



From Anarchy to Empire

Interstellar governments in the STAR FRONTIERS[®] game

by David Cook

[Editor's note: David "Zeb" Cook was one of the original designers of the STAR FRONTIERS[®] game system. This article is "official" STAR FRONTIERS game material, though its principles may be applied to many science-fiction games.]

What lies beyond the Frontier? Eventually, the characters in a STAR FRONTIERS game campaign will start probing the reaches beyond the known star systems, and the referee should keep up with them by designing new sectors of space for the group to explore.

When preparing a new sector map, the referee should think about the governments that will control the planets in the sector. How many governments will

there be, and what will they be like? How will the different governments get along? These are just a few of the concerns that a referee must consider when devising interstellar governments.

Interstellar governments

Interstellar governments ruling planets in several different systems (as the UPF does) may or may not exist in a sector, as the referee desires. Some basic types of interstellar governments that may be used in the referee's sector are described briefly, with notes on how they work and what their aims or goals might be.

Trade federation: Under this govern-

ment, each member planet rules itself and has its own laws, but all the planets will have signed a trade agreement. This agreement promises free trade between all the member planets and also serves as a mutual peace treaty. The different planets will try not to interfere with each other's business. If one planet is attacked, the other planets will join with it to fight the enemy.

Trade federations are delicate and easily upset, since each member is in the federation for a profit. If a planet or a group of planets decides it can do better on its own or with another group, it may pull out of the federation. An example of a trade federation today is the European Common Market.

Galactic empire: All of the member planets are controlled by one government, usually based on one planet which is considered the heart of the empire. All other planets may be treated as colonies, provinces, or states of the empire. Because an empire tries to control everything from one place, it is often corrupt or loaded with layers of bureaucracy.

An empire stays in power by keeping its subjects (the people) happy and by the liberal use of military force. Since empires have a way of getting in trouble if they stand still, they are often trying to expand their frontiers by colonization or by military control. The ancient Roman Empire is an example after which interstellar empires may be modelled.

Political federation: Each member planet rules itself; however, all planets belong to one loose governmental body, and all must follow certain standards of conduct. The United States of America and the UPF are political federations.

More possibilities exist, of course. The referee should feel free to create any other interstellar government he wants.

Planetary governments

When designing a planet, the referee needs to think about the government controlling the world. Even though the planet may be part of an interstellar union, it may have its own laws and elected officials. Many sorts of governments operate among human worlds, and alien races may have governments that humans have never been able to make work. Some of the possible planetary governments are given below.

Anarchy: No organized government at all. Some Dralasite worlds do very well with this type (or lack) of government.

Company-owned world: A planet controlled by a company or corporation and run for profit. This system is common on Vrusk worlds.

Confederacy: A number of smaller areas banded together under one loose planetary government. Yazirian clans often form confederations.

Democracy/republic: A government run by elected representatives. Humans and Dralasites favor this option.

Dictatorship: Absolute rule by one leader. Humans sometimes have this government.

Monarchy: Rule by a king or queen, usually of one family. Only Humans use this type of government.

Plutocracy: A government run by those with the most wealth — another popular government used by the Vrusk.

Socialist state: The state owns and controls most activities for the equal good of all people. Such states are often used by Humans and Dralasites.

Stratocracy: Rule by a nation's military leaders. Yazirians will often form this type of government, using the military leaders from each clan.

Syndicracy: Rule by an organization of the most powerful corporations on the planet. Vrusk favor these governments.

Theocracy: Government by religious leaders, sometimes seen among Humans and Yazirians.

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Many variations and combinations of these basic governmental structures are possible. A little research into Human history will turn up many more ways to rule a planet (or portion thereof).

Human and alien societies

A society is the way a group of people lives together — how members deal with each other, what they believe in, what they consider important, and how they work. Societies do not have specific natural laws to follow and seldom have written laws or regulations. People in a society generally know what is correct or incorrect; they learn this by experience as they grow up. This section gives general guidelines and suggestions on how to create interesting societies in a STAR FRONTIERS game.

To gain specific ideas on creating planetary societies, the game referee should check out some books on Earth-Human history and present societies. Human civilization is filled with examples of many different societies and cultures that may provide ideas for gaming.

Societies are formed from several different forces — the planet's races, governments, current laws, religions, climate, landforms, history, etc. To ask a referee to think out all these areas is far too time consuming. Instead, the referee should work with what he already knows about the planet.

The race of the inhabitants affects the society with its particular needs, likes, and dislikes; these, then, play a part in any planetary society of that race. If the referee creates a new race, he should write down what that race considers important and consider how that affects the culture.

The physical conditions on a planet affect how people live and what they consider important for their survival. If a planet has very little water, water becomes very important. People who waste water would be "bad," and bathing would be a luxury saved for special events. Swimming and boating might be terrifying for the average dry-lander. If a planet has a great deal of water, people who couldn't swim might become social misfits. The referee should think about the planetary conditions that might affect the society.

The government of a planet also affects the society's customs. A planetary dictatorship is rarely likely to tolerate free speech; people of such a planet may be unwilling to speak their minds. Under an anarchy, those citizens supporting an organized government may be considered dangerous or "strange." Atheists in a theocracy are bound to have difficulties with the focal government. The laws of the planet also make a difference. A theocracy has more laws dealing with religious crimes, while a dictatorship has laws to control free speech, and a plutocracy has laws to protect the very rich.

When creating a society for a STAR FRONTIERS planet, it helps to start by listing a few notable customs of the planet's citizens. These customs should be interesting and obvious to the player characters. The Dralasites of Inner Reach in the Frontier Sector dye their skin every day, for example. As the characters become more involved in the life on the planet, they will probably want to know why the Dralasites do this. By having the players ask such questions (and by giving them answers), the referee will slowly build a description of the society on the planet.

The referee should remember that it is not necessary to have every detail of a society worked out in advance. Significant customs and laws should be prepared, but playing the game and having the player characters get involved with life on the planet often helps the referee focus on the social elements he needs to evolve. The referee should make each planet distinctive and unique whenever possible, to enhance the enjoyment gained in playing the game.

