



Science Fiction Worldbuilding Workshop

PAX East 2013: Jack Graham, Andrew Linstrom, Caroline Willis

Templecon 2014: Jack Graham, Leah Huete, Marc Huete

Pick Your Poison:

CARRIER GROUP ALEPH

Military SF

Inspirations: Farscape: Peacekeeper Wars, Battle Star Galactica, Battletech, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Starship Troopers, Mass Effect 1

Themes & tropes: Fascism vs. Democracy, Authority vs. Individuality, Military Hardware Technofetishism, Politicians vs. Soldiers

Setting: massive space fleet & worlds it visits/protects/devastates, chronology not based on human calendar

RIDERS ON THE WARP

Weird SF

Inspirations: Black Sabbath, Dune, Farscape, HP Lovecraft, The Sword: Warp Riders, Fading Suns, Gene Wolfe's Book of the New Sun, Jack Vance's Dying Earth, Rogue Trader

Themes & Tropes: Crumbling Imperialism, Dying Worlds, Feudal Rivalries, Mind-Enhancing experiences, Techno-occultism

Setting: Far-flung star empire where science & tech are shrouded in symbolism, 61st Century

FAR SECTOR DJANGO

Space Western

Inspirations: Cowboy Bebop, Firefly, Star Wars, Sukiyaki Western Django

Setting: Frontier Planets, aka, "[name]," nearby star system with a dense planetary habitable zone, late 22nd century

Themes & Tropes: Bounty hunters, criminal syndicates, liberty vs. "civilizing" control structures, individuals vs. authority (be it governments or criminal organizations), hard luck cases & hard knock lives, acculturation of Wild West cultural memes with non-Western ones


NIGHT MARKET SINGULARITY STALKER BLUES

Transhuman Sci-Fi

Inspirations: Altered Carbon, Neuromancer, Charles Stross, Deus Ex: Human Revolution, The Windup Girl, Schismatrix, The Diamond Age, Shadowrun 4th Edition (minus the magic), Transmetropolitan

Setting: Space Habitat, Mars Orbit, 2177


Themes & tropes: biological immortality, human enhancement, micro-manufacturing, nanotechnology, capitalism vs. post-scarcity economics, personality uploading, uplifted animals, post-national social clades, techno-singularities, ubiquitous augmented reality



The _____ [government form] _____ of the _____ [name] _____ is the greatest polity of this galactic age, connecting hundreds of worlds across a distance of 1000 light years. Led by the human-like _____ [species name] _____, whose culture espouses _____ [quality] _____ and _____ [quality] _____, its only rivals in this galactic arm are the _____ [adjective: tendency] _____ [name] _____ and the _____ [adjective: tendency] _____ [name] _____. The mightiest force of this star-spanning _____ [same government form] _____ is its space navy -- which now faces its greatest crisis ever.

Table Topics


1. The Polity. What's the nature of this star-spanning association of worlds? What are its core worlds, major political factions, and economy like?
2. The Founding Race. Who are these human-like creatures, and what forces of history, biology, and myth shape them?
3. Navy. What are its history, traditions, achievements, and failings -- its finest hours, and its most desperate.
4. The Crisis. An apocalyptic force faces the Polity, one against which military force is seemingly its only hope. What is this crisis?
5. Shocks. What's a key technology that defines warfare in this setting. How is it used -- and what's the price of using it? What's a key fact of nature -- astronomical, planetological, or otherwise -- that constrains a star-spanning empire in this universe?
6. Issue. Define a social issue afflicting the Polity and how it plays out in the ranks of the Navy. Does it tie in with a technology, with economics, or with the political status of different worlds in the Polity?
7. Ally Alien Race. The human-like race's closest ally and partner in maintaining the Polity.
8. Rival Polities. Flesh out the two rival polities mentioned in the mad lib.
9. Bridge Crew. Describe a notable ship, its officers, and its crew.
10. Groundpounders. Describe the soldiers who do the dirty work and their tools. Could be a single space marine recon squad, could be an entire pulse rifle regiment.



All hail the omnipotent Empress _____ [name] _____,
may the praises to her name be as numerous as the
Thousand Worlds she rules! Connected by the
mystery of _____ [interstellar travel technology] _____, all of the
Thousand Worlds are her children. The _____ [aliens] _____
quake at her name, the _____ [monopoly] _____ serves her
devices, and even the _____ [imperial antagonists] _____ do her
obeisance! As to the _____ [mutants] _____ and
_____ [fringe protagonists] _____, they are beneath her notice.
Her Omnipotence bids her trillion subjects to
disdain rumors of the _____ [troubling event] _____. The Empire
of the Thousand Worlds is eternal!

Table Topics:

1. The Empire. Its history, traditions, ruling class, the reasons for its rise -- and the reasons for its decline.
2. Hyperspace. How did humanity cross the gulf of space and time to people a thousand worlds? What's the technology they use? And what's the price of using it?
3. Mutants. Describe a group of humans who've been altered by science, technology, mystical forces, or some combination thereof. They could be protagonists, antagonists, or both.
4. Monopoly. Describe a group that holds commercial power by controlling a key resource or technology. How do they hold on to power?
5. Occult Technologists. Describe a group that controls a key science or technology and how their practice of it intersects with myth and/or mysticism.
6. Waning. A change in the physical universe threatens to crumble the Empire and result in the slow death of humankind. What is it?
7. Alien species. Describe an important alien species. What's their interaction with humankind: are they friendly, threatening, or only the stuff of legend?
8. Fringe Protagonists. Describe a group on the fringes of the imperial order who have unusual freedom to travel and act as they please.
9. Imperial Protagonists. Describe a group within the Imperial social order who act as a positive force. This could be a single noteworthy family, a techno-mystical order, or even planetary civil servants.
10. Imperial Antagonists. Describe a group within the Imperial social order who act as a corrupting, destabilizing, acquisitive, or otherwise threatening force -- if not to the polity as a whole, then to the protagonists.




Yep, ever since the _____ ["civilizing" forces] _____ changed
the game back Earth-way, been no shortage of
_____ [space-age name for cowboys] _____ settin' course for
_____ [Greek letter] _____ Space. What with humankind inventing
_____ [shock: technology] _____ and the effects of
_____ [shock: environment] _____, ain't no reason not to try your
luck out here. But be careful, _____ [Cowboy name, singular] _____. The
_____ [A Group of Crooks] _____ has got their fingers in
everything, and you never know what to expect
from the _____ [Natives' Name] _____. Welcome to
_____ [Planet Name] _____, partner. Keep your friends
close, & your blaster closer.



Table Topics:

1. Frontier space. Why's there a frontier; what's it a frontier of? How long have humans been here, and what challenges shape their settlement and exploration?
2. "Civilizing" forces. What's the society from which the frontier is expanding like? And why would there be conflicts between its ordering forces and people on its fringes?
3. Shock: Technology. Invent a scientific or technological invention that shapes life in this universe.
4. Shock: Environment. Invent a fact of nature -- be it astronomical, xenobiological, or otherwise -- that shapes life in this universe.
5. Cowboys. Who are some likely good guys in this universe? They might live on one of its worlds, or travel between all of them.
6. Crooks. Invent a crime syndicate who've taken advantage of the near-lawlessness of frontier space. Who are they, and what's their M.O.?
7. Natives. Invent an indigenous group. They might be aliens, or they might be humans - - possibly altered humans -- who arrived long before the most recent wave of settlement. Do they have one home world, or are they spread around? Do they approve of the colonists?
8. Social issue. Describe a social issue that pervades this setting and how it causes conflict between good guys and bad guys.
9. Alien animal. Come up with an alien animal that has an important effect on human life -- for good, for ill, or both. If it lives on a specific world, sketch that planet, too.
10. Worlds. Describe a crossroads world in frontier space, who and what lives on it, and how Cowboys can get in a whole heap of trouble there.



Heinrich Fong was a bodyhopper -- man/woman of 1000 faces -- and my hunt for him/her had taken me to _____ [Space Habitat Name] _____, in Mars orbit. The _____ [Antagonists] _____ who run the Night Market might spill his/her location -- or they might feed me to their _____ [nanotech] _____. You can get anything on _____ [Space Habitat Name] _____ : _____ [more nanotech] _____, data on _____ [Foreign/Alien Group] _____, hell, even sexual favors from _____ [name for uplifts] _____ if that's your thing. The _____ [post-national factions] _____ have their strongholds out here, and between them and the _____ [Antagonists] _____, us _____ [Protagonists] _____ have a hard time just making a living. And they say the _____ [Synonym: Singularity] _____ is coming, but me -- I just want to make it to the next job.

NIGHT MARKET SINGULARITY STALKER BLUES

Table Topics:

1. The Space Habitat. Cylinder spun for gravity, cluster of micro-G modules, hollowed out asteroid, or something else? What's the economy of this space station based on, why do people come here -- and how can they get into trouble?
2. The Night Market. Literal southeast Asian night market, infomorph-run virtual marketplace, criminal red market exchange, or all of the above? You can get anything on the Night Market -- but so can your worst enemies.
3. Uplifts. Artificial Generalized Intelligences (AGIs), talking bonobos, and dogs with AIs riding in their heads are just some of the possibilities. Why did humans create them, and how do they affect the world?
4. Nanotech. If you can't buy it at the Night Market, you can probably print it out from a download. Describe how microscopic robots, nano-scale 3D printers, and other uses of nanotech affect this world.
5. Protagonists. Ego-hunting gumshoes, hacktivists, & meat puppets with hearts of gold. Describe some good guys in this universe -- keeping in mind that no one in the Night Market is too good.
6. Antagonists. Immortal oligarchs, soul-trading slavers, and people who've decided they're more advanced than the rest of transhumanity -- too the point where they think we're all cattle. Describe some villains -- keeping in mind that they probably have their reasons.
7. Post-National Factions. The nation state is dead; all hail the clades! No longer dependent upon geography, transhuman organize themselves into nations of ideas. Describe one or two of these factions.
8. Social Issue. Even in a post-scarcity economy, there are still have-nots. What happens if you can't afford a new body, or if intelligence enhancements leave you behind? Describe a social problem & how it creates conflict.
9. The Singularity. Transhumanity is catapulting itself toward a point of technological enhancement so profound that beyond it, the effects of the changes it will wreak are nigh-incomprehensible. Are we about to become a god-like computer mind, an undifferentiated sea of programmable matter, or something weirder? What's about to happen to Transhumanity -- and is it good?
10. The Visitors. We don't know why they came, or how, or even what they truly want. An outside intelligence has contacted transhumanity, and we don't know what it bodes. What are they, and did they arrive physically, or otherwise?

NIGHT MARKET SINGULARITY STALKER BLUES

Woo! We Did It!

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Slides 1, 2, & 11: An X-ray image of the center of the Milky Way. Public domain, [courtesy of NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory](#).

Carrier Group Aleph: An M-109A6 Paladin Self Propelled Howitzer firing as a part of a demonstration. Public domain, [courtesy of the USAF](#).

Riders on the Warp: The first day of Pax Prime 2012 (8/31/12), a giant prominence on the sun erupted- sending out particles and a shockwave. This may have given Earth its third radiation belt, which appeared shortly afterwards. This is an image of the prominence before it erupted. Public domain, [courtesy of NASA](#).

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