

Star Traders: Frontiers

Covert Operative &

Privateer

Unlock Guide



by Iguana Tabarnak

Preface

I know many Star Traders players are perfectly happy on Normal difficulty. But there comes a day for all of us where the siren song of the "Hard or higher" unlocks can no longer be resisted.

This is the first in a series of detailed guides on how to achieve these Hard+ unlocks, even if it's your first time venturing above Normal.

For this guide, we'll start off with arguably the two simplest of all the Hard+ unlocks: **Covert Operative** and **Privateer**



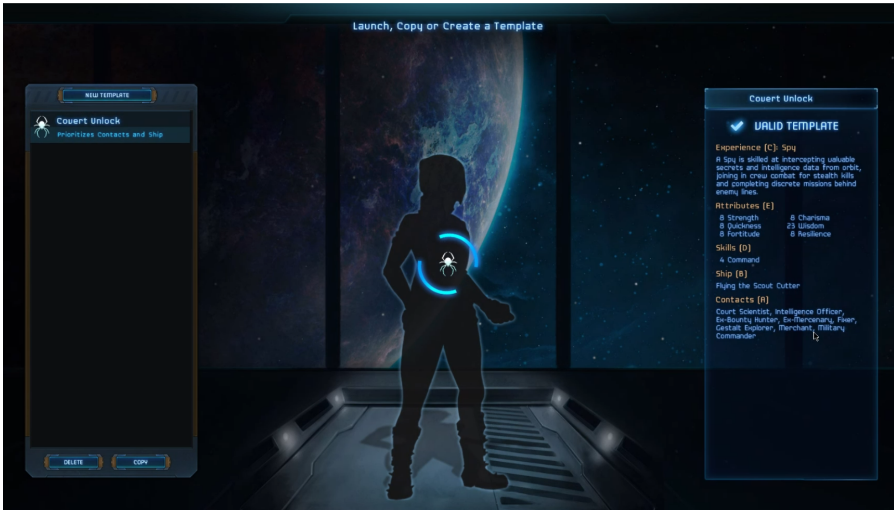
Each of these unlocks require us to perform 50 orbital maneuvers (Spying for Covert Operative, Blockading for Privateer). And each gives us just two years to complete this task. With this guide, you'll be able to complete BOTH within that time frame in a single run.

Theoretically, of course, spying and blockading are activities that you can just dive into on turn 1. But this is Hard mode. There's a bit more to it than just clicking a button 50 times. Not *a lot* more, mind you, but a bit.

NOTE: *There is a video companion to this guide available on the Tabarnouche Interplanetary YouTube channel*

The Right Captain for the Job

The demands of a sprint unlock are quite distinct from those of an ordinary Impossible playthrough. Under most circumstances the advice you'll see is to always prioritize the things that will be with you for the whole game (Captain Attributes/Skills), while putting a lower priority on things you can relatively easily accumulate through play (Ship/Contacts/Experience). The recommended build for this unlock looks a bit different...



Priority A: Contacts - I recommend putting Ex-Mercenary as your first contact, and making sure that both your second and third contacts buy intel. This can make it a little easier to transition from Spying to Blockading without wasting any time. Mostly though, the contacts you choose don't matter. We're putting contacts in Priority A entirely for the boost to starting reputation and influence, allowing us to recruit higher level officers as fast as possible.

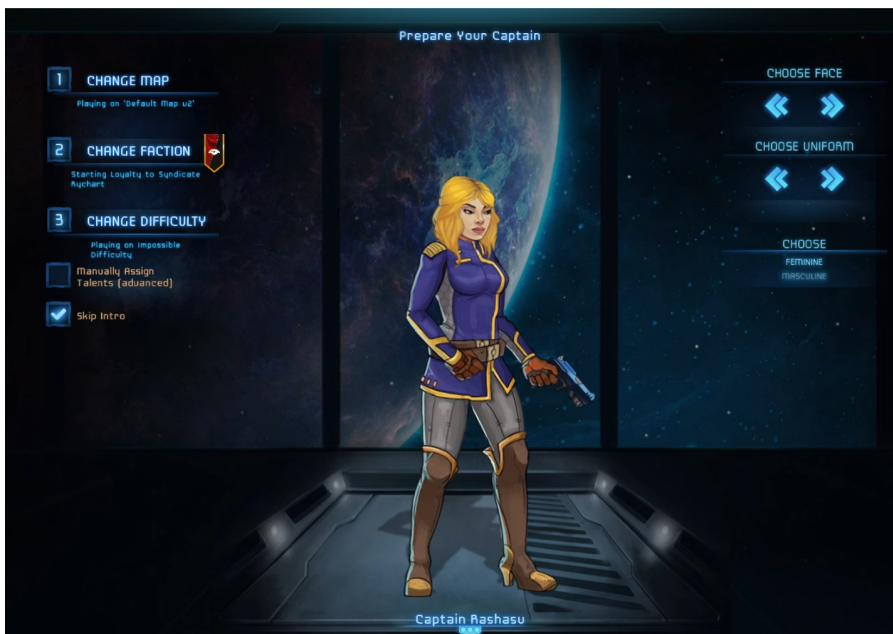
Priority B: Ship - This is a bit of an odd choice, since we're going to choose the Scout Cutter, which costs so little that you can have it with priority D. But by taking a cheap ship with priority B, we get an extra \$36k in starting cash, which makes a very big difference when we are recruiting and dismissing high level officers. Why the Scout Cutter? Well, first, it's cheap. Secondly, it's the fastest of the default-unlocked ships, which cuts down in-game time flying from planet to planet. If you already have the Palace Interceptor unlocked, there's a solid case for using it instead, as it's slightly faster and has an extra officer cabin. You'll be giving up \$24k in starting cash though...

Priority C: Experience - We'll be spying first, and so we want a Spy captain for the relevant talents. And we really want our captain to be reaching Level 5 for Scouring Search by the time we begin actually spying. Experience at C does the trick just perfectly.

Priority D & E: Attributes and Skills - We're not really worrying about these at all. You can put a few points into Command or Intimidate and that will help a bit. Likewise you can gain a small benefit by upping Charisma, Wisdom, or Resilience (Charisma is checked most often in Spying and Blockading, but Wisdom and Resilience are also checked fairly often while simultaneously boosting morale). In the end though, what you choose in Attributes and Skills will have a negligible effect on this strategy.

My Heart Belongs to Rychart

For pretty much all of the sprint unlocks, I recommend choosing Rychart as your faction, especially if you're playing on the Default Map v2. On this map, Rychart has only four zones in its starting quadrant, three of them in a tight little 12AU triangle, and the fourth just 24AU away. This keeps your starting contacts clustered together and limits the amount of flying you have to do during the initial rush for reputation and influence. The fact that Rychart has a particularly high cap on rep from intel can also help with the transition from spying to blockading in some situations.



As with all these guides, I'm playing on Impossible. If you choose to play on Hard, these strategies will work even more smoothly, with a bit of a buffer.

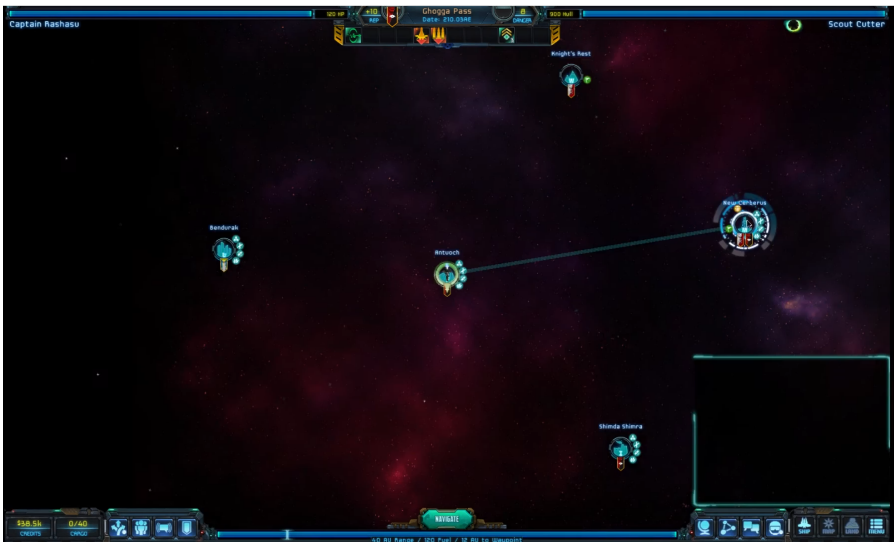
Finally a note on manually assigned talents. It's *always* better to manually assign starting talents, but this run is straightforward enough that you can save yourself a minute or two

by letting them be automatically assigned. If you do choose to manually assign talents, take a skill save for literally everyone but your captain and your combat crew. **DO NOT** assign your captain's second talent until you reach level 5, or else you won't have a talent slot free for Scouring Search.

If you truly want to optimize, give one of your pilots Sure Landfall. Then, at the first zone you touch down in, dismiss your starting combat squad and recruit four more pilots, giving all of them Sure Landfall as well.

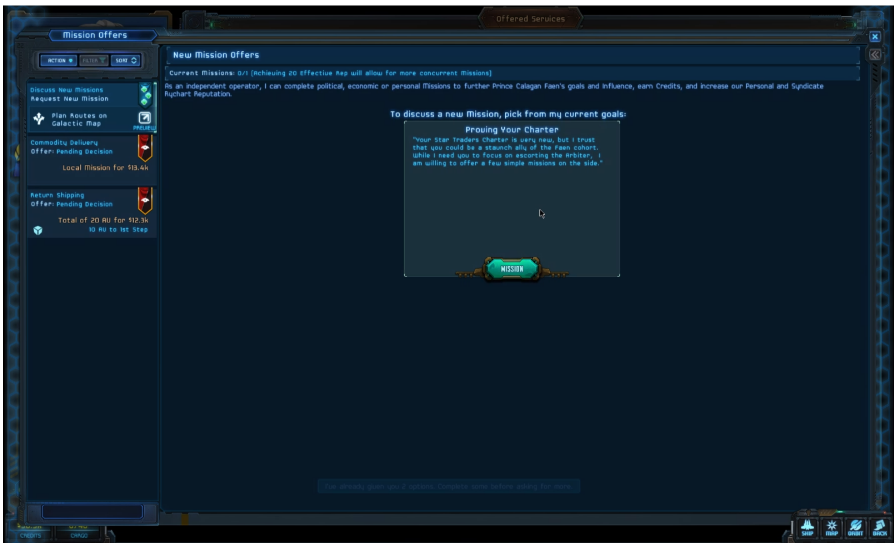
Estelle... Chill.

I've toyed around with the idea of just leaving the Arbiter hanging to save a week or two in these sprint unlocks. What I've found though is that, on average, the introduction to Calagan Faen helps enough to warrant running this little errand. Grab Estelle, set your ship to Auto Refuel (assuming you're as absentminded as I am), and drop her off at Calagan's court.



Proving Your Charter

Now the real fun begins. It's time to blitz some Proving Your Charter missions.



For the first 17 weeks of the game (until 210.20), Calagan Faen and your starting contacts will be offering this type of mission exclusively. The Proving Your Charter missions are all quite straightforward, involving no skill checks, no crew or ship combat, and no reputation loss. The goal here is to blitz through as many of them as we can in as short a time as we can, to pump our reputation with Rychart up to 50+ (to friendlier ship encounters) while also pumping at least one of our contacts up to 60 influence and ~100 effective rep (allowing us to recruit 3 level 12+ officers).

When taking these missions, only accept ones that are in the home quadrant (distance in AU, not jumps) and prioritize the Return Shipping and One-Way Shipper missions. You can also take the So-and-so Escort missions and the Short Jumper missions, but bear in mind that you only have a single passenger cabin. If you get a mission roll where it's all passenger

offers, it's not the end of the world to pull guns from your ship and add another passenger cabin or even two. Installing a passenger cabin takes 3 days and costs \$7k, but it's worth it if the alternative is running fewer Proving Your Charter missions. **DO NOT** take the Commodity Delivery missions.

Faen will only let you accept one mission at a time to start, so grab the best one and then head straight to the nearest zone with contacts. With a little luck, using Rychart on the default map, all of your contacts will be in the same zone.



Now, go ahead and take as many Proving your Charter missions as you can from each of these contacts as well, using the same prioritization above. While you're doing so, scope out the contacts for their starting influence and reputation, as well as whether they might have traits that make recruiting cheaper or more expensive. **Remember, the target here is 50+ faction rep and at least one contact offering level 12+ recruits.**

Once you're loaded up with a full slate of 7 or so missions, just start flying a clockwise or counter clockwise loop around the four Rychart planets, turning in every mission you can at each zone, and picking up more if you have a contact there who isn't maxed out on missions accepted. You'll have more missions at this point than there are zones for them to spawn in, so it makes much more sense to be flying zone to zone in order rather than plotting a course based on individual missions.



When you're turning in these missions, you'll usually have a choice between a faster option ("Over the Spice Plate" or similar) and a more prestigious option ("Public Spectacle" or similar). Always choose the fast option with Proving Your Charter missions. Even though rep is our goal, you get more rep per in-game week speeding through them rather than getting caught up in pomp and ceremony.

If you encounter ships while flying about, always submit to looting/inspection/report if it's an option, and retreat if it isn't. In the first year of the game, with neutral rep to all factions, there should be no circumstances where you are forced into ship combat. Once your Rychart rep is high enough that Acknowledge is an option, choose that.

Recruiting New Officers

Each time you find yourself at a zone with a contact, check to see if they will offer you level 12 recruits yet. This will usually happen around influence 60 and effective reputation 80. Ideally your effective rep will be closer to 100, as each recruit costs a little rep, which can lower the level for the next recruit. As soon as you're in a position to recruit multiple level 12 recruits, it's time to forget the missions (even the ones you've already accepted) and move on to the next phase of the plan.



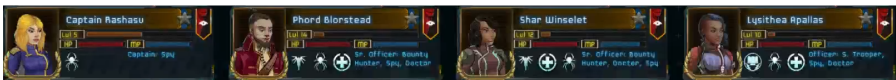
First, dismiss your starting Doctor and Quartermaster officers, then pay your crew to level up your captain. Next, go to Upgrade Ship and replace one of your weapons with an Officer's Quarters. The Scout Cutter can accommodate 4 officers (including the captain) but only starts with enough quarters for three. Then, recruit three new officers from whoever is offering the highest level recruits. The starting job of these officers doesn't matter. If, however, you have multiple contacts offering level 12+ recruits and one of them is the Ex-Mercenary,

preferentially recruit from the other contact at this point, saving the high level Zealots for phase two (blockading).

OPTIONAL: After recruiting your officers, you may opt to buy one level of Military Rank, one level of Edict, and one level of Trade Permit from either Calagan Faen or one of your other contacts. These will slightly increase the friendliness of some of the ships you encounter in later stages. Testing has shown that this is not strictly necessary however, and flying back to Faen's world to do it if you're not already there is probably not worth the precious time.

A Talent for Espionage

Now that you've got a level 5 captain and three level 12 officers (or something roughly approaching that), it's time to choose some jobs and talents. First off, your Captain should take 5 job ranks in Spy. If you have ranks to spare, put one into Pirate and the rest into Zealot. As for your officers, They're each getting 5 ranks in Spy as well, followed by 5 ranks in Doctor. Extra levels can go wherever.



As for talents, your captain and every single officer should learn Espionage Sweep and Scouring Search as the first priority. For those with 5 ranks in Doctor, the next priority is Life Saver. Round it out with the electronics and doctor Skill saves (Deft Control and Medical Staff).

	Medical Staff Automatically passes a failed Doctor test in any situation, including deep space travel, orbital ops or exploring or during a mission	
SKILL SAVE	Ready! (3 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 1
	Espionage Sweep When Spying in the orbit of a system, remove a risk card	
SPY	Ready! (5 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 1
	Life Saver Saves a life during ship combat, blockade, spying, patrol, salvage or black market. Crew member is restored to HP equal to Doctor Skill + 5 x Medical Rating of onboard medical components	
ON DEATH	Ready! (9 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 5
	Deft Control Automatically passes a failed Electronics test in any situation, including spying, deep space travel, or during a mission	
SKILL SAVE	Ready! (5 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 5
	Scouring Search When Spying in the orbit of a system, replace a risk card with an Intel Records reward card.	
SPY	Ready! (5 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 5

Note: If your captain somehow has a third talent available for training at this early stage, don't spend it on Deft Control. Buy the Rank 1 Pirate talent Corsair's Eye instead. We'll need it later.

When all is said and done, you should have 8 talents that let you remove or replace a card in the Spy minigame, three lifesaving talents, and a wealth of electronics and doctor skill saves. If, for whatever reason, you ended up a couple of level short, it's okay. What's really important here is that we have **a minimum of 6 Spy card game talents and 1 lifesaving talent**. The rest is buffer.

It's Finally Time to Spy

Now that you're stocked up on all the talents for the Spy game blitz, simply undock and start spying over whatever Rychart system you happen to be in. That's right, we're spying on our home faction. Many of the risk cards in the Spy minigame involve encounters with Military Officers of the faction you're spying against. But, because we've got 50+ faction rep with Rychart, those officers will be much friendlier than they would otherwise be.

If we were really trying to optimize our spying minigame we would be looking for a Rychart Zone with a Government rating of at least 4, and the lowest possible combined Military and Trade Law ratings (in the Default Map v2 Rychart starting quadrant, this is a tie between Radius Orb and Central Dundher). But really, for our purposes, it hardly matters and flying to a more optimal system costs us time we don't have.

In case you're somehow unfamiliar, the spying minigame looks like this:



And, as you can see, we've got eight talents ready to go. Since each of our talents has a three week cooldown, and considering that drawing a card usually takes between 3 and 6 days, we should easily be able to use a talent on every single draw. We just need to figure out which cards to remove/replace.

Card Removal Priority

Here are the cards we want to be prejudicially removing from the minigame, sorted in order of priority from critical on the left to not-that-scary on the right.



Time Lost: This is straightforward. Time is our most precious resource.

Reputation Loss: Rep is our second most precious resource. If our rep falls too low, the military officers will be less inclined to look the other way. If you end up with a hand with both this and Time Lost, you should be removing Time Lost at first. But if you've had the bad luck to actually draw one or two Reputation Loss cards already and your time is looking good, you might switch to prioritizing this above Time Lost.

Deadly Accident: This is not nearly as scary as it seems, since we're rolling in lifesaving talents. When you see this in a hand and have drawn one or more of them recently, make sure to double check that it says "Near Death Among Crew" (with the reminder "Life Saver Talent will prevent death" and not "Death Among Crew" with no reminder. If you see "Death Among Crew" then your lifesaving talents are all on cooldown. You should dock up for a moment, and retrain your talents on one of your Doctor officers to reset the cooldown (see next chapter if that instruction is confusing).

Varied Results: We're in to not-that-scary territory now. The only reason we're removing this is because some of the distress signal variants can burn quite a few days. But we have

enough talents to use on every turn, so if this is the worst card, go ahead and remove/replace it anyway.

Ship Danger: This is slightly worse than crew danger, because we can recruit more crew without using a significant amount of time if need be, but if we end up needing to repair our ship that can ruin the whole run depending on which components are damaged. The vast majority of the time we draw this though, one of our skill saves will protect us. I could possibly be convinced that the -5 risk version of this card is worse than Varied Results (and possibly even Deadly Accident) and I won't judge you if you choose to prioritize it accordingly.

If none of the above cards are in your hand, feel free to just remove whatever risk card looks at you funniest. And then just keep drawing cards until you start seeing fuel, damage, health, or morale warning signs in your status bar at the top of the screen. At which point it will probably be time to *briefly* land at the same zone we've been spying on.

A Note on Remove vs Replace Talents: In regular gameplay, we're usually interacting with these card games in order to hunt certain good reward cards. In these circumstances, a card removal talent is generally better than a card replace talent, because it ups the odds of drawing the reward we want from 20% to 25%. In this run though, we are more concerned about avoiding the bad risk cards, and so card replace talents are generally more precious because they let us remove one risk card without increasing the probability of drawing one of the other risk cards in the hand. To this end, you should preferentially use your card removal talents on hands that aren't that scary and try to conserve your card replace talents for hands that have 2+ Time Loss and/or Reputation Lost cards. Still, if the time comes that you're staring down two Time Lost cards with only removal talents in your pool, I'd recommend just removing one and praying rather than docking up and retraining talents.

A Note on Dealing with Ship Encounters: You'll draw plenty of cards that have you encountering Military Officers, Pirates, Bounty Hunters, and Explorers. As long as your Rychart rep remains high, none of these should force you into ship combat. When given the option, always submit to inspection or looting. Otherwise, simply retreat. If, for some reason, you can't retreat but do have the option to offer a bribe, pay up until the choice to retreat becomes available.

Taking a Breather

If you're lucky (especially with drawing Ship Repairs and Refuel cards), you might be able to knock off all 50 spy draws without needing to land once. But, in most runs, at about the midway point you'll start to run low on fuel or run into some other complaint in your top status bar. No problem, landing doesn't take that much time. The important thing is that, once you land, you don't accidentally do anything that's going to slow you down...



BUTTONS NOT TO PRESS

Medic: Doctoring takes time we don't have. They'll be fine.

Repair: Mechanicing takes even more time we don't have. If your ship is literally falling apart, you can click into the detailed view and get a breakdown of what components can be repaired how quickly, but you're probably putting your unlocks in jeopardy. As for non-disabling damage, don't even worry about it. Your biggest danger is reflexively clicking this button out of habit.

Spice Hall: This is no time to party. If you have crew that are at unpredictably low morale, just dismiss them and recruit replacements.

Upgrade Ship: Okay, at this point I think you're just trying to make me mad.

BUTTONS TO PRESS

Refuel: Refueling is necessary and doesn't take *too* much time. You probably don't need to actually click this though, since I told you to enable auto-refuel

Pay Wages: Levelling up your crew can get you access to some helpful skill saves.

Recruit: At any point in this, if a crew member is suffering low morale (or happens to drop dead), simply let them go and hire a level 1 replacement. No problem.

Retrain: Okay, this one isn't actually in the services menu, but it's only available when your docked/landed at a zone. If you don't know what I'm talking about, go into your crew manifest and click through to the talents page of one of your officers. You'll have the option to retrain all their talents for ~\$10k. Most often you'll want to do this if you've run out of lifesaving talents (choose the Doctor with the longest cooldown period remaining on Life Saver). But if you happen to have less than the full complement of 8 spying talents and find yourself running out, you can also take this opportunity to refresh the talents on one of your officers (again, choose the one with the longest cooldown period).

Now get back in the sky!

One Down, One to Go

The preceding chapters should have given everything you need to know. Just keep clicking until your achievement dings.



With a little luck you should be achieving the Covert Operative unlock very early in year 211. So long as you manage it before about 211.15, you should still have time to complete the Privateer challenge in the same run. If it's taken you longer than that, it's probably safer to start a new game for the Blockade phase and run the first part of this guide again (up until "Recruiting New Officers") before proceeding.

Friendship Ended with Spy. Now Zealot is my Best Friend.

Transitioning from Spying to Blockading is relatively straightforward. First dock up, fire all three of your Spy officers, then pay your crew. Teach your captain a job rank of Pirate if you don't have it already and then learn Corsair's Eye. If your Gunners have somehow dinged job rank 8, teach them Twitchy Trigger.

Now, if your faction rep is below 50, sell as much intel as you can to your highest influence contact until you're back at 50+. Next, pay a visit to your Ex-Mercenary contact and see what level of Zealot recruit he's offering. Unfortunately there's no job with two useful blockade replace/remove talents like there is with spying, so we're going to need to train our new officers up with both Zealot and Pirate. This is why we'd prefer to hire Zealots, because then they can triple job with the unholy combination of Zealot/Pirate/Doctor.

If your Ex-Mercenary is offering level 12+, go ahead and hire three of them. Give them 5 ranks in Zealot, 2 ranks in Pirate, and 5 ranks in Doctor, with a talent loadout that looks like this:

	Medical Staff Automatically passes a failed Doctor test in any situation, including deep space travel, orbital ops or exploring or during a mission	
SKILL SAVE	Ready! (3 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 1
	Corsair's Eye During a blockade of a system, replace a risk card with a Merchant card	
BLOCKADE	Ready! (3 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 1
	Icy Stare Automatically passes a failed Intimidate test in any situation, including deep space travel, mutiny, or during a mission	
SKILL SAVE	Ready! (3 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 1
	Life Saver Saves a life during ship combat, blockade, spying, patrol, salvage or black market. Crew member is restored to HP equal to Doctor Skill + 3 x Medical Rating of onboard medical components	
ON DEATH	Ready! (9 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 5
	Fanatical Siege During a blockade of a system, replace a risk card with a Tithe or Influence Conflict reward card	
BLOCKADE	Ready! (3 weeks Cooldown)	Req Rank 5

If you your Ex-Mercenary doesn't love you enough, don't panic. It just means you'll be running with only one lifesaving talent. Hire two level 6+ Zealots (or level 8+ anything from another contact) and give them 5 ranks in Zealot and 1 rank in Pirate. Teach them the Corsair's Eye, Fanatical Siege, and one or both intimidate skill saves. For your third officer, get a level 12+ anything from another contact and teach them 5 ranks of Zealot and 5 ranks of Doctor for Fanatical Siege, Life Saver, Medical Staff, and Famous Fury.

If, for some reason, no one is offering you level 12+ recruits any more, just feed them intel until they do. You should have plenty.

Now undock and start blockading in the same system you were just spying on! The process is exactly the same as spying, except that (absent Gunner prodigies) you won't have any removal talents and you'll be taking somewhat more regular reputation hits. If your rep drops below about 35, dock up and feed a contact intel until it's back above 50. Also, if you're stuck in the 1 Doctor build, make sure to keep a close eye on if you need to retrain talents to skip cooldown on your lifesaving ability.

Fifty will come before you know it.

Op Success!

If you've followed this guide, and have avoided a particularly miserable string of bad luck, you should achieve your second unlock at around 211.40. Congratulations!



Now it's up to you whether you want to take this weird build out for a spin in the broader galaxy, or whether you'd rather start a new run with your shiny Blackheart and Retired Spy contacts. Either way, good luck, and I hope you had a good time dipping your toe in the higher difficulties.

Stay tuned for my upcoming guide on the salvage sprint unlocks!