

Fools Rush In...

NEA 2.0 Campaign Diary
By Charles Lewis

So here I go on another solo exploration campaign using B5 ships and centered on the Earth Alliance. Seeing my old campaign map in a recent Great Machine made me nostalgic and I was sorely tempted to fire up the old one and see what happened with the Earth/Minbari War that was soon to evolve in the Pak'ma'ra/New Earth Alliance vs the Minbari and Orieni War. Also known as The War of Religious Fanatics With Better Ships Than Us... But the Minbari had a large empire that I hadn't done the systems for yet, plus many of the rules in use had evolved since that playtest, and in the end, I decided it was more work than it was worth.

But I still had the itch. For the final round of playtesting of the Moderator's Companion, I had done a Brakiri/Narn campaign that was humming along, but I found it to be totally uninspiring. I seem to have trouble finding my voice with aliens. I finally decided, Why Not? and resolved to start a new Earth Alliance campaign. The NEA rides again!

For those not familiar with my last effort, the NEA (New Earth Alliance) is what I call my Human faction using Earth Alliance ships from Babylon 5. Since I like to do exploration campaigns, I don't use the B5 map. So the explanation is that this is some other 3rd Age of Man, or 103rd Age, or whatever. Work with me. ;)

This time around, I'm starting even earlier. The last campaign started in 2216. This one started in 2205. This gives me over 60 years of EA ship designs and developments. I'm in this one for the long haul! Unless the Minbari show up angry again...

I'll give you the list of optional rules that will be in effect in a moment. First, I want to highlight a couple of significant differences from the last campaign. I used what are now called the Commodore Level Detailed System Rules for my Brakiri/Narn playtest campaign and really like the compromise between the abstract regular rules and the very complex Admiral Level rules. I really like having the different locations within a system, but detailing every last moon was a little obnoxious (such that not even the Admiral Level does this anymore), and it made the whole thing tedious after 25 or 30 systems. So I'll be using the Commodore rules for this campaign. Also, I didn't start out with the home system pretty much maxed out. Since I'm starting out so early, it didn't feel right to do so. Initially, the campaign began with just the three planets settled by default according to the rules. As such, the diary doesn't even begin until halfway through the second year of the campaign, and will be relatively sparse for a while until we hit critical mass.

The last major difference is the narrative focus. The first one had me, the narrator, in the role of the CNO (Chief of Naval Operations). This time, at least initially, the focus will be on Captain Dirk Mace of the EAS Pandora, an ancient derelict scout ship found on Sol II and reactivated. Rather than rip the ship apart to learn its secrets, it has been decided to use the ship as the centerpiece of the exploration and expansion efforts. The fact that it is a Scout(3) versus the Scout (1) of the Oracle (Beta) was not an insignificant factor. Eventually, as the NEA grows, the CNO will return. But we will continue to follow the exploits of the Pandora and the elite officers that lead her crew under the guidance of Admiral Jane T. Kirche, Commander in Chief, Exploration Command.

Optional Rules Manifest

CG 4.1 Wartime Economics
CG 4.3 Extended Supply Routes
CG 4.8 Quick Expansion Rules
CG 4.10 Extended Construction Time
CG 4.17 CSCR Skirmish Rules
CG 4.18 Creating or Upgrading Jump Lanes
CG 4.19 Blockade Maintenance
CG 4.21 Ballistics Packages
CM 2.0 Advanced System Generation – Commodore Level
CM 2.2 Exploration Campaigns
CM 2.3 Star System Surveys
CM 2.4 Terrain Features
CM 2.5 Special Resources – Q40, Trade & FTL Bonus
CM 2.6 Ancient Ruins
CM 2.7 Ancient Derelicts
CM 3.8 Restricted Lane Escort
CM 4.1 Retreating From Combat
CM 4.3 Advanced Dedicated Missions
CM 6.1 Non-Players Entities
CM 6.2 New Diplomatic States
CM 7.1 Unit Special Abilities
CM 7.2 Planetary Facilities and Installations
CM 7.3 Heavy Basing Capacity
CM 7.4 Operating Alien Units
CM 7.5 Personnel Recruitment
CM 7.8 Unit Refits
CM 7.9 Unit Availability – Option 1, Availability Percentages
CM 7.11 Strip mining
CM 7.12 Productivity Liquidation
CM 7.13 Emergency Production
CM 7.14 Extended Trade Routes
CM 7.15 Terraforming
CM 9.1 Rebellion
CM 9.2 Elevated Rebel Threat
CM 10.1 Elite Officers System
CM 10.2 Personnel Grade Levels (for NPEs)
CM 10.3 Alternate Experience System (for the NEA)*(However, I'll be tracking flight experience per ship's complement, not per individual flight, and bases and their flights will be considered to have regular crews by default)*

Whew!

Modified Rules

I use my own little variant of the jump lanes options. By default, all new jump lanes are Restricted. Building a jump gate in a newly discovered system will automatically upgrade the lane to Regular. In the case of a new route to an established system, then the route can be upgraded for the same cost as building a jump gate. Improving a lane from Regular to Super-Duper costs 60.

For this campaign, the Raider Wars ended in the recent past, seeing the NEA victorious against various pirate bands operating in the outer system. As such there will be no chance for Raiders until contact is made with an alien race and the NEA no longer has total control of space.

Random Events are currently OFF but may get turned ON later in the campaign.

I use Extended Construction Times, but rather than paying the entire cost upfront, I pay as I go. So, for example, an 8 point ship takes 4 turns and costs 2 points a turn to build.

As before, any commentary from me will be in italics. Enjoy!

P.S. To save some possible confusion down the road, Earth is Sol I and Mars is Sol V. Mars is the second best planet in the system. Together, the two are the primary home of Humanity.

Captain's Personal Log

June 30, 2206

EAS Pandora, in orbit around Mars

Dirk Mace, commanding

Well, this is it. After a year of shakedown and training, they're finally going to let us off the leash. '*dora*' is a constant marvel, and we've only begun to figure what all she's capable of. But there's only so much we can do trolling around the Sol system. It's past time we take her out and let her come into her own.

Hard to believe it's been almost 18 months since Wilma found her buried 250 meters deep on Sol II. That was back on the *Gobi*, when we were testing the latest software upgrade on the sensor system. What possessed her to do a maximum power deep scan on that particular stretch of nowhere I'll never know. The last thing anyone expected to find was an alien ship at least 400 years old (based on the carbon dating of the surrounding soil). All at once, Lieutenant Commander Wilma Deering became humanity's first xenoarcheologist and we all knew, once and for all, that we are not alone in the universe.

Now, a year and a half later, I'm Captain of the hottest ship in EarthForce, and we didn't even build her. Admiral Kirche must've used every political favor she had in the Senate to get permission to refit *Pandora* for Fleet use instead of just ripping her apart.

The Admiral let me have my pick of the Fleet for my crew. Of course, I had to have *Commander* Deering as the Chief Science Officer. She and Lieutenant Commander Johnny North, my Chief Engineer, are the only ones who have been able to get our computers to interface at all with '*dora*'s computers. Those two were the only two I had to have, and I didn't really have a choice. Not that it mattered, they're both top-notch. I made only one request, and that was for my XO and Flight Group Commander. Commander Antoinette Fleming is the best of the best when it comes to flying *and leading* small craft and fighters. She's also tough, level-headed, and the smartest officer in the Fleet. I should know. She's my ex-wife. That fact that she figured out a way to wedge a third flight of Foxes when all the *experts* said only two could be efficiently operated is just the icing on the cake.

The rest of my officers and crew I left in the Admiral's hands. Unfortunately for all of us, EarthDome insisted on one crew member and left us no choice in the matter. Special Envoy Randall Wilkerson is along for the ride as the personal representative of the President. He's along as a negotiator in case we run into any aliens. Last thing I want is some stuffed shirt from the Dome riding herd on us.

The Admiral argued until she was blue in the face that the last thing an exploration squadron needs in a crunch is a division of command. Since Special Envoy Wilkerson has the lead in any First Contact situation, ostensibly that could put him in a position to be giving orders to *me* regardless of the tactical situation. EarthDome is convinced that any alien race we encounter will, of course, want to be our friend, and only someone who knows how to use every fork in the place setting is equipped to negotiate on the behalf of Earth.

<snorts> Yeah, right. If everyone is so peaceful out there, then why is this ship armed? Why am I commanding a flotilla including two Oracle-class Armed Explorers and a Laertes-class corvette? Because the Admiral and I both know there's a damn good reason it's called *The Unknown*. Fortunately for me, Admiral Kirche is Old School. She may be a political animal, but she's still Fleet First. I have unwritten permission to stuff *Special Envoy Wilkerson* into the nearest locker if he puts my ship or my flotilla in danger unnecessarily, consequences be damned. Let's just hope it doesn't come to that.

Anyway, tomorrow's the big day. Exploration Command Flotilla Number One heads out. Fools rush in...

2206.07

Captain's Log
14:50Z, July 21, 2206
EAS Pandora, somewhere in hyperspace
Dirk Mace commanding

ExCoFlot #1 has been in hyperspace for over two weeks. The crew of the Pandora has gotten over their excitement at taking their baby out beyond the Sol system and has settled into a comfortable work routine.

Lieutenant Commander North is pretty confident that *Pandora* is capable of generating an artificial gravity and he says he's 90% confident that he can work out an interface between the computer systems to activate it. I've asked that he hold off on actually testing his hypothesis until we have returned to normal space and can put all flights into space as well as both shuttles with as many personnel aboard as possible...just in case. His enthusiasm waned a bit, but acknowledged that some safety precautions were in order.

<Log out>

"Captain?"

"Yes?"

"I'm picking up something on the long-range scanners. I think it could be a system."

"Are we in range yet for the *Sahara* and the *Gobi* to be able to triangulate?"

"Um....not yet. *dora's* sensors are just so much more powerful."

"Understood. How long until they're in range?"

"I'd say at least 14 hours."

"Very well, Commander Deering, you have the conn. Let me know when the rest of the flotilla is in range."

It turns out to be 17 hours before the Oracles are able to get a good enough bearing on Commander Deering's sensor readings to triangulate and verify the presence of a star system. *Pandora* activates her jump engines, and the flotilla re-enters normal space. Before them is a pale yellow star orbited by six planets with an asteroid field dividing them into two groups.

"Well, will you look at that!" exclaims Toni Fleming.

"Wow. We're the first humans to actually be in another star system. You know how many papers I can get out of this?"

"You know, Wilma, I sometimes wonder why you left the University," chuckles Captain Mace. Commander Deering cheeks flush as she realizes the scientist in her has taken over again.

"Sorry, sir. It's just this is all so new and exciting. The scope of human knowledge is expanding with each new discovery we make."

“Well, time to get to work, People. I need an astrographic workup on any other possible hyperspace routes. We need to coordinate with the *Sahara* and the *Gobi* on planetary surveys. Toni, get your people out there for close escort. And I want a full sensor sweep of the system looking for any energy signatures. I want to know for sure that we’re the only ones here.” Captain Mace sweeps the bridge, making eye contact with everyone.

The bridge of the *Pandora* jumps alive as the crew work on their assigned tasks.

“Oh, and Commander Deering? I believe you won the toss. Got a name ready?”

“Yes, sir. Welcome to the Vandeventer system. It was my grandmother’s maiden name. I always thought it a shame that she gave it up to become a Smith.”

“Vandeventer it is. Log it, and let the flotilla know. Communications? Get a message off to Mars. Let the Admiral know what we’re up to.”

I think I’m going to soon adjust the format of the diary. We’ll continue to follow the adventures of the Pandora and her crew, but I want to include the happenings elsewhere, as well. Eventually, we’ll leave the Pandora as the campaign grows, but in the meantime, I think we’ll do a little bit of both. This is mostly because I can only get so creative with basic exploration.

2206.08

With Commander Deering’s Planetary Surveyor ability, ExCoFlot #1 is able to survey six of the seven objects in the Vandeventer system in one turn. Too bad the survey is so poor. There’s only one jump lane in this system (the one they came in on), and the planets are collectively worthless.

In a cruel twist of fate, the outermost planet, a hostile world, has Q40 deposits, but has the minimum 1 RAW and 1 Capacity. Given the cost of improving productivity on a hostile world, it’s just not worth it with only 1 RAW. Even if I transfer the 1 RAW from the asteroid field there, with only 1 Capacity, it would be decades before I saw a real return on the investment.

The moons of the one gas giant, however, collectively have 2 RAW and 7 Capacity. Sending the asteroid field’s RAW there, could make that a decent little colony. Given that it’s a dead-end system, security would be a minimal concern. We’ll see how the last planet, an adaptable world in the inner zone, surveys next turn.

Thematically, I’m always happy to have at least one dead-end system connected to my home system. I figure if I need a place to have secret ship development, or the like, such a system is ideal. I don’t have to worry about interlopers, and enemies have to get past my homeworld defenses if they do find out about it. Given the nature of my source, with new ships appearing with the passage of Tech Years, it’s not really a functional element, but I’m always interested in the story aspect, as well.

2206.09

“Wilma, are you sure about this?” queried Commander Fleming.

“Absolutely, ma’am. I’ve triple checked the results and ran a diagnostic of the system. There is definitely Q40 on Vandeventer I, as well as a respectable degree of natural resources. Combined with the 30% climate variance means that this planet is as close to a garden site as Vandeventer has.” Commander Deering had the look on her face that she always got when she was one hundred percent certain of her facts.

“And if the resources of the asteroid belt were brought here, it would combine to make Vandeventer I a very worthwhile colony site.” Toni Fleming was thoughtful.

“That was my thought, as well.” Unknowingly, Wilma Deering was looking more than a little smug.

“I’ll be sure to let the Captain know. Good work, Wilma.”

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Vandeventer is redeemed! OK, so a RAW 2, Capacity 5 planet is not normally something to get excited about, I admit. But it has Q40, which will allow the trade fleet in Sol to hop over and generate some bonus income, and the extra RAW from the asteroid field gives it some extra oomph. The 30% climate variance seals the deal, as that means I’ll only be paying a small penalty to develop productivity here. It’s not great, but the Q40 makes it worthwhile.

Of course, this means I’ve hit the magic “11” on the special traits chart four times in two systems. Even though one of the four isn’t really viable, that’s a lot of Q40 lying around in proximity to my home world. But then with my luck, this’ll be the last Q40 I find.

Now to spend the next few turns building a jump gate, settling Vandeventer I, and making it productive. See you in a few!

2206.10 - 2207.05

Upon their return to Sol, the crews of ExCoFlot #1 were greeted as heroes. Sure, everyone understood that what had been accomplished wasn’t *all* that big, but they had forged the way for humanity to grow and prosper beyond the home system. Besides, everyone likes a good party.

While the Oracles *Sahara* and *Gobi* oversaw construction of a jump gate in the Vandeventer system, *Pandora* was ordered to Mars. An Orion starbase was under construction there that was to be the new home of EarthForce and Exploration Command. It was massive compared to the small bases in orbit over Earth and in place at the jump gate on the edge of the inner asteroid field.

Captain Dirk Mace, and his executive officer, Commander Antoinette Fleming took a shuttle down to the planet to meet with their boss, Admiral Jane T. Kirche, head of Exploration Command. Shortly after arrival, they were escorted to the Admiral’s office. After exchanging pleasantries, and updating the Admiral on the performance of *Pandora*, they got down to business.

“We’re reorganizing your flotilla, Captain. *Sahara* and *Gobi* are being permanently detached, and will be replaced by *Tulip* and *Orchid*.” The latter two ships were Epimetheus-class jump cruisers left over from the Raider Wars. Along with their sister ship, *Rose*, the Epimetheus’s and the sole remaining Olympus corvette, *Zeus* had been brought out of mothballs and reactivated prior to ExCoFlot #1’s departure.

“Admiral, they’re not going to like being put on the bench. If nothing else, I expect Captain Denali will be down here demanding a second flotilla so that we can explore faster,” said Mace, looking vaguely uncomfortable. In the wake of the discovery of *Pandora* many in EarthForce accused him of being a glory hound, but truth be told he was always sensitive to the feelings of others, and knew how much the reorganization was going to upset the crews of *Sahara* and *Gobi*.

“Of course, they’re going to be upset. But we have got to face the fact that our Oracles were put on the bench when the decision was made to refit *Pandora* for our own use. That ship is so much more capable than anything we can build. The fact is that I’ve had several experts go over your data from the search for and survey of the Vandeventer system. Between them, our two Oracles were only capable of handling half the workload that *Pandora* did, and while I’m sure the extra eyes and ears were helpful, I just can’t justify that the kind of waste,” said the Admiral.

“Now, ma’am, both Captain Denali and Captain Jones and their crews did top-notch work. I’d hardly call that *waste*,” Mace interjected.

“I’m not saying they didn’t. I’m saying the systems of their ships prevented them from doing more. Without them, you still would’ve needed two months to do the surveying work, so they didn’t gain us anything by their presence. Not when I can replace those two ships with two that are more combat capable. You and I both know there it’s just a matter of time until you run into an alien race. And they may not be friendly. *Pandora* is just too valuable to risk any further without a proper escort.

Besides, this will actually speed up exploration. Thanks to that monstrosity overhead the Joint Chiefs insisted on building, the budget is blown until the economy can grow some more. That means there’s no money to build any more Oracles to handle jump construction as you find more systems for us to colonize. And we just so happen to have a couple of Oracles not being all that helpful right now. So there you go.”

“I can’t imagine the Joint Chiefs were all that happy to be giving up two Epimetheus class cruisers to Exploration Command,” mused Fleming.

“No, they weren’t, Commander. But it just so happens that the Senate Subcommittee for Exploration and Interplanetary Relations was having hearings over the future of exploration in the wake of your success in Vandeventer. A number of key senators found my opinions to be quite logical. Including a couple of senators that also sit on the Armed Forces Committee, one of whom is also on the President’s re-election advisory board.” She winked at Captain Mace.

Dirk just chuckled and shook his head. “You used to be a lot more subtle, Admiral. Aren’t you worried about biting the hand that feeds you?”

Admiral Kirche looked quite predatory as she replied, “Thanks to you and your crew, Exploration Command is the darling of the press and the public imagination. Just keep opening those doors, and we can do no wrong.

Oh, and you are now *Commodore* Mace. I don’t want there to be any question on the part of the captains of *Tulip* and *Orchid* who’s in command. Congratulations.” With that, Admiral Kirche got up from her desk and went over to Dirk. In her hand was a small case, which she opened, revealing the rank insignia of an EarthForce Commodore. With no ceremony, she removed the silver eagles denoting him a Captain, and replaced them with the single bronze star of a Commodore.

“Now, I’m sure you two have plenty to do. I’ll be up for a tour before you head out again. Good day.”

“Um, thank you, Ma’am.”

Dirk Mace and Toni Fleming shared a look, made their farewells and then returned to their shuttle for the flight back to *Pandora*.

2207.06

For the second time, ExCoFlot #1 re-enters realspace in a solar system never before visited by Mankind. They find a relatively small system, a humble star and six planets in orbit.

Ironic, mused Dirk. We lost Sahara and Gobi because they weren't as efficient for survey work as Pandora, but if they were here, we could do this entire system in a month. Alone, it's going to take us more like six weeks. Still, I can't fault the Admiral's logic.

"Say, who won the lottery to name the next system?" asked the Captain.

"That would be Petty Officer 2nd Class Kira Piglowski, Sir. She's one of my Engineering rats, so I brought her up with me," responded Johnny North as he entered the bridge. "Boy, life is so much easier since Commander Deering and I got the artificial gravity working."

Commodore Mace turned to greet the newcomers. "Thanks, Johnny. Both for getting the anti-grav working and escorting Miss Piglowski to the bridge. Well, Miss Piglowski? What shall it be?"

"Indigo, Sir. I've always liked the word and the color."

"Indigo, it is! It's got a nice ring to it. Commander Deering? If you would be so kind as to log our new system's name, we can then get to work on surveying it."

Wilma Deering responded without looking up from her sensor panel. "Aye-aye, Sir. By the way, I'm just wrapping up the astrographic survey and it looks like we've got another cul-de-sac."

"Hmm, that'll make colonization and exploitation worry free, but if we don't find a junction pretty quick, we're going to get awfully lonely."

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It doesn't look promising as there are no terrestrial worlds, one adaptable, two gas giants, and then a mix of hostile and barren planets. Hopefully, one of them is hiding something good. And if I hit another dead-end system after this, I'm going to have to put on my CM hat and re-roll. Horrors! ;-)

2207.08

Well, it could've been worse. The two gas giants' moons both ended up with 2 RAW and 3 Capacity. Fortunately, Indigo II, a hostile world, ended up with 3 RAW and 4 Capacity, so that'll be worth colonizing. So far exploration has been rather disappointing in terms of good worlds to settle. Hopefully that will improve before I run into anybody else.

2207.10

"OK, Commodore, I do believe we're here...finally," said Commander Deering. It had been a tedious two months looking for the next system. The crew had gotten used to finding a new system in a matter of weeks.

"Very good. Communications, alert the Flotilla. SOP on the jump back to realspace: *Colorado* with us and *Tulip* and *Orchid* together, with *Orchid* keeping her jump engine hot in case we have to beat feet out of there in a hurry. Navigation, activate jump engine...now!" With a word, the *Pandora* and her sisters punched a hole from hyperspace to realspace and returned to the galaxy.

Waiting for Exploration Command Flotilla #1 was a quiet, unassuming little star system with five objects orbiting the star.

“Doesn’t look too promising, does it?” said Commodore Mace.

“Hard to say, Sir. It looks like we’ve got two gas giants and three other planets. Won’t know their value until we do the surveys. One bit of good news, though, I’ve identified another potential hyperspace route, so this system is not a dead-end,” replied Commander Deering.

“Excellent! That is good news,” responded the Commodore. About that time, Commander Fleming entered the bridge. She was wearing her flight suit and drinking from a mug.

“By the way, Commodore, shall I select the winner for the Lottery?” queried Commander Deering.

Toni Fleming tipped her mug back as she finished the last of her beverage.

“That won’t be necessary. I think I’m going to exercise my Commodore’s Prerogative and name it, ‘Dirkie.’”

Toni Fleming spewed the contents of her mug all over an Engineering panel.

“It’s just a name that reminds me of a special time in my life, is all.” Mace had a thoughtful look on his face as he looked at a very embarrassed Toni Fleming trying to wipe off the panel dripping with caffe.

“Aye, Commodore, Dirkie it is. Is that with an ‘ie’ or a ‘y’?” Wilma Deering hurriedly asked, trying to ease the sudden tension on the bridge.

“‘Ie’, Commander...’ie.’”

2207.11

“Are you sure about that, Wilma?” queried Commodore Mace.

“99%, Sir. The energy signatures are very similar and the dimensions and design parameters are close enough for me to believe that the ship down there on Dirkie V was built by the same race that built *Pandora*.”

“But you said it’s bigger?”

“Yes, Sir. Much bigger. I won’t be able to say for sure until I get there and get a closer look, but I’d say based on size comparisons in our own fleet, that there’s a heavy cruiser down there.”

Commodore Mace whistled. “Wow. EarthForce is going to absolutely love us if we are able to salvage that sucker. Better let Toni know to get the shuttles fired up. I want you and Johnny and your crews down there ASAP.”

“Aye-aye, Sir. We’re on our way,” Commander Deering replied. She then turned her station over to an ensign and left the bridge.

10 hours later...

“Yes, Sir. We’ve gained access to the ship. She’s a biggun, alright. Commander Deering is heading to the bridge to see if she can access the computers, and I’m on my way to engineering to see if there’s any life in the ol’ girl yet. What?... Wait one, Sir...

“Sir, better get Commander Fleming on the next shuttle down. One of my guys just checked the flight deck. She’s loaded to the gills!” Chief Engineer Johnny North was breathless with excitement.

“Really? Loaded with what? Can you tell?” replied Dirk.

“Not sure, Sir. They don’t look like fighters, more like shuttles of some sort. Commander Fleming ought to be able to give you a better assessment after she’s had a chance to look them over.”

“Good work down there, Johnny. You guys be careful. Keep me posted of any further developments. Mace, out.”

36 hours later still...

The senior officers of ExCoFlot#1 have gathered onboard *Pandora*.

“You really believe you can raise her, Lieutenant Commander North?” asked Captain John Lomax, captain of *Tulip*.

“Yes, Sir, I do. Due to the geography of Dirkie V, she’s not as deep as *Pandora* was, so freeing her from the surrounding soil and rock is within our capabilities.” Johnny North held up a finger, and added a second. “Plus, I’ve got her engines restarted. They’ve been at minimal power for...” he looks down at his watch, “11 hours and 43 minutes to help blow the cobwebs out.” A third finger joins the other two. “But most importantly, Commander Deering has gained partial access to the computer system.” A collection of gasps and exclamations circled the room. “Thanks to the work we’ve been doing here on *Pandora*, we had a better understanding of the aliens’ language and the computer structure. We weren’t able to fully access the system, but we will be able to control the ship directly, even through hyperspace.” Johnny North leaned back into his seat looking quite satisfied with himself.

“Good work, Johnny. You and Commander Deering and your crews have definitely earned your paychecks this month.” A round of dutiful chuckles met Dirk’s humor. “Captain Vasilovichnoya,” the Commodore made eye contact with the statuesque captain of *Orchid*, “The honor is yours. I’ll give you Johnny and Wilma to help shepherd our new baby home, and you can have your pick of the Flotilla to put together a skeleton crew to run her. As her first CO, what would you like to name her?” Commodore Mace asked.

Captain Vasilovichnoya paused, obviously thinking hard. “Commodore, in keeping with *Pandora*, I think the new ship should be called *Prometheus*.”

“Excellent choice, Captain. The Joint Chiefs might try to rename her later, but I doubt the Admiral will let them. In the meantime, assemble your crew. I’ll leave *Colorado* here for local security while you get *Prometheus* ready to fly. The rest of the Flotilla will finish off the survey of the remaining planets. Once we’re done, we’ll rendezvous with you here prior to returning to Sol. After you reach orbit, I’ll send Toni Fleming over with a flight of Foxes. She thinks she can wedge them in with the shuttles and breaching pods already down there.”

2207.12

Yippee! Not only do I find another ancient derelict ship, but the system is pretty good. One of the gas giants' moons combined to have 3 RAW, 6 Capacity AND Q40. And the Adaptable world's climate isn't so great, but it has 4 RAW and 6 Capacity. That makes the Dirkie system worthy to be the first system where I will establish a significant presence (as opposed to just enough to claim it) outside of Sol.

I have one unexplored jump lane in my home system. Depending on what I find on the other end of it, Dirkie could end up being my gateway to the rest of the galaxy. Of course, as I put on my CM hat, I find myself with a delicious little dilemma. I am very tempted to make that last jump route go to a dead-end system. Why? Dirkie is the first system beyond Sol to not dead-end. It's also where I found my second ancient derelict ship; the first being in the Sol system. Now this is all due to random die rolls, but it's almost like a trail left by an ancient race. We'll see what the dice say when I get to that system, but I feel a new development in the story coming on!

2208.01 – 2208.10

ExCoFlot #1 returns with the Prometheus to Sol. After being refitted, Prometheus is claimed by EarthForce and joins the Fleet. While the Jump Gate in Dirkie is being built, the Flotilla gives up its two Epimetheus Jump Cruisers for three Olympus Corvettes. Not quite as durable, but with a little bit more firepower and I can get three into the same command limits as the two cruisers. Sweet!

In the meantime, I figure Wilma Deering and Johnny North have been "borrowed" by the Fleet to help bring Prometheus online. Not wanting to leave without two critical members of his crew, Commodore Mace convinces Admiral Kirche to authorize an extended series of maneuvers to get the new ships of ExCoFlot#1 working together and ready to face the unknown. I also swap out one of the flights of Flying Foxes on Pandora for the flight of Ancient Derelict Standard Shuttles found with Prometheus. Tactically silly, but thematically sound. The shuttles would be more useful for exploration and survey work since they are atmospheric capable while the fighters are not.

With the Prometheus up and running, the Flotilla humming along, and Deering and North back on the Pandora, our heroes explore the last jump lane from Sol and after a couple of months of rolling '7's find Sedalia, an outpost with four jump lanes. Now to find out what's in Sedalia...

2208.11

Bingo! Sedalia is a dinky little system, and two of its four objects are asteroid fields, the gas giant's moons are worthless, but one of those fields has Q40 in it, and Sedalia I is a Terrestrial world with only 45% climate variance, 6 Capacity and 5 RAW! This means there will be sufficient local resources to turn both Dirkie and Sedalia into forward bases, and since Sedalia has four unexplored jump lanes, it's an ideal hub. Since it's a small system, local resources are concentrated and easier to defend, and it's got the potential to become a major part of the NEA due to its resources. Needless to say, EarthForce will be halting exploration until both Dirkie and Sedalia are secure. I've got a lot of unexciting work to do, but it's all about realizing potential. Back in a while...

2211.12

It was a sunny day in December, and unseasonably warm; more than a few of the dignitaries present were sweating in their heavy winter outfits. The President of the New EarthAlliance is addressing those assembled; beside him on the podium are the officers of the Pandora and Admiral Kirche.

“The brave men and women of Exploration Command have led us beyond the stars and we are prospering as never before. It is only right that their efforts should never be forgotten.

In accordance with the new policy laid down by the Joint Chiefs, I hereby decree that the actions and accomplishments of the crew of the *Pandora* have earned her a place on the Roll of Honor. From now on, EarthForce will always have a *Pandora* in service, and the accomplishments of her crew will be remembered forever.

And so, Commodore Mace, as you and your officers and crew members prepare to once again venture out into the Unknown, know that the thoughts and prayers of all of us go with you.”

The Roll of Honor is something I took from David Weber’s Honor Harrington books. Basically any ship that sufficiently distinguishes itself has its name added to the Roll of Honor, ensuring that the Fleet will always have a ship with that name in service. In the books, entire squadrons have had their ships’ names enrolled. It’s a way to build a history and acknowledge outstanding accomplishments. I thought it’d be fun to do here, as well, particularly since I’m tracking individual ship experience anyway; what’s another few entries in the spreadsheet?

In case you were wondering, the last three years have been filled with shuttling colony fleets out to build up Dirkie I and Dirkie III, as well as Sedalia I. Along with the accompanying productivity improvements, the budget has been strained for a while now. The reward is that both systems now have enough population to enable them to function as supply points. Dirkie is finishing up an Orion Starbase, and Sedalia is ready to start one. With the RAW from the two asteroid fields funneling into Sedalia I, it now has an effective RAW of 7, so I’ll be building a shipyard there after the Orion is finished, and I expect EarthForce will be shifting a significant amount of its operations there from Sol. ExCoFlot #1 will be exploring the lane in Dirkie after the Orion goes online and Pandora’s Flying Foxes have been swapped out with the new Tigers.

The economy is now humming along well enough that I can afford to expand EarthForce and build a few of the new Hyperion class cruisers that have become available. Whee! Of course, now the question is: How long until I run into an alien race?

*Oh, and one other thing: I’m dropping the Random Morale Shift rule from the CM guide. In an exploration campaign you have too many systems with only 1 or 2 morale because of only having 1 or 2 census. New colonies are too susceptible to revolt under those circumstances, so *boot* out it goes! In a game of established empires, I think the rule would be quite useful as a way to prevent anyone getting too complacent.*

Oh, and one other other thing: Systems that have objects with Q40 present get the object added to the trade value of any route passing through the system rather than adding the entire system a second (or third) time. I don’t think this is clarified in the CM Guide, and Tyrel seems to have lost the email I sent regarding this rule in relation to the advanced system rules, so I’m going with what I had suggested during playtesting. So there! <sticks tongue out> hehe ;-)

2212.04

Hmmm...the one lane in Dirkie dead-ends in the Miromoto system. All that money tied up in an Orion Starbase in Dirkie, and now it’s not needed. I guess when I can scare up enough transport fleets I’ll shift the base. Too expensive to just scrap when I’ll need another one sooner or later. Now to find out if Miromoto is any good, or not.

2212.06

EAS *Pandora*

Near the asteroid field of the Miromoto system

June 14, 2212

Admiral Dirk Mace paced the bridge. The air was seething with a strange mixture of disappointment and curiosity. The survey of the outer and middle zones of the Miromoto system had yielded nothing of interest. The three gas giants that had been surveyed on their way through the system had been spectacularly devoid of resources. The asteroid field had proven to have limited resources, but so far there was no where to ship that resource. But the inner zone was wrapped in a nebula, specifically a *dark matter* nebula; something never before encountered.

“Comms, get me the Flotilla,” he directed towards the Signals Officer. After a pause, she responded that all four captains were patched in.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, we have before us a mystery. My science people have determined that this is a dark matter nebula. However, even *they* have no idea what might be waiting for us in there and what effects traveling through it could have on our ships. Our sensors have had a very difficult time penetrating the nebula, and so far all we’ve been able to identify are two gravitation sources consistent with planetary bodies. The nature of those planets is still unknown.

I’m not inclined to risk the entire Flotilla. Therefore, I’m ordering the rest of you to wait here. Make contact with Exploration Command Flotilla Two as they should be here shortly to start work on a jump gate. If communication with us is lost and not regained after 36 hours, fall back and join them. Captain Anderson, you and the *Zeus* are in command after we leave.”

“Commodore, with your permission, *Colorado* would like to escort you into the nebula. I acknowledge the risks you have pointed out, but would like to offer our services anyway. Given the uncertain nature of the nebula, an additional ship might be to serve as a communications relay with the rest of the flotilla.” The Commodore noted with satisfaction that Captain Singh voice was the very definition of steadfast, and made a mental note to himself to recommend to the Admiral that she be given the opportunity to command a vessel larger and more significant than a Laertes class corvette.

“Permission granted, Captain Singh. But at the first sign of trouble or anything that endangers your ship and crew, I want you heading back here at maximum speed, understood?”

“Yes, Sir!”

Within a matter of minutes, *Pandora* and *Colorado* engage their engines and head into the nebula, while *Zeus*, *Hera*, and *Athena* look on. It soon became evident that a significant effect of the nebula was to greatly hamper sensors, and Commodore Mace ordered the *Colorado* to stay within their own greatly reduced sensor range of *Pandora*. Communications were also effected but as long as they aimed at the last known location of the rest of the flotilla, a link could be maintained. Had they not known where the ships were, they almost certainly would have lost contact. A sense of foreboding pervaded the bridge of the *Pandora*: anything could be hiding in the nebula.

In due course, the first suspected planetary body was encountered. It turned out to be a small planetoid, barely worthy of the name. Resources were minimal. Appropriate entries were made in the logs, and the two ships penetrated deeper into the murk.

As they approached Miromoto I, the crew of *Pandora* could see that it was another very small planet, and the survey soon showed minimal resources and a less than desirable climate.

“Well, Commander Deering, it looks like you’ll get another paper out of this with your observations of the nebula, but otherwise it would appear that Miromoto is pretty worthless.” Commodore Mace sounded more than a little disappointed.

“So it would appear, Commodore...wait...” Wilma Deering’s universe shrank to the size of her console. “Rob, double check your system...run a diagnostic...” The enlisted crewman at the adjacent console was a concentrated flurry of activity. Dirk got out of his command chair and walked over to them.

“What do you have, Wilma?”

“Sir, I’m having difficulty locking it down, but I’m getting what appears to be a faint energy signal from the planet. Definitely artificial.”

“Really? Looks like this trip was worthwhile after all.” He went back to his command chair. Comm, get me Commander Fleming...”

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An hour later found Toni Fleming at the stick of one of the ancient shuttles found with *Prometheus*. In back were Commander Deering and one of Johnny North’s engineering hotshots by the name of Hiram Lewinski. *Pandora* and *Colorado* were rapidly receding behind them as Toni angled the shuttle for an atmospheric insertion.

The ride got progressively rougher as the shuttle entered the planet’s atmosphere. Toni Fleming was a study in concentration, her hand tight on the stick as her eyes flitted from sensor to gauge to scanner and back.

Meanwhile, on the bridge of the *Pandora*, alarms were going off.

“Commodore! I’m reading an energy surge at the source down on the planet below!” Lieutenant Williams noted with panic.

Dirk whirled to face the Communications Officer. “Tell Toni to abort the insertion. Get her back into space NOW!”

“Too late!” yelled Lieutenant Williams.

Down on the shuttle, things were a little tense. A wide beam of energy washed over the shuttle just as it was breaking through the wispy clouds. Immediately, the engines began to stutter and the lights inside began to flicker. Toni looked down at her control systems to see everything wink off and the stick went dead in her hand.

She had just enough time for her heart to stop and the first glimmer of panic to begin to swell in its place when the stick once again responded and her controls came back on. The engine stopped stuttering and she was able to quickly regain controlled flight.

After checking in with *Pandora*, Toni began to feel something akin to normal when she noticed a blinking light on her scanner. After a quick double-check of her notes and a shouted conference with Wilma Deering,

she realized that the blinking light corresponded with the coordinates of the energy source that drew down in the first place.

“This ought to be interesting,” she thought.

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As the shuttle approached the signal, what looked to be some sort of structure appeared on the horizon. As they got closer, Toni could see it was some sort of ruined building or complex. Much of it was collapsed and judging by the piles of snow and ice obscuring most of what remained, it had been abandoned for a very long time. Toni was glad the nature of the atmosphere was going to require them to be in full environment suits that also just so happened to be heated.

A few minutes later, she landed the shuttle at what she hoped was a safe distance. The three of them got into their environment suits and made their way to the ruins.

“How do we get into this thing?” asked Chief Petty Officer Lewinski.

Inside her suit, Toni Fleming quirked an eyebrow up. “That would be your department, Mr. Engineer. Just as soon as Commander Deering finds the door.”

Hiram responded with a nervous chuckle. “Oh, yeah. I forgot... I’ve never been on a mission like this before, Ma’am.”

“Yeah, well, none of us have. Except for maybe when *Pandora* was found in the first place. Commander Deering? Any thoughts on where we might find an entrance?”

Wilma Deering responded in her usual distracted tone, “Hmm? Oh, well given the amount of snow and ice piled up, I suspect the intended entrance is buried deep. I suggest we work up as far as we can and see if we can find some sort of...” Her voice trailed off.

“Door?” suggest Lewinski. Then he looked up at what she was looking at. “Oh. Nevermind.”

Up above them, near the top of the structure, a doorway shaped opening had appeared and light could be seen inside.

“Do we go in?” asked Toni.

Wilma snorted. “Do we go in? Of course we go in! Obviously, someone or something is expecting us, and we shouldn’t keep them waiting. Besides, I have a theory, and the only to test it is to go in.”

“I just hope your “theory” doesn’t get us all killed!” replied an exasperated Toni.

“Hasn’t yet, has it?” And with that, Commander Deering started working her way up to the doorway. CPO Lewinski looked at Commander Fleming, shrugged, and followed the scientist. Toni, in turn, threw her hands up in the air, paused long enough to contact *Pandora* and let Commodore Mace know what was about to transpire, then quickly turned off the link before he could order her to do something sensible.

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Once all three were inside, the door shut behind and refused to open again. As Toni got angry and Hiram panicked, Wilma calmly informed them that the ambient temperature had warmed up enough and the atmosphere improved enough that they could remove their helmets.

After several repeated attempts to get through to Toni and Hiram, they eventually calmed down enough to listen, and soon all three were looking around, their helmets on the floor...which was clean.

“Welcome,” said a voice. Everyone whirled around trying to find the source of the voice. “No, you can’t see me. Neither can I see you, for I am ages dead.”

“What? How is this pos...”asked Toni.

“I’m sure you’re full of questions, but this is a recording. While we could anticipate your actions to what we felt would be a comfortably accurate degree, but weren’t not able to adequately anticipate the course of a discussion. There are limits to the application of logic based on observation. So just listen, and I’ll explain as best as I can.

Our race watched yours for millennia. We found you fascinating. Here was a species filled with unbridled curiosity and the intellectual capacity to work out means of satisfying that curiosity. It was only a matter of time until you reached the stars and worked your way out into the galaxy.

In the meantime, our race was dying. Wars, disease, disinterest: all had taken their toll. While some of us had achieved a higher state of being, most had not, and in fact, were starting to decline. Those of us with a desire to preserve our heritage and pass on what we had learned felt that you would be suitable inheritors of our knowledge.

As such, we left artifacts to guide you here. Logic informs us that by now you have found both ships that we left for you to find. How do we know? Simple, we only left two ships, and the second was the one with shuttles suitable to landing on a planet. Barring accident or malfunction, your shuttle was hit with an energy burst on your way down. A shuttle of a lower technological achievement than our own would have been permanently disabled, causing you to crash. Therefore, you are either as advanced or more as us, or you found our shuttles and wisely used one of them. Given the extreme curiosity inherent to your race, we felt it safe to assume the latter.

Within this structure you will find many answers, as well as keys to unlocking the full potential of the ships we left you, if you have not already managed that for yourself. In addition, there is navigational data of your surrounding area that should improve your ability to expand. Finally, not far from here is our final gift to you: our last exploration vessel. This ship, combined with the scout and the heavy cruiser you have already acquired should enable you to explore with confidence and security.

Who we were is no longer relevant. Our knowledge, however, is still relevant and useful. Suffice it to say, we were once one of what you will come to know as the Older Races. Our time had passed before even the Middle Races had come to prominence, so there are only two races, assuming they have not yet passed beyond the Rim, who could possibly recognize our vessels.

Of them we have only this to say: Beware of Shadows, and never trust a Vorlon.

Fare thee well until that time that we can meet beyond the Rim.”

Silence followed. It was quite some time until anyone felt brave enough to break it.

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Is that the end of the mystery? Who knows? But it is definitely a significant step forward for the NEA. Now I admit that I did fudge a little bit of this in my role of CM. However, the dice determined the temple, the navigational computer, and the ruined shipyard. I tweaked the results to make it a fully intact, and atmospheric-capable explorer ship. I also decided to give the NEA a short-term science bonus, reducing their target for research by 10% to 40% of total output, effective starting the next calendar year as it will take some time for the NEA to get into a position to exploit the find. At the end of each year starting with next year, 2213, there will be a 5% cumulative chance that the knowledge has been fully exhausted and no further benefit available, at which point the bonus will go away.

For those of you new to VBAM, am I cheating? Not really. This is a solo campaign, so it could be argued that I am making things up to benefit my empire, but as you can see all I'm really doing to adjusting things based on the dice rolls: something any CM should feel free to do.

This also signals a shift in the narrative focus. The crew of the Pandora will begin to go their separate ways in the wake of this discovery, but I'm sure that this is not the last we'll see of them. From now on I'll be mostly just describing events and explaining some of my decisions. However, as our heroes find themselves in significant events, I'll include a narrative interlude. I enjoy doing them, but they do take time. Since my daughter has recently starting shifting her nap patterns, I don't have as much free time as I used to, and I'm more interested in playing my campaign than writing the narratives: otherwise, this would be a novel, and not a campaign diary! ;-)

Oh, and I'm sure you're all wondering who the mysterious benefactor race is. So am I. I have no idea. I just know it was neither the Shadows nor the Vorlons (mostly because I'm not sure I will ever convert them for use). It was some minor race contemporary with them that has since disappeared from the galactic stage.

2212.12

Year's end sees the transfer of the Orion Starbase in the Dirkie system to Sedalia, which, along with the one built locally, substantially beefs up the defenses of the Gateway to Sol.

Three of the new Hyperion class cruisers join Earthforce. The old Epimetheus cruisers will probably remain in Sol as a system patrol force while the rest of Fleet relocates to Sedalia.

The Explorer vessel, now known as the EAS *Diogenes*, that was found on Miromoto I finishes its refit. The flight of ancient shuttles is moved over from *Pandora* and the remaining hangar space is filled with Tigers.

Toni Fleming was promoted to Captain in 2212.11, and is now the Captain of *Pandora*. Dirk Mace is now flying his flag from the *Diogenes*. Newly-promoted Captain Wilma Deering is now the Chief Science Officer of Exploration Command, and has been re-assigned to ExCo headquarters located in one of the Orions at Sedalia I where she will coordinate both the efforts to examine the temple in Miromoto I as well as oversee any findings made by Commodore Mace's Flotilla. Johnny North is also promoted, now a full commander, and remains on *Pandora* as her Chief Engineer.

Exploration Command Flotilla #1 is reorganized yet again. EAS *Diogenese* is now the flotilla flagship. EAS *Pandora* remains, and the flotilla is joined by EAS *Prometheus*. While there is resistance from the Fleet to give up *Prometheus*, it is decided in a meeting between the Joint Chiefs and Admiral Kirche that since EarthForce is now in possession of three ancient vessels from the Benefactors, to organize them into the primary exploration and potential First Contact unit. The thinking is that if contact is made with an alien race that proves hostile, they will have seen a style of ship that doesn't match anything else in EarthForce's

inventory, giving a second unit a chance to restore relations before hostilities get out of hand: “Oh, them? They’re a rogue group that we’ve been trying to deal with for years. Any chance we can talk this over?”

I figure, why not? Should this situation actually arise, I’ll re-roll and average the result with the previous roll. There’s no guarantee this would actually improve relations with the respective race, and could make things even worse!

Once everything that’s going is relocated to Sedalia, ExCoFlot#1 will head back out into the Unknown.

In the meantime, research has dibs on the budget to make the most of the research bonus from the temple on Miromoto I, remaining funds are going to improving productivity on a number of worlds that saw a census boost at the end of the year, which is important, because all these ancient derelicts are wreaking havoc on my maintenance budget!

Some end of year stats:

Total Census: 35
Total Output: 134 (before peacetime economy reduction)
Total Trade Volume: 28 (with governmental Trade Focus bonus)
Total Monthly Budget: 95
Total Maintenance: 58

2213.12

A pretty quiet year has gone by. Andalia was discovered past Sedalia. An unimportant little system noteworthy only for the six jump lanes it has. One of them was explored and led to a minor system called Himalaya. It will eventually get settled, but since it dead ends and doesn’t have anything spectacular, it is low priority. Another jump from Andalia was explored and it turned out to connect to Miromoto, a system previously thought to be a dead-end.

End of year stats for 2213:

Total Census: 39
Total Output: 155 (before peacetime economy reduction)
Total Trade Volume: 32 (with governmental Trade Focus bonus)
Total Monthly Budge: 110
Total Maintenance: 61

Oh, and the knowledge left by the Benefactors? It dried up after one year, but we did get significant insight from what was there. *Jumped 2 Tech Years, but then rolled a ‘2’ to have the research bonus end. Oh well, easy come, easy go. ;-)* On the plus side, that combines with the early double jump I made when I had nothing else to spend money on for a while but research. The result is that I’m currently two years ahead, making my Tech Year 2216. I now have access to the Oracle Scout Cruiser (Gamma) and the Artemis Gunship (Gamma). Next year will yield the Hyperion (Beta), a wonderful missile platform for this stage of the game.

2214.03

*Onboard EAS Diogenes
Columbia System
March 3rd, 2212*

“Commodore, we definitely have indications of mechanical activity in the asteroid belts. Looks like we’ve got miners of some sort hard at work,” said the sensor tech.

“Really? We have found aliens? Fantastic! Comm, let Mr. Wilkerson know that we may actually have some work for him finally.” Dirk Mace looked excited. The bridge was buzzing with energy. First Contact!

Shortly thereafter, Randall Wilkerson entered the bridge. He was dressed in a conservative dark blue suit, his dark brown hair trimmed short and neat. His blue eyes almost glowed with his barely contained excitement.

“Is it true, Commodore? Are we about to make First Contact?” he asked.

Dirk looked up from the report he had been reading. “Yes, it is. I thought you should be present before we attempted to establish communications.”

“Well, I’m here now! Let’s get to work!” He rubbed his hands together.

“Comm, tell *Pandora* and *Prometheus* to hold here. These are miners, so we don’t want to overwhelm them with the entire Flotilla. Helm, take us in, but slowly. Oh, and Comm? Once you’re done with *Pandora* and *Prometheus*, start broadcasting the prescribed greeting on all frequencies.”

“Sir?” asked the Communications Officer, “Captain Fleming is asking permission to launch fighters for local defense...just in case.”

“Hmmm...Mr. Wilkerson, your opinion?”

“Commodore, you said these appear to be miners, with no sign of military units in the vicinity?” Dirk nodded affirmatively. “Then what do we have to fear? Besides, we don’t want appear threatening if we come in peace.”

“Very well. Comm, tell Captain Fleming she can launch one flight, but keep them close! She can put the rest of her pilots on alert if she wants, but no additional launches unless the situation calls for it. Meanwhile, go ahead and alert our own pilots for possible launch.

Mr. Wilkerson, you are correct in that we don’t want to come across too strong. But I’m not going to ignore security, either. Hopefully, this is an acceptable compromise?”

“Certainly, Commodore. As long as Captain Fleming’s fighters stay back with *Prometheus* and *Pandora*, I don’t think it should matter. The important thing is that we don’t launch ours.”

“Sir, I’ve got them!” exclaimed the Communications Officer.

“Put it on the speakers!”

“...Who the bloody blue blazes is tying up all my comm channels? I’m runnin’ behind quota here, and you’re making things worse. Now get off the radio. I don’t care if you ‘come in peace.’ Just SHUT UP!” The speaker clicked off.

You could hear a pin drop on the bridge. Dirk looked Randall, who looked back utterly baffled.

Mr. Wilkerson finally broke the silence. “The aliens...speak...English?”

“And with a British accent, apparently. Comm, put me on.

This is Commodore Dirk Mace of the Earth Alliance Ship *Diogenes*. To whom am I speaking?”

“hehehe “Commodore” is it? Look, Jones, if you’ve been drinking that rotgut swill on duty again, I swear to God Almighty I’ll...”

“Sir, I am not Jones. We are here representing the Earth Alliance. Who might you be?”

“Uh...Miles Lawrenceson. Um, I’m the foreman for this watch. Er, we work for Tacoma Industries of the Belt Alliance. Earth, you said? Really? It’s not just a legend!”

“No, Mr. Lawrenceson, it’s not just a legend. Now where might I find someone in charge?”

The next few days became a whirlwind as it was quickly discovered that the Belt Alliance was a splinter group of Humanity. It was unclear how they came to be there in the Columbia system, but it didn’t take Special Envoy Wilkerson long to convince the Belt Alliance leadership of the benefits of joining the Earth Alliance. The only stipulation required by the Belt Alliance was the freedom to develop their home system once the technical assistance from the EA could be assimilated; no outside colonies were to be allowed in Columbia.

Funny how life repeats itself. My last campaign saw the NEA run into a splinter colony, the Free Human Union. I had already decided that any splinter colonies I encountered would be a place for the various human factions from B5Wars, like the Belt Alliance, the FHU, the Terran Concordat, and Hyperion’s MarsGuard. And voila, there we go. Small splinter colonies will have some forces limited to atmospheric-capable designs, while large ones will have a shipyard and a modest fleet. The Belt Alliance was a small one, and since the only atmospheric designs available were some old fighters, they are very modest indeed. The big thing is that Columbia has five unexplored jump lanes, is adjacent to the Fleet Base in Sedalia, and only two jumps from Sol.

The stipulation was to reflect the independent streak of the Belt Alliance as often noted in the B5 fluff. Given the strategic value of the system, that’s going to be a real pain, as I’m limiting development to what the BA can pay for itself (though I’m not actually keeping their economy separate). EarthForce is, however, going to insist on putting a squadron in the system for defense. Fortunately, with Sedalia next door, supply is not an issue.

Fortunately, I still have other jump lanes to explore, so I don’t have to put ExCoFlot #1 on a leash while Columbia builds itself up. I definitely don’t want to endanger by exploring from it anytime soon. Now I just need to build a jump gate (which will be provided by the EA – we’re not waiting THAT long), so that it can be integrated into the rest of the Earth Alliance.

Also, note that I’m dropping CM 7.10 Overpopulation. On reflection, it’s not something I want to deal with in a solo campaign – just one more rule to try and remember. Don’t get me wrong, I think it’s a fine rule, but with me doing this solo, I don’t want to implement it only to discover I’ve been forgetting it for 2 years’ worth of turns. The ol’ noodle can only hold so much at a time!

2214.07

Commodore's Personal Log
EAS *Diogenes*
Alpha System
July 6, 2214

"Wow! This has been a crazy month and a half, or so. We had pushed on from the Willickers system mostly on a whim. You can imagine our excitement when we picked up a jump gate beacon that we hadn't placed!

Shortly after using the jump gate, we were hailed by alien ships that later turned out to be the Alpha system patrol force representing the Attarn Union, whose territory we had entered.

Wilma's new Universal Translator™ that had been sent out with us got quite a workout. We had a few issues at first, but her widget did the trick! It didn't hurt that the Attarns are both friendly and patient.

They're a strange race. Cybernetics is in widespread use, and pretty much every individual we met had some sort of implant or another. I know we've never had much luck with the stuff, and after seeing the Attarns, I'm glad we haven't. The tech is workable, but requires constant maintenance, and they have to take anti-rejection drugs so their bodies don't fight the presence of the implants.

Their ships looked a little odd to me at first, also. Their ships have sleek lines and obvious turrets for their weapon mounts. Their fighters are a little on the bulky side, but look to be atmospheric-capable (I found out later that they aren't). I'd say it took about a week before I finally made the connection. I had to check the archives to verify, but their ships look a lot like our old wet-navy warships

After we established communications and Mr. Wilkerson earned his keep by establishing formal relations with the Attarns, we were able to get a closer look at the ships the Attarns use for their system patrol in the Alpha system. They had two *Indomitable*-class light carriers on patrol in the system. They are roughly comparable to our new *Hyperion* cruisers, but appeared to have a higher anti-fighter capability and twice the fighter load of a *Hyperion* (two flights to one). And that's their light carrier! However, all their weapons are matter-based, which could cause them some serious logistical headaches in the event of a war. Their fighters, the Buccaneer medium fighter is very comparable to our new Tigers, though again, I'd say they have a slight edge.

They were, of course, suitably impressed with *Diogenes*, *Pandora*, and *Prometheus*. Not wanting to outright lie to our new friends, Mr. Wilkerson told them that our Flotilla represented the best ships in EarthForce. He very carefully did *not* tell them we had no way to build more of them. <chuckles>

After contact was established with their government, we did begin to notice some weird messages. It was not uncommon to get three totally contradictory messages on the same day regarding the same topic. Whenever we would ask for clarification, it would take a week to get a straight answer.

Fortunately for me, that's Mr. Wilkerson's department, so he gets that headache.

In the end, though they may be a bit erratic, they are friendly enough. Mr. Wilkerson is confident that he'll soon be able to get them to agree to more formal ties.

Time will tell... At least they're not shooting at us."

I've got Sean Martinez' B5 Races guide he wrote up using a playtest version of the Menagerie book, which I'll be using where appropriate. Unfortunately, the Attarn Union is not an official race, so it doesn't have an entry in his stuff. Fortunately for me, however, Tyrel added a random race generator to the back of Menagerie, so I decided to give it a whirly-go. Basically I rolled until they had maxed out their points based on the current set of traits; i.e. I didn't try to maximize their negative traits. If I had rolled one last negative trait instead of the last positive, which used up their available points, I would have kept rolling (if that makes any sense).

First off, the Attarns are 76/84/01 for their AIX values. It's amazing what a Xenophobia of 1 does for a race's relations with strangers! The Random Generator gave me a Military Meritocracy with a negative scientific focus. They got the Erratic, Open Society, Chemical Addiction, Cybernetic, Professional Armies and Master Tacticians: Maneuvers traits. I was surprised how well they all work together, and the Erratic trait helps to offset their insane level of friendliness.

Commodore's Personal Log

EAS *Diogenes*

Alpha System

July 29, 2214

"Whaddya know? Mr. Wilkerson was right in his assessment of the Attarns. They've just signed a formal Non-Aggression Pact.

However, he and EarthGov are both concerned about the apparent flakiness inherent in the Attarns, so I've been ordered to detach *Prometheus* for his use while he engages in further talks with them. I guess the hope is that we can get so entangled with agreements and treaties that they can't worm their way out of them anytime soon.

In the meantime, the rest of the Flotilla is going to be upgrading the route between Willickers and Alpha in anticipation of a trade between our peoples. A jump gate is also going to be built in Willickers, and I imagine a colony not too long after.

That should keep us out of trouble for a while, but I'm sure we'll be back out there pushing back the boundaries before we know it!"

So, yes, I got a Non-Aggression Pact out of them. I'm probably going to shoot for a trade treaty next turn as even with treaty delay there's a 64% chance they'll accept it. The Erratic problem goes away for a race once they're at a Mutual Defense Treaty or Alliance level, so I'm going to try and get to the MDT as fast as I can so I can stop worrying about whether the Attarns are going to flip a coin and tell the NEA to blow.

2214.08

The Attarn Union agreed to a Trade Treaty, even though the link from Sedalia to Willickers to Alpha is not yet sufficient to allow for trade. Randall Wilkerson is working hard! His efforts are rewarded with a promotion within the Foreign Affairs Office, and a courier vessel is dispatched from Sol to serve as his personal transport, thereby freeing up *Prometheus* from having to shuttle him around.

2214.09

Feeling frisky, Mr. Wilkerson pushes the Attarns into a Peace Treaty, which they readily agree to. When word of this reaches Earth, he is specifically ordered to back off for a bit lest the Attarns start feeling like they're being backed into a corner.

I just want to point out that through all this the relationship level between the Attarn Union and the NEA has been in the 40s. That's just how much of an impact that a very low XE value can have.

Meanwhile, the route between Alpha and Willickers is upgraded, and assets move in to begin construction of a jump gate in Willickers, completing the link between the NEA and the Attarn Union.

And in other news, the Attarns finally succeed in exploring their last remaining route from their home system. They find the Eta system, a good sized system that will keep them busy surveying for quite some time.

2214.12

And so another year comes to a close. This one has been rather eventful with the discovery of the Belt Alliance and their return to the greater fold and the introduction of the Attarn Union, our friendly neighbor to the north. (*What, are they Canadian now?*) Things have been quiet on the diplomatic front, as even with their low Xenophobia, a treaty delay in the 30s means it's time to back off for a while.

ExCoFlot #1 is back in Sedalia chasing down the last unexplored route from that system, while the Attarns are busy surveying Eta.

An attempt at terraforming Columbia III, home of the Belt Alliance, failed, but we'll try again in 2215.

Here's an updated snapshot of the New EarthAlliance:

Total Census: 41
Total Output: 166 (before peacetime economy reduction)
Total Trade Volume: 35 (with governmental Trade Focus bonus)
Total Monthly Budget: 118
Total Maintenance: 65

For comparison, here's the Attarn Union:

Total Census: 50
Total Output: 191 (before peacetime economy reduction)
Total Trade Volume: 28
Total Monthly Budget: 124
Total Maintenance: 53

2215.07

Commodore's Personal Log
EAS *Diogenes*
Sedalia I
July 23, 2215

"Well, today I realized how much I still love Toni. Typically, it's when I find out she may not be around much longer.

Evidently, there was some sore of alien virus lurking among those ruins on McNerney V. Our search teams caught it, brought it back to the Flotilla, where it went to work. The docs here in Sedalia have just finished

doing examinations of everyone, and right now the infected rate is only 15%, but Toni is one of them. Wilma told me that this virus is completely unlike any other virus encountered before, and while work is starting to find a cure, it's unknown how long that will take.

In the meantime, Toni is getting sicker. Some of have already died.

Dammit! I hate feeling helpless. Even worse, I hate feeling responsible and helpless. I just received word from the Admiral that there are reported cases outside of my crew here in Sedalia and in Andalia. Someone must have had contact with a merchant ship crewman. I can't escape the feeling that this is all my fault. We should have detected while we were still surveying McInerney, then we could have just stayed there and not risked spreading it to the civilian population. But nobody started showing signs until we were already on our way here.

Wilma believes that because it was an alien virus, it took some time for it to adapt to our physiology. Now that it has, it's able to spread faster.

How many will die because we didn't catch it?

How many will die because I failed?

In a bad attempt at humor, the Admiral noted that the second alien species we've encountered is in an all-out attempt to kill us all, so we're currently battling .500 in meeting friendly aliens. Thank God, the Attarns don't seem to have caught it. We're going to have to stop all merchant shipping from passing through Andalia and Sedalia until a cure can be found. Our new trade relations with the Attarns have merchants passing through Sedalia on their way to both Attaria and Sol. Last thing we need is to spread this thing through both our populations willy-nilly.

I'm sure there will be much anguish over the loss of trade revenue, but it beats the heck out of millions or billions dying.

Fortunately for everyone else, Sedalia is the primary base for EarthForce, so the means of creating and enforcing a blockade of the system is already here. Unfortunately for EarthForce, there's a very good chance many of those on the blockade could end up sick themselves. All those known to be infected are in quarantine, but we don't know yet how far it's spread.

I just hope they can find a cure and fast. Toni doesn't have much time."

This was a tricky one. I triggered the Contagion in the middle of a system survey with a month to go, but the description clearly indicates that the contagion gets loose among the general population before detection. I rolled for the Human susceptibility to the virus and got a '1', which bought me some time. That meant it wasn't going to start killing people in a frenzy. So I figured it would take some initial incubation time as it adjusted to human physiology. Good enough. So when ExCoFlot#1 arrived in Sedalia, I started rolling...

And I rolled a d10 for all officers exposed, getting infected on a '10'. Only Toni got sick.

2215.09

"Unto Almighty God we commend the soul of our sister departed, and we commit her body to the stars; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life.

Amen,” intoned the High Chaplain of EarthForce as Captain Antoinette Fleming’s casket was launched towards Sedalia’s star.

Commodore Dirk Mace felt like his soul was being shredded with each shot of the honor guard. *I never got to tell her*, he thought.

After the service was over, Admiral Kirche grabbed him by the elbow and steered him away from the gathered mourners. “Come with me, Mace,” was all she said to him until they were safely in the study next to her office. Dismissing her steward, she went over to the corner and got out a crystal decanter.

“This is 100 year old whiskey from Kentucky. I haven’t touched it since I got promoted to Admiral. We’re going to have some now.”

“Uh, Admiral, I really don’t feel like drinking right now,” said Dirk stiffly.

“You presume you have a choice in the matter. You do not. You are going to have a drink. That’s an order. And you are going to sit down. That’s also an order.” With obvious reluctance, Dirk went to an overstuffed leather chair and sank down. Admiral Kirche handed him a glass with more than a few fingers full of whiskey in it. She raised her own glass.

“To Toni Fleming: the best damn fighter pilot I ever knew.” She tipped her glass back and had a healthy swallow. Only a slight cough gave any indication that the liquor gave her any trouble. As she peered over her glass at Dirk she said, “Drink more.”

“Admiral, really, I don’t...”

“Drink more, dammit. There’s something I have to tell you, and I don’t want you completely sober when you hear it.”

“Crap,” he responded, and proceeded to drain his glass. That triggered a coughing fit that lasted a couple of minutes. When he was a semblance of control again, he looked up at the Admiral expectantly.

“Just before we left for the service, I got word from the lab. And...well, um... There’s no good way to say this, Dirk, but they’ve found a cure. No one else will die from this damn bug.”

Commodore Dirk Mace proceeded to throw up several fingers worth of very old Kentucky whiskey all over the Admiral’s rug.

...

I got lucky in that it only required the minimum investment to find a cure (200 EPs of invested research). This I was able to do in two turns. I did the rolls for casualties before implementing the cure, and Toni lost her roll.

2215.12

The end of the first decade of the campaign. This has been a very quiet period, overall, with contact being made with only one alien race. That being said, I just checked for end of year NPE activation, and we have a new kid on the block. Specifically, we’ve been joined by the Hyach. I haven’t converted them yet, so there’ll be a pause while I do so.

...

I'm back. The Hyach joined the galaxy by finding the Delta system, an unclaimed system on the edge of Attarn space. So they're here. But nobody else knows it. Whee!

...

*I'm back again. Between moving and that darn pesky thing called "Real Life" I've been too busy lately to do anything with this campaign. But no longer! **Fools Rush In!** is back in business. The resumption of the campaign is going to see a shift in format. From now on (or until I change it), I will be commenting on the activities of all powers, leading off each month with the NEA. The occasional narrative interlude will probably still appear, but right now, I'm more interested in moving things along. Of course, should a nice tasty war break out, all bets are off!*

2216.01

ExCoFlot#1 begins another round of exploration based out of the Columbia system. The Exploration Support Group is in orbit over Columbia III, while TF1 patrols the system and provides general security for the Belt Alliance.

The jump gate being built in McInerney finishes up, and funds are poured into another attempt at terraforming Columbia III to Human norms.

ExCoFlot#1 finds the Maui system, an outpost system with four objects.

Attarn Union: Scout Force explores the other route from the Zeta system, while most of the budget is used from Productivity Investment in the Eta and Zeta system in the wake of the large colonization effort last month.

Hyach Gerontocracy: Scout Fleet surveys the Delta System. On Delta I they find an ancient derelict destroyer. Delta II just so happens to be the Hyach equivalent of a Gaia world.

Uh-oh. The NEA no longer has a monopoly on ancient derelicts. This could have some interesting consequences down the road.

2216.02

A colony fleet is organized at Sedalia I to establish a colony in McInerney, where there is a juicy terrestrial world with 5 RAW waiting. ExCoFlot#1 surveys the Maui system.

Attarn Union: A trade fleet is organized for Zeta. Due to the nature of the jump routes around Attaria, some of the neighboring systems have their own trade fleet in anticipation of future growth. Attaria is already involved in a Gamma → Attaria → Beta route, and Alpha anchors a route into NEA space. Hopefully, some exploration will yield some profitable systems.

In addition, more Productivity Investment in the Eta system is made.

Hyach Gerontocracy: First order of business is to get their new ancient derelict destroyer home. Scout Fleet is then going to work on building a jump gate in Delta so that the Gerontocracy can formally claim the system, thereby paving the way for contact with the Attarns. Delta isn't the most promising system, but it is

next door to Shri-Shraba, so it must be secured for the Gerontocracy. The hulls required for a second scout fleet are laid down at Shri-Shraba IV.

2216.03

The entire budget for the month is plowed into improving the productivity on Sol III. A worthless rock with only RAW 1, but with a recent growth spurt to 5 census, I want to keep morale under control.

Attarn Union: Most of their budget goes to improving productivity on Epsilon IX, a gas giant with a lucrative cluster of moons. Meanwhile, Scout Force continues to work on the remaining jump route out of Zeta.

Hyach Gerontocracy: The Hyachs are busy plowing *their* budget into productivity investment, as well. As a newly activated NPE, they are not at optimal productivity in relation to census levels.

2216.04

Productivity investment at the new colony in McInerney, while the ExCoFlot#1 and #2 both converge on Columbia.

Attarn Union: The Attarns build another colony fleet and wait patiently for the Scout Force to find something.

Hyach Gerontocracy: Investment and shipbuilding. As soon as some funds free up, they'll begin construction on a jump gate in Delta.

2216.05

Six Laertes (Delta) corvettes are laid down in Sedalia. Two Olympus', the *Athena* and the *Zeus*, are transferred to TF1 in Columbia to boost local defenses. With ExCoFlot#1 focusing its efforts on the four remaining unexplored jump lanes stemming from that system, the Joint Chiefs feel that more than a Hyperion and an Olympus are sufficient protection for the system. Once the Laertes' are finished, three of them will also head out to Columbia to round the Task Force, bringing its total strength to one Hyperion (Alpha), three Olympus (Alpha), and three Laertes Police Corvette (Delta). With the Belt Alliance starting construction on three Escort Carriers, that should ultimately give the Columbia system more than sufficient protection until work can begin on an Orion starbase.

Exploring out from Columbia, ExCoFlot#1 encounters the Vree, an IND-3 (i.e. interplanetary) race that has developed spaceflight, but does not yet have the ability to use jump gates or jump engines and is confined to its own system. Since they don't have interstellar travel yet, I opted to start their Tech Year at 2162, which gives them the Zorth light fighter and a couple of their earliest warships. Once they achieve interstellar travel, I will bump their Tech Year up to the first year they have a jump capable ship available.

The Vree do not like Humans, with an initial relationship of 21. However, they don't dislike them enough to initiate hostilities, so they firmly invite the humans to leave Vreetan. I'm going to have to get Special Envoy Wilkerson over to Vree space and see what he can do to warm things up a bit.

Attarn Union: A transport fleet is assembled to handle the transfer of RAW in Zeta systems asteroid belt to the growing colony at Zeta II while additional colonists head out to the system.

Hyach Gerontocracy: The jump gate in the Delta system is built and the refit of the ancient derelict destroyer found in that system is begun at Shri-Shraba IV.

2216.06

The Attarns declare the Peace Treaty to be null and void, but Special Envoy Wilkerson talks them into signing a new one.

The Attarns "Erratic" trait kicked in. Fortunately, Wilkerson was able to repair the damage, but overall, relations are worsened as a result. The bad part is that treaty delay was finally starting to come down to a reasonable level, and now it's kicked back up thanks to the delay for signing a new Peace treaty. I'm anxious to get them up to a Mutual Defense treaty, so I don't have to worry about it anymore. The big question is whether it's more important to keep Wilkerson focused on the Attarns, or shift him over to the Vree to get them up to a trade treaty, or some such... Ultimately, I think the prudent thing would be to keep him focused on the Attarns. A one system, pre-interstellar race just doesn't compare to a multi-system empire.

Attarn Union: Huh? What are the Humans are upset about? And Scout Force finally finds something. *And just missed triggering an NPE two jumps from their homeworld by 3%!* The Theta system is minor with six objects and five additional jump routes (!!). Scout Force prepares for system survey.

Hmmmm... Two systems adjacent to Attaria with five or more jump routes, and now a third system that is two jumps from Attaria. The Attarns have the beginning of a security issue. I think it would behoove them to grow their fleet a bit more and build a few bases before exploring much further. Of course, since they don't have any base designs of their own, they're limited to civilian Small Bases, which are fairly limited. If they weren't so busy being flaky on the NEA they might've gotten the design for the Hephaestus, but they'll have to get a friendlier before the NEA will consider transferring a base design.

Hyach Gerontocracy: Colonists head off to Delta and Productivity investment continues.

Vree Conglomerate: Productivity is improved on the homeworld, and the remaining points are thrown into research. Now that they've seen interstellar travel in action, they want some for themselves.

2216.07

Oh, sweet merciful... The Attarns did it again! Something about some typos that crept into the new treaty that invalidate the whole thing. Having just arrived in Attaria, Special Envoy Wilkerson again attempts to get them to sign a new treaty, but alas, this time it's for nought, and relations between the Attarn Union and the NewEarth Alliance are beginning to suffer.

So much so that the Joint Chiefs have a vigorous debate on the merits of building some additional ships in case relations should worsen even further. Eventually it is decided that building additional Hyperions might precipitate a crisis, so a compromise is reached where four Artemis Gunship (Gamma)s will be built, and if the Attarns break the Trade Treaty, Hyperions will be built, consequences be damned.

Attarn Union: Evidently, the Attarn military leaders read my comments from last turn, as they explode in a frenzy of base building. Of course it would be more impressive, if they were building something larger than a civilian Small Base, but hey, you work with you've got.

Hyach Gerontocracy: The ships for their second Scout Fleet are almost finished, while the first moves to construct a jump gate in the Yonog system, formally bringing it into the Gerontocracy.

Vree Conglomerate: All available funds are poured into research.

July 12th, 2216
EAS *Diogenes*
Tokati system
1700 Hours, Ship's Time

"Are you sure we're clear?" asked Commodore Dirk Mace.

"Yes, sir. Sensors indicate they've removed the active weapon locks. Weapons are still powered up and targeting sensors are active, but we're no longer painted," responded one of the crew.

"Very well. Pull back a bit further. Captain Kierkegaard, inform the flotilla that once we've finished gathering the basic astrographic data, we're outta here."

"Aye, sir." Captain James T. Kierkegaard was a rising star in Exploration Command. Young and charismatic, the crew loved him. He was one of the youngest officers in EarthForce history to make Captain, and the youngest ever selected to be a Flag Captain. Commodore Mace found the guy to be a bit annoying at times, but a valuable officer nonetheless.

"Wow. I've never been screamed at in a first contact. These Tokati are pretty nasty customers for a bunch of featherless birds given their tech limitations." He turned to the Lieutenant Commander in charge of the electronic warfare and sensors section of the bridge. "Are you sure about those readings, Jim?"

Aye, sir," responded Lt. Commander Jim Weatherly. "By all accounts, they're even behind the Vree a bit. The Tokati are fully capable of interplanetary travel, but no indication of jump gate or jump engine technology. And while those ships of theirs outgun anything we have here short of the *Prometheus*, they seem to be rather fragile."

"In other words, they're a bunch of bantam roosters spoiling for a fight, but they have a glass jaw?"

"Yes, sir. Something like that..."

Yes, the dreaded Tokati. After they were activated, I checked my files and only had 3 fan designs for them. Doing some digging amongst my B5Wars resources showed them on maps, but no further information. A quick check on the web indicated that they were mentioned in one episode of B5, they are descended from birds but featherless, and don't like the smell of Pak'ma'ra. But then, who does?

Since that's all there was to them, they weren't included in Bandit's B5 VBAM Race guide. So I warmed up the online die roller and used the random chart from the back of Menagerie. I got quite an eclectic mix of traits: Weapons Specialists (+3), Artifact Aficionados (+1), Social Solidarity (+1), Veteran Crews (+2), Aggressive (+1), Xenophobic (-2), Atrophied Form (-2), and Slow Population Growth (-2), and they ended up with an Aristocratic (Military) government. The only thing holding the Tokati Empire back is a lack of jump technology. Thank god.

The really interesting part is that they ended up with Aggression: 57, Integrity: 63, Xenophobia: 8. Yep, the Tokati are a Xenophobic race that isn't very. But they won't sign a Unification treaty ever, and they are

going to be very difficult to make any sort of agreement with. And if you try and force them? Nasty, nasty ships.

Now in my campaign, all races have access to civilian and the more generic raider designs. Which means between those sources, the only thing the Tokati are really lacking is a scout of some sort. Once they reach INT-1 status and have access to jump engines I'll probably gin something up. In the meantime, the NEA is grateful they're stuck to their home system. The last thing they need is a bunch of jumped up Wolf Raiders running through hyperspace (in the Tokati's hands, a Wolf is a DV 4, AS 7, AF 6 bundle of joy).

2216.08

Very interesting. At the start of the turn, as I was checking diplomatic shifts, the Tokati rolled a 50 for their relationship with the NEA. While it didn't change their level, it caused a critical shift, and I, as CM, was in a dilemma on what to do about it. Given that their relationship is only at '01' (It was lucky that they didn't immediately trigger hostilities with the NEA!!!) it could have meant instant war, but since they don't have interstellar travel, they couldn't prosecute it. The most they could do was attempt to destroy the NEA Exploration flotilla that's getting ready to depart the system. So I reasoned that they might be inclined to forego the war in favor of closer relations in hopes of getting the secret of interstellar travel from the humans - then attack. But Xenophobia got in the way and prevented them from being able to sign a Non-Aggression Pact. I figured, given their integrity, that that made more sense than starting a war they couldn't finish.

Fairly quiet turn for the NEA. ExCoFlot #1 is leaving Tokat, while ExCoFlot #2 is surveying Sophia. The Belt Alliance is finishing up their escort carriers, so some Starfoxes are built for them. Given that there are now two minor races next door, the Belt Alliance has extra incentive to start building up its defenses.

Attarn Union: The relationship with the NEA continues to degrade. Otherwise, development of Zeta continues.

Hyach Gerontocracy: A jump gate in Yonog is built, and more productivity investment is done.

Tokati Empire: All surplus funds are plowed into research. Now that they now there's more out there, they want it for themselves!

Vree Conglomerate: Ditto!

End of Turn: Now that the Hyach and the Attarns are neighbors, I had determined that there would be a 50% chance each turn that they would find out about each other. Even though neither has shown any intention of going down the jump route between Delta and Gamma formally, there's always a chance that smugglers or free traders could venture across. And since any Naval Intelligence agency worth its paranoia has spies and agents planted among the merchant marine, it would only be a matter of time until such news found its way to official attention. This has now happened. Naturally, they love each other.

How much do the Attarns and Hyach love each other? They both rolled 95 or higher for the relationship shift check, moving them both up 5 points toward each other. Sheesh! Get a room you two!

2216.09

With their Escort Carriers online, the Belt Alliance formally retires the old atmospheric Deltas from service. Further, a Medium Gunship is started to flesh out their squadron. They also request the plans for the

Hephaestus Small Base (Zeta) to serve as the linchpin of their system defenses and headquarters for the Belt Alliance Defense Force. The Joint Chiefs readily agree.

With NEA colonization efforts currently focused on the McInerney system, and the sudden appearance of two alien races in close proximity to the Columbia system, it is decided that the remaining jump route out of Columbia will be left unexplored at this time, and the Maui and Sophia systems will not annexed for now. The Belt Alliance is still very mindful of their autonomy within the NewEarth Alliance, and while they tolerate an EarthForce squadron to bolster their defenses, they're not happy about the necessity. And since they see it as EarthForce's exploration that has caused their precarious security situation, the Senate oversight committee formally requested that EarthForce and Exploration Command focus their efforts elsewhere for the foreseeable future.

Fortunately, McInerney has two unexplored routes and Andalia has three, so Exploration Command still has plenty to do. There is some debate over whether to upgrade the route between Andalia and Miromoto, but ultimately it is decided to leave it Restricted. If an enemy is discovered along one of Andalia's routes, an upgraded link between Andalia and Miromoto could provide a backdoor route to Sol that would bypass the fleet base at Sedalia. The defenses of Miromoto and Dirkie would have to be upgraded, and that's money better used elsewhere right now. With McInerney's colonies still very young and vulnerable, Exploration Command will focus first on the Andalia system. An Hephaestus is started in Andalia, and EarthForce will be organizing a Task Force to handle local security while Exploration Command is working out of the system.

Finally, the Small Base in Vandeventer is scrapped as it is no longer necessary.

Attarn Union: More Small Bases come on line, and Scout Force begins construction of a jump gate in Theta.

Hyach Gerontocracy: Scout Fleet 2 is completed. However, exploration is being put on hold while the route between Delta and Gamma is improved in anticipation of a trade agreement with the Attarns. A Commerce Fleet is organized to be sent to Delta, also in preparation for a future trade agreement. All other funds in the near future will be used to development of Yonog and Delta. In the meantime, the two Scout Fleets will be providing local security for the two systems in lieu of regular squadrons. The Hyach leadership feels that to be a more efficient use of funds than to mothball or reserve the Scout Fleets and build patrol units.

Tokat Empire: At the pace they're on, the Tokati will achieve interstellar flight within six months.

Vree Conglomerate: The Vree invest in the productivity of Vreetan I.

The diplomatic situation has taken a definite turn for the worse with two political disasters occurring this turn. First, a critical diplomatic shift has led to the estrangement of the Attarns. They broke the Trade Treaty as a result of the Political Disaster, then opted to break the Non-Aggression Treaty after a successful Hostilities check. Tensions are ratcheting up swiftly. Needless to say, the Joint Chiefs are having kittens, as while they had been concerned about the state of relations with the Attarns, they didn't think the situation would fall apart so fast.

Then, the Tokati also had a critical shift and have declared that a State of Hostilities now exists between them and the NEA. The declaration of Hostilities as a result of the Political Disaster was then followed up with a formal declaration of war. They can't aggressively prosecute the war at this time, but if any NEA vessels enter Tokat, they will be attacked.

The one bright spot, diplomatically, is when the Vree, who only had an offer chance of '01', successfully rolled and offered the NEA a Non-Aggression Treaty.

September 29, 2216
EAS *Diogenes*
Hyperspace
12:10 Hours, Ship's Time

"Helm, do we have the proper coordinates to jump in near the Fleet Base rather than use the jump gate?" queried Commodore Mace.

"Aye, sir."

"Sir, may I remind you that EarthForce procedures prohibit jumping directly into an NEA system except as authorized during an exercise or in time of war," interjected Captain Kierkegaard.

"Yes, Jim, I know the regs. For what it's worth, we're in full compliance." Mace looked tired.

"This has something to do with that Your-Eyes-Only message you received yesterday, doesn't it?"

"Mm-hm. 'Fraid so. Once we're in-system, everyone will find out soon enough, but the Tokati declared war on us three days ago and the Attarns have broken our trade agreement and are starting to rattle the sabers. The mobile assets of Exploration Command are being co-opted by EarthForce. My orders are to make best time to the Fleet Base in Sedalia and report to Admiral Kirche for new orders."

"Oh. Well, we'll show those Tokati a thing or two!" Kierkegaard said, smacking a fist into his other hand for emphasis.

"Don't forget those scans we made while we were in Tokat, Captain. They might not have jump technology, but they're going to put up one hell of a fight. And we don't know how close they are to jump tech. We certainly don't want to take them for granted and then have a Tokati fleet jump into Columbia and rip the Belters a new one, do we?"

"Hmmm, I suppose you're right, sir. Shall I pass the word to the flotilla on the jump?"

"Are we in position?" At a nod from the helmsman, Mace ordered, "OK, Jim, let the flotilla know what's up, and fire up the jump engines as soon as we're ready."

2216.10

"Commodore Dirk Mace, reporting as ordered, ma'am." Dirk stood at attention in front of Admiral Kirche's desk.

"Very well, Dirk. Have a seat." Once he was settled, she continued, "As you know, we're now in a war with the Tokati. Even so, the Joint Chiefs are more worried about the state of affairs with the Attarn Union. While the scans you brought back indicate that a fight with the Tokati is not something to dismiss casually, the Tokati have a fraction of the resources the Attarns do, and do not yet have access to jump technology.

That could change, however, at any time. As such, the Joint Chiefs have chosen not to dismiss the Tokati. We can't afford to ignore them until such time as they jump into Columbia with their shiny new jump engines. But because of the growing threat of a war with the Attarns, they want the Tokati dealt with and

dealt with promptly. However, in their infinite wisdom, *we* are going to prosecute the war against the Tokati.”

“*We*, Admiral?” Mace looked decidedly puzzled.

“Yes, Commodore, us. As in you and I. Since most of Exploration Command is being reintegrated with the Fleet, what’s left doesn’t need an Admiral in charge. Captain Deering will keep an eye on things while we’re gone, and I will be forming 1st Fleet, and you are coming with me.

I’ll be keeping command of most of ExCo’s mobile assets with the exception of the *Pandora*, the *Hera*, and the *Laertes* from the Support Group. They’ll be staying here while 2nd Fleet is formed, and *Pandora* will provide ELINT support to them. I’m also getting the *Holistic* as my flagship. I recommend you transfer your flag to *Prometheus*. Even though *Diogenes* isn’t really meant for a fleet combat role, it will be serving as an auxiliary carrier, with its wing of Starfoxes. However, I’d feel better if you were on a more durable ship if we’re going into Harm’s Way.

As soon as all ships have been resupplied, we’re heading to Columbia, where we will hook up with TF1 and ExCo Flotilla 2. The Belters are just going to have to handle their own security for a bit. The plan is for a quick attack into Tokat and clear the system of any mobile Tokati assets. We will then blockade any colonies and land Marines where possible to establish a presence in the system that can be used as staging area for follow-up troops who will invade the Tokati homeworld.

The Joint Chiefs expect the space combat phase of the campaign to be brief, and that the bulk of fighting will be planet-side. As such, once we’ve done our job, the responsibility will shift to Marine General Torquemand, whom we are to support at his direction. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am. May I ask how you managed to secure a fleet command? I would have figured that there would be any number of Fleet officers chomping at the bit for it.”

Admiral Kirche chuckled. “Well, don’t forget I am in pretty tight with the Armed Services committee. But mostly, it’s because they’re assuming the situation with the Attarns is going to turn into a shooting war before too long, and they figure that’s where the action and the glory will be. Not in some sideshow against a low-tech race.”

“Admiral, they’re not a low-tech race, they just don’t have jump engines,” cautioned Dirk.

“I know that. You know that. “They” prefer to ignore that. For better or worse, this falls to us.” The mood perceptibly got serious as Kirche’s face darkened into a frown. “Dirk, I’m going to be leaning on you heavily. I can handle the paperwork and getting everyone on board, but you and I both know I’m more of a bureaucrat than a line officer. You’ve been out there getting your hands dirty in active command for the last 11 years while I’ve been going from one cocktail party to the next. As such, I’m organizing 1st Fleet such that the support elements like the *Diogenes* and the *Refuge* will answer directly to me, but I’m putting you in charge of the rest. This is your chance to shine in the sun. Make the most of it!”

“I will, Admiral. I will.”

.....

With the economy gearing up for war and the normal Representative government restrictions lifted, EarthForce is like a kid in the candy store. 2 Orestes, 2 Avengers, 2 Porcupines, and 6 Laertes Assault Corvettes are laid down at shipyards in Sedalia and Sol. A second shipyard is started at Sedalia, as well.

The 4 Artemis gunships started when things with the Attarns first started going sour are finishing up this turn, and right now the plan is start two more Porcupines and a couple of escorts in their place at the shipyard in Sedalia.

Naval Intelligence also gets a big boost as money is poured into building up Intel Point reserves.

The Army and Marines are also built up, with 2 units of Marines being organized in Columbia for the invasion of Tokat and 9 Regulars being built around the NEA to shore up local security.

The biggest problem facing the NEA in their attempt to conquer the Tokati is the lack of assault ships. Six Laertes Assault Corvettes are under construction at Earth, but it's going to be three months before they will arrive in Columbia. I don't think I want to give the Tokati's that much time to prepare. If things go badly against the Tokati, they'll come in handy for the follow attempt, otherwise, they'll be on hand should the balloon go up with the Attarns.

Aye-yi-yi!

Attarn Union: 3 Victorious Armored Cruisers are laid down in response to the growing tensions with the NEA. Otherwise, it's business as usual, though the loss of 20 EPs a turn from the cancelled trade agreement with the NEA stings a bit.

Hyach Gerontocracy: Internal development continues apace.

Tokat Empire: 3 Hactrus Corvettes and 2 Wolf Raiders are laid down, while a Sanctuary Base is started at Tokat III. The shipyard full, the rest of the budget is poured into Tech Research.

Right now the Tokati are assuming that the NEA isn't going to act aggressively. Next month they'll build a few troops, but their focus is still ships and tech.

Vree Conglomerate: The Vree throw this month's budget into tech research. They are now less than 50 points from reaching Interstellar status.

The Attarn Union reaches a Crossroads in its relations with the Hyach Gerontocracy, and decides to move for closer ties, signing a Non-Aggression Pact.

Oh, and for some irony, those wacky Attarns rolled a '97' for their relationship with the NEA, moving it back up 5 points. Hopefully, that means cooler heads are prevailing. One war at a time, please!

2216.11

After gathering up ExCoFlot #2 and most of the elements of TF1 in Columbia, the three squadrons of 1st Fleet enter hyperspace for the Tokat system, leaving behind the Belt Alliance squadron and a Cotten support ship escorted by three Laertes corvettes. Loaded into transports are the two Marines and one Regular of Marine General Torquemand's 1st Expeditionary Army.

TF21 is organized and departs for Willickers. They'll be the first line of defense should the situation with the Attarns get hot.

Attarn Union: Unconcerned about relations with the NEA, work continues on developing the Zeta and Theta systems.

Hyach Gerontocracy: The Hyachs are saving up resources to organize a colony fleet to send to the Yonog system.

Tokat Empire: 3 Regulars are raised on Tokat II, and a second shipyard is begun.

Vree Conglomerate: The Vree pour their budget into research this turn. They should achieve interstellar technology next turn.

The Battle of Tokat III: Upon entering the Tokat system, NEA sensors quickly determined that the Tokati had a squadron near Tokat II, their homeworld, and another over Tokat III. Since the first objectives were to clear space and secure a staging area for the ground troops, Admiral Kirche opted to strike at Tokat III, which did not have the benefit of an orbital base unlike Tokat II. She then ordered Commodore Dirk Mace to lead the 1st and 2nd Squadrons ahead and engage the Tokati, while her 3rd Squadron escorted the transports loaded with troops. The Tokati opted to intercept the incoming NEA fleet, and both squadrons moved to engage the invaders.

As the two sides closed to engagement range, the Tokati 2nd Squadron closed to attack with the 1st still closing, accompanied by six flights of Imp light fighters from the base over Tokat II, while the NEA's 3rd Squadron hung back sufficiently to stay out of the fight.

The NEA's two Oracles present were used to modify their surprise level, resulting in the NEA forces starting out at normal readiness. The Tokati would have been at the Good level, but Mace's Unpredictable trait reduced them to normal. Neither side would have an initial advantage due to surprise. The NEA opted for maximum scenario length while the Tokati opted for minimal. The engagement length ended up being 8 rounds maximum.

Mace ordered 1st and 2nd Squadrons to criss-cross, catching the Tokati squadron in a murderous crossfire. One pass left all three Wraith Gunships exploding gas clouds, but at the cost of two Olympus and a Laertes crippled by Tokati return fire. The Wolf managed to knock down the flight of Tigers escorting the breaching pods from Prometheus, which were able to latch on. The marines then did enough damage in a hit & run raid to leave the Wolf Raider crippled. It was a simple matter to finish off the Wolf while *Hollandais'* Tigers finished off the lone flight of Imps.

In the wake of such rapid destruction, the other Tokati squadron, which was almost to the fighting, pulled back and retreated to Tokat II, allowing 1st Fleet to progress to Tokat III unmolested, where it made short work of the base under construction.

A unit of Marines then invades Tokat III, where it is met by local militia, the fighting is fierce, but brief, and soon enough a beachhead is established, allowing the rest of the 1st Expeditionary Army to land.

The civilian population of Tokat III does not take well to being conquered, however, and morale plummets. Keeping the population in check will require the entire Army, meaning the campaign is stalled until additional ground troops can be sent to the system.

In the wake of the news of the NEA's victory at Tokat III, the Vree send a message asking to sign a Trade Treaty, which the NEA readily agrees to. This will become particularly significant when the Vree achieve interstellar travel next month.

The Vree rolled a '100' indicating a positive critical shift in its relations with the NEA. This makes the 5th critical shift of one sort or another in the last few turns. Wild times!

Many of the smaller vessels started with the advent of war come on line, including the Laertes Assault Corvettes, which immediately head out for the Columbia system.

The *Athena*, *Zeus*, and *Mississippi*, all crippled in the battle of Tokat III are escorted back to NEA space by the *Sahara* along with the empty transports that had brought the 1st Expeditionary Army. Since a garrison will have to be maintained for some time, the marines can swap out with reinforcing regulars once they arrive. Admiral Kirche wasn't crazy about letting one of her scouts leave the area, but wanted to keep all other combat-capable ships on hand. In any case, the *Sahara* will be back soon as it will hook up with the assault corvettes and additional transports of troops to escort back to the Tokat system.

The matter of upgrading the route between Columbia and Vreetan will either have to wait for the Tokati War to end or the Vree will just have to do it themselves. There isn't room in the budget for additional scouts, nor the inclination right now.

Commodore Mace will be taking 1st and 2nd Squadrons to attack the Tokati fleet at Tokat II and hopefully shut down all Tokati ship production, allowing the ground campaign to progress as soon as possible without the threat of enemy interdiction.

Attarn Union: Pretty quiet. A couple of colony fleets are gathering in Zeta awaiting the completion of the jump gate in Theta.

Hyach Gerontocracy: A colony fleet is organized for the Yonog system.

Tokat Empire: More ground troops are raised on Tokat II in the wake of the loss of III. With the completion of three Hactrus Corvettes, three more are started in their place, while two Wolf Raiders will be finishing up this turn.

Vree Conglomerate: They finish their research and will achieve the ability to build jump gate and ships with jump engines at the end of the year.

The Battle of Tokat II: The Tokati elect to organize their defense around their Sanctuary Base and its 6 Imps. Commodore Mace, unable to draw the Tokati ships away from their fixed defenses, has no choice but to charge in. He is, however, able to determine *when* the fight will occur, and he manages to catch the Tokati napping and at a Poor readiness state. Again, the fight will last no more than 8 rounds.

The initial assault results in the Tokati base taking a level of damage, and one of the Wraith Gunships crippled with the *Ares*, an Olympus Corvette, crippled and the *Poseidon* taking some attrition damage. The NEA point defense fire is absolutely lethal against the Imps, and all six flights are shot down before they could attempt an attack.

As the fight devolves into a melee, two Hactrus corvettes are destroyed and the third captured, and the Sanctuary Base is gutted. Meanwhile the *Prometheus* and *Olympus* are crippled and the *Poseidon* destroyed. One of the breaching pod groups is destroyed by Tokati point defense fire, as well. Commodore Dirk Mace, onboard the *Prometheus*, is rattled as the ship is savaged by Tokati fire, but is able to continue to lead the fight.

Mace orders the Fleet closer still, while the Tokati continue to hammer on his squadron. NEA fire slackens a bit, resulting in two Wraiths crippled, while the *Olympus* and *Ares* destroyed. The *Prometheus* takes additional damage as the *Hollandais'* Tigers are shot down. The remaining breaching pod raids one of the

crippled Wraiths and captures it. In an effort to save the *Prometheus*, the *Gobi* moves closer and blankets it with defensive EW, hoping to disrupt Tokati accuracy.

The *Gobi*'s efforts, combined with Captain Kierkegaard's maneuvers, are successful, with the Tokati's fire missing the mark, while the remaining Wraiths are destroyed, and after being crippled, the Wolf is captured. The rest of the NEA fleet is then able to finish off the base with ease, return fire being totally ineffective.

At this point in the war, with the Tokati fleet destroyed, the Tokati have lost about 61 points worth of units, while the NEA has lost 35 points destroyed or crippled. Given how outnumbered they were, the Tokati have fought like demons. Now for the hard part: the ground campaigns to secure the system and conquer the Tokati.

With 2216 ending, it has been quite a year. Two new races and a war all livened things up dramatically. Here's a quick summary of the situation of the various empires now in the game:

New Earth Alliance

Total Census: 51
Total Output: 198
Total Trade Volume: 38 (with governmental Trade Focus bonus)
Total Monthly Budget: 187 (with gearing up)
Total Maintenance: 100
Tech Year: 2220

Attarn Union

Total Census: 65
Total Output: 237
Total Trade Volume: 33
Total Monthly Budget: 152 (peacetime)
Total Maintenance: 85
Tech Year: 2217

Hyach Gerontocracy

Total Census: 48
Total Output: 123
Total Trade Volume: 14
Total Monthly Budget: 76 (peacetime)
Total Maintenance: 33
Tech Year: 2218

Tokati Empire

Total Census: 18
Total Output: 45
Total Trade Volume: 0
Total Monthly Budget: 38 (with gearing up)
Total Maintenance: 2
Tech Year: 2215

Vree Conglomerate

Total Census: 14
Total Output: 60
Total Trade Volume: 9 (with several bonuses)
Total Monthly Budget: 39 (peacetime)
Total Maintenance: 15
Tech Year: 2175

Quick Note: I'll be excluding comments on any NPE race that doesn't do anything of note on a particular turn, just to keep things moving. I mean, how often do you want to read about Productivity Investment? Though in all honesty, this will probably go back to being primarily the NEA Diary.

2217.01

With the Porcupines built, and the Avengers coming on line at the end of the month, EarthForce feels the main battle line needs to be built up. While two Orestes Dreadnoughts are well under way at Mars, the Joint Chiefs decide to start three of the new Orestes System Monitor design at Sedalia, along with three more Olympus corvettes to replace those lost in Tokat. The difference between the System Monitor and the Dreadnought designs is the Monitor drops the missile launchers in favor of additional armor plating and a few more point defense guns. The Monitor is also a bit cheaper to build and to maintain. There are some concerns about crew comfort in either design, but neither is intended for prolonged deployments away from friendly territory, but rather, will be used for defense. Other classes, like the Hyperion cruisers and Avenger carriers, are better suited for power projection. Unfortunately, in the current climate, there is plenty of work for all.

Meanwhile, the mustering of troops in Columbia for service in the Tokat system continues. *Sahara*, having successfully nursed three crippled ships through hyperspace is returning with three more units of Regulars, the Laertes Assault Corvette division, and three more Laertes Police Corvettes to help in maintaining control of space in Tokat.

Next month, *Sahara* will be escorting *Prometheus* back to Columbia where the *Refuge* will make field repairs before *Prometheus* goes on to the shipyard at Sedalia. It is unknown if the Joint Chiefs will authorize full repairs as the ship was almost destroyed at the Battle of Tokat II, and a new Avenger or Orestes could be built for what it is estimated the cost of the repairs will amount to. The debate continues, however, and *Prometheus* has been added to the Honor Roll, so even if it is ultimately decided to scrap her, there will continue to be a *Prometheus* in the Fleet, bearing the name with pride.

Tokati Empire: Knowing that they've lost control of space, and that they have no chance of regaining it as long as 1st Fleet is in the system, the Tokati focus on raising as many units of Regulars on their homeworld as they can while plowing ahead on their research.

End of Turn: Rebellion breaks out on Tokat III as a massive uprising threatens NEA control of the planet. Intelligence estimates that as much as two-thirds of the population is actively supporting the rebels. Meanwhile, the Attarn Union and the Hyach Gerontocracy sign a Trade Treaty.

2217.02

The decision is made to invest in the productivity of Tokat III. Assuming the 1st Expeditionary Army can put down the rebellion, particularly considering three additional units of regulars just landed, it is hoped that putting down the rebellion combined with more job opportunities will make the Tokati on that world a bit more tractable.

Of more immediate value, though, is that if the investment goes through and Morale on the planet stabilizes, the NEA will be able to use Tokat III as a supply point. Given the route between Columbia and Tokat is Restricted, supplying 1st Fleet and the 1st Expeditionary Army has not been easy. The Joint Chiefs also discuss the merits of building a jump gate in the system, as well, though that would divert both *Sahara* and *Gobi* from other uses for three months. *Pandora* could be recalled from TF21 in Willickers to assist, but they are unwilling to do so, given that potential for trouble with the Attarns.

Further, given that the space campaign with the Tokati seems to be at an end, and the relationship with the Attarns has not worsened any further, it is decided to not start any additional hulls for EarthForce. Maintenance costs are spiraling, and there is concern about the long-term effects on the budget, particularly if war with the Attarns does not actually occur.

Finally, given the difficulties raised by the lack of adequate assault ships, the Joint Chiefs direct the Bureau of Armaments to give priority to developing a better vessel than the Laertes Assault Corvette. Given its small size and the number of ships required to transport a unit, the Joint Chiefs feel that something larger and more robust will be essential in future campaigns. The Laertes is really only usable in situations like the Tokati campaign, where space superiority has been established.

In practical terms, the NEA is a decade away from a cruiser-sized assault ship. Rather than artificially convert a currently existing design, I've decided to allocate any future successful over-investment in Tech Research into lowering the ISD for the Hyperion assault ship version. I did this in the previous campaign with the Orieni and their decided lack of fleet carriers and it seemed to work well. Since I'm not using Starmada to generate designs, but rather going off existing force lists, this seemed more in keeping with the source. Of course, should the situation become dire, I'm not above ginning up a better assault ship. Given the experience the NEA is gaining in amphibious operations (for lack of a better term), there is certainly growing institutional knowledge of the requirements that could allow me to adapt an existing design for such work. And if war should break out with the Attarns, I just might do so, but otherwise, I'll stick with the slower method.

I'm doing something similar for the Vree. After successfully achieving jump technology and now having access to hyperspace, I advanced their tech year to the first available ship with a jump engine. However, they don't currently have any sort of scout design; so successful over-investment will lower the ISD of the first available scout ship.

End of Turn: NEA ground troops have no problem squashing the rebellion on Tokat III. This in turn allows the investment into the industry of the planet to go forward. It is hoped in the Senate that quashing the rebellion and offering more jobs for the people will stabilize public opinion on Tokat III and show the NEA in a better light.

2217.03

With *Prometheus* back in friendly space, the Joint Chiefs decide to halt *Sahara's* shuttling trips and have her and *Gobi* build a jump gate in Tokat, upgrading the route between there and Columbia and allowing normal supply runs. Since 1st Fleet has total space superiority, the scouts are needed right now for ELINT duties, and there should be threats to the construction crews.

Meanwhile, with reinforcements in place as a garrison, 1st Expeditionary Army gets reloaded on transports for the next phase of the campaign: Tokat V. While there is pressure from the Senate to hit Tokat II before they can build up their defenses any more, Marine General Torquemand feels that it will require more troops than he currently has and has opted to secure the other colonies in the system before hitting the homeworld. A sufficiently large enough faction in the Senate backs his plan to allow it to go forward; several Senators hope that the Tokati will surrender before an invasion of their homeworld becomes necessary.

End of Turn: Tokati scientists work out the secret of jump technology; for all the good it will do them. The Attarn Union and the Hyach Gerontocracy sign a formal peace treaty, further strengthening the ties between them.

It is ultimately decided that *Prometheus* is too damaged to effectively repair. As such, she is sent to the scrapyards to be broken up, and any surviving Benefactor tech will be removed for further study. Since her role at the Battle of Tokat II earned her a place on the Roll of Honor, one of the Orestes System Monitors coming on line at the end of the month will be named *Prometheus* to keep that hallowed name active in the Fleet.

In the meantime, Captain Kierkegaard is going to do a promotional tour for the government; sell war bonds, raise morale, and so forth, followed by a stint as an instructor at the Academy. The Joint Chiefs really wanted Commodore Mace to do that, but he successfully begged off, so he's being sent back to Exploration Command to take over from Captain Deering in the absence of Admiral Kirche. Mace's primary goal will be to lobby the Senate either to have *Pandora* returned to exploration duties or have more Oracles built so that ExCo's duties may be resumed.

With the successful invasion of Tokat V stripping another piece of the Tokati Empire away from them, the Tokati leaders admit their failure by committing suicide. Fighting breaks out among the various units garrisoning Tokat II against the expected NEA invasion as various factions struggle for dominance in the power vacuum. One of the factions contacts Admiral Kirche, in orbit above them, and pledges to formally surrender to the NEA if she will help them against the other factions. Eager to find a way to avoid invading a unified Tokat II, she readily agrees. While there aren't any NEA troops in a position to join the fighting, she does direct 1st Fleet, the bulk of which is in orbit around the planet blockading it from the rest of the system, to provide orbital bombardment support.

NEA intervention turns the tide; as otherwise, the friendly faction was outnumbered by their rivals. After 10 days of intense combat, the friendly faction emerges victorious. Their leaders promptly gain control of the government bureaucracies and broadcast to the other colonies their intent to surrender to the NEA. In return for their surrender, Admiral Kirche offers them a place in the NEA, though with some obvious restrictions. No human colonies will be formed in the Tokat system, Tokati citizens will be allowed the freedom to travel throughout NEA space, and Tokati merchants and businesspeople will be allowed to trade with the rest of the NEA and conduct business as usual. The Tokati will not, however, be allowed to have their own navy, or conduct diplomacy with other powers. Individual Tokati will, however, be allowed to join EarthForce after one year from the acceptance of the Tokati surrender.

All of the colonies but Tokat I accept these terms and recognize the new government on Tokat II. The die-hard holdouts on Tokat I will not negotiate, and pledge to fight on in the name of the old government. It would appear the 1st Expeditionary Army has one campaign yet to fight.

So what happened? During the Diplomacy segment, I checked for the Tokati response to Admiral Kirche's longstanding call for their surrender. They rolled an '02', well within their armistice check range, and rather decisively at that. However, given the aggressive nature of the Tokati (at least how they exist in my campaign), I decided that it would be that straightforward. After doing a civil war loyalty check of the 24 units on Tokat II, I found that 13 of them would rebel against a new government intent on surrendering. Given the fragile nature of Tokati regulars (attrition 1 thanks to their atrophied forms), the result would be a slaughter that would result in 2 rebel units alive. 1st Fleet was able to neutralize three rebels with orbital bombardment, allowing 1 loyalist to survive the carnage. With a new government victorious, I then had to check what the other colonies would do. I decided to make a morale check for each colony with a target of '3'. Making that check would mean the colony opted to side with the new government, and the colony's morale would become equal to half its census (rounded up), while failure would mean continued resistance. As mentioned, only Tokat I refused to accept the surrender.

Regardless of what happens on Tokat I, there's the small matter of the NEA now having a subject race of Weapons Specialists and Veteran Crews. For now, I've opted to do the following: unless the NEA is willing to have entire ships crewed by Tokati, they cannot gain the benefit of their Veteran Crews trait, nor can they apply the Weapons Specialists trait willy-nilly. Tokati designs can be used without penalty by the NEA, and they will continue to have the bonus, but it cannot be applied to NEA designs unless the NEA is willing to fully share the design with the Tokati. Any shared designs would stay with the Tokati in the event of their future independence/liberation. Further, what have been future designs for the Tokati no longer will be, so the only Tokati-boosted designs available to the NEA without sharing are those that currently exist. Unless the NEA is willing to share their tech with their new subject race, they will only gain some upgunned light warships. Nothing super-duper, but hopefully not unbalanced, either.

As a player, I'm sorely tempted to open up and go nuts; while the bonus isn't overwhelming (+1 AS, +1 AF), it's not to be sneered at either. In any case, I'm just glad the NEA has had a short, victorious little war, as the threat of war with the Attarn Union is still looming large, and the Attarn Union has a bigger economy.

2217.05

The Senate is not exactly thrilled at the notion of accepting Tokati Senators, but they're also anxious to end the war and reassert more control over EarthForce's budget. While there is still the matter of the diehards on Tokat I to deal with, the Joint Chiefs are unsuccessful in arguing that the Tokat I colonists represent the government that declared war on the NEA and therefore, the NEA is still in a state of war. The official ruling by the Supreme Court is that by accepting the surrender, the NEA formally recognized the new Tokati government as the only one capable of entering into binding agreements, and as such, the war is over. The diehards will still have to be rooted out, but officially, the NEA is no longer on a war footing.

This causes no small amount of hardship for EarthForce. They had taken full advantage of the removal of the spending restrictions normally in place, and a large number of ships have been built in the past few months. However, with the restrictions back, maintenance costs have pretty much taken over the budget. Fortunately, the jump gate in Tokat will be completed this month, and it is hoped that integrating the Tokati into the NEA economy, as well as the expanded trade opportunities, will ease the budgetary pinch a bit.

Since the budget can manage the maintenance costs, if barely, and the threat of war with the Attarn Union is still looming, the Joint Chiefs have won approval to maintain EarthForce at its expanded level for the time being. However, the Senate Armed Services Committee has warned that ships may need to be scrapped or mothballed if relations improve; they want to free up resources to fuel further expansion.

The Vree are anxious to trade, but lack the ability to take advantage of the trade treaty. They have the tech, but don't have any scouts yet to upgrade the route between Vreetan and Columbia. They've offered to pay for the construction of a jump gate in their system. The NEA, eager to increase revenues, will be taking them up on the offer as soon as possible.

For Commodore Dirk Mace, hero of the Tokati War, and interim commander of Exploration Command, he's been reduced to a construction supervisor. With only two Oracles at his disposal, and they busy working on the backlog of jump gate construction, there's not much for him to do right now. While publicly backing his superiors on the Joint Chiefs, in the background he's quietly using Admiral Kirche's contacts in the Senate to lobby for a return to active exploration.

Admiral Kirche, the only admiral in EarthForce to have commanded a fleet in time of war, is busy securing the system and coordinating with Marine General Torquemand on the campaign to win Tokat I from the diehard Tokati. It is hoped that since Tokat I is a fairly poor colony that they won't have the resources to equip enough troops to make the campaign any more difficult than it needs to be. Only time will tell.

2217.06

1st Fleet arrives over Tokat I and arrays itself into a blockade of the planet. Next month, Marine General Torquemand's troops will invade.

With the jump gate in Tokat completed, Admiral Kirche summons TF11 to rejoin the fleet and releases *Diogenese* back to Exploration Command. Commodore Mace immediately orders the *Sahara* to jump to Vreetan with the permission of the Vree government while *Gobi* returns to Columbia. Next month, construction will begin on a jump gate for the Vree. The NEA is desperate for more income. More accurately, the Joint Chiefs are anxious to do anything to boost income that will allow them to keep all of their new toys.

The Attarn Union and the Hyach Gerontocracy sign a Mutual Defense Treaty at the behest of the Attarns. The Hyachs reluctantly agree. For better or worse, the Hyachs seem to have hitched their wagon to the Attarns.

2217.07

The reconditioned Tokati ships are transferred to the Belt Alliance to bolster the defenses of the Columbia system. The two ships will serve as the nucleus of a second defense squadron.

Meanwhile, on Tokat I, the invasion fails to gain a beachhead. Orbital bombardment and support wiped out two defenders, but the Marines were unable to secure a landing zone and are destroyed in the attempt. The other unit will try again next month. Unfortunately, the Regulars aren't equipped to properly carry out an invasion, and are dependent on the Marines to secure a beachhead before they can mop up the opposition.

Eager to improve relations after the arrival of the *Sahara* to begin construction of a jump gate for them, the Vree inquire about the availability of plans for a scout or explorer vessel that they could purchase. After several meetings between the Joint Chiefs and representatives from the State Department, it is agreed to sell the Vree the plans for the Oracle Explorer (Alpha). Since that design's sensors are not optimized for combat use, the Joint Chiefs feel it's safe to give them the design unmodified. In exchange, the Vree are paying the NEA 5 EPs for the design, as well as funding the construction of the jump gate. *The Vree rolled a '100' on their relationship check with the NEA, even with the immediate +5 to their relationship, they were still in negative territory for a Mutual Defense Treaty, the next available treaty. Instead I decided they would offer a naval appropriation treaty in hopes of acquiring a usable scout ship so that they could explore and hopefully expand. Since the NEA has already advanced the Oracle design several times, and they have Diogenes and Pandora, they had no problem sharing the design for their original explorer vessel. With tensions still high with the Attarns, it never hurts to make friends elsewhere.*

2217.08

While construction continues apace on the Vree jump gate, the 1st Expeditionary Army prepares for a second drop on Tokat I. This time is more successful, with the orbital bombardment destroying a unit of rebels, and the remaining Marines are able to overcome another unit and establish a beachhead, enabling the six units of Regulars waiting on transports to land. Marine General Torquemand is confident that 1st Army will be able to root out the rest of the rebels very soon, and the Tokati War will be officially over.

And not a moment too soon, either. No sooner does the Joint Chiefs finish reviewing Torquemand's report than word arrives of the Attarn Union's Declaration of War. Grateful that they had been successful in their attempt to keep the new construction in service, this meant that almost all of the new ships have finished

their shakedowns and are ready to fight. Additional troops will need to be raised as 1st Army will be dispersed as garrisons in the Tokat system. With a new war on the other side of the NEA, the last thing the Joint Chiefs want is a fresh uprising in Tokat. Once Tokat I is secured and the garrisons in place, Marine General Torquemand, as well as most of the elements of 1st Fleet will be recalled to Sedalia for further service.

The Attarns had another critical diplomatic shift, rolling an '01' for their relationship with the NEA. Since no treaties were in effect, this resulted in immediate hostilities, and resolving the rest of the NPE diplomacy yielded a successful declaration of war. Fortunately for the NEA, the Attarns are the aggressor, so their MDT with the Hyachs is not triggered. The big question is how far are the two sides willing to go. Will this just be a space campaign, or will there be an exchange of territory? Only time will tell!

2217.09

Captain Kierkegaard is transferred from his teaching duties at the Academy and returned to duty with Exploration Command, where he will serve under recently promoted Commodore Wilma Deering, the new CinC. He will assume command of ExCoFlot#1, currently building the Vree jump gate. It is unknown if the Joint Chiefs will authorize a resumption of exploration with a war going on, but given that construction was authorized on two new Oracle Scout Cruiser (Gamma)s, it would seem that *Diogenes* and the older scouts will be allowed to return to their intended purpose.

Commodore Dirk Mace is promoted to Rear Admiral and given command of 2nd Fleet. While there are grumbles in EarthForce about both Fleet commands going to ExCo officers, the Joint Chiefs feel that given Admiral Mace's experience in the Tokati War, it would be foolish not to utilize his abilities. Also, Admiral Kirche had secretly informed the Joint Chiefs of her intention to retire upon the conclusion of the Tokati War when she was initially given command of 1st Fleet. Once 1st Fleet is finished with its operations in the Tokat system and has returned to Sedalia, her retirement will be made public.

1st Expeditionary Army conducts a lightning campaign against the last of the holdouts on Tokat I. 1st Fleet provides devastating orbital bombardment support than enables the ground troops to mop up the rebels while losing only one unit of Regulars.

During Diplomacy, the Attarns roll another '01' critical shift with the NEA. Since they are already at war, this just results in a further slide in relations and another quadrupling of their treaty delay – which is currently over 800 turns. (!!!)

2217.10

2nd Fleet gathers up TF21 in Willickers and enters hyperspace to attack the Attarn Union in Alpha. Intel reported what appeared to be one squadron. Wanting a decisive victory, Rear Admiral Dirk Mace orders the entire fleet to attack for what should be a one-sided battle. Unknown to the NEA, the six ships of Alpha Patrol are actually two squadrons, and the Attarns' Expeditionary Fleet arrives two days before 2nd Fleet. What was supposed to be a piece of cake for 2nd Fleet is instead a major fleet engagement.

Mace, however, had unexpectedly prepared for this. His operations orders had centered around an attempt to surprise the local patrol in deep space. His intent was to keep the fight away from the fixed defenses, intending to bombard the station with stand-off missiles after the maneuver elements had been destroyed. His plan worked, and the Attarns were caught off guard while 2nd Fleet was fully mobilized at battle stations. The only thing Mace hadn't been prepared for was the presence of the Attarn Expeditionary Fleet led by a Courageous Super Carrier. The 10 flights of Buccaneers that it launched combined with the four flights from the Indomitable Light Carriers meant that the 31 flight of Tigers and 8 flights of Atlas Torpedo Fighters were

going to have to work a bit before space superiority could be established. Mace found himself praising the Joint Chiefs for the wisdom of having two Avenger fleet carriers and 4 Porcupine light carriers built a year ago and earmarked for 2nd Fleet.

The initial skirmishes were fierce, with 2nd Fleet having seven ships crippled, while the Attarns had three ships crippled and two destroyed. Even though the Attarns were greatly outnumbered, their heavily armored ships gave them great staying power in combat.

As the fighting intensified, *Prometheus*' breaching pods, under Lt. Commander Mentali, successfully boarded and captured a Vanguard light cruiser crippled in the early exchanges. The Attarns fire was wildly uncoordinated, and they only managed to cripple two more Artemis gunships, while having three more ships crippled, and two destroyed. The NEA superior numbers of fighters were starting to have an effect, though the Buccaneers dropped four flights of Tigers while only losing two of their own.

At first, it looked like the Attarn fleet was wavering and might retreat, but they regrouped and struck 2nd Fleet with a vengeance. Focusing all their fire on the carrier squadron, the Orestes System Monitor *Deborah* that was the squadron's flagship was destroyed outright, and all three Porcupines were finished off, while the crippled *Yorktown* took more damage. Incensed, Admiral Mace ordered the fleet to target the local defense squadron, resulting in the destruction of a Glory destroyer and crippling both of the Indomitables. Mentali's raiders crippled a Victorious Armored Cruiser, and the Atlas' heavily damaged a Warrior heavy cruiser.

The battle peaked as *Rebecca*, *Aragorn*, and *Current* were destroyed by the Attarns, while 2nd Fleet fire finished off the Indomitables, a Warrior, and a Victorious. NEA fighters went after the Courageous, but were met by a firestorm of defense fire and some very determined Buccaneers, resulting in the loss of six flights of Tigers and a flight of Atlas'. The remaining two flights of Atlas' severely damaged a crippled Defiant, but couldn't quite finish it off.

Taking advantage of finding themselves near the Alpha system jump gate, the remnants of the Attarn forces made their escape and left the Alpha system to the NEA.

The Battle of Alpha resulted in heavy losses for both sides. The Attarn Union suffered nine ships destroyed, four crippled, and one captured, with only their Courageous Super Carrier escaping unscathed. They also lost 10 flights of Buccaneer medium fighters. The NEA's 2nd Fleet lost seven ships, with an additional five crippled. They also lost 10 flights of Tigers and six flights of Atlas Torpedo Fighters. At best a minor victory for the NEA only by virtue of remaining in possession of the system.

NEA Casualties at the Battle of Alpha

EAS *Deborah*, Orestes System Monitor (Gamma), destroyed
EAS *Rebecca*, Orestes System Monitor (Gamma), destroyed
EAS *Aragorn*, Artemis Gunship (Gamma), destroyed
EAS *Armadillo*, Porcupine Light Carrier (Beta), destroyed
EAS *Jackelope*, Porcupine Light Carrier (Beta), destroyed
EAS *Rhino*, Porcupine Light Carrier (Beta), destroyed
EAS *Current*, Laertes Police Corvette (Delta), destroyed
EAS *Yorktown*, Avenger Heavy Carrier (Alpha), crippled
EAS *Artemis*, Artemis Gunship (Gamma), crippled
EAS *Ranger*, Artemis Gunship (Gamma), crippled
EAS *Strider*, Artemis Gunship (Gamma), crippled
EAS *Black*, Laertes Police Corvette (Delta), crippled

In all, 2nd Fleet suffered 34% casualties to inflict a little over 59% casualties on the Attarn fleet. This is going to a tough campaign. The NEA is going to have to keep the shipyards humming if it's going to be able to send a steady stream of reinforcements to the front.

In the wake of the battle, Rear Admiral Mace, Commander Johnny North, and Lieutenant Commander Anderson Mentali all received new abilities, with Mentali being promoted to full Commander. Mace got the Master Tactician ability, which combined with his Unpredictable ability, ought to make life difficult for his foes. Mentali got the Ejection Seat ability so I won't have to worry about him dying with his breaching pod. I spent a bundle on North and gave him the Scientist ability of Repair Specialist – he is now the bomb when it comes to fixing things.

The Attarns used their experience with the reduced costs to raise the Courageous super carrier, a Defiance escort and a Victorious Armored Cruiser to Veteran crews.

2217.11

As Vice Admiral Mace orders 2nd Fleet to initiate a blockade of the Alpha system, a message is received from the Attarn Union explaining that the war was a big mistake and would we be willing to sign an armistice agreement? (*They rolled an 02 on a 14% Armistice Check*). Mace forwards the message to EarthForce in Sedalia, who forward it on to the President.

In spite of the fact that the Attarns have been extremely erratic of late, the President authorizes an acceptance of the Armistice offer. This should maximize the morale boost from the pyrrhic victory last month if it can be turned into peace. Quite frankly, the Joint Chiefs were seriously concerned about a long-term campaign against the Attarns as the heavy armor on their ships made even their lighter combatants difficult to take out with suffering heavy casualties. All-in-all, EarthForce is happy to have a victorious little war.

Of course, now, Dirk Mace can do no wrong and in a few more years will probably find himself CNO. Not bad for a humble scout ship captain.

TF21 had been reorganized to handle the return of the cripples to Sedalia for repairs and was about to depart when the Armistice offer came in. Mace ordered it to hold in case the status of the Vanguard Light Cruiser that was captured became an issue. The blockade is also halted.

After some discussion, it is decided to repatriate the crew of the captured ship, but the ship itself will be kept. The Attarns weren't happy about it, but did eventually accept the decision. The Joint Chiefs have no intention of taking the ship into service as we have no source of ammunition for the matter-based weapons systems, but it is hoped that something can be learned by studying their technology.

Well, so much for my worlds-shattering conflict. I waited six months to reactivate my campaign to get an armistice? Hehe, you get what you pay for. Now back to the eXploration, eXpansion, and eXploitation parts of 4X games.

2218.01

As 2nd Fleet transits Willickers on its way to Sedalia I, Admiral Kirche arrives with 1st Fleet wreathed in glory from a successful campaign against the Tokati. Many are surprised to hear of her retirement, but many more in EarthForce are happy to see a plum fleet command open up and no one from Exploration Command in a position to grab it. Vice Admiral William Jennings, Vice Chief of Staff is tapped to take over 1st Fleet.

For now, 1st Fleet stands in readiness for possible action against the Attarn while 2nd Fleet returns for repair and refit. 1st Fleet is in better shape having received attention in Columbia. The Joint Chiefs, however, are hopeful that the armistice will stick and the Fleet can be reorganized once it has consolidated in Sedalia.

Random Events, which I opted to do this turn, saw the Vree lose 20 EPs due to cost overruns on Productivity Investment at their homeworld and the otherwise not-so-fecund Hyach saw a population boost at the colony of Yonog I. Diplomacy was quiet, as the Attarn attitude towards the NEA defrosted a point to an awesome '7'.

2218.03

The Orions in Sedalia get their fighter complements replenished after being stripped during the war with the Attarns for reinforcements. System patrols for major nodes are just about in place to protect key areas from the threat of piracy.

Investments are made in productivity at Dirkie I.

Both ExCoFlots are exploring this month. #1 out of Columbia and #2 out of Andalia. With EarthForce maintenance exceeding our peacetime budget and only trade keeping us solvent, we need to expand and grow the economy, stupid.

Relations with the Vree improve slightly, while the Attarns cool down a point. Hyach/Attarn relations also lost a point in both directions. It's too bad the NEA doesn't know the Hyachs exists. It would behoove both powers to have an alternative to the flaky, increasingly belligerent Attarns.

And nobody finds anything anywhere. (That was a lot of mediocre die rolling for exploration)

2218.04

The rest of the System Patrol forces arrive on station. Andalia, Sol, Tokat, Columbia and McInerney all have dedicated local defense forces. Sedalia is protected by 1st Fleet as the main base of EarthForce, and Willickers has the benefit of 2nd Fleet watching the border with the Attarn Union.

Investment is made into productivity on Andalia I. Until the explorers can find some new targets for expansion, resources are being put into maximizing output in settled space.

Diplomatically, little occurs, though the Vree gain another point in their relationship with the NEA.

Every exploration group but Captain Kierkegaard's ExCoFlot#1 is successful.

2218.05

Kierkegaard is still lost in space.

ExCoFlot#2 finishes surveying the newly-discovered Magdal system, and the results are disappointing. Magdal II has a quantity of Q40; it is otherwise very unappealing with two gas giants and two barren worlds. Not a priority for colonization at this point.

The Iota system, newly discovered by the Attarns has a gem of a Terrestrial world with 6 RAW and 7 Capacity. For the Attarns, the climate is less than ideal, but for those kinds of numbers, it's worth it.

The Hyachs hit the jackpot in the Tirrith system. Two mineral rich worlds, a gas giant with very rich moons, two sources of Q40, ancient ruins on Tirrith I and an ancient derelict corvette floating in orbit over Tirrith V. Not bad at all! However, this is balanced by Roth being very unremarkable beyond being only one jump from the homeworld.

The Vree discover a major system that they call Alzeral. Unfortunately, it is a dead end with only the one jump lane into it from Vreetan. This means that unless they either take Columbia from the NEA or work a deal with the NEA to give them access to other worlds, the Vree will be confined to two systems. They may just have to invest in improved relations with the humans. Fortunately, it will take some time for them to fully exploit what they have, so that should keep them occupied for a while.

The Attarn ambassador evidently was caught in a compromising situation as the Hyachs reduced their relationship by 5 points, though there were no further implications.

The Hyach's Delta Fleet recently conducted a series of very successful exercises, and the crews of the Fleet are at a greater level of preparedness for the next six months.

Independent investors boost the Productivity of Vreetan III.

2218.06

Kierkegaard finally gets somewhere. Too bad all that time resulted in discovering another connection to the Vree's newly discovered system of Alzeral. The Vree are noticeably surprised when ExCoFlot#1 arrives from an unexpected direction, but welcome Captain Kierkegaard's offer to assist with jump gate surveying. *(I suspect the Vree are now also hopeful that some other unknown jump route may still be discovered.)*

The rest of the races begin a flurry of jump gate construction to facilitate expansion to newly discovered territories. The Vree are a tad bit friendlier to the NEA (+1 to relationship).

Side note: I'm officially discontinuing use of the Personnel rules. One more thing to track and due to other factors, never really figured in. It's mostly used to limit shipbuilding on the frontier, but the existing rules do that rather well. Besides, getting rid of it will allow me to clean up my spreadsheets a bit.

2218.07

A colony fleet is dispatched to Himalaya. The Senate determined that given the paucity of suitable alternatives, that the effort should be made to go ahead and settle the system. It's an unremarkable system whose main advantage is isolation, being a dead-end system.

The Attarns evidently don't like peace as they've managed to seriously offend the Hyachs. The critical shift significantly reduced relations (-5) but the Hyachs failed in their attempt to break their Peace Treaty. Given that the Attarns have been hovering at a 64% chance to declare hostilities on the NEA since the end of the war, it's only a matter of time until that one hots up again. It would be nice to have a second front to divert Attarn strength. Of course, it would also be nice to know that the Hyach exist so that relations could be pursued, but you know what they say about wishes. ;)

2218.08

A relatively quiet month. As new jump gates come on line, a wave of colonization goes forth. The Hyachs also begin a round of shipbuilding, laying down 3 dreadnoughts and 3 light carriers to further bolster Home

Fleet against possible aggression. *(I finally got done converting Tyrel's early Hyach ships, giving them some very useful additional options.)*

2218.09

September was shaping up to be a quiet month until a message was received from the Attarn Union declaring that a State of Hostilities once again existed between us. *(Given the extremely low relationship value, this was inevitable)* At least this time, we don't have another war going on elsewhere, meaning both 1st and 2nd Fleets are available and ready for service.

2218.10

The 2nd NEA/Attarn Union Conflict

The President has ordered that EarthForce maintain defensive positions. Since it is the Attarns that have renewed hostilities, it is her feeling that given their mercurial nature that they might change their minds if we don't provoke them. I don't agree with this position, but I'm not the elected head of the New Earth Alliance, so I don't have to like it, I just have to do it.

For the time being, 2nd Fleet will hold position in Willickers, with 1st Fleet backing it up in Sedalia. An additional squadron or two will probably be dispatched to strengthen Mace's command.

Unknown to the NEA, the Attarn Union has determined that the Humans must be driven out of Willickers and the system occupied as a buffer against future NEA aggression (the NEA won the last one, remember?). As such both the Expeditionary and 1st Fleets have been dispatched from Attaria. That's 26 ship and 28 flights of Buccaneers. Yikes!

Meanwhile, the Hyach nearly triggered another NPE when they discovered the Minas system down the last unexplored jump lane from Delta.

2219.11

The Attarn Union's Expeditionary Fleet jumped into the Willickers system with a flurry of vortexes. Fortunately for Rear Admiral Dirk Mace, the enemy jumped too far out to complete the ambush, and 2nd Fleet had time to get to battle stations, though not all ships were cleared for action as the enemy engaged.

Mace knew he was in for a fight as sensors picked up the presence of 2 *Courageous* super carriers and 4 *Indomitable* light carriers. As the flights of Buccaneers started pouring out of the launch bays, he knew his Tiger crews were in for the fight of their lives.

The Attarn fleet did not attempt any fancy maneuvers, trusting instead on the thick armor plates of their hulls as they drove straight at the outnumbered 2nd Fleet. As swarms of fighters moved into their attack runs, the ships unleashed Armageddon on each other. Holding no punches, the Attarns concentrated their fire on 2nd Fleet's 2nd Squadron, composed of 2 *Orestes* Dreadnought (Alpha), an *Avenger* Heavy Carrier (Alpha), and an *Artemis* Gunship (Gamma), while 2nd Fleet combined its fire against a squadron of 3 *Victorious* Armored Cruisers. As the fighters began to dogfight, 2nd Squadron ceased to exist as all four ships buckled and exploded under the weight of the incoming fire. The Attarns, meanwhile, fought on as a *Victorious* was destroyed and two more crippled.

Caught off guard by the devastation of 2nd Squadron, Flag Squadron's anti-fighter defenses were ineffective as 19 flights of Buccaneers came in. They were met by 8 flights of Tigers, who proceeded to do their utmost

to stop them, but only managed to shoot down 3 flights before they were overwhelmed. The remaining 16 flights of Buccaneers then proceeded to almost destroy EAS *Strider*, an *Artemis* Gunship. Venting atmosphere from many rents in her hull, *Strider's* damage control crews fought valiantly to save their ship.

Meanwhile, the remaining Tigers assaulting the Attarn fleet met with mixed success. One group met with withering fire and only did light damage to a *Defiance* Escort Destroyer. Meanwhile, Commander Mentali's group of breaching pods managed to destroy an *Indomitable* Light Carrier (with some help from some Tigers, of course).

Realizing how hopeless the situation was, Rear Admiral Mace ordered a full retreat by what was left of 2nd Fleet. He knew there was no chance to win this fight, so his only objective was to salvage as much of the fleet as he could.

Unfortunately, it was a lost cause as the Attarn fleet turned its guns to the Flag Squadron and blew everything out of the sky. Special Envoy Wilkerson and his courier vessel were unable to escape the system. Rear Admiral Dirk Mace was killed in action. Commander Mentali was captured by the Attarn fleet. The loss of the Battle of Wilkerson has been a terrible blow for the New Earth Alliance. Only time will tell if it is one that it can recover from.

[Insert dramatic B5 3rd Season Music here]

The Attarn Union, eager for blood after their victory in Willickers continued their assault into Sedalia. The few EarthForce survivors barely had time to alert 1st Fleet before the lead Attarn units began jumping in.

Vice Admiral Jennings was tactically brilliant and 1st Fleet was ready and waiting for the enemy, but it just wasn't enough. The Attarn Expeditionary Fleet was just too strong. 1st Fleet was lost, really, before the action began. For all the blood-letting inflicted by EarthForce, the Attarn Fleet had sufficient strength to tackle the fixed defenses around the Fleet bases.

With the victory in Sedalia, the NewEarth Alliance lay prostrate before the unstoppable might of the Attarn Union. The only forces between the attackers and Earth itself was the Sol System Patrol, composed of a Hyperion cruiser, 2 Olympus corvettes, a Porcupine light carrier, five Laertes police corvettes, and six Tethys laser boats fresh from the shipyards. These forces worked desperately to assemble some sort of defense for the home system of Humanity.

Shortly after the assault on Sedalia, Attarn Union troop ships arrived in Willickers and subdued the two colonies in the system. This improved the Attarn supply situation tremendously. When the troop ships reached Sedalia two months later, the Attarn fleet bombed the defenders senseless, and while the defense was spirited, ultimately it was as futile as the fleet action had been four months prior.

At this point, the government of the Alliance realized the situation was hopeless. With the home system cut off from the rest of the Alliance, there just weren't sufficient resources or time to assemble anything remotely strong enough to hold the line. A formal surrender was transmitted and accepted.

And thus another B5 campaign ends in flame. In retrospect I should have been pumping more effort into the diplomatic effort to improve relations with the Attarns after the "short, victorious war." The EP would have been a small price to pay to get back in the good graces of the Attarns, who showed how dangerous their ships were. Without any significant threats to worry about, they were free to build up their fleet and just smash through the NEA fleets in front of them when war returned.