

THENNLA

SORANDIB



MythraS

THE DESIGN
MECHANISM

SORANDIB

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INTRODUCTION



A suitable venue for the climax to an extended campaign, Sorandib provides plenty of opportunity for adventuring as players navigate their Adventurers around the many factions competing for control of the city and its treasures. This is also a place of exiles, so Adventurers who have found themselves on the wrong side of the law or branded as traitors may well take refuge in the city alongside many others in the same boat, ranging from idealistic political rebels to common criminals and abominable vampires.

Sorandib is an ancient city in catastrophic decline. The surrounding country has been laid waste by years of banditry and civil strife; the city itself is rife with factions, 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. In the past 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.

Just as the Emperor owes his immortality to magic provided by the king of Sorandib, the city will surely play some sort of role in his final ascension to the heavens. The Iron Simulacrum himself looks to Sorandib as the place he will discover his fate when the Emperor departs the physical plane, where he might be unmade in such a way

as to find the key to a continued existence as an independent soul. Sorandib could be the scene of treason on a world-shattering scale. The cult of Thesh in Taskay has its eye on direct control not only of the Artificers but of the fire-demon Sorantar, who is the city's god. Adventurers who get to know Sorandib may well decide to assist the Empire in finally absorbing this failing kingdom – perhaps even by hastening the King's inevitable death; but they could equally attempt to loot what they can and get out, or decide to shore up a resistance movement that attempts to block an Imperial take-over.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Sorandib has had two eras of greatness; the first was over 500 years ago, when the fertility of its lands was famous, A Sorandine Summer was a byword for the most agreeable climate, timber and ores were plentiful in the surrounding country, and the river brought significant trade. After a rather destructive war with the city-state of Felsang and the rebellion of Sorandib's subjects in Brotomagia and Camtri, significant changes took place. King Basgerik had invited in a sorcerous order – the Artificers – to support the war effort, and convinced of their vital contribution to his realm's survival he rewarded them with a key role in its renewal. It was at this point that the massive ziggurat was built to house the fire spirit Sorantar and his cult was established as a citywide phenomenon, amongst many other projects that amounted to an explosion of new and unprecedented constructions under the guidance of the Artificers. Middle City was built to house a massive increase in the city-state's artisanal class. A natural cistern beneath the palace was enlarged, and engineered to feed its waters to the Baths of Basgerik, as well as supply water to be heated by Sorantar's fires and

TIMELINE OF MAJOR HISTORICAL EVENTS

Year	Event	Description
512	Foundation	Ostrik the Synoikist unites the Tarsenians West of the Shol River into a single kingdom.
514	The Sorandine Apostasy	Ostrik refuses to sponsor public cult to the chief deities of the Tarsenians, and denies the divinity of Tarsen himself. Sorandib is henceforth considered an outsider to the community of Tarsenian city states.
529	The Similarity Engine	Thorrik II unveils the Similarity Engine, with which the people of Sorantia may exert their will upon the land 'as if a god.'
603	The Tribes of Sorandib	Ostrik II divides the people into Tribes, which will henceforth be the basis of voting, militia service, funeral rites and propitiation of the Similarity Engine.
742–751	Shol River War	Sorandib and Felsang engage in an extended conflict. During the war Sorandib loses its imperial possessions in Camtri and Brotomagia.
750	The Artificers	Basgerik I of Sorandib invites a sorcerous order to settle in Sorandib and affords them significant privileges in return for their contribution to the war efforts.
753–8	Basgerik the Builder	An extended campaign of construction, during which Middle City, the Baths of Basgerik, the Great Cistern and the Ziggurat of Sorantar are built.
757	Sorantar's New House	The city's patron spirit is moved from a natural cave system beneath the palace to a temple built atop a huge platform in its own city district.
758	Basgerik's New Beginning	Amidst wild celebrations Basgerik announces a new start for the city, and forbids all discussion of earlier times. It is extremely difficult to uncover information on historical events dating before this time. Nevertheless Basgerik's new calendar does not catch on.
803–814	New City	King Ilmerik builds New City, and Sorandib reaches its largest size with 35,000 inhabitants.
987–1019	Wars of Tarsenian Unification	Sorandib sacked Ashkor in 991 and participated in several battles in the early campaigns. However after 1002 she withdraws behind the Shol and plays no further part in the war.
1002	Zygas Taga's Siege	Sorandib's vulnerability is shown when a warlord with an army of brigands lays siege. The crown buys off the invader who crosses the Shol to join up with the army of the Zarimians.
1055	The Korantine Cataclysm	The Inundation of Korantis and the subsequent crisis among the Korantine states weakens Sorandib's trading network.
1114	Battle of Izangraz	The Kalebite clan plays a key role in blocking a Sheng raid into Sorantia. This is Sorandib's last moment of military glory.
1135–1175	The Great Decline	Sorandib is deeply affected by the strife that followed the loss of the Marble Simulacrum – but fails to recover when stability returns to the Taskan Empire.
1167	The Razing of Shelthra	For the first time the Vale of Shelthra is razed by 'bandits' while the crops are still in the fields. The Gundever clan are awarded river tolls in the city to replace their losses.
1189	Burning of The Tax Collectors	Amid unrest, and persecution and murder of royal officials, this is the last year that the crown attempts to raise taxes across the entire country.
1208	Ersjud Re-founded	The Kaleb clan creates a safe zone around Ersjud to bring peace and prosperity to part of the country.
1211	The Taskan Road	The crown permits a permanent Taskan presence to enable regular patrolling of the road between Sorandib and Felsang.
1214	The Smiling Gods	Quag Kaleb renounces the Apostasy of King Ostrik (which almost nobody has heard of) and founds a temple at Ersjud on the 700th anniversary of the event.

pumped to the palace and a few other key sites. The Black Rock, an artefact that had been the source of the city's magical energies, was decoupled from the ancient enchantments it had hitherto powered and repurposed by the Artificers to power their creations. The city was transformed over the course of a generation from a state founded on its agricultural riches to one thriving on manufacture, trade and commerce, generating products unavailable anywhere else in the world.

Basgerik's reforms included new ordinances for the city, including a prohibition on singing in public and the destruction of all chronicles and histories referring to earlier times, that earned him the sobriquet 'The Uncultured'; or more popularly, just 'Mad King Basgerik'. Nevertheless his reign ushered in a new era of prosperity that was only

slowly undermined by the gradual decay of the rural economy. Even under Basgerik's rule the farming population was starting to fall. Ever more people migrated to the city, resulting in the construction of a vast new suburb known as New City, under Basgerik's grandson Ilmerik. At the height of its urban growth spurt, Sorandib contained up to 35,000 citizens within its walls. Another 20,000 lived close by. 200,000 more people still occupied the townships, villages and farmsteads of its territory.

The first sign of serious trouble was that the frequency of bad harvests was on the increase. This seemed at first not to matter as funds were available to bring in imports on a huge scale. Until, that is, Zygas Taga appeared outside the walls at the head of an army. He made no effort to storm the city, which was considered impregnable thanks to

the defences created by the Artificers. He simply cut off the roads and river traffic, laid waste to the countryside, and waited. Basgerik III quickly came to terms as starvation threatened, and Zygas Taga moved on, laden down with 100 talents of gold and a secret that he would soon use to secure his immortality.

Now Sorandib's failing agriculture started to bite as wars and strife in neighbouring lands interrupted its easy access to grain shipments, with the collapse of the Korantine Empire in 1055 being the most terrible blow. Once the Wars of Tarsenian Unification had come to an end many of its citizens began to desert the place and resettle across the Shol River as citizens of the Taskan Empire. Declining resources resulted in the gradual decay of many of the city's finest buildings, and while the Artificers focussed their attention on revenue generating activities, such as the supply of the Taskan army with useful devices such as firearms, there were fewer and fewer resources left to maintain all the fantastic constructs that made Sorandib such a remarkable and celebrated city.

As if to mirror the lost fertility of the land, the royal line of the house of Muttine also began to fail. As each generation passed, every branch and offshoot of the royal line had to be exploited to keep a legitimate dynast on the throne. Efforts to have the current king Shadrian II sire an heir has come to nothing, and the terms under which the city is guaranteed independence from the Empire are specific to the royal bloodline, which means that adoption is not an option. It has been a battle with ever diminishing prospects of success. The king has lingered into his 77th year, and his health is failing.

THE REGION

Sorandib's historic territory is known as Sorantia. It encompasses a large part of the region known as Western Tarsenia, and the kingdom has always been regarded as culturally part of Tarsenia, if perhaps a slightly eccentric cousin. The old pact between the Muttine dynasty and Zygas Taga has meant that the region has been left outside the homogenizing effects of the Empire, and as a result Sorandib preserves both its regional idiosyncrasies and a great many archaisms – not least the Willpower of monarchy – that have long since vanished from the Imperial cities beyond the Shol River. The parlous state of the country means that Sorantia has suffered declining population, resulting in abandoned farmlands and deserted villages. Only some parts are under any kind of authority and now a large proportion of the population are considered to be lawless bandits.

POPULATION

The kingdom's population is tiny in comparison to its historic heyday, and indeed in comparison to any of the imperial provinces of Tarsenia. Sorandib itself has 22,000 people living within the walls or close by. Its immediate hinterland and the few remaining towns under at least nominal royal authority – Middra, Iatra and Ersgud (the largest), plus those inhabiting the Fengo-harvesting villages around lake Barur, amount to almost a further 20,000, while the balance of the population – some 27,000 people or so – lives outside of royal control.

The sparse population means that there is an enormous opportunity for settlement in Sorantia; this has not escaped the notice of any of the

REGIONAL POPULATION	
Locale	Population
Sorandib	22,200
Sorandib Region	7,300
Middra and the Upper Vale	3,300
Iatra and East Vale	2,600
Ersgud and Kaleb's Vale	5,200
Lake Barur	1,200
Badlands	3,400
Shepherds	6,000
Free Farmers	15,000
Hunters	3,000
Total	69,000

land's neighbours, but the Taskans work hard to keep people out – including its own – until such time as it can effects an organised takeover.

All native Sorandines speak a dialect of Tarsenian. While in the major towns this dialect is entirely comprehensible to someone brought up in the Taskan Empire (skills checks are one grade harder), out in the hills and in the villages around Lake Barur it is highly idiosyncratic and thickly accented (two grades harder).

THE BRIGA

This river rises from Lake Barur, and tumbles over two cataracts along its route before arriving in the Vale of Middra. The town of Middra is still the main staging post for goods and people moving up and down the river between Lake Barur and Sorandib. From here the river is navigable for its entire length to the sea. Beyond Middra the Briga winds its way south along the edge of the Yellow Hills being joined by lesser streams in its progress, until the highlands fall away to the west and the river crosses the plain to the south east, through Sorandib, and on to its meeting with the Shol. At the confluence of the two rivers, which marks the southernmost extent of the Kingdom of Sorandib, it is the more powerful Briga that gives its name to the river that flows south through the kingdom of Morkesh to its meeting with the Inner Ocean.

THE SHOL

The lesser river rises in the hills East of lake Barur, and curls round until it cuts south, forming the ancient division between Sorantia and the rest of Tarsenia, which is now a frontier of the Taskan Empire. The Shol can be forded at several places, the most frequently used crossing being the one found on the Felsang to Sorandib road.

THE VALES

The richest and most populous areas since olden times are the Vales of Sorantia. These are well-watered and fertile lands, which makes it all the more remarkable that the kingdom's decline has been so extreme as to allow large swathes of premium land to return to nature.

The Vale of Middra is the name for the whole valley of the upper

Briga, as far south as Sorandib itself. It is bounded to the west by the Yellow Hills, which are cut by two valleys that drain into the Briga, the Vales of Ashlom and Ritheb.

To the south the Vale of Middra meets a watershed along which runs the main east-west road connecting Sorandib with Felsang. Beyond this road is Kaleb's Vale, so called because the Kaleb family has its estates there, and they have founded Ersgud astride the road, a town almost entirely in their power.

To the west lies the Vale of Shelthra, which was once the demesne of the Gundever family, but is now lost to bandits and squatters. Despite its potential wealth it is now referred to as The Badlands, for some of Sorantia's most aggressive bandits now control the area. Finally, the Vale of Esha is formed by an arm of the Shol, and faces east towards the Taskan Empire. Its proximity to that great power does nothing to diminish the wild and isolated feel of the place which is increasingly encroached upon by expanding forest.

THE HILLS

The Yellow Hills frame much of Sorantia, and Lake Barur is nestled among them. Herdsmen moving their flocks between highland and lowland pastures according to the seasons are the main inhabitants. There are good pastures and some forestry to be exploited, as well as the unique harvest of Fengo offered by the lake. There are mines in the hills, but while some are spent others are abandoned due to the lack of security. There is still iron and bronze to be had if conditions improve. The hills are also known for the presence of mineral crystals that have uses to the Artificers, both for arcane purposes and as exotic tableware. There are few surface traces left, but there are places where caves or mines give access to untapped resources.

ROYAL SORANTIA

While Sorantia is recognised as a single political entity under the king of Sorandib, the part of the country remaining subject to royal authority is very small. Aside from a cultivated area around the city, which extends further on the east bank of the Briga than it does to the west, there are perhaps 30 villages and three towns (Middra, Iatra and Ersgud) enforcing, or at least recognising, the law of the crown, and occasionally paying taxes. The most successful is Ersgud, a re-foundation by Quag Kaleb on the site of an agricultural town and royal road way-station on the route from Sorandib to Felsang. Thanks to the security provided by Quag Kaleb's own henchmen, Ersgud has swollen to a population of 4,000 people, made up both of settlers from Sorandib itself and a respectable number of 'bandits' who have decided that civilisation offers them something worthwhile after all.

BANDITS OF SORANTIA

The population of Sorantia has lived under unhappy circumstances for many years, and have become hardened to the constant threats brought about by instability, lack of law and order, and the resulting general poverty. Several subcultures have formed over time, each of which asserts its own sense of identity and its own interests above any idea of a unified kingdom or nation. To most outsiders, and sometimes to one another, these people are bandits – chaotic, dangerous and prone to acts of violence if they imagine some advantage to them will be the result. They are self-reliant and seek to be self-sufficient, however with no rule of law to curb their behaviour they will not think twice about preying upon others to fill any gaps in their self-sufficiency.

They inhabit, and to an extent lord it over, large parts of the old kingdom of Sorandib. Those who have particular reason to fear the Taskan authorities tend to keep themselves west of the Briga, but pickings there are slim, and this exile necessitates effort to find lucrative work or to travel some distance to raid.

When the time comes for the Kingdom of Sorandib to finally collapse, and for the Taskans to march in, the attitude of these various bands may prove decisive. Someone who united these groups could potentially raise an army of over 5,000 rebellious souls to resist the Taskans or to assert someone else's claim on the kingdom.

THE HUNTERS

These fellows move around in small bands of 3–6 individuals, and make their way by hunting and trapping in the area known as The Huntlands. An abundance of wild game has sprung up since most of humanity retreated from the territory, and a good living is to be made bringing meat, skins, furs and feathers, or even captive creatures, to markets in Sorandib or across the river in the Empire. They are known to take money to allow well-to-do Taskan hunters into their territory and to provide services as guides and beaters. Of course anyone who does not pay a Hunter group for such access and services will be ambushed and at the very least robbed of anything they have of value.

The Hunters have no organised community or hierarchy, and only a handful of small villages punctuate the territory they roam. They nevertheless recognise each other by renown, and their mode of dress – a mixture of skins and furs and textile garments acquired from nearby settlements in trade – is quite distinctive. Some hunters live among, or close by, settled communities – such as those of the Free Farmers – but many are content to spend almost all their time in the wild.



Hunters are generally not too dangerous unless they find people in their ranges that are not known to them. When they do, they avoid them if they appear strong or ambush them if they look weak.

Some Hunters are devotees of Sumis, the Tarsenian goddess known as The Lady of the Wild Things, and they are aware of numinous places in the wooded hills that have an aura of sanctity about them because the goddess or one of her minions appears there and where devotions can be made. Sometimes shepherds join them in this, whose interest is less to propagate more wild animals but to seek protection for their flocks and families from the wolves that have grown common in the region following their near extinction when the kingdom was at its height.

THE SHEPHERDS

The Shepherds are mobile herding communities who once tended the flocks of the great magnates of the land, but now just look after themselves and their own livestock. The territory they roam and call their own is now generally referred to as the Grazelands, and comprises much of the hill country south of Barur as well as pastures in the Vale of Middra. Always ready to fight rustlers or to steal from communities they encounter on their travels, the Shepherds are actually one of the most notoriously dangerous groups in the region. They will trade from time to time, which only adds to the unpredictability of an encounter with them. Meeting a Shepherd band typically involves an encounter with 1d6+4 bandits, tending anything up to 20 times that number of livestock. There are villages dotted around the hills where the Shepherds' families are based and to which the roaming herdsmen may return at certain times of the year. Many shepherd families live among the Free Farmer communities.

THE DESERTERS

These people are former soldiers in the Taskan army who have absconded without paying the army the significant sums required to terminate their contracts early. They are a dangerous gang for obvious reasons, being trained in war and in some cases still bearing the military grade arms and armour they were equipped with by the Empire. The Deserters are a single group, and the core is a gang of bandits which fluctuates between 50 and 100 in number as individuals or sub-groups come and go. A greater number, formed of reluctant or former members settled in the area, can be summoned by peer pressure and intimidation to form a war-host if needed. Because the Taskan army will execute any of these men who fall into their hands, The Deserters keep to the Western side of the Briga, where they have taken control of the Vale of Shelthra, a fine land that, for now, nobody feels strong enough to drive them out of. Sometimes members of this fraternity can be found in Sorandib, looking for work as sell-swords, buying supplies or even recruiting lone deserters who have made their way there. Their overall leader is Taras Harfang, who is sufficiently brutal and ruthless that many deserters who initially fall in with the gang swiftly look for a way out. The Deserters extort money and supplies from communities in their area and sometimes take prisoners as slaves. Their raids can reach out as far as Brotomagia or even the

Jekkarid. They effectively control the road west from Sorandib to Ramassa, and travellers who seek to use that route must buy them off to travel openly.

THE FREE FARMERS

These people inhabit some of the farms, villages and towns of the region that were 'abandoned' by their former occupants – in effect they are squatters, mixed in with many people who never left their ancestral home but simply began to actively resist or simply ignore any sort of state control. A typical community is a village of perhaps 50 or more people, with some of the larger ones being a couple of hundred, except for the town of Eshom which is home to over 1,000 souls. The largest of the 'bandit' categories, they are also the easiest to treat with as they have settled homes and farms to look after, and usually family too. The total population of these communities exceeds 15,000. The 'farmers' will come together to see off any attempt by the crown or one of the aristocratic factions to assert control over them, since this can mean taxation or even highly unwelcome efforts to examine who holds the true title to the lands and dwellings they inhabit. Their bandit status is entirely based on their refusal to acknowledge any form of state authority. If they do not specifically engage in acts of brigandage it simply because they have few opportunities to do so. Nonetheless specific groups or communities find themselves under the thumb of some bandit leader or wizard from time to time – and quite a few have resettled at Ersgud out of choice to avoid just this eventuality.

Free Farmer communities tend to be headed up by one or more elders, or just the most forceful local strongman. These people will welcome a new political order or Taskan takeover in Sorantia, or fight it tooth and nail – depending on whether or not they are confirmed as the owners of their homes and farms.