

ASTRONEER

NARRATIVE PROPOSAL

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Introduction

Astroneer offers a universe rich in narrative possibilities. The already well-integrated and self-consistent gameplay represents a vibrant, flexible, and fun universe that passionate players are eager to explore. This document outlines some of my proposed answers to these inherent questions of narrative detail. In the following sections, I will outline a broad sketch of important events leading up to the time of *Astroneer*, speak to matters of tone and design, offer some further details of narrative elements, and suggest potential franchise and cross-media opportunities developed from these ideas.

Tone

Astroneer's gameplay already establishes several tonal qualities that would inform any future narrative development. Players inhabit a universe of playful peril, determined optimism, and relaxed exploration and development. Potential expansions might flavor this with humor (as well-intentioned, but distant corporate entities try to assist the Astroneer) and hint at a slowly-unfolding mystery behind the architects of the Gateway devices.

Proposed Timeline of Events

There are many narrative story arcs that can encompass a span of time as broad as 4 centuries, and the sequence of events below is only a single possibility.

The *Astroneer* wiki offers some key details of the 25th century ‘present.’ It is known that *Exo Dynamics*, the largest (and presumably interstellar) conglomerate operates the Astroneer program and is instrumental to its existence and continued development. Technologically-advanced artifacts, located both in space (*Gateway Portal*) and within the cores of planets (*Gateway Engines*) suggest an alien origin. There are new substances, currently unknown to 21st-century science, such as *Composite* and *Astronium* that need to be woven into the fabric of Astroneer’s story. And lastly, the technology that underpins the gameplay itself suggests a long and inter-connected story of future human achievement to be acknowledged.

The early history of the world parallels that of present-day earth. The point of divergence is sometime in the not-too-distant future, where technological events and societal development have allowed humanity to spread throughout the solar system and beyond.

- **20th - 21st centuries**
 - Exploration and settlement of the near-Earth environment (geostationary orbit, Moon, and Lagrange points)
 - Exploration and resource exploitation of asteroids
 - Exploration, settlement, and resource exploitation of Mars
- **22nd century**
 - *Xiao Overseas Partners* expands to service the inner solar system, becomes part of the first wave of companies to establish a significant presence on Mars, and rebrands itself as *Tellus Transport*.
 - *Orleans Aerospace*, one of the leaders in propulsion research and spacecraft component manufacturing, likewise relocates to Mars.
 - *Manifold Machines* becomes a major player in autonomous resource harvesting, self-assembling construction and fabrication, and artificial intelligence
 - By mid-century, research and mining outposts have been established on Jovian and Saturnian moons, further extending the reach of humanity
 - By the latter part of the century, as more permanent colonies establish themselves throughout the solar system society begins to find a new equilibrium. During this time, *Hikaru Itai* (“I want to shine”), a media conglomerate, begins connecting the people and places of humanity’s broader home with a high-speed holographic network.

- **23rd century**
 - At its research facility on Mars, Orleans Aerospace makes strides in advancing energy storage and propulsion systems. They begin a partnership with Manifold Machines, establishing the *Wayfinder Project*, and start development of long-range, self-repairing, and autonomous interstellar probes. After successful completion of prototype systems, Orleans Aerospace acquires Manifold Machines and re-organizes as *Orleans Astrodynamics*.
 - Even with faster propulsion, the first targets of the interstellar probes are not reached until the latter part of the century. Resource harvesting and construction packages are left behind to establish forward bases in the exploration of the galaxy. One outpost discovers an anomalous compound in an intake sample, first designated as W1061b-x1. It's versatility as an all-purpose construction and fabrication material would not be identified until years later. At that point, it would become colloquially known as *Composite*.
 - By the end of the 23rd century, Tellus Transport's acquisition of *PackMat* begins to pay off with the development of a revolutionary new packaging system called the *Packager*. It is later marketed as the "*Kondo*." Tellus Transport's new technology is so successful they spin off a company, *Xiao Jingzi* ("Little Surprise"), to develop this new technology to its fullest potential.
 - Orleans Astrodynamics' Manifold Machines subsidiary makes advances in AI
- **24th century**
 - By the dawn of the 24th century, humanity's inexorable growth had allowed the occupation of nearly every potential site within the solar system and eager eyes now looked outwards to the galaxy for new frontiers. With convergent development of Orleans Astrodynamics' Mark 2 propulsion system and Tellus Transport's *Packager*, a new joint venture, *Prospector*, begins to take shape. Newer, faster probes retrace the steps of earlier *Wayfinder* missions, returning to locations designated as high-value targets. One of these outposts was Wolf 1061b, the discovery site of the unknown compound. The return mission identified the incredible properties of the material, now referred to as *Composite* for its ability to readily combine with a multitude of other raw materials.
 - Eventually, other probes discover the new compound in a swath of planets across the far reaches of space. Further exploration leads to a far more profound discovery near a strange and distant stellar binary system: the identification of artifacts of an alien origin.

- Autonomous machines begin construction of an orbital monitoring station. Once the nature of the discovery was confirmed and the potential for a safe approach had been determined, the station was expanded to include a habitat module for any future crewed missions.
- Tellus Transport merges with Orleans Astrodynamics, becoming *Exo Dynamics*
- Exo Dynamics begins a rapid period of growth and acquisitions, including the media giant Hikaru Itai. This acquisition, along with work done previously by Manifold Machines, allows the realization of an emergent AI system dubbed *The Mother Node*. As its capabilities grew, it began to manifest unique personalities dedicated to specific organizational responsibilities. As part of its growing mission to oversee deep-space exploration (both crewed and robotic), the particular persona tasked with this role was affectionately nicknamed 'MOM,' for Minder of Missions.
Exo Dynamics also acquires NORM Faktor (a company dedicated to researching new energy containment and generation technologies), BI/OTA (an exobiology research and development company), and GalTrans (an expedited shipping service)
- Founding of the Astroneer Academy in the mid-24th century.
Cadets at the academy are referred to as *Prospects*.
After a rigorous training program, recruits are entrusted with Exo Dynamics' most advanced equipment and assigned star systems from its ever-growing catalog of resource-rich targets.
- Mother Node's ongoing analysis of Composite suggests that it may not be naturally occurring and could in fact be the byproduct of an advanced manufacturing process.
- It would not be until the late 24th century that advances in technology would allow the first crewed mission to the site of the alien construct. The crew of *The Ineffable* reaches the quark star station and begins exploration of a small planetoid composed of a dense, crystalline substance.
While exploration would ultimately yield abundant scientific discoveries, little could be learned about those who had constructed this remote outpost.
The two primary discoveries:
 1. The location of a chamber at the heart of the crystalline object that suggested that this location was a node in a galactic fast travel network. While it appeared that there were several portals available, none were currently active. While it was believed that the node could harness the exotic energies of the quark star the ability to do so was

well beyond current scientific understanding. However, they were able to extract the locations of each of the portal destinations, and one system was within reach of current exploratory vessels. This would become the location of the system in *Astroneer*.

2. The identification of a new substance, dubbed *Astronium*, theorized to have been created in part due to the intense gravitational fields of stellar system. It remains unclear what role, if any, the material plays in the gateway device.

The alien construct is dubbed *Tantalus Threshold* for the promise of new discoveries and the distant destinations currently out of reach.

New/Enhanced Game Modes

As the story of *Astroneer* grows and evolves, the game could support additional or enhanced play modes.

One potential addition is a ***Survival Mode***. This would be a version of gameplay that introduces (or activates as a measure of enhanced difficulty) environmental challenges (flora, fauna, atmospheric, etc.) that affects the primary tasks of exploration and construction.

This could manifest as protecting equipment and resources from the environment (rain, wind, etc.) or repurposing existing research items to solve new problems (e.g., using lights to stave off photo-sensitive flora or fauna, or using the horn to create specific waveforms to drive off aggressive animals). Additionally, this would yield new tasks, missions, and mini-games, where the player has to navigate obstacles, retrieve items, and survive the particular risks of these more perilous environments.

As narrative elements are added, **co-op/multiplayer** modes could take on new significance as players work towards more far-reaching goals (trading/commerce, galactic exploration, etc.) that encompass expanded levels of the game.

Additional Game Levels/Expansions

- **Astroneer Academy** - While a tutorial already exists, establishing a series of precursor mini-games under an ***Astroneer Academy*** might be a fun way to expand on the learning experience and introduce players to the universe of *Astroneer*.

Exo Dynamics' AI training persona (MOM) could assign missions and offer (mostly!) helpful suggestions. Exo's 'drill' Sargent could lead the way in explaining the Terrain Tool and other devices.

- **Expanded Universe** – The current version of the game offers tantalizing clues about an alien culture responsible for the Gateway devices. Both single- and multi-player versions could build upon the base game to allow exploration of this mystery as well as new star systems. Each level progression in the game would expand the tech/research tree (space stations, orbital energy generators, large-scale printers, etc.) and allow the player (or players) to expand humanity's knowledge as it progresses further into the galaxy, tapping into the Gateway Network in search of those that had created it.

Humanity's charge into the unknown, with the Astroneers in the lead, would swing the door to discovery wide open, taking the era of galactic exploration to new heights.

- **HQ (or "Dome Sweet Dome")** – A personal place for the Astroneer to inhabit in-game. Customization and collection are always fun, prized elements of a gameplay experience, and having an area of their own would be a great place to store achievements, collect unique artifacts and receive messages/mission briefings.
- **Mobile Game** – Gameplay would be designed around a series of mini-missions that would constitute both a self-contained player experience as well as an adjunct to the main Astroneer gameplay.

One potential series of missions could center around harvesting resources from asteroids in the same system as the planets of Astroneer. Other tasks might include celestial navigation, establishing a deep-space satellite network, looking for life or collecting potential alien artifacts.

Completing missions could unlock unique spacesuits, research or decorations that the player could then incorporate into their main Astroneer game.

Cross-Media Suggestions

- **Astroneer Webcomic** – *The Adventures of Pick and Puck, or Tales of An Astroneer and Their Blob* – A series of short adventures with an Astroneer exploring new planets, their loyal alien 'dog' by their side.
- **Tutorial/Instructional Animations or Comics** – Brief, lighthearted introductions to in-game topics, possible hosted/narrated by Exo Dynamics' favorite AI.