

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY

10/30/2011

THE GRAND FINALE!

Attendance

Ernest comments, “I did nothing yesterday except read a thousand pages of book: I got a whole trilogy of *Warhammer 40k* novels in. So far, I have learned that in the grim, dark future there is only war.”

Bruce offers from faraway Richardson, “You know, I’ve heard that. So, do they detail the specific kinds of war?”

Ernest allows as to how they don’t spend a lot of time on the subject, at least from an academic perspective.

Chris speaks favorably of the first hour and a half of *Zombie Apocalypse*, and quite less favorably of the last half hour. He notes, “It was retarded. If you’ve been through a zombie apocalypse, wouldn’t you keep an eye out for zombie animals? Of course not – if that happened, then you’d have moved clear to the bottom of the food chain.” Apparently, the cause of the apocalypse was disease. Governments eventually gave up on trying to quarantine the affected populations, so they resorted to EMP’ing the entire world. Because, you know, the zombies are the tool-using folks who are going to notice.

Paul makes a grand entrance. Everyone celebrates by speaking his name in various dramatic idioms. He is reassured that everyone knows who he is. DNA tests will not be necessary.

Speaking of Vietnamese boys by the pound, *Tim* arrives. He is deeply, deeply upset to realize just how he’s being featured in this summary.

But by the time *Patrick* appears the conversation has moved on to the hypothetical, including an ongoing discussion on the possible uses of the “Rusty Venture.” *Tim* is much happier once he sees *Patrick* even more discomfited than he was. And that’s not because *Patrick* is a shrinking violet upset by the mention of any specific body part.

| <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 | Formerly Possessed |
| Bruce | Banoor | Mechalus Verge Alliance Bioscientist | 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 | Present |
| Tim | Haggernak | Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec | Present |

Time Has Passed

The Verge Alliance fleet deployed to Mantebron only to find that the I-krl forces were already withdrawing to Hathorn. *Admiral Takashi* orders the Verge Alliance flag planted, commissions a series of medals for the veterans of the Mantebron Campaign, and returns the fleet to Bluefall.

Admiral Takashi grumbles, “I don’t like this. We keep on showing up in systems just to find the I-krl leaving. I think they’ve managed to get inside our decision loop.

Captain Martin St. John offers, “Yes, just like we used the psychic donut to get inside their decision loop.”

Ten-zil Kem comments, “Could we stop talking about decision loops? It’s making me nervous.”

Operation Rache

Admiral Takashi explains to the others that “rache” means “revenge” in German. It is the designation given to the Old Space expedition traveling to the Verge to provide relief against the I-krl. The Operation Rache fleet shows up at Tendril, but the number of

ships is quite unimpressive. The fleet includes no Fortress Ships, just a couple of dreadnoughts and some other vessels.

As a side note, Tendril is (generally) quite a nice place except that the star is unstable so every fifty days (or so) it surge and puts out a lethal wave of radiation. The worlds of the Tendril system have a vibrant market for high-SPF sunblock.

Rear Admiral Joe Hanson commands the Operation Rache fleet. As his ships achieve starfall into Bluefall, Admiral Takashi organizes a meeting with him and *Undersecretary Michael Thane*, along with various other luminaries: the other Ambassadors, plus *Banoor* under his new title as Chief Scientific Advisor to the Admiralty (Captain St. John notes, “That title doesn’t come with a pay raise.”). Rear Admiral Hanson is seconded from the Galactic Concord military. The fleet itself is a mix of Galactic Concord, StarMech Consortium and Orion League vessels.

Meeting with the Rear Admiral

Rear Admiral Hanson notes that things are not going well with Operation Rache: as the characters can see, there are not many ships in the fleet as most of the vessels in it returned to Old Space to join with their national militaries. There is war in Old Space now, after the revelation that VoidCorp had a communications relay in the Catalog system linked to the I-krl network. The Galactic Concord demanded to see VoidCorp’s deep gas-mining records from the Catalog system, a request that swiftly led to violence. There is fear that the conflict will develop into Galactic War 3.

One of the revelations coming out of the conflict is that the VoidCorp has been run by an AI for some time now. There is significant fear that the VoidCorp CEO has been completely compromised for some time now. The Orlamists have come to VoidCorp’s aid, but the Thuldan Empire has broken ties with VoidCorp and is now sending ships against it. The Nariac Domain has also thrown in with VoidCorp.

The Cathedral Ship and the I-krl Fleet

Undersecretary Thane describes the tactical situation in the Verge to Rear Admiral Hanson. He mentions in particular the Cathedral Ship at Hathorn. Verge Alliance spies (a combination of fraal infiltrators acting as thaal priests and sifarv captives turned against the I-krl) report that the Cathedral Ship has been extensively

modified with alien technology taken from Mantebtron. The vessel is now encrusted in bizarre massive crystal growths. The spies claim that the crystals are a defensive system, but they do not know specific details.

The remaining I-krl forces include the Fortress Ships *Phlegethon* and *Lethe*, plus the Hathorn Cathedral Ship *Ascension* and their support vessels. The *Phlegethon* remains damaged from the battle of First Mantebtron.

The Operation Rache Fleet

Rear Admiral Hanson indicates that his fleet will be at the disposal of the Verge Alliance. His captains all have family ties to one or another Verge system, and are willing to throw over their loyalty to their home nations on behalf of the Verge Alliance. The same cannot be said for their full crews, but for now the ships are here.

The Verge Alliance Fleet

The Verge Alliance fleet is largely comprised of the original Galactic Concord fleet, the Regency fleet from Bluefall, the Galvinite mind-worm fleet, and a few additional vessels from whatever source. The Verge Alliance has two significant advantages beyond simple firepower. The first is the Medurr RiftShip, which can provide both a unique transportation capability and a DriveSpace denial weapon. The second is the Stoneburner psychic donut that has allowed the Verge Alliance essentially instant interstellar psychic communications.

The Rear Admiral's Opinions

Rear Admiral Hanson thinks that the I-krl forces are clearly planning something big, but to strike at them directly is not realistic unless the Verge Alliance can come up with an edge of some kind. Removing the Cathedral Ship from the equation would surely provide such an edge.

It is at this point that Admiral Takashi places a significant military secret on the table. The *Lighthouse* was originally an Orlamu station built during Galactic War 2 and donated to the Galactic Concord in the aftermath of the conflict. Its StarDrive is not just a propulsion device – it is also a massive one-shot weapon. The entire StarDrive can be fired (along with the bridge and the entire engineering section) at a target. The entire

length of the *Lighthouse* serves as a massive railgun to project the drive. Once it strikes its target, the drive triggers and rips the target apart by sending it through DriveSpace. The original design purpose was as a planet-killer.

There are several problems with using the *Lighthouse* as a weapon. Its core attack is short-range and would result in the effective destruction of the entire ship. The secret nature of the weapon means that evacuating personnel from the ship beforehand would be difficult. The *Lighthouse* itself is not well-defended (as a warship would be), so moving it into striking range of the Cathedral Ship would be difficult. And finally, the Glassmaker defensive array on the *Ascension* would need to be eliminated.

Could Peppin Be Helpful?

The evrem *Raphael* suggests an interesting option. He notes that *Gerard Peppin*'s body and mind have been remade to make him into a suitable channel for extradimensional alien entities ever since he was possessed by one of the falkri. The Stoneburners also owe the evrem race a favor – so if the characters are able to use that to persuade a Stoneburner to help, it could possess Peppin and allow him to serve as the delivery vehicle to bring the Stoneburner onto the *Ascension* and destroy the Glassmaker shield.

Gerard Peppin is initially not too enthusiastic about this plan, until Admiral Takashi explains that the Stoneburners were like prehistoric mollusk stoners. On hearing that, Peppin is completely on plan. His tri-vid crew is officially designated as war correspondents.

The Grand Plan

The characters set up a big sham to convince the I-krl that the medurr are breaking with the Alliance and that there is a huge desire to retake Hammer's Star. A fleet will be deployed to Hammer's Star with the RiftShip, a big enough fleet that it represents a significant fraction of the forces currently stationed at Bluefall. This should convince the aliens that Bluefall is undefended. The *Red Queen* will use her illusion powers to hide the remaining Medurr RiftShips. The Verge Alliance draws the I-krl into attacking Bluefall, at which point the characters use the RiftShip DriveSpace denial weapons to scatter them out and clean up.

This plan is designated as Operation Hammer of Freedom. The plan name is mostly a reflection of the quantity of bourbon consumed at the planning meetings. It is only by the barest margin that it wasn't called Operation Hammer Poon-Tang.

The Possession Plan

The characters (both the A Team and the B Team) travel back to Yellow Sky in the Tychus system, with the explicit goal of getting Peppin possessed by yet another type of Space God. They use the frigate *Basilisk* (normally attached to the *Lighthouse* as an escort) to get there, as the *Red Queen* is busy hiding RiftShips. The stealthy *Justifiable Curiosity* is strapped to its hull, just in case a stealthy escape from somewhere becomes necessary. The *Basilisk* normally has a crew of about 80.

The characters return to the Stoneburner throne room. Admiral Takashi takes the throne and addresses the Stoneburner presence. He describes the current situation and notes that Raphael the evrem claimed that the Stoneburners owed his people one. He asks that a Stoneburner presence possess Peppin and help the Verge Alliance defeat the I-krl by destroying the Glassmaker defensive array on the *Ascension*. The Stoneburner presence responds, "We. Will. Get. Back. To. You."

The characters wait for a while. When the Presence returns it intones that the terms of the deal the characters have proposed will be final. Unable to get any ancient wisdom on the subject from the Presence, Admiral Takashi agrees that he thinks the proposed deal is just fine.

Suddenly, Peppin feels the immense weight of something pressing on his mind. He relaxes his brain-sphincter and allows it access. It probes around for a little while. Then it goes away. And then it comes back in force. He recognizes that the Stoneburner entity isn't entirely in his mind: it is actually too large. It really just has a small hook into his soul.

The Fleet Action

Admiral Takashi's plan works pretty well. The assault on Hammer's Star is complicated by the fact that the I-krl had sufficient hidden assets there to seriously engage the Verge Alliance forces. The Verge Alliance ships manage to return to Bluefall in good order, but don't manage to completely reduce the I-krl forces there.

Admiral Takashi and Captain St. John both station themselves on board the *Lighthouse*. The station crew is cut down to the minimum needed: engineering staff, Alliance Marines for security, and not much else. The other characters on board include *Haggernak*, *Drest Talorgin* and *Lambert Fulson*. Everyone expects that the I-krl will teleport assault crews onto the *Lighthouse* as it approaches the *Ascension*. Haggernak and Drest will both serve as security to stop the teleporting assault groups. Lambert Fulson will organize the evacuation operations, using the tramp freighters he's got moored to the ship spines.

Banoor, Gerard Peppin, *Lenny*, *Markus Oroszlan*, and *Ten-zil Kem* will be on board the *Red Queen*, along with the C-Team of named Marines. They will be responsible for bringing Peppin and his Stoneburner payload to the Glassmaker defensive screen. They will be supplemented by medurr ninjas and Pict warriors – Ten-zil Kem points out that *Alice* can use illusions to turn guns off, in which case a crew of melee combatants will be very helpful.

Taveer (in a guest appearance) indicates that he is going to strap himself down in the engineering section and go down with the *Lighthouse*, and with the AI *Mina*. For her part, Mina is willing to sacrifice herself for the cause as long as some way is found to save her and Taveer's AI daughter *Viera*. Transferring her off the *Lighthouse* will require a significant amount of hardware. The characters decide to move her into the VoidCorp VORAL boxes under the ocean, and then physically move those boxes into another ship when the time is right.

Admiral Takashi for once approves all of Taveer's backlogged purchase requisitions. The tragedy is that the mechalus does not have time to actually implement all of the system improvements to the *Lighthouse* before the ship is destroyed. Then the Admiral gets on the PA system and gives an incredible (amazing!) speech to the fleet in the grand old spirit of General George S. Patton.

The I-krl Cathedral Fleet Attacks

The I-krl fleet has clearly identified a way to bypass the Verge Alliance DriveSpace denial tactic: their ships arrive at the Bluefall system in good order. As soon as they break out of DriveSpace the *Red Queen* drops into stealth and heads for the

Ascension. The main formations of the Verge Alliance fleet power up and vector out to intercept the I-krl squadrons.

Free-Space Assault

The *Red Queen* approaches the *Ascension* as closely as she dares, then the characters make free-space jumps to the hull of the I-krl Cathedral Ship. As they go, Alice extends her illusion powers to transform the characters into knights, assaulting a fearsome fortification. They find themselves not drifting through space, but swinging on ropes across a wide moat.

They come into a courtyard full of horse-drawn carriages and very confused ape men. The barim defenders look with dismay at their horse-whips, but still leap to the defense. Picts and Verge Marines in body tanks crash into them, looking for all the world like plate-armored knights.

The assault party breaks through the gates and into the hall, where they are confronted by a mixed force of barim and elite sifarv commandos. The Picts, medurr and Marines engage the barim while the characters attack the sifarv. Peppin asks his Stoneburner passenger for help and is forced to negotiate with it; he offers a month's worth of childhood memories. Banoor aims at a sifarv and shoots it out of the air with a barrage of laser SMG blasts.

A sifarv swoops past Lenny, leaving a long slashing wound. Another sifarv dives upon Ten-zil Kem and delivers a savage strike leaving him on the verge of falling. Banoor takes a mere minor wound.

Peppin finally finishes negotiating with the Stoneburner. He stands up out of cover, points and Ten-zil Kem, and heals him in a blaze of white light. Ten-zil Kem calls upon Alice to bring the helmets of darkness down upon his foes. His plea is answered, and several of the sifarv are blinded. Markus Oroszlan takes full advantage, plowing through three sifarv with his chainsword. One of them collapses, leaving the other two wounded and confused.

A sifarv finds his way to Lenny and cuts him badly.

Ten-zil Kem lines up his heavy depleted-neutronium gun and shoots clean through a sifarv, killing it instantly.

The end of the round has only one blinded, wounded sifarv left. He charges for Peppin and his lethal eye-beams. The sifarv's strike is deeply damaging, but doesn't take Peppin down. Ten-zil Kem guns the sifarv down while Peppin's passenger psychically heals him.

Beyond the hall, the characters are confronted by a portcullis. Lenny, now apparently the wizard-thief, works on the portcullis controls. He is easily able to open the way to the core of the alien crystals. This is one case where reality and illusion match: the characters don't know if Alice's illusions simply cannot affect them, or she felt they were genre-appropriate enough.

Peppin approaches the crystals. He touches them and feels his alien host enter the crystal. Within seconds, cracks appear in the crystal and it goes dark, like a burnt-out lightbulb. Markus pulls Peppin away from the crystal; he is limp, like a rag doll. The characters run back to the *Red Queen*.

The characters are almost out of the *Ascension* when the lights all go out, then surge bright. Their way is blocked by the thaal priest *Y'thon Kadar* and a smiling gard'hyi. A horrific cloud of teeth, claws and dimensional shift hovers between the two I-krl mystics. But that isn't the greatest threat – the two of them seize control of Markus Oroszlan's body using psychokinesis.

For their next step, the two of them consume three ranks of Banoor's guns skills. As a bonus, they also take a few moments of his recent memories to leave him confused and disoriented.

The characters quickly determine out that the two psychics are protected by an energy field that gives them a +6 defense bonus. Sensing that this is a time for massive response, Ten-zil Kem dumps Peppin full of stimulants and screams at him until he stirs. Peppin responds by trading away all of his memories. All of them, every last one. His entire life.

The enemy psychics next drill into Ten-zil Kem's mind, leaving him with the illusion that he is trapped in a small room. "Where am I? How did I get here? It's so much better than where I came from!"

Lenny looks over at Ten-zil Kem and shouts, “Those monsters! They’ve turned him into a mime!” He manages to shoot the gard’hyi, but only enough to draw attention to him.

Banoor regains his bearings enough to discover that he’s in a space battle. He sees a gard’hyi and shoots towards it, but his inexpertly-aimed shots are ludicrously wide.

Markus swings his chainsword at Lenny, who evades. Markus chops massive chunks of metal out of hull and stanchion.

Peppin comes up glowing as a huge purple light-show emerges from him, expanding first to fill the chamber and then beyond. Space crews outside the *Ascension* are able to see the purple glowing globe expanding out of the ship hull to encompass a large percentage of the I-krl ships. Everywhere the aura touches, psychic powers fail. He doesn’t realize it at the time, but it also disables the StarWeb. Peppin utters one last phrase, “The deal is done.” And then he dies.

Out in the fleet action, all of the kadaren ships that rely upon living brains for control suddenly suffer systems failures. Their firecontrol systems sag and fail.

Markus Oroszlan finds himself freed of control. He announces, “I’m gonna drive a fucking chainsword right through Y’thon Kadar!” The thaal brings up his crystaff in a desperate attempt to ward off death. Markus cuts him straight through.

The gard’hyi quickly realizes that he can’t teleport anywhere. He runs, but not fast enough to avoid Markus. The warlion pins him to the deck and watches his body twitch. Interestingly, because the StarWeb is disabled the gard’hyi’s body doesn’t burn up.

Banoor examines Peppin’s body. He is utterly dead, but without a visible wound on him. The characters pick up his body, plus those of Y’thon Kadar and the gard’hyi and run for it. As Markus notes, “They’re going to shoot a missile at this ship, and we don’t want to be here when they do!”

The Space Battle

The battle outside has been going as expected. The *Ascension* has been completely unaffected by both beams and missiles, at least until its Glassmaker shield

goes down. Even after that, it remains a massive warship. And because it isn't of kadaren construction it was not impacted by the failure of psychic control mechanisms.

On the auxiliary bridge of the *Lighthouse*, Admiral Takashi utters one command, "Prepare to fire the primary weapon!" Captain St. John reads the codes into the computer and aligns the fire control. Admiral Takashi observes that the *Ascension* has good antimissile defenses, so he orders the *Lighthouse* to empty its magazines in advance of firing the drive.

He calls down to the engineering deck, "Taveer! It's time to get out of there!"

Taveer responds, "No sir! I'm staying at my post with Mina!"

Captain St. John fires the main drive. The entire lower half of the *Lighthouse* is fired at the *Ascension*, spinning as it goes. From the auxiliary bridge, the characters (except for Taveer) see the drive module impact, then the blue glow of starrise as the *Ascension* vanishes.

An Aside

Even as the *Ascension* is traveled into the heart of the Aegis star, it will be 121 hours before the ship emerges in the heart of the sun. Taveer transfigures his mind into the computer and passes the time in union with Mina. He doesn't even notice when the barim break into the module and kill his meat body.

The Ambassador

After the destruction of the *Ascension*, the characters expect that the Verge Alliance has defeated the I-krl, but their Ambassador disagrees. He sends a blustery message to the Verge Alliance command from his cell in the brig: "You have not won the battle you think you have won! When you turned off your DriveSpace weapon, we fired ours! We have sent a poison into the ocean of Bluefall, targeted to destroy the deepfallen! We know you can communicate with them, unless you tell them to open their gates they will all die!"

Admiral Takashi tells the Ambassador's jailors, "You have my orders to kill his dumb ass." The jailors oblige.

The medurr Matriarch's judgment is simple, "The deepfallen must die."

The characters use the psychic donut to attempt contact with the deepfallen. This is difficult, because the deepfallen have a collective consciousness. Lenny reaches out, managing not only to make contact but also to stay sane. The deepfallen speaker *Tethys* refuses offers to evacuate, claiming that their own deaths are the only way to ensure that the I-krl will never attack them again.

Lenny responds, “We thank you for your noble sacrifice.”

Admiral Takashi adds, “Your race will not be forgotten!”

The End of the Session

The *Lighthouse* campaign ends here, with the destruction of the I-krl Exeat forces in the Verge and the end of the Externals threat. Old Space remains in conflict, with what could be the early days of GW3 unfolding, but the future of the Verge Alliance is bright.