

Twilight Season

Fathomless Campaign Episode 3

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Introduction

Twilight Season is a mission for a Gamemaster (GM) and 3-8 players. The pre-generated characters may be used, but the players can just as well create their own characters. To run this adventure, the GM should be familiar with the mission itself, as well as the *Star Trek Adventures* roleplaying rules.

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To play, you will need the following:

- At least two 20-sided dice (d20) per player, and several d6s to serve as Challenge Dice
- A set of chips or tokens for Determination
- A set of chips or tokens for Threat
- A set of chips or tokens, or some other manner of marker, for group Momentum
- The pre-generated character sheets, and a starship sheet
- The *Star Trek Adventures* core rulebook

Synopsis

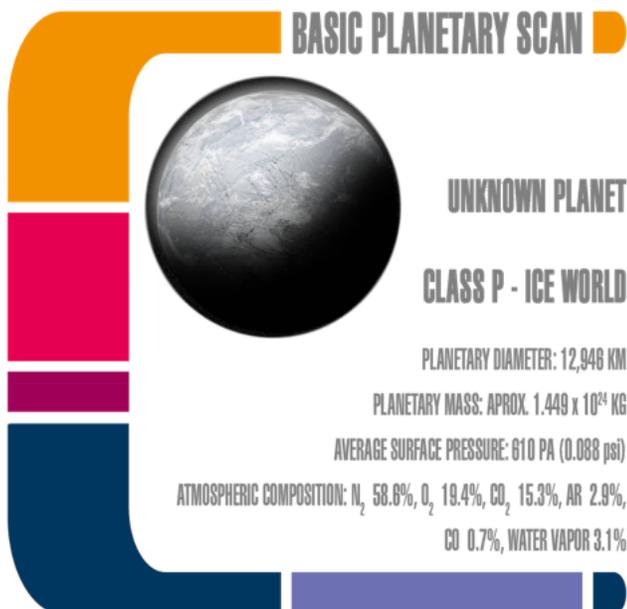
While further investigating the fringes of the Magna Oscura Nebula, the crew happens to witness a lonely planet emerging from said nebula. Initial scans reveal the planet to be a class P ice world with a thin but breathable atmosphere and surface temperatures of averagely about -90° Celsius. Detail scans, however, show remains of large cities scattered all over the planet. The scans also show the wreckage of a crashed starship of unknown origin. Furthermore, there seems to be an active energy source in the ruined city next to the shipwreck.

After beaming down in environmental suits to investigate whether the energy source could mean survivors from the crash, the crew finds out that the ship much resembles those of their new alien friends, the Cavna, but seems to be a somewhat older spaceframe, and has been lying here for decades. The energy source can be found in a ruined building in the city. When activated, it points the crew to another place in a nearby mountain ridge, where they might find out about the fate of the planet.

Once there, the crew finds the resting place of the long gone Ra'asku'ulh people, an extinct ancient culture that got hurled out of their native star system by a natural catastrophe. Trying to survive using cryogenic hibernation, they build a huge station inside the mountains that in the end turned into a giant tomb when, unrealized by the people, their great sleeping machine failed, killing them all.

While finding this out, the crew gets tracked and attacked by robotic guards that in no way resemble those machines the Ra'asku'ulh left behind. What happened to them? And can the crew stop these twisted machines to escape alive and with the knowledge of what happened here?

The GM begins the mission with **2 Threat** per player character.



Scene 1: A Rogue Planet

A World Without a Sun

Once everyone is ready, hand a copy of the following to the Player playing the Captain to read aloud:

Captain's Log—We have been sent to the fringes of the mysterious Magna Oscura Nebula to gather more information without endangering the ship. So far, a mix of focused long-range scans and deep space probes has revealed that the strange composition of the nebula has a worse effect on our equipment than initially thought. While the first batch of probes seemed to simply disappear into thin air, an adjustment to the sensor telemetry showed that the material of the equipment actually dissolved into nothingness. We will have to proceed our further investigation with the utmost caution.

On the bridge, the captain and crew discuss the situation. Their preliminary encounter with the **cryptic matter nebula** last episode yielded some data, but now they must gather more.

With the nebula dissolving the space probes, it is impossible to gather enough information about the nebula's composition, to fully understand why exactly the probes are breaking apart. Equipping the probes with shields may help with the problem, as well as adding some kind of ablative armor. However, both defensive measures only extend the life of the probes for just a few minutes, which may be just long enough to get more clues.

Preparing a probe either way is a **Control + Engineering** task with a **Difficulty** of 2. One character may assist. This Task is resolved after the probe is launched, so players will not know how effective their enhancements are until it is "too late". For every unsuccessful Task, add one Threat.

When shot into the nebula, the probe immediately starts transmitting data. At first, the added defense seems to work properly, but the incoming data starts to deteriorate. To get the most out of it, the ship's sensors have to be used with **Reason + Science** against a **Difficulty** of 2, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**. A successful Task reveals that the nebula is mainly composed of **cryptic matter** as expected.

However, while still reading and interpreting the data from the probes, which basically reveals nothing more than the composition of the nebula and some details on how the probe itself is dissolved by the cryptic matter, the long range sensors reveal a single planet leaving the nebula only a few hours away at cruising speed. Even more puzzling than the rogue planet itself, is the fact that it seems to be totally unharmed by the devastating substance that just a few seconds ago completely dissolved the ship's scientific probe.

There is, of course, only one thing to do: investigate. An initial long range scan is a **Reason + Science** task, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**. The base **Difficulty** for the Task is 1, however, there are some distortions coming from the nebula, raising the **Difficulty** to 2.

A successful scan reveals all information given on the scan readout on page 1 of this mission. Any Momentum obtained from this roll may be spent for further information, like:

- **Where did the planet come from?** It seems to be a rogue planet that somehow lost its original star system. Such planets are quite rare, and usually some major catastrophe hurled them out of their system. If

they monitor the planet's movement, the characters can use the ship's computer to calculate its flight path.

- **Are there any signs of life?** The sensors cannot scan such details at the current distance.
- **Why is there so little mass, when the planet is slightly larger than Earth?** From this distance, the sensors cannot penetrate the outer crust of the planet. Maybe it is hollow, maybe it is just an illusion...

Feel free to come up with any more or less plausible information for the player's questions, as long as you do not give away too many details that can only be obtained by a detailed close range scan from an orbit around the planet.

There is no problem in plotting an interception course, and no task is needed to fly to the planet. However, if you want the crew to gather some momentum for the scans ahead, you can have the conn officer roll a **Control + Conn** task with a **Difficulty** of 0. All successes can be banked as Momentum, up the maximum of 6.

Once in orbit around the planet, a detailed scan can be initiated. This is the same task roll as before: **Reason + Science**, assisted by the ship's **Sensors + Science**, versus a **Difficulty** of 2.

A successful scan reveals that:

- The sensors cannot penetrate the planet's outer crust.
- The entire surface is covered with ice.
- The average surface temperature is around -90° Celsius.
- The atmosphere would be breathable for most humanoids, but is very thin.
- The surface pressure is similar to that of Mars.

Spending Momentum, the crew can further find out that:

- There are signs of previous life on the surface (various larger cities in ruins).
- The wreck of a ship is located in the outskirts of one such city.
- There is a faint energy reading in the vicinity of the crashed ship.

This should lead to the crew sending an away team to the planet to further investigate their findings. The away team should wear environmental suits.

GM Guidance: *Even if players spend on Momentum learning the planets' mysteries, as they beam down or are about to land a shuttle, they will spot the ruins. This should trigger an interest to further investigate, and possibly give them a new try at scanning at reduced Difficulty, as they can now pinpoint their sensors.*



Scene 2: Ancient Debris

Investigating the Shipwreck

Captain's Log, Supplemental: We stumbled across a rogue planet that emerged from the nebula. It is an ice world with signs of a lost civilization. As if this was not strange enough, our sensors cannot penetrate the planet's surface. The computer calculates it far too light, and there is an energy reading on that dead world, right next to a shipwreck that according to its material signatures seems to be of Cavna origin. We will send down an away team to unveil these mysteries...

Beaming down to the planet is not as easy as usual. Something causes a disturbance in the transporter system. This is no major problem and can easily be compensated for. However, it is noticeable.

On the planet's surface, the away team appears next to the shipwreck. Everything is immersed in a dim twilight, created by the faint light of the stars, reflected from the planet's frozen surface.

The ship's hull is partly dissolved, partly simply destroyed from the impact. The design appears to be an older version of the Cavna ships the crew have encountered so far. It has been lying here for at least several decades, but has been preserved quite well by the icy environment.

The crew can enter the ship and find out that it is indeed Cavna. However, they find neither the remains of the crew nor any trace of what might have happened to them.

GM Guidance: *There is a certain chance that your players will try to solve the Cavna riddle. Should they insist on investigating every last nook and cranny of the shipwreck, you can have them roll an **Insight + Engineering** task with a **Difficulty of 3**. A success will allow the crew to transfer some energy from a tricorder or phaser into a Cavna databank. They can then download the computer log of the ship and have the color patterns of the last few entries translated by a tricorder.*

When the crew is done investigating the shipwreck, they can follow the faint energy reading into the city.

Who Left the Lights On?

What happened to the Cavna ship?: *About 40 years ago, the crew of this prototype exploration vessel stumbled over the rogue planet, much like the player characters did. After it emerged from the nebula, they closed in to investigate. They found the ruined cities, and a faint energy reading. While still discussing what to do next, the nebula swallowed the planet and the ship in its orbit. The cryptic matter of the nebula instantly started to dissolve the Cavna ship, first destroying the engines. With no means to escape the planet's gravity, the ship went down. The last entry reveals the Cavna ship master ordered the ship to be abandoned. There are no escape pods left on the wreck...*

After searching the ruined city for a little while, the crew is led to a building that once might have been a skyscraper. The footprint of the ground floor measures at least 100 by 100 meters. The surface of the building is smooth and rounded to a certain degree and up to a certain height, from there it looks

like the building has been dissolved by acid, or simply melted away.

The lower floors are intact, and the crew finds the source of the faint energy reading in a small back office. There, a small console sticks out of one wall. Upon touch, holographic keys appear, showing symbols that none of the player characters have ever seen. It takes the crew a successful **Insight + Science** or **Insight + Engineering** task with a **difficulty** of **3** to find out that the symbols are no alphabet but pictograms. A success also helps the characters guess which one to tap to activate the holographic screen above the console. A video recording starts playing automatically.

An alien being appears on the holographic screen. The species is unknown to the characters. The creature might be male or female. It has a long head with a large smooth forehead, and black hair on the top and the sides of the face. The eyes are relatively large and almond-shaped, there are two small slits for nostrils, and another small slit for a mouth. The alien has no lips and a purplish-blue skin. It seems to wear some kind of gray overall. The voice sounds strange, like the words were spoken in a large, empty room, or in a cave.

It takes three full runs of the video before it can be translated with a tricorder (no Task roll needed).

"This is city head Brah'anish Tra'al speaking. The environmental circumstances leave us no other choice than starting operation Twilight Season. Fellow Ra'asku'ulh, come to the temple of the sages, to lie down in your chamber of rest. There you will sleep well until someone guided by the sages comes and helps us in our despair. May the sages guide you."

With the first run of the video, one of the symbols on the console lit up red. Should the characters tap the symbol, a map will be displayed instead of the video. The map shows a route from the city to a nearby mountain range. A successful **Reason + Science** task with a **Difficulty** of **1** will reveal the coordinates of said temple of the sages.

The crew can either have themselves beamed over to the coordinates of the temple, take a shuttle, or they can choose to march the 190 kilometers. There is nothing else that survived intact in the city.

The Temple of the Ancient

Once the characters reach the coordinates in the mountain range, they soon enough find the temple. The six roughly 30 meters high statues of members of the same alien species as the one in the video are guarding an about five meters wide and eight meters high entrance. The statues seem to depict philosophers or wise men. All of them are decorated with some kind of laurel and wearing a toga.

Behind the entrance, the crew enters a huge empty hall. The inside of the temple is as cold as the outside. Several corridors lead away from the entrance hall and further into the complex. The entire complex is so huge that it takes the crew at least five hours to explore it. At first they find empty living quarters, dining halls, and various rooms for study, briefing, and perhaps entertainment. There seems to be no energy in the complex. None of the consoles can be activated, all rooms are dark. The only light the crew can use are the searchlights of their environmental suits.

Deeper inside the temple, the characters find large halls with what looks like hundreds of glass caskets filled with a slightly bluish liquid. Some of those boxes are empty aside from the liquid, most of them, however, are populated with individual

beings. Most of these creatures look like the alien from the video. Some are deformed, though, with mutated arms and legs, empty sockets for more eyes in their faces and foreheads. Some show crystalline growth on their bodies. Some have developed tentacles. And some just look as if something has eaten away at them.

As the crew can now see, the aliens have an average height of about 220 centimeters. They have a slender built, long, thin arms and legs, and hands with a long thumb and only two long fingers. Their feet feature three long toes. Due to the liquid, their skin looks dark blue.

There is no energy circling through this system. However, these have to be the resting halls the alien in the video talked about. It takes a successful **Reason + Science** or **Reason + Medicine** task with a **Difficulty** of **1** to identify the caskets as a system for cryogenic hibernation. A scan with a medical tricorder might reveal whether the aliens are dead or alive. Rolling successfully on **Reason + Medicine** against a **Difficulty** of **1** does the trick. However, the scans will only reveal what could already have been expected: all aliens are dead. The temple of the sages is nothing more and nothing less than a gigantic tomb.

GM Guidance: *As you might already have noticed, there is no map for the temple. You can use any kind of map from any game that you might find suitable, or you can draw your own. In any case, remember that the complex is huge and full of corridors, hallways, living quarters, schooling and briefing rooms, recreation centers, etc. The cryogenic chambers alone need to be so large and many that the complex could at least house a million or more sleepers.*

Give your players the feeling that no matter how long they would explore the temple, they will most probably never see all of it. Also, the deeper they enter into the complex, the harder it will be to communicate with their ship.

Furthermore, create a feeling of eerie darkness and subtle horror. Something might be lurking in the dark, and indeed it is...

Something Survived...

After about half the time the characters spend investigating the temple, they get a feeling of being watched, and as if something is creeping through the dark halls and up to them. Empathic characters get a sense of straightforward paranoia, seeing movement just beyond the corners of their eyes, and hearing strange noises.

In the third or fourth cryogenic chamber, some of the casket-like tubes are broken, the bluish liquid spilled around them, frozen to strange, icy crystals. The crew cannot distinguish whether the tubes were broken from outside or from the inside. Either way, the bodies that once rested here are gone.

Shortly thereafter, the characters find a frozen body in a corridor. It appears to have been dragged here by what can only have been wild and most possibly savage animals. The body has been mutilated, and it looks as if it has been nibbled upon. However, something seems odd. A successful **Insight + Science** or **Insight + Medicine** task with a **Difficulty** of **2** will reveal that the 'bite marks' are in fact no such marks, but that the flesh of the alien seems to have been dissolved, as if devoured by some kind of giant spider.

At the same moment, a loud deep moaning sound echoes through the corridors of the temple, followed by an even deeper rumbling noise...

GM Guidance: *The lurkers in the dark are the twisted robotic guards of the complex. They are programmed to attack everyone who might disturb the sleep of the Ra'asku'ulh. If you want to scare the characters with faint shadows or glimpses of these creatures in the periphery of their sight, you can find the description of the guards at the end of the mission.*

The crew should not be able to see or catch one of these creatures just yet. Just create a feeling of being watched and stalked.

If players opt to beam back to the ship, the GM should play on their Values (and possibly award Determination) to make them stay true to Federation values and keep searching for answers.

The rumbling noise comes from the planet itself. Think of it as an earthquake growl, however, the floor does not shake. The sound is produced by the crystalline cryptic matter reacting with its gaseous form, slowly dissolving the planet from the inside out.

Scene 3: Twisted Fate

Whoever May Hear This

Finally, the characters will find what seems to be some kind of large library. All walls are covered with shelves holding hundreds, if not thousands of small (5 centimeters diameter, 5 centimeters high) cylinders made of a multicolored crystal. In the center of the room stands a single white column, on closer inspection obviously some kind of reading device with one cylinder already inserted.

In the meantime, the crew has grown familiar to the symbols used by the aliens. So, they have no trouble starting the recorded message. As in the city, an alien of the same species appears. This one, however, is older with grayish-white hair and a long beard.

"I am Ahrush'tan, sage of the Ra'asku'ulh and first guardian of the Twilight Season. Whoever may hear this, you must understand that we are a desperate people. In the age of Devwarh, our neighboring world was destroyed by our own mistake. The immensity of the destruction hurled our world Ra'asku'ulh out of our home system and into the deep of dark space. At first, we struggled for survival, but after some time – we calculated it to have been at least seven full rotation cycles – we had no other choice than to start the great project our leaders called Twilight Season. It was a program of cryogenic hibernation to save at least a certain minority of our twelve billion people. We would sleep until someone guided by the sages would find us, and save us from eternal sleep.

You must know that our culture is based around the Bezgalga Gisma, a bluish crystal easily found anywhere in our world's crust. It has the strange property to make energy cells built with it last unusually long. This has driven our technological advancement for centuries, even allowing us to send probes and robotic workers out into the dark void. However, should the crystals melt, they produce a poisonous gas that eats away at

any kind of matter, and most probably even on matter's theoretical counterpart.

In this pool of knowledge, you will find the entire history of our culture, our science, our religion, our technology. Feel free to learn about us, before you awaken us, but awaken us you must."

The characters can watch as many recordings as they want. They learn that the Ra'asku'ulh had overcome poverty and need due to the powers the Bezgalga Gisma offered. They find out that the crystals could not only turn energy cells into long-lasting power sources (but inferior to Federation technology), but would work the same way on biological matter, if ground to powder and induced in a liquid. Even though this would not work as a life-prolonging drink, the Ra'asku'ulh turned this revelation into a working cryogenic hibernation that would theoretically keep the sleepers alive forever, as long as the system was fed with energy.

They will also learn that the Ra'asku'ulh were a pre-warp culture who sent probes out into deep space and mining robots to the neighboring gas giant, mining various gases they needed for their industries. However, they did not engage into manned space travel, as they deemed it too dangerous.

Finally, the characters learn about the catastrophe that led to the Ra'asku'ulh's doom. In the age of Devwarh, which a successful **Reason + Science** task with a **Difficulty** of **3** will identify as having been around 600,000 year ago, the mining operation on the gas giant led to changes in that planet's gravity field. Its moons crashed onto the planet, causing a devastating explosion that destroyed the gas giant. The shockwave blew Ra'asku'ulh off its solar orbit and out of the star system.

Attack of the Twisted

While the crew is still studying the records of the sages (there have been various since Ahrush'tan), they continue to hear the low growling noise.

At some point, have the characters roll an **Insight + Security** task with a **Difficulty** of **2**. Any focuses relating to perception will apply. On success, the characters notice some strange creatures gathering at the entrance of the library. There are two per player character, but you may spend Threat to increase the number.

These are the twisted robotic guards of the complex. If unnoticed, they mount a surprise attack and go first. If the characters spotted them, the first combat phase will go to the crew.

There is no way to reason with these creatures; they can only be destroyed. Their original programming drives them to try to stop the intruders. However, since they no longer recognize each other as guard drones, there is a chance that they might turn against each other. With every attack of a guard, roll 1 ▲. On an Effect, the guard attacks another guard.

Twisted Robotic Guards (Minor NPCs)

Originally hovering drones equipped with a paralyzing beam, these robots have been twisted by Oscuran experiments with cryptic matter.

When the planet entered the Magna Oscura Nebula, an Oscuran merged all machinery on the planet with cryptic compounds and inadvertently killed the hibernating Ra'asku'ulh. At the same time, the gaseous cryptic compound began hollowing out the planet.

Due to the experimentation, the robotic guards grew tentacle-like pseudo-biological limbs, and their paralyzing beam turned into a deadly cryptic energy charge that slowly dissolves any kind of matter it hits.

Originally, hundreds of guard drones patrolled the temple to keep the sleepers safe...

ATTRIBUTES

CONTROL 10

FITNESS 11

PRESENCE 09

DARING 10

INSIGHT 01

REASON 01

DISCIPLINES

COMMAND 00

SECURITY 02

SCIENCE 00

CONN 05

ENGINEERING 00

MEDICINE 00

STRESS: 13

RESISTANCE: 1

WEAPONS:

- **Charge of twisted energy:** Ranged, 6▲, Vicious 1

SPECIAL RULES:

- **Explosive End:** When a twisted robotic guard is either reduced to 0 Stress or suffers an Injury, it will explode. The explosion causes 3▲ damage to everyone in the same zone.

A Narrow Escape

Once the crew destroys the guards, they can continue to download the cultural data of the Ra'asku'ulh. However, there is an incitement to hurry up. On the back wall of the library, a black dot appears that slowly grows, while at the same time the growling noise gets louder.

A tricorder scan (**Reason + Science** Task with a **Difficulty of 2**) will reveal that the signature of the spot is similar to cryptic matter, but in the form of a gaseous cryptic compound. The characters have to leave soon, lest they want to be dissolved with the rest of the place within the next few minutes.

The download process of the data is an **Extended Task** with a **Work Track of 10**, a **Magnitude of 5**, and a **Difficulty of 3**. The Task itself is a **Control + Science** or **Engineering** roll, and can be assisted by one additional character. They have six minutes, and the time interval is one minute.

EXTENDED TASK

DIFFICULTY 03

MAGNITUDE 05

RESISTANCE 00

WORK TRACK 10

TIME INTERVAL

1 minute

With each breakthrough, the crew can choose one of the following data packages. However, they will most likely not be able to save all data, since they only get a maximum of six rolls

in their endeavour, if they manage the number of time intervals carefully by spending Momentum.

The saved data might be:

- about the Bezgalga Gisma and its properties
- about Ra'asku'ulh biology
- about Ra'asku'ulh cryogenic technology
- about Ra'asku'ulh space probes
- about Ra'asku'ulh robotic technology
- about Ra'asku'ulh culture
- about Ra'asku'ulh history
- about the great catastrophe
- about the world Ra'asku'ulh and its home system
- about the original fauna and flora of Ra'asku'ulh

After the six rolls, the crew has to flee. Any knowledge they were not able to download by then is forever lost. You can spice the escape with some more twisted robotic guards, should you have any threat for reinforcements left. Otherwise, the crew can simply run for the entrance of the temple and exit. As soon as they are outside the complex, they may contact their ship to beam them aboard. They make it to the bridge just in time to see the planet disappear, as it is finally dissolved from within by the gaseous cryptic compound.

Nonetheless, they have recovered valuable information about the now finally gone species of the Ra'asku'ulh and their homeworld. Archaeologists and space scientists may be able to find out the origin of the planet from the information gathered. They may also be able to link the mysterious Bezgalga Gisma (a crystalline cryptic compound) to the cryptic matter, since the described effects of molten crystals resemble the effects of the strange gas. Furthermore, the signature of the cryogenic liquid is not very far off the cryptic matter signature.

Sciencing all these facts together will be valuable and helpful information in missions to come...

Successful analysis of cryptic matter or the gaseous cryptic compound during this mission allows a reduction to the level of **Phenomenon Intensity** as described in the campaign notes on Cryptic Matter for subsequent missions. If analysis fails but they have downloaded the data on Bezgalga Gisma, they can use that knowledge to reduce Phenomenon Intensity.

GM Guidance: *Bezgalga Gisma is a crystalline cryptic compound in the crust of the Ra'asku'ulh homeworld that has been there for millennia. It may be an ancient Oscuran experiment rather than the more recent experimentation that made the twisted robotic guards and the gaseous cryptic compound. But how did it get into the crust so long ago? As it is an ancient mystery outside the scope of this campaign, we leave it for the GM to develop. For example, the region of their native star system may have more cryptic matter than found in the Magnanebula.*

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