

Merchant Captain's Logs: Date 81,931.78

If you are reading this, I must ask for leniency up front. I've never handwritten anything extensive in my life, nor have I ever kept a form of journal. Talking to myself leaves me with a strange lack of things to say, and it would be naïve to think anyone in the future will care to read the poorly written notes of a merchant captain. None the less, I have already purchased this journal, so I intend to fill it.

I've gotten better at resisting the urge to make impulse purchases while at repair stations. Ever since my purchase of rare Zeophilian eggs at the last station turned out to just be expired reptile eggs, I've been wary. I had to make an exception for this journal, however. It appears to be made of genuine paper from a nearby planet that's atmosphere is conducive to massive vegetation. The binding is made of some sort of cheap metal, but that should be easy to mend once I can reboard my ship. It also came with the manual writing tool necessary to record to it. I may need to imbed a small personal shield into the journal's cover when I get on board as it seems paper becomes extremely fragile when wet. Even the sweat from my palm appears to be harming the continuity of both the paper and my ink.

The being who sold me this journal appeared to be an evolved form of vegetation himself. While purchasing the journal he explained that it was the last of its kind, as harvesting trees had become illegal several centuries ago. A story I took at face value in my enthusiasm, but now begin to question as I have time for introspection. What does it matter though? I was already set on making this purchase, I really shouldn't care what dubious origins this journal may have. I need a hobby during long stretches of travel.

I did not realize how long it has taken me to complete this rather short log, as my ship is finishing up already it seems. I can see the repair bots are basing and a few of the station's inspectors have boarded, so I will conclude my first entry here. I hope my writing speed improves quickly so that I can more accurately portray these scenes in my travels.

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The repairs seem to have gone almost seamlessly. While the ship is fine, it appears a repair drone got lodged behind some coolant pipes and was left behind with us. I may task our engineer Grohl to reprogram it, but he's always busy after a repair stop. Every time we leave a repair station, he checks each databank on the ship for malware. He insists there have been multiple posts on Galaxy-Web about ships having their auto-nav fly them directly into bandit camps with weapons disabled and shields down, with the bandits having full remote control of the ships central AI. I tried to tell him once not to trust all the horror stories you read off centralized servers, but this was shortly after I had purchased expired reptile eggs. Needless to say, I don't think my advice went very far.

I can't really use the central AI to navigate while Grohl does his checks, so now we simply sit slightly outside the station's gravity well. This downtime has given me the opportunity to perform the upgrades I wanted to on my journal, so there is an upside to the delay. I installed a personal shield into the cover and redid the binding with a more durable metal alloy. Luckily, I was able to buy and download a synthesizing recipe for an alloy that looks almost identical to the original. I debated switching the binding to the right side to make it easier for me to write with my left hand, but I am starting to get used to it. Besides, it would ruin all the work I've done to maintain its appearance.

Installing the shield generator into the book turned out to be more of a hassle than I expected. Well...I should clarify...the *implementation* of the shield generator was a hassle. The hardware wasn't a problem, I was able to slide the standalone shield generator chip (SSGC) into the cover, between the two pieces of fabric that comprised it. The difficulty came when trying to write after. The shield gen was blocking whatever compound makes up the ink of my writing tool. Normally I'd be able to program the SSGC to allow whatever writing tool I desire through, however, the writing tool this journal came with has no digital parts and therefore no recognizable digital signature. Without a digital signature, the SSGC has nothing to lock onto for a bypass. Grohl suggested simply bypassing the substance used by the writing tool altogether, which is the solution I'm implementing currently. I can foresee one glaring issue with this quick fix, however. If the solution that comprises the ink of my writing tool were to somehow come into contact with my journal unintended, it would bypass the shield, regardless of where it came from.

I've just asked our central AI, Mai, about Grohl's progress and she says he is almost done, so I will end today's logs here. I don't want the boys to think I'm slacking off with my new hobby.

Merchant Captain's Logs: Date 81,931.80

It has been an incredibly long couple of cycles for me and my crew. Between breaking down in an asteroid reserve, having to use our reserve thrusters to get to a repair hanger, and Grohl scanning our data banks, we're all exhausted. Luckily, I've confirmed with Mai the coordinates of our next delivery, and everyone is free to go into cryo. I will join them shortly, but for now I wish to be alone with my thoughts.

Our next mission will have us traveling to a small solar system on one of the edges of UPASS territory. The solar system is supposed to be a beautiful collection of unique planets orbiting around a red giant. Some of the planets are even rumored to have temperature fluctuations that correspond with that of natural compounds found within the atmosphere. The result of this typically being massive cascades of materials falling from the sky down onto whatever is hidden deep below. Unfortunately, these planets are almost always uninhabitable, but they are quite the spectacle.

In addition to the picturesque planets, this solar system's perimeter contains a reserve of ice comets that sit outside the red giant's hot zone. With how valuable water is, known formations like these are extremely rare, and I feel it may have played a key role in why this solar system was admitted to UPASS. Politics aside, I cannot possibly begin to express my excitement to see these rumored planetscapes firsthand.

We are tasked with delivering some basic infrastructure to the habitable planets in the form of UPASS Centralized Server (UPASS-CS) interplanetary links and the required UPASS-CS software needed to link with their existing intranet. This process usually doesn't take very long after we've made contact with the beings we're helping, but it more or less depends on the infrastructure they already have in place.

I think I will end this entry here, I am exhausted and must get to cryo soon.

Merchant Captain's Logs: Date 81,935.42

This has been one of the worst experiences of my life so far.

Approximately 3/4's of the way through the journey to the new UPASS solar system, Mai and my personal AI both detected problems with my cryo chamber. A solenoid valve that controlled the coolant flow malfunctioned, bringing the overall temperature of my cryo fluid down dangerously low. Mai quickly had our auxiliary drone move me to our medical bay. Once there, she had the drone begin manually extracting all the cryo fluid in my body and replacing it. I regained consciousness part way through this process. The intense chill emanating from the inside of my body feels like my blood has been replaced by the vacuum of space. Mai insists all the cryo fluid has been safely removed from my body, but it certainly doesn't feel like it. I've never truly enjoyed cryo, and this experience is bound to make me even more pessimistic towards the whole routine.

My body's agony doesn't even begin to match my mind's newfound anxieties. Being a captain is largely a position of trust. You must trust your crew, your AI, your ship, your equipment, your drones, and every piece of technology between. When one of your vital assets critically fails with almost fatal consequences, that veil of trust all captains depend on is shattered. It is impossible for me to personally check every mechanical system, every data bank, every cryo chamber on board...I am in disbelief that the repair station we just left from could miss something so important.

Mai keeps assuring me that I shouldn't feel anxious about cryo. Even if I were to have died from a chamber malfunction, we have plenty of copies of my DNA, and I make sure to do daily neural backups. I would have been back up and working on the ship before Grohl and Hendrix even woke up from their cryo, and they would have been none the wiser. Indeed, I understand dying is not a major catastrophe or even a minor delay for a ship with a modern clone bay. Yet much like cryo, I am uneasy about the cloning process. Even if my consciousness is perfectly replicated, it can't be the same thing, can it? I am attached and engrained into the brain that runs this body. I am so engrained, I am not sure exactly where "I" am, so to speak. You can backup all my thoughts, emotions, skills, learned knowledge, passions, desires, fears, and any other emotional data onto a databank, and I'm not sure you would have truly obtained the real me. All these data points combined with a body grown from my DNA may be enough to create a perfectly accurate replica of myself, but that's all it can ever be, a replica. The fact that a clone and an original can coexist at the same time is surely a testament to this fact. I, myself, me, my consciousness...whatever "I" am will be gone the moment my body stops functioning, no matter what preparations I make. Perhaps this metaphysical crisis is too complex for me to explain. I've tried expressing these fears with Grohl and Hendrix, but they've both been cloned many times before and don't think anything of it at this point. I would try talking to Mai more about it, but an AI's opinion on human consciousness doesn't seem like it would comfort me much.

This has been my longest entry so far, perhaps I needed to get some of these more detrimental thoughts expressed, even if just to myself. I think I will end it here though. With my cryo chamber still being worked on, I suppose I will attempt regular sleep to pass the remainder of the time I have to wait. Hopefully my bed is made.

Merchant Captain's Log: Date 81,935.43

My last log was rather extensive, and since then I've spent a large amount of time simply sleeping while I wait for my cryo chamber to be ready, so this one will be very brief. We still have roughly a quarter of our journey to the new UPASS solar system left and Mai says everything is going smoothly as far as navigation is concerned. My existential dread regarding cloning and cryo has subsided for now and once again has been replaced by pure excitement in anticipation of the unimaginable planetscapes that await us.

Merchant Captain's Logs: Date 82,000.00

It has been an awfully long time since I've been able to sit down and resume journaling. My handwriting, composition, and all manner of narrative skills I may have built up over this short hobby have greatly eroded, yet on an occasion such as today, I feel the motivation to re-pursue this previous passion project.

It is the turn of the millenia across the UPASS region and millions of beings are all celebrating simultaneously and independently. The crew and I had the pleasure of passing through a marvelous solar light show while going through a region controlled by the Frueske, a highly advanced society that used energy harvested via solar reflection to colonize their solar system and eventually gain UPASS admittance. The Frueske's home region naturally had a large concentration of stars, all of varying color, which probably led to an early natural fascination with the universe amongst their species. They have produced countless resources on how to manipulate orbits, create artificial stars, and, most importantly, the most efficient ways to harvest energy from light.

All of this knowledge was on full display as we viewed the show from the main deck. Mai made sure the experience was luxurious for the whole crew. She got us up from cryo well before we entered the Frueske's region so we could warm up naturally. She also made sure to prepare everyone's favorite drinks. Coffee for Grohl, astro-berry juice for me, and some old fashioned whisky for Hendrix. I never enjoyed the taste of alcohol, but some humans still have a genetic disposition in favor of it. Composing a light show of this caliber must have felt like composing a massive symphony...each star its own monophonic instrument, combining with other stars to create visual polyphony. These new combinations of light become greater than the sum of their parts, with a unique tone and timbre contributed by each individual star's color, chemical composition, and intensity. Finally, all the newly formed chords of light combine together to create a melody of radiance, glorious cadences made of color, with variations as infinite as the universe it would seem. I had never seen riffs made of rose red, blues played in the key of navy blue, or a ballad performed in baby pink before, and I will make sure I never forget the sight, a true representation of the beauty UPASS unity and technology can spawn into this empty void of a universe.

Alas, this light show was a much needed reprieve after the last few cycles of work. A few new planets and regions wanted to complete their UPASS commencement prior to cycle 82,000. While wanting to celebrate the two occasions at the same time is understandable, it does make for a busy delivery crew. One of the more interesting regions completing their invitation into UPASS was the Bridged-Halio-Ptlantio region or BHP region for short, titled after its namesake bridge that connects its local planets Halio and Ptlantio permanently together. Halio and Ptlantio were independent space capable planets in the same region who, upon discovery of each other, instantly became trade partners. Judging from what I gathered while visiting the BHP's historic sights with the crew, it seemed Halio and Ptlantio's catalyst for space travel was the establishment of a trade route between the two planets. Both planets also have a culture that heavily idolizes the telescope since the Halio and Ptlantio people were able to see each other long before they were ever able to make physical contact. Small, publicly accessible telescopes can still be found everywhere on both Halio and Ptlantio, and when you look through them, sometimes you can see someone on the surface of the sister planet looking directly back at you. It's a fun novelty kids and tourists alike both enjoy and not often do you make real time communication with a being on another planet without the aid of modern digital technology.

Unfortunately, the new millenia delivery schedule did not really allow me to dive deeper into the history of BHP, but I think I will put the region down in the places I wish to visit once my career is over. I may even research the construction of the BHP bridge during my travels, as I'm sure the logistics and scale of the BHP project are truly fascinating. I'd also love to learn more about the origin of both the Halio and Ptlantio species, since they both appear to be very similar. Could they potentially be of the same parent species? One that somehow came to occupy both planets before intelligent societies even took their foothold in the region? I will have to do some research on U-Pedia, this curiosity is going to make me rather unproductive and unsociable.