

## SK-30 Network

It is a little-known (read: 'highly classified') fact that Fermi's Paradox was in fact solved in the 1970s; the answer to the classic question ("Where the Hell is everybody?") turns out to be "They're all dead." Or, at least, they're no longer capable of dealing with pre-starflight civilizations for the foreseeable future. To be fair, they would have, if they weren't dead: there was apparently a procedure in place to integrate new species into the Galactic scene.

And humanity did its part; the Apollo 16 mission quietly brought back an alien device from the Moon that seemed to be some sort of intelligence test. The US government had it duly solved by 1975, and discovered that the Device doubled as a communications interface with the larger Galactic civilization. After a short period of time to process the sheer magnitude of this event, the five permanent nations of the UN Security Council collectively began to reach out to the larger interstellar network.

And discovered, again, that all the aliens out there were all dead.

The actual details are maddeningly and terrifyingly vague. Whatever happened, it happened quickly enough that very few details are available on those few automated databases that our species can currently access. The event was definitely comprehensive and even more terrifyingly recent; the last non-automated entry that anyone could find on the SK-30 Network (the name is derived from a rather grim joke about dead radio operators) was a mere 300 years ago. But what actually *happened* is unclear. It might have been a war, or an invasion; or perhaps it was a plague or weird physics or Azathoth manifesting and eating everyone. The Network's automated systems can't really say, and there aren't any other sources to consult.

Yet. Humanity has reached the limits of its current SK-30 Network access; further access and permissions are contingent on our species achieving transluminal travel. According to the records, our species would have been assigned mentors to help us reach that goal; obviously that won't happen, but simply knowing that FTL travel is **possible** (and, broadly, *how* to do it) has allowed researchers to throw together a prototype exploration vessel. It doesn't have to work for long; just enough to get a team of researchers to the nearest habitable planet, access the Network there, log our new status, and

hopefully unlock more access. Should be simple enough, if very creepy. After all, everybody on that planet will be dead, right?

Of course, that team of researchers will need bodyguards. You know. Just in case.

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