Apocalypse in "The Old Neighborhood"

Phantasies of Longtermism in Starfield and other Space-themed Digital Games

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Earth

Earth

Konstantin Tisolkovsky (1911)

"The Earth is the cradle of humanity, but mankind cannot stay in the cradle forever."

Hanna Arendt, Vita Activa (1958/2019)

Earth is the only place in space that is suitable for sustaining human life without further ado (p. 9).

Hanna Arendt, Vita Activa (1958/2019)

Improving human beings beyond their natural abilities and characteristics corresponds to a "rebellion of man against his own existence" (p. 10).

Longtermism

Ensuring the longterm survival of humanity.

Survival is always under the danger of existential risks, such as a nuclear war, the climate catastrophe, or a superintelligent AI.

Longtermists give a higher priority to the well-being of future human beings than to the well-being of the currently living ones and their direct descendants.

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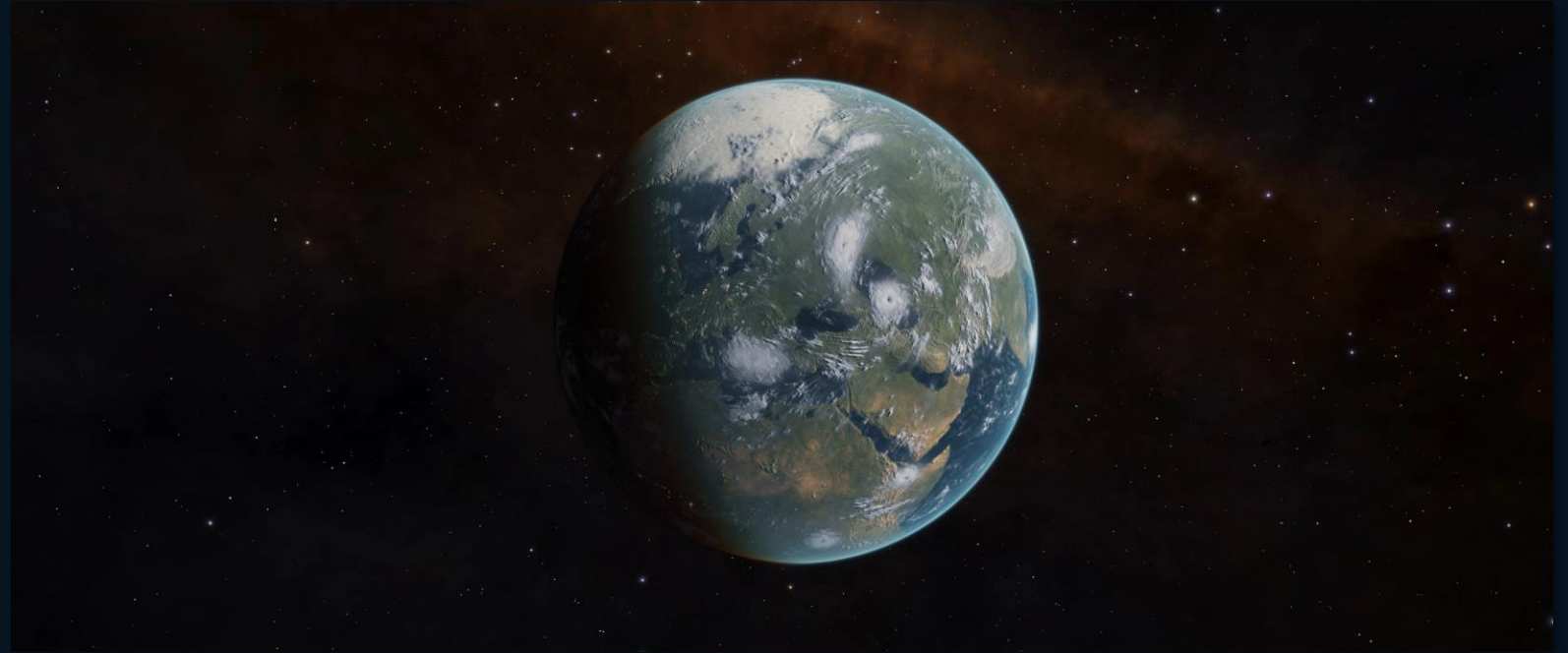
Elite

Elite (1984)

Elite

Elite (1984)

Elite Dangerous (2014)

Starflight

DOS version (1986)
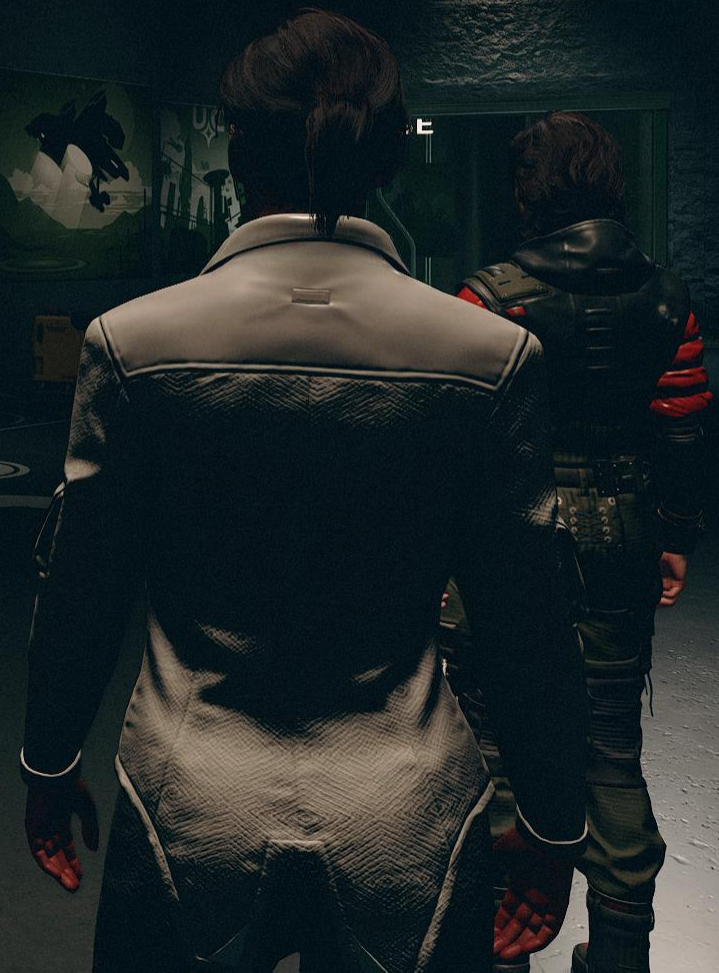
Starflight

DOS version (1986)

SEGA Genesis / Mega Drive version (1991)

THE END OF EARTH

Starfield

A few thousand privileged survived Earth's destruction by getting on a few spaceships in time. They ensure humanity's continued existence outside "the old neighborhood"

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- Freestar Collective: a libertarian mix of frontier myth & cyberpunk dystopia
- House Va'ruun: a theocracy which leans into being your crazy cliché cult

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No one lives in a liberal democracy.

Economic and social conditions are really bad except for the richest.

People **know** that it's bad. They suffer and they talk about it. But they don't act. And we can't act as well.
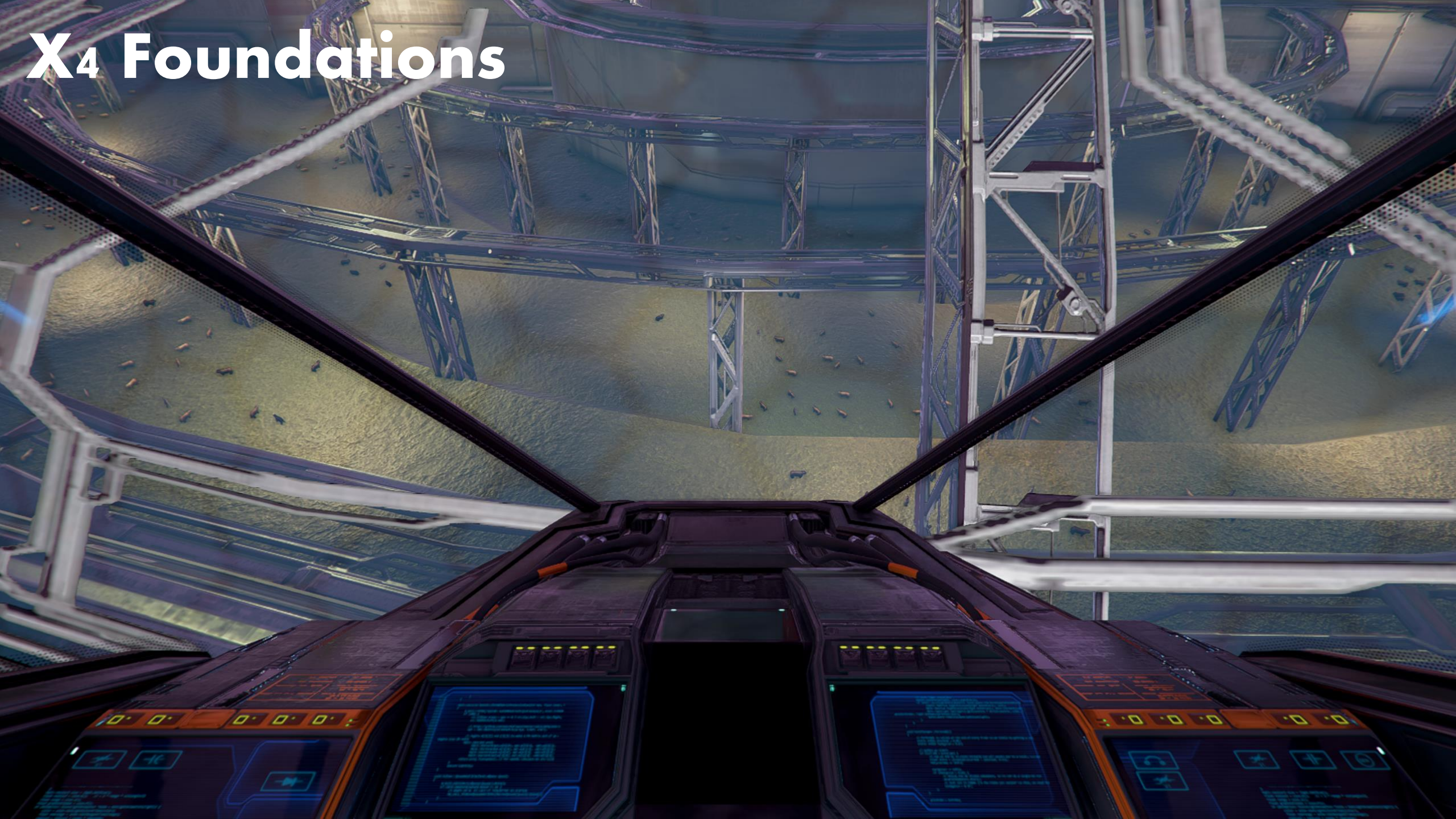
Starfield

Jade King (2023):

"I wish more quests and character motives were about rebelling and changing the systems of Starfield's world instead of nicely operating within them. I want to change things, not reinforce societal archetypes that ensure those on top remain immovable, while everyone beneath must struggle to make ends meet."

Earth, out of reach

No Heroes

Anja Kathrin Hild (2015):

Heroes are observable as acting in the political sense (p. 153)

(with Hannah Arendt; acting ≠ working ≠ producing)

Old and current space games depict working and producing in dangerous, exploitative and oppressive systems, but do not allow players to act against that system.

Gameplay loops depend on the former. Acting against the system would end the gameplay loop / the game would stop

e.g. X4 Foundations: when battles end, the economy simulation and with it the game itself comes to a halt.

Maybe, in our rather depressing world, we need more games which OVERCOME the old patterns.

Which throw away that old "future technology will save mankind" mantra.

Games which put Earth into reach again.