

# Prologue: The Signal and the Stone

## Chapter 1: Arrival

Minutes earlier as the craft approached Verdantis, the Interstellar craft's crew were assessing the potential landing sites. But the crew on The Bridge were neither human, nor Proximan, they were something else entirely. These were drones.

This was the Interstellar mother ship and it was hanging in high orbit, silent and dark above the turning blue-white planet. The drones had no need for windows, but their equipment detected clouds of water vapour curling along the spine of a continent that stretched almost from pole to pole. They observed a plateau gleaming faintly in thermal resolution, its parched ridges ancient and untouched.

Class 1 Drone reporting:

Role: Flight Physics & Mass Calibration

"Gravitational field at selected zone: 9.775 meters per second squared. Atmospheric drag projected: 14.3% below baseline entry profile. Topographical curvature minimal; no tectonic stress within a 200-kilometre radius.

Energy savings on landing vector: 2.6%.

Energy savings on ascent: 3.1%.

Recommendation: approved."

Class 2 Drone reporting:

Role: Terrain, Cover, and Bio Threat Index

"Surface biosphere index: 2. Low sentient activity. Visual concealment: complete under refraction shield. Acoustic and seismic interference: negligible. Plateau is stable, low erosion, dry climate. Symbols or structures etched here will remain intact beyond 40,000 cycles.

Recommendation: approved."

Class 3 Drone reporting:

Role: Semiotic Context and Cultural Projection

"Region is aligned with the southern stellar plane; clear view to Centauri constellation. Elevation allows stellar mapping to be cast on surface with minimal refraction

distortion.

Prediction models show emergence of tool-using primates within 1,800 to 2,000 generations. Geometric impressions will be misread — but remembered.

Site may catalyse mythological retention.

Recommendation: approved.”

Class 4 Drone Analysis:

Role: Central Oversight AI ("Orrion")

The audio voice aimed more for the cockpit recordings than for the machines who had no need for audio was calm, ancient, and bodiless — almost like a memory echoing inside the metal hull.

“Convergence confirmed.

Descent corridor cleared.

Deploy triad — orbital bloom in twelve cycles.

Mark the plain with sample geometric impressions before landing.”

“Prepare to board and despatch the shuttle to locate and bring the Proximan crew. Alert the Proximan entity called Vael of our arrival”

A low harmonic trembled through the vessel. The three drones detached from their moorings and drifted toward the planetary burn chamber that was their shuttle, taking Vael with them. Below them, the dry bones of a plateau waited in silence.