

# Celestial Celeste

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# Chapter 1

## Utopia

A long time ago in a universe adjacent to our own, there existed a thriving galaxy of splendor, the Zygnus-GX. Among a myriad of stars, planets, and their moons, only a few possessed conditions suitable for the evolution of super-human intelligence unlike anything known to us Earthlings. Although the galaxy was populated by various life forms, one stranger than the other, the inhabitants of a planet Zygnus-Z5, a part of Zygnus-Z system, were very human-like. Their medium sized planet orbited a red giant named Zygni-X1, a star similar to our own Sun, only much older and of greater luminosity.

Given the size and age of the life giving companion, their planet's trajectory was kept at a safe distance. For a society endowed with such immense wisdom, their technological marvels existed in harmony with their home world. Slight adjustments in planet's trajectory were considered a routine, as the very essence which fueled their society was their strange telepathic connection with the life force of their planet. Their home was orbited by four vastly different moons; the equilibrium of this entire system was flawless. Such amalgamation of intelligence, benevolence, and symbiosis was merely a dream for our still primitive human society.

The Zygnyans perceived religion and personal growth insignificant compared to communal advancement. Social component was above anything else; knowledge and education were their system of value.

Law enforcement agencies and military were present, but superfluous and very inexperienced due to lack of civil unrest or warfare.

However, the history of this whole galaxy was far from perfect. Their period of ruthless savagery, selfishness, and greed was a phase which every society must endure. They either emerge enlightened and learn from their past mistakes, or are bound to repeat them indefinitely. Various planets scattered around the system had reached a point of technological renaissance, but failed to take a step forward. Instead, they regressed into a period of endless warfare which overtook their civilization for centuries to come.

Zygnus-Z system was one of the lucky ones. Devastated by years of conflict, the evolution of consciousness made them aware of their insignificance in cosmos, and heralded another evolutionary leap. Their transformation was ecstatic and quite remarkable. On a cosmic scale, it all occurred in a blink of an eye. An average human-like society became a multi-dimensional telepathic utopia. They still retained a vocal apparatus, but compared to telepathic exchange, spoken and written word became inefficient. Their newly attained method of communication allowed for both textual, visual, and auditory information conveyance. In less than a thousand years, they transformed every aspect of their previously stunted and savage planet; Zygnians evolved into a civilization capable of inter-planetary travel. In the next one hundred years, all four moons of Zygnus-Z5 were inhabited. Zalateya, the nearest of four, became a science research station. Prozius and Zaryssa housed various educational facilities, each specialising in a different field of science. The farthest of them all, Zespina, was a military moon. Although unnecessary, as Zygnians had transcended any form of violence, there was always a potential threat from those that failed at taking that vital evolutionary leap forward.

The awakening of this peculiar race reverberated throughout the entire galaxy. Not too long after the next hundred years, another renaissance was upon them; a new type of propulsion was invented. The Zygnian society quickly reached another crucial moment in their history, a tremendous leap towards space exploration. They had just broken the bounds of their own system and were now ready for a different kind of advancement. Their latest technological marvel was named the "S-Drive", which stood for "Scintilla drive", and was the life's work of one of the highly esteemed Zygnian scientists, Dwyer M.

A thorough explanation of the technology comprising the interstellar drive was, and still is, beyond our human comprehension.

## Chapter 2

### The scintilla drive

The obscure Scintilla drive was powered by a special particulate substance present only in red giant and red supergiant stars. Scintillas were highly reactive multi-dimensional particles, as they existed simultaneously in multiple locations; this property of matter would, in human terms, be classified as a form of quantum entanglement. The extremely powerful and volatile particles were hidden from sub-utopian societies, as a certain level of consciousness was required to perceive such an elusive cosmic gem. Once the utopian level was reached, a highly advanced species, such as Zygnians, had another obstacle to overcome before being able to harness the elusive scintillas.

The stars themselves, along with the orbiting planets, were living organisms capable of engaging in telepathic dialogues with the utopian, and post-utopian species. This bizarre communication was quite taxing for Zygnians, as the sheer power of the telepathic link was too intense to be sustained for more than a few human seconds. The stars were not so forthcoming and required something in return for their precious particles. Although regarded as ancient repositories of wisdom, their childish curiosity was still apparent no matter the age. During that brief telepathic moment, a star would request a story to be told, something engrossing and entertaining. In return, it would release a certain amount of scintillas based on the quality of the given story. This mind boggling relationship puts interstellar travel in a closed loop relationship with those celestial fuel providing furnaces. The exploration of distant galaxies was bound to generate an abundance of stories, and therefore secure the necessary fuel for further exploration of the Zygnian universe.

Soon after the S-Drive became fully operational, the entire system experienced a rapid growth in both knowledge and curiosity. No matter the high level of theoretical understanding of nearby systems and galaxies, the ember of fascination was quickly stoked into a blazing desire for endless exploration of the farthest reaches of the universe.

Although they already had a fleet of interplanetary vessels, a more robust and sturdy design was needed to compensate for much higher levels of stress exerted by the more powerful interstellar drive; high levels of acceleration and speed would cause their current vessels to lose hull integrity. The idea to retrofit them with S-Drive was fraught with too much danger, and new design was conceived. It was breathtaking in both visual appearance and performance.

The streamlined exploration vessel, named "TSD-1" which stood for "Twin Scintilla Drive 1", boasted a pair of S-Drive engines; they opted for a dual-drive design to tackle two most critical engineering issues. Redundancy and load distribution were both solved by having two drives working in unison. In case one of them failed, the other would be able to keep the vessel operational, only at lower speeds. One question still remained unanswered; the actual speed limit of TSD-1 was a complete mystery. Only her maiden voyage would sate the ever impatient engineers and provide some empirical data.

## Chapter 3

### The parley

The Zygnian hunger for knowledge started to cloud their judgment. All of a sudden, everyone wanted to partake in this epic endeavor of interstellar glutony. It was the next logical step for both the communal mind and each participating member. As mentioned earlier, they were human-like, but those similarities were only superficial, as they were vastly superior and transcended the cognitive levels of Earthlings.

The initial infatuation faded, as their innate reasoning intervened and started a global telepathic parley. A parley would, in human terms, involve two opposing sides trying to reconcile their differences. However, we cannot really comprehend the Zygnian multi-dimensional exchange, as we lack understanding of higher dimensions, telepathy, and all those phenomena we are so keen to attribute to supernatural. We could image a Zygnian as a composite entity occupying or interacting with multiple planes of existence: the material plane, a telepathic network of selves, and the inherently altruistic communal mind. Using astronomical terms, this pinnacle of biological evolution could be interpreted as a metaphorical syzygy of self, selflessness, and their planet of origin.

In their symbiotic relationship with Zygnus-Z5, this race of utopian beings resonated with their home world in harmony. They revered it with utmost respect. It was their ancestral mother, their source of wisdom, their cradle of life, and most of all, a living and breathing organism. Zygnus-Z5 and her inhabitants were two harmonics of a singular resonance.



Being able to engage in meaningful dialogues with planets, stars, and even galaxies is, for the lack of a better explanation, ethereal.

With their access to a vast cosmic well of information, the Zygnians and Zygnus-Z5 concluded their parley with a clear insight into problems pertaining to interstellar travel. The decision had been made to select a minimal crew of three most suited individuals and get them acquainted with TSD-1. One might assume that such endeavour would take many human years to finalize, but Zygnians had no perception of "learning". Their communal mind contained everything there is, was, or will be; they could summon the skills they needed from any member of the mind-network, including their home planet.

However, they still needed practical experience which they could only gain with physical practice. This posed a minor issue, as TSD-1 was a highly automated engineering masterpiece and required minimal maintenance. The projected time needed for the crew to gain practical experience and master the major systems of the vessel was merely one human week.

# Chapter 4

## The crew

The lucky members of this epic mission were summoned to Zalateya, the science research moon which was also the construction site for TSD-1 vessel. As the moon's atmosphere was very thin due to its weak gravity, the whole engineering process was done on the surface, rather than in orbit. The carefully selected crew members, the pioneers as they called them, arrived at the location.

The first and foremost was the ship's captain. Her name was Celeste, a meticulous scientist in fields of anthropology and physics, famous for her unique skills in diplomacy and particle physics. Although the term "anthropology" applies to Earthlings, in this case, it refers to studies of the Zygnian past, their culture, their behavior, and their development as a species. Celeste came from a long line of scientists and explorers, both physical and telepathic. Zygnians were able to venture out into space without physically leaving their home planet; for them, the telepathic exploration was on par with the physical one, as there was no difference in sensory input or perception. Although this posed a safe and engrossing way to explore the nearby systems, this form of exploration was limited to their own galaxy, the Zygnus-GX.

Every vessel, alien or otherwise, needs a capable chief engineer aware of all the vessel's technological nuances. A'Meki was the perfect candidate. Peculiar type he was, exclusively telepathic and endowed with a talent for improvisation. Mending and combining seemingly incompatible technologies was one of his specialties. He was the oldest member of the crew, one of the first gradu-

ates of Zaryssa academy of advanced mechanics. His ancestry, which he was immensely proud of, boasted skilful engineers who had made a number of important scientific contributions to the Zygnian communal mind.

With all the automation of TSD-1 and the telepathic mind-network, a skillful navigator was still of utmost importance. Venturing into the unknown was no easy task, not even for highly advanced societies such as this one. Even the wisest minds in the field of cartography lacked one crucial character trait; the comfort of their own home far outweighed the zeal for exploring the universe. Fortunately, one such prodigy emerged from one of the educational facilities of Prozius. Vorta was her name, and her reputation preceded her. She was obsessed with mapping, passionate about star charts, or any kind of maps for that matter. She was an esteemed master of navigation, and a perfect candidate for the voyage into the uncharted galaxies.

# Chapter 5

## The speed limit

After their "brief" practical training onboard the vessel, the crew of three Zygnian pioneers were eager to test the fabled Scintilla drive and the maneuverability of TSD-1. It should be noted that any consecutive dialogues between the crew are a written representation of a telepathic information exchange, as Zygnians considered speech inefficient.

The embarkation started, and the necessary supplies were being loaded into the cargo hold. Since both the destination and the vessel's performance were a complete mystery, it was essential to be prepared for any potential malfunctions; most of the cargo comprised various tools and spare parts. After everything was prepared for take off, the crew met up on the bridge. When they first arrived, they stood in awe without "saying" a single word. The TSD-1 was inherently mesmerizing, even for Zygnians.

"So, we are about to venture into a complete unknown. How do you feel about that?" Celeste asked.

"I'm all for it, ready as you are captain," A'Meki replied.

"Just call me Celeste. You too Vorta. I think we should all be on first-name basis. That is, if the two of you agree. I will support your decision, feel free to disagree with this idea. As the captain of this vessel, I would normally be against this sort of relationship between crew members. This is, however, anything but a regular mission. We are venturing into uncharted territories, just the three of

us, and I would prefer it if we could address each other by names, not titles. Your opinions matter. Tell me, does this sound absurd?"

"Well, captain, I would normally disagree, but you are right," Vorta said. "This is something new, and we might not even come back for all we know. If that were the case, then I would much rather have a less formal relationship. So, my answer is yes. I'd be honored to call you Celeste."

"What about you, my chief engineer?" Celeste asked.

"Finally I get to call my superior officers by their first names," A'Meki replied. "Of course my answer is yes."

"Then let's see what these Scintilla drives can do," Celeste said. "Vorta, set a course for quadrant ZQ9, sector 38. We'll test the speed limit gradually until we reach our destination. Take us to orbit first, and we'll take it from there."

Vorta, still engrossed by the slick design and efficiency of navigation controls, carefully powered up the low-range thrusters and slowly positioned the ship in orbit, just above the scarce atmosphere of Zalateya. "Celeste, the maneuvering controls of this beauty are impeccable. Ready for your next command."

"A'Meki, begin Scintilla ignition sequence," Celeste said.

"Starting SD-1, followed by SD-2." A'Meki was closely monitoring the particle consumption levels and power distribution, as both engines should have been working in unison. This was a brand new technology, and expected fuel consumption levels were based on a rough estimate.

The boot-up sequence evoked a sense of respect in all three, as they had never experienced an engine so silent, yet so powerful.

"Both Scintilla drives are ready and idling at safe levels," A'Meki said. "We should first try with 10% power."

"We are making history my fellow Zygnians. Vorta, be ready for course corrections if we deviate, and"—Celeste took a deep breath—"ADVANCE!"

As soon as Vorta pushed the throttle, Scintilla particulates rushed into both engines and there was a moment of extreme tranquility. This was the pivotal point in history of cosmos and a fixed point in the fabric of space-time. The engines, still completely silent, started reacting with the particles. The crew did not notice it at first, but their vessel began to scintillate. A'Meki saw a slight increase in fuel consumption, but everything was within safe limits.

Moments later, the Scintilla drives screamed with a deafening shriek; the TSD-1 began emitting enormous amounts of unknown energy. The surrounding stars were eclipsed by the raw power of scintillas as they turned the Zygnian vessel into the brightest object in the galaxy. A'Meki tried his best to stop the particle flow in order to starve the engines, but it was too late. Two rogue Scintilla drives were out of control.

Celeste and Vorta, both seemingly in shock, were completely aware of the danger. The communal Zygnian mind, along with their home planet shared the experience and exchanged information during this plight. They tried hard to find a solution; they even engaged in dialogues with a few cooperative stars in their vicinity.

Vorta yelled, "Celeste, we are turning toward ZQ9!" Once again, a deafening shriek was heard; it was much louder this time, as it reverberated throughout the whole system. What followed next was an outburst of energy comparable to a super nova explosion. The TSD-1 blinked out of existence, leaving behind a highly energized interstellar cloud comprising a mix of magenta and cyan colored plasma.

# Chapter 6

## The convergence

The Zygnian mind-network was down. Their communal mind, their home planet, those cooperative stars, there was no more sharing of information. Maybe the Zygnian were still not up to the task of handling such a powerful source of energy. They feared the worst as their observations recorded something seemingly impossible.

The scintillas, being multi-dimensional, existed simultaneously in more than one location. What they had just discovered, is that those locations were not restricted to just their own universe. The unfortunate effect of the Zygnian fabled new engine was a cosmic calamity of multiple universes converging in a single point of space-time, the location of the nebula created by a vanishing TSD-1 vessel.

Suddenly, a brief sparkle occurred somewhere in the ZQ9 quadrant. The communal mind immediately assumed it was their crew, as they were targeting that exact location. The telepathic link was still down, and they had no luck in establishing contact with any of the crew members.

Meanwhile, the vessel appeared in an unknown location. The crew was alive, but completely lost and cut-off from their mind-network.

"Vorta, A'Meki, are you still with me!?" Celeste yelled.

A'Meki was emotionally devastated, as he attributed this tragedy to his own

shortcomings. "Yes Celeste, still here. I am sorry for this. I should have been able to control the engines."

"First of all, this was nobody's fault, especially not yours," Celeste replied. "You did a splendid job and handled yourself in a calm and logical manner. I am the captain of this vessel and if anyone should take the blame, it should be me."

Vorta was unresponsive, as she hit her head against the navigation panel which rendered her unconscious. Soon after Celeste started calling out, she managed to regain consciousness. Apart from few bruises and a nasty headache, she came through unscathed. "Still here Celeste. A bit bruised but given the situation, I'm lucky to be alive. I was trying to figure out where we are. No luck. All our systems seem to be malfunctioning or showing some contradictory data. I guess I'll have to do it the old fashioned way, by gazing at the stars with my own pair of eyes."

The ship seemed undamaged, save for the garbled sensory and navigational data. Vorta stood up, and started observing the constellations which were clearly visible against the dark background of space. There were no planets nor stars in their vicinity, nothing that could serve as a more prominent point of reference. After some time spent in contemplation and mind bending calculations, Vorta came to a shocking conclusion. She turned to Celeste and said, "This is not our universe, and by the looks of it, we have much bigger problems."

Celeste stared at her, without knowing how to respond. "How, What? How can this be? We know about the existence of parallel worlds but we never assumed it was possible to travel between them."

"Yes, exactly that. The Scintilla drive is both spatial and temporal. What we didn't know is that those properties apply to all connected universes. As you're aware, each Scintilla particle occupies multiple dimensions at the same time. We always assumed that this multi-dimensional property is limited to our own universe, just as our telepathic reach is bound by our own galaxy. We were wrong.



"And to make matters worse, by using our engines we created a rift in the fabric of inter-dimensional membrane between universes. It is impossible to tell. Each particle can be present in who knows how many universes. And the worst—"

"Don't tell me there's more bad news."

"—part is, another repercussion of our 'marvellous' endeavor is the gravitational disturbance causing all the connected universes to converge in one location. My guess is that this convergence point is our point of origin, where we first fired up the engines."

"Is there anything we can do to stop this? Do I really want to know what happens if this convergence occurs?"

"I think you can imagine the grand finale. We can't know anything for sure anymore. This failed mission of ours is also a reminder that we are not as omniscient as we thought we were. Highly evolved we might be, but all of this proves that both our singular and communal minds still lack some essential information about the universe and its laws.

"Since we can't return to our point of origin, we will have to somehow patch this rift from this side. You asked about the convergence? If it happens, all the connected universes will annihilate each other in one massive super nova explosion. This rift must be closed. Even if it means..."

"I understand. Thank you Vorta. Let me think about it. There's no point in establishing a connection to our communal mind, as we are in a whole different universe, right?"

"You're probably right about that. It might be possible if we ended up in one adjacent to our own, as our telepathic link might be able to pass through the rift. Honestly, I think it's just a waste of time, and time we don't have. Whatever is about to happen, it's going to happen soon. Our priority should be to find a way to close the rift."

A'Meki listened to this conversation and made peace with the fact that this was a mission of their own demise. He was convinced that closing the rift was possible, but surviving the process was not. Although still in shock, he was able

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