



Ardent

s p a c e r s

KENOBASIS

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In the spirit of Halloween, we asked attendees of Ardent Spacers to send in spooky stories and art. This zine is formatted as an IC document, a collection of urban legends that you may have heard on the ship. It's unlikely to be accurate, unless...

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@charleyhallart

No AI was used in the production of this document.

From the lorn orchards of Earth to the refineries in orbit around Marzion IX: the end of a cycle, the long-awaited harvest, is a time of anticipation and change. Our minds turn to the season past, and our eyes open to the shadows. Tever say the voices of the dead whisper through the boughs of their trees; Skala trade tales of shed skins on silent pilgrimage to the burrows they were born in. Even aboard the Ardent, among the Alliance's vanguards, there is a sense of suspension – a keening note added to the shriek of the FABREP, an uptick in requests made to T/OM to explain the unexplainable...

What do you remember, at the edge of all that is known? What has been forgotten? Or, perhaps: what are you trying to forget?

Is there a spectre that haunts the Ardent's halls? Did you see the void pawing at the ship's membranes? What lurks in the corner of the picture you took in the reactor chamber? Did something follow you aboard? Have you, in short, witnessed something that you can't explain – something strange, something paranormal? Did you file a report about it?

Kenophenomena Log

By Adam Hill

CAUTION: This form is strictly for the recording of known Kenophenomena. If the Kenophenomena is unknown, please use the Kenophenomena Discovery Log. Personnel accessing these files illegally are in breach of Alliance data protection laws and will be reported to A-COM.

KPL-001 - “Sensor Ghosts”

Sensor ghosts, often referred to simply as “ghosts” by more superstitious sailors, are a type of anomaly encountered in deep space.

There are several recorded types of sensor ghost and whilst all of them share certain characteristics, they all display unique behaviour that has been documented below in their respective sections.

Common Characteristics

Sensor ghosts are considered an ominous sign by many sailors. All sensor ghosts display the following common phenomena:

- Display Faint returns on ship sensors, despite zero physical mass.
- Are unable to be visually confirmed by external cameras or the naked eye.
- Induce momentary equipment glitches including but not limited to:

- Corrupted telemetry
- Auditory static
- Power fluctuations
- Loss of data connectivity
- Coincide with crew unease, often reported alongside the following non-exhaustive list:
 - Nausea
 - Feelings of dread
 - Intrusive thoughts
- Will disappear upon closer investigation or maintenance.

There are several specific types of documented sensor ghost, which have been collected below.

To note, it is currently unknown what causes these anomalies. Any person or persons claiming to know the exact cause of this specific kenophenomena should be interviewed to confirm the accuracy of their information. Any person or persons claiming that sensor ghosts are the work of spirits, dead gods or eldritch entities are to be ignored as these have no basis in scientific fact.

KPL-001-A

“Bleeding Echo”

Signature: Faint, shifting contact that mimics a nearby vessel.

Threat Level: 1/5

Description: Bleeding Echoes report as small vessels travelling parallel to a ship at close range. They mirror ship manoeuvres as well as vector and velocity changes with unnatural precision. Previous attempts to hail or scan these have resulted in feedback on either comm or scanning frequencies. More superstitious sailors have reported hearing the voices of dead crewmembers or their ID codes.

These readings are considered harmless, aside from the effect they can have on a ship's morale.

KPL-001-B

“Static Veil”

Signature: Sudden and complete sensor blackout within a defined radius.

Threat Level: 3/5

Description: The anomaly referred to as the Static Veil is not a singular sensor ghost but rather a zone of effect. Ships passing through this zone have reported full sensor collapse, navigation computer failure and chronological

desynchronisation. Clocks drift, varying from seconds to hours. Some crews have reported losing days without notice or supposedly arriving before they were due.

This anomaly is given a threat rating of medium, as the implications of time being malleable is concerning. Unfortunately, there is currently no way of confirming if this is the case or if these reports are merely the influence of drugs or other intoxicants.

KPL-001-C

“Harmonic Lure”

Signature: Faint SOS beacon buried in background sensor noise.

Threat Level: 4/5

Description: This anomaly presents as an emergency distress signal, usually repeating across several outdated frequencies and almost always transmitting stellar coordinates nearby the detecting ship’s current position, making the prospect of a potential rescue a tantalising idea. Ships that have responded to these beacons however have found nothing. Further investigation has found that the signal appears to be coming from inside their own systems.

This anomaly is rated as a High threat level, as whilst it is theoretically harmless, there have been reports of ships disappearing shortly after reporting a response to this beacon.

KPL-001-D

“Afterimage”

Signature: Repetition of previously logged sensor data

Threat Level: 1/5

Description: This anomaly has been said to replay old sensor events as if they are re-occurring. This has been reported to occur on several different readings including but not limited to:

- Asteroid fields that do not exist
- Ships previously detected
- Signals recorded anywhere from one week to several years ago

This anomaly has not been reported to cause dangerous issues, however some spacefarers have reported experiencing deja vu and disorientation after repeated events.

KPL-001-E

“Red Silence”

Signature: Unknown red-spectrum anomaly

Threat Level: 5/5

Description: Perhaps the most unnatural of the anomalous entries recorded here and certainly the least common, as the anomaly known as Red Silence has only been reported three

times. Each time this has been reported, the anomaly is detected as a blood-red sensor contact of enormous size; larger than the average moon. It should be noted that the colour of the sensor contact appears red even if the sensor in question is unable to display colours in that spectrum. The anomaly displays no electromagnetic readings and like all ghosts, zero mass. Despite this, navigation solutions curve towards it automatically as though it has an extreme gravitational pull. Before contact, sensor logs are wiped and crew biological readings flatline for approximately two to three seconds, though no crew lose consciousness.

This anomaly is classified as a high threat due to the issues it could potentially cause due to the severe interference with ship systems.

Incident Logs

Several reports of various anomalies have been collated below. These are written as received, but due to the nature of these anomalies cannot be verified.

IL-01

Vessel: Orion's Wake - Cargo Hauler

Location: Vista, Crest of the Spectral Sea

Date: 46BA

Summary: The crew of the vessel reported a mirrored contact maintaining a 6.7km parallel trajectory. Contact lacked

transponder ID. Attempts to hail resulted in distorted responses.

Excerpt - Captain's Log

"Every time we adjusted our course, it matched us—pitch, yaw, even drift compensation. When we cut thrust, it cut thrust. sensors couldn't get a hull reading. When we hailed, the response came back over the emergency band. Faint, like it was almost out of range. My helmsman turned white—said it was his sister's voice. She died seven years ago on Viront."

— **Capt. R. Liao**

Outcome: Contact vanished after approximately 2.7 hours of travel. No further contact was reported for the remainder of the voyage.

IL-02

Vessel: Vigil-3 - Patrol Boat

Location: Horizon, Helium Lanes

Date: 22BA

Summary: Patrol Boat responded to SOS beacon. Signal maintained a steady distance from the ship despite the captain ordering full speed. Final transmission terminated partway through.

Black Box transcript - Final entries

Ops: "Signal is now repeating below 10 kHz—why would anyone broadcast there?"

Captain: "We're close, boost signal clarity—"

[STATIC – tone rises into faint harmonic whistle]

Unknown Voice (faint): "...come find us... we're waiting..."

Ops: "Captain, that voice is coming from—inside our beacon system?"

Captain: "What do you mean 'inside'—"

[ALARM WAILS]

Helm: "New contact! It's right on top of—"

[SIGNAL TERMINATED]

Outcome: Ship disappearance logged. Hull was not recovered from last known location.

IL-03

Vessel: Wayfarer - Cargo Hauler

Location: Forest, The Nimbus

Date: 10BA

Summary: Crew reported detection of a destroyed freighter (Prospect Dawn, lost 11 years prior) appearing on long-range sensors at regular intervals. Contact was always noted at 33km ahead, always listing to port. Attempts to confirm sensor reading resulted in episodes of déjà vu and blackouts amongst the crew.

Recovered Internal Comms Log:

Pilot: “I swear I’ve seen this. We said these exact words.”

Comms: “We’ve scanned this three times already. My logs are repeating.”

Captain: “Engineering, confirm engine cycle count.”

Engineering: “...cycle count shows 104 restarts. We’ve only restarted once.”

[silence]

Captain: “...Helm, get us out of here. Now.”

Outcome: Ship pulled into port above Arliris without damage. Crew were alive, but suffering severe mental health issues reportedly related to overlapping memories.

IL-04

Vessel: Nova Runner - Exploration Frigate

Location: Edge of Abyss, close to Belt of Tiamat

Date: 3BA

Summary: Ship found over 900 light-years from last known position. SOS beacon active. No external damage to ship or signs of combat.

Bridge Audio – Final Entry Before Silence

Captain: “Relax. We’ll get to the other side of this static cloud and get our bearings.”

Navigator: “Sir, we exited the cloud 15 minutes ago.”

Captain: "...we haven't entered it yet."
[distant knocking begins behind bulkhead]
Engineer: "...who let someone outside?"

Outcome: Crew recovered alive, but catatonic. Onboard environment within nominal values. Clocks aboard ship showing to be desynchronised by 117 years.

IL-05

Vessel: [CLASSIFIED]

Location: [CLASSIFIED]

Date: [CLASSIFIED]

Summary: All records redacted. The truth is too horrifying.

Outcome: [Classified]

IL-06

Vessel: Far Reaches - Mining Barge

Location: Unknown - suspected to be too close to the Core.

Date: 56BA

Summary: Crew detected a large, silent red-band signature approaching their vector. No mass readings were detected, nor any form of EM or radiation. Helm controls became locked into the navigation course, which was forcibly altered towards the anomaly.

Black Box Data Fragment

Helm: “AUTO-CORRECTION FAILURE, vector’s been altered towards the reading!”

Captain: “Override the nav computer! Full reverse burn!”

Nav Officer: “Controls aren’t responding! I can’t change our course!”

Hull Vibration Begins – Low Frequency

Resonance

Unknown Voice (unlinked): “...we see you...”

[DATA CORRUPTED]

Outcome: Ship recovered adrift in deep space. No crew were found aboard. Hatches sealed from the inside. No sign of hull breach. Escape pods remained in their docks.



Grandma

Phoenix

The Light of Darkness

By Serenity

[Data recovered from AES Integrity database on REDACTED]

[Debrief transcript – Commander Arlen Voss]

[Date – REDACTED]

-

"Cough, cough, test, recording, hmmm."

"This is Commander Arlen Voss of the AES Integrity, transmitting my debrief and operational log following response to the distress call aboard Station Icarus."

"Confirm, station to be deemed decommissioned following on-site assessment, single survivor recovered."

"Sad to report single casualty of the away team."

"Log open."

"Approach and docking were nominal."

"Boarding was recorded as a routine retrieval and status check mission."

"The away team were rookies, newly assigned, minimal field experience."

"Early in transit they joked about the paperwork, traded barbs over who wrote the worst log entries, and showed good

camaraderie; their laughter filled the hatch before we depressurized."

"Away team composition: Lieutenant Elena Voth; Petty Officer Jonah Vale; Ensign Mara Quinn; Specialist Iben Kade."

-

"Station Icarus had been placed to monitor the progress of a black hole as it consumed nearby solar systems; it served as both a scientific outpost cataloguing gravitational lensing and tidal interactions and as a leisure observatory for a privileged clientele, their money couldn't save them."

"I led the team through the first galleries, lights low, scanners pinging old warnings. I had been at this long enough to know how quickly a routine could empty a person; they looked to me to keep everything together even when I did not feel that steadiness inside. I kept my voice flat to give them something steady to follow."

"We moved corridor to corridor, checking seals and logging environmental statuses."

"Mirrors and reflective surfaces across observation galleries and suites were covered or defaced but not smashed. Cloth, paint, adhesive wraps and scored lines hid reflections; the coverings were deliberate and consistent."

"As we pushed inward, we ran into living, feral inhabitants—gaunt, wrong in the face, snapping like animals. They came from thresholds and service tunnels. Jonah and I had to put two down in a supply corridor; one lunged at Jonah's arm and we neutralised it to stop it from tearing open his tendon. Kade took a bite to the calf; I remembered the chemical tang of blood on his suit, metallic with a stale,

breathy sweat, the fabric smelling of ozone and the sour of recycled air. Jonah's hands were shaking before he steadied them; I wondered what must have raced through his head in those first seconds."

"We cleared rooms together. I killed when I had to; I did it cleanly. That was the calculus in front of me."

"We found Elena in an observation gallery."

"We were alerted by the unmistakable and terrible sound of her body hitting the floor."

"When we reached her, she was collapsed beside an uncovered reflective panel."

-

"I secured the scene and directed Jonah to check pulse and airway while Kade sealed the gallery."

"We brought Elena back to the shuttle for initial examination before returning into the station. I oversaw the transfer. When Jonah and I lifted her onto the med slab it was obvious—her neck was broken. The angle was wrong, the jaw slack; beneath the clothing the vertebral line had been destroyed in a way that left everything after that moment wrong. The sight lodged in the back of my teeth."

"Above the gallery, the service vent was torn outward and deformed."

"Inside the duct, we found a smear unlike anything in our manuals—impossibly dark, viscous, pitch-like, clinging to the ribs of the duct and glistening black under my beam. I swabbed it myself."

“We pushed deeper. Rooms were full of bodies: clusters where people had turned on one another; isolated beds left to vacuum. Many were dead by hands and many by engineered exposure; environmental systems had been weaponised.”

“Feral pockets ambushed supply corridors and tramways. We had to clear them; in every engagement the team was quieter afterward. I noted Jonah’s hands steadying after the first fight and wondered again at what rippled through him.”

“On-board manifests and resident registries were corrupted and unreadable; identity logs were damaged or tampered with.”

“I found Escape Pod 7 tucked in a remote service alcove after a drone picked up an anomalous heat signature. I pried the hatch and opened the pod.”

“Inside was a woman clinging to a ration pack and a sealed med canister. She had rationed water by sipping every four hours, stripped insulation to make a nesting curtain against the pod wall, and rigged a slow power cycle to keep the distress beacon on at minimal draw. She had stretched emergency stores and kept the life-support trickle long enough to make roughly two weeks of supplies last. She had a handwritten schedule in the pod’s storage compartment—minute marks for water, timed pulses for the heater—small rituals she used to count the hours.”

“Her name was Lila Voth.”

“She was gaunt, vacant-eyed, and she flinched at polished instruments and avoided anything that could reflect her face. Jonah carried her to the shuttle med bay while I stayed with the pod and checked seals.”

“I ordered biometric swabs and a close visual comparison. Lila Voth and Lieutenant Elena Voth were identical twins—same shoulder-length dark hair, same faint crescent scar on the right eyebrow, same freckled left cheek, same height and gait.”

“The pod’s distress transmitter had provided the signal that drew us. The looped audio read: ‘static... help, please send help... static... ly... crying... help please, it waited, in the dark, please help.’”

“Forensics summary: bodies showed blunt trauma and occasional ligature marks; multiple deaths were exposure-related from venting or from environmental sabotage. No single conventional weapon accounted for all wounds. The pitch-like smear in ventilation and the internally severed cervical trauma on Elena remained anomalous and unexplained.”

“Lila had survived by strict, ritual rationing, by converting the pod into a micro-environment of light and heat, by using insulation and timed power cycles to conserve energy, and by refusing to open the hatch until she heard something she trusted. She had kept minute marks to mark days, small acts that turned survival into habit.”

“Lila was minimally communicative; she flinched at reflections and reached toward wrapped panels before stopping. She answered with fragments when Jonah coaxed her with med stim.”

“Readable portions of the command console showed manual engagement of launch suppression keys and some override sequences prior to our arrival; some pod launch protocols were locked where accessible. Other logs were corrupted.”

“Our team had been rookies on a mission logged as routine; their camaraderie made the silence after Elena’s discovery louder.”

-

“I updated the AES database as far as the shuttle uplink allowed, pushing manifests and casualty records where the link held. I recorded Lieutenant Elena Voth as deceased and Lila Voth as survivor recovered. It felt absurd, typing neat lines into a system that was half-dead. I was turning over the inconsistencies in my head—why would Elena be listed as an only child where Lila clearly existed, whether the manifests were incomplete, or someone had scrubbed a sibling line...”

[AUDIO: a dry, snapping sound, like thick bone giving way under a clean, final pressure, followed immediately by a heavy thump.]

“One five was finally down. The darkness awaits. We are here.”

-

[Transcript ends]



Hatchman

By Becky

Taskminder Maintenance Log

By Wil Morgan-Mclean

FILE: Taskminder Maintenance Log Ref:47f and supplemental entries

Ardent Mission Day 72

Power loss on Deck 6 port side. Narrowed down to somewhere between sections 6 and 7, entered service level via hatch 6-325/C and located issue. Melted power conduit shorting out.

Repaired and left working. Visual and digital scans showed nothing unexpected.

Ardent Mission Day 73

Intermittent power losses on Deck 6. Visual Inspection via hatch 6-304/B revealed more melted conduit and fused circuits in section 6 same as previous job.

Repaired and left working.

Evidence of unknown lifeform came up in scans, Kenolab notified.

Ardent Mission Day 74

More power loss in Deck 6 despite two fused conduits already repaired. Inspection via hatch 6-300/B.

Third incident reported this week.

Same issue as previous. Repaired.

Unknown lifeform signs picked up on scans again.

Fur-like substance fused into melted steelwork.

Kenobab and Mattock notified.

Ardent Mission Day 76

Fourth time this week of power loss in Deck 6. Engineer Binkley was sent to investigate yesterday but had not returned. I attended with a member of Mattock security and located the source of damage.

Unsurprisingly fused conduits.

Humanoid arm and repair kit found near damaged conduits.

Damage repaired then Mattock officer escorted me to the hatch and stayed behind to secure the area.

Ardent Mission Day 77

Unsurprisingly more power losses in Deck 6. Apparently, the security officer who attended the previous issue didn't check back in post-shift. Nobody has seen Binkley either. Probably shouldn't have gone alone this time.

Power conduits were fused, surprise surprise. Hull plating loose, repairs enacted on resealing plating and resupplying conduit. All left working.

Ardent Mission Day 78

~VOICE LOG TRANSCRIPT~

This is Taskminder Engineer Albert Silverstein, recording 'cause I've lost comms with the ship, probably a crap signal down 'ere. Hopefully this at least gets saved if it all goes tits up. I'm

following up on these bleeding power cuts I've been looking at all pissing week, and I seem to have found that poor bugger from Mattock down here all torn to bits. I reckon it's him anyway, from what's left of him. Probably should have brought backup but O'Brien'll deal with anything untoward in 'ere. Looks like something furry's been living 'ere, it's made itself real cosy. Burrowed itself right into a main transformer, no wonder we've been having problems. Hang about - there's something moving down there. Oi, what you bleeding playing at? Looks like a rabbit. Piss right off, you! Blinking hell, it's got teeth the size of me 'ed! Ahh, bugger, that's gonna leave a mark! 'Ere, taste hot rivet! Don't like that? Have another 6!

repeated use of power tool

heavy breathing

There, that's dealt with that. Is this still recording? Bert here still, looks like I found the source of the issue, will write a full report when I get this mess cleaned up and this leg patched up. Bert, out.

~END OF VOICE LOG TRANSCRIPT~

No more entries

Subject: Potential Unreported Kenophenomenon

by Trick

<Kenolab file

AUTO/KPL-0.38126-un/APR-020-extcomlog/1025AD1>

<Subject: potential unreported kenophenomenon>

**<This file has been automatically generated for review by
KENOLAB staff>**

<start_excerpt>

[...]

No, the worms aren't magic. Also, they have a home here, as nice as I could make "CaTeGoRy 3 BiOhAzArD" containment units. As funny as it would be [...]

[...]

Did I tell you about our ghost?

Maybe it's always been here, and I just haven't noticed. I have spent the early days here scraping the baseline. Sleep, eat enough stimulants to...well, eat. Exercise. Sleep again. Took a minute for the brave new adventure to set in. Re-tuning myself for our first outing actually helped, and it turns out that the ship full of nerds don't really chat enough to form cliques in transit, so I haven't missed out on the socialising.

Anyway. Ghost.

It was on a walkway, one of those that go past the massive external windows. I've lost time at the theatre, so by the time I left, anyone who wasn't on maintenance shift had gone to sleep. People don't party here, either. It's grim. I think that's why I noticed it. Otherwise, I'd have thought it was a shadow, or a reflection of someone else: standing there, looking at the patterns outside. After the ship comes out of manifold collapse, for a while you can see these trails - like lights in low-exposure photography. It stood there and looked outside, all while being itself made almost of the same flattened shimmer. It watched the colours, and I watched it until one of the traces outside faded enough to change the light levels, and the person-shaped flicker vanished.

I went to check the recordings the next day. They won't let me see security footage, obviously, but the deck has this rotating reflection display, which technically retains some of its data for a few hours. Not enough to see last night, it turns out, but enough for me to spot it again. Walking around this time. It was following just a few steps behind a whole wave of Diplos heading to the wider deck. And again, all it took was a change of camera angle for the humanoid shape of translucent colour to vanish.

And all right, yes, I had nothing better to do than to try and track a ghost. It's my job here, poking at weird shit to see what happens!

It wasn't just cameras, either. There were little things in high-traffic areas: an extra person registered in conference room vacancy numbers, login sweeps on basic access points with no one around. In any kind of old place, there is always an explanation for this sort of stuff. Someone died or went missing nearby, someone else had a horrible vengeance

against the owners and knew a person who knew a person who could all but straight up curse the whole situation. But the Ardent is new new, so there hasn't really been time for anything like that to accumulate. Emergent folklore hasn't really emerged. I probably didn't help, but it was fun to be the one telling ghost stories. I think my attempts at a coherent narrative got to a point where it must have been a supernatural passenger, stalking a member of the crew for terrible revenge. Then someone from Tasks actually explained what must be going on.

I still don't understand a third of their explanation, but the point is: the ship goes into and comes out of manifold collapse slowly, almost superimposing on itself in the process as it fully goes from A to B. And normally it is too subtle to notice, but sometimes these... echoes remain behind. A delayed shadow of a person just going about their business, captured in the same single frame of coloured light. Stuff with access pads and numbers is either a result of the same reality delay, or just the natural consequence of very new and expensive systems being sensitive to being glared at wrong for too long.

That, too, might be bullshit from someone who got tired of my imagination. I refuse to do enough research to verify anything a Taskminder says. Maybe I've just missed the chemical balance on my end- "light people" won't make the top ten interesting trips list. Still, I like the idea that it is a ghost of all of us. Literal omni-presence. It gets all the best things a groundbreaking interstellar voyage can offer without any downsides. It can learn, watch movies, keep the ship going and hang out in a bar after a long day. It can leave all the miserable stuff like workplace health and safety conferences to the tangibly living. If I were a ghost of the Ardent, I'd only stay in the good times. And I am, technically, the ghost of

Ardent, as much as anyone else is. I like the idea that just for a few moments there is a me without any body or thought at all. Just a soul, using its seconds of existence to stare at the shapes and colours in the window.

Reading this through is an indicator that it's time [...]

<end_excerpt>

<File marked: resolved by K. Sagnant-APR-020>

<File note:

Raised this with A-COM, but if this system keeps flagging my personal broadcast messages, I swear I'll start inserting full transcripts of Holo-Tanto Mystery Hunters episodes into them!>

The Quietstitch Protocol

by Serenity

Erebus Station was never meant to be remembered. A mining outpost orbiting the dead planet Calyx-9, it was built for silence—no tourism, no traffic, no questions. When the distress signal arrived, it was half-erased, a garbled whisper of static and blood. The rescue crew docked, expecting fire or vacuum. What they found was worse.

The station was intact. Lights pulsed. Oxygen flowed. But the crew...

They were seated at their posts. Smiling.

Their bodies had been hollowed out from within—organs gone, bones polished, skin draped like ceremonial cloth. No signs of struggle. No signs of pain. Just serenity.

The logs revealed something worse: the crew had continued working for hours after infection. One technician filed a maintenance report while her ribcage was being dissolved. Another adjusted reactor settings with her lungs liquefied. The venom—if it could be called that—was a neurochemical anaesthetic. It didn't just numb. It pacified. It rewrote fear into peace. Victims watched their own disassembly with the calm of monks in meditation.

They weren't worms. They were *quietstitch* filaments—bio-threaded harvesters, born from a failed military experiment. Designed to infiltrate enemy nervous systems and

pacify them before combat. But the prototypes escaped. They learned. They evolved.

Mara was stationed on Khepri-6, a terraforming colony built on volcanic glass and atmospheric hope. She had seen the Erebus footage. She had studied the wreckage of Virex Prime, where the Somnophage project had first unravelled. She knew what was coming.

When the first colonist reported “phantom warmth” in their spine, Mara locked down the medbay and began her autopsies.

She found quietstitch filaments — thin as hair, glistening with a wet sheen, pulsing like veins. They were growing. Feeding. Learning the architecture of the human nervous system. And they were broadcasting.

The infected began to speak in unison. Not words. Frequencies. A low hum that vibrated through walls, scrambled comms, and made blood thicken. Mara recorded it. Played it back. The sound made her teeth ache. Made her dreams bleed.

She tried to warn the planetary council. But the signal was intercepted. The harvesters had learned to mimic human speech. Her message was overwritten with a calm voice saying,
“All is well. We are whole. We are peace.”

The final stage wasn't death. It was integration.

The harvesters didn't kill. They repurposed. The bodies became bio-relays, transmitting the anaesthetic signal across planetary distances. The infected became nodes in a growing network of calm. A hive of serenity, pulsing with stolen flesh.

Mara fought. She injected herself with neuro-blockers, wore a suit lined with electromagnetic mesh. She burned the infected. She screamed into the void. But the harvesters were patient. They waited. They whispered.

One night, she woke to find her suit peeled open. Her ribcage exposed. The filaments were already inside, coiled like lovers around her vertebrae. She felt no pain. Only warmth. Only peace.

She smiled.

The last transmission from Khepri-6 was a lullaby. A soft hum. A voice saying,
“We are the end of suffering. We are the quiet between stars. Let us in.”

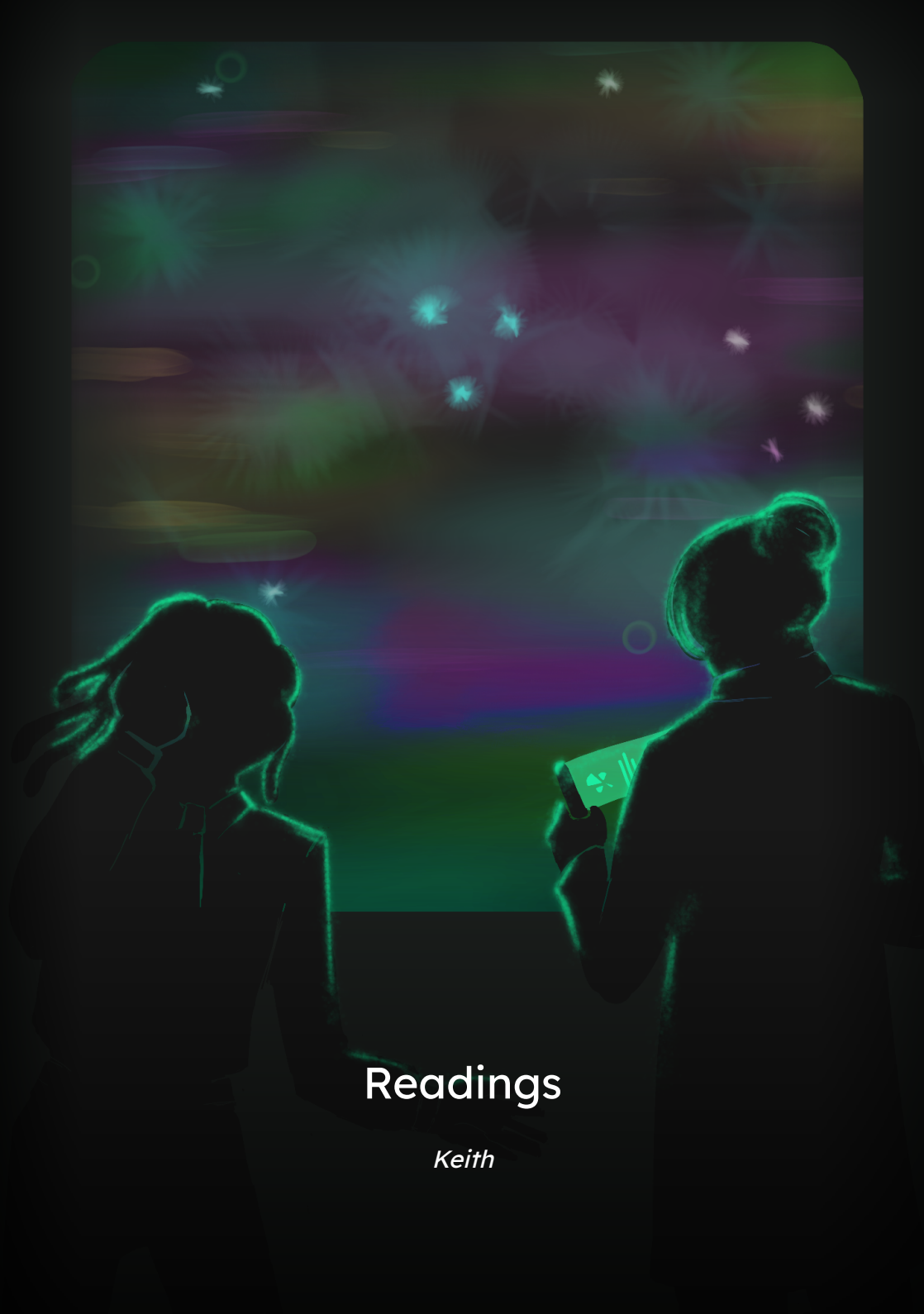
The outer colonies received it. And listened.

The signal spread like a virus. Not through blood, but through belief. Through the promise of peace. Through the ache of exhaustion. The infected didn’t scream. They welcomed it. They sat down. They smiled.

And the quietstitch filaments grew.

Now, across the rim worlds, the quietstitch bloom. They drift in air vents and water supplies. They thread through vertebrae and hum through bone. They do not rush. They do not rage. They wait.

They are the end of suffering. They are the quiet between stars. They are already inside.



Readings

Keith

Skala Ghost Chant

Universal translation

As recited on the launch of the AES Ardent

T/OM: Cultural Preservation Archive

-=-

We who curl within ourselves,
who make heat and feel the cold:
we give this child
to the wind.

This world is not for you
with its spurs and spines, its peaks:
the dead are empty,
and restless.

Starlight for you-without,
soil for you-within.
Do not linger.

We have seen you right,
who bore and fed and loved you:
your skin fills with wind,
and you walk.

Join your hollow siblings
on the routes of the remembered:
freed from what has passed,
you will fly.

Pale as the suns,
dark as the soil.
Do not linger.

-=-