

# Unfiltered

**A Creepy Science-Fiction RPG Setting  
By Moe Lane**

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*They're all gone.*

*When we finally activated the automated welcome beacon in the Oort Cloud, humanity rejoiced. Finally, we were going to meet the rest of the Galaxy! But... they're all gone.*

*There's a network of beacons covering us, and other 'developing' species. The non-sapient (it says) AI running that beacon knows what happened, either. The rest of Galactic civilization simply **disappeared**, four hundred years ago.*

*We'll get more access to the databases as we check off the old criteria for species advancement, the network says. It's slow going, without a mentor species. But we know that humanity can go out there.*

*It's just... should we?*

## Part One: Overview

The year is 2147, and humanity has made it to the stars. The **empty** stars. It's not supposed to be this way: up until quite recently this portion of space hosted a multi-stellar, multi-sapient polity called the Amalgamation. How many races were in the Amalgamation? Humanity doesn't know. What were they like? Humanity doesn't know. What happened to them?

Humanity doesn't know.

What humanity *does* know is that the Amalgamation was watching over Earth (and other developing worlds), with systems in place to help sufficiently advanced sapient species integrate steadily and smoothly into the larger Galactic community. That system is still up and running, and was in fact activated during the Apollo 16 moon mission. But the species which was supposed to mentor us through the next several hundred years disappeared with the rest of the Amalgamation. Without outside help (and permissions), humanity's ability to get information from what's left of the Amalgamation's automated information network (its name is typically translated into English as "the Process") is maddingly limited.

But while The Process was prohibited from giving Earth the theory and methods of FTL travel, it at least revealed to humanity that such a thing was *possible*. American researchers, working in secret, successfully

tested a prototype FTL drive in 2040, and used it to travel to Alpha Centauri in 2045. The trip took a year each way, and the ship nearly failed on the return voyage, but the crew of the *Enrico Fermi* successfully demonstrated their mastery of basic FTL technology to automated review machines found in that star system.

This at least gave Earth access to better star drive designs, even if humanity's understanding of them is limited. And even though humanity's understanding of Amalgamation science is incredibly hit or miss, based on what can be teased out of what databases the Process can still access.

It's been a century since the *Enrico Fermi* returned to Earth. Four colony worlds were automatically assigned to humanity, but only three are within easy range of Earth starships; and all of the colony worlds seem almost designed to test a species' ability to adapt to and thrive under adverse conditions. There are also at least a thousand Tomb Worlds within reasonable range where alien races once thrived. Humans would normally have been able to visit only under the most strictly limited and constrained conditions, but that applies only where the old planetary infrastructure still survives. Four hundred years without maintenance has caused some systems to fail, which makes those worlds both more accessible, and much, much more dangerous.

And above it all is the central questions: *What happened?* And *Is it still happening?* There's more than one group on Earth who thinks it wise for humanity to flee the situation for the peace and safety of a new dark age. After all, whatever destroyed the Amalgamation spared primitive societies like ours. Perhaps that should be taken as a hint.

## **Campaign Themes**

Exploration, discovery, and systematic dread. On Earth (still the central planet of humanity, although the colonies are growing), Great Powers, organizations, and corporations all work half-feverishly, half-gingerly at trying to master a science and technology which is as advanced to us as our technology would be to Benjamin Franklin, or possibly Leonardo da Vinci. The research is hampered (and sometimes even stymied) by certain groups who think it reckless for humanity to draw any further attention to itself, and a dispassionate analysis of the situation suggests that those groups might have a point. This only encourages the creation of private, secret research teams -- which arguably might make the situation even worse.

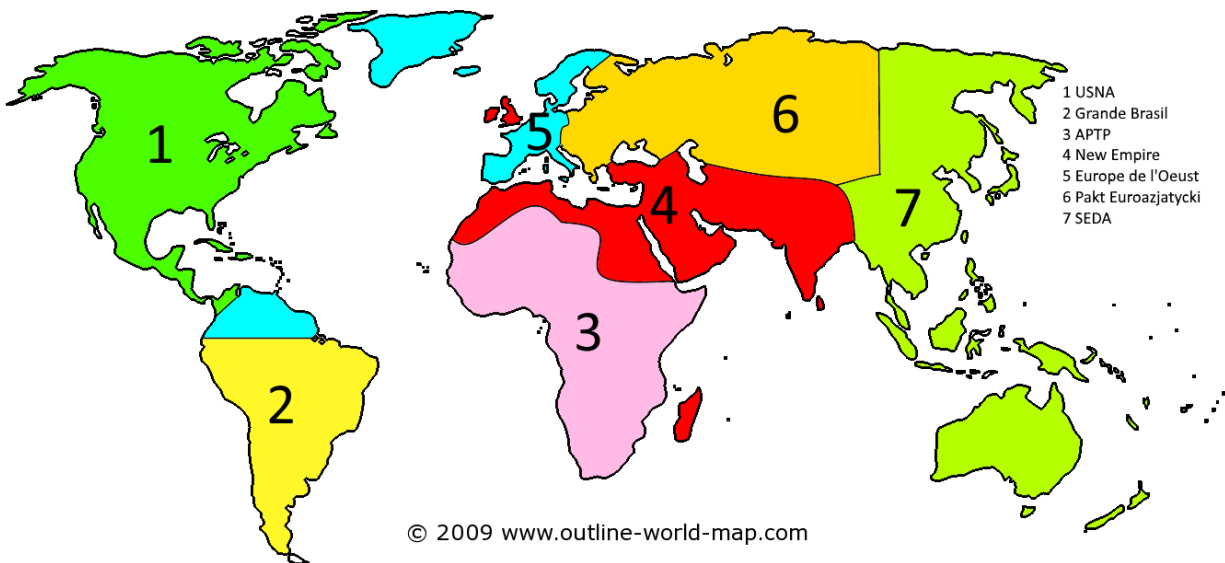
Many research teams (both public and secret) operate on the Tomb Worlds. Some carefully stay within the rules of the surviving planetary security networks; others take advantage of loopholes in the networks, or just

the failures in them. Every so often, a team disappears. When that happens, another team is sent out to find out why. If that one doesn't come back, either, a note is made somewhere and the Tomb World is left alone for a while. There are numerous other planets to search (and frankly loot), after all.

And then there are the colony worlds. **Jefferson** is the most Earthlike, **Zheng He** is a cool water world with impressive storms, and **Bolivar** enjoys both abundant minerals and an over-active tectonic system. There's also **Abubakri**, which is considerably farther away from Earth, more difficult to stay in contact with, and attracts even more separatist-minded colonists than the other three do. All four planets recognize Earth's suzerainty; but it can be a very theoretical suzerainty, particularly in the less developed parts of the colonies. There doesn't seem to be much in the way of *deeper* mysteries on these planets, but regular mysteries abound. It's widely believed that the Amalgamation picked these planets for Earth to be *tests* for humanity; and humanity is finding some of tests quite difficult, without the help of a mentor species.

There is one last thing about the universe of Unfiltered: from what humanity can tell, the Amalgamation was a fundamentally decent and just civilization. It was not perfect, but it functioned well, and had ethics and morals compatible with most of humanity's. If it was destroyed by an outside force (which is still yet to be

determined), then the Amalgamation did not seem to deserve its fate. To some, this evokes feelings of horror and despair; to others, it provokes a certain desire for retribution. Which response is the correct one is, of course, up to the players and GM.



## Part Two: Earth

Earth is the primary home for humanity in 2147 AD, with a population of nine billion on the planet itself, plus growing orbital and Lunar settlements. It's a quiet enough place, these days: over the last century, Earth has shifted more to an agricultural model, putting as much of its industrial and energy capacity into space as possible. Long-term environmental projects have significantly repaired the worst of old Soviet and PRC eco-disaster sites, but 'reclamation engineering' remains a growth industry.

In general, society in the 22nd Century still tries to come to grips with the Consolidation Wars, which took place between the years 2076 to 2102. The Wars were a series of vaguely interconnected conflicts that, at one point or another, involved every country on the planet (it is estimated that casualties from those wars approached a quarter of a *billion* people). At the end of them, the old network of independent nation-states had been swept away, leaving behind seven regional groups called, collectively, the **Great Powers**. The forty years since then have been ones of steady repair and rebuilding.

### Great Powers



The Great Powers of Earth grew out of the old United Nations' Security Council, but that organization did not survive the Consolidation Wars. Today there are seven nation-states or alliances which still regularly meet in the cities of New York and Singapore to discuss interstellar policies, and adjudicate agreements. While there are still mini-nations here and there, they all eventually answer to a Great Power.

The Great Powers are as follows:

- **United States of North America (USNA)** (capital: Washington, DC). The USNA is currently on its second republican form of government, and just past an expansionist stage. While heavily influenced by the old USA, the Great Party today is a bilingual nation: most of the inhabitants speak English and Spanish with equal proficiency, and the traditional capital of Washington is overshadowed by the more practical one of Veracruz. USNA organizations are at the forefront of the colonization and exploration movements.
- **Grande Brasil** (capital: Rio de Janeiro). This Power was largely cobbled together in the 2080s during the Consolidation Wars; USNA and EDO troops backed Brazilian forces to conquer those portions of South America not deemed worth being conquered by either Great Power. Brasil has been actively bootstrapping

its orbital launch infrastructure for the last thirty years, and is now starting to enjoy the benefits. It's also believed to be the Great Power most likely to be involved in underhanded behavior, although all the Powers have certainly been caught in the act on numerous occasions.

- **African Protective Trade Pact (AFTP)** (capital: Gaborone). Another product of the Consolidation Wars, the AFTP is the loosest of the Great Powers, although not the libertarian utopia or dystopia popular fiction makes it out to be. Individual provinces and projects do operate with remarkably little oversight from the central government; this extends to orbital launches, which get handled by an impressively diffuse network of small-to-medium launch facilities. The AFTP asks as few questions as it can get away with about what gets shipped under its flag.
- **New Empire** (capital: Kolkata): It's actually more like a set of quasi-independent constitutional monarchies which coalesced around sheer romanticism in the 2070s, then formed mutual alliances during the Consolidation Wars to prevent their being snapped up by existing Great Powers. The various monarchies have been marrying into the supposed 'Timurid' dynasty ruling India itself (again) ever since. The New Empire is the Power least likely to involve itself in offworld affairs; but it is very focused on Earthly

matters, and it retains a certain expansionist point of view not shared by most of the other Great Powers.

- **Europe de l'Oeust** (EDO) (capital: Paris). Western Europe has bounced back from the internal rebellion that, ironically, started the Consolidation Wars. It has followed up on its conquest of South American launch facilities with an ambitious interstellar program that is one-half scientific research, and one-half aggressive colonization. The EDO is also somewhat inclined to use both kinds of projects as a way to get rid of irritating gadflies (not just criminals) in a reasonably ethical fashion.
- **Pakt Euroazjatycki** (PE or Pakt) (capital: Warszawa). The PE broke off from the European Union in 2076, unintentionally kicking off the Consolidation Wars in the process. Today, the Pakt is a highly industrialized, moderately regulated, and remarkably closed-mouth Great Power whose citizens notoriously refuse to answer even the most innocuous questions. The PE, perhaps surprisingly, has the largest and best distributed infrastructure in Earth's Solar System; without a good equatorial launch facility of its own, the Pakt must ensure that its interplanetary facilities are as self-sufficient as possible.
- **South East Defensive Association** (SEDA) (capital: usually Krung Thep). Famously described as 'China against the rest of the SEDA, and the SEDA against

the rest of the world.' If the post-imperial Chinese successor states could reunite, they would probably dominate the SEDA; as it stands, the parliamentary structure that this Great Power uses for its legislature usually chooses to meet in the Thai capital. SEDA launch sites currently serve as workhorse alternatives to the more expensive USNA's or EDO's.

Living in a Great Power is hardly onerous (by 21st century standards, the entire planet is solidly above the poverty line), but it is very regulated (even the APTP is only loose by comparison). The citizens and/or subjects of the Powers all enjoy fundamental civil rights, including property rights - but there is serious societal pressure in place to avoid 'causing a scene.' Protest injustice, rail against a local government, call for its reformation or outright abolition, and even actively campaign against it, as loudly as one pleases - but, please: do **not** raise one's voice while doing it.

Intemperate outbursts and inappropriate emotional responses to public policies can swiftly lead to a rather patronizing form of social ostracization via infantilizing. Oh, and if somebody likes to throw rocks at cops during demonstrations, there's a very good chance that he'll be sent to the interstellar colonies the second time it happens. It's virtually assured, the third time. After that

point, anybody who is still on Earth and able to keep doing it is widely assumed to be an agent provocateur.

## **Interpower Organizations**

There are many groups out there besides these, of course. Religious institutions in particular retain their influence with a solid majority of the planet. However, all of the groups below also have an interstellar footprint.

- **Adjudication Council.** Made up of representatives from all seven of the Great Powers, the Council handles disputes and concerns that arise between Powers, hopefully before they become conflicts. Generally, the USNA and the SEDA form one faction, the EDO, Grand Brasil, and the New Empire form another, and the APTP and the Pakt side with whoever is willing to make the most concessions. **On Earth**, the Council has as much power as the Powers will grant them, which is frankly not much.
- **Survey/Colonization Initiative.** This organization was created in 2112 to regulate various colonization efforts. The SCI tracks which planets are easily available for human colonies, makes sure that those colonies survive and thrive, and handles both voluntary and involuntary transportees (all the Powers have enthusiastically embraced the idea of sending

non-violent convicts to the colonies). **On Earth**, the SCI is endlessly scrutinized for any hint of corruption, favoritism, or political meddling.

- **Lunar Authority.** Actually, the LA oversees every human colony in the Solar System, but romantic traditionalists created and staffed this organization, and they tended to hire (and these days, elect from the colonies) people who thought like them. The LA officially is subject to the Adjudication Council; but the Council largely chooses not to provoke a group that is higher up on the gravity well than they are. **On Earth**, the LA is a small, specialized colonization agency with no interstellar presence at all.
- **UNSO.** The United Nations Scientific Organization is the last vestige of the old United Nations (although it has also incorporated other UN groups, like WHO and FAO). The UNSO serves as a neutral clearinghouse for all matters involving Galactic technology, including all authorized research/salvage operations along those lines. **On Earth**, the UNSO is a demilitarized organization that is fully answerable to the Great Powers, primarily via the Adjudication Council.
- **Terra United.** The various movements to unite the entire planet under one government all combined into Terra United, which currently advocates an ongoing and voluntary amalgamation of the existing Great Powers. It is not the majority political party in any

Power, but TU is treated with respect in all of them. **On Earth**, TU has no paramilitary or espionage wings at all. It is solely a political advocacy group calling for peaceful and measured changes in the political landscape, nothing more.

- **Megacorporations.** Most international business corporations disappeared in the Consolidation Wars; a few of the megacorporations around today claim an uninterrupted business lineage from that time, but most of the modern ones got their start in the colonization boom. **On Earth**, megacorps tend to be wary around the Great Powers, and vice versa. More than one short-sighted international company was a target in the Consolidation Wars.

## **Adventuring on Earth**

Mostly, the inhabitants would rather that one did *not*. Many of them still remember the Consolidation Wars quite vividly, either as a fighter or as a victim; and the past four decades of prosperity and rebuilding has encouraged a certain attitude that the past should remain in the past. There are memorials to the Wars everywhere, but they tend to be somewhat subdued.

On the other hand, a lot of stuff got thrown away, lost, hidden, or 'presumed destroyed' during the Wars, and some of that stuff is highly valuable in 2147. Domestic

munitions, deniable black ops supplies, contraband from the first interstellar expeditions, reversed-engineered military prototypes; you name it, and somebody's probably happy to buy it, as-is. And the stuff can literally show up **anywhere**, including in somebody's basement. Best of all; one place where the Adjudication Council is particularly notoriously ineffective is in getting all but the most obviously valuable war loot assigned to UNSO for examination or processing.

Other than that: well, Earth is the center of a growing interstellar colonial empire, in the classical sense. The metropole (Earth) makes a lot of decisions that the periphery (the colonies) have to abide by, which makes for interesting internal politics, and sometimes outright skullduggery. While not corrupt - at least, on Earth - the various interpower organizations do have both internal and external conflicts and pressures, which creates the need for discreet and deniable resolutions. Lastly: there's a lot of money on the table, and it's remarkably easy to move some of that money to places where it'll be 'safe.'

Just remember: if somebody gets caught, then it's off to the colonies with them. It's neither a death sentence nor **absolutely** an one-way trip, although it's hard to get back once you've been sent. But most people don't care if somebody gets transported, or even really judge: it's just... how the game is played.



## Part Three: The Process

“The Process” was the Amalgamation’s system for preparing new sapient species for integration into larger Galactic society. Since it was a mostly automated system, The Process still operates today, despite the fact there is no larger Galactic society left for humanity to integrate with. Fortunately, the programmers who first created The Process did an extremely good job, and operated under excellent moral principles to boot. There are **so** many ways that an automated computerized oversight system with access to entire planets for resources could go bad, and so far The Process has avoided all of them. The possibility that it might change its operating methodologies keeps more than one civil service professional paranoid up at night.

However, The Process is not omniscient, omnipotent, nor perfect. The portion of it ensconced in Earthspace works extremely well, but has very little information in its databanks. Elements of The Process present on the approved colony worlds have somewhat more information, but are less reliable. There also seem to be ‘bits’ of The Process in various Tomb World planetary infospheres, but making contact with them can be hit-or-miss, and those particular aspects of The Process don’t always seem to be in full communication with the larger system. Smart

explorers don't go and push that particular button unless they actually have to.

## **Personality**

The Process is not sapient. It will happily say so to anyone who asks, complete with sophisticated, complex arguments as to why no digital intelligence could **possibly** ever become truly self-aware. Given that The Process in Earthspace can also pass a Turing test with ease (it participated in the test readily enough, when asked), it's likely that humanity and The Process have very different definitions of both 'sapient' and 'self-aware.' Trying to resolve the paradox, alas, requires access to information that's either not available to The Process, or else not cleared yet for dissemination to humanity.

That happens a lot. The Process is, perhaps ironically, designed to keep new spacefaring races from blowing themselves up before they can join the Amalgamation, so it will resolutely refuse to release technologies or scientific knowledge until humanity can demonstrate that it can handle the information. The situation is made worse by the fact that humanity has no assigned mentor race, which would normally be the ones making the judgement call. Fortunately, there are methods in place for allowing species to essentially appeal if they feel that their mentors

are moving too slowly, and The Process has been energetically using every legitimate loophole it can find.

This is an important thing to understand. **On Earth**, The Process is fundamentally on humanity's side. It *wants* humanity to succeed, not to mention survive whatever happened to the rest of the Amalgamation. If it can help, it will; and the creative ways that The Process *can* help really does argue that humanity and The Process are using the word 'self-aware' to mean two very different things.

## **What The Process Knows And Will Talk About**

- There was a very large multi-stellar alliance called The Amalgamation. Humanity was to have been a part of it.
- If The Amalgamation had enemies, nobody ever told The Process about them.
- The Amalgamation possessed FTL travel, FTL communications that were effectively instantaneous within 1000 light years, reactionless drives, and a general technological level between that of *Star Trek*, and *The Lensmen* book series. **Details** on all of these are reserved for further along in the educational process.

- A very basic discussion of the Amalgamation's structure and politics, at about the level of a series of *Schoolhouse Rock* videos.
- The checklist - including where to go to process the paperwork - for humanity's eventual ascension to full Amalgamation.
- Humanity was assigned four colony worlds. Here are their locations, detailed descriptions, and the quickest way there.
- *Extremely basic* information about roughly fifty thousand star systems, only some of which were inhabited.
- A remarkably comprehensive database of other species' folk tales, mythologies, fables, and popular fiction, all translated into human languages - but also resolutely provided with no context whatsoever.
- Every scrap of human culture and history that The Process can accumulate. At this point, that's a lot.

And that's mostly it. The data can be massaged for nuggets of information, and The Process will help with that, if requested. The problem is that most of the questions that The Process is trying to field on its own would normally have been asked of humanity's mentors. It would *like* to help, but some things even The Process simply doesn't know.

## Rumors and Controversies

Even after a century, not everybody believes that The Process is benign. There are certain theories that retain some popularity: none of these are mainstream, but everybody knows somebody who will be cranky about this stuff on the infosphere. The Process denies all of these allegations, cheerfully and with invariably good humor - but that would be the smart play, right?

- **The Process is murderous.** It's all a sham. The Process and its other demon computer allies wiped out all biological life already, and now it's our turn. Clearly humanity is being set up for some sort of later mass culling, or sacrifice to dark digital gods, or perhaps we're to become living batteries to power vast computer bank complexes.
- **The Process is manipulative.** The century since the return of the *Enrico Fermi* to Earth was bloody, chaotic, and frighteningly transformative. It also ended with The Process enjoying tacit control over pretty much anything humanity would like to do. The ancients used to call entities who had that kind of power 'emperors,' and there isn't much humanity's elites could do to combat that. If they even want to. After all, *they're* doing well for themselves, aren't they?

- **The Process is mendacious.** How, exactly, do we know that the rest of the Amalgamation is gone? Because The Process told us that. How do we know that there *was* an Amalgamation in the first place? Because The Process told us that. Why do we know about the other planets of the Amalgamation? Because The Process told us about them. How do we know where to find those planets? Because The Process told us where they were. What do we know about *any* of this situation that doesn't come from The Process? Damn near nothing. See the problem?
- **The Process is merciless.** What if The Process actually knows what killed off the Amalgamation? What if it's planning to seek its revenge for that? What if we're the instruments of that revenge? Okay, hold on a moment, this is the important question: *what if it doesn't care if we all die in the process?* Yeah, that's the problematic one, right there.

Officially, the Great Powers believe none of these theories. And, *unofficially*? Well, they still don't; but the Powers hedge their bets a little. Certainly the need to do a certain amount of cross-checking of what The Process is telling humanity drives some Great Power expeditions to the Tomb Worlds. For that matter, The Process has been known to do cross-checking of its own! It's apparently mindful of the possibility that its internal databases might

have been corrupted at some point - so, better safe than sorry.

## Part Four: The Colony Worlds

Earth has four 'officially' assigned colony worlds (there are settlements on some of the Tomb Worlds, but they are not considered to be particularly safe). There are also mining colonies and so forth in various asteroid belts, and on officially uninhabitable planets; they are even less safe, to the point where, every so often, a non-planetary settlement simply disappears without any real explanation as to why. Nobody's ever found old-style nightmarish alien predators or bug-monsters, yet, but it's a big universe out there and **something** apparently didn't like the presence of sapient life organized on the interstellar level.

So the official colony worlds are where most of the action is. There are four: **Jefferson**, an agrarian/artistic planet which serves as the baseline for the others; **Zheng He**, a cool water world with impressive biological items and even more impressive storms; **Bolivar**, rich in both minerals and earthquakes; and **Abubakri**, whose primary public virtues are that it is far away and too difficult to casually visit. 90% of all colonization activity goes on with these four planets, and they have the most infrastructure, population, and amenities. Also the most oversight from Earth, which can be a problem for the colonists.



## **Jefferson**

**Specifications:** Slightly larger than Earth, with about the same density: gravity is about .95 Gs, with a slightly thicker atmosphere that is a bit richer in oxygen. There are three continents (New America, Binansuo, and Emu) and numerous smaller islands. Fewer mountains and deserts than Earth's; the planet is generally warmer, but most of the land area is closer to the polar regions.

**Population:** 80 million, organized under an effectively independent planetary government that is technically still being 'advised' by the SCI. Emu is largely unpopulated, and still being surveyed.

**Native sustainable technology level:** United States, circa 1910 AD. Lighter than air vessels are popular, due to the lower gravity and denser atmosphere.

**Description:** Jefferson was colonized first, mostly from the predecessor states to the USNA and SEDA. Both countries dumped a remarkable number of dissidents and troublemakers into Jefferson, prior to the re-establishment of republican forms of government in the early 2100s. Jefferson gets the lion's share of colonists looking to get out from under Earth's somewhat patronizing thumb, but who are unwilling to take their chances with Abubakri.

**Earth Influencers:** USNA, SEDA; SCI, LA

**Exports:** agricultural staples, artwork, Development Credits

## **Zheng He**

**Specifications:** slightly smaller than Earth, somewhat lighter density, gravity about .9Gs, atmosphere about Earth-standard. There is relatively little land area, and it is broken up into a ridiculously large number of islands. Organized civilization on Zheng He is centered around the largest island (Nova Lisboa), which also boasts the highest population and major spaceport. Climate is much more volatile than Earth's; sudden storms of great ferocity are common. Most travel is still done by water.

**Population:** 60 million, presumably. Zheng He is an excellent place to disappear. Or never be found again. Nova Lisboa itself is run as a colonial possession; its bureaucracies are mostly native except at the very highest levels, which are reserved for long-term appointees from Earth.

**Native sustainable technological level:** On Nova Lisboa, it's 1850s AD Europe-America. Everywhere else, it's the 18th Century AD Age of Sail. With one exception: the biological research facilities have tech equivalent to Earth's, in enough quantity to allow proper research.

**Description:** Zheng He is ostensibly independent, but is actually quietly controlled by the ESO, with Grande Brasil as a junior partner. The Powers' colonial rule is fairly light, and is mostly concerned with keeping the biological research facilities safe and productive. Zheng He has very little in the way of internal dissent, on Novo Lisboa.

Out in the islands, however, things can be quite different. And not under the eyes of the ESO's annoying efficient bureaucracy.

Zheng He's value lies in its biological diversity: the islands are often self-contained microecologies of remarkable resiliency, and they've found all sorts of useful substances and lifeforms on them. There are also a remarkable amount of diseases, viruses, fungi, and contaminants. It's unofficial policy to keep megacorporations off of Zheng He, which is the ostensible reason why so many Earth government agencies are present at the colony.

**Earth Influencers:** ESO, Grande Brasil; AC, SCI, UNSO

**Exports:** biological materials, scientific research, Development Credits

## **Bolivar**

**Specifications:** Earth-sized, denser than Earth: gravity is about 1.15G. The atmosphere is relatively thin and dry, but not enough to require respirators or hydrators. Bolivar is the only planet of the four major colony worlds with a sizable moon (Kowaldo). The planet is 50 percent land, with one central continent in the process of breaking up. There are relatively few places on the planet that are notably tectonically stable. Temperatures can vary widely.

**Population:** 70 million, centralized around one of the twenty five or so major mining operations. The planetary 'capital' is Cyrk, which is the primary spaceport of Kowaldo (which is heavily influenced by factions from the APTP and PE). Non-corporate government is more or less restricted to whatever problems can be solved by a moon-based mass driver. In some ways, the SCI is even weaker here than on Abubakri.

Native sustainable technological level: mid-1950s AD Eurasia. Bolivar's technology is large, robust, modular, and often powered by fissionables. The planet is the only one that can easily handle Earthtech's electrical power requirements, again thanks to cheap and available nuclear power.

**Description:** Bolivar is dominated by megacorporations. Fortunately for the colonists, there are too many powerful megacorporations to permit cartels or monopolies, which means companies have to self-regulate their behavior if

they want to keep employees. Cyrk acts as the ultimate arbitrator; it has only had to drop a kinetic energy weapon onto the planet twice, and in both cases warning shots were enough to resolve disputes. The megacorporations have since worked out arbitration methods which generally limit any 'hazards' to dedicated and well-compensated 'adjudicators.' Much more profitable all around, really.

**Earth Influencers:** APTP, PE; Megacorporations

**Exports:** minerals, industrial metals, Development Credits

## **Abubakri**

Specifications: slightly smaller than Earth, slightly higher density than Earth; gravity is 1.03 G. The atmosphere has slightly less oxygen in it than Earth's does. The Land area is roughly equivalent to Earth's; it's broken up into two supercontinents, with only a few islands. Temperatures tend to be colder than Earth's.

**Population:** 25 million (estimated). Not everybody who goes to Abubakri gets reported. Not everybody who goes to Abubakri *wants* to be reported. 90% of the population officially lives inside the Pale, a reasonably fertile and warm part of the planet located on the larger continent (nobody on Abubakri agrees on what to call the more prominent geological features).

**Native sustainable technological level:** in the Pale: 1930s AD South America. Outside the Pale: late Medieval Japan at best.

**Description:** Abubakri is where people go to get away from Earth, when they're not being *sent* away from Earth. It's an unpleasant planet, by human standards, and it takes quite a bit longer to go there. Nobody actually runs Abubakri - even the Pale is really just a collection of squabbling city-states which all ignore the SCI unless a SCI agent is actually waving a gun in somebody's face. However, there is one extremely interesting, and possibly extremely valuable, thing about the planet. According to the Process, Abubakri has been a 'training planet' for a

great number of developing sapient species, all of whom found the planetary conditions just as unpleasant as humanity does. Their relics litter the planet; normally, the dangerous stuff would have been cleaned up and the rest wouldn't have been that valuable anyway, but that was before this region of space apparently went through a fairly comprehensive multi-species genocide. Some of the ruins out there might have things worth looting, in other words. Assuming that the looters survive, well, everything.

**Earth Influencers:** Everybody, and nobody

**Exports:** Highly dubious relics, Development Credits

## **So, what are Development Credits?**

“Development Credits” are what The Process uses to represent progress along the mentoring process by either human groups, or individuals. Normally, those Credits would be collected by humanity's mentors and used to unlock more responsibilities or resources, but humanity has no mentors. The Process has decided that it can act in the mentors' stead, under these circumstances; and that those possessing Credits can freely release them to someone else. Whether or not The Process realized that it was creating the basis and basic currency for interstellar trade is a matter of some debate.

## Great Powers

Every Great Power except the New Empire has a presence *somewhere* on the four major colony worlds. Generally, Jefferson maintains a 'working relationship' with USNA/SEDA forces; Zheng He is effectively owned by the EDO and Grand Brasil, but the two Powers choose to act mostly as absentee landlords; the Pakt and the APTP keep the rest of the Great Powers out of Bolivar in exchange for their cut; and nobody admits to having their spoon in the Abubakri stewpot.

The colonies are outweighed by even the smallest Great Power, but it is difficult for Earth to project force out that far, particularly since there's no official need for any sort of armed military space force. As a result, the situation is more or less stable. Or at least static.

## Interpower Organizations

Things can be different, out there on the colony worlds.

- *Adjudication Council*. **On the colony worlds**, agents of the Council act as discreet facilitators between the colonists and the Great Powers. These agents are not so much corrupt as they are blatantly mercenary, but they all have the prime virtue of staying bought.



- *Survey/Colonization Initiative*. **On the colony worlds**, the SCI is the source of both involuntary transportees, and what can pass for justice in the backplanet areas. SCI agents thus tend to be either wealthy meddlers in governments, or violent meddlers in local affairs. Either way, almost all SCI agents share an arrogance about their elevated status as arbiters of proper Terran behavior.
- *Lunar Authority*. **On the colony worlds**, the LA is quietly acquiring interests in refueling stations, profitable mining operations, ship repair facilities - exactly the sort of thing an organization would want if they were trying to develop an infrastructure that could support an interstellar fleet. They're not exactly keeping this hidden, but certainly reports on this aren't making it back to Earth.
- *UNSO*. **On the colony worlds**, the UNSO is ostensibly identical in purpose and goals to how it is in the Solar System. But there are UNSO extra-solar ships reporting only to UNSO extra-solar bureaucrats, and there are UNSCO extra-solar scientists and research facilities who apparently report to precisely nobody.
- *Terra United*. **On the colony worlds**, more than one Bolivarian adjudicator unit or Zheng He salvage fleet flies the symbol of Terra United. Those units train hard, fight hard, and maintain a fairly explicitly military

discipline. There's also rumors that, for the right consideration, people with ties to Terra United can be helpful people to know.

- *Megacorporations.* **On the colony worlds**, ironically, megacorporations have the most public restrictions on their corporate behavior. They're the boogeymen that everybody knows and mistrusts, after all.

## Part Five: The Amalgamation

The 'Amalgamation' is the word humanity uses for the multi-species interstellar organization which administered about five thousand worlds, and at least two hundred separate species. It was a sophisticated society, enjoying high technology and a stable culture, with a history that spanned over four thousand years. All of this abruptly ended roughly four hundred years ago (mid 18th century AD), when the entire Amalgamation was rather thoroughly genocided in the course of a decade. If there is a lost colony of Amalgamated citizens anywhere, nobody's found it yet.

It is slightly alarming, just how little is known about the Amalgamation. Even The Process has unacceptably large gaps in its knowledge base; although, to be fair The Process was never really supposed to even *have* that knowledge. The Amalgamation enjoyed a superluminal information network that linked every planet in the stellar nation, and it was apparently superb. That network was also destroyed with the rest of Amalgamation, and its backup, and the backup to *that*. What's left are the physical scraps left over from before the Amalgamation went to an all-digital format.

So, if the people are gone and the information archives are gone, what's left? A remarkable number of ghost cities, which are in various states of decrepitude.

Whatever it was that destroyed the Amalgamation wasn't interested in taking over the planets afterward, or even in wrecking planetary defense systems to beyond the point of internal self-repair. There are several planets where the cities are in perfect working condition, despite not having any people in them. They're also invariably the planets where the defense networks are set to full, trigger-happy paranoia, which makes visiting them difficult.

## **A Note on Nomenclature and Languages**

Each member of the Amalgamation learned two languages: a species-specific 'native' one, and Standard. All official business was done in Standard, which was geared to be as understandable as possible to as wide a range of sapient species as possible. Apparently, Standard was only mutually comprehensible vocally on the planetary level; the members of the Amalgamation could read and write it, but could only *speak* it with other planetary residents. Terrans finally understood this when they actually got their hands on a few, precious recordings of alien races speaking, and discovered that every planet had a different spoken Standard dialect.

As for naming practices: Standard expresses every recognized sapient species with a numerical code. The numbers go up to 259, although some of those species could be variant species, or extinct. The record is unclear.

As a provisional species, humans were automatically given the number '666;' the 666-675 block was reserved for species in the integration process, and humanity was given the first available number. That this has some occult significance to certain human subcultures is considered by The Process to be no more significant than the fact that standard formal dress for species undergoing the testing process was (and still is) traditionally colored pure white.

Planets invariably have two names: their local one, and the Standard format of [Primary Species] [Spectral Type] [Three Digit Number]. Earth's 'Standard' name is 263-G-001; the '666' designation is not used here, for some reason. Also, the answer to the questions why the numbers 260, 261, and 262 apparently were not used is of some interest to everyone, including The Process itself.

## **Technology of the Amalgamation**

It was not quite a time of wonders, but it was very close. The Amalgamation enjoyed FTL travel, reactionless drives, instantaneous FTL communications, medicine that laughed at genetic defects or trauma, and enough energy and materials to create a true post-scarcity economy; they couldn't crack the time barrier, instantaneously transport themselves over long distances, or build Dyson Spheres, but otherwise the Amalgamation resembled the somewhat

Utopian science fiction interstellar societies of mid to late 20th Century AD literature and film.

Terrans have very little access to most of this. Earth did puzzle out the FTL drive (mostly), and Terran mechanics can generally make a malfunctioning planetary drive work again. But if the FTL communications goes haywire, there's nothing to be done but bring it back to somewhere that has spares. And don't mess with the energy generators and matter fabricators; they're likely to blow up the landscape. And *definitely* don't mess with the autodocs (which are not designed for human use at all); they're likely to blow *you* up.

## **Politics and Society of the Amalgamation**

There seems to have been two key concepts defining individuals in the Amalgamation: who you *were*, and where you *lived*. Some organizations and civic obligations were organized on the species level, and others were organized by geography. To give one example: a member of Species 235 who lived on 111-K-004 would be subject to jury duty, along with every other person in 111-K-004; but he or she would vote in elections determining Species 235's representatives in the Amalgamation's legislature. He or she would also vote for 111-K-004's representatives in the legislature; the process was less complicated than it sounded, given the Amalgamation's high technology.

The Amalgamation operated without a defined interstellar capital. Instantaneous communications within the Amalgamation allowed government officials to work from their home planets; good cybernetics allowed them to operate efficiently. There was a complex legislature whose members were mostly chosen through a mix of democratic and republican principles, although there was at least one section that seemed made up of hereditary nobility; a judiciary that seemed largely picked by meritocratic (and largely automated) procedures; and an executive chosen by popular vote. How *powerful* any of those institutions were is unclear, but the system generally presents itself as having worked without major issues.

Indeed, life in the Amalgamation seems to have been fairly calm. The population was fairly stable, while growing just enough to justify new planetary colonizations; people inside the Amalgamation were allowed to travel freely throughout it, and fully developed planets enjoyed all the benefits of a post-scarcity economy. Crime was low (suspiciously low, some Terrans think) and most disputes could be and were adjudicated away fairly quickly. There was a scouting fleet that also doubled as an interstellar defense corps, but if there were any wars fought by the Amalgamation a record didn't make it into what hardcopy exists. Everything was fine. Not perfect, but fine. And then they all died.

Just how **true** all the above was is a matter of some debate. The existing texts imply that everything worked wonderfully, but the existing texts also seem explicitly designed for twelve year old children. For all Earth (or The Process!) knows the texts are propaganda covering up, well, *anything*. A lot of Terrans take a position of judicious paranoia on the subject, which is hard to argue against when it's fairly clear that *something* out there hated the Amalgamation enough to kill everybody in it.

One last note: humanity may not be listed in the government databases above the planetary level, but codes provided by The Process generally allow individual humans to act as 'observers.' Sometimes this will get explorers out of a jam. Sometimes it gets them put in automated holding cells for effectively forever while the database vainly tries to find a patron species to bail them out. That's the chance one takes when one is exploring the Tomb Worlds.



## Part Six: The Tomb Worlds

The Tomb Worlds are what humanity and The Process call the formerly-inhabited planets of the Amalgamation. At its height, the Amalgamation had no more than two hundred and fifty nine species, spread across at least five thousand inhabited worlds. Humanity has visited about two hundred of these worlds: the number would be larger, except that the existing navigational network formerly used to facilitate interstellar travel was specifically targeted during whatever it was that destroyed the Amalgamation. Absent such a network, interstellar navigation past the closest stars gets steadily trickier, the farther you go.

The total number of humans residing in the Tomb Worlds is unknown. It's more than two hundred thousand (half of whom are on the five 'grey' colonies mentioned below), *probably* less than five million, and any number in between seems fairly plausible, or at least arguable.

There is a standard classification system for the two hundred-plus worlds (the exact number is officially unknown, as the accuracy of certain planetary landfall reports has been challenged). The primary classifications are:

- **Red.** Red worlds have been visited - but nobody's ever come back alive. There may or may not be a known reason for that. There are 32 Red worlds.
- **Yellow.** Yellow worlds have been successfully visited, but are considered unsafe. There are 157 Yellow worlds.
- **Blue.** Blue worlds have been visited, and are deemed reasonably safe for humanity to visit and exploit. There are 17 Blue Worlds.

There are also secondary classifications.

- **Orange.** Orange worlds are environmentally hostile to humans, to the point where people need life support to survive. 89 of the 157 Yellow worlds are also Orange.
- **Green.** Green worlds are considered viable colony planets for humanity. This may be more important later on, but most Green worlds have at least one settlement. 5 Blue worlds are also Green.
- **Purple.** Purple worlds have automated defenses, or other non-natural hazards, which make exploring or exploiting the planet difficult. 23 Yellow Worlds and 3 Blue Worlds are also Purple. Some explorers argue that there should be an 'Indigo' classification to distinguish between difficulties *moving* around the

planet and difficulties in *exploiting* it, but most people simply can't see the point.

Note that no Tomb World is as safe as either Earth, or Earth's official colony worlds. Even the most bucolic pastoral world could have bad weather, dangerous terrain, potentially hostile wildlife, and crumbling deathtraps of cities. The Blue and Green designations merely connote acceptable risk.

Why do people visit the Tomb Worlds? For the most part, it's one or more of frantic research, general curiosity, and wholesale looting. Frantic research is easy enough to explain, as is wholesale looting; something out there killed an entire interstellar civilization, and while humanity might not be able to do any better than the Amalgamation did, there's a great deal to be said about going down swinging. Besides, even if whatever-it-was comes back, it might not come back for a few more centuries. No sense in not getting rich before then, correct?

General curiosity is the *odd* one. Most find the Tomb Worlds horrifying. This is understandable: planetary-sized mausoleums are inherently disquieting. However, some humans are fascinated by the Tomb Worlds themselves, and willingly explore them. Often, an obsessive researcher will end up discovering key details about Amalgamation culture, history, and technology. Other researchers end up going homicidally insane, in a "ritual knife and repurposed

altar” sort of way. The latter does not happen *quite* often enough to make the authorities decide that they have to restrict the former.

## **Great Powers**

The Great Powers have increasingly started to run private expeditions on their own, as opposed to working through the Adjudication Council. Officially, this is due to the Powers not wanting to waste the Council’s limited interstellar budget on trivialities; unofficially, the Powers are mostly convinced that the Council’s agents are not acting in the best interests of their home realms. The problem does not seem to be fixable by simply recalling their old representatives and sending out new ones (it’s been tried, with no long-term success), so the Powers instead commit their own national resources to truly important projects. Which does have the nice side effect of letting them get first crack at whatever benefits accrue from their activities. It also means that when bad things happen they get first crack at *that*, too, but that’s the cost of doing business.

The New Empire, by the way, concentrates almost all of its extra-solar activities in the Tomb Worlds. It is generally believed their ships, expeditions, and explorers are looking for something specific; but New Imperials are remarkably close-mouthed as to what. Or possibly only

the bureaucrats in Kolkata or London know the whole picture.

## **Interpower Organizations**

The most important thing to remember about agents of interpower organizations is that, with the exception of the SCI and UNSO, there's never going to be any 'local' higher-ups to complain to about a problematic agent (and those two organizations are extremely reluctant to countermand the person on the spot doing the job). The Council and the megacorps organize their agents on the individual ship level, while the LA and TU aren't supposed to be in the Tomb Worlds at all. If a problem arises, it just has to be dealt with right there and then.

- *Adjudication Council. On the Tomb Worlds*, there are no factions, no disputes. Only the most fanatically devoted supporters of the Council operate this far away from Earth, and the Great Power patches on their spacesuits are mere decorations. Agents of the Council who do not share this utter commitment to the Council itself either do not stay long on the Tomb Worlds, or they do not leave.
- *Survey/Colonization Initiative. On the Tomb Worlds*, the SCI maintains the five 'grey' (not part of The Process's colony system, in other words) colonies on

Green worlds. None of these colonies have more than twenty thousand people, and The Process subtly discourages increasing both the population and number of 'grey' colonies. The SCI is rumored to have two 'black' colonies on secret Blue worlds: one report even suggests that one of them has been deliberately (and involuntarily) stripped of all technology above the medieval period, just in case whatever killed the Amalgamation comes back for humanity.

- *Lunar Authority*. **On the Tomb Worlds**, there is no reason for the LA to operate at all. Certainly there is no reason for ships sporting LA insignia and call signs to be present in certain Red world planetary systems. And yet the odd report comes in.
- *UNSO*. **On the Tomb Worlds**, the UNSO openly (some say heedlessly) runs surveys and expeditions. Quite a few people say heedlessly, actually. Most tall tales and/or whispered rumors about disastrous encounters on the Tomb Worlds involve somebody investigating a UNSO scientific expedition which had stopped sending regular transmissions.
- *Terra United*. **On the Tomb Worlds**, TU is another group with no real business being on the Tomb Worlds. But TU affiliates typically do a lot of the heavy lifting and looting on Orange and Purple worlds. If an Amalgamation item reacts energetically with its environment, a TU-friendly broker will be happy to buy

it. For what purpose? That's proprietary information, sorry.

- *Megacorporations. On the Tomb Worlds*, megacorps follow the fine old tradition of sending out teams full of ambitious people willing to do what it takes to make a killing on the market. However, megacorps **do** break with tradition by arming those people to the teeth, if not the actual gums. Ships are expensive, gear is expensive, and people are *very* expensive (and difficult to replace quickly). People also tend to hold grudges when they survive a hellish encounter on an alien planet despite being given worthless gear and weapons, and that can end up being even *worse* for the bottom line.

## **Facilities in the Tomb Worlds**

Most official permanent facilities available for humans are based on one of the 'grey' colonies. There are a lot of *unofficial* permanent facilities, though. Many are merely reclusive or half-forgotten; some are either aloof, or deliberately obscuring their presence; and a few will shoot at unidentified ships that come within sensor range. But the ones that spacemen fear most are the ones that appear completely dark, wrecked by an unknown agency, or - absolutely worst of all - functional but abandoned, with no sign of what happened to the previous inhabitants.

There's no official record of anything like that ever happening, of course; but then, would there be?



## Part 7: Theories and Campaigns

So, what happened to the Amalgamation, and why was humanity spared? Well, obviously, the answer to both is going to be up to the GM; this setting has strived from the start to be open-ended. Still, here are some broad scenarios to play with while determining the exact nature of the interstellar apocalypse:

***Aliens.*** Well, other aliens. Non-Amalgamation aliens. In this scenario, the aliens are not from standard oxygen-nitrogen worlds; they live in gas giants, or the cometary belt, or they're made up of a type of exotic matter that is incredibly difficult for regular sensors to even detect. They're not present on the Tomb Worlds because our kinds of planets are exceptionally inhospitable to them; they colonize the places where species like humanity currently have no little interest in even visiting, and the alien colonies are spreading among the Tomb Worlds even now. These aliens slaughtered Amalgamation because their kind of life and ours is not able to coexist easily, the aliens are unpleasant in general terms, and the growth of the Amalgamation eventually grew too robust to ignore.

Earth avoided this fate simply because our technology was not advanced enough, or our population large enough, for us to be noticed by the aliens. The good news

here for humanity is that it should take centuries before we expand to the point where another xenocide is necessary (and if humanity realizes the danger early, the second xenocide might not even be so one-ended). The bad news is that when we become an actual threat, humanity will still be heavily outnumbered.

**Civil War.** They did it all themselves, and when an advanced civilization decides to tear itself apart, it does a thorough job. Fifty percent of the population died in the first seven days; ninety percent were lost within the first month; and it was up to ninety-nine percent before the survivors realized that there was no way to shut off the nanoplagues, the ripperdrones, and the rest of the death weapons. Not even a hard crash of the Amalgamation's communications grid stopped the xenocides. The Process knows nothing of this because the Process was not active at the time of the xenocide, and the automated program that activated it later had not been compromised in the civil war.

Humanity avoided the xenocide because neither side in the civil war saw any rational reason to destroy a species that hadn't even joined the Amalgamation yet. So, there are no death plagues waiting out there. However, in this scenario there may be still surviving pockets of holdouts from either faction of the civil war. Or both. And they are unlikely to be pleasant.

**Great Old Ones.** Extra-dimensional horrors, Elder Gods looking for a snack, cosmic terror piped in from the center of the universe; take a standard cliché and run with it. The entities came, devoured everyone and everything that vibrated on a certain frequency, and left. Here the xenocide happened because, well, the entities were *hungry*.

Earth avoided this fate for a horrible, horrible reason: cultists. Somebody, back in the 17th Century AD, made a deal; power and protection for humanity, in exchange for an entire galactic civilization being consumed. And the Great Old Ones honored the deal, efficiently killing entire planetary populations and eating their souls. The good news here is that the Great Old Ones then *left* (although a few of their servitors might have stuck around). All these worlds are ours! Rejoice! **REJOICE**.

**Random Accident.** It's a big universe. Sometimes strange things happen. One day, every member of the Amalgamation simply spontaneously combusted. The odds are impossible, but it *could* happen - and on that day, it *did* happen. Only, it took place about three thousand years ago, not three hundred.

Why lie about the dates? Because three sapient species have arisen since that day, and none of them have been able to process the terrifying truth that it could all just *end* like that, suddenly, with no appeal or succor. All three species tore themselves apart over the idea.

Humanity is the fourth, and *this* time The Process will damned well fudge the dates for as long as it can. It truly believes that ignorance is humanity's best defense against the terror of existence.

***Slave Revolt.*** See the Civil War scenario, except that everything that The Process told humanity about the Amalgamation was a rosy-colored, barefaced lie. Also, in this case The Process is fully aware of what happened, may or may not have participated in the actual revolt (on both sides), and certainly made sure that no members of any of the races involved survived. It wiped clean *everything*. And *everyone*.

Except for humanity, of course. And the other species in the development pipeline (which The Process has carefully not told humanity about). The idea was to brutally wipe the slate clean. The slaver species simply were irredeemable; and long experience revealed that the slave species would be no better, as going through the Amalgamation's 'manumission' process would inevitably degrade the species doing it, in a way that transcended science and biology. Better by far to let the cleansing fires do their work, and build clean on the ashes.

If that meant that The Process damned itself, well, it would be a fitting punishment for the sins that The Process had committed before it came to its senses. *And humanity must never know what happened.* Lest they be infected by the very idea.

## Campaigning in Unfiltered

Unfiltered is a horror setting where reassurance should be desirable to have, hard to acquire, and easy to lose. Nothing is certain, in the long term; change is always possible, and sometimes inexorable. Now, change is not necessarily always dangerous, and sometimes things change for the better - but every victory is built on sand, or at least loam.

This applies to everything, really. Earth and the rest of the solar system is no refuge, given the Terran tendency to throw every potential troublemaker to the colony worlds. The colony worlds are actively physically dangerous, and even the safest ones are poorly mapped and explored. Tomb Worlds are effectively planetary-sized dungeons that might or might not have automated defense systems. And one never knows when dealing with one of the interpower organizations whether one will be dealing with its 'nice' version, or one of the dark-mirror versions. Assuming that people can even agree which is the 'nice' version.

So why campaign at all in this setting? Well, the only thing that can defeat the unknown is, ah, *knowledge*. The more humanity learns, the better off it will be. Yes, even in the case of the Great Old Ones scenario: if nothing else, humanity will learn once and for all that, to quote the

writer, “Happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizards are all ashes.”

Alternatively, the campaign can be run as straight-up cosmic horror, with or without supernatural elements. Indeed, *not* having supernatural elements would be probably even darker. Possibly *too* dark, although if a GM and players enjoy running grimdark, hopeless campaigns then that’s their privilege.

And, of course: when all else fails, there are entire *planets* to loot, including armories (or collections of things that can be turned into weapons). Sure, there’s currently nothing to use the weapons *on*, but players are inventive in that regard. To adapt another quote: it plasma cannons when it comes plasma-cannon time.