

Prelims Game 1 – Friday 11.03.22

This is my write up from the first prelim game. If you enjoy it let me know!

Preparation

I had played once on TTS before, and about 5 games of TI in total, so I knew I was probably coming in as the least experienced player at the table. I listen to the podcast a lot, and think about the game more than good for my life. To prep the draft I wrote up an excel table of each faction and thought about which slices I would like for them, and specific strategy cards were necessary to do well (so if speaker order mattered). The only factions I didn't bother doing that for were those that I didn't think I would ever draft – Naalu and Yin because their pools had Arborec which is more fun, and Saar, because the chances of me getting to draft them were super low. I also made a list of the exploration cards, and public and secret objectives in excel (copy paste from the wiki) so I could track which ones were still available mid game.

Pregame

We jumped on Discord about 30 minutes before the game started, and had a nice chat getting to know each other and setting up the mood. BigAl fostered right from the get-go the friendly boat-floaty culture and stated outright his plan for a 55 point game. No one seemed against this, so I was looking forward to a game where we could trust each other to stick to deals, and build something greater than the sum of our parts.

Draft

As third in the order I was surprised to get Saar as an option, and although they were the one good faction I hadn't prepped for, I just really wanted to try them so went ahead and grabbed them. I thought the slices are all pretty good, and Saar doesn't particularly care about bad slices as they can just take other peoples systems. I took Between a Rock and a Slow Place because it was a good slice for resources, had a perfect combination of a wormhole in an asteroid field which I could safely sit in while having access to the table, and had for objectives a legendary planet, two anomalies, and three cultural planets (for four of a kind). Cultural planets are my preference over the other two types for the slim chance of getting Tomb and Crown for a point, as well as the gamma which can be good. I took the later speaker order to try to get on BigAl's right, as I wanted to work together with him while still having the speaker order advantage.

The two secrets I drew were 1) have units in Mallice and 2) have units in 6 systems. I kept the Mallice one as with my asteroid wormhole I would be able to get it as soon as someone finds the gamma, and I had three culturals to have a go finding it myself. I assumed I would prefer to bunch my units in a Saar ball, so thought units in 6 systems would go against my general gameplan.

Going clockwise from me we're:

BigAl as Vul Raith, red

Gambler as NRA, green

Chocclax as Titans, white

DLSauron as Mahact, blue

Robofish as Argent, purple

Round 1 – Here we go!

Open objectives – 2 techs in 2 colours, 5 trade goods. Secret: A unit on Mallice.

Ok, since I had only one starting tech there was little chance of scoring that. 5 trade goods is pretty easy as Saar gets 1tg for each planet taken. This was my first game as Saar so I was a bit nervous, and wanted to play safely to keep my balls safe. That plan went quickly out the window.

If you have never been on the receiving end of BigAI's dealmaking desires, I have to say it is quite an experience. We had lots of open and secret chats setting up a plan to work together, be non-aggressive, and generally help each other the whole game. This let me plan to stretch thin and go aggressive, as I trusted him to keep his word and intention. Even if he did betray me, it would likely only end in disaster for us both, as a Saarball could come in and blockade a Cabal spacedock if necessary.

Strategy Phase – I was immediately paralysed with choice. I wanted Warfare to not be picked as that would restrict the other player's initial expansion, whereas I would already have good reach and builds through my floating factories. I thought BigAI would take Construction, and as I really wanted Diplo to be taken so I could build I couldn't let Politics go as otherwise Gambolor would take it instead of Diplo. That meant I had to take Politics, which is usually never a bad pick I think.

I saw that Mahact with a red skip and the two wormholes had a path to Mecatol round 1 if Diplo got taken as they could tech Cruiser II (and they start with one already built). However, my agent could copy that speed and I would get to Mecatol first. Taking Speaker meant I could then Imperial round 2 for the double guac with custodians and the Mecatol point. I was pretty nervous about pushing forward so fast, but trusted in BigAI not to betray me instantly, and the other players were too far away to punish me before I could hide my central fleet in the asteroid field on the right. I did want Primor round 1, but Custodians was more important as otherwise Mahact would get it. Mahact with Mecatol and 6 influence in their slice feels like game over, as they would just have so many command counters they would have free reign in their final round.

I was keen to get enough tgs to score this round as well as Custodians. Since I had to spend some for Custodians, I needed Choclox to give me the X-0 before people realized how ahead I was and stopped giving me money. Selling ceasefire round 1 was not ideal and mattered later on. I wasn't too worried about it mattering soon as I didn't want to fight Titans, my central fleet was weak and I didn't have many resources. If I invaded anyone I would get ganked on the counterattack. In the end I only got 4 tgs, so not enough to score, but I did then sell that money to both Cabal and Mahact for a point debt each, which pays itself back later on. If Economic Equality hadn't popped in the agenda phase I would have had to beg for enough dollars to score with imperial first action next turn, but I was lucky (a common theme for me this game).

Agenda Phase:

Economic Equality passed, setting everyone on 5 tgs, which was great for me as it secured the round 2 first action Imperial score.

Archived Secret – I love getting secrets early so I know how to plan my game out. I managed to sell a cultural fragment and a dollar to Mahact for their votes which got them a relic. I had already explored most of my slice, so doubted I would get anymore fragments so didn't mind selling it. I drew 4 techs in 1 colour – directly opposed to 2 in 2 colours! I still only had 1 blue, but had always planned to go 4 blue for Light Wave.

Round 2 – Feeling the rush

Open objectives – 5 trade goods, 8 resources. Secret: A unit on Mallice, 4 techs in 1 colour

Strategy Phase – Imperial was the clear choice here as I could catch up the missed round 1 score as well as get the Mectacol point, and I had an extra secret draw so would still be even with the other players.

I felt safe on Mecatol as no one except BigAI had the speed to bring a powerful enough force to push me off while being able to still defend it afterwards, but I still activated Imperial first action to avoid the temptation for someone to punish me for sitting there.

I teched DET and moved off into the asteroid field because I was searching for the Gamma for my secret to get to Mallice, as well get the extra tech card for 2 in 2, as well as to find my last secret, as well as needing 4 blue techs. NRA didn't have Antimass so I didn't need Chaos Mapping straight away. Titans wouldn't attack me there because it doesn't help them get anything, and they had enough problems coming with a strong NRA as aggressive neighbour. I was lucky and directly drew my third secret (discard 2 fragments, which I already had in hand! Thanks 7th player)

I had thought BigAI and I would trade Supports, so him giving it away to Gambolor made it hard to find another partner, especially as I already had two guac and three secrets. Robofish was the only choice, and I couldn't find a way to convince him at this point of the game. I would have paid almost anything!

Scored 5tgs through Imperial, 8 resources public objective, and discard 2 fragments (secret), and a Mecatol point – 5 points at the end of round 2 without a Support!

Agenda Phase: Covert Legislation -> Checks and Balances (against), then Minister of Commerce (BigAI). I probably should have taken the support swap with purple here - I can't remember exactly how BigAI convinced me to give it to him, but it felt correct at the time. I think it may have been that I was fully open on the side to him, and he could eat my whole slice without effort. Plus we were ride or die bros. It did net me lots of money later, but really taking the support swap would have probably been better.

Round 3 – Looking for opportunities

Open objectives – 6 planets outside of home, 2 techs in 2 colours. Secret: A unit on Mallice, 4 techs in one colour.

Strategy Phase - I took Trade as I couldn't see anything better, and wanted to bank dollars for future objectives and buy command counters. Construction would have been nice, but I didn't have the resources to really benefit from a third space dock.

I drew a fourth secret from Imperial, and discarded going to Mallice in favour of winning a combat in an Anomaly as the Gamma hadn't been found yet and there were only two more Frontier Tokens I was planning to explore. Fighting in an Anomaly should be easy as Cormund had only a few units, and BigAI has a nebula we could fight in and he owed me a point. Naturally I found the Gamma on my next action... I had been hoping for the extra tech card instead.

Rise of Messiah was a stall; I wanted to stall out any attacks on my six planets especially as I was planning on moving to Mallice which everyone could reach. When I did move there I only built ground forces because I misunderstood floating factories again, thinking they could survive if their planet was safe, but it turns out they die if they get blockaded! I should have built Dreads/Fighters, that's what happens when an inexperienced player takes a race they have never played. Naaz-Rohka

tried to swap Ceasefires, and my selling of it in the first round for a point (through x-0) came back to bite me. Instead, they then moved their Dread to Mallice, forcing my space dock to retreat back to the gamma.

BigAl popped his hero, which luckily only captured a cruiser from me and didn't devastate my asteroid fleet.

Scored 6 planets outside of home but no secret.

Agenda – Colonial Redistribution – used to destroy the Cabal space dock on Mehar Xul. Ixthian! Mahact played an Imperial Rider in true Mahact fashion; they deserve dominion, there are no rules holding them back. Luckily it still went for, but unfortunately it blew up instead of getting me the 2 techs I needed for my objectives and the likely win in round 4. Blowing up didn't hurt me much as I had enough fighters and infantry to soak the hits, and destroying Cabal's major fleet on Mecatol probably stopped him winning.

Round 4 – Desperate measures

Objective – Ships in 2 systems adjacent to Mectaol, 2 techs in 2 colours. Secrets – 4 in 1 colour, win a combat in an anomaly.

Strategy Phase - easy Tech pick for my two objectives. Double teching still wouldn't get me both, unless I found a tech card in the frontier exploration deck.

I could win this round if 1) I got my support swap (hard), 2) I got my action phase secret to win in an anomaly (easy), 3) I got 4 techs in 1 colour (easy) and 4) I scored ships in 2 systems adjacent to Mecatol (hard), probably in that order. If I got the anomaly win too early then Robofish probably wouldn't give me the support, as he correctly deduced that I had a scoreable secret in hand. That meant I had to stall as much as possible while I thought of a trade he would take.

I eventually got him to take my political secret and the target and timing of Armageddon Relay for the support swap. This finally let me go for my secret in the anomaly, and set up for 2 ships next to Mecatol. I couldn't go 2 in 2 colours, as then I couldn't get 4 in 1 colour. Chat spotted it exactly, it was a really annoying spot to be in. I teched Sarween as I wanted the efficiency, but had considered Scanlink to be able to search for unlikely stuff like the Crown in case I got the Tomb, which I later did on Mirage. Unfortunately I was starved on command tokens so didn't have the luxury to do an unnecessary explores.

For ships in 2 systems next to Mecatol I had agreed to not be in the empty space in front of Argent, and if I contested red he could just crush me, so I either had to go to Cormund or Lodor. Since I would have already got my other secret I would be on 9, so Mahact would at any time Benediction me out of the appropriate system once he saw that I was set up. This meant I had to set up to be in THREE systems next Mecatol and survive staying there, which meant taking BOTH Cormund AND Lodor, a pretty hard ask.

I attacked Cormund first, even though it dropped my Support, as I trusted Robofish to give it back considering he directly agreed to do that. Unfortunately he didn't do that, instead agreeing to give it back at the start of next round if he didn't have a good path to win. I needed to take Lodor as well and I knew it would be an unlikely fight, but I knew I could get my 10th point next round on 2 in 2 colours so I didn't need the ships afterwards. Unfortunately I only had 1 command counter and couldn't stall further, so had to risk just sending a dread, a cruiser, and a fighter at Lodor against 3 titans cruisers and a destroyer. This was a real Hail Mary, and it didn't pay off. I should have spent money on more command tokens to stall better, but I was hedging against going into the next round

where I could use money to build a fleet out of chaos mapping which would allow me to winslay to win on objectives. I would be on 9 points and therefore not expecting to receive any more trade goods this game.

I didn't see NRA getting Cormund from me, but that's because I just didn't see it. They at least got immediately destroyed by Mahacts Benediction which smashed them into Robofish's Warsun at Mecatol.

Scored no publics, got 4 techs in 1 colour secret.

Agenda – Fleet Regulations went for, for max of 4 tokens in the fleet pool. Homeland Defence Act got vetoed, then Swords to Plowshares gave me 9 tgs.

Sorry Matt and Hunter for going to round 5! We knew it was rude to be so close to finishing on round 4 but just going over, but I couldn't slow it down as it would be to my advantage going to tie-breaker, as I didn't think I would out race Cabal or Mahact in that I didn't have an action phase secret or Speaker for Leadership or Imperial.

Round 5 – On a wing and a prayer

Open objectives – Ships in 2 systems next to Mecatol, 2 in 2 colours or 6 planets of same type, all secrets scored. Shard on Titans homesystem, Crown of Emphidia not found, Tomb on my Mirage.

Things are looking slim – I need 6 planets and no one took tech for my 2 in 2, and I don't have any ships, but at least buckets of money. I have a slim hope to get the tech from the frontier token next to Titans home system, which I can then buy with 6tgs. I am worried about an action phase win from someone else, so try to get Shard, which is why I took Warfare and used Plagiarise for Fleet Logistics instead of 2 in 2 colours. This would allow the following epic play:

1. Agent and Crucible to move a half built fleet to the empty space next to the Titans homesystem and build 9 units (Warmachine) with my 20 trade goods, then Fleet Logistics to Warfare the token. This lets Titans build at home with Warfare, but I can't stop that. They then can choose as their next action to either Construction or build again at home; Construction would allow the PDS to prevent bombardment, but the build is more units.
2. Then on my second action I would Armageddon Relay to destroy all fighters and infantry, and then attack the Titans homeworld. It would be 4 mechs and 1 infantry vs 3 mechs and 2 pds, which isn't great but my best chance that I could see.

Unfortunately I miscounted the number of tiles with crucible, so building the dreads with chaos mapping was a waste of time as they couldn't reach. We had a pregame audio check counting 1,2,3,4,5, and joked that showed we could count at least that high. Now, near the end of the game, this was for me no longer the case - it was 2am and I was mentally wrecked. I wanted to stall so I could build up with chaos mapping, but unfortunately that meant Titans could pop Construction before I did my first move, allowing him to build at home as well. Also, it turns out white had NOT sold my ceasefire from turn 1 to green, which made my whole plan moot.

Cabal was helping me as I had agreed to kingmake him if he got me to have this attempt, and I needed his help to do it. It was what I am told is a Magi's gambit – if I got it I would win, if I lost I would help him win.

When Choclox showed me the ceasefire, I felt defeated. I now had no idea how I was going to win from here. I went afk for a bit just to sit and breath. It was now 3am, I was exhausted, and had no

plan. I was fully intending to fulfil my gambit with BigAl, and would have taken his home system for his Become a Martyr. We looked desperately for an option, but in the end it just wasn't possible. Al had thought my cruiser on Mirage was a carrier. Sorry man, we'll get that finish next time!

The final round was crazy with each player having legit paths to win, and I totally lost the plot as to who was winning.

Gambolor had the best chance with 6 Culturals, but needed to stretch hard to get and defend them.

Choclax had a good path with the secret for 4 Hazardous, but unluckily lost the fight on Perimeter with 1 mech vs 1 mech. Clutch Emergency Repairs saved the day there. I had not imagined Choclax would take Hopes End, otherwise I would have waited out and taken that for the Shard from the asteroid field.

Robofish's comeback suprised me completely, he had such a good try for six Hazardous but was defeated by RNG with a 5 shot whiffing Dread.

Mahact just needed to take Mecatol and pop Imperial, and had lots of tokens to stall for it. Luckily Robofish's Warsun held him off.

After a break I came back and saw a path – winslay everyone and win in the status phase on 6 with ships in 2 systems next to Mecatol. It was a slim chance, but it was possible. I jumped on the single Mahact cruiser as it was the weakest, and wasn't in anyone's way to get planets. I then did two things for the rest of the game:

3.20am my time, timestamp 2:45: Put ships in 2 systems next to Mecatol, then passed as I literally had no more available actions.

4.30am my time, timestamp 3:55: Asked Mahact to take Lodor from Gambolor as payment of their point debt from the first turn, when I gave them money to score. The money had come from selling my Ceasefire to Titans. This attack took Gambolor's 6th cultural planet, getting me the win on the 6! So even though it was a crazy bad plan, and there were many times someone else should have won, that sale in the first round actually directly won me the game.

I had sat there for an hour with no actions left, just sweating bullets trying to get my win on the 6, and now it was finally over after 12 hours. What a game!

A couple things I learned:

- Saar Floating Factories die when blockaded, unlike normal space docks
- Buying 2-3 command counters a turn and never getting leadership really puts the pressure on your actions, I felt constantly command token poor the whole game and often passed before the other players
- Crucible allows crazy movement if shared
- Chaos Mapping is amazing to build up units right before you need them. I would take it even without asteroids to hide in.
- Light wave deflector is fantastic, you can just ignore everything and take what you want
- It's fun to float the boats

Thanks everyone for playing, it was great to have the opportunity to share such a crazy and fun game.

Gambolor, your play was clean, sensible, and I think you probably played the best „classic“ game. I really appreciated you keeping the table in order with time reminders.

Choclax, you played great, but got the poor end of the RNG stick as well as facing down an aggressive, well fed NRA without support. It would have been epic to have the final showdown be the fight for the Shard on Elysium, hopefully next time.

DLSauron I think you did a great job with what you had, getting sniped out of your fully legitimate first round Custodians was rough, and unfortunately the Benediction didn't clear out Mecatol as well as it could have.

Robofish, thanks for being my support partner. It was a long road getting there, but your comeback was inspiring. If only that one dread hadn't whiffed so much, the 10 points would have been yours as far as I can tell. Huge plays with the Warsuns, I loved it.

BigAL – what else is there left to say? I loved our partnership, even if it was tough sometimes resisting your mindcontrol. This game was testament to what can be achieved if people choose to trust each other and stay true to their stated intentions. If you had drawn a more scoreable secret the game was yours in round 5, even despite Ixthian and losing Mehar Xull, which speaks volumes for your success.

Ultimately I had a fantastic game and loved the chaos. Floating boats was fun, and trusting players allowed fun plays which really enriched the experience. Thanks everyone for playing, streaming, watching and reading. I look forward to many more games together with you all!