



ARES™

BLINK OF AN EYE:

Don't blink or you'll miss it. See? In that second, the t'sa did something. It might be something good, or it might be something bad, but they did something. Quick thinking and quick acting, the t'sa are always busy, always looking for something new. It's this trait that drove them to colonize space, and it continues to drive them toward new challenges in the STAR[®]DRIVE[™] campaign setting for the ALTERNITY[™] game.

THE WORLD OF THE T'SA

BY STEPHEN KENSON

ILLUSTRATED BY MARK NELSON

THE T'SA ARE A REPTILIAN RACE from a world where mammals never developed to out-evolve reptiles. Instead, smaller reptiles became smarter, outstripping the larger reptiles with brains rather than brawn. The t'sa have been applying their native inventiveness and curiosity to the development of their civilization ever since.

The t'sa are perhaps the most industrious race in the known galaxy. They are certainly the fastest growing civilization among all the human-dominated Stellar Nations. The t'sa are fiercely independent and proud of their achievements. They are also the indirect cause of the two worst wars in galactic history. If anything is certain, it's that the growth of t'sa civilization holds surprises for everyone in known space.

T'sa are small reptilian humanoids, standing from 1.1 to 1.4 meters tall on average and weighing 30 to 50 kilograms. They have a sleek hide of small, overlapping scales that cover whipcord muscles. Skin color ranges from dark brown through greens to red, ochre, and golden. Male t'sa tend to have brighter skin tones than females. The t'sa head is small and triangular, with a blunt snout, slitted nostrils, and small, slitted eyes. The head is topped with a tall, finned crest that reveals the t'sa's family heritage. T'sa have long, whiplike tails that are always in motion, lashing from side to side or twitching slightly even when the t'sa is standing still (a rare occasion indeed).

Although they are reptiles, t'sa are warm-blooded. They are oviparous, laying eggs to produce young. T'sa feel the urge to mate only one week out of every three to five years,

PIDGIN T'SA

assa	food
at'dava	water
cha	mine
cho	yours
ch'nakan	guiding spirits
Ch'Nal	the creator-god
ch'sa	guide of the people, a Ch'Nalist priest
ch'tass	family/egg-clutch
dait'sya	dagger
dei'sya	tattoo patterns
k'chal	guardian
K'san Ch'nak	the guiding spirit of the t'sa
naka	many
nal	me
sa'tova?	where is ...?
sheen'esh	cold/freezing
sheen'esh'ach	cruelty
sho'deer	spear
so'naka?	how many/which?
Taasa	the t'sa home-world
t'ak tau	the mating time
ursh'hue	achievement
va'moosh	failure (literally "sinking")
xakksha	a kingdom or nation

a period they call *t'ak tau*. Otherwise, they do not concern themselves with the issue of procreation and find the human preoccupation with mating activities humorous. Female t'sa lay small clutches of four to ten eggs, which hatch after roughly twenty-seven days. Young t'sa mature rapidly, reaching adulthood in only three months. The mother cares for the hatchlings during this time, then leaves them to fend for themselves. Thus, t'sa do not develop strong emotional bonds with their parents. T'sa families are based around the egg-clutch or brood of siblings.

T'sa are omnivorous, eating both plant and animal material. T'sa prefer their meals raw or lightly cooked, often highly spiced. Eating small animals alive is considered a delicacy. Humans planning on eating in t'sa establishments or visiting the T'sa Cluster are advised to make the t'sa aware of their dietary needs.

HISTORY

The t'sa evolved on Taasa, a large, warm planet dominated by thousands of small lakes, swamps, and marshes rather than oceans or seas. Early life on Taasa developed much like life on prehistoric Earth, with many different types of amphibians and reptiles. Unlike Earth, however, Taasa never evolved insectoid or mammalian life-forms. Instead, small, quick lizardlike creatures began to develop greater intelligence and hands with opposable thumbs. Eventually they became the early ancestors of the modern t'sa: intelligent, swift, and inquisitive.

PROGRESS LEVEL 0: THE STONE AGE

The early t'sa soon began to shape their environment. They employed intelligence and cunning to evade hostile predators, forming secure communities. They discovered the use of fire, a valuable tool for keeping other creatures at bay. The t'sa also developed simple weapons, particularly spears and knives, for use in hunting. Unlike other intelligent species, the t'sa rarely used their weapons against each other. Their non-confrontational nature allowed them to avoid much of the warfare that fills the history of races like humans, mechalus, and weren. From the beginning, the t'sa were able to cooperate for the overall benefit of their species.

PROGRESS LEVEL 1: THE CITY AGE

The t'sa began to build larger communities, interconnecting webs of alliances between clutches, known as *xakksha*. This led to the development of the first cities on Taasa around 20,000 years ago, considered the dawn of t'sa civilization. T'sa cities often grew quite large, surrounded by terraced farms and animal pens. Large predators remained a concern, but the t'sa learned to domesticate many animals for food and labor. The rich, moist marshlands provided waterborne plants for consumption.

These advances allowed more time for pursuits such as exploration and scientific research. T'sa curiosity drove explorers all across Taasa, leading to much cultural and genetic cross-pollination and the early rise of a homoge-

neous world culture. T'sa scholars and scientists discovered and explored astronomy, animal and plant husbandry, and chemistry. Metal-working lagged behind other sciences, due to the lack of large metallic deposits on Taasa and the lack of warfare to encourage technological development. Spears and daggers remained the main t'sa weapons, since swords required too much metal. The t'sa needed improved weapons only for hunting and fending off larger predators. Their naturally tough hide eliminated the need to develop armor for millennia.

The City Age also saw the beginning of modern t'sa religious and spiritual beliefs with the development of their *Ch'Nalism*, based on earlier animistic t'sa practices. The doctrine of many different types of spirits involved in the creation and guidance of the world created a tolerant and open-minded belief system for the t'sa. All t'sa are considered under the guidance of the same spirit, so religious conflict between the t'sa was minimal. The basic tenants of Ch'Nalism have changed little since this earliest point.

PROGRESS LEVEL 2: THE GROWTH AGE

As their progress reduced the hazards of their environment, the t'sa expanded rapidly—in some cases, too rapidly. The growing populace demanded new territory and new frontiers, sending t'sa explorers searching for new lands to settle. The lack of oceans limited travel on the surface to walking or riding beasts. The ground was too uneven and marshy in most areas for the development of land vehicles, and large ships weren't effective without seas. Water travel was limited to small boats, which often required portage to move from one lake or river to another.

Early on the t'sa hit upon the idea of air travel as a means of getting from place to place. T'sa inventors began experimenting with gliders based on the wing-structure of native flying reptiles and birds, as well as lighter-than-air balloons. Such vehicles were useful only for short trips and required considerable altitude. Still, the t'sa continued to look to the sky as their new frontier.

The growing population and the

demand for new territory caused some problems among the t'sa. For the first time, there was reason for competition between groups of t'sa. T'sa clutches and xakksha struggled to gain the most useful and valuable land. Explorers rushed to find the best new territories for settlement. Fortunes were made by the t'sa who founded new cities and offered opportunities for growth, while other explorers lost their lives in hostile swamps or to native predators. Skirmishes and wars broke out between competing xakksha from time to time. Still, this competition was limited in comparison to the wars of expansion and conquest fought on other worlds.

PROGRESS LEVEL 3-4: THE SCIENTIFIC AGE

As the population continued to expand, the t'sa moved across Taasa in an inexorable wave of civilization. There was no Industrial Revolution on Taasa. T'sa technology progressed at a steady pace, with each new development well-integrated into their society before the next came along. They developed sophisticated metalworking techniques using the limited resources available. The first functional t'sa airship, using lighter-than-air gasses, was built fifteen thousand years ago. The t'sa began to harness hydraulic and steam power about thirteen thousand years ago.

For thousands of years, the t'sa continued to colonize areas of Taasa and develop new technologies, exploring the world around them. They tamed or wiped out the most dangerous animals, advanced agriculture and medicine, developed sophisticated means of air-travel, and looked for new ways to expand their understanding of the universe. Competition between xakksha continued, along with the occasional war of expansion, but the t'sa settled most of their conflicts peacefully.

T'sa astronomers developed theories relating to the existence of other planets and stars before the first cities arose on Earth. By the time the pyramids were being built in Egypt, the t'sa were ready to travel to other worlds.

PROGRESS LEVEL 5: THE SPACE AGE

The t'sa achieved interplanetary travel

nearly 4,500 years ago. They first put unmanned probes and satellites into orbit around Taasa, using them to study and survey their homeworld, as well as gathering information on other planets in their star system. Not long after that, they sent probes to other planets in their home system. That was followed by manned exploration of the system, sending t'sa crews to land on other planets for the first time. The t'sa quickly determined that several of the planets in their home system were capable of supporting colonies, and a new frontier was opened.

The t'sa space program was not without its hazards. One difficulty the t'sa encountered in their earliest space flights was the length of time it took to travel from one planet to another. The t'sa do not take well to extended periods of confinement, particularly not long months spent in tiny space capsules. From the beginning, the t'sa looked at ways of suspending the crew of a space vessel so they could endure the long journey. This began the development of cryogenic technology, which the t'sa continued to refine over the centuries. Many early t'sa astronauts and explorers died in accidents when their vehicles or cryogenic systems failed, but the t'sa kept trying.

For more than a thousand years, the t'sa explored and colonized planets in their own star system. The process of building new colonies and early terraforming efforts occupied them for some time. It also continued to stimulate the advancement of t'sa technology. Advancements developed for the space program were applied to everyday life: new computer, medical, and propulsion technologies, for example. The t'sa population boomed with the availability of new frontiers for them to explore. As the population grew, so did the number of t'sa clutches and individuals who sought to expand the frontiers of their race.

The planetary colonies of the t'sa and the need for communication between them led to the expansion and refinement of the t'sa version of the Grid. An extensive information network already covered all of Taasa, but now the t'sa Grid needed to expand to encompass the colony worlds as well. Limited to light-speed communications links, the

T'SA MARTIAL ARTIST

T'sa sha'cre'tasa, or martial artists, are useful as bodyguards or explorers. Their smaller size often causes opponents to underestimate them, allowing them to work covertly with ease. A sha'cre'tasa is never truly unarmed and can react with incredible speed. Martial artists often seem calmer and more "centered" than most t'sa, carrying themselves with a deadly grace and ease.

Core Skills (33 points):

Acrobatics—defensive martial arts 2, dodge; Stamina—endurance; Resolve—mental resolve.

In the Verge:

T'sa martial artists are known to wander the Verge, seeking employers able to afford them and opponents worthy of their skills. Along the way, they seek to learn as much as possible to help them refine their art. A fighter who defeats a t'sa martial artist in combat can expect to have the t'sa request to study with him or her for a time, to learn and improve.

t'sa grid suffered from extensive time-lags, a problem t'sa technicians continually worked to correct.

PROGRESS LEVEL 6: THE INTERSTELLAR AGE

Although t'sa scientists labored unsuccessfully to discover a means of faster-than-light travel, the t'sa did not allow their lack of a stardrive to slow their expansion to the stars. They sent probes into the depths of interstellar space and surveyed new star systems using powerful telescopes. When they discovered a suitable planet in a nearby star system, they made ready to colonize it.

Without a stardrive, the trip would take over a century. Generational starships were not an option for the fast-breeding t'sa; within only a decade, the population of such a t'sa ship would increase tenfold. The t'sa refined their sophisticated cryogenic technology, already used to suspend t'sa colonists and space-travelers for long journeys in-system. Thousands of brave t'sa colonists entered suspended animation

CH'SA DIPLOMAT CAREER: T'SA CH'SA

Ch'Sa are knowledgeable about the t'sa faith and tend to be good at dealing with people. The career is unique in that it is neither the t'sa primary career and may be combined with another career choice. T'sa who become Ch'Sa often have the Faith perk, able to call upon reserves of inner strength in times of need.

Core Skills (23 points):

Knowledge-theology, Resolve-mental resolve, Teach, Leadership-inspire.

In the Verge:

Ch'Sa are found throughout the Verge. Unlike most clergy, they are nearly invisible, since they do not proselytize or display their position in t'sa society. A ship's engineer may turn out to be a Ch'Sa who offers to conduct religious rituals for t'sa on board ship. There is no center for Ch'Nalism in the Verge, but small public shrines are found on any world with a t'sa population.

and began their journey toward the stars, guided only by their ship's computer systems and crewmembers who were periodically awakened. When the t'sa discovered other habitable planets, they followed the same course, sending out sleeper ships of colonists to explore and settle the new frontier. So began the expansion of the T'sa Cluster.

Life on the colony worlds was often hard, virtually cut off from Taasa, with communications taking years between systems at light speed. But the t'sa persevered and prospered, much like their ancient ancestors who colonized distant regions of Taasa. Colonies grew rapidly; a few thousand t'sa were able to populate a planet in just a few generations. The t'sa might have continued sending out sleeper ships and colonizing worlds in this way for another millennium or more, if it weren't for their first fateful confrontation with another intelligent species: humans.

PROGRESS LEVEL 7: CONTACT

In 2296, explorers from the Orion League discovered the T'sa Cluster. Humanity was, to say the least, shocked

to find an entire interstellar civilization on the expanding frontiers of human space. Except for the fraal, all the other species humans had encountered thus far were limited to their own star system, at best, but the t'sa had traveled to the stars on their own.

The t'sa were initially cautious in their dealings with humans, but they were fascinated by the humans' possession of a functional stardrive and what that implied for t'sa science and technology. Several colonial states made overtures and tried to annex the T'sa Cluster, but the t'sa firmly refused. Although they wished to join galactic society, the t'sa had no desire to become a client state of any human nation. The diplomatic conflict over the disposition of the T'sa Cluster stretched tensions between human interstellar powers to the breaking point, leading to the First Galactic War.

The t'sa remained carefully neutral during the war. They negotiated and traded with various factions, always careful to distance themselves from what they saw as a human conflict. When the dust from GW1 settled, the t'sa continued their trade relations with the new stellar nations. They had gained, among other things, stardrive technology in exchange for t'sa developments in cryogenics and biotechnology. This gave t'sa explorers and settlers a newfound freedom, allowing the species to settle three additional worlds during the war. During the Interbellum and the chaos of the Second Galactic War, the t'sa maintained their neutrality and expanded their territory, settling another fifteen worlds by the end of GW2. This increased the size of the T'sa Cluster to some twenty-three worlds.

With the end of the Second Galactic War and the founding of the Galactic Concord, the t'sa were finally accorded the recognition they desired. The Concord offered the T'sa Cluster the status of Concord Neutrality, surrounded by Concord space. The Cluster would have complete autonomy in exchange for favorable trade agreements with the Concord and cultural exchanges. The t'sa agreed, and the Cluster truly joined galactic society. Millions of t'sa chose to serve the Concord, seeking opportunities for exploration and advancement.

Billions of t'sa had already emigrated from the Cluster and chosen to become citizens of other stellar nations. With plans to colonize another forty-one worlds in Concord space, the T'sa Cluster continues to expand, and the t'sa are becoming a force to be reckoned with in galactic society.

CULTURE & SOCIETY

As a race, the t'sa are hyperactive, quick-witted, curious, gregarious, and technologically oriented. They tend not to be aggressive, although they are fiercely proud of their history and their achievements. T'sa are simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by humanity; they are curious about humans and their technology, but repelled by human aggression and arrogance.

The first thing that comes to mind when a human thinks about the t'sa is that they are fast. The t'sa are bundles of nervous energy. They rarely stand still for more than a few moments. Even then, their tails usually lash from side to side and they fidget in ways humans often find annoying. When necessary, t'sa can explode into a flurry of motion quicker than the eye can follow, making them more dangerous in a fight than their reputation suggests. T'sa talk quickly, and conversations in their native language are often too fast for non-t'sa to follow. When speaking other languages, t'sa have a tendency to repeat themselves or use different synonyms of the same word to get their meaning across to listeners of other, less "quick-witted" races. For example, a t'sa merchant might call out "Come, come, good sentients people folk. Come and examine my fine wares products goods!"

T'sa are extremely curious. Some would say too curious. They are born explorers, always wanting to know what lies just beyond their reach. Mysteries fascinate them. A t'sa cannot stand not knowing what lies behind a locked door, or what some new technological artifact does. Oftentimes, t'sa curiosity becomes a problem when they begin poking around things better left alone, such as sneaking past that locked door, or pressing buttons on the technological artifact. A great many t'sa explorers end up dead because they became

overly curious and forgot to take proper precautions. Non-t'sa often have to keep a close eye on their t'sa companions to keep them from wandering off and getting into trouble.

The t'sa also have what many other races consider an unhealthy interest in other people's business. Among themselves, the t'sa believe that asking personal questions is simply a way of getting to know someone better, and they're quite open with information about themselves. They think nothing of asking complete strangers about the intimate details of their lives, and often forget that humans and other races find such questions rude.

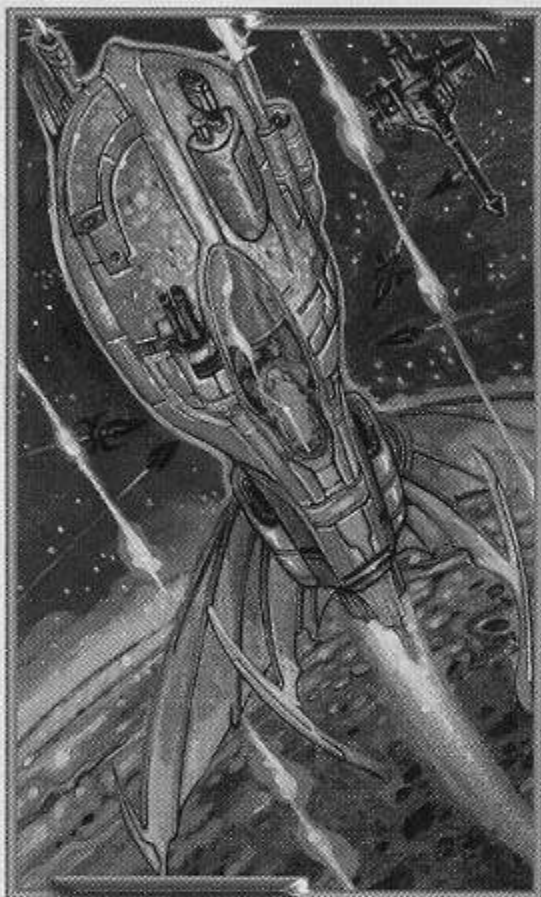
Part of the inborn t'sa curiosity is their fascination with technology. The t'sa consider science the greatest opportunity for exploration and discovery. They are driven to unravel scientific mysteries and to discover new ones. All t'sa have at least some interest in the inner workings of different machines and devices. They have a knack for understanding how things work. T'sa make excellent engineers and technicians because of this, and many ships have a t'sa engineer on board. T'sa love to tinker and can occupy themselves for hours studying a new piece of technology. Hopefully, the t'sa remembers how to put it back together again afterward.

FAMILY LIFE

T'sa do not marry or mate for life like some other races do. Mating is conducted casually, since it does not constitute the same commitment for t'sa that it does for other races. T'sa mate with an eye toward producing progeny that will be an asset to the community and the t'sa race, making them pragmatic. T'sa are often bewildered by the importance other races attach to mating customs and rituals. To them, courting is simply a waste of valuable time.

The t'sa say "every t'sa is part of a family." From the moment they are born, the t'sa are part of a social unit: the egg-clutch. T'sa are highly social beings

and enjoy having others around them. T'sa do not like to be alone unless they have somewhere to focus their attention. A t'sa who is hard at work can shut out the rest of the world for hours, but a t'sa who wants to relax always seeks out some kind of companionship. T'sa make friends easily, and they are loyal to their friends until death. Humans are often



amazed how quickly t'sa form emotional bonds with others, even members of other races. A t'sa can become friends with someone he or she has just met, and such a friendship may last for a lifetime. For their part, the t'sa do not understand the social divisions among humans and other races. The concept of human nationalism confuses the t'sa, who have had a unified culture for millennia. The t'sa are loyal to individuals and to the idea of their race as a whole, but the idea of being loyal to the abstract division of a nation is alien to them. T'sa xakksha involve complex systems of loyalties, but they are personal loyalties, given from one t'sa to another, and the t'sa recognize that they are still of one race and culture.

STATUS

Status among the t'sa is measured by achievement, both individual and family related. A t'sa who achieves great wealth or fame not only advances his or her own status, but that of the entire clutch as well. Likewise, a t'sa clutch can be brought down by the infamy of one sibling. This makes t'sa families fairly tightly knit, since they succeed or fail based on the actions of any of the siblings. T'sa are achievement-oriented "go getters" by human standards. Every t'sa seeks to achieve greatness in a chosen field, whether that be discovering new worlds, inventing new technologies, founding a new company or guild, or mastering another field. It is this desire for achievement that led the t'sa into space and continues to drive them to explore new worlds and seek out new challenges.

Somewhat naive by human standards, the t'sa desire for achievement makes them prey for con-artists offering get-rich-quick scams and similar schemes. This has led to the dual t'sa view of humans as kindred spirits who share a desire for exploration and achievement, and liars and cheats who simply stumbled into the discovery of stardrive. The t'sa have something of a love/hate relationship with humans, although their interaction with the Concord has helped to improve the t'sa opinion of humanity.

As part of their status-conscious culture, the t'sa often decorate their bodies with complex tattoos, called *det'sya*, that reflect their individual heritage and achievements, as well as profession and personal tastes. A t'sa with proper *det'sya* patterns gains a -1 step bonus to encounter checks with other t'sa, and a t'sa can learn a great deal about another just by looking at his or her tattoo patterns.

A FRIEND IN EVERY STARPORT

T'sa have a knack for making friends (and enemies) wherever they go. Well-traveled t'sa often seem to know everybody. To reflect this, a t'sa hero may wish

NEW T'SA AGENT CAREER T'SA KAWAK AGENT

The *Ka'Nak* is a secret t'sa government organization dedicated to the preservation of t'sa independence and sovereignty. It answers directly to the chosen leader of the T'sa Cluster, and few outsiders even know of its existence. Even the Concord is unaware of the true scope of the *Ka'Nak*. Agents spy on the Stellar Nations to gather information vital to the security of the Cluster. There is a minority movement within the *Ka'Nak* to further the welfare of the t'sa people at the expense of other nations by stealing technology and committing acts of sabotage. So far, Chaluk Chisier has suppressed these elements, fearing they could damage the Cluster's relations with the Galactic Concord.

Core Skills (32 points):

Acrobatics—defensive martial arts; Athletics—climb, jump, throw; Stealth—sneak; Investigate; Interaction.

In the Verge:

T'sa *Ka'Nak* agents operate occasionally in the Verge to protect t'sa interests there. The expansion of the Verge is something the t'sa have a stake in, and they're also interested in keeping up-to-date on the activities of the other Stellar Nations, especially members of the Expansion Pentad who may have designs on t'sa space, colony worlds, or technology. Some t'sa agents operate under deep cover as members of other professions for years before being called upon to take on a particular mission.

to take the Celebrity perk. The hero is well known by many people, although not necessarily a celebrity. Any perk check resulting in a Critical Failure means that the hero has run into an old enemy rather than an old friend, while a Failure indicates a place where the hero isn't particularly welcome, due to past problems. Reputation and Powerful Ally are also common perks for t'sa heroes.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

By human standards, t'sa government is

pure anarchy. For the t'sa, their complex system of loyalties and relationships makes perfect sense. T'sa society is based around a concept they call *xakksha*, which humans translate as "kingdom" or "nation." It is similar to the feudal system in Earth's history, and it arose during the earliest periods of t'sa civilization. In a *xakksha*, each t'sa is strongly loyal to the other members of his or her clutch (siblings), forming a t'sa *ch'tass*, or "family." Humans generally refer to a *ch'tass* as a "clutch," and most t'sa accept this term. Each clutch in turn owes loyalty to another clutch of higher status. Each group of siblings is loyal to each member of another group of siblings. Clutches join together to form different clans, professional associations, guilds, and companies. These join together to make up the individual *xakksha* which comprise modern t'sa society. This forms a complex web of duties and obligations on the part of the t'sa. Despite the fact that a *xakksha* is a nightmare to show on an organizational chart, it seems to function quite well for the t'sa. There are hundreds of *xakksha* currently spread throughout the T'sa Cluster, with more appearing all the time as the t'sa form new alliances. A t'sa can easily determine another t'sa's *xakksha* from appearance, scale markings, and *del'sya* tattoos.

The T'sa Cluster is a Concord Neutrality existing in Concord Prime space. Although under the protection of the Galactic Concord, the Cluster is autonomous in terms of government, a stellar nation unto itself. The t'sa have their own policies and laws and enforce them. Visitors to the Cluster are notified of this by automated Concord gridsats scattered along the border of t'sa space. They provide complete downloads of t'sa laws and customs for visitors to observe. The t'sa encourage trade and tourism. They welcome visitors to their worlds, but they do not tolerate criminal or violent behavior. The Concord maintains an embassy on Taasa to facilitate relations between the Cluster and other stellar nations.

T'sa laws are fairly simple and straightforward. They are based on a strong respect for the rights of the individual. Violations of an individual's rights, such as violence or theft, are pun-

ishable by fines and imprisonment. Fines or other forms of reparation are the most common punishment, dating back to ancient t'sa history. The guilty party must compensate the victim or surviving family members. Enforced labor or social service is also quite common. Imprisonment is considered a particularly harsh punishment by the t'sa, who do not take well to confinement. Criminals are more likely to be placed under "house arrest" and equipped with a tracking device that allows the authorities to monitor them. The t'sa do not believe in the execution of criminals, since they believe that everyone has something to contribute, even if they do so as part of a forced labor camp.

Relations between the T'sa Cluster and other stellar nations vary, but most stellar nations consider the Cluster a wild card in the political deck. Chaluk Chisier, the leader of the Cluster, is a wily politician with the best interests of his people at heart. For the time being, the Cluster is a strong ally of the Galactic Concord, which provides recognition and protection.

A considerable amount of political intrigue takes place between the t'sa and other stellar nations, despite the close ties to the Concord. Intelligence agents from the Stellar Nations work undercover to learn what technology and assistance the t'sa provide to the Concord. Agents of the t'sa *Ka'Nak* organization (roughly translated as "guiding protectors") keep a close watch on any Stellar Nation that might threaten the Cluster's sovereignty. Eventually, the T'sa Cluster's ongoing and rapid expansion will become an issue that will test the diplomatic skills of Chisier and the Concord.

RELIGION

The t'sa follow a polytheistic religion known as *Ch'Nalism*. It is based on the ancient t'sa belief that each aspect of the universe is governed by a particular guiding spirit, known as a *Ch'Nakan*. The greatest of the spirits is *Ch'Nal*, the creator of the universe. However, *Ch'Nal* is a lofty spirit and has little to do with the day-to-day running of its creation, leaving it to the various *Ch'Nakan*. There are literally thousands of *Ch'Nakan* in t'sa belief, spirits for

every type of being and thing in the universe. The t'sa give particular honor to K'san Ch'Nak, the guiding spirit of the t'sa race. K'san Ch'Nak is said to embody the t'sa ideals of achievement, curiosity, quickness, and friendliness: the perfect t'sa. Many t'sa joke that it is fortunate their guide is an immortal spirit; if K'san Ch'Nak were mortal, his curiosity and trusting nature would have gotten him killed many times over.

Ch'Nalism is the only major religion on Taasa and has been for nearly all of t'sa history, allowing the t'sa to avoid the religious conflicts that have plagued human history. The religion is very accommodating to new and variant belief systems, since all they require is the addition of another Ch'Nakan to the ranks. Also, because everything in the universe has a guiding spirit, the t'sa have few problems with the religious beliefs of other races, seeing them as facets of the complex pattern created by Ch'Nal. While some t'sa living outside the Cluster have chosen to adopt other religious beliefs, within the T'sa Cluster, nearly all t'sa follow Ch'Nalism. The t'sa also see no conflict in following Ch'Nalism and another religion at the same time.

Ch'Nalism has priests of a sort, those t'sa who are recognized as particularly in tune with the Ch'Nakan and K'san Ch'Nak. They are known as Ch'Sa, or "guides of the people." However, Ch'Sa are expected to have careers and lives outside of their religious duties. There are no full-time priests of Ch'Nalism among the t'sa, nor is a Ch'Sa required for the practice of the t'sa religion. Public shrines are maintained, and many worshipers gather on holy days, but most worship takes place in the home at small personal and family shrines devoted to K'san Ch'Nak and the clutch's own guardian spirits.

SPACECRAFT & WEAPONS

The t'sa have had spacefaring ships longer than any other race except the fraal. The t'sa were launching their earliest space vessels when humans were still perfecting ocean vessels. However, the progress of t'sa space technology remained slow and steady until their encounter with humans and their acqui-

sition of the stardrive, so t'sa ships still lag behind the most state-of-the-art human vessels.

SYSTEM SHIPS

The t'sa use modern ship designs with gravity drives, but they still have hundreds of older ships with fusion plants powering ion or fusion torch engines. They are slow by modern standards, but the t'sa see no reason to scrap them while they are still functional. They are in the process of refitting older ships to use gravity drives.

Most t'sa system ships are cargo haulers that carry materials between planets in a system. The haulers can also be easily fitted to carry t'sa passengers in freezer compartments, treating the passengers themselves as cargo. This eliminates the need for extensive life-support systems and reduces the space needed for each passenger to a minimum. It also reduces the cost of a trip across-system to only fifty Concord dollars, although such a trip might take as long as a month. While the t'sa don't mind this method of travel—interplanetary trips being quite dull, after all—members of other races don't care much for the t'sa "ice cube express," as humans often call it. They are usually willing to pay the additional cost for a more comfortable, faster ship to get them where they're going. Many of the new gravity-drive ships in the T'sa Cluster are used to ferry tourists and VIPs who want to avoid travel in deep freeze.

SLEEPER SHIPS

The t'sa also apply their cryogenic technology to interstellar travel. T'sa colony ships are drivespace vessels with vast cargo holds to contain thousands, even millions of freezer units holding t'sa colonists destined for a new world. Even with drive technology, a trip to a new system can take months. The t'sa can install less powerful and less costly drive units in their colony ships by placing the colonists in suspension for the duration of the trip. The ship's computer systems and a small crew can handle its operation. For long journeys, the crew may also enter suspension during the ship's starfalls, emerging to make navigational adjustments and maintenance checks of the ship's systems.

T'SA VIEWS

The t'sa are certainly not shy with their opinions; just ask them. Although individual t'sa views may vary, here is generally what the t'sa think of the other major races of the Sma'Dave galaxy:

Fraal: "All is talk, talk, talk, think, think, think. The fraal always think, but they never do—at least, not by themselves. The fraal gave humans the tech science and the learning knowledge to travel to the stars. Imagine what we could have done if they'd found us instead."

Humans: "Lucky, lucky, lucky, that's what humans are. A human slips in the mud and comes up with gold. They were lucky with dark matter, lucky with mass reactors, and lucky with the stardrive. If you spend time with humans, things will never be dull. Trouble is, some humans think their luck makes them better than everyone else."

Mechalus: "They know plenty. They understand the importance of science tech, but they're always about computers, Grid, and shadows. They need to jack out, unplug sometimes, and explore the real world."

Sesheyans: "We will never, ever, ever be like the poor sesheyans, taken advantage of by humans, treated like property slaves. They remind us to always remain free independent, standing on our own."

Weren: "Humans don't know them like we do. They think weren are just brutes who fight, war, battle all the time. But weren understand many things: philosophy, living, and dying. Try talking to them sometime. Just be careful to not get them mad."

UNARMED COMBAT

When it comes to weapons and armor, the t'sa started off with the evolutionary advantages of a tough hide, claws, and sharp teeth. Although the t'sa avoid confrontations when possible, they have also learned to defend themselves. In particular, the t'sa have developed many different styles of unarmed combat in the history of their civilization. Such combat styles have been further refined since the t'sa spread throughout

T'SA HOMEWORLDS

	Taasa	(N'Chalak)	Ka'Taasa
Primary:	Ch'Nara	Taasa	Ch'Nara
Planetary Class:	Class 1	Class 1	Class 1
Gravity:	G2 (1.03g)	G2 (.94g)	G2 (.97g)
Radiation:	R1 (7 rem/yr)	R1 (6 rem/yr)	R1 (3 rem/yr)
Atmosphere:	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)	A3 (N, O, CO ₂ , Cl)
Pressure:	P3 (1.05)	P3 (1.01)	P3 (1.1)
Heat:	H2 (21° C)	H2 (20° C)	H2 (19.2° C)
Orbital Distance:	0.83 AU	0.83 AU	14 AU
Diameter:	7,890 km	3,642 km	7,677 km
Year (Earth days):	247.4 days	247.4 days	362.5 days
Day (standard hours):	28.2 hours	18.3 hours	23.7 hours
Axial Tilt:	8°	10.4°	6°
Density:	0.97	0.89	1.13
# Satellites:	2 (N'Chalak and N'Shona)	None	None

the galaxy and often prove a surprise to individuals who think the t'sa are cowards who shy away from a fight.

The various t'sa martial arts styles almost all fall under the Acrobatics specialty skill *defensive martial arts*. They rely on sweeps, blocks, and swift motions designed to take advantage of the strength of a larger and more powerful attacker and the natural speed and agility of the t'sa. The most popular style is sha'cre'ta, which includes training in Resolve as well as Acrobatics. Many t'sa learn the Acrobatics broad skill and have at least basic martial arts training.

MELEE WEAPONS

In addition to unarmed combat training, the t'sa still make use of various melee weapons based on ancient designs and updated with modern materials. The first is the *dait'sya*, a thin, double-bladed dagger designed to slip between the scales of an opponent. T'sa traditionally fight with a *dait'sya* in each hand. The dagger's lightweight design, combined with t'sa speed, reduces the penalty of fighting with two weapons by 1 step.

The other traditional t'sa melee weapon is the *sho'ileer*, or short spear. It is 1.5 meters long, topped with a thin, two-edged spearhead. The *sho'ileer* can be wielded in melee combat or thrown. Several spears are usually carried, traditionally in a quiver slung across the back.

ICE GUNS

Early t'sa explorers and colonists adapted cryogenic technology to produce this unusual weapon, which uses a widely available ammunition: water. Cryogenic coils inside the gun freeze water from the ammunition clip into sharp projectiles of super-hard ice that are fired at the target using a blast of compressed air. Ice guns are not as effective against hard armor: Double the effects of rigid armor when resisting their damage.

Ice guns are quiet and easy to use and reload, so long as a supply of water is available. Additionally, the projectiles melt away in an hour or two, leaving no evidence. This and the fact that liquids other than water can be included in the gun's ammo mix have made ice guns popular weapons with assassins

throughout the Verge and the Stellar Ring. They are also still in use on t'sa colonies in the Cluster.

WHIP GUNS

Whip guns, known as *ch'raak* to the t'sa, are another military application of t'sa technology. They are named for the whipcrack noise they make when fired. Whip guns use superconductors to create powerful magnetic fields, accelerating metallic projectiles to great speed. With the use of PL 7 superconducting technology, whip guns are slim and compact weapons. They have considerable range and virtually no recoil because of the lack of chemical propellants.

BODY ARMOR

Throughout most of their history, the t'sa neglected the development of personal armor. Their own scaly hides protected them from most weapons. Early t'sa warriors wore cured hides, but Taasa was too metal-poor for the production of metallic armor, which would have slowed the swift t'sa fighting style. It wasn't until the development of pro-

T'SA WEAPONS TABLE

Weapon	Skill	Acc.	Md	Range	Type	Damage (O/G/A)	Actions	Clip	Hide	Cost
Dait'sya	Melee-blade	0	—	Personal	LI/O	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w	4	—	+2	250
Sho'ileer	Melee-blade	0	—	Personal*	LI/O	d4w/d4+2w/d4m	3	—	—	15
Ice pistol	Ranged-modern	0	F/B	6/12/40	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	4	15	+2	500
Whip pistol	Ranged-modern	0	F/B/A	20/40/200	HI/O	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	4	12	+2	850
Whip rifle	Ranged-modern	0	F/B/A	80/400/800	HI/O	d6+1w/d6+2w/d6+1m	4	20	—	2000

jectile weapons capable of easily penetrating their scales that t'sa gave thought to more advanced armor. *Ptokh k'se* is a weave made of alloy wire and heavy ballistic cloth, worn to protect the torso and limbs. It protects well against most impact weapons (with an armor value of d4-1/d4-2/d6-3 for LI/HI/En). In general, the t'sa do not like wearing heavier armor, as it interferes with their movements and only slows them down. "The best defense, protection, armor" the t'sa say, "is to be anywhere, elsewhere when the attack gets where you were."

HOMEWORLDS

Taasa orbits the star Ch'Nara, a G-class main sequence star. Taasa is larger and warmer than Earth, with a thick, damp atmosphere that humans find acrid due to traces of chlorine. Despite Taasa's larger size, gravity is near Earth-normal because of the smaller amount of metals present in the planet's crust. Seasonal variations are limited due to the planet's small axial tilt. The t'sa have long since domesticated the many different animal species on their homeworld. The more dangerous predatory species have been wiped out. The

t'sa still use large bipedal lizards known as zar'each as riding animals, since the surface of their world is often swampy and difficult for land vehicles. Most traveling is done via aircars and slow-moving airships.

Taasa's larger moon, N'Chalak, was terraformed by the t'sa who settled it millennia ago. It has gone from being a dry world with a thin atmosphere to a lush, miniature version of Taasa, although with more carefully engineered waterways. The greenery and settlements of N'Chalak are visible from the surface of Taasa on clear nights. The

planet's other moon, N'Shona, is a lifeless rock the t'sa mine for useful minerals and metals.

The system's other inhabited world was originally known as Za'lor. It was renamed Ka'Taasa ("New Taasa") when it was settled more than a thousand years ago. Ka'Taasa is smaller and cooler

ment of technology, remains. With the power of the stardrive in their hands, the t'sa have opened a bold new chapter in the history of their race, expanding to new worlds and new frontiers at an ever-increasing rate.

It may be that the t'sa will navigate the treacherous waters of interstellar



than Taasa, but its dense atmosphere helps to trap in heat and provide a comfortable environment. The rocky terrain is covered by a variety of hearty plant-life, and numerous crater lakes and deep tarns cover the lowlands of the planet. The middle elevations are home to t'sa cities that teem with activity.

THE FUTURE

Things change quickly for the t'sa, moving ever toward the future. Trends come and go on t'sa worlds in the blink of an eye, but always their fascination with the unknown, and with the advance-

politics and take their place as a true power among the human-dominated stellar nations, or the t'sa may become the spark that ignites interstellar war for a third, and perhaps final, time. Only time will decide the fate of their civilization, but one thing is certain: So long as the t'sa are involved, it won't be boring.



Steve Kenson's fascination with lizards comes from his boyhood love of dinosaurs. His appreciation for the t'sa comes from seeing them in action. (And they really are that fast!)