

Veyra-9 — GM Hub · Arc 9

Phase I Finale → **Arc 9**

Arc 9 — Exfil and Testimony

GM — Phase I Recap (10 Bullets)

- **Arrival:** PCs entered Haven under Obsidian Accord mandate, walking into factional tension and unexplained outages.
- **Helion's Optics:** Governor Orus Hestrel wanted calm for the Board, while Captain Lira Veyne tested the party's resolve under fire.
- **Quarter Unrest:** The Reclaimers pressed for safety and dignity; Serin Vael and Rust Varo offered fragile trust.
- **Zeratek's Shadow:** Kaelen Drix angled to hide faulty emitters while selling diagnostics with strings attached.
- **Compliance Medicine:** Director Sael extended "screenings" and sedation euphemized as stability, offering calm with costs.
- **Accord's Watcher:** Saint demanded proof unspinnable by optics; Accord trust grows only through receipts, not promises.
- **The Choir Emerges:** Electrical variances whispered rhythms in ducts and wires; miners called it *the Choir* but would not repeat it.
- **Silent Evidence:** Ren, a worker silenced at the throat, led PCs to proof—burned modules, variance logs, and the Icon of Compliance.
- **The Conduit Crawl:** PCs survived three surges, spent dampener charges, and carried proof out through crawling steel veins.
- **Final Stakes:** With evidence in hand, factions circling, and the Choir offering invitation, PCs must decide who gets the truth first.

Use as an opening read-aloud, or paraphrase for players before Arc 9 choices begin.

Mandate: leave the Factory with proof intact, decide who gets it first, and survive the spin war. The Choir won't chase; it will **invite**. Timers: **Audit Window** (if any remains), **Helion Response**, **Compliance Sweep**.

The overlook held a thin wind that couldn't be from outside, yet tasted of night. Below, the Factory's lines ran in obedient geometry, light pulsing like a measured breath. Behind you, the crawlspace hatch clicked as if counting—one,

two, three—waiting for you to become another rhythm. You carried proof that could end jobs, or save lives, or both, depending on the room in which it was read aloud.

Scene 1 Scene 2 Scene 3 Phase II Bridge

Scene 1 — The Stair That Chooses You

“Truth arrives late to meetings but ruins the agenda.” — Saint

Exfiltration should have been simple: retrace the crawl, duck through service doors, climb the same stairs down which the Factory had swallowed you. Instead, the building rearranged itself with the patient cruelty of bureaucracy. When you reached the first junction, three new exits stood waiting, none of them where they had been, each one lit in a different register of kindness.

The **north stair** carried the honest gray of municipal paint, the kind used on walls of hospitals and civic centers. The smell rising from it was faintly of old coffee and wax, like morning meetings no one wanted to attend. Fluorescent lights buzzed without flicker, but the hum beneath them was not electrical—it was rhythmic, almost like a heartbeat pacing your steps in advance. Somewhere far above, you could swear you heard the shuffle of shoes, as if an audience waited already.

The **east lift** was a mouth of brushed steel, wide doors lit by a wellness-blue strip. A pleasant chime sounded as you drew close, melodic and almost reassuring. Its screen scrolled slogans in corporate font: *Wellness is Productivity. Your Safety is Our Outcome.* The letters lingered too long, as though aware they were lying. The air smelled faintly of antiseptic and lavender, a staged comfort that made the hairs on your arms lift. The lift whispered speed, but also surveillance.

The **service ramp south** bore yellow hazard chevrons faded by years of traffic. It sloped into shadow, grease streaking the walls, the smell of coolant and fried circuitry drifting upward. The silence there was not absence, but secrecy: the kind of quiet where people whispered names of the dead and believed the walls kept confidence. On the edge of hearing, you caught a faint, childish *ta-ta-ta*, like a game being played in ducts too small for adults. Ren froze when he heard it. He pressed fingers to his throat and looked at you, eyes wet and furious, as if daring you to pretend you hadn’t noticed.

Tala shifted her lamp beam between the three choices, her face hard with calculation. “The Factory isn’t showing exits,” she muttered. “It’s showing *judgments*.” She clicked the lamp off for a second. In the dark, the hums and scents grew louder, clearer, as if competing for your consent. When she clicked it back on, she added, “Whatever you choose, it’ll write itself in the record. Someone’s keeping the minutes.”

Each step of choice felt heavier than the last. Even breathing seemed to set off

echoes: when you inhaled, the lights of the north stair flared. When you exhaled, the lift's chime ticked softly, as if congratulating you. The ramp whispered nothing, and its silence was more demanding than the other two's invitations.

GM — Exit Fork

- **North Stair (Helion Optics):** Clean route through monitored areas. Easy Stealth now, harder spin later. Helion Stability +1 if used (they “escorted” you out on camera). Gain access to Spire lobby without alarms.
- **East Lift (Compliance Shadow):** Fast but flagged. Save vs. Spells to resist lull from “wellness” chime; failure = −2 to first reaction roll in Scene 2. Compliance Control +1 on use.
- **South Ramp (Accord Street):** Dirtier route through service bays and Graywater alleys. More checks now; better optics for Accord if you emerge with workers. Reclaimer Trust +1 on success, +2 if Ren accompanies.

Note: If Audit Window 1h, trigger a roving *Internal Sweep* (2 drones + 1 Compliance pair) on the first failed Move Silently/Hiding roll regardless of route.

Ren tugged at your sleeve. He pointed first toward the stair, then toward his chest, shaking his head—he would not survive more optics. He pointed at the lift, then made a sign of sleep, his jaw tight with warning. Finally he pointed at the ramp, then at the ground, fingers splaying wide to mean *roots, home*. His silence spoke louder than the three exits combined.

Tala met your eyes. “We can’t stand here long. The building counts us every breath. Sooner or later it’ll notice the math doesn’t add up. And then it’ll adjust.” The lamp flickered once as if to prove her point.

Whichever choice you made, the Factory rearranged itself to accept it. The stair hummed louder, the lift's chime sharpened, the ramp exhaled heat like a furnace's sigh. Even before your foot touched the first step, you knew the path wasn't an exit at all—it was testimony, recorded by walls that had learned to sing.

Scene 2 — Who Gets the Truth

“Testimony is a weapon that breaks in the hand that lies.” — Reclaimer proverb

Haven's corridors remembered you faster on the way out. Doors pre-opened by a quarter, cameras panned politely away, and the floor stopped whispering safety reminders. It was as if the Factory itself had decided you were finished and now the city would decide what to make of you. Outside the last threshold, night pressed against the dome, aurora stitching the sky in restless green-white threads. Sirens tested their voices and quit, unwilling to speak before you did.

Three destinations waited, none of them secret. Each was a mouth that wanted to swallow the proof you carried, chew it into a shape the public could digest,

and spit the rest into silence. Each was also a wager about who would own tomorrow's story.

The Spire's lobby was lit like a cathedral of glass and optics. Governor Orus Hestrel had arranged the angles, knowing which corners flattered and which lights erased shadows. Potted trees disguised tripods; cameras nested discreetly in the leaves, the way birds trust a place not to shake. Hestrel stood at the top of the steps, suit the color of outcomes, tie the color of patience. He raised his chin at you as if framing you for an invisible audience. Lira Veyne flanked him, helmet under her arm, braid coiled tight. Her eyes met yours with an unspoken message: *don't let him spin you into silence*. When your pack shifted, both of them noticed, and the cameras leaned closer like predators that smelled blood.

The Accord office lay two tiers below, an anonymous cube with unmarked walls. Inside, Saint had stripped the place bare of comforts. No chairs, no desk, no window—only the gravity of her presence. She did not sit; she let the room remain unbalanced so every word would wobble before finding purchase. “What did they make you sing?” she asked, softly, like a doctor who knew the answer but needed to hear you bleed it out. When you laid down your proof, she arranged it without touching, headlines taking shape in the empty air. Her face was calm, but her eyes were storm maps, tracking where the surge would land. Accord couriers waited in shadow, pens already inked.

Graywater's Market Quarter burned with lamps strung low, oil and cheap neon reflecting off puddles that never dried. The air smelled of fast-fried meat, solder smoke, and promises bought in handfuls. Serin Vael stood on a pallet, voice sharp enough to cut the night. Rust Varo flanked her, his presence promising that whatever happened here, no worker would face it alone. When you raised the film, the crowd hushed, the way mobs do when they decide history is watching. Children clambered onto crates for a better look. Miners pressed their hands together as if in prayer. “Say it,” Serin urged. “Say it where they can't claim you whispered.” Her eyes burned at you like a forge, and when you placed the proof in her hands, it weighed the entire square.

GM — Delivery Fork & Consequences

- **Deliver to Helion (Spire lobby):** Hestrel receives proof with cameras rolling. If sanitized (no Choir language) → Helion Stability +2, Accord Optics −1. If “your mouths are ours” included → Compliance Control +1, leverage banked for later. Lira's loyalty may fracture: protect PCs if they're spun, or pull back if sidelined.
- **Deliver to the Accord (Saint):** +2 Accord Optics (+3 if Ren present). Helion Stability −1. Saint demands immediate publishing. PCs can delay by spending CHA/INT checks, earning a Favor token instead.
- **Deliver to the Street (Reclaimers/Graywater):** Reclaimer Trust +2; Accord Optics +1; Helion Stability −2 if phrase “your mouths are ours” chanted by crowd. CHA check required to keep rally controlled; failure → trigger Orderly Dispersal attempt (nonlethal sweep, risk escalation).

- **Ren’s Fate:** To Spire → sidelined by “care protocols” (Compliance Control +1). To Accord → becomes living testimony (+1 Accord Optics). To Street → protected, but hunted in Phase II (hook).

The decision was not about safety—it was about *who owned the silence you were about to break*. In the Spire, Hestrel smiled the way men smile when they believe the outcome is already theirs. Lira’s jaw tightened, her eyes telling you she would rather die than see your words clipped. In the Accord office, Saint’s lips hardly moved, but you felt the weight of her ledger, already measuring lives in columns. In Graywater, Serin’s fire met the aurora overhead, and for a heartbeat it was hard to tell which burned brighter.

Whatever choice you made, the night reshaped itself to record it. Cameras blinked red; crowds leaned forward; couriers unfurled parchment like scripture. The aurora’s rhythm pressed closer to the dome, as if even the sky was waiting to see who you trusted first.

Scene 3 — The Choir’s Invitation

“When a machine sings without power, ask not where the current came from but what debt was paid.” — Accord field notes

The choice of where to place the truth was yours, but Haven did not wait for outcomes. The aurora pulsed harder, green-white bands widening across the dome as if the sky had been wound too tight and now sought release. Power grids hiccuped; screens blinked; elevators halted mid-tier with passengers locked inside. The city’s breath staggered. Somewhere below, the pipes carried a sound not waterborne—a tone, layered and patient, threading through steel. A voice without a body, humming through the bones of the dome.

Ren clutched your sleeve (if alive), whispering what witnesses feared to say: “That’s the Choir. That’s the sound we aren’t supposed to hear twice.” Their eyes were too wide, reflecting aurora that no human iris should hold. Even if Ren was gone, the words surfaced in memory—his final warning carried on the static itself.

Crowds shifted uneasily whether you stood in the Spire, the Accord cube, or Graywater’s square. No one taught them the tune, but already miners mouthed along to the rhythm. Some clutched their throats as if chords were not notes but *openings*. Children tilted their heads, smiling at nothing. The aurora’s shimmer began to sync with the lights of Haven’s tower, and in the brief second between pulses, silence pressed so completely that hearts sounded like engines in the ribs.

Saint’s voice, if near, cut thin as wire: “Do you hear who’s writing the next headline?” Hestrel’s lips moved soundlessly, the Governor staging words no microphone caught. Serin Vael spat into the dust, muttering that the city itself had picked sides. Lira Veyne’s hand hovered over her sidearm—not at you, not at the crowd, but at the ceiling as if she could shoot the sky into silence. And all

of them, for one unguarded moment, looked smaller than you expected leaders could be.

The Choir's presence was not loud. It was *intimate*. A whisper inside ducts, behind eyelids, under the pressure of blood in the ear. The kind of sound that does not enter by hearing but by remembering. You realized with creeping certainty that some part of you had always known this song—it had waited for recognition like a name too long unspoken.

Then the dome itself cracked light: a seam opening above Haven's core tower. Not broken, but *parted*, as if a hand had drawn curtains back to let something peer through. The aurora pooled downward, forming a funnel of color that brushed rooftops and froze drones mid-patrol. In its current, faces blinked in and out—worker, soldier, child—each mouth moving with words no one could quite parse. Some faces belonged to the living; others were already names carved into memorial walls.

GM — The Choir's Contact

- **Effect:** All PCs must make a *Save vs. Spells* (AD&D 2e). Failure → character hums involuntarily for 1d4 rounds, unable to act except to move toward the light. Success → hold ground, gain fragmentary vision ("Veyra is not alone").
- **Lira Veyne:** Auto-saves first round, then begins humming unless PCs intervene. Her survival here shifts Phase II alliances.
- **Saint:** Uses the moment to record. Accord Optics +1 if she survives. PCs who protect her couriers gain Accord Favor.
- **Serin Vael/Rust:** If present, attempt to rally crowd. CHA checks DC 15; success → +1 Reclaimer Trust; fail → panic causes casualties (−1 Stability).
- **Combat Trigger:** Zeratek drones reboot with new firmware, hostile to *all*. AC 4, THAC0 17, 10 HP. Swarm until PCs disengage or disrupt the aurora funnel.

The song was no longer ambient—it chose you. Your proof, whichever hands held it, vibrated with resonance as if the Choir itself reached through the data to claim authorship. Text scrolled across screens though no terminal was powered: *your mouths are ours*. The phrase repeated in cascading fonts, sizes, languages—until even ancient dialects of the Belt scrawled across walls. Somewhere in the tunnels, alarms failed because they too were trying to *sing*.

The air tasted metallic, like copper wires stripped with teeth. Cold sweat broke out across crowds. Some miners began tearing at their clothes as though to shed flesh too heavy for the rhythm. Accord couriers fainted. Helion guards fired warning shots, and the bullets themselves left contrails of light that bent toward the aurora's funnel. Even silence became theater here; even breath carried the weight of testimony.

At the crescendo, the aurora's funnel touched the plaza. Where it kissed the

ground, concrete glowed and *shifted*, as though the city was learning to breathe through stone. A voice—many voices braided—spoke inside every skull at once: “*Mouths. Sing. Choir.*” The words were not a command but an invitation, a door without hinges. Step through, and you risked never returning the same.

GM — Player Options at the Invitation

- **Join the Choir:** PCs who step willingly into the aurora funnel gain visions (GM improvises Phase II foreshadowing). Mechanical effect: temporary +2 WIS, −2 STR, and a permanent “Choir Mark” that other factions can detect.
- **Resist Together:** Group CHA/INT checks. Success → PCs ground each other, aurora retreats one tier. Failure → funnel deepens; 1d6 drones spawn and one faction leader is captured (GM choice).
- **Divert/Redirect:** Magic or tech use allowed to bend aurora into machinery. Success (INT + WIS checks, DC 16) → PCs seize momentary leverage: Phase II starts with a Favor Token from any faction. Failure → feedback burns PCs for 1d6 damage each.

No “safe” option exists. Whatever the party chooses, the aurora marks Haven forever. Phase II begins under the shadow of the Choir’s awakening.

When the funnel finally withdrew, retreating into the sky like a tide pulling back from black sand, Haven exhaled a sound like a thousand shutters closing. Lights flickered, hearts steadied, and for a breath the world seemed ordinary again. But the silence that followed was not *absence*—it was *ownership*. The Choir had written itself into the city’s ledger, and everyone alive would remember their invitation.

Saint folded her recorder, lips a grim line. Hestrel adjusted his tie twice in silence. Serin wiped her palms on her trousers, leaving streaks like oil. Lira stared at the sky, whispering that Haven had just lost command of its own voice. Whether you had resisted or joined, saved or surrendered, the verdict was already entered: Phase I of your mission was over. The city was no longer yours alone. The Choir was awake, and it would not sleep again.

Phase II Bridge — After the First Song

Phase I concludes when proof is lodged and the invitation is resolved. Set Phase II flags based on final clocks:

GM — Final Clocks & Flags

- **Accord Optics +4:** Accord publishes; Haven becomes a media battlefield. PCs gain *Press Leverage* tag.
- **Helion Stability −2:** Board intervention; Hestrel on thin ice; Veyne’s autonomy increases. PCs gain *Access: Spire*.
- **Compliance Control +3:** Curfews & screenings. PCs flagged; *Heat* begins at 1 in all Spire tiers.

- **Reclaimer Trust +3:** Street shelters the party; Graywater maps unlock; Serin offers strike leverage.
- **Zeratek Favor +2 or -2:** Drix becomes ally or saboteur. Firmware update chain available or blocked.

Carry Ren forward if alive; if lost, begin Phase II with a **Rescue or Requiem** vignette.

Next: Phase II opens with **Arc 10 — The Hearing** or **Arc 10 — Curfew** depending on flags. Your call sets the tone: debate or barricade.