

DreamCraft

NARC



the
FUTURE

According to Mel Keegan

THE FUTURE

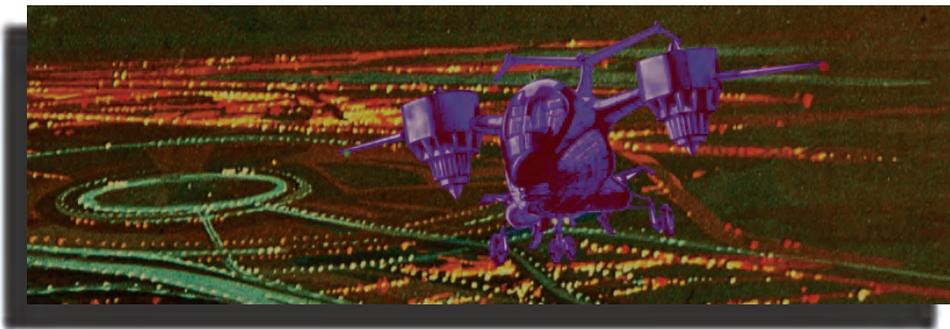
According to Mel Keegan

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Fleet gunship in the night sky of Hydralia City. Omaru

CONTENTS

A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE - 4

The future history which both these universes share ... And so do we!

RESALQ 101 - 8

Designing a living language from the ground up...

HIGH-TECH 201 - 12

It's all about the details. MK takes time out to answer readers questions.

THE TALE BEHIND

A WORLD OF ICE - 19

World building is an art. Check out what went into Aurora and Kjorin!

SETTING THE SCENE: NARC - 21

The backstory to the bestselling NARC series...

SETTING THE SCENE:

HELLGATE - 23

...the backstory to the new master-work of SF.

DISCLAIMER:

The Mel Keegan novels feature graphic violence, frank depictions of same-gender relationships, and some coarse language. They are for the mature adult reader only. Please do not recommend that young readers become involved with this material. Let them grow up first, and then make the recommendation!



The HELLGATE history and the NARC history are intimately related ... in fact, they are in the same 'time-line,' two centuries apart, with the events of HELLGATE taking place around 600 years in our own future.

So how does the world of 2004 become the world of HELLGATE? The future has been mapped out in quite a high degree of detail, and the hints and clues are all over both the NARC and HELLGATE books. However, a lot of the backstory work will probably never be used in the books ... and it makes interesting reading! Direct from the files of Mel Keegan, here is a synthesis of the background notes which form the foundation for the history of these novels.

HELLGATE

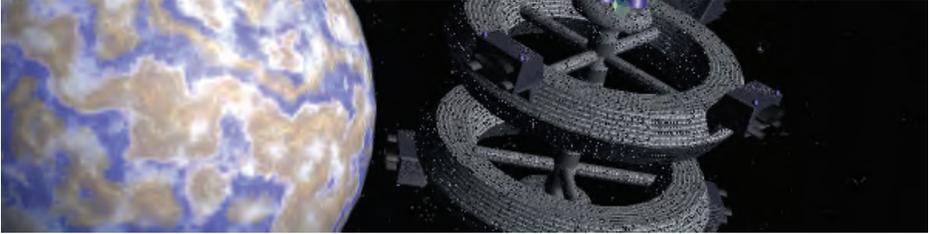
A History of the Future

The manned and robotic space program on Earth stalled due to spiraling costs and failed technology, and for some years the exploitation of space was reduced to commercial satellite launches. But in the Twenty-First Century, the leading industrial countries of the Second World began to feel the pressure of being squeezed out of the world's finite resources, and in a search for raw materials they began to look at the high frontier. Their first objective was the Moon.

The plans for colonizing and mining the Moon were laid down as long ago as the 1960s, so the actual development of the Moon in the 2030s and onward was more a question of political commitment to 'being there and doing it,' rather than a technological hurdle. With China and India and Japan thoroughly established on the Moon by 2055, the competing consortiums turned their attention to Mars ... and the governments and corporations from the enduring First World powers could only race to catch up before their tardiness caused the balance of power to shift on Earth.

When the United States, the European Union and the Russian Commonwealth joined forces in 2097, the colonization and mining of Mars, the asteroid belt and the moons of Jupiter followed rapidly. By 2140, indus-

try had moved off Earth, and the 'greening' of the home planet began. Earth's population had by then touched fourteen billion, and the impulse to look for new ground elsewhere was strong.



In the early decades of the Twenty-Second century, two technologies were developed, cheek by jowl, and though they shared no common ground, they would be exploited together in years to come. The art and science of the terraformers came of age when their work on Mars was demonstrated to have warmed the planet and thickened the atmosphere to the point where, in the deepest depression of the Mariner Valley, liquid water was seen in 2187. Terraforming projects were planned theoretically for other worlds, though colonization was dependent on the development of the second technology: the Kovak-Junger deep-space drive.

This derivative of the ion propulsion system made the nearby star systems accessible to humans. Using gravity-lensing, the planets of these systems had been intensively imaged since 2022, and suitable worlds for terraforming had already been chosen. The Kovak-Junger drive was slow enough that human crews and colonists were placed into suspension for the months-long, and years-long flights. These were the sleeper ships, and the Era of Human Expansionism had begun. One of the pivot points of this century was the use of genetic engineering to create new forms of Mankind who could live and thrive on the new colony worlds, where Terraforming was always a compromise. Few worlds would ever be genuinely Earthlike, but with adjusted genes, humans could easily cope with differences in gravity, atmosphere and temperature.

The first interstellar flight took place in 2182-86, and though the Weimann Drive remained a long way in the future, the colonies soon began to flourish. In this era, vast fleets of 'human cargo' ships took up to 250,000 souls per voyage out from Earth to the new worlds where robot-automated terraforming and city building had gone ahead. Earth's population began to

dwindle, and the colonies established themselves as separate and independent worlds. These worlds soon became heavily industrialized, and their populations drifted away from Earth as the generations passed. They developed their own cultures — and problems. One of these problems was the designer drug Angel, and the department known as Narcotics And Riot Control (NARC) was authorized by the government of Earth to combat this problem. The Angel War was on across the colonies, from Darwin's World to the Cygnus Colonies.

Back home, things also began to change. Earth became increasingly dependent on the taxation levy from the colonies, and by the Twenty-Fifth Century all of Earth had come under one government, and the 'celestial territories' had been recognized: the Terran Confederacy was born. The premier technological development of this century was the Weimann Drive, and Mankind's expansion raced.

Very soon, the robot pioneers who prepared the way for human colonists stumbled over the first evidence of a dead civilization. Archaeologists worked to uncover the ruins of a race who had been called the Resalq. For decades, humans puzzled over where the Resalq had gone, and why their worlds were left in ruins...

Meanwhile, in just a few decades, the old colonies, which had comprised the whole of the Confederacy, became known as The Near Sky, while the frontiers were pushed back. By 2665, the Deep Sky was established, its cities robot-constructed, its populations migrating from the Near Sky and Middle Heavens worlds. The Deep Sky worlds were settled by people to whom 'Earth' was a dot on a map ... people whose cultural affiliations and political preferences were far removed from the old homeworld.

In the Twenty-Seventh century, the populations of the Deep Sky began to chafe at the taxation ... and this ill-feeling became much worse when scientists on the frontier turned up the first evidence of a third intelligent race ... a dreadful, faceless enemy which had destroyed the Resalq utterly, and which posed a terrible threat to the humans now inhabiting the old Resalq skies. The senators of the Confederacy perceived a threat from the unknown, unknowable Zunshu, and then-President Jardine Mayhew issued his famous 'Strong Fleet Policy,' which began the rapid building of the biggest warships in space ... and conscription throughout

the colonies, to man those ships. However, data concerning the Zunshu was withheld from the general population to avoid the panic evacuation of the trillion-dollar developments on the frontier back to Middle Heavens worlds unable to support such numbers.

Under the weight of taxation and the draft, the colonies began to simmer with unrest. With the Zunshu threat still unresolved, the fuses of the Colonial Wars were already set, and waiting to be lit.

(And on this note, the HELLGATE series begins)



The 'unit badge of the carrier NARC-Athena

HELLGATE

Resalq 101: developing a language

One of the most challenging things about the HELLGATE books is that we are confronted by a race of people with no cultural connections back to Earth, so their language is different in every detail ... from the words themselves to the grammar, dialect, context — everything !!

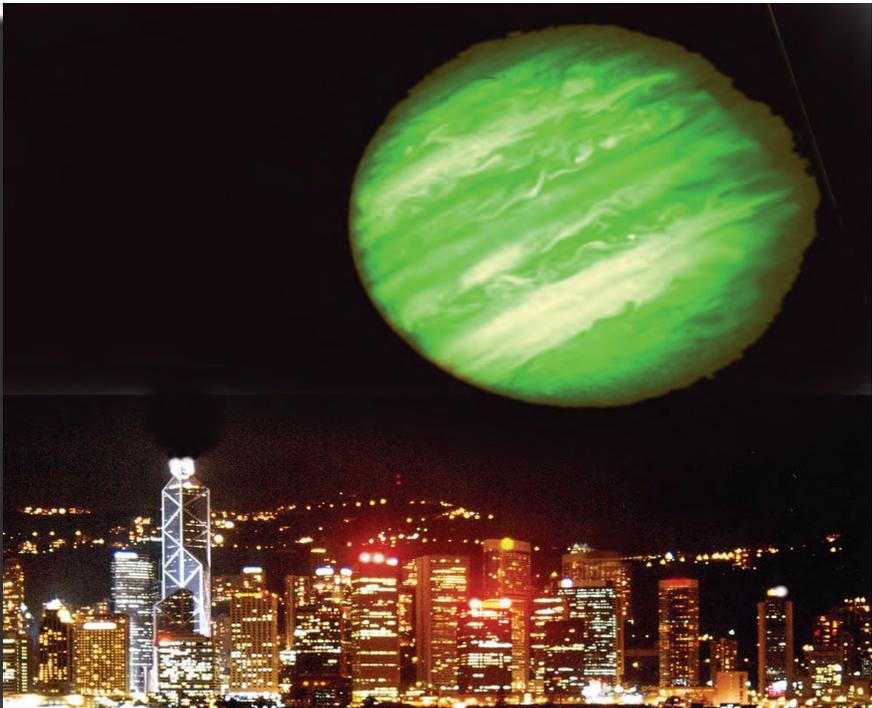
With the first book, I knew I was setting out to construct a piece of fiction which would, eventually, be around a million words long. I also knew that the 'reality' of this universe would be found in its details. I had to formulate a language for the Resalq which would hold together properly over a text-length double the compleat Lord of the Rings (!), while some sharp-eyed readers to whom languages are their forte would quickly pinpoint woolly-brainedness, if I'd just written a lot of weird-sounding stuff and called it Resalq!

So I approached the question of language like a puzzle. The Resalq as a people are artistic, long-lived, single-gendered, ultimately peaceful. It followed that their language would have no reference to gender (in contrast to, say, German, where even the nouns are masculine, feminine or eunuchs). It also followed that the language would be expressive and probably 'flowing,' because of the artistic temperament of these people. However, it would also be a spoken language which had been refined over many centuries, and culled down to minimal syllables to say something, rather than having patterns which ramble through many syllables ... because rambling languages are at a disadvantage when a society becomes intensely technologized! So I described the Resalq language as being 'slurred,' where whole syllables are swallowed, not spoken. In this way, the artistic element comes out in the speech, yet the language has been culled down by dropping unnecessary syllables ... the process is evident in English too. Consider this: aggravation became aggro, which soon became ag. Also, television

swiftly shortened to telly in the UK, tv in the States, and I've actually heard teev ...!

A writer can always be clever, but there's a point you can't get beyond: there is no such thing as a single human language. Rather, we have hundreds of languages, and it'll come to a brawl when/if we ever have to decide which language will be used to represent the Earth.

So you just have to overlook this and accept the somewhat unlikely proposition that a complex race like the Resalq will have a single mother tongue. If you can set aside your disbelief, you can get on with the next step! Developing a single language ... and doing it to a believable, reproducible pattern.



The Elysium skyline

It comes down to a number of questions: what does the infinitive form of a verb look like? How do you change it into the other tenses? What do you add, to form the plural? How is a word turned into the negative (lucky/unlucky, soul/soulless, sense/nonsense)? Is a verb conjugated in a way which (like Spanish) indicates who's speaking, so the personal pro-

noun isn't needed? Whereabouts in the sentence is the verb placed? Does this language use the definite article or, like Russian, does it do without? And what are the pronouns?

Answering those questions gives a reasonably good foundation for the language! So the next step was to add some words.

The vocabulary began very simply in THE RABELAIS ALLIANCE, with a few terms. *Zunshu* simply means enemy; *e'quero* means parent. *Elar'ne* means 'the stormy side of the sky,' which re-translates as The Vast = Hellgate.

In DEEP SKY, we got to add in some brief phrases, because the language was taking shape as I took apart the terms and analysed them. *Sem arnellan-shun* means 'no time to waste.' *Havre lustr'en* means 'ambush.' *Carellan Djerun* means 'Rainbow Voyager.' *Kjor'in* means a 'malicious practical joke,' and *Car'am anha* means 'Dying Time.'

So far so good. Now, to take those to pieces. For example...

ELAR'NE ... the word is abbreviated in the middle, meaning one or more syllables is/are dropped. Figure ELAR means (the) storm. You can also derive a verb from this — to storm. Say, ELAR started life as ELAREN, and the 'en' was swallowed. In English, storm becomes stormy with the addition of a 'y' ... in Resalq, drop then 'en' to go from storm to stormy. Now, add in something to be the equivalent of 's' in English, the pluralizer. Say, 'am' pluralizes words in Resalq.

Now you have ELAREN for Storm; ELAR is stormy, when everyone drops the last syllable. ELARAM is the plural, storms. And to derive a verb from ELAR, assign a syllable to represent the extension to the verb-stem which forms the infinitive ... call it 'len' ... and you get ELARLEN, being the verb '(to) storm.'

The second segment in ELAR'NE is also abbreviated, from UNE, meaning sky. Add the pluralizer, and you have UNEAM, meaning skies.

Now, ZUNSHUAM would be 'enemies.' Add a syllable to indicate possession in the first person (my, mine) ... call it 'or' (same as the 's' in English), and ZUNSHUOR = my enemy; ZUNSHUORAM translates out as 'my enemies.'

CARELLAN DJERUN is pretty simple: Rainbow + Voyager/Traveler. Carellanam gives you the plural, rainbows. Djerunam = travelers. You can also derive a verb from 'traveler.' We decided 'lal' is the

infinitive extension added to the verb stem, so DJERLAL is the verb (to) travel. And you can also infer that the addition of 'un' to the verb stem turns the play into the player: travel to traveler (one who travels). So now you could also have ELARUN = one who storms (ie., blew through here in a fit of temper).

The analysis of the language took off from there. Using no more than what is on the printed page already in RABELAIS and DEEP SKY, you can infer a tremendous amount, and the Resalq language will build from here. Rather than being euphaneous gibberish, you can actually speak it (if you wanted to, though heaven knows why you would):

e' quero-or prelel djerlan Elar'ne ...

my parent chosen/was (to) travel [to] Hellgate

my parent was chosen to go to Hellgate.

...it wasn't easy, but it was interesting!



High Tech 201

Many readers wonder about the details in this future vision, be they technological, societal, even religious! MK took time out to answer a raft of questions right here, and the results are interesting, to say the least!

What exactly is an 'autochef'? Like the replicator on ST?

Alas, no. Trek's replicator technology depends on transporter beam technology and using raw materials to 'beam into being' anything from a cup of tea to a plate of mashed spuds. In the NARC (and HELLGATE, 200 years later) universe, I haven't touched on any such technology ... to me, it seems more 'iffy' than e-space transit systems and the pseudo-transoptic 'hyperflight' which allows ships to travel fairly rapidly between stars. Transporter beams are very, very convenient for the medium of a TV show (you don't need to have special effects depicting a ship landing in a new location each week), but for text, you don't need to beam down, and in fact, describing a ship entering a new environment gives the writer's muscles some exercise! So I haven't touched on the technology which is lurking behind the replicator concept ... instead, I refer to it as an autochef ... so, what the hell is an autochef? Something like a hot-locker, where meals are stored pending serving (like the serving carts you see on an airplane? Almost, but not quite. Imagine a cubic meter of food: tanks of noodles, rice, ten different sauces, five different meats and fishes, ten assorted vegetables, all cooked to perfection and stored in cryogen. The only part of the machine the user sees is the interface: a keyed menu pad, and a 'dumb waiter.' When you key in what you want, the *ingredients* are flash-heated and served up with whatever timelag. The user can get about a hundred combinations, working with that the machine has in stock, and the machine is called a

'chef' because rather than just serving up a pre-plated meal, it combines the ingredients on demand. The only SF technology involved is the super-cold storage and flash-heating. The autochefs would be restocked by kitchen staff ... daily, in the mess, and weekly in the case of private 'chefs in officers' quarters.

These guys sometimes smoke ... what are they smoking?

I refer to it as kip grass, there's also bel grass, and so on. A plant of some kind, given the fragrance of roses or jasmine, or whatever; it's a very mild sedative (ie., it takes the edge off when you're living on your nerves), but I would guarantee to you that there is nothing harmful in these cigarettes. Don't confuse them with the 'cancer sticks' we know in our century! I personally don't smoke (when you've watched someone take eighteen years to die of lung and brain cancer associated with smoking, you don't smoke yourself), but a majority of people between the ages of 12 and 50 do, and I think they always will. The fact is, people *need* something to take the edge off. The pressures of life are not getting any easier, nor will they in future ... but the second fact is, smoking kills. Put the two things together and you come up with one realistic conclusion: a cigarette has to be developed which will take the edge off, and is not dangerous. I invented a weed called kip grass to fill the void: harmless, mildly sedative, and you add in a fragrance like jasmine both for relaxation purposes and to make the second-hand smoke acceptable to others. I may be a non-smoker, and I'm absolutely convinced that smoking kills, but I also believe people will always smoke ... so being realistic in the SF context, I meet everyone halfway and developed something harmless.



What language are these people speaking?

It's not quite English, that's for sure! Yet I write in English, which is a second-language for so many readers around the world. We ship these books to Scandiavia, Germany and Switzerland, France, Spain and Italy, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, The Phillippeans ... the common denominator is English, and I have to be extremely cautious about using too much of a mish-mash of 'cityspeak,' slang and dialect. If I were to write the dialogue in the language they're really speaking, I think it would be a mixture of English, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese. Why? Because these are the dominant languages of our century, as we prepare to 'head out,' and these are the lanuages we'll take with us. Imagine a colony fleet heading out from, for example, the Shanghai con-urb. I can guarantee to you that if three million Chinese-speaking colonists were going to settle on the world which their terraformer fleet had licked into shape for them over the previous decade, the mother tongue of that colony won't be English! But as the colonies grow up, grow old and homogenize, and populations spread themselves around as people follow work ... the language of the street will develop into a curious mixture. I think it will simplify. No one will conjugate the definite article, there won't be masculine and feminine nouns! When a word has been settled on by a majority of 'end users' to stand for an object, irrespective of what the root language was, that will *be* the word. For instance, the English language is already becoming a hybrid! We're using words inducted from French, Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Indian, plus the ever-drifting slang terms. In the last half-century, no one blinks at words which are actually far from English. Fast-forward four more centuries, and although I think the structure of the language won't change (the grammatical framework), the nouns and verbs will drift ... and then, the pronunciation will drift too. I'd like to experiment with this, but I can't, and won't: I respect my readers in countries like Finland and Japan! They have a great English dictionary to hand; but that dictionaty won't supply them with a blizzard of Spanish and German slang! I'm very much aware, the bottom line is readability across many borders ... so I content myself with dropping copious hints. The names of things and places and people actually tell you what's going on, while you soon come to realize, the book you're holding has been translated into English for your reading pleasure!

.What's life expectancy in this era?

A lot longer than it is in our age ... but everything depends on how you treat yourself. I refer to Harry Del at one point as 60, but looking 15 years younger; Bill Dupre is in Harry's age bracket and still conveys a feeling of youth. Gene Cantrell is right behind them by ten years, and still in the field, though it's 25 years since he busted Aphelion out of the Jupiter system. Leo Michiko is mid/late 50s, and ageless ... and I dropped a hint at another point, that Cassius Brand went into a new career in his 70s, when most people were starting to think about retirement. I'd say life expectancy in Jarrat's and Stone's era is flexible, from about 120 to about 200, but after that it depends if you want to take good care of yourself and live that long. Substance abuse and junk food will still shorten your life back to about 100 (and you can do that in today's world ... lots of people live to a ripe old age on a diet of whiskey and fat cigars!) ... but we ourselves are swiftly living into an era where being a centenarian is nothing unusual. A person who, today, is still under 50, fit, healthy, and determined to stay that way, can seriously expect to live to 110-120 without any outside help. Now, in that case of person of 30, that gives him/her another 90 years from now. This guinea pig of ours will be winding down as we approach the dawn of the Twenty-second Century. Hmmm. Don't we expect any advances in the gene therapies for the diseases of old age? Controls for cancer, heart disease and the sclerotic diseases (including Alzheimers and MS) are high on the agenda of medical research right now. I think you can expect to see the human life span extend out, with the quality of elastic, to about 150 by the year 2100. So our thirty year old can hope to see the year 2125 come in. And if you look forward three further centuries, to say that people are living to 200 in the era of Jarrat and Stone isn't too much of a stretch of the imagination. Having said all this, the *desire* to live long is a pivot-point in one's life. Not everyone wants to live for two centuries, and as I said above, a steady diet of junk food plus substance abuse will drop the curtain prematurely on anyone. As for me? I'd love to see where the next century goes ... but only if I have my health and vigor. So long as brain and body are working just fine, why not see what tomorrow is going to bring?



Can you outline gender roles in this 'universe'??

In a line ... there aren't any! One of the best things about going back to play in this universe is, the exotic dancer is a guy and it's a gal flying the gunship. There is no gender role playing any longer. A lot of gender demarkation which is hanging on in our century, is still about work, and dress habits, and the lines are eroding. Stay-home dads and moms who drive dump trucks are accepted on the street now. Girls in bluejeans and guys with ponytails and earrings don't raise eyebrows ... 'punk' fashion will always 'clash' with the rest of socieity: that's what it's for. Gradually, the utrageous becomes normal, and 'punk' fashion will always be pushing, looking for something new to make eyebrows rise, but we're in the process of leaving behind gender roles as defined by one's clothing! Women have been wearing the bluejeans for a half century, and you only have to 'retro' a 1800 to find guys in lace, pantyhose, high heels and eyeshadow ... folks, it's ALL been done before, and it'll all be done again. The important aspect for a writer of speculative fiction is to forcibly

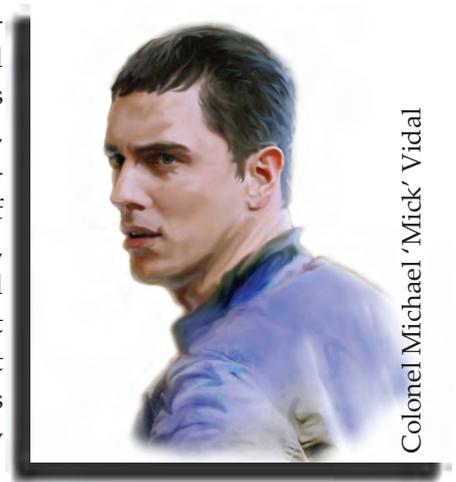
separate gender (and by extension the role-playing games of centuries gone by) and dress codes, unless those dress codes are a key part of the world-building. For instance, a 'police state,' a thousand years from now, virtually insists that males wear their skirts tight and their heels high, and if women don't wear a tie they're not going to get into this fancy restaurant. No, seriously, folks ...! Gender roles date back to our pre-human ancestors; it's the badges and symbols of those roles which have been enforced by ourselves, and they're arbitrary. The roles themselves are set, and then busted wide open, by sheer necessity, as in a time of war which puts women down the coal mines, because there's no one else left to do work which, ten years before, no one believed women could even physically do. Once rules have been broken, they're very hard to glue back together. Like the saying goes, give people an inch, and they'll take a mile. And rightly so.

What is the status of religion in Jarrat's and Stone's universe?

Religion survives, but, for most people, as a background feature to one's life rather than the hub about which one moves. God and gods, heaven and hell are most certainly still in the vocabulary! The liberal profanity of the era reflects the public knowledge and nature of spirituality, and I've made throw-away references to prayer on many occasions (Gable, when Stone is playing 'chicken' with the freighter in SCORPIO, for one). The one aspect of Twenty-fourth Century spirituality I haven't delved into is *which* God or gods, *which* church or temple, has survived. I would suggest, they all do. And I do mean all: four centuries from now, you'll be as likely to find a Temple of Ganesh as a mosque, a synagogue or a chapel. The only religious institution I recall referring to in specific terms (in EQUINOX) is a Temple of Gaia. Here's the quotation:

[Stone] saw several overviews of the funeral in Belrevoe, the grieving family, a knot of politicians and local Tactical officers. Notable by his absence was Stuart Wymark. So Curry was keeping him out of sight. The eulogy was read by a friend. In the background were clergy in the green robes of the Temple Of Gaia.

People will certainly take their spirituality with them, no matter how far-flung the colonies ... but the nature of that spirituality is surely a whole 'nother question, and one which I would hope is as personal a matter as one's sexuality. Maybe it's wishful thinking, but I would like to speculate that another four centuries will level the playing field: we'll grow up, as human beings, enough to admit that everyone has a right to choose their brand of faith. Methodist, Wiccan, Hindu, Islamic, does it matter? Ultimately, we're all headed in the same direction, they're surely just different modes of transport used to get there. Okay, I'm the eternal optimist. This is one of the things that 'comes through' in my writings.



Colonel Michael 'Mick' Vidal

Forgive me if I digress to a moment here! The positive aspects of the NARC universe far outweigh the negative: real freedom of choice in spirituality and sexuality; genuine democracy; true equality between the genders; fantastic opportunity for growth in every way, from the individual to the community. Sure, it's a future vision with a lot of dark corners — industrial pollution, political corruption, lethal narcotics, criminal cartels — but these are very human shadows which won't quickly be left behind. Ignoring them would only sanitize this view of the future, which would go a long way towards undermining it. The NARC and HELLGATE books have been called "uncannily realistic," and I believe one reason for this is, I don't ignore the shadows ... nor do I make more of them than they're worth. You can invent all the cool hardware and high-tech you like, but the scaffolding holding up really successful speculative fiction, as opposed to a flight of fantasy, is the depiction of a future human society that either works or doesn't (and its failure will almost certainly be the pivot point for the fiction).





The Tale Behind a World of Ice

The thing I love most about SF is the world building. The biggest 'kick' I get out of writing these novels is projecting our world into a future where you can still see our reality, and yet it's different, evolved. You think to yourself, 'I could live and prosper in this universe,' and yet at the same time it's different enough to be endlessly exciting.

Terraforming and genetic engineering are right around the corner in our own world. We may not *quite* be able to do it right just now, but we know how it should be done. Give us a few decades, and we'll be on top of those problems. Starship engines and anti-gravity are another question entirely, and this is where you have to remember, the 'F' in SF stands for FICTION. Take out the C25th physics, and none of these stories will 'go.' The plotlines would still be viable, but they'd have to play out against a background of a future Earth. (Which in itself is quite an idea: if readers enjoy SCORPIO, the next J'n'S story does actually bring the characters to Earth and Mars). It may be self-indulgent to want to go planet-hopping, but I'm one of those souls who grew up on SF. I cut my teeth on the novels of Bertram Chandler and John W. Campbell, Robert Heinlein and E.E. 'Doc' Smith. In other words, I like nothing better than exploring really wild places, and you don't find too many of those on Earth!

Having said that, the SF I like best is so realistic, it makes you shiver. You reach the end of the book (or movie) convinced that the world where you just visited was real. So when I come to build worlds like Aurora in SCORPIO, or Avalon, in EQUINOX, I put a lot of thought into it ... and yes, I do some heavy-duty research before I start to write. Aurora was a

difficult case. I knew I wanted to construct a 'winter world,' but I didn't want it to turn into the old 'ice planet' stereotype. I wanted to do something that was astronomically, geologically and environmentally realistic — ie., to make a fictional world rather than a fantasy world. You can get away with a lot in SF, but there *is* a line where the fic crosses over into fantasy!

I think I invested something like two pages scattered throughout various parts of SCORPIO to explaining how the world was built up by the robot terraformer fleet (as mentioned in DEATH'S HEAD UNABRIDGED, apropos of the Rethan colony). And with those foundations laid, we could then go out and play. Regions like the island of Maui would be natural to this environment.

It all starts with research into the processes of terraforming, as understood today. And the Internet was a terrific place to do the research. Start at your favorite search engine, and see where it takes you!



Captains Jerry Stone and Kevin Jarrat,
Of Narcotics And Riot Control (NARC)

Setting the scene...

MEL KEEGAN THE NARC BACKSTORY

Four centuries from now, humans have colonized scores of worlds, terra-forming them and populating them with the untold, unwanted millions of earth's people. The colony worlds opened up new vistas of opportunity ... for the criminal cartels as well as the law-abiding.

It is an age of massive technology: ships the size of cities, artificial intelligences — and designer drugs which have never been imagined in Mankind's long history of experiment with rare, precious substances.

All the "traditional" drugs of the last several centuries have been rendered harmless and therefore legal. The "blockers" are as cheap as the drugs, sold legally, side-by-side ...

But one drug is different. There is no blocker, no "cure" ... and the first dose is lethally addictive. One rash act, one inebriated mistake — or an act of spite on the part of a rival — and the user is on a one way trip.

The drug is known as Angel. A bitter, golden powder than has built empires and torn them down, across the exotic colony worlds of the Twenty Fourth Century. The "Angel empires" are the drug syndicates ... Equinox, Black Unicorn, Death's Head, Scorpio, Apogee. In the far colonies, their rule exceeds the power of government. And the siren-song of Angel, the most seductive "exotic" ever designed, lures ever more humans, endangering whole generations in the colonies.

Fourteen years after Angel appeared in the Cygnus Colonies, its threat was monstrous enough for the government of Earth to found a new paramilitary department. NARCOTICS AND RIOT CONTROL (NARC) as designed, chartered, and equipped, to take the new drug-war to the front lines: Deep space, raw new colonies and rancid old ones, where high technology has put the Angel empires outside the law and beyond the reach

of Tactical Response (Tactical or Tac). In the third book, SCORPIO, we learn more about the early days of NARC, how the department was set up, who was involved, and their first 'pivotal' syndicate bust, which took place in the Jupiter system, at a time when the government of Earth didn't actually trust NARC to deploy back home! Saying more here without getting into plot spoilers would be difficult.

NARC is based on the biggest carriers in space, built in Kure, Japan, by Mitsubishi Aerospace. Each ship is a kilometer in length; they house a squadron of four gunships, and the "descant troops," units of armored soldiers, whose task is to jump into the urban battlefield and lock horns with the high-tech of syndicates like Equinox and Death's Head. (The carriers are also the base ships for a small squadron of fighter-interceptor aircraft, the VM-104 Corsairs, a dozen transports, and a motley assortment of other light craft, including at least one Yamazake Apogee).

But the urban battleground is only one of the fronts on which NARC fights. Their war is more often about data, jurisdiction, espionage and "deep cover" work, assignments taking their special agents ... such as Kevin Jarrat and Jerry Stone ... undercover into the hearts of the syndicates. Dangerous work, which will one day probably claim their lives — and they know it! In DEATH'S HEAD the urban battlefield is the smoggy, dirty slums beside the spaceport. In EQUINOX, it was the heart of a vast city smoldering in the deep emerald shade of the gas giant, Zeus, and in SCORPIO, the warzone is an arctic region where humans have built fantasy cities to escape from both the climate and the old, corrupt city bottom. Taking the Angel war into these zones stretches NARC to its limits.



Michael Vidal and the hellgate probe ship

Setting the scene...

The Hellgate backstory

On the edge of a region of space so terrible it has long been known as 'Hellgate,' the super-carriers of Earth's DeepSky Fleet play an endless cat-and-mouse game with the starship wreckers, the privateers who, alone, can navigate the wilds of the Rabelais Drift.

The super-carriers are the most magnificent ships in space, but under the iron control of a corrupt officer corps, unanswerable to any authority, parsecs from the nearest center of civilian or military justice, these leviathans have become hellships where conscripts are used up and discarded. And in an era where enforced conscription is a way of life, anyone — everyone — will serve the DeepSky Fleet. Many will be assigned to carriers.

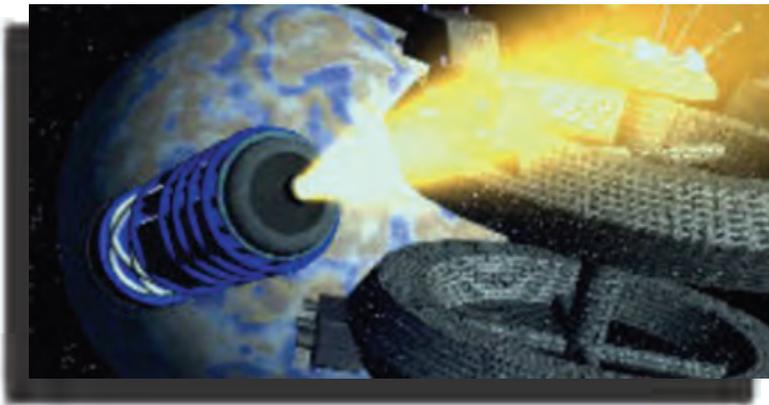
It is thirty years since the Confederacy instituted its 'strong Fleet policy,' first taxing the far-flung colonies to build the ships, then conscripting their young people to crew them. Decades ago, Earth's military scientists first became aware of a shadowy nemesis, a faceless enemy so powerful, humankind's closest companion in this region of space was obliterated.

The same fate awaits Mankind, with only the DeepSky Fleet holding defiance against the dimly perceived foe known simply as the Zunshu. But as the day grows ever-nearer for the DeepSky Fleet to fight this ultimate battle, its infrastructure is rotting at the core.

The super-carriers can barely keep pace with the wreckers — mere human foes — and their abused crews have no concept of the mission they were recruited and trained to fight.

Into this arena of misery step two unlikely players. Travers and Marin are from worlds so vastly different, they have only their conscripted military service in common — that, and the desire to survive, to see justice done, and to uncover the truths still hidden by Earth's distant government. Travers is still in the service, but his connections to the privateer fleet would be more than enough to execute him. His current assignment is the super-carrier Intrepid, his field of conflict, the Rabelais Drift ... Hellgate.

In an age of rampant injustice, often justice must be pursued on a personal level. This mission brings Curtis Marin aboard the carrier as the executor of a sanction purchased by a citizen whose son was murdered by a travesty of justice. Marin has come aboard as an assassin ... if he can stay alive long enough to complete his mission ... and if the carrier herself can survive the corruption of her officer corps, the endless battle with the privateers, and the insuperable forces of nature that churn across the ripped face of the void known as Hellgate.



MEL KEEGAN

NARC



DEATH'S HEAD

MEL KEEGAN

NARC



EQUINOX

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SCORPIO

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3.5



STOPOVER

MEL KEEGAN

NARC

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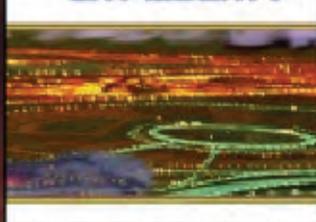


APHELION

MEL KEEGAN

HELLGATE

CRY LIBERTY



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HELLGATE

PROBE

