

Pitch Sheet

Title: Soulsphere: Imprisoned

Author: Lyra Porcasi as L. Carmichael

Format: Novel

Setting: Future Earth, Outer Space/Spacecraft

Genre: Science Fiction

Budget Level: Medium

Logline: A young woman whose psychic abilities are a deadly weapon she can't control spends years hiding to protect humankind but now finds that using her powers may be the only way to save it...

Summary:

It began when Gale was twelve and pitted against Terran youth champion Niall in the laser ball arena. Furious that their match is a tie, he uses his AI (the 'brain weapon' known as Arm Inchinn) against her; it is a newly evolving ability that some have. As he hits her again and again, while simply standing there, she yells for help but realizes that no one sees him doing anything. It is a psychic assault from one mind against another's. Gale, unable to move and defend herself, does the only thing she can: she screams and Niall is thrown backwards. When he lands, he is dead and Gale now sees a shimmering circle of light surrounding her and, she will come to realize, protecting her. Gale has a new ability that will be known as SI, Sciath Inchinn, that literally forms a shield that protects her from anyone entering her 'sphere'. She didn't mean to kill Niall but has no control over its power. With the Enforcers after her and realizing that she is a danger to her family, Gale escapes to the wilderness where she lives alone for some fifteen years. Save some animals and a poor homeless thief, she avoids harming anyone. But when invaders arrive to conquer Earth, everything changes...and now the girl who hid to protect others may be the only one able to save them.

TREATMENT FOR A SERIES
(based on the first book in the series)

The Power

We track a figure moving through the woods. Hooded and dressed in rough, simple clothes, we come to realize it is a teenage girl. Armed with a laser pistol, in short order GALE McCARTHY fells a rabbit, collects firewood and sets up camp. The skinned hare soon roasts over a fire. From our vantage watching her, a WOLF appears, watching her too. The smell of food is a magnet. Teeth barred, it starts to growl...

On alert, Gale looks up. We are now looking out at the darkening woods with her and realize that a shimmering light surrounds her, a circle that extends some nine feet out and up, dome-like. As the wolf approaches she holds up a hand. She seems alarmed not for herself but for it: "No! Stay back." But of course the animal keeps coming. She starts to knock down the fire so she can extract the rabbit. "Just wait, I'll give it to you." But it doesn't wait. It leaps for her and as it does --

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

Gaye battles NIALL in the laser ball arena. As she scores a point, she is tied with the Terran youth champion. Rage shows in his eyes as he attacks, kicking her feet out from under her. She lands on her backside; the crowd erupts in boos and cheers. The sound is deafening. But as he glares down at her, everything fades and she winces, like her head has been struck by a club. His lips curl in a smile as he realizes he's had an effect on her. Another hit, then another. She can't move; she is powerless. "You feel it, right?" His lips aren't moving, yet she can hear him. Another hit, then another. She realizes, "You have it. Arm Inchinn, the brain weapon?" He just grins and smashes her head, again and again. "Help. Help." But she realizes the words are just in her head. No one realizes what he's doing so no one can help. She sums all of her energy and that's when it happens --

She SCREAMS and as she does, the shimmering circle of light appears, and Niall is thrown backwards. He lands in a heap. PEOPLE rush over and someone yells, "He's dead!"

CUT BACK TO:

The wolf lands dead at her feet. She looks down at it sadly. "I tried to warn you."

CUT BACK TO:

FLASHBACK

Chaos in the arena. Gale stands horrified and confused. "You killed him!" "No," she says she didn't, but maybe this thing did, this light, but it's quickly clear no one but her can see it. "I don't know where it came from." But no one is listening. People yell to call

The Enforcers and Gale does the only thing she can do – run.

Gale heads into the countryside, eventually taking refuge in a cave. But the search-lights and sirens of the gliders aren't far behind. A loudspeaker calls her name and she knows she is trapped. Concerned that whatever killed Niall might hurt them, she comes out, hands up, and beseeches them to keep their distance. They can't see the edge of her sciath, and don't believe her. AI has become well known, but no one has the powers she describes. She begs one to test it, to throw a rock and he happily does, heaving it directly at her face. When it bounces off the dome, the smirk falls from his face. But her claim that this SI seems to be protecting her from harm of any kind incites another of them – "Really? *Any* kind?" he asks. He aims his laser pistol and fires at her. Her scream is too late and pointless. The blast rebounds off the sciath and burns through his chest, killing him instantly. As she cries out that she didn't do that, it's not her fault, the rest turn and run back to the gliders, hightailing it. She collapses to the ground, left alone in tears... alone with her second victim.

CUT BACK TO:

Gale breaks up camp, no interest in staying near the dead wolf. Then she hears a sound in the brush. She takes out her laser gun. "Who's there?" She cautiously moves forward, the SI moving with her. What she finds is a baby wolf cub. That's who the wolf wanted food for. She sighs and picks it up. "Guess I'm not the only orphan, huh, pup?"

At a new camp, Gale feeds pieces of the rabbit to the cub. It eats and licks her hand. She makes her bed for the night and lays down, drawing it close to her. It doesn't resist...

CUT BACK TO:

FLASHBACK

It's night as Gale creeps up the hill overlooking her house. She watches as a different group of Enforcers search for her, questioning her parents and siblings. When they finally leave, she cautiously heads down. Her mother is the first to see her and comes running. Gale yells to stop her but she comes anyway – and is unharmed as she reaches and hugs her daughter. "It must know you wouldn't hurt me."

Her family wants her to stay; she is innocent, it will all get cleared up. But she knows it won't, not without more people dying. They go inside for a last meal together. They talk as if it'll just be for a little while. People are just getting used to AI and when they realize how it can be used as a weapon, they'll understand that she had to defend herself. Why she suddenly has this new power, well, time will explain that too. They all know that if she stayed now she would either wind up in prison or in a lab being studied for the rest of her life. They don't want either of those for her. Meanwhile, it's a good thing her father taught her how to camp and hunt; she'll be safe out on her own. They pack her supplies – clothes, a shovel, a knife... Outside, a storm has moved in; thunder claps, ominously. It's time to say goodbye, kissing and hugging each. It's

hardest to leave her little brother. She promises to collect the most amazing gemstones and bring them home for him. One day...

Her father walks her out, telling her to send word when she can. He watches from the porch as she leaves. She turns back for one last wave ---

CUT TO:

In a secluded clearing in the forest, Gale begins to make a permanent camp. The wolf cub trails her as she cuts tree limbs for a sleeping structure.

A MONTAGE as time passes, seen by the camp taking shape, and the wolf cub getting bigger. She fishes in the river while the wolf plays on the shore. They hike to the hilltop, surveying for signs of danger. The camp is done; the wolf is grown.

An adult Gale now roams the hills. Only the wolf abates her loneliness until one day, other wolves appear. It sees them and runs off to join the pack. Gale bites her tongue from calling it. And heads back to camp, alone again.

Asleep by the dying embers of the fire, she stirs feeling a presence. A tall figure in a dark cloak strides down the hill, toward her camp. She jumps up and calls out to stop, there is danger in coming closer. The figure doesn't respond but halts just outside the SI, as if perhaps knowing it's there? Then behind it, on the horizon, a cloud of dark smoke rises. "What is that?" A dark voice booms, no doubt the figure's but seeming disembodied. "It's your death. The end of your world." "You're wrong. No one can touch me, not even death." The figure laughs and resumes walking. Now from behind the hill, a giant spaceship rises into the sky. "Join us. Kill for us." He is approaching the SI line. "Stop! Please stop!" But he doesn't and – he passes right through, striding up to her, although she still can't see his face. "How did you get past the sciath? How did you do that? He leans down, his voice a whisper and loud at the same time – "I didn't. You did. Because you wanted me here." The roar of the spaceship explodes the night with sound and light and --

Gale wakes up with a scream. But she is alone in the camp, it was just a dream. And there is her wolf, just outside the SI watching her. Before she can react, it trots in safely, and to her side to comfort her. She sighs, relieved but confused by the dream. She looks up at the night sky.

CUT TO:

The cloaked figure, as if looking down on her. But as we pull back we see he is in fact on a spaceship. This is OBERON. Prince of Choraia and Commander of the Colonial Fleet that is about to invade Earth...

CUT TO:

The Arrival

Tall, handsome and confident to the point of arrogance, Oberon commands the fleet and his own, The Hammer, now headed toward Earth; he is the possessor of perhaps the strongest AI in the galaxy, second only to Praetor, the master of all, whom he serves and is now headed to see to brief him on the upcoming invasion.

Bright lights blind Oberon, intentionally, as he enters. He walks to the throne and drops to one knee in front of the creature PRAETOR has become. His latest incarnation is human fused with DNA of a vulture: enormous wings spring from his back, his bald head sports a curved beak rather than a nose. His feet, well rather his razor-sharp talons, cling to the branch he sits on atop the throne. Why Praetor has chosen a vile bird to try and extend his life is beyond Oberon. But one doesn't question the master. Oberon assures him everything is in place for the invasion of Earth. The rotting corpse in the corner what's left of the Lieutenant who botched the last planet invasion. Nonetheless, they have successfully conquered the dozen planets inhabited by humans and all that is left is Earth, the mother planet from where they all came some three hundred years before. The humans left there were too timid to leave, too afraid to explore the galaxy and settle new worlds. There is no doubt they will be easy to conquer, Oberon assures Praetor. Oberon's ship will strike first and the fleet of fifteen ships will then spread across the continents.

The Praetor is pleased and waits for his offering. Oberon tries not to grimace as he drops his robes, kneeling as Praetor's talon slicing a gash between his ribs, lapping up the blood that flows.

Oberon heads to the infirmary to grab a bot to cleanse and close his wound. None available, he pulls one off a surgical patient. The man starts to protest but Oberon silences him with a blast of AI. There is no doubt he enjoys his ability to inflict pain on others. Cleansed, he leaves, tossing it back to the now unconscious patient.

He checks in with his Generals, who are assembling the troops. Seeing that everything is in order, he heads back in his quarters for his pre-battle preparation. He sits in his chair, eyes closed, relaxing into meditation. His breathing slows, his body eases. Slowly, he can hear the sounds of war, explosions, cries and screams, the booms of cannons. His eyes open... He stands in a clearing on Earth. But the troops are nowhere in sight. Instead, a deer bounds into the open space, immediately followed by a shot that fells it. "Nice shot, soldier." But it isn't a soldier. It's Gale; she frowns. "You again? Why are you here?" "I can see the future." She ignores him, setting to work at skinning the deer. It's hard for him not to be impressed with her skill. "It's a shame you'll soon be dead. You'd have made good breeding stock." She snorts, "In your dreams, which is what this is." "Not exactly, I told you, my AI lets me glimpse the future. It's the strongest in the galaxy." "And yet no match for me." She hoists the dead carcass across her shoulders. "Enough." He shouts to troops who are not there, "Cannons! Fire! Take aim!" She smiles. "If you insist." She starts to spin, twirling the

dead animal around herself, faster and faster until she lets go. The corpse strikes him like a bloody projectile.

He is thrown from his chair in his quarters, landing on the floor, covered in sweat. The communicator on his wrist is beeping. "What is it?!" It is his AIDE telling him there is an urgent communication from his father, the King, encoded and for his eyes only. Oberon is annoyed. "He can wait. I have a planet to conquer."

CUT TO:

Gayle is awakened by the sound of the ship approaching and the scores of animals fleeing through her camp. Trees are breaking like matchsticks as the enormous craft uses its engines to lower slowly to the ground. She has a feeling of dread. She looks at her companion wolf. "Run." It does, joining exodus. She grabs her essential gear, prepared to do the same. Yet she feels compelled to look...

She edges through the forest, coming to the clearing where the craft now rests. The enormous bay doors open and hundreds of armor-clad, laser rifle toting soldiers descend. She's about to flee when he comes out – the figure clad in the flowing black robe, the figure from her dreams. A lone deer bolts through and he startles. frightened. His Generals notice but he shakes it off. "Report!" he barks. He's told there are minimal humans in the area, one close by they likely crushed with their arrival. She can't help it. She steps forward. "Not so much." She finally sees his face and hopes her intake of breath isn't audible: he is handsome or would be if not for the cruel sneer. "You." "Yes, me." He looks at her intently and she realizes – "AI? It doesn't work on me." "Then we'll just have to dispatch you the old-fashioned way." He nods at the GENERAL and turns and walks away. "First line, take aim." She yells, "No! Stop." But he's already given the command, "Fire!" She closes her eyes so not to see the carnage. But she hears the zing of the rifles, the sound of the blasts as they ricochet and the gasps and thumps of bodies falling. Another round of volleys – the second line perhaps. The same sounds then silence. When she finally opens her eyes, she tries to look ahead, not down at the scores of dead. She sees him turned back, staring at her; he is the only one left standing. The soldiers behind are fleeing back to the ship.

He approaches, slowly. He asks, almost courteously, how she did that. She explains her SI. He asks questions; she answers. It's strangely civilized. When she thinks he finally understands the danger of her sciath, he instead tells her it's the greatest weapon in the universe and beseeches her to join him – they can become masters of the galaxy. He's annoyed at her adamant refusal, at her insistence that it's not a weapon. "Of course it is," he says, she's kidding herself, and he can help her learn how to control it, to make it even stronger. She's pissed. She tells him to hop back on his ship and head back to wherever he came from. He seems to relent. Almost apologetic. And sprints off. She's surprised but pleased.

In the sky, she sees the dots of what must be the other ships in the fleet heading into space. The Hammer rises too. Satisfied, she collects her things and heads off; she'll need a new camp in a part of the forest not levelled. And maybe she can find her wolf. She sets off, whistling for it...

But the ship doesn't leave, it hovers above her. She has to cross an open field and even though she knows she is protected, she is still unnerved as it follows her. She quickens her pace. Then the cargo bay doors open and what can only be called a gigantic claw on a chain emerges, lowering toward her. It opens, its talons spreading their enormous reach. She is unsure if it can penetrate her SI since it might not seem a danger. But the talons instead bury themselves in the dirt fifty yards around her on all sides. The sound is deafening as they start to close, tearing up the soil in a huge circumference. Then the clang of metal on rock and the apparatus stops, unable to cut through the layer. Gale relaxes but then –

With a grinding sound, the claw begins to lift upwards on the giant chain. And with it, the entire slab of rock -- with her on it! Horrified, she watches the ship above getting closer and the ground below further away. Should she jump? Will the SI shield protect her? She isn't sure and chooses not to chance it. After all, no matter where she is, she is safe within her bubble. She takes a deep breath as she is pulled into the belly of the ship.

CUT TO:

It worked! At the controls of the claw, Oberon is exultant. Like playing the old arcade game, he's grabbed his prize and now carefully lowers it into a bay that holds a circular enclosure of transparent steel, normally used for collecting dangerous animals. Done. She is his.

Pushing through the crowd gathered to see the remarkable human who killed a hundred men at once, Oberon blasts a circle ten feet from the walls of the room, marking a perimeter around what he knows to be the invisible SI. He orders that no one to go any closer. He doesn't bother to explain the reason or her powers. But his Aide is by his ear: "You will be more powerful now than even Praetor." Only the hint of a smile passes his lips.

CUT TO:

The Captive

Gale isn't scared but she is helpless. She is a lab rat and experiments ensue to test and define her powers. The bot sent in with breakfast is fried trying to cross the SI; somehow the sciath knows the food is poisoned. The soldier sent to fire upwards from the bay below is killed instantly; evidently the SI extends below. In between, Oberon 'educates' her on the history of humankind, meaning those who left Earth. She knew about them but grew up believing those who stayed did so to protect the nearly destroyed planet, to save what they'd achieved. To him, those who left did so to try

and achieve more. Perhaps because of the difficulty in adapting to new worlds, their evolution has been faster, in terms of AI and of course technology. He tells her about his home planet and the royal family. There are moments when she can see a decent human – he makes sure her privacy is respected, that she is eating enough -- but mostly he is pure ambition. Meanwhile the SI protects her from drowning, as he unleashes a torrent of water, and suffocation, as the air is pumped out and poisoning as toxins are let in. Gale is getting quite bored with it all, yawning pointedly...

The Praetor has heard the news. When Oberon returns to his quarters the Supreme One's face appears holographically, angrily floating above him. The Praetor demands an ETA for the Hammer's return to the mother ship; in truth Oberon has slowed their progress in order to conduct his tests. But Praetor is anxious to meet "his" new weapon. Oberon fights to hide his annoyance.

Once docked, Oberon arrives in the bay to collect Gale. Her assertion she isn't going anywhere, and he can't make her fade when he brings in a dozen slaves, captives of his AI powers, and casually threatens to kill them – or make them kill themselves – if she doesn't come with him. As one and then another fall to the floor in agony, she screams for him to stop; he may be a monster, but she is not. He isn't stupid though and as they head into the corridor, not only does he stay behind her and her SI, but he's lined the hallway with slaves, so she has no choice but to keep moving forward.

Before they enter the Throne Room, Oberon tells her how to behave – to not react to the glaring lights, to walk to the riser and kneel, to not look directly at The Praetor, not to speak until spoken to... She chuckles, "Rules?" Gale isn't cowed. Upon entering she immediately shades her eyes and walks to the rise and stomps on it. "Hey, boss man. Kill the bulbs." There is silence, especially from everyone in attendance. Oberon has circled so that he is now in front of her. He tries to warn her with his glare. But the Praetor is making nice, saying that he means her no harm. That he is going to make her dreams come true. She responds she only has one dream -- to go home, to Earth. Once she has used her power for his cause, she will return to Earth as its ruler, he promises. But she sloughs that off, telling "Feather Boy" she'll return and keep him and his incompetent lackeys from her planet for good. It's too much. He leaps up, starting for her, his face contorting as he summons his AI. Oberon sees and yells, "My Lord, don't. It won't work! The sciath—" The Praetor turns on him. "You!" Oberon lets out a scream and hits the floor, his body thrashing as the Praetor disciplines him; "You deliberately kept her from me." Oberon opens his mouth but can't even speak as he body continues to spasm. Gale yells, "Stop!" Only the innocent slaves in between prevent her from stepping forward to block his power. The Praetor is surprised she objects to him torturing someone who's been torturing her. She disagrees; Oberon hasn't harmed her, and neither can Bird Man. He sneers, she is very wrong about that.

Gale is made to accompany Oberon to the infirmary. His ribs are cracked, his lung collapsed, his skull fractured, his optic nerves severed, eardrums punctured... Gale

covers her face; the Praetor had done all of that with his AI? She feels genuine relief as the bots repair him. He feels like an ally compared to that monster.

Later, when the Praetor recalls Oberon to the Throne Room, it is this very trait of compassion he sees as their way forward; rather than force, Oberon should use kindness to bend her to their side – he needs to make her fall in love with him.

Back in his quarters, Oberon bemoans the impossibility of this task when a flashing light catches his eye. He still has that urgent message waiting from his father, the King. As he listens to his father's voice, his eyes widen and he lets out a primal, gut wrenching howl...

CUT TO:

The Rebellion

SALVATOR stands over the king's body, a slave no more. He smiles, the first step in the revolution complete. As FLANKO, his second in command enters, he steps over the bloody body of the Queen. He reports that the rest of the royal houses have been executed, the palace slaves eagerly await Salvator. Like the other thousands of slaves, they will follow him. There is only one problem: the King sent a message off to Oberon. This means Oberon will be aware and expecting them, they have lost the advantage of surprise. Furious, he kicks the King directly in the face with his boot, shattering his nose and eyeballs. "You told him, didn't you? About my SI?" We now realize Salvator is protected by a glowing sphere, just like Gale. "It doesn't matter. We will liberate the colonies, humans will be free, once again. And your son? Don't worry, he will soon be at your side." He turns to Flanko, noticing the sword gash across his shoulder. He motions him forward; Flanko hesitates but then crosses the SI boundary and as he does, the glow envelops his wound, healing it. Sal nods, "Bring anyone else wounded to the courtyard."

CUT TO:

In the Cargo hold, Gale watches an unkempt and tired looking Oberon hunched over the control panel. He isn't running experiments or talking. She tries to draw him out, it's just her nature. He wonders why she hasn't tried to escape; the answer, that the best outcome would have her floating alone in space in her SI bubble, includes the fact that she doesn't want to put anyone else at risk. He is the one who points that out, as if an admirable trait. She wants to know what he's done with "Prince Jerk." Something's clearly happened to him since she saw him last. He offers a truth for a truth and gets her to tell her story, of how the SI came to be and her life with it. He is most interested that her family could penetrate the SI; he presses her for details, in particular why and that it didn't hurt any of them. Gale's mood darkens...

CUT TO:

The night it happened. Gale gets ready to leave her family, hugging each one. Outside the storm is worsening. Her father follows her out, standing on the porch as she leaves. She turns back, for one last look, one last wave goodbye.

But this time we see – at that instant, lightning cracks from the sky. It hits her SI with a blinding flash and bounces off, shooting in all directions – “Dad!” Her father is flung off his feet as it hits him. He lands on the ground – convulsing... then still. Absolutely still. At the window, she sees the horrified look on her mother’s face...

CUT BACK TO:

Oberon’s comment that he can skip trying electricity on her is met with a glare. He sighs. He needs to work on his empathy. But now it’s his turn and when he says he likely won’t ever see his father again either it is with genuine emotion. He tells her about the uprising and the likelihood his entire family has been slaughtered. She is genuinely horrified for him but also confused: if Oberon and his lines have the most powerful AI in the galaxy, how did they lose control? Oberon doesn’t tell her the rebel leader has SI.

He doesn’t share that info either when the Praetor summons him to deliver the news of the rebellion, not knowing Oberon already knows. It’s easy to show shock because now the certainty of his family’s deaths is confirmed. The Praetor knows of Salvator’s SI and the fact that his men can share his sciath, something Oberon deduced from Gale’s story of her family. The ‘how’ of it eludes him, but clearly it must be someone who means no harm, someone whom the person wishes to enter. To the Praetor this is all the more reason for Oberon to win Gale over. Figuring it out will be key to then quashing the rebellion. Here Oberon genuinely agrees – it will come down to SI versus SI.

Oberon’s aide is reporting the intel as it’s received – nine of the colonies have been attacked and fallen. Somehow, the inhabitants of each planet have been released from the AI control of their rulers and are joining Salvatore and his men in the battle, slaves no more. But again, how?

Oberon has a slave brought to him. The old woman has cancer and is scheduled to be ‘destroyed.’ Instead, he takes her to the cargo bay. He tells Gale that he is sending her in, to see if she can heal her. Of course, they themselves could, but they don’t bother fixing slaves. But if she could, if her SI could, then think what a positive force it could be? Gale is horrified; the SI might see the cancer as a threat and kill the woman. It’s possible, but he doesn’t think so. And if not, she could heal thousands, she could walk through a battlefield and save soldiers, into a hospital and save children. How can she say no? The woman is going to die otherwise so there is no risk. The woman, meanwhile, has been walking toward Gale, toward her sphere. Gale backs away but now she is getting close to where Oberon stands. Keep moving and she will kill him; stand still, she might kill the woman. “Kill me or save her. How is that a hard choice?”

he asks. Gale stops moving and holds her breath as the woman crosses the line. A loud wail erupts from her mouth and she starts shaking violently, then collapses to the floor. But she isn't dead. And a scan with a medical bot Oberon sends in shows she is now cancer free. Oberon is amazed at the essential goodness of Gale, as the SI comes from her mind, so healing is what she inherently wants for everyone; it's a revelation to him. Even more amazing, when the slave opens her eyes they are clear, no longer under AI control. She speaks, for the first time in years. Gale is dumbfounded; Oberon is enlightened – this must be how the rebellion is freeing the slaves.

And it is. Salvator walks through prisons, walks through cities, freeing thousands from their mental captivity on planet after planet. But as he arms a group of women with knives and lets them have at it at a rapist guard and cuts the arm off another to use his hand for DNA access, even Flanko is surprised at his ruthlessness and brutality. When his men intercept a message and realize that Oberon is in possession of a prisoner with a sciath too, Sal leaves the newly released slaves to sort out taking the planet back for themselves and sets out immediately for The Hammer. On route he divulges his true plan – he sees himself and Gale as the ultimate power couple. If he can not only free but win her, they can start a new master race that will rule the galaxy. He has quickly gone from liberator to tyrant.

CUT TO:

The Plot

In his dream, Oberon floats in space. In each hand he has a glowing globe of light, holding them apart, knowing they shouldn't touch. A voice says, "Put them together." It is the Praetor, in yet another glowing globe. Oberon wants this one too so he begins juggling the first two and when they are in rhythm he grabs the third. But the Praetor's globe burns his hand. The Praetor laughs. Oberon can barely touch it, so it throws off his rhythm and he almost loses the other two. But he recovers, juggling all three even as the one sears his flesh at each pass. "Can we stop? I'm getting dizzy." He realizes it is Gale's voice, coming from the first globe. "No, you're in danger from both of them." She laughs. "Now you want to protect me? Why? What's changed?" He realizes it's true. "I don't know..." As he struggles with the idea, his seared hands start to melt until they are nubs and can't hold the globes. He screams as they tumble, falling into each other, exploding into a blinding white light. He wakes up on the floor in his quarters, having fallen from bed, drenched in sweat.

The former slave Helena has stayed with Gale and is a force to be reckoned with; she hates Oberon and doesn't trust him, for good reason. Knowing, Oberon makes sure she is kept at a distance when he approaches Gale and asks for her help – her help to kill the Praetor. Gale is shocked. He tells her the rebellion is coming and both it and the Master are a threat to him, and possibly her. With her help, they can kill the Praetor and he can then focus on the rebellion. He will keep her from harm and return her to earth. He almost seems sorry to have taken her to begin with, but nothing prepares her

for him saying that he is beginning to care for her, in fact, falling in love with her. Maybe it's her inherent goodness, the slaughter of his family, the cruelty of the Praetor, but somehow he now sees a different path for himself...if she can trust him and will help. He has a plan...

Helena presses her for details; Gale doesn't confide, yet she is troubled. How many times can everything you believed get upended and you feel the ground disappear from beneath your feet? How do you know who or what to trust? Helena has been through much in her lifetime; all she can counsel is that Gale must simply trust herself and the rest will follow.

When the time comes, Gale is to be brought to the throne room just as before. The corridors are lined with slaves, as will be the room. Oberon has assured her that when she moves on the Praetor and has to pass her SI through the slaves, rather than hurt them it will free them, as it did Helena. But can she believe that? Will they truly pose no menace that would trigger the SI to defend her? As she now walks down the hallways, she tries to look into their eyes, but they are fixed and blank. She does feel eyes upon her and blushes. Oberon is watching her appreciatively from behind. She sneaks a look back and he immediately looks away. Is he embarrassed? Who is this man?

This time when she enters she follows the rules – she doesn't blink at the lights, she walks to the rise and kneels. The Bird Man hisses, pleased, and tells her to rise and approach. This plays into Oberon's plan: if she can get close enough, her SI will protect her by killing the Praetor for her – he is a threat so it should be that simple. And yet, she now sees he seems to be glowing. Strange. Knowing he is of hybrid DNA, she asks him if he's pregnant, since that's usually when humans start to glow. Oberon clearly cannot see it, he looks confused but also horrified. Praetor's response is that she will now join him, and it's not a question. That's when it hits her – he must now have his own SI in some form. How is that possible? For the first time, she is scared and feels vulnerable. But before she can reply, alarm klaxons sound – they are being attacked!

CUT TO:

The Battle

From the deck of the Rondo, Sal orders his guns to target The Hammer's engines. Flanko is aghast; this means destroying the ship and the thousands of slaves onboard. Weren't they supposed to free them, not kill them? Sal explodes in anger at his subordinate questioning his orders. Killing Oberon and the Praetor and rescuing the prisoner with SI is well worth any collateral damage. Flanko's hesitation disappears and he slams the button that fires the Rondo's cannons.

The Throne Room rocks as the ship is torn apart. Time slows as Gale watches it unfold. As the craft disintegrates, her mind sees Helena, alone in the hold, along with the guards suddenly thrown into space. She realizes that they all will die, except for her, assuming her SI protects her. She sees Oberon at the nearest computer station,

frantically trying to launch an attack as the whole board shorts out and ignites in sparks. Coughing, he reels, and their eyes meet: his head shakes in resignation. This is the end. Another blast and this part of the ship comes apart at the seams. People and objects are blown into space. She sees Oberon being hurtled and intercepts, letting him collide into her, holding on as they fly into the void. He has her in a bear hug. "Oberon! Stop, you're crushing me." But he holds tight. "You don't have to let go, just stop trying to become me, okay?" He loosens his grip, somewhat, as he realizes "We're in space? The ship's gone?!" "Yes, and yes." His eyes remain clamped shut. "I can't look." Despite their predicament, she is almost amused. She turns his face toward hers. "Prince Oberon. Strongest AI in the galaxy. Open your damn eyes and think about where you are – where you really are, and how." That works. He slowly opens them and focuses on her. "I'm inside...with you." She laughs. "And how did that happen?" He realizes the implication: "Because I'm not going to hurt you. I will never hurt you." His hand curls behind her neck, pulling her close again. "And you wanted me inside... You want me." Now it's she who closes her eyes as he kisses her, and she melts. Floating in space, they are locked together, their embrace lasting until a voice screeches –

"How perfectly vile!" It is the Praetor floating just above them, safely encased in his own sciath sphere. "He did it." "But how?" Oberon has figured it out. The Praetor stole Gale's DNA, collecting cells from her 'trash' and fusing it with his own, as he had done with the vulture and other creatures in the past. The Praetor tells Oberon there was no way he trusted him, he knew Oberon would betray him and want to keep Gale for himself. After all, AI is nothing compared to this. So he figured out how to give himself her power. This was the glow Gale saw, the nascent SI before it was full blown. Much like hers coming into being when she was threatened by Niall, likely the ship being destroyed triggered his to emerge and protect him. Likely she had carried a glow too, but no one had been able to see it. Oberon says this is his fault, he never should have taken Gale from Earth, and he should've dealt with the Praetor long ago. The Praetor of course disagrees; what Oberon should've done was to find a way to kill Gale, not have succumbed to his weak emotional feelings. But it doesn't matter now; despite what they think, he is not the enemy -- the real enemy is approaching. In fact, the Rondo is above them and its cargo doors have opened. Now it simply angles down and scoops them up. The Praetor's protests over what good is the SI if it can't prevent capture gets only an eye roll from Gale: "Yeah, tell me about it, birdbrain."

CUT TO:

Captive Again

The group is put behind force fields in the cargo bay of the Rondo. Before long, Salvator saunters in, surrounded by his sphere. Gale is shocked; she thought she was the only one with a sciath. When she realizes that Oberon knew about it, she feels betrayed and turns on him, to Sal's pleasure. She literally walks away, leaving him outside of her protective sphere. However, she warns Sal that Oberon isn't to be harmed. While the Praetor is taken to the brig, she insists on staying with Oberon, even

eating his food first to make sure Sal doesn't poison him – after all, she knows what was done to his family. Once alone, Oberon tries to explain, that when he first learned of Sal's SI he didn't yet have feelings for her, so had no reason to confide, and once he did have, well, he was afraid she might prefer Sal, given what they share. The memory of their kiss and connection makes Gale soften, but just a little; once again, she isn't sure what to think or who to trust. Meanwhile, Sal's efforts to court Gale – sending a hologram trio to play a lullaby to awaken her in the morning – are transparent to her and infuriating to Oberon, who's in no position to do anything about it.

The real test is having the SI meet/touch. Will Gale's protect her if Sal has bad intentions? And if it doesn't react, does that mean she can trust him?

When it's time for this experiment, Gale insists Oberon come too. The mess hall is cleared of everything and everyone. Oberon watches as slowly Gale and Sal approach each other. He can't see the outlines of their spheres but when their boundaries touch, there are visible sparks. Gale laughs and Sal grins, to Oberon's jealous displeasure. "What's happening, Gale?" "It's like they're melding, becoming one!" Her face lights up as Sal reaches out to take her hand. She looks so happy. Oberon knows that, other than their kiss, she's been alone in her bubble all these years, to now have 'company', well, he understands her joy, but it breaks his heart. How can he compete? "It's one big sphere!" Oberon feels he's lost everything. Sal smiles at her, "Obviously, we both wanted this. To be one. Think of our future!" He tries to hide his disappointment as Gale says, "Now let's see what happens when we separate," and backs away. This time there are no sparks. There are two spheres again. "There's a lot of tests to run but this is excellent! Let's try one more thing." As Gale nods, he again approaches her. But when the sparks of the SI meeting happen, he comes no further – rather, he reaches out his open hand toward her, concentrating, and then pulls back, slamming his fist into his chest. "Hey!" she yells. Salvator is breathing heavily, "Whoa, that is a rush." "What did you do?" She is in a panic. Oberon is anxious, "Gale? What's wrong?" "It's gone!" "The SI?" "Yes! He...he took it!" Salvator is laughing, a bit maniacally. "I thought it might work. But I didn't expect it to double my power." She sees his dome is shining more brightly, almost throbbing. She feels vulnerable and afraid for the first time in years; she can only whisper, "Give it back." He just laughs. Now she is angry, she stomps toward him, "I said, give it back!" Suddenly, he doubles over in pain. "Take it...take it back, please." He is pale and sweating. "It's not...happy." Unsure what to do, Gale closes her eyes and reaches out her hand and – with a whistling, squealing sound, she feels then sees the energy and light return to surround her. She nods at Oberon, who's been watching so concerned. "It's back." Now she turns to face Salvator, "I'm only going to say this once. Do not. Ever. Do that again."

Salvator claims this was just an experiment; his idea is for her to use her power to take the Praetor's SI away and, given that it comes from her DNA, it would probably be 'happy' to be returned to her (as opposed to hers being unhappy to be taken by Sal.) The explanation mollifies but she certainly doesn't trust him. What really bothers her

about the whole thing, she confides to Oberon later when they are alone, is that after all of these years of wanting to be rid of the SI, how much she wanted it back. Perhaps she is used to its safety, or perhaps it is now just such a part of her. It's become normal. In fact, evolution means that there will be more and more with AI and SI; it's likely already not just her and Sal. To Oberon, that's why her using it is a necessity -- she needs to control and rule the 'Sals' before they do the same to her. It's just the way it is. She can't accept that and puts her mind to coming up with a plan to free them...

CUT TO:

The Best Laid Plans

Sal comes to get her; it's time for them to take the sciath away from the Praetor. Oberon resists being left behind but Gale quietly tells him he is where she needs him to be, slipping him a note. Within the safety of his SI, the Praetor is oblivious to danger. When Gale gets close enough, seeing their spheres overlapping, she closes her eyes and stretches out her hand – “Come to me!” The Praetor doesn't realize what's happening until it's done; the SI being a part of Gale to begin with, there is no pain as it is re-absorbed. The Praetor is left vulnerable. Salvator orders Flanko to teleport him not to the brig, as agreed, but into space. Gale yells at his deceit but he is unmoved, that is until the brig guard calls to announce the Praetor's arrival. Gale smiles and, in her mind, says, “It worked.” Having used his AI to remotely control Flanko, Oberon smiles. Now it's Sal who realizes too late what's happened as Flanko comes out of his trance. Gale laughs, “Yeah, AI – it's still a force to be reckoned with.” Yes, she and Oberon tricked him but only because she feared he would betray their agreement – and he did. He is furious. He tells Flanko to teleport both the bird man and Oberon into space. But Gale doesn't look worried -- because Flanko's scan of the brig finds it empty. They've already used their AI to make the brig guard release them. They are out, loose on the ship.

Oberon is heading for the bridge, planning to take control of the ship. The brig guard is still with him, opening secured doorways. Oberon uses his AI to incapacitate crewmembers who try to stop him. The Praetor has no interest in saving anyone but himself, so goes his own way, killing those he encounters (and snacking on them) while heading for the escape pods. But Sal has other ideas.

Gale is helpless as Sal orders the air in the cargo bay is evacuated. Next, the cargo bay doors open and the ship rotates – and Gale, within the SI sphere, is simply 'dropped' into space. The ship now above her, she hangs motionless in the vast enormity as the doors close. Petrified, she holds her breath. If the ship leaves, she will be marooned there alone...perhaps forever. She waits, and watches... hoping.

Oberon is nearing the bridge when Sal's voice comes over the intercom, ordering that he and the Praetor turn themselves in at the bridge within the next ten minutes, or the ship will leave, stranding Gale. Oberon isn't sure if he's telling the truth but can't risk it;

after a moment's hesitation to head for the escape pods, he instead continues to the bridge, hands up in surrender.

Brought in at gunpoint, he is horrified at the sight on the monitor of Gale suspended in space. He reaches out to her with his AI, calming her fears, promising he will bring her back in. Sal, meanwhile, counts down as the Praetor fails to arrive. He is about to order their departure. Oberon barter that he will find the birdman and deliver him to ensure Gale's safe return; after all, didn't Sal want to breed with her? Sal agrees, realizing he needs her back if only to teleport her ovaries to the infirmary for future insemination.

CUT TO:

New Alliances

Flanko injects Oberon with a nano tracker so they can monitor his movements. Then he is off, searching for the Praetor. With a trail of blood to follow, it's not hard. The Birdman doesn't even see him coming, he's so busy gorging on a crewman. He snarls at Oberon, calling him a traitor and assuring him he has no interest in helping him save the girl. But when Oberon tells him that the escape pods have been jettisoned (a lie) the Praetor turns angry, saying then the slaughter will begin. Oberon counsels for strategy, suggesting that together they together they can outsmart Salvator and take over the ship, giving them a crew of slaves and a beginning to a new empire. The Praetor isn't stupid; he knows Oberon will betray him again. But meanwhile, he is in on the plan...

The bridge doors open. Oberon, with great difficulty, enters dragging the body of the dead Praetor. His pleas for help meet icy stares as he finally drops him at Sal's feet. "That was easy." Oberon shrugs, "He didn't even see me coming." Sal's suspicious. He wants the Birdman's body checked. No one answers when they call the infirmary and a scan shows no lifeforms present – Oberon shrugs, saying that's where he found the Praetor. Without a medic or a bot, Sal orders crewman Trovi to check the Praetor. With much fear, Trovi bends over the vulture-man and puts two fingers on the corpse neck, cringing as he feels for a pulse. As he reports no sign of life, Oberon communicates with the Praetor, "Why is it so easy to fool them?" He releases Trovi's mind, and then adds, "Get ready." Satisfied, Sal turns to Flanko, telling him to move the ship to recapture Gale. But as he looks at the monitors, he frowns. "Where is she?" He yells, "Did you move the ship?!" Flanko insists his didn't, but then -- where is she?

"Right here," is the response as Gale enters the bridge. As they all turn and gape, the Praetor rises from the floor and joins Oberon in blasting AI to fell everyone on the bridge, at least temporarily. Only Salvator is immune. Furious, he turns on them – "How did you do it?" It was simple. In the diversion of Praetor, Oberon has teleported Gale back onboard. To Sal's horror, she invites Oberon into her sphere, giving him protection. Then the Praetor rises Flanko, Trovi and several others, controlling them to form a human shield around him. If Sal wants to kill him, he'll have to kill his friends as

well. But for Sal, well, that's no biggie – he says he'll kill anyone he has to to get to Praetor.

Sal takes a step toward the human shield, but Gale takes a larger step to block his path. "I won't let you." Oberon has to jump back as the two sciaths meet and the sparks erupt. Gale and Salvator both extend their arms toward the other, fingers forming claws. "Come!" Gayle pulls at his SI. It is harder than with Praetor, since that had been a part of her. Sal pulls back, stronger and fueled by his anger. She doesn't deserve the sciath, he tells her. She could've had power and ruled by his side but she's a traitor, she's chosen the wrong side and now all she is good for are her reproductive organs. His words start to piss her off; he is the one who's a genocidal sadist. But as mad as she is, she can feel herself weakening. But then she hears – and feels – Oberon's presence, like a pair of arms wrapping around to give her strength. "I'm here. Take what you need from me."

With new strength she reaches out, "Come!" She pulls with all her might. She can feel the sphere give, and now she uses both hands, pulling like reeling in a rope, backing up right into Oberon. "You're not strong enough." "You're right, I'm not – but we are!" And suddenly, she has it! Sal looks horrified. But realizes, "Just wait till the pain starts. Then you'll give it back." "Not if there's no one to give it back to"" screams the Praetor, emerging from his wall of humans, fixing his eyes on Sal – whose eyes roll back in his head. He opens his mouth to scream, but instead blood pours from it, his eyes and ears now bleeding too. He collapses to the floor, twitching then still as an expanding pool of blood forms.

Gale is doubled over in pain. She can feel Oberon inside her head, trying to help but the pain is too much. "I have to get it out." "Put it into me," he says but she knows it would kill him. Then he has an idea. He turns toward the Praetor and using all of his power, knocks him back against the wall, unconscious. Gale is collapsing so he takes one of her hands, points it at the Birdman and takes over her mind, saying "Out! Now! Go, go!" He feels the sciath burning as it races from her body/mind and shoots across the room, enveloping Praetor. The Birdman comes to, awakened and renewed by the energy. He looks around, confused but pleased. He snarls at Oberon, "Don't try and follow me." Knowing what's about to happen, Oberon is downright deferential: "Of course not, my Lord."

Praetor makes it no further than the doorway when the pain starts. Oberon is urging Gale to open her eyes, so that she can see this unfold. It is the SI, of course. He tells Praetor that not only does the sciath not belong to him but he killed its owner -- no wonder it wants revenge. As the Birdman doubles over, the SI seems to pulse and with every pulse gets smaller and brighter, as if concentrating itself. The Praetor manages shrieks from his beak as he writhes in pain. Gale and Oberon cover their ears but keep their eyes on the sphere as it shrinks and shrinks until it is the Birdman's size. He curls into a fetal ball as it literally squeezes the life out of him -- each part of his body it

touches drains and dries up... feathers melting, flesh peeling off to expose bone. The Praetor dies in agony as those bones disintegrate, becoming dust that falls to the floor. The doorway he was in now swishes closed, there being nothing left to keep it open.

Gale and Oberon are horrified and relieved. They finally stand up, taking a breath. Then with a 'pop', the SI is back to full size, hanging in the corner, empty. They look at each other. "So what we do with that?"

CUT TO:

New Beginnings

The crew members fall unconscious under Oberon's AI and are secured in the brig. A course is set to take them back to Choraia. Oberon hopes to make amends for the generations of enslavement and his family's role. He tells Gale that he may be at risk, and he may never be forgiven, but he has to try and help the colonies to set up real governments and have a fair chance at self-rule. Salvator freed the slaves but leaving them adrift without any guidance after years of being under AI mind control, well, it was almost as bad. Eventually, he and Gale will return to Earth and live there.

As time passes, Oberon begins to wake the crew members up and tries to make peace. A video of what happened on the bridge, showing Sal's willingness to kill his friends, goes a long way, as does Gale's trust in Oberon – if her SI doesn't regard him as an enemy, he must not be all bad. Trust is slowly being won...

Meanwhile, Sal's 'vacant' SI hangs over the bridge. Since it shows no signs of 'life' there is no signal to lock onto to teleport it into space or even to the brig. They simply have to let it be.

Alone together for the first time since sharing the sphere in space, Oberon and Gail can reaffirm their love. Any lingering mistrust she had from being lied to is gone; Oberon risked his life so many times to save and protect her. They stop short of consummating their love, that will wait for marriage. That doesn't prevent snuggling and kissing and a bit more however... They may be saved by the 'bell' when a kissing session is interrupted by an alarm.

Rushing to be bridge, they are stunned to see the Rondo is surrounded by a dozen spaceships. Oberon runs to the tactical panel and determines the ships' weapons are trained on them. "Who are they?", Gale asks. He has no idea. The ships design and weapons appear more advanced than their own, impossibly. The communicator screen flashes a message ordering them to identify themselves. They seem to have no choice. "High Commander Oberon, Prince of Choraia, on return trip home with my fiancé, Gale, from the planet Earth." Gale reacts with a smile to his choice of words but that fades to shock as an image fills the screen – a WOMAN sits in the Commander's chair, behind

her a dozen CREW and ALL OF THEM HAVE SPHERES. Her shock seems mirrored by the Commander, THEA, seeing hers. Gale whispers to Oberon, "They all have sciath."

On screen, Thea and the others' eyes are all on Gale. "Is what he says true? You are from the mother world? Born on Earth?"

Gale's a bit nervous. "Yes." Thea presses her, "But who's sphere is it?" "You mean the Sciath Inchinn?" The crew members try not to laugh. "Is that what you call it, dear? So it is yours?" Gale nods, "Yes, Oberon can simply pass within because it knows he would never hurt me"

Thea nods; "It knows because it is your Soulsphere. And you, well, we have long been looking for you."

Thea and the others stand, to then fall to bended knee. "You are the First Terran Sphere, the highest of all of the Firsts from all of the colonies. We are royalty but you, you are our Royal Majesty!" She bows her head.

Gale and Oberon exchange shocked looks.

END BOOK ONE