

Veyra-9 — GM Hub · Arc 1

Top Open Dossier

Prologue □ Arc 1

Arc 1 — Miners' Desperation (Continuous Chapter)

Mandate: the Obsidian Accord inserts the party as deniable stabilizers. Sponsors circling: Helion (Governor Orus Hestrel, Capt. Lira Veyne), Zeratek (Kaelen Drix), the Accord (Saint), Reclaimers (Serin Vael, Rust Varo), Compliance Medicine (Director Sael). Something new and wrong moves in the electrics—miners call it the Choir and don't say it twice.

"You are to keep Haven alive without embarrassing anyone wealthy enough to own a share of it." — Saint

Arrival at Haven

The shuttle's belly caught the docking clamps with a metallic shriek that traveled up through your boots, a sound halfway between a scream and a sigh. It was the sort of sound that warned you a city like Haven was built more on desperation than engineering. Frost burst into white ferns across the viewport as atmospheric seals flexed. Beyond the glass stretched the dome—an immense bubble of polymer and alloy that should have glowed steady, but instead flickered with green-white auroral threads. They stitched and unstitched like a wound that couldn't decide whether to close.

The city underneath the dome looked like patchwork held together with nerves. Modular blocks pressed against scaffolding, scaffolding welded to older scaffolds, layers upon layers of construction that looked less like a blueprint and more like a scar that never healed clean. Lights sputtered along walkways, and every time one guttered you could swear the whole dome dipped its breath. It was a city that had been rebuilt more times than it had ever been finished.

Inside the cabin, the recycled air reeked faintly of ozone, sweat, and sealant. A voice on the shuttle's comm—a woman from Helion Industries PR—repeated a brittle welcome. *"Haven: your frontier home. Built with courage. Sustained by unity."* The message hiccuped midway through, and the last word repeated twice before the system cut the feed. Unity, unity.

Security teams waited at the hazard-red line where docking gave way to clean floor. They formed a crescent wall: visors down, rifles slung but unlocked, boots polished though the plating beneath them was scuffed. Their posture wasn't menace—it was exhaustion tautened into readiness, the sort of soldiers who could drop into violence without lifting their

heartbeat. Civilians gathered behind them, craning necks to glimpse the new arrivals, whispering like the presence of outsiders might reset the odds.

Captain Lira Veyne stood at their center, helmet tucked beneath one arm. Her uniform was pressed as if wrinkles were a personal insult. Her braid lay pinned flat and exact, the way a surveyor pins lines on a map. She didn't scan the group of you like a commander inspecting troops. She measured, quietly, like a mechanic deciding which tools would last and which would break under pressure.

“Three fires,” she said, her voice sharp but weary. “One extinguisher. Production has stalled. The Quarter bleeds. If the miners can't go home and come back again, Haven dies before the week is out.”

The aurora above the dome spat a sudden flare, and for an instant every face reflected ghost-light. The civilians twitched at it but pretended not to notice. The Security line didn't even blink. Lira Veyne let the silence stretch, measuring how long it would take you to fill it. That, too, was a test.

Behind her, a pair of Helion banners hung limp. They bore the corporate seal—an eight-pointed flare over a stylized dome. The edges were frayed, and someone had sewn over a tear with crude black stitches. Nothing in Haven escaped patching.

One of the civilians in the crowd muttered something about “*Accord fixers*,” and the rest turned their eyes on you—some with hope, others with contempt. Hope that you could relieve the pressure in the Quarter. Contempt because outsiders always came with promises that didn't fit the shape of the colony's wounds.

Lira raised a hand. The murmuring died. “You're with me to the Quarter,” she said. “The other fires wait their turn.”

GM — Roleplay Notes (Arrival)

- Atmosphere: Stress the *fragility* of Haven. The dome flickers, scaffolds creak, the PR messages glitch. Make the PCs feel they've stepped into a city that survives on habit, not stability.
- NPC reactions: Civilians treat PCs as both saviors and liabilities. Roll 1d4: (1–2 hopeful, 3 suspicious, 4 contemptuous).
- Lira's test: She's not giving a choice. She's weighing if the party wastes words or commits quickly. If PCs stall, mark *Accord Optics -1*. If they step forward decisively, grant +50 XP for “reading the room.”
- Foreshadowing: The aurora's flicker should feel unnatural—drop subtle hints that its rhythm isn't random.

As the party steps off the shuttle, the crowd's whispers rise again. Words like “*rations*,” “*strikes*,” and “*lost rigs*” thread the air. A child on someone's shoulders points at the shuttle and asks, too loudly, “*Are they the ones who make the drones stop singing?*” His parent hushes him, but the phrase hangs there, connecting the static hum of the aurora with something far more immediate.

Lira Veyne ignores the question, but the way her jaw tightens is an answer in itself.

Captain Lira Veyne

Captain Lira Veyne was not the kind of officer Helion's corporate brochures imagined for their frontier colonies. The pamphlets painted Security Chiefs as shining examples of discipline, smiling in staged photos with polished rifles and scrubbed armor. Lira carried none of that shine. She wore her helmet tucked beneath one arm not for show but because she had been walking the Quarter herself, counting ration bracelets and pacing out the distance between where guards stood and where civilians dared gather. Her braid was pinned tight not to impress but because loose hair in a brawl gave enemies something to grab. She looked at people and saw uses, limits, and breaking points before she ever asked for a name.

Still, Helion used her face in reports. Every time the Board called for an update on Haven, her image appeared on-screen—stoic, crisp, and silent. They presented her as the embodiment of stability, proof that the colony was under control. What the Board never asked, and what Lira never offered, was that the silence in her photo was not approval but fatigue. She had held lines before—on Bryndor's water flotillas, on Kharsis's storm caravans, in skirmishes where desert raiders taught her how few bullets it took to decide a town's fate. She knew what a line cost, and how it frayed when executives demanded optics before outcomes.

To the party, she did not offer charm or warmth. She offered the blunt fact of her presence. When she said, "Three fires. One extinguisher," she was not dramatizing. She was telling you what you had walked into: a city with more crises than bodies to answer them. Her eyes, gray and restless, lingered on each of you in turn as if weighing a scale invisible to anyone else. She judged not posture or gear but whether you flinched at the aurora's flicker, whether you shifted your stance when civilians muttered about outsiders, whether you asked questions that mattered or wasted her time with politics.

Helion Security behind her watched too closely, as if her approval was their cue to relax. It was an open secret that she was the spine of the unit. Without her, the line would sag into fear or cruelty. With her, they maintained a hard, brittle professionalism. The colony whispered about her: some called her a tyrant, others a shield. Children who played near the hazard lines imitated her barked orders. Miners painted her silhouette into mural margins, sometimes with a halo, sometimes with horns. In Haven, reputation was always painted twice.

Lira's relationship with the factions was as precarious as the dome itself. Governor Orus Hestrel relied on her to keep Security presentable, though he clipped her reports before forwarding them to Helion's Board. The Obsidian Accord trusted her competence but distrusted her loyalty; they preferred agents who bent optics into leverage, not officers who reported blunt truths. The Reclaimers tolerated her because she kept some of their people alive when numbers said they should have been dead. Even Zeratek, whose drones sometimes appeared on the wrong side of a barricade, respected her refusal to hide casualties. She was not beloved, but she was understood. In Haven, that was safer than love.

When the party stepped forward, her expression did not change, but her nod was the closest thing to welcome you would receive. "If you're here to posture, turn back to the shuttle," she said. "If you're here to work, follow me. The Quarter won't wait."

GM — Running Lira Veyne

- Demeanor: Minimal words, maximum weight. She rewards clarity, despises wasted time.
- Trust: PCs gain her respect by acting decisively, protecting civilians without being asked, or taking risks she recognizes as necessary. PCs lose her respect if they grandstand, stall, or prioritize optics.
- Factions: Use her as a barometer. Accord = “Can you leverage her?” Reclaimers = “Does she keep us alive?” Helion = “Does she make us look stable?”
- Progression: Patron if respected, rival if undercut, martyr if forced into impossible optics.

In this moment, as the aurora stitched itself into the dome like luminous thread, Captain Lira Veyne became the colony’s axis. Not because she was flawless, or beloved, or even victorious. But because without her, everything in Haven leaned toward collapse. She held the line not by shouting, but by standing still when everything else trembled. The party had not chosen her; the Accord had. But from here forward, the question would not be whether you followed her orders. It would be whether you could stand the weight of being measured and found either useful—or already breaking.

Descent to the Quarter

The elevator doors yawned open with a sigh of hydraulics older than most of the miners it carried. Inside, the cab was a grated cage that rattled like bones in a drum. Veyne gestured for you to step in, then followed last, posting herself by the controls. She pulled the lever with the casualness of someone who had done it a thousand times, and the floor lurched as gravity took over. The descent began with a shudder that traveled up your teeth.

Through slatted windows the colony revealed itself in slices. First came the mezzanine markets—stalls of synthetic fruit, bootleg stimulants, and salvaged drone parts arranged like talismans of survival. Faces turned upward at the sound of the elevator’s groan. Some faces were hopeful, others suspicious, and many bore the same etched weariness: the look of people who had survived so long they weren’t sure they wanted to keep paying the price. Children ran alongside the descending cab, laughing until the next flicker of the aurora made them stop and clutch each other’s hands.

The cab dropped further. You glimpsed a canteen where steam rolled against cracked glass. A man inside stirred a pot the size of a drum, his ladle carving lazy circles through a stew that looked more like boiled ration packs than food. A mural sprawled across the opposite wall: names painted in careful block letters. Thirty-two in all, each outlined in black. Space remained beneath them, blank rows awaiting additions. The elevator passed so close you could see where paint dripped, where some letters had been scrubbed clean and replaced with fresh names only weeks old.

Next came the infirmary. Queues stretched around pillars where hand-sanitizer dispensers blinked empty warnings. The smell of boiled antiseptic wafted through the vents and made eyes water. A nurse in a wrinkled coat glanced up as the cab passed, her expression unreadable. One patient in the line whispered, “Accord fixers,” and another muttered, “Helion’s dogs.” The words clung to the steel like oil—nothing clean here, nothing without residue.

At last the cab groaned to a halt on a platform sprayed with hazard-yellow lines. The doors clattered open. Here, the Quarter announced itself not with speeches but with the scrape

of boots, the hiss of water lines, the coughs of tired lungs. The Quarter was Haven's heart and its wound: where the colony's laborers lived and worked, where production kept the dome breathing, where hope was rationed thinner than food.

Serin Vael stood at a water manifold, sleeves rolled to the elbow. Her hands were steady but her voice was steel as she argued allocation with a technician who avoided her eyes. She was not dressed like a leader; she was dressed like everyone else, in coveralls patched at knees and elbows. What set her apart was not her clothing but the ledger she carried in her head: a mental accounting of who owed whom, who had earned trust, who had squandered it. She noticed you the instant the cab doors opened. Her gaze was sharp but not hostile. She took in your badges, your posture, and your silence—or lack of it.

Without waiting for formalities, she spoke. “*Row-C is running dry,*” she told Veyne. Then to you: “*And drones keep waking in tunnels they were never assigned to. Get my riggers home in one piece, and we’ll talk about trust.*”

The crowd around the manifold stilled, listening not just to her words but to your reaction. Here, trust was a commodity traded more carefully than credits. Every blink, every hesitation, every half-smile weighed on scales you could not see. If you flinched, you were weakness. If you boasted, you were arrogance. If you listened and promised nothing, you might just be measured as worth the gamble.

GM — Quarter Atmosphere

- Sensory detail: Push the players with imagery—smell of ozone, rattle of pipes, coughing children. Make them feel *the Quarter is alive but sick*.
- Trust economy: Serin is the Quarter's conscience. PCs who promise rashly lose her favor. PCs who commit to tangible acts (carry water, fix a scanner, patch a sprain) gain her trust. Track *Quarter Morale* as +1/-1 depending on PC actions.
- Faction presence: Reclaimers blend in with the crowd. Accord watchers linger on the edges. Helion Security stays close to Lira, not to protect her, but to watch the PCs.

A man with tired eyes pushed forward carrying a broken ration scanner. He held it out like an offering. “If you're really here to help,” he said, “start with this. My kids can't queue if the scanner reads them as frauds.” Behind him, a woman clutched a jug so heavy her knuckles whitened. She looked at you without speaking, but her gaze was louder than words. Around you, these silent requests multiplied until they became a chorus of small demands: a wrench turned, a pipe sealed, a bandage wrapped.

Veyne gave no orders. She watched, arms crossed, to see if you bent down to help or kept walking. Serin Vael's lips pressed thin, recording your choice in her mental ledger. The Quarter did not ask for speeches. It asked for hands.

GM — Quarter Skill Checks

- Carry water drums: STR check, success = gratitude, failure = spilled ration water □ *Quarter Morale* -1.
- Repair ration scanner: INT check, success = families can eat, failure = sparks & burns □ *Accord Optics* -1.
- Field-triage sprain: WIS check, success = miner hobbles back to line, failure = pain worsens □ *Reclaimer Trust* -1.

Each PC who chooses to stop and help can roll once. Reward +50 XP for selfless actions, regardless of outcome.

As the party moved deeper, the Quarter seemed to close around them. Narrow alleys funneled between stacked dormitories. Laundry lines drooped overhead, heavy with recycled water. Signs scrawled in chalk warned of ration cutbacks. The hum of the colony grew louder here—not just the drones, but the very bones of Haven: pipes clattering, pumps whining, circuits groaning like a tired animal. The Quarter lived, but every sound said it lived in pain.

When a child darted forward to touch one of you, her hand was clammy, her eyes wide. “Don’t let the singing come here,” she whispered, and then she was gone, pulled back into the crowd. No one acknowledged her words, but everyone seemed to hear them.

By the time you reached the tunnel entrance, Serin Vael’s presence lingered behind like a shadow. She had not promised you trust, but she had offered a ledger. In Haven, that was the closest thing to faith.

The Tunnels

The Quarter’s mouth opened into the tunnels with no ceremony—just a stairwell slick with condensation and a chain-link gate whose lock had been broken and repaired too many times to matter. The air grew cooler as you descended, and the hum of the colony deepened into a register you could feel in your sternum. Water dripped with an irregular rhythm, the drops fat and metallic, tasting of rust on the tongue before you even stepped through the threshold.

Light here was not electric alone. Miners had strung charms across junction boxes: washer-strings, colored fuse glass, even bits of ribbon scavenged from ration crates. Each charm clinked when the air shifted, producing a jittery chorus that stood in for hymns. “Keeps the hum honest,” one rigger explained in passing, eyes refusing to meet yours. You got the sense the charms were less for luck and more for defiance. If the machines had started to sing, the miners meant to sing back, however off-key.

Conduits arched like ribs along the ceiling. Resin patches slicked across welds where stress fractures had tried to split the skeleton of Haven. Your boots stuck briefly to the floor in places where sealant oozed, then pulled free with a sound like tearing fabric. At every junction, someone had scrawled numbers in chalk, but the sequences didn’t align. Row C claimed this was junction 18, but Row D swore it was 22. The colony’s map was dissolving at the edges, just as surely as the aurora dissolved the sky above.

Tannic “Rust” Varo waited for you at the gallery mouth, a coil of resin charges strapped across his back. His forearms were latticed with scars, not self-inflicted but earned through decades of keeping tunnels open with more grit than tools. He greeted you with a nod, the kind that carried weight not because of words but because of what it withheld. He checked each of you the way a veteran checks rigging: tugging in silence, deciding whether it will hold. His laugh lines had long since hardened into trenches, but when he met your gaze there was no dismissal, only a tired loyalty to anyone willing to step into the dark beside him.

Beside him, Meryn Ralos clutched a tablet so tightly his knuckles bleached white. He wore

the insignia of Helion Compliance, but the badge looked flimsy in this place. His hair was perfectly parted, his nails buffed clean, and his voice trembled as he tried to recite policy into a space where policy had no gravity. “Intervention must be documented... liability assessments must be noted... variance categories must be assigned...” Each phrase faltered as his eyes tracked condensation dripping down resin walls like tears. He looked at you as though begging for someone—anyone—to confirm that words on a tablet could still matter here.

Rust ignored him. He crouched by a blossom-lens drone sprawled on its side, casing scarred and serial number scratched away. The lens twitched once in the light, then stilled. Rust spat into the dark and muttered, “Zeratek built these to listen, not to work. Now they’re listening to something they shouldn’t.” He drove his boot into the drone’s carcass, the impact echoing like a cracked bell. The washer-charms above shivered, their discordant notes briefly aligning into a chord that set your teeth on edge.

GM — Tunnel Atmosphere

- Claustrophobia: Emphasize the narrowness, the sticky resin, the constant hum. PCs should feel the walls pressing inward.
- Miners’ rituals: Charms, chalk numbers, whispered phrases. Reward PCs who engage respectfully with +25 XP and a minor Quarter contact.
- Rust vs Ralos: Play them as contrasts. Rust = grounded, practical, survivor. Ralos = bureaucrat out of depth, but with access to valuable records if reassured.
- Foreshadowing: The hum. Stress that it feels *alive*, like something counting in a rhythm the PCs can’t quite catch.

The further you walked, the more the hum seemed to shape itself. At first it was random—a machine vibration with no pattern. But then you noticed it aligning with your footsteps, just briefly, before skipping ahead again like a child playing tag in the dark. Miners refused to speak of it directly. One woman muttered, “Don’t call it what it is,” and made the sign of a circle with three slashes. Another spat on the floor each time the hum rose, as though trying to drown it in ritual contempt. You realized quickly that the Quarter had already given this phenomenon a name, but no one here dared say it twice.

Ralos finally broke, voice cracking as he held his tablet higher. “This variance is not statistically significant,” he insisted. “We... we just need to recalibrate the arrays, file the correct forms, and...” He trailed off when his own words bounced back from the walls, repeating like a mocking echo. His hand shook so violently he nearly dropped the device. Rust took the moment to growl: “Forms don’t hold walls. Resin does. People do.”

As you pressed deeper, the tunnel narrowed until only two could walk abreast. Lights above flickered with a staccato rhythm. Once, twice, three times—then darkness so complete you felt your pulse speed as though chased. When the lights returned, one of the charms had vanished, leaving only a bare wire swinging slowly in the air. No one touched it.

GM — Encounter Hooks (The Tunnels)

- Drone carcasses: PCs who investigate can recover 1–2 *blossom lenses* (see Loot in Ambush). They pulse faintly if held against the aurora flicker.
- Charms: Interacting with charms respectfully (e.g., humming along, repairing one) earns Quarter goodwill. Breaking them or mocking them = Quarter Morale –1.

- Ralos’ notes: If protected, Ralos will later release compliance reports that expose Zer-atek firmware inconsistencies. PCs who ignore him risk losing this lead.

At last, the tunnel opened into a jagged gallery where vents should have been neatly braced. The resin patchwork ended abruptly, replaced by raw metal split like bone. The hum here was undeniable. It rose and fell in a pattern your body wanted to interpret as music, though no instrument could play it. Somewhere in the shadows, a blossom lens clicked open like an eye. Then another. Then three more. Each one oriented not on Rust, not on Ralos, but on *you*.

Rust cursed under his breath and primed a resin charge. Ralos whispered, “Variance category three,” though his hands shook too badly to type it. And above, the washer-charms rattled in a syncopated rhythm that sounded almost like applause.

Ambush in the Gallery — North Shaft Collapse

The tunnel opened like a wound. Where there should have been braced vent lines and neat resin patching, there was only raw metal, cracked wide and jagged. The air stank of hot copper and resin smoke, the kind that sears your nostrils and makes every breath taste like pennies. At first glance, you might have thought the drones littering the gallery were wrecks. Then one blossom-lens twitched, oriented on movement, and a chorus of faint hums filled the air—low and arrhythmic, like the clearing of mechanical throats before a song.

Rust cursed and primed a resin charge. Ralos whispered “Variance category three” under his breath, his tablet quivering in both hands. Veyne’s jaw locked as she raised her weapon, but her eyes didn’t track the drones. They were fixed on the North Shaft, where a girder had collapsed into a spidery heap. Two miners were pinned beneath its weight, boots protruding from the rubble. One foot twitched weakly. The other was still. Sparks cascaded as drones cut patient, surgical lines through the debris, moving closer with the steady assurance of tools that had been taught cruelty.

The scene froze for a heartbeat, then came alive at once: resin smoke thickened, the hum aligned into something perilously close to rhythm, and the gallery lights stuttered like they were afraid. The shaft was not just a collapse. It was a stage—and you had just walked into the first act.

“If they cut through to the bodies, they’ll finish what the girder started,” Rust snapped. “We move now or we dig graves instead.”

The drones did not rush. They never rushed. Each cutter flared with surgical precision, carving away supports like they were dismantling the colony piece by piece. Their blossom lenses gleamed faintly green in the aurora’s reflected light from above, as though the sky itself had crept down here to watch.

GM — Encounter Setup (North Shaft)

- Terrain: Jagged debris, resin smoke, failing braces. PCs who climb risk 1d6 bludgeoning damage if supports shift.
- Threats: 3 Scrap Drones (AC 7; HD 1d8; THAC0 20; DMG 1d6 cutter; Morale 12). They focus on finishing the miners unless stopped.
- Timer: 3 rounds before the first pinned miner dies. After 5 rounds, the second is lost unless freed.

- Skill options: STR to lift debris, DEX to brace collapsing beams, INT to jury-rig support with tools. Award XP for ingenuity over brute force.

As you approached, the collapsed girder groaned under its own weight. Resin patches peeled back like scabs. The twitching boot spasmed once more, a feeble protest against inevitability. The other miner—still pinned deeper in the rubble—remained frighteningly silent. Rust threw his shoulder against the beam, teeth gritted, sweat dripping into his eyes. “Help me hold!” he barked. His voice cracked with something not often heard from him: fear disguised as command.

The drones turned in unison, three lenses catching the dim light. They shifted their cutters from the beam to the rescuers, as if deciding that mercy was no longer efficient. Sparks leapt, carving the air with harsh white arcs. One drone lunged, its cutter screeching against a steel brace an inch from your shoulder. The hum spiked in pitch, and for an instant you could swear it wasn’t mechanical at all—it sounded like someone *counting*.

Ralos yelped as sparks sprayed his tablet, nearly dropping it. “This... this isn’t in any variance record,” he stammered, more to himself than anyone else. “It’s—this is wrong.” His panic only added to the claustrophobic press of the gallery, where every sound seemed to echo back as though the tunnels themselves were listening.

GM — Outcomes (North Shaft)

- If the PCs free both miners: Quarter Morale +1; Reclaimer Trust +1. Survivors whisper the PCs’ names like talismans.
- If only one is saved: Gratitude mixes with grief. Quarter Morale unchanged, but Serin Vael marks the ledger against those who hesitate.
- If neither survives: Quarter Morale -2; Street Temperature +1. The Reclaimers spread word: outsiders talk big, save none.
- If drones destroyed creatively: Accord Optics +1. Recordings can be leveraged against Zeratek. Otherwise, salvage only abstract 0–50 cr worth of parts.

By the time the girder groaned its last and the cutters died down, the gallery was smeared with resin smoke and sweat. The miners—alive or not—were carried out on makeshift stretchers of pipe and canvas. Rust leaned heavily against the wall, breathing like a man who had fought gravity itself. “We don’t get to pick what we save,” he muttered. “We only get to decide what dies slower.”

Above, the washer-charms chimed in an uncanny harmony, as though the gallery itself approved or condemned what had just transpired. The hum lingered, quieter now, but unmistakably alive.

Ambush in the Gallery — Main Line Defense

Across the gallery, the Main Line looked less like a battlefield and more like desperation incarnate. A half-dozen workers—helmets dented, coveralls streaked with soot—had formed a shield wall out of scavenged crate lids and dented plating. They held their line at the mouth of a supply corridor, feet braced against resin-slick stone, knuckles white on makeshift grips. Every breath came in ragged gasps, but still they stood. Behind them, families huddled in the shadows, their eyes wide, their silence more terrified than any scream.

The drones did not charge blindly. They pressed with machine patience, cutters gnawing against the shields in precise, repeated arcs. Sparks spat and hissed with each contact. The workers buckled, then surged back, singing half a work song between clenched teeth to keep rhythm. It was an old miner's cadence, stripped of melody and left only with stubborn beat. Even so, it trembled on the edge of breaking. One more push, and the wall would shatter.

The moment you approached, the drones hesitated, lenses swiveling toward fresh motion. The song faltered. For the first time, the workers' eyes flicked sideways, as if silently asking whether you would join or simply watch them collapse. The children in the shadows clutched tighter at sleeves, the air thick with smoke and waiting judgment.

"Keystone's cracked," one miner rasped through his shield. "We need bodies in the line—or we break."

Rust shouted from across the chamber, his voice hoarse but urgent. "Hold the damn line! Give them a chance to live!" Even he sounded unsure if it was command or prayer. Ralos muttered numbers under his breath, trembling fingers inputting casualty projections as if statistics could hold the shields upright. Veyne's rifle barked once, cutting down a drone mid-step, but she looked back to see what the party would do. She had measured you once at the shuttle bay. This was the second measurement.

GM — Encounter Setup (Main Line)

- Terrain: Narrow corridor mouth, resin-slick footing. Crate-lid shields provide AC bonus if PCs join wall.
- Threats: 4 Scrap Drones. They attack in coordinated bursts: +1 to hit if 2+ strike the same shield.
- Timer: Workers can hold only 2 rounds unaided before rout. With PCs in line, each PC adds +1 round of morale.
- Skill options: STR or CON to absorb impacts, CHA to rally the song, DEX to slip past and flank drones. Reward creative positioning.

When you stepped into the line, the rhythm shifted. Shields rose higher, grips tightened, and the song found new voice. Your bodies formed a keystone the wall had been missing. The next drone surge hit, cutters screeching against metal, sparks showering your faces—but this time, the line held. The resonance of voices rose: not tuneful, but relentless, the sound of defiance hammered into beat.

The washer-charms above the corridor rattled, their discord somehow aligning to the rhythm of the song. For a moment, it was unclear whether the colony itself was singing along, or mocking. The hum beneath your feet deepened, vibrating bones, as if counting the beats of your defiance.

One drone shifted tactics, swinging wide to flank. A child shrieked as its lens flared. If no one broke formation, the drone would carve straight into the civilians. If someone peeled from the line, the wall risked collapse. The choice was sharp, immediate, and costly either way.

GM — Outcomes (Main Line)

- If PCs hold the line without breaking: The civilians remain safe, the drones are destroyed, and morale surges. *Accord Optics* +1 as word spreads that outsiders held firm.

- If PCs peel to save civilians: The line buckles, 1d4 miners injured, but the child is spared. *Street Temperature +1* (seen as protectors of the vulnerable).
- If PCs fail to reinforce: The wall collapses, drones spill into civilians. *Quarter Morale -2*. Survivors blame Helion, but whispers tie the failure to the Accord's agents.
- Loot: Drone salvage worth 50–100 cr if recovered, or one intact blossom lens (records 30s of distorted audio).

When the final drone shuddered and collapsed, silence rushed in like a vacuum. The workers leaned on their battered shields, gasping. One spat blood, another laughed a laugh that sounded more like a sob. They looked at you with the eyes of men and women who had seen the abyss and stepped back only because someone else stood with them. For the first time, their song stopped trembling. For the first time, it felt like a hymn.

From the shadows, the children stared. One whispered, “They sang with us,” and the others nodded solemnly, as though a pact had been made. Above, the charms rattled again, eerily on beat. Whether it was harmony or mockery, none could tell.

Ambush in the Gallery — The Child in the Alcove

At the far edge of the gallery, tucked behind a lattice of pipes, a maintenance alcove opened like a throat into shadow. There, a child sat alone, knees drawn up to chest, eyes wide but unblinking. He did not scream when the drones advanced. He did not run when their cutters flared. Instead, he hummed—softly, tunelessly, but unmistakably in rhythm with the vibration in the walls. The sound raised hairs on your arms. It was not mimicry. It was *harmony*.

One drone peeled away from the skirmish, lens flickering like an eye catching scent. It prowled toward the alcove with measured precision, cutter sparking against metal as if sharpening itself for the work. The hum deepened in your bones, the colony's heartbeat aligning with the child's song. For a moment you could swear the drone hesitated, cocking its lens as though listening for the next verse.

The child's humming grew louder. Not defiant, not frightened—simply matter-of-fact, as if he were part of some choir only he could hear. His lips formed syllables too faint to catch, but the pattern was clear: three notes rising, one falling. The same cadence you'd felt in the aurora's flicker above the dome. The same phrase you'd heard in the washer-charms' rattles. The same motif that haunted the tunnels since you stepped foot inside.

“It's not supposed to know us,” Ralos whispered, his voice strangled. “It's supposed to *obey*.”

The drone's cutter flared inches from the grille. Sparks rained across the child's face, painting his features in brief, sharp light. He didn't flinch. He hummed louder, and the drone's lens dilated in reply. For a terrifying moment it seemed as though the machine might lay down its cutter and simply listen forever. Then the harmony fractured. The motif stumbled. The drone's head twitched violently, and the cutter thrust forward.

You reached the alcove in time. Whether it was steel, spell, or sheer strength, you struck, and the blow landed with all the weight of inevitability. The drone spasmed, cutter shrieking against metal, then collapsed in a hiss of smoke. The child blinked once, then reached for your hand without a word. His palm was clammy, his grip fierce. He did not let go.

GM — Encounter Setup (The Child)

- Terrain: Narrow alcove, low pipes, little room to maneuver. DEX checks to avoid catching gear on conduits.
- Threats: 2 Scrap Drones drawn to the alcove. One focuses on the child, the other on PCs who intervene.
- Timer: 2 rounds before the child is injured if unprotected. At 3 rounds, his humming escalates into an uncontrollable motif—risking panic in all drones present.
- Skill options: WIS or CHA to soothe the child and break his trance; STR or melee to intercept drones; INT to rig an emergency EMP from nearby fuse boxes.

The gallery around you blurred into smoke and sparks, but the child remained fixed on your face, humming even as you carried him clear. He looked not at the drones but at the walls, counting lights, lips shaping notes only half-sung. His eyes were too calm, too old, for a child his age. When one of you unconsciously echoed his motif—a low hum beneath your breath—his gaze sharpened like a beacon finding its target. He knew. He knew you had heard it too.

GM — Outcomes (The Child)

- If the child is saved unharmed: Street Temperature +1. Word spreads of outsiders who protect the vulnerable. The child becomes a recurring ally—his ability to map motifs to places is invaluable.
- If the child is saved but injured: Quarter Morale +1 (gratitude) but Reclaimer Trust -1 (resentment that you let harm touch one of their own).
- If the child is lost: Quarter Morale -2, Accord Optics -1. Whispers of “the ones who let him die” follow the PCs everywhere.
- Special: PCs who hum the motif with the child unlock a persistent campaign thread: *The Choir recognizes them.*

When the final drone fell and silence reclaimed the alcove, the child pressed himself to your side. He would not release your hand. His hum dwindled to a murmur, then silence, but the rhythm lingered in your bones long after. The washers above rattled one last time, in uncanny synchrony with his heartbeat. The aurora flickered faintly through cracks in the dome, and for an instant the whole colony seemed to breathe in unison with the boy.

Silence After & Fallout

When the final drone collapsed in a hiss of resin smoke, the gallery exhaled as if it, too, had been holding its breath. The silence that followed was not peace but shock—a vacuum left where sound should have been. For a long moment, no one moved. The only noise was the faint rattle of washer-charms above, chiming in a pattern that could have been approval, or mourning, or both.

The miners began to gather the wounded. Makeshift stretchers were fashioned from pipe lengths and torn canvas, their edges slick with sweat and resin. Those who had survived stumbled forward, eyes wide and hollow. Some touched the PCs’ arms as they passed, wordless gratitude etched deeper than language. Others refused to meet your gaze, grief eclipsing any thanks. In Haven, survival was never clean. It always demanded payment.

Rust Varo leaned against a buckled beam, breathing like he’d just wrestled the colony itself.

His hands shook—not with fear, but with exhaustion. “We don’t get to pick what we save,” he muttered, voice rough. “Only what dies slower. You did what you could.” He looked at you then, and though his eyes were shadowed, there was no contempt. Only recognition that you had stood where others might have run.

Ralos, pale and trembling, tried to compose a report. His tablet screen was cracked, the words flickering, but still he tapped lines of text: *“Intervention successful. Casualties within variance threshold. Recommend review of drone firmware integrity.”* His voice shook as he recited it, like he was trying to convince himself more than anyone else. When he realized you were watching, he faltered, then whispered: “If I frame it right, we can hold Zeratek liable. But only if... if you protect me when they push back.”

The child clung to your side, his grip unyielding. He stared at the ductwork, lips moving in half-formed hums. When one of you echoed the motif—consciously or not—his eyes widened with eerie clarity. He knew. He had heard the same voice in the aurora that you had. He would remember this moment, and the memory would shape the way the Quarter whispered your names in the nights to come.

GM — Fallout Tracking

- Quarter Morale: Adjust based on outcomes at Shaft, Main Line, and Child. Positive totals mean gratitude; negatives mean unrest.
- Reclaimer Trust: Grows if PCs risk themselves for miners. Falters if sacrifices are made in the name of optics.
- Accord Optics: Boosted if victories were visible, recorded, or spun. Penalized if deaths outweigh PR gains.
- Street Temperature: If PCs saved the child, word spreads fast. If not, suspicion burns hotter than any torch.
- Machine Wake Clock: Advance 1–2 ticks (of 6) for every uncanny electrical event. The Choir remembers.

Captain Lira Veyne surveyed the aftermath with a soldier’s calm. She barked orders to Security, who began clearing debris and stabilizing braces. Then she turned back to you. Her voice was low, but every word landed with weight. “You bought us time. Not victory. Haven doesn’t trade in victories anymore. Just time.” She studied you for a long moment, then added: “We’ll see what you do with it.”

The workers carried their wounded away, their footsteps echoing like a drumbeat of endurance. The smell of resin clung to your skin, mingled with the metallic tang of blood. For all the chaos, there was no mistaking one fact: you had altered the rhythm of the Quarter. Whether for better or worse, you had become part of the story whispered in these tunnels. And stories in Haven had a way of spreading faster than light.

As you ascended back toward the Quarter, the colony itself seemed to shift around you. Conversations hushed as you passed. Eyes followed you with mixtures of awe, suspicion, and calculation. Serin Vael awaited you at the manifold, arms folded, expression unreadable. She glanced at the survivors behind you, then at the child, then back at you. “Ledger’s open,” she said simply. “Where you fall in it—well, we’ll see.”

Above, the dome’s aurora flickered again. This time, it was not random. Three pulses, one pause—the same motif the child had hummed. You could no longer dismiss it as coincidence. Haven was singing, and someone—or something—was teaching it the words.

GM — Bridging into Arc 2

- Governor Orus Hestrel summons the party for a “courtesy call” in the Spire. His invitation is less request than verdict.
- Kaelen Drix (Zeratek) demands return of salvaged drone parts, offering firmware updates in exchange. His smile hides teeth.
- Director Sael (Compliance Medicine) offers screenings for “residual stress.” Volunteers rarely emerge unchanged.
- Saint of the Accord pings: *“Bring me something they can’t spin—a clip, a sample, a pattern. Make it sing even to the deaf.”*

End Arc 1 with the party walking toward the Spire’s sealed doors. Let the building hum once—just enough to suggest the aurora’s song has reached even here.

And so Arc 1 closed not with victory, but with silence. A silence filled with unspoken debts, unburied grief, and the faint, chilling suspicion that Haven’s voice was no longer human alone.

Top Go to Arc 2 Open Dossier