

## STAR\*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 11/08/2009

### Attendance

*Paul* reminisces, “Ahh, *Magic: The Gathering*! That was such a wonderful game! But I always had separation issues, so I could never trade cards. Except the Atog. I hated that card.”

*Bruce* (Taveer and Lambert Fulson) points out, “Oh yeah! It ate artifacts! It ate *your own* artifacts! Gee, I don’t even know why I remember that.”

*Ernest* (Markus Oroszlan and Captain Ken Takashi) points out, “That’s because you’re a freak. And I bet you never played *Magic* for ante. It was pussies like you who ruined the game!”

*Chris* (Ten-zil Kem and Rokk Tressor) groans. Why must everyone else in the group be so completely drawn to such uncool things as *Magic*? He thinks back to when he was a lad and his entire life revolved around pogs. Such happy days...

*Patrick* (Martin St. John and Lenny) stays silent. It wouldn’t do for the others to realize that in his other life he is the reigning online blogger and expert on *My Little Pony* collectibles. He suspects that they might mock him, rather than simply appreciating his hard-won expertise.

*Peco* (General Ivan Stukov and Ambassador Adun Zelnaga) decides that it’s safer just to be involved with soccer clubs. Even if those clubs mostly populated by English expatriates always seem to be more interested in cheap gin, tire-irons and rioting than actual athletics. Man, he could really go for some cheap gin right now.

<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

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

### *Taveer Improves the Network*

A computer communication comes through for *Taveer*. As always, he screams reflexively. There have been a lot of computer security issues recently, and the monstrous *Captain Ken Takashi* has been putting him under a lot of stress to fix them. The ship AI *Mina* manifests to him. *Taveer* has dressed her evocation up like a Victorian gentlewoman, after *Mina Harker* from that charming huu-man novel. She proposes a solution to the ongoing computer security problems: to become more personally involved with the individual passengers upon the station. She proposes to interact with them and analyze their behavior for leading predictors of problems.

Like all mechalus, *Taveer* really lacks good understanding of human weaknesses so he analyzes her proposal on the basis of the soundness of her code. He proposes some changes to the algorithm and gives his approval. Thus begins *The Operation*.

### *Ten-Zil's Private Time*

*Ten-Zil Kem* is relaxing with *Angela Quinn* after her recent acquittal. *Ten-Zil* thinks on this accomplishment and says, "I rock!" Then he plays his theme song, briefly.

*Angela* looks over at his life-size *Seshy the Happy Sesheyan* plush doll and asks him what it's for. His response is... equivocal. She tells him that the CIB has a thick file on him, and she's certain that they have a full-time analyst following him trying to figure out what he's up to. She suspects that they might want to blackmail him.

He isn't impressed, but asks for a copy of the file "because I like reading about myself." She asserts that this would violate many protocols. He responds, "Well, lots of things have been getting violated recently, so what would be one more?"

Then *Mina* appears on the viewscreen. *Ten-Zil* asks, "Why are you interrupting?"

The AI tells him, “One of your aides has found something interesting. You gave instructions not to be disturbed, but I think you should contact him.” She gives him contact information for *Shane the Aide*, a man cursed by VoidCorp naming schemes. Ten-zil thinks for a moment about the various signs that he might be dealing with a seed AI poised for a hard-takeoff Singularity event, but he isn’t too sure why.

Shane is rather surprised that his boss is calling him: he appears to be indisposed. In a flustered tone, he tells Ten-zil, “Something is a little amiss. We got an aid package from VoidCorp. Per your instructions I was looking through it for pharmaceuticals, but instead I found a box of statues.”

Ten-zil asks, “Why don’t you show me some pictures?” Shane flashes up some pictures of metal statuettes about 30 cm high of humans in various attitudes of prayer. They weren’t listed on the manifest, nor is it clear what they’re made of.

Ten-Zil eventually orders Shane to have them analyzed.

Angela Quinn speaks up, “I know something about art. Those look like Hatire religious artifacts.” They decide to take a look at them in person.

From the interface screen Mina chirps up, “You’re going out! Perhaps you’d like some legwarmers!”

“Shut up, computer.”

*I Am a Mutant! I Don’t Need Health Advice!*

*Markus Oroszlan* has been having a strange day. All day long the computer has been telling people that their bowel movements are insufficient and that they need leg warmers. He’s trying to do an arms deal with *Zalan Vagner*, a man who has been told some odd things by the AI Mira that very morning.

Markus muses, “If you think about it, this station has been around a long time, and the AI has been with it the whole time. It’s no surprise that the thing is degrading. In any case, can we do some business?”

“Sure, here’s good. Wait, where am I?”

Mira advises, “The warlion is using too much oxygen.”

Oroszlan is not impressed, “Right. What do you need?”

Vagner confesses, “I made some bad bets upon a hurricane match, and I’m having trouble making my payment to you. But I’ve got some information you might want.” He

describes *Doctor Wizard*, a very peculiar sort of surgeon who's having trouble finding an appropriate patient. Vagner has been selling him some medical equipment on the sly – all sorts of things, none illegal but all normally worth some official curiosity. They make a deal: Vagner will set up a meeting with Doctor Wizard, and if anything comes of it then Oroszlan will forgive some of the debt.

### *These Things Don't Go For Eyes, Do They?*

*Martin St. John* has his own problems: a crate of dhros ("o-monkeys" or "space gerbils") got broken and some of the creatures got into the vents, where they're reproducing. That inconsiderate monster *Captain Ken Takashi* has set him to hunting them all down. He'd normally just flood the ventilation shafts with knockout gas, but the new security protocols are getting in his way.

Dhros can get to 20 kilograms, and they're quite clever, very good at stealing food. There have also been some strange computer messages, "Unknown child, you should not eat insulation!"

St. John puts out some of his own computer messages, to the effect of "Do not feed the dhros and keep an eye on your children!" Station security personnel help him a bit, but not publicly because their boss *Jacquelyn Witt* hates him.

Things start to get out of hand later on in the afternoon, with reports of more mysterious computer messages: "Small child, you are not sufficiently groomed!" (accompanied by the sound of an automated shaver). There have also been reports of mysterious shaved dhros.

### *Thuldans Are Made from Stern, Strange Stuff*

*Ambassador Ivan Stukov* is no longer in the hospital after being shot in the face. After all, it has been almost five days. *Doctor Adun Zelnaga* would shoot himself in the face if anything took more than five days to cure. In any case, the *Lighthouse* has arrived at Bluefalls and the Thuldans are sending a team of negotiators to discuss the new missile batteries they want to install.

The lead negotiator is *Maximilian Yaeger*. He greets Ambassador Stukov with a huge smile and a firm handshake. The two Thuldan officials faintly hear a friendly

synthetic voice drift from the ducts, “Unknown child. You are in a restricted area. I have informed your parents.”

Yaeger is clearly more a salesman than a technician, but he clearly really believes in the new *Zero-Point Missiles*, weapons that twist the underlying fabric of the universe to destroy enemies. And being Thuldans, there’s not much he likes more than the idea of destroying enemies.

### *Security Is Feeling Insecure*

*Rokk Tressor* has no idea why the computer has started greeting all new arrivals by name. These greetings often include personal improvement instructions that visitors consider insulting. He tries to explain this to Taveer and gets nowhere. Then he calls the Captain, “The AI is acting strangely, and Taveer seems unconcerned. But I think there might be a silver lining. It seems like it can access all personal communications and data now, which could be very useful to some of us. I think it can spy on almost everyone almost all the time.”

Captain Takashi agrees that action is required. He calls his assistant to schedule a pre-meeting for the pre-meeting to prepare for a staff meeting. Then he talks to St. John (“Yes Captain? Aaah! Space monkey! Zzzap!” “Pilot St. John, you have generated some waste material. I have dispatched a helpful cleaning drone to remove it.”) on talking to the Thuldans about the new missiles. St. John agrees, but his attention is far more fixed upon the space-monkey problem.

St. John asks the Captain, “Can you free up some space-funds for a bounty on the space gerbils?”

Captain Takashi is dismissive, “Yeah, let me just get out my space-wallet. Seriously, we could set up something like 10 Concord Dollars a head. It’d be something for the kids to do. Or do something like a ‘Best Dhros Hunt Video’ contest on GridTube.”

### *The Long-Awaited Staff Meeting*

Captain Takashi invites Taveer, Martin St. John, Rokk Tressor to a staff meeting. As soon as everyone is settled, he shoots the computer speaker on the wall and tells Taveer to back out of the computer system “upgrade”. Taveer complies, though he points

out that he and the four other mechalus on the station have never been happier. He provides email testimonials from them (“Make it stop!”)

The Captain turns to the question of the Thuldans missiles. He charges Taveer and Rokk Tressor with ensuring that the Thuldans do nothing untoward with their access to *Lighthouse* systems. Taveer is eager to use this as a platform to demonstrate the improved security protocols available in the new upgrades.

Martin St. John asks, “What are the Thuldans getting out of this deal?”

Takashi, “All the intel they can steal, plus maybe the ability to install a secondary AI in our systems...”

“Sir, I actually meant what are their *stated* goals in this deal?”

“Oh, PR mostly – they want to get some credit for keeping the *Lighthouse* safe. Right now the Orlamus and the Concord get the lion’s share of the glory, and the Empire wants to change that.”

Rokk Tressor outlines some guidelines on fake data, then turns it over to Taveer so Mina can manufacture it into a series of fabricated reports on various Verge worlds created by a dozen different agents. Then she encrypts them all for the Thuldans to find.

### *Meeting the Thuldans*

Maximilian Yaeger receives Captain Takashi and the other characters with a broad smile and a diplomatic gauntlet. He suggests a demonstration of the new weapons systems, noting that the missiles are scaled to work against the heaviest ships humanity possesses. He emphasizes the Kroath threat and the Klik incursions at Hammer’s Star and the need to have modern weapons systems to counter them. He also mentions that “our partners at VoidCorp” wrote the missiles’ targeting software, prompting Taveer to quietly make a note to figure out what would be required to replace and rewrite the targeting software so it will work properly (and target VoidCorp ships).

### *What Are These Things, Anyway?*

Down in the cargo holds, Ten-Zil Kem examines the Hatire religious statues. The material is lustrous and shiny and very, very hard. Angela Quinn looks over his shoulder and offers, “Those are familiar. There was a planet destroyed in the last Great War that

made these things. They're clearly Hatire religious relics. I think we could learn more with a bit of research."

Mina speaks up, so the two of them close themselves into the storage bin. A pair of space monkey eyes watch from the ventilation grill.

In the darkness, Ten-zil Kem finally answers her, "That's great, Angela. By the way, could you get me a copy of my file?"

She seems unsure about complying. So he kisses her. There's nothing to arouse the libido than hiding from a crazy AI and space monkeys in a storage bin filled with old Hatire religious icons. Or at least that's the way it works in Ten-zil Kem's world.

After he's finished up in the cargo bin, Ten-zil Kem hires up some folks he is confident will have no interest in religion to package up the icons and ship them to VoidCorp headquarters. He adds in a Bluefalls dive suit and an aqualaser with the instructions, "Weaponize this!"

### *Visiting Doctor Wizard*

Markus Oroszlan and Zalan Vagner go to meet Doctor Wizard. They find him in his offices, guarded by two cyberdogs. Doctor Wizard notes that he's looking for a customer willing to pay top dollar for an invasive alien device, an exoskeleton. Its abilities are untested and it might have unknown side effects. He thinks that it is a one-man army sort of device. He has been having trouble finding a customer willing to get it implanted.

Oroszlan calls up General Ivan Stukov, even though Thuldans are not normally enthusiastic about cybernetic implants. The General suggests that he might be able to convince one of the members of his personal guard to undergo the procedure. He manages his guard through a combination of fear and threats, so he is good to his word – one of his men volunteers for the implant. And then backs out once he understands that he's not volunteering for something normal like genetic reconstruction through a combination of replicant nanostructural and retroviral agents.

Thinking swiftly, Oroszlan calls up Guildsman *Lambert Fulson* to see if he knows anyone. The guildsman knows some Nariac Domain people who might be enthusiastic, but he always hates talking to them: they're raised in boxes as proto-borg communards and hate capitalism. But he relents when he reminds himself of how much he likes

money. The Nariacs are interested, and pass word on up to the Nariac *Ambassador Gregor Chapin*. Ambassador Chapin's main interest is in expansion, though oddly he doesn't seem nearly as hulked-out as most of the Nariacs with their crazy implants. He's really dialed down the "you will be assimilated" score.

Fulson is able to get the interest of the Ambassador, to the extent that the man (mostly) is willing to cancel the next day's protest against the stock market. As a way of capturing additional value, Fulson quickly downloads the Nariac "protest calendar" off their wireless network and sells it to the Director of the Stock Market, a mechalus who had really appreciated the recent changes to Mina.

Markus Oroszlan and Gregor Chapin finally meet up, a bit after Markus beats a Nariac cyborg in an arm-wrestling competition. At the last minute, Ten-zil Kem shows up, interested in buying the alien endoskeleton as a gift for his girlfriend. They go into Doctor Wizard's lab. The whole place is strangely impromptu: it is lined with plastic sheets all around the operating table and tools. The Nariac manages to win the bidding and arranges for it to be installed into a Nariac soldier. Ten-zil Kem and Markus Oroszlan watch the surgery as Doctor Wizard extracts and replaces all of the soldier's bones. Even with 26<sup>th</sup> century technology it takes several hours, and at the end the soldier remains out cold.

### *We've Solved Our Space-Monkey Problem!*

Martin St. John is walking past the *Dinner And A Conversation* restaurant, a place dedicated to the two Borealin passions of eating and social discourse, when he notices some dhros bones out behind the restaurant. The bones are covered with a strange residue. He collects some and takes them to *Doctor Adun Zelnaga* for analysis.

He finds the Doctor working on a cure for an obscure degenerative disease only suffered by a rare creature on a distant world. The Doctor insists that his work is very important, but apparently not so important that he cannot analyze the bones.

After a few minutes' investigation, Zelnaga reports, "Something. Ate. This." St. John is not impressed with the quality of scientific analysis he's getting. He turns to the security cameras, looking for some evidence of what might be eating the dhros. He manages a fragmentary image of something long, scaly and snakelike. The creature is at least four meters long. He tells Zelnaga, who is then able to identify the substance on the



bones as the digestive enzymes of the *xiim-xiir*, a predator native to the planet Praxatel. It mostly eats small prey, nothing larger than a small child or housepet. However, when it lays eggs it seeks a warm nest. The corpse of a large mammalian creature like a human would be ideal for the purpose. If the creatures can't find dead prey, they will stalk living prey, test it for suitability, and then leave their eggs anyway. The creatures have a circular fanged mouth with a central ovipositor and four vestigial manipulatory appendages behind their head.

St. John puts out a security alert for an escaped *xiim-xiir* and notifies the Captain. The Captain responds by scheduling another staff meeting. He's recently been reading some mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Earth management books that really like the idea of static, structured hierarchies.

At the staff meeting, Captain Takashi details Taveer out to examine recent cargo manifests to see if anyone was foolish enough to actually admit to transporting these things. Doctor Zelnaga's task is to find ways to track or subdue a *xiim-xiir*, and to review with local xenobiologists to see if anyone has brought in a research sample recently. Rokk Tressor and Martin St. John are to organize some dhros decoys (maybe with eatable tracking capsules) as a trap for the *xiim-xiir*. Doctor Zelnaga sterilizes the decoy dhros first.

### *Ten-Zil On the Watch*

Ten-Zil Kem heads back to his quarters to investigate the source of his Hatire icons. He learns that they were originally made on Falucha IV. There were once thousands of them, but they were rarely removed from the planet due to religious restrictions. The world is now a radioactive hell-hole so the surviving icons are quite valuable. Unfortunately, they are mostly not salable because the Hatire Community has brought lawsuits against the Concord claiming that they are all stolen and should be returned to the Hatire without cost.

Ten-Zil Kem decides that he would like some expert advice. Unable to find a real expert, he decides to call on Taveer. He asks Taveer to spend some time watching his assistant Shane. Taveer offers to divert a spy-eye robot to follow him all the time. He even suggests providing Ten-Zil Kem with a live feed, which he declines on the basis that

this would be boring and creepy. He also asks for information on the five Nariacs who were present at the surgery at Doctor Wizard's facility. Taveer agrees to this as well.

*Alert! Alert! We Have Movement on Specimen Five!*

Doctor Zelnaga is monitoring dhros lifesigns when he gets a panic signal from one of them. He pings Pilot and Animal Control Officer Martin St. John. The two of them head out to capture their quarry. The two of them spot it slithering away from the remains of its prey. They engage and swiftly find themselves in combat with two of them. Zelnaga lashes out with his psychokinetic powers and wounds a xiim-xiir. St. John shoots it and shuts it down. The second xiim-xiir lasts a little bit longer, but not that much longer. St. John cages them up and drags them away. Doctor Zelnaga notes that both of them are laden with eggs, and that one of them is unlikely to survive the night.

St. John calls up Captain Takashi, who is in the process of creating a LOLDhros for the internal Grid. St. John reports, "We got the snakes! Both of them!" Captain Takashi is pleased.

*A Mysterious Visitor*

Suddenly, Captain Takashi's electronics short out and the lights dim. Somebody walks out of the door to his kitchen. He challenges the intruder, "Halt! Who goes there!"

"Captain, I have something to tell you." The man is Thuldan and is dressed in Thuldan military gear. He is *Alex Racine*, a Thuldan general. "I have come to you in this manner because I don't want anyone to know about our interaction here. I represent a group of people deeply concerned about all the alien influences arriving in the Verge. The group is called Safeguard. We were hoping that we could count upon your support."

"Very possibly. What exactly is Safeguard's platform?"

"We cannot reveal our entire plan, but I can tell you one thing. The Thuldan ambassador sent to negotiate over the missile installation is a mutant. He is using pheromones to influence the course of the negotiations. We do not believe that the Empire has the best interests of humanity at heart in their desire to have these missiles installed."

"I see"

“You should be reassured that we have our eyes upon you. You will be relieved to know that you are free of alien parasite infestations, but you need to be careful of the Doctor. He is a Mindwalker.”

“How would I find evidence of alien parasite infestations?”

“They are hard to find. But time is growing short and I must go.”

“I appreciate the information. I look forward to future discussions of alien threats.”

General Racine walks back into the kitchen. There is a brief whisper and he is gone. Captain Takashi cautiously walks into the kitchen and taps on the refrigerator, “Zuul?”

Captain Takashi quickly looks up techniques for counteracting pheromones. He learns that Vicks VapoRub works fine. He calls up Martin St. John and suggests that he go out and buy VapoRub for the whole staff. Then he goes over to talk to Rokk Tressor about what the Thuldans might have in mind for the missiles they’re installing on the *Lighthouse*. The worst plan they can think of is that the missiles might simply be rigged to explode on their own at some delay, destroying the *Lighthouse* and removing an obstacle to Thuldan expansion.

They head over to Ivan Stukov to ask him what he knows. They convince him to get them an invite to the Thuldan space station to inspect the missiles prior to installation. They decide to bring along the engineer Taveer (in part to look at the missiles and in part to create a diversion), plus a few Concord Marines. They also decide to bring along Markus Oroszlan because he’s a Thuldan mutant and thus okay, but the Captain will not go.

### *Is Anyone Selling Neurotoxin for Illegal Beauty Treatments?*

Doctor Zelnaga, Lambert Fulson and Martin St. John investigate to see if anyone was importing xiim-xiir to extract neurotoxins for illicit use. This is a hard investigation for Lambert Fulson, as he knows that he is a limited partner in the venture that imported both the dhros and the xiim-xiir. He cleverly arranges to eliminate his name from the articles of partnership while selling out his onetime business partner *Ernie Goatscape*, telling the others that the man just left the station for Bluefalls. The call goes out to Ten-

zil Kem, who has Angela Quinn render him. This is fine as far as Fulson is concerned – Ernie never met him in person and doesn't even know his name.

*The End of the Session*

As the curtain falls Rokk Tressor, Ivan Stukov, Taveer, Markus Oroszlan and Martin St. John all head over to inspect the missiles at the Thuldan station. Each character gains four experience points.