

ESCAPE VELOCITY

NOVA

Preambles: the history behind the legend

Part II: The Aurorans

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Section Alpha

THE UNWRITTEN LAW OF AURORAN WARRIORS

Some notes on the most prevalent warrior ethos in known space.

From the diary of Eamon "Archindar" Flannigan, Commander of the Wild Geese (see appendix II).

The Auroran Warrior has been largely misrepresented by mainstream Federation media. Typically portrayed as a group of mindless savages whose lust for blood clouds their questionable reason, the Auroran Warrior is usually perceived by Federation personnel as a threat that will easily be overcome through superior skill and tactics. Occasionally, older veterans will refer to the "Wily" Auroran that took their arm/leg through base cunning alone.

What is so often overlooked by these people is the extraordinary lengths a man must go to in order to become a Warrior within Auroran Society. The years of physical, mental and spiritual training that go into the internal make-up of the Warrior's Life.

To the Auroran, becoming a Warrior is to aspire to the greatest height of existence. In the Cultural hierarchy, it is the Warrior who achieves the greatest prestige, and who has the most likelihood of fame and fortune.

During my many years of soldiering in the Heraan House, I earned the title of Warrior. Rather than a person who carries arms in the name of their house, their lifestyle and mental outlook is much more similar to that of one of our Wild Geese.

Make no mistake; the Auroran Warrior is a powerful foe, capable of unbelievable feats, not only through his training, but also through the strength of his code.

Bound by his Honor and by his Duty to his House, a Warrior will perform feats of incredible bravery. This is not through the Lust for Blood, or power, or spoils of war (as our Federation neighbors would have us believe) but through an almost poetic fear of failing himself and his house.

This fear is not because of punishment by the house elders, (although Auroran punishments are usually harsh) but through a fear that the house will be dishonored if a Warrior does not perform his duty with dedication.

The House is the most important bond in a Warrior's life. To serve the house is to preserve the very thing that allows the Auroran to be an individual. However, this bond does not lead to mindless obedience, but a strong sense of purpose.

Before I give you an example, I should explain a few things about the Auroran House Structure. The House is organized as a loose extended Family. The Elders sit at the top of the pyramid, and their control is usually hereditary. Next come the advisors, who are most often veteran Warriors who are now unfit for active duty. Following this are the two most prestigious positions to which the average Auroran Warrior can aspire, the Thurokiir and the Mundokiir.

The Mundokiir is an Auroran term meaning, "heart of crushed Garnet, the eye of Fury". It refers to the general of all the House forces. The title is somewhat metaphoric, for it is the Mundokiir who must lead the House in all major battles. Thus, he is truly the Eye of Fury, standing in the eye of the storm, calm amongst the fighting, perceiving all that occurs around him. If any military action is taken by his House, the Mundokiir has final approval and responsibility over it. It is by his judgement that the House succeeds or fails militarily, and no Warrior gains this title without proving himself so often that many of his great deeds have been long forgotten. His heart is of garnet; red to show the blood that surrounds him at all times.

The Thurokiir is another Auroran term meaning "Obsidian Heart, Arbiter of Reckoning". He is perhaps the most fearsome of the Warriors in a House, as it is his role to act as the Houses' means of upholding its honor. He is the black hearted winner of rough justice, the darker side of simple morality, for as any student of life must know, it is violence that is the leveler; be it physical violence, political force, or the force of justice. The Obsidian Heart falls somewhere outside the regular structure of the House. He has the ear of everyone, and the implacable will and authority to back his judgements. He is the Balance Keeper, the black soul who will stop at nothing to ensure that the will of the House is served.

To give you some idea of a Thurokiir's role I give you the example of the time, during my 'apprenticeship' with the Heraan House, I was stationed with some young Warriors on a small Heraan listening post. They attacked an unarmed supply convoy of a rival house, destroying it utterly. No one can dispute that they were denying their enemy by disrupting his line of supply, but they were not given a heroes welcome. Upon landing, they were met by the Thurokiir, the Obsidian Heart of the House, who was passing through on a mission. He had seen the attack, and commented on their lack of skill, claiming their shots were wild and erratic. At this implied insult, the Warriors began to strike fighting poses, despite the fact that they were outmatched by the man. He stood passively, waited for them to attack, and knocked them all unconscious easily.

When they had all recovered, he stood before them and said one sentence.

"Where is the Honor in attacking those who cannot defend themselves?"

The young men bowed their heads in shame, realizing their mistake.

Following the Thurokiir's gesture, they stripped to the waist, as did their judge. He spoke, "For bringing disgrace to the House you will all wear a black mark upon your arm, a constant reminder of your folly, and the black mark that exists on your honor."

With that he removed a portable tattoo laser (see appendix I) from his belt and branded each man accordingly. One of them remarked that the Thurokiir was not fit to pass judgement, as he too wore a black mark on his arm. The Obsidian Heart looked very old for a moment, as he regarded the man before him; perhaps he was reliving a similar moment in his life. "Young Lion," He said, "I too was once as young as you are now, and I too made foolish mistakes. To this day, I have not recovered the honor that I lost when I earned this mark. I carry it always as a reminder that perfection is what we seek and so often fail to achieve." He turned and left.

For the Obsidian Heart, despite all his triumphs and although he had served his House with considerable distinction, without which he would not have earned his title, could never remove the mark on his honor. It was as impossible to remove as the tattoo on his arm. So throughout his life he had fought, against his many enemies, but mostly against his disgrace, in order to prove himself worthy of the title 'Warrior'. It was not in the eyes of his colleagues that he sought redemption, but in his own, and in the eyes of the now long deceased former Thurokiir who bestowed this mark upon him, despite wearing one himself. His judgement was as final as death, and just as inevitable. For, like the rest of humanity before him, he was destined to fall short of his goal of perfection. He had lost his impeccability, and once lost, it can never be regained. Despite this, it may be argued that in his striving he had become impeccable once more, but never in his own eyes. Always he would bear his shame, for even if he had only failed once, he had nonetheless failed.

Understandably, it is only in later years that the young lions will understand the most important lesson, and inalienable truth, that was taught to them that day. Most of them would be lucky to survive long enough to realize it, and it is this fact that makes the Thurokiir so formidable. His moral code is tempered by many years of battle and it is known that the title is taken with some reluctance. For no sane man should be willing to stand as an impartial judge over his friends and fellow Warriors when he has already shown himself to be incapable of being a true Warrior. It is this striving that gives the Thurokiir the moral authority on which to base his oft-times harsh seeming judgements. His heart is as black as obsidian for he lives with the knowledge that not only has he failed, but he will be the man to judge the failures of others.

One may ask why a sane individual would endure such hardship. Simply, his House requires it of him, and no other calling is as important. It carries a crushing weight of duty with it, and only by being the provider of an impeccable moral code can that weight become bearable.

As can be seen, everything done by the Mundokiir and Thurokiir greatly influences the standing of their House, and it is upon the actions of these two Warriors that the ideals to which all young Warriors aspire will be created. They are the living embodiment of their Houses honor and spirit.

And so the unwritten code of Auroran Warriors is based on what is best for their house, and has little to do with personal glory. It is as binding as steel, and is the hard-tempered core of the Auroran fighting spirit. We must realize that the Aurorans fight with not only skill and honor, but also that they fight for something that they believe to be larger than themselves. They place the honor of their House far above their own personal survival, and this is why, despite their relatively low technology and their bloody inter-house rivalries, they have been able to hold the Federation at bay.

Appendix I

Ritual Tattoos

In the Auroran culture Warriors show their prowess, their fears, their failings, their triumphs and their standing through the use of tattoos. Every ceremonial event has the Warrior bare-chested and it is possible to 'read' of his career by observing his tattoos. For example, for every battle a Warrior survives honorably, he marks a small circle on his body. The color of the circle depends on whom the battle was fought with, and by what means, e.g. a space combat with the Federation is indicated by a Blue circle with a black interior, while an unarmed duel with a fellow Auroran is a Red circle with a white interior. These circles are very small. Occasionally, if a major battle is fought or if an individual Warrior performed a great deed, a special mark is given (the mark for surviving the only battle with the Wild Geese in Auroran history is a small green goose in flight, worn by only twelve Warriors).

Death tattoos are revealed to Warriors by 'war-gods' during long periods of meditation and fasting, which form a large part of a Warrior's life. These tattoos take the form of animals or extremely powerful symbols, and these are worn on the Warriors' chest. For example, if an Auroran perceives death as blackness, he will tattoo large portions of his chest black. If he perceives death as perishing in eternal flames, he will adorn himself with tattooed flames. This practice comes from a belief that if you are prepared to wear your death openly, it has no power over you. This type of tattoo is the first to be given and is received on being fully accepted as a Warrior.

Scars too are usually highlighted with color to show that a Warrior has been wounded but was too strong to die.

On first sight, many Auroran Warriors appear as forbiddingly painted wild savages, but it was I who was embarrassed to reveal my unmarked chest at my first ceremonial gathering. As far as my brother Warriors knew, I was without victory or standing.

Appendix II

Names of Honor

Auroran Warriors give each other names that only their brother Warriors will know them by. These names are earned in battle and for an honorable (or dishonorable) deed, and are not given freely. I was given the name 'Archindar' during my 'apprenticeship', which translates as 'he who refuses to die', after a battle with a rival house in which I covered the withdrawal of the Heraan House by dropping back again and again to destroy the forward scouting elements of the Moash invading fleet. This name has a special distinction as it was given to me by the Mundokiir of the Moash House after the battle. He was forced to abandon his campaign because it became bogged down because of lack of information brought back by his recon units. It was immediately adopted by my blood brothers, and a tattoo made, for there can be no more honorable a name, than one given by an enemy to a valorous opponent.

However, I also earned a 'blood enemy' that day, which is not as bad as it seems. In Auroran culture a 'blood enemy' will seek to ensure your survival until he can face you in a death duel in fair, open combat. To this day, I have been saved by Nyiaarh, which means 'the wily maker of widows', many times, as he wishes to face me in a death duel on his home planet in front of the elders of his House to honor my deeds. With luck, we will both become old and infirm before this can happen as we share a closeness that only valorous opponents can know. In short, I cannot imagine my life without him.

Units too can be given names of honor. I was lucky enough to serve with such a unit, which held the name 'Vygrian', whose name means 'they who hold in the face of death'. The Wild Geese, despite being employed by the Federation to defend their borders, have been given a name of honor by the Aurorans also. After the battle in which the Wild Geese saved the Federation by aiding Commander Raczak in holding off the Aurorans as they advanced on Sol we were given the name 'Archekro', meaning 'they who dance with blood and war', and again, it should be highlighted that this name was given to us by our enemy that day. Obviously they thought us worthy foes.

We should be proud of this name and the tradition it represents.

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Section Beta

Turo'mar walked briskly through the gathering darkness. The chill of the moon he was on meant it was rarely inhabited by any but the hardest (or most desperate) of people. It was one of the latter that he had come to claim. While he was not an overly big man, the casual grace with which he moved spoke volumes. If the observer was a dancer or a warrior, they would have immediately been able to classify it as a deep knowledge of his bodies movements. To one it would mean the ability to move his body with the utmost control, while to the other it would mean the same thing, only with far reaching implications.

Turo'mar silently wondered what the poor wretch he was to eliminate had done to deserve such a fate. Surely living in this frozen hell was enough punishment for any man, but it was not for him to ponder the decision of the House. His only concern was to complete his mission with the required brutality. He again thanked his lucky stars and death for making him the force of destruction that he was. He thought back to the time that his skill for destruction had come to the attention of the House...

It had been during a mercy run when he was an aspiring warrior. The convoy were transporting refugees from a heavily battered sector of the Auroran / Federation border. The mission was deemed to be "safe" by the House Elders, which meant that it only needed young men who were not yet warriors to keep things in order. That is until the Moash sent out a Wolverine to test the mettle of their young men. As the convoy had no military worth, and was without escort, the refugees (who were mostly old women and young children being moved out of the combat zone) and their would be protectors thought little of the Moash ship, until it was too late. To their horror, the Moash quickly disabled the lead ship, and systematically blasted the remainder of the convoy, before boarding the ship. Trying to protect the women and children, Turo'mar was knocked unconscious. It was by not killing him that the Moash made their first mistake.

By the time he regained consciousness Turo'mar knew that the refugees were dead. The warrior in front of him had been in much of the close killing and was covered in blood. He was roughly pulling Turo'mar down a corridor, presumably thinking he was dead and to dispose of him. His eyes widened in surprise as Turo'mar opened his eyes, but he was not quick enough to call out a warning, or to avoid Turo'mar plucking out his larynx. The strike was delivered with such lethal assurance that Turo'mar might as well have been plucking an apple from an overladen bough. The dying man's blood pumped over Turo'mar as he rolled to the side, allowing the man to fall heavily to the floor.

Quickly, Turo'mar had stripped the dead man of his weapons, and begun to stalk down the corridor. He knew that he was facing odds of at least 20 to 1, but this gave him scant cause for concern, for he cared little if he lived or died. An ice-cold rage had settled over his heart, and the only thought that worried him as that some of the Moash might escape, and thus avoid the vengeance they so richly deserved. He intended to allow them to reap the harvest that their actions had sown - the fury of his revenge.

The first group of Moash Warriors Turo'mar found numbered six. They met at the junction of two corridors. The Warrior leading them died before he even had time to register what he was seeing - as Turo'mar hacked his head from his shoulders in a savage slash that ended in the chest of the following man. Blood spurted from the swaying torso, painting the walls in crimson. The Warrior behind the falling corpse tried to pull his blaster, but the thought stopped as his brains splattered across his companions as Turo'mar pulled the trigger of his own blaster, which he had pressed to his enemies forehead. The remaining four attempted to blast Turo'mar into the next world, but were hampered in their efforts as Turo'mar used the brainless body of his victim as a shield, his sword jutting from its chest like a bizarre joystick. With an adroit flick of his wrist, Turo'mar pulled the weapon clear and shoulder barged past the body, his blade already in motion. The next to fall was a woman who tried to rush Turo'mar, which would have worked had he not already been in motion.

The stride placed her right at the point of Turo'mars attack, and led to her leg being sliced cleanly off. The bloody nub of her thigh jetted gore in a gush at the floor, and her scream of pain echoed loudly in the enclosed spaces of the corridor slaughterhouse. Her companions stopped for a moment in shock, which was all the time Turo'mar needed to batter one of them aside with his shoulder, knocking him backwards with his momentum, before calmly placing a laser blast through the chest of one opponent, and between the eyes of the other. Pirouetting, Turo'mar allowed his momentum to carry him around, his sword slicing through the air with the power of a helicopter blade, and plunging into the head of his final opponent, cleaving through his upper ear, skull, and lodging somewhere in the brain base behind both. Turo'mar calmly turned and began to ask the wounded woman questions. The woman was stubborn, but Turo'mar quickly extracted the information he required before ending her life.

The remainder of the engagement followed a similar pattern, until Turo'mar finally allowed himself to stop. The bridge of the Moash Wolverine was his tribute to Death, as he had dragged every one of their corpses there and smeared their blood across every surface. The captain who had led the cowardly attack was propped in the captains chair, his scrotum placed on the display board before him, alongside his tongue and heart. Turo'mar had programmed a course into the navicomputer for Moash space, and recorded the internal camera views of his deeds into the captains log underneath the entry. . .

Thus die those who attack the innocent. Death's harvest is rich with the blood of cowards, and the virtuous have the strength to reap it. The claimer is here. Take heed . . .

. . . and sent the ship on her way. Thus the legend of "The Claimer" was born.

That had been over 15 years ago. The fall out from such an act of brutality was far reaching. It was not that Turo'mar had carried out an act of revenge. It was just that the mutilation of the dead was even shocking for the Auroran. It was necessary for Turo'mar to disappear, as the Auroran council had decreed that he must die. So it was easier for the man that Turo'mar was to die. His ship was blasted apart in a failed "escape attempt". Of course there was no one at the helm, and Turo'mar had by that stage become the secret weapon of the Heraan House. He was now the Claimer, the Tharakoodesh, the most dreaded and feared of all punishments. People whispered of him in dark corners, and the legend grew. The original 20 men that had died on that fateful day grew to 50, 100. The House Elders didn't mind. They had recognized the place for honest brutality, so long as it was focussed and controlled. And so when criminals ran from their heinous crimes, the claimer was sent to return with their heads. The only way people knew that he had been there was the message he habitually left...

Thus die those who attack the innocent. Death's harvest is rich with the blood of cowards, and the virtuous have the strength to reap it. The claimer is here. Take heed . . .

The sun rose on another bleak day. The hardy and desperate rose to the sight of the headless body of the criminal Varakash, whose crime was the killing of Dani aid workers en route to a planet overcome with disease. The Claimer had struck before the act could be called to account by the Dani Warriors, and so the balance was restored. Of the head there was no sign, but all knew it had been claimed, just like the disgraced warriors soul. Claimed by the agent of Death. All who saw the body and read the message and took heed. The Claimer was the voice of retribution, and all who heard it perished.

Turo'mar had long lost count of the men he had killed. It numbered in the scores. Each one was part of his continuous montage of Death. He knew that his time on this plane would be short in comparison to the stars, but he knew his contribution would count. That Evil would perish as long as he was able to combat it. It had to be done. It was his destiny. The filth would be his harvest, and he would be Death's Scythe.

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