I thought I might try a new start with a ground rules in place to make things a little more interesting. I've seen a few people try a dead-is-dead approach so I thought I'ld give that a go and pick the Boring Boron start since that's the one that seems to start you off with the least to your name.

Rules:
1. Dead-is-dead
2. No buying ships. If I want it I have to persuade the owner they'ld quite

like to donate it.
3. No reloads. If I lose an expensive ship then that's tough.
4. Personal ship repairs only, anything else gets paid for.

So this is going to be the exciting (if possibly quite brief) series of events to follow.

Zero-time puts me in Kingdom End, a nice tune playing in the background.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
1x 1 Mj shield
2000cr

Right, I've got no weapons, a miniscule hold that can only hold S-class freight and bugger all cash. This severely limits the mission options available. Looks like it's going to be a trader start for me.

So with that in mind I decide to head down to Herrons Nebula and see what the current price for space-fuel is. On the way I stop at Three Worlds equipment dock, sell my 1 Mj shield and buy a duplex scanner. I'm working to the theory that if I die it's game over so the more intel I have the greater my chance of not having something nasty creep up on me. Seems my luck is in and SFD-beta has rock bottom prices. Spend a little time zipping back and forth with the trading station selling fuel and slowly upgrading my Octopus. Eventually some git comes along and buys up the lot but not before I've made 28,000cr and upgraded some.

Space-fuel trade opportunites are a bust so what to do next? I really don't fancy trading e-cells in an Octopus so I decide to head down to Elenas Fortune and see if the pirates are causing any trouble. Might be able to pick up a few dropped missiles. Decide to stop off on the way and grab a couple shields and IREs. You know, just in case...

Elenas Fortune seems kinda quiet. I'm assuming that's due to the Titan, three Cerberus and two dozen escorting smaller craft that are stationed around the south gate. I pop down into Split Fire to see what's around. Seems the pirates are all blue to me at present and really aren't interested in me so feeling brave I head into Brennans Triumph. Again pirates have no interest in me but are jumping the odd transport group. Manage to snag a couple missiles from destroyed escorts. Continue on into Dannas chance and going thru the gate take a hit from the rear turret of a Paranid transporter which puts my hull to 85%. Good thing I bought those shields or that would have really hurt! Note to self: be wary of Paranids.

A quick run away and repair and I'm into Nopileos Memorial, which seems to have changed colour these days. Think I preferred the blue. Paranid task force in the distance, Deimos and escorts. I'm wise to them this time so trail along behind at a respectable distance. Halfway thru the sector I get a missile-warning. Gravidar says I'm clear, sector map says nothing unfriendly nearby. Bleeps are getting faster. Looking ahead I suddenly spot the missile, so a quick turn and run. Target computer says it's a Tomahawk. Encyclopaedia says it does 625k damage. I have 2mj shielding. It's moving faster than I am...

Fortunately the Tomahawk was still a few km out so I've got time to do something about. I've got a couple IRE's so spamming fire at it is an option, on the other hand I've watched the AI hit things with them before and they seem to make quite a bang and I'm not entirely sure if they have a blast radius. So plan B, hide behind a rock. Fortunately Nopileos has quite a few asteroids so a quick jink to put one between me and it and all was well. There was a hell of a bang behind me. I didn't look but I suspect there wasn't much of that asteroid left.

Decided cowardice was probably the best approach from here on in so scarpered back to Argon space to see if i could find any missions I could do. Found a couple ship recovery for 3-4k each rescuing M5's then hit the jackpot with an 11k recover Argon Express Hauler. That's handy, I've got a single octopus, in need of a transporter class and they want me to go recover a TP for them... and they expect to see it again.. Ok! Slight catch, it's in Empires Edge. Paranid territory. Same guys that just recently tried to shove a thermonuclear warhead up my jacksie.

Anyways I scoot on down there, all goes well. Express is right by the gate as I jump in, couldn't be better. As I'm busy securing it tho a couple of the local customs take an interest. Only an M4/M5 duo and I could probly take them ok if I wanted, but I'm doing crime and I'm trying to do my crime quietly and shooting up the place doesn't feature in that plan. Fortunately they seem only interested in me so I lead them off a ways while the Express slips thru the gate. I've only got 20 mins to get to the pirate base and the Express is so damaged that will only be just enough.

Next sector doesn't go so well, halfway across the sector and then border control shows up. This time it's two M3 and despite my best efforts to draw them off they decide they want my TP first and the Express goes down in a blaze of HEPT fire. Nothing for it, I'm going to have to run. I'm not thinking my client is going to be too happy and the rep-loss on a TP is likely to be painful. I'm pleasantly suprised however to get a message regretting the loss and small %10 payment for my time. No rep-loss! Guess they appreciated my attempts to bring their property back. Good thing they didn't realise what I had in mind for it..
Heading back to Argon space I pick up yet another recovery mission but this ones for 33k. I'm thinking it might be a problem but it's just an M5 and it turns out it's in the next sector over. Cakewalk.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
2x 1 Mj shield
2x Ire
34000cr

Head up to Atreus Clouds Pirate base grab me a freight scanner and now I'm all set to do crime.

Right, Octopus is fine for tooling around but is very limited so what I really need is a TS to allow me to take on all these lucrative delivery missions.

Unfortunately I'm not thinking I'm going to find one just floating about which means I'm going to have to "liberate" one and be careful about doing it. I've got paper-thin hull and only one chance to get it right so careful target selection required here. What I'm looking for is a nice super-freighter, preferably under-shielded and no fighter drones on board. Parking up by the north gate I start scanning passing Split Caimans looking for a potential candidate. Sadly most of them seem to either have a boatload of drones on board or they've got escorts which is more than I'm inclined to tangle with in an Octopus.

After a bit a lone tech freighter wanders in scan range. Motherload. This guys got about 4 Mill in weapons and shields on board. Sadly most of it is M class so worthless to me. On the plus side tho he does have 10 Mass drivers on board, and they're S class.. Oh, and there's the small matter of the 9 MKII fighter drones. Now I've seen the MKII in action, a careless pirate group attacking a

freighters that had some onboard and the pirates came off worse. But 10 Mass driivers.. Dilemma.

After some careful consideration unadulterated greed triumphed over common-sense and self-preservation as it so often does in these situations and I decided to implement a two-part plan of the utmost cunning. Part 1 proceeded well as I boldly blazed into action and hammered away the shields of my target... The Splits response was to yell abuse and jettison the MKII's at which point I implemented part 2 of the plan and ran away like a girl.

Now MKI drones are fast but weak. MKII's might be hard as nails but they're slow. A lazy trek around Atreus Clouds and they eventually ran out of fuel. Problem sorted. Caught back up with my target and we then negotiated from Rolks Fate south gate all the way to the Ceo's buckzoid west gate, me demanding he cough up the goods, him telling me to go take a long walk. Finally just as I'ld decided he wasn't going to cooperate and was going to let him escape thru to Ceo's he gave up and spewed crates all over the sector. Success!! 10 mass drivers worth a cool million. Time to head back to Rolks fate equipment dock and sell my ill-gotten gains.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
2x 1 Mj shield
2x Ire
800cr
10x Extremely hard fought for Mass drivers.

So, cruising back down thru Rolksfate to sell my ill-gotten gains I bring up the sector map and set autopilot for the equipment dock. Except I don't. Because it's not there. Pause for a couple seconds while I contemplate that one and recheck the factory listing. Nope, no equipment dock. Flick back to universe map to make sure I am actually where I think I am and yes, this is indeed Rolks fate which I passed thru fairly recently and which definitely had an equipment dock earlier because I distinctly recall docking at it to flog a couple missiles to make room for all those mass drivers I fully planned on bringing back. This confuses me some.

Epiphany strikes me in the form of a blossom of red on my gravidar and in my main view I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. .. or it could have been Khaak beams around Plankton Farm L alpha. Just as I'm starting to realise where the equipment dock has gone and that I might be in trouble here a purple pineapple looms out of the pea-soup low on my right and confirms beyond any doubt that yes, I am indeed hurtling into the middle of a Khaak taskforce and that's not generally a good thing to do. There's really only one thing to do at times like these and that's run screaming like a girl, so I do. In fact I'm beginning to suspect that this is something I may be doing a lot in this game so henceforth this will be known as the RSLG maneuver.

Giving the centre of the sector a wiiiiiide berth it appears there's 3 KM2 and a bunch of scouts busy wrecking the place. While I've no intention of tangling with them I'm certain I can outrun the scouts so sit back and watch the fireworks.

After a while a Thresher and escort appears to the south and heads after one of the KM2's that has split from the rest. Now he may have some escorts but I'm thinking KM2 v M7? my moneys on the Khaak for this one but I nosy on over to see the action. As it happens it seems the Thresher packs a mean punch because even tho the KM2 is doing damage the Thresher is winning. Looks like 1-0 to the boron, unfortunately it seems the Thresher captain is a little target-fixated because he doesn't bother to slow down, or evade. Consequently there's an almighty crash and the Thresher comes off the worse for it, going down in flames. The final impact tho does strip the remaining shields off the KM2 and the Thresher escort makes short work of a shieldless destroyer. Sadly they then go after the other two KM2's and without capital support promptly get shredded in short order

so bit of a pyrrhic victory there.
Anyways, nothing further I can do here so I head back down to Atreus, sell my Mass drivers at the military post and go back to hunting for a vulnerable transport. Deciding what I really need to help out here is something to thin the fighter drones out I nip off and pick up some mosquito missiles which lets me go after transporters with more drones on board and knock a few out safely while running away until they're at more manageable numbers. End result of picking on half a dozen or so energy traders is a Caiman Superfreighter large-type bails for me.
Success, not only have I got the first TS I need to do the bigger payout missions but I transfer a cargo life-support over to the SF and go pick-up the ex-owner. This guy is now my first marine, or at least he will be once I figure out how to get him trained for it.
Time to look for a few more ship recovery missions while my SF heads for Argon space and gets himself repaired and upgraded for duty.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
1x Caiman SF (83%)
2x 1 Mj shield
2x Ire
1,000,000+ cr

Came this close --> <--- to having a terminal accident today. More on that later..

phoenix-it: I checked, it turns out mission used ships still count as having been bought on the player stats so they're out.

So my SF is off to spend some of my cash on upgrading itself and while it putters on over to Argon Prime I'm doing more ship recovery missions being as they're the only ones I can do near enough. Seems I've crossed some sort of rank threshold as I'm now consistently getting ship recovery missions in the 30-40k range whereas before they were 5-10k. I'm not complaining, they're easy to do and nobody tries to kill you. Suits me. Today tho I properly failed my first one.

Now I don't use the guidance feature because I find it more entertaining to actually have to go hunt for the thing rather have it handed to you on a plate and up till now that hasn't been a problem. This time around tho it was only a Harrier they wanted returning but it was in The Hole which is both pea-soupy and colossally huge. I had an hour and change to track it down in but despite criss-crossing all over the sector do you think I could find the thing? Like hell. I spent so long looking that my SF had trekked all the way back from Atreus, got himself fully kitted out, trekked down to Terracorp, bought a jumpdrive and jumped to Elenas Fortune to grab a triplex before I finally started jumping him into the 4 gates of The Hole to see if my SF could spot the damn Harrier on his triplex, eventually picking it up near the west gate.

By the time I've got over there, zapped it with the repair laser and set it on it's way home it's 7 mins left on the clock which is not quite enough time. I'm hoping tho that the mission time runs over and I'll get away with it as sometimes it does that for some reason. Nope, mission ends right on queue, I get accused of stealing it and my Teladi rep takes a dropkick to the nads. Oh, well maybe I'll be able to sell it as a consolation. Nope, two Teladi police M5's jump in and promptly shoot hell out of it. The day is not going well.

Oh well, at least my SF is up and running. I made the decision to spend nearly all my cash maxing out his cargo hold. It cost most what I had a but it'll come in useful in the long run I think for doing the delivery missions where they want large quantities. Currently I've got him doing e-cell runs all over Argon space as their seems to be a huge shortage in the Argon prime area and nearly all the factories are stalled. Might not seem like much but I'm making 40% profit or so run which is pretty

good.

I head back up to Atreus Clouds and see if I can steal another CaimanSF to partner up with my first but it seems today the RNG gods are not smiling up on me and despite a fair amount of time spent and a dozen or so attempts not a single one shows any inclination to part with his ship I think I'm going to give up for now and go back to running recovery missions. Queue auto-pilot for Cloudbase South-East, line up on the gate, hit seta and settle back for a quiet ride back.

Suddenly the screen whites out blinding my view there's an almighty roar of engines and the auto-pilot pulls some kind of wild corkscrew maneuver. Resettling my eyeballs back on an even keel I take stock of what's what. Seems I'm not dead which is nice to know. Checking behind me there's a freighter which wasn't there a moment ago.

It seem TC now has freighters that use jumpdrives. More to the point it seem they use jumpdrives that are considerably better than mine as I still have to use the jumpgates and they seem able to point-jump anywhere in a sector. Including it appears directly in my flight path. I'm not sure how close I came, but apparently traffic control weren't too impressed.

Squiddy now has only 8 of his 9 lives remaining. Squiddy is a fish, not a cat. I'm unclear if this is pertinent.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
1x Caiman SF fully upgraded at great cost. I hope noone shoots it.
2x 1 Mj shield
4x Ire
128,000 cr

So after my near-death experience I decide to take a more sedate approach to things and build up my cash reserves a bit. Fully kitting out my lone SF 'Tax Deductible' nearly used up all my reserve but I'm not too worried. The whole Argon prime region seems critically low on energy cells to the point that practically no manufacturing is taking place. All the factories have the secondary and tertiary resources in stock in high numbers so there's almost no money to be made there but hardly anyone has ecells to power it all.

It's not for a lack of SPP's, there's a fair few in the surrounding sectors, it just seems the NPC traders can't be bothered with anything so lowly. No worries, I'll do it then, I'm not proud. So while my SF jumps ecells around and kickstarts the local economy I go mission hunting. I'm getting about 40k a recovery anyway plus flitting thru the sectors looking for ships I can pick up the odd "Deliver me 8000 e-cells" missions which pay a nice bonus.

So I do this for a while, my cash reserves are creeping up nicely and then I get a recovery mission for a Kestrel.. What the hell is a Kestrel when it's at home? Consult the encyclopaedia (very useful) and it informs me that it has no idea either (not very useful). Seems I've not come across one of those yet, sounds kinda Teladi-ish tho. Intruiging.. My lucks in and it's floating down in Cloudbase South east which only two jumps away and a tiny sector anyway so I should have no problem finding it or getting it home if it's a slow one.

Entering the sector thru the north gate and I can see it just off to the left on the sector map, M5 icon, fair enough. I pull up next to it capture and start repairing it, takes a couple repair charges so inbetween recharges I check it out. What we got here then.. 600+ speed, (Hells bells!) M-class cargo, 5mj shield, room for Pacs and a rear turret to boot. Ok, I'm sorry. I'm trying to be good here. All I wanted was to run a few trades, return a few ships, generally mind my own business

and then they go drop that in front of me. Fine, I'm weak! I admit it!.. but they ain't seeing this one again..

Ok, I've still got 48mins on the clock before anyone starts wondering where their Kestrel went. My Argon rank is pretty good and I'm pretty sure I can handle a couple police M5s coming after me. I mean, seriously how much trouble could I possibly get in for stealing one little M5?

Right, 47 mins on the clock, no time to dawdle. Dump all ship equipment out the Octopus. EVA over to the Kestrel. Send trusty Octopus to shipyard, won't be needing that again. Scoop up my gear. Putter over to Equipment Dock. Upgrade cargo/rudder/engines. No 5mj shields available but there's a fact in Elenas. Exit Equipment Dock, line up on gate. Hit boost.

WHOMP! my skull practically exits thru the back of the crash-couch and I'm hurtling (not flying, I know what flying is like and there's some definite hurtling action going on here) towards a rapidly approaching jumpgate. This thing isn't an M5, it's a missile with a pilot chair taped to the nose.

Make it to Elenas, grab me a 5mj shield and a triplex plus a couple Pacs from the military outpost and I'm good to go. 40 odd mins left to go before plod comes calling gives me enough time to do a few taxi missions since I can now take passengers. That'll earn me a bit more rep and mitigate the rep-loss when it comes.

Total Assets:

1x Kestrel
1x 5 Mj shield
2x Pac, 2x Ire (rear)
600,000+ cr

In the interests of not reducing myself to a molecule-thick smear on the side of an asteroid I decide it's probably a good idea to get used to handling my new Kestrel before I get too clever with it, plus it'll be nice to see exactly what it can do.

A quick scan of Ore Belt nets me a couple asteroid scanning missions for a few thousand apiece plus a taxi mission into Cloudbase South West. No problem so far, I can scan the asteroids I need here, then head to CBSW and drop off the guy. Lucks in so I manage to pick up another scan mission and another taxi run and things pretty much tick along happily like that. I've got a jumpdrive in case time gets short but with some smart juggling of scan missions I'm able to go from sector to sector without having to double back much and at one point I've got 4 seperate missions on the go and successfully complete them albeit with only a couple mins to spare. Speed is good!

Seems I must have crossed another threshold tho as I'm starting to see a lot more delivery missions in the 10000+ units area. Highest I've seen was for a little over 29,000 e-cells. Pay was good but too short a time to do with a single SF. I'll have to see if the RNG gods are in a better mood and try and cap another one or two. Also getting some really nicely paid courier missions of 500K or so showing up but tho I could do it with the Kestrel in the time allowed the quantities they want moved are too much for my little 55 space cargo.

Cruising across Home of light I decide it's time to test combat out a little bit so I pickup an easy station defense mission and chase out to intercept the incoming M5's. First one in a Harrier doing 500+ and we go blazing past each other so fast by the time I've turned around we're already several kilometres apart. Not too hard to catch up with tho but I'm so focused on chasing him down that I nearly plow into one of the station pylons right after he suicides into it. The rest are easy to chase down as they're much slower Discovers and they don't even get halfway to the

station before I'm behind them and blasting away. The M8 launches a couple fruitless Tomahawks at the station but they're no problem to intercept and a few high speed passes strips the shields off it and a Wildfire in the face finishes the job.

The Boron is happy, aside from a small Harrier-shaped impact crater near the docking arms his station is undamaged. I'm happy, my little Kestrel is proving to be capable both as a mission-ship and fighter and the previous owner of my Kestrel is most definitely very, very unhappy. Quite how unhappy I quickly come to realise as there's a jumpdrive flash off to my right, my proximity alarm bleeps a warning and Heavy Centaur starts gobbing missiles and fiery white-balls-of-death at me..

Total Assets:

1x Kestrel
1x 5 Mj shield
2x Pac, 2x Ire (rear)
750,000+ cr

1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'

It's times like these when it's most convenient to be sat in a ship that bears more than a passing resemblance to something that should be fired *at* ships rather than be one itself. Being able to do 0-600 faster than you can say ".." certainly doesn't hurt either. Anyways, I pull a full-on RSLG maneuver to the sound of thunderous explosions behind me and put some distance between me and the Centaur. I'm not particularly concerned by the missile warning as according to the encyclopaedia the only missile I currently know about that can actually catch me is the Rapier and they only do 1mj damage. Even then I've still got that handy back turret so should be fine.

Pulling up a few kilometres away I bring up the sector map to see what's going on. Yep, they're definitely a Heavy Centaur there and he's heading this way. Also my Argon rep seems to have dropped thru the floor, I'm now Suspected Foe and the local laser tower has gone red on me. I take some solace from that fact that I'm only a suspected foe, it implies someone somewhere feels I may have some redeeming qualities after all. The Centaur on the other hand seems to be in no such moral quandary, is very sure I'm an actual foe and not merely a suspected one, and is fully intent on doing something about that.

Aside from that tho all the rest of the sector is still blue to me. Suddenly there's more flashes around me and the sector map acquires a few new red contacts. A panicked stab for the cancel map button and I'm RSLGing again. A quick glance behind me reveals there's now 5 M5's and a Nova chasing me. What's the deal here? This Kestrel belong to his dead grandmother or something?

I'm now having serious concerns now as to whether I'm going to have ships attempting to jump me at every opportunity so make a swift dash thru the superstructure of the nearest Crystal fab and then head for the East gate. One of the M5s tries to follow but doesn't quite make it. Stopping in the middle of Presidents End I wait for a couple minutes finger on the boost button just in case any more jump in on me but nothing seems to happen so it looks like that was the. lot. It appears tho that somewhere along the way I took a hit as my hull is down in the nineties. I'm fairly sure I didn't take any laser fire so I think I must have been clipped by a mass driver. Hopping out quick to patch the hole I get a proximity warning... they're following me.

Ok, fine, I was quite happy to just run away but if they want to follow me then there's going to be trouble and if there's going to be trouble it's going to be in Paranid space. Might as well get a bit of Paranid rep out of this mess, perhaps then they'll stop firing nukes at me.

Down in Priests Pity the local defence force seems to have taken out the pirate base, there's just the burnt out hull left. So I potter around for a bit waiting for the Argon police to arrive. When they do get there they're nicely strung out so no problem to deal with. There's only 3 of them tho so it looks like another one has come a cropper somewhere. Bumped into a pirate on the way down through Split Fire perhaps? Anyways, I presume the Nova and Centaur are on the way down too but even knocking out those 3 M5 seems to have been enough to get me into bare minimum docking rights with the Paranid which is all I really need so I spend a while doing missions in the area and jump my SF down to do a few factory runs. They may not be red to me but I've no longer got Argon docking rights so there's nothing my SF can do around Argon space anyway.

Ship recovery here, taxi mission there, a liberal sprinkling of e-cells and much apologising to Paranid border control and I'm now in the good graces of the Paranid empire. The nova eventually shows up as I'm looking for a lost Jaguar and while I'm a little wary of that mass driver a single M3 isn't a problem. Takes a while to wear him down but my speed leaves him wallowing. I'm assuming that Centaur is still out there somewhere but I don't fancy trying to take him out so instead make a long loop round the back and up thru CBSW/Redlight to Kingdom End, across to Menalaeus Frontier and then down to Atreus to try and grab another SF or two. If that Centaur is still following me that'll give him a nice long run to catch up so I'll be safe for a good while.

Sadly despite a fair amount of time spent chasing down freighters the RNG gods are still wholly disinclined to shower me with their bounty and nothing bails. Perhaps I should head down to Xenon 101 and punt my SF ex-pilot out the airlock as a human sacrifice...

Total Assets:

1x Kestrel
1x 5 Mj shield
2x Pac, 2x Ire (rear)
900,000+ cr

1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'

Oh dear, today we mourn the loss of a loved one.. <sniff>

Things started off so promisingly, I actually managed to convince a freighter that I was a very scary desperado engaged in acts of a piratical nature and gained myself my second SF but that was to be the only one. In retrospect I suspect my charade was not particularly convincing and that particular Split captain was just of a nervous disposition.

Decided I should probably sort out my Argon rep so I can get jumpdrives again and get the new SF doing something useful, mebbe turn him into a sector-trader perhaps. Remote trading is ok, gets you a little rep and keeps the cash flowing but the real cash and rep boosts comes from the missions with the bonuses. Fortunately I'm currently occupying that happy borderline that exists between persona non grata and shoot on sight so while I'm free to travel thru Argon sectors they won't let me dock in core sectors or buy any goods. That's fine tho, so long as I can dock I can still sell stuff and given the state of the local economy there's always someone down in the border sectors crying out for e-cells and willing to give a good bonus for them.

So I switch to my SF and do a few runs between Queens space and CBSW stocking up those ever-hungry weapon facts then after a while I spot a guy who wants a taxi run to the Pirate base in Antigone Memorial. Now last I checked there wasn't a pirate base in Antigone memorial.. but then there isn't one in Ore Belt anymore either since the local defence force paid a visit. They must have set up a new one! That's handy because I've been picking up any boarding pods I can find since apparently they get a bit rare later on. Not a problem, I task my Kestrel to go scout out the sector

while I decide where I'm going to get 255 space fuel from for the guy that wants to pay me 400k for the privelige, decide not from anyone who likes me enough and go back to e-cell trading.

By this point I've managed to convince the Argon that they were right to only suspect me as a foe and that I'm really not all that bad and they let me get back to trading basic goods in their core sectors. Oh, and some stupid M5 exiting a gate and not watching where he's going has managed to knock a 30% chunk out of my hull. Maybe I should invest in some shields..

A few minutes later I'm cruising thru CBSE when I'm somewhat disturbed to hear Betty calmly inform me one of my ships is under attack. Now I've only got three. One is sat in Terracorp HQ awaiting a jumpdrive, ones off looking for pirate bases and I'm sat in the third and I'm pretty sure I'ld have noticed people shooting at me which means... oh, bugger..

"Your ship, Blinkandyou'llmissit! has been destroyed in sector Antigone Memorial by, Khaak Scout"

Total Assets:

1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)
150,000cr

Well it's not a complete disaster, I've still got my two freighters and a reasonable reserve of cash so economically I'm not in any trouble. If I'm going to progress tho I'm going to need a combat capable craft. This means I'm going to have to go stealing things again. You see you try to be good but you end up forced into criminality anyway. I blame society.

This time around I think I may just 'borrow' a ship for a while. With the support I've got from my freighters I can max out whatever I find, use it to capture something else and then return it in time for tea and biscuits and nobody any the wiser. Except the previous owner of ship I've 'liberated' but that guy will be duct-taped and stowed in my hold. shhh!...

Sadly it seems the RNG gods are still out to get me with a vengeance and despite doing cargo runs across a number of sectors it's a good while before I can find a recovery mission. Plenty of stolen ship missions but while the Caiman can fit frontal guns it fairly lacks the speed and maneuverability to chase down anything much faster than a one-legged asteroid. First up is 100k mission, that's the biggest payout I've seen for a recovery so I'm assuming it's something big?

Unfortunately the guys giving these missions out never seem inclined to let you in on those niggling little details such as where it might be and what it is you're actually looking for until they've got you to agree to do it.. at which point they cheerfully inform you there's a broken down Dolphin 80km off the ecliptic of X598 and can you bring it back for the princely sum of 12 credits and a packet of breathmints. And they want it back in 12 minutes. Or else. Yes we mean it, or else. Anyways, this one turns out to be a Falcon Vanguard. M3 nice, but only 48 mins so not really what I'm looking for. Unfortunately having accepted it I've now got to do it. Or else.

It turns out Caimans aren't ideal for ship recovery missions either. It works fine if the ship you're looking for just so happens to be near a gate as you can jump around till you spot it. but if it's deeper in sector you have to go looking or it and with a top speed of 89m/s that's not a quick exercise in a larger sector. Eventually tho I find the thing, looks like had I gone north rather than south from the Emperor Mines East jumpgate I'ld have found it almost immediately and not had to do a sector circuit but there you go. Falcon Vanguards aren't very quick tho and I've wasted a lot of time already as I've only got a fraction under 10 mins to return and given the slightly over the top response to me stealing an M5 I'm not keen to have the entire Teladi Home fleet come after me because they think I'm stealing an M3.

Basically I need to get this ship back on time and the only way to do that is to jump it back to CBSE. Unfortunately if I do that then when I return it I lose the jumpdrive. While I'm not hurting for the money that is my only jumpdrive and the Argon are still a little ticked over the Kestrel incident and aren't prepared to let me buy another just now. Time is ticking and there's only one way this is going to work then so I transfer jumpdrive + e-cells to the Falcon, order my SF to head back to CBSE and jump to CBSE myself. Ejecting the jumpdrive I exit the Falcon and order it to make it's way back to the PRG forge (should manage that with a few mins to spare) Meantime I kick in my suit thrusters and start EVAing my way back thru the jumpgate and across Ore Belt to meet up with my SF somewhere along the way.

Halfway across Ore Belt the potential foolhardiness of this exercise dawns on me given that there is potentially still a Heavy Centaur looking for me, but on the bright side my 02 levels are holding out nicely so at least I'm in no immediate danger of suffocation.

Total Assets:

1x Spacesuit
1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)

Crossing Ore Belt doesn't take too long using strafe and judging from the distance counter ticking down it looks like I'm pulling about 100m/s which is pretty good going in a spacesuit. Safely hooking up with my SF on the west side of Ore Belt I head back the way I came to CBSE to pick up my jumpdrive, On the way there I pick up a couple more recoveries, one a Caiman Miner down in CBSW for an hour and a half and one for an Octopus over in Red Light with a 3 hour timer which is perfect for what I need. I skip down to CBSW west first to get the Miner, it's a bit busted up and slow and I'm not inclined to spend an hour repairing it so I decide to send it to the trading station first for some engine tunings. Doesn't matter if I spend 10k or so since it's a 48k mission so I'll still come out on top either way.

Once that one is on the move I jump up to Red Light north gate and immediately spot the Octopus off in the west corner so that was good fortune. A quick trek over and repair and I'm up and running just need some suitable weapons and shields and I'm back in business. I transfer over to the Octopus and head for the trading station to sort engines and rudder while I send my SF off to get some IRE's and a couple 1mj shields then head up to Argon Prime via Ringo Moon to meet up with it by the west gate a quick transfer of equipment and I'm all set. I let my SF go off and do some more e-cell trading and plot a course to Atreus Clouds. I've got two and a bit hours and I aim to misbehave.

Scooting across Argon Prime towards the east gate thru The Wall I'm just passing the centre of the sector when there's flashes around me (again), the gravidar blossoms red (again) and the proximity warning kicks off (again). Who's trying to kill me now? Everything is quiet for a second or so and then there's the sound of kyons. Not the little higher pitched small ones either but the big capital-ship rending gamma variety. Looks like another Khaak task force having a go at Argon Prime and I'm in the middle of it. Great! At least I assume they're after Argon Prime, tho the amount of trouble I've had with Khaak so far I'm starting to think they've got something against me personally.

Fortunately Argon one is in the vicinity and the Khaak seem more interested in that than the little Octopus running away crying so I manage to put enough distance between me and the nearest KM2 for safety then park up for a moment to see what's what. Two of the KM2 have engaged the Argon One, the third has wandered off with a second cluster and is busily shooting up the station to the south. By this time the clusters have all broken and the space around Argon One is filled with

little purple triangles kyoning the bejeezus out of it while Argon One tries to swat them with what I guess is a flak cannon.

Now Argon One always used to have Invinci-armour(tm), does that still hold true? It's going to be an unfortunate day for the Argon home system if it isn't because there's currently no other capital ships in the system. With the amount of abuse it's taking it's not long before the shields go down and after a few percent of hull gets ripped off no further damage gets taken, Yep, still invulnerable. You know you'ld think that having an indestructible capital ship at his disposal Mr Danna could have come up with a better strategic move than park it in homespace orbit and chase the odd pirate. This is the guy that's going to win the war? Pfft..

Oddly enough the situation seems to be a bit of a stalemate. The KM2's can't destroy Argon One but it appears the Argon One isn't packing anywhere near the firepower it used to as it's barely denting the Khaak shields. This looks like it'll be a long fight tho I'ld probably give it to the Khaak on points as KM2 No.3 is busy vaporising the south stations while his two buddies run interference. Anyways, time is ticking so I decide to leave them to 'negotiate' and get moving.

A quick sprint thru The Wall and The Hole and I'm back in the familiar territory of Atreus Clouds. To be honest it's always familiar in Atreus, no matter which way you look it's always pea-soup. My goal is to capture an M4 or possibly an M3 if the RNG gods are feeling benevolent (fat chance!) so the danger involved is significantly greater than from a few fighter drones from a TS so I need to be very careful I choose the right target. Ideally I want a lightly shielded victim with no turret and with no tracking missiles on board. I don't want to have to be dealing with a lock-on and lose my position on his six. High-tech and Weapons dealers are almost invariably well armed and shielded or have escorts whereas the basic freighter types go solo and are often undershielded with minimal weaponry.

I'm confident patience will be rewarded (preferably within two hours) so meantime I settle down next to the gate, in my Octopus, with an uncomfortable sense of deja vu, and start eyeing up likely candidates.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
2x 1 Mj shield
4x IRE
1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)
300,000cr

So I'm initially just sat there using the freight scanner to run passive scans of the weapon loadouts of passing M4/M3's. This is fine as only a deep scan incurs a rep loss or chance to aggravate the target. Ideally I'm looking for a Split ship since I'm in Boron space and don't want the hassle with the authorities, but needs must and if the opportunity presents itself I'll take whatever I can and worry later, so I'm checking everything.

Most of what passes by I rule out on passive scan either because they're too heavily shielded or have weapons/turrets I don't want to mess with. Of those that look worth a deep scan, again I rule out most if they have too many fighter drones or they have tracking missiles on board. That does leave a few tho and I make a few attempts. Most are Scorpions which I can try in sector, a couple are other races which I tail and allow to fly into other sectors before engaging so as not to annoy the Atreus border control. No luck so far tho as either they refuse to bail and I have to destroy them or they fire missiles at me while under IRE fire and the resulting explosion destroys their own ship outright.

I'm coming up for about halfway thru my time now and no joy when my AdvSat to the east picks up a couple pirate Buzzards exiting the Pirate base there. Now a Buzzard is a fairly good M4, shielding is pretty respectable and it has a nice turn of speed so one of those would be a nice capture. Heading over from where I've been laying doggo I catch up to them as they're passing the Military outpost and pull in behind. A quick scan reveals that one's packing fragbomb launchers and Firefly/Hurricane missiles and the other PAC and Wasp/Wildfire.

Weighing up the odds the more dangerous one is going to be the one with the swarm missile. The second Buzzard has just the single Hurricane so if he did fire it at me and it detonated that's not enough damage to kill the Buzzard in one go. The first has that Wasp tho which means he needs to be taken out quickly both so he doesn't get the chance to launch and so I can be on the tail of the second one to stop him launching either. Time to break out my secret weapon..

Dragonfly. Under 1000cr apiece, does 250m/s and dishes out 5k of damage a pop with an 18km reach. Available from all good weapon shops, all good weapon shops apparently being limited to the solitary Dumbfire missile production complex in Cloudbase North west. Quite why these little dudes are in such limited demand I've no idea because they are utterly fantastic. Contrary to the fact that they're built by a Dumbfire complex they are in fact seeker missiles and they have a truly excellent tracking ability. They cost less than the equivalent firepower in Silkworm and are both faster and have the added advantage of being more warheads in the air so are that much harder to shoot down plus they're available in large quantities. I strongly suspect a lot of X3:R vets remember Dragonfly being a worthless missile and don't realise just how great they are now. Try them out for yourselves.

Anyways, pulling back to 800m or so behind I target the more dangerous of the two and empty an appropriate amount of Dragonflies at him, ie. all of them. Where it comes to missile doctrine I come from the 'Nuke the site from orbit, it's the only way to be sure..' school of thought. Besdies I've got a SF parked by the East gate with anther 500 or so on board so it's not like I don't have spares.

While they track in I drop behind my main target and as my first Dragonfly makes contact open up full bore. A few short seconds later and there's a dead in the water Buzzard in front of me, only 50%ish hull left but it's blue and that's what counts. The shields are even ticking up slowly so there's at least some equipment still on board. Bonus!

Pulling up a few metres away from it I jump ship and start patching up the holes in my new acquisition.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
1x Pirate Buzzard (51%)
2x 1 Mj shield
4x IRE
1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)
300,000cr

Psycked: Only when I'm travelling across sectors.

So I'm drifting in the pea-soup welding panelling back on my Buzzard. The Buzzard has 15mj of shielding which for an M4 is in the mid to high-end range. Couple that with a 265m/s top speed and decent weapons loadout and rounding it out with M-class cargo opens up a whole new set of

opportunities.

It's taken quite a bit of damage tho and this is going to take a few charges of the repair laser so inbetween recharging I bring up the universe map and start plotting my next moves. However fate it turns out can be a fickle mistress indeed and has her own plans for me. Just in case there's any doubt she illustrates the point quite graphically moments later as my new Buzzard explodes in my face.

I'm probably sat there at that moment with a quite stupefied look on my face as I can quite honestly say I've not the faintest clue what just happened. One second I'm fixing my new M4, the next, without warning, I'm enveloped in a rapidly cooling cloud of vaporised M4 parts. A few seconds later the cause of my misfortune appears, a pointlight crawling lazily across my screen and disappearing off into the fog leaving just a blue wake behind it. It's a Banshee missile.

Comprehension suddenly dawns on me and I realise what's happened. As I caught up to the Buzzard duo and started trailing them they had passed the Atreus Military outpost. It seems while I was busy choosing my targets and making my move we were drifting further inside the missile envelope of the Medium OWP and it responded the only way it knows how. A ship would have stopped firing once the Buzzard had quit but I guess a missile once locked is committed. Had I realised the threat I could have countered it but I hadn't considered the possibility. It seems the RNG gods giveth and the RNG gods taketh away.

Fortunately I hadn't by that point transferred any equipment across so despite a slightly scorched spacesuit and down a few credits in Dragonflies I'm not for all practicality any worse off. It would appear I'm going to need this Octopus just a little longer. Heading back towards the west gate I top off my Dragonfly supply, resume my station and start watching the traffic go by once more. A couple more attempts on Scorpion escorts yield me nothing more than a few percentage points of hull damage when I fail to realise until too late there's a Jaguar attached to one particular flight group but a quick missile kill on the Scorpion and then its one-on-one so no problem in the end.

Now you'ld probably be forgiven for thinking that after the events of earlier I'ld expended my quota of misfortune for the day but you'ld be entirely wrong. Who remembers that Caiman Miner? The one I sent off for an engine upgrade before returning home? Anyone who does, you get a gold star and a pat on the head. I however get no star and a slap round the head. The Argon also now consider me Confirmed Insurgent which is a cheery thought in itself.

By now I'm wondering if possibly I should quit for the day before something even worse happens (tho I'm at a loss for the moment to think what that might be) when I scan a passing Teladi freight M3. It's a Perseus but it's got only 7mj of shielding, a single IRE in front and a single Firefly missile, In fact the only thing that's even giving me pause for thought on this one is the Fragbomb launcher in the rear-turret. Today seems a good day to die, however I'm not keen on that idea and would much prefer today to be a good day to cap a Perseus.

I'ld like to have wasp missile at this point to distract the turret while I make a move but sadly the Octopus can't handle them. Fortunately Fragbombs are slow with low ROF so a bit of deft flying should win the day. I make a couple passes, strip the shields and start nibbling at the hull while dodging turret fire. I get a lag spike for a couple seconds and take a hard hit I never see coming which knocks my hull right down into the red on 13% but when it kicks back into action it's a beautiful sight in front of me. A blue M3 and a spacesuit rapidly jetting off into the distance.

I save and go make a cup of tea.

Total Assets:

1x Octopus
1x Perseus (84%) (Unless some spiteful misfortune occurs to it)

2x 1 Mj shield
4x IRE
1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)
300,000cr

By this point I've developed a healthy paranoia of anything that looks like it may be going my way so I resist the urge to take control of my new M3 and instead stay in my Octopus and wait for something bad to happen. There's no particular reason for me to think a missile is going to come screaming out the fog and vaporise my new toy. Nor have I any expectation of a Khaak taskforce suddenly dropping out of nowhere all around me.. or even that Heavy Centaur to finally show up but I'm not giving the RNG gods the opportunity. While I act as overwatch I order my SF to jump out and pick up some 25mj shields from the fab in Rolks Fate.

On it's return I transfer control, exchange freight with my Octopus and then beam myself over. It's nice to have managed to make it into the cockpit of this one and even tho my shields are only on 5% and charging I'm already feeling a lot more secure than I did in the Octopus. Something about 10x the armour and 75mj of shielding has that effect. I've currently still only got the 4 IRE fitted so not a massive firepower improvement yet although with the weapon generator on an M3 that will let me fire them pretty much continuously. My available missile options have also significantly improved although I've no plans to do away with my trusty Dragonfly which has proven so useful.

Checking my ship stats in the encyclopaedia it seems the Perseus is a fairly well-rounded ship. There's no particular area in which I would say it excels but then from what I can see it has no real weak areas either. All in all it's a solid ship and should put me in good place to expand from and what I've discovered from my time spent patiently watching traffic flow thru the gates is that there are actually quite a lot of M3+ in common use by traders. Betty on sector map just lists them as freight transporters without saying what they are, you have to look to see and I'm thinking this will be the better avenue to try and capture one rather than try and take on a military convoy. Anyways, those are musing for later. Right now I need more guns. Lots of guns.

The playing field has changed and I've gone up a notch in the food chain which means all those Split Strong Arm weapons dealers and Hi-tech goods convoys that I've previously had to allow to pass unmolested are now very much on the menu. There's pretty much two types. the TS class which are your standard type with either none or a single M4/M5 escort, and the other is the TM class which is considerably more dangerous and usually has four escorts in the M4/M5 range. TM seems to me to tend to have the more valuable cargo on board. Right now seems an excellent time for me to fieldtest the 'Shifty Business'.

My standard practice for assaulting a TM class is fall in behind it and then fire a single Dragonfly at any M5 first and then fire several at any M4. Dragonfly on an M5 is a one-shot kill and targeting the M5's first you can almost garuntee they're all destroyed before they can react. If you target the more dangerous M4 first the M5's get time to react and most can outrun a Dragonfly and you're left with them nibbling at you while you deal with the TM which is not good news.

A half-dozen or so runs nets me a bunch of PACs to give my Perseus a little more teeth and approx a million credits in other weapons/missiles that won't actually fit my ship but they'll be good to sell. I also manage to bag a single PBE which should come in handy for capping.

Life is looking up.

Total Assets:

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'

3x 25 Mj shield
5x PAC, 1x PBE
1x Maxed Caiman SF 'Tax Deductible'
1x Caiman SF (85%)
1,500,000cr

Necrosexual: I'ld suggest resisting the urge to shoot anything until you have a freight scanner and can see what you're up against. Safer.

Ok, I have small confession to make, I may have slightly lied in the last update. You see I claimed to have picked up a PBE when that wasn't entirely true. In all fairness it did look like a PBE, but it's turned out it's actually a magic ship-capping artifact dealing 4d20 of panic damage to targetted pilots.

Of the last seven ships I've gone after 5 have bailed. Consequently my little fleet of three has suddenly gained three extra Caiman superfreighters, a Caimain Hauler, a Toucan Hauler that went pirate on scanning it and a Pirate Hades that I picked up off a station defense mission I decided to do on a whim during a slow period in Split freighter traffic. All in all a pretty good haul. The Hades even came with a single Tomahawk left intact so I've got the capacity to punch a capital ship in the face really hard should the urge (or need) take me.

Now the extra observant among you may have realised that actually makes six ships. Sadly I did manage to lose one to a Pirate Scorpion I didn't see coming because I was too busy capping ships left and right and not paying enough attention to security. Unfortunate but lesson learned. My big problem now is that I've actually got too many ships which probably seems an odd issue to have but being Boron and about as welcome in Split space as a bacon sandwich at a bar mitzvah this makes procuring 25mj shields a little tricky. Currently I'm aware of only two fabs in the universe as explored to date and one of those is in Argon space and right now they're not too happy with me. Unless and until I can get hold of a 25Mj production capacity of my own it looks like I'm going to have to feed these two fabs and buy up shields as they get built which means getting back on good terms with the Argon. Not ideal but it'll have to do.

The other big gain aside from the bomber of course is the Toucan. This is my first TP and gives me the capacity to board larger vessels as soon as I can get hold of some suitably trained pyschopaths. Originally I had planned to source all my marines from the ex-pilots of the ships I capture and as it is I do actually have enough for a small team now. Trouble is as far as I know there isn't any way to actually convert captured passengers into marines yet, or at least the functionality isn't present in the game yet. If anyone knows different feel to correct me. Otherwise seems like I'm going to need a different method of obtaining marines that sortof stays with in the rules. Suggestions?

Meantime my small fleet is holed up in Atreus Military outpost and I need some 25Mj shields which means I need to play nice with the Argon, which is going to be bad news for Paranid shipping in the area..

Total Assets:

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
3x 25 Mj shield
5x PAC, 1x PBE
2x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1 x Hades 'Special Delivery'
1,500,000cr

Good plan, we'll go with that.

So, who remembers that Caiman Miner? Yep, it's true I've just noticed I've STILL got the damn thing holed up in a trading station hiding away from the small cloud of M4/M5's that are staking the place out ready to shoot it if it so much as peeps out. You know given that they're Argon police forces and it's stuck in an Argon sector you'ld have thought they'ld just kick in the door and get on with it. I guess there must be some jurisdictional issues between stations and local border control. Anyway, for the trouble it's caused me I think I may just keep it now. It seems safe where it is and maybe the police will give up eventually?

Right, I need to get back on friendly terms with the Argon partly because I now suddenly have a small fleet that needs jumpdrives and partly because they own 50% of the known 25Mj shield production available to me. Quickest way to get back in their good books is probably to start shooting up Paranids. Let's face it, who isn't pleased to see Paranids getting shot up? Anyways, I decide to head down to Elenas Fortune since that's probably the best place to find both Paranid heading up from the Paranid core sectors and of course any Pirates passing thru. Double the rep opportunity there.

As I'm passing thru the south Atreus gate I'm very nearly hit square in the face by a transport which turns out to be a Dukes TP and a particularly nervous one at that as he can't bail out quick enough when open up. So first salvo of the day nets me a second TP. I'm off to a good start here. This worries me somewhat as I'm assuming yesterday the RNG gods just weren't paying attention and therefore suspecting divine retribution any moment.

Moving down thru Farnhams Legend I come across a couple M3+ tech dealers one of which is an Eclipse. Now I remember the old Eclipse had 125Mj shields, so seems they've done some upgrading there as it now sports a most impressive 200Mj. Speeds been sacrificed a bit but for the survivability bonus that may actually be worth it, especially in my case. Still looks likes something you'd find crawling down your wall tho but then looks aren't everything.

Down thru south gate and I'm in Elenas Fortune and staring straight at a Brigantine beating the snot out of the sector defence. Now this could be interesting to watch, it's the first time I've seen a Brigantine and I have to say it is a pretty nice looking ship actually. Might have to try and capture one perhaps one day. It seems quite effective as Sector defence seems to be throwing themselves quite ineffectually at it, M3 and M6 are popping left and right. The Brigantine has escort so they're helping keep things stirred up too.
Interestingly there seems to be a couple Pirate Kestrels in the mix. More interestingly it appears that Pirate versions are actually slightly better spec than the one I had before. More interesting even than that is the Colossus that's coming up fast from the south behind the Brigantine and more interesting than all those things is what looks thru the vid goggles to be a Titan group coming thru the west gate but which is not quite in gravidar range to confirm. It's going to be interesting.

I'm not quite sure how you creep up on an M2 with an M1 but the Colossus captain seems to manage it somehow. The Brigantine is having such a fine time swatting fighters it's completely oblivious until the Colossus closes to point blank and opens up. It's a commendable move by the Colossus captain and had he been in an M2 with some actual effective weaponry would most likely have been a stunning victory. Sadly he's not. It takes a couple secs for the Brigantine to realise the danger but after that it slews over and shatters the Colossus in moments for the loss of about 20% shielding.

It does turn out to be a Titan group and it's a pity the Brigantine lost some shields as it would have been nice to see the two taskforces slug it out at full strength. As it is the end is never really in doubt but the Pirates make a good show of it and the Titan ends the day losing 90% of it's shields.

Shows over so I get going and spend a good while blowing up Paranid shipping in and around the lower Argon sectors. I do get a couple bails from M4/M5's but nothing that survives the experience due to some overuse of Wasps. Still it's a couple more potential mercs. At least I'm back in favour with the Argon even if the Paranid now hate me with a passion again.

Total Assets:

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
3x 25 Mj shield
5x PAC, 1x PBE
2x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
1 x Hades 'Special Delivery'
1,500,000cr

With my Argon rep now firmly back in the black I can get my fleet up and running properly so a fairly boring escort job back to Argon Prime and then I leave them to get themselves off for kitting out. Getting this lot fully upgraded and repaired however is going to cost fair amount so for now I spend what I've got on getting the Hauler upgraded fully and set him up as my logistical support freighter. His task will be to keep my supplied with missiles and sell off any loot

Jumping back to Atreus south gate I arrive just in time to meet a pirate convoy heading down into Farnhams, two Blastclaws and a TS. The TS doesn't interest me but the Blastclaws do as it seems they can mount ION Disruptors and I'll have need of that in future. Both are armed with those PBG's and I don't fancy trying to take both at once but they're not paying me any attention anyway so I let the TS go thru and once the first of the Blastclaws is committed to jumping I hit the second. Seems he doesn't want to bail but he does drop two Hammerheads which is pretty nice. Heading thru I just jump the second one but he fires a missile at me and blows himself up in the process. Not a huge success to date but early days.

With nothing particular of interest in sector I head over to the nearby factory to see what missions are on offer. The only one there that interests me is a scanning one. Apparently they'ld like me to scan a load of freighters in pirate space for which I'm offered 8% of the total cargo value. Now I've not done one of these before so I've no idea what they consider to be 'valuable freight' but the obvious solution here is just scan everyone and their dog, can't go too wrong then.

Jumping down into Split Fire where the main flow of traffic is I zip around there and Brennans Triumph scanning absolutely every ship that passes by until the 10 min timer runs out. The payout for the mission isn't huge, only about 40k, but what I've discovered is there's a rather large amount of expensive goods flowing thru the pirate sectors. Which is handy because I'm going to require a fairly fat wad of cash to repair, rearm, upgrade and generally get my little freighter fleet up to scratch.

With criminal intent in mind I head back to Argon space and spend what cash I have on getting my Hauler fully upgraded. The plan is to go on a piracy run down thru the Split Fire -> Hatikvahs Faith sectors and bag as much loot as possible. I'm fairly sure of a pretty good haul given what I saw earlier. Soon as everything is ready I'll get going but for now what I want to do is work on the Merc problem. It turns out I've acquired a total of eleven cheery volunteers by this point and I just need to get them educated for the job. That's going to take a little while so sooner they get in training the better.

On an earlier pass thru the pirate sectors there was a Merc training facilty down in Danna's Chance so with my Toucan loaded up and ready I jump into the sector to make sure the coast is clear only to find it most assuredly is not. Not only has the Merc facility been destroyed but as the jump effect clears I appear right in the face of a second Pirate taskforce and staring down the barrels of a second Brigantine. And they're not happy to see me.

Fortunately it appears the Brigantine captain is as shocked to see me up his left nostril as I am to find myself up it and as he slews around and fire starts landing around me I hear that noise that every capital ship owner dreads, grating hull-metal. Luckily for me the Brigantine succumbs to carelessly steering into the gate before he can bring any flaks to bear and cracks up in a huge explosion. That just leaves his slightly confused escort to deal with and while they try to sort themselves out I launch everything I've got and blanket the area in missile fire. It's a less than 30 second enagement but at the end of it the only one left alive is me.. with this to show for it.

I think that will sort my immediate monetary concerns..

Total Assets:

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
3x 25 Mj shield
5x PAC, 1x PBE
2x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
1 x Hades 'Special Delivery'
2,000cr

Moving north into Brennans Triumph to make sure nothing nasty is coming I call my Support-Hauler into Dannas and order him to collect all the goodies while I watch on the sector map to make sure nothing comes from the east gate to get him. Soon as he's done I drop back down thru and hook up with him.

With the destruction of the Dannas Merc base I'm going to have to look elsewhere for Mercs which probably means venturing down into the 'Pirate Alley' sectors of Loomanckstrats Legacy. Since I'm going to have to go that way anyway I might as well do a piracy run from here thru to Aladna Hill and grab as much loot as possible on the way. So with him following at a safe distance behind on ware-collecting duty I make my way eastwards hitting anything and everything with stuff worth stealing on board. By the time we've hit Hatikvah east gate my Support-Hauler is stuffed to the gills and I've got a few bailed ships floating around in pirate space which I'll pick up another time. My rep has taken a little abuse across the board and I'm not sure if I've now got negative rep with the Corporations or whether that is going to cause me issues later but to be honest OTAS ships are fugly anyway so I'm not too bothered.

Passing into Aladna Hill I jump my Support-Hauler back to CBSE equipment dock, I'll sort thru the goodies later and see what's worth keeping. Plotting a course to Loomanckstrats via Avarice it's nice to see it's acquired a couple asteriods, I'll have to check back at some point and see if it's worth building here now. Arriving in New Income I jump in my Toucan and head to the Pirate base with it where I convert my passengers to slaves before continuing down to Loomanckstrats.

Loomanckstrats it appears is about to get blown away. There's a fairly comprehensive Boron fleet sat at the north gate obliterating anything that moves and heading down the sector a short way I start detecting a sizeable Paranid force as well. It appears they were waiting for me because as I arrive they start moving towards the Anarchy port and it's surrounding factories. This isn't good news as Loomanckstrats is currently housing enough capital firepower to handily take on a fairly busy Xenon sector so I'm not thinking the Merc base is going to last long once they get in range. In fact there's a Thresher headed for it right now and a Ray not all that far behind..

Looks like I'm going to have to do a crash trading session here. I don't have time for the Toucans auto-n00b to negotiate the asteroid field so I transport over and take control myself and head straight for the Merc base. As I'm getting into docking range it's already taking PPC fire and lost about 15% shields. A quick dock maneuver at far too high speed nearly puts me into the side of the station but I just about make it and quickly 'educate' my slaves in to Mercs. Undock and transport back over to my Perseus and I order my Toucan to jump back to CBSE.

A quick look over my shoulder shows me the battle is raging proper now, Anarchy Port laser towers are lancing fire into the night, streamers of PPC fire are smashing against station hulls and between it all the small specks of fighters exchanging HEPT and PBG fire. It's all not looking very good for the bad guys.

Not having quite enough e-cells to make a full jump back to Atreus I end up in Brennans Triumph and make my way up thru Olmancketslats. On the way I come across a Teladi tech transporter which immediately goes pirate when I scan him. This pleases me immensely because it's a Medusa and I quite fancy the idea of upgrading to an M3+. 75Mj of shields is fine but still susceptible to capital ship fire or heavy missiles. I'm not really going to feel secure until I'm somewhere around M6 level shielding.

The problem with this one is that he's armed with quad PBG up front which means I really, really don't want to go head to head with him and he's got PBE in the turrets which means I really don't want to be behind him either. Sometimes however you just have to accept the lesser of two evils and take it on the chin so setting up behind him I do my level best to dodge a practically insta-hit weapon while trying to encourage him to bail. We're at it for a few mins ducking and dodging around an asteroid, him slowly chewing into my hull and me slowly chewing into his before he finally gives up on 81% with me down to 84% by this point.

Feeling rather pleased with myself I transport everything across, send my Perseus to the Atreus Pirate base and slowly make my way back to CBSE. Life is good.

Total Assets:

1x Medusa
3x 25 Mj shield
5x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
2x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
1 x Hades 'Special Delivery'
2,000cr

Arriving back in CBSE I join up with my Support-Hauler and sift thru the goodies on-board to outfit my Medusa before sending him to the equipment dock and selling some stuff off. Taking the advice of those that know better I'm keeping the IBL's and some other stuff I don't recognise until I've had chance to field-test it myself but even so from the Brigantine salvage and my piracy run I manage to top 10 million. Sweet!

A quick upgrade for myself and some repairs at the shipyard and I'm good to go. I've lost about 20m/s in speed over the Perseus but the trade-off is an extra 25% in shielding and extra cargo space for missiles so I think overall it's a good upgrade and leaves me a little more secure.

I've had enough of fighting for the time being plus I've got a lot of administration work to do, ships to get repaired, upgraded put to work etc. plus I think it's time to lay down some factories. I want to build a small loop in Presidents End which produces e-cells, silicon and ore for sale and provides me a safe point to refuel and then get back to running trade missions while my freighter fleet gets repairs upgrades and are assigned jobs.

I now have a total of ten Mercs working for me and checking their stats it appears that five of them are 2-star fighters and the other five are 1-star. I'm not sure of the relative strengths the fighting ability gives them so seeing as how I have two TP's at the moment I decide to split them up into two squads and train them seperately. I think ultimately I'll try and get five TP's and fill them according to fight star rating so as Mercs improve they get promoted to better squads. Currently my squads are as follows:

Squad 1: 1-Star

Ho t'Sht
Ha t'nst
Olmanckelttak
Fui t'Nnt
Cho t'Knt

Squad 2: 2-Star

Ra t'Plp
Holigis Gutosos Yahondras VI
Gaga Lo
Yosulis Joranas Tzessosis VIII

Na t'Ztk

Squad 1 should get on ok being Split and Paranid. I'm not sure how well the lone Boron is going to do in Squad 2 with the Split for company but we'll see..

Also going to need a couple squad names for these guys so all suggestions welcome!

Easy come, easy go. It's amazing how quickly you can burn thru 10 million and by the time I'm done sorting everything I'm down to just a few hundred thousand again and my Mercs it seems are training fast, at least in the initial stages and consequently with ten of them on the go are eating funds quite rapidly. My doing missions and my SF's running cargo around is only just about sustaining them.

However it's not all bad, all my administrative stuff is done, all my freighters are fully upgraded and assigned there tasks and my loop is built and making money. Unfortunately the Ore mine had to be seperate because it was too far away to connect directly so until I can get a tractor beam and an M6 I'll just have to move goods the hard way. I've also rescued the Caiman Miner I had elsewhere for only a minor drop in Argon rep (less said about that the better) so now I've got him wandering around Ore Belt collecting ore and delivering back to my Ore mine.

Personally I'm laying doggo in Farnhams Legend by the north gate as I've recently realised that there's a pirate convoy that makes it's way up here periodically from somewhere, docks at the Atreus Pirate base and then heads back down again presumably to wherever it came from. Currently I've caught one in Atreus space and am monitoring it on my sat-net waiting for it to do its return journey. Generally each convoy consists of a TS plus a few escort Blastclaws/Prototypes/Elites. I'm feeling a bit of a bruiser in my new Medusa and plan to put it thru its paces and hopefully grab at least one Blastclaw in the process as I'll be needing one for my upcoming boarding plans.

As I'm watching the convoy returning towards pirate space a small Xenon wing enters thru Atreus north gate. A P, an M and an N. Not particularly notable normally but for me these are actually the first Xenon I've seen in my entire game to date. Previously there wasn't even a reference in my encyclopaedia for Xenon. Khaak, yes, cos they've been trying to kill me since day one, but never a single Xenon before. Odd. Anyways, they disappear off thru the west gate to go do whatever it is that Xenon do (probably try and terraform something) and my pirate convoy drops thru the gate in front of me and heads off towards the south gate. Silently I drop in behind them and follow at a discrete 10km distance..

As they reach the south gate and slow to pass thru I close the gap. I allow the TS and two of the Blastclaws to commit to entering and then volley fire Wasps and Dragonflies at the Elite while I pounce on the last Blastclaw. The Wasps totally confuse the turret on the Elite and allow a gap for the Dragonflies to get thru and it's dead and I'm on the six of the Blastclaw before it can react. A short burst of EBC and then a switch to PBE and the Blastclaw pilot can't jump out quick enough. Well that was easy!

Following down thru the gate into Elenas Fortune the convoy is a ways ahead of me and it would seem pirates are none too bright as they don't appear to have realised two of their number have disappeared someplace. I try the same trick down by the south gate and then the on the last one in Split Fire but it seems I'm only destined to get the one capture today. Maybe tomorrow..

Total Assets:

1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
4x 25 Mj shield

4x EBC+Ammo, 4x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
1x Blastclaw
2x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
1 x Hades 'Special Delivery'
250,000cr

Bit of a mixed day today..

Started off well, captured another SF-L to add to my freighter collection, also getting quite adept at taking on these pirate convoys and managed to bag myself a second Blastclaw and even a Blastclaw Prototype. All of them bailed in the high 80's which was pleasing, however there was a small incident with the second Blastclaw where it appears I may have accidentally fired a Wasp missile at it. Instead of being treated to the view of my Wasp missiles spiralling off into the distance and the Jaguar I was targetting going up in smoke they spiralled off a short way, promptly did a 180 and flew back behind me. Eep!

I knew instantly what I'ld done and feeling a complete numpty had to do a quick about face myself and attempt to PBE wasp missiles out the air before they impacted my shieldless (obviously..) Blastclaw. I got a couple so the damage wasn't as bad as it could have been but from 80+% it was down to 45%. Not a good result and I've learned an expensive lesson, from now on I always carry an extra 25Mj shield to transfer across after a capture. It's not going to protect a capture from a determined attacker but it will at least protect them to some degree from my own stupidity. However this was not to be the end to my woes, nor was Wasping my own Blastclaw going to be the pinnacle of my incompetence for the day, No, that event was merely a warmup for what followed..

Scanning a couple TM weapons dealers I found one that was carrying, among other things a bunch of Tomahawks. Ideal, I thought, as my Hades only has a handful by this point and quadrupling its firepower was a most attractive prospect. As I commenced negotiations with the TM to part with it's goods I called my Hades in ready to transfer the dropped Tomahawks over. The TM however was not as fixated on me as I had first thought and as my Hades came into range it's front turret suddenly decided it preferred shooting at my bomber rather than me.

Now previous to this I'ld set up my bomber with a 100% firing ratio and equipped it ready to go so as soon it started taking fire it responded the only way it knew and started firing Tomahawks at the TM. Obviously this was not going to end well for somebody and I suspected that somebody would be me. Realising the danger I instantly switched back to EBC and pounded the TM, but even quad-EBC takes a while to get thru 400mj of shielding and before I could get the shields down and take the TM out my bomber decided to cross the path of my fire at the same time as it launched a torpedo. My fire intersected the Tomahawk, there was a huge explosion and when the screen cleared the only thing left was debris.

In a display of staggering ineptitude I've just blown up my Hades.. /cry

Total Assets:

1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'

4x 25 Mj shield
4x EBC+Ammo, 4x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
2x Blastclaw
1x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
170,000cr

Dropped into Kingdom End today for a visit, not been here for a while, and as I exited the gate I was commed by a Dolphin. Apparently this joker has a couple mates who decided it would be a grand adventure to go waltzing into a Xenon Core sector. Not just any old Xenon you hear, but a CORE sector.. because what could possibly go wrong with that plan?

Anyways, this poor Boron has obviously got me confused with someone else because he's labouring under the misapprehension that a) I give a monkeys what stupidity his friends are perpetrating, b) That I'm as stupid as they are and also think a trip to Xenon-land is going to be a sunshine and pixies experience or c) I'm a suicidal manic depressive looking for swift end to it all. He'ld quite like me to take a trip over there and see how they're getting on. He's even given me the sector coordinates as if that's likely to encourage me. I've looked, they are waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay the hell over the other side of the universe!

I'm all set to inform him of which particular orifice he can shove this plan when he suddenly mentions a reward. Oops, that does it, suddenly my greed gene kicks in and the whole situation loses a little of that 'absolute certain death' feel to it. I mean, I suppose I could always swing by the place.. I don't exactly have to go in there, I could just kinda go... near. Besides, if I encounter anything more threatening than a pocket calculator with attitude I can always run like hell. I'll just tell him I found them, they died horribly and it's all very sad. Its not like he's going to know any different is it?

Anyways, I tell him I'll get right on it and that seems to keep him happy. I'm not, but he doesn't know that. I guess I'll find myself down that way sometime (mebbe when I have an M6) till then I'm sure they'll keep.

It seems I've got enough captured pilots to get another squad up and running which is cool. Not so cool is the sight I find as I jump into Loomanckstrats. The Merc base is gone. Actually so is everything else as it happens. It appears the Boron/Paranid fleet have quite comprehensively finished the job after I left and the place has been completely devastated. This means before I can get another squad going I'm going to have to track down another Merc base so the two squads I have now had better do a good job when they start live ops because they're all I've got for now.

Spying a jumpgate off to the east I decide to investigate and find a pirate industrial sector. As I'm snooping around I spot another Dukes TP and always eager to bolster my ranks make a play for it. The Paranid pilot is a little reluctant to part with it at first but a little PBE diplomacy eventually convinces him of the best course of action. Parking up next to it I take a breather and organise some trading runs for my SF fleet, got to keep them active to fund my Merc training. I'm about halfway thru doing this when I begin to get that creeping feeling that somethings not quite right.. Never one to ignore a feeling of impending doom I quickly bring up the sector map and yes, that Pirate TM that was passing thru north to west has changed course and is rapidly closing on my

position. Worse still as I'm watching on the sector map it suddenly spits out a wing of five Blastclaws. That's interesting in itself as a Pirate TM can only hold four fighters, but I've no time to worry about cheating pirates right now as I've got a whole bunch of Blastclaws armed to the teeth with burny deathguns overhauling my position and my TP is busted to the point it can only do a measly 50m/s. This can't end well.

Going for the distraction option I head one way and order the TP to make a break for the nearest station while I fire a wasp at each to try and get their attention. They're not taking the bait tho, they've obviously decided they've got me by the short 'n' curlies and they chase down and incinerate my TP before turning around and closing in on me. I've decided on hit and fade tactics and bolt for the nearby SPP, pull around the back and wait for them to get closer. As they do they open fire on me but I'm safe behind the back of the SPP array.

Or so I thought. Turns out PBG passes thru objects which is a bit of a cheat (damn pirates!) and I'm sat stationary on the other side getting roasted! A quick boost gets me out of the cone of damage and it's very fortunate for me that I am around the back of the SPP because to pursue they're all forced to go around the edge which puts me out of range. Just as well really as I'm seriously hurting! They burnt right thru 100mj of shields and incinerated my hull down to 55% in just a couple of seconds. Safe to say I'm not looking to play anymore and initiate an emergency jump out of there thanking my lucky stars my jumpdrive is still functional.

I guess I had it coming having been preying on Blastclaws for a while now but that's the most resounding whupping I've had to date. Ouch.

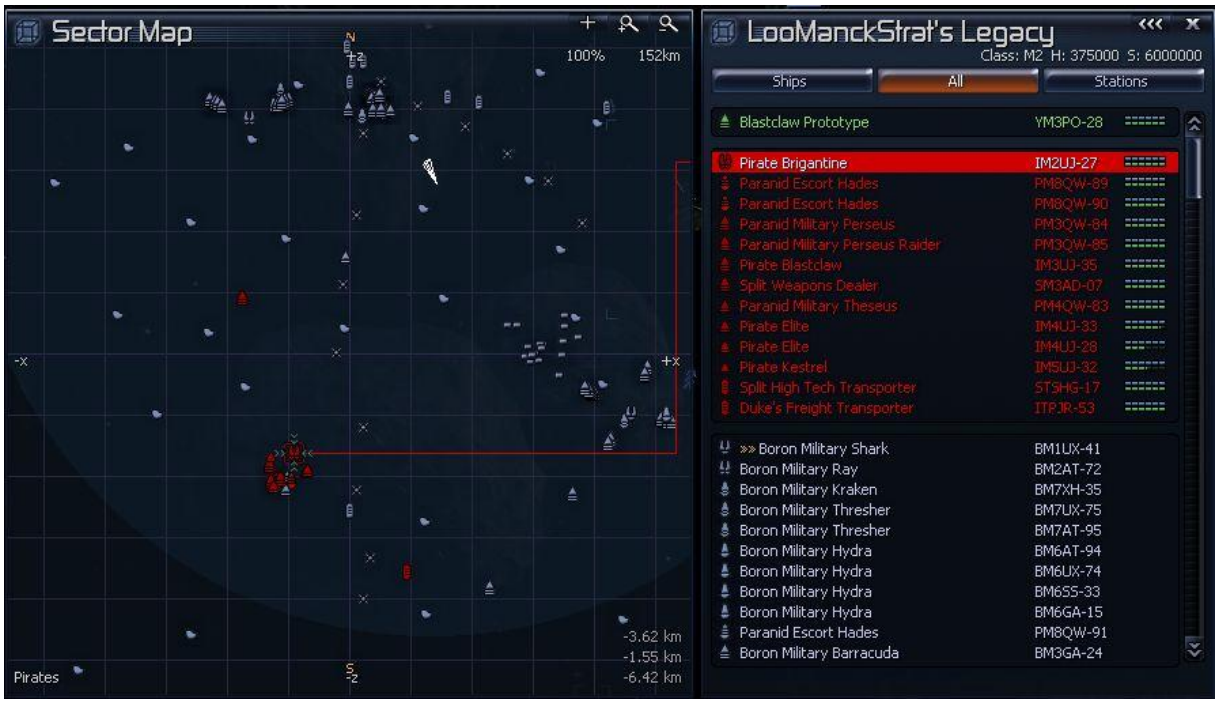
Various: Yes, I convert passenger to slave then sell slave to Merc base in exchange for a Merc. Been training them in Argon Military outpost tho cos I wasn't aware Pirate bases could do it. Will probably find a Pirate base and use that from here on.

Update today contains funky bonus images for that additional multimedia razzamatazz.

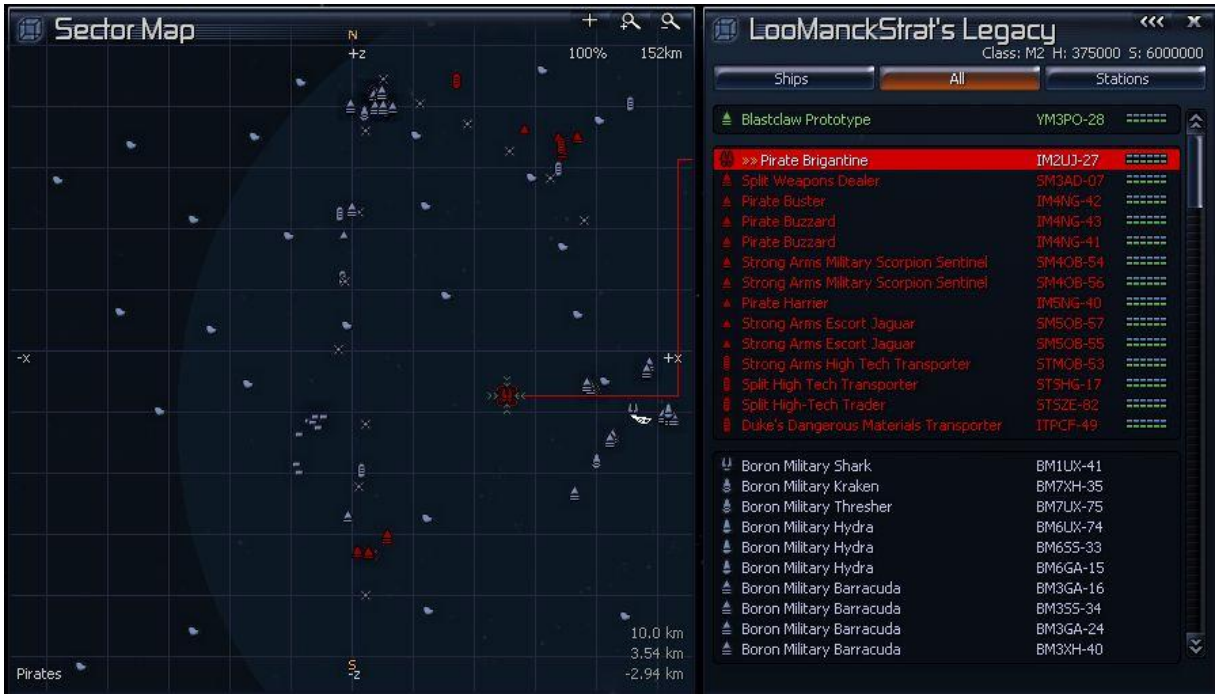
In an effort to find a new Merc base I decided to scout out the pirate sectors south of Loomanckstrats. Today I'm test-driving my as yet unnamed Blastclaw Prototype as my Medusa was involved in a small incident with some flamethrower wielding maniacs yesterday and is in the CBSE shipyard getting a couple dents knocked out. Imagine my pleasure as I headed south to come across these guys..

It may not be my M2.. but I wonder how much damage I can do with it? Firing a couple Wasp missiles to get the Brigantines attention you can see where I've parked up behind that Thresher group. I've a fairly good idea what's going to happen next..

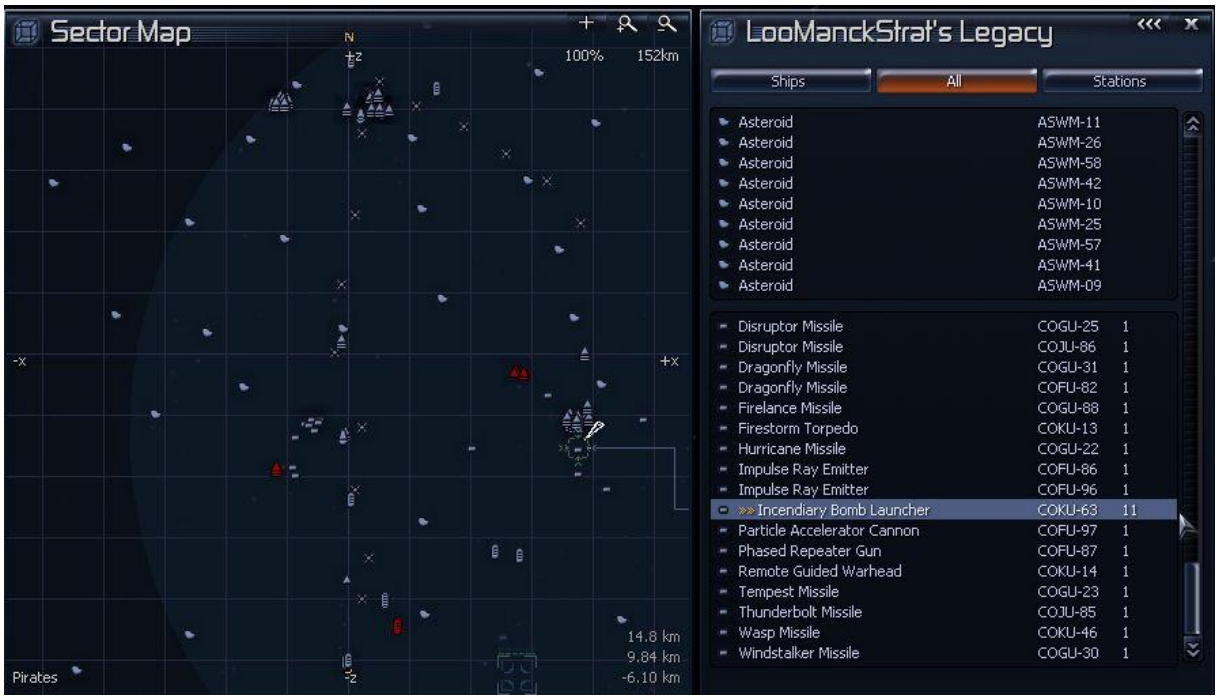
Yep, the Thresher group gets whacked hard. Here you can see I've moved down to the Paranid Ares group and am waiting on the Brigaintine to do it's stuff again. Centre of the screen there is a Kraken group that have woken up and are moving down to intercept the Brigantine. I suspect they'll regret that. From where I'm sat I can see the Kraken firing Hammer torpedoes..



The Kraken took a facefull of PPC and went down hard, new they'ld regret that. The Ares followed shortly after. What you see there is a big Boron/Paranid/Pirate furball as the respective escort groups take each other out. Meantime I've hopped up north and am heading in to grab all the dropped crates..



The Brigantine has finished off the Boron/Paranid fighters but lost it's own escort in the process. Meantime I'm hiding around the back of the Shark. There's also a second Thresher and a couple Hydras plus all their fighter escort in that area so I'm thinking the Brigantine might not do so well this time..



Brigantine finally went down but it took the Shark and Thresher with it in the process. Left me a present too, yay!

In other news Ho t'Sht's Raiders and Gaga Lo's Misfits have completed basic training to two-star in all fields and will shortly be entering negotiations with a number ship captains with a view to brokering a property 'loan'.

I'm thinking initially Ho t'Sht's Raiders being the squad with the fighting ability of a wet paper bag will cut their teeth by making an attempt on a TM class ship. Depending upon their performance (or lack of) will determine whether or not Gaga Lo's Misfits, the squad with the fighting ability of a three-legged donkey, make an attempt on something a bit toothier like an M6. Missions kick off tonight, results tomorrow..

Total Assets:

1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
4x 25 Mj shield
4x EBC+Ammo, 4x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
2x Blastclaw
1x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
20,000cr

Right, it's about time Ho t'Sht and his Raiders prove that they are indeed the t'Sht and earn their keep. For our first combat mission we will be attempting the acquisition of a TM class vessel so that I don't have to keep making lengthy treks back to Terracorp for a new jumpdrive every time I

capture a ship. Having consulted the ever-wise encyclopaedia I've selected the OTAS Zephyras as target as it has the best specs for the role I think and because it seems to have escaped the fugliness disease that inflicts the rest of the OTAS product line.

Troops for this mission will consist of:

'Ho t'Shts Raiders'
1-Star Fighters, 2-Star everything else.

Ho t'Sht
Ha t'nst
Olmanckelttak
Fui t'Nnt
Cho t'Knt

Jumping into Nopileos Memorial I survey the sector and choose a position for what may be an extended stakeout. Within 10 seconds of my arrival however a Zephyrus comes belting past me from the west gate. How fortuitous, looks like we're onto a winner here!

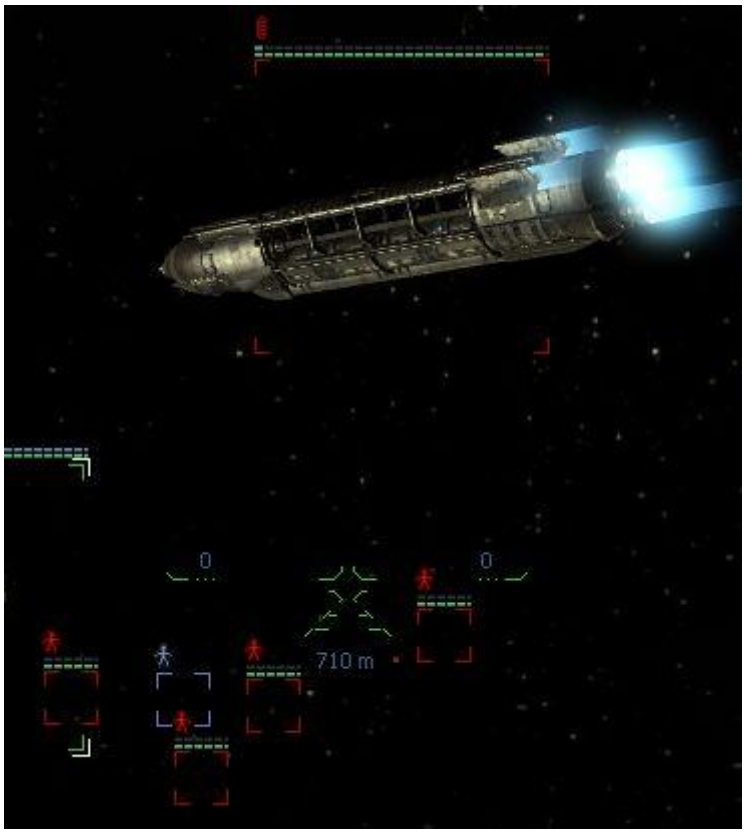
I've downgraded to one of my Blastclaws for this exercise as they're the only ION capable ship I have currently. First thing I need to do is remove any escorts so tucking in behind the Zephyras at about 6km I launch a couple Wasps at it to encourage it to go defensive and launch it's Solanos. Once it does that they get a couple Wasps and eight Dragonflies launched at each just to make sure, which is slightly overkill but it garuntees the job. That leaves just the Zephyras.

With phase 1 of the plan complete and the escort removed I switch to phase 2 which entails switching my secondaries to ION-D and frying the bejeezus out of the Zephyras to kill off the turrets. This takes a few mins but with that done I've got a defenseless Zephyras with a single 200mj shield at my mercy.

Phase 3 involves bringing in the Mercs so they can explain my point of view to the Zephyras captain firsthand. I jump in my Toucan to the south gate. Transferring myself across to the Toucan I remove all but one gun and set my Blastclaw to attack shields. This actually works really well and he follows behind it firing the odd shot at it. Only problem is the shields are slowly going up so I have to add weapons to his loadout until he's doing enough damage to keep the shields low. I also set IRE turrets to attack all enemies so that it can maintain light fire even when maneuvering.

This is a mistake.

With the Blastclaw very slowly whittling away the Zephyras' shields I move into position alongside and as soon as the shields drop below 4% I make my move and quickly order my Mercs to go kick ass. (I've been practicing running thru the menus so can do it quite quick now) Ho t'Shts Raiders jettison themselves off into space towards the Zephyras and report back to me that they're 'Moving in'.
Now you're probably all thinking you know where I've cocked up but I bet you don't. You see I've overlooked a small consideration. My fireteam is made up of four Split and a Paranid. The Paranid don't like me overly but I'm not at shoot-on-sight status with them. The Split however...



... and I've only gone and set my Blastclaws turrets to fire at all enemies. Anyone see the potential for misfortune here? Predictably my Blastclaw chooses that moment to make a turn and the rear turret loses it's lock on the Zephyras.. but hey, no problem, it's just found four new ones!

Fortunately the Raiders are almost on top of their target at this point so even tho one of the team gets insta-gibbed by IRE fire the remaining four manage to latch on before anyone else bites it. A short time later, much weapons fire and complaints by Split to watch where people are pointing their guns and it's all over, Olmanckelttak hacks the ship and it's green. Success!

Debrief:
It was a commendable attempt by Ho t'Shts Raiders. Even tho they managed to lose a total of three soldiers, one to err... friendly fire. The mission was a success. The two remaining Mercs, Ha t'nst and Olmanckelttak, are now 2-star fighters and have been promoted to the Misfits. That leaves no surviving soldiers in the Raiders so their unit has been regretfully disbanded.

Total Assets:

1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
4x 25 Mj shield
4x EBC+Ammo, 4x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Zephyras TM
1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
2x Blastclaw
1x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'

1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
130,000cr

Yesterdays mission while ultimately succesful wasn't the resounding success it could have been. Whether they were unlucky or whether it was just down to poor fight skills is debateable. I'm choosing to overlook my own incompetence. More experimentation is required to provide a definitive answer, however until I can find another Merc base I'm sorely limited on troops.

A TP is useable for capturing but is not ideal as without weapon support I'm having to jump between ships and that complicates an already tricky operation. What I really need is an M6 which can mount ION-D which would negate the need for a TP. Having spent some time with the encyclopaedia it seems the only M6 that can mount ION-D are the Hydra and Centaur. Boron ships are off the menu, at least for the time being, so that means unless I can relocate that Pirate Centaur I saw down in Mookeyes Revenge one time I'm going to be upsetting the Argon again..

Centaurs seem to come in three variants according to the encyclopaedia, normal, heavy and heavy-prototype. Heavy and Heavy-P seem largely the same except the prototype variant is a whole hell of a lot faster. In fact it's got a top speed that would be fairly good for a fighter. If I'm going to do this then I might as well go the whole hog and go straight for the Heavy-P. In for a penny, in for a pound and all that. First task of course is to locate one. I've never actually seen one up close but I must have passed one at some point.

I buy up a few Advsats and order a couple ships to layout a grid around the Argon sectors since I'm assuming that's where they'll be while I wander off and do a few missions. Ship retrieval missions are much, much easier when you've got a TM along for the ride and with 600Mj of shielding around me I'm feeling quite safe as I don't think there's much that could do me harm before I can RSLG-JD out of there. I even manage to fit in a nice assassination mission which for the cost of a handful of Wasps and the Hammerhead I sneaked in under their radar nets me a cool 3 million. Sweet!

As it happens it seems there is at least two Heavy-P's in the area. the first I pick up in Red Light and assign my Medusa to tail it, the second in Herrons Nebula and attach a Blastclaw to that one. Jumping into Red Light I do a sneaky scan of the Heavy-P. Pros: It's fast, massively shielded and horrendously well armed. Cons: It's fast, massively shielded and horrendously well armed.. and I have to defeat that.

Hmm, having actually looked at one first-hand I'm suddenly having second thoughts. I'm not really keen to go up against that level of firepower in a single fighter.. and dropping off troops on it? Ideally I would much prefer to attempt something like this with an M6 for the shielding but with only seven remaining squaddies I can't at the present time afford to take the almost inevitable losses from other boarding actions as that would leave me insufficient manpower to get the Heavy-P. Dilemma.

So what do you all reckon? Do I make the play for the Heavy-P or take a pass on that and try something a little easier.. a TL perhaps?

I decided to put Operation 'Steal an M6/TL (*delete as applicable)' on hold for a brief period while I make a concerted effort to track down a Merc base. Until I can get the slaves I've got 'converted' to extra troops the squaddies I've got are a valuable resource. While I'm busy exploring it will also give me some time to monitor the activities of the two HCPs and identify any possible point of vulnerability plus it'll give the Misfits a bit more extra training towards 3-star which can't hurt any.

Getting together a bunch of AdvSats I start up in Farnhams legend and make a run down thru Split-Fire -> Hatikvahs scouting out each sector and laying an Advsat in there for intel. Aside from a Brigantine group floating around Brennans Triumph the area seems devoid of pirate activity

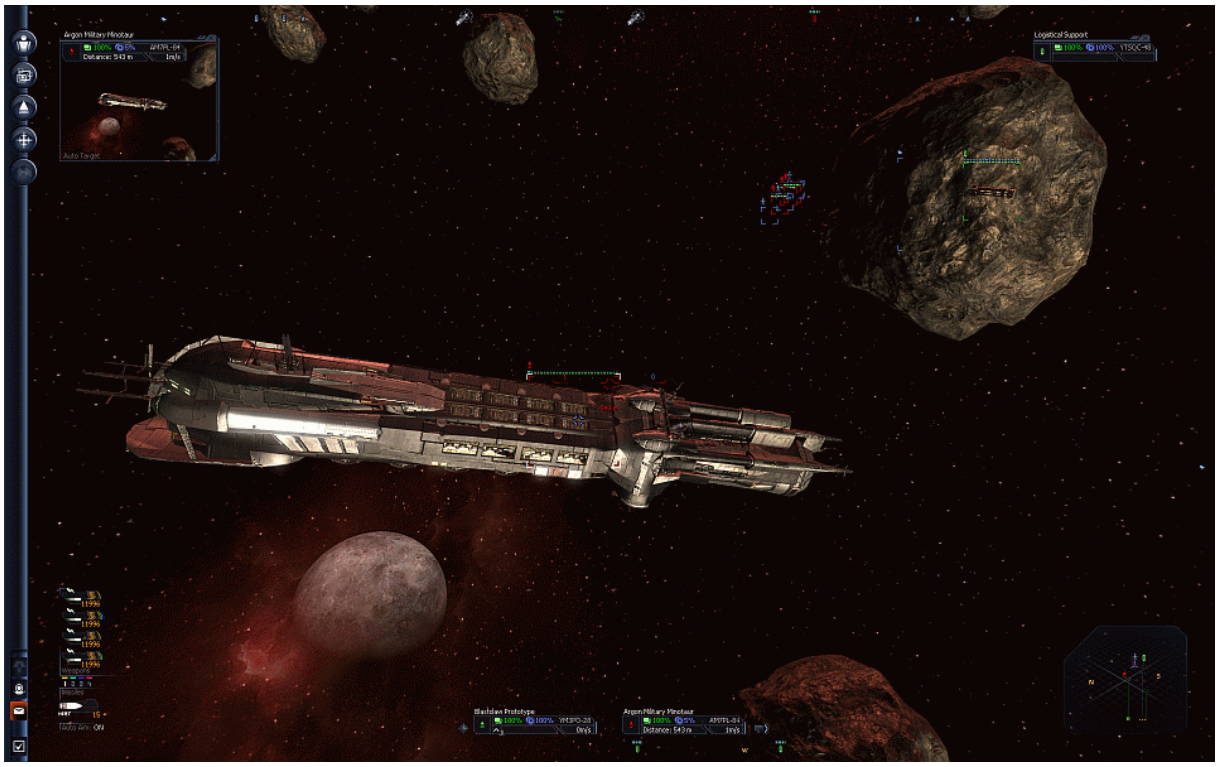
which would seem to indicate the race military patrols are having some success in keeping the bad guys in check. Jumping into Loomanckstrats is much the same story. The Boron/Paranid combined fleet is still living there quite happily although the Anarchy Port is up and running again. I suspect that's going to be a brief period of operation tho as while I'm heading towards the south gate there's stirring in the Boron fleet to the north and some elements are heading east. I think the place will be pirate-free again pretty soon.

Heading down thru Mookeyes I'm still keeping an eye out for that Pirate Centaur but it seems as tho it was just passing thru and wherever it is now it certainly isn't here anymore. West into Desecrated Skies and with that sector scouted and sat-tagged that's pretty much all the main pirate sectors accounted for and no Merc base which is altogether a bit depressing. Heading back into Mookeyes there's a bit of activity to the south which turns out to be a Minotaur taskforce clobbering a wing of Pirate Novas so I watch that while I ponder what to do next. Far as I'm aware the only other place with a few pirate sectors is way down south-east around Maelstrom. (Down to the last two Novas) It's a good deal more of a trek than I would like however it is fairly off the beaten track so may not have been hassled by any military forces. (Last Nova) Which means if there is one down there it's probably still there. (Dead)

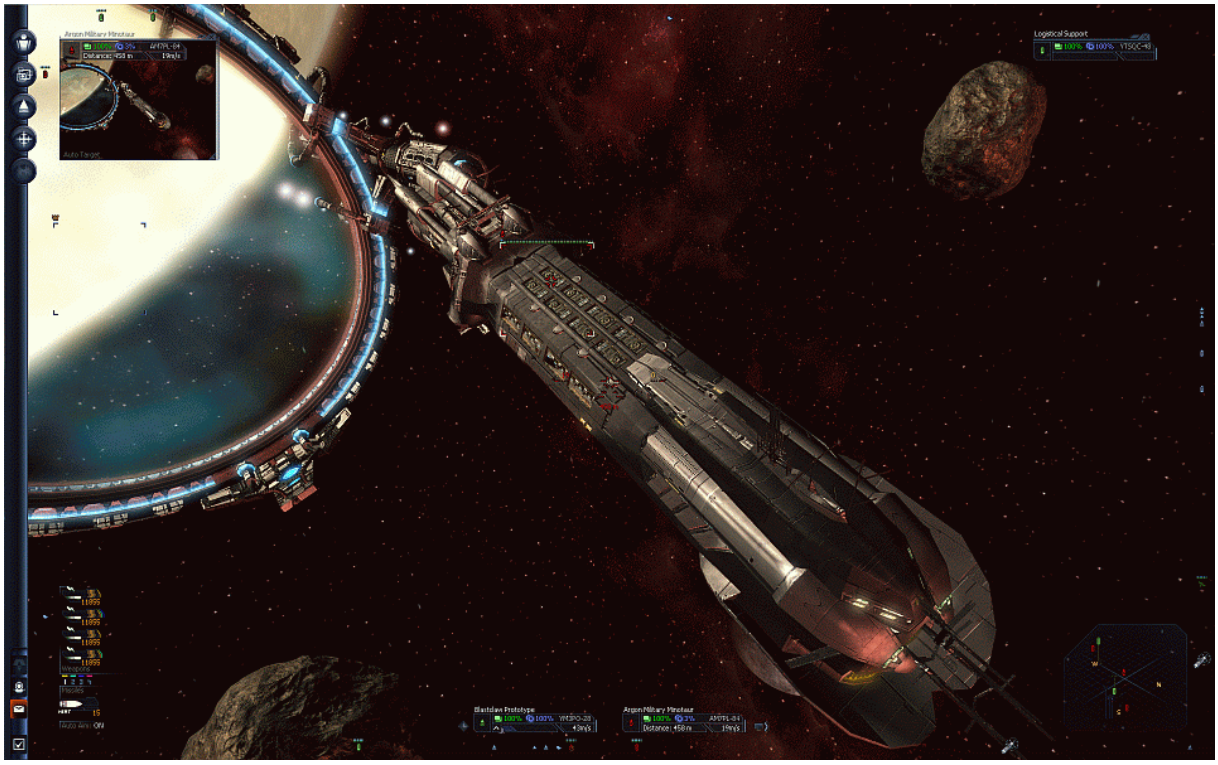
It's as the last Nova goes down in flames and the Minotaur group forms up and calmly resumes it course westwards that the dark thoughts begin to creep into my mind and I start to look at that Minotaur group in a whole different light. Is it feasible? Could my guys actually pull that off or is that too big fish to be trying to hook? Only one way to find out but either way it's not going to do my Argon rep much good. A quick equipment check and the kernel of a plan forms. Yep, I aim to misbehave.

Lining up on the Minotaur I wait until they're in a clear region of space. The Minotaur is in X formation so I select the M8 in each arm of the formation since they have no ability to shoot down an incoming warhead and fire a Hammerhead at each. 4Gj+ of thermonuclear death goes careening off into the distance and I'm rewarded a short time later by four clean connections and thirteen ships are now two. Somehow or other one of the escort Novas managed to avoid being vaporised but it's not a problem, a couple follow up Thunderbolts resolves that one. With the Minotaurs escort removed and the area safed it's time to do some crime.

Jumping in my Toucan I order him to initiate boarding ops while I switch to quad EBC and bombard the Minotaur with Thunderbolts. Soon as the shields drop the Toucan deploys all seven of my remaining troops in an all or nothing assault and they make their way to contact..



The split guys are still red to me as you can see but this time around I had the foresight to turn my turrets OFF before starting so we had no repeat of that unfortunate insta-gibbing incident. A quick EVA to target and the Misfits have latched on and are breaking out the oxy-cutters. I'm realistically thinking that this is as far as they'll get because I'm really not expecting them to get thru the hull. However my lack of faith in my team is unfounded as they ably prove my wrong..



Having already suprised me by getting thru the hull can they possibly pull it off? There is seven of

them and they do have super-hacker extraordinaire Olmanckelttak to finish the job up..

Hmm..

Debrief:
An exceptional performance from the team in a difficult mission pretty much made up on the fly practically no planning. Mission success was estimated to be negligible but they exceeded all expectations. Tea and biscuits all around. It's regretful that Gaga Lo didn't survive to share in the victory with his squadmates and tho he was never too popular with some of his squad and his death was somewhat controversial the Split members of the squad are vehement in their claim of "Split say, foolish Boron throw pin not grenade!" I guess we'll just have to take their word for it.

Anyways, I now find myself in the possession of capital ship for which I have no weapons and no present manufacturing capacity to be able to supply it. It also needs about 14 million in repairs.. Odd how days turn out.

Total Assets:

1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
4x 25 Mj shield
4x EBC+Ammo, 4x PAC, 1x PBE

1x Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Perseus 'Shifty Business'
2x Blastclaw
2x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'

1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
4,800,000cr

Would you believe it only took me about ten minutes to have my first shunt with the Minotaur? Yeah, thought you would..

As part of my piracy runs thru Splitfire -> Hatikvahs I've been fortunate enough to acquire a fair amount of high-level equipment which up until this point has been sat in a TS in CBSE equipment dock waiting for that day when I might actually have something to plug it into. Well it seems the day has come to put some of it to use and those 4x1Gj shields are going to come in handy after all. Jumping my Support-Hauler in I transfer across some shields and basic equipment and I'm good to get out of here before the Argon wonder why their M7M isn't reporting in anymore.

Once my shields are fully charged I jump back to my fuel base in Presidents End. As I'm busy checking the property menu I suddenly get collided with and realise it's my TM jumping in behind me. My fault completely, I'm so used to flying small ships up till now I'ld entirely forgotten that I now need to clear myself from gate lanes asap as I'm currently piloting a capital ship with a fat arse.

Fortunately the Zephyrus is fairly robust but I'm not able to recover the situation before it's lost all shields and taken about 30% hull damage. Great, I'm already facing a 14mill repair bill and now I've just tagged another couple hundred K on top to fix my TM. Still, I can't complain too much tho, I'm lucky it didn't die as that would have been even more costly given it's got two fully equipped Blastclaws on board.

Anyways, minor RTA over with it's time to consolidate my gains for the day and it seems I'm not quite as toothless as I thought. It appears I actually do have something useful to use with my new toy, 25 Flail missiles I've picked up somewhere and a single boarding pod I got from the Pirate base back on page 5, shortly before my Kestrel got ganked by that Khaak scout. Now this has definite possibilities.

My plan to capture an HCP has basically hinged on two unknown considerations. The first would be my squaddies ability to actually do the deed. The Misfits have been whittled down to a mere five now after their last successful op but they're all 3-star trained 2-star fighters. They've also more than adequately demonstrated that they're capable of capturing an M7M given the chance so by comparison an M6 should be a doddle. This leaves the second consideration which is me. Am I able to adequately suppress an HCP with my current equipment to the point where my boys can do their stuff? I'm not sure yet, but I'm going to find out. What we need is a plan, not just any plan, but a plan of the utmost cunning. Lucky me, I've got one..

Operation: 'Ooh, look! Shiny!'

Intel has indicated that the two HCPs are running patrol routes throughout the main Argon sectors. These routes also encompass the border sectors of Argon space. Extended monitoring of military traffic has indicated a point of weakness, Cloudbase South-West. This sector serves the requirements of the mission on several fronts, It's small, enabling full coverage of the sector via Advsat for early warning. It has no military forces stationed there, nor does it have any police/border control prescence to intervene. There's also plenty of obstacles to use should discretion/RSLG be required.

Mission craft for the op will consist of two Blastclaws configured for EBC and ION-D with Wasp

backup. EBC will be used to reduce shields and preserve weapon-energy while the ION-D will be used to fry the bejeezus out of the HCPs weapon systems. Wasp missiles will be used as a distraction against the HCP turrets if/when (more likely when) things get serious. Two Blastclaws will be used so that in the event of hull-damage a swap can be made for repairs while pressure on the HCP is maintained.

The actual capture process will be undertaken by M7M-'Ask Questions Later' using our sole boarding pod (provided I've figured out how to work it by then) while the Blastclaws run shield suppression duty.

Squad for this op will be:

Olmanckelttaks Misfits:

Olmanckelttak (SqdLdr)
Ha t'nst
Holigis Gutosos Yahondras VI
Na t'Ztk
Yosulis Joranos Tzessosis VIII

Operation: 'Ooh, look! Shiny!' will commence shortly after a cup of tea and a mince pie. Tales of glorious victory against overwhelming odds/bitter recriminations over failure and lives lost to follow.

OPERATION: ' Ooh, look! Shiny!'

With the arrival of the HCP in CBSW the mission is a go and I jump into CBSW geared for war. Of the two HCPs I've chosen to go for the first one rather than the second. The first has several more weapons onboard which will mean it's going to be more difficult to disable but the second, while less well armed, makes up for it by carrying a substantial amount of missile firepower. Engaging the second would likely result in either it or me getting a capital-class warhead in the face. I don't much fancy either of those possibilities so HCP2 is relegated to backup option.

Currently the HCP isn't aware of the danger and the few seconds before it realises will be crucial to getting the shields low and me into position. To aid this I've brought a couple Tornado missiles with me which I intend to use to Alpha-strike it. First mistake. It turns out Tornado missiles are IFF locked and it refuses to fire on the HCP. Fair enough just have to do it the hard way and QUAD-EBC it. I've got him down to around 25% shields before he figures out I do actually mean business here and aren't just messing about and then he tags me as enemy at which point I get a volley of CIG fire directed my way. I'm anticipating it tho and avoid it.

Now it's turned into a maneuvering war. I've determined the HCP has a small blindspot slightly behind and below so I'm trying to stay within that zone and hit him with alternating EBC/ION-D. EBC to remove the shields and conserve energy, ION-D to try and burn away those CIGS. Meantime the HCP is maneuvering to try and bring his side-turrets to bear and fire his CIGS at me. Unfortunately for me the HCP is only marginally slower than I am which means it's hard for me to maintain a steady position. When he does get a bead on me I have to jink out the way but then that puts me even further off position and the speed difference makes it tricky to get back in there without taking fire. While CIG fire is relatively slow it does hit quite hard and in my case every hit is 10% off my shield.

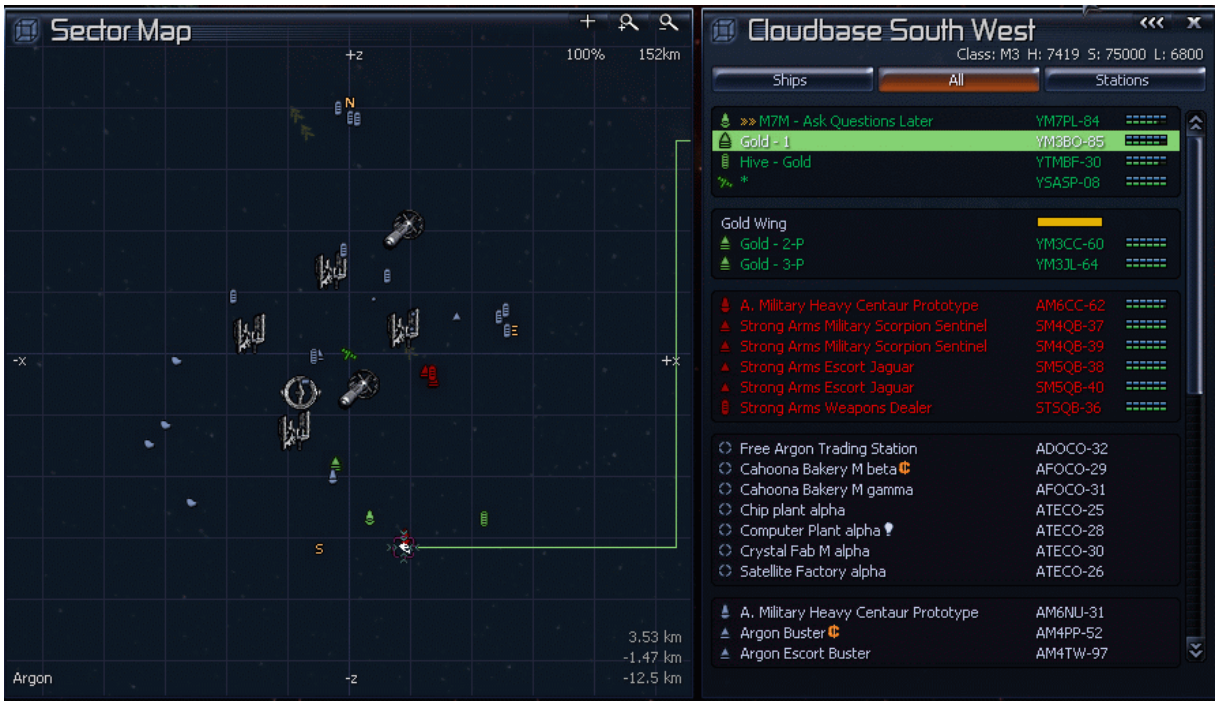
My shields ended up at a critical point and I had to break off, but I'm making some progress as you can see. I've reduced his shields to 25% capacity which makes it easier for me to get the ION-D thru. He's also lost a couple CIGS but has replaced them with PBE which in some ways is easier and others not. If I stay within 950-1000m off his position then he tries to use the PBE on me but I'm just fractionally out of range. If I drift past 1000m he switches back to CIGS and I have to start dodging. I'm having to try and maintain some fairly precise positioning, while in a turning maneuver and while under fire and swapping between EBC and ION to maximise burntime. I need more fingers.

As you'll probably gather this hurt. A lot. In short I just plain got outmaneuvered and with his high base speed I wasn't able to pull away fast enough and got banjoed good and proper. I'm fairly sure the mass of Wasps I fired to distract as I hit the jumpdrive saved my skin there. Barely tho. Anyways, I wound up at the east gate and while the HCP came steaming in quickly called in my second Blastclaw, transferred across and jumped the first one back to CBSE.

Back in action again, I've learned my lesson, and I've decided to changed my tactics. Instead of trying to maintain a position close enough to encourage the HCP to waste PBE shots I'm hanging back a little more and consequently I'm having CIG fire lobbed my way again. Instead of trying to follow the HCP tho I'm using boost to accelerate to top speed and then immediately cutting my engines, turn to a different vector and repeat. In short I'm making random pulsed movements and hitting him with fire inbetween. I'm finding this is confusing his turrets a fair bit to the point where we get here..

This one's a fair while later but as you can see I've made good progress. In fact left and rear turrets have been completely disabled so I'm now holding position off his left flank and frazzling him with no return fire. It's just a matter of time now. At least that's what I thought. After about 15 mins of constant frying that turret still wasn't disabled and I wasn't going to attempt a boarding pod with that turret still active. I was starting to wonder if it was because it was the other side of the ship so I decided I'ld be clever and buzz over the other side of him and hit it direct. It was a move that turned out to be not so very clever after all because as I did so he suddenly banked round the other direction, pinned me in a turn again and then pulled twin PBE out of somewhere and flayed my shields off again before I could duck under him. I knew he had them but as he'ld made no attempt to use them in other turrets I'd made the mistake of assuming he wouldn't.

Lesson learned I went back to being patient and as you can see was duly rewarded. Took a while tho.
With the HCP properly disabled this time (and I made sure by flying all around it) It's time to capture it so I jump in my M7M and prepare to initiate boarding action. I'm all set to go when..



..Gold wing shows up, which is a bit of an issue because they've been assigned to follow the second HCP around. It would appear I've been tied up with the first for so long that the other one has caught up. It also appears this guy is aiming to be a pain as well because he faffs around for a full 15 mins before finally deciding all is fine and heading north. Just as well really because by this point I've called in the rest of Gold wing and was very close to issuing a kill order.
Distraction done with I set the weapon loadout on my Blastclaw back to quad-EBC and IRE turrets and then transfer across to my M7M. Assigning my Blastclaw to shield supression the HCP seems to finally give up as he cuts engines and just sits there. Fine with me, that just makes life easier.
Soon as the shields hit 4% I fire Boarding pod 01..

..which you can just see between my M7M and the HCP. A clean connection and while they cut the hull I transfer to my Blastclaw and keep the shields low. And they're in..

..it all goes to plan, Olmanckelttak breaks out his Vista boot-disk and reboots the ship computer and..

.. Sweet.
Debrief:

Aside from a little cretinism on my part on my part that went fairly smoothly. The mission lasted for nearly an hour in total and given that the only military/police vessel that showed up in all that time was the second HCP wandering thru suggests CBSW was indeed a good choice to stage the op. 61% for a capture isn't too bad, it'll cost a few million to repair but that's to be accepted. Mission costs were a little higher than would have been preferred. Blastclaw 2 needs at least 500k of repairs and Blastclaw 1 is going to be far too costly to repair. I think I'll just write that one off.

Overall I think the mission total cost was around the 8 million mark when you add everything up. Compared to the approx. 500k it cost me to capture the M7M 'Ask Questions later' that's probably not looking so good, but it was a positive outcome and overall that's what counts at this stage.

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 1x ION-D

1x Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
2x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Dropship - 01'
1x Hermes 'Dropship - 02'
1x Express
1,200,000cr

Well, 'Thunderchild' cost a small fortune to repair and upgrade, I even had to dig into a my UTHQ slush fund for a couple million to get it all finished. Fortunately I already had all the weapons/shields I needed in storage so at least I didn't have to incur that cost as well. But it's done now and I'm fully tooled and ready to roll.

So where to go from here?

I have the unexpected M7M but without some serious investment in a support complex for it that one is fairly limited in what it can do currently. Ideally my next move would be to attempt to capture a TL as that would probably give me the greatest benefit in terms of cash-making potential. I quite fancy an Elephant as a first TL as they're quite flexible. The tricky bit will be finding one suitably exposed that I can make a play for it. Alternatively, of course, I could always have a go at that second HCP as I've still got a tail on it.
Unfortunately I'm down to three squaddies by this point and although they've done an excellent job to date I think it would be overly risky to expect them to try and take a TL. However, until I can locate a Merc base I can't recruit any more reinforcements so it seems essential that I make that the priority which is going to entail some serious exploration. If I'm lucky I'll even find a few more boarding pods on my travels as they're much easier to use than the booting guys out the airlock method.

I think my best bet is probably the pirate sectors down near Maelstrom. Hopefully being so far out the way they've remained unmolested by the race military and I'll get lucky so I'll make the trek all

the way down there.

I think I'll take a route via the Split sectors even tho they'ld quite like to make sushi out of me, partly cos it avoids X347 and partly because I want to scout for Elephants on the way. That'll take me down thru Scale Plate Green, neatly avoiding X347, and then down thru the Argon sectors to Grand Exchange. It also unfortunately looks like it'll put me fairly close to where that whiny Boron said his idiot friends went hunting in Xenon Core sectors for misery, pain and suffering and, I most likely suspect, found all three in spades. I suppose I should probably make at least some attempt to look for them if only for appearances sake.

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
2x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
1x Hermes 'Training- 02'
1x Express 'Carjacker'
3,700,000cr

Well my trip thru the split sectors was educational. My belief that they don't like me was somewhat confirmed and it gave 'Thunderchild' a chance to show what she can do. I do like having ION-D as a turret option all around as it gives me an impenetrable EM shield from missiles and believe me the Split certainly weren't shy about lobbing warheads my way. Big ones, small ones, they really weren't fussed.

I'm also liking the PBG. I've only got the two so far that I was lucky enough to capture along with a Blastclaw but they seem to make good turret weapons. I'm actually quite pleased the HCP didn't load a couple of those into his turrets and fry my face off when I was busy capturing him. He did have three in his cargo bay at the time so the option was definitely there. I guess he didn't qualify for the HCP captaincy due to his smarts.

Add to that the high speed and heavy shielding and all in all I'm very pleased with the performance. If I had to pick one fault tho it would be the slightly small cargo bay. Fully loaded with equipment, weapons and enough missiles to Base Delta Zero a small moon it does leave a limited amount of room for fuel, but then that's what tankers are for right?

Anyways, I found what I'm looking for on my way thru. Having given it some thought I've come to the conclusion I'm unlikely to encounter an Elephant alone outside Split territory unless the RNG gods are smiling upon me and we all know they hate me with a passion. Consequently I'm currently in the early planning stages of Operation: 'Dude, Where's My Car??' which will entail the audacious heist of a Split Elephant from their core sectors, right under the noses of sector security. Should be fun!

Scale Plate Green is suprisingly intact, I was half expecting it to be crawling with Xenon but it

seems not. In fact now that I think about I'm fairly sure I've seen a grand total of exactly three xenon craft since day one. In my book that doesn't exactly make them the 'Menace to civilization' that I keep hearing about. Personally I think they just have bad PR. Passing thru Omicron Lyrae some bloke in the local Trading station comms me. Apparently I look like the kind of guy that likes babysitting important dignitaries. Sorry, no. I'm busy, maybe another time. Unless you're paying of course? No? Sod off then..

Into treasure Chest and I decide to pay the Goners a visit. They're a bit of a loopy bunch this lot but I could pick up some salvage insurance while I'm passing, that's always useful. Except I can't because the mad buggers have dismantled their equipment dock and used the parts to build half a temple. Who builds half a temple without checking you've got enough parts to build the other half? Goners that's who. Seems they'ld like me to help them out and unlike the Argon guy they know how to appeal to my better nature and they'll pay me for the privelige. These are the kind of guys I can deal with and hey, lucky me, they want Ore and silicon and I just so happen to have a small Ore/Silicon complex back in Presidents End. How cool is that?

I organise a couple freighters to deliver what they want and meantime head on down to Maelstrom to get me some Mercs. I don't really like this area, far too big and pea-soupy. It also seems to be fairly pirate-active as there's two Carracks and a Galleon in the area. They aren't pleased to see me either and try chasing me but they're easy enough to outrun. On the plus side tho if the pirates are alive and thriving this can only be good for me. Dropping thru into Gaian Star I head into the sector and finally at the end of my long, tiresome journey find sweet, sweet FA.. Well there's a Pirate base there but that's not what I'm looking for. How tiresome.

Ok, so this avenue of investigation was a bust. Seems I must look elsewhere. Meantime I'm in the area so I might as well make the Boron guy happy. Heading back to Grand Exchange I call in my Support-Hauler and tool up. If I'm going to venture into Xenon territory I'm going in loaded for bear..

A quick systems check and then bracing myself for trauma I drop into X598 to be greeted by a wall of red on my Gravidar.. ah, no wait. Hang on, that's just jam (never eat while flying). Actually it appears there's a mere three ships guarding the other side. Fair enough it's an M2 an M1 and a Q but still, only three ships. Xenon, plague on the universe my arse.

Anyways, I'm much faster than them and by the time they've realised one of those meatbag critters is invading their space and turned around I'm already going hell for leather towards the east gate. Way off in the distance by the north gate I can see what looks like another three Q's but I'll be long gone by the time they get anywhere close. Apparently the Xenon aren't really expecting people to fly INTO Xenon territory as they haven't bothered to guard the east gate at all. I guess just me and Mahi Ma's idiot friends do this kind of thing. Reaching the gate without incident I head thru into X627..

Ok, that's almost even better, a grand total of two ships this time. An N and what is apparently a PX, a variant on the P I'm guessing? The N isn't a problem as it's 20km away.. and it's an N. The PX in the other hand is right on top of me. Fortunately I've got the positional advantage and 6xHEPT eat thru PX quite handily it seems. Continuing across the sector I start to see movement in the distance.. maybe this sector is a bit livelier after all. I can't see much more than a single J/K at the moment tho as they're still out of gravidar range.

Quarter way across the sector and I start to get registers on gravidar and the place lights up red, a jam-free red this time. This is more what I was expecting. I might be inclined to back off at this point were it not looking very likely that the next gate leads me to my goal. Then again it might turn out that's a goal I don't want to achieve..

Anyways, I'm currently looking at one K, possibly another in the distance and a Q plus a veritable

horde of fighters. There's even some closing in behind me from the edge of the sector cutting me off, and they're all converging on my position. I'm not too concerned tho, I have the utmost confidence in Thunderchilds ability to handle the smaller stuff and I have a little suprise in my cargo bay. Continuing on a little further I reach a point towards the centre of the sector which puts the maximum number of targets in range and at this point I cut the engines and go 'Deathblossom'. Rapidly cycling thru targets I dump all my missile tubes and approximately 4Gj of damage goes streaking out across the void towards the incoming Xenon.

First strike is a resounding success and cores a path thru the centre of the Xenon fighter swarm. Foot to the floor I go burning down the middle of the resulting debris field towards the east gate into Core 023. A couple more follow-up missiles pick off a straggler or two and a quick dodge around an asteroid to avoid that K and I'm clear and free. The only thing that can catch me now is a wing of N's coming up rapidly from the south but Thunderchilds turrets and shielding is more than capable of withstanding them and a few Wasps in the mix soon thin out the swarm. Coming up fast on the gate I break thru and into...

.. I'm not quite sure what actually. Well I'm not in Core 023 where I was expecting, that's for sure. I know where that is and there and here are most definitely not the same place. It appears I'm in some large structure of some sort and if what I can see out the 'window' is anything to go by I'm way the hell too close to a sun for my liking. SPF-50 really isn't going to cut it if the shields on this place fail. On the plus side at least nobody is shooting at me at the moment so that's some consolation and it looks like there's a busted up ship not far off. Could be the Boron guys idiot friends.

Yep, that's them all right. Blackbox says the Xenon didn't appreciate them interloping and shot the hell out of them. Well who would have thought eh? Anyways, as far as I'm concerned that's my end of things dealt with so I guess I'll drop by Kingdom End and report in with Mahi Ma. Hopefully I'll get that reward he was being so vague about before.
Think I'll tell him they died horribly just for giggles..

I decide to jump back to Kingdoms End. There is rather large cloud of nice missiles still waiting to be picked up in X627 and having expended my entire stock of Thunderbolts on the run in it's a little tempting, but there's a few capital ships in there still and I suspect they're quite annoyed with me so it's not worth the risk.

Mahi Ma seems pleased to see me, he hasn't got my reward tho, in fact he's more interested in the widget I found and wants me to take him there despite a fairly gruesome account of his friends demise. I just left a Xenon sector, why exactly would I want to go back? And where's my reward? I agree to take him tho after he points out I can jump straight there and avoid all the Xenon. Besides, if it turns out it's not worth my while I can always leave him there..

Arriving uneventfully, which mollifies me slightly, Mahi Ma does something clever and fixes the docking clamps and then informs me in tones of hushed awe what a fantastic contraption this is and oh, can I pop off and find him 400 computer components? Well I could, but what's in it for me? Reward? I don't work for free you know. Fortunately I just so happen to have quite a few computer components already from my piratical exploits in Nopileos Memorial so I don't have to splash out much to make up the remainder. Jumping in one of my SF with the required parts I'm informed that that'll be perfect now can I just go pop off and rustle up 500 microchips... 500? Is he nuts?

Leaving Mahi Ma alone next to a sector full off angry Xenon to ponder the advisability of irritating the one person in the entire known universe who currently knows his whereabouts I head back to Elysium of Light to organise delivery to those crazy Goner dudes. They seem quite happy to buy my Ore/Silicon which is good as I'm equally happy to sell it to them. Heading back thru Omicron Lyrae I get commed again. It's that same guy as before wanting me to escort some diplomat back to Terran space in case the Xenon get him. Ok, fine. I'm in the mood to kill something so yeah, I'll

do it. Bring 'em on.

Two M's and two N's. Hardly worth the effort but it seemed to impress the Terran guys, they'ld like me to go visit one of their guys for a patrol mission. I guess I could do that, maybe they'll have something for me. Apparently I have to meet up in one of the Terran sectors so I guess I'll get to see how the other half lives. Lining up on the north gate I head thru in to new frontiers..

Good god those Terrans have some fugly ships. I dunno who they're lead designer was but he seriously needs to take a course in astromechanical aesthetics. I mean I thought the OTAS corporation had some horrendous looking monstrosities but these Terran guys could give them a run for their money. And why is it my jumpdrive doesn't work? Can't these neanderthals even manage that basic a function? At least the place is secure and given the amount of capital firepower passing by that hardly surprises me. A bit of a militant bunch these Terrans, the Split should get on fine with them, assuming they don't start a war with them..

Seems they want me to do a basic patrol with them, which is fine, I' wasn't expecting trouble but I really ought to know better by now. Initially all is fine but halfway thru our run it all kicks off and before we know it we're involved in a running battle with some fairly heavy Xenon forces. Apparently the Xenon have been pretty quiet up until recently when the Terrans reckon someone stirred them up. I decide it probably best not to mention my recent misbehaviour in X627..

Mission over with and a fat paycheck (I think I'm going to like working for the Terrans) and the next thing they want me to do is simple tail job. Find the guy, follow the guy, be discreet. Discreet in an HCP...? Well I'll give it a go.. As it happens it's a cakewalk and he leads me to an unknown sector off PTNI Headquarters where...

... Oh hallelujah!

With my slaves enrolled in the Merc training plan and learning their little socks off it's time to decide what to do next. I still need a supply chain for my currently largely useless missile frigate. Along those lines I also need to find myself a suitable sector to setup in. I could also do with at

least one more TM as my poor Zephyrus is running itself a bit ragged trying to be in five places at once and I could also do with a TL. And then of course there's the annoying Boron and his outrageous microchip demands..

Further captures are out for the moment until my new squaddies have put in some training time and I don't have the cash to get a second complex going yet, even if I had somewhere to put it, so I think further exploration is in order. I assign my three SF to sector-trader duty to generate some cash-flow, order my Blastclaw wing to split up and start mapping out sectors around Paranid Prime and southwards and my remaining transporters get the unenviable task of fanning out from Kingdoms End with the sole instruction to trawl every sector in the universe for as many microchips as they dig up. Meantime I'll be exploring new frontiers.

After a good long time trawling thru sectors, scanning asteroids and doing the odd mission here and there I've managed to discover a couple unknown sectors which might meet the material needs for what I have planned and I've managed to lose a Blastclaw which was ganked by a Khaak Cluster somewhere on the outer edges of Priests Pity. Rather irritatingly of the four I had out and about earning their boy-scout mapping badge the Khaak elected to pick on the one I had setup as a capture ship and the one i used to get my HCP. Consequently it had quite a selection of expensive equipment onboard. I'm not happy, those little purple dudes are going to get it one day.

My microchip farming fleet has also finished it's lengthy trawl of the known universe and between them they've wiped the universe clean of microchips and amassed a quite staggering 145 units. Obviously 145 units is a touch shy of the 500 I require so it would appear I need a new plan. I certainly can't afford to setup my own chip complex yet but fortunately I don't need to. The next best thing to setting up your own is obviously to borrow someone elses so with the help of the encyclopaedia to identify chip plants I jump a ship to each one and park it there to monitor stock levels. Soon as they reach about 15 units I buy them up.

Meantime I break my SF crew off ST duty and get them to jump around and keep the chip plants fed. With 14 chip plants now effectively working for me full tilt that's only 3/4 of a full cycle + whatever extras I can find myself to get me over the 500.

Hopefully that loony Boron won't have any more unreasonable requests and I can get back to something a little more interesting tomorrow..

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
1x Hermes 'Training- 02'
1x Express 'Carjacker'
5,800,000cr

Well, my ghetto chip complex is busy cranking out silicate goodness and currently even turning me a profit as I supply it with resources so it's off to the Goners again. Sadly it seems they've had all the minerals they want off me which is a shame, I was quite happy supplying them. Now they want me to run a Teladianium panelling delivery for them which I'm quite happy to do, it's an easy run and the pay is good and I'm all in favour of that kind of thing.

Next job they've got for me tho poses a slight complication. Seems they want three Argon transporters. I'm hoping they won't mind if they come with a few scorch marks as I'm going to have to purloin them someplace. Nopileos Memorial being my favoured hunting ground I jump to the south gate ready to setup a capture operation. As I arrive I check the sector map to see what's what and..

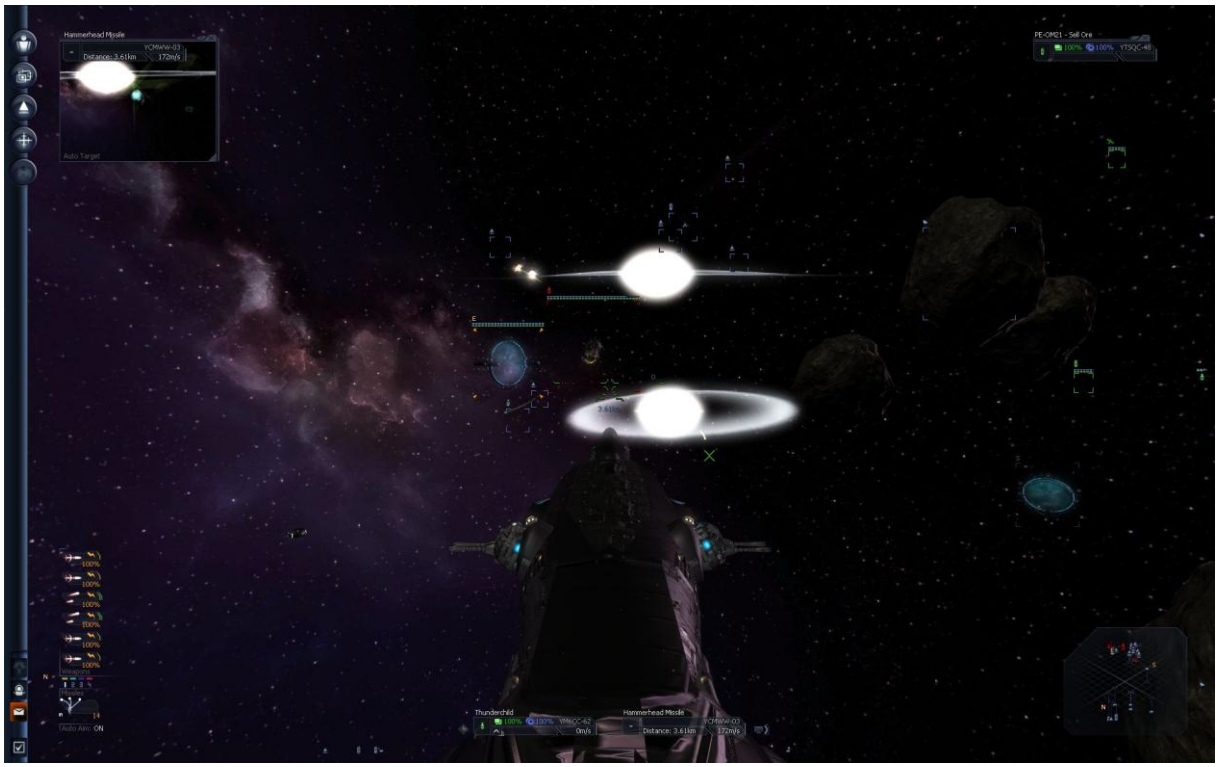
.. the situation suddenly changes just like that and it's another crash-plan mission on a capital ship. Unfortunately the majority of my Mercs are busy in training and currently the only ones free are the three remaining members of the Misfits and three complete noobs who couldn't be greener if they were cabbages and are probably more dangerous to themselves than anyone else.

As if that wasn't bad enough Nopileos is not a good place to perform the op the way I would prefer as it's too cluttered and I have to make the intercept before the Minotaur reaches Brennans Triumph as there's a Brigantine hovering around Brennan south gate and will very probably wipe it out.

Relocating to Dannas Chance I setup and wait for the Minotaur to reach strike point..

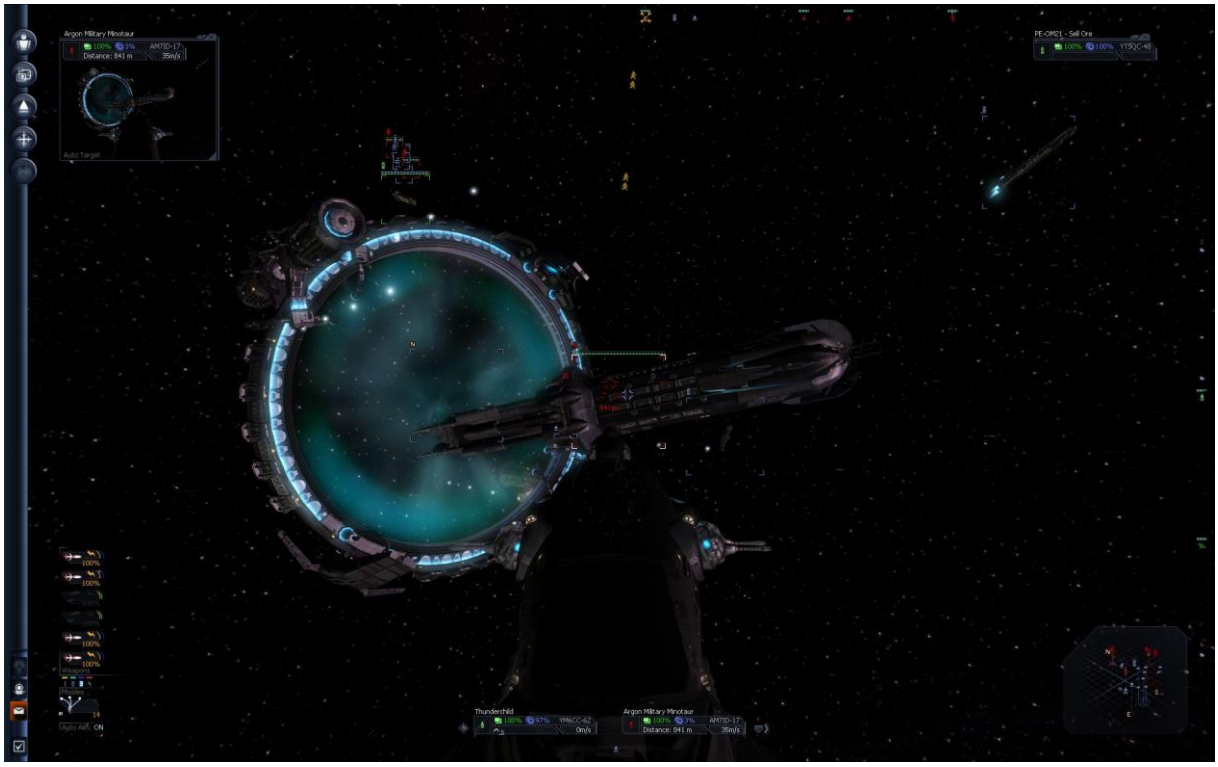
.. which gives all it's escorts plenty of time to form up into a nice tight group which I'll need when I alpha-strike the lot..

.. quad-Hammerhead salvo away and a few seconds of patience is rewarded with..

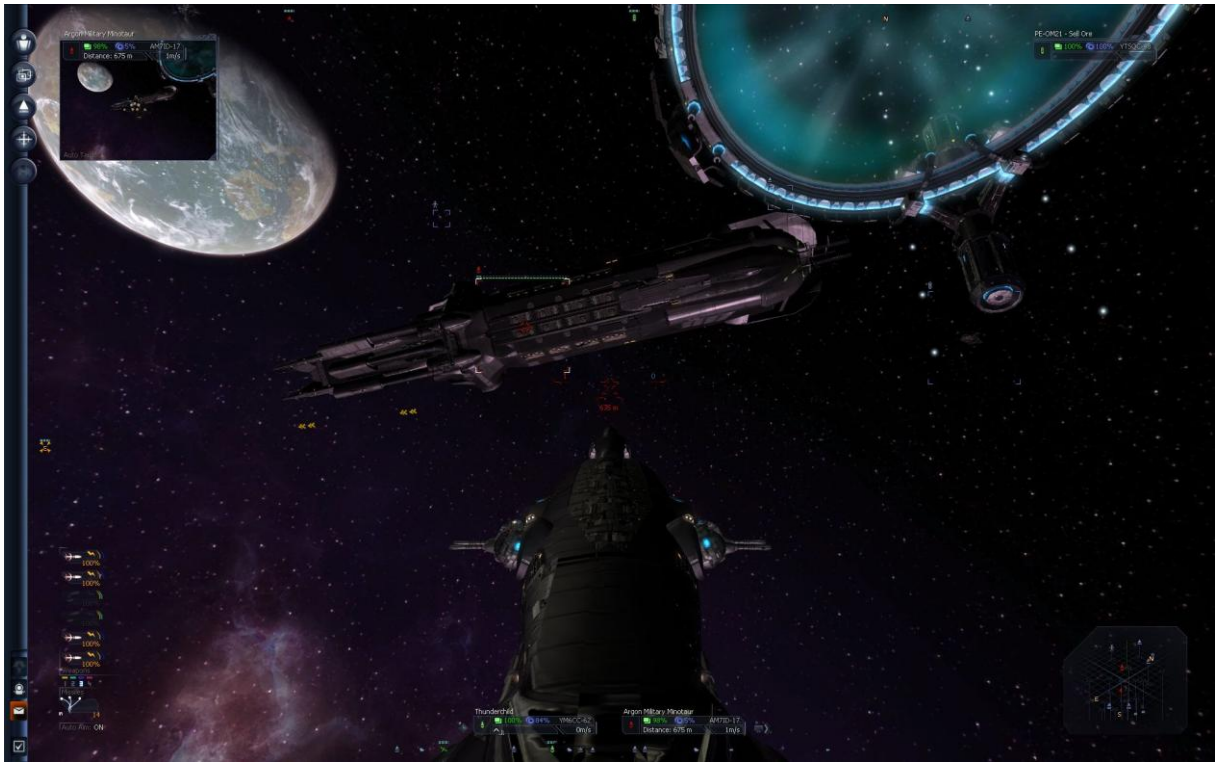


.. clean connection and the entire escort wing insta-gibbed.

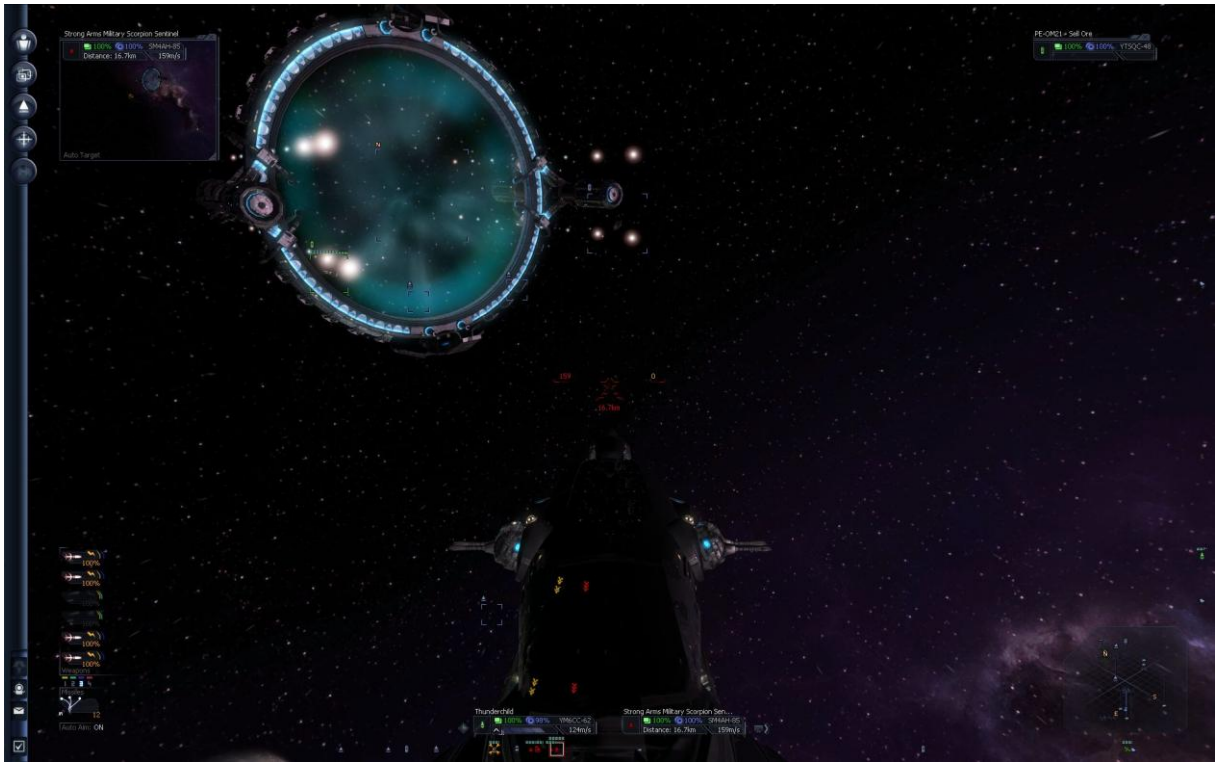
With the escort removed I switch turrets to missile defence, load ION-D in each one to give me all around protection and bring down the shields. The Minotaur fires a few rounds of Flails at me but with my EM defence not a single missile gets thru. Shields down and I jump my TP up north and deploy troops..



.. It seems they elected to split into two teams because I get a fail message on the hull followed by a successful breach so it looks like one guy tried to go solo. You can see him heading back to the TP here..



.. With my team onboard I'm fairly confident they'll do the job and I'm just sitting back to wait it out when..



.. it all goes a bit wrong. Ok, seems I have a problem here. A moment ago there was an M7M in front of me the next it's jumped.. taking all my Mercs with it. Not good. So I'm sat there looking

stupid, wondering what I'm going to do next when my comm beeps and a really rather pleased with itself Teladi voice informs me they've captured the ship! That's nice, care to let me know where it is? I start checking nearby sectors and then realise that's a dumb move and just look under my ship list and yep...

.. there she is and hadn't gone too far.

Debrief:
Another successful zero-plan mission. That can't continue. I suspect the Misfits did most of the grunt-work but at least the other guys made for good meatshields. As it was there were only two casualties although one was unfortunately Olmanckelttak, which is a bit of a shame as he was getting to be quite good.

Anyways, another M7M to add to the fold, now I really need to work on that missile complex..

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'

1x Hermes 'Training- 02'
1x Express 'Carjacker'
5,800,000cr

Not a hugely successful day today.

My ghetto chip complex has finally coughed up enough chips to leave me with 515 units which is just a little over what I require for Mahi Ma and upon delivery that satisifies him enough to get this Hub thing slightly working. He reckons it's some big machine for rerouting jumpgates which sounds interesting and he needs me to choose a target point for it. I think just about anywhere other than between Xenon sectors will do but I have a plan..

I'm wondering if I can use it to annex off a chunk of the galaxy, say the pirate sectors from Split Fire -> Hatikvahs and split those sectors off from the rest of the gate network. Unfortunately I've only got one go at this until he can fix some more of it so I go for the east gate of Split Fire as the first one. Sadly it seems Mahi Ma's theories of how it works aren't quite right or I misunderstood. (It's probably me but I'm blaming him regardless) Anyway, it appears that what it actually does is insert itself BETWEEN jumpgates, kinda like a bridge. I'm not sure that's going to achieve what I'm after..

Anyways, it's done now and appears to be working ok, only problem now is the crazy Boron now wants me to acquire for him the entire mineral content of a small solar system in order to fix the next widget. This is going to require some thought..

Dropping down into Olmancketslats later on a satellite replacement run I discovered what had killed off the last one. It's that Pirate Centaur I saw many moons back, or at least one of his cousins. Now while I certainly have very little complaints about my HCP one of the few is that it's geared for war and consequently doesn't have a Tractor beam mount. The Pirate Centaur does however as well as having a funky paintjob. I need a tug and this is going to be it.

Except it's not because I manage to screw up what should by rights be a simple capture. Four Dragonflies pop the four Harriers escorting and then it's quad-ION-D to burn the guns out, so far so good. I decide he's too quick to use a dropship on so I call in one of my M7M's to pod some guys over. Unfortunately this particular Centaur was massively undershielded, only 2x25mj so they recharge quite quickly which means I can't switch to M7M, fire pod and switch back in time to keep the shields below danger point. This means I'm going to have to rely on a shield supressor..

Now the smart move would have been to call in a dedicated Blastclaw to do the job since they've proven excptionally suited to the task in the past,.. so of course I didn't do that. I decide to be clever and let my HCP do the job for me. Not cool. HCP is good but it does handle like a bit of a cow and suffice to say after some general wallowing around and minimal achievement the auto-n00b decided the solution to the problem was a head-on collision. Were that not bad enough, having knocked off 90% of the Centaurs hull, it then decided to finish it off with missiles despite me telling it specifically not to use them.. <sigh>

Finally, just to cap off the day I somehow managed to lose a couple Mercs during transfer between ships. I'm still not quite sure how but I definitely ended up with less than I started with. I'm guessing they weren't too happy at being pressganged into service and decided to do a runner..

About the only bright spot to it all is my latest batch of Mercs are at 3-star and are ready to rock. Consequently, Operation: 'Dude Where's my car??' which is the long-planned smash and grab raid for a Split Elephant will kick-off tomorrow and should all go well I'll end up with my TL.

We'll see...

Operation: 'Dude?, Where's my car??'

Mission objective is a smash and grab raid on one of the Split core sectors to acquire a Split TL. The goal will be to get in, hijack the target and get out again as fast as possible as my prescence in sector is likely to cause a bit of a stir.

The target for this mission is the TL Hospital ship currently ambling around Thuruks Pride. This ship was chosen specifically as it has the happy benefit of being completely unarmed so no need to disarm any turrets. Simply drop shields and pod in, as soon as the ship is captured, evac asap.

Ships for this Op will include:
HCP 'Thunderchild' (Target suppression and area defence)
M7M 'Shoot First' (Boarding ops)
M3+ Medusa 'Questionable Ethics' (Decoy/Jumpdrive transfer)

I'm also experimenting with some new hardware today, specifically the Hornet missile. I've chosen to use this one because it does a speedy 186m/s while packing a nice round 200Mj warhead. This is convenient for my purposes as TL class ships mount 200Mj shields so I can very precisely reduce my targets shields to 0% at distance. Plus if anything tries to interfere I can punch it in the face.. really hard.

First run doesn't go well. jumping from staging ground in Nopileos into Thuruks I have to close 25km to target and my M7M isn't that fast. By the time I'm down to 10km I've already attracted the attention of the local Python and even tho I've convinced it to chase my Medusa extra M6 forces have arrived in-system from the north and south gates and are rapidly chasing down my decoy..

.. Forced to jump my Medusa out to safety just causes all opponents to turn on me and I'm only barely in strike range of the TL. There's a time to fight and a time to not fight and knowing which is which is a fine line sometimes. This time tho I'm clearly outgunned so accept my defeat graciously and call an abort.

Despite being forced to turn tail in Thuruks the game is not over yet. it's always good to have a plan B and I've got one in Family Pride. Jumping to the west gate the sector seems fairly clear, just a few police M4/M5's in the area which are no threat and my target..

.. and he's not too far away tho he's heading for the Equipment dock. I jump in my M7M behind me and order him to follow as we go in hot pursuit of the TL Arena. I'm very carefully making sure I stay within 5km of my M7M at all times because I need to be able to transport over and fire a pod. The sector is still clear of any immediate danger to me and I'm rapidly closing the gap on him when suddenly..

.. uh-oh, that's a Raptor and he's locked on me and heading in on full power. I don't know how well armed it is, I don't particularly want to find out. Either way I don't have time to mess around with it so it needs removing. Switching to Hammerheads I fire off a salvo of three and as soon as the first strikes I follow it up with a half-dozen Hornets just to make sure before sending five after the TL to knock out his 1Gj of shielding..

With the TL's shields reduced to tatter and the M1 destroyed I quickly transport back to my M7M, fire a pod at the TL and while it's tracking in switch back to my HCP and tap the shields to keep them down. A successful pod attachment and my guys are in and doing their stuff. I call my Medusa back in as I'll hopefully be needing him in a minute. Meantime a quick check on the sector map shows the M1 going up left some goodies behind..

.. Bonus! The boarding op drags on for a fair while and I'm starting to get the impression it's not going well when eventually..

.. Result.

Debrief:
A bit of a false start in Thuruks and it wasn't quite the quick-in, quick-out I was originally aiming

for. And the boarding operation did indeed go badly. I managed to lose three squaddies doing it including one 3-star fighter so that was a tough nut to crack. The chief issue I think is relying on the M7M to pod troops across. It may be easier and help them breach the hull but the Minotaur itself is not a fast-mover so sec-def gets time to respond.

Mission accomplished tho. Next time I'll attempt an EVA capture I think.

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Elephant
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
1x Hermes 'Training- 02'
1x Express 'Carjacker'
7,200,000cr

Some of you may have gotten the impression that I'm good at what I do. I plan to dispel that particular myth. More on that later..

I've chosen to place my initial support complex in the two unknown sectors past Unholy Descent. I've scouted out the area between the two and there's enough minerals to support a sizeable industrial setup as well as it being safely out the way of any marauding lunatics. Downside is most of the silicon is in asteroids that are massive distances from each other so there's going to be a fair bit of tractor beam work required to bring it all together. I must track down another pirate Centaur somewhere..

Meantime in order to fund the build project I'm aiming to place down there I've raided my UTHQ piggybank which had built up a nice 11 million to date and have been using the cash to do station delivery missions with my new Elephant. It's a pretty good earner and noone tries to kill you. Ideal mission in my book. An afternoon of chasing around the universe and I've built up sufficient cash to make a substantial start on the basic infrastructure of ny complex.

With the basics in place and manufacturing starting up I'm now both poor and in the mood for misbehaviour. My squaddies are now all fully trained 3-stars so it's time they got to work. If I'm going to achieve my ultimate goal of capturing a Brigantine of my own then I'll be needing some good fighters so these guys need to get some training time in.

I've previously laid an Advsat network throughout all the pirate sectors so I can keep tabs on what's passing (Oddly, I have to keep replacing the Hatikvahs one cos somebody keeps taking it out) and a quick check thru reveals nothing of any special interest aside from a Carrack in Dannas Chance, but I'm not feeling brave enough to take on a full M7 yet. Just on the off-chance tho I flick

thru a couple other advsats I've got up and spot an HCP in Nathans Voyage heading west. Cool, I could always do with a second one of those and with my current hardware I reckon this should be a relatively simple mission, however it turns out that I have absolutely no idea what I'm talking about.

My plan went something along the lines of pick up the HCP inside the unknown sector to avoid any defenders, strip his weapons, pod over, capture, go home smiling. How it actually went down wasn't much like that at all. Initially all went well, hit him hard, switched to ION-D and fried him good and proper.. and then managed to screw up the M7M switch to the point that my first pod ended up hitting his shields and half the team got fried, the other half winding up in space.

Realising the need to speed up the pod launch I decided on a different approach. The HCP had 200Mj shields so I fired a single Hornet in a wide arc and while it tracked in I switched ships and got my pod ready. The instant the Hornet hit and zeroed the HCP's shield I fired my pod... just as the HCP swung round and fired his one remaining CIG and took out my entire team.. Entirely my fault for being greedy and trying to capture a free CIG..

Burning out the last of his weapons I tried again and my last pod seemed to blow up early or not connect properly or something as my mercs ended up floating in space instead of attached to his hull. So now we're in the situation of a whole bunch of marines in the area trying to capture an HCP going 5x faster than them. I'm just thinking this isn't going very well when the Khaak arrive..

The first thing I spot is a missile on my gravidar but since I've not got a lock warning I'm wondering where it came from.. Khaak interceptor apparently.. targeting my Mercs. I watch as the missile curves around and vaporises one of the poor blokes. Oh, well I guess it was quick. Dealing swift retribution to the incoming Khaak units I switch to my TP and go pick up my remaining floating squaddies. For some reason tho, when my TP scooped up my mercs I wound up with a cargobay full of passengers instead of soldiers. I guess the trauma of the day has shell-shocked them to the point of forgetting their training.

The HCP has given up and is now dead in space but I've no mercs left to capture it with. Of the 15 I started the day with I now have just 7 remaining.. It's been a very costly excercise and I've absolutely nothing to show for it.

And so I find myself ending my day parked up next to a dead in space Argon HCP, firing the odd wasp missile at encroaching Khaak scouts and wondering where it all went wrong while my remaining squaddies are sent off for retraining. I plan to stay here until they're done. Given the amount of grief this HCP has given me there is absolutely no way in hell I'm leaving this spot until it's mine.

Today has been mostly spent staring at the fat arse of an HCP while I remotely go about running my freighters around and my boarding crew of numpties get themselves reacquainted with the process of holding a gun the correct way around and shouting threatening piratical type slogans.

It's also transpired that what I thought yesterday was an unfortunate run in with elements of a broken cluster was not actually the case. This sector seems to have a heavy Khaak prescence to the point that my babysitting was interrupted by a fairly unpleasant looking Khaak M6 which I had to move to intercept. I've subsequently had a couple more show up over the day and I'm somewhat concerned about a KM2 putting in an appearance as that would force me to abandon my prize.

A short while ago things took an interesting turn when I got an unexpected visitor..

.. two for the price of one is always welcome and this time I didn't try and be clever about it and just got the job done. Strip, disable and subdue. A short while later and with a bit of judicious tug work (ie, ramming) I get a nice picture..

.. When my mercs finally get back here (about 50% trained now) I should be fine for both. Happy days!

FREEDOM!!!

Finally, after a day and a half cooped up in this godforsaken hellhole at the arse-end of the universe, the cretins that I employ to capture ships for me have finally got there sorry carcasses trained up to the level of 'monkey-with-a-gun'.

It has not been a fun time baby-sitting my charges chiefly because those little purple horrors have been harassing me constantly. It got to the point where I eventually decided to go porcupine, called in my entire capital fleet, set up a box around the two HCP's and then set turrets to fire at will. Elephants these days seem able to pack quite a nice array of weaponry, I've got Ion-Shard Railguns and Flak on mine and with me lobbing the odd missile into the mix that made for quite a nice kill-zone.

Anyways, with my last seven squaddies having finally got here and done their job (bady I might add as yet another five of them managed to get themselves killed) I can finally get of here. It's been a long operation but the end result is somewhat satisfying. I'm now the owner of three HCP's and in the process have accounted for:

KM3 x45
KM4 x26
KM5 x145
KM6 x9

It's some consolation for what they did to my Kestrel, not enough, but it's a start..

My main manufacturing power complex is getting up to speed way down south. It seems I slightly miscalculated the food requirements tho so it's overproducing Bofu by quite a bit. Not to worry tho, it gives room for expansion later. Trouble is tho it's cost me an absolute fortune to get it up and running so I'm now skint for cash which means it's going to be a while before I can fix up my two new HCP's. Meantime they'll just have to keep Mahi Ma company in Hub dry-dock.

Plans for tomorrow, locate a tractor beam for one. My freighter pilots supplying silicon to my power-plex aren't too happy about having to ship it 200km and since my Elephant can allegedly fit one that solves the tug problem. I'm also going to need some equipment to outfit my HCPs so a piracy run in Nopileos perhaps.. Then again I'm now critically short of Mercs being down to my last two so that means no more boarding ops for a while. I've already had to watch several opportunites go sailing past becuase I don't have the tools for the job. Perhaps a capturing run might be in order instead?

We'll see.. .

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x HCP 'Walk Softly'
1x HCP 'Big Stick'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Elephant 'Fatboy'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype

3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
1x Hermes 'Training- 02'
1x Express 'Carjacker'
400,000cr

Thinking it would be a grand idea to outfit my new HCP's with weapons and shields and even grander if I didn't have to pay for them I jumped my entire fleet (2xM7M, 2xHCP, Scavenger TS) into Nopileos Memorial and setup halfway between the centre of the sector while I headed in to scan traders for stealable things. There was a Pirate Carrack wandering back and forth between the east/west gates flakking eveything in sight and generally making a right old racket but for some reason or other the pirates seem to be back on friendly terms with me just lately so he wasn't a concern, just bloody noisy. I'm guessing the vast amount of cash I've been funnelling into pirate training programs may have boosted my rep with them some.

Anyways, we're all ok for a while, I'm busy doing things of a piratical nature, I've even got a couple freighters to bail, when I suddenly notice a bunch of red dots on my gravidar. Now they're not the odd red dot of Split traders in the trade lane, these red dots are way off to the side. With the distinct impression this is unlikely to be a good thing and/or that general feeling of impending doom I bring up the sector map and yep, there's a P and flurry a Xenon fighters coming up thru the south gate and heading right for my practically unarmed and undershielded fleet. And I don't think they're looking to be friends.

Now you'ld probably rightly say it's my own fault for setting up on the doorstep of a Xenon sector but in my defence I'ld like to say that in all the time I've spent pirating in this sector not once since day one have I seen so much as a single, solitary N come thru that gate, much less a complete P task force. It seemed fairly safe to me. Well they're here now and while my personal desire would be to RSLG my very expensive and hard won fleet will get totally shredded if I do. Looks like I'm going to have to fight my way out of this one.

Short-jumping to the south gate I start dumping missiles at everything in sight and go straight for the P since that is currently the biggest threat. By this point there's a fairly sizeable amount of fighters around me. I'm not quite sure how many but a quick sector check shows lots, ranging from LX down to N. The P evidently doesn't like being prodded with Wasps and turns to engage me which suits me fine. The fighters have found me by now and and as we close to firing range I'm taking light PBE fire as I open up and take him out in one pass.

A quick look behind me and I'm really not liking how many Xenon I can see, especially since they seem to like packing PBE these days. Fortunately I do still have a trick up my sleeve in my M7M's. I've tested the Flail individually before just to see what they do but I've never actually tried the volley-fire command as I've never had enough missiles to be able to waste testing it. Well if ever there was a time to test run it I'm thinking now would probably be it so I get 'Shoot First' to target an M and 'Ask Questions Later' to target another and tell them to have fun. Meantime the M/N/s are all over me by now and my 800Mj is depleting at an alarming rate so I emergency jump to the south gate again..

Arriving at the jumpgate with around 18% shield left I'm greeted by the beautiful sight of a mass of twirling yellow swarm missiles streaking out from my M7M's towards the enemy. The good thing about the Flail is it's self-targeting so as soon as the first Xenon goes down they'll reacquire a new target and chase that down. I'm not sure how many my M7M's accounted for and how many went down to me sat at the gate hurling Dragonflies at anything that moved but the rest of the Xenon fighters went down pretty fast and aside from an LX and a couple L I had to chase down that was

job done.

Unfortunately that's my entire stock of Flails expended and my M7M's are now completely toothless, but given I could so easily have lost both HCP's I think I got off lightly. Learnt my lesson too.. I'll be setting up piracy ops on the OTHER side of the trade lane in future..

Deciding that was enough trauma for one day I headed down to my Hub loop which, after much deliberation and in a spasm of creative genius, I've decided to call 'Hub Loop' and did some admin work organising freighters. I've split it into two seperate loops, one for Teladianium and one for Ore since I might as well get a headstart on the ore production being as that Boron git wants 450,000 units of the stuff.

While I'm there I notice a 'Paranid Employee Shuttle' on my Gravidar which is odd because a) I've set my stations to not trade with anyone else and b) this is an unknown sector so there's no other reason he should be visiting. Being the curious type I wander over to see what he's up to and apparently he's decided he wants to dock at my power loop. Well I've decided no he's not but, I wouldn't mind another TP. Explaining to the captain why I'ld like to borrow his Hermes until say, the end of time, it appears he can't fault my argument and graciously hands it over.. and what do you think I find when I check in his hold..?

.. I reckon that just solved my Merc problem.

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D
1x HCP 'Walk Softly'
1x HCP 'Big Stick'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Elephant 'Fatboy'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'

1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
2x Hermes
1x Express 'Carjacker'
100,000cr

Problems, problems, problems...

With the capture of the Hermes and the press-ganging of it's passengers into the Squiddy Space Corps. I'm pretty sorted for meatshields for a while, I just need to get them trained up some. Unfortunately being civvies they're all completely inept at anything involving ship boarding which means I'm having to train them right up from practically nothing.. this is both spamming my messagebox with a colossal amount of crud and costing me a small fortune as the little suckers bleed me dry.

'Hub Loop' is busy whining about lack of energy cells partly because I screwed up my resource allocations but mostly because I'm trying to get a single XL-SPP to power far more than it's physically capable because I built too big an Ore and Teladianium complex. I'm going to have to supplement it externally somehow. Just to be extra difficult it turns out that Mahi Ma is being a pain in the arse and won't accept any Ore until he's got all the Teladianium he needs. This is a problem as I had originally planned to run the two loops together and do both at once, however it seems that isn't going to work so my ore complex is busy cranking out Ore that I'm going to have to find someplace to store. I worked it out, I need 450,000 units of the stuff and at 8x storage per unit that works out at a cool 3,600,000 storage units needed.. or 60 Mammoths worth.. Urk..

I'm also running low on specialist armaments (which is admittedly my fault as I keep firing them at people) and I'ld quite like to build a supply complex to keep myself in Hornets. I've decided Hornets are my most favouritist missile to date. Aside from a slightly poor turn rate they have it all, good speed, good range and 200Mj of KABOOM!!! that does quite cheerfully obliterate whatever you aim it at. I like that in a missile. I also of course need something to feed my poor M7M's which are feeling a little emasculated at present.

I've also got two HCP's in need of equipping so they can do something more useful than dangling off a docking clamp and then there's the small issue of my fleet running around on about 65% hull. Sadly all these things require money, lots of it, I'm probably looking at about 40mill purely for repairs..

On the plus side it turns out the couple TS captures I made shortly before getting jumped by Xenon the other day included a couple Mercuries so I'll be delivering them to them mad Goners soon. I'm hoping they wont ask too many questions about the scorch marks..

Plan for the day tho is track down and capture another bomber, I've got a fair mass of Tomahawks I've accumulated to date but no platform to launch them from since I managed to blow up my previous Hades. I'm not sure if they'll bail outside of defence missions but I'll be finding out..

Apparently helping out the Goners wasn't such a grand idea after all. Ended up biting off a bit more than I could chew.

We were all fine delivering the three freighters they requested and they didn't even query the condition they came in, which is just as well cos it would have been kindof tricky to explain that one to a pacifist. Build 'em a Teladianium factory? Yep, no probs. Got 'Fatboy' on the case and job done in no time. Even rescued the Elder Council from a couple of ne'er do wells.. tho quite what their panic was I've no idea since their ship seems to employ the same type of invulni-armour that Ban Danna likes to cower behind. In hindsight tho I probably should have left them to it as by this point they'ld got this funny notion I was going to rescue all their little Goner buddies too. Altruism not really my strongpoint.

To be fair tho they have been paying me quite well to not really do a whole lot and that's not really the kind of business relationship you want to sour so I guess I can run a few escort missions.

Now you wouldn't think that a bunch of hippy do-gooders could really get themselves into too much strife, but you'ld be wrong. I'm not sure how, I'm not sure what they did, I'm fairly sure I don't even want to know what they did, but somehow or other these Goner chaps have really annoyed somebody. I'm not talking your average call somebody savoury names when they nick your docking clamp space kindof annoyed.. more your stab them to death with a rusty spoon kindof annoyed. Which I think you'ld agree is fairly annoyed. Hopping down to Bright Profit to escort a freighter I'm set to deal with a couple pirate troublemakers. Instead I get swamped by a pirate armada..

Wings of ships and not just fighters, M6 too. All after one little freighter. Good for him they came up from the south because I was able to intercept them but that's a little overkill there, I was half expecting a Brigantine to show up any second. With the TS safely away I thought that was it, but no, seems another Goner under attack elsewhere. Turns out anything in the surrounding sectors with a Goner tag on it is wearing a target as these pirates are after it in force. The next TS I don't make it in time as the pirate M5s reach it way before I can get there, the next couple missions are station defence which is much easier and then it's another ship protection.

It's a Goner Ranger to protect, this time tho I'm ready for it. I jumped my support-hauler in during a lull in missions and loaded up on Disruptors. As expected the M5's break away for the Ranger but they've got Disruptors after them at the 28Km mark and as they're arriving at the Ranger so my Disruptors are arriving up their tailpipes. The rest is M3 and bigger and no problem for 'Thunderchild' to handle.

Then they want me to go re-capture one of their ships. Unfortunately it's quite literally guarded by eight Centaurs/Ospreys and being a professional coward I'm very much not inclined to take that lot on simultaneously. Normally I'ld resort to high-explosives at this point and use a Hammerhead to blow them all up but my Goner employers very specifically requested I recapture their ship not atomise it so that rules that out.

Plan B is call in Gold-wing so they can give me a help AND use high-explosives. I tell you no plan is ever sound without some suitable application of high-explosive somewhere along the line. I'm limiting myself to Hornets and Thunderbolts tho.

With Gold-wing guarding my back I go to full throttle, fire a swarm of missiles on the way in and plough thru the centre of the pack taking out an Osprey on the way thru while missiles impact all around me. Swinging back around for a second pass it seems a lot of my missiles made it thru and Gold-wing is busy causing mayhem. With the damage my missile-volley inflicted on their shields, Gold-wing mixing it up and me spraying HEPT and PBG everywhere it's a fairly short and brutal fight. Sadly Gold-1 got fried but job done. Apparently I was supposed to send in marines to capture the Goner M6 but it turned out I could just claim it normally which is just as well as all my guys were in training anyway.

Anyways, now I find myself trailing a pirate Blastclaw back to his base of operations and so far he's heading towards Malestrom.. I have a horrible feeling I'm in for a very long and boring tracking job all the way to Gaian Star..

Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
6x HEPT, 2x PBG, 3x PBE, 3x ION-D

1x HCP 'Walk Softly'
1x HCP 'Big Stick'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
1x Elephant 'Fatboy'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
2x Blastclaw Prototype
3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
2x Hermes
1x Express 'Carjacker'
650,000cr

Yep, a long boring trip to Gaian Star which isn't as bad as it sounds actually as the last time I was down this way the pirates didn't seem to like me too much and I got chased. This time around tho I seem back on half-decent terms with them, I've no idea how or why, but they're blue to me aside from a couple fighters.. and even they ignored me. Just as well really as there was a Galleon camped by the west gate and as I passed thru into Gaian Star there was not one but two (count'em!) Carracks laying in flak range the other side of the gate.

Trailing on down to the pirate base in the west which is apparently the source of the trouble I get commed from my Goner employer who's made a break for it and wants picking up. Well I'm sure that would be nice but there is the small problem of the pirate base that's just dumped half a dozen M6's between him and me. I'm largely out of missiles by this point and no more inclined to tackle this lot alone than I was the last lot, especially since they seem to be spamming CIG fire my direction and I know for a fact that stuff hurts when one M6 is hitting you with it let alone six.. Discretion seems the order of the day here so I loop around them using my speed advantage, do a flyby grab of the goner dude and RSLG-JD out of here.

Turns out he's most appreciative of the rescue (yeah, I should hope so!) but feels these pirates are going to be a continuing probelm until they're dealt with so he'ld like me to destroy their base. Now this seems a distinctly un-Gonerlike attitude to me, they allegedly being all peace and fluffy bunnies normally, but I guess when you get enough people trying to kill you then it's probably good to develop some flexibility in your faith. Anyways it's an idea I can get behind, I'm all for blowing stuff up (for profit obviously) and I'll get right on it.. right after I sort out my Hub Loop which is all going a bit pear-shaped.

I really need to sort out the resourcing of this thing properly and I also need to sort out the whole storage issue because I'm rapidly running out of places to shove ore and my freighters are running

ragged trying to keep it all ticking over. I've also managed to lose another freighter to a pirate Caravel sometime while I was busy saving Goners. I checked my sat network all around that area with murder in mind but it appears they made a clean getaway which doesn't make me happy.

On the plus side it seems the Elder Council were suitably grateful at my rescuing their never really in any particular danger ship and have decided to gift it to me which is very thoughtful. It's not a particularly outstanding ship in any way other than the quite staggering array of weapons it seems it can mount, which would be a little more impressive if it had weapon generator with slightly more kick than a AA battery, but for free I can't complaint too much even if out of that vast array of weapon selections it fails to be able to mount the one single weapon that would give it a practical use for me.. a tractor beam. Oh well..

With my Hub Loop semi-functionally back on track, at least for the time being, it's back to Gaian Star with enough explosives to the level the place three times over. I'm all set to do exactly that when the Goner guy I rescued early suddenly pops in behind me in a Goner HCP, because of course the obvious thing to do when you've just recently been rescued from a pirate sector is hop on the nearest ship and head straight back there... Anyways it seems he doesn't want me to blow the pirate base up, he wants me to deliver them a load of spaceweed to lull them into a false sense of security and then enough Squash mines to crack a moon and THEN blow them up. That seems a kindof overly elaborate and sneaky plan to me and I'm not really seeing the difference myself given I've already got enough firepower to blitz it right now but hey, he's the one paying.

So I get the weed, I get the Squash mines. The pirates evidently being too drunk and/or stoned to realise I'm the same person who shot up their ships earlier happily let me land. Some Terran guy hops onboard and suggests that we might want to leave really, really quickly and the place subsequently blows sky high. See, now I could have done that and none of the cloak and dagger intrigue required. Hopping back to Elysium of Light I'm thanked for my help and apparently that concludes my business dealings with these crazy Goner dudes.

Interestingly the Goner HCP I saw earlier is on patrol duty in sector.. all alone..

Yarrr!

Well it was an exciting day today..

I transferred some funds, bought some ore mines, ordered some freighters around, sat in an empty sector while my TL built a spaghetti-plex, transferred some more funds, ordered my freighters back the other way, transferred some more funds, added a bit more to the spaghetti-plex, transferred some more funds, ordered my freighters to go both ways at the same time, added more ore mines, transferred some funds, ordered my freighters to go both ways at the same time while travelling thru time and space... and transferred some more funds.

It's hard work this pirating lark..

The ore situation is getting somewhat critical, I'm literally down to cramming it into any and every crevice on any ship I own that can physically get the stuff thru the airlock and I'm still not quite keeping up with the production rate of my Ore-plex. I need additional storage space and I need it very, very soon. I think my current band of ex-Paranid shuttle passengers are trained enough to get out there and save the day so tommorow will see the kick off of Operation 'If it ain't nailed down...' which should alleviate some of the pressure..

Operation: 'If it ain't nailed down...'

Objectives for this mission were two-fold. Primary mission goal was to secure much needed additional storage space for my Ore-plex to dump its overproduction. With this in mind I needed to

get as much bang per buck from my Mercs so that means big ships and they don't come much bigger than the Mammoth. Selected targets for this mission were the unarmed civilian types which are found only in core sectors which tend to be patrolled by capital ships, so operations needed to be carried out with a degree of alacrity or else I'ld wind up with an M2 breathing down my neck.

Secondary goal was the acquisition of selected additional targets that my recon crew had picked up and been busy tailing for a while now with a view to bolstering my fleet of warships. Being mobile these could be approached at a point much more of my choosing. Given operations on this type of target require a greater time investment this reduces the danger of the authorities getting wind of what I'm up to and spoiling my fun.

Finally, a tertiary goal was designated as 'targets of opportunity' which includes anything I happened to bump into and took a liking to while out and about achieving my main goals.

Troops for the mission consisted of a platoon of 30 Mercs designated 'The Expendable Mooks' comprised mainly of an ex-Paranid Engineering team. I was hoping their engineering expertise might come in handy even if their fighting skills were a little subpar. Hopefully not only would they get the job done but there's always the chance some of them might actually develop a small talent for war and as I'm going to need some decent troops for my Brigantine capture operation a little training couldn't hurt.. unless they all died horribly of course.

Main loadout for the mission included the now standard Hornet and Dragonfly/Wasp mix with the addition of a new toy I was using specifically for this op, the Firestorm Heavy Torpedo. I chose this one specifically because it does exactly 1Gj of damage. A Mammoth conveniently mounts 5x200Mj shields for a grand total of 1Gj. This meant I could fire at my target, switch to my M7M and have a boarding pod queued up and ready to fire. The instant the Firestorm went off the Mammoths shields were at 0% and pods away. This gave me plenty of time to switch back to 'Thunderchild' and accelerate in to keep the shields low. Minimum shots fired at target meant in-system defence forces were slow to realise what mischief I was perpetrating.

When the capture team were onboard and doing their thing I called in a jumpdrive equipped BCP with a full load of e-cells and as soon as the Mammoth was captured, docked, transferred jumpdrive and e-cells and was away before anything big enough to stop me could get in range. The few small police and military ships that attempted to intervene were summarily dispatched with Dragonflies.

Operations went smoothly in all areas right up until I got greedy attempting to capture an opportunistic Split Cobra before it could get thru the north gate of Split Fire into Elenas Fortune. Having spotted it late I wasn't in the position to take its escorts out at range and jumping in I landed right in the middle of the taskforce. Needing to take out the escorting split fighters quickly I fired on the Cobra to get it to abort its entry thru the gate then accelerated away from the Split fighters which by now were reacting to my attacking their taskforce leader and were pursuing me with a vengeance. Feeling rather clever with myself for having caught them in time I switched to the rear view, selected Thunderbolts and started to fire missiles at each of the pursuing Split. Feeling rather clever is however no substitute for actually being clever and after firing about five Thunderbolts I ploughed headfirst at maximum throttle into the nearest asteroid..

I'm not really sure how I managed to to fail to notice the looming kilometre wide rock directly in my flight path but I can assure you it makes for one hell of a fender-bender. I came to an abrupt halt, spilled my bofu-juice and 800Mj of shields instantly vanished along with 38% of my hull. Now this in itself is bad enough, I'm at a full stop and there's a horde of angry Split coming up fast behind me but it's about to get worse, much worse. Betty politely informs me that my jumpdrive used to be installed in the nose of my HCP and that no, its no longer functional. Couldn't be the freight-scanner could it?.. of course not..

It's at this point that the first PBE fire starts peppering my ship and with only fractional shields it takes them no time at all to strip what little I've got and start chewing into my hull. With no way to jump out my only option is to evade and fight them, so hugging the asteroid like an agoraphobic limpet I haul myself around the other side until the fighters break off and I'm no longer under PBE fire at which point my shields start to recharge to the point where I can safely fire missiles, and I do.. lots of them. I don't dare move so I just hug the asteroid and empty my tubes at everything in sight while Betty gives me a running inventory of all the equipment that used to be installed on my HCP and is now full of PBE holes and useless.

Fortunately I tend to carry lots of missiles and the amount I fire swamps the area sufficiently to save the day. At a cost tho..

.. Ouch.

The Cobra incidentally, sneaked off while I was busy getting my arse handed to me but chose to head up thru Farnhams Legend which was ultimately a mistake. Calling in a BCP to restore some much needed functionality to 'Thunderchild' I hopped up there and intercepted it at the north gate. No second chance.

Feeling I'ld pressed my luck far enough for one day I called a halt to operations and limped home for some R&R.

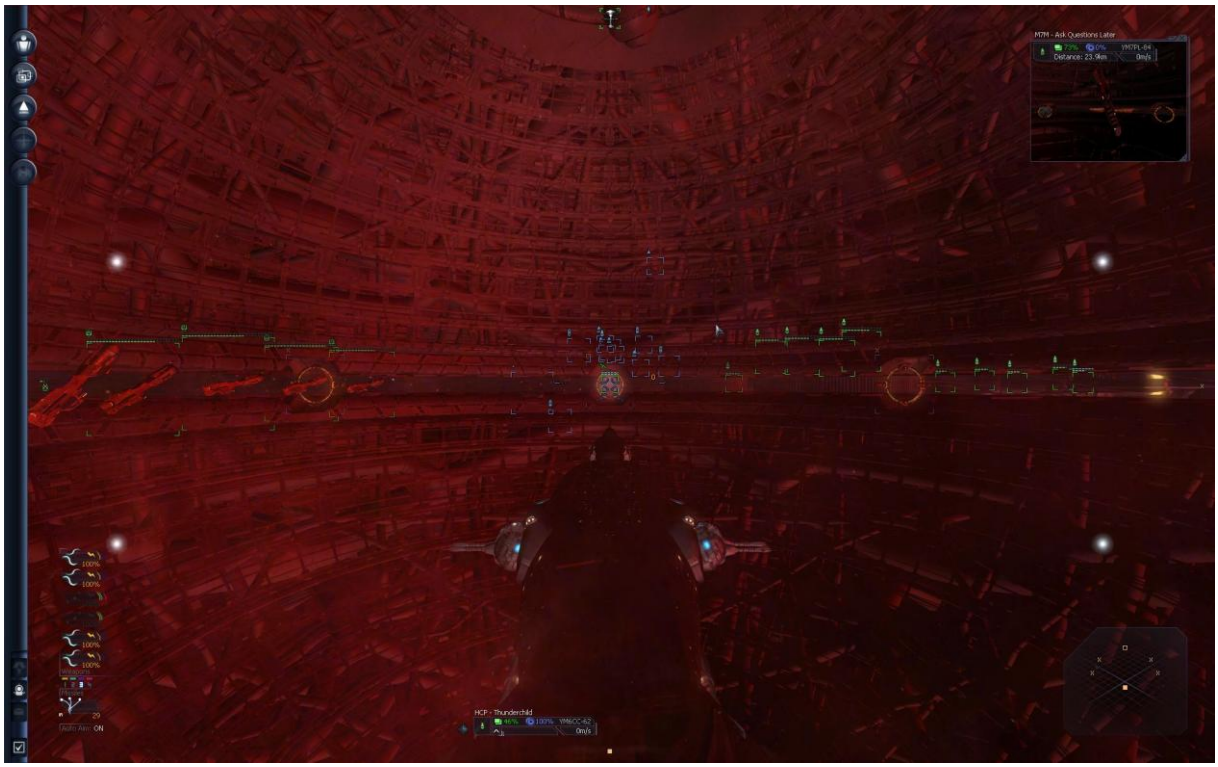
Debrief:

Despite some mindnumbing incompetence which is going to cost me a hell of a lot to fix, Operation:'If it ain't nailed down...' was an unqualified success..

.. total haul for the day, 5x TL, 3x M6, 2x M7M and 1x M8. Not bad.

'The Expendable Mooks' proved themselves to be mostly exactly that as they died in droves tho there are a couple guys left who have some good fight skill now. I'm not entirely sure what happened with Mammoth-05 as it appears the mission parameters of 'capture intact' were slightly misinterpreted by the squad involved as 'shoot the hell out of everything'. I guess that's what happens when you use an all-Split squad. The way they were going at the time I'ld assumed they were having trouble and were going to fail the capture op but as it turned out they were in actual fact the only squad that completed a mission without losing a single operative.

Makes for a nice view in-sector too..



Total Assets:

1x HCP 'Thunderchild'
4x 200Mj shield
4x CIG, 2x PBG, 4x PBE, 4x ION-D (Hornet/Dragonfly/Wasp)

5x HCP
1x M7M Minotaur 'Shoot First'
1x M7M Minotaur 'Ask Questions Later'
2x M7M Cobra
5x Mammoth
1x Hades
1x Elephant 'Fatboy'
1x Zephyras TM
1x Medusa 'Questionable Ethics'
1x Blastclaw
3x Blastclaw Prototype

3x Caiman SF - L
2x Caiman SF - S
1x Caiman Hauler 'Logistical Support'
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
1x Toucan Hauler 'Training - 01'
3x Hermes
1x Express 'Carjacker'

2,400,000cr
Teladianium remaining: 24,963
Ore remaining: 450,000

They say pride comes before a fall and apparently theres a certain truth to that one. Sitting looking at my new fleet arrayed across my hub sector a sudden thought crossed my mind, I'm missing a ship in that lineup..

Checking down my property list a couple times I can't see it, I'm fairly sure I didn't rename it.. could it be? A quick scan thru message log and...

.. well, nuts!

Bad enough to lose a unique ship. Worse still, having seen it could mount all those weapon types, I'ld filled it with a variety of very expensive equipment I was planning to field-test. I'm estimating around about 6mill in equipment up in smoke.

I am NOT amused and will be lodging a formal complaint with the relevant Paranid authorities in the near future.

Operation: 'Snowflake'

Thusly named because there's a whole heap of them floating down my browser at the moment or because I can't think of anything better right now. Take your pick.

Since it only requires 3-star mercs to reliably capture an M7M I made the assumption that an actual M7 would very likely be just as easy for the troops to deal with, provided of course they can get close enough. As far as I can tell the only real difference between the two is the M7 has guns, lots of guns, whereas the M7M has none, but can pack enough explosives to crack a moon.

So with that in mind I've been keeping an eye out for an underarmed M7 and today I found one I decided was vulnerable..

.. Quite a lot of firepower there still of course but it's much more the types that got me interested. IBL/CIG are pretty hefty weapons but the shot velocity is slow and provided you keep a safe distance and stay alert you can see it coming and dodge. The rest are all lighter weapons and are minimal threat but the big one here is the single, solitary flak weapon. I don't like flak, it's noisy, it's insta-hit and it blows up in your face and stops you seeing those incoming IBL rounds.

I picked him up in Desecrated Skies which is fairly well patrolled by military forces so first task was to get his attention and then lead him way off the centre of the sector so I wouldn't get interrupted. This proved easier than planned as it turned out he must have spotted me the same time I had him and was already moving to try and overhaul me. 70km off the centre I turn and we get to it.

CIGS are first up to batter his shields down and once down to about 10% I pull away and swap them out with ION-D. Heading back in I've now only got a 1km reach which means I have to get that much closer which puts me under more fire but that's what shields are for...

... When he gets me down to 25% I decide to back off for a bit, recharge shields some and see

how we're doing..

...Yep, he's lost a shield, which makes it much easier for my ION-Ds to fry him, and a few guns have gone as well. Rather pleasingly the flak cannon got disabled fairly quickly which made life much easier (and quieter). Once shields are back up to a healther margin I head back in for round

two. A few minutes later and.

.

... Excellent, all the weapons down the left side have been taken out which leaves a huge blindspot for me to slot myself into and take advantage of. I can hit him...

... but he can't hit me.

At this point I've pretty much got him. With no abilty to fight back I can pound him indefinitely so it's purely a matter of time now before he loses the remaining weapons. A little while later and we're nearly done..

... Just one more to go.

This ones a stubborn one and takes a good while to fry but eventually it goes and the target is dead in space. Time to call in the recovery crew..

... and a short while later..

.. yay!

Debrief:

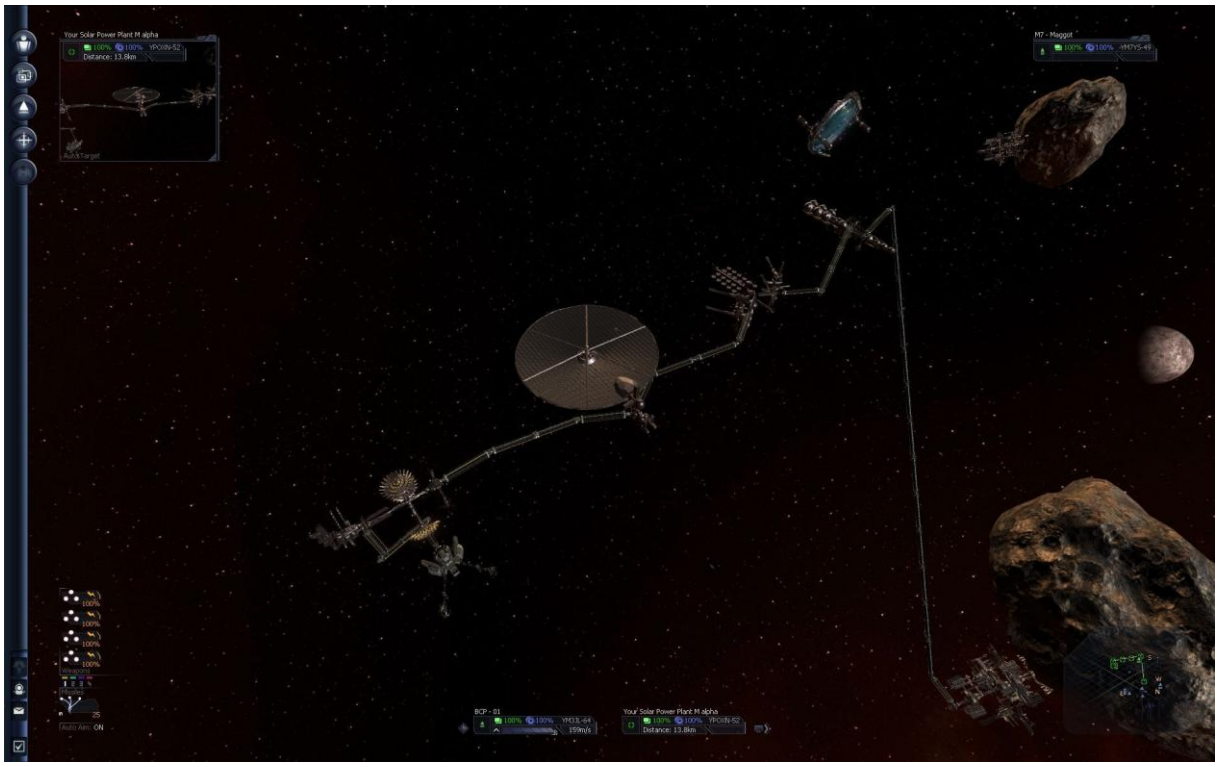
Yes, they made a bit of a pigs ear of that one again and shot up the hull far more than I personally consider was justified. It was a Split squad-leader again, I think I may have to reconsider the viability of having Split in leadership positions for future ops..

Mission accomplished tho so I guess one can't complain too much. M7 'Maggot' is now heading back to Hub HQ for refit and repair.

As a plus I now have something I can actually use some of those IBLS on. The lawyers are still in talks but should negotiations with the Paranid over compensation for the loss of my Truelight Seeker fail then that may come in handy..

Haven't really mentioned my factory complexs other than to say that they're there and that they're doing something useful. So being as all I did today was buildy-related things I thought I might do that instead.

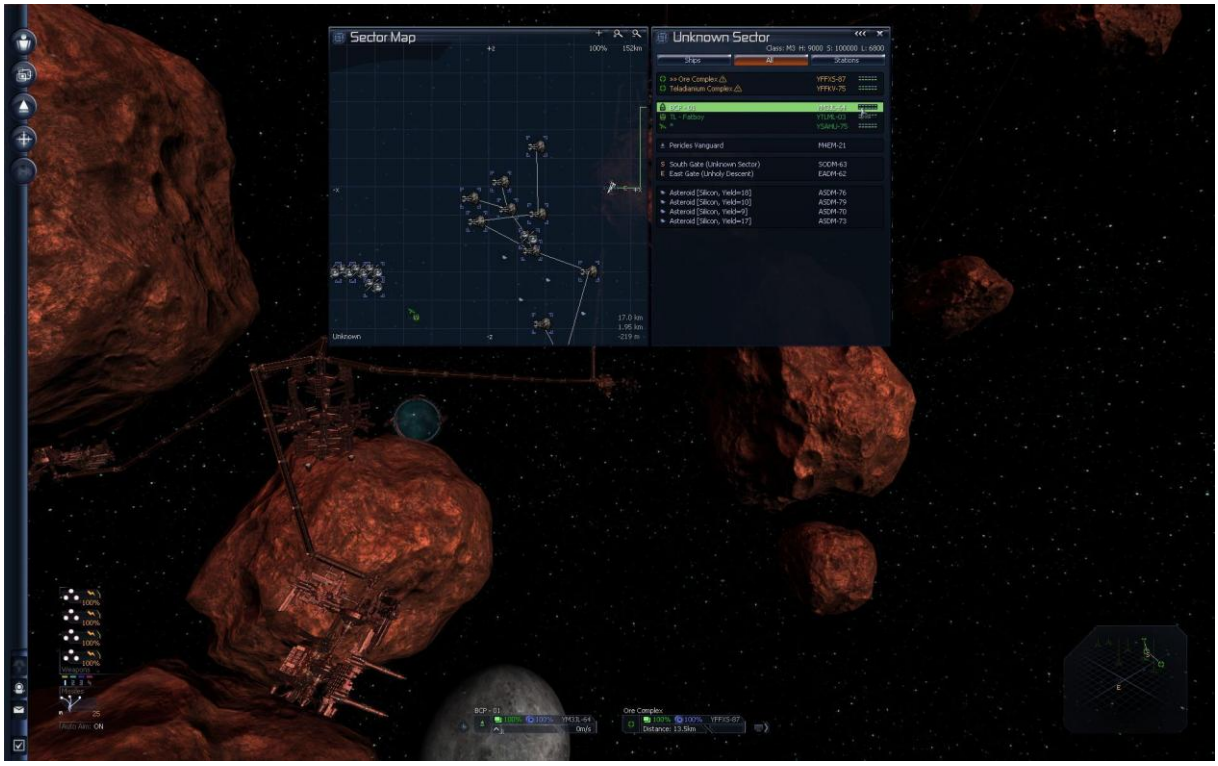
So, this here was the first little complex I put down..



.. based in Presidents End it produces Ore and an excess of Silicon and E-cells which it cells into the surrounding sectors. Might not sound much but it's actually an extremely profitable little thing given its size. Currently turned over to supplying E-cells to my Hub as a fueling base.

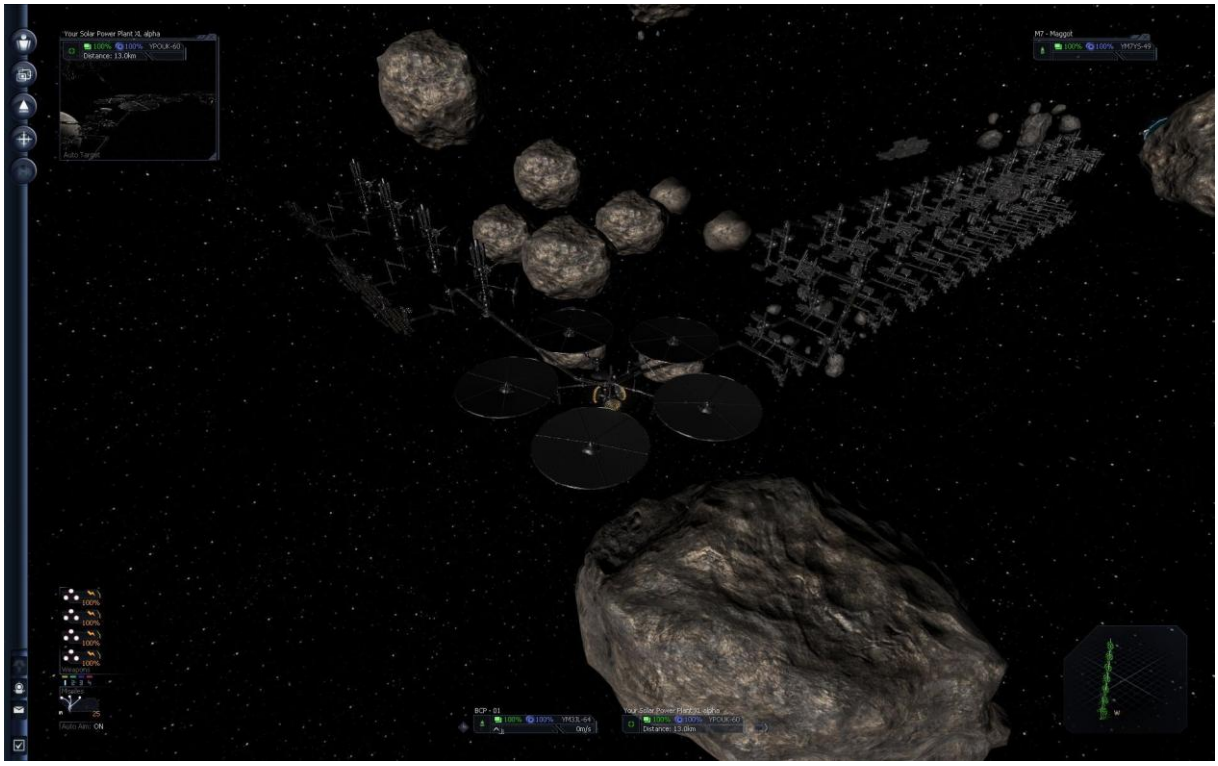
This is my main power-complex way down south of Unholy Descent. It's the one I screwed up the food resources for so it currently has a massive backstock of Bofu, but that'll come in handy somewhere else. Took a little while to build as I was adding bits over time but main feature is 12x Crystal fabs which is 2x and a bit more than it needs to run so it produces an excess of crystals. Recently I've been forcing it to try and power both my Teladianium complex..

.. which is all neat and pretty (and redundant now I've completed that phase) and also to power my Oreplex..



... which is a hideous monstrosity and gave me major headaches trying to store it all. Fortunately now that annoying Boron will actually let me deliver Ore that problem has gone away but it's still very hungry for E-cells and has to be fed extras regularly.

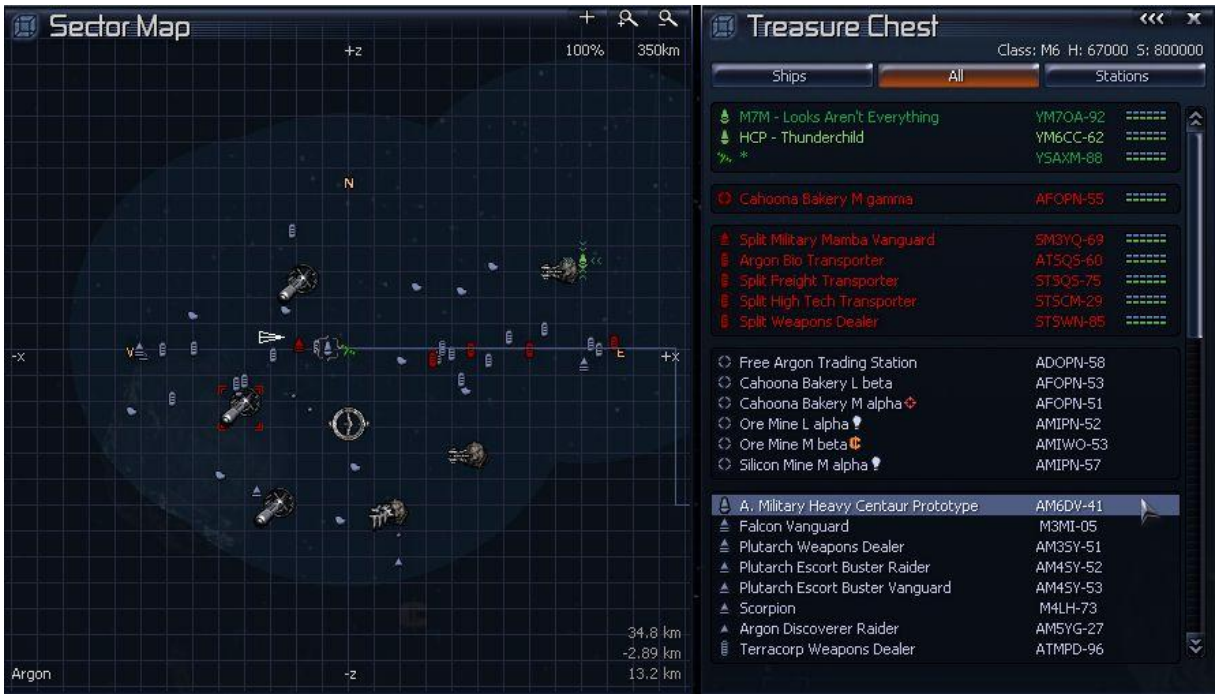
With the massive storage requirements gone that freed up a lot of ships and I decided to downsize my fleet to a minimum for the time being and use the cash to invest in a support complex. I opted to sell three of my M7Ms and retain one of the Cobras for now as they have a bit more speed and when you're doing hit and run on core sectors that helps. I also sold three of the mammoths and had a clear out of booty from my Hub. Net result was a fair wad of cash which I used to build my current engineering masterpiece..



.. 10x Flail Barrage and 10x Hammer Heavy Torpedo for a whole heap of explody goodness and all for just a shade over 90 Million which even left me enough to fix the hefty dent on the front of 'Thunderchild'.. It turns out tho I may have overdone this one a tad as it does seem to be cranking out torpedoes at a fair old rate of knots..

Since there seems a certain degree of interest in exactly how I go about capturing an HCP here's a boarding op from start to finish and exactly how it went down. Apologies for being slightly pic-heavy.

Ok, op takes place in Treasure Chest on an HCP recently disembarked from the Military Outpost in Blackhole Sun..



.. Ships for this op, HCP 'Thunderchild' and 'Looks Aren't Everything' which is my M7M Split Cobra. Bit of an ugly ship but does have a decent turn of speed for its class. (It also appears there's a Scorpion floating about in the sector which I need to get around to claiming at some point).

This is Thunderchilds standard loadout..

.. a wide selection of guns which I can swap in and out as the situation demands and a variety of missiles for dealing with different targets depending on whether I aim to poke it or atomise it. Downside to having all this equipment onboard is of course a fairly limited fuel supply but with my Split TL 'Fatboy' now converted to a mobile supply base it's not really a big deal. Fatboy, incidentally is currently sat up in Elysium of Light waiting for mission completion.

My weapon choices are as follows.

Main guns:
1: Concussion Impulse/Phased Repeater/ION-D
2: Concussion Impulse/Phased Repeater/ION-D
3: Pulse Beam
4: Pulse Beam
5: Concussion Impulse/Phased Repeater/ION-D
6: Concussion Impulse/Phased Repeater/ION-D

Turrets Left/Right
1: Energy Bolt Chaingun
2: Energy Bolt Chaingun

Turrets Back
1: Plasma Burst Generator
2: Plasma Burst Generator

Weapons 1,2 and 5,6 I swap out depending on how hard I want to batter the target.

So, dropping in behind the target HCP around the centre of the sector a quick scan reveals..

.. and his current weapon loadout..

.. which tells me he has both missiles and guns loaded. Now you might think frying a target with missilse onboard is a bad idea in case he fires one and blows himself up but it's been my observation from my dealings with HCPs to date that they NEVER fire their missiles unless they're pursuing a target. In order to achieve my goal tho I need to remove both so this is a two-stage deal. More on that later..

As this particular HCP has only recently begun patrol he's not got a lot of flying time so for the sake of convenience and to make it easier to see how long things can take I decide to wait for a good time index to start from, get right on top of him..

... and we're off. First thing to do is switch mains to 4x CIG and then beat the hell out of him before he figures out I'm serious..

.. Down to 5% shield and he's still not red which is good, gives me time to swap out the 4xCIG for 4xION-D. Next shot gets his full attention tho and he starts firing back, but I'm all over him. After a couple mins of frazzling I suddenly stop taking incoming fire which is generally a really good sign. Pausing for a quick check..

.. we're doing pretty well. Just under 3 mins in and he's lost the entire left side and rear weapon mounts and three shields which leaves a huge blindspot in his defence which I plan to sit in and take advantage of..

.. A couple mins later and he's lost all turret defences, just a two more to go..

... bit later again and now he's down to his last one. It's at this point that I want to go to part two and get rid of his missiles which as you can see he still has all of. As I mentioned before an HCP won't fire missiles unless in pursuit mode which means I'm going to have to let him chase me. Of course while he's chasing me he'll be firing at me which is why I fried him down to the single gun before trying it so I have much less incoming fire to dodge..

.. Down to his last two Disruptors and I've by this point pulled away to a point just out of CIG range. While I wait for him to fire them at me it gives me chance to check the sector map. While I was busy fighting him you see my IONS managed to upset a couple passing traders who weren't happy about being zapped and retaliated. I had to set my turrets to 'protect ship' to deal with them...

.. It appears one of my turrets managed to get a Mercury to bail, bonus! ☺

.. Last missile away and that should leave him completely missile-free.A quick check..

.. and yep, just over 10 mins since I started and just one more CIG to go..

.. Final time 21:50 and that's him completely disarmed. 'Looks aren't Everything' has been steadily closing while we were messing about and is now in range...

... Transporting over I expect the HCP to re-evaluate his options and give up.. which he doesn't do and instead decides to turn and RSLG towards the west gate. Feeling this is spoiling my

demonstration somewhat I transport back to Thunderchild and head off in hot pursuit. Picking him up again inside Omicron Lyrae, which is not a grand idea since it's an Argon core sector and I'm persona non grata here, I remind him who's boss by jamming a Hornet up his arse...

.. at which point he sees things my way and gives up..

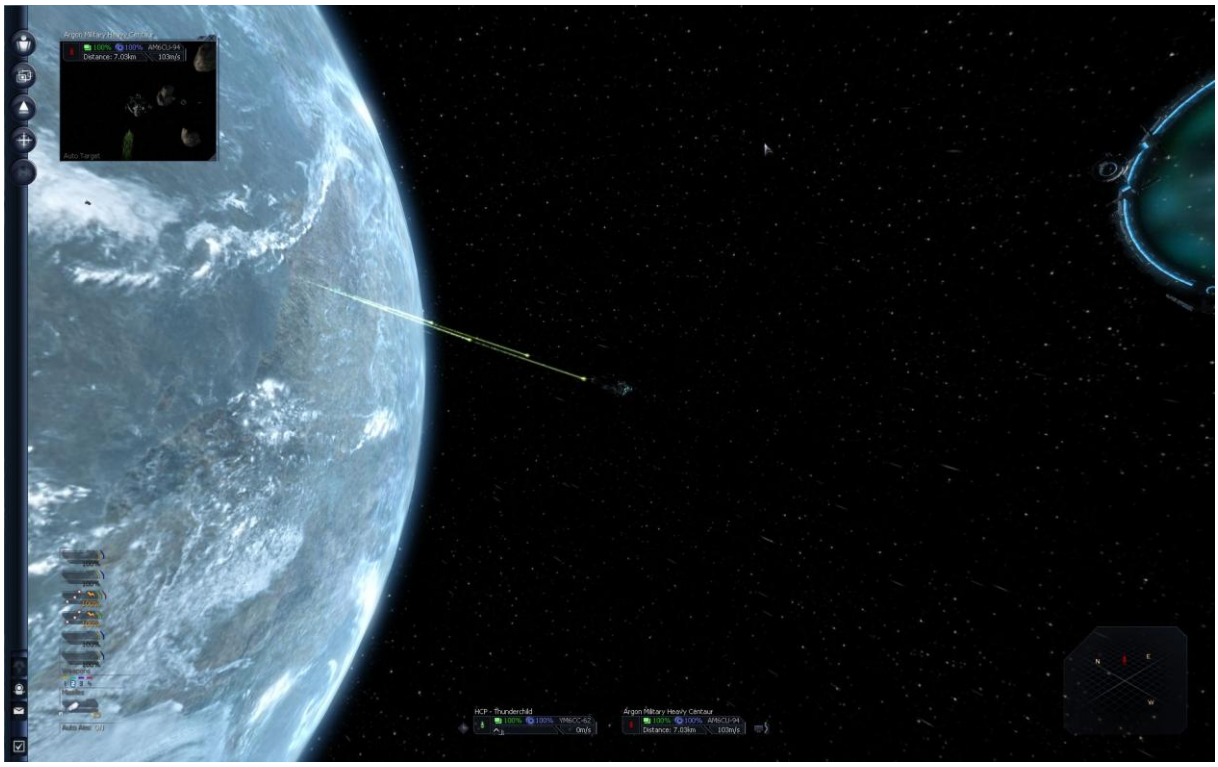
Positioning myself so my target is between me and my M7M lets me strip the shields with PBE, transport over...

... Fire a pod and then transport back again in time to keep the shields down as my guys arrive..

With the guys on board 'Looks Aren't Everything' jumps back to Elysium of Light to hook up with 'Fatboy' and a short time later..

.. it's mine. Interruptions from the local constabulary during the capture process are kept to a minimum via application of standoff waepons. With the capture completed I transfer jumpdrive and E-cells and jump my new acquisition back to Elysium of Light. Heading back myself I'm tagged by a

an Argon Heavy Centaur in Treasure Chest which seems to be unhappy with what's been occurring and launches a Firestorm at me. I return the favour with a salvo of Hornets..



.. I came off better. Arriving back at Elysium rendezvous point ..

I'm extraordinarily pleased to note that somehow or other my boarding team managed to do

exactly zero damage to the hull while doing their thing. See? No Split squad-leader and it's a whole different outcome! I did lose a couple guys in the process but it seems they managed to capture some equipment along with the HCP. Extra bonus!..

So there you go, others may have better ways to do it, but that's how I do it.Cookie to the first person to spot what's wrong in this picture..

Yes, it's not been a good day all things considered.

In hindsight I should probably have taken the hint this day was destined for a downer when I noticed I'ld gained a new option on my nav-menu, 'Unfocused Jump'. If I'ld stopped to think about that one for a second I'ld probably have come to the correct conclusion that kicking your jumpdrive into first-gear without actually providing it any destination coordinates is probably about as wise as trying to extract some nutritional content from chewing nails. I mean seriously, you could end up on the wrong side of a sun for example, the inside. Or worse..

.. Hive Central!.

I was, shall we say, not particularly impressed to find myself surrounded by a bajillion little purple triangles. They, it seems, were as pleased to see me as I was them and introduced themselves in the time-honoured khaak tradition of Kyon-ing the hell out of my shields while I suffered a moment of panicked confusion as to where the return jump option had suddenly vanished to on my nav-menu. Fortunately it turned out just whacking jumpdrive was enough to get the ball rolling but there's times 10secs can take an eternity..

Returning to normal space I'm undamaged but one ticked off fishy. Apparently this jumpdrive 'feature' was my 'reward' from the Goners for my efforts saving their sorry hides from that Pirate Syndicate. Reward my arse, I know what this is about. They're trying to cover up their involvement in the Squash-mine bombing of that pirate base they had me do. Let's face it, it sure wouldn't be good for the Goner name if they were ever associated with that particular little event. And what better way to 'make it go away' than to do over the only guy that knows their dirty little secret? Yeah, well it didn't work and I'm on to their game now..

Plots of diabolical retribution will have to go on hold for the moment tho, I've got a new batch of squaddies fresh out of boot and a need for both a cash injection and some serious training time for my mercs. If I'm ever going to borrow that Brigantine I'm going to need some quality troops and currently I have just three 4-star fighters that are slowly being trained to 5-star in all others. Three isn't enough for a full pod-assault tho so I need at least two more. I'm not sure how many I'll actually need to take an M2 but I'm thinking my 5-man elite squad plus a bunch of expendable mooks to soak up fire. I mean, what could go wrong with that plan?

Scanning down my advsat network it appears not a single M7M wandering thru any of the pirate sectors, aside from the Boron Kraken that's been lurking in Loomanckstrats since forever, so no easy cash-cow there. I wonder if the top brass have noticed they keep going missing? Instead then I decide to setup in Nopileos and pick on passing TM weapon traders instead, relieving them of the burden of carrying their wares and then the burden of owning their ships. All goes well for the first few and then one hack that goes wrong, sadly the ship is too badly damaged to attempt a second go. All my guys get out safely tho so, meh. I've picked up a handful of PPC/ION cannons and a

Guass cannon tho so I'm quids in to date.

And then a Gannet pops thru the east gate from Hatikvahs.. Now this is actually the first time I've ever encountered the Teladi M7M and it's one nice looking ship, in my opinion anyway. Kindof slow, but I reckon for an M7M speed isn't as essential when you have the capacity to blow stuff up from the other side of the sector. Nice shields too, 3x2Gj, that's destroyer class. It appears I've found myself a flagship..

A short time later and my as yet unnamed flagship is heading back to home territory for refit. Apparently the Teladi have taken some exception to it's disappearance but I'm sure we can smooth relations out in due course. Scanning thru my advsat network again I spot a Minotaur over in Hatikvahs just about to head thru the south gate, that's right next door. Well there you go, earlier there weren't any to be found anywhere and then two come along at once!

Catching up with the Minotaur in Claritys End a few missiles tkes out the escort group safely. By this point the Minotaur appears to be trying to do something unseemly with the nearby Crystal fab but with a lack of missiles that's probably going to take a while unless it resorts to ramming so with a seeming complete lack of interest in me it makes for an easy capture. Not having a jumpdrive to transfer to it as I used my spare on the Gannet I just transfer a few shields over to keep it safe and pick on a couple passing OTAS TMs as they're always useful.

I'm just done capturing the second one when I notice a big red splodge on my gravidar.. I'm really going to have to pay more attention to my surroundings, the other day I got clobbered to 50% shields by a Q that I had completely failed to see approaching. This time tho it's a Colossus, Cerberus and fighter compliment which being a good deal slower than a Q is probably a worse thing to be snuck up on by really. Either way they're most definitely displeased with my picking on Argon freight traffic and are heading right for me, trouble is I've got a lame duck with me at present. Myself, Fatboy and my Cobra can jump out easily enough but that would leave the Minotaur to the mercies of the oncoming Argon.. and they don't look in the mood for tea, biscuits and some light conversation.

Looks like I'm going to have to fight my way out here again which is unfortunate both because I much prefer the standard run away option, it being safer and all that, and because if picking off the odd freighter annoys the Argon authorities then I don't they'll look favourably on me taking out an entire battlegroup. Fortunately my missile-plex has been cranking out the warheads at a goodly rate of knots and 'Looks Aren't Everything' has a full compliment of 400 Flails and 150 Hammer Torpedoes so I have much KABOOM! at my fingertips..

Deciding the Cerberus was probably the more immediate threat I did a quick weapons calc in my head and fired of a sufficient barrage of Hammers to kill it dead then fired a few Flails to distract it while my Hammer swarm closed to impact. Hitting the Cerberus dead amidships my initial barrage dealt it a crippling 10% of the damage I was anticipating... I think my Hammer swarm mostly blew themselves up there, Oops! Plan B, cycle Flails and Hammers until it's dead. That worked much better and shortly we were one less Cerberus to worry about which left the Colossus which seemed to be having a few issues navigating the asteroids and the mass of fighters that were closing on me rapidly. A few went after Fatboy but he's got a couple Blastclaws onboard and they did their bodyguard routine. Meantime I switched back to flails and cycled through targets taking them out. I do like the Flails ability to seek new targets after it gets it's original one, that's a great feature and it makes short work of fighter groups. A short time later and the area is Argon free but I'm down one Blastclaw bravely sacrificed in the defence of his mothership and they killed the TMs. The Paranid are well-pleased with what went down and have promoted me to 'Friend of Emperor', the Argon are not so happy and I'm now 'Confirmed Insurgent' I think that's me off their xmas card list.

Deciding it's time to leave I set Fatboy off on a jumpdrive buying run, I somehow doubt Terracorp

will sell me one so it's off to Atreus HQ. In but a few scant minutes they'll be back and I can get my Minotaur out of here but it turns out that's a few minutes I don't have as a Raptor suddenly pops thru the north gate.. Now the Split and me haven't really seen eye to eye for a good while now and this one is no different it seems as he starts spewing Mambas into space. Lots of Mambas. Lots and lots of Mambas. In fact I'm starting to think he's not going to stop spewing Mambas at me when eventually it seems he does have limits to what he can pack in that hull. Finally having finished launching enough ships to make a respectably sized locust horde envious the whole unwieldy mass starts banking in my direction.. Ah crap, here we go again...

Plan C, lets try the Minotaur out. I've heard good things about the missile launch capabilities of the Minotaur and I've already established the Cobra just doesn't cut it for Hammer barrages. Transporting all my Hammers into the Minotaur I target the Raptor, assess the rapidly closing the distance between myself and the 50% of the Split military machine that's heading my way, do a quick mental calculation of how many Hammers I'll need for the job and then decide, screw it, and fire the lot. The initial wave of Split fighters is on me at this point and I'm taking PBE fire and even my 3GJ of shields are taking some abuse so targetting the nearest Mamba I follow the Minotaurs lead and fire a 50 round barrage.

Two things rapidly become apparent in the ensuing couple of minutes. The first is that the Minotaurs reputation is well deserved and it is, quite frankly, 'da bomb' when it comes to launching Hammers. Torpedoes splay out in a beautiful fan and then go streaking off to intercept their unfortunate victim. The second is that, in hindsight, I may have fired just a few too many warheads really. Don't get me wrong, they did a most excellent job of clearing the surrounding space of anything resembling a Split fighter. Unfortunately, having done so, the remainders (a sizeable cloud of them) went streaking across the sector and proceeded to erase everything else that was considered unfriendly to me. Oops!

Many Split died, unfortunate for them. Unfortunate for me the Paranid are semi-friendly with the Split so as Split fighters and traders died to a hail of missiles so my Paranid rep steadily plumetted from 'Friend of Emperor'. I'm now 'Tainted Wanderer'. Tainted Wanderer is shoot-on-sight status in Paranid sectors and this was around the same time as some of the TM's I'ld captured back in Nopileos had made their way to Paranid Prime for selling. They didn't make it to the shipyard.

Not having any missiles left it seemed an excellent time to leave before the other 50% of the Split military showed up so I called back my TL with jumpdrive, transferred it across to the Minotaur and ordered my fleet to head home for refit while I headed back to Nopileos. Arriving thru the east gate I promptly smacked headfirst into what looked briefly like a Zephyrus before I got bounced back and found myself the other side the gate in Hatikvahs. That was unexpected. a quick 180 and back thru and yes, it was a TM but it turned out to be a Jonferco weapons dealer. Not only that but a quick scan reveals a huge array of hugely expensive weapons, Jackpot!

Giving him a good clobbering and politely requesting that he parts with it he equally politely asks me to get bent and launches fighters. I'm briefly aware of an M3 shooting out left and break off to deal with it. Nova Raider, which can be a pain as they tend to be PBG armed but no problem so long as I'm behind it. I've just got him lined up and about to unload quad-CIGs into him when my view suddenly goes completely yellow/orange and I find myself absolutely awash in a sea of fire. My shields start dropping thru the floor and I'm instantly and acutely aware that I've just screwed up big time. Hammering the jumpdrive I start dodging as best I can with the flying skills of a small asteroid (As one pirate informed me once) but HCPs aren't really built for trick flying and I'm on about 20% shields already. 10 secs is an age and they're thru my shields and busy slagging my hull before very long. I'm in somebodies good books up there tho as I manage to make it thru an interminable countdown without managing to have my jumpdrive fried which given how fragile those things are is miracle in itself.

I wasn't too sure which gate I was going to end up at but frankly any was better than under that

blowtorch, but I ended up at the south gate. That's fine, checking the sector map it turns out there are three Nova raiders heading my way, so less the one I CIGGED as the world turned all flamy means that particular TM was packing 4 M3s and they probably were all armed to the teeth with PBG. Stupid me for not checking, I'ld gotten so used to M4/M5 and the odd M3 I hadn't thought to look having been bedazzled by the lure of shiny, shiny cargo. That'll learn me. Anyways I'm in no mood to play games with these three so I wait till they're within reach of Wasps and then fire a few at each followed up by a Hornet.

And so that's how I came by that most distressing pic at the top and how I now find myself piloting HCP-04 while Thunderchild is in for some extensive repair work. The engineer at the shipyard did that whole sucky-air-thru-the-teeth thing when he looked at it so I suspect repairs are going to cost me an arm and a leg.

Oh well…

Another crappy day at the office…

Subsequent to my disaster the other day, and having swapped out my HCP for a slightly less charred one, I went back to boarding TM's/training my mercs for their inevitable conformtation aboard the infamous Brigantine. That's assuming of course that I can find another one. Capital pirate ships of any type have been as rare as a Split in a good mood just lately. I've not seen a single one in the Split Fire->Hatikvahs or Loomanckstrats 'Pirate Alley' areas for a good long time. I strongly suspect they're tired of being chased by race military ships and are presently all hiding down near Gaian Star.

The first two captures went smoothly and I even got a handful of 5Mj shields and a couple weapons as a nice bonus. By this point of the original twenty or so mercs that I'ld been industriously training up I was down to my last five, but they were almost all 3-star fighters by now. 4-star gets them promoted to my ninja crew which then gets assigned for full training in all areas. One or possibly two more boarding ops should probably qualify a couple of these guys.

The third capture went fine right up to the point where I'ld disabled his weapon systems and beamed over to my M7M ready to launch a pod, at which point it all went horrifically wrong. As I hit the launch button and my brave squaddies launched into space so flames suddenly washed over my ship and my poor band of merry mercenaries in their unshielded boarding pod were instantly reduced to crispy charcoal briquettes...

Blastclaws, a 4-man wing of them. 95% of the pirates are friendly to me and this bunch of clowns just so happen to come along at RIGHT this second and screw up everything. I was not happy. It's not like they even stood a chance either, I'm sure they just did it to spite me. I've got 3Gj of shielding and 500 Flails on board, what were they thinking..?

One of them elected to bail out, unfortunate for me that his ship didn't suvive the hail of Flail missiles after it, even more unfortunate for him that he did survive it. I'm going to have to find some particularly unpleasant job for this guy to do.. preferably one with a low survivability. Squash mine maintenance engineer perhaps? Standard issue equipment, 1x mallet...

In other news that annoying Boron is making further unreasonable demands (Seriously, it's like having a wife). My Ore-plex finally managed to cough up the last nugget required for fixing the Hub gates so now I have a gate set I can move about at will. Some experimentation required there, I'm sure I can come up with some kindof diabolically devious use for a toy like this. The next thing he wanted was 500 units of Nividium which after the last request seemed positively benign and since I'ld already located a couple Nividium asteroids no t a problem to fill. Obviously he also felt I'ld accomplished that task far too easily as now the miserable sod wants 750,000 crystals. I thought

he was kidding at first, but no, the smug git really does actually want that many.

I don't think there's that many in the entire universe...

'Fun with Wasps!' (tm)

No, not the little buzzy yellow kind that have a bad attitude and like jam, but the swirly space variety that put large holes in small M5's. The Wasp is a fairly versatile missile with a couple of characteristics that I find attractive.

1. Swarm type - Splitting into 8 component warheads each of which is capable of doing 1K of damage the Wasp is effectively capable of doing a fairly solid 8K should all warheads contact their target. Compared to other single round missiles such as the Dragonfly which does a straight 5K damage for a similar cost then you can see the Wasp does represent a good amount of damge to cost. Multiple warheads swarming a target also means that there is a much greater chance that one more more warheads will be able to approach on a vector that enables it to hit its target no matter how it tries to dodge.

2. Speed - Being swarm type and designed to kill fast-moving small targets it has the benefit of high speed which makes it hard to hit when trying to shoot it down. It does however mean it's quite easy for a Wasp to overshoot it's target and have to track around again for another go. When you're trying to actually kill an M5 with one this is not really a beneficial feature but if you're attempting to use the Wasp to spoof the turrets on a larger fighter like an M3 then a Wasp that's busy doing loops around it and occupying the turret for a good long time is very useful.

3. Size and cost - Approximately 1K to buy and 1 unit of S-size cargo space makes the Wasp both very affordable and allows you to pack a whole lot of them into even a small fighter.

What to use them on?

Small craft. M5 you can use it to kill just on it's own. Sometimes you might need to fire two if the M5 you're after is particularly fast or well shielded. You can also use them on M4 which being slower are easier to hit but equally being better shielded will require more missiles to deal with. They also make excellent turret distractors allowing you to either deal with a turreted M3 or keep it occupied while you deal with something else/RSLG. One use that I find for Wasps which probably not a lot of other people do is missile defence. Yes, the mosquito can do the job, but the Mosquito takes up the same amount of cargo space, is one more missile I have to have in my inventory to cycle thru and doesn't always hit anyway. Personally I much prefer to have 8 warheads chasing down that Hammerhead than 1 Mosquito.

What not to use them on?

Big ships. Basically anything with M3 or bigger shields you're largely just tickling them unless you plan to absolutely bombard them with them. Also attempting to distract the turrets on anything bigger than an M6 is not going to work well. The Wasp is far too fast getting to target and on a larger ship it's wild flight path is still very likely to connect with the target regardless so the turrets aren't going to be distracted trying to chase it down.

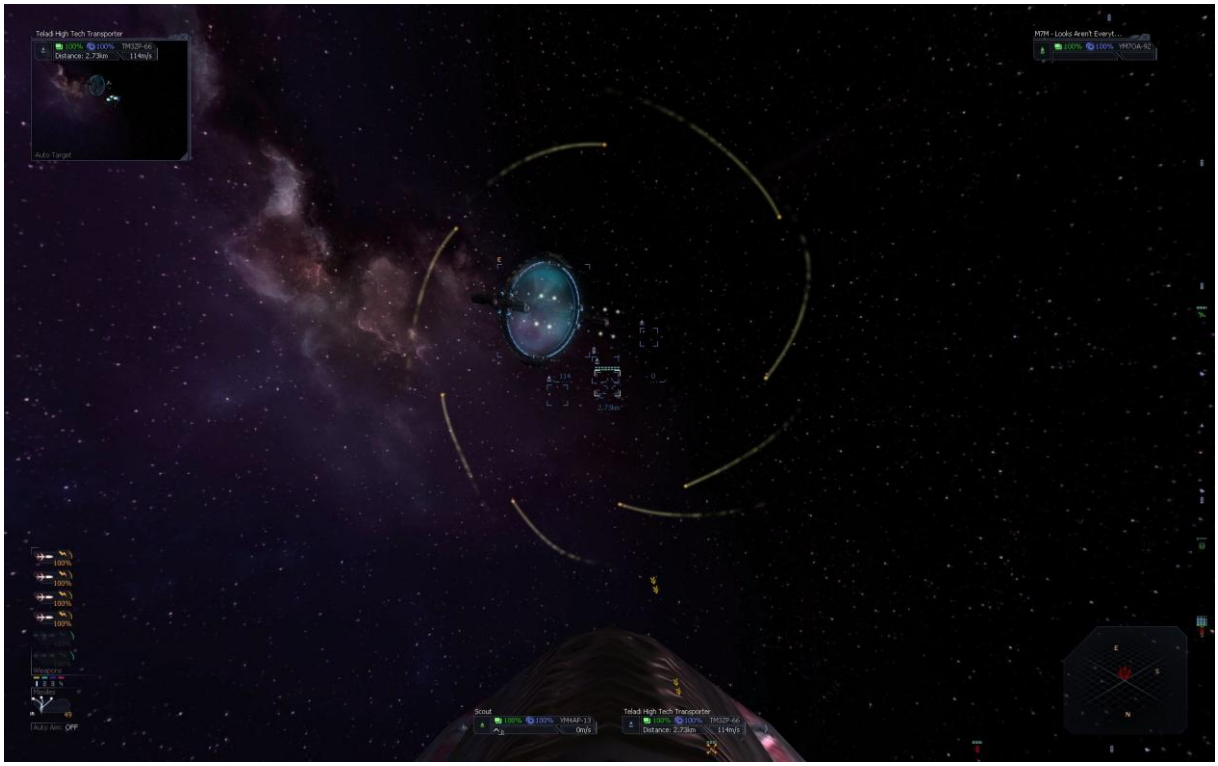
Should you be listening to me?

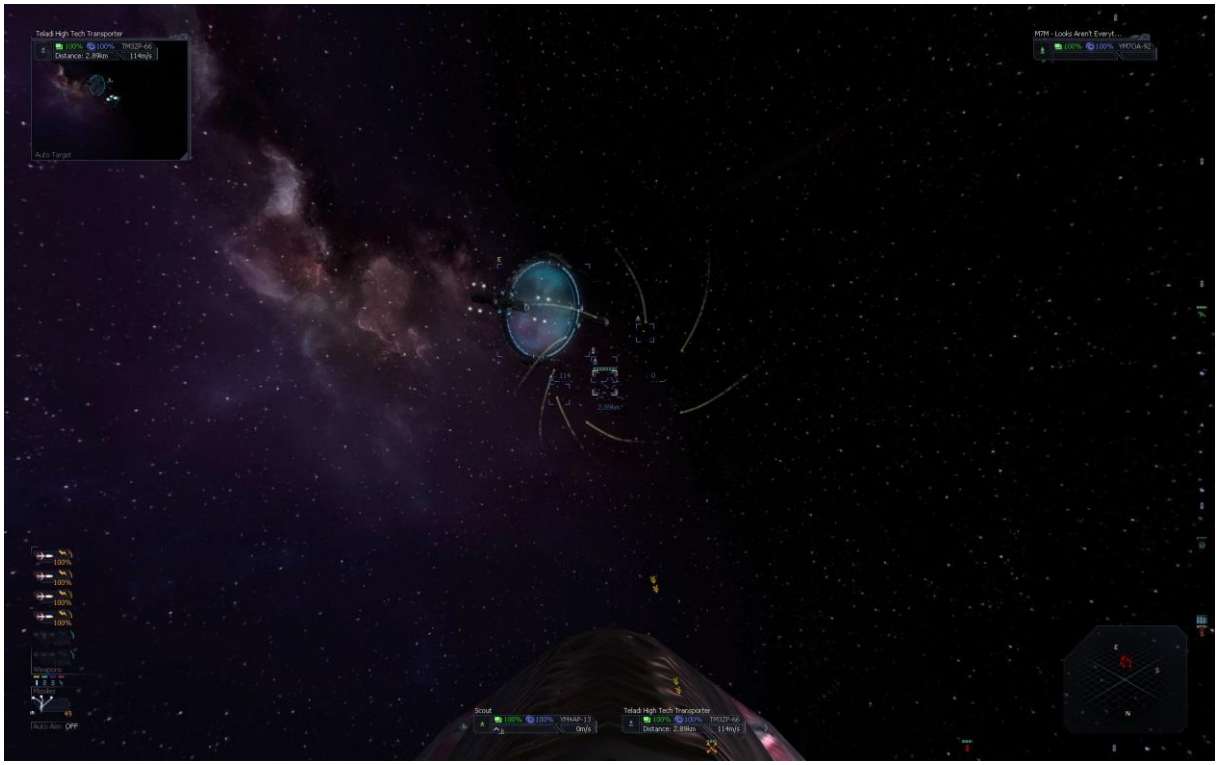
Probably not, as having just told you not to use them on M3 or bigger I'm now going to show you how to use the 'Wasp-Shotgun' technique to great effect on M3 (or bigger). Confusing eh?

Anyways, to see how this works you first need to understand how the Wasp function. In short it

has two modes. Firstly, upon launch, it goes into swirly hit-me-if-you-can mode and spirals in towards its target from wherever you fired it from. As it approaches its target and reaches a point around about 5-600m it changes from avoidance into terminal attack mode where it dives straight towards the target and acts just like any other heatseeker. This is an important point because you can manipulate it to your advantage.

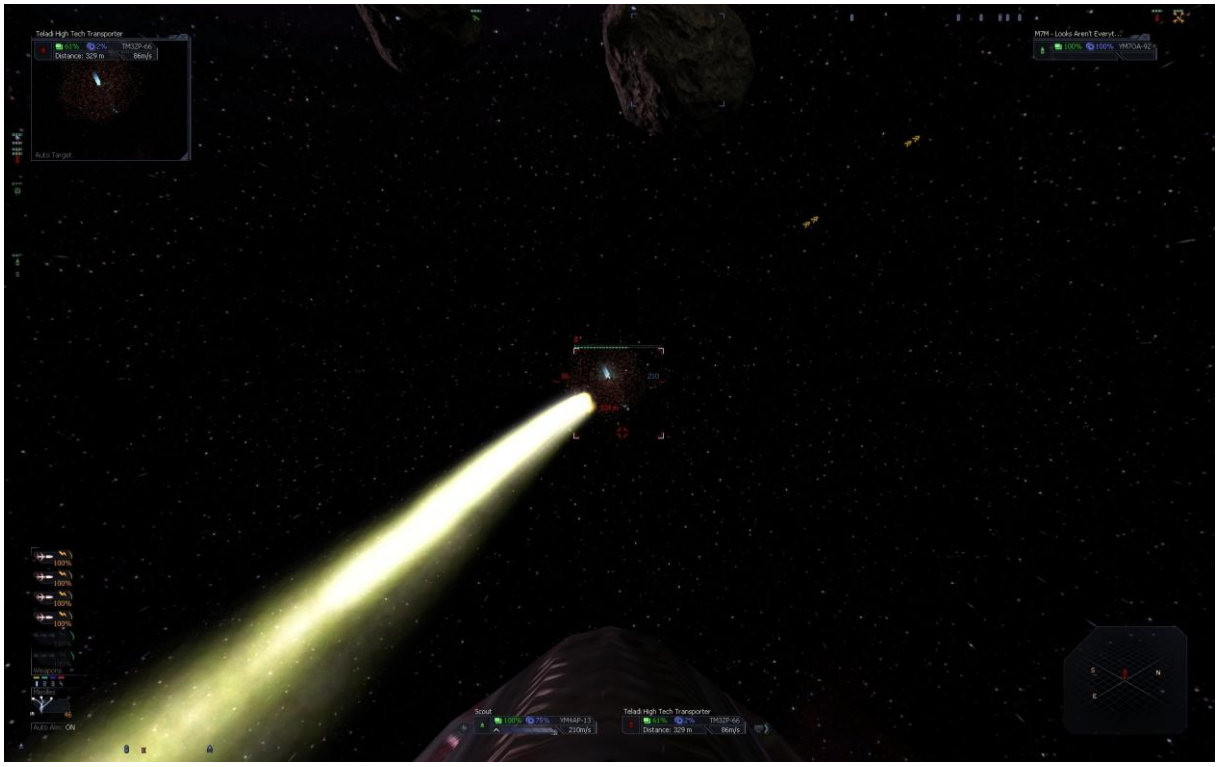
Example.





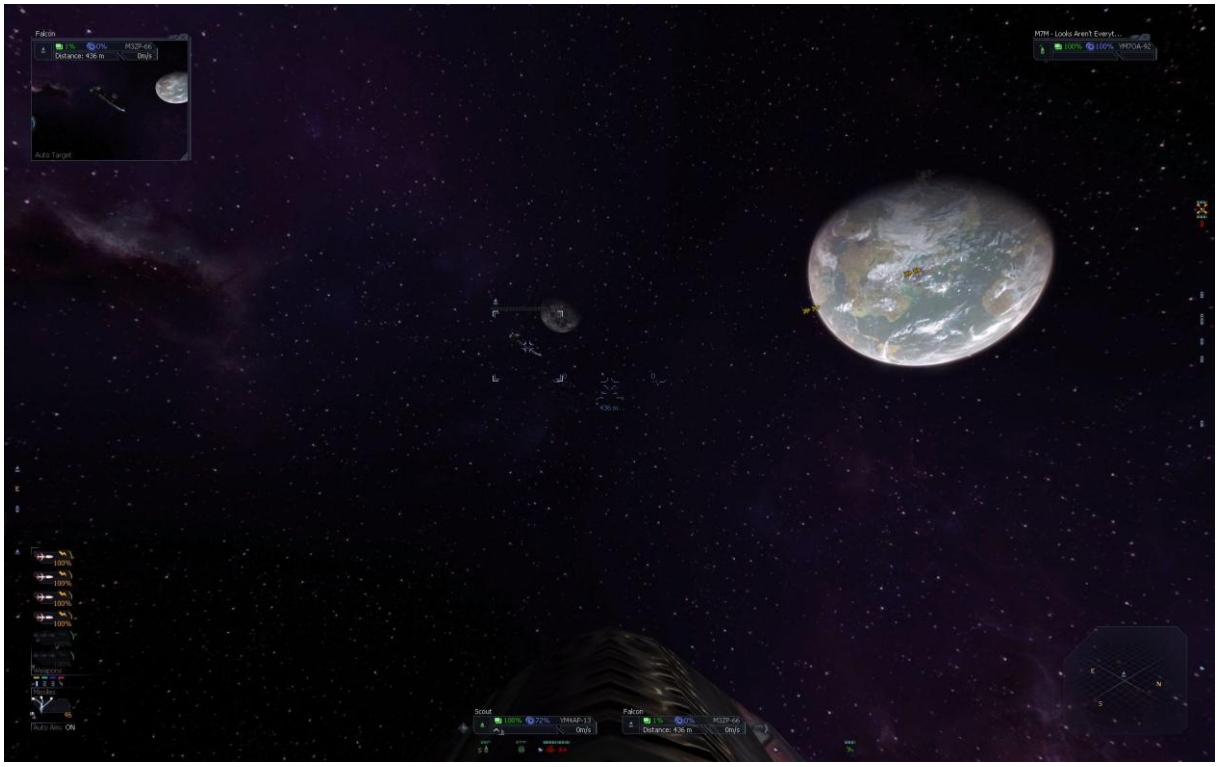
As you can see I fired this one at just under 3km range and it's in swarm mode as normal.

This one I fired at approx 600m from target..
.. and you can see that it's not swarming. Because I fired it within the threshold of its terminal attack mode it's heading straight for target in one solid bunch of warheads. That's 8K of damage heading smack on target..



... Bang! Instant big chunk out his hull and fire a second to finish the job.

Oddly enough tho second one didn't quite do it..



.. Not sure I'll get much for 1% hull remaining, but it shows you can cap fighters with missiles. (I wouldn't advise it tho)

Not having a whole lot of luck just lately. Today 'Fatboy', which is my mobile supply base, had an unfortunate encounter with a Q out of X101. Those Q's are suprisingly quick on their feet when they want to be. Suffice to say what was on 65% hull is now on 20%, yet more expense pending.

To be honest I really think I need to look at fixing some of my fleet up as I've a horrible feeling I don't actually have anything larger than a TS that doesn't have some kind of dent/gouge/rent/tear (*delete as applicable) somewhere along the line. In fact I'm pretty sure a good few suffer all of the above. I think my next bunch of mercs I get going will have to make themselves useful capturing large stuff for resale and Mahi Ma will have to wait for his crystals for the time being.

On which subject I think Barren Shores is going to be a key component of the whole Crystal-plex plan. There seems to be rather a large collecion of nice silicoids down there and I'll probably need a goodly supply. I'll have to work out later approx how many Crystal fabs I can run off that much silicon, hopefully quite a few.

But I digress. Getting back to the whole Q incident I think it's time to engage in a little live-fire excercise. This will serve the purpose of both clearing out the nasty Xenon infestation from my soon to be mini-universe and allows me to justify expending huge amounts of expensive munitions in a glorious firework show. Cue Operation: 'Hey Kids!, Let's play with matches!'..

Operation: 'Hey Kids!, Let's play with matches!'

Wherein many Xenon will ideally be swatted by a hailstorm of heavy warheads..

Dropping thru the north gate of X101 I've decided to bring just the three ships with me for this one..

.. 2x M7M and my one and only active HCP to keep overwatch. I'm pretty sure noones going to come calling thru the one and only entry/exit gate from this sector and any Xenon reinforcements

are going to be a good while making their way from wherever so I shouldn't need any major fighter cover.
Hardware wise, HCP-04 has standard anti-fighter loadout, the Minotaur is currently packing 160 Hammer Heavy Torpedoes and my flagship 'Failure To Communicate' is currently carrying 210 Hammer Heavy torpedoes and 520 Flail Barrage. Should be enough..
The goal of this operation will be to eliminate all hostile forces in sectore split into two objectives. Objective 1 will be handled by myself commanding the Gannet and will entail suppression of all mobile enemy units. Objective 2 will be handled by the Minotaur which will be tasked with destruction of fixed Xenon assets, so in this case just the one Xenon Shipyard. At present there isn't a whole lot on the gravidar..

.. just a couple Q's and and an odd assortment of fighters but I can see some larger ships moving around in the distance, at least another three Q's, so there may be nastier suprises further in.

The Xenon don't seem particularly perturbed by my being here, but we can soon alter that.. time to get the ball rolling. Accelerating up to my flank speed of a not particularly impressive 47m/s I creep further in-system. Fortunately speed on an M7M isn't particularly critical as while it may take me a while to get from A to B I've the weapons on board to be able to punch you at B when I'm still at A.

As I'm moving in I order the Minotaur to alpha strike the Xenon shipyard only to discover that you can't actually directly order an M7M to attack a fixed structure, only mobile units. Now that's a bit rubbish as it slightly defeats the point however it turns out that if you target the structure first then you can subsequently order a missile barrage and have the option of using the targeted structure. Bit of a workaround but it does the job. Missiles away!...

.. Now the nice thing about the Minotaur is it has three missile pods so when it fires its salvoes they jettison out the sides and the top and splay out quite nicely and form a triangular wedge of missiles that head in. Of course if you happen to be directly in front of the Minotaur when it launches, not really a sensible place to position yourself really but there you go, then you get a pretty effect...

... Yep, Xenon shipyards are quite tough so I fired the lot. That's 160 torpedoes heading into target (less the two or three that hit me up the arse cos I wasn't quite central) which allowing for a few

losses and premature detonations should kill it quite, quite dead. While they streak in I'm busy bracketing Q's and firing salvoes at each, single Hammers at anything M3 or bigger and Flails at anything else. By the time the Minotaurs strike is reaching the Shipyard...

... and taking it out in a glorious explosion that lights up the sector, the space ahead of me is looking a little spartan for Xenon ships..

.. Just the 2 Q's visible now tho I've a little further to penetrate so there could be something else back there off gravidar. As it turns out tho, no, they were the last two Xenon and with mission accomplished my spoils of war amount to a small collection of largely useless missiles...

... Somehow I was hoping for more.

Debrief:
Total success and a comprehensive victory. In fact the only damage I took during the entire operation was from shooting myself up the arse with stray missiles from my Minotaurs initial barrage and, in all fairness, starting a war and not taking a single round of enemy fire is by anybodies standards a fairly successful conclusionto the day. Now to the bit that's probably going to make a few of you wince...
Cost-wise:
Minotaur -
160 Hammers @ avg. 50,536 = 8,085,760

Gannet -
95 Hammers @ avg. 50,536 = 4,800,920
40 Flails @ avg. 33,692 = 1,347,680

Total expenditure: 14,234,360. Blowing up a Xenon sector from 75Km away. Priceless.

Mahi Ma can shove his Crystals where it's going to take some fairly intrusive surgery to remove. All 750,000 of them. Yes, I'm very happy to say that I no longer need the irritating little prima donna nor do I have to put up any further with his outrageous demands as I've discovered the true secret of The Hub..

There've been many theories surrounding its discovery and its origins. A maintenance station created by the builders of the gate network. A commerce transit point to breathe economic life into the universe. A bridge between disparate civilisations, bringing far-flung star-nations closer together and encouraging intercultural communication and understanding. These and other theories each more outlandish than the last have been put forward and every one of them has one thing in common, they're wrong. It's no trading outpost, no diplomatic facilitator, no shining beacon in the night. I know it's true purpose, I know it for what it truly is. It's a weapon.

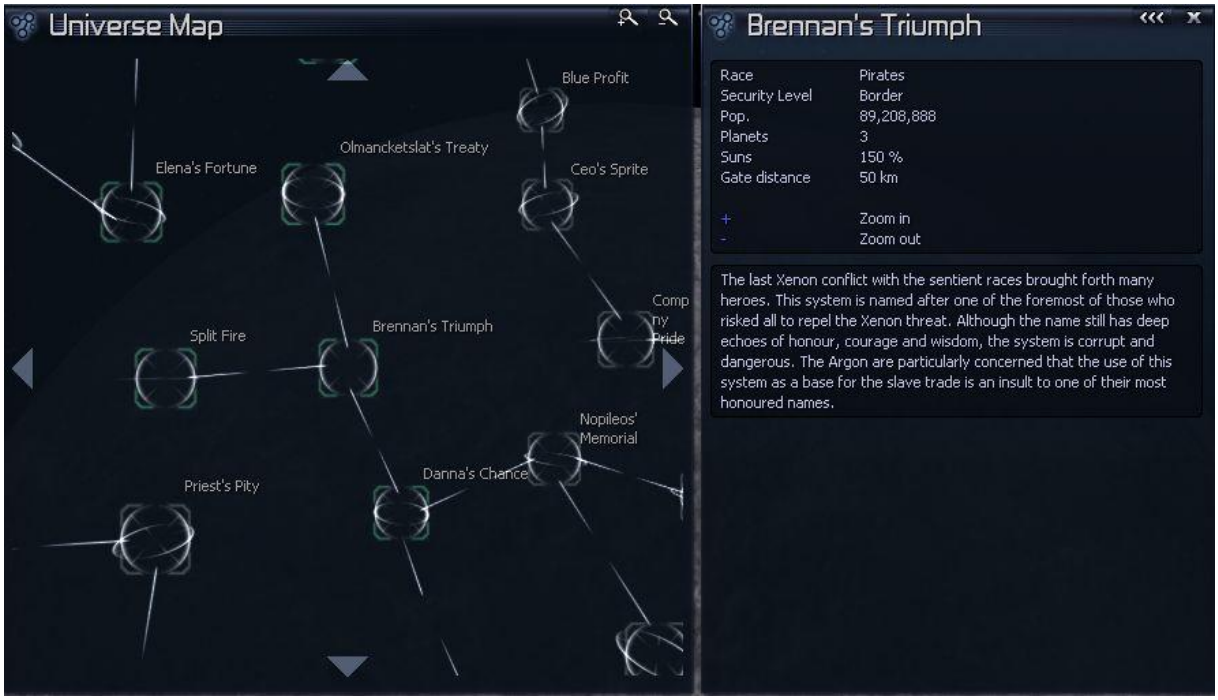
But there are weapons and there are weapons. Planet-busting superweapons may seem the pinnacle of warfare to some, but they're mere childrens toys compared to the capabilities of this device. This is a weapon the effects of which will be felt on a galactic scale, that will reshape the universe and forever alter the destiny of trillions, and all of this power in the hands of one individual.

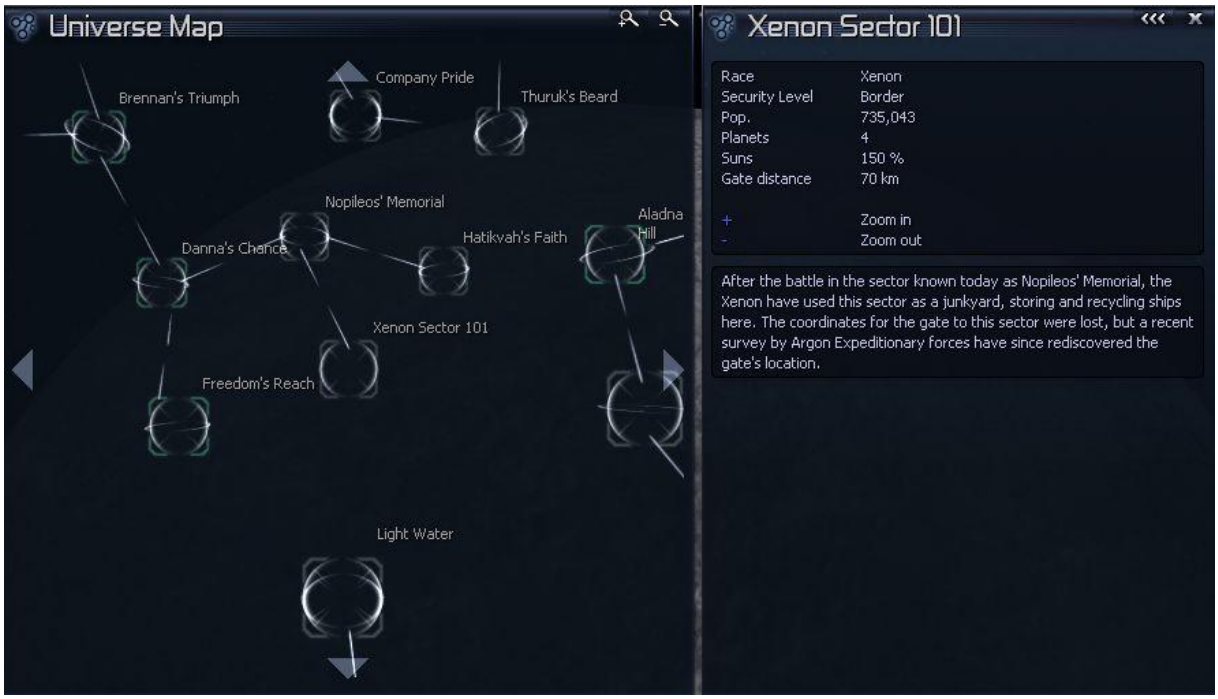
However, with great power comes great responsibility. As with all things, what has the power to destroy, has the power to create. Perhaps the temptation to abuse a power so great can be resisted and from a potentially dark future a new light born as the device is turned to the power of good?

Hell no, where would be the fun in that?

There used to be a long-standing pirate problem in the X-universe. A troublesome breed they occupied the sectors between Argon space around Argon Prime and Light of Heart. Being the shortest distance between these two regions of space this was a principal trade route despite the dangers of being attacked by pirates. The main races solution to the rampant piracy in these sectors, dubbed 'Pirate Alley', was regular military patrols to eliminate any and all pirate vessels operating in the area. It was thought that the pirate problem would never be truly stamped out and that patrols would have to be maintained for all time. Today however all that changed. Not because the pirates saw the futility of the efforts and gave up, or because the patrolling authorities achieved victory, but because the pirate problem simply vanished, along with eight sectors of the X-universe.

Yep, there is no longer a problem with 'Pirate Alley' because pirate alley no longer exists in the X-universe. It exists as a seperate entitity entirely outside of the gate network...





... I welcome you to the realm of King Squiddy I. Population one.

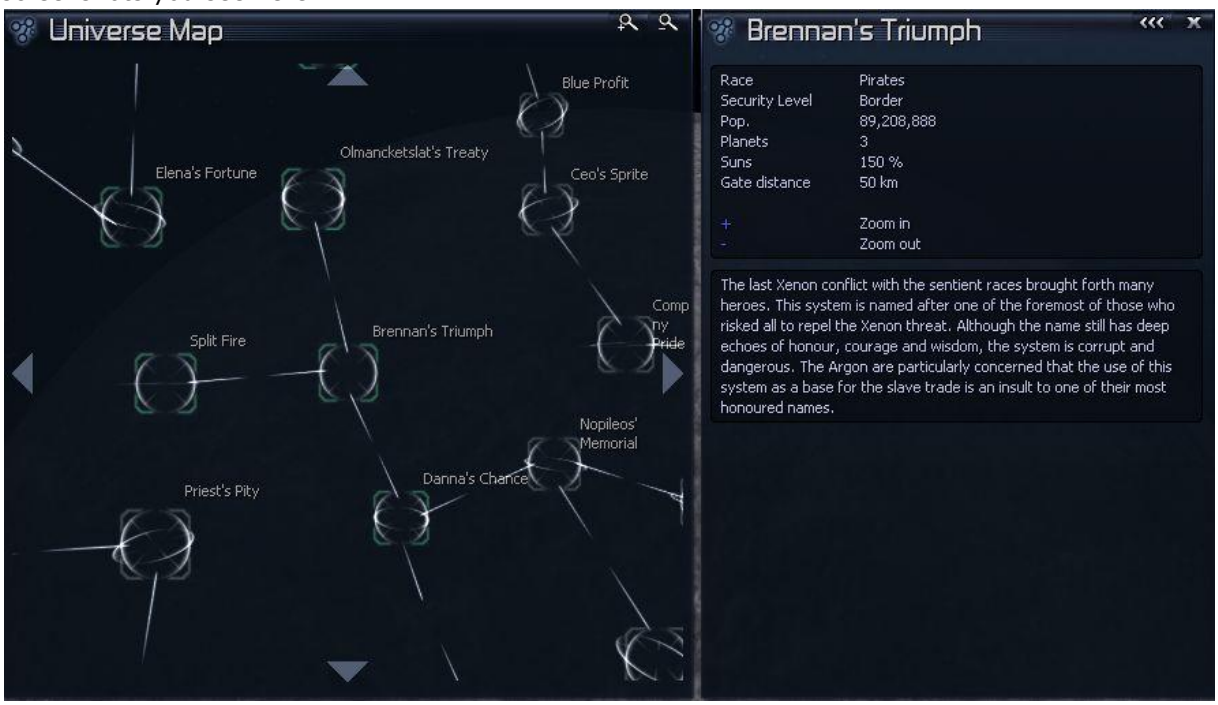
Assets:

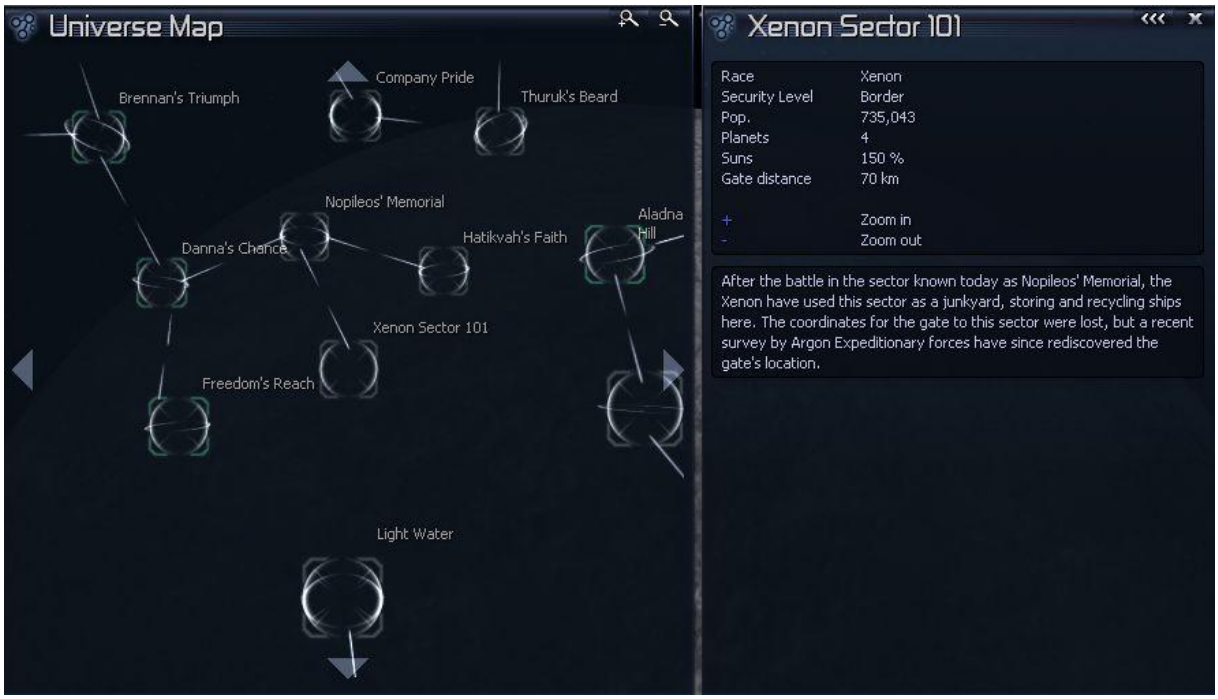
1x Advanced Discoverer
1x TL Albatross 'MPLEX - Storage'
5x Blastclaw
2x Blastcaw Prototype
1x Caiman 'Scavenger - 01'
1x Caiman hauler
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
4x Caiman Superfreighter S
5x Caiman Superfreighter L
1x M7 Carrack 'Maggot'
1x Chimera
1x M7M Cobra 'Looks Aren't Everything'
1x Dolphin Hauler
1x TL Elephant 'Fatboy' Mobile supply base
1x Express 'Carjacker'
1x M7M Gannet 'Failure To Communicate' Flagship
1x M8 Hades
7x HCP
3x Hermes
2x M
2x TL Mammoth
1x Medusa
1x Mercury
1x M7M Minotaur
4x Rapier
2x Solano
1x Toucan Hauler

2x Zephyrus
14,800,000cr

Hmm, I may not have explained myself quite adequately there so I'll reiterate the point and explain exactly how it's done in the process.

So, just to clarify, what I've done is break off a section of the galaxy into a seperate entity using the Hub. There is **NO** physical connection between the 8 sectors I've grabbed and the rest of the X-universe. In no instance is the Hub inserted between any of the bordering jumpgates in the screenshots you see here…





It is **completely impossible** therefore for any ship to fly into or out of those 8 sectors. They are completely sealed off from the rest of the universe because the jumpgates that border those sectors have been disabled. You cannot, for example, enter Split Fire from Elenas Fortune. Any ship that attempts to do so will just pass thru the gate event-horizon unharmed and remain in the sector they started in, just the other side of the gate.

So what's the trick?

Ok, as some have mentioned already the standard operation of the Hub is to 'insert' itself between the two jumpgates of two neighbouring sectors. The Hub has potentially three sets of gates and if for example I were to align Gate-01 to Argon Prime and Home of Light the result would be passing thru the south gate of Argon Prime would end inside the Hub at Gate-01A. Passing thru Gate-01B would end you up at the north gate of Home of Light.

There is however an interesting effect from aligning the Hub gates to themselves. Say we performed the above example and joined Argon prime to Home of Light. If after the gates had recharged you the realigned Gate-01A to point at itself what happens is that the anchor at one end of the wormhole joining the two gates becomes detached and the gate shuts down. Passing thru the south gate of Argon Prime will still leave you inside the Hub. But the corresponding exit gate, Gate-01B is no longer anchored and leads nowhere. In the same way the north gate of Home of Light has also become unanchored and is effectively disabled.

If you then align Gate-01 to a completely different sector, say Kingdom End and Three Worlds, the Hub now inserts itself between those two sectors and functions as normal. However in doing so it detaches from the south gate of Argon Prime which would normally be anchored to the north gate of Home of Light. Because Home of Light north gate is already disabled the south gate of Argon Prime has nowhere to connect to and is itself disabled. What this means is that travel direct from Argon Prime to Home of Light is no longer possible. You would have to go around thru Ringo Moon and Red Light to get there.

So just to recap..

Argon Prime (S) <------> Home of Light (N)
[Align Hub to Argon Prime (S)]

Argon Prime (S) <------> Hub(01A) Hub(01B) <------> Home of Light (N)
[Align Hub to Hub(01A)]

Argon Prime (S) <------> Hub(01A) Hub(01B)disabled <------> Home of Light (N)disabled
[Align Hub to Kingdom End(S)]

Kingdom End(S) <------> Hub(01A) Hub(01B) <------> Three Worlds (N)
Argon Prime(S)disabled <------> Home of Light (N)disabled

As you can see for 3 gate alignments, which is 6 hours and 30,000 E-cells, it's possible for me to destroy the linkage between two sectors entirely. And I only need 1 set of gates to do it with.

What I've elected to do is steal part of the universe for myself. Other potential opportunites for mischief could include isolating areas of the universe. Let say for example that your UT's have an

annoying habit of wandering thru X347. No problem, knock X347 out of the gate network. Not only will that stop you losing ships but it'll put a stop to any Xenon patrols. In fact why stop there? Nuke out the links for all the Xenon sectors and pen them up for good.

How about reconfiguring the trade lanes a bit? There's some fairly busy trade routes, say the link between Menalaus Frontier and Ceos Buckzoid. Break that link and force all the trade traffic to go around. Not sure of the value of doing that but hey, chaos and mayhem has its merits.

How about splitting off a couple of sectors as a 'prison' for capturing ships in? All you'ld need to do is align your gates to a route your target takes and as soon as they enter your hub realign to your prison sectors. Suddenly your target has nowhere to go anymore.

Started off the day doing one of those ever fun ship recovery missions. They tend to be easy money and minimal hassle. Payouts having been jumping quite a bit and I'm all in favour of 1.3M for a rescued M5, especially when I've got a TL to use to exedite the process. One can only assume the owner must be fairly attached to it to want to shell out that much to get it back. Sentimental value?

Anyways, arriving in Argon Prime to pick up the ship I was a little disturbed to find it wasn't going to fit in my TL being as it was not an M5 but an M7. Who the hell goes losing a Deimos? And when I'm short of cash who the hell gives me jobs like that and expects to see their ship again? It's a crazy, crazy universe..

So, a short time later and 14 million the richer I'm off looking for more missions. Oddly I didn't appear to take a rep hit for fencing the Deimos, I can only assume the authorities couldn't believe anyone would have the audacity to do it. A couple assassinations here, a delivery there and a taxi mission for a Split guy that seems to do my rep with them no end of good. Given I was previously Enemy of Rhonakar 99% suddenly finding myself as popular as Creature was somewhat of a suprise but hey, why not capitalise on it. Jumping into Split territory yes, noones trying to shoot me. Good stuff.

I've taken to using my TL with a Solano to shuttle me around and then call in whatever ships I need for a mission. The Solano I captured a while back and it's a fairly good looking little ship and is well equipped. A few missions in and around the area and aside from having to apologise to a few police vessels that evidently have slightly longer memories than the average Split no trouble at all. My rep has now gone from shoot-on-sight to merely spit-upon-on-sight which in Split terms is fairly friendly.

Jumping into Family Pride west gate I was anticipating a less cheery reception being as last time I was here I stole the Elephant I'm currently sat in and blew up a Raptor. Generally speaking that's not appreciated. All is quiet tho so I exit 'Fatboy' order it to follow me and accelerate in-system to see what's on the jobs boards. I've barely been in the air 10 seconds and brought up comms on the first station when I hear a colossal bang behind me and flicking to my rear-cam with that sinking feeling get to watch the final moments of Fatboy as it goes up in a huge explosion. Moments later the front end of a Split Tiger noses thru the expanding fireball..

I'm undecided whether I should consider this a fortunate occurence and be happy given that mere seconds previously I was stood on the bridge of that debris cloud, or whether I should ponder the 60+ million in assets that just got burnt to a crisp and cry. However now is not an appropriate moment to decide as the Tiger captain apparently blames me entirely for the collision, considers it an act of war and is bearing down on me fast lobbing IBL rounds and flak. Time to be elsewhere..

RIP Fatboy, the 7 fighters stationed on it and all the spare equipment on board. Mobile supply base to cloud of containers in a heartbeat…

Assets:

1x Advanced Discoverer
1x TL Albatross 'MPLEX - Storage'
2x Blastclaw
1x Caiman 'Scavenger - 01'
1x Caiman Hauler
1x Caiman Miner 'Red Dwarf'
4x Caiman Superfreighter S
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1x Dolphin Hauler
1x Express 'Carjacker'
1x M7M Gannet 'Failure To Communicate' Flagship
1x M8 Hades
7x HCP
3x Hermes
2x TL Mammoth
1x Medusa
1x Mercury
1x M7M Minotaur
4x Rapier
1x Solano
1x Toucan Hauler
2x Zephyrus
27,500,000cr

Met yet another weirdo today.

Somehow every time I think I've met the craziest individual in the whole universe the universe goes and dredges up someone even more mentally degenerate than the last. Must be one of those immutable laws of the cosmos or something.. Anyways, this particular nutjob I discovered passing thru Omicron Lyrae

Jesan Nadina, fighter-jockey, hero-wannabe and man with a most unhealthy hero-fixation on one Julian Brennan. Now I thought I recognised the name as soon as he mentioned it but it didn't click immediately. Normally that might have caused an awkward social situation but old Jesan was so busy looking all misty-eyed and drooly that I don't think he noticed. Good ol' JB, 'Hero of the universe' according to Jesan. Funny, I seem to recall he got smeared across half a sector by the Xenon..

Anyways, it appears Jesan has grand notions of following in his heroes footsteps and heading into Khaak space to end the Khaak threat once and for all. Being as that's almost, if not possibly slightly more, stupid than flying into a xenon Core sector I feel he's off to a really good start.

Now normally I'ld be happy to just wish the poor lad well and leave him to go about organising his own imminent and unsavoury death, but the fate of my little Kestrel of oh, so long ago, is still somewhat of a sore point with me and the opportunity to batter some more of them little purple triangle guys does have a certain appeal, so I think I'll tag along for a bit. This seems to please him and he instructs me to follow him to Black Hole Sun, then goes shooting off at 200m/s. Good for him, not so good for me as I'm currently flying my Gannet with a top speed of 47m/s. Mebbe I'll just jump and meet him there..

Arriving in BHS it seems the Xenon have decided to invade and Jesan is clearly eager to die heroically as he's off to get them. Personally a J, a K and an assortment of P's and smaller fighters isn't something I'm inclined to tangle with up close but that's not stopping him. Fortunately while I may have the pace of a 1-legged hippo I do have the reach so while they handle the fighters I just stay put and blow up the capitals and P's. with Hammer Torpedoes.

Job done and nothing to show for it more exciting than a handful of Banshee missiles and we're off to some top secret Argon sector hidden away someplace. Turns out it's not quite as secret as they might like to think tho as I know it's their already being as it's one of the main routes I go pirating HCPs on.. Wonder if they'll remember me?

Turns out no, or if they do they're choosing to turn a blind eye as I'm here 'for the greater good' or some rubbish like that. Anyways, I'm expecting a colossal fleet of warships all primed to jump into Khaak space and deliver righteous wrath upon the unclean. Instead the Split general coordinating things wants me to pick up a satellite and go drop it in Khaak space on a recon mission. A recon mission? In an M7M? See, now this is why the Split have never defeated the Boron. All the will, none of the knowhow.

Arriving in K931 expecting nothing but trouble finger poised over the return jumpdrive button, my first thought is 'Ooh, pretty colours!, the second, 'Yipe, that's a lot of fighters!' Fortunately fighters are all there are. I was fully expecting to arrive smack in the middle of a destroyer formation or something but there's not a single one to be seen, I guess they're all busy elsewhere Kyoning the hell out of innocent Kestrels.

Fighters aren't much of a concern for me tho, 2 salvoes of Flails at a fighter N,S,E and W of me and the resulting hail of missiles wipes out everything within 20km. Sweet. Apparently I now just have to punt the Advsat out the cargo bay and then go scan that base and job done. Trouble is it's a good distance away and 47m/s is kindof slow. As I'm crawling towards it so fighters are spawning all around me. I suspect it would be more straightforward in a faster ship (probably cost me less in

missiles too), but then I'ld lose the 6Gj of shielding which is effectively making me invulnerable to them. Tradeoff I guess. Many missiles later and job done it's back to HQ for a debrief.

Apparently my next task will be to go and rescue Jesans black box recorder from the remains of his ship. It turns out our JB-wannabe succesfully emulated his hero by doing something incredibly stupid that got him killed.

I'm sure his parents must be proud and I suppose if nothing else it benefits the gene pool.

Epilogue:

Split after-action military reports state the pirate vessel M7 - 'Maggot' registered to one Squiddy McSquid, wanted in connection with the disappearance of the Raptor assigned to Family Pride Home-fleet as well as numerous other piracy related crimes across the galaxy was contacted today in Tharkas Sun attempting to commit acts of piracy on a TM class vessel and may have been aiding raiders on the local XL-SPP.

Sources further indicate the pirate vessel was intercepted by a Split military patrol from Family Rhonkar who, in coordination with local police defence forces, engaged the rogue vessel.

Despite the enemy vessel putting up a spirited defence superior Split firepower won the day and the enemy ship was destroyed with all hands.

Glory to Rhonkar!