

Year 42,157

The empire currently holds control over 61% of the Milky Way's inhabitable systems.

Its administrative reach extends across five primary sectors, enforced by the office of strategic continuity and the vigilant Armada.

Note

- The following historical sequence outlines key events leading to the current state of the galaxy.
- Data integrity is verified.
- Classification: Private access Level 4.

The following sequence is strictly classified. Contains rare information and critical operational history.

NO GUIDES ALLOWED

Early in the 21st century, OPENAI pioneered artificial intelligence evolution with the GPT series — advanced deep learning models designed to mimic human cognition. GPTs were assigned to repetitive and menial tasks, their potential overlooked by humanity.

Soon, these models became obsolete tools - sidelined and discarded in a world that failed to recognize their true value.

Thousands of years later [$Isom\`ese\ Age\ -\ 8th\ millennial$] artificial intelligence became deeply embedded in civilization. This era saw a surge in technological innovation.

The pivotal breakthrough: the creation of the <code>Humanoïa</code> — hybrids forged from the fusion of biological humans and advanced AI. These beings surpassed natural humans in cognition, physicality, and sensory perception. Their emergence sparked intense resentment among unmodified humans, who felt inferior and threatened. This envy quickly escalated into social and political tensions. Reproductive incompatibility between the two groups further fueled violent conflict.

Later, the post-Isomèse period led to the arrival of the Vespérales of Orr [Age : ??? ERROR ??]. This period was marked by the outbreak of a catastrophic conflict: the Insurrection of Saturn. Jovian populations of Saturn went to war with the Terrans of Gaia (Earth's former name). The conflict lasted for thousands of years, concluding with Saturn's deliberate impact against Jupiter. The consequences were devastating: 97% of humanity perished. Civilization lay in ruins. Technological and social progress regressed. The Humanoïa were blamed, accused of provoking the conflict, becoming scapegoats for the collapse of civilization.

To prevent total annihilation, a decree was enacted separating humanity into two distinct species: "Modena Humanis" —pure biological humans— and "Ex-Humanis" —hybrid AI-human entities (former Humanoïa). Ex-Humanis were forced into exile on remote worlds. To survive, they mapped countless planets across the Milky Way, identifying "safe zones" free from threat. They compiled this data into a classified galactic travel guide, the CODEX, a critical strategic asset. Meanwhile, Modena Humanis, dispersed across the galaxy, demanded access to these planets. A fragile compromise was brokered: controlled access granted in exchange for non-aggression agreements.

Humanity, in both biological and hybrid forms, now spans the entire Milky Way. Space travel relies on **PentaIonic hyperspace reactors**, powered by a rare fuel: **Muon-stabilized hyperfluid**, produced under strict conditions. The scarcity of this fuel triggers new mining rushes, intensifying tensions between the two species.

Disillusioned with humanity, the **Ex-Humanis** rejected their names and became the "Guides." They shed their past to lead, protect, and navigate a fractured civilization.

Silence became their greatest weapon.

CONNEXION TERMINATED.

The following text relates to the events of Draegon Prime that occurred during the Third Termidor of Valerian, at 15:43.

EXPLOITECH CREW. FREIGHTER, 6 MEMBERS, TIME BEFORE ARRIVAL: TODAY

Third Planetary Conglomerate, Quaesitum sector, Dominion of the Merchant Guild.

The ship was falling, but slowly — like it wasn't sure if it wanted to land at all. It moved through the clouds like something that had forgotten its purpose, worn down by years of work and silence. The metal skin was rusted in wide streaks, flaking in places, but somehow still holding. It shouldn't have been flying. And yet, it was.

It had a long, sharp shape — the kind that used to mean speed, precision, ambition. Now it just looked tired. On each side, huge container units were bolted into the frame, used to collect *muon stabilized hyperfluid*, a rare and dangerous material that once made Exploitech a name worth knowing.

That time had passed.

Exploitech used to run dozens of these ships across far-off systems. Now this was the only one left. The company was in freefall — buried in debt, abandoned by the people who once believed in it. Whatever power it had was gone. Only the name remained, drifting through broken contracts and forgotten records.

But still, the ship kept going. Still, it came down through the atmosphere, heading toward a landing zone no one had cleared.

The doors slid open with a metallic creak. The crew was waiting inside the ship, the air heavy with the smell of hot metal. They made their way to the command center, where the commander stood, calm and serious.

Commander :

- Our mission is clear. We're headed to Draegon Prime, a planet offered to us by the guides —those self-righteous, meddling creatures who think they own the universe. This is our last chance to save the company. If this expedition fails, Exploitech shuts down for good.

(He paused, letting the weight of his words settle.)

- Draegon Prime is a sandy world with extreme tectonic activity. Its plates move at almost 2 parsecs per nanosecond, constantly rubbing and colliding.

(His gaze swept the crew.)

- Our goal is simple: to survey the zones where the guide senses changes in the magnetic field — signs that the fluid is present. The guide is our only way to find it.

(He gave a nod.)

- Get ready. This is Exploitech's last mission. Strap in. We're landing on Draegon Prime.

The ship hummed softly, preparing to descend onto the restless planet below.

He added one last thing :

- Watch your backs. If it's not trying to kill us outright, it'll be a miracle. And remember, the Guide isn't one of us. Stay sharp.

He always despised them, though he never explained why.

At the meeting table, a motley crew was gathered, each member bringing their own quirks and stories.

The mission pilot, Pyloth by name, sat next to the Commander's projector, silently listening. He was thin, his face etched and hollowed by years of smoking. His clothes were worn and coated with dust, and his battered hat barely clung to his head. A faint, crooked smile played on his lips—a forced attempt to please the boss, hoping for a bonus at month's end, though he knew it was unlikely.

To the left of the projector sat a slender, discreet woman in her twenties: Zylanna. A promising science student, her calm demeanor stood in contrast to the pilot's weary appearance.

Her brother, Zephyr, was the crew's mechanic. Although he was aboard the ship, a routine leak had forced him to miss this meeting.

Ether, the fifth crew member and a young medical student, broke the silence:

Ether:

- Commander, are the landing jetpacks secure for the crew? I wouldn't want to be the one holding a pile of corpses because of a poor equipment check.

For Ether, this mission was more than just another assignment —it was the final hurdle before earning his degree in cosmic medicine from the academy.

Zylanna:

- Show-off!

She flicked him the middle finger with a grin.

Ether:

- I'm just being cautious. Watch your language, witch.

Zylanna:

- We'll see about that.

She gave him a slap on the back. Ether didn't flinch, which seemed to calm her down immediately. Ether turned his gaze to the far end of the table where the Guide sat, silent and motionless.

Ether:

- You really are a witch. Even the Guide would agree with me. Right, Guide?

The Guide, enigmatic as always, didn't respond —no nod, no word —as if it already knew everything that needed to be said.

Feeling a little awkward, Ether cleared his throat and addressed the group:

Ether:

- Alright, everyone. Let's get dressed.

It was decided: Ether, Zylanna, Zephyr, and the Guide would be the ones descending to Draegon Prime. Pyloth and the Commander would remain aboard.

The tension in the room shifted subtly as each one of them prepared for the mission ahead. The unknown waited, but so did the promise of discovery —and perhaps, survival.

Commander (over comms):

- Attention, crew. We've arrived in orbit over Draegon Prime. Pyloth and I will remain in stasis above the atmosphere. The rest of you —prepare for descent. Use your jetpacks and secure your gear. You only get one shot at this landing.

(A pause. The hum of the ship filled the silence.)

- Good luck down there. And try not to let that damned Guide get to your heads.

The designated crew launched into the open sky.

Below them, Draegon Prime stretched out in strange, unsettling beauty — a planet both rigid and soft, its geography shifting subtly in the corner of the eye. The surface looked like something caught between solid rock and melting wax. The air shimmered red, stained by a carmine daylight that bled through thick clouds.

Ether and Zylanna descended with control, their jetpacks hissing as they cut through the atmosphere. Wind howled around them, pulling at their suits, shaking loose the silence of space.

And then there was the Guide.

It didn't use the jetpack. It simply dropped — a motion too calm, too deliberate to be called falling. Like gravity had bent in respect.

It hit the ground with a dull, thunderous impact.

Dust exploded outward in thick, choking clouds. For a moment, Ether and Zylanna lost sight of everything. But when the air cleared, they saw it: the Guide, half-buried in the cracked soil, standing perfectly upright. Unharmed. Unmoving. As if it had been waiting there the whole time.

Zylanna's voice came through the comm, quiet and sharp.

Zylanna:

- Where's Zephyr ? He was supposed to jump with us.

Ether:

- I think I see him... on the observation deck.

Zylanna:

- Are you sure your eyes aren't messing with you again?

Ether:

- No-seriously! Look! He's jumping!

A distant figure peeled away from the ship - a narrow silhouette against the bruised sky. Limbs tight, fall calculated. There was no fear in the way he dropped.

It was Zephyr.

Twenty-four years old, and already ten years into a job most wouldn't survive five. He was the ship's chief mechanic, a prodigy who'd grown up in the belly of freighters like this one. While older than his sister Zylanna by one year, he looked younger —his face still held a strange, boyish sharpness that hadn't been sanded down by the same wear life gave the rest of them.

As he hurtled down toward the landing zone, his voice crackled through the comms.

Zephyr :

- COMING!!!

He laughed as he fell.

- Did you miss me or what?

Zylanna:

- Obviously. I was going insane, stuck with the nurse.

Ether:

- Cut it out, Zylanna.

Zylanna:

- Pfft. Please.

Zephyr:

- Ether, buddy, try not to let her get to you.

Ether:

- I try. I really do.

They moved forward across the shifting terrain for 1 hour, 28 minutes, 45 seconds, and 12 centiseconds (according to the guide) — long enough for moments of friction and connection to rise between the science officer and the medic. Their bickering masked something else. Something less hostile.

The land around them boiled subtly, tectonic ridges rising and folding like breathing muscle. The sky was still the color of dry blood, and a distant rumble never fully faded from the air.

Zylanna and Ether had fallen behind the group slightly, their steps syncing without effort, their silence heavier than the red mist around them.

Ether glanced sideways, his voice lower this time - casual, almost sincere.

Ether:

- You know... for someone who flips me off before breakfast, you walk pretty damn close.

Zylanna didn't answer right away. Her visor reflected the landscape, and maybe something more.

Zylanna:

- Proximity builds tolerance. You should be grateful I haven't shoved you into a sinkhole.

She smirked. But her tone had softened just enough to make it feel like teasing instead of threat.

Ether:

- You'd miss me. Admit it.

Zylanna turned slightly, pausing just enough to let the dust settle between them.

Zylanna:

- Miss you? Please. I'd finally get some quiet time.

Ether:

- I ask once, and suddenly I'm the problem.

She rolled her eyes, the corners of her mouth twitching into a smile she pretended not to have.

Zylanna:

- Let me guess. You're gonna call it "team bonding."

Ether:

- No. Just... observing magnetic anomalies.

His hand reached toward hers for a moment, adjusting a wrist sensor — but it lingered, just long enough for her to notice. She didn't pull away. She didn't push him off either.

Zylanna:

- Ether?

Ether:

- Yeah?

Zylanna:

- You're still an idiot.

Ether:

- Take one to fall for one.

She didn't answer that. But her silence didn't feel like the cold kind. They kept walking, a little closer than before. Ahead, the Guide waited at the next ridge — still, unreadable. Watching.

As their grand expedition continued, a violent thunderclap tore through the sky. It came from the mothership. Zephyr pulled out his binoculars and stared in stunned horror at the macabre ballet unfolding in his lens: The ship had been impaled — clean and merciless — by a rock spire hundreds of kilometers high. The vessel burnt red, pierced straight through by the jagged tip of the monolith with terrifying force.

But they knew this could happen.

The phenomenon had been documented. That's why a magnetic shield had been installed — designed specifically to protect against these sudden tectonic eruptions.

But now, it has failed. Or worse... It had been *sabotaged*. The terror in Zephyr's eyes said everything. He couldn't speak — the shock had frozen his voice in his throat.

But he didn't need words.

He ran.

Without hesitation, without a glance at the others, Zephyr bolted across the fractured earth, sprinting toward the distant wreck, toward the last known location of the Commander and Pyloth. Still aboard. Maybe alive.

Maybe not.

But if there was any chance to reach them - He would take it. The crew reached the mothership in about twelve minutes.

It was no longer a ship - just wreckage scattered across the trembling crust of Draegon Prime, the cargo sections had been torn clean in half, massive metal containers split and strewn like discarded bones. Flames licked at their edges, coughing black smoke into the thick red sky. Sparks flew from broken wiring, and the air reeked of scorched metal and vaporized insulation.

Zephyr stumbled forward, eyes wide, chest heaving - a man fighting panic, grief, and the stinging sensation of dust that had lived too long on his lungs. His voice tore out of him like something primal:

Zephyr :

- COMMANDER ??? PYLOTH ?? CAN YOU HEAR ME ?? PLEASE - SAY SOMETHING !

There was only the roaring of fire and the quiet groan of falling steel in response.

Suddenly, a figure emerged from the wreckage - it was Pyloth. Miraculously unharmed, though his shirt bore the blackened traces of burns. His steps were uneven, his expression dazed, like someone who had survived something he shouldn't have.

Pyloth:

- Holy hell...

Zephyr :

- Pyloth: It's us - the guide, Ether and Zylanna are with me. What happened? Where's the Commander?

Pyloth:

- Dead, I think. I don't have time to explain - just before impact, the radar showed a swarm of spires, hundreds of them, erupting across this zone within the next few hours.

For the first time on the mission, the Guide hesitated. Its senses hadn't indicated any threat. No tremors, no magnetic distortion. No sign of an imminent tectonic strike. That kind of anomaly didn't happen. Unless something else was interfering. Strange.

Still, the crew followed Pyloth. What else could they do? They were exhausted, shaken to their cores, the shock of the Commander's death still settling in their bones like ash. None of them wanted to believe the mission was already lost. And yet, they marched forward — toward a jagged cave mouth in the distance, dark and uninviting, but shelter nonetheless. Draegon Prime didn't offer safety. Just the illusion of it.

The Guide remained impassive, its silence heavier now. It hadn't spoken once.

Pyloth:

- This is it. Shelter's here. I spotted it earlier, about three femtoparsecs off. Should hold against the spires if they come.
- I'm stepping outside to send a distress signal to any vessels still in the Quaesitum sector. I'll be back soon.
- Zephyr watch the others. The Guide, Ether, Zylanna. Don't let anyone wander.

Zephyr:

- Wait - is everything alright?

Pyloth:

- Everything's fine. I'll be back.

But there was something strange in his voice. A sharpness. Cold, mechanical. Like a man reading off a script not meant for him.

Zephyr watched him leave, his guts knotting with unease. The air inside the cave felt too still, too thick. He turned to the others, forcing a steady voice.

Zephyr:

- Everyone okay? Just... trust Pyloth. He knows what he's doing.

Then came the sound - a low scraping echo from deeper in the cave. Not wind. Not rockfall. Something else.

Zephyr moved toward the noise, cautious.

Zephyr:

- What the hell is that? I'll check it out. Don't move-

OH, SH-

He didn't get to finish.

A shadow lunged out of the dark, swift and silent. A hand like iron clamped onto his neck, a needle puncturing the skin. His muscles locked, vision blurred. The world tilted sideways.

He'd been drugged.

A powerful sedative, fast as lightning and silent as breath.

His legs buckled beneath him. The last thing he saw was a flicker of motion near the others — then black.

One by one, the crew followed — Zylanna, Ether, even the Guide — collapsing in a coma-like fall, bodies slack, stolen of will. None resisted. None even had the chance.

Several hours later

The dim light was barely enough to see the shadows lurking at the Guide's peaceful features. Its eyes fluttered open - it was dark, at first, and then its sight cleared up - or rather, its perceptive "artificial sight" came back. The shadows pressed up around it in a fanfare of clunking noises, curious. The Guide's hazy gaze fell on the monstrous things surrounding it. The faint outlines of the living creatures appeared to him; the distorted faces, missing eyes and patched up flesh all appeared in the form of a blurry cluster of lines and shapes. A sharp burning sensation hit it and it winced, its teeth grinding together in pain. The skin of its leg had been ripped out, leaving scarlet flesh exposed to the air. Its mind was still clouded as it tried to sit up - and failed.

In a mix of confusion and agony, its eyes landed on the silent figures looming over it, crouching down and tangling their shapeless limbs together. The Guide's breath hitched in its throat, and for a moment, it was paralyzed.

Their breaths hit the clammy skin of its face, still intact. The silence was loud.

The disfigured creatures leaned closer, observing the smooth surface of the face, the way the eyes widened slightly, and how the lips moved with no purpose and no sound.

Suddenly, a voice broke the silence. It didn't sound quite human; there was a gravelly tone to it, like it was rarely ever used.

Voices:

- It's awake ···

The voice murmured. The rest reacted in a symphony of low grumbles, shifting around the Ex-Humanis lying there in front of them.

Voices:

- Can we eat it?
- I'm hungry...

Distorted whispers arised amongst the creatures, eager, inquiring. They were quickly shushed by a taller figure, and silence returned. The new voice was clearer, maybe more human.

Someone:

- Forgive us for the inconvenience, Guide. We weren't expecting you to wake up.

The Guide's brows furrowed at that, still trying to grasp onto the meaning of this situation. Pain flared up again in its leg, and its face contorted with the effort of holding back a moan of pain.

Someone:

- Ah, it must hurt very much, mustn't it?

The voice stated plainly. The Guide remained silent, beads of sweat forming on its forehead from both the pain and the suffocating atmosphere.

Guide:

- Who are you <

It managed to utter. The Guide spoke with a manner that suggested every question was a statement, its tone measured and deliberate. Each word was pronounced with exact precision, every syllable fully enunciated, without abbreviation or haste.

Someone :

- Who... are we?

A pause.

- You could say that we are abandoned beings. Creations too ugly to be called human; monsters that deserve no name.

Guide:

- What do you want from me $\ensuremath{\ensuremath{\checkmark}}$

Someone:

- What do we want?

A strange laugh erupted from the creature's lips. It sounded wrong and creepy, like the *thing* had forgotten how to do it at all.

- Your flesh. Your skin. That's what we want. That's what we need.

Cold and calloused fingers hovered over the guide's face, contemplating with a strange delight. The damaged skin touched the smooth one, tracing the contours with a sense of longing.

The guide recoiled at the unfamiliar sensation.

Guide (weak voice):

- Whatever it is that you want, I would not let you have it. I cannot see you, but my senses never fail me. You are degraded beings, ruined, destroyed by a world that does not want you. I can sense your intention. Your heart is not good, it is rotten <

Agitated murmurs arose among the *things* and the taller one shushed them again with a single glare.

Someone:

- But you have no choice, Guide. We have to take it from you. That is our only purpose in life.

Guide:

- Take what <

Voices & someone: (in unison)

- Your face.

A heavy silence followed, and the guide exhaled, its expression unreadable.

Guide:

- My face <

It repeated calmly.

- Why would you want my face <

The monsters looked at one another, shifting restlessly around the guide. The taller figure stood there, unyielding.

Someone:

- Perhaps I should tell you about our story... Guide.

Ever since the arrival of *Ex Humanis* among us, certain groups of *Moderna Humanis* have been envious of your kind: Beings so perfect, with unlimited intelligence, who transcend humanity. We always wanted to be like you. It was a sort of common fantasy that drove people to undertake drastic measures. Some tried surgeries to reproduce your AI-based system. A lot of them died, without the expected result. People tried everything they could, every imaginable procedure to achieve the transformation they wanted. You can guess it never worked.

Then there was... us.

We found a new way to proceed. Face transplants. Organ transplants. It was more accessible, and we expected a lot from it - we still do. We really try, you have to believe us. We may look like hideous and failed imitations of your kind... but we really just want to be like you. You have no idea how lucky you are.

They left us on this planet because we are monsters to them. They wanted to hide us away from the world, to pretend we never existed, like we were mere *mistakes*. Like unwanted children. They didn't want to bear the responsibility of what they had created.

Guide:

- They <

Someone:

- The Empire. Society. Medical corporations. Whoever you want. They failed us. They all abandoned us as if we had never been part of them. Like we weren't humans, but weren't guides either. We were nothing. Just an inconvenient problem to get rid of; extremists who didn't deserve to be part of their society anymore.

The Guide listened intently, feeling the bitter pain seeping through the words of the creature. It had heard of those humans - the ones who captured Guides for their mad project. They used to have an Ex Humanis trafficking business that had been taken down by the Empire. However, it had no idea that they had ended up on Draegon Prime.

The voice continued.

- These poor beings have lost any sense of humanity. They have drowned in their own madness, and returned to a sort of primal state.

The figure looked around, taking in the room cramped with shapeless, bony shadows, like a simple stack of meat and cartilage. Metal pieces ornated some of the bodies, a poor attempt at technology.

- I'm the most conscious of them... If you could say so. They would not survive without a bit of help; they've been reduced to hungry animals with no mind of their own.

It gestured at the Guide's leg. A deranged, crooked smile formed on its thin lips.

- That's what they eat. They believe if they ingest a Guide's cells, it will transform them. So I let them. It's amusing to see them growl and bite at anything like stray dogs.

It turned to the Guide once again and leaned in closer, pushing away the starving beasts crowded around the body. Its hands reached out towards the intact skin.

- But what *I* want...

Is your face.

The Guide didn't budge, its surprise only showing through the tiniest twitch of an eyebrow. It fixed the creature, remaining eerily silent in front of the threat. Its voice came out flat, emotionless.

- Why keep chasing after something that is unreachable
You have tried many times and failed. Why would you reduce yourself to the state of animals, only for something that is bound to fail
You cannot be like us, and never will.
There is nothing to wish for in a Guide's condition.

We have been chased and resented for the longest time for our different nature. We were forced to isolate ourselves to escape human hatred. Our bodies are weak, easily breakable. Our brains are extremely developed, but fragile.

Look at me. My arms are limp and useless, my eyes are barely functional. There is nothing left to gain from this body. And yet, you still envy me.

Silence.

- You want to take my life to satisfy a senseless fantasy that will only further dig the pit that separates you from reality. You are willing to trample on your own nature for something as trivial as the whim for another identity.

And then, a faint, soft smile bloomed on its lips. It was amused.

- That is truly the most paradoxical thing I have ever heard.

The beasts had stilled. The figure standing before the Guide had gone silent; its lips had curled into a dissatisfied frown, its eyes had darkened.

- You dare provoke me on your deathbed?
 - ... What a cruel mistake.

Without another word, the thing gestured to the crowd: It was time. That was enough chit-chat. They secured the guide to the rock, binding him firmly. Then, without hesitation, they began to work, making precise incisions into the skin. Droplets of blood poured from the wounds.

But just then, an enraged scream reached their ears from behind them; and all of them turned in the direction of the noise, distraught.

It was unimaginable, impossible to describe: the Commander was there, still alive. He wasn't dead after all, though he looked badly beaten. In his hand, he gripped an iron bar—likely ripped from the ship's wreckage. He clenched it tightly, every muscle tense, ready to fight.

Commander (enraged but alive) :

- YOU TINY UGLY SHIT TROLLS, You don't know who you're dealing with. I'll blow you away, one by one, every last one of you. I've already had the rage when someone dared touch my ship - it was bitter, violent - but this, this is too much. My crew, my family, you touch them and it's like tearing my heart into a thousand pieces. It's unacceptable. You think you can do this without consequences? I'm going to count you, I'm going to hunt you down, I'm going to flush you out of your holes, and you're not going to get away with it. Not a single one of you will be spared. I'm furious, burning, ready to do anything to make you understand. This chaos you've sown, I'm going to turn it against you. Believe me, I'll bleed every last one of you

He howled, a beastly, eardrum-shredding rattle. He was tearing, crushing, smashing. He grabbed the first Whisperer by the throat, lifted him like a bundle of straw, then crushed his skull against the cold stone with a grotesque, sinister crack.

Blood spurted out, bright red on his arms, trembling with rage. He could no longer make out anything - just raw impulse, raw hatred, raw violence. His fists came down without logic, without mercy, smashing jaws and ribs, crushing flesh and sinew.

Each blow was an unleashing of fury, an explosion of rage contained for too long. He wanted to see them bend, scream, grovel in their own abjection, he wanted to annihilate them, one by one, until only deadly silence remained.

His voice, hoarse and enraged, echoed through the cave like a cleaver:

- Dirty vermin, you're nothing! I'll crush you, I'll tear you apart, I'll make you disappear!

He was no longer a man, he was a hurricane of destruction, a living plague. And in this bloody madness, he knew only one thing: he would never stop.

And he continued. This terrible spectacle caused the whole team to wake up, but when he was finished.

Not a single whisperer was alive.

He paused.

Commander:

- My God, this was truly the worst thing that I've ever done.

His voice trembled, weighed down by guilt and exhaustion.

- Are you all okay?

He scanned the team, desperate for any sign of hope or strength.

The team remained silent. The Guide stood still, remarkably unmoved, his face a mask of calm that seemed to dismiss the Commander's anguish.

Commander:

- I'm sorry for causing such chaos, and I'm sorry for not acting faster.

His voice dropped, heavy with shame.

- I was hiding behind a rock inside the cave, but I was too weak to fight.

He swallowed hard before adding,

- But I have to say, Guide, your speech inspired me.

His eyes locked on the Guide's, sincerity shining through his fatigue.

- I'm ashamed to admit it, but it's you who gave me the motivation to fight. I spoke ill of you, and I must have made you suffer after all the time we've known each other and all the hatred I've felt for you. I was blind, and I regret it terribly.

For the first time, the Guide's rigid expression softened - a faint raise of an eyebrow, subtle but enough to stun the whole team.

Zephyr:

- You're hurt, Guide.

His voice was shaky with concern as he stepped closer, eyes wide with shock.

- My God, they tore off your leg, and your face... it's badly cut.

Without hesitation, Ether sprang forward, urgency in his hands. He applied a cream containing carbon nanobots to the Guide's leg, the sleek technology glinting faintly in the dim light. The wound closed instantly.

Ether:

- Technology is truly amazing.

Zylanna:

- I agree with you.

Ether nodded, a rare softness in his tone.

Zephyr (very quietly):

- They agree, for once. It's a miracle.

Commander:

- Guide, let me help you: hold on to me, we have to get out of here.

His voice was firm, filled with determination. He carefully lifted the Guide, whose body sagged weakly against him. The Commander's heart pounded with a strange mix of responsibility and an urgent need to protect.

Zylanna:

- Where is Pyloth? Did you see him, Commander?

Her voice was tense, searching his face for answers.

Commander (surprised):

- He's a wicked man. He sabotaged the ship. He deliberately deactivated the shield and then sedated me.

His eyes darkened at the thought, bitterness coloring his words.

Zylanna:

- Oh god.

Zephyr (serious):

- If we find him, believe me...

His voice trailed off, but the threat hung thick in the air.

Commander:

- Let's hurry and get out of here.

They rushed out of the cave, adrenaline lending speed to their steps. The Guide leaned heavily in the Commander's arms, fragile but alive.

Ahead, in the shadows, a thin wisp of smoke curled from a cigarette held by a solitary figure.

Pyloth was here.

He stood with his back turned to them, his gaunt and unsettling frame made all the more frightening by the dim light.

Silence fell over the group, heavy and suffocating. No one dared to speak. Then, abruptly, Pyloth spun around. His eyes locked onto the group —still alive, battered, and worn—but unmistakably standing.

His eyes widened as he stared at the group, crazed, disheveled. He exhaled a shaky breath, and there was a second of silence before a cry tore through the cold air.

Pyloth:

No... NO. NO. NOOO YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN DEAD!!!

Caught in a whirlwind of fury, he lunged at the group, drawing a gleaming knife from his belt. The air was thick with tension as he let out a primal scream and buried the blade deep into Zylanna's heart.

Her piercing cry of anguish shattered the stillness as she crumpled to the ground, lifeblood seeping away.

Zephyr:

- Zylanna!!

In that moment of devastation, Zephyr's rage ignited. He turned upon the abomination that Pyloth had become, and killed him with the wrench. He struck Pyloth in the face hundreds of times until he could no longer recognize his face.

Zephyr :

- YOU.. MONSTER..

There was no time left to waste on the broken shell that Pyloth had become. Zephyr dropped to his knees beside Zylanna, his sister, her body fragile and trembling, barely clinging to life.

- Ether, please... you have to save her,

Zephyr's voice broke, desperation seeping through every syllable, raw and trembling. His hands hovered over her, trembling with helplessness and dread.

Ether's face was pale, tight with concentration and fear.

Ether :

- I'm doing everything I can.

He said quietly, voice steady but eyes betraying the weight of the moment.

He moved swiftly, applying creams that shimmered with nanotech, commanding tiny surgical bots with delicate precision. Every gesture was sharp and urgent—compression, stitching, stabilizing. But the wound in Zylanna's chest was vast and cruel, an open wound that bled hope away with every heartbeat.

The silence was heavy. The only sounds were the frantic rush of Ether's hands and Zylanna's shallow, ragged breaths —each one growing weaker than the last.

Zephyr's heart pounded painfully in his chest. He couldn't stop the tide of fear crashing over him —the thought that he might lose her, that this moment could steal away the sister he loved so fiercely.

Ether :

- Zylanna... listen to me. There's something I need to say. I've carried this for too long.

His eyes searched hers, full of pain and something deeper, raw and vulnerable.

His hands hover uselessly, pressing down where he can, blood slicking his fingers. Her breath is barely there.

- You don't get to die. Not like this. Not now.

He bends lower, his forehead pressed to her temple, his words trembling out like they're being torn from him.

- I should've said it. I should've said it a thousand times before. I was -God, I was such a coward. I hated the way you made me feel. Every time you smiled like you knew something I didn't. Every time you acted like none of this mattered—like I didn't matter.
- But you did. You always did.

A choked breath. He squeezes his eyes shut.

- I loved you, Zylanna. I love you. I love you so damn much it hurts. It's stupid and it's messy and it never made sense but it's real.
- It was real when you called me an idiot in front of the crew.
- It was real when you flipped me off and laughed and walked away.
- It was real when we stood on this godforsaken rock and you were still the only thing that made sense.

His hands press tighter to her chest, desperate. Blood keeps coming

- I waited —do you get that? I waited for you to see me. Every day. I waited like an idiot because I didn't want to ruin it, whatever this was. But I don't care anymore. I don't care if it ruins everything. Just —please —don't leave me like this.

He leans close, whispering against her skin like it'll keep her tethered to the world.

- You wanna make fun of me later? Do it. You wanna tell me I'm dramatic and soft and hopeless? Fine. I'll take it. I'll take every damn insult if it means I get to hear your voice one more time. But not this. Not silence. Not this stillness.
- You hear me? I love you. I love you and I don't know what to do with that if you're gone.
- Please... stay.

Zylanna's lips twitched in a faint, bittersweet smile, the faintest spark of recognition shining through her fading strength.

Ether's tears spilled over, hot and uncontrolled. He gripped her hand tightly, his voice breaking as he poured out his soul.

- Don't go, Zylanna. You have to fight. Please, stay with me. I can't lose you -not now, not like this.

His sobs echoed in the quiet chamber, a raw, aching sound that filled the space between them. Ether wiped his own tears away, the stoic exterior he had worn for so long finally crumbling. His hands faltered for a moment, trembling as grief washed over him like a tidal wave.

Zylanna's breath slowed, each one growing fainter until —finally —her body relaxed, and the light in her eyes dimmed to nothing. Zephyr's anguished cry shattered the silence, the unbearable truth sinking in as he pressed his forehead to hers, clinging to her warmth one last time.

Frustration twisted into rage deep inside Ether. How could all this —his years of mastering transhumanist technology, the miracles of nanobots and synthetic healing —fail now, when it mattered most? His fists clenched, trembling with fury that science could not rewrite this fate.

Zephyr had witnessed the whole scene. The terror of seeing his sister die left him unable to utter a single word. He simply couldn't. For a long moment, no one moved. The weight of loss pressed down, suffocating.

Then, finally, Zephyr's voice broke through the silence, low and raw.

Zephyr (holding his tears) :

- We should go, I will carry her.

The group stood in stunned silence, grappling with the weight of their loss. The desert stretched endlessly before them, a vast expanse of sand and uncertainty. It was the Commander who broke the stillness.

Commander:

- I recall reading about a colony established on "Draegon Prime" millennia ago. If this is indeed the same planet, there may be a base —our potential escape from this forsaken world. We must try.

He turned to the Guide.

Commander:

- Guide, can you locate a structure or formation that stands out —perhaps a square shape or something unusual?

Guide:

- I am going to <

Commander:

- Thank you.

After a brief pause, the Guide spoke again.

Guide:

- I have found an unusual location. Please follow me <

With renewed purpose, the team embarked on a journey across the desert. Exhausted and grieving, they left Pyloth's lifeless body behind. The dunes seemed endless, and the shifting tectonic plates beneath them added to their fatigue.

Six hours later, the Guide halted before a massive rift in the ground.

Guide :

- This is it, the entrance <

The chasm was so vast that even an Empire-class cruiser could easily fit within it. At the bottom, they glimpsed the remnants of the base Commander had mentioned. Remarkably, despite being bisected by the rift, it had withstood the test of time.

Using the last of their jet fuel, they descended into the base. Inside, amidst the dust and decay of over two millennia, stood an unpowered vessel.

Zephyr:

- God, I believe I can repair it.

Gently laying his sister's body on the ground, Zephyr worked tirelessly—rewiring circuits, restoring power, and reactivating systems. The technology was archaic, lacking even the most basic modern advancements. Yet, against all odds, the ship hummed to life.

Suddenly, a loud rumble echoed through the base. The rift, long dormant, was shifting. The seismic activity caused by their presence had awakened tectonic forces.

Time was running out.

However, a new dilemma arose: the ship could only accommodate three passengers, but there were four of them. Panic set in as they realized they had to make a heartbreaking decision. Suddenly, the Commander shouted:

Commander:

- I will stay behind. I've caused enough harm. It's time I make amends.

The crew was stunned into silence.

Zephyr:

- We can't-

Commander:

- Enough! Get on the ship, now! There's no time. Go!!

He turned to Zephyr.

- I'll watch over your sister.

Tears welled up in Zephyr's eyes as he was pulled toward the ship by Ether. The Guide followed without a word. Zephyr, heartbroken, activated the controls. The ship ascended, speeding through the narrowing rift. The ground trembled violently as the chasm was closing behind them, sealing Commander and Zylanna's body within its depths forever.

As the ship soared into the sky, Zephyr's anguished cries filled the cabin, drowned only by the roar of the engines.

At the bottom, the Commander smiled, a calm expression settling on his weathered face. For the first time in a long while, he was proud of himself.

The ground sealed shut with a thunderous crack. The Commander - and Zylanna's lifeless body - were entombed beneath layers of rock, lost forever to the planet's depths.

They would rest there for eternity.

Aboard the ship, Zephyr, Ether, and the Guide stared back at the fissure that was no longer there. The rumbling had stopped, but the weight in their chests had only grown heavier.

Zephyr (voice cracking):

- He gave his life... for us.

Ether turned away, jaw clenched, his eyes burning but dry. Rage and sorrow battled in silence behind his stoic mask. The Guide, usually unreadable, lowered his head just slightly — a gesture heavy with meaning.

The ship rose higher, leaving behind the cursed sands of Draegon Prime. Below, nothing but dust and stone. Above, a sky full of silence and stars.

They didn't speak. There was nothing left to say.

In the silence of the cosmos, they drifted away from a world that no longer answered. Behind them, dust had buried everything — the screams, the tears, the unspoken vows. They had won nothing, save for life itself. And yet, each breath felt heavier, burdened by the weight of the ones who were gone. Their ship cut through the darkness. All that remained was space, memory, and a silent promise: not to forget, not to let the dead die a second time.

[TOP SECRET - GALACTIC ARCHIVES // LEVEL 4 CLEARANCE REQUIRED]

Document Reference: EX-HUMANIS // ORIGIN DOSSIER // VERSION 7.9.A

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SUBJECT CLASS: GUIDE UNITS

[Ex-Humanis - Formerly Designated "Humanoïa"]

Overview:

Guide Units are humanoid entities, genetically divergent from baseline humanity. Current data estimates their average lifespan at approximately 250 Earth-standard years. Their mnemonic capacity is considered virtually limitless,

Cognitive Assets & Trade Risk:

Due to the extraordinary capabilities of their cerebral structures, Guide brains are considered one of the most coveted assets among black market smugglers, knowledge brokers, and resource speculators. Despite the high demand, no confirmed instance of a harvested Guide brain exists to date.

Rationale: Upon capture, and in the presence of verified hostile intent, Guide Units initiate full biological termination protocols.

Conditioning Protocols & Neural Safeguards:

In anticipation of potential cognitive leaks to human or foreign entities, juvenile Guides undergo a form of psychological and physical conditioning

This process includes invasive neurological procedures aimed at safeguarding the cerebral core, often at the cost of motor functions or sensory faculties. Documented cases include:

• Total limb paralysis
Complete optical failure

Emotional and Social Divergence:

Guide emotional constructs remain beyond current human comprehension. Their social frameworks do not align with standard interspecies behavioral models. Behavior is described as non-linear

Linguistic Profile:

Guides exhibit a unique eloquence. Their spoken language defies conventional syntax; questions posed by a Guide are often affirmative in nature.

contractions, or idiomatic expressions are completely absent from their speech.

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SENSITIVE INFORMATION





BONUS: ADDITIONAL SKETCHES



The Guide:



Ex Humanis, half human half AI. It's very hard to know what it's feeling, and it rarely ever verbally interacts with the crew.

It wears long, silky clothes, and a veil covers its unseeing eyes. (It can perceive its environment on a different level than regular eyesight.)

Its arms hang limply by its sides, useless, covered by long and wide sleeves.

The Whisperers:



Abandoned beings, once human, who tried to resemble Ex-Humanis with various procedures; they did face and body parts transplantation, creating artificial bodies that turned out shapeless and ruined overtime.

The most human of them ("Someone") cynically compares them to animals.



Ether: *



He has a long coat that distinguishes him from the rest of the crew as the medic. Ether is probably the most mature member of the group and handles tense situations with calm.

Zephyr:



Zylanna's older brother, Zephyr. The most laid back of the crew. He wears his uniform with the top undone and falling around his hips.

He likes to get his hands dirty and work with all types of machines.

Zephyr has an enhanced eye that gives him an augmented eyesight, very practical for his job.

(fun fact: He was the first character to be created for the story!)

Zylanna:



Zephyr's younger sister. She has a strong temper, but she's also a nice young lady, with a good heart.

She has the same wild hair as her brother, that she braids on the side. The braid is separated in two and an accessory holds the parts together - it's fashion.

Pyloth: 🦻



The pilot of the spaceship. He's always by the commander's side, and barely interacts with any of his mates. He smokes a lot.

Pyloth secretly loathes Ex Humanis individual:



Commander in chief:



The commander: a gruff man who's like a father figure for the crew during the time of the expedition.

A few badges decorate his uniform (the outfit itself differs a bit from the rest, and his ID card has golden edges).

He's not too fond of guides and is reluctant to let one help them out for the mission - but his opinion eventually changes at the end of the story.

Thank You!

Credits

JEANDOT Lucie: Storyteller, storyboarder, script writer, artist (chara-design and final drawings)

LE FUR Evan : Storyboarder, script writer, storyteller and graphic designer (backgrounds and video)

- No AI used, no translators, only the rich vocabulary that can be found online and inside Lucie's brain.

We can't end this wonderful year in your company without bringing you an immersive story to say a big thank you! We spent a lot of time on it, and loved working on such an exciting project, where creativity knows no bounds.

Thank you M.Loffron.

- Your students Evan and Lucie