

THE
GENESIS

MATRIX



February 2018

Gold Channel

Seasons Greetings.

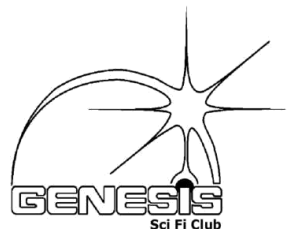
This month is the AGM, where you get to decide the course of the next year for the club. If you are interested in being more active in the club organization, we'd be happy to have you! We'd also love any and all suggestions for future events, field trips, or activities for the coming year.

Your chair,

Rene

I am standing down as editor of the Matrix, time for some one else to shine me thinks

This months contributors
Iron Druid, Prus
Blakes 1, Rob
Space X, Devin Coldewey



This Month the Genesis Book Club is set to read

The Iron Druid Chronicles – Kevin Hearne

So I thought it might be time to republish this

I heard of this collection of books at Book Club (from Jacob who was reading them). So after hearing how good they were I thought I would give them a whirl myself. Hunting down copies on Youtube I downloaded copies as mp3s and shoved them all over onto my mp3 player. So headphones in and my truck heading down the M3 and M27 I was off towards Ringwood and a good days' work and hours of listening. To date there are 8 novels and several short stories in the series with the publishing date of the final novel still to be announced. (April 5th –Ed)

The story is told by Atticus O'Sullivan the last of the druids. After being in hiding for over two thousand years he has finally had enough and calls out the Irish god who has been hunting him. Yes in Atticus's world all the gods are real as are vampires, werewolves and all the fey and monsters that humans have imagined. I do love the first person narrative and to me the books have the same feel as the Dresden Files which I enjoyed immensely. The story begins with Atticus running an occult book shop working hard at staying hidden, his lawyers a werewolf pack and a vampire keeping his secret. He meets fights and works with witches is hunted by some other witches as well as Irish, Norse and Roman gods, is aided by others and given tasks by yet more gods across the whole pantheon of human religions. The events unfold in a linear sequence, as Atticus and his faithful hound Oberon travel the world and different planes struggling against foes mighty and small, recruiting a new druid and saving an old friend. Oh yes and Thor is an arse hat and brings his own rewards. So in conclusion I really enjoyed this set of books, they filled many hours of motorway driving for me, I would highly recommend them if you enjoyed Dresden and or the Rivers of London novels.



Blakes 1

The rusty brown planet circling an unremarkable star filled the view screen the moment the ship dropped to sub-light speed. Additional information began to appear alongside the image. They were several systems inside the federation border but you still couldn't rule out the possibility that a hostile ship might be in the area. To be honest given the age of the ship and the infrequency of its routine maintenance even the lack of sensor reading didn't rule out a hostile raiding party on the far side of the planet, or a cloaked battle cruiser more than half a click away.

The pilot surveyed the data looking for the other ship he knew was out there orbiting that inhospitable world. It was almost an hour before a white box, appeared on the screen, with a set of sensor readings that indicated that this was a large starship but it was either making an incompetent attempt to achieve a zero power profile or a very competent attempt to look disabled. The pilot checked his air supply and decided to take his ship in closer. He carefully manoeuvred the ship and fired a three second burst on the main engines. Ten minutes later the starship was recognisable to the naked eye. The pilot appeared to breathe a sigh of relief although it was hard to be sure through his environment suit.

At this distance the difference in scale between the two ships was obvious. The starship was primarily cylindrical with a spherical protrusion at one end and the tapering point of a star drive at the other. The starship showed signs that at least two and probably three additional engines had at one time been attached. Even without the extra engines it was massive twelve full clicks from end to end and at least a click across.

The other ship by contrast was little more than a shuttle. It was roughly cuboid in shape, a little over 30 metres in length with a pair of boosters at the back and a dented metal hemisphere on the roof that had once been part of a fully functional hyperdrive and was now part of a barely functional hyperdrive. The shuttle entered what had once been a docking bay but had long since lost its outer doors. It landed in the corner of the hanger and activated its docking clamps.

After a minute or so the shuttle's airlock opened and the pilot launched himself out. Making frugal use of his directional thrusters and frequent use of a guide rail, he made his way across the hanger despite the microgravity conditions. His torch illuminated a circular doorway that opened in the wall ahead of him and closed again behind him.

The room he found himself in was not an airlock but a gravity lock. These were common on large starships in the early days of interstellar travel but had now become somewhat anachronistic and their function was generally incorporated into airlocks. The shuttle's pilot drifted towards what had previously seemed to be the ceiling but was now most definitely a floor as the artificial gravity gradually activated. After what seemed like hours but was probably less than five minutes a green light came on and the outer airlock door opened. The pilot entered the airlock and closed the door behind him.

Exiting the airlock the pilot checked the readings on his suit and, satisfied that there was a breathable atmosphere, removed his helmet. The face underneath the helmet was that of a middle aged and somewhat chubby man who was clearly overworked but had a determined look. He now moved with a sense of purpose as if he knew exactly where he was going. After a couple of minutes walking he came to a steel staircase leading up or down. He headed down the stairs and through a door at the bottom.

The door opened into an antechamber of some sort. A number of environment suits of such startlingly different designs that they could only belong to different species were hanging up. The shuttle pilot carefully removed his own suit and added it to the rack next to a number of suits that differed from it only in colour. Under the environment suit he was wearing a cheap brown business suit that had clearly seen too many meetings. He took a deep breath and opened the other door.

This door opened onto a populated space. The room was well lit and people from various species were sitting at small tables around the periphery of the room. The newcomer's attention however was focused on a large area in the centre of the room. It appeared to be a rectangular table about five feet high. Encircling it almost entirely were a number of seats, taller than was normal for those intended for human use, with no backs to them. However the table surface was less than a metre across allowing additional people to stand in the middle and presumably attend to those sitting at the table. A number of cabinets in the centre suggested that this was at least the purpose it was currently being used for, as did the handles fitted to the inner edge of the table at regular intervals which the two human males trapped inside the table regularly pulled at the suggestion of one of the tables occupants or as part of a request passed from one of the outer tables.

One of the humans apparently enslaved inside the giant table was tall with dark curly hair and a barely visible scar below his left eye. He had the look of someone who in his former life had been athletic but lacked the disciplined air of a soldier. He looked up from his current task which seemed to involve arranging containers of carefully measured amounts of various liquid on to a tray and noticed the new arrival. He offered a greeting of sorts. "Hey Norm," he began, "What do you want?"

The new comer now identified as Norm didn't wait for the man to finish speaking before he made his way at impressive speed to the central table array. Having raised himself carefully on to one of the oversized seats he responded to the question in an easy going fashion that suggested a long established friendship with the other man. "A reason to live," he said in reply and then added by way of clarification, "Give me a beer." The man who had greeted him smiled and placed a transparent container somewhere underneath one of the handles and pulled it. The container returned to view filled with a pale yellow liquid. He handed the container to Norm and took a number of metal tokens from him as a form of payment.

The cheerful servant that had greeted Norm was despite appearances the owner of this derelict space vessel and proprietor of the public function room where he was currently serving. He was known as Roj although even his close friends didn't know whether this was his real name.

He had acquired this disused wreck of a starship, in a card game, twenty years previously. Many people believed he had been fooled in to thinking it was still functional but he had decided that if he couldn't use it to fly away he could convert it into a business. Whatever the truth what he had established, in the relatively small area of the ship that was still capable of sustaining life, was what had at once been known as a bar. He had chosen to name it "Blake's". No one could discover the reason behind this name choice but some suggested that it was part of Roj's real name.

The demand for intoxicating liquors was at a high in that sector having only recently become part of the federation and the two nearest inhabited solar systems having only discovered alcohol after their recent first contact. This meant that there were a lot of potential customers many of whom were coming from off world. So Blake's orbiting bar had become an overnight success.

The other man serving at the bar was noticeably older. He had a receding hair line and an air of good naturedness that could only come from a lifetime of achieving your goals or a frontal lobotomy. His real name was Kerr but everyone called him Skipper.

Despite their close working relationship Roj never really trusted Skipper to work the bar on his own. Part of the reason for this was about to become apparent as he placed four glass container on a tray together with a caged specimen of an earth life form of the family anatidae. Roj got to him in time to stop the tray being removed by one of the waiting staff. "Skipper?" he said caution dripping from every pore. "Why is there a duck on this tray?"

"It's what they ordered," Skipper responded in a slightly muzzy voice, "Take look." He handed Roj a piece of paper evidently torn from the pad of one the less competent waitresses. It read "Tble 2 - Lge Canard + 4 glasses"

Roj carefully lifted the cage off of the tray and handed it to Skipper. He then took a peculiarly shaped pale green bottle containing approximately one litre of a dark viscous liquid and placed it in the centre of the tray. He waved to a nearby waitress who picked up the tray and carried it away. "The group on table two are Cardassian, not French." He said to Skipper by way of explanation and returned to serving customers.

At this point I stopped writing for fear of what I might produce.



Space X

Tuesday's Falcon Heavy launch made history, not only becoming the highest-capacity rocket platform since the Saturn V but accomplishing the first double autonomous booster landing. And that's just the start of what could prove to be an epic year for SpaceX — if Elon Musk's ambitious timeline isn't delayed, say by high winds.

There are three major events in the works for 2018 — two likely in the summer and one at the end of the year.

First there's the next Falcon Heavy launch, which after multiple delays will hopefully be taking off in June with a handful of satellites both military and private. This could set a couple of records — heaviest commercial payload, for instance, and if things go well it might even get that triple autonomous booster landing that was hoped for yesterday.

The June launch, by the way, will carry a couple interesting payloads. You may remember the test flight of lightsail, a prototype solar sailing spacecraft that launched in 2015. The new version should launch this year, built by the Planetary Society; Bill Nye is one of the project's most outspoken advocates. And there's also the Deep Space Atomic Clock, which is pretty much exactly what it sounds like, keeping hyper-accurate time that spacecraft can check with for navigational purposes.

SpaceX may also attempt the first water landing of its fairing, Musk hinted in the press conference following the Falcon Heavy launch. We can expect it in the next six months, he said, but the problem is that it's not a guided landing and the fairing tends to drift on its way down.

"Fairing recovery has proven surprisingly difficult. You pop the parachute and you've got this giant awkward thing — it tends to interfere with the air flow on the parachute," he said. "My guess is next six months we'll figure out fairing recovery. We have a special boat to catch the fairing; it's like a giant catcher's mitt in boat form."

That would be the "Large Barge," though it hasn't been put into play yet. Catching a falling fairing before it hits the water would be another historic feat, further reducing the cost of launch and recovery. (Clearly they're saving the capsule catch record for another year.)

"I think we might be able to do something similar for Dragon," he added, half-jokingly.

The last major item planned for this year is a crewed flight of the new Dragon capsule. Musk said at the press conference that "After Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy Block 5 [the next revision of the platform], it's all hands on deck for Crew Dragon. We're aspiring to fly a crew orbit by the end of this year. I think the hardware will be ready."

Commercial crewed missions are the next major area of interest of commercial space industry, and SpaceX is competing with Boeing for the glory of it and, as a secondary consideration, the lucrative government contracts. But sending actual humans up in rockets that still occasionally explode isn't an option — the reliability of the launch platform has to be rock solid and any issues causing failures need to be addressed. SpaceX's record has been clear for over a year; the last real failure was in 2016, when on September 1 a Falcon 9 exploded on the pad during launch prep, apparently caused by a pressure vessel failure. In late 2017 a Merlin engine exploded during testing, but that's kind of what testing is for. And the mysterious Zuma payload from Northrop Grumman didn't go right just last month, but it wasn't actually SpaceX's fault.

Again, though, actual humans will be on this. As they say, “Failure is not an option.” Nevertheless, Musk seemed confident that they would be ready for a crewed Dragon orbit by the end of the year.

Less clear timing-wise are early tests for the spaceship section of SpaceX’s BFR project. Musk gave a few hints about this at the press conference following the Falcon Heavy launch. “I think we might also be able to do short hopper flights with the spaceship part of the BFR, maybe next year,” he said. “By hopper tests I mean go up several miles and come down. We’ll do flights of increasing complexity. We want to fly out, turn around, accelerate back real hard, and come in hot to test the heat shield.”

“The ship is capable of single-stage orbit if you want to fully load the tanks,” he added, but real test flights probably won’t happen for three or four years. How that all will play out is very much in flux right now. And who knows when Starlink, or whatever it’s called, will happen.

