Our gunship escort would meet us when we picked up our cargo. We had 13 days to get there, then 14 hours to the asteroid mining outfit. After the launch party a drunk Samantha ended up in my room. I was pretty drunk as well so the sex was a bit sloppy. It was probably not a great move on my part, getting into a relationship with my captain but oh well. We were both castoffs of a corrupt system.

Well, I didn’t get see the captain again during the subspace trip. She had turned into a task master wanting the heavy lasers incorporated. With my other duties and all the work we were still doing I only managed to get one installed top side and one installed on the bottom of the hull. I was on the bridge when we came out of sub space sitting at the makeshift gunnery station to test the weapons. There were no threats on the radar envelope, but our gunship escort was not there either. The captain decided to head in system anyway and I went to engineering to do my work maintenance on the FTL drives.

Six hours later the captain let me know the gunship was inbound. She joked their lead engineer hadn’t been as successful as hers. I opened a com channel to their engineer and we started talking. They were barely running. Their FTL drive was old and they didn’t have a qualified engineer to maintain it. We could actually outrun them if we didn’t have any cargo as 60% of their thrust was not available as those lines were gummed up. After some time I commed Samantha and suggested we dock with the gunship and help get their ship up and in working order. She agreed.

The gunship was 46 meters long and had the smallest long range FTL drive the Union made. They had a 14-person crew, 9 men and 5 women. The added mix would make socializing much more fun. The plan was to create a solid dock locking system for the two ships. That way we could be tied together through sub space. I designed six separate locking clamps along the forward skeleton that held the massive cargo containers to hold the gunship to our hull. Our navigator was already running new sub space calculations for the additional mass and altered center of gravity and incorporating their emitters.

We reached the mining station and the loading ended up taking two days. Our empty containers were quickly removed when we arrived, but the full containers were in the wrong place or just not ready. This required us to take our salvage out of the containers and cram it into our ship. The wait gave me time to tour the gunship and go over their FTL drive. Yeah, it needed a complete overhaul and recalibration. I transferred three bots to the gunship, one hull and two engineering. That should help them with getting her more combat worthy. I also talked their captain into a plan to take the seventeen torpedoes and mount the two launchers on their outer hull. It meant they only had two shots as reloading would be a pain, but I didn’t like them on my ship and we needed to free up some space.

Finally loaded with raw ore we moved out of the gravity well. We found two destroyers doing a patrol so that probably scared any chance of pirates off. The destroyers remained in range until we docked with the gunship and transitioned. After a day completing my duties and making sure the FTL drive was operating well enough I went over to the gunship to help out. While I worked on their FTL drive my bots swarmed over their ship. The tear down, rebuild and calibration would take me 10 days and I decided to sleep on the gunship. I ended sharing a bunk with their female navigator after I found her sparring with another crew member and joined in. Her name was Kryna and she was of Asian ancestry. She was super intelligent and very experienced sexually. She taught me a bunch of new things and it made the trip in subspace very pleasant. The last few days I managed to get the torpedoes tubes mounted and the 17 torpedoes transferred. The FTL drive on the gunship was also good to go. It should operate around 88% efficiency. I couldn’t do better without better parts and a lot more time.

The two crews had mingled a lot during the trip and even though we were all supposedly misfits both ships were operating beyond normal parameters when we exited subspace. The gunship immediately detached and went to shadow us. The trip in system was smooth and the cargo containers were transferred without incident. We had to wait three days since they didn’t have any empty containers for our ship. Oh they had empty containers, it was just our ship was low on the priority list. Our next pickup would be from a heavy metal mining planet based operation. It was a 17-day transition. The mission was rated top priority as the last two freighters had been ambushed and destroyed. The mission plan was once we reached the system one destroyer and two more gunships would join our escort. Most of the crew did some rec time on station. I avoided the station other than calling Camila and working to get some parts for the bots and my fabricators.

We got our empty containers finally and once we got out of the gravity well of the sun we docked our gunship and transitioned.

This trip I was focused on getting the other six heavy lasers incorporated into our hull. Kryna came and visited me every night on our ship in my room. I had a large personal room and had salvaged a large luxury bed from the pirate corvette. Samantha had kept her distance from me and that was her prerogative. I finished getting the turrets embedded and managed to get six lasers powered before we exited subspace.

I wasn’t on the bridge on exit so the alarm sounding had me calling the bridge for an explanation. The two gunships scheduled to meet us were destroyed and the destroyer was being pursued by six corvettes. It looked like one pirate corvette had been disabled as well. I rushed to the bridge. I took up my station at weapons. Technically I should have been in engineering but I had Eve down there covering for me. Our gunship had already detached. We were fleeing at a ninety degree angle. Our subspace drive could cycle in twelve hours. A clear map came up on the main screen of the system. It just wasn’t the seven corvettes by our entry point. There were two other groups of pirate corvettes, each with three corvettes. Well the pursuit of the destroyer had saved us, pulling the corvettes out of position to ambush us. In the inner system the space stations orbiting the planet were being assaulted by long distance attacks from a cruiser and two destroyers. They definitely were not pirates. No pirate could afford to maintain a cruiser.

Samantha was talking with the destroyer captain and our gunship captain. The plan was we would skirt the outer system since we couldn’t do anything. Two corvettes, one from each of the three groupings moved toward us. We had fifteen hours to decide what to do according to the plots. I began running some calculations on my terminal and pulled in our navigator to help. I was figuring out the calculations to dock with our gunship and then using their FTL drive. It would be over taxed and probably last less than 48 hours before burning out but that didn’t matter. My plan was to make an attack run on the disabled corvette and then push to pursue the group of seven corvettes, hopefully drawing enough away from the destroyer that they could escape or at least put up a fight. We had a get out of jail card if we docked and went to FTL. The grav well radius appeared on screen so we could note the danger zone. Trying to go to subspace too close to a grav well would greatly stress a hull, if not crush it completely.

I remained on the bridge as our gunship strafed the corvette, causing a few decompressions with its kinetic rounds. The action caused two corvettes to start to decelerate to meet us. Good so far. Fifteen minutes later we were on a direct course. The corvette only had energy weapons and our gunship had kinetic rounds giving us an advantage at range and converging vectors. Seventy minutes to contact range for their energy weapons. They should focus on the gunship. The plan was one torpedo for each ship which they should be unaware of. They fired their torpedoes and the flak gun on our gunship destroyed all four of them. Under the cover of the explosions the gunship fired their two torpedoes. It took them a few minutes to realize what was happening.

They started firing their lasers but the torpedoes were hardened against them, they really needed kinetic rounds which they lacked…or more likely had exhausted. Still one torpedo was eventually destroyed with repeated hits but the other struck home. Since their forward deflectors had been depleted by the energy weapons and mislead by debris. Suddenly our gunship burst like a bubble. Samantha was in shock for just a second. We flipped our ship over so we could get all 6 heavy lasers on the other corvette. The batteries opened up, one failed after two shots, two couldn’t lock on target and failed to fire, but the remaining three scored repeatedly until the ship hull was penetrated and lost integrity. It didn’t burst but molten holes clearly showed the disabled ship.

But we were screwed. Our gunship and friends were gone as was our escape plan. Samantha asked for options. I suggested we cut engines, rotate and eject all but one of our empty containers, the reduced mass would speed us up. We should also get the shuttles ready as a second option. She agreed. After the containers released we got some luck. Two more corvettes broke off to meet the containers. This allowed the destroyer to turn and fight the remaining three. It was a brave if futile action. The destroyer destroyed one corvette and disabled a second but shortly after the vessel exploded, its internal tanks exploding.

Our vector away from the battle at max thrust looked good. We could outrun them and recharge. I went to engineering and got the FTL drive ready before returning to the bridge. It was just a wait till we could leave the battleground. There were dozens of emergency calls in the system from both sides but we were leaving. This system was in the interior of the Union and was one of our primary sources of heavy metals. Losing it would cause major problems in ship production and repairs. Although news of the how bad the war and invasion was going wasn’t dispersed it was obvious the Union was going to lose.