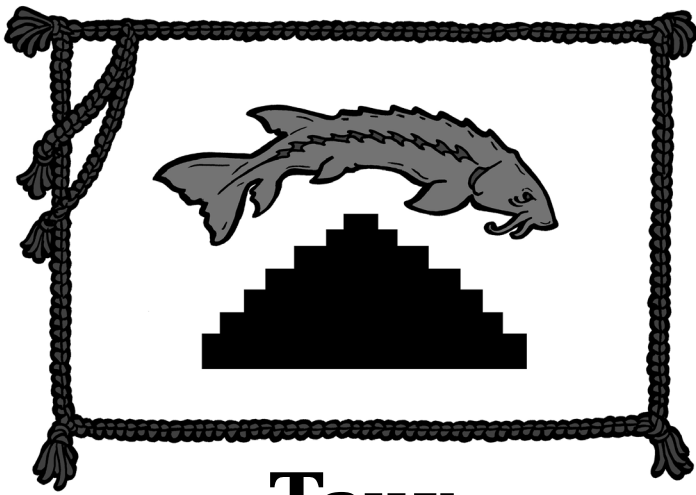


THE FOLIO

**Ports
of the
Nameless Realms**
By Scott Taylor



G
ART
of the
genre



Taux

The City of Cursed Stone

Political Status

Free City

Ruling Body

Red Pillar Council

The Red Pillars are a floating number (always odd to prevent ties in voting) of high level merchants and power players within the city. They are known to wear masks at public events, and about 50% of those on the council are completely anonymous. Women are welcome on the council, assuming they have the money and political motivation to be cutthroat about keeping their seats.

Ship Types

As a cultural center of the New Kingdoms, the port has a plethora of ships from around the greater Halo Ocean. Most local vessels are barques or sloops, costal traders plying their wares from the Minotaur Straights in the West down to the Kraken Straights south of Ebontra and Closed Mouth Isle.

Trade Goods

Trade into this massive port comes from all over the Halo. However, it is at the northern end of the trade circle, which means trade goods from the Opal Gates and the T'ung such as gems, silks, and even magical trinkets from far Arcania aren't as plentiful as cotton, linen, wine, and wheat that can come from Findalynn or the New Kingdoms.

Flag

The trade flag of Taux is well known throughout the Halo. It boasts a black step pyramid with an arching sturgeon fish leaping over it.

History

Shrouded in mystery and legend, Taux is a city of apocalypse. Once the capital of the great Tolimic Empire, its citizens were destroyed in a single night by an unknown magical retribution. 'Flash-burned' souls were trapped in the stones of the city and now whisper to those who will listen. Now repopulated by the various interests and races of the New Kingdoms, the city has a European flare based around the architecture of the old Tolimic people. Ancient temples, ball courts, and canals dominate the city.

Port District

Stone quays and a huge circular breakwater shelter this deepwater bay. It is a perfect place for greater trade ships to dock, and there are

ample trade houses to make money from. Sailors are plentiful, and no press gangs are employed in Taux, although disappearances of crewmen do take place on a regular basis, be these from men seeking fortune in the city or becoming victims of its darker criminal culture.

Law

Law on the docks is enforced by Sturgeon patrols. These mercenary soldiers (funded by the Red Pillar Council) are charged with maintaining order, quelling sailor rowdiness, and securing illegal contraband. A patrol typically consists of a sergeant (5th level fighter) and 6 regulars (2nd level fighters).

Taxation

A docking tax is levied on all ships entering the port, roughly one GP per foot of overall ship length. Goods debarked are taxed at a rate of 1 GP per cubic foot for 'elite' trade goods (silks, objects of art, weapons, etc.) and 1 SP per cubic foot of raw commercial goods (foodstuffs, lumber, etc.).

Powers that Be

Matricious Von Helder of Gariny, fallen lord of the northern Grand Duchy, prevails within the port of Taux. The human migrated to the city 20 years ago, and now his holdings encompass many of the warehouses lining the docks and the ships that support his varied commercial endeavors. He is a known member

of the Red Pillars, the ruling merchant council of the city.

The Sturgeon Captain of the Dock is Fell Dainen, a half-orc (jai-ruk if playing the Taux specific races) from the Wounded Land who is known to run a very tight operation with very little graft. He certainly has ties to Von Helder, but is his 'own man', and can be considered fair in most dealings, unless you are caught with contraband, then his sentencing is typically over the top.

Where to Go

The Driftwood (Inn)

The Driftwood, or 'The Drift' as locals call it, was one of the first structures erected in the city when explorers from the New Kingdoms began showing up after the apocalypse. It was initially a fortified waystation and adventurer's bastion on the docks, built of repurposed ship parts and driftwood scavenged along the docks. As the city's population grew and the districts were reclaimed by immigrants, the need for the small fortified barracks lessened, and the barracks was eventually abandoned. Still, an enterprising dwarf (kin for Taux races) named Dorn Hammerfall claimed ownership of the abandoned structure and turned it into an inn for newcomers to the city. There are ample

rooms here, and part of the structure is actually built over the water with a great hole in the common room to allow fishing by the patrons. Rooms are solid and secure, and since the structure is new and made of wood, there are no trapped souls in the walls to whisper to the guests. There is an old observation platform atop the structure that gives a great view of the city. It costs 5 silver to go up to it, and it is a known destination for couples looking for a romantic view of Taux at night.

Lodging

Private Room: 2 GP per night
Common Room: 1 GP per night
Suite: 5 GP per night (20 GP per month)

Ten Men Under (Tavern)

A story that persists around the docks of Taux is that of the ‘Ten Men Under’. In it, a group of men from somewhere in the Halo (the story differs here from Findalynn to the T’ung, and beyond depending on who is telling it) took a bet to consume a tankard of ale containing a water breathing enchantment on the night of the Taux apocalypse. When the magical storm hit, the men then jumped into the bay to avoid the horrors above, but in so doing somehow trapped themselves below the surface in a ‘world between’ and can now sometimes be heard through the hulls of ships screaming for help or pounding on the wooden planks. Whatever the case, the tavern that bears the story’s name is a notorious establishment with a reputation in the city almost as large as the

Emerald Serpent, which lies in the Black Gate. No one really knows who currently owns the Ten Men, but the proprietor is one Denen Mourne, a human from Thalonian. Although experienced in keeping patrons happy, Mourne still has his fair share of fights in the Ten Men as sailors from around the world are here on a daily basis, and old grudges and prejudices are hard to shake.

Costs:

The Ten Men has an extensive menu that is praised by most who come to the city.

Breakfast:

Plain (rice pudding, toast, cheese) (1 SP)
Elaborate (eggs, fish, corn bread, honey bun) (5 SP)

Lunch/Dinner:

Plain (pan-fried tomatoes, breakfast bacon, bread & honey butter) (1 GP)
Elaborate (grilled eggplant, fish stew, soft loaf & sugar butter coat) (2 GP)

Supper:

Plain (chicken legs, hard corn rolls & bacon gravy, fruit of the day) (1 GP)
Elaborate (fresh catch of the day, corn meal cates, butter squash, soft loaf, hot jungle berry pie) (5 GP)

Spirits:

Beer, small, pint (5 CP)
Beer, heavy, pint (1 SP)
Ale, pint (2 SP)
Ale, Dwarven, pint (1 EP)
Mead, pint (1 EP)
Mead, Urn Special Brew, pint (15 SP)
Wine, table, pint (1 EP)
Wine, Gariny Sparkling, pint (15 SP)
Wine, Thalonian Red, pint (1 GP)
Wine, Arcanian White, pint (2 GP)
Wine, Isle of Elvish Jephher, pint (4 GP)
Wine, Findalynn’s Promise Reserve, pint (1 PP)
Brandy, New Kingdoms, gill (1 EP)
Brandy, Grand Duchy, special aged, gill (1 GP)
Wounded Land Dark Liqueur, half-gill (5 GP)



Whispering Wall (Magical Place)

One of the most famous places on the Taux docks is the Whispering Wall. This ancient tidal retaining wall defends the city as a crescent dike and was once the original high water mark before the docks were expanded. Now, it seems an odd defensive work that rests too far inland from the main commerce of the port. Still, the wall persists, and its entire length is decorated with stone carvings of leering faces, monsters,

and death. Once, it was probably carved so to scare would-be attackers or perhaps ward dark spirits away, but now it has become home to hundreds, if not thousands, of trapped souls from the city. Those drawing close to it will feel as though the eyes of the carvings follow them, and many will hear the whispering of the trapped dead, some telling stories, other asking for help, and even a few who are known to tell the future.

For those seeking answers to questions, treat the wall as a Contact Other Plane spell, with all answers having a 75% chance of being completely misleading, if not blatant lies, to get the characters killed.

Thousand Feathers (Brothel)

Of the two great brothels on the docks, the Thousand Feathers boasts the most notorious madam, Shana of the Serpent Eyes. Stories abound about this strange and beautiful woman. Some insist she is a naga, others say she is the daughter of a medusa, while still more insist she is a feathered serpent from the Ebon Swamp come to the city to enchant men and then eat their souls. Whatever the case, Shana and her strange reptilian eyes have drawn men (and some women) from far and wide to share in the comforts of her dockside establishment. Appointments with her widely varied ladies

are priced by the hour or evening, and should one be looking for Shana's personal company, bring a heavy purse.

The structure itself boasts a large common room that can be sectioned off with multi-colored dressing screens as well as a central fountain/shallow bathing pool. Upstairs, private rooms have been added and are above the stone foundations to make them less inclined to have whispering spirits within.

Rates:

Massage (Common Room): 5 SP
Bath (Common Room): 2 GP
Private Massage & Bath: 5 GP
Private Room Session (Hour): 10 GP
Private Room Nightly: 30 GP
Add Another Companion: 3 GP hourly,
15 GP nightly

Private Session with Shana:

Inquire within

Behind the Veil (Brothel)

Seemingly less appointed than the Thousand Feathers, this brothel is more of a mystery even than Shana as all the ladies within wear veils over their faces. Thus, patrons have no idea what their perspective companions will look like before they pay. Some might think this would detract from business, but the opposite has been found to be true as gangs of men enjoy entering the Veil, paying for service, and then watching as their choices remove their veils for all to see. All manner of cheering, ribbing, and laughter accompany these open sessions, and

'the reveal' has become a tradition for many wayward crews from all over the Halo. Once the reveal has occurred, the crewmembers then utilize an hour of service with their respective ladies in the common room, creating orgies that are rarely forgotten by their participants.

The madam of the Veil is known only as Zephyr, and she is said to be a half-elf (Farian if using Taux races) of exceeding beauty, but to see beneath her veil (never in a common session) will cost a patron a small fortune.

The Veil itself is built within a reclaimed dockside temple, and its private rooms are small acolyte cubicles that many men speak of as tomb-like. The main common room, with an altar still in the middle, was likely once used for sacrifice. Patrons often share stories of mysterious screams, moaning, and all manner of noises if they stay the night, although most are laughed at because such noises would seem to be well in place at a brothel.

Rates:

Open Reveal, Group: 5 SP
per member (includes 1 hour
common room 'session')
Massage (Common Room): 1 SP
Bath (Common Room): 5 SP
Private Massage & Bath: 1 GP
Private Room Session (Hour): 2 GP
Private Room Nightly: 15 GP

Add Another Companion:

1 GP hourly, 10 GP nightly

Private Session with Zephyr: Inquire within

The Independent (Trade House)

Certainly buying goods within Taux itself can be costly, but for those on the docks looking for a deal, the Independent is the place to go. This single warehouse is home to dozens of small traders who have found a way to subvert the customary city taxes and pass the savings on to their customers. There is an entry fee into the warehouse (a modest 2 SP), but everything found here is considered to be at a 10–15% discount off the prices regularly found in the Player’s Handbook or Dungeon Master’s Guide (for magical items).

Adventure Threads

Low Level (1–3)

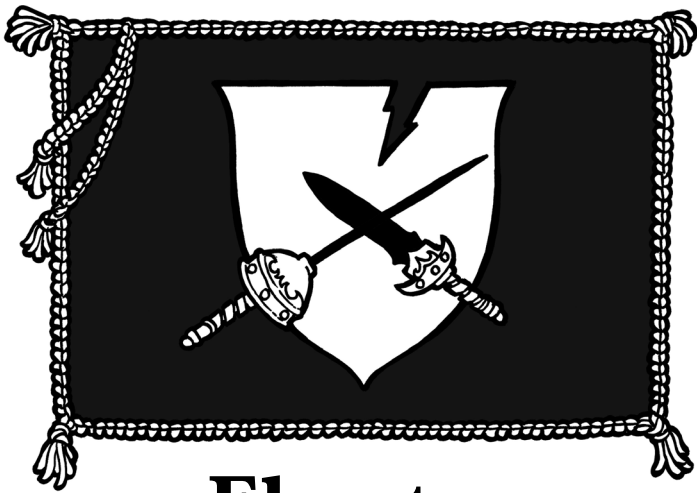
A series of break-ins and thefts at the Independent have caused a small group of non-Taux merchants to offer a 100 GP bounty on the whereabouts of those who perpetrated the thefts. A group of smalltime thieves calling themselves ‘The Wet Blades’ have been swimming to the pier, taking a secret trap door from the water level into the Independent warehouse, and then swimming out again. They have been fencing the goods to an agent on the docks and currently rent a room in one of the dock flophouses.

Moderate Level (4–7)

Burtrom Stain, a moderately successful fence for illegal goods on the docks, has run afoul of the group of half-orcs (jai-ruks for Taux races) called the Bridge Dwellers. He owes them money, and they have taken him captive and hold him in an underground safe house beneath a bridge that leads to one of the bay-flanking islands. His son, Blair Stain, is offering a 500 GP reward for his safe delivery from the clutches of the gang. What Stain did to deserve the ire of the half-orcs is up to the DM.

High Level (7–10)

Shana of the Thousand Feathers has disappeared, and the ladies of the house are looking for someone to solve the mystery. Was she abducted by agents from the jungles beyond the Opal Gates who recently arrived in the city (naga)?, has she cocooned herself in an underground chamber of the brothel before transforming into her true form after collecting enough souls?, or has a Red Pillar sought to add her to his growing harem? You decide.



Ebontra

The Dark Freehold

Political Status

Free City

Ship Types

Like most of the northern ports along the Free Coast that share the New Kingdoms waters, tall ships are the norm for this southernmost trade city before the Kraken Straights.

Trade Goods

Ebontra is an ‘exchange port’, meaning it takes in goods from the northern Halo reaches as far east as Findalynn and as far into the Minotaur Straights as Thalionia in the New Kingdoms before sending goods south to the Opal Gates. Almost any Northern good can be had here for the cheap, and even Southern goods (having come ‘up the circle’) from Arcania (Magical Talismans), Aflyr (Art & Bronzecraft), the Wounded Land (Weapons), and the T’ung (Silks).

Flag

The flag of Ebontra is a black field with a white shield split with a crossed rapier and dagger (also black).

History

Founded ages ago, in the upheaval after the fall of the Corsair kingdom of Uthoria, and then abandoned, this city was lost to the world for a thousand years before being uncovered in the misty and secluded ‘black bay’ of Close Mouth Isle. There are those that say it remained lost because of the Star Tower within the bay keeping ships away from its sheltered docks, but that is unconfirmed. All people can truly say is that after one hundred and fifty years of reoccupation, the city is a thriving port and the ‘last stop’ (along the greater Halo circle) before trying to pass the Kraken Straights to the southern reaches of the Opal Gates and the T’ung. Boasting some of the most impressive architecture in the known world, the black basalt walls and onyx crystal towers of Ebontra make it a sight to behold. As much as its sister city, the White Palace of Tristra is light, Ebontra is a shadowy place of lost magic and engineering.

Port District

The deepwater bay of the city houses hundreds of ships, including an exclusive ‘tall ship’ dock for three mast galleons coming from Findalynn. There are more Findalynn ships in

Ebontra than any other New Kingdoms port as an alliance between the maritime nations is strong, and Lynnian (Findalynn) Frigates ply the waters outside the port all the way northeast around the Free Coast to Perlot of the Tall Ships. This also means that there are a lot of duels in the port as Findalynn Bravos and Ebontra Crosses often try to prove which blade school is better.

Law

Law along the docks of Ebontra comes in two forms, the Shadow Cloaks, a mercenary company of nearly 100 members charged with maintaining order, and the Ebontra Crosses, a guild of duelists who see the city as their own hunting ground. The Shadow Cloaks are run by a human woman named Sanja Grey. She is from the Opal Gates and lived her early life as a slave master and caravan boss before moving her and her company to Ebontra. Now, she controls tariff enforcement, basic law, and the administering of press gangs if needed for shipping concerns. Her foil in the docks is Silver Cross Hans Evaine, a full blood Corsair from the southern archipelago who has been running duels on the Ebontra docks for the past thirty years. He and his underlings in the guild maintain a fighting force on the docks ready to repel piracy, while also looking to sharpen their dueling skills on unwitting mercenaries.

Taxation

A docking tax is levied on all ships entering the port, roughly 2 GP per foot of overall ship length. Goods debarked are taxed at a rate of 2 GP per cubic foot for 'elite' trade goods (silks, objects of art, weapons, etc.) and 5 SP per cubic foot of raw commercial goods (foodstuffs, lumber, etc.). As noted, these tariffs are higher than those found in Taux, but Taux requires a northern bootleg around the horn of the Free Coast while Ebontra lies in a straighter route to the Kraken Straights, saving valuable shipping time.

Powers that Be

The docks of Ebontra are run by a trio of merchant families, all of which are distinctly different and have no particular love of one another. The first is the Carthons, an ancient bloodline of Corsairs that trace their lineage far into the ruins of the archipelago of the far South. They have strong ties to the Crosses guild, and are open to free trade with an eye on ever expanding the reach of the port city's interests abroad. The Dethunes are a family of dark-skinned elves (and half-elves) from the Nublar Desert deep in the Opal Gates. They are slavers and are interested in spreading the flesh trade through the New Kingdoms while making Ebontra a bastion for more cosmopolitan elves.

The Deepforges are a tight-knit coven of sea dwarves who have banded together to create a single purpose entity concerning the crafting of ships. They control the dry dock and have a stranglehold on all commissioned vessels in the city.

Where to Go

The Dark Gates (Brothel)

Owned by the Dethune family, this high-priced brothel acts as both a slave market and a storefront to advertise the incredible wares of the Opal Gates flesh peddlers. Housed in a former city watchtower and surrounding stockade, 'The Gates' first gives the impression of an armed camp before opening up into a lavishly decorated house of ill repute. Pricing for companionship is on display next to actual purchase prices if you would like to keep that which you have sampled. Extravagant baths, dining, a sauna, and even sleeping suites in the tower are available. Security within is carried out by armed eunuchs, and the current overlord of the establishment is Falarian Dethune, a half-elf male who is a known gambler and barterer.

Rates:

Massage (Common Room): 5 SP
Bath (Common Room): 1 SP
Private Massage & Bath: 2 GP
Private Room Session (Hour): 5 GP
Private Room Nightly: 30 GP
Add Another Companion: 5 GP hourly,
20 GP nightly
Nightly Suite: 50 GP

Purchase:

Inquire within as prices vary
depending on stock

Lotus Petals (Opium Den)

Owned by the Sang Cartel, a group of Tungese traders, this opium house serves as a place for locals and tourists alike to escape their daily troubles by riding the dragon's tale. However, after one passes through the front salon, the Sang have created a small labyrinth of sliding paper panels that create secret meeting rooms for the trade elite. Many of the largest deals among captains, lord merchants, and even duelists have gone down within the Lotus Petal, and all movers and shakers in Ebontra have standing reservations with the house for late-night meetings. It is also whispered that the Sang know all secrets in the city as they have spies that can 'move within shadow' and 'murder without sound'. If this is true, one can only wonder, but whatever the case, deals struck within the Lotus are never spoken of outside, and no news of these contracts is ever delivered to information brokers. The saying, 'What happens in the Lotus, stays in the Lotus,' is a true one.

Seven Hanged Men (Tavern)

This old tavern, located on the northeastern jetty close to the city dry dock, once served as a prison for pirates in the early days of Ebontra's reopening to the world.



4-7

Once piracy fell away with the arrival of the Lynnian frigates, the small prison, and its accompanying gallows, were abandoned. They were eventually purchased by Laris Proudnose, a gnome who turned the place into a decent eatery frequented by many of the dwarven craftsman working on the docks.

Costs:

Breakfast:

Plain (porridge, toast, cheese) (1 SP)
Elaborate (eggs, ham, toast, gravy, sweet bun) (5 SP)

Lunch/Dinner:

Plain (pan-fried potatoes, breakfast ham, bread & honey butter) (1 GP)
Elaborate (sweet potato, ham stew, soft loaf & cane butter) (2 GP)

Supper:

Plain (pan-fried fish fillet, hard rolls & gravy, fruit of the day) (1 GP)
Elaborate (wild boar cutlet, cup of sauced beans, pan-fried potato slices, soft loaf, hot fruit pie) (5 GP)

Spirits:

Beer, small, pint (5 CP)
Beer, heavy, pint (1 SP)
Ale, pint (2 SP)
Ale, Gnomish, pint (1 EP)
Mead, pint (1 EP)
Mead, 'Karas Mountain' Special Brew, pint (15 SP)
Wine, table, pint (1 EP)
Wine, Highland White, pint (1 GP)
Wine, Opal Gate Reserve, pint (2 GP)
Brandy, New Kingdoms, gill (1 EP)
Brandy, Grand Duchy, special aged, gill (1 GP)
Wounded Land Dark Liqueur, half-gill (5 GP)

Far Dock (Inn)

Located 'mid dock' as a central hub for all incoming traffic to Ebontra, the Far Dock has served those entering the city for more than seventy-five years. Based in an old warehouse, it boasts an impressive sixty private rooms, two large common rooms, and a massive two-story central gathering area with balconies that overlook the bay. Gaming tables, a wrestling pit, a small bar, and an elevated stage allow for entertainment within the gathering area, which makes for no shortage of traffic, even in the off hours.

Costs:

Spirits:

Beer, small, pint (5 CP)
Beer, heavy, pint (1 SP)
Ale, pint (2 SP)
Mead, pint (1 EP)
Mead, 'Karas Mountain' Special Brew, pint (15 SP)
Wine, table, pint (1 EP)
Wine, Highland White, pint (1 GP)
Wine, Opal Gate Reserve, pint (2 GP)
Wounded Land Dark Liqueur, half-gill (5 GP)

Lodging:

Private Room: 2 GP per night
Common Room: 1 GP per night
Suite: 5 GP per night (20 GP per month)

Wishing Well (Magical Place)

Just beyond the Far Dock Inn, at the foot of the city's main port gate before entering Ebontra proper, an ancient black obsidian fountain rests. It has three onyx monoliths at the center, each of which mysteriously pours

out fresh water into the fountain's basin. Locals and travelers alike throw coins within the basin while making wishes, some of which have supposedly come true. Perhaps those rumors of wish granting are false, but certainly those who give tribute to the well claim a renewed sense of purpose for their day. Note: Those offering a copper will be allowed a +1 to hit **[single advantage roll]** for the next 24 hours. Those offering a silver will have their Charisma score raised by 1 for 24 hours, and those offering a gold piece will be considered under the influence of a Bless spell for 24 hours.

Adventure Threads

Low Level (1–3)

The dwarves of the dry dock are having problems with rats that are eating their lunches while they are at work. The foreman has offered a 5 GP per 'large' rat killed within the dry dock area. A hunt will produce up to 20 giant rats around the area but will also anger the wererat who controls them! This dark creature will certainly scheme to take revenge on the hunters.

Moderate Level (4–7)

One of the 'elite' slaves of the Dark Gate has escaped, and a reward of 250 gold pieces has been issued for his return. The slave, known as Epoch, is a human of the Hilani tribes of the

Opal Gates (meaning he is black). Raised and trained to become a personal guard of a noble house of Taux, Epoch was to be delivered to Taux in two weeks, and his safe return is paramount. He can be found through various Charisma checks at the port, typically three successes in this endeavor will lead the party to a little-used warehouse where Epoch, two slave girl conspirators, and a sympathetic Ebontra Cross duelist are held up, awaiting transport on a ship south. However, this adventure will be one of weighing the effects of slavery versus the value of 250 gold to turn this man and the others in to the very questionable business practices of the Dethune family.

High Level (7–10)

The transporting of dangerous cargo is something that happens on occasion over the Halo. The hope is that all goes well, but sometimes that isn't the case. The ship, the Rimworld Traveler, was not allowed into port because it was carrying a monster too dangerous to let into the port proper so it sat in the deep bay. However, when most of the crew went ashore, the ship's lights went out and all signals to it were not returned. Now, the Hecate Consortium, a merchant guild responsible for the ship, is offering 1,000 gold for the ship to be boarded and the creature subdued. The DM can determine the type of creature.

