

-Spacefaring Cultures-
A Galactic Primer
by Havoc

“Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.”
- Jawaharlal Nehru

Ailians

History

Ailian history goes back many thousands of years, to approximately one hundred millenia before human culture began to take shape. They evolved, of course, on the desert planet of Lirna in the Andromeda Galaxy. In contrast to the arid areas of Earth, Lirna has actually become *less* so over the course of time, which allowed for the earliest Ailians to move out of the scattered temperate zones and inhabit the rest of the planet. Early Ailians were typical hunters, and tended to be loners upon leaving their families and until forming their own families. As Ailian society progressed and their population began to increase, conflicts were frequent. The early days of recorded history on Lirna are bloody, with families fighting other families, and even fighting amongst each other. Hunting territory usually drove these early disputes, but as the deserts grew milder and Ailians began cultivating crops, farming territory was also a motivator for conflict.

Approximately fifty thousand years ago, the diversity of the Ailian species had become such that the many separate family units meant that a fight was just around the corner for anyone at any moment. This led to the families of various regions banding together, leading into Lirna's tribal period. Tribes tended to be based around the economies of their regions, whether that was farming, manufacturing, herding, or most commonly a combination of all. Vestiges of this can still be seen in Ailian culture today, with many families able to trace their current familial businesses back to their tribal roots. The tribal period is generally agreed to be the beginning of the slave trade in Ailian society, with tribes attacking other tribes to steal members for menial labor.

As technology progressed on Lirna, a big focus of scientific advancement was in the area of military technology. Ailian blades are even today legendary throughout the known universe, and they invented gunpowder before many types of medical technology. As their technology progressed, overpopulation became an issue and eventually they looked to the stars as a source of relief. Also partially driven by militaristic endeavors, space travel developed at a rapid pace from approximately twenty thousand years ago to today. The first Ailian colony world, Syleen, was settled during what was still technically the tribal period, with the various tribes sending colonization ships in an effort to claim as much of the resource-rich planet as they could.

Numerous other nearby star systems were colonized in a similar fashion, and the fights that erupted between tribes over territory on these worlds led to the first major Ailian Civil War. After a period of several thousand years, an alliance of the largest tribes defeated the rest, which finally resulted in the union of the Ailian species under a common banner. The leader of the largest tribe in the alliance became the first Empress of what came to be called the Ascendancy. Over the past fifteen thousand years, the Ascendancy has spread across the Andromeda, the Milky Way, and the Triangulum galaxies. This period of rapid colonization also led to the Ascendancy becoming a fairly even mixture of militaristic and mercantile cultures.

During this period of rapid expansion, the Ailians forged deep into the Triangulum galaxy and eventually made contact with the Pteryd Combine, an empire belonging to an insectoid alien race. Just as fiercely territorial as the Ascendancy, the Pteryd fought back against the encroachment. It was only due to the technological superiority of the Ailians that they were not defeated by the Pteryd, and after several centuries of brutal war the Pteryd withdrew back behind their borders, while the Ailians stopped much of their advance into their territory. Both species still hold great animosity towards each other, and skirmishes along the border regions are still quite common.

With such a wide area of influence, it was perhaps inevitable that disparities would eventually develop. Ailian merchant organizations drove colonization of the furthest reaches of the Ascendancy, colonizing worlds on the outer areas of Ailian space for the purposes of exploiting their resources. Often, once these worlds became less than ideally profitable, the colonies would be abandoned by their parent companies with the inhabitants left to fend largely for themselves with little support from the central government. These worlds formed the loose group referred to as the Outer Colonies, while the richer worlds closer to the core of the Ascendancy were referred to as the Inner Colonies. Understandably, the Outer Colonies came to resent the Inner Colonies and the Core Worlds for their prosperity, which eventually led to the Second Ailian Civil War, with the Outer Colonies making a grab for control of the Ascendancy. If not for the luck of first contact with the Nuretan Empire, the Inner Colonies and the Core Worlds might have fallen to the greater population of the Outer Colonies.

Today, while the Ascendancy remains a highly militaristic society, their focus is mainly on economic expansion. The Ailian economy is driven mostly by technology and scientific research. Many of the advances in spaceflight technology of the past several thousand years have originated within the Ascendancy, driven by a desire to avoid falling to the rapidly advancing Pteryd, whose technology is now considered to be on par with that of the Ailians. The Ascendancy still maintains close ties with their Nuretan neighbors, and in recent years have begun developing friendly relations with humanity after the conclusion of their relatively brief war with that species.

Culture and Religion

Ailian culture is rich with folklore and myth, driven largely by their deeply polytheistic religious views. Even before the tribal period, many Ailians maintained a belief in multiple gods who governed over various areas of daily life. The chief of these gods is Liren'sa, a goddess who holds sway over war and love, two things seen to be closely related in Ailian culture. Every Ailian world has a temple dedicated at least to this goddess, while most have temples dedicated to one or more of the others. The largest of these is on the homeworld of Lirna, where the great temple in the center of the capital city stands in celebration of all.

Ailian society has always been overwhelmingly matriarchal. Traditionally, the head of the family unit is always the oldest living female, though curiously it is the male's responsibility to choose his own mate. This can lead to the head of the family being, should the mother pass, the oldest daughter rather than the father. However, for practical concerns, such as the oldest female relative being a young child, the father or older male siblings will take charge in these cases until such time as the female should be old enough to assume responsibilities.

For many, many years, slavery was also a central part of Ailian culture. Going back to tribal times, slaves were seen as a status symbol, and less powerful tribes would send their members to more powerful tribes as slaves in order to curry favor and avoid being wiped out. Slaves were also taken as spoils of war, and some Ailians even sold themselves into slavery, or indentured servitude, as a way to erase substantial debts. Although outright slavery was abandoned in much of the Ascendancy even before contact with humanity, it remained in some areas of the Core Worlds and Inner Colonies, and indentured servitude is a wide, if heavily regulated, practice to this day. Slavery in its purest form is strictly outlawed.

Biology

Ailians, in human terms, are a feline species bearing marked similarity to many of the large cat species on Earth. Cosmetically, they resemble tigers that walk on two legs and are coated with medium-length fur over most of their bodies. Owing to the heat of their desert world, their fur serves as insulation that serves to cool rather than keep warm. For this reason, Ailians tend to avoid worlds that would be considered comfortably cool by other species, finding them too cold for their liking. While not common, Ailians will sweat if they are hot enough or exert themselves enough. Ailians tend towards lighter shades of fur, the most common being white, orange, and dusty red. Less common shades are blue and black, with these color schemes being more common among the noble ranks. For this reason, darker fur colors are seen as highly attractive. All Ailians are striped, though the darker the fur shade, the less noticeable the stripes are. Some exceptions do occur. Blue Ailians, for example,

sometimes have a golden color to their stripes. The fur of most Ailians grays with age, most notably around the muzzle and tips of their tails. If an Ailian lives much past the age of one hundred and fifty years, their fur will almost always be completely gray. The typical Ailian has a lifespan of between one hundred twenty and one hundred thirty years, with males averaging a higher life expectancy than females. An Ailian reaches sexual maturity at age fifteen, but is not considered an adult until age twenty. All things considered, Ailians mature at a faster rate than other species, in light of their longer lifespans.

Ailians are a tall species when compared to Nuretans and especially to humans. Ailians generally max out at heights of around eight and a half to nine feet, although individuals as tall as ten feet are not uncommon and individuals in excess of eleven feet have rarely been documented. Height is seen as a mark of status for Ailians. Their body weight is very disproportionate to their height. Ailians are extremely compactly muscular, and judging weight by sight is very difficult for members of other species. Females are generally larger than males, which perhaps explains the matriarchal nature of Ailian society. Most Ailian females would find the idea of having a taller male for a mate to be undesirable. This has led to shorter males being seen as attractive. Females are generally disdainful of males, seeing them as inferior members of the species, and males are often passed up for positions of importance in favor of females, even to the point of less-qualified females being elevated over more-qualified males. This doggedly matriarchal culture extends into all areas of Ailian society, including government, military, and economic sectors.

As far as diet is concerned, Ailians remain a largely carnivorous species, relying heavily on meat for the majority of their nutrients. The raising of crops throughout history has usually focused on food production for meat animals. However, most Ailians also have an appreciation for protein and carbohydrate rich vegetables, with legumes and tubers being highly-prized additions to any meal. Ailians also enjoy fruits in great quantities, especially sugar-rich varieties. Leafy vegetables are sparsely consumed, though some varieties found on colony worlds have come to be seen as delicacies. The most prominent exception to the rule lies in the Ailian fondness for beverages brewed from plants, most notably teas, many of which have psychoactive properties to them. They are typically consumed in the same manner as recreational drugs among humans, though without the social stigma. Indeed, Ailian tea is seen as a cornerstone of social gatherings, with tea usually being offered to guests as a way of welcoming them to the host's home. Amusingly, humans have observed that Ailians who consume tea exhibit behaviors oddly reminiscent of Earth felines who have consumed the mint variety known as catnip. Alcohol, while not unheard of in the Ascendancy, is rarely consumed as Ailian biology does not process it well. Even consumed sparingly, alcohol can lead to serious health complications for an

Ailian, and a surprisingly small amount of it will lead to an Ailian becoming drunk. One shot of a powerful enough liquor, such as human vodka, is usually enough to impair an Ailian, so most Ailians who do imbibe alcohol dilute it heavily with nonalcoholic liquids such as juice or non-psychoactive tea. Beer, introduced to the Ascendancy after contact with humanity, is seen as a happy medium, as brewed grains appeal to the Ailian palate and the alcohol content is low enough to minimize the effects.

Government

The Ailian government is a hereditary monarchy with some elements of democratic rule. The head of the Ascendancy is always the Empress, who can trace her roots back to the original founding of the Ascendancy either by blood or by mateship. In recent millenia, the monarchy has ceded some of its power to civilian authority, with the business community wielding more influence in modern times than was historically the case. The military also holds sway over some areas of life. Naturally, one Empress cannot effectively govern such an expansive empire, and so the Empress will designate a royal governor over each planet in the Ascendancy, trusting them to rule their respective world in line with her policies.

Military and Law Enforcement

Apart from the royal family, the military is the strongest institution in the Ascendancy. Composed of a number of fleets based in and peopled by the areas they serve, all Ailian military forces fall under the banner of the Navy. While the military is traditionally led by the Empress, in practice the day-to-day leadership falls to the Chief Admiral, who is based on Lirna with an office in the royal palace. However, some Empresses have held greater sway over the military than others. When the crown Princess is the direct daughter of the sitting Empress, as is most often the case, she will typically join the military when reaching adult age and will retain her rank upon ascending to the throne. The majority of Empresses have also been admirals, with a few of them holding the simultaneous positions of Chief Admiral and Empress.

Each fleet of the Ascendancy is headed by an admiral, though not all admirals head fleets. Some admirals hold staff positions, command ground forces, or are outright planetary governors. Each fleet is generally composed of no less than fifty capital ships (ships of a length greater than or equal to one hundred meters) and a wide assortment of smaller warships, picket vessels, fighters, and transports. A fleet usually hosts approximately fifty thousand naval troopers, give or take several thousand, the basic dedicated infantry soldier of the Ascendancy. There are also innumerable support troops, all of whom are required to be combat-capable, as well as armored cavalry and combat pilots. The pride of the naval infantry division lies in their commandos, specialized troopers who receive advanced training in weapons, demolitions, ordinance disposal, and recon. A typical commando squad consists of ten

“operators”, two scout/snipers, and a heavy weapons specialist.

Separate from the regular military, under the direct joint authority of the Chief Admiral and the Empress, are the best of the best, the elite Lirnan Royal Guards. Recruited from the commandos and some of the best naval troopers, the Royal Guards receive special training in recon, unarmed combat, infiltration, survival, investigations, and dignitary security. The best of the Royal Guards earn the privilege of serving on the personal protective detail of the Empress and the rest of the royal family. Royal Guards also protect planetary governors and important members of the diplomatic corps, and in certain cases are also assigned to protect foreign dignitaries. In times of war, the Royal Guards serve as a black operations special forces unit, engaging in conventional and unconventional warfare largely behind enemy lines. The Royal Guards present an entirely uniform appearance; while Ailians of all sizes, shapes, and colors serve in the military, all Royal Guards are required to have black fur, whether it be natural or dyed, and there are fairly strict height and weight restrictions, with very few exceptions made. The Royal Guards are almost exclusively female, as few males meet these requirements, and the majority are unbonded with few living relatives. A Royal Guard must be prepared to sacrifice his or her life for her unit, and above all for their “principal”, especially those on the Empress' detail. A Royal Guard can be distinguished from any other Ailian soldier by their unadorned, jet black uniforms.

Law in the Ascendancy is both strict and fair. Summary execution is reserved for military crimes, and even then only for the extreme offenses of treason and fraternization with the enemy. In all other offenses, civilian and military, from simple larceny all the way up to murder, criminals are given the presumption of innocence until guilt is proven either by a jury trial or by military tribunal. In the past, the death penalty was a possible punishment for even the most minor of crimes. Today, execution is surprisingly rare within the Ascendancy, as it is seen as a grievous affront to the personal honor of the condemned and their family. Even mass murderers are typically given life imprisonment. Crimes against the royal family are the obvious exception, seen as unforgivable.

Enforcement of law in the Ascendancy falls to local law enforcement, generally. Each planet, from Lirna down to the smallest colony, usually has their own police agency which is under the purview of the planetary governor. During peacetime and minor times of conflict, the Lirnan Royal Guards serve as a federal law enforcement agency across the Ascendancy, in addition to their regular protective duties. Special investigators with the Royal Guards address crimes that span across worlds in the Ascendancy. The Royal Guards also cooperate and exchange information with their analogous agencies from allied species: the Nuretan Secret Service and now the human Cerelan Federal Police. The arrival of a Royal Guard agent on an Ailian world is usually a sign that something major is about to go down, although the Royal Guards maintain field offices at all times on a number of important

colony worlds.

Family Life and Relationships

The Ailian family unit is led by the oldest female in the immediate family, typically the mother. Ailian families tend to be large, with the average family consisting of a female, a male, and four to six children, although families with as many as fifteen or more children are not uncommon. Ailian children remain in their family home for longer than those of other species. An Ailian usually does not take a mate until they are twenty-five or older, preferring to remain at home until they are sufficiently independent enough in their personal finances to strike out on their own. The oldest female child will usually take over their parents' business, if they have one. Few Ailians pursue a career different from that of their family. This has led to long lineages of merchants and military alike.

Ailian culture holds a great taboo against same-sex relationships, as this is seen as not beneficial to the carrying on of both the species and one's own family line. An Ailian who is attracted to members of their own sex will often be ostracized from his or her family. These Ailians will, under social pressure, usually keep their orientation a closely-guarded secret, living a life as though they are a normal Ailian and taking an opposite-sex mate. Some notable exceptions have occurred. Famously, during the tribal period of Ailian history, a Lirnan tribe leader headed an all-female tribe, taking exclusively female Ailians from other tribes as slaves. Several Empresses over the millenia have been rumored to be lesbians, but nothing has ever been proven conclusively. The only openly homosexual rulers have been Empress Kri'a Solan IV, the last Empress to rule during the Ascendancy's war with humanity, and her consort Li'ren Amani, who herself became Empress upon the death of her mate. While it does not spell the end for the taboo in the Ascendancy, the fact that these two noblewomen remain highly admired by most Ailians may speak to a slow change in that area of Ailian culture.

While love is no less important to Ailians than it is to humans, they approach it in a different way. Romantic love is the ideal state of a relationship for an Ailian couple, but it is seen as a highly personal and private affair. Public displays of courtship and affection are frowned upon. The male initiates courtship and it is up to the female to accept or reject his affections. Males often will not pursue a female without first seeking the approval of her family matriarch. Ailians do not have a public, formal ceremony of bonding as humans do. Instead, the male will give his mate a piece of jewelry known as a bonding gem, which consists of a curved piercing of precious metal that goes through the navel and is capped with a gemstone. With most forms of Ailian clothing, the jewelry will usually be visible to show others that a female is spoken for. Some Ailian males will wear less invasive forms of jewelry to symbolize the bonding, but this is a relatively new invention and is not widely adopted off of Lirna. Like humans, Ailians mate for life, but a female may take another mate if hers dies.

Traditionally, males are not afforded the same courtesy.

Art and Language

Ailians have a surprisingly rich history of art for a species which often chooses to focus on martial pursuits. Ailian poetry in particular is regarded quite well in academic circles, with epic poetry being the most common. Similarities have been noted in the ancient epic of the goddess Liren'sa with some prominent Earth tales. Ailian music has found a following in the Nuretan Empire, with the tendency for flowing, ethereal music reminding many Nuretans of the oceans of their birth. Visual arts are largely composed of sculpture and painting, focusing mostly on religious aspects, though no Ailian home is complete without a painted portrait of the family matriarch. The Royal Palace on Lirna is famous for its grand receiving hall containing life-size portraits of nearly every Empress going back almost ten thousand years.

The Ailian language has evolved over thousands of generations. Hard to learn for outsiders, the language is seemingly random to non-native speakers with unusual syntax when compared to English or the Nuretan language. The language consists of many hard sounds and full stops, and similar-sounding words can be very difficult to distinguish. Some Ailians even have difficulty with the different dialects from different areas of the Ascendancy. The Lirnan brand of Ailian is used in diplomatic circles, and is spoken on most worlds of the Core and Inner Colonies. As one ventures out into the Outer Colonies, dialects vary greatly, to the point where some dialects can be and have been considered separate languages in their own right.

Fashion

Ailian fashion has evolved from a rudimentary study over the years to the deceptively complex variety of what is worn today. The earliest examples of Ailian clothing based on historical finds were animal skins, worn mostly over the lower body. Once manufacturing processes led to the development of artificial fabrics, Ailians began wearing lighter clothing, finding them more comfortable in the heat of their homeworld. Typical Ailian fashion for females consists of bolts of sheer fabric wrapped around the body, similar to a sari. The clothing usually leaves much of the shoulders and the midriff bare. Depending on how modest the individual wishes to be, the number of layers will be increased to decrease the translucence. Males wear light clothing that covers most of the body, with long pants and short-sleeve shirts being the most common. Formal clothing for both sexes is no different, but is generally of higher quality than day-to-day wear. The nobility, however, dresses differently from normal Ailians. Their clothing consists of flowing, multi-layered robes that cover the body from shoulder to floor level.

Naturally, not all Ailians live in desert environments, and in fact most of the worlds of the

Ascendancy are temperate to subtropical overall, with a few arctic worlds here and there. Fashion changes from world to world accordingly. On most planets where the average temperature is closer to that of Lirna, fashion remains traditional. On some slightly colder worlds, such as the forest planet of Arbaros in the Inner Colonies, clothing is traditional in style but composed of heavier fabrics to insulate better. On the arctic worlds, out of necessity, Aillians dress head to toe in heavy overcoats and thick leggings, and their homes are well-sealed and heated so that they may enjoy the comforts of Lirna when in their residences.