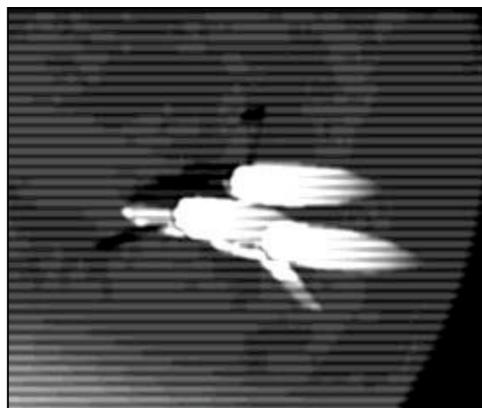


PASSENGERS LOST IN SHUTTLE AMBUSH

By Sean Jameson

FIFTY passengers and crew are missing and feared dead after their transport shuttle disappeared yesterday en route to the People's Republic of Racedat.

Executive SpaceWays Flight 272, a Trident H-4 shuttle, had set out on a routine flight from the Dicebe system and had successfully registered its course with Racedat space traffic control before disappearing off the security grid moments later. GalCop units responding to an automated distress signal discovered a field of wreckage near the ship's last known position, but reported no traces of any other vessels in the immediate area.



Final moments: Flight 272 captured by Racedat security systems

While accident investigators continue with their detailed analysis, security experts have been quick to suggest that the shuttle was the victim of an attack by the League of Anarchists, an organisation that has a history of violent opposition to the growth of democratic influence in the sector.

Amongst the shuttle's passengers was a delegation from the Dicebean Board of Commerce, which was set to hold a series of key talks with the Racedat Workers' Union over plans for increased trade between the two systems. There are fears amongst neighbouring anarchist states that any weakening of the People's Party in Racedat will leave the surrounding systems exposed to the growing commercial and political influence of the Dicebean democracy, and a concern that greater social order may be imposed through the use of GalCop and federal military forces.

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End of the dream? A Trident H-4 shuttle of the type operated by Flight 272

Chairman vows to fight on

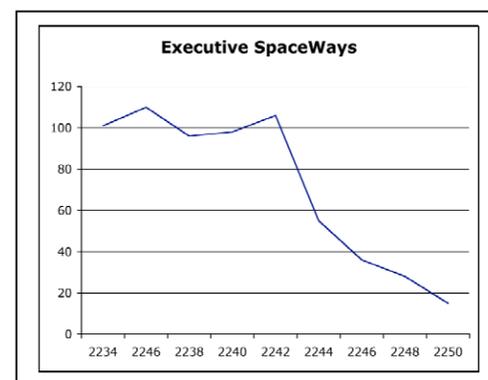
GIDE VAN HEYSEL, founder and Chairman of Executive SpaceWays, has given in to growing demands for future flights to be operated under dedicated fighter escort. Yesterday's strike was only the latest in a series of unfortunate incidents for the fledgling Executive line, whose publicity lists numerous politicians, business leaders and celebrities amongst its regular clients.

A memo leaked to *The Bianti Telegraph* last month revealed that Executive's insurers, Lloyd's of New London, had reconsidered its risk assessment of the spaceline after detailed passenger manifests were recovered during a GalCop raid on a pirate cove near Edrari. It is believed that Executive was granted an ultimatum to improve its security measures or else seek the services of an alternative insurer.

In a statement delivered outside Executive's headquarters at Lavebe, Mr van Heyssel said: 'I can confirm that we have been forced to re-assess the security needs of our shuttle services in the light of recent events.'

'We are disappointed that previous requests to GalCop for limited escort services were denied, especially as a significant proportion of our clients are government officials who are reliant upon our services for their transport needs. We value the business of all our customers and have therefore initiated steps to improve security on all scheduled routes.'

Despite these reassurances, there is little belief amongst industry that such sweeping security measures can be implemented without massive financial losses to the company. Analysts at the Enonla Exchange could only watch as Executive's share price plunged to a record low by the end of yesterday's trading, suggesting a wide lack of optimism from the markets as to the company's immediate future.



Executive's problems are compounded by having already invested most of its previous year's profits into advanced research, including a major new development with propulsion specialists OKB Korshkov. If current conditions persist and no new sources of revenue are forthcoming, Executive may have to appeal to its parent company, GvH Engineering, for a financial assistance package to see out the coming months. It is by no means certain whether the GvH board would agree to such an appeal, having shied away from offering such assistance in the past. An emergency board meeting is scheduled to take place next week at Executive's corporate headquarters.