

-Spacefaring Cultures-
A Galactic Primer
by Havoc

“There is something even more valuable to civilization than wisdom, and that is character.”
- H.L. Mencken

Nuretans

History

Nuretan history does not reach as far back as Ailian history, but it is no less rich. Recorded history for this aquatic race begins about eighty thousand years ago on the planet Nurenai in the Milky Way galaxy. Nurenai is primarily an oceanic world with scattered islands, and a single massive continent roughly the size of Earth's Australia. Nuretans evolved from an ancient aquatic species in the massive oceans of their world, and eventually began leading amphibious lives, dividing their time between the water and the land. Originally, their culture was a fishing one, and they lived solitary lives when not reproducing. Although the oceans of Nurenai contain numerous large predators, they tend to stick to the deeper parts of the ocean and are easily avoided by staying on dry land.

As the population on Nurenai began to increase, Nuretans began to naturally congregate into loose villages on the larger islands, and especially on the main continent. A peaceful species by nature, they did not experience many fights for territory and instead strove to work together. Their technological advancement progressed much more quickly than either humans or Ailians, and they began colonizing the planets in their area of space nearly ten thousand years before the first Ailian ship left Lima. Curious but cautious, Nuretans sent space probes around the three galaxy cluster of Milky Way, Andromeda, and Triangulum to see what they could discover. They learned of the existence of Ailians and Pteryd before either species was aware, and after observing the warlike tendencies of the Ailians and the rabid expansionism of the Pteryd, they were driven to create weapons of war for the first time. Nuretans never intended to use this technology for anything but defense, playing the safe route in case the other species in the universe should be unfriendly.

The Nuretan Empire, as their collection of colony worlds came to be known, did not actively seek first contact with the Ailians. Instead, Ailian survey ships happened upon a Nuretan colony world during the height of their civil war with the Outer Colonies. Impressed by the advanced state of the Nuretan Navy, the Ascendancy managed to negotiate a friendly alliance with them. Seeing the Ailians as a far lesser threat if led by the Lirnan government, the Nuretans agreed to help push the Outer Colonies back, fearing that they might be next if the Ascendancy was defeated. The Nuretans have also always lent aid to the Ascendancy in their battles with the Pteryd, as the Nuretans would be the next

logical step should the Ailians be defeated. However, once the Ascendancy went to war with humanity, the Nuretans tactfully declined to involve themselves, perceiving them to be of little threat.

Today, the Nuretan Empire remains at the forefront of scientific research in the known universe, and Nuretan scientists are acknowledged to be the most efficient and intelligent. Owing to the fact that Nuretans and humans do not have the history of bad blood that humans have with the Ascendancy, they generally get along better with humanity. The Empire has lent their expertise to human shipbuilders, leading to much more efficient forms of travel for humans, and the strength of their trade with the United Nations now rivals that of their relationship with the Ascendancy.

Culture and Religion

Nuretans have never subscribed to what could be considered a form of religion, but they do maintain a strict belief in the power of nature not unlike that of many tribal cultures on Earth. Nuretans hold their home ocean in the highest regard, and have never allowed even the slightest pollution to sully its waters. Visitors to the Nuretan homeworld are few and far between; even meetings between Ailian and Nuretan dignitaries are typically held on nearby colony worlds. The few visitors who are allowed on Nurenai are required to agree to heavy restrictions: bring out what you bring in, remove nothing, leave nothing behind. Groups of visitors are always accompanied by a Nuretan “minder” to make sure that these restrictions are followed to the letter.

Unlike with Ailians, Nuretan society has never been overly matriarchal or patriarchal. As Nuretan males and females are quite similar in their physical capabilities, there has never been much for them to use as a basis for favoring one over the other. A slight majority of Nuretan leaders have been male versus female, but this is generally agreed as no more than random chance. Somewhat similarly to humans, however, in the home Nuretan males tend to make the financial decisions while females tend to take a lead in the day-to-day household decisions. On Nurenai, children do tend to follow in their parents' footsteps as far as their careers go, but they are much more free to choose their own paths in comparison to their Ailian counterparts.

In keeping with their solitary ancestral roots, Nuretans tend to like to work for themselves, and slavery was never as widespread in the Empire as it was in the Ascendancy. In fact, the base level economy in the Empire tends to resemble cottage industry even to this day, with a lot of Nuretans running businesses, if not actually out of the home, then in independent stores. The open-air market, while a tradition in the Ascendancy, is a necessity on Nurenai considering the strict environmental laws that preclude the building of large structures, laws which are only relaxed in the main city on the large continent. As the primary diet of the Nuretans consists of fish and water plants, the average Nuretan not involved in the military or the scientific community is a fisherman, or something related to that.

Biology

Nuretans bear a much greater similarity to humans than Ailians do. Nuretans average taller than humans, most in the range of six to seven feet tall. They are bipedal humanoid creatures with amphibian features. Nuretans have smooth, rubbery skin in green and blue hues, which evolved to blend in with the startlingly blue waters of their homeworld. While primordial Nuretans once had webbed toes and fingers, the webbing has since receded so that they have individual, separate fingers and toes. The most striking feature of Nuretans are the eyes, which have double pupils and are colored neon, most commonly yellow, green, blue, or orange. Their heads are topped with feathery, long white hair, which both males and females often braid. Females tend to favor a single, thick ponytail, while the fashion for males is to braid numerous thin, tight strands. Nuretan skin retains moisture well, though they periodically must return to the water to rejuvenate. In keeping with their amphibian lifestyle, Nuretans are equipped with two sets of lungs and a special valve in their throat that controls which set is used. The first, larger, set of lungs is used to breathe air, and the second, smaller, set of lungs is used to breathe water. Nuretans can remain underwater for extended periods when compared to other species, but since the water-processing lungs are not as efficient as the other set, they must eventually return to the surface. The average Nuretan can remain underwater for approximately twelve hours, with practiced divers able to maintain underwater breathing for one to two days at a time. Nuretans like to avoid dry climates, but heat is not a problem for them. They do surprisingly well when visiting the Ailian homeworld, so long as they keep their skin covered, since sunburn can be a particularly nasty affliction for them.

Nuretans reach maturity at a relatively young age, usually between eight and twelve years. Ten years is considered adult for them. They live shorter lives than Ailians, with the average life expectancy for both males and females hovering around ninety. The only difference, cosmetically, between young and aged Nuretans is a slight dulling of the sheen of their skin.

In comparison to Ailians and humans, Nuretans are physically weaker, but they have extremely firm grips owing to their aquatic ancestry. They will often wear gloves when not in the water, as their fingers will leave a slightly sticky residue on dry surfaces. Nuretans will use machinery for heavy lifting, and physical exercise is very important for individuals who work in labor-intensive fields. Their bodies are very slender, giving them a lanky appearance.

The Nuretan diet is heavy on fish and crustaceans, with generous portions of green aquatic vegetation such as kelp and seaweed. On non-aquatic colony worlds, they rely heavily on imports from Nurenai and other aquatic planets. The lack of carbohydrates in their diet makes them very intolerant of intoxicating substances, making it awkward when they visit Ailians, as they are unable to partake of the

socially important tea. Needless to say, they avoid alcohol altogether. Since their introduction to human cuisine subsequent to the second Outer Colony uprising, sushi has become a prized delicacy, though Nuretans prefer to forgo the rice.

Government

The Empire is a very pure form of representative democracy, with representatives elected by popular vote. The central government consists of a Parliament, in which two to three Nuretan ministers are elected to represent each world, depending on population size. The Parliament is headed by a Prime Minister, and the Nuretans as a whole also elect a President. Parliament is responsible for enacting laws across the Empire, and the President and his or her cabinet are responsible in areas of diplomacy and internal policy. Nuretans are very proud of their form of government, which has continued uninterrupted since Nurenai was united. Parliament ministers are elected for terms of eight years, and the Prime Minister is elected by Parliament directly after the popular election and after Parliament has been sworn in for their eight-year term. Ministers have a term limit of four. The President is elected by direct popular vote, however members of Parliament are not eligible to vote for President. Presidents hold office for a period of ten years, and are limited to three terms. Nuretans who want to be ministers must be at least twenty years old, and the President must be at least that age as well.

Military and Law Enforcement

Environmental law is seen as the supreme law in the Nuretan Empire. They take their stewardship of nature very seriously, and the most grievous crimes that can be committed are those which result in ecological disaster. The most famous example of high crime in the Nuretan Empire occurred five hundred years in the past, when a company researching alternative energy means devastated the environment of a colony world, resulting in the extinction of ninety percent of the wildlife and plant life in the ecosystem. All of the responsible parties were executed, which created a great controversy in the Empire, as capital punishment was next to unheard of prior to that.

Apart from the environment, petty crime is the most pressing concern in the Empire. The murder rate among Nuretans is far, far less than among Ailians and even humans, with most whole planets experiencing fewer than ten such cases per year. Laws are enforced by the central government on Nurenai, and planets do not typically have their own law enforcement agencies. The Nuretan Secret Service is the largest law enforcement agency in the known galaxy, based on the homeworld and having an office on each world in the Empire.

The military of the Nuretan Empire is older even than the Ascendancy Navy, but is formed much the same, with a number of fleets. Unlike the Ascendancy Navy, the military has separate divisions for various functions: Navy, Army, and Air Force. The Navy controls the fleets of space-based

battleships and cruisers, and the Air Force is housed on naval carriers. The Army is based planetarily, and when they are required to move from place to place they are transported by naval ships. Unlike the Ascendancy, the Nuretans do not rely heavily on armor, focusing instead on highly mobile units of soldiers in light vehicles and hovercraft.

While the Ascendancy's Navy focuses offensively on large capital ships and heavy weapons, the Nuretans rely more on fast-attack cruisers and heavily-armed interceptors, preferring a defensive strategy. Nuretan fighter craft are generally not bound to their mother carriers, as their interceptors are large enough to house their own short-range hyperspace engines, allowing them to make jumps between planetary systems with relative ease, to a certain limit. Crossing a galaxy would be prohibited by fuel, but would theoretically be possible for a Nuretan fighter pilot if their fuel tank was large enough.

Nuretans do not have much in the way of special operations commandos, but the exception to this rule is the Nuretan Imperial Marines. Under the joint command of the Navy and the Army, these soldiers are specially trained in small-unit action, close quarters combat, and demolitions. The Imperial Marines are directly commanded by a single general officer, who is traditionally the highest-ranking and most senior officer in the entire military, the equivalent to the Ascendancy's Chief Admiral. Unlike the Chief Admiral, however, the General of the Imperial Marines is expected to, and frequently does, accompany their forces directly into battle.

Family Life and Relationships

Unlike Ailians and humans, Nuretans do not have what could be considered a traditional family structure. Monogamy is seen as a quaint but impractical state of living, only suitable for raising children. When a female becomes pregnant, she and the father will be together from the birth of the child to when that child reaches adulthood. As the typical Nuretan reaches adulthood between the ages of eight and twelve, that is usually how long a monogamous relationship will last. Should additional children be conceived during that time, of course, the relationship will extend until all children are fully grown. At that point, the male and female will part and resume their “normal” lives. Males and females typically share household duties equitably. No tasks are seen as either “masculine” or “feminine”, with both parents taking an equal share of the child-rearing.

Nuretans consider pansexuality to be the natural state of existence, with few societal taboos in mateship. They are confused and bewildered by the deep Ailian prejudice against same-sex relationships, finding this to be severely restrictive. Because of this, many homosexual Ailians who are unable to maintain appearances in the Ascendancy have found relief and acceptance in immigrating to the Empire, with a respectable population of expatriated Ailians inhabiting several Nuretan colony

worlds. Since the alliance of the United Nations, the Ascendancy, and the Empire, many Nuretans have found more common ground with humanity considering their relatively more accepting societal norms. Humans, likewise, have begun to enjoy the free atmosphere of the Empire, with some scattered instances of Nuretans and humans even forming romantic bonds, for those Nuretans who are more readily open to monogamy as an option.

On a seedier note, the openness and polyamory of Nuretans has led to them gaining a reputation in human space as being somewhat whorish, though this could not be further from the truth. Nuretans are simply more willing to accept that love can take many forms, and they have a much different idea of what faithfulness to an emotional bond can be. Even so, some enterprising Nuretans have decided to exploit this perception, and as a result several Nuretan worlds are notorious as destinations for tourism of the sensual strain. Prostitution, while a crime in the Ascendancy and in most of human space, is unrestricted and in fact quite legal in the Empire, with a framework of regulations in place to guarantee the health and wellbeing of Nuretan sex workers. Rules exist in the Ascendancy and the United Nations to bar travel to the Empire for “pleasure”, but covering a trip as business or regular tourism is enough to get around these laws for humans and Ailians who wish to sample the local culture in a direct way.

Art and Language

Nuretan art takes many forms, many of which incorporate water in some form. Abstract sculpture is the most common form, with sweeping, rounded shapes being used to represent the flowing, gentle currents of Nurenai. One form of art unique to Nuretans is the “water table”, which is, as the name would suggest, a table-like item that is filled with water. The basic gist of the art form is a flattened, hollow compartment composed of clear glass that sits on legs of the sturdiest coral. The artisan who creates the water table will fill it with purified water that contains colored dyes and oils. The artist will take care to select colored substances that will not mix readily with each other, or with the water. Set into the edge of the table will be small pulse-emitting devices, which will randomly send impulses into the water and cause the colors to swirl about each other in startlingly beautiful patterns.

Another common art form in the Empire is underwater sand painting. Using hydrophobic colored sand, artists will lay down patterns on the shallower sea floors. Sometimes the paintings will be cohesive pictures, and other times they will be more abstract. Regardless, the real beauty of the art form is seen not as what is painted, but how the paintings are affected and altered by the currents of the water flowing over the sea floor.

The Nuretan language is a relatively easy one to learn for outsiders, with most humans and Ailians able to become fluent, with concentrated study, within two to three years. The language flows very effortlessly off the tongue, and is designed so that each word of a sentence is led into by the

preceding one. Outside listeners have been heard to remark that Nuretan sounds like bubbling water, and while not literally Nuretans agree that the description is apt. The only difficulty that Nuretans find in understanding non-native speakers is that, since the Nuretan throat is designed to breathe both air and water, Ailian and human speakers lack a certain undertone that helps to impart subtle inflections to the language.

Fashion

Nuretan fashion is derived from their aquatic roots. On the homeworld and in similarly moist environments, Nuretans wear close-fitting suits of a pliable, stretchy material that hugs the form fairly tightly. This allows them to glide through water effortlessly when swimming, and the material retains moisture very efficiently when they're on dry land. The suits will cover the body from throat to ankles, and are usually a single piece with a zipped seam in the back, not unlike wet suits that human divers wear. In hot or dry climates, Nuretans wear suits of a thicker material that has been infused with a water-based polymer which dramatically resists evaporation, allowing for their skin to stay wet while insulating them from heat.