

# ASPARA

During each of the three great festival weeks - Dessalia, Assalia, and Zenalia - wondrous celebrations are held in the city-state of Nibenay. These are known as the Starlight Pageants, and they are the chief cultural events in Nibenay.

The highlight of the Starlight Pageants, most Nibenese agree, are the dances performed by the **aspara**. These young women perform exquisite ballets that last until dawn, drawing on a repertoire of 231 traditional dances. The dances are grouped into sets of three, each associated with one of the 77 years of a King's Age, and stem from Nibenese folklore - modified to glorify the sorcerer-king.

While the dances of the Starlight Pageant are primarily performed for cultural reasons, the aspara develop considerable skills that can be put to use in other ways as well. The aspara kit presented here is intended for use by characters who have trained as an aspara but also seek to use their skills in a more adventurous fashion.

The DM may wish to open this kit to male characters as well, working with their players to come up with appropriate reasons for such individuals to receive aspara training.

## Aspara

An aspara is a highly trained dancer who performs traditional ballet as part of Nibenay's Starlight Pageant and other cultural events. An aspara excels in dramatic expression, athletic and acrobatic ability, and cultural lore and history.

An aspara learns three major styles of ballet. These are the dramatic *liaka-ih*, the joyful *priytu-ih*, and the warlike *wriquo-ih*. Each dance focuses on specific skills, granting the aspara useful abilities that can be applied beyond the confines of the ballet.

Aspara are respected and admired by the people of Nibenay, and are seen as a key embodiment of their culture. They are expected to uphold Nibenese traditions and always reflect the city-state in a favourable light.

**Recommended Weapons:** None.

**Recommended Non-weapon Proficiencies:** Craft (seamstress/tailor), endurance, etiquette, expression (musical instrument, singing), knowledge (ancient history), language (sign).

**Bonus Weapon Proficiencies:** None.

**Bonus Non-weapon Proficiencies:** Acrobatics, expression (dancing), knowledge (local history).



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**Equipment:** An aspara is expected to dress in traditionally appropriate clothing of sufficient quality. The character must purchase at least three fine gowns or similar outfits (one for each dance, each costing at least 30 cp). Failing to dress appropriately for their station causes the aspara to lose access to the Cultural Appreciation benefit below.

### Special Benefits

**Cultural Appreciation:** So long as she continues to embody Nibenese cultural virtues, an aspara receives a +2 reaction bonus from all Nibenese individuals and enjoys a 20% price reduction on all purchases made within the city.

**Dance of Excellence:** The aspara may perform a version of their traditional ballet and gain benefits from doing so. It takes one turn to prepare for a dance, stretching and undergoing intense breathing exercises. If this preparation is interrupted, the aspara may not perform the dance.

Once ready, the aspara may perform that dance for up to one round per level at any time within the next hour. After the dance is completed or the hour has passed, the aspara must undergo a further turn of preparation before performing the same or another dance.

- *Liaka-ih:* This dance embodies the tragedy of existence. Enemies viewing it must save vs. Spells or suffer a -1 penalty to initiative, morale, and saving throws for the duration of the dance.

- *Priyту-ih:* This dance embodies the joy of life. Allies viewing it receive a +1 to morale and are immune to fear for the duration of the dance.
- *Wriquo-ih:* This dance embodies excellence at war. While performing it, the aspara gains a +1 to initiative and a +2 to hit and damage with all daggers and swords.

When performing the *liaka-ih* or the *priyту-ih*, the aspara may not wear armour of any kind. While performing any of the dances, the aspara can take other actions but suffers a -2 Armour Class penalty.

### Special Hindrances

**Cultural Conservatism:** If an aspara transgresses Nibenese cultural norms, she is met with stern disapproval from those who value such norms.

These norms include dressing in a way befitting the aspara's station, respecting one's parents and ancestors, respecting polygamy and arranged marriages, ensuring non-Nibenese do not gain undue privileges, and accepting the absolute authority of the sorcerer-king and his templar-wives.

If the aspara transgresses or speaks out against any of these cultural norms, she loses access to the Cultural Appreciation benefit until she performs in a Starlight Pageant to restore her status.

**Wealth Options:** Standard.