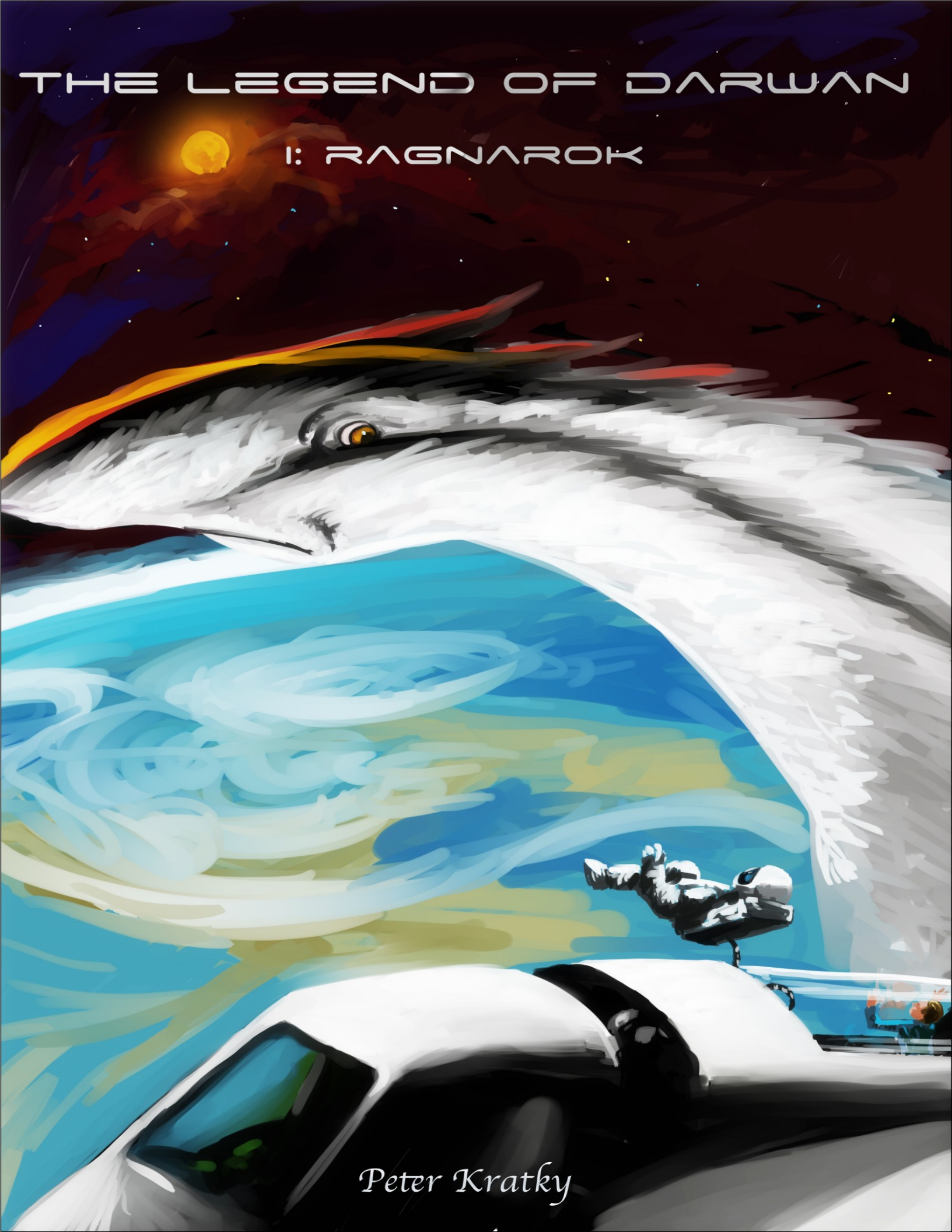


THE LEGEND OF DARWAN

I: RAGNAROK



Peter Kratky

The legend of Darwan I: Ragnarok

Author: Peter Kratky

Revised and extended edition.

ISBN: 978-1976838088

Cover: Antonio Rodríguez Cano.

A note from the author

This work was going to be one more of my short stories. Four to ten pages maximum. But a drawing of a painter friend caught my attention. Somehow, I connected the drawing (which is part of the cover page) to the end of my story, and the story began to change quickly.

Today this text has become the first part of a trilogy, with the general title “The Legend of Darwan”, this first part being “Ragnarok”, the name that in Scandinavian mythology is known as the end of the gods. This volume has two additional chapters compared to the original version, and a new and complete revision and correction of the text.

To thank my friend and companion Cano for his design, which was the basis that inspired this work.

Finally, this trilogy is part of the “Saga Aesir - Vanir” which will consist of twelve books, and some short stories detailing the next 4 billion years of human history in the galaxy. Four more books will finish the story. If I don’t die before of course.

First Spanish version. Barcelona, September 2013.

Second extended version. Barcelona, 21 March 2015.

First translation: Barcelona. January 2018.

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"Sometimes, you must pay a visit to Hell in order to get your ticket to Heaven"

(Helen Parker).

The encyclopedia.

Those who only fly with their wings will never be able to reach the sky (known as LauKlar).

Galactic Encyclopedia: The first species of the Galaxy.

... Research into the origin of life and consciousness is as old as the emergence of the first technologically intelligent civilizations. It is estimated that the original galaxy inhabited was created when the universe counted only a few hundred million years since the Last Reiteration. The first stars of type I, basically hydrogen and helium, without the presence of heavy elements, were generally gigantic, and this meant that the number of supernovae was much higher than in later periods, with less massive stars known as type II.

These first type I stars produced, at the moment of becoming supernovae, a large quantity of heavy elements, which allowed the creation of stars with less mass and greater concentration of these elements with helium weight, as well as planets formed in many cases by these elements, the so-called "rocky planets". Thanks to the longer duration of these type II stars and rocky planets (whose outer layers are made up mainly of silicates, water, iron, and carbon) the first living beings could be generated, and later the first intelligent species.

Archaeological data presented by different species have shown signs of life soon after the start of this stellar phase II, and intelligent life not long after. It can be inferred from this that the first worlds with intelligent life appeared in the Galaxy when it was about one billion years old. Since then, many intelligent species have been born, grown, and perished in the galaxy to this day. At present, the galaxy, known simply by the name of Galaxy, in capital letters, as a result of the fusion of two ancient galaxies known as

Milky Way and Andromeda, is coexisting with thousands of technologically advanced species. Of all of them, the LauKlars stand out...

Sand and wind

"It's too big! Much more than in the pictures!"

"Yes, it is. And it will grow much bigger, you can be sure."

"How far?"

"Until it occupies the whole sky."

"Will I be able to see it when I grow up? Kirak waved his wings up, a gesture of sympathy and fun."

"I don't think so, Nahr, at least not much bigger than it is now. It's got to be several hundred more years yet. But in universal time it is a moment." Nahr seemed saddened. "Wow!" He said at last. "I wanted to see it explode like a balloon!"

"Like a balloon?" Kirak laughed. "When it reaches its end it will shrink again, and leave a beautiful and wonderful halo of light around it. It is the usual cycle in the stars of the so-called Main Sequence. Like the photo I showed you the other day, remember the old photo, the one in the planetary nebula?"

"You bet!" cried Nahr, recalling that halo of bright light, which in the midst presented a small dying star.

As Nahr stared in amazement at the huge star, which spanned an area that over time had taken up an ever-increasing portion of the sky, someone approached him and watched him with interest.

"He's a very curious boy," he said, addressing Kirak.

"It is, as was his mother..." The words seemed to weigh as they came from the corners of his sharp bicentennial beak.

"I was very sorry for your loss. She was a good friend and a great colleague. Her research work was outstanding. And her admirable temperance and determination".

“Yes, but that's the way it is...” replied Kirak meditating. “We've always been exposed to these things, and when they come suddenly, you can never get the idea. After two hundred years together, I was part of my life. But I appreciate your support, Garrin. You've always been there, wing to wing, flying together, in the good times and the bad times...”

Garrin turned his left wing slightly in a gesture of approval and gratitude, revealing the soft, wavy front feathers. The old expression “flying together” contained an acknowledgement to someone for having been of particular help in a particularly important way. But in the case of Garrin and Kirak, the phrase took on a full meaning. They had worked together in the last one hundred and fifty years until they discovered the Original Planet, the one where the LauKlars had developed, before emigrating to conquer that quadrant of the galaxy. And they had flown literally thousands of miles together, doing research on more than two dozen worlds.

The Original Planet had become a legend in the last fifty thousand years, and its interest in knowing its location had grown over time. “I'll fly to our mother who saw us born” was an expression used since time immemorial. It signified, among other things, the desire to know the origin of their own existence, when in the course of time, many thousands of years ago, the LauKlars had abandoned their planet of origin for some cause hitherto unknown, a cause whose exact reason had been lost in the past. Rediscovering the world that gave birth to the species, after thousands of lost years, was a challenge, and its achievement an unprecedented success.

“You know you can always count on me,” Garrin said as he rested the end of his wing flat on the ground. That gesture was a sign of sincerity and camaraderie. “We're not just colleagues. We're friends. We've been through a lot. You and Blanrek were by my side when I needed you, and it's only fair that I'm by your side now.”

Kirak held a quiet, thoughtful moment, staring down at the floor, as if a spring of memories passed through his two brains. Blanrek had been a friend and a tireless companion. She never ceased her efforts to go beyond what others had gone to find the Original Planet, and much of the success

was due to her dedication and success. Finally, he raised his beak and exclaimed:

“Nahr, come on! We have to keep collecting samples! And you said you'd help us!” Nahr flapped his wings slightly and rose a few feet. His youth, only 58 years old, gave him enormous vigor, but even so he was overwhelmed by the experience he was living.

“Of course, I said it, and I will!” he answered enthusiastically, as he rose at full speed and then fell down, resting nimbly.

The three took flight and headed east on a fast flight of visual exploration at medium altitude, recording the area visually and with the help of an integrated scanner system. They were flying over an area that had once been a vast ocean, but was now reduced to a series of small lakes. Lakes that in a few decades, or at best some centuries, would dry forever. The life that once flooded this marine landscape had long since perished, and the remains of flora and fauna that many centuries ago populated those waters could be found everywhere, little by little that a skilled excavator sought with some tenacity. Only some bacteria were able to resist even in the few remaining humid areas, adapted to this heat- and windbreaking environment. To the LauKlars, anyway, that was a dead planet. They did not consider that bacterial life alone would grant a planet the status of a living planet. Bacteria always appeared whenever there was a minimal chance on a planet, and many planets did not get past that phase of microscopic life before it, for various reasons, disappeared.

Three years earlier, Kirak, Nahr, Garrin, and another two hundred thousand LauKlars (literally, “those who see the sky”) arrived on the old planet, which they called the Original Planet, in search of its most remote history. The world, once a verge of life, perished forever, victim of its star, turned into a red giant.

It wasn't the first time it happened. Since the origin of the universe, on the first planets after the formation of galaxies, billions of worlds had flourished from the first planets, and many of them had then been destroyed, and their precious life extinct, by turning their star into a red giant. In other cases, simply by the explosion of a nearby supernova. And in

others, by the action of very powerful gravitational fields caused by neutron stars and black holes. In others, brutal collisions of large bodies led to massive extinctions, sometimes with devastating effects. In other cases, the planet's tectonics were responsible. Thus, the case of the Original Planet was one in millions.

The LauKlars traveled on huge spacecraft, often trying to collect nearly extinct species to transport them to other planets, give them a new chance and allow old and nearly extinct ecosystems to regenerate. It was a work among the thousands they developed, but it was certainly one of the proudest of the old race. Also, if they found a planet fit for life and morphology, they could colonize it and turn it into a new home. The exploration vessels, such as the Yusimat T-102 from which Kirak, Nahr and Garrin came, were fifteen kilometers long by seven and a half kilometers wide and three deep. Other ships, those dedicated to transporting settlers to new planets, were more than a hundred kilometers long and in themselves artificial worlds, capable of accommodating millions of individuals.

The LauKlars had saved species of all kinds, including intelligent breeds in different stages of technological evolution, but unable to meet the challenge of fleeing a dying planet. In general, these species were collected in gigantic spacecraft of massive transport, up to three hundred kilometers long, and transported to planets where they could rebuild their lives.

But this case was different. This world was their world. Their home planet. The place from which the species departed. Finding it seemed like a dream, something basically impossible. But there were very few things that the LauKlars could not achieve if they proposed. It was a peaceful race dedicated to exploration and research, and one that would have naturally become extinct if it had not been for its advances in science. In fact, the LauKlars were sterile, and their diet was based on compounds of carbohydrates, amino acids, proteins, lipids, water, in solutions that allowed them a complete vital development and without nutritional deficiencies. All this is generated in hydroponic farms by creating artificial organic compounds. Not a single living being was employed in their natural

diet. For the LauKlars, life itself was untouchable. It could have been said to be sacred, if the LauKlars had any kind of religious belief. But it wasn't like that. Since ancient times, the LauKlars had understood that the universe was a self-contained whole, without the need for gods or mythological heroes of any kind. Although they themselves continued to refer to some ancient myths and rites that had remained alive in their mental and written language.

While the three LauKlars flew over the dry places of the Original Planet, Nahr, not without enthusiasm, but somewhat bored by the landscape they flew over, he asked:

“Is it all the time like this, so deserted, so arid?”

“It is,” Kirak replied mentally, as Garrin watched the area closely to detect any interesting details. The warm rays of the red sun were powerful and unforgiving, but the invisible protection of energy that enveloped Kirak, Nahr and Garrin allowed them to move freely during sufficient hours to carry out their work.

Nahr was the first to realize that something was shining in the distance. Soon Kirak and Garrin saw it too. They were the remains of a huge steel and glass structure, of an ancient civilization already extinct. Kirak exclaimed:

“Behold, there is the dome we saw from space.”

“I saw her first!” Nahr protested. Kirak and Garrin looked at each other with complicity.

“All right, all right, Nahr,” said Kirak. “We'll name this discovery after you. What do you think?”

“Great!” Nahr exclaimed.

“Never mind the species,” Garrin whispered to Kirak. “All young people are the same.”

“It's true. She has the character of her mother.”

“I won't question that!” Garrin replied.

As they altered the flight to the top of the structure, their sensors began recording data from what they were observing. Nahr was amazed at this work of megalithic dimensions, which undoubtedly would have belonged to a very advanced society, at least in the aspects related to architecture.

“Did these beings populate the planet before?” asked Nahr interested.

“Yes,” Garrin replied. “For what other groups have been able to find out in the days before our arrival, they were a species of the planet, with a name, after conversion to our language, which could be called as the Xarwen. A highly evolved bipedal anthropoid race of the saueropsides family, which was on the verge of discovering the physics of hyperluminal travel.”

“Sauropsides?” Nahr protested. “We too are saueropsides!”

“It’s true, at least in part,” Kirak replied as Garrin explored the area. “But their structure, as far as we could tell, was very different from ours. The closest word we have found is reptile. And apparently there was also a very ancient species, when the planet was much younger, which was similar in some way to reptiles and us, and which could have evolved into an intelligent form. But, as so often happens, a natural disaster prevented it. Some suspect that those beings may have a connection to our more remote ancestors. Anyway, we're still investigating.”

Kirak looked around as he continued his explanation. Nahr was absorbed while listening.

“Fine. According to the latest data we have obtained in other excavations, the Xarwen understood that, what are usually known as the laws of nature, are only derived from the basic structure of the universe, formed during what they called the Primordial Birth. They believed that this birth was the birth that gave rise to the origin of the universe and to such natural laws. They also believed that these universal laws, as such derived from the Primordial Birth, can be conveniently altered with appropriate technology. They understood that the values of the constants and masses that make up matter and energy have the values that correspond to a universe

determined by a specific configuration, but that this is only one of billions of possible combinations”.

“Kirak,” interrupted Garrin. “Come and see this.”

“I’ll be right there,” replied Kirak.

“Go on, Father!” Nahr demanded.

“Well, well... This step, understanding that our universe is one of many, and understanding it from a scientific, not metaphysical point of view, is usually given by many intelligent civilizations, but the Xarwen had begun to work in a practical way on the problem. Apparently, some of their knowledge was acquired from an intelligent civilization that previously existed on the planet, extinct when they had not yet developed superior intellectual abilities. But the Xarwen failed to finish their dream before they perished. As it happens so many times, the summit of its civilization was the point and end of its history. The final motive is a mystery.”

“Are we going to find out, Father?”

“No doubt, with your help, young discoverer.”

“I’m serious!” Kirak continued:

“I know, Nahr, but relax. This research work is usually slow. Patience is a virtue, remember that.”

“Yes, Father.”

“You should know that this planet has had at least one technological civilization before our own and the Xarwen’s during its history. The first of these was very, very old, about five billion years old, and they were similar in many respects to the Xarwen, but very different in many respects from others. They weren’t sauropsides, that seems clear. They called themselves “humans”, and are catalogued within an extinct group called “mammals”. It was a rather interesting species in some respects, although they have certainly not made history because of their merits.”

“And where are those humans?” Garrin smiled and intervened as his father continued to investigate the area.

“They're extinct, Nahr. They disappeared. In a process that the paleo-scientists call “death by technology”. It is a simple concept: a civilization develops technology, and that technology enables them to thrive. At one point, this same technology becomes the cause of its disappearance due to lack of controls and adequate scientific evolution. They perished long before they found other civilizations and developed the hyperluminal reactor. From the paleo-scientific point of view, they were a classic model of technological evolutionary failure. Technology is a powerful tool, but misused is a first class extinguishing tool. Moreover, their evolutionary model had led them to believe in fantasies of gods, and a very deep religious and mystical basis. With that background, it is very difficult for a species to survive and reach the stars. We also suffered a mystical phase, but we were able to advance and evolve in a satisfactory way and move away from those ideas. Not all species do.”

Galactic Encyclopedia: human species.

The human species developed on a planet they called Earth, about four thousand to four and a half billion years ago. The vestiges that have remained of this species are mostly indirect, obtained through the Xarwen remains that are still preserved on the planet and in other locations of the solar system. Apparently, it was a level-one technological species, which gained knowledge of the basic structure of matter, but failed to grasp the fundamental question of what they called "laws of physics.

The General Intelligence Algorithm classifies the human species at the lowest levels of technological intelligence, although it is hoped that new data can provide a better vision and knowledge of this species.

The Discovery

While Garrin was talking to Nahr about the architecture of the area and its main features, Kirak was reviewing his instruments with growing interest. The readings from the area indicated certain anomalies that could not be reconciled with the common remains of that civilization. Something was altering the results.

Kirak addressed Garrin, showing him a sensor indicating a strange signal detected:

“How about this, Garrin?” Garrin turned and looked with growing interest.

“It's very interesting. These readings didn't show up on the scanners from space. There appears to be a blockage limited to this area, and the instruments cannot make precise readings. I think Deblar could give some additional information on this data.”

“Do you think it's necessary to bother her about this?”

“I think so, yes.” Garrin quickly activated the hidden transmitter inside his ear.

Garrin confirmed:

“Copy that. Yes... We've detected a field that is only quantifiable at close range. Please review these data, they are not within the parameters and I believe that the readings may result in derived nucleotides and DNA/RNA strings, as well as protein memory n-grams.”

A long silence was heard, and Deblar finally answered:

“Correct” confirmed Deblar. As I see, and verified by the bioscanner, you are close to a biocomputer system, specifically designed for managing carbon-based structures, and designed to store records of a species. Specifically, with 86% probability, they belong to the species known as human beings. At least that's what I get from the initial reading. Remember, we have very little data on that species. Where did you get these readings?”

"In an ancient dome of the Xarwen. We watched them from space, but we hadn't made a search of the area yet. These structures are protected by a field that cushions the scanners at a certain distance," Garrin replied. "I'm sending you the coordinates now. I think we could investigate it in more detail."

"I agree," Deblar replied. "I'm going over there with a team."

As they spoke, Kirak had been triangulating the exact position of the reading.

"Apparently, the entire area is in a self-sustaining energy warehouse. As I see it has been conserved for at least three billion years, I suppose thanks to energy sources that must come from the same hot magma of the planet."

"Still, it's amazing it's still active!" Garrin exclaimed. "Three billion years is an impressive figure."

"Yes it is," Kirak confirmed, "but the Xarwen were a very advanced civilization, let us not forget. They had to equip the system with some self-sealing and self-repairing system, probably. They were durability experts. These same ruins bear witness to this. Anyway, we'll be right over. Deblar's on her way."

"Can I come with you?" cried Nahr enthusiastically.

"It's okay," Kirak replied, not very convinced. "But remember, at the slightest problem, you're flying away. Is that clear?"

"Yes, very clear," Nahr replied without too much belief in his own words.

The three departed in a gentle flight to the area indicated by the instruments. The energy released by the old maintenance system was modulated to be captured only under a specific and rotational pattern by a pseudo-randomized algorithm, but the LauKlars had overcome this type of masking strategies thousands of years ago. State-of-the-art detection systems could detect traces of energy and gravity fields of tiny size at the

edge of physics, even if they tried to hide themselves by imitating natural radiation patterns. In that case, it was not necessary; the signal was strong enough to detect it several hundred meters away clearly. However, it was invisible from a standard orbit.

They reached the area and settled down as they watched the surroundings. The area was converted to rust, but the old dome was still standing, thanks to an energy system similar to the one they were investigating, except that in the case of the dome the field was not coded, and had been detected from several light years away. Probably the field had been set aside for other purposes besides the dome support, and no one should have thought that this signal would lead to the other coded signal. Or maybe they had simply spent thousands of years between the two events. They could hardly ever know the truth.

But it didn't matter. At least not too much. Deblar arrived with the team of scientists who were studying the traces obtained in the area. Deblar had recently been promoted to Level One Supervisor, something that had not happened for centuries. Level one was only reserved for scientists of a truly exceptional level. Given the apparent importance of the finding they had just made, their experience and capacity were certainly much needed. Sometimes science finds itself faced with something unexpected that allows it to step forward where there was no hope. But the unexpected has to be sought, and Deblar had extensive experience in this.

The group began to move toward the source of radiation, while Kirak mentally ordered Nahr to wait in that area until any potential hazards had been cleared. Nahr seemed willing to refuse, but his father had been strict, and when his father was strict it was better to obey.

A radiation field concealed and hidden for thousands of years could have many surprises, be extremely unstable, and include traps for the curious. Deblar was an expert in this type of situation, so she would be the first to cross the area.

They entered through a narrow corridor that hardly allowed them to move and which had evidently been created for beings much smaller than themselves. Its ten meters of wingspan did not adapt well to closed areas,

created for beings two meters high. Of course, for those beings that small corridor would be a main entrance of considerable size. As so often happens, everything depends on the observer's point of view.

After the corridor, they reached a large underground room, and found that the emission field was right in the middle, over what looked like a control table. The room had been vacuum-sealed for millions of years, and protected from light and any external influences. In fact, even in such extreme conditions, it was surprising that the whole structure remained standing. The Xarwen had carried out a very high level of engineering work, which even the plate tectonics had failed to destroy.

They placed several spotlights that at the time illuminated the camera almost entirely. Meanwhile, Deblar started operating on the old control table. The minds of the LauKlars were able to introduce themselves into a bioinformatics system and understand its basic functionality based on the protein structures found in their operating system. Biocomputers were the technological pinnacle of many species, and LauKlars had long understood that, in one way or another, the search for the best solution led to similar technological solutions in most advanced civilizations, similar to the evolutionary convergence of species. Deblar commented on what she was observing.

“It is a classic molecular computer system based on protein models and artificial RNA structures, containing all process and data information. Coded in these molecules is the information we're looking for.”

“Can you get the information?” Kirak asked.

“Yes, they are partially degraded, but the system is redundant on five levels, and I can get the data without problems. I've connected the system to our biocomputer, which is tracing the functionality of the operating system. It's pretty advanced, no doubt. They did a good job here. Ah, we're beginning to read the information... Yes, interesting... Yes....”

“What readings are you getting?” asked Garrin this time.

“Basically, they are DNA and RNA molecules, diverse protein models, and memory n-grams of a basic level brain with deductive capacity belonging

to a mammal... And they correspond... Yes... Exactly, they correspond to the human species in its final phase, shortly before its extinction. However, these samples are virtually intact.”

There was silence among all present. Even their minds didn't speak for a few seconds. Kirak finally broke the silence.

“And what's a human database doing on a Xarwen computer?” Deblar reflected for a moment.

“I don't know. I can't explain it to myself,” Deblar finally replied as she stared at the data. “It is clear that this data was stored here for a very long time to be preserved, and they have managed to do so. Kirak, this discovery could prove a research work of the Xarwen of the species known as humanity. We have many details of the Xarwen, which we have been collecting these weeks from different sources, but, as you know, humanity is still largely surrounded by mystery. We know it's extinct, and we know it was the first technological species on Earth. But these data are revolutionary for two reasons: because they contain very detailed information on human specimens, and because they make it clear that the Xarwen had somehow found a way to obtain very elaborate information on an extinct species. And even their memory n-grams. Not only do we have humans stored in this Xarwen biocomputer; we also have their minds.”

Deblar gave mental instructions to her team, and they quickly began to extract all the information from the Xarwen database into their own systems. Deblar, meanwhile, addressed Kirak verbally, looking at him with astonishment. This discovery could be the most important of the LauKlar science in the last thousand years...

Galactic Encyclopaedia: Xarwen species.

The Xarwen were a race of engineers and architects superior to almost any other known in the galaxy. Their instruments and designs have not only withstood the passage of time in a staggering way, but have also adapted automatically to all the circumstances of the planet to continue to exist in perfect condition, long after the Xarwen species itself disappeared. The exact mechanism to achieve this is unknown...

... Although many data on this species are known, it remains unclear why they did not develop the hyperluminal reactor, which would have allowed them to leave the solar system and begin to populate the galaxy. Other sources however indicate that they did develop this technology, but disappeared without a trace for unknown reasons...

... The Xarwen designed protein and RNA/DNA-based biocomputers and bio-devices that revolutionized the history of species in the galaxy. Other species have developed similar technologies, but none of them so amazingly effective...

The decision

“Kirak, I need your permission. You're the expedition leader.”

“I can't believe what you're thinking,” Kirak reflected mentally, perfectly reading the idea that formed in Deblar's mind.

“It's the only way to access and get all the information from these biocomputers.”

“But you know that our program doesn't include this sort of thing, and it's not convenient. We're researchers, we're archaeologists. We investigate the past, we don't mix with it. They had their chance. Their moment. They are part of the planet's remote history.”

“I know,” Deblar replied, looking up and moving her wings slowly. “But this discovery is exceptional. It can open up new frontiers in Xarwen research. It is generally believed that they did not develop the hyperluminal motor, but how did they achieve sequencing, not only of human DNA, but also of their memory n-grams? This doesn't make any sense,” Deblar whispered mentally as he slowly lifted and lowered her wings, a clear sign of confusion.

“Do I need to have it?”

“The what?” Deblar asked, coming out of a sort of trance.

“Sense. Is it necessary for all this to make sense?”

“What do you mean, Kirak? We're scientists. You said it yourself. It all must make sense.”

“Do you really think so?” Kirak asked as he raised his wings. “We're archaeologists, and we're paleo-scientists. We investigate the technological and scientific past of extinct cultures. It's not an exact science. There will always be holes. There will always be doubts. To pretend to know the reality in its entirety is simply impossible, we could not in a hundred thousand years of research cover 100% of the knowledge of the past that we investigate. And now you come up with this? Bring back to our time

specimens who had their time, their opportunity, their moment? They died, and were inscribed in history as vestiges of a remote past. That someone or something determined to get their DNA and memory n-grams to store them is not our competence, nor should it be a reason for any foolishness. We can and must investigate what they do on the Xarwen biocomputers, but we must ask the remains before us, not them directly. They are part of the story. They cannot become part of that story.”

“It's 27, if you want to know the number,” Deblar said with determination.

“Twenty-seven, seventeen, seven, three, three, one... One would be enough to leave this subject as it is.”

“Kirak, the only sure way to find an answer to this puzzle is written precisely in the memory n-grams of this database. But n-grams can only be interpreted by the brain that created them. We need those brains. And those humans. With them back, we can directly ask them anything. Can't you see that? They'll be firsthand sources of information! We will bring ancient history to our times through their regenerated minds, and we will learn from them all that we can only speculate now!”

“Can't you simply regenerate mental structures and load the n-grams to read them directly? In one of our biocomputers you could recreate some of those brains in a virtual way, and try to read their minds.”

“I could, but it would take at least five years of work. And without a guarantee of success. Those brains were primitive, we don't know their exact structure, their neocortex was quite different from our brains. There are too many unknown variables.”

“Five years is better than regenerating those individuals,” Kirak said emphatically.

“Yes, but we don't know for sure what remaining stability the Sun has left. You know that in a normal process the Sun will slowly expand over several millennia, but it could also happen that in a matter of days it could expand violently and destroy what is left of the Earth. In that case we'd lose all the material still on the planet. And there may be a lot of secrets to discover... Besides, it's about our ancestors.”

“They are not our ancestors,” Kirak replied with displeasure. “We were not perfect, but we never reached the extremes of species such as humans, which were lost because of their eagerness for unlimited growth without counting on resources and means to grow in harmony with them. Not to mention the mystical obsessions of this kind of race. We had a slower development, but it has allowed us to expand across the galaxy and live with thousands of species, technological or otherwise.”

“In any case,” Deblar went on to say without paying attention to Kirak, “we must focus on the now. And now we have an opportunity to know what could be a discovery of a level that would modify the science of paleotechnology forever.”

Kirak, finally .and as expected, gave in. He was the leader of the expedition, but Deblar was an authority on the matter, and opposing it too much could bring him complications. In addition, 27 primitive and controlled individuals did not appear to represent a danger. After all, there were twenty-seven individuals of a primitive species, which would be isolated in a world incomprehensible to them. They would depend on the LauKlars for everything and everything. And perhaps they might even know secrets that would otherwise be buried forever.

Definitely, recreating human beings seemed a unique opportunity to explore the distant past of the original Planet, or Earth as they called it, directly and with witnesses from that time. Besides, Deblar would end up getting it, with or without his permission.

Galactic Encyclopedia: Red Giants.

... The main sequence, in which most stars are found, is much larger than that in which they develop most of their stellar cycle, and this leads to drastic changes in the entire system of celestial bodies in their orbit, especially on the planets. Klaye Narrekkum was the one who determined with precision the first physical-mathematical model that would allow to know the complete cycle of a red giant, and how to calculate the transformation process until becoming a white dwarf....

In the last two billion years, the number of red giants and white dwarfs has increased, as a result of the final consumption of many stars in the Galaxy's main sequence. The pace of creation of new stars has been falling more and more sharply, which is creating a Galaxy with fewer stars in its main phase. It is estimated that the current star creation rate is approximately 5% of the first two billion years of the universe, when there was the largest production of massive stars based on hydrogen and helium and that, in their conversion as supernovae, created the rest of compounds that populate many stars and current planets, as well as the creation of life based on carbon...

Only humans

Three weeks later, the sequencing of human nucleotides was complete, and the generation of individuals had begun. There were thirteen males and fourteen females, with no special characteristics in any of them. All memory n-grams were intact, and were reinserted and converted into memory proteins. For their comfort, they were accommodated in a large and comfortable living environment, where they could carry out their daily activities, whatever they might be. It was known that their brains only allowed voice communication, so no mental scanners were installed. Besides, it might have taken too long for such primitive minds to calibrate them.

Finally, the twenty-seven human beings were removed from ecstasy, once their accelerated embryonic development, converted into adults, and their minds activated, were completed. Several dozen LauKlars scientists, and other species, observed the process: the return to life of an intelligent species lost in time. Primitive beings and without any special characteristic, beyond the fact that, inside their brains, were found the stored memories of an epoch that had ceased to exist millions of years ago, when the Earth, as they called it, only counted half the present time, and when the LauKlars had not yet begun their evolutionary development from lower birds.

The attitudes of those humans, however, were not in line with what they expected, or at least not predictable for a mammalian bipedal species of its physiological and mental characteristics. They were locked in their space, without any interaction with the outside world, and had begun to try to find ways out. They spoke to each other heatedly and it was evident that their state was becoming more and more agitated. Their attitudes were inconsistent with simulations of their behavior patterns. They hit the walls hard. A LauKlar in that situation would have settled on one side and let time pass, taking the nutrients and water to which they had access. But those humans didn't seem to settle for anything. Something had to be done. And it had to be done soon.

Deblar, along with Kirak and his assistant Garrin, decided that the time had come to communicate with these individuals, these primitive “mammals”. If that communication was really feasible. Although certainly primitive, humans were intelligent beings, albeit on a limited scale, and were therefore entitled to know their status, according to the rules and laws of the LauKlars, which clearly specified respect for all sentient life. Of course, those laws had always referred to other intelligent beings of the same Era, not to beings at least three billion years old.

The great main gate where humans were housed was opened, and those early mammals were able to see a LauKlar for the first time, just as a LauKlar was contemplating, for the first time and directly, a human being. Two species separated by an ocean of time, each dominating the planet in its own time, were facing each other for the first time. Or at least that was the assumption.

Galactic Encyclopedia: interspecies communication.

The Galaxy is populated by several thousand intelligent species, understanding as such intelligence the concrete meaning related to technologically advanced species. Communication between these species has always been defined at four levels:

Level 1.

The mathematical level, in a first contact, is the one that allows basic communication, which is established by means of parameters modeled on simple concepts of algebra and calculation.

Level 2.

A second level is verbal-guttural language, but it requires both species to be able to emit sounds and to receive and process them, so that they can be common in order to build correct communication, as well as a language that both can understand.

Level 3.

A third system involves the use of a computerized automated information transfer system, so that each party understands what the other party communicates through an artificial device. This model is usually useful, once correctly configured, but requires the constant presence of this system among the interlocutors. Any malfunction leaves both parties without the possibility of communication.

Level 4.

The fourth system is direct mental communication. It is the most precise, but it requires that both species can share ideas with the mind. In this case, it has been discovered that the mental waves of many species allow the transmission of idioms, which are ideas and concepts that inform an interlocutor of something by means of a mental language. Languages are the preferred means of communication between members of the LauKlar species, although not the only one.

A bridge between minds

The humans seemed impressed. The large difference in size between the mammalian species and the LauKlars was evident.

"A dragon?" muttered one.

"Some kind of vitamin bird?" whispered another

"It's not a chicken, that's obvious," commented a third.

Humans retreated, though not much, separated as they were by an invisible protective force field. The bird on the right looked up at the bird on the left and sounded like a grunt or whimper. In fact, it was Garrin's mental commentary to Deblar accompanied by a guttural nuance that reinforced an idea, indicating that the blood pressure and pulsations of humans clearly showed restlessness and nervousness. Although inexperienced in human physiology, it was clear that the physical and mental tension endured by those primitive beings was very high. They had to calm them down, and do it right away.

Deblar replied, and again appeared what to humans were those incomprehensible sounds, which seemed the distant echoes of the hawk or eagle furrowing through the sky.

Deblar made the decision: they had to communicate with them immediately. In those primitive bipedal mammals were the answers to many questions she had been feeding in her mind, and it was time to start answering those questions. Clearly, she should use her mental capacity. Telepathic communication is direct between minds; it conveys ideas and concepts, not words, so although it is not a standard spoken language as the one known to humans, it incorporates many more nuances. Nor does it serve to read the human mind, due to the important structural difference and lack of exhaustive knowledge of these primitive minds. Only ideas that are formed instantly can be read by LauKlars. That's why she needed to speak directly with them, even with my mind.

One of those who seemed to have taken the lead stood before the others. Deblar would address everyone, but she'd look at that particular individual. Her eyes rested on her mind, and, curiously, this one, a female, although evidently surprised, did not turn away from her gaze.

The twenty-seven humans looked at each other, trying to understand where that voice came from within them.

“You mustn't be afraid, nothing will happen to you,” Deblar said. “It's me, I'm standing in front of you, and I'm communicating mentally with you. Your brains are fortunately on the frontier of development to receive my messages, and to respond. They're not for you to start a conversation. But you can always ask me to speak with you through mental gestures, that is, expressions of what you want to communicate with your minds, and thus initiate a mental conversation.”

Humans murmured some sounds in what seemed to be their strange language. A language made up of sounds emitted by their larynx, small muscular structures called vocal cords, and the manipulation of the sound wave with the mouth and tongue. It was undoubtedly a coarse but effective system for forming a rudimentary verbal language, as was the case with other lower intelligent species. The LauKlars had long since gone on to combine physical sounds with mental messages, in a system of extremely superior efficiency. Finally, a female from the group of humans took two steps and began to think about what she meant. Surprisingly for her, she saw that others could hear her thoughts. Not directly, but through Deblar's mind.

“My name is Helen, and I have been appointed spokesperson for the group by my colleagues.”

“Hello, Helen,” Deblar greeted, as she had seen humans doing when they populated the planet, in some of the fragmentary data on customs they had been able to recover. “I suppose in your language my name might sound like Deblar. You can address me by that name. The first thing I want to say is that, if you have any doubts, any complaints, about your state and situation, tell us right away. We know you'll have many questions.”

"Are you going to kill us?" was Helen's first direct question.

"No, no, not at all. What's the point of recreating and then killing each other?"

"I don't know. Fun, maybe? Or maybe some sort of morbid curiosity?"

"We don't understand how such a thing could be fun. And our curiosity is scientific."

"Are you sure?"

"Completely. What else?"

"Are we prisoners?"

"No. You're definitely not prisoners."

"Then why can't we move freely?"

"Move where? Right now, we are on board an interstellar spacecraft, in orbit of what you know as planet Earth. And, on Earth, the survival conditions for your species, in reality, for any species, are zero." The humans looked at each other.

"Any other questions?" Deblar suggested. Helen raised her eyebrows slightly and smiled."

"What if we have any other questions? We have hundreds, thousands of questions," Helen answered in a deep voice. "And we have a request: clothes."

"Clothes?" asked Deblar strangely.

"Clothes. Garments. A kind of element we humans use to cover our bodies. I don't have anything against nudists, but here, we don't have that style." Deblar reflected for a moment and replied:

"Oh, yes, clothes! Warm clothes, clothing, it's true!" Deblar recalled the ancient images of humans with tissues covering their bodies. Several hypotheses had been given for this custom, but it was never very clear why. Deblar unconsciously named some of them.

“Your species required to cover your body with different materials, for unknown reasons, although we suppose that climatic, aesthetic, cultural, and moral. I remember it from the few data we've obtained on your species. I think we have samples of these “garments” or “clothes” as you call them. We'll replicate them.”

“And another thing,” Helen added by raising her finger. “Isn't there anything better to eat than that crap?” Deblar didn't understand the question. She then realized that she was referring to nutritional inputs.

“They are carbohydrates, proteins, and other basic elements that will allow you a stable development of your organism. Especially because your bodies have been recreated from a bioinformatics matrix, and will never end up being exactly the same as the originals.”

“It's rubbish, and I'm being nice,” Helen complained. The others moved their heads up and down as if to indicate something, although Deblar did not understand the gesture.

“You were omnivorous and fed on meat, fish, vegetables... We understood many thousands of years ago that we could not keep our bodies by the sacrifice of other living beings. Since then we have been manufacturing our own artificial foods.”

“Wow, you're vegans, what modern!” laughed Helen.” Well, you're lucky to be alive.” Deblar again didn't understand exactly what she meant by ‘vegans.’ Then, after processing Helen's response, and through the mental context, she understood its meaning.

“We're not what you call ‘vegans.’ I suppose you refer to a specific form of nourishment for some humans in your time. We don't feed on living tissue of any kind. We have evolved a lot since then, since the ancient times of the Ancient Age, when we began our journey through the Galaxy... But now let's drop this subject, we'll get you the clothes...”

“And shoes. And bathrooms. We're not animals.” Deblar didn't understand that last statement. Of course, they were animals. With intellectual capacities, but animals. She answered:

“... And shoes, it's true, you protect your feet, and baths? What are bathrooms? Does it have anything to do with aesthetic issues?” Helen didn't seem too excited about these questions.

“This I'll have to check. Baths... How many unknown terms... Well, tomorrow we'll follow this conversation.” Helen didn't seem to have much fun with that last statement.

“Tell us at least what do you want from us,” she asked forcefully both verbally and mentally. “Why are we even here? How long has it been? What are you going to do with us?”

“You are here because we have recreated you from a bioinformatics matrix that we obtained from the planet.”

“A what?”

“We'll explain it to you in more detail. The place is Earth, or at least Earth after many millennia since your era. And time, well, that's more complicated; actually, your old bodies died about three to five billion years ago, we can't know for sure at the moment.” Humans began to speak with an increasingly louder tone, muttering things like cloning.

“Please, please, please” required Deblar. “Not all at once.”

“Four billion years? Is this a joke? Did you clone us?”

“No, it is not a joke, and yes, in a way we have cloned you, although it is not that simple, it is not a cloning, because there has not been an organic matrix, but bioinformatics. But now the important thing is that we've had a first contact. Tomorrow, with your clothes and your baths, whatever they are, we will continue.”

Galactic Encyclopedia: The Past Era.

The Ancient Age is known as the time when the history of the LauKlars is lost among myths and legends, when the species began to spread through the Galaxy. In those early centuries it is believed that the expansion was caused by major population changes, combined with a greater inability of the parent star to maintain the species on its original planet.

This Era ends approximately sixteen thousand years later, when the first self-managed information systems were developed. Systems whose data capacity was virtually infinite and self-supporting. These early ancient systems still maintain what is called the writing system, prior to mental communication and direct storage of the memory and memories of LauKlar historians.

Since then, the memories and ideas of LauKlars can be stored directly in memory devices, usually managed by historians and archaeologists with mental abilities of various species, although only LauKlars can read the information completely. This system of storing direct memories has two advantages: it doesn't fit the interpretation; everyone sees what the historian saw and recorded, and it doesn't change with time, since the two LauKlars' brains have remained virtually unchanged. With this system, any LauKlar can literally know the past recorded by historians as the historian himself saw it. It is the closest thing to time travel...

Introspection

Deblar retired and the front door closed. She was relatively satisfied with that first contact. The human female who had been chosen as a representative seemed intelligent enough to have an acceptable basic level of conversation. Always keeping in mind their primitive mental schemes and basic brain development. But it was all she had, and they could certainly expect to get a good deal of data from that experience.

Humans were observed, and their minds read as far as possible, to try to find out as much information as possible about their nature, and to try to find out what might have led the Xarwen to record in a bioinformatics matrix a group of ancient humans, who had already become extinct about a billion years ago. The Xarwen were a methodical race, very rigorous in their scientific work, and had the immense fortune of never having believed in mystical and supernatural options, which had allowed them a truly remarkable scientific development. However, they still became extinct, not before leaving that secret timeless mausoleum where they had found the database of human patterns. The answers could only be found among the same humans, or they would never be known. Knowing and understanding why the Xarwen had decided to store and preserve this information for millions of years was essential.

The next morning, Deblar returned to the lab to talk to the humans. She was accompanied by Kirak and Counsellor Narhum, a member of the High Council, the highest institution of the LauKlars, who was specially displaced from the main ship of the group to attend the interrogation.

The gigantic door opened, and the light momentarily blinded the humans, who were now already dressed in various garments that had been made that night. Deblar found it grotesque to see these human beings dressed. They had no need for it, but they seemed much more comfortable. They didn't seem too excited to see what they called three "giant birds" in front of them. Deblar approached them mentally to try and calm them down.

“Hey”, Deblar had a hard time getting used to that kind of human greeting. “As I told you, I am here again, and I am accompanied by two members of my species to evaluate this interrogation.”

“Interrogation?” Helen replied. “What we want is our freedom. This is demeaning. We want to know why we’re here, and why you keep us locked up like dogs.” Deblar reflected, and finally assumed that ‘dog’ had to be, so she could read in their minds, a quadruped animal that lived with humans, and that in general had to endure some kind of abuse, or at least live in conditions not consistent with an acceptable level of well-being, hence the comment of the human female.

“Please, there's nothing to worry about. We need answers for an investigation. We want information that can help us understand the facts.”

“Don't you have an almighty mind that reads our minds?” Helen asked mockingly.

“Yes, but I cannot read what is not built and molded by the mind at all times. The most important thing, the fundamental thing you should know is that you are an extinct species, which disappeared some four thousand to five million years ago.”

“And why should we believe you? We want proof, evidence!”

“Evidence?” Deblar responded softly, trying to calm the human. “All right, there's the proof.” An earlier gate opened, and began to show the light of outer space. Behind it was drawn what was the emptiness of space and its stars, a huge red star of great size, and a yellowish and dry planet, which seemed devastated by the action of that star.

“There you have it,” Deblar told them. “That star is what you call the Sun, and that planet is the third orbiting planet, which you call Earth.” The spectacular view showed a monstrous red giant occupying much of the space, and a planet shivering and torn apart by the influence of the dying star. Humans murmured among themselves as they approached the portal where an invisible screen of energy separated them from the emptiness of space.

“That's the Earth,” Deblar repeated again. “That's your home, or what's left of ours. Because it was our home, too. We simply call it ‘The Original Planet’.” Helen turned to herself, bewildered and confused.

“Your home?” Helen asked hesitantly.

“Indeed. We LauKlars are native to this planet. Like you. And like the Xarwen, the species from which we have extracted the data to recreate you. We left the planet many thousands of years ago, when life on its surface began to be impossible. By that time, we had already begun the exploration of the Galaxy. Then its location was lost, and that's how it was until recently, when we rediscovered its position. We began to explore it, after all it is the home of our ancestors, and one of those explorations came up with a Xarwen laboratory, and with you. The Xarwen were a species that lived between your end and our origin.”

“And that spot of light on the horizon?”

“It is the Galaxy, or let's say, from your point of view, the new Galaxy. You would call it something like Androlactea, or ViaMeda, or something similar. About five hundred million years ago, the old Milky Way galaxy and the Andromeda galaxy collided, creating a new galaxy. This phenomenon is relatively commonplace, and in fact your scientists calculated it with acceptable precision.”

“What about the Earth being your home? What exactly did you mean by “your home”?” Helen asked strangely. Deblar would have smiled, if she could. Dealing with such primitive species was a challenge, right on the frontier of reason and logic.

“I mean that there have been three species on Earth which, as a result of evolution, developed to a point where they gained mental, psychological, technological and social faculties, which would allow us to call these species “intelligent”, at least from a technological point of view. There were other species of intelligent profile, but in a different classification to the one that we have here. We are talking about technological civilizations, which developed development models based on science, culture and industry. That's the specialty of the one who discovered the place where you were coded.”

“Place where we'd been coded?”

“Yes. As I have said, you were found in a laboratory of the second technological species that inhabited Earth; the Xarwen. The human species, that is, you, did not prosper beyond understanding the basic aspects of the universe, nuclear theory, basic aspects of gravity, and little else. Of course, you didn't develop the hyperluminal reactor. The Xarwen went much further, although we know that they did not even travel through space at hyperluminal speeds, which in itself is a mystery, since it contradicts what we know about them and their very high level of technology. Their knowledge was very advanced, and in some respects even superior to ours. Their technological IQ must have been enormous.” At that moment another human intervened.

“I'm Scott. On Earth I worked with theories about physics. We were trying to understand what dark matter and dark energy was. We knew there were important issues to be resolved. We were clear that the speed of light was a natural barrier, and we had problems with the development of a theory that brought together the different concepts of matter, energy, gravity, space, and time. I can't believe it's been thousands of years since that.”

“Miles? They're actually...” Helen interrupted Deblar.

“Yes, yes, millions of years. Anyway, what else will it be? Thousands, millions... This all sounds the same to me. And finally, finally, you appeared,” she whispered without much conviction. Deblar noticed something strange in that human female's mind. For a moment she felt something different. She assumed it was an effort to read such a primitive mind.

That's right,” Deblar replied. “We are descendants of what you commonly call “birds”, which in turn descended from some species of some species of the ancient animals that you called dinosaurs. There were some highly evolved animals among these highly developed animals, but a massive extinction interrupted the evolutionary flow. But we haven't been birds for millions of years.” Helen looked down at Deblar with dismay. She seemed bored.

“Deblar, very cultural and enriching. We could put together a National Geographic special with all this material,” she said. The others laughed. Suddenly, her face changed, and his gaze became cold and hard. She stared at Deblar as she approached slightly.

But this doesn't solve our future, “Helen said as she pointed to her classmates. “We want to know exactly what you want from us, and we want to know now. And we're not going to stop until you tell us... You see. It's the bad thing about having primitive minds, Deblar. Of being a little more evolved than bacteria. We can't see beyond our noses.”

“I've told you all I know, human.” Helen seemed upset.

“Human? Did you call me human? Listen, you ten-meter-high piece of poultry! My name is Helen, or Freyja, which is how I'm nicknamed! I don't like it though, but they do. Is that clear, you species of vitamin chicken?”

“Very clear.”

“Great! We're finally getting along. We are now going to talk about important issues, because we have to get out of this chicken farm as soon as possible. Let's see... What about that lab you were talking about? Do you have more information?” she asked. Deblar turned her large neck toward Kirak.

“That lab, that data center, is a mystery, like everything else.” Kirak stepped in for the first time. Although mental reading cannot distinguish voices, because they do not exist, Helen realized perfectly well the change that went from one mind to another. The inflections, the strength, the mental vibration, were very different.

“I am Kirak, responsible for the expedition that found you. The data from your DNA, recomposing proteins and memory n-grams were found in that laboratory, research center, or whatever they wanted it to be. We have no hostile intent whatsoever with you. You are not a matter of experimentation, nor are you here for your own benefit. We have recreated you because, apparently, the Xarwen recorded your biometric data so that someone could bring you back into the world. Obviously, it seems feasible to think that, for them, you were important. Enough to

store your biodata and expect a chance of future regeneration. We know that it is traumatic to reappear into existence after so long dead, but Deblar insisted in order to solve the mystery.”

“What mystery?” Helen asked.

“The mystery of your presence in the Xarwen database. What do you know about it? The Xarwen stored you for some reason.”

“We were not stored voluntarily,” Helen said in a deep voice. “From what we've been able to find out, from what we've talked to each other about, we all lived a normal life. Normal, until we suddenly appeared here.”

“Is it possible that your biodata were obtained indirectly?”

“What do you mean, chicken?”

“To have your data collected in a computer warehouse, obtaining samples from old sources...”

“That doesn't make sense,” interrupted Deblar. “Even if the paleo-DNA of these humans was collected, their memory n-grams would have been destroyed long ago. We could have their bodies, but never their minds.” A signal sounded at that moment that only the LauKlars could hear.

“The President is coming to see you, Deblar,” confirmed Counsellor Narhum.

“The President comes here? Why is that?” Deblar wondered strangely.

“I don't know,” answered Narhum. “But I guess it has to do with this whole human thing. It is becoming a popular topic, and there are theories of all sorts and kinds about its presence, and, above all, about how its existence is possible. Personally, I think this research is becoming much more complex than a simple archaeological study. We have a group of humans. They are living beings, conscious, thinking, that deserve our attention and respect. And we've got them stuck in a hole in the middle of space. I'm afraid this could be a good reason for the President's presence on this ship.” Kirak nodded, confirming his original idea that this adventure of regenerating humans had not been a great idea.

“We'll see...” Deblar replied with no interest.

Galactic Encyclopedia: model of life LauKlar.

... LauKlars are gregarious animals. Although they form families, they live together in large groups. Its interstellar ships do not have rooms in the classic human sense of the term, but large spaces that they call Salas. They live and sleep in groups, and only rarely are they isolated in the so-called Chambers of Reflection. They raise their progeny in a group, although the biological parents are the primary educators and trainers. Their main mode of communication is mental, although they combine them with their own verbal language, and they have certain telekinetic capabilities that allow them to manipulate the environment, although not on living objects....

... If one of the great achievements of humans and Xarwen were their hands, true tools capable of manipulating the environment with great precision, the success of the LauKlars was to achieve the same with their minds; the LauKlars do not have hands, but their minds are perfectly capable of manipulating the environment with even greater precision. This evolutionary achievement allowed the LauKlars to develop comparatively much faster in the creation of tools and, later, in the control of their immediate area....

... The reason for the remote control of the LauKlars, what is often called telekinesis, is made possible by the double brain configuration. In fact, evolutionarily, the second brain was formed approximately a thousand million years ago, when the frontal lobe began a process of division through a fold of neocortex that was developed to form a separate structure, linked to the first brain by filaments of very high density gray neurons.

The second brain boosted the LauKlars' capacity for mental and psychic development, which evolved into a truly powerful center of information and active control, including bi-directional thought transmission and mental communication. While the first brain continues to perform the classical functions of all living beings, the second brain is developed for purely cognitive and subjective process tasks. It is often said, but not proven, that the LauKlars would be able to survive in a world of four physical dimensions....

The LauKlars live approximately five hundred and fifty to six hundred years, reach maturity at one hundred years, and their death is seen as the Final Jump, or the Final Flight, a flight that will last forever. However, they understand that these terms or concepts are only symbols, since they do not process any kind of mysticism or have beliefs in supernatural higher beings. In fact, the abandonment of supernatural beliefs is considered one of the critical steps in any advanced civilization so that it ceases to be considered primitive and prone to self-extension...

The Great White Room

The halls of the LauKlars ships make up the basic representation centers for the ship's operations. In fact, there may be several, or even many, rooms of each type.

The Grey Room for a human would be what is known as engineering, the heart of the ship. Of course, because of its dimensions and structure, it wouldn't look like that human. The reason is that the LauKlars have a spatial sense in three dimensions far superior to the human being, which allows them to build multi-level rooms where the sense of top and bottom is practically irrelevant.

The Blue Room has all the scientific instruments of the ship. The LauKlars work in very diverse basic and applied research, which includes multidisciplinary activities in which scientists of other species usually collaborate.

The Green Room is the recreation and rest room, taking into account that the LauKlars live and sleep together, never alone, at least in small groups. It is the area of greatest social activity, although the LauKlars are social animals by nature, and interact constantly in any environment and place. Normally the Green Room has leisure activities and games.

The Red Room is the nerve center of the ship's combat system. It had not been used for a long time, but when it had been used, the last time, thirty years ago, it had demonstrated its power to a newly identified very violent species, which tried by all means to start a futile war against the LauKlars. It is difficult, very difficult, for two species that cross each other for the first time in the universe to be at the same level of technological development, and to be able to start a war where there is no clear winning side. Almost always, one of them is technologically far more advanced than the other. If the advanced species is peaceful, the war ends in days, maybe hours. If violent is the advanced species, the near-absolute annihilation of the inferior species is a common option, and one that has been a constant in various periods of the history of civilizations.

The Great White Room is the legislative heart of the ship, and the assembly center of the Central Command of the same. Deblar and Kirak had been summoned there, along with the research team in charge of the Xarwen ruins and the newly biosynthesized humans. A huge two-kilometer-diameter circular room in seven rings, where the President stands right in the middle, while around it, in a semi-circumference of 180 degrees, are placed those who must answer your questions. Narhum, as a witness and member of the High Council, stood at the President's left. In the right corner was Helen, who, as representative of the humans, had been summoned by the President, who, after a few seconds of the invocation of verbal and mental silence, went directly to the matter.

“Deblar” spoke the President, “I have been informed of all aspects related to the discovery of a hidden Xarwen laboratory on the Original Planet, and the discovery of a bioinformatics system that stored, among other data, memory n-grams, DNA molecules and pre-nuclear proteins of sequencing for the rapid development of complete individuals. Specifically, samples were found of 27 humans, of which we have here their representative, who answers to the name Helen”.

“That's right,” Deblar replied.

“Do you understand that your act of regeneration of these individuals goes beyond what is required by simple scientific research? These twenty-seven individuals are living beings, intelligent, who under our laws must be treated with the same rights, and with the same respect and care, as any other living being in the galaxy, intelligent or not. Beyond that, having their own intelligence allows them to choose their own destiny, and there we can only immediately offer them complete freedom, and cooperation in whatever they need to establish themselves and live, as human beings, a complete life somewhere in the Galaxy. Even your research, however important it may be, is, by law, subject to the collaboration that humans want to offer. If they want to answer your questions, they can. Otherwise, they can act freely. I hope that these fundamental points have been made sufficiently clear.” Deblar was beginning to feel really irritated. So much talk about rights and duties bored her.

“Mr. President, I would like to say that this investigation, which is clearly exceptional in its importance and findings, must require a special protocol. These human beings had died about three billion years ago. But for some unknown reason, the Xarwen not only stored their memory n-grams and DNA structure, but stored it in a perfectly camouflaged laboratory and stored by an extremely sophisticated security system. So much so that we couldn't detect it until we found ourselves within a very short distance of it. It is evident that the Xarwen had a great interest in these humans, for whatever reason, and so they had to act in this way. But we can't explain what interest that might be. We have analyzed humans and they are perfectly normal with respect to the data we had previously on the species. There's nothing special about them, but somehow, they're special. So much so that the Xarwen decided that safeguarding their DNA and memory was paramount. It could be, yes, a simple question of cultural and paleontological interest. But, how they obtained the biological data, and why they stored it so carefully, is a mystery. I thought it appropriate that the best way to get answers was to ask them directly. That will be all.”

“Is that all?” The President asked, with a tone of concern. “We cannot ignore the basic aspects of our laws about life, especially with individuals who have reasoning skills, even if it is limited as it is in this case. They must be able to choose their destination. And bringing them back to life in this way, in order to be subjected to an interrogation of an archaeological investigation, means breaking with our principles of solidarity for any living being in any inhabited world.” The President left the last word in abeyance in order to finish his verdict. Although silence was obligatory, it was impossible not to capture traces of the LauKlars' minds attending the event. Finally, the President ruled:

“I must declare, and I declare, that the twenty-seven human beings who have been regenerated have, as of this moment, full freedom to choose where they want to settle, and complete freedom to collaborate, or not, in Dr. Deblar's archaeological research, and in any other matter of interest or competence. I also declare that, if humans wish to collaborate in this research in order to know their own past, they will do so in full freedom of their mental faculties and in total freedom, being able to leave the project at any time, and being interrogated only if they deem it appropriate.”

Helen smiled. Deblar captured the human feeling of joy, which seemed to be aroused by the President's words, with a tension and mental strength that caught the attention of several members of the room. Especially to her, who had served as a mental link so that Helen could follow the Council.

Helen thought that, any minute, that huge bird was going to pull out a mallet and hit the table. But she just spread her wings and flew away next to Narhum. she had the feeling that this huge bird was going to ask her some questions, and she had even prepared a moving speech. But none of that was necessary. The decision was made, and nothing and no one could change it. It was the Law. And the express order of The President.

And, for a moment, for a second, Deblar felt a powerful force coming into her mind. It was a split second. But it was enough.

Back in the room where the rest of the humans were staying, Helen's companions looked at her with attention. Already with clothes and shoes, obtained from a mixture of times that understood more than five thousand years, they expected to hear some good news. She approached him walking slowly and with a slight smile on her face.

“Well?” asked Scott.

“It went better than I expected. They have given us full freedom of action. We can get out of here and go wherever we want.”

“¿And...?”

“Silence!” Helen ordered. “Not another word now. Save those questions for later. Remember: they cannot read our mind, but they can read our ideas expressed. If we access information in our minds and organize it to ask a question, then that question is legible to them. I have been talking to one of them after the meeting, or the trial, or the assembly, or whatever they call it. They have proposed that we go to a planet similar to Earth, with a fairly similar atmospheric pressure and gravity, in which we can live well after a period of adaptation and with the help of some genetic adjustments. Scott, Darrell, Karl, you'll be responsible for each team as we agreed. And don't forget: no matter what happens, we must thank fate, or

if someone wants it, a god, that we are finally alive again, and with our memories intact. If the plans could go well, they have gone better than we could ever imagine. Late, but we're here. Alive. And in one piece."

"I'm just missing a jazz band and it'll be perfect," commented one of them. Helen looked at him hard.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with your jazz band if you open your mouth again, Karl?"

"No... I mean... Yes, Freyja."

"Three billion years buried in a biocomputer, and when you wake up, all you think about is jazz."

"Yes, Freyja."

"Well, let's move on... First of all, we're alive. These huge birds might not have come back, and we would still be a lot of data on a biocomputer for all eternity, or maybe more. The risk was enormous, and we knew it. We have to thank these vitamin birds for getting us out of there. The Xarwen lab, where they extracted our data, is still intact. I mean, everything's set and ready. And I am sure, convinced, that you will all want to thank our friends, the LauKlars, for saving our asses. We owe them an eternal debt, and we are going to thank them with all our love and brotherly enthusiasm..." Helen smiled slightly trying to hide her feelings, even though she was aware of the difficulty that this entailed. But the LauKlars didn't seem to care much for them, nor did they seem to monitor their thoughts exhaustively. It was better that way. All present nodded and looked at each other with approval. Things were going well. Surprisingly well, though.

"Well then, as far as I know, in what would be the equivalent of a couple of hours or so, they will come after us. If I have understood correctly what they meant by their unit of time. Go on, get ready. This time things will be different..."

Galactic Encyclopedia: the interstellar journey.

... As a general rule, each technologically advanced race ends up, in one way or another, pretending to travel through space to planets of its star system, and later to other stars. The physical laws are the same for everyone, and this entails the rationalization of the problem, its mathematical and physical analysis, the development of theories, and the practical implementation of stellar travel. Many civilizations never manage to reach this last point, perishing before, either because of constant internal conflicts (social, economic, religious), or because of the disappearance of the species due to different causes (diseases, natural disasters, etc.). In some cases one species may disappear or be made a slave to another expansionist militaristic superior that reaches the planet to dominate it...

In these civilizations, given the right conditions and advances, similar theories and ideas are commonly proposed, some of them hypothetically feasible, for interstellar travel. But, although a physical-mathematical model works on paper, this does not imply that it is feasible to create an efficient and reliable engineering system. The only viable solution, at least the only one that has been endorsed by different species in the Galaxy, is the interdimensional bubble. It consists of creating an area of interaction between two complementary universes, creating a bubble of space-time where the ship is housed. The controlled manipulation of the bubble allows the spacecraft to move through space at hyperluminal speeds.

Just as nature creates the same solution for the same problem on different ecosystems and planets (evolutionary convergence), so interstellar ships of different species all have one thing in common: a superstructure surrounding the main spacecraft that is responsible for creating and managing the space-time bubble. These ships are thus easily recognizable as they contain an outer ring or cylinder structure, which allows the creation and manipulation of the bubble, and an interior which keeps the crew and cargo....

The getaway

Ronta was a good pilot. Since childhood his dream was to fly with his wings, as it happened with all LauKlars, and also through the void of space. His dream had come true with one of the best rates of return in his group. He certainly felt very proud of it.

The interstellar voyage was routine, but this did not imply that it was not dangerous. The theoretical basis of the hyperluminal journey consists of a perfect balance between two energies converging and creating a subspace zone of zero level. Level 3 civilizations thus obtain and derive the secret of being able to cross the borders between the stars at hyperluminal velocities. The Xarwen were therefore a level 2 species, advanced but incapable of hyperluminal flight, and humans, level 1. In reality, the ship did not actually move from its place at any time, but it was the interaction of the universe with a complementary universe that generated a bubble of neutral space-time in front of the ship, to close behind.

Ancient theories had postulated the manipulation of the same space-time tissue to travel through the stars. But this, although theoretically feasible, required enormous energy, not too far from that generated in the Big Bang. So much so that the Big Bang itself modeled the fabric of space and time, like a blanket that extends from the top of a bed, and falls into a position, thus remaining forever. As long as there's not enough energy involved. No, the hyperluminal journey involved interacting by opening a gap in the universe towards another complementary universe. A complementary universe is one that has the same structure as another universe but with opposite values. It's something similar to electron and positron. Both are the same particle, but with opposite charges. Joining them together generates a great deal of energy. Similarly, joining a universe with its antiuniverse (another way of calling the complementary universe) corresponding generates an area of zero density and enormous energy. Unlike a universe of opposing charge, an anti-universe is an anti-replica of all universal constants and laws, not just the electrical charge. The interaction generates a vacuum field without interaction of virtual

particles. That field surrounds the ship and can travel at hyperluminal velocities. The maximum velocity is not infinite logically, since the displacement involves a modification process of the interaction field.

Ronta was an expert in interuniverse field theory. He must have been, because a pilot cannot be subjected to mere mechanical knowledge of the instruments of a ship. A pilot must understand the principles that allow interstellar travel, because the computer can predict the amplitude of the field of interaction between universes for it to be efficient, but it requires a pilot with advanced mental preparation to get the maximum performance at the lowest energy cost, and of course to prevent any possibility of accident. By accident they mean the uncontrolled mixing of the interaction between the two fields of the two universes, which can lead to an explosion of a huge power.

Ronta arrived in the room where the humans were waiting, and without much enthusiasm, he told them:

"I'm Ronta, pilot of the shuttle, and I'm responsible for your transport. I have been marked by a world that can be inhabited sixty light years away from where you could live, called Solaria 4. It was formed two and a half billion years ago, and is in the second phase of its development after abandoning the gas belt that formed it. The belt no longer exists of course, but the stars that were generated in its core do."

"Sorry chick, "Helen commented without enthusiasm. "We are not interested in astronomy, nor when that world was formed."

"I thought you'd be interested to know."

"What we're interested in is why you want to take us to that Solaria 4. What's so special about this planet?"

"Solaria 4 is a planet within a group of double stars. It is a planet similar to the Earth, located as its numbering indicates in the fourth orbital position of the main star, Solaria A. It has a very rich native fauna and lots of water. It's a good place to live. We will provide you with everything you need for

your survival of course. Since you are primitive beings, you can hunt and gather food.”

“Primitive?” Karl asked. “Do you want me to detail what this primitive can do to your precious neck?”

“Karl, shut the fuck up...” Helen cut. “Tell me... Ronta? Let's see: what chance would we have of living on Earth?”

“On Earth? You mean the Original Planet, the one we orbited? None, certainly,” Ronta replied amusingly, when asked a question whose answer was obvious, and they should already know if they were supposed to be intelligent. Although humanity only exceeded the LauKlars' intelligence concept parameter by a small margin.

“But we are human, and this is our planet,” insisted Scott, who was the closest to Helen.

“It is also our planet of origin,” Ronta said. “We evolved here also after the disappearance of the Xarwen, as they did when you disappeared. According to our tradition, when our technological development began, the Sun had begun to become a red giant. For several thousand years the situation gradually deteriorated. It was then that we developed the hyperluminal reactor, and when we sent the Earth's species to a nearby habitable planet. For each species we try to transport the largest number of specimens, and many have already adapted to the new environment. We call it Novaria, a planet lost in time. We only know about it from our ancient oral history. But it was the first planet inhabited by us after leaving the Original Planet, or Earth as you call it.”

“Noah's ark,” commented one with evident humor. Ronta didn't understand the expression.

“But don't you live in a world? don't you have a capital planet?” another woman asked.” Ronta didn't fully understand the word “capital planet”.

“No. We don't have any fixed planet as a residence or any “capital” planet as you call it. We live mainly on our ships, and yes, we visit and explore diverse worlds, but we do not make them our homes. Raw materials are obtained from asteroids, comets, and gaseous planets. Naturally we also

collect the energy of the stars. We colonize worlds, but we do not change anything about them except to locate a research center or a small colony.”

“It's all beautiful,” Helen said. “But it's not what we want. At least not at the moment. We want to go to Earth.”

It's impossible, “insisted Ronta, a little annoyed by the humans' insistence. “Earth is, I repeat, a wasteland. It's dead, except on a microscopic level. It's been a long time since all but a few bacteria have disappeared.”

“No, you don't understand me, my dear bird,” that expression Ronta didn't understand. Bird? He wasn't a bird, he was a LauKlar. “We want to go back to the place where you found the data that stored the information of our natural persons and our minds.”

“And for what purpose?” Ronta didn't understand what humans in that dead zone might want.

“We want to try and find out what we were doing there. How we got to that computer... to that machine. We want to investigate the area. We'll need supplies, food and water.”

“It can't be done,” Ronta responded with growing concern. “We do not have material and resources adapted to human beings for survival on a planet in these conditions, and most importantly, our engineers and archaeologists have already examined the area and analyzed all the information that was there. Oxygen levels are low, you'll have trouble breathing if not with the right equipment. Surfacing means death in a couple of hours from solar radiation. The ozone layer that covered the planet is almost gone. We can live a few hours in that environment, since we adapt evolutionarily to this planet in conditions already very hard in the past, but your bodies will not last long, you come from a world that no longer exists as you knew it. The planet is dead.” Helen looked at him inquisitively.

“Didn't the President say we were free to make our own decisions?”

“I wasn't at the trial, but yes, that's what he said. But....”

“Then take us to the planet, and once there, to the place where you found us.”

"I'll have to talk to my superiors."

"Then do it. We don't have all day," Helen responded harshly.

Narhum was surprised. Ronta repeated the request: "They want to go to the planet."

"Really? What's the point?"

"They want to investigate on their own the area where they were found. And they want supplies to settle in the lab or whatever the Xarwen left there."

"But there's nothing there of interest. Ancient machinery of the Xarwen civilization, much more advanced than the technology that humanity has ever disposed of, and which cannot comprehend, much less operate. They'll be wasting their time."

"That's pretty much what I told them, Counselor. I explained to them that the entire area had been analyzed and the surface and what lies below it had been tracked within a radius of 1,000 kilometers. And they want to examine the contents of the Xarwen biocomputers." Narhum arched what in the human species would have been considered eyebrows.

"Anyway, I understand that their past and themselves have been stored there for millions of years. It is evident that they want to see for themselves the place from which the data of their structures and minds were extracted and examine them. They have the right to recognize the area and see the place, and we are responsible for their well-being, as we have regenerated them. It seems logical that they want to check their origin by themselves, and try to extract some information from the Xarwen and their systems. In short, they want to see where they were found by themselves, and draw their own conclusions. It is a useless task, but at least they will be comforted. So, you have my clearance to take them. Let them go, let them examine the Xarwen biocomputers, let them take the time they want, and when they understand that they are incapable of understanding this technology, they will lose interest, and they'll be happy

to go somewhere where they can spend the rest of their days in comfort. Solaria 4 is the most suitable planet for them without a doubt.

Ronta left the Great Grey Hall, and a few moments later Deblar entered. Her mood was not the best, something that Narhum noticed immediately after a small mental survey. She expected criticism, and of course she was going to receive it.

"Well, they're free now. They can go wherever they want," Deblar said unconvinced.

"That's right", Narhum replied. "What did you expect, any other solution from the President? Have you forgotten the thousands of years since we gave ourselves the Fundamental Law for the care of species? They are living beings, like us, and intelligent, at least according to the established standard parameters. We cannot and must not interfere. Regenerate them, give them life again, it was a big mistake. I understand your position in seeking to know all the facts, but recreating an extinct species just to obtain archaeological data seems to me to go too far." Deblar didn't seem to be affected by the accusation.

"The circumstances were special, as I explained to the Council. The place where the data was found was special. The Xarwen built these structures, these biocomputers, with this human data, for some purpose. It was evident that they wanted to preserve the data of these humans for millions of years, and it is evident that they took the utmost care to make them safe except for technologically advanced species, capable of discovering the energy field that the laboratory concealed with biocomputers. In other words, the Xarwen wanted only a species with a capacity similar to ours to find that information. Naturally, the finding itself is revolutionary. If we add to that the circumstances, it is doubly revolutionary. The logical step was to obtain that information, process it, and get answers. We didn't get any information. We've got nothing." Narhum was annoyed by the expression that treated humans as mere sources of information.

"Processing information for answers? We are talking about living beings, not a mathematical problem, or a physical mystery, or ancient documents to be translated from some ancient language. No, we're talking about

thinking living beings. We cannot give the same status to a history book or a biocomputer as we can to a living being that is part of history.”

“These people had their chance,” Deblar replied. “They had their time, their part in history, at a given moment four billion years ago. The Xarwen somehow obtained these human samples, and processed them into their biocomputers. End of story. Do they really have the same rights as any living thing? They are not part of this time. In fact, they are living relics of a remote past that became extinct billions of years ago. Human cities disappeared. Their culture, their history, their art, their science, their philosophy, their dogmas, their fears, their religion... Everything is dust today, except for the few samples that we have been able to collect, always very fragmented, stored in what they called “time machines” or “time boxes”. But this is different. The Xarwen did not create a safe to store data; they created a repository of human history, a living species when the Earth was only five billion years old. It's impressive. And, without a doubt, we must go all the way to the end of this story. There are too many questions that deserve to be answered.”

Narhum shut up for a few seconds. Although in everything related to the transmission of mental information between the LauKlars, talking about time is risky. Verbal information is linear, one word after the other, one sound after another, always forward. Mental transmission was not immediate, but neither was it linear. Silences were not moments without details, but they were not completely white.

“Your attitude is commendable,” Narhum finally commented. “And humans are certainly a mystery in themselves. But they're as confused as we are. We cannot read their minds except when they expressly refer to a particular idea verbally, and we do not have data on the reason why the Xarwen stored their data. What is the conclusion of all this?”

“There is no conclusion,” Deblar replied with remarkable despair. “It is absurd nonsense and pointless gibberish, and so far, our work has only generated several questions, and no answers, in a highly questionable model of effectiveness, not to mention the incapacity that we have shown in this study. We have got nothing from humans, and I doubt if we will get anything now that they feel supported. If they know anything.”

“Exactly,” exclaimed Narhum without intending to delve into Deblar's frustration. “That's why you'll have to keep investigating. The President and I think this is a very interesting issue. But it is still a scientific investigation of archaeology, we cannot afford to violate the laws for something like that, nor for any other reason or circumstance. What were you planning to do, Deblar? Hold the humans until they spoke?”

“That defines quite well what my intentions were,” Deblar replied. “Always with the utmost care and clear respect.”

Clearly clear,” Narhum said with an even joking tone for a LauKlar. “You must understand that this matter could have become a problem. If humans are held back for a long time and become known on a galactic scale, it would have been a blow to our interstellar policy of species welfare. What would the Tarw, the Karit, the Mannkotr have thought? A species such as ours, which is considered a leader in respect for life, and which by minor research is dedicated to keeping another intelligent species in a hole, even being extinct, by the simple argument of “everything for science”. We can't expose ourselves to that, Deblar. We can't.”

Deblar raised her wings vigorously, a gesture that contained a significant symbolic charge of force. “I think things are getting confused. At least it cannot be considered as such until the facts under investigation have been established.”

“It's archaeology,” Narhum replied. “It is not a complex project of high level and high cost. This research has opened a series of questions of great interest, but our species will not change either to evolve or to deal with a crisis, simply because these archaeological questions are resolved or not. In addition, the High Council supports this research, and its reputation enables it to have the means to carry it out. But we can't consider this first level project. Much less use humans for their own scientific ends. It's selfish and arrogant of us.”

Deblar made a pretense of wanting to respond, but she limited herself to a ‘okay,’ turning around, spreading her blue-white wings in a typical gesture of respect, and flying out of the Great Hall. And her determination was clear: now, more than ever, she was going to make every effort to solve, in

one way or another, the skein that the discovery of the laboratory had become, with all the consequences that this implied. For the High Council, that was a routine, secondary investigation, nothing more. For her it was the tip of an iceberg that she wanted to solve as directly as possible. The most direct, and the most cautious. She was never going to do anything again that implied or moved members of the High Council to investigate what was happening. The turmoil of human regeneration had caused unrest and confrontation, and although it was necessary, it would not allow a similar situation to develop. She would do whatever she had to do. And nobody was going to care, because nobody was going to be informed.

The moment that she and her predecessors had been waiting a long time had arrived. The current events, once her suspicions with humans had been confirmed, would lead her to make a decision that would forever change the course of LauKlars history. A decision that would have consequences as never before had been seen in the annals of the peoples and worlds of the Galaxy...

Galactic Encyclopedia: LauKlar ships.

The current LauKlar ships, interstellar vessels for the journey through the Galaxy, are the product of thousands of years of constant improvements. They usually have many sizes, but there are two basic types: the 5- to 15-kilometre model for exploration, and the 110- to 230-kilometre model for transportation. Between both sizes, some units of between 40 and 70 kilometers are built for all kinds of activities.

Some ships are equipped with real living ecosystems, and some special models of more than 250 kilometers are used to simulate complete environments very similar to those of a planet, either for the LauKlars themselves, or for other species that, for whatever reason, have had to abandon their original planets.

There are also smaller ships, two to five kilometers long, designed almost exclusively for combat. These ships can destroy an entire solar system in a few hours. They do not use firearms, but a phase variation of the gravitational field that disturbs the system cumulatively, so that a small change in the shape of gravitational waves at the exact point leads to the disappearance of virtually the entire stellar system, destroying life and all possibility of life on any previously inhabited planet. But the LauKlars wouldn't put a stellar system at risk if it weren't for an absolutely essential cause.

Other than that, LauKlar combat weapons are of various types, but the most powerful are based on cannons of high energy gravimetric or electromagnetic fields, which destroy any known ship in a matter of seconds.

The origin of the Age of Chaos

The LauKlar shuttle, which was carrying the group of twenty-seven humans, with Ronta at the controls, landed softly on the surface of the Earth, as they had requested. In reality, the word 'landed' was a way of expressing an idea, since the ship was suspended by the antigravity reactor.

Ronta took the humans to the laboratory where they had been found, and Helen began to give instructions to several members of the group, who began to move in different directions through the area where the Xarwen teams were located. They didn't seem to breathe with the difficulty that was foreseeable. He also missed so much organization. Why run? What was all that movement and instructions the human female seemed to be giving?

Something was definitely going on. Ronta verified that the humans, instead of starting to investigate the place, began to manage it, to control it. But how was that possible? Not even the LauKlars were able to fully understand the sophistication of the Xarwen systems, and hard work was being done to explain the technology of those ancient beings who lived between humans and the LauKlars. What were humans supposed to be doing then? Would it be a ritual? It didn't look like that. Because a ritual would not bring the Xarwen instruments back to life, as it was happening before his eyes.

Several humans were manipulating terminals that didn't exist seconds ago. Where they had come from seemed inexplicable, although Ronta assumed that they might have been hidden somehow. The place began to come alive with a rumor of something, like an initiator, an increasingly sharp and penetrating sound, of some system feeding energy to something inconceivable. Ronta tried to communicate everything to his superiors, but the transmission was blocked at source. Somehow, they were intercepting their signal. But how was that possible? They were just primitive beings...

"Scott! How's everything going?" Helen asked.

"In very good condition," Scott responded as he consulted a console. "Negative field has kept the systems safe. Millions of years have passed here, but the systems are no more than two thousand years old. They're practically brand new."

"Perfect," whispered Helen smiling. "If the field has endured here with that time shift, above and in all other locations the same thing will have happened."

"It's most likely," Scott commented. "Although the time matrix can never be accurate, the deviation will not be greater than two or three percent."

"Okay, let's get going. I'm going to talk to our esteemed chicken that you've kindly brought us. You go ahead with the preparations."

"Yes, Freyja." Helen approached Ronta, who looked at her strangely without understanding anything.

"Ronta?" said Helen smiling as she looked at the enormous being before her.

"I am the one they call it that way," he responded mechanically with the classic Lauklar greeting.

"Does your ship have access to universal data on your species, I presume?"

"That's right. Each computer contains a database of general documentation of known species and the Galactic Encyclopedia. What are you doing with those consoles? Where did they come from? How did you get all the systems up and locked down communications?"

"Too many questions," Helen answered as she was accessing Ronta's shuttle computer, rising above her feet. "I have too many things to do now. But don't worry, I'm with you right now..."

"Are you going to at least tell me what you're doing with those panels, human?"

"These databases of your ship will serve as initial support for general information to locate us," Helen said ignoring the question, and while accessing Ronta's shuttle computer easily. He observed how the human named Helen could break all the safety protocols of her ship, something

impossible for such a primitive species. Then Helen stepped off the shuttle, looked directly at him, and said:

“Ronta, my friend, you are a great pilot and a good boy, as well as a spectacular member of your species. But now, what you're seeing condemns you. As they used to say in my day, there can't be any witnesses.”

Without understanding what was happening yet, Ronta stepped back in a reflective way, only to turn his eyes and see three humans with strange objects in their hands. Ronta took a moment to realize that they were probably weapons of some sort. Again, where those weapons came from was a complete mystery. He was aware that the entire area had been thoroughly examined by specialists. If there were weapons, they should have been detected immediately. If there were hidden systems, such as the terminals that humans were operating, they would have had to be seen, even if they were perfectly hidden. However, for some reason, this had not been the case. Either a very advanced cloaking system had kept part of the laboratory's systems secret, or the explanation was very different from what appearances showed. Not to mention the ease with which they had accessed his computer. Ronta tried to re-activate his integrated communicator to talk to his superiors. And in a quick turn, he raised his wings sharply, causing what for humans was a small-scale hurricane. He took advantage of the moments of confusion to raise the flight and leave the area at high speed. He was safe. Or so it seemed.

“We have to go,” Karl said.

“And that's what we'll do,” answered Helen. “But I want that bird.” Scott instructed two women to accompany him.

After a few moments, they surfaced. One of the women accompanying Scott carried a handheld device, which operated through a small portable console. She pointed to an area, and they saw a giant hole in the sky appear. It was something similar to a tunnel that emitted a red-violet light and whose edges were like tongues of fire, but did not burn. From that gigantic hole opened in the same fabric of what was once a blue sky, a large ship slowly emerged. A jet-black ship, clearly triangular in

appearance, like a large arrow. In the anterior part, just at the tip, it had three structures in the form of giant elongated extensions, one leading to the upper zone, and two oriented towards the lower part, at an angle of fifteen degrees above the vertical. The ship carried a symbol composed of three octagons encircling a cube, and was three kilometers long. It quickly approached the area where the humans were, clearly controlled by the human holding the small control console in her hands. The spacecraft was parked about six hundred meters high, while a small auxiliary spacecraft, a transport shuttle, emerged from its interior, going ashore.

Helen and two other humans entered the shuttle, which rose and disappeared on the horizon. She smiled after sitting in front of the wheelchair. Everything was intact, almost new. Meanwhile, the main triangular spacecraft was occupied by the others by a second shuttle. They went to different areas of the ship, as if they knew it perfectly well.

"We're going after Ronta," Helen ordered from the shuttle. Unlike the ship, the shuttle was white and had large transparent shields that allowed the inside to be seen.

The shuttle spotted Ronta flying at high altitude. His intercom was still blocked, probably because of some unknown human ship system, if that ship was human. Suddenly, the human shuttle vanished. Ronta was surprised. Where did that human shuttle go? Just at that moment, the shuttle reappeared near Ronta, at high altitude. They followed him as he tried to escape, but it was evident that his effort was futile. Only one LauKlar ship could help, but communication was still cut off. Helen, to her surprise, mentally communicated with him.

"Ronta, it's Helen."

"I know," responded Ronta, still trying to escape instinctively, while the shuttle and he flew parallel at high altitude. "You can talk with your mind. You tricked us." Helen ignored the comment.

"I don't want to hurt you," Helen said in a conciliatory tone. "But I can't let you go. I want to know your species in detail. Your species as it is now. Come with us, and I assure you we won't do you any harm. You'll be our guest."

"A moment ago, you tried to kill me."

"It's true. And it was a mistake. We'll need a few days to get ready."

"Get ready? What's the point?"

"Never mind what for. My people were going to shoot you because they know you shouldn't tell anyone. But it would have been a mistake. You're much more useful to us alive and on our ship. Yours will worry about you and your disappearance, it is clear, and they will almost breathe relieved by the fact that we have disappeared. But no matter what investigation they initiate to locate you, they will not consider any possibility that is dangerous to us. When they understand the truth, it will be too late."

"What truth?"

"That we're back. And that we are the herald of your destruction, and of the end of your civilization. We are the Fenrir loosed from the rope that has kept us silent, and that opens its jaws. You, Ronta, are witness: you are witnessing the beginning of the end of your species..."

Helen's shuttle moved smoothly a few meters from Ronta, as they both flew near the border with space, where oxygen is minimal. LauKlars can fly at high altitudes and with very little oxygen for a while, thanks to their mental capacity, but then require considerable time to recover. As she spoke, Helen had put on a space suit, and stepped out of the shuttle. Her second, Scott, who had climbed up with her, approached the glass to watch Helen approach the huge LauKlar, while Ronta looked at her with distrust. And fear.

"Freyja!" Scott exclaimed. "Come back! He can attack you at any time!"

"He won't do it," answered Helen. "This species does not behave like this. Not now." Helen went back to Ronta.

"Ronta, I want to insist: Come with us. Look at it from this point of view: you can learn a lot from us, and we from you. We'll have to prepare a cockpit for you on our ship to get that awesome body in, but we'll adapt. Besides, we have no choice. To be honest, it's your only chance. But I don't want to hurt you."

"You threaten my species, and you say you won't hurt me."

"There may be minimal hope of survival for some of you, Ronta. But it will only be in very specific conditions. Conditions to be established by us, of course."

"I could attack you now."

"I don't think so. I have a personal weapon on my wrist. An antimatter beam from our ship could be detected at this distance by your ships. But my personal weapon, which I have here, will do the job smoothly. That's why I was forced out. Also, to get close to you, and see that I'm being completely honest. You could try to kill me now, it's true, and you're not going to do it. I won't hurt you, as long as you come with us."

"In my civilization kidnapping is a thing of the past. For thousands of years, we have put aside violence and punishment. We have weapons and combat capabilities, but limited to self-defense. But we will fight you, if necessary. A single ship with a handful of humans is no danger to my people. It is you who must surrender yourselves. And you will be treated with respect." Helen smiled.

"I can see it's impossible to dialogue with you. You don't understand anything I say. And you have no idea, you or your species, of the future that awaits you. You're very, very wrong, Ronta. But, I'm afraid, you won't be able to witness the facts. As they said in my day, resistance is futile. Either you submit, or you won't stand a chance."

"Opportunity? With a gun pointed at me, what chance do I have?"

"Just one: come with us."

"I don't know what Deblar has done waking you up after all these years. But the High Council will stop you. You don't stand a chance."

"We'll see," Helen replied coldly as she lifted her weapon.

The last thing Ronta's yellow eyes saw was a blue line leading toward him, and disintegrating his body molecule by molecule. After a few seconds, there was only a trace of blue smoke and some ashes in the faint wind of the planet's old atmosphere.

Helen stepped back into the shuttle, and quickly removed her suit. At that point, communication came from the planet.

"Helen? I'm Karl."

"Go ahead Karl, it's Helen. What's going on."

"Did you manage to catch the pilot?"

"It was not possible. He refused to enter the ship, and we must leave the area now. I had to finish him off."

"It doesn't matter."

"Oh, no?"

"No. I got another one of these birds here. We activated the ship's scanners and detected it hidden in an interior room."

"Yes? And where did it come from?"

"I don't know. Looks like he followed Ronta's shuttle a little later than we left the LauKlars ship. He came in on another single-seater shuttle. He's young. Apparently, he's the son of the expedition leader who found us. His name is Nahr." Helen smiled.

"Is he willing to come with us?"

He doesn't have enough training, conviction, or old age to say no. So, I think we still have our bird in the cage."

"Wonderful. We must stick to the plan, and we must not delay any longer. The accumulators are no more than 20% and we are vulnerable at the moment."

"All right, we're waiting for you."

Helen returned to the command room of the giant black ship. As she headed for the shuttle hangar, she activated a communication system so that it could be heard by the entire crew of the black human ship.

"Hello, everybody. I'm Helen. We've waited a long time for this moment. It was risky. We never knew how the facts would evolve. We knew we were

at stake. But it went well, as we had planned. Now the time has come to finish what we started. The phrase "what's impossible in a year, is inevitable in a million years" makes more sense now than ever before. We have made the impossible inevitable. Now it is time to move on. We're back. And this time, it'll be different. Thank you all so much for being there at a difficult time. Now, after all this time, our time has come. The galaxy will be human, or it won't be. Be attentive, work hard, and we will have nothing to fear, and much to gain. Oh yeah... Scott, get me those copies of Sheryl Crow over there, please. I haven't heard music in eons. End of connection."

The huge black ship landed in the devastated area near the Xarwen laboratory, and a fearful Nahr climbed into one of the few rooms that allowed him to be housed in the cargo area, escorted by four armed humans. His father was going to worry, a lot. Why should he have been so curious? However, something told him that, after all, he was still alive at the moment. And he'd take any chance. "Don't get in trouble," his father often told him. No doubt, he was in a lot of trouble now...

Galactic Encyclopedia: The Age of Chaos.

The Age of Chaos is the nickname with which the Karni Age was officially known, and specifically, according to historians, the Karni-Mat period. It was a period of enormous tension in LauKlar society, and by extension throughout the Galaxy and the thousands of species that populate it. For the first time, and without practically any previous reference in the historical archives of the oldest civilizations, the possibility of a total war and a complete annihilation of life in the Galaxy was a possible factor and to be taken into account.

The facts date back to the beginning of the second phase of the Karni-Mat Era, when the LauKlars, for what reason, did not know very well, initiated an investigation, apparently unimportant, which set in motion a relentless war machine under the control of a species thought to be extinct. The beginning itself is remembered by the name of Neivaark T-893, by the first ship that had contact with unknown ships of a strange triangular configuration, black and with a strange symbol on its surfaces....

Editor's note: this entry has new information recently obtained which should be updated shortly. Please attach your neural profile if you want to receive information when the modification occurs. If you belong to a species that does not have mental reading capabilities, you can sign up for the list of textual updates.

The First Threat

Neivaark T-893 was the name of the LauKlar city ship which was moving across the area that millions of years ago had been known as Orion's belt. Now that group of stars had long ago disintegrated, and ancient stars moved through the area with their cut planets, several of them alive, and several of them populated by groups of LauKlars and other species. All those LauKlars planets had small populations, due to the philosophy of allowing planets to develop according to their natural principles, without external actions. That is why T-893, known among its inhabitants as Neivaark (white sky in the LauKlar language), was, like many other ships, completely populated. And it was, in every sense, their home. When a ship is a hundred kilometers long and fifteen kilometers high, and large areas are immense flight zones, inhabited by living nature, the mind can feel that it is, in its entirety, in a world. A world that is a home traveling through the stars. Like a planet, but artificial.

So, when the ship's sensors detected three objects just over a kilometer away moving towards them, there was no immediate concern. It was striking that these ships had not been seen with long-range sensors, something inexplicable. It almost looked like they came out of nowhere. Something, of course, impossible. Nor could they be equipped with a cloaking system. The sensors of the LauKlar ships were able to detect even the smallest distortion of space-time caused by the mass of a ship of that size.

The official in charge of navigation fixed the screen on the ships. They were black, completely opaque, with some bright windows at their ends. And with three octagons circling a cube in its center. One of them had a strange picture of an ancient predator. The ships were approaching at hyperluminal velocities. There was no record of such ships in the database. And they weren't responding to standard warning calls.

The standard procedure in such a situation was to activate defense systems. LauKlars used to engage in combat defense activities, although many would never see a real shot, nor would their parents or

grandparents, children or grandchildren. But in this case, those ships were not responding to the call, and were moving on an intercept course. So, to everyone's surprise, the combat alarms were activated.

The black ships approached two light-years away, and suddenly disappeared. The confusion became evident among the LauKlars. They had simply disappeared from the sensors. Where were those ships?

They checked the instruments. They were all operating normally. The human ships, simply, and after a new verification, had disappeared, leaving no trace... Just to show up again 60,000 kilometers away. They were still moving, apparently, at the same speed. How had they come that far in an instant? No hyperluminal engine was capable of anything like that. Something very dangerous was beginning to take shape.

The black ships approached. Suddenly, from each one of them came a blue-white light, a very intense beam with an energy that the LauKlars could not measure. The three beams of light converged at one point in front of the central ship, and a new beam of light was directed towards the Neivaark...

The impact was terrible. The Neivaark's energy shields barely held up the powerful power source, and part of it reached the hull, piercing several decks. The LauKlars fired the entire arsenal of energy, plasma and antimatter weapons, but the black ships disappeared just before impact, reappearing later. Getting a target seemed like impossible business. Every chance of impact failed over and over again.

The LauKlars began to flee in despair, as the Neivaark captain tried to turn the ship around and increase speed, placing the area where the shield was strongest towards the black ships. These were still approaching, and launched a second group of beams, this time separately, entering through the weakest areas of the shield. Two of the three beams opened huge holes in the Neivaark, and the LauKlars in that area began to be depressurized and thrown into the vacuum of space. Many of them were irremissibly suffering from the force of the ship's decompression. A cold and cruel death that left many thousands of bodies floating along the hull.

Black ships launched a third concentrated beam. This hit the ship again in the engine area, causing a chain explosion. The Neivaark began to disintegrate. Shortly before she died, the captain sent a distress message and a file with information on the incident, which reached a LauKlar base a few light years away.

The Neivaark was left adrift, wounded to death. Some escape ships were destroyed, but others could survive. Or maybe they just didn't attract attention. Or perhaps it was hoped that some witnesses would survive...

Then the emptiness. The darkness. All three ships were gone. It was the first contact with those black ships. It wouldn't be the last.

Re-encounters

The Neretva starship was an improved variant of the Leena class starships, built just before the end of the Previous Age. Together with the Fenrir, they were considerably faster and agile in standard space, and of a wider range. This was the second ship recovered after Fenrir herself, commanded by Vasyl Pavlov.

Now, the Neretva was Helen's temporary headquarters, while her own ship was recovered and overhauled, along with her crew. Everything was provisional in that room where a table, a computer terminal and a coffee machine had been set up, next to an old record player that had been recovered from a warehouse. An old vinyl LP was spinning at 33 revolutions per minute through an outdated analog data storage system, emanating some music from someone called Steve Hackett.

Helen was standing behind the old table. An antique table with an aspect that imitated walnut wood. She was seated, or almost arguably stretched, on a rickety standard four-legged chair, which once had wheels. The gravitational chair to be used for this position required adjustments and was not operational. In the sordid silence of the room, intensified by the large window that showed the few stars on the edge of the Galaxy, Helen looked at the constant twist of the disk, with her eyes lost in memories of a time that had long since ceased to exist.

A double knock on the door pulled her out of the ecstasy she was in. The audio signal from it didn't work either.

"Go ahead! " she shouted unconvincingly. A woman poked her head out, walked in, closed the door, and walked toward the table. Her complexion was rather brown, and her figure thin and small, not very tall. With big, dark eyes, her hair was wrapped in a classic bow tie. She watched Helen for a moment before she spoke.

"Ma' am, you called me..." Helen turned her head, and smiled warmly.

"Yolande Le Brun! my dear Le Brun, how good to see you safe and sound. You're looking good."

"Thank you, madam. The DNA regenerators are fully operational. I've been lucky."

"Good luck? No doubt. Being able to count on you in this new Era is a great advantage for everyone."

"Thank you, madam."

"Don't be modest, Le Brun. You've earned the respect and admiration of everyone. And you're really doing great. To me, however, look at the face those giant chickens have left me..." Helen touched her face with both hands. "I look horrible, I look like a monster."

"Milady, you don't look like a monster," denied Le Brun. "You're looking good. But, if you'll allow me, you should cheer up a little." Helen arched her eyebrows slightly.

"Cheer me up, Le Brun? Why is that? Is there any particular reason for this? Do you realize where we are? And, above all, how are we doing?"

"Well... I think so... For starters, we're alive, thank God. And fortune." Helen rose from the chair and sighed.

"God has nothing to do with this, Le Brun. And fortune, well... You've seen it."

"See what, ma' am?"

"The time. The time we've spent here. In this universe. Three billion years..."

"Yes, ma' am. But we're here now. The chances of survival were..."

"Scarce, yes," Helen cut. "And no sign of the Xarwen. To know what happened to them. We need to check the databases we have stolen in detail, and see what information they contain. We're on our own now, Le Brun. Completely alone. A handful of humans lost in a universe that saw the end of humanity an eternity ago. More than it took life to be born and evolve to humanity on Earth. Do you realize what that means? It's not going to be like it was in the Old Age anymore. This time things are going to get really tough."

“Ma' am, if I may: We will fight. Like we did before. “

“Fight? No doubt. But what are we fighting against?”

“Well... Against the LauKlars, ma' am.”

“Yes, yes, of course, the LauKlars.... But what LauKlars, Le Brun? These are not the ones we left behind. They've changed. They're different. They seem... More confident. Even peaceful ones.”

“I don't believe the pacifism they seem to have, ma' am.”

“Of course. But they've fallen into the trap, and now we're free. They could have destroyed us, and they didn't. I wonder why.”

“There must be a very powerful reason, ma' am. And that worries me.”

“I totally agree, Le Brun.”

“We'll finish them off anyway, ma' am. One way or another.”

“Well, that's the idea. We have a major advantage over them. They will submit, or disappear.”

“Yes, ma' am.”

“What is known about staff and material recovery processes? Any word from Pavlov?”

“Recovery is going well, as established. Pavlov's with the Fenrir.”

“Have you talked to him?”

“Yes, ma' am.”

“And what did he say to you?”

“Apart from a bunch of obscene and completely unrepeatable expressions and adjectives, ma' am?” Helen laughed.

“Yes, I can imagine. Other than that... Kim, where are you?” cried Helen for the intercom.

“I'm helping the chief engineer to restart all systems and the main engine, ma' am,” replied Kim, Helen's personal assistant, through the built-in earphone.

"Bring me a bottle of water when you can. The ship's water system is not yet operational. Is there anything that works in this can?"

"I'll take care of it right away, ma' am. And you must eat something" confirmed Kim.

"Sure, Kim, a great idea! Eat something, of course!.... And if possible, chicken, not that nutrient crap."

"I'm glad to see that the lady is regaining her sense of humor," Kim replied through the communicator.

"Don't be so hopeful, Kim," answered Helen, cutting off communication. Then she headed back to Le Brun.

"Where were we?" Helen asked disoriented.

"We were with the man who could destroy the patience of any human being, ma' am," Le Brun answered with conviction.

"Oh yes, Pavlov! I didn't get a chance to talk to him very often. He was always saving somebody's ass with the Fenrir. We owe him a lot. He was one of the architects of the, well, you'd call it a miracle."

"It was a miracle, ma' am. But milady was the principal architect."

"Well, let's call it whatever we call it, that was a way to save the skin. I won't complain about it, Le Brun. Pavlov may have expeditious and straightforward ways of doing things, but they are certainly effective methods."

"There is no doubt about that, ma' am." Helen glanced sidelong at Le Brun.

"I think there's more than pride in your words when you speak of Pavlov, Le Brun." Le Brun shuddered slightly.

"Ma' am, I wouldn't look at such a man if he were the last in the universe."

"No? Are you sure about that?"

"No, I'm not sure, ma' am. And lying won't do me any good." Helen nodded with a smile.

“Well, let's put that down now. Send him two orders. First, don't open the lines too much. I want you to attack and destroy several more LauKlars ships before contact with that... President of theirs. Let him do all the damage he can. But watch out for any suspicious actions by the LauKlars, and above all, don't risk the ships for anything in the world. We have to be grouped together in these first steps. The second is that, for once in his life, he should learn to follow my orders without questioning them, or mumbling or roaring like a stampede elephant. Will you make yourself clear to him?”

“I'd be happy to do it, ma' am.” Helen leaned back on the chair. She almost sank into it. She sighed deeply.

“How do you see it, Le Brun?”

“What, madam?”

“This madness.”

“We must be cautious, ma' am. We have a technical advantage. But....”

“That's what I'm thinking... Anyway, everything has to be reorganized again. I...” The door rang again.

“Come in! Get in there!” Helen shouted. The door opened slightly, and the face of a thirty-something old man appeared, a somewhat neglected-looking man with half-broken jeans, sneakers of a near twentieth-century style, and a shirt from an old rock band.

“May I?”

“Will you please come in, Scott? Le Brun, that's all. Leave me here with the man of a thousand mysteries.”

“Yes, ma' am.” Le Brun bowed slightly and stepped out. She glanced sidelong at Scott, who looked sideways at her. Helen got up and approached him.

“I thought I'd get rid of you after three billion years in a bottle. But it seems my condemnation is certainly eternal.” Scott stood still, frozen, stiff, and unable to look at her. She continued as she leaned against the table:

"Look at him, there, undaunted, the ice man, the distant heart... Will you please relax a little? You are not in front of the goddess Freyja, even if you continue with the habit of calling me that. I'm Helen, not a Tyrannosaurus. Damn it! Who would send me to get into..." Helen babbled something unintelligible as she touched her head with her hands in a gesture of pain. Then, suddenly, she stood still, stood up, and turned around, at a speed that defied all physical logic, as she looked directly at Scott.

"All right, let go now! What happens now, Scott?"

"You must calm down. Please. Tough times are coming. What we went through in the past has little to do with what we are going to live through."

"Really, Scott? Don't you see? We're back to the same thing. How many times have we had this conversation in the past?"

"Too many times."

"Too many times, yes..." Helen sat in the chair. She looked exhausted.

"Do you think we're sick, Scott? Do you think it's been worth sleeping for three billion years, just to wake us up in order to turn the dreams of thousands of species into an endless nightmare? Do you think that, after so long waiting for the Ragnarok, the Apocalypse, or whatever you want to call it, we are finally the angel who plays the trumpet, or the Fenrir who unleashes his fury before the LauKlars and thousands of other species?" Scott remained pensive for a moment. He looked up slightly, looked at Helen, and answered:

"I think you are Freyja. You are the answer. You are the path that humanity must travel. We won't be afraid of you. Because we trust you. Everyone. If you ever fail, humanity will have failed. And if you ever triumph, humanity will have finally found rest, and a new future."

Helen got up and approached the record player, who turned around with the plate spinning freely. She lifted the arm of the needle, and put it back in place. Then she turned slowly, and looked at Scott with a dark countenance:

"Do you realize, Scott, that you are, once again, betting humanity on a woman who isn't thirty years old and inexperienced? A woman who was

nothing on Earth? That only had time to waste? Why are you doing this to me? Tell me about it. Why is that?"

"I told you, because you are Freyja."

"Damn it!" she shouted with a thump to the table with her hand. "I'm not a goddess, Scott!"

"You are what humanity wants you to be. And now, humanity wanted you to be Freyja. That's your destiny. And you'll have to accept it. Or watch humanity die, and become extinct. And this time, forever."

"I hate all this, Scott. I hate it." Helen drew her hands to her face. A teardrop sketch rolled down his face.

"I know. And I understand that. It won't be easy. We'll all support you. But the pain, suffering, anguish, and fear will only be yours. That's your destiny. Since you were born. And until you die."

"What if I never die?"

"Then there will never be peace for mankind."

"What a comfort, Scott. At least I have you by my side." Scott looked at her. And she understood that not even that desire could be fulfilled.

"I'm going to retire, Freyja."

"Retire?"

"I cannot be your second in this new age. Pick someone else. Pavlov, for example."

"What are you talking about, Scott? Your mind and your ability are vital to the progress of this operation. We need you." Scott lowered his eyes slightly.

"I know, and I owe it to everyone. But what I have to do now, I have to do alone. I need a room, a lab, and a lot of quiet." Helen looked up at him with a frown and her hand on her chin for a moment. Finally, she replied:

"Always the same, Scott. Always your mysteries, and your words flipped upside down... Anyway, all right. You're going to the Enterprise, or the

Charles de Gaulle. I believe that both ships have already been recovered, and either one of them has sufficient equipment for any kind of experiments..."

"Yes, Helen."

"Am I Helen now?"

"You're Helen to me. You'll always be Helen. But as part of this group of survivors, it is my duty to see that you remain Freyja to the end."

"I see. And you're not going to tell me what this is about? What's on your mind?" Scott looked at Helen. His eyes trembled slightly.

"I'm just going to tell you that..." Scott hesitated for a moment.

"What?"

"That I will keep you informed of my progress." Helen leaned back on the table as she breathed soundly, gesturing in a sense of defeat.

"It's all right. It's all right. Get out of here now. And take care of yourself. We need you."

"Yes, Freyja."

"My name will always be Helen's. But I'll do this pantomime. You and the others. Because you ask me to, and I trust you. But don't expect me to be a hero, Scott. I can't work miracles. I couldn't in the past. And I won't be able to now."

"The miracle is to contemplate your strength and perseverance every day, Helen. That strength that encourages us all to move forward."

"You're crazy, Scott. You, and everybody, for following me. But I'll try to live up to it. I hope this time we have options..."

Scott said nothing. He bowed simply and stepped out of the room. Helen sat in the chair. The computer showed Ronta's stolen data. Fortunately, it had been easy to decipher the LauKlar database. The image of the three-dimensional screen showed how they had spread from one side of the Galaxy to the other. Thousands and thousands of inhabited worlds.

“What a party is coming,” she whispered.

Wounds

The President and Narhum departed on the personal ship of the first to one of the hospital ships, known as Laia-Mar T-97. It was one of the ships that were treating the wounded from human attacks and their black ships. They were accompanied by Mirna, a young engineer who was only 120 years old and already had a promising career in the world of particle physics. Mirna had been studying the early analyses of the interaction of the strange energy emanating from human ships with common matter, and the preliminary findings made one thing clear: that energy required a reactor much larger than human ships in order to be generated. Bearing in mind that the human ships were not that large, the immediate question was where so much energy came from, and what exactly the type of energy it was.

“What did you find out, Mirna?” Narhum asked as they approached the medical ship.

“Not much. The decomposition of the material has been done on a subatomic scale, and it is as if the gluons themselves have stopped acting, breaking the hadrons into pieces. The result: the baryonic standard material decomposes. Metals, compounds... Everything. Everything is disposed of in a way we cannot understand.”

“That seems impossible,” said the President. “Such an energy would require a tremendously powerful energy source.”

“I know, President, and the conclusions are contradictory. Such an energy cannot exist, but we are seeing its results. The logical conclusion is that the human species has some technology that goes beyond our current knowledge and capabilities. I think we will be able to understand the exact nature of the black ray energy they project onto our ships, but I don't see how we can reproduce something like that in the short or medium term.” The President moved his wings slightly, with obvious nervousness.

“So we are completely defenseless in the face of this barbarity of destruction?”

"Let's get back to work, President. But I need to research more material, and compare results."

"And where is Deblar? How could she allow this?" Narhum asked with exaltation, flapping his wings eagerly, in a rare gesture among the LauKlars. The President replied:

"I don't know. Her attitude to this issue is incomprehensible. She has certainly gone much further than she should have."

"I think it all boils down to scientific interest," Mirna said. "She's a great researcher, and it's hard to resist such an opportunity. Not that I'm trying to justify her actions, but..."

"I know, I know," cut off the president," but science must have limits, Mirna. For millennia, our research has progressed at an appropriate pace, and Deblar has complained about this at times. But patience, and painstaking work, is the only way to achieve progress and success without exposing our species, or other species, to obvious danger. And now, at the moment, we are contemplating the consequences of not adapting to the method."

"I'll talk to her again," Narhum said.

"And what good will it do?" the President replied. "Evil is already done. Now we will have to act, and find solutions. Or the human species will turn the Galaxy into an unprecedented chaos in the annals of our history, and in the history of all peoples that inhabit it."

The president's personal ship approached the hospital ship.

"Personal Transport P-01 of the President requests permission to approach."

"P-01, you have permission to dock at pier 323-B."

The LauKlar T-97 hospital ship was designed from the outset for global disease control. In its seventy-three kilometers, it had housed thousands of different species in severe or very serious pandemic situations for thousands of years. Her mission consisted of helping any planet that required it, in which a disease had been established that threatened the

disappearance of a large part of its population, or even its extinction. The LauKlars had earned a reputation as a miraculous species by treating species with diseases of all kinds, many of them with mortality rates above 80%.

But, on that occasion, it was not species from anywhere in the galaxy that were being treated, but thousands of LauKlars victims, with hundreds of thousands injured by the attacks of black human ships. LauKlars of all ages swirled around in makeshift cures, while emergency medical units failed to treat many of them before they died.

The President, with Narhum and Mirna, took flight in a quick eye inspection. As they flew, they could feel perfectly the mental waves of pain coming from all over the ship. A pain of crying and death they couldn't bear.

"This is crazy," Narhum said as they flew over the covered areas of wounded LauKlars. Some beings of other species, who had been affected by the attacks, were also visible, being served with the same promptness and resources as any LauKlar. Mirna intervened, saying:

"I hope to live to see every human being in the Galaxy die, and every last wreck of this cursed species destroyed."

That's very good," said the President. "But we need the means. Your work, Mirna, and that of the other investigators, will be fundamental in trying to prevent new attacks and to prepare a counteroffensive against human ships." Mirna added:

"We'll come up with solutions, President, and we'll get them to pay for it. I myself will join the first warship where there is a position available. We'll fight those humans until all of them are destroyed, or even expelled from the Galaxy. " Narhum looked at her and asked:

"And lose a mind like yours on the battlefield? No, my dear Mirna. Your will of vengeance is noble, but you will fight humans better in the laboratory."

"That's right," added the President. "Your gesture is very noble and honoring. But now the real war is not on the battlefield, nor on our fighter ships, practically useless in the face of human technology, whatever they

employ to outperform us in this way. Now, the main war is, and I presume it will be, in the research laboratories, and in discovering the key to those human technologies, how they work, and how we can cope with them.”

“It could be a month's work. Or years,” Mirna suggested nervously.

“I know, I know,” answered the President bitterly. “But we have to get through all this and face them. There is no alternative now.”

“We will work until we find an answer,” Mirna said with obvious agitation. The President looked at her enthusiastically:

“Calm down, Mirna. I admire your strength, and I envy your youth. You, and those like you, are the future of our species. I am pleased to see that this strong and passionate heart knows how to see the reality of the facts, and understands the situation.”

“Always with you, President,” said Mirna.

After completing the inspection flight, the three LauKlars met with the ship's captain, who received them in their nesting area.

“It is an honor to receive you. I am the medical officer Kurkma, captain of the T-97” greeted all three of them as the officer spread his wings in a classic salute. Kurkma was the highest ranking officer on the medical ship.

“In other circumstances I would be delighted to receive his honors, Kurkma,” replied the President. “But here, and under this dantestic scenario of death and pain, I can only feel completely sorry and dismayed. Because I am, without a doubt, responsible for this massacre....”

“That's not true,” Kurkma replied. “I couldn't foresee such a thing. This situation, and this scenario, was completely and utterly unpredictable.”

“Are you sure, Kurkma?”

“I am, President. My crew and I are with you and the High Council.”

Suddenly, there was a signal. A giant three-dimensional screen appeared in front of them. Thousands of LauKlars turned their eyes. A shocked LauKlar appeared on the screen. Several wounds could be seen on his body, and

his plumage was stained with blood. It was evident that he could only move one wing while the other was fallen on one side and lifeless.

“Does anyone hear me? I must speak to the President immediately!” the image shouted. “I am Commander Zamar of Nar-Mabiter, a heavy combat cruiser escorting civilian ships with LauKlars refugees and other species. Identification T-1139. Where's the president?” he asked again with great anguish. Behind them were flames, and several fallen LauKlars. Some dead, some crawling on their wings. Others more flying in chaotic formations. The President spoke:

“I'm here, Zamar. Can you see me?”

“We only get mental audio!”

“Doesn't matter! Report! What happened to you?”

“It's the humans, President! Two ships attacking us! One of them has a picture on it and... Yes! I think the image is the Fenrir, President! The Fenrir of Darwan Legend! We need urgent help! We're in the Nar-Tirma sector. Help me, please! Our weapons and defenses are useless, they move in a way we cannot understand or follow!” The President and Narhum looked at each other for a moment. Then the first answered:

“We will send ships immediately. Hang on, Zamar! Hang in there!”

“No! It's late! They're moving at a bewildering rate! They come and go! How can they...?” Commander Zamar never finished the sentence. There was an explosion. The image disappeared from the screen.

“Do you have any outside views?” asked the President.

“Yes, we have two probes there,” answered Kurkma. “We can target the area and the ship.”

He accessed a nearby panel. The image of the screen was placed on Commander Zamar's ship. The ship was partially open to vacuum, and several flashes were coming from its engines. Suddenly, the ship exploded into pieces, while one of the human ships cut the T-139 cleanly in half.

At that moment, several thousand LauKlars of the medical ship that had observed the scene began to emit a high-pitched sound, which would be

almost imperceptible to the human ear. Others joined in. Soon, much of the LauKlars on the medical ship joined that expression of pain and suffering, which was only emitted in moments of great despondency and despair.

Finally, the whole ship was one. They were a mind. A village. One heart. All, and each one of them, living and feeling the suffering of those who had died. Thousands and thousands of them united in a harmony of despondency, anger, and frustration. Also of anguish, faced with the death of those LauKlars, who had perished before his eyes, in an explosion of such a power that the remains scattered at full speed, and in all directions. The LauKlars united their minds, and each felt the anguish of others within them. It was a pain that no LauKlar had felt for thousands and thousands of years.

Finally, the union ceased, and the ship was submerged, for an instant, in a great sepulchral silence. The President and Narhum felt several waves of pain and hatred as they had never felt in their lives, nor had they felt in thousands of generations LauKlars. The President looked at Narhum, and said to him:

“We must return, and report back to the High Council. We have to act somehow. We have to find a way out of this madness. And I have to talk to Deblar.”

“Yes, President.”

“And you, Mirna, stay here and try to find out everything you can about the composition and technology behind human weapons. We're counting on you.”

“Of course, President!” said Mirna proudly.

The President and Narhum left the medical ship and returned to communicate with the High Council, transmitting the latest information received. The medical officer Kurkma dismissed them with a simple gesture. He saw them both fly to the President's ship, and leave the medical ship. Then Kurkma turned to Mirna.

“Have you talked to Deblar?”

"Yes," answered Mirna. "She's informed of everything."

"Fine. You can leave now."

"But..." Mirna replied. "I don't think we should hide this for another minute."

"What do you say?"

"I'm going to talk to the president. I can't take it anymore, Kurkma."

"Don't do it. You mustn't do it."

"Why? We need him."

"Mirna, please," begged Kurkma.

"I'm sorry, Kurkma. But that's what I have to do. I'm gonna talk to him. Bye-bye."

Mirna made a gesture, ready to lift the flight. But, before he managed to rise, a gun, controlled by Kurkma, was fired, and the result was an impact on Mirna's chest, which fell dead at his feet.

"I'm so sorry, Mirna," said Kurkma looking at the young engineer's body. "I have also done what I had to do..."

The General

Doren was what humans would have defined as a military general within the LauKlars. An old LauKlar soldier with very limited experience. Military conflicts were scarce, and the power of the LauKlars was enormous. Any conflict could be resolved in a peaceful and orderly manner, but in the few cases where a certain military capability was required, the LauKlars could meet that requirement with complete satisfaction. Its advanced military technology was impressive enough in itself to prevent other civilizations from attempting any adventure. And the peaceful nature of the species had allowed the Galaxy to develop without serious incidents in a prolonged peace for at least the last four hundred thousand years, although peace was undoubtedly much more lasting, except for very specific and minor occasions.

Thus, when the old general received the news that a young pilot named Ronta had been killed on the original planet of the species, that another LauKlar had been abducted, and a week later, that several LauKlar ships, one of them the Neivaark, had quickly succumbed to the appearance of three strange black ships with three octagons encircling a cube drawn on its surface, he could not by any means betray his own. How was that possible? Where did these ships come from, what power did they have, and why had they destroyed their ships without provocation? What measures would be taken to prevent further attacks? And what was him going to say to the President, who was probably already waiting to hear his answer?

The Great White Room fell silent at the arrival of the President. Only Narhum remained impassive, as the room was filled with thoughts of anguish at the news that was arriving.

Weeks ago, Deblar had done organic engineering work on a group of humans in a Xarwen laboratory, whose data was in an old bioinformatics system. There was nothing else. These humans had returned to the Xarwen laboratory and somehow reactivated a system that was bound to be beyond any ability to become operational again. On the other hand, black

ships with strange unknown symbols were attacking at different points in the Galaxy, randomly and apparently without any real defense against them. No LauKlar ship had survived until now. Only the data they transmitted on relief and disaster reports, plus some groups of survivors who were apparently allowed to remain alive. Then everything was static. Static, and an extremely important coded message received by a high-priority channel.

Councillor Narhum began speaking, addressing the President and all present. Kirak and Deblar were there, called to declare as the main precursors of those terrible events. Him, as a witness. She was suspected of causing a disaster. Kirak looked worried. Deblar, indifferent.

“Chairman” said Councillor Narhum “We are here to talk about the origin of this emergency situation, and the events that have led to this crisis. However, before dealing with this issue, I must report that we have recently received a high priority message in the High Priority band. An encrypted message that could only be decrypted using a Xarwen key. Dr. Deblar was the one who understood that the symbols were Xarwen, and has been able to decode and retrieve the message. Now we have a complete transcript of the message.”

“All right, turn it on and project it,” the President said in a cool voice. The room darkened slightly, and a three-dimensional image of the human Helen appeared on screen. Their gaze was not, far from it, the one they remembered of that human female they saw on the first day, submissive and frightened. The recorded projection began to speak.

“My dear birds” began with a clear mocking tone, though many did not quite understand what he meant by birds. What they were going to hear would change their lives forever.

“It's been a long time. Too much maybe. We have slept, stored as biodata, in an old but very sophisticated Xarwen computer. We always knew that our chances of survival were limited. But we never imagined it would be so many thousands of years before our rebirth. What has happened was foreseen more than three billion years ago. What you initiated was

planned by us at that time. Why we get access to the Xarwen systems, and how we end up as a group of data in their biomemories, inside a self-supporting laboratory protected from external time, is something that now does not matter and is not interesting to explain. At least not at the moment, let alone some birds that are a little grown up in size and arrogance. I will only tell you that, if you check the metallurgy of the systems, you will be surprised..."

"What does the metallurgical analysis of those Xarwen remains indicate?" the President asked mentally.

"Approximately two thousand years since they were installed and commissioned," replied Kirak.

"How is that possible? How could those humans stay hidden in material that is two thousand years old, if it has been three billion years..." Helen's voice continued to speak.

"Where our ships that scare you so much have come from is something we will not comment on either. The important thing is that our technology allows us to interstellar travel, and more importantly, our weaponry is immensely more powerful than the best you can dispose of. We have confirmed this with your military databases and your Galactic Encyclopedia. Very entertaining indeed. And, apparently in that Galactic Encyclopedia, our task is going to be simpler than we thought." A mental oppression grew in the Great White Room before the words of a real and incalculable danger that took shape with each passing hour... The recording continued to speak:

"The human species has the right and duty to rule the Galaxy. It has been, and always will be. You tried to take that right away from us, but you failed. You tried to subdue us, but failed. Yeah, you got our extermination almost total. But you failed. The living and palpable proof that you failed is us, and our presence here and now. From that, we learned that there should be no pity or any kind of rationalization of life and matter. Morality and scruples only serve the weak. We learned that only the strongest survives, and that the strongest subjugates the weakest. We learned that democracy, that

freedom, that justice, has as many forms as individuals and societies that create and manage them, and that they are an impediment to the future of the Galaxy.”

“However, we do not deny a certain form of justice. Of course, human justice. We are going to create our own form of justice and freedom. They will be based on the absolute dominion of humanity over any other species, starting with you of course. And also in controlling the resources of the Galaxy. Submission will be complete, or there will be nothing to submit. Because there will be nothing to be submitted. Any resistance will be immediately stifled by the complete destruction of opposing worlds. Any planet and any species that refuses to submit will be completely and forever erased from the Galaxy. There will be no second chances for anyone. We'll give you a chance to survive. Just one. If you submit quickly and with total obedience.”

“It may seem like a cruel attitude. It is not. We have simply proved to be better, superior, more able to control and dominate the Galaxy. Our extermination was attempted. But we prevailed. We survived. Our technology is better, our weapons are better, our strategy is better. We were born to govern, but not because we want to impose some kind of dictatorship. Dictatorships are imposed by those who by their nature should not govern. It's not our case. We are the heirs of the Galaxy. Simply because it is the best thing for all the species that populate it. With us, all this paraphernalia of supposedly free societies will know a new form of freedom and justice: the one that we will apply to each and every one of the individuals of each and every one of the inhabitants of every world of the Galaxy. Actually, we're liberators. We come to offer you a universe of possibilities infinitely better than the present. You can, if you want, feel lucky for it. And you can submit freely and peacefully. Or you can die. It is your choice.”

“But let's focus. The important thing here is that we have begun our work, so long anticipated and planned. And we won't stop until the end. Just two answers to your questions. the first: why? Because the human species deserves it. We have our reasons, as I have explained, and perhaps, in time, you can learn about our history. What motivates us. Why we're here.

How it all started. And how we want to proceed. And it's not just the craving for conquest. That would be too basic for a species with our power. The second answer to the second question is something that I have already commented on, and which I will now stress: an unconditional surrender. That alone can save your species, and all the other species in the Galaxy."

"We do not want to appear as monsters before you. We are not. If we were, with the power we have in our hands, we could wipe out your civilization, from one side of the Galaxy to the other, in a few years. We want, however, a long and prosperous peace where humanity and the LauKlars and other species can develop without resentment and pain. The only thing we demand is the submission of your laws and customs to our rules, which will be, you can be sure, fair and equitable. We do not want to create unnecessary pain where there can be peace and quiet for all. That is why we encourage you, from now on, to accept our conditions. Everything will be simpler and easier. Besides, the alternative is your annihilation. You don't have a choice. It is therefore better to accept our offer. It will be better for you, and better for us."

"You have seen what our ships can do. At this moment hundreds of new human ships are being prepared, and their crews are being shipped, to begin the mission required of them. Where they came from doesn't matter at the moment. They are there, and they will do whatever it takes to carry out our purpose. You will follow my orders to the end. And I hope those orders don't have to be bad news for your survival."

"Like the ancient Vanir of an ancient human myth, we have returned to reclaim what is ours. What belongs to us for our past, and for being the heirs of the future of the Galaxy. And like the Vanir, fire and chaos will take over those worlds that want to resist. Yours is the decision "...

"Oh, yes, one last thing... I have as a guest one of your kind, who calls himself Nahr. Don't worry, we won't hurt him. Our show of strength is over. For now. And always subjecting the future to unconditional surrender."

"Think about it calmly and, at the right time, we will contact you. There will be no more attacks for now. But remember, there will only be one chance

for peace. If you waste it, the war will be massive and total. And it will reach the very end of the Galaxy.”

“The LauKlars are a powerful and interesting species. I've been going over all your accomplishments in your encyclopedias. You're magnificent. But you will be lost in time, and you will only be a memory, or a legend, if you do not do what we command. “

“End of transmission.”

The room was completely silent. Only a cloud of confusion and mental frustration swept through the ship's space. Among all the oppressive mental states, one hope appeared marked in Kirak's mind; at least Nahr was still alive. He was going to do everything in his power to ensure that this situation was maintained until his release. Or those humans would have to pay a high price if they hurt their son...

Galactic Encyclopedia: The Legend of Darwan

... Few are the myths that resist the passage of time of the LauKlars. After thousands of years of history having abandoned ancient irrational beliefs, the myths and rites of their ancestors had been lost in time. Although some texts contained fragments of the ancient ritual customs of the LauKlars, one of the classic stories preferred by many focused on the myth of Darwan's Legend.

In that myth, it is explained that the LauKlars, many millions of years ago, had coexisted with an unknown and undetermined species of the Galaxy, especially LauKlars and another one. Both species had controlled the Galaxy equally, sometimes peacefully, and sometimes in periods of cruel and harsh war, where each tried to impose its superiority on the other. At that time, a strange and unknown technology related to the artificial manipulation of variable universes was discovered, a concept that could turn a species into something similar to a god, but that could also destroy the very structure of the Galaxy, and also of the entire universe.

Who that other species were and why the LauKlars lived with them is unknown. It is known that from that very fragmented part of ancient history, there were only traces of texts, mainly in the form of children's stories and myths. The LauKlars never gave much credibility to those stories of struggles and heroes, and the vast majority knew only children's stories. Until, at one point, the human species appeared. The obvious question that the LauKlars asked themselves was, "Were those humans the other species that Darwan's Legend spoke of?"

For a few moments, there was complete silence in the Great White Room. Only slight clicks of thought from those present broke the sepulchral emptiness that filled the hearts of the LauKlars.

“What was that human woman talking about?” the President asked harshly.

I don't know,” replied Counsellor Narhum, unable to shake off his astonishment at what he had just heard. “This seems to be much more serious than a few unexplained attacks. If that human female is right, and that power they have is confirmed as impossible to counteract, we will have many problems.”

“What's my son doing there?” Kirak cut. “Where and how was he kidnapped? He told me he was going to travel to Laconta to see archaeological remains, but he is with those humans...” Kirak did not come out of his surprise. His son was abducted by those beings only slightly conscious...

“Apparently,” said a LauKlar, “he was spotted in a shuttle traveling to the planet. Apparently, he went alone. It was not given more importance at that time, so it was not reported. Naturally, if we had known that he had disappeared...”

“No... It's nobody's problem... It's only my responsibility to take responsibility for his abduction. I'm his father, and I'm responsible for his safety. Nahr, my son, always in that spirit of investigating everything, was probably more interested in humans than he told me. They were no apparent danger, they are supposed to be creatures only one degree above the minimum consciousness, and there was no special control. I repeat, therefore, the responsibility is mine alone.”

“Don't blame yourself,” commented the President. “The responsibility for what has happened lies solely and exclusively with these humans. I believe that, somehow and involuntarily, we have activated a plan prepared by these beings for millions of years, and now they have become a total threat. Apparently, their ships and weapons are far superior to ours. What I wonder is: how is it possible that we are so overwhelmingly helpless in the face of such a primitive extinct species, which had a technological level of

development far below that of many other species?" Old General Doren replied:

"President, we have analyzed the few tactical data that we have been able to recover from human attacks, and apparently they have the capacity to appear and disappear before our eyes. This, and weapons that should be powerful but not so powerful as to destroy our ships, is what allows humans their superiority. Those weapons should not inflict so much damage, but somehow, they pass through our defenses without problems. And then they disappear."

"Are you talking to me about cloaking systems on their ships?"

"No, President. It's not that simple. A cloaking system is useless with our technology. Human ships go one step further. We are investigating how they proceed, how they act, what their technology is. At the moment, both their transport systems and weapons are beyond our comprehension. But we will continue to work with the best scientists."

In fact, ships, in plural," Kirak remarked. "These beings were disposed of for their escape from a ship. Now there seems to be more, and more humans flying those ships. Where did they come from, ships and humans?"

"We don't know for now," answered the general. "But it was clearly part of his plan. Somehow, they had those ships prepared and hidden. As for the rest of humans, it is possible that there were other laboratories like the one we found, ready to be reopened, and the human beings inside regenerated."

"Well, let's get going," replied the President. "Too many unanswered questions. And apparently this is a danger that threatens our species, and also the other species in the Galaxy. General, I want the First Task Force to stop everything that could be doing, I repeat, everything, and immediately start to study the ability of humans to take advantage of us in this way. They should support the scientific research team to find out as soon as possible how human technology works, both in terms of transport and armaments, so that they can counteract it."

“Yes, President” confirmed General Doren.

“Kirak, I want you to go back to the planet and dismantle those biocomputers and all the associated technology piece by piece, and try to find out anything that might be useful to us. You will lead a multidisciplinary team, in which the Second Task Force will be involved. We will send biotechnology experts to support you in any technological aspects that may be necessary. But the key may lie in time, in history, in the past of which they speak, and in those mentions to their subjection. I mean, what happened and why they made the decisions they made. Learning from their past can be the key to our future, and there you are the most capable.” Kirak nodded in the LauKlar mode.

“Deblar, your responsibility in all this cannot be forgotten. You have initiated all this, and you must answer for it. But there's no time now to look for innocents or culprits. Now we need to work together. You will study human behavior, analyze their acts, their voices, all the information we have recorded about them, and will try to look for patterns of behavior that allow us to foresee their past, present and future motivations... On the move, and seek solutions. I fear that this issue may become, if not already, the biggest crisis in our history.”

Deblar nodded, too. She'd do everything the president ordered. But she would go much further. As far as necessary to stop this growing group of mammals. The plan was drawn up. And Fate played to her advantage.

Finally, the three LauKlars nodded, raised their wings in the classic farewell salute, and took flight. It was the first day of a new Era. And they should try to make it as short as possible. They would all have had a lump in their throat if they had vocal cords in their throats. But for very different reasons.

The news of the human attacks, and the threat they posed, spread swiftly throughout the Galaxy. If the LauKlars, who were undoubtedly the most powerful species, could not stop these humans, it was difficult to imagine what it could do. But there was one hope: all species knew of the tenacity, power, and strength of the LauKlars to deal with problems of all kinds of nature. The question was whether, for the first time, a large-scale conflict

would overcome them. To submit to the designs of humans was unthinkable. But trying to stop them without adequate means to counteract their technology was a collective suicide of all species.

The Great White Room was clear. And at last, Narhum approached the President, and told him:

“President, you haven't told them anything about the Discovery. That which, if confirmed, will indicate that the Legend of Darwan is true. And, if true, it could be the answer we're looking for.” The President seemed slightly uncomfortable.

“It's better that they don't know, at least not for now. Remember, my dear Narhum: if the concept of the artificial variable universe is true, if the control of the atom of space and time can be controlled, and if that control is in the hands of these beings, we are going to face the greatest challenge of our species in all its history. The work must be continued, but, for the moment, in the most absolute of secrets.”

“But something like that is supposed to have an infinite chance of collapsing on its own. It's against all the laws of nature.”

“True, but we can't rule anything out. It needs to be investigated. And we have to do it now. But all information relating to the Legend of Darwan must be kept in absolute secrecy. If the Galaxy were simply to come to know the aspects that have recently been discovered about those facts and those times, the question of humanity would be by comparison a mere pastime.”

“Thus it will be done,” answered Narhum.

“Go now, my old advisor. The coming times are going to test our people and the galaxy. We may never be what we were. It is our duty that, whatever the circumstances, these human beings be detained. And they will be. That is my solemn promise.”

Narhum took flight, and the President watched as he wandered through the vast space of the Great White Room to his destination. And everyone's fate was shaping up at all times. If everything failed, if humans could not be stopped, it would be the end of the LauKlars' story. And the whole

galaxy. A single species would dominate them all. Like, apparently, and according to Darwan's Legend, once it had happened. A single species... What species? How did they get it? Were they human? Or was it another species, perhaps one already extinct? What was their relationship to the newly recovered humans in the Xarwen biocomputers?

The legend of Darwan could be the key. Of course, all that information, fragmented and broken, after millions of years, had become a legend.

They had to investigate, they had to get to the bottom. Because, perhaps, just perhaps, in the past the answer was written. Another war was to take place, far from the battles between human ships and other species. That other war could be the key to winning the military war. Knowledge of the past could contain the solution for the future.

The President pressed a button, and a three-dimensional image of Helen appeared. He looked at her with disdain, but also with concern. From that moment on, he would dedicate his whole life to this being and his species. He would. And history would account for that.

Deblar appeared, drawing the President out of his thoughts.

"President."

"What's going on?"

"I suppose you're concerned about the Darwan Legend business."

"That's right. What do you know about that? Only the High Council is supposed to know the details." Deblar extracted an instrument that floated in the air. An image of the Galaxy emerged from it. In it there was a huge blue area marked with the symbol of three octagons surrounding a cube. And another red zone, with a mark that the President immediately recognized.

"What galaxy is that?"

"It's our galaxy."

"I don't recognize that configuration."

Because this is the galaxy with the structure it had in the past, approximately three billion years ago. The legend is catalogued in that period."

"And where did you get this information?" Deblar ignored the question and continued:

"The Legend of Darwan is the key."

"What do you know about the legend?"

"I know we must be prepared."

"Then you know everything."

"You must come with me."

"Where to, the planet?"

"No. Sun 6-1. The humans called it Titan. It's a moon from the sixth planet of this star system. It was a mining operation of hydrocarbons in the epoch of humanity."

"What's going on in Titan?"

"There, there may be all the answers. Remember the human speech. He referred to the Vanir."

"It was a rhetorical figure."

"Yes. It's a rhetorical figure. But it's also a key. A key that opens a door. And that door leads to the Galaxy's greatest secret..."

Epilogue: Ragnarok.

Galactic Encyclopedia: Kleoron, the fundamental particle, or Primordial Particle.

For many species, including the LauKlars, it had been hard to understand that gravity was not a field like the others, nor was it a distortion of space-time, although it could be explained in those terms.

In fact, the LauKlars used to draw a thick line between the intelligent species that came to understand the true nature of gravity as one of the variants of the basic forces of the universe, which are part of what was known by humans as “dark energy,” and their local expression, dark matter. The complete secrets of these forms of matter and energy, true precursors of the universe, of which baryonic matter only consists of the unexpressed part of the Big Bang, were never known to the human species before they became extinct, which had led to its classification as level 1, the most basic engineering. The three classical fields for humans, electromagnetism, strong nuclear, and weak nuclear, were in turn the same field which is expressed in different ways according to the measure. The gravitational field was one of the remaining three forming the second qualifying group. And above all of them was the fundamental particle, known by the LauKlars as “Kleoron”, from which the rest emanated. The Kleoron, together with its antiparticle, are the ones that give rise to baryonic matter, dark energy and dark matter, and allow interstellar travel through the interaction of the anti-universe universe....

The Xarwen clearly went beyond that level, but surprisingly they did not seem to have developed the interstellar journey, one of the first practical applications of Kleoron field theory, understanding that Kleoron is the precursor of the structure of the universe. All other fields and forces, and what humans would have called associated “matter-energy”, start from the Kleoron as a base, and are variants of it. Graviton, in turn, is derived from Kleoron, which makes up the rest of the fields and masses. The Kleoron was the particle that initiated the Big Bang, and in fact all matter and energy, as well as all intermediate states, are concentrated forms of Kleoron fields

with different expressions. Some humans theorized about that possibility, but could not go further in their theoretical models. The Kleoron was the base that gave shape to the universe, and in the Lauklar universe, its concrete expression, spin, constant fine structure (incomplete in almost all species, including the human) and quantum angular moment, had given shape to a particular structure that was capable of generating and harboring life. Other universes do not follow the same destiny...

The call

The President was isolated in a House of Reflection. In these chambers, the thoughts of other LauKlars cannot pass through the structure impervious to the thought of walls, ceiling and floors. LauKlars often use these cameras at special times from time to time, when, for various reasons, they want to be reflected in their reflections without any external disturbance. Although LauKlars rarely need such isolation, it is sometimes an extremely effective tool for sorting their minds.

So, when the President noticed a second presence in his mind, he was surprised. He found that the chamber closures were locked and secured, and that they worked perfectly. However, that strange mind was still there. After a few moments of confusion, the voice spoke.

“President.”

“Who is he? Deblar?”

“Please, President, don't insult me by comparing me to that giant chicken.”

“To all the stars of the heavens!...”

“By all the stars! Speak up! Are you really in your kind always so ceremonial? It's really frustrating that, after all this time, we have to face each other again with the biggest chickens in the Galaxy, and you're such a challenge... Edible? Sorry, I see fried chicken when I think of you...”

“Helen!”

“Bingo! I see you're a fast-minded being, President.”

“But how did you get in touch with me? Where are you located? And how did you get through the shield...?”

“Follies, President. It's the same technique we used on our ships. We're ten light-years away, and we're right next to you. Then we return to our point of origin. My telepathic link is only a few hundred meters away, using a hidden probe close to your ship. Isn't that fantastic? “

“We don't know how you move like that, but we'll find out, human. It's some form of temporary displacement, that's for sure.”

“Of course you will, you'll find out everything we're up to, I don't question that. We won't underestimate you. But by then you will be a people subjugated and enslaved to our will, with no chance of recovering lost ground. Moreover, this trick is only one of those we have, our advantages are not only technological.”

“Why are you doing this? What is the reason for this obsession with conquest? The Galaxy contains thousands of intelligent species. It has been shown that we can live in harmony. There is enough for everyone, much more than we could ever need to engage in absurd resource wars.”

“Resource Warfare? What do you take us for, President? Do you think we have waited all this time to launch a “resource war”? You think our target is some kind of Lebensraum?”

“I don't quite understand that term.”

“It doesn't matter. And you obviously know why we're here, and why we do what we do. And it's not just a stupid war of resources or space, or mere domination.”

“I don't know.”

“Don't you know, President?”

“How do you want me to know?”

“However, you know the Legend of Darwan. You know what it says. And you know that, for thousands of years, it has been there, hidden, told the children who don't eat their dinner, who don't behave well, who don't do their homework.”

"Our children don't do homework. And they don't eat dinner. Not in the human sense of the term. It is true that sometimes they may have attitudes that can upset their parents."

"As it has happened with Nahr."

"Don't you dare harm him."

"We're not going to hurt him. We are not here to cause unnecessary harm, only that required to meet our goals. And that chick is more useful to us alive than dead. I was thinking of taking it as a pet.... But let's focus. The Legend, in its absurd infantile version, tells that a long time ago, there was a bloody battle in the Galaxy, and that after thousands of years, a new species would arrive and take them away, it would take away the bad children who do not behave well... And so the children learn to obey... A children's tale, nothing more, like the man in the sack of my time. Right, President? However, some LauKlars know more about the Legend. You know it's not a story to scare the kids. And you've kept it secret for thousands of years..."

"That's fantasy!"

"Fantasy? Don't make me laugh, President. You know the truth."

"What truth?"

"The truth, President. The truth. The damn stubborn truth. In the depths of your brains you know the truth of the Legend, and that, of all that is going to happen, you are the only ones responsible. Your species will fall, and the most paradoxical thing will be that it is you, and not us, who have programmed your own end. It's almost comical, President. A species stupid enough to have such great pride that it causes its own disappearance, and its conversion into slaves. I'll drink to that. Undoubtedly, a curious epitaph for a species that wanted to play God. Yes, even among you conceal a vital part of the Legend. You know it's a myth, you know it's part of the story. But you also know that it contains the secret of the greatest power in the Universe..."

"We will stop you, human. All that crap won't do you any good. And, the Legend... It is nothing more than something you have found in the Galactic

Encyclopedia. You won't use it against us.”

“Don't make me laugh again, grown chicken. And don't try to test me. In the Galactic Encyclopedia, and you know it, there are no real data of the Legend; only the children's tale, conveniently distorted and adapted so that those who read it will be satisfied with what it says. The actual data is encoded in the President's Chamber, accessible only to a very small group of Directors and some special members. And, in an even more hidden second layer, new data only visible to your eyes and right hand: Narhum. The real data on the Legend is also in our Xarwen database. And you know why. So, don't insult me with your pretended ignorance. We could have blown your ship to pieces hours ago, but you are part of our plan, and we want you alive. For the time being. That doesn't mean I'm going let you try to trick me with your lies. Don't try it again. You're the one we need. But your family, your partner, your children, are great beings, full of life and future. I'd feel like you saw them passing by the main lock of your ship dismembered and turned into chicken pulp. Obey, shut up, and speak only when you're asked from now on. I hope that's clear enough.”

“That's clear enough. You said you wouldn't do any unnecessary harm.”

“Whether your family, and thousands of other LauKlars families, become a necessary target ultimately depends on your collaboration. And don't try to fool me.”

“I will not deceive you.”

“We'll see. For now, I'm going to make an effort and believe you. Well, it was an interesting conversation. It won't be the last. And I'm going to make that clear again. If you cooperate, there will be no unnecessary deaths. We need slaves, not dead. Of course, that doesn't go with you, but it goes with everyone else in general. You will be treated well as I have already said, but you will have to collaborate in everything and everything that is said. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I understand.”

“Fine. Nice, pretty little bird. I love your colors. Now go with your loved ones for a while, and enjoy their company. They're so charming!”

“I will do so.”

“Goodbye, President. And remember. I'm tuning you in. Don't forget that.”

“I won't do it...”

The President left the House of Reflection, and immediately summoned the Major Council, the main group of LauKlars with the most senior access. He also summoned Deblar. He wanted to talk to her to try and find out more about the human species. He sent a short message. The content of the message only said:

“Darwan has begun. We must be ready.”

At the moment, he felt Deblar's mind inside. She was strange. Different. Powerful. He almost flinched when he read the answer:

“President, we've been ready for three billion years...”