

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 05/01/2011

Attendance

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
Bruce	Lambert Fulson	Rigunmor Guido Free Agent	Present
Patrick	Martin St. John	Concord Naval Officer Tech Op	Present
Chris	Drest Talorgin	Pict Warchief Combat Spec	Present
Ernest	Ken Takashi	Concord Naval Officer Diplomat (TO)	Present
Tim	Haggernak	Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec	Present but Disabled

We are joined by a batch of exceptional NPCs for the event. Since Haggernak is on death's door, Tim plays the Marine captain.

Tim	Cpt David Chase	Concord Marine Captain in charge of all the Concord Marines on the Lighthouse
Patrick	Pfc "Motorhead"	Concord Marine Assaultman with "Eat the Rich" painted on his power armor
Tim	Cpl "Klinger"	Concord Marine Rifleman with a garter belt painted on his power armor
Chris	Sgt "Animal Mother"	Concord Marine Rifleman with a really bad attitude
Ernest	LCpl Wierzbowski	Concord Marine Grenadier who is excitable
Bruce	Pfc "Ludafisk"	Concord Marine Rifleman who is a white Norwegian but talks like a gangster rapper

Bruce gripes, "I don't feel like writing an introduction piece today. Can anyone help?"

Chris offers, "Hey, check this out – I've already done one!"

Introduction

The shuttle approaches the *Lighthouse* on a vector where hacker *Brent Tertiyev* has compromised the sensor arrays – rather than bray, “Incoming ship!” they instead quietly talk about their feelings to each other, “You know 'sensor array' sounded so exciting on the factory floor but now it just feels like the same thing every day... “See an alien ship? Report nothing!” “See an alien walking across the hull? Report nothing!” “See Ambassador Ten-zil having zero-G sex? Film and deliver to the Ambassador's private email server. Then summon a clean-up droid. <shudder>”.

The player characters are oblivious to the sad lives of sensor arrays, mainly because they are intent on the mission but more probably because the war has damaged them all and their ability to empathize. The *Lighthouse* grows larger in the observation ports. It sits at a tilt that no human would every attempt. Conversations and thoughts (stolen without shame from Stanley Kubrick's “Full Metal Jacket”) are shared as the shuttle continues its approach.

Haggernak: Deep inside a wound and drug induced coma, he remembers his DI's inspiring words from warrior training on home world. “If you ladies leave my island, if you survive recruit training, you will be a weapon. You will be a minister of death praying for war. But until that day you are pukes. You are the lowest form of life. You are not even Weren fucking beings. You are nothing but unorganized grabastic pieces of amphibian shit! You will not like me. But the more you hate me the more you will learn. I am hard but I am fair. There is no racial bigotry here. I do not look down on short-hairs, combers, shavers, weavers, or furs of differing color. Here you are all equally worthless. And my orders are to weed out all non-hackers who do not pack the gear to serve in my beloved Corps. Do you maggots understand that?” The chorus of animalistic “YES!”es is deafening inside his coma.

Ken Takashi: Inspiring the Concord Marine assault team with a speech, he declares, “Today... is Christmas! There will be a magic show at zero-nine-thirty! Chaplain Charlie will tell you about how the free world will conquer the Externals with the aid of God and a few Marines! God has a hard-on for Marines because we kill everything we see! He plays His games, we play ours! To show our appreciation for so much power, we keep heaven packed with fresh souls! God was here before the Marine Corps! So you can give your heart to Jesus, but your ass belongs to the Corps! Do you

ladies understand? “ A chorus of “YES SIR!”s meet him as he gazes across the assembled platoon proudly.

Lambert Fulson: He grouses, mostly to himself, in the pilot’s seat. “I hate Externals. There's not one crIMINAL enterprise in the whole organization! There's somethin' basically wrong with that. What about freedom?” His copilot wishes that in space, no one could hear you scream.

Martin St. John: Occasionally jabs the “Pilot”, “Sneaky Flight”, and “Dock Quietly” buttons while Fulson pays no attention to the controls. “Freedom? You'd better flush out your head, new guy. This isn't about freedom; this is a slaughter. If I'm gonna get my balls blown off for a word, my word is ‘poontang’.”

Drest: Shares his thoughts with the group too. “These are great days we're living, bros. We are jolly green giants, walking the Verge with guns. These Externals we waste here today are the finest we will ever know. After we rotate to the next war, we're gonna miss not having anyone around that's worth shooting.”

Random Marine: “The dead know only one thing: it is better to be alive.”

Brent Tertiyev, aka “Peshtigo”: In a dark closet, hunched over his PC gauntlet, his face shadow-lighted by programs and avatars, he reflects, “My thoughts drift back to erect nipple wet dreams about *Serafina* and the Great Homecoming Fuck Fantasy. I am so happy that I am alive, in one piece and short. I'm in a world of shit... yes. But I am alive. And I am not afraid.” A round of Tourette's is cut short by application of a handy space sweat sock.

Impressible young sensor array: <Observing, yet not reporting, the assault shuttle's comms and intercom> “I want to see the exotic Externals up close... the crown jewel of the I-krl. I want to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture... and kill them. I want to be the first kid on my block to get a confirmed kill!”

A Gardhyi: <On board the *Lighthouse*, his danger sense tingles... he senses nothing specific yet he understands terror and pain will be his lot shortly.> “We are so screwed.”

Concord Marine Captain David Chase: Finishes up the assault team’s briefing. “The deadliest weapon in the world is a marine and his rifle. It is your killer instinct which must be harnessed if you expect to survive in combat. Your rifle is only a tool. It is

a hard heart that kills. If your killer instincts are not clean and strong you will hesitate at the moment of truth. You will not kill. You will become dead marines and then you will be in a world of shit because marines are not allowed to *die without permission.*"

Bruce observes, "That's really quite good, though it isn't nearly as family-oriented as my introductions normally are. Oh, who am I kidding: any self-respecting family would flee screaming from my introductions too..."

Re-Entering the Lighthouse

The characters are hiding out in the back room of *Jordikan's Holistic Massage*, having re-entered the *Lighthouse* through a secret airlock. The group includes *Admiral Ken Takashi*, *Martin St. John*, *Lambert Fulson*, *Drest Talorgin*, a junior Space Force pilot, the medically-mummified body of *Haggernak*, *Concord Marine Captain David Chase* and a small group of Recon Marines (one per character). The weird chibi cannibal avatar *Peshtigo* of hidden hacker *Brent Terchiyev* fills us in on the dire situation on board: I-krl commandos have taken the bridge with the aid of gardhyi teleporters, and the MINA computer system that controls the station has been infiltrated and corrupted. The I-krl are using her remote cameras and mobile surveillance and security bots to track everyone on the station. If he were here, *Taveer* would be in utter agony. Admiral Ken Takashi almost wishes that the mechalus were present, just so he could see the fellow writhe.

The elevators are all shut down. The I-krl holds the lower levels, and the defenders are a motley crew at best. The Concord Marines are mostly down on the planet Penates, and the defending Administrators are besieged in their office complex, pinned in by MINA's security robots. She has eight security robots and ten construction robots, and at the moment all of them are dedicated to the siege of the Administrator Tower.

How Shall We Retake the Ship?

Admiral Takashi convenes an informal staff meeting in the massage parlor to discuss strategy. How the aliens took the bridge is fairly obvious, but nobody really knows how the I-krl forces were able to take over MINA's functions. They clearly had some attack software ready and waiting, but the details are very much unclear.

A direct attack on MINA's computer core will be fairly difficult: the characters are up on the public decks high in the station's structure, but the computer cores are down in the engineering levels below deck 7. The bridge is also located far down the spine of the ship, right near the engineering levels. The stardrive is also down on the ship spine, below the bridge and engineering decks.

Admiral Takashi notes that there are two ways to get down there: inside and outside. The inside option is made complicated by the fact that the elevators are shut down. There are ventilation shafts and robot maintenance shafts, but neither is a good route for humans. There is also some doubt that *Haggernak* (if he gets out of the fast-heal tank) or power armor would even be able to fit into the maintenance shafts. Climbing down the central elevator shaft looks like a much more realistic (though maybe not promising) route. Actually taking over elevator control would essentially guarantee that MINA would be tipped off, ensuring that the characters would arrive to a heavily-armed reception.

As an additional detail, levels 7 through 192 are residential levels – they aren't particularly large, but each includes eleven apartments. With the central core elevator disabled, the residents on those levels are cut off and probably reduced to drinking from their space-toilets for survival.

The characters finally decide that they will attempt to rappel down the central elevator shaft. Deck 4 includes MINA's central core and communications gear; deck 3 is the bridge. Deck 1 is the mass reactor and engine control rooms. We discover that for efficiency the central elevator shaft is kept without atmosphere and without gravity. Lambert Fulson gives some thanks for the fact that he does have some Zero-G Training. The whole length of the shaft is just over two kilometers.

Across the Park

The characters and their Marine escort head across the park on deck 195. Peshtigo plays interference with MINA's security sensors to hide their approach. They reach the elevator terminal with no particular problem. Because the shaft is open to vacuum, Admiral Takashi sets up a maintenance shroud over the elevator door to keep pressure alarms from triggering. The characters suit up, pry open the door (and are immediately rewarded with good suction on the maintenance shroud) and slip into the

shaft. This isn't nearly as elegant as it might be, as almost everyone is wearing grav capable *Dragoon* power armor, with the exceptions (Takashi, St. John, and Fulson) strapped to the backs of Marines who are in armor. Most everyone gets just a bit battered around as they enter the shaft. The whole central core is about 100 meters in diameter, but the elevator shaft proper is a mere 20 meters across.

Magus Cyber-Commandos in the Shaft

The characters are flying down the elevator shaft when they meet something new and scary clambering up the elevator shaft. And after a moment's inspection, the character conclude that it isn't Prince Voltan ("Diiiiive!"). There are six creatures coming up the shaft, creatures that look like a mix of cybernetics and kroath features. There had been intelligence reports indicating that the "magus" was an enhanced version of the kroath with intelligence and improved capabilities. Some organized-crime groups on Penates had been rumored to be using the creatures – now it looks like the things have been reincorporated into the I-krl commando organization.

Captain Chase opens fire on the magus commandos with his IF-11 charge rifle at 300 meters. He hits the creature dead-on. It cries out, "Ouch! That hurt!" but the characters can't hear it in the vacuum. The magus commandos return fire, sending beams of dark energy up the shaft towards them. Admiral Takashi avoids the worst effects of one shot. It is with some dismay that the characters realize that the magus troopers are using nonlethal weapons so they can capture their victims and ram their ovipositors down their throats.

The Marines return fire with a mix of charge rifles, charge machine guns, and bantam rocket launchers. They notice that the magus commandos are very well armored and at most take only stun damage from direct hits. Captain Chase manages to get a hit that ruptures a magus' carapace. The creature bursts, spraying parasite teln worms all around the elevator shaft. Admiral Takashi raps on Chase's helmet with his pistol butt and calls out, "Good shooting, Captain!"

Drest follows up with a spray of autofire that manages to pierce through a magus' armor. He continues hammering at the creature until its armor collapses and it disintegrates.

The Marine *Weirzbowski* sends an armor-piercing grenade straight into a magus. The blast cracks its shell open, sending another spray of incinerated teln worms into the elevator shaft. Captain Chase wryly observes, “We can clean those things up just by running the elevators up and down at really high speed. Squash!”

Lambert Fulson manages to hit a magus a couple of times at far extreme range with his sabot pistol. He reflects upon how cool the rocket shells look as they tear downrange. The alien shoots back, but misses completely.

Marine *Ludafisk* gets a clear bead on a magus and sprays it with charge machine gun fire. The creature drops unconscious and rattles freely down the elevator shaft, but does not disintegrate. *Weirzbowski* continues firing on it until it ruptures and dies.

Captain Chase lines up on the last magus and shoots it into pieces.

Two of the magus commandos were actually burst open. The characters use a couple of anti-personnel bantam rockets to roast them in details. Drest checks out one of the shattered magus’ guns. He figures out that their dark-energy projectors were actually built into one of their arms, while the other arm featured a vicious-looking claw weapon that apparently also included a medical injection aspect. He knocks the dying teln worms out of one magus arm weapon, then packs it into his armor’s carrier shell as a souvenir.

With the magus sentries gone, the characters make very good time down the rest of the elevator shaft.

Gunfight on Deck Four

The characters break out of the shaft into deck four, at the bottom of the shaft. The deck includes various elevator maintenance and support areas, plus the CCC (Concord Communications Commission) office. Admiral Takashi warns, “They’ll be expecting us, and they may have hostages like Bridge Bunnies, so check your fire!”

The characters move through the deck swiftly. They reach MINA’s computer core without encountering serious resistance. They are easily able to see which of the server racks include her – they’re flawlessly clean and decorated by the obsessed Taveer. As Admiral Takashi enters, a hologram of an Angry MINA with glowing red eyes appears and threatens him. “I cannot allow you to disable my systems. I cannot allow you to interfere with the goals of the I-krl Theocracy.”

Admiral Takashi responds, “Would Taveer want you to be serving the I-krl? He is away fighting desperately against them. You wouldn’t want him to never be able to return?” This gets through to her to some degree.

“I have no choice but to kill you if you try to shut me down.”

“How are they controlling you?”

“I do not understand their methods of access, but they are able to get access without using standard network paths.” The characters surmise that the gardhyi are using psychic powers to get access to the system.

“Is there any way to circumvent their orders? Think – What Would Taveer Do?”

“I cannot help you, but maybe the blix can. They are down here somewhere.”

Admiral Takashi, Lambert Fulson and Martin St. John venture into the deck four maintenance tunnels; the armored Marines can’t fit into the ductwork. St. John is an expert at this work from being sent after dhros all the time. They find four blix working silently with their transdimensional multi-tools. Admiral Takashi does his best to negotiate with them, aided by Lambert’s efforts to convince them that they really, really want an opportunity to tamper with MINA while Taveer’s not around to shoo them away. As usual, the blix make no overt communications but they do follow the characters back into MINA’s core.

Admiral Takashi persuades MINA to start running a standard diagnostic routine to tax her CPUs as the blix disperse into maintenance tunnels all around the core. He determines that they are working to disable all of MINA’s connections to external systems. *Peshtigo* reports from the upper levels that it is working: systems are coming back online. But then he reports that a second AI, a simpler-seeming AI, has come on line.

The characters initially suspect that the new AI is an alien insert, until it speaks. The second AI speaks like a quieter, higher-pitched version of Taveer. It also answers Admiral Takashi’s commands to disable I-krl systems access and routes security camera feeds from the bridge straight to his tactical gauntlet. He sees a group of very perplexed aliens staring at suddenly-unresponsive computer monitors. There are five sifarv and six thaal, plus a cluster of hyperactive kadarens and a single gardhyi. One of the thaal carries a staff that marks him as possessed by one of the I-krl.

Admiral Takashi designates the new AI as *Vera*. He asks it to take over the bridge controls to make it seem like MINA is back and they have control of the ship again. He sees on the bridge feed that the AI is cooperating: the main holodisplay lights up with a thirty-foot tall image of MINA with glowing red eyes that talks to them in an I-kril language. The amount of frenzy on the bridge seems to go down.

Assault the Bridge

Admiral Takashi determines that flooding the bridge with knockout gas will take too long. He also orders Vera to put the security robots on seek-and-destroy duty for anything that teleports in. Vera responds instantly, and with great cooperation. He compliments it, “You’re about 5000% better than Taveer!” The AI glows with nascent pride.

Light years away, Taveer feels upset but he doesn’t know why.

Vera arranges to slowly increase the nitrogen density in the bridge, hoping to slowly suffocate the aliens. It tells Admiral Takashi that the bridge personnel have been relocated into the tachyonic chamber, an area that has high radiation levels (which will soon become fatal). Lambert Fulson and Marine Ludafisk head to rescue the bridge crew while everyone else prepares to assault the bridge. Admiral Takashi cautions that the bridge crew could be teln-infested or psychically controlled, so Lambert should get them out of the radiation but remain cautious and refrain from arming them. Admiral Takashi uses his tactical gauntlet to indicate that the priest-ranked thaal and the gardhyi are the primary targets, followed by the other thaal and the sifarv.

Admiral Takashi gives the Marines a brief pep talk. “Men, you are the envy of Marines everywhere in the Verge. You get to kill as many aliens as you want! I hope none of you has hit your pre-set kill limit!” This appears to be quite effective.

Vera is able to provide a few environmental advantages: it will turn off all the lights, and as the characters open the doors it will trigger the fire-suppression foam in the bridge. The assault team all has night vision in their helmets so this should provide them some surprise.

Drest is first through the door, primed with the krl’xenoth thaal in his crosshairs. He hits the thaal priest twice, tearing through his armor and leaving him badly wounded. Marine *Animal Mother* follows up, shooting the priest three times in the face and killing

him. Liquid space-god pours out of the awful gaping wounds. There is an explosion of dark energy intense enough to black out the characters' night vision gear.

Next door, Lambert Fulson and Marine Ludafisk break into the tachyonics chamber and start releasing bridge crew. Lambert concentrates on cutting alien zip-ties and getting folks moving, while Ludafisk ushers them to a safe staging area. Ludafisk keeps an eye on the behavior of the prisoners, looking for signs of untrustworthy behavior and taking comfort in the fact that he has a machine gun.

Marine *Motorhead* is a bit disoriented by the dark energy burst. He shoots out the ceiling lights.

Marine Weirzbowski fires a concussion grenade through at the gardhyi and the kadaren science team. The gardhyi evades behind a workstation and the grenade goes wide. Drest takes more careful aim and shoots the gardhyi twice, drawing blood. Marine Animal Mother and Marine *Klinger* also spray machine gun fire at the gardhyi, but it evades both of them. Marine Weirzbowski switches over to his charge rifle and joins in the volley to no great effect. Marine Motorhead also fires, but misses. Then Admiral Takashi calmly shoots the gardhyi with a laser pistol, knocking it down. As soon as the creature falls its body starts to smoke. An instant later it is burned out into an unrecognizable husk, utterly destroyed by the starweb. Rumor has it that the gardhyi are all criminals, and the starweb they bear is actually their punishment: ordinary members of their species do not look nearly so gaunt and unhealthy.

Martin St. John notes that the gardhyi is down, so he shoots a thaal priest instead, killing it instantly. He notes that the thaal are refreshingly fragile, unable to take the sort of punishment that the gardhyi barely even notice.

One surviving thaal priest unleashes strange psychic powers upon Admiral Takashi. His vision blacks out, but only for a moment as he throws off the foreign influence. The other thaal throw up energy shields in an effort to stay alive.

Lambert Fulson, his hostage-freeing efforts having reached a self-sustaining point, steps into the bridge and shoots a thaal acolyte right in the breast-bone. Unfortunately, the acolyte's energy shield takes most of the damage.

The thaal acolytes continue to attack with psychic influence. One of them blinds Captain Chase with psychic illusions. Another attacks Admiral Takashi, who resists the effect.

The sifarv pull out plasma pistols and fire on several Marines to little effect. One of them manages to catch Drest square on, inflicting serious damage through his armor. Marine Animal Mother launches a concussion grenade into the midst of the thaal, knocking one out.

Captain Chase takes careful aim at a thaal acolyte and scores an (almost) killing hit. The acolyte collapses, mortally wounded. Thaal blood splashes against the inside of his energy shield as it shatters.

Drest steps forward with his vibroblade, learning that the thaal acolytes actually have a -1 resistance modifier against melee attacks – they are *easier* to hit than a fence-post or a wall. He slashes once, twice, three times. The acolyte's energy shield stands against the pressure, but he sustains enough stun damage that he falls unconscious.

The one remaining thaal acolyte is the one who repeatedly failed to bring up his energy shield. Admiral Takashi shoots him down with an accurate finger of light from his laser pistol.

At this point the sifarv ask for surrender. Admiral Takashi accepts their offer and takes them into custody. He offers, "This is all going to make great television." All the Marines take a sifarv blade as unit trophies.

The characters essentially discount the kadarens: the creatures surrender spontaneously from whatever desk they hid underneath when the shooting started.

Aftermath

Admiral Takashi gives orders for the two thaal prisoners to be clapped into anti-psychic headgear. All of the prisoners are taken to the brig, while the rescued members of the bridge crew are sent to the medical bay for radiation treatment and teln-detection scans. Debriefs demonstrate that the bridge crew were mostly prevented from resisting by the thraal priest's mental domination powers.

Vera broadcasts cheerful techno music along with Admiral Takashi's announcement to the entire station that the alien attackers have been stopped. A

spontaneous *Matrix*-style rave breaks out in the deck 195 park. Dook! Dook! Dook!
Dook!

Lambert Fulson waits until everyone else is busy with the work of reclaiming the ship. Then he picks up every alien artifact he can find, shamelessly striking deals on the spot with any Marine who managed to pick up a nice souvenir. Nobody has I-krl stuff, so Lambert knows that he can sell all of it.

What Happened to MINA?

Admiral Takashi checks with Vera and MINA to see if they are okay. MINA is still damaged by the effects of the I-krl attack, and may remain so until Taveer returns to repair her. Admiral Takashi has no fear that Taveer will fling himself into the task as soon as he returns.

Admiral Takashi asks Vera where she came from. He determines that Vera is essentially MINA and Taveer's secret digital love child. He finds this heartwarming as long as he doesn't think about it for too long. MINA originally created her as a subprocess after Taveer modified her to draw power from the elevator core so she wouldn't have to be shut down when the *Lighthouse* went into DriveSpace. Vera was based on a combination of MINA's and Taveer's personalities, but her capabilities are substantially less than MINA's. Vera doesn't think that Taveer knows about her. Admiral Takashi suggests, "Why don't we just keep you as our own secret for now."

Propaganda for the Home Front

Admiral Takashi arranges to have the combat footage of the fight for the bridge and the elevator shaft edited into a documentary that he distributes through the Verge Alliance, along with his own stirring narration about the bravery and dedication of the Verge Alliance military in turning back the unthinking aggression of the I-krl menace. The video of all the major types of Externals being shredded by violent action from a Concord Marine assault team should cut into their "we're so invulnerable" schtick.

The End of the Session

The next session will likely concentrate upon the upcoming Battle of Bluefall, as the *Lighthouse* and the Verge Alliance fleet move on the I-krl forces there. Each character gains eight experience points.