

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 04/03/2011

Attendance

Bruce calls in via Skype to report, “I have the whole War Room going on here! Check it out! Multiple displays, video telephony, plus an active chat server!”

Chris notes, “That’s all very nice, but you realize that we’re playing a game that would work fine with nothing more than a yellow notepad, pencils and some dice? By the way, I’m getting my house tiled – would you like some cats for a few weeks?”

Paul observes, “This technology is excellent, but it really doesn’t answer my main problem – that of getting the players to actually participate in the game. *Without* tedious, long-winded explanations that just slow things down. I’m looking your direction, virtual boy.”

Chris looks around. “It’s almost 12:30, where is everyone? Do they think we’re starting at 13:30 again these days?”

It is at this moment that *Patrick* shows up, announcing his presence to *Bruce* as a fast-moving blur. *Tim* shows up quickly thereafter, but he is quite shy on words – he is much more interested in absorbing his cruelty-free lunch. Munch!

Just as *Ernest* shows up, the conversation has turned to the incompetent parenting habits of some species of penguins. In particular, one type of penguin that builds its burrows into old bird guano and abandons its eggs as soon as the water temperature gets to a comfy 50°F or so, leaving the young to fend for themselves against the gulls. *Tim* suggests that scientists should consider using genetic engineering to create a sort of plant-penguin, a creature whose eggs are edible but with embryos that will pass unharmed through a predator’s digestive system.

<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

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
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 Phlegethon

Before we flee Mantebtron with our tails between our legs, we are determined that the External forces won't get away with their Glassmaker artifact spinal gun they've mounted on one of their two fortress ships in the system. Sifarv Fortress Ships like the *Phlegethon* and the *Styx* are huge, at least three kilometers long. Beyond their own weapons complement, they carry two Invader-class capital ships, three Intruder-class cruisers, five Ritters, and at least 100 fighters. Even with the firepower of the *Red Queen*, a straight-up fight with the ship is out of the question.

The characters' plan starts out with *Taveer* hacking into the *Phlegethon's* computer systems through a remote link. *Ten-zil Kem* supports him. It takes a couple of tense hours of effort, but they are finally able to copy across a layout for the ship. Taveer comments, "Well, now we know where all the mess halls and barracks are." Ten-zil rolls his eyes and starts looking for vulnerabilities. Taveer joins in afterwards. He observes that the new spinal gun is growing into the body of the *Phlegethon* rather the same way the Glassmaker control device grew into his brain. The kadaren scientists aren't so much installing the gun as allowing it to grow through the structure of their ship.

While Taveer pores over engineering documents, Ten-zil Kem and *Markus Oroszlan* put together a list of their assets:

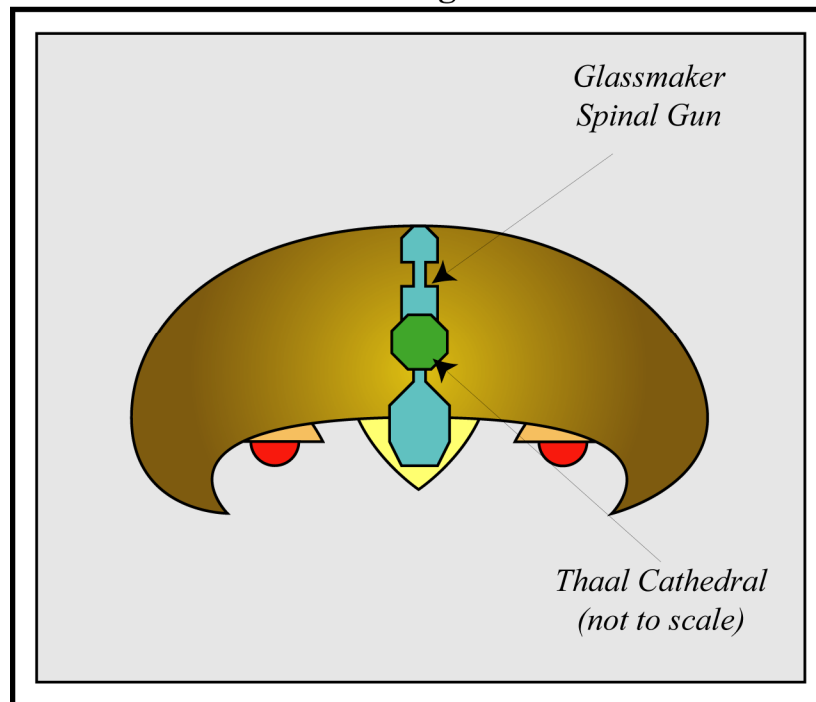
- The *Red Queen*, with moderate firepower and fantastic stealth powers. Most of her weapons are energy projectors, but she does have some nuclear-tipped missiles.

- A cyborg crew of Nariac “peacenik” commandos, who can maybe put their star-swords on “stun”
- The green sex crystal that created such havoc on the *Lighthouse* several sessions ago.
- The *Red Queen’s* nuclear weapons. Don’t forget the *Red Queen’s* nuclear weapons.

One primary target must be the thaal priests, as without them the ship has only limited interstellar travel capability. They would normally be located in the central Cathedral of the ship. Taveer suggests sending a small team in, armed with a nuclear warhead, to destroy the Cathedral and the priests in one fell swoop.

Taveer is able to locate both the Cathedral and the central Power Core of the ship. Both of them look like good targets for a strike, but the ship is so large that even a nuclear warhead directly attached to a major system won’t be enough to actually cripple or destroy the entire ship.

The Phlegethon



Markus suggests that a really key thing to do if the characters are able to get a team onboard for an extended amount of time would be to determine if the ship actually has some kind of backup stardrive, or if the thaal priests really are the only way the ship

can travel faster than light. Both he and *Gerard Peppin* offer that there is probably enough empty space on the Fortress Ship that the insertion team might be able to remain in place for weeks without being disturbed. Unfortunately, Taveer does not have access to badge records among the data he was able to extract, so it is hard for him to identify underutilized sections of the hull.

The crew on board the *Phlegethon* is likely to be comprised entirely of the I-krl “higher races”, including sifarv, thaal, bareem, karadin, and ghardhyi.

The Clever Plan

After much discussion, the characters finally agree upon a plan that doesn’t sound like absolute suicide. In brief, it consists of:

1. Take out a lab ship and steal its registry
2. Approach the fortress ship with the Red Queen disguising herself and us as a lab ship and bareem goons
3. Insert via pirate ship *Baby Rattle* w/a nuke payload
4. Have the Red Queen remotely disguise us as bareem with her illusion powers
5. Release green sex crystals into the Phlegethon
6. Hack systems for info (may take a day or more)
7. Go to cathedral; use falcric entity living in Peppin to shield our brains from the psychics
8. Nuke the thaal. seriously, fuck those guys
9. Make glassmaker weapon go nuts, maybe even firing on the other fortress ship
10. Extract with intel and prisoners and get out of the system

The more the characters talk about releasing the green sex crystals on the *Phlegethon*, the more they like the idea: it will be harder for the ship crew to identify what is happening, they’ll be likely to attribute strange crystal side effects to their new Glassmaker weapon, and some of the subject races might respond to the crystals in very permanent ways. For example, the three-brained kadarens could well end up in a catatonic state, assuming they haven’t bred out their reproductive tendencies in favor of specialized machines generations ago.

What Does the Nariac Queen Think?

Ten-zil Kem goes to the bloated *Mistress Dostalov* of the Nariac cultists to recruit some of her people. She agrees to provide pilots for the *Baby Rattle* and some other support, but no gunbunnies for the assault.

A Category Error

The characters then explain the plan to *Alice*, who explains very carefully that the *Red Queen* is actually too large to fit inside a kadaren Jellyfish, but she can essentially disguise herself completely as a Jellyfish. Of course, she would still need a ship registry and a reason to dock with the *Phlegethon*.

Obtaining Authorization

The characters turn to packet-sniffing various kadaren Science Jellyfish to identify a good impersonation candidate. They finally pick out a ship called *Flying Worghul*. It takes the *Red Queen* mere seconds to core out the *Flying Worghul* and disguise herself in its place. Nobody thinks too much about the unfortunate kadaren crew: they were all totally amoral anyway.

The *Red Queen* disguises most of the characters as bareem, except for Taveer (who ends up looking like a kadaren) and Peppin (who could only become a thaal). *Lenny* and Ten-zil Kem look like the smallest bareem ever, so they make a special effort to learn how to show “crazy eyes”!

On Board the Phlegethon

The characters finally make it on board the *Phlegethon* and catch their first view of an actual sifarv. The creatures really do look like avians, perhaps 4’6” to 5’6” tall, with long, overhanging beaks and rotund bellies. The characters notice that the ship internal layout allows the sifarv crew to consistently occupy higher perches and walkways than the “lesser” bareem. It is also very clear that the sifarv commander of the *Phlegethon* really hates kadarens: he has their areas segregated off from the rest of the ship.

The characters find a quiet corner in the kadaren science center and Taveer and Ten-zil Kem commence hacking. It takes six hours of work, but by the end of it they

have detailed records of the ship layout and system design, including some access codes. One of the things Taveer comes up with is everything the kadarens know about the tachyon cannon. He also finds files on some of their other weapons, including:

- The Converter Gun: a weapon that fires a concentrated blast of antimatter; and
- Virtual Matter Shields: a defensive system that surrounds sifarv vessels with a physical layer that acts like armor, but which does not actually exist. To date, Verge Alliance ships have not yet encountered ships equipped with this system. It is available in light, moderate and heavy versions. The heavy version provides d8+2 armor against X. Energy input from the shield is stored in ship capacitors, which could be overloaded.

The characters are also able to learn that the *Phlegethon* is equipped with a hardware StarDrive, albeit one that is substantially inferior to human-designed StarDrives.

The characters also find files discussing a giant Cathedral Ship, a vessel that dwarfs a Fortress Ship, located in the Hathorn system where the Externals have their Verge base. Tactical updates from various I-krl forces suggest that Lucullus remains a point of strength for them: their kroath troops are dug in deep there. However, the human forces remaining at Tendril are creating an ongoing problem for the I-krl attackers. The I-krl regard activating the deepfallen “star gate” effect at Bluefall as a high priority, but so far have not had any luck at activating it. They plan on sending the two Fortress Ships at Manteborn to Bluefall, a force large enough that will completely overwhelm the defenders if they are not further supported. The Fortress Ship they have stationed at Tendril will remain there both because it is damaged, and because it is needed. Their Cathedral ship will stay at Hathorn.

The characters take some of this as quite good news: they had previously assumed that the colony at Tendril had been carpet-bombed into glowing slag. Knowing that there is still an organized resistance will be a morale boost for the Verge Alliance fleet.

Significantly, there is no good estimate for when the spinal mount on the *Phlegethon* will be complete. The kadarens are projecting that completion will take months, but they do not know how many.

The characters fall to discussing fleet dispositions. One huge question is how to exploit the medurr Riftship and its drivespace-denial weapon. Another tidbit is the fact

that the I-krl ships do not have the same level of stardrive detection that human ships have. This means that the Verge Alliance could launch an attack (at least with the *Lighthouse*) right on the doorstep of a Verge Alliance fleet.

While the Characters Argue

As the characters park themselves in a corner of the *Phlegethon* arguing about Verge Alliance strategy, the green sex crystals have been growing surprisingly quickly. Taveer is monitoring the various ship systems and notes that the *Phlegethon* is having functionality issues in weapons bays, life support sections and other important ship systems. Many of the fighters in the Fortress Ship's bays are essentially out of commission.

Taveer proposes sending contradictory orders to the teams dealing with green crystal outbreaks, using the characters' pet kadaren to compose orders that make sense to thaal and bareem. The others are busy arguing about how to kill the thaal priests without tipping off their precognition and giving them time to teleport out of danger. Nobody seems to pay attention to him, so he just proceeds to start issuing appropriately bad commands.

The characters finally realize that the bareem also go to services in the Cathedral, and more to the point that bareem workers do maintenance there. Taveer generates a bogus work ticket to install additional squid-monster platforms on rows 18-32 of the east transept, and to install more power strips to persuade the kadarens to show up to services more often. He then adds an acceptance for the order so the characters can show up as the work team without raising suspicion. An undocumented part of the effort will be to install a nuclear warhead.

The Thaal Cathedral

The Cathedral is quite different from the rest of the ship. The cacophony of bird noises and bright sounds are gone, replaced with a dark hall decorated in muted colors. Quiet choral tones pervade the space. The *High Priest Krl'xenoth Klozhak* is present. His eyes are filled with glowing dark purple clouds. He is surrounded by eight lesser Mindwalker priests.

As soon as he enters the chamber, the falkri presence within Peppin's mind activates. He senses that there is a very strong I-krl force in the Cathedral. The characters gradually come to understand that High Priest Klozhak is possessed by an I-krl entity. If Peppin were to fight it now, he would have a chance to destroy the physical structure of one I-krl entity, but that would likely just push the I-krl back into DriveSpace rather than destroying it.

Apparently, "Krl'xenoth" is a title meaning "Possessed by the I-krl". Peppin's falkri guest is able to confirm that that High Priest Klozhak personally is the force needed to move the ship through DriveSpace. All the other Mindwalkers are just acting as a fuel source, to provide the massive psychic energy needed.

The characters do have a personnel manifest for the ship. They determine that there is only one Krl'xenoth-ranked individual on the ship. Unfortunately, the falkri tells them that if the current Krl'xenoth is killed, the I-krl will simply promote someone else to that rank (and possessed status).

The characters decide to forego personally killing Krl'xenoth Klozhak in favor of just emplacing the nuke. Taveer manages this with an amazing success.

Precognition. Not Everything You Might Hope For

Krl'xenoth Klozhak does make his Precognition check, but all he gets is a vague premonition of coming danger. He concludes that the fleet must prepare for possible attack. But from his preparations, it is clear that he has no idea from what direction.

We Are Seriously Crazy!

As the characters start to exfiltrate, the plan changes. The new plan is to partially exfiltrate, move to minimum safe distance for the nuke to go off and then after the thaal priests all die, give Peppin an opportunity to commune with the crystal gun (since the thaal will be communing with crystal gun up until the nuke goes off).

Taveer concludes that the green sex crystals have had a permanent impact upon the minds of his comrades.

The nuke detonates, eliminating the thaal priests and inflicting only 8 mortal damage upon the *Phlegethon* (out of a supply of 188). Taveer mourns, "I should have brought more nukes."

Peppin chastises him, “That’s your solution for everything.”

The Tachyon Gun Control Room

The characters head towards the control room for the Glassmaker tachyon gun. They encounter four bareem warriors standing guard over a bulkhead door in their way. Markus and Ten-zil Kem quickly shoot one down and injure another one. The survivors brandish their filament whips and quantum rifles. Another shot from Ten-zil Kem leaves the wounded bareem nearly incapacitated.

The bareem turn on their deflection harnesses and volley with quantum rifles. Ten-zil Kem takes a hit, but his armor absorbs most of the harm. Peppin verges into his battle mind and instantly develops a superhuman situational awareness. He tells the others, “Battle Mind! Superhuman situational awareness!”

Taveer moves in and strikes one with his tri-staff, inflicting seven wounds. The creature swings at him but misses. Peppin and Lenny fire upon the fourth bareem, killing it immediately.

The last bareem is wounded. Markus moves on it with his Glassmaker blade and inflicts ten wounds. The creature falls. Markus decides that the Glassmaker weapon is a keeper.

The characters enter the tachyon gun control room. The place is a combination of sifarv and kadaren technologies, overlaid with a profusion of crystal growths and protuberances. There are several kadaren technicians inside, working on mysterious consoles. Suspicious bareem slavemasters watch their activities carefully.

Peppin (still in disguise as a sifarv) orders the bareem, “The commander has passed down orders. Execute the kadarens. There is a kadaren insurrection going on, they can no longer be trusted.” This is apparently not a surprising instruction for the bareem: they comply without question. He then tells them, “Very good. Now go execute more kadarens on level four. Ignore the bodies in the corridor.” The bareem again comply without hesitation.

Peppin moves to the main control console and proceeds to enter communion with the control. He clambers along the underside of the crystal like a giant spider, doing his best to avoid the patches of green sex crystal growing all around.

While Peppin does strange, quasi-human things, Markus orders Taveer to mine the door. Taveer complies, tamping a double plasma jelly shaped charge that he thinks should be enough to ruin the day of anyone entering the room unexpectedly.

The falkri entity in Peppin's mind detects the presence of an I-krl entity in the crystal spinal gun. From its signature, it is the same entity that occupied the unfortunate High Priest Klozhak. The falkri manifests and attacks the I-krl. Everyone is momentarily blinded by the bright light as the two energy beings fight each other in the center of the room, but Peppin is not dissuaded – he establishes communion with the crystal tachyon gun, then brings Alice on the *Red Queen* into the link to act as fire control.

Alice uses her main engines to modify the attitude of the *Phlegethon* enough to strike the *Styx* with the tachyon beam. Given the state of the crystal tachyon gun, the one shot is enough to severely damage the gun, possibly beyond repair. She triggers the accelerators, sparking abnatural flames that run along the length of the *Phlegethon* and twist space-time through the corridors of the massive vessel. The effect upon the *Styx* is even more noticeable. The ship suffers 11 critical damage (out of 96, granted) and takes six system hits. The characters follow that up with messages apparently from a kadaren insurrection promising to destroy the *Styx* from the liberated *Phlegethon*. Damage includes:

- Accommodations – Explosive Decompression;
- Power Plant – inflicting 8 more points (no armor);
- Engine – reduced movement in realspace;
- Hangars – destroying some support ships;
- More Explosive Decompression; and
- The Computer Core!

The spinal gun rips itself out of the *Phlegethon's* hull, shattering as it goes. Peppin is horribly wounded from the tachyon backlash – the other characters have to peel him off the ruins of the crystal core and are quite certain that he will need some time in the bacta tank.

Flee the Ship!

The characters decide that now is the time to leave. They head to the *Red Queen*, but their way is blocked! A crack squad of five bareem stands in their way. Markus unlimbers his grenade launcher and sends a pulse grenade into their midst. They are all injured, and they respond (of course) by firing with rifles. Markus takes a serious hit, but manages to stay standing. Taveer takes a hit as well, but refuses to let it trouble him too much.

Ten-zil Kem fires at the two lead bareem, shooting one dead. They shoot back, missing entirely. Ten-zil crows, “I’m invincible! Nothing can stop me!”

Markus ignores him. He’s too busy firing grenades at bareem.

Lenny carefully lines up a wounded bareem and guns it down. He pats his maser gun with the sort of fondness normally reserved for offspring.

Markus finishes the last of the bareem.

The characters turn to looting the bodies. Each of the bareem was equipped with a fully-mechanical quantum rifle, in addition to a deflection harness. Markus reminds the others, “And boots! Don’t forget the boots!”

The rest of the way to the *Red Queen* is uneventful. She undocks from the crippled *Phlegethon* and immediately turns on stealth.

The Aftermath

Peppin takes a long time recovering from his wounds. He comes out of the experience with sparkling blue skin, which confuses most of the other characters: you’d think that sort of thing would be what people who *do* have Space Gods have. It doesn’t confuse any of the Nariac cultists who healed him – they feel that glowing blue tattoos are a mark of robust health.

Ten-zil Kem spends much of the return voyage having tea with Alice and various stuffed animals. He finds this very, very creepy.

The End of the Session

Each character gains ten experience points. Most characters are likely to gain a level. The I-krl fleets are disordered and both the *Styx* and the *Phlegethon* are damaged, but neither is destroyed.

The *Red Queen* will stay in place at Mantebtron to keep track of I-krl communications traffic, while the *Lighthouse* will attempt to quickly free some people from Lucullus on the way to Aegis for the climactic space battle.