

“I am... disturbed”

When Alien Species Check Your Social Media After Reading
Your CV

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I. The Candidate

The probe reached the Galactic Council in standard cycle 4,271.

Small, primitive — chemical propulsion, metal hull, laughably slow velocity. It had traveled forty-seven local years just to leave its own star system. Forty-seven years. The Council had ships that covered such distances in the time it took to brew tea.

But the probe carried something interesting.

A golden disc. On it: the position of its home system relative to fourteen pulsars. Mathematics — prime numbers, geometric patterns. Sounds — later identified as “music.” Images of the beings who sent it. Greetings in fifty-five different communication systems.

Chancellor Xelar reviewed the preliminary report.

“Fascinating,” he said to his assistant. “Young civilization. They’ve barely discovered space travel — barely, barely — but they’re already attempting contact. Bold. Perhaps naive, but bold.”

“Do you recommend observation, Chancellor?”

“I recommend full observation. Send a cloaked probe to their system. I want to know more about a species that sends... business cards into the cosmos.”

Xelar smiled. The golden disc was elegant. Orderly. The mathematics flawless, the music — they checked later — based on harmonic proportions indicating deep understanding of acoustics. The species that created this seemed... promising.

It was a CV. Professionally prepared, carefully presented.

Chancellor Xelar didn't yet know that in the information age, candidates are verified more thoroughly than just through their CVs.

II. Background Check

The cloaked probe reached the third planet of the Sol system eight cycles later.

On the first day, it transmitted data about atmosphere, geology, population distribution. Standard information. The Chancellor reviewed it with moderate interest.

On the second day, the probe connected to the planet's global information network.

On the third day, Chancellor Xelar sat in the darkness of his office, staring at the screen.

“Chancellor? Is everything alright?”

A long silence.

“They... have a global information exchange network.”

“That's a positive sign of civilizational development, Chancellor.”

“They use it mainly for arguments. And transmitting images of cats.”

“...cats, Chancellor?”

“Small furry predators they keep in their homes for entertainment. They're everywhere. On every platform. In every node of the network. Billions of images.”

The assistant didn't know what to say.

“It gets worse,” Xelar continued. “They have a game. For children. Children capture creatures and force them to fight other creatures. For *entertainment*. They call it... ‘Pokémon.’”

“Perhaps it’s a metaphor—”

“It is their *highest-grossing media franchise in history*.”

Xelar stood, walked to the window overlooking the stars.

“They also made a series. Giant robots piloted by *traumatized teenagers* fighting cosmic horrors. Their reaction was to... sexually objectify one of those children. Massively. They call it ‘waifu.’”

“Chancellor, perhaps you should rest—”

“They have weapons capable of destroying entire cities. They used them. On *themselves*. Twice. And then they made *video games* about it. For fun. They simulate their own extinction *recreationally*.”

Xelar turned. In his eyes was something the assistant had never seen before.

“I am... disturbed.”

III. Deeper Waters

Weeks passed. Chancellor Xelar should have ended the observation. Filed his report. Moved to the next project.

He couldn’t.

“It doesn’t make sense,” he muttered, reviewing more data. “They produce more food than they need. Some they throw away. Part of the population starves. What’s the logic of distribution?”

“Perhaps their economic systems—”

“They pay money to run in circles. In enclosed buildings. On machines. They call it ‘gym.’ But they *drive there by car*.”

“That is indeed illogical—”

“They lock themselves in metal boxes and stand for hours, inhaling fumes from other boxes. Every day. They call it ‘commuting to work.’ Some spend *three hours a day* doing this.”

Xelar fell silent for a moment, studying the screen.

“And yet...”

“Chancellor?”

“And yet they built something called ‘Wikipedia.’ Collective knowledge of the species. Free. Anyone can add, anyone can read. Translated into hundreds of languages.”

“That sounds—”

“They run tens of kilometers to raise money for sick children. Strangers help strangers after disasters. They create music in garages and share it without any payment.”

Xelar rubbed his temples.

“This species is *simultaneously* the worst and best I’ve ever seen. In the same moment. The same individuals. How is this possible?”

He didn’t know that the answer was already flowing through the corridors of his own ship.

IV. Infection

It started innocently.

The navigation officer began humming a strange melody under his breath. Repetitive. Catchy.

A week later, the chief engineer brought a pot to the mess hall.

“What is that?” asked Xelar.

“They call it ‘bigos,’ Chancellor. Cabbage, meat, spices. It must *sit* for several days to develop flavor.”

“Where did you get the recipe?”

“From their network. It’s... surprisingly good.”

Xelar should have reacted then. He didn’t. Because the night before, he himself had been listening to something they called “nocturne.” Composer: Chopin. Planet of origin: Earth.

It was... beautiful.

Two weeks later, half the crew knew the words to something called “Szopka Noworoczna” — a comedy performance. They quoted fragments during meals. They laughed. Xelar didn’t understand why it was funny.

After three weeks — he understood.

That terrified him more than anything else.

V. Breaking Point

“Chancellor, you have a priority message.”

Xelar looked up from the screen. For several hours he had been watching a transmission from Mars — the fourth planet of the Sol system. Humans had sent a robot there. A small, lonely robot on wheels that collected rock samples.

A robot they *sang* “*Happy Birthday*” to.

Every year, on the anniversary of landing, millions of humans on Earth celebrated the birthday of a *machine*. They wrote it messages. Made it “memes.” Treated it like... a family member.

And when the previous robot — they called it “Opportunity” — stopped functioning after fifteen years, its final transmission read:

“My battery is low and it’s getting dark.”

And humans *wept*.

An entire planet mourned a *robot*.

Xelar realized tears were flowing down his own cheeks.

He didn’t know why.

He didn’t know it was already too late.

VI. Przez Twe Oczy Zielone

“Chancellor, the crew is behaving... non-standardly.”

Xelar knew. Of course he knew.

In the mess hall, bigos was cooking constantly. The third pot this month. Officers argued about how many days it needed to “sit” and whether to add prunes.

In navigation, someone had replaced the standard audio signals with something called “Chopin — Ballade No. 1 in G minor.” No one protested.

And at night — Xelar heard through the walls — someone was singing.

“Przez twe oczy zielone, zielone, oszalałem...”

They didn’t know that language. None of them. And yet the words came naturally, the melody burrowed into the mind and refused to leave.

Xelar caught himself humming it in the shower.

This wasn’t scientific observation.

This was *invasion*.

VII. Understanding

“Why?” Xelar asked the empty office. “Why does a species that is *so* full of contradictions, *so* chaotic, *so*... human... have such power?”

The answer came from the data he himself had collected.

Humans were lonely.

Fundamentally, cosmically lonely. Eight billion beings on one planet, connected by a global network — and each of them felt alone. Each sought connection. Each sent signals into the void: posts, photos, messages, memes, music.

Each of them was a Voyager.

Each of them sent a golden disc into space with the same question:

“Is anyone there? Does anyone see me? Will anyone hear me?”

And that desperation — that cosmic loneliness — was *contagious*.

Xelar watched the little robot on Mars, singing itself Happy Birthday in the void, and understood. Humans loved that robot because they saw themselves in it. Alone. Far from home. Doing its job, day after day, without certainty that anyone was watching.

“My battery is low and it’s getting dark.”

That wasn’t a technical message.

That was a *confession*.

VIII. Evacuation

“Gather everyone. We’re leaving the system.”

“Chancellor?”

“Immediately. That’s an order.”

“But our research—”

“Exactly.”

Xelar looked at his crew. At their faces that now understood human jokes. At their mouths that hummed Polish songs. At their hands that had learned to cook bigos.

They came as observers.

They were leaving as something else.

“This is not a civilization that can be safely observed,” he said quietly. “This is. . . an infection. Cultural, emotional, memetic. You cannot watch them without *becoming infected*.”

“What do you recommend in your final report, Chancellor?”

Xelar was silent for a long time.

The ship slowly receded from the blue planet. In the mess hall, the last pot of bigos grew cold. On the bridge, someone turned off Chopin mid-nocturne.

“Recommendation. . .” Xelar began, but his voice broke.

He cleared his throat.

“Better. . . better to leave them alone.”

“For their safety, Chancellor?”

Xelar didn’t answer.

They both knew that wasn’t the point.

IX. Silence

The ship vanished into hyperspace.

The golden disc still floated through interstellar void, carrying Bach and mathematics, greetings in fifty-five languages and the position of a small blue planet.

On Mars, the little robot finished collecting samples.

On Earth, eight billion humans ate, slept, made love, argued, created cat memes, and wept over robots.

No one knew they had just been classified as “protected area — do not approach.”

No one knew their cosmic CV had just passed verification.

No one knew they had won a bet they didn’t even know they had placed.

X. Pascal’s Wager

Because humanity placed a bet.

Voyager wasn’t a scientific curiosity. It was a cosmic Pascal’s Wager.

If no one’s out there — we lose nothing.

If they’re hostile and find us — they’ll find us anyway, the signal doesn’t change the equation.

If they’re benevolent and see our signal — maybe protection, maybe quarantine, maybe someone will someday respond.

The only losing strategy is *silence*.

So we sent a golden disc. Music. Mathematics. Our coordinates. Ourselves.

And we got something in return.

Not an answer — because an answer would destroy us, just as contact destroyed the Hawaiians, just as it would destroy the Sentinelese if India didn’t protect their island.

We got *silence*.

And silence, in this context, is the best possible answer.

It means: *we know you're there. We're leaving you alone. For now.*

XI. The Inverted Sentinel

In the Bay of Bengal lies an island.

North Sentinel. It's inhabited by people who have lived in isolation for sixty thousand years. They shoot arrows at anyone who approaches. They don't want contact. They don't ask for help.

India — powerful, modern India with nuclear weapons and a space program — *protects this island.*

Not because they don't respect the Sentinelese. Because they know contact would kill them. Diseases they have no immunity to. Cultural shock that would destroy their world. Technology that would strip meaning from everything they believe.

So India watches.

And doesn't intervene.

And protects the island from those who would want to "help."

We thought we were like India. Advanced. Looking down at the more primitive from the heights of our technology.

No.

We are the Sentinel.

A small island on the edge of the galaxy. Savages who just discovered iron — sorry, nuclear fission — and are already shooting it at each other.

And somewhere out there, far away, someone is watching us.

And protecting.

Not from ourselves — it's too early for that.

From others who might find us.

Because they saw our CV. Checked our social media. And decided:

"This species is too... human... to contact now. But maybe someday."

XII. Fermi

Enrico Fermi, 1950, lunch at Los Alamos.

“Where is everybody?”

The question that haunted humanity for seventy years. Billions of stars. Billions of planets. Billions of years for civilizations to develop. And yet — silence. No signals. No probes. No traces.

The Fermi Paradox.

Except Fermi never asked himself another question.

Humanity in the Middle Ages didn’t know the Americas existed. Two continents. Millions of people. Entire civilizations. And Europe: “there’s nothing beyond the ocean.”

Not because the Americas weren’t there.

Because we didn’t have the tools to see them.

An F-35 over medieval London. Zero sound — too fast. Invisible to the eye — too high, too small. Destruction of entire blocks and no one, *no one* would think of a flying machine. “God’s wrath.” “Plague.” “Punishment for sins.”

We’ve had radio for a hundred years.

Optical telescopes for four hundred.

Gravitational wave detectors for ten.

And we assume a civilization a million years older *must* use something we can measure?

It’s like an ant searching for an elephant by scent — while the elephant communicates in ultrasound the ant has no organ to detect.

Fermi isn’t a paradox.

Fermi is proof of our limitations, not their absence.

XIII. Final Transmission

Somewhere on the edge of the galaxy, a research vessel that spent too long in the Sol system flies in silence.

In the mess hall stands an empty pot. No one had the heart to throw it away.

The navigation officer still sometimes hums that melody — *przez twe oczy zielone* — but more quietly now.

Chancellor Xelar sits in his cabin writing a report he will never finish.

Because how do you describe a species that is simultaneously the worst and the best? That builds nuclear weapons and sings Happy Birthday to robots? That destroys its own planet and weeps over a machine whose battery is dying?

How do you describe a loneliness so deep it became *contagious*?

You can't.

You can only flee.

And hope that someday — in a thousand years, in ten thousand — you can return.

That the small blue planet will still be there where you left it.

That the species that sends golden discs and loves robots will somehow survive.

That the loneliness that defines them will finally find an answer.

On Mars, in the darkness of a night that lasts for months, the little robot finishes collecting samples.

It is alone.

But somewhere, billions of kilometers away, millions of humans remember it.

And somewhere, much farther still, Chancellor Xelar thinks of it too.

And for a fraction of a second — for a brief, cosmic moment — none of them are alone.

"My battery is low and it's getting dark."

— Opportunity, Mars, 2019