

The Auriculans

Cleave Summary

"I'm here to make you an offer for your soul," the Devil said.

The businessman, not looking up, pushed a paper across the desk. The Devil looked down, and for the first time in two hundred years, he frowned.

"You had papers prepared?"
-- from *"Under New Management,"* by Emily Chen

The Auriculans call themselves "secular supremacists." They accept the common theory that Prosaic Reality is just a lie the Earth tells itself. However, they consider it a *better* world than the world of Myth. They want to strengthen that lie, driving on its growth until it becomes the truth. The most prized element of Prosaic Reality, to them, is money. They summarize the philosophy that drives the mundane world as "only wealth and prosperity matter." The Auriculans themselves do not share this philosophy, although they distinctly prize personal and global wealth. Rather, they believe that *proselytizing* the cause of wealth and material riches is the best use for their time. For this reason, the Auriculans accept new members only rarely. They want other people to devote their energy to investing and developing wealth. Converting someone to their cause rather than the cause of secular hedonism -- the greatest material good for the greatest number -- represents a kind of failure on their part.

The Auriculans have built a tight alliance with the Cammora, sometimes even presenting themselves as the Vehmgericht's "Noble branch." In exchange for providing the organization with miraculous support and such loyalty as the Auriculans can spare them, the Cleave receives "poaching rights" on mortal governments and institutions of financial influence. The Auriculans do not have the protected legal status of the Cammora, but they benefit indirectly from it. When they use the resources they possess, they must abide by Lord Entropy's law. When they use power to *gain* resources in the mortal world, their actions are legally invisible. The Cammora can reasonably expect to employ those resources when the organization needs them, and therefore the Auriculan's action benefits the Cammora directly.

"Wealth," as the Auriculans mean it, can refer to any kind of quantifiable material resource. Unfortunately, even in this broad sense, Nobilis usually have access to all the wealth they need. This has traditionally made the Auriculans' work harder. The Cleave struggles to create an economy from the few things that Nobilis *do* value. This includes resources from other worlds on the Ash (e.g. Jotun-forged artifacts, neither priceless nor cheap) and scrip currency tied to "favors" from willing Nobilis. Unfortunately, physical resources from other worlds are rare and scrip favors have no legal backing. This hinders the Auriculans' efforts. They cannot even encourage the greedy stockpiling of currency, since a promissory note becomes valueless as soon as the Noble backing it dies. Attempts to build a trade network based on the advanced technology and magic available in some Chancels foundered on the unwillingness of the Imperators to participate; unlike the resources of Jotunheim and Aelfscienne, Imperators take a proprietary interest in such artifacts.

On the whole, few of Noble or Imperial spirit hate the Auriculans. Members of this Cleave can afford to admit their allegiance openly, so long as they deny that the society to which they belong actually exists. Not all Powers share their opinion that Prosaic Reality should dominate, but most of those who disagree with the Auriculans' aims also doubt that the Auriculans' methods will produce that result. To the average Noble, these Powers constitute a

bizarre cult that fills a potentially useful role in Noble society; the reasons behind their actions are irrelevant.

The flower of the Auriculans is, of course, the auricula flower, which represents wealth.

A Story of the Auriculans: The Man Who Had Everything But Money

Once upon a time, a man who had everything but money lived in a small village at the edge of the sea. His family, numbering twenty-eight grandparents, six parents, eighteen cousins, four aunts, ten uncles, three wives, and eighty-two children, loved him deeply and well. In every field, he had both mastery and the community's respect. He commanded every virtue and lacked all vice, and he lived his fisherman's life in a state of simple joy.

A merchant from a nearby village came to this man and said, "I admire the things that you have, the life you lead. Therefore, I have a proposal. I offer you all my possessions -- numbering among them ten thousand coins of gold -- in exchange for your identity."

"I do not think," the fisherman said, "that ten thousand coins can buy happiness; nor will I sell it so cheaply."

The merchant nodded, and bowed his head, and left, and did not return for five years. His hair turned grey. His wealth dwindled. The voice of his heart grew quiet and dark.

When the merchant returned, the fisherman remained full of health and youth, and his life was as before. "I beg you, fisher," the merchant said. "My time runs low. My life slowly destroys me. If you have compassion in your heart, you will gift me with your life to live and your name to wear. In return, you may have all my possessions, five thousand coins of gold among them, and the knowledge that you have done me a good turn."

"I do not think," the fisherman said, "that five thousand coins can buy happiness; nor will I sell it to a man who thinks it is for sale."

The merchant nodded, and bowed his head, and left, and did not return for five years. His hair turned white. His wealth dwindled. The voice of his heart cried out in despair.

When the merchant returned, the fisherman remained full of health and youth, and his life was as before. "Please," the merchant said. "I cannot survive. My life holds nothing for me. Is your heart a stone? Give me what you have. You may have everything I own -- my clothes, my house, my --" he fumbled in his pocket, "my coin of gold and three coins of silver. Please."

"I do not think," the fisherman started, "that one coin --"

The merchant's coin glistened in his hand.

"I will not sell --" the fisherman tried again.

"What hesitation is this?" asked the merchant, a desperate hope rising in his eyes.

"I have not seen one of those before," the fisherman said, tongue slow. "It is pretty."

"I will go," said the merchant. "You are right; one coin cannot buy happiness."

"It is just," the fisherman said, "that it is one more coin than I have ever had."

A Tract of the Auriculans: The Inspired Doctrine of Kishar, Viscount of Contraception

In the beginning, the world had no order, and the angels saw order nowhere on the Ash.

Then came a work in Heaven named the Work of Structure. In reflection, the Demiurge, named by the uninitiated Hormahiel and by the humans Gabriel, descended to the Earth. He struck the world with a hammer of stars, and from that destruction came a new creation. For the Estate of the Demiurge embodies not Destruction but Maturity through Destruction. Therefore, from Gabriel's Hammer came a new and more mature world. The "Prosaic Reality" represents the primary echo upon the Ash of the great Work of Order in Heaven, and stands first among all worlds beneath the Shining Realm. It rests atop the corrupt and chaotic Mythic World like a saint riding the Devil's back, like a serpent skimming the surface of a pond.

What makes the prosaic world more mature? Ask an astronomer and she points to the precise progressive course of the stars. Ask a natural philosopher, an alchemist, a student of the phenomena, and they marvel at how their theories can model the artifacts of the world. These things define the Nobles' vision of Prosaic Reality, yet they do not embody the truth of that cosmos. The Demiurge's act did not create a world where stars and lightning have a consistent structure; for all the claims of the technologists in their Chancels, this does not merit Gabriel's time. Rather, the prosaic world exists to order the animistic and abstract forces that seem on first look no part of it. Humans, that is, and animals. Governments, economies, and laws.

Governments and economies control the natural progression of the "prosaic" world, and I have seen them growing stronger. Everything, from the health of the simple farmer to the complicated creations of the artificers, relies on distribution networks and on social order. Solid financial and social realities, whether glorious or harsh, underpin civilization and orderly human life. Humans are commoners, of course, but they represent the incarnation in the Demiurge's world of the basic sentient principles of our Realm. Dionyl has the Edge Cauldrons, more important than life; the Acmonion Wood has living trees, more important than its mobile life. Earth, as it has been from its inception, is a place of mind. The order of human life embodies the maturity of the world.

I speak of other holy truths.

Humans and Nobilis say they place value in the things they adore. They believe that value is an imbued property, an instilled property. One mind grants value to another. Living minds give value to unliving things. It's a very fine theory, and it's as wrong as Tehuteshub's theory of rabbits under the sea.^{*} Value represents something intimate and important about an object. It can change, as a man's soul may grow bitter or a crowd's heart may be inflamed, but it exists within each person, object, and phenomenon as an inherent property. The movement of substance and energy in the prosaic world mirrors the flow of value from one place to another. The actions of spirits in the Mythic World reflect the shifting patterns of utility.

^{*}Strictly speaking, the original read "Tehuteshub's theory of rabbits on land." Events since, involving a mass relocation of sea rabbits onto the continental masses, have necessitated certain alterations in Kishar's work.

Value can grow -- *wealth*, the sum total of the value in the world, can grow. With careful management, we can increase the utility of the resources available to us. If the mature world does not yet allow this, we must develop it until it can. If the society of flowers does not permit this, we must work to build an economy of our own. We must master coin and trade as we have mastered reality. In this manner, we strengthen both the world of the Demiurge and the world of the Ash. For what is the world but the sum of the effort invested in it? And what is value but power used in the Creator's service?

Cleave Philosophy

The first holy mystery of the Auriculans is the origin of Prosaic Reality. From the act of the angel Hormahiel, whom they call the Demiurge and sometimes Gabriel, came a world of a kind seen nowhere else upon the Ash. This new world, they say, represents something "more mature" than the worlds found elsewhere.

Classical metaphysics suggests that Hormahiel's act created an illusory reality specifically to define "reasons" for events based on physical laws rather than animistic actions. The Auriculans' interpretation differs slightly. They believe that the prosaic world exists to order, not events, but life energy and abstractions. It matters very little to them that gravity has consistent rules. The sanity of humans and animals, in modern terms, means much more. The predictable, sensible functioning of abstract entities like economies and governments is priceless. Precisely consistent gravity aids technological development. Dependable social and financial realities provide an invaluable underpinning for both technology *and* human-style civilization.

Other worlds on the Ash have characteristics reminiscent of Prosaic Reality. Many resemble both Prosaic Reality and the Mythic World, while possessing traits wholly their own. The Auriculan perspective, therefore, includes bias towards Earth as well as its prosaic side -- the orderly cosmologies found elsewhere are, in their opinion, inadequate.

The second holy mystery of the Auriculans is the sacredness of Value. They believe that events in the mundane and mystic worlds reflect the patterns of changing value rather than vice versa. Most Auriculans have an Aspect high enough to see the world in exactly that way, without losing the ability to draw reasonable conclusions. In Prosaic Reality, they make legendary economists and deific accountants.

Auriculans cannot prove that this value-oriented perspective has more merit than standard cosmologies. For the most part, they do not bother trying -- they espouse materialism, not the Auriculan philosophy. However, in communications among themselves, the Auriculans connect the second holy mystery to the idea that the universe has a purpose. "We cannot demonstrate that the Creator made the cosmos with any particular goal in mind," they admit. "Neither, however, do we doubt the statement of the Serpents and the Angels that the Ash has a Creator. A Creator, as opposed to a Big Bang, acts with purpose; this makes it likely that its Creation has purpose. Value, then, is the element of an object or person's being that contributes towards that purpose."

The third holy mystery exists as a consequence of the second. Wealth, the sum total of value, can increase. The physical and mystic resources of the world can be invested and monetarily manipulated to continuously increase their utility. To this end, the Auriculans work to control and "properly" develop mortal economies. They strive to bring the Prosaic World and Noble society into harmony with their wealth-worship, which they believe will strengthen all

three. As part of this, they work to encourage the minimal economy of the Nobilis.

"Humans have an economy," the Auriculans argue, "because an economy works. As time goes by, a structured economy makes the world ever easier to control. With a sufficiently strong concept of money and investment, the Nobilis might lose some of our independence and godlike freedom, but at the same time we would become a unified society capable of destroying the Excrucians with ease. All the benefits of civilization without the price tags. Rather than a ragtag mob, we'd become a prosperous and decentralized army.

The Auriculans believe that the Nobilis should 'encourage' and 'strengthen' the Prosaic Reality. "The philosophical principle here is simple," they explain. "The Mythic World lacks most of the possibilities inherent in Prosaic Reality. Humans in the Mythic World would never have developed the kind of orderly, advanced world we see around us today. Prosaic Reality, however, openly admits to a deeper reality, and thereby contains all of the possibilities of the Mythic World. Consider the subjectivity of prosaic perspectives, the way that proving a physical law appears logically impossible, and the way society integrates the abstract and the physical. Even commoners can tell that Prosaic Reality is hiding something -- the Mythic World, of course. We can choose, however, whether that Mythic World remains a hidden 'truth' -- or becomes a simple metaphysical substructure of the prosaic Earth." Their method for strengthening reality, as mentioned above, is to encourage the wealth-based mindset. This directs the revelations of all three mysteries towards a single unified goal.

The Auriculans work heavily with the Cammora, but do not attempt to justify this ethically or philosophically. It simply makes their work easier, and compromises must be made. The Cleave takes it on faith that it controls the Cammora and not the other way around.