

“Welcome To The Mare Inebrium Spaceport Bar...”

“I believe that a more formal introduction may be in order”

The Comte de St. Germain, 1748

Where to begin? Well, I suppose a short origin story wouldn't be a lick amiss. Back in the late 1970s I hadn't long been out of High School, and had run through my college funds in just a few short years at the University of Georgia. I eventually found myself gainfully employed in a factory in Athens. Boring, repetitive, mind-numbing physical labor and I were not strangers at the time. In order to fill the mental void of the long shifts at the factory I began scribbling down various daydreams that my mind produced. In one well worn little notepad, I chanced to record a few lines, narrative hooks they're called. Possible opening lines to some putative story or other. It just so happened that in 1979 I dashed off a few words that seemed meaningful at the time.

“That's the trouble with time travel,” said the man with blue hair.

Little did I know at the time what those innocent words would grow to be in the future. I kept that notepad, filling it eventually with other random thoughts. Then I filled several more. Time passed, in the dull, plodding way that time seems to prefer when it dallies with a 20-something growing into a 30-something young man. I read thousands of SF&F books, listened to a wide variety of different kinds of music, I collected comic books and textbooks and novels and indulged myself in drawing, painting, attempting to learn how to play different musical instruments, and so on. I kept busy, in other words. I lived in a

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series of apartments, with a series of roommates. One of whom proved especially adept at sparking my creativity. In one besotted evening he and I came up with the idea of a bar located at the North pole of Earth's moon. We joked about it for months, our literary influences battling with our alcoholic influences. After a few years, my friend left to pursue a real job, as well as the love of his life. I also pursued as many of my interests as possible. Eventually I found myself in possession of a typewriter. Or it possessed me, I could never tell which. I began trying to develop some of the stories that I'd dreamed up years before. And then the Internet happened.

I began working on the background material back in the 1970s- even though I didn't know it at the time. I jotted down notes for story ideas, drew maps of places I imagined, made up names... And the material piled up. Then came a snowstorm and cabin fever brought me a challenge from someone annoyed with me. I began to write a story, to prove that I could do better than the TV movie I was complaining about when the challenge was issued.

Turns out that first one wasn't very much of a story. Oh, it had a beginning, middle, and end. It had action, a monster, a damsel in distress, a daring rescue, a mighty magic spell to defeat the monster, the death of one of the heroes... and it was about 8 to 12 pages long... handwritten. Clearly I had more to learn. Eventually, I thought up a place where my stories could happen, pulled all my maps together and made them fit, shuffled my notes and outlines, and thought deeply for a very long time. Then I re-plotted the story to fit the new playground, and came up with a lot of background concepts to influence the events of whatever story uses the backdrop. Before I was through I had a map of the planet's one landmass and an 11,000+ year-long time line of its history. I knew the major players and the minor characters, I knew the names of landmarks in the native language I'd made up, the big stories and the small ones. Now if I only knew how to write effectively...

Of course, this was back in the days that a typewriter was the state of the art word processor. Computers were either big, clunky machines built to do one thing at a time, or they were little boxes

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that you hooked up to your TV set to play games like Pong, or Breakout, or Pinball. Eventually there came the TRS-80s and the C64s, and the like. Grand old computers, for their time. I have over a hundred pages of outline for my first attempt at a Bethdish novel stored on audio cassette and a hardcopy printed out from an old TRS-80 CoCo3. I have had roughly a third of it online as "Threat of Valleor" since the late '90s... But I digress. About the time that modern computers were in their second generation, I made the leap from a 128k CoCo3 to a 33Mgh 386 with a whopping 16 megs of RAM and a 20 meg hard drive running Windows 3.1 and good old DOS. I started transcribing my files from the CoCo3 into the 386. That turned out to be harder work than I expected, since I was expanding on the outline as I was transcribing it. It also slowed me down, and above all, showed me a bright warning flag that I still had a lot to learn about this writing gig. So a third of the way through transcribing this novel outline, I decided that I needed to learn to write short stories so that I can more quickly learn to write better.

And so the Mare Inebrium series was moved from Earth's moon to my little planet of Bethdish. But I was still setting my stories in the same general background. Adjustments had to be made. Continuity mistakes were made also. Then the Mare became an online Shared Universe with its third story- the first one that I didn't write. Further continuity tweaking became necessary. And I had to scramble to keep up with all the other new writers for the series. Inventing new details to answer their questions, writing my own stories as richly in relevant details as I could create. Rejecting the few that violated my elaborate continuity... Well, actually, I pointed out the violations and asked for re-writes. Detail became added to detail. But the Mare writers are almost never allowed to venture outside of the spaceport city the bar is located within. The rest of the planet is mine alone.

As I said, eventually I bought a computer, was dragged online kicking and screaming and deathly afraid of computer viruses, and within a short while was passing my little stories around various creative writing websites. In 1997 I wound up with my own website, Aphelion Webzine. I had two spaceport bar stories online at that time, and then a good friend asked if he could write

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a story in my bar. The Mare Inebrium, as an online shared universe series was born. I wound up with half a dozen stories in the series, which quickly grew to dozens of writers and almost a hundred stories. I had to set ground rules and a regular cast of characters for the series writers.

Here you will meet Max, the bar's manager and head bartender, his girlfriend Trixie and her friend Blanche who are waitresses there, Kazsh-ak Teir one of the bar's most famous alien patrons and storytellers, Mister Polios the mysterious owner of the establishment, Bruce the bouncer in the main bar, the Reeve of the Immortals, who is the Top Cop on the planet and Ambassador for the various native species, several different narrator characters to tell the various stories, and so on. This volume contains my all original stories in the series, as well as many new stories I wrote expressly for this book. Tales untold for nearly two decades, as they languished in my notes until the need arose.



This is the world where most of my stories take place. Bethdish is a world circling a star called Antuth by the natives (who named the star after the chief deity in their pantheon),

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presently some 65 light years from Earth. Rumor has it that the entire solar system had earlier been located in the Andromeda Galaxy, but was moved by some mysterious force to its new location in our own Milky Way Galaxy. The surviving written history of Bethdish covers some 12,000 years, (with the aforementioned displacement to the Milky Way occurring in their year 6055 -- circa 3068 AD, Terran Calendar) but the records of the Immortals reportedly go back roughly a billion years and relate the rise and fall of several civilized eras of non-immortal natives before the present recorded history begins.

The Immortals claim to have been directly created by the Gods of Bethdish, while the diverse non-immortal species are said to have evolved naturally. The several alien colonies now present are, of course, immigrants. One Xenoeologist of note, Professor Eustas Gray of the Emperor Norton University of San Francisco, has published several monographs on the subject of excavations on Bethdish that purport to uphold the Immortal's beliefs. Other experts in the field dispute his findings, but all the evidence is not yet in.

The following example is an English translation of a fragment of one of the folk tales from the prehistoric eras of the planet, preserved as a "grandfather tale" from various native civilizations on Bethdish:

**"I am the sole arbiter of princes and
battles,
The sole lonely judge of pirates and prey.
I chose between those who are heroes or
villains,
And each I send on their infinite way.
Reward or damnation, their own separate
way.
I judge without malice-
High standards have I.
To the hero the chalice.
To the villain, the flame.
But *who* will be *what* is no simple say..."**

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*From the Song of T'nishe-t'alla, Judge of Princes & Battles, God of War. Composed by the Bard Oroden during the Lost Times. Preserved from oral history by transcript recordings of traditional native songs. Transcription made possible by the Planetary History department of the Collegium Lux, City of Lights.

City of Lights, the spaceport city, is one of the few places on the planet where non-native technology is allowed. The rest of the world is set aside for the natives to develop at their own pace. There are laws against interfering with the natural development of the native civilizations. The Reeve enforces these laws strictly, yet fairly.

The building that houses the Mare Inebrium is a close replica of the Empire State Building in New York City. A little taller, without the airship mooring mast, but looking as if the two buildings were designed by the same hand. The bar takes up several levels of the building, with the main bar being on the ground floor, surrounded by various smaller rooms with special themes. These specialty rooms allow stories that can't possibly take place in the main bar to have a more intimate setting. One geared more towards the needs of a particular story. Each of the side bars have their own cast of bartenders, wait-staff, and bouncers as needed. If a story needs to be about Space Rangers, military types, pirates, and frequent bar fights, it might be set in the Red Dog Saloon side bar. If the tale needs a more civilized, private setting, it could take place in the "gentleman's club" side bar called Piper's. If the story involves deities, writers, and other beings of enormous power, it usually takes place upstairs in the Pantheon Room. If the story requires a stage for music or theatrical performances, it can be set in the Small Ballroom side bar. The main bar is quite large, with room for several hundred patrons at once. The walls are decorated with paintings, mirrors that can shift to show a view inside one of the side bars rather than reflections, and displays of alien artifacts scattered about tastefully. The bar itself is up against the back wall of the main room, behind the bar are shelves of hundreds of varieties of beverages alternating with mirrors the bar staff can use to

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discretely monitor the needs of the patrons. Around the perimeter of the room are booths for groups of customers, closer in are tables anchored to the floor, and up closer to the bar itself are tables and chairs that float freely enough to move into whatever positions a customer might need. Right up next to the bar is an open area to allow customers to gain access to the seats at the main bar itself. The floors of the building above the main bar contain various restaurants, shops, meeting rooms, and even hotel rooms. The top floor of the building houses a very fancy restaurant with views of the city spreading out into the far distance.

It has been a long, strange journey from then to now. As I slowly learned to be a better writer, my little scribbled notes have grown into an entire book. Along the way my very earliest bar stories came to inspire other writers to explore the limits of my initial concept. As they pushed the boundaries of the bar into new and exciting directions, I learned more about my own creation. In order to keep up, I had to become even more creative. I look forward to hearing just how well or badly y'all think I've done. Keep me posted, please,

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Casa Vila, Colbert, GA
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