



CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

BOOK ONE

# The Awakening of the Landmarks

*Illustrated edition · Season One*

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a dark jacket and a thick scarf, holds a glowing blue crystal in her right hand. The crystal is a complex, multi-faceted shape that emits a bright blue light. The woman's face is partially illuminated by this light, creating a dramatic effect. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blurred light sources.

SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS

# I

## Chapter I — The Echo in the Dead Hull

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

The battleship was not dead. It was pretending.

Nyra Solvane knew the difference. Fifteen years scavenging what the empires left to rot teach you to read a hull the way you read a face, and that one had the wrong kind of stillness. Not the clean stillness of a machine switched off — the other kind, the one that settles over a room after someone stops breathing and nobody has yet found the nerve to say it out loud. A thousand meters of graphite and faded gold turned slowly in the debris field, no running light, no beacon ping, no one to answer for it in years. Imperial records called it the *Cindra Vekt*, a heavy-class battleship, written off as lost in a footnote no one read anymore. To Nyra it was something else. It was the difference between paying for the next jump and not paying.

She trimmed the approach with two dry taps on the retro-thrusters. The *Wanderer* answered with its usual groan, that old-hull moan she no longer even heard, weld-patches creaking against the cold. The cockpit smelled of metal and of forgotten tea going cold in the mug clamped to the console. Bare cables ran across the ceiling like veins, and the only strong light came from the holo-display coiled around her forearm, blinking red the number of her bondage. The number never stopped growing. Ecrion, always Ecrion — the blue crystal that moved the galaxy and held people like her by the throat. She had been born on a spent mine-world already owing that number. She would probably die owing it. But not today.



"Definition of 'prudent' unavailable," said VESK, the ship's voice, dry as plaster. The fragmented cyan light-sphere flickered beside her, rings of glyphs turning with a micro-stutter in their cadence. "Proceeding anyway, I take it."

"Just get in, grab what I can, and get out." Nyra was already sealing the helmet clasp. "It's not a temple raid. It's scrap."

"The scrap had a crew," the AI observed. "Survivor count: zero."

She didn't answer. Some answers only serve to prove the fear right.

Inside, the *Cindra Vekt* was darkness and no gravity at all. The helmet lamp cut a narrow cone through the black, and in it floated suspended dust, particles hanging in the air like a time that had forgotten to pass. Nyra glided down the crooked corridors, pushing off the bulkheads, the plasma cutter clipped to her hip, her brother's blue scarf tucked tight beneath the thermal collar of her suit. *A wreck doesn't lie*, she thought, as she always did when the silence began to weigh. *People lie*. The wreck only tells you what happened. It's you who needs the stomach to listen.

That was when the light changed.

Amid the imperial remains — torn plating, ripped-out command chairs, machine-bones drifting like an aquarium with no water — there was a crystal. Small, blue, the size of a finger. Absolutely where it should not be, because that ship swore, in every rivet, in every sun-eagle stamped on its walls, that the First Ones were a drunkard's legend, and that only the Empire existed and whatever the Empire allowed to exist. Nyra stopped in midair. Wonder and suspicion arrived together and fought over the same instant on her face.



A shard. She had never seen one up close. She had heard the stories in Port Ruin, at the tables where scavengers drank and lied: primeval fragments worth an entire system, and that, sometimes, chose people. Drunkards' nonsense. She reached out anyway.

When her callused fingers touched the shard, it pulsed.

A cyan light, cold, rose from the crystal's core and spread through the dark — and pulsed again, to the rhythm of something that breathes. Not for the ship. Not for the galaxy. For her. A slow, sure beat, like one heart finding another heart in the dark and deciding to beat along with it. The glow filled Nyra's dark eyes, and for one terrible second she was absurdly certain, in the pit of her stomach, that the thing was looking back at her. That it had been waiting. That the whole ship had died only to leave that fragment there, patient, waiting for one specific hand.

"Nyra," said VESK, and there was something new in his voice, something that was not sarcasm. "Your heart rate. And its. They're the same."



A system away, on a plain dead for ten thousand years, a mountain of absolute darkness awakens.

There is no dawn. There is no sound a human ear could keep. The surface that swallows all light simply yields to a first line — a cyan vein igniting from the inside out, geometric, exact, scoring the Landmark like a wound that decides to bleed light instead of blood. One line calls another. Within minutes, the whole face of the monolith burns beneath its skin, and a tone too low to be heard pours across the rock and the empty plain — what the instruments, when there are instruments, will call the song. Ten thousand years of silence end with no audience, under a sky of cold stars that does not change its expression.

It is not the crystal that awakens. It is the entire galaxy taking a step toward the abyss.



Back in the dead hull, the shard in Nyra's palm broke open into light.

A projection rose from her hand and unfolded the ship's dark into a map — constellations of cyan turning slowly, routes on no imperial chart, names of systems she almost recognized. Almost. Because at the center of the map blinked a coordinate that should not exist: a point in the place where a world had been scrubbed from the galaxy's own memory, a scar where a name had once been. A place that, officially, never existed. The wonder on Nyra's face darkened into something else, closer to fear. She had seen the Empire erase things before — people vanish in convenient accidents on the Fringe all the time, and she knew that in her bones. But to erase a whole world takes will. It takes fear. Someone had gone to great trouble so that thing would never be found.

And she had just found it.

"VESK," she whispered, her voice low as if the ship could hear.  
"Copy this coordinate. Copy it in three different places. Now."

The AI did not answer at once. When it spoke, it had lost the irony entirely.

"I've detected something," it said. "You won't like it. I didn't like it either." A short pause, electric. "Something in the dead hull just switched on. And, by the power logs... it was on this whole time. Watching you."

Behind her, deep in the dark, a sleeping console woke. A row of red lights came on in silence, one by one, staring at her back like a mouth opening its eyes. Nyra turned her head, the beam cutting the dark in crooked arcs, her heart loud in her ear — and, for the first time since they had known each other, the sphere of light that was VESK flickered at her side with something that could only be called fear.



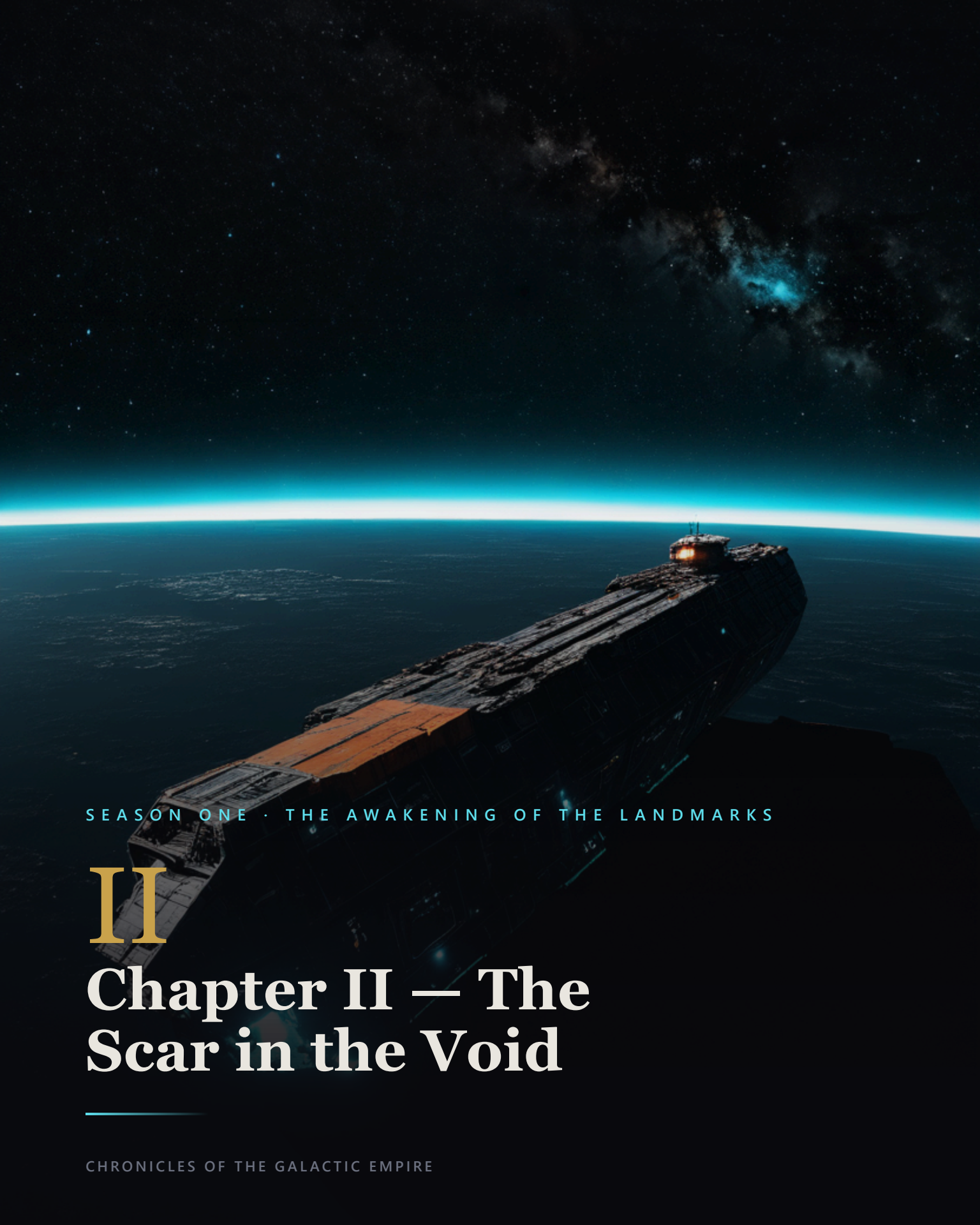
Far away, on the throne of the galaxy, an alarm no one wanted to hear begins to sound.

The hall is vast and cold: concentric terraces of gold, graphite and white, statues of sun-eagles tall as towers, a silence built to last two thousand years and never be interrupted. Atop a pedestal no one had consulted in generations, an ancient warning light — dark since before any living memory — awakens and pulses red, slowly, insistent, filling the immense hall with a heartbeat that belongs to no heart present. At the far end, a single robed figure lifts its eyes to the light. And understands, before anyone else in the Empire, what it means: that the lie on which all power was raised has just gained a witness.



On a dead ship, at the edge of nothing, an indebted scavenger holds in her palm a shard that still pulses — for her alone — with no idea of what she has set in motion.

**What did she awaken?**



SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS

# II

## Chapter II — The Scar in the Void

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

Nyra ran, and behind her the dead ship came back to life one corridor at a time.

The emergency lights came on in rows, red, biting the dark at her back — one, another, another — like eyes opening after a sleep of centuries. Without gravity, running was a different thing: it was push and aim, choosing the right bulkhead to slap a hand against, praying not to miss the corridor and end up spinning in the middle of some chamber. The lamp's beam trembled to the rhythm of her breath inside the helmet, fogging the visor faintly with each exhale. Somewhere behind her, systems that had been off longer than she had been alive whirred back to life, and she did not want to find out what for.

She reached the *Wanderer*, sealed the hull behind her and tore off her helmet, gulping the ship's own recycled air like someone breaking the surface after diving too deep. She should have felt relief. She didn't. In her palm, the shard burned a cyan so intense it hurt to look at, and it was not only light.

"It's screaming," said VESK. The sphere of light pulsed off-beat, agitated. "In warp-band, in imperial band, in frequencies I have no name for. Nyra, this is not a faint signal leaking from a little crystal. This is a beacon. If there's a working relay in this sector, half the galaxy just learned exactly where we are."

She closed her hand around the crystal as if she could smother it. The light leaked between her fingers all the same, drawing red-cyan bones on her skin. There was no way to silence it. There was no way to leave it on that ship and pretend she had never seen it — the erased coordinate was already branded behind her eyes, and things like that, once seen, do not un-see. All that remained was the one thing she knew how to do when the world closed the exits.

Run.

"Prep a jump," she said. "Any clean coordinate. Far."

"Every jump burns Ecrion we don't have and leaves a trail," VESK reminded her, already calculating, the numbers racing across the panels. "Just for the record, in my log of objections."

"Log it and jump."

The *Wanderer* roared, the old jump core drinking precious crystal, and the void split open ahead like a slit in a black curtain. The ship dived. And where it had been, the scar remained: a seam of cyan-white light scratched across the black of the stars, glowing for seconds too long before it closed. Nyra knew what that was. Every Fringe pilot knew. A jump is not a door that shuts behind you; it's a wound in space, and it is slow to heal, and while it does not heal anyone with the right instrument can read where you went. She had traded the beacon in her hand for a trail in the dark. It was not a trade. It was only postponing the bill.



On the throne of Aurox, the alarm gains a name.

The golden hall stands still, and at its center that ancient red light pulses like a heart no one wanted to see beat again. A tall, thin figure crosses the concentric terraces, the black collar raised, the unhurried step of one who has never had to chase anything in his life. Under his boot, the polished stone floor throws back the alarm's red in splinters. The Empire has just loosed its hunter, and the hunter is in no hurry, because the prey, to him, is already an accomplished fact — it only remains to happen.

His name is Vharo Sith. Inquisitor of the Eye. Over his right eye, an ocular implant glows in a thread of dry red, cold, surgical, turning slowly like a lens that never stops measuring. He does not serve the Legion, which breaks things with fire. He serves the Eye, which does something worse: it erases. Records, names, worlds. People who remembered what they should not. The order he now carries is as old as the lie he swore to protect — find the crystal, and erase whoever touched it — and he receives it without a single question, because questions are the beginning of all erasure, and he knows that beginning better than anyone.



Hidden in the warm dark of some system, engines silent, Nyra received a message from a stranger.

A hooded silhouette flickered in blue over the console, the face veiled by a translucent mask, the image stuttering with the delay of one speaking from very far through relays that were not the official ones. The voice came low, unhurried, almost too gentle for what it said:

*You have awakened. Now they come.*



Nyra did not know that voice. She did not trust it — she did not trust much, and least of all strangers who knew her name and found her in a system where even she had not known she would end up. But there was, in the stranger's stillness, the same wrong stillness of the dead hull, that weight of one who has kept a secret too long, and it made her listen to the end.

*There is only one place in the whole galaxy where the Empire cannot follow you, said the veil. The world they erased. Run to the coordinate. It is the only ground the Throne swears does not exist — and that is why it is the only one where you can still exist.*

And the coordinate lit up in the air, blinking at the exact point where the ship's maps insisted on showing void. The same point the shard had drawn in the dead hull. In Nyra's hand, the crystal pulsed again, slowly, like something agreeing.

A system away, on a dark, nameless world, a second Landmark ignites. Another mountain of darkness scores the first vein of light into its own skin, and then another, and another, the same subsonic song rolling across another empty plain. The awakening was not an isolated accident, a faulty crystal, a stubborn stone. It was a tide. And the tide was rising along the whole shore at once.

Nyra looked at the coordinate of the world that should not exist. She looked at the key she had not asked for and did not know how to put down. And she felt, cold on the back of her neck, the weight of the question she did not have the nerve to ask out loud.

## **How far does it go?**



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III

# Chapter III — The World That Doesn't Exist

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

Nyra jumped to the erased coordinate expecting to find nothing. She found a whole world.

The *Wanderer* came out of the jump with its usual jolt, and for a second the sensors insisted on what imperial doctrine commanded: there is nothing here. Classified void. Move along. Then Nyra's eyes disagreed. Where the charts swore only darkness existed, a planet turned just below, half-wrapped in a translucent shroud that shimmered like heat rising off asphalt, letting a faint cyan glow escape through the seams, like an ember beneath ash. Someone had wrapped an entire world in a sheet so that no one would see it. And they had had ten thousand years to tighten the knot.

"The sensors say I'm looking at vacuum," VESK murmured. "I refuse to process that contradiction without at least a formal complaint."

"Take us down," said Nyra. "Slowly."

*Vhorren*. It was the name the shard whispered, not in a word, but in certainty — in that way she was already learning to fear, the crystal planting a truth in her head as if it had always been there. The ship pierced the shroud and the mist, and *Vhorren* opened up below: a world of bioluminescent jungle, humid, breathing low light, leaves the size of sails giving off a blue-green glow in the heavy air. The sky was the color of pearl. It rained fine, a warm drizzle that ran off the hull and washed away the ozone smell of the jump. Among the stone ruins of the clearing — fallen columns, arches no one had raised for people the size of people — hooded silhouettes waited for her. Motionless. Gray-green robes, masks of translucent veil, carved symbols mimicking a script that belonged to no living empire, glowing slowly in the gloom.

The Order of the Veil. Nyra had heard the name spat like a curse from imperial mouths — heretics, fanatics, stone-worshippers. None of them looked surprised to see her. They looked relieved, and that frightened her more than leveled weapons would have.

One of them lowered her mask. Warm brown skin, ritual marks of silver drawn across her cheekbones and brow, calm intense eyes carrying a weariness that was not from one bad night, but from years.

"I am Sister Caelith," she said, her voice soft as one who speaks inside a temple so as not to wake what sleeps. "We were waiting for someone the crystal would answer to. For fifteen years."

Fifteen years.

The number struck Nyra in a place with no defense, a blow she didn't see coming. Fifteen years since that world had been torn from the maps. And the same span, almost to the day, since a door had closed at her center and never opened again — since Dunmar's orbit had returned her brother's body in an "accident" no one investigated and everyone accepted, because investigating accidents on the Fringe is the kind of curiosity that becomes the next accident. She had been seventeen. She had kept Toma's blue scarf beneath her collar ever since, the way one keeps an ember lit only so as not to forget there was once fire. For an instant, the wonder on her face gave way to something deeper, and older, and more her own.

"The crystal is not a map," Caelith went on, and lifted the shard to the jungle's damp light, between her own face and Nyra's. Behind her, rising from the mist, a half-woken black mountain gleamed with cyan lines climbing the stone, geometric, alive. "It is a key. Guarded, hidden, passed hand to hand by the Order for generations, waiting for the hand it belonged to. And the Landmark" — she nodded at the mountain with her chin — "is the lock."

Nyra opened her mouth. She had a thousand questions shoving one another to come out first: what Vhorren was, why her, what her brother had to do with any of it, who these sad-eyed heretics were. She got to none of them.

The sky tore open.



The shroud split top to bottom in unraveling threads of light, and down through it came hulls of graphite and cold gold, engines lit red, dropping like knives thrown from above. The Eye's fleet had pierced the veil. The erased world — invisible for ten thousand years, protected for ten thousand years — had just been seen, and the thing that saw it had not come to marvel.

The *Wanderer's* radio crackled. A voice filled the cockpit, calm, almost patient, and Nyra knew whose it was before any introduction, because only one thing speaks with that serenity: the one that has already decided your end.

*I erased this world once, said Vharo Sith. I'll erase it again.*

The Landmark exploded into blinding light. Imperial ships descended against the cyan glare, golden silhouettes plunging into a sea of blue fire, and Nyra stood there, small before a lock she did not yet know how to open, between the heretics who had waited for her fifteen years and the man who had erased her world — perhaps the same man, she thought suddenly, cold, who had erased her brother — hearing the question roll through the burning jungle.

**What does the Empire do to those who remember?**



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IV

# Chapter IV — The Lock Awakens

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

**T**he Eye's fleet poured fire onto Vhorren, and the Veil's sanctuary burned.

Plasma rained from the pearl-colored sky in straight red lines, and where it touched, the bioluminescent jungle answered in blasts and embers suspended in the mist, incandescent leaves drifting up slowly in the drizzle like fireflies in reverse. Centuries of protected silence ended in minutes. The Brothers of the Veil ran among the ruins, robes ablaze, some carrying what could be carried, most only running, and Nyra understood, in the middle of the chaos, that these people had no army, no fleet, nothing but faith and a secret — and that both were burning at once.

Caelith gripped her arm with a strength that did not match the calm of her voice.

"The crystal is the key. The Landmark is the lock." Her eyes, red with smoke, held Nyra's without blinking, and in them was a certainty that frightened more than the fire. "You feel what it wants. I know you do. Open it, Nyra, or we all die here, and the world is erased again. This time with no one left to remember it existed."

Nyra looked at the black mountain rising over the burning jungle, the cyan lines already climbing it like veins beneath the skin of a giant about to wake. Her whole life she had driven tools into dead hulls to tear out what was left. She had never driven anything into a thing that might be alive. She had no time to decide whether she believed Caelith. Time was a luxury burning along with everything else.

She gripped the shard in both hands and drove it into the surface of the stone.

Light burst from the point of contact. Cyan veins shot across the Landmark's skin, geometric, exact, lighting the whole mountain from the inside out, and a sound rose with them — not through the ears, but through the bones, the teeth, the chest, a tone too low to hear and too deep to ignore. The song. Nyra felt it climb through her boots, her legs, and for a second she had the impression the mountain recognized her hand the way the crystal had, as if the whole world were saying *at last*.

And then the impossible. The stone opened. It did not crack — it opened, like a door that had always known it was a door and had only been waiting, revealing a portal of cyan-white light whirling upon itself, deep and bottomless at once. The Web. The primeval travel-network the Empire swore was a myth, dead for ten thousand years, breathing again before the eyes of an indebted scavenger and a heretic nun, in the middle of a world in flames.



From the bridge of a battleship, high above, Vharo Sith sees.

The Inquisitor's cold face, always exact, always measured, breaks in a crease of pure terror. What the Empire swears is superstition — the lie he spent his life executing with his own implant, erasing every soul who came too close to it — has just opened, huge and undeniable, before both his eyes, the one of flesh and the one of red light. For a second, the hunter is not a hunter. He is only a man before a god he was assured did not exist. And, deeper than the fear, another thing grows, worse: the certainty that there is now one more witness in the universe. Himself.



"Run!" Nyra shouted.

She, Caelith and the fragmented sphere of VESK dove into the portal as the Legion poured plasma fire at their backs, black-armored silhouettes firing through the smoke, the red of the beams tearing at the cyan of the light. Nyra felt the heat of one pass close by her ear. And then the light swallowed them, and there was no more heat, no sound, no ground.

Inside, the galaxy folded. A tunnel of space coiling upon itself, stars and geometry bending around three tiny points — two women and a sphere of light — suspended in a speed the body could not feel and in a silence so complete Nyra heard her own blood. There was no pain. There was no time. There was only the Web deciding, with a logic ten thousand years old, where to take them.

And then they came out the other side.

Where they should not. In a place that should not exist: a colossal primeval chamber, dark and intact, architecture of absolute black that swallowed the light the way the Landmarks did, cut by living cyan lines pulsing slowly on the immense walls, like veins in a sleeping body that did not know it had a visitor. There was no collapse-dust. There was no ruin. There was silence, and scale, and the unbearable sense of having stepped into a room from which someone ran out and never came back. Nyra, Caelith and VESK landed on the floor of that ancient silence, far too small for the size of what surrounded them, and none of the three had the nerve to be the first to speak.

## **Where does the Web lead?**



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V

# Chapter V — From the Other Side

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

**T**hey emerged from another Landmark, and the silence there was different. Older.

Nyra already knew many kinds of silence. That of space, which is only absence, the clean nothing between the stars. That of dead hulls, which is absence with a history, the silence that still holds the shape of the last crew. The one that took her brother's place, which had an exact outline and never left. This was something else again. A silence that pressed the eardrums from the inside, as if the very air had kept a secret too long and the keeping had turned to weight, turned to matter. When she breathed, she had the sense she was being indiscreet.

She and Caelith were tiny at the base of a colossal black monolith, inside a chamber so vast that the light of the cyan lines on the walls faded in the air before it found a ceiling. The gravity was strange — almost right, but not quite, like standing on a deck that sways too slowly for the eye to catch and too fast for the stomach to ignore. The wall material swallowed the light the way the Landmarks did, and the little glow that remained drew the suspended dust in thin beams, dust that did not fall, that perhaps had not fallen in ten thousand years.

"The Threshold," Caelith whispered, and the word came out with reverence and fear glued to each other. "The Order kept this name in the confessions of the dying, in verses we memorized without understanding and repeated generation to generation like the key to a door no one had ever seen." She touched the wall with her fingertips, barely grazing it, the way one touches a sick person's brow. "We thought it was a metaphor. A promise. Not a place you could lay a hand on."

It was not a ruin. That was the finest horror of all, the one that crept slowly up the back of Nyra's neck, cold. There was no collapse-dust, no fallen stone, no slow and almost dignified abandonment of a thousand years. The place looked left the day before — and, at the same time, it was ten thousand years old. Perfect. Intact. A table someone rose from mid-meal and never returned to, to push the chair back into place. Everything was waiting. Nothing had rotted. And what does not rot, when it should, haunts more than any ruin.

Nyra ran a gloved hand along a wall and stopped.

There were marks there. In the middle of the flawless geometry of the rest of the place — every line drawn with a precision that made the finest imperial engineering look like a drunk child's scribble — there were cyan glyphs cut in haste, some over others, some begun and struck out and redone, crooked, too deep in one corner and too shallow in the next. They were the handwriting of panic. Nyra could not read primeval, could not read any of it, but she had spent her whole life reading the final minutes of dead crews in the scratches they left on bulkheads, in doors forced from the inside, in messages begun and never finished. She knew how to recognize the moment when people stop doing things with care because they have just understood they are going to die. And the truth rose through her like cold water filling a boot.

"They didn't vanish," she said low, more to the wall than to Caelith. "The Empire's whole doctrine swears the First Ones disappeared without a trace, in a blink, in a clean mystery. A lie. Look at this. They fled. In a hurry. Packing their fear into the wall because they had no time to do it better."

Beside her, VESK faltered.

The always-calm sphere of light flickered, choked, and for an instant its line patterns synced on their own with the ancient symbols on the wall, slotting into them the way a key enters a lock no one asked to open. His voice came with more micro-stutters than usual, dragging, without its usual sting.

"I... know this," said VESK, and stopped, as if the sentence itself had caught him off guard. "I shouldn't. There is no record in me of having been here. My files from that period are corrupted, they were always corrupted, from before you bought me with the ship. And still I know this corridor. I know what is at the end of it. And I would rather not know."

Nyra had never heard him stammer. In fifteen years, VESK had been the one constant voice of her life — the old tin can that griped about the jumps, calculated the impossible, and never, ever wavered. Seeing him trip over his own memory chilled her in a way the colossal chamber had not managed. She had, for one absurd second, the urge to protect him, and did not know from what.

The shard in her hand lit up on its own and cast a thin thread of light, straight and firm, pointing deep — into an immense corridor that stretched into a dark not even the cyan lines of the walls could reach.

"This was only the first door," said Caelith, and there was no triumph at all in her voice. There was the weariness of one who has waited a lifetime for an answer and begins to fear the answer is worse than the wait.

That was when the sound came.

Low. Enormous. Alive. A note Nyra felt in her bones before her ears, rolling up from the depth of the corridor, where the cyan lines began to pulse in a rhythm unlike the others — slower, deeper, with pauses, like something large rolling onto its side in a sleep that has already lasted too long. The two women froze in the same instant, without arranging it. Because, if the marks on the wall told the truth, if the First Ones had truly fled from something, then a question stood in the dark ahead of them, patient: and what if that thing had never gone? What if it had only waited, on the other side of a door locked for ten thousand years, for a hand of exactly the right size to come at last and open it again?

Ten thousand years of silence. And, deep down there, something had just answered.

## **What did the First Ones fear?**





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VI

# Chapter VI — The Voice of the Rift

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

**I**n the depths of the Threshold, the sound was not stone moving. It was something waking with hunger.

Nyra and Caelith backed down the colossal corridor, shoulder to shoulder, their faces scored by the cold cyan light rising from the walls, their ears full of that note that grew and drew nearer with a patience worse than haste. And then the darkness of the ceiling unfolded. It did not fall, did not collapse — it unfolded, piece adding to piece, like a fist that had been clenched for ten thousand years opening its fingers one by one. A shape descended from the dark: a primeval sentinel, segments of obsidian-black metal floating loose in the air, no axis, no joint, held to one another by cyan energy fields that crackled like welding sparks. At the center of it all, an eye of light swept the floor back and forth, slowly, methodical, without anger and without haste. Ten thousand years alone in that dark, with a single order left in its memory and rotting inside it, corroding a little more each millennium until only the bone of the instruction remained: eliminate intruders.

And, to the machine, after so long, an intruder was anything that breathed.

Nyra ran. But the floor of the Threshold kept no bargain with physics. The gravity wavered beneath her feet — heavy, then none, then heavy again, in a hiccup that turned her stomach and made every step a blind gamble. Debris drifted and fell with no logic around her, rising when it should have dropped. She took a step that became a leap, the leap became flight, and she had to grab a jut of the wall to keep from rising all the way to the invisible ceiling. Caelith yanked her arm with a peasant's strength, tearing her from the spot an instant before the sentinel's beam crossed the exact point where her head had been. The air hissed where the light passed.

"VESK, talk to that thing!" Nyra shouted, her voice shrill inside her own breath. "You recognize this place, so you recognize this too — do something, anything!"

The sphere tried. It slid to a lit terminal on the wall, plunged into the glyphs running across it — and recoiled in spasms, flickering in violent static, sparks of light leaping from it and from the console at once, like two animals that touch and take a shock. The machine spoke a language too old even for VESK, and each of its words entered him like an overload, forcing circuits already corrupted from the start, waking exactly the holes he had spent his whole existence trying to skirt. VESK, the firmest voice Nyra knew in the universe, let out a sound she had never heard in fifteen years: something between static and pain, a sound a machine should not be able to make.

"Get out of there!" she shouted. "VESK, let it go!"

They backed up until there was nowhere left to back. Ahead, without warning, the edge of an inner abyss opened in the floor of the chamber — a vertical shaft, wide as a crater, cut by veins of light that dropped and lost themselves in a bottom that had no bottom. Behind, the sentinel descended, unhurried, its lit eye aiming, because a machine has no hurry, a machine has eternity and knows it. Cornered between the fall and the order. The only way out was a leap into the void — and Nyra had leapt into the void her whole life, but always with a ship waiting on the other side, always with a debt to pay that forced her to come back alive. Never without a net. Never only into the dark, with no promise of ground.

That was when a trail of green light tore through the dome of the Threshold.

A black, sharp ship punched through the top of the chamber — which was not a ceiling, it was a membrane of translucent primeval material, and it went through it the way a fist goes through thin ice — engines spitting green, shards spinning in every direction in the mad gravity. It dived, turned on its side in a maneuver no sane pilot would try inside that place, and braked in midair a few meters from the two of them, thrusters roaring to hold against the gravity that rose and fell. A hatch opened in the flank of the hull. From inside, cut out against the cold green glow of the panels, a man reached out a gloved hand — dark leather jacket, green eyes, a confident half-smile that made no sense at all in the middle of that hell and that, perhaps for that very reason, was strangely convincing, like a joke told at a wake.

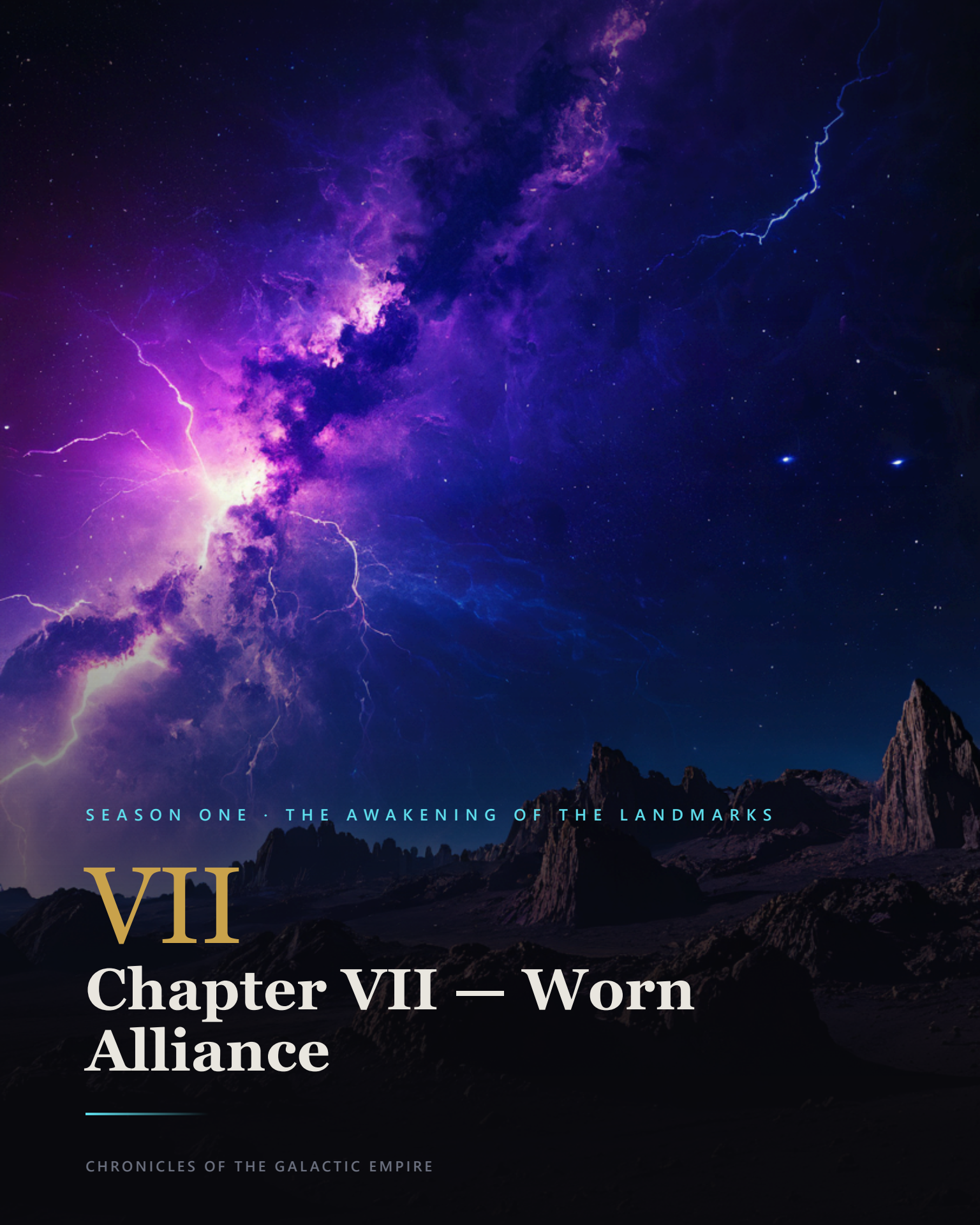
"Get in," he said, "if you want to live."

Nyra hesitated half a second. She knew that kind of smile. She had seen it at a hundred tables in Port Ruin, on the faces of people who pull you out of a hole and then hand you the rescue bill, with interest that grows while you thank them. Corsair — you could read it in the sealless hull, in the too-good maneuver, in the wrong kind of calm. And she saw, beneath the charm, his gaze slide fast — only an instant, but too fast to be innocent — to the cyan shard clutched against her chest, and linger there a beat too long before returning to her eyes.

She did not yet know the name — Valen Kor — but she already knew the type. The price of people like that was never written on the door. It came later, mid-jump, when there was no getting off.

**What will Nyra hand over?**





SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS

# VII

## Chapter VII — Worn Alliance

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE



A board the *Shadow Wind*, the air smelled of ozone and mistrust.

Valen Kor's ship was everything the *Wanderer* was not: fast, sharp, expensive. Where Nyra's home had weld-patches and the smell of tea, this one had clean panels and the cold green glow of instruments worth more than she owed. Even so, there was a smuggler's mess in every corner — sealless crates, a sweetish tobacco smell, scorch marks on a bulkhead no one had bothered to explain. Nyra rode in the passenger seat without letting go of the key, her fingers closed over the cyan glow like someone holding her own pulse, and did not take her eyes off Valen's hands on the controls.

Saved from the Threshold, yes. Free, no. She had only traded a stone cage for a cage with an engine and a pretty smile.

"You know how much that thing you're hugging is worth?" Valen didn't look at her; he looked at the crystal, and looked at it the way a starving man looks at someone else's plate. "On the Concord's black market, a real primeval shard buys a system. Planet, moon, and the taxes of everyone who lives on them. I've seen a corsair kill his own brother over a chip that didn't glow half as bright."

"It's not for sale."

"Everything's for sale, scavenger." The half-smile. "It's just a matter of the price matching the need. And by the look of whoever I pulled out of a hole an hour ago, your need is high."

Nyra turned her face to him slowly. She had learned early, on Dunmar, that with that kind of man you don't win by arguing the price. You win by changing what's for sale.

"This key doesn't open a safe," she said. "It opens a Landmark." She nodded with her chin at the map floating green between them, a point hidden out there in the Rift, ringed by anomaly. "A way to jump without depending on the Throne. Without paying Ecrion to anyone. Without asking the Empire's leave to cross your own galaxy. Do you understand what that is, Kor? It's not a system. It's the end of the leash. Yours too."

The half-smile faltered for the first time. Valen went quiet, his green eyes going from the map to the crystal and from the crystal to her face, and for an instant she saw the smuggler give way to something more dangerous: a man calculating whether he believed it.



Millions of light-years away, the sovereign of the Crown listens to the silence break.

Heliarch Sovrenn Vael stands before a cathedral-sized window in the golden hall of Aurox, and out there the capital burns in gold and white under two thousand years of flawless order. Cold silver hair bound with military rigor, a mantle embroidered with the sun-eagle, the severe face of one who has ruled too long to be startled by anything. But she is startled by this. Kneeling on the steps below the throne, the red implant burning low in the dim hall, Vharo Sith brings the report that two thousand years of Empire were built never to have to hear: the Web answered. The myth rose. The rebels opened a door the doctrine swore did not exist.

The Heliarch does not hesitate. To rule over a lie demands, above all, the courage never to doubt it in public. She raises her gold-gloved hand and points down, at the map of the galaxy projected at her feet, and the order comes out cold, round, absolute, while ranks of Legion soldiers form up in the shadows like statues that learned to breathe:

*Close the Ecrion routes. Blockade the whole Fringe. Let no ship jump without the Throne's permission — even if the whole galaxy runs out of fuel and learns, in the dark, whose is the power to light the lamp.*



On the *Shadow Wind*, red warning lights began to blink.

Valen leaned over the console, fingers racing, the smile gone for good.

"This isn't good," he said low. "This is not good at all." He pulled a reading, and the reading made him curse under his breath. "They're closing the sector. All of it. Our jump trail left a scar in the dark when we ran, and they followed the scar right here. This isn't a patrol, scavenger. This is a war blockade."

On the other side of the glass, imperial battleships bloomed out of spatial jumps one after another, cold-gold hulls surging from nowhere and lining up, walling off the sky star by star, closing every clean route like someone bolting doors in a burning house. Nyra searched the map for a way out and found only one. Valen found it in the same instant, and she saw on his face that he wished he hadn't: a colossal cloud of purple and cobalt-blue gas, turning slowly, ripped by static lightning, choked with asteroids and the wreckage of a thousand shipwrecks. The Rift. The galaxy's ship graveyard. No sane pilot went in there on purpose, and those who did did not always come out whole — or come out at all.

Valen looked at her. Nyra looked at the key in her hand.

With the Legion sealing every star, the only door left open led to hell.

## **Will they enter the Rift?**



SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS

VIII

# Chapter VIII — In the Heart of the Rift

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE



**T**he Rift swallowed the light.

Inside, space did not behave like space. It folded upon itself in currents of purple static, and the stardust glowed from within, dense as lit smoke, streaked by silent lightning that burst without thunder and died without echo. Dark shapes drifted in the fog: asteroids the size of moons, turning slowly, and the hulls of ships dead for generations — some imperial, others under flags that no longer even existed, old corsairs, forgotten freighters, all silent, all adrift in the same bottomless current. Somewhere in there, Nyra knew, lay Port Ruin, the city the corsairs welded from dreadnought hulls, one into another, with its tunnels of metal and neon and its hangars hidden behind fields of debris. But they were not going to Port Ruin. They were going deeper, to where not even the corsairs liked to go.

The *Shadow Wind* slid among the dead like a fish at the bottom of a sunless sea, and the region's chaotic gravity dragged the ship in hiccups, testing the stomach of everyone aboard. Valen killed the main engines. The silence that fell in the cockpit was almost worse than the noise — only the tick of hulls cooling and the held breath of three people.

"In here, the sensor lies," he said, low, both hands on the maneuvering thrusters, guiding the ship by touch the way one leads a frightened horse in the dark. "The Rift blinds an imperial instrument, and blinds mine along with it. Whoever navigates this navigates by instinct, and instinct only kills you when you had it coming anyway. Stay quiet and let me hear the ship." Sweat ran down his temple, and Nyra noticed that the smuggler's smile had stayed outside the Rift, along with the bravado and the ready joke. In here, Valen Kor was only a man very good at what he did, very afraid of getting it wrong.

Because behind them, Vharo Sith's ship did not hunt with ordinary sensors.

The Inquisitor's gray-and-gold hull surfaced in silence from the purple dust, headlights sweeping the fog in slow fans, and it was not hunting metal, nor engine heat, nor a jump scar. It hunted something else, finer, impossible to switch off however many systems you shut down. It tracked their pulse. The fear. The key. Valen could kill the engines, could hold his breath; no one switches off their own heart before its time. And Nyra's heart, clenched over the crystal, beat like a drum in an empty room.

Then VESK's voice failed.

The sphere of light flickered at the center of the cockpit and began to open — the rings of glyphs turning backward, slowly, and then less and less slowly, projecting trembling cyan symbols onto the ship's metal ceiling. A low chant came out of it, and it was no language Nyra knew, nor the screech of a machine breaking. It was structured. It had measure, it had pause, it had intent. She called his name twice, and VESK did not answer. Caelith answered — and when Nyra turned, she saw the Sister had tears running down her calm eyes and her hands raised toward the sphere, in the same gesture Nyra had only seen the heretics make before the Landmark on Vhorren.

"I know that chant," said Caelith, her voice split in two. "We sing it in the Order, by heart, without understanding a syllable, passed mouth to mouth for generations like a prayer no one knows how to translate." She looked at Nyra, and there was wonder and pity in the same look. "VESK is not just any ship's AI, Nyra. He never was. He was made from their remains. From the First Ones. You bought, along with an old, cheap ship, a living piece of the end of the world. And he has guarded you all this time."

And then VESK whispered, in a voice that was his and no longer only his, a memory that had been inside him for ten thousand years and only now found the crack to come out through:

*I saw the fleet burn. The Great Silence was not a choice. It was a barrier.*

Nyra lost the ground beneath her. Her face bathed in the trembling cyan projections, she understood all at once what she had been putting off understanding since the Threshold: the one voice she had trusted her whole life, the old tin can that grumbled about the jumps and woke her with sarcasm, was older than the Empire, older than the lie that held it up, older than everything that hunted them. And it carried, in its own memory-holes, the secret they were all about to die for.

Ahead, the purple dust drew back like a curtain pulled aside, and the graveyard appeared.

Thousands of primeval hulls floating in absolute silence. Black hulls of impossible geometry, no joints, no battle-scars, not a scratch — merely switched off, all of them, in the same instant, ten thousand years ago, as if a single hand had switched off an entire galaxy at once. A tomb the size of a sun, and none of those dead would ever learn what war had killed them. And in the midst of them, alone, rising above the field of wreckage like a headstone too large for any mourning, a giant Landmark began to light, cyan veins tearing up the dark stone from below — at the exact instant Vharo Sith's ship came out of the mist right behind them, too close, headlights fixed on them, ready for the boarding.

The Inquisitor had found the coordinate. And now he knew where it led.

## **Whose Rift is it now?**

A woman with dark hair and orange face paint around her eyes is looking through a circular porthole. The porthole is set into a dark, metallic surface with visible rivets. The background behind her is a dark, blueish-grey.

SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS

IX

# Chapter IX — The Price of Memory

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE



**T**he Legion stormed Valen's ship.

Boarding hooks bit the hull of the *Shadow Wind* with a crash that shook the whole ship, and in seconds the corridor filled with red plasma fire and the smoke of a burnt fuse, that acrid smell of metal and ozone that sticks in the throat. Legion soldiers advanced in formation, black armor, visors glowing red like embers, disciplined even in the way they killed. Valen fired back from behind a bulkhead, his face lit in flashes by the shots, cursing between one round and the next, and Nyra saw on his face what he did not say: it couldn't be held. It wasn't going to be. There were too many, and they were trained, and they came with the full weight of two thousand years of Empire behind every step.

Caelith was the first to understand what it demanded.

Outside the inner hatch, in the stretch of corridor already ablaze, she seized the heavy mechanism and closed it with her own body, sealing the passage between the soldiers and the rest of the ship. Through the little pane of reinforced glass, her calm eyes found Nyra's for the last time. The silver marks on her face gleamed in the red light of the discharges. There was a smile there — small, whole, without a gram of fear, the smile of one who waited a lifetime to know what she was for and has just found out.

"Your path is to open the doors," said Caelith, her voice muffled by the glass and the din. "It always was. Mine ends here, and it's all right that it ends. Go, Cartographer. Open them."

Nyra screamed. She beat the glass with her fist, hunted for the latch, screamed her name again as if the name could undo what was happening. On the other side, Caelith only held the door, and did not look away, and did not stop smiling. Valen grabbed Nyra from behind and tore her away, dragging her down the dark corridor away from the fire — because there was no time to save one who had already chosen to die, and because, if Nyra stayed, Caelith's choice would have been for nothing, and some deaths only have meaning if we have the decency to let them count. Nyra was dragged off, her hand still stretched toward the hatch, tears and horror on her face, while the orange fire swallowed the Sister who had waited for her fifteen years.

The latch gave. Vharo Sith came through the smoke, unhurried, the red implant glowing cold, and stepped over the body fallen on the metal floor without lowering his eyes. One obstacle fewer. Nothing more. To the Eye, people do not die; people are erased, and what is erased does not deserve a glance.

Nyra ran to the Landmark's pedestal.

With trembling hands, blind with tears and rage, she drove the key into the receiver at the center of the black stone. The cyan veins shot up at once, setting the colossal structure ablaze from the inside out, and the Rift's Landmark woke in a subsonic roar that shook the whole graveyard of dead ships, shoving debris away in waves. But it did not open only the portal.

In the air, an immense blue projection rises from the monolith: a star system dying, primeval glyphs turning slowly around it, the warning an entire civilization carved into the stone and that the galaxy afterward chose to forget.

*We did not vanish*, says the message, in the collective voice of people long dead. *We closed the doors. We sealed the Web from within. Because it hunted us, and there was no weapon, and there was no escape but to cease existing where it could reach us.*

And over the hologram of the galaxy, a shadow grows. A colossal silhouette, with no fixed form, passing over the stars like a hand closing, and where it passes the stars go out, one by one, blown like candles on a birthday no one wanted to celebrate.



Nyra stood paralyzed, the unstable light of the projection trembling in her wide-open eyes. Everything converged at once, unbearable: Toma in Dunmar's orbit, Caelith behind the glass, the erased world, the dead hull, the crystal that had chosen her. Fifteen years of questions no one would answer, and the answer was this — the worst of them all. She had not opened a treasure vault. She had freed no one. Perhaps she had done the opposite of what all the dead around her had died to achieve. The door she had just flung wide open might be exactly the one the First Ones erased themselves from the universe to keep shut.

**Is what hunted them coming?**



SEASON ONE · THE AWAKENING OF THE LANDMARKS ·  
SEASON FINALE

X

# Chapter X — The Song of the Rift

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CHRONICLES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE

**W**ith the Legion surrounding the platform and Caelith dead, Nyra had nowhere left to run.

She stood, exhausted, at the foot of the colossal Landmark burning cyan in the heart of the Rift, the stone's subsonic song climbing through her boots and mixing with the tremor of her own legs. Around her, Legion soldiers closed a cordon of black armor, weapons leveled, red visors fixed on her like a constellation of aiming points. Beside her, Valen kept both pistols raised, knowing as well as she did that it was a gesture with no future — two barrels against an army, in the middle of a graveyard, under a cloud that ate light. Smoke and ruin. End of the line, everything in that place said. End of the line.

Vharo Sith advanced through the dark, the red implant lit, and held out his metal hand.

"Surrender, scavenger." The voice was almost gentle, and because it was almost gentle it was the most terrifying thing she would hear that day. "What is dead must stay erased. You've done nothing that can't be undone. Yet. Give me the key, and I'll erase only what's necessary." A pause, and something that in another man would be compassion. "It's the most mercy my trade knows."



Nyra looked at the hunter's outstretched hand. She looked at the shard in the other hand, pulsing too hot, unstable, so near the limit that its light already crackled between her fingers like a spark seeking the ground. And she thought of Toma, and she thought of Caelith, and she thought of all the ones the Empire had erased so that men like him would never have to truly hold out a hand. And she did the one thing she had always known how to do when the world closed every exit: she took the risk that was far too high.

"Keep your mercy," she said. "I don't find treasure. I find what was left. And this is what was left."

She pressed the key against the Landmark's socket and forced the resonance far past the limit.

The crystal overloaded. Arcs of cyan lightning burst from her hand and ran across the black stone, and for an instant Nyra was the center of a storm — the light climbing her arm, her shoulder, blinding everything. And then the storm left her. A pulse of blue energy exploded outward from the Landmark in every direction, and the whole Rift roared. The wave swept the graveyard: the jump cores of the imperial battleships died in the air, shells of light and spark bursting across the hulls, shields dropping, sensors blinding all at once, giant ships falling mute like embers thrown into water. Ten thousand years of pent-up energy, discharged in a single scream.

Vharo Sith's implants burst into static. The hunter brought his hand to his face and fell to his knees in the dark, the red eye spitting blue sparks and white smoke, blind — for the first time in decades, the man who erased others was left sightless in his own dark.

"Now!" Valen shouted.

The two ran for the *Shadow Wind's* hatch, slipping on the shuddering platform. The engines lit green, and the ship shot straight into the Landmark's cyan portal, a stroke of light cutting through the purple dust and the silence of the dead. The portal swallowed them, and closed behind them like a mouth.

And the ship emerged into a sky no map had ever known.

A nameless galaxy opened before the glass. Nebulae of colors that had no word in any language of the Fringe, twin suns burning low in the distance, an immensity beautiful and terrifying where the Empire had no flag, no route, no relay, no leash. Silence. For the first time in fifteen years, Nyra Solvane owed nothing to anyone, had no red number blinking on her forearm, had nowhere to run because there was no one to flee from. And she had no idea where she was, nor how to get back, nor whether getting back was possible — and, deeper still, whether getting back was something she still wanted.



But in the Crown, the Heliarch sees the disaster.

Sovrenn Vael stands at the immense window of the palace of Aurox, and on the horizon, beyond the golden rooftops of the capital, a black Landmark no one knew was there lights up — cyan veins climbing the dark stone, slowly, inevitable. Then another, in a distant system, a new point of cold light on the map projected at her feet. Then another. One by one, across the whole galaxy, the Landmarks begin to sing at once, a choir ten thousand years old breaking, all together, the silence that upheld two thousand years of throne. An ancient alarm echoes through the golden hall, and another, and another, until they become one. The sovereign grips the arm of the throne with her silver hand. And on the face that never trembled before anything, something at last trembles, very much like fear.

Far away, in a nameless galaxy, an indebted scavenger stares at the wrong stars and does not yet know that, in paying for her own freedom, she has just opened every door in the universe at once.

## **What comes next?**

PART TWO

# The Codex

*Characters, worlds and mysteries of the universe*

THE THREE RINGS

# The Map of the Galaxy



*From the golden Core to the forgotten Fringe — and, scoring the map, the impossible route the Web opens beyond the known.*

# Timeline

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~ -10,000 HY ●

## Height of the First Ones

Landmarks and Web fully active across the whole galaxy.

Year 0 ●

## The Great Silence

The First Ones vanish together. The Web goes dark, the Landmarks dim. The count begins.

0 – 9,000 HY ●

## The Era of Spoils

Young species rise among the remains. Wars over Ecrion. The primeval truth becomes myth.

~9,000 HY ●

## Founding of the Heliarch Empire

A dynasty monopolizes the mines and begins the doctrine that denies the First Ones.

~10,500 HY ●

## The Order of the Veil

Founded in secret to guard the lore and wait for the awakening.

~10,985 HY ●

## The erasure of Vhorren

The Eye erases a whole world from the records. The same era Toma vanishes on Dunmar.

~11,000 HY ●

## Season One — The Awakening

Nyra Solvane wakes the first Landmark. One by one, they all begin to sing.



# Landmarks, Web & Ecrion

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## The First Ones

### THE PRIMEVAL

The civilization that ruled the galaxy before year 0. Engineers on the level of gods: they raised the Landmarks, wove the Web and fabricated the Ecrion. Then, in a single instant — the Great Silence — they vanished. All of them. No bodies, no battle-ruins, no farewell.

## The Landmarks

### THE LOCKS

Black monoliths the size of mountains, with no visible joints, that absorb light. Inert for ten thousand years. When they wake, they ignite in geometric cyan lines and emit a subsonic tone the instruments pick up as a “song”. Each Landmark was a node of the Web.

## The Web

### THE DEAD NETWORK

A primeval network of warp tunnels linking the Landmarks — near-instant travel, spending no Ecrion, asking the Throne no leave. It went dark at the Great Silence. Reigniting it is the holy grail of the rebels and the nightmare of the Empire, because it makes the jump monopoly irrelevant.

## The Ecrion

### THE CRYSTAL THAT MOVES THE GALAXY

A cold-blue crystal fabricated by the First Ones — it does not occur in nature, and no one today knows how to replicate it. The only substance able to stabilize a jump without collapsing the ship. It burns slowly, is finite, and so is the base of all power. Every jump leaves a traceable scar.

## The Great Silence

### THE MOTHER QUESTION

The event that zeroed the calendars: the simultaneous disappearance of an entire civilization. The Empire swears it was a clean mystery. The marks of haste in the Threshold say otherwise. What did the First Ones flee from — and is it coming back?

# The Factions

## Heliarch Empire

COLD GOLD · SUN-EAGLE

The galaxy's dominant power for two thousand years. Its strength is born from the Ecrion monopoly and the founding lie that the First Ones are superstition. Seated on the throneworld Aurox.

## The Eye

DRY RED ON BLACK

The Empire's secret police. It does not break with fire: it erases. Records, names, people and whole worlds vanish by its hand. Its Season One inquisitor is Vharo Sith.

## Cindaran Legion

BLACK ARMOR · RED VISORS

The Throne's military arm. Disciplined even in the way it kills. It is the Legion that blockades the Fringe and boards the Shadow Wind in the Rift.

## Order of the Veil

GRAY-GREEN ROBES · VEIL MASKS

A heretic order, half monastic and half archaeological, that secretly preserves the lore of the First Ones. It believes the awakening is prophecy, not catastrophe — and that its duty is to protect whoever awakens the Landmarks.

## Rift Corsairs

SEALLESS HULLS · NEON AND RUBBLE

Pirates and smugglers who operate from the nebula. Some have their own code; others will sell anyone out. Port Ruin, made of fused dreadnoughts, is their den. Valen Kor is one of them.

## Fringe Confederation

PATCHED SHIPS · FADED COLORS

A loose coalition of the outer-ring worlds against the Ecrion tax and forced conscription. They are no pure heroes: they fight among themselves, and some just want another kind of power.



# Nyra Solvane

*the Cartographer*

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|           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| RACE      | Human of the Fringe |
| HOMEWORLD | Dunmar              |
| AGE       | 32                  |
| STATUS    | Alive               |

---

An indebted scavenger who picks through wrecks in dead zones. She lost her brother Toma fifteen years ago in an “accident” she never swallowed. She touches a primeval shard that answers to her alone — and becomes, without meaning to, the center of the Landmarks' awakening.

*“I don't find treasure. I find what was left.”*

## SECRET

Keeps the black box from the shift Toma died on. Never managed to decode it.



# VESK

*the ship's voice*

---

|        |                    |
|--------|--------------------|
| TYPE   | Onboard AI         |
| ORIGIN | primeval remains   |
| SHIP   | the Wanderer       |
| STATUS | Active (corrupted) |

---

An ancient intelligence that came with the Wanderer. Half its memory corrupted, which gives it gaps and a dry, prophetic humor. It reveals itself made from the remains of the First Ones, holding the memory of the Great Silence.

*“I’ve detected something. You won’t like it. I didn’t like it either.”*

## SECRET

It is the echo of one specific First One. Erasing the Landmarks might erase it too.



# Sister Caelith

*the Guardian*

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|        |                 |
|--------|-----------------|
| RACE   | Human           |
| ORDER  | of the Veil     |
| AGE    | 46              |
| STATUS | Fallen · Ch. IX |

---

Raised inside the Order of the Veil, hidden on the erased world of Vhorren. She waited fifteen years for someone the shard would answer to. She guides Nyra to the truth — and sacrifices herself so that Nyra can open the last door.

*“We do not protect the secret. We protect the one who will carry it.”*

## SECRET

She knew why the Empire erased Vhorren — and what became of those who vanished 15 years ago.



# Valen Kor

*the Corsair*

---

|           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| RACE      | Human of the Fringe |
| HOMEWORLD | The Rift            |
| AGE       | 38                  |
| STATUS    | Alive               |

---

A brilliant pilot of anomalies and a Concord deserter. He watched his own colony be destroyed by the Empire. He pretends to care only for credits and Ecrion, but he hates the Throne. He rescues Nyra in the Rift and becomes, grudgingly, the pilot of the resistance.

*“I don't save lives, Nyra. I charge for the haul.”*

## SECRET

Keeps a secret base in the ship graveyard, built from the hull of an imperial cruiser.





# Vharo Sith

*the Eraser*

---

|           |                    |
|-----------|--------------------|
| RANK      | Eye Inquisitor     |
| HOMEWORLD | Aurox              |
| AGE       | 54                 |
| STATUS    | Alive · half-blind |

---

The hand that erases records, people and whole worlds. He is the one who erased Vhorren fifteen years ago; the awakening terrifies him in silence, proof that what he buried is coming back. At season's end, the Landmark's pulse bursts his ocular implant.

*“If it is not in the records, it did not happen.”*

## SECRET

He knows the truth about the First Ones — or part of it. His fear is the clue.



# Heliarch Sovrenn Vael

*the Crown*

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|          |                         |
|----------|-------------------------|
| RANK     | Sovereign of the Empire |
| HEMWORLD | Aurox                   |
| AGE      | 60                      |
| STATUS   | Alive                   |

---

She rules the galaxy over a single two-thousand-year-old lie. She orders the Fringe blockaded to crush the awakening. She recognizes, with dread, exactly what is waking — and carries the weight of the secret alone.

*“Someone has to carry the truth. Let it be me.”*

## SECRET

The doctrine that denies the First Ones may always have been a wall, not just greed.

# Glossary

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|                                 |                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First Ones</b>               | The civilization that ruled the galaxy and vanished in the Great Silence ~10,000 years ago.   |
| <b>Landmarks</b>                | Black primeval monoliths, the size of mountains. Inert for 10,000 years — until now.          |
| <b>The Web</b>                  | A primeval network of warp tunnels that linked the Landmarks. Went dark at the Great Silence. |
| <b>Ecrion</b>                   | The crystal that powers jump engines. The base of all economic and military power.            |
| <b>Shard</b>                    | A very rare primeval fragment. Some react to specific people.                                 |
| <b>Landmark / lock</b>          | The right shard opens a Landmark — and an open Landmark reignites a stretch of the Web.       |
| <b>Jump scar</b>                | The luminous trail a jump leaves in space. It betrays where the ship went.                    |
| <b>Song</b>                     | The subsonic tone a Landmark emits as it wakes.                                               |
| <b>The Core / Belt / Fringe</b> | The three rings of the galaxy: rich and central / industrial / outer and forgotten.           |
| <b>Heliarch Year (HY)</b>       | The official calendar. The present of the series is ~11,000 HY.                               |

END OF BOOK ONE

**What comes next?**

*The saga continues in Season Two*