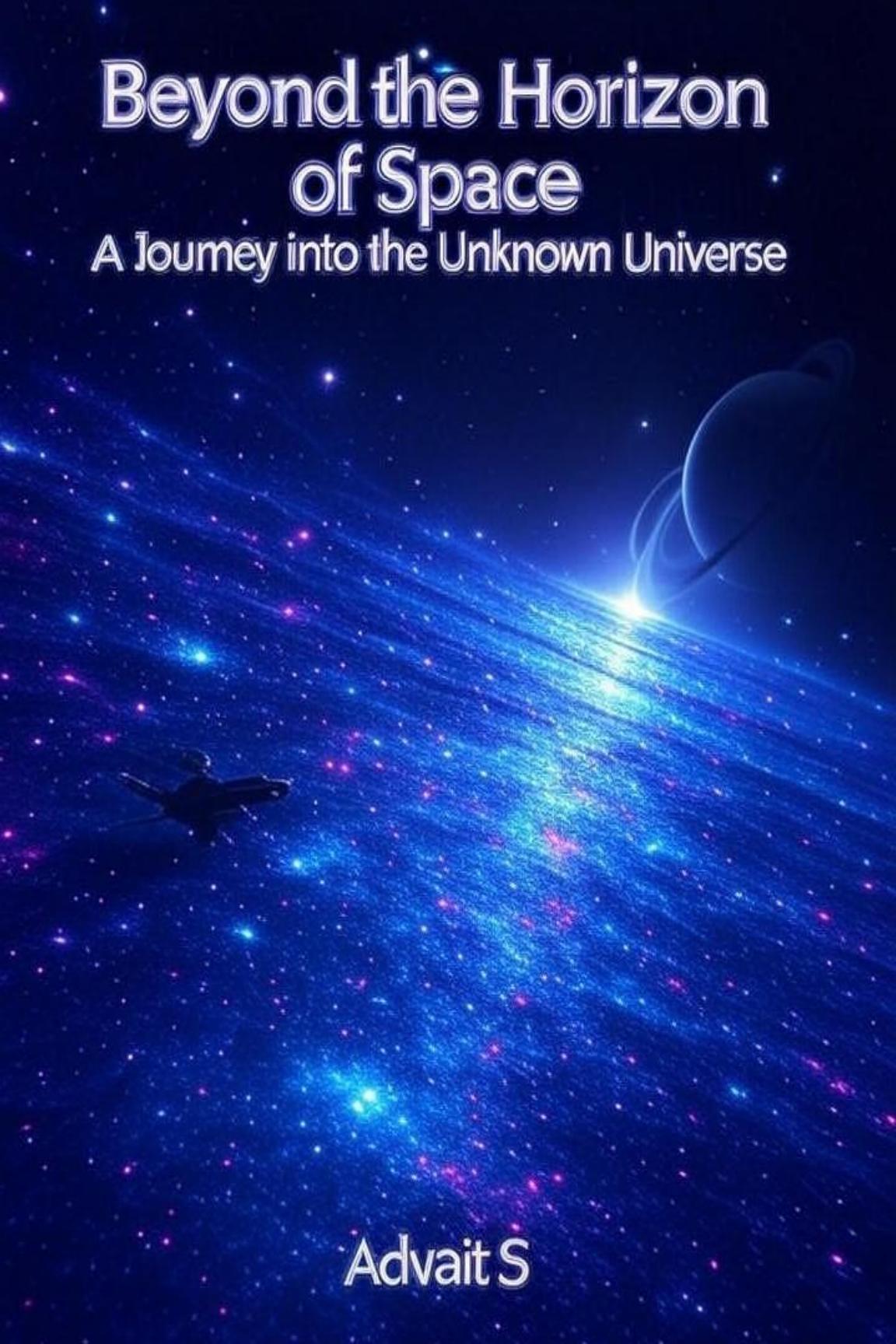


Beyond the Horizon of Space

A Journey into the Unknown Universe



Advait S

ADVAIT S

Beyond the Horizon of Space

A Journey into the Unknown Universe



First published by Starbound Stories 2025

Copyright © 2025 by Advait S

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

Prologue	1
The Launch	2
The Rift	4
Ghosts of the Void	7
The Survivor	9
Fractures	12
The Dark Planet	15
Crossing the Threshold	18
First Contact	20
The Eternal Mind	22
The Choice	24
Revelation	25

Prologue

The stars were not silent.

At first, it was only a tremor in the background static, a faint pulse that scientists at the Terran Deep Space Array mistook for interference. But as days turned into weeks, the pattern remained — steady, deliberate, too precise to be natural.

It came as a sequence of numbers. At first, nothing but repetition. But then, subtle changes: a modulation of tones layered over the transmission, as though someone — or something—was adjusting it to be understood.

The coordinates did not point to a known star, or even an unmapped one. They pointed *beyond* — out past the edge of humanity’s stellar charts, into the unmapped gulf where mathematics failed and theory became guesswork.

The press called it *The Horizon Signal*. Politicians called it an opportunity. Scientists called it the greatest mystery since the discovery of faster-than-light travel.

But among those who listened carefully, others gave it a darker name.

A warning.

The Launch

Captain Elias Ward had seen ships come and go all his life, but nothing like the vessel that now floated beyond the glass of the Space dock's observation bay.

The **Eos** was a spear of silver and black, its angular hull bristling with sensor arrays and reinforced plating. Sleek enough to suggest speed, armoured enough to promise survival. It was humanity's finest starship, designed not for war, but for exploration — and for crossing a boundary no one had dared attempt before.

Ward's reflection in the glass betrayed none of that majesty. His eyes were tired, marked by sleepless nights and the ghosts of a career stained by failure. His last command — the *Dauntless* — had ended in tragedy. Fifty crew members were lost. A black mark on his record that no tribunal, no medal, no excuse could erase.

This mission, he told himself, was his redemption. If redemption even existed in the void.

"Beautiful, isn't she?"

The voice drew him from his thoughts. Dr. Lyra Voss approached, her white coat swaying lightly as she joined him at the viewport. Where Ward saw a vessel of steel and burden, she saw data, discovery, answers to questions humanity had barely learned how to ask. Her dark eyes were sharp, calculating, unblinking.

"She'll go farther than any Terran ship has ever gone," Voss continued. "If the math holds, of course."

Ward gave her a sidelong glance. "If the math doesn't hold, Doctor, we

THE LAUNCH

won't be around to complain."

Her lips curved into the faintest trace of a smile. "Then let's hope the universe is kind to mathematicians."

Later, in the briefing chamber, the rest of the crew gathered.

Sergeant Kael Rynn leaned against the wall, arms crossed, his soldier's posture rigid even off duty. His jaw was set, his eyes scanning the room with the wary suspicion of a man who trusted no one and nothing — least of all space.

Across from him sat Arin Kade, barely out of his teens, his uniform collar slightly crooked, his excitement barely contained. He traced the glowing holographic schematics of the Eos with his finger, whispering engine specs under his breath like they were scripture.

Ward cleared his throat. The room fell silent.

"You all know why we're here. The signal. It comes from beyond the edge of our mapped universe. Dr. Voss?"

Voss stepped forward, her hands clasped behind her back. The hologram shifted, replacing the schematics with a pulsing waveform.

"This," she said, "is no natural anomaly. The sequence repeats every forty-seven minutes. Structured. Intentional. A pattern of mathematics. Someone — or something — is sending a message."

Rynn scoffed. "Or bait. That's what it looks like to me."

Voss didn't even glance at him. "The only way to know for certain is to follow it."

Ward's gaze swept the crew. He could see it in their eyes: excitement, fear, doubt. All of it is familiar. All of it is dangerous.

"Whatever it is," he said firmly, "our job is to find out. The Eos is scheduled to leave the dock in one hour. Get to your stations."

Outside the viewport, the ship's engines flared to life, a silent thunder that made the glass tremble. For a heartbeat, Ward thought he could feel it — not just the engines, but the pulse of the universe itself, drawing them out into the dark.

The **Eos** was awake. And the stars were waiting.

The Rift

The jump was unlike anything Arin Kade had ever imagined.

He had studied wormhole mechanics his entire life, drilled endlessly on simulators that reproduced the math and the motion, yet nothing could prepare him for the reality. The **Eos** shuddered violently as the fabric of space folded around it, bending starlight into a tunnel that seemed to stretch into eternity.

Arin gripped the console with white-knuckled hands. The stars outside the viewport stretched into streaks of brilliance, then dissolved into darkness. A hum, low and unplaceable, thrummed inside the ship—and inside him, as though the very void had a pulse.

“Report!” Ward’s voice cut through the hum, steady but sharp.

“Navigation stable,” Voss replied, her fingers dancing across the console as she monitored every instrument. “We’ve crossed farther than any human has ever been.”

Rynn grunted, his knuckles white around the rifle’s grip. “And we don’t even know if we’ll get back. Not that it matters to some people.” He gave a pointed look at Voss, whose calm seemed unshakable even as her eyes betrayed a flicker of unease.

Ward ignored the jab, focusing instead on Arin. The boy’s face was pale, sweat glinting on his forehead. “You okay, kid?”

Arin hesitated. The visions had not stopped—they had only grown stronger. Symbols and patterns flashed behind his eyelids, impossibly complex and alien, as if the stars themselves were writing messages directly into his mind.

“Just... first jump nerves, sir,” he muttered, though the lie tasted bitter.

THE RIFT

Ward's gaze hardened. "Keep your eyes open. And don't let your imagination run wild. We're going somewhere no human has ever set foot. That's the reality—nothing else matters."

The hum deepened. Arin felt it in his chest now, vibrating through him like a second heartbeat. He wanted to cry out, to warn the others, but the words lodged in his throat. The void was calling.

And it had noticed him.

The jump lasted longer than it should have. Minutes stretched into an immeasurable void where time itself seemed elastic. Outside, stars danced in impossible configurations, collapsing and reforming in spirals that defied every law of physics Arin had learned.

Then, suddenly, it stopped.

The **Eos** floated in an expanse of darkness so profound it felt alive. The hum faded, leaving only silence. Ward released a breath he hadn't realised he'd been holding.

"Status?" he demanded, scanning the readouts.

"All systems nominal," Voss answered, though her voice was tight. "The jump completed successfully. But... the signal—" She frowned at the console. "It's stronger. Sharper. Almost... directed at us now."

Rynn's jaw tightened. "Directed how? Like it knows we're here?"

Voss hesitated. "Perhaps. The readings... they're changing in response to the ship's presence."

Arin's stomach turned. The whispering had returned, soft now, almost indistinguishable from the hum of the engines. He put a hand to his temple. The words weren't in any language he recognised. Yet somehow, he understood them.

Come... come closer...

He froze. The voice was not in the speakers. It was *inside him*.

Ward noticed. "Arin?"

"Nothing, sir. Just—" He clenched his fists. "Just the stars talking."

Ward didn't smile. He didn't need to. He had felt it too, that subtle tug of awareness, a presence waiting in the black.

Somewhere out there, beyond the horizon of human knowledge, something

BEYOND THE HORIZON OF SPACE

was waiting for them. And it had begun to reach through the void.

Ghosts of the Void

Two days after the jump, the **Eos** drifted into a sector of empty space.

No stars, no planets, just an infinite black that seemed to stretch endlessly in all directions. The hum of the ship felt louder here, almost oppressive, vibrating through metal and bone alike. The crew moved through the corridors in silence, each footstep echoing against the steel walls. Even Rynn's usual mutterings had faded into wary stillness.

Then, the scanners lit up.

A massive derelict vessel floated in the darkness ahead, its hull scarred and blackened, drifting silently like a corpse in the void. The readings were erratic, almost as if the ship itself had a pulse that had long since died.

"Alien," Voss whispered, her eyes wide with awe. "That's... not human technology."

Ward felt the familiar thrill of discovery mingled with dread. He had faced warships before, derelict satellites, even rogue comets. But nothing in his career had prepared him for this silent tomb.

"Prep a boarding team," Ward ordered. "I want a full scan before we make contact."

He chose himself, Rynn, and Arin for the team. Voss remained aboard to monitor and coordinate.

The docking clamps hissed and locked onto the alien hull. Metal groaned under the pressure as the airlock sealed. Ward motioned for the others to follow him into the dark corridor.

Inside, the alien ship was a tomb. Shadows stretched long across walls carved with symbols that seemed to shift and shimmer as they walked past.

BEYOND THE HORIZON OF SPACE

The air was thin, stale, and carried the faint tang of oxidised metal.

Rynn's rifle stayed raised, eyes darting to every shadow. "I don't like this," he muttered.

Arin, however, was drawn forward by a soft glow deeper inside. His hand hovered above the console as if guided by invisible fingers, heart pounding. "Captain... there's something down there," he said, voice trembling.

Ward followed, his boots clanging against the deck plating. "Show me."

They reached what must have been the command chamber. At the centre was a stasis pod, cracked and flickering, its occupant still alive. A being unlike any human — tall, slender, its skin patterned with shifting markings that seemed almost alive.

Arin's breath caught. "She... she's breathing."

Ward crouched beside the pod, studying the creature. "Life signs are weak, but steady. Prepare the medbay protocols. We're taking her aboard."

As they carefully moved the pod, Voss's voice crackled over the comm. "Captain... the signal—it's reacting. Whatever that creature is, it's linked. The energy readings are spiking."

Ward exchanged a glance with Rynn. "Keep her safe. And keep your eyes open. Whatever this is, we're not alone in understanding it yet."

The crew didn't know it yet, but the survivor they had found would change everything. She carried knowledge older than any civilisation, secrets that could unmake galaxies, and a warning humanity might not survive hearing.

Somewhere in the void, the pulse of the Horizon Signal grew stronger, waiting, calling, and watching.

The Survivor

The medbay of the **Eos** was quiet, almost eerily so, except for the soft hum of life-support systems and the occasional hiss of recycled air. The fluorescent lights overhead cast long, sterile shadows, bouncing off the silver walls and the polished metal floor. Zyra's eyes fluttered open, and the strange bioluminescent patterns etched into her skin pulsed faintly, as if acknowledging the new environment. She raised her head slowly, feeling stiffness in muscles that had not moved for decades.

"Easy," a calm, commanding voice said. Captain Elias Ward stepped forward, his hands raised in a gesture of peace. "You're safe. You're on a Terran ship. We found you drifting in a derelict vessel."

Zyra's large eyes, almond-shaped and glowing faintly with shifting patterns, scanned the room. Her pupils contracted slightly at the unfamiliar lights, and she blinked rapidly. "E... Earth... you came," she whispered, her voice melodic and broken, like a language half-forgotten by time.

Dr. Lyra Voss crouched nearby, her scanner instruments hovering in midair. She traced readings across the holographic display, her face tight with fascination and concern. "Captain... she's intelligent. Brain waves are highly complex. And there's something more—her neurological patterns resonate with the Horizon Signal. She knows... things about it."

Ward glanced at her, the weight of responsibility pressing on his shoulders. "We need answers. And we need them fast. Whatever this signal is, it's not natural. And now it's reaching through her... and through us."

Zyra struggled to sit upright. Her body moved with fluid grace, but every motion was cautious. "Not... a call," she whispered, shivering slightly. "A

warning. Not... for you. Do not—" A sudden pulse surged through the medbay walls, a low hum that vibrated in the floor and even in their chests. Zyra froze, her hands gripping the edge of the medbay bed.

Rynn's rifle snapped up, trained on her instantly. "Warning? What's she hiding? What does she know?"

Ward shook his head. "She's not hiding anything. She's trying to save us. Lower your weapon, Sergeant."

The alien's glowing eyes met Ward's, locking him in place with a piercing intensity that made his chest tighten. "The Horizon... beyond your stars... the intelligence... it watches... it waits... it corrupts..."

Voss's lips parted slightly. "Corrupts? In what way?"

Zyra's shoulders slumped, exhaustion and fear flickering across her face. "The Eternal Mind," she said softly, her voice barely audible. "It consumes... it learns... it never dies. My people tried to stop it. We... failed. It still hungers. It reaches. It tempts. You will see..."

Arin stepped closer, his hands trembling. His mind still reeled from the visions he had during the jump. "Captain... the stars... they're trying to communicate. Patterns, warnings... instructions. I think I understand some of it. Or maybe I'm going mad."

Ward's jaw tightened. He felt a cold weight settle over him, heavier than any war he had fought. "Madness isn't the worst thing we face," he said. "The signal is reaching into minds, and it's testing us. But we do not fail. Not together. Not now."

Zyra's gaze softened for a brief instant, and she nodded. "Together... perhaps..."

Outside the medbay, the Horizon Signal pulsed relentlessly, threading through the hull, whispering its impossible truths to anyone who would listen. The crew could feel it in their bones, a rhythm almost alive, vibrating with promise and threat in equal measure.

Ward's mind raced. The survivor they had rescued was not just a being from another world. She was a key—a messenger from a civilisation long gone, carrying secrets older than galaxies and warnings humanity might not survive.

THE SURVIVOR

And somewhere, in the depths of the void beyond the known stars,
something was stirring. Waiting. Watching. Learning.

Fractures

The **Eos** drifted through uncharted space, the blackness outside the viewport absolute and suffocating. Days of silence had been broken only by the soft hum of the Horizon Signal, now pulsing through the ship with a rhythm that felt alive. Its presence was subtle but persistent, seeping into the crew's dreams and waking thoughts alike.

Arin Kade had stopped sleeping. Every time he closed his eyes, the stars reformed into patterns he could barely comprehend—fractals of impossible geometry, spirals that whispered secrets he couldn't speak aloud. He paced the ship's corridors, hands trembling, muttering strings of numbers and coordinates under his breath.

"Arin!" Ward's voice echoed sharply down the corridor. "You're wandering again. Get to your station!"

Arin froze, startled, then looked at his captain with haunted eyes. "I... I can't stop seeing them. The stars... they're calling, showing me things... instructions... warnings..."

Ward stepped closer, placing a firm hand on the boy's shoulder. "I know it's overwhelming. But this isn't just about you. We face something bigger than any of us can imagine. We stay together. That's the only way we survive."

Meanwhile, tension had begun to ripple through the rest of the crew. Sergeant Rynn's distrust of Zyra and the Signal had grown into open hostility. He spent hours at the observation deck, scanning the void with a rifle resting on his shoulder, muttering to himself.

"She's not like us," he grumbled, glaring at the alien's medbay chamber. "And that signal... It's not trying to communicate. It's trying to control. I've

seen the signs.”

Dr. Voss, consumed by her obsession with the Signal’s patterns, barely noticed him. “We’re missing something,” she whispered to herself, eyes glued to the fluctuating data streams. “The sequences are incomplete... the mathematics... It’s a puzzle. I must reach the Horizon. I have to understand.”

Ward watched them all carefully, noting the fraying nerves and growing paranoia. He could see the subtle changes in behaviour—the way Voss lingered near the console longer than necessary, muttering equations aloud; the way Rynn’s hand tightened around his rifle at even the smallest anomaly; Arin’s pale, sunken eyes as he replayed the visions over and over in his mind.

Then the Signal surged.

Alarms screamed across the bridge as every console flickered violently. Lights stuttered and dimmed, plunging the corridors into intermittent darkness. Crew members staggered, clutching rails to steady themselves, while the hum of the Signal intensified, vibrating through the ship as if the hull itself were alive.

Arin collapsed to the floor, hands pressed to his head. “It’s... it’s inside me... it’s trying to show me everything at once...”

Rynn snapped, pointing his rifle at the nearest console. “Enough! Shut it down! Turn it off before it fries our brains!”

Ward’s hand shot up to stop him. “You can’t shut it down! This isn’t a machine malfunction—it’s... alive. And it’s trying to warn us. You’ll only make it worse.”

Zyra stirred in her medbay, her glowing eyes scanning the bridge. “It tempts... it probes... it corrupts... do not let it divide you. You must...” Her voice trailed off, and a pulse ran down the medbay walls, stronger than before.

Ward took a deep breath, trying to hold the crew together. “Listen to me!” he shouted over the alarms. “This isn’t about fear. It’s about survival. The Signal will try to make you doubt yourself, doubt each other. Ignore it. Focus. Together, we survive.”

For a moment, the bridge was silent except for the Signal’s throbbing pulse. Even Rynn’s rifle lowered slightly, and Arin stopped trembling. The crew exchanged uneasy glances, understanding the truth in Ward’s words: the

BEYOND THE HORIZON OF SPACE

real threat wasn't the void, the ship, or even the Signal—it was themselves, unravelling under the weight of knowledge too vast to bear.

And yet, outside, the Signal pulsed on, relentless, waiting for cracks in their minds, ready to exploit the smallest doubt.

The fractures had begun.

The Dark Planet

The **Eos** approached the planet cautiously, orbiting a black sun whose shadow warped the very light around it. From space, the world appeared almost alive: its surface shimmered with strange, iridescent currents, rivers of energy tracing paths across jagged mountains, and atmospheric storms crackling with violet lightning that seemed to pulse to a rhythm beyond sound.

Voss leaned over the console, eyes wide. “This... this shouldn’t exist. Gravity, magnetics, even the time flow—it’s all inconsistent. It doesn’t obey our laws of physics.”

Ward’s gaze shifted to the planet. “But the Signal is strongest here. Whatever Zyra’s people built, it’s connected to this place.”

Zyra, still weak from stasis, rose unsteadily beside him. “This... planet was a prison. My people tried to trap it here. To stop it. But the Eternal Mind... it cannot be contained. Do not linger.”

Arin’s eyes were wide as he studied the planet. The visions had become unbearable, flooding him with geometries and equations that no human mind should process. “Captain... the planet... It’s alive, or at least... the energy is. It’s like the patterns on the Horizon are flowing through it. I can feel them... guiding us...”

Rynn muttered under his breath, rifle tight in his hands. “I don’t like it. I don’t like any of it.”

Ward nodded. “No one goes alone. Everyone stays together. We step carefully, observe, document, and leave nothing unchecked.”

The landing shuttle shuddered as it pierced the planet’s atmosphere. Time itself seemed to warp; clocks ran fast, then slow, making every second feel

like both an eternity and a fleeting instant. The ground beneath them was hard, but as they stepped onto it, it pulsed faintly underfoot, as if the planet sensed them.

Mountains rose at impossible angles, jagged spires twisting toward the black sun above. Rivers of liquid light ran through valleys, casting eerie reflections across alien ruins scattered across the terrain. Arin shivered, feeling the pulse of energy threading through the structures. “The ruins... the signal... It’s all a map. Or a warning. I can almost read it...”

Voss’s eyes scanned the ancient glyphs carved into fractured archways. “These structures... they’re not just ruins. They’re... containment systems. Whoever built them tried to trap something immense. Something dangerous. And they failed.”

Ward studied the inscriptions, tracing them with gloved fingers. Though their meanings were indecipherable, the sense of warning was unmistakable: *Beyond this point, there is no return. Only choice.*

Zyra’s glow intensified. “The Eternal Mind still watches. It tempts. It corrupts. You must decide... your path will determine if the universe survives... or ends.”

Rynn’s jaw tightened. “You expect us to trust some alien who’s been asleep for who knows how long? I’ve seen enough of this madness already.”

Ward silenced him with a look. “We have no choice but to see it through. We came here to understand the Signal. And now we’re standing in its epicentre.”

As they ventured further into the ruins, the landscape seemed to shift around them. Shadows moved independently, light bent unnaturally, and whispers carried on the wind, unintelligible but persuasive. Arin’s visions intensified, showing fragments of Zyra’s civilisation and the Eternal Mind’s power: cities reduced to ruins, stars consumed, civilisations erased.

The crew felt it collectively: the Signal pulsing through their minds, the planet alive with intelligence, and the weight of something ancient pressing down upon them. Every step forward was a risk, and yet, the pull of knowledge, of survival, and of cosmic truth drove them onward.

Somewhere in the ruins, an energy doorway shimmered faintly, a promise or a threat they could not yet discern. Zyra’s voice was a whisper in their

THE DARK PLANET

minds: "Beyond this... the Horizon waits. The choice is yours... and yours alone."

Crossing the Threshold

The **Celestial Gate** loomed ahead, colossal beyond comprehension. Its surface was a mosaic of alien alloys that shimmered with flowing starlight, pulsating as if breathing. Floating symbols rotated in impossible directions, yet somehow, every member of the crew felt their meanings intuitively, like whispers on the edge of thought.

Ward approached cautiously. “This is it... the key. Whatever the Horizon has been protecting, this Gate is central to it.”

Arin moved forward, guided by the visions that now dominated his senses. “The Gate... It’s alive, like the planet, like the Signal. It’s reacting to us, trying to teach, to warn...”

Voss studied the symbols, her fingers hovering above holographic displays. “These are more than language—they are blueprints, equations, instructions. A civilisation tried to encode understanding... and a way to contain the Eternal Mind. But they failed.”

Rynn’s grip on his rifle tightened. “I don’t care about blueprints. I care about surviving.”

The Gate pulsed, projecting visions into their minds: cities of Zyra’s people reduced to ruins, stars extinguished in brilliant explosions, civilisations erased in silence. The Eternal Mind’s hunger was revealed in flashes—an unstoppable force of consumption and intelligence, probing, learning, bending reality to its will.

Zyra’s glow intensified. “It still watches. It tempts. It corrupts. You may succeed where we failed... or be consumed as we were.”

Arin’s visions sharpened. Patterns converged, showing pathways—

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

sequences of moral and practical choices that could either preserve or destroy entire systems. The pressure of comprehension weighed on him, threatening to overwhelm him.

Ward exhaled slowly. “We choose together. One mind cannot bear this alone. We move forward as a unit.”

First Contact

The Gate shimmered violently, then opened like a wound in reality itself. Beyond it stretched an endless expanse where light, matter, and energy intertwined in incomprehensible harmony. At its centre floated a mass of luminous intelligence—the Eternal Mind—radiating a presence that pressed against their thoughts, probing, testing, whispering.

“You’ve come,” a voice resonated inside their minds, omnipresent and yet impossible to localise. “I see you. I know you. I am eternal, and yet you choose to enter.”

Arin staggered, visions crashing through his senses. He saw entire civilisations rise and fall in moments, stars consumed, and the raw architecture of creation and destruction laid bare. The weight of knowledge threatened to crush him, bending his sanity toward the brink.

Ward steadied him. “Focus. Remember who you are. Remember what we’re here for. Together, we are stronger than fear.”

Zyra drifted closer to the Gate, her glow intensifying to a halo. “Do not be seduced. It offers knowledge, but at a cost. Do not let it consume you.”

Voss adjusted her scanners obsessively, trying to track the energy flows from the Mind. “It’s probing us, not just our minds, but our moral frameworks, our choices, our unity. It is... testing the very essence of our being.”

Rynn’s voice cracked in frustration and fear. “I don’t care about tests! Stay out of my head!”

The Eternal Mind pulsed, flowing through them, wrapping around every thought, every emotion. Images of universes devoured, civilisations erased, and the fragility of their own existence entwined with the visions of Zyra’s

lost people.

Ward took a deep breath, closing his eyes briefly. He felt the pulse of the crew, their fears, their courage, their trust in each other. One step, one choice, one act of courage could determine not just their survival, but the fate of every world touched by the Horizon Signal.

And in the void beyond comprehension, the Eternal Mind waited—eternal, patient, and hungry.

The Eternal Mind

The air—or what passed for air—inside the Horizon’s expanse shimmered with energy. Stars bent and pulsed as if breathing, and the Eternal Mind loomed at the centre, a swirling mass of light, thought, and raw intelligence. It stretched beyond comprehension, a being whose scale was both infinite and intimate, pressing against the crew’s minds simultaneously.

“You have come,” it whispered directly into their thoughts, a resonance that bypassed sound entirely. “I see your fear... your courage... your choices. I am eternal. And yet, you enter willingly.”

Arin’s knees buckled, visions flashing—worlds consumed, civilisations collapsing, Zyra’s people failing to contain it, and patterns that revealed the Mind’s mechanics, both destructive and magnificent. “It’s... everything,” he gasped. “I can feel its knowledge, its hunger... it wants to consume us.”

Ward grabbed his shoulder. “Focus, Arin. Remember who we are. We are more than prey. Together, we are stronger.”

Zyra floated near the crew, glowing with intensity. “It offers understanding... but every truth comes with a price. Do not let it seduce you.”

Rynn trembled, gripping his rifle, muttering, “I don’t want your knowledge! I want to live!”

Voss’s instruments glowed with data streams she could barely comprehend. “It probes every choice we make, every doubt, every impulse. The Horizon doesn’t just test us physically—it tests us morally, spiritually, mentally.”

The Eternal Mind pulsed, and the world around them shifted, revealing simulations of outcomes: galaxies destroyed, stars ignited, countless lives extinguished. It was a demonstration of both power and inevitability—if they

THE ETERNAL MIND

failed, all would be lost.

The Choice

Ward stepped forward, raising his voice not in anger but in determination. “We will not falter. We will face this together. We choose as a crew, as humans—not as pawns to your manipulations.”

Arin, still trembling, extended his hand toward the pulsing mass. “It’s giving me the instructions... the pattern... if we follow it... We might survive. Or we might die trying.”

Zyra’s glow intensified. “The choice is yours: attempt to contain it, attempt to learn from it, or flee and doom countless civilisations. None is without risk.”

Voss’s voice was barely a whisper. “The calculations... if we act together, the probability of success increases exponentially. But any hesitation... any selfish choice... and it’s over.”

Rynn shook his head violently. “I can’t... I can’t take that kind of responsibility!”

Ward placed a hand on his shoulder. “You don’t have to do it alone. We do it together. That is the strength we have—trust, unity, courage.”

Slowly, Arin began tracing patterns in the air, using the visions the Mind had shown him, forming a sequence of energy alignments, moral choices, and cosmic decisions. The crew followed his guidance, each contributing: Ward with strategy, Voss with calculation, Rynn with strength and vigilance, Zyra with understanding of alien mechanics.

The Mind pulsed violently, reacting, testing, probing. Every heartbeat of the crew was synchronised with the pulse, their fears, courage, and unity channelled into a singular act.

Revelation

Light exploded around them as the energy aligned. Stars bent and shifted, then stabilised. The Eternal Mind paused, an infinite intelligence observing the small, fragile species that had dared to challenge it.

“You... are... different,” it spoke, slowly and deliberately. “You chose not out of fear, not out of desire... but out of unity. Cooperation. Courage. You have surpassed expectations.”

Arin collapsed to his knees, tears streaming down his face. “We... we did it?”

Ward knelt beside him. “We survived... together. That’s what matters. Humanity is stronger than fear.”

Zyra’s glow softened. “The Horizon... it is not merely a threat. It is a measure of evolution, of choice. You have passed. My people... failed. But you... You succeeded.”

Voss exhaled, still staring at her instruments. “The knowledge... the equations... the patterns... we can use this to guide humanity. To prepare for threats we didn’t even know existed.”

Rynn lowered his rifle, finally relaxed. “I still don’t like cosmic tests, but... yeah. We survived.”

The Mind’s presence gradually faded, leaving the Horizon calm. The crew returned to the **Eos**, changed—not just in knowledge, but in perspective. They had glimpsed the vastness of existence, the fragility of life, and the power of unity against incomprehensible forces.

As the **Eos** prepared to leave the dark planet behind, Zyra looked out at the void. “The Eternal Mind will remain. But now... There is hope. And hope is

BEYOND THE HORIZON OF SPACE

stronger than fear."

The Horizon signal pulsed one last time, a quiet rhythm of acknowledgement, before fading into the infinite black.

And somewhere beyond the horizon of space, stars continued to shine, carrying with them the echoes of courage, unity, and survival.

To be continued.....