



# STARLIGHT GUARDIANS

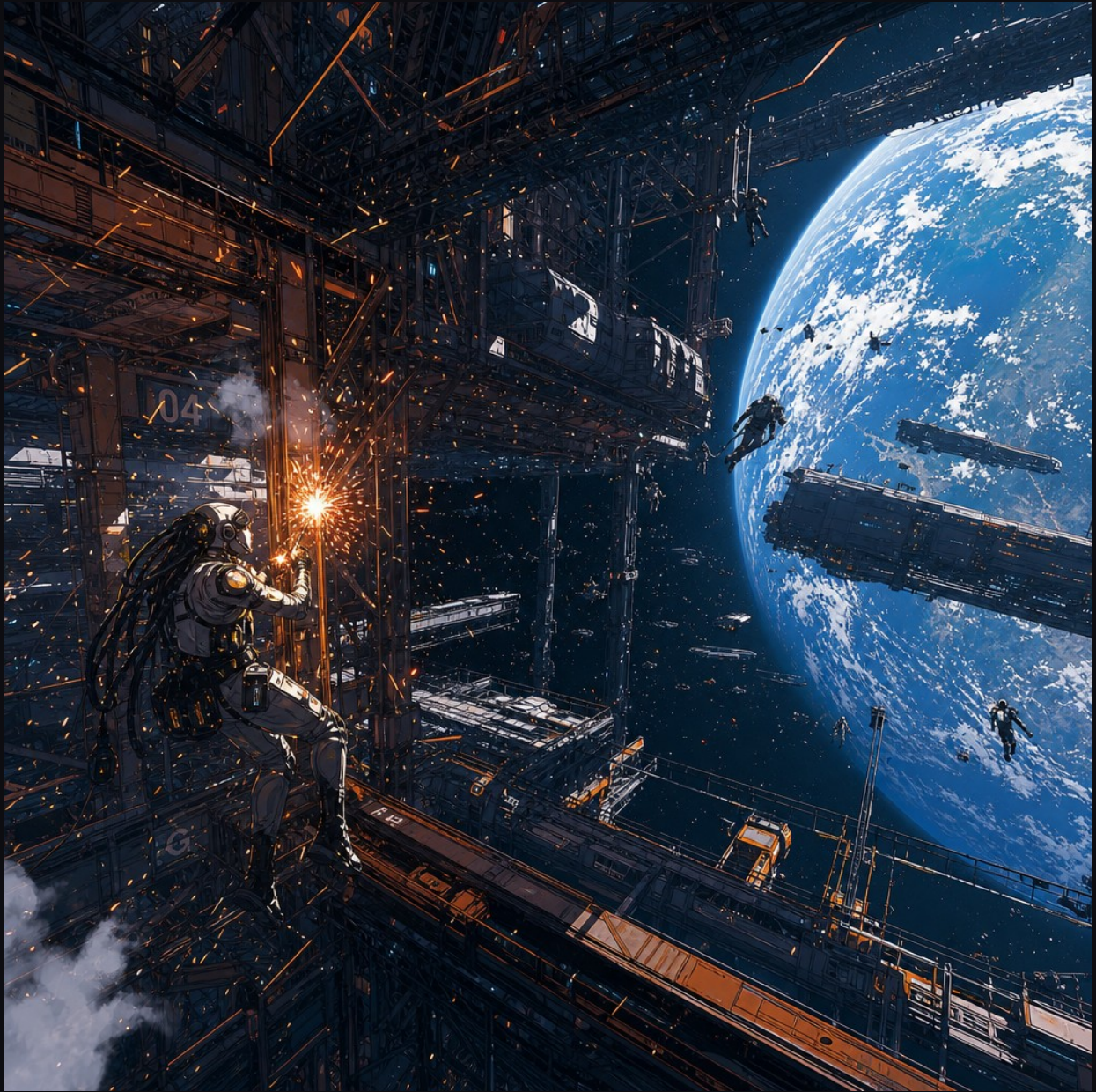
THE ANIMA CHRONICLES S01E05

EN



The spine of the sky, under a hammer.

Sparks slantwise across the atmosphere's curve. Earth below, magnificently indifferent.



### Cathedral of Momentum.

Void-Born workers drift in slow spirals, their elongated limbs and prehensile fingers gripping struts with practiced ease, magnetic boots clicking singular mechanical notes against steel as they push off toward freighters trailing coolant vapor.

A welder's torch ignites in the station's twilight, sparks scattering in three dimensions like a swarm of luminous insects, each ember drifting independently until blue Magnetica fields corral them into ordered streams that snake toward collection ducts.



Ninety-seven years of recycled breath. Two thousand exiles. Zero airlocks.  
 The suits grew into them. The language grew away from everyone else.  
 For ninety seconds, the sun finds it— a brazen, lovelorn scar, scavenged bolt by  
 bolt, crawling toward something that resembles a cathedral.



Vortex Station — vivid sovereign of high orbit.  
Each breath up here costs. The ledgers never sleep.  
The blue beam holds. For now.



Hub-7, Vortex Station. Rookery outskirts.

A Magnetica tracer — charnel blue, impromptu, irreducible — cuts the vacuum where nothing should move.

The Void-Born technician's boot lifts one instinctive inch. Her mind hasn't caught up. Her body already knows.

Whatever fled into the abandoned modules wasn't mechanical. It wove. It chose. It's gone.



Registry of the Welded Rim — hull plates stamped with the years of the dead.  
Magnetica stirs the loose bolts into orbit. The station breathes through her hands.

Somewhere below: recycled ions, acetylene, the inextinguishable hum of borrowed air.

Void-Born. Bravely stationary at the brink of everything.



The workers hold perfectly still, pressure suits depressurized, magnetic boots locked to the deck plating, breath visible in the cold recycled air as they wait for the resonance pulse that will signal safe passage through the maglev tunnel beyond.

Behind them, or perhaps impossibly beside them in this compressed perspective, a cargo shipment bay door remains stubbornly ajar—its twenty-meter frame reduced to a thin vertical slash of orange safety lighting that cuts through the monochromatic industrial sprawl.



DECK 4  
COMMAND

...research.



LOGIC IS  
SOUND  
COMPASSION  
IS REAL

INSTITUTION  
AVOIDS  
MORAL CHOICE

VORTEX STATION,  
ETHICS MATRIX

MASS REVIVAL  
3,520 DEAD

SELECTIVE EUTHANASIA  
INSTITUTIONAL MURDER

CONTINUED SUSPENSION  
EXPONENTIAL COST

TRANSPARENCY  
SYSTEMIC COLLAPSE

NO OPTION  
PRESERVES VALUES

VOTE  
DEFERRED

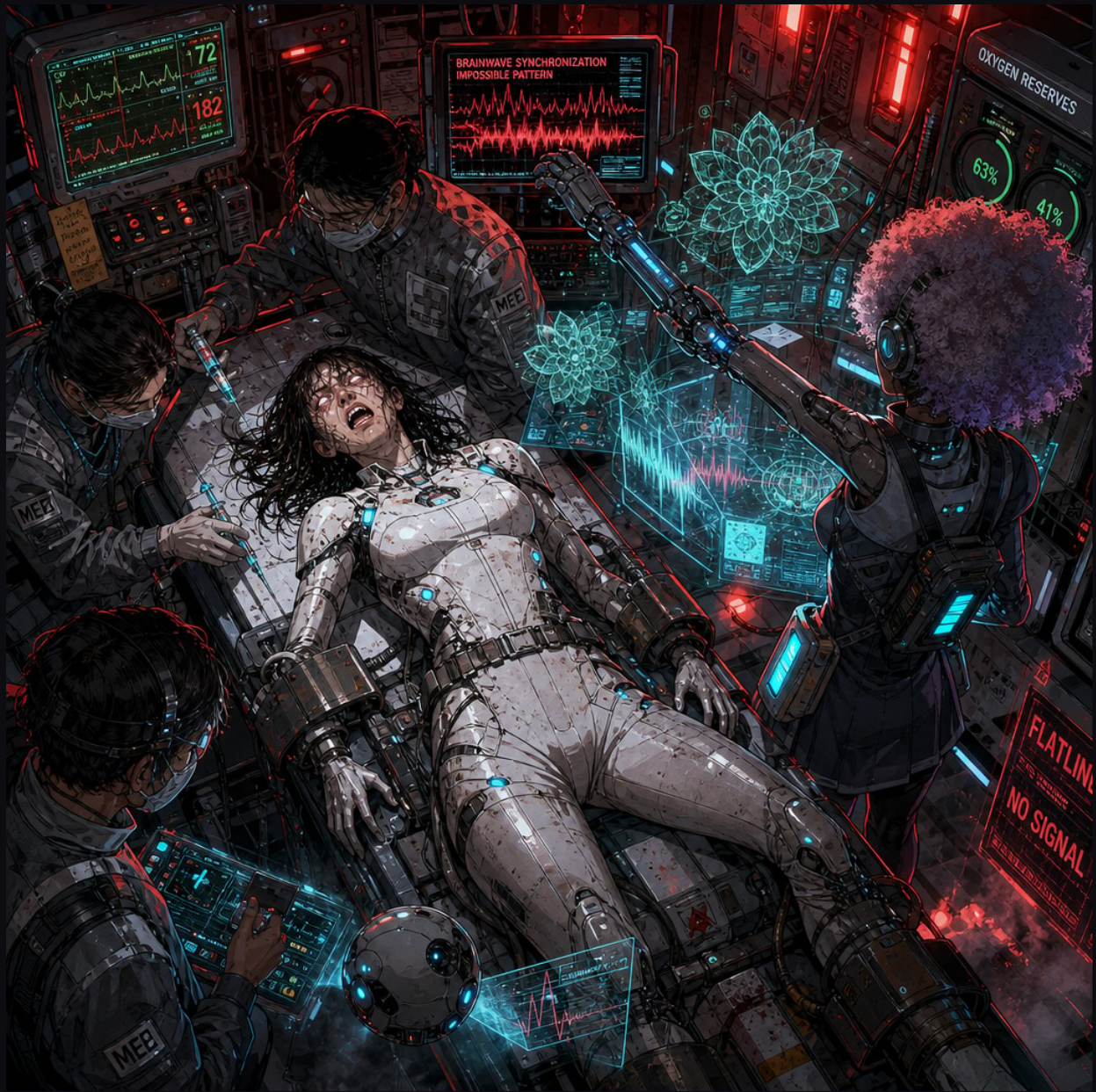
RESEARCH  
EXTENDED  
INDEFINITELY

Deck 4 Command. 312 years of deferred reckoning.

Four choices. Each one a different shape of ruin.

Someone says 'research.' The vote dissolves into the scrubbed air.

Below, in geometric rows, the frozen brunt of every postponement —  
thousands of bodies suspended in Oxygen-Credit limbo, immaculate and  
untended.

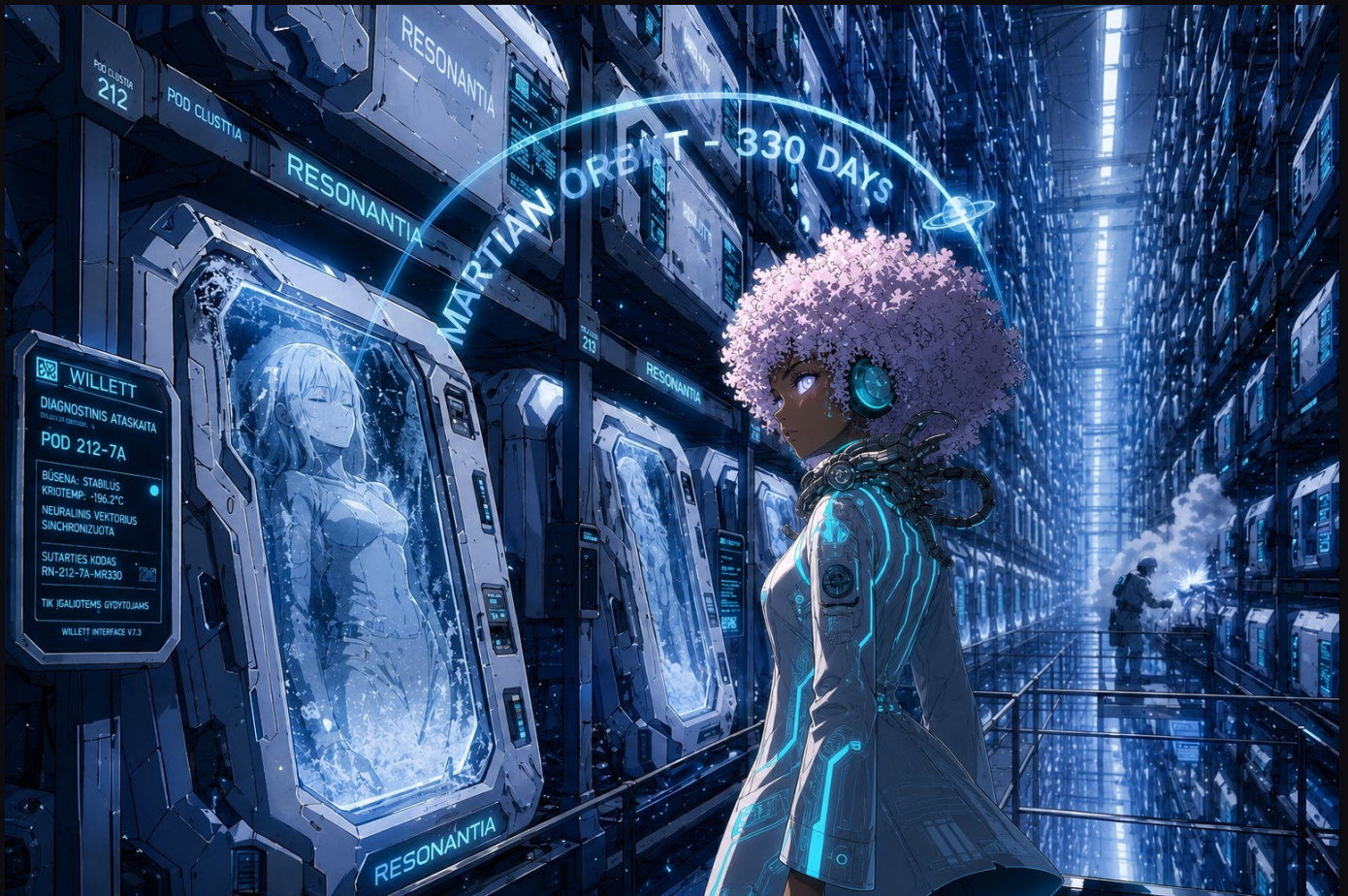


The medical bay reeks of antiseptic and burnt ozonewalls lined with salvaged diagnostic pods, their screens flickering between green vitals and crimson warnings as Dr. Chen convulses on the gurney, magnetic restraints snapping taut against her wrists.

She is the first to come back...



493 mornings of genuflection — the 494th, a theft.  
Pod 847. Stolen warmth pressed flat against the cold doctrine of her order.  
She has written no apology. She will not.  
The authorization code glows. Her hand rises. Consequence, at last, chosen.



The Sleeper Cathedral stretched beyond human comprehension.

Where four thousand glass coffins reflected preservation light in endless blue recursion.

Kaori at the observation catwalk, her wrist implant bleeding oxygen credits with each breath, watching frost patterns writhe across the nearest pod's surface like living cipher.



Three hundred years those sleepers had waited, frozen debts from centuries ago.

Now their vital signs climbed without permission.

REM storms visible through translucent lids, fingers twitching against restraints, bodies attempting resurrection the Directorate could barely afford.



## VORTEX STATION — CRYO LEVEL NINE

Steadfastly, the sleepers hold their cold vigil.

Two resolute minds. One unfathomable question.

The damndest dreams begin before the waking does.



A cathedral of cold. 250 bodies suspended in the selfsame pose. The geometric precision of their arrangement suggests choreography rather than storage.

Kaori moves through the bay. Her True-Sight catches what instruments cannot: The Anima signatures are not silent. They are striated.

Each frozen form is inscribed with faint golden rings of Chrono energy, rippling outward in patterns that suggest not death but a ceremony of waiting, rigorously maintained.

250 suspended bodies, spinning together in some hothouse dimension. Kaori is weeping. The tears crystallize before they fall. These sleepers are not dreaming alone.

Her neural implant engages. Recording. The harmonic signature. What she witnessed here will dictate the arc of what comes next.



## THE VELVET BERTH OF EXILES

She left Earth in 2147. Every soul she loved grew old and died while she was still becoming.

On Vortex Station, air is bought by the breath. Time, she learned long ago, cannot be bought back.

The stars do not move. Neither does she. The crowd apports its terror into elegant, goldenly lit retreat — and the oxygen counter ticks on, indifferent as an aeon.



Three souls beneath a gutted drive — Earth's dawnlight curving into dark beyond the glass.

Two words, recycled air, the fetor of ozone and lubricant: the most uncommon gamble a scarred jump-tech will ever take.

Vitalis does not permit hesitancy. Emerald breaks across her forearms before she can choose silence. The body, always a telltale.

Between them, a debris field drifts in freefall — proof that some confessions, once released into the void, cannot be recalled.



Half a second. Every cortisol spike, every recycled breath, every flagged inefficiency — rendered in amber and iron, indifferent as a constellation. She passes through. The walls close a little tighter. Behind her, the iris opens again.



Kaori sits alone in Vortex Station's maintenance corridor.

Her body's Tether burns through reserves; her hyperspace comm embedded in her wrist implant is warm enough to sting.

Dr. Chen's revival data still flooding through it in encrypted pulses.

'They're waking them,' she whispers into the dead air of the corridor, her voice steady but layered with something inexpressible guilt, fear, duty as she watches the phantom reflection of herself in the black ceramic wall.



Vortex Station, Tertiary Agricultural Sector — the Algae Cathedral.

Ten thousand organisms burning metabolic fever into gentle radiance. No bulb. No artifice. Only the insatiable logic of life refusing inertia.

Wraithlike figures in magnetic boots tend the granary of the void — their shadows cast upward, devout and ungainly, like a mosaic of something older than the station's welded bones.

Each photon: an existence proof against the dark pressing down from above.



Deck 17. Three rotations overdue.

The hatch should have been welded shut.

Karthian's knuckles go white — as if the valve alone might anchor them to something real.

Above the cathedral of girders, the Energia wisp skitters across bare steel. Patient. Unostentatious. Watching.



Vitalis stolen. A brother frozen mid-Burnout, veins charred to silence.  
Three silhouettes. One vial. The bio-wing holds its breath.  
Raw Law injected into a shattered nervous system — resurrection, or  
obliteration.  
Her hand steadies. The station creaks. The void has always been patient.



## VORTEX STATION — HOLLOW HUB, ZERO-G TAPROOM

Here, every exhaled breath costs something. Every sip tastes of copper and geometry.

The Void-Born barkeep plucks a trembling bead of algae wine from the air — her elongated fingers grazing the seething stillness like a jackal at the edge of a feast.

Below the scratched porthole, Earth rotates with the poignant indifference of a planet that has already banished you.



The dormant Sleeper's cryo-pod hisses open in Bay 17, releasing a plume of vapor that froze instantly in the station's unheated air.

A Void-Born technician—tall as a doorframe, with mirror-eyes reflecting the pod's amber warning lights—moves to silence the alarm, magnetic boots clanging against the grated floor.

'Oxygen allocation: insufficient,' the system intoned, its voice a monotone that seemed to mock the gasping man inside, his lungs working against air that wasn't there.

The technician's gloved hand touches the manual override; behind her, seventeen more pods lined the wall, their occupants' biometric readouts beginning to spike in sympathetic response.



Outside the reinforced viewport, Earth rotates indifferently;  
Inside, she's rehearsing her encrypted message to the Crater City Directorate:  
Dr. Chen is lucid. Memories intact. The collective consciousness integration is  
accelerating. The sleepers are becoming something new.

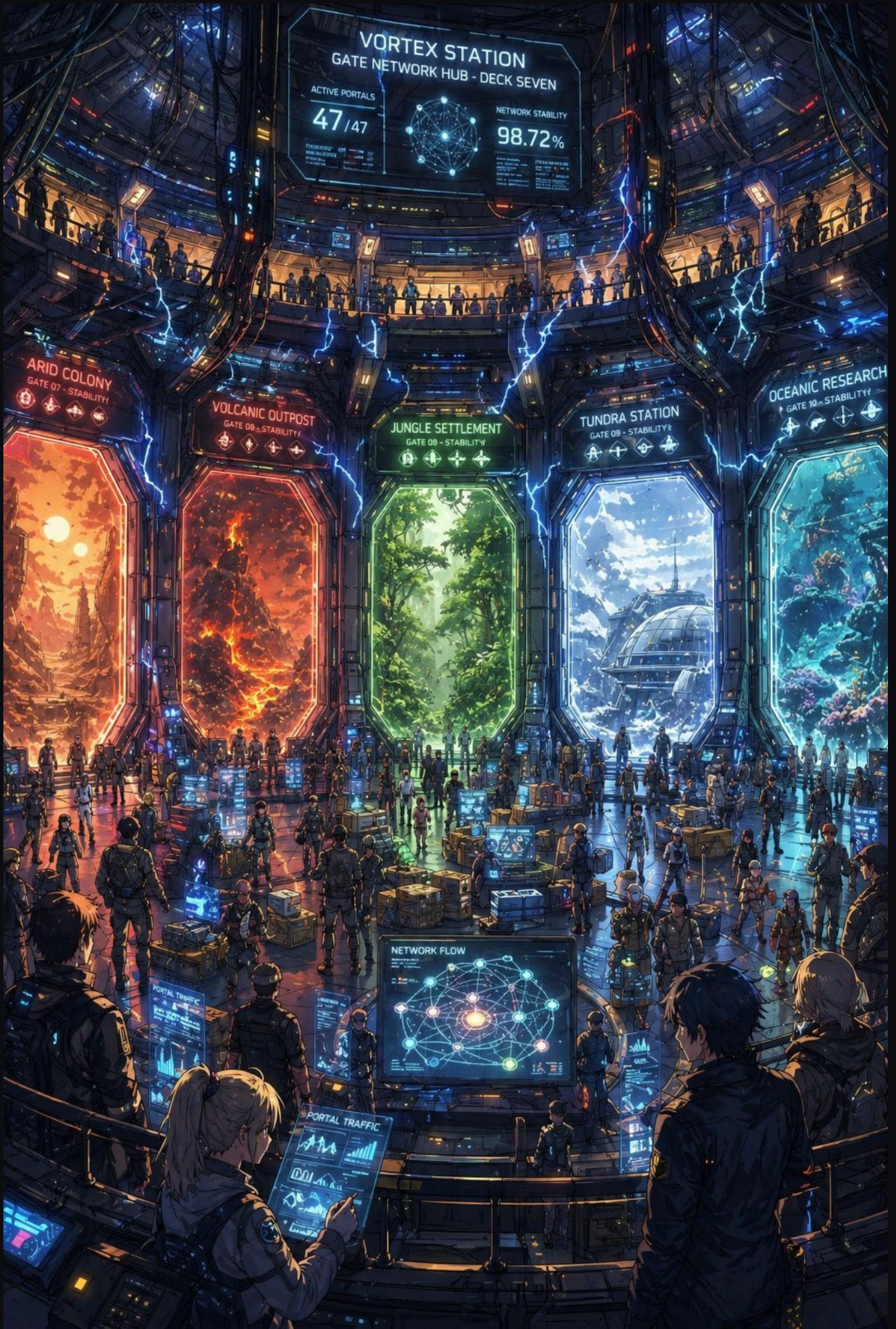


Four figures. Four vigils. One impossible night.

Taro burns and left behind is Crater City — Energia tracing the cost of every bond he could not keep.

Eve watches Nova Terra's spires from the uttermost edge. Kaori watches Earth grow small. Mira writes words that exhaust themselves in heat.

Above them all, the Dragon Guide coils through pressure and wind — ancestral, unfaltering, indescribable in its patience — sowing nothing but the long reminder that they are still here.



Forty-seven doorways. Forty-seven versions of elsewhere.

Desert ochre on a traveler's sleeve. Frost still clinging to a technician's visor.  
Jungle humidity bleeding through a jade-green frame.

Spatia bends the geometry. Energia holds the seam. Ozone and scorched  
copper — the smell of stitched distance.

Vortex Station's beating heart: proof that desperation, honestly shared, can  
weave scattered souls into something resembling wholeness.

Folding space in seconds...