

A History of Torei

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There's a lot of talk about Torei, lately. You hear folks chatting about it in hushed tones, wondering if what other folks say is true. People want to know how to get there, how safe you are once you get there, and would you get in trouble when you come back. You see people scowling angrily about Torei's human rights problems, but those same people are the ones who have copies of *Torean Love Slave* hidden away someplace private.

But most of all, people want to know how such a place could have existed all this time. How could human life have developed on this isolated planet in the middle of nowhere while we were busy inventing intergalactic ships and coating every inhabitable surface of the Milky Way with our culture? We've become so used to human life being the only sapient intelligence on Earth-like worlds. So why, then, is Torean culture so... *alien* to us?

Well if you listen to me closely, I will tell you what I know. I'm a historian, of sorts, and history is an alchemical sort of discipline. We find symbols in old sources, and then we have to analyze our sources themselves. We put all these symbols in the context of other symbols, and sometimes if we shake real hard out comes a compelling narrative.

I think you folks appreciate a cracking good yarn; so if you'll permit, I'll embroider the facts as much as I'm comfortable. Some

of what I'll say isn't *known* to be true, but we don't yet know that it *can't* be true. I'll keep the hair-splitting for the *Journal of Toreology* and just tell you all my tale.

The Milky Way

Long long ago, back when humanity had only begun to spread out of its spiral arm of its home galaxy, an empire had ambitions. This empire, known only to history as "The Laminate Culture" or "The Lamination People" because of the style of clothing they produced, saw the end of expansion within the Milky Way before most of the rest of us had. Due to coincidences in the angular momentum of outer-spiral stars, they were hedged in by strong nations they had a tense yet stable peace with. They needed someplace to grow, but didn't dare move in on any of the stars in their neighborhood.

And so an ingenious yet barmy plan was hatched to send colonists to the Andromeda galaxy. The plan was to settle those stars with Laminate Culture colonies early, and spread outward through *that* galaxy before anyone else had managed to start an expedition. To their credit, they thought long-term: the journey would take a thousand years, and they'd have no way of ferrying wealth from these new stars to the motherworld. This was a very very long game, and it took a special kind of desperation to even want to play it.

You can't send a live crew on a thousand-year journey that never comes close to any stars. A generation-ship would need more fuel for life support on such a journey than it would for deceleration. The fleet they designed was effectively a big dumb intergalactic comet: machinery and gene banks and artificial intelligences wrapped in a giant geode of protective minerals and ice. Everything would just sit off and safe and inert until it came

near the energy of a star again.

Off Course

Of course, as you can all guess now, this little spore *never made it to Andromeda*. Stories differ on what happened to it. Some say that the geode craft had some sort of purely analog course-correcting device that locked onto a stray stellar cluster in intergalactic space. Others say that something went wrong, and emergency systems woke to active mode and changed the ship's course. The more fanciful tales tell of signals sent from the Milky Way to sabotage the project by changing the objectives.

Whatever the reason, the ship took a rendez-vous course that brought it to a stable orbit around the most suitable of a handful of lonely stars stuck like an island out in the nowhere between the galaxies. The light of this star melted the geode and woke up the machines, who began building factories and supply lines to construct a suitable habitat for the colony.

As I've mentioned before, the amount of planning that went into this project is breathtaking. The original implementors hadn't considered their payload would get mired in this backwater, but they'd designed the construction phase to bootstrap itself even in harsh conditions. Simple machines built factories that spat out more complicated machines that built more factories to make even better machines. This process continued until at least three of the AIs in the fleet had been augmented enough to begin the next phase.

Building Habitat

Once the brains were awake, it was time to build a home for organic life. None of the planets in the cluster were likely globes, so the machines took a rocky ball on the edge of the Goldilocks

zone and launched all the chunks of ice and carbonaceous chondrite they could find. If you think the timescale for the original mission was long, well the AIs had near-infinite patience. Piece by piece over tens of thousands of years, they built up a planet from dry stone into something that could support life.

Machines around the various stars in the cluster lensed starlight to knock matter out of stable orbits and off toward the new planet. I've been on expedition, and seen the lens devices with my own eyes. They're impressive machines, like vast engines of war from our distant and more violent past. I'm told they still work, if the AIs ever want to use them again.

The planet's new crust slowly cooled around the freshly molten core, and this is where the Torei we know today began. The machines set down at the two poles and dug intricate tunnels through to the hot mantle beneath, making impossibly complicated fractal corkscrew patterns. Through coriolis forces, heat, pressure and other simple physics the magma was separated out into component elements useful for generating an atmosphere.

The machines built tetrahedral "caps" of sorts atop the vents from these tunnels, and did all of the final distillation and synthesis in them. These pyramids are apparently still there inside the current-day ziggurats. The real machinery for atmospheric generation descends down into the network of tunnels, but there is a hollow space inside the zigs where the caps can be seen.

Ah, I suppose you all have the famous image of the Dahom ziggurat in the snow. Well imagine that landscape with no snow yet, because the air was too dry. Now imagine that the vast stepped pyramid is only one-twentieth the size, and smooth-sided. That's how they got started. Those little pyramids worked tirelessly for centuries to generate an atmosphere suitable for garden crops and large mammals.

The ziggurats at Mazos and Dahom were built later, and we

have hints that they were an act of desperation. We think that the AIs realized that they weren't making enough progress on a self-sustaining biosphere. They created the zigs as habitat domes with the hopes that human workers could help speed up the project.

First Humans

If that was the plan, then it worked. The first humans probably awoke inside the bottom level of one of the zigs, before they built the upper layers. They'd have had hydroponic gardens already running to give them fresh food and filtered water. There would have been some livestock, but likely no birds because the air wouldn't have been clean enough for them yet.

Life for these first few generations was probably pretty miserable, even by what we see at the Torean poles today. The AIs were still completing their program of habitat creation, and to them the humans were little more than lab rats and plough-mares. The ziggurat was a castle of horrors full of biological experimentation and vat-grown chimeras. We think that this work resulted in tissue cultures that are still alive as membranes inside the atmosphere generators today.

This period when Torean humans lived only inside the ziggurats is somewhat hard to pin down, historically. Most of what we have is myth from the humans and propaganda from the AIs, so who knows what to believe. All we can really say is that this period marked the development of the current social system at the poles.

Husbandry

The goal of the AIs was to make Torei habitable for normal humans, but the death rate among the early populations was too high. The bio-engineering research program produced humans

who were more durable, and could withstand more of the half-made world. Specialized organisms were seeded at the equator, to try and build up biomass where the conditions were most favorable. Life on Torei began slowly to step outside, but it was all strange new breeds meant specifically for that world.

Since this was a breeding program, the human genotype was altered to produce nine females for every male. The reproductive systems and sexual drives of these humans were cranked up to unusual levels for maximal fertility. Each man would impregnate one woman per month, like clockwork. The population grew and new levels were built to make the ziggurats we know today.

Controlling such a population was not the same task as it had been before. During each pole's summer, when the sun did not set, humans were let out onto the planet's surface in laminate environment suits. These were an early form of today's isolation laminates that the Emissaries wear, and they did far less. The wearer was protected from the unfinished atmosphere outside, and infosystems in the helmet kept the AI in control of what the occupant saw and heard.

What originally started as an environment suit for humans being let outside soon became a population control mechanism. A misbehaving colonist could be locked into one of these suits and made to act as an internal police force. The suits could simulate almost any sensation to the wearer's flesh, which made it an efficient system for re-training.

The colonists' ramped-up sex drive and lack of almost any other means of entertainment meant that the AIs had a convenient reward system. Pain is always an effective punishment, but the AIs learned how to prey on a person's fears and desires. What we've seen in the present day suggests that even a limited time in the isolation suits completely changes a person. And this was important, because if the AIs were going to start actual farms on

the equator, they'd need to be able to trust the farmers.

Farmers

I'm not a geologist, but even I am stunned by the dramatic difference between the equatorial band and the rest of Torei. You can drive around in the badlands for days without seeing anything but igneous and metamorphic rocks. You joyride down dusty craters, follow fissures down tectonic thrusts, and then suddenly out of *nowhere* everything is covered in lichen.

If you turn in the direction of the blooms, you start to see little green shoots in the dusty cracks, here and there. Plants with long taproots extend fernlike fronds up to the daylight. And as you continue, within only a short time you find yourself on a dirt-like surface driving through low scrub. You can tell your latitude to a novel degree of accuracy simply by looking at vegetation around you. There's a reason the planet's flag has that green belt around the globe.

What's also interesting is when you dig down through equatorial soil. The topsoil itself is very thin, but well-managed as a sort of sacred trust. But once you lift that off, you find caustic stuff that could make for devastating dust storms if allowed to become airborne. Early farms were planted just to control this layer of atmospheric fallout and keep it buried where it wouldn't be a problem any more. Ask a Pembric plantation master about "leechcorn" some time, and you'll get an amazing education in bioremediation techniques!

The farms were a success, in small part thanks to the controlled watering the equator gets. The AIs control underground aquifers via long tunnels that are off limits to most humans. When it's time for crop watering, they engineer rain showers that bathe a portion of the equatorial region. It's run like clockwork,

and typically during the evening. You sometimes see the rain schedule next to the train timetables, for example.

At this point, the habitat creation project sadly stalled. The AIs needed the farms to supply its biotech machines with ingredients, and the humans needed the AIs to keep the rain falling and the air flowing. As one of the old poems put it (and apologies for my somewhat unskilled translation): “And the Dæmons kept dominion of the sky, and Men claimed dominion of the land.”

Sharecropping Wars

Of course, the “Dæmons” kept dominion over the humans, as well. The end of expansion on Torei meant that there weren’t enough isolation suits for all of the troublemakers, but the ones that were bound in them made effective police for the rest. Well, at least for a while, anyway.

The problem with releasing an incredibly randy and fertile population to the furthest corner of a planet from your control is that your carefully controlled breeding program will go wildly off course. It didn’t take many generations for the natural-born humans at the equator to see the isolates as foreign oppressors and set plans to overthrow them. This begins what is possibly the bloodiest time in Torei’s history, which Toreologists have come to call the *Sharecropping Wars*.

At first, the AIs saw this population as expendable, and simply eradicated whole towns when it encountered trouble. There were usually enough people inside the ziggurats who were willing to colonize an evacuated farmstead and live out under the Torean sun. But eventually the costs of this became clear to both sides.

The exterminations and re-population efforts brought more and more humans over to the revolutionary side. Furthermore,

the rebel humans had taken to destroying the crops that were destined for the ziggurats. A human colony could survive on tubers and ruminant milk for a year if they had to, but a critical missed shipment of seed oils or other organic chemical ingredients could mean trouble for the whole planet. Time and again, the humans showed the AIs that they were willing to ignore the threat of ecological disaster in pursuit of independence.

This is something that seems predictable to you or I, but the AIs genuinely seemed to have trouble accepting it. They kept up their program of recolonization for over a century before finally recognizing the equatorial ring as independent. Now the “Dæmons” became “Emissaries”, and they negotiated air and water rights in exchange for necessary crops. They traded technology for the food needed to keep the population in the ziggurats alive.

From this point on, aside from the occasional nation that tested the AIs’ wrath or surrendered sovereignty to one of the Emissaries, the political role of the AIs remained in this stalemate nearly into the present day. For a thousand years, humanity was able to build its own society on the equator, and the “ringdoms” as we now call them were formed.

Free Humanity

The politics get boring for a while here, but wars are now waged between the ringdoms more often. Alliances form, nations conquer other nations, and realms are partitioned up for heirs who then fight one another. Throughout all of this, the threat of interference by the AIs looms.

It’s not really useful as a scholarly classification, but I find it’s easiest to describe this period to people as *feudal*. The culture was based heavily on male inheritance of arable land, and conduct of war was often regulated by the AIs. Commonly, when a dispute

between ringdoms broke out, war would be a last resort after bringing the case to an Emissary.

The art from this period often depicts the AIs as turbulent gods, bringing bounty and destruction on ineffable whims. The laws of men could be appealed to an Emissary, but the result would sometimes leave everyone suffering. Humanity wrestled with its relationship to the AIs, hating and fearing and ultimately relying on them even in independence.

For a time, a class of priestesses emerged, promising to interpret the “Dæmons” for their masters. The story goes that an Isolate raped the women of a powerful landlord, to threaten the legitimacy of any heirs. The daughters of these unions were believed to have insight into the AIs, and allegedly they were seen talking to their biological father (a difficult claim to prove, as all male Isolates effectively look the same). These women were ejected from the estate their mothers belonged to, and began prophesying in the streets on market days. Their prescience became legendary, and soon it became common for stray women to claim insight into the plans of the AIs.

This trend improved the lot of unowned women immensely over the years. Originally the term “freewomb” meant a woman whose children were not by her owner, but the word soon came to mean the children themselves. Cast out of an estate, these girls had to make their way alone in societies that did not consciously value the roles they could play. A lack of loyalties made them neutral mediators, taking over some of the roles that the Emissaries had performed before independence. But the association with Dæmon-scriving proved devastating

The Princess Thrall

There are Toreologists who spend their whole careers studying just one period for one house of one nation during the warring states era. Land and loyalties switched around like plains rivers during a storm, but a stalemate between five remaining ringdoms held off unification for three generations. The details of this struggle make up much of the high art on Torei, and people sometimes identify culturally by which of the five empires they descend from rather than which of the current ringdoms they currently live.

There was a courtesan named Theca or Nebla (depending on the language of the tale), and the emperor of Falon made a grand present of her to the emperor of Prellatia. This gift was part of a court gesture of great magnitude, but war demanded the Falonian emperor's attention at the home front. So he locked her into Falon's symbols of state (scepter, crown, and boots) and sent her along with an escort formed of his most trusted palace guards. He would be present in a ceremonial sense, and would arrive in person later to wear the diadem once more.

By the time Theca reached Prellatia, the war in Falon had claimed the lives of the four emperors. The Prellatian emperor gloated, and tried to take the crown from Theca's head. Her guards dispatched this ruler expertly, and in a legendary battle managed to hold the Prellatian palace.

There were further battles, but within a year all of the noble houses on Torei were swayed by Theca's calls for peace. She was but a slave, yet she wore the Falonian and Prellation crowns. She seduced hundreds of powerful men who came to her court, and each man felt he owned a piece of her. The planet was tired of war, and Theca offered a new model for human self-rule.

In a coronation ceremony that is the subject of all the great

murals and hangings on Torei, she bound herself with circlets made from the crowns of the five empires: one on each ankle, one on each wrist, and Falon's about her throat. The remaining symbols of state were made into a multi-colored chain that kept her locked to the throne for the rest of her life. Torei now knew life without war for the first time since it had settled the equator.

Polar Relations

With the ringdoms no longer fractured, the need for Emissary intervention or alliances with the poles almost vanished overnight. People worried what the Dæmons would do at first, but soon forgot their fears: the rains kept coming on schedule and no waves of slick black bodies descended on their habitations.

The polar AIs, for their part, seemed to enjoy this era of peace. Without war to sap resources, the cost of equatorial goods went down. They exported fewer engines of war and more agricultural and lifestyle goods. The peace dividend seemed to pay out to everyone.

Unfortunately, the freewombs on the streets suffered terribly. With a culture no longer nervous about the mood of the polar Dæmons, they soon found themselves scapegoats for all kinds of problems. During the Princess Thrall's rule, the ruling houses enacted hundreds of strict laws governing their lives. Many sought enslavement in poor houses to escape persecution, but most soldiered on in the oppressive regime.

After the death of the Princess Thrall, the Council of Regents continued to meet and honor the peace for some time. One woman would be offered up from each of the original five empires per year, and chained to the throne as a group. Many of the festival queens you see today are inspired by this tradition.

Dissolution.

With human society stable and peaceful, it was only a matter of time before revolutionary thinking cropped up again. This time it was more of a nationalist flavor. In the time since the wars, local cultures had a chance to flourish. Language was largely uniform thanks to the AIs' influence on communication, but customs and traditions gave people a national identity that they wanted to see reflected.

Over the next two centuries, local independence movements chipped away at the authority of the Council of Regents. Some set up their own copies of the Council, claiming authority over all of Torei. Some brought in polar Emissaries and boasted that they'd bring back the heroic age that had settled their land. In all, the Regents were as tone-deaf as the AIs had been, and they responded to uprisings with brutality.

Once the dust settled, the rough borders of modern Torei were laid down. One can look at a map of Torei from three hundred years ago and still identify almost all of the nations based on a modern atlas. Unity was gone, but trade struggles replaced war as the means for jockeying among the ringdoms. The AIs had become experts at the use of political economy to control the human settlements, as the ringdoms weren't so eager to sacrifice quality of life once they'd re-gained stability.

And who knows where Torei would have gone if this had been allowed to continue?

Discovery

All the guidebooks tell you, Cmdr. Stave Fedman was the first human from mainstream intergalactic civilization to visit Torei. While it's true that he was the first to join Torei and the rest of humanity in contact, there is ample evidence that others discov-

ered Torei's stars long before this.

We have records of a pirate fleet from the early days of Andromedan colonization. The logs hint of a "cache of starrs(sic)" where their plundered booty could be staged far from intergalactic jump points. Some micro-asteroids found around other stars in Torei's cluster are believed to be wreckage from an orbital battle, but little conclusive evidence has been collected.

The AIs themselves have marked certain ravines and cave systems on Torei as off-limits to humanity. Some of the more creative analysis of long-range reconnaissance hints at a structure shaped rather like the hull of a long-space frigate of the sort used five thousand years ago. It's sketchy at best, but it's at least somewhat corroborated by faint burn marks on the surface rock when the regolith layer is cleared by wind.

At any rate, Torean humans themselves had no contact with the outside world until Commander Fedman's expedition. Torei's cluster had been known since regular passage to Andromeda had opened up, but the cost of visiting it hadn't been justifiable. Once the cost of habitable land in the Milky Way had climbed back up and the technology for space travel had advanced enough, it was only a matter of time before someone visited each little isolated star out in intergalactic space hoping for a homestead.

Fedman's diaries were cleaned up for the official record, but at least three versions claiming to be the originals can be found in bookshops all over Torei. Each one tells a slightly different tale of the debauchery and revelling he engaged in on his visit, but they're all really based on interviews with his crew.

Off-Route Trade

The ringdoms built landing pads to attract visiting ships, but all of the orbital infrastructure was controlled by the AIs. Voidcraft

would stay in a solar orbit for ages before being permitted to even approach a Torean orbit. The AIs vetted and quarantined visitors fastidiously. When a ship was allowed to the surface, the humans paid top prices for any cargo aboard.

At first, the humans bartered: the AIs had spent tens of thousands of years perfecting genetic manipulation and biotechnology as part of the habitat creation project, and Torei had the capacity for medical services unavailable anywhere else in the cosmos. Eventually all of the nations were able to trade in common currency, and word started to get out that they paid handsomely for certain cargoes.

A flotilla of rough trading ships sat idle in orbit of Torei's star, each waiting for permission from the Dæmon Dockmasters to land. From time to time a chaff-runner would make an attempt at unauthorized landing, and some would succeed. The AIs dutifully broadcast the registration IDs of all impounded vessels, and there are some downright chilling recordings from the captured pilots who claimed to have "defected" to Dahom or Mazos.

In retrospect it's obvious why the AIs were so picky, but at the time they seemed as mysterious to us as they did to the Torean humans. The AIs were still pulling the strings of the human economy, and wanted a surplus in goods needed at the ziggurats and a deficit of items needed at the equator. So generally a lot of food and water and hydrocarbon mixtures made it through, while processed goods and technology stayed in orbit.

Gunboat Diplomacy

Unfortunately for the AIs, it was the manufacturers of technology and processed goods that had the strongest space forces. The Zanweg Cartel sent an armada directly into Torean geosynchronous orbit and began to lower a tether to the peak of the

highest mountain on Torei's equator. With fighter escorts running interference swarm patterns around the tether, a full-scale orbital lift was built along it's length.

The space elevator on Torei changed everything. The mountain it was built on was not very high, but it never had a chance to build up any soil layer of note. It had been disputed territory for centuries, and several ringdoms that abutted it considered it a national treasure. Once the base anchor port was completed, the borders were formalized and the tower was declared a neutral intergalactic trade zone, and all ringdoms on that side of the planet were granted access corridors to the base.

Once trade in industrial goods opened up, the neighboring ringdoms were able to build vast tower arcologies around the planetside port spire. The more wealthy nations were able to build skybridges to the orbital lift tower from the tops of their own structures. It's a common for a vast city to spring up around one of these, but Torei has over a dozen!

I said this was unfortunate for the AIs, and it really was. The economy has swung out of their control, and the habitat-creation project is seriously compromised by this. If the planet never becomes self-sustaining, they may resort to force once more. It remains to be seen how well Mazos and Dahom adapt to this new reality. They've been slow to change before, probably because a biosphere-building project requires a very patient long-term mindset, and they seem to treat the human economy as yet another ecological system.

The Future

The ringdoms seem to be doing a brisk business in sex tourism, tax havens, and basic medical services. The AIs could outclass them on the last one, if they ever decided to. Of course, it could

lead to their biotech secrets getting out, which would ruin any advantage they have.

The AIs have always held control over the badlands, but they appear to be stepping up their game lately. Word is that they're losing population and have to spend more and more of their resources sending Emissaries further and further afield. The unrest at the poles is helped by agitator-liberator groups that run a sort of underground railroad to help people flee to the ringdoms.

One of the reasons the AIs are stretched thin is that they've begun to maintain a space fleet. It's a rag-tag collection of used and commandeered vessels, but they've been spotted at ports in three galaxies. They may be trying to export their services, and they seem to buy exactly the same things they've always needed.

And of course Torean expansion to other stars was always part of their mandate. The Dockmaster is largely silent, and only issues quarantine orders from time to time. It could be busy managing the polar fleets and preparing for conquest. We just have no way of knowing.

Academics

People often ask me why Toreology even matters. Surely it must just put an erudite face on whoring and carousing! I wish I could claim innocence on that part, but there is much more to be learned from Torei than fancy biotech and sexual practices.

One thing that makes Torei unique is its status as a time capsule of human society back when we were still confined to just the one galaxy. The AIs raised the humans with materials from the Laminate Culture's archives, and much of the art and craft still retains something of their fingerprint.

We don't have any surviving samples of written or spoken works from the era of the Laminate People, but the language

spoken on Torei is almost certainly an unmodified form of their common tongue. Our research on Torei shows almost no change in dialect during its entire recorded history, no doubt due to the influence of the AIs on reasserting “High Torean” when local drifts occur. We often see local subcultures branching off, but they quickly become historical curiosities or caricatures as the population aspires to rejoin everyone else.

The clothing, in particular, is produced in almost exactly the same manner as that found in Laminated Culture rubbish mounds dating back ca. 100,000 years. The resulting garments are flattering to all figures, form-fitting, glossy and eye-catching, and resistant to the elements while breathing well for dermal health. I’ve taken to wearing Torean small-clothes beneath my professional attire when I return home for conferences, just because I’ve come to love the feel of it. These clothes also make me feel something of a connection with my own ancient Milky Way ancestors when I run my fingers over their smooth surface.

Field Life

How do I get on in such a strange world? Well, for starters they’re a people that understands hierarchy better than qualifications. I’m always amused that they’re less interested in my degrees or publications, and more curious about how many people work under me. I’ve built up a medium-sized staff of interns and paid workers just because some requests get ignored if you haven’t got a “dozenhand”, or twelve people following your orders. They love ship’s captains, for obvious reasons.

Slaves? Yes, of course many of my staff are slaves. It’s not really what you think, and I’m going to have to beg out of any arguments over ethics or human rights. Suffice it to say that these are skilled professional women who signed up for my protection

in exchange for their loyalty. I said it was like feudalism, and they have effectively sworn fealty to me. If I had them on contract the way I do my off-world staff, their lives would be much harder without the ability to wield my authority in certain situations. I've complicated my life in more ways than just having to field irate attacks on my feminist principles!

Another problem with hired women is that they are subject to curfew and are unable to sign for things in my name. I often send the slaves in my team on solo journeys to deal with paperwork hassles, and they're authorized to use my signet on any document. I hope you see now that this is not what you see in *Torean Love Slave* or any of the sensationalist documentaries that have become popular. I also use the legal safety practices advised by the Abolition League: should something happen to me, these women will be able to re-incorporate under a structure of their own choosing.

Conclusions

I hope you've enjoyed my little sketch of Torei's history. I simplified in places, and as I said many of the elements of the story don't really have a historian's standard of evidence behind them yet. We're always revising the narrative as we do our research, but this is to my mind the most coherent tale the facts tell us so far.

You can tell I'm a great lover of the planet, and I enjoy my time there. I hope, though, that you won't take me the wrong way when I tell you *not* to visit.

It's a lovely world, and if you go past the casinos and the sex clubs there is a whole planet of people living their lives in a culture that couldn't exist anywhere else in the universe. But also it's a very proud world, and they don't make it easy to take

that long climb down through the ringdoms and into an everyday Torean's life.

They have a saying: "chained legs don't open for new guests." Toreans live in a surrounding atmospheric pressure of rules and powers and consequences that make it unlikely for them to open up to every well-meaning off-worlder who drops by. You won't be able to just dress up in their clothes and learn their language and be welcomed as one of them. Believe me, I've tried.

The real trick is that you don't walk on Torei's surface without a powerful master of your own. You can be a military figure with your own superiors, a diplomat serving a powerful government, or a member of a religious order (they have no word for "monk" or "nun", and call them all slaves). You need to conduct yourself as a representative of a higher power. On Torei, even the masters have masters.

But the real reason to stay away is that every off-worlder who paws around in the lives of Toreans leaves a bit of outside culture behind. We taint the place with our very presence, and in a few years our clumsy fingerprints will be all over everything. We upset trade imbalances and threaten the very air they breathe. We naïvely try to liberate their slaves, and ruin lives with no lasting emancipation. We think we know what's best for them; but when we try to explain, their questions reveal assumptions a hundred millennia distant from ours.

So do not go to Torei. Wait for Torei to come to us. Without fail, some day it will.