

HUMAN INTEREST

by  
Jason Hall

[Note: this draft contains the first two scenes of the play.]

Jason Hall  
PO Box 832  
Marietta OH 45750

E-mail: [jasonhall26@gmail.com](mailto:jasonhall26@gmail.com)

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ACT ONE - SCENE ONE

Lights rise, minimally.

In the half-light, a dormitory-styled room is visible, late 1990s and male. The room is in slight disarray, with clothing, soda cans, and other detritus scattered about.

It's habitable, with a desk and chair, TV and video game system, bookcase and single bed visible. A few movie and band posters serve as wall decor.

One door leads to a small offstage bathroom, and an entry door stands opposite. Part of the back right wall is transparent, built of something like plexiglass. The opposite side is dark.

An AUDIO RECORDING plays. Each language presented by the GUIDING VOICE, nonsensical as it sounds, nonetheless has the consistency of communication.

GUIDING VOICE

Moose keegawscoom to moskendo resomaschnurp bento. Soom cavintrow so pooklepopple, eedy rah be sinkortow.  
(A bell DINGS.)

The next recorded voice is a series of ethereal high frequencies, like whalesounds combined with a string section.

GUIDING VOICE

MeeeeEE. MEEEE  
eeeeEE.  
(Ding!)

Next, a guttural slobbering noise, guttural and forceful.

GUIDING VOICE

BWLAHH bwahbllah grawblahblah grub BLAAAHblabwlah blah. Blah Grawhlb grah do blah GRAH blah, Bwlah grab blah dee blah.  
(Ding!)

GUIDING VOICE

Welcome to Quadrant Five Intergalactic Zoo, sponsored by Reigel Seven. If you choose to listen to the audio guide in Earth English, press the red button now.  
(Ding!)

And the same message, now in a language based on high-pitched "moops" and "meeps."

GUIDING VOICE

Moop meepmeep moop moop MEEP moop meep moop. Moop MEEPMEEP moop meep moopmoop meep Meep meep, moop meepmeep moop.  
(Ding!)

The recording returns to the first message and repeats the sequence.

GUIDING VOICE

Moose keegawscoom to moskendo resomaschnurp bento...

As the sounds and dings continue, a new noise adds to the mix: the BUZZING of an alarm clock.

Under the blankets of the bed, an inhabitant stirs. This is CARTER.

CARTER

Awwww-RRRAH!

Light floods the room, as if on a timer. The sleeper burrows under the blankets. Alarm and voice sounds continue.

A moment, then a hand reaches from beneath the blanket and fumbles about the night stand where the alarm clock sits. The hand finally finds a remote control, points it at the clock--about six inches away--and pushes a button.

The buzzing stops. The hand drops the remote and returns to bed.

The recording loop cuts off and a new message plays.

GUIDING VOICE

(Ding!)

Thank you for choosing Earth English language. Please scan the identification plate in front of each exhibit for more information. Please scan the identification plate in front of each exhibit for more information. Please scan the identification plate...

The bed's occupant shoves off the blankets and sits upright.

This is CARTER BEASE, 25. He is not a morning person.

CARTER

Awww-RRRAH!

GUIDING VOICE

Please scan the identification plate in front of--  
(Ding!)

GUIDING VOICE

You are viewing the Earth Human. The earth human is an energetic species, populating most of the regions of its home planet. The human transports itself on two appendages called legs and speaks and consumes with its face hole, known as a mouth.

As the Guiding Voice continues, Carter begins his day. He manages to push himself out of bed, throws a faded bathrobe over his t-shirt and boxers, stretches, scratches and yawns, and shuffles into the bathroom to relieve himself.

GUIDING VOICE

Human life system is carbon-based, and exists within an earth atmosphere of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide. The species contains male and female organisms, and fertilization can occur within seconds. Contrary to popular belief, the earth female does not eat the earth male after mating. The average human male life span is seventy-point-two earth years, while the human female's average is seventy-three-point-five years.

Carter continues to putter around, shoving some clothes under the bed and attempting to do push-ups.

GUIDING VOICE

This human is named Carter Bease. He is a male from Earth's North American region. Carter Bease is twenty-five earth years old, which places him in young adulthood. He enjoys playing with a sphere called a basketball and participating in games of visual coordination with a television unit and a Playstation 2.

(Ding!)

You are viewing the Earth Human. The earth human is an energetic species...

The Guiding Voice repeats its speech.

GAX enters the room carrying a covered tray.

Dressed in smart business attire, Gax has an unflappable, energetic demeanor. He sets the tray down, smiles at Carter, and launches into a cheery pep talk--but in an alien language.

GAX

Monteekru moray smeevalora blossom! Mecoolar be shnorinten ver gerble au shnook shnook...

Gax continues, the Guiding Voice continues. Carter holds his head in frustration, and signals for Gax to stop. Gax talks throughout.

CARTER

Wait, wait! I don't have my ear thing in.

(Miming)

No ear thing, no translator, just wait!

Carter searches the room: on the floor, on the desk, in the bed. Gax continues to chatter.

Carter finally finds a small object on top of the TV set.

CARTER

All right, just a minute!

Carter clips the object to his ear, and at that moment Gax's speech transitions from alienspeak to English.

GAX

(Continuing)

...Pazkinny maig rompa meescoot bandameeko more exciting. I said I would talk with you, see what suggestions you might have to remedy the problem. Did you sleep well in your bed device?

CARTER

My bed device was fine, but it's been a LITTLE LOUD today, thank you. Will you tell them to turn that off?

GAX

It is the third day in our calendar cycle. Time for Shnostik to test the audio voice.

CARTER

It's tested. Tell Shnostik to turn it off.

(yells at ceiling)

Turn it off!

GAX

Guiding voice plays okay? Shnostik is a bit of a perfectionist.

CARTER

Yes, it plays fine.

(Gives thumbs-up)

Shnostik! Good job, buddy! Now turn it off!

GAX

You insult Shnostik with that finger?

A beat, and then Carter understands the confusion.

CARTER

No, this is a thumb. This is a good sign. Tell him--tell him Guiding Voice is fine and we want it to go away now.

Gax addresses the ceiling.

GAX

Okay, Shnostik! Human tells you all is good with Guiding Voice!

The voice stops in mid-speech.

CARTER

That oughtta hold him till next calendar cycle.

GAX

It is more quiet now. We take it down a notch.

CARTER

Question. Why do you bother with English on the voice guide when no one on Earth knows this zoo is out here?

GAX

Answer: The English speech only plays during your exhibit, to give zoo patrons the sound of your language. All of the facts are correct, yes?

CARTER

Yeah, I guess so. And why did you keep talking when you knew I didn't have my ear translator in?

GAX

I thought perhaps you would enjoy learning another language.

CARTER

No thanks.

GAX

Think: I could teach you. We could converse in my native Venusian, without your earpiece.

CARTER

Pass. Is this my breakfast?

Carter lifts the cover of the tray, revealing an impressive plate of eggs, bacon, and toast. He nibbles as the conversation continues.

GAX

Yes, I asked to deliver it. Me, I'm a student at heart. I want to know how the human thinks, how the human talks.

CARTER

Here's how the human eats.

(Taking a new bite)

And it's good. Hard to believe it's not the real thing.

GAX

The real thing is a matter of context. It's real, just not of your earth. The eggs come from the space hens of Persei Three, the bacon from the star beasts of vector nine, and the toast made by the good people from the hellpit planet.

CARTER

Very clever, those hellpit people.

GAX

But today I deliver more than a tray of food materials. Today I deliver important news.

CARTER

I figured you were here for a reason. What's up?

GAX

It is Zoo Director Scrouch. It is he who is up. He is concerned with the visitor numbers to the Human exhibit.

CARTER

What about them?

GAX

They are down. Embarrassingly down. The only zoo exhibit with lower visitor numbers is the vapor cloud beings from Gaspar Twelve.

CARTER

Well...I don't think it's anything to worry about. We just give it time, maybe promote me a little, and the numbers will come right back up.

GAX

I am sorry, Carter Bease. You suffer from a delusion.

CARTER

Now, look. I'm sure you and Scrouch are overreacting. I think maybe your standards are too high. Let's go back to the numbers. Who's doing better than me?

GAX

Perhaps if you attracted crowds the way the Terryphoids do.

CARTER

The Terryphoids? The Terryphoids look like puppies and shoot lasers out of their eyes. How can I compete with that?

Gax takes out some index cards.

GAX

According to several recent visitor comment cards, your exhibit falls under the heading of "zoo disappointments." Patrons have called the Human display "boring," "tedious," and "visually unattractive." Under "interest to return," visitor average rates you a five.

CARTER

Well...

GAX

Out of seventy. Visitors often find you asleep in bed, staring at the television unit, or playing with the video game controller while staring at the television unit. It does not make you a must-see exhibit.

Carter stands and feigns humility.

CARTER

Look. I am a Hu-Man. I sleep. I eat. I watch TV. That is what I do. I'm sorry if I don't fire lasers or hover when I walk. I wish I could.

GAX

Perhaps if you simply tidied up your room and yourself a bit...

CARTER

Gax Gax Gax! You know better than that, you have an Intergalactic Zoo degree! First rule is: don't mess with an animal's environment. Humans need bathrobes and TV sets to thrive.

Carter pulls Gax to the door.

GAX

But Zoo Director Scrouch...

CARTER

You tell Scrouch not to worry. He's got an Earth Human in his zoo, and that's enough to get people in the door.

GAX

But they want the Earth Human to be more interesting!

CARTER

Sorry. We're just not an interesting race. 'Bye now.

Carter closes the door on Gax. He returns to the tray, takes some more food, and sits down across from the TV. With a remote he turns the TV on, and turns the game system on with his foot.

Video game MUSIC plays. Carter stares at the screen for a moment, then with a frown turns the TV set off.

Munching on toast and bacon, he moves to the clear glass of the right wall.

The lights flood the adjacent space. A formidable LIONMAN, half-man, half-beast, presses against the glass, his paws outstretched above him.

CARTER

Hey Lionman.

LIONMAN

Is that fried star beast?

CARTER

Mm-hmmm. Want some?

LIONMAN

Yes.

Carter pushes a piece of bacon through an airhole in the clear wall. Lionman eats. The two converse, each on their own side.

CARTER

Did you hear what happened over here?

LIONMAN

I hear nothing. I smell meat and I want it. Do you have more meat?

CARTER

Yeah, but I want it.

LIONMAN

I want it.

CARTER

Tough. I want it and it's mine.

LIONMAN

I will kill you. I will kill you for fried meat.

Carter sighs and gets the last piece of bacon. He breaks it in half and shoves the half-piece over to Lionman.

CARTER

I'm giving this to you because we humans like to share. Remember that the next time you threaten to kill me. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

LIONMAN

I do not want honey or vinegar. Flies irritate me.

CARTER

So Gax came over just now. And I'm all like, Hey Gax, how's it goin'? And he's all like, your numbers are down, you're not as popular as the laser puppies, you need to attract more visitors.

LIONMAN

Who is this Gax?

CARTER

Aw, come on, you know! The shapeshifter guy who helps run the zoo. I call him Gax 'cause he reminds me of the guy on the video card games.

LIONMAN

He is the Lionman impostor.

CARTER

Sure, he takes your shape when he's talking to you. To me he's just a human impostor. He's not a bad guy, though.

LIONMAN

Why does this Gax appear?

CARTER

That's what I'm telling you. He says I'm not enough of a draw for the visitors. I said to him, "Hey, I'm human. That's enough of a draw right there."

LIONMAN

I am Lionman.

CARTER

Yes, you're a Lionman. And I'm a human. We're both interesting. You've got that jungle warrior-wild beast vibe going for you, and I'm a member of the most advanced species in the universe. What's not to like?

LIONMAN

I cannot stay here.

CARTER

I'll tell you another thing: we've got it pretty good. Three square meals and two snacks a day, satellite TV reception that includes HBO and Cinemax, a new game or two dropped off every couple months by interplanetary mail. Not a bad exchange for letting some silly aliens gawk at you part of the day.

LIONMAN

I must escape.

CARTER

You're overreacting. I'm telling you, man, back on Earth you couldn't get a gig like this. On Earth, everyone expects things from you. Punch the clock, go to school, work for the man your whole life and then die drowning in bills. And here? No bills, no school, no man.

LIONMAN

Here is Lionman.

CARTER

I mean man man, like the boss.

LIONMAN

Lionman should not be here. Lionman should be home.

CARTER

Aw, they gave you a decent pad, didn't they?

LIONMAN

No.

CARTER

Sure. Looks like African Veldt over there, lots of grass and trees.

LIONMAN

My cage is fifty paces.

CARTER

So? My pad is probably the same size, and I'm not complaining. And I've seen what they send your way at dinnertime. There's gotta be twenty pounds of meat, just handed to you.

LIONMAN

(With disgust)

Yes. Handed, yes. On my home of Roartor, we kill our food. With honor. This is disgrace.

CARTER

You need to lighten up.

LIONMAN

I must escape, return to Roartor.

CARTER

Well, good luck with that. If you need me, I'll be over here by the TV, watching something interesting.

Lionman prowls behind some tall grass and moves out of sight. Carter sits across from the TV and aims the remote. Before he pushes the button, a curious SCRATCHING sound is heard from the entrance door.

Carter pauses, looks back at the door. Nothing. He turns to the TV again, aims the remote, and... more SCRATCHING.

Frustrated, he crosses to the door.

CARTER

This had better be good!

Carter opens the door, and ZOO DIRECTOR SCROUCH barrels through. Scrouch is a heavy-bodied alien, bureaucratic and exotic at the same time. He is not in a good mood. Gax follows him in.

SCROUCH

Why did you not answer my scratch? I had to scratch twice!

CARTER

On Earth, people knock on doors, they don't scratch.

SCROUCH

Ridiculous!

GAX

Carter Bease, Zoo Director Scrouch would like to speak with you.

CARTER

I can see that.

SCROUCH

You will hear me too! Your translator device is working?

CARTER

Yes.

SCROUCH

Good. Then you will listen. Your visitation numbers are pitiable! What will you do?

GAX

(To Carter)

I told Mr. Scrouch that you are considering ways to generate interest in the Human exhibit.

CARTER

Yeah, but that was five minutes ago!

SCROUCH

(To Gax)

What did he say?

GAX

He said that was five Earth minutes ago.

SCROUCH

Earth minutes?! What of them??

CARTER

I haven't had any time to think.

SCROUCH

You have had ample time! Are you not an advanced life form?

(To Gax)

Is he not an advanced life form?

GAX

He is.

SCROUCH

He wastes my Saturnine time! Prepare the space for more Terryphoids!

Scrouch starts shoving clothes and posters onto the bed, pulling the blankets up to form one bundle. Gax tries to intervene.

CARTER

Hey!

GAX

My apologies, Carter Bease. Mr. Scrouch has decided to use this space for another Terryphoid exhibit.

CARTER

Stop! Where am I going to go?

SCROUCH

You are of no consequence!

GAX

You'll be placed in a transition tank.

CARTER

Aw, come on! That's nothing but a holding cell! Let go!

Carter still struggles with Scrouch, who is messily packing everything away.

GAX

Perhaps this is a good time to inform Mr. Scrouch about your plans to generate interest in your exhibit.

CARTER

My plans? Oh. Right. Ummm. Okay. Okay, wait! I was thinking-- Mr. Scrouch sir? I was thinking--

Scrouch finally stops the packing to glare at Carter.

CARTER

I was thinking, what if? What if we...

(Improvising)

What if we...mounted a couple extra TV screens to the front of the cage--

SCROUCH

For what purpose?

CARTER

Well, they would be hooked up to the video game system in here and that way the visitors outside could see the game I was playing and they could cheer me on. And it would be fun.

SCROUCH

Pah! That is the trouble already. You watch too much TV units. Motion failed.

Scrouch wipes the desktop's contents onto the bed.

CARTER

Okay! Okay okay. How about... What if I made art? You know, started drawing? Like I could make my own graphic novel, and then post the pages onto the wall and everyone could read it.

SCROUCH

How does a human make art?

CARTER

Like this.

Carter goes to the desk, sits down, grabs paper and pen, and starts doodling. Scrouch watches, then:

SCROUCH

You just sit there! That is not interesting! It is even less interesting than when you sleep! You think me a fool!

CARTER

(Desperate)

Not at all! Look, I'm trying to find--

GAX

You must offer something that appeals.

CARTER

I'm trying! Look, maybe I could run a marathon in the middle of my room....

SCROUCH

(Still packing)

Pah!

CARTER

Okay! You know what? Fine!

(Starts to throw things on the bed in a fit)

Because short of having a baby, I don't know how I'm going to compete with all of those goddamn laser-eyed puppies that everyone's so fond of around here!

GAX

Mr. Scrouch...

CARTER

Go ahead, throw me in the holding tank, the transition whatever, do your worst. You're not gonna have this human to kick around any more!

GAX

Is that not a fine suggestion, Mr. Scrouch?

SCROUCH

What? Kicking?

GAX

No. Our human, Carter Bease, has suggested he has a baby.

This stops Scrouch in mid-pack.

CARTER

I did what?

SCROUCH

A human baby?

GAX

Correct. It would be an event.

SCROUCH

Are human babies cute?

GAX

They're interesting. And from what I've researched, the birthing process is attractively messy.

SCROUCH

We could promote the addition. It would make the visitors curious to see a human baby.

GAX

Beings would come from geerlorps around just to see it.

Carter is a bit dazed.

CARTER

I never thought about being a father.

GAX

How difficult can it be?

SCROUCH

Yes. This is good. I am pleased.

(To Carter)

HUMAN, I COMMAND YOU! CREATE A BABY!

Blackout.

## SCENE TWO

Gax checks the interior of a small space cruiser, a cross between a mini spaceship and Volkswagon. The audience should be able to see its riders through the front windshield. Scrouch watches Gax's moves.

SCROUCH

The gravity balance system is in working order?

GAX

Yes, Mr. Scrouch.

SCROUCH

You have checked the boron thrust gauge?

GAX

I'm checking that now.

SCROUCH

You have the intergalactic map with you?

GAX

Yes, sir. Please, Mr. Scrouch: relax. It will be a successful trip to Earth. We will retrieve a suitable mate for Carter Bease and return.

SCROUCH

Must the human go with you?

GAX

I would advise it. He is the best subject to select a healthy, compatible partner.

SCROUCH

You must stay in humanoid form! You must not change into your Venusian shape. People will talk.

GAX

I understand.

SCROUCH

And do not let the human out of your sight. I do not want him to flee!

GAX

I shall be ever at his side. Carter Bease arrives!

Carter crosses to the ship dressed in a silver space suit.

He walks in a slow-motion, stiff-legged gait like a moon astronaut.

SCROUCH

Why does he walk like that? He does not know how to wear the space pants!

GAX

Is something wrong with the space pants?

CARTER

No man, I'm just doing a little astronaut walk. One small step for man...

SCROUCH

I do not understand the reference. Walk correctly or I shall make you walk correctly!

CARTER

(Drops the space walk)

You need to loosen up.

SCROUCH

(To Gax)

The ship is ready?

GAX

Yes sir.

SCROUCH

(To Carter)

You understand your mission? You are to return to your planet and find a compatible female of your species.

CARTER

Easier said than done.

SCROUCH

Then you and the specimen return to the zoo with Gax, and proceed to birth human babies.

CARTER

Riiiiight...

SCROUCH

Do you argue with me?

CARTER

No, I get it. My ratings are down, so we add a kid. Sitcoms have been doing it for years. But what happens if I bring someone back and we can't have kids?

SCROUCH

You must not fail! The ship is ready! Retrieve a female. I command you!

CARTER

You command a lot, you know that?

SCROUCH

(To Gax)

I expect reports. Begin your journey.

GAX

You can depend on me.

Scrouch leaves. Gax enters the ship.

GAX

All right, Carter Bease. Our mission is most serious. Let us begin.

CARTER

Shotgun!

Carter jumps into the ship.