

*"The difference between a 'tourist' and a 'traveller' is that the tourist gets himself into trouble and then can't get out, while the traveller gets himself into trouble and then saves himself somehow." -Travellers' Digest #13*

There is no doubt that the Travellers' Aid Society is a tremendous convenience to player characters, but referees commonly under-utilize the Society, overlooking the potentials it has to offer an adventure or campaign. To encourage the inclusion of the Society in Traveller play, this article details the history, benefits and operations of...

# The Travellers' Aid Society

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## **HISTORY**

### **The Interstellar Wars**

The Travellers' Aid Society has roots extending back to the period of the Interstellar Wars. While battles raged in the Solomani Rim, Terran traders moved coreward to practice their considerable skills among the Vilani. Binding these Terrans wandering alien space was a powerful sense of brotherhood. And from this came a code of honor to aid and assist fellow Terrans in distress. These were times of great opportunity. Terrans seldom found themselves in competition with one another in the vastness of the Grand Empire of Stars. They infrequently came into contact with one another, and so a custom evolved of exchanging plans and itineraries. It was a point of pride for a captain to display good knowledge of the location of various Terran ships. And when a ship became conspicuously absent, investigations automatically began. A captain that searched for lost Terran vessels was always regarded with esteem.

Locating and assisting a distressed vessel was a greater honor, and the better the story it made, the more widely acclaimed it was. These tales have ever after been the subject of romantic literature. Often times, however, such ventures were personally costly, either by cutting into profits or the ship's resources. It was customary for fellow captains to provide compensation if the distressed party was unable to. The assisting captain never advertised what his losses were, but it was always polite to ask, and the captain would answer honestly. Terran traders were notorious about veiling the truth in matters of trade. However, in regards to expenditures and losses involved in responding to the distress, they were honor bound to remain scrupulously honest. Those giving compensation to the assisting captain were also regarded as contributing in the assistance. In talking of the rescue, it was expected that the assisting captain also mention those from whom he received compensation so they might partially share in the accolades as well.

## **The Rule of Man and the Space Traders Union**

The practice of compensation changed over time. Successful traders establishing corporations in remote sectors took up the responsibility. Soon, this evolved into foundations to which the expanding Terran corporations also contributed. These foundations, however, did more than provide compensation for those responding to distressed vessels. Many also provided for retirement, medical care, and insurance. Soon after the advent of the Rule of Man, the foundations were combined into the Imperium-wide Space Traders Union, which was open to all, including Vilani. This Union was not an organization whose objective it was to directly assist those in distress.

Much of the attitude of being personally responsible for aiding others faded with the establishment of the Second Imperium, but the Space Traders Union strongly endorsed the assisting of distressed starfarers through its policy of rewards and its internal traditions never flagged. The founders of the Travellers' Aid Society adopted much of this wholesale. The Space Traders Union divided itself into smaller entities in -1776, coincidentally the very same year Imperial scholars mark as the end of the Rule of Man. These eventually faded completely away during Twilight. Through most of the Long Night, there was no organization in existence to assist distressed space farers.

## **The Coming of the Third Imperium**

The Cosmos Club was established in the year -70. This is the earliest organization that eventually became part of the Travellers' Aid Society. The membership was formerly of the Sylean navy and marines who displayed particular excellence during their service in space or on other worlds. These uniquely trained and experienced individuals continued to push back the frontiers of explored space after mustering out. The Cosmos Club supported their efforts by bringing together like-minded and motivated individuals. Admission required the recommendation of at least one member and the approval of a board. While independent of a military process, the Club generally responded favorably to the recommendations of commanding officers.

The first lodges were usually built on naval property adjoining a starport. Later, as contributions waned, services were opened to qualified individuals for a price. Although the Cosmos Club needed an infusion of capital, it didn't want to sacrifice the spirit of exploration and adventure it was well known for. Membership was thus extended to Sylean Federation Scout Service personnel and exploratory traders who best reflected the spirit of the Club.

In an interesting move, the organization also opened its doors to potential patrons. Economic, political and scientific leaders were allowed to join for a hefty fee and were encouraged to look upon the membership as a resource to draw upon. These leaders got the trained manpower they needed and the members gained important contacts willing to supply jobs, funds and information.

In -27, the Cosmos Club was renamed the Sylean Space Society to reflect its new makeup. Noted for its excellence in food and lodging, the Sylean Space Society saw profit and once again flourished. As they specialized in catering to the needs of starports, the lodges competed successfully with commercial hotels, while continuing to give their members priority service. After the formation of the Third Imperium, the Sylean Space Society slowly grew to encompass the Domain of Sylea. Three more similar societies were created in other Domains: Vland in 32, Antares in 43, and Ilelish in 57.

## **The Easter Concord and the Travellers' League**

With the formal presentation of the Solomani Hypothesis in 114 and the subsequent beginning of the Solomani Movement, Capital deliberately delayed Imperial expansion toward the Solomani Rim. The concern was that Terra would command too much influence over Imperial politics if it were incorporated. However, the Easter Concord was most welcoming of the Syleans and actively sought membership into the Imperium since the beginning of the Pacification Campaigns.

For its eagerness, the Easter Concord was incorporated in 426 even though it was still separated from the interior by a gulf almost two sectors wide. Prior to incorporation, a foundation was created, called the Traveller's League. The primary purpose of the organization was to promote commerce in the crossing between Easter and the core worlds. Easter was anxious to promote trade, but the space between was dangerous and not patrolled by the navy. The League arranged for convoys and set up outposts along the way to advise and assist starfarers. With additional grants, they were also given light patrol cruisers to accompany convoys and assist distressed vessels. Their services were also extended to other states in the Solomani Rim.

After the Easter Concord was incorporated, the Easter Imperials took it upon themselves to establish a starlane to the Imperial interior. Bases and starports were established along the way, and naval fleets began regular patrols. Most of the responsibilities of the Travellers' League then fell to the Imperial Navy, but instead of fading away, the League expanded laterally into Daibei and the Old Expanses. It continued to promote commerce by linking these developing sectors to the newly secured starlane back to Core. In addition, the League began to compile and disseminate economic, cultural, political and other types of data for use by merchants and travellers. Its "Traveller's Aid" series of guidebooks became the standard against which other reference sources on travel of the day were judged.

Others noted the success of the Traveller's League across the Imperium, especially along the route through Corridor towards Deneb. The first of many franchise operations opened on Khukish (1606 Corridor) in 439 and within a decade, commerce between the frontier and the core had nearly doubled. Other franchises were similarly successful.

## **The Founding of the Travellers' Aid Society**

Almost from its inception, the Traveller's League maintained close ties to the Sylean Space Society. Society members were an integral part of maintaining the starlane to the Solomani Rim and the later expansion of the League. A significant portion of the research done for the Travellers' Aid series was performed by and used by the Society. It was not uncommon to find League patrol cruisers manned by Society recruited crews. The same patrons working to expand the trade routes were often Society members as well. It became clear to both organizations that they complimented each other quite well. In 488, they united to become the Travellers' Aid Society, melding the League's mission to assist travellers with the Society's tradition of adventure and exploration. The mission of the new organization became:

*"For those brave souls who determine to people the galaxy, the Travellers' Aid Society is their port in the storm, their rest from the pursuing darkness between the suns, and their rejuvenation of determination. As the bringer of timely intelligence, focal point of fellowship, and fount of information, the Society will ever serve her heroes among the luminaries."*

## **TAS and the Octagon Society**

Established in 342, the Octagon Society was the first major distressed spacefarer assistance operation to appear in the Spinward Marches. The group thrived on public contributions and some tax revenues for 150 years; it collapsed in the late 400's when scandals emerged over quality of shelter construction and the disposition of certain funds. The society was dissolved in 499 and its assets sold at auction. A number of the octagonal shelters remained for many years and were gradually replaced by TAS facilities on more traveled worlds.

## **The Civil War and TAS**

During the Civil War (604-622), several of the 18 Admiral-Emperors looked upon the strength of the growing TAS as a threat to their rule. The Traveller News Service (TNS) would not be used as a propaganda arm of either the Moot or the Throne and was instead seen as an enemy that needed to be conquered. Owing to the fact that succession was too rapid for any organized movement against the TAS by any one Admiral, plus the fact that her members and Naval tradition viewed the TAS as a necessarily independent entity, the Society was spared take-over by the government. The lessons learned during that unsettled period helped the TAS to better define its role and to insulate itself from official connections to any government body. That TAS today seamlessly crosses many boundaries is owed in great measure to policies developed in the wake of that era.

## **ORGANIZATION**

TAS has amazing uniformity in quality and content of service considering its complete lack of central control. The key to the whole organization is the TASPoC, the Traveller's Aid Society Policy Computer.

The highest level of organization is at the sector level where the title of Sector Aid Administrator is given to a figurehead. The SAA is normally a Society member of some renown who acts as liaison and master of ceremonies, meeting with VIPs, passing out awards, making recorded announcements and posing for posterity.

Various departmental senior administrators, backed up by a centralized TASPoC, carry on the actual business of the TAS. Each senior administrator is beholden to a Board of Ombudsmen covering their area of administration: Traveller News Service, Hospitality, Finance, Trade and Travel Classification, Benefits, Membership, Oversight, Personnel, etc. The TASPoC sets and adjusts policy, the administrator carries it out, and the ombudsmen send or bring field reports to the TASPoC. The computer is the defacto head of operations at the sector level.

At the subsector or lower level there is another, smaller layer of administration for all areas of the organization. Administrators and ombudsmen interact directly at this level with the goal of providing high quality service to members and carrying out the directives of the sector TASPoC.

The only department of TAS that interacts throughout the entire organization is the Policy Oversight and Review Committee. The PORC meets once every ten years to consider adjustments to the TASPoC instruction set. Each sector organization is represented by a delegate chosen at random from among member-volunteers in the sector where the meeting is to be held that decade. The delegate arrives fourteen weeks before the meeting and researches the member satisfaction surveys, policy modifications and suggested review items sent from the sector that they represent. They submit suggested agenda items based on their findings. Out of the meeting come policy improvement suggestions and authorizations, which are in turn sent back to the TASPoC in each sector.

## ***BENEFITS***

### **Material Benefits**

- ❖ Bi-Monthly High Passage. The passage can be used immediately or left "on account" with the Society. Unused passages remain the property of the member and are allowed to accumulate. They are not transferable and can be redeemed for 80% of their face value in credits as per Ministry of Transportation regulations. (The standard discount rate).
- ❖ Access to TAS Facilities. Food and lodging is available at a reduced rate. The quality of both is universally regarded as being high and is a hallmark of TAS service.

Beyond these are other benefits intended to provide travellers with the best, most complete information and assistance possible. It should be noted that many of these services are available to the general public for a modest fee. (These are denoted by a "\*" next to the specific benefit).

- ❖ \*Library Data Files. Complete information about the system, its main world and other bodies in the system is available at the hostel and, sometimes, through the local data net. Information crystals explain such things as the complete physical, social, political and legal aspects of the system as well as the kinds of pests that may be encountered (the local equivalent of Terra's insects and rodents), diseases (providing free or low cost prevention advice and/or treatment), warn of what local foods might not be compatible with the traveller's digestive system (depending on ancestry, Vilani, Terran, other minor human, and so on), important current events, interesting places to visit, customs, and other useful insights left by previous travellers.
- ❖ Legal benefits. A character in trouble has ready access to legal assistance. A lawyer of some degree of skill, who is either employed by the hostel or is a local resident member of the Society, is made available at little or no cost depending on the circumstances. Each hostel will have differing capabilities based on the local law level and the applicable requirements to practice law on that world.
- ❖ \*Star Charts. TAS was the organization that invented the classifications, "amber zone" and "red zone." These charts are updated through continuing contact with the IISS and are supplemented by the reports of individual members.
- ❖ \*Language Translation Software. TAS has some of the best language translator chips available. Although based on standard and well accepted translation programs for each world, these are enhanced by the practical experiences of the travellers that have used them.

- ❖ Identification and Credit services (TAS ID). Each TAS member is issued a combined ID and Credit chip. The chip is permanently encoded with the DNA of the owner and their identification and embedded in the forehead (for most species). Credit information can be read and written only by special equipment using special algorithms at official TAS facilities. Normally, a traveller will obtain a local world debit bracelet or fob by making a withdrawal from their “bank” accounts at the TAS.
- ❖ TAS Conventions.
- ❖ \*Travellers' News Service (TNS).

## **Intangible Benefits**

Many of the benefits of membership are not something you'd find in the brochure. Contacts with potential employers or patrons are the most obvious one. There would more likely be positive reactions from fellow members, even across cultural barriers. Rescue from danger, legitimacy in business and preferential treatment at most port facilities are also possible. Not at all times or every location, perhaps, but just at the right times.

## **Membership Levels**

Most people are unaware that there's more than one degree of Travellers' membership. In fact, there are three.

- ❖ Type A is the most common and includes the basic benefits described above.
- ❖ Type B membership is rare, averaging about 200 individuals per subsector. This includes all the benefits of type A membership, except that the number of high passages is increased to one every month. This class of membership is awarded to individuals who have consistently aided the Society and their fellow members or for actions above and beyond the call of duty.
- ❖ Type C is the most rare class of membership, averaging perhaps only 50 individuals per sector. To obtain this class of membership, the individual must so thoroughly distinguished himself in thought and deed that he has been set as an example for other members to emulate. Type C members have free use of all TAS facilities and travel at TAS expense. (There are reasonable limits of course). More often than not, it is customary for members encountering a Type C member to extend that individual every aid and courtesy at one's own expense. Such members carry a lot of influence within TAS as well.

## ***OBTAINING MEMBERSHIP***

### **During Character Generation**

The MegaTraveller Player's Manual describes two ways by which Travellers' membership can be obtained. First, it can be received as a mustering out benefit. Membership acquired in this way "may be construed as a reward for heroism or extraordinary service to the Society, rather than an official benefit of the service."

Any act that would merit being awarded a membership would need to be conspicuous and personal. For instance, being a member of a unit that rescued a misjumped merchant wouldn't afford such reward. Being commanding officer of a unit that parachutes from orbit into a remote facility to rescue kidnapped tourists might. The same for a merchantman; being the captain or first officer of a merchant ship that came to the aid of a yacht under attack by pirates, succeeding at great personal cost or damage to property, might also qualify.

The second way membership in Travellers' can be had is by paying a Cr1,000,000 application fee and filing a request for membership, which is a hold over from the days of the Cosmos Club. The application is reviewed to see how well the individual has lived by the underlying precepts of the organization. Those failing to measure up, for whatever reason, are blackballed and can never apply again. (Whether or not this rule is strictly enforced is up to the individual referee. Characters could conceivably redeem themselves).

Ideally, any application for membership should be role-played as no task or even series of tasks can adequately represent the review process. (Traveller is after all a role-playing game). Factors to take into consideration during a review:

- Recommendations by TAS members or former superiors.
- The character's personal history of aiding others. Incidents involving great personal risk and/or financial hardship are especially noted. The time it takes to go through the review process will vary depending on how long it takes to compile sufficient evidence supporting an applicant's request for membership.
- Social standing and personal wealth of the character. Those who could be considered patrons are often admitted if they have a record of philanthropic or business conduct that has benefited the general membership.



## Through Role-playing

To involve the Travellers' Aid Society in a campaign, it is not necessary for the player characters to start with membership. It might even be better to leave it as a goal. The referee's objective then becomes to subtly encourage players to seek membership. Develop the campaign in such a way that many of the most interesting non-player characters have Travellers'. Such NPCs are never villains, but benign and amiable with a propensity to establish friendships with the adventurers.

Once you have their interest, hint that membership might be awarded even if they do not have the money. The party could extend certain courtesies to TAS. For instance, they might provide an occasional free passage to TAS members or carry a critical item to a TAS member at no charge. This could earn them return courtesies, like bar chits, a dinner at the hostel, high passage tickets, or a free refueling. But more importantly, they are likely to catch the attention of Society administration.

After good terms are established, all they need to be considered for membership is for them to distinguish themselves. This can be either through an important service to the Society or otherwise a major adventure deserving of such a reward. Examples of services to the Society are:

- ❖ Pirates are attacking a merchant ship owned by a TAS member. There are no other ships in range to assist but that of the adventurers'.
- ❖ A ship, operated by a TAS member, is overdue from a circuit that was to take it beyond local factional borders. A group is needed to conduct a search.
- ❖ A TAS member was imprisoned by planetary or factional authorities for a legal oversight, real or imagined, and the Society failed to free him through negotiation. The adventures are welcome to apply their own talents toward liberating the member.

Note that when characters are considered for membership, they can still be blackballed (although they could conceivably redeem themselves) and not all player characters need be offered membership simultaneously. Players that exhibit the spirit of adventure while remaining particularly supportive of their fellows should be rewarded first.

By the time everyone in the player group has attained membership, the Travellers' Aid Society should be an integral component on the campaign. Past events and the friendships that were established in the process will often suggest lively adventures for an indefinite number of sessions to come.

## ***REFEREEING TAS MEMBERS***

The universe is a dangerous place, full of characters that could bring harm and trouble to player characters. A noble patron may go back on his word, or a woman in distress might be a crafty con artist. But it is probably best to make members of the Travellers' Aid Society an important exception to this -- all of them are benign if not favorably disposed to the characters. Admittedly, this is a game contrivance. But a stock of such characters is very useful to a referee in leading the player characters into adventures.

Of course, do not overtly announce that all TAS members are friendly and trustworthy. Allow the players to learn this through experience. Honest patrons and characters that are well liked --regularly make them TAS members. On the other hand, those that come in conflict with player characters never belong to the organization.

If there is a danger of this seeming artificial, introduce a "bad apple". But before doing so, it is perhaps best the player characters be well advised in advance of his reputation, perhaps through another TAS contact. To maintain the trust, avoid letting the player characters get hurt by the contact with TAS. A natural consequence of this is that membership in TAS will have greater value to players than the benefits alone.

## **Working for the TAS**

Beyond the occasional rescue scenario, it is possible for characters to be directly employed by TAS as a TNS Journalist or on an extended security detail. Characters with journalism or investigative backgrounds may be hired by TAS to report on conditions on worlds be considered for classification or declassification as Amber Zones. TAS does not rely on second-hand reports for Amber classifications since worlds have so much at stake economically. Nor do they always use in-house investigators for this work. Many times TAS will hire members who are heading into the area. They are then officials of the TAS in what is basically an undercover investigation.

Security details are sometimes filled with mercenary units. These are normally escort duty for shipments or special events security. Escorts might take a matter of months, while event security might be only two or three weeks.