

The Big Hello!

Alastair Reynolds

Welcome aboard! If you are in receipt of this message (and if you've succeeded in understanding it, of course) then you've already passed the hardest test! You've attained a basic competence in physics and engineering, coupled with enough of an understanding of the universe you live in, to intercept and decode signals from the Galactic Information Network!

Congratulations! This is already more than most cultures achieve, so you're already well ahead of the pack! Give yourselves a pat on...whatever it is you guys pat yourselves on!

The next step, should you choose to take it, is to participate in the Galactic Information Network by replying to this message! It's easy - all you have to do is generate a modulated gravity wave signal with a source strength of around four billion billion Megawatts! That may sound a lot, but it isn't really - it's only one percent of the energy output of the G-type star your planet orbits! Go on - you won't miss it!

But wait! Before you launch into a reply (and we're really keen to hear from you!) there are a few things you might want to keep in mind! Call them rules, call them guidelines, call them Good Old Common Sense - we don't care, as long as you obey them without question!

Only kidding! But there are still a few little things you might want to bear in mind, if only to avoid wasting expensive Galactic bandwidth! To assist in this, we've supplied a few tips that you may find useful!

Firstly, most new cultures want to know a bit about the wider Galactic Community - and who can blame them! It's a big old Galaxy out there and you've just joined the party! Right now, though, all you need to know is that you are one of the more junior members of the inhabited Galaxy, and that there are a few tests you have to pass before you can ascend to the second level of sentience! Don't be disheartened, though - you'll get there in the end if you stick at it! All it takes is intelligence, determination, and maybe a short extension on the Main Sequence lifetime of your star! In the meantime, we've prepared a Primer Package to get you started! There's a lot of information in the Primer Package - far too much to squeeze into a gravitational wave signal! So what we've done is pre-install the Primer Package on the metallic hydrogen ocean of your system's largest Gas Giant planet!

That's right - it's already there!

And if you'd already found the Primer Package and were wondering what that meter-wide grey ball was actually for - well, now you know! Just be careful opening it - or did you find that out already?! Well, it was a nice Gas Giant while it lasted!

Only kidding! But one of the things you'll notice about the Primer Package is that it doesn't say anything about faster than light travel! A lot of new species are really keen to learn about this, for some inexplicable reason! All

we can say is that by the time you've ascended to the second level of sentience, you will find the question of 'faster than light travel' about as interesting as 'faster methods to cure animal skins', or 'faster ways to ferment mammalian lactic fluid'! Trust us! We were the same, once upon a time! (And no, we didn't believe it either!)

All the same, the Primer Package should answer a lot of your basic questions - and more! Most likely, though, you'll only end up with more questions that you want answering! We don't mind - that's what we're here for! But before you go firing off a bunch of random queries, have a quick glance at the following! It'll save your time - and ours!

First, make sure your query isn't covered by the Primer Package! It sounds obvious - and it is - but you'd be amazed how many cultures don't seem to have read their Primer Package all the way through! Remember that the Primer Package is highly nested, and that some content layers may not be accessible given your current spatio/temporal perception horizon! Just be patient!

Secondly, there are a few topics covered by the Primer Package that - while they may seem to lead to interesting follow-up questions to a level one culture, are a tiny bit passe where we're concerned! Frankly, we're just a little fed up with going over the same ground over and over again!

Some, but not all, of these topics include questions related to Supreme Beings, the Birth, Life, Death and Afterlife of the Universe, the Possibility of Other Universes, the official explanation for the Great Void at $z=10$, and the unscheduled downtime of the Orion Arm Router during Galactic rotation cycle 15, and its possible implication in the Ninth Mass Extinction (and the ensuing cover-up)!

If you could steer away from these topics, guys, that would be great!

Also, please don't reply to any transmissions originating from the M13 globular cluster in Hercules - and never, ever send them unsolicited messages! Especially not radio - they hate radio! Also beware of messages claiming to originate from ascended level 3 cultures, especially those which offer suspiciously cheap Dyson conversions of your solar system! Believe us - they are too good to be true! You'll also want to keep away from any entities posing as the legal heirs of the capital assets of the fallen level 2 culture on the edge of the Cygnus Loop - and you definitely don't want to give them the coordinates of your system!

Oh, and before we forget - never, ever ask what happened to the humans! Unless you want to find out!

PS - When appending content to incoming messages, please do not top-post.