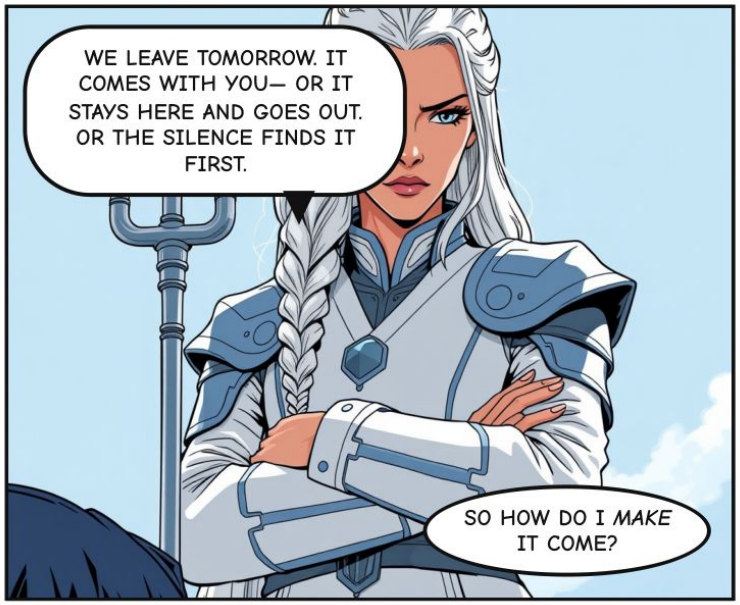
NOVA HARMONY

#2 · FIRST BOND




UNBONDED ECHO BEASTS STAY WHERE THEY FORM. THAT ONE FORMED HERE. OUT OF *YOU*.


IT WAS FADING. A LITTLE MORE EVERY HOUR.


WE LEAVE TOMORROW. IT COMES WITH YOU— OR IT STAYS HERE AND GOES OUT. OR THE SILENCE FINDS IT FIRST.
SO HOW DO I *MAKE* IT COME?


YOU CAN'T. THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT.
GREAT PEP TALK, WARDEN.


GOTCHA—
ZIP!
...MMF.
HERE. IT'S FROM THE BAKERY. THE *GOOD* ONE.
HMPH.
BY AFTERNOON I'D TRIED CHASING, BRIBING, SNEAKING AND BEGGING.
IT WAS FADING FASTER.


THAT'S THREE THINGS.
MUM SENT DINNER. ALSO A SCARF. ALSO A LIST OF REASONS YOU SHOULD WRITE EVERY WEEK.
FOURTEEN YEARS I WAS THE KID WHO COULDN'T HEAR. EVERYBODY WAS *NICE* ABOUT IT.
WHAT IF IT CAN TELL? WHAT IF IT FIGURES OUT I'M NOT... WORTH IT?
THEN DON'T HIDE IT FROM THE FOX.
TELL IT *THAT.*
NIGHT, TAV.
SO I DID.


I'M NOT GOING TO GRAB YOU. I'M DONE GRABBING.


I'M SCARED. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO *BE* THIS.
I CAN'T SING. I NEVER COULD. BUT LAST NIGHT I HEARD YOU. YOU'RE THE FIRST THING I EVER HEARD.


IT CAME CLOSER.


CLOSE ENOUGH TO TOUCH.
I DIDN'T.

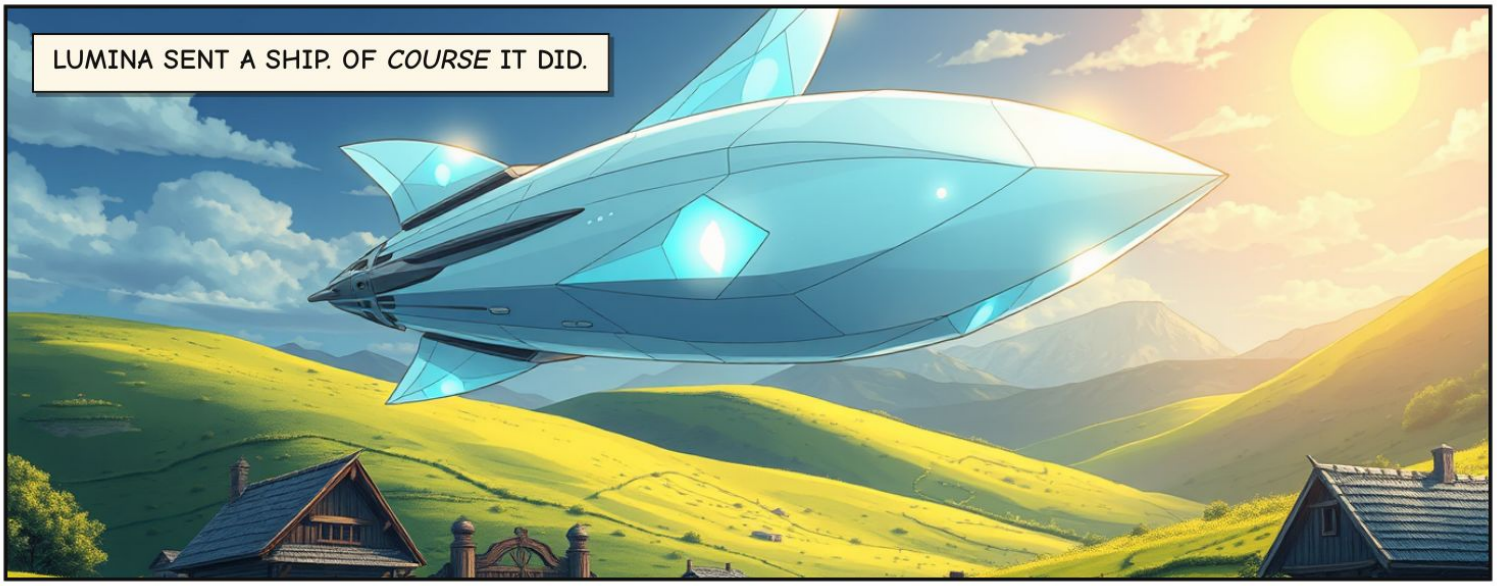

THE PATCH HELD. MOSTLY.
UNBONDED ECHO BEASTS ARE VULNERABLE TO THE SILENCE. SELA SAID IT LIKE A FACT.
GET AWAY FROM IT!
THE BURST WAS RIGHT THERE. SAME AS LAST NIGHT. READY TO GO.
AND BEHIND ME, EVERY BELL IN HOLLOWMERE I HADN'T BROKEN YET.


NO.
NOT LIKE LAST NIGHT.
NOT *LOUD.*
OPENNESS, NOT DEMAND.
SO I DID THE ONE THING I'D NEVER ONCE DONE RIGHT.
♪ MMM— MMMM— ♪
I SANG.


IT SANG BACK.
♪ MMMM— ♪
NOT MY NOTE. THE ONE THAT GOES *WITH* MINE.


IT CHOSE.
AND SO DID I.
THEN I COULD FEEL IT. ITS HEARTBEAT, UNDER MINE. LIKE A SECOND SONG.
SELA CALLS IT INTEGRATION. THE BOOKS CALL IT THE BOND.
I CALL IT THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I WASN'T ALONE IN MY OWN HEAD.

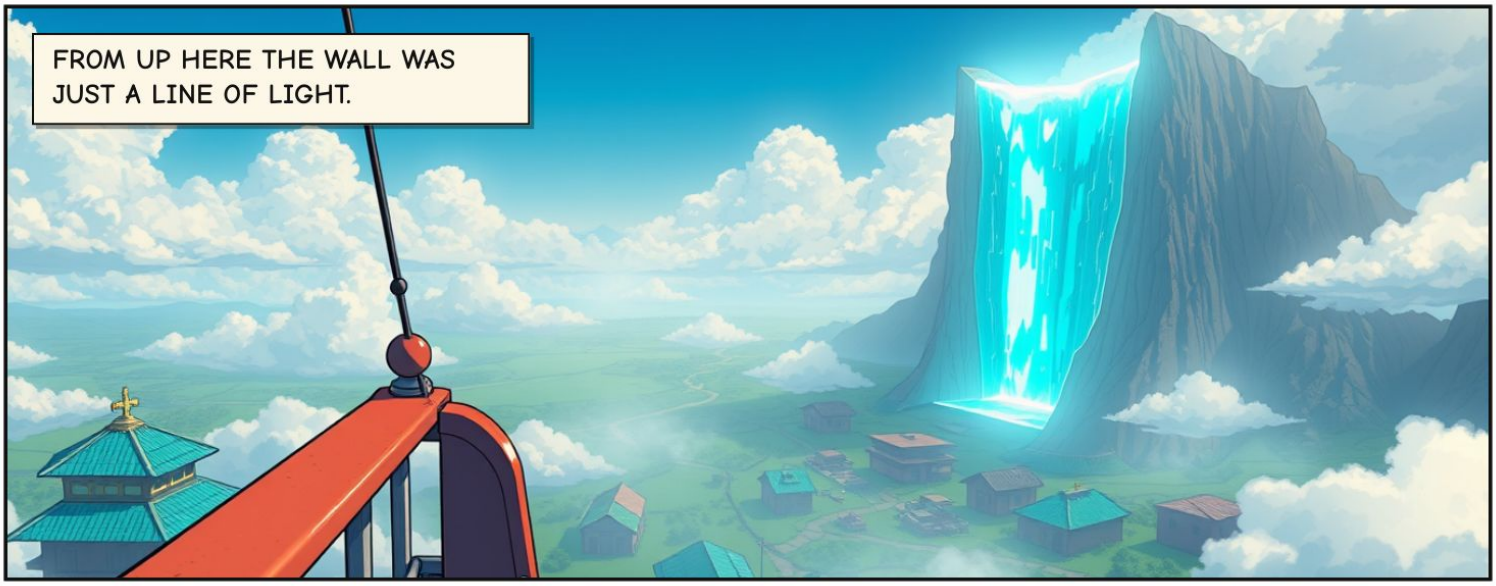

YOU SANG.
...BADLY.
IT WASN'T LISTENING TO THE PITCH.
WHAT WILL YOU CALL IT?
MRS. FENN ALWAYS SAID TO HUM QUIETLY.
MMM!
SO... HUM.


LUMINA SENT A SHIP. OF *COURSE* IT DID.


FROM THE TOWER. IT DOESN'T RING ANYMORE.
NEITHER DID YOU, DEAR. UNTIL YOU DID.


WRITE EVERY WEEK. MUM'S ORDERS.
THREE THINGS?
JUST ONE. COME HOME *LOUD*.


EVERYBODY IN HOLLOWMERE CAME. EVEN THE ONES I'D NEVER TALKED TO.





SOMEWHERE BACK THERE, A BELL THAT DIDN'T RING ANYMORE WAS WRAPPED IN A SCARF IN MY BAG.

AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WASN'T WORRIED ABOUT BEING QUIET.



NEXT ISSUE **THE CRYSTAL CITY**