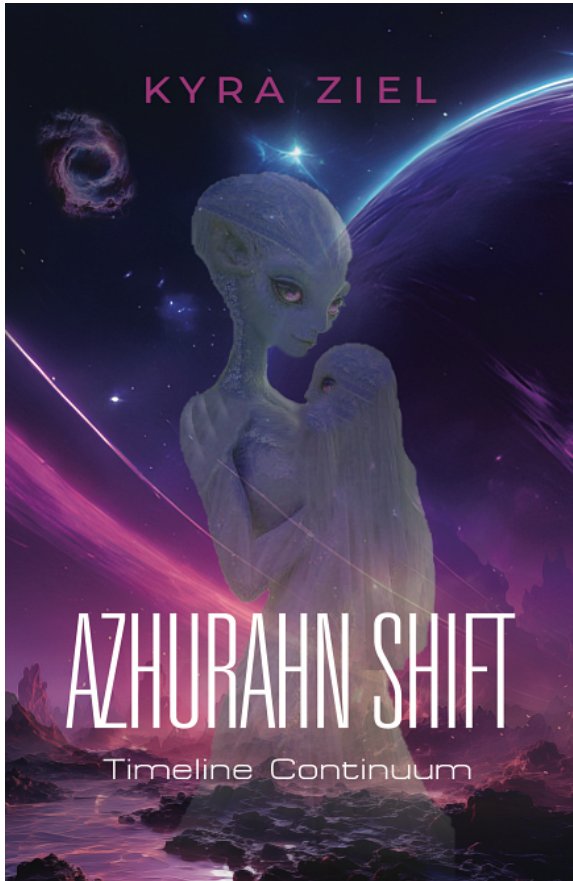




Join two, gifted, alien friends, who leave everything familiar behind, only to find the familiar again in the most unexpected place – another galaxy. Go with them on a dangerous journey bringing them full circle and to almost certain death.

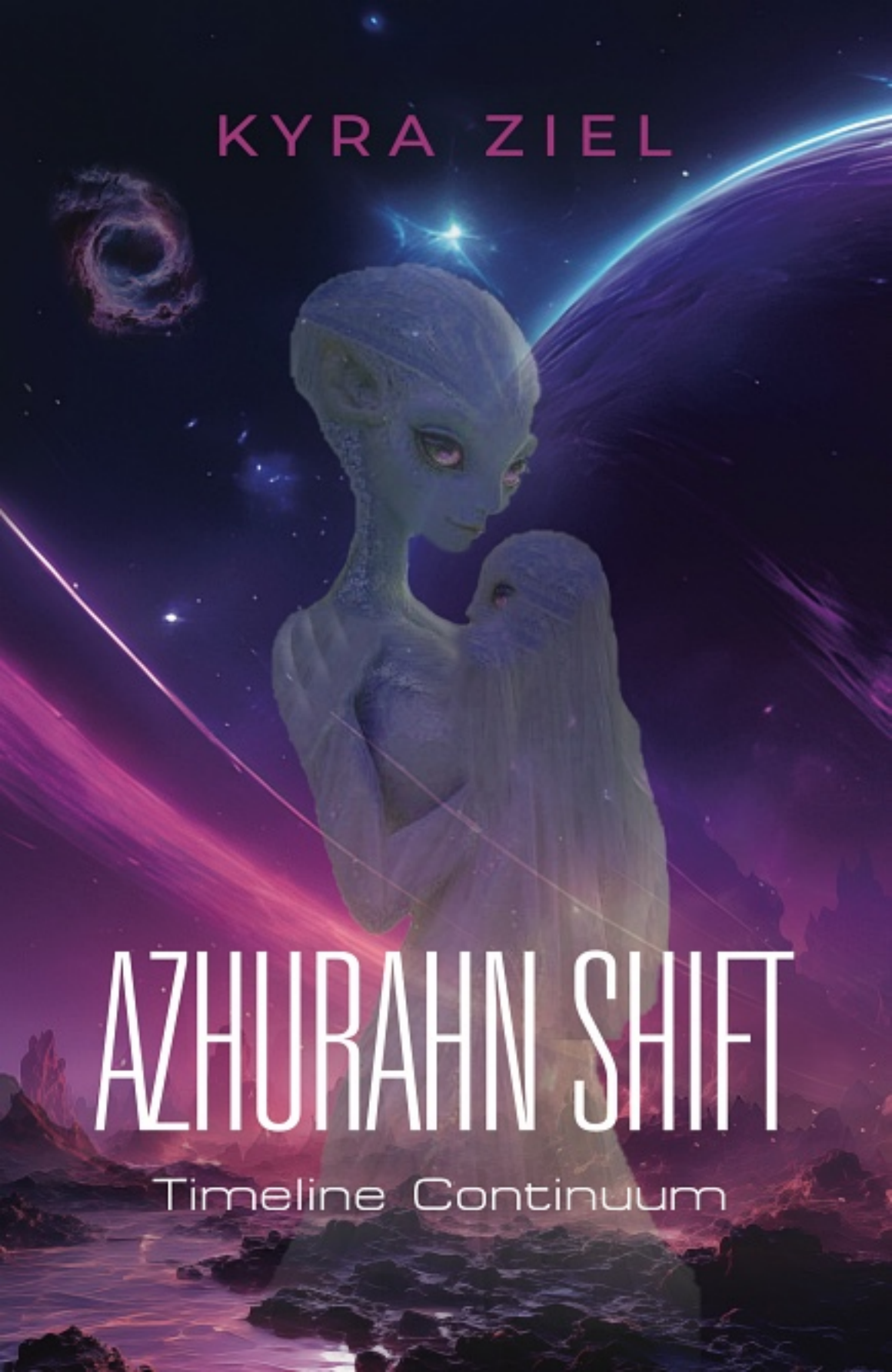
Azhurahn Shift

By Kyra Ziel

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The book cover features a central illustration of two grey, alien-like figures with large, expressive eyes. One figure is standing and holding the other, who is smaller and appears to be resting its head against the larger figure. They are set against a cosmic background with a large planet on the right, a nebula on the left, and streaks of light. The title 'AZHURAHN SHIFT' is at the bottom in large white letters, with 'Timeline Continuum' below it. The author's name 'KYRA ZIEL' is at the top in pink.

KYRA ZIEL

AZHURAHN SHIFT

Timeline Continuum

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Chapter 4

DI'Egn

Z'jhi and A'ezl did not notice, being the newcomers they were, but certain low-lying, sometimes aglow vegetation was gradually dulling. Many plants in that grouping could display violet tinges, but now those displays were much harder to make out. Even the gleaming rock faces of Z'Aunqa gradually dulled. Despite all that, amongst most Z'Aunqyns with the experience to see the difference, such change went barely noticed.

Failing to notice by some may have been due a lot to the slow onset of change, over much time. Subtle enough, it managed escaping most attention. But despite that, at some point before Z'jhi and A'ezl were born, someone noticed.

DI'Egn was one of the Prime Ancients. He alone possessed key insight about how the unwelcome changes began, in Z'Aunqa's natural back drop. Actually, he succeeded in observing and pointing the changes out fairly well. On the other hand, everyone else seemed to have no clue.

DI'Egn attempted to share his truly inspired revelations on the issue. He knew they were highly significant, enough for prompt acceptance by all, through the common mind. Then he deduced everyone should likely adopt his assessment. They should also likely adopt his proposed solution. Still, when DI'Egn telepathically announced his findings to the common mind, they were met with prompt resistance.

The other Prime Ancients at the time, all twenty of them, blocked DI'Egn's announcement. Together, they were responsible now for something never before done, in all the people's history. They resisted and even blocked highly admissible knowledge from reaching anyone.

As an added insult, they lacked any consideration for DI'Egn's findings. In truth, they were quite reactive, with the consensus among the twenty that DI'Egn's findings bordered on heresy. Or at the very least, they were little more than idle musings.

Later on, when DI'Egn risked being totally marginalized by his fellow Primes, unsuccessfully appealing to them both mentally and verbally, he fell silent on the issue. At last, he allowed it to fade away. It soon became hardly a memory in the minds of his peers. But no one could dispute DI'Egn's brilliance.

He took the unexpected but not entirely surprising rejection as an opportunity. Now that he had made the attempt, it would simply serve as the first step. It would clear the way for the next phase.

Eventually free of interference and intrusion from the other Primes, DI'Egn bided his time and prepared. That is, until the births of Z'jhi and A'ezi. By and by, their rare births, under a rare celestial setting, came as a major sign for him.

DI'Egn had waited patiently, in anticipation of their births. For him, it served as indisputable confirmation of what his fellow Primes chose to reject. After all, he himself had quietly predicted the births, years earlier. Now, he reached out to Z'jhi and A'ezi directly. It became the chosen time.

Chapter 18

Zub'Ekhan

The Eyljyans called the continuum quadrant key to their presence, Zub'Ekhan. They also called a specific outpost they established, by the same name. The outpost resided well within their quadrant's boundaries, and it was as beautifully conspicuous as it was strategic to Vy'unga. But it also functioned as an access point to many other Eyljyan locales. Those, of course, included the home planet, Eyljya.

For an artificial structure, Zub'Ekhan Station measured in the massive range, and it had a somewhat irregular shape. Though a radiant glow obscured much of its exterior, as the capsule, with its passengers, were soon taxied to a receiving deck, with a large bay.

The outpost personnel expected their visitors, as the capsule settled in at the receiving deck. Then the new arrivals became instantly bathed in a flood of light. Still, the glare if it soon softened.

The capsule glided into a receiving bay. Z'jhi and A'ezl watched from inside. And they had their first good glimpse of the bay's layout.

Everything seemed to produce light: various structures and devices big and small. They each performed their functions with no noise. And the flooring was richly colored, while translucent and walkable.

Z'jhi and A'ezl stepped out of Ahn-Ket'h. Then the X'Anj began to change. As they looked on, it reverted to its original form again, complete with wings.

They proceeded to glance carefully around. As they did, the X'Anj remained stoic. But Z'jhi and A'ezl became quietly astonished.

Monstrous shafts rose to invisible heights. Other monoliths ascended, their shapes unclear, shrouded in iridescence. Also inside

the bay, convexed beacons of some kind bordered certain intervals of flooring, and the beacons periodically elongated. Interestingly, they seemed to undulate, without fluctuating in containment and shape.

The beacons apparently served as guideposts, each with color variations that defied the dull. Then those guideposts gathered ahead to line either side of an immense avenue of some kind. It plunged deep into the interior.

The guideposts marked the way for the new arrivals, directing them to the avenue. Although the lined avenue acted like a fluid. Or was it solid? Ahn-Ket'h had seen that kind of thing before, in I'zahaut.

The avenue moved in low, broad waves, while sustaining no ruptures in its form. And all three of them watched while a singular wave appeared then rolled on unopposed, followed silently by another and another. The avenue's purpose totally eluded Z'jhi and A'ezl, but Ahn-Ket'h appeared much less unsure. It moved forward, then stepped onto a wave.

The twosome quickly caught on and followed. After another wave passed, Z'jhi stepped onto the next one, then A'ezl, onto the one behind that. Then all three visitors, either sitting or standing, found themselves on an enjoyable ride of continuity and comfort. And they headed down the avenue.

As the guideposts lined the way, some glowed brightly, others softly. Still others, in the distance ahead, all dimmed subtly. An interesting change, it seemed to indicate a variation in the direction.

A gigantic, iridescent structure came into view directly ahead of them. It dominated the foreground, and the avenue seemed swallowed up by it. As Z'jhi and A'ezl moved closer, though, they could see the avenue plunged under a radiant bridge. That rested at the base of the huge object.

The bridge had a bend in it that extended around to the central, cylindrical shaft. Though not characteristically iridescent, it was also massive. It also seemed lost in dizzying heights.

All three visitors were dropped off on the bridge. Then they followed it to the base of the shaft. At that point, Ahn-Ket'h shared its thoughts with its two companions.

The X'Anj explained that they were at the Zub'Ekhan MitonRud entrance. It said that they should go inside, for transport directly to Eyljya. And it finished by saying Eyljyans were already waiting inside.

Ahn-Ket'h expressed no doubts, as it motioned to them, and they all three confidently proceeded to the arched entrance. As they did, its protective grid instantly dissolved to let them pass. At last, a sign of people, as they were greeted by Eyljyan Station Masters inside.

Admittedly after the warm greetings, Z'jhi and A'ezl felt honored. And they were prompted to relax on a large, nearby floor-cloud. As they went, they marveled at the fact that the Eyljyans spoke verbally, in a strange tongue. But they could still understand them!

The floor-cloud caressed its two, new occupants. It was soft, super supple, no solid traits. In the meantime, Ahn-Ket'h stayed with the Station Masters to discuss key steps in the next travel plan. Then shortly thereafter, a large view screen materialized out of thin air.

A clear image appeared. In it, Chu-Ect'h was being honored on Eyljya for its valor against Cav-Moord. Many people were seen all around the X'Anj, looking on supportively. Then the image panned, showing surrounding features, like the greenish colored sky and structures similar to those on Zub'Ekhan.

Eyljyans were especially tall compared to Z'Aunqyns. Although they were anatomically similar, having two limbs, with hands and several fingers on each. And they had two legs, while standing on two feet.

Eyljyan skin glowed faintly, sometimes almost obscuring any facial features. Yet it was easy enough to make out the shape and size of their heads. They were large, a bit oblong. As for some attire, many of them wore dazzling skull caps.

Although strange for soon-to-be-visitors, the natural environment of the planet brimmed with unique beauty. And the heavens above were even more striking. For in the evening, a luminous, somewhat circular nebula dominated the sky. While present for half the Eyljyan year, it looked ponderous, amazing to behold.

Besides its dominant evening feature, Eyljya had a small moon. The planet also experienced subtle, seasonal changes. And quite a habitable planet, vastly advanced settlements covered many regions.

Presently, the screen's introduction to Eyljya changed. It turned into an appearance by Prime Chief Vyz'Ki. He proceeded to address Z'jhi and A'ezl.

"The people have spoken," Vyz'Ki said, "and they agree each of you may have the offer of honorary citizenship. Please accept this gesture. It is one of the sincerest forms of our esteem."

Then Vyz'Ki reached out through his screen image. He placed awards on each of their heads. He placed them as though he were actually there, on the outpost.

Both off-worlders happily accepted the nebula representations around their heads. And Ahn-Ket'h, looking on, seemed to bask a little in seeing its companions being officially recognized. But the honor was not something it needed. It already automatically had honorary citizenship.

The nebula 'halos' rotated with subtle and colorful changes, around their heads, and Z'jhi and A'ezl truly admired them. Then they learned something else about the awards. Ahn-Ket'h said they also

symbolized excellence. It added that few were given freely, let alone to off-worlders.

Vyz'Ki continued, saying, "Chu-Ect'h has confirmed with me that the deviant, Cav-Moord can never regain consciousness and mobility, whatever the case. He will not escape again, and subsequently, we plan to entertain the remote possibility that a cure could exist for him. Although we find that extremely unlikely.

"We encourage you to join us here. Stay indefinitely if you like. We welcome you with open arms."

With his arms still open, Vyz'Ki's image faded from the screen. Then the screen faded back into thin air, but a few moments later it reappeared. This time Chu-Ect'h came through.

Apparently, the X'Anj needed to communicate directly now with Ahn-Ket'h, and they shared thoughts, exclusively. As they did, Z'jhi and A'ezl looked on inquisitively. Then Ahn-Ket'h was given leave to Fifth Vallzyg, should its two companions decide to stay on Eyljya.

All X'Anjes apparently made Fifth Vallzyg their home. That said, no one in continuum seemed to know exactly from where these beings hailed. All the same, Fifth Vallzyg was directly associated with them.

The private conversation between the X'Anjes carried on for just a few moments or so. But Z'jhi and A'ezl managed to pick up on one thing. Any direct knowledge of Fifth Vallzyg and visits to it: unattainable for *all* outsiders.

The Station Masters encouraged both off-worlders to once again relax. Actually, while preparations were being finalized for their transport, they still had a little free time. And Z'jhi and A'ezl willingly eased back into their floor-clouds. Then marvelously comfortable there, they fell asleep.

Amazingly, both friends had the same vision, while they slept. In it, they were on another, strange world, with golden clouds and multi-colored skies. Then they walked through fields of spongy vegetation and around spherical pools of shimmering liquid. Something told them to taste the liquid, and they knelt down at one of the pools to take a sip. It tasted sweeter than Z'Aunqyn ak-reij nectar.

As the vision continued, a great wind came up. It blew southward and seemed to plunder the land. But though it sounded ominous, it was somewhat gentle. Then trees, reminiscent of L'Anjes, stretched their limbs slowly to receive it.

Nothing was uprooted or left in disarray by the wind. Instead it seemed to caress everything. And those trees...they seemed to even take nourishment from it.

Both visionaries were compelled toward the phenomenon of the wind. Then they glided right into it. Without warning, their spirits seemed as though penetrated.

It was as if the wind imparted some type of life-force. And it swirled around with a mind of its own. It caused them to feel fancy-free.

A gentle horde of winged creatures came into view over the horizon, and danced into flight. Translucent, they captured the daylight like prisms and flashed brilliantly. The horde traveled quickly then overshadowed the whole place.

In the horde's passing, a pleasant moisture fell to the ground. Then everything it touched absorbed it, including the trees. But in the creatures' passing over, the vision also passed.

Z'jhi and A'ezl woke up from their sleep. As they did, they knew they had just experienced something extraordinary. Something they could never have simply imagined.

Did they see some things on Fifth Vallzyg? Did they get a glimpse of the spirit of the X'Anj? Did they share a bit in the spirit of the L'Anj? If true, no other outsider had ever done even one of those things. But, in any case, what an unforgettable vision!

Awake now, someone else requested their attention. Ahn-Ket'h and the Station Masters prompted them. It was time for the trip to get underway.

They went with the X'Anj to the ziyner initialization module. They followed the Station Masters instructions and took their arranged places. Now they were ready to take the leap, from their world to the next.

In little time, Eyljya would begin hosting them as welcome guests, even indefinitely, if they liked. And in that process the possibility existed that they might stay. They might even find a new home on the planet.

Whatever the case, staying or not would remain unclear, until much later on. Admittedly, they were eager to join Ahn-Ket'h in the ziyner for transport. But time would attest to their truest intentions.

The ziyner module operated flawlessly, opening a jump connection. As it did, all three were whisked, in another instant, to the receiving gate on Eyljya. At last, yet in no time, they arrived.

Z'jhi and A'ezl found themselves fully present in the moment. They even felt refreshed, and at first, barely noticed the dozens of Eyljyans around them. They were there to eagerly greet and welcome them.

When a warm night wandered in, he settled down. Peace and solitude seemed to speak loudly, in the muted surroundings. Later on, Lynx truly relaxed, drifting off to sleep. Then he dreamt of a young woman he met in college. Someone, who may have won his heart, already.

The night deepened, and the sky grew cluttered with stars. Then something stirred the young man, waking him up. It was enough to shake him from a deeply sound sleep.

It was deeply unsettling. The earth shook under his encampment. The plant life around him seemed to quiver, uncontrollably. Above, the sky grew bright, then darkened.

Something blotted out the stars. By that time, Lynx stood in full alarm, his heart pounding. A part of him wanted to shriek, as he realized everything went wrong, somehow.

He lost his footing and dropped to his knees, as the land quaked. It was as if the land itself...was terrified. Then he asked himself, "If the land is afraid, how can I not be?!"

The Earth that Lynx had always understood as an endless source of stability, continued to quake under his feet. And the quaking did not lessen. Instead it grew stronger.

Lynx began to fear that at any moment, the land would literally split open. He tried to head back home, but he hardly made it past the bluff where he had slept. Then, while the ground was not splitting open, was something else about to?

Lynx could only describe what he saw next, as the sky splitting. It 'opened up' over the lofty peaks, astride the northern horizon. Then the opening grew wider, stretching like a huge mouth about to devour the world!

The last thing Lynx remembered seeing, in horror, was the lofty peaks exploding, shattering into millions of fragments. What happened after that could only be described as planet-wide upheaval and utter devastation. In the process, some continents sank. Some sea floors rose.

Lynx fell unconscious, having been struck by a sound wave. It was generated by the massive destruction. He no longer knew what was happening around him.

Lynx's destiny did not lie amid the oncoming destruction. Although as great quantities of every kind of debris, and people were 'sucked up' into the sky's 'mouth,' so also was Lynx. He became lost forever to the home, even the world he knew. But then, the world he knew...was already gone.

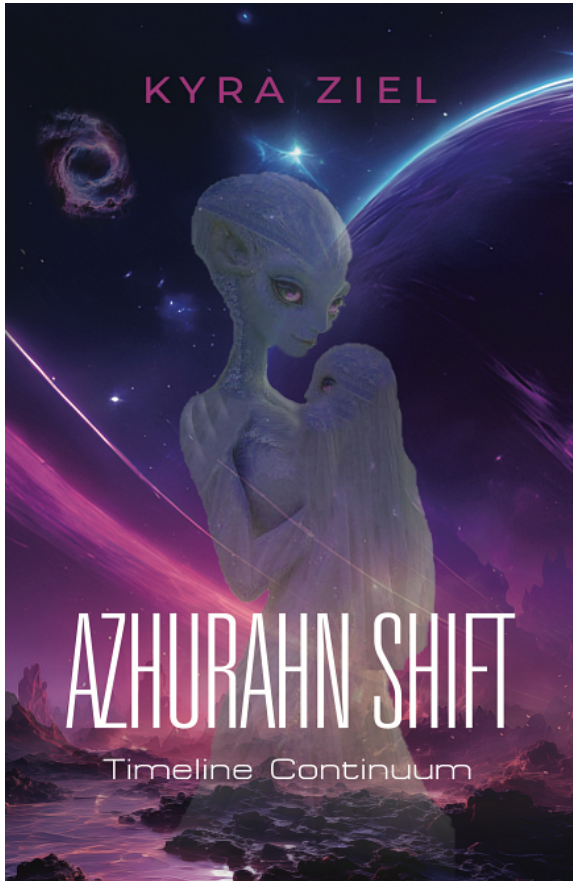
Still alive, somehow, Lynx regained consciousness gradually. As he came around, he could barely see, having extremely blurred vision. He also felt incredibly groggy.

Hours may have come and gone, for all he knew, before Lynx could think again. Then he felt a gash in his leg and one on the side of his head. A little to his relief, though, soon afterward his vision improved.

In understandable trepidation, he took a look around. As he did, he started to wish he had not survived. Then that wish changed, into a realization that he faced the greatest challenge of his whole life, past, present, or ever to come.

Nothing was the same! Plant life, everything different. On top of that, he seemed to be in some kind of weird jungle. At the same time, his head throbbed relentlessly, reminding him of how the Earth itself rumbled, before he had collapsed.

The thought caused sheer panic to rise in Lynx. It made him feel unable to move. He tried to fight it. Then, before he could conclude



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