# COLONY 42
## Developer's Notes

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# FOREWORD

This is the Alpha release of the Goldsource version of Colony 42. It is also the final release. (Make of that what you will) After spending the greater part of 4 years actively developing the mod, and another 3 with it for the most part collecting dust, it's time for me to close the book on this mod. I've learned a lot during the development period, (in some cases you can even see my growth as you progress through the mod) but that amount learned also means I can see that, without a solid foundation that simply isn't there, any attempts to finish this mod in the form it currently has will result in either failure or a half-baked final product. So, that's it. The Goldsource mod, Colony 42, is both officially dead for the final time, and out in the open. I leave both what I have finished, and the source files, to you - If you wish to continue the saga, as it were, you have the ability to do so.

It's been a long road, a long time coming, but I can finally close this chapter. But first, let me tell you why.

-JeffMOD
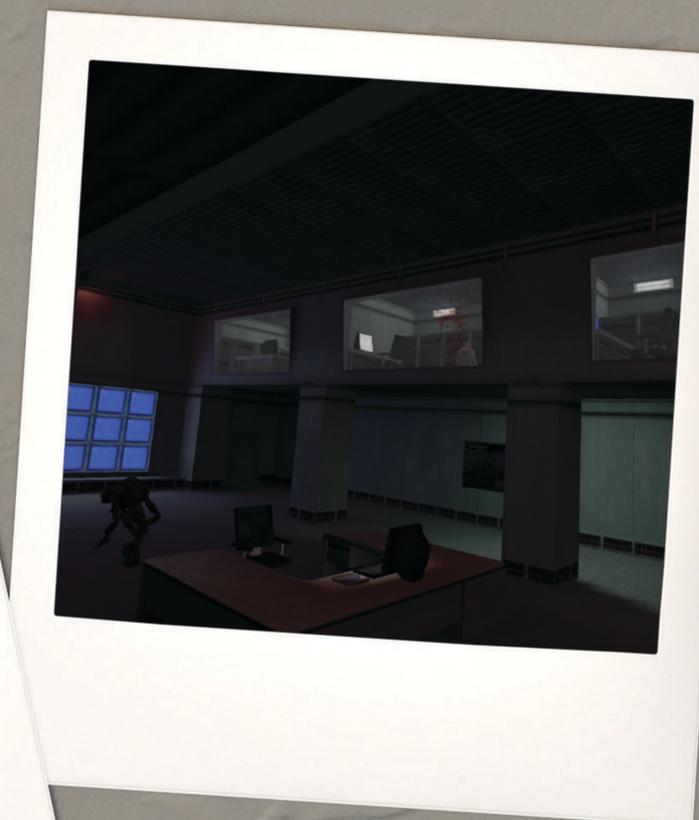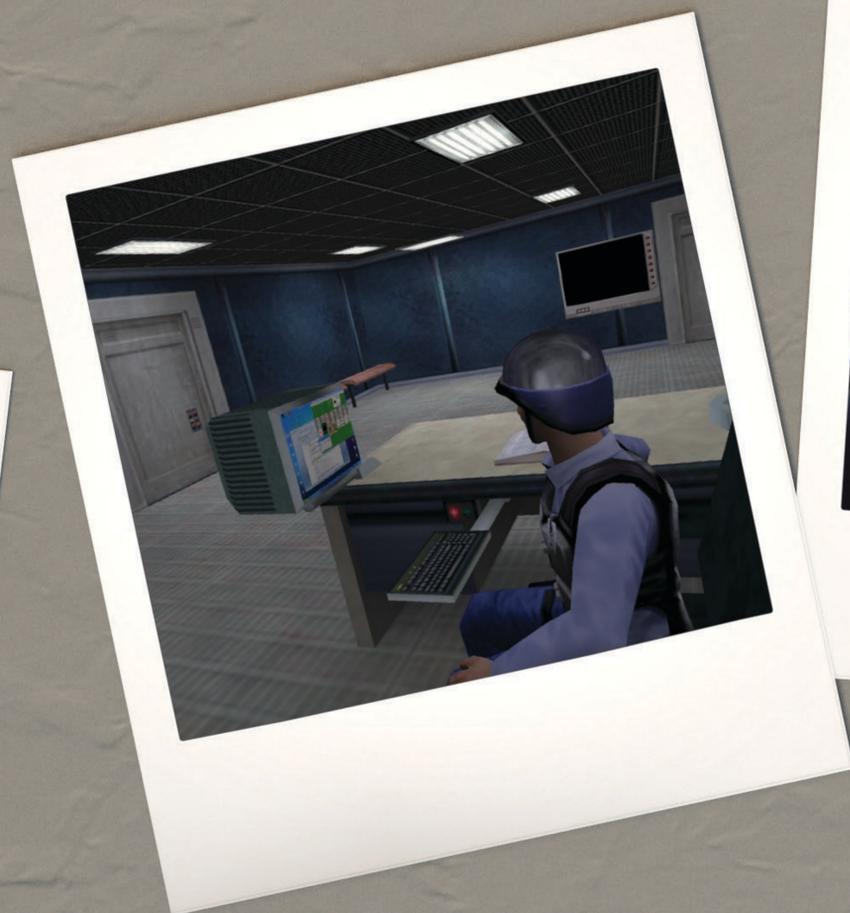
Colony 42's genesis came from a single thought - "This mod is really good, but it's a bit dark." I had just finished playing Neil Manke's USS Darkstar mod, and the only complaint I could think of is that I spent too much time relying on my flashlight to be able to see my surroundings. I wanted to tell a similar story, of a disastrous first contact, and one man's fight to survive it, but with what I felt was a better choice of, well, brightness, in terms of lumens. Of course, I was 14 at the time, and in no mental position to say so with quite such... flowery language. But, I reasoned, I was in a position to make the ultimate Half-Life mod. I had, after all, a total of 0 maps under my belt. And so, I started a mod that started with "USS" and ended with a word I no longer remember. I hastily blocked out a map consisting of a dormitory room, a hallway with an open, sparking bulkhead, and another, branching hallway, all beautifully rendered with the same 5 or so textures, zero wall details or side doors, and topped with a levelchange that crashed the game.

...It did not go well. Discouraged, I scrapped what I had, and rebuilt it from scratch a week or so later. This version, dubbed "USS Bravo" (because it both had a VOX word and went with 'Encore', which this was of the concept – I thought I was being clever at the time) got a little bit further- I had a protagonist with a name, (Oscar Guthrie, again, two VOX words, one from the NATO Phonetic Alphabet and another from Half-Life's Developer name cameos) a custom WON splash screen (I was using my older brother's nearly-forgotten copy of Half-Life at the time) and custom models in the form of a low-definition Otis from Blue Shift's files. I actually got to the second map in this one, including a very hacky elevator with doors (I had not yet discovered Spirit of Half-Life) before running into some roadblock or another (likely lack of ideas) and scrapping it. At the time I was also developing another mod, based around the 7-hour war, side by side with USS Bravo. It ended with about the same amount of progress – though a map from it does still exist in some form as part of the *Castle Disposed* project.

Months and a few other failed mods later, I had joined the incredible TWHL community after having read their tutorials at the start of my, erm, 'career', and had a total of 3 released and no more than 1.5 dozen unfinished maps under my belt. I decided that this time, this time for sure, I would do it. I was going to make my space mod.

I changed the setting from a ship to a space station with a very... loosely defined exterior shape, gave it an arbitrary number that I got from a science fiction book I had been reading recently, and this Colony 42 was born. I had high hopes, high expectations, and no plan whatsoever. Oops. Design of the mod came from whatever popped into my head while mapping for plot, details, and encounters, and the level design itself was a combination of improv and rough notebook sketches made in class that I continue to use to this day. (Though hopefully to a higher degree of quality.) The mod had, in my young eyes, everything - custom sounds, (both in the form of ripped music stingers and terribly written dialog handed out to and dutifully recorded

by people whose skill and talent deserved better) HD models by the talented (and generous) Ambient.Impact, which I much later downloaded the source files to so I could make further alterations, custom textures, (which were terrible) readable notes on oversized paper, and a frag grenade being flung down out of a vent. Also references to current popular culture that very much date the development of the mod.

And things were going swimmingly. I was churning out maps at the fastest rate I have ever, even to this date, achieved, and they all met my quality standards at the time. I was even learning a lot, about layouts, aesthetics, lighting, etc.

But two things started to nag at me after a while. The first was the setting - being in space, I could only use the high-tech and metal Half-Life textures, and no concrete, tile, or brick, and the textures there were kept leading to environments that looked samey and dull. The second was that, as I learned things, I got better at making maps. My standards were raised, and the older environments just no longer cut it for me. But I didn't want to restart the mod from scratch yet again, so for consistency's sake I limited myself to keeping within the same basic theme and architecture style so as to not jolt the player with a sudden change. As time went on, I also started running dry on ideas, and development began to slow down, with lulls that lasted sometimes weeks at a time. My lack of knowledge to create decent environment textures kept me limited to the same sets even when I occasionally tried to make the architecture more extravagant, and my lack of coding or modelling knowledge prevented me from doing much to liven up or modify the gameplay, characters, and weapon set, aside from a few small model hacks. I began to leap at any excuse to work on a map for something else - minicompetitions, "contract" work for other mods I wanted to see come to fruition, anything that would allow me to work on an earth setting where I could use concrete, bricks, dirt, anything that didn't look like it belonged in the Lambda Core or a lab that got cut in the Half-Life alpha.

Work on Colony 42 had become a chore, and I didn't want to do it anymore. But because people kept telling me they were excited to play it, and because I felt I owed it to the people who contributed to the mod, I kept on picking it up again anyway. But my zest for it was gone, and the mod felt as empty as it looked ugly, aside from the rare places I felt were "media-worthy". It didn't help that I had finally, after years, gained the ability to work with the Source engine, and the improvements in it led Goldsource mapping, even with Spirit of Half-Life, to feel clunky and painful. Eventually I found my way into other projects with Source, including one with an actual team where I could enter a motivation loop where seeing what one person achieved led us to feel motivated to do even better than them.

I think that's what I was lacking most with Colony 42, aside from the obvious answer of actual experience. A healthy team environment. Seeing what other people come up with, being inspired by that, and in turn inspiring them, along with the feeling that other people have your back, makes a lot of difference. I was something I didn't have, and something that, for technology reasons, I wasn't able to have with Colony 42- I was still stuck on a dial-up connection with a 56k modem and a 28k phone line, which made any kind of collaboration or real-time communication impossible- I could barely download files larger than 5MB without them becoming corrupted from a sudden drop in connection at home, and there were only so many opportunities to leech off of my high-school's internet connection without being tossed out of the library's computer lab by a very anti-game librarian. To be able to keep a Dropbox up to date or use a file versioning solution would be impossible (as I found in my early work with the Hazard Course team, before I finally moved out to go to university)

Another thing I was lacking was planning. If there's one thing I've learned from the years I spent on this project, it's that things go well when I plan them out in advance, and in great detail, and, well, turn out horribly when I don't. If, from the beginning, I had a more solid plan than "*Aliens attack, you fight through the space station, and then ram their organic ship with a cargo vessel, kill their captain, and the entire ship explodes in a mess of guts.*" I probably could have done it. But I had no meat to the mod - there was no plan for the middle. So I had to improvise gameplay and plot, which didn't turn out so well. It would have also helped if I had been able to come with a better architecture style for the station's interiors, or some concept of what shape the station was, what size, how power is generated on the station, or how they generate gravity - the list goes on and on.

...I need to go do some research.

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

Despite having a very thin script, there were a (relatively) large amount of characters I planned to include.



Gman - Charlie Blanks

Charlie Blanks, the head of Maintenance.



Urby - 1st Officer

The first officer, found on the bridge.

Archie-Comns officer

The Communications Officer, also found on the bridge.



brendanmint — John

John, a guard used for exposition and direction near the mall.

Jacob, the Colony's bartender.
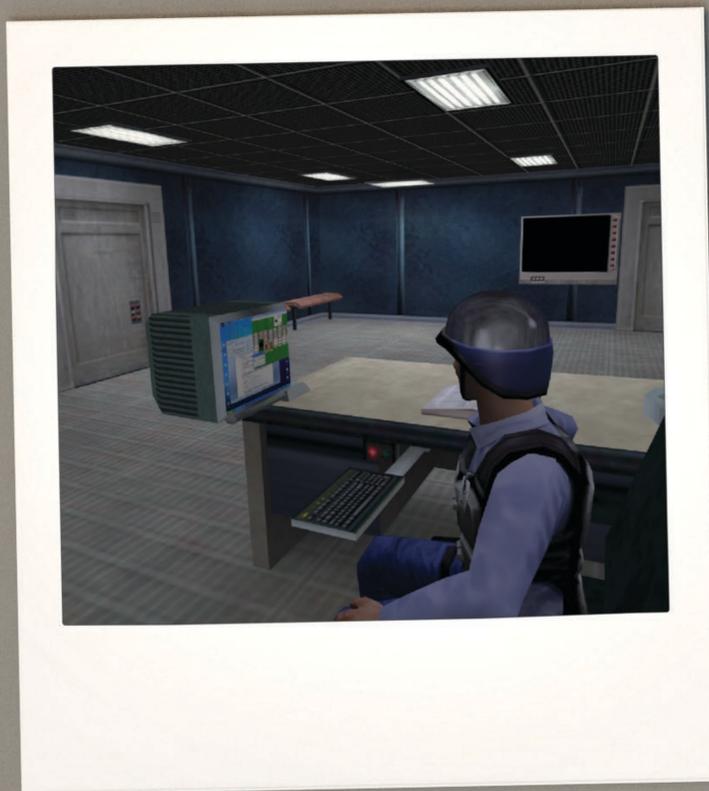


Sancho, a guard from the dorm security checkpoint.

# MISC NOTES
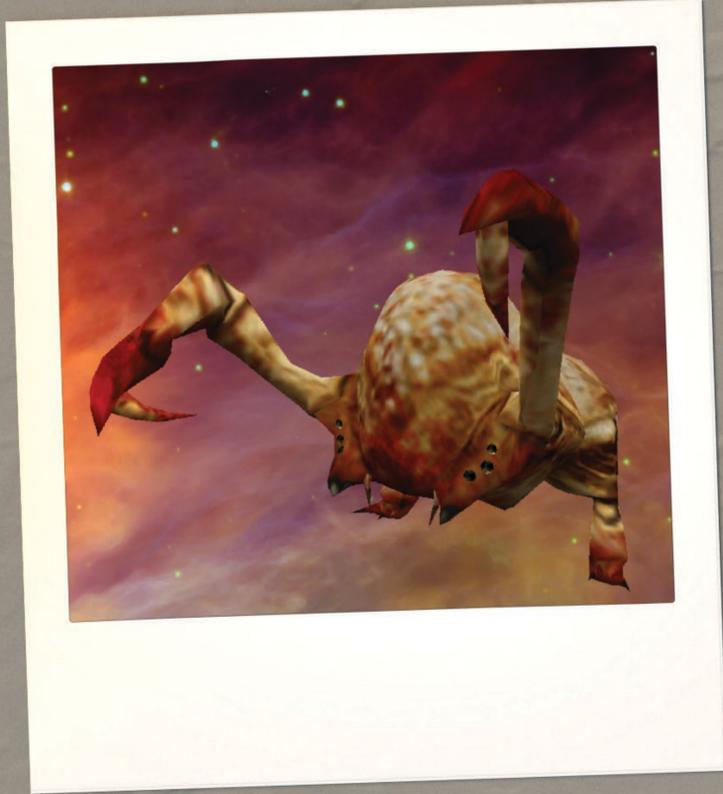




Headcrabs are introduced to the colony via hollow torpedos, similar to HL2's shells. The first post-attack map was going to feature one of these, but it was cut due to difficulties making the torpedo look decent. The room it was to be in was replaced with a sealed door due to the decompression (which was going to be present as a minimal damage factor in the original room)
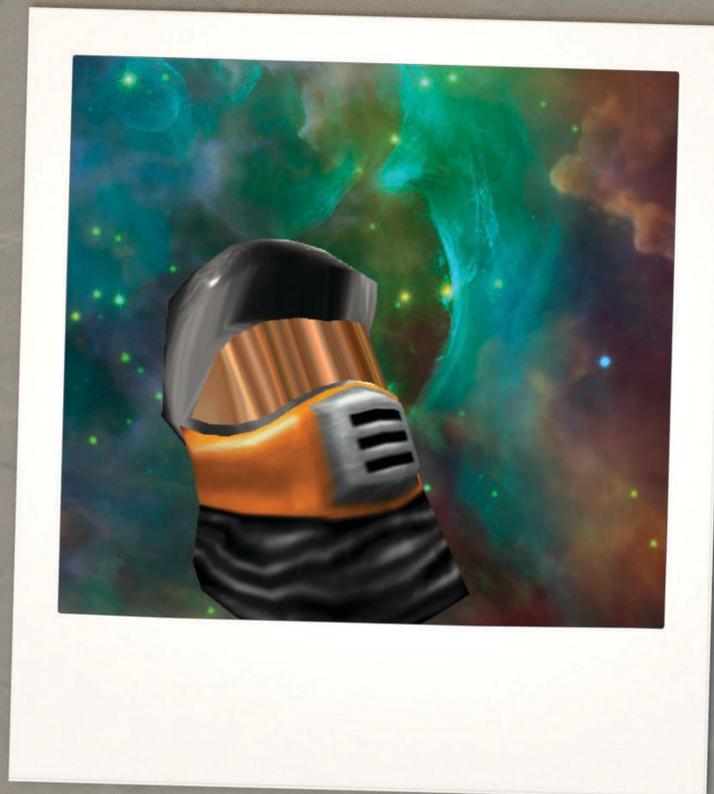


The helmet was planned to be used to allow the player to breathe in the decompressed shuttle bay and on the alien spacecraft. You were to get it from Charlie after meeting him a second time, the shuttle (Named after the USS Bravo version of the mod) having delivered a set of replacements after the epidemic of lost helmets.

Houndeyes were made to be friendly using Spirit's relationship customization, giving them the role of recently-discovered non-sentient life being researched by the colony's zoological department.



Vortigaunts came in multiple varieties; Grunts, Ranking officers, the Captain, and civilians/engineers that would flee from the player instead of attacking. Alien Grunts were in a bruiser role, subordinate to the ranking vorts, but higher ranking than the vort grunts.

The 'human' grunts in the intro actually do negative damage to avoid killing the player in the dream sequence without removing their ability to shoot. Since this could have been used as an exploit to give the player hundreds of health points, I triggered the transition s0a0 with the map command to force reset the game's variables. (This is a very hacky way to do it - don't follow suit.) The dream sequence itself was a mix of premonition and a game-fueled nightmare.



I felt the .357 revolver was too out of place for a futuristic setting, so I decided to go with Opposing Force's Desert Eagle - also because it matched the Otis models I was already using. I couldn't do model hacks at the time, but Soup Miner (at the time known as Worldcrafter) was kind enough to do it for me. I also had plans that, if I ever got around to learning how to implement custom code, one of the first things I would do is up the amount of ammo the weapon_357 had to 7.

Ever notice how nobody, in practically any movie or game, ever seems to use the iconic folding stock on the SPAS-12? It got to the point where I decided to break from that tradition for the sake of both realism and memorability.



I made a conscious decision to not use the 9mmAR weapon, as it didn't seem like the sort of thing a security force should be using, even in a riot situation. Since it wasn't being used anyway, I figured nobody would mind if I replaced it with the railgun from TFC and made it do 900 damage per shot. It was quite fun during testing, if a bit game-breaking. Though it occurs to me now it would have made a better replacement for the tau cannon.

The wrench replaced the crowbar because it was just slightly less cliché for a HL mod. It also fit the role of "engineer's item" a lot better. The charge animation is now gone, since it's a direct model replacement and wouldn't be seen anyway.



Otis' head texture is a combination of both variants of Ambient.Impact's model - The moustache from "True Otis", and the hair from "Young Otis." I also toyed with the idea of making a helmetless Barney variant. Both Barney and Otis have model variants for the Beretta and the Desert Eagle.
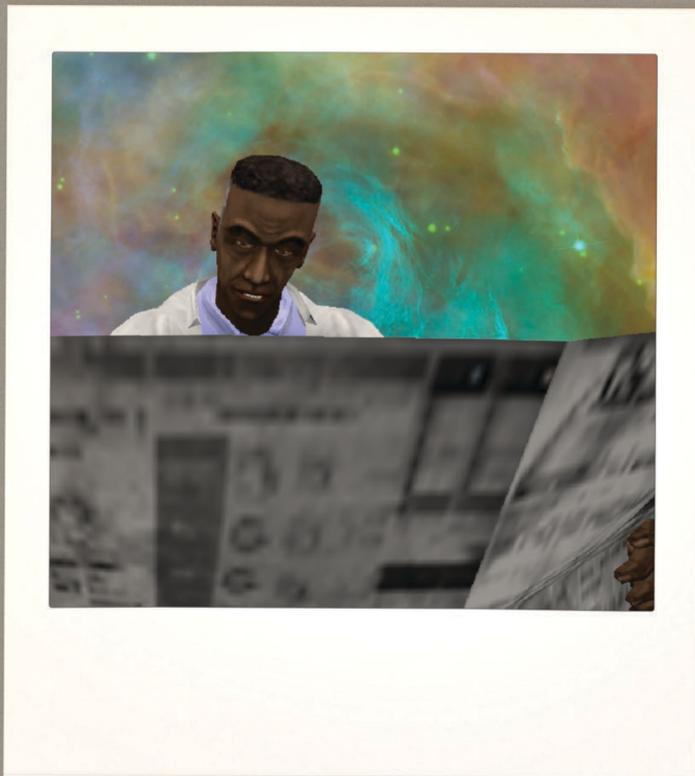
The newspaper scientist was intended to go in the re-designed pre-invasion maps which were never made. These maps were nearly always in the back of my mind during development, because the first drafts looked god-awful, and the further I got, the bigger the gap between them and what I could potentially make got. It eventually arrived at the point where I figured by the time I was finished the pre-invasion maps again, I'd need to redesign everything else, and the cycle would never end. Maybe it's a good thing I never started.

# THE ALIEN VESSEL

I had intended for the Alien ship to have an organic feel to it, somewhere between the damp and fungal caves of Xen and the slimy interior of an animal's throat. There would be enough room for alien grunts to move in comfortably within the cylindrical walls, with the occasional bridge over a moat of acid or wastewater. Lighting of many colours was to be provided by overhead crystalline fixtures, and instead of doors and windows, there would be thick, fleshy membranes. One such membrane would already be growing over the hole the USS Bravo created when it impacted with the ship by the time the player was to wake up after passing out as the Bravo's pre-programmed autopilot was engaged. There's really not much material that I produced for the ship due to my linear workflow, but I did have a very basic concept map that I've included in the game files.

# CUT AREAS

- Atrium Park with spaceview skylight, lots of foliage, benches, etc. Piped in nature sounds like in the dorm atrium in s0a0.
*(Replaced by Atrium Mall)*
- Multilevel engineer dorms
*(To replace s0a0 - never mapped, but nameplate textures were created)*
- Chapel area accommodating all major world religions
- Redesigned Bridge
- Redesigned elevator area leading to bridge
- Redesigned first post-disaster map
 *(Script concept for this can be found in the development files folder)*
- More areas featuring houndeyes as combat allies
- Cencom 9
*(An update broadcast was to be made from here, informing the player of an attempt to take the fight to the aliens, with the USS Bravo being remotely programmed and Charlie having gone towards it, but having disappeared. When finding Cencom 9, it was to be destroyed with bodies scattered about.)*
-  An explanation as to why a bunch of old games and TV series were the talk of the colony in all the notes and computer monitors.
*(A retro throwback of sorts - with the rediscovery of various things via the internet, suddenly everything old was new again - generations of people were discovering 'old classics' that they had never been exposed to. Still no explanation as to why an NES and SNES were still in working order after all those years. Must be the Nintendium.)*
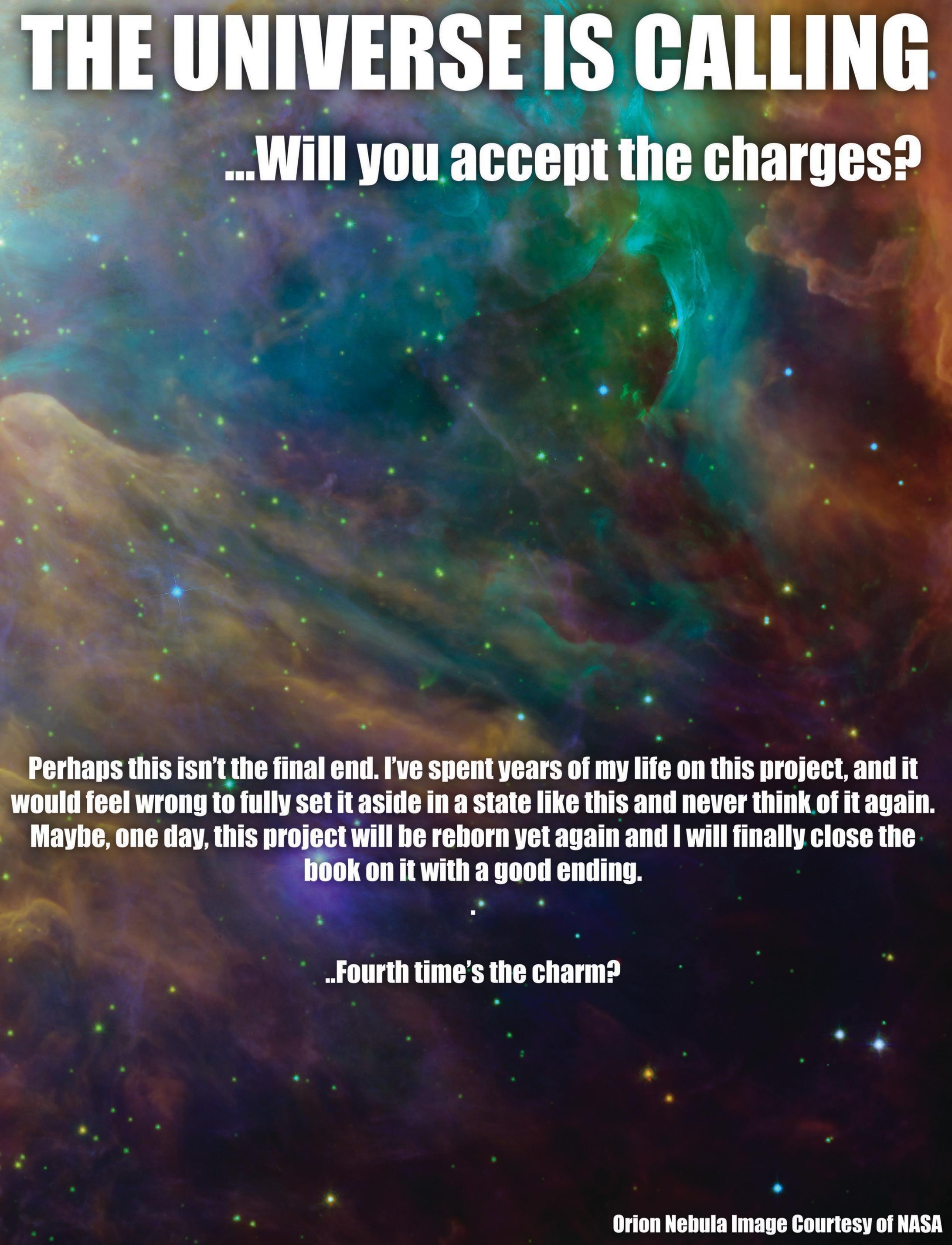
# THE UNIVERSE IS CALLING

## ...Will you accept the charges?

Perhaps this isn't the final end. I've spent years of my life on this project, and it would feel wrong to fully set it aside in a state like this and never think of it again. Maybe, one day, this project will be reborn yet again and I will finally close the book on it with a good ending.

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..Fourth time's the charm?