

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 05/15/2011

Attendance

Ernest comments, “I bought the *REIGN Enchiridion* on Friday. Perhaps now I’ll be able to interpret when Bruce wanders off to gibberish land. That was really the one high point of my evening, which was otherwise dominated by dinner at Cici’s Pizza.”

Chris comments, “They’re still making their crust out of used shipping containers?” Ernest mournfully nods.

Bruce simply howls out some gibberish.

Paul reflects upon the wisdom of wrapping a Ranier cherry with French fries to create new, forbidden taste sensations. Bruce just has a flashback to *eXistenZ*... We want the special...

Bruce gripes, “I don’t feel like writing an introduction piece today. Can anyone help?”

| <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 | Drest Talorgin | 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 | Absent |
| Tim | Haggernak | Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec | Absent |

What Happened? What Happened!

When *Taveer* returns to the *Lighthouse* he finds that *Veera* is running the ship while the engineers struggle to bypass all the protections and booby-traps Taveer had put on *Mina*. Taveer is horrified by the damage done to *Mina* by the alien incursion – he clears his calendar and seals himself into the main computer room to fix the damage. The others notice that Taveer has physically networked himself into the main computer banks and is mostly just twitching randomly. They don't think this is weird at all.

Admiral Takashi tells Taveer, "I'm going to need clear and uncompromised proof that *Mina* is no longer infected by alien influences before we hook her back up." Taveer is nonverbal and just writhes in what might be a response. The Admiral turns to the Marine guards, "I'm going to need clear and uncompromised proof that Taveer isn't infected by alien influences before we let him out of this room."

The guards salute, "Sir, yes sir!"

Meanwhile, *Veera* is running the ship on a hacked node running through the elevator power supply. She isn't nearly as powerful as *Mina*, and people are missing some of *Mina*'s capabilities. In particular, there isn't nearly enough bandwidth for porn. Admiral Takashi sets the Blix to the problem: "Blix! We have a porn crisis!" The Blix get on the problem.

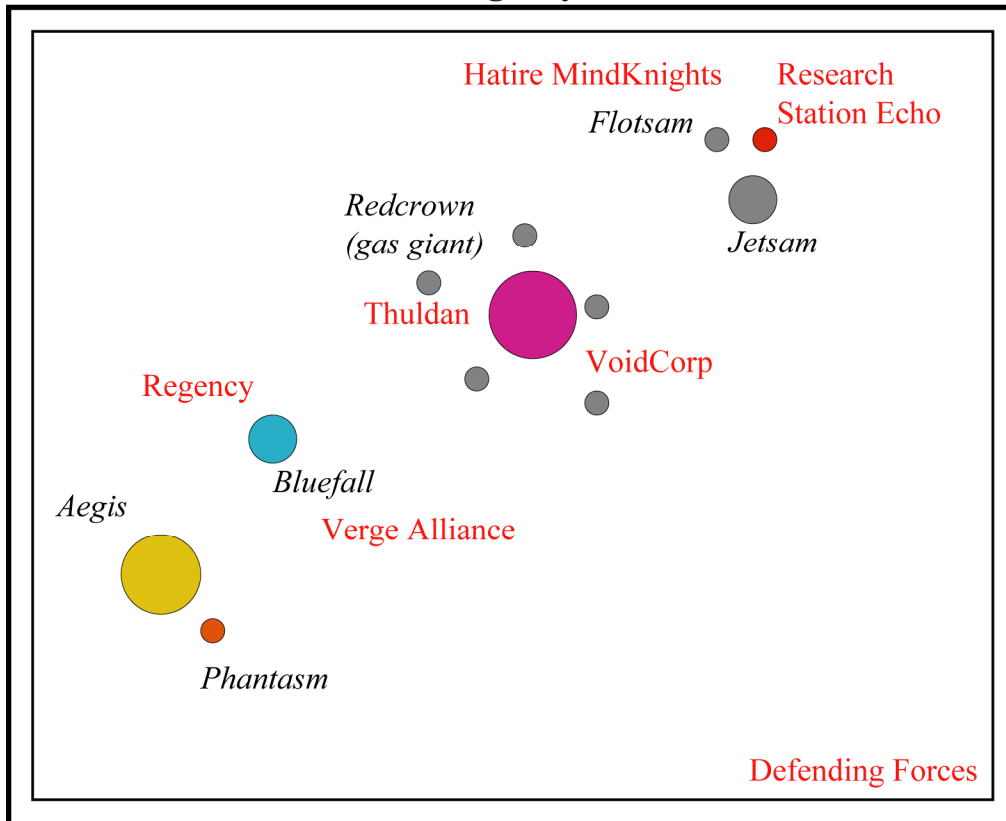
Defending the Aegis System

Everyone knows that an I-krl attack is coming, even though this is supposed to be a secret. Acting on this intel, both the Thuldans and VoidCorp have moved ships in to protect their gas giant and moon mining operations at Redcrown. There are significant defenses around Bluefall, provided both by the Regency and the Verge Alliance. And finally the iceball world of Flotsam has a small monastery of Hatire Mind Knights and a Regency space station, Research Station Echo.

Admiral Takashi opens negotiations with the Medurr on how to deploy their drivespace denial weapon. His basic goal is to spread out the arrival of the two I-krl Fortress Ships expected to be part of the invading force. The challenge is that the characters (and the rest of the defending fleet) really don't know the specific schedule for the attacking fleets. Another issue is the fact that most of the defenders (specifically the

Thuldans, the Hatire and VoidCorp) don't know about the drivespace denial weapon, and may be compromised by alien infiltration – if the weapon is used too obviously, I-kr1 spies are certain to spill the beans to the attackers.

The Aegis System



The clear I-kr1 target is Bluefall, but the specific approach is a matter of some debate. Most StarDrive systems are not that accurate (the *Lighthouse* is an exception), so ships jumping in to a system will typically target an arrival in the outer system. The accuracy of the I-kr1 psychic stardrive is an unknown, though its cycle time is clearly pretty long: movement data on I-kr1 Fortress Ships shows that they never show a time in-system of less than several weeks.

Regent Christopher Hale's main contribution to the discussion is to emphasize that the defenders must not engage the I-kr1 in close orbit over Bluefall – any near-miss in the battle would turn into a massive strike on the world.

Admiral Takashi's plan is to recruit everyone available into a unified command structure, turn Research Station Echo into a forward operating base, buy about two light-days worth of engagement time with the Medurr drivespace denial weapon, and try to

engage the two Fortress Ships separately. Admiral Takashi particularly wants to have the Hatire Mind Knights deployed with the Verge Alliance ships to serve as anti-psyhic shock troops. One additional detail is the deepfallen: the I-krl have done a lot of work unsuccessfully trying to open the deepfallen gate to depopulate Bluefall, but sending another embassy to them to try and enlist their aid is low-cost.

Hobnobbing With the Politicians

Bluefall is both the home world of the Regency and the center of the Verge Alliance, so Admiral Takashi spends some time talking to both Regent Hale and Verge Alliance President *Michael Thane* about his plan. He is the space tactics expert of record, so they generally don't challenge him on the details. He does ask whether they have any hole cards (like secret weapons systems on Echo Station) that they would like to flip over right now.

Regent Hale explains that Echo Station represents the most sophisticated sensor system available in the Verge. It is currently used for astrophysical surveys, including surveys of the Perseus Arm (home of the Externals). It also has two mass transceivers to keep in contact with military and science offices on Bluefall, and serves as an observation base to coordinate the Regency fleets. It is also the home of one of the two DriveSpace detectors in the system (the other one is on Bluefall).

Admiral Takashi points out that Echo Station is a probable target for I-krl infiltration. He recommends first using it as a logistics base, and second that the first ship out to it should include a detachment of Concord Marines to keep the place secure.

Admiral Takashi's success in convincing the Medurr to agree to close integration is more limited. He works through the dhamrin (the technically-minded, bondage-squid-like medurr client race), who in turn are able to convince their masters that using a flag-waving system for communications is not going to work.

Hypertrack Activate!

Taveer manages to shake free of his work repairing Mina to put together a Hypertrack system to link the fire control systems of the *Lighthouse* and several of the larger Verge Alliance capital ships together, coordinating through Echo Station (he gets two Amazing juryrig successes to do it). The goal of the system is to provide a few

highly coordinated volleys against a single target – he expects that this will be of use against the I-krl Fortress Ships.

Flotsam and Jetsam

The public announcements say that Flotsam and Jetsam are being evacuated, but in reality fleet resources are heading there to turn them into a repair and logistics base. Admiral Takashi makes every effort to make it look like the battle plan is to engage the I-krl above Bluefall, when the actual plan is to trap them outside of Flotsam.

What Is Out at Redcrown?

Markus Oroszlan, Ten-zil Kem, Lenny and Lambert Fulson (newly deputized as a Bluefall Customs Inspector) head to Redcrown with two goals. First, they are charged with persuading the Thuldan and VoidCorp forces there to work closely with the Verge Alliance and Regency defenders. Second, they intend to skulk around looking for evidence of illegal weapons research at Redcrown, specifically weapons research that might be helpful in the defense of the system.

The Thuldan forces are under the command of an old friend: *Commodore Thea Pfender*, a mutant with enhanced intelligence (but four-fingered hands). She tells Markus, “The Thuldan fleets at Aegis do not acknowledge the so-called Verge Alliance.”

“You don’t need to, but there’s a big old alien fleet headed here, and it’s stand together or fall separately time.”

“We may not acknowledge your Alliance, but we will always stand with fellow humans against alien incursion. We will help in your defense.”

The Thuldans have a small fleet, sufficient to help but not enough to dramatically change the balance of the upcoming battle.

Lambert Fulson and Markus Oroszlan investigate possible Thuldan secret projects. They conclude (to their dismay) that the Thuldan legionnaires are present for nothing more secretive than protecting the Thuldan mining colony. Markus is upset by this. “Thuldans that aren’t up to something! What’s the world coming to?”

Cleaning up the eGrid

The Aegis system features the most sophisticated network virtuality in the Verge, the eGrid. Admiral Takashi calls up Taveer and asks him to look for signs of alien infiltration in the eGrid. He also contacts *Brent Turtiyev* to help out. It takes the two of them several hours to pierce the system level, though in the process Brent manages to run afoul of some system defenses. It is actually this failure that allows Taveer to finally break through (while Brent runs by screaming, “Bad pull! Bad pull!”).

Taveer finds a very powerful AI in the eGrid. It has established partial control over several of the eGrid core systems, and through them control over millions of eGrid users’ experiences. Certain worm programs embed themselves into data, and when that data goes into Regency databanks the worms open up access ways for their masters, exposing sensitive Regency systems to infiltration and control. The AI appears to be of human origin. Taveer thinks the AI is VoidCorp technology.

Taveer attempts to create a counter-worm. He releases it into the eGrid. It is immediately defeated by everyone’s stock installation of McAfee Antivirus 2500. And then the *Lighthouse* systems come under attack from *VORL*. The virtual battle is epic in scale, bringing in not only Brent Turtiyev but also Veera and Admiral Takashi (who uses his leadership talents to turn the tide). By the end, Taveer manages to fling back *VORL* from the *Lighthouse* system and lock it out.

Admiral Takashi orders, “Track it down! Track it down and burn out its logic cores!” Taveer, Veera (0 step, base skill 21/10/5) and Brent (-2 step, base skill 18/9/4) launch themselves into the eGrid. The battle involves clouds of virtual phages released through the eGrid by both sides, occupying a truly remarkable percentage of the total computing resources of the entire system. During the conflict, Drest gets bored and sends out teams of jackboots to round up the primary eGrid system programmers and beat some information out of them. His basic question is whether they are telIn-infested or corrupted by VoidCorp. Meanwhile, monitors are exploding and keyboards are smoking all across the *Lighthouse* because this universe features an odd lack of understanding of how computers actually work. On a more serious note, some remote computer networks in the Aegis system that were heavily infiltrated by *VORL*’s worms start to shut down as they turn into battlegrounds.

Admiral Takashi notices that as the conflict rages that his email inbox is filling up with a flood of disclaimers from various VoidCorp representatives indicating that they had nothing to do with super-intelligent AI's corrupting systemwide networks. He takes this as a de facto admission of guilt.

By the end, Taveer manages to crack through VORL's defenses. He shuts down its access to the eGrid. Then Admiral Takashi asks our old friend on Bluefall, *Angela Quinn*, and her CIB operatives to take the trace information from the battle to find VORL's physical host. They do very well. There have been a number of reported wrecks of VoidCorp ships on Bluefall, which turn out to have been their effort to drop hidden AI installations onto the planet surface at strategic locations. The CIB investigators locate a half-dozen scanner-shielded waterproofed mainframes beneath the waves. Each of them has V0-RL98316 stamped on it.

Admiral Takashi casually comments, "This is sort of on the treason, act-of-war side, spiking the Regency military systems and so on." The characters debate how to use this new knowledge for leverage.

Lenny suggests, "We could go after VoidCorp for the insurance fraud..."

VoidCorp's Chief Administrator *Myasa Ombe* tells Ten-zil Kem that the VORL modules were part of an initial effort to construct the VoidNet on Bluefall long ago. It was a project that the Regency rejected, was long abandoned, and wasn't meant to interact at all with the eGrid. Ten-zil Kem finds this an unconvincing explanation, especially if he needs to sell it. She provides him with some detail on the original specs for VoidNet, but warns that the AI has probably made significant changes since then. Three of the massive mainframes contain the AI; the other three contain the storage and network infrastructure needed to allow the VoidNet to parallel the eGrid.

A Surprise for the I-krl

Admiral Takashi orders Taveer to set VORL up as a surprise for the I-krl. Maintenance crews retrieve the three mainframe packages and mount them on a cargo barge ship (space ship, that is), along with some captured sifarv wireless networking equipment and a mass reactor to power it all. Taveer sets up VORL to attack and infiltrate sifarv spacecraft systems. Not being stupid, he also places a couple of nukes

with remote detonators on the ship. Then the whole package gets pushed beyond the system limit to wait for the I-krl arrival.

As a side note, Taveer purges all eGrid data out of VORL's memory before letting it go.

Operation Rache

The Regency Council sends word to Admiral Takashi of some new news. Several of the stellar nations have been assembling a relief fleet in the Kendai system to assist the Verge against the alien attacks. The participating nations include the Concord, Orion Theocracy and the StarMech Consortium. Austrin-Ontis is not participating in Operation Rache, but they have argued in council in favor of a full military assault upon the aliens, backed by all nations. VoidCorp has generally argued that the Verge is simply lost.

The fleet at Kendai should have departed for the Verge long ago, but has been delayed by a series of unfortunate accidents and mishaps. To the characters this reads as clear evidence of I-krl (or possibly VoidCorp) sabotage.

VoidCorp – Champions of Fence-Sitting

Ten-zil Kem contacts the VoidCorp forces at Redcrown to see if they will help in the common defense. They indicate that they are going to sit tight and defend their own assets. They wish the Verge Alliance luck.

Admiral Takashi is not willing to accept this. He goes back to demand active assistance from them. Myasa Ombe's representative remains uncooperative. Admiral Takashi tells them in no uncertain terms that given the VORL incident he considers them a danger to the system in wartime, and that they can accompany the fleet or have their assets seized. A bunch of Verge Alliance cruisers head out to Redcrown to loom ominously about and ask, "Did we hear a distress call from around here somewhere? How about now?" The VoidCorp forces reluctantly comply.

News from Algemron

With the withdrawal of all Concord ships from the Algemron system, nothing is coming out of the system anymore. Informed observers suspect that Galvin and Alitar have simply turned to slaughtering each other, with the side that is probably teln-infested having the upper hand.

Promotion!

Some months ago, Admiral Takashi sent the following letter to the Admiralty:

From: Admiral Ken Takashi, Commanding Officer, Verge Alliance Starship
Lighthouse

To: Verge Alliance Lords of the Admiralty

Subject: Request to Convene Officer Selection Board

1. I would like to respectfully request that an Officer Selection Board be convened with the purpose of evaluation of Commander Martin St. John's fitness for promotion to the rank of Captain.

2. I would like to further submit the following information for consideration in addition to the Commander's record on file.

a. Commander St. John has served under me with distinction aboard the Lighthouse for many years and enjoys my personal confidence and recommendation.

b. His record for command and bravery as well as discretion is without question, and includes the recent rescue of Admiral Rastaad from the occupied Hammer's Star system.

c. He has led ships during a number of spaceborne engagements with hostile forces including the pacification of pirates in the Corrivale system and destruction of numerous klick vessels in the Hammer's Star system.

3. The exact date of the Lighthouse's return to Bluefall is unclear due to the exigencies of the current conflict, but I respectfully request that such a Board be scheduled for the earliest possible opportunity.

4. I sincerely believe that Commander St. John's record indicates the highest standards of excellence of command and request that the board deliberate these when deciding upon the Commander's selection for promotion to Captain.

Signed,
Adm. Ken Takashi

Commander Martin St. John is summoned to the Admiralty office on Bluefall and undergoes a board of inquiry. He impresses the admirals and as a result he is promoted to the rank of Captain. Admiral Takashi expresses his confidence in Captain St. John and indicates that the *Lighthouse* needs a real captain now that his duties are more strategic. He would understand if St. John wanted a destroyer or something of his own to go out and make a name for himself, but offers him command of the *Lighthouse*. St. John happily accepts. Takashi formally hands over command in a bridge ceremony; everyone is dressed in their dress uniforms and a post-brass band (like tubas crossed with Theremins) plays. Their salutes are solemn and meaningful.

Afterwards, Takashi goes back to his quarters and prepares a LOLdhros for the occasion. It features a dhros looking at Captain St. John through an air vent screaming “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!”

It's Go Time

On Dec. 9, a massive alien fleet commanded by the fortress ships *Phlegethon* and *Styx* comes in-system. We are ready for them. Our fleet is out on the edge of the system – all capital ships move out to Jetsam as soon as we hear they've departed Mantebron, leaving only smaller system defense boats around Bluefall. We trigger the drivespace denial weapon in short bursts to spread out the incoming enemy as much as we can. Echo Station's sensors help us with that.

As a result, the two External fortress ships are separated by two full days of sublight travel, with pockets of smaller ships spread out between them! The *Phlegethon* is only 6 hours away from Jetsam. The Red Queen with the B Team on board goes out and

litters mines in their path and the entire fleet advances on the lead fortress ship. The Medurr needle ships come through the riftship to reinforce us.

We have a fleet strength of 50,000 and we keep it in one solid group. The plan is to hit the first fortress ship and then roll right up the line of scattered aliens.

Captain St. John assists Admiral Takashi with Space Tactics rolls. We take out the first group including the *Phlegethon* but take significant losses and are down to 35,000 fleet strength. We send damaged ships and casualties to Jetsam and send the Medurr and Thuldans after the small groups of stragglers. Then we regroup and get about 2000 strength repaired and head after the *Styx*.

The *Red Queen* piggybacks the barge with the AI on it. It heads out stealthed and drops it within space wireless range of the second large group and fortress ship. It links up and transmits a laughing skull over all their monitors, and degrades its combat value from 10,000 to 7,000. The *Red Queen* dumps mines in their path to further rain on their parade.

The aliens keep on coming. They are only at 15,000 fleet strength and we are at 37,000. With an Amazing success on our first Space Tactics roll we lose 5% and they lose 25% of our respective forces. Then we get the same result again. Then finally we lose 10% and they lose 20% and they fall apart with 70% of their forces depleted! We fight off the attack at the cost of 40% of our total fleet. We take as many prisoners and assets as we can. The aliens run but given the drivespace denial weapon we go hunt them all down, while sending the bulk of the fleet back to secure Bluefall.

POW Planning

We capture the *Phlegethon* but the *Styx* got away. We try to get the aliens to serve us. The kadarens are happy to do it. The sifarv and bareem give us the cold shoulder, but we bring out Hox and Admiral Takashi tries to convince them to join us instead.

We take the thousands of prisoners to Redcrown and rip out stardrives from some damaged ships and convert them into prison hulks. The Thuldans are all about guarding them. We interrogate them at length.

The klick (900) come together and elect a leader to talk to us. They want to toss off the kadaren reproduction bioengineering and then breed freely on a colony somewhere. We say they have to fight with us and sign on to the general Verge Alliance charter on sentient's rights and we'll see what we can do. We send back a klick detachment on a still-working klick ship ship back to the friendly klick fifth column to let them know about our success.

The kroath are mindless, we kill them off.

The kadaren (100) are about joining up if they get to do techie stuff. They are all evil but we tell them they have to follow the laws. We enlist them as science work gangs.

The bareem (800) are slaves but not unhappy with it. They like weren, so we try to liaise with them through that.

The sifarv (200) are not all happy with the thaal and their weirdo religion. Some start turning quisling. We send in the Orlamu missionaries to try to give them a new crazy religion. They say there are sifarv rebels out there fighting the thaal called the trillaari, led by one Trillith Karsada. They have like 4 battleships and 7 carriers! We get some turned sifarv and put the bareem under them. This makes the bareem thrilled to be a part of this plan.

The gardhyi all self destruct rather than be taken captive. We mourn for about 10 milliseconds.

The thaal (50) are hard cases. We poll them to see who's unhappy with Scientology. None are. We put them all into solitary.

We put the bareem through Marine training and try to brainwash them into being able to attack opposing sifarv. We observe as a Marine drill sergeant dubs one of the bareem "Curious George" and makes him choke himself. We leave, satisfied.

Next Steps

We decide to send a fleet (12k fleet strength + 10k of Medurr) to Tendril to lift the siege. The plan is to rift the main group to Cambria, then send a small group with the riftship to Tendril, rift in everyone else, turn on drivespace denial, and kick some ass. This leaves 15.6k active, plus casualties (9200 additional get repaired), plus the alien

fortress ship, at Bluefall. We put some of the more tractable POWs onto repairing the fortress ship.

Then we plan to send the Red Queen and B Team and elite marine squad to Algemron to figure out what is going on there. We get some kadaren working on a science project to do teln detection at range.

We set Brent Terchiev on trying to get hacker and conspiracy theorist *Avatar* to come in from the cold.

But First...

The Admiral declares a 3-day leave for everyone (rotating, of course) and the Bluefall beach parties are endless. While on shore leave, the B Team is engaged in a naked beach volleyball game with Angela Quinn during which she mentions there's been an explosion on the set of holo-star Jack Everstar's current movie. We all decide we should meet Jack Everstar!

Markus says, "I can offer my services as a military advisor!"

Ten-Zil Kem says, "I can sell them all drugs!"

Lenny says, "I can demand my 7.50 back from the last movie of his I saw!"

We all agree this is a sound party type plan.

The A Team, meanwhile, starts looking for the N'sss and turns the Echo Station sensors on the system itself to help in that. We determine that the VoidCorp gas mining station has been sending out odd communications into the gas giant of Redcrown, where the N'sss are most likely lurking, for some time. "God damn it! I've had it with them! Send in the Marines!" yells Admiral Takashi. Ten-zil Kem puts together some Amazing bureaucratic paperwork to legalize the firing of local VoidCorp head Mayasa Ombe and we start stuffing an orbital assault team into dropships to go blast the bejeezus out of the obstreperous VoidCorp gas mining station on Redcrown.

The End of the Session

10 XP each, spread between your characters as you wish!