

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 08/23/2009

Attendance

Paul confesses, “Ever since I’ve been little I’ve wanted to be the sort of person who designs a robot army to kill all humans.”

Chris (Ten-Zil Kem and Rokk Tressor) explains, “But with a business plan like that, you’ll never get funding. You need to start small and say that you just want to kill all WASPs or something.”

Bruce (Lambert Fulson and Taveer) offers, “But you’ll still need to show your investors how they’re going to make a return. You need to change your message. Maybe you could say that you want to *harvest* all WASPs.”

Peco (Adun Zelnaga and General Ivan Stukov) suggests, “Actually, if you do that then you can tell outsiders that it’s an insect-control program. That way, you’ve got plausible deniability.”

Patrick (Lenny and Martin St. John) offers, “It might not be all that plausible. After all, people might want to know why your insect-control machines need artillery and plasma guns.”

Paul remains silent.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Spec / Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
Lambert Fulson	Bruce	FA3	Rigunmor Trader
Taveer	Bruce	TO3	Lighthouse Chief Engineer
Martin St. John	Patrick	TO3	Lighthouse Head Pilot
Lenny	Patrick	FA3	T’sa Ambassador
Ten-zil Kem	Chris	D3	VoidCorp Ambassador, dressed like a 1980’s Space Pimp
Rokk Tressor	Chris	FA3	Concord Intelligence Officer
Markus Oroszlan	Ernest	CS3	Thuldan Warlion
Ken Takashi	Ernest	D (TO)3	Star Force Captain
Ivan Stukov	Peco	D (CS)3	Thuldan Diplomat and Retired General

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Spec / Level</i>	<i>Description</i>
Adun Zelnaga	Peco	MW3	Fraal Mindwalker Doctor Guy

The VoidCorp Charity Ball

VoidCorp is sponsoring a charity ball in *Sendir Park* on Deck 194 (named after one of the heroes of the Orlamu Nation) on behalf of the VoidCorp Cultural Fund. They use the Cultural Fund monies to create new parks for the children, at least according to their glossy brochures. Some people suggest that the Cultural Fund might also serve as a conduit to send restricted military hardware to VoidCorp black chamber project teams. These people are clearly deeply misinformed.

The charity ball includes several pavilions scattered across the park. The VoidCorp pavilion showcases several VoidCorp products, including the new Thimblefish O/S and the Steel Fortress security software. One of the prizes in the silent auction is a doll of *Seshy the Happy Sesheyan*, the VoidCorp official mascot. He serves as an inspirational example to all sesheyans, who can see how happy he is to be a permanent employee of VoidCorp.

Ten-Zil Kem is in attendance at the ball, escorting *Lady Deutschmark*. She twitters, “Ooh! I was named for money!”

Ten-Zil Kem observes, “Yes you are, honey. Yes you are.” He glances over towards her husband the *Lord Deutschmark*, who seems very ill at ease as he gazes at the VoidCorp fashion models preparing for their show. Ten-Zil Kem asks him what he does. His answers are vague, as if he doesn’t really want to be pinned on details. Ten-Zil Kem is unable to tell if this is because he doesn’t know, or if his details are truly horrific. Ten-Zil Kem does his best to steer the conversation to something that will cause the Lord to go away.

Lady Deutschmark is very interested in charity, and very artistic. She has a dancer’s body, and is quite a bit younger than her dour husband. She is very bubbly and thinks that Ten-Zil Kem is the funniest fellow around, even though he’s not actually joking when he talks to her.

She implores Ten-Zil to help her get the models get ready, back behind the bushes. He has no idea how to help models, but he is more than willing to volunteer for

the cause. She calls after him, “Don’t let them take advantage of you!” He chuckles evilly. He finds that the models are a mix of male and female, so like the terrible person he is he spends a lot of attention on the female models and not a bit upon the males. He notes that various body fashions are on the upswing: many of the models have bits of fur on their arms, among other modifications.

Ten-Zil Kem runs into a bit of a problem when the diva *Pareta Felo* simply must have a pinch of powdered eschek fungus. It goes without saying that the fungus is illegal. He tries calling one of his functionaries, but the man is weirdly naïve for one of his staffers and has no idea how to find drugs. So he calls up Lambert Fulson.

Lambert On the Town

Lambert Fulson has been partying with his friend Flight Officer *Runlun Bors* aboard the Rigunmor Independent Trader *Long Horizon Venture*. They’ve apparently been talking about weaponized pornography. Bors’ ship was hitching from Bluefalls to Argos, so he’s been on station for a week or so. They know each other from the Academy, and they’re having fun. At the moment, this puts them in the *Lucky Elfman*, a tavern decorated in the style of the nomadic 21st century Dreth Commonwealth, folks who were obsessed with the perfection of both body and mind. The place is decorated in frescoes of 200-year-old languages, and features real, talented dancers. Mostly naked, talented dancers. Two of whom are teasing all of Lambert’s and Runlun’s money away.

Fulson finds that he has almost forgotten that he’s Rigunmor when his phone rings. “Hey, Ten-Zil! I’ve found a great place, I’ve only been here a million times before but it’s like it’s new every time! You should come down!”

Ten-Zil explains what he needs, and Lambert promises to come through for him. Sadly, he doesn’t have any eschek himself, but one of the dancers knows where to get some. He leers and tells her, “Lead the way, toots! Lead the way!”

Looking Under the Carpet of the Illicit Samples Trade

General Ivan Stukov is investigating the possible importation of some biological samples stolen from the Thuldan outpost. He enlists the T’sa ambassador *Lenny* to help him find it. Oddly for an ambassador, Lenny is quite familiar with black marketeering and knows a lot of the officials responsible for facilitating the smuggler trade on the ship.

He tries talking to them and finds one guy who knows that a package came on board for *Zalan Vagner*. Lenny knows a bit about him: he is a curious man with interests in several criminal activities, but who normally keeps his hands fairly clean. He has great enthusiasm for various bloodsports (bearing in mind that modern medical care has made most bloodsports rather less dangerous than they once were).

General Stukov asks Lenny to arrange a meet. He thinks about bringing along a half-dozen Thuldan Marines, but then elects to go discreetly instead.

Meanwhile In the Alien-Infested Outpost

The rest of the characters are fortified down in the command center of the terraforming outpost down on Meribel. *Doctor Chibuzo* indicates that he wants to take tissue samples from the two infected (but not fully-converted) patients, *Doctor Terah* and the intern *Kaitlyn Anselma*. Both have stabilized ever since *Taveer* pulled all of the sulfur compounds out of the outpost environment. He explains that he wants the samples because he thinks the croth are Series IV organisms who require sulfur to survive. The fact that the infection has survived so far suggests that the croth may be re-engineering themselves to survive in human-compatible environments.

Martin St. John and *Adun Zelnaga* accompany the doctor. He finds that while the external infection has been arrested, on the inside the nano-organisms are still changing: they are actually adapting their chemistry to use oxygen as a reactive agent in place of sulfur. This is truly amazing, but also fairly slow.

Doctor Chibuzo notes that the equipment at this outpost is not really well adapted to study this kind of problem. He recommends relocating to a more appropriate facility. The characters quickly hatch a plan to transfer all of them, plus the affected personnel and the converted croth warrior, into quarantine on board a ship hooked into the *Lighthouse* docking spines.

The Croth Are Active

It is at this point that *Taveer* notices that *Doctor Terah* is awake and screaming. He alerts the others. *Adun Zelnaga*, *Rokk Tressor* and *Martin St. John* all go to see what's going on. *Doctor Terah* is screaming, "It's trying to take over my mind!"

As soon as they leave, Taveer watches as the converted croth in the cold storage cuts open one of its forearms and starts smearing the green ooze that spills forth over the door. Unable to get the attention of the others over Doctor Terah's screaming, Taveer hits the alarm button, gathers up his powerstaff and heads to face destiny. A couple of minutes later, Martin St. John shows up to help. The two of them drag a heavy lab table to block the door, which is already smoking.

Adun Zelnaga attempts to sedate Doctor Terah. He quickly discovers that the sedatives have little effect upon him.

Taveer announces, "I've got an Amazing action check!"

Martin St. John mourns, "I only got a Marginal check. Space-bugs freak me out."

Taveer points out, "They freak me out to, but that causes me to take dramatic and effective action. In your case, it seems to make you run around screaming like a schoolgirl."

Martin St. John grumbles and takes position to fire on the croth as soon as it bursts through the door. The croth rushes the characters' barricade. Taveer hammers it on the head with his tri-staff, doing nothing.

Rokk Tressor screams out, "Turn the staff on!" He thinks the mechalus looks abashed as he flicks a switch. The staff starts to glow and emit a threatening hummmm...

The croth howls and claws at Martin St. John, ripping through his armor and laying his chest open. St. John manages to keep conscious, ensuring that the creature will continue to shred him in following rounds.

Adun Zelnaga shows up in time to unleash an utterly ineffective kinetic strike at the croth. It ignores him, but the strike did unbalance it enough to interrupt its progress at shredding St. John.

St. John and Adun Zelnaga keep up a steady barrage of laser fire and pyrokinesis. They become very impressed at the quality of croth armor in the face of energy attacks. Behind them, Rokk Tressor gets filter masks on the surviving (mobile) scientists and heads them out to the outpost door. His plan is to use the same shock apparatus that worked so well to stop Doctor Ermene's dive suit.

Taveer leaves St. John to draw the croth's attention while he retreats to the main control room to warm up the shock apparatus. Rokk Tressor drags the cables in to main control. Taveer reminds him, "Those cables are live now! Don't let them touch! Or get within three feet of each other! Or any metal objects!"

Rokk Tressor muses, "This electricity is really wicked stuff!"

Behind them, Adun Zelnaga actually manages to injure the croth with his pyrokinetic powers. Almost simultaneously, the croth runs out of rage and becomes much, much less threatening. Taveer yells out, "I'm becoming really impressed with those psychic powers of yours! They're better than lasers!"

Adun Zelnaga responds by running back to the control room. The croth rushes after the fraal. It storms into the control room and slashes away at Taveer. Rokk Tressor runs up behind the creature and attaches the contacts. Taveer throws the switch, there is a massive electric bang, and the croth is completely unharmed.

The croth responds by clawing at Rokk Tressor. Taveer scrabbles at the controls, trying to up the voltage. Everyone else notices as the lights dim. There is a horrible stench of burning insulation. Taveer announces, "I managed to avoid blowing up the generator for the whole station!" The others do not feel like cheering.

St. John continues to blaze away at the croth with his laser until he runs out of charge. Adun Zelnaga reflects that the weapon is still almost as useful now as it was when it did have a charge. The croth doesn't even notice. Then Adun Zelnaga hits it with another psionic blast and it falls.

Everyone cheers.

Then it regenerates and gets back up.

Taveer shocks it and it falls again.

Rokk Tressor steps up and shoots it in the head from point-blank range. He is pleased to see that the blast actually causes a visible wound. He tells the others, "Yep, maser pistol. As long as your opponent is lying down, and unconscious and not moving very fast, it's the thing that'll do some real injury. Let us celebrate our victory with some jello and Kool-Aid."

The croth proceeds to crumble and ooze into a corrosive puddle. Within seconds the entire croth is destroyed, rendered down into smoking bits.

These Things Are Linked, Somehow

The characters check on Doctor Terah after the destruction of the croth. They find him sitting quietly, completely unresponsive. Rokk Tressor indicates that he wants a useful souvenir, so he charges Adun Zelnaga with the task of excising a piece of armor plating from Doctor Terah's skin and purging it of corrosive green goo before it disintegrates. He manages the job, encasing a mostly-undamaged piece of croth armor in a laboratory bag.

Ten-Zil Kem Is Getting Nervous

Ten-Zil Kem is getting nervous: he's made some calls, but so far none of his friends have managed to come up with any powdered eschek fungus. Even worse, neither Vonner Pontus nor his clothing have arrived either. He calls his personal assistant and instructs him to figure out what eschek fungus looks like, then to mix up some of the blue and the yellow from his personal stash and combine it with some spices from the galley to make it look like eschek fungus.

Then he starts making calls to see if the missing designer is even on the station. Several bureaucrats assure him that Vonner Pontus has arrived and rented a suite at *His Emperor's Palace*, a Thuldan-run hotel.

Making the Connection

Lenny and General Stukov meet with the smuggler Zalan Vagner. The man doesn't look good: he is sweaty and seems to have been sampling his own wares. He has a ragged cloak wrapped around himself and it seems like his torso is oddly misshapen. Lenny just assumes that this must be the season for the humans to molt.

The two characters ask Vagner about a guy with some biological samples who might have made it through customs in an informal manner a few days ago. They're fairly unclear about details, but he agrees that he might be able to help if they can help him. In particular, he's got a contact who needs to move some powdered eschek fungus and he's looking for a buyer.

Halfway through the conversation, General Stukov recognizes that Zalan Vagner is actually desperately ill, as if he had run afoul of some Thuldan biological samples. General Stukov makes some small talk about how the Thuldan scientists are looking for

their samples, but for the rest of the conversation he is really trying to see if Vagner is emitting any green bio-gel.

Ten-Zil Kem Can't Wait Any More

Ten-Zil Kem looks up the effects of powdered eschek fungus, then powders up some ecstasy and gives it to the needy model. But at the same time, he's become interested in the possibility of getting some of the fungus for himself.

Lambert Fulson Gets the Goods

Lenny and Lambert Fulson finally manage to connect. Lambert Fulson exchanges a suitcase full of money for a suitably large amount of powdered eschek fungus, which he hides in the false bottom of a second briefcase.

Children Are the Future

Ten-Zil Kem thinks that things are going pretty well when Lady Deutschmark comes in and asks if he's ready to give his presentation. He checks his day planner, observes that there is no such thing listed, vows to discipline his assistant, and tells her, "Absolutely." She tells him that his slides are all ready. He thanks her, takes something from his private stash to give himself some courage, and heads out to give his talk.

As Ten-Zil Kem stumbles from slide to slide, he speculates that Lady Deutschmark's husband might have been the sadist responsible for assembling the slideshow. By the time he's gone from the photos of the Children's Facility to the Burning Teddy Bear and the Young Man With a Crustacean to the Illustration of a Fish-Man with an Axe in His Back he's quite grateful to see Lady Deutschmark collapse.

He rushes to her side only to find that she is coughing up green slime into a scented handkerchief. When the attack subsides, he asks, "Are you okay? Have you been taking anything unusual?"

"No, I'm find. I just need to rest. Perhaps you could take me somewhere quiet?"

Ten-Zil Kem appoints his assistant *Rex* to take over the presentation. The next picture is A Strip Mine Thirty Kilometers Across. While Rex sputters, Ten-Zil Kem takes Lady Deutschmark off to a quiet room.

Meanwhile at the Alien-Infested Outpost

Adun Zelnaga proposes restraining Doctor Terah with the dive suit so he can't move enough to break his own skin. All agree that this is an excellent idea. Taveer sets to welding metal straps around the unfortunate Doctor.

A couple of hours later the shuttle from the *Lighthouse* touches down. The characters file into the cargo hold and are promptly placed into quarantine.

Upon his return to the ship, Taveer finds that he has some messages waiting. *Vice-Admiral Raastad*, an old friend of his from the Academy, has been trying to get in touch. He is the Concord Vice-Admiral in charge of the fleet near Hammer's Star. Now that Taveer has arranged shaped-charge explosives to instantly destroy the ship he is on, he has a lot of spare time to write long letters back.

What's Wrong With Vagner?

Lenny and General Stukov meet up with Zalan Vagner again. Vagner is grateful for the recent business connections Lenny has provided, but he's clearly not in good shape. His skin is sheened with an unhealthy greenish slime. Lenny asks if he has seen a doctor. Vagner notes that people are looking for him and that it wouldn't be a good idea for him to see a doctor right now. General Stukov suggests that he might be able to arrange some under-the-table medical care, but Vagner remains dubious. General Stukov eventually convinces him.

Adun Zelnaga starts to think that he might be looking at a biological sample that is no longer contained. He gets a sample from Ten-Zil Kem taken from Lady Deutschmark that is even more adapted to human biology than the samples he took from the terraforming crew down on Meribel, and may have been in circulation in the human population for longer than the strain that was released on the planet. He alerts the Captain and urges that measures be taken to quarantine people.

Around this point, Captain Takashi decides to identify a large cargo ship or liner that he can commandeer as a quarantine vessel. Ten-Zil Kem sends Lady Deutschmark over to Adun Zelnaga; she ends up in quarantine. General Stukov sends Zalan Vagner to Adun Zelnaga also; he is also quarantined.

A Conversation with Thuldan High Command

General Stukov places a call to *General Alex Racin* at the Thuldan fleet. He asks for more information about the biological sample that he is supposed to be locating. General Racin demands, “Have you found it? What’s the situation?”

General Stukov explains, “The *Lighthouse* crew have just brought some people up from Meribel and put them in quarantine. They are infected with a croth virus.”

“How many people know about this?”

“Right now? Everyone. But we need to take more measures before things get out of control. We need more information about what we’re dealing with.”

“So no ships have come on board with a biological sample, but you think you’ve found exposure on Meribel. We’ll work on a way to... *help* you. But in the meantime we need to get that biological sample case back as quickly as possible.”

“Yes, well. Could you at least give me a physical description of the sample case?”

General Racin provides a description of a sophisticated sample containment system that very much resembles the container the other characters found at the outpost on Meribel (not that General Stukov knows this).

“What did the case contain?”

“You’re not cleared for that information.”

“Even for an old friend?”

“Let’s not play games like that.”

The Quarantine Spreads

While General Stukov is thinking of ways to blow up the *Lighthouse*, Ten-Zil Kem talks to Lady Deutschmark about things that she and her husband might have done in the last few weeks. She mentions that prior to the *Lighthouse’s* departure for Meribel she and her husband had dinner at *His Emperor’s Delight* with Vice Admiral Raastad of the Concord.

Lenny decides that since Zalan Vagner is in quarantine he may as well break into the man’s quarters. Ten-Zil Kem helps him out after Lenny explains that he thinks one of the quarantine victims might have been involved in transporting the source of the

infection. Ten-Zil Kem indicates that he also wants to talk to General Ivan Stukov, so Lenny invites General Stukov to join them all.

Coincidentally, Lambert Fulson decides to stop by Vagner's quarters to talk to him about buying more fungus powder. He hasn't been answering his phone, after all. Fulson is just a bit surprised to find several people standing in the corridor trying to force the entrance. They explain what's going on, at least as much as they understand. Which, unfortunately, doesn't amount to anything close to a complete understanding. Fortunately, it does include the tidbit that a contagious alien disease is spreading through the station.

Ten-Zil Kem opens the door, half expecting to see a croth watching TV and drinking a beer. The place is meticulously clean, but smells of rotten eggs. The characters draw pistols and move in. The kitchen is also spotless but doesn't include much food. Lenny starts a search. He quickly finds an interesting array of pill bottles and bags of powder.

Ten-Zil Kem turns on the living area holodisplay, interfaces his computer gauntlet, and breaks his way through Vagner's security software to access his home system. He quickly determines that Vagner didn't have much security set up at all, or much interest in covering his tracks. Vagner was, however, obsessively organized: Ten-Zil Kem is able to find a detailed client list. He finds Lambert Fulson's name, and the clothing designer Vonner Pontus. He finds that the first customer Vagner dealt with after the *Lighthouse* arrived in the Argus system was a Concord officer looking for painkillers. The clothing designer was second, buying hallucinogens, followed by some local low-lives. The Concord officer turns out to be *Maurice Gammons*, Vice-Admiral Raastad's aide.

Lenny becomes curious as to where the rotten-egg smell is coming from. He finds that the air vents have all been blocked off. He unblocks them.

The Path of Infection

The (non-quarantined) characters start putting together a theory on what happened. The first key point was when the Concord picked up the sample container from the Thuldans and forwarded it to Meribel. That is the point when Maurice Gammons was exposed to the contagion. By the time the *Lighthouse* arrived in Meribel

orbit Gammons was in bad shape, which is why he was looking for painkillers from Vagner, incidentally passing the disease to the dealer. The dealer in turn passed the disease to the fashion designer Vonner Pontus, who is now probably infected and incapacitated in his hotel room. Lady Deutschmark caught the disease from Pontus.

The characters decide that the next step is to track down Maurice Gammon. They decide to do this through his boss, Vice Admiral Raastad.

What Happened to the Admiral's Aide?

General Stukov and Ambassador Kem arrange a meeting with Vice Admiral Raastad to discuss the penetration of illicit drug trafficking on the station. They indicate that they have found some indication of problems associated with the Admiral's aide, Maurice Gammon. The Admiral indicates that Gammon has been sick recently. Ten-Zil Kem persuades the Admiral that they need to talk to the man.

As soon as the two characters open Gammon's door they are almost overcome by the scent of sulfur. The furniture is overturned and clawed. Some areas look like they have been partially melted with acids. Ten-Zil Kem knocks on the doorframe, "Hello! Coming in!" The characters and Vice Admiral Raastad move in carefully.

They don't find anything that looks like a biological sample container. The air vents in this compartment don't seem to be blocked off. And there is no sign of the unfortunate Maurice Gammon.

General Stukov asks, "Did you make any special stop-offs before you arrived here?"

Vice Admiral Raastad muses, "Well, we departed from Hammer's Star. We stopped off at Vieron, where the Thuldans have been having trouble from the croth. We inspected their defenses, then traveled straight to Argos. We have been here since before the *Lighthouse* emerged from drivespace."

After the characters leave the Admiral's chambers, General Stukov calls Zalan Vagner (currently out in quarantine). Neither of them realizes (or perhaps cares) that Taveer is recording all wireless communications to the quarantine ship. By the end of the conversation, the characters on the quarantine ship have a much better idea of the disease transmission path on board the *Lighthouse*. General Stukov also talks to Adun Zelnaga, who describes some of the events from the outpost on Meribel. This ensures that the

characters expecting to go look for Vonner Pontus understand that they might encounter a croth warrior.

Doctor Ermene's Story

Now that Doctor Ermene is more sane thanks to drugs he is able to tell the Concord characters that the sample was originally forwarded to him by a Concord Intelligence agent named Maurice Gammon. Agent Gammon told him the sample was able to infect humans, and wanted Doctor Ermene to find a way to cure or destroy it.

Doctor Ermene's memories get hazy for the seven days after the delivery of the package. He started to think that the microbes were talking to him, and then that the lab equipment was talking to him, and then everything just vanishes into a haze.

A Friendly Conversation With General Racin

With more information on where the biological package is and what it might have contained, General Stukov calls up General Racin. Far from admitting failure, he demands to know more about the contents and threatens that if General Racin does not help him it will look very bad for the Thuldan Empire and for General Racin personally. General Racin eventually admits, "Perhaps if some kind of disease was affecting the Lighthouse we might be willing as a good-faith gesture to help out, provided that our property was returned to us."

The Hotel Room

Needless to say, Vonner Pontus' hotel room also smells of sulfur and has been torn apart. There is no sign of a croth warrior inside.

The Sulphur Plague

When Taveer and the quarantined bridge crew start asking about sulfur smells on the ship they find that there have been complaints about sulfur odors for days. He is quickly able to trace the croth movements to the atmosphere control section of the engineering decks.

The initial plan is to send in a team of heavily armed and armored marines. The marines encounter the croth and get defeated in detail.

The second plan is for Rokk Tressor, Martin St. John, Taveer and General Stukov to gear up and lead another team of four marines in Paladin assault suits into the atmosphere control. When the characters arrive, they find the remains of a couple of marines assigned to protect the engineering crew. Martin St. John immediately starts checking the ceiling for lurking xenomorphs. One of the Concord Marines grumbles something about, "Just another damned bug hunt."

The characters move in behind Taveer, who is driving a modified forklift: he's welded metal plates to the front panel. The atmosphere inside the Environmental Control is now both poisonous and corrosive, which prompts a bit of a delay as the characters put on respirators and environmental suits. Taveer cautions, "Don't get shot or clawed!"

The croth are on the characters in seconds, four of them. One of them is carrying a strange weapon that the characters eventually recognize as a dark plasma rifle. General Stukov fires on the armed croth with his stutter rifle, but the creature evades his shot. Rokk Tressor levels his charge rifle and strikes the creature.

The rifle-armed croth takes cover and fires at Rokk. Rokk's armor saves him from taking more than a nasty burn. The remaining three croth claw fruitlessly at the armored marines, leaving Rokk Tressor very glad for the marines' presence.

Martin St. John manages to get a tangible hit on an unarmed croth. Noxious fluids spill on the floor, burning away the tiles. He fires again, scoring a second good hit. The croth burbles rothfalbul.

Dark plasma washes across one of the marines, leaving the man burnt and his suit charred. The marine assures Rokk Tressor, "I'm okay, sir! Still eager to kill bugs, sir!" Rokk Tressor urges him to carry on.

A croth tears into Taveer. The mechalus engineer shrieks and pulls away. Another croth claws at Rokk Tressor, who confidently allows his armor to take the hit. He proclaims, "Gee golly, that was underhanded! Shoot them down men!" The four marines open fire, disintegrating one croth into slime.

The croth rifleman opens fire on an armored marine, knocking him down. Taveer announces that the marine still has vital signs, he's just unconscious. He celebrates with a clean shot to wound a croth.

Martin St. John fires burst after burst into an onrushing croth, but his weapons are not strong enough to pierce the creature's armor. The croth manages to catch him in the side of the helmet with a claw, nearly knocking him out.

Taveer is amazed when his rifle shot actually downs a croth. He eventually understands that this is because the croth had already been subjected to sustained fire from three marines and three other characters. Then a burst of dark plasma downs a second marine.

Rokk Tressor takes another serious hit from a croth combatant. He reassures his men, "Keep firing! Keep firing!" He watches as the rifle-armed croth takes aim at a third marine. The marine manages to dodge the bolt. Rokk is inspired: he hits a croth right between the tubules, staggering it.

Taveer fires frantically at the last croth out in the open, knocking it down. He crows in triumph as the creature bubbles into goo.

Rokk decides to show the mechalus how things are done. He lines up a shot on the rifle-armed croth and hits it square in the head-pod. Martin St. John discards his quantum rifle, grabs the charge rifle discarded by one of the downed marines, moves around to the flank, and hits the last croth square in the rib-lings. Then the croth's dark plasma gun ruptures. The final marine barrage takes the creature out.

Tidying Up the Mess

Taveer looks around at his Environmental Control station. He wails, "It's all ruined! Everything is destroyed!" Several consoles are burned and shattered by dark plasma. Dead aliens are busily burning their way through the floor, right to the gravity induction engines. Taveer is beside himself. Then he starts calling in the damage control teams.

Everyone else goes to sleep that night, content in the knowledge that the croth menace is eliminated. Except Taveer, who stays up all night fixing the environmental systems.

The next morning, the biological sample container is gone, replaced with another, similar container. Review of the security tapes just shows the whole chamber going black. There is no record of the door opening at all. But the container that is left

contains a compound that will destroy the croth entities on contact. Everyone except the partially transformed man is cured, but he is screwed: the compound will just kill him. The characters call in appropriate religious figures and explain the situation to him.

The End of the Session

Each character gains six experience points.