

REBUILDING A SPECIES: A FRESH START

BY JOHN R DAVIES

I spent a lot of time going from place to place. Most of my life in fact. My people were all dead, my family was dead and I had nowhere to go. What I didn't know was that others had survived. Out in the coldness of space was one of those colony ships we used. I found out about it after a friend of mine talked about it whilst we were both getting drunk in some dive bar. Said he found some strange ship that looked real old. We checked it out and I was surprised by what I found. The way colony ships work is much the same way the planetary escape pods (PEP) that carried me, George and Sandra. The only real difference is that you get to decide where those colony ships go. But they can be programmed to jump to random co-ordinates in a random series of dates, much like the PEP. Colony ships generally have several compartments, mostly for cargo. Three cargo holds, a birthing chamber and a bunkhouse for the colonists. The birthing chamber holds up to 25 birthing pods, but the one on this colony ship was three times that size. It seems that the ship builders removed one of the cargo holds to make room for the extra birthing pods. But the more surprising aspect came from the rest of the ship. One of the cargo holds had been converted into data banks with a sole interface where the door should be. I didn't know much about computers at the time (and still don't), so I left that alone for my companion to check out. I decided to check out the last cargo hold and the bunkhouse. Now you can imagine my surprise when I find not just a cargo hold full of colony supplies, but a bunkhouse that isn't a bunkhouse. It had been converted into a Cryo Chamber: an unusually large room with 600 very full cryo pods on three levels. I couldn't believe it. There were Devonians in every single pod. Suddenly, I wasn't as alone as I had been for so many millions of years. Obviously my friend wasn't too happy. Since the crew was still alive, any claim we had on the ship was null and void. I appeased him with some claim I knew about but never acted upon (I never cared much about being a salvager).

It took some time to use the terminal connected to the databanks to find who to thaw out of cryo. No one I recognized (I was a ten year old kid when my planet burned). The person in charge turned out to be a rather progressive individual who for the sake of no human translation will be called Ingrid. Ingrid was one of the few warriors produced by the civilization that fell before and was clearly had a lot of experience fighting. I judged this from all the scars visible on her* body. The process that thawed her from cryo was automated but took a long time to finish. I was excited, though weary. Long periods sat in a cry tube did not sit well with the mind of an intelligent being. Fortunately for me, Ingrid didn't seem fazed by all this. In fact, she wasn't even awake. She didn't wake up until three days later. I had already decided by that point that I wouldn't wake up any of the others until I could guarantee their survival. I wasn't going to lose this chance to have a people again.

You know, it's funny. I spent most of my life alone. Many would consider immortality to be a blessing rather than the curse it had become for me. I would often fall in love, only for it to die before my very eyes. But Devonians have a natural lifespan of 20,000 years. By all accounts, the Devonians in cryo were quite young, no more than 5,000 years of age (human equivalent would be mid-twenties). Given their age, and the existence of the birthing pods, it would mean nothing to find a habitable world and found a colony. All I would need to do is helm the ship.

[* All Devonians will be counted as female, although no such gender exists within the species. All Devonians are both male and female.]

One thing you need to know about all Devonian ships: they always have an AI on board. They weren't meant for military purposes before anyone wonders about them. They were used for navigation. Ever heard of Slipspace tunneling? It uses a form of quantum tunneling to get from one place to another very quickly. As with standard means of transportation, it has variable speeds. The lower speeds can be handled by any Devonian who has had the time to learn the equations. But the faster speeds require both AI and Devonian navigators. Like a massive plane that requires two pilots – one for each jet engine. The colony ship had an AI. Had being the operative term. For some reason, there was no AI. There were signs of one amongst all the data files I sifted through. But for some reason, it seemed to have been deleted. I don't know how anyone can delete an AI, especially on a colony ship like this. I did find the ship name. Roughly translated, it said "ECS Ulysses". Ulysses was a Devonian scientist known for discovering and explaining spatial paradoxes. Humans also have a hero named Ulysses. I cannot stress that they are unrelated in nature and time (obviously). The Ulysses, as I mentioned, lacked the necessary AI to get it to its current position. AI's not only help with the higher speeds of Slipspace, but could also take control of a ship when necessary, useful on a colony ship with a crew in cryo-stasis. There were no logs explaining why the AI had seemingly been deleted, so I made a mental note to ask Ingrid when she woke up.

When Ingrid did wake up, she wasn't what I expected. She was afraid yet confident, strict yet quiet. She gave off a sense of experience. Barely 5,000 years old and I suspected she saw than most her age would even dream of seeing. She'd certainly seen war. That's what her eyes told me. I didn't say anything, standing in awe as you do. I hadn't seen another Devonian since I killed my brother, and hadn't seen one unrelated to me since I was a young child. And now I stood across from one of my own kind millions of years after the supposed genocide of the Devonian species. That first meeting has left an impact on me. For years, I roamed without purpose or intent, wondering if there was any meaning to be had in an immortal life. That was the moment I knew. My purpose was to help rebuild my species.

Ingrid and I spoke for days. A simple greeting can be such a formal process that it can take hours to simply say hello. Today, such formal greetings are relegated to one of the three noble houses, but it would've been unthinkable to not perform the traditional greetings to another survivor. Ingrid was well spoken and knowledgeable. She was fully aware of my parents and their experiments, though she admitted that the colony ship launched before my birth. She was more than curious to find out about me, though ended up horrified by what I'd become. Couldn't blame her for that one. Calm and patient, Ingrid decided to put aside my past evils and focus on getting the other survivors out. I informed her that without a planet suitable for habitation, the waking up 600 Devonians whose last waking memories involve a full scale interplanetary Genocide. Not knowing anything about the wider multi-verse, we both agreed that I would find a new planet while she thawed out a small crew to help her get started.

It isn't difficult to find a suitable planet. The multi-verse is infinite in scope, with an infinite number of habitable planets to choose from. My issue was finding one where realistically we could get any resource we could ever need, yet be far enough away from other species that we wouldn't get noticed. Alternatively, the need for trading routes with other species is also important as no interstellar species can exist without trade. Fortunately, I know of the perfect

place. (Roughly translated) New Tellion is planet in the Gunitton System in the Loxa Galaxy. The galaxy itself has always been teeming with civilizations, with the downside being that they are constantly at war. The Gunitton System has always been uninhabited, being far enough away from the known trading routes and no intelligent species to make it worth the journey. New Tellion is rich in all sorts of raw elements such as hydrogen and iron. When you consider a lot of land suitable for agriculture is readily available, the New Tellion makes the perfect planet for a colony.

When I informed Ingrid of the planet I had chosen, she had already thawed out 73 Devonians. Thirteen of them were the crew of the Ulysses. The other sixty were the warriors sent to protect the ship and the precious cargo it contained. An argument ensued regarding the action Ingrid wanted to take. Her plan was to dump the colony off on New Tellion and then pursue the alien species responsible for the death of our culture. I've heard of a lot of absurd plans in my lifetime, but this is one of the dumbest ideas anyone has had in my presence. I told her as such and that it wouldn't mean anything anyway, since I had already wiped out the species. The Redvar was one of the species I had vindictively wiped out in my youth. This angered her. But she relented when I convinced her it was already too late to take revenge and there was nothing left to do regarding the matter. All we had was a planet and 500 other Devonians waiting for a new home. If someone were to attack the colonists, then any chance to rebuild would be lost. I essentially argued for her to lead them since no one else was in any position to do so. I couldn't do it, my past notwithstanding. And if she was meant to be the captain of the Ulysses, then she was officially in charge. Ingrid countered that warriors had no place leading the Devonian people. I still laugh about that to this day. Ingrid was mired in the pacifism of the old world. I told her we needed to change as a species, which perhaps the reason why we were here was because the warriors weren't in charge. Ingrid was unconvinced, but willing to give it a go.

Ten years later and a thriving colony had been established. Ingrid did come round to leading the colony. Shortly after the colony was established, I convinced her it would be a good idea to teach everybody how to fight. That included any children who were born. Note that I'm not talking about using child soldiers. I will make the point now as I did then: training should start at an early age, preferably around the age of ten. They would only be brought into active service when they reach adulthood (For a Devonian that would be around 500 years old). I made this point then under the reasoning that a single attack could wipe out the whole colony if the attack itself was large enough. Ingrid agreed with me, explaining that she had seen entire cities be wiped out overnight due to no warriors defending them. I did have an ulterior motive that I chose not to reveal: I wanted it to become part of our culture. You see, I've lived long enough to see all the variants of culture you can reasonable expect to see. And the strongest will always be the warrior cultures. Of course there needs to be those who farm and build, but if everyone knows how to fight and act like a soldier and can follow orders, then a lot more people can be saved. At the time, I didn't fully realize the implications of what I had done but I stand by my decision now as I did back then.

Thanks to the Birthing Pods in the Ulysses, our numbers grew from a mere 600 to over 1800 (we could only birth 60 at a time due to power issues). I was happy that the Devonian race had re-established itself, but worried about the future. Ingrid was worried too. The reason being was simple. The Ancients were watching. The Ancients were the creators of the Vault, the pocket universe. Normally, they would avoid interacting with outsiders. Even the species habiting the Vaults had minimal contact with the Ancients (they only traded for supplies

through Arbiter). It was common knowledge that they kept an eye on any races that had made it inside the Vault. Chances were they had found out about this colony and it made everybody uncomfortable. Who knows how they would react?

We wouldn't have to worry about them for a while though. Our more immediate concerns were with defense. Remember that pesky little detail that I mentioned plagued the Loxa Galaxy? Well, it intensified in such a way that threatened the colony. Not only had the multitude of active species detected us, many of them considered us hostile. They had space faring fleets, superior numbers and had been fighting longer than the colony had even existed. We already had a few scouts test our very limited strength. Sure, we had weapons and experienced soldiers. But with less than a hundred of said soldiers armed to the teeth with our equivalent of handguns and shotguns, it just wasn't realistic that we could hold out against an invasion force. That's where I came in. I had stuck around with the colony, acting as a sort of advisor. But the situation demanded I find a solution, as did Ingrid. I knew exactly where to go. In the last ten years, we had gathered a lot of valuable elements such as Gold and Silver. In fact, New Tellion was literally covered in Gold. The three active gold mines produced roughly 15,000 tonnes of Gold a month. That gave us a lot of money to barter with. My first thought was to buy ships with space-bearing weapons, but without the crews to operate them it would be a useless endeavor. But there was a solution. Anti-ship cannons were very common and the kinetic variants were very cheap. They had the added benefit of only needing crews of two people to operate them, meaning we could have a lot of them covering the colony. I didn't need too many, fifteen would be more than enough. The next thing to do would be to acquire an anti-air defense network. The biggest issue wouldn't be the space faring ships but the aircraft they'd throw at us. I didn't want to cheap out, so I went and "borrowed" the old colony ship. I bought a large cargo ship from a species whose name I can't be bothered to remember. The ship itself was fairly unimpressive, with only three space capable fighters, minimal single fighter defenses and one escape pod. But it had eight large cargo holds, two of which were technically joined (so they can be converted into a single fighter bay). It allowed me to fit both the fifteen plasma cannons and a midsized anti-aircraft defense network. Hell, it would still have room to spare if not for all the food and medical supplies I also acquired.

The situation would take a turn for the worse over the next twenty years. The colony would still continue to increase its numbers (from 600 at its founding to over 2400 in the thirty year span), but it would do so at the cost of ever increasing threats. Attacks became more frequent, but the plasma cannons and anti-aircraft network halted any aerial threats. On top of that, the decision to train everyone how to fight proved useful. The cargo transport proved to be more than excellent, not least because of the refits I ordered. The cargo ship had a name I had a certain attachment to: Illumi. The CTS Illumi would be refit with better defenses (1500 anti-fighter missiles, two nuclear launchers and a MAC) and the two cargo holds I mentioned above were adapted into single fighter bays. We'd eventually have ten single pilot fighters on the CTS Illumi and another twenty on the colony. This was on top of the crew complement. The CTS Illumi would be piloted by the twelve that served on the Ulysses (save for Ingrid, who was busy leading the colony) and another 50 for other roles (10 crew members that filled roles such as engineers and medics, 10 pilots and a unit of Marines). But the greatest additions came from the two AIs we had purchased from a friendly species (who are sadly extinct now). One was sent to the colony and the other was kept with me on the ship. The ship-bourne AI went by the name Filhar 18B6 (but we will call him Filhar) and was a welcome addition to the crew. He was funny

and cheerful and had the unique ability to make everyone around him laugh and smile. One of the major refits for the CTS Illumi was a new cold fusion reactor to replace the old nuclear power plant. In this respect, Filhar proved his worth ten times over. With the Slipspace engine and new reactor, the Illumi was able to travel at speeds most cargo ships would be unable to reach (remember what I said about AI navigators). Let me give you an example. It would take the Illumi six months to get from Earth to Jupiter before the refit, but would be able to do the same journey in less than two weeks after the refits (it was already an ancient ship when I bought it). The Slipspace engine was scavenged from the Ulysses, so wasn't as fast as I would have liked. From Earth to a planet in the Alpha Centuri system would take 3 months, for example. This made resupplies an uncertain thing given the situation in the Loxa Galaxy.

The Ulysses also had a few refits. I don't know how, but the engineers somehow added all sorts of weapons to the former colony ship. For obvious reasons, the Ulysses would never leave the system. But it could act as a warship. The refits gave it 1,000 anti-fighter missile pods, an underpowered MAC and several ship-based plasma cannons. The reactor was more advanced than anything we could acquire from the local galaxy, but was modified to put out more power. It was essentially an underpowered weapons platform. It wouldn't stand a chance against large fleets of destroyers or cruisers or even frigates, but would certainly do some damage against carriers and pirates (we had a lot of them). Compared to the warships we have now, it was a joke. But it did its job at the time.

You're probably wondering where this is all going. Many of you reading this already know. Thirty two years after the founding of the colony, we were attacked by a small fleet of warships. The fleet belonged to the Hundill Empire. Empire would be stretching it, since the only really controlled eight planets. Several of the other big players (The Axions, the Yandill and the Ilo Ferx) had at least 15 planets each. But the Hundill Empire was a vicious threat that wiped out the native populations of the any planet it controlled. Who knows why they would target New Tellion. Perhaps they had no reason. No communication was offered, they simply attacked. Three destroyers, two frigates, a carrier and a cruiser made up the fleet. The Ulysses wouldn't stand a chance and was destroyed after the crew decided to ram the enemy cruiser. The suicide move worked, but our airspace was undefended. Now, the plasma cannons had been automated and had been improved (we purchase thirty more cannons), meaning that they couldn't land their frigates anywhere near the colony. With the anti-air defense network, any direct attack would have been impossible. It ended up coming down to land based combat. They outnumbered us thirty to one and were backed up by several armored tanks. We had minimal air support, no tanks and a colony that by all accounts had no substantial military. But we had several advantages. Firstly, the colony was built into a mountain range. This was done to give us the advantage over the terrain, since the only way to access the colony was via three well travelled roads (to the farms). It made defending the colony from the ground much easier. Secondly, the training had paid off. Everyone knew how to fight and most of them turned into decent fighters. Not soldiers, but certainly capable of holding off skirmishes and the odd siege. The actual soldiers (of which there were 120) were tasked with fending off the tanks and larger attacks. I should note that the fighters and Marine unit on the Ulysses managed to get off the doomed ship and rejoin the colony (I'll explain in a minute). And the third and final advantage was the CTS Illumi, which wasn't in system when the attack started.

I should make things simple. Below is the designation between the different units with a brief explanation of how they were used. Please be aware, human names will be used for the designations:

- Colonial Infantry: The 120 soldiers based at the colony fulfilled the role of defenders. They never left the planet. The Colonial Infantry was split into three units that served different roles. Units Alpha and Bravo would defend the colony itself with support from civilian forces. Unit Charlie would use hit and run tactics to deal as much damage as they could to enemy tanks and bases. They took a lot of casualties before the conflict was over;
- Marines: Two units of marines existed. Unit Delta was stationed on the CTS Illumi to fend off any boarding parties. Unit Epsilon was stationed on the Ulysses for much the same reason. They managed to get aboard a dropship before the ship was destroyed. After rejoining the colony, Unit Epsilon joined unit Charlie in hit and Run tactics and caused serious damage before being wiped out themselves;
- Fighters: We had a total of 45 fighters at the time, but only thirty five were kept at the colony. They were used in support roles only, carpet bombing convoys and supply lines whenever the opportunity presented itself;
- Civilians: The civilians all had basic combat training, meaning they could defend themselves if needed but weren't in any position to be deployed as soldiers. But it was for the best that they were able to defend themselves;

It would be two months before I would find out what was going on in the colony. We hadn't yet developed an interplanetary communications network, since we didn't need one, so there was no way for the colony to send a signal for help. The Illumi had been given orders to search for an old warship we could use, preferably with some sort of ftl engine (Slipspace, war, anti-grav etc). We did find one (the DCW Calune, as it would be named), but it needed some refits in order to be bought back into service. The only reason we came back to New Tellion was to pick up the Marine unit that was intended for the warship as they were being trained while we were away. We were all in shock after seeing the small fleet. We tried to get in contact with the colony, but I'm guessing the fleet was blocking communications. We couldn't stay for too long as two Destroyers moved to intercept. I gave the order to cut and run with the knowledge that we couldn't do anything, even with survivors potentially still fighting.

The next 18 months were difficult. The crew was getting restless with many saying we should go back. I had to point out several times that the Illumi wasn't equipped to deal with a war fleet and having a single Destroyer wouldn't change anything. With limited funds and two ships to fuel and supply, I made the choice to put our services up for sale. We would transport cargo from one destination to another, taking whatever payment we could get. My ulterior motive was to hire some of the mercenary fleets that were prevalent on that galaxy. But we needed money before that was even a possibility. I was fully aware of the situation back on New Tellion, but there wasn't anything I could do. It would turn out that I was overly worried. The colony was being held, with Unit Epsilon being wiped out. From my understanding, Unit Charlie also suffered losses.

In the two years the Illumi and Calune spent in exile, we would hear snippets of the ordeal New Tellion was going through. A friend of mine had connections in the Hundill Empire and word had come down that they were struggling to take the colony. For whatever reason, they had

decided to not nuke the colony and had been in a stalemate for the two years since the invasion. I knew that the Devonians couldn't hold. I had managed to accumulate a decent amount of wealth and even gather some allies willing to help me (although many of them had their own reasons to hate the Hundill Empire). The tipping point came when an alliance was formed between my people and the Axions. They needed a steady supply of Gold but had already mined what little they had on their own planets. I approached them after hearing of this, mentioning the fact that New Tellion was rich in Gold. A deal was arranged where they would help me liberate the planet and the Devonians would let them set up a few mines at various points on the planet. With the money saved from all the cargo runs, I was able to hire some very ruthless mercenaries to help on the ground.

The Axions didn't waste any time putting together a fleet. Six Destroyers, two Carriers, four Frigates and two Cruisers, this was by far one of the strongest fleets they had mustered. Meanwhile, I had a single outdated Destroyer, a cargo ship and some less than reputable mercenaries. It was a good thing that the Axions were a very honest people; they weren't fond of betraying allies. I was hoping that the ensuing battle would be quick, but the Hundill Empire didn't go down easy. The battle between fleets was a long and hard fight. In the two years since the initial invasion, the Hundill Empire had swapped out their chosen ships. Now they had two Destroyers, a Carrier and three Frigates. We outnumbered them three to one. But they had superior ships armed with plasma cannons and shielding. In a fair fight, one Hundill Empire Destroyer was worth four Axion Frigates. And they had two. I stood on the bridge of the Calune and ordered the Illumi to descend onto the planet below. The Illumi was full of mercenaries and Axion tanks and infantry. It also had relief supplies provided by the Axions. All I could do about the colony itself was trust Ingrid to know what to do.

The only reason I took command of the Calune was because I had the most experience in space battles of any Devonian alive. Previously, I had spent time with Forerunners in another universe a few millions years previously. I was one of the few non Forerunners to serve under the military (their equivalent of a navy). It only made sense that I would assume command and take part in the naval battle. The DCW Calune was armed to the teeth, but it showed its age. There weren't any shields and had six plasma cannons on either of the ship. The Calune also had a kinetic MAC, but it was an older, underpowered version. With over two hundred missile pods and anti-fighter cannons, the Calune barely qualified as a Destroyer. The best course of action was to engage one of the enemy Frigates. They didn't have shields and were on par with the Calune.

I don't know how long the battle lasted. But the damage reports didn't lie. The Hundill Empire fleet had been destroyed in its entirety. Not a single ship attempted to flee. But it came at a cost. Five out of the six Destroyers the Axion provided had been destroyed. The remaining Destroyer had been gutted.... But had made it in one piece. The two Carriers hadn't been damaged. They had offloaded their precious cargo of single pilot fighters before moving away from the hellish battle. The Frigates sustained heavy damage but had made landfall before being destroyed (they had carried troops and supplies to set up staging areas on the planet itself). They would rejoin the battle after the first three Destroyers were themselves destroyed. Frigates are good all rounders. While they're better off as troop transports, the Axions used Frigates as giant battering rams, knocking enemy ships off balance. Only the two Axion Cruisers came out without serious damage. Both ships were armed to the teeth and were giant weapon platforms. Each cruiser had two MAC, eighteen Plasma Cannons and over 3500 anti-fighter missiles and

cannons on each side of the ships. Each cruiser had a personal shield. It wasn't very powerful, but any advantage is desirable.

As for the Illumi and Calune, well. The Illumi stayed on the planet, avoiding the battle at all cost. But the Calune took heavy damage. I remain thankful that I only had a crew of eight (including the AI Seran) and that none of them were injured or killed. Things looked even better planetside. The colony hadn't even been touched. Unit Epsilon had been wiped out and Unit Charlie had taken losses, but the colony had been saved. It seemed like the Hundill Empire spent more on its ship than it did on its infantry. Simple slaves, brutal and untrained. It seemed that the Hundill Empire didn't train its soldiers. This was the primary factor in the battles. We had trained everybody to fight whilst they seemed to train nobody. That is what saved us. I couldn't hide my relief. Ingrid was just as happy as I was that the colony was safe. Over 113 people had died, mostly civilians caught outside of the colony when the invasion happened. I honestly thought that we would take much heavier losses. But happiness was short-lived when Ingrid found out about the deal I made with the Axions. It took a long time before I could convince her that it was for the best.

Within 6,000 years, our population had grown from a mere 600 to over 150,000 Devonians. The occupation by Hundill Empire showed that training everyone was a good idea. It became a part of our culture, as I intended it to be. 150,000 Devonians, of which a third were non-military (mostly the young and farmers) and our fleet included 30 cargo ships, 70 warships and over 10,000 single pilot fighters. Best thing was, the Axions were helping us build the ships and in return we'd support them with Gold and military support. Eventually, the galaxy would stabilize as many of the civilizations collapsed (including the Hundill Empire and the Axions), but it wouldn't matter too much thanks to the next major event that would change the course of my life....