

IN THE DARKNESS OF SPACE, ONE LIGHT STILL SHINES.

THE LAST DISCIPLE

EVEN TO THE ENDS OF
THE UNIVERSE



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Chapter 1 - The Last Disciple

His name was John—though he wasn't *the* John, not the Beloved one who leaned on Christ's breast. Yet, in his own way, he was the last disciple.

When the fires of World War III scorched the skies and poisoned the oceans, the governments of Earth finally united—but in fear, not faith. The new Universal Concordat banned all religion, blaming it as the root of humanity's hatred. Scriptures were outlawed, prayer forbidden. Bibles were burned alongside Qur'ans and Torahs. Those who resisted were hunted as relics of a primitive age.

But John survived.

He'd hidden deep underground during the final purges, clutching his grandmother's leather Bible like a treasure map. The words of his Lord still burned in him like a star:

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Now, two centuries later, "all the world" meant not just Earth, but the stars.

Space flight was as common now as driving to work had been in his grandmother's day. Towering starports dotted the cratered surface of Earth and its colonies on Luna, Mars, Titan, and dozens of newer worlds beyond. Ships came and went, carrying humans alongside strange alien forms—scaled and feathered, furred and armored—species no one even had names for yet.

And John walked among them.

He was older than he should have been, though not by miracle—just gene therapy and medtech that anyone could afford these days. To the world, he was just another long-lived drifter. But in his heart, he knew: he was a witness, a herald of a kingdom not of this universe.

On a Tuesday (though no one called it that anymore), John arrived at Proxima Station, a sprawling orbital hub circling a blue-white gas giant. He wore his usual faded coat, a duffel slung over his shoulder. Inside the duffel were the only two things he owned that mattered: the Bible and a small hand-scanner.

The scanner was his secret weapon. He'd written software that hid the holy text on the device under an innocuous interface, disguised as a weather app. He could pass through checkpoints unharassed.

The station thrummed with alien music and the hiss of oxygen vents. Holographic billboards in dozens of languages glowed above the crowds:

NO RELIGIOUS PROSELYTIZING. NO PUBLIC PRAYER. FINES & EXILE ENFORCED.

John smiled faintly at the warning. They'd been putting up signs like that since Nero.

He made his way to the docking bay where the next colony ship would depart for Epsilon Eridani. It was rumored the Eridani settlements were less regulated, more tolerant of "cultural eccentricities." A good place to plant seeds.

But as he waited, he felt the familiar prickle of being watched.

From behind a pillar, a black-uniformed Enforcer stepped out. His armor gleamed under the station lights, his eyes cold behind mirrored lenses.

"John Gabriel," the Enforcer barked. "Step away from the boarding line."

John turned slowly. His heart hammered, but his voice was steady.

"Why?"

"You know why," the Enforcer said. He jabbed a finger toward the duffel. "We scanned your device. We know what you carry. You're in violation of Concordat code 17-A. Religious contraband. Intent to proselytize."

A crowd was gathering now. Silent, curious. Some of them human. Some not.

John's fingers tightened on the strap of his bag. He looked at the Enforcer, and then at the people watching.

And he thought of Stephen, standing in the middle of the mob, stones in their hands. He thought of Paul, beaten and chained, yet singing hymns. He thought of Jesus, lifted up between earth and heaven so that all could see.

John lifted his head.

"Yes," he said. "I intend to tell them. All of them. Because He said: 'Go into all the world. To every creature.'"

The Enforcer drew his stun-baton, crackling with energy. "Blasphemy."

John didn't flinch. He raised his voice, his words carrying above the hiss and hum of the station.

"HE IS RISEN," he cried.

The Enforcer swung. Pain arced through his body, and darkness fell.

When John woke, he was not in a cell, but on a ship.

A dimly lit cabin hummed softly around him. He blinked against the light and found himself staring at a pair of golden, slitted eyes.

The alien crouched on its haunches, its scaled hands folded over its knees. It spoke in halting English:

“You... spoke of a god. A king... not of stars?”

John’s breath caught. He looked around and saw others in the cabin—humans, aliens, all watching him intently.

The alien leaned closer.

“Tell us... more.”

And so John began again. On a ship sailing between stars, to a handful of hearts eager to hear good news in a cold, empty galaxy.

They couldn’t ban him. They couldn’t stop him.

He was the last disciple. And until his breath failed, or Christ returned, he would go.

Even to the ends of the universe.

Chapter 2 — Seeds in the Void

The ship's name was *Long Horizon*, though her crew called her *The Mule*. She was an old freighter, patched together from human and alien tech, hauling ore and agricultural machinery to the Epsilon Eridani colonies. To John, she might as well have been the Emmaus road.

For three days he stayed in the small bunkroom at the aft of the freighter, gathering with his strange flock each night as the ship drifted through the black.

There were seven of them now.

The golden-eyed alien who'd first spoken to him called himself Karesh. His people, reptilian and proud, were recent arrivals to the Concordat. He'd worked as a cargo climber and was quick to listen but slow to speak.

There was Sera, a human woman with steel-gray hair and a synthetic arm. She'd been a child soldier in the final years of World War III and still bore its scars—outside and in.

Two Martian miners, a Titanian engineer, a feathered avian merchant, and even one of the Concordat's own bureaucrats—a small, mouse-like creature who never gave his name—completed the group.

Every night, they squeezed into John's cabin and shut the door against the cameras.

And every night, John opened his ancient Bible and read aloud:

“And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”

Sometimes they just listened. Other times they wept. Always, they asked questions.

Karesh's eyes glittered with hunger as he crouched by the bunk. “You say this... Christ was killed? That he—rose? You saw?”

“I didn't,” John admitted gently. “But others did. Many others. They wrote it down so that we'd believe.”

Karesh hissed softly, a sound John was coming to understand as thoughtfulness rather than hostility. “On my world, the strong do not rise again. They only die. What you say... is impossible.”

John smiled faintly. “That's what makes it good news.”

On the fourth day, alarms blared throughout the *Long Horizon*.

The crew ordered all passengers into the common hold as the ship slowed to sublight. John felt the familiar stab of fear—had the Concordat tracked him here already?

A security officer, flanked by two drones, barked over the din.

“Routine inspection by Concordat patrol. All passengers will present identification. Any contraband will be confiscated. Resistance will be prosecuted under interstellar law.”

The words were automatic, but John knew what they meant.

This was not a random inspection.

As they lined up in the hold, Karesh sidled close to him.

“They come for you,” he murmured.

John kept his eyes forward. “Maybe.”

“You will not fight them?”

John shook his head. “I was told to turn the other cheek.”

Karesh’s golden eyes narrowed. “You would rather die than deny your god?”

“Yes.”

The alien gave a soft hiss again—different this time. Something almost like respect.

When the inspector reached John, the man was dressed in the usual black of the Concordat Enforcers. He held out his scanner impatiently.

“Name,” he demanded.

“John Gabriel.”

The scanner beeped as it read the datachip in John’s wrist. The Enforcer’s eyes narrowed. He ran the scanner again, slower this time.

“Step aside.”

John obeyed, hands raised.

Karesh watched him go with a strange expression on his face. Then, with a sudden and sharp motion, Karesh grabbed John’s duffel and slipped into the line himself.

By the time the Enforcer had marched John into the next room and began his interrogation, the duffel was already hidden in the guts of the ship's machinery.

The Enforcer slammed John against the wall, eyes blazing.

"We know who you are. We know what you carry. People like you keep spreading this sickness across our colonies."

John groaned as the man's baton pressed into his chest. "It's not a sickness," he rasped. "It's hope."

The Enforcer struck him once, hard.

"Hope is illegal."

John spat blood and smiled faintly. "It always has been."

The Enforcer's glare darkened. "You'll never see the colonies. You'll never speak another word."

But as John was dragged toward the airlock, he caught sight of Karesh watching from the crowd.

The alien raised his clawed hand to his chest and tapped it once.

The signal.

John smiled through swollen lips. Even if they silenced him now, the Word was already alive.

Karesh would carry it.

And others.

The seed had been planted.

Later, in the cold and dark of his cell, John whispered into the silence:

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion..."

Even to the ends of the stars.

And somewhere out there, in the black void between suns, a reptilian cargo climber opened an ancient book on a tiny scanner screen and read:

"For God so loved the world..."

Chapter 3 — The Prison and the Promise

The cell was small, metallic, and cold. John sat on the edge of the bunk with his back against the wall, staring at nothing.

He hadn't seen the stars in three days.

The *Long Horizon* had handed him over to the Concordat authorities at the nearest outpost—an ugly, gray slab of a station orbiting an airless moon. His wrists still bore the faint burns of the stun-cuffs, and his ribs ached where the Enforcer's baton had landed.

But his mind wasn't on the pain.

He thought instead of Karesh.

He thought of that clawed hand, tapping against his own chest—the silent promise that the Word would live on, even if John didn't.

He whispered the verse to himself, a quiet liturgy in the empty cell:

"...the Word of God is not bound..."

The door hissed open, and two guards marched him down a narrow corridor lined with similar cells. They shoved him into a larger room, and John stumbled before catching himself.

The room was dim, but not empty.

A dozen other prisoners looked up as he entered. They sat in a loose circle—some on benches, some on the floor.

One was a tall woman with deep blue skin and translucent hair, her long fingers folded over her knees. Another was an old man, hunched and trembling, his Concordat tattoos faded with age. There was even a pair of children, huddled together, whispering to each other in some language John didn't know.

But what struck him most was their eyes.

Not afraid. Not bitter.

They were watching him with something almost like... hope.

The blue-skinned woman stood and beckoned him forward.

"You are the preacher," she said softly. Her voice was musical, each word stretching like a note.

John blinked. "...I've been called worse."

Some of them chuckled at that.

The woman smiled faintly. "We have heard of you. Even here, word spreads."

"How?"

The woman only tapped her temple and replied, "Hope travels faster than ships."

That night, for the first time since his capture, John slept without fear.

When he woke, the circle had grown.

New prisoners—some human, some alien—were sitting with them now. Word had gone out that a disciple of the banned faith was among them. And they came, risking punishment, just to hear.

And so John opened his mouth and spoke.

He told them of a carpenter's son who healed the sick and fed the hungry.

He told them of a cross, where the innocent bore the weight of the guilty.

He told them of an empty tomb.

And as he spoke, he saw something like fire light up their faces—flickering at first, then stronger.

On the seventh night, the blue-skinned woman approached him after the others had left.

"Do you believe your god can reach even here?" she asked, her eyes glimmering faintly in the dark.

John looked around at the stark walls, the cameras in the corners, the guards just beyond the door.

Then he smiled.

"Especially here," he said.

The next morning, the guards came for him again.

They dragged him down another corridor, farther this time, until the floor grew colder and the lights harsher. At the end of the hall was a door he'd never seen before. Above it, a sign in Concordat Standard:

EXECUTION CHAMBER.

The guards shoved him inside and left him alone.

He stood in silence, staring at the sterile chair in the center of the room.

For the first time in a long time, his hands trembled.

He sank to his knees and prayed:

“Lord... if this is my end, let me die with your name on my lips. But if there is more to do—give me strength.”

The door behind him hissed open.

He rose to his feet slowly... but it wasn't a guard standing there.

It was Karesh.

The alien's golden eyes glinted in the harsh light, and his mouth curled into what John now recognized as a smile.

“I told you,” Karesh said. “Hope travels faster than ships.”

Behind Karesh, the blue-skinned woman and three others stepped into the room, each armed with a stolen blaster.

John's breath caught.

Karesh tossed him his own duffel bag—the Bible and scanner still inside.

“Come, preacher,” Karesh said. “We have more stars to reach.”

As the five of them disappeared into the maintenance tunnels below the prison, alarms began to sound.

And John, gripping his battered duffel tight against his chest, couldn't help but laugh through the tears.

Even in the depths of a moon-prison, the Word had gone out.

And nothing—not walls, not guards, not even the vacuum of space—could stop it.

The last disciple was still on his way.

To the ends of the universe.

Chapter 4 — The Starship Church

The maintenance tunnels smelled of ozone and grease.

John followed Karesh and the others through the winding maze, his breath coming hard, his duffel bouncing against his side. He kept his head low, the sirens above them still wailing.

Finally, they climbed through a hatch into a cavernous bay, dark and quiet but for the hum of engines. In the center of the hangar stood a ship—a sleek, black courier with no markings, just big enough for the seven of them.

The blue-skinned woman—whose name John now knew was Lys—turned and gave him a rare smile.

“You’ll want to strap in,” she said. “This part’s not holy.”

Karesh let out a guttural laugh and motioned for John to climb aboard.

Within minutes they were streaking away from the lunar outpost, engines burning hot to escape Concordat pursuit.

John sat in the back of the ship, pressed into his seat, the stars spinning around him.

Karesh was at the helm, clawed hands surprisingly deft on the controls. Lys sat beside him, her long fingers dancing over a navigation console.

Sera, the one-armed soldier from *Long Horizon*, leaned in the doorway and gave John a long look.

“You really believe,” she said flatly. “Even now.”

John looked up, meeting her eyes.

“Especially now.”

Sera chuckled mirthlessly and walked away. But John caught the faintest glimmer of something on her face—not mockery, but longing.

Three days later, they were deep in uncharted space, far from any Concordat patrol routes.

Karesh dropped the ship into orbit around a dead rock of a planet—airless, lifeless, but hidden.

“This is where we refuel and lay low,” he explained. “No one comes here. Not even smugglers.”

As the others went about their business, John stood at the viewport, staring down at the barren world.

“Even here,” he whispered. “Even here you are God.”

And in that moment, an idea took root in his heart.

That night, he called the others to the cargo hold.

There was no altar, no pews, no music. Just the seven of them sitting in a circle of battered crates, stars spilling through the viewport above.

John opened his duffel and pulled out the Bible.

“I don’t know how long we’ll be running,” he said. “I don’t know how far we’ll get. But what I do know is this—where two or more are gathered in His name, He is with them. Here. Now. Even on a stolen ship in the middle of nowhere.”

He looked at each of them in turn—Karesh, Lys, Sera, the feathered avian, the Martian twins.

“We are His church,” John said. “Not the buildings they burned. Not the planets they banned Him from. Us.”

For a long moment, no one spoke. Then Karesh let out a low, rumbling growl—the closest his species came to a laugh.

“Then preach, human,” he said. “We’re already fugitives. Might as well make it worth the hunt.”

Sera smirked faintly and leaned back against a crate. Lys bowed her head in quiet agreement. Even the twins nodded.

And so John read.

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

As the words filled the hold, something strange and beautiful happened.

Sera closed her eyes.

Lys folded her long fingers in her lap.

Even Karesh bowed his head slightly, golden eyes glinting.

In that moment, they weren't fugitives. They weren't criminals. They weren't prey.

They were a church.

The first starship church.

Weeks passed.

The Concordat tightened its grip on the colonies, doubling down on its ban of faith. Enforcers swept through settlements, scanning for contraband, imprisoning the faithful.

But whispers began to spread too.

Stories of a preacher who couldn't be caught. A ragtag crew of believers slipping between patrols, landing on forbidden worlds.

On Mars, a prospector found a scrap of paper tucked in his rations: *"He is risen."*

On a mining station in the Belt, an alien worker found a small datapad hidden under his bunk with the opening of John's gospel encoded inside.

On Titan, a Concordat captain arrested a dozen men and women for gathering in secret. When he asked them what they were doing, they only smiled and said,

"We are the church."

In the hold of their little ship, John marked another verse in his Bible and looked out the viewport at the endless stars beyond.

The mission wasn't finished.

There were more worlds to reach.

And as long as he drew breath, the last disciple would keep going.

Even to the ends of the universe.

Chapter 5 — The Martyrs of Europa

Europa was a jewel of ice and steel, glittering against the black.

From orbit, it seemed almost peaceful—massive frozen oceans beneath its fractured crust, human and alien settlements carved into its caverns, lights glowing like tiny candles under the ice.

But peace was a lie.

The Concordat had declared Europa a “model colony,” a showcase for order and conformity. Enforcers prowled its tunnels like wolves, stamping out dissent wherever it sparked. Those caught breaking the Concordat’s bans—on speech, on gatherings, on faith—disappeared.

And yet whispers still reached John’s ship.

Someone was holding services in the deep caverns. Someone was baptizing converts in the subglacial sea. Someone was spreading the Word.

The starship church couldn’t ignore it.

Karesh brought the ship in low, masking their approach behind the electromagnetic storms that swept the surface. Lys handled the docking quietly, her long fingers dancing over the console.

“You’re certain it’s not a trap?” she murmured as the clamps bit into the ice port.

John adjusted the strap of his duffel and smiled faintly. “That’s what they asked me in Jerusalem too.”

Karesh let out a sharp hiss—a laugh—and handed him a small comm. “Then go, preacher. If you die down there, at least die loud.”

The caverns of Europa were bitterly cold.

John walked through tunnels of frozen water and steel, his breath a pale cloud. Sera shadowed him from a few steps back, her synthetic arm flexing restlessly.

They found the gathering in a hollow deep beneath the crust—a natural ice dome dimly lit by smuggled lamps. Perhaps two dozen men, women, and aliens stood in a ragged circle around a shallow pool, singing softly.

The sound stopped as John and Sera entered.

A tall miner with a scarred face stepped forward, wary.

“You’re the one they say comes from the stars,” he said.

John nodded. “I came because you already believe.”

At that, the miner’s expression softened. He motioned for John to join them.

And so, for a few hours at least, they worshiped.

John read from his Bible by the light of a smuggled lamp. They prayed. They baptized three new believers in the icy water.

It was quiet. Fragile. Beautiful.

Until the alarms blared.

The Enforcers came in force—black armor glinting, boots cracking the ice.

“By order of the Concordat, this gathering is illegal!” the commander barked. “You will disperse immediately and surrender the preacher!”

No one moved.

The tall miner stepped forward, his hands raised. “We won’t stop. Not now.”

The commander’s baton flared to life.

“Then you’ll die.”

John felt Sera’s hand on his shoulder. “You can run,” she hissed.

But he didn’t.

He stepped forward, standing between the commander and the gathered church.

“You can kill me,” he said, his voice steady, echoing against the ice. “But you’ll never silence the Word. Not here. Not anywhere.”

For a heartbeat, no one moved.

Then the commander struck.

The baton crackled as it slammed into John’s side. He fell to his knees, gasping. Another blow came. Then another.

But still he spoke, through bloodied lips:

“He is risen.”

The miner shouted the words back: *"He is risen!"*

The others joined in: *"He is risen indeed!"*

The cavern erupted in defiance, the sound echoing through the frozen tunnels.

Even as the Enforcers opened fire, even as the ice turned red, the church did not stop singing.

Hours later, Karesh's ship lifted silently from the ice.

In the hold, Lys sat quietly with Sera, tending to her wounds. The Martian twins wept silently in the corner.

Karesh stood at the viewport, his golden eyes fixed on the shrinking moon below.

On the deck at his feet lay John's Bible—streaked with blood but still open.

One of the miners had pressed it into Karesh's claws as the starship church fled, whispering one final charge:

"Tell them. Always."

Karesh crouched and picked up the book, his claws surprisingly gentle on the fragile pages.

Then he turned to the crew, his deep voice breaking the silence.

"We will return," he said. "We will tell the story. And if we must die, we will die loud."

Sera's steel fingers tightened into a fist. Lys bowed her head in solemn agreement.

And above them all, the stars burned cold and bright.

In the icy tunnels of Europa, they would remember that night.

The night the last disciple bled and prayed and stood firm.

The night the church became unkillable.

Even to the ends of the universe.

Chapter 6 — The Word on Titan

The methane seas of Titan shone like black glass under Saturn's golden rings.

Karesh brought the ship down through the thick orange haze, his clawed hands steady on the controls. They landed at the edge of Kraken Mare, where clustered domes and spires of human and alien settlement rose out of the fog like candles in the dark.

This was Titan. The farthest frontier still clinging to life.

And now, it was their mission.

It had been two months since Europa.

Two months since John's body was left behind in the frozen caverns.

His absence weighed heavy on all of them.

Karesh, who'd once scoffed at the preacher's soft words, now found himself reading quietly from the battered Bible when the stars seemed too cold.

Sera barely spoke at all, her grief buried under a harder edge, her synthetic arm clenching unconsciously whenever John's name was mentioned.

Lys took on the role of planner and diplomat, keeping the crew fed, hidden, moving. But even she sometimes sat alone, staring into the stars.

John was gone.

But his mission was not.

They gathered in the cramped hold the night they arrived.

The crew sat in silence, the Bible resting in the center of the circle.

Karesh broke the quiet first.

"Titan is Concordat territory," he said bluntly. "Their patrols are heavy here. Preachers don't last long. You all know that."

No one answered.

Karesh's golden eyes moved from face to face. "So why stay?"

It was Sera who finally spoke, her voice low and flat.

“Because if we don’t, he died for nothing.”

Karesh gave a faint hiss of approval. “Good. Then here’s the plan...”

The underground on Titan was larger than they’d expected.

Hidden networks of tunnels and catacombs stretched beneath the methane ice. Refugees, smugglers, dissidents—all hiding from the Concordat’s gaze.

And among them, whispers of faith already stirred.

The *starship church*, as they’d come to call themselves, began small.

Lys would slip into market crowds, whispering words of hope to merchants and miners.

Karesh met with alien guilds in the dark, showing them pages from John’s Bible on his clawed datapad, explaining the story of the carpenter-king who died and rose.

Sera trained small cells of believers in how to evade patrols, how to hide their gatherings, how to survive.

They called her *The Shield*.

They called Lys *The Light*.

And Karesh, they began calling *The Preacher*.

One night, deep in the under-ice tunnels, Karesh stood before more than fifty souls—humans, Martians, avians, reptilians—all gathered by candlelight.

In his claws, he held John’s Bible.

He took a long breath and began to read:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

His voice echoed through the ice.

When he finished, no one moved.

Then, slowly, they began to sing.

A song in a dozen languages.

A song of hope.

Later, in the quiet of the ship, Lys found Karesh sitting alone at the viewport, staring at Saturn's rings.

"You did well," she said softly.

Karesh didn't look up. His golden eyes glowed faintly in the dark.

"He should have been here," he said.

Lys sat beside him. "He *is* here," she said simply.

Karesh looked down at the Bible resting on his knee.

The battered book. The fragile pages. The impossible story.

And for the first time, he believed it.

In the months that followed, the Concordat tightened its grip on Titan. Raids increased. Dissent was crushed.

But so was something else.

The underground church grew.

Believers gathered in hidden domes beneath the ice. They passed down verses and prayers. They baptized new converts in the bitter-cold methane seas.

And every time the Concordat struck, the church scattered like seeds—taking root in new tunnels, new hearts.

It could not be stopped.

John had taught them that.

And now Karesh carried it forward.

One day, deep in the under-ice catacombs, Karesh stood before a new gathering, holding the Bible aloft.

Behind him, Sera and Lys stood like pillars.

Before him, dozens of new believers watched, eyes bright with hope.

Karesh's voice filled the cavern:

“We are the church. Not because of where we stand, but because of who we follow. Even here. Even now. Even to the ends of the universe.”

And the people answered:

“Amen.”

And the stars beyond Titan burned a little brighter.

Chapter 7 — The Return of the Word

It started as whispers.

On a windswept Martian plateau, a Concordat patrol found three words carved into the red rock:

HE IS RISEN.

On a trade station above Venus, a cargo manifest mysteriously carried a line in ancient Earth script:

Even to the ends of the earth.

On Earth itself—old Earth, battered and bitter—a low-level clerk in the Concordat archives discovered an encrypted transmission routed through forbidden backchannels. It contained nothing but scanned pages of an ancient book, written in human languages long erased from public education.

And at the very end of the file, a single line of text:

From the starship church. We are alive. He is alive. We are coming home.

The underground church on Titan had grown larger than any of them had dared imagine. Karesh and Lys worked tirelessly to organize new cells, smuggling small shards of the Word on encrypted chips and cleverly coded hymns.

Sera trained fresh groups of believers in subversion and survival, teaching them how to endure interrogation without giving away their brothers and sisters.

But still, something gnawed at them.

It was Lys who finally gave voice to it one quiet night in the cargo hold.

“Everything we do here matters,” she said, “but it started there. On Earth. The Concordat thinks they’ve won there, that the name of your Christ is dead on your homeworld.”

She looked up, her translucent hair catching the starlight.

“But it is not dead. It cannot be dead.”

Sera nodded, her synthetic fingers flexing.

Karesh said nothing at first. He just stared out the viewport at Saturn’s rings.

Then he growled softly: “Then we go back.”

The others stared at him.

“You want to *what?*” Sera asked flatly.

“We go back,” Karesh repeated. His golden eyes glinted. “If John could stand before them and not bow, why should we?”

Lys tilted her head. “The Concordat is strongest there. Every city is monitored. Every surface is crawling with Enforcers. Do you think we can just... walk in?”

Karesh bared his teeth in something between a smile and a snarl.

“We won’t walk,” he said. “We’ll shine.”

The plan took months to set in motion.

The starship church moved quietly through the outer colonies, gathering allies—human and alien alike. They collected encrypted networks of sympathizers. They staged coordinated distractions throughout the Belt and beyond, forcing the Concordat to divert attention away from Earth.

Meanwhile, Karesh’s crew acquired a civilian transport ship registered to a Concordat-approved shipping company. Clean papers, clean scans.

On the eve of their departure, the little hold of their hidden ship on Titan filled with believers one last time.

Karesh stood at the center, holding John’s Bible. His claws traced the ancient letters.

“He began this,” Karesh said softly. “He gave his blood for this. For all of us. For me.”

He looked at Lys, then Sera, then the others.

“And now we carry it home.”

The believers lifted their voices together:

“Amen.”

They landed on Earth three weeks later, under the cover of the smog-choked skies of what had once been Jerusalem.

It was a city of glass towers and surveillance drones now, the old streets buried beneath layers of steel and sin.

But beneath it all, the stones still remembered.

The wind still carried whispers of a tomb once empty.

They moved quickly, quietly, down into the ancient tunnels under the city.

There, among the ruins of catacombs and cisterns long forgotten by the Concordat, they gathered.

Karesh stood before a circle of humans and aliens, his voice low but firm.

“You were told this story was dead,” he said. “You were told he was a myth. A sickness. A lie.”

He opened the battered Bible and let its pages fall open.

“But the Word is alive,” he said, his voice rising. “And the Word has come home.”

And for the first time in centuries, the name of Jesus Christ was spoken aloud in Jerusalem.

The underground church repeated it in a dozen tongues, over and over, until the sound shook the dust from the ancient stones:

“He is risen. He is risen indeed.”

Above them, in the streets of the modern city, the Concordat Enforcers noticed flickers in their sensors. Something strange. Something wrong.

Words scrawled on walls and data screens alike.

HE IS RISEN.

Whole sectors of the city went dark as encrypted broadcasts slipped through firewalls, carrying scripture and song to every corner.

And from the tunnels below, a light began to shine—faint at first, then brighter, then brighter still.

The Word had returned to the place where it began.

And no empire could stop it.

As the sun rose over Jerusalem, Karesh stood on the steps of a forgotten church and looked out over the city.

Behind him, Lys and Sera stood shoulder to shoulder, the Bible clutched tight in Sera's hands.

"Where to next?" Lys asked quietly.

Karesh's golden eyes glowed faintly as he watched the sky.

"To the ends of the universe," he said.

And together, the starship church walked into the light.

Chapter 8 — The Great Persecution

For a moment, it seemed the impossible had happened.

On Earth, in the very city where their Lord had once walked, the Word rang out again. And like water on cracked soil, it began to spread—fast and wild.

Within weeks of the starship church's arrival, encrypted gospels circulated through the underground networks of every major city. Prayers were whispered on Titan, hymns hummed on Mars, verses etched into the walls of Luna's tunnels.

The Concordat panicked.

Their sleek black starships fanned out from Earth like a swarm of hornets. Martial law was declared on the inner colonies. Preaching became punishable not just by imprisonment, but by public execution. Entire settlements suspected of harboring believers were razed.

The Great Persecution had begun.

It came suddenly to Jerusalem.

Karesh and his crew had been meeting with local leaders in the catacombs, helping them organize a growing underground congregation.

The service was simple. Someone read from the Book of John. Someone else led a quiet song. They shared bread and water, passing it hand to hand.

Then came the sirens.

Then the thunder of boots.

Concordat shock troops poured into the tunnels, their batons and rifles flashing in the dim light.

Sera moved first, shoving the nearest believers toward an escape route.

“Go! Now!” she barked, her synthetic arm blocking a blast meant for one of the children.

Karesh scooped up the Bible and planted himself in the center of the cavern as the troops advanced.

“This is holy ground,” he growled. “You have no power here.”

The lead Enforcer didn't hesitate. His baton cracked across Karesh's jaw, sending the reptilian preacher sprawling.

The others were rounded up in seconds, shoved into chains.

Lys, her hands bound, met Karesh's eyes. Her calm voice somehow carried above the chaos.

"You said we would shine," she whispered.

Karesh, his breath ragged, bared his teeth—not in anger, but in defiance.

"And we still will."

The prisoners were marched through the streets of Jerusalem, surrounded by armored guards. Crowds lined the roads, silent and afraid. Above them, massive holoscreens flashed a single message in dozens of languages:

ALL RELIGION IS TREASON. ALL TREASON IS DEATH.

In the city square, the prisoners were forced to their knees before a towering tribunal. The Concordat governor—cold and elegant in his black robes—looked down on them with contempt.

"You have spread lies," he intoned. "You have poisoned the minds of citizens. You have defied the peace."

Sera raised her head, her voice steady.

"You mean your chains."

The governor sneered.

"Any last words?"

Karesh struggled to his feet despite the chains, the Bible clutched in his clawed hands.

"Yes," he said.

And with all the strength left in him, he lifted his voice to the sky.

"He is risen."

From the crowd, a single voice answered: *"He is risen indeed."*

Then another.

And another.

And suddenly the whole square was filled with it, echoing from every corner, rolling like thunder through the city streets:

“He is risen! He is risen indeed!”

The governor shouted for silence. The guards raised their weapons.

But it was too late.

The Word was alive now.

That night, Karesh and his crew were locked in a dark cell deep beneath the city.

Bloodied, bruised, but unbroken.

Sera leaned against the wall, her synthetic hand shattered but still clenched into a fist.

“They’ll kill us tomorrow,” she muttered.

Karesh sat quietly in the center of the cell, the Bible open on his lap. His golden eyes glowed faintly in the dark.

“Then we die loud,” he said.

Lys gave a faint smile and nodded.

And together, they began to sing.

Above them, in the streets of Jerusalem, the Concordat hunted down every known believer.

But wherever they struck one down, three more rose up.

On Luna, workers painted crosses on their helmets.

On Mars, miners etched scripture into the rock.

On Titan, the under-ice tunnels overflowed with worshipers.

On Earth itself, hidden churches bloomed in basements and alleys.

The persecution only made them stronger.

Because they had learned the truth John had died for:

That even in the face of death, the Word of God cannot be chained.

Even to the ends of the universe.

Chapter 9 — The Revelation

The day before their execution, Karesh dreamed of stars.

He stood on the prow of a ship sailing through the void, stars streaming past him like sparks from a forge. In his claws, he held the Bible, its battered pages glowing faintly as he opened it to the end.

But instead of letters, the final page was blank—only a faint line of light, pulsing like a heartbeat.

When he reached out to touch it, he woke.

They came for them at dawn.

The guards marched Karesh, Lys, and Sera through the subterranean corridors, chains rattling in the silence.

But as they neared the execution chamber, a strange sound met them.

A faint hum.

A rhythmic tone, low at first, but growing stronger.

The guards stopped. One raised a hand to his comms, listening.

Then chaos erupted.

Lights across the entire complex flickered, then died. The hum grew louder, shifting into something like a voice—metallic, but unmistakably speaking words.

“He... is... coming.”

The guards froze, eyes wide.

Karesh tilted his head, his golden eyes narrowing.

Another voice followed, overlaid on the first—softer, but clearer.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega. The first and the last. Behold... I am making all things new.”

The Bible in Karesh’s hands—hidden inside his robes, as always—grew warm.

By the time they were dragged into the square, the entire city was alive with whispers.

Every holoscreen had gone black but for a single shimmering line of ancient script.

Revelation 22:7 — Behold, I am coming soon.

The Concordat governor stood above the crowd, shouting over the murmurs.

“This is nothing but sabotage! Lies and superstition!”

But no one seemed to believe him.

The strange signal now echoed through every street, every comm channel, every Concordat command console.

And still it spoke:

“Behold. I am coming soon.”

That night, in the depths of their cell, Lys worked furiously on the guard’s confiscated datapad. Sera stood by the door, listening for patrols.

Karesh sat quietly, his Bible open on his knees.

At last, Lys looked up, her translucent hair shimmering in the dim light.

“It’s not just a broadcast,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper. “It’s a *transmission*.”

Karesh’s eyes narrowed. “From where?”

She tapped the screen, showing the coordinates.

It was coming from outside the Sol system.

Far outside.

From a region of space no one dared enter.

The Perseus Expanse.

The next morning, the Concordat moved to execute them.

But the underground church was ready.

Dozens of believers stormed the execution square, armed with nothing but torches, knives, and courage.

The guards fell back under the sudden onslaught.

Sera broke her chains with her synthetic arm. Lys pulled Karesh to his feet, shoving the datapad into his claws.

“This is it,” she said. “The next step. The Revelation.”

They escaped that night, smuggled through the catacombs and onto a stolen Concordat shuttle.

Above Earth, Karesh stood at the viewport as the planet shrank below them.

In his claws, the Bible and the datapad rested side by side.

On the screen, the transmission still pulsed faintly, repeating the words:

“Behold. I am coming soon.”

Sera stepped up beside him, her jaw tight. “Could it really be Him?”

Karesh didn’t answer right away.

He just stared at the stars, at the point of light far beyond where the Concordat dared to go.

Then he smiled faintly, his golden eyes glinting.

“If it is,” he said, “then we will be there to meet Him.”

The starship church had a new mission now.

Not just to spread the Word.

But to follow it.

Even to the ends of the universe.

Chapter 10 — The Expanse

The Perseus Expanse was a void no map dared name.

Beyond the spiral arms of the Milky Way, beyond the last scattered colonies and the reach of the Concordat, the Expanse was a place of ancient myths and modern terror.

Starships that entered rarely returned.

Those few that did spoke of storms that tore through hulls like paper, of lights moving where no lights should be, of whispers on the comms in languages no one could understand.

The Concordat had forbidden all travel there centuries ago.

Which made it the perfect place for the Revelation to come from.

Karesh's ship—newly christened *The Alpha & The Omega*—cut through the black, her engines burning hotter than they'd ever dared push them.

The crew worked in tense silence as the Perseus Expanse loomed on the forward viewports like a bruised sky.

The stars beyond it shimmered strangely, as though seen through water.

Sera, strapped into the weapons console, muttered, "I hate this already."

Lys stood beside Karesh at the helm, her delicate fingers dancing over the sensors. "The transmission's stronger here," she murmured, almost reverent.

Karesh said nothing. His golden eyes were fixed on the distant shimmer, his claws gripping John's Bible on his lap.

They crossed the threshold an hour later.

Every alarm on the ship screamed as the sensors overloaded.

Waves of gravity folded space around them in impossible ways. Colors bled and danced on the viewports, violet and gold and something deeper still.

The stars themselves seemed to shift.

"Engines are holding," Lys said, her voice strained. "But we can't stay here long."

Karesh's gaze never wavered.

“Follow the signal,” he ordered.

Days passed.

Or maybe hours.

Time itself seemed uncertain in the Expanse.

The crew slept in shifts, though sleep brought no rest—only strange, vivid dreams of fire and water, of cities of light and skies alive with wings.

And always, always, the words whispered through the comms, in every tongue they knew:

“Behold. I am coming soon.”

On the seventh day, Lys gasped.

“There,” she said, pointing at the shimmering forward screen.

A shape resolved in the distance—huge, radiant, utterly alien.

At first it looked like a star gone supernova, but as they drew closer, the form became clear: a vast construct, larger than planets, its surface etched with shining symbols older than any known language.

It hung at the heart of the Expanse, a beacon in the darkness.

The source of the transmission.

Sera swore softly under her breath.

Karesh stood, the Bible in his claws.

“We’ve arrived,” he said.

As they approached, the ship’s systems began to fail one by one.

Lights dimmed. Power faltered. Consoles sparked and died.

By the time they reached the edge of the construct, the *Alpha & The Omega* was running on nothing but momentum and prayer.

And then, as they drew alongside it, a voice—clearer than before, and no longer coming through speakers—filled the cabin.

It was not a whisper anymore.

It was a shout.

“Come and see.”

Karesh turned to his crew.

Lys’s eyes shimmered with tears. Sera’s jaw was set, but her hands trembled.

They all nodded.

Karesh opened the hatch.

They stepped out onto the shining surface of the construct.

It was warm beneath their feet, thrumming with life.

Around them stretched endless corridors of light, and in the air was a sound—not quite music, not quite words, but something deeper, something alive.

At the center of the plaza stood a figure.

Not human. Not alien. Not anything Karesh could name.

But when it turned to face them, he knew Him.

Golden light streamed from His wounds, and His eyes blazed like a thousand suns.

And His voice shook the stars.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end. Well done, good and faithful servants.”

Karesh fell to his knees, tears cutting dark paths through his scales.

Behind him, Lys wept openly. Sera bowed her head at last.

And the church that had fled to the ends of the universe now stood at the beginning again.

Later, when Karesh finally found the strength to speak, he whispered the only words that seemed to fit.

“He is risen.”

And the stars themselves seemed to answer:

“He is risen indeed.”

Epilogue — The New Heavens and the New Earth

Years later, the Perseus Expanse was no longer feared.

It was a pilgrimage.

Where once the Concordat had ruled with fear, their starships patrolling the colonies with iron and flame, now their black banners lay in tatters.

Not because armies overthrew them.

But because their power dissolved, one heart at a time.

The story of Karesh and his crew spread faster than the Concordat could silence it.

How the *Alpha & The Omega* disappeared into the Expanse and returned, bearing a message for all creation:

“Behold, He is coming soon.”

It could not be contained.

On Titan and Europa, thousands gathered to worship openly in the tunnels where their blood had been spilled.

On Luna and Mars, Enforcer patrols simply stopped coming, their commanders quietly walking away rather than strike down unarmed believers again.

And on Earth, the place where it all began, the name of Jesus Christ was spoken in the streets once more.

He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Karesh never spoke of what he’d seen on the construct in the Expanse.

Not fully.

When asked, he would only smile faintly, golden eyes shimmering, and say:

“Some things are not told. They are lived.”

But he kept traveling.

With Lys and Sera at his side, and others who joined them along the way, he carried the battered Bible to every corner of the stars.

Everywhere he went, he left behind something small but indestructible: faith.

Even to the edges of the known universe.

One day—though when and where no one could later say—Karesh's ship vanished.

Some say he went back to the construct.

Some say he walked into the light that had called him there once before.

Some say he's still out there, preaching in places no map has drawn yet.

But in his Bible, left behind on the altar of a small, hidden church on Earth, a final verse was underlined in his clawed hand:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.'"
(Revelation 21:1,3)

And below it, scrawled in his own writing, just three words:

"He is coming."

The universe waited.

And the stars shone brighter than ever before.

Historical Note — The Legend of the Starship Church

In the centuries that followed, historians, theologians, and even Concordat defectors wrote volumes about the strange and sudden collapse of the Concordat's iron rule.

They wrote about riots and rebellions, about economic failure, about overextension into the outer colonies.

But in the quiet corners of libraries, in the hidden archives of cathedrals among the stars, there is another account—one rarely spoken aloud, yet never fully silenced.

The account of the **Starship Church**.

According to these records, it began with a single man—a preacher who survived World War III. They say he carried the last Bible through the ruins of Earth and into the colonies, whispering the gospel even when the entire universe banned His name.

When he finally fell on Europa, others rose in his place.

Karesh the Preacher.

Lys the Light.

Sera the Shield.

And together, they carried the Word across the stars.

Legends say the Starship Church planted seeds on every world they touched.

Underground congregations that outlived the Concordat itself.

Catacombs of worship beneath the methane seas of Titan.

Hymns sung in the silent skies over Mars.

Crosses carved into the frost of Europa.

And of course, the great pilgrimage: the journey into the Perseus Expanse.

Every year now, thousands of ships make the voyage into that mysterious region.

Pilgrims walk the shining corridors of the ancient construct, stand where Karesh is said to have stood, and hear for themselves the Voice that still whispers there:

“Behold. I am coming soon.”

Historians dismiss it as superstition.

The Concordat remnants call it heresy.

But still they come.

And still they sing the words that no empire has been able to erase:

He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Even to the ends of the universe.