

## What I hate about galactic empires

I love galactic empires. Adore them. I think they're great settings for conflict and character driven stories, and give us the space to explore things at a remove from the cultural here/now of our own time and space and 21st century society.

But that's what I hate about most of the galactic empires I read about: too many authors don't really go there. They don't take the bold step, don't jump off the precipice into the unknown or risk exploring the place where one must be truly inventive. Instead, they cling to the [Mae West](#) that is 20th or 21st century (usually American) society transported to the stars.

Ok, fine, yes, we all love stories about ourselves, the people we know, the places we live, but I'm really tired of staring endlessly into that same so overtly narcissistic mirror when it comes to empire-spanning science fiction.

### Slip the Surly Bonds of Earth

I have another take on the galactic empires I love to live in and explore, and they are what I call Star Warsian science fiction settings: not because they contain the story elements of Star Wars, but because they lack what SW also lacks; namely, any intentional, explicit ties to 20th/21st century Earth.

Although I'm using Star Wars here as a self-defined adjective, I acknowledge all the earth-referential subtext that so many fans and critics have read into the SW saga. Nevertheless, when we watch that movie, we are not, in point of fact, watching a story about, say, the descendents of Earth colonists who won a civil war with technology refined from 21st century American military weapons, against a backdrop of greedy corporations running the universe. For example. That's the sort of Terran thing that permeates this sub-genre, and it is the absence of that which I celebrate in SW, and all kinds of Star Warsian (in my specialized use of that word) fiction.

And what a relief, I say, to get away once and for all from our projections and iterations of us here/now extrapolated into the umpteenth generation.

### The Empire of the Other

When you visit Palpatine's Empire, or my Sa'adani Empire, or Catherine Asaro's [Skolian Empire](#), you are going someplace decidedly different. You are entering the empire of the Other: i.e., they who are not Terrans, transliterated. True, there may be earth analog elements present (we are after all still dealing with homo sapiens, and parallel development is always a possibility), but these settings have their own cultures, their own histories, and they are not rooted in specific "descendent of Terran man" issues.

This can completely reframe the story opportunities and what the reader experiences in the book. Can, and should. (And hitting that target is another challenge, as well, and the subject no

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doubt of another post.)

I'll be writing about this in greater depth here in February. I had started a brief post on this for the [Oort Cloud](#) site, for the galactic empires group, but it's growing like a weed. So I'm going to nurture this weed for a bit, and see what I can harvest from the overgrowth.

To be continued.