

Breathing Space, Fading Frontier
contains adult language and
situations, including alcohol use,
and romantic relationships.

This episode includes references
to violence against children.

Additional sensory contact
warnings can be found in the show
notes.

Intro plays

I ain't got no home to go to
I ain't got nothing to sell
But my stars will never leave me
Even when I'm sold to hell
I was born under a blue sky
And I'll die out in the black
When I'm gone don't no one mourn
me
'cause my debts will drag me back

Intro fades out

INT. "FORGE SORROW INTO JOY" A MEDIUM SIZED PEREGRINATION
FREE TRADER. A STORAGE HOLD ACTING AS A MAKESHIFT BRIG.

NULLA

I hope you're not still mad about
our little scuffle, grinner.
Though that is a nice shiner you
ended up with. Bet the boys in the
bunk will love hearing how you go
tossed around by a little girl.

ABLE

Fuck you, ulko.

NULLA

'Yoolko'? I don't know that one.
Is that some kinda grinner slang?

Door opens

CAPTAIN

Ulko. It means stranger or
foreigner. Someone not of the
Family.

NULLA

Ooh, I guess class is in session.

ABLE

Quiet, fish. You will speak only
when...

CAPTAIN

Able. Step out while I interview
our guest.

ABLE

Captain. The XO told me to guard
her close. She's a menace.

CAPTAIN

Ensign. You are relieved.

ABLE leaves; door closes

NULLA

That one's as dumb as they come
but he's not wrong. I am
dangerous. You saw what me and my
friends did to your...

CAPTAIN

Your friends are dead. That ship
you were on is just salvage now.
I've got a crew over there taking
her apart. I've got two wounded
laid up in sick bay, but no
deaths. And you, little one, are
sitting in shackles in my hold.

Your accent says 'station rat' so
you ought to know what happens to
anybody caught committing an act
of piracy, but let me make it
clear: Inner Law, Outer Law, Void

Law, even the Law We Carry With Us
says I can shove you in that
airlock and cycle it.

NULLA
So fucking do it already.

CAPTAIN
Questions first. Then we figure
out what we're gonna do with you.
How's the food on Tethys station?

NULLA
It's shit. Like everywhere. How
did you know...?

CAPTAIN
Your approach vector. To intercept
us here and now from that angle,
you came from Tethys. Makes sense,
it's not much more than a hole.
Good mustering port for pirates.
Did you sign on there or a
previous port?

NULLA
I was shanghaied out of Ceres.

CAPTAIN
Try a better lie next time. You
fought off half the boarding party
by yourself. Cracked open a face
plate by hand, so I'm guessing
there're cybernetics under that
suit. Nobody shanghai's that much
trouble. I bet they paid you a
signing bonus, or you were running
from something and they were an
easy way out of port.

NULLA
Fuck you, skinsack.

CAPTAIN
Hn. OK. What was your station on
the ship?

NULLA

I was in the barrel.

CAPTAIN

Hah. I always heard y'all took turns, but I guess if you weren't good for anything else...

NULLA

Astrogation.

CAPTAIN

Assistant?

NULLA

Solo.

CAPTAIN

Getting greedy with this yarn. I'm supposed to buy that?

NULLA

When you popped on our scope two days ago, I calculated your transfer orbit from the readings. Your point of origin comes back to the plastics refinery at Titan L1. And you're using Hohmann orbit, which means you're going for efficiency over speed. That means this ship is fully loaded. Looking at all these crates, I was right. You're headed to the Jupiter system. Probably Ganymede. You're two weeks out and still off their scopes. We burned a lot of delta-v to catch you before the fight could be spotted.

CAPTAIN

Not bad. I'm still not sure I buy you as solo astrogator, even for a pirate. You're too young to be licensed.

NULLA

Math doesn't care about a piece of paper.

CAPTAIN

(laughs)

Ain't that the truth.

NULLA

You done playing yet? As much fun as this is, I got a date with hard vacuum I'd like to get to.

CAPTAIN

What if you didn't? We could let you go.

NULLA

Helmet or no, I can't walk to the nearest space station.

CAPTAIN

If we saw fit to take you as far as Ganymede, dropped you there. Do you think you'd find your way back onto a pirate ship?

Pause

NULLA

You want me to say 'no'.

CAPTAIN

And you want me to think the truth is 'yes'.

NULLA

Obviously this line of work didn't pay out. Rolling the dice again doesn't seem worth it.

CAPTAIN

Do we need to keep those shackles on you the whole time?

NULLA

I'd rather you didn't.

CAPTAIN

Let's start easy. I'm going to call the ensign back in here and have him uncuff you. Then we look for someplace on board where you can spend a few weeks keeping your head down without us tripping over you every five minutes. Deal?

NULLA

I could live with that.

CAPTAIN

I hope so. Welcome to the *Forge Sorrow Into Joy*, home ship to 152 of The Family. I am Captain Yuri Arturoskin.

Do you have a name, little one?

NULLA

No. ... no. Let's just... No name.

CAPTAIN

Alright. Well, we'll figure something out.

NULLA

Why? Why not just space me? That's easier, safer for you. If the tables were turned, that's what I'd do.

CAPTAIN

How many people were aboard that pirate ship of yours, before the fight?

NULLA

I don't know, 40 maybe.

CAPTAIN

Even if you don't pull the trigger yourself, even if you just hand

someone a weapon or give an order,
even if it's in self defense,
every life taken is a weight on
your soul. I'd like mine to stay
light enough to fly a little
longer.

Scene Break

INT. ENGINEERING ACCESS TUNNEL IN THE FORGE SORROW INTO JOY.

Sound of someone knocking on a heavy bulkhead; a door opens

NULLA

Occupado. I ain't decent. Fuck
off.

CAPTAIN

I can see you sitting on your bunk
fully dressed, Nulla.

NULLA

Dressed or not, I ain't decent.

CAPTAIN

Hm. Well, I can see you've kept
busy. I think the crap around this
makeshift bunk consists of more
petty theft than this ship has had
in the last two decades combined.

NULLA

Flattery gets you everywhere,
cap'n.

CAPTAIN

This and your continued fights
with my crew, is not what I count
as 'keeping your head down'.

NULLA

Fine. Space me then.

CAPTAIN

There is a middle ground between
'letting you do whatever you want'

and 'killing you'. It would be inconvenient for everyone if you spent the rest of this trip in shackles.

NULLA

I'll break some more noses if you try that again.

CAPTAIN

Hn. Since we've met, has threatening me ever gotten you anything? So why keep trying it? Are you so feral that you'll bite even when that hurts you more in the end?

(sighs)

We have five days left in our journey. As we discussed, we can let you off at Ganymede and, contingent on you behaving yourself, just how you ended up aboard our ship can stay a secret. But that does leave you in a strange port with nothing.

NULLA

I'll do fine.

CAPTAIN

You'd probably do better if you have some cash to get started. Ah, I see the little one's ears perk. Yeah, I want to pay you for some work.

NULLA

What's the job?

CAPTAIN

Just good ol' heavy lifting. We're planning on offloading a couple dozen tons of processed plastic. But the idiots back at Titan scrambled our loading order. Half

of the crates we want off are blocked by others we're taking on to our next port. At the moment we'll have to unload everything at Ganymede to sort it out. It'll cost us days.

NULLA

Why not just order some ensigns to do it for you?

CAPTAIN

Manpower is short at the moment, what with repairs. And no one on my crew has your qualifications. Yeah, we scanned your enhancements. Quadruple Limb replacements. Level 2 rated at least, with spinal reinforcement. You're a walking forklift.

NULLA

Sweet talker.

CAPTAIN

I'll give you the Stevedore Union day rate from now till we hit Ganymede, even if you finish early. That puts you in port with a couple hundred in your pocket.

NULLA

What's gonna stop me from cracking open crates and pocketing the good stuff?

CAPTAIN

If you want to stuff your pockets full of polyurethane and polyethelyne pellets, then you should'a had your brain replaced too. That's all that's in there. But I'll assign somebody to keep an eye on you if you're lonely.

NULLA

Whatever. OK, I'll take the job.

CAPTAIN

Ventral hold, oh-eight-hundred
then.

NULLA

Fine.

Scene Break

EXT. A DOCKYARD ON GANYMEDE. THE *FORGE SORROW INTO JOY* IS
MOORED.

X.O. BLINDSKIN

Stores are topped off and the
Yukon rep signed for the poly.
Once payment clears, I don't see
any reason we can't launch
immediately.

CAPTAIN

Yukon drags their feet on paying
anything but their stupid
'ganders' so I don't expect a
rush. I don't like staying docked
too long but a little leave won't
hurt us.

X.O. BLINDSKIN

We shouldn't drag our feet either.
A Family ship in dock will make
the locals nervous. Always does.

CAPTAIN

Tell senior staff to walk softly
in port. Put a leash on the kids
too. Tell 'em we might scramble at
20 minutes notice and run a couple
drills to show 'em we're serious.
That'll keep them close.

X.O. BLINDSKIN

That will be popular.

CAPTAIN

They'll live.

NULLA

Yo! Cap'n!

CAPTAIN

Holy shit, she's back.

X.O. BLINDSKIN

You want a security detail, Yuri?

CAPTAIN

Not yet, but not 'no' either. Hold on, I'll talk to her.

Footsteps

CAPTAIN

If you left something behind, we burned everything you left in your spiderhole, kid.

NULLA

Shut up. I don't need anything.

CAPTAIN

If you didn't need something, you wouldn't be here. So what is it? Run out of money already?

NULLA

Shockingly, no. I've still got all of it. I just... I had a look around. I think maybe Gany's not a good prospect. There are better marks out there. Maybe Eros or Arcturus Station or the Ring. Figured maybe you were heading that way.

CAPTAIN

So you came looking for a ride?

NULLA

Something like that.

CAPTAIN

We're not headed any of those directions. And ships of the Peregrination do not take passengers. Not for free. Not for pay.

NULLA

Crew then. Put me to work. I'm Ablebody.

CAPTAIN

I don't need an unlicensed astrogator.

NULLA

Human forklift, remember? Or security, I can do that. Or make me peel potatoes and rehydrate meals. Or fucking train me in something; I'm a quick study.

CAPTAIN

Even if I didn't need to teach you to be useful, little one, I'm not sure the math comes out. You come with a heap of trouble.

NULLA

Fine, you don't want me. I'm out.

Footsteps

CAPTAIN

Hold up. Here's my deal: I bring you on as crew, shifts are six and ten, one off. Plus four a day of schoolwork.

NULLA

Fucking school? What do I look like?

CAPTAIN

You look like a station rat turned pirate who's never had a lick of

education in your life. But I can tell there's a brain in that half-shaved head of yours which is more useful to this world than the rest of you put together. Think of it like this: if your mind's a knife, school's a whetstone for it.

NULLA

Fine, is that it?

CAPTAIN

That was all carrot. Here's the stick: you quit trying to lie to me.

NULLA

Sure. OK.

CAPTAIN

This ain't something to blow off, kid. Look into my eye. If you're on my crew, there will be things I gotta know. Now I can see that there are things you don't wanna talk about written in big red letters across your forehead. That's fine. I ain't gonna pry for kicks. But if I ask something important, and you're smart enough to know when that is, if it's important, you tell me.

NULLA

Alright. Deal.

CAPTAIN

First important question: you're walking around with a fortune in cybernetics wired into you. Way more than a station orphan could afford outright.

NULLA

I didn't hear a question yet.

CAPTAIN

You ran out on a debt somewhere. A big one. Which means somebody is looking for you. I need to know where and who.

NULLA

I got rebuilt on Europa, under a contract with Taurus. And yeah, they might be looking for me.

CAPTAIN

Taurus would put a killswitch in any body that's collateral on a big debt.

NULLA

I hacked that first day, then hopped a ship off colony. But you don't need to worry about them, I can handle any repos they send myself.

CAPTAIN

That ain't the way it works. But we'll figure it out. Welcome back to the Forge, little one. We'll get you a legit bunk this time.

NULLA

Honestly, I liked the access tunnel. It was quiet.

Scene Break

INT. CAPTAINS QUARTERS OF THE FORCE SORROW INTO JOY.

CAPTAIN

...Ten days of restricted duty for the lot of you, even Lieutenant Adi, when they're back on their feet. But I'm putting this in the record as an accident instead of what it was. So it won't follow you. That won't happen a second

time, so let us refrain from further fights. Understood?

ABLE AND ROMEO AND GORE

Yes sir.

Pause

NULLA

Oh, yes sir.

CAPTAIN

Very good. Able, Gore, Romeo, dismissed. Nulla hang back for a moment.

Footsteps as ABLE and THE OTHERS leave

NULLA

Look, I know what you're going to say and you can stuff it. Those four came after me and Gore threw the first punch from behind like a coward. Am I supposed to just take it? With the way they fucking talk about me like I can't hear them and act like they're so much better than me just cause I'm not Family or whatever. And you're going to blame me for what they started? Where do you get off reprimanding me for defending myself? I could tear them apart with my bare hands. Ask any one of them to add up a number that they can't count on their fingers and toes. And I'm the dirty stupid foreigner?

CAPTAIN

Honestly, I'm quite impressed you put up with it this long.

NULLA

Uh, what?

CAPTAIN

I am well aware that when an ulko joins a Family crew, the ship becomes a bit of a pressure pot. This was bound to happen and I'm just glad you didn't do more damage to those idiots.

NULLA

I went easy on them. Four on one isn't fair odds. What did you keep me after for?

CAPTAIN

While you were having your little scuffle, your test results from the Academy came in. The Professor General called me personally to verify we sent over real test answers. Said she'd never seen anything like it. Astrogation, Programing, Engineering, Chemistry, Statistics, Calc, anything even remotely related to math and science and it's like you were copying off the rubric. On the other hand, history, sociology, art, politics; worst scores they've ever seen. Worse than random.

NULLA

So? None of that's important on a spaceship.

CAPTAIN

I can't even begin to explain the sheer goddamn ignorance of that. And one of the benefits of being the captain is that I don't need to, cause I can just order you to take the classes anyway. Don't have to waste our time. But these scores mean we can skip you through a few years worth of

technical classes and spend that time catching up where you're deficient.

NULLA

Deficient? Just cause I don't know when some kings died back on Earth? Or the name of some flower-painting fucker?

NULLA

Ugh, I've already worked a 10 hour shift today and kicked four assholes and the assholes they were attached to. I just want to go back to my bunk and sleep.

CAPTAIN

School was part of the deal and school is in session. Did you know they once tried mining on Neptune?

NULLA

It's a ball of gas. Were they sticking shovels into clouds?

CAPTAIN

Nearly. They built a floating rig to gather deuterium. Massive thing, bigger than Arcturus Station is now. Needed heaps of workers to build it. Biggest population outside Jupiter. But it was a shit design, unstable. They were nearly done building it when somebody back on earth realized that the liability was too great. Too big a risk. Might as well shut it down. But Neptune is the ass end of nowhere, getting all those people back was going to be expensive and the company was already deep deep into the red.

NULLA

Cold.

CAPTAIN

Damn straight. The company just stopped sending resupply. Figured the problem will take care of itself. But it's kinda hard to keep something that big quiet, and word gets out. 150 ships start burning for Neptune. Company freighters, asteroid miners, even an Earth Defense cruiser. All of them giving their bosses the finger and going to help their neighbors. Nearly wear out their reactors getting there in time, but they do it. The smaller ships were ferrying people to safety right up until the damn thing sinks into deep atmo, never to be seen again. They didn't save everybody, but they got most of them. They turn around and start heading home. Can you guess what happens next?

NULLA

Home doesn't want them.

CAPTAIN

There's that brain working. Earth, Mars, Luna, everybody says "You come back here and you'll start a war, throw our balance all out of whack. Oh, and all those people who came to rescue you, they're criminals, by the way, thieves and mutineers. Hand them over."

NULLA

Fuck that.

CAPTAIN

That is just what the refugees said. So they go to the Belt, then the Jovian moons, nobody can take

them. The Outers are only just self-sustaining, and they can't risk pissing off the inners by taking in the fleet. So our rag tag bunch just goes from one port to the next, wandering.

The story the outside world tells is that the fleet disappeared out to the rim, not to be heard from for a decade or more. And they come back calling themselves 'The Peregrination' and they don't like mixing with outsiders. Funny ways about them. Maybe they're crazy. Maybe they're a cult.

The truth isn't anything fanciful like that. The fleet just kept moving from place to place, but they avoided ports, only sending in a couple of ships at a time, keeping their heads down. They did what they had to survive. It was a hard time, a lot of them didn't make it. Starvation, dehydration, air leaks, radiation. No medicine, not much for tools but some welding torches and hammers. Through sweat and blood and willpower, they converted freighters into homes, made that cruiser into a farm. Mined some asteroids when nobody was looking. Wrangled a couple of comets. Even did a little piracy when they had no other options. And years later, some of them were still alive.

Times like that temper people, make the bonds between them strong. Makes them a Family, a Family made up of little Families all working together. That was 80

years ago and we still count our days from that time.

NULLA

Were you there?

CAPTAIN

Shit, how old do you think I am?
No, my grandmother was there.
Captain of an NMC freighter of the original fleet. You'd have liked her. Hard as a railroad spike. Cursed so much she'd run out and invent new ones. But that's who you got to be to survive out here.

That's why history is important, it's not the names and the dates, it's the context that lets you understand the present. Those young bloods whose heads you knocked around are fourth and fifth generation Family, living their whole lives out on the fringe of the edge of humanity.

So, grind your gears a little, tell me what our little poetic origin story says about why today's little scuffle happened.

NULLA

(thoughtfully)

I'm sort of a symbol of the outside world. Even though all that happened six plus decades before I was born, as an outsider I'm the face of all those decisions that put your people through all that. And I'm on their turf, where they used to feel safe. So me just being here puts them on edge.

CAPTAIN

Not bad. Not the only reason, of course. But true. Anything else?

NULLA

I'm sure what they know of my past ain't helping. I get dragged on board as a pirate and then a few weeks later I'm an acting ensign, which makes me the same rank as some of them. Might seem a bit insulting.

CAPTAIN

Can you think of anything you could do to make them feel better?

NULLA

Why should I? If they've got a problem they can fucking well chew on it till their jaws weld shut.

CAPTAIN

I'm not saying you need to do anything. This ain't an order to make friends. I'm just asking you to tell me what you could do.

NULLA

Maybe... maybe show them that I sort of get it. That I know what it's like not to trust strangers. to feel like every person I don't know is a threat. That I don't feel any more at home with the ulko than they do.

CAPTAIN

That might help. If you choose to. Anyway, we need to put you on a more permanent duty schedule. You still interested in astrogation?

NULLA

Yes sir.

CAPTAIN

My X.O., Blindskin, is the Forge's lead astrogator. I can put you one out of six shifts with them. We don't actually need much charting done, so you'll be helping with logistics and personnel work too, but it all counts for hours if you want to get certified for a license down the road.

NULLA

That'd be nice.

CAPTAIN

I wanna split the rest of your shifts between manufacturing and weapons, does one of those appeal to you more?

NULLA

Weapons, for sure.

CAPTAIN

Even if that means you'll be working directly under Lieutenant Adi? Who is currently in sick bay, getting a cast put on from recent 'accidental' injuries. You OK taking orders from Adi and obeying like a good sailor?

NULLA

If they can handle working with me, I can handle working with them.

CAPTAIN

Adi's a good sort; you two will be fine. As for your schoolwork, on board we've only got couple dozen kids total, not big enough for classrooms for most subjects. You'll be working one-on-one with different officers for your courses. I'll get you your full schedule once I got it, but for

now, report to me after your work shift and I'll send you off to whoever for the evening.

NULLA

Sir? Will you being doing any of that course work?

CAPTAIN

Uh, yeah. I ain't much of a teacher but I can handle some history and such.

NULLA

OK. Great.

CAPTAIN

All right. Dismissed, ensign.

Scene Break

INT. CAPTAINS QUARTERS OF THE FORCE SORROW INTO JOY.

NULLA

Ensign Nulla reporting, sir.

CAPTAIN

At ease, ensign. Blindskin says you've got an argument to make to me.

NULLA

Yes sir. I brought it up to the X.O. and Adi and Lieutenant Commander Simoneschild. All of them told me to come to you with it.

CAPTAIN

Translate that as them sayin "I can't agree with you but you're being more of a pain than I get paid for so now it's Captain Yuri's problem".

NULLA

Yeah, I figured as much.

CAPTAIN

And I really did mean "at ease".
We're just talking right now. Take
a seat.

NULLA

I just think there's a missed
opportunity that could help this
ship.

CAPTAIN

Go on.

NULLA

The *Forge Sorrow Into Joy* is a
flying factory and you don't do
anything with it. This ship has
the largest and most complex
fabber I've ever heard of for a
ship this size and you have two of
them. Nobody else carries this
much onboard production.

CAPTAIN

Family ships do. We take self
sufficiency more seriously than
others. Same reason we got a
ship's garden.

NULLA

And your fabbers, they're both
hacked. Which means you can
make...

CAPTAIN

Not hacked.

NULLA

I know, y'all built them
yourselves. So no license fees or
copyright BS. That's just it, if
you're not paying Yukon, BNL,
Cappy's, or whoever for every item
you make - with that the profit

margins start making sense.

The Forge goes from refinery to colony, buying tons of plastics and metal from the people who produce it, and selling it to factories to make into bulkheads and t-shirts and kids toys. But you could cut out the middle-man and start churning product yourselves en route. Sell the finished items at the port instead of material and make three times the profit.

CAPTAIN

You're not the first person to propose this idea.

NULLA

That's not even it. The Forge's fabbers are good, like, really good. You can heat treat metals and pick and place electronic components. You could make some good stuff, stuff that the Inners just won't sell out in places like Ganymede or Ceres. And that means you can charge kind of whatever you want.

CAPTAIN

What you're talking about is guns.

NULLA

Not just guns.

CAPTAIN

Simoneschild already sent me the designs you've been working on.

NULLA

That's just cause I've been working with Adi in the armory; it's what came to mind when the Lieutenant Commander asked me to

learn the design software. Just look at them. They're solid. I know people who would pay good money for stuff like that.

CAPTAIN

I can't in good conscience go along with this. Nothing you've said is technically wrong, but Family law, the Law We Carry With Us, restricts what we can sell to the ulko, and frankly I agree with it on this.

NULLA

But you could make so much more money.

CAPTAIN

Stop. Our ability to make weapons isn't well known but it's not a secret either. If fabber-made guns and missiles start showing up in Belter hands, it will be painfully obvious who's responsible. And the détente we've got going with the Inners will turn into a war real quick. And we ain't gonna win that.

NULLA

OK, so not weapons, but we could make electronics and clothing and furniture. It would still be more profitable.

CAPTAIN

We do make those things, when we need to. When the gamble is worth it. End product manufacturing is risky, you make more money, but you've got to predict what products to make and guess right. Or you end up with a hold full of novelty mugs for a meme that's

been dead for weeks. Materials are a safer bet, and at the moment, they're profitable enough. See, I think you're missing something. We don't fly to make money; we make money to fly. If we're turning a smaller profit but safer, that's fine. That's ideal.

NULLA

(understanding)

But if material prices fall, you have the capacity to switch into something more profitable. The fancy fabbers are an insurance policy.

CAPTAIN

In part. They also make just about everything we need on ship too. And if we can't, another Family ship probably can. It's a whole separate supply chain. It's about safety. Does all this make sense? I know you might not agree but I hope you understand.

NULLA

No, I get it. I just think that you're leaving money on the table. And money could buy more ships, or build a station, or buy land on Ganymede.

CAPTAIN

Not my call, but I'm happy that you're trying to help. If it's alright with you, I'd like to upload these designs of yours to the Family database. If circumstances change, they could be useful.

NULLA

Yeah, that's fine.

CAPTAIN

Done then. Is there anything else?

NULLA

I... No, I'm good.

CAPTAIN

OK, ensign. Dismissed. Oh wait, I saw you and Adi in the mess the other day. You looked close.

NULLA

We've been getting along.

CAPTAIN

Do me a favor and be careful.

NULLA

I wouldn't do anything to hurt them, Captain.

CAPTAIN

I wasn't worried about them.

Scene Break

INT. FORWARD GARDEN OF THE FORGE SORROW INTO JOY.

Soft air circulation and the rustle of leaves

NULLA

Whoever is there, I can hear you lurking. Fuck off.

CAPTAIN

Sorry, kid. I didn't mean to disturb you.

Sound of her standing and snapping to attention

NULLA

Sir.

CAPTAIN

Oh, no. You're off duty, none of that. Relax.

NULLA

I figured you had orders or needed to tell me I fucked something up.

CAPTAIN

Nothing like that. Blindskin told me you were up here. I didn't take you for a garden type.

NULLA

To be honest, I didn't think I was either. But you mentioned it the other day and I wanted to see it. It's shockingly nice.

CAPTAIN

Do you mind if I sit with you?

NULLA

It's your ship.

CAPTAIN

It's all right. I'll leave you be. Enjoy your R&R.

NULLA

Sit down, you old coot.

The CAPTAIN sits

NULLA

It's nice here. All this green. Would you believe I hadn't ever seen a flower in real life before I came aboard the Forge?

CAPTAIN

Yeah. I would.

NULLA

I saw those little yellow ones the cook puts on the cakes down in the mess. I thought they came out of a bio printer or something. But

there they are, growing for real.
I looked 'em up: Dandelions. Back
on Terra, apparently they're a
weed. People tear their hair out
trying to get rid of them.

But I think they're kinda pretty.
Edible too, apparently. Didn't
know you could eat flowers. I've
been picking them off the cakes.

CAPTAIN

Yeah, that seemed weird to me too
the first time. You wanna try one
now?

NULLA

Sure.

Chewing sounds

Not bad.

CAPTAIN

Is it ok if I ask you a question?

NULLA

You're the boss.

CAPTAIN

This ain't the captain asking.
Just ol' Yuri.

NULLA

OK.

CAPTAIN

When you dropped off at Ganymede,
I didn't figure to see you again.
What made you come back?

NULLA

My first thought is to say that
you looked like an easy mark.
Cause of how you let me go and
even arranged for me to have that

money when I know you didn't have to. I ought to have thought about how to get a hold of something valuable and leg it at the next port. But I didn't. On the other hand, if Blindskin's pysch classes are to be believed, I'd say I was just looking for safety. You blew that pirate ship out of the sky, which makes the Forge more powerful. That makes it more safe. And it's a dangerous world out there.

CAPTAIN

Is that it?

NULLA

The truth is I spent two days on Ganymede wandering around. I'd never been there before, but I already knew it. It felt just like Europa, or Ceres, or Tychus. It even felt kinda like the pirate ships I've been on.

Since I was a little kid, every place I've been is really just the same place. And I didn't want to be there anymore. Here feels different. It's almost like... But maybe that's cause I know now what the family on the Forge is like and I didn't really feel that back then. Maybe I can't know exactly why I came back.

CAPTAIN

That's alright. Sometimes figuring yourself out takes a lifetime.

NULLA

Is it OK if I ask you a question?
This ain't Ensign Nulla, just me.

CAPTAIN

Shoot, kid.

NULLA

Why in the black void would you
take me on as crew?

CAPTAIN

Well, I...

NULLA

Why even let me on the ship after
the attack? I'm a fucking pirate.
I beat the shit out of your crew,
your kids. Started causing trouble
immediately. I've got a price on
my head. I'm a walking tank. I'm
dangerous. I could get people
killed. I could get you killed.

CAPTAIN

I don't think you will.

NULLA

You say that. You see these hands?
I got 'em on Europa. I was dumped
there by another pirate crew.
Scrawny weak little twisted up
kid, but I'm smart. I spend some
time with my nose pressed to the
Taurus casino door, watching the
Swifthand dealers. Count the
tokens as they get pulled, quick
calculation, until it becomes a
sure thing. But I couldn't do it
myself. I couldn't even...

So I find this other station rat,
Mags. Big kid, looked way older.
Mags and I team up. She helps me
out, and she's the one who goes in
and makes the bets. I watch from a
hiding spot and signal her. Works
like a charm and we make bank. For
one week. Then security tags us,
and two Bulls come out of nowhere
and haul us in.

They split us up and grill us.
Eventually they offer me a deal.
They already have me on a charge
that gets me 2 years in Taurus
Juvie. But if I confess and pin it
on Mags, they'll drop the charges.
Let me go and she takes the fall.

And of course, I know they're
offering Mags the same deal. I
could almost look through the wall
and see her taking it, sending me
up river. So I take the deal. We
both do. And Taurus has us both
for ten years on contract to pay
off our crimes. So, I negotiated
another twenty for them to pay off
for my cybernetics. They knew
they'd make a lot more off me like
this.

CAPTAIN

Oh kid.

NULLA

A week after the surgery, I was
already off Europa. Saved my own
skin. And a month after that,
there was an accident in a Taurus
mine. Mags was there. Didn't make
it.

Don't you see? I've only been here
a few months and I can already
tell what all of you are like. Put
Able and Gore in those rooms. You
and Blindskin. Adi. Pick any two
people off the Forge and nobody
takes the deal.

But I did, and I would again. I'm
not like you. I won't be like you.
You can't rely on me.

CAPTAIN
I'm going to anyway.

NULLA
Please don't.

CAPTAIN
Kid. If I was you, back on Europa.
I'd take that deal too. But what
you did is not who you are. I'll
tell you this: put me in an
interrogation room and offer me
that deal, with you in the other
room. I don't take it. Never. I'm
already trusting you every day.

NULLA
I'm gonna fuck it up.

CAPTAIN
Maybe. Try not to. But here's a
secret: I've fucked up a lot too.
It don't seem like it, but it'll
be ok.

NULLA
I have a shift in a few hours. I
should get some sleep.

Nulla gets up to leave

CAPTAIN
All right.

Footsteps

Little one?

NULLA
Yeah?

CAPTAIN
If you want to talk again, just
Ol' Yuri and you. Let me know.

NULLA
OK. Yeah. Yeah, maybe.

Scene Break

INT. CAPTAINS QUARTERS OF THE FORGE SORROW INTO JOY.

NULLA
You wanted to see me, captain?

CAPTAIN
Close the door. Grab a chair, kid.

Door closing; chair sliding up

Do you drink?

NULLA
Sure. Unless there's Family Law
saying I'm under age.

CAPTAIN
(laughs)
"Age: Undetermined" is what I put
on your paperwork, so I think
we're in the clear. Let me guess:
chemohol or whatever they call
that brewed runoff sucrose stuff
these days. Used to be 'pipe
juice'.

NULLA
Whacker is what we called it.
People usually add caffeine.

CAPTAIN
Old trick.

Sound of pouring and glass clinking

CAPTAIN
Here, smell that.

NULLA

Interesting. Better than whacker,
for sure.

CAPTAIN

I'd hope so. That is Shōchū,
brewed from rice and barley grown
on the Family ship *The Light You
Carry In Your Heart* and refined in
their honest-to-god copper still.
We don't sell it. You can only get
it by trading favors in the
Family. I got this bottle because
I officiated at the wedding of two
ship captains. Nice fellas.

Now, as far as I know, no one
outside the Family has ever had a
drop of this.

NULLA

I guess I shouldn't then.

CAPTAIN

Please.

NULLA takes a sip, swallows, and makes an appreciative noise

NULLA

Alcohol with actual flavor. That's
novel.

CAPTAIN

Part of this story will go out
soon. Everybody will know most of
this, but I'd like to keep some
details between you and me. Is
that OK?

NULLA

Of course.

CAPTAIN

*The Huddle Close for Safety and
Warmth* is what we call a Hearth
ship, bigger'n the Forge. Crew of
twelve hundred including a lot of

kids. Eight days ago she went dark. No one could raise her on comms.

NULLA
Accident or...?

CAPTAIN
Pirates. Two ships. Knocked her around and boarded her. Boarded her with atmosphere intact.

NULLA
Fuck. That's not good.

CAPTAIN
I know.

NULLA
No. Pirates only keep the atmo if they want as many live prisoners as possible. Which means they want people to...

CAPTAIN
I know exactly what it means, little one, but not everyone on this ship does. So I'd appreciate it if you kept the implications of that to yourself. It could upset people.

NULLA
OK.

CAPTAIN
The thing is Family ships don't surrender. There was a lot of fighting on board. A holding action to buy time. Four of our other ships immediately start pulling heavy Gs to get there. And very lucky for us, the Huddle's crew were more heavily armed than the pirates expected.

Seems they had some fabbed
weapons, good designs. Through the
fighting, they kept churning them
out too. Turned out to be very
useful indeed.

Held off long enough for our other
ships to get there. When the dust
settled, there were a lot of
casualties, but more than three
quarter of the Family members
aboard were saved. Those people
are alive now in part because of
your designs.

I wanted you to know and to be the
one to say thank you, on behalf of
everyone. Every member of the
Family of Families is grateful for
you tonight.

NULLA starts softly crying

CAPTAIN

Oh jeez, uh, here. Come here. It's
OK. You did real good.

Pause

NULLA

You said when we met that I looked
like a station rat. That's not
exactly right. I'm a ship rat. I
was born on a ship. My parents
were rock hoppers in the belt. I
don't remember much. But we were
hit like that Family ship was.
They boarded with the atmosphere
intact so they could take people
alive and...

CAPTAIN

It's all right. You're safe.

NULLA

The pirates took us.

I don't know what happened to everyone but mom was... they kept me.

I was useful for a while, because even then I could do star charting in my head. But they didn't like it if I talked back, or if I screwed up a calculation. Or I guess if one of them was having a bad day. Or bored. Eventually they'd done enough damage that I wasn't worth it anymore. So they dumped me on Europa. I couldn't even walk on my own.

CAPTAIN

I get it. It's OK.

NULLA

And then after I got the new limbs I was stupid enough to join a pirate crew of my own accord. I figured I was safe now that I was strong and I knew how to fight. Figured it was better to be surrounded by wolves than... I don't know.

But what if instead of losing that first battle. What if we'd won?

CAPTAIN

You didn't. Instead we found you. And now you're not a lost kid on your own. We here. I'm here.

NULLA

I should go. We're only a week from Arcturus. I could make a go of it there. It'll be better for...

CAPTAIN

What the...? I can't stop you from leaving if you want but you shouldn't. You belong here.

NULLA

No. No. I'm not...

CAPTAIN

Take a breath. 1 2 3 4. Out. 1 2 3 4.

NULLA breathes along with the count

Another one. Keep it going.

NULLA

I'm not worth it.

CAPTAIN

You are. You always were.

I'm sorry for that. If I'd known, I would have warned you or found a better way to... Anyway, I'm sorry.

NULLA

It's... it's OK. But really I don't think it's right that I keep flying with the Forge. You've been so good to me, but I'm ulko. I'm not Family.

CAPTAIN

The hell? You damn well are.

NULLA

I wasn't born into...

CAPTAIN

Birth ain't got nothing to do with it.

CAPTAIN ARTUROS KIN taps on a keyboard, computer beeps in response

CAPTAIN

Here you go. Filed the day we left
Ganymede with you on board.

NULLA

Adoption? You didn't feel like you
needed to ask me about this?

CAPTAIN

Not how it works here. You can
decide if you want to stay, if you
want to be here with us. But these
papers mean you got a place. I
can't stop you from running off to
Jupiter or Mars or the goddamn
Oort cloud. But if you do, we'll
be...

I'll be here waiting for you.

NULLA

I don't know ... I don't know what
... I'm not ...

CAPTAIN

Nearly forty years ago, somebody
held their hand out to me and I'm
holding mine out to you. You're
welcome here.

Blindskin likes you. Simoneschild
thinks the world of you. Adi...
you know how they feel. Hell, even
Able's on your side these days.
When you showed back up on
Ganymede, I knew.

I know you, little one. I know
what a pain you are. I know you're
trouble. And I know you're scared.
But you are worth it.

Rustling fabric as they hug; NULLA blows her nose on the
CAPTAIN's uniform

CAPTAIN

You staying?

NULLA

Yeah. I just...

(deep breath)

Back at the start, I said I didn't have a name and y'all started calling me Nulla. I'm not an idiot, I know what it means: Zero. Nothing.

CAPTAIN

I'm sorry. We had to call you something. It just kinda...

NULLA

No, it was fine. It fit. But instead of nothing. I'm ready to be something else. My mom called me Evie. It's short for Evelyn.

CAPTAIN

I like it.

NULLA

Evie Yurisdottir?

CAPTAIN

(emotionally)

Yeah, that'll do.

OK, let's take a sec to compose ourselves and then we go to tell some people what's up. We got good news today, which means there'll be a party.

NULLA

Sounds good.

Scene fades out

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Breathing Space, Fading Frontier.

This episode, Rat Among Falcons,
was written by Scott Paladin
directed by Scott Paladin and Lee
Seguinte
and edited by Scott Paladin

Nulla was voiced by Jeremiah
Captain Yuri Arturoskin was voiced
by Scott Paladin
X.O. Blindskin was voiced by M.
German
with additional voice work by Sean
Gettys, Kris Allison, and Cam
Clark

Our theme, Blues for the Black,
was composed by Michael Freitag
with vocals by Jeremiah and lyrics
by Scott Paladin.

You can find links to learn more
about our cast and crew in the
show notes and more information
about our show at our website,
breathingspace.lawofnames.com.

Breathing Space, Fading Frontier
is a Law of Names Production