

The Mighty Mega-Corporations

STAR FRONTIERS® game background

by Kim Eastland

STAR FRONTIERS game characters confront a number of identifiable organizations throughout the course of their adventures (Star Law, the Sathar war machine, spy networks, etc.), but one organization stands out from all the rest: the Pan-Galactic Corporation.

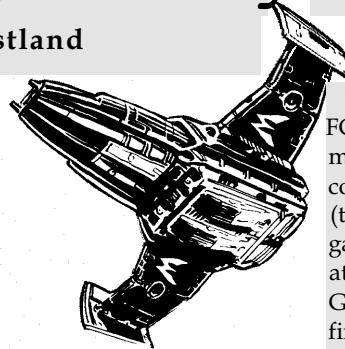
The STAR FRONTIERS Alpha Dawn basic game rules list Pan-Galactic as "the oldest and largest interstellar company." The history section explains how Pan-Galactic was established: "Soon, settled worlds in the Frontier became melting pots for the four races, with dazzling mixtures of architecture and alien cultures. To supply the needs of these worlds, the first interstellar company, the Pan-Galactic Corporation, was formed. It developed interests everywhere, from scientific research to farming to spaceship building. PGC even created its own language, Pan-Galactic, which soon became the most common language of all races on Frontier worlds; Many large companies which started later were modeled on PGC, but none approach the size or power of the Pan-Galactic Corporation."

In the STAR FRONTIERS Knight Hawks game, Pan-Galactic is mentioned as the largest of over a half dozen huge and multi-faceted corporations operating in the Frontier. How and when did Pan-Galactic's monopoly on the Frontier fail? Where did these other companies come from? The status of the mega-corps is the subject of this article.

The establishment of the PGC as the major mega-corporation on the Frontier was designed into the basic rules as a starting point from which game referees could launch their own scheme-of-things for corporate structures. The information given in the original STAR FRONTIERS Alpha Dawn game was applicable for the time of the First Sathar War. The information given for the Knight Hawks game is specifically placed at the beginning of the Second Sathar War, decades later. This article's material is based on the time period after the Second Sathar War, at the start of the Corporate Wars that followed. This allows referees to pick the time period their campaigns will occur in as well as the campaigns' locations.

Corporate History

Before discussing the "current" mega-corps, we should take a look at the past. The first large interstellar company was the Pan-Galactic Corporation; it is no exaggeration to say that the PGC ruled the Frontier in the early days. Like the great railroad corporations of late 19th- and early 20th-century Earth, the PGC was the only fast, safe way to travel through an unknown frontier for the millions of pioneers who yearned for land and their own fortunes. The PGC had its fingers in every pie, controlling financing, transportation, mining, industrial and agricultural organizations, and more on the Frontier worlds.



There is a lot to thank the FGC for in this early developmental period. It founded a common unit of currency (the credit), established the galactic board of trade, created and spread the Pan-Galactic common language, financed innumerable scientific breakthroughs that led frontiersman further and further into space, and did much, much more.

But there were great problems inherent with the one-company system. Corporate corruption became rife on the less civilized worlds. Often whole planets and races were at the mercy of the PGC's concept of "morality," and too often aesthetic values were lost to financial ones. No competition meant stagnation in many industrial areas and complete control of the economic system by a single entity. Possibly the worst problem, however, was the lack of autonomy on a planetary and interstellar scale because of the overwhelming dependence of the Frontier on one source for all its needs. Because of this last factor, it was inevitable that PGC would lose its monopoly on the Frontier.

During the period between the Sathar Wars, secret financial groups sprang up, investing money in land and various industrial operations and gaining power until their size could no longer be hidden from the PGC's eyes. Many of these initial investments were made in cities, planetary governments and militias, and even in the UPF itself. By the time PGC recognized its potential rivals, it



was too late; their footholds were established, and with them came planetary autonomy. Pan-Galactic's hold over the Frontier was broken at last. The new corporations decided to fight PGC on its own ground, making diverse investments and establishing their operations in the same areas as PGC's own operations.

This last point is very important, because without it, the Sathar could not have presented a serious threat to the UPF in the form of a Second Sathar War. Escalating competition between the larger companies, particularly PGC, the Strel Corporation, Greater Vrusk Mutual Prosperity Institution, and Cassidine Development Corporation, led to armed conflicts that required much of Star Law's and Spacefleet's time and energy to monitor and quell. Many galactic historians agree that without this debilitating distraction, the UPF forces would have been far better prepared for the Second Sathar War. For an example of Star Law's need to keep constant surveillance over the Frontier, see the STAR FRONTIERS® module SF4, *Mission to Alcazzar*.

With the coming of SWII, investments and corporate focus changed radically and swiftly. Many executives and design teams left the established mega-corps to found their own companies, aimed at far more specialized areas. Financing became available through planetary and galactic bonds created to increase local industry and jobs. Because of this shift of talent, many of the established mega-corps decided not to compete with these emerging companies, choosing to shut down those particular operations of their own which were now forced into competition. The logic behind this was based on the larger investment firms' solid belief that specialized companies could not grow to any significant size and, thus, would later be merged back into existing mega-corps.

This was a disastrous mistake by the few mega-corps of those pre-war years and clearly shows the tunnel vision and lack of foresight which permeated the top executive levels at that time. The specialized firms grew at unprecedented rates and reinvested their income in their own specific areas, not in mergers and outside acquisitions. Because of this, within years, the thought of traveling with anyone but Trans-Travel or buying weapons from anyone but WarTech Inc., was all but absurd. They were the best in their fields, were reliable, and were competitive in their pricing lest some upstart company gain an advantage on them. In short, they represented reliabil-

ity in many areas that the PGC could not even compete in.

The single greatest factor preventing those embryonic firms from being swallowed by their richer cousins once they were successful was the UPF Anti-monopoly and Merger Laws, passed during the Second Sathar War. Wishing to discourage centralized industry, the UPF enacted numerous laws that prevented complete monopolies from forming and laid down complicated guidelines for mergers. So effective were these laws in curbing continuing corporate tyranny that they were kept "on the books" following SWII. The animosity some of the older mega-corps felt towards the UPF Governing Council's decision to keep these laws is still felt today.

The Corporate Wars

The term "Corporate Wars" was not coined until a decade after SWII. The first use of the term was by WarTech, Inc., in a special weapons catalog they released for various industries. The media quickly picked up on the term and pumped it to its sensationalistic best (after all, things had been pretty calm since SWII).

The true beginnings of the Corporate Wars are actually decades old. In fact, they started before SWII began. The confrontation that started the war is described in the STAR FRONTIERS® Knight Hawks game: "Laco's World (Dixon's Star) is the scene of a decade-long conflict between the Strel Corporation on one side and Pan-Galactic Corporation operating through the Galactic Task Force on the other. Tens of thousands of casualties have been inflicted on the planet, and more than a dozen space-ships have been destroyed in what has come to be called 'Laco's War'." This war started and was settled before SWII, the results decided by PGC's extravagant military expenditures. This set the pattern for future corporate conflicts of an "unnegotiable nature."

At first, the UPF could not afford to go to war with every corporation who raised an army or space fleet. With the sudden reintervention of the Sathar, culminating in SWII, corporations ceased their hostilities to combine their efforts against the common foe. But the end of the war quickly brought resumed tensions and private military escalations began anew. This time, however, the UPF was mobilized for such occurrences. New laws gave Star Law more power over corporate infringement on other corporate operations and prop-

erty. Spacefleet was rearmed and could easily intimidate smaller fleets. For a while it looked like the UPF forces could prevent any occurrences leading to further "Laco's Wars."

Unfortunately, the government didn't reckon with the mega-corps greed or resources. A combination of swelled mega-corporate coffers from the Second Sathar War, thousands of unemployed soldiers no longer on the UPF's payroll, and the emergence of specialized companies who thrived on military conflict resulted in an escalation of corporation warfare to a previously unknown level.

In addition to covert Sathar, Mechanon, and pirate activities, the UPF security forces now had to deal with full scale invasions, sieges, and battles fought by over a dozen mega-corps and conglomerates of smaller firms. It is during this time period that the information in this article (*and the one following in next month's AREST™ Section - Ed.*) applies.

Stages of a Corporate War

To better understand the Corporate Wars, one must go to Star Law and their guideword for rookie Deputy Officers: ICEWARS! This acronym outlines the seven steps of escalation usually seen in a Corporate War:

* *Interest conflict* — A conflict of interest develops between two corporate entities over mineral rights, world development rights, or whatever.

* *Corporate espionage* — Usually an increase in corporate spying takes place after the initial conflict of interest develops. If results indicate the opposing corporations' goals are not in actual conflict, then the entire matter is cleared up immediately.

* *Economic sanctions* — If espionage does indicate a conflict exists, economic sanctions are imposed to pressure the opposing corporation out of the conflict. Sometimes this works, sometimes it doesn't.

* *Withdrawal* — When economic sanctions do not pressure either side out of a conflict of interest, then a rapid withdrawal of corporate personnel and equipment from the site begins. This "pullout" sometimes confuses opponents into believing the economic sanctions worked. Generally, it is a prelude to war.

* *Armed Conflict* — Once a site is deemed to be vacated by a corporation of any potential "hostage" personnel or material, mercenaries are sent in to "hold" the site while "negotiations" proceed.

* *Reinforcements* — The inevitable hostilities are exchanged and reinforcements are sent in to “protect the corporate interests.” The actual war has now begun and “negotiations” continue to be held while the war continues. The length of the war varies. The shortest war on record was between two moon-mining colonies around Outer Reach in the Dramune system. A stray maxi-missile with two high explosive warheads bit a cache of TD-19 in a tin hut and the blast of shrapnel punctured every spacesuit worn in the battle. Actual battle time: 3 minutes. Casualties: 135 dead. The longest war on record is the great PGC-Streel War over Laco in Dixon’s Star system. Actual battle time: 10 years. Casualties: 235,000 dead, 367,000 wounded, 170 tril-credits in equipment destroyed.

* *Stabilization* — When one corporation wishes to withdraw from the conflict, because of the drain on its resources or the inevitability of its defeat, the “negotiations” suddenly become serious and the conflict is usually resolved within a week. Terms of “surrender” range from full reparations for the victorious corporation’s financial outlay to the withdrawal

of the losing corporation’s forces.

It should be remembered that these wars are no longer fought on developed worlds within the Frontier. Nearly all battles occur on newly discovered worlds and moons. If a corporate war is seriously effecting the health or welfare of a planet on the Frontier, Spacefleet may step in and end the conflict in the swiftest, surest fashion it knows, by space bombardment, blockade, and other procedures. No corporation has ever won a battle with Spacefleet’s forces.

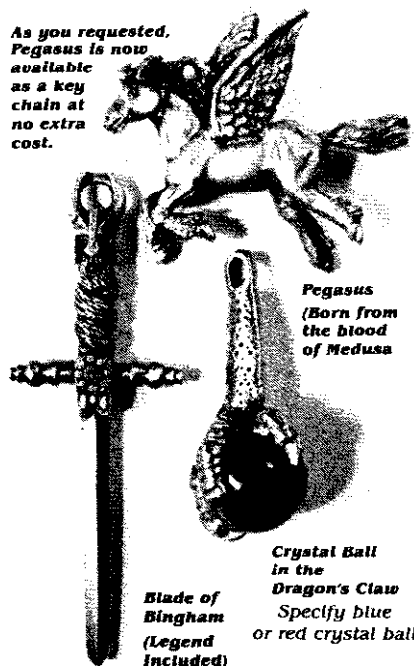
For campaign play’s sake, it is also important for the referee to remember that forces within the mega-corps often make for unpredictable developments. Power struggles between executives are commonplace. The cadres, akin to modern labor unions, are strong in certain industries, and a planetary government certainly affects a mega-corps operating procedures (not to mention the effects of the UPF government and Star Law on corporate policies).

Look for a detailed list of the major mega-corporations of the Frontier in next month’s ARES™ Section.

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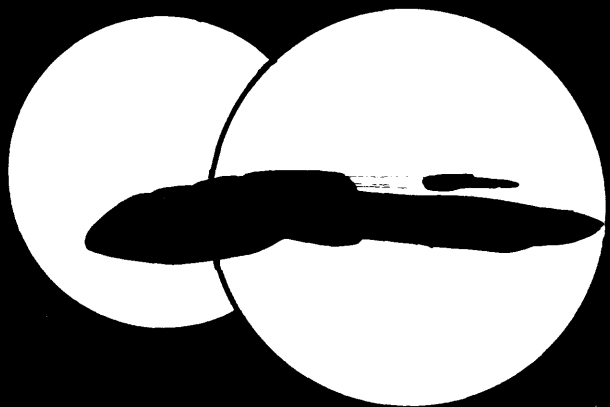
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