

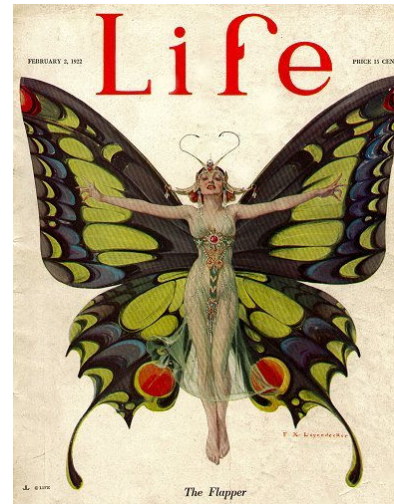
Les Années Folles

“The spirit of the Roaring Twenties was marked by a general feeling of discontinuity associated with modernity, a break with traditions.”

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1920s>

Some thoughts on what I want to do with this campaign setting.

I do not want to turn 2300AD into Transhuman Space. Both are fine as they are. What I want to do is to let loose the 2300AD world, a bit like how 2320AD has already done it. Things are changing, and starting to change fast.



According to historian Arnold J. Toynbee's hypothesis, the failure of a civilization to survive is usually the result of its inability to respond to moral and religious challenges rather than to physical or environmental challenges. This is what might be happening now: the post-Twilight civilisation is facing crisis from within.

If 2300AD was the colonial era the Kafer War was the First World War. Unlike the WW I it was less obviously morally problematic and had an enemy outside humanity. But it still pushed mankind to a brink where it had to confront some of its darkest sides. It did wipe out a generation on the French Arm. It shattered the certainties and conceits of the pre-war era.

As I see it, the 2300AD universe is now in the roaring 20's. This is the era of Freud, Einstein, Hemingway, surrealism, quantum mechanics, jazz, expressionism, feminism and emerging fascism. The old order has been irreparably shattered but no new order has yet arrived.

The colonial empires are starting to falter, transhuman technology *might* get loose, and the economies of human space are not quite as stable as they ought to be. The fundamental assumptions set by the Twilight war – a need for strong national states and big organisations, to squash the marauders wherever they appear, risk aversion in most fields and external, outwards-looking robust big technology – are being challenged. The demarchist experiments, colonial independence, tactical nuclear war and biotechnology are just the start. Somewhere the new Freuds and Ghandis are formulating their earth shattering ideas.

Things Flying Apart

This suggests a number of interesting social shifts. And the “wrecked” French Arm is a great environment to see them happen.

We have the Kafer War generation on the French Arm, who has grown up during a full-scale war. They have experienced planetary sieges, nuclear bombardments, fled between the stars and seen war firsthand. To them the Kafers are more real than the Core.

Nationalism is losing its force, requiring other things to keep societies together (or apart). As the union on Adlerhorst demonstrates, the Kafer War generation is quite pragmatic about nationalism.

The colonial economics is changing. The colonies have been forced by the war to become more independent of the Core, and now trade between each other. Kie Yuma, Nibelungen

and Beowulf are becoming high-tech centres. Beta Canum is risking losing its central position, making places like Joi more powerful. All this further weakens the Core hold over them. At the same time the new colonial nations may be unstable: compare to post-colonial Africa or the (real world) former Soviet states. There is a real chance that many of them will turn into failed states.

The arrival of tugships may cause a changed topology of space. If the Latin Finger suddenly becomes accessible or the 61 Cygni Cluster opens up enormous changes will happen. The Core could establish much firmer power over many colonies – but not all. Expansion would be possible in new directions. Some colonies and outposts risk becoming completely irrelevant. The French Arm is unlikely to become more easily accessible¹, so if tugs become more powerful it may remain as independent as now.

The relationships between humans and the aliens are evolving. The Kafer War led to a serious debate about the ethics of genocide. While it is so polarized that most proponents are just screaming at each other, there are also quiet discussions going on about whether to do it, how to protect against somebody or something else doing it, and what the proper principles are. At the same time the percolating insights on Kafers from the Gamma Serpenti base will be unsettling: understanding an enemy, even an implacable one, changes the nature of the conflict. Conversely, there is a “white man’s burden” in relation to the less developed alien species. Humans once took charge and freed the Xiang, and many think that ought to apply to all other developing species. The Klaxun never became a cause celebre across the Core due to their alien nature, but the voters are clamouring for helping the Little Guys despite their distance. Even the Ylii appear in media as weak victims in need of human aid. Meanwhile the Sung are becoming more assertive and taking human ideas and twisting them for their own uses. And the pentapods appear to be moving in with the humans far more strongly than many would like.

The Return of Ideology

It is telling that no ideologies or religions of 2300AD were ever mentioned, with the exception of some small fringe groups. It took many years for roleplaying games to mature to the point where real-life (or sufficiently plausible) ideologies and religions could be incorporated.

Within the setting, the Twilight War more or less killed off ideology as a valid basis for nations for 300 years. The trauma of seeing communism and capitalism destroy the world convinced most people that national pragmatism was the way. But this is, as described above, now breaking up. It is just that none of the old ideologies matter much, they have all to be reinvented from scratch. That reinvention is going to be dramatic.

One of the main ideological conflicts is between militarism vs. antimilitarism. The military forces hold tremendous power in most major nations, and the War has given them even more. Many people believe that the only way of beating the Kafers is to become more militaristic, moving societies in the directions of a total species war to subjugate or kill off the Kafers. Others fear that humanity risks becoming just like the Kafers, or trapped in corrupt hierarchical systems.

¹ Using tugs it would still be necessary to pass by Beowulf and at least one more system on the Nyotekundu finger. A route through Xi bootis would open up to the American arm, but it would be long and messy.

There are an increasing number of people wanting to break up corporativism and power concentrations. So far many have emigrated to the colonies, but more and more people in the Core are also asking uncomfortable questions. The trends that led to Trilon becoming its own nation and a media magnate emperor are not healthy ones, they argue, and societies should work against the formation of these interstellar elites.

In the colonies more and more are seeking independence, as their economies mature, interstellar trade picks up and they feel less beholden to the mother nations. The colonial freedom movement has a reflection in the Core, where taxpayers don't want to pay for the colonies. But colonial independence will also fragment the international system enormously.

Provolution is likely just the first group to really formulate an ideology for the 2300's. They will be met by opposing perspectives of all kinds.

Inspirations

Ken Macleod, *The Star Fraction*

Richard Morgan, *Woken Furies*

Alastair Reynolds, *Chasm City*

<http://www.davidcsimon.com/crimsondark>