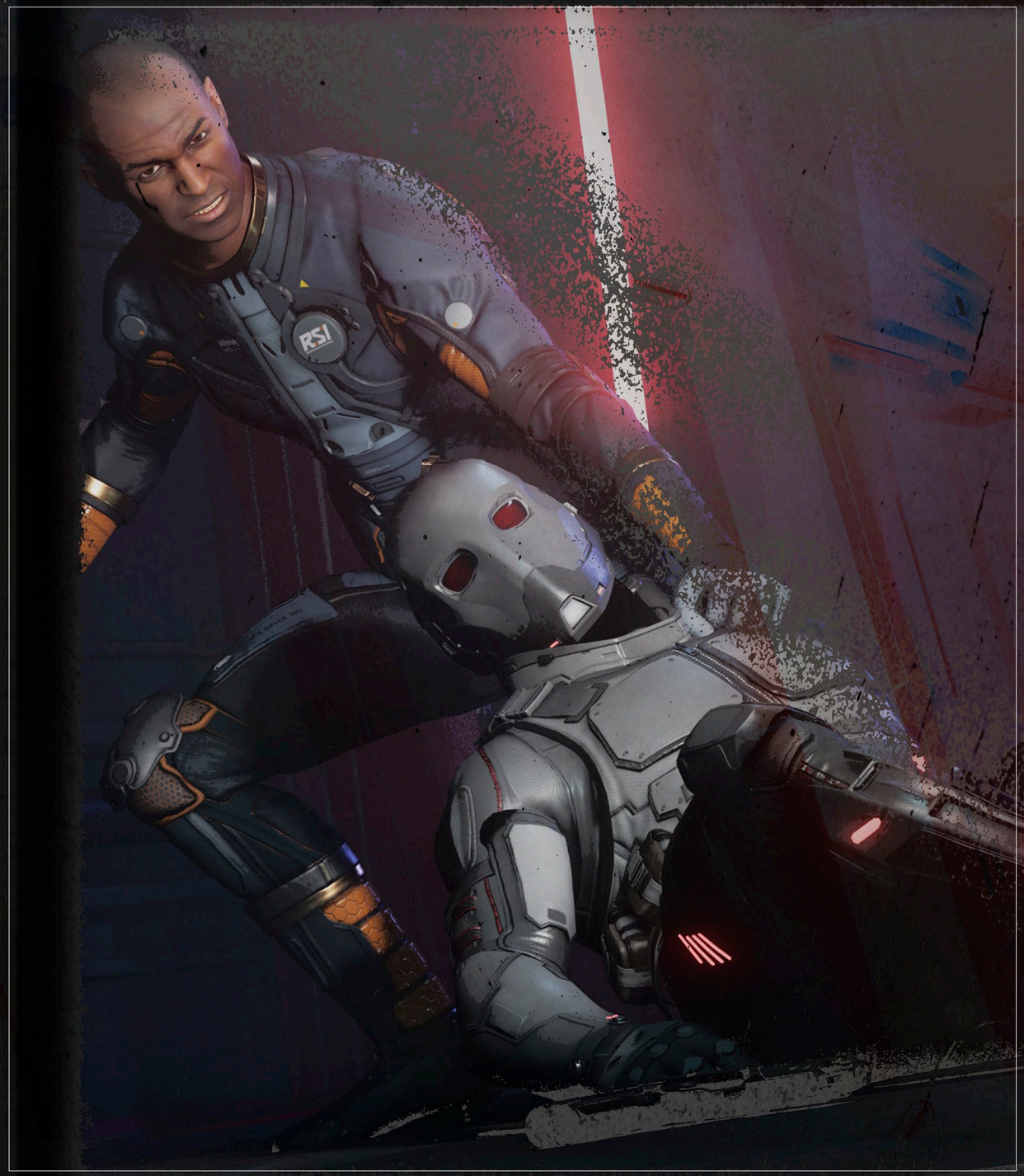
Her sister didn’t reply at first, instead looking down at her still bloody hands from when she tried and failed to stop Yuto’s bleeding.

“I’m… going to have one last look around the wreck…”

Marley retreated, leaving Sinead alone to watch Nick through the small hatch next to the sealed door. He had been laying on



DO NOT STAND



the bed unmoving since discovering he couldn't break free from his makeshift cell.

"You must be starving. Please, try to eat something."

"No... I can't..." He shoved the protein bars she'd left in the room for him on to the floor away, his face bathed in fear and urgency. "You... you need to stop eating too. It's too late but... maybe you can stave it off a while..."

There it was again, "too late."

"Why do you keep saying that?"

For the first time since he awoke, Nick looked Sinead in the eye, appearing to study her face.

"Oh, oh Shay... you shouldn't have come here, but... I'm..."

Sinead tentatively reached for Nick through the hatch, and at first, he stepped back from her. But, after a moment, he cautiously allowed her to cup his cheek in her hand as months' worth of love and longing overwhelmed them both.

"It's selfish, but I'm glad I got to see you, at least once."

"I don't...?"

Nick took a deep, shaky breath, and leaned in close.

"If we leave Hades III, we'll be the death of everything."

*****

Bileworms.

The word sounded as disgusting as it was absurd to Sinead.

"We managed to finish our original charter, but while we were flying back home, we got a tip from one of our sources that Hades III had some remote structures of archeological significance deep underneath the planet's surface. Figured if we could get here before the Department of Xenoarcheology we could at least get some recognition for the discovery. But," Nick paused, "There's a reason the DoX haven't come looking here before. We had our ship reinforced to withstand the toxic atmosphere, but we discovered too late that it wasn't enough."

Nick had begun to curl up again as he continued, a notable strain in his voice now.

"We also discovered too late that we'd brought *them* back from the caves. The worms. It was... unbelievable how fast people began to change. Food seemed to be the catalyst; with every meal, my crew became increasingly insatiable – managed to devour five months' worth of food rations in barely two. I'd gotten hit with a bout of the flu shortly after we arrived in Hades, so not being able to stomach food let me see the signs. I... the only thing that kept me going was the hope that I could cure them, but... but I was too late..."

Nick took a deep breath.

"As they ate more and more, the few of us that managed to fight the urge to eat began to see that something was moving, *wriggling*, under our skin. When we tried to dig them out, they would retreat deeper into the body. Even though we couldn't see them anymore, we could feel them, gnawing at our insides as we kept eating, until they got strong enough to not have to rely on us feeding them... they started feeding on our organs."

Nick grabbed at his own stomach. Sinead reached over to touch his arm.

"We- We need to get you to a medstation. They can--"

"It's too late for that! You didn't see them, Shay, they weren't... once they're inside, there's nothing that can be done..."

Nick turned his head toward Sinead, desperate fear in his eyes.

"As it eats, it rapidly reproduces, each one starting small until it devoured its organ – the stomach, the intestines, kidneys, liver, lungs – kept the person alive by mimicking the body's functions with their own. Once one gets to the brain, that's it. My crew... my friends, turned completely in a matter of hours. They'd hobble around as if on strings, eating anything they could find, scream obsessively about leaving. Even throwing themselves at the already destroyed engine if it meant a chance of escape. Whoever they used to be, they weren't themselves anymore."

The realization crept up Sinead's spine like tendrils of ice as the words fell from her mouth with painful sluggishness.

"And when you said we're all infected..."

Nick's eyes began to well up with tears.

"All it takes is a touch... When you pinned me down... I'm so sorry, I tried to warn you..."

The couple sat in teary silence for a moment that felt like hours while Sinead grappled with the gravity of their fate. If what Nick said was true, then this was really it. All those months of struggle and pain, only to have one single moment of joy before the rest of her life was forcibly snatched away.

But something else came to mind as she looked into his eyes. Her wedding day. She remembered thinking back then, basking in the glow of his beaming face as he put the ring she still wore now onto her finger, that if the world came to an end at that very moment, she would die happy with him.

"How long do we have together, Nicky?" She gently whispered.

Nick thought for a moment.

"I... I don't know, it's different for everyone... I've managed to stave off mine by starving myself as long as possible, but it only postpones the inevitable."

Sinead tried to fight the pang of sorrow at his suffering by combing her fingers through his matted hair.

"You might last a while before you lose yourself, but the others... They're at my ship now, right? I heard your sister... The whole place is crawling with them; I'm sorry, but they'll be gone before they realize what's happening to them."

They stood in silence for a moment, before Sinead spoke up, more seriously this time.

"Nick, we need to tell the others what's going on. Marley can—"

"No."

Sinead was taken aback by his quick, stern answer.

"But... she's my sister."

"She's not. Not anymore."

She stood still for a few minutes. Of course, she wanted to respond, but a nagging thought held her tongue. Is Marley still Marley? Is Nick still...

For a moment, the pair stared at each other. She took in his now unfamiliar appearance. Quickly, however, her doubts were quelled by the soft, reassuring smile that crept up on Nick's face – it was a look she had held onto these past months alone.

The smile faltered as they felt the vibration from The *Historia's* engine roaring to life. *Marley and the others must have come back already, Sinead thought.*

"No, no, we can't leave." Nick grabbed her through the hatch, his smile replaced with sheer panic. "Let me out, Shay. Now."

"Why-"

"We'll tell them, alright? Get them all together and we'll come up with a plan. Together. But right now, we can't let them leave the planet."

Sinead's hands moved to release him without conscious thought. Before she could consider the consequences, Nick was already gone, bounding down the hall towards the cockpit.

*****

Sinead had found Marley and Alice huddled together in the cargo bay, next to a cryopod containing Yuto's body. They were speaking in hushed, rapid whispers.

As Sinead watched them closely, she analyzed every inch of exposed skin, listened to the ever-so-slight differences in their mannerisms; their frustrated sighs, their shared longing for escape from Hades III. Once, Sinead had caught Alice giving a small, unnatural jerk in her stomach, but Marley didn't seem to notice... or maybe pretended not to.

Though Sinead was used to the distance between herself and her sister's crewmates – as though they were all in on a joke she wasn't part of – this separation felt... sinister. Hostile. Did they know what they would all eventually turn into? Had it already happened?

Her own stomach churned instinctively. Was it even her stomach anymore?

Their whispering ceased the moment they noticed Sinead watching them from the doorway.

"I need to tell you something... *both* of you." Sinead finally uttered.

Alice and Marley looked at each other apprehensively, before Alice gave Marley a nod. They all felt the ship give a familiar rumble as it shifted into autopilot. *I'm running out of time*, Sinead thought.

"We have to tell you something too, it's about Nick—"

"I already know," Sinead cut them off, "Nick told me what happened on his ship. There's this parasite, it infected the crew, changed them."

"Parasites? What are you-- no, no Sinead, he..."

"Listen," Alice interjected, "There's something *wrong* with him, Sinead."

"Yes, exactly! There's something wrong with all of us-"

"For fuck's sake, I told you she couldn't be reasoned with Marley. Listen, Sinead! We saw his ship, the bodies were—!"

The ship suddenly gave a lurch, before thudding back onto the surface of the planet, hard. The straps holding up Yuto's cryopod threatened to snap at the jolt.

"Hell, Oscar, are you a pilot or not?!" Alice screamed down the hallway. But Sinead wasn't listening, her attention focused entirely on her sister, who held her gaze in silence.

"You have to believe me."

But where Sinead had hoped Marley would stand up for her, or at least try and play her usual mediator role, her sister only solemnly dropped her gaze.





"I've stretched my neck out for you time and time again, dragged the people that trust me to keep them safe into your mess because I felt like... like I owed you... But what did that get me? My friend... dead, and the rest of our lives in *danger* for the sake of a... a *lunatic*! So no, I'm not going to enable you any-!"

The door to the cargo bay swung open and Nick trudged in. Sinead smiled at him, relieved that he could explain, until she noticed the blood on his face and left hand, his right hand dragging something behind him. Before Sinead could find the words, Nick flung Oscar's mutilated body onto the floor.

Sinead could barely hear the others scream over the sound of ringing in her own ears. Her mind was foggy, processing in slow motion as her eyes drank in the sight of Oscar's innards in his sunken, hollow stomach cavity. The only thing that snapped her out of it was Nick's tearful voice.

"It's okay. It wasn't him anymore... He was trying to kill me. To kill us, Shay..."

Nick pointed a blood-soaked finger at Oscar's insides. Sinead tentatively looked closer and could swear she saw his intestines... wriggle ever so slightly.

"See, Shay?! All of you! You see it?! They move! They-"

"What the *fuck* did you do?! Sinead, get away from him, now!"

It was Marley who cut him off. She was holding Alice, who could barely stand up, as best she could while tears streaked down both their faces.

"I saw those bodies on your ship; I know what you did to them. You..." she could barely get the words out, "You tore them apart."

"I had no choice."

The bullet ripped through Nick's stomach before anyone could react. Alice, still on the floor, shook as she held her gun in trembling hands. Without thinking, Sinead threw herself at Alice, wrestling for the gun with all her strength.

BANG!

Another bullet, an accidental fire, shredded through Alice's leg during the chaos. Screaming, Alice's hand on the gun barrel slipped, and Sinead backed up to where Nick was doubled over in a pool of his own blood. Marley, who had been paralyzed with fear, dropped to the floor with Alice, trying her best to stop the blood oozing out of her leg.

Sinead trained the gun on Alice as Nick whispered in her ear.

"I... told you, Shay. They're... trying to kill us...

Marley held Alice in her arms, sobbing, looking at Sinead with pleading eyes.

Nick put all his remaining strength into gripping Sinead's arm, his fingers digging into her skin.

"It's not them anymore."

"Please, just, wait-" Sinead stammered.

A flash of anger plastered Nick's face.

"Are you too far gone too?"

"I, no I'm not--"

"You've been feeling it too, haven't you? You can feel them working."

Nick groaned as his grip gave out and his body slumped into the growing pool of blood leaking out of him.

"Stop it, Nick, you're scaring me!"

"*Good!* You should be scared!"

He took a deep, ragged breath and tried to hold his hand out to Sinead.

"But not of me, Shay." He spoke in that soft, soothing voice he always used to use to bring her down from anxiety. "You should fear *them*. Those... *things* aren't who you think they are anymore. They'll tell you everything you want to hear so they can escape. So they can infect more and more. That's why we have to stop them. While we can."

"No...! Sinead, please listen to me! We can fix this, we can get out of here, all of us; just give me the gun. This isn't you."

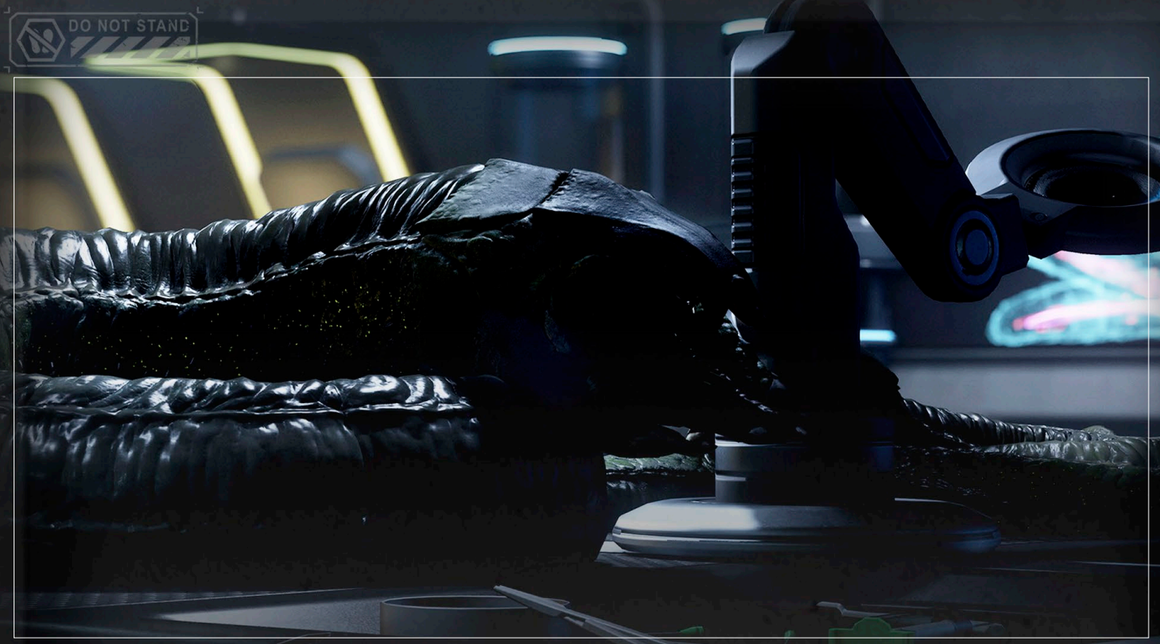
Sinead was crying so hard, she barely registered herself lift the gun to aim at Marley.

"Shay," Nick's arm fell back down to his side, "The only thing... that made me able to do what I needed to do to postpone the inevitable... was the thought of you. My... longing, doomed you here with me... I'll forever be sorry for that... But, please Shay... while you're still you..."

"Sinead, *please*, I'm your sister! *I'm still your sister!*"

"Help me save the world, my love."

****



click

"Testing, testing. Audio log: 01, ready to rumble... This is Dr. Bill Cooreman, Stonehearst Pathologist, brought on in response to an automatic emergency alert from The *Historia*, which was found crashed on Hades III. It is currently... 10:47 PM SET on Saturday the 14th of January, 2947. With me is Assistant Pathologist Dr. Sydney Stone-"

"Hi."

"...As well as the three men and three women brought in from aboard The *Historia*. Right, let's get started, Sydney."

shuffle shuffle

"First of all, this man here shows evidence of cryostorage – he'd been frozen for some time before we found him, so someone had to be alive to freeze him. I'd hazard a guess that this fellow here died before the rest."

shuffle

"Now contrastingly, this man here's been gutted almost completely. Gruesome. And these two women, shot... excessively, all close range too... Strange, seems the assailant was aiming to hit all their major organs, even after the victims had died."

shuffle shuffle

"Well, well, who do we have here? A "Mr. Nick Barrett" aye? He's an odd one. Sydney, would you like to tell us why?"

rustle

"He's only got one gunshot wound, as opposed to the others who seem to have many – in his stomach.

shuffle

"And this one... A Miss Sinead... oh, Mrs.... oh."

ahem

"Doctor Cooreman, we should check their internals. The recovery officers said something weird, something about a recording left on the adjacent ship, *Second Columbus*. The other team are analyzing those bodies, but they think this recording was relevant to these ones here too. Someone presumed to be Mr. Barrett, talking about some parasite?"

"Ah, yes, yes let's set up the scanner shall we?"

shuffle

scrape

vwrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
...
ping!

"The scan detected... nothing. According to this, all their internals were, and still are, perfectly normal."

THE END

IAE 2956