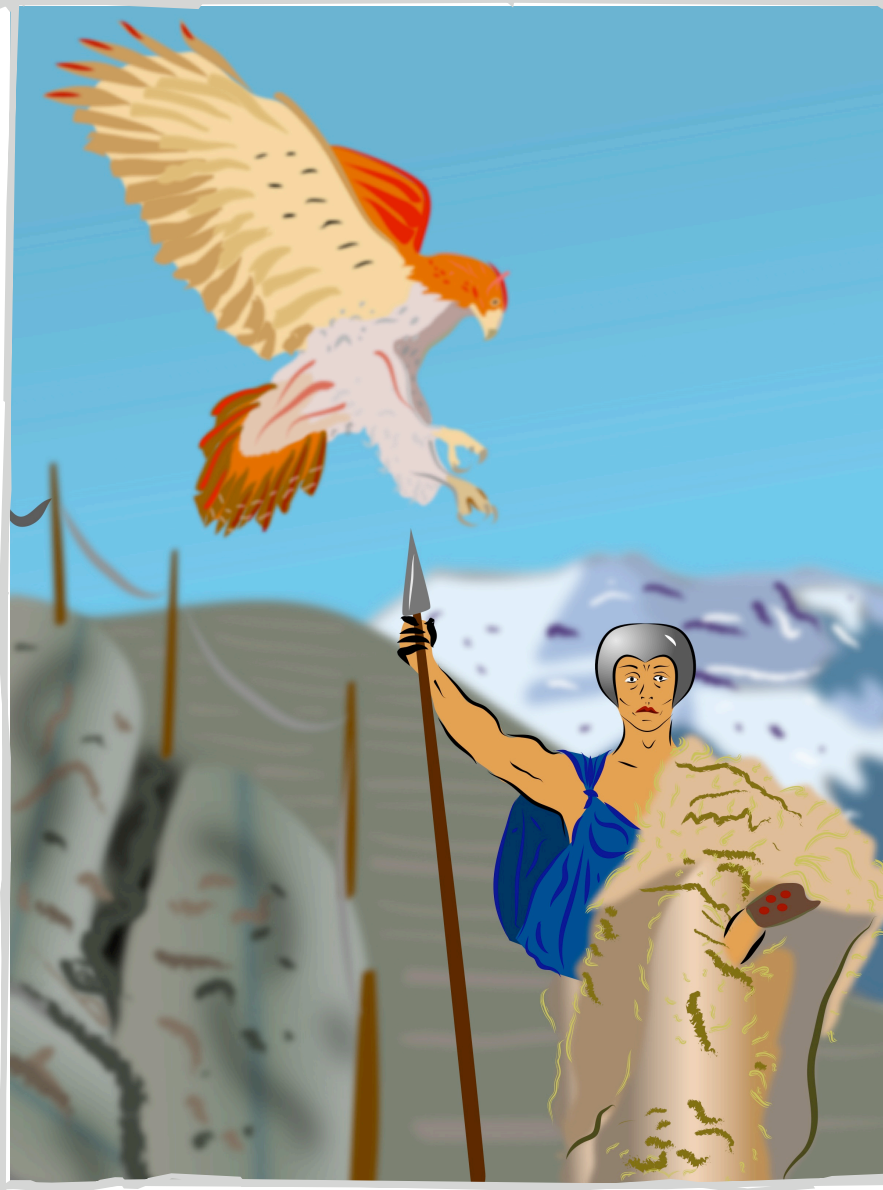


The Maemeck Matriarchy



This is the story the Matriarchs tell.

In the beginning, there was Maemeck and she made the world and put people upon it. In those days, there were ten women for every man. This was as it should be, since men can plant their seed and wander off, forgetful, while women are tied more tightly to children, who are of their very bodies. The goddess gave the women the Book of Maemeck so that they could gauge all their actions rightly, and for a thousand years there was peace and tranquility. But in time, some grew restless with their station and questioned why things had to be as they were. These were the first of the Undisciplined.

The Undisciplined were disorganized, but they had sweet words and persuasive songs, they spoke movingly of the great cause of 'equality,' never fully addressing the obvious inequities between sexes and castes. Because they lazed in indolence instead of toiling, they seduced the weak of every caste with promises of luxury and 'freedom.'

These rebels were little more than pests until one of their number stumbled across knowledge forbidden by the Book and, in his arrogance, used it. He was the first sorcerer, and with low cunning he hid his power from the wise and showed it only to his fellow troublemakers. With these secret powers, the Undisciplined came to draw in more and more with promises of dark miracles and secret joys.

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All was dismay and disruption, but no true disaster until one of the Judges was led away from the right course of judgment and lost his discipline. Tempted by the promise of enchantment, which he intended to use for the good of all, he agreed to study under the Undisciplined and was soon warped away from his purpose and to their cause. Because he had his caste's gifts of leadership, he quickly came to lead the Undisciplined, organizing them to spread like weeds. Because he had his caste's gift of wisdom, he was soon the greatest of sorcerers, transforming a collection of idle tricks and fancies into tools for a horrible war.

Learn, then, from this. When a great good is corrupted, it becomes a far deeper evil than the further fall of that which is fallen by nature. Strength turned against its natural course of order is far more dangerous than weakness following its natural course of chaos.

The battle between the righteous and the Undisciplined raged for generations. Each elder who died took with her one more memory of the times of peace. Each child born was another who knew only the strife of war and could not grasp the joys of a discipline he had never known. Those following Maemeck's true teachings fought fiercely and with honor, but they were forced back, and back, and back until they were at last confined in a ring of mountains. "Why?" they wailed, "Has our judgment failed? Why are we set to suffering by our lessers? Where is the justice that perfect judgment gives?"

At last, the goddess Maemeck heard their cries and appeared to their Judges. "You suffer because you failed," she said. "You did not see the danger of the Undisciplined before it was too late. Now, they will be with you always, and I shall call the least dissolute among them to your land in the mountains, that they may in time be saved. As for the others, they will never overwhelm you because I shall give you two gifts and one punishment. The first gift is that the great birds who are in my image will submit to carrying you, so that you can survey your enemies from a proper position above them. The second gift goes to those Undisciplined who will join you, for this gift is a polluted one. I will show them secret shapes that will drain the corrosion of magic out of the world and render it harmless. Finally, the punishment. From now on, women and men will be born in equal numbers. This is, I know, a burden to you, but with the Book you are far better equipped to deal with this disaster than the Undisciplined."

All came to pass as Maemeck predicted. The sudden influx of male children sundered the Undisciplined forces within three generations, turning them into a vast multitude of squabbling nations. Some retain one vestige of Maemeck wisdom, some another, but only we stand on land that has had the righteous dwelling upon it always.

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Overview

The Maemeck Matriarchy is stuffy, antiquated, xenophobic, sexist and founded on a relentlessly striated caste and level system. Its ability to conquer its neighbors is limited by its small population and the difficulties of bringing an influx of Undisciplined foreigners into their carefully balanced society. On the other hand, the Matriarchy is indisputably stable. Indeed, stability is the defining aspect of the Maemeck structure. What it does better than anything else is resist change. With its forbidding natural defenses and the strategic advantages of their flying mounts, they're not getting conquered themselves any time soon.

Values

Order is the primary Matriarchal value, and every rule of its hidebound society is aimed at putting people in their place, moving them to positions where their strengths best serve the rulers, and holding out enough promise of improvement to keep rebellion at bay. The Empire's recent aggression has cemented this Maemeck truculence: They were a vassal state once, and after the Bloodcutters decimated the Warrior and Judge castes, their civilization nearly collapsed. Fortunately for the Matriarchy, a few of those families were able to hide themselves and

The mountains around the Matriarchy are perilous and barren. The only crop natural to that soil is dead enemies.

— Prince Will of The Empire

preserve the core cultural doctrines and documents from foreign pillage.

'Maemeck' means 'judgment' but despite their reverence for the concept, they don't mean the same thing by it that foreigners might. The common meaning for judgment is the ability to discern right action under duress—to know what's just or what's best in a murky situation. To Matriarchs, judgment means an ability to relate any problem to the Book of Maemeck and find a solution.

Castes, Tests and Ranks

The various interactions of caste and rank are illustrated on page 323 of **REIGN**. Keep in mind that males of any caste and rank are treated as if they were two levels lower. They retain the rights and prerogatives of their actual level—an Undisciplined male who reaches fourth rank gains his autonomy. But if he comes into legal conflict with a third level Undisciplined woman, the Judges are likely to favor her instinctively.

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Furthermore, many tests involve getting testimonials from (for instance) a second level Warrior or better. For *those* purposes, men are indeed judged at the lower rank.

The rigid Book of Maemeck is quite explicit that once a level has been attained, it can *never* be rescinded. A fourth level Warrior who betrays the Matriarchy may deserve death, but he dies as a fourth rank Warrior, with all the respect that implies.

The text is equally clear that one cannot skip ranks. A brilliant doctor who discovers a cure for a hideous plague qualifies for the sixth level of Laborer, but if he hasn't taken the test to get to fifth, he's stuck.

Undisciplined

This is the caste of beggars, teachers (of anything other than specialized caste knowledge, like languages or basic math or history), entertainers and enchanters. Undisciplined are permitted to accost and speak to those of better station because, frankly, it's ridiculous to expect restraint from them. The exception to this concerns the highest of Judges. Only Undisciplined of the sixth rank are permitted to speak in the presence of a sixth rank Judge. Lesser Undisciplined must remain silent unless that Judge addresses them directly. They're expected to be (of course) without discipline, but there are limits.

"Um, Yes... Preserve."

In actual historical fact, some of the Judge families that survived the Imperial occupation did so by turning into belly-up quislings. Furthermore, when the time came to drive the foreigners out, several versions of the Book of Maemeck were presented (by different families) as the central document. The disparity between the three books has been covered up and integrated and explained over the decades since the country broke free, and the books were in accord about 90% of the time anyway. But those 10% disparities concern pretty essential matters of the highest caste.

Does it matter? The families who helped the invaders have been so thoroughly interbred-with that more than half the current crop of Judges has at least one great-grandparent among their number. The bigger threat is that some scholar might find the three books and see the differences. That's why they're kept under tight guard at Stagshead.

Sixth rank Judges get respect even from those who are expected to lack respect for anyone else.

The Undisciplined are forbidden to own land, handle weapons or touch gold.

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Seeing Caste

Once one qualifies for status improvement, how does everyone know? The short answer is, you wear it on your sleeve, though it's a bit more complicated than that.

Every citizen in the Matriarchy is expected to have documents, stamped and sealed and composed by an empowered member of the Judge caste, that testify to the individual's proper place in society. But it's far too difficult to compare documents every time you need to know if you should look away from someone in contempt. Therefore, each citizen wears a band on her left forearm decorated with one to six circles. Wearing the band isn't mandatory, but without it you can safely be treated as Undisciplined. The number of circles indicates level of accomplishment, and the color shows caste.

Undisciplined—Black, for the darkness of their ignorance.

Laborer—Brown, for the earth in which they toil.

Merchant—Silver or white, for the coins they gather.

Warrior—Red, for the blood they spill.

Judge—Gold, for the light of leadership they shine on all.

The penalties for wearing a band indicating undue accomplishment are typically harsh but temporary—public humiliation or flogging, or both. Forging the official documents is far more grave, and is punishable by maiming, blinding, exile or (in the case of impersonating a Judge) death.

First Rank: The lowest of the Undisciplined beg and do day labor or odd jobs. They're not trusted with anything else, really. Only rarely can they earn more than a few small coins, because no one would trust someone so lowly with any task that merits higher pay.

Second Rank: To rise above the lowest rank, the Undisciplined must receive a testimonial from someone on the level of a third rank Merchant, or greater. Once that testimonial has been certified by a Judge, the Undisciplined is permitted to enter service, hiring herself exclusively to one employer.

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Third Rank: The next test of the Undisciplined is to serve a first rank Judge (or someone of similar station) for a year without disgrace. Those who can accomplish that are permitted to learn an art or trade (though not skills reserved for Laborers).

Fourth Rank: When an Undisciplined person can amass testimonials to her character from someone of at least second rank in each caste, she can present them to a Judge and, if they are acceptable, become fourth rank. At this level, she's permitted to manage her own affairs instead of being subject to her parents or employer.

Fifth Rank: To reach fifth rank, it's necessary to get a recommendation from someone of sixth rank, any caste. At this high level, she can be trusted to manage and command other Undisciplined.

Sixth Rank: On the recommendation of a fifth rank Judge or better, the Undisciplined can be elevated to this high level. This gives the right to interact with anyone, of any level or caste, without shame.

Laborer

Laborers are by far the most numerous caste, encompassing foresters, smiths, miners, farmers, shepherds, carpenters, weavers, farriers and the like. Essentially, anyone who makes something or follows a practical trade is a Laborer. Second rank Laborers outnumber all members of

the Warrior and Judge castes combined.

Laborers are not permitted to own or carry weapons, nor may they adorn their heads with jewelry.

First Rank: Uneducated, crude effort is the purview of the first rank laborers. Typically these are laborers who are too young to have risen to second. There are a few who get stuck at first due to handicap, attitude or because they angered a Judge somehow.

Second Rank: To qualify for the commonest level, a laborer must work for one entire year in the service of a first level Judge, or someone of equivalent or greater status. Once that term is verified by the appropriate Judge, the Laborer receives permission to study a specialized trade (smith, carpenter, herbalist, bonesetter, builder, etc.) and apprentice himself to one of its masters.

Third Rank: Third rank Laborers have demonstrated knowledge in a specialized field, and once that knowledge is legally validated, they are permitted to charge money for that service.

Fourth Rank: There are sets of higher standards for fourth rank specialty labor, roughly equivalent to being an Uldish master craftsman. Fourth rank Laborers are permitted to own land and hire servants for terms longer than a month.

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Fifth Rank: Very few Laborers reach the fifth level, because it involves studying a chapter of the Book of Maemeck covering the laws and duties of their station. If they can pass a test on that knowledge without a single error, they qualify as fifth level Laborers, who are permitted to voluntarily travel outside the district in which they were certified. (Lower Laborers can move to other districts, but only in the service of a higher-caste employer.)

Sixth Rank: The rewards of sixth rank are rare indeed, bestowed only on those who make a significant contribution to the nation (as decreed by a fourth level Judge). Those who demonstrate their value by bridging great chasms, creating magnificent public statues or heroically saving lives can become sixth, who are the only Laborers permitted to voluntarily travel outside the nation.

Merchant

Handling money, making loans and governing the exchange of services and goods is the provenance of the Merchant class. They, and they *alone*, are permitted to 'engage in commerce.' (Lower castes aren't trusted to make financial transactions, while money grubbing would demean the higher classes.) A commercial action is when cash, labor, material or documents of debt change hands over something that was not made or enacted by either the purchaser or the seller. Thus, when a farmer sells his corn to a fellow Laborer, that's not commerce.

When he sells it to a Merchant, that's not commerce. When the Merchant sells it to someone else, *that's* commerce. When a bonesetter takes pay for treatment—not commerce. When a Merchant acts as an agent for several bonesetters, directing patients away from the busy ones and managing the money for all of them, that's commerce.

Merchants are the most heavily taxed caste, and (with one exception) the higher the Merchant's level, the more taxes he pays. Cunning Merchants find that the opportunities at high ranks more than compensate for this extra charge, complain though they might.

First Rank: The lowliest of merchants are still permitted to act as the middlemen of commerce, and first level Merchants are more numerous than all the other Merchant ranks put together.

Second Rank: There is only one requirement for a second level license, if one is already of the Merchant caste, and that is to pay a Wealth 3 surcharge to the Judges. With the paperwork in order, a second rank Merchant can travel anywhere within the Matriarchy in order to trade. (Lesser Merchants are restricted to the district of their birth, or to a district they were directed to by a higher-status employer or a Judge.)

Third Rank: If a Merchant can stay in continuous business for ten years, he can qualify for the third rank (as long as he's paid the fee for second). It's only at third

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level and above that a Merchant is permitted to own a shop and hang a placard in front advertising his services. (Many merchants of lower status get around this by operating out of their homes, but the stores of dedicated purpose are held in higher esteem.)

Fourth Rank: As with the second level, the only requirement is a surcharge. However, at this point, it's not a fixed amount. It's half of all the Merchant's possessions. Naturally, this spurs many in the third level to spurts of generosity right before applying for this promotion. The Judges don't really care, as long as the Merchant isn't contemptuously open in his attempts to circumvent the spirit of the law. Fourth rank Merchants can trade internationally.

Fifth Rank: As with the fifth rank of Laborer, this level is attained by taking a lengthy test about the Book of Maemeck's laws. In this case, it's the sections on Merchant endeavors, but as with the Laborers, not a single mistake is permitted. Once the test is passed, the Merchant has official sanction to charge interest on loans. (Illegal loan operations are legion throughout the Matriarchy, and the Merchants pursue them fiercely. It must be said that when they catch someone outside their caste breaking the loan laws, they're much angrier than when it's a low-rank Merchant.)

Sixth Rank: The reward of being a sixth level Merchant is a drastically lowered tax rate—back to what was paid at first. But to attain this, the Merchant has to give *all* his money and possessions to the government and, starting from scratch, earn enough to give them Wealth 3 *again*. Of course, many Merchants get around this fairly easily with a spouse's help, but as long as the initial sacrifice is big enough, the Judges turn a blind eye. Disdainful of commerce they may be, but the Judges still aren't about to turn down a pile of cash.

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Warrior

The Warrior class serves not only to defend against foreign incursions (or grab land from nations that would just misuse it anyhow), but also as the armed will of the Judges. Blasphemy, fraud, insurrection and failure to pay taxes are all investigated by the Judges, who also declare guilt and pass sentence, but the sentences are carried out by Warriors. In large cities, Warriors and Judges often operate in pairs to keep the peace and enforce the law.

Warriors of any age are the only ones permitted to routinely carry weapons. Even children of the caste are often given a symbolic club or bow. They are forbidden by law to ingest alcohol or barkwater.

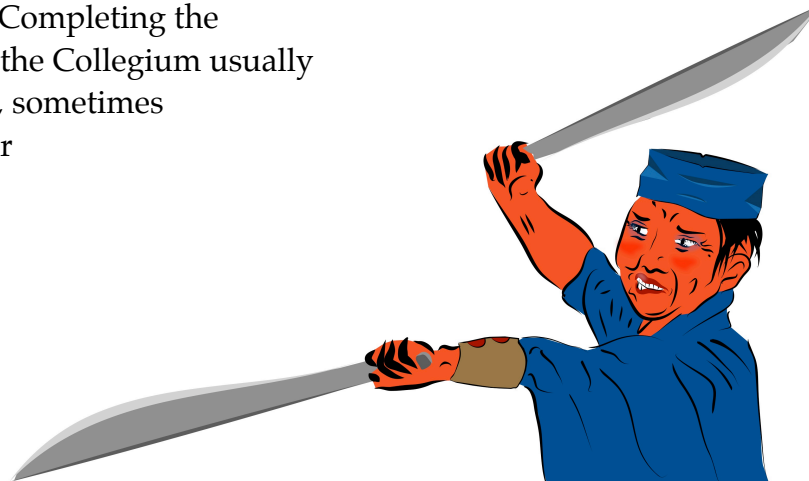
First Rank: The lowest Warriors aren't even assigned to a unit or a duty. The only right exclusive to their station is the right to enter a training Collegium and receive instruction. Most Warriors leave first level by puberty—sometimes before.

Second Rank: Completing the coursework of the Collegium usually takes 2-3 years, sometimes as many as four and very

rarely just one. Those who emerge have undergone physical training, harsh mental discipline, and rigorous weapon drills. With graduation, they're assigned to an army, a unit, a squad and a regional station. They go there, join that, and do what they're told.

Third Rank: After serving three years at second, or after accomplishing something distinctively brilliant or courageous, a Warrior can advance to third level, the rank at which she can command a squad of ten of her fellow Warriors. She may be reassigned, but not typically. This is the lowest level at which a woman can begin to train with biauchris.

Fourth Rank: After five years commanding a squad, or (again) after notably meritorious service, the Warrior may be advanced to fourth rank, at which point she faces the choice of either advancing up to the level of unit command (which puts her at the helm of five to ten squads), or of entering the Master's Academy.



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Fifth Rank: Completing the Master's Academy course in tactics and strategy rarely takes more than two years, more often getting over in one. Graduates earn the title of 'General' and are considered capable of leading an entire army. (In actuality, there aren't enough armies to go around and many Generals wind up chafing under the command of someone who's theoretically an equal.) Generals are also qualified to teach at either the Collegium or the Academy.

Sixth Rank: Only one Warrior can occupy the sixth level. It's the position of Foremost Commander of Maemeck Armies and to qualify, a General must either be universally acclaimed by all other Generals in the nation, or be appointed to the job by a trio of sixth level Judges. Foremost Commanders can *only* be removed by death, voluntary retirement, or conviction of high crimes. All the Judges in the country acting in concert lack the authority to expel one against her will.

Judge

The smallest, best educated, ruling elite of the Maemeck Matriarchy is the Judge caste. Only they are permitted to read sections of the Book of Maemeck that don't concern their own station. Only they are permitted to touch originals of the Book. Certain elements of the Book of Maemeck can only be read by a Judge—indeed, can only be *looked upon* by the holy Judges.

First Rank: The callow youth of the Judge caste still have the right to handle the holy books, though it's a right they seldom get the opportunity to exercise. A first rank Judge is under tremendous pressure to advance from everyone else in his class.

Second Rank: All the Judges' tests are written examinations about the Book of Maemeck and its laws. All the tests must be passed flawlessly. To reach the second rank, the Judge must pass a test verifying her command of the laws governing the Undisciplined. Success at that test entitles her to hear the complaints of the Undisciplined and render decisions.

Third Rank: The next test for Judges is over Labor law, and passing it entitles them to render judgment over Laborers. Some Judges of this rank also serve as a high court for particularly difficult cases involving the Undisciplined.

Fourth Rank: Mercantile law is a long section of the Book of Maemeck, and one not clearly written. Nonetheless, those who master it are entitled to judge Merchants and be done with the sordid affairs of the working and frivolous classes. They can also review and overturn the decisions of lower Judges, as can all Judges of higher level.

Fifth Rank: As one might expect, the test for rank five is on martial law. In contrast to the Merchant book, the laws of war aren't terribly complicated, though this in turn leaves some situations maddeningly

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vague. Only fifth rank Judges and above are permitted to read the Inner Laws of Judgment.

Sixth Rank: The highest rank of Judges are those who have mastered the Inner Laws. In addition to carrying authority over any Judge of lesser level (as well as anyone of any other caste) they are the ones who make decisions of policy for the entire nation. There are currently nine Judges of rank sitting in council and directing the Matriarchy.

Culture

A nation that disdains its poets, musicians and painters by exiling them to the lowest social class is, understandably enough, deficient in original poetry, music and paintings. Sculptors, being classified as Laborers, have it a bit better, and it's possible for a talented singer or storyteller to rise to the highest ranks of her caste... but that doesn't change the fact that it's the lowest caste.

Most music in the Matriarchy is communal, meaning that people get together, sing, and beat on home-made drums. Construction of instruments is regarded with suspicion, if not disdain, so only the most passionate Laborers study the skill—often to their heartbreak when they get hold of an Opetkan instrument or, even worse, an Uldish one. Realizing that their craft is far more advanced and honored elsewhere can be crushing. Or infuriating.

The only public spectacles that the Book endorses are yearly religious plays (or, as the Judges call them, 'historical plays'). Enacted by the Judge caste themselves, these performances are often lavish affairs, each striving to outdo the previous season's, and the previous year's. It doesn't hurt that the plays, though burdened by stilted language, have gripping narratives. These plays are...

The Giving of the Book: Short on actual conflict, this performance shows Maemeck descending from the sun in flames to teach her human children the ways of proper judgment. There is much rejoicing, both in the play and in the audience. Since this festival takes place during the icy Dyingmonth, the opportunity to go to a warm place is welcome. (Fire is always a prominent theme in The Giving of the Book, so much so that there have been some tragedies when effects get out of control. This is one reason that almost every Hall of Judgement in the Matriarchy is made of stone.) Each of the play's three acts is punctuated by Judges passing through the audience and distributing gifts of food, drink and coin, which also contributes to its popularity.

The Rise of the Undisciplined: The pleasant weather of Threemonth brings the performance of "Rise of the Undisciplined." While presented as a comedy of errors with copious slapstick, there are edges of genuine shock and evil

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that slice through the narrative every now and again—often when a foreigner, seeing the play for the first time, least expects it. It chronicles the first, feckless disobedience to the Book and how this gradually poisoned the lives of all who turned aside from Maemeck’s wisdom.

The Sorcerer: The swelter of a Matriarchal Fruitingmonth is an apt setting for the third play, a hellish tragedy. In stark contrast to “Rise of the Undisciplined,” “Sorcerer” chronicles the hubris and treachery of the first Judge to fall away from the Book. A magnificent figure, the sorcerer makes compelling and seductive arguments for his position, pointing out every flaw and problem with the Matriarchal system. But at each turn, he’s offered a chance to leave his evil ways, repent his errors and understand his (carefully countered) mistakes. In his pride, he refuses them all, becoming a greater thrall to magic and chaos. The play ends with him slaying the younger daughter who won’t join him and laughing madly over her corpse.

Maemeck’s Return: The autumn of the year hosts the autumn of the ‘historical’ Matriarchy. Opposed on all sides by the Undisciplined and their sorcerous master (now wholly evil) the faithful Judges stage a final defense and are, at last, rewarded for their faith. Their goddess reappears to bless them with quelling and biauchris, which figure prominently in the final battle against the sorcerer.

(The Undisciplined sorceress who defies him with her newly-learned quelling is his older daughter, who followed him right up to the point that he killed her sister. Throughout the final play, she’s regarded with suspicion and mistrust, until she gives her life to protect the Matriarchy and is posthumously elevated to her blood caste of Judge.) This play is always held outside, so that the charge of the biauchris can be enacted with real birds. (Their riders are the only actors in these plays who aren’t Judges.)

Cuisine

The fundamental unit of Maemeck cooking is the goat. Goat meat, goat milk, goat cheese or goat butter are featured at nearly every meal. Lamb is a close second. Accompanying this is thick black bread made from the valleys’ scruffy wheat (or, for gourmets, light white bread from imported Winçu grain). The Maemeck mountains have an abundance of plants with edible leaves, so salads are popular spring through fall. There’s also a common starchy sweet tuber (the *halnack*) that gets put aside for winter, or made into a sort of bland, crunchy candy (*halnacku*), or gets distilled into a syrupy, thick liquor that looks almost like blood and is blindingly rich in alcohol. This beverage, called *halnackeck*, is by weight the most lucrative export from the Matriarchy. It’s particularly prized (of course) in The Empire, where the war with the Matriarchy makes it extremely hard to get.

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Clothes

For daily wear, almost everyone wears pants, usually loose wool tucked into leather boots. Broad leather belts constrain a loose, low necked tunic. The shirt's loose sleeves are typically held by leather bracers on the forearms, where caste circles are displayed. Woven caps with ear-flaps and chin-ties are common in winter, while woven grass sun hats are used in the sunlight summers. Scarves are worn in winter, kerchiefs in summer.

Robes and gowns are formal wear. Most often, they're worn in a caste-appropriate color, with the circles on the sleeve embroidered as delicately as the wearer can afford or accomplish.

The clothes of the lower five castes are remarkably similar in outline, differing primarily in detail. Undisciplined often decorate their belts, bracers and boots with tooling, pigment or polished metal details. Laborers eschew such fripperies, taking pride in the quality of the repairs to their garments. High level Laborers dress in imported cotton, but make a point of repairing any damage or wear, often with eye-catching embroidery. Merchants are ostentatious in the color of their clothes, and take pride in outrageously long and brightly colored neckwear. Warriors have no particular sartorial code, except for the biauchrus riders. They are the exclusive owners of their steed's molted feathers, and they often use them as components in cloaks or gowns.

The Judges break the pattern, dressing exclusively in robes. Some are elaborate and splendid (most often those of the men), while others settle for quiet luxury. Hats and headdresses are typical, usually designed to emphasize height and grandeur.

When Judges Kill

Shedding blood is forbidden to Judges, leaving them ritually impure. A Judge found guilty of enacting violence on another, of any caste, is considered Undisciplined until purified in accordance with the Book. The purifications involve quests and ordeals, of increasing difficulty for each level of Judge.

The one time a Judge can kill without guilt is when carrying out a death sentence she herself passed. *Only* Judges may take life in the name of Maemeck law. This still leaves them soiled, so few Judges speak the final sentence. If a Judge becomes haunted as the result of an execution, it's considered obvious proof of misjudgment. Haunted Judges can never be redeemed.

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The Political Situation

It is, if nothing else, stable. Whatever outsiders may think of the caste straits of the Matriarchy, the principles laid out in the Book of Maemeck are a powerful engine of social order. Everyone has hope for improvement, but very few reach the highest levels where there are no new realms to conquer. The Judges generally agree with one another because they're in the superior position. The Warriors enforce the rules because they're indoctrinated from childhood with notions of honor and courage: To them, judging seems like listening to people whine all day. Similarly, the Merchants have a nice mix of privilege and freedom. If they lack the accolades of the Warriors, neither are they risking their lives. The Laborers are often too busy to complain, and like the Merchants they aren't getting killed or having to master reams of complicated law texts. The Undisciplined are, in many respects, the most liberated of the castes. The price of their relative freedom is poverty and contempt, but it's still freedom.

The greatest political challenges to the Matriarchy are external. Once an Imperial territory, the Matriarchy was stiff and standoffish to their great neighbor for generations before The Empire decided (rather capriciously) on war. Despite some specious claims of diplomatic offense, treaty violation and reneged debt, few doubt that The Empire's attack was purely mercenary.

Taking the Matriarchy puts them next to the bounty of the Plains of the Winçu, which could affordably feed enough troops to carve out a piece of Opetka down to the sea. Great as The Empire is, it has no ports, yet.

The people of the Plains are good neighbors to the Matriarchy. For one thing, the Matriarchy's poor fields and reliable mines make them a good trade partner for the Plains, who have an abundance of crops to sell, but little mineral wealth. Propping up a nation that stands between them and the rapacity of The Empire is, certainly, another reason for the Plains to forgive any past Matriarchal aggression.

That leaves Opetka, a notoriously poor neighbor. But there's nothing like a restive Empire to make for strange bedfellows. They trade with the Matriarchy, they send their spies into The Empire from Maemeck lands, and they share what they learn when they think it's likely to hurt The Empire. It has not escaped Opetka's notice that the Matriarchy is single-handedly holding the world's greatest army at bay, and that's the sort of thing that puts a damper on any envious eyeing of the Matriarchy's mines. On the other hand, there's a faction within Opetka that thinks a stab in the back is best delivered to someone who has all she can handle in front of her.

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The Matriarchy at War

The traditional military categories are foot soldiers, specialized troops and enchanters. The Matriarchy is skewed towards elite units: The Warrior caste ethos ensures it. It also ensures that foot soldiers are, one on one, often better equipped and motivated than their enemies.

Even the poorest troops are likely well-equipped, given the nation's wealth of iron. Breastplates, steel helmets and metal shields are standard, along with a war-pick and several javelins. Given the passive function of queller runes—they just stall other effects—foot soldiers may turn up with one sketched on their shields or engraved into their helmets. Sometimes, fraudulent quellers swindle soldiers with phony runes. Ironically, confidence in these empty sigils often serves just as well as a real rune in encouraging soldiers to charge a sorcerer.

Many of those Warriors survive to pursue deeper skills, leaving behind the role of “mass on the battlefield” to specialize in siege artillery, stealth scouting, guerrilla tactics or fighting in the mountains. Most obviously, the biauchrus riders provide battlefield intelligence, serve as heavy cavalry, bypass tough terrain and, last but not least, scare the hell out of enemies.

Maemeck sorcery is limited to variations on a theme, and that theme is “no sorcerers allowed.” They have some

effects that take out individuals, but for the most part they just offset the advantage held by The Empire or the Plainsfolk, or anyone else who expects to pull a magical surprise out of their pocket at a decisive moment.

The Matriarchy's arcane tactics are built around not needing sorcerers to accomplish anything, other than ensuring that the other side's sorcerers don't accomplish anything. Fighting defensively in the mountains has a similar chilling effect on numerical advantages: A massive army is far less effective when it's broken up into chaotic bubbles by unyielding terrain. Maemeck forces do poorly when outnumbered on a broad flat plain, which is why they rarely venture onto broad flat plains to fight. Instead they fall back, let the experts do what they do best (kill people and escape unseen) and let the mountains do what *they* do best (kill people and just lie there). The crowning touch is the air corps, who can blithely ignore the terrain that so constrains and confounds invaders.

The Matriarchy's victories against The Empire have made them confident, almost cocky. Trying to fight another country without mountains to hide in or large, established zones where magic is impossible... many Matriarchal Generals fail to appreciate just how different that sort of conflict would be.

The Maemeck Matriarchy



Matriarchal Character Concepts

...the Warrior boy who always dreamed of riding a biauchrus...

...Undisciplined gigolo who married into the Judge caste and has just become a widower...

...Cunning forger born in the Laborer caste, masquerading as a prosperous Merchant...

...wounded biauchrus rider back from the front lines of The Empire...

...Judge who has lost faith in the Book of Maemeck...

Matriarchal Company Concepts

...Queller conspiracy against the upper classes...

...Merchant spies in The Empire's pay...

...Undisciplined criminals given the chance to escape punishment by crossing the border to spy in Opetka...

...diplomatic envoy to Upunzi...

...a small village near the Imperial front where rubies have just been found...

Matriarchal Plot Complications

...civil unrest erupts throughout Opetka...

...crop failure in the Plains of the Winçu mean a lean year ahead...

...The Empress sues for peace, on the condition of a high ranking male Judge permanently going to her chamber of consorts...

...the biauchris get sick...

...the Laborers enact a work stoppage over a law in the Book of Maemeck that they claim is unfair to them...

Maemeck Names

In addition to common Imperial names, there are some common names from the old language. (Other a few names and phrases, that language is dead except to the Judges, who mostly read it. Even the tests and laws for lower castes have been translated into Imperial.)

Male	Female
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Boe	Gijini
Joho	Halneckeck
Kulnick	Rura
Nold	Tirl