

FASA GAMES NEWS

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Space the Final Frontier

These are the

voyages of



This volume is focused on space. Like most geeks, we here at FASA are very into the universe both in and out of fiction.

I found it very hard to narrow down the writing prompts. There is just too much awe-

someness in the grand vast universe to pick one little aspect.

Instead the prompt was kept as open as space itself.

We hope you enjoy everyone's take on how

space has intersected with them as individuals.

If you're into space games, please consider backing the Kickstarter for our brand new game

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INTERCEPTOR

From the Desk of Ross Babcock

I was just about to turn 11 years old on July 16, 1969. I do not remember what I saw on tv that day, but I remember that no one was outside. Everyone was inside watching the first moon landing. Since then, we have all seen replays of the events of that day and they are imprinted on all of us. From that point on, my lifetime of reading has been mostly science fiction. My library contains over 3000 books and is still growing.

The next big event that I remember most happened in the summer of 1977, at the urging of my Mom, I spent one of my few summer vacation days traveling to downtown Chicago to see Star Wars.

And then, there was Traveller.

These events set the theme of everything since. FASA's early games were just about all science fiction. Our most popular games were science fiction. The games we liked to play in-house were science fiction. Our VWE games were science fiction. Our new games are science fiction.

Can't beat a winning subject.

Notice how old Ross is ...

By Michael Allegro

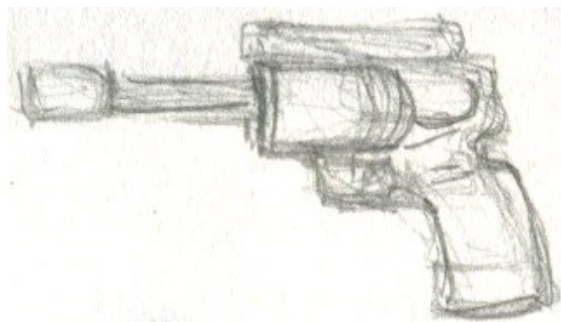
One of the most influential “space” things for me would have to be Star Trek, more specifically Deep Space Nine.

DS9 had a few differences that made it stand out to me. The biggest of those being the format of the show was based on a space station, rather than entirely on a starship. This allowed the series to have a wider variety of recurring characters weaved more intricately into the overall story arc, which was one of our goals for the Legends of Barsaive adventure series. DS9 also had a darker tone than other Star Trek series, particularly in the later seasons, which is something Earthdawn benefits from as well. Be it dealing with the corruption of a Horror or the disciples of a Mad Passion, the dark undertones present in Barsaive give the game-world depth, past the cheery adventure setting that is usually seen on its surface.

One piece of direct inspiration I took from DS9 was the interaction between Starfleet and the Bajoran government, specifically how the Federation was asked to administrate the station and the looming threat presented by the Cardassians. When

working on Elven Nations, I was trying to figure out how the politics of Kaer Eidolon would be structured. I ultimately decided that the relationship between House Sirtis, the Blood Elves, and House Iskarat could interact similarly to how the Federation (administrators), the Bajoran (residents protecting their home), and the Cardassians (invaders and plunderers) do in DS9.

As a bonus bit of behind the scenes info, the layout of Kaer Eidolon was based on the station’s central promenade area.



Fisher Space Pen Writing History

There are a few different urban legends around pens in space. Most go something like the following:

NASA spent millions of dollars developing a pen to write in space. Russians used pencils.

Part of this is true: Russian cosmonauts used pencils in space. They also used grease pencils on plastic boards. However, NASA astronauts used pencils as well because pens don't work in space because they are gravity fed. Also the same reason they won't write upside down once the ink on the ball is spent.

The truth is: no one wants to write with pencils in space. Graphite doesn't play well with electronics. Wood shavings are flammable. Pencils smear and aren't permanent, which causes problems with documentation. All this is exacerbated in a zero-gravity environment. NASA began de-

velopment of a pen to write in space, but abandoned the project as the development costs shot into space.

Enter Paul Fisher, creator of the eponymous Fisher Space Pen. Technically the science is in the ink cartridge rather than the pen. There are four features that make it possible to write in space.

The first is the pressurized cartridge. It contains compressed nitrogen at around 35 psi (240 kPa). This forces the ink out regardless of the writing position and need for a gravity feed. Also, nitrogen is mostly inert, which is a good thing when it comes to extending shelf-life. Despite our need for oxygen, it doesn't play well with others. Among other features, this gives the cartridge an approximately 100 year shelf life.

Next is a sliding float to keep the nitrogen and ink separate,



By Morgan Weeks

otherwise the pressurized gas would force its way through the thixotropic ink to the ball and it wouldn't write at all.

Third, we have a precisely fitted tungsten carbide ball to prevent any leakage. Tungsten carbide for the ball was popularized by the Parker Jotter in 1954. Previously brass or steel were primarily used for this function. The advantages of tungsten carbide are the ability to produce a very smooth, non-porous surface (low surface roughness), corrosion resistance, and high hardness. A low surface roughness means the fit is a much better quality than other materials, the writing surface is more stable, and the wear between ball and ball seat is reduced.

The final feature is the thixotropic ink. It's a big word, but stand back, I'm a material scientist! The premise of thixotropy for those who aren't familiar or didn't read Wikipedia already when I mentioned it previously is a fluid which is viscous (thick) under static conditions, but becomes less so when agitated. A common example of this is ketchup and its stubborn refusal to come out of a container until it is agitated in some fashion. I prefer a knife. Once agitated, it flows more freely. Perhaps too freely at times. This ink has the same property.

It flows when the tungsten carbide ball agitates it, but becomes viscous and un-moving once deposited on the surface. This characteristic prevents it from floating away and wreaking an entirely different kind of havoc in space.

This entire development cost roughly \$1M in 1965 dollars, which is around \$8M today. NASA was approached with the pen and spent two years evaluating it before accepting it for use in all future space missions. Despite the apocryphal tale of Russian pragmatism, they too used Fisher Space Pens beginning in 1969. Why? Because they are awesome and perfect for the environment.

In fact, they are still made and used today. There are two popular models: the AG7 Astronaut pen, which looks and functions like a standard, retractable ballpoint pen, and the Bullet pen, which has a short, cigar-like shape when capped. It can be posted to make a full sized pen and can have a removable clip attached. There are also adapters to allow the Fisher ink cartridge to fit into nearly any ballpoint pen that accepts cartridges.

Learn more
about our current
lines!

EARTHDAWN
FOURTH EDITION

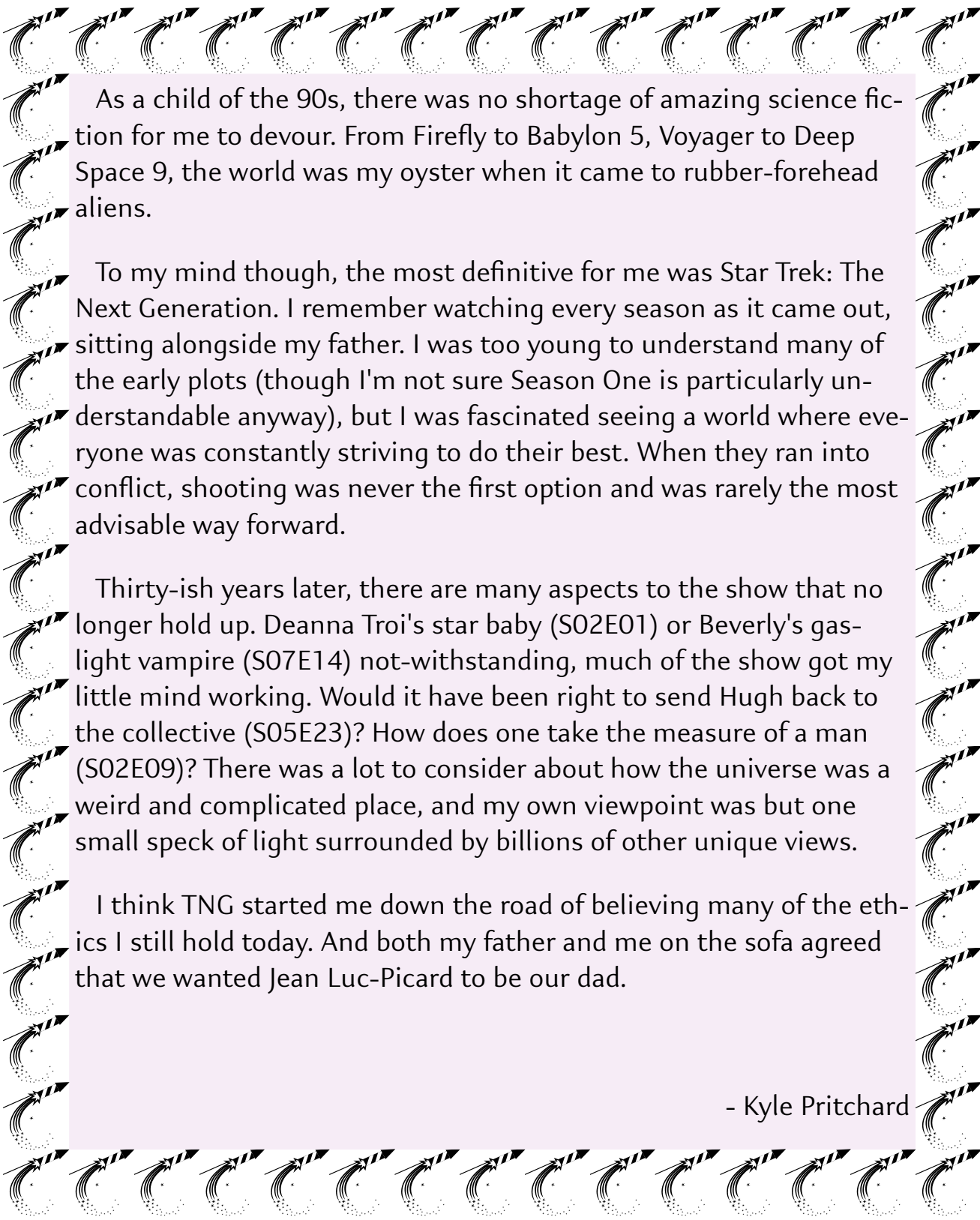
CHAMPION'S CHALLENGE
AN EARTHDAWN WEBCOMIC / GRAPHIC NOVEL

1879

HA'PENNY PIE

NOBLE ARMADA

DEMONWORLD



As a child of the 90s, there was no shortage of amazing science fiction for me to devour. From Firefly to Babylon 5, Voyager to Deep Space 9, the world was my oyster when it came to rubber-forehead aliens.

To my mind though, the most definitive for me was Star Trek: The Next Generation. I remember watching every season as it came out, sitting alongside my father. I was too young to understand many of the early plots (though I'm not sure Season One is particularly understandable anyway), but I was fascinated seeing a world where everyone was constantly striving to do their best. When they ran into conflict, shooting was never the first option and was rarely the most advisable way forward.

Thirty-ish years later, there are many aspects to the show that no longer hold up. Deanna Troi's star baby (S02E01) or Beverly's gas-light vampire (S07E14) notwithstanding, much of the show got my little mind working. Would it have been right to send Hugh back to the collective (S05E23)? How does one take the measure of a man (S02E09)? There was a lot to consider about how the universe was a weird and complicated place, and my own viewpoint was but one small speck of light surrounded by billions of other unique views.

I think TNG started me down the road of believing many of the ethics I still hold today. And both my father and me on the sofa agreed that we wanted Jean Luc-Picard to be our dad.

- Kyle Pritchard

There are two space-related media properties that had a notable effect on me.

The first is probably not that surprising—Babylon 5. It doesn't loom as large in pop culture consciousness as Star Trek or Star Wars, but it somehow managed to pull off heavily arc-based storytelling in an era where that wasn't really done but did it as a *syndicated show*. *Credit for a big part of that success must be given to J. Michael Straczynski, who had an epic saga planned in advance, and wrote the vast majority of the scripts for the series.*

But one of the more interesting aspects of the show's production most applicable to gaming is that while Straczynski had a singular vision of the story, he was not necessarily attached to a particular *execution of that vision*. *Understanding the vagaries of TV production, his plan had many 'trap doors' and alternate routes that could lead to the conclusion he had in mind. While this introduced a bit of potential narrative dissonance, it also allowed for discoveries and 'happy accidents' along the way.*

The lesson we can learn here? When developing a campaign or story arc for our game, be willing to adapt and change as things develop. Don't be so enamored of your narrative that you stifle the growth and change that can arise from your players interacting with the set pieces and supporting cast you have put in place.

The other significant property is from the same era: Event Horizon. This mash-up of science fiction and horror showed me that genres aren't pure, and there's a lot of potential to be found in the grey, blurry areas where they can overlap. It draws on some Lovecraftian ideas, as well as classic tropes of demonic possession and the like, but dresses them up in science fiction clothing.

To be fair, Event Horizon was not the first to do this—Alien did a similar science fiction and horror mash-up almost twenty years earlier. But in my personal brain space, Event Horizon (along with another excellent Sam Neill horror vehicle In the Mouth of Madness) did a lot to shape my feelings on horror as and its potential as a storytelling vehicle.

By Josh Harrison

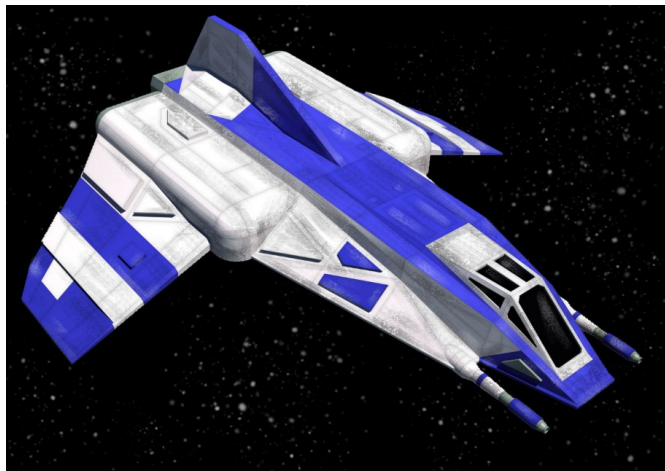
Morgan Weeks

Most influential “space thing” is a complicated bit of introspection. Looking back over my life analytically, trying to see how various exposures influenced me isn’t an easy ask. Since contemporary influences are likely more overt and by choice, I’m going to focus on my childhood and the memories of what I carry with me. Meaning some important pieces of sci-fi aren’t making the cut because they don’t particularly involve space. For example, while the run on the space station in Neuromancer technically happens in space, it’s really just a different set piece and doesn’t really involve space in a meaningful way.

Like many, my earliest exposure was through media. My favorite consumption as a very young child was Battlestar Galactica, The Black Hole, Robotech, Space Pirate Captain Harlock, Star Blazers, Star Wars, and Voltron. Reminiscing,

these all come back to me vividly. It comes as no surprise space opera has a special place for the fantastic tales and epic scope.

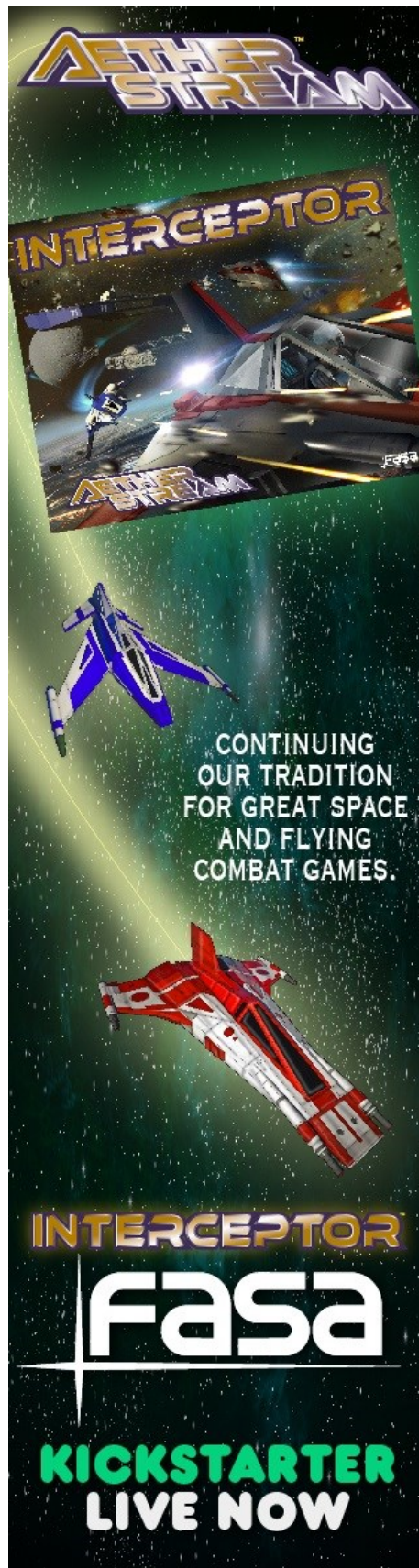
My uncle, Roy Weeks, took an interest in me as I got older. He ran the space shuttle simulator program for NASA and that gave



me access to minds perhaps a precocious child shouldn’t have. While I had little desire to *go to space, I was fascinated by it and took advantage of that access. Tempering the fantasy with reality did nothing to dull my interest. Also, I crashed the space shuttle many, many times. It has the worst handling characteristics of a lawn dart and a pregnant whale.*

A friend of the family stored a trove of old sci-fi novels in a windowless room in the partially submerged basement that smelled musty from the aging, yellowed pages. That room was my sanctuary in some ways. Far off from the rest of the house, it was quiet and cool. Only the spiders, who abided by the truce and stayed in the corners, knew I was there. I buried myself in those novels, finding complicated thoughts and allegories. First Lensman, Forever War, Foundation, Integral Trees, Ringworld, Solaris. The list goes on.

Unfortunately, I believe I failed at the task given. Perhaps the task itself is impossible in its complexity. Or I’m overthinking it. Could go either way, or a little from column A and a little from column B. Regardless, thank you for coming with me on this brief jaunt through time about space.



INTERCEPTOR

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<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/fasagames/interceptor-0>

