

BASIC GALACTIC HISTORY

In the 21st and 22nd centuries, Earth began a push toward interstellar colonization. Colony ships were built – not generation ships, but vessels that would take 20 years or more to reach their destinations. A couple of nearby stars were chosen – nearby, in this case, meaning within 40 light-years of Earth. The first was Alpha Colony. The world seemed promising, but the colony failed utterly. Traces were found by later expeditions, but there were no signs of what had happened. But the second attempt, Beta Colony (p. 34), survived and grew.

Global disasters on Earth put a temporary halt to interstellar colonization. The details are never specified, but radioactivity was involved, and the aftermath included some really nasty mutant mosquitoes. Perhaps they have been exterminated by Miles' time. Perhaps not.

This disaster wiped out Cleveland, and maybe some other cities I dislike . . .

*– Lois McMaster Bujold,
Dreamweaver's
Dilemma*

After the hiatus, the wormhole jump drive was discovered, and exploration began explosively in all directions. However, America had been particularly hard hit; the new colonies came mainly from other Earth societies. One promising new world was called Barrayar . . . but, shortly after the first colonists landed, the Barrayar wormhole closed, and it dropped out of galactic history. For a while . . .

Beta Colony invented the uterine replicator, resulting in an immediate surge of interest in genetic engineering. At this time, various new human types, including hermaphrodites (p. 74) and quaddies (p. 75) were created – hermaphrodites as a social experiment on Beta Colony, and quaddies as a zero-gravity labor force. Galactic opinion eventually turned against this, especially after the Nuovo Brasilian cloning fiasco. The Jacksonians (p. 42) continue building servants and slaves to order, but no new races of human are being created. The exception is the Cetagandans' self-improvement project (p. 41), and most of the changes they are making in their own genome are not obvious to the casual observer.

Beta Colony's invention of artificial gravity increased the speed of sublight space travel, and made large-scale space stations more feasible. No longer did personnel in zero gravity need to visit planetside regularly, or spend several hours exercising each day, to prevent physical degeneration. Space stations were promptly built at important wormhole junctions which lacked habitable planets nearby, such as Kline Station and Dalton Station. Subcultures began to develop on these stations, as permanent populations grew up and new generations spent their entire lives without seeing a planet.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

At the moment, the galaxy is a relatively peaceful place. So what could possibly go wrong? Everything. The Vorkosigan universe is constantly expanding and evolving. Even if its heroes win peace for a time, the next generation will encounter its own problems. New discoveries will bring

both opportunities and ethical issues. Human beings are human beings – that, in itself, is enough to create as many interesting situations as any GM could possibly want. See Chapter 8 (p. 132) for a number of ways that things could go interestingly wrong.

