

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY 03/06/2011

Attendance

Chris and *Bruce* start out early with the videoconferencing. Isn't it great to live in the 21st century? Especially since *Chris* is foreseeing a local shortage in snacks, a shortage that *Bruce* is powerless to alleviate. He explains, "I'm perfectly happy here – I have tea and strawberries!"

Paul comments, "It's interesting the way that the webcam microphone picks up every last little background sound. For example, right now we can hear the sounds of your digestion in a level of detail that might not be suitable for children."

On the subject of things not suitable for children, *Ernest* shows up and offers some vision into his secret fantasy of being a Chippendale's dancer. Nobody dares to rise to the level of responding to his comments.

Patrick shows up and remains very quiet, especially as *Ernest* starts discussing the venality of politicians and their willingness to go to the barricades on behalf of financial company CEO's who are desperately underpaid, and then turn around to throw overpaid teachers and firefighters off the back of the bus. As it were.

Tim shows up just as *Ernest* starts to describe his newly-acquired tendency to read Hornblower novels. The conversation quickly degenerates to the point where everyone is discussing the existence of an active Hornblower slash-fic community online. *Tim* tries his hand at some exposition: "Hornblower fired his ten-pound gun... across... Simpson's prow..." He seems slightly uncomfortable. *Ernest* exults in his ability to steer conversation to an arbitrarily lowbrow place almost at will.

<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

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

We're Leaving Drivespace Early? Seriously?

The *Lighthouse* is bound for Cambria to speak to the medurr. Ten hours before their scheduled arrival, Mina shocks the crew by announcing that the ship is coming out of drivespace. This normally never happens: all jumps take 121 hours, it is unheard of for one to take only 111.

Just before the ship returns to normal space, the sensor officer reports a gravitational signature detected in drivespace. *Captain Ken Takashi* announces, “General quarters! Crews to their ships, prepare to scramble fighters! Where are we?”

The bridge crew leaps to action. They report that there are no other ships in the immediate vicinity. *Martin St. John* asks, “Did we just travel through time?”

Gerard Peppin shows up on the bridge to offer his theories. “Perhaps we are still in drivespace, and the space vampires are spoofing our sensors. We’ve done that to other people in the past.”

Drest verifies the situation directly by looking out a porthole. He reports that he can see stars. About the same time, the bridge navigation crew indicates that the *Lighthouse* is close to its destination, perhaps three days out of Cambria. There is also an extreme gravity emanation through the entire area. The center of gravity is towards Cambria. The science staff discusses the sensor readings for a while. Their conclusion is that the *Lighthouse* is in the middle of a massive distribution of dark matter. The source of the distribution is unknown. Gerard Peppin suggests that it could be a defensive measure against stardrive-based ships developed by the medurr.

To further complicate the situation, the engineering crew reports that they are unable to recharge the dark matter tachyon reserves in the stardrive. Without that, the *Lighthouse* is unable to jump at all. The ship has no choice but to proceed at sublight speeds.

Resolving the Situation

Admiral Takashi decides to send scouts to determine the extent of the anomaly. He has access to the fighters and frigates normally carried by the *Lighthouse*, but to increase the scout force size he summons *Lambert Fulson* to the bridge to requisition all the tramp freighters the Rignunmor trader has latched to the ship. Fulson agrees to help for a nominal fee, reasoning that once he impresses the Verge Alliance high command he will be able to write his own ticket for future military supply contracts. Admiral Takashi allows him to entertain his delusions.

Gerard Peppin communes with his alien artifact to speak with the rest of the fleet. He contacts his psychic network to send a status message and look for anyone else experiencing a similar phenomenon. He learns that *Ramil ibn Beighur*, Captain of the light cruiser *Birmingham*, has some information. Captain Beighur is a Solar and models himself upon the ideals of an Ottoman officer. Much more relevant is the fact that he was involved in the first contact with the medurr Protectorate.

Captain Beighur reports that he was tracking the pirate *Chenassan* (a fraal whom the characters met on Bluefall) when he first encountered the medurr Riftship. His cruiser was precipitated out of drivespace early due to a medurr drivespace-denial defense. At the time, the Riftship was unoccupied and operating only under automated control. But shortly after members of his crew managed to board the ship and disable the area-denial device medurr needleships emerged from the rift and nearly killed all of them. Captain Beighur indicates that he was lucky to escape with his life.

The underlying reason for the discovery of the Riftship was happenstance: the pirate ship's navigation systems were damaged. *Chenassan* was jumping randomly and just happened to end up on a course that intersected the exclusion zone.

There Is a Way Out

The scouts report that the *Lighthouse* is on the outer edge of the phenomenon: it dissipates as the scouts travel farther away from the Cambria system.

Checking with the Local Space Gods

Gerard Peppin moves from communing with his psychic network to seeking out local psychically-potent entities. He identifies one: *Varnoc the Destroyer*. Peppin catches Varnoc in congress with Lambert Fulson. After he shoos the creature away from Fulson's braincase, he has a polite conversation. Varnoc is able to explain that the medurr are concerned about Externals ships arriving in drivespace; they use the dark matter exclusion device to keep them away.

Varnoc reports that there is another ship approaching the Cambria system, but its perceptions are only weakly tied to the physical world so it doesn't really know where the ship is located.

N'sss Ghost Ships!

Martin St. John reports that he is detecting traces of three ships, probably troop transports, with a very strange signature – they appear to constantly change shape, in a manner similar to n'sss ghost ships. They are running at speed and are perhaps thus not able to use their cloaking effect. Analysis of their course suggests that they had been tracking the *Lighthouse* through drivespace. This is known to be possible, but difficult: it typically requires either excellent sensors or psychic powers.

Admiral Takashi orders three of the escorts with two fighters each to intercept the ghost ships. The n'sss ships are substantially larger than the escorts, but likely carry less armament. In the past, the n'sss have carried kroath troops. If they are doing the same here, each of the ghost ships might carry at least 100 kroath.

Hoping to catch the n'sss unawares, Admiral Takashi also orders Peppin, Fulson and Drest to crew up the stealth ship *Justifiable Curiosity* and send it to follow the warships. Martin St. John doesn't get posted as pilot because he's needed on the *Lighthouse* bridge. Admiral Takashi will also remain with the *Lighthouse* as it leaves the exclusion zone.

While the characters prepare to intercept the n'sss vessels the bridge crew reports that there are also medurr vessels climbing out of the system gravity well, apparently to intercept the n'sss. The medurr contingent includes two Briar-ship carriers and a cluster of Needle-ship attack ships.

The Medurr Speak

Admiral Takashi resolves to provide a strong front to the medurr when they decide to talk. Not long after, the approaching flotilla sends a message: "Human! Desist your approach to our system if you do not wish to be destroyed!"

The Captain responds, "We are keeping our distance, but we have sent vessels to destroy the n'sss interlopers!"

"Hah! That is just a pretext! You seek to take our lands! We have done similar things ourselves! We will destroy all ships that penetrate our systems!"

"Surely you do not expect us to share the glory of destroying the Externals ships!"

"We will not listen to your lies any longer!" The medurr officer cuts the connection.

"Hey, St. John! They're feeling froggy!"

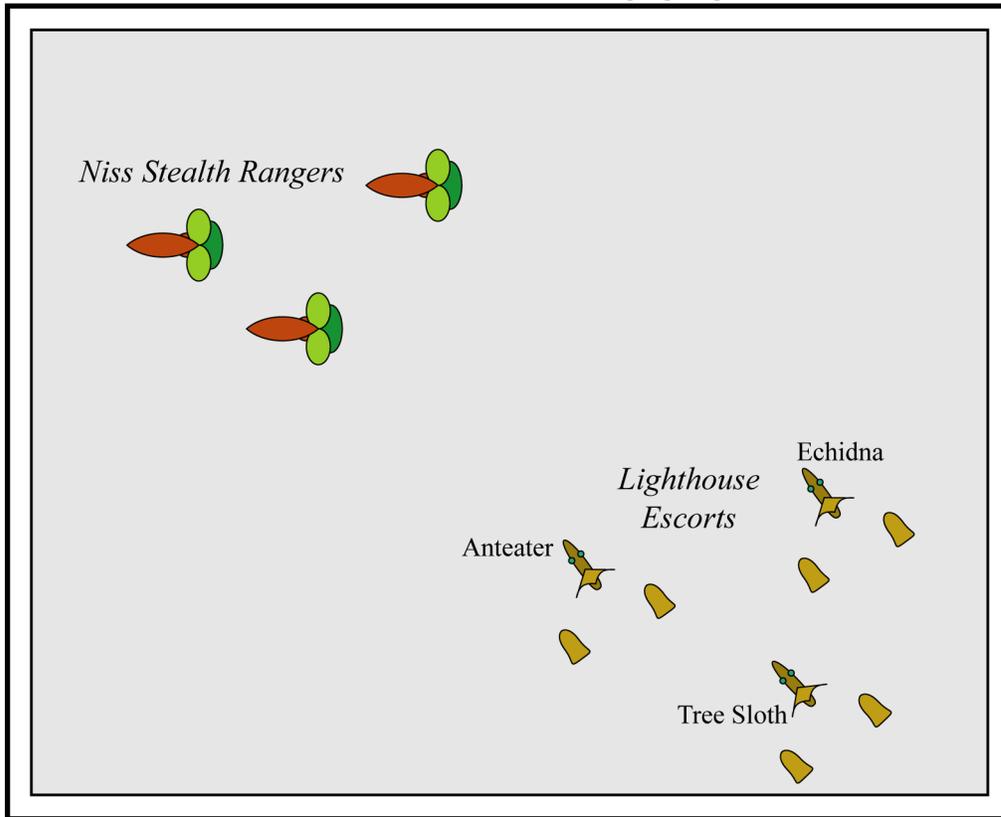
Engaging the N'sss

The escorts *Anteater*, *Echidna* and *Tree Sloth* move in on the three n'sss ghost ships. As the *Lighthouse* vessels approach the n'sss decelerate, perhaps to bring their stealth effect into play. The three escorts unleash concentrated fire on one n'sss ship with fusion beams, damaging its engines and harming some of the crew.

The n'sss vessels volley back against the *Anteater* with matter beams. The fact that the n'sss are using antimatter-based weapons prompts significant concern among the Verge Alliance crews.

The Verge Alliance fighters keep their missiles back, as they are expecting the n'sss to be very good at evading. Instead, they close to point-blank range of the damaged n'sss ship and fire on its systems, destroying its sensor net. The *Anteater*, *Tree Sloth* and *Echidna* turn their heavy guns on the second n'sss to good effect, and their lighter weapons against the damaged n'sss vessel to little effect.

Battle of Cambria Reach: Engaging the Niss



The damaged n'sss ship is truly crippled, unable to track the small fighters and no longer able to generate sufficient power to consistently fire its heavy gun. It responds by unleashing a cloud of one-man Squids to harry the fighters, which withdraw to avoid getting overwhelmed. The two more functional n'sss ships unleash a horrifying volume of fire upon the *Anteater*, which manages to shrug it off, then down their engines and bring up their stealth shields. Both of them vanish from the human ships' sensor screens instantly (+8 step penalty to detect).

The Aftermath

Admiral Takashi orders the damaged *Anteater* to close with the crippled n'sss ranger and light it up with its heavy plasma cannon until it can't shoot back. The *Anteater* slowly tears the ship to pieces. It slowly becomes clear that the other two n'sss ghost ships have abandoned their companion.

Hunting the Hunters

The other two escorts and their fighter screens, accompanied by the *Justifiable Curiosity*, move out along the last known path of the two vanished n'sss ships with their sensors lighted up. They search hard, but they are unable to locate the n'sss.

Admiral Takashi orders the task force back to the *Lighthouse*, leaving the crippled n'sss ghost ship as a prize for the medurr (with the floating array of n'sss in battle pods as a hazard for possible medurr boarders). As a parting gesture, they use the fighters to push the n'sss ship's acceleration down from 1 to 0 so the medurr don't have to work so hard.

The *Justifiable Curiosity* heads towards Cambria with the goal of catching the n'sss in the act of transforming the local dinosaurs into kroath slaves.

Medurr Diplomacy, Round Two

Admiral Takashi calls the medurr matriarch again to offer her the crippled n'sss ship as a trophy and to once again point out that he is friendly. This time, she is almost willing to believe him. She is not yet convinced that the other two n'sss ships are not working for the humans, which in turn leads to all sorts of merriment on the subject of how to interrogate a jellyfish-like creature that cannot handle oxygen atmospheres and has no ability to pronounce human language. Martin St. John suggests that a n'sss could be used as sort of a whoopee cushion to produce inappropriate sounds. This might be a useful interrogation technique, if only the interrogators could understand what the creature was saying.

Investigating the Rift

The *Justifiable Curiosity* moves in closer to the medurr rift. It looks very much like a hole in space, surrounded by equipment and infrastructure. They do not see any sign of kroath or n'sss.

The Kroath Assault Starts

The medurr send another message out to the *Lighthouse*: "Your kroath slaves have landed upon our worlds and are destroying our people!" Admiral Takashi does his best to avoid mocking them.

Shortly afterwards, Admiral Takashi gets a call from *Nystor of Clan Kor*, the daughter of the somewhat hardline medurr matriarch *Stykor*. She explains, "My mother

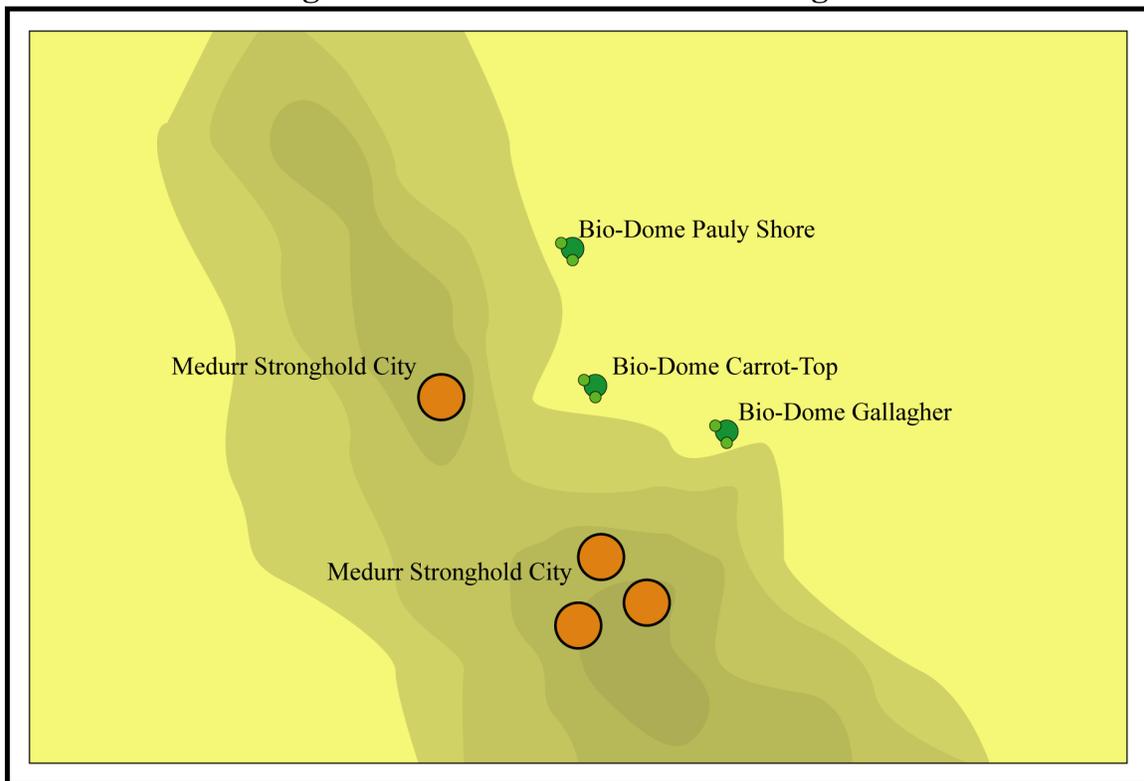
doesn't trust you, and is not impressed with the abilities of human soldiers." She wants to deal with the original negotiating team that humanity sent to talk to the medurr. Admiral Takashi notes that some of the negotiators are available, and that Drest is the lieutenant of *Markus Oroszlan* ("King of the Picts").

The characters quickly work out a deal in which some of Stykor's loyal Needle-ship pilots escort in the tramp freighter *No Taxable Value* loaded down with Pict warriors. The Picts themselves have been seeing the news reports describing how the kroath have been converting the population of Santiago and are very enthusiastic at the idea of taking the fight to the enemy. Drest will lead the expedition from the front. Even Lambert Fulson is willing to volunteer to be on the ship crew.

Landing on Cambria

The *No Taxable Value* lands at a port near the main medurr stronghold of Tolvis. The stronghold is under siege: the kroath have ringed the base of the mountain with three of their bio-domes. They have only been pressing the attack for a day, but already they have been able to hold the medurr counterattacks off.

Siege of the Medurr Mountain Stronghold



Drest and Admiral Takashi confer with the medurr commander on tactics. The decision is to assault with a mixed medurr and Pict force, under cover from the capital weapons on the available spacecraft. The medurr commanders under Stykor define the specific plan, which has most of the medurr and Pict troops moving in using grav-induction sleds. Admiral Takashi will stay with the command post and offer inspiration through his Command skills. As he observes the medurr commander's operational style, he slowly works to take over the tactical side of the operation. Apparently the medurr are not very smart. Drest (of course) will lead from the front. Lambert Fulson will drive one of the grav sleds.

The escorts and fighters from the *Lighthouse* are assigned to overwatch, with a partial goal of assisting the advance and a secondary goal of watching for n'sss ghost ships dropping additional kroath reinforcements. The fighters are mostly restricted to providing ground support, while the escorts stand in low orbit as hammer resources.

The assault force includes 100 Picts and several hundred medurr soldiers.

The kroath force is large enough that it incorporates several kroath generals, economy-sized versions of the classic model that include a larger number of the kroath organisms in their structure and thus have substantially more brain power.

The initial assault is bloody on both sides: the kroath lose 25% of their force, while the medurr and Pict attackers lose 5% of theirs. Things quickly bog down into attrition – the second phase of the operation costs each group 15% of its remaining strength. The turning point in the battle occurs three hours in: the Picts manage to draw out forty kroath warriors into the open, where heavy weapons and fighter gun runs cut them to dissolving pieces.

Round	Kroath	Medurr	Picts	Kroath Loss	Medurr Loss	Pict Loss
0	150	450	100	25%	5%	5%
1	112	427	95	15%	15%	15%
2	89	359	80	15%	15%	15%
3	66	291	65	25%	5%	5%
4	28	268	60	25%	5%	5%
5	0	245	55			

Post-Battle Intelligence Gathering

The characters already know that interrogating individual kroath is a waste of time, even if it were really possible to capture them. However, Peppin determines that the bio-domes have their own biocomputer brains, brains that he might be able to read. He tries reading information out of one of them. He learns that it isn't very intelligent. It knows how to plan a defense, and something about kroath life-support requirements (not many), and that's about it.

Meeting with the Grand Matriarch

Grand Matriarch Skykor agrees to meet the characters after their heroic victory. She meets them in a massive hall. She is seated upon a low throne with her male harem arrayed around her on the dais. She wants to know about the characters' plan to attack the I-krl Theocracy. She notes that while the Verge, Old Space and the Medurr Protectorate are all in the Orion Arm of the galaxy, the I-krl Theocracy is out in the Perseus Arm and far away enough that direct assault will be difficult.

After some discussion, Stykor agrees to accept a position upon the Verge Alliance Council. She also agrees to allow the *Lighthouse* to bring the Rift Ship from Cambria into the Verge proper to assist with the defeat of the I-krl fleet. The current I-krl fleet in the Verge includes one element at Hammer's Star (including one Fortress ship and a station under construction) and another at Mantebron.

The Strategic Situation

Interrogation of an I-krl prisoner some time ago revealed that there is also a significant I-krl settlement in another isolated Verge system, one that the I-krl have named *The Sacred Sea of Kadarr*. They have occupied an asteroid belt for the last hundred years, the most habitable world in the system is their headquarters, they perform most of their local shipbuilding there, and the local gas giant includes a large population of n'sss. The characters detail out people from their staff to investigate old scout records for a system that could be a match. Certainly no human ship has survived an encounter in the system for decades.

Research of old scout records fingers the Hathorn system as the location of the I-krl headquarters. The scout reports say that it has four worlds: one iceball, one gas giant,

one rockball, and a jungle world with many moons. Some of the moons are habitable. The I-krl have handed the jungle world mostly over to the barim. One of the moons has been built into a massive communications array.

Intelligence reports out of Mantebtron confirm that there is still an I-krl fleet in system. The I-krl appear to be settling in for the long haul, with a particular sense of interest in the Glassmaker ruins. Kadarens are establishing laboratories on the planet, with the apparent goal of manufacturing terrible superweapons from ancient knowledge.

Lucullus was an alien invasion target, but after the defeat of their fleet there most of the surviving I-krl fleet jumped out leaving only the ground troops on the planet surface. At this point, the main I-krl fleet elements are believed to be at Hathorn, Hammer's Star, Mantebtron, Lucullus, Ptolemy, and maybe Algemron.

On the Verge Alliance side, Battlegroup 1 is at Ignatius, Battlegroups 2 & 3 are at Aegis, and Battlegroup 4 is deployed between Ptolemy and the Pirate Assembly Point

The tactical plan will be to send Battlegroup 1 from Ignatius to Lucullus. As a coordinated effort, the *Lighthouse* and the medurr Riftship will jump to the same location. The immediate goal will be to liberate Lucullus. And at that point the stage will be set for a massive Riftship-transited assault upon Mantebtron.

The End of the Session

Each character involved in the session gains six experience points.