

Weaponized Balloon Animals

And that's what they're called, in fact. Even the official Galactic Patrol documents use an obscure phrase from one of the more accessible Ascended Race languages, which pretty much translates to... Weaponized Balloon Animals (WBAs). Basically, humans think that it's funny, and the other races don't really care if humans think that it's funny. Which is why any part of Galactic civilization that has humans running it will be overrun with puns... but I digress.

WBAs are typically just military versions of the balloon animals that virtually every sapient species has independently produced at one point or another in their cultural development; of course, by the time one gets to 'interstellar societies' on the technological tree even balloon animals are pretty sophisticated. In this case, by now they're mobile, virtually impossible to puncture, incorporate both sensors and communicators, and of course can download/upload a reasonably sentient artificial intelligence. The military versions typically just have a more powerful transmitter and decent stealth options.

So what are they used for? Mostly stealth observations of primitive planets: as noted above, most sentient species have balloon animals, and ‘obviously nobody could plant a recording device on one of those things.’ The Galactic Patrol prefers to have as small a footprint as possible when interacting with pre-First Contact planetary societies; surreptitiously setting up a network of interlocked, ubiquitous children’s toys cuts down on the number of field teams needed.

Plus, every so often you need to *nudge* a society a little. WBAs are excellent for discreet nudging. Well, more accurately, they’re excellent for drifting into a nascent dictator’s residence at night and strangling him, her, or it. ...Look, do you **want** to have Space Orcs? Because ignoring unfortunate societal trends in species on the threshold of interstellar flight is how you get Space Orcs.

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