

The Northern Marches

In contrast to the Sanisan Plains, the portions of Jarzon north of Leogarth—bounded by the Sanisan River in the south, the Veran Marsh in the west, and the Golgan Badlands in the north—are far harsher in both climate and temperament. Unlike the rolling hills and moderate rains of the southwest, the Northern Marches are dry prairie, suitable only for ranching tough Jarzoni cattle and sheep and growing hardy grains like rye and barley.

During the winter, bitter winds blow down from the Golgan Badlands. During the hot summer, rain is infrequent, and crops must be irrigated from the land's few creeks and wells. Except for the spindly saplings planted by the inhabitants, the Northern Marches are mostly devoid of trees, so winds blow unobstructed. The grasslands extend from slightly north of Leogarth to the edge of the badlands. The locals often build houses from thick sod slabs. They then use a mixture of sod, rammed earth, and rocks dug out of their fields to build walls around every settlement.

Because of the poor land, the infrequent rainfall, and the necessity of building settlements near the few creeks and waterways, settlements in the Northern Marches are almost always several days apart, and travelers must risk spending the night in the open. As a result, the itinerant peddlers, healers, and performers who wander the Sanisan Plains are rare here and band together in small caravans, with mercenaries or soldiers to protect them from shadowspawn and bandits. The region's villagers and townspeople rarely travel, since it is so dangerous.

The only safe route is on barges going up and down the Sanisan River. Towns within a day's travel of the river have somewhat more contact with the outside world, but even here, the barges rarely arrive more often than every few weeks.

Especially for the communities living near the Golgan Badlands, raids by shadowspawn are a fact of life. Every man in these settlements above the age of 15 is expected to train with spear and bow so they can defend their homes against attack. In the southern badlands, vicious ogre tribes hold sway. Whenever there are lulls in their internecine wars, ogre raiders descend on the Northern Marches, hoping to carry off their favorite foods: cows, sheep, and children. North of the ogre lands, travelers are at risk of being attacked by crazed elementals, driven mad by sorceries gone awry in the Shadow Wars. The elementals are known to occasionally wander into the Northern Marches, sparking chaos wherever they pass. Air elementals tend to appear in winter, water elementals in spring, fire elementals in summer, and earth elementals in fall.

Bandits in the Northern Marches rob travelers and extort money and goods from isolated communities. Clever bandits send a scout pretending to be a lost traveler or the sole survivor of a caravan into a village they hope to plunder. This scout determines the settlement's defenses and either kills the chief defenders or opens the gates before an attack. As a result, people are wary of strangers. The priests who minister to these communities reinforce such feelings. Isolation, distrust, and constant threats from monsters and bandits have all helped make their faith rigid and intolerant.

LIFE IN JARZON

When most Aldins think of Jarzon, they think of a greedy Hierophant, fanatical priest-adepts, and heretic burnings. Life in Jarzon is actually more varied than that, and not always so grim.

The villages, towns, and cities of Jarzon are similar to those in less fertile regions of Aldis. Jarzoni houses are made of local gray volcanic rock, rather than white Aldin marble, but the activities going on in the shops and houses of Jarzon are much the same. The differences are in the details. Because life is harder and the church has limited tolerance for entertainments that take people's minds away from their work and their faith, most public festivals have at least some religious content and taverns do not serve alcohol or other intoxicants on Hearth Day.

Another striking difference between the two nations is that Jarzon is far more culturally and racially homogeneous than Aldis. Jarzon never attracted large number of refugees from the Shadow Wars, nor immigrants afterward. The majority of the inhabitants are the descendents of people who lived here during the Old Kingdom. Today, the combination of rigid religion and the harsh and dangerous land means refugees from Kern and some of the barren lands further east do not seek to immigrate to Jarzon.

The near-universal worship of the Pure Light, combined with the large degree of cultural uniformity, means most Jarzoni are uncertain how to deal with anyone with a different culture or religion. The two most common assumptions in Jarzon are that outsiders think, act, and worship like themselves or that outsiders are completely different and possess all manner of unsavory habits. Traders from Aldis and other nations do their best to reinforce the first impression and often dress and speak in Jarzoni fashion, which does little to further Jarzon's tolerance or understanding of foreign ways.

Attitudes in Jarzon

In addition to not easily tolerating people with different beliefs or the use of arcana by people who are neither priests nor healers, Jarzoni regard the peoples of the world with varying degrees of prejudice. Almost everyone in Jarzon is either human or vata'an. As long as they abide by the customs of Jarzon, neither of these races experiences any discrimination. On the other end of the spectrum, night people and vata'sha are considered irredeemably corrupt shadowspawn, and Jarzoni priests burn them in the cleansing fires.

Sea-folk and rhydan fall somewhere between the two extremes; neither is considered innately tied to Shadow, but neither are they completely accepted. Although the Jarzoni acknowledge the vital role that rhydan played in the Great Rebellion, they also consider them too strange and inhuman to be accepted into their society. As a result, only priests are permitted to have anything but the most casual contact with rhydan. Ordinary Jarzoni are supposed to leave them strictly alone and to report their presence to their local priest. Some corrupt priests attack and even slay rhydan, and few priests are inclined to investigate any complaints made by the rhydan. In Jarzon, almost all rhydan live in the most inaccessible wilderness areas, like the theocracy's eastern frontier or the few parts of the southern Golgan Badlands not overrun by ogres, and they do their best to avoid Jarzoni priests in general. The rest have long been driven to more hospitable environments.

Rhy-bonded Jarzoni are troublesome for the Church of the Pure Light. Since most Jarzoni dealing directly with rhydan are priests, occasionally a priest becomes rhy-bonded. Rhy-bonded priests are considered suspect and always assigned to patrol wilderness areas or minister to the inhabitants of the harshest and most sparsely inhabited rural areas. Even there, some of these priests run into conflicts between the demands of the church and the advice of their bond-mate. Because of the enduring nature of the rhy-bond, most of these priests turn their back on the church and either flee Jarzon or attempt to become rebels or reformers. The fate of lay people who are rhy-bonded is far worse. A few of the most tolerant rural priests immediately place adolescent boys and young men who are rhy-bonded into training as priests. Elsewhere, all other rhy-bonded, including all rhy-bonded women, are considered sorcerers dabbling in forbidden magic. Knowing this, most rhy-bonded attempt to flee from Jarzon at the first opportunity.

As for sea-folk, many Jarzoni consider them secretive and strange. As worshippers of light and fire, Jarzoni are suspicious of a people so intimately tied to water. Although the inhabitants of the coast trade with sea-folk, intermarriage is frowned upon. Sea-folk are permitted to live along the coast and rivers of Jarzon, but are expected to either live in their own communities or in specially designated areas of the coastal cities and towns. Sea-folk are not permitted to become priests of the Purist faith. Among the sea-folk, visiting Jarzoni priests are viewed as barely tolerated foreigners, but priests who accept the sea-folk are often respected by them in return. Naturally, far fewer sea-folk live in Jarzon than Aldis.

As in other lands, the Jarzoni do not limit their prejudices to considerations of appearance or ancestry. The doctrines of the Church of the Pure Light also consider *caria daunen* and star marriages (that is, multi-partner marriages) threats to the natural order of society. According to the church, the foundation of a proper society is the nuclear family, and the purpose of sex is procreation and the continuation of life. In the writings of Lanis Rhon, carrying on the family and maintaining the nation of Jarzon are closely equated, dating back to the ancient fertility cults of Leonoth. Most Jarzoni believe encouraging "deviancy" only serves to weaken the family and thus the entire nation of Jarzon. As a result, only

THE ALIGNMENT OF JARZON

Aldis is generally a good and just place, just as Kern is a horrific land ruled by a monster. Jarzon is more ambiguous. Most of the inhabitants are decent people, living their lives as best as they can, and the priesthood is a mixture of humane priests and those motivated by self-righteousness or self-interest.

Some Aldins believe the Hierophant and the Keepers Council are tainted by Shadow, but the majority are men of genuine faith, who attained their positions through a mixture of self-interest and an honest desire to protect Jarzon. Since ruthlessness and personal ambition are helpful in advancing through the ranks of the priesthood, the proportion of Twilight-aligned individuals is higher among the high priests and a significant proportion of Shadow-aligned priests also end up in positions of power. Currently, most high priests are Twilight-aligned, but some are Light- or Shadow-aligned.

Most high priests firmly believe their draconian policies are in the best interest of Jarzon, but unlike the majority of Aldin nobles, their desire to protect Jarzon is not tempered by mercy or compassion, which has led to psychic inquisitions, the burning of heretics, and the like. If nations had alignments, Aldis would be aligned with the Light, Kern with Shadow, and Jarzon with the ambiguous and shifting Twilight, struggling between its two natures.

marriages between one man and one woman are legally recognized in Jarzon, and anyone who attempts to live in a different manner faces discrimination.

Such nonconformists are expected to live apart from others so that their influence will not spread. They cannot become priests and are denied membership in most professional guilds. As a result, the majority become laborers or shopkeepers. In Jarzon, deviant ways of life are not topics of polite conversation, and in many plays and other popular entertainments, villains and traitors are often depicted as *caria daunen*. *Caria* and people in informal star marriages are among the most likely to flee Jarzon for life in Aldis.

The Faith of the Pure Light

While Jarzon contains a similar mixture of farmers, artisans, traders, cooks, healers, and entertainers as found in Aldis, daily life is considerably different.

Everyone in Jarzon is expected to visit a shrine or temple shortly before noon on the last day of the week, Hearth Day. There everyone gathers for a ritual, involving chanted prayers and incense burned in the temple's sacred fire, and a sermon from the local priest. These sermons typically consist of moral homilies and inspirational speeches about following the guidance of the gods and giving thanks for the freedom and continuation of Jarzon. After the sermon, the congregation spends a few minutes in silence, and the remainder of the afternoon is a time for socializing. Friends



share meals, and some neighborhoods or villages hold communal meals. While the Jarzoni work hard the rest of the week, after the Hearth Day service, they relax, play games, tell stories, and listen to entertainers.

Jarzoni do not confine their religious observances to the Hearth Day services. Every day at noon, everyone who is not engaged in some other activity is expected to take a short break to pray for a few minutes at a hearthside altar. In addition, every Jarzoni owns one or more religious tokens. The most common are gold or brass pendants made in the shape of a stylized flame. Flame patterns are a common Jarzoni artistic motif.

Purist rituals for holy days and important yearly events are more elaborate. Most Purist religious rites involve fire in some form, representing the fire aspect of Leonoth and the hearth fires so important to the faith. Offerings and written prayers are often burnt in a central fire pit or hearth. The dead are cremated (as much to free the spirit with the holy fire as to ensure the corpse does not rise as one of the unliving). Couples light a central candle or hearth flame together to signify their union. Vigils are held before candle flames or temple hearths. The condemned are burned in public executions.

In Jarzon, only priests interpret scripture and doctrine. The common folk discuss religious topics with their friends and families, but public preaching and attempts to interpret scripture earn a visit from a priest-adept. The overly zealous are reminded that mistakes can creep into the faith if the uninitiated attempt to preach doctrine. However, if the individual shows a keen understanding of scripture, they may be recommended for priestly training or a position as a clerical assistant.

Those with unorthodox views who persist in preaching to others face either indenture in one of the church's work brigades or having their misunderstanding corrected by a psychic priest-adept. Some cynics in Aldis claim heresy is punished so severely because the Hierophant needs a steady supply of convicts for the mines. Convicts rend gemstones and ores from the rocky soil until they have worked off their five- or ten-year sentence.

The Theocracy

Jarzon is a theocracy. Priests do not just dispense religious teaching, justice, and spiritual advice; they are also the rulers of the nation. The theocracy is the only legitimate authority in Jarzon, and the local high priests hold absolute power over the districts they administer. In Jarzon, secular and religious law are one and the same, so heresy is a crime. It is considered more serious than theft but less serious than murder.

The Purist priesthood is therefore more formal and hierarchical than the priesthood of the Eternal Dance in Aldis. In many ways, the Jarzoni priesthood is more akin to the Aldin nobility. In the Purist faith, the priest is a father figure and spiritual guide, like Leonoth himself. Because of this, Purist priests are always men, ideally family men who are heads of their own households. This ideal applies more to older priests; younger initiates are expected to travel, see the world, and learn the skills they will need to help guide their people. Still, a cleric intending to advance through the ranks should be settled with a wife and family if he hopes to become a high priest.

Purist priests are addressed by the title Keeper, referring to them as keepers of the sacred fires. In the ancient past, priests of the cult of Leonoth were fire tenders responsible for the community hearth fire. In modern Jarzon, a married layman or young novice usually occupies the role of hearth tender in a Purist temple, but the term has carried over. Priests with an established parish are referred to as "Keeper of . . ." followed by the place's name (such as Keeper of Fiery Defense or Keeper of Northridge). High priests are called Lord Keeper, while the Hierophant, who is the Keeper of Leogarth, is Lord High Keeper or Lord Hierophant.

In addition to their religious functions, Jarzoni priests serve functions similar to Aldin nobles. They dispense justice and oversee trials, attempt to resolve local disputes in a fair and impartial fashion, and make reports about these incidents to the high priests in Leogarth. In addition, just like Aldin nobles, Jarzoni priests are divided into traveling and regional priests, and to prevent favoritism, priests are never assigned to the cities or towns where they were born or raised.

These similarities occur because both Aldin nobles and the Jarzoni priesthood are based on the structure of the Old Kingdom's nobility. However, while educated people in Aldis and Jarzon know of this common origin, the Jarzoni believe combining the secular duties of nobles with the religious and spiritual training and duties of a priest is the best way to keep Jarzon from falling prey to the corruption that overwhelmed the Old Kingdom.