

THE TASKAN EMPIRE



RUNEQUEST

JONATHAN DRAKE

THE TASKAN EMPIRE

A Thennla Sourcebook for RUNEQUEST

By
Jonathan Drake

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INTRODUCTION

The Taskan Empire is a place where everyone can count themselves free. Slavery is no more. Aristocratic privilege is abolished. A citizen of the Taskan Empire can hold his head up high wherever he may go, knowing that anyone intent on doing them harm must reckon with the swift and terrible retribution of the Emperor. The Taskan Empire only occupies a fraction of the surface of the earth; it does not even reach to the shores of the Inner Ocean. And yet it comprises so large a part of humanity that no other nation can be its rival.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is a companion volume to *SHORES OF KORANTIA* and details the Taskan Empire, the most powerful of the Thennlan imperial nations. The material presented here first appeared in *Age of Treason: The Iron Simulacrum* published by Mongoose Publishing. It has been adapted to *RUNEQUEST* and its structure revised.

THENNLA

Like *SHORES OF KORANTIA*, the Taskan Empire is set in the world of Thennla. Thennla is detailed more fully both in *SHORES OF KORANTIA* and also in the free PDF book *World of Thennla*, available separately from *The Design Mechanism*.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The book is arranged into the following chapters.

Taskan History and Culture

An overview of the Taskans, how they came to be, the nature of the Iron Simulacrum, and the empire's customs, ways and traditions.

The Imperial Court

Important information concerning the governance of the empire.

Cities and Provinces

Detailing the regions and communities of the Taskan Empire, and how they deal with those beyond their borders.

Economy

Money, equipment and the cost of living is described in this chapter.

Beyond the Empire

Regarding travel, encounters in transit and the wider world beyond the Taskan borders.

Taskan Characters

Rules for creating Taskan characters. If you are keen to start creating a character, jump to page 55.





Taskan Magic

How magic works in the Taskan Empire, and how it shapes daily life.

Cults

Taskan religion, cults, orders and brotherhoods.

RULES CONVENTIONS

Although the RUNEQUEST 6th edition rules are used for this supplement, there are some changes made to how certain things work. A brief summary of these changes follows. You can, of course, ignore these and use the RUNEQUEST rules as written.

Characteristics

Humans have a maximum score in any Characteristic of 21, and if this is ever exceeded it denotes that the character concerned has undergone some sort of change in their nature – becoming god-like. Likewise a character with a Characteristic less than 3 suffers from a serious affliction or disability that should have an effect in play, while a score of zero is a cause (or consequence) of death.

Skills

Skills are capped at a level of five times a character's Basic Percentage, and this level is referred to as a character's Aptitude. This can be exceeded by the application of magical enhancements.

Magic Skills

Every culture has its own Rites skill, and this is used instead of a Folk Magic skill to trigger Folk Magic spells or even to invoke spirit effects when they are provided by entities that are part of the character's cultural traditions. It can also be used to augment other spell casting roles when the casting is ritualised by taking more time in casting.

Devotions and Pacts

It is possible to have a magical bond with a deity, demon and even some types of spirit in which the mortal puts magic points at the disposal of the supernatural entity and receives some sort of magical benefit in return. In most cases a Devotional Pool is created (even though the Character does not hold rank within a formal cult), and the devotee makes use of Devotion and Exhortation skills to call upon miracles provided by the object of their devotion just as if an initiate of a Theist Cult - but with

significant limitations on which miracles can be accessed and how, and when a devotional pool can be renewed. A Pact is similar but provides a 'boon' (see [page 65](#)) – usually a gift such as a magical enhancement secret knowledge or skills or a the service of a supernatural being. The Magic Points allocated to a Devotion or Pact cannot be regained until such time as those in the pool are expended or whatever terms were agreed between mortal and immortal have expired or been terminated.

Enchantments and Charms

Sorcerers can use the Enchant spell combined with another to create a Charm, which is not a permanent enchantment but a spell with extended duration that no longer depends on a multiple of the caster's POW but is taken from the following table:

| GAME WORLD TIME | SHAPING COST |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 hour | 1 |
| 2 hours | 2 |
| 3 hours | 3 |
| Until Sunset (Or Sunrise) | 4 |
| One Day (24 hrs) | 5 |
| One Week (7 days) | 6 |
| Waxing or Waning Moon (14 Days) | 7 |
| One Month (28 days) | 8 |
| One Season (3-4 months) | 9 |
| A Year and a Day (365 days) | 10 |

A year and a day is the maximum duration for a charm; to create a permanent enchantment requires a permanent sacrifice, often in the form of Characteristic Points – either those of the enchanter or some victim sacrificed for the purpose.

Magic Point Recovery

Magic points are recovered at a character's Healing Rate, per day. Magic points that have been spent on any magical effect that remains active cannot be recovered – the spell or enchantment must be terminated or expire before the magic points begin to regenerate.

Spirit Manifestation and Spirit Combat

In the Thennla setting Discorporation (including using the Trance skill) is a rare ability, but conversely many spirits have the Manifestation ability that allows them to cause some effect in





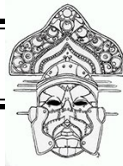
THE TASKAN EMPIRE

the material world. Those spirits who have the Manifestation ability can in some circumstances force a corporeal being into spirit combat. When this happens the corporeal being is playing 'at home', so it can resist the attack using its Willpower skill at Standard difficulty. If the manifested spirit faces a character who

has the Binding skill it is the spirit that suffers a Formidable grade of difficulty.

Manifestation is based on the Spirit's POW+CHA and a typical skill level can be determined by Basic Percentage x3 or POW x 5 at the Games Master's discretion.





TASKAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

The heartland of the Taskan Empire is the famous land of Tarsenia. Over two centuries ago Zygag Taga intervened in the region's endemic wars between its rival city-states, and ultimately unified the land with Taskay as his capital. Since that time the Taskan Empire has expanded into other lands carrying Tarsenian customs and language with it. For the most part the terms Taskan and Tarsenian are interchangeable.

Tarsenia is a heavily cultivated and densely populated region blessed with a pleasant climate that turns hotter and drier the further South and East you travel from the Gulf of Taskay, until you reach the White Hills beyond which lies the Korazoon Desert. East Tarsenia is the largest part, containing the cities of Zarina, Taskay, Merat, Tarsang and Pryjarna; Western Tarsenia contains the cities of Sorandib, Felsang and Ashkor. On the north side of the Gulf and bounded by the mountains that form the rampart of the Kitan Plateau is to be found Further Tarsenia. Here was planted the city of Ralmyra, a colonial expansion into lands cleared of its barbarian inhabitants to make way for settlers from the crowded cities of Tarsang and Zarina, as well as foreigners who wished to take Taskan citizenship and people displaced during the troubled period following the loss of the Marble Simulacrum.

HISTORY

In ancient times the region was inhabited by scattered tribes and peoples ruled by lords who owned the horses and the herds, while the commoners tilled the soil or served as craftsmen and herders. The ancient names of these tribes are largely lost, but some of the earliest records refer to the Golden Poppy Folk,

the Lucheks, Winter Swallows People, Taskush, White Lizard Walkers and the Sangramansi as occupiers of various territories in what is now Tarsenia, and these are presumed to be archaic tribal names.

The land is now named for its folk hero, Tarsen, a man who went abroad in search of knowledge and who brought back the art of writing and secrets of sorcery he had learned; who was himself a master of many magical arts and even claimed to have studied with the mystics of Shuja.

Tarsen devised an alphabet suited to his native tongue and educated those who had the will to learn and the leisure to listen. Warlike chieftains who measured their wealth in horses and cattle, and who celebrated their own martial prowess in song, begat sons who put faith in accounts and records and composed complex literary poems about their genealogies and virtues. The aristocracy used their new-found literacy and lores as a common medium to define their class. With it they assembled the disparate customs observed across the region and decided what was worthy of recording and sharing. As trend-setters for their more humble followers, a sense of common identity took hold that stretched from the Briga River in the West to the Straits of Mysher in the East.

In the later years of his long life Tarsen codified the protocols by which his adherents would deal with the divine and supernatural, completing the creation of a nation by uniting the many gods worshipped throughout the region into a single pantheon and bringing people and gods together into a covenant; for this reason, when he finally died at the respectable age of 92, it was immediately found that he had not passed on to the Many Hells





but instead joined the pantheon of Tarsenian Gods that he had formulated.

Armed with the civilized arts that Tarsen had bestowed upon them, the Tarsenians became an urban people and their cities were famous throughout the East. Yet they were ever at odds with one another, competing for land, treasure and honours, frequently by the clash of spears. In due course a tradition of warfare between cities became a war for supremacy, in which the intervention of the Jekkarene-born mercenary Zygas Taga was decisive. Over a period of 20 years, generations of conflict was resolved through the unification of Tarsen's people into a single community – with Zygas Taga at its head.

The Imperial Age

Ever since Zygas Taga became Emperor, the cities of Tarsenia have each paid over a share of their taxes, supplied his army with troops and maintained a cult to honour and worship him. All, that is, except Sorandib, ruled by a royal dynasty that was guaranteed its independence under an ancient pact concluded between Zygas Taga and King Basgerik III of Sorandib and remains in force today. Zygas Taga withdrew from public life, and ruled his empire through a magical viceroy, the Marble Simulacrum. When the Marble Simulacrum was destroyed at Araxa along with most of its army, some cities sought to reassert their independence and even those that did not were beset by internal struggle between loyalists and separatists. A group of army officers headed by general Sharfang took the loyalist path, and after a brutal campaign in the East to punish the empire's enemies returned to Tarsenia and quelled any remaining separatist sympathies with equal brutality. After a period of martial law in which Sharfang made himself somewhat unpopular with his harsh methods of control, the emperor intervened. A new viceroy was put in place - the Iron Simulacrum – and Sharfang forcibly retired to Further Tarsenia. His brother officers were obliged to make their oath to this new commander in chief. The Simulacrum then turned on the Emperor cult itself; he dispensed with many of its incumbent priests and enrolled replacements who better suited his plans for the future. When he lifted martial law in the penultimate day of the year 1137, the Simulacrum handed every city of Tarsenia a new constitution – one that was entirely subsumed within the structures of the Emperor cult.

The Age of the Iron Simulacrum has lasted for nearly 80 years, during which time the Taskan Empire has conquered the Eskar horse-people and the Thennalt land of Camtri; seized Timolay and made the king of the Marangians who resided there an imperial subject; forced Morkesh into a one-sided alliance; and

built its first ocean-going naval flotilla based at the Jekkarene port of Lyortha. All of this has brought wealth and opportunity to the people of Tarsenia. Only one great reverse has been suffered in the current era: barbaric Sheng warriors invaded Further Tarsenia and burnt the city of Ralmyra to the ground. Thousands of the Emperor's citizens were killed or carried off as slaves. Revenge was swift and terrible, yet perhaps not complete. The army found that the enemy's leading war-chiefs had largely dispersed and could not pursue them into the distant and rugged lands where many former citizens now languish as slaves to barbarian masters. Ralmyra was rebuilt and new settlers found to replace those whom the imperial army had come too late to rescue.

The Empire is now at a turning point; its expansion has brought it ever more distant and longer borders in need of defence, yet it is still vigorous and capable of further conquests. It has no direct access to the Inner Ocean and however much Taskan merchants have the run of ports such as Lyortha in the Jekkarid, and Largil in Morkesh, it is not the same as having your own merchant fleet to hunt down the riches of the fabled occident. Many now think that conflict is inevitable with the city-states of Korantia, even the smallest of which routinely fail to appreciate their weakness in the face of Taskan power. With the blessing of their ineffectual emperor, the Korantine city-states have formed a league that threatens war on any state that falters in its rejection of Taskan hegemony.

SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

Taskan society has developed in ways that are radically different than most of its neighbours, because the emperor has regularly engaged in making laws that have had a deep and enduring effect on society.

Zygas Taga took the unprecedented step of abolishing slavery in his empire; all that a slave had to do was to declare his obedience to the immortal Emperor, and no mortal man could claim title over his soul. In doing so he found a ready source of adherents to his cult, first from Tarsenian slaves wishing to be free of their masters, and subsequently from foreign slaves who found that if they could escape to Taskan lands they could claim an asylum that no power on earth could break.

The Emperor also gradually eliminated hereditary power and privilege from Tarsenian society. High birth still has its advantages, but any good citizen who manages to win fame and





HISTORICAL TIMELINE FOR THE TASKAN EMPIRE

| YEAR | EVENT |
|---------|---|
| 465 | Apotheosis of Tarsen, founder-hero of the Tarsenian race. |
| 514 | The Sorantine Apostacy: King Ostriik denies the divinity of Tarsen. Sorandib is henceforth considered an outsider to the community of Tarsenian city-states. |
| 882 | Foundation of the cult of Basat at Pryjarna. |
| 964 | Birth of Zygag Taga. |
| 987 | Outbreak of the Unification Wars in Tarsenia which rage on and off for the next 30 years. |
| 991 | The sack of Ashkor. Sorandib's last intervention in the Tarsenian wars. |
| 1002 | Zygag Taga makes a pact with the Mutline dynasty of Sorandib, guaranteeing their independence for as long as they hold the crown. |
| 1003 | Fall of Taskay; Zygag Taga declared a god; foundation of the cult in his honour. |
| 1019 | Fall of Zarina; Unification of Tarsenia completed. |
| 1020 | Zygag Taga retires behind the walls of his palace. Appearance of the Marble Simulacrum. |
| 1055 | The Inundation of Korantis. |
| 1057 | Marriage of Zygag Taga to the Moon-Goddess Jekkara. |
| 1114 | Sheng raids; a large force of barbarians thought to number over 40,000 ravages parts of Eastern Tarsenia until defeated by the Sorantines on the banks of the Briga River |
| 1120 | Settlement of 'Further Tarsenia' and the foundation of the city of Ralmyra. |
| 1122 | Submission of Yegusai. Its people are granted partial independence in return for an unequal alliance in perpetuity. |
| 1134 | Marble Simulacrum destroyed at the Battle of Araxa. |
| 1134 | Burning of Haran by loyalist army under General Sharfang, which is later resettled by Tarsenian colonists. |
| 1137 | Appearance of the Iron Simulacrum. The cult of Zygag Taga assumes full control of the reins of state. |
| 1141 | The abolition of slavery. Owners are compensated from the proceeds of those estates confiscated from separatists during the troubles of the previous 7 years. |
| 1160-63 | Camtric War, in which the Taskans and Korantines take opposite sides in an internal struggle; the Korantines are forced to withdraw |
| 1170 | Annexation of Camtri, whose people take citizenship en masse. |
| 1195 | Further Tarsenia invaded by the Sheng and their allies, Ralmyra sacked. |
| 1200 | Capture of Bandaknar and submission of the Eskars. |
| 1202 | Relics of the Marble Simulacrum recovered by the young hero Balthus, who is soon after admitted to the ranks of the Iron Companions. |
| 1207 | Submission of the Marangian king Arkenson the Portly at Timolay. |
| 1213 | Tursiba, Queen of Morkesh, acknowledges Taskan primacy and grants Taskan merchants favoured nations access to her country's ports. |
| 1214 | Current date. |





fortune may elevate himself to high office through his own efforts; only rank bestowed by the Emperor-cult actually matters. Real or imagined attempts by members of the old ruling class to stand in the way of progress are regular themes in theatrical comedy, political hustings and even the law courts.

Finally, Zygas Taga set womankind free of their husbands and fathers, insisting that no role or station in society be denied them based on their sex alone. Women would enter into contracts in their own name and hold property in their own right. While this has not dissolved the traditional roles assigned to each gender, some women do cross the line into traditionally male occupations and the Emperor has encouraged this process by admitting women into the ranks of that most male institution of the all, the military. A few volunteer to join the professional army, rather more find themselves bound to put themselves forward for selection into the militia for lack of any suitable male candidates among their local community.

CITIES

Each of Tarsenia's cities has a character of its own, in part based on heritage and in part derived from the special niche each has carved within the economy of the Empire. A typical Tarsenian city is divided into several quarters with their own wardens - administrators and public servants, responsible for regulating construction and demolition work, sanitation, water supply and local bye-laws. As officials who have experience of serving in this capacity may one day have the chance to secure a priesthood within the Emperor-cult, wardenships are much sought-after. Candidates purchase the right to stand for election from the Emperor cult, and are chosen by ballot of the local residents.

Every city has public temples to several deities in addition to its temple and altar to Zygas Taga. The temples house a deity's statue or sacred symbols, its cult paraphernalia and treasure. Public ritual takes place outside, usually in connected colonnaded courts or plazas. At other times these areas are used for civic activities such as trade fairs, courts and tribunals, electoral ballots or as places where schoolmasters and teachers gather their students for teaching and instruction. The most important open space is Emperor's Court, always adjacent to the Zygas Taga temple, the place where the Emperor-cult priests conduct their business in the open air, perhaps shielded from the elements by awnings and pavilions. Some cities also have a theatre, a rectangular arena with tiered seating where entertainments are provided on festival days. At other times it is available for hire by performing companies as a venue for their productions.

Those cities lacking this facility generally put up temporary seating in a public space as and when required.

TARSENIAN RELIGION

The Tarsenians have a pantheon of gods and demigods which are in character like human beings writ large - less abstract than the civic gods of the Korantines, for example. This may be why they have proved so accepting of a human being who has laid claim to divinity.

There are a multitude of small cults even for individual deities, which may be informal associations or highly regulated religious hierarchies. There is no one rule about how such things are done. The objective of most private ceremonies is simply prayer and observance, which over time is intended to improve the participants' Devotion and Rites skills, with the more experienced and knowledgeable members of the group acting as mentors. Sometimes the worshippers seek a blessing, favour or miracle from their god. There are no legal restrictions on private worship, although from time to time in the Empire's history a particular cult may be declared outlaw due to its subversive or anti-social activities.

Most simple acts of piety and worship take place in private. Any space that is purified prior to the rite by a Folk Magic spell, Sanctify will serve. The place of worship could be a niche by the fire in the home used by the family, a room hired for the day at a local inn or a purpose-built structure to which the owner invites friends or fellow cultists to come and worship with him.

Public worship takes place on each god's annual holy day. Every city has its own selection of gods that are the object of a major festival each year, and some gods are worshipped this way in several different cities. Holy day festivals are almost always conducted in the open an altar set up in a public court serving as the principal focus rather than the temple. The deity is called upon to make an epiphany, usually by inhabiting the body of a devotee or perhaps a cult statue, and paraded in front of the crowd who will use the occasion to seek a blessing, renew their devotions, acquire access to new miracles, or simply just reinforce the Devotion or Passion skill that relates to the god.

A provincial citizen from Bandaknar, Yegusai or Torestal probably clings to the gods of their own culture and traditions, and the empire puts no barriers in their way unless there is some reason to believe these local cults are being used to orchestrate opposition to imperial control. Increasingly however these people also look to the gods of the imperial heartland as an alternative or additional source of religious devotions, as this allows





them to participate more fully in the dominant culture of the Empire.

of information and influence, and above all for rituals, however informal those rituals might be.

Death and Burial

A proper funeral ensures the deceased will find his way to an appropriate part of the Many Hells and will not be left wandering as a lost spirit, probably to fall prey to the god of death himself, or trapped in the material world as a ghost. Tarsenians, like most people, go to great lengths to make sure this is done properly. Their solution to the problem, the creation of Funeral Clubs, has become one of the fundamental forms of social network in their society.

Tarsenians generally cremate their dead. The ashes are gathered up and placed in a pottery urn or stone casket, which is itself then interred in a tomb owned the dead person's family, guild, regiment, cult or funeral club. Tombs are grouped together into a Necropolis. Only worshippers of the god Basat are interred intact without cremation, as a symbol that those not immediately restored to life are spared permanent incarceration in the realm of the death god Gomorg and will one day be resurrected. There are cults that offer the promise of immortality but they are without exception considered treasonous and stamped out by the authorities wherever discovered.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is the act of attending a festival or visiting a Sacred Site dedicated to your god beyond the territory of your home town. It is a popular and widespread practice. So much so, in fact, that it is at least equal to commercial and military traffic on the roads and waterways of the Empire. Characters may well find themselves travelling with pilgrims, who gather in numbers to travel in safety. There is always the chance to get work protecting or serving wealthy pilgrims.

CUSTOMS

People from all levels of society join cults and associations that are a key part of Tarsenian society. These may be dining or drinking clubs, small cults, guilds, funerary associations, veterans' groups or a combination of any of these elements, and a citizen may belong to several such societies meeting anything from once per week to once per year. They reflect not just a sense of equality under the laws but also the Tarsenian passion for cooperative action and mutual support, for building networks

THE ARTS

Tarsenian decorative arts are rather formal and Korantines in particular tend to regard Tarsenian works as dull and brutish. Tarsenians themselves tend to prize imported wares - exuberant barbarian metalwork from Thafna or woodwork from Bandaknar, woven textiles from the South, fine Korantine or Jekkarene pottery.

Performing arts, in particular poetry recited over musical accompaniment, are popular at all levels of society. The city of Merat fosters poets, choristers and musicians and actors and its artistic fashion shape Tarsenian high culture. The highest artistic honours are for poetry including the composition of choral works, followed by dance, and finally drama which is thought a rather vulgar entertainment.

MILITARY

Every citizen of the Empire must be prepared to do militia service between the ages of 17 and 40. The annual levy is held at a meeting of all able-bodied souls on Army Day, which takes place in the spring. Militiamen serve for two years, and after that time are only eligible for compulsory mobilization in times of emergency and by special decree, although they must report each Army Day for review and for occasional training. Militia units serve right across the Empire, often on garrison duty, but also to bolster the field army when it is operating in the same region.

The Taskan field army is made up of professional soldiers who have signed up for a 20 year term, and mercenary units contracted for shorter periods. It is led by the Iron Companions, the college of Emperor- cult priests in attendance upon the Iron Simulacrum, who is the commander-in-chief. The Pikes of Ashkor, heavy-armoured troops armed with long two-handed spears, comprise 20 regiments each one thousand strong; there are four regiments of the Imperial Light Infantry, popularly known as The Brigands, and for cavalry there is an elite regiment of 1000 heavily armoured horsemen known as The Furies. A Praetorian Guard is provided by a regiment native to Taskay comprised of devotees to the fire-god, Thesh, entitled The Unconquerable Heroes. Three hundred picked men form an honour guard to the Simulacrum and are armed with muskets,





the latest innovation from the Artificers of Sorandib. A further 80 serve as specialists in artillery and siege warfare.

The field army is backed up by mercenary troops recruited from within the Empire, of which the most important and numerous are Eska cavalry recruited at Bandaknar and Thennalt footmen from Camtri.

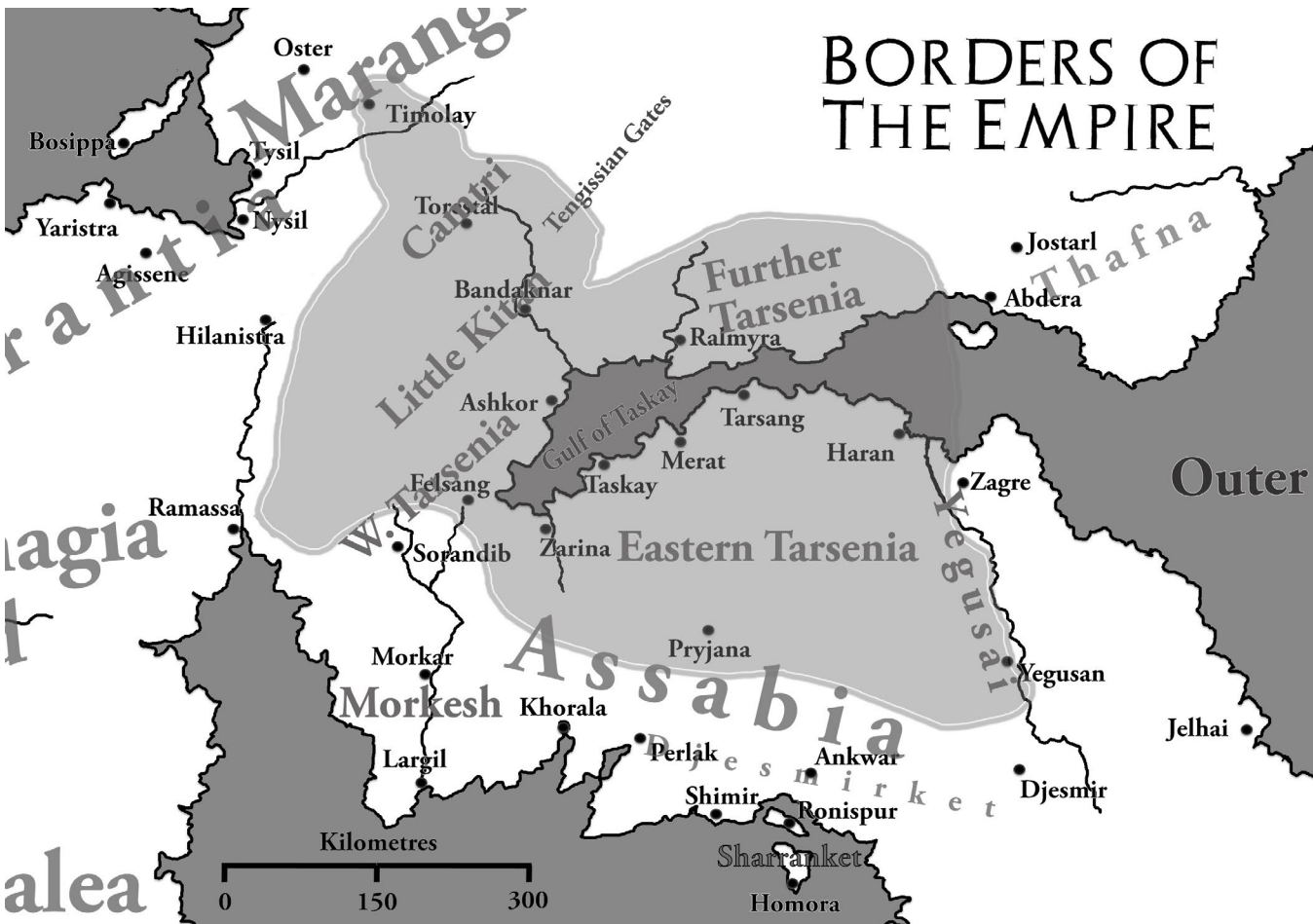
TRADE AND CURRENCY

The official currency of the Empire is the Taskeen. The obverse shows the Simulacrum seated on a military stool, the reverse shows the emblem of whichever city minted it. The Taskeen is

a nominally silver piece, although silver content varies with the date and place struck. A copper penny or 'bit' is used for smaller transactions, of which there are five to the Taskeen.

THE TASKAN CALENDAR

The Tarsenian year has 366 days, 13 lunar months and 2 intercalated days on which the Emperor-cult festival takes place. There are no weeks in the Taskan Calendar, although the idea is known as a foreign practice used by the Korantines. Instead the month is punctuated by market days, traditionally held on the 9th and 18th days of the month, a two day 'holiday' at the end of every month and the festival days of the various gods as celebrated in each city.



This map shows the extent of the Taskan Empire. A more detailed map of the empire and its neighbours can be found on page 25.





THE TASKAN CALENDAR

| MONTH | EVENT | SEASON |
|--------------|---|--------|
| Sheroth | New Year; First Shoots Of Spring; Early Rains | Spring |
| Iroth | Late Rains | |
| Kamay | Lambing; Spring Barley Harvest | |
| Shamseroth | Late Grains Harvest | Summer |
| Gameroth | Summer Fruits | |
| Damais | Drought | |
| Brenai | Winter Barley Harvest; Orchard And Vine | |
| Jaroth | Pickling, Milling, Brewing | Autumn |
| Molkert | Flocks Brought Down From The Hills | |
| Arkay | Slaughtering, Salting; Winter Barley Planting | |
| Heroth | Spring Barley Planting | Winter |
| Venafer | Midwinter | |
| Taguth | Elections And Public Appointments | |
| Emperor Days | 2 Day Intercalation | |





THE IMPERIAL COURT

Zygag Taga is the undisputed master of the Taskan Empire and the Iron Simulacrum the instrument of his divine will. Nevertheless most of the day to day business of state is conducted by senior figures in the cult of emperor-worship that has grown up around him. The cult has evolved and adapted to the events of 200 years of conquests and expansion, triumph and disaster, politics, intrigue and the emperor's own unfolding destiny. The rules and structures of the emperor cult are in effect the constitution of the Taskan state. If it has endured and made itself fit for purpose, it has not done so without also creating some internal inconsistencies, rivalries and redundancies; it is not a perfect machine nor is it immune to the poison of faction and intrigue.

THE DIVINE EMPEROR

The divine emperor Zygas Taga was an outcast who first made himself a bandit king, then a powerful warlord, a conqueror of many cities and finally a god.

Origins

He was born 252 years ago, the illegitimate son of Maslaskore, a Jekkarene moon-priestess who fell pregnant in circumstances that contravened her cult vows. To escape punishment and in fear for the unborn child she fled into exile where her son was born. Zygas Taga was raised in a shanty-town that also served as an outlaw stronghold. Clever, strong and talented, he grew up to become a chieftain of these outlaws and, due to his remarkable successes over several years, the numbers of his band eventually swelled to thousands. In time the fruits of his plunder

allowed him to equip his followers to match any standing army of the day. His fame was such that kings and chieftains would send emissaries to him bringing gifts, offers of friendship and requests for military assistance. One day Zygas Taga accepted an invitation from the Tarsenian city of Zarina to aid them in their war against the powerful neighbouring state of Taskay, and in doing so set upon the path to an extraordinary destiny.

Setting out overland from the badlands of Methalea and brushing aside the Jekkarene forces who attempted to stand in his way, Zygas Taga and his brigands soon found themselves in the Vale of Middra in Western Tarsenia, where the famous city of Sorandib controlled the principal crossings of the Briga river. He briefly invested the city in order to have its spoils and supplies but the Sorantines bought him off. Aside from the usual quantities of gold, grain and livestock, he was presented with arcane secrets through which it was promised he would become the first human in 500 years to achieve godhood.

Immortality

Zygas Taga's apotheosis came one year later when he entered city of Taskay at the head of his army and the conquered inhabitants begged for his protection and offered sacrifice to his name. Zygas Taga acceded to their wishes and in the following days his deification was made official at a ritual held in the precincts of Thesh, the patron god of the city. The year in standard reckoning was 1003 and Zygas Taga was approaching his 40th birthday.

Over the next 17 years Zygas Taga campaigned continuously until he had brought all the other Tarsenian city-states under his rule, including the huge metropolis of Zarina that had first





called upon his services. Yet all the while his deification was taking a steady toll. He was showing signs that the divine power contained within was too much for his mortal frame as he began to experience lesions, eruptions, violent fits and involuntary, and sometimes explosive, emissions. A favourite concubine was hideously burned by his divine 'presence'. After a particularly ugly convulsion in which his limbs seemed temporarily turned inside out and his hair spontaneously combusted, Zygas Taga realised he must retire from public view before his loyal followers came to the conclusion that he was some sort of monster.

All of this had come as a surprise; the chance for immortality handed to him by king Basgerik III of Sorandib came with a health warning but no clear instructions as to what to expect, other than the fact that becoming an immortal and receiving the veneration of others was only the first step on the way to finding a permanent place in the heavens. To actually cast aside any physical form for good, escaping the gravitational pull of the flesh – and do so without risk of being dragged down to the Many Hells – would require an astonishing accumulation of magical power.

So Zygas Taga hurried along work to build a massive palace at Taskay, the city he had decided to make his capital. This palace would be surrounded by the sea except for a narrow neck of land that connected it to the rest of the city. He contrived that it would also hold some 2,000 'body-slaves' – a term that persists still, despite the abolition of slavery within the Empire – all of whom would be constrained to stay there with him for life and never breathe a word to the outside world of the terrible, tortured and twisted abomination that he had become. A small elite group of acolyte-priests known as The Seated Council would act as intermediaries between the palace and the city.

The Marble Simulacrum

The Emperor left in his place a magical creature fashioned in his likeness by the Artificers of Sorandib from pure white marble, in the idealised image of Zygas Taga when he was young and in the prime of life. This statue was animated with a fragment of his own soul, and was sent out to be the unchanging, ever-beautiful and indestructible instrument of the Emperor's will: to lead his armies and hear petitions from his subjects. For more than a century this proved an effective means of control. The Marble Simulacrum sent Taskan armies to the conquest of Yegusai and oversaw the settlement of Ralmyra and the creation of Further Tarsenia on the north side of the Gulf of Taskay. During its regency Korantis was swallowed by the ocean and the new 'Taskan' Empire became the world's paramount power. Hence in 1057, during the chaotic period ushered in by the

loss of Korantis and the subsequent fracturing of the Korantine Empire, Zygas Taga was declared consort to the Jekkarene moon-goddess, an event through which the Jekkarenes won the protection of the Taskan army without submitting to direct Taskan rule.

However the Marble Simulacrum harboured a desire to claim some military glory in order to prove his credentials as a ruler and insisted on personally achieving a conquest of his own devising. Zygas Taga indulged his factotum's ambitions. The Simulacrum found adequate pretext to invade Djesmirket and marched South via the Korazoon desert. However once in the desert the army was led astray by treacherous guides. Relentlessly driven on by a commander with no ability to empathise with his men's suffering, the Taskan expedition was exhausted and demoralised when eventually pounced upon near the oasis of Araxa by the combined forces of Djesmir, Harran and the Soribisi. The Simulacrum was lost, his army routed, his body-guard slaughtered, his pristine marble flesh broken into pieces and shared out among the victors for trophies.

Perhaps worse, the reputation of the Empire lay in ruins and widespread revolts broke out, even in the heartlands. A small cadre of generals held things together while everyone awaited the return of the divine Emperor to public life that never came. Within three years Zygas Taga presented the Empire with a second regent, this one made of iron. Radical changes were made to the ruling structures of the Empire to ensure that no similar disaster could bring it to the point of ruin again. Since that date the Emperor's followers have swelled in number with every year and every new conquest, and the Emperor's power has increased accordingly. The sacking of Ralmyra by Sheng horse nomads, which might have shaken the people's faith in their Emperor as much as did the defeat at Araxa, was soon consigned to an unfortunate episode of history and spurred only further expansion to expunge the shame. Within five years the Iron Simulacrum had subjected the Escars, the Sheng tribe whose territory lay closest to the Empire's borders, to the imperial yoke.

The Emperor's Path to Heaven

Few people know whether Zygas Taga has yet accumulated the raw power required to achieve his ascension. At some point the immortal emperor will at last take his leave of his people but, despite the wretched state of his existence, he must not rush things. After all, there is no point being a god if no one worships you when you are gone and if all the other gods despise you for being weak. Zygas Taga knows that he is playing for eternity and will delay the day until he is convinced there is not even the remotest chance of error. He can afford no mistakes,





either in the transformation that must take place in himself, or in the creation of an enduring Empire to provide a stable pool of adherents to his worship for as long as any mortal society can be expected to.

The Iron Simulacrum

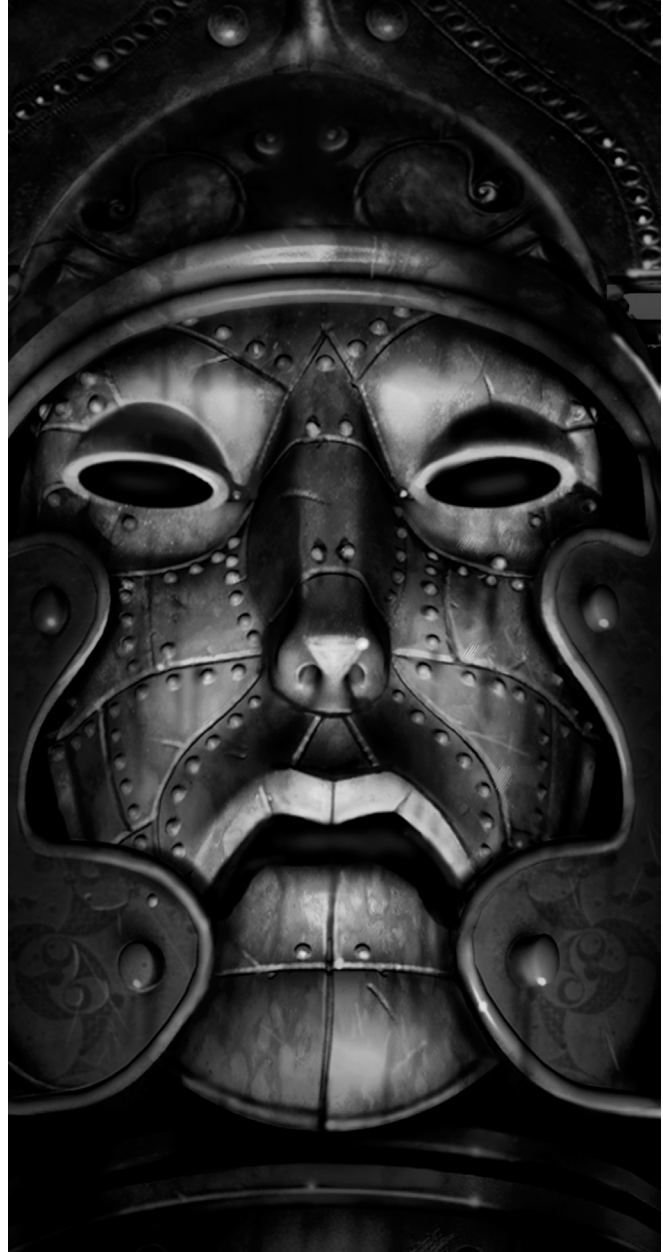
Emperor's familiar, Viceroy of the Empire, Patriarch of the Emperor cult.

The Simulacrum is the apogee of the enchanter's art, constructed through both artifice and magic. He is brought to life with a little fragment of the Emperor's soul that makes him Zygaz Taga's familiar as well as his factotum, and entitled to call himself 'Son of the Divine Emperor'. He rules the Empire not from Taskay but from the fortress-city of Ashkor, the headquarters of the Taskan army, or from the elaborate pavilion that serves as his command tent when he is on campaign. A juggernaut, a massive wagon pulled by 24 oxen, carries the pavilion and the wooden structure that forms the consecrated temple at its heart, and the Simulacrum himself, when he is on the move.

The Simulacrum's body was made in Sorandib, an articulated golem with toughened iron shell, and then enchanted to become a fully aware creature capable of learning and improving its knowledge and skills. It is further enhanced by sorcery charms provided each year during the Emperor Days festivities by Maresh Martek, high priest of Thesh and Exarch of Taskay.

The Simulacrum stands almost eight feet high. His iron skin is dotted with rivets and traced by seams where the metal has been joined in a crazy patchwork of plates to render the human form as closely as can be. His face is a grim and hollow mask – a far cry from the serene, beautiful and beneficent image with which its predecessor, the Marble Simulacrum, was carved. When he speaks his face remains motionless; only the occasional tilt of his head serves to add emphasise or convey the emotion that is intended with the words he projects.

The Iron Simulacrum is jealous of the human condition and nurtures an ambition to one day be truly human. He sees his closest followers endure love, pain, grief and joy – and all these things are emotions he barely understands. Having no sense of touch, smell or taste he is curious to enjoy the same senses as a natural creature does. He does not want to die before he has lived. It is only apparent to his closest advisors that the Simulacrum has personal goals and objectives rather than simply being the mouthpiece of the Emperor – perhaps because of a peculiar chance remark, or because from time to time the Simulacrum requires some task be done which is somewhat obscure in purpose and causes them to question the motivation behind it.



He seeks the means to persist in the world even after the Emperor has ascended to heaven. He senses that time may be near, and fears what will become of him. He takes a great interest in magic that appears to prevent death, deliver immortality, or achieve a transfer of a soul from one body to another. These magical practices are generally regarded as treasonous and are proscribed under the law; so the Simulacrum disguises his own interest in them by the zeal with which he pursues the perpetrators. Whenever a likely case comes to his attention he dispatches an inquisitor to investigate and has the suspect brought to the dungeons of his own palace at Ashkor where they are interrogated by whatever means will best reveal the truth behind their





magical arts. If he discovers they have something he wants, they are detained indefinitely for future use.

The empire has enemies both within and without its borders, and for them the Simulacrum is a monster. To destroy him would be a decisive act in any plan to change or bring down the Empire. He knows just enough about human nature to realise that even for his loyal followers and citizens he could in a moment become the monstrous enemy rather than the icon of the Emperor. The Simulacrum has weaknesses – not least its dependence on the spells furnished by Maresh Martek each year. His Insight and Deceit skills are limited by a fundamental alienation from the human condition that is as much because he is his father's son, created when the Emperor's mind had long since forgotten what it is to be a frail mortal, as because he is an artificial construct.

THE COURTS

There are three 'courts' at the top of the imperial hierarchy, each of which enjoys access to the Emperor in some way:

The Seated Council

This body of priests, supported by a small army of officials, technicians and servants, run the Emperor's household. Responsible for upkeep and victualing of the palace, a significant proportion are shut up within the palace and forbidden to leave its confines. Formally known as the Curules, the Seated Council is the remnant of the cult's early leadership, and so called because its members were entitled to sit in the Emperor's presence.

Garan Varsang, the Seated Council's chairman, is allowed to freely move in and out of the confines of the palace - so he is the only man outside the palace walls who has actually set eyes on the Emperor and is aware of the true horror of his condition. The Curules have no authority in the wider cult, and no direct control over any military or security personnel. Nevertheless the Curules claim their access gives them direct knowledge of the emperor's true thoughts and desires and the fact that they must defer to the Simulacrum's authority is a matter of great irritation.

Garan Varsang

Chairmen of the Seated Council, Garan Varsang is responsible for relations between the community within the walls of the Emperor's palace and the outside world. Garan Varsang is widely known to be an ambitious schemer. His responsibility is for the Emperor's Palace and the Zygag Taga temple precincts at

Taskay, which gives him access to a great many secrets and the ability to manipulate the allocation of jobs and sinecures within certain parts of the imperial court.

The Emperor's Body Slaves

Once admitted within the walls of the palace, these people are never seen again. Their numbers are replenished by new admissions, almost always orphaned youngsters below the age of 12, their acceptance into the ranks of the Emperor's Body Slaves is both a charity and an honour. Despite the fact that both girls and boys are taken, so far as is known to any outsider they never marry, never procreate – and are burned and buried within the palace grounds when they die

The Exarchy

These political heads of each diocese are the exarchs, high priests of the Emperor cult, hand-picked by the Emperor to rule over one of the cities or provinces of the Empire.

The dioceses are: *Ashkor, Taskay, Pryjarna, Ralmyra, Tarsang, Felsang, Zarina, Merat, Torestal, Bandaknar and the Taskan Army.*

Only the Simulacrum, who heads the Military Diocese, can call a conclave of the exarchs, so they have no independent existence as a corporate body. Each has his own relationship with the Emperor established through magical means of communication installed in each temple.

An exarch chairs a college of Emperor-cult priests all recruited locally; this body has full tax raising and judicial powers, and control of the militia forces in their locale. Upon the death, or more rarely the retirement or dismissal of an exarch, his office is filled by the promotion of one of the priests of the college. The emperor's choice has often shown favour towards candidates who are accomplished sorcerers.

Maresh Martek

Martek is the most important person in Taskay after the Emperor himself. He is a crotchety and bilious old man, for which he might be forgiven given that he is 132 years of age. What most people have forgotten, but Martek still remembers, is that 60 years ago many of his family and friends were put to death on charges of treason while he stood by and did not intervene. Not because he was afraid, nor because he was not sympathetic to their cause - but because this intensely calculating conspirator thought the time not yet right for action and their treason doomed to failure. Martek is extremely influential - and by virtue of the fact he conducts the spell casting rituals





every year that renew the Simulacrum's magical defences and enhancements, his powers are vital to the Empire's security.

Maresh Martek was one of the individuals responsible for the Iron Simulacrum's creation - and ever since that day he has regretted his involvement in an act that successfully brought peace and stability to the Empire at a time of great turmoil and unrest. In Martek's view the price of peace has been an indefinite postponement of the day when the cult of Taskan Thesh replaces the Emperor cult at helm of the empire, and his beloved home city of Taskay becomes not just the Emperor's place of residence, but a true imperial capital.

Morshek Musabis

Morshek is the Exarch of Zarina. He is probably one of the three most powerful sorcerers in the enormous city that he rules. While he cannot match Maresh Martek in years he has held his current job for a generation, which means he is thought to be more than 90 years old. Morshek appears to be failing in health and he is carried most places by a team of litter-bearers. He may often be found in the library, where it is his pleasure to test young students on their studies, and impress the assembled company with the breadth of his knowledge.

Nysim Dal

Nysim is the Exarch of Tarsang. He is only 43 years of age, having won his position due to the lack of competitors who had knowledge both of politics and of the sorcerous arts. Nysim's family is very famous in the city. His grandfather gave the city her walls and his father built the theatre. His shame is to have failed to father any offspring to inherit the family's considerable fortune.

Jererk Sandarin

Jererk Sandarin is the Exarch of Pryjarna and patriarch of Basat's cult, Originally from Ralmyra, he served his time as a soldier stationed in Pryjarna where he became a devotee of Basat. His family were killed when the Sheng sacked Ralmyra, so he decided to adopt Pryjarna as his native town and upon mustering out of the army he gave himself over to serving the god. Sandarin is now 52 years old, but still strong and quite handsome. He is a highly respected statesman and a popular leader.

Gortim Zubast

Gortim Zubast is Exarch of Merat. He finds government work terribly dull, a drain on his time which keeps him from honing his sorcery skills and enjoying the civilised lifestyle that Merat has to offer. Luckily for him Merat is sufficiently isolated from

what is going on in the Empire at large that the Emperor and his minions rarely impose upon him. His occasional journeys to the capital or to Ashkor always involve a retinue of the finest poets and performers his city has to offer, and serve as an advertisement for Merat as the destination of choice for the cultured traveller. He is grooming his son for high station; his son has great interest in the good life but no interest in sorcery, which may prove career limiting

Sula Sonzush

Sula Sonzush is Exarch of Ashkor, and currently the only (although not the first) woman to serve as an exarch over a Tarsenian diocese. Her chief concern is management of a city where the population swells significantly during winter months when the imperial army settles into cantonments around its margins, and the fact the Simulacrum is so often near at hand to scrutinize how well she performs in her role. Sonzush is a grumbler, famously stressed about the pressure of work and can be counted on to enumerate how hard is her lot compared to that of her fellow exarchs.

Anthul Marsin

Anthul Marsin is Exarch of Ralmyra. His sorcery skills are regarded as well below par by the other exarchs, but Marsin is nevertheless the most capable in Further Tarsenia where such skills are rare. He has proven himself a popular and capable leader in difficult circumstances. He takes care to set aside the trappings of the sorcerer and politician and show himself an active participant in public business. He can often be seen working with architects and builders engaged to improve upon the city's earlier works that were razed by Sheng invaders a generation ago.

Thulvel Thulzek

The Exarch of Felsang rules a city famous for the Empire's only state-sponsored school of magic - run by his elder brother Enek. The peak of Thulvel's skill with the magical arts is well behind him. An encounter with demons he inadvertently conjured during a magical rite resulted in his retirement from actively practising magic outside the demands placed upon him by his office. The same event left his hair white and his teeth quite black, and for some reason short of two toes and a ring finger. Thulvel now prefers to spend time in the religious sphere, both as head of the local Emperor cult and as a devotee of at least seven deities. He is regarded as an expert in matters of ritual.

Orivastus

The Exarch of Torestal is a local Thennalt from the wealthiest family in Camtri, who owe their station to lands confiscated





from Korantine-sympathisers and other anti-Taskans after the recent war. He relies on the magical support of colleagues with traditional Thennalt priesthoods and from a Tarsenian appointee to his college of Emperor-Cult priests.

Rusasma Horsetooth

The Exarch of Bandaknar is the daughter of an Eskar mercenary who served in the Taskan army and had his children sent to Zarina to be educated. Rusasma nevertheless leans towards her barbarian roots and has few graces; but she is smart and tough and has made herself quite at home in the brutal politics between prominent Eskar families.

The Iron Companions

The twelve most senior generals in the Empire, the Iron Companions form a college of priests attending the Simulacrum as Military Exarch whose diocese consists of the army and those lands and territories under direct military control. Iron Companions technically do not outrank the Exarchs, but in practice they are likely to have the authority of the Simulacrum behind them which trumps all.

Count Balthus

Born into slavery in Korantia from which he escaped as a boy of 12, famous for the deed of recovering fragments of the Marble Simulacrum from the deserts of the Korazoon in his young adventuring days. Count Balthus has no specific office but is often sent where the Simulacrum sees the need for decisive intervention by a senior commander.

Count Bunais

The Commander of the Pikes of Ashkor is Count Narkot Bunais of Tarsang, a 40-year old general of the Iron Companions. Narkot is a lover of wealth and all the pleasures it can buy and spends what spare time he has drinking and feasting with his crowd of hangers-on and lavishing his considerable share of booty on new estates, fine clothes, works of art and personal adornment. This strutting peacock is nevertheless an efficient commander and a strict disciplinarian

Countess Kedsinka

Originally from the city of Jostarl in the land of Thafna, Countess Kedsinka is now Commander of the Northern Frontier. Her attention is mostly absorbed by business in Timolay, only recently occupied by Taskan forces and still surrounded by hostile Marangians. However she is also charged with preventing any new incursion by Sheng tribesmen from beyond the Tengissian Gates. Kedsinka is a handsome woman, but her facial

tattoos that are a feature of high status Thafneving women and her severe cut black hair give her a terrifying aspect.

Count Sarastil

The Thennalt-born Commander of the Mercenaries, count Sarastil, comes from Camtri where his family can claim a long and illustrious history. For the last three generations this has been intertwined with Taskan interests. Sarastil's father distinguished himself in battle against the Korantines fighting for the Taskan cause, and his uncle was a highly respected priest and a political operator who ensured many important families and tribes sympathised with Taskan rather than Korantine interests. Sarastil wears traditional Camtric whiskers, but otherwise dresses as a Taskan soldier.

Count Maranis

Maranis is the Iron Companion who commands the cavalry. At 33 years of age he is the youngest of the Simulacrum's generals and a handsome, dashing character to boot. He frequently puts himself at the head of his men in battle, wishing to set an example in coming to blows with the enemy. Maranis is from a wealthy family in Zarina and he returns there at the end of each campaigning season to winter with them.

Count Toramsor

Commander of the Southern Frontier, Toramsor is in charge of the forces stationed at Pryjana and the associated forts and outposts. At 35 years old, Toramsor is an active commander, and often accompanies his men on patrol. However he is also a cautious individual who puts a high value on planning, training and logistics - all qualities that are very useful on a desert frontier.

Count Ranksum

The military Governor of Haran presides over a Taskan enclave surrounded by a subjugated native population who have good reason to hate their overlords. Ranksum and his people are tough and sometimes brutal oppressors. He has been in post for seven years, has survived eleven assassination attempts, and seems to enjoy it. None of his colleagues are in a hurry to replace him.

Countess Kashalla

The Resident of Yegusai. At 63 the oldest of the Iron Companions, and generally thought the wisest. She is long past her fighting days but has become a consummate diplomat. Her position in Yegusai is to manage relations with the king, provide support and encouragement to those local people who decide to take Taskan citizenship and to report on any threats or hostility towards Taskan interests.





Count Zamasin

Commander of the West, Zamasin is based at Ashkor and his responsibilities include the politically sensitive border regions with Sorandib, Jekkarene Ramassa and Hilanistra. Despite this it is often said Zamasin has been chosen for this brief because he is famously simple in his outlook, asking few questions and usually failing, or refusing, to see any complexity in what is going on.

Count Arrak

The Imperial Light Infantry, known as The Brigands, are commanded by Count Arrak. For historic reasons this is a higher prestige role than that of commanding the cavalry. Arrak is himself from an old family of aristocratic lineage, although he has a down-to-earth manner that makes him popular with the troops.

Count Farchang

Farchang is Aide De Camp to the Simulacrum and commander of the Unconquerable Heroes of Taskay, the Emperor's Praetorian Guard. Count Farchang is a senior member of the cult of Taskan Thesh and some suspect his loyalties lie more with Maresh Martek, the Exarch of Taskay, than with his fellow Iron Companions.

Count Kemur

Sharustang Kemur is a bald, bear-like 50-year-old. A very seasoned soldier now suffering from chronic joint pain, he has effectively retired from active service, bought a fine house in Zarina, and settled down to write a treatise on military affairs. In view of his illustrious background the Zarinian Emperor-cult had no hesitation in co-opting him into their ranks, conferring on him the largely honorary role of commander of the Zarinian militia.





CITIES AND PROVINCES

Each city of Tarsenia with its territory, and the imperial provinces centred on the barbarian cities of Torestal and Bandaknar forms a self-contained administrative region termed a diocese.

TASKAY: THE CAPITAL

For over 200 years Taskay has been the home of Zygas Taga, the man become God. The Emperor lives in a great palace surrounded by high walls of red stone, on a rock at the end of a promontory that stretches out into the gulf of Taskay. Supplies are brought to the palace gates in great quantities every day but no human being from the outside is allowed entry and the supplies are handed over to palace staff to be carried into the inner precincts.

Taskay's other famous features include the Temple of Thesh, which sits on a hill facing the palace across the harbour. Outside this temple is a great bronze dish supported by a tripod six metres high, in which flames of a dozen elementals leap and dance. Also well known are the Wall of Tears, which stretches eight kilometres across the width of the peninsula on which the city stands and is its only major defence-work; and the royal cranes, birds sacred to Thesh that inhabit a small island some 200 yards off the shore. Taga's Court is the paved and cloistered area at the foot of Temple Hill where Zygas Taga first held court upon capturing the city and where the first formal rites of Emperor-worship were performed. Here now stands an unprepossessing altar to the Emperor and it is here that the notables of enemy nations captured in war are brought to offer

sacrifice to his name. It is also here that they die if they refuse the offer of mercy, pardon and citizenship.

Beyond the suburbs but still within the Wall of Tears there is pasture and parkland and several cemeteries where the city's dead are housed in family or communal mortuary structures, built to hold large numbers of funerary urns, some of which are impressive monuments several stories high. Abutting the Wall of Tears is the Fortress of the Unconquerable Heroes (popularly known as the Fire-Eaters), the barracks for a regiment of 1,100 men, devotees of Thesh, who form the Imperial Guard. At any one time about one third of the regiment's manpower is in barracks, while another third is on active duty with the Iron Simulacrum and the remainder are on courier duties or special missions.

Outside the wall is a ramshackle but extensive collection of fire-hazardous dwellings, where those who have not been granted a right to live within the walls are forced to stay. Here too are animal pens, unlicensed trading stalls and usually dozens of tents and temporary shelters for those travellers who cannot afford or find a bed in one of the city's inns.

ZARINA: THE METROPOLIS

Before Zygas Taga made Taskay his capital, Zarina was the most powerful city of the Tarsenians. It is still to this day the most populous, its inhabitants said to number more than 200,000. It is the seat of much of Tarsenian culture and learning and Zarinian society often sets the fashions which become accepted throughout the heartland.





Zarina is blessed by an excellent location, on the shores of the gulf of Taskay and close by the mouth of the Siskil River. There are a total of 11 distinct suburbs, of which only four are encompassed within the walls. The remainder spill out onto the plain apart from the necropolis, which is built on a river island connected to the shore by a bridge. Each quarter and suburb is named after a celebrated hero from the city's past.

The Old City

Dimarnis is a residential quarter of Zarina-within-the-walls, or the 'Old City'. This is where the wealthy citizens live in a suburb that preserves its class distinctions from pre-imperial times. The inhabitants of this district no longer have legal privileges but they retain their ancient obligation to present themselves for militia service equipped with a horse and cuirass. Busatis is the administrative quarter of Zarina and the location of the Zygas Taga temple with its open court, where the priests sit in session. Close by is Nysim Quarter, which features many shops, the city's largest market and the Great Library, which is the most famous seat of learning in the Empire, said to hold more than 10,000 books in over 50 languages. The fourth quarter within the walls is the Sutermin or Temple Quarter, featuring the Great Temple of Tethis. The plaza surrounding this structure, the Court of Tethis, is the territory of prostitutes and entertainers and on Tethis' high holy day is the scene for a contest of arms between devotees of Basat and Machank in which participants are frequently killed.

The Suburbs

Outside of the city's northern gate is Gortyn Quarter, a district of inns and taverns clustered around the Theatre. Across Gortyn bridge is the island suburb of Sugartis, which consists in the main of the necropolis, built in streets radiating out from the Gomorg Temple at its centre. Timna and Jumatis Quarters are mostly residential, with a scattering of workshops and businesses, sporting tenement blocks of four, five or even six stories. The ground floors of these blocks are usually occupied by the landlord or let out to shopkeepers. Bordering Timna Quarter is Thumastin's Menagerie, a collection of exotic beasts from many different lands collected and put on display by the eccentric magus Thumastin Thumank. Raheb Quarter is a residential area containing many rich houses with impressive gardens and close by is the outskirt suburb of Kebal, which is mostly inhabited by agricultural workers, clustered around the impressive Temple of Samanse and Kait. Kebal hosts the city's main market for agricultural produce.

The last suburb is Samais Quarter, a sprawling jumble of buildings located the other side of the Siskil river and reached by a ferry, which runs once in the morning and once at night in each direction, carrying passengers and animals at a fixed rate. Wealthy patrons may hire it privately at other times of the day. Samais is the poorest district of the city, inhabited by all sorts of undesirables, excluded from the other side of the river by the militia. Besides these it also has a substantial population of agricultural labourers, who have no land of their own and can only find work at certain times of the year. Those who are citizens can at least expect handouts from the government to help them through hard times. Samais' most notable features are a large, secure inn called The Lock Inn, within which travellers failing to make the last ferry can find safe lodgings; and a government office which is at the same time a dole centre and hiring hall for the military.

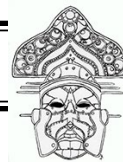
ASHKOR: THE SIMULACRUM'S CAPITAL

Ashkor is a soldiers' town, where the Taskan army is assembled, trained and outfitted. A constant traffic of young men and some women converges on the city, who have enrolled with recruiting sergeants in their home town and have been sent on their way with just enough money in their pockets to live off on the journey. Needless to say this pocket money is often squandered and would-be recruits end up stealing and robbing to provide for themselves, making the roads leading to the city dangerous routes to travel alone. In addition to the army recruits and the regular round of delegations to the court of the Iron Simulacrum, a stream of tinkers, entertainers and other purveyors of goods and services to the troops and a constant to-ing and fro-ing of official couriers makes the Ashkor Road the most travelled in all the Empire.

Ashkor is an unwallled town, although it is overlooked by a strong fortress set atop a tall natural tumulus, the only high point for miles around, which commands views over both land and sea. This place is the palace of the Iron Simulacrum, a defence work of considerable size approached by a long, winding ramp, guarded by all manner of devices manufactured by the Guild of Artificers.

At the foot of the fortress is the town itself. On one side are the various camps of the regular and mercenary units, of which there are five permanent ones and many more during the winter months when there can be 30,000 troops based here. On the other is a long beach suitable for shallow-draughted warships





and an artificial harbour, which can accommodate the merchantmen bringing supplies for the troops. During the campaigning season Ashkor is a fairly quiet place, where the people are a peaceable and law-abiding crowd involved in agriculture, crafts, shipping and services to the many official visitors who come here. During the winter months the bulk of the army is quartered here. The troops, camp-followers and hangers-on then outnumber the townspeople two to one. Foodstalls and wine-shops open up all over, the gaming houses open their doors, entertainers and showmen from all across the Empire bring new and exotic acts to town for the season and Ashkor becomes a very rough place indeed. So much so, in fact, that the wealthier inhabitants retire to the country for the duration and the army's Enforcer battalion takes over much of the responsibility for law and order.

The town's major features include a Temple of Machank, in which a proportion of the spoils of war are placed as trophies and at which a brave few dedicate themselves to the pursuit of death or glory before setting out on campaign. There is also an arms factory belonging to the Emperor's estate and employing 200 indentured workers in the manufacture of weapons for the army; similar enterprises on a smaller scale belonging to local landowners and businessmen produce shields, helmets, spears, armour, belts and other leatherwork, tools and mess equipment, rations and hardtack according to regulations laid down by statute.

Between the town and the village of Kispal, where the Samanse temple stands, are the two military training grounds. The first is the Choosing Ground, which is used by the town's militia; the second, much larger, is the Field of Machank, where the professional army drills its men and trains new recruits. In one part of this field is an area roped off from the rest, where the portable temple that the army carries with it on campaign is erected during the winter.

TARSANG: THE TRADE CENTRE

The Empire's key trade hub is Tarsang, and this is a city famous as the headquarters of many of the Empire's merchants and shippers. Goods and commodities are traded here before being shipped on to their final destinations. A network of courts serve as market-places where the bulk trades take place, regulated and taxed by the local Emperor-cult. A cartel of warehouse owners

also profits from the volume of goods passing through the city, and a local thieves' network is said to steal goods to order for customers all across the Empire.

Tarsang has a deep-water harbour, and dry docking facilities are available at the shipwrights' yards a couple of kilometres down the coast. The harbour is fronted by a line of great warehouses, offering storage space at rates which reflect the conditions of the building and the level of security offered. Just outside the city walls through Merchant's Gate is the caravanserai, and an area of inns, hostels and taverns and residences known as the Foreigners' Quarter.

Tarsang is home to Tarsen's Empty Tomb and the cults that honour him; his tomb consists of a large lined pit where his body was to have been burned, set before an elaborately carved shrine into which his ashes were to have been received.

OTHER CITIES OF TARSENIA

Merat

A small city famous as a centre for the arts and favoured playground and holiday spot for wealthy Tarsenians. The annual festival of Merai, the city's tutelary deity, is the most important gathering of artists and performers in the world.

Ralmyra

The newest city foundation, is the centre of Further Tarsenia. Ralmyra has undergone substantial rebuilding and resettlement after disastrous barbarian incursions 20 years ago.

Pryjarna

A city on the southern frontier famous as the Holy City of Basat, god of truth and life. Pryjarna is the gateway to the caravan routes to Djesmirket and Sharranket across the Korazoon desert; however major commercial traffic to the South tends to use the riverine routes via Morkar in the West and the Beshor Valley in the East.

Felsang – A small city famous for its schools of sorcery but mostly dependent on its craft industries. Felsang has developed in the shadow of Sorandib and increasingly is a refuge for craftsmen trained in Sorantine schools.





POPULATION

In the Taskan Empire most people do not live in cities, but in small towns and villages at the centre of a network of fields, pastures, forestry and fisheries. The Empire's most populous diocese, Zarinia, has a total territory of over 2 million Hectares of which some 30% is good arable land, some of it the best in Tarsenia, enabling her citizens to produce cash crops for export as well as to feed themselves.

The Population Table

The Population Table sets out the approximate population of each diocese of the Taskan Empire. These figures include all individuals whether citizen or non-citizen. To these figures can be added a large number of citizens resident outside the borders of the Empire, almost all of whom are to be found in one of the protectorates, subject nations, allied and client states, some of them émigrés but most of them indigenous folk who have taken citizenship for their own reasons.

| DIocese | URBAN POPULATION | RURAL POPULATION | TOTAL |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Ashkor | 32,000 | 242,000 | 274,000 |
| Bandaknar | 12,000 | 76,000 | 88,000 |
| Camtri | 27,000 | 803,000 | 830,000 |
| Felsang | 37,000 | 345,000 | 382,000 |
| Merat | 13,000 | 164,000 | 177,000 |
| Pryjarna | 21,000 | 209,000 | 230,000 |
| Ralmyra | 16,000 | 68,000 | 84,000 |
| Tarsang | 56,000 | 398,000 | 454,000 |
| Taskay | 71,000 | 289,000 | 360,000 |
| Zarina | 230,000 | 850,000 | 850,000 |
| Total | 515,000 | 3,444,000 | 3,959,000 |

Urban Population includes the city proper and its suburbs; all those, in fact, who live within an hour's walk - roughly 5km - of the city centre. A minority of these people are involved in agriculture - those lucky enough to have fields close to the city.

Rural Population comprises everyone else, although they may in fact live in some quite substantial country towns as well as villages and scattered farms. The vast majority of these people are somehow connected to agriculture, and probably work in it on at least a part time basis.

Each of the cities and provinces on the table has independent magical support for its agricultural economy, as there is no Empire-wide pact with a deity who can provide such support (which is beyond the divine Emperor's capability). Tarsenian cities and their regions generally rely on the help of the Goddesses Samanse and Kait, and the farmer-god Hoonvel. Every major town will have a temple of some description maintained at public expense, and most villages will have their own sites and shrines, possibly including some local nature spirit who it is best to have onside. The provincial emperor-cult ensures that a college of trained priests is available that specialises in agricultural deities, and that public cults are well supported.

IMPERIAL DOMINIONS

In the provinces and dependencies of the Empire there are many important settlements and a couple of major cities. In reality the Provinces cover lands that are tied to the Empire through a variety of different means, ranging from a simple unequal alliance to being under direct military rule. The various categories can be summarised as follows:

Subject Nations

These people have submitted to the Empire following conquest and for some reason have been saddled with a punitive regime. Taskan citizenship is only granted to selected sections of society or those individuals who prove themselves loyal and worthy. A governing body is set over them, which operates under military jurisdiction, reporting to the Simulacrum. Subject status is expected to be an interim stage prior to creation of a Province. At present the Eskars, Haran and Marangia - and in reality only a small part of that land around the main city at Timolay - are Subject Nations.

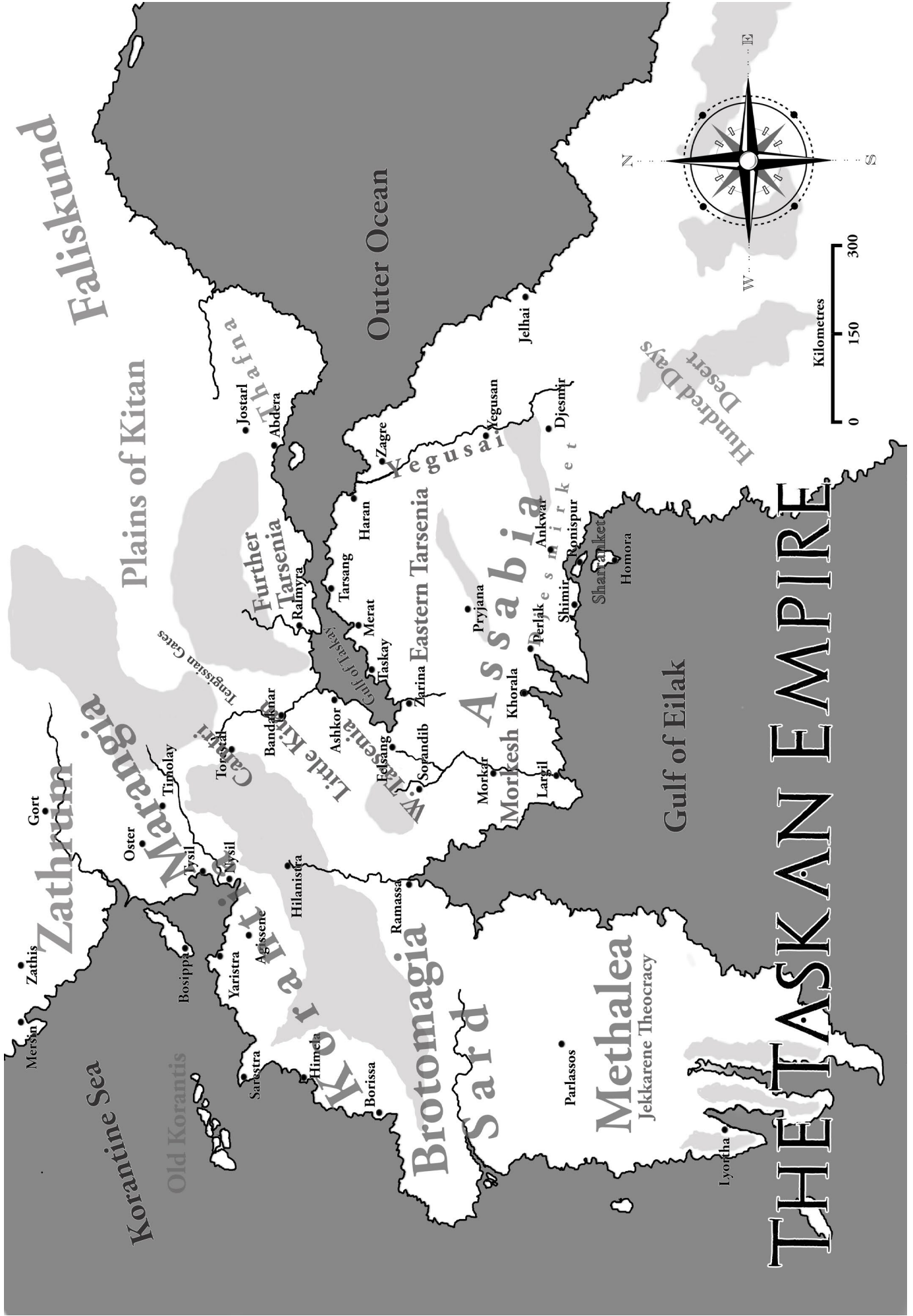
Dioceses (Provinces)

A territory that has accepted Taskan rule and with it a universal grant of citizenship and the replacement of their traditional leadership by a college of Emperor-cult priests in the Taskan style - albeit pretty much populated by people from the same ruling class as before. Camtri and The Little Kitan are Dioceses.

Client States

These lands retain their ancestral traditions and constitutions but have no right to enter independently into foreign relations and must usually supply some sort of tribute, service or resource to the Empire, particularly specialist magical or military services. The Kingdom of Yegusai is a Client State.







Protectorates

Independent states whose constitutions and freedoms are guaranteed by the Taskan military. They enjoy a permanent state of military alliance and usually offer favoured nations terms of trade and exclusive access to certain products and resources in return. Unlike a client state the leaders of a protectorate are granted full honours and technical equality in inter-state relations. Protectorates are free of direct interference and the Emperor cult does not proselytize there, only maintaining such temples and shrines as are required to serve an émigré population. Sorantia and the Jekkarene Theocracy are protectorates.

Allies

Not technically part of the Empire but in fact independent states who have entered into an unequal alliance with the Taskans. This inequality is usually reflected in non-reciprocal guarantees of the treatment of Taskan citizens (in particular of merchants) and the Emperor's enemies under their legal codes. Morkesh is an Ally of the Taskans.

Northern Territories

While the lands now known as Further Tarsenia were effectively cleared of indigenous people and colonised by Tarsenians, the rest of the Northern territories are inhabited by people thought of as barbarians, who are now under Taskan rule. At its heart is the land of Camtri, shared by a number of related 'Thennalt' peoples with a common cult centre at Torestal. Some of them were friendly with the Taskans from early on and frequently provided mercenary troops to the army – while others had traditional friendships with the Korantines. At one point the two civilisations found themselves on opposite sides of a civil war, the only time that Taskans and Korantines have ever come to blows in battle. In the end Camtri became united as a Taskan land, the first in which the conquered people were fully assimilated by adopting Taskan citizenship with their own college of Emperor-cult priests installed at Torestal. Beyond Camtri to the north is the city of Timolay, seat of a king who nominally rules over Marangia but who has been made a subject and now rules only a small territory around his capital with the support and counsel of Taskan agents. The people on its borders are largely hostile. A process of consolidation is under way through the settlement of military veterans and loyal Camtrians on land confiscated from rebels and exiles.

Camtri is a pleasant and fertile land but to get there from Western Tarsenia you have to cross the rather bleaker 'Little Kitan', a broad plain some 200 miles across, bisected by the swift-flowing Black River. The southern end provides excellent pasture for the

Taskan army's livestock. The Eastern side is the homeland of the Eskars, a largely nomadic tribe who are now a subject nation and whose sprawling, one-story, wood-built city of Bandaknar is an important centre for trade between the Taskans and the Sheng nations to whom the Eskars belong. The hills that flank the Little Kitan to the East are cut by a pass known as the Tenggissian Gates, which is the most practical route up onto the Kitan plateau where the other Sheng Tribes have their homelands. Some high ranking Eskars have the citizenship already, as do any warriors who have served a five year term as an auxiliary in the Taskan army. Eska communities and their herds are allowed to cross the Black River with their livestock to access the grasslands that fall within their historic ranges but anything that resembles a war party is strictly forbidden and the army has first call on the best pastures.

Bandaknar

There is only one city of any size in which the majority of inhabitants come from nomad stock and that is Bandaknar, which serves as a meeting place and market between Sheng and Taskan lands. Bandaknar is situated on a natural ford across the Black River. It is a notoriously filthy town, the stinking rat-infested streets and lice-ridden inns are legendary and visitors are advised to only take the water, or bathe, upstream of its suburbs. Bandaknar is a sprawl of wooden single-story buildings and only the stone-built Taskan temple and watch towers stand out above the crowd. Unsurprisingly it is the most important centre for trade in horses in the known world but this is in all ways a stockman's town, full of the stench from animal pens and enclosures, home to butchers, tanners, leatherworkers, dairymen, horse-breakers and slaughterers. Almost everyone in Bandaknar has some connection to the raising, consumption or processing of animals. Bandaknar is now the administrative capital of a Taskan province. As a result the vast majority of its inhabitants have been forced to submit to the Emperor and taken citizenship. The city has its own militia, the only formed unit of foot soldiers amongst the Sheng and consequently much derided and despised.

Western Territories

Part of Western Tarsenia is still, strictly speaking, independent of the Empire, albeit under the protection of the Taskan army. Just 40 miles West of the city of Felsang flows the Shol River and to the west of that the Taskan army only operates to keep the road between Felsang and Sorandib safe and clear of bandits. The old road further West, from Sorandib to Ramassa, is effectively cut off by the lawless state of the country through which it passes, as the king of Sorandib can barely exercise power within the





walls of his capital, let alone beyond. North of Sorandib is Lake Barur, nestled among unforgiving yet metal-rich hills, choked with weeds which are a highly prized source of healing remedies and also the source of the Briga, a river that flows through three famous cities and acts as a vital trade route for the Empire.

West of the Badlands around Sorandib is Ramassa, gateway to the Theocracy of the Jekkarenes, which occupies much of the great peninsula that is generally known as the Jekkarid but more properly referred to by scholars as Methalea. These people who are, like Sorandib, under Taskan protection, generally forbid foreigners from entering their lands and so maintain Ramassa in the East and the port city of Lyortha in the South as places where foreigners are welcome and business can be done.

Eastern Territories

Tarsang is the most Easterly city that is truly Tarsenian. Beyond that is the land of Haran, formerly part of the Kingdom of Yegusai. When Yegusai submitted to Taskan hegemony Haran became the centre of rebellious conspiracies and eventually

the city threw in its lot with an alliance of Djesmir and the Soribisi, which handed the Taskans their first major military defeat at Araxa. As a result Haran was brutally sacked, purged of rebels and settled with Tarsenians to maintain a garrison colony. The city still has a subject population in servitude to a citizen minority. The remainder of the Kingdom of Yegusai is crowded into the valleys of the Beshor and its tributaries – outside of these valleys the country is rather dry and barren. Yegusai remains a client state of the Empire, one which sends magicians rather than soldiers to contribute to the army. Yegusaian ‘sorcerers’ – are very much in demand in the cities of the heartland because they come from a wholly alien tradition and have arts that are hard to replicate with regular sorcery or Theism – it is said that they have more in common with the wild shamans of Kitan, even though they are a very ancient and literate civilisation. Yegusan itself is considered so exotic and ancient that it is a favourite tourist destination for Tarsenia’s educated elite.





ECONOMY

The *Taskeen* is the currency introduced by Zygus Taga when he became Emperor over a unified Tarsenia. It takes its name, but not its value, from the old currency of the city of Taskay. As a symbolically democratic gesture Zygus Taga fixed the value of the standard silver coin on the daily wage of an unskilled worker. This is essentially half the value of the old standard unit of exchange, based on the pure silver piece. It also conforms to a traditional measure of value in Tarsenia - which is 1 kilo of Blessed Barley. In order to still keep a coin of acceptable size - although still a little smaller than other silver currencies - the silver is mixed with base metal, and a blanching process ensures the coins still appear to be silver. The actual purity of any *Taskeen* coins depends on the year of issue and the state of the treasury's finance at that particular time. Enquiring into the specifics of an issue's purity is certainly Treasonous.

Gold Coins

The Taskan Empire does not mint gold coins; large transactions can be carried out using promissory notes for internal trades, or by weight of bullion in gold or silver for foreign trades.

Copper Coins

Smaller copper pieces (pennies) are issued that generally trade at 5 to the *Taskeen*. These copper pieces have retained the same notional value from pre-Imperial days, so there are many very old, worn coins still in circulation. A healthy economy is one in which you can purchase a loaf of bread using a single penny.

EXCHANGE RATES

The international trade economy is still based on bullion coins, and more or less pure silver coins are still issued by mints in Sharranket (the Sharranketan Dinar) and across Korantia by the Syndics of the merchant societies under the tutelage of the trade god Sabateus. The Korantine Emperor also mints gold coins that are little short of 100% purity, and a little larger than most silver coins. Despite the power and reach of the Taskan Empire these high purity foreign coins are still popular because they are easily moved and accepted internationally, without a money changer taking a cut.

The usual conversion rates are as follows:

10 pennies = 2 Taskeens = 1 Korantine Silver Piece = 0.05 Korantine Gold Imperials = 1 Sharranketan Dinar

1 Taskeen = 1 Djesmiri Dinar = 1 Morkeshite Dinar = 1 Korantine State Silver = 0.2 Yegusan Silvers = 5 Jekkarene Iron Bars

METALS

The trade in metals is an important one, with vast quantities required for state purposes, particularly outfitting of the army. Rich ore deposits are found in Further Tarsenia; resources in and around Eastern Tarsenia are much depleted, however Merat still produces 19 tons of silver per year, worth over 6 million *Taskeens*. Merat's contribution to the exchequer means her (admittedly small) citizen militia is exempt from providing troops for the Empire.





Metals

| ITEM | DESCRIPTION | AVAILABILITY | COST |
|--------------------|---|--------------|--------------|
| Bronze | Even though it can be mined in its alloyed state, bronze is more expensive than iron as it is less common and also has useful properties such as being resistant to corrosion and able to be polished up to a shine | Uncommon | 8 per kg |
| Iron | Desirable as the standard metal for practical use in tools, weapons and construction, iron is quite abundant and therefore relatively cheap | Common | 5 per kg |
| Silver | Bullion value. 1 kg of silver can make 160 bullion coins (Sharranketan Dinars), and this provides the benchmark market price for the precious metal | Uncommon | 320 per kg |
| Copper | Less useful than bronze, copper's chief use is for cheap utensils and minting low value coins that have no real bullion value | Common | 6 per kg |
| 1 Taskan Talent | Bullion value of 1 kg of gold, traditionally 12 times the same weight of silver | | 3,840 per kg |
| 1 Korantine Talent | 1.875kg of gold, enough to strike 180 gold Imperials | | 7,200 |

Camtri is an important region for iron mining, copper is found in the White Hills near Pryjarna. Some metals, bronze in particular, are imported from the Jekkarid, but the Merchants of Sharranket bring substantial quantities from regions such as Thafna and Kitan with which Taskan merchants have few direct connections.

The value of precious metals is difficult to set; in reality the value of a weight of pure metal is always greater than the equivalent in bullion coins as the content of the coins may be suspect.

WAGES

A character may need to know what they can earn by picking up casual work - or alternatively what they need to pay hirelings for their services. The basic service that anyone can offer is their time and energy. An individual of sound body with no skills to offer expects to receive 1 Taskeen for a full day of his labour. An individual with a useful skill in excess of 50% may be able to earn double that - the wage of a skilled worker - as long as there is a demand for what they can do. Certain skills of course attract a premium as sometimes do particularly high (101%+) skill levels. Sample wages by day, month and year are given on the Wages Table.

Wages

| JOB | DAILY RATE | ANNUAL RATE* | MONTHLY RATE** |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Skilled worker or craftsman | 2 | 520 | 40 |
| Unskilled worker or labourer | 1 | 260 | 20 |
| Elite Artisan (e.g. Artist) | 8 | 2080 | 160 |
| School Teacher | 2 | 520 | 40 |
| Messenger | 1.4 | 364 | 28 |
| Clergyman, Praise Singer | 2.2 | 572 | 44 |
| Soldier, professional*** | 2 | 738 | 56 |
| Soldier, militia | 1 | 260 | 20 |
| Army Officer | 25 | 6,000 | 500 |

* Daily rates are higher than the annual income would suggest – this is because people don't work every day. Workers generally put in about 260 days per year - the remainder being one sort of holiday or festival or another.

**A Taskan year has 13 lunar months.

***The professional soldier receives 2 Taskeens per day, plus 10 Taskeens bonus for the Emperor Days at the end of the year. The basic cost of feeding them is deducted from their pay when not on campaign. Military rates of pay tend to be high. The income shown here is also expected to be boosted with cash bonuses, booty, and even a grant of land at the end of service. This is because professional soldiers can cause a lot of trouble if they get fed up with their pay. Militia pay shown is net of the cost of rations.





PRICE LISTS

The following tables provide prices for items that can be bought and sold in the Taskan Empire. Prices provided are those in the major cities, although when shopping in rural areas discounts might be applied to commodities and foodstuffs of anything up to 50%, while similar premiums are paid for luxuries and trade goods if you can find them.

In general, items noted as being Common can be found almost anywhere in town and country; items noted as Uncommon can be found in outlying towns as well as the key cities; goods that are Rare are only found in the cities, and those that are Very Rare are usually only found in specific cities that are on the right trade routes or that have a specialist outlet. Special Order indicates that no-one actually advertises this service, you have to track down someone who will provide it.

The prices given in the tables starting on [page 33](#) are market prices in Tarsenia, so do not necessarily apply elsewhere.

Food and Drink

Tarsenians generally consume barley as their staple, although wheat is also known. This sets them and the Jekkarenes apart from the Korantines and Thennalts who prefer wheat and feed barley to horses. The penny price of bread in the cities is a critical sign of economic well-being, and the Simulacrum will intervene if this rises to 2 pennies or more.

A kilo of flour is enough to bake two and a half 0.5 kg loaves of bread, which means there is a penny margin on the price of flour for every five loaves sold which has to cover labour, additional ingredients and fuel for the ovens before paying him any profits. Small wonder many bakeries mill the flour on site for additional margins. A commercial bakery in one of Tarsenia's cities produces at least 500 loaves per day and typically employ 5-10 people all told.



Meats are rarely consumed by the poor except on feast days, however the military always tries, often unsuccessfully, to ensure its men get a kilo of meat per week - best not to ask what it came from in most cases. Game is hard to come by except in the more out of the way places – only in Further Tarsenia can the locals still assume they can kill game on a regular basis to supplement their needs at minimal cost. The prices here are for flesh with no particular distinction about what part of the animal the flesh comes from.

Tarsenia is a land of wine drinkers rather than beer drinkers. Beer is used almost as an alternative to water, and is usually very weak. In Camtri beers are more highly regarded, but even there Tarsenian tastes are starting to take hold and the well-off make a show of consuming the best wines they can get their hands on.



Livestock

Taskans make use of a wide variety of animals, and like any other society do so at all stages of the lifecycle. Once a food animal reaches its optimum weight, or when a beast of burden passes the point at which its value as a carcass is greater than its value as a working animal, every part that can be is used or consumed. The poorest peasants often dress in hides because animal skins are a cheap by-product - much cheaper than cloth, which requires significant processing and man-hours to produce. Young animals are always less expensive as they have to be cared for and fed, and possibly trained, until they can be put to use. Prices here are for adult animals, ready for exploitation.

Tools

These basic tools are manufactured by blacksmiths and carpenters and do not usually require the work of a specialist. Prices given here are for tools with metal fittings. Significantly cheaper,





The Cost of Money

If a character needs money quickly, he can always try to find someone to lend it to him. Because the Emperor has done away with slavery, and thereby with offering one's own self as security for debt, the amount of credit available and the rate of interest paid is likely to vary greatly according to your true credit worthiness. Credit worthiness is governed by a character's Social Class.

| SOCIAL CLASS | UNSECURED LOAN | MARKET RATE OF INTEREST |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Outcast | 0 | 1000%* |
| Freeman | 2d6x50 Taskeens | 15% |
| Gentry | 2d6x150 Taskeens | 10% |
| Aristocracy | 2d6 x 250 Taskeens | 2% |

A bona fides money lender will extend an unsecured loan to an individual according to their Social Class, and will fix an interest rate according to the same principle. Foreigners and outsiders, even Taskans from a foreign city, will not be given credit unless someone local can stand as guarantor. If offered security on a loan the money lender may extend additional credit up to about half the value of the goods or land put up as collateral.

*No legitimate lender will give credit to someone from an Outcast social class; anyone who does will charge enormous rates of interest and then only if they have means – usually hired magic or muscle - to come after a bad debt.

Loan terms are fixed and a lender expects to receive repayment plus all interest for the contracted period - there is no saving in repaying a loan earlier than agreed. Loan terms are usually set for a month, a season or a year, with only the state treasuries borrowing for longer contracts. If you extend a loan beyond the contracted period, interest rates rise sharply, typically doubling each time.

Funding Ventures and Adventures

Significantly larger sums may be made available to fund a business venture – including an adventure if the objective is to come back with treasures, trade goods or the spoils of war. In this instance the lender sees himself as an investor, and while taking security over whatever assets the characters are leaving at home, will be looking for a return of at least twice their investment and possibly many times that, depending on how risky the whole thing sounds. Securing an investment is an exercise in Influence and Commerce skills.

if less effective, versions can often be made without the benefit of metal parts, and may cost no more than a few pennies.

War Gear

The War Gear table on [page 35](#) contains prices quite different from the usual RUNEQUEST Price list. On the other hand the list of weapons and armour is restricted to those generally available. Weapons and armour types not on this list can be imported from where they are made and used.

These prices are for basic, practical examples without embellishment. Prices are for iron weapons; bronze weapons may cost a little more due to the higher cost of metal. Prices for items such as swords include furniture, scabbard and hanging strap.

Land and Property

Owning land brings respectability and an annual income so long as you work it, rent it out or pay someone else to.

The prices in the table on [page 36](#) are for good arable land. For marginal land suitable for olive trees and grazing goats multiply price by 0.4, for forestry or uncleared land multiply by 0.25. For unproductive land multiply by 0.01.

Proximity to a temple or sacred site that provides reliable divine blessings to agriculture will increase land prices.

A Hectare of good arable land requires 40 Taskeens' worth of seed corn and will deliver a yield of six times the seed sown, generating crops worth 240 Taskeens.





Rents on land average 15-20% of its produce. If you wish to live comfortably solely off land rentals, you need more than 20 Hectares under cultivation to do so.

Transport and Shipping

Transporting goods by land is vastly more expensive than doing so by sea. The following costs give an idea of how much a character will have to pay to ship a big load from one place to another - or alternatively, the sort of money he can charge for doing so himself. These costs include all hands required to do the job, as well as the use of the ship, wagon or beast of burden. Guidelines are also provided here for acquiring watercraft and wheeled vehicles.

Luxuries and Trade Goods

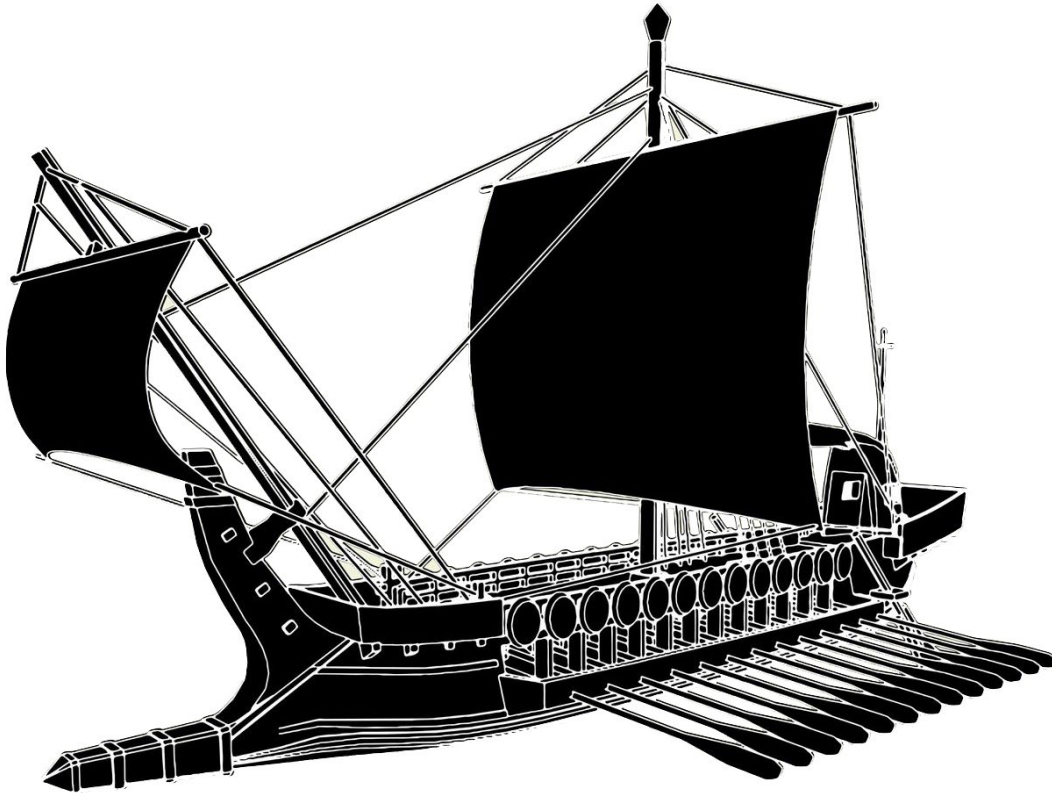
The following table provides a sample of luxury goods available on the market, and demonstrates how far the Empire's trading connections can stretch. Any of these prices can massively

inflated or depressed according to supply. Were even one Sharranketan merchant galley to be lost at sea on the route from Balbufera, you can expect pepper prices to go through the roof until alternative supply or transportation is set in place.

Magical Services and Enhancements

The market in spell casting is generally split between priests who see it is their duty (and business) to offer their services to the community, and sorcerers who pretend at least not to be interested in the market and sell their services to well-heeled private clients.

Some libraries have magical texts that can be accessed, but will charge an admission price and vet the enquirer for suitability. There is a market in magical literature (including grimoires), the main ones being in a street close to the Great Library of Zarina and by the College of Sorcery in Felsang.





PRICE LISTS

| STAPLES | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|----------------------|-------|--------------|-------------|
| Loaf of barley bread | | Common | 0.2 |
| Wheat | | Uncommon | 0.4 per kg |
| Barley | | Common | 0.3 per kg |
| Rye | | Common | 0.2 per kg |
| Barley flour | | Common | 0.45 per kg |
| Wheat flour | | Uncommon | 0.6 per kg |
| Salt | | Uncommon | 0.3 per kg |
| Olive Oil | | Common | 2 per litre |

| MEAT AND FISH | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|--|---|--------------|------------|
| Pork | | Common | 1 per kg |
| Mutton | | Common | 1 per kg |
| Goat | | Common | 0.8 per kg |
| Beef | | Uncommon | 1.2 per kg |
| Game bird | Duck, partridge, pheasant | Common | 3 per bird |
| Poultry | Domesticated fowl such as a duck or chicken | Common | 2 per bird |
| Venison | | Uncommon | 1 per kg |
| Crustaceans and Premium Saltwater Fish | | Rare | 1.6 per kg |
| Other Saltwater Fish | | Rare | 1 per kg |
| Freshwater Fish | | Uncommon | 0.6 per kg |
| Preserved (salted) Fish | | Uncommon | 0.4 per kg |

| DRINK | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|---------------|---|--------------|-------------------|
| Wines, Fine | Probably from the hill country around Merat in a distinctively shaped jar and consumed by the well to do without the addition of spices or sweeteners. | Rare | 2 per litre |
| Wine, Good | Produced across Tarsenia, with the territories of Felsang and Tarsang being the largest producers | Uncommon | 1 per litre |
| Wine, Basic | Probably produced from a small vineyard and consumed locally, or mixed with wine from a variety of small producers and probably slightly diluted before it is sold to the market. | Common | 0.4-0.8 per litre |
| Beer, Premium | A common drink even for the young, the poorer sort may be available at a penny for a large 2L pitcher, or free with food. | Common | 0.4 per litre |





THE TASKAN EMPIRE

| LIVESTOCK | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|--------------------------|---|--------------|-----------|
| "Eska" Riding Horse | Typical of the horses bought in bulk by the Taskans for training up as cavalry horses. Reared by Sheng tribes for the market, but only used by their nobility. | Common | 400 |
| Assabian Racing Horse | The finest horses are bred on the southern fringes of the Korazoon. The richest races are held each year at Ronispur in Sharranket where enormous sums change hands. | Rare | 1500-3000 |
| Bull | Usually kept to be rented out to other famers. A Camtric Bull is the gold standard, but rarely seen except on the estates of the wealthy. | Common | 120 |
| Camel | A regular riding camel or beast of burden from the Korazoon. In Rasputana highly prized camels trained for war or for racing can fetch many times this amount | Common | 130 |
| Donkey | The most accessible beast of burden for a farmer, particularly in the South of Tarsenia | Common | 80 |
| Draft Ox | Oxen are a vital resource for pulling both wagon and plough. | Common | 140 |
| Kitan pony or pack horse | Tough little horses, although used by the Sheng as mounts others often buy them for burden | Common | 200 |
| Milk Cow | Tarsenians are not great dairy farmers, but many rural families will keep a cow if they can. The people of Camtri are famous for their love of cattle herds however | Common | 100 |
| Mule | Favoured by the army for beasts of burden, bred mostly around Ashkor | Common | 240 |
| Pig | A young pig may be 60kg when slaughtered, but fully grown they can reach more than twice that weight. A pig provides the best body weight to calorie ratio of any meat animal | Common | 50-120 |
| Sheep | Massive flocks are kept in Eastern Tarsenia, mostly for wool, however mutton is also regularly eaten | Common | 20-40 |

| TOOLS | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|-----------------------|--|--------------|-------|
| Adze or Hoe | | Common | 2 |
| Axe, Hatchet | | Common | 4 |
| Axe, Tree Felling | | Common | 6 |
| Pick | | Common | 6 |
| Ploughshare and Board | | Common | 15 |
| Scythe | | Common | 3 |
| Shovel | | Common | 3 |
| Work Maul | | Common | 2 |
| Yoke for Oxen | Complete with tracers and harness. Can also be hired at a rate of 8 Taskeens per month | Common | 20 |





| WARGEAR | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|--|---|--------------|----------------------------------|
| "Kitanian" (composite) bow | | Rare | 80 |
| Arrows | | Common | 0.2 each |
| Ashkorian pike | | Uncommon | 24 |
| Case and quiver for comp.bow | | Rare | 10 |
| Club | | Common | 1 |
| Dagger | | Uncommon | 20 |
| Hunting (flat) bow | | Common | 4 |
| Javelin or hunting spear | | Common | 8 |
| Lamellar Armour, bronze or iron, 4AP 3 ENC per Location | | Rare | 30-50 per Location |
| Lamellar Armour, Leather or horn 3 AP, 4 ENC per location) | | Rare | 10 per Location |
| Mace or Battleaxe | | Uncommon | 12 |
| Metal helmet, fancy (5 AP) | | Rare | 60 |
| Metal Helmet, premium, full face (6 AP) | | Rare | 100 |
| Metal or composite helmet, simple (3-4 AP) | | Uncommon | 30 |
| Militia shield | | Common | 20 |
| Padded cloth (1 ENC) or Leather (2 ENC) Armour, 2 AP | | Uncommon | 4 per location, double for Cloth |
| Pikeman's Shield | | Rare | 25 |
| Shortsword or Falchion | | Uncommon | 60 |
| Simple quiver | | Common | 2 |
| Tarsenian Dirk | | Uncommon | 50 |
| Taskan half armour | As above, leaving arms and legs exposed | Rare | 60-100 per location |
| Taskan Layered Armour | 25-60/location, being composite metal, leather and horn (5 AP 6 ENC) or metal lamellar (5 AP 5 ENC) backed with padding and with overlapping joints. Immune to the Bypass Armour Effect | Rare | 500-700 |
| Taskan militia spear | | Common | 6 |
| War or specialist Arrows, each | | Uncommon | 0.4 each |
| War shield | | Uncommon | 30 |
| Warsword | | Uncommon | 100 |





THE TASKAN EMPIRE

| LAND AND PROPERTY | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|-----------------------|--|--------------|---------------------------|
| Camtri | Very rich land and blessed by the ancient Thennalt deities of the earth, the little land that comes on the market is generally freed up by confiscation from rebels or those who die without inheritors. Thennalts, even Taskanised Thennalts, do not like to part with their land. | Uncommon | 1600-2400 per Hectare |
| Eastern Tarsenia | While land immediately around the capital is prized, that close to the huge and hungry city of Zarina is the highest priced | Common | 1250-3500 per Hectare |
| Fine House | A house that includes separated rooms for entertaining, cooking and sleeping, servants; area and possibly even plumbing | Uncommon | 30,000-80,000 |
| Further Tarsenia | Always cheap to encourage settlement from other cities in the Empire, this is the price for land in the vicinity of Ralmyra. In the back woods of the region it is possible to actually get a grant to take on virgin territory - sometimes in cash, sometimes in the form of a pair of plough oxen. | Common | 600-1200 per Hectare |
| Grand House or Palace | Capable of impressing any visitor, and home to a whole establishment of servants as well as the owner and his family. Expected to have well-tended gardens, and if out of town those gardens may include 'managed wilderness' in which the owners can pursue their leisure. | Rare | 150,000-500,000 |
| House | An urban house suitable for a family. Probably 2-4 rooms at most, flat or tile-roofed. It may have a very small yard or kitchen garden, and if in the country space for domestic animals | Common | 6,000-12,000 |
| Mature Vineyard | Planting a vineyard costs 5,000T per Hectare, and takes a year to prepare and plant and up to 3 more to be ready for cropping. A mature vineyard is therefore at a premium. Each Hectare should generate 1500-3000 litres of wine per year | Common | 12,000-15,000 per Hectare |
| West Tarsenia | West Tarsenian land is easier to come by, but not so well suited to arable. Highest prices are near the ready markets of Felsang and Ashkor | Common | 1200-1600 per Hectare |





| TRANSPORT AND SHIPPING | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|--|---|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Construction of merchant ship | To build and outfit a merchant ship, not including magical enhancements. Average vessels carry some 75-100 tons, with the biggest examples being 250-500 tons | | 400 per ton of capacity |
| Construction of oared warship | To build and outfit an oared galley, not including magical enhancements. Taskan galleys rarely come in at more than 60 oars; however Korantine examples from before the Cataclysm are said to have sometimes had multiple banks with up to 300 men at the benches. | | 400 per rower's station |
| Cost of moving goods by open sea | Typically by merchantman between major ports, each vessel carrying 75-100 tons | | 6 per ton per 100 miles |
| Cost of moving goods by river or by daylight-only short coastal routes | Typically by small boat, barge or lighter; often an oared vessel. Capacity of 5-20 tons is typical | | 30 per ton per 100 miles |
| Cost of moving goods overland | Typically by ox cart, each cart moving circa half a ton per ox, and some carts are so massive as to have 16 animals to draw them. Cost and including pay for driver and boy, fodder etc. A ton of goods might need a string of 8 or more pack animals to carry it, depending on whether you are using donkeys, horses, mules or camels and how heavily you are prepared to load them. | | 160 per ton per 100 miles |
| Fishing Boat | Small boat suitable for river, lake and coastal fishing, with a crew of up to 3 men | | 350 |
| Litter | Used by people of rank in city streets where mounts and carriages are not permitted or not practical | | 40 |
| Ox Wagon or Cart | A big vehicle with four solid wheels capable of hauling a ton or more of bulk goods, drawn by teams of oxen; assume a ton of capacity per 2-ox team. | | 50 per half ton of bulk capacity |





THE TASKAN EMPIRE

| LUXURY ITEMS | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|--------------------------|---|---------------|--|
| Assabian crossbow | An exotic weapon, usually richly decorated with engraved metal or ivory fittings. | Rare | 120-180 |
| Assabian Robes | Lightweight cotton, wool, or linen, full sleeved long robes sporting various degrees of colouring and embellishment. A simple version available for a few SP, this price for a prestige version | Very Rare | 75-150 per outfit |
| Assabian Spell-Slave | This is the price of purchasing the slave, but as slavery is illegal in the Taskan Empire the transaction involves freeing the slave in return for a contract of indenture, typically for at least 5 years, sometimes as long as 12. | Special Order | 5,000 or 1,000 per 10% of Spellcraft (Sorcery Manipulation) skill. |
| Beshorite Goatskin | Fine "kidskin" for the use in luxury shoes, hats and gloves. | Uncommon | 3 per prepared skin |
| Beshorite Honey | Simply the finest, from bees who enjoy the wild flower gardens of the Beshor Valley delta | Uncommon | 4 per litre |
| Blessed Barley | Corn crop blessed by the grain goddess. Nutritious and keeps well | Common | 1 per kg |
| Brotomagian Hunting Dog | Tough but sleek and graceful, these are prized animals for any man of status. | Uncommon | 400 each |
| Camtric Wool | Regarded as the finest available, therefor priced at twice the going rate for raw wool | Uncommon | 6 per kg |
| Dragoman Riding Cloak | A fine felt riding cloak with sleeves (usually worn hanging loose) and hood, richly decorated with Kitanian embroidery | Rare | 120 |
| Exotic Hides and Pelts | For use in high status clothing, usually as trim, but occasionally to construct a whole garment. Price for a small (Raccoon or Beaver) size pelt | Rare | 5-50 per pelt |
| Fengo, Fresh | As dragged out of lake Barur and kept packed in lake water until used (Fengo soaked in river water from the Briga comes in a little cheaper). 1kg of fresh packed Fengo delivers 150g of raw Fengo once dried but loses significant value in the process. | Special Order | 400 per kg |
| Fengo, Raw | After it is harvested from Lake Barur, most Fengo is dried and hacked into a fibrous litter. There is a readier market for this type because of its narcotic uses. A typical dose for smoking or chewing is 12g and retails at 1 Taskeen. | Special Order | 65 per kg |
| Fengo, Refined, Narcotic | An expensive refining process involving soaking and mashing in water and stages of drying and grinding, leaving a dun coloured powder. 1kg of raw fengo delivers 100g of refined fengo. One dose = 5g and costs 4 Taskeens. | Rare | 800 per kg |
| Jekkarene Sweetwine | Perhaps an acquired taste, this honey-sweetened and heavy wine is a growing export for the Jekkarenes | Uncommon | 6 per litre |
| Korantine Shirt | Fine woollen tunics, with various levels and quality of colour dyes, often decorated with embroidered borders or patches | Rare | 40-80 per item |
| Korantine Wines | A broad variety of imported wines, from vineyards situated on the ideal sunblessed slopes of Korantia. Morado (from Agissene) and Solarnian (from Himela) are the most celebrated | Common-Rare | 4-8 per litre |
| Marangian War Dog | A breed that looks like an oversized Rottweiler, famously vicious and used as guard dogs as well as for war | Rare | 200 each |
| Moon Barley | A special form of barley smuggled out of the Jekkarid and sought after by alchemists | Special Order | 30 per kg |
| Rasputan Pepper | From the port of Babulfera in the deep south of the continent, a favourite spice | Rare | 300 per kg |
| Silk of Jelhai | Unimaginably expensive stuff, used by only the richest folk. In Assabia it is commonly illegal for anyone other than the Sultan and members of his household to wear silk. | Very Rare | 1500 per metre |
| Sorandine Brightcrystal | A lump of this amber crystal will provide the effects of a Light spell if Magic Points are fed to it, at a Magnitude of 1 per 0.25kg | Very Rare | 0.25kg = 100 0.5kg = 300 0.75 = 600 1kg = 1,000 |
| Tansoceanic Ivory | Most likely from the Sharranketan trading colony at Janisaron in Jandekot, most of which is destined for the small ivory carving industry now established in Homora. This is the cost for the raw material. | Very Rare | 350 per kg |
| Turtleshell from Zarland | In raw form ready for use in production of combs, knife handles, plaques and boxes | Very Rare | 160 per kg |
| Zagreiot Cloak | A fine linen cloak, distinctively decorated with patches of colour | Uncommon | 64 |





| MAGICAL SERVICES AND ENCHANTMENTS | NOTES | AVAILABILITY | PRICE |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|---|
| Characteristic Point Donations | A shady business exists in which the poor and desperate submit to characteristic tapping to assist in the creation of an enchanted item. This is regarded as a form of oppression of the poor, and outlawed. The effect has been to drive the price up, which makes it even more attractive a proposition. | Special Order | Donated Characteristic Points, squared, x100, or x200 if INT or CHA |
| Exorcism of a Person | Tarsenians often trust in the power of immigrant holy men from the Beshor Valley, who are acknowledged masters of spirit magic. The price for services is high, the premium driven by the cachet enjoyed by these exorcists among the moneyed classes. Some exorcists use these fees to subsidise charitable work. | Rare | 50 per Intensity of the spirit. |
| Exorcism of a Place | In most cases Tarsenians turn to specialist priests of their own tradition to have a ghost banished from a haunted site, although if that fails they may turn to a Beshorite for this too | Uncommon | 5 for the priest and his retinue, plus the cost of any Miracles used |
| Grimoire (also Alchemical Manuals) | The price of an existing, off-the-shelf Grimoire is highly dependent on the rarity of its contents and its length; a Grimoire may contain a single rare spell among many commonplace ones that drives its value. This price as a rule of thumb for Grimoires written in Tarsenian (Taskan) | Rare-Very Rare | 10-20 per Folk Magic spell or 50-100 per sorcery spell contained; add 1000-5000 if a very rare or powerful spell is included. |
| Miracles | Conducted by a devotee of the god whose help is needed. | Varies | 25-75 per Miracle according to spell rank |
| Sorcery Spell Casting (Augment) | To have a sorcery spell cast that benefits the buyer | Rare | 2 per Magic Point cost of spell |
| Sorcery Spell Casting (Curse) | To have a sorcery spell cast on an enemy as a curse - NB this constitutes a criminal assault under the law | Special Order | 10 per Magic Point cost of spell |
| Spell Maintenance | Each day of duration maintained beyond the first | Very Rare | 2 per Magic Point cost of spell |
| Summoning | To summon up an otherworld entity, not including the cost of protective magic or control spells | Very Rare | 20 per Magic Point required to effect the summons |
| Worship Ceremony | Conducted by a priest hired for the day to officiate for a congregation | Common | 1 plus 0.2 per congregation member |





BEYOND THE EMPIRE

The overland travel routes of Tarsenia are really designed for local use, connecting each city to its outlying towns and villages. Imperial engineers have selected which of these roads are capable of bearing heavy traffic and plotted routes between the major cities that are signposted as highways and provided with milestones.

Purpose-built trunk roads connect Pryjarna to Zarina (from where it branches off to the capital), then on to Felsang (from which it branches to Sorandib) then north to Ashkor. These are the only routes that are properly engineered with surfacing and drainage and provided with waystations approximately one day by ox cart (circa 30km) distant from one another.

From Ashkor there is a military route more or less following the Black River to Torestal but it is unmetalled for most of its length and simply marks out a broad path that avoids problem terrain or has been driven through it by the military engineers.

WEATHER

The climate of Tarsenia is generally favourable to overland travel. Temperatures rarely drop below freezing even in winter except in the hill country; extended heavy rainfall that turns the ground to thick mud or washes away road surfaces is fairly unusual. However the summers can be uncomfortably hot, with temperatures averaging over 25 degrees and sometimes peaking over 40. For those exposed on an open road this can be uncomfortable and even dangerous, so it is common to set out while still dark and make camp before the hottest part of the day in the mid afternoon.

INNS AND WAYSTATIONS

A waystation typically provides no more than a collection of stone corrals for animals, a guaranteed source of fresh water and some simple structures that provide enough shelter for travellers to protect themselves from sun, wind and rain. Most are unmanned except under special circumstances but it will be the responsibility of nearby communities to make sure that they are kept serviceable through the year. However on the plus side they are also planted with trees suitable for shade and sometimes the shade trees are interspersed with some fruit-bearing types and even some with healing properties. At busy points or times of year when more traffic is on the road, a waystation may also be populated by peddlers, food and drink stalls, entertainers, beggars and thieves, all of whom pitch their tents and ply their trade until such time as someone in authority decides they should be moved on.

Inns are more widely dispersed, generally situated just outside of towns that are more or less a day apart by horse (45–50 km) for a traveller unencumbered by baggage. Inns will usually have a high-walled courtyard, proper stabling, a mix of dormitory and private rooms and will be compelled to maintain suitable changes of horse for official couriers. The basic prices at these inns are fixed by the government; however anything extra, including private room facilities, is up to the landlord to set his own price for. These inns are not taverns. There is no bar room, just the communal courtyard, some of which may have an awning to keep off the elements and travellers are welcome to prepare their own food here in the courtyard if they do not want to pay the innkeeper's rates for food. There are often





massive establishments on the approaches to major cities or by an important trade route connection – for example where an interchange between road and river takes place. These ‘super-inns’ are known as Caravanserais and are capable of catering for big parties of several hundred people and animals. Some are fortified.

Basic tariffs per head per night are:

| ROOM TYPE/SERVICE | PRICE (TASKEENS) |
|--|------------------|
| Bath | 2 |
| Dormitory Room and half board | 2 |
| Dormitory Room or camping space | 1 |
| Other large livestock barn plus fodder | 1 |
| Stabling per horse plus fodder | 2 |

ENCOUNTERS ON THE ROAD

The main reasons people who are not in the adventuring business travel around the Empire are military, commercial and religious. The following section provides some ideas about the kinds of people you will meet on the road; these are specifically transients, who stand apart from the locals that you might encounter as you pass through their territory.

Military

Encounters with military personnel on the road are usually with a group en route to or from a posting and rarely with a unit on active service or patrol. Soldiers are most obviously identified by the fact they bear arms (except the new recruits) but they will not be wearing armour unless expecting a fight and most of them do not wear recognisable uniforms. To that extent they may be hard to distinguish from bandits (and their behaviour may add to that impression). An Insight roll or a Culture roll may spot that the way they wear their weapons, or particular items or type of clothing or kit, suggest they are bona fide soldiers. They might still rob you, of course.

Typical Military Travellers

Recruits

A party of 2d10 recruits being forwarded to Ashkor for training, 50% chance they are accompanied by a serving soldier or sergeant – apart from whom these men will be in civilian dress.

Patrol

1d6+6 Militiamen on foot patrol. They are equipped with light armour and weapons. Patrols are largely uninterested in law-abiding citizens unless they have a mind to extort money but will assume that a band of weapons-toting characters are likely to be robbers unless convinced otherwise.

Officer

A senior officer and entourage of 1d6 men, all mounted. If there are thought to be bandits around, a senior officer party like this will be out hunting them with a militia unit as outlined previously.

Couriers

1d3 mounted couriers on a mission.

Army Unit

A military unit of 1d4x100 men en route to its next posting, with one large ox cart per 100 men. Most likely a militia unit unless close to Ashkor but 10% of such encounters are with a regular or elite unit.

Baggage Train

A military supply train en route to a base or camp, comprising 2d4 wagons, 1d6x10 pack animals, with three men and one guard per wagon and per 10 pack animals.

Veterans

A party of 1d6 demobilised veterans on their way home. They are probably in good spirits, have plenty of ready cash and are a tough prospect to take down to relieve them of it.

Commercial

Commercial travellers might be plying a trade with a cartload of merchandise, travelling to or from a market, negotiators or businessmen on the way to or from a meeting, or driving a big shipment of goods in caravan. Much of the big scale traffic goes by sea or river, however huge caravans with more than 40 vehicles and 200–300 staff and co-travellers may be encountered, if rarely. Commercial travellers often accumulate hangers-on who want to travel with safety in numbers. Most times they are encountered they will actually be halted or in camp – a typical day’s progress for an ox cart is not much more than five hours.





Typical Commercial Travellers

Peddler

A peddler on a local circuit, possibly with his family, or local craftsmen or farmer heading to market with his produce. 1d3 adults, 1d2 small wagons (one for goods one for personal effects).

Caravan

A large caravan shipping a commodity from one region to another. 1d4x5 massive ox-wagons each pulled by 1d10+10 oxen; three handlers and one armed guard per wagon, plus 1d4 merchants and a guard captain. Accompanied by 3d6 travellers.

Merchant

A private merchant with his small caravan of mixed goods. 2d4 goods wagons, a merchant and his assistants plus staff and hangers on as previous.

Agent

An agent or courier travelling with documents for signature, contracts or hard cash. If the latter, assume 1 professional armed guard per 1,000 Taskeens. An agent may travel by horse-drawn carriage. Couriers will be mounted.

Entertainers

A group of entertainers or travelling brothel moving to their next town. 1d3 ox-wagons or horse-drawn carriages, with 1d6+6 members of the troupe and their promoter.

Landowner

A wealthy citizen on a tour of his estates and properties. Accompanied by a secretary and 2d6 servants. The rich man (or woman) is probably mounted or in a horse drawn carriage, with servants on foot. Servants also act as bodyguards, typically armed with clubs and/or daggers.

Pilgrims

Religious traffic is made up of people travelling to attend festivals, or on pilgrimage to sacred sites. Pilgrims are quite capable of posing a threat and otherwise behaving in ways they would not do at home. They are often not the best equipped or experienced travellers and, like anyone else, can find themselves in need of money or food so turn to robbery of fellow travellers or

of homes and villages in their path. They are also quite easily wound up if their particular cult or religious society is belittled or insulted. The sight of rival cultists devoted to the same deity coming to blows over whose cult is better favoured by the God, or sports more prestigious membership, is not uncommon. There are dozens of religious festivals worth travelling to throughout the year but the most famous ones are:

- The Festival of Tethis at Zarina, which incorporates bloody duels between devotees of Machank and Basat vying for the goddess' favour (11th day of Kamay).
- The Festival of Thesh at Taskay, which is the biggest religious festival held at the capital (9th Damais).
- The Festival of Basat at Pryjarna, in which prospective devotees can be seen going through a gruelling four day test (15th–20th Damais).
- The Festival of Music at Merat, famous across the Empire as a nine day celebration of the performing arts. (11th–20th Brenai).
- The Festival of Tarsen at Tarsang, an occasion surrounded by a major annual market and trade fairs (9th Jaroth).

Typical Pilgrims

Novice Pilgrims

A small party of 1d6+6 pilgrims heading for a sacred site on foot. They are respectable types and serious about their religion. At least one of their number is intent on making their first devotional pact. They may be embarrassingly deferential to anyone they meet who has serious religious credentials.

Family Pilgrimage

A rich family on their way to a festival in a horse and carriage and probably with an additional cart for baggage. A husband and wife plus their 1d3 children, 2d6 servants and an armed guard. They are more or less on holiday.

Supplicants

A small party of 2d4 pilgrims escorting a friend or relative who is sick, grievously injured or under a magical curse – en route to pledge devotion to a deity who they think can help.

Community Pilgrimage

A whole community of 1d4 x 100 people on pilgrimage; men, women and children. They all come from the same village,





town or city district or are perhaps a whole cult on the move and are making an important statement both of solidarity and of reliance on the future good will of the deity.

Militaristic Pilgrims

A band of 1d6+6 young yahoos looking for a fight, preferably with followers of the same god from a rival cult – in order to prove their superiority. Armed with clubs, fists and daggers, perhaps one real weapon among them, they are not intent on murder but violence can easily boil over with tragic consequences. Quite likely they are local boys looking to beat up co-religionists from out of the area.

Mendicant

A solitary pilgrim, a devout wanderer who spends his entire life going from festival-to-festival and from one Sacred Site to another. Potentially young and troubled or old and worldly-wise, this character likely has some very high Devotion scores and a fistful of miracles and blessings.

Hazards

The most common threat of violence and robbery when on the road is not from organised bands of heavily armed bandits issuing from a hidden stronghold in the mountains. Such folk do indeed exist but mostly on the fringes of the Empire, particularly those provinces that are not fully subdued and border onto hostile territory. As has been suggested in the descriptions of likely encounters when travelling by road, otherwise law-abiding citizens and soldiery are liable to use a dark night, lonely road and strength in numbers to take advantage of their fellow citizens - particularly if they are hungry and have no money.

Of course a well-armed gang of characters has little to fear from such people but that can be its own problem. Even good-hearted honest folk are wary of strangers. Adventurers are not a common sight and can look very much like what everyone expects an evil brigand to look like. Armed to the teeth, decked out in armour and other hardware in a peaceful civilian area...it is enough for doors and windows to be bolted, shops closed and shuttered and to send many a villager scurrying off to get the militia. Characters may very easily find themselves ambushed at their camp by the local constabulary.

As for professional robbers and bandits anyone travelling West of the Shol River is in danger, particularly if leaving the road between Felsang and Sorandib, which is patrolled.

Beyond Sorandib you can expect to have to fight or bribe your way through various robber bands on the little used road to Ramassa, since in this region only those who are capable of violent action have any chance of scraping a living. In the badlands around Haran there are plenty of escaped peasants at large who have taken up arms rather than serve a Taskan master; and in the Northern Provinces there is always the danger of 'barbarian' raiders issuing from the hill country or out of the Kitan Plateau. In the south Soribisi desert raiders continue to be a problem, however the Empire has adopted a strategy of 'forward' garrisons, which keep the conflict to the oasis towns and caravan routes across the desert rather than letting the raiders spill into Tarsenia itself.

Travel itself can be difficult – weather can make roads impassable with flooding or landslides, wash away bridges, dry up watering holes and blast the traveller and his horse with dust storms. A minor landslide on a narrow road can cause a bottleneck. News of sickness in a town on the road ahead can cause everyone to stay where they are until it is declared safe, or else find a long detour. Inns can be overloaded, wagon wheels and cart axles busted. There are plenty of opportunities for the GM to spend some real narrative time on the road and use it as a context in which to trigger major plot devices and encounters.

THE RIVER ROUTES

While the sea and roadways are crucial to trade and travel around the Empire, external trade relies on two other important routes. The great river valleys of the Briga and its tributary, the Shol, in the West and the Beshor Valley in the East carry significant quantities of goods and provide the most efficient trade connections between the Empire and the Southern lands of Morkesh, Djesmirket and Sharranket – accounting for over half of external trade. Finally the overland routes to the South from Pryjarna consists of a network of trails across the Korazoon desert that have been traced out over centuries and in which little oasis towns form crucial connections. However these routes are difficult to police and increasingly open to attack from local tribes such as the Soribisi, who sometimes seek to profit from trade across their territories and other times to kill it off by attacking foreign merchants and travellers. The Korazoon remains famous for the massive camel caravans that travel east to west and back again between Yegusai and Morkar (between one and two months in each direction) as well as north to south but these are dwindling in frequency.





TRAVELLING BY SEA

Most Taskan sailors have only sailed the Gulf of Taskay. They consequently know this small stretch of sea very well (Locale checks at one grade easier than normal), but if attempting to sail on the open waters of the Inner Ocean a Taskan captain would find all Seamanship tests one grade harder until he has spent a month getting used to the more challenging conditions – and at the additional cost of two Experience Rolls.

The Gulf of Taskay is ideal water for galleys (oared ships). Apart from some super-expensive private cruisers, the fastest galleys are almost all in the hands of the Taskan navy.

Merchant galleys, with a smaller rowing crew manning perhaps 10 oars to the side and cargo capacity for anything between 200 and 400 tons, are commonly used for shipping goods up and down the Beshor River Valley but are also used at sea. They are not capable of the sprint speeds that a war galley or sleek yacht can deliver but have the same advantages when making a voyage in calm weather.

The highest class vessels may have bound sylphs to fill the sails or undines to drive the hull through the water.

Passage on a ship between ports around the Gulf is not necessarily very expensive and is the most common way to move between them. Passengers who do not require a cabin will pay around five Taskeens per person per day, and another fifteen per large animal (such as a mount or ox).

Charters can be had from 30 Taskeens per day for a small vessel with a three man crew and can easily go up to 500 Taskeens per day for a larger vessel with an expert captain and a complement of 25 crew.

In some cases a city is some several kilometers inland from its shore – this is true of both Zarina and Ralmyra. At Ralmyra it is necessary to make port at the coastal town of Baleda and transfer to small river transports which can use the Myrsa River to come within a few hundred meters of the walls, or else travel overland, which is preferred by those without cargo; the Siskil River is navigable by larger ships from its mouth all the way to Zarina and another 20km beyond.

For more information on seafaring see either SHORES OF KORANTIA or the RUNEQUEST supplement Ships & Shield Walls.

Sample Sailing Distances and Frequency

This table provides some idea of the distance between some key Taskan cities and how frequently a character might find a ship that is going that way on which they can get passage. This assumes a fair wind and good sailing conditions.

| ROUTE | KM | FREQUENCY |
|-------------------|-----|-----------|
| Ashkor to Merat | 140 | 2/Month |
| Tarsang to Ashkor | 195 | 1/2 Days |
| Taskay to Ashkor | 85 | 2/Day |
| Taskay to Ralmyra | 130 | 1/5 Days |
| Taskay to Tarsang | 145 | 1/Day |
| Zarina to Ashkor | 115 | 1/3 Days |

KM is the approximate crow-flies distance between the two ports. The optimum speed of a Taskan sailing vessel is approximately 8-9km per hour, hence under near ideal conditions, a sailing ship should be able to manage 100km in a 12-hour period; with a fair wind it is normally possible to cross the gulf in a single day if travelling in a straight line. In more difficult conditions a journey can take twice as long. The actual route taken must account for the currents and avoidance of fixed hazards such as rocks and sandbars. Taskan sailors prefer to make port each night, failing that to beach or anchor somewhere sheltered rather than travel through the night, so even in good sailing conditions the journey from Tarsang to Ashkor routinely takes two days to complete.

Frequency is a guide to how often there is a ship sailing the route and therefore how long an Character is likely to have to wait to find a ship. This does not mean that he will be able to get a place on it, nor that the ship will sail as scheduled.

Sailing Conditions

Prevailing sailing conditions are checked on the Sailing Conditions Table with a 1d20 roll against the column for the relevant season. Conditions on the Gulf are by and large more benign than on the Inner Ocean, and even in winter there is plenty of opportunity for seaborne traffic.

Hazards

The Gulf of Taskay is generally a gentle sea – but this does not preclude the odd freak storm or unexpected fog that obscures landmarks from view or heavy clouds that deny a sailor sight





Sailing Conditions

| SPRING | SUMMER | AUTUMN | WINTER | CONDITIONS | MODIFIER TO MOVEMENT | SEAWORTHINESS ROLL |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 01 | 01-02 | 01 | - | Dead Calm | No movement unless under oar | Easy |
| 02-04 | 03-05 | 02-03 | 01-02 | Poor Wind | Reduce movement by half if under sail | Standard |
| 05-07 | 06-08 | 04-05 | 03-06 | Contrary Winds | Reduce all movement by half | Standard |
| 08-13 | 09-14 | 06-11 | 07-09 | Good | Normal movement | Easy |
| 14-16 | 15-16 | 12-14 | 10-12 | Following Wind | Gain additional 25% Movement if using sail | Standard |
| 17 | 17-19 | 15-18 | 13-17 | Heavy Seas, Violent Winds | Danger of going off course by up to half normal movement per day in a random direction | Hard |
| 18-20 | 20 | 19-20 | 18-20 | No Sailing | Nobody puts to sea on a day like this; those who are at sea are in serious danger of being lost | Formidable |

of the stars for navigation at night. There are patches of dangerously rocky coastline and sandbars on which a ship can run aground. Potentially dangerous sea monsters were exterminated long ago, however, once in a generation something big and nasty enters the gulf from the Outer Ocean. The gulf is also safe from pirates – there is no hostile shipping to fear and with the Gulf being effectively a Taskan lake it is unlikely to materialise. On the other hand, there is always a chance that the ship on which your characters take passage is crewed by unscrupulous criminals, who think nothing of robbing their passengers and throwing them overboard – if they think they can get away with it.

TRAVELLING ABROAD

Sooner or later a group of adventurers from Taskan lands will find themselves straying into foreign territory. As soon as they do they will encounter unfamiliar customs and some potentially hostile attitudes.

Before You Set Out...

To head beyond the borders of your homeland is a major undertaking. Any traveller is warned to seek advice on the best route and to find out a little about what they might encounter on arrival. Leaning on your community connections can be very helpful and for some travellers this might result in a letter of introduction to someone at their destination who should give

them a friendly reception, or at least some recommendations of places to stay and things to do. Travelling in numbers is always safest course and some sort of local guide (someone with a 50% or greater in the appropriate Culture and Locale skills) or even an interpreter is often an absolute necessity. A traveller should always be armed to protect himself from robbers and wild beasts but be careful not to alarm those whom he meets along the way. The recommended routes may well be dull and sometimes not the shortest, but they are by far the safest and there is a reason people use them!

Talking to the Locals

In the Taskan Empire, people speak Taskan – which is the dialect of Tarsenian spoken in Taskay and taught in the provinces as the lingua franca of the Empire. This dialect is also the one applied to all official records, laws, edicts and communiqués issued by Imperial authorities. Even within the Empire characters may encounter whole communities where Taskan is not the mother tongue – for example in the northern territories most people have either Thennalt or Shengen as their first language. So on arrival in a new land, the first thing characters may have to deal with is the language barrier. A character can and should try and get some tuition in a language that will be helpful on their travels before their departure. This can be done in accordance with the normal rules for acquiring a Professional Skill as provided in the RENEQUEST. Receiving teaching or mentoring in a language is also an excellent way to make use of time





in transit, so long as you can secure a native speaker to act as teacher or mentor as you go.

The Languages and Cultures Table shows what languages are commonly spoken in the territories bordering the Empire, as well as in its provinces and client states. The Primary Language is the mother tongue of the majority of indigenous people. Where it is followed by (d) indicates that the region has its own variant (dialect) of the language and possibly more than one.

Dialects typically differ from one another enough by one grade of difficulty to language Skill Tests. Two grades is a more extreme variation, to be found between Thennalt dialects, which are extraordinarily widespread and have no universally recognised pure form. A three grade penalty due to dialect difference is effectively a different language and is the gap that separates the related Jekkarene and Korantine tongues. These differences may also be present in the written form of the language (which is true of Djesmiri) or else the written form may be 'Classical' and standardised, which is the case with Korantine. Where a classical form exists the upper classes probably also share a common standard form of the language and look down on those who do not.

Secondary Languages are the native tongue of large minority populations of the region, or those which many of the locals will speak as a second language.

The Lore of the Land

The Locale column on the Languages and Cultures Table shows which Locale skill is relevant. Where the region is particularly diverse there may be more than one. In these cases the Game Master and player should decide which one a character is most familiar with and apply one or more grades of difficulty to the others.

Getting to Grips with Local Culture

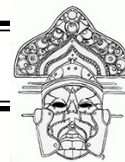
Finally, the Culture column provides the specific culture that a native would acquire as a Custom skill or that a foreigner will need to pick up as a Culture skill, in order to get under the skin of the local community.

Many people make an effort to assimilate when they get to their destination, by immersing themselves in the local culture and doing their best to communicate with the locals through whatever means they can. A character can thus learn the basics of a foreign language and of the local Culture without a teacher or mentor by spending two Experience Rolls on each, so long as they spend a minimum of one month immersed in the culture. This assumes they are interacting with friendly locals willing to indulge them, otherwise the Game Master should double the

Languages and Culture

| REGION | PRIMARY LANGUAGE | SECONDARY LANGUAGE | LOCALE | CULTURE |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Brotomagia | Thennalt (d) | Korantine | Brotomagia | Brotomagian |
| Camtri | Thennalt (d) | Taskan | Camtri | Marangian |
| Djesmirket | Djesmiri (d) | Soribish | Assabia | Djesmiri |
| Kingdom of Yegusai | Beshori | Taskan, Djesmiri | Beshor Valley | Beshor Valley People |
| Kitan | Shengen (d) | — | Kitan | Sheng (Independent Tribes) |
| Korantia | Korantine (d) | Thennalt | Korantia; Aspalia; Kipsipsindra | Korantine |
| Korazoon | Soribish | Djesmiri, Khazind, Taskan | Korazoon | Soribisi |
| Little Kitan | Shengen | Taskan | Camtri | Sheng (Eska) |
| Marangia | Thennalt (d) | Korantine | Marangia | Marangian |
| Methalea | Jekkarene | — | Jekkarid; Forest of Sard; Badlands | Jekkarene |
| Morkesh | Morkeshite | Taskan, Soribish | Assabia | Djesmiri |
| Sharranket | Djesmiri (d) | — | Assabia | Djesmiri |
| Sorantia | Tarsenian (d) | — | Sorantia | Tarsenian |
| Thafna | Thafneving | Shengen | Thafna | Thafneving |





amount of time it takes or increase the Experience Roll cost to three.

What to Take With You

As has already been mentioned, letters of introduction are a great help, if of course you can find the person they are addressed to. However in all other instances there is no substitute for ready cash to smooth your journey. The Empire's currency can get you a long way but if people will not take your money and refuse even to exchange it, the best alternative is a quantity of bullion in handy small lumps to trade at their local value by weight or, failing that, some suitable goods for barter. Nobody welcomes foreigners who arrive armed to the teeth but with no visible means of financial support. It will be assumed that they are robbers and they will be run out of town or worse.

KORANTIA



Once the heart of a huge empire with footholds on both sides of the Inner Ocean, Korantia is now carved up between a number of independent city states. Korantines live with the painful memory of a catastrophe that wrecked the empire when the island of Korantis, home to the imperial capital, sank beneath the ocean waves in a terrible earthquake. Despite the passage of over 200 years, so ingrained is this disaster in their collective memory that they can be a little obsessed with reliving the dreams of past glory – and so they are a somewhat conservative people, often preserving archaic forms of dress and speech

and preferring traditional conservative social arrangements over anything new. This does not, of course, prevent innovation. The fragmented nature of the Korantine world, with its large number of competing city states, acts as a catalyst to change.

Relations

A Taskan visitor to Korantia is unlikely to encounter outright hostility but he will be regarded by many of the locals as an untrustworthy foreigner. There is a substantial body of opinion that Taskan and Korantine will one day be at war and on both sides there are some people spoiling for a fight. However everyone knows that such a war could be immensely destructive and bring terrible tragedies in its wake. What was long regarded as a failing civilisation seems to be entering a new era of confidence thanks to the recent formation of the Korantine League. Taskan hegemony over Korantia no longer seems an inevitable future.

Getting There

The most direct route is to set out from Ashkor heading West and skirting the Yellow Hills, then turning Northwest and striking out for the Thoraso River. Following this river northward towards its source brings you to the Korantine Emperor's capital of Hilanistra, which is the gateway to the land of Korantia. A more dangerous route is to make for Timolay and from there head directly West, arriving in the territory of the twin Korantine cities of Tysil and Nysil – assuming you are not attacked by hostile Marangians on the way.

KITAN

North of the Taskan Empire lies the broad plain known as the Kitan, a great expanse of grassland and patches of desert hedged in by hills and mountains on three sides but to the East spilling into the wet green lowlands of Thafna. To the West a pass called the Tengissian gates debouches into another plain known as the Little Kitan, which is part of the Taskan Empire and sports the only settlement of any size in the region, at Bandaknar. The Little Kitan is well known to Taskan travellers, couriers, soldiers and merchants as it must be crossed in order to travel between Tarsenia and the Empire's northern possessions of Camtri and Timolay, or to head West towards Korantia and the Jekkarene trading town of Ramassa. Kitan is known to Taskans for all the wrong reasons; thousands of people were carried off there as slaves when its barbarous inhabitants sacked Ralmyra 20 years ago. Despite official efforts and a few intrepid private expeditions, very few have ever been repatriated and most have probably, by now, perished in that bleak and unforgiving country.





This untamed frontier is the haunt of the horse people, known as the Sheng; fierce folk whose monuments of cairns and standing stones to honour their ancestors and mark out their Sacred Sites punctuate an otherwise rather featureless landscape. The Sheng are made up of several tribes, of which the Eskars, Tsen-girs, Dragomans and Kismeks are the biggest and most well-known. While The Eskars who have their homeland in the Little Kitan are now tame subjects of the Taskan Empire, some of their cousins in the other tribes are the stuff of nightmares and their homeland is a place where a Taskan traveller must think very hard about how much he values his skin before venturing in – for it is quite likely to end up adorning the saddle of a Sheng warrior.

Getting There

Most people who travel to this region are passing through the Little Kitan or travelling to Bandaknar. The closest they get to the high plains is Hamcha, a settlement on the Taskan side of the Tsengissian Gates. This pass provides access to the high plains of the Kitan proper and is therefore a place hotly contested by rival warlords. This is as far as most foreigners will go, for once beyond the protection of whatever warlord controls the Gates they are likely to be attacked by the natives. The quietest route onto the high plains is to take a boat to Ralmyra in Further Tarsenia, then spend several days picking your way through the hills – which are infested with dangerous creatures – to arrive on the southern flank of the Kitan. Finally, one can take a sea passage to Zagre and from there travel with Sharran-ketan traders across the straits to Abdera. That is a good place to negotiate safe passage up onto the plateau with a representative of the Dragoman tribe, who have a less evil reputation than some of their cousins.

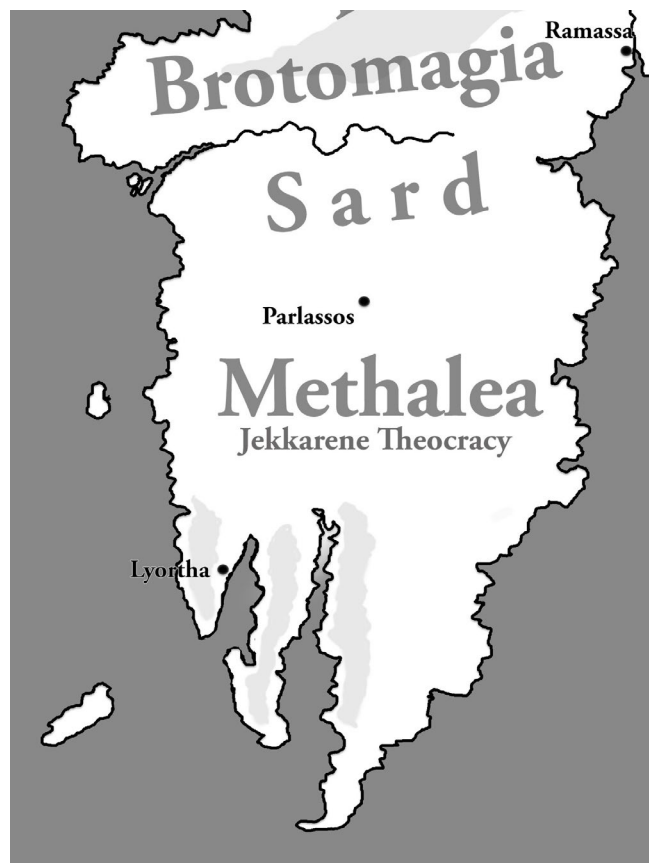
Relations

While a Taskan is safe enough in Eskar territory, the high plains are a no-go area to all except those with the most influential local connections, or who are able to put on a sufficient show of force to deter predatory tribesmen. For many people the memories of when the Sheng descended upon further Tarsenia is still very much an open wound. The imperial government has rescued or purchased the freedom of some 2,000 Tarsenian captives; however there are rumoured to still be anything up to another 4,000 Tarsenian-born slaves living in the Kitan and the bones of perhaps 5,000 more. There are hundreds of thousands of Taskeens' worth of rewards and ransoms on offer for repatriations, put up by wealthy individuals, cults and funeral clubs – even if just for the bones of the dead in order to provide them with a proper cremation. Nevertheless the size of the task

and the danger of the mission have proved too daunting for most. The Taskan Empire has learned that to attack the Sheng requires a formidable army or is to risk disaster; even then the chances are that the Sheng will simply retreat before them and refuse battle. There are always a number of Taskan agents at Hamcha whose purpose is to listen out for rumours of Ralmyran survivors and be ready to negotiate their purchase if the current owner is ready to sell.

METHALEA

Methalea is a huge peninsula dominated by what is considered to be the oldest civilisation still in existence, the Theocracy of the Jekkarenes. The Northern part is a wilderness region known as the Forest of Sard and the Eastern part of the peninsula is a rough, almost barren region known simply as the Methalean Badlands. The rest of the peninsula – and indeed sometimes by extension the whole peninsula – is known as The Jekkarid after the secretive and matriarchal society devoted to the night-goddess Jekkara. This goddess manifests as the Moon, usually visible by day but at night the biggest and brightest planet in the heavens. The Moon hangs stationary in the sky above the capital city, Parlassos.





As the birth-place of the divine emperor Zygas Taga, this land has an important place in Taskan tradition. However Methalea is also where the Sun God (Lanis) and Moon Goddess (Jekkara) reigned together over the first human civilisation, until a disastrous separation. When Jekkara threw Lanis out (or was abandoned, depending on who is telling the story), she became a goddess whose full powers could only be manifest on the physical plane at night. This drama was played out not in the heavens but amongst their worshippers on earth; nevertheless it resulted in the diminishing of a goddess as well as the fracture of a society into two opposing factions. The Jekkarenes claim that their goddess was the motivating force that drove the Ocean to destroy Korantis as terrible revenge for the ancient insults she bore. Hence the history of Methalea touches upon all the civilisations of the East, not least that of the Korantines.

Getting There

From the Taskan Empire the direct route is due West from Ashkor to Ramassa, with a significantly more dangerous alternative running West from Felsang via Sorandib. Alternatively a traveller might go south into Morkesh and take a ship from Largil to Lyortha. These important towns provide no access to the interior unless you are equipped with a visa that allows passage across the interior of the Jekkarid, something that is rarely

provided to anyone other than officials representing the Taskan Emperor. Obtaining such a pass requires the patronage of the powerful Baron Solfernoy of Lyortha or Baron Lankermost of Ramassa, the noblemen in charge of inbound traffic through these two points of entry to the country.

For unofficial and unauthorised visitors, the Northern border is fairly porous. There are ways to cross into the country secretly through the Forest of Sard; however this is a land haunted by beast-men and also favoured hunting grounds for both Jekkarene and Brotomagian nobility. The whole Eastern coast of the peninsula is open but the impoverished communities of the Badlands are always on the lookout for ways to supplement their meagre existence with a little brigandage by both land and sea. Once you cross through the Badlands you reach the border with the Jekkarene Theocracy and here you are likely to run into one of the frequent patrols.

SORANDIB

Sooner or later every wandering adventurer finds his way to Sorandib, whether the aim is to hide out from authority, find work as a sell-sword or simply to loot its treasures.

Sorandib is an ancient city of West Tarsenia in catastrophic decline. The surrounding country has been laid waste by years of banditry and civil strife; the city itself is rife with faction, lawlessness and social unrest. Large areas are effectively abandoned or under the control of the local gangs. There are city districts where civilisation and law and order hold sway and these are the places where most people live and do their business. However no single force exercises control over the whole city and outside its walls there is near anarchy to the West, while Taskan soldiers maintain some order in the East to keep the road to the imperial heartlands open. Since its foundation Sorandib has thrived or at least been kept alive by two things: its control over a key river trade route along which passes a drug harvested from the weeds that choke lake Barur to the North; and the creations of the Guild of Artificers, a centuries-old association of sorcerer-scientists who are famous for their inventions, feats of engineering and practical devices – many of which are built into the very fabric of the city.

Getting There

You only need to head west from Felsang and cross the Shol river to find yourself in Sorantia, the territory of the city of Sorandib. Aside from the main road the countryside here is in a state of ruin, with a few villages and estates near the road still





occupied but everything beyond in the hands of brigands or left uncultivated. To the East of Sorandib and the Briga river things are even worse as not even the road is kept safe. So anyone crossing the Shol has one purpose; to make their way to Sorandib itself. The Taskan Empire takes an interest in anyone who is doing so and Taskan soldiers will waylay travellers and ask lots of questions about their business. You can of course approach the city through open country but there is a very high chance that you will encounter bandits and robbers on the way or stray into the territory of some dangerous wizard.

Relations

The Muttine dynasty enjoys a guarantee of independence from the Emperor himself. The current king Shadrian Muttine remains under the Empire's protection and only when the Muttine line fails – as now seems imminent – will the Taskans walk in and take over. When they do there will be opposition but this will probably be rather futile as the Taskans cannot afford to allow Sorandib to fall into the hands of anyone else. Sorandib provides firearms to the Taskan army as well as a host of other devices and specialist arcane skills and knowledge that find use in imperial service. The Emperor himself achieved immortality with the help of local sorcery and the Artificers created his latest familiar who now acts as imperial Regent, the Iron Simulacrum. All of these things suggest secrets of Taskan power, hidden in the city, that the Emperor has no desire to see revealed to anyone else.

THE KORAZOON

This broad desert is certainly not a featureless waste but sports a variety of environments from oasis towns to shifting dunes to immense dried out river valleys and shimmering sun-blasted

hills. Temperatures can reach over 40° Celsius in the height of summer and at night can plummet to near freezing. In very ancient times more of the Korazoon was cultivable and there are ruined towns in the middle of the desert to prove it. The region is dominated by the Soribisi, a nomadic tribe that moves their goats, camels and horses from place-to-place in pursuit of fodder and water. Soribisi chieftains fight over control of the few oasis towns and the trade routes that connect them. These towns and trade routes are generally populated by people of Assabian descent - from Djesmirket, Morkesh or Sharranket. Another people, the Khazeri, can be found dispersed across the region in small family groups, mostly clinging to the hill country, particularly the areas near the Tarsenian border.

Getting There

The Taskan city of Pryjarna is not far from the Korazoon and the troops that patrol the desert border are headquartered there. A Taskan traveller would be very unlikely to be heading into the Korazoon for any other reason than to cross it and make use of the old trade routes to reach the lands of Assabia. This is an increasingly dangerous thing to do and the Taskan army has had to push its garrisons further and further down those trade routes to keep them functioning. Besides the potential to encounter hostile natives, the environment is extremely harsh and there are other horrors one might encounter like the Dust Devils, wraiths that haunt the desert and will attack anyone who looks remotely vulnerable.

ASSABIA

To the south of the Taskan Empire is a distinct cultural zone known as Assabia that is, in the main, comprised of the lands of Djesmirket, Sharranket and Morkesh. This is a region sandwiched between desert and ocean and both are significant influences on the highly developed cultures to which it is home. Rich and varied magical traditions, access to the wider world across the Inner Ocean and a constantly shifting political landscape make Assabia a place where there are many adventures to be found.

Getting There

Most Taskans reach Assabia through Morkesh, travelling down the Briga valley to Morkar and beyond. Alternative routes are via the ancient trade routes across the Korazoon and a further route runs South from Yegusan to Djesmir on a road passing through the Hills of Qom.





Relations

A Taskan visitor is likely to get a mixed reception depending on who and where he visits. Mostly Taskans are treated with the indifference afforded to most foreigners, although the official reception in Morkesh is somewhat warmer as their ruler has a treaty with the Taskan Empire that includes 'favoured nations' terms for Taskan merchants. However there are places where people who bear a grudge against the Taskan Empire and ill will towards its people are very influential or even in control and it is best to make proper enquiries when planning an itinerary.

Djesmirket

Djesmir is a huge city that is regarded with a reverence in the region as home to the most ancient and important temples and of the most skilled and powerful sorcerers. In reality it is in a state of decadence and decline – Sharranketan merchants no longer consider the place to be the most prized market for their goods and the Taskan Empire has always been cool towards the Djesmiris since they participated in a war against the Taskans 80 years ago. Djesmirket was once synonymous with the whole

region of Assabia but is now simply the territory directly to the South of the Korazoon including the cities of Djesmir, Ankwar, Perlak and Khorala. These cities are Sultanates, independent monarchies that share the same cultural traditions as one another and both recognise and uphold each other's' rights of sovereignty.

Sharranket

Sharranket is a small but very wealthy nation famous for its position as the hub of many of the world's most important trade routes and for being the only nation to have an economy almost exclusively based on trade. The territory consists of two off-shore islands and a small stretch of mainland bordered to the North by Djesmirket. Each of the islands has a city, one the capital of Homora, the other a smaller city named Ronispur, the third and smallest city of Shimir being on the mainland. Formerly a sultanate, Sharranket is now ruled by a council drawn from five families of merchant princes who plant trading enclaves along the major trade routes they operate, which stretch right across the Ocean to distant Jandekot and are serviced by the most advanced fleet of ships in the world.





Morkesh

Sitting astride the river Briga, Morkesh is a powerful kingdom currently ruled by a feisty Queen, Tursiba the Lioness. Its inhabitants speak a dialect sufficiently different to the Djesmiri of their neighbours to be classed as a language in its own right. The royal dynasty that rules Morkesh was founded by a pirate from across the ocean called Tark the Reaver. The city of Largil in Morkesh is the biggest and most important port for Oceanic trade and travel outside of Sharranket (whose ports are more or less closed to foreign shipping).

Jelhai

This Sultanate East of Djesmirket is set apart from the others by an evil reputation for oppression and dark magic. Its Sultan not regarded as one of the brother-kings and nobody willingly offers him a daughter or son for marriage into his family. Nevertheless everyone deals with him, for Sultan Hajil of Jelhai controls access to silk.

YEGUSAI AND ZAGRE



A protectorate of the Taskan Empire for nearly 100 years, the Kingdom of Yegusai is regarded by most Taskans as a land full of mystery and ancient secrets. Its religion is essentially animist in nature and Yegusan shamans are very much sought after by fashionable and wealthy patrons in the cities of the heartland.

The Kingdom of Yegusai once had two great cities, Haran and Yegusan, however the people of Haran were foolhardy enough to raise a revolt against the Taskans during the interregnum between the Marble and Iron Simulacra, the result of which was the destruction of the city and its resettlement by Taskan colonists. Haran is therefore no longer a part of the Kingdom of Yegusai and these days the indigenous population is subject to the settlers and are bonded peasants, explicitly excluded from membership of the Emperor-Cult. Those who abscond may attempt to conceal themselves among the free population of Yegusai, or escape across the river into the Kingdom of Zagre. The pursuit and return of these fugitives is a constant source of friction.

Yegusai is a riverine culture, with the great majority of its population inhabiting a narrow cultivated zone on the banks of the Beshor River. A highly developed system of irrigation has stretched the available land to its limits. Yegusai competes with the Kingdom of Zagre on the East bank of the river for control of land and farming population, a contest played out through small scale warfare between ruling elites and their henchmen, or through intrigue and skulduggery, that hardly impacts the ordinary people. Yegusai and Zagre are culturally identical; only the river, separate royal establishment and their relationship with the Taskans divides them. All the inhabitants of the region, from either kingdom, can be referred to as Beshor Valley People.

Getting There

The route from Tarsenia is well beaten by traders and tourists alike. Most people take a ship to Haran and there transfer to a craft that will provide transport up the river, or more rarely, to an overland road along the Beshor river valley. There is a route into the country from the South via Djesmirket but the whole Western flank of the country gives onto the harshest parts of the Korazoon desert and only the Soribisi desert people have any prospect of entering the Kingdom from that direction.

Relations

Taskans are welcome throughout Yegusai, as whether they are tourists, traders or diplomats they bring money into the local economy. Some visitors do antagonise and baffle the natives with their failure to understand or show proper sensitivity to centuries-old traditions but this rarely results in anything more serious than an embarrassing public altercation or a heavy fine for an attempt to smuggle a sacred artefact home as a souvenir. Across the river in the kingdom of Zagre Taskans are much less welcome, and their failure to observe local custom more easily results in hostility.





THE>NNALTS

Widely considered as barbarians, the Thennalts in reality encompass a diverse set of cultures at various stages of development and with differing ideas about whether, and how, to embrace the opportunities presented by the civilised lands around them. Some of them are now dutiful citizens of the Empire, others implacable enemies, while an isolated tribe inhabiting the land of Brotomagia are allies and loyal followers of the Korantine Emperor.

CAMTRI AND BROTOMAGIA

The Southern Thennalts are relatively settled and civilised, having long lived in the orbit of either Korantine or Taskan Empires. Camtri is now embedded within the Taskan Empire as a diocese administered from Torestal, and is a key strategic territory for the Taskan army. Step-by-step Taskan culture and customs are taking over and those who do not embrace the process generally up sticks and look for hospitality in Korantia or go North to Marangia. Brotomagia remains independent. Famed for its beauty, the wooded hills and green valleys of Brotomagia are home to many a local chieftain who can sport a Korantine education, fluency in several languages and sophisticated tastes. However as Brotomagia is a buffer zone between the Jekkarenes,

Taskans and Korantines, there is always a feeling that the good life may one day come to a disastrous end.

MARANGIA

The Marangians are famously warlike and considered even by other Thennalts to be venal and untrustworthy. The Marangians have a traditional king, Arkenson the Portly, whose capital is at Timolay, but this is now under Taskan control and the king made their puppet. So the Marangians generally feel rather put upon of late and harbour significant resentment of both the civilisations on their borders. With Timolay under foreign control an ancient cultic centre at Oster is now regarded as their capital.

Getting There

Camtri is a land well within the orbit of the Empire, to get to its chief city of Torestal you need only follow the military road North from Ashkor via Bandaknar. If you are feeling brave you may progress onto Timolay, the chief city of the Marangians, which is under Taskan military occupation but surrounded by country that is still in the hands of hostile natives. Brotomagia is, for most Taskans, out of reach – no road goes there and very few people have got any business in that part of the world anyway.





Relations

Camtri has embraced Taskan rule and is beginning to embrace Taskan customs. There are a few people around who dream of independence or who resent that they are now drawn into the orbit of the Taskan Empire and have lost old ties with the Korantines as a result but such people increasingly find it convenient to keep their ideas to themselves. A visitor from the heartland will generally find nothing other than a friendly reception.

Any foreigner who finds themselves in Brotomagia will quickly realise they are something of a curiosity. So long as they are not suspected of being spies for the Jekkarenes, some sort of hospitality is likely to be on offer.

A visit to Timolay in Marangia is a very different experience. A Taskan traveller will be keenly aware that they are on a dangerous frontier. If caught outside the military zone without a substantial escort, one may have to hope that the natives are interested in ransom money rather than just cutting Taskan throats. The presence in the area of opportunistic Taskan grave robbers, drawn by rumours of fabulously wealthy tombs and cemeteries, increases tensions and makes life more dangerous for everyone. One consolation is that the hostiles tend to reserve their most intense animosity for those of their countrymen who willingly serve the Taskans.

THAFNA

This land situated on the north side of the Gulf of Taskay is a melting pot of influences from nearby cultures. Its port at Abdera is a place where Taskan and Sharranketan, Djesmiri and Beshorite, Faliskan and Sheng can all be found doing business with each other under the watchful eye of Thennalt mercenaries in the king's service.

The King of Thafna rules from Jostarl, a hilltop fortress in the interior of the country. Jostarl is significantly less sophisticated than the kingdom's commercial centre at Abdera, to the extent that Adberans regard their compatriots in the capital as barbarians. Anyone who would seek an audience with the king must come here, as he leaves the place only when equipped for war or hunting. Built with little regard for planning of irregular stone masonry, and its houses roofed in thatch or turf, Jostarl is surrounded by a landscape remarkable for its spectacular rock formations, its windswept pastures, and its wealth in sheep and cattle.

of Kitan



While there is rarely a formal threat to his realm made by a foreign nation, the unruly tribes to the West and North present a constant source of trouble. Sheng nomads regularly cross the country when moving in and out of the high Plains of Kitan, and every so often some of them will seek to loot and plunder on the way. From time to time Faliskan tribesmen appear on his borders in vast numbers, driven by internal conflict or forced from their homes by one of the catastrophic floods that blight their traditional territory.

Relations

Thafna is a traditionally neutral land, where people who may be hostile to one another can meet and trade in peace. It is a route for goods and people to move between the dangerous territory of Kitan, the vast wilderness of Faliskund, and the civilised lands that lie on the southern side of the gulf.

Getting There

Taskans will generally arrive at the port of Abdera, which can be reached by ship from Tarsang.





TASKAN CHARACTERS

Most Taskans come from Tarsenia, a civilised land confederated by the emperor Zygag Taga from several substantial city-states that share common language and customs: Taskay itself, Tarsang, Zarina, Ashkor, Felsang, Zarina, Merat, Ralmyra and Pryjarna. Tarsenians are also the ruling class over a subject population in the city of Haran. Provinces include Camtri, a Thennalt land where the people are considered by some still to be barbarians; The Little Kitan, inhabited by the semi-nomadic Eskar horse-people; and Yegusai, a civilised ancient riverine kingdom which practises ancestor-worship. The Taskans are protectors of the Jekkarene Theocracy, the traditional enemy of the Korantine race, and also of Morkesh.

TARSENIANS

These are the people of the Taskan heartland, those who think of Tarsenian and Taskan as essentially the same.

Culture Type

Civilised

Language

Taskan

Customs

Taskan

Standard Skills

Conceal, Deceit, Drive, Influence, Insight, Locale, Willpower

Example Combat Styles

Taskan Citizen Infantry, Zarinian Equestrian Levy, Ralmyran Levy Archer, Tarsangan Levy Slinger, Ashkorite Pikeman

Professional Skills

Art (Any), Commerce, Craft (Any), Language (Any), Literacy (Tarsenian), Lore (Any), Musicianship, Rites (Taskan), Streetwise

Cultural Passions

Loyalty (Emperor); many will also have a Loyalty towards (or Love for) for their home city or province and there are times when these things are conflicting drives.

Magic Type

Folk Magic, Sorcery, Theism. Taskan citizens have one magic point permanently deducted from their total as a cost of their citizenship, in this case put at the disposal of the divine emperor Zygag Taga. More information can be found in the Magic chapter and the Cults chapter.

At Character Creation an adult Taskan with the Rites skill knows 1d3 Folk Magic spells. Subtract or add one Folk Magic spell for each age category younger or older.

Those who pursue magical professions also have one appropriate spell for each 20% of the relevant casting skill.

Social Class for Taskan Characters

The Taskan Empire has no slaves and no ruling class is permitted to assert itself lest that could threaten the pre-eminent position held by senior members of the Emperor cult. For Taskan





characters a roll of 03-20 on the standard RUNEQUEST table for Social Class is treated as a Freeman, and 00 is treated as Aristocracy for the purpose of determining starting money.

Taskan citizens are not assessed by wealth or status, and all citizens, male and female, have the right to vote for their local leaders and stand for public office... so long as they do so through the auspices of the Emperor-cult.

Typical Professions

Any

Starting Money

4d6x50 Taskeens. The normal multipliers for Social Class apply.

ESKARS

The Eskars are one of the major horse tribes of the Sheng nation whose home ranges are East of the high plains of the Kitan, a region known as the Little Kitan, now under Taskan rule. Their one and only city is Bandaknar, and this is now a diocese of the Imperial administration. Many Eskars have taken the citizenship, and some have been forced to do so because the Empire needed tokens of willing submission. Other Sheng tribes consequently look upon the Eskars as Taskan slaves, increasingly divorced from the 'free tribes' of the High Plains, but then the tribes have always actively embraced reasons to forge enmity towards one another.

Culture Type

Nomad

Language

Shengen (Eska Dialect)

Customs

Sheng (Eska Tradition)

Standard Skills

Endurance, Drive, First Aid, Locale, Perception, Ride, Stealth

Example Combat Styles

Eskar Scout, Eskar Horse Warrior, Cataphract

Professional Skills

Craft (Any), Culture (Taskan, Thennalt), Language (Taskan, Thennalt), Navigate, Rites (Sheng, Taskan), Survival, Track

Cultural Passions

Loyalty (Clan Chieftain); Hate (Rival Clan or Tribe); Love (friend, sibling, or lover); Loyalty (Emperor)

Magic Type

Animism, Fetishism*, Folk Magic

An Eskar character can at the players option begin play with 1 magic point dedicated to the Ancestors to awaken a Clan Fetish and knowledge of one of the clan's Folk Magic spells per 20% of his rites skill.

Eskar Social Class

A roll of 91-100 on the Nomad Social Class table indicates the character is of Royal Clan status and may become a Shaman. Any character born to this heritage with a POW of 14 or greater is capable of taking the Shaman profession and acquiring the Trance skill. Those who have this ability are intensively trained to make the most of it, using the maximum allowed number of Free Skill Points to awaken and increase it. The prospective Shaman must also dedicate a minimum of 1 Magic Point to the Ancestors in order to create a Soul Fetish.

Typical Professions

Beast Handler, Crafter, Herder, Hunter, Merchant, Scout, Warrior. Characters from the Ruling Class can choose the Shaman profession.

**Eska magical traditions are rooted in a form ancestor worship shared by all the Sheng nation with slight differences in ritual practices from tribe to tribe. Tribesmen create fetishes that invest their magical energies in a life-long Pact with their tribal ancestors, and the benefits of this relationship are manifested through magical augmentations. More information is provided in the Magic chapter.*

Starting Money

4d6x20 Taskeens. The normal multipliers for Social Class apply.

THENNALTS

The Thennalts are a matrix of peoples speaking related languages and united by the recognition of the earth goddess Theyna as the paramount deity. Thennalts are spread across an enormous geographical area, and live in communities that show a variety of levels of development and cultural sophistication. Those who inhabit Camtri, a land long celebrated for its rich pastures and fine cattle, are now part of the Taskan Empire and the vast majority have taken the citizenship, providing a huge boost both to the Taskan empire's citizen roll and to its army.





Gender roles among Thennalts are clearly defined and traditional but there is no particular dignity attached to one gender or the other. Thennalt men tend to wear a short tunic, often colourful, gathered at the waist with a broad girdle or belt of leather and adorned with bronze. The sword is a status symbol; only married men who are heads of their own household are entitled to use one. Their basic dress is supplemented with cloak, leggings, jerkin and hats according to the clime and season. Thennalt women are more likely to exhibit different basic forms of dress from region to region, but the classic form is a dress that is simply a long version of the tunic worn by men pulled tight at the waist with a broad belt or girdle.

Culture Type

Barbarian

Language

Thennalt (regional dialect*)

Customs

Thennalt

Standard Skills

Athletics, Brawn, Endurance, First Aid, Locale (Camtri), Perception; and either Boating, Drive or Ride.

Example Combat Styles

Huntsman, Levy Spearman, Thennalt Levy Skirmisher

Professional Skills

Craft (Any), Language (Any), Lore (Any), Musicianship, Rites (Thennalt and/or Taskan), Survival

Thennalts from Camtri can take Taskan. Language as a professional skill

Cultural Passions

Loyalty (Local Warlord, Head Man or Chieftain, or Taskan Empire)

Love (Friend, Sibling or Romantic Lover)

Hate (Rival Community, Enemy Lord)

Magic Type

Folk Magic, Theism. There are examples of Animism in Thennalt lands, generally referred to as Witchcraft. Typical Thennalt deities include Theyna, the all-mother; Thenn, the hunter and civilisation god; Palaskil the storm and sky god; Sheagu goddess of death and burial.

Magic-using Thennalt characters begin play with one appropriate spell for each 20% of their casting skills.

Typical Professions

Crafter, Farmer, Herder, Fisher, Merchant, Scout, Warrior.

Starting Money

4d6x30 Taskeens. The normal multipliers for Social Class apply.

BESHOR VALLEY PEOPLE

Inhabitants of the Beshor River Valley, a green and fertile strip of land snaking through parched deserts on both sides, the Beshor Valley People are divided into three distinct political entities: The Kingdom of Zagre occupies the East bank of the river; the Kingdom of Yegusai, which occupies the West bank and which is a client state of the Taskan Empire; and Haran, a city and district once part of Yegusai but now annexed by the Empire and under direct imperial rule. The people of Haran live under harsh subjection to Taskan settlers and are even deprived of access to their ancestor worship traditions.

Culture Type

Civilised

Language

Beshorite

Customs

Beshor Valley People

Standard Skills

Boating, Conceal, Customs, Influence, Insight, Locale, Willpower

Example Combat Styles

Yegusite Slinger, Yegusite Levy, Zagreiot Camel Lancer

Professional Skills

Art (Any), Commerce, Craft (Any), Language (Any), Lore (Any), Rites (Beshorite and/or Taskan), Survival

Cultural Passions

Loyalty (Kingdom)

Love (Friend, Sibling or Romantic Lover)

Hate (Rival Kingdom, Enemy Lord)





Magic Type

Folk Magic, Animism, Theism. Beshor Valley folk worship their ancestors, but also participate in some Theist cults which have spread to their land from Djesmirket and Tarsenia. Their ancestor-worship is conducted on a national scale by a caste of shaman-priests. People of Yegusai have the option to be worshippers of the Taskan emperor and acquire Taskan citizenship, however not many do.

Beshorite Ancestor Worship is described in the Cults chapter.

Beshorite Social Class

Use the table for civilized characters, but treat a roll of 11-20 as a Haranite serf in thrall to Taskan overlords. A roll of 85-95 indicates a character is from the priestly class.

Typical Professions

Crafter, Farmer, Herder, Fisher, Merchant, Scout. Characters from the priestly caste can choose Priest as a profession, and aristocrats can choose Warrior

Starting Money

4d6x40 Taskeens. The normal multipliers for Social Class apply.

NEW PROFESSIONS

Taskan Cleric

Clerics are a class of professional priests whose job is to deal with matters of religious ritual and conduct ceremonies for an appropriate fee. A cleric's education and religious credentials are suitable for all manner of other tasks, especially the recording of oaths and contracts. These clerics belong to professional associations, family firms and brotherhoods distinguished by often rather idiosyncratic costume. While they attempt to keep as much as possible of their knowledge and skills a trade secret, the increasing availability of published material made accessible to the wider reading public threatens to make them an irrelevance.

A character with this career background starts play with one Folk Magic spell from the new spells described in the Magic chapter for every 20% of his Rites skill in addition to the allowance of 1d3 for cultural background.

Standard Skills

Customs, Deceit, Influence, Insight, Locale, Sing, Willpower

Professional Skills

Bureaucracy, Commerce, Literacy, Lore (any), Oratory, Rites (Taskan), Streetwise

Beshorite Shaman-Priest

These guardians of Beshorite tradition combine both animist and theist practices, as the Ancestors of the Beshor Valley People are a powerful spirit-world faction capable of powering miracles for their living descendants.

Standard Skills

Conceal, Customs, First Aid, Influence, Insight, Locale, Willpower

Professional Skills

Binding, Craft (Builder), Devotion (Ancestors), Exhort Ancestors, Lore (Architecture), Lore (Genealogy), Rites (Beshor Valley),

The Shaman-Priest will have one miracle, spell or one Intensity of spirit per 20% of each relevant magical skill.

Taskan Spell Slave

Not a slave but usually indentured into service, a spell-slave also learns some practical skills to enable them to provide support to the military unit or private household to which they are attached.

At the completion of training the Spell Slave knows one Folk Magic spell per 20% of his Rites skill and one Sorcery spell for every 20% of his Sorcery skill.

Standard Skills

Customs, First Aid, Influence, Insight, Locale, Perception, Willpower

Professional Skills

Healing, Language (any), Literacy, Lore (Mundane Arcana), Rites, Shaping, Taskan Sorcery





WHAT MY FATHER TOLD ME: A PERSONAL VIEW OF TASKAN CULTURE

The following statements reflect common opinions and attitudes of a Taskan from the Empire's heartlands. Not all the assertions made are true from a strictly factual perspective.

Who Are We?

We are the Zarinians, people who live in the diocese of Zarina on the banks of the great Siskil River. We are Tarsenians, named for Tarsen, the hero who united us as a nation, the greatest on earth, and our city is one of many found in the lands that surround the Taskan Gulf which are named Tarsenia after us. Since we were united into a single realm by Zygas Taga, the Divine Emperor, other people have come to know us as the Taskans after the city that the Emperor chose as his capital, Taskay.

What Makes Us Great?

The Tarsenians are blessed to live at the centre of the world, thereby accorded highest honour among men by the gods. Our people were the first to make an alphabet, which Tarsen the Founder gave us. Many years ago a Tarsenian wrote the first poem and put it to music. We are the most civilised of peoples, violent in war and gentle in peace, being neither rough and barbarous nor decadent and effeminate. Most of all we are great because we are powerful; through the leadership of the Divine Emperor we have mastered the known world.

Among the Tarsenians the people of Zarina are the greatest because our city is the most populous; our territory encompasses the widest extent of fine farming land; more goods and produce flow in and out of our city than any other; we furnish the Empire with its greatest scholars; there are wonders in our city such as the Temple of Tethis and the Menagerie that people come from far and wide to see; and it was our ancestors that brought the Emperor here from his homeland, who then fought with us to conquer and pacify our enemies whereupon he became a god.

How Do We Live?

Although our city holds nearly a quarter of a million people, the bounty of our land is enough to provide. Even close to the city you can find some of the best soil in all Tarsenia, and there is barely anyone in Zarina who neither owns any land nor has

a farmer in their family. Even if there is a bad harvest in any year we do not starve like we did in the old days because the Emperor commands our sister cities to send us their spare food. We eat bread and porridge of barley and sometimes einkorn wheat; pork and mutton, sometimes beef and fowl; cheese of many different kinds, vegetables grown in private gardens and fruit from fine country orchards. Exotic foods and spices are imported from around the empire and beyond. Many people keep vineyards, and we drink our wine without water, unlike the effeminate Korantines. Olive trees grow in the harsher soils, and we crush their fruit for oil.

Our cities and towns are of built of bricks and mortar, often faced with fine dressed stone or rendered in stucco. A tiled roof is the sign of a civilised home, however in the South where it rarely rains many people have flat roofs to their houses.

How Do We Dress?

We clothe ourselves in wool or linen, and if you are wealthy might wear cotton from Rasputana or, if you are obscenely rich, silk imported from Jelhai. You can otherwise tell a rich man by how elaborately decorated are his clothes, or if he has a passion for foreign styles – perhaps a long-flowing riding cloak or a Korantine shirt. Both men and women wear long tunics that hang below the knee, but the mens' can be gathered up about the knees when we practice sports or prepare ourselves for battle. Womens' clothes often have fancy sleeves or necks. Loose-fitting leggings are also common, and some have adopted the trousers popular with barbarians. In winter we might wear a short quilted jacket over the tunic, woollen stockings and a cloak tied and pinned at the left shoulder. On our feet we wear leather or rope-soled sandals; open toed boots are worn by civilians, and full boots are preferred by soldiers. In wet weather we tie on a pair of wooden soles to hold our shoes above the mud. Travellers often wear a broad brimmed hat of straw, leather or felt. When at home we go bare-headed except when conducting religious rites, when we wear a fillet or a veil of linen or wool. It is common for men to wear a beard, kept properly trimmed, but hair may be worn short or long, gathered, tied or oiled as fashion dictates. For men and particularly for women an elaborate hairstyle may be a signal of wealth, as it speaks of the leisure time and hired help required to produce and maintain it.

What Is Important in Life?

When you are 17 years old you become a citizen of the empire. You sacrifice to the Divine Emperor and commend yourself to his safekeeping. Once you have completed these coming of age rites the family is no longer the only circle in which you move.





You are a public person, and will join one or more of the cults, feasting clubs, guilds and funerary societies through which adults form ties of friendship and loyalty.

At this time you also become eligible for selection for a term in the militia. Through military service all citizens have a chance to serve the Emperor, and in so doing to contribute to the peace and security of the realm.

Every citizen strives to own something from which they can gain a livelihood. For some this is a patch of farmland or a flock of sheep, others a shop on a busy city street. Only through achieving this goal can a man truly be free, for if one has always to beg another man for paid work then in his heart he will think you his slave.

While you might seek love in many quarters, a marriage that is blessed with children is the ambition of all people, so you must work hard to make enough to support a family. You will be paid back in the long run when you have grown children to share your labours, to care for you when worn out, and to mourn at your funeral.

Death will come to us all eventually. Before it does you should live a little, seek happiness, and above all strive to be best at what you do. When you pass into the realm of shadows be prepared to spend an eternity of reflection upon what was, not what might have been.

Who Rules Us?

Zygas Taga, the immortal Emperor, rules over us. For generations now he has kept himself locked away in his palace, but his viceroy, the Iron Simulacrum, leads his armies and enforces our laws. A college of Emperor-cult priests drawn from our leading citizens governs each city of Tarsenia and each province of the Empire. To become one of them you must first win the approval of your fellow citizens and be elected to serve as a Warden over a rural district, town or city suburb. This path is open to anyone, not like in the old days before the Emperor when only a small class of aristocrats could hold positions of power.

What Makes a Man Great?

Men can be great in many ways. A great man shares whatever his gifts may be with his fellow men by his deeds, generosity, the employment of others, or by service to the Emperor - and through him to all his fellow citizens. By these acts the good fortune of one man is multiplied, and works to the benefit of all.

It used to be said that, *'the rich man uses magic to encourage himself to observe a life of virtue, and a stick to encourage the poor man do the same'.*

The Divine Emperor has dismissed the subjection of the poor by the rich and banished strife among the people; now all citizens are equally free to make the right moral choices. To this end many rich men have set up public inscriptions that provide spells to the masses with which they can detect malign influences at work in others.

Now it is said that, *'The good citizen observes a life of virtue through deed and word, and raises his sword only to compel the barbarian to do the same'.*

Any man who brings favour and benefit to others deserves loyalty and respect. Of all such men our Emperor is the most outstanding, because his favour, his virtue and his generosity touches the entire nation.

What Is Virtue?

Virtue is the abjuration of evil, and the pursuit of a life that brings benefit to the nation, the family and the self. There are many kinds of evil. The Song of Tarsen is an epic poem that describes the feats of Tarsen the Founder, and it describes the Five Evils thus:

- The first inspires men to covet their neighbours' land and possessions. This is Jealousy.
- The second clouds men's judgement so they cannot tell truth from falsehood. This is Ignorance.
- The third tells a man to live only for himself and to care nothing for his fellows. This is Selfishness.
- The fourth causes men to destroy instead of build, and to desire unjustly to do harm to other men. This is Malice.
- The fifth causes men to seek the easiest way, to shun work and avoid responsibility. This is Sloth.

Tarsenians value magic by which these evils are abjured. All the old books of lore have abjuration spells, and the family folk magic of the aristocracy warn of many supplementary evils for which some spell has been made to warn of its presence or as its cure.

What is Treason?

Treason is a state of opposition to the things that hold our nation together. Chief among them are: the Emperor and his Simulacrum; the proper exercise of government and justice





through the Emperor's cult; the security of our nation's economy represented by its currency. Any action that undermines these institutions is in some way an act of treason.

A man who conceives an act of treason is a danger to all of us because the peace and stability of our nation is put at risk and war, chaos, famine and rebellion are the probable consequences..

The Emperor appoints Inquisitors to root out traitors, and when found such people are dealt with severely and without undergoing public trial.

How Do We Deal With Others?

Depend first upon your family, but seek the support of loyal friends in all that you do. You will find friends in the various societies, cults and professional brotherhoods that you join in the course of your life because you will be introduced to people who have similar values, goals or interests. Some of these may be people of status, and you show them respect not because they are better folk but because they have the power to give you work, food and shelter when you are in need. When you come into conflict with a fellow citizen your proper recourse is to take your enemy to court. However you must beware the legions of false accusers and perjurers who attempt to use the courts for dishonest ends.

Our tongue is spoken now in many lands, and with it people have adopted our customs. Show these people friendship and tolerance, for they seek to be like us and share in the Divine Emperor's grace. Otherwise be suspicious of foreigners, for you do not know their ways nor their intentions. Many will show you respect because you have the Emperor's protection, but some will try to trick you, others may rob you, some may even kill you. If you travel into foreign lands be sure not to travel alone, and find a trustworthy guide.

Who Are Our gods?

The Tarsenians have many gods, but there are a dozen or so that you will certainly encounter in the course of your life, and others that you will do well to avoid. To name but a few: Samanse is our mother and goddess of the home; Machank our god of battles; Hamath the defender of the poor; Jarmost god of thinkers and Hoonvel of farmers. They are our chosen partners in life, Gods who care and understand about things that people care about. Those for whom we have particular affection, or can be relied upon to bring the greatest benefit to our city, have temples that are maintained at public expense. In Zarina the temple of Tethis is the greatest. She is worshipped in other

cities too, but not in the same way as we do. People come on pilgrimage to Zarina in order to get a glimpse of our Tethis. Other cities are famous for the worship of one god or another too: Tarsang sports the tomb of Tarsen, the founder of our race, which is empty because he ascended to heaven at the moment his pyre was lit; Pryjarna has the great temple to Basat, a god of truth and life; and Taskay is the favourite home of Thesh, a god of fire.

Zygas Taga, our Divine Emperor, is a god who has not yet ascended to the heavens. He is the only one whom every Tarsenian worships in the same way, but he stands apart from the others.

It is the order of things that we worship the gods, and for as long as we do so everything will happen as Tarsen told our ancestors that it would. But when the gods fail us we are not powerless, for mortals can also work magic. Other people devote themselves to mightier gods, but exist in a lesser state of harmony with them, and so are less mighty people than us.

What is Magic?

In ancient times magic was the action of the gods and other supernatural beings in our world. Then as now, those who are devoted to one of the gods may wield a little of their power too. When Tarsen gave his people the power of writing he liberated us from dependency on the gods, because through the power of words men learned to work magic through their own arts, without divine assistance. This is called Sorcery. But we did not forget the gods, merely sought a more balanced relationship with them. The Korantines still are their slaves and reject sorcery; and the peoples of the south hold to sorcery so much that many of them reject the worship of gods altogether. Only we Tarsenians have the balance right.

What Happens When I Die?

When you die your body will be burned and your ashes placed in a shrine; your soul will find its way to the afterlife and will be honoured each year on the Day of Ghosts. All this will be taken care of by your family if it is wealthy enough, otherwise by a funerary cooperative or cult to which you have paid the necessary dues during your lifetime.

Unless your soul is lost you will pass over to the home of our people in the Many Hells that has been there since the days of Tarsen. Be sure that your heart is not filled with evils when you die, or the Lord of Hell will turn his demons loose upon you to extract them under torture and return them to the Pit whence they came before sending you to your allotted place.





THE TASKAN EMPIRE

You will call your favourite gods to come to your aid in settling you on land in the afterlife as big and as fertile as you deserve, somewhere among those souls who share bonds of family or community with you.

One day Zygas Taga will ascend to heaven, and create a new Empire in the afterlife for his people that is as meritorious as

the Empire he has created here, and where the bonds of citizenship for people of different lands and families and traditions still persist.





TASKAN MAGIC

Taskans practise Folk Magic, Sorcery and Theism. Of these Folk Magic and Theism are native traditions in the homeland of Tarsenia, whereas sorcery appears to be based on magical lore developed in Djesmirket to the South.

FOLK MAGIC

Tarsen created a common set of symbols and protocols for dealing with the gods and magical traditions of Tarsenia, encapsulated under Tarsenian Rites, now known to most people as Taskan Rites. The skill's most common use is to cast Folk Magic spells. To fully understand Tarsen's system requires Literacy at a minimum 26% – Tarsen was nothing if not an elitist - and so its practices do not come easy to someone who lacks basic facility with letters (all skill checks are one grade harder). As a result a clerical class evolved, experts in magic, customs and laws who levied fees for their services in both religious and secular matters. Nevertheless literacy became more widespread under the empire and this reliance on the written word ceased to be a way to restrict magic to an elite, but actually to share it with the whole community.

Despite being central to making religious observances, Folk Magic is a diverse corpus of magical knowledge. Many of its spells are little known outside of a specific locale or trade. Others are actually inscribed in some permanent medium and set up in public places, or recorded in books that are now available to be consulted in the empire's public libraries enabling anyone who is literate to study and learn them. These are spells that have practical use for domestic and civic community life, such as Cleanse, Cool, Heal, Perfume, Light, Tidy and Polish. Citizens

are expected to use them in the public interest, for example to keep public spaces, monuments and shrines in good order.

A character's cult, community or trade association may make Folk Magic available. Trade spells are used to assist in work, and a character might start with a spell that relates to their Professional Skills. Appraise, Bladesharp, Calculate, Heat, Magnify, Pierce, Preserve, Repair, Tune, Voice are good examples.

New Folk Magic Spells

Knowledge of the right Folk Magic spells to conduct basic religious rites is not restricted to the clergy, however it is a requirement for anyone holding themselves out to be a professional and charge a fee, and necessary for anyone who wishes to avoid such fees by managing for themselves.

Blessing

Trigger, Touch

This ritual is used by the congregation at a rite of worship and is known by anyone who has the Taskan Rites skill. To acquire the blessing a worshipper must make a prayer and succeed in a Rites roll during the course of an appropriate religious service, expending one Magic Point in the process. If the Rites roll is successful, the Blessing is received and can be triggered at any time.

Divine favour is given in the form of an intervention by the deity in some action related to the deity's sphere of influence, and allows a character to reroll a skill check. The recipient may choose which of the two dice rolls to apply, but the Blessing is expended in the process.





This Magic Point spent to acquire a Blessing cannot be recovered until the Blessing has been triggered, however many Taskan deities allow for the cost to be paid through a specific sacrifice, in livestock or goods. As a rule of thumb, the cost of such sacrifice should be no less than 5 Taskeens per Magic Point. A group of worshippers can pool resources to offer a sacrifice capable of providing for all their needs, and it is quite common for the wealthiest participant to provide the sacrifice as a benefaction to his fellow worshippers.

The maximum number of Blessings that a character can retain at any one time is determined as for Luck Points, but uses the CHA characteristic instead of POW. This maximum applies no matter how many different deities are entreated for help.

Funeral Rites

Ritual

A successful casting means that the deceased is blessed with a Luck Point for use on his journey to The Many Hells. It does not guarantee a happy afterlife but it usually guarantees that the deceased will not fumble in the darkness and so will make the transition without getting lost or being snared in the physical world as a ghost - unless a more powerful form of magic intervenes.

Marriage Rites

Ritual

A successful casting blesses the couple with a group luck point.

Sanctify

Ritual, Duration Special

This spell creates a ritually pure area in which religious rites can be properly conducted. The spellcaster marks out an area appropriate to the rite to be conducted, up to his POW in square meters, and may have to perform other rites such as fumigation with burning incense or sprinkling with clean water from a natural spring. This spell lasts for the full length of the ritual so long as the ritual is begun within POW minutes of the Sanctify being cast. A sanctified area is neutral, and not tuned to any particular deity. Note that a Sacred Site or area under the effects of a Consecrate spell is considered to be permanently sanctified and this spell is not needed.

Sense Evil

This spell alerts the caster to the presence of one of the Five Evils identified by Tarsen as the root of mankind's sufferings. These evils are Sloth, Malice, Selfishness, Ignorance and Jealousy. The

spell can be used one of two ways: either to specifically detect the presence of a relevant Passion in somebody the character is dealing with, or in other circumstances to make an Insight test one grade easier so long as the person whose intentions are under scrutiny are in some way influenced by one of the Five Evils.

Worship (Specific Deity)

Ritual

A Worship (Specific Deity) rite can only be cast in a sanctified area. Separate spells exist for each and every deity of the pantheon and some exist that combine two or more deities into a single rite. The spell can be used to provide potency to a number of different sorts of religious service, depending on whether the specific deity is an appropriate object of worship for the occasion.

A successful Worship ritual means that the god gathers in all the offerings, whether Magic Points or other form of sacrifice, made during the service and that participants may gain Blessings in return.

If the priest has a critical success in the casting roll, the receipt of a Blessing by the entire congregation is automatic, In addition all members of the congregation who have a Devotion to the deity gain 1% to their Devotion skill.

THEISM

Many Taskans seek to deepen their relationship with the gods in ways that will give them access to divine aid in the form of miracles and gifts. Some take the step to join a formal cult in which the journey is set out for them through cult teachings, duties and obligations and progress through cult ranks. In Tarsenia rather more people embark on a personal journey of faith as a lay devotee, involving pilgrimage and acts of devotion that can also be rewarded with access to theist magic.

A character can combine personal religious devotions to one or more deities and cult initiation in the service of another so long as they do not have conflicting requirements or obligations; for example Basat's cult will accept no candidates for initiation who are current devotees of Machank.

Calling Upon the Gods

The Taskan Pantheon comprises many different gods and goddesses, some of them very obscure and unknown to all but a few scholars and clergymen. Nevertheless they have all at some





time subscribed to the pantheon established by the hero Tarsen several hundred years ago.

Devotion

A separate Devotion skill is required for each Taskan deity. The skill is often acquired and nurtured by regular observance as part of a congregation of lay worshippers, and by participating in acts such as pilgrimage to a god's sacred places or holy day festivals.

Exhortation

A single exhortation skill can be used to call upon any of the Taskan pantheon of gods except for the Emperor himself. This skill is learned like any other Professional Skill – in practice the most common way to acquire it is to pay for instruction by experts in religion and ritual, or to benefit from the teaching a cult provides to its initiates.

Cultists and Devotees

Those worshippers who become members of a formally constituted cult at initiate level or higher can access Miracles and other benefits as described in the RUNEQUEST rules. More details on the benefits and obligations of Taskan cults are provided in the Cults chapter.

A *lay devotee* is a lay worshipper who has developed a direct personal relationship with a deity and has some of the benefits normally restricted to initiates of a theist cult. These benefits include limited access to miracles.

Miracles and Boons

The Tarsenian gods offer two types of divine favour to their followers: miracles and boons. Boons are magical benefits and enhancements given in return for a permanent magic point dedication that might increase a characteristic, inspire a talent or replicate the effects of a miracle or spell.

Boons

Any character with a Devotion skill in excess of 50% may ask a boon of his god. The magic points offered in return are set aside for the god's use and cannot be recovered until the boon is relinquished. Consequently a permanent effect results in a permanent reduction in the character's Magic Points Attribute.

Many lay devotees lack the Exhort skill and consequently a boon is a more accessible form of divine favour than a miracle.

The maximum number of magic points a character can have dedicated to boons with each deity is based on the character's Devotion skill.

| DEVOTION % | MAXIMUM DEDICATION |
|------------|--------------------|
| 51-70% | 1 Magic Point |
| 71-90% | 2 Magic Points |
| 91%+ | 3 Magic Points |

The trade of magic points in return for a boon is no different in nature to the Pact described in SHORES OF KORANTIA except that the cost in magic points of each favour is fixed rather than negotiable. Nevertheless there may be strings attached – it is not uncommon for the god to require the favoured worshipper to adhere to behaviours or accept a geas, especially if the worshipper is a devotee who is not under the rule of a formal theist cult.

Gifts

Taskan gods sometimes grant Gifts to their devotees. A Gift is just that – there is no 'payment' required in terms of dedicated Magic Points. A Devotion skill of at least 71% is usually required to receive one unless the god has some special agenda of its own that give it cause to relax the rules.

Acquiring a Divine Favour

Cultists usually benefit from privileged access to temples and holy places where they can acquire miracles and boons, and add to or top up their devotional pools as described in RUNEQUEST.

Lay devotees must work even harder to win their god's favours. Without the support of a cult it may also be difficult to gain access to the place where the devotee hopes to supplicate themselves before the god – after all cultists tend to jealously guard the inner sanctums where theist magic can be acquired or recharged. Moreover while a particular place of worship may provide a cultist with all the benefits available from the god, it may offer but a single miracle to lay devotees, who consequently have to make pilgrimages around the holy places of Tarsenia if they are to accumulate a store of miracles. Each city of Tarsenia helps the very many lay worshippers seeking to access divine powers by holding public festivals each year that are designed to make the god available to all the faithful, not just those who are members of theist cults. The central event of these festivals is an Epiphany.

Epiphany

Tarsenian deities offer an Epiphany miracle, which is used to invoke the deity's personal presence at a major religious rite.





This miracle is always restricted by the god to their chosen favourites – the ability to access it is a Gift. Much more rarely a god may decide to make an appearance for reasons of its own because it feels compelled to intervene directly in human affairs.

An epiphany is a great opportunity for the god's faithful to deepen their devotion by adding to or topping up their devotional pools. A devotee who witnesses an epiphany, even if just one voice of prayer among a crowd of worshippers, can also use the opportunity to attempt to beg access to a new miracle, or a boon. The chance of success is equal to the character's Devotion skill, modified by his Taskan Rites skill.

In this instance a fumbled roll results in the god imposing a geas or tabu upon the worshipper while granting no favour. Observing this obligation until the next epiphany will be a pre-requisite for the next attempt to be successful

Vigil

Vigil is the process by which a worshipper attempts to commune with a god, top up his devotional pool and acquire access to a new miracle. The character spends time in a temple or other sacred place – or perhaps in the presence of a holy relic - in prayer, contemplation, incubation (sleeping in hope of a vision), and sometimes fasting. The god's acceptance of a devotee's offerings and granting of the benefits requested can be abstracted to a Task, with each round consisting of 24 hours of vigil. At the Games Master's option, the holiness of the place of worship has an effect on the chance of a positive response – see the section on Places of Worship for more information.

If a supplicant cannot maintain a vigil for long enough to secure its success, or one of the rolls is a fumble causing the vigil to be broken and the attempt abandoned, the failed entreaty to the gods cannot be repeated until the supplicant's Devotion skill has been increased.

Limitations on Personal Religion

Arduous pilgrimage and long periods of vigil - and frequent disappointment - are the cost of pursuing personal religion. However if these aspects are not referenced much in play you may feel your players can take too much advantage of the availability of miracles without the obligations of cult rank, and consequently unbalance the game. There are several ways to introduce limitations. For example, ruling that a lay devotee's maximum Devotional Pool is 1/20th of his Devotion skill, and if the character is a devotee or cultist of more than one deity the sum of all Devotional Pools cannot exceed 1/10th of the character's Taskan Rites skill. An appropriate geas for every gift or miracle granted is another way by which a devotee character might be burdened with obligations that have an effect in play.

Places of Worship

Accessing theist magic requires a more potent form of religious observance than that provided by the Folk Magic rites described above. It also requires worship at a sacrosanct location – a sacred site, shrine or temple that has been consecrated to the deity or has acquired a holy aura of its own due to its connection to the deity.

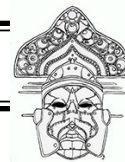
The power of a sacrosanct location's aura limits how many miracles may be on offer to those worshipping there; see the Places of Worship table, below. The number in brackets is the maximum number of miracles that may be available to lay devotees. Note that some locations are sacred to more than one deity, and that even an Awesome temple cannot offer six miracles if the god or gods to whom it is sacred do not have that many miracles to offer. A specific site may offer a unique miracle, one that cannot be acquired from the god at any other location.

Devotees who hold a vigil at a sacrosanct location are more or less likely to have their prayers heard depending on the aura of the place. This is reflected in the difficulty grade of the Devotion roll made to acquire new knowledge of a miracle or petition the god for a boon.

Places of Worship

| SACRED AURA | EQUIVALENT TEMPLE SIZE | AVAILABLE MIRACLES | VIGIL |
|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Numinous | Minor Shrine | 1 (0) | Herculean |
| Holy | Modest Shrine | 1d3 (1) | Formidable |
| Revered | Major Shrine, Minor Temple | 1d3+1 (2) | Hard |
| Hallowed | Modest Temple | 1d3+2 (2) | Standard |
| Awesome | Major Temple | 1d3+3 (3) | Easy |





Sometimes possession of or contact with a holy artefact, or even with an individual who has become a channel for a god's power, can provide the same benefits as a Sacrosanct Location.

Shrines

A shrine is any place, building or altar that is permanently reserved for religious observances. It may be in public or in private, but it is almost always maintained by private individuals or by a local cult or brotherhood at their own expense. Shrines are suitable places for ordinary acts of worship, but unless also consecrated do not offer the ability to add to or replenish a character's devotional pool of Magic Points or acquire Miracles.

Temples

Taskan temples are the focal point for public worship of the gods to whom they are dedicated, and perhaps the headquarters of a cult organisation. The majority are founded at state expense according to rites conducted under the auspices of the Flamen (priests of the deified Tarsen). However sometimes they are paid for, embellished or restored by wealthy individuals who wish to demonstrate their public spiritedness and piety, or by a cult organisation from its own funds. Temples are consecrated, and some become so steeped in divine energy that they can become permanently so, in effect sacrosanct locations. Nevertheless the consecrated part of a temple is usually off-limits to all but key staff, and it is difficult for a non-initiate to gain access to the god at any other time.

Sacred Sites

A sacred site is a place where some part of a god's essence is thought to be permanently present. The regular appearance at the same spot of a particular god leaves a residue, detectable by Second Sight and Mystic Vision, which can also attract spirits in the service of that god to the area. A sacred site is in effect permanently consecrated by a special connection to a specific god – sometimes to more than one, with the benefits to worshippers of being able to replenish their devotional pools through prayer and observance there.

Sacred sites are sometimes under public control like a temple, or at least under some sort of supervision so local communities and cultists do not develop too keen a sense of ownership to the detriment of would-be pilgrims.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is the act of making a journey to visit a place sacred to the god and made holy by its presence, or to encounter the god itself when it makes an epiphany. A pilgrimage may be

a short journey to a local shrine or a major undertaking that involves weeks of travel and significant trouble and expense.

Pilgrimage is equivalent to time spent in training (see RUN-REQUEST pages 110-111), either to acquire or to gain increases to a character's Devotion skill. The duration of a pilgrimage is the total time from beginning of the journey until such time as the character leaves their destination to resume normal life or make for home. If the pilgrim sets out in earnest and completes a substantial part of the journey but does not reach his destination, the Games Master may allow a partial award of skill points, however this should never exceed the minimum possible gain for a successfully completed pilgrimage.

| PILGRIMAGE DONATION | DEVOTION SKILL GAIN |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1 day | 1d3-1 |
| 1 week | 1d4 |
| 1 month | 1d6 |
| 1 season | 1d6+4 |
| 1 year | 2d6+8 |

Just as with other forms of training, a character's Devotion skill cannot be increased through pilgrimage again until it has been increased through the use of one or more Experience Rolls.

A pilgrimage is more than just a way to increase a character's Devotion skill; for many pilgrims the purpose is to worship at a place where they can request the god grant them access to a miracle, or even grant a gift.

SORCERY

Sorcery is a foreign art that has been embraced by many Tarsenian folk, and by the Emperor Cult in particular. The state publishes grimoires to be used by senior members of the Emperor Cult, and also sponsors a school of sorcery established in Felsing so as to ensure the establishment of a solid home-grown foundation for the magical arts. Tarsen did not import sorcery to Tarsenia, although he understood it and used his knowledge of it in creating the rules of Tarsenian Folk Magic.

Taskan Sorcery (INTx2)

Taskan Sorcery makes use of the same protocols and many of the same signs and sigils derived from Assabian rites with some borrowings from Jekkarene magic, interpolating the Tarsenian language only in so far as mundane instructions are required. Hence it is necessary for a Taskan sorcerer to master unfamiliar and sometimes difficult words and phrases, and often to





dress and accoutre themselves in exotic foreign costume and equipment. Sorcery is therefor a rather specialist art, not easily grasped without dedicated instruction and study.

A character's Taskan Sorcery skill is capped by their Literacy skill.

The corpus of spells currently incorporated into the Taskan Sorcery tradition is as follows. Some schools, or individual wizards and sorcerers may have managed to adapt other spells to its protocols, but if so keep their knowledge to themselves.

Abjure, Animate, Banish, Bypass Armour, Damage Enhancement, Damage Resistance, Dominate, Enchant, Enhance, Evoke, Haste, Hinder, Holdfast, Intuition, Mark, Mystic Vision, Neutralise Magic, Protective Ward, Project, Regenerate, Sculpt, Sense, Spell Resistance, Spirit Resistance, Summon, Telepathy, Wrack.

Assabian Sorcery

A character who is literate in Djesmiri may be able to learn and make use of Assabian sorcery spells. Their Taskan Sorcery skill is applied at a level at least one grade harder, but even so their chance of success cannot exceed their Literacy skill in the Djesmiri language.

Spell Slaves

While there is no slavery in the Taskan Empire, nevertheless there are people who fulfill the role of 'spell slaves', a Southern phenomenon in which a magician lives in thrall to a wealthy family or individual. While chattel ownership is not part of the deal a servant – master relationship may well be. At least in the Taskan Empire a spell-slave who is required to follow their master around covered in Attract (harm) charms is rare. Spell slaves may be sourced from overseas, may be discharged from the army, or former apprentices who have failed to make their own way as a magician of independent means.

Sorcery School

The School of Felsang is a place where candidates with a high aptitude for magical arts (INT+POW of 31 or higher) may be taught the basics of sorcery with a view to service in the Taskan army, where others are trained on a fee-paying basis, and where those who have achieved advancement in the civil administration of the Emperor Cult are given the training they need to use the cult's grimoires. All other sorcerous training is acquired through a master and apprentice system. Sorcerers do not tend to belong to orders or guilds, but some may affiliate themselves with organisations in Morkesh or Djesmirket.

Wizardry

Wizardry is a treasonous crime, and is essentially the pursuit or use of antisocial magic. This could be the deployment of sorcery in an assault on another citizen including anything that removes or overrides free will; the conjuration of otherworldly beings that may cause threat or harm if not adequately controlled; or the use of controlled magic such as anagathics (magic that pursues indefinite extension of the normal lifespan). Anything that involves attempting to discern future destinies or spy upon the current activity of those in government is similarly proscribed.

Wizardry may be dealt with through the exile or even execution of its perpetrators.

BARBARIAN MAGIC

Sheng Traditions

Sheng magic has its roots in Animism, being a distinct form of ancestor worship. The only Traditional Spirits, and the only ones that followers of this tradition control in the standard way, are the Tribal Ancestors. Its main practice is the enchantment of magical tokens known as Fetishes that the Tribal Ancestors invest with magical potency, and that are carried or worn, most commonly in the form of tattoos, by almost all tribespeople.

Every Sheng Tribe has its own Rites (Tribal Tradition) as a Standard Skill. Each tradition is like a dialect of a common language, and between traditions there may be one or more grades of difficulty applied to skill rolls.

The Sheng rely on the services of Wise Men (and women) and Shamans to lend magical support to the clans in time of need. Wise Men can be found in many places and in every clan, and are those who have acquired the Binding skill. These people are the experts in rites and ritual, deal with the day-to-day management of the clan's relationship with its Ancestors and the provision and teaching of the clan's magical lore to its members.

Full shamans are provided by the Royal Clan of each tribe and distinguished by their ability to enter into a trance that projects their spirits into the Spirit World. Aside from managing the tribe's relationship with deceased ancestors and presiding over the major rituals that punctuate the year, the shamans are able to offer individual tribesmen access to the tribe's magical support and protection through the use of tribal fetishes, of which there are a great variety with many different purposes and powers.





A Royal Clan is capable of generating new fetishes, or adding or taking away access to a fetish from a clan within the same tribe. This is done using Trance to meet with the tribal ancestors and negotiate a new overall covenant with them.

The Ancestral Pact

A Sheng character can devote one or more Magic Points to a Pact with the Ancestors to lend potency to their fetishes. The magic points are placed at the disposal of the ancestors until the character dies and joins the ancestors himself. A Royal Clan shaman works towards dedicating the vast majority of his Magic Points to the tribal ancestors, however any character who wants to make use of his clan's Folk Magic must enter into the ancestral pact and is expected to work towards a state in which a quarter or more of his Magic Points are deployed in this way.

Clan Magic Fetishes

A tribe has a number of clans, each with their own version of the tribal tradition that includes access to Folk Magic, expressed through a unique pattern of tattoos referred to as the Clan Fetish. Once awakened, a Sheng's clan tattoo can be continually added to as he increases his access to and knowledge of his clan's lore. These tattoos are the most common of a host of fetishes employed by the Sheng as almost every adult has them. Some clans have unique elements in their fetishes, perhaps a Pact with a nature spirit that provides a special ability or power or a unique Traditional Spirit, or even access to Miracle provided by a powerful clan ancestor. Clan Fetishes are activated, and Folk Magic cast, using the Rites (Tribal Tradition) skill. Casting time and Magic Point cost is calculated as per the standard rules.

One or more Folk Magic spells are learned upon initiation into adulthood, more may be added as the tribesman proves his worth. The warrior might perform a deed, but equally could bring some increase of wealth to the community. As a rule of thumb, the standard measure of 'notable wealth' that applies in these cases is a 'fine stallion', which is equivalent in value to 4–5 ponies or 2 horses (and to some 800–1,000 Taskeens). Learning the new Folk Magic spell requires the usual expenditure of Experience Rolls, and a new addition to the character's clan tattoos.

A clan's maximum store of Folk Magic is determined on 1d6+4.

A Sheng passes from one clan to another by marriage or adoption he carries his heritage with him, and in this case simply begins a new tattoo on some other part of his body to chart his progress in the traditions of the new clan without losing access to the old.

Gaining a Clan Fetish

The process of creating a Clan Fetish takes place within the recipient's home community, where his kin celebrate with him the rituals associated with some new step forward in a tribesman's life. Needless to say, the basic requirement to qualify for receiving a Clan Fetish is the support and goodwill of one's clan. In addition they should be considered ready to be an adult, with the responsibility that entails – and some clans may demand proof in the form of a successful hunt, a contribution to the clan's efforts in battle, or breaking a spirited horse that will become the first steed the candidate owns.

Tribal Fetishes

There are several types of fetish that are common to all the tribes, with some variation in the physical component used to embody them. Tribal Fetishes are entirely in the gift of the Royal Clan shamans, unless there is some historical idiosyncrasy that has left a clan able to incorporate one into their Clan Fetish.

Procedure

Acquiring a Tribal Fetish inevitably requires a journey to a tribal centre as the Royal Clan Shamans are not in the business of making house calls. The fetish is also prepared for or by the supplicant under the supervision of the Shaman and with the help of the Shaman's entourage. The Royal Clan Sham expects gifts in return, at least one item of 'notable wealth' per Magic Point to be invested in the Tribal Fetish.

The shaman enters a trance through which he will learn if the recipient is considered worthy by the Tribal Ancestors. He may return from his ethereal journey with a spirit that wants to challenge the recipient, or a task the Ancestors have given, or a taboo that the Ancestors have set out as a necessary condition for their support.

Sample Tribal Fetishes

Soul Fetish

Required by a shaman to gain the Trance ability, and to enable an Ancestor to manifest in the shaman's body while the shaman 'hides' his soul in the fetish. Requires a minimum of two magic points dedicated to the Ancestral Pact.

Spirit Fetish

Typically used for binding spirits of a combined Intensity of 1 per Magic Point, used for non-traditional spirits.





Spirit Ward

Blocks hostile spirits of 1 Intensity per Magic Point.

Spell Ward

Blocks hostile spells of 3 Magnitude per Magic Point.

Wound Ward

Blocks damage after armour and other protection is accounted for at a rate of 1 per Magic Point, or blocks damage of a particular type (piercing, crushing, slashing, fire) only at a rate of 3 per Magic Point; or negates the ill effects of one combat Special Effect such as Bleed, Stun Location, Impale or Maximise Damage at a cost of 2 Magic Points. Those who are protected by a Wound Ward may be expected to accept a geas to go into battle without armour or even naked.

Poison Ward

Provides immunity against one type or category of poison (Serpent Venom/Injected, Herbal/Ingested, /Contact etc) per Magic Point.

Luck Fetish

Provides an additional Luck Point for a cost of 1 Magic Point. This fetish cannot be stacked.

Some examples of common fetishes and components are in the Fetish table, below.

Using Fetishes

Most fetishes only have to be worn or carried to do their work, and are considered “always on”. As they are powered by Magic Points dedicated by the beneficiary, fetishes usually only work for their owner and are not transferable. If the owner dies there is a small chance, equal to the owners POW, that the fetish will retain a potency that can be transferred to a new owner.

Fetishes

| FETISH TYPE | TENGIR | ESKAR | KISMEK | DRAGOMAN |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------|-----------------|
| Clan Fetish | Tattoo | Tattoo | Tattoo | Tattoo |
| Soul Fetish | Horse Tail | Tattoo | Tattoo | Horse Tail |
| Spirit Fetish | Varies | Varies | Tattoo | Varies |
| Spirit Ward | Phylactery | Headband | Tattoo | Phylactery |
| Spell Ward | Piercing | Torc | Tattoo | Amethyst |
| Wound Ward | Tattoo | Jacket | Tattoo | Girdle or belt |
| Poison Ward | Snakeskin | Snakeskin | Tattoo | Piercing |
| Luck Fetish | Finger Bones | Gopher skull | Tattoo | Silver talisman |





CULTS

For both native Tarsenians and for many foreigners who have taken citizenship by joining the Emperor Cult, participation in worship of one or more of the Tarsenian Gods is an essential part of being Taskan. Many Taskans are members of several cults at the same time – this is a sign both of one’s piety and of one’s commitment to the wider community. In addition, the Emperor-Cult cannot offer any support in the afterlife, at least not until Zygas Taga’s apotheosis is complete, and so the traditional gods provide for the most fundamental concerns of much of humanity.

The worship of the Taskan Gods has both social and personal, public and private aspects. In reality it is a myriad of small cults each serving a specific community, trade or even family, each maintaining its own rules and patterns of worship. The majority are small in scale and local in character to the extent that in the larger towns and cities there may be several cults even to the same deity, often squabbling between themselves for status and respect.

THE TASKAN PANTHEON

The pantheon of gods assembled by the hero Tarsen has a distinctive character and is worshipped in ways that a recognisably different from the religious practices of surrounding lands and people. Tarsenians do not, as a rule, bother worshipping the impersonal forces of nature or indeed those gods who are so powerful or abstract that they are difficult to relate to on a personal level. Their gods are closer to mankind, each with an interest in some specific aspect of the human condition. The vast majority of people will have as many on their side as they

can muster and maybe a clutch of more obscure or purely local deities as well.

For each deity the spheres of interest are noted, and the miracles that may be available to a lay devotee. Initiates of formal cults serving the deity will have a wider range of miracles to choose from, and there may be others unique to a specific shrine or holy site available even to devotees who make a pilgrimage there.

Tarsen

Tarsen is the founding father of the Tarsenian race, patron of law, custom and religion. He was once a mortal man who was promoted to godhood to join the pantheon of gods that he himself had assembled. Tarsen’s worshippers and devotees are often clergymen, who officiate at services of worship and provide instruction in religious lore.

Sphere: Law, Custom, Religion

Miracles: Covenant, Tongues

Thesh

The Tarsenian fire god is patron of the crafts which fire makes possible. He is also a death god since the Tarsenians almost without exception cremate their dead and so he can therefore be called to preside over the last rites of a corpse before a dead citizen’s spirit is sent on its way to the Many Hells. Thesh is the tutelary god of many guilds of craftsmen, chiefly metalworkers, armourers and blacksmiths. He is the patron god of the city of Taskay, where the aristocracy also worship him and a regiment of warriors, The Unconquerable Heroes of Taskay, made up of





devotees in his cult, form the Taskan equivalent of the Praetorian Guard.

Sphere: Fire, Metallurgy, War

Miracles: Dismiss Elemental, Summon Salamander

Hoonvel

Hoonvel is credited with persuading the earth goddess Samanse to part with her daughter Kait, a grain goddess, for two thirds of the year to be his wife. Thus the ancestors learned to till the soil and harvest crops for food. Hoonvel is patron god of farmers as well as labourers, represented as a cheerful and bawdy fellow whose rites are usually drunken, riotous affairs. Hoonvel has no civic temples but is worshipped at rustic altars.

Sphere: Agriculture, Husbandry, Labour

Miracles: Fattening, Fecundity, Turn Earth

Samanse

This is the Tarsenian version of the eastern earth goddess Tolat. She is one of the few divinities of the Tarsenian pantheon to whom permanently staffed temples are erected. The women of a city elect honoured matrons from among their number to administer the temple, who preside over many of the important festivals in the life of the community and its citizens. There is always an altar to Kait within the precincts of her temple.

Sphere: Domestic Crafts, Family, Motherhood

Miracles: Cure Malady

Kait

Kait is the barley-goddess of the Tarsenians. She is most commonly represented in the persons of the young virgins who attend upon Samanse's priestesses and, at the appropriate festivals, of brides-to-be and expectant mothers. In ritual and myth she is closely tied to the farmer-god Hoonvel.

Sphere: Barley, Brewing, Crops

Miracles: Bless Barley

Machank

Machank is the favourite Tarsenian war-god. Only those who are willing to risk mortal danger should devote themselves to him, as he blesses his devotees with a divine madness that compels them to seek out the point of maximum danger on the battlefield and never to flee before the enemy while there is still some goal to be achieved. Machank's military devotees always

receive extra pay, along with an extra share of any captured booty and can count five years service for every one they complete. Those that survive more than a year or two in his service usually feel they have earned their renown and retire from active participation in his cult.

Sphere: Battle, Conflict, Killing

Miracles: Berserk, Fear, Seal Wound

Jarmost

Jarmost is the patron of seafarers, travellers and astrologers. He taught men how to navigate by the stars and how to use a compass when the stars are not visible. He is also credited with the invention of the wheel, the first boat and the yoke – which Jarmost used to pull a cart but later showed it to his brother Hoonvel who used it to draw a plough. Jarmost is also credited with the invention of numbers, which he placed upon a wheel to measure distance. 'Jarmost's Wheels' refers to an astrological device, which demonstrates the movements of the heavenly bodies and is a useful tool in navigation.

Sphere: Crafts, Invention, Navigation

Miracles: Clear Skies

Sumis

Sumis is a goddess of forest, mountain and other wild places of hunting and survival. Her worshippers are often those who wish to explore their primal instincts and understand their place in nature's grand scheme. Some are hunters and woodsmen by trade. She has no permanently staffed temples but many Sacred Sites inhabited by unpredictable spirit guardians. Sumis can save those whom she loves from the dangers of the wild, or she can unleash those same dangers upon those she despises. Her Chameleon miracle is only useful in a natural environment.

Sphere: Hunting, Nature, Wild Animals

Miracles: Chameleon, Growth, Madness, Rejuvenate

Jezri

An imported Jekkarene goddess, whose initiates are young maidens dedicated to serve in the temples of Zygus Taga and his consort Jekkara. These girls perform ritual dances at the major festivals and live in strict seclusion overseen by a priestess. Jezri is manifest as the evening star, which accompanies the moon in the night sky.

Sphere: Dance, Obedience, Virginity

Miracles: Harmonize





Jekkara

Temples to the night goddess are associated with those of Zygas Taga. Only Jekkarene women of noble birth may serve her and outside the cult's homeland its only role is to add extra pomp and mythic importance to the rites of Emperor worship. The Goddess is the fount of women's wisdom and is the patron of secret knowledge and the power that it brings. Jekkara's Miracles have a default Magnitude of 1 between dawn and dusk.

Sphere: Intuition, Magic, Night

Miracles: Moonbright

Merai

Merai is the patron god of the creative arts – music, poetry, drama and dance – and also of the art of healing. He is the tutelary god of the city of Merat, which is the only place a major festival is celebrated in his honour. Merai is usually represented as an adolescent with girlish features. His male devotees often disguise themselves as women and the women as men. Merai can gift his devotees with creative talents.

Sphere: Performing Arts

Miracles: Enthral

Tethis

This goddess is the Tarsenian personification of love. She has a famous temple in Zarina, where the temple servants prostitute themselves in its courts. Her devotees are often wealthy urbanites who seek diversion through their sexual liaisons and build up complex social networks through which they indulge their passions.

Sphere: Fertility, Erotic Love, Prostitution

Miracles: Fecundity

Basat

Considered an imported deity from Djesmirket, Basat is the Tarsenians' god of light, healing and selfless devotion. He is the arch-enemy of the death-demon Gomorg, whose underworld minions only dare invade the world of men at night when Basat is at rest. In folklore Basat has courted Tethis with the help of Merai's poetry and song and fought for her hand against her cruel husband Machank. He has also pursued his sister Sumis for love and rescued Kait from the underworld to restore her to his friend Hoonvel. Basat is a popular cult among soldiers. His great festival is held at the city of Pryjarna.

Sphere: Companionship, Life, Truth,

Miracles: Daybright, Sacred Band

Gomorg

Gomorg has first claim to the souls of Tarsenians when they die. While his minions guide a departed soul to whatever destiny awaits them in the Many Hells, Gomorg can collect and dispose of those who have made no proper provision for the afterlife in whatever way he sees fit. Gomorg is a god who is very possessive of his rights and privileges, among which is entitlement to lost souls. Gomorg's devotees are often undertakers by trade but he can also count amongst them necromancers and murderers, and condemned criminals are executed under his auspices. The Necropoleis in which the Tarsenians inter their dead usually have a small temple in his name at their heart.

Sphere: Afterlife, Death and Burial

Miracles: Dismiss Ghost

Hamath

Hamath is the champion of the poor but because the Empire supports its citizens who have fallen upon hard times Hamath is left with the care of the rootless, the oppressed, the enslaved and the outlawed. Hence he is also a god of thieves. The 'self help' groups which form under his patronage are notorious for helping themselves to other peoples' property. Hamath appears either male or female, usually as a fat wealthy character in the act of giving out donations.

Sphere: Generosity, Liberty, Thievery

Miracles: Backlash

NEW THEIST MIRACLES

Basat's Daybright Miracle

Duration Special, Touch, Rank Initiate

Daybright is similar to the Extension miracle but affects any form of magic except Theist Miracles. The caster can extend the Duration of any non-instant spells of his own casting up to a combined magnitude of 1 per magnitude of the Daybright miracle. The spell can only be cast between sunrise and sunset and lasts until sunset the same day and no longer. If the spell being extended is an offensive spell, the target gets to resist that spell a second time at the expiry of its original Duration.





Basat's Dismiss Ghost Miracle

Instant, Ranged, Rank Initiate

Dismiss Ghost banishes the spirits of the dead infesting the physical world to the Many Hells where they belong. Spirits with a POW of no more than three times the Intensity of the Miracle are affected. A ghost gets no resistance roll, however if it is bound by other magic the miracle must have a greater magnitude than the binding to work.

Basat's Lay to Rest Miracle

Duration Permanent, Touch, Rank Initiate

This miracle is as described in the RUNEQUEST rulebook, however it is a specific rite used for the devotees of Basat on account of the intact burials employed for members of his cult where most Tarsenians practice cremation and hope for future resurrection in the flesh. Lay to Rest guards against the greater risk of tampering with the spirit of the deceased when remains lie uncremated. Any attempt by a non-Basati to summon the spirit of the deceased or otherwise tamper with the body or departed spirit with magic must overcome the Magnitude of the Lay to Rest Miracle to have any chance of success.

Basat's Restore Corpse Miracle

Touch, Duration Minutes, Rank Acolyte

This miracle perfects an imperfect corpse, readying it for resurrection. Any lurking diseases are neutralised, poisons and toxins are expelled, wounds healed and decomposition reversed. Missing limbs are not restored, and the corpse must possess all vital locations for this miracle to be worthwhile. Even a skeletal corpse can be restored if the magic is powerful enough, however it must retain its overall form and if the skeleton is also destroyed through cremation or decomposition the miracle will fail. The required magnitude is dependent on the state of the corpse and the CON of the target when alive, however the

miracle is also limited to creatures of a SIZ no greater than 3x the Magnitude:

If this spell is cast as part of a ritual for the Resurrect or Summon Ghost miracle, the Duration is deemed to last until such time as the total ritual is complete. Once the Duration expires the body begins to decompose again as normal if it has not been brought back to life by having a spirit inhabit it.

Basat's Resurrect Miracle

Ritual, Touch, Rank Priest

This miracle has the additional trait of Ritual and consequently a casting time of a minimum 1 hour. The ritual needs to take place in a space that is sanctified or consecrated, or in the presence of an artefact or holy man. It can only be used on one of Basat's own devotees whose spirit is in, or en route to, the afterlife provided for them by the god, and whose corpse is on hand for revival. If the corpse being used is older than the one day per Magnitude permitted by the spell, or in any case if it is in poor condition, this can be overcome by the use of the Restore Corpse miracle. If Resurrect is successfully cast, the deceased returns to life and is expected thenceforward to serve the cult community in some form.

An Excommunication spell immediately dispels and reverses the resurrection, and if the target refuses to behave in a fitting manner the priests are entitled to use it.

Basat's Summon Ghost Miracle

Duration minutes, Resist (Willpower), Ritual Summons

This rite must be deployed to resurrect someone who is not a Basat devotee (hence whose spirit does not reside with the God), or a Basat devotee whose spirit has not found its way to its allotted place in the afterlife. The magician must have the mortal remains to hand of whichever individual they are summoning, and the target must have a POW no greater than 3 per Magnitude of the miracle. If the spirit being summoned is for some reason trapped in its current location the caster must overcome the Magnitude of whatever entity or force is holding it there. If the spirit itself is unwilling to be summoned, the roll is opposed by the spirit's Willpower.

The spirit manifests in the corpse it is invited to repossess. An unwilling ghost cannot be forced to remain there beyond the spell's duration without additional magic. It can now be Dominated using an appropriate spell (Dominate Human, Or Dominate Citizen as it is no longer technically a spirit or ghost) to speak, answer the caster's questions or perform some action, or simply to stay put. A spirit that remains with a viable body after

| CONDITION OF THE CORPSE | REQUIRED MAGNITUDE |
|--|--|
| Fresh, recently dead or well preserved through refrigeration or pickling, no more than 1 Major and/or 3 Serious Wounds or equivalent | 1 Per 3 CON of deceased person or creature |
| Dismembered, decomposing with significant loss of soft tissue, mummified remains of any age | 1 Per 2 CON |
| Fully decomposed skeletal, no remaining soft tissue | 1 Per CON |





the Duration of the Summons expires is permanently restored to life.

Basat's Turn Undead Miracle

Instant, Ranged, Resist (Willpower), Rank Acolyte

Turn Undead sends out a blast of energy in an arc of 90° in front of the caster that destroys the creations of necromancy. It affects undead creatures in front of the caster in the order in which the blast hits them – i.e. closest targets first. To destroy a skeleton costs 1 Magnitude, a zombie 2, a wraith or ghoul 3, a Vampire 5. Each creature attacked reduces the Magnitude by this amount, whether or not it is destroyed. Magnitude in excess of this amount passes on to the next target in line.

Epiphany

Duration Special, Rank Acolyte

For each of the Tarsenian gods there is a special Epiphany miracle, which is usually only used on the God's annual High Holy Day – which can vary from city to city even for the same divinity. Epiphany causes the deity to manifest, often by inhabiting a cult statue, relic or even a worshipper for the Duration. The Miracle is cast in a consecrated area but the purpose is usually to make the god available to the people as a whole, so it should take place in a big open public space, or the focus of the god's epiphany might be paraded around the city.

The ability to learn this miracle is a Gift, only ever made available to someone with a Devotion of no less than 71%; the local authorities in each city or province will be keen to make sure that the local cults can furnish an individual able and willing to access the miracle in order to properly observe the god's annual festival. As a result, there is usually at least one cult honouring each important local deity that has official recognition and support and is expected to nurture individuals within their ranks who meet this requirement. The Duration of the spell is 15 minutes per 10% of the caster's Devotion and the actual epiphany is the centre-piece of religious observances that can last for several days.

Any state-level magics cast in the God's presence will take their proper effect and everyone else who actively participates and offers up at least 50% of their Magic Points for the day and succeeds in a Rites (own) roll, will benefit from the god's Blessing.

Such major rites usually take place at the god's public temples, however sometimes there is a more important Sacred Site or temple outside of the city and everyone goes there instead. Cults may acquire (through their members) the Call (specific deity) Divine spell and call the god forth without state sanction or

public access. This is regarded as bad form, probably treasonous and is a politically dangerous thing to do.

Hoonvel's Conceal Crops Miracle

Duration (1 Day); Rank Initiate, Touch, Area (1 Hectare)

This Miracle hides crops from would-be pillagers. The crops are literally swallowed up by the earth and removed from sight. A field, orchard or similar of 1 Hectare can be affected per Magnitude.

This miracle in its various versions came to prominence during the Wars of Unification. In some places it is provided by a local nature spirit or hero. It can be accessed by devotees of Hoonvel who make the pilgrimage to his sacred site at Ushaya, a hill-town in the territory of Merat that was a famous place of refuge during the wars.

Reports exist of a Thennalt version of this spell in which the crops continue to grow beneath the soil until they ripen, but are not returned to the sunlight until the caster is dead. This can allow a man to go to war out of season, leaving his crops in stasis beneath the soil to be revealed to his family upon his death – but potentially requires the caster make a human sacrifice of himself to properly serve his community.

Hoonvel's Fattening

Duration Special, Rank Initiate, Touch

This miracle accelerates the growth of a domesticated INS-driven animal to make it ready for instant use, usually to slaughter for meat. The effect is achieved during the course of the miracle's 15 minutes duration, and is permanent. For every point of magnitude the animal gains 10% in weight, however it cannot exceed the maximum SIZ characteristic for the species.

An alternative version of this miracle has the target creature simply rapidly gain age, at a rate of one month per magnitude, until such time as it reaches its full rolled SIZ score. The creature retains its current condition – hence if this spell is cast on an immature but well fed and healthy beast the result will be an older, larger, healthy specimen.

Hoonvel's Turn Earth Miracle

Duration Special, Rank Acolyte

This miracle summons one or more gnomes for the sole purpose of ploughing the earth. One Hectare per Magnitude of the spell can be ploughed in the course of a single day. The caster must mark out the area to be affected, and the means of doing so may vary from place to place. Common approaches include placing boundary markers, making a circuit of leather strips, or





simply ploughing a furrow the hard way with a team of oxen that encompasses the desired area of affect.

Jekkara's Moonbright miracle

Duration Special, Touch, Rank Initiate

Moonbright is used as an extension spell, affecting any form of magic except Theist miracles. The caster can extend the Duration of any non-instant spells of her own casting up to a combined Magnitude of 1 per magnitude of the Moonbright spell. The spell can only be cast between sunset and sunrise and lasts until sunrise the same night and no longer. If the spell being extended is an offensive spell, the target gets to resist that spell a second time at the expiry of its original Duration.

Kait's Bless Barley Miracle

Duration Special, Touch, Rank Initiate

This miracle is used to bless barley after it has been harvested. Each point of Magnitude blesses one large sack (10 ENC) of barley so that it has premium qualities. Blessed Barley is more highly prized and nutritious than wheat and the well-to-do insist that both bread and beer are made from it. If used on seed corn the miracle ensures the seeds have the very best chance of landing in a good spot when sown, of germinating and putting down good roots. As a result it takes only 10 pecks of Blessed Seed to sow a Hectare of land – half the amount of normal seed required.

Blessed Barley is sold at no less than three times the going rate for regular barley.

Machank's Seal Wound Miracle

Duration Minutes, Touch, Rank Initiate

The devotee uses this miracle to bless a weapon. For the Duration the weapon inflicts damage that cannot be healed by Sorcery or Folk Magic.

Sumis' Blast Crops Miracle

Duration Special, Touch, Area (Square KM), Rank Initiate

This miracle has the opposite effect to the standard spell Bless Crops. It affects a number of square kilometers equal to the Magnitude of the spell. The target area will be infested with creatures that root out seed corn from the ground and the field itself will be choked with weeds that force out all crops planted by man. Blast Crops and Bless Crops cancel each other out. Each instance of this spell known by a worshipper can be used once per year.

Tarsen's Covenant Miracle

Duration Special, Enchantment, Rank Initiate

A Covenant miracle is used to enforce a promise made. The target is the individual making the pledge, who must be a willing participant in the process, however begrudgingly.

A covenant can be any oath or promise agreed between caster and target. The target speaks or reads aloud the oath that this spell will enforce, and the caster provides the spell, or spells, that will afflict the target should he break his promise. These spells can be of any kind and are fuelled by a 'devotional pool' specifically created for the Covenant. The target must agree to the number of Magic Points he has to allocate as part of his willing submission to the spell. The caster may have a 'witness' present to provide the spells if he desires. The caster or his witness may manipulate any sorcery spells he applies when the covenant is established within his normal limitations. The spells are fuelled by the magic points dedicated to the covenant by the target. No Resistance roll nor any form of counter-magic can defend against the punishment meted out by a broken Covenant.

The Covenant lasts until any limiting conditions placed upon it are met or the penalty is triggered, but in any event expires after a year and a day. The only way to extricate oneself from a Covenant spell is through expiry, divine intervention or satisfaction of its terms and conditions. If the oath expires naturally the spell target recovers the Magic Points they dedicated to it.

Tarsen's Tongues Miracle

Duration Minutes, Touch, Rank Initiate

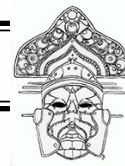
The target of this Miracle can be understood by others as if he were speaking their native language. For each point of Magnitude the caster can nominate one language in which listeners will be able to understand the recipient's speech. An unwilling recipient may resist the spell using Willpower.

Tarsen's Truespeak Miracle

Duration Minutes, Touch, Resist (Willpower), Rank Priest

Truespeak renders the target of the miracle unable to tell a lie. The target can of course say nothing at all, or carefully choose their words. Note that Taskan citizens may not, by law, be subjected to this magic for the purpose of giving evidence in court except under the auspices of an Inquisitor.





TYPES OF CULT

Many cults are simply the religious aspect of a community that a character already belongs to, whether this is their family, military unit, guild or neighbourhood. In these cases membership is automatic, there is little or no hierarchy and the purpose of the cult is simply to come together for acts of worship. These informal cults, which usually involve no theistic magic, are known as Congregations.

More formal cult structures are set up in order to make sure that a god's annual festival will be properly observed, or to maintain a sacred site or guard a sacred artefact. Some of these cults have been in existence for many generations and have established rules and hierarchies involving initiations and cult ranks as well as being able to offer easier access to Theistic miracles than a private citizen can secure for themselves through acts of devotion and pilgrimage. If a cult receives state support it will almost certainly have a public temple or sacred site to look after and will gain some influence, if not direct control, over any local congregations that worship the same deity.

Congregations (Folk Magic Cults)

These cults are mostly for the benefit of, and run by, the lay worshippers. The required rituals to conduct ordinary worship services are Folk Magic spells, and so even a lay worshipper might know them. Alternatively there are professional clerics available for hire who can be called in to conduct a service for the cult on a daily or hourly rate. Congregations usually do not have ranks of acolytes and priests. Individual members may become devotees of their favourite deity, able to call upon miracles or even be granted divine Gifts, and while this may earn them the respect and admiration of their peers it does not necessarily grant them higher rank. Nevertheless this is regarded as an admirable purpose in itself, and a community cult usually tries to offer whatever material support they can to devotees and pilgrims in keeping with their means.

Congregations exist to serve a particular locality or an identifiable community who live in it, such as members of a particular profession, family or ethnic group. The community that a cult serves may be as small as a city block, a trade guild or rural hamlet, or as large as a city quarter or township. Community Cults constitute the greatest proportion of cults to be found within the Empire and often act as 'feeder cults' to more formal Public Cults that take overall responsibility for ensuring that the key deities are properly honoured.

Membership

Anyone who is an active member of the community from which the congregation is drawn is usually welcome to participate. There is no initiation required. Worshippers will be expected to make small voluntary donations of money or time in keeping with their means. Often the hierarchy is simply assumed from the community in which the cult maintains its roots, so that a family head, a guild master or an army officer will lead their dependents or co-workers or soldiers in worship.

Devotees

Congregations will usually support a member who wants to set about becoming the god's devotee. Devotees may in return consider it their duty to volunteer more of their own time and resources to support the cult in return.

Objects of Worship

Congregations can be established to worship any of the pantheon of Tarsenian gods, and sometimes a selected group of up to 6 deities. They often have a charitable purpose, doing their bit to contribute money and time to the annual festivals in honour of the god and providing support to those who intend to use the festival for an act of devotion.

Worship

Congregation members contribute time or resources to the care of any local shrines or temples and typically meet for worship a minimum of once per season and sometimes as often as 2–3 times per month. Their places of worship may be an open air shrine in the street, someone's house or yard or a meeting hall hired for the occasion.

Benefits

Membership of a congregation typically benefit from camaraderie and moral support, perhaps reflected in acquiring Contacts and Allies that may be of use in play. A common way of supporting a cult member is in providing funds or logistical help for a pilgrimage, or ensuring a worshipper has the right ritual clothing and equipment to make their act of devotion at a festival. If a player character wants to get the backing of his community for an act of religious devotion, an Influence roll should be made to persuade fellow members or congregation leaders to provide help in money or kind.

Folk Magic

Congregations always teach the Blessing, may have knowledge of a further 1d6 folk magic spells including the key Worship





ritual and other Folk Magic spells appropriate to their purpose and membership. Many communities maintain a grimoire containing the required knowledge or have them inscribed in stone or bronze and set up in public spaces, or perhaps on the God's shrine itself.

These spells may be freely available to all members who will take the time to learn.

Skills

A congregation will offer free instruction in Taskan Rites but does not normally offer any other training or magic, except in as much as they may be fully integrated into a professional association that does. The congregation may assist a prospective pilgrim by securing training or instruction in skills and knowledge required for their journey.

Theist Cults

There are organized cult structures through which a worshipper's devotion to a Taskan deity can be channelled and ready access to miracles and gifts acquired. These cults can be divided into Public Cults, which benefit from state support and recognition, and Mystery Cults, which are private, sometimes even secret organisations.

Public Cults

Public cults are mostly specific to individual cities and provinces in the Empire and are those that are supported and encouraged by the local Emperor-cult administration. In order to receive such support they must first be endorsed by the local Flaman, a priest in service to Tarsen the deified founder who acts as the regulator of religious affairs. In the provinces local non-Taskan cults may also benefit from state support, maintaining ancient tradition under imperial patronage.

Every city has a board of priests – between five and ten in number - who are experts in religious matters and devotees of Tarsen, able to access the consecrate and Extension miracles which are essential to establish and maintain a public temple, which it is then up to the cult to manage. However once a temple has been in existence for some time and has been the site of an epiphany it acquires a sacred character of its own, and their work is done unless some disaster occurs which requires the temple be reconstituted.

Public cults are entrusted with the maintenance of key religious sites or artefacts and proper orchestration and performance of ritual when a deity is summoned to receive worship in person at

his annual public festival. A public cult has overall responsibility for the upkeep and management of a god's public temples. Many of their members are devotee-initiates, there are priest and sometimes acolyte rank members, and theist magic is available. The most famous and powerful public cult is the cult of Thesh at Taskay, which not only provides the head priest of the local Emperor-cult but also maintains its own military wing that forms the elite nucleus of the Taskan army.

Membership

Those who participate in a Congregation which has an association with a theist cult are considered its lay members, as are cult employees who are also expected to turn up to religious services.

A prospective initiate in a public cult must be a locally registered citizen of good standing with at least a couple of years' membership of a congregation associated with the cult. In some cases it is expected they have already made their devotions to the god prior to initiation. The cult's leader must be someone of status who can manage the relationship with the Emperor-cult and manage the wider public image and influence of the cult. Very often this leader will be a priest of the local Emperor-cult anyway.

Objects of Worship

A city or diocese maintains a public cult for every deity for whom they hold a public festival in which the god is invited to make an epiphany. For example in Zarina there are public cults to Tethis, Gomorg, Hoonvel, Tarsen, Samanse and (at a sacred site some distance from the city), Sumis.

Worship

The elite cadre of initiates in a public cult meets for private worship at least once per month. They do not hold open rites of worship that anyone lay worshippers can attend except for the annual public festival. The whole existence of their cult is, however, geared towards the successful management of the festival, when the god is called to make an epiphany and taken out of the temple to move among the city crowds so that they can make their acts of devotion or seek the god's blessing.

Benefits

Members of a public cult have access to the means to dedicate Magic Points to their devotional pool or to replenish points used. This is a resource that the cult can use to make membership a privilege and enforce the rules and behaviours on cult members.

Public cults encourage their initiates to build up their Devotion and Exhort skills. They also encourage initiates to learn





Miracles and accept Gifts where appropriate but often impose rules on which cult ranks are entitled to access what magical privileges. The god itself may be indifferent to these rules; they are simply designed to create a sense of order and hierarchy within the cult itself.

A public cult expects its initiate members to be aware of the responsibilities of membership and allocate much of their free time to the organisation and certainly not to take on other cultic obligations if they might impinge upon the time they can devote to cult business. The initiate's Devotion score should be kept higher than for any other deity.

Obligations and Compulsions

Being an initiate in a public cult brings with it significant obligations. The initiate is regarded as fully engaged with the cult's business, maintaining the temple and so forth. However it is common for better-off initiates who have private business to attend to, and even for priests, to instead provide funds for the cult's coffers. The normal form is that the initiate pays over funds equivalent to his own cost of living for the time he wants to reserve for private business. These arrangements are convenient for both sides, but in no way release the initiate from their formal duties connected to major religious rites and festivals.

Mystery Cults

Mystery cults are a tradition independent of Tarsen's arrangements of the Tarsenian Pantheon. Some are very ancient, pre-dating Tarsen's ministry. Others are more recent, sprung up in response to a specific esoteric need or opportunity. The more recent the foundation, the more they may attract suspicion from the official quarters and the wider public.

Mystery cults are unusual in that they embody a particular understanding of a deity into the way they worship. Step-by-step the worshipper gains a greater understanding of the god's role in the universe, sometimes by living a life informed by the cult's principles, sometimes by the revelation of secret meaning in stories told about the god. Mystery cults are usually created around a particular sacred site, artefact or a holy man and are often outside of state control.

A mystery cult will teach a unique Exhort skill, which must be used instead of the Exhort (Tarsenian Gods) skill devised by Tarsen.

Membership

Mystery Cults are usually open to non-citizens and foreigners. They often proselytize, both looking for converts and sending

senior members out to found offshoots of the cult in distant places, however they almost always try to sell themselves by creating scarcity and stressing how difficult it is to be admitted as an initiate.

Lay members of a mystery cult are essentially preparing themselves for initiation. These cults prefer candidates who have not yet acquired miracles as a lay devotee so that their bond is made through the auspices of the cult.

They sometimes have the most elaborate hierarchies in which even the normal cult ranks of initiate, acolyte and priest are divided into sub-groups reflecting variations in cult role or status.

Objects of Worship

The cult of Zygas Taga, the divine emperor, is a mystery cult – so too is that of Basat. Both however have become central pillars of the establishment. Cults are known, or rumoured to exist, that worship obscure deities that Tarsen did not know of or encounter, as well as foreign gods such as Shomat, Haliset and Tolat. There are also a few survivals of cults that preserve ancient, pre-Tarsen modes of worship even of the standard Tarsenian gods. In such cases there must be a reason for the survival – perhaps guardianship of some sacred site or artefact, or some important miracle that is only available through the ancient cult.

Worship

The most obvious difference to normal worship is their tendency to hold the most important rituals in secret and take great pains to ensure that the profane have no idea what they are up to. In some cases this can be the cause of suspicion, and in some cases the suspicion is merited. The secrecy can even apply within the cult, so that members are not allowed to witness the rites conducted by those of more senior rank.

Mystery cults sometimes encourage pilgrimage, especially foreign cults that urge their members to go to visit their land of origin.

Benefits

Mystery Cults offer the normal benefits of theist magic, but in addition might offer exotic sorcery and other foreign magic or unique divine gifts. Like a public cult, a mystery cult promises access to the god that is regularly available rather than dependent on annual religious festivals or pilgrimages, and a more complete set of Miracles possibly including some that are unique to the cult.





Obligations and Compulsions

A cult may impose some strict rules upon its members that they should adhere to in day-to-day behavior, possibly to include taboos and geasa. Sometimes rules do not have magical rewards and punishments associated with them – they are devised and imposed by the cult hierarchy rather than by the god and influence the initiate's standing within the cult and their chances of promotion.

Clandestine Mystery Cults

On the whole mystery cults are recognised as important and relevant parts of the Taskan society. There are exceptions – cults that have been caught calling up deities in private, entertaining dangerous ideas and agitating about them, or pursuing socially unhealthy goals in company with socially unacceptable daemons have often been proscribed. Proscription may not be effective; sometimes the effect is to drive the cult underground. Persisting with worship the state disapproves of, and in particular calling upon a deity to make an epiphany in private, is definitely treasonous.

Funeral Clubs

Funeral clubs are a pervasive feature of Tarsenian culture, and a sort of congregation cult comprising anything from a handful of members to several hundreds. They are based on the simple pledge to ensure that each member gets a proper funeral in line with their expectations, a proper place for their ashes to be interred – usually in a communal plot or mausoleum maintained by the club – and continue to be commemorated in the future. A typical funeral club meets at least annually to ensure that a full remembrance ceremony is conducted for all deceased members. There is usually an associated general meeting at which officers of the club (if any) give an account of their actions and new candidates put themselves up for election. Given the purpose of the clubs, many of them have a legal function as guardians not only of their members' funeral requirements but also of their wills. It is quite common for officers of a deceased person's funeral club to be named as executors and even for the club to be the beneficiary of an estate if there are no loved ones left to pass it on to.

Membership

Funeral clubs are often formed amongst co-workers, veterans' groups or extended families. If an character wishes to join a club and they fit the profile of its members and can pay their dues, acceptance should be more or less automatic. There is a small fee to join, which goes towards the club's running costs and the

character must also provide a sum of money to be banked by the club to cover the cost of the funeral they have specified. Only in the case of those clubs with a selective membership should the Games Master call for an Influence test to gain entry, adjusting the roll in accordance with the club's exclusivity. A minimum Social Class may apply in some cases, backed up with a requirement for higher fees to be paid and an assumption of funeral rites that are a cut above the norm. There is an upper limit – the Emperor has decreed a cap of 5,000 Taskeens on funeral expenditure. The minimum outlay for a traditional Tarsenian cremation ceremony should be:

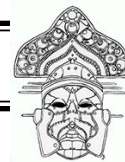
| EXPENSE | COST IN TASKEENS |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| Preparation of the Corpse | 5t |
| Funeral bier, offerings etc | 3t |
| Simple cremation urn | 2t |
| Fuel for the pyre | 2t |
| Professional mourners (each) | 2t |
| Officiating Priest | 10t |
| Feast for club members | 20t |
| Total | 44t |

Those who do not practise cremation – foreign residents and Basat cultists in particular – often have their own funeral clubs intended to ensure their particular non-standard funerary needs are properly respected. For example those of Sheng stock are often keen that their tattooed skin is properly preserved in order that their clan magics be available to them in death as in life. Basatis are simply concerned with ensuring that their body is not inadvertently cremated and their hope of resurrection in the flesh foiled. They tend to have separate cemeteries in order to accommodate the intact inhumations that their tradition requires and these are usually situated a little way from the traditional necropolis.

Ransoms and Insurance

Some clubs go a little further than managing funeral arrangements. It is common to extend the mutual funeral obligations to other things such as ransoms. A ransom is a sum made available to secure the freedom of a member if he or she should fall into captivity. A member captured by a bandit, for example, can offer ransom in return for their release; captured soldiers can use it to ensure they are kept as prisoners of war for future exchange rather than immediately killed or enslaved. If the ransom offer is accepted, the association will arrange for the exchange. In these instances the captors have to go to the trouble of contacting the society and asking for the payment.





Fixing a Ransom

A character's ransom value is based on what funds they can access as ready cash in times of need; however funeral clubs often run a form of mutual insurance – since ransom situations are rare, those members who wish to be covered by a ransom policy will each entrust a sum to the club in line with what they can afford. The club's officers will, depending on their rules and policies and the availability of funds, honour ransom demands of up to five times the amount deposited and handle all the associated negotiations and administration. The rules of the club will dictate whether the club can decide to attempt rescue rather than ransom but this is really only an option where larger sums of money are involved and the cost of hiring and outfitting a posse is substantially less than the cost of paying ransom. Rescue attempts in foreign lands are particularly unusual.

Buying Freedom

Other policies are available in the right clubs. For example, if the society becomes aware that a member has fallen into slavery in a foreign land, they may also seek out the unfortunate member and attempt to negotiate his or her release. The member's ransom value, less costs, is made available as funds with which to purchase their freedom, usually at a premium on market value.

SAMPLE CULTS

Taskan Emperor Worship

Zygas Taga is worshipped at temples in every major city of the Empire. The rites of emperor worship unite the Empire and all who participate are counted among its citizens, deserving of the Emperor's protection, whatever their race or nationality.

Every city and province is constituted as a diocese and has its own college of priests who not only see to the proper observance of rites and festivals honouring the deified Emperor but also form the local government administration. Each college is chaired by a chief priest termed an Exarch, usually an accomplished sorcerer, who controls the magical means of communicating directly with the Emperor. The patriarch of the cult is the Iron Simulacrum. In attendance upon him are a college of priests who general the Taskan army and are known as the Iron Companions. The College of the Iron Companions has as its diocese the Taskan army and its members take precedence over those of all other colleges.

The cult hierarchy is also responsible for ensuring that the traditional gods receive their proper worship by seeing that the

major festivals are observed and temples maintained – and many Emperor-cult priests are also devotees of these other gods.

Since the Emperor became husband of the Jekkarene goddess there has been a separate cult of Zygas Taga in the Jekkarid, which stresses his personal feats as a hero, warrior and ruler of men. The devotees of this sub-cult are a military caste of aristocrats, for whom virtue lies in emulation of Zygas' life before his apotheosis.

Public worship is only ever held in the vicinity of consecrated temples and during the Emperor Days, two intercalated days at the end of Winter that end one year and begin the next. At these events new citizens are enrolled and the citizenry are expected to put their Magic Points at the Emperor's disposal. Only the Iron Simulacrum leads public worship ceremonies outside of this sacred time, having both a portable consecrated temple and, in his own person, a direct channel to the Emperor.

Membership

All those born of citizen parents are expected to become lay worshippers and thereby citizens of the Empire as soon as they come of age. As for outsiders, although individuals often join, most new adherents come via the submission of whole communities to Taskan rule; the alternatives for a conquered people are often undesirable. There is technically no slavery in the Taskan Empire so if a slave arrives from abroad, either as a fugitive or accompanying his owner, and takes sanctuary at a Zygas Taga temple, he can secure his freedom by asking for citizenship. Taskan law will uphold the former slave's claim to freedom against the slave's former master.

To become and citizen requires only that the candidate be freely 'willing' to make the required dedication of one Magic Point. The supplicant gains the Passion Loyalty (Emperor), at the following level:

- Offspring of citizen parents at coming of age: 30+POW+INT
- Foreigners seeking citizenship: 30+INT
- Subjected peoples forced to become citizens: INT
- Slaves seeking freedom through citizenship: 30+POW+CHA

This Passion acts in all ways as a Devotion skill at such time as the character achieves higher rank in the cult where he can also access Miracles.

The examining priest will most likely also exact a tribute of about 10 Taskeens in money or kind, or as much as he thinks





the supplicant can afford to cover the paperwork involved in enrolling a new citizen. Some familiarity with the Tarsenian language is usually expected but this is frequently waived in the case of a mass initiation of conquered foreigners.

Benefits

The worshipper's benefits are the privileges of citizenship and his responsibilities are the obligations of a citizen. The ordinary citizen-initiate receives the Emperor's protection and full rights, whatever his social station, under the Taskan legal system, and is expected to nurture the Loyalty (Emperor) passion for which training is free. Because the Emperor is a living being in the material world, this passion and the Devotion skill are in his case one and the same. No other skills are taught by the cult and none are proscribed. Citizens are not taught any magic by the cult but may learn any magic from other sources, so long as they are not discovered using it for ends that could be considered dangerous or treasonous.

Obligations

A citizen must never act against the interests of the Empire and should always report any threats to the state to his priests. He can be called upon at any time to undertake some service to the state, in keeping with his abilities. The most usual service that is called for is enrolment in the militia but sometimes the government needs to conscript citizens for corvee labour.

The Price of Treason

A failure to observe the cult's rules can potentially be regarded as treason. Not all acts of treason are punished with hideous torture and death. Some just warrant a period of exile, and others little more than a form of re-education and penance resulting in an increase of the culprit's Loyalty (Emperor) score.

Irrespective of whether the Inquisitor finds and punishes you, getting involved in a treasonous plot can have a negative effect on a citizen's Loyalty (Emperor) score. If this drops to zero without the intervention of an Excommunication spell (so simply through character actions and choice), the character concerned is considered an Apostate. Apostasy is a treasonous act, and the Inquisitors will busy themselves in otherwise quiet times rounding up such people.

The actual circumstances and severity of an act of treason will affect the penalties inflicted; use the Treason Table as a guide.

Penalties

An Inquisitor working in the field can usually decide the fate of those he investigates and finds guilty on his own authority.

Of course when the object of his investigations is someone of importance and influence, or who enjoys popularity, and in particular when that person holds a more senior rank in the Emperor cult than the Inquisitor himself, there will need to be wider consultation on the matter and politics will play a significant part in the outcome. In general, the Inquisitor can be so lenient as to demand an act of contrition or penance resulting in an increase in the traitor's Loyalty (Emperor) score. However if that is all there is to show for an investigation it suggests that the Inquisitor has been wasting his time with trifles. Most likely such trivial punishments are reserved for those tainted by association with the true traitor. For such a person, the following punishments are available.

Excommunication: A Miracle is used to remove the accused's connection with the Emperor by severing their connection to the Emperor, and thereby strips them of citizenship. This can have a serious impact on the effects of other forms of punishment.

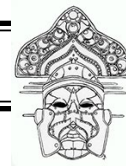
An Inquisitor can temporarily suspend the target's citizenship with this spell in order that he may apply means of interrogation from which a citizen is protected by law. The spell duration is measured in minutes and can be increased using Extension. An Iron Companion or an Exarch can cast a permanent Excommunication miracle.

Execution: Someone found guilty of Treason and condemned to execution is generally excommunicated first, thus denied any public scrutiny of their fate, and then done away with. The killing may be done in private and the body returned to the family for funeral rites, or may be very public, with the victim's body dragged through the street on hooks, suspended in a cage in a public place or dumped in a river or rubbish heap. There is no set means of execution and disposal where treason is concerned - it is up to the judgement (or whim) of the Inquisitor.

Exile: Exile comes in two forms. The lenient kind comes without Excommunication and simply forces the target to stay away from home, thereby suffering significant inconvenience, but usually accommodates them somewhere in the Empire - perhaps one of the newer provinces. The harsher sort is a removal of citizenship via Excommunication, and expulsion from the Empire (sometimes this extends to protectorates as well, and diplomatic treaties give teeth to the Taskan government to ensure their allies enforce the expulsion notice).

Proscription: A proscribed individual forfeits all of his property to the state. If combined with Execution, it means the state is the inheritor of the condemned man's property and his family is ruined. If combined with Excommunication, Proscription subjects its target to the absolute removal of protection under the





Treason Table

| ACT | PENALTY | LOYALTY LOSS |
|----------------|---|--|
| Apostasy | Immediate performance of an act guaranteed to increase the offender's Pact score to a positive value. If this remedy is declined or failed, Exile. | N/A |
| Counterfeiting | Assuming the counterfeiting is of official Taskan coinage, then Execution and Proscription. It is not a crime of Treason to counterfeit foreign currency, however this is open to civil lawsuits brought by defrauded customers. | 3d6+6 |
| Divination | Divination in respect of the fortunes of the Emperor and the Empire is strictly prohibited. As it is the case that most people's futures are in some way bound up with these very things, Divination in general is frowned upon and its practitioners frequently purged. Someone who employs a seer from Jelhai to tell them about their love life prospects may get off lightly. In general however Excommunication, Exile and Proscription may be deployed. | Variable, from 1d6 to 4d6+6 depending on the nature of the enquiry. |
| Espionage | Passing information to a potentially hostile power may be punished differently according to how hostile the foreign power is and the level or type of information passed. Excommunication, Proscription and Exile are all options, as is Execution. | Variable, from 1d6 up to 2d6+6 in times of peace and perhaps as high as 5d6+6 in times of war. |
| Immortality | Denial of Anagathics and/or Exile; division of property amongst heirs while still living; Execution if any third party has been harmed or exploited in the process (this may mean people who have been magically tapped, but includes those denied an inheritance by the culprit's longevity if they bring a formal complaint!); otherwise Exile and Proscription. | 1 Per Ageing Roll avoided. Full immortality results in an immediate 4d6+6. |
| Rebellion | Execution and Proscription of the active offenders, Excommunication and Exile of the passive members (the wider family and community) unless their association with the act of Rebellion is such that the remedy for Apostasy may be employed. | 3d6+6 |
| Tax Evasion | Exile until the 1d4+1 x the sum evaded is paid. Proscription if the sum is not paid. | 1d6+6 |

law, so while the state takes his property, any other citizen may take his life if he so chooses.

Appeals

A citizen being investigated by an Inquisitor has the right to appeal to the Iron Simulacrum to intervene or directly judge their case. The appellant needs to make their appeal before they are excommunicated, as it is a call upon their deity for Divine Intervention.

The Simulacrum is deemed to be a creature who exercises pure reason, free of prejudice and personal motivation (although this is not entirely true). Likewise his decisions in the realm of punishment are considered 'dispassionate', which means they may in fact be extremely brutal, should it be his view that the public good is best served by making an example of the perpetrator.

Initiate Membership

Those who seek initiation into the Emperor cult are those who seek a career in the Emperor's service. This includes anyone who

wants to achieve officer rank in the army, or to stand for public office in any of the Empire's dioceses and provinces, and those who want to be directly employed by the imperial administration in some capacity that involves exercising state authority.

A prospective initiate requires a Loyalty (Emperor) skill of 51% or greater, but otherwise all that is required is some competence in the skills of the roll he or she intends to pursue.

Initiates have no access to Miracles, nor are they taught any Folk Magic or special skills.

Acolyte Membership

Acolytes of the Emperor-cult are devoted citizens who have entered into a special relationship with the Emperor that will last beyond death; instead of passing to one of the traditional hells they will enter a state of limbo in which they will remain until the Emperor ascends to heaven, at which point they will become the first colonists and leading citizens of whatever after-life he manages to provide for his followers. In the meantime





they provide cult spirits, serving the Emperor and the Empire even in death. Acolytes, identified by a gold ring bearing the Emperor's seal, are 'super-citizens' who exist outside the normal cult hierarchy and can, if seized for a crime, demand trial in front of the Simulacrum himself. They may count themselves as natives of any city of the Empire and participate in its public life, irrespective of their place of birth. An Acolyte is effectively always on duty, expected to undertake any mission emanating from the Emperor or his regent at any time and carry out their orders with the utmost diligence and determination. To be chosen as an Acolyte usually requires that the candidate has completed a minimum of five years loyal service to the state in either military or civilian capacity and distinguished himself through some special service or deed. The Emperor does not like a large number of Acolytes to be in existence at any one time – there are a few dozen at most.

Those who are considered worthy for this special role in the Emperor's service will be sent together with prospective priests for instruction in the mysteries of the Emperor's journey to godhood, gaining the Exhort skill that they will use to request Miracles and dedicate Magic Points to a Devotional Pool.

Acolytes are entitled to join the priesthood in communing with the Emperor in the inner sanctum of a Zygas Taga temple, enabling them to increase their dedications and gain access to Miracles and Gifts. This can take place at any time the local college of priests desires (usually on a fixed monthly basis with additional sessions by arrangement), except during the Emperor Days when the entire cult hierarchy is too busy dealing with public matters.

Acolytes maintain their own, very exclusive, funeral club. When one of their number dies they are cremated as is normal in Tarsenian custom but their ashes are interred within the Zygas Taga temple precincts rather than outside city limits in the communal necropolis. The Acolyte's spirit is bound to their cinerary urn with the condition that only a priest can command it and that it will be released upon the Emperor's ascension.

Acolytes sometimes retire from service. From this point the Acolyte can no longer replenish his Devotional Pool, nor learn new Miracles or accept further Gifts. In the unlikely circumstances that an Acolyte abandons Emperor-worship altogether or is excommunicated, all access to Miracles is lost and Gifts withdrawn.

For any Acolyte the Influence skill is always one grade easier when dealing with Taskan citizens. Acolytes are allied to, rather than subject to, the priests of the cult, receiving their orders from the Simulacrum and sometimes even from the Emperor

himself. The responsibilities of priesthood – carrying with it the duties of public office – are usually too onerous to combine the roles; however a lapsed or resigned Acolyte may find themselves in the priesthood if they retain the Emperor's good favour.

Acolytes can be Inquisitors, Agents or Companions (soldiers).

Magic

Acolytes can acquire the following Miracles: Absorption, Bind Acolyte, Command Human, Command Salamander, Excommunication*, Extension, Find Citizen, Find Enemy, Shield, True (Weapon). Miracles are called upon using the Exhort (Emperor) skill.

**Excommunication is only available to Acolytes acting in the capacity of Inquisitor.*

Boons

Acolytes may acquire Zygas Taga's divine 'Gifts', but these are boons that are acquired by devoting Magic Points to the Emperor. These Magic points are allocated from the Acolyte's devotional pool on a permanent basis and therefore reduce the maximum points available for use in exhorting Miracles.

Mastery: For 1 Magic Point the Acolyte can increase a skill in which they already have an ability of 50% or more to 90%, or by 25%, whichever is greater.

Enhancement: In return for a dedication of 2 Magic Points the Acolyte receives a Gift of an increase of 1d3 in a chosen Characteristic.

In normal circumstances only one of each type of Gift will be granted; however in exceptional circumstances, or in preparation for exceptionally difficult or dangerous missions, additional Gifts may be permitted.

Inquisitors

An Inquisitor is an acolyte who has been detailed to undertake an Inquisition – that is, to investigate a suspected case of Treason. This horrible crime can take many forms from plotting against the Empire or the Emperor, to indulging in forbidden magics to do with divination or immortality. An Inquisitor is usually appointed for the purpose of a specific investigation or problem and is entitled to access the Excommunication miracle – not least because it has the effect of stripping an individual of their citizenship and rendering them open to forms of interrogation and punishment to which citizens are immune. An Inquisitor has significant powers to requisition the resources he needs to pursue his investigation with the upmost vigour





and usually is supported by a small posse of clerks, guards and experts.

Agents

An Agent is an acolyte tasked with furthering the interests of the Empire in the border regions and provinces. While installed as administrators or diplomats, their main purpose is to warn of, or prevent, any possible incursion or threat. They usually have access to significant funds in order to build networks of informers or simply to buy off potentially hostile tribes. An Agent is



looked to for the last word in political advice on matters of security in their area. Agents usually have some military experience and many of them raise small units of local followers to act as a bodyguard. Excellent command of local languages in their area of operations and understanding of local cultures are essential to their effectiveness.

Companions

A Companion is a military member of acolyte rank – one of the Emperor's chosen men. These individuals are entrusted with the

most dangerous missions and form small cadres of between four and six warriors willing to undertake daring ambushes, infiltrate enemy lines or assassinate enemy leaders. Older members usually take command of an army regiment (a 'Thousand') and if necessary will lead their men into battle from the front or stand by them at the last ditch. These acolytes aspire to join the ranks of the Iron Companions one day, should they survive long enough to retire into such a comparatively sedentary life.

Priesthood

The priests of the Emperor-cult are the administrators and governors of the empire. In each province or district the priests are organised into a college, which forms both civil and military administration. For a new priest to be appointed there must be a vacancy in the collegiate caused by the death or retirement of a current member or the expansion of its number. A candidate should have previous experience of serving in some public capacity, for example as a judge, priest of a public cult or as an elected magistrate; and must have at least 75% in Loyalty (Emperor), and Influence and 50% in Literacy and Orate, as well as 100% or more in some field of expertise useful to the government. Individual colleges have their own preferences. In Taskay high rank in the local cult of Thesh is a definite advantage, as is some connection to a family with old aristocratic pedigree even though such people were removed from the automatic right to rule by Zygas Taga himself; while in Pryjarna devotees of the god Basat are in the majority.

Skills

A prospective priest will be given further instruction in Exhort (Emperor) in preparation for their investiture. Subsequently they have all the resources of state at their disposal, so should they wish to have access to learning of any kind they have the means to acquire it. However priests of the Emperor-cult are very busy people and have precious little time to go to night school.

Iron Companion Membership

Iron Companions are a college of priests chosen by the Simulacrum himself. If a candidate is to become a member of the Iron Companions an exemplary military record and experience of high command (with a Command skill in excess of 75%) is vital.

Curule Membership

The Curules are a college of 11 priests whose members are denied the ability to be promoted either to the Exarchy or to the Iron Companions. They are appointed for life and choose their own chairman. The Curules include some of those who have





retired from other priestly roles within the cult and many of its members are of quite advanced years. Its principal requirement is a skill in excess of 75% in Exhort (emperor), but those with significant sorcery skills are either excluded from membership or required to take a vow setting their practise of the arts aside.

High Priest (Exarch) Membership

The high priest of a diocese is chosen personally by the Emperor, whose preference is often for the most powerful sorcerer in the college. Each high priest serves as Exarch (prime minister) – of a diocese of the Empire. The Iron Simulacrum is Exarch of the Army.

Miracles

In addition to those spells available to Acolytes, Zygas Taga's priests can access the following Miracles:

Bind Acolyte, Consecrate, Contact Emperor, Excommunication, Power Sharing.

Bind Acolyte

Duration (Months), Touch, Rank variable, Resist (Willpower)

This miracle binds an acolyte in the cult to service in death as a ghost. The Duration applies to the period in which the target's spirit can be kept in reserve, dormant and bound to the funerary urn in which his mortal remains are kept. Prior to the expiry of the miracle the priest can transfer the binding to another place and issue instructions for their duties. The binding requires a suitably prepared object or structure to act as its focus and if this is destroyed the spirit is released.

Irrespective of the Duration of the miracle the acolyte must be bound to his new service as a spirit prior to the Emperor Days that mark the transition between one year and the next or the spirit is released to find its own way in the afterlife.

Binding the acolyte to a new duty requires a successful Taskan Rites roll; if the roll is failed it can be retried unless a fumble occurs, or the miracle expires.

The spirit-acolyte has the following ghostly abilities:

Spirit Manifestation is the ability to appear to, interact with or imprint upon a living creature. It has a starting percentage equal to the acolyte's Loyalty (Emperor) plus the Intensity of the miracle

Spectral Combat equal to the acolyte's Willpower plus the Intensity of the miracle.

The acolyte can assume one of the following powers:

Haunt (Rank: Acolyte)

The acolyte becomes a Haunt capable of defending an area in a radius of POW meters from their point of binding. Its principal means of attack is forcing an intruder into spirit combat to dominantly possess the target.

Wraith (Rank: Priest)

An acolyte may be detailed to behave as a Wraith, serving as a supernatural guardian to a cult object or place and with a range of action of POW meters from its point of binding.

Guardian (Rank: High Priest)

The acolyte is detailed to serve as the Guardian Spirit to a cult official, shielding his charge from hostile spells and attacking spirits

Contact Emperor

Duration (Minutes), Touch, Rank High Priest

This miracle requires the use of a sacred mirror of beaten copper, which is hung in the inner sanctum of every Emperor-cult temple.

The miracle gives the user a percentage chance of attracting the Emperor's attention, equal to his Loyalty (Emperor) score, and if successful direct communication can take place. By speaking to the image of the emperor seen in the mirror and listening to his echoing voice that emanates from it.

Cult Sorcery

The libraries of the Empire have a vast collection of magical literature including many rare and unique spells and once you reach the upper echelons of the Emperor-cult you have ready access to them. Some of this sorcerous lore has been aggregated and compiled for use by officers of the cult, presented in standard form across a number of tomes. A single Invoke skill suffices for all.

The Blue Book is the standard Zygas Taga Priest's Grimoire and a copy typically contains the following spells:

Banish, Dominate Citizen, Enchant, Mystic Vision, Neutralise Magic, Protective Ward, Spell Resistance, Spirit Resistance, Trap Soul (used under special circumstances)

The Black Book is the standard Inquisitor's Grimoire. It usually contains the following Sorcery spells:





Abjure Mercy, Dominate Citizen, Imprison, Intuition, Mystic Vision, Neutralise Magic, Project Hearing, Project Vision, Wrack (burning)

The Red Book is the standard spell grimoire for Agents. It typically contains the following Sorcery spells:

Dominate Non-Citizen, Enhance CHA, Intuition, Mark, Sense (Assassin);*

*(*a variant of Dominate Human, not effective on Taskan citizens, nor on non-humans, spirits etc)*

The Yellow Book is the standard spell grimoire made available to Companions and typically contains the following spells:

Abjure Rest; Damage Enhancement; Damage Resistance; Enhance CON; Enhance DEX; Enhance STR; Treat Wounds

The Cult of Tarsen (Public Cult)

Tarsen is the legendary father of the Tarsenian people and the last human being known to have become a god before the Emperor Zygag Taga. He is regarded as the founder of Tarsenian civilisation and credited with the giving of laws and the invention of trade through which men learn how to live together and get what they need for to survive and to thrive without resorting to violence. Most importantly he is the founder of Tarsenian religion as it is now practiced; he decided which gods would form the pantheon of gods worshipped by his people, and how they would be worshipped. All these things have now become the bedrock of Taskan society in the Imperial Age.

Tarsen's congregations are composed of praise singers and clergymen, scribes and scholars and, because Tarsen is the origin of the traditional forms of contract under Taskan law, merchants and traders. His formal cult however is only for those who wish to steep themselves in the lore and customs of Taskan life and adopt a way of life entirely dictated by concerns of religion and ritual.

Nature of the Cult

Tarsen is worshipped through a public cult in every city of Tarsenia except for Sorandib and Pryjarna. His priests are the Flamens, charged with supervising customs, traditions and laws and regulating religious affairs in their dioceses. As the more recent laws and edicts of the divine emperor Zygag Taga take precedence, Tarsen is invoked in support of the laws of custom; that is, anything that has not been specifically legislated for by

the Emperor. His patronage over Tarsenian religion is absolute, and only the emperor-cult is free of the authority and influence of the Flamens.

Tarsen's priests lay the foundations for each new public temple set up to one of the Taskan pantheon of gods. His Consecrate miracle is used to dedicate a space to any of the deities in the pantheon.

The cult's authority rests upon the knowledge and expertise of its personnel and so membership is highly selective. It also assumes responsibility for the observation of taboo, the propitiation of hostile deities and the general religious wellbeing of the community; consequently its members are subject to a great many onerous ritual obligations, including idiosyncratic forms of dress so that they are easily recognized in the streets.

Organisation

Tarsen's temples are often tucked away in the shadows of some greater public building. They are meeting places for the priests and their initiates and not open to the wider public. Some of them also hold extensive repositories of ancient texts, inscriptions and other artefacts relevant to researching the religious traditions of the city and its people. It is widely believed they are also places where artefacts relating to religious traditions considered heretical or undesirable by the Flamens are kept away from profane eyes.

His most holy site is Tarsen's tomb – which stands empty as a consequence of his apotheosis – situated in Tarsang, the city formerly known as Holasur, renamed for him in his lifetime. An annual festival takes place there attracting pilgrims from all across Tarsenia; however Tarsen does not make epiphanies and lay worshippers attempt to call upon his blessings and make their devotions at the tomb itself.

The High Flamen of Tarsang is the cult's most senior figure, even though he does not have direct control over the cult's local hierarchies in other cities. His pronouncements on religious matters and protocols affecting all Tarsenia are regarded as authoritative and it is very difficult to contradict or contravene them without invoking considerable censure.

Since the creation of the Taskan Empire the cult of Tarsen has been subordinate to the emperor-cult. While generally permitted to go about its business as it always has, some matters are expected to be referred to the Emperor-cult for decisions or approval, or so that an inquisitor may be sent to look into religious irregularities discretely rather than it be left to the flamens whose work is essentially conducted in public.





Membership

Tarsen's cult tends to have only as many initiates as are required to be in training for the priesthood. The cult does not like to recruit the young and inexperienced, and expects candidates to be at least 25 years old. Women are eligible but required to dress and deport themselves as men. A candidate for initiation should have Devotion, Literacy and Locale skills at 50% or greater and Custom and Rites skills at 60% or greater.

Initiates

Initiates are fully occupied by their cult duties. They are understudies to the flamens, and required to fulfil both menial house-keeping tasks and ritual duties. They may be sent out to make initial enquiries and produce reports if some matter of religious concern is brought to the flamens' attention. Some initiates find themselves responsible for the maintenance of a propitiation cult that keep some potentially menacing spirit of minor deity in check. Many of them will never progress to the priesthood, as each public cult maintains a fixed number of priests and vacancies usually arise only upon on the death of an incumbent.

Initiates receive free training in cult skills and Exhort. They have access to the god's miracles.

An initiate must observe taboos, the basic ones being to never eat certain types of beans, to never touch a dog nor use one of 47 prohibited words in any communication.

Priest Rank: the Flamen

To be elected or appointed to the ranks of the flamens requires a character has considerable knowledge and expertise in the religious sphere. This usually translates to knowledge of the cult skills at a level of 75% or higher, however Customs and Rites are expected to be at 90% or more. Sometimes the appointment is highly political as the local firms of clergymen vie to ensure one of their people sits on the college of flamens and so lends lustre and authority to their business.

Flamens see to the establishment of public temples and ensure that they are properly prepared and equipped to hold the annual festivals in which the gods are called upon to make their epiphanies.

The flamens have the right to proscribe or promote local cults, whatever god they worship (excepting of course the cult of the Divine Emperor); proscription censures a cult and denies it access to public temples or a role in public festivals. Promotion of a local cult does the opposite – grants privileged access to places of worship, or some honourable role in organising or conducting an annual festival.

High Flamen

The High Flamen in each city usually also holds priestly rank in the local Emperor cult, however the post is denied a vote on key political matters and is not eligible to be appointed Exarch. In reality, such are the taboos and geasa borne by men of High Flamen rank that it is almost impossible for such a character to successfully acquire and conduct public office.

Skills

The cult skills are Custom, Devotion, Exhort, Influence, Literacy, Locale, Rites

Magic

Tarsen's initiates are able to access Folk Magic spells relevant to their trade – including Sanctify and Worship (any deity).

Tarsen's miracles are Consecrate, Covenant, Extension, Inviolable, Propitiate, Tongues

Tarsenian Propitiation Cults

When Tarsen set about creating his pantheon many gods and spirits were deliberately excluded or refused to participate. His solution to how such deities would be dealt with was propitiation, and it fell upon local communities to ensure that the necessary propitiation rites were maintained. These cults have a very specific, and sometimes short term, purpose: to tackle and contain a deity who is either hostile by nature or simply prepared to use its power to make life unpleasant for mortals. Rather than offer a set of benefits, the first thing a Propitiation provides for is that the deity will do no harm.

Tarsen's Propitiation Miracle will work on most entities; however it only forces the target into some kind of bargain, and the bargain must continue to be upheld. This is the job of propitiation cults, which are in effect sub-cults of Tarsen's.

Membership

Participation in a propitiation cult is usually obligatory, with a specific congregation dedicated to the deified Tarsen also tasked with the burden of maintaining the propitiation under the supervision of a cult initiate. While the rules are laid out by the flamen, the community at risk will who among them must maintain a devotion to the cause. Usually the choice of dedicators will be of a specific gender and age class, in order to make sure it is not a lifelong commitment and people must take their turn.

When the Propitiation rite is enacted the worshippers must pledge to observe whatever other requirements the object of





the cult demands in accordance with limitations laid down by Tarsen or one of his later followers in a form of pact. This may be a dedication of Magic Points, or of material sacrifices, or a pledge to certain behaviours in the form of taboos or geasa.

A propitiation cult usually comes together once per year simply in order to renew the Propitiation dedication demanded of it. If the offering is made in Magic Points the cost is variable depending on the scale and kind of disaster and inconvenience to be averted. However as a rule of thumb, divide the number of lives at stake by 10 and that provides the total annual Magic Points that the cult needs to ensure is dedicated to the devotees' devotional pools in order to fuel the propitiation. For example:

| PROPI TIATORY DEMAND | PLEDGE (MAGIC POINTS) |
|---|-----------------------|
| Keep blight from a village's fields | 5 |
| Prevent a major storm from wrecking the fishing fleet | 40 |
| Keep plague from a small city | 250 |
| Keep massive volcano dormant that threatens several towns | 500 |

The Magic Points cost is divided amongst all devotees who make their contribution, either equally or each according to their own ability and desire. They cannot be recovered until such time as the rite is renewed and new pledges replace the old, which usually occurs on an annual basis. A Propitiation is broken if the total Magic Points dedicated to the target falls below the agreed number. Typically the god will provide warnings and a short period of forbearance while things are set right.

The Cult of Basat (Mystery Cult)

Basat, a god of truth and life, is a peculiar phenomenon in Tarsenian religion. Although considered to be a domestic and not a 'foreign' deity, he is a relative newcomer and the origins of his worship seem to be in Djemirket or Morkesh in the south where he is listed as a junior companion of Shomat, a local sun God. He can be worshipped in accordance with Assabian Rites, yet is equally capable of receiving congregational worship through the medium of Taskan Rites. He is a god who can still effect general changes in the human condition, because his role is still unfolding through the lives and deeds of his followers. Only Basat's cult has a dualist doctrine of good and evil as two warring forces and in this its teaching is akin to that of some atheist philosophies.

Nature of the Cult

Basat's cult offers salvation – both in this life and in the next. While concepts of sin and guilt are not very well evolved, the cult preaches that worshippers can relieve themselves of anxiety by the abjuration of lies and confrontation with their misdeeds (harm to those they love, betrayal of trust). A soul that has dealt with these things has emerged from darkness into the light and is free, and in that light can find courage to face anything the world offers. This message has proved very popular, and many have come to embrace the righteous glow of Basat's teaching.

Basat's cult, which is little more than 300 years old, very much cuts against the grain of normal Tarsenian traditions. He does not respond to the form of Exhortation set out by Tarsen for the pantheon, and so is considered a Mystery Cult. Nevertheless it is the third most important and influential cult in the Empire – after only the Emperor-cult and the Cult of Thesh at Taskay.

Organisation

Basat has only one formal cult, and that has a monopoly on his worship, a universal hierarchy and a common set of rules that apply to all adherents wherever they may be. The chief priest of his temple in Pryjarna is recognised as Patriarch by the priests and congregations of all other temples. This small city was once very much a border town, considered by some not to be properly Tarsenian at all. In order to cement the place within the empire, it was necessary for the Emperor-cult to find a place for the city's major deity in the Taskan firmament, and since then its patriarch has usually also held the title of Exarch in the Diocese of Pryjarna.

Jerent Hasandarin is the current patriarch. Originally from Ralmyra, he served as a soldier stationed in Pryjarna and during this time became a devotee of Basat. His family was killed when the Sheng sacked Ralmyra, so he settled permanently in Pryjarna and upon mustering out of the army he gave himself over to serving the god. Hasandarin is now 52 years old but still strong, fit, a respected statesman and a popular leader. Even so there are people who would attempt to secure succession to the patriarchy for someone from outside the Taskan empire – from one of the communities of Assabia where Basat's worship is said to have originated.

Membership

Basat has many lay worshippers who seek his blessings – many are simply travellers passing through his home city but Pryjarna is a favourite destination for pilgrims too. Both men and women worship Basat, however the cult has a visible male bias and the theatrical rites involved with initiation tend to be restricted to





men – womens' initiations take place in private away from the public gaze.

Lay worshippers receive no benefits other than the chance to be blessed at a worship ceremony.

Initiates

Initiation into his cult is no easy process and is the occasion for an elaborate ritual.

Only someone who has attended services regularly for a year as a lay member, and who has 50% in five of the cult skills, might be accepted to his following of devotee-initiates. In Pryjarna, the candidates take part in a foot-race that takes them on a circuit of the god's own city quarter, known as The Holy City of Basat, starting and ending at the temple. Along the way crowds of spectators pelt the runners with garbage, stones and whatever other missiles come to hand and even strike at them as they run by. Although there is a prize for the winner of the race, those who demonstrate selflessness in helping along injured fellow-runners are held in highest esteem by the spectators as much as by the priests, and feasting follows.

The next morning begins the greater ordeal, in which the candidates are shut within the temple of the death god Gomorg without food and water for a vigil lasting three whole days. During this time they might have many visions and receive visitations from the lands of the dead. At dawn on the third day, the priests break open the seal on the temple and welcome the new initiates into the light. A great breakfast is held and the Initiates then receive individual instruction from the priests in the lore, traditions and taboos of the cult. The initiates then participate in the procession around the city which marks the climax of Basat's five-day festival.

The initiate is assured that he will be spared an eternity in one of the Many Hells, for one day Basat will defeat death and all his worshippers will be resurrected. To this end it is important that the corpse of an Initiate is interred intact (in contravention of general Tarsenian custom, which is to cremate the dead). If burned or dismembered resurrection in the flesh is made impossible. Initiates also receive the benefit of membership of a close community, for devotees of Basat are accustomed to extending filial love, respect and hospitality to one another, even if they are strangers. Initiates are commonly asked to tithe 10% of their income to their local temple but in return their funerary needs will be taken care of by their local priest when the time comes.

Priests

Priests of Basat are teachers, healers and morticians. Candidates for priesthood within Basat's cult must be initiates of at least five

years standing. There must also be a vacancy in the hierarchy of the local temple, or else the candidate must have sufficient means to provide a meeting place for a congregation of his own, such as a good-sized chamber within his house.

A priest of Basat is expected to know sorcery but should not spend his time on offensive or combat oriented magic. A priest may learn Basat's special miracles which give him the power to restore life to the dead. This is not usually performed on initiates and priests of the cult, who await resurrection at the hands of the god himself, but serves as a potent demonstration of the god's power when used on outsiders.

Skills

Cult skills are Athletics, Craft (Prepare Corpse), Devotion, Endurance, Exhort Basat, Insight, Healing,

Magic

Initiates may learn the miracles Daybright, Lay to Rest, Shield and Turn Undead. Miracles available to priests includes those available for initiates plus: Consecrate, Excommunicate, Restore Corpse, Resurrect, Summon Ghost.

The cult has a sorcery tradition, known as the Living Grimoire, that some initiates may be allowed to study. A complete tome contains: Abjure Lies, Abjure Passions, Mystic Vision, Neutralise Magic, Protective Ward, Regenerate, Resist Djinn, Spirit Resistance

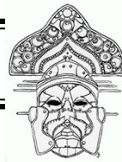
Basat's Army of Light

The cult's beliefs include the idea that at some future date Basat will resurrect all its dead who are properly interred, and these people will form his Army of Light who will set out to free the world from corruption and falsehood. Factions within the cult disagree about when this might take place and who is likely to be the target of the Army of Light – and even if it is indeed going to be a military force or some kind of peaceful movement.

Eternal Brotherhood of the Glorious Dead (Congregation and Funeral Club)

The Glorious Dead are not the object of this cult but the members themselves, who have committed themselves to a lifestyle that is likely to be glorious...but short. Their god is Machank, Lord of Battles, who is a deity that no sane individual would choose to serve for their entire life. Devotion to him is usually a passing phase that signals that an individual cares little for his own life or rates taking the life of another above preserving





their own. While most of his followers are warriors, a minority are individuals who, out of personal motives such as revenge, pledge themselves to him in the hope of receiving help in making a violent end of their enemies. In the old days of aristocratic rule, when feuding was common between the great families of Tarsenia, young nobles would dedicate themselves to him before fighting bloody duels.

Nature of the Cult

Machank's devotees within the Taskan army all meet together as a cult, The Glorious Dead. These men – and occasionally women – are formed into specially created units where their commitment to unfettered violence on the field of battle can be both controlled and exploited. Any army has a minority of natural born killers who can be expected to do the butcher's work effectively and without compunction, setting an example to their comrades. Machank's devotees swell this cadre of front line warriors, as they are imbued with a passion that drives them to a fighting fury. They are either dispersed along the first ranks of the army to sharpen its cutting edge, or else brigaded together to use as shock troops sent forward to break the enemy line, storm a breach, or make a stubborn stand that allows the rest of the army to manoeuvre or escape the field.

The cult also acts as a funeral club for its members, serves as arbitrator in matters of pay and benefits and always ensures that enough is put aside from the booty and pay to cover a decent funeral for the casualties. It is extremely keen to ensure that the bodies of its fallen warriors are recovered for cremation. It will not pay ransoms for live members but it will for dead ones. The cult will often mount rescue missions whether the captured member is thought to be dead or alive.

The cult selects one of its number every year (often by drawing lots) who will fight a champion from the cult of Basat as part of the annual festival in honour of Tethis held in Zarina.

Organisation

The Glorious Dead is officered by men and women elected to their post from the rank and file. One cult officer is elected by the others to be the cult's leader but can just as quickly be deposed if the membership does not like his style. The whole cult is under the direction of the Iron Companions, who choose when and where to deploy them.

Membership

The Glorious Dead are exclusively comprised of devotees of Machank in the service of the Taskan army. If a serving soldier dedicates himself to the god, dedicating a minimum of one Magic Point to a devotional pool and receiving the god's gift of

Valour, membership is automatic with the briefest of initiation ceremonies. Not all those serving in the Machank battalions are recruited from the regular army; some are civilian volunteers, often escaping from the forces of law and order or perhaps some shameful episode in their past.

The 20 year term for which the regular soldier enlists in the Taskan army is reduced by four years for every one year spent in the ranks of the Machank fanatics. A member also gets a bigger share of the spoils of war compared to other soldiers in the army. Each man counts for two shares and each man who dies in battle still receives his allocation which is then shared between his fellow Machankites (but not any family or inheritors back at home). The proportion that lives out their term to enjoy these spoils is often disappointingly low but the potential rewards are consequently quite high.

A member will receive the support of his comrades in acquiring the best equipment, weapons and magic to improve his chances on the field of battle.

Clergy

Devotees who learn the appropriate rites and spells can lead their comrades in worship and these priests can become the chaplains of their units. A Taskan Rites skill in excess of 50% is usually expected, as well as sufficient literacy to learn the necessary rituals. The prospective chaplain is selected for their position by a vote among their comrades.

Machank's Gifts

Every Devotee of Machank takes the gift of Valour in return for the first magic point dedicated to a devotional pool. This magic point counts towards the maximum devotional pool but is not available for use in exhorting miracles.

Valour

Valour is a Passion acquired at the rate of 30%+ the character's POWx2. This passion can augment any Morale check for NPCs; it will also augment Endurance rolls when a character is wounded. If a character at any points considers fleeing or avoiding a fight, or disobeying an order to attack or otherwise put himself into danger in combat, the Valour passion is rolled and if the roll succeeds the character is compelled to take the dangerous course of action he might rather avoid.

A critical roll results in a violent battle frenzy in which the character will not desist from offensive action until exhausted, unconscious or somehow magically prevented from further action. A character in this state will always seek to kill their opponents without quarter.





Machank's Epiphany

Machank's Epiphany is called upon just before battle is to be joined – for battle, any battle, is a Festival for Machank. In real terms this is a carefully managed event conducted only when stakes are high, a major battle is in prospect and the Iron Companions have given their consent to summoning the battle god. Machank's epiphany results in the automatic (no resistance roll) and immediate berserking (as per the Miracle) of all his devotees in a radius of 1km. On rare occasions it may be that both sides in a battle attempt to call the god. In this case opposed rolls determine on whose side the Machank appears but all devotees on the field go berserk, no matter which side they are on.

Epiphany

This gift may be bestowed on a devotee who has a Devotion skill of 71% or higher. The devotee is now able to learn the Epiphany miracle, through which the god is called upon to attend a battle.

Skills

The brothers of the cult provide free training in Willpower, with the express purpose of helping the devotee to control the onset of battle fury sent by the god, and in Endurance.

Magic

The cult does not go out of its way to provide magic or magical training to its members, who are free to become devotees and dedicate Magic Points in return for access to miracles.

Machank's miracles include Berserk, Epiphany, Fear, Seal Wound, True (weapon)

Members of the cult are free to learn or use whatever magic they have a chance to acquire from sources outside the cult.

Machank is a greedy, demanding and devouring god. There is usually no shame within the cult in leaving his service unless the apostate has never participated in a battle. In most cases the apostate simply returns to their original unit. However Machank craves blood and many devotees find that the Valour passion will not leave until they have shed some – making retirement to civilian life somewhat uncomfortable.

Vyako (Brotherhood/ Demonic Pact)

The Vyakots are a secret society made up of people with an unhealthy and treasonous desire to achieve immortality. Recruited by word of mouth and lured little by little into the inner workings of the cult, those who commit themselves fully in pursuit of their goal realise there is a significant price to pay. This is a cult of Vampires.

The cult first appeared in the city of Tarsang, where a leading undertaker who dabbled with necromancy summoned up an unexpected guest to his funeral parlour. The guest was Vyako, a demon in the retinue of the Tarsenian death god Gomorg with an ambitious career agenda involving promotion to deity status. Rather than suffer a horrible and immediate extinction at this demon's hands, the undertaker Thagrish Martigern was forced to dedicate his very soul (POW) to it in a Pact. The upside to this bargain, as Vyako explained, was that Thagrish should, if he took the right precautions, never die. The downside was if his body were to be destroyed there would be nothing of him to pass into the Many Hells and whatever afterlife he would meet there – he would simply cease to exist.

Immortality is an act of treason in the Taskan Empire, where only the Emperor is entitled not to die. For Thagrish Martigern this was soon the least of his crimes, for with his own soul already pledged to another, Thagrish would henceforth have to sustain his own existence by feeding off the souls of others, something the Vyako was pleased to equip him to do. Eventually Thagrish learned how to channel Vyako at will, enabling others to dedicate themselves to the demon and receive his blessings. At this point Thagrish left the lonely life of the Empire's only vampire behind him and became the founder of a cult – and of a secret tribe.

Nature of the Cult

The cult of Vyako exists to elevate the demon Vyako to godhood. It does so by stealing the POW of cult members and of innocent victims, passing them to Vyako. The cult serves its members by providing them with the means to heighten their own abilities and to prolong life indefinitely if they adhere to the cult's purpose, by creating a system of mutual dependency on vampiric feeding.

Organisation

Vyako's followers could be anywhere and everywhere. As a secret organization the cult is composed of chapters (cells) that





maintain walls of silence between themselves, and some chapters may also run a 'front' organization that to all appearances is legitimate cult or brotherhood with rather demanding rules of membership and secretive rites. This front serves the purpose of recruitment, as from its membership potential initiates are identified and groomed.

Each chapter is officered by a cadre of Vampires (acolytes) and headed by a Vampire Lord (priest). Perhaps only the highest ranking members have any idea of its true extent, maintaining contact with former fellows from the chapter in which they originally acquired their Vampire status. The cult's most senior vampire lord is Thagrish Martigern himself, presumed still in existence but his whereabouts unknown.

Vyako is a demon of the darkness and the cult's secret rites, to which only initiates and higher are admitted (or even aware of) are held on the night of a dark moon, in total secrecy. It is on those night that the Fangs trait is used to feed the cult's demon master, Vyako.

Membership

Lay members of the cult may know of Vyako as any number of things – whatever, in fact is his local disguise. When a new chapter is established in a town or city quarter, the first job is to identify likely targets and attempt to win their trust. This can be supported by some subtle networking, little rumours planted here and there of a new cult that offers wonderful, if dangerous secrets. Once there is a pool of potential converts they are carefully groomed and any that are thought to be a danger are either let go as unworthy of the mysteries on offer before they know too much. If they might be trouble makers, they are quietly disposed of. The remainder are on their way to being initiated into Vyako's rites.

Benefits

'Lay worshippers' who attend meetings or join a congregation are taught the Devotion skill and may also be rewarded with the opportunity to use Folk Magic, training in cult skills or simply finding themselves supported by benevolent companions willing to use influence on their behalf.

Vyako's Blessing can be invoked in support of a lie, for example to reroll a failed Deceit or Disguise roll, or conversely to force an opponent to reroll their Insight, or for a Seduction. Other Folk Magic spells available will vary from chapter to chapter, a typical list would include: Darkness, Deflect, Glamour, Incognito and Vigour.

Eventually a promising Lay Member will be tested – asked to run an errand for one of the inner circle, or tempted to do something bad – perhaps lure an unsuspecting victim to a place where one of the initiates will use their Life Drain on them. Those who show a real appetite to please their superiors are groomed for the next stage of the cult.

Initiates (Demi-Vampires)

To become an Initiate requires a Devotion skill of 50% or higher. The candidate must pass tests that challenge both their loyalty and their morality before they are submitted to initiation in which the candidate enters into a Pact with the demon Vyako – and this involves devoting not mere Magic Points, but a part of the follower's soul in the form of characteristic POW. The means by which the POW is taken is traumatic, and can even come as a surprise. The candidate must submit to be fed upon by a fanged acolyte, a process in which he loses 1d3 hit Points from the location bitten, and one or more levels of Fatigue in blood which will eventually recover. With each level of fatigue drained in blood a point of characteristic POW is taken that is permanently dedicated to a Pact with Vyako.

Demi-Vampires can hide their altered nature with little difficulty. They are not undead, and magical scrutiny may do no more than reveal a scar upon their souls where the dedicated POW has been ripped away. Demi-Vampires may be a little paler and wan than before, and more prone to sunburn and dazzling by bright sunlight.

Benefits

Each time an initiate permits an acolyte to feed they can receive one or more of Vyako's boons in return. Boons do not have to be taken straight away; the value of the POW dedicated can be redeemed at a later stage of the cultist's career. The Initiate may choose to allow an acolyte to continue to feed on them as time goes by, thereby sacrificing further POW to a maximum of half their original POW.

Initiates are deemed worthy to be taught Folk Magic from grimoires held by the chapter.

Drawbacks

Reduction in POW may not immediately affect skills based on the POW characteristic, however the character's Aptitude (Basic Percentage x5, the maximum natural limit) is now lower and if the character's skill already greater than that it must be reduced to match.





Acolytes (Vampires)

Becoming a Vampire is an extreme step and only those Initiates with a Devotion score of 70% or higher will even be considered. The process requires the sacrifice all remaining POW to the god, becoming reliant on the Magic Points that the Vampire can steal from others. This final dedication can only be made through a Vampire Lord, who will feed on the Initiate and drain from them their last POW. This of course means that the prospective vampire must first break or allow to lapse any other religious devotions they have, in order to give himself completely to Vyako.

Benefits

Acolytes have achieved true immortality at the expense of their souls and are utterly exterminated if their physical body is destroyed. Acolytes are technically undead in the way that Initiates are not; the process of becoming a vampire is so exacting as to alter the nature of the worshipper.

The final POW dedication is spent on additional boons – including the Fangs ability and further increase to Characteristics, but those who aspire to become a Vampire Lord will likely keep some of their entitlement in reserve in order to one day be able to select one of the boons available to that status.

Vampires have no POW therefore their maximum Willpower skill is 0. This is reflected in complete and absolute submission to their vampiric existence, and consequent freedom from the frailties of the human psyche. Conversely, they are immune to the effects of spells and miracles that call for a Willpower resistance roll.

Drawbacks

A full vampire can be detected by magical means as the lack of POW is a glaringly obvious. It is also now vulnerable to direct sunlight. Unless protected by the Abjure Darkness spell or similar the Vampire takes damage per round from direct sunlight on exposed skin and flesh. At Games master's option this may vary with the season and Sun God's power - 1 point in the Winter, 1d4 points in Spring and Autumn, up to 1d6 points in Summer

Vampire Lord

These terrible creatures have advanced to the level of Thagrish Martigern himself, become leaders of the cult, able to directly channel the god using the Fangs trait at any time, and their very presence is a holy place for cult members. Each new Vampire Lord is sent off with one or two followers to found a new

chapter and start the process all over again, although it sometimes happens that he simply attempts to destroy his creator and usurp their chapter.

Magic

Vyako's cult has no magic or spells of its own, but each chapter may eventually acquire a collection of magical lore into its own Grimoire containing Folk Magic and Sorcery spells.

Sorcery: Vampire sorcery is made more difficult by the lack of POW to determine range and duration; once fully a Vampire acolyte a sorcerer's spells cannot be manipulated beyond Touch and have a default Duration of instant. The only ways for a full Vampire, with 0 POW, to overcome this obstacle is to stack magic points into the spell to serve as the POW from which some of the spell's traits are calculated; or to combine with use of the Enchant spell, thereby fixing spell duration according to world time rather than a multiple of the Vampire's POW. Consequently vampires tend to rely on Folk Magic for everyday use.

A typical example of a cult Grimoire is the Book of Enduring Love, which contains:

Folk Magic: Alarm, Babble, Blessing, Darkness, Glamour, Knock, Praise Vyako, Protection

Sorcery: Abjure Darkness, Attract Magic, Enchant, Dominate Human, Fly, Intuition, Regenerate

Skills

Deceit, Devotion, Disguise, Insight, Seduction, Stealth.

Vyako's Boons

As a cultist's POW is reduced by vampiric feeding, he can take one or more boons in return. These boons define the cultist's powers and traits as a vampire.

Demi-Vampire Boons (1POW each)

A Talent for Lying

For each point of POW consumed by Vyako in payment for this Gift, the character gains an advantage in either Deceit, Disguise or Seduction, making all skill tests one grade easier.

Darksight

As per the trait described in RUNEQUEST.

Eternal Youth

All Ageing rolls are one grade easier.





Life Drain

This trait is the ability to steal a part of a victim's life force and convert it to Magic Points. It is specific to a Characteristic, so while one initiate may steal POW from his victims, another might drain STR or CON. SIZ and INT cannot be drained. It is possible to kill a victim this way but unless this will help prevent detection, it is unusual to do so. The number of characteristic points drained is one tenth of the initiate's Devotion score. The trait has a default Magnitude of 1, so simple Folk Magic can frustrate the vampire's efforts.

Unnatural Charm

Increases the Character's CHA by 1D6 at night (sunset to sunrise). The enhanced characteristic can exceed species maximum.

Unnatural Speed

Increases the Character's DEX by 1D6 at night (sunset to sunrise). The enhanced characteristic can exceed species maximum.

Unnatural Strength

Increases the Character's STR by 1D6 at night (sunset to sunrise). The enhanced characteristic can exceed species maximum.

Unnatural Vigour

Increases the Character's CON by 1D6 at night (sunset to sunrise). The enhanced characteristic can exceed species maximum.

Vampire Boons (2 POW each)

Fangs

This boon costs one Magic Point to trigger and produces a transformation in the vampire that takes a combat round to complete. An acolyte vampire can perform this feat on nights of the dark moon. A Vampire Lord can do so at any time.

The vampire's mouth is distorted and stretched to accommodate a mass of fangs and suckers capable of slashing and puncturing flesh and draining blood. If the victim resists the vampire must first grapple his victim and once he has a hold must make a successful bite attack (use Unarmed) to inflict 1d3 damage and subsequently drain one level of blood (Fatigue) per round. At the same time the victim must make a successful Willpower test or the Vampire drains a 1 POW with each level of fatigue, which passes directly and permanently to the Vampire's demon lord. The victim cannot be reduced to less than one point of

POW unless they are a willing participant undergoing transformation to Vampire status. They can be killed through simple blood loss.

Regeneration

The Vampire recovers from damage one step faster than a mere mortal – minor wounds heal in hours, serious wounds in days and major wounds in months. No Healing roll is required for major wounds to begin healing or prevent maiming. This boon can be taken twice, resulting in a healing rate of minutes, hours and days.

Shape Shift

Shape Shift gives the Vampire the power to turn himself into an animal, retaining his existing INT and Magic Points but redistributing STR, CON, DEX and SIZ to form the Characteristics of their shape-shifted form. Each Characteristic can be raised or lowered by a maximum of five in this way. This ability costs 1 Magic Point to trigger and 1 per hour to maintain the shape-shifted form. A Vampire Lord can choose his own alternate form, but his followers always adopt the same.

Vampire Lord Boons (3POW)

Domination

At the cost of one Magic Point the vampire can charm a human or other creature and subject them to his will. The Vampire must use Influence or Seduction, opposed by the victim's Willpower. Once charmed the victim will obey the vampire master's command so long as the vampire concentrates on the domination and so long as they remain in the vampire's gaze.

Revenant

A Vampire Lord can, if killed but his body left intact, attempt to bring himself back to life through Vyako's Intervention on the following night. A roll against the Vampire's Devotion is required to succeed. 1d4+1% is deducted from the Vampire's Devotion skill. Restored to life the Vampire starts with but a single Magic Point and his Fatigue at Debilitated and needs rest before he can take action.

Taskan Thesh (Public Cult of Taskay)

There were once many cults honouring the god of fire, but in Taskay Thesh was always a special deity regarded as the city's





main protector. His local cult served as an important prop to the ruling elite – landed aristocrats supported by the army and the propertied classes. The city's cult extended its reach into other parts of Tarsenia and its influence is now such that all other cults honouring Thesh are encouraged to recognise its seniority or even make themselves subservient to it. Any attempt to promote a rival cult will be confronted by the considerable influence of its leader, Maresh Martek.

Nature of the Cult

The cult of Thesh is at the heart of the Empire and is intimately involved with its hierarchy and with the army in particular. However it represents a potential challenge to imperial power. Whereas the Emperor-cult is inclusive and welcomes people from newly conquered lands the cult of Thesh at Taskay is unapologetically Tarsenian and even within that community deeply entrenched in Taskay itself. It prepares for the day when the Emperor ascends to heaven and aspires to assume an even greater role at the heart of the Empire and make the city of Taskay a true imperial capital. Despite the cult's parochial nature devotees of Thesh from across the Empire come to Taskay to join in worship directed by the cult and witness Thesh's fiery epiphany each year.

Organisation

Lay worshippers are expected to be active members of a congregation with their own rules and arrangements for worship, usually organized through a place of work or perhaps a funeral club. These congregations are expected to recognize the authority of the cult and its officers, and give due respect to any initiates among their ranks.

Lay worshippers can come from any walk of society, but initiates are divided into three sub-cults, each with their own membership rules and roles, and based on pre-imperial social divisions: Soldiers, Artisans and Sorcerers.

The cult's leader is Maresh Martek, who is without doubt the most important person in Taskay after the Emperor himself. He is 132 years of age and well remembers the time of the Marble Simulacrum. Maresh and his cult played a crucial role in the years of crisis that followed the Marble Simulacrum's destruction, and while disappointed to have to bow before the Iron Simulacrum when it appeared, he nevertheless secured a position of power at the heart of the imperial state which includes a monopoly of the Exarchy of Taskay.

Maresh Martek's military experience is both limited and a very long time ago, hence he delegates command of the cult's military arm to professional officers. The most senior officer of the

cult's military wing is the Iron Companion, Count Farchang. He is the Simulacrum's confidant and chief agent, entrusted with knowledge of the most secret plans, and often with their execution, and if not on active service is usually based with the Simulacrum at Ashkor.

Kepil Narmost commands the cult's troops garrisoned at Taskay. Kepil is a priest of the Emperor cult belonging to the diocese of Taskay as well as being an acolyte of Thesh. His ambition is to succeed to command the regiment and thereby to gain a permanent place at the side of the Iron Simulacrum as one of the Iron Companions.

Membership

The Cult of Thesh at Taskay welcomes those who have already made their devotions to the God or are prepared to do so at the point of admission. Only those registered as citizens in the city of Taskay itself need apply and a prospective initiate must have minimum Custom, Devotion (Thesh) and Rites (Taskan) skills of 30% in addition to the specific requirements of each branch.

Soldiers

The military arm of the cult admits those from the lower ranks of society if they are fine military-looking specimens. Gaining access to the ranks of the Unconquerable Heroes of Taskay carries a minimum requirement of STR11, CON 11 DEX 11, INT 12 and SIZ 13 and a minimum commitment of 20 years. A recruit is expected to have at least 30% in Athletics, Endurance and a Combat Style.

With a paper strength of just over 1,000 men the 'Fire-Eaters', as they are popularly known, are the praetorians of the Taskan Empire. The main body is stationed at Taskay and has the defence of the capital and the Emperor's palace as its primary function. 300 of them form an honour guard for the Simulacrum and a further 80 form a specialist unit of engineers and artilleryists also based with the field army at Ashkor.

Artisans

The Artisans represent the respectable civilian body of the cult. The cult admits those who are business owners or individual craftsmen who practice high-status crafts, particularly if the craft requires either an intellectual training or work in high value materials such as gold. Artisan admission to the cult is for those with Literacy of 30% and at least one Lore skill or Commerce and one Craft or Art skill relevant to their trade at no less than 50%.

An Artisan is required to diligently pursue their business at the expense of other interests, is exempt from military service, but





not exempt from providing financial and administrative support to the militia. Fully 10% of their earnings are tithed, and these earnings are accumulated in the cult's treasury to be at the disposal of the leadership to use for the public good.

Sorcerers

The sorcerers represent the intellectual and leadership foundation of the cult and an initiate of this branch outranks an initiate from either of the others. Following the practice maintained in Taskay since ancient times, the cult recruits its sorcerers from the upper classes only. A Social Class of Gentry or greater and a Literacy skill of 50% or more are absolute requirements, as well as 50% or more in Sorcery and either Shaping or Alchemy skills.

Sorcerer initiates are fully employed in cult business, and this includes providing service as clergymen to the congregations of lay worshippers.

Acolyte Membership

Acolytes are the principle agents of the cult. They must have a Devotion of no less than 70%, and three other cult skills relevant to their branch at the same level.

Officers and officials of this highly organised cult are also specific to each branch:

- Soldier-Acolytes form an officer class, and while attached to the Unconquerable Heroes often have significant freedom to take extended leaves of absence.
- Artisan-Acolytes head up the leading guilds in Taskay
- Sorcerer-Acolytes look after the temple, its property and treasures and its traditions, and after external relations with Thesh cultists in other cities and with the Emperor cult.

Perhaps unexpectedly even the Sorcerer-Acolytes are expected to learn martial skills. They are the inheritors of an ancient aristocratic tradition dating back to when aristocrats were not bookish sorts but bloodthirsty warmongers competing to demonstrate their prowess with the horse and bow. Were it ever to come to it, they might appear fully armoured and mounted in front of the Taskay Militia, over which they claim leadership, with the Unconquerable Heroes as their men at arms. That at least is the romantic image attached to notions of an independent city of Taskay under the cult's guidance.

Priesthood

Priests in the cult of Thesh of Taskay are highly influential leading citizens of the city and can expect to be treated with respect wherever they travel in the Empire. Many of them will also be high up in the local Emperor-cult, which is after all chaired by their own high priest and some of those have also found a place on the staff of the Iron Simulacrum.

Priests can be drawn from any of the branches, however Sorcerer-priests outrank the others and so far as tradition is concerned only a Magus (a sorcerer with a Shaping skill of 90% or better) can fill the role of High Priest.

A prospective priest should have Devotion skill and two other cult skills relevant to their branch at 90% or better.

Skills

Commerce, Combat Style, Craft (any skilled or high status), Custom, Devotion, Endurance, Exhort, Influence, Lore (Any), Orate, Ride, Rites

Combat Styles

Archery, Cloak and Dagger, Sidearm, Swordsmanship (Tarsenian School). Members of the Unconquerable Heroes can learn Ashkorian Pike, Black Powder and Artillery

Magic

The cult offers no teaching to lay worshippers. Initiates can be taught up to three Folk Magic Spells relevant to their branch from Avert, Coordination, Extinguish, Heat, Ignite, Fireblade, Repair, Warmth

Initiates and above can learn Miracles appropriate to their Rank. Thesh offers Dismiss Elemental, Elemental Summoning (Salamander), Extension, Incinerate, Rain of Fire, Shield

Thesh's Boons

Boons are granted to those identified by the cult leaders as being especially worthy. The musketeers of the Unconquerable Heroes all have the Burning Touch gift. Each boon reduces the worshippers maximum devotional pool by 1.

Fire Shield

The character is immune to small flames or fires, and can negate damage from greater fires to his body, but not things worn or carried. The ability costs 1 magic point to invoke, for POW minutes and negates 1 intensity of fire damage for each 20% of the devotee's Devotion skill.





Burning Touch

The character is able to inflict pain and damage through the searing heat of his touch. Each successful attack costs 1 magic point to invoke and can ignite combustibles and cause a target damage equivalent to a flame or fire of 1 intensity per 20% of the devotee's Devotion skill

Thesh's Incinerate Miracle

Instant, Ranged, Resist (Evade), Rank Initiate

Incinerate instantly raises the target to extreme temperatures. If the target is readily combustible material it is reduced to ashes, if it is organic it takes severe damage from burning. The caster can affect 3 SIZ of combustible material per point of Magnitude or affect a Hit Location of a living creature inflicting 1d3 Hit Points of damage per point of Intensity ignoring armour; if the damage inflicted exceeds twice the location's Hit Points, it is destroyed utterly. Incinerate can also be used to simply heat 3 ENC of metal per point of Magnitude to the point of malleability.

Beshor Valley Ancestor Worship

The Kingdoms of Yegusai and Zagre are home to a priestly class of shamans whose job it is to manage the Beshor Valley folk's relations with their ancestors. They preside over all the key rituals of the community but no other task is so serious a responsibility as the proper administration over funerary practices. The Beshorites expose their dead to the elements until they are stripped of all soft tissue, then gather up the bones and store them away. The priests conduct all these rites and take charge of the design, approval and excavation or construction of buildings and catacombs for use as ossuaries and the recruitment and command of a volunteer constabulary to stand watch over them.

Nature of the Cult

The cult of the Ancestors is a hybrid of animist and theist practices. The Shaman-priests can only disincorporate through a miracle granted by The Ancestors and The Ancestors not only provide access to miracles but can also be asked to intervene directly as spirits by the priests.

The priestly caste is completely focused on their relationship with the deceased ancestors and their specialist knowledge is contained within the Lore (Genealogy) skill. A successful use of

this skill allows a priest to identify by name a specific spirit who will provide the insights, skills or knowledge they need. If they have that individual's mortal remains to hand then a successful Binding test will summon it for discussion and negotiation.

Being the only shamans with which most Taskans are familiar, priests from Yegusai are highly sought after in the Imperial heartlands as exorcists and some immigrants to the cities of Tarsenia have even built up cults around themselves.

Membership

Almost all indigenous people in the region are lay worshippers (Followers) in the Ancestors cult. Those who come from the right families have the chance to become initiates and take set out on the path to become a shaman-priest. The royal houses of Zagre and Yegusai furnish the acolytes, and the acolytes are kings.

Initiates

Dedicated members are few in number, drawn from a number of families who have the hereditary right to offer their young men up for acceptance into the cult. If not born into the priestly class it is possible to gain entry by adoption if a character has POW17 or greater. An adoptee will be trained up to ensure they qualify as a Spirit Worshipper by the age of 17. Initiates must have 50% in each of the cult skills.

Initiates serve as assistants, attendants and understudies to the shaman-priests.

Acolyte Membership (King)

The expectations of the Ancestors rest on no one more than the kings; it is they and only they who can acquire and use the Inundation miracle that brings fertility to the Beshor Valley as the river breaks its banks. This is not caused by snow melt in distant mountains but the magical exhortation to the river god to swell his waters and flood the land. Each king-acolyte performs this rite on his side of the river, hoping that he will tempt more of the god's power into his land than that of his rival.

A prospective king is chosen for many reasons besides his cult skills; all prospective heirs are intensively trained in order to ensure they are as well prepared as they can for their religious duties if they should inherit.

Priesthood

A prospective Shaman-Priest must have 70% in four of the cult skills. He is expected to acquire the Disincorporate Miracle so that he can communicate with the ancestors on behalf of the people.





Skills

Binding, Craft (Builder), Craft (Undertaker), Custom, Devotion, Exhort Ancestors, Literacy, Lore (Architecture), Lore (Genealogy), Rites (Beshor Valley).

Magic

Folk Magic: Dry, Find Life, Perfume, Preserve, Visibility, Witchesight.

Visibility

Ranged, Resist (Stealth or Willpower)

This spell causes a hidden supernatural entity to become visible, at which point it can be targeted with spells or a shaman can attempt to force it into spirit combat with his binding skill. The spell cannot force a djinn to materialise. If the entity is a spirit it must be one that is capable of manifestation in the material world for the spell to affect it. If cast at a person possessed by a spirit the spirit's aura becomes clearly visible.

Theist Miracles: Consecrate Tomb, Discorporate, Exorcism, Excommunicate, Extension, Inundation, Obliterate, Spirit Block, Summon Ancestor

Discorporate

Duration 15, Rank Acolyte, Touch

This miracle causes the target (usually the magician himself) to discorporate, and project his soul into the Spirit World, leaving a lifeless body behind him. Other than the fact that the user has no fetch to guard his physical body, the effect is the same as a Shaman's Trance skill as described in the RUNEQUEST Core Rulebook. The Shaman's Evoke skill serves as the Trance skill to determine the power and effects of the discorporation. The priest can use the miracle offensively in which case the target may resist using their Willpower. The priest can exhort multiple uses simultaneously to have others accompany him on his journey.

Traditional Spirits

Ancestor Spirits, Guardian Spirits

The Hradori

There is a cult among the Beshor Valley People that not only views the boundaries between life and death as supremely sacrosanct, but is aggressive and militant in policing those boundaries to the extent that they might attempt to stamp out transgression even where they hear of it in foreign lands. Still little more

than a rumour outside their homeland, the cult of the Hradori (Threshold-Keepers) seeks out vampires, ghosts and other signs of undeath. Followers of this cult are sent out into the world equipped with whatever skills, spirits and magic their fellow cultists can provide them, to assassinate anyone the cult suspects of necromancy. The Hradori cult is a subcult of Beshor Valley Ancestor Worship. Its members are usually from those adopted to the priestly caste. Its most senior members are acolytes.

The cult arranges teaching for range of skills and Folk Magic that will be useful to its members in the field, and has the Turn Undead miracle in place of the Discorporate miracle.

Magic

Rites: Beshor Valley

Folk Magic: Avert, Coordination, Find Undeath, Incognito, Protection, Visibility, Witchesight.

Theism: Exorcism, Extension, Spirit Block, Turn Undead

Turn Undead

Instant, Range (Tens of Metres), Rank Acolyte, Resist (Evade)

Turn Undead sends out a blast of energy in an arc of 90° in front of the caster that destroys the creations of necromancy. It affects undead creatures in front of the caster in the order in which the blast hits them – i.e. closest targets first. To destroy a skeleton costs 1 Magnitude, a zombie 2, a wraith or ghoul 3, a Vampire 5, Vampire Lord 10. Each creature attacked reduces the remaining Magnitude by this amount, whether or not it is destroyed. Magnitude in excess of this amount passes on to the next target in line.

Skills

Binding, Combat Style (any), Custom, Devotion (Ancestors), Exhort Ancestors, Language (any), Lore (Genealogy), Rites (Beshor Valley)

The Hradori can gain access to Ancestors who will act as Guardian Spirits and Bane Spirits

MILITARY UNITS

The famous Unconquerable Heroes of Taskay are an elite unit but only number a thousand or so men in a professional army that never falls below 30,000 in number. The regular army is comprised of three main arms: the Light Infantry, the Pikes and the Cavalry.





The Imperial Light Infantry (ILI), aka The Brigands

Named in honour of their origin in Zygag Taga's irregular army that marched out of the Jekkarid, The Brigands are the Taskan army's force of 10,000 light infantry.

Nature of the Corps

Their place in battle is at the front – 'before the standards' – where they open most engagements with missile fire and sudden rushes to hand to hand combat before retiring to the wings or the rear to let the heavies in to finish the job. The Brigands will lead the way in assaulting fortifications, and they will act as the main force in broken, steep or forested terrain. As a result they are well placed to win promotions and awards for conspicuous bravery. ILI men often adorn themselves in bright coloured clothing and attach plumes and feathers to helmets and shields to make sure they stand out and are easily recognised on the field of battle.

The men are equipped at state expense but usually adapt or supplement the equipment with their own resources – so are generally armed and armoured with little eye to uniformity. A typical soldier will have a leather or metal helm, lamellar corselet of

leather scales or a simple leather jerkin, a padded coat and a round or oval shield. For weapons a pair of javelins and a side-arm such as a hatchet, sword or mace is common. Most will carry and be proficient with a sling and at least one in five will be equipped with a bow instead of javelins.

Organisation

The Brigands are formed into units of 80-120 men referred to as 'hundreds', and each hundred is made up of ten files and each of those is made up of two half files of up to 6 men. A file is commanded by a sergeant and his corporal. The Hundred is commanded by a Kentarch (captain) who usually has one deputy or lieutenant. Ten Hundreds are brigaded together under a Miliarch.

The Brigands' commander is the Iron Companion, Count Arrak. He will often deputise to one or more subordinates in order to effectively control his force when it is split

Membership

The basic requisites for acceptance into the ILI are a minimum of 11 in STR and DEX and 13 in INT. Enlistment is for 20 years, however a soldier can buy himself out from 5 years service, at 1500 Taskeens less 75 Taskeens for every year served after the 5th. Standard Taskan army pay applies at 2 Taskeens per day.

Sergeant (File Leader)

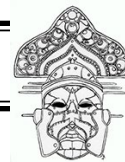
A file leader in the ILI is chosen from the ranks by the company officer. A sergeant should have 50% or more in five of the unit's key skills. They receive twice the pay of a regular soldier, and can nominate one of their men to be corporal, and leader of the second half-file, which brings with it one and a half times the pay of an ordinary soldier.

Captain (Kentarch)

Officers are usually promoted from the ranks, first to a lieutenant and then to the rank of Kentarch. To make take the step from lieutenant to captaincy requires initiation in the Emperor cult. Officers are expected to have 70% in three of the key skills as well as literacy of 30% or higher.

An officer is handsomely paid for his services: 30 Taskeens per day for a Kentarch and 20 for his lieutenant. enough to ensure he is finely equipped, can maintain a horse, afford the services of one or more servants and still set aside funds for a good retirement.





Colonel (Miliarch)

A Miliarch is in charge of ten Hundreds, unsurprisingly known as a 'Thousand'. This is a senior commander with a small staff of officers, couriers and specialists including surgeons and sorcerers. The Miliarchs are the highest ranking officers who are in the full pay and service of the Imperial Light Infantry. They report to commanders directly appointed by the Iron Companion with responsibility for the ILI, currently Count Arrak.

To be eligible for appointment to the rank requires that there is a vacancy, that the candidate is an initiate in the Emperor cult and has 90% or greater in at least two of the regiment's skills or combat styles, 30% literacy and 50% or greater Command skill.

A Miliarch is paid an astonishing 10,000 Taskeens per annum and is guaranteed a handsome plot of land as a gift upon retirement from the regiment.

Skills

Athletics, Combat Style, Endurance, Evade, First Aid, Lore (Strategy and Tactics), Survival

Magic

The regiment will ensure instruction is available for those who are able to learn so that a typical soldier will know three from the following:

Coordination, Firearrow, Heal, Mobility, Speedart, Vigor

Combat Styles

Archery, Targeteer, Slinger

Pikes of Ashkor

The largest single entity in the Taskan army are the Pikes of Ashkor, a division of men wielding stout two handed long spears whose job is to dominate the battlefield – an insuperable bulwark in defence, an irresistible steamroller in offence.

Nature of the Corps

The Pikes are the backbone of the regular army numbering some 15,000 heavy infantry. These pikemen form dense infantry masses on the battlefield, relying on armour, magic and a hedge of spears to ward off enemy missiles. Each soldier is equipped with metal helm with leather or scale aventail, lamellar corselet of bronze, iron or sometimes of leather over a quilted coat, and splinted or lamellar greaves and vambraces. The Ashkorian pike is about 10 feet long including a very long spearhead with a straight cutting edge along one or both sides. A small shield, round or tear drop shaped, is worn on a strap, sometimes also

fixed to the forearm, leaving both hands free to wield the spear. The pikemen usually carry swords as a sidearm, and they are also trained to use a compound bow. Most commanders like to keep at least the rear ranks – a quarter of the total – armed with missile weapons.

Organisation

Each pike square is made up of 250-300 men, and there are at any time 50 of these squares on the active list. These are arranged into brigades of between four and six pike squares, and numbered from left to right of their position in the line. These brigades are temporary creations, commanded by appointees. The most senior commander who is permanently attached to a unit is the captain (First Spear) of each pike square. A square has its own standard, a wooden pole mounted with symbols topped by a coloured streamer. It can also be recognised by its shield colour, or if the unit has been awarded battle honours, by the shield blazon.

The commander of the Pikes is Count Bunais, a 40-year old general of the Iron Companions. His staff and the officers who command each brigade of pikes are all personal appointees, but consist of men who have fought in many campaigns and are not to be mistaken for politicals or dilettante aristocrats playing at war.

Membership

The minimum requirements for acceptance into the Pikes of Ashkor are STR 11, SIZ 13. Enlistment is for 20 years, however a soldier can buy himself out after five years for 1,000 Taskeens less 50 Taskeens for every year served after the 5th.

Ordinary soldiers in the unit are paid 2 Taskeens per day.

Sergeant (File Leader)

A file leader in the pikes is chosen from the ranks by the company officer. A sergeant should have 50% or more in five of the unit's key skills one of which must be Lore (Tactics and Drill). They receive twice the pay of a regular soldier, and can nominate one of their men to be corporal, and leader of the second half-file, which brings with it one and a half times the pay of an ordinary soldier.

Captain (Kentarch)

Officers are usually promoted from the ranks, first to a position of Kentarch, who despite their position still take their place in the phalanx and then to the rank of First Spear, who is commander of the pike square but does not burden himself with a pike. Officers are expected to have 70% in three of the key





skills as well as literacy of 30% or higher. The First Spear must be an initiate in the Emperor cult.

An officer is handsomely paid for his services: 20 Taskeens per day for a Kentarch and 30 for the First Spear. The First spear of the most senior square – the one which has the place of honour on the left of the line – is paid double.

Officers in the pikes are not allowed to ride when their unit is in the presence of the enemy but must march on foot alongside their men.

Skills

Brawn, Combat Style (Ashkorite Pikeman), Combat Style (Archery), Endurance, First Aid, Lore (Tactics and Drill),

Magic

The regiment will ensure instruction is available for those who are able to learn so that a typical soldier will know three from the following:

Bladesharp, Heal, Protection, Speedart, Vigor

Combat Styles

Archery, Ashkorite Pikeman

The Emperor's Furies

The Furies are a heavy cavalry regiment trained in warfare techniques learned from the Sheng – who also supply many of its recruits.

Nature of the Unit

Well armed and equipped with bow, lance, sword or mace, buckler and dagger, the Furies are capable of a wide range of tasks on campaign and on the field of battle. The Furies also have their own dedicated squadron of Machank devotees. Even the rank and file are well armoured, with thick padding beneath – or sometimes over – metal lamellar and splinted armour reinforced at key points. Horses are usually barded at least to the front and sometimes their hindquarters too.

Organisation

The Furies are divided into two wings and each wing into ten squadrons of approximately 50 men in each.

Count Maranis Askim is the Iron Companion who commands the cavalry.

Membership

The minimum requirements for acceptance into the Furies are STR11, DEX12, SIZ 12 and a Ride skill of 30% or higher. Enlistment is for a minimum of 20 years, however a soldier can buy himself out after five years for 2,000 Taskeens less 100 Taskeens per year of service after the first five.

A Fury is paid 4 Taskeens per day, but from this is expected to maintain his horse and harness.

File Leader (Dekarch)

Each squadron has five File Leaders who form a committee of officers, and who elect one of their number to command of the squadron. He should have Literacy 30% and 50% or more in five of the unit's key skills one of which must be Ride. He is paid an additional 2 Taskeens per day.

Captain (First Lance)

A captain in command of a squadron is simply the most senior of the dekarchs. If there is any dispute over seniority the matter is resolved by vote of the squadron's men. The senior dekarch draws double pay. The fact that pay is lower than for an infantry captain is almost a matter of pride; many dekarchs in fact come from wealthy backgrounds.

Skills

Athletics, Combat Style, Endurance, Lore (Tactics and Drill), Ride, Willpower

Magic

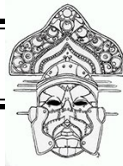
The regiment will ensure instruction is available for those who are able to learn so that a typical soldier will know three from the following:

Bladesharp, Bludgeon, Heal, Mobility, Pierce, Speedart

Combat Styles

Taskan Heavy Cavalry: Bow, lance, sword or mace, buckler, dagger. Trait: Mounted





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The greatest empire in Thennla.
Ruled by the Iron Simulacrum, the
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When the Emperor ascends to heaven,
Who will emerge victorious?

Welcome to the Taskan Empire.
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