

— CHAPTER VI: THE MATRIARCHY OF LAR'TYA —

goddess of law and justice. This trinity is seen as the Great Matriarchs of Lar'tya, who inspired the first inhabitants of the islands.

The story of the fall of Anwaren (see **The Creation of Aldea** in *Blue Rose*, pages 16–19) is evidence to the Lar'tyans of the frailties of men. After all, was it not the goddesses who soothed his madness, cared for him, and restored him? In their interpretations of myth, Lar'tyans see men as flighty and emotional, women as reasonable and levelheaded.

The highest caste, the royal *Lar caste*, is also the smallest, consisting of one extended clan of about two hundred people. While most members of the caste live near the queen in the capital city of Ty-An, a few live in the nation's other cities. Their presence is a mark of status and prestige. The caste's members consider Maurena their patron and model. Branches cut from flowering tropical trees are signs of authority in the islands and are considered symbols of Maurena's Rod of Blooms.

The *Hagin caste* is made up of nobles and warriors, with righteous Aulora as their patron. Merchants, artisans, many artists, and sailors occupy the *Bleyn caste*, blessed by Goia, and servants, laborers, and farmers fill out the *Nuit caste*, associated with Anwaren in his harvester and laborer aspect.

While many people have the same profession as their parents, everyone is free to apprentice into any profession within their caste. However, inter-caste mobility is forbidden; crossing caste lines is considered deviant behavior. People who transgress caste boundaries either undergo psychic treatment from a healer to cure them of their antisocial tendencies or they are exiled.

While both sexes are considered equal among the Bleyn and Nuit castes, women of the Hagin and Lar castes are considered wiser and better equipped to rule than men. A queen, elected from among the members of the Lar caste by a vote of the caste, always rules Lar'tya. As a result, the people of Lar'tya consider women braver and more sensible than men, an attitude most residents of Aldis find odd, especially when male visitors are treated in a condescending fashion.

During any important treaty negotiations between the sovereigns of Lar'tya and Aldis or between members of the Hagin caste and Aldin nobles, Lar'tyans tend to assume that the highest-ranking female is the leader of a foreign delegation. The ascension of Queen Jaellin to the Aldin throne has improved relations with Lar'tyans, who approve of the “sensible” choice of a queen over another king as the sovereign of Aldis.

There is naturally friction between the Matriarchy of Lar'tya and the Theocracy of Jarzon, which is patriarchal. Jarzoni priests are often scandalized by the roles assumed by Lar'tyan women, while the female members of the Hagin and Lar castes find it difficult to deal with the (always male) priests and emissaries from Jarzon without condescending to them.

Although Lar'tya is slightly more prosperous than Aldis, the disparity between rich and poor is greater. In any



NEW HUMAN BACKGROUND: LAR'TYAN

Choosing to play a Lar'tyan human leads to an important question: Which caste? Caste determines social rank and function and even appearance. Each caste also has its own favored skills and feats (Lar'tyan humans otherwise have the same traits as other humans).

Lar Caste

Favored Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, Knowledge (nobility)

Favored Feats: Fascinate, Inspire

Hagin Caste

Favored Skills: Diplomacy, Gather Information, Knowledge (history)

Favored Feats: Fascinate, Weapon Focus

Bleyn Caste

Favored Skills: Concentration, Knowledge (geography), Perform

Favored Feats: Jack of All Trades, Skill Mastery

Nuit Caste

Favored Skills: Climb, Handle Animal, Knowledge (local)

Favored Feats: Diehard, Improvised Tools

Lar'tyan city, the poor live in small wooden huts, while the wealthy dwell in luxurious gilded mansions and palaces. While the bounty of the land and the abundance of fishing around the coastal reefs assures everyone has sufficient food, the poor have fewer creature comforts than their counterparts in Aldis. Meanwhile, the wealthier members of the Hagin and Lar castes live amid a level of splendor Aldins consider excessive. Nobles and merchants from Aldis tend to be most comfortable around the merchants of the Bleyne caste, who have a standard of living similar to their own.

More disturbing to many Aldins than the differences in wealth is the deference members of the lower castes show to the higher ones. People in the Nuit and Bleyne castes prostrate themselves before members of the royal family, and members of the Nuit caste do not speak to members of the other castes unless spoken to first. Members of the Bleyne caste can openly address nobles, but must do so softly, with great respect and many honorifics.

Similarly, members of the Lar and Hagin castes either ignore servants and other members of the Nuit caste or speak to them in a haughty and authoritarian fashion. Nobles regularly speak to the merchants of the Bleyne caste, but openly talk down to them, like young children. Casual conversations between members of different castes only occur in private and only on those rare occasions where members of different castes become friends. Such friendships are frowned upon, and in public, the castes maintain a strict separation.

Whenever Aldin nobles and merchants chat with Aldin carpenters, the most traditional Lar'tyans mumble uncomfortably and pretend not to notice. This situation becomes worse if an Aldin noble attempts friendly conversation with a Lar'tyan shopkeeper or artisan. The Lar'tyan the Aldin visitor is talking to may know of the strange customs of Aldis, but even the most open-minded low-caste Lar'tyan can do little more than stammer and look away or respond with the strict and deferential politeness they normally use when talking to members of higher castes.

In general, the inhabitants of Aldis and Lar'tya baffle one another with their strange ways, but they also engage in exceedingly profitable trade, and close friendships between people Lar'tyans consider to be social equals are not uncommon. Diplomats from both nations are aware that the social differences would be more of a concern if the two nations shared a common border, but the distance between them makes the need for understanding less pressing.

Aldis serves as a useful and humane place to exile Lar'tyans who refuse to abide by the restrictions of caste. In addition, every year dozens of Lar'tyans board ships bound for Aldis, where they seek different lives. Similar numbers of Aldins immigrate to Lar'tya, drawn by the warm, sunny climate and the islands' prosperity. Aldin immigrants are typically assigned to the Bleyne caste, unless they are nobles, in which case they automatically become part of the Hagin caste, although few nobles emigrate from Aldis.

Sea-Folk in Lar'tya

Lar'tyans were originally all human. The arrival of refugees from the Empire of Thorns added vata'an to their numbers, and humans and vata'an live in harmony, with vata'an belonging to the Hagin and Bleyne castes. Lar'tya also has a substantial population of sea-folk. Before the arrival of the refugees, the sea-folk were treated as a foreign people on the same soil, and Lar'tyans regularly traded with them.

Since the end of the Great Rebellion, the population has grown enough that sea-folk can no longer live separate from the islands' other inhabitants. Eventually, the Lar caste decreed that the sea-folk were a separate caste, the Seyn caste, allied with the Bleyne caste (in large part because so many sea-folk are sailors). Making the sea-folk a separate caste allowed them to retain their own culture while remaining within greater Lar'tyan society. Although marriages between members of the Seyn and Bleyne castes are somewhat frowned upon, they are legal because the two castes are so close.

With few exceptions, the sea-folk of the Seyn caste live in separate villages and towns along the coasts or in special quarters of Lar'tyan cities. The rules applying to their caste allow them to work as sailors, pearl divers, and fishers, as well as artisans using products harvested from the sea. Shell and pearl jewelry made by members of the Seyn caste is in high demand in Aldis and highly regarded in Lar'tya.

Visitors to Lar'tya

Merchants and diplomats from Aldis are not the only visitors to Lar'tya, although they are by far the most common. While the Lich King's servants do not travel beyond the boundaries of the continent and would not be welcome if they did, Jarzoni occasionally visit Lar'tya. Jarzoni is a minor naval power and has only a small merchant fleet, but the theocracy enjoys some of the luxuries produced in Lar'tya and periodically sends missionaries to attempt to convert the populace to the Purist faith. The Jarzoni are rarely able to send out more than half a dozen ships a year, and missionaries are on at least a third of those vessels. While the Lar, Hagin, Seyn, and Nuit castes have absolutely no interest in foreign faiths, the members of the Bleyne caste are the most widely traveled, and a few have converted to the Church of the Pure Light.

Relations between Jarzoni and Aldin visitors are sometimes strained. Sailors and merchants tend to be more worldly than most, while Jarzoni missionaries are typically young, devout priests burning with the desire to spread worship of the Gods of Light with Leonoth at their head. Aldin merchants often regard proselytizing as uncouth, while sailors are frequently bored by it. Tensions between the Aldins and Jarzoni can sometimes run high, although some Jarzoni sailors discreetly commiserate with the Aldins, since many of them have little patience themselves with the more fervent representatives of the church. By the laws of Lar'tyan hospitality, anyone