



Finnras

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Serialized flash-fiction: the sci-fi story of a father looking for his daughter. Written by @doycet.

The Drift

<http://doycetesterman.com/adrift/index.php/about/>

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# 2008

## *May*

Tuesday, 13th of May.

12:28:24 Deirdre bringing the ship in to dock. How I got myself talked into letting a little girl pilot my ship, I don't know, but she's good.

Wednesday, 21st of May.

12:31:15 The Drift is the same; millennia-deep piles of ships welded into a moon-sized Tortuga of traders and beggars. We are neither, I hope.

## 2009

### *February*

Wednesday, 4th of February.

13:57:30 Deirdre opens hailing frequencies to request permission to dock; almost cute, if it didn't mean getting boarded, killed and set adrift.

Thursday, 5th of February.

11:28:00 I grab the mike and complete the call, mentioning a different - very distant - airlock. D doesn't frown - she's a blank-stare type. Eerie.

Friday, 6th of February.

12:04:11 Our comms-mod makes little Deirdre sound like a chain-smoking ore miner - unlikely anyone recognized my voice on the call. I hope.

Saturday, 7th of February.

10:27:40 Jon steps onto the bridge, scratching his jaw in the way that says he heard me on comms. I share our ETA. He doesn't mention Burns. Fine.

Sunday, 8th of February.

14:53:10 The dock-shadow falls across our deck. Jon asks if we're taking Yoren. Fair question, but no; even hostile, the Drift doesn't deserve that.

Monday, 9th of February.

14:33:13 We disembark and pick out a guide. I've been here many times, but not this decade - a half-klick of 'new' layers to reach corridors I know.

Tuesday, 10th of February.

13:28:40 Our guide: a six-limbed, optionally bipedal, gray-furred marsupial. The asymmetrical rows of nipples and squirming carry-pouch? Distracting.

Wednesday, 11th of February.

15:08:04 Our guide's name is Bilabil... give or take. His fur ripples when I ask questions. Yes, this area is stable; almost no one shot today. Hmm.

Thursday, 12th of February.

15:23:48 Surprise: we aren't shot or robbed on our way to Manifold Bazaar. The towering, giant plants still impress; the babble still deafens.

Friday, 13th of February.

09:23:58 The chamber -- dozens of hanger bays cemented together, leading in all directions. In the feather-light gravity, every angle is an option.

Saturday, 14th of February.

09:02:02 We arrive at a stack of shipping-containers-turned-building, covered in multicolored human handprints; "Five Finger Freight." My comm beeps.

Sunday, 15th of February.

14:48:16 It's Deirdre; says she's tried to reach Mak a half-dozen times, but got no reply. Odd, since I'm watching him walk down the ramp toward us.

Monday, 16th of February.

13:42:13 Mak's expression says "... the HELL are you doing here?" while his mouth says "Come on inside!" Taken together, that's less than reassuring.

Tuesday, 17th of February.

16:11:03 Connected like stacking blocks, the cargo containers create a nest of junk-filled 'rooms'. The junk hides actual valuables... in theory.

Wednesday, 18th of February.

14:07:46 We take seats in the "office" container. I take a crate; Jon, a futon; Mak, the pilot's chair with pistol holstered on the side. Hmm.

Thursday, 19th of February.

10:32:20 Mak doesn't waste time asking if I'd forgotten that Burns wants me in tiny pieces. He asks why I'm here, and I say Kaetlyn's name.

Friday, 20th of February.

10:56:32 She was here. I let out my breath. Mak says she had a freelance scouting job. Normal type of deal; client was Church of Ishbel. Wait, what?

Saturday, 21st of February.

10:28:11 The Church of Ishbel is supremely anti-expansion, anti-exploration, anti-anything about returning to space. They do NOT hire remnant-scouts.

Sunday, 22nd of February.

15:31:34 I ask what kind of supplies she'd needed - a hint of her destination - but he shakes his head. She didn't get supplies; she hired a guide.

Monday, 23rd of February.

15:14:04 Why would a planetary scout hire a guide? Apparently, when she's going \*inside\* a world; Mak says she wanted to go to the Drift's core.

Tuesday, 24th of February.

10:57:09 The Drift is a millenia-old accretion of ships; an archeologist's dream. At its core? Relics from before we first lost our right to space.

Wednesday, 25th of February.

10:51:51 Kaetlyn found something in the guts of a federation-era jumpship and heads off into the Remnants. I ask Mak for the guide's name. Jon sighs.

Thursday, 26th of February.

12:52:03 Mak can't get me in touch with Kaetlyn's guide. It's not secrecy or client priviledge, just impossible; he died on the trip back topside.

Friday, 27th of February.

09:37:00 The core is dangerous; got it. Maybe another g-- My comm beeps. A red light on Mak's desk starts flashing. Outside, klaxons wail. Wonderful.

Saturday, 28th of February.

08:46:43 I pull out my comm while Mak flips monitors on and fingers his chair-pistol. Deirdre says ships are landing. Everywhere. Raiders.

10:47:15 [[Story posts for February are complete. Read all 28 posts of the-story-thus-far in proper order here: <http://tinyurl.com/finnras-feb> ]]

## **March**

Sunday, 1st of March.

13:15:27 I ask Mak where the other exits are. He says the answer depends on where I'm going. Jon says "the ship" before I can answer. Wrong.

Monday, 2nd of March.

10:21:04 Jon asks if I'm really going to leave our 11-year old pilot alone with Yoren in the middle of a raid. Put that way, it's hard to say yes.

Tuesday, 3rd of March.

12:56:52 Hard to say yes... but not impossible. I'm going to find whatever Kaetlyn found, alone, if I have to, and maybe that's best. Jon stares.

Wednesday, 4th of March.

14:52:45 Kaetlyn is family. Deirdre is crew, just like Yoren - just like Jon. Better if everyone remembers that. Jon nods. Mak points out his exit.

Thursday, 5th of March.

11:28:45 As we slip out the back, Mak mentions that the last time I was here, I told him my crew /was/ my family. A long time ago. Things change.

Friday, 6th of March.

11:08:09 The route Mak and I take ends near the bazaar's ceiling. From there, we low-g brachiate to an exit. Easy, until the shooting starts.

Saturday, 7th of March.

15:51:17 No one's shooting at us, exactly: just raiders in the bazaar, shooting into the air to get attention. I'm /in/ the air, so they have mine.

Sunday, 8th of March.

12:21:12 I glance back at the raiders as we swing up into an exit shaft, but... articulated hard-shell vac-armor? That's Concordance Navy. The Hell?

12:28:28 Also, most of them are looking my direction. With bullets. Looks like they /were/ shooting at us, and don't seem inclined to stop. Running.

Monday, 9th of March.

09:47:26 "Running" means ladder-scrambling up a 65 degree slope. We emerge in a new 'zone'; the microgravity changes directions and swings me around.

09:54:31 Mak keeps me moving through the quieter space (a cargo bay converted to a multi-layered cot-hotel). My comm beeps. Deidre is angry.

Tuesday, 10th of March.

09:09:51 The anger isn't in her voice. She's just confirming Jon's order to cast off and await my call. Her version of "say it to my face."

Wednesday, 11th of March.

13:45:43 In mid-reply, my com squeals like a bone drill; a traceback. No idea who; I already had enemies, and there's a pile of eager new volunteers.

Thursday, 12th of March.

12:31:45 The traceback means unfriendly people on the way. With friends. I tell Mak I need an exit route no one expects. He grins, which is... new.

Friday, 13th of March.

09:06:21 In a place that's nothing more than ships purposely crashed together, no passage is straight. Mak finds one that is; straight down, unlit.

Saturday, 14th of March.

13:00:27 I shine a light into the shaft (smooth, undecorated; a launch tube turned sideways?) and ask how we get down. Mak shoves me. Hard.

Sunday, 15th of March.

16:19:14 I don't think it's fair to say I scream. Profanity is still profanity, regardless of the pitch of my voice.

16:36:35 Full atmo and low grav means lower terminal velocity, but the only real difference between 23 and 56 meters per second is a prettier corpse.

Monday, 16th of March.

09:29:13 I start to scrape/tumble along one wall and slow down. Apparently, this thing curves, which means I might not die. Mak still will, though.

Tuesday, 17th of March.

10:25:40 When skidding down an incline, feet-first is an order of magnitude better than head-first, especially in the dark. I'm not that lucky.

Wednesday, 18th of March.

11:06:19 I come to a stop in the dark, hands blistering. Mak slides down seconds later, flashlight in hand. If I could make a fist...

11:22:25 [[We interrupt this broadcast for a link: Publetariat interviewed us about @finnras. Cool! Part 1 is here: <http://is.gd/nTUS> ]]

Thursday, 19th of March.

13:57:22 Mak hisses to shut me up before I even get a good yell going. The shove into free-fall probably lost the approaching unfriendlies. Probably?

Friday, 20th of March.

14:24:06 Mak says they might follow, but they can't keep a traceback going when we're surrounded by so much magnetic interference. I'm afraid to ask.

Saturday, 21st of March.

10:57:27 Magnetic interference; we're standing in is the barrel of a gauss cannon. Non-functional, of course. Probably. Can we go now?

Sunday, 22nd of March.

12:59:33 Smudged handprints reveal a maintenance hatch; we're not the first to use this route. Door opens, guns point our way. Nope. Not the first.

Monday, 23rd of March.

10:34:47 Mak puts his hands up, but doesn't look surprised; means he /could/ have warned me. Starting to think he's enjoying keeping me off balance.

Tuesday, 24th of March.

12:30:17 The armed locals apparently have guides in the group that know the core of the Drift, and are willing to trade. Mak asks what I can barter.

Wednesday, 25th of March.

08:51:04 I pull out a jingling bag. Mak eyerolls; they don't use money. He does, though. Give him the bag; offer the tribe a line of credit at Mak's.

09:01:11 Mak's not happy about being offered in trade to a Drift tribe. Hmm. Probably shouldn't have shoved me off that LEDGE, then.



Thursday, 26th of March.

21:23:09 A man says something to a girl at his side and steps forward once the tribe's deal is made. Seems old for a guide. Unfortunately, I'm right.

Friday, 27th of March.

16:47:24 The old man is my translator and bodyguard - he's originally from a colony world. The guide I just hired... is the young girl. Of course.

Saturday, 28th of March.

11:14:09 I tell Mak what I think of him finding a pre-teen guide to make an point about my crew and my daughter. No one nearby needs a translator.

Sunday, 29th of March.

05:29:18 Mak's unrepentant. According to him, guides that know the Core are all this young. If I want to follow Kaetlyn, then I have to hire a child.

Monday, 30th of March.

10:25:30 The bad news: about to go cave-diving into a moon-sized ship graveyard with a preteen and octegenarian. The good news: that's what I wanted?

10:27:31 The fact that the 'good news' is in fact merely less-bad Bad News has not escaped me.

Tuesday, 31st of March.

09:26:30 At least I'll lose whoever is currently after me. Only feral sentients and animals in my way. Radiation. Hard vacuum. Ancient bio-weapons...

## **April**

Wednesday, 1st of April.

08:30:19 My second day with the girl and old man. Spent traversing catwalks above a four-mile, half-submerged cargo bay. The ammonia-stench burns.

Thursday, 2nd of April.

10:31:40 Day Four: Working down through a massive battle cruiser. Upside: open corridors mean easy rappelling. Downside: ship defenses still active.

Friday, 3rd of April.

09:47:42 Backtracking routes for three days now. Can't find a way past a hard vacuum zone. The girl/guide is puzzled: the atmo loss is recent.

Saturday, 4th of April.

11:48:52 Ninth day. The first time I've crawled into a derelict ship and felt as though I should take off my shoes before proceeding. We're close.

Sunday, 5th of April.

11:52:07 Tenth Day: It doesn't feel like a ship so much as a vast cathedral. To some, it is; I understand why the Church of Ishbel sent Kaetlyn here.

Monday, 6th of April.

13:41:13 Ship's systems still work. Impossible, according to everything we know. Then again, 'everything we know' was stolen from ships like this.

Tuesday, 7th of April.

22:08:48 Ship's systems still work. Impossible, according to everything we know. Then again, 'everything we know' was stolen from ships like this.

22:15:33 What now? I explain Kaetlyn used one of the systems here; question is: which? The old man suggests the one with the folded note on top. Oh.

22:33:08 Screw it. Decided to write the scenes in anyway and send the revised-revised revision off. Magical word-finder puzzles FTW.

Wednesday, 8th of April.

12:08:44 I want the note to be for me; for Kaetlyn to know I'd try to find her. It isn't - just jotted notes in her

handwriting - left behind.

Thursday, 9th of April.

09:46:40 Strange. Kaetlyn knew the ins and outs of nano-crystal difference engines when she was six. She wouldn't need notes. // probably w - A ha.

Friday, 10th of April.

10:10:50 I follow the notes as best I can, rolling down through holograph scrolls and tapping glyphs. On the final semaphore, the ceiling explodes.

Saturday, 11th of April.

21:24:50 Amazing holo-nav display - like a planetarium built into a temple. Female voice - unknown language, but the tone says 'captain's journal'.

Sunday, 12th of April.

08:29:22 Half-blind from the holonav 'explosion', and I don't understand the words, but I know what I'm seeing: the route this ship took to get here.

Monday, 13th of April.

10:26:00 So, the Church whose core message is 'reject the stars' hires an interstellar scout to backtrack the route of a pre-Scourge survey frigate.

Tuesday, 14th of April.

13:08:43 The old man is shaken by what we see. The girl doesn't care. That difference is probably why she lives and he dies when we try to leave.

Wednesday, 15th of April.

09:34:05 He slows on a open catwalk to look back when he should run. The rad-pulse from a shield-stripped engine takes him apart. I suspect he knew.

Thursday, 16th of April.

11:23:39 We make it across the exposed traverse surrounding the ship. Now, the girl looks back; cheeks wet, chin trembling, staring at nothing.

Friday, 17th of April.

09:48:11 With only Deirdre around I'd forgotten the shock of seeing a girl's tears. Lacking words, I share my tactic for dealing with loss. Movement.

Saturday, 18th of April.

17:07:42 Our first rest break. Everything I can think to say is asinine, and she wouldn't understand anyway. I show her a picture of Kaetlyn.

Sunday, 19th of April.

14:39:30 She assumes Kaetlyn is dead, too. I probably get a little too loud correcting her. Another girl I can't talk to worth a damn. Hooray.

Monday, 20th of April.

09:02:06 We climb out of the belly - bowels, really - of the Drift. Going up and out is just as hard; I don't have time to think about what I saw.

Tuesday, 21st of April.

20:22:04 We've avoided every group of sentients in our way; the girl has a sense for trouble. When the nets fall, she actually looks insulted.

Wednesday, 22nd of April.

09:58:43 The ambushers are her people, which explains her surprise. They've added new traps due to 'strangers'; strangers looking for me. Of course.

Thursday, 23rd of April.

14:40:19 Seems people looking for me are shooting at those who /might/ have seen me. Worrying about Jon, Mak, and Deirdre. And Yoren, I suppose.

Friday, 24th of April.

08:44:14 The headman anticipates my thoughts; tells me that my original payment - trading credit with Mak - is useless now that Mak is gone. Dammit.

Sunday, 26th of April.

15:39:44 Went to ground. Deciding what to do next. Tried raising the Bingturong on comms; the crew's either radio silent, fled, or unable to answer.

15:42:27 The girl got me close enough to the Manifold Bazaar to see Five Finger Freight. Gone. Nothing there but rectangular rust stains on the deck.

Monday, 27th of April.

15:25:30 The tribe, while helpful, doesn't know what went on in the bazaar; only their territory. I need

someone who knows all the Drift's business.

Tuesday, 28th of April.

08:37:05 The only person with their hands that deep into the Drift is Burns, who promised to watch my eyes boil in hard vacuum last time we met. Hmm.

Wednesday, 29th of April.

10:33:19 Burns can be dealt with, provided you have something he wants. I don't, aside from the eyes he'd like freeze-boiled, which isn't... Wait.

Thursday, 30th of April.

11:20:11 Sitting in the Bazaar where Mak's shop used to be, eating some meat on a stick. Tasty. If this plan kills me, it's not a bad last meal.

11:35:18 [[The 3rd month of the story is done. \*cheers\* Read it top to bottom via the monthly archives here: <http://doycetesterman.com/adrift/> ]]

## **May**

Friday, 1st of May.

14:48:42 Concordant Navy gets to me first. Not surprised; they had watchers stationed. I put my hands up, but close enough to my face to keep eating.

Saturday, 2nd of May.

11:44:01 The number of marines sent is comfortingly excessive. Near the exit, the crowd stops moving out of our way. Burns's faster than I expected.

Monday, 4th of May.

08:48:46 The crowd has a spokesman I recognize; a big sack of angry named Borden. "Smarter than he looks." while true, would not be fair warning.

Tuesday, 5th of May.

07:06:34 Borden tells the OIC that his friends would like to talk to me, and asks that I be handed over. The Lt. doesn't know enough to be cautious.

Wednesday, 6th of May.

12:23:39 Borden and company think the Lt. giving them orders is funny. The Lt. disagrees. Two dozen arming rifles is very loud in the sudden silence.

Thursday, 7th of May.

11:17:20 I drop a few words (and a smirk) into the quiet. "Guess you lose out this time, Borden." It's almost - /almost/ - enough to push him over.

Friday, 8th of May.

15:41:46 As the Navy escort walks me out, Borden informs me I'm not safe yet. This is safe? Must've missed it. I remind him he knows where I'll be.

Sunday, 10th of May.

04:06:37 The OIC comms in when we're clear of the Bazaar, calling me 'the Captain'. Good; I'm not 'the Captain' to them unless they've met my crew.

Monday, 11th of May.

07:40:05 We escort-march about far enough to reach the skin of the Drift, pass an airlock, and everything gets extremely bright, hard, and official.

Tuesday, 12th of May.

14:57:26 The ship is new, but familiar - I've crewed many like her. Not something I'd realized I missed. I expect this visit will cure my nostalgia.

Wednesday, 13th of May.

12:56:42 Where they take me first will speak volumes about the situation. With my crew? Solitary? 'Interview room?' I'm escorted to the bridge. What?

Thursday, 14th of May.

14:32:54 The commander is staring 'out' of the huge viewscreen psuedo-window. He turns when I enter and orders everyone else out. Again... What?

Friday, 15th of May.

15:11:45 The commander makes nice; speaks as an equal - a fellow ship's captain - a peer. It's a charming lie; unfortunately, I think he believes it.

Saturday, 16th of May.

18:31:28 He calls for drinks and appetizers. Still crazy, but... free drinks? I turn down the food; explain about the meat-on-a-stick. He nods.

Sunday, 17th of May.

19:27:33 He asks his first question when the drinks come; have I ever had a crewmember die. Sounds like a hidden threat, which is actually a comfort.

Monday, 18th of May.

15:15:16 I don't care for the topic, but at least thinly-veiled threats put things in familiar territory. Next, he'll mention the laws I'm breaking.

Tuesday, 19th of May.

13:20:26 True: the Drift lies in the Remnants, where Concordant law is as relevant as dining etiquette. Guns matter, however, and the Navy has many.

Wednesday, 20th of May.

14:50:48 I ask what exactly it is that he wants. The question stops him cold - the look on his face says

that he was sure he already mentioned it.

Thursday, 21st of May.

14:52:27 He wants Kaetlyn's employer, which he calls a 'rogue government element'. The Church of Ishbel? Jon's right: I should follow politics more.

Friday, 22nd of May.

10:09:35 Doesn't take much more talk before the commander tsks and sends me to the brig to 'self-assess'. Naval officer training has /changed/.

Saturday, 23rd of May.

18:48:09 I'm taken to solitary in the brig. Everything is regulation; even the normal rattles and thumps of a ship at dock are orderly. TOO orderly.

Sunday, 24th of May.

15:24:14 Actually... /much/ too regular; it's a semaphore. 'If you recieve, captain, respond. 2758th message attempt.' 2759. 2760. Has to be Dierdre.

Monday, 25th of May.

18:59:50 I tap back a counter-message. Ship's unmanned, but watched. Jon and Yoren were in with her, but Yoren's in solitary now. No need to ask why.

Tuesday, 26th of May.

12:19:07 Actually, that gives me an idea - a proposal to the Commander that hinges on Yoren. Dear Yoren, closest friend, without whom I am lost. Heh.

Wednesday, 27th of May.

13:12:38 I put on Angry Captain Face for my Commander-visit; ask him where my crew is - why we've been kept out of contact. He oozes concillation.

Thursday, 28th of May.

15:59:56 He assures me that my first mate and ... pilot? (I nod) are made available immediately. I wave all that away: what about YOREN?

Friday, 29th of May.

16:01:52 He informs me Yoren will not be released. No apologies. No smile. He doesn't try to look sorry. Things must have gotten ugly. /Excellent/.



Sunday, 31st of May.

11:05:15 Several hours later, convinced him Yoren is important to me, then let him convince me I can't have him. Hardest part? Looking disappointed.

## **June**

Monday, 1st of June.

14:57:38 Clearly (I hope) desperate, I offer to bring in Kaetlyn - trade her for Yoren. The words stick in my throat - I cough quietly as he ponders.

Tuesday, 2nd of June.

12:52:54 I'm allowed to visit Deirdre and Jon. She brings me up to speed while Jon sullens in my direction. De might be mad too, but who could tell?

Wednesday, 3rd of June.

16:03:03 Deidre was the only one on hand for the 'display' that put Yoren in solitary. There was biting. Also, chewing and swallowing. Ah. Hmm.

Thursday, 4th of June.

18:03:33 I don't know if anyone is listening, so I can't explain OR play it straight and hope they keep up. Jon would, but Deirdre does not lie well.

Friday, 5th of June.

14:06:15 All I can tell them is 'trust me', which goes over... less than well. The Commander meets me in the hall - says we have a deal. Finally..

Monday, 8th of June.

07:01:48 He tells me that, while he won't release Yoren, he understands I'll want to see him, since he's so important to me. He insists, in fact.

Tuesday, 9th of June.

17:06:15 As we walk to his cell, I try to remember the last time I spoke to Yoren directly, instead giving orders via Jon. Nothing springs to mind.

Wednesday, 10th of June.

13:28:20 I've no idea if Yoren is a good liar; it wasn't why I hired him. I move in for a hug straight off and just hope he doesn't throat-punch me.

Thursday, 11th of June.

14:23:22 Looks like he's too confused to resort to violence. I tell him we're off to earn his release. Then something explodes. Remote lie detector?

Friday, 12th of June.

16:23:44 The explosion is followed by howl of hull breach alarms. Yoren whispers he knew I had a plan. He trusts me; Jon and De don't. I feel ill.

Monday, 15th of June.

15:48:53 Not possible the explosion is my fault. Concordant Navy craft infringing on Drift's beloved anarchy? Explosions are inevitable. Right?

Tuesday, 16th of June.

08:53:48 ...unless the explosion is Burns trying to get his hands on me; then it would have something to do with me, yes. He wouldn't, though. Right?

Wednesday, 17th of June.

11:45:17 Wrong. The door opens to admit the commander and sounds of faint gunfire. The attackers are demanding... me. Yoren jumps him before I reply.

Thursday, 18th of June.

11:55:05 I pry one of Yoren's hands away and drag him into an arm bar. /This/ time, he throat-punches me. I twist the arm and lean away. Socket pops.

Friday, 19th of June.

12:11:17 Mostly, dislocating someone's shoulder encourages reconsideration of bad choices. It's reliable in that way. Yoren releases the commander.

Monday, 22nd of June.

07:00:29 Forgot this is Yoren; he doesn't give up on bad ideas - it's a kind of loyalty. Sometimes, though, he /will/ trade one bad idea for another.

08:23:44 He trades up from 'kill the commander' to 'pop out the Captain's eye with my thumb'. Starting to suspect hiring Yoren might have been rash.

Tuesday, 23rd of June.

08:20:50 He can't quite reach my face, given our position. Unfortunate, that; lacking alternatives, he goes after my soft tissue. Abdomen. Groin.

Wednesday, 24th of June.

13:31:58 The grapple/pummel doesn't go on as long as it feels like. Probably. Yoren's enthusiasm is prematurely dampened by via a charged stun baton.

Thursday, 25th of June.

12:15:25 The commander, still holding the stun baton, offers a hand up. Takes me a bit to respond - caught part of the baton's charge through Yoren.

Saturday, 27th of June.

14:06:02 If this were an adventure vid, I'd knock him out with his own baton and leave. In the real world, I like NOT being chased by the navy.

Monday, 29th of June.

14:13:50 He takes me back to Jon and De, fielding skirmish reports while explaining he's just decided to accept our deal. Now; to our shuttle. What?

15:39:55 The good: There's no way he can get us through the station, so we get a free ride to our ship.  
The bad: He has no idea what happened to Mak.

Tuesday, 30th of June.

14:40:35 The commander see me off with "Ishbel's blessing". He's keen enough to see the irony, given the situation, but True Navy enough not to care.

## **July**

Wednesday, 1st of July.

14:15:38 The shuttle pulls away. I peer through a port hole at the big ship's airlock with the Drift. The damage doesn't look that bad from here.

Thursday, 2nd of July.

10:06:59 We dock with the Binturong. Breathing stale ship air removes a weight; feels good. The sound of guns cocking ruins the homecoming a bit.

Sunday, 5th of July.

04:45:44 The guns, which are many, are being pointed our direction by a crowd of serious-looking people. Serious, except for Burns. He's smiling.

Monday, 6th of July.

14:22:42 The attack was Burns' "bolting hound, flushing game." For a man living in deep space, he has an odd affection for genteel hunting analogies.

Tuesday, 7th of July.

17:56:57 He also enjoys cooking analogies, which is disturbing. The pointed religious analogies are a new addition to his repertoire, however... Hmm.

Wednesday, 8th of July.

15:47:29 I have to wonder why he keeps making references to fanatics and martyrs. Is he part of whatever Kaetlyn's involved in, or just being creepy?

Thursday, 9th of July.

14:10:01 Really, the answer to that is obvious: Burns is violent, territorial, and vindictive - yes. Creepy - no. Which means he knows about Kaetlyn.

Friday, 10th of July.

14:13:33 I think about Kaetlyn, mixed up with Burns. I'd much prefer him morbid and apocalyptic instead. There: the upside to a revenge crucifixion.

Monday, 13th of July.

07:05:59 I know Burns - better than I'd like, and well enough to regret. Right now, he's stalling because he wants two mutually exclusive things.

12:59:13 Educated guess: he wants to gut me on the deck of my own ship, AND wants what I know about Kaetlyn's mission. Has to be an angle I can use.

Tuesday, 14th of July.

13:55:14 The problem: he can't ask me for anything in front of his people - comes across weak. Hell, some are twitching because I'm not dead already.

Wednesday, 15th of July.

13:46:25 Solution: I beg. For my life, my crew, my ship, my daughter. I beg to reveal what's going on; throw wary looks at the others in the airlock.

Thursday, 16th of July.

14:34:45 He takes an underling's weapon and pistol whips me - shuts me up before I say anything more. Victory feels a lot like a broken tooth. Ow.

Friday, 17th of July.

16:35:00 He has me hauled to the bridge. (\*My\* bridge, technically - I let it slide.) No one objects; Burns's expression does not invite team input.

Monday, 20th of July.

12:39:46 As soon as we're alone, Burns rounds on me, growling threats too... /honest/ to be ignored. However, they aren't aimed at me, which is new.

Tuesday, 21st of July.

15:26:09 For a few seconds, I even can't sort out who he's angry at, let alone what he's angry /about/. It's not me, though, which -- wait. Kaetlyn?

Wednesday, 22nd of July.

17:57:06 Now he's talking about his son. Didn't know he had a s- wait, what? What's he saying about K- What? WHAT? Can't talk when I'm CHOKING you?

Thursday, 23rd of July.

10:57:34 He tries smashing something into my head, by my shoulder takes most of it. Fishes some aerosol accelerant out of a pocket. I get a faceful.

Friday, 24th of July.

13:36:50 Shirt soaked in accelerant. I keep choking him. Don't know where he gets the stim-lighter, but it reminds me Burns is a verb, not his name.

Monday, 27th of July.

13:53:36 The blue-white brushtip shape of the lighter flame grazes my shirt; its ignition makes a hard WHUFF in the air. Adrenaline crashes into me.

Tuesday, 28th of July.

13:16:15 Adrenaline encourages large gulps of air - \*supremely\* unhelpful when on fire, or coated in extinguisher foam. (Which I am, near-instantly.)

Wednesday, 29th of July.

12:49:42 Burns could be stabbing me while I'm blinded and coughing foam, except... he is too. Lesson: don't start (or be) a fire on my ship.

Thursday, 30th of July.

17:47:41 The foam smells like kids medicine - burns the skin. Ironic, that. Scooping it away from my eyes; shoving myself back against the helm.

Friday, 31st of July.

13:18:41 No knife in my ribs, or bullet. Or shouted call to his troops. When I can see again, Burns is just sitting along the opposite wall. Moping.

## **August**

Monday, 3rd of August.

15:04:51 Burns sees me watching him, shakes his head, and says one terrible word. 'Eloped.'

Tuesday, 4th of August.

14:40:08 Makes no sense; Kaetlyn's utterly dismissive of romance, let alone marriage. Burns says he forbid his son to see her. Oh. Well... shit.

Wednesday, 5th of August.

16:03:41 FORBID?! Might as well buy Kaetlyn a dress and honeymoon cruise with a note reading 'Congratulations! Love, Your new, idiot Father-in-Law.'

Thursday, 6th of August.

16:11:28 Kaetlyn left, but Burns' son found clues to follow her - some kind of note, left in the deepest parts of the Drift; an ancient... ship. Oh.

Friday, 7th of August.

17:53:47 No. Kaetlyn sent me the wave. She had to know I'd find the Ante-D ship. Burns' kid might have sussed it out, but the message was for /me/.

Monday, 10th of August.

19:14:15 That's the first thought in my head. Second thought is "Are you /really/ getting jealous of the /boyfriend/?", spoken in Kaet's mom's voice.

Tuesday, 11th of August.

15:56:15 I ignore that thought. The more important point here is that Burns wants something I can provide - something /other/ than my charred corpse.

Thursday, 13th of August.

05:22:20 We stare at each other until it becomes uncomfortable. Takes much less time than I expect -- two solitary men, alone with too many ghosts.

Friday, 14th of August.

14:46:17 I tell him I'll split them up, if he let's me out of here. He scoffs. I risk another fight to remind him



I'm good at breaking up couples.

Sunday, 16th of August.

06:34:29 On his face, desire to murder me wrestles with desire to control his son's life. Brief struggle, but violent. The 'winner' is... well, me.

Monday, 17th of August.

16:32:36 The next hour goes sunburn-careful. Burns gives instructions. I act very agreeable. His people... don't. Too many want a corpse of me. Hmm.

Wednesday, 19th of August.

09:52:30 On one hand, dissent in the ranks is Burns' problem (and, privately, kind of funny). On the other, this 'dissent' is pointing a gun at me.

15:12:41 Burns shoots the loudest dissenter in the leg - an effective debate tactic, if a little inelegant. I think this is going to work out.

Thursday, 20th of August.

09:19:12 I should NEVER think thoughts like "this is going to work out." The Universe can tell. So can the guy with the bleeding leg and the gun.

Friday, 21st of August.

13:14:28 Guy raises his weapon, Burns is turning too late, and I don't have a gun. My last thought: it's okay - at least I'm dying on my own ship.

Monday, 24th of August.

15:27:29 I don't hear the bang, i don't think, but my body jerks all the same.

Tuesday, 25th of August.

12:44:59 My spasm was just a flinch, not a bullet impact. The shooter's hand, still gripping the gun, is crushed to the deck beneath Deirdre's boot.

12:48:25 I have zero doubt that, at some later point, Jon will refer to my artful dodging as 'gracefully feminine'. I will retort by being not-dead.

Wednesday, 26th of August.

12:08:56 Burns motions for his people to leave. He looks at Deirdre, waiting. Long pause. I have to remind her she's standing on one of his people.

Friday, 28th of August.

06:32:51 At the airlock. Burns says to knock some sense into Kaetlyn. I pause, then say I will. Burns hesitates. His eyes widen. Pausing was bad.

15:27:43 I punch the big red button next to the hatch. The one we're not supposed to punch. The one that initiates emergency explosive decoupling.

Monday, 31st of August.

13:40:24 The hatches bracketing the venting airlock drop like stones. Burns leaps backward to safety. Mostly. Blood sprays; wet, then crystalline.

## **September**

Wednesday, 2nd of September.

09:49:33 Deirdre sprint-stomps toward the bridge - the force of the decomp will push us away from Burns' ship, but we need /much/ more distance.

10:05:13 Frozen blood crystals fill the space between our ships, fountaining from the leg caught in/under Burns' hatch. We need MUCH more distance.

Thursday, 3rd of September.

14:29:51 Bin's engines spin up; I get heavier - the ship's gravity kicks up to normal once we're on live power - and we tumble away from the Drift.

Friday, 4th of September.

12:26:09 Seeing bulk of the Drift slowly falling behind us is a relief. The intercom squawks - Deirdre says a text communication just came through.

12:29:17 One line of text. "We still have Mak."

Tuesday, 8th of September.

16:31:00 The ship engines - a bone-deep subliminal hum that goes unnoticed until absent - fade to idle. Jon asks for orders. He saw the message.

Wednesday, 9th of September.

16:01:59 I tap in two messages, sent in opposite directions. The first reads, "I am coming." The second: "I am coming back." I tell De to jump.

Thursday, 10th of September.

08:39:58 [Part One: The End]

14:37:35 The ship is quiet during jumps. Ambient energy absorption mutes the engine thrum and muffles speech. Not that anyone is speaking. To me.

Friday, 11th of September.

08:15:07 I start some engine work. Deirdre comms - says it's affecting the jump. Open a terminal; Jon has them offline. I'm evicted from my own ship.

Saturday, 12th of September.