# Without Rule: Anarchies and Informal Governments in Traveller

## by John G. Wood

*Traveller's* government type 0 covers those societies with no government structure; in *GURPS* this means Anarchy or Clan/Tribal. Technically, only anarchies have no government -- the word "anarchy" means "without rule," or "without rulers" -- but tribes and other family-based communities have very informal government and are classified the same way by the IISS. For convenience, this article uses the term "anarchy" for both types of society, and "intentional anarchy" to refer to groups that have been deliberately set up with no government.

Anarchies have no political authority imposing order, and no formal social hierarchies; they do not have kings, presidents, CEOs, priests, or social classes. Not everyone has equal say, but influence is based on personal qualities and experience rather than formal positions. The lack of significant government structure means that there are also no police, no judges or other public officials -- and no taxes. Most anarchies do not, however, lack *organization* -- humans are social beings who often need to act together. Nor are they idylls in which bullying and other such coercive relationships have been banished. Anarchies are a group of societies like any other, with their own strong and weak points.

## Economics and Technology

Anarchies are generally weak economically, partly because they have too few members to sustain a wide diversity of economic activity, partly because society offers little incentive to produce more than is required for local use. As a result the locally-sustainable technological level is low, and they can afford little imported tech (though the advice given in Primitive, But Not Stupid applies). Sometimes the founders brought higher-tech devices with them, and then there *is* an incentive to earn enough to maintain them. Occasionally, offworld organizations may support an anarchy by providing useful equipment for their own reasons.

Because there is no money issued by the society, barter is the most common form of exchange. Sometimes there are standardized goods against which prices are measured (shells, metals, power cells), but not always. Imperial credits are usually highly prized (except on worlds without a starport); travelers will find their money goes a long way. Most imported goods or currency are bought with natural resources, though "cultural artifacts" also provide some income.

## Law and Order

Control Ratings (Law Levels) in anarchies are generally low, and enforced by the individuals of the local community. Conflict resolution is informal, although there is usually some procedure for airing grievances. Punishment is often based on social

sanctions -- disapproval and exclusion can be powerful deterrents. One consequence of this is that anarchic societies do, in fact, coerce their members into fitting in even if they loudly proclaim the opposite. In some intentional anarchies members are excluded from using any common resource they do not help to build or maintain.

Anarchies are, on average, no more or less violent than any other form of society -- murders and blood feuds are common in some kinship communities, while some intentional anarchies are largely pacifist -- but they do tend to be well-armed. Individual judgment is always considered important, and most anarchists are willing to make their own decisions and defend themselves if necessary.

How anarchies deal with outsiders in a dispute depends very much on the perceived power of the individual. An Imperial official, for instance, will likely be handled very carefully, whereas a ragtag band of adventurers-for-hire will be dealt with summarily -- unless they have bigger guns than the anarchists, which changes the power dynamics. Visitors need to remember that "due process of the law" does not apply.

# Social Forms

## Unorganized Individuals

There is no shortage of space in the Third Imperium; continents, worlds, and even whole systems are often occupied by no more than a handful of people. Some of these (such as corporate outposts) do have formal government, but many are unorganized. The occupiers may be loners (such as "mountain men"), pioneers looking for a break, or refugees seeking a place of safety. In the longer term they are likely to be absorbed by other societies, die out, or be destroyed, unless they join together (in which case they may form a society like the ones described below, or go straight to formal government).

Unorganized groups can also come about when a more structured society breaks down. Such complete breakdowns are rare and don't usually last long before someone (possibly by force) creates a new government. They also tend to be violent, with individuals struggling for power (or simply survival).

## Kinship Communities

For most of human history everyone on Terra lived in societies without formal government, held together by bonds of kinship. Decisions in such "organic" societies are usually made by the elders and the experienced, though all adults have a say; for children, of course, this can seem just as dictatorial as in any other society. The nature of each group depends on its population rating (PR), with some overlap:

### PR 1: Bands (<100 people)
Bands are groups of one or more extended families, all related by birth or marriage. Historically they needed to be nomadic herders or hunter-gatherers as the population wasn't big enough to support a settled lifestyle, but imported high technology can change this. Bands of a few dozen people are typical.

**PR 2: Tribes (<1000 people)**
The next step up from bands are tribes, which consist of multiple kinship groups (clans) connected by intermarriage. These are usually settled, often in a single village or small group of villages, with land normally owned by the clans. Tribes are limited in size by the need for everyone in the group to know everyone else. This works best with fewer than 200 people, but larger tribes have other advantages (mainly resulting from a better division of labor among the members) that push up the most desirable size. Nevertheless, tribes larger than 300 are in the minority.

The bigger communities grow, the more they need a different form of organization. Some tribal societies have a transitional form, with emerging social hierarchies. A common pattern is for a "big man" to appear, a "first among equals", who gradually assumes the trappings of power. Once there is formal redistribution of wealth (often tribute to the big man which he then gives out as he pleases) the tribe is well on its way to formal government. Another pattern is for the various clans to develop fixed roles, introducing a caste system.

## Intentional Anarchies

### Are Intentional Anarchies Possible?

Many people doubt that societies without government can last, often suggesting that human nature wouldn't allow it. It is certainly true that any culture relying on the altruism of its members would fail, but some research has demonstrated that people can naturally maintain cooperative groups without a coercive government if certain conditions are met:

- The society must be small enough that everyone knows each other.

- People must feel they have a stake in maintaining the group's common resources (such as land, water, or roads). This can be based on individual or communal ownership but not some abstract principle, otherwise there will be a "Tragedy of the Commons" with everyone taking as much as they can and giving nothing back.

- There must be sufficient resources for everyone, but government-led societies must not find the group's land desirable enough to want to take it.

*The Origins of Virtue* by Matt Ridley (ISBN 0140264450) discusses this in much greater detail.

Anyone may choose to live without formal government, but these "intentional anarchies" have a different quality to the kinship communities. The decision is often prompted by a perceived lack in the society from which the pioneers have come: prejudice against a specific group, abuse of the environment, or suppression of some activity the utopians consider vital, such as the arts or pacifism (conscientious objection). Sometimes this spur has a continuing effect on the new society, coloring the way it functions.

These groups face all the usual problems of designed societies, such as arguments over differing visions, children rebelling against their idealist parents, disaffected members,

and economic pressures. By their nature anarchies are more resilient than many utopias, since disaffected groups can split off to follow their own vision, but the going is often hard. One particular problem is that there are often gurus who interpret the ideology to keep the community pure, and these can quite quickly develop into a "priesthood" of anarchy -- in which case the society has become a theocracy.

Decision-making is often communal, resembling participatory (Athenian) democracies. It differs in that minorities are not expected to act on the majority decision if they disagree with it, and can opt out with few repercussions (other than, perhaps, loss of face) -- if this changes, the society is likely to become a formal democracy. Anarchic organizations at all scales are voluntary and non-authoritarian, based on principles of co-operation. Solidarity is important to anarchists; without it there is no society, just isolated individuals.

Intentional anarchies define the economic as well as the political form of the society, since removing the inequalities of one without the other quickly leads to the reintroduction of oligarchy. One of the key idealistic conflicts between anarchists concerns how this should be done; there are left- and right-wing solutions:

**Collectivist Anarchies**
These societies are often difficult for travelers to deal with, because there is generally no money and no market for goods or services. Individuals only possess what they use; everything else is held in common by the group and distributed according to each member's needs. Collectivist anarchies in crisis have to be careful not to become communist oligarchies.

Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (ISBN 006051275X) offers one SF example of a collectivist anarchy, complete with extrality wall.

## Freedom to Starve

In individualist and libertarian anarchies, individuals are responsible for providing their own food, clothing, and shelter. Family, friends, or charities may help those in need, but there is no *dependable* source of life's necessities. In places with bountiful food for the picking (or at least good farmland), it is possible for such individuals to set out with very little and carve a homestead out of wilderness. In less hospitable places, mere life support may require advanced -- and expensive -- technology, and earning a decent living may require training in skills such as Prospecting or Vacc Suit. Poor newcomers or young adults without financial support may have to go into debt to somebody with surplus wealth, or resign themselves to life as employees.

*Indenture* is a labor contract where a worker agrees to work for a certain time at a set wage in exchange for initial training, possibly room and board or perhaps the starship passage to another world with a labor shortage.

*Debt slavery* is a situation where a debtor must work for the creditor and where the debtor is charged for room and board at a rate which precludes the repayment of the principal of the debt.

The distinction can get blurred, and while the Imperium outlaws slavery it allows many forms of indentured labor contracts. These situations often arise when intentional anarchies (of any type) fail, during the economic turmoil as society adjusts.

**Individualist Anarchies**
In contrast, some anarchies do have a market for goods and services (although anything not used still reverts to common ownership). Individuals can own and sell what they wish (usually excluding land), but because goods cannot be stockpiled trade is limited.

Individualist anarchies in crisis are likely to become capitalist oligarchies.

**Libertarian Anarchies**
These societies are *already* capitalist, allowing the invisible hand of the market to operate without the interference of government. This can lead to inequalities of wealth (and thus power); as a result they can easily turn into oligarchies. Most other intentional anarchists don't regard them as true anarchies (sometimes labeling them "propertarian"). This is because the inequalities can lead to "wage slavery", with theoretically free people who nevertheless have to work for a wage in order to survive, even if the conditions of their employment are poor (see also Freedom to Starve). For the people involved, of course, arguments over labels are irrelevant.

## Larger Societies

Anarchic communities cannot be stable if they are too large for their members to know each other, but without some agreement between communities arguments and misunderstandings can lead to loss of trade, feuds, or even war. A common solution is to form a federation. Larger intentional anarchies are often set up as a federation from the start, with the individual communities (known as associations) all very similar to each other. Tribes usually form a federation when they grow too large and split into two, or when trusted neighbors want to cement their relationship. Tribes within a federation are often more varied than associations.

## Anarchy in the *Traveller* Universe

These groups are vulnerable to conquest by more organized societies; where both exist, anarchies only tend to survive in places that are of no interest to their rivals. The Third Imperium sanctions anarchic member worlds, recognizing their sovereignty despite the lack of government; this provides a degree of protection. Nevertheless, anarchies tend to have little power or influence and when their needs conflict with those of the megacorporations it is the latter who almost always win -- unless they can get some other powerful body on their side.

The Imperium recognizes anarchies for pragmatic reasons. In the early days of its expansion it was important to claim as many worlds as possible; in modern times there has been more of a focus on preserving native cultures. It also happens that a member government can disappear, leaving an anarchy, and it is usually more convenient to simply recognize the new social form than challenge it.

## Nonhuman Anarchies

The Hive Federation is probably as close to anarchy as any multi-sector society can be, and all individual Hiver worlds are fundamentally anarchic, even when technically ruled by a corporation or sept. The nest takes on the same role in Hiver society that the family does for Humaniti, but with the nest leader in a "big man" role; other races are like children within the Federation. Human attempts to set up worlds based on the Hiver model have largely failed because of the differences in racial psychology, but analyzing the Federation's structure and making selective use of some of the coping mechanisms

has helped collectivists create more viable societies.

Vargr also take more naturally to anarchism than do humans, and Vargr worlds given another code by the IISS frequently display anarchic features. This is partly an effect of their focus on charisma; status and relations always depend on the personal qualities of the individuals concerned, and stripping away the formal structures of government just makes this more obvious.

No other major race ever forms societies without formal government, but more than a quarter of the minor races known to the Imperium have stronger anarchist tendencies than Humaniti and Vargr: examples include the Ael Yael, Ahetaowa, Hlanssai, Jgd-Il-Jagd, Schalli, and Virushi. Although some Imperial sophontologists consider this a statistical fluke, most believe anarchism is a barrier to the development of interstellar societies and it is the Hivers that are the anomaly.

Some sociologists have observed that direct comparisons of social forms between races is impossible; what can seem like an anarchy to humans may be a misinterpretation due to differences in racial psychology. The (predominantly human) IISS field members, tasked with studying and categorizing thousands of worlds, tend to ignore the debate.

## Details for *Traveller* Worlds

*Note:* As usual, these rules are intended to provide inspiration for GMs, not to act as a straitjacket. They should be ignored whenever desired.

## Predominant Social Form

Roll 1d and consult the following table (U -- unorganized individuals, K -- kinship community, I -- intentional anarchy):

|  | **PR** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *ROLL* | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5+** |
| *1:* | U | U | K | K | K | K |
| *2:* | U | K | K | K | I | I |
| *3:* | U | K | K | K | I | I |
| *4:* | K | K | K | I | I | I |
| *5:* | K | K | I | I | I | I |
| *6:* | I | I | I | I | I | I |

## Number of Societies

Worlds with kinship communities are often divided into multiple societies; each group must be PR 2 or smaller. Allocate people to tribes by repeatedly rolling 3d on the table below until a roll is larger than the remaining population, then allocate bands similarly.

| Roll | Tribe Size | Band Size |
|------|-----------|-----------|
| 3-4: | <100 | <20 |
| 5-7: | 100-150 | 20-30 |
| 8-10: | 150-200 | 30-40 |
| 11-13: | 200-250 | 40-50 |
| 14: | 250-300 | 50-60 |
| 15: | 300-400 | 60-70 |
| 16: | 400-500 | 70-80 |
| 17: | 500-600 | 80-90 |
| 18: | 600+ | 90+ |

If there are multiple tribes, about (2d-2) * 10% of them are in federations. Roll 2d for the number of tribes in each federation until this percentage is reached.

Intentional anarchies are usually more coherent. Roll (1d + PR): on a 7-8 there has been a split into two factions, on a 9+ the group has fractured into 1d+1 separate societies (some of which may be kinship communities or even groups with formal government). Each intentional anarchy may be a federation of associations; roll 3d repeatedly on the table below for association size, as for tribes.

| Roll | Association Size |
|------|-----------------|
| 3: | <25 |
| 4: | 25-50 |
| 5: | 50-75 |
| 6: | 75-100 |
| 7-8: | 100-150 |
| 9-10: | 150-200 |
| 11-12: | 200-250 |
| 13: | 250-300 |
| 14: | 300-400 |
| 15: | 400-500 |
| 16: | 500-600 |

*17:* 600-700

*18:* 700+

## Detailing Societies

Except for unorganized individuals, roll 1d to see how each society is progressing (do not roll for individual associations within an intentional anarchy):

**Populati
on**

    *1:* Shrinking

  *2-5:* Stable

    *6:* Growing

The type of a kinship community is defined by the number of people in the group (with some overlap). For tribes of 100 or more, roll 1d-1. If this is less than the population multiplier (the first digit of the population), there is a "big man". If a further roll of (1d + population multiplier) is greater than 8, the tribe is in transition; roll 1d:

**Tribal
Transition**

    *1-2:* Tribe splitting in two

    *3-5:* Big man becoming chief

      *6:* Castes forming

For intentional anarchies, roll 1d on each of the following tables:

**Economic
Form**

    *1-3:* Collectivist

    *4-5:* Individualist

      *6:* Libertarian

**Specia
l
Intere
st**

  *1-4:* None

*5-6:* Roll 1d:

> *1:* Environment
>
> *2:* Arts (freedom of expression)
>
> *3:* Pacifism
>
> *4:* Rights of a large group (e.g., women, men, untouchables)
>
> *5:* Rights of a small group (e.g., psions, bwaps, offworlders)
>
> *6:* Other (GM choice)

**Unity of Vision**

> *1-2:* United
>
> *3-5:* Debating
>
> *6:* Fragmenting; see below

Debating societies may have recently been formed and still sorting out the details, or simply be responding to changing conditions. Fragmenting societies are normally in the process of adjusting the social contract by which they live, but sometimes the crisis cannot be so easily resolved. Roll (1d + PR):

**Ideological Crisis**

> *1-6:* Adjustment of social contract
>
> *7-8:* Society splitting
>
> *9+:* Government forming

United societies should be stable for 1d decades, debating ones for 1d years, and fragmenting ones should have changed in 1d months (GM's decision how). Roll again on the Unity of Vision table after this time, if necessary. Each time an already fragmenting society comes up fragmenting again, add 1 to the Ideological Crisis roll.

## Adventure Seeds

RPGs need conflict; adventures centered around *any* society type concentrate either on their dark times, or on the clash of cultures when the travelers arrive.

- *Hostile Takeover:* A valuable resource has been discovered on a band's land. One

of the megacorporations has decided not to wait for the legal battle but instead to send in a front company and take over, presenting the Imperium with a *fait accompli*. The adventurers are asked to help hold off the corporate forces until the Imperial observer arrives in two weeks' time. Can they turn a group of individualists with decent combat skills but no support weapons or command structure into an effective fighting force, when none of their clients are used to taking orders from anyone?

- *Tribal Memory:* A society of more than 3,000 people is using imported memory-enhancing drugs so that it can function as a huge natural tribe. The supply has not been delivered for two months and reserve stocks are almost gone; soon withdrawal symptoms (including severe memory loss) will seriously damage their ability to function as a group. The adventurers are asked to investigate.

- *Big Man, Pig Man:* A tribal big man wants to become a chieftain and has started collecting tribute, assisted by a gang of cronies armed with offworld weapons. Some of the other tribe members want the adventurers to investigate where the weapons are coming from, and to get them some as well.

- *Communal Property:* The party leaves their air/raft for a day or two while on some other business in a collective, and when they return they find it gone. Since it was not being used it was added to the communal store of property and allocated to someone else who needed it -- the adventurers are offered use of some aging kian to ride instead. This is *not* how the community usually treats outsiders -- what have they been offered, and can the adventurers find someone who will tell them?

- *Love Thy Neighbor:* The party tracks an enemy to a (well armed) individualist anarchy. It seems he was born here, and his friends and neighbors will stand by him against the outsiders. They give the adventurers one chance to make their case -- on very short notice, and according to rules and precedents that are not written down anywhere, but which their adversary knows exactly.

- *Greed is Good:* The group arrives at the starport of a libertarian anarchy in crisis, with an urgent package to deliver. The halls are filled with people who cannot afford the air recycling fees outside, mainly the elderly, the sick or crippled, and mothers with young children; every square foot of land around the XT line is owned by somebody wanting a "passage fee"; and there are rumors of Imperial intervention "to keep the peace". If they leave the starport, will they be able to find their patron, and (perhaps more importantly) will they be able to get back to their ship?

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