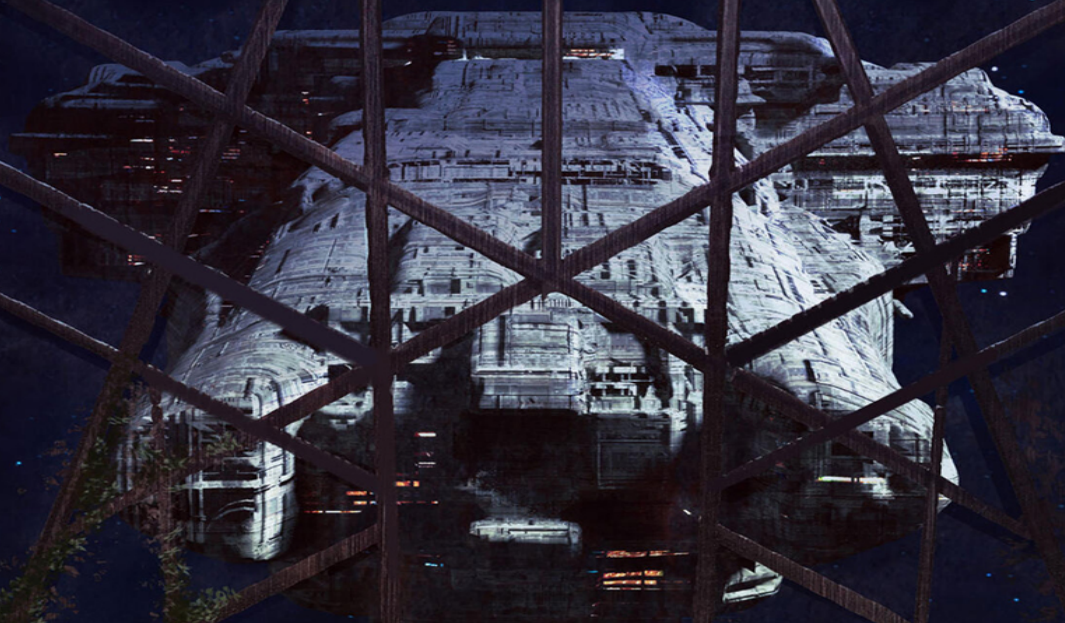


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—VERONICA ROTH, #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR, ON *THE STARS UNDYING*

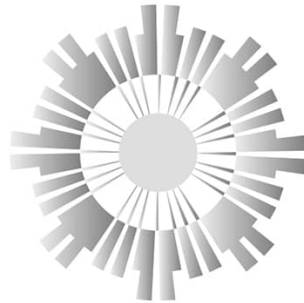
THE SEA ETERNAL



EMERY ROBIN

THE SEA ETERNAL

EMPIRE WITHOUT END:
BOOK TWO



EMERY ROBIN



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To my great-grandmother, who I used to be
named after

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THE GALAXY AND ITS PEOPLES

(Or at least the ones A. thought were important.)

THE CROSSBAR: A galactic spiral arm. Celestial bodies include:

CEIAO: The greatest planet in the galaxy. *(According to some.)* Capital is the city of Ceiao, language is Ceian (except among the wealthy, who speak Sintian). Homeworld of the Ceian Empire. After a revolution against its tyrannical priest caste, Ceiao banned religion for one hundred and fifty years. The ban has recently been relaxed.

- **Ana “Anita” Decretan.** Part-time admiral, Demipotestate, and lady of the Swordbelt Arm and the Crossbar. *(Full-time drunk.)* Former right hand to deceased commander Matheus Ceirran. At his funeral, delivered a speech that sparked a citywide riot and drove his assassins into exile. Lover to Altagracia Caviro Patramata, Oracle of Szayet. On Szayet, she is referred to as Ceirran’s “disciple.” *(She allows this for reasons best known to herself.)*
- **Lieutenant Cardean, Lieutenant Ludon, Crewman Ruzhaya.** Ana’s sworn men.
- **Galvão Orcadan.** Former captain to Matheus Ceirran, now captain to Ana Decretan.
- **Otávio Julhan.** Full-time admiral, Demipotestate, and lord of Arqueiran and the Shieldmirror. *(Part-time human being.)* Matheus Ceirran’s cousin. Heir to his fortune, and to his name. *(Don’t forget to change this name to “Otávio Julhan Ceirran” once my spider-litter crosses into the city of Ceiao proper.)*
- **Captain Águeda Vipsânian, Captain Cecílio**

Maicenán. Otávio's childhood friends, now his sworn men.

- **Flavia Decretan.** Ana's sister. Excellent party hostess. Patron of organized crime.
- **Teo Pulcron.** Flavia's former husband. Patron of organized crime, and later rebel against the Merchants' Council. Died by execution after his rebellion failed.
- **Sonia Couron.** Ana's childhood friend and former lover. Died in battle.
- **Mara Decretan.** Ana and Flavia's mother. Died of illness.
- **Túlio Cachoeiran.** Rhetorician, philosopher, politician, lawyer, patriot, master of the Ceian tongue. Enemy of Matheus Ceirran. Died after betraying Ceirran to his assassins.
- **Quinha Semfontan.** Former friend and mentor to Matheus Ceirran, later his enemy. Killed on Arcelia Caviro's orders after losing a civil war against Ceirran.
- **Jonata Barran.** Assassin of Matheus Ceirran. Died after losing the Battle of Micavalli to Ana.
- **Cátia Lançan.** Assassin of Matheus Ceirran. Died after losing the Battle of Micavalli to Ana.
- **Patrícia Laubian.** Assassin of Matheus Ceirran. *(Not dead yet.)*
- **Matheus Ceirran.** Commander of Ceiao. Friend to the Ceian poor and savior of the Ceian Empire; a bloody tyrant. Died by assassination. *(If he's really dead at all.)*

SINTIA: The birthplace of civilization. *(According to some.)* Capital is Sintielo, where most wealthy Ceians attend school. Language is Sintian. The Sintian language's ancestor is Malisintian, which is still used for religious purposes among worshippers of Alekso of Sintia.

- **Alekso of Sintia.** A tyrant. Three hundred years ago, conquered most of the Crossbar and the Swordbelt Arm. In the process, he knocked Ceiao several degrees off its axis, exploded Szayet's moon, caused assorted environmental and

human rights disasters, etc. Across his former empire, except in Ceiao, he is worshipped as a god. Known on Szayet as Alekso Undying and known on Kutayet as the Holy Flame of the Swordbelt. (*And the way the Ceians talk, you'd think he's the only one who's ever destroyed a world.*) His body now rests on Szayet, in a tomb on the Isle of the Dead.

- **Caviro Orakolo.** Alekso's lover and disciple. Settled on Szayet after his death. Ancestor of *Dom Caviro*, the Szayeti royal house, and first Oracle of Szayet.

MICAVALLI: A planet near Sintia. Site of the last battle against Ceirran's assassins.

CEIAO 20M3: A dead planet. One of the Vigesimal Colonies of Ceiao (the name given to colonies orbiting the stars Ceiao 20 through Ceiao 29). Once it had a forest, and once it had mountains, and once it had a great and saltless sea. (*And once it had a name, and the name was Tenessa.*)

- **V.'s father.** A refugee. Died of radiation sickness.
- **V.** A poet.

THE SWORDBELT ARM: A galactic spiral arm, bordering the Crossbar. Celestial bodies include:

KUTAYET: Homeworld of the Kutayeti Empire. Language is Kutayeti. Alekso's greatest and most difficult conquest. It is ruled by an emperor, and its royal house is *Dom Harsaky*.

- **Sasha Vualo.** An ambassador.
- **Carmela Lukhaya.** A scholar.
- **Polina Harsakaya.** A prince.

SANCTA MIRTALO: A planet in the Kutayeti Empire. Home to the

emperor's winter palace, Roof-without-Rain, located in a vast desert.

KHRAMYA: A satellite in the Kutayeti Empire. The emperor's rose garden.

- **Maral os-Margad.** A teenage girl.

THE FORTUNATAS: A set of rings around a planet deep in the Kutayeti Empire, near the Black Maw. Legendary and possibly nonexistent.

SZAYET: Ceian client world. An ocean planet, dotted with a few islands. Capital is Alectelo, languages are Sintian and Szayeti. The resting place of Alekso of Sintia's body. Home to the Library of Alectelo, the greatest archive and research facility in the galaxy.

- **Altagracia "Gracia" Caviro Patramata.** Oracle and queen of Szayet. Caviro's ten-times-great-granddaughter. Twin sister to Arcelia. Bearer of the Pearl of the Dead, a tiny quicksilver pearl computer said to contain Alekso's soul. Like all Oracles before her, she rules (*or claims to rule*) the planet exactly as he commands her to. As of Matheus Ceirran's death, she now bears (*or claims to bear*) a second Pearl of the Dead, which holds Ceirran's living soul. Recently dredged the Szayeti oceans of their treasure, making herself and Szayet fabulously wealthy. Lover to Ana Decretan. (*And how.*)
- **Zorione.** Altagracia's maid. Raised Altagracia and her sister from childhood.
- **Delio.** Altagracia's minister of war.
- **Sister Constanza.** A priestess and librarian.

OSTRAYET: Szayet's moon. The Ostrayeti people enslaved the Szayeti people. Alekso of Sintia shattered the moon into three pieces,

flooding Szayet and sinking almost all its wealth and resources beneath the ocean. After the shattering, the Szayeti people worshipped Alekso as liberator and god.

ITSARYET: Ceian colony. Conquered by Quinha Semfontan. A planet near the border of the Kutayeti Empire. Home to an ancient temple to Alekso Undying, now a prison ruled by jailer-priestesses.

- **Arcelia “Celia” Caviro Diomata.** Former oracle and queen of Szayet. Twin sister to Altagracia. Bearer of the Pearl of the Dead after her father’s death; ruled until Altagracia launched a civil war against her. With the help of Matheus Ceirran, Altagracia seized the Pearl of the Dead and the throne.
- **Sister Božena.** A young priestess.

MEDVEYET: Ceian colony. Its prince is rumored to have had an affair with Matheus Ceirran in his youth.

BELKAYET: Ceian colony. Former Szayeti colony, hundreds of years ago.

CHEREKKU: Ceian colony. Conquered by Quinha Semfontan. A secretive planet ruled by a king and a council of priests.

PLYUSNA: A satellite. The Oracle of Szayet met Ana Decretan here in an enormous barge, declared Ana the Disciple of Matheus Ceirran, and (*somehow or other*) won her heart.

THE SHIELDMIRROR: A galactic spiral arm, bordering the Crossbar on its other side. Celestial bodies include:

MADINABIA: A gas giant surrounded by a series of moons.

Matheus Ceirran made himself famous by conquering these, with Ana Decretan's help. In the process of being settled by Ceiao.

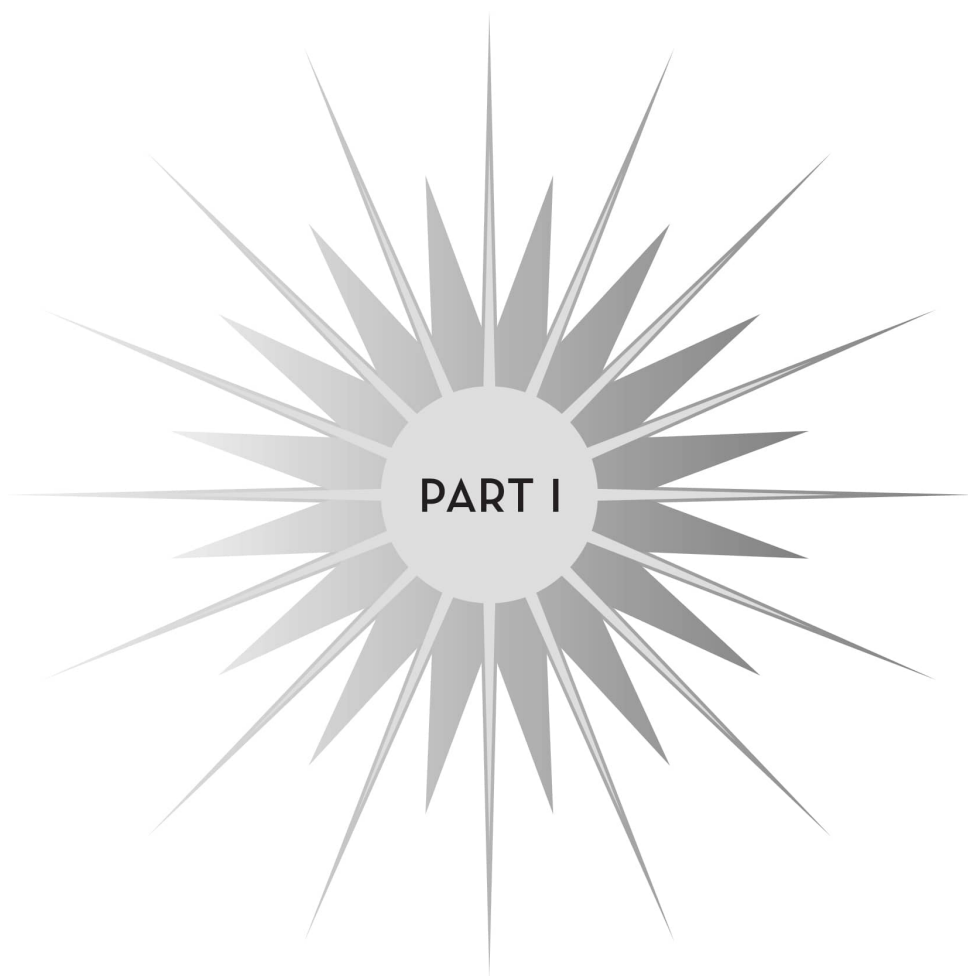
FAR MADINABIA: A neighbor to Madinabia. Otávio Julhan and Ceirran met here shortly before Ceirran's death. In the process of being settled by Ceiao.

THE BLACK MAW: Also called the Great Maw, the Well of Souls. The center of the galaxy. A darkness.

I'll have to remember to cross out all these little notes before I reach Ceiao, in case someone—a doctor, or an attendant, or (God forbid) C. himself—catches sight of this notebook. Hell, perhaps it would be better to rid myself of this whole list of names. I wish I didn't have to keep these kinds of notes at all. Only my mind wanders, and I'm tired...

—V.

Goddess, tell me the story.



IN THE MIDDLE OF THINGS—

CHAPTER ONE



One fine summer day, when the birds were singing and the lindens had flowered and the sun had come to rest on the ripples in the river, a woman bashed her sister's skull in with a rock. So the city of Ceiao was born.

Don't like it? Well, it's only one story. Here's another: Long ago, so long ago that the days were too new to be counted, a great ship landed on a fine and fertile planet. Out streamed the people, men and women, noble and brave. They had come from a faraway city by the sea, these brave and noble people, a city where a war had been lost and all their fine towers had burned. They had fled a long way. And their leader was the noblest and bravest of them all, because building Ceiao was his destiny, and because he was the son of a god, and because he always did as he was told.

When I was young, my neighbors would tell me that the people of the second story made Ceians in their image, strong and disciplined, upright and hardworking, uncorrupted and chaste and dutiful, enlightened and enlighteners and explorers and leaders of men. For all I know, it may have even been true. That was beside the point. It was for children, and so it wasn't the truth but the lesson that mattered: Home is wherever you can take it. This is the beginning of empires.

You asked for a story. Before I begin, let me tell you the truth: I think now

that the woman of the first story made Ceians in her image, too.

At the highest point of heaven there was a spark, and the spark danced, and as it danced it grew and licked with a red tongue out at the dark and at the jagged half-moons, and it spat out light and shouted, and the seagulls cried and hurled themselves off the ships and the harbor-gate and beat frantically toward the west. Through the light shot one—two—three dozen steel dots, flashing through smoke, weaving, screaming toward the town below.

“A message for you, Disciple,” said a servant into my ear. “Urgent news from Ceiao.”

“Go away,” I said, and emptied my gun at the sky.

The drones burst. Where they’d hung in the sky, scraps fluttered, ashes falling—then, as they drifted toward the torches and strings of lanterns and flashing violet lamps, the light caught them, and the crowd that had gathered before the royal palace shrieked and leapt up, hands scrabbling in the air, snatching the flakes of gold to their chests, turning up their faces to let them fall into their open mouths.

A palace official threw her hands up. “Twenty-one confirmed hits to Admiral Decretan!” she bellowed. “The Honored Disciple wins again!”

The noblemen around me burst into applause. So did the crowd, hooting and whistling, waving cups and tankards in my direction. I let my gun fall, and so did the Szayeti next to me, a long-haired young man in the palace guard. The official stomped her feet for attention. “The prize!” she shouted, gesturing. Around the side of the steps, puffing and panting, came two of my soldiers, carrying an enormous silver platter stacked with bottles of wine.

Fire streaked across the sky again, green this time, then blue. Behind it, an eye opened up in the black, and resolved itself into a glittering golden falcon, which spread its wings and became two leaping cats, four silver crocodiles, eight asps winding down the sky toward the horizon, a holo-forest of shining kelp curling back up from the sea and bursting into sunflowers.

I thrust my fist in the air. “Give them to the people!” I bellowed.

The Alectelans roared, surging up. The platter tumbled immediately and vanished. A dozen hands reached out and bore me up onto the people's shoulders, a riot of hot flesh and drunken voices, the river of stars rolling and swaying above me, the buildings of the Bolvardo del Tombo bobbing along the corner of my eye. Women smacked kisses onto my cheeks. Wine spilled over my mouth and down my shirt collar. I whooped, shouted, stuck my tongue out for people to drop sweets onto it, and somewhere around the third street corner fell out of their arms and into a circle dance. The dancers were screaming the words to a song I didn't know, something Sintian, and when I howled nonsense syllables in time they shrieked with laughter, tugged me back toward the palace, and shoved me toward the woman waiting at the base of the steps.

"My lady," I called, swaying, and held out a hand.

Fireworks burst again. Szayet's smile flared gold. She seized me and spun into my arms.

When we had come down to the streets of Alectelo this morning to begin the festival day, her hair had been braided tightly back, her kohl in neat wings beneath the jade on her eyelids, her crown straight and gleaming on her brow. Now that we'd paraded up and down the Bolvardo del Tombo, cheered on the footraces, feasted on fish and beer and fresh cherries with the crowd at the Summer Market, and rowed out into the harbor to light the first fireworks, the kohl had smeared across her temple and the pads of my fingers, the crown sat askew, the hair hung loose and sweet-smelling over her bare brown shoulders. I'd been dragging my fingers through that hair not half an hour ago, when we'd ducked into an alleyway near the Summer Market, and she'd walked me up against the wall and pushed her thigh between my legs and her hands under my shirt.

"What is this," she said into my ear now, "the fifteenth time you've won an athletics contest against the Alectelans this week? The sixteenth?"

I tilted my neck invitingly. She laughed and kissed me there, lingering to dig her teeth briefly into my pulse. "Fortune loves me," I said.

"Someone certainly loves you," she said, took my chin in two fingers, and