

Aside from the very limited number of permanent theaters and amphitheaters, traveling performers provide most of the entertainment on Hårn. This article provides some food for thought to help a GM use traveling performers in their campaigns and adventures. Although this information is written with a Kaldoric slant, it can be adapted to other parts of Kethira with very little work.

A Brief Note on Theater Style

Theaters, just like food or fashion, has distinctive styles in the different regions of Hårn. Conservative playwrights work and rework the twenty-seven basic, traditional, themes. Their body of work devotes itself to reinforcing traditional values and moral lessons within the plays. In their purest form, these thematic plays are highly stylized, conservative, and heavily laden with religious overtones. Writers have changed the presentation of themes from tragedies to romances to comedies, depending on the mood of the populace or the desire to try something new. Practitioners of the 'classical' school avoid any hint of political or religious commentary, since secular and ecclesiastical authorities frequently observe their work and are often their major patrons.

In addition to the classical school, there is also a genre of contemporary dramatists, called 'populists,' who specialize in the use of allegory to satirize current figures or political events. These plays are strictly the province of street performers, as no theater owner would risk incurring the wrath of the authorities by staging a populist play in his establishment. The populists are a rising theater movement in eastern Hårn and have introduced the use of satire – specifically political satire – into their writing.

Costumes consist of masks and stylized props. There are some thirty or so characters in the traditional themes, each portraying a stereotype. Mask makers belong to the hideworkers' guild, as the masks are made from leather that has been painted and gilded. Poorer troupes substitute face paint for masks but this is rare.

Many classical plays make use of a small chorus that chants or sings harmony behind a lead actor's singing or dancing. Some theaters also use more physical accompaniment. Productions with an Agrikan focus include real combat as well as more stylized drama.

Playing a Player

Actors, especially traveling players, offer a number of role-playing opportunities and adventure hooks. A traveling group of actors, a small circus, or even a traveling minstrel is easily turned into an adventuring party.

Players have a wide range of occupations that can be fit for acting-based PC groups. Thespian characters are the cornerstones of the group. Animal trainers are natural additions to a thespian troupe. Acts with dogs, bears, and even horses are popular in both towns and manors.

Other occupations can fit into a group of players as bit players and supporting cast. Knights and warriors can use their muscles to become guards, strongmen or, if they are agile enough, partners in dance or acrobatic routines. Thieves can become conjurers or acrobats in a circus while courtesans with developed signing or musical skills have a place in any stage enterprise. And do not forget the stagehands, as teamsters, woodcrafters, and even toymakers can find places behind the scenes.

On With the Show

This article describes several types of performer that PCs might meet in towns or along the highway. Each has a short description, followed by an example and player entries.

CREDITS

WRITER

Joe Adams

WITH THANKS TO

Robert Barfield &
John Sgammato



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The Acting Company

Thespian companies produce entertainment. Operated by Masters of the Thespian's Guild, these businesses obtain funding, bring actors and writers together, and provide costumes, props, and a venue. The companies generally have a stock ensemble of in-house players but their real power is their control of the theaters and their access to the nobility. The theater companies offer plays that run the gamut of comedy, tragedy, religious, and satirical work.

An evening's entertainment might start with a puppet show that explains the plot of the play. Actors in masks and simple costumes perform their play in short acts, often accompanied by a narrator. Intermissions are filled with jugglers and short, usually bawdy, skits that occasionally feature animals.

Longer plays, called cycles, are performed during fairs and festivals. These are a number of shorter works, played over a number of days, that tell a single story. In the case of Tashal's Summer Fair, the cycle varies from year to year but the story is usually about a great achievement of the House of Elendsa. This year (720 TR), the Tashal cycle will tell the story of the Treasure War and Torasträ's magnificent victory.

The Traveling Player

Acting is not steady employment. Except for the most successful thespians, players find "regular" jobs to keep food in their bellies and clothes on their backs. Those actors, puppeteers, singers, and mimes that do strive to earn their living through full time entertaining often travel the length and breadth of the kingdom during the off-seasons. These players are common sights on the kingdom's highways. The actors and actresses walk beside (or sometimes pushing) a brightly colored cart full of props.

Their cart becomes the stage as they journey through the villages, playing at manors and hamlets to earn food throughout the winter. Players perform for noble households or local

temples and guilds. Summer always brings the troupes back to Tashal, as a good showing at the Fair can earn an actor as much as he might receive throughout the rest of the year. The better troupes have relationships with acting companies but others struggle to make ends meet between jobs.

Eleri plays are an exception to this rule. Although they are used to teach Haeian liturgy, these productions are performed by a small number of actors to limited audiences. Bored and debauched noblemen sometimes sponsor these lewd performances, often encouraging audience participation. Actors that accept roles in Eleri plays often find themselves unable to find work in the "legitimate theater."

Merelin and the Pennywhistle Players

Merelin serves as the lead actress and playwright for this small troupe. They specialize in Laranian and Peonian liturgical plays and usually find employment with the Laranian temple or devout worshippers in Tashal. Their summer months are filled with performances at religious festivals in or near the capitol city. For the last six years, she has been fortunate in finding a seasonal arrangement at one of the kingdom's larger religious houses. Last winter, they stayed in Ledyne and had the honor of performing for the Serekela when he came to visit the Rekela.

Because of the small size of the group, each player fills a stereotype. Merelin takes the "goddess" parts or plays the damsel in distress in their plays. Hubrat, a tall, lean tenor from Olokand, plays the hero. Drimsel plays the villain, and Lutus fills in as narrator or performs bit parts. Lutus is also the troupe's cook and teamster, leading their small pony cart when they travel.

Player Entry

The Serekela will sponsor a cycle about Dolithor on the Lion of Mendiz day (17 Halane) at Caleme. Five plays will be presented, each focusing on a different Laranian virtue. Merelin would like to claim the play on "valor" but she needs more players. Can the PCs fill in the parts?

The Traveling Circus

A traveling circus straddles the line between the guilded theater and itinerant performers. Most circuses are led by a Thespian Guild member and even employ small numbers of journeymen.

Traveling circus masters often hire people "off the street." These newcomers are either tasked to perform something they're talented at or are taught the basics before being shoved in front of an audience. The guild, whose chapters run roughly along regional lines, turns a blind eye to these "provincial" apprenticeships. Indeed, many journeymen get their start in traveling circuses.

These family-run enterprises provide entertainment to the Hârníc everyman. They offer the widest possible variety of entertainment – small plays being only a portion of their repertoire. A traveling circus production is akin to street theater. The plays are bawdy, what modern readers would consider vaudevillian, and interspersed with intermissions featuring jugglers, knife throwers, singers, and acrobats.

In short, the farther a troupe travels into the provinces, the more formality and pretense it must shed to gain a happy audience. Where an intermission in Aleath might be a reading of poetry or a heroic saga, the interval would be comprised of earthy farmer jokes and ribald ditties in Uldien. Any performer that has the ill fate of standing before an unfriendly crowd may be pelted with the offerings of local farmyards and dung heaps. On the other hand, well received players find that the rewards are not so much in coin as in the enthusiasm and loyalty of their admirers.

Each circus has a general circuit that it keeps. This schedule allows them to perform at the fairs and religious celebrations in the larger settlements. Smaller manors are visited if they are on a route between two scheduled stops or if they are not too far out of the way.

Esiko's Circus

Esiko's Circus has been coming to the Wool Fair for the past twenty years and is well known

in eastern Kaldor. The circus is centered on the stage offerings of Esiko and his three sons. Their plays are conservative and traditional, leaning heavily on old Jarin tales for inspiration. The circus offers more plebian entertainment as well. Esiko's wife tells fortunes and his daughter-in-law sings. He would like to add an acrobat or a juggler to the group but has not found a person that will stay for a full season.

Esiko winters on his family's land outside of Athelren. At the first sign of spring, the wagons are loaded and set out on the road. Esiko follows the same route every year. He has plied his trade at Vemionshire's fairs and manors since he was a young man and is well known and respected.

The circus travels in two, heavy, mule-drawn wagons. The first wagon is Esiko's. He shares the small cabin behind the driver's box with his wife, Myle. Their youngest son, Abrynn, sleeps in the back of the wagon. During performing days, Myle tells fortunes and casts horoscopes in the wagon. Mikhyl, Esiko's eldest son and heir, drives the freight wagon. This canvas-topped wagon hauls the props and provisions for the circus.

The Performers

A Master of the Thespian's Guild, Esiko (42) dreams of playing the "big time" in Tashal or even Cherafir. As a boy, Esiko played the strongman when his father ran the circus. He grew to enjoy acting roles, especially parts where he played the heroic, but doomed, warrior. Esiko's journeyman Galyn Indaro (24), an actor and writer who originally hails from Thay, maintains the troupe's acting tradition and specializes in playing the villain. Esiko's middle son Aryl (18), a feckless dreamer who can barely remember his lines, plays the supporting roles.

Mikhyl (22) is Esiko's eldest son. He and Aryl's wife Brigyth (16) play instruments for the plays and provide the accompaniment for his wife, Geriam, while she dances for the crowd. Geriam (20) is a vain and demanding woman. She is always pushing Mikhyl to become more active in running the business, as she sees herself becoming the power behind the throne when her malleable

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husband takes over. Mikhyl, on the other hand, is more interested in women that don't nag him than in assuming the responsibility for the circus.

Esiko's wife, Myle (44), is a fortune-teller. She is an extremely superstitious woman and does a brisk business in good luck charms and love potions. Myle does tarot readings in her wagon for the standard "piece of silver" but she always gives vague and generally uplifting predictions. She will not do séances and will report anyone who presses for one as a "worshipper of the Dark Orb," her term for Navehans.

Abrynn (14) is Esiko's youngest son and a thoroughly spoiled child. He is a burgeoning pickpocket and sneak thief. He is already showing some skill in lock picking. Anyone complaining about Abrynn's behavior will see a sample of the boy's acting ability as he proclaims his innocence.

In addition to the family and players, Jadryl, has been with Esiko for 15 years. He had been a mercenary but now serves as a general guard and stagehand. He is getting old and grumbles a lot.

Player Entries

Jadryl is a real nice guy but he is a bit long in the tooth for the grinding days on the road. Esiko wants to hire some younger backs and sharper eyes to do the heavy lifting and guard duty.

Galyn's new play requires more actors and set changes than the circus has. Esiko is offering a season's employment with the circus - for actors, guards, and stagehands. The guards also work as stagehands and camp laborers but even the actors do some of the manual tasks. Performers that are willing to help with the heavy labor will be well paid; those that can only do one or the other job, less so.



The Wandering Minstrel

The wandering minstrel, the troubadour, the jongleur - no matter what he is called - is the most pervasive entertainer on Hârn. Predominantly male solo acts, these performers sing and juggle in taprooms and manor halls in towns and villages across Hârn. Minstrels are rarely guild members, usually working for room and board instead of hard coin. This lack of material wealth keeps the minstrel moving. They are common sites in villages along trade routes, although occasionally a troubadour will strike out from main routes to visit more remote manors.

The life of a minstrel is hard. Long walks in all kinds of weather usually follow long nights singing in smoky taprooms. While wanderlust is a trait that many of them share, most minstrels eventually look for a warm place to stay, safe from the damp and dangers of the road as the years take their toll.

Gylin

Gylin is a regular sight in the inns and manors along the Silver Way between Getha and Kiban. A foundling, he has never known a permanent home and feels "closed in" if he stays in one place too long. Having just passed his twentieth birthday, Gylin is in the prime of his life and looks forward to many years on the road.

The short wiry man sings tenor and plays the lute, entertaining patrons with songs and stories. His repertoire draws from local folk tunes and regional legends. He also writes his own poetry but rarely lets others see his work.

Player Entries

Gylin has hurt his hand and is looking for a partner while he heals. A group of caravan guards got a bit rowdy at his last venue and expressed their thoughts on his performance by physically ejecting him from the inn. If a PC can play an instrument, he might join Gylin to see where the road takes them.