

Cycles



Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	World: A Hundred Billion Stars	5
3	History: The Death of Progress	6
4	Mankind: A Universe in the Universe	7
5	Galactography: A Map Noone Will Paint	8

Chapter 1

Introduction

This setting book will to evolve a vision for a Science-Fiction/Fantasy universe that has been lingering at the back of my head for a while. Here I am foremost focusing on worldbuilding, trying to write a manifesto that captures the essence of this setting. In doing so, I am trying not to stray too much into unimportant details – the scope of this world will be huge and complex, way larger than a single person could ever fill with life. It might well be, that due to the scope of this setting, the characters and places of one story or game round might never meet or even be knowable to those of another. Rather than trying the tantalizing task of constructing a perfectly consistent world and history full of unarguable details, I will only sketch a rough background of world and history – as subjective and incomplete as the world we live in. This background is more supposed to convey specific moods and emotions, motives and ideas. In doing so, I hope to give some coherence to all stories happening in this setting on a more abstract level.

To get a first grasp on the ideas and moods I am trying to convey, let me list some of these:

- The universe is vast and indifferent to mankind ... even while mankind conquers the stars.
- Mankind itself is vastly complex in all the ways culture and the human psyche evolved ... across time as well as space.
- History repeats itself, and the basic conflicts, cravings and fears of man stay the same.
- There will be no Utopia to end mankind's struggles – We will always face challenges.
- There is no real progress – At most change and diversification.
- Nature will always hold mystery, however far we evolve.
- Advanced technology holds the same kind of mystery to those who do not understand it.

An important part of Science-Fiction is extrapolating a possible future for mankind to look at philosophies and problems that matter *today*. Often this aspect happens with regard to the so called 'Novum' a very specific societal development or technology that defines the course of history. In a similar vein I will define three rules that are used as condensation nucleus for the themes listed above:

- 1. There are no significant gamechangers beyond the laws of physics known today.**

While there are infinitely complex details to study in the universe, the basics stand – especially concerning the way humans can interact with nature. Lightspeed is the definitive limit of communication, conservation of energy and momentum holds and, every action produces a reaction. *We are moving slowly, and nothing comes without a price.*

- 2. The universe is generally fertile to life, but truly intelligent life is very unlikely.**

As far as I can judge, this is mostly in line with what we can conclude today, while it also conveniently avoids the problem that this universe might become too complex. Mankind will be complex enough in and by itself, how much harder would it be to construct a similar convincing, but still alien society? And foremost it serves the mood of cosmic loneliness. *We are alone, and the only ones to help us will be ourselves*

- 3. The culture known today is remembered across millenia, although in sometimes strangely deformed ways.**

This might be the largest stretch amongst these rules, but it serves the narrative purpose to keep the world relatable to todays world. While it seems unlikely that people in 10.000 years care about todays gods and customs it simplifies the task for the author to come up with a diverse range of human behaviour.

To give some credit as well as inspiration, these and similar ideas have been explored in a vast number of works. The tropes of technological progress slowing to a crawl and mankind staying fractured into poor and rich – or low-tech and high-tech – are standard tropes of cyberpunk and end-time universes. Here I am mostly influenced by the *Fallout*-games, the *Warhammer 40k*-universe, and the movies *Ghost in the Shell* and *Blade Runner*. Especially regarding the role of low-end technology, I should mention the more hard-sci-fi series *The Expanse* and *Firefly*.

The feeling of appreciating the mystic beauty of a vast, indecipherable universe is best summed up in the term *sense of wonder*. Nowhere has it been captured as masterfully as in the works of Arthur C. Clarke. He also expanded this notion to technology beyond the human capability of understanding and coined the genre-defining phrase: *Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.*

Keeping all of this in mind I want to construct a world that reaches a space opera scope similar to *Star Wars* or *Warhammer 40k* but stays technologically down to earth by not blatantly disobeying laws of physics. One should be able to imagine a logic route of history to the state at its telling. Yet there is no need to flesh out every single planet and political person. Staying scientifically grounded means that travelling to the stars will be an endeavour of huge effort and demand incredible personal sacrifices due to the time-scales alone. Individual stories or game sessions may change the fate of whole societies or planetary populations, yet still be insignificant in the big picture. Cultures will clash in apocalyptic ways, yet in the end everything is dust in the wind...

One last note to the reader: The informations in the following chapters are mostly to be considered the inner clockworks driving this worlds evolution and no single character knows everything, or even a small fraction of these happenings. These events happen beyond the timescales of most people's historical or spatial horizon and only very few enlightened people are able to grasp the scope of mankind's history. Therefore, especially if this setting is used in roleplay, players should only read as much as needed and be able to strictly separate player- from character-knowledge. If used in a story, the big strokes of history should be revealed very scarcely and such a reveal should mark a major plot point.

Chapter 2

World: A Hundred Billion Stars

And they are ours to conquer...

As I already emphasized, defining for the atmosphere of this world should be scope – The infinitesimal size of mankind versus the vastness of the universe and its absurd effort to become significant in any way.

This trope alone might sound quite depressing, but it can be contrasted to the aforementioned *Sense of Wonder* – appreciating all the fragile and complex beauty that we encounter on the way, be it created by man or evolved naturally.

To convey both ideas, we first have to take a look at the arena we're playing in –
The Milky Way

Chapter 3

History: The Death of Progress

We are like butterflies who flutter for a day and think it is forever.

– Carl Sagan

Chapter 4

Mankind: A Universe in the Universe

*Out of the cradle onto the dry land
Here it is standing
Atoms with consciousness, matter with curiosity
Stands at the sea, wonders at wondering*

*I, a universe of atoms
An atom in the universe*

– Richard P. Feynman

Chapter 5

Galactography: A Map Noone Will Paint