

CREATE A
RELIGION
IN YOUR

SPARE TIME
FOR FUN &
PROFIT

by M. A. R. Barker

Perhaps it is about time for a symposium or seminar — even a book, if somebody wants to write it — on the nature and place of “religion” in fantasy rôle-playing campaigns. Religion is so central to human society that it is hard to find a culture without it; yet many game designs provide only the sketchiest of guidelines or else offer an easy take-off from our own Western-Classical-Mediaeval tradition, the Norse or Celtic pantheons, or the works of some established science-fantasy fiction author. At most, one finds an occasional “alien” religion with odd names and a dollop or two of “mythology.”

If the game designer has created cultures with “religions,” it is going to be vital for players in his campaign to know a LOT about them. What happens if I please my “god?” What transpires if I offend him? What sorts of behaviour does he approve — or dislike? Ethical questions (“What happens if I kill that guy?”) are vital, as are concepts of “Good” and “Evil” generally. What is the organisation of my temple and my priesthood? What about life after death? What do we know about “ghosts” and “magic?” Most importantly, what is my temple’s socio-political position vis-à-vis the government and other structures of my society? The player who does not learn these things very early in the campaign “gets hosed” (to use the vernacular), as he richly deserves.

Religions in fantasy rôle-playing games are part of the fun: the pomp, ceremony, costumes, recondite doctrines, mysterious lore, powerful forces for “Good” or for “Evil” — all have been part of our literary heritage for a long time. Yet fantasy game designers rarely come with degrees in anthropology, history, or comparative religion. The usual practice has thus been to grab randomly from the more colourful sects of this world, plus those found in science-fictional fiction. One thus sees temples of Ra, Isis, and Set cheek by jowl with mediaeval Catholic churches, shrines devoted to Thor and Odin, Druidic fanes, sanctuaries to Crom — and Crom knows what else! This is neither very original nor very realistic. [Some other time we can argue whether “realism” is a positive value or not.]

A good science-fictional author could explain how all of these sects, cults, and churches came to be so haphazardly jumbled together in one society. But not only is this sort of world pretty unlikely, it raises sticky questions: How do all of these groups get along together, particularly the more militant, missionising sects? What are their relations with the secular authorities? How do they support themselves? Why aren’t devotees of the simpler faiths converted by the doctrines of the subtler ones? Man being who he is, chances are that all of these sects will be struggling for secular and divine supremacy, and this should logically bring about persecutions, pogroms, and religious wars. Some faiths do tolerate other sects in their midst, of course, and even attempt to integrate them into their own fabric (e.g. an early attempt on the part of the priests of Vishnu to make Jesus Christ an “avatar” of their deity — sternly rejected by the Christian missionaries in South India). Other cultures wipe out unacceptable religious traditions with a vengeance. Although the “melting pot” idea can indeed work, thus, it needs to be balanced by a lot of explanation in a good rôle-playing campaign.

Another common treatment of religion is to borrow from just ONE world of science-fictional literature. Many players are quite satisfied just to live vicariously in an exact replica of the worlds developed by such authors as Prof. J.R.R. Tolkien, R.E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, and others. These people are not really different, thus, from those “realistic” gamers who desire careful simulations of Twelfth Century France, the Egypt of Ramesses II, Alexander’s Macedonia, or the Europe of Napoleon’s time. The designer’s duty consists in devising a game system which presents this mythos accurately, and in interpreting and filling in details missing or left vague by the original author. This solves the problem for these gamers — although it still does not address some of the fundamental assumptions about society and religion made by the fiction writer himself.

Those who want to be a little different find the “alternate timeline” approach useful: there can still be “Christians,” “Jews,” “Muslims” and other familiar faiths (with altered histories and tenets, usually), plus “Reformed Churches of Quetzalcoatl,” a “First Holy Temple of Ba’al,” or whatever else sounds fun.

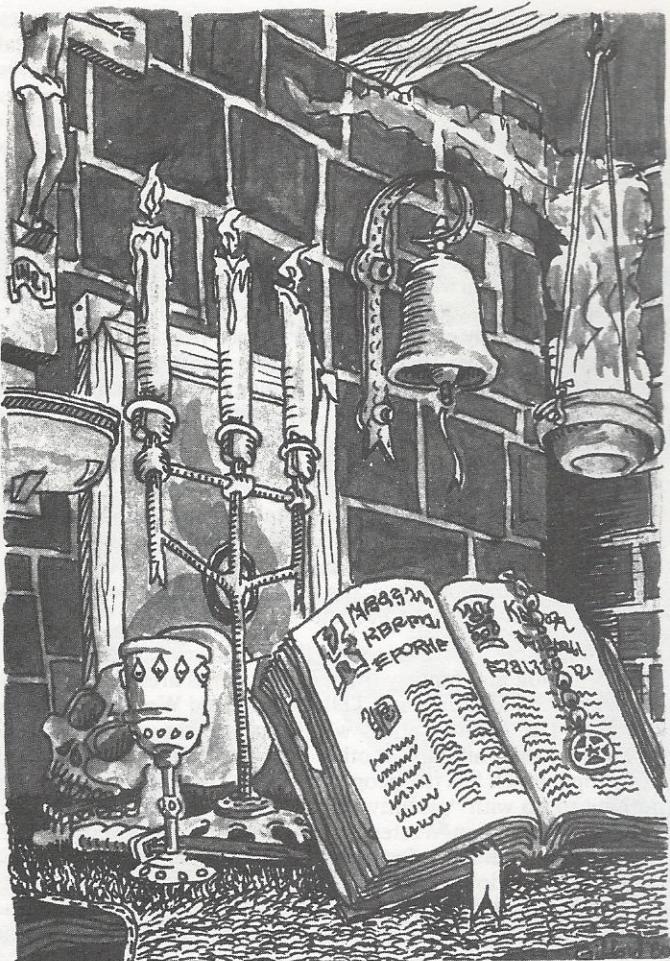
Fantasy game designers have much more frequently had recourse to yet another interpretation of our own Western-Classical-Mediaeval “legendary” tradition, however: more trolls, elves, dwarves, fairies, griffins, dragons, unicorns, and other beasties. This has been done now by so many authors — and so unimaginatively by some — that it must seem pretty old-hat to most readers.

It is much harder — and not always as satisfying — to create a wholly new world with new peoples, new faiths, new political systems, and new mores. This needs a staggering amount of work and thought. Otherwise it is likely to appear too simplistic, too neat, too “clean,” too colourless — just normal Americans running about in funny costumes. Many science-fictional worlds have this flavour for me: their authors concentrate so heavily upon space ships and weapons and technology that they forget that their characters are still human, that they will have views about life and the supernatural which do not necessarily coincide with our own Twentieth Century ideas any more than ours do with Fifteenth Century Spain, that there will be religious structures, hierarchies, and behavioural manifestations which are vital to the peoples of those societies but which may seem silly, stupid, cruel, alien, or just outright crazy to us. The farther removed from our own world in time and space, the more different the peoples of the future will probably have become.

One undeniable fact has to be faced, however: both science-fictional fiction and fantasy rôle-playing games are created by and for people of THIS time and THIS generalized Western European heritage. The cultural ethos which encourages us to speculate about the future and about other cultures is hardly shared by all of Europe, much less the peoples of “The Third World.” This has nothing to do with “primitive-ness” or a lack of technology; it is simply that our own Western traditions in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries have come to focus upon this type of speculation; our *Weltanschauung* (“world-view”) pushes us to do this, while other cultures do not share this and have no interest in it. Nevertheless, it has to be underlined again and again that we are all creatures of our own cultures, bound by them, limited by them, and unable to produce much of anything that really transcends them. We do have the broadening of our horizons vouchsafed us through history, philosophy, anthropology, and a host of other disciplines; yet we are still parochial in our outlook and limited by our own mores as to what we can and cannot imagine. To prove this, one has only to look at the science-fictional fiction of the Twenties, the Thirties, the Forties, etc. to see that as our own world-view changed, so did the sorts of future worlds envisaged by our authors. This has not changed today, and I doubt if it ever will. Today we have the essential American-ness of the socio-political backgrounds postulated for *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*; tomorrow we will see something else — but it will be just as limited by the times and the cultures which produce it as our own creations are.

What this means for the designers of fantasy rôle-playing games is just this: a familiar background will probably “sell” better than an unfamiliar one. The more intelligible the characters, social structures, languages, mores, and religious manifestations are, the easier it is for players to assume comfortable rôles in that world. Even a mediocre Western-Classical-Mediaeval background will probably be more saleable than an esoteric one. Pages of odd names and lengthy disquisitions tend to repel the reader, and it is a lot easier just to toss mediaeval France-England, Classical Greece and Rome, and the Norsemen and Gauls into a blender, season well with Tolkien, Howard, Vance, Leiber, and Lovecraft, and add a soupçon of one’s own imagination: voilà! a world!

Let’s assume, however, that an author or a campaign designer does want to break new ground. One of the first questions to be asked is: MUST every society have a “religion?” Here I am going to go out on a limb and say, “yes,” although a definitive answer properly ought to be left to those with more expertise than I have. Every society I know of has (or had) strong beliefs relating to “the supernatural”: events and relationships which transcend or lie outside of that culture’s corpus of prosaic, material knowledge. Nearly everybody (even those atheists who still knock on wood, don’t step on sidewalk cracks, and avoid breaking mirrors) has



some idea of "supernatural" power, although this is not always anthropomorphicised into "gods." There are always supernaturally-enjoined ethical and moral principles (how else does one justify an intense respect for "life" when it is quite clear that we cannot hope to feed all of the living?); there are always ideas about life after death; there are always "supernatural" sanctions upon incorrect or antisocial behaviour; there are always ways to obtain "supernatural" aid in getting what one wants and other methods for avoiding "bad luck." Nearly every culture also indulges in "explanations": how the world got to be as it is, what brought if all about, how man relates to it, what its eventual denouement is going to be, and especially what man has to do in order to acquire the most goodies: eternal salvation, the favour of the gods, good luck, worldly success, and whatever else the culture preaches.

In spite of the inroads of "Science" into the supernatural in our century, I still cannot conceive of a future without any recognisable "religion" at all, much to my atheist friends' disgust. I can hardly imagine a future in which all "religion" has been depersonalised, boiled down, and homogenised into a great abstract "Life Force." Humans love to anthropomorphise, personalise, and complicate. I suspect there will always be counter-arguments, splinter sects, heresies, re-interpretations, and religious squabbles. Even the fiercely monotheistic and iconoclastic religion of Islam has these tendencies. Somebody always comes along to spoil a utopia. Whether one believes in Prof. Toynbee's theories of cyclical rises and falls of societies or not, the one thing that seems certain about mankind is the endless capacity to change and to foul up nice, neat systems! Alternative doctrines are popularised and spread, political leaders get deified, some group manages to establish their particular "ism" as the State Religion, a prophet, holy man, or reformer appears — and there goes the ballgame. The only changeless and eternal principle seems to be Change itself.

Let's turn to some basic physical requirements for different manifestations of "religion." The most fundamental is, of course,

a food surplus large enough to permit specialisation. If food-gathering is so time-consuming that every member of the society has to work all the time just to eat, then the establishment of a priestly class (or any other class, for that matter) becomes practically impossible. Given a good food supply — whether it be cattle-herding, fishing, agriculture, or the natural bounty of a South Pacific island — craft specialisations can develop, as can priestly hierarchies, full-time political leaders, etc. Bare subsistence societies may have a large corpus of oral myths, a part-time shaman, a recognised leader, and lots of other things, but they are not likely to display temples, hierarchies, and other religious-secular trappings. Even a sacred glade, a secret hut for men's and women's initiations into adulthood, a holy dance ground, or an off-limits burial area imply enough food to support some degree of specialisation.

The usual ancient-mediaeval background given in many fantasy rôle-playing games indicates quite a high degree of specialisation. Metal tools and weapons, clay pots, glass goblets, woven cloth, tanned leather and furs, wood and stone carving, permanent houses — all imply at least part-time specialists. These people have to be supported by a larger group of food-producers. As specialisation develops further, the craftsman has to distribute his products, and this brings about trade, markets, caravan routes and roads, and larger towns and cities. It is hard for a nomadic or semi-nomadic ways to the more settled life of a permanent agricultural community.

Given a settled society, thus, specialisation — and religion, as a strong concomitant — just seems to grow. Ancient history and anthropology again provide some fair guesses about the processes involved in this. The earliest gods and totems of ancient Egypt were the products of small agricultural settlements. As time went on certain centres became richer through commerce and military conquest. Others became subordinate or went under entirely. The god of a powerful community first extended his hegemony to the surrounding countryside, than to neighbouring villages and towns, and eventually to a whole region. Competing deities were subsumed into the ruling god's mythos or else fell into desuetude and disappeared. Trade and political support allowed the early local priesthoods to expand, and the mud-brick shrines became stone temples. Pilgrimage centres evolved, as did priestly hierarchies and organisations. Land ownership was regularised, and records had to be kept, leading to the development of writing. The more popular and powerful gods were merged with the deities of less prestigious and more localised sects, and eventually a State Religion appeared. This struggle continued all down through Egyptian history, but even this did not produce a neat, homogeneous, and permanently stable system. Shifts of political power led to the prominence of one god or group of gods at one time and their replacement by others in a later period. Those deities who were unlucky either ended up on the outskirts of the cosmogony (with no worshippers or profitable temples) or else they were relegated to a brief mention in some obscure, archaic text. Foreign gods were introduced by invaders and settlers and were syncretically merged into the pantheon. Greek mercantile communities brought in their philosophies during the later dynasties, and these became part of Ptolemaic Egyptian thought. When Christianity replaced the old Egyptian-Hellenistic gods entirely, the older ways changed but persisted in the teachings of the Gnostics and other sects. The advent of Islam finally put paid to most of this, but even today there are some unique features in Egyptian Islam, particularly in rural areas. There are even a few faint traces of the Old Gods: I myself have seen bunches of flowers and dried dates on the little altar of Sekhmet at Karnak. The bored Egyptian guard opined only that, "There are still some crazy people back in the villages." The winds of change wear away the monolith of conservatism, but slowly, oh, so very slowly ...

Once the ecology and economy of a fantasy society have been worked out, the designer has to go on to consider what the world-view of his culture is going to be. What is man's purpose in the world? Is the supernatural frightening, or is it protective of man? Is it simple a divine manifestation of the normal cycles of the community: the plantings, the harvests, the rains, the tides, the rising and setting of the celestial bodies? Does the culture view the world as "progressing" towards some divinely ordained goal (e.g. a perfect world, a Second Coming, a final Judgment Day)? Or is

religion interpreted as only a means of sanctifying and maintaining a status quo, "Things As They Are?" Are the community's mores imposed by the divine, or are the gods themselves subject to external principles of "Good" and "Evil?" How much of human life is to be governed by supernatural injunctions and commandments: are there only broad general principles about "how to live," or is there an intricate code of laws ruling everything from the words of the rituals to how one brushes one's teeth and goes to the bathroom? Do the gods enjoin an inward-looking, meditative, self-contained society, or do they demand that all peoples everywhere be brought under their sway and converted to their worship? There are all kinds of possibilities — and most of them have probably motivated one or another society of this world at some time or other.

What, then, is the nature of the Supernatural itself? Does the culture believe that inanimate objects, plants, etc. possess innate powers of their own? If so, can mankind acquire these powers through some kind of recognised "religious" action, rather like the "Mana" of the South Pacific? Going farther, do inanimate things, plants, animals, etc. possess personalities — spirits of some sort — which can be got to aid or hinder human objectives? Do certain animals possess powerful spirits or archetypes with which man can ally himself? Are there spirits or deities inherent within various natural forces: the sun, moon, thunder, wind, rain, lightning, fire, or the sea? Are the gods organised around the human family: a mother (fertility) goddess, a father (pro-creator) deity, sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters? Are the gods related to man's own activities and economic cycles: harvests, corn, war, smithing, cattle, etc.? Do ghosts — the spirits of one's dead ancestors — walk the world ready to render service or to harm the unwary? Do the beings of dreams and visions have power over men's acts? If there are indeed personal, anthropomorphic "gods," how do they act in the present world: can one expect to meet a "god," perhaps mate and produce half-divine children? Have human heroes ever been promoted into the divine pantheon? Can an ascetic, saint, or holy man achieve contact with a god and thus gain divine insights? Do the gods want to contact man (through revelation or prophecy) and thus guide man's actions in this world? Do the gods really CARE about man's actions? Do they thus enjoin a code of "Good" or "Evil" upon their devotees? The possibilities are well nigh endless, and it is easily possible for one and the same society to exhibit more than one of the above concepts at the same time.

There is no easy way to determine just which route a given culture will take. Monotheism, dualism, trinitarianism, and other such pairings down of the supernatural are not limited to technologically developed societies. Some, like modern Hinduism, have several such "isms" going all at the same time: there is a multiplicity of "gods" for the average believer; these are in turn all considered to be "avatars" (aspects) of one or another of the three major deities by the more sophisticated; and some sects and philosophers go on to state that these three deities are really only aspects themselves of a greater Divine Oneness.

Philosophy is also not necessarily found in every society. There are some clearly non-philosophical cultures: e.g., the ancient Egyptian texts deal with rituals, the attributes of the gods, the ways to achieve the gods' favours, the cosmogony of the universe, the realms of the afterlife (and how to live forever afterwards in good health), spells and charms to insure various kinds of success or the avoidance of unpleasantries, etc. No Egyptian sage I know of seems to have cogitated on the oneness of creation, a "First Cause," external models or universals which exist independently of the gods, epistemology, and a host of topics dear to the Greeks of Plato's day. The actions of the Egyptian gods in the myths often seems unpredictable and strange to us, far more so than the lusty adventures of the Greek deities. This was the Egyptian ethos, and it is now difficult for us to guess what it meant to an average Egyptian or to the High Priest of an Egyptian deity. It did motivate their society for over three thousand years. The study of Egyptology is thus a fertile field for the study of man's conceptualisations of the Supernatural. The same applies, of course, to all other religions and societies.

Many cultures evince a "First Cause" explanation for "How Things Got to Be as They Are" without becoming overly



"philosophical" about it. In some cases this is no more than a simple myth: "In the beginning there was God X, and from him A, B, and C came forth." Other societies prefer an (unexplained) Mythic Age, in which the gods and other beings dwelt, fought, and performed mighty deeds; this is then contrasted with the Historical Age, in which man and other present-day creatures appear. This transition is sometimes a slow change, while in others it is effected by a "culture transformer" deity who goes around slaying hostile beings, teaching mankind how to live, solidifying reality, and performing other useful tasks to get our present world going and keep it on course.

Logic and philosophical underpinnings for one's theology are not that commonly found around this world. [Judging from some of the manifestations I see around me, it seems there are a lot of sects even today which could use some of this, but that's another story...] In any case, there need not be an Hegelian, Kantian, or Cartesian "philosopher" produced by other cultures and times may indeed include concepts and premises at which a Western philosopher would throw up his hands and cry, "Philosophy this is not!"

Almost all religious systems I know of have something to say about what happens to man after death. This runs the whole gamut of ideas from no afterlife at all, through wandering the world as "ghosts," to theories of reincarnation, to intricate labyrinths of "heavens" and "hells," to being accepted into the Supernal One and becoming part of God Himself. You pays your money, and you takes your choice...

Ethics and behaviour may or may not be legislated by "religion." In some societies proper conduct is simply the society's accepted norms, and the gods don't seem to have a lot to say about it one way or the other. Elsewhere, the gods demand certain rituals and sacrifices, but leave ethics and mores to a pervasive set of magical taboos, injunctions, and minor figures. In still other cultures the gods may make, reflect, or represent the behavioural norms, prescribing acceptable behaviour action for certain spheres (e.g. war: heroism, bravery, valour) and yet say nothing about other

areas of societal interaction (e.g. cheating at business). Some societies possess divinely revealed or inspired codes of law and ethics (e.g. the Ten Commandments) and a few display related concepts of "sin" and "virtue" (enforcing these with the carrot and the stick of "salvation" and "damnation").

When one turns from concepts to the material manifestations of religion, a vast array of traits, features, and patterns comes to view. Every conceivable sphere of human life has been involved in some religion or other at one or another period of history: rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, totems, images, shrines, temples, sacred objects, holy days, fasting, taboos, scriptures, priesthoods, monasteries, ascetics, mystics, hymns and music, art, dance, theatre, sex, economics, politics, natural science — you name it, and it's yours. There is hardly room even in an encyclopaedia to discuss all of these things.

The point of all of this is that an author or game-designer will probably err on the side of oversimplification rather than on that of overcomplexity. Hack writers all too often produce simplistic "religions," some so poorly thought out as to be downright silly. This spoils what otherwise might have been an enjoyable background for me. If the author of a science-fantasy novel has done no more than trot out the old familiar Graeco-Roman, Norse, Celtic, or what-have-you pantheon and given it archaic-sounding new names, I admit to boredom. Personally, I guess that I am not much interested in "simple" simulations or rôle-playing games. I want to encounter something new and different, something challenging and detailed — not just another rehash of the Old Faithful. The same applies whenever I am confronted with a world cribbed from Tokien, Howard, Lovecraft, or Burroughs. It was fun at first to see what I could do as an inhabitant of Aquilonia or Barsoom, but the concepts and the backgrounds are now so trite and so often done that they have palled. This is not just my own insatiable dilettantism: bored and blasé with the old, casting about for some new plaything. It is just that as fantasy rôle-playing games have evolved during the past five or six years, I have come increasingly to believe that a really good "world" has to have as many of the dimensions of real life as possible. There always have to be more unknowns, facets which I have not seen yet, materials for further curiosity and speculation, and complexities which can keep me interested long after the initial thrill of the world or its game has worn off.

In some ways fantasy novel backgrounds may be easier to construct than those meant for fantasy rôle-playing games. The author of a novel does not have to answer questions from his characters about their supposed religions; the designer of a fantasy rôle-playing campaign does. In a story, "Great Jugbo" of the Huitinani tribe needs only to be established as a ferocious war-god, complete with juicy details about idols and temples. He is only there because the writer needs an evil, hostile priesthood from whose clutches lovely damsels can be rescued by Our Hero. (Thereafter the author can plug in the cassette entitled "Rescue from the Temple During a Hideous Ceremony" or perhaps that one called "Fighting the Enemy Champion in the Arena." Dull.)

In any kind of an ongoing rôle-playing game, however, Jugbo's putative worshippers are going to want a LOT more explanation. Just who is this god anyway? How does he fit into the pantheon? Tell us more about his sphere of activity ("war") and what we are supposed to do about it. What are his ceremonies like? How do we dress? What actions will win us promotion and prestige in the hierarch? Who pays us if we become priests and how much do we earn? Are we respected and in a favour with the chiefs of our tribe? What is our position vis-à-vis other sects? How widespread is the worship of Mighty Jugbo? And so forth.

It is relatively easy to work out Jugbo's details. Providing that the deities of the society are anthropomorphic (or at least "persons" with intelligible motives), the pantheon can be expanded and embellished until it reads like **Bulfinch's Mythology** or **The Golden Bough**. (Unfortunately, these two older works have been superseded by much recent study in the field of comparative religion. Most of those reading this article will have already had some college or university education and can browse through the relevant sections of a library on their own; there is thus no need to add a bibliography.)

Let us assume that the designer has described Jugbo's cult in some detail. Players are told how Jugbo fits into the tribe's mythology, who his relatives are, and what his sect preaches. If the designer is himself of a theological bent, we can expect such statement as: "Jugbo represents the Great Primordial Hunger present throughout the universe and evinced by the survival of the fittest and the need of every creature to feed upon others. Everything slain by Jugbo's devotees thus passes into his Mighty Maw to feed the Fifteen Fiery Furnaces of Being, preventing the cosmos from winding down to the frozen eternal stillness of Final Entropy, called by the Huitinani people 'Gheri the Unmoveable,' Jugbo's sworn foe."

Look at all this tells us; here we are given a basic theological position. Jugbo is clearly an active deity. He favours violence, and yet this violence supports the Existence of Things As They Are. He accepts the morality of killing to live, and his worshippers are thus not likely to be vegetarians. We can extrapolate that those who perish in the Path of Jugbo are going to pass on into some sort of Valhalla, a heaven reserved for warriors. Or perhaps their spirits will be taken into the Fiery Furnaces themselves, becoming one with the energies of the cosmos. We can surmise that Jugbo approves of bravery, daring, military skill, strength, and indifference to pain. He disapproves of passivity, peacefulness, cowardice, and meditative inaction. Depending upon the rest of the tribal ethos, Jugbo's doctrines may include gallantry to enemies, chivalry, kindness and toleration towards non-warriors — or the opposite of these traits: cruelty, treachery towards non-members of the sect, contempt for the meek and helpless, etc. Going still farther, we may expect to see a warrior caste or military aristocracy, secret military societies, a war-chief for the tribe, and a philosophy of conquest and continual expansion. We can also guess that Jugbo likes fires and hates cold, that he enjoys feasting and eating, and that he may also serve as the patron of such war-related crafts as smithing, hunting, and armourmaking. His ceremonies will probably be pretty strong stuff: sacrifices (remember the "Mighty Maw?"), fires, war-dances, possibly such displays of courage as walking across beds of hot coals, going into a "berserker" trance and dashing off to prove one's bravery by killing somebody, secret and painful initiations for boys becoming adult warriors, the sanctifying of military weapons, fire- or blood-coloured vestments, perhaps a lower status for women (if the society does not encourage female warriors), and other related features. Jugbo probably also approves of the number fifteen (the "Fifteen Fiery Furnaces," above), although this may be a more generalised pattern number in the culture. This in turn may give us a take-off point for theories on tribal numerology, omens, calendars, and all sorts of other traits.

Fine. Jugbo is now fleshed out to the point that players in the Huitinani campaign can see what sort of deity he is and what sorts of rôles are available to them in the culture. Wh have begun to get an idea of the *Weltanschauung* of the Huitinani people. Problems may arise for Jugbo and his followers, however, if the designer introduces some ethical principle beyond the gods and to which they must adhere as do mortal men. Whether the designer inserts this principle only through his own god-like power (e.g. by simply stating that Jugbo is "Good" or "Lawful," "Evil" or "Chaotic"), or whether he brings this in through some feature of the creation itself (e.g. a prophet, philosopher, reformer, or some event in Huitinani history), the result is the same: Jugbo's every action is now going to be scrutinised and judged according to external standards over which he has no control.

The content of this principle, standard, or philosophical position has to be made clear to the players since their positions are entirely dependent upon it. If the Huitinani are dualists, holding that there are "Good" deities and "Evil" deities and that both fit into the theology, then there are only practical problems: the relative political and social positions of the two "alignments." Jugbo himself can be put into the "Good" or "Lawful" category because of his rôle as a world-maintainer; or he can be placed amongst the "Evil" or "Chaotic" deities because of his emphasis upon violence, killing, and mayhem. If these two categories possess roughly equal status and power, then each player can join the group of his choice depending upon his own temperament and inclinations.

If Jugbo is put into an "alignment" category which has prevailed over the other in the culture, then he and his adherents are home

free: Jugbo's temples will be honoured, his followers respected, his commandments obeyed, and his priests will be at the centre of the tribe's affairs.

Pity poor Jugbo, however, if he is in a disadvantaged group! Heaven help him and his followers if the Hutinani have largely become pacifists holding to a "Do unto others" Golden Rule! Chances are that the Hutinani will now consider Jugbo to be nothing more than a hold-over from a darker, bloodier past, something to be expunged or expelled as soon as possible. Of course, he can always be "re-interpreted": his priests may emphasise his rôle as a "world maintainer" and sweep his gorier legends under the temple carpet, so to speak. They may rewrite and expurgate his myths and call them nothing more than "allegories." They may tone down his ceremonies and focus more upon his patronage of crafts and "manly prowess." He may in time become a minor, forgotten figure in an inhospitable pantheon, an "aspect" of some more socially acceptable deity, or only a useful "mythological" subject for sculpture, painting, or literature. Alas, as with Ares or Mars in our own world, poor Jugbo may serve out his final days as nothing more than a frieze over the R.O.T.C. armoury door...

Sic transit gloria Dei.

Religions are rarely neat and homogeneous, as said above. We have not even mentioned possible doctrinal disputes within Jugbo's temples, heresies, "progressive" and "conservative" factions, "Angry Young Men" and "Old Diehards," prophets and reformers, secret societies of fanatics (or liberals, for that matter), mystical versus non-mystical interpretations of Jugbo's being, political strife between powerful members of the hierarchy, splinter sub-sects, and all of the personal responses to any dogma ranging from atheism and cynicism to blind faith and wild-eyed fanaticism. We have also not considered possible regional variations, class and caste variations, and variations between the tenets taught to commoners and those held by the intellectual elite. There may also be temporal changes between the Jugbo of today and the Jugbo of a hundred years ago. A good simulation ought to take some of these historical and sociological factors into account, and a few of them can be put to good purpose even within a simple campaign.

Perhaps enough has now been said about Jugbo. It is time to look at some specifically game-related issues revolving around "religion" in fantasy campaign games.

One fundamental premise, in many "Swords and Sorcery" novels and also in almost all fantasy role-playing game I have seen, is that the "gods" and the supernatural do really exist. Whether this is explained away on pseudo-scientific ground (e.g. the "gods" are really only vastly powerful interdimensional beings), or whether there is really "Supernatural" power in the usual religious sense of the word, the fact is that a real, live, imminent "god" can do a lot more to help or hinder a player character than can some of the "deities" of this world! This "god" can bestow favours upon his faithful, revivify them when they die, guide them and give them information, and help them acquire a lot more goodies than are usually available to the long-suffering non-player characters of the fantasy world. Conversely, a player who acts contrary to his deity's wishes really ought to expect a stiff lightning bolt up the backside, but in my experience this happens only rarely, no matter how justly deserved, since one's players raise such cries and miserable remonstrances of protest that it seems heartless for a referee to employ this "ultimate weapon" too often.

Having the referee serve as "*Vox Dei*," with or without modifying dice rolls, does serve the useful purpose of allowing him to direct his scenarios, guide and aid his players, and generally keep the world balanced. Misuse of this power or even positive overuse of it, however, can ruin a game. If "divine" aid makes it too easy to attain objectives, or if "interfering gods" make it too difficult, the campaign is usually quickly junked. The same seems to be true of campaigns in which player characters themselves may become so immensely powerful that they can take part in the activities of the gods, even perhaps combating and slaying the deities themselves! These "gods" are then nothing more than super-strong "monsters," and any mythical or religious content they may have



had is lost. Moreover, in order to do this a player character must be granted incredible strength and/or vast quantities of "magic," and once he has these things he finds it very hard to settle back down to earth and continue his rôle as a regular member of his society. It may be one godawful ego trip to be the equal of a god and slay him in battle, but what do you do for an encore? Living with the other gods on what passes for Mount Olympus can quickly get boring, as can dwelling all alone in some unapproachable wizard's tower in the depths of a forest. It is then pretty silly to go on adventuring and rousting about with "lesser" mortals.

Another basic assumption in most fantasy rôle-playing games is the reality and efficacy of "magic." It is not always clear whether this works through the powers of the gods, or whether it operates as a "natural force" (again possibly with a pseudo-scientific explanation).

The fact is that fantasy magic is an extremely potent weapon. Unlike a novel, where it works only when and how the author wants it to operate, sorcery in a rôle-playing game has to be carefully curbed and balanced; otherwise one finds player characters going around blowing down cities, devastating armies, finding out the innermost secrets of the world, and generally making a wreck of the designer's pretty scenery. If it is made too hard to acquire and use, players seem to find little fun in the campaign; if it is made too potent and too available, the same thing happens.

In reality, of course, "magic" would rapidly become the fiercely guarded private property of the most ruthless and influential forces in the society: the priestly hierarchy, the secular rulers, or a combination of the two. A good sorcerer, therefore, might find himself rather like a World War II Nazi rocket expert, whisked off by either the Russians or the Americans to a strange country, pampered and fed but worked very hard, and probably stamped "Top Secret" forever. Even in the dispersed, comparatively loosely structured society of Arthurian legend, this was the sort of rôle played by Merlin. As long as he did what the Round Table and the

King thought he ought to do, and as long as he did not develop any yearnings for power of his own, he was accepted and given respect. Those sorcerers who did not toe the line, on the other hand, tended to suffer for their noncooperation.

In all likelihood a "mighty wizard" who did not accept state patronage from the society and went off to dwell in a lonely tower on the moors would soon realize that he needed food (and hence lands, villages full of farmers, etc.), goods produced by artisans and craftsmen, and certain other comforts and goodies to be had only within the society. If he attempted to establish his own realm, obstruct traffic, and break the king's laws, he would soon find himself the target of a punitive expedition. If he opted to live as an ascetic recluse in a cave or ruined tower, he might be tolerated so long as he did not become a nuisance — but he would have to give up any real power thereby over others in his cultural milieu.

All right, all right, some may protest; you are arguing from "reality"; yet this is FANTASY. What is wrong with a designer postulating mighty wizards living all alone in remote towers, beautiful maidens imprisoned in castles with no visible means of sustenance, dragons who can fly around like fighter planes, and all the rest? The answer is that nothing is wrong with all of this, if this is your cup of tea. All I am saying is that if you want your fantasy world to have any depth and detail to it, then these are problems to be considered and explained either in pseudo-scientific terms or in mythic fashion.

Another problem is that of "alignments." Many campaigns rather blindly follow Prof. Tolkien and postulate a dualistic system: "Good" versus "Evil," "Law" versus "Chaos," or "Light" versus "Darkness." Good Zoroastrians all! I can disagree with this simplistic dichotomy, but if I accept the designer's premises and am given some content to these terms, then I cannot fault it. Speaking realistically again, I doubt whether the "Good" of a fantasy world should be quite so close to what we in the Western European tradition consider to be "good," and the "Evil" so much like the "evil" of our own heritage right down to the existence of "demons," "The Devil," "Hell," and the colour black. All of this may be familiar and as comfortable as an old shoe, but it just does not tickle my imagination enough.

"Good" and "Evil" are also relative. Religion tends to be conservative and to support the most strongly held beliefs of a society. Therefore, whatever the culture says is "good" IS "Good." If the gods must be appeased and the order of the universe maintained by the cutting out of human hearts, as in Aztec society, then this will be what is "Good," and it will have all of the support and sanctions of the priests, the rulers, and the common man. The priests of Ba'al tossed infants into the flames burning within the bellies of their brazen idols with just the same serenity of motive. So did the ancient Britons when they burnt their captives alive in wicker cages. So did Adolf Hitler when he postulated a society free of Communists and Jews. To quote John Toland's book, **Adolf Hitler**, "...for Hitler already had massive support on all levels of German society. Even the Association of National German Jews issued an appeal in his favour. And so, on August 19 [1934] almost 90 percent of the German people freely voted their approval of Adolf Hitler as Hindenburg's successor." (p. 358) He was also favoured by many churchmen, catholic and protestant alike. His "Good" was perceived as the Good of all Germany.

All of this only demonstrates that "Good" and "Evil" may have meanings very different at other times and places. Our "Good" appears "Evil" when viewed by the other side. Most fantasy novels do not expound on the viewpoints, theological foundations, mores and ethics, and the world-view of the "Heavies." Yet in a society with two equally balanced "alignments" one must expect much more dialogue, discourse, position-putting, and attempts to convince the other group. This is essentially what one finds in a fantasy rôle-playing game, with its neat black and white division into "Good" and "Evil" or "Law" and "Chaos." This very black-and-whiteness is suspect, of course; most peoples and cultures and institutions are various shades of grey.

I do realise that this division into "alignments" is there at least partially to aid game mechanics: each side has an opposite side to fight, providing opportunities for conflict and excitement

Yet even if I accept a dichotomy into "Good" versus "Evil," or perhaps just "Friendly" versus "Hostile," I still find it hard to comprehend "Neutral" as a permanent third "alignment," much less such combinations as "Lawful-Neutral," "Chaotic-Neutral," "Lawful-Chaotic," etc. I can understand "neutral" as a specific reaction to individual stimuli, particularly those which do not affect oneself directly. I know people who are "Lawful" about murder and incest, "Chaotic" about speeding and laws relating to the smoking of controlled substances, and "Neutral" about zoning laws in Iowa, marriage customs in Afghanistan, the rights and wrongs of the Albigensian Crusade, and much of what else is going on at a distance from them. I can imagine a foreigner or an outside observer being "neutral" to some extent, as an anthropologist is supposed to be when studying a foreign culture. But I find it hard to believe that an individual, a community, or an ethnic group can remain "neutral" to events which intimately affect its welfare. One can opt to be an "isolationist" and stay out of a conflict as long as possible, or one can try to deal equally with both sides and favour neither; if events or issues arise which make this "neutrality" untenable, however, then this "alignment" is going to vanish. In no case can I imagine a person or group living within a society, affected by its laws and mores, and pressured by its religious and secular imperative remaining "neutral" for long. Moreover, each "neutral" group is going to have its own internal standards of "Good" and "Evil," "Law" and "Chaos," within itself, and these will complicate its position vis-à-vis other groups. Complexities within complexities! Once more I recognize that "Neutrality" may be a useful game device, making it possible for Group X to cooperate both with Group Y and with Group Z, but this can probably be handled in more logical and realistic ways.

In reality (to use that ugly word again), "alignments" shift with the winds of politics and social change. The enemies of today are the friends of tomorrow. I can imagine starting out in a fantasy campaign with Sect X in violent conflict with Sect Y. Events within the campaign may then make it likely that this hostility must end, and the two groups might end up as allies and the best of friends. As an example, let's bring up Might Jugbo once more. He starts the campaign as a "Lawful" deity, doing his job as a world-maintainer and employing his violence for the good of the Huitinani people. As events unfold, however, it becomes more and more clear to Jugbo's priests that the temples of the other "Lawful" gods are going to swing their support behind Gherkin the Mild, a follower of the pacifistic Earth-Mother goddess, Alraita. Jugbo's followers can see the handwriting on the proverbial wall; if he stays where he is it won't be very long before he ends up as the aforementioned frieze over the armoury door. Jugbo's hierarchy performs a quick volte-face, alters a few scriptures, perhaps trots out a "miracle" or two to explain things to the common folk, and joins forces with the temple of Ghurbafazh, Lord of Death ("We DO have so much in common..."). Jugbo still cannot stomach Gheri the Unmoveable, figuratively or physically, but he is now in the same camp, and maybe some further re-interpretation and reconciliation can be mythically effected later.

A related problem in fantasy rôle-playing games arises when the designer does create a mythos with precepts very alien or unpalatable to his modern European-American players. People cannot help but carry their usual attitudes and reactions over into a campaign, even though playing in a rôle-playing game theoretically demands that they give these up while the game is in progress and substitute the mores of another place and time. Some types of behaviour which are considered highly antisocial in this world are accepted easily by rôle-playing: e.g., vicarious violence, slaughtering peasants, burning down villages, and massacring city guards (read "police"). Slavery, thieves, harlots, duels — all have been drained of their ugly connotations by generations of "Swords and Sorcery" novels, comic books, and the movies. It depends upon the designer whether these antisocial activities are even considered "Chaotic" or not; in some campaigns they are "Lawful." Other forms of behaviour have not received this stamp of approval: e.g., incest, homosexuality, infanticide, polygamy and polyandry, etc. I remember once having incredible difficulty trying to get a player in an ancient Egyptian campaign to marry his sister, a non-player character. The fate of the Throne of the Two Lands depended upon it, yet Pharaoh just

would not tie the connubial knot. He could not face the idea of incest, even though this was "approved behaviour" for a King of Egypt. I finally let him get away with it, sending the sister off to marry a prince of the Mitanni.

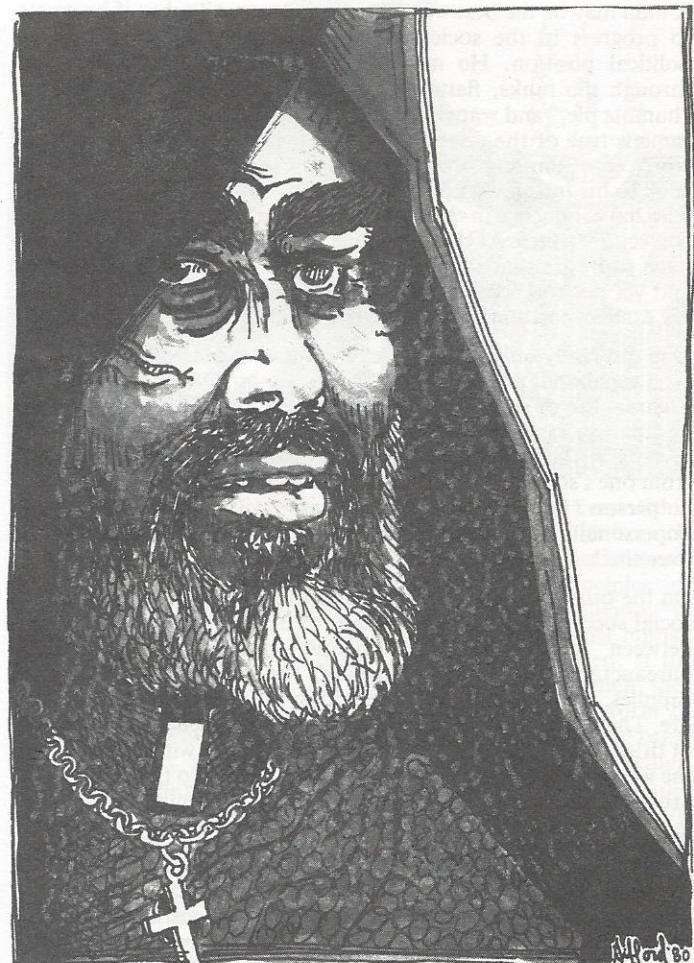
Even the sorts of violence sanctioned by "Swords and Sorcery" fiction can become unthinkable if the player is made aware of all of the ugly details. I once had a player who had chosen to be a priest of a particularly ferocious deity who demanded daily human sacrifices. So long as I kept the description of these rites brief and abstract there was no objection: "You and your fellow priests cut out the hearts of twenty victims today." Okay, no problem. Then, once, as an experiment, I manoeuvred this player into a situation where he himself had to sacrifice just one person. I made this a real tearjerker: A little girl, a peasant child, barely ten years old and as cute as could be. I overdid the description: her innocent trust, her tearful eyes, how she clutched his hand as he led her to the altar, etc. — a regular soap opera. You can guess what happened: he could not perform the sacrifice, cast about for any way out of it (including calling upon the god for "divine intervention" — the same god who had demanded the sacrifice in the first place), and then when he balked and had to be "assisted" in his job by a fellow non-player character priest, he felt badly about it all the following week. His goodhearted American conscience must still hurt because he talks about this incident with some bitterness even today. I figured that this will teach him to be "Chaotic" when he does not even understand the real meaning of the term!

This is NOT to urge that fantasy rôle-playing games be used to teach cruelty, indifference to life, or other antisocial attitudes! Psychologists differ as to whether vicarious violence has a cathartic and useful effect, or whether it teaches us things we don't really want to learn. My little peasant girl was an experiment only. Such issues have to be squarely faced when one sits down to devise a fantasy rôle-playing campaign. Really unpleasant and vicious "Chaos" may be harmless for some, but for others we should probably tone down our "Chaotic" characters, soften their beliefs, and underestimate their actions. Yet we should not regulate it all to the pleasantly innocuous atmosphere of an English back-garden. This may be all right for games produced for children, but the players of advanced fantasy rôle-playing games are usually young adults. We should perhaps attempt to offer interestingly different, even "alien," rôles to play, rôles which teach the need for a deeper understanding of how other societies think and act, which help us to rid ourselves of our parochialisms and prejudices, and which build bridges of empathy rather than burn them down.

There is one more game-related topic relating both to "religion" and to the secular areas of a fantasy world: this is the issue of "individual freedom," as permitted by so many fantasy campaigns. One finds player characters wandering about without let or hindrance, pushing into palaces to talk to kings, intruding upon ceremonies in the holiest of holies, travelling from country to country with no questions asked, starting businesses and ventures which have tremendous social consequences and ramifications, and generally acting as if they owned the place!

None of these things would be very easy in reality. Even "knights errant" have homes and families, property which they must manage in order to eat, and duties within the society other than going about potting off dragons. "Priests" are usually even more restricted: there are prayers, studies, rituals, administrative work, people to see, and things to do. Most of these prosaic details can be glossed over — it is a fantasy after all — but "realism" does become a problem when a "priest" shirks his responsibilities to go off adventuring. The same is true of the "soldier" who has a military command yet spends his time exploring draughty dungeons or out rescuing fair damsels. This is not just a case for ignoring the nitty-gritty for playability's sake; it is flagrant, outright dereliction of duty! In this world such a miscreant would be fired or courtmartialed. In less gentle eras he would swing on the gallows.

Anything approaching a "realistic" society can hardly be so unstructured that characters can roister about "adventuring," clouting city guards, offending the aristocracy, robbing tombs



and temples, and amassing great quantities of wealth with nary a question asked. Such actions would receive very short shrift indeed. One has only to glance through any ethnography, any history, any description of a real human society, to realise that ALL societies have established institutions to prevent just this sort of thing: to guard, reinforce, and sanctify "accepted" behaviour and to exclude or punish those on the fringes, the vagabond, the criminal, the nouveau riche, and the parvenu.

Yet isn't this kind of "adventuring" just what happens in novels? Doesn't it even happen in real life sometimes? Certainly it is. But the real-life examples are very rare, perhaps flukes, a matter of being in the right place at the right time for historical forces to coincide. A novel can put forth any premises its author wishes. But the very fact that the story is unique enough to be told, the reader recognises that it is not representative of average or even frequent events in the culture. The beggar becomes a king, the mighty-thewed warrior slays all of the baddies and rescues the girl, the little peasant boy becomes a great wizard and destroys the tyrant — and they all ride off into the sunset at the end of the story.

A fantasy rôle-playing game is similar, yet different. Players do take on the personae of mighty-thewed heroes and clever wizards. They start off as nobodies, and if they are lucky enough and smart enough to outwit the referee, they can rise to become rich and mighty. This is perhaps logical for a novel-like single adventure, a unique series of events in the lives of the protagonists. But "They lived happily ever after" is not only one of the least likely statements ever made about real life or a story purporting to be "realistic," it also just does not apply to fantasy rôle-playing games. Once Our Heroes have explored the dungeon, slain the beasties, and scarfed up the treasure, they must go back to living in the culture, and they must also become men and women of affairs. There is no social value to being an "adventurer." Real power in any society is based upon wealth, age, prestige, family position, and in being the smartest cog in the Establishment's machine.

A man may be the best warrior in the community, but if he wants to progress in the society, he must achieve some military or political position. He must join an army, work his way up through the ranks, flatter his superiors, eat great quantities of "humble pie," and wangle promotions when and how he can. The same is true of the priest: being clever and a wonderful sorcerer won't earn him any brownie points in the hierarchy. He has to stick to his job, fawn upon his masters, satisfy the needs of those who have influence in the community, and make sure he holds the correct doctrines. At the same time both the soldier and the priest have to insure that they will stand out from the herd, be clever and yet not too eccentric, etc. Cardinal Richelieu did not rise to his exalted position by flouting the Establishment!

One can really only "adventure" when one is outside of the society, a vagabond, a foreigner, a "fringe-person," in effect a nobody. The real life of such people is usually not pleasant: who wants to be hungry, ragged, poor? Who wants to hang around scummy taverns in the slums of a city, fight as a bodyguard, eat insults from one's social "bettters," and suffer all one's life? Any time such a person fights back, the society will methodically and impersonally crush him: prison, the gallows, or just a quick crack over the head.

On the other hand, it is equally dull to game the logical result of social success. No one would want to play out the long intervals between a great general's heroic campaigns: the endless bureaucracy, the filing of papers, the organising of troops, supplies, and staffing, the politicking and the humdrum social life. The life of a high priest is even more restricted: the accounting of titles, the administration, the petty squabbles within the clergy, the worry about finding money for a new annex to the temple, the prosaic duties of the rituals, and again the interminable politicking and boring social life. The same is true of the aristocracy, even dukes and earls and kings, and for every other socially prestigious class in the culture.

The solution I now employ in my own campaigns is not entirely satisfactory: since it is not much fun to be too weak and ignoble, and it is just as tedious to sit too high in the halls of the mighty, I tend to focus upon the middle levels: the character's rise to power. I make it relatively easy for my players to get out of the slums, achieve a certain amount of wealth, prestige, and position, and establish themselves as valued members of the society. I make it much more difficult to rise to the very high (and logically boring) posts within the power structure. The most enjoyable part of our campaigns is to be had while characters are still free enough to "adventure" but not so weak and helpless that they have no recourse against hostile forces.

The problem with this is that many players are persistent; they have a strong drive to see their characters succeed to the highest posts, achieve the most unreachable goals, and progress to the very pinnacle of power. No matter what I do, some players are going to become generals, high priests, nobles, or what-have-you. (As the referee, of course, I could easily prevent this by wheeling out "referee's specials" to knock them down every time they got near this status, but I don't think this is either logical or fair.) Perhaps the best solution is to announce in advance that characters will be treated like those in a novel: once the Great Adventure is over, the foe defeated, the maiden rescued, and the treasure won, Our Heroes must ride off into the sunset and "live happily ever after." In other words, players must "retire" characters whose duties and high social positions logically prevent them from gallivanting off on "adventures." It is nice to have the fruits of victory and the peace to enjoy them — but it is boring to play this out. A further method can be devised to allow a player to "look in" upon a former character from time to time to see how he is progressing. Indeed, if the game scenario demands that the character reappear, he can be brought back to do so. The Great Patriarch of the temple can be summoned forth to deal with some new and horrendous sorcerous threat to the prosperity of the Empire. The High General can take command of all the legions when a neighboring nation launches an invasion, etc. These characters can be played either by the referee or by the original player. (It is rather strange and amusing to imagine one's new character serving as a private in an army commanded by one's old

character! The mighty commander could glance down the lines of marching, dusty troops, single out a young face for a moment, and muse, "What a curious sensation; once I must have been like that boy there...")

Let me now sum up the steps I see as necessary for the creation of a "religion" for a fantasy rôle-playing world.

(1) Establish the ecology and the economy of the region and in particular of the society in which the religion is practiced.

(2) Work out the world-view of the culture: its attitudes towards life, death, right and wrong, success and failure, final goals — as much as possible.

(3) Develop the culture's conception of the "Supernatural": why it exists, how it works, what sorts of entities it postulates, and what influences it has over men's lives.

(4) Build up the details of the pantheon and mythology (if these exist), fitting them into the ecological and economic structure.

(5) If the society is "philosophical" in nature, the overall premises of its system must be stated. The same applies if it is essentially a "mythical" or a "materialistic" culture. These features must be tied into the holistic world-view and with beliefs about the "Supernatural."

(6) Outline the central religious doctrines: those relating to life after death, morals and ethics, warfare and societally approved violence, magic and sorcery, the rewards and punishments expected from the gods, methods of obtaining "Supernatural" power, etc.

(7) Given some basic theological position statements, one can now elaborate upon the physical manifestations of the "religion": the rituals, the costumes, the architecture of the temples, the images, the hierarchy of the priesthood, taboos and customs, church history, scriptures and sacred objects — a whole host of things. Many of these traits will in turn relate to other features: e.g. a calendar, astronomy, astrology and numerology, tithing systems, class and caste, planting and harvests, and so forth.

(8) If there is more than one religion (or sect) in the society — and this is often true of societies on this planet — then one must return to (4) — or even to (2) and (3) — above and start over.

(9) Differences within each religion or sect must be added: sub-sects, doctrinal disputes or heresies, conservatives and liberals, prophets and reformers, secret societies, and the like. Not only does this add depth and richness, it also provides opportunities for adventure and the development of interesting scenarios.

(10) Any "alignments" or groupings of sects must be thoroughly thought through. Is there some Great Principle which transcends even the gods (and if so, from whence does it stem)? Or are these alliances and constellations temporary, perhaps based upon the exigencies of politics and self-interest? The societal implications of having two or more antithetical "alignments" operative in the same society at the same time must be worked out, explained, and balanced.

(11) Turning to strictly gaming matters, if the gods of the fantasy creations are assumed to be real and imminent, and if they play active parts in the character's lives, then one must provide the players with the details of their demands, likes, dislikes, and especially the rewards and punishments which can be expected from them.

(12) The nature, use, and social ramifications of "magic" must similarly be detailed for those playing in the campaign. How does "sorcery" work? What can it do? What is the social and political position of the sorcerer within the culture?

(13) The problem of "individual independence" for player characters affects priests and warriors alike — anybody, in fact, who desires to achieve recognition and status within the culture. One can design a very loosely structured society, or one can ignore the whole issue and say, "It is a game." Neither of these views is very satisfactory. It seems better to build methods of dealing with this problem into the rules themselves, as suggested above.

As a final example, let me suggest how a particularly knotty "Supernatural" problem might be "explained" through a more detailed world-view and a set of theological-supernatural assumptions. Suppose that a designer wants to use the game device of

"intelligent" weapons in his campaign: swords, maces, etc. which have intellects, egos, and even magical spells all their own. Depending upon his initial basic premises, this feature can be made to fit into the system without difficulty. Let us look at a few examples of "world-view models":

(1) Model A postulates natural "Mana": a tool or weapon used for centuries by a succession of powerful persons develops innate potency all its own. The most mighty of these become "beings" in their own right and manifest behaviour comprehensible to humans as "personalities."

(2) Model B holds that the spirits of the dead remain in this world after death, staying in close proximity to objects which they valued in life. The weapon is thus inhabited by a powerful personal "ghost."

(3) Model C has no "Mana" and no "ghosts," but it assumes the existence of nonhuman races, some of which dwell in specific locales (e.g. water pixies, tree dryads). A "sword person" now becomes no more than a member of a species of entities which makes its home in steel weapons, perhaps gaining sustenance from the blood of the weapon's victims.

(4) Model D exhibits a complex pantheon of greater and lesser deities, supernatural minor races ("angels" and "demons," etc.); all one needs is a magic system which can imprison a lesser entity within a weapon and keep him there.

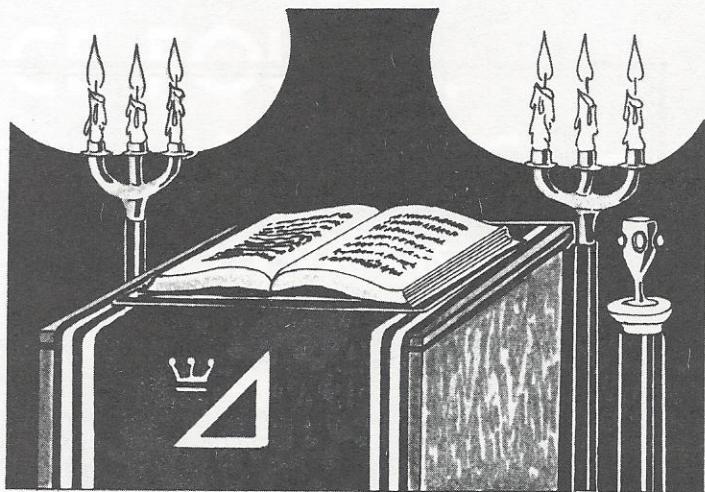
(5) Model E presents two great antithetical Principles. These appear to mankind as personalised, imminent "gods." In their eternal war against one another each Principle has directly created powerful instruments to aid its supporters in this plane. These tools and weapons have been given "personae" in order to make them immediately intelligible to the lesser races for whom they are intended, and they are keyed to react hostilely if used by a follower of the opposite Principle. (One ramification of this might be that there are weapons attuned only to mankind, others only to dwarves or trolls or what-have-you, and still others made to be used by other supernatural sub-entities. Characters would then become extremely careful of handling strange weapons!)

(6) Model F displays none of the above. In this world "magic" is a natural force with its own laws. There are no "real" supernatural beings, and life after death is only assumed but not demonstrable. An advanced sorcerer can transfer the personality patterns of a living being into certain substances, however, through the power of his magical "science."

(7) Model G is similar to the foregoing except more "science-fiction-y": there is now no magic and no "real" supernatural. The same effect can be obtained, nevertheless, through pseudo-scientific "explanations": electronic circuitry, gadgets, and "Science."

(8) Model H is the least tractable of all. It postulates an omnipotent, omniscient God who is innately "Good" (whatever that means from one place and time in history to another?). The very existence of "Evil" in such a universe is unexplainable, much less the need for such physical aids to the Supernatural as "intelligent" weapons and other bric-a-brac. If God is "Good," why does He permit "Evil" to exist and oppose Him? One can argue that God created "Evil" to "test" mankind (a thoroughly anthropocentric notion), or one can beg the question and say that the purposes of the Almighty are unknowable and inscrutable to us, His limited creations. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, He must know how the results of his "test" will come out — and so forth. The important point relevant to our problem is that if man has direct, hot-line access to God through prayer — and if He is "Good" (i.e. on mankind's side essentially) — then what need is there of physical devices: weapons, crucifixes, talismans, holy water, and the like? On this one I pass. Go ask your friendly neighborhood theologian.

To sum up, I cannot conceive of an ancient, classical, mediaval, or "legendary" world without some form of organised religion. The premises, structures, and manifestations of this have to be built into a novel and especially into a rôle-playing campaign (in which your characters ask rude questions). I tend to favour complex and "realistic" creations — those which exploit the possibilities of their initial "fantasy" premises to the full and which treat the "realistic" parts of their mythos realistically. If there are bows and arrows, I expect the author to speak "realistically" of ranges, penetraion, and other matters pertaining



to archery. If there are horses, I expect the designer to keep within the laws of possibility for their gaits, endurance, and abilities. If there are men, then I want to see them described in understandable terms, with societies which reflect the principles of economics, anthropology, sociology, and history. "Religion," in some form or another, is so central to the lives of most human beings that it cannot be omitted, minimised, or ignored. If the author or game designer has "human" characters, then they almost certainly will have one or another identifiable form of "religion," depending upon their environment, ecology, and other cultural factors. I do not mind the insertion of "fantastic" beings, events, or phenomena. I only ask — for myself, and not demanding that all readers and gamers agree with me — that once the "fantastic" premises are given, the rest of the creation flow intelligibly and logically from it. I am intolerant of oversimplification, hack work, and easy rip-offs from traditional faiths or legendary sources. The more depth, structure, and richness there are — and the more of the designer's imagination, originality, and perspiration — the more I will find enjoyable in his "world." This is what makes Prof. J. R. R. Tolkien great; the tapestry of his mythos is so fantastically detailed as to provide me with food for thought for years to come. On the other hand — and here I verge upon heresy — I find too little "organised" religion in the good professor's world for my tastes. I just cannot believe that humans at the technological-economic level he postulates are going to display so little identifiable "religious" behaviour. I am no expert on Prof. Tolkien's works, and perhaps some scholarly reader can point me to a mention of a human priest, a religious hierarchy, or the phenomena associated with a formalised, institutionalised religion anywhere in these books. I cannot recall seeing anything very definite along these lines. I would have been happy to have seen a lot more since I prefer my humans "realistic" if they are supposed to be "human." Naturally, one can make any assumptions one likes for the nonhumans; they are "fantasy," and their societies can be anything the author desires.

All through this article it is understood that I am addressing the designers and players of fantasy rôle-playing games for adults. Such games can be excellent teaching devices for children, and it is obvious that products meant for younger players must simplify the "realities," make the world a little more clearly identifiable black and white, and ignore the intricacies. My remarks here are meant for those who are interested in more elaborate simulations.

Unfortunately, "realism" goes only as far as our own specialised fields of knowledge. I still cannot get my great flying creatures to obey the laws of aerodynamics. Nor can I explain how the inhabitants of my "dungeons" manage to dwell in such harmony with one another without any visible means of sustenance except the odd party of player characters which chances their way. For some, it has been a long time between snacks. I hope to see what others have thought of these and many more problems. That is what makes a forum for ideas so useful to all of us. It is pleasant to be able to lay aside the endless details, elaborations, and superstructures upon superstructures of the "house" gaming magazines and consider some of our basic assumptions. We'll all probably create and play better for it.