

# THE LAST PARSEC

## DESIGN DIARY

By Shane Hensley

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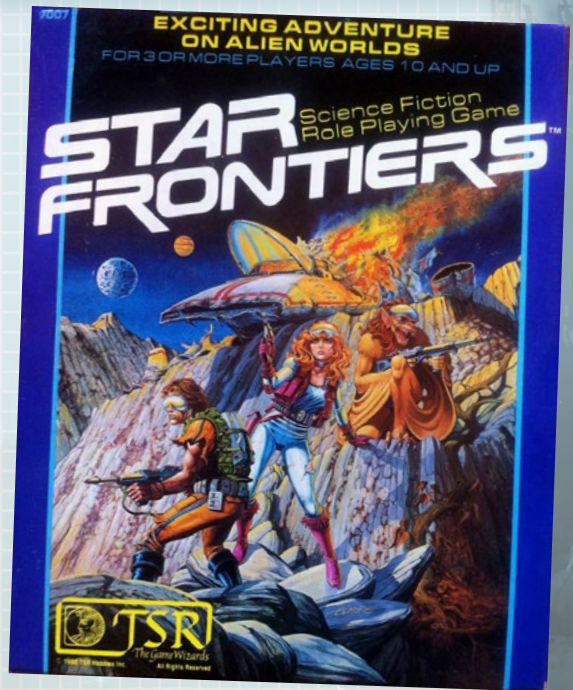


# 01: ORIGINS

*The Last Parsec* wasn't designed like most of our settings. Usually, I get inspired by something like a movie, book, or tv show, think about a cool spin I'd like to have on it, talk it over with my friends, and start writing. *50 Fathoms*, for example, was inspired by the animated *Sinbad* movie (loved it), concept art for *Pirates of the Caribbean* before the first one came out (amazing), and most of all, the *Pirates of Dark Water* animated series (truly fantastic).

*The Last Parsec* was inspired by my love of TSR's *Star Frontiers* roleplaying game from the early '80s. I only got to play it a few times--most of the time I ran little battles with pirates or aliens by myself--but I loved the concept of exploration. (If you're familiar with Bartle Types, I'm definitely an explorer myself.) The grim «Ritual of Quickdeath» still stands out in my mind as an RPG highlight of my youth.

But it took a long time for Pinnacle to do a science fiction setting. Why? I wrote a story for West End Games' *Shatterzone* line once called «Reaching for the Stars» that explained it. When I was young and read books or comics about aliens and strange worlds, I was entranced. As I entered high school, I learned the moon was nothing but white dust, Mars was an arid waste that likely didn't even have bacteria, and all the other planets in our solar system were equally dead. They were expressed in terms of mass and orbits and basic composition. Math. But there was no life there. No long lost alien civilizations or John Carters



waiting for rescue or even *Star Wars* style aliens playing strange music in a wretched hive of scum and villainy.

So mostly, I read pulp, fantasy, history, and my beloved comics. Pinnacle's product line reflects my tastes since I'm the guy who has to make these things happen, which is a far larger job than most people probably understand. (Things are a little different these days--but that's a different article.)

There were certain kinds of sci-fi I still read. I enjoy military sci-fi (William Dietz and Jack Campbell are favorites) and love space opera, read everything Ray Bradbury ever wrote



(but he focused more on characters than science for the most part), and I devour non-fiction books on astrophysics, astronomy, the origins of the universe, and anything by Michio Kaku or Stephen Hawking. But most other sci-fi has left me as cold as space itself.

Strangely enough, it was the hard science reality that finally brought me back around to *Star Frontiers* and doing a game in the same spirit.

Once you grasp just how vast the universe is, the “math” of reality weighs in to show you not only how *possible* it is that we’re not alone, but how *unlikely* it is. There are roughly 300 billion stars in the Milky Way alone. Our nearest neighbor, Andromeda, is likely three times larger. Many of those stars are the heart of solar systems like ours with numerous planets locked in their orbits. And there are estimated to be one hundred billion galaxies.

Statistically, there is a very high chance that there’s other life out there. There are very likely strange creatures, alien civilizations, and phenomena we’ve never even *dreamed* of. In the real world, we’re excited by that a bacteria may have hitchhiked to Earth on an asteroid and left a *trace* of its existence on some microscopic sample. Imagine the awe and wonder of

discovering an intelligent *being*. Or even some wild and terrifying animal.

And that’s what *The Last Parsec* is all about. It’s not hard sci-fi or military sci-fi or even space opera. It’s exploration sci-fi where an explorer and her companions can be the first to step into the *boundless* void and discover things beyond our wildest dreams. It’s a setting where you can *play* alien races humanity has already encountered and experience the awe and wonder of the *possible*.

The sheer size of *The Last Parsec* also means that we wanted it to be something like a “sandbox”, or more appropriately, a “starbox” game where Game Masters can make their own worlds, armies, societies, monsters, races, and adventures. That’s why we’re creating three example settings *first*, then adding the expanded core book later.

We hope you’ll come with us on this voyage to the depths of space and the astounding locations beyond. Our first wave of books introduces you to three locations and enough adventures to fill a lifetime.

And this is only the beginning.

—Shane Hensley  
September, 2014

