

The True Extent: Ex Nihilo

Exclusive First 3 Chapters Release

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Greetings,

First of all, I want to say thank you for showing interest in my debut SFF Action Adventure novel – The True Extent. There have been some unexpected delays in the release of the novel, and so to make up for that, I have decided to give out the first three chapters of my novel for free.

You are free to share and distribute these chapters to others; however, you do not have permission to edit it or change its contents in any way. All rights are reserved by me as the author.

If you enjoy these exclusive chapters, please consider buying the full novel upon its release. Your support would be much appreciated.

*The True Extent will be available on Amazon, Rakuten Kobo, Google Play and Apple Books (*tbc) as an eBook ONLY in February 2026.*

Kind regards,

Ray Tshepa

Note: These chapters are not exact representations of those in the final version of the manuscript.

She made her way up the steps towards the hall. She took each step carefully as if she were carrying precious cargo in her hands. Upon entering the hall, she saw that it was about half-full. It figured. No one really cared for these impromptu meetings that often did little more than interfere with the plans that people had for the day. She surveyed the room as numerous Cyreeanai were chatting about and their voices echoed in the dome-shaped structure. She noticed that the faces she was used to seeing at these meetings were not all there, and that there were some entirely fresh faces she had not seen before. Her eyes darted around the room and then locked onto a familiar face. That face looked like it was about to go to sleep before the meeting had even begun. She made her way forward and, before taking a seat, glanced at the rows behind her, which were still mostly empty. As she sat down, she noticed the rows of seats in front of her were occupied in scattered places. One particular Cyreeanai in front of her nearly fell off his seat as he hollered aloud at something that was said from the person beside him, and then they both continued to use animated gestures to get their points across. Norah didn't know whether they were arguing or mocking each other. She giggled at this and then turned to her left in her seat and greeted her mother. She bowed her head slightly and placed a hand on her mother's chest to finalise the greeting. She could feel her mother's heartbeat. Her mother's heart rhythm was slow, and she seemed calm. Norah thought that perhaps this explained the sleepiness she had seen in her just moments ago.

"I feel heavy-eyed just being next to you," Norah said.

“I’m not a sluggard one,” her mother denied. She then turned to another Cyreeanai beside her and asked if she had seen her sleeping once. The person’s eyes went wide, and her head shook furiously.

“You, Seearah, sleeping in here? Never.” Seearah nodded at her friend’s statement and gently tapped on her friend’s thigh approvingly. She then turned back to her daughter.

“See,” Seearah said.

“She has been your friend *forever*. She would support anything that you say,” replied Norah.

“Are you accusing my friend of misrepresenting the truth?”

“Misrepresenting you, yes. She looked afraid of you the moment you turned to face her.”

“That is exaggerative! Who raised you?”

“I wonder that myself sometimes,” joked Norah.

“Speaking of things that grow, how is the little one today?”

“I am sure you felt when I touched you that she is fine.”

“Yes, but she seems excited for some reason. Or nervous, I can’t tell. Is she singing well?”

“Yes, too well and also a little bit too loudly. I struggle in the allocations for slumber. And there is now more pain around my belly as she gets larger.”

“You are almost there, my girl. Just a few more double cycles and you will be at full term. The last stages are always the most difficult.”

“What’s it like being a mother?” Norah's blue eyes stared intently at her mother’s turquoise ones.

“So many things, Norah, so many things. Challenging, scary, exciting, but most of all fulfilling. It is like a part of you becomes complete. She is now a part of you, and nothing will be like the bond that you two have. Not even our bond.” As Seerah said this, Norah’s belly glowed a light green. “What timing,” her mother remarked. “It’s official, the last stage has begun. Have you made all the preparations with the sanatorium? It’s important the birthing process goes well.”

“Yes, mother, I have done so,” said Norah. Her mother gave her a steely gaze, and her turquoise eyes shone, but Norah quickly disengaged. *It’s not fair that she can still read me like a book.* Norah mentally noted that she would go straight to the sanatorium after the meeting and get right on it. She did not need her mother breathing down on her at the moment. She was carrying enough at the moment. An entire little Cyreeanai, in fact. Norah looked forward and saw one of the Council leaders step up onto the podium and stand in the centre circle etched into the floor. His arrow-shaped ears twitched as the volume in the room was visibly starting to affect him. He looked as if he were carrying a heavy load upon his shoulders that no one else could see. His tired eyes surveyed and scanned the hall as if he were looking for someone. He then jotted down something on a block of softened wood in front of him as if he were a teacher taking attendance register. *I hope, when I get older, I fair like my mother and not him,* Norah thought.

“Please settle down. This meeting will begin in one-sixteenth of a cycle,” said the Council leader. The Cyreeanai then took a few steps backwards and turned to take a seat beside four other members whom Norah knew to be some of the other Council leaders. They were earnestly discussing amongst themselves, and Norah noticed that the red eyes of one of them were starting to display concentric rings that radiated out from the iris of his eyes, out of fear. Norah poked her mother, but her mother was too busy gossiping away with her friend. By the time her mother had turned towards her, the Cyreeanai had disappeared, and only four of the Council leaders now remained seated.

“What is it, Norah?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know. Elder Yonah just suddenly left.” Just as Norah finished speaking, one of the seated Council leaders stood to his feet and approached the centre circle. He did not need any sort of voice projector as some others did, as his voice was more than loud enough for all in the hall to hear him. Norah whispered a joke to her mother that the people of Tarmak, on the next distant planet, were currently rejoicing, since whenever he spoke from the centre circle, even they would be able to hear him and would surely become wise to all of their plans. Her mother gave Norah a disapproving glance, but Norah still heard her silently giggle. The hall was now silent as the Head Council member began to speak. His piercing orange eyes were a match for the ever-so-slight hue of dark orange that glowed around his whole body. Given that different bodily glows meant different things to and for each Cyreeanai, Norah could not be certain that his glow was a bad thing. But she could not be certain that it was not.

“Greetings to you all,” the Council leader began. “I realise that the timing of this meeting is irregular and that of late we have had more and more of these sorts of

untimely gatherings. We apologise for disrupting the current labour cycles. Your employers are all aware of this meeting and will not penalise any of you for unattended time periods. Your time slots will remain as normal, and the labour cycles will remain on track and will not be extended. I will try to keep this brief, but this meeting is in fact an emergency meeting. We have only selected Cyreeanai from select labour segments, as well as those belonging to royal or elite echelons, to be a part of this meeting. That may seem unfair, but it is the final say of the Council. With that said, there is no easy way to say this. Our cosmic surveyors have, over the past several orbital phases, noticed irregularities in interstellar space that have grown increasingly sporadic and unstable as time has gone by. Beyond interstellar space, in the realms where galaxy fields and clusters are abundant, these same irregularities appear. Numerous parts of the fabric of space have simply folded in on themselves, for no apparent reason, creating numerous fracture points that are scattered throughout the universe. The nature of these fracture points is currently unknown.” At this news, loud groans were heard around the hall, and different Cyreeanai began glowing like stars in the night sky. Blue, purple, pink, yellow, green. All Norah had to do was think of a colour, and one of them, either in front of or behind her, was displaying it. The Head Council member observed the contrast of colour in the room and, with a wave of his hand, blew a small and brief gust of wind across the lot of them to settle the crowd and bring all to silence once more. The gust briefly blew some of Norah’s long flowing golden hair into her face. She gracefully tucked it back behind her ears. “Please remain calm and allow me to speak. This news is troubling, and we have sent several teams out to the furthest reaches in order to more closely examine these anomalies. Once they return in fourteen to sixteen orbits, we will

know more definitively what the situation is and the best way we should approach this. We have made it a point to have some of those working in fields related to cosmic intelligence and research suspend their regular duties and join the Cosmic Investigations Taskforce to become a part of the teams that have been assembled there. Most of you here are from the mining and engineering labour segments. Do not be surprised if you are reallocated to be a part of the Cosmic Taskforce as well. Obviously, all your remunerations will remain intact. This is because we may need to establish a terraforming rig or two, if the need be – if somehow our safety here becomes compromised. We may also require underground shells to be constructed. Members of the royal strata, may you please provide resources and assistance in the pursuits of these projects and endeavours. I trust the weight of this matter can help persuade you to be generous in your offerings. *That is all.* Members of the engineering and mining segments are to meet up on my left. Members of royalty are to remain behind so that Council leader Iros can speak to you as well as two members from the Monetary Legion who will be joining her. Members of the Cosmic Investigations Taskforce are to meet the remaining Council leaders in the Sanctum in a quarter of a cycle. We have much further to discuss there. *This general meeting is now dismissed.*” Loud groans once again erupted in the hall as the four Council leaders all made their way out in a single file.

“That’s it?” Norah said, turning to her mother. “It would have been better if he just said nothing until he actually knew something. Now everyone is panicking.”

“I have to go, my daughter,” said Seerah, standing to her feet suddenly.

“You’re going to leave too?”

“I don’t like this. There is too much that he is not saying.”

“What is going on, mother?”

“Don’t concern yourself with that now, Norah. Please go to the sanatorium *now* because I know you haven’t finalised the preparations.” Norah looked to the ground. Her mother lifted her chin and looked into her blue eyes. Her mother’s turquoise eyes lit up and now sparkled with shimmers of silver in them. “Focus on protecting this bundle right here,” she said as she placed a hand on Norah’s belly. “That is your only bother right now. If all is well after birthing, then you can help me.” Norah nodded in agreement. Her mother then placed a hand on her daughter’s shoulder, turned around and left. The hall was still packed, and the commotion of complaints and grievances was getting to Norah. The bright colours of the Cyreeanai around her that glowed were starting to disorientate her. And all their colours only got brighter as they continued to voice their concerns amongst one another. She felt an uncomfortable twist and turn in her belly, and she made to leave the hall immediately. As soon as she got out and climbed down the steps, she took in several breaths. She glanced up at the red clouds above and then looked down at her belly.

“It is okay, little one. All is okay,” she said as she placed a hand on her belly to calm her little bundle down. An amber glow around Norah betrayed her words of comfort, but fortunately, her young one could not see it. *Or rather, I hope it will be,* Norah thought.

She made her way through the dusty sandstorm towards the structure in the distance. The wind's velocity had picked up since the time of her departure, but she was determined to get to her destination. Phyteri had been walking for what felt like many moons, and her legs started to buckle slightly with each step she took. The structure did not look any closer now than it had when she had last awoke, and thoughts of doubt began creeping into her mind about whether she had the stamina to endure the journey. About whether she was truly chosen and whether the moonlight would shine favourably upon her. These thoughts and these doubts that appeared so real and felt so real, if succumbed to, would drain her of all the strength necessary to make it to her end goal. *Amazing*, she thought. *They feel so real but are not. And yet something that is not real – can impact me so.* It had long been established in Raxteri culture that the mind was akin to a particular house. Within it, on the tables, were many shiny and valuable things that drew one in to behold the beauty of them. In the corners of the house, however, lay rotted-out and decayed items that repelled even the toughest of skins. Those decayed items only pushed one further towards the allure of the valuables. Eventually, the whole house was alight with the brilliancy of those most cherished things. Their light refused to dim. It became so bright that all the valuables eventually lit themselves aflame. One would attempt to head for the exit at that point, but the entrance that once was had ceased to be. The flames set everything on fire, the same way the brilliance of the lustre had illuminated all parts of the home. When she first heard this story, it did little to provide her with any insight or revelation. But as she got older, she came to understand the narrative a little better. *It sets you alight*, she thought. *This world of the mind. It sets*

you alight, in it. And once you're in, you're in. So, use it, take what you need and get out. Don't get caught up in the allure. Don't fall for its trap. It is powerful, but it is dangerous. Don't live in it. It is not real. Therefore, what was real was the journey ahead and not the fears that now were shining so brightly in her mind. She would not be distracted by them. She would stay focused on the task at hand.

Phyteri blinked twice in order to clear the dust that had built up in her eyes. She wondered if the sandstorm would ever end as a sudden gust of howling wind sent several small rocks flying towards her face. With an extended arm, she blocked her face and the tiny rocks cracked apart against her arm. She then returned both her arms to the pouch in her belly and smoothed her hand against the surface of the oval shapes buried in there. She felt no cracks or leaks. It wasn't likely anything could get to her eggs buried there, but she knew it was better to take precautions than to be left without measures for recourse. The sand on the ground was thick, and each step she took had a bit of weight to it, but at least the weather was favourable. She had heard stories of other Raxteri who had to walk through earthquakes and the resulting avalanches, many of whom either fell to their deaths as the ground split apart and swallowed both them and their eggs whole or those who were buried so deep in the aftermath of a collapsed mountain that it was only by the favour of the three moons, that anyone would find them. Of course, even when they were found, their eggs were often completely destroyed. One of the moons was setting down now in the east, and it would be a while before the other would rise in the west. This meant her path ahead was about to be laid in darkness. This did not bother her, though. Each step she took was progress, and

eventually it would all be worth it. She would wait for *the day* with bated breath. The day when all of the sacrifices would bear fruit and she would be able to see her babies all grown up. To one day have one of her own come knock on the door and esteem her and herald her as the rightful caregiver. The thought produced within her a glimmer of happiness, but as all Raxteri know, happiness is not a strategy. If her people want something to happen, then they make sure it is done through sheer grit and determination. There are no two higher virtues than this for the Raxteri. Slothfulness is punishable by death, and what an embarrassment it would be to see one of her babies succumb to such a fate. No, she didn't think this would happen. She had raised them right up until this point. She had laid all the right seeds in all the right places. They would follow the trail, and they would find the way. The only way back to her. They would not put her to shame. She wished she knew this for certain, but all she could do was hope.

The first moon's light had completely gone, and now it was just her and the darkness. Her arms fell to her side and suddenly two beams of light shone from them. She had been using the light to keep her eggs warm, but they could survive the cold. What they could not survive was a sulphurous thunderstorm, whereby sulphuric gas envelopes and grips one tighter than the ring around their neighbouring planet, and eats away the individual from the inside out. Just like what had happened to her sister, Visteri. At the time, Phyteri had just found out about it during the time of her expectancy, and her sister's demise had put a dark cloud on all her hopes regarding being a caregiver one day. Since the day that they had honoured her sister's life by evaporating

her into eternity as befitting all noble Raxteri, Phyteri promised herself that she would not allow herself to fail. She would endure where her sister failed. The two beams helped her see what was in front of her, but did little to help her see anything else. She stopped to sense the direction of the wind as a sulphuric storm always leaves a trace of heavy elements in the air, but as soon as she stopped, so did the wind. The sandstorm suddenly dissipated, and without the howling of the wind, all that was left was the eerie silence all around her. She knelt down and lifted her hands to the sky. Her hands had numerous fine circular openings in them, each the size of a blueberry. The openings lined up in a way that made a spiral shape. As her hands were lifted skywards, four spherical balls were ejected from her hands, two from each hand. They launched like projectiles into the dark sky above her. In the air above her, the balls spread out in different directions and began to spin as they went their separate ways. She wouldn't move now. Something was coming from the west. It wasn't a storm. But what *it* was, she wasn't sure. So, she would wait . . . until she was sure.

The last stage had gone by like the wind in a game of Roushetts. Her mother warned her about her tendency to be late, and although she had joked about how improbable it was for her to run late for her own birthing process, it seems that was exactly what was happening. She feared to see the look on her mother's face now. Given that she couldn't run there in her current fragile state, she opted for her uncle to come and take her there. Now, Norah stood waiting outside her chambers, waiting for him to arrive. There were hardly any clouds in the sky, and the light from the bright blue star that orbited their planet was burning furiously hot, yet Norah felt a slight cold chill in her body. *Probably this full-term body, telling me that it has had enough now*, she thought. She picked up a stone from the ground and began rolling it in her hands to smooth it out. She threw the stone high up in the air, and then she began to flick her fingers at a fast pace, creating little bursts of wind. She targeted the stone as it came back down towards her. The game was simple. Keep the smooth stone in the air for the longest period of time without shattering it. Except this time the game was no fun – because there was no one to play with, because she was nervous about what would happen in the birthing chambers, because the little one in her belly would not stop kicking and because on top of all this – she was running late. Out of frustration, she forgot about the stone and let it drop to the ground. She began pressing her fingers against each other as she set her sights on bigger targets. She aimed for a semi-large tree that was in her neighbour's garden, and shot at it with small, powerful bursts of wind that sent chips of tree bark splintering from the tree. She continued chipping away at the tree to form a series of letters that she had in her mind. Unfortunately, the tree

had to endure a bit more damage than Norah initially intended, but she eventually began to find a rhythm. However, just as she was settling into it, it was disrupted by one of her neighbours, who poked her head out from the balcony of her own chambers.

“Excuse me!” her neighbour bellowed. The sudden shout from the woman caught Norah off guard, and she unintentionally sent a burst of wind flying towards the woman’s face. The woman recoiled into her chambers, just as the burst of wind made a small crack in the wall beside the balcony. Norah was uncertain about what to do next, but fortunately, just then and there, her uncle showed up. The oscillator was an old machine, probably as old as her uncle, that attempted to glide in the air with the grace of an eagle, but which in reality ended up swirling around in circles, like a moth around a flame. Norah shook her head. The oscillator landed with a thud upon the ground as Norah approached it.

“Really?” Norah said.

“How about – I am much obliged, Uncle Yonah. Where would I be without you?”

“We will get there ten cycles too late in this,” said Norah.

“You wouldn’t be getting there at all without me. How could you not have planned for this properly? Your mother raised you better than this.”

“I am sorry, I know. But I have been busy. I have been . . .” But just at that moment Norah’s neighbour came out of her home, demanding an explanation for what had just happened. “Quick, Uncle Yonah, fly us out of here,” Norah exclaimed.

“What’s going on?” he asked as he saw Norah’s neighbour walk towards them and point an accusing finger towards his niece.

“No time,” said Norah, as she pressed the ignition button for her uncle, which sent the little machine hovering up into the air, in an awkward, jolted fashion. As they did so, Norah remarked, “Uncle Yonah, if I fall out of this expired thing, you had better be there to wind catch me or else my mother will kill you.” As they continued to ascend upwards in circles, Norah’s Uncle noticed the damaged tree in the yard below them.

“Did you do that to the tree, Norah?”

“I didn’t even get to finish. I was spelling out her name. . .” Norah said in a disappointed tone.

“Truly, she is rubbing off on you now. When she affects your behaviour this way, she expresses her desires for independence through you. This is good. It means she is ready to come. Your birth should be smooth.”

“I hope so, Uncle Yonah,” said Norah. The oscillator continued to rise higher, and when it had reached a suitable height, it began swirling forward in circles, and the jolting ceased. And so did the twisting in Norah’s belly. Norah’s body began to glow pink, and her uncle pressed a couple of buttons on the dashboard in front of him to increase their speed. Norah then let out a cry of pain.

“We are almost there, Norah,” he said. “The final stage has begun now.”

“Distract me,” she said. “Talk to me about something. What didn’t you tell us in that emergency meeting that happened many orbits ago? What’s going on, Uncle?”

“You really want to know *now*? Your curiosity knows no bounds.”

“Tell me, Uncle. How bad is it? When I am done birthing, I want to help, but I can’t do that if I don’t know what is going on.”

“I don’t know everything, and I have only just finished reading through the numerous reports that come from the cosmic surveyors. The next meeting with the Cosmic Taskforce is—”

“So spill it,” said Norah impatiently.

“These anomalies are occurring throughout the cosmos. Spatially, they occur in random places, but each one has a structure to it. They are targeting portions of space that are mostly empty, in effect reducing the fabric of space available in the cosmos.”

“They’re sucking in the space around them?”

“Not sucking it in. Eradicating it.”

“How can they function this way, without eventually eradicating themselves?”

“I don’t know. They did not seem to form through any natural process like with a black hole where a star dies and explodes. However, like a wormhole, they seem to lead somewhere else, and this indicates to us that they may have another source that is sustaining them.”

“But there is only one source for power in the universe as it is, and all the energy within the universe remains constant. Nothing can add to or take away from it once it is there. If these fracture points are within the universe, but are not being sustained by it, where do they come from?”

“I don’t know Norah. It’s as if they have been *planted* where they are. Now, please, take deep breaths,” her uncle said sternly. “You need to remain calm for this process to work. Ease your mind and relax. Focus on *her*. Your only focus needs to be on her now. You need to be attuned to every note she sings. You cannot be distracted, Norah.” Norah nodded her head.

“I understand.”

“If you fail to sync your song, she will feel neglected, and your bond will be diminished. Not broken, just not everything it can be. Forget about everything else, Norah.” Norah nodded once more and placed a hand on her belly. She spoke to her little bundle in a gentle tone.

“Okay, little one. It is just you and me. You have your mother’s full attention. I have even picked out a beautiful name for you – but you can’t hear it yet, though. So, for now, I will sing one of my favourite songs to you, my love. Are you ready?”

Norah’s uncle nodded in approval as he saw Norah close her eyes, as her whole body began to pulsate various shades of pink and red. Even if he were to holler at Norah now, she wouldn’t be able to hear him. She was now in her own world, where just she and the little one existed.