

SESSIONS 12-15: THE SINISTER SIGNAL

A summary of Sessions Twelve through Fifteen of *Empyrean Skylark*. "**George Aroden**," our Envoy and Leader, is played by Rog. "**Brelkith Bonebreaker**," our Soldier and Big Guy, is played by Travis. "**Thresca**," our Technomancer and Smart Guy, is played by Blake T. "**Flicker II**," our Mechanic and awesomely awkward Chick, is played by Fweeba/Joe. "**Thysella Tethris a.k.a. Thys a.k.a. Codename: Jack**" is our free-spirited Pilot and Lancer, played by Velvet. This summary includes in-session and inter-session play.

Previously, on *Empyrean Skylark*...

After their wild adventures on the planet Castrovel, Team Skylark found a warm and above-all-profitable welcome aboard the world-ship known as the *Idari*.

The team were pleased to discover that views for their media-stream had reached an audience of more than a million for the first time. They delivered the now-dormant Orrery of Tranquil Harmony and their cargo of saerincense as contributions to the funerary rites of a well-respected former Starfinder, Yanak, to whom the team had a most extraordinary connection.

The great world-ship had made a two-century journey to reach the Pact Worlds, but showed little sign of wear and tear. It was an elegantly designed oasis in the depths of space, its inner core a lush paradise that provided food, light and green spaces for the multitude of citizens who made their homes in the surrounding decks. At the terminus of this great ship's park, near its artificial sun and long-quiescent motivator drives, lay Hub City, the *Idari's* open-air town and centre of its great public rituals.

Were it not for the way the landscape curved upward into the middle distance, Hub City's plaza would seem like many another plaza in a town on many another world. Almost. The weight of tradition in that place, carried and nurtured from a dying world like a precious seed, was palpable. It was hung around with the banners of great Houses as the Skylarkers returned one of their own to them in a most unusual form.

Yanak's relations told long and winding stories of his life that carried a ritual air about them, standing over the coffin that contained no body. The clergy of Talavet, the Kasatha goddess of storytelling and tradition, had set his unquiet remnant at liberty by their own methods the very hour he was brought home; elaborate coffee service rituals and politesse had clothed their quiet anger at the illicit artifact of Eoxian design that had held him.

As their new adventure was set to begin, George, Brelkith, and Flicker II finished delivering their role in the funerary rite: the Resonant Lament. After a stirring oratory from George, Brelkith's saxophone wailed plaintively alongside Flicker's perhaps... *slightly* off-key rendition of the dirge? A few polite winces could be seen on the faces of the mourners, but it was the thought that counted.

The presiding Solarian, a Priest of Talavet named Malam, looked properly appreciative and thanked the team for bringing the soul of his friend to rest. He had assigned rooms for them in the Stellar Tower Hotel on the Legation Deck.

People & Places, Creatures & Artifacts.

THE LEGATION DECK. Cozy home-away-from-home for offworlders on the *Idari*.

STASIA ESTIN. Android and Priestess of Triune.

SETTLERS FROM SENZENI NA. A distressed group of petitioners.

ILSKAREN LAR. A rarely-seen living Elebrian from Eox, Honorary Consul of the Eternal Convocation of Bone Sages to the *Idari*.

BIG LOLO. Fast-talking Ysoki and proprietor of *Big Lolo's All-in-One*.

BLOBBO. Big Lolo's tame Assembly Ooze, produces most of his stock.

EK-AK-ONO. Big Lolo's business partner, an enigmatic anacite.

TICO VEYAN. Honorary Consul for Absalom Station, and a former Knight of Golarion.

THE LOIAN EXPANSE. Just two degrees along the mid-point circumference of the Diaspora, but still vast.

THE TF2 PSYCHOTRON. Serious *Science!* from Thresca and Flicker II.

RIVER'S-END CLUSTER. Sarcesian homesteads surrounding a creche world, with a small trade center and a few settlers of other species.

THE REFUGE. A cluster of planetoids being assembled into the nucleus of a future android home-world.

RELAY X112. A communications station of the Refuge.

SENZENI NA. A small android settlement that recently entered the Expanse as part of a year-long journey to join the Refuge.

THE SCORE. Enigmatic asteroid cluster long thought abandoned.

ALKAROTH. Nearest of the largest asteroids of the Score to Senzeni-Na's flight path... and the recent source of a mysterious signal.

SS LIGHT OF THE PEREM. Small Sarcesian explorer encountered in the Score.

SS MOTHER OF INVENTION. Myserious hostile encountered in the Score.

THE TOKARAN CONCESSION. An in-development mining project of the Ulrikka Clanholdings. "**MISKO VENTRELLA**," **DWARVEN "PROSPECTOR."** A "prospector" with old ties to George Aroden and a possible place among the top ten Worst Undercover Agents of all time.

Part One: An Idyllic Interlude.

Offworlders on the *Idari* had residential space, and a series of small honorary consulates, on the Legation Deck. There were a few thousand of them at any one time, and while pleasant and park-like in a limited sort of way, quarters were nevertheless relatively cramped as settlements go.

Nevertheless the team had a spacious penthouse suite at the hotel and there was room in a Florist's Garden for Thys and George to take a walk and discuss the brief contact she'd managed to have with her family on Castrovel... and the resulting aid she'd rendered to an invalid former Xenodruid there. On the whole, the deck was a safe and orderly place to pass a little time and plan the *Skylark's* next move.

Shopping was definitely on the menu. The commercial heart of the deck was a combination general store, infosphere cafe and cafeteria by the name of Big Lolo's All-in-One, run by and named after an enterprising Ysoki whose partners were an enigmatic anacite and a tame Assembly Ooze named Blobbo. Thanks to the third partner in the venture, Big Lolo's had a surprisingly solid selection of goods, armour and augmentations. They also had... well, they had NutriPaste? Lots of flavours of NutriPaste. And some grubs which Thresca reported were really quite delicious.

It turned out Big Lolo – the smallest Ysoki any of the team had yet seen – had his unusually large ear to the ground and knew the *Skylark* was carrying some statuettes, ancient artifacts of the Cult of Magdh on Castrovel. He knew these were of considerable value... but more than this, that he could connect the team with a potential buyer who could offer them five times (George estimated he was low-balling this) what the artifacts would get on the academic market. Of course all Lolo asked was a *small* finder's fee.

The team tabled this offer for the time being as they dealt with other parties. An android woman caught sight of Flicker II and looked at her with a strange sort of recognition. Not the kind of second-hand fandom the she was accustomed to seeing from Glimmer fans, the devotees of her body's former pop-Icon occupant. It turned out this woman was the local deacon of Triune, named **Stasia Estin**, and that she sought to arrange a meeting between the Skylarkers and another party in her care. Curious, Flicker II accepted and set up the meeting for later that day.

George Aroden meanwhile had an invitation to drinks from the Honorary Consul of Absalom Station, one **Tico Veyan**, who was a former Knight of Golarion eager to trade stories of old times. The *Skylark* Captain's journey there took him by the Plaza of the Divinities, a small shrine complex to the Big Five deities (Sarenrae, Abadar, Oras, Pharasma and Triune) surrounded by the small kiosks of a kind of "food court of faith" where worshipers could seek guidance from deacons or artificial personalities

dedicated to most of the Pact Worlds' major deities. He stopped and made an offering at Iomedae's rather small and tacky but nevertheless satisfyingly sacral shrine.

Arriving at the legation, George kept a straight face and an upright bearing through a slightly... over-friendly welcome from Veyan's attractive young Vercite wife. Presently Veyan, a still fit and handsome man with a retired Knight's bearing and easy manner with George, appeared and welcomed him as he poured them some brandy.

It turned out he had more than just a pleasurable drink in mind: he also wanted to impart a word of warning to George. There were rumours of a group of androids having come to the Legation Deck, in search of help with a certain situation out in the Diaspora to do with a place called the Score. Veyan himself had captained the famous *KSS Immortal Spirit* in rousting a pirate's nest out there twenty years ago, and counselled George to have a care if travelling there: the region was infested with hazards and a political powderkeg to boot. He recommended that if a trip to that place proved necessary, George should get in touch with an old Knightly informant in the *Tokaran Concession*, a prospector by the name of "**Misko Ventrella.**" who might be able to offer further guidance.

That was it for business talk. They passed a few hours in reminiscing and chatting before George was on his way again. Future adventures for the team were taking shape.

Part Two: Senzeni Na.

The team gathered at the Shrine of Triune to meet Stasia Estin and her charges, a group of distressed-looking settlers from a community called **Senzeni Na** in the Diaspora.

The settlers were more than just distressed. It was clear after a short while of talking to them that they were under the active influence of something that was afflicting their minds in an agonizing way.

Senzeni Na had begun a year ago – after years of deliberations and debate – a journey to join **The Refuge**, a great Android Liberation Front project to build a homeworld for androids out of the planetesimals of the Diaspora. (It turned out that *Glimmer I* was actually known to the settlers as someone who played a pivotal role in proposing this decision; apparently Flicker's predecessor in her body had enthusiasms she hadn't guessed.) Within the last month it had entered a region called the **Loian Expanse**, and begun receiving a sinister signal from a supposedly-abandoned asteroid cluster called **The Score**. From one asteroid in particular, called Alkaroth.

They played the signal back briefly for the team, though the settlers could not endure it long. It was the sound of an archaic music box plinking over the sibilant whispers of a young girl's voice speaking in an unknown language. When Thresca cast Comprehend Languages, the speech resolved into a weird and vaguely threatening cycling message whose main thrust seemed to be “we will make you understand.”

George had to soothe the settlers' spokesman, who revealed that the message was more than just radio; it was psychic, too, and constantly replaying in their heads even now. George's diplomatic talents were able to calm the man down and he thanked the Captain as the team accepted the mission, proffering a sack full of random bits and bobs of wealth the people of Senzeni Na had pulled together as a down payment, with more to come from the Refuge itself; but George and Brekith both gallantly refused to take the money of obviously not well-to-do pioneers, saying that doing them a good turn was enough.

With the team's next mission in hand, all that was left was to pay a follow-up visit to **Big Lolo** and see about his offer of a lucrative buyer for the statuettes from the Temple of Magdh. The team accepted his terms and he directed them to the Eoxian legation, a larger pavilion decorated in rich, dark colours and inhabited by a juvenile corpsefolk squire and his mistress – a living Elebrian, surprisingly enough, named **Ilskaren Lar**, who told them that a necrovite named **Kemrodor** would offer the team forty thousand credits for the statuettes upon delivery to Eox after their present mission. It was an offer they could not refuse.

As the team was leaving her presence, Lar commented curiously on Thresca's scattergun, whose decorations she associated with an old and long-lost faction of the Corpse Fleet known as the Seventh Fleet, a faction she identified as known to be rogue even among that already-rogue nomadic navy. She was fascinated to discover that the team had encountered someone from the Seventh Fleet in the Pact Worlds, and George was mildly unnerved as he clearly saw the wheels of schemes – though what schemes it was hard to tell – turning in the Elebrian's acute mind. But that was a matter for another day. For now, the *Skylark* had a job to do.

Part Three: Entering the Loian Expanse.

The *Skylark* undertook a journey of several days to reach the Loian Expanse. As they entered range, the crew tried transmitting to various interested parties within range, announcing their presence and their intentions.

The Refuge – through communications Relay X112 – gave a friendly welcome and thanked the *Skylark* for coming to the aid of their newest community. Communicating with Senzeni Na was considerably less edifying: it elicited mostly silence and the distant sounds of fighting, clear signs that the madness there had escalated.

It was the communication with the dwarven “prospector” **Misko Ventrella** that proved the most interesting. It turned out that this was a Knight of Golarion and a former commanding officer of George's: **Captain Kelvin Alestorm**, now apparently undercover (despite having clearly limited acting abilities) as a miner on the lonely, isolated rock. The team registered George's surprise at seeing him, and seeing him that way: he was “one of the last true paladins” in George's estimation and deception ran against his nature.

“Ventrella” sent the *Skylark* a chart partially mapping some of the hazards in the Score and on the approach to Alkaroth. It proved to have an encrypted message embedded in its code, which communicated that George's old ship – Alestorm's ship – the *KSS Lucerne Hammer* was “on assignment” and that cautioned the team to proceed with extreme caution.

That message was not lost on anyone aboard the *Skylark* as the ship embarked for the Score. The sinister signal from Alkaroth was already beginning to assail the team as Thresca and Flicker II – mindful of the fate already befalling Senzeni Na – embarked on an effort to jury-rig some kind of device that could protect the team's minds from whatever lurked on the asteroid. One spectacular montage of *Science!* later, they had created a backpack unit called the **TF2 Psychotron** which would provide bonuses to Will saves for those within a range of 30 feet. It was not a complete solution... but it might provide the team with a much-needed edge, or at least a solid chance.

With the Psychotron in operation and the sinister signal ahead, the *Empyrean Skylark* entered the hazardous asteroid field called the Score.

Part Four: The *Light of the Perem*.

Despite the team's precautions, the Signal began to take a toll as they entered the Score. Brekith and Flicker II awoke with mysterious wounds on their bodies and a strange sense of dislocation sweeping over them. There were other pressing problems, too: the ship encountered a radioactive magnetic storm that seemed drawn to her, glitching systems dangerously as the engineer fought to stay ahead of the damage.

Then they detected another vessel, approaching on a vector out of Alkaroth. It was a badly damaged Pact Worlds scout ship broadcasting wildly on all frequencies: “*No! Won't go back! You can't make me!*” Thresca's scans revealed it to be the *S.S. Light of the Perem*, registered out of River's-End and with almost all of its systems malfunctioning... except for weapons, which she promptly fired on the *Skylark*. The team's returning fire blew her to fragments, but they were able to detect the ship's black box floating in the wreckage.

Brelkith went EVA to retrieve the black box, unfortunately at just the same time as the magnetic storm came sweeping back in again. The effects of the Signal came clearer to him as he found himself hearing a beautiful, sublime music as he looked into the void of space. He jerked himself free of its influence just in time to retrieve the box on his third attempt, damaging his armour as the storm jolted the ship.

The replay of the ship's log revealed it had been made by a young, naive Sarcesian from River's End who had apparently joined some kind of treasure-hunting expedition – brokered by outsiders – to Alkaroth.

Entry #1. 12-15-16.

"I met someone today who's unlike anyone I've ever met. Cousin Qemry took me to see them. I've glimpsed outsiders on Alpha before but I've never seen them up close. Female humans have a certain beauty, and a Dragonkin from Triaxus! Wow!

"I will have to be very sceptical about all this, though. A big payday hanging in space in easy reach of my childhood home? It should be too good to be true... but Cousin Qemry is excited and he usually knows the score. So to speak."

Entry #2. 12-21-16.

"Well, it's crazy, but we're doing it. Cousin Qemry and me are 'borrowing' the Light and we're heading out to make our fortunes. I can't believe this day is finally come! Uncle isn't speaking to me but I'll show him. We're going to change the galaxy and put River's End on the map starting right here."

Entry #3. 1-2-17.

"That was one hell of a ride, I don't mind telling you. We've been practicing the route all week. Uncle still won't answer my messages. He'll come around soon, though, and I'll have some stories when we get out of here."

"The real deal? M. Nightingale tells us the payout here might be ten times what we expected! We're breaking through to the sub-level today, so fingers crossed."

Entry #4. 1-12-17.

"Whatever they triggered down there is going to get annoying pretty soon. It's hard to sleep. And it's... kinda creepy."

Entry #5. 1-19-17.

"Something's wrong with Cousin Qemry. He won't talk to anybody anymore. Keeps looking off into space and saying 'Can't you hear it? Can't you understand?'"

"I... I don't like this. I've never been afraid of my Cousin before. I think this was a mistake. I want to leave."

Entry #6. 1-25-17.

"Have not slept fifteen days now. Everything hurts."

Entry #7. 2-3-17.

"The others are getting weird - Cousin Qemry no longer coherent - that music is in my head all the time - M. Nightingale wont see anyone - we are in trouble here why wont anyone admit it - we have to get out of this terrible place"

Entry #8. 2-8-17.

"They are kiling each other the one on the ship wont answer I have to walk the void its beautiful but it scares me that its so beautiful kuzin qemry is gone and im gonna try an live thru this becuz Im trying to get back home an say Im so sorry uncle I should have listen to you"

Entry #9. 2-15-17.

"I

"I think I understand

"oh no

Part Five: The Mother of Invention.

The Skylark forged onward, coming to the edge of the unusually dense asteroid field fringing near-Alkaroth space, the Signal continuing to mess with the team's minds as some began to hear the voices of their crewmates alternately trying to tempt them to look at the Void and hear its beautiful music... and viciously mocking and berating them if they refused to give into the temptation. Brelkith found himself locking away his weapons and handing George the key to the locker, fearful that he might hurt his companions if his sanity failed, and even asked his shipmates to tie him up if it began to look like he was losing his grip. They declined – and in the event, Brelkith seemed to improve after he made an effort to meditate and focus himself – but it was clear they had to reach the source of the Signal soon.

The little ship found herself buffeted as she wended her way into what one might call a Zone of Danger. Eventually they detected another vessel lurking in a pocket of tranquility amid the clashing, colliding asteroids. Its presence was not a comfort. Identified as the *Mother of Invention* – and at least matching the *Skylark's* shields and weapon loadout – it was the source of a chillingly detached voice that asked the crew whether they “understood.”

Bluffing his way through, George answered in the affirmative, and the *Mother of Invention* proceeded to “escort” the *Skylark* toward Alkaroth. Whoever was aboard the vessel seemed to grow suspicious, though, when the *Skylark* accidentally moved in the wrong direction and was buffeted by another mini-asteroid swarm. The ship re-verified the *Skylark's* understanding and then switched “escort” directions: a move that turned out to be a test, because when the 'Lark followed suit, the mysterious ship promptly turned and attacked.

A harrowing space battle followed that saw powerful exchanges of fire between the *Skylark's* linked coil guns and the *Mother's* advanced plasma torpedoes as the two ships swooped and whirled around each other in a search for advantage. The *Mother* seemed to know the asteroid field better... but the 'Lark had the brilliant teamwork of her crew and Thysella Tethris at the helm, and eventually she outmaneuvered the *Mother* and blew her out of the stars.

She had sustained no small amount of damage in the process, though. The team reluctantly decided to take no chances, they had to get out of the asteroid field and repair the ship before they proceeded to Alkaroth.

The repairs took ten hours and virtually all the remaining UPB's on board. Flicker II began to feel the effects of the Signal and Thys began to hear voices; Brister Fen proved to be in a parallel state and would have had to be literally pried out of his locked media suite but for a brilliant bit of reverse psychology from George. The mission to cut off the Signal was becoming more urgent by the minute, simply if the team was going to survive exposure.

Part Six: The Abandoned Pirate Base.

The *Skylark* arrived at Alkaroth. A maze of vast tunnels into its interior confronted the crew, and even an increasingly confused-seeming Thys was equal to the task of navigating the ship, under George and Thresca's direction, through the maze and to the likeliest point of embarkation, a docking airlock hidden deep within the planetesimal as befitting a pirate anchorage. And maybe something else. The team docked and disembarked, insisting that Brister Fen and Mister Cricket come with them (they didn't fully trust him on the ship alone).

They found that the base's artificial gravity was disabled – if it had ever had any – and it had only the dimmest lighting as befit auxiliary power. Pulling themselves along its abandoned corridors in zero-gravity, with Thys babbling curiously and randomly repeating the last thing that was said to her, they explored a space that seemed largely-abandoned... but with signs of violence and madness everywhere.

Someone had scrawled Sarcisian writing all over the walls of almost every tunnel and chamber using what looked like waste food-matter. Cloud of dark crystals floated in various places that Brelkith eventually recognized as frozen blood. The team encountered a shock trap in the base's control chamber – marked, they later discovered, with subtly scrawled symbols written in dust and grease that looked to Thresca's eye like the iconography of the Cult of the Devourer – and found and disabled a much nastier trap on the main reactor whose explosives they retrieved for their own use. They found theatres, with seats mag-locked to the floor, where propaganda movies related to Jadnura (old First Seeker of the Starfinders) were running on thirty-second loops.

In one of the northernmost chambers they discovered that the scrawled writing had switched to another language, perhaps infernal, which Thresca's Comprehend Languages spell rendered into the cyclical phrasing of the Signal, now with certain characters emphasized and with Sarcisian numerals written over those letters along with the phrase: “Yes! Thank you my friend!” As if someone had experienced a Eureka moment. Thresca copied down what appeared to be a complicated numerical code.

As the team systematically searched and cleared the base's ominously cold, silent and empty rooms, they finally came upon a chamber occupied by a pair of nanite vats. The corpse of a large Dragonkin floated here – a nasty wound from weapons fire partially patched on one arm, with necrotic-looking veins spreading out from it – and as Brelkith moved to search him the being abruptly animated... and attacked.

Fumbling in the zero-gravity environment and struggling to bring their full power to bear on their antagonist, the team were further hampered by Thys' confusion: at one point Thresca found herself stabbed by her and had to dispel her weapon's magic. Brelkith meanwhile (with Brister Fen, who'd blundered into fellow teammates at one point, now harnessed on his back) engaged the creature with direct support from Flicker. Seemingly undead in some way, the Dragonkin was still a formidable opponent and wound up dousing Brelkith, Brister and Flicker with a cloud of its acid breath even after being thoroughly carved up by the mighty Veski.

George finally managed to reach some remnant of a mind in the creature and to get it to stop attacking. But there was not enough consciousness left to question or really communicate with, and with regret, the *Skylark* Captain finally euthanized it with his

plasma revolver. Shaken and in some cases badly hurt – Brister had gotten a good acid searing and Thresca had to bind Flicker's wounds as the Signal's shouting grew louder – the team regathered themselves and prepared to push on. It was past time to finish this.

Part Seven: The Hidden Heart of Alkaroth.

This is Session Fifteen. This part of the adventure was played with Travis autopiloting George, because Rog apparently loves his Mom more than the game... the traitor.

Leaving the quiescent form of the ill-fated Dragonkin behind them, the team moved out toward the still-unexplored central chamber of the abandoned pirate base. As they entered what looked like a large cargo-loading bay, they spied the floating corpses of two deceased Sarcesians near what looked like a lift to the lower levels. And as they moved in, Mister Cricket – clambering along the walls with an agility so pronounced that it was almost like he'd been statted as a hover-drone – was the first to spy a pair of heavily-armed and armoured Sarcesians lurking on the cargo bay's far wall. Their void-flight wings glowed as they moved to the attack.

As Brelkith surged forward to engage the Sarcesians, the team abruptly found themselves in two battles at once. The first was against the Sarcesians, who had a strange clarity in their eyes... and the second was against Thys, who had that same strange clarity in her eyes as she wheeled around and pulled herself into position to stab Thresca once more. The Signal had captured her mind, and she was doing her level best to show her teammates the sublime beauty of the Void that she had seen. If she worked hard enough, they would Understand.

Brelkith dealt with the Sarcesian ambush with his customary efficiency. Thys was by far the greater threat, especially given the team's reluctance to really cut loose at her. She came near to killing Flicker with a devastating trick attack – she was just as agile in Zero-G – before Brelkith battered her with a pair of powerful blows and Flicker left her in a coma with a well-placed plasma shot.

The price of victory had been steep. The party was significantly weakened without Thys, Flicker was badly wounded, nobody was at one hundred percent... and they had yet to reckon with the source of the Signal. Even as Thresca opened the code-locked lift to the asteroid's sublevels whose key had been extracted from the Signal by their mysterious wall-scrawler, the group chewed over the problem.

Finally they arrived at a solution. One which took some persuading of Brister Fen, but a solution nevertheless. They would wire Mr. Cricket up with the explosives they had found earlier, and send him into the sub-level to reconnoitre... and perhaps to destroy the source of the Signal at last.

The little stealth droid embarked on its mission, finding the sublevel to be a complex likely carved out of the asteroid a long time ago, long before any pirates came here at any rate. It found itself in a circular chamber with several exits and a door with a very overt Cult of the Devourer symbol carved on it, something much more definitive than the symbols they had seen subtly marking traps on the upper level.

It turned out that the overtness of this symbol may have meant it was simply a more blunt warning to intruders, because Mr. Cricket did in fact trip an explosive trap on his way through the door, but the drone survived it and proceeded into a larger chamber. Into the heart of Alkaroth itself.

The droid found that a large Devourer Cult symbol was worked into the flagstones here and that there was a vest more than ten feet across, nursing some kind of organic / cybernetic brain that was likely powering the Signal. The holographic form of a human woman flickered to life as the drone clambered across the ceiling, protected by an Invisibility spell from Thresca that also defended it against the scrutiny of another Sarcesian – a decidedly mad-looking one – that came searching into the chamber in response to the tripped trap.

The pit was protected by a clear diamond lattice covering. Mister Cricket accidentally hit on a way to open the covering when he accidentally drew the Sarcesian's fire while exploring a control console to the aft of it. A plasma rifle blast from the mad creature opening the protective casing and Mister Cricket exploited the opening... destroying himself in a huge explosion that disrupted the Signal, to extent. But did not end it.

It became clear at this point that the team, what was left of them, was going to have to go into the belly of the beast themselves. The Signal rose to a screeching pitch at this point, confusing Flicker and Thresca's mental states; Brelkith, with disjointed assistance from the technomancer, managed to slot a spell gem into their spellthrower-equipped scattergun and fire it at them, temporarily removing the condition from at least one of them. Flicker, George and Thresca then proceeded toward the final confrontation.

They prevailed in a battle where they received some surprise assistance from one Nightingale, the treasure hunter who was all that was left of her ill-fated expedition and had been surviving down at this level since the Signal began. Brelkith carved up and beheaded the last Sarcesian and the whole team hammered away at the vat of evil whose holographic defender blasted back at them with various forms of magic. It was George who dealt the final blow. The team had sacrificed heavily to achieve it... *but the nightmare of the Sinister Signal was over.*