

# BEYOND TERRESTRIAL FUTURITY

AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCRAPBOOK PROJECT BY MITCHELL SHERMAN  
FOR PROF. SARAH ENSOR'S ENG 449: SEXUALITY, GENDER AND ECOLOGY



## The Great Mistake: From Cradle to Grave

“The earth is the cradle of the mind but one cannot eternally live in the cradle” - Konstantin Tsiolkovsky

Tsiolkovsky's quote is often cited with “humanity” replacing “the mind.” This is an odd and important modification. A cradle is a tender place. It is something provided to protect and nurture through the transition of infancy into early childhood. It is a privilege to have a cradle; a gift from parents who have the means to provide it. If humanity finds itself cradled, in a state of infancy, thrust into a world whose time span finds the species so insignificant that it is imperceptible when represented as anything other than a discreet point, then universe provides no developmental timeline and we must create our own—as we dutifully have.

However, if “the mind” is in a cradle then a developmental timeline ceases to be legible and becomes amorphous and unwieldy. And if “the mind” finds itself cradled, then perhaps it represents inability to fully comprehend the flourishing potential of our own imaginations; thus we must think our way into new forms of *being* in the universe.

*Beyond Earth* encourages its participants to imagine new forms of being and then to invest in new forms of being through participating in their development and expansion. The game is set 600 years into the future and follows an event called “the great mistake” that drives humanity to seek new beginnings away from Earth. The specifics of the collapse are ambiguous but it is implied that they are ecological, environmentally-based and a result nuclear war; it implicates humanity simply through the language of mistake.

The use of ambiguity to detail why Earth is abandoned not only forces the player to focus on the present, world/civilization-building within the game but also forces a projection of their own theories of

collapse from the player. This illustrates an perceived inevitability of collapse (past tense for the game, future tense for humanity) that is certain, even if the shape that it takes is not. But it forces the player to accept the future collapse of their globalized society contemporaneously with the imagined past of the game and work to build an Earthly paradise beyond earth.

The player chooses a faction directly inspired by current global nations and their imagined societal trajectories and then selects a landing plot from which to expand and explore the new biosphere. The goal is always victory and the paths towards it vary. But the ultimate means is always already imperialism, the end is always already a reestablishment of a dominant global culture that works to protect, exploit, or assimilate all life into its systems. By mid-game, the player has explored the new planet and progressed through their tech-web (a non-linear research matrix) deeply enough to establish an “affinity” which enables the paths towards victory to become more readily perceived.

Beyond each affinity's victory path, there are two alternatives: global domination through conquest, which requires the advanced warfare technology provided by an entrenched affinity –or– through establishing contact with the Progenitors, an alien species who left clues of their existence throughout the new planet that the player must exhume. While domination is often the most engaging path to take since it requires the most strategy and while contact is perhaps the most intriguing, the affinities and their victory paths provide unique and attentive imaginings of humanity's future role in the universe.

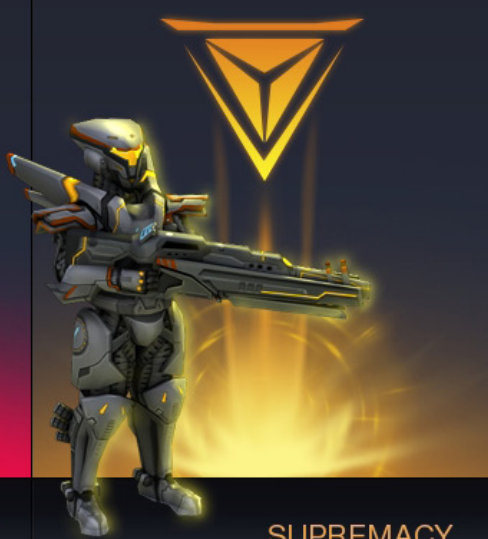
## AFFINITIES

My psychohistorical simulations suggest that our society could evolve in three very different directions, or Affinities, based primarily on which technologies we invest our research in. As we level up in a specific Affinity, we will gain benefits which will help us adapt to life on this planet, and unlock powerful upgrades to our military units.



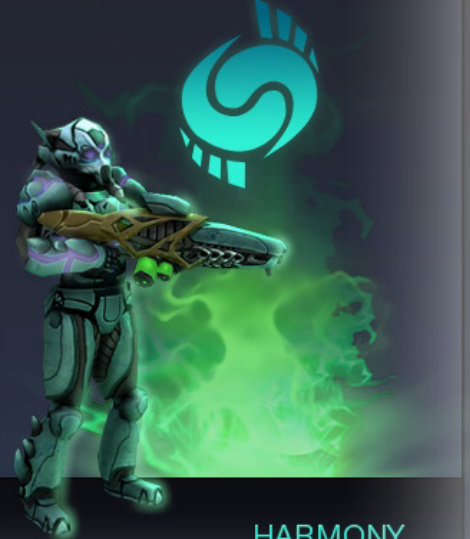
### PURITY

Reveres and preserves our origins on Old Earth, and reshapes the new planet in its image - an ideal home for an ideal human race.



### SUPREMACY

Looks neither to the old or new world, but draws on human ingenuity and technology to transcend to a new, independent existence.



### HARMONY

Embraces and learns from the new planet, merging the lessons into itself to evolve into a new form of humankind.

Civilizations that embrace “Purity” uphold and maintain “humanity” as it is most traditionally understood. Purity civilizations rely upon farming, biospheres, and terraforming to produce a more Earth-like civilization on their planet. Their cities slowly adopt neo-classicist architecture, harkening back to an idealized past to inform an unknown future.

Purity entrenches itself into the alterity between wilderness and human, their soldiers fight in mechanized suits of armor and levitating battle platforms which provide separation between the humans and the contagion of an alien planet. Their planetary relationship is always antagonistic. Early on, the player is provided with a dilemma: vermin from earth have stowed away on the ship and have begun to populate the new planet. The player earns “purity” points by doing nothing. The purity player’s mantra is “more of the same.”

Purity’s victory is “The Promised Land” and achieved through the collection and re-settling of refugees from Old Earth.

Purity insists that humans are not a problem and that human society should transform its surroundings to accommodate its needs. It is the future imagined as manifest destiny, a proselytizing of humanity to alien worlds. But the hermetically sealed suits remain a necessity; the alien poisonous miasma still injures troops that enter it. Societally enforced antagonism ensures that antagonism proliferates ad infinitum.

Civilizations that embrace “Supremacy” transcend the human and natural through their adoption-of and reverence-for cybernetics. Supremacy’s cyborg future blends human and machine, tissue with metal to construct a society which leaves behind question of corporeality and singularity of the individual. While Supremacy uses terraforming, they are as much reliant upon computer nodes and a harnessing of geothermal energy to support their cities. Their cities adopt a sleek, metallic sheen with sharp architectural angles that represent a renovation of the human into something more elegant.

Supremacy is largely indifferent to the planet and its flora or fauna and exists parallel to it, their soldiers are fantastical robots and colossal machines driven through a web of artificial intelligences. Their strategic strengths are largely defensive, slow moving cannons with an immense range of fire and small automatons that gain potency if left immobile.

Supremacy is equally expansionist, they attain victory through “Emancipation”: by returning to Earth with an army to conquer and assimilate the remaining population into their cyborg society. The Supremacy player’s mantra is “resistance is futile.”

Supremacy is apathetic to questions of humanity or harmony, believing itself to be the natural evolution of a species susceptible to its environments. It is an alien society of apotheosis fostered through the translation of bodies and minds into cybernetic input.

Civilizations that embrace “Harmony” genetically modify their populous into the new planet’s biosphere and ecosystem. Harmony values xenomass, an alien elixir that gathers in pools throughout the planet; it provides everything their society needs to flourish. Planetary miasma that is deadly to others heals a Harmony player’s units as they pass through it. Their cities mutate into structures of biomass, more closely resembling ant hills than human settlements; they retire antiquated humanities to assimilate.

Harmony units appear increasingly insectoid and organic. Their soldiers are a fusion of local fauna, assimilated human beings, and genetically-engineered super creatures. Their strategic strengths are offensive.

Harmony gains victory through “Transcendence” with the construction of a planet-wide intelligence, the “mind flower” and a subsequent “awakening.”

Harmony is the most legibly ecologically-minded affinity. They are not afraid to touch or become intimate with their new biosphere. The affinity’s reverence for the environment lays within its ability to provide, nurture, and transform society and they acknowledge that humanity cannot merely enforce itself onto this ecosystem but must adapt in equal measure. Harmony, at its core, acknowledges a production through mixture and transformation of human and alien into something uncanny and post-human.