

# Skunk Urine

Description: ...it's urine. From a skunk. And no, this is not the chemical mix that Terran skunks spray as a defensive tactic. Many a would-be intergalactic drug smuggler has made this mistake, often with hilarious results.

There are many interesting things about the Terran striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*) -- its useful fur, its attractive and amiable appearance, its highly-effective noxious spray -- but most Galactic observers instead focus on its urine. It turns out that the average Terran skunk's bladder can produce enough urine per day to let roughly four thousand adult Herh'Ami drift in drugged-out bliss for about four hours. Given that the Herh'Ami are a major species on the Galactic political scene, with about two thousand high-technology core worlds in about fifteen different polities, this makes the contents of those bladders very valuable.

Particularly since Herh'Ami also happen to be horrible snobs. Synthetically-mixed skunk urine? That's for either the lower classes (who get the cheap stuff) or the higher ones (who get the expensive, expertly synthetically-mixed stuff). Herh'Ami bourgeois require only the finest,

natural-raised, *artisanal* skunk urine. The really obnoxious ones want only skunk urine that came from a Terran skunk that was raised on Terra itself.

Now, thanks largely to well-meaning Terran government agencies, skunk urine is illegal to sell **off-planet**. It's also illegal to *transfer* off-planet. So is transferring the skunks themselves. Or the skunk's embryos. Or the skunk's DNA. Or skunk urine that was mixed with a bonding agent (thus making it a solid). Or -- look, there's a lot of money in this stuff, OK? People keep figuring out ways to get the product to where it can get sold at a huge markup.

Mind you, the Terrans largely consider the whole thing mildly ridiculous (and remarkably lucrative); but various Herh'Ami counter-narcotic agencies do **not**. A ship that can evade or bribe the lackadaisical Terran customs inspectors can bring in millions of dollars' worth of skunk urine per run -- and that's in *Galactic* dollars, not Terran. And, needless to say, the effects of skunk urine on Herm'Ami societies isn't all that great.

So why hasn't there been a war yet? Because there are fifteen different Herh'Ami polities, and their intelligence apparatuses are all using skunk urine to mess with each other's societies. Plus, humans are turning out to be fairly

good at developing their own multi-star system polity; the Terrans can't take on **all** of the Herh'Ami star nations, but they can absolutely hold off two or three of them and probably wreck the days of a few more. So, there's a kind of stalemate in place here.

Fortunately, the Terrans *will* allow teams of Herh'Ami law enforcement personnel to work in Earth's major spaceports. Those teams almost always have Terran cops assigned as liaisons, of course. The better for interspecies amity, and all that. The mixed teams typically work on stopping the shipments; stopping the production itself is almost never possible. Still, they persist in trying to bail out the ocean with a spoon. At least they're paid well for it.

It should be noted at this point that Herh'Ami are remarkably humanoid, and even reasonably attractive (both species find each other to be *just* on the right side of the Uncanny Valley). The major difference is that Herh'Ami skin and hair colors tend to be various bright variants of purple, gold, black-and-white stripes, pink, and green (all metallic). And that they have an aesthetic style to match.

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