Player Council Report

Quarter 1, 2022

What is the player council?

The Player Council is a player-advocacy group formed to help represent the interests of *Starbase*'s player base with respect to the game's continued development, invited at the behest of Frozenbyte to consolidate community feedback and weigh-in on hot topics such as gameplay trends and feature development. Overseen by the developers, the Player Council currently consists of 21 community members and has generated over 700 messages across nearly 60 topics of interest during its short existence.

Information available to the player council

As the Council is primarily concerned with the future of *Starbase*'s development, it is – by some necessity – privy to information regarding such topics as the prioritization of feature development, concept art, feature development, and (in broad strokes) near-future patches. Most frequently, the Council holds discussions about the conceptual design of the game, and is not involved in sensitive matters such as stat values, material changes, etcetera. Council members are not allowed to share information outside of the designated forums unless that information has been previously made publicly available by Frozenbyte, nor may they allow such information to influence how they play the game during the time of their participation in the Council.

Foreword

The following consists of highlights from discussions held within the Player Council, and does not necessarily represent the intent of Frozenbyte nor the direction of game development. These topics should not automatically be considered to be guaranteed features in *Starbase*, now or in the future. However, some of these topics are indeed concepts, mechanics, or designs which are currently in development, and others still may be planned for future development. Beyond that, some topics remain purely speculative, having either been put forth by the Player Council as a suggestion, or otherwise touched upon briefly. To help clarify this distinction, each section and bullet point has been marked with one of three labels:

- Content marked as `IN DEVELOPMENT` is content that has been confirmed to be currently in development, though it should be noted that development priorities or direction is liable to change.

- Content marked as `PLANNED CONTENT` is content that is not currently in active development, but has been included as a development goal in some form or another. However, no assumption should be made as to when this content may enter development or be released.

- Content marked as `SPECULATION` has been discussed by the council, but no concrete resolution or implementation was reached or otherwise confirmed by the developers. Though these features or mechanics may not be planned for development, some of their elements could still be adapted for development at a later stage.

Again, it is important to remember that – though these topics were often engaged with by developers – **this report should not be mistaken as a road-map for development**, neither in scope nor as an estimation of a timeline for release. Further, the details of this report should not be presumed to be official statements on the game design nor direction of *Starbase,* and **all content herein should be considered effectively as speculation**. Readers should understand that the development direction and key design concepts of *Starbase* are fluid and are always subject to change; therefore, nothing in this document should be considered as set in stone.

Risk and reward

The financial and material investment in ships is severely at-odds with the return that player-vs-player combat provides. Outside of combat, ships are generally thought to be extremely fragile, and seemingly minor crashes and issues can render an entire ship unusable. Several options have been considered to help alleviate the burden so as to better balance the time spent gathering materials with the lifespan of a ship.

- **Improved blueprint repair:** `IN DEVELOPMENT`

  Though already partially implemented, in-the-field blueprint repairs could use some polish to enable the repair of pipe and cable segments, as well as extended support for the use of crafted items. A type of multi-purpose alloy was briefly discussed, which could be used to repair any part without needing the otherwise-requisite materials. This would allow ship crews to make temporary repairs without needing to carry sufficient quantities of each material, though at the expense of needing to invest comparatively more into a single omni material.

- **Repair hall:** `IN DEVELOPMENT`

  Like the Ship Design Workshop, the repair hall should ideally be positioned somewhere between manual building and factory automation in terms of resource usage, so as not to totally preclude the use of other forms of repair. Some discussion was had about tying both the repair hall and manual repair into the research system, so as to generate research points during the process.

- **Ship-to-ship towing:** `IN DEVELOPMENT`

  In concert with salvage deeds, ships need some way of moving other ships or constructs to facilitate salvaging, as well as other ship recovery efforts. An initial version of this has since been implemented in the form the towing device.

- **Ship insurance:** `SPECULATION`

  Some discussion was held concerning the possibility for ship insurance, in order to return at least some amount of value in the event of a total loss (excluding combat). This insurance would not include ship-based weaponry, and would be geared more towards early-game mining ships, etcetera.

- **Salvage and towing deeds:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

- A salvage deed can be generated by the owner of a ship to allow another player to claim ownership of the ship, though it does not automatically transport the ship to them. Salvage deeds will likely come with some form of coordinates for the ship to allow the buyer to find the salvage. Insurance cannot be claimed if a salvage deed has been generated.

- A towing deed allows a particular player to tow a ship that they do not own through a safezone, which would ordinarily not allow the interaction.

- **Blueprint updating:** `IN DEVELOPMENT`

  A system has been designed to allow a ship to have save slots associated with it, which will allow a player to save their modified ship as a blueprint to which it can be restored by visiting a repair hall.

Conflict drivers

Starbase currently lacks features which are designed to push players together, be that towards cooperative goals or for conflict. While the premise of the game is for players to naturally create their own content, some game features are required in order to facilitate that. These features may range in scope from company control tweaks to station sieges, but the balance between emergent and feature-driven gameplay ought to be preserved.

- **Territory control:** `SPECULATION`

  Territory control is a fundamental component of player-vs-player competition, and it must be not only supported by but also integrated with other features, such as a map, passive resource generators, and production. Consideration has been posed for the transfer of ownership for successfully besieged assets, and whether all assets within the zone will automatically transfer to the attacking team or whether individually-owned assets will persist. Given the breadth of territories, some form of map with detailed information about each zone could be of significant value, though whether or not these map areas should be automatically visible or hidden until discovered is a matter of some debate.

- **Artificial events:** `SPECULATION`

  Early design thoughts for spontaneous events to occur throughout the universe to provide a basis for some form of reliable conflict. Such events could include rudimentary NPC convoys which transport goods or materials between points, and which are automatically generated by the game. These convoys could be discovered and attacked,

and could have some mechanics to allow for 'instant action' styles of drop-in attack-and-defend gameplay. More general design concepts were also discussed, such as the ability to broadcast information about sieges and other points of interest to a wider area, which would by necessity include enhanced transponder signaling systems.

- **Points of interest:** `SPECULATION`

    In-line with the aforementioned artificial events, some form of conflict which is routinely scheduled could provide a form of consistent casual gameplay. However, some concerns were aired about the 'gamification' of mechanics which may distract from the rest of the game, though a more organic approach with roots in existing gameplay features may ameliorate these concerns. A discussion of so-called 'seasonal events' was briefly held to identify the potential of larger universe-wide events within *Starbase*, but such opportunities are much further away than smaller point-of-interest events.

Economic opportunities

Though *Starbase* does encourage cooperative gameplay, there are many features that can benefit both group play as well as solo play. These features should be developed so as to cultivate gameplay that can be rewarding and entertaining without requiring such a significant investment of time or other resources.

- **Ore generation:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

    Improving ore generation with a focus on creating interesting hot-spots and variations in density would go a long ways towards not only driving players, but also towards making mining a complex profession in-game. Ores could be scattered with more interesting variation, not only in terms of material but in terms of voxel size and density. Extreme variations could help to create more interesting zones as well as give cause to compete for stations and mining access.

- **Player shops:** `SPECULATION`

    Currently, shops and the general market between players is practically non-existent, having been replaced in whole by auction houses. Some players have expressed an interest in maintaining a physical presence on stations, with the auction house taking on the role of a shopping directory which lists stores and their inventories within a certain range.

- **Civil infrastructure:** `SPECULATION`

Some discussion was had about having the construction of massive infrastructure (eg: warp-gates, neutral spaceports, moon-based railroad networks, etc.) be organized by the developers with some input from the community, and funded and constructed by the players. These would naturally draw a variety of players to the same area, providing both regular economic incentive as well as a potential source of military conflict.

- **Mass transport:** SPECULATION

  For players who have not built a capital ship, or who otherwise lack the ability to traverse the warp gates, moving around the universe can be difficult. Some discussion was held about an automated travel service via a network of server-hosted capital ships making scheduled trips between preset areas. Players could embark and disembark at any of these stops, and optionally bring items or even ships with them via the capital ship's hangar halls.

- **Salvage options and ship graveyards:** SPECULATION

  Shipwrecks and salvageable constructs which have sat undisturbed for an extensive amount of time could have a chance of being spawned near players over the course of regular gameplay, so as to increase the odds of a player coming across them as a salvage opportunity. Occasionally, a large number of these shipwrecks could be moved within a close proximity to each other, forming artificial ship graveyards which would offer significant salvage value.

- **Player contracts:** SPECULATION

  Similar to company missions, this would entail a system that allows players to generate public or private contracts that other players could participate in without needing to be part of the same company as the issuing player. These contracts could allow players to select from a variety of sub-types, assign a list of objectives, completion date, reward, etc., and have them automatically broadcast to other players (when desired).

- **Exploration**: SPECULATION

  Though space is conceivably full of things waiting to be stumbled across, there is a lack of tools that can be used to help players discover installations, abandoned ships, significant mining deposits, etcetera. This could also include tools and functionality for sharing notable points of interest with other players, to help companies coordinate and to spur new market opportunities for salvage players.

Companies and factions

Cooperative play forms the backbone of *Starbase*, and requires not only a plethora of exciting gameplay opportunities, but also nuanced tools in order for it to flourish. While most of these discussions favored companies and factions with their focus, some additional considerations may be needed for the transient group player.

- **Company storage and assets:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Additional tools are needed to facilitate a company's accrual of materials, equipment, etc., as well as automatic record-keeping to keep track of input and output, and a more advanced permissions system. These could be so granular as to keep track of even minute details such as a ship access and usage time, durability states, etc., and extend for the lifetime of the ship.

- **Granular permissions and access:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Companies require a flexible permissions system to eliminate unnecessary busywork. These permissions would include access control to assets and to station areas, as well as the ability to modify or generate company data for use in things like mission-making, etc. Stations should be able to control which ships and players are able to enter their safezone, and which ships will be able to dock at their capital ship docks (if applicable).

- **Station clusters and nation borders:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Cooperative stations within a certain proximity to one another have the option of forming a cluster, which merges their safezones into one contiguous area. While individual stations will retain their ownership and associated rights, the cluster may be owned by another player or company who will be able to affect taxation and some permissions along the safezone's border. Station clusters can be captured piece-wise, but conquests must begin from the outermost stations of the cluster.

- **Taxation:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Concepts were discussed to enable companies and factions to levy taxes on their constituent zones via transfer fees and/or via automatic deduction on material generation/trades. However, such taxes should only affect player-built stations, and not allow a company to unilaterally levy taxes on all transactions from their members on a galaxy-wide scale.

- **Company missions:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

Companies require tools that will enable them to generate missions of varying complexities with a checklist of objectives. These should allow the assignation of teams for completion, and provide options for rewards of both materials/credits as well as recognition in CV awards.

- **Influence map:** SPECULATION

  While a map would benefit all players, companies especially stand to gain with its implementation as they could be able to chart the boundaries of their own space as well as that of their rivals. A company map should not only visualize data-points, but also allow for coordination between members of a company so that they may plan strategies for things such as shipping lanes and warfare on a system-wide scale.

Progression

Though *Starbase* does not follow traditional RPG design principles, it could nonetheless benefit from some measures with which players can measure how far they've advanced in their spacefaring career. This could optionally include special armors and cosmetics, CV decorations, etcetera.

- **Research:** SPECULATION

  The current form of the research trees presents significant challenge to new players, as it gates access to basic components and services (weapon parts, refilling propellant tanks, etc.) behind many hours of crafting. Further, since research point rewards are arbitrarily valued per component, players are often stuck mass-producing a single component to grind for research points, leading to a flood of a handful of items on the market with little manufacturing capacity left for the remaining items. This is partially exacerbated by the ship design workshop's ability to sidestep crafting restrictions, though it's worth noting that this bypass is considered practically essential for ship-building to not require too much time investment.

  Numerous options with potential were discussed, such as making research points awarded as a direct conversion from an item's volume per material use; adding in environmental points of interest which may contain items worth large amounts of research points; exploration and discovery of devices leading to their unlocking in the tree; etcetera. However, the overwhelming response seems to advocate for re-purposing

the research tree into a *recommended* path of progression as a sort of tutorial, rather than the hard gate it currently is. It could also be more suitably presented by relegating crafting to factory devices in place of crafting benches, and making the construction of a proper factory the real hurdle in production (ie: the need to set up manufacturing machines instead of the need to research precursor devices).

Key takeaways:

- **Research is too laborious:** Players should not be required to craft thousands of devices to unlock a full research tree.

- **The role of player crafting and factories:** Crafting benches must be balanced so as to coexist with complex factories, with the latter forming the backbone of player manufacturing.

- **Arbitrary limitations:** Some gameplay features, such as refilling propellant tanks, is locked behind a significant research investment. These features should be extracted from the research tree and made more accessible.

- **New ways of progressing:** Concepts have been explored to allow players to generate research points in new ways, such as 'research items' which can be discovered in the universe and redeemed in some way to reward a significant amount of research points. 'Reverse-engineering' – salvaging – a component is another way that research points could be generated, as well as changing the point reward during crafting or manufacturing to correspond directly to the volume of each of a device's constituent materials

- **Device stats and materials:** One possible solution to encourage natural progression along the research trees is to allow the materials used in the construction of a device to affect its resulting properties. Players would naturally seek to enhance the stats (efficiency, damage, etc.) of a device, and would thus be rewarded with both the unique device and the research points associated with it without the pain of crafting a multitude of the same item.

- **The role of research as a tutorial:** The initial design for the research tree was for something that would ease new players into crafting and manufacturing, but unfortunately ended up acting as a hard-gate for most players. The design of the mechanic ought to be reworked so that its initial purpose can be achieved – or, it should be removed.

- **Personal character progression:** SPECULATION

Though *Starbase* is not necessarily pursuing traditional RPG progression features such as leveling, skill points, etc., there is still room for some persistent character building in the form of insurance transfer point access, automatic CV builders (especially in the form of stat tracking), profile badges/campaign ribbons, etcetera. Controls and options should be extensively explored in the pursuit of allowing players to tailor their public-facing CV as a form of recording history.

Automation and factories

Though physical interaction is considered to be a feature of *Starbase*, automation at the end-game level should not be discouraged in favor of manual labor in the earliest stages of the game. A number of topics were discussed in consideration of the massive scales of production which will be required to sustain endoskeleton civilization and company warfare.

- **Metallurgy:** `SPECULATION`

  Affecting the yields of refined material from mined ore, metallurgy could have significant ripple effect in gameplay. Asteroids could have variable ore purity stats, providing an additional layer to ore hot spots, and alloying materials could have better or worse attributes depending on percent composition.

- **Factory devices:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Though mostly functional, the current system of crafting benches is not particularly extensible. Large-scale manufacturing requires a swathe of new devices which can – in cooperation with one another – produce components and devices with limited player interaction, while still allowing for interesting builds. Such devices include:

  - **3D printers:** Produces components through an interface or via blueprint chips. Speed is boosted when in proximity of other printers.

  - **Power generation:** A variety of options to generate power should be implemented, each with their own drawbacks and advantages. Such options may (non-exhaustively) include solar panels, turbines, nuclear power (fuel rods), propellant-fired generators, etc.

  - **Utility grids:** Connects station devices to one another, and eventually to power.

- **Conveyors:** Whether physical or virtual, these shuttle materials and objects between devices.

- **Alloy furnaces:** Produces unique materials by combining other materials.

- **Recycling:** Reduces objects to requisite materials. May require manual loading for complex objects.

- **Storage:** Mass storage without the intensive labor associated with regular ship crates.

- **Offline processing:** `SPECULATION`

  Factories could be centralized so as not to require a player nearby to host the simulation in order to continue production. This could be achieved via a headless client, or by emulating production that *would* have occurred (taking into consideration resource limitations and time lapsed) whenever a player returns to the factory area.

- **Passive resource generation:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  If stations are to be considered a primary asset for companies, and thus worthy of the significant investment of a siege, they must be able to routinely produce something of considerable value. Apart from manufacturing, stations could be able to – with the installation of devices such as an atmosphere pump – automatically generate and store resources which could then be transported, sold, or used in manufacturing.

Miscellaneous parts and devices

- **Weaponry:** `SPECULATION`

  Ship weapons and small arms could do with a dose of customization. Ship weapons would benefit from a degree of variation in the form of stat-affecting components (barrel lengths, magazine types, etc.) that would enable ship loadouts to be more closely tailored to the ship's intended role. Small arms would also benefit from this customization, allowing players to customize their weapons in ways that make them functionally (and potentially visually) unique.

- **Missiles and torpedoes:** `PLANNED CONTENT`

  Missiles and torpedoes both would benefit from enhanced guidance options as well as a general re-balancing to bring them in line with player expectations: the former to be used

against ships and endoskeletons, and the latter to be used against stations and capital ships.

- **Sensors:** `PLANNED CONTENT` `SPECULATION`

    Separate from missiles and torpedoes, YOLOL sensors are currently quite limited. Radiation sensors and their associated mechanics are in the development pipeline, but other ship mechanics are hindered by a lack of informative devices. Suggestions from the council range from the relatively basic, such as heat sensors and accelerometers, to more complex sensors that would support radar/I.F.F systems and enhanced mouse control for piloting ships.

Capital ships and sieges

The breadth of *Starbase's* playable universe is intended to allow all players some room to grow, but it can be daunting with consideration of the current limitations of regular spaceships. Capital ships are designed to be accessible for all players, so that they may more easily explore the vast universe and interact with each other without needing to labor over a multi-day flight plan.

- **Features and limitations of civilian capital ships:** `SPECULATION`

    If civilian capital ships are intended to serve as a sort of mobile home for players, they should also have some setbacks to ensure they are not unbalanced in terms of function and utility. Some suggestions brought up in discussion included the following:

    ○ Players could be limited to a single civilian capital ship-based

    ○ Material cargo and hangar storage could be limited by the quantity of storage modules on the ship

    ○ The physical dimensions of civilian capital ships could be constrained much more than military ships, further limiting their storage and utility

    ○ Crafting requirements could include exotic material to soft-limit their acquisition in the early game

    ○ Civilian capitals could be prevented from entering the belt without a station to harbor at, preventing them from being used to quickly accrue vast material wealth

- Civilian capitals could be prevented from transiting across nation borders or station clusters (presuming they are developed) if those stations have denied border access

- Players on a capital ship could be prevented from disembarking during a station siege

- **Military capital ship interception:** `SPECULATION`

Some ideas were discussed to allow players some options to interdict the travel of a military capital ship and force it out of warp. Such a device could optionally drop the safezone shield of the capital ship, but would have to be actively monitored and would only last a short while so as to prevent a group of players shielding a station or other area around the clock.

- **Spontaneity:** `SPECULATION`

Some concerns were aired about the design of capital ships and stations funneling players into a single archetype for attacking their enemies, and eliminating some aspects of fighting such as hit-and-run tactics on logistics and other types of guerrilla warfare and insurgency. Players could have many options to participate in company warfare, and in more flavors than the reigning station siege model. Such a design could include safezones becoming temporarily vulnerable when an attacker arrives at a minor station in force, but only while the companies or factions involved are already actively at war. This could allow smaller splinter forces to have measurable impact on a war effort without needing to commit to a massive siege, and without risk of the defenders permanently losing the attacked station as the safezone would return after the window of vulnerability (provided there was some amount of station left to support it). However, there are concerns about the ability to nullify a safezone without any warning whatsoever, as it could lead to the feature being used to attack stations while defenders were offline.

- **Risk vs reward of sieges:** `IN DEVELOPMENT`

The overarching principle of company warfare in *Starbase* is that the individual participants should never be at risk of losing all of their assets during any one moment. However, this protection must also be balanced against the interests of the attacking forces, as there must be the opportunity for profit in war. To this end, civilian capital ships and safezone stations (that is, stations within a permanent safezone, like the Origin network) offer some amount of unassailable security for assets, but otherwise a station siege offers a 'winner takes all' victory scenario. To ensure an equal commitment to the siege, the attackers may only have an opportunity for a tactical withdrawal after a timer has expired, provided their assets are still flight-worthy. After a siege has ended, the surrounding area will be rich in gaseous minerals from the destruction sustained during the fight, which can be extracted over a long period of time via the use of atmosphere

pumps. Further, a station will enter a cool down period during which it cannot be sieged again; to counter abuse of this, sieges will not be whitelisted, and will allow *any* user to participate in it so long as they show up during the event.