

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 03/20/2011

Attendance

Paul complains to the group, “Why won’t you tell me about your characters’ plans? I need to know these things!”

Chris very reasonably explains, “But you’re the gamemaster! You should just know these things. That’s your *job*.”

Bruce reinforces this point, “Or you should just draw upon your immense powers of improvisation! You know, those powers that you use to create complicated ship stats and NPC details in nice typeset format on the fly!”

Paul holds his head and groans. Why, why do these people expect such unreasonable things out of him? He is merely human. Well, mostly.

Tim redirects the conversation towards a lighter topic, “Hey, have you heard about how all the world’s media hates Sarah Palin? That’s why they keep on giving her column inches! Besides, she’s brought attention to the way that so many food stamp recipients just blow their government cash on food. Say, is Ernest going to show up at all today?”

Paul explains, “He’s got some house-guests, so it depends on when they leave. He’s entertaining some Slovakian hookers.”

Chris mourns, “Yeah, in town you can only get Albanian hookers. It’s all the fault of the Albanian mafia.”

Tim asks, “Hey, aren’t all Albanians vampires?”

Bruce clarifies, “Actually, they’re mostly draugurs.”

Tim chirps up, “I know those! They’re in *Bestiary 2*!”

Bruce explains, “They’re actually also in Scandinavian mythology. They’re bloated undead creatures that rise out of barrows to avenge themselves against their killers.”

Chris offers, “Yes, but they’re also in *Bestiary 2*. I looked them up – they’re CR4.”

Tim once again changes the subject by opening up a container of ranch dip and offering, “Mmmm! Smells like botulism!”

And hours later, *Ernest* shows up and explains that he's only just managed to get rid of his houseguests. He doesn't describe exactly how. Or if they were either Albanian, Slovakian, or undead.

| <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 |
| Tim | Haggernak | Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec | Present |

The Loss at Tendril

The *Lighthouse* embarks towards Lucullus with the medurr Riftship attached to its docking spines. Preparations are underway to send a fleet to Cambria so it can be moved to action through the Riftship.

Verge Alliance spies report that the *Styx* and its associated escort fleet departed Hammer's Star, but they do not know where it went. Additional reports come in from Tendril that the system has been taken by an Externals fleet led by an unfamiliar Fortress ship. The characters deduce that this must be the *Lethe*, the Fortress ship that the Verge Alliance had not yet encountered.

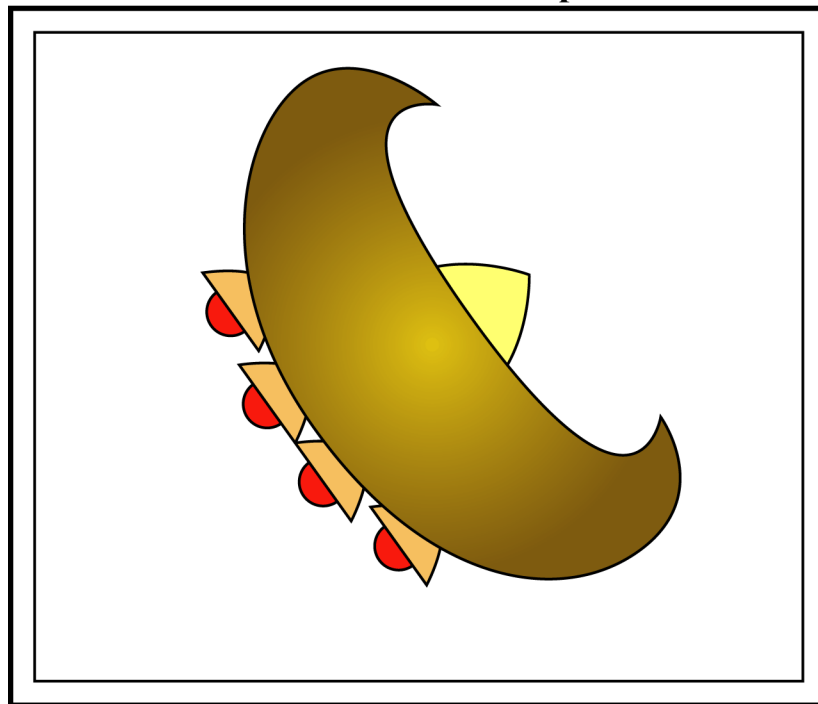
The loss of Tendril is significant: the system is a major mining center and includes the only working space elevator in the Verge and one of the few drivesat stations. Reports from the one Verge Alliance ship to escape from the I-krl assault

indicate that the *Lethe* deployed a new weapon. It was a single massive missile that launched at such a slow velocity that the Verge Alliance defenders discounted it as a valid threat. Then it jumped into DriveSpace and detonated there, creating a shockwave that destroyed the drivesat station and cut off fast communications from the system.

The overall battle for Tendril was not without cost to the I-krl. The Verge Alliance defenders managed to inflict only limited damage to the *Lethe*, but they did inflict heavy losses upon the Fortress ship's escorts. By the time the I-krl were victorious their fleet was reduced to a pale shadow of its original strength.

To date all of the Externals Fortress ships the Verge Alliance has encountered are constructed and crewed by the avian sifarv people. They have a bird-like design, reminiscent of a classic Bird of Prey, and are completely mechanical designs (in contrast to the biological ships built by the clicks).

Sifarv Fortress Ship



The Admiralty decides to deploy a scout ship to Tendril to keep an eye on the I-krl ships. They make certain that there are at least two crew on board that Peppin has met, so he can use the alien artifact to make psychic contact with them. Peppin reflects upon how the cruel utility of the psychic artifact works to put all of his friends into direct risk on the front lines of the war.

Red Queen to Mantebron

The characters send the *Red Queen* to Mantebron. On arrival, they discover that both the *Styx* and the *Phlegethon* are present in the system, along with all of their escort ships. This solves the mystery of where the fleet from Hammer's Star went. The character take some comfort from the knowledge that the *Red Queen* should be stealthy enough that the I-krl ships should not be able to detect them, at least as long as they stay far out.

The *Red Queen* reports that the signature of the *Phlegethon* is no longer the same as it was the last time the Verge Alliance got a good look at it. Closing to visual range, it is clear that the I-krl are modifying the vessel. They are installing a massive new gun a half-kilometer long along the central spine of the ship. There is significant shuttle traffic between the *Phlegethon* and the world of High Mojave. There are known to be a lot of Glassmaker artifacts on High Mojave, so it appears that the kadaren scientists have managed to weaponize some Ancients technology.

Approaching to within a couple thousand kilometers of High Mojave, the characters are able to see that there is at least one kadaren Jellyfish laboratory ship landed at each known Glassmaker site. There is a cluster of Jellyfish at the Tonsil site, along with clear indication of an increased kroath presence there. *Taveer's* archive files include several reports on the area. He tells the others that initial human exploration found a large number of Glassmaker stasis pods there. The explorers opened some of the pods and found that they contained hostile spider-like creatures dubbed *arachnons*. Subsequent observation indicated that the creatures tended to stay to their own ruins, but also were prone to releasing additional arachnons from time to time. The human settlers on High Mojave treated the area as a quarantine zone. All appearances are that the kadarens have made significant progress in exploiting the area. It isn't clear how the doubtless ongoing arachnon-versus-kroath conflicts are doing.

Time for a Fugue State

Peppin decides that now is the time to ask his falkri spirit entity about the Glassmakers. He drops into a fugue state. The entity tells him that even at the height of the falkri civilization the Glassmakers were a distant legend. They created races to act as tools, entities like the arachnons. The Glassmakers did not make mechanical or

electronic computers – they stored their information in living creatures, but they made those creatures of ageless materials like crystal and glass. Some of those races still survive today. Communicating with them is difficult, as many have been driven insane by the passage of millions of years, but it might be possible for entities with sufficient psychic power.

Peppin attempts to astrally project into the ruins to look for residual Glassmaker sentience, but he is unable to achieve the proper focus. He proposes an expedition into the Glassmaker ruins so he can try making contact more directly. The other characters are perhaps less enthusiastic, as they understand that such an expedition will involve being shot at by kroath, attacked by immortal Glassmaker creations, and possibly frozen during the 120-hour night (with low temperatures reaching -100° C). However, his arguments win them over.

The Glassmaker Ruins

Peppin, Taveer, *Lenny* and *Ten-zil Kem* form the core of the expedition team. The standard equipment loadouts include:

- Breather masks;
- Cold-weather gear;
- Insulated survival tents;
- Heavy weapons;

Ten-zil Kem persuades *Alice* to issue maser pistols and maser rifles to the other characters. Then he spends the rest of the time discussing how to stylishly dress himself for the trip. Alice is tremendously pleased; by the time the two of them are done, his environment suit looks like the clothing of a Renaissance Spanish nobleman.

Taveer ensures that he has a detailed satellite map of the Glassmaker site and everything within 1000 kilometers loaded into his internal computer storage.

The characters' shuttle touches down at the far edge of the Glassmaker site under cover of the *Red Queen's* illusions. They land during the day, when the temperature is not nearly so horrible. The entire Glassmaker city was constructed from silicon-based materials, but it is tremendously old and the years have not been kind. The whole area is studded with haunted, jagged-edged fragments of broken structures. At one time, High Mojave was a pleasant place, but the whole Mantebron system is ancient. The star is

cooling and dying, High Mojave's moons are in decaying orbits and expected to collide with the planet within the next 20,000 years, and the surface environment resembles Mars. The local plant life, that which isn't silicon-based and obviously a Glassmaker creation, resembles the giant air-storing folding cabbages of Robert Heinlein's *Red Planet*.

Ten-zil Kem identifies a reasonable route into the ruins. Along the way, he determines that the characters' group wasn't the first – he finds an abandoned human camp with a fair quantity of technological junk scattered around. Peppin tries reading the residual emotional content, but all he really picks up is greed.

The characters continue on. Parts of the area have receded beneath the local water table, so they encounter occasional seep-ponds of muddy water and treacherous submerged shards. There is something beyond water in the ponds – they smell repellent and are turning into a rancid septic marsh. There is something unnatural about the lakes, not least the fact that they are able to stay liquid with a night that goes far below normal freezing temperatures.

The path turns and moves into a treacherous section with many protruding shards of glass. Taveer trips into a particularly nasty piece and gets sliced up badly. Peppin moves in and administers hallucinogenic mushrooms as first aid. Taveer does not improve. Ten-zil Kem shoos Peppin away and moves in to help. He explains, "I first learned First Aid after I had a prostitute die on me. I thought that it would be quite useful to know how to remove objects that were obstructing the airpath." Sadly, neither of them are able to do much for Taveer.

Some Local Fauna

Nine local creatures ambush the group. The things look like scaly dogs or coyotes, and they look very upset with the characters' presence. They appear to be biological in nature, and as Ten-zil Kem points out, "They're all muscle. Fabulous."

Lenny fires his maser pistol wildly, striking an overhanging crystal structure and shattering it. Razor-sharp shards fall on everyone, injuring five of the attacking animals. Lenny decides to act as though he meant to do this, especially because the characters all manage to make their Athletics rolls to avoid getting hit.

Two scale-dogs fall upon Ten-zil Kem and knock him out. Icy drool drips from their fanged maws as they anticipate a meal of decadent diplomat. Before he falls, he manages to thoroughly maser one of the creatures, but it doesn't fall. While the largest scale-dog stands between Ten-zil's body and the other characters, the two scale-dogs who knocked him down start dragging his body back towards their lair.

Taveer is caught off-balance. He desperately parries scale-dog attacks, stopping about half of them. The remaining attacks are enough to knock him down.

Peppin observes Lenny spitting out ineffective maser shots at a scale-dog. He calmly aims his own heavy maser and shoots the creature cleanly through the head. It falls twitching.

The scale-dogs press the attack on Peppin. He desperately fights on as more dogs start dragging Taveer away. He strikes one scale-dog twice, leaving it nearly crippled. Lenny helps out by gunning another one down. Then the two of them combine fire on the last scale-dog attacking Lenny, hurting it badly.

In a terrible setback, the crippled dog tears at Peppin while he's distracted and downs him. Lenny decides to run for it, using his stealth skills to evade them. He returns to the ship.

What Happened to the Others?

Ten-zil Kem regains consciousness. They find that they have been dragged into a glass cavern filled with glass webs. The scale-dogs are standing in a semicircle around them. Peppin lies unconscious nearby. At the center of the webbing is a structure that looks like two hemispheres with an hourglass joining them. Six long glass webs extend from the hemispheres. A row of red eyes rings the radii of the hemispheres.

Ten-zil Kem sits up. The red eyes throb. It is clear that the entity is paying close attention to the characters. He notices that Taveer is also stirring, but Peppin is clearly badly wounded.

While Ten-zil Kem does his best to perform first aid on Peppin, Taveer keeps his eyes upon the crystal spider. Taveer whispers to Ten-zil, "If it becomes necessary, I have enough plasma jelly explosive on me to blow this cavern to Kingdom Come." Ten-zil

rolls his eyes, gently moves Taveer's hand away from the detonator and goes back to first aid.

Thanks to Ten-zil Kem's efforts, Peppin rouses up within a few minutes with two wound points back. He makes a gentle effort to reach out to its mind. The entity moves closer across its immense net of glass fibers. As it approaches, Peppin is able to see that it has a beaked mouth with abrasive glass teeth. He can sense that it has psychic powers of its own and that it is feeling out his mind. It sends first-person images of kroath, apparently of it being destroyed by a kroath. Then Peppin sees himself as one of many glass arachnoid creatures fighting against the kroath. He recognizes that these entities must form a psychic area network with each other, so each of them can see the death throes of their comrades.

The characters respond by putting up holographic images of kroath being destroyed by various human weapons. This seems to convince it to not kill them immediately. Peppin's botched psychic statement, "We love the kroaths!" touches the line, though.

The scale-dogs approach slowly. Taveer commences setting up plasma jelly charges, suggesting to Ten-zil Kem that he might want to try expressing that the sex gargoyle has enough explosives to bring down the cave. Ten-zil Kem ignores his suggestions and instead sets up an ongoing broadcast of, "We come in peace... we come in peace..."

The dogs stop moving.

Peppin makes another effort at first contact. The entity responds, "Why are you here?"

"We are trying to contact the Regents left behind by the Patriarchs, and to destroy the kroath."

"You are classified as invaders. The kroath are classified as invaders."

"If we help you with the kroath, can we be classified as something other than invaders?"

"Are you willing to accept control?"

"Permanent?"

"Unless the implants are removed."

“Sounds. Bad. We are an individuated species.”

“Inefficient.”

“Will you allow us to remove ourselves?”

“Acceptable. But you must not return.”

“Do you need help with the kroath? Do you have things under control?”

“All intruders must be removed.”

Peppin explains the situation to the other characters. He is able to spot and point out the crystalline control modules on the backs of the scale-dogs’ skulls.

Peppin asks the crystal entity, “Have you been able to control the kroath? The clicks?”

“The kroath cannot be controlled. The clicks can be controlled.” Peppin gets the idea that the kadaren scientists are thoroughly isolated from the crystal entity’s reach. It is fully aware of the I-krl bio-domes and their defenses, but is not able to attack them. However, it isn’t willing to make bargains or compromises to get the characters’ help. It does send images to Peppin of a flat-topped purple pyramid with many additional arachnon pods.

Peppin eventually cuts a deal that involves submitting one of the other characters to control. Taveer is already rather obsessed with the Glassmakers, so he volunteers. Ten-zil Kem tries to make clear that the control process needs to be temporary, and that the mission includes not only clearing the I-krl off the planet but also gathering information on the new superweapon being installed on the *Phlegethon*.

Taveer Is Controlled

The orbweaver unweaves some of the webbing around the characters and allows Taveer to approach. It instructs Peppin to have Taveer put his explosives back in his pack first. Taveer hands the detonator to Ten-zil Kem (“The code is M-I-N-A!”).

Once Taveer gets close to the orbweaver it jabs a spiked leg into the back of his head. The crystal control module expands and grows into all of the parts of his brain, giving it complete control over his body when it wants to. It motions him to back away, then reweaves its protective web.

Ten-zil Kem asks, “Taveer? Are you still in pain?”

“I do not acknowledge this pain concept you two-legs talk of.”

Ten-zil Kem self-medicates himself into a better place.

The Purple Crystal Pyramid

Taveer leads the other characters to the purple crystal pyramid. There are eight clicks moving around the base of the pyramid. They are unarmed and are moving slowly and uncharacteristically. Their chitin appears to be cracked in multiple places. Peppin tries to read their emotions and gets nothing back. He reports, “Those guys are in a non-emotional state. Even the clicks have basic emotions, and they aren’t even showing those.”

Ten-zil Kem asks Taveer (or the orbweaver behind him) about defenses. The orbweaver explains that there are internal defenses, controlled by the host computer. It doesn’t have any level of control over that device, though it can open the door.

The entire pyramid starts to glow more intensely purple. Peppin notes, “Somewhere a kadaren is shitting bricks over that.” There is a grinding noise. A two-meter wide section of the pyramid near one corner recedes, leaving a visible passage behind.

The clicks move towards the characters slowly. The characters easily evade them and enter the pyramid. They enter a passageway that appears to run around the perimeter of the structure. Midway along the passage there are five identical crystal doors. The center of each door is a worn four-by-four keypad with strange symbols on the keys. Peppin reads one keypad with psychometry. He gets an image of small bluish dots on keys. Peppin uses this knowledge to open the central door. Steps lead down and away from the door. There are bumps on the walls on either side of the stairs. The characters follow the stairs down into a room. There is a spent lantern of human design in one corner. It has a Verge Confederation symbol on one side, so it has clearly been down here for quite some time.

The next room is mostly free of debris, except for the partially mummified body of a klik in the northeast corner. The body is marked with burn scars. Across from the dead klik are two glowing statues of an unknown type of humanoid. One is kneeling, one is standing. There is a button of dark purple stone at the standing statue’s base.

Peppin concludes that the klick died from a combination of electrical shock and full-body dehydration. Then he pushes the button, in spite of Ten-zil Kem's complaints, "It killed a klick! Those things are tough! Don't be stupid!" Nothing happens. He touches the door, nothing happens. He opens the door, and it opens. Weird...

The Hidden Room

Peppin walks around and finds out that there is an empty space in the middle of the visible areas. He turns intangible and finds a secret room. Even better, there are two (live) clicks in there. He ducks out, and the clicks open the doors to follow him.

Taveer swings his tri-staff and hits a klick twice, then twice again. The creature twitters and strikes with claws! The bioweakness field takes Lenny out as Ten-zil Kem and Peppin deal out moderate damage to the second klick. Ten-zil Kem notes that his shots are merely inflicting stun damage to the klick.

The characters recognize that the two clicks are still standing. Ten-zil Kem decides to drop his maser pistol and change over to his charge pistol, knowing that klick armor isn't as good against high impact damage. This doesn't change things much: his hits are good, but the klick's armor stops almost all of the damage. He shoots again and manages to take it out by nickel-and-dime. Peppin fires on the second klick and again manages to knock it down with secondary damage.

Peppin examines the two dead clicks. He concludes that they were warrior clicks. They also have the same small cuts through their outer shells as the clicks around the pyramid. The cuts do not look random – they look more like the results of an attack by a weapon shooting crystal shards. There is also something wrong with the clicks' blood: it seems to be contaminated by a foreign substance.

The characters generally conclude that the clicks were probably not working on behalf of the I-krl. It is much more likely that they were being controlled by the pyramid brain. There are chairs in the hidden (security) room that look like they are built to fit something as tall as a weren, but as wide as a fraal.

Establishing Contact with the Pyramid?

Peppin decides to sit in the chairs. They don't do anything: they're just chairs.

The Arachnon Stasis Chambers

The characters move further into the pyramid. They find a large room with four doors. It is filled with arachnon stasis chambers. The walls are decorated with images of slender, tall, glowing aliens in various jungle and field scenes, probably from the early times of High Mojave. The aliens are shown in cities of glass, and creating different species with their hands. One Glassmaker carries a long staff with several world-like spheres around its tip. One of those worlds is water-covered and has a fairly good representation of a deepfallen near it. Taveer has no compunctions about releasing the arachnons from their chambers. The other characters run for the security room, in hopes of surviving the experience.

As he scurries for safety, Ten-zil Kem wonders, “How many arachnons are there in here?”

As if to answer him, Taveer booms out, “RISE, YOU UNCOUNTED HORDES OF DEFENDERS! THE INTRUDERS WILL BE SWEEP AWAY! SOME ARACHNONS HAVE BEEN DAMAGED BY THE MANY EPOCHS THEY HAVE SLEPT, BUT IT IS OF NO CONCERN! THE STASIS CHAMBERS REACH FAR INTO THE PLANET! THE DEFENDERS OF THE PATRIARCHS WILL SWEEP THE INVADERS AWAY!”

Ten-zil Kem groans: Taveer isn’t being mentally compelled, so he doesn’t need to be saying these things.

Peppin manages to make psychic contact with the pyramid defense entity. It agrees to hold back the arachnons, but warns him that there are intruders within the structure. The arachnons start crawling up the walls and ceilings and everywhere. The effect is very creepy.

And it is at this point that *Markus Oroszlan* shows up. Apparently he was there all along, but he’d reached his preset kill limit and had to shut down for a while. The others explain that he can shoot at anything in the pyramid except for other characters and crystalline spider entities.

The Externals Research Lab

The characters manage to open up one of the doors out of the central stasis pod chamber. Lenny sneaks down the corridor to find a small Externals camp, including a few portable klick sleeping pods and two kroath on guard. Lenny sneaks back to tell the others about it.

The characters decide to refrain from lighting up the two kroath. They turn to investigating other parts of the pyramid.

The Museum of Archaic Weapons

The characters move into another chamber. The walls are covered in hooks, racks and shelves containing primitive weapons of various description. The weapons are mostly decayed with age and built for a variety of creatures. Among them are some items of quality, blades of crystal and glass that remain razor sharp. Markus Oroszlan picks up one of them and tests it: it does not break when struck against a wall. There are also some spears and axes of similar construction. The east wall includes a variety of bones and skulls, along with the stuffed carcass of an ape-like creature with long floppy ears. The characters speculate that it might be the taxidermied remains of a favorite slave. Markus offers, "I dub it the slender loris."

The Arena

The characters continue into a sunken oval room with jagged walls and a fetid, algae-covered pool. Various mummified corpses litter the floor, both clicks and humans. High-backed narrow seats ring the upper level of the room, protected by a five-meter crystal wall. Glassmaker statues are visible in the shadows beyond the seats, and another Glassmaker statue bearing a sword and spear stands at the end of the arena. Three of the scale-dogs lurk near the edge of the pool, but they're not normal: they are covered in kroath scales and growths.

Peppin moves into the arena, with Taveer behind him. Taveer fires on one kroath canite, striking it several times but failing to inflict a significant wound through the creature's armor.

The creatures rush and attack, but fail to inflict serious damage. Ten-zil Kem, Lenny and Peppin shoot the wounded kroath-dog but fail to end it. Markus spins up his quantum chain gun and ends the creature.

Up on the top level of the chamber a curious kadaren scientist steps over to see what is causing all the noise. The creature watches as a kroath-dog's armor deflects a maser hit from Ten-zil Kem's gun. Then Peppin manages to shoot it down into a puddle of goo. The third kroath-dog doesn't last much longer.

Up on the top level, the kadaren orders a nearby burim to, "Get down there!" Then it turns and scuttles away. The burim lurches over the wall and leaps down to the arena floor. Because it's a burim, it doesn't go for the weakest target, it goes for the strongest: Markus. It strikes him with its filament chain for nine wounds. Raaaaagh!

Then the characters open fire and turn the burim into shards and gibbets.

Markus Oroszlan reasons that the kadaren can't have gone far, so he flings a grenade up over the lip of the arena. There is an explosion, but no sense on how much damage he might have done. He follows by thundering his way up and over the wall. He finds himself in a seating area for the Glassmaker aliens, decorated with several statues of various Glassmaker creations. Discarded kadaren personal effects and empty eating-pods are scattered around. Markus aims his maser cannon (which he describes as his "pain wand") at the kadaren, who is trying to hide behind a chair. Markus blows a big hole in the seat right above him and demands, "Surrender!" The kadaren surrenders.

Interrogating the Kadaren

Markus takes the lead in shaking thoughts loose from the kadaren's head. The creature is *Mitak Argo*. It tells the characters that the kadarens are interested in learning about the deepfallen. Specifically, they want to know how to trigger the deepfallen's power to make entire populations vanish. The gun currently being installed on the *Phlegethon* was recovered from the Glassmaker ruins.

Ten-zil Kem explains, "Mitak Argo, you are now the captive of the Verge Alliance, and this has some benefits. When you answer questions accurately and tell us useful things, we will give you interesting projects to work on. But if you do not tell us

the truth or cooperate fully, then we will lock you in a featureless box with nothing to do.”

Mitak Argo didn't need much persuasion anyway, and Ten-zil Kem's words are enough to get him to spill everything. He tells the characters exactly how many kroath, clicks and kadarens were in the expedition. He is almost the last one left: they failed to find the pyramid's computer and most of them pulled out to work on other projects. He was left behind to continue the work.

Mitak Argo doesn't know much about the new main gun on the *Phlegethon*, but he is willing to describe what he knows. It uses a gravimetric snare to collect faster-than-light particles, then project them to decay when they reach the target. The particle decay interacts massively with the target object, dumping an amazing level of heat and radiation directly into its core. Ranging is accomplished by adjusting the accelerating potential of the beam-line, using relativistic time dilation to control the apparent half-life of the particles. It is estimated at a PL of 9, maybe. Whatever technology level it is, the energy discharge would be sufficient to utterly destroy any ship of less than cruiser size. Taveer is able to understand the concept of the weapon, and he can explain it to the other characters in terms that they are only barely unable to understand.

Another Secret Room

Peppin continues psychically walking through walls around the Arena. He finds another secret room, something that looks like a tactical control center. Several explosions have destroyed much of the interior, but there is another orbweaver still present. Peppin performs alien meditation and attempts to establish contact with it. And then he opens the door to let the other characters in.

As soon as Taveer enters the chamber, he starts to shudder uncontrollably and emit high frequency crystalline humming. He is serving as a communications link between the two crystal computers that have been separated for millennia.

Peppin decides to perform a mind scan on the orbweaver. The orbweaver deflects the attempt, then unleashes swarms of its brain-bugs. Everyone clears out. Markus notices that Taveer is still acting as a psychic modem for the two orbweavers. He grabs the mechalus under one arm and the kadaren under the other, then runs.

The characters head back to the shuttle by way of the first orbweaver, which very obligingly dissolves the crystal interface link in Taveer's head.

Can We Destroy the Phlegethon?

The characters debate their options for damaging or destroying the *Phlegethon* or its new spinal gun. Taveer spends some time examining the images the *Red Queen* took of the vessel for weak points and finds nothing useful.

Taveer suggests that an alternative would be to send a probe near to the *Phlegethon* and use it to tap into the Fortress ship's communications networks, perhaps to get a ship's layout or structural diagrams.

The plan will be: take over a kadaren lab ship, loot its computer banks, make a hole in it and park the *Red Queen* inside, send it towards the *Phlegethon*, perform hacking as possible along the way, dock with the *Phlegethon*, plant a nuke on the spinal gun, then run for it and set off the nuke.

Hacking into the *Phlegethon's* main computer system is an attractive notion, but difficult. The ship will have an Amazing computer (+4 difficulty, 10 successes needed). Fortunately, the characters include several capable hackers: Ten-zil has Hacking 17, Taveer has Hacking 20 (with a -1 step bonus), and Mitak Argo can help out. Mina has Hacking 27, BTW.

The End of the Session

Eight experience points for everyone!