

The Mulholland Drive

When asked by the press why he named Earth's first practical FTL engine the 'Mulholland Drive,' the Drive's sole inventor cryptically replied "*Because it runs on dead stars.*" ...Which is admittedly true enough, but the connection was still not immediately obvious. Ach, well, genius must be allowed its little jokes.

It all goes like this: FTL travel -- for that matter, FTL communication -- depends on pulsars. The creation and life cycle of a pulsar does things to local physics that cannot even be *hallucinated* by 21st Century Terran physicists; their intellectual descendants, on the other hand, have pioneered a method for tapping into the pulsar's energy instantaneously, and in very small amounts. It's not powerful enough for a bomb, but it is enough to allow a starship to ignore the lightspeed barrier when doing constant-boost acceleration, as well as allowing instantaneous communication between two transmitters tapped into the same pulsar network.

The only limiting factor is the pulsar itself; the average pulsar generates a useful interference with local physics in a globe (centered on the pulsar) that extends out only

about 1000 light-years. Fortunately for humanity, there *is* a pulsar (PSR J0108-1431) only 424 light years from Earth; unfortunately, there is as of yet no way to tune a particular drive's engine to more than one star. Which it passes beyond the pulsar's range, any particular ship will rapidly lose its ability to travel faster than light, and be forced to deal with relativistic effects.

In other words: anybody who wishes to travel more than 1,000 light years, at best, will be forced to switch ships at some point. There are other spacefaring cultures using these drives, and there are overlapping pulsar transportation networks, but no other species has figured out how to crack the basic limitation of the Drive. In the meantime, Galactic Civilization flows around the pulsar networks; needless to say, species trapped in planets outside the networks will find themselves at a severe disadvantage...

...What's that? Well, yes, I suppose that it *could* be said that the Mulholland Drive can best be described as a vehicle for a star. Why is that apparently funny?

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