

## Origons of Galactic Etiquette

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Illustrated by STONE

*Take this handy guide along on your Galactic jaunts—to avoid death—or even worse!*

### **PREFATORY NOTE**

*MAN rippled out through the Galaxy, learning. He was learning—often the hard way—to abandon the set notions of morality that had conditioned him. He was learning that the guiding hand of the past could not reach from star to star. He was learning to evaluate new situations arising out of changed conditions. In sum, he was learning that etiquette varies with environment.*

*At first, breaches of etiquette were all too common. The trouble they caused resulted largely from twin errors. The offender erred in failing to use his intelligence to determine the proper social expedient; and the one taking offense erred in failing to allow for the blunderer's ignorance.*

*To reconcile conflicting ways of life—without allowing one to impose its beliefs, shames, and fears upon another—is the Galactic Council's mission. In 2937 the Galactic Council consolidated its counseling services into the Department of Etiquette. It commissioned experts with a background of comparative studies in ecology, sociology, and psychology.*

*These experts took the generic title of MLE, from the initials of Manners, Logic, Expediency—not, as many think, from Emily Post, a probably mythical authority on Terran etiquette.*

*The following examples of Galactic etiquette are a cross-section of MLE-ing in its formative stage.*

**FROM** the microfiles of MLE Zel Pret (2916-3040), dean of the Derben XI MLEs.

*Question:* Three years ago a friend of mine disappeared. He had been working on a self-popping cereal when it exploded. He left no trace and so we held mourning rites over the spot we believed he had last occupied.

Six months ago he reappeared. But, naturally, until he goes through the birth ceremony, we must religiously follow the custom of "not seeing" him.

He is taking unfair advantage of his "invisibility." Judging by his mischief-making, I suspect that he staged the explosion to cover his leaving—and I shudder to think of what he must have done during those missing years.

Now he walks right into our houses, helps himself to our best liquor, snatches food from our grasp, and pinches our wives. And he caps these indignities by tying our eye-stalks into neat bows, turning our "unseeing" eyes upon ourselves.

What do you advise? Fit-to-be-tied.

*Answer:* You have a knotty problem, Fit-to-be-tied. To see how to cut the knot, simply follow the lesson you learn from the following example.

Alusded Anstef (2613-2709), a Prubnild III feather magnate who sculpted for a hobby, taught his son Rusica to believe in his philosophy, which held that the mind never can gather facts enough to be sure that one course of action is wiser than another—that what now seems good may in the long run prove bad.

One day in 2679 Alusded stood on a high scaffold in his studio. He was absorbedly putting the finishing touches to a colossal statue. He stepped back to admire his work. He fell.

The sudden stop didn't kill him . . . as he belonged to a metallic race, it merely dented him. Shakily, he grasped the scaffolding to pull himself upright. The scaffolding toppled. It struck the top of his head. Again his iron constitution saved his life—but as he happened to be slanting in the right position relative to the magnetic lines of force of the planet, the blow permanently magnetized him.

**H**E lay dazed for a while. Then his head cleared and he started to get up. His heart bonged when he found himself stuck to the steel flooring. He strained, but couldn't pry himself loose. He needed help, and called out.

He grimaced at the undignified sight he presented, but welcomed the ring of his son Rusica's footsteps.

Somewhat bad-temperedly, he explained what had happened.

Rusica stood watching his father thoughtfully. Then he slowly reflected aloud.

"Analyzing the situation," he said, "I must weigh my desires and good intentions against unforeseeable effects."

By now, adding to Alused's embarrassment, a group of his friends had gathered. They listened—some impatiently, some amusedly—to Rusica's careful reasoning.

At last, Rusica made up his mind. Taking the long view, he found himself unable to judge whether he would harm or help his father and/or society by acting—and so, uncertain that good would come of freeing his father from the floor, he went out.

Less philosophical, three of Alused's friends came closer to take hold of the fallen magnate. Three clangs echoed through the room—and the three friends were sticking to Alused.

The remaining friends wisely used ropes to tug loose and sort out the quartet. Alused gratefully wanted to shake hands with his rescuers, but they moved out of reach, wary of his personal magnetism. They suggested that he undergo heat and so lose his drawing power.

Among themselves they muttered about Rusica's unfilial conduct. But Alused, proud that his teachings had taken, resoundingly praised Rusica for sticking to them.

Now, Fit-to-be-tied, you and I know that Alused was rationalizing a defeat. His case shows how a stern doctrine may boomerang. Your problem will answer itself, I believe, when your "not seeing" makes you blunder into your friend in ways I leave to your imagination. Of course, I don't counsel that you run him down or through. But after he experiences two or three close calls he will decide to arrange for his rebirth.

**FROM** the microfiles of MLE Atrata Beritar (2966-3187), Cygnian expert; author of the famous *Melanocoryphic Memoirs*.

*Question:* My neighbor hovers about, making disparaging remarks, while I'm bleaching or dyeing my feathers. It's nearly moulting time and I'm afraid she'll want to come along when I shop for falsies. Would it be proper for me to tell her to go preen herself? '

Ruffled.

*Answer:* Patience, Ruffled. If your neighbor's kibitzing becomes overly annoying, you may with propriety ask her to desist. However, you'll do well to think of this: there are occasions when it's perfectly correct for one to kibitz.

For example, when a Groombian philosopher seems lost in abstract thought, other Groombians deliberately make all manner of distracting sounds and gestures. They do this to remind him of the omnipresence of environment.

Largely speaking, of course, most Galactic societies frown on derogatory kibitzing, because of the totalitarian taint clinging to even such a modified form of spying. But in all societies, constructive kibitzing has become acceptable ever since 2516.

In that year, a scout ship of the University of Capella Expedition crashed in the wilderness of Deneb IX. A twisted beam pinned the scout in the wreckage. Only the thrust of his arms held the beam from crushing his chest. But his arms soon tired, and the weight of the beam slowly but inexorably settled.

The magnetic storm that had caused the crash made it impossible for the command ship to get a fix on the lost scout. So when the scout failed to return or report, search parties set out on the ground to cover the area from opposite ends.

As they made their way toward each other, both parties became self-consciously aware of an arboreal creature that flitted back and forth between them. First it would hover over Search Party A, and with bright beady eyes watch the members blasting their way through the brush. Then it would swing back to give its attention to Search Party B.

These bursts of scrutiny were distracting to the Capellans. They were itching to scare off the creature. But respect for all forms of life channeled their energy into the search for the rapidly weakening scout.

After several hours of shuttling, the arboreal being diffidently addressed the members of Search Party B. An alien voice appeared to creep into their thoughts. It said, "Pardon me for intruding upon your minds, but would it be sporting if I were to tell you whether or not you are warm?"

So, Ruffled, you see how one being may be in a position to do others a better turn than anyone imagines. You see how the others may be in a position to deprive themselves of that aid. Fortunately, in this case everything worked out happily. At length, but happily. But you see how easy it is for beings to fail to read each other's purposes.

So try to keep from letting your annoyance with your neighbor's fault-finding open a breach between you. Remember what birds of a feather must do.

FROM the microfiles of MLE Naea Muc (3054-3197), who won fame in the Cymini sector.

*Question:* I recently had a pleasant visit at the Vernac branch of the Galactic Museum. I saw—and rather fell in love with—an outer garment made of animal pelts. I'd like to synthesize a duplicate of it. Would such a garment be socially acceptable today?

Madcap.

Answer: Stick to non-objective covering, Madcap. Otherwise you violate a long-standing taboo.

This usage traces back to the disappearance of Katherine Roman, Miss Terra of 2403. Among the prizes she won when she gained the title was a mutated-cat coat worth four kilocredits.

She wore it while enjoying another prize, a trip around the Galaxy. She never completed the trip, however, for she disappeared while on a stopover on Tasinack.

The natives of Tasinack are a fur-bearing race. They turned out in honor of Katherine's much-publicized visit in a crowd that spread over the spaceport like a rug. Unfortunately, Katherine's appearance rubbed the nap the wrong way. She stepped out of the spaceship and waved and smiled at the Tasinackians, and while their standards of beauty found Katherine wanting, they were anxious to make her feel welcome and so they had rehearsed spontaneous cheering for days. But when they saw that her coat consisted of pelts very like their own, their cheers changed to catcalls.

Katherine's chaperone sensed the reason for the resentment and urged her to keep the fur coat out of sight during the stopover. Katherine reluctantly agreed.

When they reached the hostelry, Katherine started to put the coat away, lingering over the packing

process. She couldn't resist giving the soft, rich fur one last stroke.

And that undid the effect of her chaperone's urging.

Deaf to all warnings and pleas, Katherine wrapped herself in her fur coat and went out into the streets to do a bit of sightseeing. She didn't return. And no Terran eye ever again saw Miss Terra of 2403 alive.

The natives of Tasinack held contests too. Tasinack's Best-dressed Female of 2404 won the title by sporting a supple jacket of something remarkably like humanoid skin.

That's why I urge you to drop your idea of synthesizing a fur coat, Madcap. Only when you've inherited one is it in good taste for you to wear a fur coat.

**FROM** the microfiles of MLE Sul Oea (3201-3370), Swind IV expert who also created a stir as a musician.

*Question:* I've just come back from running a trading post on Tontowe II. I've come back empty-handed. Sessuly, my competitor, has come back with all *his* arms full. And I can't understand why.

I remember the shock I felt when I first saw Sessuly acting boorishly. There he stood, in the middle of a horde of bellowing natives. He was nodding and smiling as if he understood what they were bellowing. And all the while he was rudely holding fingers in his ears, shutting out the deafening blast that passes for talk.

I laughed to myself, because I was sure he was taking the wrong tack. It came as a blow when he began reaping a windfall. The natives were storming him with trade goods and leaving my trading post strictly alone.

For a long time I held to my course of politeness. I couldn't bring myself to veer about and follow Sessuly's example. And I saw my threshold remaining uncrossed and my goods becoming shopworn.

Finally I made up my mind: if rudeness was etiquette on Tontowe II, I would outboor Sessuly. And so, though it scandalized me, I forced myself to make awkward attempts at being rude. I thumbed my tongue and stuck out my nose at the natives. I elbowed and shouldered them aside. I tried to drown them out with a vast bellowing of my own, until my lungs began to leak. But all in vain. My trade goods stayed becalmed on the shelf.

What's the matter? Isn't etiquette what it's puffed up to be?

Deflated.

*Answer:* How did you wangle your trading permit? Sessuly had the good sense to bone up on the folkways of Tontowe II. You didn't.

You leaped wrongly when you concluded that Sessuly was being rude.

You remind me of Le4e Han (2844-2880), of Lorsa I. While visiting Prah he heard cries of pain that shook him. The cries led him to a hut where a Prahi was beating his frail mate brutally. Han rushed in to stop the wife-beater. When he recovered from the wife's flesh-clawing and hair-pulling attack on him, Han found out that the frail wife had wanted the beating because she was frail. Her broken bones would knit beautifully and the callus that formed would strengthen them. This is how the females of Prah become fit for the heavy work they do.

You, too, rushed in. You should have learned that the natives of Tontowe II speak a polyphonic form of double talk. The bellowing you heard was really a combining of two voices, a bass and a treble.

The native uses his bass voice to give his running commentary on long-term space-time factors—climate, social forces, and the like. He uses his treble voice to deal with matters of immediate concern, such as trading.

The bass is—in the ears of a non-Tontower—so loud that it overpowers the treble.

When Sessuly stuck his fingers in his ears he was making practical use of a simple principle: to hear speech above a loud continuous noise, plug your ears.

Buy ear plugs, Deflated, and try Tontowe II again.

**FROM** the microfiles of MLE Inili Sostota (3274-3386), Seden X expert, who redeemed himself many times over after failing in this case.

*Question:* My problem becomes more pressing as my spaceship nears your planet. Some five months ago I hastily snapped shut a yawn. I was in the middle of a spaceship that was in the middle of nowhere—and I was hearing meaningful tapping.

I tracked the sound to a porthole. I looked out. I saw nothing but space. The tapping continued. I stepped up the magnification of the porthole—and saw the tappers. They were spores. The tapping told me that inside each thick tough shell was a nucleated mass of thinking protoplasm with a food reserve of starch.

For some time I had been yawning out of boredom, and so I eagerly welcomed company—even if that company was protoplasm that communicated by Galactic Morse. Phrasing their query most politely, they asked me to let them land on my ship. I tapped back a warm welcome.

But as the months dragged along I lost interest in what the spores had on tap to talk about. We really have nothing in common. What's more, they were—and still are—generating their own atmosphere, and are budding and fissioning wildly all over the hull.

I'm concerned. This cluster of space barnacles threatens to impair the efficiency of an aerodynamic landing.

How can I get rid of them now without negating my original welcoming of them?

Host.

*Answer:* Frankly, Host, I know nothing about the ways of the spores of space. But I hazard the following. When you point out that they are likely to become incandescent along with your spaceship, you will quickly lose your guests.

(Postscript: How unfortunate, Host followed my advice, which I based on insufficient data. Actually, his spaceship had passed through a stream of cosmic dust, resulting in millions of infinitesimal punctures. He was unaware that the self-sealing walls failed him. Oxygen seeped out. His yawning was due more to oxygen loss than to boredom. Unfortunately, the spores were polite—much too much so to put him in their debt by telling him that they had sensed his danger and had come to plug the holes with themselves. They left for this reason, rather than because they were looking to their own safety. They converted some of their food reserve of starch into explosive and blasted off into deep space. Soon Host began to yawn again.)

**FROM** the microfiles of MLE Inx Sorgu (3021-3137), distinguished Vegan expert.



*Question:* I recently lost a valuable ologog. A Cetian found it and graciously returned it. When I gushed my gratitude, the Cetian stomped on my tail and stormed out. What do you think of such barbarity?

Sore.

*Answer:* Simmer down, Sore. *You* were at fault. Following this rule should help you in the future: it's better form to express one's thanks to one's benefactor in writing than to do so in person. There are various reasons for this.

Many races become embarrassed at a show of gratitude: they have merely done their duty. Others are also merely doing their duty, but resent the trouble another's carelessness puts them to. Still others would place a Freudian interpretation upon your losing an object you consciously value; they would consider your effusive thanks evidence of unconscious hypocrisy.

Your Cetian falls into the last-cited category.

On the other hand, gratitude so delights a Siriute that he will filch an object over and over again in order to enjoy the pleasure of returning it.

But perhaps the gravest reason for heeding this rule dates back to Dila Mirg (2519-2667).

To his fellow Achernari, Dila Mirg was a particularly handsome specimen. To humanoids, however, his appearance was horrifying. Solarians, especially, found the sight of Mirg so chilling that they froze in terror.

The effect on Mirg was just as great—but in his case the effect was one of intense hurt, for he was extremely sensitive to the reaction of others to himself. His only release for the emotional pressure on his wounded ego was to lash out with an eely tentacle. This tentacle was of modified muscular tissue; on

excitation through the nervous system, it discharged a powerful electric shock.

IN 2602, Mirg in this manner electrocuted a terrified Terran he encountered while the spaceship he astrogated lay docked on Callisto. To escape his angry pursuers, he stowed aboard a Procyon-bound freighter just before it blasted off.

Mirg managed to stay hidden during the early part of the trip. But when he saw Mallory Quayle —Mate and sole Terran in the ship's complement—in danger, Mirg impulsively gave away his presence and risked his life to save Quayle's. From his hiding place Mirg watched Quayle brush against a bare live wire. Instantly, Mirg slithered to the rescue.

He shorted the circuit with his own body.

There was a blinding flash.

Mirg blew out a fuse gland, but his regenerative powers would soon put him on the mend. Quayle suffered nothing worse than facial burns.

Brimming with gratitude, Quayle fumed until he could remove his blindfolding bandages and thank his rescuer face to face.

When the moment came, Quayle hurried to the astrogation room, where Mirg was now working his passage.

As he laid eyes on Mirg, Quayle choked on the words of thanks he had prepared. Terror transfixed him.

Hurt, Mirg lashed out with his tentacle.

Like you, Sore, Quayle neglected to sound his benefactor's depths, neglected to ask about him. If Quayle had known in advance about Mirg's peculiarities and the effect they would have on himself, he would have been prepared. Then he might have averted his eyes while delivering his thanks. He might even have steeled himself to master the ordeal of looking squarely at Mirg. Or, better yet, he might have dropped Mirg a note of thanks, as you should always do in the future.

—EDWARD WELLEN