

THE  
**CHILDREN**  
OF **AMARGOSA**

AMARGOSA ARC BOOK ONE

**TS HOTTLE**

A COMPACT UNIVERSE STORY

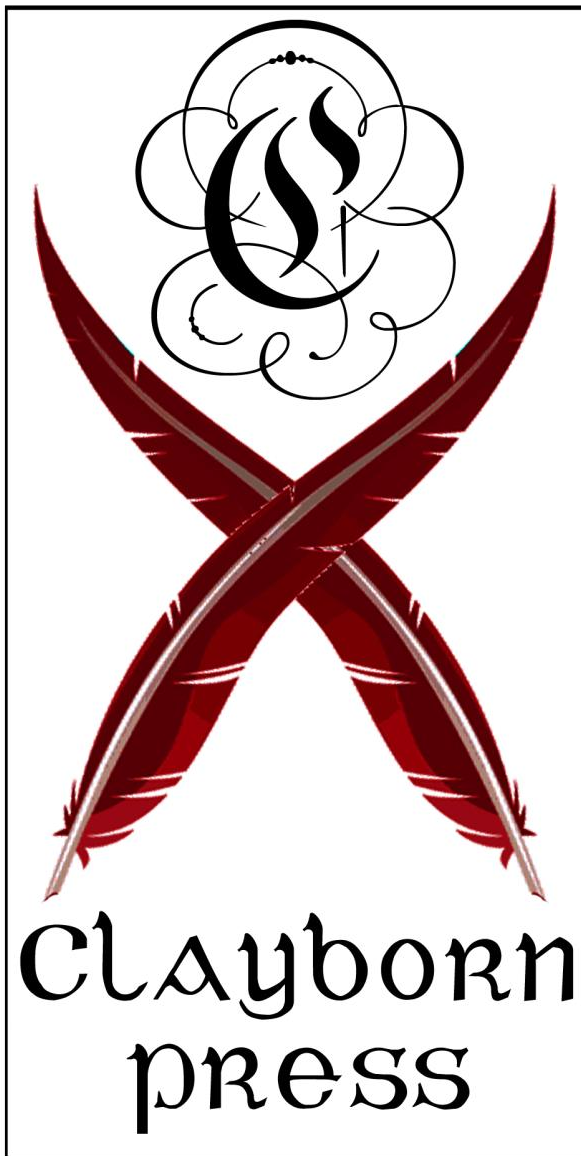
The Children of Amargosa  
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*For Austin. A good son. A good stepson. A fine man.*

## CHAPTER 1

Something violently shook the station, knocking Davra Andraste out of her bed and leaving her on the floor in complete darkness. Seconds later, the emergency klaxon bellowed with its urgent buzzing. The lights came back on with the blaring noise, but they were not the pleasing, soft indirect lights typical on Amargosa's orbital station. They flashed instead with the harsh red glare of the emergency lanterns that made her dark brown skin look almost ebony. The deck swayed like a boat in a storm.

"Daddy?"

Her father did not answer. She tried to work her way to the door to her room, but the deck kept bucking and pitching beneath her feet. She had to grope the furniture to keep her legs beneath her. "Daddy!"

As she pulled herself out of her bedroom, her father burst through the front door of their quarters. "Dav, come on." He ran over to her and grabbed her arm.

"What's going on?"  
"Something destroyed the hypergate."

That would explain the station's shaking and swaying. The blast might have even knocked it out of orbit.

"I'm going to get you to a lifepod," he said. "I want you to wait there until we get the station stabilized."

"Lifepod? Daddy, I'm in my pajamas."

"Hush."

It took them several minutes, but Samuel Andraste eventually got Davra to the outer ring of the station. Out there, the shaking became more violent, and they were thrown to the deck more than once. Samuel Andraste slapped the emergency lock open on one of the pods and shoved Davra inside. "Stay put. Don't go anywhere until I come for you."

“Where are you going?” she said, tears forming in her eyes.

“I’m going to try to keep the station aloft.” He stepped in with her and stroked her cheek. “If we have to jettison the pods, promise me you’ll try to find the authorities as soon as you land.”

“Daddy, I...”

“Promise me.”

She could only nod. Samuel leaned in and kissed her on the cheek. “You look so much like your mother. I love you, Dav. Everything will be all right.” He backed out and slammed the hatch shut.

“Standby mode initiated,” said the pleasant female voice, sounding like a spaceport computer giving directions to baggage claim and rail service.

Davra sat in the empty pod shaking, rocking, wondering when she would see her father again. When the pod suddenly ejected, she screamed. She kept screaming until she saw the orbital station explode.

*“Daddy!”*

\* \* \*

Another explosion lit up the sky as JT Austin and Lizzy Parker arrived back at her parents’ farm. Above them, something in space had become a slow-moving fireworks burst, gravity pulling its glowing tentacles downward.

When they walked into the house, Lizzy’s mother rushed them into the kitchen. “You two pack your bags. Quickly. I’m sending you into the settlement.”

“What happened, Mrs. Parker?” asked JT.

“Where’s Dad?” Lizzy demanded.

“Your father got called in. Something blew up the hypergate. Now the news feeds are saying the orbital station’s been destroyed.”

“Mom,” said Lizzy, “something crashed in the mountains on the far side of the pond. It happened before the first explosion in the sky.”

“Go. Get your bags.”

They went to their respective rooms and threw clothes, toiletries, and their pads into duffle bags. When they emerged, Quan, the Tianese man who managed the Parkers’ farm, waited by the door. “I can get them into the shelter. But once I’m there, the militia’s going to press me into service.”

“Any word on what’s going on?” said Sarah.

Quan shook his head. “Rumor has it something came out of a wormhole and started firing at the gate.”

Sarah herded Lizzy and JT toward Quan. She stopped JT and turned him around. “Take care of my daughter, JT.”

\* \* \*

Fire obscured the sky outside as the pod sliced through Amargosa’s atmosphere. Davra had managed to strap herself in. The inferno outside frightened her, but she could not take her eyes off of it. She was inside a fireball.

She hoped her father had gotten out alive. Some part of her knew he had not - that she was alone now. Just as frightening, she would not even begin to know her own fate until the pod landed.

\* \* \*

Quan drove them into town with his own runabout. Despite the sparse population of the surrounding township, farm wagons, runabouts, and even the odd flutter jammed the square. Quan pushed his way through the crowd, leading JT and Lizzy to what JT took to be a courthouse. It looked like many of the older ones he had seen in smaller

cities on Earth, a large stone building with an archaic-style spired clock tower perched on top. The traditional clock struck JT as a somewhat odd and meaningless choice, as Amargosa had a twenty-five hour rotation.

A deputized civilian was trying to keep the crush of people wanting inside from stampeding the building. When they reached the front of the line, Quan said, "This is the Constable's daughter and his ward."

The man, middle-aged with sun-darkened leathery skin and iron gray hair, looked him up and down. "They haven't called you up yet, Quan?"

"Where are the arming us?"

The man tilted his head up, pointing with his chin across the town square. "Over by the arsenal. You bring your runabout?"

"Just need to swap out the power cells."

"Let the sergeant know, and he'll hook you up. There's already rumors from around Arcanum that something's prowling the countryside, firing energy weapons at people."

"Human?"

"We wish." He motioned the kids inside. "Come on. Take it easy. Head down to the second sub-basement. You'll be safe there."

JT grabbed Lizzy's hand and led her down the stairwell. Halfway down, she stopped.

"I can't do this," she said.

"Lizzy, we've got to take cover."

"You go. This isn't your fight."

"It's not yours, either."

"Yes, it is. My parents are up there defending the farm. I should be with them." She let go of his hand and headed back up the stairs.

*Take care of my daughter.* That's what Sarah Parker told JT before they left. Now Lizzy was running back to



the farm. “Dammit.”

He headed after her but lost her quickly in the press of people still trying to get in. Once outside, he looked around frantically for her, his heart now in his throat. He knew where she had gone, but his brain could not accept it. “Lizzy? Lizzy!”

How could he face John Parker if his daughter disappeared on JT’s watch?

Spotting a deputy, he started to ask him if he’d seen Lizzy when someone grabbed his arm.

“If you’re not going into the shelter,” said a black man with a scowl on his face, “come with me.”

JT followed the man over to where he’d seen Quan heading earlier, hoping Lizzy had done the same. A woman of about forty stood on top of a farm wagon, handing out various weapons. She looked down at JT. “You ever fire one of these before?” She held out what looked like a rail gun, a backpack of lead charges at her feet.

“No, ma’am,” said JT, “but my dad’s in the Navy.”

She shoved the rail gun in his hands, then handed him the heavy backpack. “Aim it at the bastards. Don’t forget to kneel, or it will knock you on your ass.” She pointed to a wagon full of civilians, all armed to the teeth. “Go with them.”

Well, if he wanted to get back to the farm and find Lizzy, he realized, this would be his best chance to do both. He went.

\* \* \*

The jolt of the chutes opening startled Davra. It no longer glowed outside, the sky having faded from brilliant to pitch black instead. The chutes may have slowed the pod’s descent, but it gyrated wildly in the wind as it

decelerated. The motion made her sick.

With no light outside, not even from the ground below, she could not judge how fast or slow the pod was falling. The turbulence became a gentle swaying, and her nausea subsided as it did, allowing her to relax a bit.

Until the pod slammed into something with a jolting thud, and water coated the window. It began bobbing erratically, bringing Davra's motion sickness back worse than before. She unstrapped and walked unsteadily to the window. At last, she saw light.

Dozens of torches were moving about on what could only be the shore of a lake.

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