



STARSECTOR ATLAS 2

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The Mercantile League

THE FOUNDATION OF THE MERCANTILE LEAGUE

The origins of the Mercantile League of Planets are bound up in the Exodus period of human colonization of the galaxy (c. 2065-2190). The early phase of Mankind's settlement of worlds beyond the Solarian StarSystem was not the happiest period in the race's history. What might have been a glorious era in humanity's evolution was made morbid and cruel by the oppressive policies of the infamous Pure Earth movement on Terra.

The first interstellar colonies were established by the United Planets government of Terra as little more than 'Botony Bay' penal settlements. The OutWorlds were used as places of exile for social and political undesirables whom the Pure Earth regime felt were expendable or even enemies of their misguided plan to create a paradise on Terra. The transportees were driven like slaves to produce food and raw materials for the insatiable, ever-growing billions of Terra. Their rights and freedoms as sentient beings were denied. Even the safety of the colonists was utterly ignored; production and more production was all that counted.

The free colonists of the Terran L-5 colonies, Luna, Mars, and the other Home Worlds were gradually but inexorably reduced to the same level as the transportees. The Pure Earthian colonial administrators ground everyone down equally with spiralling taxes. Impossible production quotas were imposed, with savage penalties for failure to meet those quotas. Ridiculously low prices were paid for colonial products, while correspondingly exorbitant prices were charged for imported manufactured goods from Terra. Since imports were generally vital items needed for the very survival of the colonies, the bitterness of the colonials could only reach explosive levels. Philosophically unable to admit the importance of space travel and the OutWorlds, the Pure Earth regime on Terra finally made a fatal error. The responsibility for construction and manning of the spacecraft linking Terra and the Outworlds was placed in the hands of the L-5 colonists.

In 2136, the Solarian OutPlanets revolted against Terran tyranny and established the High Republic. In their contempt for all things of the Earth, the Pure Earthian fanatics had allowed Terran space technology and production capacity to lapse, leaving such 'frivolous' matters to the L-5 colonies. Thus Terra found itself unable to enforce its will beyond the atmosphere when the revolt occurred. Rather than rising to the challenge, the Pure Earthers abandoned space entirely. It was argued that development of an armed Space Force would bleed Terra of vital resources and production needed to support its burgeoning population.

(For a detailed treatment of this period of Terran history, refer to the 'SocioTechnic History of the United Federation of Planets' by Tal Maleena, Ac.Em., summarized in *StarSector Atlas 1*).

Though the insane policies of the Pure Earth government denied direct access to space, Terra was far from cut off from the OutWorlds until much later. Trade had to continue with the OutWorlds if Terra was to survive at all. In the decades after 2136, many Terrans were also able to emigrate to the stars. The Pure Earth regime did not discourage the practice at first, as the OutWorlds were attracting the most troublesome elements in the developed regions of North America, Japan, WestEurope, and the SovWorld. Resentment against Pure Earth policies was deepest in these regions, upon which the greatest sacrifices had been imposed to support the exploding populations in the less developed areas.

Many intelligent and skilled Terrans saw the proverbial handwriting on the wall and fled Terra before its entire socioeconomic structure collapsed in 2175. As one North American immigrant quipped upon landing at Tycho City, Luna, 'Just another bunch of rats off the sinking ship, chums!' These immigrants were to form the mass of the colonials scattering across a volume of space over 1500 light-years across. There were colonies in the Deneb Cluster by 2088, forming the nucleus of the Azuriach Imperium. Immigrants from the SovWorld headed for colonies in NCG 1039, the future heart of the Galactic Peoples' Republic. Many from North America, Britain, and the old Commonwealth, and Japan, settled either in the High Republic or one of its OutWorld colonies.

But there were also a number of latecomers who arrived in the final years of the Pure Earthian debacle. They were perhaps the most rootless of all. For they knew only the hated culture of Pure Earthian Terra. Their historic cultural roots had been vigorously suppressed by the Pure Earth regime as it struggled desperately to impose regimented uniformity on scores of billions during the last 40 years of its existence. Rejecting everything they knew of life on earth, these new colonials were unable to adjust to the life-styles of the High Republic and the other colonial groupings. For these cultures were simply too alien for people brought up on latter day Pure Earthist Terra. Indeed, many found themselves reacting little less hostilely to their new environments than they did towards the mindless conformism and regimentation of life on Terra.

Many of the colonists were highly intelligent specialists - scientists, engineers, and skilled technocrats - who had been forbidden to emigrate because they were essential to Terra's failing industries, hydroponic farms, and transportation net. Courageously escaping alone or with their families on ships of the High Republic, they longed for the freedom to turn their skills to personal profit. These young men and women were prime candidates for the new and massive colonizing projects being planned by the entrepreneurs of the OutWorlds to open up the planets of the Antares StarSector.

The economic potential of the OutWorlds was obvious to anyone with imagination and intelligence. Blocs of companies and wealthy entrepreneurs pooled their resources to colonize new worlds, sometimes charging settlement premiums to immigrants seeking a better life. Others with still more imagination acted to establish extensive mining, agricultural, and manufacturing complexes on worlds rich in natural resources and fertile soils to provide the products so urgently needed on Terra. Thus began the Mercantilist Dispersion (2140-2190).

The first Mercantilist expedition to the Antares OutWorlds was launched by a conglomerate of 11 companies in 2140. It was the first of a series of superbly planned, financed, and equipped private commercial ventures on a major scale. Almost 700,000 colonists were transported in nine waves to establish a completely self-sustaining colony on the worlds of the Augusta system in the Antares sector. The backers of the project selected the majority of the colonists from the latest exiles from Terra. These were engaged as employees of the founding corporations. The exiles had great difficulty adjusting to the largely unregulated life of the High Republic and, while loathing totalitarian government, they found the disciplined life of vibrant corporations congenial and promising.

The corporations found that, with proper treatment, their new employees transferred intense loyalty to their employers. To the last man and woman, the exiles from Terra hated all 'statist' governments that fenced in people with a treacherous morass of unending laws, regulations, and taxes, the whole administered by self-important bureaucrats who delighted in mountains of red tape. They simply wanted to get on with the job, unfettered by authority. Since their desire for freedom to work and prosper exactly suited the aims of the entrepreneurs, the Terran exiles were prime candidates for the Antares colonies.

The Free Colonies prospered. The products of the finest minds in human entrepreneurial circles, the colonies boasted operational mines and factories within ten years. A growing stream of food-stuffs, manufactured goods, and raw resources moved from the Antares Worlds to Terra, the High Republic, and a number of the other colonial OutWorlds. In 2176, the first StarShip was launched by Tetragammetron Shipyards on Augusta, and the beginning of what would become a huge interstellar merchant fleet came to pass. By 2180, eleven worlds had been settled in the Antares sector, and almost eight million colonists had been attracted by the unlimited opportunities for advancement and profit.

The general collapse of Terran society by 2175 did not put a lasting brake on Free Colony markets and development. The worlds of the High Republic and more than a hundred known outworld colonies took up the slack. New races were also being discovered - entire planets and groupings of planets full of potential customers. Often less advanced than Humanity and eager to purchase high-technology goods, these worlds proved to be a rich source of profit.