

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 07/04/2011

Attendance

Bruce logs in somewhat late, with the predictably lame excuse that he's having car problems. *Chris* expresses sympathy, and suggests that it would really be very helpful to have someone else in the same household with a car. *Georgina* agrees, very quietly. Secretly, she enjoys the idea of Bruce walking to work in 100F heat.

Ernest enquires, "Are you familiar with *Mameshiba*?"

Paul is dubious, "Is that some kind of Japanese thing?"

Ernest explains, "The name translates to 'bean-dog.' It features these little bean-things and it's so popular that 78% of people in Japan under the age of 20 are experts on its mythology. It's also proof that Aoife is totally tuned in to the pulse of Japanese culture, because she's a fan."

Patrick sits very quietly just outside the range of the camera.

Bruce asks, "Are we expecting Tim to show up today?" *Ernest* makes some comments about the limits of human knowledge. *Paul* adds in that Tim has added seafood back into his diet, possibly a sign that he will soon hear the Call to go under the seas and reunite with the... other branch of the family.

Tim shows up after a while, chewing on something scaly and refusing to make comment upon where he has been.

<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

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

We Give the Medurr a Planet?

One of the decisions from last time was that the Verge Alliance would give the medurr their own (local) planet. It turns out that they aren't interested in either living space or natural resources – they really want a place where their lead Matriarchs can fight each other. Accordingly, the Verge Alliance leadership picks out a desolate rock, names it *Thunderdome*, and signs over the deed to the Medurr Empire.

From Last Time – Expedition to the Event Horizon!

The *Twelve Clutch* was a t'sa science vessel with an experimental drive built with assistance from the StarMech. The goal of the experiment was to learn about the structure of DriveSpace, but something (probably) went wrong. For the last year, the ship has been mysteriously dropping in and out of DriveSpace. The only transmissions from it have been the word “I-krI”, repeated over and over.

Five days after the *Lighthouse* starfalls into Tendril the *Twelve Clutch* appears! Luckily it's not during the solar flares that plague the near-nova sun. *Captain Martin St. John* gives the orders to kick in the Medurr drivespace denial weapon and fix them in space. Then he organizes an away team.

The away team consists of *Admiral Ken Takashi*, *Captain Martin St. John*, *Haggernak*, *Drest Talorgin* and *Taveer*, plus some t'sa technicians, some medical staff, and a squad of marines. The characters rush to Docking Bay 2 and launch immediately as sensor and communication staff try to figure out what up.

Sensor Scan the Derelict, Mister Jones!

The sensor readings coming back from the *Twelve Clutch* are inconclusive. The ship appears dead and dark, but life readings are hard to interpret. The characters take this as clear reason to board a shuttle and fly over to investigate. *Captain St. John*

suggests, “We should try to avoid the tentacular masses when we dock.” The others are not totally sure what he’s referring to.

St. John does an excellent job of piloting, perfectly matching the shuttle lock up with the *Twelve Clutch* docking arm. Taveer does an equally amazing job of overriding the t’sa airlock so the characters can enter.

What Is That on the Floor?

The characters carefully enter the *Twelve Clutch*, noting that there is a reddish stain on the floor of the airlock. The characters must manually override and hand-crank the airlocks because the ship power is off. Everyone with a sense of self-preservation is wearing their hardsuits (armor as heavy assault gear, Ordinary, LI d6-1 / HI d6 / En d6-1). Admiral Takashi does not rule out the possibility that not all characters have a sense of self-preservation.

The *Twelve Clutch* is a fairly sizable science vessel, with about thirty major compartments. The characters move into a large open chamber. The ship systems are off, but the air is still breathable (if a bit stale). There is also a botany chamber in the core of the ship, so even without active power there is some environmental refreshing going on. There is blood smeared on the floor as if a body had been dragged through it.

Haggernak winches open the door the body was dragged through. Beyond, the characters do not find the body, but they do find a severed t’sa hand. The t’sa medics report that it was severed by a sharp implement over a month ago. The *Twelve Clutch* went into drivespace over a year ago in the outside universe, but there’s no telling how long the event might have been in subjective time on board ship.

Drest Talorgin proposes going immediately to the cryosleep chamber. If the crew fell to savagery and cannibalism, they would have treated the cryosleep tanks as their larder, so the characters should be able to see the evidence right away. Taveer seconds the suggestion, as if any place on the ship has emergency power active it will be the cryosleep tanks.

Reaching the cryosleep chamber requires either passing through a large number of smaller chambers, or going through the hydroponics spine. The characters take the (shorter) hydroponics route, reasoning that they’d best encounter the monsters right away rather than waiting for later. Oddly, the plants (alien t’sa every one of them) are thriving.

Admiral Takashi leads the way, loudly proclaiming that this is a rescue mission.

From his time in the Nature Scouts (though he would never admit it), Taveer recognizes several of the plants. Haggernak detects some movement in a patch of bushes ahead. He tosses a vacuum-environment (chemical/LED) flare into the area, but sees nothing. He follows by forcing his way through the heavy vegetation. As he crushes the leaves, he notes that it leaves a slimy trail behind on his hardsuit. Haggernak looks around for tracks or signs of passage, but sees nothing.

Taveer decides that there is something not quite right about the vegetation. Some slow-growing plants have overgrown their bounds, the fruits are overlarge and misshapen, and the leaves are lush and large beyond the normal range. The more he looks at the plants, the less he recognizes about them.

Admiral Takashi listens to Taveer's comments and advises, "Nobody touch nothing!" Then he advises the Marines standing guard at the airlock by comm that if they see anything suspicious coming from the hydroponics bay they should just start out by lighting it up.

The Cryogenics Bay

The characters reach the Cryogenics Bay and determine that most of the crew is dead. It looks like someone shot them as they slept in stasis. There are no survivors in the chamber, but there are several empty cryogenics pods so there is at least some chance that the would-be occupants might be alive somewhere else.

Taveer comes up with a t'sa computer gauntlet that still has power. He boots it, finds all the contents are in t'sa and starts routing it through a translation program until Martin St. John mentions that he speaks (and reads) t'sa. There are several other computer gauntlets and wearables around, but most of them don't contain too much of interest beyond the 26th century version of *Angry Birds* and t'sa pornography. The other characters are somewhat amazed that St. John's "cultural awareness and sensitivity" training included a practical introduction to t'sa porn.

Drest Talorgin reasons that nobody knew who the original crewmembers of the *Twelve Clutch* were, so he starts taking photographs of all the dead t'sa and sending them back to the *Lighthouse* via the shuttle's data link. He finds that the bodies are a mix of crew, officers and scientists. He does not find the body of the Captain, but he does find

the Second Officer, the Head Scientist and what looks like most of the Flight Crew. He does not find any members of the Engineering Crew. All told there are about twenty bodies.

Admiral Takashi reviews the empty cryogenics pods and finds one labeled for *Captain Lk'rol*.

The characters force a couple of the cryogenics pods to find out if the (dead) t'sa inside are still frozen. The answer is that they're at room temperature.

Computer Room Next!

The characters elect to avoid the hydroponics core, as the side-route only requires passing through a couple of chambers. As the characters open the door to the computer room they see that there is still light inside. The chamber is octagonal with a massive glowing shape with bizarre shifting geometry floating in the center. Watching it for any length of time creates headaches. Taveer reports, "My geometry sensor jammed when I pointed it at the thing! The non-Euclidean alarm is going off!"

Admiral Takashi orders, "Everyone into the corridor!"

Taveer and Haggernak go back into the chamber to power up the main computer using a portable generator Taveer brought. When Taveer pulls the panels on the power distribution box he finds signs that a power surge did substantial damage to the ship's electrical systems. He needs to reroute power through those undamaged components he can find. It takes him a little while, but he manages to turn the computers back on.

While Taveer works, the others spend their time fretting that the surge that damaged the ship might have carried a signal over to the *Lighthouse*.

The computers boot up. Taveer is able to find massive amounts of engineering data about the initial transition to drivespace. He sets up a process to dump all of it to portable data crystals. With that running, he brings up the Officers' Logs.

The initial tone of the Captain's log reports is very optimistic: this is a great scientific mission and he is breaking his diet to celebrate. The characters scan forward through the reports, looking for signs of impending disaster. Around two months after transition into drivespace the biologists report odd developments in the hydroponics chamber. They check out the vegetables and for all that their appearance is unusual they

check out as safe to eat. The Captain remains optimistic and reports that the vegetables are delicious. He hopes to be able to sell them when the ship returns to real space.

Then the murders begin; ghastly and vicious murders. The Captain reports them as unexplained. But then the logs change over to the Second Officer who reports that the Captain has been removed from command due to his involvement in the murder of several crewmen. The Second Officer (now Captain) reports that several crew members are showing signs of mental degradation and physical mutation. Some crewmen lose the use of language. Efforts to return to normal space fail: the drive keeps on dragging the ship back into drivespace.

At four subjective months the Second Officer orders everyone into the cryosleep pods, with the computer ordered to periodically attempt to drop back into real-space and transmit a distress signal.

The characters compare the timestamps on the log against the known appearances of the *Twelve Clutch* in real space and conclude that the ship is experiencing variable time distortion: they have definitely been out for more than a year, perhaps as much as two years.

There is also mention in the logs about a single crewman who has become nearly catatonic. His problems started about three subjective months into the journey. He only murmurs a single word over and over: "I-krl". The characters verify that he is not among the known dead crew.

The last log entries deal with the process of putting everyone into cryosleep.

The AI and the Distress Call

Around this time, the *Twelve Clutch* AI contacts Taveer through his wireless link and asks to be hosted on his internal AI rig. Taveer gives permission and creates a space in his internal infospace to host the AI. The AI is upset because it cannot access most of its systems: it cannot get to communications but it must send out a message. Taveer checks, and it is trying to send the regular recorded distress call.

The other characters point out that the distress call might have been recorded by the catatonic crewman who has been speaking to the I-krl. Taveer listens to it anyway. His WIL roll is stunningly bad. The others see Taveer's eyes go blank, or perhaps even blanker (mechalus eyes are pretty blank to start with).

The others see Taveer move with strange, jerky haste and conclude the worst. Admiral Takashi resolves to destroy the wireless interface, but fails to identify it. He shoots a computer terminal instead. Taveer wheels around and swings at Takashi with his tri-staff. The entity now controlling Taveer is unused to controlling a humanoid body so the strike is clumsy and wide.

Drest Talorgin fires on Taveer with a stutter cannon. Admiral Takashi tries to trip Taveer, but his strike is deflected by Taveer's tri-staff field. Concord Marine *Private Motorhead* lines up on Taveer with his stutter rifle at ridiculously close range and downs the mechalus like a sack of potatoes. His hit is so good he leaves Taveer with some broken ribs into the bargain.

The t'sa medics set to work on Taveer with great success. Noting that his eyes are glowing with the characteristic purple of I-krl possession, the other characters zip-tie him and take away his weapons. Admiral Takashi connects in to his internal computer array and purges the AI out.

Admiral Takashi proposes, "Let us bring him around and hear what he has to say. Either he will be cured, or his insane rantings may give us valuable information." As a protective measure, Drest Talorgin and two Marines turn off their audio inputs and turn on their psi-detectors.

When Taveer regains consciousness, his eyes again glow with purple-black. The psi-detectors do not go off. However, word comes in from the *Lighthouse*, "Sir! The computer systems are going crazy! Someone is uploading a virus into our main core!" The Marines stutter Taveer into unconsciousness, but the virus invasion does not stop – instead, the *Lighthouse* drops out of communication. Even worse, heavy jamming goes into effect, closing out all data links. Suspicion is that it is the *Lighthouse* that is doing the jamming.

As a precaution, Admiral Takashi orders the others to put Taveer inside a Faraday Cage (or, in space parlance, a "local jammer"). Drest Talorgin also pulls out Taveer's jury-rig power connection to shut off the *Twelve Clutch* computer core.

We Find the Survivors

The characters head back through the hydroponics core. Along the way, they find the survivors, clambering along the overhead catwalks and pointing blasters at the

characters. They look like t'sa, except that they are encased in heavy black suits. Haggernak notices that the suits bulge in ways that they shouldn't. There are nine of them. One hisses at Haggernak, "The Captain wants to see you!" We agree to accompany them.

The Heart of Darkness

The t'sa survivors shuffle the characters along. The characters notice that the t'sa have a device specifically designed to jimmy the doors open and closed. Admiral Takashi keeps an eye on the guy carrying the device: he will be the first to fall.

The t'sa lead the characters into a darkened chamber. They can only barely see a huge scaled mass in the back of the chamber, apparently the Captain. A faint purplish glow shines from its eyes. The Captain explains that the *Twelve Clutch* is a peaceful vessel and must be allowed to go on its way. He goes on to describe the I-krl as gods in the universe, able to destroy all of the Verge Alliance in a trice.

Admiral Takashi suggests that Taveer makes an unworthy host for an I-krl. The Captain doesn't seem to buy the argument: "Those who have been touched become more!"

The Captain is willing to let the characters leave with some of the fruits from the hydroponics core. No telling what side effects eating the fruit might have. As the characters talk they hear sounds coming from the Captain that do not sound like normal t'sa noises, strange clapping and clicking and slithering sounds.

Admiral Takashi continues the conversation, "So, how can we help your I-krl masters?"

"Accept them! Worship them! Become their slaves!"

"So, how do I do that exactly?"

"Surrender yourselves to the I-krl Theocracy! They are the result of a moment's effort by the I-krl!"

Admiral Takashi waves goodbye to the Captain, promising to write, and drags Taveer back out of the room. He notes that Taveer is carrying (as per his usual tendency) a dozen charges of plasma jelly, plus detonators. Under the guise of gathering fruits, he decides to set some charges through the hydroponics core.

Drest Talorgin tries thinking the most insulting thoughts he can about one of the t'sa's egg-mother. No response. So then he simply tells the creature flat out. This very nicely serves to distract the t'sa from what Admiral Takashi is doing. "No, you've got it wrong. I'm not saying that you've had unnatural relations with your egg-mother. I'm saying that you've had *lots* of unnatural relations with your egg-mother!"

Hasty Ambush!

Then the explosives go off! Unfortunately, it turns out that the Admiral has limited demolitions skills so he emplaced a shaped charge in the wrong direction. One or two of the t'sa wet themselves laughing, but the only casualties are a few trees and hydroponics tanks.

Gunfire breaks out. Private Motorhead lines up three nice bursts on a t'sa mutant and is amazed to see the creature just shrug off the attack. Haggernak opens fire with his plasma cannon, to very little effect. He explains, "It's the plants – they make it hard to shoot well."

Drest Talorgin draws out his blade and slashes away at the nearest t'sa mutant, chopping the creature practically in half. The creature's suit spills open, but instead of entrails it contains long, wriggling, glowing tentacles. The only reason the creature looked at all like a t'sa was because that was the shape of the suit.

Admiral Takashi opens fire with his laser pistol, warming up a mutant but inflicting little real damage.

A t'sa mutant blasts Haggernak, leaving him desperately injured with 5 points of mortal damage. Haggernak's automated health-pack takes over, mitigating the effects of the injury. The mutants inflict moderate damage on Drest and Admiral Takashi. Then a mutant makes a lucky shot on Takashi and takes him down with 3 points of mortal damage.

From beyond the corridor there is an awful sound, a sound as if something much larger than a t'sa is trying to force itself through a t'sa-sized door.

Martin St. John takes stock of the situation and turns on his deflection harness.

With Admiral Takashi down and Haggernak injured the characters still face six t'sa mutants. The Marines open fire with a mix of charge rifles (fully automatic) and

charge machine guns. They have little effect upon the mutants, but shred dozens and dozens of plants. The characters note that as the gunfire impacts more of the vegetation there are rustling sounds suggesting that the plants are trying to get out of the way.

Haggernak gets a good shot off with his plasma cannon, turning all but one of the mutants into smoking charcoal ruins. Drest Talorgin resolves to finish off the last mutant with his vibroblade, and does so in fine style.

The Captain Comes Onstage

At this point, the Captain forces his bulk into the hydroponics core. the characters are finally able to see what a monstrosity he has become. He has purple glowing eyes, horns, hooves, extra tentacles, two flexible mouthparts extending from his torso, and even more that sane people dare not mention. His body seems far too large to fit through the ship doors, but he manages it anyway through a technique resembling a mix of jello and horrific musculature. He lurches to the attack.

Martin St. John shoots the Captain twice. He hits directly, with one shot that would be fatal to a normal t'sa but which barely slows the creature down. Drest charges to the attack with his vibroblade. As with St. John's attack, he hits solidly but doesn't inflict enough damage to really hurt the creature.

The Captain bears down upon Drest. It attempts to ram its ovipositor down Drest's various orifices. Drest thinks, "This is where clenching pays off!" Drest feels lucky to escape with only six wounds, which his armor deflects.

Corporal Wisbowski goes to one knee and starts walking tracer rounds straight up the Captain's body, to very little effect. Private Motorhead does likewise, with somewhat better result. Strange purple-colored ichor spills onto the floor, glowing as it flows.

Drest strikes again, chopping deeply into the Captain's neck and felling him. He reflects upon taking some trophies, in particular the horns. He imagines how he could use them as a conversation starter: "Do you like these horns? I took them from a t'sa Captain!" "You mean they were his trophies?" "No, I mean I cut them off his body!" "I didn't think t'sa had horns like that, let me check Wikipedia..."

The characters make some effort to make a count of the bodies against the crew roster. Barring the possibility that some new mutants might have spawned during the

voyage, they think they have accounted for everyone. Admiral Takashi, restored to consciousness with some remarkable medical care, proclaims that there is no scientific value to be gained from studying the *Twelve Clutch*.

Drest makes a point of collecting the Captain's Horns. The others make him spend four hours decontaminating them, prompting Haggernak to ask, "Do you think that autoclaving is good for alien artifacts?" Drest ignores him: he is too busy hanging the horns in his quarters.

Back in the Lighthouse

The characters head back to the *Lighthouse*. The heavy jamming is still in effect, so they have no contact with the ship. When they arrive, they find most people alive but a lot of panic in the corridors. Many of the crew expected that Admiral Takashi and Captain St. John were both dead, killed with the rest of the away team. Admiral Takashi does his best to reassure the ship's complement with a public address.

The virus attack was interrupted by the Communications team: two of them managed to shut the signal down before it was broadcast on the public-address speakers. Unfortunately, quite a few of the Communications team have had to be held in isolation as they're also I-krl possessed just like Taveer. *Lieutenant Bennet Hicks*, the Communications bridge bunny (female, despite the name), is among them.

Haggernak's subordinate *Lieutenant Gayth Ahrian* is fraal and has psychic powers, so Admiral Takashi has her check out Taveer. She reports that a malignant dark psychic octopus has wrapped itself around his consciousness. She isn't able to remove it: it is strong enough that only the most powerful human or fraal psychics are likely to have a chance. The characters debate taking Taveer to be cared for by the Hatire donut priests. The fraal Wanderers and their ancient super-psychics would be an excellent choice, except that they've shunned humanity for centuries. Finally, the evrem might have the power. There was an evrem ship destroyed some time ago, and one evrem is known to be living on Bluefall.

Because the *Lighthouse* is moored to a medurr rift-ship paired to another ship at Bluefall, sending the possessed patients back there for treatment by the evrem is quite straightforward. The characters follow fairly dramatic security precautions: if the I-krl realize that someone has the I-krl god-codes stuck in their head, they'd totally want them.

There is also the matter of the *Twelve Clutch*. Admiral Takashi orders it towed into an open section of space and destroyed with heavy missiles. He has the remains scanned and re-destroyed until it is clear that nothing remains, most especially any floating non-Euclidean triangles.

Review of the images the characters took of the strange floating non-Euclidean object in the *Twelve Clutch* computer core shows that the object does not appear in any recording. Gayth Ahrian explains that the object was probably not “real” in the way mortal creatures normally think of it: its appearance was likely just a construct of the characters’ minds. Even a psychic wouldn’t be able to record it properly, and would likely have perceived it in entirely different ways.

The I-krl Fleet

Intelligence reports coming back from Tendril reveal that the I-krl fleet there has departed. Subsequent reports indicate that it withdrew to Mantebron, where the characters originally damaged the *Phlegethon* after the kadarens attempted to install a Glassmaker tachyon gun inside it. This means that Mantebron fleet strength is now about 30,000. Hathorne fleet strength is about 35,000 including the (mostly unknown) Cathedral Ship.

Overall disposition of the I-krl fleet includes the damaged *Phlegethon* at Hathorne, the *Lethe* at Tendril, the I-krl Death Star at Hammer’s Star and the unnamed Cathedral Ship also at Hathorne. Of the original four I-krl Fortress Ships, the *Acheron* was destroyed at Ignatius and the *Styx* was captured.

The Verge Alliance fleet strength amounts to about 35,000 at Bluefall (including the *Lighthouse*). Galvin and Alitar in the Algemron system could contribute another 25,000, presuming that Markus’ treachery is not revealed (and depending upon the willingness of the teln-infested Galvinite leadership to send ships). The medurr can provide another 10,000 fleet strength.

The Verge Alliance high command creates a battle plan to attack Mantebron. The plan depends upon assembling the *Lighthouse*, a medurr riftship, and as many fleet elements as Galvin is willing to contribute at a point one jump away from Mantebron. When everyone is assembled, all will fall upon the I-krl fleets. There is risk in this: Verge Alliance forces have achieved great victories against similar-sized I-krl forces, but

generally only on the defensive, when they can use the medurr drivespace denial weapons to precipitate out I-krl ships in scattered clumps. The Verge Alliance has yet to achieve a substantial victory on the offensive.

The A Team takes the *Justifiable Curiosity* through the rift to Bluefall to cure Taveer. If that works, they will turn around and hit Mantebron. If it doesn't work, they will use Taveer and his god-codes as bait. Either way, the characters will send the B Team in the *Red Queen* to scout the Mantebron system ahead of the assault.

The End of the Session

Each active character gains eight experience points.