Suros

Surai, often known colloquially as “waterbloods”, are a stoichen race originally native to Baťrasa. Written records indicate that surai may have developed a form of sedentary agriculture several millennia before their migration to Itlnis, but the specifics of their practices have raised questions as to whether or not they can be truly be considered “sedentary” agriculture, as well as debates on the precise definition of such. In either case, the cultivation practices of surai on Baťrasa allowed for the growth of early civilization.

Though there are no longer any true oceans on Itlnis, the surai have demonstrated remarkable adaptability, adjusting to a predominantly terrestrial lifestyle with little difficulty. Aided by near-perfect memories and sharp reasoning skills, suros scholars have been responsible for some of the most significant historical and scientific discoveries that the world has seen.

History

While attempts have been made to reconstruct a historical timeline for the surai as a race, these projects have been repeatedly frustrated by the nature of suros life on Baťrasa. Since different leviathans might have different habits and paths, and these might change as the creature aged, suros communities did not share a standard “year” time-unit. As such, piecing together the histories recorded by different groups is a maddeningly complicated and imprecise task.

Origin

While it is often unclear what races arose when, suros histories and creation myths from their time on Baťrasa make it clear that the marids were already well-established by the time that modern surai came into being. Indeed, many such stories begin with a variation on the same basic concept: “We opened our eyes, and the hunters were already here.” While the marids have been generally unwilling to open their archive doors to mortal scholars, several individuals have confirmed that their accounts agree with those of the suros in this matter.

Suros tales paint the marids as cruel, vicious hunters that worshipped a dark god named Apoleť, whose constant demand for blood drove the marids to hunt both surai and the leviathans upon which they lived. Marids have made no attempt to deny that they hunted the suros and their homes—some even still showcase various trophies and curiosities made from suros bone—but claim that they hunted for food, not in the service of any god.

Migration to Itlnis

Surviving written records from their time on Baťrasa make it clear that surai had developed full behavioral modernity, including language, music, and other cultural universals, before the Stoichen Migrations. While surai records of this period are more complete than those of the other stoichen races, significant portions are still missing, and the inconsistency in time units used by the surai on Baťrasa has rendered them useless for the purpose of identifying the time

period during which the migrations took place. Moreover, most of the written material concerning the migration itself was lost in the Shattering, leaving only a fragmented narrative of the events.

From what has survived, it seems that some entity or entities—some claim that it was the leviathans—spoke or "sang" to the surai of calmer waters, on a world where the hunters could not reach them. Following this revelation, some of the accounts state that the surai were encouraged to swim down into the dark depths of Baťrasa, where hidden waterways led them to the oceans of Itlnis. If these records are accurate, they would strongly support the "planar convergence" theory behind the Stoichen Migrations, as they describe travel between the two worlds as a continuous passage. As usual, marid records are unavailable for comparison, and even sources normally willing to discuss their contents have refused to comment.

As the surai spent much of their time in the water, they most likely came into contact with the native anthropoid species of Itlnis only rarely. Conflicts between the migrant stoichen and other races seem to have been rare, though few records of this time period survived the Shattering. Curiously, some suros writings speak of another aquatic species, described as possessing an anthropic top half joined to the tail of a fish, but such mentions are rare, and none of the surviving records of other species attest the existence of such a race.

While some suros communities may have remained on Baťrasa, the vast majority of surai made the migration to Itlnis and adapted to a diverse array of environments. Modern surai are spread globally, with a dominant presence in Hüliš and Vanska, a significant present in Sekál and Tšu Šijāng, and a minority presence in Hanāša, Karatšja, and Tirdu li-Dar.

Habitat and Population

Early suros settlements were both permanent and mobile: they made their homes on the backs of the great leviathans that swim through the waters of Baťrasa. The relationship between surai and the leviathans is agreed to have been a symbiotic one, though opinions remain divided as to whether it should be classified as mutualistic, commensalistic, or parasitic. Studies of the leviathans that survive today have shown that, while the presence of structures and buildings on the creatures can produce additional drag, a leviathan is not seriously affected by the mere presence of life on its surface. Much of the debate now centers on the "agricultural" techniques practiced by the surai, which seem to have involved growing food directly in the skin of the leviathans. As these techniques have been lost to the ages, however, it is impossible to tell what "crops" the surai were growing, much less the precise means by which they did so.

It is still somewhat unclear whether Baťrasuan leviathans are members of a single species that displays substantial biological variation, members of several species that share similar qualities, or purely individual creatures that are not "born" in the traditional manner and cannot be classified into species, as is the case with the Qažadarni phoenix. What is known is that, taxonomical considerations aside, each leviathan follows a unique path through the waters of Baťrasa, usually a circuit that repeats regularly. As such, it is difficult to make any

generalizations about suros settlements, as even the “seasons” experienced by a community would differ from leviathan to leviathan. Some leviathans might surface only once every cycle, while others might spend much of their time either at or just beneath the surface.

After the migration to Itlnis, the suros population seems to have remained similar to what it had been on Baťrasa, though there may have been slight initial fluctuations as they adapted to life without the leviathans. However, the population decreased sharply during the Shattering, with many lives lost as the sea floors cracked and the oceans boiled away. The population has recovered since then, however, and has adapted to a variety of different habitats, from the rivers and marshes of Hüliš to the wind-swept steppes of Tšu Šijāng.

Biology

Anatomy and Physiology

As is common, many aspects of suros physiology are closely homologous to corresponding physiological aspects of other anthropoid races. They follow the basic anthropoidal body plan, with two legs, the torso, two arms, the neck, and the head, and share the same basic bodily systems. Like most anthropoids, however, surai have several anatomical traits that set them apart from other races.

Of all these traits, the one to which the surai tend to ascribe the most cultural significance is the sara, commonly called the “third eye.” While it does indeed look like a sideways eye placed in the center of the forehead—complete with an “iris” and “pupil”—the sara is actually an entirely different kind of sensory organ: an electroreceptor. For the most part, passive electrolocation is performed by ampullary electroreceptors found in the iris of the sara, which sense the weak bioelectric fields generated by other animals. The purpose of the pearl-like pupil is not entirely clear, though it has been proposed that it might contain a high density of electroreceptors derived directly from the trigeminal nerves. While this electroreception normally only functions at a useful level underwater, some especially sensitive surai claim to be aware of their surroundings through their sara even on land.

Culturally, the sara is often given great importance as a spiritual and intellectual channel through which one can communicate with spaces of higher consciousness, and it is often associated with religious visions, clairvoyance, the ability to observe chakras and auras, precognition, and out-of-body experiences. In some traditions, the importance of the sara is literal, with its ability to sense electric fields being believed to possess the capacity to tune into the “current” of the universe and gain a solid foundation on which to reach more advanced levels of thought, while other traditions focus more on the organ as a metaphor for non-dualistic thinking.

Curiously, the sara has a parallel in the ignis ajna possessed by ohanya. Like surai, ohanya have historically ascribed spiritual significance to the ignis ajna. Its lack of sensory function, however, has led to very different traditions: instead of serving as a gateway to enlightenment, the ignis ajna is believed to serve as a focal point through which the individual draws magical energy

from their surroundings into the self. The passage is effectively reversed, with surai believing that they can reach *outwards* through the sara, while ohanya believe that the ignis ajna allows them to draw energy *inwards*. Moreover, there are distinct structural differences between the two, most notably the fact that the sara is positioned over an opening in the skull similar to an eye socket, while the supratrochlear notch in which the ignis ajna resides is simply an indentation in the skull. Though many have looked for a reason or meaning behind this similarity, no relationship between the sara and the ignis ajna has been found.

While other adaptations may be more complex, the most visually striking of the suros traits are the illicia. These long filaments consist of transparent membranes filled completely with pure water, and generally terminate in bioluminescent patches known as escae. If the membrane is damaged or severed, an illicium is capable of complete regeneration, including the growth of a new esca. While the membrane contains no visible musculature, surai can move their illicia in any direction, though they are not capable of complex motions such as grasping or holding a complex shape. Similarly, surai can control the brightness of their escae with as much ease as controlling one's facial expressions. Given the bioluminescent esca, the regenerative capacity, and the mobility of the illicia, it is generally accepted that the illicia originally served as lures for the purpose of catching prey. Two main types of illicia exist: the illicia trichos and the illicia cauda.

The illicia trichos, which are found primarily on the head, now play much more of a role in nonverbal communication than in predation. In close conversation, the way that the illicia move and the changes in the intensity of the escae have been likened to body language and blushing. Moreover, when underwater, the illica trichos and escae can be used in a sort of long-distance sign language for nonverbal communication. While some of this functionality can be replicated on land, the lack of water to support the illicia results in a lessened range of motion and thereby a lessened vocabulary. As surai age, the membranes of their illicia trichos begin to weaken and "unravel," sometimes even herniating to a mild extent. Newly-regenerated illicia will initially be as strong as they were in the suros's prime, but they will weaken faster and reach the same state as the other illicia in a comparatively short time.

The illicia cauda, which are found in two rows on the dorsal side of the tail, see much more of the "traditional" use as lures. They are also one of the main forms of sexual dimorphism in surai: females have smaller and more numerous illicia cauda than males. Unlike illicia trichos, the membranes of illicia cauda do not usually "unravel" as surai age, though some exceptions exist.

Bizarrely, examinations of the water contained within the illicia have shown that it is not drawn from water recently consumed by the suros, but instead appears to be a mixture of any and all water she has ever been in contact with. While it was originally suggested that the water was simply accumulated over an individual's life, subsequent tests have revealed that the water contained in a newly-regenerated illicium is still drawn from the same admixture of waters. It has been proposed that illicium water may be generated through metabolism of magic, and the

mixed nature of the water could well be linked to the clarity and tenacity of suros memories—though whether as a cause or effect is still unclear.

One of the most unique traits of the surai, both among anthropoids and among other creatures, is their complex respiratory system. While surai are capable of breathing both water and air indefinitely, it is taxonomically incorrect to call them amphibians, and they are incapable of any form of cutaneous respiration. Instead, they make use of a combined lung-and-gill complex that switches between the methods of gas exchange as needed.

Suros lungs are divided into two chambers: the superior chamber and the inferior chamber. These chambers are separated by the alveolar glottis, which is opened when the suros is breathing air and closed when breathing water. Unlike in the lungs of most anthropoids, the bronchus leading into the superior chamber—which is also known as the "respiratory sac"—does not itself branch into secondary bronchi and bronchioles, as the chamber contains no alveoli. This branching occurs on the other side of the alveolar glottis, with the opening protected by the glottis leading directly into the secondary bronchi in the inferior chamber—which is also known as the "true lung"—where the alveoli can perform gas exchange normally.

The respiratory sac also connects to the gills through an opening protected by the gill glottis. In contrast with the alveolar glottis, the gill glottis is closed when breathing air or inhaling water and opened when exhaling water. The gill glottis also replaces the laryx's role in phonation when breathing water, modulating pitch and volume when the suros "exhales" water to the gills. The gills, which have their arches mounted on the bottom three ribs, are also protected by cartilaginous opercula that are closed along with the gill glottis when above water to prevent the gills from drying out.

Whether breathing air or water, surai utilize two stroke breathing that relies on diaphragm-driven cavity expansion to create suction. When above water, air is drawn into both the respiratory sac and the true lung simultaneously, as the passage between the two makes them into a single continuous chamber. However, as alveoli are only present in the true lung, this method of breathing is less efficient than that of fully terrestrial creatures. When underwater, however, both the alveolar glottis and the gill glottis are closed during inhalation. As the respiratory sac is the only part of the lung that is open, less water is taken in during a single breath. To exhale water to the gills for gas exchange, the gill glottis is then opened, while the bronchial glottis closes the connection between the respiratory sac and the trachea, forcing the water out through the gills.

When switching between breathing air and breathing water, surai first empty their respiratory sac with a complete exhale. When switching from water to air, it is common to lean forward so that gravity contributes to the exhalation of water through the gills in order to prevent any fluid from remaining and later entering the true lung. For the same reason, the floor of the respiratory sac is angled towards the gill glottis, causing water to naturally flow down and out through the gills. Whenever the true lungs or gills are not in use, blood flow to the relevant structures is severely reduced in order to minimize inefficiency.

Suros lips are unique among the known anthropoid races, to the extent that it has been debated whether or not they should be classified as a different organ entirely. Rather than the simple folds of tissue typical of other creatures, surai possess a set of separated muscular hydrostats that can move either in unison or independently. These structures, known as hydrostatic barbels, replace portions of the orbicularis oris muscle that is found in the lips of other anthropoids.

Hydrostatic barbels are capable of mimicking all the standard functions of anthropoid lips, from sealing the mouth to articulating speech, as well as serving their own unique purposes. While the lips of other races provide only tactile senses, hydrostatic barbels also house taste buds on their tips and inner surfaces. These taste buds supplement the normal sense of smell, allowing surai to locate food in murky water, and compensate for the diminished functionality of the nares when above water.

In addition, as the nares are not connected to the respiratory system, all breathing both above and below water must be performed orally. By relaxing her barbels and spreading them slightly, a suros can breathe through the spaces between them without having to fully open her mouth. This method of breathing, known as gill-lipping, produces less drag than other forms of oral breathing and is often used when swimming at high speeds.

Some have compared the hydrostatic barbels to the tentacles that ring the mouths of polyps, theorizing that early surai might have had more developed “facial tentacles” that might have been used to capture prey. While it is generally considered unlikely that there is any relationship between surai and cnidarians, it is possible that the ancestors of the modern suros were more sessile creatures that attached themselves to leviathans with their claws and used their barbels to catch passing food.

Suros eyes are also highly distinctive, with pupils unlike those of any other anthropoid species. Rather than the round or slit pupils seen in other anthropoids, suros pupils consist of three connected segments that form separated "pinholes" when contracted. When light shines through these pinholes, multiple images shine onto the retina depending on the distance between the suros and the object being viewed. Only at the perfect distance will a single image be displayed—a distance that lines up perfectly with the suros's reach.

Surai possess an unusual skull structure that is informed heavily by their unique sensory organs. The most visible aspect of this structure is the pair of ossicones that sprout from the zygomatic arch. The skin covering these ossicones bears ampullary electroreceptors similar to—but weaker than—those found in the sara, which appear to be responsible for clarifying direction and serving as a sort of “peripheral vision.”

In addition to these visible protuberances, the suros skull structure has two less immediately obvious differences. The more significant of these differences is the saral orbit, a cavity in the center of the frontal bone that lies beneath the sara. This structure is nearly identical to the

ocular orbits, and serves to support and protect the structure of the sara, as well as connecting to the optic canal. The second, more subtle, difference lies in the shape of the nasal cavities. As the nares are purely sensory organs, and do not connect to the respiratory tract, the nasal cavity is not connected to the oral cavity. Moreover, the nasal openings are a bit more exaggerated than in other species, as each side must accommodate two nares.

Surai are slightly shorter than the average anthropoid species, with a sleek body type. Of all the tailed anthropoids, the surai have the largest tails, which serve as their primary means of aquatic locomotion. The size of the tail has a notable impact on suros posture, which is most visible when walking or running. When standing in place, surai can adopt something close to the typical anthropic posture by lowering their tails, but they are usually still pitched slightly forward.

The middle fingers of both hands and innermost toes of both feet bear large, sickle-shaped claws and are highly modified to accommodate them. The toes are held fully retracted off the ground, while each middle finger contains a fourth phalanx that rests in a retracted position. These claws were originally used to climb and cling to the leviathans of Baťrasa, with the modified digits serving to preserve the other functions of the hands and feet. As their original use is no longer relevant, some surai file or clip their claws for practical purposes, though long, well-kempt claws are still fashionable in many cultures.

It is estimated that the average worldwide height for an adult suros female is about 152 cm (5 feet), while the worldwide average height for adult suros males is about 158 cm (5 feet 2 inches). Shrinkage of stature may begin in middle age in some individuals, but tends to be universal in the extremely aged. The average mass of an adult suros is 50-60 kg (110-130 lbs) for females and 54-64 kg (120-140 lbs) for males. Despite being mammals, surai possess no hair anywhere on their bodies.

Mating and Life Cycle

The suros reproductive system differs markedly from that of other mammalian anthropoids. Surai are polyestrous and, like many anthropoids, undergo concealed ovulation. Their estrous cycle is not seasonal, however, and is similar in several ways to a menstrual cycle.

While most mammalian anthropoids are placental mammals, surai are marsupials. As with other mammals, suros reproduction takes place as internal fertilization by sexual intercourse. However, rather forming a direct connection to the embryo through a placenta, the female develops a kind of yolk sac in her womb to deliver nutrients. Pregnancy is very short, typically 8 to 10 weeks, and the embryo is born at a very young stage of development.

Unlike most marsupials, surai genitals are not paired—the female has only one vagina, and the male's penis is not bifurcated—and the genital tract is not part of a combined urogenital system. However, like many marsupials, female surai do not give birth through the vagina canal. The birth canal, which corresponds to the median vagina of most marsupials, passes through a heavily-modified clitoris that serves to transfer the newborn to the male.

While lactation is typically performed by female mammals, female surai do not possess nipples. Instead, the male is equipped with a marsupium on his abdomen, with a strong ring of muscle that serves to keep the pouch watertight. After the embryo has developed sufficiently within its mother's womb, her clitoris everts into a temporary pseudopenis, which she uses to penetrate the male's pouch opening in order to deposit the newborn in the marsupium. There, it attaches to its father's nipple and nurses for a number of months.

As surai have a very short gestation period, the joey is born in an essentially fetal state. The blind, miniature newborn, the size of a bean, usually passes into the marsupium without incident, where it latches onto a teat for food. It will not reemerge for several months, during which time it develops fully. After this period, the joey begins to spend increasing lengths of time out of the pouch, feeding and learning survival skills. However, it returns to the pouch to sleep, and if danger threatens, it will seek refuge in its father's pouch for safety.

For several months after giving birth, lining up with the joey's development process within the marsupium, the mother feels a daily urge to visit her mate for "morning greetings". During these visits, pheromones from the joey calm the mother's urge to visit, and the mother may press her hands against the male's pouch in order to feel the joey moving within. It is common for the mother to bring her mate gifts during this time, a behavior that may originally stem from the need to provide him with food while he is slowed by the child in his pouch.

Lactation in males is initially triggered by a combination of pheromones given off by a female ready to deposit her child and the physical penetration of the pouch opening, and it continues for as long as the joey continues to nurse. While it is most common for the female to deposit her newborn in the marsupium of her mate, that can be impossible if the mate has died or is otherwise inaccessible. In such cases, it is common for a male family member to nurse the child, though other males close to the mother may also fill that role.

Joeys stay in the pouch for up to two years, or until the next joey is born. A newborn joey is unable to regulate its own body temperature, and may have difficulty breathing through its gills. Until the joey is capable of breathing with both structures and is old enough to leave the pouch, a pouch temperature of 30-32°C (86-90° F) must be constantly maintained, and the male must surface regularly in order to provide the joey with fresh air.

When ready to leave the pouch, suros infants are typically 8-10 kg (17-22 pounds) in weight and 60-70 cm (24-28 inches) in height. By this time, skin tone and countershading have fully developed, though it has been observed that some changes to skin pattern can occur after this point. Though no longer helpless by this time, surai continue to grow for some years, typically reaching sexual maturity at 14 to 17 years of age. Males continue to develop until around the age of 20, whereas female development continues until around age 23. The suros life span can be split into the standard anthropoid stages of life, with development of the claws and ossicones beginning in infancy.

For various reasons, including biological causes, male surai live on average almost five years longer than their female counterparts—the average life expectancy at birth of a male is estimated at 96.7 years compared to 91.9 years for a female. It is not uncommon for surai to live into their hundreds; higher ages have been claimed, but they are not well substantiated.

Diet

Surai are mesocarnivores, with meat making up the majority of their diets. The exact percentage of the suros diet that is composed of meat varies with available food sources in regions of habitation, but is generally somewhere between 50% and 70%. This high meat content is supplemented with fungi, fruits, and other plant material.

For early surai, the most readily available meat on Baťrasa would have been fish, and many modern surai communities still rely heavily on fishing in order to meet their needs. While there is evidence that the surai held cultural taboos against eating the flesh of Baťrasuan leviathans, they also appear to have practiced some kind of "agriculture"—more properly aquaculture—based on encouraging the growth of algae, seaweeds, barnacles, and mollusks on the surface of the leviathans themselves. However, the exact nature of the early suros diet, both before the development of these aquacultural practices, is not entirely understood. It is assumed that surai discovered the use of fire in preparing and cooking food fairly late in their development as a species.

In general, surai can survive for two to eight weeks without food, depending on stored body fat. Survival without water, by contrast, is usually limited to two to three days. After the first full day without water, a suros's body begins to draw on the water stored in the illicia in order to stave off dehydration, resulting in a desiccated appearance.

Biological Variation

Biological variation in the suros species manifests primarily in traits such as cranial structure, sara shape, ossicone shape, eye color, distribution of illicia, height and build, number and arrangement of hydrostatic barbels, and skin color. The typical height of an adult suros is between 1.4 m (4 ft 7 in) and 1.7 m (5 ft 7 in), although this varies significantly depending, among other things, on sex and ethnic origin. Body type is partly determined by heredity and is also significantly influenced by environmental factors such as diet, exercise, and sleep patterns, especially as an influence in childhood. In addition, populations that have for a long time inhabited specific climates tend to have developed specific phenotypes that are beneficial for surviving in those environments—larger true lungs in drier regions, shorter and stockier builds in regions without deep bodies of water, and a variety of differences in the distribution of electroreceptors. Similarly, skin patterns vary clinally, with starker countershading in watery regions—where the camouflage sees more active use—and less noticeable shifts in skin tone in more arid regions.

Suros skin tone demonstrates countershading camouflage patterns, with darker hues being present on the back and lighter colorations appearing on the ventral side. In many ethnicities,

the ventral side is a very pale shade of the same hue that appears on the dorsal side. The precise hue tends towards clinal distribution, and ranges from deep blues bordering on black and grey to more greenish hues and even dusty browns.

The shape and size of the sara also varies ethnically, with some ethnicities having smaller and more eye-shaped sara, while others have sara that can take up the majority of the forehead. Interestingly, the size and shape of the saral orbit does not always line up with the shape of the sara. For instance, the Vanskan suros phenotype has a sara that extends from just above the eyes to the edge of the illicia trichos, but the actual saral orbit is roughly similar in size, shape, and location as that of surai from Hüliš. While the orbit itself is not notably changed, however, the skull slowly slopes inwards around it, providing much of the same function that the orbit itself normally does. In most cases, facial muscles do not cross the saral orbit, but they can run beneath the sara in cases in which it exceeds the bounds of its true orbit.

Suros ossicone shape varies somewhat by individual, but major variances can be accounted for by ethnic origin. It has been theorized that different ossicone shapes may offer different advantages in electroreception in different aquatic environments, due both to the content of the water and the type of environment—river, lake, or sea—but no definitive proof has been found to explain these differences. However, if optimization for electroreception were responsible for these variations, it could also explain similar differences in the sara of different ethnicities.

The sclera of surai is usually black, but their irises show a wide range of coloration, from a piercing light blue to yellows, greens, and even reds. The pigmentation of the iris is duplicated in the pigmentation of the skin of the sara, for reasons that are still not entirely clear. Unlike in some species of anthropoid, the coloration of suros eyes derives from true pigmentation, rather than being entirely the result of structural coloration.

In addition to these cases, the number and size of hydrostatic barbels varies between individuals, and the location of the nares varies ethnically.

Psychology

The pattern of suros encephalization appears consistent with the theory of convergent intelligence, with postnatal brain growth in modern surai allowing for extended periods of social learning and language acquisition in juveniles. However, as with most anthropoid races, the increase of brain volume over time affected different areas within the brain unequally, leading to slight behavioral differences between surai and other races. The temporal lobes, which play important roles in processing sensory input and memory formation, have increased disproportionately, as has the hippocampal formation, which has been related to spatial navigation and control of attention. As a result, surai have unusually sharp and extensive memories and tend towards a more logic-based approach to problem solving.

The differences between the suros brain and the brains of other anthropoid races have led some to call the surai more innately "intelligent" than the other races, though exactly how one objectively defines "intelligence" is the subject of its own ongoing debate. That surai are guided more by rationality than by leaps of intuition is a more accepted assessment, though it should be stressed that this is not to say that surai are devoid of emotions, but simply that they tend more towards logical reasoning on average.

Consciousness and Thought

Like all true sapients, surai possess enough self-awareness to recognize themselves in a mirror. By the time they emerge from their fathers' pouches, most surai children are aware that the mirror image is not another suros.

Due to its proportionally larger temporal lobes and some unique developments in the parahippocampal gyrus, the suros brain has an unparalleled capacity for memory formation, storage, and retrieval. Some arcane research has implied a link between this capacity and the nature of the waters of the illicia, and it has been suggested that some of the structures of the parahippocampal gyrus were developed in order to store information related to water content to later be produced through metabolism of magic—possibly by other structures within the gyrus.

In any case, the tenacity and clarity of their memories often leads surai to consider things from a perspective of objectivity. Without the doubts that members of other races will often have about the contents of their own memories, a suros will remember things the way that they occurred. While she will most likely accept new information and recontextualize her knowledge appropriately, the idea that the memory itself could be flawed is an alien and an uncomfortable one for many surai. Cultures in which surai form a significant presence will often consider memory-altering magic to be taboo, even if they do not have similar prohibitions against enchantments and mental domination.

Because of this tendency to objectivity, along with the increased control of attention associated with the hippocampal formation, surai often value information gathering and rational thought as primary problem-solving tools. To the suros way of thinking, with enough information and careful deliberation, it is always theoretically possible to arrive at the correct answer. However, in part because their larger temporal lobes allow them to process sensory information in greater detail, many surai also recognize that any given situation or problem has an incredible amount of factors affecting it, and that perfect knowledge of every single one is not always a realistic goal. As a result, suros logic often takes instinct into account as a piece of information to be considered, rather than something to be risen above. After all, as they reason, instincts must exist for a purpose, so to disregard them would be to disregard one of the oldest and most basic sources of information available.

Motivation and Emotion

While many who are unfamiliar with the species often assume that surai either suppress their emotions or lack them entirely, it is more accurate to say that they do not allow their emotions to rule them. A suros feels joy, anger, and the full emotional range with as much intensity as any anthropoid. However, surai are less likely than other to act immediately on their emotions, instead applying the same methodology of information gathering and rational thought to sources of emotional stress or the attainment of desired emotional states.

While this approach may seem contingent on a great deal of emotional restraint, it has been suggested that the clarity of suros memories may actually be responsible for their seemingly collected demeanor. As surai memories are far clearer than those of other races, and do not degrade and change as readily, they usually carry the full emotional context that the events did when they occurred. If surai were to respond to emotional stimuli with the same need for immediate action as races like the ohanya, they would eventually go mad from all the conflicting impulses. The suros psyche is well-adapted to the lingering nature of their emotions, however: while it registers emotional stimuli normally, the resulting motivation to action is usually felt less as an impulse that needs to be satisfied and more as what has been called “the responsibility to the self.” In the case of emotional problems that have already been resolved, a suros can satisfy this “responsibility” by reflecting on the memories of that resolution.

Along with this unusual psychological approach to satisfaction motivation, the suros tendency to careful deliberation and thought generally encourages conflict avoidance. In order to have the time and opportunity to seek knowledge and think through all the possibilities, it is important to not be in the midst of active conflict. Though surai have a notable ability to direct their attention to the task at hand, even in the face of environmental distractions, open conflict can present active barriers to gaining knowledge, and so is avoided as much as possible.

For most surai, happiness is something to be treasured, but not pursued for its own sake. As their memories of happiness do not lose their glow, happy memories will accumulate over the years, and can always be reflected upon. So, rather than chasing after something vague and undefined, many surai reason that it is best to pursue freedom from want and distress, for that state is one in which happiness may more readily occur and is desirable even if one is not necessarily happy at any given time.

Sexuality and Love

As with emotions, those unfamiliar with surai often assume that they are sexual only by necessity, engaging in sexual activity solely for the purpose of procreation or in order to pursue some goal using sexuality as a tool. And, as with emotions, this is a misconception: the suros valuation of instincts as a source of guidance means that they feel sexual urges just like the members of any other race. However, it is true that, as with any situation, surai are more likely to stop and think through the ramifications of sexual activity before succumbing to their lust.

Many surai consider romantic love to simply be the intersection of instinctual lust and rational recognition of compatibility, but this does not lead them to dismiss it as unimportant. Instead, the proclamation of love is held to be one of the most intimate steps that a suros can take. To

proclaim one's love for another is to say that, having carefully weighed all of the options, one has reached the conclusion that there is no better match to share one's life with.

Because of this integration of rationality into the concept of love, some surai consider instinctual lust to pose no threat to one's love for another person. So long as the subject of lust is not recognized as being a better match than the one to whom love has been proclaimed, they believe that the satisfaction of that lust in no way harms the other relationship. This stance is far from universal, however, and many surai consider external sexual affairs to lead inexorably to a division of resources and conflicting loyalties that can destroy the original relationship, meaning that such indulgences undermine any declaration of love.

Homosexuality occurs among surai at roughly the same rate that it does in other anthropoids, but is accompanied by what is termed transthesiality. Transthesials derive more sexual pleasure from the secondary sex act, in which the female penetrates the male's pouch opening with her everted clitoris, and can be either heterosexual or homosexual. Male transthesials are more likely to seek sexual pleasure through stimulation of the pouch opening, whether by masturbation, penetration by a female's everted clitoris, or the penis of another male; female transthesials force their clitorises to evert into the pseudopenis state through anal stimulation and then likewise seek sexual pleasure through stimulation of the pseudopenis, penetration of a male's pouch opening or anus, or the penetration of another female's vagina or anus.

Cultural Trends

Like most anthropoids, surai are highly social beings and tend to live in complex social groups. Left to their own devices, surai tend towards elaborate kinship clans, which can range in size from only a few families to large nations. Suros cultures tend to share several traits, most of which can be seen as influences in those multi-species cultures with a significant presence of surai.

Gender Roles

While surai are a visible dimorphic race, the sexual division of surai into male and female has not been significantly marked by a division of roles, norms, and power along gender lines. As suros reproductive labor is split between both sexes more equally than is the case with many races, with the female carrying the child through gestation before transferring it to the male's pouch, cultural responsibilities around child care have not been assigned categorically to either gender.

Kinship

Surai kinship groups value consanguinity and affinity relations nearly equally, establishing large descent groups that are interlinked to form larger communities. Due to the way in which romantic love is considered to include aspects of rational evaluation, marriage for the purpose of forming kinship alliances is not uncommon.

Inquiry and Analysis

Due to the psychological importance of gathering information, surai tend towards the development of complex methods for acquiring knowledge through observation and quantification. Variations on the scientific method tend to be very important in suros cultures, often paired with the emphasis on objective truth. Surai say that any question worth asking is worth an answer—and also that all questions are worth asking.

While surai place great importance on inquiry and attaining knowledge, they also recognize that there is simply too much information in the world for a single individual to ever fully attain. One of the most important skills among surai is that of analyzing the work of others. By reviewing and analyzing what others have done, one both ensures that the others' work is the best that it can be and also gains new knowledge from the analyzed work.