

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 02/20/2011

Attendance

Chris offers, “Hey, have you seen the cheetah milk webcam? There’s a mother cheetah out there with two cubs and the zoo has been filming her nursing them.” *Paul* chimes in, “Yeah, cheetahs normally have trouble producing enough milk for their cubs so this one is really a champion of cheetah motherhood.”

Ernest suggests, “Perhaps you can order cheetah milk over the Internet. But you might want to check the bona fides of the folks selling it, or you might find that it isn’t *real* cheetah milk. I hear it will make you go fast.”

Bruce decides to not mention that he’s expecting *Tim* to show up with his eggs. That would just open him up to all sorts of snide remarks.

Then *Georgina* shows up and announces, “Stop bickering and discussing strange Creepy Clown Pops! I have brought chocolate cake!”

Paul exclaims, “Clown heads on a stick! I have no idea what these are! But I must have them!”

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
Bruce	Lambert Fulson	Rigunmor Guido Free Agent	Present
Bruce	Taveer	Mechalus Concord Engineer Tech Op	Present
Patrick	Martin St. John	Concord Naval Officer Tech Op	Present
Patrick	Lenny	T’sa Ambassador Free Agent	Present
Chris	Ten-zil Kem	VoidCorp Ambassador Diplomat (TO)	Present
Chris	Dreth	Pict Warchief Combat Spec	Present
Ernest	Markus Oroszlan	Warlion Bartender Combat Spec	Present
Ernest	Ken Takashi	Concord Naval Officer Diplomat (TO)	Present
Tim	Gerard Peppin	Borealin Ambassador Mind Walker	Present

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
Tim	Haggernak	Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec	Present

Did We Seriously Agree to that Plan?

Ten-zil Kem asks the others, “Of all the plans for turning St. John into a double agent in the alien spy network, did we seriously agree to the one where we publicly defame him as an insubordinate officer? Couldn’t we have picked something else, something like making him look like he’s got lots of bad gambling debts?”

Martin St. John offers, “Yeah, I like that one a lot more. I like it so much that I’ve been racking up uncollectible gambling debts on my own just to make the story more convincing.”

Into the Red Queen

Taveer, Markus, Ten-zil Kem, Lenny and *Haggernak* head down one of the Lighthouse boarding spikes and depart in a small shuttle to rendezvous with the *Red Queen*. They bring along several blix, but *Alice* vetoes the plan to bring along a Marine squad. They reach the designated point, but see nothing at all... until a massive starship simply materializes less than 1000 kilometers away from the shuttle. The shuttle pilot is quite dismayed by this development.

The last time any of the characters saw the *Red Queen* it was badly damaged by the volleys of nuclear warheads the *Lighthouse* shot at it. And the nuclear mine the characters set off inside the ship’s hull. Everyone is very glad that *Alice* appears to be the sort of AI who is big enough to not let that kind of previous history interfere with current cooperation. Since that time, the ship has been completely rebuilt, apparently out of pieces of other ships – the characters are able to see some corporate logos and nameplates from those vessels that donated components. The *Red Queen* is also decked out for war, mounting a truly amazing quantity of weapons.

The *Red Queen*’s docking bay includes both a physical bay door, and a gravity shield to keep in the air. The characters debark from their shuttle. The *Red Queen*’s five handmaidens greet them. All of them are dressed (and cybered-out) in the same fetish

style affected by the mechalus, but all are clearly from human stock. One of them has a Mohawk, goth makeup, and a t-shirt with skulls printed on it. Taveer thinks, “Hey! Maybe new girlfriend! I hope they understand my relationship with Mina.”

One woman steps forward and introduces herself, “I am Quoyan, Head of Security on the *Red Queen*. We have designated quarters for you. I will send you there directly.” Taveer feels the information show up through his integral wireless link, along with additional information: a map, service details and locations, and other data. Including her cell number.

Taveer quickly recognizes that the ship has its own Grid and a large number of inquisitive minds on board. He murmurs, “I just know I’m going to get along here very nicely.” The others are concerned by the fact that Taveer is standing mute and twitching for longer than normal.

Quoyan asks the characters, “Do you need to refresh yourselves, or shall I bring you directly to Mistress Dostilov?” The characters recognize the name as one common in the Narislav linguistic family, probably indicating an upbringing in the Nariac Domain. Quoyan turns to Haggernak, “I see you here, but I do not sense you on the network. Do you need assistance?”

Haggernak rumbles, “I prefer to stay off the network because I am afraid of Taveer.” He flexes his cybernetic arm.

Quoyan is sympathetic, “You will be much happier if you are able to fully join us. We have an advanced clinic on board, and we can make the alterations without pain.” Haggernak politely declines.

Markus notes that the only two characters with installed cyberwear are Taveer and Haggernak. He resolves to keep his gun trained upon their backs at all times.

On the way to their quarters, Quoyan explains that she and her sisters were part of a small spiritual community in the Nariac Domain. They were not politically popular with the government and fled to find a place where they could seek their mystic union with the Great Machine. Now that they have found a home on the *Red Queen* they have reached their temple of Enlightenment.

Strangely, this explanation reassures Haggernak into agreeing to let them implant an SI port into him.

Mistress Dostilov

Most of the Handmaidens are quite slim, but *Mistress Dostilov* is clearly going for the Earth Mother look: she is quite rounded, almost grossly so. “Welcome to our paradise, fellows! We do not normally have men on board, but we hope that your presence will not be too disruptive over the next few weeks.”

“Why no males?”

“Most of the members of our group were female, and those males who were members were not accepted by the *Red Queen*. It was an unfortunate loss to our Grid Collective.” She ushers them to a dinner, a meal prepared from various nutritious solids. Food in the Nariac Domain is apparently primarily a series of colored cubes of various kinds. And to drink later, there is Tang!

Markus Oroszlan eats well. He explains that the food is better than standard Thuldan military rations, which was made to make the soldiers angry enough to excel upon the battlefield. He notices that one of the Handmaidens in attendance at the meal is looking just a little bit stressed, possibly on the edge of cyber-crazy.

Over the last six months of their time on the ship the Mistress indicates that they have not been involved in the ship’s military operations, as their creed calls for nonviolence. Markus imagines how they must rationalize hearing the ship’s guns going off, especially when the AI announces, “There are new spare parts for you in the loading dock” (“I’m sure that she must have purchased them.”)

The *Red Queen*’s armaments include twelve independent Queen’s Knights, smaller AI-controlled fighter ships, plus several hundred laser cannon and sixty larger guns (rapid-fire plasma, quantum guns, all the classics).

Starfall Is Imminent!

After a few hours travel, *Alice* announces that the ship will be starfalling. For a few moments, the ship devotes all power to the stardrive, causing the lights and air conditioning and such to turn off. Then things return to normal.

Who Are these Little Blue Folk?

Alice asks the characters about their companions the blix. Markus Oroszlan explains that they are an elder race that is much more interested in the technology than in

the people. Ten-zil Kem notes that they're currently overhauling the boiled-egg cube maker.

Adventures in Cybernetics

The other characters notice that Taveer hasn't moved in hours. *Lenny* shakes him loose. Taveer tells him that there are at least two dozen cultists on board. He's friended all of them, and has joined at least eighteen Grid Interest Groups.

Meanwhile, Haggernak goes to the clinic to get a wireless adapter installed. Lenny goes along with him, just to make sure that the Alice cultists don't remove all of the grey matter in his head. He declines offers for various alternative-lifestyle enhancements, opting just for the adapter. After all, he's pretty short on cybertolerance after he got the new arm and the endoskeleton. And nobody wants a psychotic twelve-foot shag rug stomping around.

Signs of Trouble in Paradise

Ten-zil Kem spends some time talking to Alice about their destination. She indicates that they are expecting to arrive in about two weeks.

A few days into the journey, there is a problem. One Handmaiden is discovered quite dead, with a massive hole burned through her torso. Markus Oroszlan examines the body and decides that the weapon used was probably a laser sword of some kind. He discusses the matter with another Handmaiden, who admits that the level of modification practiced on board can have negative impact upon some weaker personalities. And while there is a lot of tracking available on board to determine where everyone is at any given time, the Handmaidens are typically also expert at software manipulation. The offending Handmaiden may have hidden her location during the time needed for the attack.

The dead Handmaiden was no pushover: she had an integral blade and a built-in mass pistol. Markus notes, "Y'all are carrying a lot of hardware for a group of pacifists."

Quoyan explains, "Many of us were upgraded from an early age by the Nariac Domain, and not all for peaceful purposes. The Domain has its own military forces and black ops teams. Not all of us have this kind of gear."

Markus grumbles, "Yeah, only the crazy ones do." He looks around for bloody tracks and finds none.

Taveer shows up and commences working out a way to physically interface with the corpse. He explains that if she had hardware for visual capture he might be able to read out the last things she saw, perhaps including the identity of her killer. Meanwhile, Ten-zil Kem returns to his quarters and works out ways to make them resistant to laser-sword strikes.

Lenny examines the cameras in the hallway. He discovers that they were physically disabled: someone physically clipped the wires, rather than trying to interfere with their programming.

As the characters investigate, Quoyan explains that this kind of incident is not unheard of: the weight of cybernetic modifications the Handmaidens carry can have an impact upon the weaker-minded. There will be a meeting later on.

Quoyan is able to identify seven Handmaidens who do not have an acceptable alibi for the death. Markus examines all of them and immediately finds one with an installed laser sword, one that has seen recent use. Her name is *Ivana* and she has the features of a country woman from the far coreward Nariac Domain. He coordinates with Haggernak to surround her. She seems close to flipping out, her composure is clearly slipping. The other Handmaidens are concerned, circling around in a menacing manner.

Haggernak asks her, "Excuse me, miss. It seems like you've been using your energy sword lately."

"Yes, I needed to cut something."

"A bitch?"

"No, a power cord in the drive section..."

"Perhaps you could show us."

Quoyan starts asking the Handmaiden more aggressive questions, pushing her emotionally. She clearly believes that Ivana is suffering from psychosis.

Ivana weighs into the discussion in a rational, well-considering scream: "Forbidding murder is a meat trait! We must be better than that!"

"So you killed her because she thought you wanted to kill her?"

"Exactly! She accused me of having psychosis!" This is her trigger to light up her enhanced reflexes and do her level best to cover the walls with arterial spray. She generates a starsword out of her arm and goes for Markus. Her initial strike lands across

his armor plating. He dodges clear of her second and third strikes then grapples her. The other characters pile on and disable her, until Taveer is able to eject the power supply for the starsword. On quick examination the starsword is PL8 technology, beyond current human technology and doubtless obtained from the *Red Queen's* labs.

Taveer tells the others, "This is advanced technology, incomprehensible to modern humans! Which means that it does marginally better damage than the weapons we carry today."

Quoyan thanks the characters for helping manage the situation with Ivana. She reassures them that Ivana will be fixed and will no longer have problems with behavioral control.

Divertment During the Voyage

Ten-zil Kem spends a lot of his time playing chess with Alice. When he isn't, he talks to the crew to get a better impression of just how good the *Red Queen's* stealth capabilities are and what her weapons capability is actually like. He also asks about the Pirate Nation of Ptolemy – how many ships do they have, how much of a local threat are they, and so on. He learns that at one time, Ptolemy had enough ships to take on the Bluefall navy, but then they tried to actually take them on and lost a lot of ships. The outcome of their abortive war on Bluefall was a raid on the Ptolemy system shipyards and port that left them in ruins. *Lord Hellas* of Ptolemy had to suppress a popular uprising after that, and has spent the intervening time rebuilding.

Lord Hellas is a third-generation pirate lord. The family was among a group of mercenaries and soldiers who seized the system from the Nariac Domain and started the campaign of piracy as a way to solve Ptolemy's economic woes.

The current Ptolemy fleet is a rag-tag pirate flotilla, now reinforced with strange alien ships and technologies. Given these new resources, it is only a matter of time before Lord Hellas launches an attack on an inhabited system.

Ten-zil Kem is struck with a product inspiration: he makes a note that VoidCorp needs to start marketing a ham-flavored baking spray called Pig Spray. He thinks, "It will be bigger than Pam!"

Starfall into Ptolemy

The *Red Queen* starfalls into Ptolemy and immediately drops into stealth mode. The main world of the system is Hurricane, a place featuring winds exactly as strong as they sound. There are four settlements with a total population of 50,000. Buildings are strongly-built and low-lying, often with windbreaks and shields to keep the worst of the weather away.

The largest town on Hurricane is the pirate citadel of Groundfall. Lord Hellas runs the place with an iron fist, though there are a few independent operators who hide out in town because they know that law enforcement (such as it is) will not bother them here.

It is quickly obvious that the pirate fleet is not bothering to hide. The largest ship in the fleet is a battered fleet carrier. Most of the vessels are smaller cutters, scouts and re-hulled transports. There are alien ships among them, including a lot of the little thorn fighters.

Information Gathering

Ten-zil Kem takes the lead in eavesdropping on the pirate fleet's communications net. He discovers that the biggest challenge is that most of the pirates do not have up-to-date hardware or software, which requires that he go back to recover various antiquated protocols. Through his information and observation of pirate fleet operations, the characters develop a plan:

- Identify an outgoing pirate ship;
- Have Alice incapacitate the crew with holograms;
- Steel themselves for the horrors they will see inside the ship;
- Board (either with explosives or with Lenny's electronics skills);
- Extract whatever we can from their computer systems

The plan works very nicely. Alice jams their sensors and pulls them roughly into the landing dock where the characters are waiting. Markus watches as the pirate ship skids across the deck at an odd angle. He calls out, "Nice! Here we go!"

The characters note that all the airlocks are either underneath the hull, or high up on the deck. Taveer calls out, “We go through the hull with shaped charges! Fire in the hole!” Boom!

When the characters enter, they find that Alice has overridden the target’s internal gravity. All of the corridors are at strange angles and several of the crew are wounded. The ship is a smaller scout with a crew of six. They don’t put up much of a fight.

Taveer tells Haggernak, “It pains me to admit this, but you may have tools available to you that are superior to those available to me. Could you have a nice discussion with this ship’s commander and persuade him to turn over the security codes for his ship’s computer?”

The captured scout is the *Baby’s Rattle*, named for the characteristic sphere-and-cylinder shape of the hull. The characters learn that the fleet has three rally points in the event that escape is necessary. The flagship *Raging Storm*, one of the human-built light cruisers, would send out a code indicating which of the three chosen points to use.

There are alien ambassadors on board the *Raging Storm*, aliens who look like fraal to the captain of the *Baby’s Rattle*. The characters understand that these are actually thaal priests, and thus represent a very high value target. The full alien ships are crewed by clicks, while the hybrid human-alien ships are crewed by a mix of humans and clicks.

The fact that there are thaal priests in the mix create some problems for the plan of luring the pirate fleet out to an ambush location. The click ships will require help from the thaal to perform a psychic jump, but if the thaal are on board the *Raging Storm* they may jump the click ships to a different location. The characters contemplate various ways to neutralize the thaal priests. Markus asks, “What kind of psychic neutralization tricks do we have available?”

Taveer suggests, “I think the *Red Queen* carries antimatter cannons...”

Markus ignores him and instead describes a plan in which the characters infiltrate the *Raging Storm* in the guise of a supply run and kill or capture the thaal on board. The complication there is that there is a good chance that most of the thaal priests are likely to still be on board one of the click *Intruder*-class vessels.

Laying the Groundwork for the Ambush

The characters pick out Jump Point A, a location five light years to anti-discward of Ptolemy. They relay a message through Peppin's psychic artifact to send a few ships from Battlegroup 4 to Ptolemy, and the balance of their fleet to Jump Point A.

Infiltration Mission: Groundfall

As preparation for their task to infiltrate and take the *Raging Storm* the characters prep themselves up to look like pirates. Taveer announces that he has all eighteen *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies playing on the ship's network for inspiration. Then he dresses up as Sex Gargoyle Abe Lincoln. Haggernak dyes himself blue so he looks like a pict, then adds a few skull tattoos. Markus plates himself up with nonfunctional pressure gauges, flattened-out tin cans, and skull stencils.

The characters board a shuttle and head down to the planet in the guise of real live pirates. They find that the planetary capital Groundfall remains a miserable shithole. Fortunately, every other building is a bar. The characters pick out one that seems to have slightly more garish and offensive neon decorations and head in. They notice that there are a lot of armed guards around to keep order, and a lot of other people carrying heavy weapons. Markus has a woman named *Sky Blue* who is wearing smart paint in the pattern of a sky with blowing clouds (and nothing else) give Taveer a lap dance.

Ten-zil Kem shares an opium pipe with an attractive female pirate. She tells him all about the supply ships going up to the fleet, then suggests that she has plenty of use for a man like him in her own crew. The two of them find a nearby rooming house and she demonstrates some of those uses, plus she shares her drugs with him. Ten-zil reciprocates and shares some of his with her.

Taking the Raging Storm

Their initial reconnaissance completed, the characters move in on the shuttle base. Ten-zil Kem determines that getting through the physical security will be no big trouble. Taveer (with Ten-zil's help) remote hacks the shuttle security and adds the characters to the passenger manifest. In addition to remotely opening the gangplank as the group approaches.

The one crewmember on board is immediately suspicious of the characters' intentions, but it doesn't help him at all. Markus and Haggernak restrain him while Taveer cores out the shuttle's operating system (and puts a 2-second delay upon outgoing communications in case the pilot decides to spread the alarm). The trip is quite uneventful. As soon as the shuttle docks with the *Raging Storm* the characters zip-tie and ball-gag the crewman and park him in a closet.

Markus creates a distraction while Taveer connects in to a handy terminal to subvert the ship's systems. This doesn't take long at all. He pulls up a ship layout, gets the codes to the elevators and various ship alerts, creates a low-level atmospheric pressure alert in the forward missile bay to distract the ship's engineers, and brings up an elevator to take the group to the engineering deck to disable the stardrive.

The way to engineering is blocked by two guards. Ten-zil Kem tries to chat up the female guard while blocking direct line of sight to Haggernak and Markus. She isn't impressed with him, until Haggernak clubs her companion down. Then she goes for her radio, but not quite fast enough. Lenny goes right through the secure door to the engineering bay.

Once in the engineering bay, Taveer parks himself at the stardrive control chair and takes the stardrive offline while the other characters round up the engineers. They don't resist.

The other characters notice that Taveer is about to distribute plasma explosive charges around the control room. They restrain him on the notion that, "What part of 'we're about to attack a bunch of mind-controller aliens' do you not understand?"

Taveer responds, "Sex Gargoyle Abe Lincoln knows what he's doing." But he does agree to not place the charges.

The Bridge of the Raging Storm

The characters head to the bridge. They find quite a few folks there: Lord Hellas, a group of bridge crew, a few guards, and a thaal in a suit that looks like it was purchased from Evil Overlords-R-Us. All of its clothing appears to be made from some kind of slimy octopoid alien creature. Two barim bodyguards stand to either side of the thaal.

Markus shouts out, “Alien collaborator says what?” and flings a pulse grenade into the midst of them. The thaal doesn’t look surprised at all, except by why Abe Lincoln is on his bridge – his Precognition triggered in time to let him throw up some defenses. He has a staff with glowing crystals on the end. Small energy sparkles from the staff tip deflect the grenade blast away from him, though his guards and lots of bridge gear are damaged.

The thaal priest focuses upon Markus. His psychic powers grab hold of the warlion and fling him across the bridge. Then the barim guards leap on top of him. Markus thumps one of them, knocking it down.

Taveer swings his tri-staff at a human guard, collapsing the man. Another one shoots him, so he clubs that one down as well.

Haggernak takes a shot from one of the guards. He barely notices.

Lord Hellas turns and runs for the heavy weapons. Lenny’s dark energy bolt runs right through his torso, but he keeps on going. Ten-zil Kem masers him down.

The thaal sends his telepathic powers at Markus, slowly exhausting him. Markus yells out, “Shoot the priest! Shoot the priest!” Lenny obliges, hitting the thaal dead center with dark energy. He observes that energy attacks cut right through the thaal’s kinetic barrier, leaving him somewhat more vulnerable than against gunshots. Haggernak follows up with a plasma cannon that washes down the area with white-hot flame but does a surprisingly small amount of actual damage (1 paltry wound). Other characters yell out various encouragements to Haggernak on the topic of proper usage of his weapon.

The thaal priest decides that he would prefer to use psychic powers against Haggernak. He exhausts him to the tune of four fatigue. Ten-zil Kem, Taveer and Lenny all take shots from guards; Ten-zil Kem falls. Lenny responds by shooting the thaal in the head, knocking him down and dead. The sparkles vanish, and all the magic goes out of the world. Everyone who isn’t a thaal breathes a sigh of relief.

The characters clear through the remaining burim and the guards, then Markus tends to Ten-zil Kem. After that, he performs some first aid upon the thaal priest.

Taveer parks himself at an engineering terminal, takes control, and puts the whole ship into lockdown. After he’s dropped every bulkhead, nobody is leaving their

bedrooms. Once he comes back awake, Ten-zil Kem contacts Alice (who promptly manifests on the bridge) and has her warn the Fourth Battlegroup that the *Raging Storm* is theirs. Everyone poses for a nice group photo with the thaal prisoner and the dead Lord Hellas.

The characters tranquilize their thaal, then gather up the contents of the rack of heavy weapons Lord Hellas had been going for.

A quick forensic investigation proves that Lord Hellas was not actually infested with teln. Ten-zil Kem suggests that while the teln can control people (and things), the thaal cannot necessarily control the teln. In contrast, some people can be very effectively controlled with money with few unwanted side effects.

The Rest of the Ambush

The situation outside goes about as the characters expected. The *Red Queen's* surprise attack destroyed the largest klikk Intruder with no particular difficulty. The human ships (including the carrier) all jumped out of the system on the basis of the characters' bogus alert. The klikk ships are forced to give fight because they don't have stardrives and cannot leave: apparently they were supposed to travel with the carrier, but the carrier left the system too quickly.

Days later, the characters will hear from the rest of the Fourth Battlegroup that they had no trouble with the ambush at Jump Point A. The Ptolemy pirates showed up piecemeal, expecting to arrive at a safe point to regroup. Instead, they arrived to be immediately engaged by Verge Alliance ships that cut them to ribbons. And with their stardrives exhausted by the jump they had nowhere to go.

The End of the Session

Each of the characters involved in the session get eight experience points for the session.