FANGS
BOOK TWO

EVERY MAN’S WISH ON BOARD
“Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth.”

—Zora Neale Hurston
01 The Devil and the Astronaut
Facing the void is easier with a copilot.

02 High Untrespassed Sanctity
There's a vast and wondrous universe out there—but what is that, compared to love?

03 Now, and Now, and Now, and Now
As things begin to crack, you should become aware of all you've taken for granted.

04 Broken Bottles, Old Gloves
Sitting in the darkness with open eyes, and catching a glimpse of the future.
05  Come Not Single Spies
   You can't hide from your problems when your problems are following you.

06  The Lightning in the Collied Night
   So quick bright things come to confusion.

Epilogue - Past the Wit of Man
   The truth, and all points thereafter.
The Devil and the Astronaut
JOEL WAS AFRAID OF THE DARK.

THIS WILL BE IMPORTANT LATER.
WE MET AT SOTHIS MINING, ABOUT FOUR HUNDRED LIGHTS OUT FROM THE BUBBLE.

NOT A PLACE WHERE YOU'D EXPECT TO FIND ANYONE WORTH MEETING.
WORD WAS THAT ONE COULD GET RICH QUICK...

...SMUGGLING GOODS OUT OF THAT ABSURD BACKWATER.

RUMORS LIKE THAT TEND TO DRAW PILOTS OF A CERTAIN CHARACTER.
THE DESPERATE.
THE HOPELESS.

THE OPPORTUNISTS.

I DON'T KNOW WHICH KIND I WAS.
MAYBE HOPELESS AND DESPERATE.

READY TO FORGET WHAT I DIDN'T WANT TO RECALL, AT LEAST.
HIS SHIP CAUGHT MY EYE...

...A WHITE COBRA NAMED "LUCIFER."

"LIGHT-BRINGER,"
THE NAME MEANT.
I thought he was taking the piss, going for the badass starpilot image.

Flying a ship named after the devil.
I had a creaky Type-6, grandly named after a famous 20th century Earth astronaut.

The similarities -- and the differences -- in our ship names were not lost on me.
But I watched him, in the bars and sleepovers. Such as could be had at Sothis, anyway.

He was quiet and aloof.

I saw a lot of myself in that.
MAYBE THAT'S WHY I BOUGHT HIM A DRINK.
It became an odd sort of courtship.

We each passed through so this every few weeks.

Sometimes we met, sometimes we left messages.
Endless months of time lag.

Know each other across like victorians, getting to precious paper. We were wrote letters, on real.
He had some money, after a few long cargo hauls back to the bubble, but he said he felt like he was waiting for something.

We were of a single mind in that, I knew.
AND THAT'S HOW WE FOUND EACH OTHER. NOT WITH FIREWORKS OR BIG EXPLOSIONS OR SOME HOLY LIGHT ILLUMINATING THE HEART'S COURSE...

...BUT WITH THE SLOW AWAKENING TO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS OTHER PERSON FIT A PERSON-SHAPED KEYHOLE.
So we signed a contract, pooled our assets, and formed a little company.

No more empty second seat.
WE HAD ENOUGH BETWEEN US FOR A BIGGER SHIP -- A HOME.

The Asp Explorer is the civilian version of the military model Asp Mk II (which first saw service in 2879). Lakon Spaceways now owns the licence to construct these ships and has marketed them heavily at customers looking for their first multi-crewed ships. The ship class has earned a solid reputation for long-range missions and those requiring some discretion.

- **Top Speed**: 254M/S
- **Boost Speed**: 345M/S
- **Manoeuvrability**: ------
- **FSD Range Laden**: 12.07LY
- **FSD Range Unladen**: 13.12LY
- **Shields**: 152
- **Armour**: 378
- **Hull Mass**: 280.0 T
- **Cargo Capacity**: 38.0 T

WE PICKED THE BIGGEST THING WE COULD AFFORD, KITTED HER OUT, AND MOVED IN.
She was the first new ship I had ever owned, and she was a dream.

We were a dream.
He wanted to name her after me, which seemed too vain -- and unlucky.

In the end, we called her "Lucy."

I painted her name myself, scrambling across the hull in null-g, grinning like a fool.
I had never been so happy -- had never imagined that this kind of happiness could exist.

We struck out from Sothis headed outward and upspin, following the ecliptic plane. We were off to see the galaxy.

Joel would be dead in thirty-one days.
High Untrespassed Sanctity
SOME NOTES ON LIFE IN AN ASP EXPLORER.
SHE'S A BIG SHIP, WITH TWO PRIVATE CABINS AND BERTHING FOR FOUR MORE CREW. THREE DECKS, TOP TO BOTTOM, WITH A REC ROOM -- A REC ROOM! -- A LOUNGE, AND A SMALL FORMAL MESS.

LIKE A MINIATURE NAVY CRUISER.
Compared with what we had, Lucy was full of luxuries.

The two of us, sharing a ship designed for a working crew of four or six. So much space!
WE PLAYED GAMES ACROSS THE DECKS - HIDING AND SEEKING LIKE SILLY LITTLE KIDS.

...OR WE CUT THE DRIVES AND MADE LOVE FLOATING IN WITCHLIGHT, LIKE MAD ADULTS.
WE DRANK DEEPLY...

...OF THE FREEDOM
OF LOVE IN SOLITUDE.
Our course bore us away from the worlds of men...

...skirted the all-devouring maw that forever seeks to swallow the Milky Way...

...and aimed us at the roof of creation, atop the Fourth Galactic Quadrant at Celestial Northeast.
Our lofty goal:
To follow the path of the Distant Worlds Expedition of 3302, and touch the Abyss at the far end of the universe.
MAYBE EVEN SET DOWN AT THAT LONELIEST OF SPOTS: BEAGLE POINT.

A PLACE SO DISTANT FROM HUMANITY'S CRADLE THAT IT MAKES OUR OLD SOTHIS RUN LOOK LIKE A WALK TO THE POST BOX.
Sometimes Joel took the helm alone, especially if we lingered to detail-scan a system’s planets.

He loved the suns -- most of all the blue type O supergiants and the howling helium wolf-rayets. He basked in brightness.
WHEN WE GREW TIRED, WE WOULD SET DOWN ON A ROCK AND SLEEP WRAPPED IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS, THEN AWAKE RENEWED. EVERY DAY SHOWED US A NEW PLACE THAT OUR EYES WERE THE FIRST EVER TO SEE.
HOT BINARY SUNS...

...OR TWIN BLACK HOLES...

...OR VIRGIN EARTHLIKE WORLDS,
GLEAMING LIKE DIAMONDS ON THE
ENDLESS SATIN DARK OF SPACE.
A BLANK CANVAS THAT WE DREW ON
A THOUSAND LIGHT YEARS AT A TIME...

...CARVING OUR NAMES INTO THE SKY.
It was ours.

All of it was ours.

The stars filled our hearts and eyes and it was as if no one else had ever or would ever exist in all the galaxy...

Except us.
A mote in the eye of a god we thought had to be real...

...for who else would create so forbidding and vast a universe, then fill it with so much quiet wonder?

If only I knew then what I know now.
Now, and Now, and Now, and Now
TWO WEEKS IN.

BLISS TURNS TO ROUTINE.

ROUTINE LEADS TO CARELESSNESS.
SRV Racing was great for killing boredom until I got careless and almost killed me.

Also, now down to one SRV.
WE BROKE OFF OUR PUSH TO BEAGLE POINT TO SURVEY A MASSIVE FIELD OF BLACK HOLES DOWNSPIN OF THE CORE.

DIDN'T PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO OUR FUEL STATE AND ALMOST GOT STUCK.
There's no help this far out if you're stranded.

It'd take too long for anyone to get to you...

...even if they were insane enough to try.
THEN WE CAME BLASTING OUT OF WITCHSPACE WITH A MASSIVE BINARY PAIR CLOSE ABOARD AND DAMN NEAR BLEW THE CANOPY.
SECFLIGHT TOOK THE WORST OF IT WHILE WE POWERED OUT OF THE GRAVITY WELL.

I WATCHED THE PLEXALUM CRACK AND SPIDER NOT A METER FROM MY FACE...

...AND THEN WE WERE FREE.

WE PUT THE AFMU TO WORK ON THE DAMAGE WHILE I TRIED TO STOP SHAKING.
JOEL PLAYED IT DOWN, EVER THE DASHING SMUGGLER, TRYING TO GET ME PAST THE SHOCK OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED.

THEN HE DISAPPEARED BELOW FOR ALMOST TEN MINUTES...

...AND CAME BACK WITH A PRESENT.

SOMEHOW HE'D FIGURED OUT MY NAMESAKE AND BOUGHT ME ONE.

I HAD NO CLUE WHERE HE HAD MANAGED TO HIDE THE SILLY THING.
HE SAID HE'D WANTED TO SAVE IT UNTIL THE HALFWAY POINT, BUT THIS WAS CLOSE ENOUGH.

IT WAS BEAUTIFUL. SHOCKINGLY ALIVE.

I STARTED CRYING BECAUSE I LOVED IT SO MUCH -- LOVED HIM SO MUCH -- AND I WAS AFRAID I'D SOMEHOW KILL THE POOR THING.
JOEL JUST HELD ME AS THE ORCHID DRANK STARK SUNLIGHT THROUGH THE CRACKED CANOPY.
That night I found Joel sobbing in the lower corridor.
HE WOULDN'T STOP SHAKING UNTIL I YELLED AT THE STUPID AI TO TURN ON ALL THE LIGHTS.

WHOLE SHIP LIT STEM TO STERN LIKE A FLYING CHRISTMAS TREE.

IT HELPED.
HE SAID IT WAS NOTHING.

A BOY'S FEAR OF THE DARK,
LEFT OVER FROM CHILDHOOD.

BUT OUT HERE, WE'RE SURROUNDED
BY ALL THE DARK THAT EVER WAS
AND EVER WOULD BE.
I pushed, wanting to talk, to tell him it was okay...

...but he snapped at me and stalked off.

Embarrassed at emotion or weakness? He should have known I didn't care about that kind of stuff, didn't think less of him for being human.

I tried to tell him.
The next day, though, he was his old self, ship-shape and smiling, like nothing happened.

He showed me how he'd been watering the orchid, how to feed it with an eyedropper.
I clung to the idea that everything was fine -- everything would be fine, as long as the little orchid lived.

It seemed suddenly more important than anything that I take care of the flower...

...that amazing, vibrant, helpless, unbelievably alive miracle with its tiny little leaves...
...FOR WE WERE THREE VERY FRAGILE LIVING THINGS...

...AND WE WERE SO VERY, VERY FAR FROM HOME.
Broken Bottles, Old Gloves
AFTER THE CLOSE CALL WITH THE BINARY, LUCY STARTED TO FUSS.

WE BUILD THESE SHIPS SO WELL...BUT THEY NEED CARE.
THE CRACKED CANOPY WAS EASILY FIXED...

...BUT SHE'D CAUGHT A GHOST.

A GREMLIN SOMEWHERE IN HER DELICATE, COMPLEX SUITE OF SENSORS AND FAR-SCANNERS.
I was no scan-tech, and neither was Joel, but the problem seemed to have something to do with the frameshift’s mass-lock inhibit limiter.
IT WASN'T A MAJOR PROBLEM, UNTIL SUDDENLY...IT WAS.

DAMN GLITCH PANICKED THE COMPUTER, TRIGGERED AN EMERGENCY DROP OUT OF FRAME SHIFT.

LEFT US TUMBLING, HULL GROANING WITH STRAIN...

...AND LUCY'S ALARMS CRYING LOUD ENOUGH TO WAKE THE DEAD.
I was too busy to be terrified as I fought the spin.

Finally nulled the rates after almost a minute of lurching craziness.
WE HUNG THERE AT SYSTEM RELATIVE ZERO, SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE LOCAL ECLIPTIC...

...PRIME INTERDICTION TERRITORY, IF THERE'D BEEN A PIRATE WITHIN SEVEN KILOPARSECS...

...WHILE JOEL AND I RAN DAMAGE CONTROL.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRE GROUPS</th>
<th>INVENTORY</th>
<th>FUNCTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>TYPE</td>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>PRIORITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>5A ENG</td>
<td>30%</td>
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LUCY HAD A FIELD MAINTENANCE UNIT AND AN AUTOMATED MICROFABRICATION PLANT, AND THE SHIPCOMP WAS SUPPOSED TO BE SELF-DIAGNOSING AND SELF-HEALING...

| 2G SYS       | 3%        | 4         | 100%    |

...BUT WE COULDN'T FIND A DAMN THING WRONG WITH THE DRIVE OR SENSORS.

| 6B SYS       | 3%        | 4         | 100%    |
| 4A SYS       | 3%        | 1         | 100%    |
I don't remember who yelled first.

Stress makes you say dumb things.

He told me he blamed me for the drop. I told him what I thought of that.
I locked myself in the guest cabin to cool off...

...and because there was nothing valuable in there to throw and break.
AN HOUR LATER, JOEL KNOCKED ON THE HATCH AND SAID I SHOULD SECURE FOR MANEUVERING.

HE'D CHASED THROUGH LUCY'S SYSTEMS MANUALLY, SATISFIED HIMSELF THEY WERE FINE. IT WAS TIME TO GET BACK UNDERWAY.
I opened the door and we held eyes for long seconds.

Then he smiled, a shy boy's smile.

He reached for me.
TEARS DON'T FALL WITHOUT GRAVITY. THEY JUST SORT OF STICK TO YOUR FACE.

CRYING IN NULL-G IS UGLY AND IT GETS EVERYWHERE.

I FLICKED DROPLETS AWAY FROM MY EYES LIKE A STORM OF TINY STARS.
HE WAS SORRY,
I WAS SORRY.

FORGIVEN, FORGOTTEN.
AND SUDDENLY IT WAS TOO MUCH. WE MADE FOR THE COCKPIT TO BRING LUCY’S DRIVES ONLINE.

WANTED DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THIS PLACE.

WANTED TO RUN.
CRACKS IN THE CANOPY.

CRACKS IN US.

KEEP IT TOGETHER, GIRL.

LUCY AND ME BOTH.
Come Not Single Spies
JOEL HAD THREE DAYS TO LIVE WHEN WE REACHED THE EOCS BRE REGION.
We'd come about 32,000 light years...

...taking just three weeks to cross a distance difficult to comprehend a thousand years ago...

...and literally unimaginable a thousand years before that.
There's something about the sky near the core. It's not just pinpricks of light -- it's oceans of it.

It's the opposite of Homer's wine-dark Aegean...

...an immeasurable bright eternity, without limit or end.
I thought about what we might do when we returned to the bubble, to the human hegemony and the ebb and flow of politics & power.

Maybe get Lucy some A-rated fittings, give her some love.

God knows she's earned it.
MAYBE EXTEND OUR MARRIAGE CONTRACT?
MAKE THE ARRANGEMENT PERMANENT?
I could see myself with him, this man who cried in the dark but smiled whenever a sun's light flooded the canopy.

The flight deck was his favorite place, and I loved watching him fly.
COMPETENT, SMILING.
JUST A BIT OF FLASH TO SHOW HE KNEW I WAS WATCHING.
THAT EXTRA BIT OF ROLL, A TEENY BIT MORE BOOST.
LUCY SANG WHEN HE FLEW HER.
Sometimes we lay in the dark and I'd listen to him breathe for hours, hearing the shift as he drifted in and out of deep sleep...

...and then I, always the chronic insomniac, would walk the decks.
THE ORCHID HE GAVE ME WAS GROWING.

I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT PLANTS AND I WAS STILL TERRIFIED I WOULD ACCIDENTALLY KILL IT -- THE STANDARD FEAR OF SOMEONE WHO'S NEVER CARED FOR A HOUSEPLANT.
But every chance I got, I picked it up in its little gravity lens pot and carried it to the flight deck. Wasn't sure which suns were best for it, so I let it drink from every one we passed by.
Joel slept while we kept watch, the flower and I.
I don't know if my parents knew the depths of schoolyard hell they were assigning me to with my name -- I hate it and have always hated it -- but the orchid is beautiful.
Joel rose at 0700 shiptime as he liked to do, and found me on the flight deck, where I usually was in the morning.

He brought me coffee, sipped at his own tea.
IT WAS A BIT OF AN extravaganza, but we'd splurged from our shared resources when we set out, stocking real coffee and tea.

Expensive, but what the hell, we'd thought.

It was just us.
...EXCEPT IT WASN'T JUST US.
The Lightning in the Collided Night
Joel's last day started with no significant event or marker.

That pivotal things happen on otherwise ordinary days is the oddest quirk of history and the human condition.
WE EXPECT EVENTS THAT CHANGE US TO ALSO CHANGE OUR WORLD...

...LIKE A BLACK HOLE WARPS SPACE-TIME.
NOT EVEN FLOATING IN INFINITE NOTHINGNESS SURROUNDED BY FOUR HUNDRED BILLION STARS CAN SHAKE LOOSE THAT NOTION, THOUGH IT IS RARELY TRUE.
WE ARE HUMAN.

WE ARE SLAVES TO OUR PERSPECTIVES.
I sipped coffee and yawned as Joel brought up the map.

We were about to start a long string of jumps, having resolved to push to Beagle Point by the end of the week.
But as we oriented on our next referent star, the damn sensor ghost struck again.

This time it tripped the interdiction warning.

Lucy bucked and Joel yanked the throttles back.

We spun out of frameshift like a leaf riding a hard wind.
THE DRIVES SHUNTED PENT-UP ENERGY AND JOEL DUMPED A PRECIOUS HEAT SINK TO KEEP US FROM BURSTING INTO FLAMES.
Scan showed one contact zenith and astern.

A fault. A phantom. We ignored it.

We were used to the sensor glitches by now.

Besides, the idea of anyone else sharing the deep dark with us seemed totally absurd.
WHAT MADNESS POSSESSES MADMEN TO LINGER IN THE DEEP AND DO THESE THINGS?

WHAT DARK BROKEN THING SITS IN OUR COLLECTIVE HEART, THAT WE CAN HOLD WITHIN US SO MUCH LOVE AND JOY, AND ALSO SUCH NAKED CRUELTY?
Might as well ask why space is black, or why gravity sucks.

We cannot escape what we are.

The universe is a clock slowly winding down, its hands eternally circling the same point.

All things eventually come round.
THE SCAN WARNING HIT LIKE A SLAP TO THE FACE.

SHIP SCAN DETECTED

WE WERE TOO STARTLED TO BE AFRAID.
I thought Lucy’s systems were really on the Fritz.

But then I knew.

This was no glitch.

Someone was back there, where no one should be.
There were no comms.

No jolly pirate hails.

No threats.

No demand for cargo, no taunts or laughter.

They simply opened fire.
Beams glittered, a star's fusion heat focused and shaped into a deadly lance.

Lucy rocked with the hits. Fire sparked and blossomed.

JOEL THREW LUCY AROUND LIKE SHE WAS A FIGHTER, BOOSTING THROUGH TURNS SO HARD THAT MY VISION KEPT GRAYING OUT.

SHE GAVE US EVERYTHING SHE HAD TO GIVE.

IT WASN'T ENOUGH.

LUCY'S SHIELDS WERE SPEC'D TO KEEP THE PAINT SAFE DURING DOCKING, NOT TO SOAK UP BATTERY FIRE FROM A COMBAT-FITTED ANACONDA.
OBJECTIVELY, I KNOW IT WENT ON FOR MAYBE SIXTY SECONDS, IF THAT.

BUT I LIVED AND DIED LIFETIMES IN THAT ETERNAL TIME-STRETCHED MOMENT OF PANIC AND DESPAIR.
My head crashed into the bulkhead and the world went to white fire.

Thoughts distant, detached.

I couldn’t feel anything.

If this was death, at least it was quiet.

Then, with aching slowness, it all faded back in.
VISION FLICKERED.

SHAPE CAME AND WENT.

HAZY.

ALARMS DEMANDED ATTENTION.

WARNINGS SCREAMED DAMAGE.

SOUNDS.

FLOATING.

EVERYTHING HURT.

COULDN'T FOCUS.
WHOEVER HAD ATTACKED US WAS GONE, DUCKING INTO THE BETWEEN OF WITCH-SPACE WHILE I'D DRIFTED, UNCONSCIOUS.

WE HADN'T EVEN BEEN WORTH KILLING.

THEY JUST LEFT US FOR DEAD, LUCY HOLED AND BLEEDING OUT.
My first thought was for the ship. The canopy was intact. Life support was still functional.

Lucy was dying, but slowly. We still had air and heat. There was still time to...
THEN I SAW JOEL.
HE WAS CLEARLY DEAD.

YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT, LOSE THAT MUCH BLOOD, AND LIVE.

I KNEW IT WITH A DETACHED GUTSHOT CERTAINTY, EVEN AS I CRAWLED OVER TO HIM.
I wept in outrage.
Furious with the universe, screaming that it was unfair.

That I loved him.

That he was beautiful and wonderful and he didn't deserve to die here, in this trackless black.

Not like this.

Not in the dark.
SO I DID THE ONLY THING I COULD DO FOR HIM.

THE LAST THING I WOULD EVER DO FOR HIM.
LUCY WAS SLOW TO RESPOND TO THE HELM, BUT SHE DID HER BEST.
WITH A SPUTTER OF FAILING THRUSTERS...
...I brought her bow around to face the sun.
HE SHOULD BE IN THE LIGHT, THIS MAN WHO FEARED DARK.

HE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO DIE AFRAID.
THERE WAS A MOMENT OF PERFECT STILLNESS.
AND THEN I WAS ALONE.
Epilogue
Past the Wit of Man
STILL ALONE.
I EVENTUALLY ACTIVATED THE BEACON. I DIDN'T KNOW OR CARE IF IT WOULD WORK.
Looking back, the time that followed is...

...jumbled.

Sharp edges.

Disconnected snapshots.
I know I sat for a day with Joel's body.

Didn't seem right to put him in the hold, or the galley freezer.
THOUGHT ABOUT KILLING MYSELF.

IT WOULD BE EASY.

JUST OPEN THE LOCK AND STEP OUTSIDE.

SIMPLEST THING EVER.

LIKE GOING FOR A WALK.
COULD TUG JOEL BACK THERE WITH ME, LIGHT AS A FEATHER.

SEAL THE HATCH.
GRAB THE HANDLE AND GIVE IT A PULL.

SAFETY OFF

SO EASY.
THE THOUGHT OF THE ORCHID STOPPED ME COLD. I COULDN'T LEAVE IT TO DIE.

THE REALIZATION SET ME TO WEEPING AND LAUGHING AT THE SAME TIME.

I WAS FLOATING THERE IN A DEAD SHIP WITH MY DEAD HUSBAND AND I WAS PANICKING AT THE THOUGHT OF A FLOWER DYING.

IT SOUNDS ABSURD, BUT THE FLOWER... ...SAVED ME, I SUPPOSE.

PULLED ME BACK.
I WIPED MY EYES, SHOOK MY HEAD...

...AND TURNED MY THOUGHTS TOWARD LIVING.
I wrapped him in our sheets.

There was no needle or thread, but I tucked and knotted as best I could.
THEN I LET HIM GO.
THE FUEL RATS CAME FOR US...
...CAME FOR ME...
...IN A FEW DAYS.

A COMMANDER NAMED "GAPPER" WITH A SLICK HAIRCUT IN A SCUFFED UP DIAMONDBACK.

TURNS OUT THOSE BEACONS REALLY WORK.

HIS FACE WHEN HE SAW ME...

...I GUESS I WAS IN PRETTY BAD SHAPE.
AND LUCY...

...I HAD GAPPER NUDGE HER SUNWARD.

SHE FOLLOWED JOEL, HULL
SCARRED AND PITED BUT STILL
GREAMING, BRIGHT AND PROUD.

I WEPT THEN FOR HER, TOO.
WE FLEW HOME.

...THOUGH THE WORD Didn'T MEAN ANYTHING ANYMORE.
AND THAT WAS IT.

NOW I HAUL CARGO.
ALL THINGS COME ROUND.
JOEL NEVER HAD ANY FATEFUL LAST WORDS FOR ME.

THAT'S ANOTHER LIE THEY TELL IN MOVIES AND BOOKS.

THE LAST THING HE SAID TO ME WAS PROBABLY SOMETHING ABOUT COFFEE.

I DON'T REMEMBER.
BUT I DON'T NEED WORDS.

I CAN SEE HIM WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES...

...THINK OF HIM WHEN SUNLIGHT TOUCHES THE CANOPY.

I CAN FEEL HIM STANDING BEHIND ME, HEAD COCKED, SMILING THAT SMILE.
AND, OF COURSE, I STILL HAVE THE ORCHID. THE GALNET WIKI SAYS IT'LL LIVE PRACTICALLY FOREVER, WITH A BIT OF LOVE.

I KEEP IT IN THE COCKPIT, WHERE IT CAN SOAK UP THE STARLIGHT.
I'm alive, and at times it feels like I might live forever, too...

Flying from sun to sun.
Sailing in light.
AND I’LL ALWAYS REMEMBER.
I’LL REMEMBER US.

I’LL REMEMBER THE DREAM.
afterword
Where Fangs, Book One spun a series of tales connected only by their setting in the Elite Dangerous universe, Book Two is all of a piece. I wanted to write a story about the different ways men and women approach memory, love, grief, and loss. Above all else it was important to me for the people in that story to react like real people do to real events. Even though science fiction is by its very nature at least somewhat fantastic, I wanted the people in this story to ring true. I hope I have succeeded.

Fangs wouldn’t be Fangs without the labors of David Hall, whose tablet and stylus have given a life to this world far beyond what I can conjure with a keyboard. I am forever grateful for his skill, his vision, and his passion for this project.

I hope together we have delivered something close to the story I’ve seen so clearly in my head for so many years. These characters have come to mean very much to me, and I hope that shines through in the telling.

Finally: if I do a third Fangs story, I hope I can get it done a little faster than this one.

…but no promises :)

Fly safe, commanders.

Lee Hutchinson
CMDR GARRUS