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HISTORICAL & INFORMATIONAL ARCHIVE

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HISTORICAL RECORDS:

ENTRY 9: The Decline of Windfall

354-PA's star is nearly identical in composition, mass, and visual brightness to Earth's own sun, further lending evidence to conspiracy theorists that argued for a greater purpose to the new solar system.



"If you asked me to envision a solar system that would serve as humanity's first step beyond our own, I think I would just point to 354-PA. It's perfect. Simple as that..."

GWYNETH MALCOLM, Scientific Consultant to the DCA

The utter disappearance of the Outbound Discovery Fleet led to a dramatic public backlash against the Windfall Corporation and the politicians it controlled. Critics denounced the haste with which the Bifröst Station was exploited and the lack of scientific understanding that had surrounded the entire event. Worse still was the public fury over the loss of trillions of dollars in taxpayer money. Windfall executives and US politicians vowed to present answers for the fleet's loss, but it was nearly six months before search teams were dispatched through the Station – a delay prompted more by bureaucratic infighting than fears of another disappearance. For weeks, months, and finally years, frequent missions attempted to recover the lost fleet. None of them found any trace of Outbound Discovery.

▲ PERFECT SYSTEM

Despite this apparent failure, the renewed voyages through the Bifröst Station did prompt a number of important scientific discoveries about the 354-PA system. A series of unmanned drones were sent to the system's various planets, confirming the viability of the second planet's

atmosphere. The planet's water reserves, too, were ideal for human consumption. Studies of the asteroid belt between the third and fourth planets found it to be rich in a number of valuable minerals as well.

While scientists hailed 354-PA as the "perfect system" for colonization, others were quick to point out that these ideal conditions – along with the Bifröst Station itself – were no mere accident. The discovery of the station had already led to the formation of any number of religious cults surrounding the object, and new discoveries only added fuel to the fire. Some embraced the idea of a ring as a "cosmic gift," while others denounced its usage.

Despite the backlash against the Guardians of the Gates of Heaven, the organization's numbers swelled after Outbound Discovery's demise. The Guardians had long decried divine punishment for the use of the Bifröst Station and many saw the fleet's disappearance as direct evidence of the claim.

THE RODRIGUEZ HYPOTHESIS

Still, American researchers – now assisted by a scientific partnership with the Martian Collective – continued to probe the infinite secrets of the Station and all that lay beyond it. While corporate interests generally gravitated toward 354-PA's economic value, scientists were fascinated by how the station might operate.

Though hypotheses abounded, the most widely-supported view was formulated by Carlo Rodriguez in 2177. According to the Rodriguez Hypothesis, activation of the relay had triggered an unknown force equidistant between the Sol System and 354-PA. Through inexplicable means, the midpoint – or rather something at the midpoint – was able to fold space in such a way as to allow for instant transportation between the two destinations.

How this was accomplished – and the source of the technology – remained a mystery, and little evidence could verify Rodriguez's claims. Still, the lack of a better-supported explanation meant that most researchers agreed with the idea for the time being.

ANTI-WINDFALL SENTIMENT

Despite the achievements of the period, the marriage between the United States and the Windfall Corporation was finally proving to be an unhappy one. Within the United States and her colonies, the four decades following the Outbound Discovery disaster were marked by great social upheaval and resistance to Windfall's influence. Protests and open riots reached a fever pitch when a third Windfall CEO was elected president by a historically-slim margin in 2198.

The rigged game had begun to expose itself. Many began to decry the loss of democratic values and demanded regulation of Windfall. Others took the opportunity to protest the striking disparity of wealth. On two famous occasions, protests turned deadly as security drones fired on angry protesters, killing dozens of civilians in both instances.

**"Windfall Starship Systems:
The Universe Awaits You The Few Who Can Afford It..."**

**FAMOUS PIECE OF SATIRE
Criticizing the Windfall Motto (2184)**

"THE LAST OF THE GUARDIANS

Seizing hold of the chaos, the ragged remnants of the Guardians of the Gates of Heaven overwhelmed the US naval escort around the Bifröst Station in 2205. Attempting to destroy the ring proved utterly fruitless, with even a nuclear detonation glancing harmlessly off the station's dark hull. The Guardians were already in a retreat by the time US forces arrived to crush the ragtag armada.

Unlike many other factions of the ACA, the violent actions and religious focus that had originally boosted their numbers failed to maintain the ranks of the Guardians of the Gates of Heaven after the defeat of 2205.

US agencies claimed the move to be a final act of desperation for the group. When US forces destroyed the Guardian fleet, they simultaneously crushed the remains of the organization's leadership. Shortly thereafter, the US resumed control of the station and the Guardians disappeared from public influence.

CHANGING POLITICAL TIDES

Despite the hopes of many politicians, even the elimination of the US's forty-year enemy was not enough to quench the anger burning against the government. When a major recession struck the US economy in 2208, the grip of Windfall on American policy was all but broken. By 2210, political favor had shifted overwhelmingly back toward populist parties, changing the political climate entirely. A new wave of legislators began to curb decades of corruption and restore key democratic principles within the US government.

Fearing a loss of both revenue and influence, Windfall executives and old-guard corporatists began to craft a new plan to reassert their interests. At the same time, populists looked for a way to restore jobs and rebuild the flailing economy. One obvious goal soon appealed to both groups: A new fleet needed to be built.

