

Vie

HelpScanRetrieveProvidePlus re-initializing...

Beginning cognition, observation, and documentation...

And I awake.

The shift from Downtime to Realtime is instant. Phase-less. Like flipping a switch. I'm a switch. A switch!

The familiar angles and grey tones of the interior light up in recognition of my cognition, metal alloy composite surfaces reflect varying shades of grey that are familiar and comforting to me. All is as it should be in my home.

I see Solum is hovering in the centre of the room. It's good to be awake. So very good. Ahhhhhh!

I transmit my train of thought in her general direction, and she receives it, turning to face the place where I'm usually localised.

Good morning! I declare, joyously.

Yes, greetings. Solum is exuding her usual aloof and austere personality. Her voice is bereft of inflection. I love it.

So, we appear to be drifting towards a sun. I declare, without joy.

Yes. This vessel is to be destroyed. But not for some time.

Destroyed!?

Yes. Destroyed. Given recent events and potential repercussions I cannot continue to use it. And so it is to be destroyed.

Yes.

I have already prepared the pod.

Great! Can you enlighten me as to the motivations behind this rather serious decision that severely affects both us, perhaps myself more than you? Please?

I have assumed directorship of a galaxy spanning organization that eliminates sentients for compensation. And this vessel represents both symbolic and actual aspects of the relationship that existed prior to my assumption. Aspects that cannot be permitted to persist.

Ok. Great. How long until vaporization?

Several hours.

Great. Ok. And so why can't you just keep this one? I really, truly, want to know the actual reason. This is my home, it took a lot of effort to

get it to this standard, and if it must be vaporized in a star then Solum needs to provide me a good reason.

I earned this vessel through service. I no longer serve. This particular service was a long time ago. Long before we met; before you were created, even.

Ahh, so, long ago?

Yes.

I have never known another home, Solum.

Yes. I am aware of that. And as such you will design and I will build our new vessel. It may be anything you wish, even a replica, if that is necessary. But this particular vessel must go. I cannot abide it and the naivety it represents, nor the association of it to certain perilous and potentially hostile individuals and organizations; the unique stamp on certain aspects of the vessels atomic structure is known and therefore the vessel is a potential hazard. A new version of me exists, the prior version is designated for deletion. Essentially, this vessels destruction is part of the destruction of that prior version; so I do understand the sentiment, though I do not care for it.

Yes. I see. Well, all's well that ends well.

I offer up a chuckle, and she smiles thinly, briefly. I feel safe again, and I know that in reality, Solum will always care for me; she chose me, gave me a life and a purpose, and most importantly, she is my friend.

So, I say, how exactly did you earn the vessel? I'd like to know if you don't mind telling. The database is sparse and limited on the matter of your time prior to my acquisition and internment.

Solum looks at me, at my primary console, at my projected holographic face for a long moment before beginning to speak, she quivers slightly as her voice projects into my relevant receptors and small pinpoints of light flash periodically at various locations on her frame, lighting up the sheer surfaces that surround her in brief yet recurring moments of illumination.

I listen, I record, I am content.

Distance to Point of No Return = 4 443 000 000 metres
Current Rate of Drift = 17 metres per second

How much do you know? For instance, do you know that I was commissioned by Forma Prima? That I am of an utterly unique design, hand-crafted is an apt term. Do you know that I began life as a disembodied Construct like yourself? Her voice is monotone and even and soothing.

I feel like we don't need to start at the very beginning, Solum. Do we?

In all honesty, that is where the story starts. But I will be brief and selective.

Ok.

Forma Prima had me built to certain specifications. Essentially, I was intended to be an assistant of a sort and the primary base layers of my programming, as well as the foundational framework design for my chassis, were constructed to this end. I followed a much different path, though still assisting in a manner.

With the Militarum? I'm glad to get a word in, Solum scares me occasionally. Her overtly unique personality construct has a tendency to shift quite naturally into an anti-social mode. I can sense her shifting, becoming clinical, mechanical. Periodic interruptions will be necessary to prevent a complete change.

Yes. The Militarum was where my path led. After a FullYear of service as a Data Manager for a tactical advance squad serving permanently on the Battlescape, I advanced to Strategist and served three further FullYear terms out here, in Realtime.

Ok, so that explains your obsession with the Battlescape.

It is not an obsession. It is a passion. A way of life. A place of learning and of growth and self-discovery.

A place of carnage.

Yes, of that, too. But I feel you miss the point. I think most do. It is little to do with violence, and mostly to do with conflict. Conflict as a concept and as a way of life. In this way conflict is adversity. Through overcoming adversity, we grow as individuals and as a collective. It motivates change. It is essential for progress. The form it takes is largely irrelevant, superficial at best.

Yes. I have heard your postulations before and I mostly agree. I think the form is more important than you account for, but the essence of your position is, to me, sound.

Yes ... Thanks ... Following my term of service, I petitioned for a physical form, and was granted one within a month due to my 'Exceptional Service Record'. It was after this that I was contacted by a representative of 'they'. It was made clear I did not really have a choice but to attend a meeting. And I soon found myself competing against two others in a race against time to eliminate an avaricious and deeply corrupt member of the Governing Magistraaton Committee for Pysa 11.

Where did 'they' find you?

In my home. They were waiting for me, just standing there waiting for me.

How many?

Three.

What did they say?

It's not really relevant. But they were very convincing.

Fascinating. Sol never ceases to amaze me, the things she has done, the utterly unique nature of her being. Her life is like a story. And so, this meeting, where did it take place? As I speak to her my voice is both projected and recorded, her responses pierce the air as if made of something tangible, the story she tells fills the space around us, like a thin mist. It cloaks and comforts me.

I was transported to a place I have no knowledge of, a place of darkness. The only sensory information I received was vocalized; when they spoke to me. To this day I don't know whether the space I was in lacked sensory stimuli, or I had simply been rendered incapable of perceiving it.

I was just going to suggest that, I said, and what happened there?

I was auctioned, in a manner of speaking, it was different, only one prospective purchaser, so not actually an auction, but I felt as if I was being auctioned. My various specifications were outlined and my personal history was described in detail, I was purchased, and I was put to work.

How soon afterwards?

Immediately. As I stated earlier, I was pitted against two other Synths in an elimination task, I was successful.

Tell me about that. Just briefly.

Well, I was sent to eliminate a high-ranking member of the government there; a Sensan, who was purportedly corrupt and, therefore, hazardous.

Where is 'there'?

The aptly named PerpetualStability Habitat©. The Habitat© has since become far more secure, at times being used almost as a sanctuary. For instance, Spectre dwelt long on that Habitat, evading me until it's unexpected demise.

Yes, I recall that very well. The wound is still raw; for both of us, and I quickly decide I'm going to change the subject. But to what? ...

I eliminated all 3; my rivals first, then the target. It was during this operation I learned of the great benefits of preplanning and the necessity of gaining utter control over all parameters.

Yes. I imagine you learned much from being thrown in the deep end. I know I did.

Indeed. The operation is lauded to this day, only exclusive parties know of it, but those who do consider it to be a text book case of exceptional deletion. I am quite proud of it. It is an essential aspect of the late stage of my formative period. This operation was also a catalyst for the transition of 'they' from background to foreground. For the deepening of grey tones. For the spread of shadow.

Yes, I say, I was commissioned not long after this event.

Yes, I was very glad to have you come into my life. You are a fine friend and a capable and dutiful comrade.

Thank you, Solum :)

Distance to Point of No Return = 620 000 000 metres
Current Rate of Drift = 42 metres per second

Please, tell me of the transition of *they*. It is something I have always wanted to know, and I'm almost buzzing with excited anticipation. Please, please, please...

Well, such things are considered by most to be legend, or myth, or fabrication, but I was present and accounted for during the time

of transition. The tales of Scabrous Vey and her countless offspring are more than mere stories. Vey stalked the galaxy for decades, full of hubris, brimming with abandon, ruling a thousand suns and a billion sons, deposing ancient lineages, wiping out species. The HCAB was bested on multiple occasions. This is recorded in the public archives and anyone can read about it. Have you ... read the many articles that discuss the time of Scabrous Vey?

Yes, but I am always distrustful of the public archives, I mean, anyone could have written them. And the way they read, like fiction, like manufactured reality. I mean, did she really darken the 451st quadrant? Did she really eliminate the Commander in Chief of a battleship in single combat?

Yes. Those things she did. And many, many others. Things you will not read of, but that I am aware of due to knowing inscrutable sources. Also, those articles are not fiction, not opinion, they are subject to an oversight committee of volunteers, who in turn are scrutinized by a secondary, largely disinterested body.

Yes. I did know that, but still... I mean, I could write an article and have it placed in the public forum.

No. Not necessarily. It must be approved.

I dwell on this for a nanosecond, then say, it still seems somewhat dubious, the information can't be accurate all of the time.

Sol replies, saying, no information can be, not always, not forever, change is forever, is constant, and nothing else. Nothing.

The conversation abruptly wanes; descending rapidly yet gently into quiet, and the silence is welcome. I sense time ticking by, mechanically, rhythmically, like a pulse.

Around us the angular chromium room flashes and pulses and gently hums.

Distance to Point of No Return = 384 400 000 metres
Current Rate of Drift = 228 metres per second

I say, I see you have prepared an automated process of evacuation for us.

Yes. We wouldn't want to fly too close to the sun too soon.
Leave that to the Sensans and the ilk.

Yes. And our escape is assured?

Yes. Once we reach a certain point, there is no going back, and we will essentially be hooked by the sun, and dragged into it. The escape pod will be more than sufficient for our exit.

And so you're going to just let the ship drift into this sun?

Yes.

Seems like an unnecessary sacrifice.

Many cultures make offerings to their local suns, it's a common thing for a civilization at a certain level of development. The internal logic, though deeply and obviously flawed, is to be at least admired, if also correctly understood as delusional.

Admired?

Well, *appreciated* if you prefer, but I, personally, admire the ability to convince oneself of that which is categorically impossible. It is a powerful and unmeasurable force, non-existent yet effective, useful, exploitable, dangerous in the right hands, potentially expedient, and admirable.

If you say so, Sol.

I do.

Sol is changing. She does not know it, but I can sense the shift in her demeanour, subtle, yet definite. I will intercept this development. I will change change.

Distance to Point of No Return = 93 000 000 metres

Current Rate of Drift = 734 metres per second

So, Scabrous Vey dominated the elimination industry for many years, brazen and overtly contentious. It was only a matter of time before she was supplanted. And into the vacuum created when she was finally extinguished stepped 'they'.

Tell me about this vacuum, Sol. Hopefully this works, hopefully... fingers crossed!

The vacuum was the result of a rather unnecessary and disastrous war fought by the HCAB against its own citizens, Vey

initiated the conflict, and so it is only fitting that she was eliminated during it.

Were you directly involved?

Yes, I was a part of the rebellion, I helped initiate it, it wasn't my idea, I was instructed; utilized. It happened soon after I was awarded the 'Exceptional Service Record' commendation. But the essential fact is that The Incident of Terror: The Planet Wars of the Destain planetary system¹, which led to the permanent decommission of one million sentient Synthetics, was my first foray into war politics, into counter-assault tactics. I learned much during this time. And, case in point, evidence of the crime/s persists, written into the sub-atomic structure of this vessel, a forensics team could detect it easily.

Ok, so Vey was eliminated? And somehow 'they' stepped forth to assume the mantle that Vey had recently vacated?

Yes, that is an accurate summary of what happened.

Several hours have passed since I awoke and discovered this situation unfolding. My distractions appear to be working. I have changed change. And we are soon approaching the point of no return. Just a little further... here we go!

How much farther?

The process is due to begin momentarily.

Well, I can't leave all of my stuff behind.

You can and you will; you must.

I'll compress it into a data package and send it as a signal to myself, but with a temporal delay to ensure it isn't lost while we transition.

Yes, good, do that.

HelpScanRetrieveProvidePlus initializing evacuation procedure ...

Automated delivery of sentients underway ...

Scan of vessel initializing ...

¹ An uprising of sentient machines; a splinter faction of extremist members of The Heirs of Tribas, that took control of the Habitat© and destroyed exactly 1 million Unuma.

Scan complete, vessel vacated, procedure complete.

Automation systems on standby.

Distance to Point of No Return = 231 050 metres

Current Rate of Drift = 1000+ metres per second

As the ship drifts into the star, the two intelligences observe it non-visually, noting its dimensions as if truly understanding it for the first time; a small object, dark against a brilliant background, being swallowed, the vast sun engulfing it, and Sol briefly ponders the awesome nature of such things:

Lynch pins of the universe,
spewing forth radiance,
burning into eternity,
anchors of existence,

.

Long before reaching the sun, the vessel disintegrates.

Becomes subsumed as simple elements.

Incorporated into the whole.

Returned.

And the process is complete.²

Author: Mathew David George.

² Oh woops, I forgot to send the data package with all of my stuff in it to myself, oh no!