

MGP
3351



Crusade



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One is left with the horrible feeling now that war settles nothing; that to win a war is as disastrous as to lose one.

– Agatha Christie

Crusade

Christopher Blackmoor

Contents

Introduction	3
Personalities of 2267	4
The Galaxy of 2267	17
The Lost Tales	99
Rules Additions	114
Artefacts	125
The <i>Excalibur</i>	132
License	143

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Introduction

With the Shadows and Vorlons gone, the galaxy left behind in their wake has been freed from the eternal struggle between chaos and order. The fledgling Interstellar Alliance approaches its fifth birthday with a sense of optimism for the future. With the notable exception of the Centauri Republic, its former allies, the Alliance has grasped the opportunity offered to it, bringing benefits to all of its members. This cause for celebration has not gone unnoticed by those dark forces that oppose this era of peaceful coexistence. The former servants of the Shadows, the sinister Drakh, have hatched a plot that only madmen could conjure. With advanced technologies inherited from their former masters, their sole desire is to make the galaxy burn.

Their plan is twofold. Earth will be destroyed using a fearsome weapon called a Death Cloud. A test on the now-lifeless world of Daltron VII has proved both the weapon's effectiveness and their expertise with it. After Earth is left a charred husk, Minbar will be next, thanks to a second weapon: A devastating nanotech plague that the Drakh do not fully understand themselves.

Should the Drakh succeed in their vile plans, they will celebrate the anniversary of the Interstellar Alliance with flame, plague and death...

Crusade

Crusade is a season sourcebook for the *Babylon 5 Roleplaying Game* detailing the personalities, events and places of

the year 2267. Used in conjunction with the *Babylon 5* rulebook, Games Masters can extend their games and campaigns beyond the timeline of the original *Babylon 5* television series and into the dark future that is *Crusade*.

Every episode of the *Crusade* series is covered in broadcast order, along with hooks for the settings and themes that allow them to be integrated into new and existing games. Campaigns set anywhere in known space will be affected by the assault on Earth and the determination of the crew of the *Excalibur* and the Anla'shok to turn the galaxy upside down looking for a cure.

This sourcebook contains the main and supporting characters from the series, including some faces familiar to *Babylon 5* fans, now older and wiser. A wide array of new rules, equipment, vehicles and prestige classes from 2267 are detailed, including Thieves' Guild and Doomsday Cultists classes, an analysis of Matthew Gideon's Apocalypse Box and the prototype Victory-class destroyer, *Excalibur* (which has a whole chapter dedicated to itself). There are also synopses of episodes of the television series that were never produced and would have occurred later in the show's run.

For existing Player Characters in a *Babylon 5* campaign or new Players wanting to begin a game in a gritty setting with a determination to succeed against all the odds, *Crusade* allows Player Characters to take centre stage in the battle to save the most precious jewel of humanity: Earth itself.

Earth is dying. Join the *Crusade*.



Personalities of 2267

The Crew of the Excalibur

Captain Matthew Gideon

'Today, everything changed. Until today, there were still days when I doubted myself. Wondered if I'd really seen what I saw that day. No more. I've proven that these ships exist. But that's not the same thing as proving that one of them killed the Cerberus. Before I can bring this back home, I need more information, to narrow the gap between what I know and what I can prove.'

9th Level Human Officer (fleet)

Hit Points: 23

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +11/+6 melee or +10/+5 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (fleet), Contact (Apocalypse Box), Rallying Call (1/day), Way of Command

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +8

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 15

Skills: Computer Use +8, Concentration +5, Diplomacy +7, Drive +3, Gamble +15, Intimidate +10, Listen +5, Knowledge (alien life) +2, Knowledge (military) +2, Medical +4, Pilot +9, Sense Motive +10, Spot +5, Technical (mechanical) +5, Technical (space travel) +6

Feats: Data Access, First Contact Protocol, Hobby (Gamble), Personal Crusade, Skill Focus (Gamble), Spacecraft Proficiency, Weapon Proficiency (spacecraft weapons)

Standard Equipment: Deck of cards, EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Matthew Gideon is captain of the starship *Excalibur*, a hybrid ship built with advanced components from different races that may very well be the only chance to save humanity from the Drakh Plague. Gideon has been described as dark and brooding, tough-minded and more than a little eccentric.

Personally selected by John Sheridan, President of the Interstellar Alliance, Matthew Gideon is in a position of great responsibility and power, even more so than his previous command of an Explorer-class survey ship. He has an unhealthy knack for ignoring those in authority if it will get the job done and it can be expected that this is the reason he was picked to command the *Excalibur*. The words used to describe Matthew Gideon by his superiors are somewhat more severe, ranging from 'obstinate' to 'difficult'. Ironically, President Sheridan is sometimes described the same way.

Gideon has a great deal of military experience, having started out as an enthusiastic young ensign aboard the EarthForce cruiser *Cerberus*. His experiences whilst assigned to this ship, in its tragic last few hours, would cast a shadow both in name and nature over the rest of his life. Whilst he was performing an external repair in zero gravity, a strange alien vessel with a jet-black hull vaporised his ship and home in the cold vacuum of space. Left floating in the void on the edge of consciousness, he became aware of another fleet of ships passing by, one of which came in closer. That ship and its occupant saved his life.



EarthForce classified the loss of the *Cerberus* as a tragic accident brought on by the failure of the jump engines. Despite his protestations about the involvement of an alien vessel, Gideon's word was discounted. The official report made no mention of his claims, and the Clark Administration clearly was not interested in his evidence. Gideon was subsequently assigned to various stations and vessels within EarthForce, his talents eventually leading him to command an Explorer-class survey ship, sending him far away from Earth.

Perhaps because of this, Gideon has difficulty holding down long-term relationships. He is not opposed to building a lasting commitment to somebody but the pressures of command mean that he has to pick up and move on at a moment's notice. Also, being the captain would place him in an awkward position were he to become involved with a crewmember under his command. If Gideon has a weakness it is surely his enthusiastic dispensation for gambling, no doubt brought on by the loss of his ship nine years before. An unkind soul might call him a card sharp but only after losing his shirt to Gideon's sheer bravado and ability to second-guess his opponents. A canny individual, it is rare for Gideon to have the wool pulled over his eyes.

One of these rare instances was when Gideon won a strange artefact known only as an Apocalypse Box, of which there are only half a dozen reportedly in existence. 'Won' is perhaps a misnomer for Gideon's apparent good fortune, given that the owner of the box fully intended to lose it to someone and Gideon was as good a candidate as any. How the Apocalypse Box actually works and whether it has any real sentience or consciousness, Gideon does not know. What is known is that the previous owner died in mysterious circumstances after the box entered Gideon's hands. The box is a blessing and curse, its words having led him to both fortune and failure. It delivers both in random measure and no-one knows if the box will one day wholly favour fortune over failure or propel Gideon to an informed but tragic end.

Roleplaying with Gideon

Players are can come into contact with Matthew Gideon in a number of ways, though unless they are members of the *Excalibur's* crew or directly involved in its mission, this contact is likely to be brief. One possible social situation in which the Player Characters could meet Gideon is in a poker game, although they would do well to be warned that Gideon is a mean player and has an ace in the hole, his Apocalypse Box.

Lieutenant John Matheson

'How odd. To know everyone's heart but my own.'

2nd Level Officer (fleet) / 4th Level Human Telepath (P6)

Hit Points: 14

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12 (+2 Reflex)

Attacks: +5 melee or +6 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (fleet)

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +9

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 15, Cha 14

Skills: Computer Use +11 (+13 spacecraft), Concentration +8, Diplomacy +5, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (military) +3, Knowledge (telepathy) +9, Listen +10, Pilot +5 (+7 spacecraft), Sense Motive +9, Spot +10, Telepathy +9, Technical (space travel) +5 (+7 spacecraft)

Feats: Ability Focus (Mind Shield), Alertness, Data Access, Nerves of Steel, Skill Focus (Computer Use), Spacecraft Proficiency, Veteran Spacehand

Telepathic Abilities: Accidental Scan, Image Projection*, Locate Mind, Mind Shield, Sense Telepathy, Warning

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

* **Image Projection:** This telepathic ability is explained on page 122.

Years before taking up his position on the *Excalibur*, John Matheson would have proudly identified himself as a member of the Psi Corps. Since the abolition of that



organisation and the founding of the Bureau of Telepath Integration, he has risen up in the ranks of EarthForce, holding the highest position attained by a telepath. For every sentient being there is a moment where his life hangs on a knife edge, capable of spinning off in different directions depending on a single choice. For Matheson it was during the Telepath War, spun by the media to appear more of a crisis than a war.

During the Telepath War, Matheson was working at a secret Psi Corps base. As part of his duties he was asked to administer sleeper drugs to a captured rogue telepath. Perhaps hooking on Matheson's own doubts, the rogue telepath convinced him to look at the Corps in a different light. The end result was that Matheson ended up betraying his masters and helping the rogues destroy the Psi Corps base by his inaction. John Matheson is too modest to admit that his actions, or lack of them, helped swing the Telepath War against the Psi Corps.

Matheson manages, for the most part, to live within the stricter rules imposed on telepaths by the Bureau, Gideon being highly reluctant to place his first officer in danger despite the obvious advantages it would give him and their mission. Even accidental scans are dealt with harshly, something that Matheson did not have to worry about in the Psi Corps. Perhaps because of the harsh guidelines he has to live under, Matheson is wholly content with playing by the rules. He is a very capable and efficient member of EarthForce. Earnestness and seriousness are two traits that Matheson would be happy for others to identify in him. That said, Matheson has a real sense of humour, traditionally not a trait associated with the Psi Corps or those who once fell under its shroud.

John Matheson is one of the individuals selected by Matthew Gideon to accompany him on the *Excalibur*, having served with him before, and is highly regarded by his friend and senior officer. The wise money is on his rising even further in the ranks should the crew of the *Excalibur* succeed in its mission.

Roleplaying with Matheson

Out of all the command staff on board the *Excalibur*, crewmembers are more likely to bump into Lieutenant Matheson than any other. They will find him a dedicated, competent and likeable individual with a deep sense of honour and responsibility. If the characters have a religious history or upbringing they will strike a chord in Matheson, for he was raised a Catholic. Any Player Characters who are human telepaths will surely develop a respect for Matheson and his devotion to EarthForce.

Doctor Sarah Chambers

'The stories, the music, they're all about hope. Hope enough to inspire a dozen generations. We talk about the needs of Earth. Well, there's more to it than the obvious. While we're waiting on science to discover the math that will lead to a cure, we need something to sustain us. This is the music and the literature of hope. It's what we need. Another culture forgot that. We can't. Not now, not ever.'

7th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 13

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15 (+5 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +6 ranged

Special Qualities: Peripheral Studies (Medical), Primary Area of Study (biogenetics), Use Alien Artefact

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +8

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 12

Skills: Appraise +7, Computer Use +12, Concentration +8, Gather Information +4, Knowledge (biogenetics) +19,



Knowledge (chemistry) +11, Knowledge (environmental studies) +9, Knowledge (virology) +10, Intimidate +5, Listen +7, Medical +18, Profession (doctor) +8, Profession (scientist) +8, Search +6, Sense Motive +10, Spot +8, Survival +4, Technical (electronics) +9

Feats: Hobby (Sense Motive), Improved Unarmed Strike, Skill Focus (Knowledge (biogenetics)), Skill Focus (Medical)

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, first aid kit, science analysis kit

The head of the *Excalibur's* medical team, Dr Sarah Chambers is a consummate professional. She is highly skilled in the field of bio-genetics, making her the perfect choice for heading up the research end of the *Excalibur's* mission. In discussion and debate, Dr Chambers is often the voice of morality, principle and reason, adopting a light, slightly cynical attitude to get her points across.

Like many onboard the *Excalibur*, she has family back on Earth who, like every human being on the doomed world, have been exposed to the Drakh plague. Unable to return home to her sister and niece, Chambers has given herself the task of being the driving force in unlocking the cure to the plague, ever mindful that failure will doom not only her relatives but the millions of humans trapped on the world of her birth. She has had to place the severity of her worries and concerns on hold to help her convince others that a cure will surely be found. Chambers likes to spend her time looking outward, so that she does not have to look inward at her own demons.

At some point Dr Sarah Chambers learned to defend herself. She has some expertise in martial arts but she has not revealed how this knowledge and skill was gained.

Roleplaying with Chambers

A warm sense of humour and a good bedside manner greet any Player Character who comes into contact with Dr Chambers. If the character is injured, it is quite likely that Dr Chambers herself will visit the patient just to oversee the activities going on in her domain. Like the other members of the command staff onboard the *Excalibur*, she is focused on her goal but Player Characters should see that she has a good heart as well. Those members of the *Excalibur's* crew who work for her quickly find that she demands the best and expects nothing less.

Max Eilerson

'The term is prodigy. Seven letters, three syllables. I can see why it might give you problems.'

6th Level Human Scientist / 3rd Level Xen archaeologist

Hit Points: 14

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +5 ranged

Special Qualities: Dodge Trap, Peripheral Studies (alien life), Primary Area of Study (alien languages), Use Alien Artefact (+2)

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +10

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 20, Wis 12, Cha 9

Skills: Appraise +17, Bluff +8, Computer Use +15, Concentration +15, Knowledge (alien languages) +24, Knowledge (alien life) +19, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowledge (law) +6, Listen +15, Medical +5, Profession (archaeologist) +10, Profession (linguist) +10, Search +17, Spot +15, Survival +5, Technical (electronics) +8, Technical (engineering) +8

Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Linguist*, Nerves of Steel, Skill Focus (Knowledge (alien languages))

Standard Equipment: Hand computer

* **Linguist:** Max is fluent in Abbai, Brakiri, Centauri, Drazi, Hyach and Narn as well as English, German, French, Chinese and many other Earth languages. He is also capable of picking up new languages exceptionally quickly due to the Linguist feat (see page 123).



The primary archaeologist assigned to the *Excalibur*, Max is an outspoken, arrogant and confident member of the crew. Indeed, whilst it is known that if the Narn hatred for the Centauri ever took wings it could fly to Centauri Prime unaided, the same could be said about Max's boundless confidence being able to take on physical form. The fact that he has received several awards for his contributions to the scientific field has inflated an already prodigious ego.

Max was insulated from the outside world by his family when he was little; it was widely recognised that the youngster was a prodigy. He was significantly more intelligent than children even three or four years older than he, which led him to develop an elitist attitude that no-one discouraged. The young Max Eilerson grew up friendless, his playmates being books, documentaries and computers. However, his confidence is not groundless, as he would not be held in a position of regard were his abilities anything less than extraordinary. He has a knack for picking up languages, an essential trait for someone who works in xenoarchaeology, and IPX employs him for this very reason. It is because of this that his wife Cynthia left him, as she could not cope with him being away for so much of the time. It is said that the only things that Max loves as much as himself are his wife and their cat, Mr Kitty.

Max has two weaknesses of note, apart from the intense dedication to his work that cost him his marriage. The first is salt, of which he consumes a great deal; the second is his fascination with interspecies pornography. If this fact were to become known, Eilerson's colleagues would have something with which to tease the smug, self-assured archaeologist. In another place and time, Max could have made an excellent politician. It is unfortunate that pride, especially exaggerated pride, often comes before a fall.

Roleplaying with Eilerson

Most Player Characters, unless they have mouths on them the size of open jump gates, will find Max Eilerson insufferable to deal with. If the Player Characters work alongside him, either as part of the *Excalibur's* crew or as bystanders on a world that the ship visits, they will be expected to go along with his views, for the simple reason that Max Eilerson is always right. Nevertheless, Eilerson has significant skills and Players who can put up with his attitude will have access to important knowledge, along with his impressive translation and linguistic abilities.

Dureena Nafeel

'Yes, I'm a thief - and a damned good one. Need to get inside something? Get out? Tunnel under? Go around? Go through? I'm it. You're going to hit some pretty strange places and you're going to need a lockpick. There isn't a lock made that I can't get through.'

5th Level Zanderian Lurker / 3rd Level Master of Subtlety

Hit Points: 17

Initiative: +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 19 (+9 Reflex)

Attacks: +6/+1 melee or +9/+4 ranged

Special Qualities: Guild Initiate, Lurker's Knowledge, Multi-Skilled (Tumble), Security Systems, Sneak Attack +1d6, Survivor's Luck

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +10, Will +4

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Appraise +4, Balance +7, Climb +5, Escape Artist +8, Hide +11, Jump +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +11, Pick Pocket +13, Search +10, Spot +7, Survival +6, Technical (electronics) +9, Tumble +13

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Skill Focus (Pick Pocket), Skill Focus (Search)



Standard Equipment: Multiple hidden knives and daggers

Preferring life in the shadows as a member of the Thieves' Guild, Dureena Nafeel would have been perfectly happy to spend her life avoiding the limelight. Picked to assist President Sheridan in preventing the use of the Shadow planet killer on Earth, despite her own homeworld having been devastated by that weapon, Dureena's presence was critical in both finding the hiding place of the Drakh attack fleet and identifying the single control node that the *Victory* and the *Excalibur* needed to target during the resulting battle.

Being so alone has left Dureena with little ability to trust others. The blame for this can be laid at the feet of her family, for they sold her into slavery and at an early age Dureena was taken away from her homeworld to work in the direst of conditions. Ironically, this probably saved her life. If her family had not sold her, she would have been on Zander Prime when it was destroyed by the Shadows. It was whilst fulfilling her chores as a slave that Dureena was noticed by Mafeek, a member of the Thieves' Guild. Spying promise in her, he offered her a chance to work out the remainder of her slave contract decades in advance by fighting in an underground arena called the Pit. She agreed. As promised Mafeek trained her, even vouching for her when it was time for her to become a full member of the Guild, which was not long as Dureena was a quick learner.

Dureena has an unhealthy hatred of anything to do with the Shadows or the Drakh. She has been described as a shoplifter, a thief, a criminal and worse. These comparisons are not unfair; Dureena would admit that she is all of these and a damned fine one to boot. She is smart, sassy and capable but is clouded by her hatred which, like Max Eilerson's arrogance, approaches boundlessness. For Dureena, the *Excalibur's* primary mission to find some sort of cure is a chance to pay the Drakh back for what they did to her homeworld. However, whilst her presence on the *Excalibur* causes the Earth Alliance significant concern, she has the confidence of her fellow explorers.

Roleplaying with Dureena

Players will initially find Dureena to be cold but she possesses a keen sense of right and wrong, especially regarding the downtrodden in society. If the Player Characters have any involvement with slavery they will see

a different side to her, a much darker and more unpleasant side. Players who are members of the Thieves' Guild may have met her before, although even for a thief Dureena keeps to herself.

Galen

'Ten years ago, I rescued a stray cat. That brings with it a degree of obligation - I can't exactly go wandering off every time he gets stuck up a tree, now can I?'

6th Level Human Techno-Mage / 5th Level Destroyer

Hit Points: 17 (+5 subdual)

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 13 (+3 Reflex)

Attacks: +6/+1 melee or +7/+2 ranged

Special Qualities: Chaos Skill, FTL Attunement, Mage Accuracy +2, Mage Focus (computer programs), Organelles (+4), Self Control

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +11

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +12, Computer Use +17, Concentration +16, Gather Information +7, Hide +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (history) +11, Listen +11, Pick Pocket +7, Magery +27, Move Silently +10, Pilot +5, Sense Motive +12, Spot +11, Technical (electronics) +16, Technical (organics) +8



Feats: Ordered Mind, Power Recharge*, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Magery), Spell Knack, Still Spell, Still Magery, Strength of Character

Primary Aptitudes: Elements (fire)

Weak Aptitudes: Defence, Enhancement, Healing

Power Points: 67

Spells: All Elemental (fire) spells plus: *alertness, armour, attract, blurry image, centre gravity, create fire, create ice, create lightning, create sound, conjure small creature, dark vision, destruction, dreamspeech, duplicate image, far speech, flare, freezing touch, gravity platform, greater armour, greater destruction, greater disguise, greater lighten object, greater lightning bolt, greater personal shield, greater phantom image, greater surge, hailstorm, homunculus, ice bolt, ice shards, icy surface, invisibility, lesser armour, lesser personal shield, levitation platform, light, lighten object, lightning bolt, mimic sound, paralysing arc, perfect phantom image, personal shield, phantom image, sharp eyes, shatterclap, skillfulness, snowfall, sonic burst, surge, ventriloquism, voice, walk on water*

Standard Equipment: *Mage's staff* (gift from Elric), medallion containing Isabelle's ashes, parents' ring, robes, personal pinnace (see page 134).

* **Power Recharge:** Galen's experiences on Z'ha'dum and his newfound relationship with his tech have

resulted in a much greater facility with his implants. This is reflected in his possession of the Power Recharge feat.

Often referred to as the spectre at the banquet, wherever Galen goes death follows closely behind. Having had more experience in his life than many techno-mages three times his age, Galen has come through the fires of loss and sorrow without being able to keep his soul from harm. Losing his love Isabelle, accompanying the techno-mages to their hiding place and rescuing a lost EarthForce ensign might have seemed enough for one sentient to handle. Galen was then thrust into situations that almost overwhelmed him, including being on Z'ha'dum at the same time as John Sheridan. Whilst there, Galen saw the horrific truth behind the implants in his own body and those of the other techno-mages. He was thrown into the Eye, a Shadow control centre, but rather than destroying him it changed him. He gained a new level of understanding of the implants in his body, something that no other techno-mage had ever done. Returning victorious, Galen became something of an outcast, for his efforts on Z'ha'dum had effectively doomed the Order to certain extinction: They would be delivered no more implants or chrysalises with which to create new mages.

Techno-Magery

The statistics give for Galen assume the Games Master possesses a copy of *The Techno-Mages Fact Book*. If this is not the case, a Games Master can use the statistics given below for Galen during the *Crusade* timeline:

Hit Points: 17 (+5 subdual)

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 13 (+3 Reflex)

Attacks: +6/+1 melee or +7/+2 ranged

Special Qualities: Chaos Skill, FTL Attunement, Mage Accuracy +2, Mage Focus (computer programs), Organelles (+4), Self Control

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +11

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 18, Wis 16, Cha 16

Skills: Bluff +12, Computer Use +17, Concentration +16, Gather Information +7, Hide +10, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (history) +11, Listen +11, Pick Pocket +7, Move Silently +10, Pilot +5, Sense Motive +12, Spot +11, Technical (electronics) +16, Technical (organics) +8

Standard Equipment: Staff, medallion, ring, robes.

* **Techno-magery:** As a techno-mage of some power, Galen has a number of quasi-magical abilities. Assume that Galen is a 14th level sorcerer who knows all 0 level and all Illusion spells up to 6th level. He also knows the following spells but is less likely to use them: 1st level; *alarm, burning hands, cause fear, chill touch, detect secret doors, erase, feather fall, obscuring mist, hold portal, hypnotism, identify, grease, mage armour, shield, sleep*; 2nd level; *flaming sphere, ghoulish touch, glitterdust, pyrotechnics, resist energy, scorching ray, see invisibility, shatter*; 3rd level; *clairaudience/clairvoyance, hold person*.

Five years after his experiences on Z'hadum, Galen became involved in the discovery of the new Death Clouds that the Drakh had discovered at a secret Shadow base and fashioned a plan to bring key individuals together to stop this threat. Despite his best intentions, Galen's plan failed in a way he had not envisaged. It was whilst on Babylon 5 that he learned that Matthew Gideon, whom he had kept an occasional eye upon, had been chosen to command the *Excalibur*. Knowing what his next course of action must be, he left Babylon 5 with Dureena Nafeel, bound for Mars and an eventual reunion with Matthew Gideon.

The truth of Galen's involvement with the crew of the *Excalibur* and Matthew Gideon in particular, is not known to anyone outside of the techno-mages. Whilst assisting with the attempt to find a cure to the Drakh Plague is not against his remit, he is charged with ensuring that EarthForce's attempts to utilise Shadow technology do not gain ground. The legacy of the Shadows must die, and if that includes his own order, so be it. However, Galen does have a secondary motive unknown even to the techno-mages. He promised to bury the ashes of his love Isabelle at the Well of Forever. With the help of the *Excalibur*, he may actually be able to fulfil his promise.

Roleplaying with Galen

Galen rarely socialises with others, being a man on a mission that few others know of. It should be rare for Player Characters to have any significant dealings with him unless Galen asks them to perform some sort of task. He comes and goes from the *Excalibur* at his pleasure and it is unbeknownst to any that he is involved with the fate of the Centauri, particularly with the Centauri ambassador Vir Cotto, as well as that of humanity.



Trace Miller

'I've got plans for the weekend and being dead ain't one of them.'

1st level Human Lurker / 5th Level Worker (blue collar)

Hit Points: 24

Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15 (+5 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +5 ranged

Special Qualities: Blue Collar, Lurker's Knowledge

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +7

Abilities: Str 12, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +10, Bluff +4, Computer Use +8, Diplomacy +4, Drive +5, Gather Information +6, Knowledge (alien languages) +3, Knowledge (alien life) +4, Knowledge (religion) +7, Listen +6, Pilot +11, Profession (pilot) +5, Profession (priest) +4, Sense Motive +6, Spot +7, Technical (electronics) +3, Technical (space travel) +6.

Feats: Evasive Action, Hobby (Pilot), Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Spacecraft Proficiency

Destined for a life on the streets in Arizona, fixing broken items for friends and family, Trace was destined to have little in the way of a career until a chance meeting with a Foundationalist priest by the name of Leon Henderson, who convinced him to put some faith into his life. The priest had something about him, a presence that the youngster envied. Accepting the Foundationalist faith, Trace began his training as a priest.

However, the young man had not been in the Order for more than twelve months before an undisclosed tragedy forced Trace to question his faith. Not able to find a reason for what he had witnessed, he left the Order at the same time that others did, including his fellow initiate Andre Sabbat. Leaving Earth behind, Trace managed to pay for pilot's training and took up any paid maintenance work or escort duties that were going. He built up an impressive set of skills and accepted a position at the helm of a survey ship working for IPX. Whilst in their employ, Trace was able to put his intelligence and skills to good use and got to see something of the galaxy.

Following a successful string of assignments, Trace was placed on a survey team assigned to Ceti IV under the command of the highly regarded

archaeologist Max Eilerson. As most of Trace's skills were technical in nature, he did not expect to be utilised very much beyond fetching, carrying and fixing equipment when it broke down. He was quite wrong on that score, as it led him to transport the captain of the *Excalibur*, Matthew Gideon, and to a job offer.

Roleplaying with Trace

Player Characters based on the *Excalibur* will probably meet Trace Miller on a regular basis. His role as a shuttle pilot means that he comes into contact with a large number of crewmembers, whether he is taking survey teams down to alien worlds or simply ferrying crewmembers destined for shore leave. Characters who are not crew are more likely to bump into Trace than any other Excalibur personality – he is a gregarious soul who often uses what little shore time he has to socialise.



Feats: Data Access, Dogfighter, Evasive Action, Great Fortitude, Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Sixth Sense, Spacecraft Proficiency, Weapon Proficiency (spacecraft weapons)

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Supporting Characters

Captain Elizabeth Lochley

'I always knew I would get court martialled for something, someday. It may as well be now and I get it over with.'

1st Level Human Lurker / 12th Level Officer (fleet)

Hit Points: 30

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15 (+5 Reflex)

Attacks: +12/+7/+2 melee or +13/+8/+3 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Elite, Branch Specialisation (fleet), Lurker's Knowledge, Rallying Call (2/day), Way of Command

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +13

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 15

Skills: Appraise +10, Bluff +10, Computer Use +12, Diplomacy +15, Hide +5, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (military) +8, Listen +7, Medical +9, Move Silently +5, Pilot +15, Sense Motive +15, Spot +9, Survival +9, Technical (space travel) +10

A calm hand on a sometimes unsteady ship, Captain Elizabeth Lochley has not successfully commanded Babylon 5 for the last five years by taking unnecessary chances. The former wife of John Sheridan (although calling it a marriage is in truth just a technicality), she stepped into the shoes that Susan Ivanova was expected to fill after the death of Marcus Cole. It fell on Lochley to convince EarthForce, and particularly President Luchenko, that the Earth was under the threat of imminent attack from the Drakh. Whilst she was worried about the reaction her call would receive, she was at least responsible for preventing Earth's total and immediate annihilation.

Visitors to Babylon 5 may bump into her as she goes about her work; even lurkers from Downbelow may encounter her as she goes on unofficial excursions to get away from the pressures of command. Whilst some may gape at her having the audacity to wander amongst the fallen people on Babylon 5, many lurkers believe that she has been good for the station and indirectly for them. Not looking for any sort of romance, her dalliance with Captain Matthew Gideon caught her off guard and she put paid to any fledgling relationship quickly. However, events have transpired to throw the two together and these sorts of random events often recur...

Roleplaying with Lochley

Likeable enough, Lochley is something of a control freak and dislikes letting go. Any instances of her doing so are out of character and it is for this reason that her recent encounter with Captain Gideon in the middle of 2267 disturbed her so. Players encountering her would be well advised not to bend the rules – to Lochley, bending the rules can sometimes be worse than breaking them. Nevertheless, she is probably the most approachable commander Babylon 5 has had the fortune to possess.

Doctor Stephen Franklin

‘Things are getting a little desperate back home.’

15th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 20

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 16 (+6 Reflex)

Attacks: +7/+2 melee or +8/+3 ranged

Special Qualities: Peripheral Studies (biotechnology, virology, xenobiology), Primary Area of Study (Medical), Use Alien Artefact

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +6, Will +12

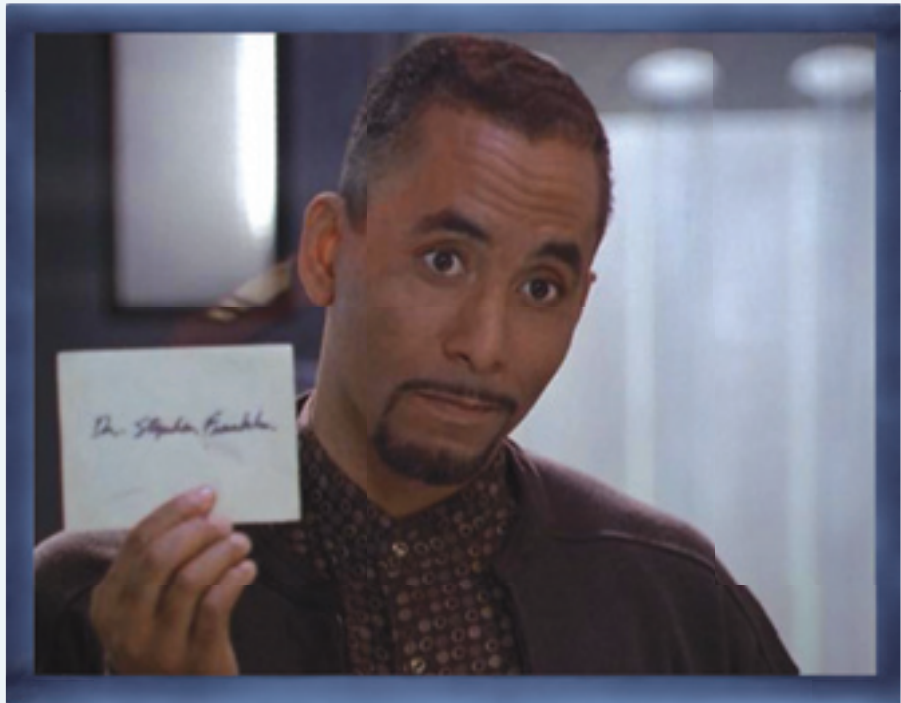
Abilities: Str 11, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 15

Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +11, Computer Use +16, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +11, Gather Information +11, Knowledge (alien languages) +17, Knowledge (alien life) +24, Knowledge (biotechnology) +20, Knowledge (telepathy) +7, Knowledge (virology) +20, Knowledge (xenobiology) +24, Listen +5, Medical +25, Profession (ship’s doctor) +14, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spot +12, Technical (electronics) +12, Technical (organics) +6

Feats: Alien Anatomy, Contact (Tessa Holland), Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Skill Focus (Knowledge (alien life)), Skill Focus (Knowledge (xenobiology)), Skill Focus (Medical)

Standard Equipment: First aid kit, hand computer, science analysis kit

Few individuals have worked harder, mainly behind the scenes, than Dr Stephen Franklin. From an undercover mission to make peace with the Minbari, through the



Narn/Centauri War and the Earth Civil War, Dr Franklin may have thought that by accepting the role of head of xenobiological research at EarthDome he was in for a quieter time. Throughout his medical career, Franklin may have had more exposure to the work of the Shadows than any other physician or scientist in the Army of Light, from his involvement with the telepaths who had been turned into Shadowhearts, to function as the control centres of Shadow vessels, all the way to his experiences with the Shadow devices which ultimately caused the fall of Centauri Prime. He might be forgiven for thinking he had left the legacy of the Shadows well and truly behind. The universe has a fine sense of irony, for before he left Babylon 5, Franklin spoke to Sheridan about the Shadow technology that might have been taken away from Z’ha’dum before that world exploded. Franklin’s words would come back to haunt him in the form of the Drakh Plague.

Roleplaying with Franklin

Similar to Dr Sarah Chambers, Stephen Franklin is a skilled physician and scientist. He is a good teacher and it is rare that any former students have a bad word to say about him. Franklin can sometimes be impatient but he has learned to control this over the past few years. One thing that he has not altered is his hands-on attitude, again a trait that he shares with Sarah Chambers. In the *Crusade* years, it is unlikely that the Player Characters will personally encounter Dr Franklin as he is Earthbound and infected with the Drakh Plague. However, should the Player Characters uncover something that he is interested in, they might receive a call directly from his office.

President John Sheridan

'We'll turn the Excalibur into a traveling resource station, manned by the best crew we can find.'

15th Level Human Officer (fleet) /
5th Level Diplomat

Hit Points: 42

Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 20 (+10 Reflex)

Attacks: +18/+13/+8/+3 melee or
+19/+14/+9/+4 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Elite,
Branch Specialisation (fleet), Contact
x3, Improved Diplomacy +1,
Legendary Speech, Rallying Call (3/
day), Touched By A Vorlon*, Way of
Command

Saves: Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +14

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha
19

Skills: Appraise +3, Bluff +21, Computer Use +11,
Concentration +11, Diplomacy +29, Drive +3, Gather
Information +10, Intimidate +13, Listen +11, Medical +4,
Pilot +17, Sense Motive +21, Spot +11, Technical (space
travel) +18

Feats: Alertness, Data Access, First Contact Protocol,
Lightning Reflexes, Point Blank Shot, Skill Focus
(Diplomacy), Spacecraft Proficiency, Resist Scan, Weapon
Focus (uni-pulse cannon), Weapon Proficiency (spacecraft
weapons)

Standard Equipment: Hand computer, ISA uniform, ISA
wrist link

* **Touched By A Vorlon:** Sheridan once hosted a part of
Kosh Naraneck's essence, which has left a lasting impression
on his soul and armoured it against telepathic influence.
Sheridan has a +6 bonus to Will saves versus any kind of
telepathic control and a +2 bonus to Will saves against
telepathic scans.

For any other human being, surviving a war by a fluke,
fighting off an ancient enemy by effectively dying in the
process, engaging and winning a civil war and helping to
found an Interstellar Alliance would be more than enough
for several lifetimes, never mind one. Fortunately, President
John Sheridan is anything but a normal individual. His



tenure as President of the Interstellar Alliance has gone well in the years since its founding. He has been intensely busy, so much so that side projects such as the Victory-class destroyer programme have had to pass him by, even though Sheridan would have loved to have been more involved.

The times that lie ahead for John Sheridan test both him and, perhaps even more, the faith that his friends have in him. He watches as the world of his birth is poisoned and then selects the leader of the mission to find a cure. Still, there is always hope and although humanity did not start the war against the Drakh, somehow or other Sheridan will help finish it. This is a principle that John Sheridan will teach his newborn son David but not for a good decade or so yet.

Roleplaying with Sheridan

Outside of the events portrayed in *A Call to Arms*, it is highly unlikely that any Player Characters will meet John Sheridan in his official capacity as President of the Interstellar Alliance. He has risen from station commander on Babylon 5 to hold the most important office in the galaxy, closely followed by Delenn, the Entil'zha of a rejuvenated Anla'shok. Players in that organisation may come into contact with John Sheridan in that capacity but only when he is involved in some matter of state or emergency with Delenn. In time they will exchange roles and then Rangers may come into contact with Entil'zha Sheridan more often.

Michael Alfredo Garibaldi

'Let me introduce you to a new theory - shut up and do exactly what I say.'

1st Level Human Agent / 2nd Level Diplomat / 7th Level Officer (fleet) / 6th Level Soldier

Hit Points: 43

Initiative: +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 19 (+9 Reflex)

Attacks: +17/+12/+7 (+18/+13/+8 with PPG)

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (fleet), Contact, Covering Fire, Rallying Call (1/day), Security Systems

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +12

Abilities: Str 16, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 12

Skills: Appraise +4, Balance +5, Bluff +9, Climb +4, Computer Use +19, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +5, Intimidate +11, Jump +5, Knowledge (law) +6, Listen +6, Pilot +10, Sense Motive +13, Spot +12, Survival +5, Technical (electronics) +2, Technical (space travel) +5

Feats: Alertness, Data Access, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Aim, Skill Focus (Computer Use), Spacecraft Proficiency, Weapon Focus (PPG), Weapon Proficiency (spacecraft weapons), Weapon Specialisation (PPG)

Standard Equipment: EF-7 PPG, hand unit communicator

Michael Garibaldi left Mars as a drunken security officer. Within a decade, he returned to become the CEO of Mars-based company Edgars Industries, one of the largest megacorporations in the Earth Alliance. Magazines would run features on the rags-to-riches story of Michael Garibaldi, much to the distaste of the former security chief.

Although a publicly reformed character, Michael Garibaldi has more secrets locked away than even his enemies give him credit for. He has managed to keep the prototype Victory-class destroyers, designed to be the new flagships for the Interstellar Alliance, out of the public eye. Garibaldi has managed to use Earth and Mars contractors on the project and to provide technical details to supporting elements within EarthForce and President Luchenko without any other corporations finding out.



Not content with this monumental task, Garibaldi still has an agenda against the surviving elements of the Psi Corps, even though he was instrumental in the Telepath Crisis occurring in the first place. There is one aspect of his life, aside from not being able to say goodbye to his old friend Jeffrey Sinclair before he traveled back in time, which Garibaldi is determined to address: Ex-Psi Cop Alfred Bester. Sooner or later, Michael Garibaldi *will* confront his nemesis.

Despite this thorn in his side, Garibaldi has much to be thankful for. He now has a daughter, Mary, and she is truly the apple of her father's eye. Sometimes Garibaldi worries that he is not spending enough time with his wife and child. The time may come when he has to step back from some of his duties, including his vendetta against Alfred Bester, to allow that to happen.

Roleplaying with Garibaldi

Players who are involved with Edgars Industries or the construction of the Victory-class destroyers stand a good chance of coming into contact with Michael Garibaldi. He has a keen sense of humour and a personality that someone remarked a long time ago was 'negative'. On the darker side, Garibaldi has several projects that are outside of general public awareness. Chief among these is his desire to hunt down Bester, who used him as a puppet five years ago, at a time when Garibaldi's friends needed him most. Players who have uncovered information on the whereabouts of this powerful Psi Cop may find themselves contacted by a representative of Garibaldi's, to see if they can be trusted or even recruited into his employ.

Senator Redway

'The Drakh'd love to wipe us out and leave EarthGov isolated, behind the quarantine zone.'

11th Level Human Diplomat

Hit Points: 18

Initiative: -1 (-1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +5 melee or +4 ranged

Special Qualities: Contacts x4 (2 sacrificed), Government Resources, Improved Diplomacy +2

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +10

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 9, Con 9, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 18

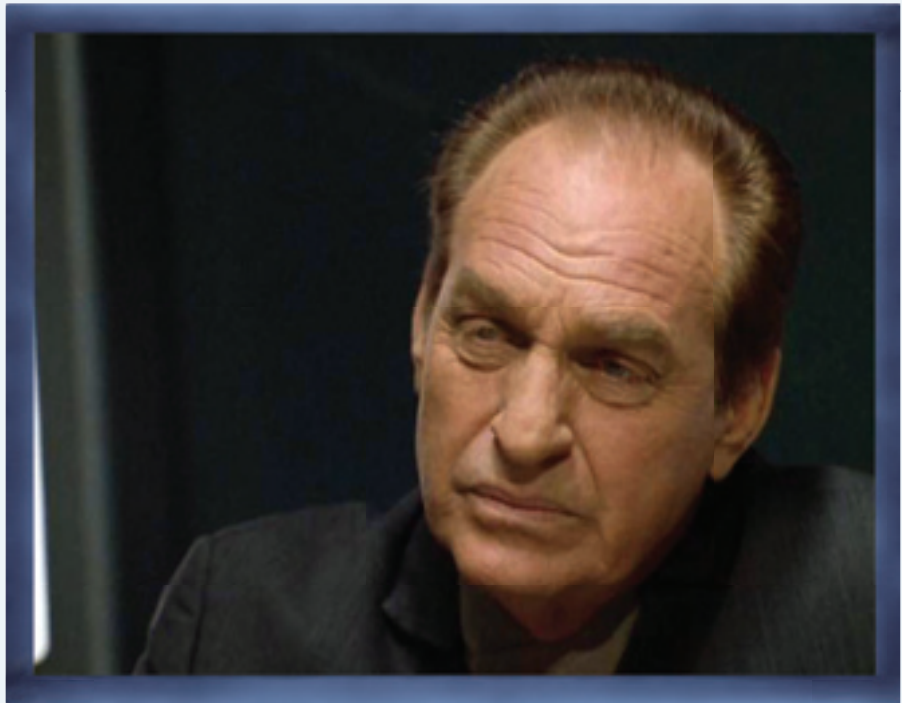
Skills: Appraise +8, Bluff +20, Computer Use +10, Diplomacy +23, Gather Information +11, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (bureaucracy) +12, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (law) +12, Knowledge (politics) +12, Listen +6, Move Silently +3, Sense Motive +22, Spot +6

Feats: Independently Wealthy, Political Survivor, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive)

Standard Equipment: Hand computer

Born to a wealthy Texan family, the young Jacob Redway never needed to work but he wanted a career. A promising legal career backed up by the prestige of his family's name led him into politics at the age of 42 and he won a seat on the Earth Alliance Senate shortly after his fiftieth birthday.

Nominally a supporter of President Clark, Redway was one of the few politicians to emerge unscathed from that particular fiasco. A somewhat slippery individual to catch in debate, Redway made several bold political moves during President Luchenko's first year in charge. His most notable action was to argue against the construction of the Victory-class destroyers, in which he was unsuccessful. Redway wanted something tangible, the ships themselves, to show for the expenditure of the taxpayers' credits, not just a pile of research reports that explained how the new technology had been implemented. In his opinion the Earth Alliance already had the Warlock programme and should focus upon that instead.



Redway is not a fan of the Interstellar Alliance or of John Sheridan. The political mess left after Clark was defeated caused Redway some difficulties, the politician having to extract himself from numerous situations and arrangements to avoid criminal charges. He managed to do so but still dislikes President John Sheridan for putting him in such a predicament in the first place.

Roleplaying with Redway

Senator Redway does not suffer fools gladly and is unlikely to associate himself with other characters unless they are of a sufficiently high level or of particular use to him. As a member of the Senate who survived the Drakh attack on Earth, Senator Redway is guarded at all times and these guards will form a significant barrier to anyone trying to arrange an impromptu meeting with the senator.

The Galaxy of 2267

This chapter consists of a complete guide to the introductory movie *A Call to Arms* and all thirteen episodes of the *Crusade* series. Games Masters can use the Signs and Portents chapter of the *Babylon 5* core rulebook in conjunction with this chapter to describe the Babylon 5 space station during the events of *Crusade*, five years after John Sheridan and Delenn move the seat of the Interstellar Alliance to Minbar. Indeed, Babylon 5 is seen on multiple occasions during the time period of *Crusade* under the assured command of Captain Lochley.

Those campaigns that veer away from the Babylon 5 station will also find the episode guides useful. One of the core goals of the *Crusade* series was for the episodes to have more of an action vein than *Babylon 5* did, at least initially. The whole series also has a darker, more sombre subtext, underscored by the seriousness of the situation in which the crew of the *Excalibur* finds itself. Therefore the theme is slightly different to an average *Babylon 5* episode, with a less complex but still omnipresent arc, a constant reminder of humanity's ticking clock.

Each episode is represented by a detailed synopsis followed by gaming hints and any relevant character statistics or background information. These additions provide rules and advice on how to incorporate the events or situations within the episode to feature in your own games.

A Call to Arms

Probable Start Date: December 2266

A news summary on ISN, beamed from the network's main facility on Earth's moon, informed the viewing public that preparations for the celebrations of the fifth anniversary of the Interstellar Alliance were well under way. The Vice President of the Interstellar Alliance and leader of the Rangers, Delenn, was seeing to the preparations herself, but John Sheridan was nowhere to be found. Speculation on Sheridan's lack of appearances varied from a goodwill visit to Narn to the flu. In reality, John Sheridan had been delivered to a White Star after being dropped off by a Minbari vessel. Michael Garibaldi, carried to this location onboard the White Star, had arranged for some dinner to be made ready for the President – not entirely for altruistic reasons as Garibaldi himself was hungry.

Over the meal, Sheridan confessed to Garibaldi that he had not taken as active

a part in the project as he would have liked. Changing the topic of the conversation, Garibaldi talked about his experiences as the head of one of largest conglomerates on Mars, confessing that he was enjoying it. Sheridan asked about the individual who was in charge of the project's construction and Garibaldi admitted that he was concerned that Drake was too much of a perfectionist. Sheridan could understand this, as implementing Vorlon and Minbari technology alongside Earth tech had never been done before. Garibaldi confirmed that when the new vessels were completed, Sheridan and the Interstellar Alliance would possess a real edge over the fleets of other races. Sheridan was glad that the project had remained a secret; the allocation of funds for the project had been kept out of common view, with Delenn keeping everyone focused on the anniversary preparations.

A Ranger approached their dining table and informed President Sheridan that the White Star was ready to jump at any time. Believing that they were away from prying eyes and that no-one could keep up with a White Star, Sheridan did not know that there was a spy observing them. The image of the White Star was transmitted to a crystal ball held by a techno-mage named Galen. Galen was being called to account, as his recent actions had come to the attention of those in charge. Reluctantly, Galen asked an associate to show him the way. A path of lights stretched forth from the room he was in, to take him to his fate.

President Sheridan entered the bridge of the White Star from underneath a main doorway that had a Celtic symbol above it, a personalisation on the part of the ship's captain. The White Star jumped back into normal space with Sheridan in the command chair ready to see the new destroyers. Sheridan confessed that he had not seen anything on the ships since the initial designs had come across his desk. These destroyers would be the pride of the Interstellar Alliance fleet, functioning alongside the White Stars that had survived the Shadow War and the Earth Civil War.



Samuel Drake waited impatiently onboard the new Victory-class destroyer *Excalibur* for President Sheridan to arrive. Soon enough, the President boarded, accompanied by an honour guard of Rangers. Drake pleased he was to meet the President – but less pleased to see Michael Garibaldi. Beginning the tour, Drake explained that the gravity was still at just below Earth standard but Mr Garibaldi had told them to move on. Drake thanked Sheridan for allowing him, a Mars citizen, to work on a major Earth contract.



Surrounded by members of the Anla'shok, working away on the new ship that would one day be theirs, Drake explained the layout of the bridge to Sheridan. It was based on the submarine model and used controls that were along EarthForce lines. Enthused, Sheridan asked how the ship handled and Drake confessed that he did not know – Drake's excuse was that he had wanted to wait until Sheridan had got here. This did not go down well and Drake was only saved from Sheridan's considerable wrath by an incoming message from Delenn, which the President left to take in the conference room. Whilst Drake received a stern rebuke from Garibaldi, the *Excalibur* was readied to pull out of spacedock – but the engines flamed out moments after being activated.

Accepting the message in the conference room, the image of Delenn did not appear. Instead, mingled amongst pictures of Minbari ships, Babylon 5 and sites of historical interests were strange symbols and equations that left Sheridan entranced. Like a zombie, he stood motionless, expressionless, until Garibaldi entered asking if the President was okay. He had apparently been in the conference room for half an hour, watching what he could only describe as gibberish. In any case, Garibaldi told Sheridan that they had some bugs to work out and perhaps Sheridan should get some rest, given the long trip from Minbar. Garibaldi was glad when Sheridan had departed, so he could attend to the *Excalibur* and Drake personally. If the *Excalibur* would not move after their efforts, Garibaldi informed Drake that he would have to go outside and push. Sitting back in the command chair, the former security chief remarked that things had been so much easier on Babylon 5.

On that very outpost, custom officials stopped a humanoid female with dark curly hair as she attempted to enter the station. The scanners had picked up weapons on her person and the current security chief, Zack Allen, appeared and asked her to remove all of her weapons. This took longer than expected, for there were a dozen knives, daggers and other close-combat weapons on her person. Once she had relinquished her considerable arsenal, she asked where the

lost people go, the neglected souls who lived here. She could mean only one area and Zack directed her toward Downbelow.

Resting in a small soldier's cabin on the *Excalibur*, Sheridan was dreaming. In this dream he had awakened on a world on fire. He was standing on an outcropping of rock, looking out over what could only have been a shattered city. A deep voice asked if he could hear and Sheridan asked what he was supposed to be listening to, for he could hear nothing. The lack of noise, the voice told him, was the sound of a dead world. Inquiring further, when Sheridan asked if the world that they were standing on had been attacked, the shadowed figure who was speaking to him, Galen, said that it was only a test. Sheridan knew this was a dream but Galen corrected him: It was actually a nightmare. Galen introduced himself properly, confirming that the jumbled message Sheridan had received earlier was actually from him. He apologised for the deception, but a connection was necessary for the electron incantation. There was a rumble and Sheridan asked Galen queried the noise, as this world was supposed to be dead. Galen explained that the perpetrators of this attack had returned, to check on their handiwork. Concerned that the attackers could pick up his probe, Galen ordered Sheridan to remember what he had seen. Sheridan turned to face the shadowy figure, but there was nothing, just the dust blowing away from a phrase engraved in the stony floor. It said 'Daltron VII'. Waking from his dream, Sheridan looked out of the window to see the spacedock passing by. On the bridge, a distressed spacesuit-clad Drake was saved from leaving the ship and pushing. Clearly Garibaldi had been deadly serious in his threat of Drake having to literally push the *Excalibur* out of spacedock.

On Babylon 5, Dureena Nafeel – the dark-haired female that had Zack had directed to Downbelow – was exploring her new surroundings. Her eyes were alert, looking for an indication of where to go. The Zocalo was busy, a new influx of ships bringing with them fresh sales opportunities.

On a nearby wall, behind a piece of cloth, she found a strange piece of graffiti, including arrows and moon shapes. An arrow extended out from the graffiti and Dureena proceeded away from the Zocalo in the given direction... shadowed by a human clad in dark clothing. Following the signs that were located on bulkheads and in places where any normal person would not look, study or scrutinise, Dureena found a passageway up a pile of packing crates covered in cloth sheets, she ascended a ladder. Evidently it was a trap, as the man who had been following her was waiting on the floor above at the top of the ladder. The man kicked her exposed head, sending her crashing down to the level below. She hit the deck hard and was knocked unconscious.

Seemingly fragments of a second later, Dureena awoke to find herself on a cliff side, overlooking a city on fire. Muttering denials, the form of John Sheridan appeared out of thin air. She jumped at him but passed through his transparent image. A scaly-faced alien replaced the form of John Sheridan, the new image having two long horns stretching out from the rear of its scalp – a Drakh. In its hand it held a miniature hologram of the galaxy, which it studied intently before crushing it. Moments later, the figure faded away. A newcomer appeared behind her, instructing her that this was not Dureena Nafeel's homeworld. This newcomer was a hooded man; she could identify little more than that about him. The man explained that this world shared the fate of Dureena's world and that when the time came Dureena had to pick the right target, as she would only have one opportunity.

Even as the figure finished his words, Dureena awoke back on Babylon 5 standing before a crowd of assorted humans and aliens. One of the figures remarked that she was clearly emerging from one bad dream into another. Dureena introduced herself and when requested showed the group a tattoo on her chest of the same design which had guided her to this spot. A series of interrogatory questions followed concerning her lineage, including her mentor Mafeek, and

her own skills. Dureena stated that she had been a thief long enough to be good at what she did. The thief who had knocked Dureena unconscious laughed at this, saying that her being captured was proof that this was not true. Dureena replied that she had intended to be caught, as it was the quickest way of checking in. Her former attacker said that she was talking pretty tough, as she was in chains. With a calculated flick of her wrists, the chain binding Dureena's arms fell away and she launched herself at her attacker, beating him unconscious. The leader of the Thieves' Guild, still wearing his sunglasses, greeted her as a fellow Guild member and spelled out the rules she was to follow whilst here: The standard rules of the Thieves' Guild. When asked what she was doing here, Dureena replied that she did not know.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, a weapons demonstration was about to begin. A Level One test firing was ordered and a nearby asteroid targeted. The co-ordinates were fed in and the forward battery of neutron lasers obliterated the asteroid. President Sheridan was unimpressed with this demonstration and made his disappointment known. He had expected more offensive potential than a standard White Star.

Garibaldi explained that this was only a Level One firing – and there was better to come. At this point, Drake interjected: There was a problem with the main guns, in that the weapons array was based loosely on Vorlon technology. As such, it was intended for ships much larger and with a greater power output than the *Excalibur*. Firing the guns drained almost all of the ship's power, so they should only be used as weapons of last resort. Noting this, Garibaldi ordered a test of the main guns on another nearby asteroid. As the preparations began, Sheridan out into space and saw Earth and the Moon where the asteroid should be. Jumping up, Sheridan ordered them to stop, saying that it was Earth out there. All of the bridge crew, including the Rangers present, turned to look at him. Sheridan looked at Garibaldi to try and convince his friend and ally before looking back out the window. There was nothing there, just deep space and a few asteroids. Drake and Garibaldi exchanged a glance, wondering if there was something wrong with the President, before the weapons test continued.

All of the lights onboard dimmed, the forms of the bridge crew illuminated by a scant few essential controls. The wing tips of the *Excalibur* burst into life with yellow energy like that of miniature suns. Each wing tip projected a beam and the beams converged at a point in front of the *Excalibur* before firing off, obliterating a rock the size of the ship. Drake took



this opportunity to explain the limitations of the weapon. There was barely enough power to maintain gravity and the ship would be left without power for a minute whilst the power reserves were replenished. Sheridan was concerned about this, as it would leave the ship vulnerable for a minute.

As he pondered this he had another vision, this time of a group of hooded figures around a campfire. One of the figures said that it was a mistake to bring Sheridan here and that it was endangering everyone. The voice of Galen spoke up, saying that there were billions of lives at stake. The group of other techno-mages was concerned at Galen's choice, asking Galen if this person, Sheridan, was the best that he could come up with. Galen, one of the techno-mages seated around the campfire, looked back at Sheridan and said that he was the one who could give them what they needed. The techno-mages must protect themselves, but could not abandon those who were left behind. Galen was warned that if he brought the others into danger, then the errant techno-mage would be the first to die. With a flash the others were gone, leaving just Sheridan and Galen behind.

Sheridan remarked that the rest of the group seemed to be upset with Galen. The techno-mage corrected the President of the Interstellar Alliance, saying that it was fear rather than being upset. He asked Sheridan if he knew what they were and the President said that he did, recalling his meeting with Elric back on Babylon 5, just before the onset of the Shadow War. The place where they were now was the techno-mages' hiding place. When Galen grew uneasy at Sheridan's questions the techno-mage conjured an image of Z'h'adum, the home of the Shadows before their departure to the Rim. That world was now gone, destroyed shortly after its masters had left. Galen said that the Shadows had gone but their allies, such as the Drakh, had stayed behind. The Drakh were in ascendance, testing their resources and weapons capabilities. Reports from other worlds had confirmed these facts. Sheridan asked how much power a homeless race like this could have.

Galen replied that answering that particular question was Sheridan's job. Sheridan had been picked because Galen believed that the war, the Drakh War, would start with an assault on Earth. It was, after all, humanity who had been at the fore in the war against the Shadows... and that had not been forgotten.

Galen impressed upon Sheridan that he had told him much, perhaps more than he should have done. Above all this, Sheridan had to tell no-one, for the Drakh had spies everywhere. Sheridan said that no-one would believe him anyway; they would think he was crazy. Yet he was curious enough to find out and that was why Galen had picked him. The techno-mage's only wish was that he could involve himself further. Behind Sheridan, a pillar of rock started to morph into faces, one of them Sheridan's own. One of them was a Drazi, one was a humanoid female and the last was a middle-aged human male with strong, defined features. Above this pillar were two moons and above them was Babylon 5. With this final vision, Sheridan returned to the present, with Drake explaining the advanced type of armour that had been fitted to the *Excalibur*. Interrupting, Sheridan jumped up, saying that they had to leave immediately on the White Star that had brought them here. They were going to Babylon 5.

On the way to Babylon 5, Garibaldi's attempt to enquire further about the sudden change of location was met with cryptic answers from Sheridan. Garibaldi offered to call in at Minbar on the way but the President of the Interstellar Alliance was adamant, focused on some drawings he was making. As Garibaldi turned to leave, Sheridan asked his friend to check up on a world called Daltron VII. The drawings that Sheridan was making were the faces on the rock pillar in his vision. As Sheridan continued to draw, Garibaldi asked a Ranger to covertly contact Lochley on Babylon 5.

Elsewhere in the galaxy, onboard the Earth Alliance destroyer *Charon*, Captain Leonard Anderson was being pressed by his first officer on whether the decision that had been made was the correct one. Captain Anderson was quite sure, even though their orders had directed them elsewhere and not to Babylon 5.



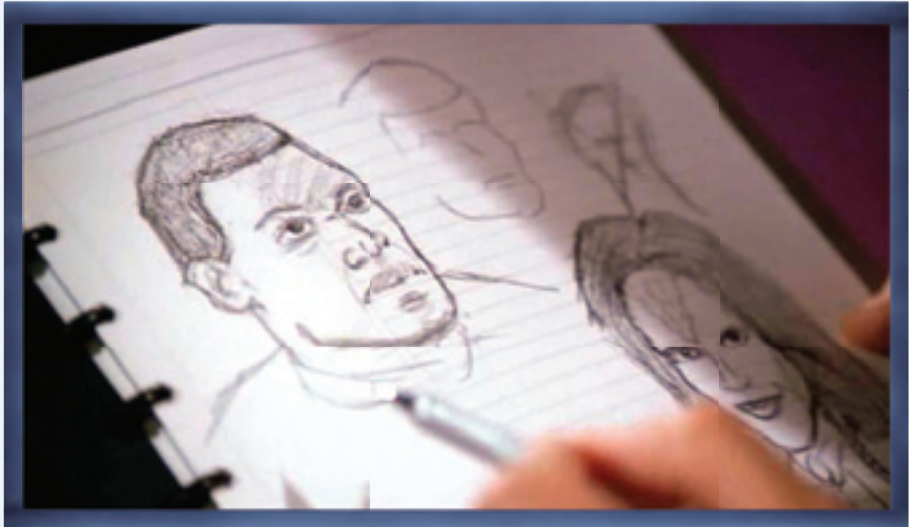
The White Star arrived at Babylon 5 and Elizabeth Lochley met Garibaldi and Sheridan. The President knew that Garibaldi had contacted Lochley but chose not to address that now. Instead he gave her his drawings of the faces and asked her to find out if any of these individuals were on Babylon 5 at the moment. With the President out of earshot, Lochley wanted to know what Sheridan was on about and Garibaldi confessed he was without a clue.

Dureena proceeded through the Zocalo, easing a notable number of purses away from their negligent owners. Two security guards, with a copy of Sheridan's drawing, identified Dureena as one of the faces. Realising that she had been tagged, Dureena bolted for a nearby corridor only to be met by two other security personnel. She tried to break way but was captured, though it took the efforts of four guards to restrain her.

In her office, Lochley credited Sheridan with the quality of his drawing of Dureena – it was almost perfect. Sheridan did not know who she was and Lochley explained that Dureena was a petty thief who had come to Babylon 5 a few days ago. Sheridan observed that to have accumulated that many purses, he doubted that Dureena was a 'petty' thief. When Lochley said that Dureena was from Zander Prime, Sheridan was surprised – Zander Prime was a dead world, wiped out during the last Shadow War by the greatest Shadow weapon: The Death Cloud. When used in the Shadow War, this fearsome artefact had wiped out whole worlds using nuclear missiles that penetrated into a planet's core, destroying it from within.

Captain Lochley received a message on her link: An EarthForce vessel had arrived and the captain of that ship wanted to speak to Sheridan. Putting him on screen, it was another of the faces from Sheridan's drawings, one Captain Leonard Anderson, who asked Sheridan if the President had been looking for him. Sheridan replied that it appeared to be so. Upon meeting Sheridan personally, Anderson was happy that somebody would finally believe his dreams, though it was clear that the whole situation was a surprise to them both. Dureena was then brought in and upon seeing Sheridan took the opportunity to launch herself at the President, before being dragged off. The thief ranted and raved that her world had died and it was all Sheridan's fault.

While the thief, Anderson and Sheridan became acquainted, Garibaldi and Lochley discussed Sheridan's mental state in a meeting the President was clearly unaware of. Two of Sheridan's pictures had actually matched up with individuals who had arrived on Babylon 5 with mysterious tales of their own. As a result of this, Lochley was worried that Sheridan was acting out of some form of outside influence. Garibaldi told her that this might not be so far-fetched, as Sheridan's strange behaviour had begun when he had received an odd message from Delenn. The signal was corrupted but it could have contained subliminal information that had taken up residence inside Sheridan's mind. Lochley wondered if this was all part of



some plan to discredit the Alliance. Garibaldi told her that if Sheridan was right, then the two of them would need to be there for him. If Sheridan was wrong, then they would have to be ready to intervene.

President Sheridan questioned a manacled and restrained Dureena Nafeel. The thief blamed Sheridan for the destruction of her world and her race. Her people had been neutral in the whole conflict between the Vorlons and the Shadows; a request for aid from Sheridan and those fighting alongside him had been ignored. Sheridan told her that he had all but tortured himself after the war over whether he could have done more. The simple answer was that he had done all he could. The truth, according to Sheridan, was that even had they been able to act upon the message, there was nothing that the Army of Light possessed at that time which could have stopped the Shadows' prime weapon. He also told her that the Shadows, despite giving the orders, were not necessarily the ones who actually fired the prime weapon, going on to tell her of the Drakh. With that mentioned, Dureena remembered her vision and the form of Sheridan changing to that of the alien, a Drakh. He told her that he could give her a chance to strike back, to prevent another world from suffering the same fate as hers. On a different score, Captain Anderson was concerned about who the Drazi in the drawing was. Sheridan was not sure but they had spent enough time already. The Drazi could catch up later on. Anderson was also concerned about their firepower. He had his ship, the *Charon*, but they would need something bigger. In answer to this question, Sheridan had an idea.

The next morning Garibaldi called in to see Lochley; a friendly air between them unlike their earliest meetings five years before. Garibaldi asked where Sheridan was but Lochley did not know; both were expecting Sheridan to be here for a meeting. After doing a little bit of digging, Lochley was told that Sheridan was busy, a pre-recorded message saying that he was working and asking for whomever it was to leave a message for him. Garibaldi



told her that Sheridan knew all the ways in and out of the station. Lochley checked on the location of the *White Star*: It was still there but the EarthForce destroyer *Charon* had gone. Worried, Garibaldi announced that he wanted to get in touch with Samuel Drake.

At that very moment President Sheridan, aboard the destroyer *Charon*, was speaking with Samuel Drake. He informed the chief designer that security had been compromised and that enemy forces may try to send conflicting orders. Drake was not to acknowledge messages not transmitted on the particular frequency Sheridan was using. Closing the link, Sheridan asked Captain Anderson if his crew was happy with the course of action they had decided upon and whether the Captain himself was content. Anderson confessed that during the Earth Civil War he had been on Clark's side and he wanted to put things right. His crew felt the same. He felt that he had let Sheridan down once before; when the dream had come to Anderson and Sheridan had been waiting for him at Babylon 5, Captain Anderson knew what to do.

Arriving onboard the *Excalibur*, Sheridan introduced Samuel Drake to Captain Anderson and his crew. They were coming aboard to take up positions on the ship, which caused Drake no end of concern, muttering that they were not supposed to be here. The crew of the *Charon* started to integrate themselves with the Rangers currently on the ship, gaining familiarity with all of the systems.

An anxious Garibaldi was trying and failing to hail Drake. Garibaldi was convinced that Sheridan planned to steal the prototype, explaining to a Minbari Ranger that if Sheridan believed he was in the right, he would take them.

With many of the EarthForce officers integrated into the crews of both the *Excalibur* and her sister ship, the *Victory*, the mission was ready to proceed. After being forced to cut their way out of spacedock, both ships proceeded to Daltron VII. Upon arrival at their destination, Daltron

VII was nothing like it was supposed to be. Supposedly a lush world with clear skies and warm weather, analysis revealed that the atmosphere was hazardous to life and the upper atmosphere contained high quantities of ash and larger debris. In addition, the core of the planet was much colder than it should have been, effectively dead. There were also surface details that were not standard and Sheridan ordered the *Excalibur's* computer system to highlight these further. The surface of the world was covered in craters – whatever had happened was exactly the same as what had happened to Dureena's homeworld of Zander Prime. There were no life-forms and only one power source remained on

the surface, a Drazi distress beacon. Sheridan decided to go down to the surface to investigate, leaving Dureena for a moment to look at the dead world, a mirror of her own annihilated homeworld.

One rough shuttle ride later, Sheridan, Dureena and Anderson investigated the location around the distress signal. Sheridan recognised it as the location from his dream. Finding a burial mound, the group found that the Drazi whom they were supposed to meet was dead; it was his distress beacon they had found. Captain Anderson, having done some recent analysis, had never seen the Death Clouds, not having been involved in the Shadow War. When Sheridan confirmed that the attack on Daltron VII was by one of those weapons, Captain Anderson explained that the attack on this world had not occurred six years ago, during the final Shadow War. It had happened only a week ago....

The Drazi had only been dead a few days. Dureena, pulling out a knife, cut into the Drazi's corpse and pulled a data crystal from underneath its arm. She explained that the data crystal was hidden in the Drazi male's reproductive area, which did not sit well with Captain Anderson, who told her that the only thing of value on his person was his wristwatch. On the shuttle ride back up, Dureena expressed her concern that Sheridan might be wrong about the Shadows and their legacy. The President was forced to confess that his previous encounters with Shadowtech had gone badly every time.

Garibaldi arrived at the spacedock, and an apparently traumatised Samuel Drake explained how Sheridan had arrived there acting like a madman. Drake had thought his life was in danger. Garibaldi remembered the question Sheridan had asked him about Daltron VII and decided to follow him there. Drake wanted to go with Garibaldi, as he was responsible for the two destroyers. Daltron VII was now their target.

Captain Anderson managed to get a message through to his wife on Earth, courtesy of a video link. There were reports that Captain Anderson and the crew of the *Charon* had deserted. Anderson explained that these reports were not true and that he was simply working for a higher force. Anderson's daughter appeared on the screen, saying that she had had a nightmare in which she was chased by monsters. Anderson promised that he would keep the monsters away from her. Informed that the data crystal had been recovered from the Drazi's body, Anderson said goodbye to his wife and daughter.

The message on the crystal explained that the Drazi, Ni'im, had dreamed too, just like President Sheridan, Dureena Nafeel and Captain Anderson. When he arrived at Daltron VII, the Death Cloud was already in the process of destroying the planet. Ni'im sent a probe in and it graphically showed the impacts of the missiles on the surface of the doomed world. Sheridan asked Dureena if she wanted to leave, out of consideration for her past, but the thief found herself emotionally chained to the screen. Ni'im identified the weapon as a 'slayer of worlds', continuing to say that they had believed that all of this was gone after the Shadows had left. When the weapon had been taken away, Ni'im had followed it to a particular location. There had been too many alien ships for him to risk further investigation, so he had logged the co-ordinates and returned to Daltron VII to see if there was anyone still alive whom he could help. It was clear that Ni'im was not a normal Drazi, possessing a high level of thought for the welfare of others.

Alien ships appeared and were noticed by the *Victory*. They were Drakh raiders and they approached the two prototypes with caution. They sent a message in Interlac, querying the large unrecognised destroyers as to their identity. The two ships had no business in this area, the Drakh said. Dureena had an idea: Bluff the Drakh. This chicanery did not have time to work, as a powerful signal was sent to the Drakh raiders from outside the system. The Drakh ships held steady and Sheridan immediately had a bad feeling about the situation. Ordering battle stations, the Drakh ships

charged in to attack, launching attacks that only grazed the hull of the *Victory*. Impressed with the resilience of the ship, Captain Anderson ordered his ship to fire. First blood was his and the *Victory* took off after its second target.

Sheridan and the *Excalibur* followed the other raiders, closing in. Ahead of them was a dark object soaking up the light around it. It was like a black hole, but at the same time not a black hole. It was a null field, drawing everything in. There was not enough time to take all the raiders out before they reached the object, but the main gun had a chance. Charging it up and draining the majority of available power, the main gun destroyed the raiders. However, it meant that the ship would drift into the null field and whatever lay beyond it. After the ship moved through something like a tunnel or pathway in hyperspace, the co-ordinates matched up with those provided by Ni'im. The *Excalibur* emerged into a battle fleet of Drakh ships that turned to face it.

Onboard the *Victory*, Captain Anderson watched the null field even as the *Excalibur* emerged from it. Anderson ordered his ship hard to starboard to avoid a collision and the *Excalibur* was followed out of the null field by a swarm of Drakh ships firing upon it. The rear guns of the *Excalibur* worked hard trying to fend off its pursuers. Captain Anderson asked Sheridan what had happened. The President told him that the Drakh fleet was on the move. A small group of ships had been sent after them. Sheridan had a plan: Run like hell and hope that their ships were not jump-capable. Luckily Sheridan was proved correct and both the *Excalibur* and *Victory* jumped to hyperspace, catching the pursuers in the hyperspace shockwave. The main bulk of the Drakh fleet was already ahead of them, following the main hyperspace beacon. Sheridan ordered the *Excalibur* and *Victory* off the beacon to try and slip past the enemy. The enemy fleet would only be travelling as fast as their slowest ship and this was to Sheridan's advantage. Then Sheridan opened communications with Captain Lochley on Babylon 5.

Captain Lochley could not believe what Sheridan told her; a Drakh assault fleet was headed for Earth with a Shadow planet killer, a Death Cloud weapon. Even when Sheridan told her that Delenn had called in as many Alliance ships as she could and that a full-scale mobilisation of Earth's forces was needed, Lochley replied that she was not able to order a full-scale deployment and was unsure why this particular job should be down to her. President Sheridan insisted that Lochley would have to be more persuasive with her superiors, as EarthGov was still wary of him, given his actions during the Earth Civil War. Having been told that Anderson was considered AWOL, Lochley





was convinced that Sheridan was asking the impossible. Convinced he was asking the right person, Sheridan pleaded with her – he had seen what a Death Cloud could do! Sheridan did not even know if the Death Cloud could be stopped. Promising her support, Lochley closed the link to Sheridan and sat down. She requested a Gold Channel message to President Luchenko's office and was reminded that it was actually 3 a.m. back in Geneva.

Onboard the *White Star*, Garibaldi was told that a strange message had been sent through the ship's systems earlier on. Attention from this was diverted by a communication from Sheridan. Garibaldi was unconvinced of the idea that the Drakh were about to hit Earth, packing a Shadow planet killer. However, he admitted that if they were, the timing was perfect: The eve of the fifth anniversary of the Alliance. Sheridan was concerned over a possible leak and Garibaldi mentioned that Dureena was a member of the Thieves' Guild. Sheridan ignored this remark and told Garibaldi that the Drakh had recognised the *Victory* and the *Excalibur*. Garibaldi stated that this was impossible but Sheridan explained that someone must have told them via the message the Drakh had received before their skirmish... and Garibaldi realised that the timing was identical to that of the strange outgoing message from his *White Star*. The sound of a PPG warming up was heard close to Garibaldi's right ear and the former security chief informed Sheridan that he would have to call him back.

Drake was the traitor holding the PPG and Garibaldi challenged him. The Drakh had made Drake an offer and Drake openly admitted that he could not have cared less about the fate of Earth. Intimidating him, Garibaldi challenged him to fire and quickly; he warned Drake about the Rangers' ability to apply terror in ways that even Garibaldi could never dream up. When a nearby Ranger distracted Drake, Garibaldi was able to knock the PPG away. In no uncertain terms, Garibaldi told Drake that if answers were not forthcoming he would turn Drake over to the Rangers; Drake was left with the impression that would not be a fate that he should ever wish for.

Returning Sheridan's hastily interrupted message, Garibaldi explained that the Drakh were on their way to Earth to make a powerful statement: Destroying Earth in a show of force. The Drakh only had one planet killer, which was one piece of good news. If they could stop this one, there would be no repeat occurrence. Ready to jump to Earth space, Sheridan asked Garibaldi to take care of things in case the Death Cloud could not be stopped. He ordered the *Excalibur* and *Victory* to jump back to normal space.

Waiting for Sheridan was a deployment of Earth's fleet under the command of General Yuri Denisovitch, in command of the Omega-class destroyer *Hermes* and the rest of the task force. The General was quite unhappy, not wanting to admit that he had had alternate plans involving an evening at his dacha with some old black and white films. His belief that Sheridan was either overreacting or acting on bad intelligence, was shelved when multiple jump points opened close to Earth's moon and hundreds of Drakh cruisers came into view. Sheridan instructed General Denisovitch that the fleet was not their main concern, as Earth's defence grid was capable of dealing with them. The Death Cloud was the real objective and the true danger. The President went on, explaining that the *Excalibur* and *Victory* had the best chance of stopping the Death Cloud, so he ordered General Denisovitch to form a wedge of ships to punch through the Death Cloud's defences.

Joined by Minbari warcruisers, a Brakiri vessel and other ships, including an ageing Olympus-class corvette, the battle was joined. Starfighters manoeuvred in between giant vessels, dodging fire and hunting down their own smaller quarry. Rushing headlong into the fray, the *Excalibur* and the *Victory* opened up with their neutron lasers, the powerful energy beams slicing Drakh cruisers into chunks. The prototype destroyers passed through a wave of Drakh fighters, the stings of multiple impacts shaking the two vessels. Sheridan ordered the *Excalibur's* weapons to fire into the Death Cloud, not to damage it but to find out what was in there. Sure enough, some of the blasts punched all the way through the Death Cloud, but some hit a solid structure within it. Sheridan proclaimed that if there was something solid inside the Death Cloud, they could hit it. Scanning the Death Cloud, the *Excalibur's* enhanced sensor array was able to pierce its inky depths, something that had not been possible during the Shadow War.

As the scanners did their work the battle continued to rage. The Death Cloud was slowly expanding; it was now the size of the Earth and was getting larger. It was almost as though it was unfolding, spreading its arms in a deadly embrace.

The scanners finished their sweep, revealing a planet-sized grid of nodes and correcting segments. As Sheridan recalled David and Goliath, Dureena was somehow reminded of Galen's words to her, of picking the right target. Sheridan identified a major facility in the structure, which looked like a control centre. He wanted to hit it but Dureena argued against him. There was a point to her being here and her instincts told her that something else would be the control centre, something less obvious. The biggest jewels were never hidden in the safe, Dureena said. She pointed out a simple connector between two segments, which on closer examination was bristling with short-ranged weaponry.



Captain Anderson told Sheridan they had time to hit only one of the two targets. Sheridan went with Dureena's opinion and both ships entered the depths of the Death Cloud. With the *Victory's* rear weapons out of commission, Anderson recalled the promise he had made to his daughter. Speaking to Sheridan, he had an idea. The *Excalibur* would fire its main gun, then the *Victory* could use *its* main gun, the two ships covering one another. The *Excalibur* fired but the shot missed the target by a fraction. Noting this, the *Victory* went in and ramming speed was ordered. Sheridan tried to convince Captain Anderson to stop but the *Victory* had a job to do. Explosions rippled along the length of the prototype destroyer, the whole of the main forward section exploding. The ship was on fire, crumbling under the intense barrage it was receiving, but it managed to hold together long enough to reach its target.

Ramming the control centre, a vicious explosion rippled along the nodes on the Death Cloud's structure. The missiles, the planet killing weapons of the Death Cloud, began to fire off randomly and Sheridan ordered everyone to get out of the area. Fleeing, the *Excalibur* joined with other EarthForce ships attempting to escape the conflagration. All this time the Death Cloud was collapsing in on itself. The defending ships managed to escape and the Death Cloud started to blow itself apart, its planet-killing missiles now destroying chunks of itself and the closer Drakh and EarthForce craft.

There was no time for celebration, as an element of the Drakh fleet had reached Earth. With their main weapon destroyed, the Drakh ships entered the upper atmosphere, opening hatches on their sides as they did so. A black mist spread out in their wake like ripples on a pond. The Earth defence grid managed to hit one of the ships, leaving it to tumble down towards the ground, still spraying its cargo. Sheridan's head dropped in horror, as he knew what was

happening, as the black mist spread across the whole globe, the skies of a green and blue Earth turning a dirty shade of brown.

Watching this in his crystal ball, Galen was told that the Circle required his presence. Clearly they wanted answers to their questions. Galen did not know if he was going to be held accountable for the failure or for involving himself in the affairs of outsiders more than he should have done.

Back on Babylon 5, President Sheridan explained the situation to Garibaldi and Lochley. The ancient Romans had had a phrase: Poisoning the well. When they could not take an area by force of arms, they poisoned it in spite.

A biogenetic plague had been unleashed on the Earth. Earth was now completely quarantined, with no-one allowed in or out. Scientists there believed that the plague had been designed by the Shadows and by their reckoning would take five years to take effect. This delay was perhaps the only good thing about the situation, for it was unknown if the Drakh had had time to modify it to human biology or if they simply did not have the expertise to do so. Some people would be affected sooner rather than later. At the end of the five years, though, every human being on Earth would be dead.

Garibaldi lamented the fact that because the Shadows were so much farther ahead in technology than humankind, there seemed to be little chance of stopping the plague in five years. Sheridan agreed but had one idea. This plague had come to Earth from outside, so perhaps there was also a cure – out there, amongst the stars. Another race must have developed a cure, perhaps the other Ancients. They would have to be found. Sheridan outlined his plan, which he had already arranged with President Luchenko. The full resources of the Interstellar Alliance and the Rangers would be put to work. The *Excalibur* would be made available to function as a travelling research vessel. The Rangers would search every corner of space and the *Excalibur* would

follow them up. He recalled the legend of Excalibur: That it would return in the greatest hour of need. Perhaps this was it. Lochley asked about the chances of building more destroyers like the *Excalibur* and the *Victory*. However, the truth was that the Drakh had also hit the prototype spacedock, leaving the *Excalibur* as the only one of her type, for the immediate future at least.

Whilst Sheridan explained his plan further, Dureena was met by Galen just outside of customs on Babylon 5. Galen had arrived aboard his techno-mage pinnacle (a personalised spacecraft only used by the techno-mage order). A few words were exchanged and the two departed together, following an unknown agenda.

Sheridan declared to Lochley that they would accept any help they could get. What they did for the next five years would determine whether humanity lived or died. Failure was not an option.

The Fifth Anniversary

As the opening news broadcast states, the Interstellar Alliance has survived moderately well for its first five years. With the only major blip being the Telepath War, the Alliance has done a good job in ensuring the peaceful co-operation of its member worlds. Despite the absence of the Centauri, the Alliance has been accepted by most elements within known space as a largely benevolent organisation. The headquarters of the Alliance are still based on Minbar. The initial worries of the Earth Alliance that the Minbari would attempt to dominate the Interstellar Alliance have not proved to be true.

It is this occasion, a celebration of five years of relative peace, that the Drakh have chosen as their moment to strike. The timing coincides with the anniversary to teach the galaxy that whilst the Shadows may have gone, their legacy has not.

Captain Leonard Anderson

‘They’re either the Drakh or the weirdest-looking pizza delivery trucks I’ve ever seen.’

10th Level Human Officer (fleet) / 2nd Level Worker (blue collar)

Hit Points: 28

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +12/+7/+2

Special Qualities: Blue Collar, Branch Specialisation (fleet), Rallying Call (2/day), Way of Command

Saves: Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +7



Abilities: Str 13, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 15

Skills: Computer Use +10 (+12 spacecraft), Concentration +11, Diplomacy +7, Drive +5, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (astrophysics) +15, Knowledge (military) +8, Listen +7, Medical +5, Pilot +7 (+9 spacecraft), Profession (steward) +3, Sense Motive +8, Spot +9, Technical (electronics) +7 (+9 spacecraft), Technical (space travel) +11 (+13 spacecraft)

Feats: Data Access, First Contact Protocol, Nerves of Steel, Skill Focus (Knowledge (astrophysics)), Skill Focus (Technical (space travel)), Spacecraft Proficiency, Veteran Spacehand

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Amongst his skills, Leonard Anderson counts himself as a train buff, a banjo player and the possessor of a doctorate in astrophysics. None of these diminish the hard life that Anderson has had or the sheer effort puts into everything he does.

As a child, Anderson grew to love the old electric trains that ran between New Jersey and Philadelphia. His father, a conductor on that service, allowed his son to ride the train on occasion, the young boy loving the feel of machinery and the sensation of speed. Nothing prepared Anderson for the loss of his parents, whom he loved so much, when he was fourteen years of age. Life gave him a severe kicking and the young Anderson found out that society and life in general were cruel and unfair. Without family that he felt he could call on, Anderson went to New York in the self-assured belief he could manage on his own. A life of crime followed by drink, drugs, women and a sorry and untimely end was averted by Anderson getting a job as a shiphand on an old transport called the *City of Birmingham* traversing the Sol system. Sadly, this was an inflated title for someone whose main concern was loading cargo, cleaning out garbage and undertaking the work that other crewmembers took for granted. Still, it gave Anderson an honest opportunity and he worked hard, progressing to become a steward until he met an Earth Alliance senator named Jeshke. Anderson’s frank argument with the senator left the young steward convinced that he would be arrested

when the *City of Birmingham* got back to port. Instead, the senator had been impressed with Anderson's plain speaking and rewarded the youngster with a scholarship, paid in full by EarthForce. Anderson repaid this debt by becoming a model officer, achieving his captaincy within a decade. He snubbed an offer to rise higher; as a youngster, all he had wanted to do was ride a train and the *Charon* – the Omega-class destroyer he finally commanded – was 'one hell of a train.'

Captain Anderson married his wife Lynne and had a daughter named Sarah. It was when his only child, the apple of his eye, was a couple of years old that Captain Anderson made a choice. There was dissension in the ranks of EarthForce and President Clark had declared martial law. Even though he could appreciate the arguments of General Hague, Major Ryan and John Sheridan, he stayed loyal to EarthForce. In time Captain Anderson would realise that he had made the wrong choice but there was nothing that he could do. When John Sheridan came calling six years later, Captain Anderson knew what he had to do. He had made his daughter a promise that he would die to keep – he would keep the monsters away from her, at any cost.

Roleplaying with Anderson

As Leonard Anderson dies in *A Call to Arms*, he has little effect during the *Crusade* series beyond the record of his actions. However, members of his crew who have formerly served onboard the *Charon* have a loyalty to him and one another that can be an excellent binding force for those who remain as its skeleton crew or off to other commands. For the members of his crew, Captain Anderson was an excellent captain and he cared about his crew as if they were his family. If the Player Characters are members of his crew they will have met him at least once, as Captain Anderson spends at least a few minutes in conversation with everyone under his charge.

In campaigns that precede *A Call to Arms*, Captain Anderson can prove to be a valuable EarthForce contact. During the Clark administration, Leonard Anderson's ship was an oasis of sanity in a military riven with dissent. EarthForce characters caught between duty and morality in this time may well gain a powerful, if reluctant, ally in Leonard Anderson, as he too was caught between loyalties.



Samuel Drake

'After three months of trying, Mr Garibaldi suggested that we declare victory and move on.'

9th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 14

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +5 ranged

Special Qualities: Peripheral Studies (engineering), Primary Area of Study (structural engineering), Use Alien Artefact

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +8

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 9

Skills: Appraise +6, Bluff +3, Computer Use +15, Concentration +12, Hide +5, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (alien languages) +10, Knowledge (alien life) +10, Knowledge (astrophysics) +15, Knowledge (structural engineering) +22, Move Silently +5, Technical (electronics) +18, Technical (engineering) +20, Technical (mechanical) +18, Technical (space travel) +18

Feats: Skill Focus (Knowledge (structural engineering)), Skill Focus (Technical (electronics)), Skill Focus (Technical (engineering)), Skill Focus (Technical (mechanical)), Skill Focus (Technical (space travel))

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Graduating second in his class of 475 would be impressive for any student in the Earth Alliance – but not for Samuel Drake, who viewed the time he spent at the Martian University of Technology to be a waste. On Earth, graduating at a Mars college with top honours is considered equivalent to achieving a passing grade at a community college in a domestic backwater.

Samuel Drake did not have life easy. His father, Morton Drake, was addicted to gambling and accumulated debts many times larger than his salary as a construction engineer. This downward spiral ultimately led Morton to take his own life. Almost three years to the day after the death of his father, Drake's mother died from silicosis, a medical condition which many suspected had been brought on by Martian dust in the air supply. Cheap filters would have allowed minute particles of matter to get through but no Earth corporation would admit liability or that there actually was a problem.

Shaped by his experiences, Samuel Drake became a vocal opponent of Earth's attitude to Mars. He never took chances, though, preferring precision over randomness in his actions. This harmed his growth and his career, for without taking risks he would never reach his potential. Drake did not care, as he still had his father's dice to remind him that gambling never paid off in the long run.

Drake got a chance to act on his views in a way that he would never have expected. An individual he met in a bar, seemingly by chance, offered Samuel Drake a chance to strike at Earth for all the denials and barriers that had been put in his way. Very few actual betrayals of his workmates would be necessary on his part, which made it all the easier for him to accept. It was only afterwards that Drake realised he had gambled on a level that even his father would not have risked. The agreement he had made was with the Drakh.

Roleplaying with Drake

Samuel Drake is an absolute perfectionist, a fact that will not go unnoticed by Player Characters. His work is his primary focus, more so than a personal life. He will seem to warm to any Player Characters who are Mars-born or have a dislike of Earth but he secretly follows his own agenda. After *A Call to Arms*, Samuel Drake is imprisoned and will not have any relationship with the Player Characters unless they wish to interrogate him. The Drakh may be interested in Samuel Drake, to eliminate him on the off chance he knows something damaging.

Alternatively, the Player Characters may wind up incarcerated in the same facility as Drake. If this proves to be the case, Drake could be a valuable if untrustworthy ally in any escape attempt. After all, his technical knowledge is unparalleled even if his loyalty is suspect.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The attack on the spacedock in which the *Excalibur* and *Victory* were built is highlighted but not explained. It is possible that a civilian contractor assigned to the project is present at the spacedock during the attack, perhaps departing after delivering a cargo hold full

of supplies. This could be an excellent starting point for a group of Player Characters to see the destructive power of the Drakh firsthand. Alternately, a civilian ship can be in near-Earth orbit and its crewmembers can see the battle for themselves.

- 5 Daltron VII has suffered total annihilation but amid the burning buildings and wreckage there may be artefacts that IPX would wish to examine. It may also be possible that one of the missiles from the Death Cloud failed to ignite or achieve enough speed to punch through the crust of the world. A recovered Shadow missile, whether from here or from the destroyed Death Cloud above Earth, would be a great boon for EarthForce to study. On the other hand, should such an item fall into the hands of a doomsday cult, the potential for terror could be tremendous. Needless to say, this could involve the Rangers tracking down such an item, possibly forming the basis for a whole campaign.

- 5 The loss of half of the *Charon's* crew in the *Victory's* sacrifice can be a powerful motivating factor and indirectly a chance at promotion for those so inclined. This is of course assuming that the *Charon*, which carried Sheridan and Captain Anderson to the spacedocks, has not been destroyed by the Drakh. It would not be out of the realms of possibility for Captain Anderson to leave a skeleton crew aboard or to lock the vessel down in a safe location, with instructions transmitted to EarthForce to retrieve it. Neither possibility is specifically excluded in the show. For a group of characters in a traditional *Babylon 5* campaign, this can give them a ready-made command vessel, as the majority of the *Charon's* command crew were on the doomed *Victory*, including Captain Anderson and his first officer.

War Zone

Probable Start Date: January 1st, 2267

A looped ISN news broadcast displays the same information it has done for the last six hours. Earth has been quarantined due to its biosphere being poisoned by the Drakh, an alien race hell-bent on revenge against humanity. As they left, their prime weapon destroyed, the Drakh had unleashed a retributive plague upon the Earth, condemning her citizens to an uncertain fate in nothing more than an act of sheer spite.

Lieutenant Matheson, a tall man of Oriental appearance, was attempting to take the heat out of a riot regarding this very issue. He tried to intervene, accusing the protestors of being mutineers. His words fell on deaf ears. The majority of the protestors were Mars-born and they did not want to go to Earth and risk the fate of those who were living there. The fight turned on Lieutenant Matheson whilst the chief

protestor and his followers ducked out. Fortune was not with them, for they ran straight into two EarthForce soldiers, accompanied by the captain of the very ship that they were on: Matthew Gideon. When the protestor claimed that the three of them had to stop all of the protestors, including him, Gideon's reply was very pointed: All he had to stop was him, the most vocal protestor.

Taking the challenge on, the chief protestor drew a hidden wrench and tried to attack Gideon but the Captain was ready. Capitalising on the protestor's wild swing, Gideon closed in and dispatched the chief protestor with brutal efficiency. Far more gracious than he could have been, Gideon ordered the protestors back to work, assuring them that this incident would not appear on their records if they did as he instructed. Upon hearing the voice of both authority and reason, the protestors dissipated, returning to work in a greatly subdued manner.

The huge survey ship on which they travelled jumped back into normal space, the red haze of hyperspace replaced by familiar patterns of stars. Ahead of them lay an Earth that had a dark tinge to its skies. Between them and the world of their origin were hundreds of ships, mostly human but some alien, all in pieces, many with plasma fires still burning. A shattered Starfury cockpit drifted past a nearby porthole, making the individual cost of this attack clear to a watching Gideon and Matheson.

Gideon was watching a broadcast from ISN, as one of the chief anchorwomen announced the death toll of the recent assault. With between six and seven thousand dead, President Luchenko had called for a week of mourning. Lieutenant Matheson entered Gideon's quarters and they began to discuss the situation on Earth. Gideon professed his opinion that the Earth Alliance had been derailed and did not know what to do. Trying to offer some small comfort, Matheson informed Gideon that one of the Drakh ships was being pursued from the scene of the battle. Rather than making Gideon feel better, it made him feel worse; had he been on a destroyer rather than an Explorer ship, he could have got here in time to contribute to the defence of Earth. When asked about the chief protestor, Ensign James, Gideon admitted that he took no joy in putting the young crewmember down. Whilst Gideon did not want it appearing on the ensign's records, Matheson warned Gideon that the ensign's father would not see it that way, being a high-ranking official on Mars. To compound Gideon's irritation at this his link chimed again, saying that they were wanted on Mars. Or more precisely, *he* was wanted on Mars.

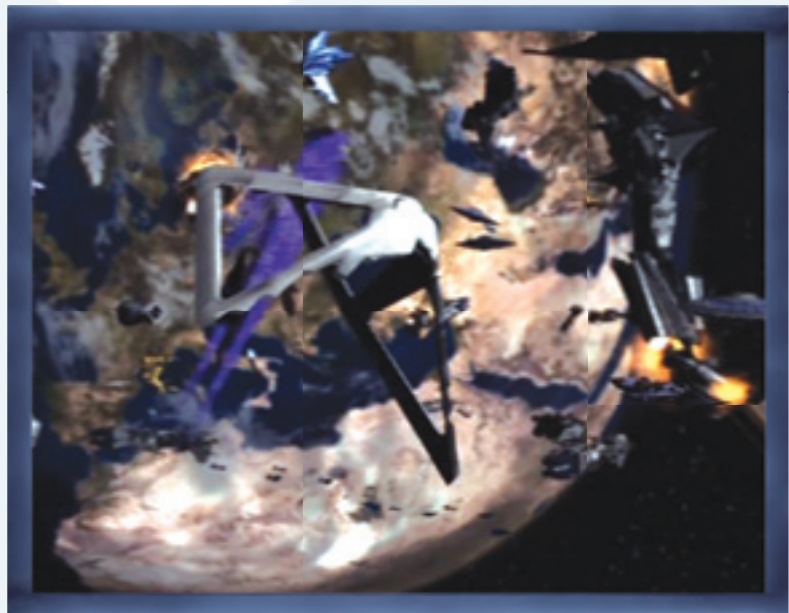
A dozen light years away from Earth, a vicious firefight was in progress, the target a fleeing Drakh ship. An EarthForce destroyer was in pursuit but heavily damaged, its fragmented and

fiery bow testimony to the potency of Drakh firepower. The captain of the destroyer, knowing that his ship was falling apart, ordered for a distress beacon to be released in the hope that another EarthForce vessel could finish the job he started. The beacon was barely away before the destroyer broke apart in a hail of fire and shrapnel. The damaged Drakh craft, spiralling out of control, fell towards a nearby planetoid, its hull glowing red-hot with the intense heat as it entered the atmosphere.

At an expedition site on Ceti IV, Max Eilerson was hard at work chipping away at a stone face once carved into a wall many storeys high. Focusing on his work, for both his own satisfaction and that of his employer IPX, he became aware of a dull grey streak in the sky at the same time that his link chimed, informing him of exactly what he was seeing. The ship crashed into the surface but without the telltale signs of a great explosion signifying the vaporisation of the craft. Eilerson instructed his assistant Sam, on the other end of the link, to send a shuttle pilot out to have a look, as they were headed that way in a few days.

A bright maelstrom of energy signalled the arrival of Gideon's ship in Mars orbit. After travelling down to the surface, Gideon was informed that he would be meeting an Earth Alliance senator named McQuate. Gideon was glad, for he feared that he had been dragged here to answer for his handling of Ensign James; knowing political realities, the trivial often got in the way of the important.

Senator McQuate was a tall man with a deep voice and thick accent. His white hair belied his age but it was apparent that McQuate was a political animal and born survivor. He introduced Mr Ames, a security liaison, and proceeded to confirm what Gideon knew of the situation on Earth. All hell had broken loose there, he explained, in every sense of the word. He showed Gideon footage of rioting, terrorist



attacks, protests, even the rise of religious groups called 'death cults'. All of this had so far been kept out of the media.

Senator McQuate also confidently stated that they had five years to cure the plague, though Mr Ames intervened by saying that it was only an estimate. Neither of them disagreed about the deadly reality of the Drakh Plague and indicating the red skies around them, Senator McQuate said that he could not imagine Earth becoming a dead world like Mars. They confided in Gideon a belief that Earth's scientists had no chance of finding a cure to the plague on their own, and that help had to come from outside. It might be in the hands of an alien race or buried in a lost underground city – it could be anywhere. To find the cure out there in the stars, they would need the right ship and the right captain. They had the ship: The *Excalibur*. They needed the best captain. With his experience with Explorer-class vessels, surveying alien worlds and civilisations, Matthew Gideon was clearly the best choice.

When Gideon asked if he could pick his own crew, the response was not favourable, as Mr Ames explained that this role was a political assignment. Senator McQuate did not care if Gideon turned the universe upside down as long as the job got done. He chose not to reveal that one of the compromises had been the selection of Gideon himself, by order of the true owner of the *Excalibur*, President John Sheridan of the Interstellar Alliance.

On Ceti IV, a lone shuttle passed over the suspected crash site. The pilot, going by the name of Jenson, confirmed on his radio to Eilerson that it was indeed a ship. As if on cue, dark individuals swarmed out of wrecked ship and began firing on the shuttle. Despite attempting to throw off their aim, the pilot's efforts were wasted as the weapons fire converged, blowing the shuttle apart.

Sitting in a tent listening to the message that the shuttle pilot had recorded, Eilerson was troubled. He was not happy to be told that the atmosphere was too ionised to allow a signal through, based on the equipment they had there. Eilerson and Trace Miller, the other shuttle pilot, debated the best course of action. Trace stated that everyone else should move out on foot and hide. He would take the last shuttle up above the planet's atmosphere and send a signal that IPX, their employer, could hopefully receive and answer. It was a worthwhile risk.

Meeting his science team on Mars in a government office, Gideon was told that he would interact with the team through his chief science officer, who was just entering the room. The newcomer, Dr Sarah Chambers, was irate that she had been waiting for over a day now and had not been told what was going on or even who her team members were. As Senator McQuate and an aide made



themselves scarce, Gideon filled her in on what little he knew. Dr Chambers pleaded to be allowed to go home to Earth because of family commitments, despite the risk of contracting the plague, but was turned down.

A commotion in the corridor outside disturbed this exchange. Outside, a tanned female alien with dark black hair and near-human features was being forcibly dragged away by several security guards. As Gideon stepped out of the room, Dureena locked eyes on him and shouted at the top of her voice that she was supposed to be on his team. Intrigued, Gideon turned to Senator McQuate and told him that he wanted to speak to her. He also told Senator McQuate that he had chosen Lieutenant Matheson as his first officer onboard the *Excalibur*. McQuate's complaint about Matheson being a telepath was swept aside as Gideon made his first command decision.

Meeting later on with Dureena and Senator McQuate, it was apparent that the presence of Dureena onboard the *Excalibur* would cause real political problems: By her own admission, Dureena was a thief. Her world was dead, Dureena's words making Gideon think about Earth and the fate that had befallen it. Senator McQuate was quite vocal in opposing her being anywhere near the *Excalibur* but Gideon was determined to have her aboard, leaving the Senator with little choice but to accept Gideon's wishes, at least for now.

Later, safely onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon introduced Dr Sarah Chambers and Dureena to Lieutenant Matheson. As Dr Chambers was escorted to her quarters to get settled in, Matheson confided in Gideon that he was surprised that he had been selected as first officer. Telling him that it was not a problem, Gideon hoped he had managed to gloss over the issue. Dureena then announced that another crewmember was on the way and would show up in his own time, to the general confusion of her audience.

Gideon had barely settled into the captain's chair on the bridge when Matheson asked again about his appointment. Gideon told Matheson that ambiguity was the source of many problems: Lieutenant Matheson was, in Gideon's opinion, the best officer he had ever served with and thus there was no ambiguity. As the *Excalibur* jumped to hyperspace to begin her shakedown cruise, no-one was aware of a strange black craft with a triangular profile following at a respectable distance.

In a shuttle high above the dusky orb that was Ceti IV, Trace Miller continued to broadcast a distress call. Whether corners had been cut in less vital areas, meaning that the communications array on the shuttle was sub-standard, or IPX simply was not listening, he was unable to ascertain. What was apparent was that without aid they were alone. Then salvation came unexpectedly, as the shuttle's instruments locating an EarthForce distress beacon nearby. Guessing that the power output and transmission range would be greater than what was fitted to his shuttle, Trace punched in a new course, thoughts of jury-rigging the distress beacon at the forefront of his mind.

Powering through hyperspace, just four hours away from the testing ground, the *Excalibur* received a message from Senator McQuate back on Mars. Ducking into a meeting room to watch the message in private, Gideon learned that the pursuit of the Drakh ship two days ago had resulted in the loss of the EarthForce destroyer, with the targeted ship forced down onto the surface of Ceti IV. McQuate also revealed that the only reason they knew about this was that an IPX expedition on the planet had managed to hotwire the distress beacon that the EarthForce destroyer had released before it was taken out.

As Gideon turned to leave, a second message began, with a strange yet familiar voice from his past. The voice greeted

him by familiarly addressing the captain as Matthew, before going on to profess that help would be offered when it was needed. When a bemused Gideon tried to learn more from the mysterious voice, it simply said that the speaker should be expected when he was seen. With that, the strange voice was gone, leaving Gideon with more questions than answers. Shortly afterward, in a transport tube heading to the hangar bays, Gideon and Matheson conferred about the strange message. Gideon asked Matheson to investigate, before heading towards the nearest shuttle.

Nestled up against a stony crag, Trace focused his binoculars on an alarming sight. Descending into the underground city, he passed on the unhappy news. Drakh warriors, dozens of them, had emerged from the wrecked ship and were converging on the hiding place that the IPX survey team had gone to. It was not apparent how they knew the team's location, whether the humans' communications had been monitored or there was some alien ability the Drakh possessed that allowed them to find the team, but either way trouble was coming. Trace was well aware that the Drakh had significantly more firepower than the survey team could hope to defend against.

With Max Eilerson complaining about the lost revenue from the thousands of patents he could have exploited, they were hailed by forces from the *Excalibur*. After a brief exchange between Eilerson and Gideon, the archaeologist revealed that Drakh forces were advancing on his position. Gideon, in a small flotilla of ships on approach to the underground city, spied the Drakh warriors, who had reached a cliffside path that led directly into the city. His order to the supporting Thunderbolt escort was simple: To clear them a path. The Drakh soldiers did not stand a chance as three EarthForce fighters unleashed their weaponry on the side of the cliff, sending both rocks and Drakh warriors plummeting.



Hearing about the assault, the command presence onboard the downed Drakh ship fell into a state of genuine panic. Councillor La'shan, his title betraying an intellect and skill at diplomacy greater than that of a mere ship's captain, conversed with a Drakh fleet that was close by, calling on them to render aid to him and his soldiers. 'Be at peace,' the voice on the line instructed him, as a taskforce of Drakh ships punched through hyperspace at top speed to retrieve La'shan and neutralise the threat posed by the *Excalibur*.

The EarthForce shuttles that had accompanied Captain Gideon down to the surface were filling up rapidly with the IPX employees and as much equipment as they could carry. A short distance away at the edge of the underground city, Max Eilerson, relieved at the arrival of an EarthForce presence, tried to greet Gideon but had his pleasantries swept aside.



Gideon was more concerned with the downed Drakh ship and the answers that it could provide. This was not a concern for Eilerson, who was displeased when Trace Miller, his shuttle pilot, offered his services to Gideon. Eilerson tried to divert Gideon by telling him that the Drakh were on their way to Ceti IV; he knew this because he had intercepted a recent communication from the downed Drakh ship. Eilerson explained that he had a knack with linguistics; He had translated enough of the former inhabitants' language to enable him to get the lights working in the underground city. However, Gideon announced that they were not leaving yet. He planned to investigate the crash site and so Eilerson was required, his recently proclaimed linguistics skills making his presence essential.

Searchlights and torches swept the darkness but there were no initial signs of any survivors. Despite their alertness, a lone Drakh figure on patrol spotted the search team and shot a soldier in a rearguard position in the head with a plasma-based weapon. Even as the soldier hit the floor, the rest of the team dived into cover, as more Drakh appeared and a vicious struggle ensued. Pinned down, the team was only saved when Dureena, using the darkness as cover, planted a small explosive device behind the Drakh soldiers, scattering them.

The Drakh fleet arrived from hyperspace and Matheson, onboard the *Excalibur*, warned Gideon about the new arrivals. Considering his options, Gideon told the rest of the search team to stay in position, because the Drakh soldiers they had run into must have been protecting something or someone. He turned to leave, taking Trace up on an offer of a shuttle ride up to the *Excalibur*. As they walked through the ship towards the exit, a Drakh soldier silently stepped out of the shadows, aiming his weapon directly at

Gideon's back. As he prepared to fire the Drakh was abruptly wrapped in strands of yellow energy, causing the alien to crumple unceremoniously to the floor. Spinning around, having heard the energy discharge, Gideon spied a hooded man standing behind the body of the fallen Drakh. With the same voice as the message earlier, the figure assured Gideon that he would be there when he was needed, before fading away. As Gideon left, the hooded man incapacitated another Drakh soldier that was following the search team.

Up above Ceti IV, the battle was in full swing. Gideon, safely onboard the *Excalibur* due to Trace's skilled piloting, commanded the battle with confidence and direction. Interceptor fire from the *Excalibur's* batteries took out incoming Drakh fighters as Matheson watched the battle with a cool, controlled fury, visible to no-one unless they looked into his eyes.

Down at the crash site, Gideon's suspicions proved to be well-founded, for behind the bulkhead the search team found a solitary individual identified as the Drakh captain. Enthused that they had found the reason for the armed presence onboard, Dureena spied the hooded man and recognised him as the techno-mage Galen, whom she had met before. The shrouded techno-mage walked off into the superstructure of the ship and disappeared.

The battle above Ceti IV was going well. Despite some damage being taken by the *Excalibur*, it was proving itself to be a capable ship. All of the Drakh ships had been destroyed save one; clearly the Drakh forces had not been expecting something as advanced as a ship built with human, Minbari and Vorlon technologies. With the final cruiser on approach, the *Excalibur* powered up its main weapon, a devastating beam issuing from the wingtips of the great ship and converging at the front of the *Excalibur*. This combined, focused energy blasted out, a thick beam of pale green energy that vaporised the final assailant. Sitting back, Captain Gideon acknowledged that the job was done. Upon hearing that the Drakh captain had been retrieved, Gideon refused to gloat about the success, simply stating that the first day had gone well.

In a secure holding cell in the *Excalibur's* brig, the interrogation of Councillor La'shan was not going well. Although Max Eilerson was able to translate to some degree, the Drakh offered nothing until Gideon mentioned in passing that La'shan was to be sent to Earth for further questioning. Realising that the Drakh understood him, Gideon made it plain that La'shan would suffer the same fate as everyone back on Earth unless a cure could be found.

The Drakh's retort was swift. 'When your world is gone, who will support you? Who will you serve? Who will you be?' Gideon left Eilerson to continue the grilling, wanting nothing more than to introduce that same Drakh's head to a nearby wall. Outside the holding cell, Gideon bumped into Lieutenant Matheson. The Captain announced that he wanted both Trace Miller and Max Eilerson, for all his irritating faults, assigned to the mission. Initially unsure, Matheson nevertheless told Gideon a most unexpected piece of news: The source of the mysterious second message was a region of space where Gideon had been lost, years before.

In her quarters onboard the *Excalibur*, Dr Sarah Chambers dictated a heartfelt but difficult note to her sister. The fact that their mother had asked Sarah to take care of her younger sister was clearly weighing on her mind and she promised to see her niece start school. Privately she was scared that she would never see them again, having to keep that knowledge and concern secret. Sending the message, Dr Chambers wandered over to the porthole in her cabin, looking out at the stars, alone with her thoughts and worries.

On a planetoid in the same region of space in which Gideon had drifted nine years before, Galen waited by a slowly dying campfire for Gideon to show himself. Eventually the captain of the *Excalibur* made his somewhat cautious appearance, warily taking a seat on a rock opposite his mysterious supporter. Gideon remembered him from the past, when he had been lost and then saved by this mysterious benefactor – a techno-mage.

Volunteering the information that he had been forced to leave the techno-mage order because he could not avoid helping others, Galen wanted some questions answered. His questions about Gideon's motives and about how far he was willing to go to find a cure to the Drakh Plague, were to be expected. Finally, Galen asked his most important questions: 'Who do you serve?' and 'Who do you trust?' It was the second time Gideon had heard one of those questions that day and he considered his answer carefully. After a while he was forced to admit that he had no proper answer. Only then did Galen lower his hood, measuring his words carefully, as if they had power by themselves. Galen told Gideon that he would go with them.

The State of Earth

It is impossible to overestimate the devastating effect that the Drakh Plague has had on civilisation back on Earth. For the first few months, covered up to a great extent by the media, society totally crumbles. Looting, rioting and arson are commonplace. Public utilities are destroyed and law enforcement officials are attacked – even though they understand the threat that the protesters are under, for like every other man, woman and child, they are under

the same threat themselves. The pained efforts of President Luchenko do manage to stabilise the situation back home but it is apparent to any political or social commentator that Earth has many problems, even ignoring the five-year deadline imposed on them by the Drakh Plague.

While Player Characters are unlikely to experience this firsthand, it is highly probable that they, like Sarah Chambers, will have family members or friends back on Earth. Even President John Sheridan and Entil'zha DeLenn have their good friend Stephen Franklin trapped on Earth, a victim of the plague. Such a motivation can help link a character into a *Crusade* game or campaign without the association feeling contrived and influence the characters to become active participants in the search for a cure.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 Above Earth there are many damaged ships, some with crewmembers trapped in sealed spaces or bulkheads with oxygen supplies running low. There is a dire need for those who have abilities in starship maintenance and recovery in the aftermath of the battle. Damaged starships that are in poor orbits may need towing away from the Earth, as the last thing that the polluted Earth needs is a hailstorm of starship fragments tumbling out of the skies.
- 5 In contrast to the above, those ships that are in good shape may be required to pursue the fleeing Drakh forces in the hope of capturing a Drakh vessel in one piece. Whilst recovery of prisoners to blame is one thing, of more long-term use will be the recovery of Drakh ships which may have clues to about the plague.



5 For Player Characters with a scientific bent, an excellent introduction to the *Crusade* era is for them to be working for Max Eilerson on Ceti IV. Many unnamed members of the science teams are seen boarding the *Excalibur's* shuttles, fleeing before the Drakh flotilla arrives. Scientist characters have a greater usefulness in a campaign set in the *Crusade* timeline, for their skills above all others are necessary to develop a cure to the Drakh Plague. They would be employed by IPX but possibly seconded to the *Excalibur*. In such cases they, like Max Eilerson, are expected to look out for the interests of IPX first and the needs of Earth second.



Racing the Night

Probable Start Date: February 24th

In his quarters on the *Excalibur*, Gideon was fast asleep, his dormant mind drifting back to a previous meeting with several alien ambassadors. An EarthForce officer, a reasonable military man called Miller holding the rank of general, was trying and failing to convince the other ambassadors that Matthew Gideon was the right man to captain the *Excalibur*. The Drazi ambassador was well aware of Gideon's reputation and the fact that Gideon had beaten a Drazi captain at cards. The Brakiri ambassador was more conciliatory, wanting reassurance that the passage of the *Excalibur* through their area of space would not lead to an incident. Attempting to reassure them, General Miller explained that Captain Gideon had been chosen personally by President Sheridan to lead the mission. Even though Sheridan was the head of the Interstellar Alliance and had provided the Earth Alliance with the *Excalibur*, the Drazi insisted that their approval was still needed.

The Drazi offered Gideon a wager and the captain of the *Excalibur* accepted it. Gideon would be allowed access to Drazi space for the first four years of the Drakh Plague's duration. In the fifth year, he would agree to personally destroy any ship attempting to leave Earth, to make sure the Drakh Plague was contained. The fact that Gideon agreed to the wager did not sit at all well with General Miller.

The alien city through which Gideon soared on a strange transport, an hour or so after he had awoken from his dream, was unlike any other he had seen. The buildings were tall and impressive, and the city appeared remarkably well maintained, but there were no signs of life. Gideon had remarked previously into his personal log that he felt the city was watching him.

Underneath Gideon's flight path, an EarthForce scientist was on his knees underneath a small archway, bending down to open his toolbox. With Gideon now long gone, a shadow appeared behind the scientist, who fell back before it panic. From the shape that cast a shadow over him, a laser beam emerged, slicing the scientist's chest open.

Entering a dusty, shadowy chamber on this now dead world, Gideon remarked to a focused Max Eilerson that the archaeologist was still working on the same hieroglyph as he had been the night before. Stressing the importance of patience to Gideon, Eilerson explained that his analysis had shown that the entire chamber contained scientific formulae and equations all over the walls. One described a new way to create and conserve energy; another was for a new engineering principle; another for a new type of alloy. All of them only contained the first part of the equation and it was this that was driving Eilerson crazy. Gideon admonished him, saying that finding a cure was more important than any distractions.

Taking this as a challenge, Eilerson launched into his standard speech about how this mission could be of additional benefit to Earth and that there was nothing wrong with returning to Earth as the saviour of mankind accompanied by several unique patents to make them all rich. Gideon, however, was having none of it, focused as he was on the chief profile of their mission. Eilerson reinforced that despite being Mars-born, he still wanted to find a cure: 'Good business is good for everyone. Out of calamity comes opportunity. But corporations go on, through good times and bad.'

Gideon moved on to spend some time with Dr Chambers, who showed him some scientific findings that she had taken from the very ground beneath them. It was puzzling,

because in the soil beneath them she had found 30 different types of DNA samples. Gideon knew this meant that many others had visited this world – indeed, the very chamber they were in – but could not understand why the world was uncorrupted and the city still standing. Any alien visitors would have stripped the place bare in a quest for knowledge, resources or simple profit.

Alien visitors had indeed been here, as the DNA evidence proved. Dr Chambers did not know why either but wondered why the hieroglyphs that had entranced Eilerson were on clear display. All she was sure of was that the planet had been deserted for a thousand years, the inhabitants having vanished overnight. Something cataclysmic had happened here but there were no bodies to prove what had actually happened. Dr Chambers agreed with Gideon's wish that Galen, his techno-mage ally, had been with them to offer assistance but Gideon had an theory for why his enigmatic friend was absent: Galen had a habit of appearing when you wanted him least and needed him most.

Elsewhere, beneath the surface of the alien city, Dureena crawled through metal tunnels not more than three feet in diameter. Exploring in the dark places was her speciality; she had uncovered the remains of alien bodies in the tunnel, belonging to more than one race. Light punctured the dust of the old tunnel until a section of it gave way, almost causing her to fall through the gap. It was lucky that she did not, for beneath her was a huge chamber with a power source shining as brightly as a sun. Clearly the power source had to be feeding something but there was no indication as to what. Dureena's link chimed and Gideon instructed her to return back to the surface, as one of the scientists had been murdered. She filed what she had seen her in the back of her mind for later discussion.



A blanket was laid over the fallen explorer. Dr Chambers told Gideon that the scientist's internal organs had been removed. When Gideon confronted Eilerson, who had given him a report stating that this world was uninhabited, all the archaeologist could do was blame Dr Chambers and the data with which she had provided him. The situation was momentarily defused by Gideon's link calling him to attention. Movement had been spotted, headed in their direction.

Looking around wildly, Gideon saw some disc-shaped objects moving several hundred yards away and grabbed the sentry who was closest, pulling him out of sight. Clearly on some sort of search pattern, the discs were moving through the city methodically and Gideon was not happy about risking the lives of everyone down here. He told Max Eilerson to get everyone aboard the shuttle; he himself absconded to buy the shuttle some time.

Taking the alien speeder they had found, Gideon gained the attention of the alien craft, which began to chase him through the skyscrapers of the city. Though Gideon took the speeder on an evasive path, the pursuers were relentless. Gideon realised that he could not lose them easily, if at all. Spying a tunnel up ahead in a vast building, he flew his speeder into it, one of the following craft colliding with a wall and exploding. Coming out of the superstructure, he put the speeder into a power dive, hoping to lose any of the ships that were behind the one that had exploded. He was out of luck, as they were waiting for him. One of them fired, the laser blast glancing off his speeder, rocking it and forcing him to hold on for dear life.

As the alien ships closed in for the kill, Gideon spied a ship coming down for him. It passed over him, scooping him up as the now-unmanned speeder and several pursuers ran straight into a solid wall. The black angular ship soared skywards, up and away from the alien city. Galen professed to be insulted by Gideon's words, saying that he was lucky that the techno-mage did not hold the grudge. Galen's ship touched down in the hangar deck, where Lieutenant Matheson was already waiting for his commanding officer. He informed Gideon and Galen as they boarded a bullet car that everyone was safe and that all activity down on the planet had stopped. Gideon turned to ask Galen for his thoughts. The techno-mage retorted that he was unsure whether his input would be wanted or needed. Gideon questioned Galen's opinion that he did not hold grudges, to which Galen replied that he did not hold grudges as he had no surviving enemies.

Reaching the bridge, Gideon informed Matheson that they would not be breaking orbit, as whatever force or entity was down

there had killed a member of his crew. Pulling down his tactical display, he said that he did not want the same happening to the next ship that visited this planet. Eilerson, who had previously been silent, agreed at least in principle with Gideon. As a representative of IPX, he did not want anyone else getting their hands on whatever was down there. He was not even aware of the name of the scientist who had been murdered. On hearing the nature of the scientist's death, Galen's interest was piqued and he queried the matter with Dr Chambers. Now fully informed, Galen made his excuses and left the bridge rapidly.

Entering a bullet car, Galen found that Dureena was the only other passenger. Replying to a question that Dureena had previously asked, Galen said that he would not teach her his knowledge. It was Galen's opinion that she wanted to learn to further her desires for revenge. Despite Dureena's protest – that the Shadows had wiped out her entire race – Galen maintained his refusal to share any knowledge with the thief. She had a road to travel first and there was no point teaching her now, otherwise she would end up meeting a bad end. Dureena was not happy with Galen's decision, that he would teach her when her rage had gone, but there was little she could do to force him.

After having made a trip to his ship for the usual undisclosed reasons, Galen returned to the bridge and the map room. The techno-mage informed the rest of the team that he had established a homunculus, a construction more real than a hologram. Whatever this projection of himself, currently in the alien city below, saw and experienced would be shown before their eyes. Taking mental control over the homunculus, Galen hoped to draw the attention of the aliens down below. In the city this created duplicate of Galen wandered, making small talk to himself in a not-too-quiet tone. Sure enough, one of the disc-shaped alien constructions approached behind him and proceeded to dismember the apparition as it had done the scientist. Clearly having too much fun with the creation, Galen's homunculus remarked that he had forgotten where his virtual liver had got to.

The alien probe finished its work, unaware that the samples it had taken were not actually real. Galen, with a thought, detached the head of the homunculus from its body, sending it up into the probe after the organs. The head came to rest, by Galen's design, close to a small maintenance window. The probe passed through the city, the walkways and buildings clearly seen by the decapitated head of the homunculus and relayed up into the holographic display in the map room of the *Excalibur*. Still focusing, Galen did not allow himself to be interrupted. The face of the homunculus saw all manner of alien ships, scattered and



piled atop one another like toys in a child's play box. A Narn cruiser, a Vree saucer, even a Centauri vessel were abandoned there. Two Brakiri ships were next and then the connection was broken.

The number of ships seen was disturbing and Galen believed that it was some form of storage and analysis area, perhaps a laboratory to study other races. Gideon realised that the partially-complete formulae were simply designed to lure them in. Confirming this, Dr Chambers stated that this would also explain the many different DNA traces she had found earlier. When Dureena confirmed the remains of bodies she had found, everyone was surprised she had kept quiet about this. Gideon was especially annoyed that information had been denied to him. Dureena snapped back that there was a wrong time and a right time for everything, staring at Galen across the map display, echoing the mage's earlier comments to her in the bullet car. Galen chided her with the opinion that it was wrong to withhold information. They shared an uneasy silence until Gideon broke it up, asking her what else she had seen. She revealed that there was a cavern down on the world with a generator of some kind. It had appeared fully functional, so large she could not see the end of it.

The *Excalibur* managed to lock on to the power source identified by Dureena on the world below. The generator was sunk directly into the planetary core to draw power. The *Excalibur* reported that no life signs were detectable down there but Matheson was concerned that any attempts to check for life signs in more detail could be picked up by hostile forces. Finally, the *Excalibur* started to pick up life signs underneath the alien city: A vast chamber, easily as large as the city itself, contained billions of alien life-forms. All were alive but in a state of suspended animation that had defied the rudimentary scans performed previously. As if to validate Matheson's concerns, movement was detected



on the planet's surface. Dozens of alien ships launched from hidden bays like angry wasps whose nest had been kicked. Their target was clear: The *Excelsior*.

Ordering battle stations, the bridge was cleared even as the alien ships passed the boundary of the planet's atmosphere. When Gideon instructed Matheson to get the *Excelsior* out of there, the lieutenant soon realised that some force of great strength was holding the *Excelsior* in position: A gravity field. Gideon believed that someone did not want the *Excelsior* to leave with knowledge of what happened here. He ordered a fighter launch and for a lock to be established on where that gravity field was coming from.

Underneath the *Excelsior* a hatch opened and a carousel containing three Thunderbolt fighters lowered into place. As the carousel descended, rotating as it did so, the ships locked into position were launched off into space, their engines igniting instantly to power them at top speed in the direction of the aggressors. The Thunderbolts were joined by more of their companions, also launched by fast-deployment carousels, as the weapon arrays onboard the *Excelsior* locked themselves into combat positions. As the alien force arrived, Gideon ordered a group of Thunderbolts to form up as an assault team and proceed down to the source of the gravity field identified by Lieutenant Matheson. The force of alien vessels met the vanguard of Thunderbolts and evasive actions ensued as the Thunderbolts unleashed their deadly firepower, taking down a number of the enemy ships. Most of the alien ships made it through to be met by intense fire from the *Excelsior*.

The assault force descended down through the atmosphere and launched their missiles. They hit the target but inflicted only minimal damage. As if in response, the gravitational force increased, pulling the *Excelsior* down out of orbit

and towards the planet, in the same way as it had done for the other alien cruisers and ships that the homunculus had seen. The warning display on the *Excelsior's* screens flashed bright red and Matheson informed the captain that the ship could feasibly be pulled down to the planet. Outside, the ship the battle continued to rage, with pilots of older-model Starfighters joining with their better-equipped colleagues in doing their best to defend the *Excelsior* from the alien force.

Gideon knew that his options were running out. Ordering Matheson to activate the main gun, the *Excelsior* pivoted, turning to face towards the planet and the source of the gravitational force. The Thunderbolts in the assault force made another pass, creating a clear line of sight for the *Excelsior* to hit the target, which was locked into the *Excelsior's* targeting computers. The lights dimmed, the main sensor console displaying a message that power levels were dropping off all

across the ship. The tips of the *Excelsior's* wings lit up with blazing yellow energy, the brightness converging at a point just ahead of the ship's nose and a vicious blast ensuing, heading down towards the city below. From that location down on the surface, a bright light was visible in the cloudy orange and brown skies for a brief moment like an additional sun before the beam hit, creating explosions so wide that the conflagration was visible even from orbit.

Gideon was surprised that Galen had joined him on the bridge at this critical time. When Gideon challenged the techno-mage, saying that Galen's ship was so advanced it could avoid being held by such a strong gravitational field, the techno-mage could only smile. Galen's answer was that his rescue of Gideon ten years earlier brought with it a level of obligation, comparing Gideon to a stray cat.

The positive news from Matheson, that the gravitational field was gone and the main gun had succeeded, was short-lived as a high-pitched squeal echoed around the bridge. The force down below, clearly not dead, was accessing their language and history files, clearly using immense computing power and skill to retrieve this information from the planet's surface. The enemy ships stopped, holding their position, waiting. Behind Gideon, the figure appeared of a grey-skinned alien, six feet tall, wearing simple ragged clothes, looking more like a hobo than the formal ambassador of an alien species.

The alien introduced himself as Kulan, the keeper of the world below for the current generation, and offered Gideon an explanation. Unsure of whether to respond, Gideon looked at his techno-mage ally, who was clearly ready to defend his friend should anything untoward happen. Gideon reached out and touched the fiery sphere Kulan was holding and his senses jolted for a moment, the

recording interfacing with his sight and hearing. Kulan explained what had transpired to lead his race to this point. Gideon saw images of dark, spidery vessels approaching Kulan's world, a thousand years before. The Shadows had wanted to create a base on Kulan's world and when they refused, the Shadows punished them. In his mind's eye, Gideon saw the huge ships launch fighters. Spreading out, they sprayed a black mist into the skies, with pinpoint positioning for the best dispersal of their brutal cargoes. It was the same plague as had been unleashed on Earth. With the poison delivered, the Shadows had left. With the telling complete, Gideon snapped out of the recording, his senses taking a few moments to adjust to being back on the bridge of the *Excalibur*. Realising the magnitude of the situation, Gideon asked Kulan if the poison unleashed here a thousand years before was the same as the Drakh plague released on Earth.

Kulan confirmed this was probably correct. He saw, via his investigation into the data stored onboard the *Excalibur*, that Earth had suffered a similar fate to that unleashed by Kulan's people. When Gideon enquired further about how Kulan had come to be here, a thousand years after the Shadows had unleashed the plague that would later be inherited by the Drakh, Galen intervened, his words and tone unusually harsh even for a techno-mage. Galen accused Kulan and his people of not being able to find a cure and thus dissecting any sentient who came near, luring the citizens of other worlds to this place to study them.

Kulan could not argue against Galen's accusation. The keeper of the world below confirmed that his race had spent three years trying to find a cure but to no avail. Unlike Earth, Kulan's race had comparatively few starcraft and nothing like the *Excalibur*. Therefore they placed the general populace in suspended animation, which successfully halted the progression of the Drakh Plague in the host. Eilerson confirmed this as possible and also found reason

in the manner in which Kulan and his predecessors had examined visitors to their world. Gideon found Eilerson's agreement with Kulan abhorrent. As if answering for the employee of IPX, Kulan stated that they had merely hoped that a race would visit their world that had developed a cure to the plague or were naturally immune.

Gideon, who was still angry, was confronted by Kulan, who had also lost his patience. The alien stated that lives must be sacrificed if lives were to be saved, the needs of the few outweighing the needs of the many, the many in this case being Kulan's entire race. Gideon stated his belief that there were other ways that could and must be explored first. Kulan gave Gideon an offer: If they sent others to this world, Kulan would investigate them, as long as the crew of the *Excalibur* sent along information on a cure if they uncovered it first. Eilerson attempted to reason with Gideon, asking if the captain would not sacrifice a few hundred Narns to save Earth...

Gideon's answer, given to Lieutenant Matheson, concerned the enemy ships still in holding position outside the *Excalibur*. Seconds later, both the *Excalibur* and its defending starfighters took the stationary alien ships apart with powerful weapons fire. He rebuffed the deal, saying that if the *Excalibur* found a cure, it would be brought here. Then, Kulan's people would be brought to account for the inhumane acts they had perpetrated. It fell to Galen to inform Gideon that as Kulan had been out of hibernation for 18 months already, the Drakh Plague would claim his life in six months. Therefore the chances of Kulan being alive when they returned were highly remote. Gideon still believed in his heart that what Kulan and his people had done was wrong. Kulan's sad, almost prophetic world cautioned Gideon, to see how proud he would be in three years time, when humanity found itself in the same situation as Kulan's race.



It was much later when a White Star arrived, holding position beneath the bow of the *Excalibur*. One of the White Star's Rangers had boarded to present Captain Gideon with new information about possible targets. As the Ranger briefed Gideon, Galen left the conference room for the adjoining map room, the captain of the *Excalibur* following behind him.

Galen confirmed that he was leaving and they talked about the story of Job, the Biblical figure who was continually tested and tormented. As he turned to depart, Galen asked Gideon how he had known about Kulan's world. Captain Gideon chose not to answer.

In the lift, Galen met Dureena and acknowledged that he could not admonish her for withholding information, for he had done exactly the same. They discussed the prospect of hope, to which

Galen replied that there was always hope, as no-one had learned how to kill it yet. Galen offered that he had seen much darker things than Dureena would believe. When the lift doors opened she asked when Galen would return. He told her that he would return in the fullness of time and in his usual enigmatic style, added that she should expect him when she saw him.

Galen's ship departed for deep space. In his quarters, Gideon opened a secret panel in the wall, bringing out an aged box a couple of feet across, with strange alien markings on the exterior. Almost prophetically, there was a playing card present inside the box: The Ace of Spades, often referred to as the death card. Gideon spoke to the box and it answered in a muffled voice that Kulan's world might have been useful a long time ago. He asked the box where they should go to next.

The Lost and the Damned

The carnage wrought by the Shadows over a thousand years ago, during the war in which Valen led the Minbari to victory, is still felt by the galaxy today. The Narn Crusade led by G'Quan against the Shadows on their world resulted in the elimination of the telepathic gene from the Narn's DNA. What happened to Kulan's people could, in some other reality, have happened to the Narn. At least the Narn had a fighting chance against the Shadows; there was nothing that Kulan's race could do against the threat of the plague.

Gideon's dislike for the actions of Kulan and his predecessors is clear and obvious and the argument that Eilerson and Kulan present seems fairly logical in response. The important difference to Gideon is that the alien visitors to the world have no choice about what happens to them, although the question then is who would actually offer themselves up, with no reward, to help Kulan's people?

What is clear is that the Drakh Plague does not infect a world indefinitely. At some point the virus burns itself out, no doubt to allow the poisoned world to be inhabited by others. Otherwise Gideon and the rest of the landing party would have been instantly infected with the Drakh Plague when they stepped off the shuttle.

A Question of Training

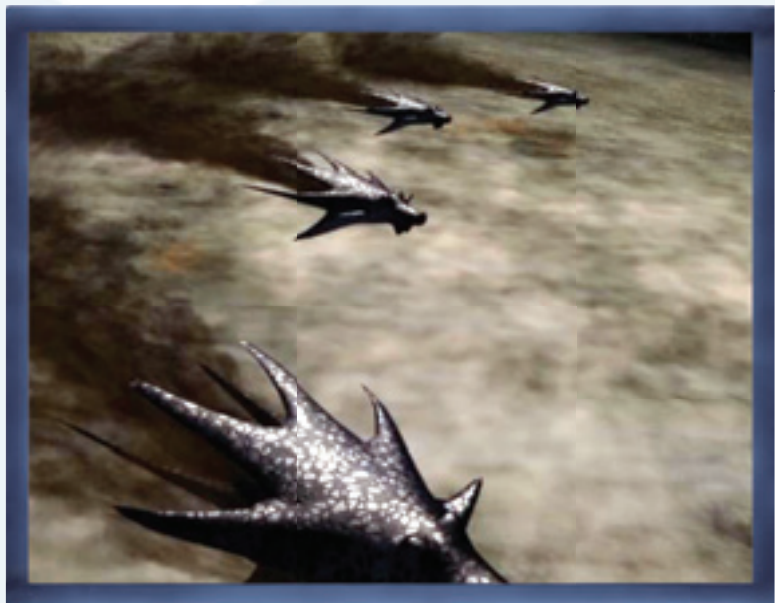
Dureena repeatedly asks Galen to share his knowledge with her. What is interesting is that Galen is physically unable to share any of his knowledge of techno-magery with her. Dureena is intrigued by the power that Galen holds in his tech but as Dureena has no tech implants of her own, what Galen would tell her would only be words. Indeed, the techno-mages actually lost the ability to create new members of their order when the Shadows departed in 2261.

The unanswered question may lie in Galen's motives. Galen may be misleading Dureena, for when she reaches the point that the anger has gone, her thirst for revenge through learning Galen's skills may have diminished. Equally, it can be argued that Galen has an understanding of the tech above and beyond any techno-mage living or dead. He may actually have an idea of how to follow through on his promise, though this is never explored.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

5 The sorts of incidents that occur on Kulan's world are perhaps the most common in any *Crusade* campaign and serve as an example. The dangers on alien worlds will tempt, torment and torture any group searching for a cure. They may find dead world after dead world but many of those worlds may still have living elements on them. A dead world greets the Player Characters with a fledgling race that has suffered a malady carried down from a meteorite that struck their world. A scientific outpost has been set up by IPX on the world to study it and look for potential artefacts. However, the same malady that affected the original race has resurfaced in a morphed form.

5 A world is found to have once had a vicious civil war that virtually wiped out all fauna upon it. The lone survivor, unbeknownst to the explorers, is a carnivorous native that thrived whilst its kin died. The alien creature, malformed over time, has built a legion of zombified or artificial agents. These agents kidnap visitors to the planet for their master to feed upon, as the carnivorous alien can find precious little sustenance on the planet.



5 Yet another dead world is found where the inhabitants killed each other. The death of the world was slow and painful. However, the indigenous race that lived on the world was already evolved enough to be partly energy-based in nature. When they died out, ghosts of their forms remained behind, possessing a rudimentary intelligence of what once was. Whether these forms assist or attack the Player Characters is up to the Games Master and the Player Characters' actions.

The Needs of Earth

Probable Start Date: April 22nd

In his quarters onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon watched a human and a blue-skinned alien cavorting on the screen. He was taking a sip from his coffee mug, clearly intrigued, when the door chimed. Dr Sarah Chambers, her presence requested by the captain, entered and was told that they were near the rendezvous point and that he would appreciate her being at an upcoming meeting. Thanking him, she realised what he was watching even as a Pak'ma'ra started to disrobe to join in with the orgy. Not sure what to say, Gideon explained that Max Eilerson had sent him a report and the captain of the *Excalibur* had been surprised to find that, by sheer accident, there was a recording on the data crystal after the report had finished. When Dr Chambers discussed the fact that this would make a useful bargaining tool to get Eilerson on side, Gideon had longer-term plans to capitalise on Max Eilerson's cantankerous nature.

The upcoming meeting that Gideon had referred to concerned a Ranger, who waited patiently for Captain Gideon in the *Excalibur's* meeting room. Anla'shok Trulann, like the other Rangers, kept an eye out for any potential leads that the *Excalibur* could investigate alongside their normal duties of securing the future of the Interstellar Alliance. Trulann's message requesting a meeting had been brief, for the Ranger had revealed that he could not risk saying more on an open channel. Information had come into their possession that conflicted the *Excalibur's* mission with the Rangers' duty to uphold the rule of law. What he proposed would require breaking many laws, interfering in the affairs of another race and helping a known fugitive to escape justice. With ten billion lives at stake, Gideon said that he was prepared to break any law he had to. Pleased with the answer, Trulann stressed the fact that when he left the meeting room the existence of the conversation



they had just had would be denied. Gideon understood the situation that Trulann had placed himself in to get this information to them and assured him that working alone would not be a problem. Gideon was used to it.

Later that day, Eilerson confronted Captain Gideon on the bridge of the *Excalibur*. His attempts to get the data crystal back without revealing what was on it proved fruitless, even when Eilerson told Gideon that the data crystal was possibly corrupt and he would hate for the crystal to affect the ship's systems. Making a brief jibe over being open-minded, Gideon went on to insist the meeting they were due to attend was more important than discussing a corrupted data crystal.

Dureena and Dr Chambers were in attendance as well, already waiting in the meeting room, and Gideon wasted no time in introducing them to an image of Natchok Var of Marata VII. According to the reports, the alien had downloaded the entire database of his race's knowledge onto data crystals and fled to sell them to the highest bidder. Bounties had been placed on both Natchok Var and his data crystals. Gideon explained to his team that even if there was no useful medical data on the data crystals, potential information about new civilisations could save years of work. Dureena's enthusiasm was dampened by the fact that Natchok Var had already been captured by bounty hunters, and her face dropped when Dr Chambers mentioned the world where he was being held, Praxis IX. The Marata already knew that Natchok Var had been apprehended but the *Excalibur* was closer than the Marata were. The only chance they had to retrieve Natchok Var was to get to the fugitive before the Marata government arrived to pick him up.

Gideon found it hard to answer Eilerson's obvious question about what the Interstellar Alliance felt about this operation. The simple truth was that the Marata were not members of the Alliance and Praxis was outside of the Alliance's jurisdiction. They were going to conduct an illegal raid, retrieve a captured fugitive and barter for stolen information. This meant that if anyone was hurt, injured or captured no help or aid would be offered. Eilerson's outspoken opinions regarding Natchok Var being a thief caused Dureena some considerable offence but his arguments against the mission fell flat when Gideon started rotating a certain data crystal in between his fingers. As Gideon challenged Max Eilerson to speak up on his thoughts around morality, Dr Chambers realised what Gideon was doing and struggled to repress a smile.

Approaching the Praxis system, Gideon and Matheson discussed tactics in the map room of the *Excalibur*. Praxis IX was a commercial planetary colony consisting of four domed cities. The planet had a poisonous atmosphere with large percentages of carbon monoxide and methane. Luckily, only one of the cities had a spaceport and this would be the most likely place where Natchok Var would be held before being transferred to a Marata ship. They had to find a way in that was not official, so they would need to be dropped off outside the city and walk in on foot.

Watching most of this discussion, without their knowledge, was Dureena. When Gideon announced that he was going alone, she spoke up. Dureena revealed that she had been to Praxis IX before and she was the only way that he could get in and out, leaving Gideon unable to leave her behind. As Matheson left to arrange a shuttle, Gideon sensed that there was something else behind Dureena's willingness to join the mission. He noticed that her gaze was focused on the three-dimensional map of the main city and the surrounding area being emitted by the map room's holographic projector. He queried her attention on the map but she gave him no answer as to what she expected down there.

The atmosphere of Praxis IX was thick, a muddy brown soup that all but obscured any details outside a ten-metre radius. One of the *Excalibur's* shuttles dropped them off, Gideon and Dureena proceeding on foot to a spot where they could ascertain the best way to reach the city. There were six miles to go but Dureena was confident of their chances of success, as she had made it out with four other individuals. Gideon was dismayed to find out that they had not survived.

Progress was slow, the terrain not at all conducive to travel, in addition which they were carrying a spare spacesuit for Natchok Var. Resting for a moment, Gideon asked Dureena how long ago it had been that she had been here. Dureena

explained that it had been a while ago, before the Drakh killed her people. She highlighted the fact that she had been to many places during that time. Dureena would not be drawn on this fact and suggested they move on.

Reaching an external service door, Dureena tried to enter a combination into a security panel, without success. There were six possible combinations to try, she explained, but some of them could have been changed in the time since she had last been here. The odds were good that at least one of the combinations was still valid. Dureena could not use the interface pad with the suit she was wearing, as her dexterity was restricted. Despite Gideon's protests, she chose to remove the gloves from her suit so she could work unhindered. As the foul atmosphere rushed into her suit, Dureena started punching combinations into the pad as fast as she could. She started to cough and gag but continued to type frantically. As she found herself without any oxygen left in her lungs, Dureena found a valid combination and the door slid open. Gideon dragged her gasping, weakened form into the safety of the city.

Inside a bar in the city, Gideon and Dureena, spacesuits stashed away, tried to blend in as best they could. Dureena was still coughing, so they took a moment for her to compose herself and give Gideon some additional detail regarding this facility. Praxis Colony was, by all accounts, a way station for the lowest forms of life for lightyears in any direction. Smuggling, illegal goods and terrorists used this place as a refuge. Her explanation became choked as she noticed something else that was being trafficked – people. Rubbing her wrists, memories flooded her of a past life, making her lose her usually well-focused composure for a moment. Gideon was unaware of the slave auction in progress, or at least the connection between her reaction and the auction, which spared her any awkward questions.



Deciding that a distraction was needed to get some more information, Gideon volunteered, finding an alien with a jet-black Mohican and horns protruding from his face. After apologising, he thumped the alien as hard as he could. His blow had little effect, the alien smiling before he picked Gideon up and threw him across the bar and onto a low table, smashing it. Using the distraction, Dureena manoeuvred her way through the crowd, who watched as Gideon was tossed around by the alien who seemed to have doubled in bulk since the fight started. Ducking to avoid a thrown bottle, she pressed her hand to a pillar, creating a shape. It was an outline of a circle segmented into eight sections, with a diamond in the centre, accompanied by six smaller shapes with an arrow pointed towards her, all illuminated in an iridescent blue. This symbol, that of the Thieves' Guild, was noticed by a lurking man and Dureena took her cue, vanishing in the direction of the arrow.



Meeting up with Gideon on the way, the captain now sporting a gash across his right cheek, Dureena was happy with the quality of the distraction he had provided. They sensed an additional presence behind them; the newcomer was another member of the Thieves' Guild. According to Dureena, this place was known to them and normally some members of the Guild could be found here. The fellow thief agreed to help.

With the local thief having pointed them in the right direction, Gideon and Dureena found the location where Natchok Var was being held. Dureena recognised the group that had caught the alien, who belonged to a group run by a previously small-scale criminal called Red Jack. However, they still needed to get inside and past those guarding him. Having an idea, Gideon inserted Eilerson's data crystal into a nearby outlet and the gang was surprised to see something new on their video screens. Even Dureena could not help but look on in curiosity before Gideon dragged her away to help retrieve the gang's prisoner whilst the gang remained entranced.

They found Natchok Var and his data crystals but for the moment Dureena was more concerned with other prisoners in the next cell, all with expressions she knew too well. As Gideon retrieved the alien, who was simply glad to be escaping, Dureena blew the door off the cell and the prisoners fled. Gideon, angered that their escape had been compromised, had to contain his fury until a more appropriate time. They reached the airlock and once back in their spacesuits they began to proceed to the designated pick-up point. Forced to rest, as Natchok was clearly exhausted, Gideon decided to confront the thief about her actions. Dureena explained that they had been slaves on the way to being sold, hoping the matter would rest there. Gideon accepted that their lot was unfortunate but slavery

was legal in this part of space. Dureena burst out that she had done what she had, for when she was in their position, waiting and praying for help, no-one had done it for her. Gideon put the pieces together, now realising why Dureena had been so apprehensive back in the map room of the *Excalibur* before his link chimed. It was Matheson and it was bad news. A jump point had opened in the sector and the silhouette of a ship coming through the jump gate fit the profile of a warship.

The shuttle carrying Gideon, Dureena and the weary Natchok Var touched down in the *Excalibur's* hangar bay. Dr Chambers was on hand, ready to take the alien into her care. When the doctor asked about the problems they had getting out of the city, Gideon covered for Dureena, saying that there was no problem.

When Gideon reached the bridge he learned that the Marata ship that had just arrived had already contacted Praxis IX and clearly had been told what had happened. Gideon ordered the *Excalibur* to jump to hyperspace, in the belief that they would escape their soon-to-be pursuers. Matheson asked Gideon to stand by, which was not greeted well by Gideon, even as the jump point opened in hyperspace behind them. The Marata knew what had happened down on Praxis and were in full pursuit, a risky venture given the volatile nature of hyperspace.

In Medbay Dr Chambers was attempting to treat Natchok Var but her efforts were hindered by his reluctance to lay his data crystals aside even for one moment. When she mentioned the fact that Natchok was only going to sell the crystals to the highest bidder, a correction was in order. The crystals were not for sale but were only to be given to someone whom he considered worthy of keeping the knowledge of his people. A lie had evidently been told, giving a malicious reason for his theft of the data crystals



that would convince others that he was only out for himself. Natchok Var explained his reluctance to let the crystals out of his grasp, in that the contents of the crystals were priceless, but to be given without charge to a person he felt as being worthy.

A warning shot was fired by the pursuing Marata ship, followed by a short message burst requesting the sending of an emissary to talk to those who had taken the fugitive, to resolve the problem peacefully. The emissary was dispatched and Gideon was ready and waiting for them in the meeting room when they arrived.

Two aliens of the same race as Natchok Var entered as Gideon introduced himself. The smaller of the two aliens, a translator named Nix, introduced his superior, Minister for Justice Apriori Flentix. The latter did not speak for himself, as he did not wish to corrupt himself by speaking to someone who was impure. Gideon learned in short order that the Minister's translator, Nix, lied frequently to preserve his master's ego.

Discussing the situation, albeit in theory, Nix stressed that the information Natchok Var had taken would cause them great difficulty if it fell into the wrong hands. At the insistence of Flentix, Nix also stated that the *Excalibur* would be destroyed if it came to that. When Gideon said that the *Excalibur* would take the chance in a fair fight, Nix was honest without wishing to be threatening. A fair fight would not be what the Marata had in mind.

Gideon answered a call to the bridge and was told that more Marata ships had appeared nearby, locking onto the *Excalibur's* position. They took up positions above, below, to port and starboard, creating a kill zone with the only remaining Victory-class destroyer dead in the centre.

Eilerson's first response was to say they should hand Natchok Var over to the Marata, at which Gideon was not happy. Informing everyone else that Flentix and Nix had been temporarily placed in the brig, Gideon believed that they would not risk an attack with someone of Flentix's supposed importance aboard. When Eilerson went on to argue that finding a cure to the Drakh Plague and the *Excalibur's* efforts in doing so, was more important than saving a refugee, both Gideon and Dr Chambers found it hard to argue against him.

In Medbay, Natchok Var listened to Dr Chambers' diary entries; one was about a planet called Tarkon III, another dead world. Selecting another data crystal, Natchok Var was shocked to hear music, an orchestral melody that brought a smile to his world-weary face. His fingers start to tap out the tunes he heard on his box of crystals and he was quite focused on one particular symphony when Gideon entered. Natchok asked if a human was

responsible for this piece of art and Gideon identified Mozart as the composer. When Natchok was surprised that one individual was responsible, Gideon answered with a level of knowledge about the composer that would have surprised his victims at the poker table. Natchok continued to listen but Gideon had other concerns. The threat that the Marata had made was a serious one. When he offered to place the *Excalibur* and her crew in between the information that Natchok Var carried and the Marata, the alien would hear none of it. He had made the decision to return back with the Minister for Justice. Gideon protested, claiming an obligation to protect Natchok, but the alien had made his choice. Natchok stated his belief that the Marata would not harm him, instead use him an example of what was wrong in their society, making him a scapegoat. He gave the data crystals to Gideon and asked him to copy the data contained in them quickly, before the delay in handing him over garnered suspicion.

By an entrance to a bullet car destined to take them to the launch bay, Matheson's statement that Natchok would accompany Flentix and Nix was not received well by the Marata Minister of Justice. Nix explained that another ship with an auto-pilot would be sent to transport Natchok, as Flentix did not wish to sit alongside a known criminal but would be content for the data crystals to go with them. Matheson was unconvinced that Natchok would get a fair trial.

Escorted by two soldiers in dark berets, Natchok arrived to take the next bullet car behind Flentix and Nix. Matheson and Natchok exchanged glances and the telepathic first officer had a distinct feeling that something that was terribly wrong with the whole situation.



With the first shuttle away carrying Flentix, Nix and the data crystals, Gideon was puzzled, believing that the process was too easy, musing this to himself verbally as the second shuttle launched. Gideon, upon pondering why Natchok had been keen to pursue this course of action, asked the communications officer present on the command deck to put him through to the second shuttle. He wanted to ask Natchok some questions but was shocked to hear that Natchok's shuttle had no other sentients onboard; it had an auto-pilot but nothing else. Gideon launched himself out of his command chair to give new orders, to protect the ship on which Natchok Var was travelling from what Gideon hoped would not come to pass... but he was too late to do any good.

One of the Marata cruisers opened fire, vaporising the second shuttle and Natchok Var in an instant. The Marata had clearly taken the opportunity to eliminate a trouble-maker, with no evidence of their handiwork save the affirmed opinion of a hostile power whom had already been shown to conduct illegal raids and harbour known criminals. Their work done, the Marata cruisers turned to depart. Matheson asked Gideon if he wanted to pursue but the answer was no. For now, Gideon just wanted to get the *Excalibur* as far away as possible.

In Dr Chambers' office, Gideon discussed with his medical Chief of Staff his confusion over why Natchok Var had willingly boarded a shuttle that was unmanned, presenting a clear opportunity for the Marata to eliminate a troublemaker, with little evidence as to their actions. Natchok must have expected their attack, Gideon reasoned, so he wanted to know what was so important that the alien would sacrifice his life. Dr Chambers announced that the crystals contained music, poetry and stories, showing a recording that explained Natchok Var's obsession with

getting the data crystals away from his homeworld. On the nearest monitor screen an image of a basement window appeared. Through the window could be seen fire in the streets, Marata running past screaming and shouting. Natchok dictated to the recording, that the final edict had been issued. The burning of the books, music and art had begun, with the Maratan leaders saying that art was a decadent past-time, subversive and indecent. Aggression and competition were the only ways to advance, with art being a drain on the morality of the people. Firearms were heard, as the image of Natchok showed his data crystals. His earnest hope was that someone would keep them safe until the Marata realised what they had lost and wanted it back.

Dr Chambers stated that what she had seen of Natchok's recordings was beautiful but Gideon was greatly displeased, as there was nothing there of scientific use. Her protestations as to the worth of the recordings fell on deaf ears. He had to be focused on the needs of Earth. Dr Chambers argued with him on that point, in that something had to sustain humanity. There was nothing wrong with literature and music, as it carried a message of hope. Irritated by the contents of Natchok's recordings, Gideon announced that the *Excalibur* was moving on to the next destination and left the Medbay.

In his quarters, Matheson recorded his personal journal. He related a story from Sunday School, when he was asked if he would, or indeed should, go back in history and prevent the Crucifixion. After debate, his Sunday School had agreed that the answer was no, because the sacrifice was necessary to redeem the world. Matheson was angry because he had not actively used his telepathic abilities to find out if Natchok Var would be given a fair trial. The alien had expected his own death, as Matheson now realised, too late to save the last guardian of Marata culture. Matheson had not spoken to Gideon of his concerns and not merely because of the new rules for telepaths which he was forced to live by following the disbanding of the Psi Corps. With genuine sadness in his voice, Matheson stated how odd it was to know everyone's heart but his own.

Later that evening, Gideon returned to the medical bay and revealed to Dr Chambers that he could not sleep. He had come down to get something from Natchok's archives, taking a data crystal. He admitted to needing a little hope himself and confessed to Dr Chambers his obsession with the subject of death. It was an aspect of his personality which Gideon genuinely believed was why he had been picked to lead the *Excalibur*. He had a problem with people around him dying, believing that that he had seen more than his fair share.

When Dr Chambers asked about the *Cerberus*, Gideon got up to leave. Having realised she had touched a raw nerve, Dr Chambers sensed an opportunity to talk to the Captain about the survivor's guilt that she knew he must have been feeling. She urged the voice of reason, that he was just an ensign at the time and there was little that could be done. Gideon felt responsible for the deaths of the 347 officers and crew who died aboard the *Cerberus*. When Dr Chambers gave her opinion that he was taking the accident that befell the *Cerberus* personally, Gideon began to argue, almost giving away what he knew of the truth behind the destruction of the *Cerberus*. Perhaps feeling more naked than he ever had since the day he was born, Gideon left the medical wing.

On the way back to his quarters, Gideon decided to call in on Dureena. When he asked her if she wanted to talk about her experiences, she was not forthcoming. She did however ask what was on the data crystals that Natchok Var had allowed to be copied and all that Gideon could say was hope, leaving the crystal with Dureena. As he turned to leave the thief felt the urge to give something back: A trade perhaps, of sorts. She admitted that her family had sold her into slavery to pay their debts. They did what they had to do and apparently she did not hold it against them. She looked at the data crystal, diverting attention from her admission and asked Gideon when he wanted the data crystal back. Confirming that he was happy with having it back when she was finished with it, Gideon left her to listen to the data crystal. As he did so, walking back to his own quarters, he heard music, soothing and reassuring, the hollow sound of wind instruments floating along the corridors of the *Excalibur*. The music of a culture that would soon no longer remember the songs once sung in its name.

A Dose of Hope

The comments that Sarah Chambers makes to Matthew Gideon are valid, especially given the low morale and high civil unrest back on Earth. Whilst the contents of Natchok Var's data crystals are not scientific or medical in nature, the beneficial effect they may have on the citizens of Earth will be a distraction from the harsh reality of the plague, and perhaps also a motivating force for others. The benefit of the recordings for humans is balanced by the loss that the native Marata will feel. In a single generation, it will be possible for the ruling council to remove the artistic legacy that previous generations have passed on to them. The songs of hope, love, the passion of youth and the wisdom in sorrow of things lost will be gone, replaced by songs that benefit the state and sing in favour of compliancy within the boundaries of their society and declare the Marata's greatness compared to others. This delusion may be the end of the Marata at some point, for as the Earth Alliance found out when it met the Minbari, there is always a larger, more powerful predator out there.

The Marata

A rising power in their sector of space, the Marata have only recently made themselves known to the galactic community, although their presence has been known for years by those outside the Interstellar Alliance. One of three races initially dominant on their world, the Marata evolved into a complex society with a dozen different caste levels. The lower classes fought in most of the wars with the other sentient races on their homeworld, a struggle that led to the last of their opponents being so decimated that a series of harsh winters, coupled with a virulent plague outbreak, finally finished them off.

A very practical people, having had such a hard progression up to this point in their evolution, it was only recently that the Marata were encouraged to dream. The gradual relaxing of caste boundaries in the last two centuries and the distant memory of the great wars of the past opened the minds of many Marata. Artistic pursuits were accepted as a valid path for a caste member to choose, though often discouraged by the older members of society. The Marata produced works of art, music and prose that would truly warm the soul of any who listened to them.

This dreaming of a better future lasted until the Marata heard about the conflict between the Narn and the Centauri and the Shadow War via a passing Abbai transport that entered a jump gate at the fringes of their system in 2261. Over a few short months, military thinkers started to question the way in which the Marata had gone into space and also the way in which they conducted themselves. There were powers out in the universe significantly more dangerous than they had



any hope of defending against. Such knowledge was always a concern to a new race but for the Marata there were also benefits. By being strong they could defend themselves and expand their frontier, especially with their newly-developed jump gate technology.

In a historic speech in front of the main council building on Marata Prime, called the High Forum after the group that sat within it, the head of the government issued a decree that a new focus was needed for the Marata. They needed to reform themselves, placing their own individual needs beneath that of the needs of Marata society as a whole and the wishes of the High Forum. From this point on, the cultural advances that the Marata had made went into a downward spiral. In 2262, the First Edict of Maratanship was issued. This complex document laid down the rights and responsibilities of each caste, returning to the level of social inflexibility that had existed a century before.

This naturally had an effect on public morale but all complaints and demonstrations were twisted by the Marata High Forum, which cited them as proof as to why action needed to be taken. This continued for 18 months until the Second Edict was declared, limiting individual rights even further. When this happened all of the arts colleges and music theatres were closed down, declaring public broadcasts and facilities wholly devoted to 'wastrel' pursuits as not being in the public interest. In the final months of 2266, the changes to Marata culture were complete. They were a stronger, more focused people than they had been before; anything that was weak or fragile or artistic was cast aside. These pursuits, termed foolish, were regarded as drawing away from what it meant to be a 'proper' Marata. All historical records that were derogatory to the state, all works of art and music that did not praise the government or promote its goals, were ordered destroyed. The destruction of the treasures of an entire race had begun.



Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The Marata consider themselves above all others and this affects all dealings with them, in any diplomatic or financial capacity. Traders will need to negotiate with a race with an inflated sense of its own seniority. Those engaging in trade will do well to heed the fact that the Marata never agree to any business dealings that are not in their own interests. This attitude may lead them to war at some point in the future.
- 5 Even though Natchok Var was the only one to escape with a set of archives, there is the potential for others to intervene and help preserve the cultural heritage of the Marata, or what little of it remains after their planetary government's purge (musicians, artists, actors and poets are all valid prey, being considered on par with genuine criminals). A group of musicians, for example, could have been offworld when the purge began, in all probability escorted by members of the Marata military to ensure they did not attempt to flee Marata governmental control. Supporting elements in Marata society may be happy to pay a group to ensure that artisans escape, though the Player Characters would need to be aware that the Marata do not have any qualms about using military might to back up their efforts. Likewise, if word of Natchok Var and his self-sacrifice ever make it back to the Marata homeworld, it is entirely possible that his self-sacrifice in knowingly going to his death will make him a martyr to any underground movement that springs up in his wake.
- 5 Praxis IX makes an excellent location for those wishing to deal with the dregs of society. With four cities to explore and gangs involved in many different facets of crime, anything can be bought, sold, bartered or traded on Praxis IX, from narcotics such as Dust to sentient life-forms themselves. Getting in or out without using the spaceport is difficult but not impossible.

The Memory of War

Probable Start Date: April 26th

Across Earth-controlled space, the latest ISN news report was beamed out from the news centre on Earth's moon. The veteran anchorwoman on ISN, relayed the current situation on Earth and the Drakh Plague. Several areas were still badly affected; the economies of India, South Africa and some parts of Central America were crumbling as they were unable to interact or trade with other worlds. Spaceports had been

closed and any transport capable of reaching the fringes of space had been grounded to prevent the plague from infecting other worlds. In the Vatican, Pope Bernadette II led a global day of prayer and fasting, calling for unity. Jane went on to state that the Rangers were investigating leads to be followed up on by the military research vessel *Excalibur*. Finishing off with other news, Jane started to discuss Dr Stephen Franklin's appearance before the Earth Senate to give a status report.

Lieutenant Matheson interrupted Captain Gideon's viewing of the broadcast in his quarters aboard the *Excalibur*. They had reached their destination and were entering orbit. Glad of the distraction from the depressing news, Gideon left his quarters, heading for the bridge. Upon reaching his destination and seeing the world in the forward window, he instructed Matheson to launch probes. On cue, several thousand spherical probes, each the size of a ping-pong ball and silvery in finish, descended through the atmosphere, appearing like a shower of hail. Analysing the reports from the probes, Matheson announced that the planet's atmosphere was breathable but no signs of life. There was the presence of architecture of some kind on the planet, mostly intact and well preserved. The only concern was that one of the probes was bringing back anomalous readings.

Galen appeared on the main communications screen, holding one of the aforementioned spherical probes, that the particular probe had made a dent in his ship. He asked if anyone had every looked before they started launching the probe. Gideon's quick retort was that if Galen let them know when he was coming, it would not have been a problem.

Galen revealed that he was here to try and dissuade anyone from going down to the planet below. The captain of the *Excalibur* was not happy about this, as they had been looking for this particular planet for months. Stressing that the situation was dire and that there would be fatal consequences from going down to the planet, Galen announced that he was coming aboard.

At a meeting in the conference room, Dr Chambers gave out a printed précis on the planet below. From her initial reports, it was known that the world they were orbiting had once supported a life-form similar to humanity. Learning whatever had happened on this world to kill off this race could have benefits for the situation on Earth. Eilerson revealed that scans indicated alloys and building materials that were advanced. All of the major buildings were intact, so whatever had happened down on the planet could not have been a bomb or other conventional weapon. Whilst acknowledging that he would defer to Dr Chambers, he agreed that the cause in her opinion, a virus, could have

been responsible for eliminating this race. When it was said that the situation on the world beneath them was a perfect paradigm for their current situation, Galen took the opportunity to make a sarcastic jibe about the dead race being happy with being referred to as a paradigm.

Gideon explained that the Rangers had been looking for this world for months, a planet with a humanoid population which had suddenly become devoid of life a hundred years before. There were no major wars or escalations recorded. All the inhabitants of the world, for want of a better expression, had just... died. If this was a virus, then it could have been the Drakh virus or one similar to it.

Eilerson was enthused about the prospect of finding artefacts and technology from this world that he could exploit financially. Dureena's presence down on the planet was mentioned as a requirement, so Galen warned them again. The techno-mage tried to spell out his concerns in simple terms. With simple classifications of worlds, there were good and bad, healthy and unhealthy, dangerous and safe. This particular world was known to every techno-mage and Galen could only confirm that the planet was haunted, in a manner of speaking. The last techno-mage to visit this world, Galen revealed, died when he came here. When Gideon stated that they were still going despite the warning, Galen was not amused. He firmly stated that he would not accompany them and so guarantee them at least one pallbearer.

In the laboratories assigned to IPX onboard the *Excalibur*, Max Eilerson's two junior officers expressed concern over Eilerson's wish that they accompany him down to the planet. A young Oriental woman named Sogayu and a thin man with short black hair named Duncan both held to the official IPX line for these situations: Protocol dictated that if Eilerson went planetside, then his supporting



staff must remain in orbit. This would ensure that information was relayed back to IPX in any eventuality. Eilerson told them both that they were going down with him as an insurance policy. If they went down with him, the company would be forced to come and rescue them. Eilerson explained that by leaving his colleagues in orbit, it implied that he was expendable. The genius classified himself as bright, charismatic and a good dancer. Expendable was not on Eilerson's list of qualities.

In his quarters, Gideon finished loading a fresh cap into his PPG. Matheson entered and was given a copy of Gideon's logs in case something adverse happened down on the planet below. When Matheson inquired whether Gideon was actually taking Galen's opinion seriously, Gideon confirmed that if Galen was that concerned there would have to be a good reason for it. As Matheson left, the door sliding shut behind him, there was the sound of air rushing in, a gust that Gideon recognised from past experience. Galen revealed his presence in the corner of Gideon's quarters, reminding the captain of the *Excalibur* that in all their voyages so far, all they had discovered was death; worlds, colonies and cities that were all dead. He insisted the reason for this was people not taking advice and this was a situation where advice was not being taken. When Gideon asked about the actual nature of the threat, Galen explained with genuine honesty that he simply did not know. The techno-mages prided themselves on knowledge and the amassing of it. The fact that the fate of the planet below was not known to Galen's order concerned him. There was a legend, that whatever was down on the planet could not be seen, heard or even killed. The only techno-mage to land there had sent back a message, consisting of one phrase: *Genius Loci*. Gideon translated the phrase easily, meaning the spirit of the place.

The four planetary shuttles descended into the atmosphere, over lands of expansive forests and great lakes. Coming into view of a large city, the outskirts overgrown from a century of abandonment, the shuttles touched down, their occupants departing to make their way into the alien city. EarthForce soldiers took point, assuring that no threats presented themselves to Gideon or any of the others. Setting up base camp in some outlying buildings, Gideon ordered the EarthForce soldiers to begin a four-hour watch cycle.

True to form, Dureena had already gone walkabout. The member of the Thieves' Guild was halfway up an alien skyscraper, sitting on a ledge that was overgrown with moss and lichen. She had found a series of markers that had led her here and was now watching the setting of the planet's twin suns. Over her link, Gideon was unhappy that she had not taken security with her; but given her precarious position, the soldiers would probably not have been happy to be where she was now.



Starting the path back along the ledge, Dureena manoeuvred herself past a statue. As she did so she found that her fingers had entered a small alcove containing an alien machine with a large lever. Curiosity getting the better of her, she pulled the lever and a bridge of shimmering light came into view between her and a skyscraper opposite. She discovered that the bridge was safe to walk on despite only being two feet wide at best. It took a few moments but she reached the other side, only to be blocked by a wall. One of the blocks that made up the wall proved to be false, containing a display lit with alien symbols and a purple crystal.

When Dureena picked up the crystal, she realised that the symbols that made up the line were twinkling out of existence one by one and so was the light bridge behind her. Realising that this could leave her stranded, she jumped down and ran along the light bridge, jumping at the last moment. Her fingers snagged the statue where she had found the lever and she pulled herself up, the light bridge now gone.

Dureena returned to the camp, relinquishing the purple crystal to Max Eilerson. Gideon queried whether it was truly a data crystal and how they could decode it. Eilerson explained that every data crystal, human or alien, shared some base properties. He had some translation programs that would establish how the data was stored so they could view it.

At the base camp, one of the guards on duty heard a noise. Investigating, he found nothing apart from a strange alien script daubed onto a nearby wall covered in vines. As he turned he was covered by a dark silhouette and did not have time to utter a cry for aid.

Eilerson worked into the night decoding the alien data crystal. With the aid of his translation software he managed to translate the alien language and was overjoyed

that he had cracked it in three hours flat, a record even for an accomplished linguist such as he. The recording on the data crystal talked about a death that walked among them, a death that glided out of the darkness and could not be stopped. At the time of the recording millions had already died, the narrator at a loss as to what was happening. It was whilst he listened to this horrifying report that Eilerson heard a scream. Investigating, Eilerson found his Number 2, Sogayu, lying on the floor, her throat cut. His Number 3, Duncan Taylor, was in a state of shock and said that something had attacked her out of the shadows.

There were several dead from whatever entity or force had attacked the security detail. Finding the message that the unfortunate first soldier had found, Eilerson confirmed to Gideon that it had been written in chalk and that the rough translation was: 'Behold and die!' Gideon ordered a shuttle to come down and pick up the bodies but apart from that, he did nothing.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Dr Chambers personally conducted the autopsy of one of the murdered soldiers whilst her team worked on the other victims. The threat of infection having proved to be false, Galen made his appearance as she completed the first phase of her analysis. She was unsurprised at the techno-mage's arrival, as some of the crew compared Galen to the spectre at the banquet, his arrival always coinciding with death and malady. Had he gone down to the planet with Gideon, she said, then lives might have been saved. Galen knew this to be false; he had hoped that they would take his refusal to go as a sign of how serious the situation would be if they went down to the planet. Dr Chambers accepted the logic of Galen's argument but as poor justification after the fact. All of the dead had been killed by different means, and all had been killed within seconds. There was also nothing

supernatural about the deaths, so they were dealing with either one extremely fast killer or seven extremely well-co-ordinated killers. Galen entertained the thought that it could actually be both and departed to find out a little more on this world.

Locating Lieutenant Matheson on the bridge, Galen asked for some assistance, in particular the frequency that the dropped probes had been using. When Matheson told him, the techno-mage placed his hand on his forehead, focusing. Lights flickered in Galen's eyes as demographic data was superimposed over the images his eyes naturally received. He remarked that the atmosphere was light and had a very thin ozone layer due to the effects of the binary star. The amount of solar energy could also play havoc with electronics, Galen reasoning that it could also negatively affect the abilities of those in his order. Thanking Matheson, the techno-mage went back down to speak to Dr Chambers.

In Medbay, Chambers was waiting for Galen with some interesting news. An alien virus was actually responsible for the problems on the world below. It was a nanotech virus, one that was actually machine-based but on an infinitesimal scale. Traces of it were in the bodies of victims and the virus had invaded the brains of the victims, rewiring neural processes. It would cause someone to act violently and even stop him from remembering what he had done.

Examining a three-dimensional representation of the virus on an analysis screen, Galen examined it further. As he zoomed in he saw a symbol on the side of a virus element. It was a glyph and Galen's rage began to build as soon as he saw it. The realisation dawned on Galen as his words gushed out uncontrollably. A techno-mage had constructed the virus, explaining why he and his kin had been taught to avoid this world; those in charge had wanted to keep the secret that one of the techno-mage order was responsible. Dr Chambers' attempts to stop Galen going down to the planet proved fruitless. Anyone down on the planet would require decontamination and according to Galen they were now up against the clock. With no explanation of the terrifying expectations he had of what would occur at nightfall, only four hours away, Galen headed for his ship.

Carrying his staff, Galen proceeded through the undergrowth on the world below. He passed through an invisible boundary that shimmered as he walked through it and this led Galen to believe he was on the right track. With considerably less subtlety, Gideon ran through the undergrowth behind him, wanting to know what was supposed to happen at nightfall. Dr Chambers passed a warning down about what she had discovered.





Galen explained, snappier than he had intended, that a nanovirus was too small to think on its own, requiring a control centre handing out instructions. When the sun went down, the solar interference would diminish and the nanovirus would then activate. Galen could protect himself by his techno-mage spells but everyone else would be affected. Gideon realised that this control centre would need to be located underground, because of the interfering affect of solar energy. Using his staff at the precise location where they were standing, Galen created a great hole in the ground and proceeded into it alone, warning Gideon that like everyone else, he too was infected.

Having returned to base camp, Gideon finished assembling an assault rifle. He gave Max Eilerson specific instructions on what had to be done. Eilerson had to lock the door and throw away the key, as he had told everyone else. They had to keep everyone apart for as long as possible to prevent them from killing one another. When Eilerson inquired where Gideon was going with a loaded assault rifle, the answer was short. He was going to follow Galen into Hell.

In the bowels of a cavern, a strange voice greeted an investigating Galen. It asked him to sit down, as Galen had clearly travelled a long way. Refusing the offer, Galen saw the image of a man in his forties with an angular nose and a thick moustache, who revealed that the body that had created the image had long since gone to dust. '*Genius Loci*.' Galen confirmed. The story unfolded: The techno-mage creator of the Genius Loci had crafted the intelligence to co-ordinate the nanotech virus he had developed. The mage was now dead, having taken the secret of how to create the nanovirus to the grave with him. The nanovirus still existed, however, and the Genius Loci had been able to utilise and manipulate it to further enhance itself.

Passing his hands over his eyes, Galen invoked a spell, creating images that his eyes now saw as though on a computer screen, analysing the surroundings around him. The spell identified several power sources in the rock face, leaving Galen with no doubt that they were maintaining the Genius Loci.

At the encampment, members of the planetary survey team had started to go insane. Some had proved more susceptible to the nanotech virus and so had gone homicidal first. Others, those who were able to resist it for now, stayed locked in their rooms in the abandoned structures they had made their temporary homes. Eilerson's assistant, his eyes in a crazed bloodlust, smashed his way out of his room by brute force, whilst Eilerson himself sat in the corner of his room, PPG at the ready.

After following a tunnel to its end, Galen found himself confronted by a huge machine, the control centre of the nanotech virus. It was monstrous, much larger than Galen had imagined it would be, but his sense of combined awe and dread was punctured by Dureena, who was standing between Galen and the control centre atop a bridge over a ravine. Clearly under the effects of the nanotech virus, she threw one of her daggers with such speed and force that even the techno-mage could not react in time. It embedded itself deep in his shoulder, Galen pulling it out and willing the techno-mage implants within his body to control the pain.

From behind Galen, Gideon appeared with his rifle locked and ready. The voice of the Genius Loci tormented the techno-mage, his deep tones echoing and seemingly amplified by the shadows around them. The Genius Loci asked Galen whom he would kill to get to the artificial intelligence but his answer came from Gideon as Dureena grabbed another knife. Gideon shouted to Galen to move aside, shooting out the bridge across the ravine. As Dureena jumped to safety on the same side of the ravine as Gideon and Galen, with a cry of anger the techno-mage threw his staff into the control centre. It embedded itself in the machinery, sending blue electrical impulses across the workings of the control centre. Explosions started, forcing all of them to run for safety. Power arrays dozens of metres tall started to implode, the power surges causing chain reactions which in turn caused others to fail. Gideon, Galen and Dureena were barely away when an explosion lit the skies between the towers and skyscrapers of the alien city, followed by a fireball which for a moment bore a similarity to the Genius Loci before dissipating forever.

Back onboard the *Excalibur*, Galen allowed Dr Chambers, one of the few doctors he trusted, to treat his knife wound. When she implored him to remove his cloak, stating that there would be nothing she had never seen before, she was shocked to see the skin on his back covered in implants of a design she could not recognise.

Entering Medbay, Gideon asked how Galen was. The captain asked Galen if he would stay on for a few days but the techno-mage declined. Pressing it further, Galen revealed that his staff, the only thing he had taken with him when he had left the order, had been lost. It was a control mechanism, Galen explained. It had been a gift from his master. Based on Gideon's assumption, Galen confirmed to Dureena that he had had to use his staff, for only a techno-mage could undo the damage caused by another techno-mage. It was a balancing of elements, using the one weapon he had at his disposal. Both the control centre and the staff were creations of techno-magery.

When Dr Chambers asked if anyone could retrieve the staff, Gideon said that the control centre was buried beneath tons of rock. Asking Matheson on his wrist link if they were ready to jump, Gideon was told that the final shuttle had just returned. Upon being angry with Max Eilerson, ready to blame him for this, the captain of the *Excalibur* was surprised to see Dureena stride into the medical bay carrying the charred stump of Galen's staff. Covered in dirt, mud and minor cuts, she spoke no words as she gave the staff back to its owner. Saying nothing more, perhaps out of remorse for wounding him with her dagger, Dureena turned and left.

With Galen's ship safely away, Gideon and Dureena watched it leave from the safety of the bridge. After they discussed how hard Galen's life must be to be constantly alone, Dureena wanted to know why Gideon had tried to shoot the bridge out from under her. He told her that even though she would have been under the control of the virus, her instincts were still there, operating on pure reflex. She did not believe a word of it and Gideon did not argue the point as his answer was more than a little weak. His link chimed, as Dr Chambers had something for him and it was apparently very important.

In Medlab Dr Chambers revealed that they had some samples of the nanotech virus that her team had brought up. The nanotech virus was inert without the destroyed control centre but not incapacitated. Before he left, Galen had been able to help her program some new instructions into the nanotech virus; nothing particularly elaborate but still something.

She presented Gideon with a small breathmask with an attachment containing a few million particles of the nanotech virus. It has been programmed to take up temporary residence in a consumer's lungs and eliminate any infection coming in. Though she confirmed with Gideon that it was in no way a cure for the Drakh Plague, it did prevent the plague, which was mostly airborne, from affecting an individual who had taken the nanotech virus. It could not help anyone who was already affected but once inhaled it would allow someone uninfected to move amongst contaminated individuals for a period of 48 hours without becoming contaminated themselves.

When Gideon asked why there was the 48-hour time limit, Dr Chambers explained that the virus required new instructions every two days. They did not have the technology to broadcast new instructions, so it would become inert again after two days and thus useless. There were further problems, in that they only had a limited supply and could not use it twice on the same individual in a short period, otherwise the individual would become sick. Even with these limitations, Gideon was impressed. He waved off her concerns, claiming that this was a major breakthrough and that perhaps once the modified virus was analysed back home it could be adapted further.

Later, back in his quarters and safely out of anyone else's sight, Gideon opened up the Apocalypse Box. Talking to the personality contained with the box, he confirmed that they had found something of use, a virus screen. He asked the box for some further advice. The box advised him not to trust a particular individual... and that was individual Galen.



Scenario and Campaign Hooks

5 Like the Vorlons before them, the techno-mages have made many mistakes over the years. The Genius Loci that was left behind with the virus is but one example of such a mistake. Whilst many techno-mages attempt to fight their chaotic urges, some embrace the chaos. On a primitive world, a renegade techno-mage could set himself up as supreme ruler. Perhaps the techno-mage has grown old and is hatching a plan to bring the entirety of his creations down with him when he dies. Perhaps his experiments have drawn the attentions of passing ships. Either way, if the techno-mage is not stopped, an innocent race may die.

5 For a character who is a member of IPX, the death of Akiko Sogayu is a promotion opportunity. If the character finds this distasteful, then perhaps a career with IPX is not best for them. An entire adventure could result around an IPX employee attempting to get to the interview without other IPX employees upsetting his attempts to win the job. Such an adventure would be different from a normal one, but if the IPX-employed character is successful then the new role will make him Number 3 behind Max Eilerson and his newly promoted Number 2, Duncan Taylor.



gymnasium where members of the crew were working out. Standing just to the side of the court, they greeted each other, Matheson remarking that the Captain was up early. Gideon explained this oddity away, by saying that it helped clear his mind and calmed his spirit, before he missed the hoop again. Gideon lost his temper and argued that the hoop was at fault and not his skills.

Matheson informed Gideon that they had received a communiqué from an EarthForce ship in the immediate vicinity. Apparently, the ship was assisting in efforts to help fight the plague back on Earth but was having trouble with the local population and assistance was needed. When Matheson mentioned the world, Regula IV, Gideon could not understand why it was causing EarthForce problems, for the only inhabitants were farmers with no real military to speak of. For the first time all morning, Gideon's next shot was squarely on target.

On Regula IV, two EarthForce soldiers assigned to the world's mining facility were hiding under cover. When a call came in requesting they confirm the target, they could do nothing but stare. A golden dragon hundreds of metres tall, complete with horns and piercing red eyes, raised its head to the skies and cried out in anger. The sheer size of it dwarfed them and everything around them.

On the command deck of the *Excalibur*, Gideon was too focused on a report to notice the arrival of Galen on the bridge, appearing behind the captain's chair with his usual air of nonchalance. The techno-mage inquired with regard to the report that was monopolising Gideon's attention. Gideon explained that the report, from the Earth Alliance destroyer *Medusa*, made confusing reading. The source of this most recent disturbance was a golden dragon. Galen abruptly inquired as to whether it breathed fire or not. As Gideon continued to explain, Galen suddenly became

The Long Road

Probable Start Date: May 4th

Regula IV span through space as it had done for millenia, its evolution stable, with little in the way of major life-forms evolving to dominate its landmasses and establish a place in its ecosystem. Down on the world, a female technician was hunched over a piece of damaged equipment. Shaken by the ground trembling beneath her feet, she laid down her tools and went to investigate. Met by a fellow engineer, she was informed that *it* was here again. The ground began to shake again and the engineer pleaded with her to get on the link and summon troops, or indeed anyone, down to help. As the technician tried the radio, the engineer felt a rumbling behind the window of the prefabricated building in which they were housed. Pulling back a dull military curtain, the engineer was greeted with a huge red eye larger than himself, the eye surrounded by tanned lizard skin.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon was practising his basketball skills and from his level of skill and focus it was clear that practise was needed. Repeatedly his shots bounced off the hoop, none of them close to scoring. Lieutenant Matheson, approached the sports hall through a small

interested in the precise colour of the dragon and insisted that he should be invited to go and meet the command team over on the *Medusa* with Gideon to discuss the situation further.

Walking through the corridors of the *Medusa*, the ship leading the task force, Lieutenant Meyers went over some brief history of the Regula IV colony for Gideon and Galen's benefit. When the first officer revealed that the Regulans had eschewed technology, Gideon's only response was that it sounded quite charming. Lieutenant Meyers went on to inform them that the goal of simply going to Regula IV and taking what they wanted had not proved to be as straightforward as they had expected. The first officer was reluctant to say any more, preferring to let his senior, Captain Daniels, explain further.

Captain Daniels revealed that humans on Regula IV had a lifespan 15 years beyond the expected Earth norm. A mineral in the water supply appeared to be a natural antiviral agent. When the Drakh Plague hit Earth, the requirement to investigate this anomaly became more important. The task force headed up by the *Medusa* had arrived in the system two months before and results from the mining operation were quite positive. With the benefits clear, EarthDome had instructed them to speed up the process.

Captain Daniels could not deny Galen's accusation that the planet was being strip-mined. The captain of the *Medusa* confirmed that this was when the problems had begun. Lieutenant Meyers passed around a list of these strange occurrences, including shuttle engines with fused control circuits and missing transports that were rediscovered missing their engines entirely; they had apparently been replaced with a substance resembling peanut butter. All Galen could do was laugh but Captain Daniels was not

amused. When asked if anyone had actually been hurt, Captain Daniels replied no – but he genuinely believed it would only be a matter of time before it happened. When Daniels asked Gideon his advice, both the captain of the *Excalibur* and Galen were in agreement that they needed to go down and assess the situation personally. Lieutenant Meyers advised against it but Galen assured him they would be safe. When Gideon asked his techno-mage ally why he believed this, Galen could only say that he was not entirely sure. Once they were safely out of earshot of Captain Daniels and Lieutenant Meyers, Gideon guessed that Galen knew something about the strange occurrences. Galen was convinced that it was something that Gideon should see.

After a short descent to Regula IV by shuttle, Galen and Gideon landed on the outskirts of the city close to both the mining operation and the area of the strange occurrences. Locating a small rustic tavern, they entered, drawing the attention of all the simply dressed regulars. As the pair sat down Gideon enquired as to their next action, noting the tenseness of the atmosphere around them. Going to the bar, Gideon tried to gain the attention of the bartender, a burly man in his forties with thinning hair but a bushy moustache. Ignored, Gideon caught the attention of a serving girl named Claire but the bartender warned her off the stranger. Gideon's attempt at friendly banter with the bartender fell on deaf ears, though the bartender still told him what drinks they had to offer. Gideon, not being familiar with any of them, tossed a couple of coins on the bar and asked what they would get him. The bartender replied that they would buy the whole inn; Gideon asked for just a couple of drinks. Looking over his shoulder, Gideon noticed the seated Galen watching him and was given a thumbs-up of approval by the mischievous techno-mage.



Near to closing time at the inn, a group of figures (an informal village posse) gathered outside. Inside, Gideon was protesting that they had wasted their time here but Galen assured him that something would indeed happen. He was proved correct as the door opened and the posse entered and ordered Gideon and Galen to get out of their village. The lights began to dim inside the bar, the door swinging wide open in their wake. Following a cold gust of wind, an elderly cloaked man appeared in the doorway. He instructed the posse to leave the newcomers alone, as they belonged to him. The visitor went on to inform the posse that the duo were returning from the border and had been promised a warm welcome in the village. By the frosty reception, the posse had made a liar of him. Sharing a laugh and a joke, the posse members dispersed, leaving the visitor with Gideon and Galen.

Galen familiarly greeted the cloaked man, going by the name of Alwyn, clearly surprising the captain of the *Excalibur*. When Alwyn, asked how he had been found, Galen stated the obvious – the gold dragon had been the clue. According to Galen it was a trick that Alwyn had used at children's parties. Alwyn admitted that the dragon spell was a classic and he did love them. Alwyn then pointed to Gideon and asked who only individual at the table not a techno-mage was.

Later, the three sat down to share a simple meal in Alwyn's abode. Alwyn confirmed to Gideon that he was also a techno-mage and was saddened when told that the techno-mages were still in hiding. This was negated somewhat when Galen revealed he had been asked to leave the order. Alwyn was glad of this, for there was still hope for Galen yet. Alwyn also revealed that he had refused to co-operate when the techno-mages had fled to avoid the Shadows. He believed that their decision to flee had been nothing short of cowardice, admitting he was surprised that Galen had followed the techno-mages in fleeing. Galen answered by saying that he was obliged to follow his teacher.

Gideon confirmed with Alwyn that the older techno-mage was behind the problems in the mining operation. Gideon's choice of words on the subject were ill-advised, and Alwyn, his ire up, ordered Gideon to follow him to a hill peak overlooking the mining operation. The operation was continuing around the clock, Alwyn revealed as they stood on a hillock overlooking the dig. The extracted mineral was a natural antiviral agent, filtered as it had been through the ground water over the centuries. The only places it was found was in the most fertile areas, with Alwyn's main concern being that the mining operation gave no thought to the villagers who lived nearby. The villagers could not simply pick up and leave, for they would not survive the winter. Alwyn confirmed that he had even tried speaking

to Captain Daniels, but to no avail. The older techno-mage warned that one day it would turn to violence and that he had an obligation to colonists.

Alwyn was not aware that the same posse who had confronted Gideon and Galen had taken a group of engineers and miners hostage, leaving behind a note stating that if the mining operation was not stopped, all the hostages would die.

Alwyn calmed somewhat and was sorry to hear that Elric, Galen's teacher, had passed beyond several years before. Galen said that when Elric had taken him in, he had spent most of his life being afraid of him. He was also afraid that he might lose him as he had his own father. Alwyn consoled the junior mage, lesser only in terms of years, that Elric would have been proud of his student. Alwyn also commented that there was much that Galen had inherited from his father, although Galen showed even more promise than his father had.

When Alwyn asked Galen to help him protect the villagers, perhaps even staying behind, Galen had to turn down the offer. His explanation was shortened by Gideon, who had been outside speaking to Matheson onboard the *Excalibur*, still circling high above Regula IV. Gideon informed them both that some workers at the mining operation had been taken hostage. The hostage takers had stated that unless the mining stopped and the EarthForce vessels departed, the hostages would be killed.

High above Regula IV an assault team onboard the *Medusa* was readied for planetary insertion. Lieutenant Meyers was not keen on going down personally but Captain Daniels was adamant and would not tolerate Meyers' lack of enthusiasm, believing that true promotions only came from genuine combat experience. In short order, three assault shuttles packed with soldiers and a nervous Meyers descended towards the surface of Regula IV. On approach, they ran straight into the form of a dragon on their descent. Meyers was initially shocked by the size of it but believed it to be a hologram. Sure enough, the ship passed safely through a fiery blast and then through the virtual construction of the dragon's body. With nothing physical to hinder them, the target became the village and the kidnappers.

Following the two techno-mages through the leafy undergrowth, Gideon pleaded with Alwyn to intercede. Alwyn would not be diverted at first and repeated his earlier warning about what he was capable of. However, Gideon's arguments caused Alwyn and Galen to stop and listen to what he was saying. If the situation escalated further, it would truly spin away, utterly beyond their control. Wanting to argue, Alwyn found that he was unable to challenge Gideon's words, with Galen's silence an additional damnation.





Onboard the *Medusa*, Captain Daniels was expecting to hear a positive report from Lieutenant Meyers, in whom he had a great deal of confidence. The actual report he received was not what he had expected – Meyers and his soldiers had themselves been captured.

Back in Alwyn's comfortable abode, the elderly techno-mage was glad that the fight in the inn was over and without any fatalities. The barkeeper, who had arrived with his daughter Claire, informed Alwyn, Gideon and Galen that the posse was refusing to let the hostages go – the villagers believed that as they were backed up by Alwyn and his abilities, they were invincible. This thought troubled the elder techno-mage. Suddenly, Claire fainted. The barkeep told Alwyn that she had been getting worse all week. Alwyn, passing a beam of light over her body, was justifiably concerned: Claire was dying.

At the inn, the posse were talking about their next move. Lieutenant Meyers and his team stormed the inn, weapons drawn. The barkeeper complained as one of the soldiers moved to capture Claire, the barkeep's daughter and serving maid. Confident, Lieutenant Meyers began, telling those present that their fate would depend on the answers he received. In answer to his demands, the lights in the inn faded and smoke drifted in through every crack and opening. The barkeeper whispered the name of Alwyn, knowing how their protector introduced himself when he so chose. Appearing in the doorway shrouded in light and smoke, the elderly techno-mage's tone was weary, that of a parent having scolded a child repeatedly with no success as he told the EarthForce soldier to leave his people alone. As the EarthForce officer challenged Alwyn, Galen appeared behind his fellow mage, even as shapes formed in the flickering fire of the inn: Winged creatures, transparent, clearly holograms. Lieutenant Meyers' conviction that they were not harmful but merely images proved to be false, as one of the tiny winged demons suddenly took on real form, a vicious swipe sending the Lieutenant spinning to the floor. The soldiers open fire, shooting at demons that seemed to phase in and out of reality at random. Shots passed through their virtual forms before they took on physical form to strike nothing but air.

Galen congratulated his elder on the technical invocation. It was clear that the soldiers were losing the struggle, no EarthForce training covering an attack by foes that could change their very nature in microseconds. Alwyn commented that the design did not last more than an hour but that that was all that was required. They continued to chat about the quality of the programme, as the holodemons continued to wipe the floor with the shocked EarthForce soldiers. Soon enough, it was all over.

Having done all he could, Alwyn revealed that the mining was having an adverse affect on the health of the villagers. The barkeeper lived closest to the mine and his daughter spent a lot of time outside, so it was only natural that she should be the first affected. She was effectively overdosing on the mineral, which was thrown up by the strip-mining in high quantities. Gideon believed that if they could tell Captain Daniels this the mining operation would be stopped. Alwyn remained unconvinced, believing that Daniels would try and deny it. Gideon offered to speak to Daniels but recommended that Claire be taken up to the *Excalibur* for treatment. Furious that his daughter has been made sick by the unintended side effect of the mining operation, the barkeeper swore that a life would be taken for a life.

Entering the inn, all the villagers stood up in respect for Alwyn. It became clear that the techno-mage was not happy. For 12 years he had lived amongst them and had been proud to call them his friends. The taking of hostages, though, was in his opinion the weapon of choice of the coward and the criminal. One of the villagers protested that as they had given up their technology and their weapons, a requirement for living on Regula IV, they were in a weaker position than they would otherwise have been. Alwyn was insistent that their choice to give up technology had been the right one and that to take up the weapons of the attackers was to become like them. The techno-mage had thus been given no option other than to settle the problem in his own way, leaving the villagers to bear the consequences.

On the bridge of the *Excalibur*, Captain Gideon reported Claire's medical condition to Captain Daniels. The mining dust would indeed kill the villagers but Daniels remained unconvinced, wanting further tests to prove these initial

findings. Daniels refused to shut down the facility, saying that the dust would be investigated after the crisis had been resolved. It was clear to Gideon that Daniels had his orders and those orders came above reason and common sense. Then their communications were interrupted by a message from Galen. There had been a new development.

Returning to his debriefing with Captain Daniels, Gideon explained the things that Alwyn, being a techno-mage, was capable of. Nonplussed, Daniels did not see one individual as being a significant threat. Gideon explained that Alwyn was amplifying his power, using the curvature of the mine to concentrate the powers he was summoning. Gideon spelled out to Captain Daniels that the techno-mage could destroy the *Medusa*, literally being able to shoot it out of the sky from the planet's surface.

From one of the *Excalibur's* probes, Daniels could see that one solitary figure was calling a cyclone of energy around him. Daniels demanded that Gideon use the *Excalibur's* weaponry to destroy Alwyn, as Daniels did not have the resources to take out the target from his current position. Gideon instructed the main guns of the *Excalibur* to fire as per Captain Daniels' request. The ship pivoted to face Regula IV, the main weapon vaporising the whole mine complex, lighting up the skies for miles around. Little was left save charred rubble.

Meeting with the barkeeper, Gideon told him that his daughter Claire was on the mend. The barkeeper said that the hostages had been released and that that he and the other colonists would help the miners find a new, safer location. He stated that he wanted to honour Alwyn's memory by doing the right thing. With Claire returned to her father, Gideon was able to leave.

Standing overlooking the devastation caused by the *Excalibur's* main guns, Galen was joined by Alwyn, the latter complaining about the coolness of the mornings. Galen complained that Alwyn had cut that one close, glad that the older mage was still alive. Alwyn realised that he had stayed too long in this particular location, for the villagers had come to rely on him. He had to move on, perhaps to another world, even another star system. He would leave behind a legend, no-one knowing if he had ever truly existed. Alwyn liked that thought.

Galen admitted that he would miss Alwyn. It had been like being back home, in the company of other techno-mages. Alwyn teased his junior, saying that he was already home, referring to something other than the techno-mage order that Galen had been asked to leave. As Alwyn left, Gideon approached, having heard the whole thing. He suspected what Alwyn would do. He asked Galen if he wanted to take up Alwyn's mantle and have a home here on Regula. Galen said that he already had a home, repeating the intent of Alwyn's last words and understanding them.



Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The colony of Regula IV, which features in this episode, has sworn off advanced technology. This presents Games Masters with some great opportunities for springing different types of adventures on Player Characters. It may be that the Player Characters' ship is damaged and forced to land on Regula IV. With no advanced industries save perhaps the EarthForce mining operation, the Player Characters will be forced to rough it for a while. Fending off predators or protecting a farmstead from raiders from another holding are valid situations in which a group of characters could find themselves. A particular colonist group could have come into possession of energy weapons, upsetting the peaceful status quo. This world could be especially useful as a plot device if the group of characters needs to be somewhere but the adventure or campaign calls for them to be delayed.
- 5 Whilst not a nasty or evil-minded individual, Captain Daniels of the *Medusa* could become a nemesis for a group of Player Characters. He is a stickler for the rules and a true gung-ho officer. He is aware of humanitarian issues and concerns but simply places his orders above them in order of importance. A mission transporting livestock, the remnants of an alien race or medical supplies could run into difficulty if its way is barred by Captain Daniels and his crew. His attitude could severely upset a group of Player Characters who are members of EarthForce or even the Anla'shok, as Captain Daniels is not the sort of person to back down or admit he is wrong.

Visitors from Down the Street

Probable Start Date: May 10th

Travelling aboard a bullet car onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon was hunched forward focusing intently. Attempts by Matheson to interrupt him were pushed aside until Gideon sensed what he was looking for. ‘There...’ he breathed. Matheson was unsure what the issue was but Gideon was convinced that there was a funny smell, as though something had died out on the tracks. Matheson tried to convince Gideon that it had been properly investigated three times before but the captain of the *Excalibur* was unconvinced. At that particular point, in the transport tubes, there *was* a funny smell. His attention diverted by his link, Captain Gideon was informed that he was needed on the bridge; a distress signal had been received. Changing the bullet car’s destination to comply, he instructed Matheson to send a team out again to ascertain the source of the peculiar odour.

On the bridge, Matheson and Gideon consulted a three-dimensional schematic of an alien saucer vessel just a short distance ahead of the *Excalibur*. It was small in size, being only 12 metres in diameter, and was a clearly a short-range vessel, probably a lifepod. Gideon did not recognise the shape, configuration or type of the ship and decided that this had to be officially classified as a first contact situation. Matheson was informed that the alien saucer contained two life-forms and Gideon decided that they could not leave the ship out here in space.

Pulled into the *Excalibur*’s hangar bay by docking vehicles, armed soldiers readied themselves at the entrance hatch to the alien saucer. Opening the external hatch, two soldiers with flashlights entered, the lights from their devices passing over a dull grey metal interior with hazard strips looking



like they belonged on an EarthForce vessel, not a strange alien saucer. The lights locked onto a female green-skinned alien with red-tipped tentacles. A similar figure appeared holding a black pistol of alien design. Both wore business-like suits, not at all dressed in the manner of space explorers or even victims of some stellar incident. The voice of the armed alien, clearly masculine and surprisingly in well-pronounced English, announced that he would kill anyone who came closer. With one of the soldiers at gunpoint, the alien demanded of Gideon and his team of soldiers that the ship be refuelled at once. When Gideon asked why they were pursuing this course of action when their lives had been saved by being brought aboard the *Excalibur*, the armed alien became agitated, insisting that he would be made to disappear like everyone else.

Matheson, who had been wandering around this situation, focused on the armed alien, stretching out with his telepathic abilities. Seeing a snake crawling up his arm, the armed alien dropped his gun and backed off, which was the opportunity the soldier taken hostage needed to wrestle the alien to the ground. The female alien yelled out the name of her colleague, Durkani, in shock. She proceeded to draw a pistol but other EarthForce soldiers were there in time, managing to overpower her. Gideon ordered the two taken to the brig. The alien identified as Durkani shouted that the truth could not be denied as he was led away. The captain noticed that Lieutenant Matheson was still standing there, rubbing the front of his head, as if the victim of an intense migraine. Projection was allowed under the new regulations for telepaths but Gideon was told quite firmly that Matheson was not allowed to do anything else. What he did get was that the aliens were confused and deeply frightened.

In the brig, the two aliens conversed in their own tongue about the wisdom of making the distress call. The female alien, Lyssa, recalled entering her offices and finding them ransacked. Filing cabinets had been opened, their contents strewn across the room. A figure checking the door scared her but she had had the foresight to lock the door behind her. Moments later, Lyssa received a call on her mobile communicator from Durkani, who told her that he was not far away. All of their files were burned and there was nothing left in the way of evidence. Durkani had a plan as to where they could go and get the proof they needed, a place he referred to as ‘out there’. Arranging to meet her in the usual place, he signed off, looking at the view before him: A military base with craft capable of reaching space.

Pouring himself a coffee, Gideon looked at a camera image of Durkani and Lyssa in their cell. Entering the conference room, Matheson noted that the pair seemed to have calmed down. Insisting that Matheson help himself to a drink of synthesised coffee, Gideon confessed that if he drank anymore he would spend the night staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep. He also

suspected that someone was adding caffeine to his coffee on purpose. He went on to talk about how he wanted to go back home, sit outside with a glass of iced tea and feel the wind against his face, something which was lacking on a starship. This was Gideon's own personal paradise.

Matheson revealed the contents of Dr Chambers' report. The aliens were vastly different to humans in terms of general biology, especially in regard to their cardio and neural systems. Matheson said that the increased brain activity recorded whenever the two aliens spoke to their guards indicated that English was not their native language and that they were translating their own language into English. So far, there was no record of this alien race in any of the Earth Alliance's archives. Gideon did not know how they knew his language but either way it was still a first contact situation and it was his prerogative to speak to them personally and find out.

The two aliens waited nervously in their cell, Lyssa apologising to Durkani that she had not believed him until now. She had once held the view that Durkani was deluded but admitted that she had been wrong. The aliens, as they referred to the humans onboard the *Excalibur*, did indeed exist. Durkani said that all they had to do was make sure that they themselves continued to exist. Entering the cell, Gideon stated his hope that he was not intruding. He was here to make sure that they were being treated well. His plain and helpful conversation was rebuffed easily by Durkani, who was still convinced that Gideon intended both him and Lyssa personal harm. Gideon was confused at the lack of trust Durkani was showing him, as the alien went on to talk about secret recordings buried half a mile beneath one of their capital cities. Durkani had spent years decoding them, learning English.

Gideon confessed that he was totally lost. They sparred around for a while, until Durkani, unrepentant in his opinion, accused humanity of visiting his home planet for centuries. Durkani alleged that humanity ruined lives and helped create high-placed agencies within Durkani's government to conceal facts. The alien had therefore dedicated his life to exposing the conspiracy. Gideon decided to seal a temporary deal with Durkani: If the allegations were proved true, he would personally take Durkani and Lyssa back to their homeworld to investigate. After Gideon left, the two aliens decided they had to play along, for now, just so they could get back home safely.

Within the maintenance tunnels running alongside the transport tubes, an unassuming EarthForce ensign named Robert Conner had been given

the unenviable job by Lieutenant Matheson of finding the source of Captain Gideon's mysterious odour. He continued his checks, confirming to Matheson that after six hours down here he was the only thing that smelled. Acknowledging this, Matheson asked Ensign Connor to continue looking.

In the conference room, Durkani explained the efforts his race had made at space travel, mainly limited to their own solar system. Probes sent to nearby systems had not found any signs of life but in Durkani's opinion this was the official party line rather than the truth. He showed Gideon photographs of sightings of alien vessels by many different elements within his society.

Gideon only needed to take one look at the photograph to identify it: A 20th century blimp similar in appearance to the *Hindenberg*. Durkani revealed that his government had explained this object away as swamp gases. One of the ships had crashed in the desert on his world, he explained, showing Gideon a simplistic drawing of a ship crash, by a witness, with a survivor. The survivor was human in appearance.

Continuing further, the alien presented him with an artefact recovered from the crash site which Gideon recognised as a charred and mangled golf putter. Durkani said that there were also crop symbols, strange music and something else that was an insult to their intelligence. One of the probes of Durkani's race had found a series of faces carved into the rock of an alien world. Gideon could not contain a smile as he recognised the faces in the picture. It was Mount Rushmore. Durkani presented another photo apparently of the same location which had been clearly doctored. Gideon acknowledged the first photo as being Mount



Rushmore on Earth but denied that his world was doing anything to Durkani's world. Gideon questioned Durkani's role in all of this. The alien revealed he had been following the trail for years trying to prove that aliens were interfering in the culture of his world. Durkani and Lyssa had been investigating possible abductions by humans. The two had surprised a pair of suspects and a fight ensued, with the investigators winning. One of the beaten intruders was wearing a mask – and underneath that mask was a human face. And underneath *that* mask was another face... of Durkani's race again. Confused at what this meant, they fled. They decided to stow away on a ship bound for the fringes of their solar system and ejected in a lifepod. It was there they had met the *Excalibur*.



Impressed with the story, Gideon still wanted to know what Durkani's ultimate goal was. Durkani said that when money destined for public services was cut, the reason was that the humans behind the conspiracies on their world wanted to keep Durkani's people unsteady and more open to manipulation. Even their clothing, of a human style, had been pushed by fashion designers influenced by humans. He pleaded with Gideon to come to his world and prove the lie. Telling Durkani he would have a decision in the morning, Durkani was returned to his cell. Gideon looked at the next piece of supposed evidence, the outline of the Stars and Stripes flag cut into a field of growing crops.

Gideon was going over Durkani's evidence in his quarters when Matheson called to let him know that an alien ship was on approach. Matheson joked that, if Gideon was tired, perhaps they should ask the approaching alien ship to return in the morning. Arriving on the bridge and having accepted Matheson's joke with a wry smile, Gideon was surprised to learn that the alien vessel was actually trying to contact them in English. Establishing the connection, Special Agent Kendarr, a male of the same species as Durkani but with a demeanour making him appear years older, introduced himself. Kendarr requested the return of the two citizens the *Excalibur* had intercepted, for the two were to be executed.

After initial introductions onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon told the newly arrived Special Agent Kendarr that he would bring Durkani and Lyssa up from the brig but just to talk for now. In a bullet car, Kendarr argued that the death penalty for these two was justified, as they had commandeered a spacecraft and taken it beyond the limits of their solar system. There were alien races beyond their space and until Kendarr's race could catch up with those more advanced than themselves, they were at a tactical disadvantage. As to why they would use the knowledge of aliens for their own ends, Kendarr stated simply that he was not at liberty to explain, taken aback by a strange odour before they reached

the next bullet car station. Kendarr was also not at liberty to explain why, out of all the alien transmissions they could have received, English was the language they had elected to learn. Gideon said that he wanted to get everyone together up in the conference room to see if the truth would wander in by accident.

Upon seeing Special Agent Kendarr, Lyssa stated that she had wondered how long it would be before he showed up. When Special Agent Kendarr told Durkani that this was all planned and that he had ended up here to find out how much Durkani truly knew, Durkani was angry with Gideon. Kendarr tried to draw a gun, saying that it was over and that neither Durkani nor Lyssa would return home alive. Durkani, managing to grab the gun, also grabbed Kendarr and put the weapon to Kendarr's head. Giving Gideon an hour to refuel their ship, Durkani dragged Kendarr off, accompanied by Lyssa.

In a maintenance corridor, Durkani, Lyssa and the captured Kendarr tried to find somewhere to hide. A small alcove on the inside of a transport tube, with bullet cars going past, was the best place that could be found.

In the conference room, a hastily called meeting had begun. A military aide informed Gideon that a search was underway but the captain was concerned with what would happen when the aliens were found. The aliens' ship had almost finished recharging. Of more concern to him was the fact that a weapon had been sneaked past the scanners, for which he berated the operations chief. Gideon was less concerned with the conspiratorial games that were being played out by Kendarr and his kin than he was by the disruption of the *Excalibur* and her mission. As if in answer to a prayer, his military aide informed him that they had located the aliens.



Climbing up to get access to the bullet tube, Gideon realised that the smell he had noticed earlier was actually most intense alongside the maintenance ladder he was climbing. He pushed a badly corroded waste disposal pipe gingerly and it collapsed, proving to be the source of the smell both he and Kendarr had previously noticed. The contents of the pipe covered the ground below, the worst examples of sewage in every sense. Thinking aloud, Gideon wondered if every time a bullet car passed by the vibrations had disturbed the pipe, causing the horrendous smell.

Noticing the strange new smell, an alerted Durkani and Lyssa were nonetheless ambushed by Gideon and a contingent of soldiers. In the centre of the transport tube corridor, they had nowhere to go. Durkani refused to put down his gun until a bullet car slid to a halt behind them, carrying more soldiers. Gideon played on Durkani's paranoia, claiming that they could kill Durkani and Lyssa if they wanted but would rather the two conspiracy theorists get off the *Excalibur* as quickly as possible. Durkani and Lyssa were taken away; left standing in the middle of the transport tubes, Gideon realised that he could feel the wind on his face, courtesy of passing bullet cars.

Telling the aliens that their ship was charged up, Gideon told Durkani and Lyssa that they could go. When the two conspiracy theorists told Kendarr that it was not over, he had a perfect answer, one he had used many times before, already prepared. He told them that without proof, no-one would believe them. The fully-charged alien lifepod left, proceeding directly back to their Durkani and Lyssa's home planet.

In the hangar bay Gideon was presented with the weapon that Kendarr had brought onboard. After a detailed analysis by Max Eilerson: It transpired that it was merely a dummy, a replica. Gideon quizzed Kendarr about the fact that he was never actually in danger. Kendarr had

intended for Durkani to grab the weapon and for Gideon to consider the situation serious but was not stupid enough to put his own life in danger. Gideon, angered at being so easily manipulated, found that Kendarr was not easily intimidated and only answered questions because there was no reason not to. Kendarr revealed that his race had a history of paranoia and suspicion, which gave rise to many wars. Most of these wars were civil wars, based around the governments of his world not delivering on their agreed promised. 200 years before, Kendarr went on, they had started to receive communications from other worlds. They had had the idea to use aliens, or 'outsiders' as they were called, as the perfect blame mechanism for their social problems. They selected a race at random – and that race was humanity. All of the alien sightings were created by Kendarr's race. By creating a conspiracy, they could blame the aliens covertly interfering with their government. Kendarr and his kin were merely puppets in the control of the alien influence.

Kendarr revealed that Durkani's experiences on an alien ship, the *Excalibur*, would help propel the conspiracy theories further and so Durkani would survive this little escapade. By picking up Durkani, Gideon had inadvertently helped Kendarr, as Durkani and Lyssa had been unable to uncover anything that would prove the alien involvement in their culture to be a carefully orchestrated set of lies. His explanation complete, Kendarr complimented Gideon on his race's culture and lit up his own race's equivalent of a cigarette.

The *Excalibur*, having followed Kendarr's ship to his home planet, saw a blue-green world that ironically bore some external similarities to Earth. When Gideon confirmed that they were within firing range, Matheson was worried. Gideon explained that the only thing he was about to attack was a lie. 20 of the *Excalibur*'s probes had been loaded with a copy of the *Interstellar Encyclopaedia*, together with a record of everything that had recently occurred on the *Excalibur*, proving the existence of the conspiracy orchestrated by Special Agent Kendarr and those whom he worked for. Kendarr had clearly underestimated Gideon and his combined ability and wish to blow the lies wide open.

The probes, distributed to the planet below, were targeted to land just outside of major population centres so that they did not cause any casualties. Their dispersion and the number of probes would ensure that the authorities would not be able to prevent all of the probes from falling into the hands of the general public. Talking over the decision, Matheson said that some might say that Gideon was interfering with the alien's culture. Gideon, his sense of honour offended and feeling wholly manipulated by Kendarr, did not particularly care, believing that truth would win out in the end.

Later, in a small alcove in the transport tube, the very same one where Durkani and Lyssa had hidden with Kendarr, Gideon sat on a chair with his shoes off wearing a loud Hawaiian-style shirt. Taking a sip of iced tea, complete with a slice of lemon, he felt the wind on his face and for a moment considered himself to be in paradise.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The aftermath of Gideon's dispersal of the probes could become very messy for the Norceti and could even result in civil war. The government would attempt to claim that the truth sent down to the world was nothing more than lies intended to destabilise the government but the sheer volume of knowledge that Gideon sends down would discredit the ruling bodies. In response, the government could declare a state of martial law. If a group of Norceti can create a working transmitter and contact the Interstellar Alliance, then the ISA may be forced to intervene. This would be an excellent opportunity for the Rangers to become involved. Alternatively, the discovery of the world could present a goldmine for IPX to exploit.
- 5 The Norceti situation illustrates the power or propaganda, a recurrent theme in both the *Babylon 5* and *Crusade* series. Whilst in this case the propaganda was devised and perpetuated by a minor oppressive government, this may not always be the case. Little is known of the extensiveness of Drakh holdings – it is more than possible that they have client races of their own, much as they were once the servants of the Shadows. A group of Player Characters crash landing on such a client race's planet may find themselves persecuted for no good reason. If the Minbari, human and Narn have been vilified by the Drakh, the deluded client race may prove remarkably tenacious in wiping out the 'invading alien scum' from their homeworld...

The Well of Forever

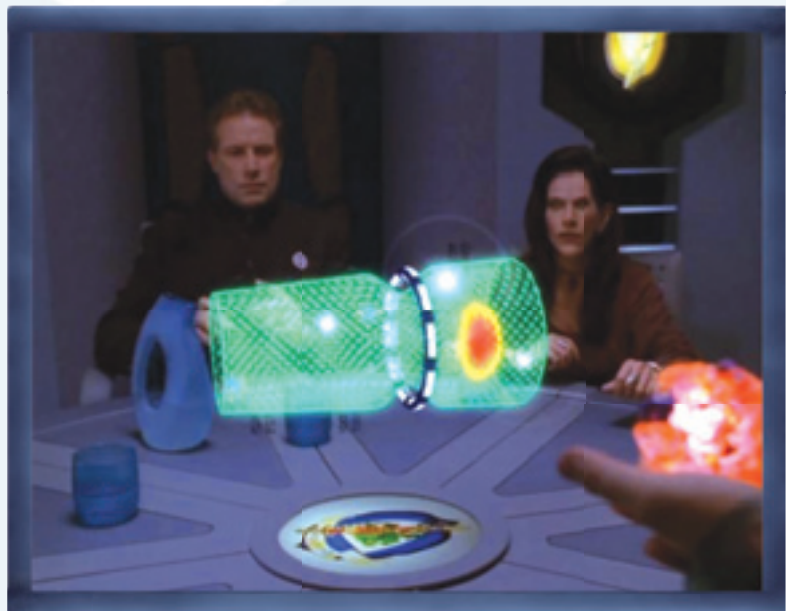
Probable Start Date: May 19th

A shuttle bearing the old logo of the Psi Corps approached the *Excalibur*. Walking through a corridor with Lieutenant Matheson, Captain Gideon was told that Mr Jones from the Bureau of Telepathic Integration was coming aboard. Given the role of interrogating telepaths in a similar manner to that of an internal affairs division of an Earth-bound police force, all of

the representatives of the Bureau were called Mr Jones, as according to Lieutenant Matheson it made the ordeal less personal. Mr Jones was here to ascertain, via a telepathic deep scan, whether Matheson had been breaking the rules. Gideon, angry at this, said he would speak up on Matheson's behalf but the telepathic first officer was forced to decline. 'It's just him, me and the rules.' Matheson answered, grateful that he had a commanding officer who was also a friend. It was only when that same commanding officer had departed that Matheson felt a shudder up his spine; Mr Jones was there, behind him.

In the conference room, Gideon asked if anyone at the meeting had anything else they wanted to suggest regarding other possible investigations in the current sector. An answer came from the door, a new voice. Galen, standing in the doorway, seemed to be in a jovial mood, a smile on his face. He showed his hand and a luminous rock within created a rotating holographic map a foot above the conference table. Explaining the information contained within the rock, Galen said that it would take them to a precise location in hyperspace that was normally hidden. The Well of Forever was a focal point of immense power, like Stonehenge, being a crossroads in hyperspace. Needless to say, the ever-sceptical Max Eilerson began pouring scorn on Galen and his magic rock. Dureena informed the others that her race had been taught to avoid crossroads, in addition to places such as cliffs, pits, caverns and wells. To a techno-mage, though, it was a place of answers for those who were willing to listen. Galen was convinced that the secrets and knowledge that might be at the Well of Forever could even benefit the search for a cure to the plague.

The entire group was sceptical, Gideon asking why Galen needed their help. The techno-mage said that his ship *could* plot the journey successfully; for any other ship to stray so far from normal hyperspace routes and the signals



of beacons would cause them to become hopelessly lost. His ship, however, was not strong enough make the trip, not being able to manoeuvre in the strong gravitational currents that far out. The *Excalibur* was strong enough to manoeuvre there, so by combining their efforts the voyage could be made.

With little else in this sector having proved of interest, Gideon acquiesced. He agreed to take a look but if they arrived at their destination and there was nothing there, they would turn around and head back to the known areas of space. Departing to his ship to set up the navigational merge, Galen responded to a question by stating that whilst some had actually reached the Well of Forever, no-one had actually returned.

Onboard his pinnacle, Galen interfaced with the *Excalibur's* systems, courtesy of a techno-mage spell represented by a transparent orange navigational globe hovering an inch above his hand. Opening up a channel, written words confirming the link passed over the surface of the globe, as inside the sphere a tiny representation of the *Excalibur* itself appeared. Upon instruction by Gideon, the merge was initiated. Almost immediately the results were visible on the *Excalibur's* main sensor display. Galen's systems were a thousand times more complex than the navigational array onboard the *Excalibur*; Gideon would have been rendered speechless were he not so enthused. Galen's ship was able to amplify the faintest signal in hyperspace and amplify it to such a degree that it was usable. This explained how techno-mages were never seen in hyperspace, as their technology enabled them to travel completely off beacon. Gideon wanted to investigate Galen's ship further and Matheson said he would do what he could. First, though, Matheson had an appointment with Mr Jones.

In the *Excalibur's* canteen, Gideon was playing with a pack of cards. Dureena found him and asked if she could speak to him for a moment. Offering to deal in for a hand, the thief identified her cause for concern: Galen and the fact that he was hiding something from them. Dureena was evidently happy with her cards; Gideon put two of his own down and picked up two new cards. Dureena told Galen that her first instruction when growing up had been never to look for trouble unless you knew in advance what you would get out of it. Gideon had a straight flush, Queen high, one of the best card hands he had been given in ages. With a smug comment, he put his cards down on the table. Smiling in return, Dureena told Gideon the second instruction had been that one should never gamble with a thief and she put down her own hand: The 9, 10, Jack, Queen and King, all Hearts. His hand was beaten by the narrowest margin. Gideon congratulated her, even though one of the cards that he tossed away was the Queen of Hearts. Saying nothing, Dureena let Gideon check the cards that he had thrown away. It was a different card from the one he had actually disposed of. Gideon asked Dureena if she would show him that trick, impressed at her sleight of hand. A genuine smile that conflicted with her normal demeanour was the response and she promised to teach him if they lived that long.

In Matheson's quarters, Mr Jones was attempting to make polite conversation with the telepathic first officer. The inquisitor had noticed that the *Excalibur* had jumped into hyperspace after he had arrived onboard. Matheson tried to assure him that they would drop him off when they were done. Mr Jones revealed that Lieutenant Matheson had become a role model to some telepaths back home. With military service being previously denied to telepaths, Matheson was the first to have a chance to fulfil a dream long barred for those with psychic gifts. Taking Matheson

off guard, Mr Jones initiated a deep probe, telling him that despite the pain and discomfort it was necessary. Reading Matheson's mind, he retrieved details of where they were going. Mr Jones was able to extract their destination, the Well of Forever, from Matheson's mind. Matheson protested, saying that Mr Jones had no right to that information. The telepathic inquisitor told him in response that his job gave him the right and that in the first officer's case an exception had to be made. Mr Jones also added that Matheson had made more than a few mistakes along the way and he would do better to think about his own job rather than that of Mr Jones and his kin.

Galen entered Dureena's quarters and was almost instantly taken aback by what she had done. Everything seemed... *smaller* than in normal quarters; even the chairs only stood





a foot off the ground. Taking a seat, Galen and Dureena discussed the nature of lies, with Galen concluding that it was obvious enough that everyone had secrets. Dureena stated that she wanted to believe Galen and that she wanted to trust him. In return, he told her that the Well of Forever was a great monument where different races had brought offerings through the ages. It was a sacred, spiritual place and Dureena would get an answer back if she asked the right question. Standing to leave, Galen offered something in return for Gideon's comment. He said that everyone had something to hide and to tell, a secret name, along with a question that unlocked their heart. Galen's question was simply 'Why?'

Captain Gideon found a seething Lieutenant Matheson on the bridge of the *Excalibur*. Inquiring after the trouble, Matheson told him that Mr Jones had found out about their destination even though he was not supposed to. The lieutenant then apologised to Gideon for bringing it to his attention.

In hyperspace, a veritable flotilla of alien forms floated, similar to jellyfish but with dark, protruding tentacles around their midsections. Any one of them would dwarf an Hyperion cruiser – one of the larger floating forms was half the size of the *Excalibur*!

On the bridge, Eileron confirmed that IPX had received reports of an alien form floating in hyperspace in this area but had little more to go on than that. He suggested that the *Excalibur* send out mini-cams to investigate them further. Galen explained them to be a barely sentient life-form, the Fen. He informed those present on the bridge that these alien forms were attracted to bright objects and if the *Excalibur* drifted through them, then they would be fine. Evidently the Fen were out to prove Galen wrong, for as the *Excalibur* passed through the flock of alien life-

forms, one of them grabbed the top wing of the *Excalibur* and pulled the ship closer. Galen's initial thought that the Fen might simply be curious was proved embarrassingly false as the Fen that had latched onto the *Excalibur* started shaking it rhythmically.

The penny dropped after a few seconds. Gideon ordered engines to full and the *Excalibur* pulled away, leaving the amorous Fen behind. Galen had done another vanishing act and Gideon was given a warning by Eileron: The further they went off the beacon, the greater the risk of encountering something bigger in the food chain. He reasoned that the Fen could not exist in the natural order without there being something that preyed on them. Dureena arrived on the bridge asking what had just happened. Gideon told her it was just some alien life-forms becoming over-friendly with his ship.

In the conference room later on, Gideon spoke to Dureena, for he was questioning the validity of this mission. Unbeknownst to Gideon, his words were overheard by one of Galen's artefacts of techno-magery as the mage proceeded down to his ship several levels below. The scanners were totally dead and Gideon wondered if they should turn back. Dureena disagreed, stating that she wanted to trust someone, anyone. Gideon decided that he would continue for another day; he owed Galen that much. After that they would turn around and head back to known space.

In his quarters, passing the time by playing a game of chess against himself, Gideon's screen showed a message from Lieutenant Matheson. They were due to arrive at the destination in a few hours but preliminary scans had shown nothing there. It was possible that the Well was hidden behind a hyperspace bubble or some other field but Matheson discounted this. Between the sensors on Galen's flyer and those onboard the *Excalibur*, there was no way that they could miss anything at that location. Pulling on his jacket, Gideon went to the door of his quarters, discovering Galen outside. The techno-mage stated that going back was not an option. Gideon protested, saying that they had come out here on a whim and there was nothing to be found.

Galen revealed that as part of the merging process between his ship and the *Excalibur*, the prototype destroyer was actually under *his* control. His tone, previously jovial and playful, turned earnestly serious. Gideon was not happy, as this was in effect a mutiny. Galen attempted a weak apology before turning to leave. Standing in his quarters for a minute, considering what had been done to him, Gideon snapped. He turned and ran down the corridor after Galen and when he reached the techno-mage he

grabbed him forcefully, snarling that Galen had no right to do this. Taken aback, Galen told him that his pinnacle would calculate a new course based on hyperspace drifting and that the link between the vessels could not be broken. If Gideon attempted to tamper with the link or force a break, then both ships risked being lost; the *Excalibur* would be unable to locate a beacon to lock onto and Galen's ship would be pulled down a gravitational incline.

Gideon wanted the reason for Galen's actions; the technical explanation was not enough. Galen rolled his eyes, commenting on that question being asked again. Gideon went over how Galen must have planned this from the start and recalled his previous comments that the *Excalibur* and her crew were like a family to the techno-mage, so he wanted to know what it was that would make Galen break this? The answer was a promise, Galen said simply, his regret at what was transpiring and his anger at being forced to defend himself gone. Gideon warned Galen that everything else after this day would be done alone. This thought, sad as it was, did not upset the techno-mage, as it would not be the first time.

In an impromptu meeting with Mr Jones, Gideon was told that the telepathic investigator had finished his scan and found some areas for concern. Matheson had occasionally used his powers to sense the emotions of those who had passed through the *Excalibur*. They were not serious breaches of conduct but they would require him to return home for some additional training. Gideon said he could not allow that, as Matheson was answerable only to him. Mr Jones disagreed, stating that Matheson was advisable to the Senate Committee on Metasensory Abilities first. Gideon accused the investigator of discrimination in picking on Lieutenant Matheson and Mr Jones could not deny Gideon's charge.

On the bridge, Matheson told Gideon that his attempts to find out more about the technology on Galen's pinnacle had failed and that the techno-mage must have been aware that they were looking. Giving up, Matheson asked Gideon what they would do if actually found something. When Gideon ordered that an EVA team go out, Matheson said that he would struggle with going EVA in hyperspace, as his telepathic abilities would be boosted to immense levels. As the *Excalibur* began to slow and the message that it was doing so was echoed around the bridge, Galen appeared, an awkward silence the only greeting that Gideon wanted to give.

Piercing a light cloud, the *Excalibur* approached a monstrous structure, multiple stone rings thousands of miles across dwarfing the *Excalibur* like a fly on a cliff-face. It glowed with a pure white light at its centre. Lieutenant Matheson



confirming that it had a self-contained atmosphere. As Gideon turned to speak to the techno-mage, he was shocked to discover that yet again Galen had done a vanishing act. His pinnacle was visible, flying towards the centre of the Well. Gideon said that he was taking a shuttle out, to find out what Galen was playing at.

On the rocky surface of the Well, surrounded by statues and tombs, Galen's pinnacle touched down. The techno-mage tucked a circular medallion underneath his robes and left his ship. Although he heard the landing of an Earth Alliance shuttle behind him, Galen did not even register its presence as he wandered around on the ashy grey soil, apparently without aim or direction.

Max Eilerson was enthusing over the results to Dureena, scribbling furiously in his notebook. The mineral deposits which made up the Well were astounding. The entire core of the Well of Forever was made of Quantum-40, which was worth billions to any jump gate construction company. In addition, there were traces of gold, precious metals and caverns of jewels. It was a treasure trove. Dureena attempted to correct a resource-obsessed Eilerson: It was a mausoleum. The surface of the Well was covered with entrances to burial mounds, the jewels and previous metals had been left here as statements of farewell and respect.

Down at the Well, Gideon asked Galen to explain what was going on. He watched as Galen removed the necklace, the captain sensing that this was the purpose behind the grand deceit. Galen explained that the reason for the deception was Isabelle, a techno-mage who he had fallen in love with. Galen went on, saying how they had studied together and pictured her tiny frame in an over-stuffed chair. In his dreams he still remembered the stitching of runes on her gown, and could hear her sighing on an evening when he was reading something, as if she was having trouble

with a particular passage, description or breakdown of an incantation. Words never needed to be said sometimes. Gideon asked Galen if she was his wife and the techno-mage said no.

Galen said that it was difficult to explain relationships within the techno-mage order but she was his love. Finding the Well of Forever had been her dream and so it had become his. Galen had promised her that he would bring her to the Well to rest, her ashes inside a vial in the necklace. Gideon nodded his agreement, to allow Galen to finish what he started. The techno-mage said a litany as he scattered the ashes of his love. Leaving the necklace on the floor, Galen stayed there awhile, as the mists of the Well swirled around him and around the *Excalibur* several thousand miles away.

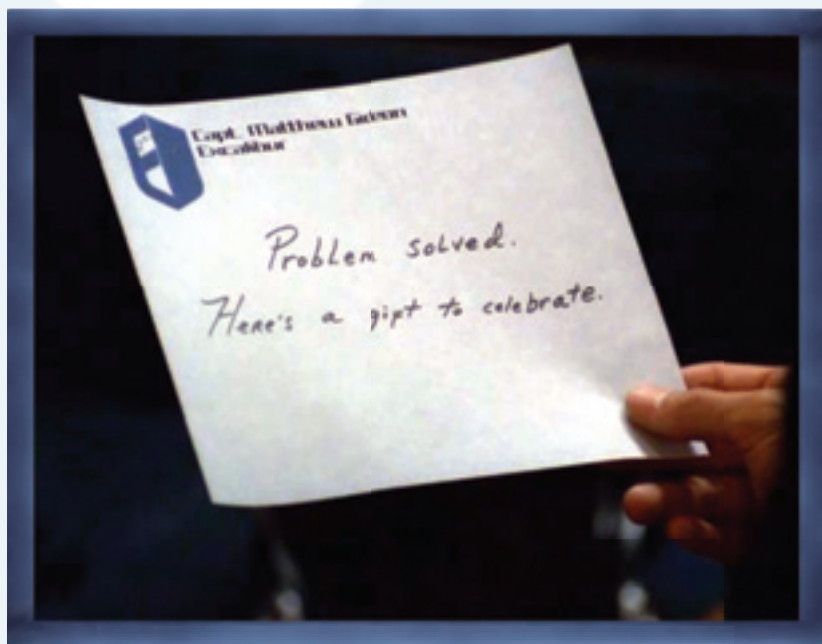
Dureena and Eilerson were in the middle of a heated argument about the Well of Forever. The archaeologist wanted the Well taken back to the Russian Consortium for Xeno Studies. Dureena did not want this, as this was a resting place, a gravesite of techno-mages and other individuals whose names and races would never be known. Taking up his place in the command chair, Gideon ordered the *Excalibur* to come about and head back for the nearest known beacon. Eilerson tried to complain but Gideon told him to shut up. The archaeologist tried to get Galen to support his argument but all the techno-mage could do was look at the Well of Forever through the forward viewscreen and utter a goodbye to his love.

Gideon placed a call to Dureena, who was just lighting a candle in her quarters. He needed a favour from someone who was single-minded. Not for him directly, but actually for Lieutenant Matheson. Sure enough Dureena found a bullet car and upon boarding, the already present Mr Jones felt something stirring mentally within Dureena, something so obvious he found it hard to ignore. He scanned her, the discomfort visible on her face as he rifled through her thoughts, finding something disturbing.

Gideon complained aloud as the telepathic investigator burst into the conference room. Mr Jones explained that there was a bomb onboard attached to the jump engines. When Gideon challenged Mr Jones with how he had come by this information, the investigator realised he had been manipulated as the Captain poured himself a fresh coffee. He had well and truly trapped Mr Jones, Dureena's ability to focus on revenge and death neatly trapping Mr Jones. He asked Mr Jones what the standard was that a watchman like the investigator should be held up to and what the penalties would be. Gideon offered to forget about everything as long as Mr Jones did.

Entering his quarters, his shift over, Lieutenant Matheson found an EVA suit and a handwritten note. It simply said that the problem was solved and a the suit was a gift to celebrate. Matheson realised that his friend and captain had done this, affirming his absolute trust and respect in his commanding officer. When there was an alert up on the bridge saying that an airlock had been opened, Gideon told a worried deck officer not to worry. Matheson, taking full use of Gideon's gift, was overwhelmed by the beauty of hyperspace, his mind soaring free and unrestrained.

In the gymnasium, whilst crewmembers practised martial arts and exercised, Galen approached Gideon, who was working out on a stepping machine. Straight to the point, Galen said that he was going and wanted to know if he should bother coming back. Gideon was hurt that Galen had not trusted him enough with the truth. Gideon said that because Galen had not given him the chance, the techno-mage would never know if Gideon would have gone along with the plan to bring Isabelle's ashes to the Well of Forever. Galen countered that neither of them could claim altruism today, revealing his awareness of Gideon's attempt to uncover the secrets of Galen's pinnace. Galen said that he had fulfilled a promise, which was more important. Rather than make an apology for the deception, he gave Gideon a promise. Galen insisted that because of what had happened today with his oath to Isabelle, Galen would do whatever was required to keep a promise he had made. When Galen asked if Gideon would do the same, the captain of the *Excalibur* confirmed he had already made that promise, multiplied by three hundred, for those who died onboard the *Cerberus* a decade ago. Galen asked if Gideon had completed this promise. When Gideon said no, Galen confirmed that, when the time comes, the favour would be returned.



On his way to his ship, Galen was stopped by a passing Dureena. She asked about the answers that Galen had promised her earlier and whether or not Galen had been telling the truth. According to Galen, for Max Eilerson the question had been to establish if there was anything in all the universe that he could not have. At that very moment, an attempt by Eilerson to collate all known information on the Well of Forever was lost as a techno-mage spell deleted the information from his computer system. Matheson would have received an answer had he gone to the Well. Gideon had received his answer but according to Galen he had not been listening, so he would have to look elsewhere.

Dureena enquired about her answer and Galen told her to be more careful when talking in front of an open channel to his ship. He replayed her earlier comments about wanting to trust someone, courtesy of a six-inch tall holographic image of her in the palm of Galen's hand. Dureena was not sure how to decipher her answer, so she asked about Galen's own question and whether he had gotten *his* answer. Galen admitted that getting that particular answer might take a little longer, sharing more in common with Gideon than the techno-mage could vocally admit.



Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The Well of Forever is practically out of limits for most groups of characters. This is not due to inaccessibility – enough ships and structures have found their way there over the years to discount the idea that it is inviolable. It is because returning from the Well takes formidable resources – the conjoined abilities of the *Excalibur* and a techno-mage pinnacle were needed to accurately plot the course and thus allow for a safe route back to known hyperspace routes. Nevertheless, the presence of one oddity in hyperspace does not exclude the possibility of another. Indeed, the Vorlon artefact containing the doorway to Thirdspace was discovered in hyperspace, for example. Whilst the nature of hyperspace makes it impossible for it to be wholly stable, with its gravitational inclines and other menaces to safe navigation, a one-shot plot device could be for a group of characters to discover a strange facility or artefact or possibly even a ship billions of years old drifting in hyperspace. If the Player Characters leave it behind, chances are it will be gone when they return, having drifted back off of known hyperspace routes.

- 5 Hyperspace travel is relatively safe to and from the majority of known worlds and for dozens of sectors around them. However, as mused by Max Eilerson when the Fen are encountered, when travelling so far from main hyperspace routes there is clearly a food chain. Whatever the reason, these life-forms and entities are not found in the areas of hyperspace close to civilised worlds. Did the First Ones conduct a purge, allowing the space around them to be traversed in relative safety? There are creatures alive in hyperspace and the presence of one could cause a nasty fright for a group of Player Characters who have grown dismissive of the dangers of faster-than-light travel.

Each Night I Dream of Home

Probable Start Date: May 28th

Sitting in his captain's chair, Gideon proceeded to shuffle his well-used deck of cards. For two hours now, the *Excalibur* had been holding steady, waiting for further orders. Gideon asked Matheson how they were supposed to know who their target was when they arrived. Matheson's attempt at humour fell flat on an impatient Gideon.

A jump point formed a short distance away and Matheson was surprised to announce that the ship that had emerged from the jump point was a Warlock-class destroyer, the *Foxfire* – long, menacing and with an impressive array of weaponry that was the best EarthForce had in its arsenal, rivalling that of the loaned *Excalibur*. Matheson relayed to Gideon that there were two passengers on an incoming

shuttle and they were requesting to come aboard. Gideon explained that only a handful of *Warlock* destroyers had come off the construction line so far and whoever was on that shuttle must be important to justify a *Warlock* carrying them. With the shuttle safely away, the *Foxfire* jumped back to hyperspace.

Greeting his guests in the conference room, Gideon was surprised to find that one of them was a Senator from the Earth Alliance. Senator Redway introduced his companion, David Williams, but would not be drawn out on the reason for his companion's presence. Despite a red carpet treatment normally being warranted, Senator Redway agreed that secrecy was the preferred choice.

Explaining the reason for his being brought to the *Excalibur*, Senator Redway confirmed that out of the full 120 members of the Earth Alliance Senate, only 12 had been lucky enough to be offworld when the Drakh attacked Earth and unleashed their plague. It was the senator's belief that the Drakh would love nothing more than to kill those senators who had escaped the attack on Earth, leaving Earth isolated behind the established quarantine zone. Needless to say, the mission had risks but it had been authorised by the Joint Chiefs. They were to proceed to Sector 100-17-3. Recognising these co-ordinates instantly, Gideon wanted to know why they were going to Earth. Senator Redway would not say more, other than they must not stop for anything.

A Starfury span helplessly through space, its pilot attempting to contact Babylon Control for assistance. Badly damaged and running low on oxygen, Captain Elizabeth Lochley attempted to contact Babylon Control again but to no avail. Either she was too far out of range or her long-range communication transmitter had been damaged by the conflict. An occasional spark lit up her face as she asked

the onboard computer how much oxygen her ship had left. Instructing the computer to reduce the oxygen flow, she listened as the system told her that her life could be under threat but she had to stretch out what remaining air she had left.

Powering through hyperspace, Matheson gave Senator Redway a brief introduction to the *Excalibur*. The Senator said that he was happy that he had voted for the project even though it cost a lot of money, conveniently glossing over the fact that technically the *Excalibur* did not belong to the Earth Alliance. Gideon reminded Senator Redway that he was in error, having actually voted against the very ship he was standing on. Smiling, Senator Redway asked Gideon if his father had ever told him never to contradict his elders.

Gideon introduced Senator Redway and David Williams to Dr Chambers. The guest of the senator asked if he could speak to Dr Chambers privately and the senator agreed that it was a good idea. As they left Gideon and Matheson alone on the bridge, the captain asked his first officer if they had passed through the ID protocol when they came aboard. They had, but had only stated their names and points of origin, at the senator's request.

Gideon was curious as to the reason why a civilian was travelling with one of the few untainted senators. Matheson responded by asking if the captain was hinting that he log on to EarthNet and do some digging. Matheson said it would be a breach in protocol and then went on to reel off a list of statistics about David Williams, having already done the search. Gideon was surprised by the fact that David Williams was in fact a plumber.

A weak signal was received by the *Excalibur's* potent sensor array. Matheson presumed it was coming from a small ship, on the scale of a Starfury perhaps. When Gideon gave the order to jump out of hyperspace to investigate, a lurking Senator Redway objected, saying that Gideon could not do that. Stating EarthForce regulations, the senator told Gideon that he had to let someone else deal with it. Reaching their destination on time was their chief responsibility. The *Excalibur* dropped to normal space, a disabled Starfury her target but continuing her course and heading, thus satisfying Senator Redway's order that she not stop. Gideon explained that the *Excalibur's* gravitic propulsion system provided the ship with artificial gravity. It also allowed dampeners in the hangar bay to bring a damaged ship aboard by creating cushions of gravity. Matheson was concerned that the system in the hangar bay was only for ships with some power and with an approach vector. Gideon ordered him to pilot the *Excalibur* carefully, even though they would literally have to run the disabled Starfury over.





Approached by the *Excalibur*, the collision alert sounded, waking Lochley. She saw the ship charging at her as the Starfury entered the hangar bay, still spinning as it did so. It passed through a series of walls comprised solely of light blue energy that managed to sap some of the kinetic energy out of her ship. But not enough, as three technicians at a nearby viewport looked on in panic. After three more speed barriers, one of the Starfury's engine pods fell away and the ship was finally trapped by the last barrier and held in place like a fly in a spider's web. Gideon turned to Senator Redway, ready to dispense a lecture. In no uncertain terms, Gideon informed the politician that he had once been at the other end of a distress beacon and that he would never turn his back on one. Telling Matheson to put the *Excalibur* back into hyperspace, Gideon turned and left the command deck.

In Dr Chambers' office, David Williams was running through his circumstances when the Drakh had attacked Earth. He had missed returning to Earth by a few days and that was the problem. David Williams actually wanted her to infect him with the Drakh Plague.

Checking on Elizabeth Lochley, whom he had met before, Gideon had to give the commander of Babylon 5 the unfortunate news that she had been unconscious for two days. Lochley revealed that she had set a trap for raiders who had been hitting civilian transports but that there had been more combatants than she had anticipated. Lochley was surprised that the *Excalibur* was running silent and headed for Earth. Gideon could not tell her why or how long this would take. When she asked what he could tell her, he took the opportunity to tease, before stating that the mission was classified. He told her that she would be moved to the infirmary, it being more comfortable there and would be returned to Babylon 5 as soon as they could manage it. He asked Lochley if she would like to join him for some dinner.

With the *Excalibur* finally in geosynchronous orbit above Earth, Gideon and Matheson discussed their homeworld. Gideon could recall every detail of the Earth but he could not remember the face of his father. In response, Matheson said that it was because people do not know which face to remember: The face of one's father from when one was a child, from when one first left home or from when one last saw him. Earth was constant, though. Gideon admonished his first officer for having such thoughts at such a young age.

An atmospheric shuttle approached them, rising from a poisoned Earth. Senator Redway, who had made himself present on the bridge, announced this was the package they were here to pick up, despite the rules on ships leaving Earth. The ascendant shuttle dropped a lifepod, then exploded shortly after, leaving the lifepod drifting in high orbit. The contents of the lifepod were contaminated but the outer skin of the lifepod had been sterilised. Telling Gideon to open the lifepod somewhere safe, Senator Redway left. Matheson's concern that Gideon had agreed to bring the pod aboard, thereby indirectly disobeying the direct order of Earth Alliance President Luchenko, was negated when Gideon assured him there was no risk. Two maintenance bots, as ordered, were dispatched to retrieve the lifepod and place it in Medbay isolation. The cargo aboard, the *Excalibur* jumped to hyperspace and then to a location designated as a test site.

In temporary quarters, David Williams requested a link be opened to Earth. Current restrictions did not limit Senator Redway's access to communications and so David Williams, having appropriated the Senator's access codes, opened up the link.

Gideon, Redway and Dr Chambers were in the medical bay, looking into the isolab that was linked to the lifepod. They agreed to open up lifepod, and as the door slid open, a figure stepped out, taking a moment to orientate himself. Senator Redway introduced the figure carried by the lifepod, Dr Stephen Franklin, Head of Xenobiological Research from EarthDome. Franklin confirmed that he was feeling well and inquired after the patient, David Williams. Gideon protested that evidently something untoward was going on and Dr Franklin chastised Senator Redway for keeping this secret from Captain Gideon, whom he wanted fully briefed on the experiment.

Dr Franklin explained that before the virus could be stopped, it first had to be identified. That meant tracing a course of infection from the initial moment of contamination, observing how it spread through a host's system. He went on to explain that when the virus had been released into the Earth's atmosphere, it had entered every air-breathing

life-form on Earth. Once inside a host it mutated quickly and finding it after that point had proved impossible. They needed a baseline and needed to follow an infection to help develop a cure. Dr Chambers realised from her earlier conversation that the intended baseline was Mr Williams.

The subject of the discussions David Williams, was making good use of his time in his temporary quarters. Against orders, he made a communications link to Earth. A young woman answered the link, well dressed and well spoken, pretty but a little frail. She was elated to see him; David told her the good news that he was coming home.

Aboard the flagship of a fleet of Drakh assault ships lurking in hyperspace, the warleader of the fleet, a Drakh by the name of Rimush was given a feed of the message that David Williams was transmitting. Known to be a capable leader and a menacing individual, Rimush gave the instruction to an aide to set course to intercept and to notify the rest of the fleet of this incident.

Still speaking to the woman on Earth, Williams was forced to break the communication when the door link chimed. Telling the woman that he loved her, she said the same to him before the link was closed.

Captain Gideon commented that he thought he had heard voices as he entered the room. Williams lied, saying that it was a video recording he had been watching to take his mind off things. Gideon made it clear that he was unhappy with the experiment proceeding without knowing the reason why. Williams did not want to explain but Gideon insisted. Williams showed the captain a picture of a woman, the one he had been speaking to earlier, named Carole. They had met and fallen in love. She had been assigned back to Earth and on the eve of her departure David had asked her to marry him. Carole had said yes and Williams had just been a few days away from returning to Earth when the Drakh assault took place. He wanted to fulfil his promise and marry her. As far as Williams was concerned, he could be dead tomorrow. He would rather have five years in her company than a hundred years without her.

In the medical bay, Dr Chambers and Dr Franklin worked in silence, separated by a transparent isolab wall that kept him and the plague he was carrying separated from anyone else on the *Excalibur*. Breaking the silence, Dr Chambers asked her counterpart if he was always this quiet. Dr Franklin replied that it was only when he was trying not to think about something. Dr Franklin went on to explain that the act of mixing the air in his isolab with that of David Williams would be his – he would not want Dr Chambers to have that on her conscience. Dr Chambers asked if there had been any luck with animal experimentation and Dr Franklin said no. The

virus mutated itself according to the host; in the example he gave, a cure for guinea pigs would only cure guinea pigs. It affected all air-breathing mammals but they had not even been able to isolate an example of it. They had gone down to a 50-micron screen but still nothing had turned up. As Gideon entered, Dr Franklin said that they knew for sure that it was there and continued to explain:

On the day the plague had been unleashed, several hundred humans contracted an unknown strain of the Ebola virus. These infected people had not been in contact with one another; some had been on an island at the time, isolated by a hurricane for two weeks. There was little relation between any of the victims, either by geographical location or social contact. Two days later several hundred more died of an unknown strain of hepatitis B. Others followed and it was this that proved that the virus was changing and adapting, showing itself in different forms. This was how they had calculated the five-year time frame – either the precise combination to kill everyone on Earth would be established by the Drakh Plague in that time or there would be so few humans left on Earth that humanity would be no more.

Gideon, having fully understood Franklin's explanation, offered as an alternative the fact that there could actually be more than one virus. If that was true, Dr Franklin offered, then they were doomed. Dr Franklin also confessed that the situation on Earth had become desperate, the tone in his voice evidence of how dire the predicament truly was. He also had to break his oath as a doctor, because he now had to infect someone with a plague that would, in time, ultimately kill him.

Having taken a walk around the ship, Gideon was surprised to find Elizabeth Lochley slumped up against a wall. When Gideon challenged her, she said that she was tired



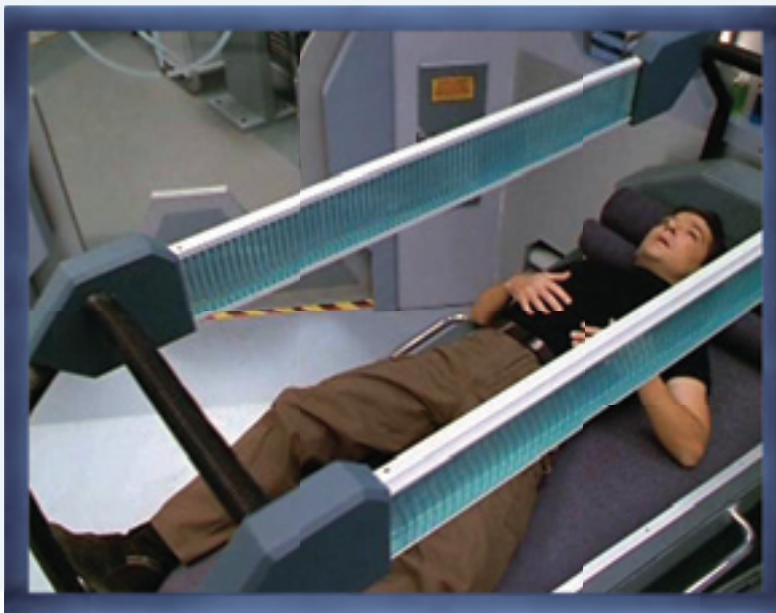
of being comfortable and that she was actually propping up a weak wall behind her. She noticed that Gideon looked a little pale. Before he could explain properly, his link chimed. They were ready to begin the process. As he left her, Gideon asked if she wanted him to deny knowledge if any medical staff wanted to know where she was. She asked if he would keep quiet about her unannounced walkabout and he confirmed that he would.

The stage was set for the experiment. Dr Franklin and David Williams were in separate isolabs connected by an adjoining room that was also sealed to prevent contamination. Dr Franklin would open an air vent connecting the two rooms and a series of injections that Williams had been given would allow the progression of the virus to be tracked. Beginning the experiment, Dr Franklin's system could not open the air vent from his console. Dr Chambers volunteered to do it, the air rushing into David Chambers' room. When Senator Redway, also present with Captain Gideon, started to complain, he was told that they did not know how long the process of infection would take. It happened much more quickly than any of them expected.

The virus entered Williams' system. It did not reproduce but rather extracted itself, directed only at the critical areas of his body. This was a cause for concern; any normal virus would be carried in the bloodstream and affect every area of the host's body. It was being targeted or it was targeting itself. They debated the possibility, now looking more like a probability, that the virus was thinking for itself. Senator Redway could not accept this, even as the battle stations alert sounded. Gideon departed, leaving Dr Franklin to confirm that from his readings, the Drakh Plague operated in a similar manner to the nanotech virus that they had uncovered previously but in a far more advanced manner.

Sprinting to the bridge, Gideon was told that three Drakh heavy attack ships were on approach. Even as evasive manoeuvres were ordered, two hits pounded against the hull of the *Excalibur*. The jump engines were still recharging, as there had been no expectations of leaving the testing area. It would take a few minutes before they were ready. Gatling interceptors unleashed a torrent of blue energy into the skies around the *Excalibur*, hoping to catch any Drakh fighters unawares or deflect some incoming fire. Another two hits struck the *Excalibur*, damaging fire control and hull integrity. Gideon ordered the fighter wing to launch and the whole of the *Excalibur's* contingent of Thunderbolts dropped into space from their carousels.

In the medical bay, Dr Chambers recommended that Senator Redway get to a lifepod. The senator, thinking of his own skin, agreed with her suggestion. Meanwhile Dr Franklin succeeded in locking onto the virus. He now had his first



clear image of the Drakh Plague, the tiny construct being spherical with around two dozen tiny needles coming off it. Any cause for celebration was lost when another hit on the *Excalibur* caused a sensor to fail in David Williams' isolab. Despite confirmation that it was only an error and that the medical bay had not been compromised, a countdown to the sterilisation of David Williams' bay began, the eventual result of which would be the flash-burning of everything in the isolab at up to 1,200 degrees centigrade. He had three minutes left to live.

On the bridge of the *Excalibur*, a failure in their communications meant that the crew were unable to issue instructions to the launched fighter wing. Making her presence known, Captain Lochley was back in her flight suit despite being injured and told Gideon she was the perfect person to lead the fighters. Initially unsure, another hit on the *Excalibur* made his mind up. He wanted every enemy vessel destroyed, clearing them out of his sky.

In the Medlab, any chance for Williams to open his door and escape from his isolab was lost when another hit on the *Excalibur* sent the infected civilian flying into the bulkhead, knocking him out. In the background the countdown continued to tick away, increasing the pressure already magnified by the battering that the *Excalibur* was taking.

Gideon had an idea. The Drakh mothership, larger than all of the other attacking ships, would surely have a larger jump engine and be able to jump more quickly than any of its compatriots, who were probably in the same situation as the *Excalibur*. If they could force the mothership to jump leaving its escort behind, then the *Excalibur* could literally steal the open jump point and follow them into hyperspace, improving their odds considerably. His only concern was that Captain Lochley, now out in a commandeered Starfury, might not anticipate what he was trying to do.



Managing to cycle his door open, Dr Franklin managed to get into the anteroom. He started cycling the door to Williams' room and as the counter hit twenty seconds he managed to grab the civilian's body and started pulling him out beneath a half-open door.

Gideon need not have worried. A direct course was initiated for the Drakh mothership at ramming speed. The Starfury and Thunderbolt squadrons, under the command of Captain Lochley, anticipated Gideon's manoeuvre precisely. The *Excalibur* and her fighters safely followed the Drakh mothership into hyperspace.

The countdown now into single figures, Dr Franklin dragged Williams clear. Hitting the seal button, the door was barely down when a bright flash lit up the isolation bays and the medical observation suite, dazzling everyone. The isolab that had formerly been occupied by David Williams was instantly flash-sterilised.

The *Excalibur*, followed by its fighter support, was in a perfect position behind the Drakh mothership. Charging up the main guns, the lance of energy struck the mothership slightly off-centre – but the power of the blast was enough. The mothership exploded, a thousand chunks falling away in hyperspace. As Matheson asked if that was enough, all that Gideon could say was that Dr Chambers had missed all the excitement. He did not know that at that precise moment, the two doctors and David Williams were sitting in complete darkness in their respective areas in the isolab, considering the ramifications of what could have occurred.

As the lifepod carrying Williams was taken to a nearby shuttle in Earth orbit, Dr Franklin said his goodbyes. Gideon told him that it did not seem right to tell Williams that his message to his fiancée had almost cost everyone

on the *Excalibur* their lives. Dr Franklin was holding an envelope with his name on it; a wedding invitation.

The next pod had been prepared to take Dr Franklin away. The Head of Xenobiological Research thanked Dr Chambers for doing what he was unable to. Gideon asked if after what they had seen here today, there was any chance to beat the plague. Dr Franklin did not know, wanting to be able to say something different but aware that it would be a lie. More than a little despondent, Dr Franklin departed for his lifepod just as Captain Lochley entered the room. Gideon thanked her for what she had done and offered her a drink. She asked what had happened in the isolab but Gideon said that he was still unable to answer.

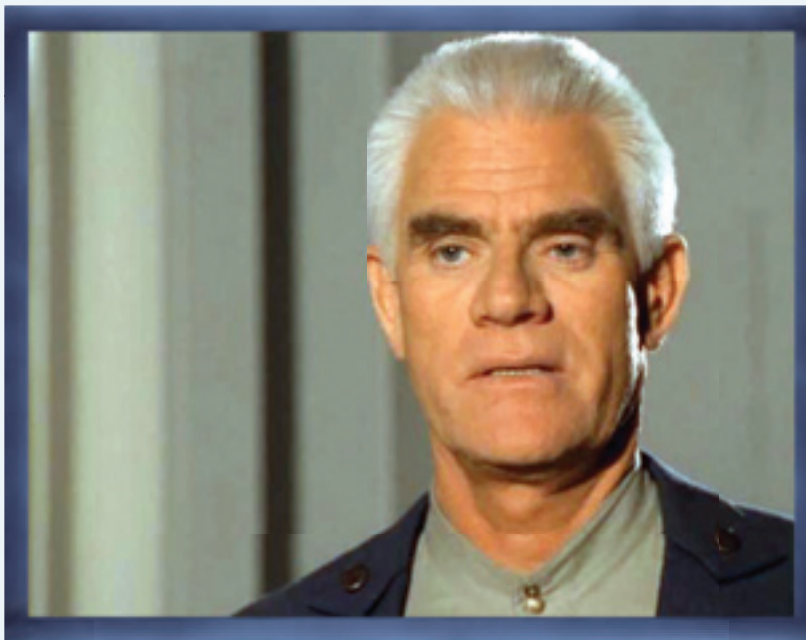
That night, Dr Chambers received a message from Dr Franklin, back at his home on Earth. He was finding it difficult to sleep and Dr Chambers confessed that she was feeling the same. He had thought about the nanotech virus (see 'The Memory of War' episode on page 46) and how it needed a central computer issuing instructions every 48 hours. The Drakh Plague was more sophisticated: There was no central sentient source on Earth issuing instructions to the plague. They had both reached the same conclusion. If there was no central computer instructing the plague, the only alternative was that the plague was communicating with itself as a hive mind. This was more worrying, as the plague might actually be testing humanity, just as humanity was testing it.

The *Excalibur* arrived at Babylon 5 and Gideon accepted Lochley's offer to call in the next time they were in the neighbourhood. Matheson could not resist a smirk at noticing the smile on Gideon's face, the latter insistent that it was merely gas. The first officer's telepathic abilities were not needed to see straight through his captain's poker face, even less so when Gideon stated that bringing the *Excalibur* back to Babylon 5 for some shore leave would be beneficial for the crew. They agreed that it would be beneficial, as life goes on. Ironically, that night both Dr Chambers and Dr Franklin would question that in their dreams.

The Damocles Contingency

Suffering badly under the threat of the Drakh Plague, the government of the Earth Alliance is fragmented, from the level of Senators down to lower officials, to those clerks whose presence allows the lifeblood of democracy to flow.

Only a dozen Earth Alliance senators out of a total 120 were offworld when the Drakh Plague hit. This includes three senators from the Republic of China, who were visiting government concerns on Orion VII. Needless to say, these members of the government must be protected at all costs. Apart from this, the cross-section of senators who escaped



the Drakh attack on Earth is pretty much representative of the split within the Senate. Not able to return home, they must give their decisions by proxy, although in the early days of the plague infestation the Earth Alliance has bigger threats to consider than long-term government.

The following senators were known to be offworld at the time of the Drakh attack on Earth. All of these are in good health, apart from Senator Giovanni, who is undergoing medical treatment for an undisclosed ailment.



- Senator Almos (Republic of South America)
- Senator Chin Mei (Republic of China)
- Senator Giovanni (European Union)
- Senator Hopkins (United Kingdom)
- Senator Lei-Shen Tsu (Republic of China)
- Senator Massey (Oceania Trade Alliance)
- Senator McQuate (Mars)
- Senator Mohammed (United Islamic Nations)
- Senator Pfeiffer (European Union)
- Senator Pozniak (Russian Consortium)
- Senator Redway (North American Federation)
- Senator Wang Shi (Republic of China)

The members of the Earth Alliance Senate quarantined on Earth are well aware that the odds are stacked against them. The cure may not be found and successfully applied within the five-year time span that scientists have given them. Knowing this, the President of the Earth Alliance, Susanna Luchenko, has had the unenviable task of planning a contingency in case of the *Excalibur's* failure. Taking a name from Greek mythology, this contingency could have no other name than Damocles.

This plan, destined to be activated should the Earth Alliance Senate have no more than ten surviving members

on Earth, would move the seat of the Earth Alliance government from Earth to Proxima in one swift stroke. The government will then be made up of those surviving senators who were offworld when the Drakh attacked Earth. All of the landmass on Proxima would be placed under government control and divided up between those nations on Earth represented by the surviving senators, with landmass apportioned to their number of Senate seats. Those senators in charge of their domains would then be charged with the elections of their respective wards, ensuring that democracy followed soon after.

Chaos would prevail on Proxima, without a doubt. However, under a pre-recorded message that President Luchenko prays will never see the light of day, EarthForce is instructed to use any means necessary to enforce the decree. When that message is sent, a copy will be sent to John Sheridan, President of the Interstellar Alliance, because the greatest favour would be required of him. The Interstellar Alliance and the Rangers would need to make sure that during this difficult time, the orphaned children of a dead Earth were protected from an opportunistic alien force, such as the Drakh, keen to deliver a coup de grace.

Sector 100-17-3

The official designation for the Sol system, the solar system in which mankind evolved, Sector 100-17-3 is a hive of constant military activity. In the light of the Drakh Plague, Mars has risen in importance, being seen by many as the 'next best thing'. Although Proxima is perhaps a better choice, being located closer to more important jump routes and having sizeable trade concerns, Mars is closer to the seat of government. This is doubly ironic, as Mars is now putatively independent.

The situation on Earth is not pleasant. Despite the best attempts of the military and law enforcement agencies, rioting and looting are still common. The police forces can only contain these situations; there is simply not the manpower to patrol the streets and solve complex crimes. Sometimes punishments meted out are more permanent than would otherwise have been intended, but there is little that can be done to ease these pains. Everyone on Earth is poisoned; everyone is doomed.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 This episode sees the first real attack by the Drakh in the *Crusade* series after the initial episode, 'War Zone'. What can be readily seen is that the Drakh are no pushovers and that they are perhaps on a similar

level of technology as the Minbari, even without the legacy of their former masters. The Drakh are also watching humanity, no doubt through agents either sworn to their cause or possessed by their keepers. An entire game could result around hunting down a suspected Drakh agent. Much like a cornered rat, even a crippled Drakh is exceptionally dangerous – their ingenuity knows no bounds and they have no qualms to hinder them.

- 5 Earth is still under quarantine. Should a ship manage to escape, it would be in the interests of all races to shoot it down lest the Drakh Plague spread to other worlds. As with *Patterns of the Soul*, below, how Player Characters interact with Earth refugees can form the focus of an interesting adventure. Peaceful Player Characters, particularly Minbari religious caste, True Seekers and Foundationists will have a tough set of decisions to make. At the other end of the spectrum, even the most callous pursuer will have trouble simply destroying a refugee ship if it contains an ISN news crew and a senator's daughter...

Patterns of the Soul

Probable Start Date: June 4th

It was late in the evening when Gideon accepted a call from General Thompson and in many ways the captain of the *Excalibur* would wish that he had come up with an excuse for not being available to receive the call. With the express permission of President Sheridan to use the *Excalibur* for an internal Earth Alliance matter, General Thompson ordered the *Excalibur* to proceed to Theta 49 and contact Robert Black and his fellow colonists. If they were found to have contracted the Drakh Plague, then they would need to be transported to an Earth Alliance ship waiting close to Orion VII.

In his own quarters, Max Eilerson was on the receiving end of a similarly toned phone call from his employers, IPX. A reminder was needed, as Eilerson had not returned much in the way of useful information that created profit margins. IPX depended on receiving information from scouts. Despite his protests, Eilerson was behind schedule. With his order issued, the communication screen went blank.

Both up and awake, Gideon relayed to Matheson that the *Excalibur* was changing course, from one that held several interesting leads to a place that in Eilerson's view was incredibly dull. When Gideon challenged Eilerson, saying that if the world appeared dull the archaeologist could take a vacation, Eilerson informed

him plainly that IPX did not grant paid vacations. Gideon professed an opinion that for such a cause, everyone would contribute. He bumped into Dr Chambers, who wanted to know what was on Theta 49. 30 people had escaped from Earth during the Drakh attack and if they were not fully offworld when the Drakh released the Plague then they would be infected. They could have been carrying the plague all across known space.

On the surface of Theta 49, a shadowy hooded figure dressed in a variety of rough-hewn garments sat at the base of a hillock. A well-built manly figure approached and asked if the hooded figure had made a decision. Apparently, a collection of seeing stones had been rolled and they had come up blank. The figure revealed that never in his race's history had there been such a dark and terrible sign. Despite the protestations of the muscular human, the hooded figure was convinced that a curse had been brought to this place and that his people were doomed. The stones had spoken. The figure begged him to take his people away so that the hooded man and his people could live in peace.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Dr Chambers attempted to convince Captain Gideon of the reliability of the nanotech virus she had obtained a few months before. In tests it had performed flawlessly by lining the lungs. Gideon would have to be careful not to eat or drink, as these would become secondary infections. Gideon gave Dureena a glance for a scathing comment as he stepped into the decontamination process. A wall of sonic energy passed around him, bombarding him and killing bacteria and germs. Completed, the door opened into the next chamber, where Gideon was instructed to breathe deeply as the nanotech virus filled the room and his lungs. Then he was ready to go down to the surface of Theta 49.



Tim, one of the colonists, protested to Gideon and Dr Chambers inside a small residential structure on the surface of Theta 49 that the colonist in charge, a man named Black, was not there. The colonist stressed that they had actually left before the attack and that the real reason for the order to retrieve them was political. Gideon could not believe that 30 colonists could actually constitute a political embarrassment that needed addressing. It had taken them six months to find the place. They had left because they were tired of having their future defined for them and also perhaps because the Drakh Plague was an object lesson in enjoying life whilst it lasted. Gideon's wish not to argue philosophies was answered when Robert Black, the same man who had been up on the hillock earlier with the hooded figure, entered.

Dr Chambers asked for blood samples from every colonist but Robert Black denied her request, saying that initially only he would give a sample of blood, as if it was the plague then they would all have it. He did not believe that they were infected and blatantly admitted that he was only co-operating so they would be forced to leave when nothing of substance was found.

On the hillside, Dureena was engaged in a spot of exploration. She found the hooded figure muttering to himself up against a small outcrop of rock. Kneeling down beside him, Dureena asked after his health, the answer painfully obvious. The hooded figure was dying. When Dureena admitted that she had wondered if she would be scared of dying alone and that she would sit with the hooded figure if that was his wish. He motioned for her to help lift the hood of his robe. Doing so, she was taken aback when the figure was revealed. The male was like her, a Zanderian. He did not recognise and he wondered if she was the guide who came to accompany the dying into the next realm. He told her to see the cave, before passing away, his day passing into night, his last words being that he could see the stars.

Dr Chambers finished her examination of a half-naked Robert Black and promised Gideon the results would be ready in a couple of hours. Forewarning the colonist, Gideon said that it might be best if they prepared to be evacuated, just in case. As they left, Dr Chambers glanced back at Black even as Tim, the colonist who had spoken to Gideon, entered the room in their wake. He was unhappy that Black seemed to be agreeing to Gideon's demands, the leader of the colonists knowing that if they were infected with the Drakh Plague then they were a risk. Black revealed that according to his chat with the tribal elder earlier on, it was foretold that the colonists had brought destruction with them. Tim voiced his concerns about being used as a lab rat again and that Gideon probably knew who and what they were. Black's arguments were not particularly convincing and Tim left unsatisfied.



On the *Excalibur*, Eilerson was commiserating with Gideon about his role as captain, for it also included the roles of jailer, ferryman and executioner. Eilerson was glad to be a member of a corporation, for he could always say that he had done what he was told, acting with a clear conscience given the information available. Blessed in absentia, to Eilerson gaining the knowledge of good and evil was the first original sin; if Adam and Eve had merely eaten the fruit without forming an opinion then things would have been different. Gideon offered no comment to Eilerson's explanation, instead shuffling his deck of cards.

The climb was one of the most difficult and taxing exertions Dureena had ever attempted, up a relatively sheer cliff face. Every muscle and sinew aching, she managed to reach the top, grabbing a rock as further support. There were about 20 or so others, of the same race as she. They were all chanting and praying, one of them noticing Dureena hanging on the top of the cliffside. Her link chimed: Gideon wanted to know what she was doing. Dureena said not much and asked after the colonists. The truth was they were infected. That had implications for what Dureena had found. She requested that Dr Chambers be sent down, for she had found some indigenous people. With the doctor on her way, Gideon left to take a priority call from EarthForce, leaving Eilerson in the map room to call up a holographic representation of Dureena's position.

In his quarters, General Thompson was indignant, having expected a status report two hours before. Given the fact that the colonists were indeed infected with the plague, Gideon asked why they could not simply put a blockade in place. General Thompson was quite firm in his instructions, with which Gideon could not argue. A record of the colonists' ship's log was to be sent directly to General Thompson so checks could be made to ensure the colonists had not infected anyone else on the way. Then Gideon was

to delete the logs on the colonists' ship; General Thompson appeared concerned with that the colonists might have put all kinds of nonsense in their logs.

Dr Chambers entered, having gathered her equipment and ready to go back down to Theta 49. There was one point of concern, in that she had found an unusual compound in Robert Black's bloodstream, a cyberorganic one at that. She affirmed that she would know more in a couple of hours, before leaving for her shuttle.

Alone in his quarters, Gideon instructed the colonists' ship's log to be sent, not directly to General Thompson, but up to the *Excalibur* instead. Something odd was going on here, Gideon was sure, and he wanted to examine the logs himself before passing them on. Beginning a search on Robert Black against all EarthForce records on Gold Channel, Gideon was told that this was restricted information and that Ultraviolet clearance was required. Surprised, he gave a different username and password.

Dureena, having been hailed as the saviour of her people by the tribe she had found atop the cliff, was having trouble accepting that this race was the same as hers. An elderly woman, evidently some sort of spokeswoman, tried to explain: They had been taken as slave labour to help form a colony by the starship *Qual'tha*, one of the first times that their race had taken to the stars. The woman's story invoked images of a pleasant-seeming world, an ungainly-looking starship above that same world being attacked by Shadow cruisers. The starship started ejecting lifepods, many hunted down by Shadow fighters. The lifepod that her ancestors had taken had miraculously survived and landed on the planet unscathed. Those survivors had eventually gathered here but they had no form of communication, no record of what had happened. It was assumed that they had been forgotten. It was clear to Dureena that this was a lost tribe, of the same race as herself.

Dr Chambers, on her way down to Theta 49 in a shuttle, was contacted by Gideon. He asked her to sweep by the colonists' ship on the way and check the waste disposal. Dr Chambers was unimpressed but did as she was asked. She examined the ship wearing a full environment suit, complaining out loud that she could have had an equivalent position on the Earth Alliance science vessel *Olympus*. Proceeding through the ship with her scanner, she started to detect signs of the Drakh Plague. Homing in on the signal, she found an unopened food packet. Locating a nearby communications terminal, she contacted Gideon on the *Excalibur*, explaining that this food packet, picked up en route to Theta 49, was infected.

Gideon explained his findings to her, that according to the ship's log it had indeed left Earth before the Drakh unleashed their plague. Dr Chambers came to the horrific possibility that, as the facility where

this food had been packed and distributed had not been infected with the plague, the only alternative was that the food packet had been contaminated on purpose. Gideon's question was centred around who could have done such a thing. Reading the label, Dr Chambers reported that the food package was created by Pro Zeta Corporation and was probably obtained either as surplus stock or in a black market operation. Gideon did not think that this was the case and decided to investigate Pro Zeta further. He knew exactly who to speak to.

Eilerson, putting down his copy of *The Canterbury Tales*, let Captain Gideon into his quarters, possibly the first time he had ever done so since coming aboard the *Excalibur*. Welcoming Gideon in, Eilerson commented that he liked Chaucer, comparing the literary figure to himself. Gideon got straight to business, asking for information on Pro Zeta. Explaining what he knew, Eilerson revealed that Pro Zeta Corporation was primarily a protein manufacturing company making synthetic meats. They distributed throughout the Earth Alliance territories and beyond. This last part intrigued Gideon, for this meant they had significant government connections. Their headquarters were based on Ceti Gamma II, but if they had done anything wrong Gideon would not be able to investigate any further, otherwise he would end up six feet under.

Talking to the female elder, Dureena was happy that they had kept their traditions alive, including reverence for the stones. Before Dureena could explain that their homeworld of Zander Prime was no more, Dr Chambers appeared at the entrance to the cave, calling her name. Dureena needed to know if they were infected with the plague as well as the colonists. The elder explained that the stones had been rolled and they were doomed. Dureena pleaded with the elder, saying that their homeworld was gone and they were truly the last tribe.



Outside the cave, Dureena asked when the results would be known. Dr Chambers said a few hours but when Dureena was told that all of them were to be transferred off Theta 49, the thief exploded, telling the doctor that she must keep quiet about this, as her people had already lost one homeworld. When Dr Chambers said that Dureena was not being reasonable, the thief had a lecture waiting for her. Dureena warned Dr Chambers that if the presence of the lost tribe was reported and EarthForce endangered her people, then the thief would find Dr Chambers personally responsible.

Initially dismissive of the dressing down, Dr Chambers left, unaware that she was being followed by a shadowing form able to move behind her without making a sound. When she was far enough away from the cave, the figure pounced; it was the colonist known as Tim. He told her that they were not leaving Theta 49 and that he was to make sure they did not go back.

Dr Chambers tried to run but had no hope of fleeing from Tim. He told her that he did not want to hurt her but his cybernetic arms were not particularly pressure sensitive, so he could unintentionally cause her real physical damage. Her cries were heard by Dureena, who started to run through the undergrowth. Dureena took the opportunity to pounce as Tim and his prisoner passed over the crest of a small hill. She knocked Tim to the floor, only for the cybernetically enhanced colonist to pick her up and throw her against a stony wall as if she weighed nothing. Dr Chambers took the opportunity to hail the *Excalibur* but the feeling of Tim's hand around her throat forced to her to cancel the link, saying that it was her mistake and that she had merely wished to contact her shuttle.

On the *Excalibur*, Gideon was going through Robert Black's war record. A veteran of the Earth/Minbari War, he had fought at the Battle of the Line and been awarded the Medal of Honour. A year later, he was transferred to EarthForce's bio-weapons division, in an underground project code-named Tarsier. Cumulative testing on the project resulted in failure and the project was cancelled. Gideon ordered an additional search, cross-referenced on Ceti Gamma II, bioweapons and General Thompson.

Onboard the colonists' ship, Tim and his supporters prepared the vessel for launch. One of the colonists tied Dr Chambers' hands to prevent her escaping. Tim was upset that Robert Black was still trying to negotiate with Gideon, believing that Black was falling for the EarthForce lies again. The ship, fully powered and ready, launched with Dr Chambers as a hostage.

In the colonists' tiny settlement, Dureena found Black and told him what had happened. She noticed that the speed



and strength of the colonist who had taken Dr Chambers was not natural and said that some explanations were in order. Too late in her warning, both Dureena and Black heard the sound of a ship launching, heading for high atmosphere.

The colonists' ship was already clear of the atmosphere and the *Excalibur* followed, a pursuit course locked in. Dureena contacted Gideon, warning him that Dr Chambers was onboard but the thief would not return to the *Excalibur*. Hailing the fleeing ship, Tim appeared, full of bravado for he believed that Gideon would not do anything with Dr Chambers onboard. Eilerson suggested that it be passed on to EarthForce to follow up but Gideon explained to the *Excalibur*'s archaeologist that Dr Chambers' shield against the Drakh Plague would be used up in a matter of hours and she would be infected. As way of reply, the *Excalibur*'s weapons were locked onto the fleeing ship.

Down on Theta 49, Dureena and Black were talking. Black understood why Dureena felt the bond to her people and her people's bond to this place. He felt the same. When Dureena said that her people had suffered enough, Black agreed and used himself and his fellows as an example. The head colonist asked Dureena if she had any idea the effects that cybernetic implants had on a normal human being. They had only elected to do it because they were young, optimistic and believed in the benefits of such a programme. The operations they performed had been illegal and the government had tried to close them down. Even so, Black still had Emma, who had also been a test subject on Project Tarsier and they had fallen for one another. She was the sort of person, Black explained, who could see your soul when she looked in your eyes and it was her eyes that eventually killed her. An experiment on her eyes to give her enhanced night vision and the ability to see in the ultraviolet spectrum failed and she died. Black's



hope was shattered after that and he had only regained his hope by doing what he had done. His hope vanished once again as a series of explosions passed across the sky.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon gave his report to General Thompson. The handover of the colonists to the EarthForce destroyer *Anubis* in orbit of Orion VII would not be required. He showed General Thompson the threats that Tim had made, followed by a short space battle that ended up with the colonists' ship cartwheeling and exploding into fragments. Gideon also told General Thompson that the colonists did not appear to have been infected with the plague when they left Earth but rather that one of their shipments had been contaminated – but he had no proof. When Gideon asked if he should investigate this further, he was told that General Thompson would look into it and that Gideon had done well.

Back on the surface, an amazed Robert Black was joined by his former compatriots. He had believed that they had been shot down by the *Excalibur*, trying to escape whilst infected with the plague. Gideon explained to Black what he had found out and his conditions for doing this. General Thompson had used to run a bioweapons operation on Ceti Gamma II, the same world that was the headquarters of the Pro Zeta Corporation, who were the source of the food supply. Gideon believed that he had arranged for contaminated food supplies to be delivered to the colonists' ship at their last stop. Theta 49 was under quarantine, as Dr Chambers had filed a report saying that the plague had infected some native fauna. Gideon's orders were to prevent the colonists from spreading the plague and without their ship, they were effectively planetbound. Plus, as far as EarthForce was concerned, they were officially dead. Gideon warned Black that a satellite he had placed in orbit would inform him if a ship ever tried to leave Theta 49.

On the shuttle back up to the *Excalibur*, Gideon and Dureena talked about the cybernetic enhancements. When questioned, Gideon's response was that Dureena had no intention of telling him that she had found a tribe of her people on Theta 49. Gideon had found out from Dr Chambers and asked Dureena to take back her threat to Dr Chambers, delivered in the heat of emotion. Dureena complained that she did not trust who Dr Chambers reported to, which Gideon was indignant over. To ensure the captain kept his word, Dureena wanted a secret traded for a secret. He knew about her people on Theta 49 and so she wanted a secret from him. He revealed that he had been able to find out about the cybernetic enhancements that were done on Black and his group because he had the access codes of a higher-placed officer. A game of chance they had played had resulted in Gideon winning and so the captain of the *Excalibur* had an edge to use occasionally, not to compromise the position of the man who he had beaten, but just to give him an advantage. The shuttle landed back safely aboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon said that Dureena now had some collateral but that it was not needed. Gideon admitted that while he sometimes acted dishonestly, killing her trust was not what he wanted.

In Dr Chambers' office, Eilerson discussed with the doctor what he had seen in the map room earlier. He had found a group of life-forms whose signature matched that of Dureena's race. When he asked if he could send the information along to IPX, Dr Chambers was forced to pull what little rank she had over him, saying that it was her decision. Going further, Dr Chambers said that she did not need Eilerson's help to make a decision like this, because she knew what was motivating him, firmly believing that he had a wallet where his heart should be.

Later that evening Dureena called in to see Dr Chambers, still having a slight limp from her brawl with Tim. The thief apologised to the doctor in a roundabout manner and asked how long her people had left. The news was not good, for the plague would kill off her people in a year, faster than it would if they were human. Dr Chambers promised to do all she could and offered to swear that statement on her life. Dureena asked her instead to swear on the life of Dureena's people.

In his quarters Eilerson added a note to his report to IPX. Having mentioned the colonists' surviving and there being another alien race on Theta 49 in his first draft, Eilerson deleted this additional comment, saying instead that there was nothing of note on Theta 49. Black's colonists and Dureena's people would be safe for now. For all of them on that world, especially the Zanderians, the clock was ticking now, faster than ever.

Project Tarsier

During the Earth/Minbari War, it was painfully obvious that the Minbari were stronger and faster than their human counterparts. There were exceptions but the general rule was that humans were simply outclassed by their Minbari opponents on the ground and to a much greater extent in space. Schemes to create supersoldiers, individuals enhanced past their genetic maximums, were common even before this time but most of these bore little fruit. The simple fact was that unlike technological advances such as more powerful guns, ships or tanks, a soldier had a physical shelf-life and needed life experience to give him reasoning skills and these could not be easily duplicated.

The dream of creating a supersoldier, a DNA modified and enhanced individual who is not a monster, is a common fantasy of military minds. There would be significant risks in any project to create a supersoldier but this dream is revisited, year after year, decade after decade. Project Tarsier, a Black Operation that commenced shortly after the Earth/Minbari War, was a good example of an attempt to realise this dream. The aim was to combine technology implantation with a genetic altering of the host human's base abilities. The actual source of the implants was not made known to those being enhanced; one can only assume they were either developed as original concepts with a standard technological background or taken from alien sources (such as the Ikarrans). It should be noted that all the modified soldiers in the Tarsier programme were volunteers.

These implants would prove to have many side effects. If reflexes were increased to a point far beyond normal limitations, the speed at which the initiate reacted could tear sinew from bone and muscle. Equally, increasing the strength of the initiate placed unnecessary stress on the skeletal structure. Sometimes the genetic tampering caused a degenerative cascade effect on the host, resulting in radical mutagenesis within one or more bodily systems. These individuals always met unpleasant ends, either due to insanity, agonising death or (more often) enforced euthanasia.

Nevertheless, Tarsier was to some degree a success. Never publicly acknowledged, the modified soldiers were used to great effect in specific military operations. Assassinations, surgical strikes and reconnaissance operations were perfect roles for the soldiers. Missions of this nature could never stay secret forever. For every ten missions that were conducted in absolute secrecy, someone uninformed queried the facts behind one. When peer groups started making links between the missions and Tarsier, the programme was cancelled. That unfortunately called for the termination of anyone involved with the project, including the very individuals who had allowed themselves to be experimented upon.

Games Masters are advised to be cautious when allowing a Player Character to use the Tarsier template. The Tarsier project was abandoned and while it is not a huge leap in expectations for a new project to start up, EarthForce would not be happy with one of its darkest, dirtiest secrets wandering around flaunting its abilities. Any Tarsier soldier who does this will likely end up liquidated within hours. It is recommended that a Player Character only use this template as an aid to storytelling, rather than as an exercise in creating a combat monster. Games Masters are encouraged to consider whether there are any long-term health implications for any soldier who pushes his body, via genetic manipulation and organ implantation, past the limits of his species.

The Tarsier Soldier Template

Hit Points: +4. A Tarsier soldier's resistance to trauma is significantly superior to an average human.

Speed: Same as base human.

DV: Same as base human.

Damage: Same as base human.

Special Attacks: A Tarsier soldier retains all of his previous special attacks.

Special Qualities: A Tarsier soldier retains all of his previous special qualities. A Tarsier soldier is not as tough and unstoppable as he seems and has serious medical issues that arise from his augmentations. As well as almost certain long-term ailments, which are left at the discretion of the Games Master, the Tarsier soldier has the DC of any Medical checks made to aid (or harm) him raised by +5. Nevertheless, a Tarsier soldier gains benefits due to his genetic engineering and physical augmentation. As part





of operations to improve their general efficiency, different members of Project Tarsier had upgrades in addition to those provided by the basic programme. Only *one* of these upgrades (Covert Operations or Physical Resilience) can be selected:

Covert Operations: The Tarsier soldier has been selected to specialise in night-time assaults and infiltration. The following modifications apply:

- ⑤ **Enhanced Reflexes:** The implantation of monofilament superconductive polymer strands and signal boosters to the Tarsier soldier's nervous system amplify his reflexes and co-ordination. This is represented by a +2 enhancement bonus to the host's Initiative checks. It also doubles the enhancement bonus to Reflex saves provided by this template (to +2).
- ⑤ **Low Light Vision:** By adjusting the manner in which signals are sent from the eye to the brain, a Tarsier soldier can see twice as far as a normal human in starlight, moonlight and similar conditions of poor illumination. He retains the ability to distinguish shade and colour while under these conditions and can even read by such light.

Physical Resilience: Whilst in no way turning the host into a human tank, this upgrade improves the combat potential of the host. The goal of this upgrade is to put a human on par with all of the physical attributes of other races, such as the resilience of the Drazi and the speed and vigour of the Minbari.

- ⑤ **Enhanced Strength:** To make this upgrade possible, the target has a complex concoction of chemicals and

enzymes injected directly into his bloodstream over the course of months. Coupled with intense physical training, these serums give a +2 enhancement bonus to the Tarsier soldier's Strength score.

⑤ **Enhanced Constitution:** Through a complex process of exposure to viruses, bacteria and mild doses of chemicals, the target becomes what a layman would describe as a perfect specimen of humanity. This process gives a +2 enhancement bonus to the Tarsier soldier's Constitution score.

Saves: +1 enhancement bonus to Fortitude and Reflex saves.

Abilities: Same as base human.

Skills: Same as base human.

Feats: Same as base human plus the Tarsier soldier gains the Alertness feat.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

⑤ Dureena's people may not be the only examples of her race, despite her belief that they are. In all probability, any other survivors are still under the boot-heels of a slaver race. Where slavery is legal, some of the surviving Zanderians may not have any legal rights or recourse if they are consigned to this fate. Page 123 has game rules for playing a Zanderian character. This is a difficult race for anyone to portray. Dureena is an exception rather than typical for her race, who are generally relatively backward and anachronistic.

⑤ The links between EarthForce and the private sector are not in any way limited to its relationship with IPX but they do form the classic problem for Player Characters to find themselves faced with. If the characters significantly cross or anger high-level IPX employees or interests, the Games Master should feel free to have them harassed by EarthForce at every opportunity, until reparations are made.

The Path of Sorrows

Probable Start Date: June 11th

Standing before a huge citadel that stretched miles into the sky, Dureena clung to the top of a doorway five times taller than she was, having attempted every trick she knew to break into the structure. Max Eilerson, at work studying the variety of alien scripts scrawled on the door, was having no luck either. For 12 hours they had been trying to find a

way into the vast structure but with no joy. Galen inquired as to what the messages, translated from their native languages, actually said. Eilerson launched into a tirade of complaints and Galen was forced to cast a tiny fireball spell, sending it three inches away from the archaeologist's face. Eilerson fell silent for a moment and then repeated that the messages referred to the Path of Sorrows.

Recalling the fireball spell and rebuffing the second wind of Eilerson's rage, Galen walked over to Dureena, who had climbed down from the top of the doorway. Galen's words to her were immediately vicious, targeted and spiteful. He accused her of being a failure and of breaking a promise to another that she would *never* fail again. As the shocked Zanderian turned away, the techno-mage swiftly stole a single tear from her face with his fingertip. Walking towards the door, he ran the finger with the still warm mark of Dureena's sorrow down the centre of the door and a green arcing light ran down the centre. The doors to the complex slid open.

Exploring the building, Dureena wanted to speak to Galen; she was upset that the techno-mage had used his knowledge to upset her. Galen said that he had not and that everyone was scared of failing. Challenging him further, Dureena asked the techno-mage if he had ever apologised for anything in his life. Galen said just once – and even then it was too late.

One of Gideon's soldiers from the security team that had come down to this world with them found a globe two metres across. It was filled with a smoky mist and it was impossible to ascertain what was on the inside. As Gideon peered into it the smoke cleared and he saw a face. When he did so, Gideon's world span around him...

He remembered floating in the vacuum of space, having gone EVA to affect some emergency repairs. His ship powered away, leaving him behind as the dark shadow of another ship shaped like a bird of prey with long skinless wings and dark black spines passed by. It locked onto his fleeing cruiser, its powerful lasers carving the ship up from behind.

Snapped back to reality, his attention focused on the globe, Dureena noticed first that the captain was, for want of a better description, mentally elsewhere. Gideon ordered the globe, with the life-form Gideon was convinced was inside, taken back to the *Excalibur*. Eilerson asked what was wrong with Gideon and it fell to Dureena to inform the archaeologist that it was Gideon's nature; he never left anyone behind.

Gideon was watching a transmitted feed of scientists examining the surface of the globe. Matheson, who was by his side, had an odd feeling about it but could not put his thoughts

into words. He left his commanding officer for a nearby bullet car. A silent Galen was in the car. The telepath tried to make conversation with the techno-mage but it proved difficult. Matheson managed to uncover that Galen had been riding the bullet cars all night, going nowhere at a 120 miles per hour. Galen said that it was mankind's natural condition, before talking to Matheson about Gideon's interest in the alien sphere. The telepath commented that people like Gideon were always looking to ask questions, searching for reasons. Galen replied that that implied a directed universe. Matheson questioned this, as he thought that Galen of all people would think that there was a plan and design to life. At that point Galen said that it was time for him to get off, metaphorically, metaphysically and literally. He had one piece of advice before he left the bullet car: For Matheson to ride the bullet car for as long as Galen had. The techno-mage was sure that by then Matheson would come to the same conclusion.

Entering an empty medical bay, all beds and cabinets pushed aside to make way for the alien sphere, Gideon took up residence on a spot right in front of the globe. Asking who the entity inside the sphere was, the smoke cleared a little, to reveal a sad-looking alien with a large crest on its skull. Gideon felt a message in his brain, even though he knew full well that he would not normally be able to understand the alien's language. It spoke directly into Gideon's mind, saying that the captain of the *Excalibur* was in pain. Gideon replied that everyone was in pain and he had never met anyone who was not. The figure vanished behind the mists again and Gideon pushed it further, asking what it wanted. The alien projected into his head the thought of the truth, whatever it was. Clearly the entity in the globe wanted a truthful answer. When Gideon said, almost as a challenge, that he was indeed in pain, he found his mind thrust years back into the past...



The EarthForce cruiser Cerberus had come under attack whilst in the Lanep system by an alien vessel with dark black organic skin not found on any of the standard identification charts. The first salvo had damaged the ship extensively, leaving the bridge filled with smoke. As casualties were removed from the bridge, Ensign Matthew Gideon entered in full combat armour. The first officer instructed Gideon to take an EVA team out and fix a hull failure on C Deck, the automated repair systems having failed.

As Gideon took his team out, he moved away from the ship to get a better view of the damage. It was when he reached the optimum position that the engines on the Cerberus ignited, moving away from him. Gideon tried to contact his ship but all he heard was the order to jump. Swooping in for the kill, the alien battle cruiser moved into position to the rear of the Cerberus and opened fire, just as a jump point was being opened. Carved up, the jump point collapsing, the Cerberus was ripped apart as though it had been made of tissue paper. The first shot hit the rotating crew section and the second hit the engine array, causing the huge ship to start a spin. The kill complete, the alien ship left.

Floating adrift in space, Gideon was told by his suit computer that he had 30 minutes of oxygen left. As he drifted, his air supply running out, he saw a flotilla of triangular dark vessels silhouetted against a nearby sun. He tried to speak to anyone in the flotilla who could receive his signals, giving his name. The ships did not seem to care or to listen as they carried on their way. Continuing to drift, his air supply almost spent, Gideon started to lose consciousness even as one of the triangular ships pulled into position above him and opened up a hatch. Entering it, he took off his helmet as soon as he could. A figure inside the vessel comforted him, willing him to rest. Gideon's immediate surroundings inside the strange triangular craft proved darker than space – at least out there the darkness had been pierced by starlight. Still, he was not floating in the vacuum of space and was grateful for that. Gideon asked who his rescuer was and was told 'Galen'.

Later, having returned to Earth, Gideon was debriefed. Trying to make someone, indeed anyone, believe his story was proving difficult. The interviewer questioned whether Captain Ross, his senior officer, had actually initiated first contact protocols. He also went on to question Gideon's report that a figure, possibly human, had rescued him and the name of that figure had been Galen. Gideon was told that President Clark wanted this matter clearing up as soon as possible and that an investigation at the scene indicated that the Cerberus was destroyed when her jump engines malfunctioned. Gideon protested at this parody of the truth but the interviewer said that Gideon's memory of events was the result of carbon dioxide poisoning. Gideon demanded to know that if he was lying, how had he managed to get out alive? The interviewer said that was for Gideon to explain, not them.



Later still, Gideon was playing cards with three other men. Two dropped out, leaving just Gideon and one other man, a bearded man who seemed to broadcast an air of insecurity. He did not have enough money but had some collateral he could offer, an artefact called an Apocalypse Box. Accepting the collateral, Gideon's hand won the pot.

At that point the man who had lost his artefact to Gideon started laughing. He claimed that he was free and started to talk about the Apocalypse Box and how it occasionally lied, until something happened – whether a triggered memory or some kind of instruction – which stopped the man from speaking. He got up and staggered out, only to be hit by a passing skimmer. Gideon ran out, knelt down by the dying former owner of the Apocalypse Box. The dying man said that at last he was free. He started to say something else but death claimed him, lying on the cold street.

His mind returned to the present, Gideon asked the entity in the alien sphere what it was going to do with the knowledge. *Nothing* was its response; it would not do anything. It replayed an earlier comment by Dureena saying that Gideon would never leave anyone behind. As Gideon stepped into the doorway to leave, the entity projected a message into Gideon's mind, saying that it had forgiven him.

Later on, Lieutenant Matheson approached the alien globe as Gideon had done earlier on, looking for an explanation for his uneasy feeling. Exactly the same way Gideon had, Matheson felt his awareness fade as he went through his memories in perfect and painful detail....

A few years before, he had been a low-ranking member of the Psi Corps. An invitation to a meeting with a telepath held in high regard named Bruder was the start of a chain of events that would shape the future direction of his life.

It was a great day for the Psi Corps; most of the Telepath Resistance had been captured, in particular their leaders. The top brass from the Psi Corps were en route to Mars and with most of the Psi Cops on active duty, a loyal telepath such as Matheson was required for an important task. He was to administer sleeper drugs to a captured telepath who was on the side of the Resistance, a high level P12. Most of the medical staff were rated at P1 or P2, so Bruder wanted someone who was of a higher level of telepathic ability to deliver the drugs every two hours.

The first instance of the administration of the sleeper drugs was the beginning of the end. The drugged female telepath asked Matheson to check what had happened to the members of the Resistance who had been sent home. The drugged telepath was insistent that Matheson check, for she believed that every captured Resistance leader had been executed rather than being sent home, as was the official party line. Matheson was of the opinion that perhaps the Resistance leaders had deserved to die.

Matheson's curiosity got the better of him, though, and he checked the records of those Resistance members sent home. Their status was reduced to a single word: Terminated. There were too many to count and Matheson was unable to nullify this truth with any reason that his mind could conjure.

It was during his next visit to administer the drugs that Matheson spoke candidly with the captured rebel telepath. Matheson had been hoping to prove her wrong and instead it was he who had been fooled. Rather than act, as they had, the telepath asked Matheson to simply not do anything. Not to fight or to rebel, simply to do nothing. Taking her cue and with a guard now in the room, Matheson sprayed the contents of the sleeper drug over her hand rather than into her bloodstream, careful that it was not seen. She would soon be telepathically aware again. Checking up on his protégé, Bruder found Matheson and asked how the prisoner was doing. Lying, Matheson said that the prisoner was begging for her life. Confiding in him, Bruder said that the Psi Corps had attacked the Resistance's main base but it was empty. It was almost as though they had known the Corps was coming.

Arriving to deliver the next injection, Matheson asked the rogue how they knew that the Resistance base was about to be attacked. She took the syringe off him and cut into her own leg, pulling out a tiny homing device that was buried beneath the skin. Matheson was incredulous that she had allowed herself to be captured. The female telepath explained that the Resistance did not know where this secret Psi Corps facility was. She had allowed herself to be captured in the hope that she could find someone with a conscience. The homing device had a telepathic trigger and could only be activated by her. Her life was over; it was a sacrifice that she was happy to make. The Resistance would strike this secret facility and it would all



be over. The irony was that the Psi Corps was attempting to do the same, not realising that the tables had truly been turned. The female telepath told him to go, get away from this place as quickly as he could, for his own safety. Before Matheson left, he confided in her that he had always had a dream: To be in EarthForce, exploring the unknown.

The base fell under attack, a Stage One alert sounding. Onboard a shuttle that was leaving, with half a dozen other telepaths who had been fortunate enough to be by the landing strip, Matheson escaped the conflagration. As an explosion rippled through the base, the first of many, he heard the voice of the captured telepath telling him to follow his dreams.

Snapped back to reality, Matheson said that he had told no-one about his betrayal of the Psi Corps. The alien entity projected a message into Matheson's mind, forgiving him. Confused, Matheson left, passing by Galen, who approached the globe himself.

Galen spoke to the globe, seeing a figure in the mists. He said that he had examined records and found the entity in the globe to be a leech feeding off emotions, in particular sorrow and pain, for it had no feelings of its own. In response, the entity projected a message asking if Galen was happy believing such stories. Galen asked what sustained the entity and it answered: Forgiveness. Incredulous, Galen was not prepared to be asked by the entity why the techno-mage was afraid of forgiveness. Galen denied that he was, only surprised by the absurdity of it, and asked if it was up to the entity to forgive. The entity stated that it forgave because it could, as the others could not. It was Galen, and not the entity, that must forgive. Galen's mind flashed back...

He was by Isabell's bedside, a brown-haired woman with a slender frame who had suffered a grievous wound. He told his

love that he was going to walk to the nearest village because he had to get help. The techno-mages and the Circle had been sold out by three of their own kind, being lured here and stripped of what they were. Isabelle said sadly that she wanted the chance to make a tapestry of the universe, putting him at the centre, but now she felt that she would never get the chance. Galen refused to accept a universe would choose that would take her away from him, knowing what would surely occur in the next few minutes.

Isabelle asked Galen what the chances were that they should meet and fall in love with one another. She professed that there was a design to the universe and that the pair of them was a part of the design as much as her love for Galen was. She begged him further to stay with her, and holding his hands, she gave him a message. Isabelle felt happy and proud and there was nothing that she regretted apart from the risk that the anger that was in his eyes would burn his soul to ashes. She said that he must learn to forgive God one day for his decisions and that if there is a design after she has gone she will call to him, send a message that Galen will know what she was right. Asking Galen to kiss her goodnight, he did so, only for her to die the moment his lips left hers.

Standing in front of the alien entity a shattered man, Galen was beside himself with the grief of his memory. Galen damned the alien in a hurt yet vengeful tone for raising that guarded memory. Feeling the anger and his techno-mage power rising up in him, he threw an accusation at the entity within the globe: Isabelle had not deserved to die but the alien inside the globe did. Galen conjured up a fireball in his hand and prepared it to strike.

The door to the medical wing slid open and Gideon stepped in, calming Galen, for he believed that the mage was not a murderer, although in truth Gideon had no concept or knowledge of what Galen was capable of. Galen's anger subsided at his friend's words, the techno-mage choosing to walk away. Gideon decided to take the alien entity back to where they had found it; it did not belong to anyone. It needed to be there for anyone who needed to find it.

With the entity returned to the world below, Gideon said to Matheson that he often had trouble sleeping. Last night, after he had spoken to the globe, he had got a whole night's sleep for the first time in years. Matheson said that he had experienced exactly the same thing and pondered the reason for why the alien in the globe remained there. It was someone, Matheson reasoned, who would never know the names of those who visited, never judged or condemned. Only forgave.

As the humans left the ancient monument and the alien globe, another ship approached the monument; another alien life-form found the globe and the cycle began again.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Matheson confirmed that Galen would be able to leave whenever he wanted to. Plus, a message had been sent here for him. Confused, Galen said that no-one could get in touch with him here, for no-one knew his whereabouts. Matheson said the message had just had Galen's name, and amid static it contained the word 'Love'. The message did not have a source; and thus could have come from anywhere. Both Matheson and Galen knew that this was impossible.

Clutching a paper copy of the message, Galen remembered Isabelle's final words, said on her deathbed. She had promised to contact him if there was a design to the universe. If there were a way, she would call to him and say his name. Sure enough, in the message, amid a burst of data chatter, were the words 'Galen' and 'Love'. Unable to accept what this meant, that there was a design to the universe and that his rage and anger at the whole of creation for taking Isabelle away from him was misplaced, the techno-mage crumpled the paper copy of the message and walked away.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 As the final scenes of the episode reveal, the alien at the centre of the Path of Sorrows is waiting to greet new visitors and sure enough some come. The Player Characters may discover the world and the strange alien in a similar fashion, whether drawn there or merely exploring. It might be intriguing for a Player Character who has suffered a mind wipe and previously has had no memory of the incident that led to it save dreams, to suddenly receive forgiveness for something he has seen in his dreams. This could kick off the whole process of a Player Character finding out what he once was.



5 This episode gives an interesting highlight on some events of the Telepath Crisis. This sort of material can be useful for telepathic characters, by giving them a point of reference for their location and actions during that situation. For example, if the characters were in the Psi Corps, did they ever deal with Matheson or more likely with Bruder? If they were with the Resistance, did they know the telepath who allowed herself to be captured and thus allowed the location of the base to be pinpointed?

Ruling From the Tomb

Probable Start Date: June 15th

The *Excalibur* sat in Mars orbit along with several passenger liners, cargo transports and even a couple of EarthForce destroyers. The skies above Mars were busy but nothing like the busy passenger terminal at the spaceport.

On the surface, Captain Elizabeth Lochley was arguing with Lieutenant Carr over facts and conclusions. Lochley was trying to get Carr to differentiate between the two but Lieutenant Carr was having none of it. A Mars native, she refused to accept Lochley's authority here, as the captain was not on Babylon 5 anymore, only being here on a temporary assignment because of the conference on the Drakh Plague.

Captain Gideon, standing behind Lochley, tried to get someone's attention but was rebuffed. Lieutenant Carr told Lochley that she did not recognise her authority because Mars was now independent. Lochley was told that even though on Babylon Five she could bark orders and everyone jumped, here on Mars she was barking up the wrong tree. Lieutenant Carr then welcomed Gideon to Babylon 5, before turning back to Lochley and parodying the sound of a dog.

It took a prompt for a distracted Lochley to acknowledge Captain Gideon and why he was there. The captain of the *Excalibur* just wanted to check that the security arrangements were satisfactory, for Dr Chambers, his medical chief of staff, was coming down to Mars to deliver a keynote speech at the conference. Gideon was not happy at all about being on Mars. He preferred to be out searching the galaxy for a cure, instead of debating one. Lochley asked Gideon to trust her, as she had everything covered. Gideon asked if that was a conclusion or a fact. Lochley told him that it was a fact – but at that very moment a man was being stabbed not a mile from the spaceport.

In a shuttle on the way down to Mars, Trace Miller, the shuttle pilot and former IPX employee invited to join the *Excalibur's* crew, was complaining that it was the eleventh run he had made so far that day. When he said that he was feeling like a yo-yo, Max Eilerson, in the co-pilot seat, explained to an uninformed Dureena that Trace meant a fool or an idiot – but Trace actually meant a toy. Trace and Eilerson went on to argue over who should escort Dureena around the city below. The thief could not believe her ears, that they were fighting over who should escort her, like she was some sort of prize trophy. To stop the arguing, she was forced to grab both their ears to capture their attention and was then able to spell out in no uncertain terms that she did not need an escort.

With some of the initial tension out of the way, Lochley ran through the security arrangements that had been put in place, as Gideon had requested. The huge conference centre, capable of seating hundreds, even bore its own banner: An impressive green flag highlighting the date of the conference, June 15th, and the goal of creating strategies for managing the plague along with avenues to explore. Gideon offered as an ice-breaker that they had gotten off on the wrong foot and Lochley confessed that she would rather be anyplace else. Dr Stephen Franklin, whom she had worked with for a time on Babylon 5, had recommended her personally for this role when EarthForce had wanted an officer in charge. Lochley had been less than enthused about getting the assignment. Gideon said that he was just being careful and Lochley said that she had heard that he was a gambler. Agreeing partially, the captain of the *Excalibur* said that he only gambled when he had a sense of the odds. He still wanted to check things out though. An impending argument was foiled by a message from Lieutenant Carr: A murder had been committed.





In the passenger lounge at the spaceport, a lost Dr Chambers had become the target of interest of a well-dressed man identifying himself as Dr Alain Lebecque. His attempts at humour failed, so the topic of the conversation turned to the subject of faith, Dr Chambers appearing uncomfortable at discussing something of this weight with a total stranger. She was glad when Lieutenant Carr announced herself and took her to Captain Gideon.

Gideon and Lochley examined the body of the murdered man, killed by multiple knife wounds. Carved into his back was the mark of a doomsday cult, the symbol for infinity with a line through it, signifying that nothing lasted forever. Lochley said that there had been a couple of hundred murders like this since the plague began. Gideon had personal experience of this particular mark however. It was specific to one group, called Sacred Omega, who believed that the Drakh Plague was akin to the second coming of Noah's flood. Humanity, in their opinion, was hopelessly evil and deserved to be wiped out with one divine act of cleansing. Dr Chambers arrived on scene and said that it sounded like Gideon had some experience of Sacred Omega. Gideon revealed that his old friend, Captain Mankowski, had been killed during a mutiny orchestrated by members of his crew who were loyal to Sacred Omega.

The murder victim was Leon Henderson, a viral studies specialist who had been born on Mars. Lochley and Lieutenant Carr started to argue again, until the Babylon 5 commander stated that the autopsy should be done offplanet. She asked if it could be done on the *Excalibur*.

Trace Miller, being in between shuttle runs, had a peek at the face of the body going up whilst Dr Chambers and Gideon discussed who should be told about the autopsy reports. The captain of the *Excalibur* wanted to pass the information down the line, feeling the need to know first.

The shuttle pilot recognised the face on the body. The dead man was known to Trace and the shuttle pilot revealed that the dead man had been the reason for Trace deciding to become a priest, years before.

Alone in a hotel room, Alain Lebecque sat down, incense burning, mumbling words of devotion to himself. Lebecque asked why the man Leon Henderson had had to die. In response, he heard words in his mind from a source that he identified as Joan. The voice spoke as he did, with a French accent, quoting her own experiences.

On his way up to the *Excalibur*, Trace Miller explained his history, unknown to many onboard the ship. He had undertaken some work for the Foundationists, a relatively new religious order, and had met a man who had an air about him – that something was right about him and what he was doing. He made Trace think a lot about following a religious vocation and so Trace had started to train as a priest. Then something happened that caused him to doubt his faith and leave the order. Lochley wanted to know what it was but it was evidently personal. She hoped that Gideon would ask Trace to talk but instead, after confirming it was personal, the captain said that the subject was closed. Lochley, agog at the lack of support she had just received from Gideon, could not find the words to explain her irritation.

Walking through a Martian bazaar similar to the Zocalo on Babylon 5, Eilerson bumped into Dureena. Eilerson took the opportunity to explain how he used to come to this area on Mars to get away from his parents and his studies. Someone bumped into him and Dureena calmly informed the archaeologist that someone had lifted his wallet. Chasing after them, the thief had two allies and Eilerson knew he was in real trouble. Dureena, running up behind him, ran straight past the hesitant Eilerson and tackled the thief who had taken the wallet. The thief's compatriots, not wishing to provoke a scene, melted away as Dureena passed the wallet back to Eilerson.

Eilerson started bragging about Dureena's abilities before realising that Dureena had already gone. Catching up to her and entering a bar, Eilerson thanked Dureena, but said that he could have handled it. Dureena said that she did not care about Eilerson particularly but had only intervened because the thief had been sloppy. Eilerson was still convinced he could take care of himself when the archaeologist bumped into a table of burly drinkers, one of whom did not appreciate having his drink spilled.

On the *Excalibur*, Gideon was handed the autopsy report for Leon Anderson. Lochley wanted to know what was in it. The details of the autopsy were effectively useless, not telling them anything they did not know at this



Rebuffing Gideon's introduction of Matheson, Lochley appeared behind them and gave Gideon an up-to-date copy of their findings. With some more sparring and jostling, Lochley confirmed that she was not going easy on him because of his alleged rugged handsomeness. They both agreed that they were running out of wrong feet to get off on and eventually agreed to dinner in her quarters.

In the bar on Mars, Eilerson had placated the group he had upset by buying them drinks. Chatting at the bar, Trace tried to make a move on Dureena but she rebuffed him easily. She said that she had given a guy a chance a long time ago, and that was why she did not now. Eilerson offered to get Trace a drink, agreeing to a drinking challenge after some tough talking. Dureena complained that she was drowning in testosterone. His confidence boosted by alcohol, Eilerson's comeback was quick: She was equipped with flotation devices.

stage, but Lochley believed that she had a bigger problem than an uninformative report: Gideon himself. She felt he was getting in the way of her work, a claim which he joked about to her chagrin. Angry at not being taken entirely seriously, Lochley was convinced that Gideon had manipulated her, manoeuvring her into bringing the body up to the *Excalibur* so that Gideon could control the investigation. She was also unhappy with her questioning of Trace Miller in the shuttle having been effectively cut off at the knees. Gideon told her that as there had been no incidents of doomsday cult activities on the *Excalibur* – it was safer onboard, because whoever had killed the virus specialist was still down on the surface of Mars. Gideon said that everyone should be entitled to their own traumas, including Trace Miller, and that he felt Lochley would be better placed investigating Sacred Omega. Despite this, he offered Lochley the opportunity to speak to anyone on the *Excalibur*. With this offer made, Lochley asked where Trace Miller was. Gideon told her that the shuttle pilot was not on the *Excalibur*, so he was still technically out of bounds, leaving Lochley standing in the corridor, outmanoeuvred once again.

Miller walked through an area of Mars known as Zone 4 and was spied by Alain Lebecque, who recognised him. Visibly shaken, Lebecque ducked out of sight, complaining that it was bad enough that Henderson had had to die. The voice in his head gave him counsel, telling him that he would be delivered. Lebecque agreed, they would be delivered with the weapons they had found.

On the *Excalibur*, Matheson asked Gideon if he was troubled or perhaps more accurately *preoccupied* with Captain Lochley. Gossip concerning the two captains had reached the first officer... but perhaps it was just a conflict in command styles. Or maybe it was not that their styles were different, rather that they were exactly the same.

Meeting for dinner in Lochley's quarters, Gideon and Lochley discussed heroes. Gideon answered her question as to who his hero was, stating that it was John Sheridan. Gideon asked if she was ever under him, causing her to nearly choke on her drink. When Gideon confirmed he was talking about Babylon 5, she said that he preferred it that way. Still talking about Sheridan, Gideon said that despite his achievements – soldier, statesman, president – he must still put his trousers on one leg at a time. Lochley muttered a comment under her breath, Gideon not catching it. Establishing first name terms, Gideon confessed that spending so much time out in space was not conducive to relationships and expected that Lochley was the same. Gideon was shocked that someone had managed to marry her then let her go. He thought that that man must have been the biggest loser in the galaxy. Gideon asked her, albeit indirectly, for the loser's name. The mentioning of John Sheridan in this context caused Gideon to gag on his own drink.

Beneath MarsDome One, Lebecque punched in the desired time delay on the detonator. As his two compatriots in Sacred Omega left, he spoke to the voice in his head, saying that he was afraid of martyrdom. The voice of the French woman in his head told him, in a roundabout manner, that he was saving himself by damning his life, as she herself once had.

In the bar, a drunken Trace Miller was talking about something that had happened to innocents in the past which had made him question his faith. He dragged Dureena up on the dance floor and proved to be an utterly hopeless dancer. Eilerson offered to show Trace how it was done and changing the music on the sound system, he started to dance with Dureena, showing astonishing footwork and grace. Stepping out of the bar, Trace was attacked by a man

with a knife. He managed to get the knife away from his attacker but being inebriated did not help his reflexes or co-ordination. The attacker had the upper hand and was soon able to put Trace down. The attacker picked up the knife even as Dureena came out of the bar with Eilerson, wanting to know where Trace had gone. The blade was up against Trace's throat even as Lieutenant Carr appeared behind the attacker, her weapon drawn. She ordered the attacker to drop the knife, beginning a count up to three. When the count hit two, Lieutenant Carr sensed that the attacker was going to slit Trace's throat and fired a PPG blast into the back of the attacker's skull at point blank range. Lieutenant Carr then finished her count.

Lochley and Gideon were both in attendance as the delegates filed into the foyer of the conference venue. Lochley received a message from Lieutenant Carr, who was at the Canal Bar, and reported on what had happened. When Lochley said that she wanted to speak to the assailant who had attacked Trace, Carr told her that it would be difficult, because the attacker was dead. Gideon and Lochley decided that she should go whilst Gideon remained at the conference, both completing each other's sentences. Dr Chambers commented that the way that they finished off each other's statements was cute. Gideon denied this but could not deny a grin.

Neither of them were aware that a nearby Alain Lebecque was holding the detonator to the weapons cache buried beneath the city, the man's hands sweaty at the thought of the work that he was here to undertake. His duty clear in his mind, he started the countdown.

Upon reaching a battered Trace in the Canal Bar, Captain Lochley was told that the assailant's name was Marco Riviera and his DNA matched with that of Leon

Henderson's killer. When Lochley asks why Riviera's DNA was not on record already, Lieutenant Carr explained that Riviera was a member of Sacred Omega, but had also been a member of the Mars Resistance years before. Individuals in that organisation had been careful to keep their DNA records out of official databases, for if they were captured their lives would depend on not being linked to their past misdemeanours. Matheson asked how Trace had known the murdered Henderson and was intrigued by how they were connected. Wondering if it was conference-related and if there could be someone else involved, Carr gave Trace a data pad with photos of the conference delegates, in the hope that he might recognise someone else who both he and Henderson had known.

Lebecque entered the arena in the same manner as the other delegates, taking a seat even as Dr Chambers took the stage to make a keynote speech. The conference was fully subscribed, with only a few empty seats. It was a monumental triumph for the organisers, in bringing the most brilliant minds in the Earth Alliance together to debate how best to deal with the threat of the Drakh Plague.

In the Canal Bar, Trace recognised one of the pictures. Although the name stamped on the picture was Dr Alain Lebecque, Trace knew him as Andre Sabbat. The man had left the Foundationists at the same time as Trace and for the same reason. It was known that Sabbat had suffered some sort of severe breakdown shortly thereafter. Sabbat had said, in simple terms, that he wanted to find a way to make the evil in the world go away. Contacting Gideon privately, Lochley told him about Andre Sabbat and Gideon, in the cover of one of the arena's entrances, spotted him. Joining the conversation, Trace told Gideon that he believed Sabbat did not consider himself a murderer. In Trace's opinion, Sabbat would not harm anyone whom he believed was innocent. This gave Gideon an idea. Approaching the stage, Gideon interrupted Dr Chambers' introduction, knowing what he had to say, claiming that he had been authorised by EarthForce to say this. He announced that the viciousness of the Drakh Plague had been miscalculated and that mankind was doomed.

Gideon continued even as conference members jumped up out of their seats and fled the arena. The wonderment was clear on Sabbat's face, even as Gideon told the conference members that they should leave this place as messengers, spreading the words that Earth had been judged and found guilty. Sabbat, hearing the voices in his head, stopped the countdown and left the conference to meet his compatriots in a cavern beneath the Martian city. His compatriots were a man and woman whom he had arranged to join him by the bomb. Wanting to explain that



the conference-goers had seen the light that the voice in his head had spoken to him about, he did not get his chance. EarthForce soldiers accompanied by Gideon, Carr, Trace and Lochley dropped into the cavern, a vicious PPG battle ensuing.

Carr took a shot to her shoulder after taking out one of the cult members. Following up, Lochley took out the remaining cultist, leaving just Sabbat, who reached for the detonator. Lining up his shot, knowing how critical it was to hit Sabbat, Gideon's shot was true, hitting the deluded martyr squarely in the chest. Rushing to Sabbat's side, Trace greeted him. The dying cultist said that Joan of Arc was speaking to him, as she always had done. His dying words were that he wished that everyone could hear the words of Joan of Arc as he did. Andre Sabbat slipped away, as no amount of medical care was able to resuscitate him.



In the departure lounge of the Mars spaceport, Gideon explained that if he had sent in armed soldiers it would have taken so long to reach Sabbat, with all the other conference-goers in the way, that the cultists would have been able to trigger the bomb, so he had decided that the best thing to do was to tell Sabbat exactly what he wanted to hear. Gideon could not believe that all the explosives were hidden away in the tunnels underneath Mars. Part of the legacy of the Martian Resistance, there were many more arms caches beneath the Martian city, a significant number of them lost and forgotten.

Lochley asked after Trace and Gideon explained that he was healing but it was unfortunate what the young man had had to go through. It was ironic that Leon Henderson, the murdered scientist, was not even supposed to be here on Mars for the conference, as he had been a last-minute attendee. Sabbat had come in with stolen papers and ID but when Sabbat's group had seen Henderson he had to be eliminated, otherwise Sabbat's cover would have been blown.

Gideon accepted Lochley's offer to visit her on Babylon 5 and spend a week there after they found a cure to the Drakh Plague, God willing. When Lochley asked if Gideon believed in a supreme being, the noted John Sheridan aside, Gideon thought a moment. He answered by saying that he had five years to find a cure to the Drakh Plague and would be able to answer that question in five years and a day.

Back in the Canal Bar, Trace was reminiscing about the Andre Sabbat he had known, not the tormented mind that had followed the voices he claimed to hear in his head to justify killing hundreds and indirectly sentencing many on Earth to death. Eilerson compared Joan of Arc to Andre Sabbat; both had claimed to hear voices. Comparing their different fates, Joan of Arc being canonised and Andre Sabbat being shot, Eilerson commented that it was a funny old world. Dr Chambers agreed, approaching their table

with Sabbat's journal. She read a section of it aloud – all of the entries were actual quotes from Joan of Arc herself. To Eilerson, this proved his point, quoting T.S. Eliot: The saint and martyr ruled from the tomb.

Dr Chambers believed that everyone ended up translating those orders to suit themselves, to justify murder, torture and slavery. Dureena offered that on her world it had been considered to be a great evil to speak on behalf of the universe and Eilerson agreed, saying that Dureena's people had clearly been smarter than humans were. As Eilerson and Dureena went on to match opinions further, the thief realised she could no longer stand agreeing with Max Eilerson and offered Trace a dance.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 Doomsday cults can be major obstacles for groups of Player Characters. The task of working towards a cure for the plague is hard enough without dedicated and focused groups opposing them. During games set in the *Crusade* era, Player Characters can expect contacts to suddenly go silent as they are threatened by cults, strange incidents of sabotage and even attacks on their very lives in darkened alleys. A doomsday cult can make an excellent secondary adversary in a campaign.
- 5 The meeting on Mars is a real kick-start in coordinating the effort to find a cure for the Drakh Plague. After this conference, despite the incident with Matthew Gideon claiming that Earth was doomed in order to flush out a terrorist, members of the scientific community are much more likely to consult and bounce ideas off one another, even sharing serums and other concoctions in the hope that one particular combination pays off. Player

Characters who have a transport vessel could find themselves making a contribution by ferrying personnel, chemicals and samples between scientific outposts and worlds within the Earth Alliance.

The Rules of the Game

Probable Start Date: July 5th

The *Excalibur* was parked a short distance away from Babylon 5 and Dr Chambers and Max Eilerson were exploring; it was the first time either of them had been aboard the last of the Babylon stations. When Dr Chambers commented on the longevity of Babylon 5, Eilerson remarked that a lot of things, many that are unwanted, hang around longer than one would like, using poison ivy and measles as examples. When he mentioned exploring on his own, there was a very good reason for it. Dr Chambers thought that Eilerson intended to explore the seedier side of the station but the actual reason was much different. A woman with curly auburn hair in her late thirties greeted Eilerson with a kiss. The archaeologist introduced Dr Chambers to Cynthia Allen, his ex-wife.

In Captain Lochley's office on Babylon 5, a full-blown argument was underway between Gideon and Yabc Ftoba, the Brakiri representative to Babylon 5. Despite a prior agreement between the Earth Alliance and the Brakiri, the *Excalibur* was not permitted to land on the world in question, Lorka VII. The world was considered part of Brakiri space and was allowed to govern itself, the Brakiri providing armed defence in exchange for a percentage of the planetary income. When Gideon protested that an agreement handling situations like this had been confirmed in advance to prevent this from arising, the Brakiri

explained that there was an exception to every rule – and this was one of them. Unrepentant, Yabc Ftoba considered the conversation as concluded. As far as the Brakiri were concerned, the matter was now closed.

Later on, Lochley asked Gideon if there had been any additional progress with the Brakiri representative. Gideon recalled a quote from Plato, that for everything that existed, there was a perfect form somewhere, so everything else was a shadow of that perfect form. According to Gideon, somewhere in the universe there had to exist the perfect form of an idiot, to use that example. Yabc Ftoba clearly fulfilled that perfect form of an idiot. Lochley could not help smiling. There was no official Lorkan representative on Babylon 5 but they did have a presence. Lochley had managed to arrange a meeting with them but she warned Gideon that the Lorkans could be pretty stubborn. Gideon explained that the reason why Lorka VII was so important was a long story. She offered him dinner, saying that they could discuss it then. Gideon procrastinated for a while before her giving a direct answer but in the end he accepted.

In some acquired guest accommodations, Eilerson asked his ex-wife about their cat. The pet was better, still under medication, but doing better. That subject dealt with, Cynthia admitted that she was surprised that her ex-husband had agreed to meet her. He dismissed this, saying that he was going to be in the area anyway. He asked her what was wrong, suspecting that she had asked to meet him for a reason.

The truth was that Cynthia's business was floundering, most of her income coming from selling alien artwork and pottery. The Drakh Plague and resulting quarantine of Earth had effectively killed her business and bank rates were just a shadow of what they had once been. All in all, she owed a lot of money and no official organisation would lend to her to help her out of the financial quagmire. A loan shark was the only solution to her problem, so she had borrowed 50,000, with a 100% interest, compounded every six months.

Cynthia needed to sit down before continuing her tale of troubles. The man who had loaned her the money, Rolf Müller, had been following her ever since. Cynthia believed that even if she paid up, the man would not go away. Eilerson asked if this individual was here on Babylon 5, and was told that he was. After serious consideration, Eilerson told her that he would pay the 50,000 she had originally borrowed but not the interest. When Cynthia complained, Eilerson commented on the principle of the matter and moved to leave. Cynthia thanked him, promising that his words would be engraved on her tombstone.



Over dinner at the Eclipse Café, Gideon explained to Lochley why Lorka VII was so important. The original inhabitants of Lorka VII had died off many years before the current inhabitants arrived, 500 years previously. The newly arrived Lorkans moved into the ruins and had been reluctant to reveal anything about the world or what they had found there. Lochley was not surprised by this, as she felt that the Lorkans were less advanced than their level of technology would suggest. Gideon divulged the difficulties that he sometimes had in his job. Lochley reasoned that he was a bigger target, because of the size of the task he had taken on. She asked how he was handling the pressure. His response, that he felt better for seeing her, caught her off guard and she had to change the topic of the conversation: What would he do if the Lorkans declined Gideon's requests? Gideon said that he would not give in and if he could not go in the front door, he would go in the back door. Unfortunately for Gideon, this whole conversation was being captured by a miniature camera floating above their heads.

The image the camera was capturing was replayed to the two Lorkans who Gideon was due to meet. Both were of standard height, their skins a shade of magenta, with small shiny patches framing their facial features. They wore clothing of a blue hue, in a simple cut. The more senior of the Lorkans, Riss, told his junior Polix that Gideon and Lochley could not be trusted and that another might not prove so persistent. The best way to eliminate the threat was to eliminate Gideon himself.

In the Dark Star, one of the seedier dens on Babylon 5 that had once been the haunt of Emperor Londo Mollari before he gained that title, Max Eilerson found Rolf Müller sitting with several cronies. Eilerson began the conversation by saying that he was here to give the loan shark 50,000 credits. Initially happy, Müller was put off when Eilerson told him that it was to settle the account for Cynthia Allen.



He was even less happy when Eilerson disagreed with him, realising that the man was Cynthia's ex and some sort of wizkid. Eilerson informed Müller that the correct term was *prodigy* and helpfully spelled it out for the loan shark. The atmosphere turning frosty, Müller told Eilerson that he still owed him 50,000. Eilerson said no, saying that everything else that Müller asked for was nothing more than pure extortion and for the crook to stay away from Cynthia. He promised trouble for Müller before departing. Trying to bluff away this dent in his image to his companions, Müller told a subordinate to get a communication link to back home, before turning his attention back to the two dancers on stage.

Meeting with Lochley and Gideon, Riss and Polix explained the story of their exodus and subsequent arrival on Lorka VII, claiming that it had almost been a religious voyage. They had found great machines and mysteries, only to be revealed to those that were like them – the 'most holy'. Prophecy stated that the technology would be theirs as long as they remained free from corruption. They had barred outsiders from coming to their world in order not to risk everything that they had been given. They were naturally pure, so the two Lorkans could walk amongst others on Babylon 5 and not be affected, in their opinion.

Eilerson and Cynthia argued about what the archaeologist had done. She was scared that he had inflamed the situation by interfering. An incoming call diverted the increasingly tense conversation. It was Diane, one of Cynthia's neighbours. Their cat, whom they were keeping an eye on, had been taken away; all that Diane had seen was a fleeing skimmer. Then a strange man arrived, giving her a message. Another 50,000 credits were required, otherwise he would kill the cat and then come after Cynthia. Eilerson put his coat on, Cynthia accusing him of walking out on her as he did before. Eilerson corrected her, saying that she had walked out on him, not the other way around. He also reaffirmed that Mr Kitty was his cat before she had walked into, or out of, his life. Leaving Cynthia's guest quarters in Red Sector, Eilerson hailed the *Excalibur* and asked for Dr Chambers and a shuttle.

Later on, Gideon stopped by Lochley's quarters in off-duty attire to see the commanding officer of Babylon 5 hip-deep in paperwork. She told Gideon that she had spoken to President Sheridan's office. The Alliance would bring some pressure to bear on the Lorkans but it would take a couple of days. There was nothing concrete to follow up on but Gideon was reluctant to set out on one of the many other leads provided by the Rangers only to turn around and head back towards Brakiri space and the Lorkan homeworld when permission to land came through. When Gideon's offer of dinner was declined, they argued about who was the most out of touch. Gideon bet Lochley 100 credits that no-one would recognise her when she put the uniform aside and stepped outside the door, even

offering to accompany her. Lochley accepted the bet. As Gideon and Lochley, now both in civilian attire, wandered around Downbelow, the Lorkan camera tracked them. In their appointed quarters, Polix asked Riss about Captain Lochley, for she would be a witness to their handling of Gideon. Riss said that he planned to kill Lochley as well, as he fitted a gem-shaped weapon into the palm of his hand.

Opening the door to her quarters, Cynthia let in Dr Chambers, who said that she had been asked to drop by. Cynthia was unsurprised, believing Eilerson had passed off taking care of his ex-wife to someone else. Dr Chambers confessed that she was no fan of Eilerson but felt that Cynthia was being a little hard on him. In response, Cynthia said a squad of marines might have been better but relaxed a bit, put at ease by Dr Chambers' presence. Dr Chambers made the situation even easier, by asking for the gossip on Eilerson. As she did so, Eilerson was back in his quarters onboard the *Excalibur*, retrieving a strange bronzed artefact from his private collection of alien acquisitions.

Still in Downbelow, Gideon professed his theory on practical experience of alien environments and when offered a sandwich by a vendor, he declined. Lochley told the vendor she would like the usual and the vendor knew her name and rank. Gideon could not believe he had been outmanoeuvred and accused her of cheating. She did not deny the fact, knowing that the bet had still been won. Finding somewhere to sit to eat her sandwich, Lochley and Gideon found themselves in an area of the station where there were no communications links, courtesy of a high level of interference. Lochley liked it here, for she would spend an hour of peace and quiet with the sandwich, after which she was ready to go back to work. Sharing some of the alleged beef sandwich with Gideon, he asked her why she had not shot down his routine. Lochley said it had been fun to play out, and the look on his face was worth it.

An awkward silence between the two was broken with an odd smell, which Gideon recognised as ozone, often given off when weapons were discharged. Gideon pushed Lochley to the floor before an electrical arc passed through the air where they had been sitting. Disagreeing over whether Gideon's presence was the cause of this attack and unable to contact anyone due to the interference, they had to keep moving, for the alien weapon was charging up again.

In Cynthia's quarters, she was baring her soul about her experiences with Eilerson, Dr Chambers being very interested in this different view of her co-worker. Looking at a selection of photographs, Cynthia told Chambers that Eilerson never spoke about the important things, instead talking about unimportant things to make up for it. An



intelligent and solitary child, he was often beaten for 'being too smart'. Their marriage and IPX had collided but by then Eilerson had been a company man. The door chimed, the voice identifying itself as Eilerson. Instead of the archaeologist, Rolf Müller entered, carrying a voice recorder. He pulled a PPG and pondered aloud what Cynthia could do to pay off some of the remaining money. He did not expect Chambers to disarm him, punching and kicking him to the floor. More surprised than wounded, he fled from Cynthia's room.

Still fleeing the alien weapon and their would-be killers, Gideon and Lochley rested for a second behind a large section of machinery. Gideon guessed that these were amateurs, for he believed that if they were professional killers both of them would have been dead by now. Lochley could not doubt their enthusiasm but she had an idea...

Returning to his dwelling, Rolf Müller was not expecting to be ambushed. Two Drazi, who had been paid a sum of money by Eilerson for this little favour, beat the loan shark into unconsciousness in short order before dragging him off to an undisclosed location.

The two Lorkans, upon seeing a surrendered Lochley, asked where Gideon had gone. Following Lochley's direction, they realised that she had sabotaged a small fuel tank and forced her away at gunpoint. They passed directly underneath Gideon, who swung down, attempting to knock the Lorkans off balance.

The execution was somewhat sloppy on Gideon's part and the aliens soon had the upper hand, bouncing Gideon off a large container. Gideon found himself a pipe which he used to batter first the alien that was attacking him, then the other one that Lochley was dealing with quite well enough on her own.

In an empty room in Downbelow, Rolf Müller woke up, in the unexpected company of Max Eilerson. Müller said that unless Eilerson figured on killing him, he would still get what he wanted. He said that all he had done was make things worse and there was nothing he could do about it. Taking the opportunity, Eilerson shot Müller with the alien artefact he had taken from the *Excalibur*. A silver ring wrapped itself around Müller's neck, the archaeologist taking the liberty to explain that the ring was somehow seamless and its alien manufacture was resistant to everything that Eilerson had tried to use to break it, including lasers and acids. Therefore, any attempt to break it would probably kill Müller in the process.



The collar gun was over a thousand years old and had at one time been used to control prisoners. To demonstrate, Eilerson fired another ring at a nearby pillar, then pulled a small control device from his pocket. This control device had probably been used by perimeter guards. If one of these alien collars came within ten feet of one of the control devices, the ring would contract. He demonstrated this by throwing one of the control devices at the pillar, which was severed neatly in two as the collar contracted. Eilerson gleefully told Müller that these devices also had a code that could cause the collars to kill their victims by remote. He advised Müller that he was going to have one of these devices and Cynthia was going to have another, so if he ever came close to either of them again, Müller would be his own executioner. Müller would leave Cynthia and himself alone and would return the cat, bathed and groomed. The only thing that Müller could say as he departed was that Cynthia and Eilerson were divorced, not married anymore. Matheson was well aware of this and he said so with a genuine measure of sadness visible on his face.

Getting back to Lochley's quarters, adrenaline still running high and more than a little dirty from their escapades, Gideon was dumbfounded when Lochley revealed that as one of the perks of her position on Babylon 5, she had actual water showers, rather than sonic or vibration-based equivalents. Lochley said it was fine for him to use it but he would have to wait until it recycled. Gideon was fine with that, as he had to get his adrenaline down anyway. The atmosphere was inescapably electric until, with uncharacteristic fervour, the pair locked in an embrace. The unchecked adrenaline led them to the shower, their passionate encounter silhouetted behind the privacy of the shower screen.

Diane, Cynthia Allen's neighbour, was on the link. A speeder had pulled up as before and Mr Kitty had been returned; the cat had even been bathed. Cynthia looked at Eilerson, incredulous at this piece of news. The archaeologist said simply that he had been polite. The link closed and Cynthia apologised to Eilerson for laying into him the way that she had. She confessed that she did not like calling him to ask for help but she found it rough sometimes. Cynthia was

also unsure why he always picked up the call to answer. Max said that it was because in his whole life he only ever loved three things. One was his work – but the other two were Mr Kitty and Cynthia. Leaving, he was forced to take a moment in the corridor outside to collect his true emotions, better hidden than many of the archaeological wonders he found on alien worlds, before moving on.

Another Lorkan was in Captain Lochley's office but it was neither Riss nor Polix. This Lorkan was apologising for the actions of the two emissaries assigned to Babylon 5. They had been selling the Lorkan technology on Babylon 5 and if those two proponents of the chief Lorkan religion had proved to be corruptible, then their whole society needed to consider the issue. Both Riss and Polix were claiming it was the alien influences on them that had led to their downfall. In any case, Gideon still expected that they would not be allowed to land. On the contrary, the Lorkans wanted the *Excalibur* to visit their world. Lochley was happy with this statement, verbally confirming that the Lorkans must have decided that humanity was not as corrupted as the Lorkans had first thought. The Lorkan explained that it was in fact the opposite, in that they needed the *Excalibur* to test their faith.

After the Lorkan emissary had left and was out of earshot, Gideon had a question to put to Lochley: Could he hit the Lorkan? Just once? Gideon complained that he never had any fun, barring their recent encounter. Lochley was glad of the introduction to this topic, because something had been bothering her. Lochley was not sure how things had moved so fast, because she was normally more in control. Lochley explained that she was not looking to commit to a relationship at the current time, being responsible for Babylon 5. Gideon said he understood. She had Babylon 5, he had the *Excalibur* and the threat of the Drakh Plague was still hanging over their heads. Lochley still asked him out for dinner, before the *Excalibur* departed for Lorka VII. Apparently, she knew a great place.

In his quarters on the *Excalibur*, en route to Lorka VII, there was a visitor at Eilerson's door. It was someone with a parcel which had been delivered to the *Excalibur* before it had departed. Opening the parcel up, Eilerson found that it contained a photograph of Mr Kitty, with a note on the back from Cynthia saying that she did not know if he had a picture of their black and white cat. He placed the photo on his desk and looked at it for a few fleeting moments before returning to his work.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 This episode highlights one of the many artefacts in Max Eilerson's possession, a collar gun (see page 131 for details). This artefact, like many, was created by a long-dead civilisation. Player Characters could find a similar device themselves but if the item has a dark history, such as an involvement in slavery, can they bring themselves to use it?
- 5 Riss and Polix were selling the technology found on their world to buyers on Babylon 5. The Player Characters may have had some involvement with these two disreputable aliens, perhaps even buying technological items for their corporate employers or sponsors. It may be that other individuals or organisations, such as Brakiri ones, have an interest in the items from Lorka VII. Perhaps the Player Characters are actually in the employ of an outward-thinking Lorkan who suspects that Riss and Polix are acting in an immoral way but does not wish to give the task to a member of his own race in case their own morality might be affected.



Appearances and Other Deceits

Probable Start Date: August 7th

In the dark and airless hallways of an abandoned alien vessel, a computer screen flickered to life, illuminating a webbed alien hand, flexing sinews and tendons as if after a long sleep. The computer screen changed colour from a deep red to a serene blue, and the centre of the screen fixated on the rotating shape of another starship – the *Excalibur*.

Sitting in the captain's chair, for the first time in years Gideon wished he was someplace else. For three days visitors from EarthGov's Political Affairs office had been onboard, attempting to deal with concerns over how the *Excalibur* and its mission was being perceived back on Earth. Kevin Sprach, one of the visitors, was critiquing the appearance of the *Excalibur's* bridge. Sprach went on to criticise their uniforms, saying that they did convey power, in fact, they reminded him of a day at the circus. Continuing still further, Sprach decided to revamp the ship's image and was going to use his own people, as he simply did not trust anyone else to do the job.

Gideon tried to protest but the dark-haired man with unassuming features by Sprach's side intervened. Mr Welles offered a few words of caution. He reminded Gideon that the mission fell under Earth jurisdiction and how important it was that the profile of the mission have the right social impact. Talking further about the problems with rioting and doomsday cults back on Earth, he reasoned with Gideon that the only positive image people back on Earth had was the *Excalibur* out in space looking for a cure. Welles said that they had to make those back on Earth feel better about the mission and the effect it would have on their chances of survival. With that, a report from Matheson detailed the presence of an anomaly on their long-range scanners and Sprach took the opportunity to leave the bridge.

Standing before the sensor screen, Gideon, Matheson and a curious Welles observed the readouts of the alien ship as they closed in. It was a huge vessel, made in part of domed sections linked by an array of pipes and tubing seemingly twisting around the ship at random. Surprised at Matheson's report that there was only one life-form onboard, Gideon queried this, as a vessel the size of this alien ship should have a crew of several hundred people. Matheson confirmed that there was only one life-form – but many organics. Apart from the one survivor, the rest were dead.

Pulling in close to the alien vessel, the *Excalibur* was dwarfed, despite being an impressive size herself. A team of explorers headed up by Lieutenant Matheson departed from the *Excalibur* wearing spacesuits

with thrusters to navigate the short distance between the two vessels. Still on the bridge, Welles was confused as to why they were bothering to investigate this derelict vessel. Gideon reminded Welles of their mission profile, but the political analyst was not moved, seemingly convinced of the low odds that this mission had for finding a cure for the plague. Gideon's assured reply was that penicillin was found in bread mould, leaving Welles without a counter-argument.

Reporting on his investigation of the ship, Matheson noted that nothing appeared amiss, until the light of his torch illuminated a large hole at the rear of the ship. It appeared that an explosion was the cause of the hole, the force originating inside the vessel, rather than being caused by raiders or some other external threat. Assessing his options, Gideon gave permission for Matheson to proceed inside but not to take any chances. Exploring further, Matheson found the main chamber of the alien vessel and was taken aback by the sight of scores of frail alien bodies twisting and turning in zero gravity like leaves in autumn. Unable to take his eyes off the bodies, he answered Gideon's obvious question by stating that it appeared that these aliens had killed each other. Moving on to the command deck, the exploration team found a life support tube, its lights dim, with an alien still alive inside it. The living alien was surrounded by more dead aliens, all touching one another.

The life support tube took pride of place within an isolation lab onboard the *Excalibur*, safely ensconced in a self-contained environment. Standing behind Dr Chambers' console looking at the recovered tube, Gideon asked the medical chief when it could be opened, as there had been a delay making sure that the tube was properly decontaminated.

Interrupting her senior, a young assistant named Janey alerted Dr Chambers and Captain Gideon to the fact that



the life signs for the alien within the capsule were failing. Taking matters into her own hands and spurred on by a recent admonishment from Dr Chambers, Janey grabbed a breathing unit and, with it barely in place, dived into the isolation lab. Popping open the tube, Janey bent over the tube only for the dying alien to grab her exposed wrist, its eyelids opening and blood red orbs boring into her own visage before the alien slumped back, dead. Dazed momentarily, Janey picked up two small hand units and started to initiate an electric shock programme on the alien. It was no use. The alien was dead. Outside the isolab, fury brimming over, Dr Chambers ordered an autopsy for the dead alien and a full decontamination process for the impetuous junior officer who had broken almost every single safety regulation in the book.

Leaving Medlab with Dr Chambers, Gideon was confused by how the situation had changed so suddenly, almost as if the alien had simply decided to give up living. When Dr Chambers made a half-joking comment about the alien perhaps not liking the ship's décor, Gideon remarked that he was not the first to have that impression, referring to the current thorn in his side that was the double-act of Kevin Sprach and Mr Welles. Dr Chambers made an effort to apologise for the alien's dying whilst under her care but was rebuffed by Gideon. He knew that the death of the alien was not her fault, instead asking her for more information. One notable thing caught Dr Chambers' attention: when the alien had been alive it had possessed multiple brain patterns.

In the canteen, sitting on a bench in front of his personal computer, Max Eilerson talked aloud about the structure of the alien language to no-one in particular. Vocally eliminating possibilities from his mind, he was interrupted by a waiter asking him if he would like some more popcorn. Keen to have someone to listen, Eilerson took the opportunity to share some of his knowledge with what he considered less informed folk. The waiter did his best to humour the linguist and managed to leave at the first available opportunity.

After receiving a second dressing-down in a single day from Dr Chambers, Janey was still hanging around Medlab, a log book in her hands. She was drawing perfectly-formed symbols in the book, many curved but ending in sharp, precise points. Putting the book down, she walked over to a colleague who was bent over a console. She placed her hand on the back of his unexposed neck and a blue haze was briefly visible around the point of contact. The man stood up and turned to face Janey, who addressed him in a deep, resonating tone contrary to her small frame, with words clearly inhuman in origin. He turned and departed, leaving Janey to look at the darkened isolation lab and the dead form of the alien contained within. Leaving Medlab, Janey continued to place her hands on the exposed flesh of other crewmembers

in exactly the same manner as she had done to the medical staff member moments before. All whom she touched appeared momentarily dazed before moving away with some newfound purpose.

The next morning, Gideon greeted Eilerson in the canteen and was surprised to discover that the archaeological mastermind had not been to bed. The reason for Eilerson's concern was that there were problems between the evidence of written language that Lieutenant Matheson had found on the alien ship and the verbal distress call. Both were structurally different, perhaps being different languages for written and verbal communication. Eilerson mused that perhaps there were two different races involved.

Aboard a bullet car traversing the length of the *Excalibur*, Matheson sat quietly, alone with his thoughts. His mental diversions came to an abrupt halt as he realised something had been written all over the inside of the bullet car, strange alien symbols similar to what he had seen back on the derelict. Many of them were rounded symbols with sharp defined points. Concerned, he departed to report these disturbing findings.

In a meeting concerning the design of the new uniforms, Sprach expressed his distress at the old clothes worn by Gideon and Matheson, which were standard issue for those stationed on Explorer-class vessels. The old design was functional and useful but Sprach simply could not understand why a captain's uniform would need pockets. To him, that was why a captain had subordinates. As Sprach turned to examine another piece of clothing, a crewmember walked past and touched Welles on his neck. His features changing, Welles suddenly announced that he had more important things to do and left the designer behind. Even as he did so, other members of the crew were moving on to one another, all of them affected by the same strange influence that had gripped Janey and everyone with whom she had come into contact.

Janey was in the canteen, her eyes keen and alert for any potential threat or new avenue to explore. As she reached for the shoulder of another crewmember, Eilerson jumped up out of his seat, his vocal triumph catching her attention; the linguist had clearly had a breakthrough. Intrigued, Janey withdrew, positioning herself better to see what Eilerson had been working on. Clearly troubled at what she saw on his screen, she reached out to touch Eilerson at the same moment that he pulled away, taking his laptop with him. Missing him and touching another crewmember, her good fortune was that the new acquisition was an armed security guard. Eilerson had turned just in time to see something odd happen and the gaze of the security guard lock onto him.

After a moment of confusion, the security guard drew out his PPG and took a shot at Eilerson, who was already



running for the nearest bullet car. Janey and her stooge turned the corner as a security guard placed himself directly between Eilerson and harm's way. As Eilerson hit the floor of the bullet car, the security guard took a hit to the neck from a PPG burst, his body falling inside the car as the door shut. Inside the travelling car, Gideon called Eilerson to find out what the hell was going on. With a dying guard in his arms, Eilerson told Gideon over a communications link that the captain had no choice but to seal all doors and bulkheads, close all decks and stop all bullet cars except his.

In the meeting room, Dr Chambers appraised Eilerson and Gideon of the guard's condition. The prognosis was not good – the shot had affected the brain stem and he was effectively dead from the shoulders up. They could keep his body alive but his mind was simply no longer there. She asked why the decks had been closed and Gideon instructed Eilerson to divulge his theories on how they had been invaded. The aliens who had flown the derelict spacecraft had picked up a probe and brought it onboard. The only thing of note inside the probe had been a high-powered energy source. Somehow, the energy source had disappeared when they opened the probe and that was when the crew of the derelict spacecraft had started to change. Eilerson went on to reveal that the alien life-form operated by subdividing itself into new hosts. The transfer mechanism was tactile but not airborne, a process he had witnessed personally back in the canteen. Gideon acknowledged this, as it matched with the alien having multiple brain wave patterns – the alien was host to something far more sinister. Gideon tried to thank Eilerson for his discovery but Eilerson could not bring himself to accept the praise. There was an idea in the logs of the dead captain of the alien derelict; to kill the alien entity the captain of that doomed vessel had elected to destroy his ship and thus kill everyone aboard. Eilerson was concerned that at some point they would have to do the same.

Using a roving camera to spy on all of the *Excalibur's* decks, Gideon and Matheson ordered all crews to their quarters. The same alien writing was scrawled all over the corridor walls, a clear and visual indication of how the alien influence was spreading throughout the ship. The remote camera ran around a corner and straight into a life-form that had evidently been waiting for them. It was Welles, clearly not himself. Looking directly into the camera, the political adviser informed whoever was listening that the alien entity, in whose power he now found himself subjugated, wanted a peaceful resolution to this problem. It also wanted to speak to the captain.

Max Eilerson was seated in Medbay with the mortally wounded guard. Dr Chambers confirmed that the man's body might be alive but his mind was gone. Finding the sacrifice hard to accept, Eilerson asked for the name of the man who had saved his life. The man's name was Stuart Greenberg. Eilerson left, no wisecracks or sarcastic comments issuing from his lips.

The meeting with the possessed Mr Welles arranged, Matheson confirmed the arrangements to Gideon. They would meet on either side of a glass pressure door. Gideon waited for Welles to arrive; he did so, accompanied by a dozen supporters, all with the same look of possession in their eyes. Janey stood to one side, Welles now acting as the mouthpiece for the entity. The infected Welles explained how the whole process had started: In the beginning there had been one of them, a single entity. That one had infected others, all shadows of the one. Those shadows had travelled and infected more. To continue their quest, they wished to be dropped off at an inhabited world so they could continue. Gideon refused this request, as he was not happy with sacrificing a world to their whims just to get them off his ship. The alien entity, through Welles, warned Gideon of the danger of opposing their true calling.

On the bridge, Kevin Sprach was studying Lieutenant Matheson, who was uncomfortable with the level of attention he had garnered from the designer. Sprach watched the recording that Matheson had made of the alien vessel and noted how the chain of aliens were joined by touch. He wondered aloud if, by using the same method – touch – the genie could be 'put back into the bottle'.

Gideon, who appeared behind them, took Matheson to the conference room and pulled up a three-dimensional schematic of the *Excalibur*. They agreed to try and shut down the heating units to force the possessed crewmembers into one location. It was not long before Janey spotted this and ordered Welles to speak to Gideon. The captain's



image appeared on the viewscreen and Welles told Gideon that he had ten minutes to surrender – or Welles would kill a crewmember every five minutes. To make his point, the alien presence inside Welles ordered one killed immediately. Gideon, who had held off killing any of the possessed crew because they were still physically his crewmembers, was outraged. Telling Matheson that he was taking a bullet car to speak to those affected by the alien influence, Gideon also authorised self-destruct protocols for the *Excalibur*, if worst came to the worst.

Outside the area containing those affected, Gideon arrived wearing a full spacesuit. Escorted by two of the possessed crewmembers, he was brought before Welles, stating that he was wearing the spacesuit for his own protection. The possessed Janey congratulated Gideon's perception, that flesh was the conduit necessary for the alien presence to pass itself on. Unsurprisingly, Gideon refused to remove his helmet, but Janey reminded him that there was only an hour's air supply in his suit and he would have to remove it at some point. Gideon agreed, making a throwaway comment: 'As Mr Eilerson says, the air is human.'

On the bridge, they discussed Gideon's unusual phrase, Eilerson perplexed at Gideon's words and the clichéd phrase he surely meant. After a few moments, they realised what Gideon was referring to. The alien entity, despite being energy-based, still required a host body and those host bodies needed air. Now understanding, Eilerson asked Matheson how they could depressurise the affected decks to render the host crewmembers immobile.

Gideon waited with the alien entity, his air supply slowly running out. An alert sounded on the affected decks and air suddenly began to be sucked out. The possessed crewmembers formed a chain, each passing the entity's life

essence along to the next person in the chain to avoid the alien essence being lost. The sum of all the essences was passed along to Welles, who stumbled out of the room gasping for breath. Lolling in the direction of a nearby airlock, Welles found one spacesuit, occupied by a crewmember and thus doubly perfect for the essence's requirements. With no time to waste, he removed the glove and transferred the totality of the essence into the crewmember inside the spacesuit for safety. The form of Welles slumped to the floor, his purpose fulfilled, as a new host had been found. Almost immediately the entity realised that something was wrong. The host form was immobile, inert for some reason, as if there was nothing there to influence or control. The body it had entered was that of Stuart Greenberg, who was without any form of mental activity due to the damage he had suffered previously. The alien entity was trapped, unable to communicate.

Calmly, Gideon dragged the body of Stuart Greenberg, containing the entrapped alien essence, to the nearest airlock. At Gideon's instruction the body was jettisoned into space; it was tracked by the powerful weapons systems of the *Excalibur*, which opened fire at the first opportunity. A scream was heard from the centre of the explosion, a form of pure energy writhing in agony for a split second. Then there was nothing, no trace of the essence to show it had ever existed.

Three EarthForce destroyers towed the alien vessel away, their crews under no illusion about the risk of contamination from any lingering traces of the alien influence. Onboard the *Excalibur*, Mr Welles thanked Gideon and his crew. As a reward, their new uniforms were ready. Kevin Sprach was proud of his stylistic creation. A glance to Welles for help was fruitless, as the uniforms had been approved by EarthForce Personnel back home and so were now official. They had to be worn with pride, Welles said, with a self-assured smirk before leaving the ship.

Arriving in Medlab, Max Eilerson found Dr Chambers but waited for her to notice his presence before speaking. He hoped that Stuart Greenberg would have approved of his body being used as a containment vessel to hold the alien entity and thus save the lives of everyone onboard the *Excalibur*. Eilerson wanted to know who spoke for those who gave their lives. Dr Chambers told him that the job of speaking for the dead belonged to Captain Gideon. He would need to speak to the family of the fallen soldier and that was one job she did not envy.

In his quarters, Gideon struggled to fit into his new uniform. The displeasure on his face at the tight-fitting costume, compared to the practicality of his Explorer uniform, was clear. Most of all, aside from the snugness of the cut

of the uniform, the colours Kevin Sprach had chosen gave him an image that he did not like. In Gideon's opinion, it made him look less like the captain of an Explorer vessel and more like a bellhop. Taking off his new jacket, he sat down at his desk and started to dictate the letter of regret to Stuart Greenberg's family, mentioning the lives that the guard had saved by his sacrifice.

Covert Takeovers

The situation onboard the *Excalibur* was prevented only by chance, when Max Eilerson moving away at the critical moment, totally unaware of what was going on around him. It is fair to say that if not for the whims of fate, the *Excalibur* would now be under the control of the alien essence and Earth doomed.

With the alien essence eliminated, the method of transfer known and the signs to identify a carrier of the alien essence recorded, the Earth Alliance need not necessarily worry itself about the threat. However, there is nothing to say that there are not other essences on other worlds, far from the known cosmos, waiting to be discovered by those looking for relics or technology.

Just as in the episode, the principle of an alien takeover is intriguing for a group of Player Characters or a possible adventure. It works best in a location familiar to the Player Characters, doubly so if there are personalities in these locations who are known to them. It can cause the Player Characters to question more or less everything around them, easily inducing a sense of paranoia. A Games Master will need to keep this in check occasionally, if an adventure with this theme slows down into an excessive level of quizzing and second-guessing, but it can also serve to bring a group closer together, especially if the Player Characters are not well known to one another.



Mr Welles, Political Office Advisor

'If anyone knows how to survive political change, it's me.'

9th Level Human Diplomat

Hit Points: 14

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +5 ranged

Special Qualities: Contact x2 (3 sacrificed), Government Resources, Improved Diplomacy +2

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +11

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 17

Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +18, Computer Use +7, Diplomacy +20, Forgery +10, Gather Information +10, Hide +3, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (bureaucracy) +10, Knowledge (politics) +12, Listen +5, Move Silently +3, Profession (political adviser) +8, Sense Motive +20, Spot +5

Feats: Iron Will, Political Survivor, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Sense Motive)

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Extracting himself from the debacle that became the Nightwatch and the Ministry of Peace, Vikram Welles has proved to have more political savvy than many ever gave him credit for. Despite having been the public face of Nightwatch on Babylon 5 and being indirectly responsible for the imprisoning of innocent members of the public, Welles is a political survivor, manipulating truths as the tools of his existence.

Welles is not opposed to the needs of Earth; he is more patriotic than one might expect. However, he did not get to his current position by placing his own needs behind others. Even those who work alongside Welles would be advised to learn that if the situation ever changed, there would be no loyalty shown on his part. It was this willingness to burn bridges and sacrifice others to keep himself afloat which allowed him to survive the mess that the Nightwatch became.

Working for a different administration now, Vikram Welles knows that he has less power than before but with also fewer enemies, a change that Mr Welles does not mind at all.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 The presence of Mr Welles highlights that even minor characters evolve and change in the Babylon 5 universe. If playing with a group of characters who are currently in the timeframe of Crusade but who previously

gamed in the time of the Shadow War and Earth Civil War, what has happened to the Non-Player Characters they interacted with? Some of them will have died, some moved on, some settled down. As an example, Welles showed amazing diplomatic ability to survive the collapse of the Nightwatch and this begs the question who else survived the fall of President Clark? What happened to Julie Musante, the political officer assigned (briefly) to Babylon 5? More importantly, how would such an individual interact with the Player Characters now, who were in all probability on the opposite side of the conflict back then?

- 5 The alien entity that appears in this episode can be a powerful tool, both in existing games and in new games. Such an entity can help a group of new Player Characters bond together for their own survival. In this case, some event would need to transpire to prevent the Player Characters from being infected, with clues presented to help them identify that those around them are behaving very strangely. Horror movies are replete with tales of possession of many different kinds and any one of these could serve as inspiration, adapted to the Babylon 5 style, for the theme of an adventure.

- 5 The fate of those crewmembers that were under the influence of the alien influence during this episode is not expanded upon. Such a group would have an instant bond; there were acts that they committed as a group which they may be unaware of, which may result in difficulties with other crew members onboard the *Excalibur*. Although the episode does not suggest as such, an enterprising Games Master may decide that there is some lingering effects of the alien influence, perhaps even manifesting themselves as a latent telepathic ability for some time.



The Lost Tales

The following synopses illustrate three episodes of *Crusade* that were never filmed, although scripts were delivered. These episodes would have drastically altered the original direction of the show, put the *Excalibur* and her crew on a collision course with EarthGov and demonstrated the fascination of the Earth Alliance military with the legacy of the Shadows. Incredibly, this would become a greater threat to Earth than the Drakh plague itself. At the end of the first season of the show, Dureena would have come into possession of a strange weapon with unusual powers and Gideon would have been attacked, perhaps fatally, in an episode proverbially entitled 'End of the Line'.

Many thanks are due to both J. Michael Straczynski and Fiona Avery for allowing the following synopses to be extrapolated from their scripts for the unproduced episodes.

To the Ends of the Earth

Probable Start Date: September 3rd

Onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon's bedside lamp illuminated itself on a predefined timer, signalling the start of another day. Roused, he picked up his new issue red and grey uniform from the back of his chair. Still unhappy with it and having avoided wearing it whenever he was away from the prying eyes of politicians and the media, he made a decision that today he would find a way to dispense with the new uniforms. Before doing so he contacted Lieutenant Matheson, who as ever seemed to be a permanent fixture of the bridge. Asking for a status update, Gideon was told that Eilerson and Dureena had taken a shuttle and headed back down to the world beneath them. The ruins there were intriguing them and they wanted just one more day to affirm that there was nothing of significant interest.

That out of the way, Gideon asked Matheson how long they had been saddled with the accursed red and grey uniforms that Kevin Sprach had designed for them several months before. He went on to question if there was any substantial evidence that showed that the change to the new uniforms had improved morale back home. Matheson said no, thinking that the change had just been to give those in authority something to do. Agreeing, Gideon told Matheson to send a message back home stating that there had been a terrible calamity in the ship's laundry and the new uniforms had been destroyed. Until they could make an official supply requisition, they would have to go back to their older, more practical uniforms. Gideon assured Matheson that there would indeed be an accident that ended up in the logs to verify the message.

Returning to his favoured uniform, Gideon was jolted by the lights suddenly failing in his cabin. The only source of illumination was the light coming from the seams around a wall panel. Taking his Apocalypse Box of the panel's cavity, he found that it had a message for him. The ship he had been searching for was on the move.

Elsewhere, an alien vessel of an unknown configuration was under attack, its back section on fire with ignited plasma. Doomed, the ship started to eject lifepods as the attacker came into view. It was a dark-skinned craft, the demon offspring of a Shadow cruiser and a bird of prey, and continued to fire on the fleeing alien ship. One energy ray hit home and the alien cruiser exploded into chunks as a critical hit was scored. Seemingly satisfied that its work was done, the attacker turned its attention to the lifepods, picking them off at will.

Down on the planet's surface, Eilerson and Dureena were arguing about the location of the main vault they were looking for. Dureena was convinced that the vault would be small, to throw off people like Eilerson who believed that something had to be big to be important. Contacting them, Matheson told them both to get back on the shuttle and back up to the *Excalibur*. If they were not back in twenty minutes the *Excalibur* would leave them behind. Therefore, with little choice, they returned to their shuttle and lifted off from the planet's surface, heading spaceward. Galen, having heard about the recall and disturbed by the urgency of it, watched Eilerson and Dureena return from his observation point on the hangar deck. He pondered this mystery, resolving to find out the reasoning behind it.

On the bridge, Gideon gave Matheson the co-ordinates provided by the Apocalypse Box and was told that Eilerson and Dr Chambers wanted to know what was going on. He told Matheson to arrange a meeting with them in the conference room as soon as they were underway. Matheson knew exactly what Gideon hoped was at the co-ordinates he had supplied and he asked his captain if he believed that it was the right ship, because they had hunted for it before. Gideon was sure that it was indeed the ship that haunted his nightmares.

The meeting did not take long to organise and Dr Chambers, Galen, Max Eilerson and Dureena were already in attendance when Gideon arrived. Immediately Dr Chambers spoke up, wanting to know what was going on. Gideon explained that an unidentified aggressor had destroyed the ship he had served on nine years before, the *Cerberus*. According to official records, the jump engines of the *Cerberus* had malfunctioned. No-one back on Earth believed Gideon's story that it was not an accident. Gideon accepted Dr Chambers' comment that EarthGov was obsessed with planetary security at the time but whatever the real reason was, he did not know. What he did know was that he had been searching for the ship which destroyed the *Cerberus* for nine years. Gideon refused to answer a request from Galen, specifically asking how he had come by this updated information. This refusal spoke volumes to the techno-mage.

With the Drakh Plague perhaps being what they should focus on rather than this unendorsed mission, Gideon looked at everyone in the conference room and told them that they were already en route but the decision as to what would happen when they arrived at the new location was up to everyone else in the room. If even one person said no, the *Excalibur* would turn back.

Leaving his colleagues to debate their next action, Gideon went to speak to Matheson. He did not want anyone filing reports that could be proved false, so he needed to handle the fact that Earth would want updates on their mission. Matheson told Gideon he had already dealt with it by telling Earth that they were maintaining radio silence for a few days, as there was a suspicion of hostile activity in the area. When Gideon asked what would happen when these hostiles were not located, Matheson said it would prove that the *Excalibur* had evaded them successfully. Thanking Matheson for his efforts, Gideon left the bridge only to be replaced by Galen moments later.

The techno-mage wanted to know when Gideon had sounded the alert to recall the shuttles. When Matheson said it had been around 7.30 a.m., Galen reasoned that if Gideon had received his information last night then he would have acted upon it last night, so it must have been between 7.00 and 7.30 a.m. The telepath, aware that Gideon had the Apocalypse Box in his possession, did not want to answer, so he chose to say that the information was privileged and excused himself. Dureena, now by Galen's side, wanted to know what the questioning was all about. Galen's opined that when an honest man was silent, it was the most revealing silence of all.

Gideon was still replaying the destruction of the *Cerberus* in his mind when Matheson contacted him on the link, saying that the others were ready to see him. Making his

way to the conference room, Gideon was told the verdict. There were three votes to support his actions and one against. Assuming that Eilerson had voted no, Gideon was surprised to learn that the archaeologist had actually argued in favour of trying to find the ship, understanding revenge as a motive. It was actually Dr Chambers who had voted no; she could understand Gideon's need for revenge but the *Excalibur* had an obligation to the here and now. They had to leave the past where it was and concentrate on the present and the Drakh Plague.

Matheson called Gideon back to the bridge. They had just jumped back into normal space and found the wreckage of an alien ship that had been attacked earlier. Its asymmetrical form had been carved up into a dozen pieces, and hundreds of bodies, many charred, were floating free in the vacuum of space. Even the lifepods had been destroyed to make sure that no-one survived. Evidently the attacker had missed one lifepod, for there was a weak signal coming from it. Gideon ordered the *Excalibur* to move in and pick it up and asked Sarah if they should ignore those killed here and now in the present. Her response was to keep going.

Recovered from the sole undamaged lifepod, the only survivor of the attack was dying. From the state of his injuries he must surely have been injured before even boarding the lifepod. Max Eilerson attempted to translate as best as he was able. Gideon asked what the ship that had attacked them had looked like; it was apparently like something from a nightmare. Eilerson got the co-ordinates of where the alien ship had first met the vessel from Gideon's past – apparently the ship had pursued the fleeing aliens to this location, away from a place it could be traced back to before attacking. With little time left, the alien started to mutter something to Gideon. Eilerson translated: The alien was asking for Gideon to find the ship and avenge his people. Dying, the alien reached for Gideon and they locked hands. Gideon promised that the price would be paid and the alien passed on. Gideon stood back, his attention still focused on the alien. That could have been him, nine years before, had no-one come to his aid. He ordered Eilerson to give the co-ordinates to Matheson; they were in pursuit.

The *Excalibur*, despite having reached the fastest possible speed in normal space, was still two days behind their quarry. Matheson noted that catching their prey would prove difficult, until Gideon hit upon the idea of making a micro-jump in hyperspace, just far enough to be beyond their vessel's sensor range in normal space. They would then make another long-distance scan and jumping again, just beyond sensor range. Matheson warned about the strain this would put on the jump engines but Gideon ordered it to be carried out, leaving just enough power for gravity control and life support.



The *Excalibur* leapfrogged through hyperspace and normal space; a red planet became visible in the far distance before one jump, only to be far behind the ship when it re-emerged from hyperspace. This process was repeated several times until Matheson noted that there was a possible problem with the scanner array. It was only when he tweaked his systems that he realised that there were no problems. He had found the ship.

Gideon was both elated and terrified. He could now get the proof about what had happened to Captain Ross and his friends and colleagues on the *Cerberus*. Ordering battle stations, he instructed a recording to be made of the conflict. This time, Gideon wanted evidence and did not want to hear from Matheson that the engines were running below capacity, the micro-jumps having given them a severe beating. Gideon was not to be denied and ordered one final micro-jump just to get them within spitting distance.

In the engineering section, at the bottom of the power core shaft, an unhealthy glow was clearly visible. A worker looking down upon them knew the power of the *Excalibur's* jump engine array and what would happen if it exploded, which was definitely a possibility.

Up on the bridge, Matheson reported that the jump engines were running 500 degrees above the recommended safe limit but Gideon was convinced that the ship could handle it. Of more immediate concern was the fact that the alien ship was launching fighters. With central cockpits similar to those of Starfuries, these hybrid fighters clearly contained elements of Shadow technology, including black organic skin and wings ending at sharp, needled points. They took up positions targeting the *Excalibur*. Matheson was about to launch *Excalibur's* own fighters in response but Gideon stopped the order. He suspected that the alien cruiser *wanted* them to launch fighters in response so it could sacrifice its fighters and escape, believing that the *Excalibur* and her crew would not do the same. Ordering interceptors ready, Gideon acknowledged that they would take some heat from the fighters.

Salvo after salvo hit the *Excalibur*, rocking the ship from the sheer volume of firepower. One of the fighters peeled off, gunning straight for the bridge of the *Excalibur*. The interceptors did their best, managing to clip the charging hybrid fighter and it started to break apart. A section of wing and main structure hit the side of the *Excalibur's* bridge, the whole bridge shuddering. With a bright flash, one of the crew was thrown from his seat even as Matheson ordered damage control. Kneeling down by the fallen crewman, Gideon realised that the hand he was using to support his head was wet with the crewman's blood. A medic team came to take the wounded crewman away and Matheson reported that autorepair systems had been engaged and the enemy fighters were falling by the wayside. The alien cruiser had pulled ahead and was now eight hours away.

In the Medbay, one of Dr Chambers' best trauma teams worked on the wounded crewman. Others were also being treated, some with broken bones, some with bruising. One by one Dr Chambers went through the chaos, co-ordinating the treatments administered as best as she was able. Gideon entered, asking about the injured crewman. Dr Chambers' answer was anything but cordial, as she began to regret her decision allowing the mission to proceed.

Later in the mess hall, Gideon and Galen sat back to back, actively unengaged in conversation. After a while Galen finally spoke, commenting on how cold the coffee was. Gideon agreed but he thought Galen was talking about the temperature of the room. The awkwardness out of the way, Gideon tried to convince Galen that while the *Excalibur* at least stood a fighting chance, he was beginning to doubt if she could actually take the alien ship down. Gideon was also concerned about whether he should be risking the lives of everyone onboard in his pursuit of knowledge and revenge. Gideon was also concerned that someone had to speak for the dead. Galen was concerned that this was a little arrogant, with no-one wondering what the dead would want said and done on their behalf. Galen had promised Gideon, back at the Well of Forever, that he would stand by the captain in his quest for justice. Galen did have one concern, though: How had Matthew come by this knowledge in the first place? A techno-mage had ways of knowing things but Gideon did not and would have had to use unconventional means. This worried Galen, for it meant that Gideon could have been using something beyond his control and that same something could be using him. Gideon turned around to answer but the techno-mage was gone. It took a bleeping link from Matheson to break the silence: The *Excalibur* had lost contact with the enemy ship.

Up on the bridge, Matheson relayed to Gideon what had happened. They had lost contact with the ship as it approached a nearby asteroid belt. The heat signature given off by the alien cruiser had faded and then the vessel had vanished from their display. Gideon was convinced the ship had not jumped to hyperspace, believing their quarry to be running silent in the hope that it would be hidden by the asteroids. He wanted to do the same: Go into the asteroid field, cut the *Excalibur's* engines, go cold. They would then wait until the alien cruiser believed that the *Excalibur* had gone and powered up its engines again. When that happened the *Excalibur* would be able to pick up its quarry's location for certain.

Smaller asteroids bounced off the hull of the *Excalibur* as it drifted through the asteroid field, rumblings echoing down the long corridors, the medical wings and the hangar bay. Gideon paced in the map room even as Matheson heard a navigator claim that Gideon was crazy. Matheson pulled the navigator over and had a quiet word with him. It evidently had some effect, as the navigator sat back down, clear that he would rather take his chances with asteroids than face the possible future Matheson had outlined.

Fortune was with them, as the alien cruiser was forced to fire an engine thruster to avoid a huge asteroid that spiralled towards it. The bridge crew picked up on the signal: The alien cruiser was directly behind them. Ordering the engines online, Gideon commanded the *Excalibur* into a power dive and demanded the release of countermeasures. A shower of round crystalline objects gushed from the rear of the *Excalibur* even as the hybrid alien cruiser opened fire. The countermeasures deflected some of the energy in the attack but a good portion still hit the *Excalibur*. The whole ship rocked from the blast but stayed in one piece. Everyone on the bridge knew what would have happened if the countermeasures had failed to absorb a share of the blast. The *Excalibur* would have been vaporised.

Gideon ordered the rear guns of the *Excalibur* to only target the enemy ship's weapons and navigation systems. The resulting shots were ineffective, scoring only light damage on the alien ship. Intervening asteroids had soaked up some of the fire in the same way that the release of the *Excalibur's* countermeasures had.

The alien cruiser started to power up her jump engines and Gideon was determined to grasp this one chance to avenge the crew of the *Cerberus*. The *Excalibur*, having come around for another pass, could not get a clear shot on the alien cruiser. Gideon realised that he had an alternative and so ordered the main guns to fire on a large asteroid dead ahead of where the alien cruiser was. Matheson reported that the alien cruiser was about to activate jump engines even as the lights on the *Excalibur* dimmed, power draining in favour of the main guns. Firing out sure and true, the main weapon of the *Excalibur* hit the asteroid dead on. It exploded into a million pieces. The storm of rocky shrapnel washed over the alien cruiser like a tsunami, shredding the very surface from it. Matheson reported through his scanners that the alien ship was floating dead in space but structurally intact. After a few drawn-out moments the *Excalibur's* power returned and Gideon ordered his ship to proceed.

The hybrid ship was now clearly visible in the main bridge window and Gideon examined the ship closely. The hybrid appeared to be the same one from his past, or a slightly modified version of it. They were still studying the ship when it sent a coded message, just as the hybrid cruiser's jump engines started to power up. Gideon realised that the ship was going to purposefully miss-jump, destroying itself and anything in the area. The *Excalibur* was forced to flee at best possible speed, its own jump engine still offline after firing the main gun. It could not turn, as that would waste precious seconds. Asteroids bounced off the *Excalibur's* hull as the hybrid cruiser started to glow. An ensuing explosion shattered all the asteroids close to the hybrid.

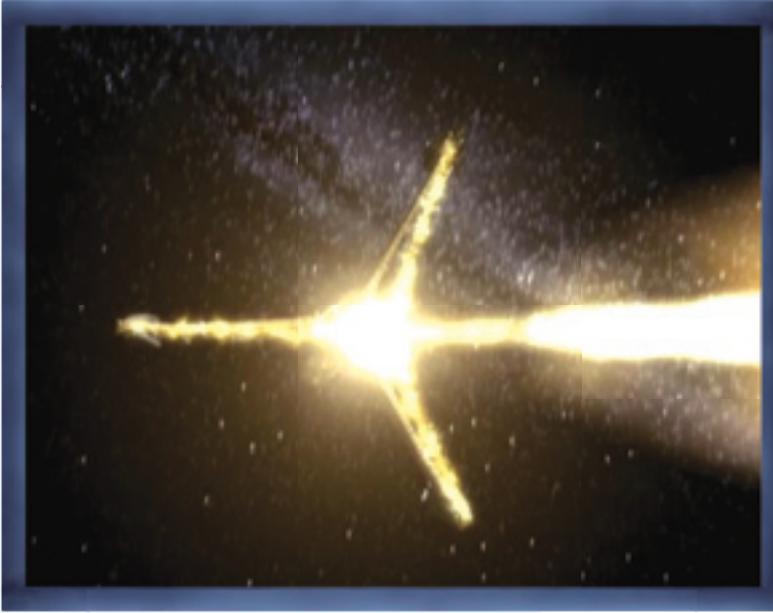
The first shockwave hit the *Excalibur* and the ship lurched badly. The second shockwave, much stronger, was blocked by an asteroid; otherwise the *Excalibur* would have been

blasted clean out of existence. After a few tense seconds, the crew picked themselves up off the floor, having made a miraculous escape. Gideon ordered a damage report. The *Excalibur* had been badly battered but the ship was still intact. The most promising news was that as far as they could tell there had been no fatalities. There was no gloating, no cries of victory, just a glare from a navigator to his captain highlighting the dangers of cold-blooded revenge.

As an EVA team moved away from the *Excalibur* to see if there was anything substantial left of the alien cruiser, Dureena caught Galen watching the expedition from a porthole. She asked why Galen had not involved himself in the battle and the techno-mage said that it would not have been appropriate. Dureena noted that he had not left either, and if the *Excalibur* had been destroyed Galen would have died too. Galen acknowledged this, saying that his and Gideon's fates were intertwined. When Dureena asked where she fitted in, Galen's cryptic answer was that she sat squarely in the middle of the fire.

The EVA team returned to the *Excalibur* with nothing of note to report that was larger than an inch across. The explosion had scorched everything beyond recognition. In the conference room, Gideon told Matheson to take the *Excalibur* to the co-ordinates given by the dying alien they had recovered. Max Eilerson entered; he had been studying the battle report and had some information that he thought Gideon might find interesting. Eilerson showed Galen a shot of the hybrid alien cruiser along with a Shadow cruiser. There were similarities between the two; the hybrid cruiser showed more than a passing resemblance to Shadow design. Eilerson mused that someone might have been building Shadow or Shadowtech ships.

The co-ordinates that the dead alien had provided were those of a small planetoid with a methane atmosphere. Gideon and Matheson took a Thunderbolt out to investigate - just the two of them, at Gideon's insistence. The *Excalibur's* sensors had picked out a massive crater which appeared to be a recent formation. Racing through the planet's atmosphere, the Thunderbolt's sensors locked onto the details provided by the *Excalibur*, passing an area that had been glassed over, burned by a blast sufficiently intense enough to fuse sand. Gideon confessed that he was worried about their recent battle; if there was one ship like the destroyed vessel, there would undoubtedly be more. Given that, Gideon conceded that the ship they had destroyed might not have been the one that vaporised the *Cerberus*. He was also troubled by the blast site below, the structure of it and the power necessary to literally fuse the sand into glass. It was similar to the blast made by the *Excalibur's* main guns. Gideon had only wanted Matheson to see this and confirm his hypothesis; the *Excalibur* had an opposing number, a rival.



Dureena and Dr Chambers were chatting in the Medbay, the thief having called in to see how Dr Chambers was doing. She was exhausted but no-one had died today. It had been close but they had got through it. Confessing that she felt useless when the *Excalibur* went into combat, Dr Chambers warned Dureena about being careful what she wished for, and asked after Galen's whereabouts. The techno-mage was in his ship and Dureena said that she would not disturb him when he was onboard his vessel. Not ever.

In his ship, parked on the flight deck, Galen was conversing with another techno-mage on a floating, semi-transparent screen. The other techno-mage, Dirk, asked Galen to confirm that the alien ship was indeed Shadowtech, and Galen said he was positive that it was. Acknowledging that Galen's decision to leave the techno-mage's hiding place had been correct, Dirk wanted to know if Gideon was aware of the involvement of the techno-mages. Galen said he was not, but would be in time. Dirk was none too pleased with this, saying that Galen should do all he could to prevent Gideon from finding out. Galen said he would do what was right. Dirk challenged Galen on his answer and Galen admitted that technically it was not an answer but the one he was giving anyway.

As the day ended, Gideon sat in his quarters making a final entry into his personal log. He had proved that the alien ships, one of which had killed the *Cerberus*, definitely existed. He needed more information. The hybrid ship had sent a message before it exploded. Gideon asked the ship's computer to inform him if a communication was intercepted on the same frequency the hybrid ship's message had been sent on. Gideon lay back on his bed, listening to the indecipherable electronic sound of the hybrid's message, a series of tones, over and over and over.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

⑤ The process of 'leapfrogging' into and out of hyperspace to get to a destination in realspace more quickly is a dangerous one. Player Characters should be discouraged from attempting this but it *is* a viable option. The chances of success are slim (with Technical (space travel) DCs of 30 or higher) but success can produce great bursts of speed, which in turn can allow for very flexible tactics. Failure, on the other hand, can easily burn out the engines. Whilst this is dangerous in normal space, it is probably a death sentence in hyperspace, as the ship will swiftly drift away from the beacons and become hopelessly lost...

⑤ The alien hybrid cruiser could be seen in other sectors, in a similar manner to the way that the Shadows were spotted all over the Known Galaxy early in the *Babylon 5* show. Perhaps a tale from a passing Abbai transport or Narn scout vessel could let on that there are Shadow-like ships on the prowl again. The Player Characters could be asked to investigate the strange appearances. Whether this is an honest investigation (probably under the auspices of the ISA) or a false trail that is destined to end in cover-up and betrayal is entirely up to the Games Master.

Value Judgements

Probable Start Date: October 24th

The *Excalibur* was parked along a standard Orion-class space station in orbit above the world logged in the interstellar databases as Tariff's Colony. Whilst there was little of note to report save the occasional passing starship or fighter escort, onboard the *Excalibur* a somewhat more interesting situation was developing. Gideon was arguing with the colony's governor, who was blatantly requesting a bribe. The governor tried to explain to the captain of the *Excalibur* that this was a commercial colony that relied on a level of unconventional aid to keep it running. IPX had already made a deal, although EarthGov had not. Asking if the governor was a betting man, Gideon challenged him to a game of poker. If the governor won, Gideon would happily pay up. If Gideon won, however, the governor would let him and his people land free of charge. The governor was intrigued by the idea and accepted the challenge. It was only when the call was finished and Matheson cautioned Gideon that the captain let loose a smirk, as he claimed that he never lost at cards on a Friday.

Down on the surface of the moon, the IPX team that already had permission to land had reached an elaborate alien doorway literally moulded into the rock face of one of the many caverns that ran through the rocky globe. The doorway had proved to be the proverbial brick wall.



Eilerson's link chimed and he answered it. Gideon, still up on the *Excalibur*, enquired how they were doing. Eilerson reported that there was no real way in past this doorway. The barrier was adorned with carved letters in an alien language claiming that anyone who passed it would find their lives enriched. Actually getting past the door was crux of the problem. Two of the IPX scouts who worked on the door were thrown back by a huge shockwave emanating from the door, the scouts tossed through the air like rag dolls before crumpling on the ground, their expensive instruments cast aside like toys. As their colleagues rushed to their aid, Eilerson hailed Dr Chambers, asking for her to get down as fast as she could. The well-defended alien door now occupied Eilerson's full attention.

Onboard the *Excalibur*, the two wounded scouts were in a critical state, both having suffered major strokes and needing life support. Eilerson was deeply unhappy, as the two scouts were among his best people. Eilerson explained to Dr Chambers the sequence of events that had led to the assault. They had been conducting preliminary scans on the door and detected no unusual readings that would have forewarned of the attack. Dr Chambers had an idea and asked Eilerson if he had seen what a high-level telepath could do to a normal person's brain. Eilerson's experiences of this, by his own admission, were only the horror stories bandied around from the Telepath Crisis. Dr Chambers went on to explain that with a single telepathic assault, a telepath could cause strokes, nerve damage or paralysis.

Lieutenant Matheson entered Medbay, from his demeanour clearly having overheard some of the conversation. Immediately put on the defensive by a probing question, Matheson denied that as a telepath he was capable of something like that, with that strength. Interpreting the damage done to the two scouts, Matheson confirmed that it had not left a psychic imprint of the attacker behind, which meant that no individual person was responsible. The *Excalibur's* first officer wondered if the scouts had

actually triggered a telepathic lock, as some races much older than humanity had mastered telepathy enough to use it as a deterrent, booby-trapping or sealing locked doors.

Onboard the slowly rotating space station above Tariff's Colony, in a darkened room, a high-stakes game of poker had almost played itself out. The governor had an excellent hand and he knew it, although nothing slipped past his well-controlled poker face. Then Gideon put down his cards, revealing a winning hand. Tossing his cards away, the governor accused Gideon of being too lucky, calling him *telepath* lucky, though Gideon offered to show the governor his records. The administrator of Tariff's Colony said that he disliked telepaths, there only being one on the whole colony. He went by the name of Al and was a dangerous individual, so people kept out of his way.

Leaving the card game victorious, Gideon was hailed on his link and told of the accident with the two scouts. Matheson wanted permission to go down and investigate, as they believed that the two scouts had been hit by a telepathic assault. Despite understanding Matheson's wishes, Gideon decided that Matheson should stay on the *Excalibur* for now, giving no reason and cutting the call off prematurely.

Having travelled down to see the sealed vault, Gideon was approached by Eilerson and Dureena, who had followed down on the next shuttle. The thief had evidently sneaked down on the shuttle that Eilerson had taken back down from the *Excalibur*, the archaeologist not having spotted that she was there. Whilst they conversed over Dureena's abilities to remain hidden, none of them were aware that the whole conversation had been recorded by a tiny camera hidden in a crate of supplies nearby. The discourse had been witnessed on a miniature video screen, held by a thuggish-looking human who moved off to tell his associates what he had seen.

Up on the bridge of the *Excalibur*, Matheson needed to confide in someone about his concerns and that proved to be Dr Chambers. Matheson's chief problem was that he felt useless being stranded up here. If the problem down on the surface was indeed telepathic, then he believed he was the best person to help resolve it. Dr Chambers understood but reminded Matheson of how Gideon reacted when someone was wounded on his watch, taking the matter personally. Matheson said that Gideon, as the captain, was not expendable. He wondered sometimes if Gideon simply had a death wish.

Down on the surface, Dureena was examining the lock. Her earlier thoughts were confirmed: All of the locking mechanisms that were visible were actually false. The mechanisms led nowhere, being designed to distract an inquisitive mind enough to set them up for a powerful telepathic assault. It was inevitable that Matheson would

have to come down, even though he was disobeying Gideon's direct orders. The telepath admitted that even as his shuttle was on approach he could feel a telepathic presence. Gideon pointedly insisted that Matheson not take any chances.

Focusing on the door, Matheson made a mental exploration, feeling around the door with his mind. He felt as if he was making progress when something hit him. Matheson managed to push most of the attack's energy away before collapsing on the floor. Dr Chambers confirmed with a portable medical scanner that Matheson had not been permanently harmed and used a powerful inhalant to bring the first officer around. Waking up, Matheson was surprised by the sheer power of the attack, comparing it to that of a P10 or higher. Matheson was only a P6 and the only way that they could fight off that level of telepathic power was to enlist the services of a higher-powered telepath. Gideon remembered the Governor's earlier words about a dangerous telepath living nearby named Al. Eilerson believed that whether the telepath was liked or not, Al would be sure to appreciate some financial recompense.

Walking to some allocated guest quarters, Matheson took the opportunity to confront his superior with something that had been bugging him. He felt that Gideon should take more of a back seat and let the first officer go planetside more often. Gideon felt the need to explain, especially after having cut off Matheson's call so hastily earlier. The simple truth was that the *Excalibur* meant more to Gideon than his own life. Gideon considered himself expendable but the mission was not and the *Excalibur* was the symbol of their mission. Gideon went on to admit that he often had a hundred different things to worry about but the safety of the *Excalibur* whilst in Matheson's care was not one of them. Gideon thanked Matheson, saying that he did not want to jinx the good care that Matheson took of the *Excalibur* whilst he was away. Not expecting such an earnest and complimentary opinion from his senior and friend, Lieutenant Matheson felt justifiably proud.

Inside temporary quarters that the owner had made efforts to make homelike, the telepath whom Gideon wanted to meet was recalling a monumental court trial. He had been a Psi Cop but that title was now taken away from him. All rank and commission had been stripped away, as he had been charged with the slaughter of normal human citizens. He heard the judge's voice in his mind asking how he pleaded. Al then heard his own voice stating that he was not guilty. Al remembered saying that the accusations were false, amid the shouts of booing and angry comments from all around him. The sound of the gavel shook him, just a little, as it always did when he remembered the accusations of war crimes including blackmail, extortion and the murders of telepaths who got in his way, as well as of normal humans. The voices increased but Al refused to let any concern show, his demeanour perfectly serene and balanced.

Feeling his memories disturbed by the present, Al sensed newcomers approaching his humble abode. Throwing the blanket off his legs, he put his cup of tea down and selected a pair of shoes from a nearby rack. Wearing a smoking jacket, attired solely in black, he went to the door. Al greeted his guests, having a particular and noted greeting for Lieutenant Matheson. There was a heartbeat, followed by a smile that was devoid of any warmth or soul.

Matheson realised the identity of the mysterious 'Al' in an instant. Alfred Bester, war criminal and wanted man for crimes committed during the Telepath Crisis. Bester sniffed at the reference to the conflict being referred to as a crisis, considering that it does not give the conflict the import it deserved. He invited them in for a drink. Angry, Matheson pleaded with them not to ask Bester for help. Eilerson was unconvinced, willing to accept Bester's apparently inoffensive offer of a cup of tea. Gideon wanted to consider all possibilities before making any judgement, so he followed Eilerson inside. Matheson could not bring himself to enter, not just yet.

Inside, Gideon questioned Bester about his past. The former Psi Cop believed that the trial had already been set for failure; too much would be lost if he was ever found innocent. A scapegoat had to be found, and Bester knew would be an excellent scapegoat. Matheson managed to summon up the courage to enter and challenged Bester, saying that the murder of members of the Psi Corps was against regulations. Agreeing with this, Bester looked at Matheson and said that it was never right to divide a family, which he believed that the Psi Corps had been. Attempting to put the conversation back on track, Eilerson asked Bester if he would help. The telepath said that he would but he wanted to be taken offworld in return for his help. Bester told them that that he believed the Bloodhounds would be coming for him soon. Gideon wanted to discuss it with his people first.

A dark shuttlecraft, sleek like a stealth bomber from Earth's distant past, cruised effortlessly through hyperspace. The pilots onboard this advanced craft, well trained and loyal to their cause, conversed with one another over their orders. Word had been received that Bester was on Tarriff's Colony and therefore a retrieval mission was authorised. Ordered to make best speed and run silent on all communications channels, one of the pilots of the craft stated that he would contact an individual known only as Top Dog with a status update.

In Bester's quarters the group was still arguing about what should be done. Dr Chambers said that the Rangers had identified this planet as a potentially useful location and thus walking away would not solve anything. Matheson was still unconvinced, saying that another telepath could be sent and that he knew that Bester was guilty. He chose not to go into detail when Dureena quizzed him about how he actually knew that, claiming that it was merely telepathic instinct.

Just as Gideon agreed to go with his first officer's wishes, Bester returned from outside where he had been allowing them to discuss the matter, stating that the ongoing debate was giving him a headache. They would indeed accept the offer that Bester had made, otherwise the former Psi Cop would name Matheson as one of his accomplices for war crimes committed during the Telepath Crisis.

The party, having returned to the dig site, looked on as Bester approached the lock, asking that everyone present try not to distract him. Gideon remarked to Matheson that he should never have doubted his first officer's instincts, being unhappy with the deal that had been made. Bester focused on the door for a moment as gears and mechanisms started to unlock deep within the wall, invisible to anyone without telepathic abilities. Something started to push at Bester but he was well equipped to deal with the telepathic traps, forcing their power aside. His efforts were worthwhile, for the door split in two on a jagged angle that no-one would have expected to be the seam. His work done, Bester stepped back, a little unsteady at the effort in defeating the telepathic defences.

Eilerson, remembering his injured scouts, was careful when he entered the vault that lay behind the doorway. It was empty, the walls made from bedrock. The sound of running water could be heard but that was it, to Eilerson's disappointment. There were no trinkets, artefacts, ancient computers or weapons of note in the room. Dureena, passing the archaeologist, approached the sound of running water; the source was a small waterfall cascading down the rocks. Where it had touched the rock face, the stones had turned a perfect emerald colour, translucent. Explaining to Dr Chambers, Dureena said that her people preferred remedies provided by nature. Dr Chambers realised what the thief was getting at and immediately produced a container to take a sample of the precious liquid. Dureena picked up some of the small pebbles at the bottom of the waterfall. Content with this sample for analysis, Dr Chambers and Dureena walked out of the vault, leaving Max Eilerson behind. The archaeologist found a scroll case buried in the dirt and started to dig it out. As he did so the door started to close. Gideon yelled at Eilerson to get out of there but the latter was intent on getting the scroll case. Pulling it free from the ground, Eilerson dived through the doorway to safety and missed being crushed by mere inches.

Taking a shuttle up to the space station upon the governor's request, the group disembarked into the cargo bay. Almost immediately they were set upon by thugs who demanded whatever they had discovered down on the surface. The recording that had been made earlier had assured the thugs that something valuable was in the vault, whatever it proved to be. Gideon's insistence that there was nothing of monetary value fell on deaf ears as the dozen thugs attacked them. Matheson leapt to Gideon's defence but there were too many of them for any of them to handle. The first

officer was dimly aware of a thug behind him, ready to strike. Abruptly the thug fell to the floor, his hands locked around his head as the screaming thug's brain was shredded like cabbage. The thug was dead before his body hit the floor. Seeing this powerful assault succeed without Bester even lifting a finger, the rest of the thugs ran, leaving Matheson with the realisation that Bester, the fugitive from the Telepath Crisis, had saved his life.

Back onboard the *Excalibur*, Dr Chambers examined the water sample and stones that they had recovered from the vault. Having placed them into an analysis machine that was worth her salary ten times over, Dr Chamber told Dureena that in 48 hours they would have some information back, a delay that the thief was unimpressed with. Standing alongside her, Max Eilerson revealed what had been written on the scroll for which he had almost lost his life. The race that had once existed on the world below had evolved beyond physical form and to help those who would come after them they had left behind a gift. Not even this race knew why the spring was so potent, able as it was to prolong life and ease suffering. Dr Chambers said that it would be 48 hours before they knew what the spring water was capable of. Dureena already had an idea of what the analysis machine would report back.

On the flight deck of the *Excalibur*, Bester was waiting for his ride as agreed. Matheson approached him and Bester sensed that it would be a good chance to ask some questions. The first officer said that being in EarthForce was everything that he had hoped it would be, much more so than when he was in the Psi Corps. Bester was taken aback by this, sensing no dishonesty in Matheson's words. Matheson replied by saying that he was trusted more here, as a crewmember of the *Excalibur*. His commanding officer and the rest of the team never wondered if or when they would be betrayed by the telepath. There was nothing to prove. Still not entirely understanding, Bester said that he had saved Matheson's life because he was a telepath. He had become a Psi Cop to protect the lives of all telepaths, even those who did not ask for his protection. Bester admitted that he had been conditioned to do this, even killing during the Telepath Crisis. Protecting the family, as he called it, was the right thing to do. Bester was aware that he had undertaken acts that the current administration approved of but believed if the war had turned out differently, he would be the hero and they would be the war criminals. Matheson still held the opinion that Bester was guilty of something, as even now he continued to run. Bester said that he was running from the mundanes, as human telepaths and human mundanes were no longer, in his words, 'the same beast'.

In the Medbay, for once Dr Chambers had some good news for Captain Gideon. The liquid was the most potent pain reliever that she had ever seen. Recalling cancer, AIDS and other painful diseases, she was sure this could help back on Earth when the Drakh Plague symptoms broke out in



force. It could even prolong life spans by up to six months, if the most optimistic view of the results was taken. On a different topic, Dr Chambers was uncertain whether they were doing the right thing now by dropping Bester off at the agreed-upon rendezvous point. Gideon wanted to keep his word; the chances were it would be the most honourable action they had undertaken all day.

Gideon and Matheson watched the tiny powered lifepod floating in hyperspace, with a seemingly content Bester inside, from the safety of the *Excalibur's* bridge. The lifepod only had 24 hours of life support and Gideon wondered if it would be better to fire up the forward guns and put Bester out of his misery. Matheson remembered the conversation he had had with Bester on the flight deck earlier, almost word for word. Somehow pulled to Bester's opinion that mundanes and telepaths were now too far apart for the gap to be bridged, Matheson shook his head in disagreement. They would be as bad as Bester if they did that but one day Matheson believed someone would apprehend Bester and punish him.

The *Excalibur* departed, leaving the tiny lifepod drifting in hyperspace, to be slowly pulled off the main hyperspace routes between beacons and lost forever. With the *Excalibur* gone, the ship that had waited for Bester could reveal itself. It had been built using the frame of the standard Asimov-class passenger liner but was darker and more sinister, with a great deal of concealed firepower. A golden Psi Corps logo was clearly visible on the side of the vessel. The lifepod was brought aboard and Bester was greeted by a rogue Psi Cop who was glad to see him for the first time in the three years since the Telepath Crisis. Bester was glad to see that the few remaining Psi Corps motherships were still in good hands. The rogue Psi Cop credited Bester with that but the compliment was waved off. EarthGov would never publicly admit that they had created a fleet of ships

for the Psi Corps. This meant that for now the Death Wagons were safe, for if the ships did not exist, then EarthGov could not attempt to hunt them down and risk a scandal.

The dark shuttlecraft that had been on the way to Tariff's Station arrived and one of the pilots revealed to the other that Alfred Bester had vanished. There were no records of him leaving and they were also puzzled by the fact that the *Excalibur* had been in the area. The individual known as Top Dog had requested a full report. The member of this crew who had investigated Bester's quarters was glad that he did not have to speak to their commanding officer, as he had a reputation for being really cranky.

The aforementioned Top Dog sat in a plush office back on Mars clad in an expensive business suit and was given the bad news from hundreds of light-years away. Michael Garibaldi, hiding behind the alias of Top Dog, could do nothing but attempt to console himself with the fact that there would be a next time. The Telepath Crisis might have been won but for Garibaldi there was still a war going on, with one rogue telepath above all others as the enemy.

The Viper in the Tomb

Contrary to the impression given to the general public, the Psi Corps is not dead, and a select number of individuals in EarthGov know it. However, they cannot admit this, preferring to hide their lies behind the simple truth that the rogue members of the Psi Corps are still on the run. Even the Interstellar Alliance is not aware that the Psi Corps is still intact as an organisation and in relatively good shape. Its forces now consolidated, the Psi Corps can begin active recruitment of telepaths who are unhappy working under the new regulations outlined by the Bureau of Telepathic Integration or who have suffered anger or prejudice from mundanes.

With a strike fleet at its disposal and the opportunity to gain new recruits, the Psi Corps could bring about a second Telepath Crisis with little difficulty. With Earth poisoned by the Drakh Plague, their efforts will need to be subtle for now, scalpel-like strikes against targets that will make humanity and especially the Bureau of Telepathic Integration look weak but not enough to destabilise an already battered Earth.

There is the possibility that the Psi Corps has been able to establish a home base somewhere off the beaten track. Byron wished for a homeworld for telepaths to exist peacefully alongside the rest of the galaxy. The Psi Corps may have taken his dream and implemented their own twisted version of it, not being above the use of kidnapped mundanes as slave labour to build their new home.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- 5 This episode gives valuable insights into the Telepath Crisis and can give players additional ideas for their character histories. It is important to remember that, like Matheson, not all telepaths who answered to the Psi Corps were evil or participated in great crimes. There is also the possibility that the Player Characters were once rogues but are now employed by the Bureau of Telepathic Integration. The tables can be turned upon the remnants of the Psi Corps, who are now the blips being hunted by sanctioned telepaths.
- 5 For players wishing to play a 'dark' campaign, there is the potential to play as renegade members of the Psi Corps in the *Crusade* period. Alternatively, the characters could have been unfairly accused of crimes by the Bureau of Telepathic Integration and have since been recruited by the renegade Psi Corps. In this sort of campaign, most if not all of the players would need to be telepaths. The drama of being caught between two telepathic institutions fighting a guerrilla war could even spill over into a Second Telepath Crisis...



End of the Line

Probable Start Date: December 28th

Lying on his cabin bed with the lights off, the only noise Captain Gideon heard aside from his breathing was the series of tones that was allowing him to track the fleet of ships that he searched for, one of which had killed all his shipmates nine years before. He recalled floating free in space, seeing the Omega-class destroyer on which he had been an ensign, the *Cerberus*, carved into pieces by an unidentified aggressor. His thoughts moved to an incident three months before when he had encountered a ship like that from his past. Not knowing if this was the same ship that had destroyed the *Cerberus* or just one of a fleet, Gideon had ordered the *Excalibur* into a battle that had almost resulted in the destruction of the prototype destroyer he had been chosen to command.

The same tones had now been picked up by the *Excalibur's* systems, echoes of them resounding around the bridge. Lieutenant Matheson attempted to placate his senior's enthusiasm by telling Gideon that although they had managed to trace the signal, it was weak. Galen had already been informed, in an attempt to use his advanced skills of techno-magery to lock onto the signal.

In his ship, Galen attempted to focus on the signal, ignoring a running commentary from Captain Gideon, who had a great personal stake in making this happen. Galen held a small silver sphere until a faint line of energy passed over

it, then released the ball. Rather than dropping to the floor, it floated into a silvery panel on the wall of his ship, leaving ripples in the panel like those on a pond. After a second, the ripples started to converge back on the point of origin. Galen announced proudly that his ship had locked onto the source of the signal, Gideon's quarry. There was nothing that could be done to break the lock. The lock was transferred to the bridge of the *Excalibur* and Gideon thought aloud about what would lie ahead at the other end. Gideon asked his first officer if he was still happy with doing this and the reliable Lieutenant Matheson said he would not stand in the way. The *Excalibur* moved away towards its destination and an almost certain dark fate.

Belowdecks, one of the crewmembers, a relative newcomer to the ship by the name of Jensen, was almost knocked off his feet by another crewmember. The crewmember complained that Gideon had got another lead on the ship which he had been chasing. Jensen asked what information the crewmember had and there was little, save that the ship was proceeding to Sector 420. Jensen allowed the crewmember to leave unhindered and proceeded off on his own agenda.

Sector 420 was supposed to be an empty sector with no known colonies, planets or outposts of any kind. The nearest jumpgate should have been 2.5 lightyears away, so for something to get there a jumpgate had to exist. This proved intriguing to Gideon, as he knew full well what the process was for laying jumpgates, having commanded an Explorer ship tasked with laying down jump gate routes. To secretly build a jumpgate required a great deal of power coupled with financial backing. The ability to combine the two at the same place and time was a real cause for concern. Jumping back to normal space, the *Excalibur* picked up the signal again, coming from the fourth planet of the star system in this sector. Matheson reported to Gideon that it would be four hours until they were in scanner range. Glad that they had arrived so far out, Gideon asked Matheson to

send the *Excalibur* in, scanners at maximum to check for incoming ships.

Enemy ships were not a concern for Galen who, courtesy of his abilities, had spotted something that Matheson and the *Excalibur* had missed. Directing Gideon to get the *Excalibur* to look for lots of tiny objects, rather than a large one such as an approaching ship, Galen was proved correct. A field of objects, each of them no larger than a marble, were laid almost perfectly across their path. To see what they were, a probe from the *Excalibur* was launched into the sea of spheres. After a few tense seconds the probe clipped one of the spheres, setting off an explosive chain reaction that lit up the *Excalibur's* bridge from several thousand miles away. Galen observed that the minefield was nasty but effective.

The slowly drifting trajectory of the tiny minefield meant it must have originated from a small nearby planetoid. Galen believed that someone knew the *Excalibur* would be coming and Gideon gave Matheson ten minutes to find out where the leak had come from. When asked why Gideon had given Matheson only ten minutes, the captain informed his techno-mage ally that the last time this had been done as a drill it had taken twelve minutes. Gideon wanted Matheson to beat his own record. Galen reminded Gideon about the fate of the first man to run the Greek marathon: He died.

The leak was found: The individual responsible was crewmember Jensen, found in a record-breaking nine minutes and twenty seconds. Speaking to the traitorous crewman, Gideon was told that what the captain was up against was bigger than he was. It was even bigger than Jensen himself and a whole lot bigger than the ship. Snapping his hand back, Jensen activated a self-destruct weapon inside his arm. Getting everyone else clear, Gideon had only moments to turn and flee himself before the bomb went off.

While no other crew members were injured, Dr Chambers informed Captain Gideon that there was little left of Jensen's body to give any clues. There was also no trace of the bomb or where it had been manufactured. All that Gideon wanted to know was whether humans or aliens were responsible. The bomb had been so effective that Dr Chambers could tell anything, never having seen anything self-destruct so cleanly or thoroughly. Dr Chambers went on to talk about Jensen's EarthForce record. It was spotlessly clean, which should have been impossible for anyone but the most anal-retentive career officer to achieve. Not even disagreements with senior officers were recorded there. She believed that the records relating to Jensen had either been doctored or simply fake. If it was true, Gideon summed up that whoever behind the bomb had contacts deep enough inside EarthForce to create a fake personnel record. Receiving a message on his link, Gideon was told that the *Excalibur* was almost within scanner range of the target. He thanked Dr Chambers for the information,

even though it had only raised more questions. According to Gideon, sometimes questions were better than answers.

The *Excalibur* scanned the fourth planet, revealing a series of unmarked domes on the planet's surface, but little else of significance. The signal that they had been tracking had just been shut off, much too late to prevent the *Excalibur* from finding this world.

Matheson picked up enemy fighters being launched in the direction of the *Excalibur*. Ordering him to launch fighters in response, which promptly left the safety of the *Excalibur* for the unavoidable conflict ahead, Gideon asked if they had an ID on the approaching fighters. Checking on a nearby system console, Matheson was frozen by what he saw. Gideon noticed this reaction and asked Matheson what was wrong. The approaching fighters were of Earth origin, painted in a dark livery that paralleled that of the secret Black Omega Starfuries. Instead of the symbol of the Psi Corps, these ships bore no external sigils to give away their base or ship of origin.

The *Excalibur's* Thunderbolts manoeuvred into position, unsure if they were supposed to engage. A signal was received from the planet and a brusque military man appeared, displeasure at the situation evident in his face. He ordered the *Excalibur* to stand down, telling Gideon this was a direct order. Unsure of what to do, Gideon ordered the *Excalibur's* fighters back, then requested more information but was rebuffed and told to leave the system at once.

Gideon informed the figure on the other end that he would need to check if the order he had just been given was legitimate and that even while being compliant with his orders he could make this area of space particularly crowded. Irritated, the figure said that Gideon could land but only he and one pilot, no more. Killing the link, Matheson was outraged. They were on the trail of a ship like the one, perhaps the *same* one, that had destroyed the *Cerberus*. Instead it appeared to have led them to a secret EarthForce base. Matheson need not have worried, for Gideon was intent on finding out what was going on.

Gideon's shuttle was escorted down to the planet's surface by two of the darkened fighters that now clearly belonged to this base. His shuttle was lowered into one of the domed buildings previously identified by the *Excalibur's* sensors. Met at the exit to his shuttle by armed guards, Gideon was escorted along unmarked and sterile white walls to a door which, like the fighters supporting this base, also had no signs of identification. A voice called him in.

Upon entry, Gideon found that the same individual who had sent the message was sitting at a worn oak desk, finishing off some filing. He ignored Gideon until the captain attempted a strategic cough. Not even giving him a glance, the individual directed Gideon to the water fountain outside if it was needed. Finally the officer, Major Lee, put his papers aside and sat back in his chair, studying Gideon. Major Lee asked Gideon what he was doing here.

Gideon gave his standard answer regarding the *Excalibur* and her quest to find a cure to the Drakh Plague but Major Lee already knew this, tapping a file on top of his desk in which Gideon and the *Excalibur* featured heavily. The only surviving Victory-class destroyer was supposed to be in Sector 730. Gideon responded that as this apparently secret base was not supposed to exist, they both seemed to be off the beaten track. In retort, Major Lee challenged Gideon, saying that he should not expect to be privy to every matter of security affecting Earth and the Earth Alliance. Major Lee explained that this world was a research facility, one of six that was working on weapons technologies vital to the future security of Earth and all of its colonies. The work was dangerous, so it was safer to conduct their experiments away from civilian populations. What they were doing was also classified and highly confidential. When Gideon tried to push his questioning further, he was told in no uncertain terms that both Major Lee and Captain Gideon answered to the same chain of command. If Gideon did not leave, then he would be relieved of command and someone more compliant would be placed in charge of the *Excalibur*. Dismissed, the captain returned to his shuttle and his ship.

Once back onboard the *Excalibur*, Gideon asked about the enemy fighters and was relieved to be told they had fallen back, waiting for confirmation that the *Excalibur* had left. Happy to give the order to leave, Gideon asked Matheson to find Galen, which he promptly did. Gideon was still unsure what the specific purpose of the base was and Galen, with his advanced ship, could sneak him in past their scanners. Before he agreed, Galen cautioned Gideon on his actions and that very often there was a point of no return. Gideon risked learning things that with hindsight he would wish he had not and would see things that he should not see. Gideon was risking the last of his innocence with this venture. Gideon remarked on the deaths of his former crewmates, saying that when they died his innocence had gone with them and so he had nothing to lose. Galen was saddened by this remark, for he believed Gideon to be wrong, and hoped that he would learn that before it was too late.

Asleep in her bed, Dureena was awakened by a shimmering, humming noise nearby. Rising, she crossed the room to pick up a shape wrapped in cloth. Unwrapping the object, an ornate yet robust sword that glowed slightly around the edges, she looked upon it with an unusual sense of curiosity before the door alarm started beeping. Covering up the weapon, she ordered the door to open. It was Gideon, who asked a favour. He was about to break many regulations and there was a chance it would all go wrong. If that happened he would want a set of information, stored on six data crystals, to be given to Lieutenant Matheson. He could not give them to Matheson now because his first officer would look like he was involved. Dureena accepted the request. She would break into Gideon's quarters if something happened to him and mess up the place to make it look like common theft. She would take away

the crystals Gideon had mentioned, for they contained all pertinent facts regarding the ship that had destroyed the *Cerberus*. Dureena would then give them to Lieutenant Matheson but only when the time was right. Saying their farewells, possibly for the last time, Gideon left Dureena in her quarters and headed down to the flight deck and Galen's pinnace.

Sneaking back onto the world after being dropped off by Galen, Gideon found an access tunnel that took him down to a subterranean realm. The sounds of machines, initially distant, became louder the longer he walked, the only light coming from a flashlight he held. It took several minutes to reach an airlock. No access code was required to open it, as whatever forces had built this facility here believed that any further security would be superfluous. As the airlock sealed behind him, Gideon realised that there was a breathable atmosphere past this point, so he removed his breather, stashing it behind a pile of packing crates.

The tunnel went on a little further before opening into a huge cavern over a mile across. This cavern was clearly some form of assembly area, with catwalks and gantries placed around it in a seemingly random order which, upon second glance, proved to be well connected, reminding Gideon of a spider's web. In the darkness, shambling human-like forms moved around an eternal landscape as if trapped in an Escher-inspired piece of art. Rails crisscrossed the cavern from one machine to another, carrying pieces of assembled technology that somehow reminded Gideon of the alien ship that had destroyed the *Cerberus*. Gideon could not recognise these shadowy parts; having lived almost exclusively on starships for the last ten years, the fact that he could not even identify the nature of these components troubled him greatly.

With his attention diverted, Gideon had not realised that someone had approached him. Turning, he looked straight into human eyes, before realising that the creature before him was truly human no longer. The creature's skin was jet black and hard, appearing slightly scaly. They looked at one another for a moment before the creature raised an accusatory finger and issued a scream that pierced straight through Gideon's mind and came out the back of his skull, as if he had been hit by a lightning bolt made of sound. To make matters worse, the door to the cavern that Gideon had used was now sealed, barring any hope of exit.

The other forms in the cavern stopped moving and, alerted to the intruder, they too started to scream, each one of them piercing Gideon's mind. By now Gideon had realised that he had wandered into a nightmare, darker and more twisted than anything he could remember. Pushing the human-alien creature aside, Gideon broke into a run as spotlights locked onto him. As the spotlights tracked him, he barged another hybrid creature out of the way. Gunfire exploded around him, Gideon leaping onto a nearby catwalk several meters below to hopefully throw off those tracking him. He hit the floor, rolled and was about to

spring up and continue running when the business end of a heavy-duty rifle appeared in his face, carried by an EarthForce marine whose facial expression and stance indicated that he was prepared to kill Gideon without a moment's hesitation. Raising his hands, Gideon knew that he was beaten. Other EarthForce marines appeared and dragged Captain Gideon off to the brig.

Alone in the cell, Gideon waited impatiently for someone to come. Unsurprisingly, that person was Major Lee, who made sure Gideon was under no illusions that the only thing between Gideon and a firing squad was Major Lee himself. Whilst angry and fully prepared to have Gideon executed, a deal could be made here. Gideon could become a valuable resource or a short-lived security threat that got dealt with. Gideon asked Major Lee what the place was. Calmly, Major Lee told him that the *Excalibur* was a combination of Minbari and Vorlon technologies, re-engineered so that EarthForce could handle them. He asked Gideon if he believed that the *Excalibur* was truly a one-of-a-kind and that EarthForce was not looking at other possibilities, from races just as old as the Vorlons?

Major Lee confirmed Gideon's guess that the Shadow technology was involved. Ten years before, some Shadowtech artefacts had been found. They had been experimenting with them ever since, until the Drakh Plague was unleashed on Earth. When that happened, the work that Major Lee and his equals were undertaking gained more significance. Major Lee proclaimed with a great deal of confidence that they could find a cure faster than Gideon and the *Excalibur* could.

Gideon asked if the Joint Chiefs of Staff were aware of this base and others like it. Some were, Major Lee explained, but it was strictly on a need-to-know basis. Gideon asked if that had been the problem with the *Cerberus*: if his captain back then had found out something that he should not have. Major Lee was upset at this question, not out of anger but from a wish that the incident with the *Cerberus* simply had not happened. Shadowtech was organic in nature and incorporated living beings into its operating system. Sometimes the mix went well, Major Lee explained, sometimes it did not. With Shadowtech, sometimes the subject goes mad, along with the ship that is part of him. The *Cerberus* was the tragic victim of simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Angry at this, and at the fact that his shipmates died as a result of a mistake, Gideon challenged Major Lee about the creatures below in the cavern. Major Lee said that he had been cleared, evidently by those higher up the food chain, to talk to Gideon about some things. Those human-alien creatures were not on that list of approved items for discussion. In any case, Major Lee said that someone close to Gideon had been using Shadowtech for some time: Galen. Gideon could not believe this until Major



Lee explained what he knew of Shadow technology and the implants techno-mages used to perform their craft. In his opinion and that of his seniors, the techno-mages had fled to avoid more than just the return of the Shadows. They had decamped from known space because EarthForce wanted the secret of their implants and the techno-mages did not want to share.

Summing up, Major Lee made Gideon an offer, believing that the wayward Captain could be useful. Gideon could nominally answer to Major Lee and those involved with this work or become a problem that would be dealt with firmly and quickly. Gideon, realising that to do the latter would result in his death in very short order, accepted Major Lee's offer, not intending to carry it through. The administrator of the research facility stated that a telepath would be sent along to verify the offer. If the telepath confirmed that Gideon was telling the truth, then Gideon would turn Galen over to them. Major Lee explained that there were still some aspects of Shadowtech and its integration that EarthForce scientists still had not managed to crack.

At that point all of the lights went out, to be replaced shortly after by the dim glare of red emergency lights. The door to the brig exploded inward, knocking Major Lee and his guards to the floor. One was still standing and Gideon leapt upon him, seizing the advantage and not letting up until he had pummelled the guard into unconsciousness. Galen, standing in the doorway with his staff in hand, asked if he had waited long enough.

The base in a state of panic, Gideon and Galen proceeded carefully along a corridor, hugging the wall as a distortion field covered them, bending the light around them and affecting the optic nerves of everyone else around them. Noting Galen's spell, Gideon commented that this could almost be organic technology. Galen looked at him sharply, realising that Gideon had learned more than the techno-mage had hoped.

Upon entering the cavern on the way back out to the site where Gideon had first been dropped off, Galen was shocked at what EarthForce had been attempting on this world, seeing the dark experiments for the first time. Galen gave Gideon his staff, informing him that it would ensure that Gideon got back to the surface without being seen. Galen said that he had to end the misery of all of the creatures here. Moving away, Galen emerged from the haze, torn between sympathy, horror and a wish to unleash hell. The altered human creatures noticed him and, perhaps recognising something in him, approached him, shambling closer.

A shiny skin of black spread over Galen's face and hands, originating at a nexus on his back where the majority of his techno-mage implants were located. It was similar to what covered the once-human creatures in the cavern but evolved far beyond that. Energy started to erupt from Galen's hands; the whole cavern became alight with explosions and chain reactions as Galen unleashed the full fury of the Destroyer, his gift and curse as a techno-mage.

Almost at the airlock and close to retrieving his breather, Gideon was knocked off his feet as a tremendous explosion echoed up the tunnel behind him. He grabbed his breather, realising someone was behind him. It was Galen, who stumbled forward to collapse exhausted in Gideon's arms. Gideon dragged Galen back to the ship and the techno-mage pinnacle took off.

On the pinnacle's deck, an exhausted Gideon and Galen shared a moment of silence. Galen tried to explain but Gideon would have none of it. It all made sense now: Why Galen had picked him up and followed him for all these years, in the hope that he would investigate what had happened to the *Cerberus*. By allowing Galen to follow Gideon, the techno-mages would then learn how far EarthForce had come along in manipulating Shadowtech. Galen tried to claim that watching EarthForce was his responsibility but the trust between them had been broken. Gideon told his former friend to drop him off at Mars, tell the others to meet him on Mars and then to go away. Gideon did not know for how long that would be; he felt he had lost the one true friend he could rely on.

The *Excalibur* sat high in orbit above Mars, having been sent straight there from Sector 420 by a curious message from Galen. Max Eilerson received a message from Matthew Gideon, calling from a commercial communications outlet on the world below. They agreed to meet outside the IPX building in MarsDome One, Gideon saying that he wanted everyone else beside Eilerson and himself left out of this. Eilerson was a well-respected employee of IPX and his word would be taken seriously.

Waiting impatiently, Gideon watched people moving to and fro along the busy Martian street, observed continually by Galen, who was masked by the shadows. Gideon was pleased to see Eilerson arrive but less so by the appearance of Dr Chambers, Lieutenant Matheson and Dureena. All of them wanted to stand with him, Matheson confessing

that he knew what Gideon was doing. The secret was going to be a secret no longer. The continued obsession that EarthForce had with Shadow technology and the deaths that had been caused by it, was going to be blown wide open.

From a nearby rooftop, a rifle focused on Gideon. The sniper holding the rifle locked onto Gideon's chest, unaware that an ever-alert Galen had spotted the sniper from an alleyway below. The techno-mage broke into a run towards Gideon, shouting for his wronged friend to get down. With Gideon squarely in his sights, the sniper pulled the trigger. Something slammed into Gideon and he fell back in slow motion, hitting the pavement...

Shadow Peon Template

The Shadow peon template details a sentient being who has been chosen or elected to undergo a painful series of operations to implant Shadow technology into his body. As the Shadow Servant class described in *No Surrender*, *No Retreat* is no longer selectable after the Shadows have departed for the Rim, the Younger Races will have to make do with their own explorations into organic and particularly Shadow technology.

Hit Points: Same as base creature.

Speed: Same as base creature.

Initiative: With his mind fogged by the technology in his body, a Shadow peon suffers a -2 penalty to his Initiative checks.

DV: With the Shadow implants within them affecting them constantly, Shadow peons are generally less aware of their surroundings, their natural reactions filtered by the Shadowtech. A Shadow peon suffers a -2 penalty to his Defence Value.

DR: The thick blank skin of a Shadow peon, similar to that of the Shadow ships themselves, provides a natural Damage Reduction of 3.

Damage: Same as base creature.

Special Attacks: A Shadow peon retains all of his previous special attacks.

Special Qualities: A Shadow peon retains all of his previous special qualities. A Shadow peon also gains the following special qualities:

Never Alone: The implants, sentient as they are, constantly talk to the peon with knowledge and guidance, as well as interfacing with any piece of Shadow technology that the peon is in contact with through their altered skin. A character with at least three levels in the Shadow Servant prestige class can command a Shadow peon by speaking with them and being within line of sight. A Shadow peon may make Will saves where Shadows, Shadow technology

or Shadow servants are concerned but these are always at a -4 penalty. This ability includes techno-mages, as they are, in effect, equipped with Shadow technology.

Shadow Implantation: A Shadow peon gains all of his abilities through the implantation of devices throughout his body, devices that are based on Shadowtech. Unlike Shadowhearts, the limited nature of a peon's implants represents itself as a -4 penalty to any Will save that he must make which relates to telepathic attacks, rather than a complete vulnerability.

Shadow Speech: As a side effect of the device implantation, the Shadow peon can understand the speech of the Shadows. He may communicate with Shadows, Shadow-enhanced characters (including techno-mages) and other Shadow peons within line of sight.

Telepathic Death: Shadow peons that were once telepaths lose access to all of their telepathic powers. They effectively lose their P-rating altogether.

Save: The Shadow implants strive to keep their hosts healthy and able to work harder and longer. This represents itself as a +4 bonus to the host's Fortitude save.

Abilities: Same as base creature.

Skills: Same as base creature.

Feats: Same as base creature plus Shadow peons gain Skill Focus (Technical (organic)). Note that this feat is actually

provided by the implants themselves, representing a guiding force in the manipulation of Shadowtech. This bonus only applies when the peon is working with Shadowtech.

Scenario and Campaign Hooks

- ⑤ EarthForce's involvements with Shadowtech are seen in their true horror in this episode. There are more bases than just the one administered by Major Lee. The players could discover one of the other bases involved with new technologies and the discoveries there could be equally horrific. While they may wish to simply slip away quietly, perhaps one of the Shadow peons is recognisably an old friend of one of the Player Characters, whom they have not seen in years. Rescuing the peon will be hard – restoring him to his old self will be next to impossible.
- ⑤ Major Lee's comments about Shadowtech, and the fact that his work may create a cure to the Drakh Plague faster than the *Excalibur* can find one, can serve as an interesting avenue in a *Crusade*-era campaign. Perhaps the players discover other alien viruses, implants or technologies that can stop the Drakh Plague or at least prevent it from killing the host or infecting others. The players would be faced with the true moral dilemma of whether to compromise humanity by using more alien technology to stop the plague.

Shadow Peon Implants

Very little detail is known about the shambling figures with Shadow skin who toil in unknown, unnamed EarthForce bases. These figures work with equipment on assembly lines with Shadow parts, building the next generation of warships and fighters to use Shadow technology. It is through their hard work that the next iteration of EarthForce fleets, ships, tanks and fighters will be more advanced than anything used by any existing race, with the possible exceptions of the Minbari and the Drakh. Regardless of their position or work profile, the following categories of implants are fitted to all of these Shadow peons:

1. **Epidermal Facilitator:** This implant modifies all external skin tissue to be compliant with Shadow technology. It may have additional functionality but this is currently its only known application.
2. **Interface Cogitator:** This implant will not function without the other implants installed. The implant allows communication between the peons and the very Shadow technology with which they operate. It has a negative effect on the brain patterns and reactions of the host.
3. **Platelet Asserter:** This implant monitors the flow of chemicals around the host body, regulating them and also helping to fight off viral infections.
4. **Spinal Implant:** No reason has been found for this implant to exist. The positive or negative effects of this node's presence or removal have not yet been researched.
5. **Pineal Implant:** The Platelet Asserter will not function without this node being present. Other than that, this implant has no known function.
6. **Vindication Node:** This implant appears to fulfil some sort of management function but has defied EarthForce attempts to discover its purpose. The other nodes perform erratically if this node is not present, often simply not working. It is believed this node is the one which nullifies telepathic ability but this is only speculation.

Rules

Additions

There are many factions in galactic society, some being so small or secretive that they escape the notice of larger power blocs throughout most of the Shadow War and the Telepath Crisis. Pro Zeta (a business front for quasi-legal EarthForce military experiments) and the Thieves' Guild are two of these clandestine factions. With the Psi Corps officially (if not completely) disbanded, a new faction playing on the galactic scale is the Bureau of Telepathic Integration. Finally, there is a proliferation of doomsday cults which rise to prominence during the years of Crusade, as tensions in the Earth Alliance reaching breaking point.

The Thieves' Guild

The Thieves' Guild has been active for several centuries and incorporates the practices of a variety of cultures. Whilst predominantly an alien pursuit, dominated by aliens from the League of Non-Aligned Worlds, the arrival of humanity onto the galactic stage led many of that race to request to join the Guild. Their efforts were rebuffed, as the Thieves' Guild did not accept requests to join their ranks. The Centauri had learned this many years before. It took time for humans to be invited to join the Thieves' Guild, perhaps longer than it would have done otherwise, as a group of humans attempted to create their own version of this covert institution. The Thieves' Guild took this as an affront and was pleased when the human equivalent died in its infancy, back-biting and sniping causing it to fall apart before it had even begun.

Spread across most of the League of Non-Aligned Worlds, the Guild has active cells in Narn, Centauri and human space. The Guild exercises little influence in the domains controlled by the Minbari, for to do so would require an element of support from the native populace or specific elements within it. The Guild is not vast in number, at maximum perhaps a thousand or so members scattered across the stars. Regardless of distance, there is a brotherhood that exists between them, based more on respect for one another's abilities than out of any love for fellow thieves.

Every organisation needs a controlling or managing core to set policy and guidelines for the whole. The inner circle of the Thieves' Guild is called the Conclave of Masters and has been in charge of the Guild for the last 150 years, ever since a previous power struggle for control. The naming of this group of leaders is ironic, for the word Conclave derives from a room that can be locked; the Conclave claims there is no room in existence that can be secured well enough to prevent access by the Thieves' Guild. It is rumoured that as of 2266, Mafeek was promoted to the Conclave after the training of Dureena Nafeel was completed but this cannot be confirmed or denied.

Rules of the Game

Every underworld organisation has its own set of standards and rules – the Thieves' Guild is like any other in this regard. As of 2267, the principles that all thieves within the Guild must adhere to are as follows:

1. Do not interfere with the activities of another Guild member.
2. Do not betray our presence to the authorities.
3. Do not include gratuitous violence in your activities, lest the interest of the authorities is excited.
4. The Thieves' Guild supports the rigging of games of chance, pickpocketing, theft, con jobs, black marketing and barter. No other activities are officially supported.
5. The Thieves' Guild expects a commission to be paid from a member's earnings.

Benefits of Membership

For those who have been recommended into the Guild, training is offered by a more experienced thief. This is not done for free – the trainer can readily expect the new initiate to the Guild to perform menial tasks and work, effectively being at his beck and call. This training stands initiates in good stead, elevating them above the simple pickpockets and hustlers that inhabit the lower levels of society. It also gives the new initiate a level of contempt for any criminal who does not appreciate the nuances and understatement that come with being a 'proper' thief. Even in the 23rd century, with all its technical advancements, a true thief can still do what others cannot. It simply requires additional deftness, thought and, above all, a finer level of subtlety.

Many local instances of the Thieves' Guilds, sometimes calling themselves bands, leagues or other names, have networks of contacts that native or visiting Guild members can use. These contacts can be supporters of the Thieves' Guild, whether as victims of protection rackets or blackmail or simply because the supporter needs the Guild's services on occasion. Informants also provide a useful service to the league, whether it is knowledge that they have personally seen and witnessed or a series of taps, viruses and snooping routines developed by those informants with computer skills. Closely related to this is the need for a thief to pass on his stolen goods to another. Fencing services are often available to the Thieves' Guild via a network of individuals skilled in the exchange of stolen goods. Some of these fencers also have legitimate businesses masking their criminal work.

Finally, whilst it may seem contrary to the solitary nature of a thief, there may be times when more than one thief is required for a given job. Some operations are too large for a single thief to manage on his own. If this is the case the Guild will demand a higher percentage of its fee relative to the level of additional support given to the thief. This higher percentage is almost always non-negotiable.

Being a member of the Thieves' Guild brings with it some general benefits that can help a criminal within the *Babylon 5* universe. In return for the commission paid, a Guild member is always offered a place of lodging, even if it is just a quiet corner of the deck floor and a level of protection provided by the local Guild. It may not be especially glamorous but is often safer than sleeping around others, such as the Pak'ma'ra lurkers.

Membership Requirements

The main requirement of a member of the Thieves' Guild is simply to pay the levied commission. Out of all earnings that the thief makes, 10% must be paid to the Guild. This money is not wasted; the buying of favours, of donations to certain causes and even of services needs an income supply. Aside from the cost, the simple training of a thief requires a period of apprenticeship. Any and all work requested by the mentor must be undertaken and very often the abilities of the initiate are pushed to their limits. The duty to a higher authority does not end when an initiate is recognised as a valid member of the Thieves' Guild. On occasion, the Guild or a local branch of it may request that members undertake surveillance or security work, commonly a stakeout or shadowing.

Finally, another requirement of membership is that when a place has been offered in the Conclave to a member of the Thieves' Guild, it cannot be turned down. Whilst it is in the nature of many thieves to stay in the shadows, if appointees could turn down the offer then only those with dreams of power would accept. Therefore those with great plans and dreams of glory tend not to be picked for ruling positions in the Conclave – these individuals often struggle to contain their own personalities, egos and accomplishments, their lack of subtlety proved by their very actions.

Master of Subtlety – Prestige Class

Additional Hit Points: 1.

Requirements

To qualify to become a master of subtlety, a character must fulfil all the following criteria:

Skills: Bluff 8 ranks or Forgery 8 ranks or Pick Pocket 8 ranks.

Feats: Lightning Reflexes.

Special: Must have the lurker's knowledge class feature.

Class Skills

The master of subtlety's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Climb (Str), Diplomacy (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (alien life, law, sector) (Int), Listen (Wis), Pick Pocket (Dex), Search (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Technical (electronics, mechanical) and Tumble (Dex).

Skill points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the master of subtlety prestige class:

Guild Initiate: This class feature represents the initial steps that a character choosing this prestige class takes when becoming a thief. 50% of all gains must be handed over to the Thieves' Guild as payment for training. The character answers to a mentor and must perform the tasks that are requested. To represent the growth in the character's skills, the character has a +1 competence bonus to all Forgery and Pick Pocket checks.

Any initiate travelling with a mentor may also claim a place to sleep in the same manner as any other member of the Thieves' Guild. If the initiate is not travelling with his mentor this does not apply and the initiate must find his own way.

Note: The Games Master may well bar advancement in this prestige class. It is generally only possible to exceed as a master of subtlety by plying one's trade – if a Player



Character master of subtlety has not been roleplayed accurately (perhaps by being thuggish or ignoring his skills), the Games Master should ban advancement in the class. In game terms, this can be represented by the approval (or disapproval) of either the character's mentor or the Conclave of Masters.

Security Systems: Thieves joining the Thieves' Guild are required to pick up knowledge, and quickly. The thief learns to break into locations, often disabling security systems as he goes. The character gains the security systems class features, from the agent class (see the Characters chapter in the *Babylon 5 Roleplaying Game and Fact Book*). If the character already has the security systems class feature, no additional benefit is gained.

Sneak Attack: A master of subtlety may be required to take down or silence a target in order to complete a commission. If the master of subtlety can catch an enemy by surprise, when flat-footed or by flanking, he can make a sneak attack. The extra damage the master of subtlety deals is listed on the Master of Subtlety table. Not that this is cumulative with the sneak attack class features gained from other classes (such as agent). Sneak attacks may only be made in melee combat or with ranged weapons when the target is no more than 30 feet away. Sneak attacks may not be made against non-living targets or those immune to critical hits.

Guild Membership: When a master of subtlety reaches this level, he is no longer under the control of a mentor and is judged to be a quality thief in his own right. He has the right to claim a place to sleep when visiting the Thieves' Guilds on any world as long as he obeys the rules. 25% of his gains must be tithed over to the guild, rather than the 50% of a novice thief.

Bonus Feat: At 4th level and 7th levels, the master of subtlety may select a bonus feat from the following list: Alertness, Dodge, Improved Unarmed Strike, Nerves of Steel, Toughness, Weapon Focus or Weapon Specialisation.

Unsurpassed Co-ordination: Being both quick and nimble are core requirements for a good thief but co-ordinating the two is even more so. The master of subtlety who has gained this class feature has a +1 competence bonus to all Climb, Jump and Tumble rolls, inclusive of any competence bonus already in these skills.

Charms of a Rogue: Throughout time rogues have possessed a certain appeal, a flair that others simply cannot deny. The charm of an accomplished rogue can, for brief periods, raise his profile in the eyes of others when needed. Once per day, a master of subtlety with this class feature may re-roll one Bluff check but must abide by the second result, even if it is worse than the first.

Guild Mentor: When a master of subtlety reaches this level, he is required to take on an initiate, as and when required. This may be at the request of the Conclave of Masters or as a result of the mentor spotting an individual with the capability to become a master of subtlety, as happened with Mafeek and Dureena. The Games Master should create a character with a single level in the master of subtlety prestige class to function as a Non-Player Character ally for the character. To prevent a mentor from building a power base of loyal thieves, a mentor may only train one master of subtlety at any given time. This is compounded by the fact that the quality of the initiate can sometimes reflect badly on the mentor. The mentor himself need only tithe 10% of his gains to the guild when he reaches this level.

Conclave of Masters: A character with this class feature has reached the highest level possible in the Thieves' Guild. Rarely will he commit crimes and steal, instead guiding the membership of the Thieves' Guild to keep to the status quo. The character gains a +4 competence bonus to Bluff and Intimidate checks when dealing with any other character who is a member of the Thieves' Guild but not a member of the Conclave of Masters.

A character in the Conclave of Masters gains the Independently Wealthy feat. This represents his income

The Master of Subtlety

Class Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+0	+1	+0	Guild Initiate (50% tithe), Security Systems
2	+1	+0	+2	+0	Sneak Attack +1d6
3	+2	+1	+2	+1	Guild Membership (25% tithe)
4	+3	+1	+2	+1	Bonus Feat
5	+3	+1	+3	+1	Unsurpassed Co-ordination
6	+4	+2	+3	+2	Charms of a Rogue
7	+5	+2	+4	+2	Bonus Feat
8	+6	+2	+4	+2	Guild Mentor (10% tithe)
9	+6	+3	+4	+3	Sneak Attack +2d6
10	+7	+3	+5	+3	Conclave of Masters (no tithe)

from the other members of the Thieves' Guilds and elevate him from normal thieving work. Of course, there is little to stop a master who simply feels like 'getting his hands dirty'. Masters do not tithe any money to the Guild – from their perspective they *are* the Guild.

Pro Zeta Corporation

It is not uncommon for private organisations to work with government agencies, as the private sector has resources that governments do not. Public accountability is a requirement of governing bodies but not of companies.

The official business of the Pro Zeta Corporation, based at its headquarters on Ceti Gamma II, is the manufacture of synthetic proteins. These have a wide variety of uses, from pharmaceuticals to chemical manufacturing and food production. However, a conglomerate the size of Pro Zeta can hide things away: Costs are filed under miscellaneous expenses, items are added to existing projects for no apparent reason, surplus orders go missing with the blame attributed to clerical errors or wastage. The company has extensive government connections but unlike most organisations in their field, Pro Zeta is not limited to trade solely within Earth Alliance territories.

This perk has a price, however, and it manifests itself in a clandestine link with forces within EarthForce. General Thompson, assigned to the bioweapons division within EarthForce, met early on with certain individuals from Pro Zeta and an understanding was reached. The selection of Pro Zeta as a partner for EarthForce's bioweapons division was not made without planning; the company's experience in chemical analysis, composition and cellular alterations would assist in several black projects, in particular Project Tarsier.

It soon got around that Pro Zeta had backing, though the source of that backing could only be guessed. IPX had a run-in with Pro Zeta and a fatal shuttle accident sent shockwaves around the organisation. The former had interests in acquiring bioweapons and associated technologies. They even operated outside of EarthGov's wishes, as on the mission to Babylon 5 to investigate a recovered Vorlon artefact in 2261. A first strike was called for and it was made with such finesse and skill that IPX was stunned. Covert discussions between IPX and elements inside EarthGov evidently had some effect, for there was no retaliation. Rumours of what had transpired filtered down through the ranks of IPX, with Pro Zeta mentioned in quiet mutterings over drinks fountains and in chance conversations in corridors.

General Thompson and Pro Zeta had significant dealings together in the past and this working relationship continues. In 2267 a food package was contaminated with the Drakh Plague and supplied to Pro Zeta by General Thompson. The fact that the general managed to get his hands on a sample of the deadly nanoplague is testament to

the political influence and backroom dealing he is capable of. The ability of Pro Zeta to handle a quantity of this plague without causing an epidemic is also a warning of the capabilities of this apparently benign organisation.

Using Pro Zeta

With little known about Pro Zeta outside of the organisation itself and the government, Pro Zeta functions best as an in-game opponent with some highly powerful alliances. Player Characters who come into conflict with the organisation on a covert level will find out why Max Eilerson is so concerned about it. Any attempt to uncover Pro Zeta's hidden projects will result in direct, personal and over-the-top measures to ensure that those doing the digging are never found again.

Pro Zeta has few criminal connections – with such a close relationship to the EarthForce bioweapons division, anything it wants can normally be supplied. Pro Zeta is more than likely to have contacts in the media who can ensure that negative news stories about it can be buried. In spite of its covert activities, to many civilians in Earth-controlled space Pro Zeta is just another company, with little to make it stand out from others in the same field. This image is carefully controlled, to ensure that no-one gives Pro Zeta more than a cursory glance.

Doomsday Cults

As Max Eilerson noted in 'Rules of the Game', throughout the ages some religious organisations have taken basic ideals and interpreted them to fit a different worldview. Typically, the core religious ideals end up bearing very little relation to that proposed by the view of the parent organisation. Doomsday cults, such as in those that rose to prominence during the *Crusade* era, are more than just a schism, however. They are fatalist offshoots, rarely large enough to be a true faction, but possessing enough conviction to seriously affect politics and society on a national, international and even galactic level.

Most doomsday cults throughout history have been focused on the perceived immorality of the cultures in which they reside and the fatalistic views they hold for the future because of this immorality. Some doomsday cults believe that redemption is found in penance. However, the more extreme cults believe that only death can redeem sinful souls. Members may even be expected to take part in group suicide as demonstration of faith and righteousness.

The leaders of a doomsday cult are normally intelligent and charismatic individuals, whose experiences, ideology and mental state have led them onto a radical path. They often control the membership with a firm hand, physically and emotionally.

Doomsday cults are small communities practising social encapsulation to keep their members close, so as not to

allow them to be affected by outside influences or to allow anyone with alternate agendas to infiltrate the group. It is common for doomsday cults to amass caches of weaponry, normally of a size in proportion to the length of time the group has been in existence.

A Sample Doomsday Cult – Sacred Omega

Combining a description of the hallowed cause in which they believe and the final letter of the Greek alphabet, Sacred Omega came into existence in early January 2267. Uniting several smaller groups, the Drakh Plague gave the merged group a direct goal to move towards, a cause which they had previously been lacking.



Sacred Omega views the Drakh Plague as divine retribution for the evils of Earth and believes the purification of humanity's sins can only be accomplished if every living thing on Earth dies. This is not the same as cults that are formed with a purely nihilistic basis, as these often reject all religious or moral principles and sometimes believe life itself is devoid of grace.

The actual number of followers within Sacred Omega varies, although at the height of their influence in 2267, shortly after the murder of Captain Mankowski of the EarthForce cruiser *Furies*, there were 17 members. The group suffered a minor setback in the middle of 2267 when one of its leaders, a former Foundationist priest named Andre Sabbat, and three other cult members were killed on Mars during a conference on the Drakh Plague. Sabbat had been one of the main architects of Sacred Omega, convinced that Joan of Arc was personally advising him.

Typical of doomsday cults, Sacred Omega view the murder of anyone either directly working towards a cure for the Drakh Plague or assisting in that goal to be a fair act, not a crime. Its view is not only that Earth has been judged and found guilty but that punishment has been meted out and that nothing should prevent its enactment. Typically, anyone who has been marked out as working to find a cure is mutilated, an infinity symbol with a line through it carved into their flesh (to signify that nothing goes on forever).

Those recruited into a doomsday cult are often those who are vulnerable in some way or have problems with the general society in which they live. Either way, the cult is there to offer a home and words of support, as long

as the initiate swears fealty and undertakes tasks that are required of him, normally doing something to prove his devotion. The Sacred Omega is no different in this regard; its initiation process normally requires action against the medical community, specifically those involved in viral research or microbiology.

Doomsday Cultist – Prestige Class

To qualify to become a doomsday cultist, a character must fulfil the following criteria. This prestige class is not recommended for most Player Characters. It is intended to help create opponents for groups of Player Characters in both standalone adventures and campaigns. Most doomsday cultists are only workers with a single level in doomsday cultist. Those with two or more doomsday cultist levels are more likely to have levels in other classes. Those with diplomat levels tend to be the public faces of their cults while those with soldier levels are often the enforcers.

Additional Hit Points: 2.

Requirements

Base Attack Bonus: +1 or higher.

Special: Must either have a worldview that agrees with the intent of the doomsday cult or be tractable enough to adopt this worldview. A character wishing to take his first level of this prestige class must also have completed the initiation process, normally a task defined by the leader of the doomsday cult.

The Doomsday Cultist

Class Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1	+0	+1	+0	+1	Clouded Devotion
2	+1	+2	+0	+2	Fanatic
3	+2	+2	+1	+2	Iron Will
4	+3	+2	+1	+2	Bonus Feat
5	+3	+3	+1	+3	Inspirational Leader

Class Skills

The doomsday cultist's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Diplomacy (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Knowledge (any) (Int), Listen (Wis), Medical (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (none), Spot (Wis) and Survival (Wis).

Skill points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the doomsday cultist prestige class:

Clouded Devotion: The process of indoctrination within a doomsday cult can override the sane mental reactions of a normal member of society. Once per day, the doomsday cultist may re-roll one failed Will save, although he must abide by the second result, even if it is worse than the first.

Fanatic: Those doomsday cultists who are more than simple footsoldiers take their dedication to the cause incredibly seriously. At 2nd level, a doomsday cultist gains the fanatic class feature from the terrorist prestige class (see the Campaigns chapter in the *Babylon 5 Roleplaying Game and Fact Book*).

Iron Will: When taking actions in direct relation to his cause, the doomsday cultist can fortify his mind with the opinion that what he is doing is just and right, even though 99% of civilised society would disagree with him. At 3rd level, the doomsday cultist gains Iron Will as a bonus feat.

Bonus Feat: At 4th level the doomsday cultist may select a bonus feat from the following list best representing their experiences within the doomsday cult: Alertness, Dodge, Nerves of Steel, Resist Scan, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Intimidation) or Toughness.

Inspirational Leader: At the level at which this class feature is gained, the doomsday cultist has gained a belief in his cause that he can put into words for best effect and is able to put the strength of his convictions over in conversation. The character gains the Leadership feat. If the doomsday cultist already has the Leadership feat, he instead gains a +2 bonus to his leadership score.

The Bureau of Telepathic Integration

In the aftermath of the Telepath War, also referred to as the Telepath Crisis, the Psi Corps was disbanded, having been involved in one war and having at least a tacit role in the election of William Morgan Clark. With the Psi Corps no longer existing as an official organisation, something was needed to replace it: The Bureau of Telepathic Integration.

Roles and Responsibilities

By creating an organisation made up entirely of telepaths, it was believed that mistrust and suspicion had forced mundanes and telepaths apart, creating the monster that it was generally believed Psi Corps had become. The main goal of the Bureau, clearly defined in the Telepath Regulation and Control Act (2265), is to allow the integration of telepaths back into general society. This simple statement is extremely hard to put into practice. A century after the Metasensory Regulation Authority had become known as the Psi Corps, it would be an uphill struggle for the Bureau to alter the entrenched mindset. The new rules that telepaths must follow are similar to those that they (should have) followed whilst under the Psi Corps. Whilst there is little that can be done to resist accidental scanning, especially when a telepath touches another sentient who is exhibiting strong emotions, unsanctioned active scanning is discouraged.

For telepaths who previously worked in the field of commerce, everyday life is perhaps most unaffected by working for the Bureau. The process of using surface scans during business transactions or meetings is still valued; the Senate considered removing this but it was deemed important for revenue, which would help the Bureau pay for its own administration via taxation. The Bureau has denied having the military capability that the Psi Corps possessed but it is painfully aware of many of the violations committed by members of the Corps which required some form of military intervention. These incidents, except for those essential as evidence against the main leaders of the Psi Corps during the Telepath Crisis, are kept under lock and key. Those in the Bureau and a handful of senators are aware that the Psi Corps once had its own elite Starfury

squadron, the Black Omegas, and its own small fleet of hyperspace-capable ships. The Bureau does not believe that all Psi Corps assets have been captured or destroyed.

To ensure that those who have been integrated back into society are kept compliant, regular inspections are required to make sure that telepaths are acting in accordance with the new rules. These are carried out once every six months for every telepath who has been granted permission to integrate into society, taking jobs and positions formerly denied to them. In practice, this permission is given by default to any telepath registered with the Bureau. These investigations are carried out by a high-level telepath, typically a P10 or higher. It is in this role that those few Psi Cops who were not actually corrupted by the very nature of their organisation have found their skills of use. The actual name of the investigator is never revealed to the individual being tested. All investigators are simply referred to as Mr Jones. This impersonality is designed to make the whole investigation and evaluation process as neutral as possible.

The investigation itself consists of a deep scan, or a series of deep scans if the investigator wishes to be thorough. Despite being unpleasant and often embarrassing, the investigations are necessary to keep telepaths in society and to give mundanes a level of privacy. Without these scans, the Bureau would not be able to do its ordained task.

For those who repeatedly abuse their abilities, the Bureau has several options it can consider based on the seriousness of the crime. The administering of sleeper drugs is common. Whether sleepers are administered for minor infractions or not, a telepath receives additional training and education, so that when the Bureau believes he is fit to return to society he will not use his gifts without reason. For details on the usage of sleeper drugs, see the *Sky Full of Stars* chapter of the *Babylon 5 Roleplaying Game and Fact Book*.

For more serious crimes such as the use of telepathic powers that cause pain, injury or death, more severe penalties are to be expected. The death of personality is a final option, for it removes both the telepathic ability and the mental state of the individual who wielded it. For repeated minor infractions, it is common for a prison sentence at a secure facility to be recommended.

Watching the Watchers

The Bureau, though, is not without its own watchmen. The Senate Committee on Metasensory Abilities regularly inspects the Bureau and has a free mandate to launch investigations as those members see fit. This is seen by the Earth Alliance Senate as crucial for the successful integration of telepaths, as many believe that it was this lack of accountability that allowed the Psi Corps to become what it did. It was the role

of the Senate Committee to co-ordinate the trials of those telepaths, typically Psi Cops such as Alfred Bester, who were tried for their crimes following the Telepath Crisis. It was this unenviable task that gave the Senate some amount of muscle, and to be fair its efforts were noticed by the public at large, which judged it to be trying its best to deal with the problem of a Psi Corps in ruins.

In the wake of the crisis over President Clark, many within the Psi Corps saw fit to destroy the evidence that linked them to his government. Only rumours were left, but these rumours were enough to affirm in the Senate Committee the need for a control process for telepaths, to ensure that politics and due process never answered to a sub-group of society. There is a suspicion that it may have been the other way around under former President Clark, with elements of the government under the control or influence of the Psi Corps.

Using the Bureau of Telepathic Integration

The Bureau is a vastly different beast to the Psi Corps and will affect the way that human telepaths are played in a game set within the *Crusade* time frame. The telepath class may be taken as in a normal *Babylon 5* campaign but it is important to note that whilst a human telepath may in theory select any ability as he improves in level, this in no way means that the Bureau has sanctioned its use. Indeed, a human telepath who has advanced himself in a particular area such as false memory implantation without the approval of the Bureau may invoke their interest if they discover it. While the Bureau accepts that the barring of existing knowledge may put humanity at a disadvantage with other races, it has to police itself.



Progression in the Psi Corps military specialist and Psi Cop prestige classes is not allowed if playing in the *Crusade* time frame. The former is not needed anymore; the integration of telepaths into normal human society allows them to fulfil roles that they could not have done previously, such as in the military. The latter, as can be expected, no longer exists in any form. No classes have access to The Corps is Mother or The Corps is Father class features. Characters that have levels in either of these prestige classes do not lose their gained levels but may not gain any more levels than they currently have.

As for other telepath-related prestige classes, such as those detailed in *The Earth Alliance Fact Book*, it is up to the Games Master's interpretation what the Bureau of Telepath Integration will allow in his game. The Bloodhound can be expected to still exist, as a group of individuals is still required to hunt down rogue telepaths. Unlike in earlier days, these

telepaths are those judged by the Bureau to either be threats to normals or using their abilities against the interests of Earth. The black ops specialist and psi-experiment classes are highly unlikely as valid choices for class advancement, given the new public face of telepathy and the increased responsibility given to them within general human society. As with the prestige classes mentioned above, any previous levels gained are not lost.

Using Telepathic Abilities in Crusade

With the limitations on classes explained, the following table details in simple terms how investigators categorise the unauthorised use of telepathic powers, based off the deep scans they conduct on human telepaths. The Infraction Level is a scale:

Mr Jones

'You know, Lieutenant, you've become something of a role model to a number of telepaths back home...'

12th Level Human Telepath (P9)

Hit Points: 15

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 15 (+5 Reflex)

Attacks: +8/+4 melee or +10/+5 ranged

Special Qualities: Maintain Concentration

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +13

Abilities: Str 8, Dex 13, Con 8, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 16

Skills: Computer Use +4, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +6, Hide +2, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (bureaucracy) +10, Knowledge (telepathy) +10, Listen +7, Move Silently +5, Pilot +2, Sense Motive +14, Spot +7, Technical (electronics) +3, Telepathy +18

Feats: Ability Focus (Deep Scan), Ability Focus (Mind Mirror), Ability Focus (Surface Scan), Alertness, Iron Will, Meditation, Mindshredder, Skill Focus (Intimidate), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Skill Focus (Move Silently)

Telepathic Abilities: Accidental Scan, Danger Sense, Deep Scan, Image Projection, Locate Mind, Mind Mirror, Mind Shield, Sense Telepathy, Surface Scan, Warning

Standard Equipment: None.

These statistics are for a general example of Mr Jones throughout the Earth Alliance. Some of the myths surrounding these inquisitors are true; they are largely humourless, punctilious and slavishly obedient to the Bureau's rules & regulations. The rumour that they are all ex-Psi Cops is *not* generally true, though in a few isolated cases this may be the case. Note that if a telepath is known to be particularly powerful or of a very high P-rating, the Bureau will attempt to send a more powerful and experienced Mr Jones to assess him. The few trusted ex-Psi Cop Mr Jones are often given these missions (as they are always P12 and often quite high-level).

Telepathic Abilities by Infraction Level

Telepathic Ability	Infraction Level If Unauthorised
Accidental Scan	None if accidental, Minor if intended
Communication	None
Danger Sense	None
Daze	Serious
Deep Scan	Major
False Memory Implantation	Major
Jamming	Minor
Image Projection	None if defensive, Minor if aggressive
Locate Mind	Minor
Mind Mirror	None
Mind Shield	None
Nerve Stimulation	Serious
Pain	Serious
Reality Fabrication	Major
Second Sight	Serious
Sense Telepathy	None
Surface Scan	Serious
Telepathic Vanishing ¹	Serious
Warning	None

¹ From *Wheel of Fire*.

None (indicating that the use of this ability is not considered an infraction).

Minor (indicating a slight breach of Bureau guidelines). Mr Jones will usually accept up to 3+1D3 Minor infractions in any six-month period without enforcing attendance at a certified Telepathic Compliance facility.

Serious (indicating a significant breach of Bureau guidelines and possibly Earth Alliance law). A single Serious infraction or any number of Minor infractions above the amount listed above will require the telepath to attend a Telepathic Compliance facility. This normally takes 1D6 weeks and may mean that the telepath is unavailable for a particular campaign game. Telepathic Compliance facilities are residential, with attendees living onsite so they can be monitored. There are 18 of these facilities; the only ones not on Earth are located on Mars and Proxima.

Major (indicating the most flagrant of transgressions of Bureau guidelines and Earth Alliance law). Any number of Major infractions, or two or more Serious infractions, will result in criminal proceedings being filed against the telepath under the Telepath Regulation and Control Act (2265).

The role that a human telepath has elected to play in society determines what the Bureau allows him to use. If playing in a campaign, a Games Master should outline these first, before character creation, so that a Player Character is aware of which telepathic abilities are valid in 2267. There are some predefined exceptions under the Telepath Regulation and Control Act (2265). Games Masters are encouraged to define different categories depending on their campaign if needed.

- ⑤ Telepaths involved in commercial dealings do not count Surface Scan as infractions, as long as the target of the Surface Scan is advised in advance and does not object.
- ⑤ Telepaths involved in military dealings do not count Locate Mind, Jamming or Pain as infractions, as long as they are used under direct, recorded orders.
- ⑤ Telepaths involved in law enforcement activities do not count Locate Mind or Jamming as infractions. Nerve Stimulation is still considered a Serious infraction for telepaths in this sector.

New Telepathic Ability

The following telepathic ability was shown in on *Crusade* as the preferred method of defence for a telepath following the Telepath Crisis. However, like most telepathic abilities, whether or not it causes infractions depends on the circumstances.

Image Projection

P-Rating: P3

Range: Line of Sight

Telepathy Check: 15

Concentration: Yes

Multiple Subjects: Yes

One of the few offensive powers to be approved by the Bureau of Telepathic Integration, Image Projection allows a telepath to create a vision in the mind of an opponent. This power can create the mental image of a snake, a spider or some form of entity crawling over the target. This power can only be used as a defensive option, never in an aggressive manner. If used aggressively, it counts as a Minor infraction for every aggressive use of the ability. The actual definition of what is classed as defensive or aggressive is of course up to the Games Master and the appointed individual from the Bureau who is licensed to conduct deep scans. Repeated uses of this ability on the same target would be considered to be aggressive.

Accidental scans, deep scans or surface scans can improve the chances of this ability succeeding. If one of these abilities has been successfully used within 24 hours of the Image Projection, the Will save of the target is automatically treated as being unfavourable, suffering a -2 penalty.

Any target failing his Will save by five or more will be unable to act for the rest of the round. Any target who fails his Will save by less than five will suffer a -4 penalty to all attack rolls, saves and checks for the rest of the round.

New Race - Zanderians

As a civilisation, Dureena Nafeel's race has been effectively wiped off the galactic map. Hailing from the now dead world of Zander Prime, the galaxy's remaining Zanderian population are nearly all slaves to one faction or another, sold or stolen from the impoverished homeworld before its destruction. Scattered and without any unity beyond whatever extended family groups may be with them, this race may well not last long and its cultural identity is already flagging. Only in small colonies, such as the one on Ceti Gamma II, can this refugee race hope to kindle a new hope for the future.



- ⑤ +2 Constitution, -2 Wisdom: Zanderians are hardy and have good resistance to common ailments (making them ideal slaves). However, their culture relies on arcane practices such as the casting of stones to make decisions, which is often compounded by their slave status, as they rarely need to make decisions for themselves.
- ⑤ All Zanderians are of Medium size.
- ⑤ Zanderians have a base speed of 30 feet.

- ⑤ Slaves: Zanderians that survived the destruction of their homeworld are invariably slaves. They have learned to work hard, keep a low profile and stay out of harm's way. Zanderians gain four free ranks at 1st level to spend as they decide on the following skills: Craft (any), Hide and Move Silently. They also have a +1 racial bonus to Reflex saves.
- ⑤ Automatic Languages: Zanderian. Zanderians do not start with English as an automatic language.
- ⑤ Favoured Class: Worker. A multiclass Zanderian's worker class does not count when determining whether he suffers an XP penalty for multiclassing.

New Feats

The feats presented below represent some of the aspects exhibited by characters that appeared on *Crusade*. These feats may also be taken by characters if playing within other time periods, such as a standard *Babylon 5* campaign or adventure, subject to the approval of a Games Master.

Linguist

The character has a knack for learning languages, be they from races still alive or a million years dead.

Prerequisite: Intelligence 17+.

Benefit: Researching a language for one full day gives the character a basic linguistic knowledge of that language. The character may only possess basic linguistic knowledge of a number of languages equal to his Intelligence bonus at any one time.

As long as the character has basic linguistic knowledge of a language, he may attempt to comprehend and even communicate in that language. A character requires written examples of the language to decipher it and audio examples of the language to understand the spoken word. Whilst reading and listening to a language are challenges, speaking or writing an unknown language is much harder. To speak or write a language, the character must make an Intelligence check – the DCs are given in the Linguist table.

The knowledge of a language only lasts for a limited time (a number of days equal to the character's Intelligence bonus after the character stops studying). How long it takes to understand the basic linguistics of a culture is up to the Games Master but will usually take at least a few days worth of intense study.

Linguist

Phrase Complexity	Example Phrase	Comprehend DC	Communicate DC
Easy	My friend is hurt.	5	10
Moderate	Get me to my ship, over the next ridge.	10	15
Hard	Our ship is in orbit above your world and our doctor can heal your tribespeople.	15+	20+

Personal Crusade

The character has a driving force that guides his life, which can grant him both great determination and tragic callousness in its pursuit.

Prerequisite: Must have suffered an incident of sufficient impact and trauma to warrant a personal crusade.

Benefit: When this feat is taken the character must, as part of his character history or as a result of previous adventures, have a cause that he wholeheartedly believes in or be something crucial that he is searching for. Games Master approval for the chosen cause is mandatory. Some valid examples of personal crusades could be as follows:

‘To find out what destroyed my ship and caused the death of all my shipmates.’

‘To reach the Well of Forever and bury the ashes of my love Isabelle.’

‘To discover what happened to the missing 24 hours of my life at the Battle of the Line.’

When involved in a subplot or plot of an adventure that relates to his personal crusade, the character gains the following (temporary) improvements to his character profile. The character gains a +1 bonus to all his saves and any Intimidate skill checks for as long as he is following his personal crusade.

The flip side to a personal crusade is the effect it can have on those close to the character. All Charisma-based skill and ability checks (other than Intimidate) suffer a –1 penalty for as long as he is following his personal crusade.

If a personal crusade is actually accomplished, this feat has no further effect. If a personal crusade also has no possible resolution, then it also has no further effect.

Political Survivor

Misdirection, spin and the twisting of truths and statistics are all the tools of a survivor in politics. Without them a politician is in a less defensible position when compared to his compatriots.

Prerequisite: Bluff 7 ranks, Diplomacy 7 ranks, Gather Information 7 ranks, Intimidate 7 ranks, Sense Motive 7 ranks.

Benefit: The character gains a +1 circumstance bonus to his Charisma-based checks when interacting with those of his political faction.

The Political Survivor feat also allows the character to sacrifice one of their contacts to achieve a goal, either by using blackmail, convincing rhetoric or abject pleading. This always results in the contact being lost for good and is marked as such. The actual benefit for this sacrifice is up to the Games Master but can:

- 5 Change the character’s political allegiance to a new faction.

- 5 Add a +6 circumstance bonus to any one skill check the character makes (only in an area the contact has influence in).

- 5 Provide a convincing alibi for a period of time.

- 5 Provide political deniability for a past action.

New Skills

Whilst featuring in aspects of the *Babylon 5* story, in particular early on in the show with Londo Mollari’s almost constant obsession with the casinos aboard Babylon 5, gambling and Captain Gideon’s skill at it were referred to on multiple occasions on *Crusade*. The following skill is optional and it is entirely at the Games Master’s discretion as to whether to include it in his games.

Gamble (Wis)

The Gamble skill is a used to play games of chance with the intent of winning money, favours or prestige. It covers poker faces, bluffing, reading tells, at least a rudimentary knowledge of mathematics, probability indexing and outright chutzpah. Any character or prestige class which has Sense Motive as a class skill has Gamble as a class skill too.

Check: Allows a character with a keen eye, sharp mind and understanding of games of chance to test his wits against others. The higher the result, the more successful the gambling attempt has been. Games of chance are either based on a single check (roulette or hand of poker) or multiple checks or rounds (poker game).

Special: A character cannot take 10 or take 20 when making a Gamble check. Gamble checks may never be re-rolled, for such are the whims of fate and chance. If the character is playing a particular game for the first time, then any results he rolls are automatically at a –2 penalty. Characters with Skill Focus (Bluff) or Skill Focus (Sense Motive) may add a +1 bonus to Gamble checks (+2 if both feats are possessed).



Artefacts

The Shadow Death Cloud

The Shadow Death Cloud is a truly horrifying weapon. It can modify its structure to envelop a planet or create a containment area to box in an enemy fleet and totally annihilate it. It can drain the life out of an entire fleet and then, using its missiles, vaporise the weakened target should capture of the enemy not be required.

The story of the Shadow Death Cloud that almost destroyed the Earth began on a distant Centauri colony with the simple designation of K0643 in the year 2266. A digging operation was commencing under the command of Lord Durla, one of the Drakh's unwitting stooges in the Centauri Republic. Vir Cotto, day by day becoming more than a lowly ambassador to Babylon 5, was involved in investigating this site, accompanied by three techno-mages. Members of the digging team had been dying by the dozens trying to recover something that the Drakh wanted.

What the Drakh had been so interested in was an entry point through hyperspace. In the course of events, Vir and his techno-mage allies discovered a legendary base called Xha'dam, spoken of in legend but never seen. To their collective horror they discovered a completed Death Cloud, with a second and third in the preliminary stages of construction. Vir and his associates watched the Drakh and the newly acquired Death Cloud move off in the direction of the nearby Daltron system. The seventh world of that system had a population of three billion sentients and only a minimal spaceflight capacity.

Entering a mostly empty Xha'dam, Vir – with the assistance of Kane, one of the junior mages – was able to destroy the legendary Shadow base by turning one of the partly-completed Death Clouds against it. The mage Kane died in the attack but Vir's eventual escape served to inform Galen of the precise nature of the situation. One of the other junior techno-mages had learned that the Drakh intended to use the Death Cloud against Earth after a trial run on Daltron VII.

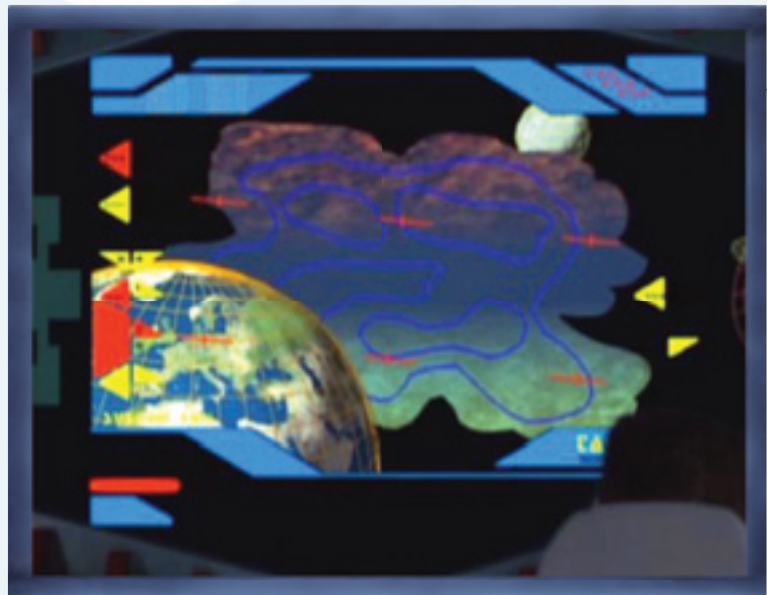
The primary armament of the Death Cloud are its arrays of immensely powerful missiles, which make the Cloud the most brutally direct weapon of the Ancients. Once a Death Cloud is deployed and surrounds the target world, it launches its entire payload of missiles, which pierce the planetary crust. Only when the missiles are deep inside the crust of the world do they cataclysmically detonate. The immense internal explosions shatter the thin shell of the planet. The seismic shockwaves destroy

every trace of life in a matter of hours. The amount of dust and rock thrown up into the atmosphere, coupled with general tectonic damage, renders the world uninhabitable even if the missiles fail to detonate.

Implementations of Shadow technology often have an organic core, a sentient being at the heart of the machine whose role it is to provide a living, intelligent component. The Death Cloud has no such central entity. It does have a control centre but it is impossible to ascertain whether this is a recent Drakh addition. Built with redundancy in mind, using an amazing array of networked parts with many fallback systems and alternate modes of operability, the Death Cloud is incredibly hard to destroy. Constructed with Shadow technology and organic armour, all the power arrays and weapon systems are distributed around the massive structure in order to prevent a strike force from taking the Death Cloud out by focusing on a single aspect. This redundancy makes the Death Cloud well-nigh indestructible unless an aggressor can find a way of sending energy spikes, perhaps from a critical strike, along the power arrays.

Death Cloud - Game Statistics

There is a notable difference between the skill levels of the Drakh and their Shadow masters in manipulating Shadowtech. The Drakh are able to utilise Shadowtech such as the Death Clouds and are able to deliver the plague that soon carries their name. The fact that they cannot modify the Drakh Plague to be more lethal shows that the Drakh understand how to apply Shadow technology but are unable to grasp many of the subtler theories behind it. Nevertheless, the Drakh are slowly but surely piecing together the arsenal of yesteryear bequeathed to them by their masters.



The first problem with the Death Cloud is the 'cloud' itself. The black, billowing cloud that surrounds the superweapon is partially related to null field technology but is also a quandary; how can the apparent gas keep from being dissipated by the void of space? Unless an attacking ship penetrates the cloud, it will have no chance to target any key nodes in the superstructure of the Death Cloud itself (see below). Whatever the null field's nature, it can have a disastrous effect on the operation of power cores in the ships of the Younger Races. The chief engineer, internal systems operator or pilot (in the case of smaller ships) of a Younger Race ship must make a Technical (space travel) check against a DC of 25 every three rounds while within the cloud. Failure causes the loss of essential power on the ship, rendering them utterly useless. They literally lose *all* power until the a Technical (space travel) check is made. This check takes at least a minute to perform and has a DC of 40. The cold of space will swiftly kill off the stricken ship's crew if this is not successful – while oxygen will probably last a little while even without recycling power, it will get cold very, very quickly on an unpowered ship. Of course, for this entire time the ship is floating dead in space and is an easy target. Ships that have been wholly or partially designed with Ancient technology, such as Warlocks, Victors, White Stars and Drakh ships, unaffected by the power-draining aspects of the cloud.

A Death Cloud in its entirety is virtually impossible to destroy by attrition. It is a construct capable of enveloping a planet and literally bristles with interceptors and point defence weaponry. Assume that the Death Cloud can fire the following weaponry every round against *every* ship that draws close enough to pierce its cloud:

- ⑤ Eight Advanced Neutron Lasers; Attack +5; Damage 150+10d10; Critical 17–20; Range 10
- ⑤ Six Modified Molecular Pulsars; Attack +5; Damage 40+4d10; Critical 18–20; Range 10; Rapid Fire

The Death Cloud will not fire its missiles at spacecraft. They are not subtle weapons and are barely guided (indeed, it would be almost as accurate to call them rockets). However, ships caught in the Death Cloud's area of effect when it deploys its payload upon a planet (or if the Death Cloud itself is destroyed) may well get hit by a rogue missile. There is a 5% chance of this occurring per round that the ship remains within the Death Cloud's sphere of influence. A missile hits automatically in this case and causes 1,000+5D100 damage.

The redundant systems of a Death Cloud *can* be overloaded, however. Dureena Nafeel noticed the key node to attack but others may not be lucky. Only characters who are not involved in piloting or operating any system of a spacecraft may search for a Drakh Cloud's control node. This is either a Knowledge (structural engineering) check (DC 20) or a Search check (DC 25) or a Technical (space travel) check (DC 30). The control node itself has the following statistics if targeted:

Colossal IV; HP: 700; Defence Value 5 (–14 size, +4 EM shield); DR 25; Sensor +15; SQ EM Shield

As soon as the control node takes a single hit, two things will happen. One, its considerable defence matrix of interceptors will be activated, boosting its DR to 100. Two, any ship firing upon the control node will have twice the defensive firepower hurled at it:

- ⑤ Sixteen Advanced Neutron Lasers; Attack +8; Damage 150+10d10; Critical 17–20; Range 10
- ⑤ Twelve Modified Molecular Pulsars; Attack +8; Damage 40+4d10; Critical 18–20; Range 10; Rapid Fire

As soon as the control node loses its last hit point, the Death Cloud goes berserk. All ships within the Death Cloud's sphere of influence, friendly or otherwise, are targeted by the confused defence systems:

- ⑤ Six Advanced Neutron Lasers; Attack +1; Damage 150+10d10; Critical 17–20; Range 10
- ⑤ Four Modified Molecular Pulsars; Attack +1; Damage 40+4d10; Critical 18–20; Range 10; Rapid Fire

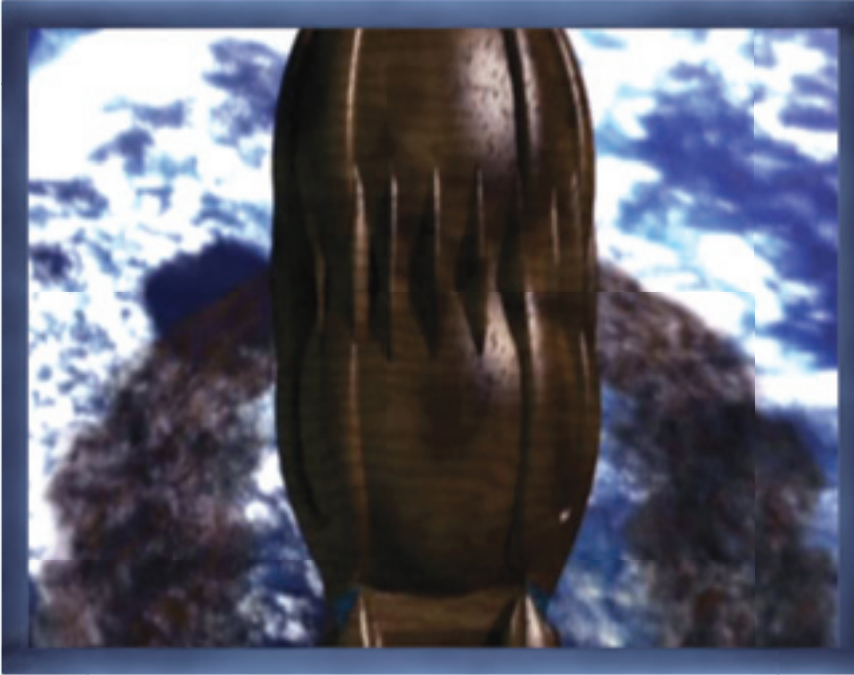
The cloud itself will detonate completely within 3+1d10 rounds. Any ships caught within it at this time are automatically destroyed.

The Drakh Plague

'The Romans had a phrase for it; they called it 'poisoning the well'. What they couldn't conquer, they killed. When they were driven out of an area, they literally poisoned the wells, so no-one else could live there either. It's the ultimate act of spite; if they can't have it, no-one can.'

— President John Sheridan

Nothing better expresses the sheer hatred the Drakh possess than the above statement by John Sheridan. Furious at both humans and Minbari for making their masters, the Shadows, leave known space, the plague is one of the Drakh weapons of revenge against a galaxy that has spurned them and their masters. The plague, or Drakh Plague as it has become more commonly known, is first and foremost a Shadow weapon. The Drakh do not know how to build, grow or modify the plague. The only supply they have is what was taken from Z'hadum in 2261 after the Shadows departed. After the planned destruction of Earth by the Death Cloud, it was the Drakh's intent to release the plague



on Minbar. The destruction of the Death Cloud meant that the Drakh had to change their plans and unleash their contagion on Earth instead.

The Drakh Plague is not biological in origin; it is not a disease, contagion or virus in the traditional sense. The plague is not a traditional malady; it is comprised of tiny machines on a scale impossible to see with the naked eye or indeed with most scientific equipment. Whilst this may seem incredible, it is important to note that the Shadows were a million years ahead of humanity in the sciences and in the manipulation and control of living organisms.

Within microseconds of infecting a host, the plague separates itself into parts, spreading at an impossibly fast rate. The virus targets the core organs required by the host for life: The brain, the bone structure, the liver, the kidneys, the heart. It does not target areas that are not critical for life and this is the greatest indicator that there is an intelligence at work behind the plague. The plague is also known to manifest itself in a different manner for every air-breathing mammal that is affected. A cure for one race of infected mammals might only affect that race of mammals. Thus there is no guarantee that a cure for one manifestation of the virus in one species will help another.

One certain fact is that the purpose of the Drakh Plague is not simply to simply kill the host. If this were the case then the plague would have decimated the population of Earth within hours by physically attacking the cell structure of the host. It may be that the interim purpose of the Drakh Plague is to learn about its host, to study it, before terminating it at the end of an evaluation period. This theory is backed up by early incidents which effectively tested sub-groups with different medical conditions. On

the first day of the Drakh Plague, just under a thousand people contracted a rare form of the deadly Ebola virus and all died at the same time. There was no contact between the victims and no route of infection. The strain of the Ebola virus that they had all contracted was previously unknown. Two days later, 700 souls contracted a fatal variant, again unknown, of Hepatitis B. All died in exactly the same manner and had no contact with one another. These two infections were not the last.

The advanced nature of the Drakh Plague proved to be the core problem for the scientific community within the Earth Alliance; before the middle of 2267, no-one had actually been able to identify a sample of the virus. The only reason the scientific community knew that the Drakh Plague was real was because the sudden outbreaks of medical conditions, such as the aforementioned Ebola or

Hepatitis variants, had no single point of contact or route for the flow of the infection. All of these facts, together with the first enhanced images of their miniature quarry, were confirmed by Dr Stephen Franklin on a controlled visit to the *Excalibur* in 2267. The discoveries he made on that day were not encouraging in terms of finding a cure in the minds of either Dr Franklin or Dr Chambers. A darker thought shared by these two noted scientists was the idea that manifestations of the virus might be different within the same species. If this is true, then the Earth is truly doomed.

Drakh Plague - Game Statistics

Type: Inhaled/Ingested/Injury

DC: 30¹

Incubation Period: 6d10 months

Initial Damage: 1 ability point

Secondary Damage: 1d6 ability points

¹ If a natural 1 is rolled to resist initial infection, then the character has also been marked out for experimentation by the Drakh Plague and the incubation period becomes 6d10 hours. A check for initial infection must be made every round the character is in contact with the plague. Once infected with the Drakh Plague, a character cannot recover from it by any means currently known to the Younger Races.

The plague continuously creates mutated versions of classic and unknown diseases to inflict upon its host. Once incubation is complete, the Games Master rolls 1d6 on the Drakh Plague table. The ability score designated is the one that takes initial and secondary damage. Once the ability

score is reduced to 0, the host dies. It is incredibly rare for a character to survive this but three successful saving throws in a row will defeat that aspect of the disease. However, the character is still infected and will suffer another mutated strain in 1d10 months.

Drakh Plague

d6	Ability
1	Strength
2	Dexterity
3	Constitution
4	Intelligence
5	Wisdom
6	Charisma

The Modified Techno-Virus

In the mid 22nd century, a hundred years before it was discovered by the crew of the *Excalibur*, a technomage crafted a weapon to assist one of the two warring governments on the planet where he was residing. Against the principles of his order, this weapon, a virus with a nanotech base, would infect the minds of the intended victims, causing them to attack and murder one another. A hundred years later, Galen and Dr Chambers were able to adapt a small sample of the techno-virus, to create a shield to line the insides of a host's lungs. This nanotech shield allows the host to move freely in areas infected with nanotech-based plagues (including the Drakh Plague) as long as he does not eat or drink anything. This protection only lasts for 48 hours and the 'infected' individual is not able to take the techno-virus again for 96 hours without taking 1d4 Con damage (and the extra dose will have no effect anyway).

The Apocalypse Box
'I worry, Matthew. I worry that you are holding something back; I worry that you may be using something quite beyond your control and that something quite beyond your control may be using you.'

— Galen

Appearing to be a small brightly-coloured box, the true malevolence inside the Apocalypse Box is not immediately obvious to the uninformed eye. It possesses a keen yet muddled alien intellect with its own set of motives which are unfathomable to any who have no knowledge of the race that created them. There is a rumour, oft whispered

by those who are aware of such things, which says that there is something alive within an Apocalypse Box. This is both true and factually incorrect. The entity that resides within is indeed conscious and sentient but is nothing more or less than the shadow of something that lived thousands of years ago in a different time, place and manner. The Box, in reality the entity inside it, often has a general hold over its owner, sometimes manifesting itself as an unspoken and in all probability psychic link. Owners of the Box find themselves unable to dispose of it, save into the care of another. Once accepted by a new owner, the prior keeper always suffers some unthinkable fate after it has left his care.

There are six such boxes in existence, the entities within heralding from a time long forgotten and rarely acknowledged. One of these boxes is owned by Matthew Gideon, the captain of the *Excalibur*.

A Calculated Oppression

The Shadows and Vorlons are classed as Ancients, having been born when the Earth and worlds like it were still young. These Ancients have now left the systems of their birth to go beyond the Rim. Those currently in galactic ascendance, such as the Centauri, humanity and the members of the League of Non-Aligned Worlds, are called the Younger Races.

Between these two extremes there is another classification of races, those who were Mid-born. Despite the Minbari perception that they are closest to the Ancients, that they are the ones who stand 'between the Candle and the Star', there are even older races still in existence. An example of these races is the Tal-kona'sha, who guard their borders jealously with advanced organic craft only a margin behind the Shadows and Vorlons in terms of technological advancement.

Another of these elder races is the Shierren, evolving shortly before the Tal-kona'sha, in close proximity to their Mid-born neighbours. Unlike the Tal-kona'sha, very little has remained of their culture and there is little evidence of their impact on galactic society to remind others of their existence. Even the sun their world orbits is dead, with nothing more than a cold, lifeless husk remaining. During the period of time in which the Tal-kona'sha expanded, their domain absorbed the dead system of the Shierren, which was forever lost to enquiring eyes.

During the course of their evolution, the Shierren diverged for a time onto two separate genetic paths. The smaller of the Shierren began to demonstrate an expanded mental capacity and keen intellect, in addition to a growing telepathic ability. The larger of the Shierren were left behind, albeit for just a few generations. It was at this point in the race's history, comparable to mediaeval times in Earth history, that those with the telepathic gift changed the future of their race forever.



The telepathic Shierren, experimenting upon the less mentally astute Shierren, discovered that the telepathic ability that was growing inside them was starting to manifest itself, albeit slowly, in the mundane offshoot. Not wishing to share their gift, the Shierren developed a way to mentally neuter the telepathic genes of those around them via a long-winded but calculated mental assault. It took several hundred years but by utilising their expanding mental powers, the higher Shierren ensured that the genetic bloodlines that carried these advanced mental powers would belong to them alone.

Over the next several thousand years, the Shierren culture split wholly down the middle. Individual higher Shierren started to bear little similarity to one another, their differing and some might say chaotic telepathic progression having tiny but noticeable physical effects with every generation. Some found their physical forms increasing in size alongside their mental prowess, while others started to drift away from the initial appearance of the race to which they had once belonged. What the higher Shierren would never know was that the genetic ability they had killed in the rest of their race had been more stable than that which they had inherited from their forbears. Over time, cross-breeding would have stabilised the DNA mutations that now affected them.

Sooner or later, either the Shadows or the Vorlons would discover this new prodigy and attempt to recruit them to their respective causes. The Shadows reached them first, several decades after the Shierren had fully mapped and explored their local star system. The culture presented to them by the Shadows, based on the strong ruling the weak and the survival of the fittest, was a most natural choice for them. The Shierren believed that they could control the Shadows, or at least their thrall races, like the

mentally diminished serfs beneath them. All it took was an attempt to take over some of the Shadow technology without permission to cause the Shadows to turn on their new subordinates.

Flames and Shadows

For 18 days the Shadows attacked the surface of the Shierren homeworld. With a certain amount of advance warning, the natives burrowed themselves underground, using their slaves to dig down further with their bare, bloodied hands. The assault was relentless at times, punctured by gaps long enough to instil a false sense of security and hope. A lesson was being taught here, not just to the Shierren but to all others: *Know your place.*

At the end of the lesson, the Shadows grew tired of administering punishment. Instead they elected to open a series of jump points underneath the surface of the Shierren sun, causing irreparable damage to the elderly star. The emission of flares was the result, literally burning the surfaces off all the worlds in the Shierren system. The resulting radiation caused much damage to the electrical equipment that the Shierren had and had unpleasant physical effects on the newly subterranean race, dooming them further.

Without a planetary surface to return to and with food supplies dwindling, the Shierren started to die out. Some of the higher Shierren turned to dark practices to keep themselves alive, in a similar manner to that which the Dilgar would uncover, sacrificing others to extend their own lives. Some turned to technology for an answer but there was nothing that could be done: The power of the Shadows was too great for them to oppose. Some tried to call the Vorlons for assistance but there was no response, which infuriated the remaining Shierren. The Shadows had brought death to their world but the Vorlons were standing back and watching them die.

They were trapped on a dead world, fully believing the Shadows were still watching the system and vigorously enforcing their punishment with a slow, agonising genocide.

The Death of a Race

Twilight was falling on the Shierren and some of the nobler beings wanted to get something of their culture and knowledge offworld before their resources ran out. 18 of the Shierren impressed the essences of their personalities into energy-based lifeforms they had previously discovered on a nearby planetoid in their solar system. The lifeforms, no larger than an average human male's fist, were lacking in even a rudimentary intelligence and so were excellent for

this task. Such practices had been attempted before, in an attempt to offset the genetic drifting that only some of the higher Shierren acknowledged as fact. The hope was that some of these constructions would reach the attention of others. The essences of the Shierren would convince their rescuers that help was urgently needed. A simple message would not suffice; if the telepathic possession of their rescuers was required to save their people, then they would do that too. The truth of the matter was that many of the 18 suspected that they would be dead before help arrived.

For safe keeping, the entities were placed into constructions appropriately known as Apocalypse Boxes. These boxes were placed aboard three starships remaining on the surface of the Shierren homeworld and launched off in different directions in a bid to foil the Shadows. All of the other Shierren starcraft, many short-ranged, would also be launched in an attempt to hide those ships carrying the Apocalypse Boxes. Some of their military craft would also launch in a desperate attempt to buy some time.

The Shadows, once they realised what the Shierren were up to, tried to stop the plan but only managed to stop two starships carrying Apocalypse Boxes. One of them got away but it had been damaged by debris during the fight. Engines weak, it missed the jump gate, to spend millennia drifting through space as the Shierren race eventually died with a whimper, their homeworld being sucked into the domain of the Tal-kona'sha.

Six hundred years before the construction of the last of the Babylon Stations, 1623 A.D. in Earth time, an alien transport passed through the fringes of the Tal-kona'sha realm, three light-years out from the former homeworld of the Shierren. The derelict was recovered and the Apocalypse Boxes were taken aboard. Despite the best intentions of the race that discovered them, the personalities inside the Boxes had changed since the original imprint countless centuries before. The memory of what they had once been was lost to the entities within the Boxes. Over the eons some of them became mentally unhinged, with little rhyme or reason to their decisions. With such fragmented mental patterns, the entities within the Boxes found it beneficial to have an owner, an individual with whom to form a close psychic bond, unknown to the host. The personalities within the Boxes felt this was right, not aware that this was how their predecessors, the true Shierren, had dominated their society.

It is not known whether the psychic influence that an Apocalypse Box exerts can result in a psychic transference into a new host. Sometimes the entity within the Apocalypse Box speaks in an echo of its owner, with voice patterns close enough for the owner to question whether he actually thought it or not. Sometimes the words come with advice and millennia-old knowledge or sometimes with nothing more than the intent to cause chaos. Such is the history and nature of the Apocalypse Box and further reason for

Galen and his order's hatred of them. Of course, some would argue that the Apocalypse Boxes and the techno-mages are opposite ends of a similar spectrum: Both are guilty of manipulation.

Apocalypse Box - Game Statistics

Tiny Container; HP: 20; Defence Value 12 (+2 size); DR 5; SQ Acceptance, Advice, Hatred of Ancients, Psychic Influence.

Acceptance: An Apocalypse Box has to be accepted by an owner. What the owner does not realise is that the Box, upon being accepted, uses this as a bridge to create a psychic connection between itself and the new owner. This is automatic for the entity inside the Box; when it was a member of the Shierren, this was how it communicated and controlled those lower Shierren beneath it. An Apocalypse Box will not bond with a telepathic owner – it can sense the telepathic gene and will respond violently (see Ancient Hatred).

Advice: As dangerous and perverted as they are, there is no denying the usefulness of an Apocalypse Box. The owner of an Apocalypse Box gains the Contact (Apocalypse Box) feat. Unlike other contacts, it only provides information, never services. Otherwise, it can be used once per month for an automatically successful Gather Information check. However, while the information a Box gives is always broadly correct, it is under no compunction to tell the whole truth. An Apocalypse Box even has access to knowledge it could not possibly possess, such as the petty secrets of creatures it has never encountered.

Ancient Hatred: Despite having little credible memory from its distant past, the Apocalypse Box still remembers that the Shadows (and to a much lesser extent, the Vorlons) had a hand to play in its past. If an open Apocalypse Box is within 15 feet of an individual with Shadow or Vorlon association (such as a techno-mage or telepath with Vorlon-manipulated DNA) it launches a powerful psychic assault. Treat this as a use of the Pain ability caused by a P12 telepath, that causes lethal rather than subdual damage. The Will save to resist this damage is DC 25 for those of Shadow association and 20 for those of Vorlon association. If a character is reduced to 0 hit points or lower by this attack, the source of the target's opposition to the Box is eradicated. This will be different for every affected individual. A techno-mage is visibly flayed of all his Shadow implants. A Vorlon-enhanced telepath would have most of their higher brain functions neutered, including their telepathic ability.

If it is in obvious danger of being destroyed, an Apocalypse Box will use this ability on anything that threatens it, whether it is Shadow- or Vorlon-tainted or not. The Will save for these to resist the power is DC 20. Psychic

influence is not in any way connectable to the Apocalypse Box responsible – it merely seems like coincidence or sheer bad (or good) luck.

Psychic Influence: Once per week, the Apocalypse Box can psychically interfere with its owner or anyone who has recently been its owner, as long as they are within 100 kilometres of the Box. The target of this psychic influence has one check, save or roll suffer a –20 or +20 modifier.

If the target has recently relinquished ownership of the Box, then this influence can only generate the –20 modifier, normally timed to cause the previous owner personal harm or distress, punishing him for letting the Box fall out of his control.

If the target is the current owner of the Box, then this influence can generate either the –20 modifier or the +20 modifier. The former is usually used to increase the reliance the owner has upon the Box. The latter is often used when the owner is unwittingly protecting the Box.

For example, when Galen gives Gideon cryptic advice, the Box will occasionally penalise the captain's Sense Motive check by –20, increasing his distrust of the techno-mage. Conversely, when Gideon is attempting to protect the *Excalibur* from destruction, the Box will grant him a +20 bonus on any one check that will help prevent its own destruction.

The Collar Gun

'It's at least a thousand years old and from what I can tell it was probably used to control prisoners during transportation.'

— Max Eilerson

Discovered by Max Eilerson on a mission in deep space, the collar gun is over a thousand years old, from an advanced culture yet unnamed. Based on the operation of the item, the location where it was discovered and his own extrapolation, Max Eilerson believes that the collar gun is some form of device used to restrain prisoners, criminals or most likely slaves.



Owing more to a catapult or slingshot than to a regular firearm, the collar gun shoots cords of an unknown material, possibly metallic in nature. This cord wraps itself around a target, bonding back together to form a solid ring. The bond is seamless with no breaks or weaknesses in the collar apparent to the naked eye. The cord is resistant to acid, common cutting tools or even lasers, so it is virtually indestructible (for humanity at least). The gun itself is of Medium size and has a Range Increment of 10 feet, dealing no damage to a struck target in itself.

The true potential of the damage that the collar gun causes lies not in the gun but in a secondary element of the weapon that can kill or maim effortlessly. Accompanying the collar gun is a small detonator just a few inches across. This detonator has a small keypad and a display. If the code is entered correctly (and Eilerson knows what the code is), the detonator will send a signal to any collar that approaches within 10 feet. This signal causes the collar to contract in on itself in fragments of a second, neatly severing whatever the collar is wrapped around. Detonators can be placed in certain areas, ensuring that no-one with a collar dares approach without risking a quick but nasty death. The collar, when it contracts, will sever whatever it is wrapped around (normally resulting in decapitation an instant death or mutilation, which instantly reduces a victim to –1 hit point).

No-one knows how to deactivate a collar issued by a collar gun; it may be that Max Eilerson knows but he has seen no reason to tell anyone. Physically removing the collar is nigh-impossible – it has DR 30, 20 hit points and is immune to acid and temperature extremes.

The Excalibur

Despite the reputation garnered during the last Shadow War, it became apparent in the days following that there was work to which even the mighty White Star fleet was not best suited. During the attack on the fleet of advanced tactical destroyers built using Shadow technology appropriated by the Clark Administration, it was painfully obvious that the presence of a bulkier ship capable of inflicting much more damage would have prevented so many White Stars from being lost.

Therefore an alternative was required – and a solution was found. The White Stars would be used more selectively, and a larger cruiser would need to be built to handle those situations where the White Stars were less effective. Unlike the failed *Valen* class, this new ship would utilise the best aspects of Minbari, human and known Vorlon technologies.

It was intended that the ship would be initially designed by the Minbari and built by the Earth Alliance, or more precisely by an organisation in the employ of the Earth Alliance. This way, by using human labour, the Earth Alliance would gain the benefits of working on a large destroyer-sized project with shared technology. Unbeknownst to President Sheridan, the Earth Alliance was already working with shared technology gained from the Shadows and had been doing so for many years.

Victory and Excalibur

Being destined for the Rangers, the first two prototypes of this new class of starship had to be developed in as much secrecy as possible. President Sheridan knew that the other races would be greatly displeased that the Interstellar Alliance was building warships; the strengthening of the Rangers and their ability to maintain the peace could affect their ability to break out of their agreements within the Alliance. Indeed, once news got out there would certainly be diplomatic issues and President Sheridan was prepared for an onslaught of questions about his increasing the ability of the Rangers, under the ISA, to wage war. President Sheridan knew that his goal was to convince them that the purpose of the Victory-class destroyer was to prevent a race from waging war and not to enforce some reign of terror at his behest.

The project was successfully accomplished with the help of President Sheridan's good friend Michael Garibaldi. Under the guise of a paper contract to supply a fleet of corporate convoy ships, the project was agreed upon in a closed meeting of the Earth Alliance Senate. The progress of the bill did not go smoothly however, for the project was met with several notable objections, including one from the well-regarded Senator Redway. His argument that there would not be anything tangible for the Earth Alliance save knowledge gained was not enough opposition to convince the rest of the Senate, who backed the proposal.

Hiding behind the false contract, Edgars Industries was able to pick from the crop of human applicants to work alongside the Rangers in building the prototypes under the keen eyes of President Luchenko and her designated representatives. The project to build the ship was headed up by Samuel Drake, a Mars-born citizen who relished the opportunity to work on a contract with a big corporation. He found himself managing the project to build a new fleet of ships for the Interstellar Alliance, which was much more than he had expected when he had first accepted the position. Drake became known as an absolute perfectionist in short order, to the exasperation of those above and below him.

The first two prototypes completed were the *Victory* and the *Excalibur*, both identical, although President Sheridan for some reason had a good feeling about the *Excalibur*. The ships were largely untested, with ongoing issues regarding the weapons systems, in terms of both power consumption and accuracy. Their first flight was a mission to discover the whereabouts of the Drakh assault fleet and the Death Cloud. It culminated in a desperate battle to save Earth from destruction. This conflict would ultimately require the sacrifice of the *Victory* prototype with a loss of all hands.

A Gift to the Condemned

With the loss of the *Victory*, the *Excalibur* was the only remaining instance of the new class of capital ships. President Sheridan weighed what to do with the *Excalibur*, given that the shipyards in which the ships had been built had been destroyed by the Drakh and would take years to rebuild. At this time the needs of Earth were greater than the needs of the Interstellar Alliance and President Sheridan knew it. He donated the use of the *Excalibur* to the Earth Alliance, to function as a mobile laboratory and research vessel. Leads would be provided by the Rangers alongside their role in ensuring the safety and integrity of the Interstellar Alliance and its members, to be followed up by the *Excalibur*. In short order the Earth Alliance began to treat the vessel as one of their own, often forgetting that the ship was officially on loan.

There was a price tag attached to this donation. The ship was Earth's for the duration of the race to find a cure but President Sheridan retained the right to pick the captain. Rather than a model officer, instead he chose a born troublemaker who had commanded an Explorer-class ship, demonstrating competency at captaining a ship on the edge of known space. Some would remark that the individual selected bore more than a few similarities to the personality of the President of the Interstellar Alliance. The choice to command the *Excalibur* was Matthew Gideon.

The naming of the *Victory* was clear enough, representing the triumph over the Shadows and perhaps also the defeat of former President William Morgan Clark. The naming of the *Excalibur* was done specifically to create a positive

image of a strong, powerful weapon. The original *Excalibur*, sometimes referred to as Caliburn or even Caledfwlch in the strong oral traditions of Celtic bards long-since dead, was supposed to have had some form of mystical power. Accompanying the *Excalibur* is a powerful legend of a time of romantic nobility and honour and it is hoped that this can galvanise lost spirits back home. In the days and nights after the Drakh assault on Earth, as the children of Earth wait for the one piece of news that will lift the death sentence hanging over them, the *Excalibur* carries their hope on its wings.

Game Statistics

The Victory-class destroyers have a chief weapon of a power level above and beyond anything that is currently on this side of the Rim, whatever elusive mysteries are contained within Vorlon space notwithstanding. The lightning cannon, a weapon based on Vorlon design, is perhaps the most frightening aspect of the *Excalibur*'s offensive potential. Often referred to as the 'main gun', the immense power consumption of such a weapon results in a power drain on all of the *Excalibur*'s systems that depend on the main reactor for an entire minute. When this weapon is fired, only enough power to cover life support and artificial gravity is left. Despite the explosive blast of the weapon being as powerful as that from a Vorlon cruiser, the recharge time means that the main gun is a weapon of either last resort or brutal intimidation.

Aside from the main gun, which quite rightly draws the majority of attention, the secondary weaponry of the *Excalibur* is still worthy of acknowledgement. Fore and aft neutron lasers, on a level of intensity comparable to the White Stars, will be the end of many opponents. Additionally, in contrast to the main gun's power supply problems, the increased level of power for the rest of the *Excalibur*'s systems, above and beyond that of a White Star, means that the secondary lasers can sustain fire better. The *Excalibur* also has several other offensive options of note. Pivoting laser cannons are located above and below the main fuselage to allow the *Excalibur* to focus its main weapons on one target whilst dealing with smaller aggressor craft. The ship has an impressive array of countermeasures available to deter attackers, including anti-fighter interceptors and a pioneering chaff system that can deflect energy from an incoming blast if deployed correctly.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the *Excalibur*, apart from its imposing main weaponry, is the low crew complement. With many automated systems, the *Excalibur* has a crew complement of just 300, with only a third of that being required at any one time to fly the vessel at its desired efficiency. This was an intentional facet of the original Minbari design; with the Rangers not being as large in number as most official armed forces, an offset for this concern was needed.

Defensively, the *Excalibur* and the departed *Victory* are no slouches either. Whilst the defensive hull of the vessel is not as advanced as those of the White Star fleet (the Vorlon defence mechanism is currently beyond the ken of Minbari engineers), the *Excalibur* is still ahead of anything the Earth Alliance, Centauri Republic or Narn Regime can offer. Constructed of a plasteel crystalline alloy, it is generations ahead of anything that the Earth Alliance could have developed on its own. On paper it is capable of refracting around eighty percent of any energy weapon used against it, although this partly depends on the nature of the attacking weapon. It is the quality of this armour that partially, but only partially, negates the tactical disadvantage that firing the main weapon causes.

Excalibur

Colossal IV Spacecraft; hp: 850; DV 12 (-14 size, +16 agility); DR 25; Spd -; Acc 7; Dec 6; Han +3; Sensor +14; Stealth +10; SQ Artificial Gravity, Bio-Adaptive Armour, Jump Point, Long-Ranged; Cargo 160,000 lbs; Crew: 16 Officers, 60 Pilots; 20 Sensor Operators; 214 Crewmen.

Weapons:

Lightning Cannon ('main gun'); Boresight; Attack +5 (targeting computer); Damage: 500 + 4D100; Critical 15-20 (x4); Range 10.

Quad-Linked Neutron Laser; Boresight; Attack +6 (targeting computer); Damage 150 + 5D10; Critical 18-20; Range 7.

Quad-Linked Neutron Laser; Rear; Attack +5 (targeting computer); Damage 150 + 5D10; Critical 18-20; Range 6.

Three Tri-Linked Laser/Pulse Arrays; Turret; Attack +4 (targeting computer); Damage 30+3D10 laser / 20+1D10 pulse; Critical 18-20; Range 5 laser / 2 pulse; Rapid Fire (pulse only).

Five Mk2b Interceptors; 3 Front/Left/Right, 1 Left/Front, 1 Right/Front; Attack +4 (targeting computer); Damage 10+3D10; Critical 20; Range 1; Rapid Fire

One Active Chaff Dispenser; Rear; Attack N/A; Damage N/A; Critical N/A; Six charges

Craft (48):

24 Thunderbolt Starfuries

12 Aurora Starfuries

12 Upgraded Transport Shuttles

(plus Galen's techno-mage pinnacle on occasion)

Active Chaff: One of the many upgrades to the *Excalibur*, active chaff is primarily a defensive weapon of last resort. One of the drawbacks of this measure is that it must be deployed between the *Excalibur* and a target that is attempting to fire upon it. Active chaff is made up of a number of crystalline objects which operate on a similar principle to the bio-adaptive shielding found on the *Excalibur*'s hull but focused more on energy dispersion. When an energy beam hits active chaff, the beam is at least partly dispersed.

Once per turn, a single charge of active chaff may be fired. No attack roll is necessary; the defending spacecraft receives a +25 bonus to its Damage Reduction against any energy attacks made within the fire arc of the active chaff dispenser for every charge released. After one turn, the active chaff is viewed as having dispersed enough to have no more effect.

Bio-Adaptive Shielding: Whilst not as advanced as the adaptive armour found on Vorlon vessels or the living skin found on mighty Shadow ships, the armour fitted to the *Excalibur* is the most advanced of any race, perhaps even including the Minbari. In game terms, 80% of the damage (after Damage Reduction is applied) from any energy-based attack is deflected by the bio-adaptive armour, so only 20% gets through. A maximum of 100 points of damage per strike can be nullified in this manner. Discard all fractions.

1st Example: The Excalibur is struck by a Delta-V Light Fighter's Twin-linked Light Particle Guns for 9 damage. As this does not even penetrate the Excalibur's DR of 25, the attack is absorbed without the bio-adaptive armour even coming into effect.

2nd Example: The Excalibur is struck by a Hyperion Heavy Cruiser's Heavy Laser Cannon for 138 damage. After deducting the Excalibur's DR of 25, the attack is still dealing 113 points of damage. The bio-adaptive armour absorbs 80

% of the damage (90.4), so that only 20% (22.6, rounded to 22) is deducted from the Excalibur's hit points.

3rd Example: The Excalibur is struck by a Sharlin Warcruiser's Neutron Lasers for 183 damage. After deducting the Excalibur's DR of 25, the attack is still dealing 158 points of damage. The bio-adaptive armour attempts to absorb 80 % of the damage (126.4) but can only absorb a maximum of 100 against any one strike. Therefore, 58 damage is deducted from the Excalibur's hit points.

4th Example: The Excalibur is struck by a Sagittarius Missile Cruiser's Long-Range Missile for 52 damage. After deducting the Excalibur's DR of 25, the attack is still dealing 27 points of damage. As a long-range missile is not an energy-based attack, the bio-adaptive armour does not mitigate the damage and 58 damage is applied to the Excalibur's hit points.

Lightning Cannon: The energy weapons that Vorlon ships and the *Excalibur* have as primary weapons are amongst the most powerful ever seen, the Shadows notwithstanding. If successful in scoring a critical hit, the lightning cannon will always cause four Catastrophic hits at random locations on the target. The discharge from the *Excalibur* firing the main cannon drains power for one minute. During this time the Victory-class ship may not change speed (either accelerate or decelerate), perform manoeuvres or fire any weapons (not even active chaff or interceptors).

Galen's Pinnacle

Galen's ship is his refuge and his freedom. His autonomy is assured by its presence and he generally has permission to dock and leave the *Excalibur* whenever he wishes – Gideon keeps a bay clear for the techno-mage's use whenever possible. In its natural form, a pinnacle appears to be a black, wedge-shaped vessel about the size of a large shuttlecraft. It can carry its pilot comfortably and has a virtually unlimited cruising range, as it operates using highly efficient power sources. Although not designed for combat, it has a surprisingly powerful weapon, an excellent sensor suite and superb stealth traits. Note that no-one but Galen (or another techno-mage at a -4 penalty to all checks) may fly his pinnacle without his presence and permission.

Gargantuan Spacecraft; hp 50; DV 16 (-4 size, +10 agility); DR 6; Spd 40; Acc 6; Dec 4; Han +6; Sensor +10; Stealth 30; Cargo 10,000 lb.; 1 Pilot

Weapons:

One Variable Weapon; Boresight; Attack +8 (targeting computer); Damage 6d8; Critical 19-20; Range 5

Pinnacle Enhancements: Enlarged interior.

Pinnacle Spells: *Detect target, greater detect target, heightened stealth.*

For those without access to *The Techno-Mages Fact Book*, Galen's ship uses the above statistics but has a Stealth score of 35, a Sensor bonus of +15 and may carry up to four passengers. The pinnacle is linked to the techno-mage and pre-programmed to collect Galen if he is close to death. Galen can also program it to perform other tasks if he so wishes.

Aurora Starfury

Huge Spacecraft; hp 30; DV 15 (-2 size, +7 agility); DR 6; Spd -; Acc 10; Dec 6; Han +6; Sensor +2; Stealth 16; SQ Afterburners, Ejector Seat, Grapple, Pivotal Thrusters; Cargo 10 lb.; 1 Pilot

Weapons:

Twin-linked Uni-Pulse Cannon; Boresight; Attack +2 (targeting computer); Damage 4d8; Critical 19-20; Range 1

Twin-linked Light Uni-Pulse Cannon; Boresight; Attack +2 (targeting computer); Damage 2d8; Critical 19-20; Range 1; Rapid Fire

Thunderbolt Starfury

Huge Spacecraft; hp 35, DV 16 (-2 size, +8 agility) or 17 with navigator (-2 size, +9 agility), DR 8; Spd 32; Acc; 12; Dec 8; Han +6 or +8 with navigator; Sensor +3; Stealth 16; SQ Afterburners, Atmospheric Capable, Ejector Seat, Grapple, Pivotal Thrusters; Cargo 10 lb.; 1 Pilot, 1 Navigator (optional)

Weapons:

Gatling Pulse Cannon; Boresight; Attack +2 (targeting computer) +3 with navigator; Damage 4d10; Critical 19-20; Range 1

Two Fighter Missile Racks; Boresight; Guidance 4; Damage 15+2d10; Critical 20; Speed 5; Fuel 3; Reloads 3

Upgraded Transport Shuttle

Gargantuan Spacecraft; hp 40; DV 9 (-4 size, +3 agility); DR 6; Spd 25; Acc 5; Dec 4; Han +3; Sensor +0; Stealth 16; SQ Afterburners, Atmospheric Capable; Cargo 2,000 lb.; 1 Pilot, 1 Co-Pilot (optional), 6 Passengers

Weapons (optional):

One Uni-Pulse Cannon; Boresight; Attack +2 (targeting computer); Damage 2d8; Critical 19-20; Range 1

Life Onboard

As the two prototype Victory-class destroyers were built by humans for the Interstellar Alliance, it can be expected that the décor and general layout is Earth-standard. The level of artificial gravity generated by the *Excalibur* is not quite of the same level as that on Earth but this does not hinder the crew in any way. For some reason, achieving a precise replica of Earth's gravity was still unachievable after three months of work – it was at this stage that Michael Garibaldi, in charge of the manufacturing process for the Victory-class destroyers, stepped in to say that enough was enough. The slightly reduced gravity would do fine. Either way, the working conditions and general environment onboard are a great leap over any other Earth Alliance vessel.

As on most Earth Alliance starships, water is at a premium. Therefore all quarters have vibe showers, including those of the officers. Water is strictly reserved for drinking and

other essential uses. Despite being widely available on many worlds, the cost of shipping water supplies up into orbit and replenishing it on a regular basis excludes it from many military budgets.

The atmosphere provided onboard the *Excalibur* is of acceptable quality, using standard units from other ships such as the EarthForce Omega-class destroyers. Despite this, the air has the stillness that is often found on starships, mainly due to the fact that unlike on planets, there is nothing to keep the air moving in a natural manner. Whilst the ship's atmosphere is cool and workable, there is nothing notable to separate this from the atmosphere of any other ship in the EarthForce fleet.

In the event of a worst-case scenario, the *Excalibur* is fitted with enough lifepods for the crew. These are scattered throughout the ship and are of simple design. They have enough supplies to last for seven days and each is fitted with an emergency beacon. With only limited thrust and manoeuvrability, the intent of these flying capsules is to put down on a nearby world, habitable if possible, and wait for pickup. These lifepods are not intended for launch in hyperspace, as any attempt to evacuate the ship in hyperspace would surely result in everyone being lost forever.

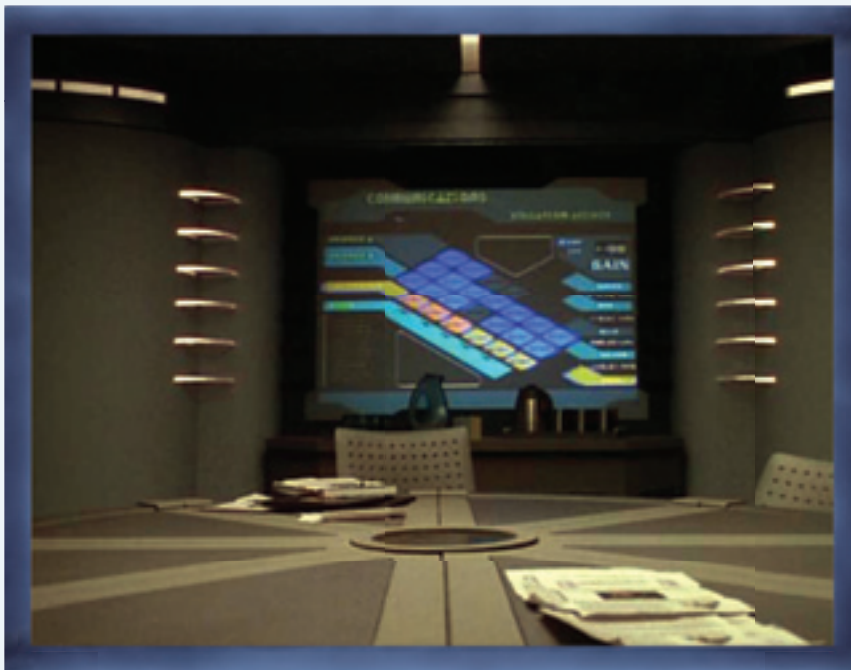
Command Deck

The bridge is based on a non-standard configuration when compared to EarthForce or Minbari models. Based on the submarine model – linear instead of circular – the majority of the elements required to command a ship are located in front of the captain's chair. There is even an information console that can drop from the ceiling, in tribute to the periscopes of ocean-going vessels many years ago.

Navigation, helm, communications and weapons stations are laid out in front of the captain's chair, allowing each station to be monitored by the captain or the designated officer of the watch. Even though the layout is non-standard, the controls have been configured to make them familiar to those who speak English and especially those who are familiar with EarthForce control and system groupings. As many of the original crew would have been human Rangers this was intentional, ensuring that interface components purchased to be used on the bridge were readily available and required no further research outlay.

Behind the captain's chair are the map room and conference room, as well as access to the rest of the ship. The conference room is outfitted in a standard military grey décor with inset lighting and a round grey table with several steel chairs. A large viewscreen fills the back wall of the room, aligned so that even this is visible from the captain's chair if the conference room is not closed and in session.

The map room, placed between the conference room and the rest of the command deck, has navigational data on



the portside wall and sensor-related information on the starboard wall. Taking pride of place in the centre of the map room is one of the most advanced holographic units within EarthForce. On par with the quality holograms that Draal on Epsilon III can produce, the unit is more than capable of producing and manipulating three-dimensional images 'on the fly'. It can also render 2D image transitions in pseudo-3D and create a real-time model of the *Excalibur* (for ascertaining damage evaluating the effects of boarding and repulsion actions).

Medical and Science Divisions

The Victory-class destroyers were not designed for scientific or exploration purposes. To allow the *Excalibur* to meet this need, adjustments have been made to some of the internal decks of the ship. Refitted shortly (and hastily) after the Drakh assault on Earth, the only remaining Victory-class prototype has several medical bays staffed by some of the best that the Earth Alliance can muster, in addition to several isolabs, much more than the *Victory* class would otherwise have carried.

Self-contained and hermetically sealed, the isolabs are designed to isolate diseased or affected entities, in particular those who have the Drakh Plague. A series of fail-safe procedures are built into the environmental control systems for the isolabs, including a flash-burn of the entire isolab that heats up from normal temperatures up to 1,200 degrees centigrade. This process is hardwired into the system should the isolab approach being compromised; even if the flash-burn kills anyone inside the isolab, it is better than subjecting the crew of the *Excalibur* to the Drakh Plague. To minimise the possibility of disease transference, the

isolabs on the *Excalibur* even have their own airlocks.

The science divisions onboard the *Excalibur* are not large but feature some of the best equipment that was available at the time of their departure from Earth. Mars corporations, many of which tried to put some corporate or political spin on the donations, supplied most of the equipment. The point was made that shareholders would not want to hear that their company had put point-scoring ahead of finding a cure to the Drakh Plague.

With such a well-equipped medical and science division, one could almost expect the area put aside for xenoarchaeology and related research to be similarly well-equipped. This is not so, for this area of the mission has been placed under the jurisdiction of IPX, which has a small office and a slightly larger laboratory put aside for its use. IPX constantly complains that its staff does not have enough space to do its work sufficiently well. EarthGov's repeated insistence to the contrary is that other areas of the ship are priorities: To modify the medical and science divisions further may require an additional refit of these areas.

Sports and Recreation

A full-size sports track is available onboard with courts for basketball, badminton and tennis, although in times of war this can be reconfigured with relative ease to house either contingents of soldiers or refugees depending on the nature of the crisis. Given the *Excalibur's* mission profile, the sports track and courts are put to good use by the crew, as it can be days or months before any of them have the opportunity for shore leave. Therefore there is an entire deck devoted to sports and recreation onboard the *Excalibur*, brightly-coloured to give the psychological effect of being outside in the sunshine on a world like Earth.

Small bars are common on the larger Earth Alliance ships, particularly on those the size of a Hyperion or larger. There are no official bars or places to consume alcohol on the Victory-class destroyer save the mess hall; with the vessel having been designed by the Minbari, with their general intolerance for alcohol combined with a preference for formality in social affairs, this should hardly come as a surprise to any visitor. The aforementioned mess hall, although small for a starship of this size, has a good atmosphere, friendly at all times. This in part due to the service staff, who know that soldiers fight on their stomachs and if they can help the scientists and doctors find a cure in their own auxiliary way, they will. Their efforts are enhanced by the décor, which is more homely and informal

than that of many other ships within EarthForce.

Someone is constantly on hand to work in the canteen, whether it is day or night. Even though an Earth-standard clock is followed, crewmembers on the night shift still need sustenance. Sometimes scientists such as Max Eilerson work in the canteen, taking a break from their offices, laboratories or quarters. Occasionally movies are shown in the mess hall and serve as a morale booster when times are hard or spirits are weak. The food offered in the mess hall is unspectacular but is well-cooked and nutritional. That said, it is slightly more adventurous than standard Earth Alliance fare, as the bean-counters back in Supply have not had the chance to cut corners on the provisions given to the *Excalibur* – yet. At times the mess hall has been known to serve up special treats on request such as popcorn but this is on a strictly unofficial basis.

Intraship Travel

With the *Excalibur* being so large there has to be a fast and efficient way for the crew to get around the ship. This is accomplished by the use of high-speed transports, that ride conduits throughout the *Excalibur*'s hull, called 'bullet cars'. Each car can hold twenty crewmembers or visitors comfortably, with 12 seated and eight standing. The bullet cars are capable of reaching all decks and in the event of an emergency a bullet car can be sidelined to let another one pass. Typically this is only done when a battle stations alert has been sounded, to allow command personnel to reach the bridge as quickly as possible. The distance from one end of the ship to the other can be covered in a matter of minutes. In an emergency a bullet car can be sealed, which is especially useful if transport tubes become compromised to the hard vacuum of space. In this case the bullet car would only have enough air to last for perhaps a few hours, enough to get the car moved to a safe point where debarkation can occur.

Support Vessel Complement

The *Excalibur* boasts twice as many Thunderbolts as Aurora Starfuries, which is an indicator of the seriousness with which EarthForce has taken the *Excalibur*'s cause. The Thunderbolt fighters are deployed by a carousel system which requires significant maintenance; an accident on a fighter carousel would be disastrous for the entire flight deck.



All other craft must launch out of the hangar bay. This includes the *Excalibur*'s complement of Aurora Starfuries, in addition to both types of shuttles and any other craft. As Auroras are not able to launch on carousels, they are often relegated to more of a support role behind their arguably more capable descendants. The *Excalibur* has a combination of shuttles, eight atmospheric and four non-atmospheric. Typically, at any time two of each type of shuttle are kept on standby, although in practice this is higher, a target set by the operations chief and the designated commander of ship operations.

The *Excalibur*'s landing system is complemented by the gravimetric power source. Typically, any damaged ship that wants to enter a landing bay is required to land at least partially under its own steam and to be stable enough to allow the passengers to get out. There have been tragic instances where a ship could not land due to fear of internal combustion, only for the passengers to die before they could evacuate the doomed vessel. The functionality built into the landing bay of the *Excalibur* consists of six restraining fields that can apply a gravitational effect to any object passing through them. The aim is to take the kinetic energy out of a ship entering the bay, even if it is damaged, so that by the time a ship has dropped to a crawl, it can be stopped and held in place by a gravitational 'wall'. This allows maintenance officers to literally cut the passengers out of the damaged ship before deciding if the vessel can be safely lowered and repaired. If there is a risk, such as of the damaged ship exploding or its weapons misfiring, then the vessel can be shunted out of the landing bay by those same gravitic force fields after the passengers have been extracted.

Crew Quarters

The larger quarters assigned to officers are pleasant affairs, around the same size as similar quarters on other EarthForce vessels and outposts. Based around a central room, commonly with a desk, a side bar and a small table, each of the larger quarters has a display screen with Gold Channel access (if available). A side room contains the sleeping quarters and bathroom. All of these quarters have soft ambient lighting designed to benefit peaceful meditation, or so the Minbari designers intended.

The smaller rooms, for the soldiers and crewmen aboard the *Excalibur*, are more comfortable and spacious than on many other military vessels. The official EarthForce line was that the design of the crew quarters was somewhat wasteful, for the preference would have been huge dormitories for lower-ranking personnel. Every crewmember onboard the *Excalibur*, even the lowest ensign charged with waste maintenance, has his own private space. Whilst nowhere the size of the captain's or guest quarters, a small room complete with a bunk bed, storage space for personal effects and an internal communications screen allows the crewmember some form of sanctuary. A shared bathroom is available for every three of the smaller crew quarters. Given the mindset of the Minbari and the fact that these vessels would originally have been crewed by the Anla'shok, the fact that every crewmember has space for personal contemplation should not come as a surprise.

The Crew of the Excalibur

Every single member of the crew of the *Excalibur*, barring some of those seconded from IPX, is dedicated to the same goal, even though their actions to accomplish it may be different. The cure to the plague has to be found no matter the cost, whether a crewmember is manning a weapons array, carrying a PPG rifle or reading the last rites to another, dying crewmember. All have valid and useful roles to play.

Shipboard Operations and Maintenance

The maintenance of a ship such as the *Excalibur* is not a task to be taken lightly. Those in charge of shipboard maintenance, often referred to as Operations, are given the task of overseeing life support systems, energy distribution, system redundancy, communications nodes and message distribution, sanitary and sewage system and many other areas. This is in addition to the various reports and information that be continually collated and fed up to the bridge's designated watch officer, who manages the ebb and flow of the ship.

The Operations division is segmented into various sectors. General Operations is the most numerous and deals with those crewmembers charged with looking after the general welfare of the ship. Administrative Operations is charged with maintaining the delivery of physical items around the ship and maintaining the records of all the other crewmembers, including handling supply-related duties. Part of its work encompasses general crew welfare, including the religious and spiritual wellbeing of those onboard, and staffing the mess room.

General Operations Crewman 2nd Level Human Worker (blue collar)

Hit Points: 10

Initiative: +0

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 10

Attacks: +2 melee or +1 ranged

Special Qualities: Blue Collar

Saves: Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +1

Abilities: Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 11

Skills: Appraise +2, Climb +2, Computer Use +4, Concentration +4, Drive +2, Knowledge (astrophysics) +3, Knowledge (structural engineering) +1, Listen +2, Profession (crewman) +7, Spot +2, Technical (all) +2*

Feats: Skill Focus (Profession (crewman)), Skill Focus (Technical (*)).

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, toolkit (electronic, engineering or mechanical as appropriate to current job)

* The particular Technical focus of a crewman depends on the individual. Choose either engineering, electronics, mechanical or space travel. That Technical skill has an additional +3 bonus due to the crewman's specific Skill Focus.

Flight Deck Operations is charged with managing the flight deck; including refuelling and rearming ships that come into its care, as well as running the complex procedures involved in traffic control. Although many of the *Excalibur's* systems are automated, there will always be a physical requirement to control the landing and departure of ships. Flight Deck Operations is also responsible for maintaining the weapons scanners at all exits to the landing bays, which is essential in ensuring that no visitor is able to sneak a functional weapon onboard. Whilst Flight Deck Operations is under the direct control of the operations chief, anything pertaining to the loading requirements and ready status of the combat craft aboard the *Excalibur* are the prerogative of an officer holding the historical rank of CAG (Commander of Air Group). This individual is the highest-ranking active pilot onboard the *Excalibur*.

The current *Excalibur* Operations Chief, Caitlyn Backrich, is capable of managing all of these ship requirements and more. An American by birth, her role as chief tech is the highest-ranking position that she has ever had and she is

determined to excel. Out of choice, Backrich has focused on her career, rebuffing romantic aspirations and efforts in order to focus on the *Excalibur* and her understanding of its technology and design. She knows that if she can get her head around the Minbari way of designing starships, it would cement her career path skyward for the next 20 years. With a lot of her job involving the collation of reports and associated data analysis, she still tries to stay hands-on, taking a personal interest in the hangar bays. In some other world she would have loved to have been a fighter pilot like the CAG, who often works alongside her.

Operations Chief Caitlyn Backrich
6th Level Human Worker (blue collar)

Hit Points: 19
Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)
Speed: 30 ft.
DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)
Attacks: +4 melee or +5 ranged
Special Qualities: Blue Collar, Salary Increase
Saves: Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +5
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 10
Skills: Appraise +6, Computer Use +9 (+11 spacecraft), Concentration +7, Drive +3, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (astrophysics) +6, Knowledge (structural engineering) +6, Listen +5, Pilot +3 (+5 spacecraft), Profession (starship engineer) +10, Spot +5, Technical (electronic) +9, Technical (engineering) +9, Technical (mechanical) +9, Technical (space travel) +14 (+16 spacecraft)
Feats: Hobby (Intimidate), Iron Will, Skill Focus (Technical (space travel)), Veteran Spacehand
Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, hand computer

Science and Medical Care

The science team headed up by Doctor Sarah Chambers comprises some particularly gifted individuals. All are in the top flights of their fields and were fortunate enough to be offworld when the Drakh attack began. Known for ability, dedication and enthusiasm to the point of obsession, the science team knows that any one of its members may hold the keys to unlocking the nanotech plague in their hands and focus is essential above everything else. In particular, Elaine Moss (Life Sciences) and Emile Horst (Microbiology) are both eminent experts and the chances of finding a cure can only be increased with these two onboard. Indeed, the smart money is on the former being nominated for a Nobel Prize. Officially (as far as EarthForce is concerned) Dr Chambers is in charge of the heads of both xenoarchaeology and linguistics. However, these areas fall under the remit of Eilerson (and thus indirectly of IPX), who will in no way admit that anyone is superior to him. In practise they share an uneasy peace, with Chambers finding Eilerson's apparent lack of humanity a great concern. In turn, Eilerson believes Chambers to be guilty of excessive sentimentalism.

General Scientist
4th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 10
Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)
Speed: 30 ft.
DV: 12 (+2 Reflex)
Attacks: +2 melee or +3 ranged
Special Qualities: Primary Area of Study (*), Use Alien Artefact
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +5
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 9, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 10
Skills: Computer Use +9, Concentration +8, Knowledge (biogenetics) +9, Knowledge (chemistry) +9, Knowledge (environmental studies) +9, Knowledge (virology) +9, Knowledge (xenobiology) +9, Listen +6, Medical +8, Profession (scientist) +11, Search +4, Spot +6, Technical (electronics) +7
Feats: Alertness, Skill Focus (Profession (scientist)), Skill Focus (*)
Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, science analysis kit

* The particular Primary Area of Study and Skill Focus of a scientist depends on the individual. Choose a Knowledge skill. That skill has an additional +5 bonus.

As part of her duties, Dr Chambers is also in charge of the medical team responsible for both the general health of the crew and any injured parties they may come across. Doctors under her care who deal with physical traumas are often referred to the Crew Welfare team to deal with any mental issues that may arise. These doctors are charged with many duties, from treating crewmembers suffering from bruises and scrapes, to other medical areas such as dentistry, to administering first aid in battle situations, with Dr Chambers very much hands-on in every capacity. These doctors also work in the hospital wing, a section of the *Excalibur's* medical capacity that allows up to 60 beds to be taken by those wounded or injured. An operating theatre is also located in this area to allow the treatment of conditions that even 23rd century medicine and procedures cannot easily fix. This operating theatre is not large but can accommodate four operations at any one time. The administrator of the hospital wing is a competent physician originally from New York named Andreas Treat. A career as a surgeon burned him out and he chose a simpler life as a physician on Mars until the call came to serve on the *Excalibur*.

General Ship's Doctor
4th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 10
Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)
Speed: 30 ft.
DV: 13 (+3 Reflex)
Attacks: +2 melee or +4 ranged
Special Qualities: Primary Area of Study (Medical), Use Alien Artefact
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +6



Abilities: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 9, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 10
Skills: Computer Use +9, Concentration +8, Knowledge (biogenetics) +9, Knowledge (biogenetics) +9, Knowledge (pathology) +9, Knowledge (virology) +9, Knowledge (xenobiology) +9, Listen +7, Medical +14, Profession (doctor) +11, Search +4, Spot +7, Technical (electronics) +7

Feats: Alertness, Skill Focus (Medical), Skill Focus (Profession (doctor)),

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, first aid kit

Linguistics and Xenoarchaeology

Unlike all other scientific areas, these particular categories of scientific research onboard the *Excilibur* are not under official EarthGov control. Xenoarchaeology can be defined as the study of (deceased) alien cultures through the analysis of the artefacts left behind and in the case of IPX, the profit that can be gained from this knowledge.

In this area IPX are considered amongst the masters. They have a long-standing involvement with EarthGov and previously with the Psi Corps. They were instrumental in the discovery of a Shadow vessel on Mars and the tracking of it to Z'ha'dum.

Onboard the *Excilibur*, Max Eilerson handles these mission concerns, primarily for IPX but indirectly for Matthew Gideon. An accomplished linguist and xenoarchaeologist, his presence was requested on the *Excilibur*, a fact that Gideon wishes to remain hidden. Underneath Eilerson in the IPX hierarchy are his two subordinates, Akiko Sogayu and Duncan Anderson. The former is a corporate creation through and through, perhaps more focused on the mindset of IPX than Max is. Anderson is similarly focused but lacks the drive and willingness to take risks that would set him

apart from a thousand other employees working for IPX. Duncan Anderson lives in the shadow of Akiko Sogayu and for the most part is happy to ride on her coattails. Both of them are well aware of the level of skill and raw aptitude which Eilerson wields but believe that he is simply too wild and uncontrollable to be a truly useful IPX employee.

The IPX personnel assigned to work on the *Excilibur* are highly skilled and all have a knack for either bending procedures or twisting the rules in IPX's favour. They rarely socialise with the rest of the crew, for the most part viewing them as idealistic and more than a touch unrealistic. As there are only a dozen IPX employees onboard, this imbalance exacerbates the problem. The rivalry between the employees of IPX and the other scientific personnel is opposed by both Eilerson and Dr Chambers, who agree that the situation is often counterproductive.

There have been occasions when the advanced equipment onboard the *Excilibur* has been made available to IPX but these occurrences can be counted on one hand. All IPX employees onboard have an impressive list of qualifications and most would put their own interests above those of any other, the situation back on Earth included. It is this quality that IPX most prizes in its employees, a culture of rivalry serving as a filter mechanism to weed out those employees who are neither devious nor supremely intelligent enough to progress. The most effective employees need to be both.

IPX Scientist

4th Level Human Scientist

Hit Points: 10

Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12 (+2 Reflex)

Attacks: +2 melee or +3 ranged

Special Qualities: Primary Area of Study (*), Use Alien Artefact

Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +7

Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 9, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Appraise +4, Computer Use +9, Concentration +8, Knowledge (alien languages) +9, Knowledge (alien life) +9, Knowledge (history) +9, Listen +4, Medical +5, Profession (scientist) +11, Search +5, Spot +4, Technical (electronics) +6, Technical (engineering) +6, Technical (mechanical) +6, Technical (space travel) +6

Feats: Iron Will, Skill Focus (Profession (scientist)), Skill Focus (*)

Standard Equipment: Science analysis kit, wrist link

* The particular Primary Area of Study and Skill Focus of a scientist depends on the individual. Choose a Knowledge or Technical skill. That skill has an additional +5 bonus.

Crew Welfare

The state of the crew's physical and mental health is important on a ship the size of the *Excalibur*. The stresses of starship life are common, especially for those who are away from their loved ones. For many onboard the *Excalibur*, this is compounded by the fact that their loved ones on Earth are under the threat of the Drakh Plague. Whilst ship's doctors cater to the physical welfare of the crew, mental welfare must also be addressed. Apart from promoting the general spiritual, religious and personal morale of the crew, the chaplaincy service also provides counselling services where needed, often liaising with those who deal in social care aboard ship in an official capacity.

Handling chaplaincy duties on the *Excalibur* is Father Dominik Zurowski, a priest hailing from Poland. Zurowski spent much of his life before entering the priesthood working for a European corporation with Centauri dealings, before disillusionment with his situation set in. Forging signatures and documents gave Zurowski a foot up the ladder and a surplus of funds in his pocket. His deceptions, of which there came to be many, came back to haunt him and Zurowski found himself imprisoned for two years, coming out a reformed character. Following his ordination, Father Zurowski was part of a successful team of priests running a church in MarsDome before being yanked onto the crew of the *Excalibur*. He answers (in an official capacity) to Operations Chief Caitlyn Backrich.

Now in his mid-forties, Father Zurowski nurses a secret heartache: Before the discovery of his true calling, when he was struggling to avoid being a corporate drone, he fathered a child outside of wedlock. The mother of his child, Eleanor, knows that he wants to help but does not need his aid or concern. Father Zurowski does not even know the name of his child and has never seen her. As both Eleanor and his daughter are Earthside, there is little that can be done to remedy the situation. Whilst happy to undertake his duties onboard the *Excalibur*, Father Zurowski firmly believes that he should return home and risk catching the plague but is torn between his ordained duty and the calling of his heart.

Father Dominik Zurowski

3rd Level Human Missionary* / 5th Level Worker (white collar)

Hit Points: 15

Initiative: +0 (+0 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 12 (+2 Reflex)

Attacks: +2 melee or +2 ranged

Special Qualities: Group Influence*, Knowledge*, Sanctuary*, White Collar

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +7

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 14

Skills: Appraise +13, Bluff +6, Computer Use +6, Diplomacy +11, Forgery +10, Gather Information +7,

Knowledge (business) +11, Knowledge (history) +11, Knowledge (religion) +11, Listen +8, Sense Motive +8, Speak Centauri, Spot +8

Feats: Alien Empathy (Centauri), Hobby (Forgery), Skill Focus (Appraise), Skill Focus (Diplomacy)

Standard Equipment: Wrist link

* From *The Earth Alliance Fact Book*. The Group Influence class feature grants Father Zurowski a +2 bonus to Diplomacy checks when addressing a group of people. The Knowledge class feature grants Father Zurowski a +1 competence bonus to all Knowledge checks (already figured into his statistics). The Sanctuary class feature allows Father Zurowski to avoid harm; as long as he himself is unarmed and peaceable, he is unlikely to be specifically targeted by combatants.

Naval Crew Complement

The Thunderbolts carried onboard the *Excalibur* have a full complement of pilots and navigators, many of these pulled from ships that were close to Earth. This includes some from Gideon's old Explorer ship but also some pilots from Captain Anderson's old ship, all of them having at least a rudimentary amount of combat experience. There is a mixture of histories between each of the pilots, some having supported Clark out of a sense of loyalty to Earth, some having supported Sheridan and Major Ryan and some having been too young to have been involved in the struggle six years before.

The Aurora pilots understandably have something of an issue with being considered a second choice in mission selections. Nevertheless, where there is no requirement to enter a planetary atmosphere or for escort duty, the *Excalibur's* Auroras are still valid choices. The fact that the Thunderbolts may be required to deploy at a moment's notice makes the Auroras a better choice for this type of work.

Carrying a large number of multi-purpose shuttles allows the *Excalibur* to ferry passengers to planetary surfaces or orbital installations with ease. These are perhaps more essential than the fighters in helping the *Excalibur* accomplish its goals, for without the shuttles the scientists and command staff of the *Excalibur* would struggle in their quest. However, shuttle pilots the galaxy over often feel like the most unappreciated members of any flight crew, for there is little glory in their work.

Excalibur Starfury Pilot

3rd Level Human Officer (pilot)

Hit Points: 12

Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 13 (+3 Reflex)

Attacks: +3 melee or +5 ranged

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (pilot), Rallying Call (1/day)

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +4

Abilities: Str 11, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10

Skills: Computer Use +5, Concentration +6, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (military) +6, Pilot +8, Sense Motive +4, Spot +4, Technical (electronics) +4, Technical (space travel) +4

Feats: Dogfighter, Evasive Action, Fire Control, Spacecraft Proficiency, Weapon Proficiency (spacecraft weapons)

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

Army Crew Complement

It is important to note that the whole of the armed presence onboard the *Excalibur* has a strong scouting reconnaissance profile. This is in part due to the need to differentiate the profile of the *Excalibur's* mission and to actively discourage the excessive participation of its soldiers in ground operations, especially if requested by other personnel. All military equipment must be small enough, or able to be disassembled into pieces small enough, to fit into atmospheric shuttles.

Recruited from many different nations, the EarthForce soldiers assigned to the *Excalibur* fall under Major Jay Kubalisk, a well-spoken officer educated at the finest military academies on the eastern coast of the United States. His father and grandfather were both military men, and Jay prides himself on doing the best he can. Polite and well-mannered, he is a credit to both his family and the institutions he attended.

Major Jay Kubalisk

6th Level Human Officer (ground forces)

Hit Points: 15

Initiative: +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 13 (+3)

Attacks: +7/+2

Special Qualities: Branch Specialisation (ground forces), Rallying Call (1/day)

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 14

Skills: Computer Use +4, Concentration +9, Diplomacy +4, Drive +4, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (military) +5, Knowledge (tactics) +5, Listen +3, Medical +4, Pilot +3, Sense Motive +6, Spot +3

Feats: Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Proficiency (heavy weapons), Weapon Proficiency (rifle)

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-7 PPG

The *Excalibur* has two companies onboard, Bear Company and Eagle Company. There is a healthy rivalry between the two, with regular competitions between them, primarily for company pride but indirectly providing bragging rights to the winners. Major Kubalisk commands the two companies well, ensuring that at a moment's notice the two can work together with no thought given to company rivalries.

The armed forces assigned to the *Excalibur* often double up as security personnel. At any one time, one platoon is on rotation within the ranks of the security personnel. The others are available for ground or general fleet operations but only at the direction of Captain Gideon through Major Kubalisk. The breakdown of armed forces onboard the *Excalibur* is as follows.

Unit	Senior Officer	Number
<i>Bear Company</i>	—	—
Tango Platoon	Sergeant Rubeski	10
Foxtrot Platoon	Sergeant Wickes	10
Charlie Platoon	Sergeant Shimoto	10
<i>Eagle Company</i>	—	—
Gold Platoon	Sergeant Anderson	10
Silver Platoon	Sergeant Crooke	10
Juno Platoon	Sergeant Schöner	10

GROPOS Sergeant

4th Level Human Soldier

Hit Points: 18

Initiative: +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 14 (+4 Reflex)

Attacks: +6 melee or +5 ranged (+6 with PPG rifle)

Special Qualities: Covering Fire, Weapons Training

Saves: Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +1

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 12

Skills: Climb +3, Concentrate +3, Hide +2, Intimidate +4, Listen +1, Medical +1, Move Silently +2, Spot +1, Survival +2, Technical (electronics) +1, Technical (mechanical) +1

Feats: Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Focus (PPG rifle).

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-PR PPG rifle

GROPOS Soldier

2nd Level Human Soldier

Hit Points: 12

Initiative: +5 (+1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)

Speed: 30 ft.

DV: 11 (+1 Reflex)

Attacks: +4 melee or +3 ranged (+4 with PPG rifle)

Special Qualities: Weapons Training

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +0

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12

Skills: Climb +3, Concentrate +3, Hide +2, Intimidate +2, Listen +1, Medical +1, Move Silently +2, Spot +1, Survival +2

Feats: Improved Initiative, Improved Unarmed Strike, Weapon Focus (PPG rifle).

Standard Equipment: EarthForce wrist link, EF-PR PPG rifle

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This is my command. I'll do whatever's necessary. If that means turning the entire galaxy upside down and shaking its pockets to see what falls out, then that's what I'll do.

I'm not subtle, I'm not pretty and I'll piss off a lot of people along the way.

But I'll get the job done.

Matthew Gideon

MGP
3351



Crusade

*A deadly plague has been loosed upon humanity's homeworld.
The only hope lies with the captain and crew of the Excalibur, a one-of-a-kind
prototype starship.
Their mission is simple: Find a cure, by any means necessary.
The year is 2267.
Earth is dying.
Join the Crusade.*

Inside You Will Find

Personalities: Full statistics for all the main characters in the series, as well as updated statistics for *Babylon 5* characters.

The Galaxy of 2267: The entire broadcast season of *Crusade* is detailed within these pages, as well as the preceding movie *A Call to Arms* and descriptions of the three 'lost tales' never filmed. Each episode contains rules for new events and advice on how to integrate fresh themes into your own campaign.

Rules Additions: *Crusade* fully details the Thieves' Guild, doomsday cults, the Bureau of Telepathic Integration (including the dreaded Mr Jones), Zanderians, a selection of new feats and a new skill, Gamble. There is also a chapter detailing the strange and dangerous artefacts of 2267, from the immense Shadow Death Cloud to the enigmatic yet equally dangerous Apocalypse Box. Last, but by no means least, comes the statistics for *Excalibur* itself, describing all its important personnel and capabilities.



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