

Capricorn War

600 Turns of Glory



An After Action Report by SMN

Table of contents

Foreword	3
The Competition	4
Federation: Ciocco	4
Lizards: Siberian Snake	4
Birds: Othrym	5
Privateers: Ruez	5
Cyborg: Ted	6
Crystals: GtrDevil	6
Empire: MJS68508	7
Robots: Julius	7
Rebels: J-Zan	8
Colonials: Gnerphk	8
Initial Strategy	9
Turns 10-60: The War Against the Federation and Borg Intervention	11
Turns 61-125: The First Coalition Phase - Stopping the Borg Federation	14
Turns 126-149: The Uneasy Peace and Collapse of The Coalition	16
Turns 150-159: The Cockup	18
Turns 160-256: The Second Coalition: Stopping Othrym & Madinson and Teds Return	18
Turns 257-296: The Turning Point: The Second Battle of Tyre	20
Turns 297- 310: The Battle of Chirpsithra	24
Turns 311 - 349: The Grind is on	27
Turns 350-352: Gnerphk and Othrym do a Little Dance	28
Turns 353-431: The Great Game Or Great Grind? You decide	28
Turn 432: Rumble at Kobol	30
Turns 433 - 500: Time for J-Zan to Decide	31
501-600 The End of History	32
Conclusions	33
Epilogue	36

Foreword

This is my post-mortem for the Capricorn War, the last Classic style championship game on Planets.nu. It is written from the Fascist point of view, just before the moment of the game ending, i.e. it doesn't include a review of the game from other players point of view and thus some of my perceptions may actually not correctly reflect what actually was happening. It is best read by opening the game for review in another window and looking at the map from there, but I've embedded some images for the convenience of the reader.

This game used the classic queue mechanism and a replacement policy for dropping players. It also had several ambitious and skilled commanders who were serious about winning. Fascists didn't yet have fast beams - had I had those, the game would have run very differently. In this case, the result was a game that went on for 4 years and 600 turns. Almost every imaginable Planets trick was applied or at least tried here and I believe a couple of genuinely new ones were done here for the first time. It wasn't easy.

The first chapter takes a look at the other players, describing who and what they were. After that I describe my initial strategy for starting an endeavour like this and how the game developed. Finally, I discuss the key cornerstones of the victory in the conclusion chapter.

As always, winners get to write the history, but I've tried to be as open and no-nonsense about it as possible. I'd also like to pass the mic to the other commanders to bring in their viewpoints into the game. To this end, I will keep this document initially open as a Google Drive document allowing my fellow commanders to comment.

I plan to include any commentary and questions/answers, where the writer gives permission to do so, by adding them to a new Appendix chapter. Preference is given to commanders who took part in the game, but any interesting analysis from experienced commanders who have reviewed the game could be interesting to include. When everyone who wants to do so has commented, I'll produce a PDF out of this document.

The Competition

Federation: Ciocco

Initial analysis:

Ciocco was a bit difficult for me to classify. Clearly not tier one in this game, but still looking like a solid contender with a bunch of fast victories with the Federation.

Afterthought:

I was stunned when Ciocco revealed his homeworld location on turn 5, and instantly decided that he will be the target I need to attack and kill. Later on Ciocco accepted help from Ted, making me seek help from Ted's enemies, and soon Ciocco was a full-blown vassal of Ted, effectively giving Ted full control of his fleet, planets and racial abilities. I only learned later, around halfway through the game that Ciocco had blatantly cheated his way to the championship match¹. Three of his Federation game victories were results of cheats and he shouldn't have been in the game in the first place, as that broadcast of HW location on turn 5 also indicated.

Spirit animal: Umgah

Lizards: Siberian Snake

Initial analysis:

Long history on the site, not participating in public discussion, a bunch of first place victories and some losses too. Difficult to classify.

Afterthought:

Siberian Snake played a true Lizard - extremely aggressive from the start. He hit Othrym hard early on and would probably have knocked him out were it not for Othrym's thinking outside of the box and trapping the Lizard main fleet with help of Ruez. Snake seemed to lack the patience for the late game queue control thinking and took a lot of losses by rash, aggressive moves that were often not justified by any risk-reward analysis. Still, a strong player tactically.

Spirit animal: Yehat

¹ Using proxy accounts to take over dropped races and carefully feeding ships to himself. See usage of 'chaosoverlord' account in <http://planets.nu/#/sector/53448/> for an illustrative example.

Birds: Othrym

Initial Analysis:

I had a shared victory with Othrym from earlier games. A really good player and a strong negotiator. He would be a strong player in the game but would he be able to win with Birds in this company? Not so sure. Certainly a tier 1 contender only held back by a traditionally non-winning race.

Afterthought:

"Othrym will always try to sell you what is already yours" I can't remember if it was J-Zan or Gnerphk who made this comment, but I found it a valid observation :)

Othrym made an absolutely astonishing comeback from having zero bases on turn 29 to holding the most numerous fleet and being second in bases a hundred turns later. Being a master of queue control he ensured first getting his fair share of builds and then locked it for good. He also surprised everyone with his massive starbase building operation on turn 100. Paradoxically, his iron grip on the queue was one of the key factors that helped me to win the game, but we'll return to that later on. All things considered, Othrym is a creative and extremely strong player who did a serious run for victory here. He has my full respect.

Spirit animal: Druuge (Also considered: Melnorme)

Privateers: Ruez

Original analysis:

I can't really remember how I saw Ruez at the start. Kind of unremarkable, a big question mark.

Afterthought:

Ruez got totally used by Ted in the beginning, and as he finally went for the inevitable betrayal and rob, he didn't have the guts to stay for the aftermath but disappeared². Nevertheless he achieved some very significant things: He crippled the early expansion and fleet building for both Colonials and Robots, leaving both with a weak fleet and defensive mindset. He also robbed the main Lizard fleet for the benefit of Othrym, thus crippling three races for the remainder of the game. At one time he seemed to be everywhere on the map.

Spirit Animal: Arilou

² After reviewing Privateer turns in more detail, I found nothing that would have suddenly demoralized Ruez at the time of the drop, he was doing pretty great actually. So now I feel worried something might actually have happened to him. All the best, and give us a shout if you ever read this!

Cyborg: Ted

Initial analysis:

I was kind of wondering why so many people bet on Ted taking Capricorn. At the time his history had some first places but also several seconds and lower, and also some resigns. Still, a solid-looking player.

Afterthought:

Ted was the perfect villain for the game. A good player with several very strong points but huge weaknesses too. For example, on tactical level, I've never seen anyone with better operational security - every single time all the tows, intercepts, tow-breaks, battle orders, everything was top notch. I don't think he made a single mistake on tactical level during the entire game.

Yet on strategic level, his opsec was the weakest of all. His inability to refrain from boasting and bragging gave away most of his plans. It was always easy to see what he was up to and design a good countermove for maximum effect. His patronizing and needlessly abusive communications solidified the cluster against him - condescending and mean-spirited, as another commander described his diplomacy. Most importantly, Ted wasn't able to accept taking strategical losses when he absolutely needed to, which made him unable to get back on the winning track after having lost the initiative.

Still, he was surprisingly creative, constantly searching for a silver bullet that would win the game for him. He conjured up many neat tricks, some of which are worth investigating in more detail. Yet these tricks always failed to create any tangible advantage, sometimes even backfiring badly. Mostly they would fail because he gave them away too early, but sometimes just because of bad luck. This earned him the nickname of Wiley T.

Spirit Animal: Androsynth (Also considered: Thraddash, Ilwrath)

Crystals: GtrDevil

Initial analysis:

I checked a couple of GtrDevils games. He didn't strike me as first tier competition, despite having achieved an earlier allied victory with J-Zan. What I surely needed to verify is that the web doesn't turn against me.

Afterthought:

GtrDevil was second tier in the matchup. He took the brunt of Ted's first attack, but didn't yield. What he lacked in skill he made up with tenacity. It's clear that without the webs, either Ted or Othrym would've taken the win. Contrary to most of the propaganda spouted during the last

three years, I don't think GtrDevil was exactly vassal to anyone. He was fighting a war against Ted without serving any specific ally of his. When Ted was in the void and Othrym and Madinson broke the anti-Ted treaty and launched their attack against J-Zan, for some inexplicable reason Madinson attacked GtrDevil at the same time. I wasn't sure he would've actually taken a side in that fight without being forced to. I did try a couple of times to open the endgame discussions with him and directly asked if he would support me to the victory, but he didn't answer either time. I decided to not push that line further and trust that things will sort themselves out, but in the end I only became certain of his full support when J-Zan gave up.

Spirit animal: Vux

Empire: MJS68508

Initial analysis:

MJS got into the game with many almost-victories as the Empire but really lacking in first place finishes. Second tier. Still, he kind of knew what he was doing. I hoped to get an SSD and/or Gorbie out of him, other than that I had little confidence in him.

Afterthought:

MJS was by far the most entertaining propagandist in the match. I really miss the early days of the game with the old forum still running, many good laughs (Read the propaganda here: <http://planets.nu/discussion/the-capricorn-war-1>). In-game, things didn't go so well. I re-read some of the message exchanges lately and am still not sure why or how it happened, but he somehow managed to corner himself in diplomatically to the point where nobody really cared if he lived or died. At least I wrote him off as someone who can't be reasoned with and pillaged his homeworld for Othrym as thanks for his help at another theatre.

Spirit Animal: Shofixti (Also considered: Orz)

Robots: Julius

Initial analysis:

I've been in the same game with Julius earlier, and while he seemed solid player, I didn't see him as first tier competition, being way too silent and not building up enough fleet.

Afterthought:

Julius did decently in the initial buildup, but as he faced an armada of Fed Biocides on the front, there wasn't much he could use those ships for. Later on the game became trench warfare for him, without anything interesting happening most of the time. I don't blame him for getting bored

and leaving. And I'm sorry for Spectre, who picked up the helm for a race that couldn't really do anything in the game anymore.

Spirit animal: Mycon

Rebels: J-Zan

Initial analysis:

I was involved with J-Zan in another game and knew he would be first tier competition. Intelligent, analytical and well versed on game theory, he looked at the board from far enough away to see what was going on and what needed to happen for him to win. Certainly a winner candidate. I also knew I could trust him and co-operate with him at the game start.

Afterthought:

Since turn 290, I saw J-Zan my main adversary in the game. However, thanks to Ted and Othrym never giving up or losing their grip on the queue, J-Zan lacked the firepower to really wage war against me and I knew that if he had chosen to fight me without the ability to dominate the field, he would've handed victory to Ted or Othrym. Meanwhile, we waged on our respective campaigns and thanks to my Firecloud network and glory device supply, I was in better position than J-Zan to expand.

Two years ago, when Die Hard 3 moving into its closing phase, I realized from the events in that game that J-Zan didn't necessarily possess that final will to win no matter what, and he might be happy enough with the academic knowledge that he could have made it, rather than going through the tough and grinding implementation of the possibly winning strategy. Sure enough, he mentioned a couple of times that he didn't really see a feasible way to victory for himself and might have to give up. So I was happy to keep postponing the showdown, while working to constantly improve my position just a bit faster than he could improve his.

Spirit animal: Utwig

Colonials: Gnerphk

Initial analysis:

I didn't know much about Gnerphk, other than that he had won quite a few games. Probably first tier competition.

Afterthought:

Smoke and mirrors, man, smoke and mirrors. I felt there were always multiple layers of deception at play with whatever diplomatic endeavour my dear Evil Grand Vizier started. He

seemed to often have some very odd strategic priorities, and I could never be certain if they were only plausible excuses from not having to do something else, or if he truly believed in those priorities. However, there were a few things I could figure out and count on:

1. He valued safety, an unassailable position, and would avoid making too risky moves.
2. He was most definitely playing all sides all the time. This would probably by time alienate him from all but the most long-tempered commanders. I could afford to wait.
3. He loved to play out military theory, especially naval theory, regardless if it made sense in strategic context or not.
4. He would backstab me without hesitation if that opened the way to victory for him.
5. In practice he would never get into the position where he could plausibly win. He lacked the fleet and support for that and he knew it himself, too.

All things considered, I felt I could position myself so that Gnerphk would never feel that the time was right to betray me (although I'm fully sure he kept looking for the opportunity!) and that he could support me to victory. There were three main events where I reinforced this policy, first to protect Gnerphk and Julius from Ted, secondly the policy choices when Othrym "surrendered" and lastly to prevent a combined Rebel-Bird attack against Gnerphk.

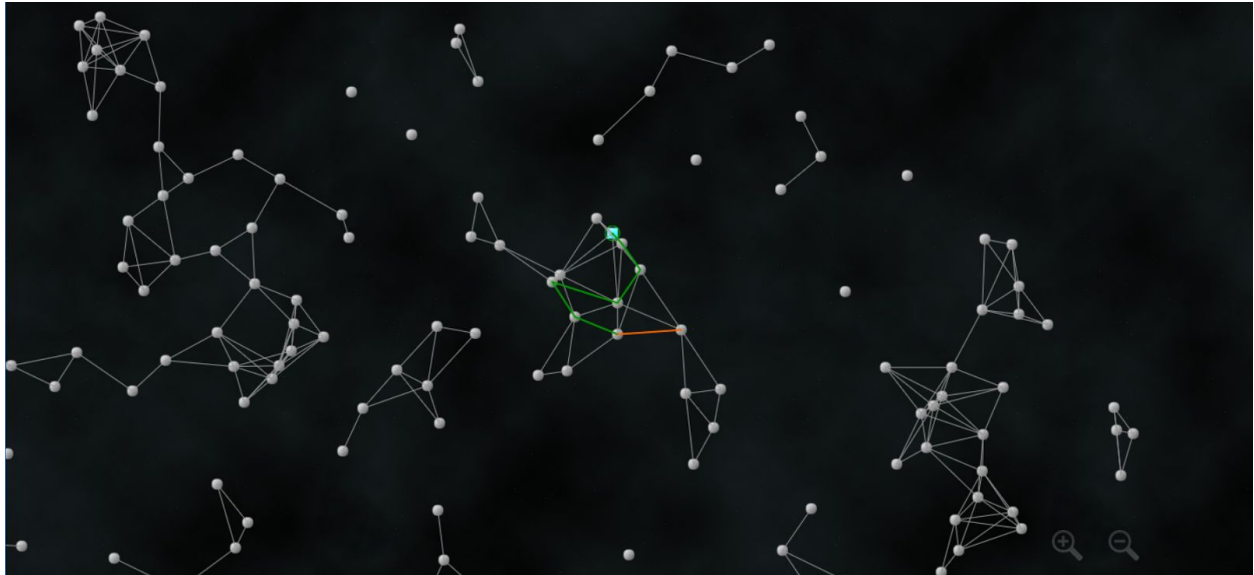
Spirit animal: Pkunk (Also considered: Spathi)

Initial Strategy

Ok, so I'm playing the classic Fascist, facing top commanders in a highlander game. How on earth am I going to win this one? I had zero illusions of the Fascist native fleet capability and I knew that I would be discounted by others as a potential winner simply because of the perceived weakness of the race. The Fascist race is kind of strong at start, weak in mid-game and become stronger again in the end game if it can overcome some fleet weaknesses. To pull this off, I knew I would need to appear at the same time as "cuddly as a teddy bear," and "as tough as nails". As a tough and scary fighter but honorable friend, to not end up prioritized too high on anyone's kill list. If there was a bigger, badder wolf around I could probably make it to the endgame.

The other important thing was that in this game format, where the rules stated that droppers would be replaced by mercenaries, there wouldn't be any dead races to colonize. **The game won't end because someone will be able to subjugate everyone else - it will end because someone will be allowed to win.** This was an extremely important distinction. To be allowed to win, one would need to figure out and keep track on which races had a clear path to victory open for them, to defeat the competition by closing that path for the other races one by one, while all the time making sure to leave no enemies that could veto your victory. If I could gain the support of those races that are no longer able to play for victory themselves, there would be hope.

My starting cluster was average. No really good natives but not bad either. 18 planets to my cluster, clearly no other players there. 9 planets in the easily reachable backwater, another 7 planet cluster between me and the center. A massive 50 planet cluster to the west, this cluster potentially holding 2 races.



My initial position

It didn't take too long to figure out the approximate order of races: Clockwise from the top: Fed, Fascist, Rebel, Lizard, Bird, Empire, Colonies, Robots, Borg, Crystal, Pirate.



Location of the races / players








My first target would be the Federation. I thought about attacking Rebels, too, but I knew I could trade with J-Zan and probably wouldn't be able to knock him out fully in an early operation, so it would be safer to go against the Feds as long as I could trust J-Zan wouldn't invade me. Plus, Feds were about to cut me out from the center by sending ships to the 7-planet cluster, so I needed to prevent that. Fortunately someone, I think it was MJS, was spreading the rumor that Ted and Ciocco were old friends and likely to be secret allies. I didn't really believe that at the time, but as the theory gained recognition and acceptance, I chose to fully play along and "do my part" by attacking the Federation. This, I thought, would secure my back as the Borg were quickly becoming public enemy #1. Meanwhile, of course, I was attempting to trade with the Borg for Fireclouds.

Turns 10-60: The War Against the Federation and Borg Intervention

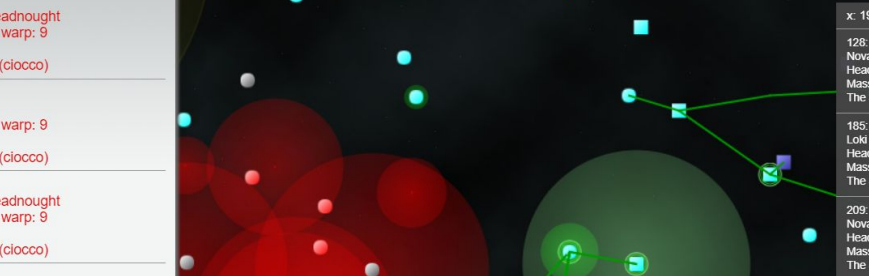
My anti-Fed strategy was simple. I didn't have much in terms of resources, but I could attack his flanks with a D7 that would move quickly and strike unexpected places, I could recruit Pirate help to further pressure his flanks and engage Feds in the 7 planet "Fresno" cluster between us

Ted had different ideas though. Just like the narrative I had chosen to play along with predicted, he saw Federation as an important ally and didn't want to let Ciocco be knocked out. I had received two Fireclouds by the ship limit and was organizing the trade of the third one with the Borg while I was preparing for the real invasion of the Fed home cluster. Then, on turn 37, a Borg minefield suddenly popped up in Federation territory. I challenged Ted about it, he didn't remove the minefield but tried to pressure me to attack Rebels instead. After a few heated messages exchanged I declared war (how old-fashioned!), dropping all masks and called for the help of the anti-Ted coalition. Diplomacy around turn 37 and immediately after makes for an interesting read.

7 Ships

	128: USS Nagasaki Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 970 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	185: Minelayer 2 Loki Class Destroyer Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 291 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	209: USS Enterprise Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 1012 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	262: Maelstrom Biocide Class Carrier Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 1624 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	296: USS Sovereign Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 930 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	321: USS Hiroshima Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 1125 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
	347: Armageddon Biocide Class Carrier Heading: Unknown at warp: 9 Mass: 1624 The Solar Federation (ciocco)

Turn 52
Map Tools ▾ Dashboard Exit

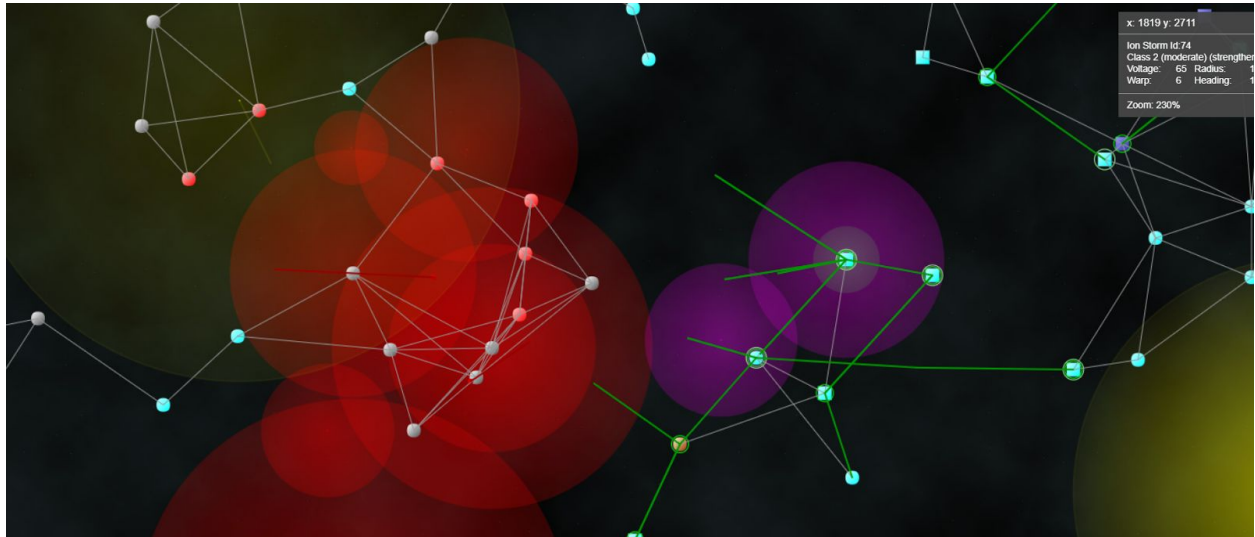


x: 1939 y: 2551

128: USS Nagasaki Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 970 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
185: Minelayer 2 Loki Class Destroyer Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 291 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
209: USS Enterprise Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 1012 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
262: Maelstrom Biocide Class Carrier Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 1624 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
296: USS Sovereign Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 930 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
321: USS Hiroshima Nova Class Super-dreadnought Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 1125 The Solar Federation (ciocco)
347: Armageddon Biocide Class Carrier Heading: ? at Warp: 9 Mass: 1624 The Solar Federation (ciocco)

Capricorn War After Action Report by SMN

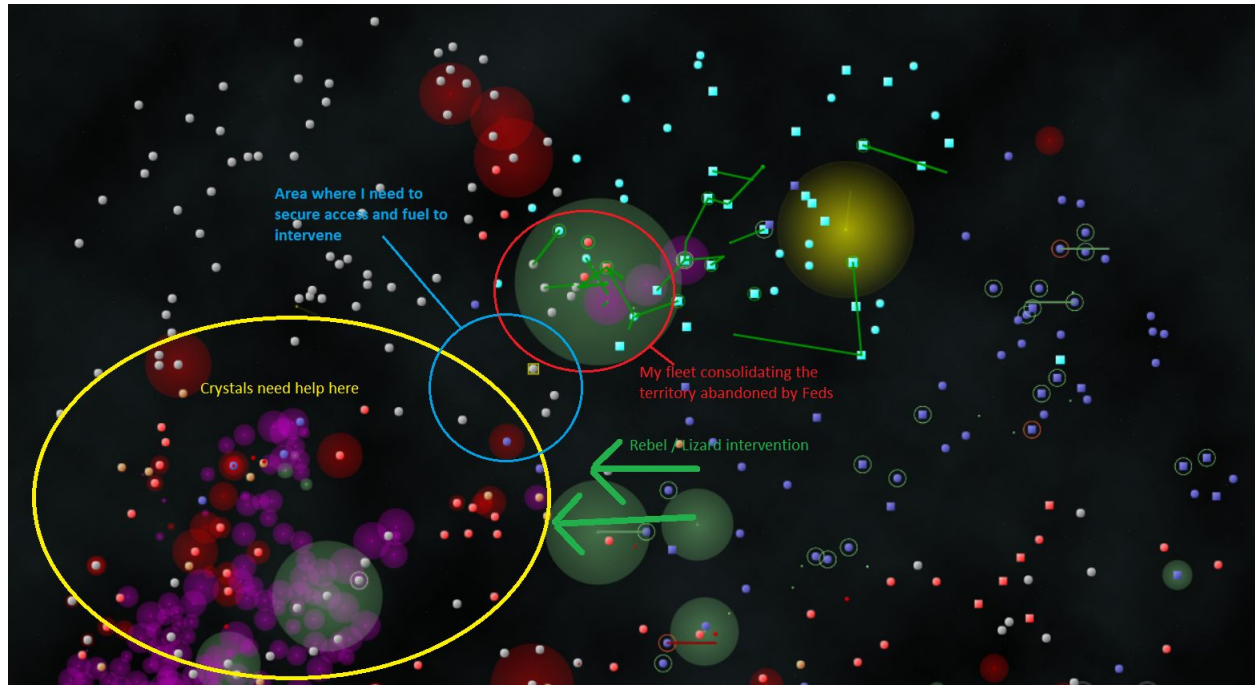
Ciocco soon invaded me with 4 Novas, 2 Biocides and a Loki, making things look bleak for a moment. Fortunately, Othrym had positioned the D7 I lent him in the region so that it could tow out the Loki. Once the invasion fleet lost its cover, it hastily pulled back. By turn 56, a lucky ion disturbance was arriving over the Federation home area and I began the plan to countermine and cover the region.



Huge ion disturbance about to drift over the Fed home area puts Ciocco in a difficult position

Around this time Ruez finally saw the error of his ways and backstabbed the Borg for a few Fireclouds and Biocides. I'm not sure what prompted it, but at this point (around turn 60) Ciocco simply abandoned his home area and became a full vassal of the Borg. So long and thanks for all the planets. I suspected Ted wanted me to invade the Privateers next and hoped to achieve that by removing the buffer between me and the Privs. So I took immediate measures to reassure Ruez I was on his side in the operation.

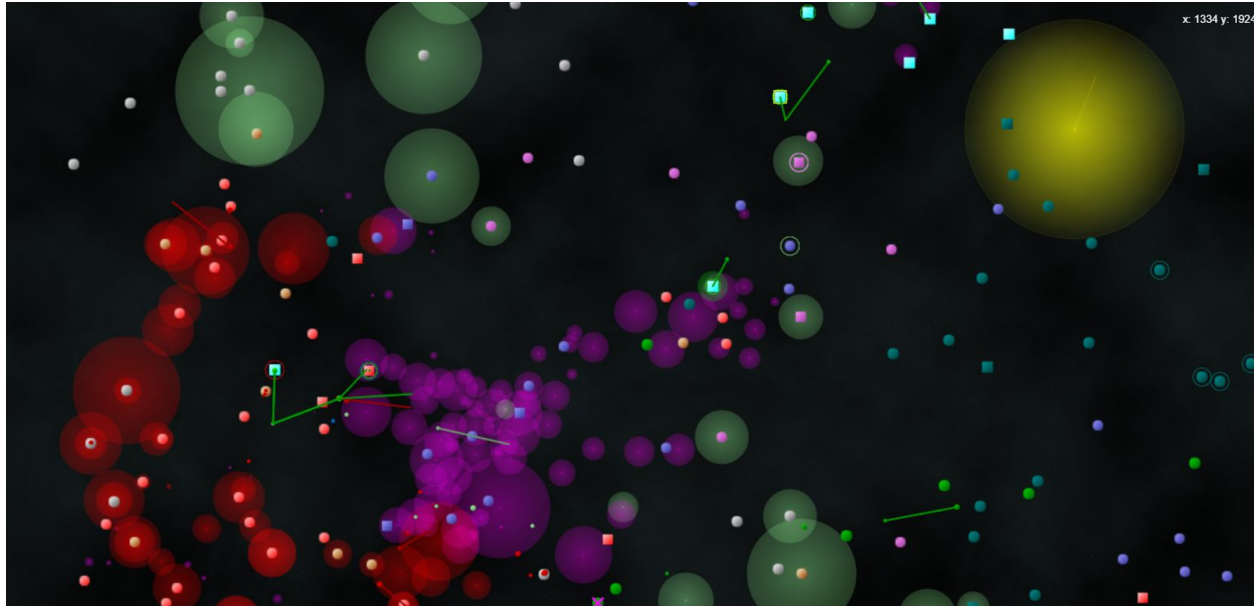
Turns 61-125: The First Coalition Phase - Stopping the Borg Federation



Turn 60: The logistics to pull this through seem tricky

The second stage of the game saw a coalition of me, J-zan and Siberian Snake sailing west to support Ruez, GtrDevil and Julius against the Ted/Ciocco juggernaut. These kinds of logistics take a long time. I sailed southwest from the ex-Fed territory, picking up some support planets on the way, while Rebels and Lizards secured the center and sailed west from there. The Borg focused now less on finishing the Crystals and more on goading Julius to engage a fleet of Federation-controlled Biocides. We promised to help Julius to regain the planets he lost, he agreed to avoid suicidal combat. By turn 80 the first Rebel fleets had arrived to break the Borg siege on the Crystal territory. Around this time Ruez disappeared and was replaced by Madinson, who makes a separate peace with Borg in order to concentrate on getting his empire into shape.

On turn 95, my first real fleet arrived to the Crystal territory by a chunnel organized by Madinson. Time to engage the Borg! 30 turns of extremely interesting tactical maneuvering ensued. On one side we had a Rebel-Fascist fleet constantly on super low fuel, covered by small webmine fields, and on the other side we had concentrations of Federation Biocides attempting to engage.

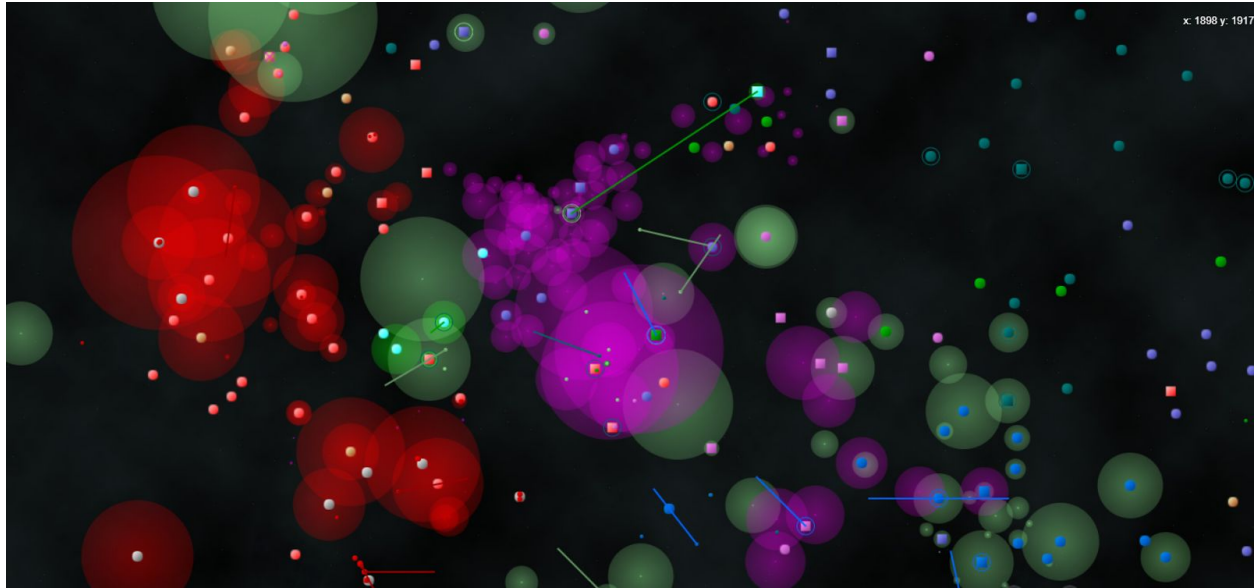


Turn 104 situation - route to Crystals secured, fleet operates deep in enemy territory

One major battle happens on turn 104, during which Fed controlled Biocides destroy a fleet of Lizards and Rebels. Somewhere around turn 115 Madinson finally engages Ted again and around turn 125, Ted realizes he can't defend his area anymore. He escapes death by retreating into the void with his fleet mostly intact.

Race (player)	Planets	Starbases	War Ships	Freighters	Military	Score	Priority Points
The Privateer Bands (madinson)	88	79 (+3)	61 (+2)	7	369408 (+7025)	10977 (+380)	4
The Empire of the Birds (olurym)	80	78	61	12	782279 (+9631)	10782	17
The Missing Colonies of Man (gnerphk)	64	63	42 (+1)	10 (-1)	694667 (+13465)	8630 (+9)	19
The Fascist Empire (smn)	59 (+1)	59 (+1)	41 (+2)	13 (-1)	588256 (+21706)	8093 (+149)	19 (-1)
The Cyborg (ted)	59 (-2)	58 (-1)	62 (+1)	12	691456 (+26983)	8182 (-130)	16
The Rebel Confederation (j-zan)	58 (+1)	56 (-1)	55 (+2)	12	782064 (-48500)	7862 (+150)	20 (+2)
The Lizard Alliance (siberian snake)	37 (-1)	32	32 (-4)	8 (+1)	178739 (-26880)	4538 (-49)	19 (+1)
The Robotic Imperium (julius)	30	14	18	6	321305 (-823)	2166	8
The Crystal Confederation (girdovil)	18	11	14 (-1)	3	79845 (-12353)	1643 (-10)	11
The Solar Federation (ciocob)	6 (+1)	2	29 (-2)	1	483726 (-78539)	591 (-10)	53 (+33)
The Evil Empire (mjs68506)	0	0	1	0	403	10	9
Totals:	499	452	416	84			
Total Ships:				500			

The turn 104 massacre in numbers

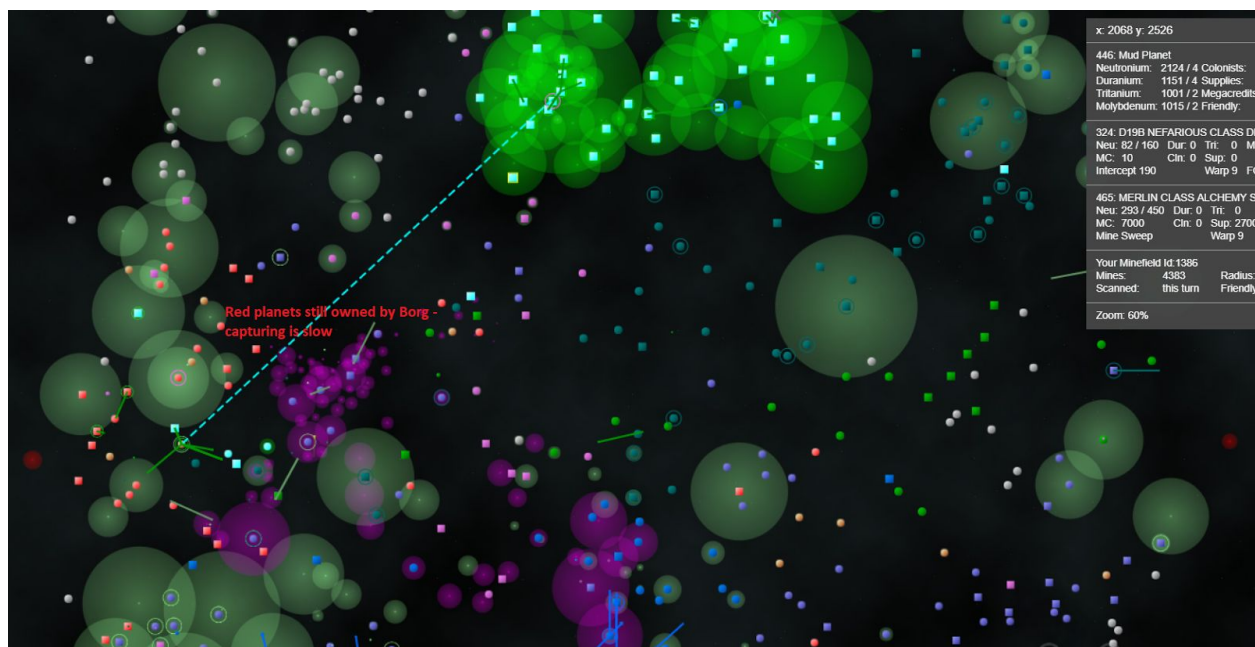


Turn 123: Advancing at some fronts, falling back at others

Turns 126-149: The Uneasy Peace and Collapse of The Coalition

The coalition had agreed to certain conditions regarding Borg ship and planet count when it would be ok to relieve the pressure. These conditions never exactly materialized as Ted retreated into the void, where his ships were untouchable. A bit of a bummer. The question was, who will betray whom and when? I wasn't sure if it would be technically a betrayal of the treaty as the conditions of treaty expiry had become unfulfillable, but I would for sure see it as one if it happened against me.

During the about 20 peaceful turns, everyone hogged on to the Borg planets. The Privateers had gained a large Firecloud network with the dual betrayal/robs and were working closely with the Birds. I'm laying lots and lots of mines over my home territory so that I wouldn't become a target of opportunity. I was still pondering the next moves - the primary competition for winning at this point were J-Zan and Othrym. And I guess Ted was still one, although he was out of the action for now. I contacted Othrym and Madinson (who I saw as a team) for discussions, as Rebels with their RGA and Rushes were a true end-game menace for me.



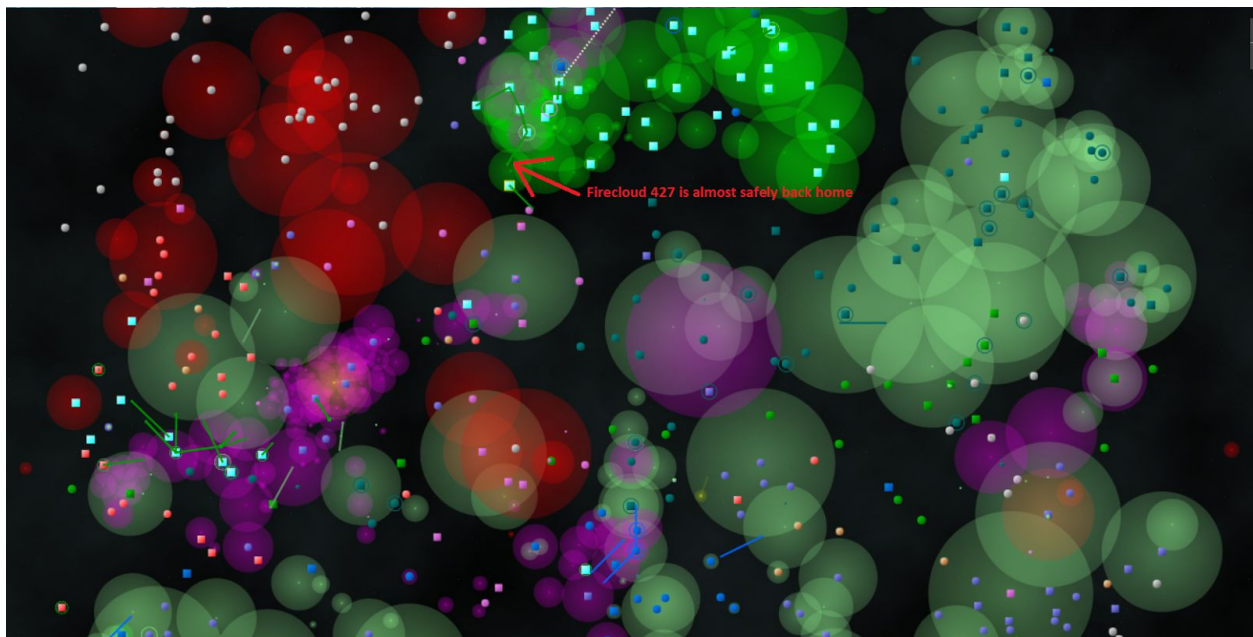
Turn 145 situation - still many Borg worlds to capture

During the talks with Othrym and Madinson, they came to understand that I wanted to neutralize the Rebel threat, and took this to mean that I would be game for joining the attack to take J-Zan out. I might have lead them on here quite a lot. It's true that I needed to block J-Zan from winning at some stage, but during the negotiations and preparation turns I saw how easily they used their superior logistics and minelaying capability to claim an unproportionally large amount of abandoned Borg territory. That capability of theirs was way too advanced for me to fight: I could take on J-Zan but I would have little chance against a Privateer/Bird combo fielding a Firecloud network and a good bunch of Biocides. If I moved against Rebels, I would likely lose the support of other races and end up alone against Othrym and Madinson in the endgame. If I were to side with J-Zan, I would make mortal enemies out of O&M but I would keep on the good side of GtrDevil, Snake, Julius and Gnerphk. At this point I was rather sure that siding with O&M would maybe let me knock out J-Zan from the competition, but I would place myself in a position where I had no chance to resist the Dynamic Duo. Additionally, I had the well-founded suspicion that after I had neutralized the Rebel fleet, they would grab most of the spoils and leave me short simply by having better logistics to take over planets.

On turn 145, Madinson robs three Rushes from J-Zan as an opening salvo of the next phase. Othrym declares his support for Madinson and soon after blows up three Merlins to lock the queue for good and joins the attack on J-Zan. On turn 145 I also received my third Firecloud from the Lizards via Rebel diplomacy. I'm still not sure how that happened, maybe it was a bribe really, but now I had a pipeline for hauling in massive resources from my home region.

Turns 150-159: The Cockup

On turn 150 I screw up, sending a Firecloud the wrong way and now most of my fleet and all three of my Fireclouds are in the west, in ex-Borg area. As the way back home is cut by both Bird and Privateer controlled territory, I'm in a difficult situation. I should declare war on O&M already, and they are wondering why I do nothing against J-Zan, but I can't afford going hostile before my Firecloud is back home and the pipeline re-built. So I play for time by first making excuses. I start to fear that Othrym sees right through my "plot" and kills my returning Firecloud en-route. So I have to make my commitment more believable, and I make up a really solid invasion plan against the Rebels which I share to O&M to calm them down. The plan I present has me and J-Zan clash properly over Rebel home turf, leaving Othrym a clear way to victory with a certain possibility of me not realizing it. I hope he sees the potential reward as being worth the risk and doesn't shoot my vulnerable FCC down.



Turn 160: Situation before attacking Othrym / Madinson

Turns 160-256: The Second Coalition: Stopping Othrym & Madinson and Teds Return

On turn 160 my Firecloud is safely back and I declare my intention to attack O&M to them. I'm not exactly proud of the way I had to handle this, but it had to be done.

Curiously, Ted and I had a long talk about how to use Borg help for taking O&M out. I am not sure how it would've played out since GtrDevil was primarily motivated by a need to bury the Borg - I might have lost web support if I had allied with Ted. But Ted decided the issue for me and sided with O&M. Diplomacy between turns 140-170 was in general quite interesting.

Turn 176: Battle for RomII ends in solid Fascist victory. A Biocide, a Virgo and a Darkwing wiped out, losing a Vicky and a Rush. This leaves 2 Meteors and 1 Resolute to be captured in the region.

Turn 177: Borg Firecloud spotted in Southwest of cluster. They are back!

Turn 180: Ted brags about a new revolutionary maneuver he's come up with. The suspense!

Turn 187: I figure out Teds "revolutionary" plan he bragged about (Prisoner Planet for Web FC control) and start immediate counter-planning ³.

Turn 190: The Prisoner Planet plan starts, as expected

Turn 191: Our initial counter-move, webs layed with 'mi4' to cover for the loss of the universal FC fails in a communication mix-up. J-Zan loses Rushes as robbed and destroyed.

Turn 193: LCC full of Lizard clans in p500 orbit puts an end to Prisoner Planet.

Turns 200-206: Aftermath of failed Prisoner Planet scheme results in battles and ship captures: I force the surrender of a drained Meteor, a drained Darkwing and a drained Biocide(!), kill a Rush and Meteor in combat while losing a Vicky. A major power shift!

Turn 209: Enemy leaves p500 (Tyre) region! First battle of Tyre ends in victory!

Turns 210-220: To much of Teds annoyance, I intervene against him at Julius/Gnerphk region. Ted had told me previously he won't be using anymore Fed Biocides and thus I was prepared to let him fight a separate fight against Robots and Colonials. But he didn't keep his promise, and once the first reports of Federation Biocides arrived from the front, I was forced to intervene. The cost of the intervention was that my Firecloud pipeline couldn't be used to keep up the advance anymore in the northwest - my movements stall for the duration of the intervention.

222: We do a major recycle operation to force the queue move forward a bit. This gives me some critically needed minesweep, mine laying and pure fighting power. The recycle coincides with Othrym cannibalizing a Merlin for PBP, which gives him a bunch of priority builds reducing the benefit we get.

³ In "Prisoner Planet", the target planet is set to 'nuk'. Then a prisoner ship is towed into orbit. The prisoner must be filled with clans. The planet then attacks the prisoner ship and gets transferred to the prisoner race. Now Birdman ships can control the friendly code for a couple of turns, before the prisoner race can torch the planet by civil war. The prisoner ship can't lift the clans out as it is already full of clans.

223: Ted launches an invasion of my Northeast. I ponder for a moment what to do and finally figure out that I shouldn't care, so I let him lose some sacrifice ships against my maxbases there.

225-250: My fleet is scattered and I can't build up an attack on any front. Fortunately, the enemy push against Robots/Colonials dwindles too. I use a lot of time to slowly get my fleet in order and the Firecloud pipeline back to a sensible place - ready to continue operations.

250: Othrym takes over p65, Chirpsithra, from Rebels by ambitious clan drop. The planet already built me a Rush on turn 222 - the queue is currently at p66. However Othrym doesn't know this and J-Zan produced 6 transwarps and 5 beams there to spoof that a Rush was in production. This move will be extremely important for me in the long run.

251- 253 My attack in the center clears enemy forces out from there, one more 'safe' frontier.

256: My main fleet has regrouped to my northeast to stop the slow enemy advance in the region. At the same time, I notice in the west that the enemy has massed significant forces into a warp well of my planet and starts sweeping webs around the region. This marks the start of the second battle of Tyre.

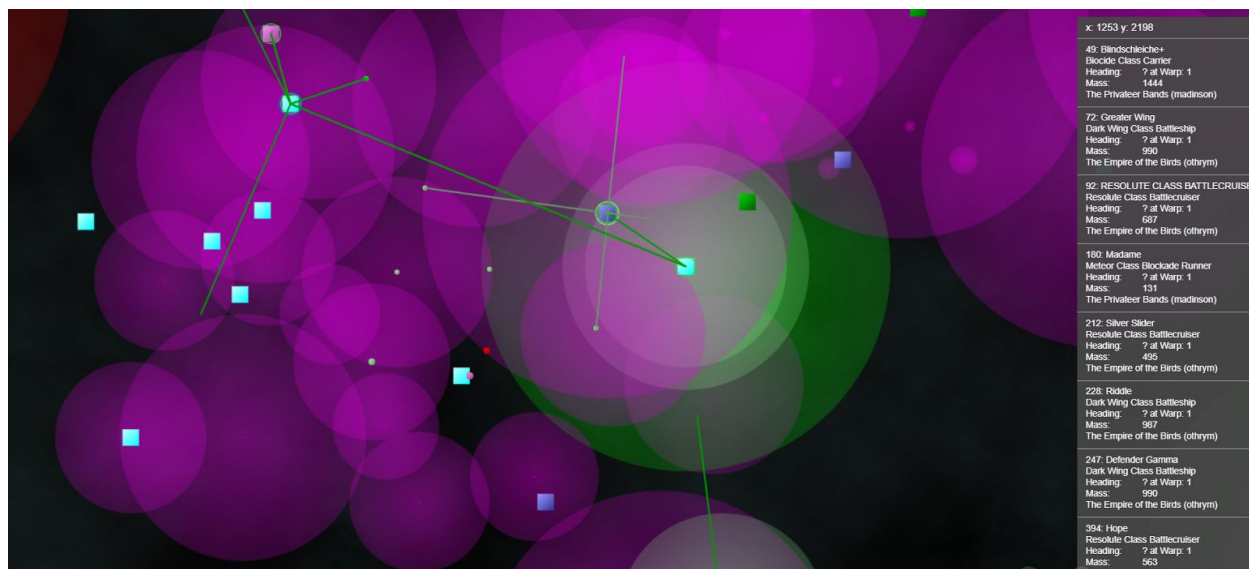
Turns 257-296: The Turning Point: The Second Battle of Tyre

This battle is the most significant point of Capricorn. Curiously, nothing much happens in it besides tedious maneuvering and one ship-to-ship combat - but those events are extremely important and after the battle is over, I realize that Ted, Othrym and Madinson are defeated.

At the start of the battle I'm still concentrating in harassing the enemy in the northeast. A secret, MBR-assisted advance of a Biocide and D19b to p499 takes a small Bird siege force by surprise - the military gains are minimal but I manage to make the region feel very dangerous and the enemy pulls out, letting me recapture p30. After this I start to pull back from the northeast front. My focus shifts into the west, where the enemy is making inroads towards p500, having already secured their way to the warp well of p428, only 78 ly from the Crystal-owned p500 and web friendly code control.

Turns 270-278: Me and Crystals are stalling the enemy advance, laying a lot of webs over the enemy invasion fleet while I'm frantically regrouping my fleet to answer the threat. Finally Firecloud endpoints are in good places and it is time to change the script. I ask GtrDevil to stop webbing for some time, to give the impression we're running out of torps (the waste has been horrific) and to get the enemy to continue their advance.

Turn 280: First enemy minesweepers leave p428 warpwell to open the route to p500. We start positioning cloakers around p428.



T280: Luring the enemy out

Turn 282-283: More minesweeper action. They all do "blinksweeping", cloaking between minesweeps, which makes intercepting impossible.

Because of the rob threat, I can't hope to tow the enemy ships out from their safe stack. So there is little I can do to fight a large enough concentration of enemy fleet in a warp well. Blink-sweepers will become vulnerable though, if there are enough cloakers between the regions. Sure, there might be 100 square lightyears to choose waiting spots from, but statistically, sooner or later I should get to lock a tow-beam on a sweeper before it cloaks and I get to kill a ship.

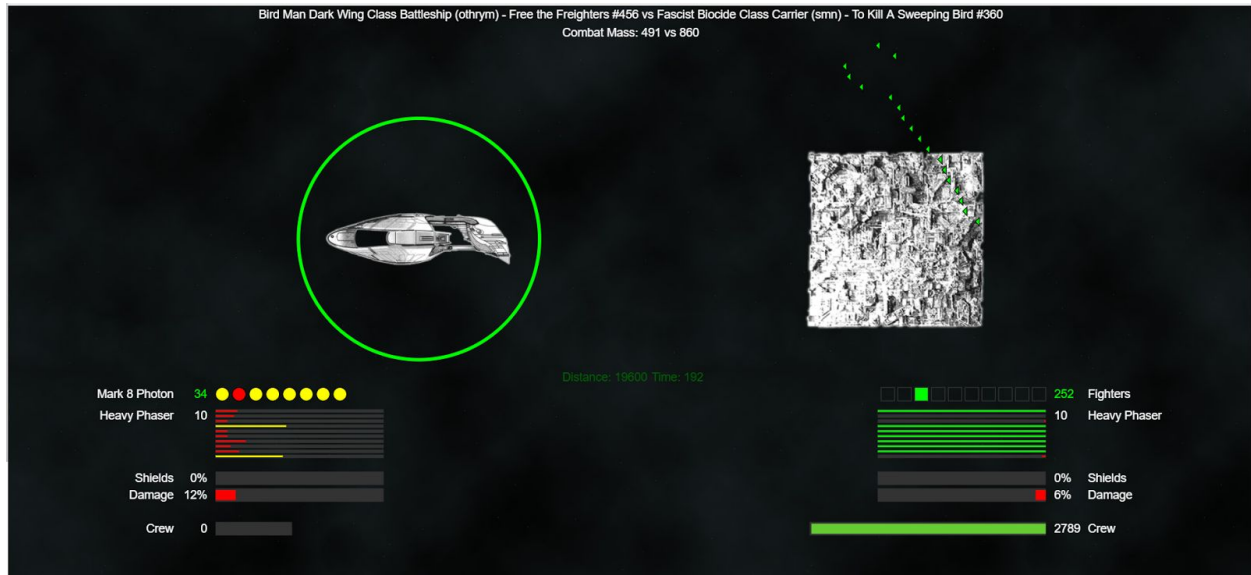
My grand plan is to lure enemy Fireclouds out. In order to reach p500 they need to get a Firecloud there. After they leave the safety of the warp well, they can be intercepted and popped by D19bs before they can chunnel in and out, but **only** if they can't retreat out of range and their ID is lower than the ID of my D19bs (otherwise they could intercept something on a small warp speed in order to evade the pop).

Turn 284: My first cloakers start to position themselves to catch blink-sweepers. Ted woke up: a Firecloud in the warp well switched ownership to the Feds.

Turn 285: Ciocco chunnels in Borg Fireclouds. I bring in more cloakers to chase blink-sweepers.

Turn 287: A hit! Coldpain #420 ends up cloaked in the same spot with Othryms Darkwing #456 "Free The Freighters". Lock that tow beam!

Turn 288: The Darkwing promptly cloaks, but is towed by the Coldpain to a D19b on trg and Biocide with its guns ready. Turns out the Darkwing only has 7 crew members, and it gets promptly captured when the Biocide gets into beam weapon range! Ted brings Firecloud 432 out from the warp well, protected by a Loki. Ted knows the intercept deal and he knows that I know he knows. I have two higher id D19bs in the region but unfortunately their positioning doesn't let them catch the Firecloud if they intercept now. Ted also chunnels in 6 Biocides and a bunch of Novas/Missouris.



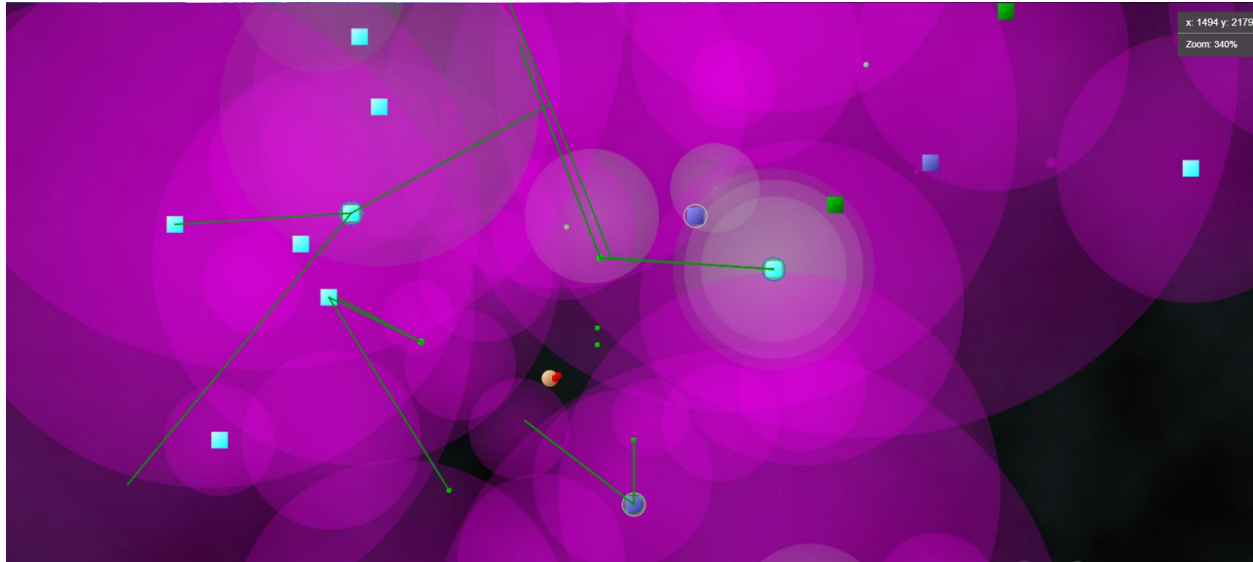
Low crew tactics disrupted!

289: The enemy pulls back from sweeping positions and brings in more high ID Fireclouds.

290: Ted takes over p428 using a sacrifice ship and a Federation-controlled Biocide.

291: My high ID D19bs position themselves right next to p428, so that any ship leaving the warp well will be in intercept range.

292-295: Enemy fleet maneuvers pointlessly around the p428 warp well and 1ly outside of it, not really knowing what to do. Maybe they were attempting to lure in D19b strikes?



Turn 292: Resume Purple Hell

296: The enemy gives up and chunnels out. The second battle of Tyre is won!

Had the enemy been able to reach p500, which was at the time a fully developed Crystal colony, they would've been in position to control the friendly code there for a significant time before the planet could've been self-destructed. This would have effectively meant losing all existing web cover at all fronts and would have made life really difficult for me and my allies. I'm still not sure why they gave up without trying to break through those last 78 light-years. Maybe I would have been able to zap a Firecloud or two, but I would have very quickly run out of high ID D19bs in the region, especially if the enemy would cannibalize a ship or two for queue control.

It's difficult to properly describe how important this battle was. It was fought without Lizard/Rebel/Robot support, simply Fascists/Crystals and a lone Colonial minesweeper and we were able to stop the advance of the "full" Bird/Privateer/Borg/Fed fleet, which easily controlled over half the fleet numbers and probably close to two thirds of the combat power in the game. They only had 78 ly between them and the potentially game-winning target. After the battle I knew that Ted and Othrym were essentially toothless against a Fascist/Crystal alliance and the last real competition would be J-Zan.

A tactically interesting but less important sideshow was fought between turns 275-283 in my Northeast, where a series of well-placed webs were deployed in rapid succession using MCBR tugs for the laying ships. The target was a Bird forward detachment consisting of a Darkwing and a Resolute. While the webs are placed, I'm moving in with a Rush, poppers and cloakers to put pressure on the enemy ships and to influence them to move into certain directions.

The enemy is late with the relief effort, and I get to pressure the detachment for a couple of turns without threat from other enemy ships. Sure enough, on turn 279 my Br4, a state-of-the-art

vessel with lasers and StarDrive 3s aptly named “The SHARK”, manages to place itself on the same spot with the Dark Wing and locks the tow-beam.



The SHARK Delivers: a testament to my claim that no ship was useless

This nets me another Dark Wing(!) Also the Resolute, now alone, tries to escape but hits webs and gets drained and captured.

The events in the Northeast were a prime example of the general problem with the enemy strategy: They would attack a region, take a few planets sacrificing a couple of small ships, then leave detachments to nearby planet warp wells to “control” the region. There wasn’t much effort in terms of trying to gain strategic advantage - it was all about trying to find advantageous fleet combat and when failing to do that, not knowing what to do. They didn’t attempt to take over defensible positions or grab planets about to build in order to let the queue run a bit.

This meant that I was free to ignore those incursions until the time was right, plan a perfect counter-attack and then launch it for maximum effect. The detachments supposed to control the area were actually very vulnerable, giving me a bunch of easy victories, as we see in the next chapter.

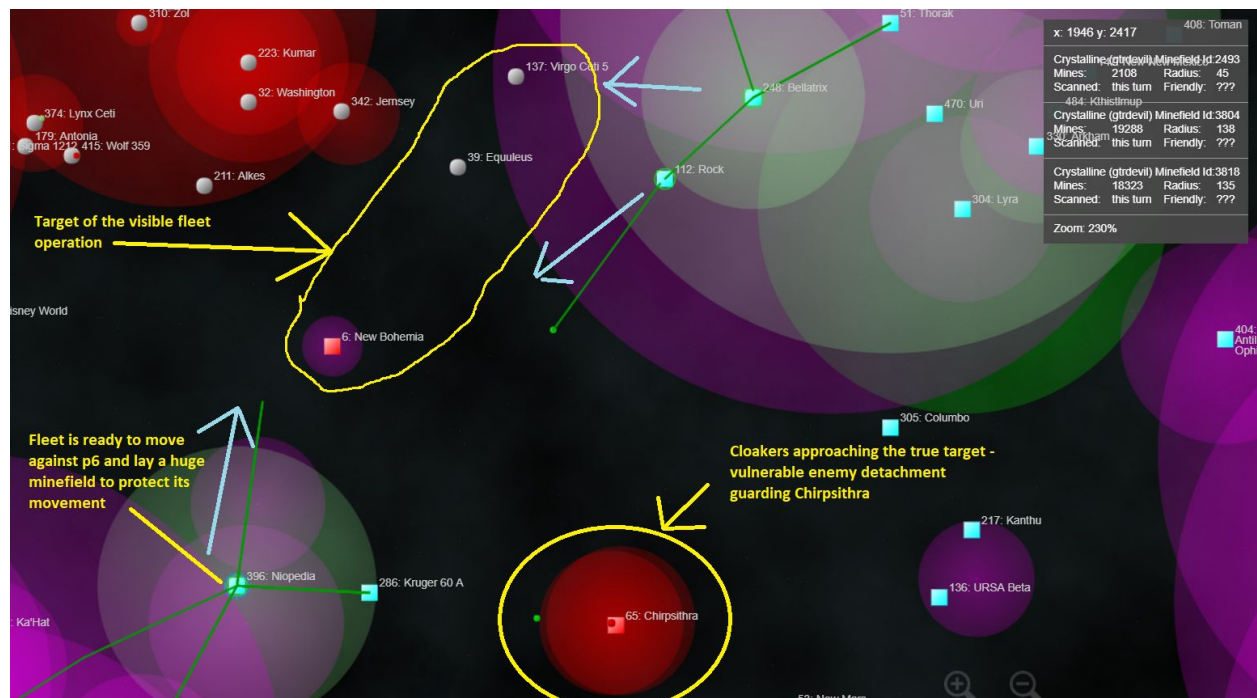
Turns 297- 310: The Battle of Chirpsithra

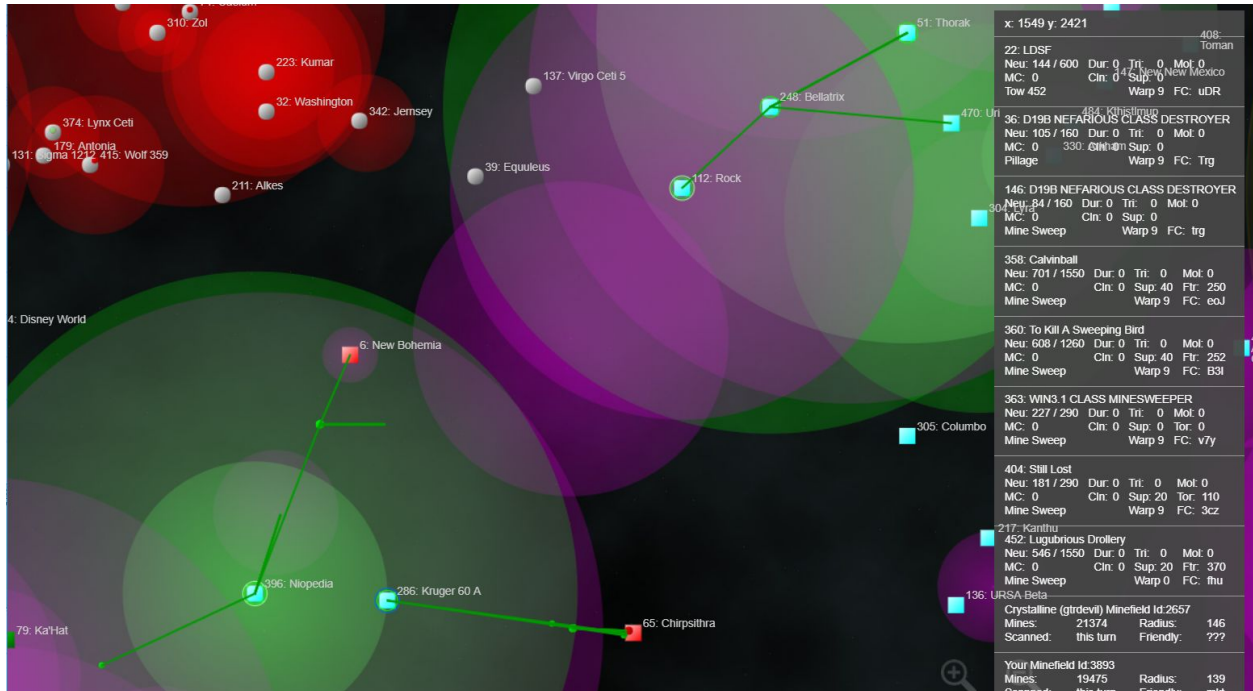
After the second battle of Tyre, I finally had the strategic initiative. I restarted my careful advance against the Privateer core, while designing an ambitious operation to eliminate the Rush (Privateer)-Darkwing (Bird) - Firecloud (Bird) detachment that protected p65, including the capture of that Firecloud.

The plan was simple: Thanks to the Darkwings I had just captured in combat and drained, I now had two Darkwings - enough to kill the Privateer Rush which was on rob mission, protecting the Chirpsithra detachment from tow operations. There was only one small problem. There were a couple of small minefields (1000+ mines each) protecting Chirpsithra, and I knew if I went to wipe them out normally, Othrym would be alarmed and chunnel in reinforcements.

In order to remove the minefields, I would need to destroy them with my own mines, and I would need to have a plausible plan for doing that without alerting Othrym. So I decided to launch a major attack against planets 6, 39 and 137.

Around turn 300, I started pushing my fleet and minefields towards p6 and p137, constantly colliding with enemy minefields in the region. On turn 302, the fields protecting Chirpsithra got wiped out as “collateral damage” in the minefield war, while I sent warships right next to p6 to indicate that it would be my target.



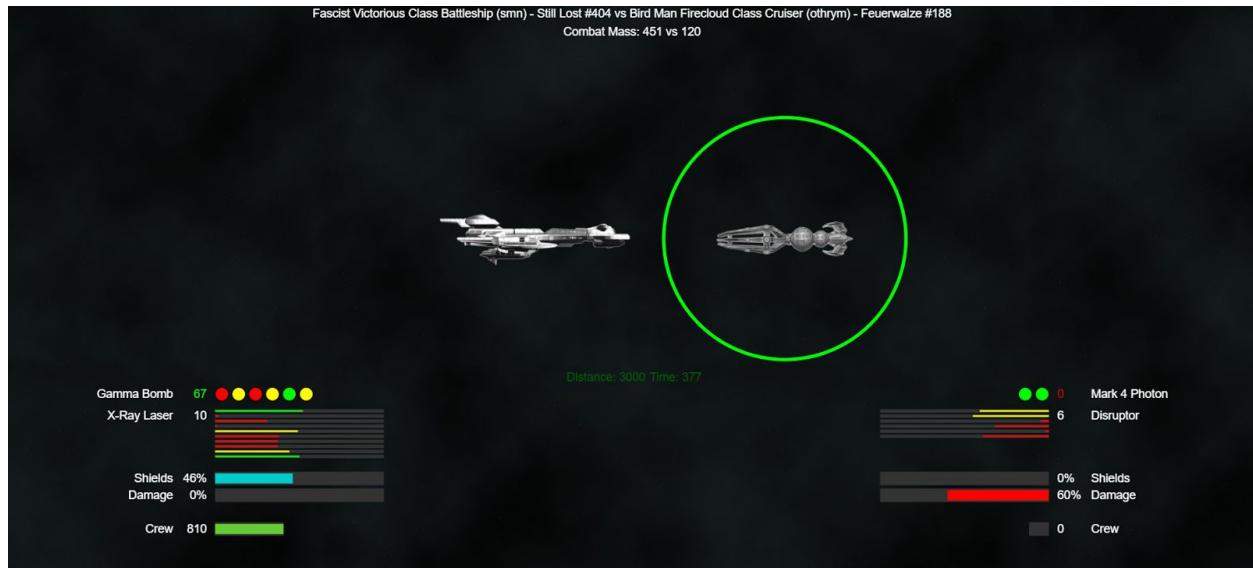


Turn 303: The three target planets are covered and my fleet advances

Turn 304 my cloaker fleet finally entered the Chirpsithra warp well, ready to hunt the enemy detachment there. My plan was simple: My two Darkwings and one Resolute would move in cloaked, PE Privateer, and two low ID Meteors would follow them cloaked without PE. The enemy detachment was moving every turn, but by trailing them in good locations I would sooner or later end up in the same square, where the action would happen. I knew I would lose one Darkwing to the Rush, and with bad luck, I could lose the other one too.

On turn 309, the fight happened. I lost a DW and killed the Rush. The Bird DW didn't engage, it probably had wrong PE. I now had two lower ID MBRs on the same spot with the DW and Firecloud, they couldn't escape now. As a side show, on turn 309 Ted launched the most creative attempt to kill my Fireclouds so far - I will let the readers try and figure out what happened!

Turn 310: My capture ship (which I built after ship limit, sacrificing 10 PBP) finally pays off! I capture the Firecloud "Feuerwalze" in combat and finally have a network! The Darkwing gets killed in combat too - so in total I exchange a Darkwing lost to a Rush and Darkwing destroyed and a Firecloud captured. A perfect little operation! I can now position one Firecloud with my industry ships, move two endpoints towed by MBRs at different fronts and have a one as a shuttle. My position is now immensely stronger.



T310: 10 PBP investment made some 200 turns ago finally pays off!

Turns 311 - 349: The Grind is on

All significant attacks and operations by the enemy have been stopped and they seem to be on the defensive now. Nothing too significant happens during these turns. I retake my northeast, advance against Madinson and help Gnerphk and Julius (replaced on turn 323 by Spectre) to advance in the southwest by pillaging planets they manage to isolate. Rebels and Lizards push against the Birds. J-Zan and I are no longer really helping each other; we both know that Othrym, Madinson and Ted are no longer running for the victory but still command so much strength that we have to keep on weakening them before turning on each other.

It's a very stressful period - no planets can be taken by sacrificing ships as those sacrifice ships can't be restored due to the queue lock. Enemy Resolutes and Darkwings give enough cloaked minesweep capability to potentially clear a large area of webs and mines in a single turn and kill my pillagers and support ships, so I need to be constantly on the watch for enemy. The 'Enemy ship list' plugin was very handy in this situation - it was simple to check when I had seen their main cloakers last time, and a few times I was able to anticipate a trap in a region. These times I simply stopped my advance and dropped more webs to overlay the area where I suspected the enemy to be in, and sooner than later the enemy got cold feet and retreated from their ambush.

Had I been playing in Othryms position I would've made sure to show my cloakers as little as possible, just to prevent my enemies from reading my fleet positions and kept them fearing an ambush all the time. During these turns my planet count goes up by 16 and my position grows continuously stronger. Despite the numbers changing very little, the game was full of action during the period. My fleet was small in numbers, but there wasn't any fat in it. All had gone in

the great turn 222 recycle operation, I had even recycled my Falcons then. All ships I had were needed all the time, I don't think I had any idle ones. The industry ships were crunching supplies, the Firecloud network kept all the time supplying two, and sometimes even three different fronts. The cloakings kept probing and scouting the enemy, the warships kept securing one area after the next.

Turns 350-352: Gnerphk and Othrym do a Little Dance

On turn 350, Othrym suddenly announces his surrender to Gnerphk. Gnerphk happily accepts. Quick queries to Spectre, GtrDevil, J-Zan and Snake reveal that Gnerphks move got them by surprise too, and for a moment all bets are off. I pour a sizable whisky dram and start to think about a sensible policy.

It takes a couple of days to analyze all the options, then I finally have my policy. I announce that I don't believe in the sincerity of Othryms surrender, that I do not accept the surrender and that Colonies are still my friend and Birds are still my enemy. I continue pushing against Othrym and ask Gnerphk to test Othryms sincerity by asking for some real concessions. Doing so, I leave the choice of turning against the rest of the coalition to Gnerphk.

Turns 350-352 give a fun burst of diplomacy to read.

Turns 353-431: The Great Game Or Great Grind? You decide

My approach for the Gnerphk-Othrym crisis turns out to be the correct one. Gnerphk doesn't attack me and the situation between Gnerphk and Othrym soon collapses. After the episode I'm still on good terms with Gnerphk and actually now feel for the first time I can trust him to some extent. He won't support Ted, his scenario with Othrym just collapsed and he and J-Zan have some sort of schism that makes him unlikely to support J-Zan over me either. This is great.

Ciocco resigns on turn 361, However Ted keeps a ship of the dead race around, to be used at a later time.

Meanwhile I continue my attack against Madinson in the north. I take a notice that the J-Zan/Snake advance against Othrym has stalled and Gnerphk never really started one, most likely due to the negotiations he was running with Othrym. I start spotting Bird Resolutes and Darkwings in Madinson's territory. Finally, on turn 359 I see a whopping 9 Darkwings at the same time. Some tracing of previous sightings makes me realize that all 12 of Othrym's remaining Darkwings are actually in Madinson's territory hunting for my invasion fleet.

Well. This can't stand. It's clear that Othrym isn't expecting J-Zan to advance and apparently not really expecting Gnerphk to attack either. Gnerphk even lacks the capability, having no way to kill maxbases without heavy losses and not having too many sacrifice ships or Virgos to start with. Now, if Othrym can just casually send all his battleships out from his home territory, it means that I need to somehow create pressure on him there.

Apparently Ted is now eager for me to kill off Madinson and provides Madinson no support. I understand this - killing Madinson removes a major risk to the carrier races and after that I'm no longer "needed" as the only remedy against the Privateer-Bird team. J-Zan is meanwhile getting depressed by his options - he has little patience for Gnerphk, no tolerance for Ted and he needs to either support my victory or conspire to stop me. He indicates he might attack Gnerphk. In a separate discussion, Othrym has a truce proposal for me: He would let me take Madinson, while he concentrates on Gnerphk. So him deploying all his might against me was also intended as pressure for me to take the deal. Ok. I'm not eager to take it though.

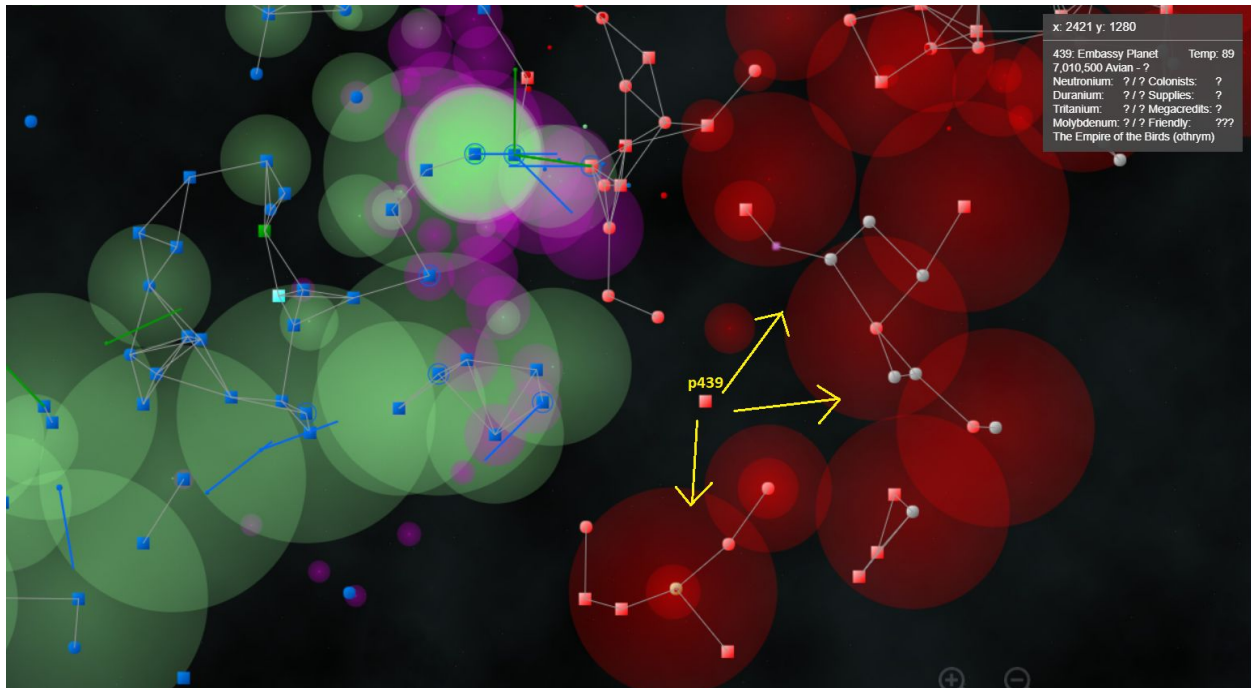
After all, Madinson's existence is a net *positive* thing for me; him being there reminds everyone that a supply of D19bs is needed. And Gnerphk, while seemingly erratic and playing all the sides all the time is still a net positive for me, I can count on his help against certain enemies. So I decide - again - that I can't allow an attack on Gnerphk, mostly because it would be very one-sided fight. Loki-proof tugs, low crew Darkwings and Rushes on RGA would leave him no credible defense.

However, I also wish to see movement in the game and on turn 375 I tell Othrym in no uncertain terms that if I were to allow this development, there would have to be something real on the table for me too. He never answers my message, so I go ahead with my plan to invade him together with Gnerphk. 4 Fireclouds and some MBRs towing them is a wonderful thing and I send a MBR/Firecloud pair undetected towards the enemy.

Gnerphk is finally happy to commit against Othrym as now it's clear that there is no common future for him and the Bird commander. This puts J-Zan into a difficult position. It's clear that he's stalled his attack against Othrym on purpose, but based on the overall situation and what he's told me, I'm certain he is not ready to attack me now. If Gnerphk and I successfully invade Othrym, we'll be taking planets that he would need to compete for the victory and put real pressure for him to join in.

Turns 384-385 again have some discussions on arranging the end for the game. Unsurprisingly, the final decision is to play it out.

On turn 385, I start the offensive with a couple of Virgos borrowed from Gnerphk and protected by glories. This is however just a small sideshow, a feint to tie up forces - the real invasion is about to start a bit more south, where a chain of planets pushes deep into enemy territory, exposing Othryms planets in three directions. P439 is the grand prize, and on turn 394 my fleet starts its attack against it.



T385: Taking p439 will expose all of Othryms hinterland

On turn 397, I get lucky. The Rush I had forgotten PE on engages the SB at p439, and wins! Perhaps my worst mistake during the entire game, but I got away with it. Phew.

The campaign goes on, Ted deploys his Biocides to defend Othrym and the front moves slowly, so slowly. J-Zan joins in by sending a combat detachment to loiter around. However I'm positively paranoid about it as it seems to seek a position where it can attack Gnerphk's fleet instead of really pressing Othrym.

The Othrym front freezes for a bit; we manage to isolate a few planets for pillaging and Snake takes a few by ground assault, but enemy fleet deployments are too dense here to make fast progress. J-Zan's fleet finally starts assaulting some of Othrym's flank planets, too. This means that one of my main goals of the operation is achieved and Othrym now defends his home turf instead of sniping my ships over at Madinson's! My campaign against Madinson continues to advance now on two fronts, and this leads us to...

Turn 432: Rumble at Kobol

I manage to get Madinson's defensive line in disorder around Casablanca - Sheegupt - Kobol. Madinson missed a turn which immediately let me wipe out a small detachment of his and as a result, his line is in a disarray. The events culminate in the battle of Kobol, where I uncharacteristically sacrifice ships to take the planet in combat, to prevent Madinson from flying

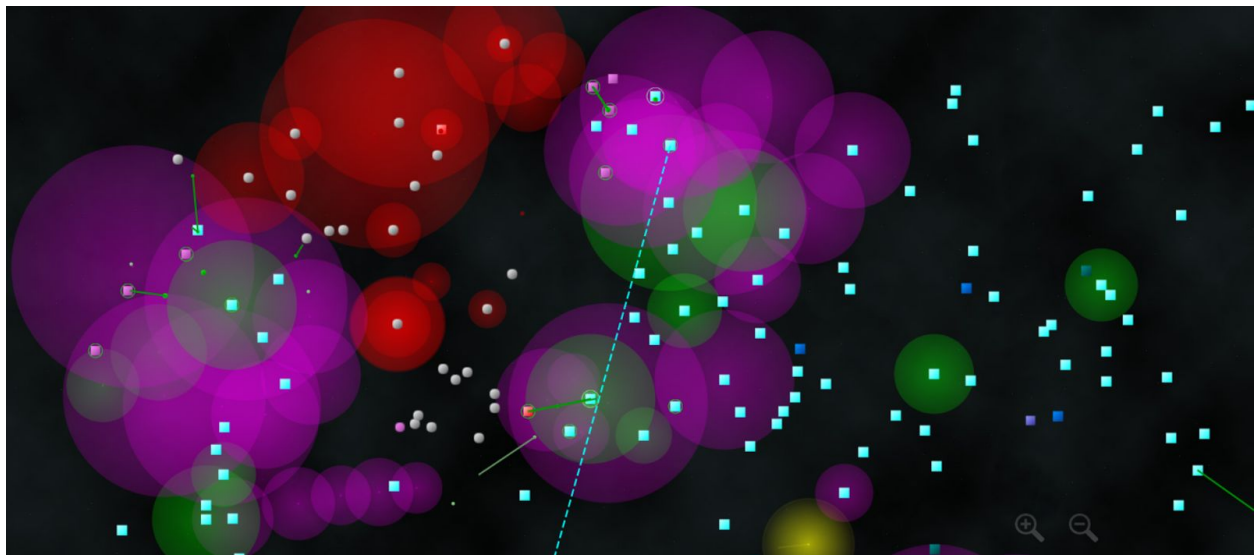
his empty Firecloud from the warp well to the planet to be recycled. This nets me my fifth Firecloud!

Another major improvement in my strategic position.

Turns 433 - 500: Time for J-Zan to Decide

Around turns 440-450 a significant Othrym fleet of 5 Darkwings and some Resolutes is caught isolated at p54, Kuhe-3 when an ion storm moves in. Othrym makes a “mistake” with it so it gets drifted off the planet to get captured by J-Zan. I analyse the events over and over and get to the conclusion that the mistake happened on purpose - that it was actually a hidden fleet transfer. Othrym clearly has some sort of agreement now in place with J-Zan. I don’t challenge it too openly, because, well, what would be the point? I decide to leave it for J to betray me, and start making mental and logistical preparations for the occasion.

Madinson has had enough and he leaves on turn 454. Can’t blame him for quitting a hopeless position. Before dropping he transfers his fleet to Othrym, who promptly starts to cannibalize it for PBP. Joshua doesn’t get a mercenary replacement for the fleetless Privateer. The Rob mission is now out of the game and this means things can start to progress quickly.



T454: Situation at Privateer front when Madinson quits

An interesting sideshow that *almost* wins the game for me happens between turns 440-453. I send a cloaked Meteor deep out into the void to attack Othrym’s PBP stash (I know of its existence thanks to him stationing prisoner ships nearby). Over 30 clearly fueled small ships - I calculate that a Meteor with 120 mk4s arriving to the spot cloaked with PE set would wipe them

all out. At the same time I coordinate an advance against Teds p68 to prevent a Biocide build there (or better yet, steal it if I can). Alas, the Meteor dies in mines 19ly from the target. I calculate the success probability - it was around 64% so I was a bit unlucky there. Still, a plan certainly worth risking the Meteor over. For the rest of the game, Othrym stations heavier warships there, so I guess it was a success in the sense of removing some combat strength from action too. Still, I feel very bad for a few days after the plan collapses.

I manage to secure most of Madinson's territory quite quickly, but Ted provides a good positional fight over parts of it. My fleet gets stretched rather thin at this point as I actually lack the ships to properly pillage all the Madinsons planets I now have access to. Nevertheless this is a period of rapid (well, rapid in Capricorn context) planet gains.

The "betrayal" I'm expecting from J-Zan fails to materialize. I keep track of his fleet movements and webbing, and while some signs are there, like new webs in Rebel identity in the central regions, nothing conclusive seems to happen. Finally, around turn 500 - J-Zan announces he doesn't have the time to follow through the plan. That he's effectively out. J hands some ships back to Othrym, some heavy ships to Snake and some Tranquilities to GtrDevil. Even Gnerphk gets a ship or two. I get none, but that's fine. He just gave me the game.

501-600 The End of History

With J-Zan throwing in the towel, I have unquestionably won. There is no reason for the other ally/friendly races to shake up the situation as nobody is in the position to actually make a shot for victory - all they could achieve is a rebound for Othrym or Ted, and we've already established that in this triangle, I'm the preferred winner. Still, there is an awful lot of planets to capture and the advance rate is slow - I could still lose if I made rash movements and let Birds or Borg ambush me. It feels a little pointless to play on from this point, but rules are rules. As there are not enough planets to be taken from Othrym and Ted to get me over 250, I agree with the other players that it's preferable that I get planet donations from everybody rather than throwing any single old ally under the bus for a larger amount of planets.

Ted again invades my north and I have to divert some forces to slow him down there. Other than that, I don't really care. The game is over, he can grab a few planets more and that doesn't change anything. I'm not going to make any hasty maneuvers now.

One fascinating piece of action still happens between turns 576-578: The battle of Hudrak-12. This is a perfect example of what kind of tightrope walking the game has been. A single lucky coincidence lands my cloaker over a Bird fleet which is planning to chunnel away from a vulnerable position in the warp well of Hudrak-12. I tow out the Firecloud and capture it with my capture Vicky (6th Firecloud, yay!) while moving another D7 under the now stranded fleet. The other D7 then tows a Darkwing to death by Virgo, and by luck the 5 Resolutes accompanying

the Darkwing move to the same spot (I had made a guess that Othrym might move there, but he had several other plausible places to move to as well). A popper explodes because someone was cloaked, and thus the Resolutes get heavy damage and the entire Bird detachment gets slaughtered. The accompanying Meteor runs out of fuel right next to the battle and gets later captured by me.

Conclusions

It wasn't easy :)

I managed to play exactly to the strengths of my race - glory devices, planet immunity and pillaging. Once there were maxbases everywhere, pillage turns into a superpower, albeit a very slow one. Pillaging such bases down to capture levels will take 20-30 turns depending on the initial happiness and natives present. In any case I would need to be able to isolate enemy planets for pillaging them and this is where the web protection was invaluable.

My weaknesses in this game were clear. Some of them were race-specific, such as the lack of heavy ship-based firepower, limited cargo room for the Victorious and cloakers, atrocious mine laying capability per PBP and extreme vulnerability to enemy minefields. Others were specific for this game setting, like the overall skill of my enemy commanders making it almost impossible to do traditional tow-killing and making it way too risky to try alpha strikes against fleet targets. I managed to address those weaknesses pretty well, by trading for supercarriers of my own and by capturing ships with stronger minelaying capability during the game.

Some of the game-specific conditions played to my advantage. That Ted managed to annoy everyone else was a huge diplomatic boon - as long as he was a force that had the potential to win the game, I could be certain that my allies wouldn't betray me. Thanks to him retreating to the void and using his fleet very conservatively, this threat never went away.

Another one was Othrym's queue lock. The queue lock is philosophically a bit like entering chess end-game; now, fleet swaps are expected and the queue controller wins thanks to initial advantage. The queue locking player is betting on everyone else losing enough combat power so that they will end up in position to ride the queue with their fleet.

Thus, in the second coalition phase the Borg-Bird-Privateer-Federation side had distinctive advantage in PBP-balance for combat (Fed Biocides, low-crew Darkwings and Novas) and they sought victory by attempting to force fleet combat without attacking too many planets, as taking planets was a net PBP loss for them. They had superior logistics thanks to the Firecloud network and could choose the theatre of operations at will. After refitting the fleet, they were relatively safe from web capture also.

For our side (Fascist / Colonial / Lizard / Robot / Crystal / Rebel) the situation was different. We were woefully short on logistics and knew that unplanned fleet battles would be disastrous to us, but, if we managed to isolate planets, we could take them over without losses, slowly but unstoppably gaining strength. The webs were invaluable in limiting enemy maneuver and slowing down their advances, so while the enemy (theoretically) had strategic initiative all the time, they couldn't get the tactical advantage. The way for our side to survive the queue lock situation was simply to avoid entering even or losing battles. We did our best to put pressure on a wide enough front that the enemy wouldn't be able to launch too large an incursion into our territory. A certain level of enemy invasion was actually preferable, as it would mean PBP losses for them, but we needed to be very careful that any single incursion wouldn't get completely out of control.

Birds and Borg were left with the narrow-minded approach of attempting to initiate advantageous combat, but in the end they never got to do that. The prospect of doing so kept their hopes up for way too long, so they never got around to switch the strategy despite it being a losing one. They applied a whole bunch of neat and creative tricks (prisoner planet, chunnel trawl, minefield farm in deep void, low crew ships etc), but I was left with the feeling that they never seriously looked at any different approach to win the war on a strategic level.

The additional and probably unintended boon for me that originated from the queue lock was that Gnerphk and J-Zan didn't get to build more carriers. Gnerphk didn't have many to start with, J-Zan had taken some losses from robbing and the turn 104 combat exchange. As they were unable to build enough strength to have clear fleet superiority, they couldn't ever challenge me without seeking help from Ted or Othrym. As long as Madinson was around, it would have been extremely unwise to challenge me anyway, as a Bird-Privateer combo is unstoppable without having access to a replenishing stock of d19bs.

As stated earlier, I knew that to win a game like this, these needed to happen:

- 1) Enough races would need to lose realistic prospects of winning. When that happens to a player, they will have to choose between resigning or staying to affect the end result. The rules specific to Capricorn made staying very attractive, which meant that:
- 2) With those races who were not going to win anymore, I would need to become the preferred candidate, or at least be not-enough-hated so nobody who could veto my victory would have the motivation to do so.

By turn 100, there were 6 winner candidates left: Ted, Othrym, J-Zan, Gnerphk, Madinson and me.

By turn 200, the list had shortened to Ted, Othrym, J-Zan and me.

By turn 300, the second battle of Tyre had happened and it was clear that neither Ted nor Othrym could force a victory. This left me and J-Zan as the potential winners. Snake would likely

support J-Zan but Julius, Gnerphk and GtrDevil were unknowns. After the developments in the field I was now the favourite winner candidate.

By turn 400, Gnerphk had slowly moved to support my victory. He implied having good influence over Spectre, so Robots were likely to be in my camp too. I was also pretty certain GtrDevil would be at least neutral in a potential showdown between me and J-Zan, or even side with me if J-Zan summoned the help of GtrDevils enemies.

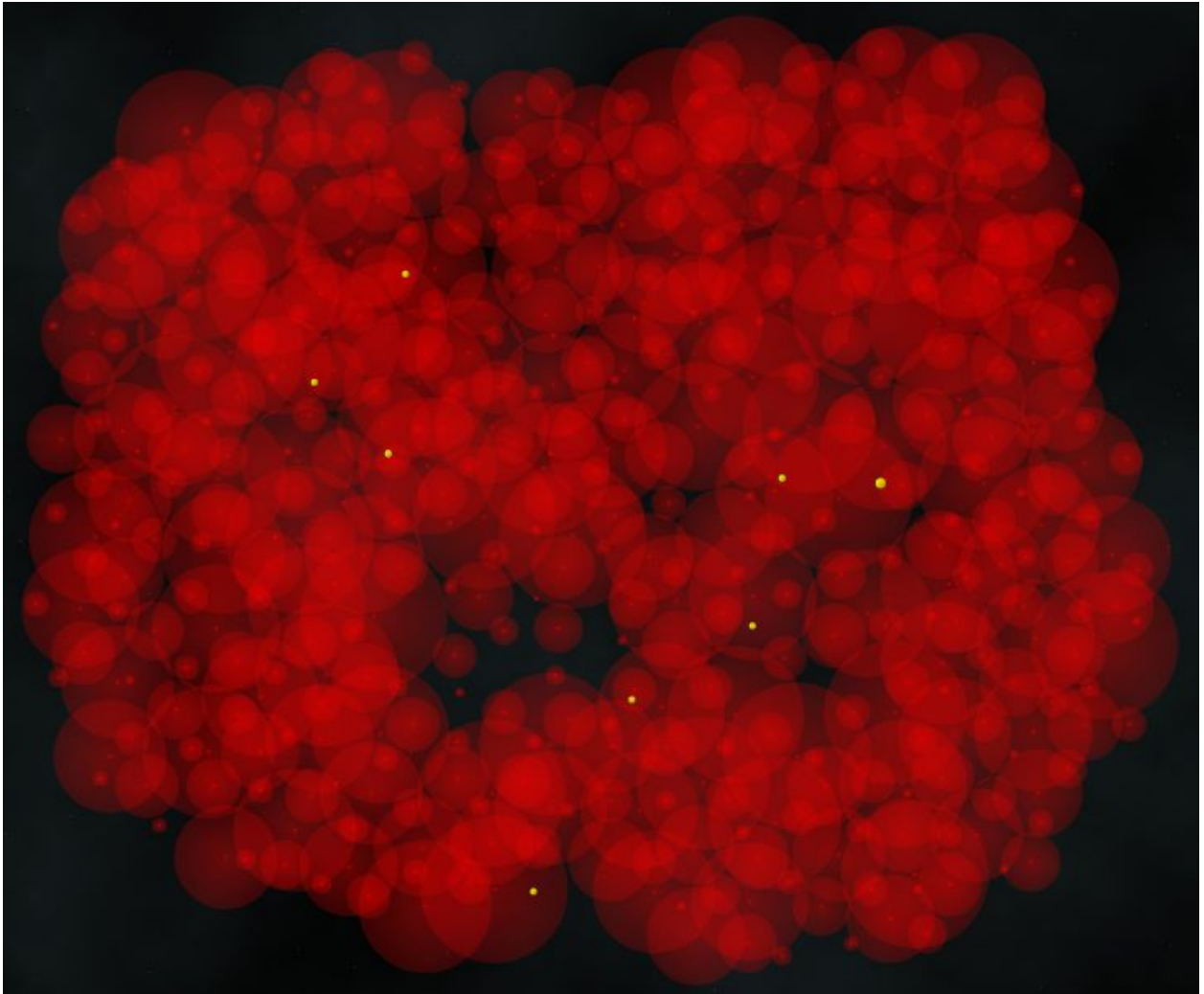
By turn 500, J-Zan had given up and the only thing left for me to do was to get the needed planets.

I kind of understand why J-Zan didn't go through with his long-negotiated plan to ally with Othrym; there was little chance to succeed without seriously risking a Ted or Othrym victory. To neutralize the threat of Ted rebounding into the winner race, Othrym would have needed to recycle some 40-50 Swift Hearts to advance the queue enough to truly marginalize the Borg fleet. However this was likely a non-starter, as at this point Othrym had so few planets left that he would've also lost massively in proportional strength when me, J-Zan, Gnerphk, Snake and Spectre would've built a significant number of ships.

Ted and Othrym still defended actively to the very end and searched for possibilities to trap me. Either they were just being professional, or they believed that they could still get back in the winning race if they managed to ambush my fleet and trash it properly. In any case this made the last 100 turns as tedious as ever. If I play without mistakes, I would certainly win, but if I made even one significant mistake I could lose it all.

Ted would constantly complain about "hiding behind webs" on the forums, but I'm pretty sure my fleet saw way more fleet combat than his (with or without Fed control) during the game. I collected no data of ship kills, and I would love to see someone make those calculations, but in general I think I did the most fleet combat overall, killing and capturing a lot of carriers and capital ships especially from Othrym and Madinson, but also from Ted.

Epilogue



*A monument in the deepest void
furious blossom of desert flowers
celebration of that thin line
between madness and ingenuity
goodbye, Capricorn*

No, wait, there is one last thing that needs closing ...

I sat on the porch watching the kids play on the lawn. They were running after and kicking the ball, so full of energy, so full of life. Hearing them screaming and shouting in joy was soothing

and relaxing. My back was aching slightly but the meds were keeping it in check. The local ale still tasted a bit bland, but that was how it should be. All was good in Fresno.

47 years had passed since the incident on the space station. The allied fleet departed soon after I started my search in the capital, and after the fleet had moved on, Fresno quickly ceased to be the hotspot of intrigue it was. The war never went away though. The heavy imperial taxing kept the local populace and Klingon colonists in a constant state of anger, and every now and then a rogue asteroid or old wreck would trigger a space mine over the night sky, changing night to day for a few seconds.

Decades ago, some industry ships had stopped over Fresno for a few months, creating ammunition for the Klingon war machine. But the industry ships hadn't been back since, apparently there was little need left as the Klingons were winning the war over the sector. The stockpiles just kept growing. Yesterday's evening news had reported the surrender and submission of the last enemies, and now the Empire was preparing for a huge victory celebration. I wondered if Fresno would see a glimpse of it. At least they should stop the war taxing.

Looking back, my search on the planet had been deeply unsatisfying business. It had taken me months to find a solid lead on the native who had set up the encounter on the space station. After following that lead for a few weeks, he just turned up dead at a back alley with no trace of malice. Clearly a professional hit, and to make it worse, the local authorities had messed up the site destroying any potential evidence. After that the lead went cold, and to date I only have a vague suspicions on who was behind the incident. But in the end it mattered little, for it was a personal obsession, and those are best defeated by finding a new obsession. And I did, I found love.

Two years after my arrival, I was getting married to a most charming young local lady. I had landed a civilian job too, managing the security of a supply factory, one of tens of thousands that were feeding the Klingon war machine. Nothing too exciting, but that was all right to me, for soon after my sons were born, the urge I used to have for playing spy games with aliens started to fade away. A distant phase of my past. Exit the tough-as-nails private eye, enter the family man.

So here I am, in my rocking chair watching over my three grandkids play in the garden. My wife has started to call me her garden gnome. She's doing it affectionately though, but I guess it still isn't entirely unfair. My waistline has been growing larger while my hairline has receded, and my beard has gone all gray. Only missing a silly hat.

END

(In case you wonder what in Gienah that was all about, the first four chapters of the "Fresno" story can be found in the last quarter of the original Capricorn thread:

<http://planets.nu/discussion/the-capricorn-war-1>)