

Food and Drink of the Gods

The sustenance of the gods has long held a special fascination. In some cases the food and drink of the deities is reserved for them alone, granting special powers to those who might manage to sneak a nibble or a sip. In others, the drink of the gods is merely a favored drink of their followers, given to the gods in sacrifice and devotion.

The following are some examples from various mythologies:

Ambrosia and Nectar: The food and drink of the Greek gods of Olympus, they gave immortality to all who partook.

Amrita: The legendary drink of immortality in Hindu mythology, amrita was thought to be the lost water of life produced at the churning of the ocean. The name is applied to various Vedic sacrifices, but particularly to the soma juice (see below).

Mead: The favored drink of the Norse gods, supplied endlessly by Odin's goat, Heidrun, who fed on Yggdrasil. It is a fermented drink of honey and water, known to the ancient Greeks and Romans and common in medieval times throughout Europe. Mead was thought to be the early sacrificial drink of the Aryans.

The people of Rugen island (off the coast of Germany) used mead in the worship of their sun god. At each harvest a cup of mead was put in the hand of the idol. During the following rites the priest took the cup from the god and predicted the coming year from the liquid left in the cup.

Soma: The soma plant of India provides an astringent narcotic juice thought to have divine power. It was offered, mixed with milk, butter, barley and water, to the gods, but was drunk by all Aryans. Later only the three highest castes were allowed to drink it, and then only for religious purposes. The soma sacrifice became one of two main rituals to the deities. In game terms, soma is about as addictive as marijuana; the GM may decide that it grants a +1 modifier to shamanistic rituals or to miraculous magic (since the plant is worshiped both as a plant and as a representation of the god).

subject to all laws of the physical world that the deity is not. This form may be given attributes and other character stats, and it may be affected by normal weaponry and spell magics. If this form "dies," the power within it returns to the deity.

Reincarnation

In many mythologies, deities associated with the cycles of nature are assumed to die and be reborn in the normal order of things. Vegetation gods are usually described as dying each autumn to be reborn at winter's end. Sun deities might sink each evening into a sea of primal chaos, only to rise again at the dawn of the new day. Some Hindu gods were born, lived for thousands of years, and then died, to be born again during the next grand celestial cycle.

This is considered a normal part of the life of the deity, unaffected by mortal actions (though certainly the death and rebirth of the god affects the powers granted to its worshipers, as well as the whole nature of the deity's religion). Often the religion's power closely mirrors that of the deity - holding widespread influence during the height of the deity's strength, and diminishing greatly when the deity weakens (see *Changes Over Time*, p. 56).

Man may even participate in this cycle. Heroic adventurers could be prophesied to end the reign of a dark god . . . who then lies asleep for some preordained time before waking once more.

Transformation

Other mythologies speak of deities who seem to die, but are only reincarnated in a different form, often with different (and sometimes greater) powers. Once again this is a natural process that is likely to be reflected in the religion that worships the deity. The followers of the deity might influence this transformation in some way.

True Death

In some cases it *is* possible for a deity to die - but only at the hands of another deity, or a true and predestined hero. (The hero usually works at the behest of fate or destiny, and thus is in many ways a pawn in the hand of a greater force. This sort of plot should only be undertaken with great care and forethought.) Generally only anthropomorphic deities with limited powers can be destroyed in this way. Even a deity may hesitate to actually kill another deity, as this may have drastic effects on the fabric of the world.

A god that personifies an idea cannot be killed without wiping the idea out of the minds of sentient creatures. If sentient creatures still need the concept, this could prove impossible.

Attitudes

Every deity has a personality, be it kind, warm and loving or harsh, cold and cruel. Most deities will fall somewhere between the extremes. Often the attitudes of a church or religion of the deity will mirror the deity's own attitudes (although an inactive, unconcerned deity may find its religion developing attitudes that it does not necessarily embrace.)

Benevolent

The deity is kind and loving. It truly cares for the welfare of its followers and will do almost everything in its power to aid them.

Benevolent deities must be limited enough that they don't solve all their followers' problems for them. Perhaps the deity cannot directly interfere in the lives of its worshipers unless called upon (see *Divine Intervention*, p. 113), either due to divine strictures or physical limitations.

Some deities are only benevolent to certain people - their own followers, or those who follow their strictures and do as they desire - but cruel and intolerant to those who defy them.

Malevolent

The deity is evil and malicious. It cares for nothing but its own power base. It might even take pleasure in the misery and suffering of others. The problem with truly malevolent deities is deciding why anyone would willingly follow them. It might be that none *do* willingly follow, but are coerced by the power of the god (see *Malthusism*, p. 137). Or it might be that the deity offers great wealth and power to its direct servants.

A single deity may be benevolent to those who follow it, and malevolent to those who do not. (Mere dislike and intolerance does not constitute malevolence. A malevolent deity or religion takes delight in destruction far beyond the simple desire to weaken an enemy.)

Meddlesome

The deity is very active in the affairs of the world. It constantly checks up on its followers, offers advice, and uses its powers to affect the course of events - a cosmic busybody.

Meddlesome deities should never be particularly powerful. If they are, people will quickly realize that little that they do matters - since the deity is busily arranging things to suit itself. This personality attribute is more appropriate for a limited divinity who must convince its followers to do those tasks it sees as necessary.

Meddlesome deities will often communicate with their followers through omens, answers to prayers, even full divine manifestations. Particularly intrusive ones might offer their followers bonuses on their Divine Intervention rolls (see *Divine Intervention*, p. 113), though GMs should be *most* cautious about allowing this sort of boon.

Indifferent

The deity is not at all active in the affairs of the world. Either it has other matters which concern it, or it simply does not care, and will rarely (if ever) intervene on the behalf of its followers.

Omnipotent or omnipresent deities often possess this trait. Indifferent gods almost never answer their followers in any sort of concrete way, preferring that those who desire enlightenment find it for themselves. Followers of particularly indifferent deities may have to take penalties on their Divine Intervention rolls (see *Divine Intervention*, p. 113) to reflect their god's extreme dislike of meddling in earthly affairs.

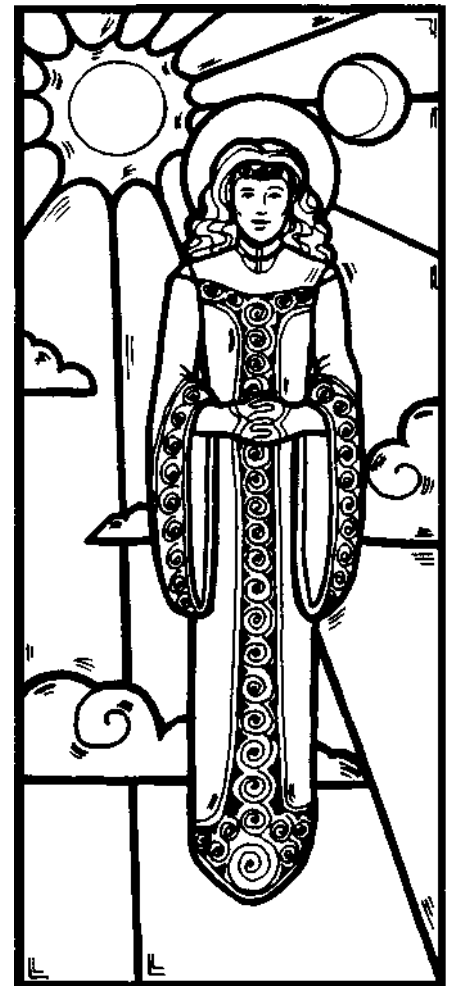
Although a deity may be generally indifferent, certain events might attract its interest. A deity might also be indifferent to normal goings-on, while concerning itself greatly with the activities of its higher-ranked clerics. Or it may truly not care, letting its worshipers muddle along as best they can on their own. Some may take great delight in watching the unguided bumbblings of man, considering them an eternal source of divine amusement.

Apotheosis

For those few who achieve true enlightenment, there is the possibility of apotheosis — the raising of a mortal to a divine state. This implies that the individual has achieved true unity with the divine, and can freely tap the same power.

This is not a common thing, nor is it something that aPC should expect to accomplish. True apotheosis turns some one from an individual into a godlike creature, concerned with the greater matters of the world. In some cases, apotheosis cannot occur until death. In others, the individual transcends to a deified state while still on earth. However, being more deity than man, he is no longer truly interested in the day-to-day affairs of mortals.

In legendary cases of apotheosis, the deified person leaves behind any former profession to become a prophet and teacher for his religion. If truly divine, he may even shift to the home of the gods, dropping all trappings of mortal existence.



Faded Gods

Deities who depend upon followers for their power must take care of them. Should too many of followers be killed or converted to other religions, the deity may find that it is unable to sustain its own existence in the world, and fade.

Depending on the workings of the cosmos, a faded deity might be one who has simply lost influence upon the mortal plane (but still exists in whatever realm the gods call home), or it may be reduced to a set of potentials which either remain unfulfilled, or are taken over by another deity. Whichever the case, the loss of such a power might have visible effects upon the world. The earth may quake, rains fall for days on end, volcanoes explode, winds howl, and so on. If it was a particularly powerful deity, certain fundamental aspects of the world's workings may alter, causing shorter days, the birth of a new season, etc. Such disasters can be used from a historical view to explain the way things are now, or they may be true disasters and calamities that will affect the present world.

The GM may choose to center a prophecy around the destruction (or fading) of a god, threatening great horrors should the heroic quest be unfulfilled. Priests or fated heroes might easily be at the center of such campaigns.

Even should they fail, and the calamity come to pass, no god which has once existed and been followed is ever irretrievably lost. Its worship may pass into legend, its temples, religious texts and symbols turned into curious relics, and still the potential of its power remains. If there are those who desire to resurrect the deity, they may attempt to do so.

This can form the basis for a different sort of campaign - one in which the only apparent solution to the problems that beset humanity is to resurrect a dead (or faded) god. Such an adventure might require that questers to venture to the home of the gods to seek out the faded deity or its remains, and find a way of revitalizing them. Or it might simply be a matter of gathering enough interest and desire on the part of others to hold a large ritual wherein power is sacrificed to the deity to restore its power base. In some cases sacrifices of food, animals, or even willing members of the congregation may be necessary.

And if it turns out that the god is quite *different* from what the adventurers expected . . . a whole new quest may begin.



Oblivious deities are generally the more abstract ones who represent some simple primal force. They are not concerned with events in the world that do not directly impinge upon them.

Oblivious deities almost never answer scrying or informational questions, and often do not even have a divination aspect to their religion. They are quite content to let the world continue on its course without their aid. Oblivion and indifference are attitudes which go together well.

Forthright

The deity's nature and purpose is clear to all. Indeed, the deity may go out of its way to ensure that all know what its worship means, trying to spread the truths that it has to offer. Forthright deities often spawn proselytizing religions who wish to convert the ignorant to their brand of enlightenment.

Deities of aspects such as light, truth and knowledge are commonly forthright, as well as those postulated by the more philosophical religions. Abstract forces have little to hide, though they may be difficult to fully comprehend.

Mysterious

The deity drapes itself, its purpose and its followers in mystery. It keeps its true nature well hidden. Even clerics may not truly understand the deity they follow, until they reach the very highest levels. A mysterious deity may simply be incredibly secretive, forcing vows of silence and confidentiality upon those privy to its secrets. Or it might actively spread confusion about its nature and purpose, engaging in tricks and other hocus-pocus to confuse and befuddle.

Observant

The deity closely watches all that occurs within its domain. If it is not omniscient, then it cannot see *all*, but what it can see it pays attention to. This does *not* mean that it necessarily acts on the information that it gains (that would require a meddlesome streak), but it will watch everything that it can.

Most actively-worshiped deities are considered to be observant. People like to think of their deity as being intelligent and aware of the world.

A deity may have many reasons for not divulging what it knows to those who follow it. It may be testing them, it might be indifferent to their concerns, or it might be cunning and mysterious, preferring to keep its knowledge wrapped in obscurity.

Oblivious

The deity pays no attention to the activities of the world. It cares little for day-to-day events, generally focusing its attention on the workings of whatever force or power it represents.

Deities of illusion, thievery, chance, dreams, fate and prophecy are often mysterious. Mysterious deities are sometimes associated with the darker forces, as the darkness, too, seeks to hide and obscure. But one should not make the mistake of equating mystery with evil. In some societies *all* deities are mysterious in nature, revealing their secrets only to the initiated, and then only as the secrets are earned. Clerics of mysterious deities do not necessarily share this attitude, though they are always sworn to hide the secrets of the deity from the public view.

Codal

The deity follows strict codes of behavior. Its likes and dislikes are clearly defined and codified, and laid down as law for its believers to follow (see *Codal Systems*, p. 133). Depending on the deity's other attitudes, these laws may be anything from rules for the benefit of its followers, to specific details on capture, torture and ritual butchery of human sacrifices.

The churches of codal deities almost always have a rigid organizational structure, from the lowest lay member to the highest-ranking cleric. Each has his specific title, duty and responsibility to those both above and below him. Such deities are very intolerant of aberrant behavior. It is better for a follower to hold to the codes and fail than deviate from them and succeed. Indeed, the laws and codes of the cult may have the force of a sworn vow, and bound by personal honor. Such deities invariably have nasty ways of dealing with those who violate their laws.

The Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat, who is referred to as "the dragon of chaos," handed down law as part of creation. In Norse mythology, Odin upheld order against Loki and his children, the forces of chaos. The idea of order as good and chaos as evil comes from Zoroastrianism (see sidebar, p. 52).

Random

The deity has no strict codes of behavior or belief, comporting itself in disorder and confusion. This can be a friendly, carefree sort of disorder, or the vile unconcern of one who is as willing to destroy as to create. Such deities are random in their actions, often doing things for no particular reason or cause.

Note that the unenlightened may not be able to tell the difference between a god working toward a mysterious goal and a god being random.

Random deities usually spawn chaotic religions with little structure or organization. In some cases there is no real religion at all - followers pledge themselves to the deity and go merrily on their way doing whatever they like in its name. In other cases the religion is simply a facade for anarchy. Those who rise to power might be those who wield their influence most effectively, or they might just be those who happen to catch the deity's fancy. The only thing certain is that there will be no rhyme or reason to the entirety.

Chaos-worship may or may not be a purely fictional construct. Even for Michael Moorcock, who codified "Gods of Law" and "Gods of Chaos" for his works of fantasy, the concept wasn't totally clear. The chaotic elements in a religion are not simply echoes of an over-used convention which most gamers don't truly understand - those elements don't even match the gaming convention. For differences between religious and roleplaying ideas of chaos, see the sidebar on p. 138.

The Power of Faith

In some cosmic views, supernatural power exists in abstract forms which can be shaped and given true life and power by fervent belief. Thus, societies may truly create the gods according to their own imaginings - gods with real substance and power, but completely dependent upon worshipers for continued existence. If the belief falters or fails, then their existence slowly loses reality, sinking back to the initial abstract form, until some other strong faith gives it shape.

A GM using this structure can create many godly factions. Different cultures will likely form different beliefs, which in turn create different gods to be worshiped. Each people's gods are as real as the next - they're just different!

The nature of the deities will likely change as the people's faith matures, and their society and world changes. Or, once given life, it might be that the divinity is immune to further changes, and will require that the people hold by the reality they have created for themselves.

Cyclical Deities

Other worldviews will create cycles of time during which a god's power grows to a high point, and then slowly wanes to a low point, after which it will begin to grow again. Deities of Nature are particularly likely to have cycles of strength and weakness.

The cycles may be as short as a single day, in which the Sun god has little power at night, while the dark god has little power over day. Or they may be tied to the seasons, or even longer, multi-year periods. Some mythologies tie the powers of the gods to the heavens, defining spans of times in terms of tens or even hundreds of years when the stars align to grant power to a particular deity, only to replace it with another at the beginning of the next cycle.

Times of transformation from one power level to another can make for interesting gaming. Followers of a preeminent god might not be happy to find their place usurped by heavenly prerogative; they might seek to change the natural order. Or the cleric of a deity whose power base is particularly weak might find his influence growing steadily, along with his duties and responsibilities to those he serves.

Strengths and Weaknesses

All deities have strengths and weaknesses. Any character strength or flaw can also characterize a deity. It may be wise, greedy, peaceful, selfish, devious, generous, jealous, proud, honest, inquisitive, arrogant, rash, aggressive, protective, gullible, cunning and so on.

Quests and Geases

Now and then a deity will come upon a task that must be completed. This task might be a mere whim of the deity - the desire for some new expansion of its religion, or to recover some lost artifact or holy place - or it might be something essential to the continuation of the religion as a whole. If the deity cannot accomplish this task with its own powers, or that of its supernatural servants, it might turn to its dedicated followers for aid.

In most cases the deity will manifest itself before those it wishes to place under a geas, to provide some explanation of the quest and request their service. Those who refuse are likely to suffer the deity's anger and retribution. In some cases the deity does not directly manifest (depending on its powers and the nature of the world), but rather provides a prophecy, omen, or other sign of what it wishes. In any case, those who accept this service must do so completely, with the understanding that they will dedicate their lives to its completion.

Such quests are the bread and butter of epic fantasy novels, and can be the foundation of a fantasy campaign. Quests provide a long-term goal that will motivate the characters over a series of individual adventures, eventually resulting in a final confrontation and climax. And once their task has been completed, the adventurers may find themselves heroes of great fame, or enemies of great infamy (depending, of course, on the nature of the quest).

GMs must be wary, however, of organizing the entire actions of a party around one motivated individual, lest his death or removal leave the rest of the group bereft of purpose. Generally it is better to place the geas on several members of the party, whether they be faithful servants of the divine or not.

Relationships

When defining multiple deities, the GM must define their relationships with one another - how the various elements of the cosmos interact and what the politics of the heavens are. This includes establishing who their friends and enemies are and what guidance they give their followers in dealing with other religions about them. There are several common cosmological models, which can be combined for interesting results.

Allies

Deities form alliances from necessary circumstance, familial feeling, or mutual need.



Multi-Faceted Deities

One common divinity is a dual-or triple-faced deity where each "face" is a separate and distinct divine entity. For example, the goddess Hecate may be composed of the trinity Maiden, Mother and Crone. The Hindu god Ishvara consists of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer and Shiva the destroyer. By

their very nature these individual deities are allied, even though their purposes are often at odds (such as the creator and destroyer aspects of Ishvara). They may never war with or seek to destroy one another, as to do so would cause their own destruction. At times this presents a paradox, with contradictory forces as two sides of a greater coin.

This sort of "alliance" can never be altered, shifted, or broken. Though the deities may act separately (the relative balance of powers within the alliance perhaps shifting over time), and even squabble among themselves, they will live or die as one.

Dependencies

Even deities have hierarchies and interdependence. Some lead, others serve. Some must draw upon the powers of others to feed their own strength. The goddess of Shadow is dependent upon the sun, the moon, or some other source of light to turn darkness into her own element. The deity of rivers may very well be subservient to the deity of water. The harvest must have cooperation from the earth and the sky (in terms of weather) to reap her bounty. Storms cannot occur without wind.

Most deities are content with their place in the cosmos, whether it be master or "servant"; their divine interdependence is mirrored in their religions. Some, though, are less satisfied, and seek freedom and independence, or even a shift of the scales. They may plot and scheme, using their followers and clerics to seek ways of freeing themselves or gaining more power.

Family Ties

Anthropomorphic deities often have traditional familial relationships - that of father, mother, wife, husband, son, brother, sister. In some cases these relationships are all but ignored, but in others they create lasting bonds.

Strongest are the ties between mates or consorts. Sometimes mating bonds are made at the time of creation and never change. Other times they are formed during times of invasion and conflict - just as in earthly politics, where an alliance is formed and bonded with marriage. Children generally feel strongly for their parents, though they may covet and attempt to usurp their position and power. Siblings often squabble, and may be close or far apart. Parents may hate, ignore, or dote upon their divine offspring.

In some cases, there may even be multiple families of gods who scheme, plot and war against each other. The Norse mythologies have an example of this. There existed two families of Norse gods, the Aesir and the Vanir, whose members eventually intermarry for mutual benefit. Some anthropologists believe that this shows the influence of encroaching Aryan culture on indigenous northern Germanic cultures. If true, it would be clear evidence of myth following culture - or, in a game world, of the gods being influenced by the actions of their people, rather than the other way around!

Deities within a family setting are more likely to grow old and even die.

Political Alliances

Alliances may also be more fluid things, forming to suit the situation at hand, breaking when circumstances alter. Deities with human characteristics are often pictured playing politics with one another, vying for power and position, making and breaking alliances as needed. Generally these activities are mirrored upon the earth, where one church might unite with a traditional foe against a common enemy.



SF Deities

How does one incorporate the concept of a supernatural entity in the rational, scientific world of science fiction? Moon bases and galactic societies seem far away from the mysteries and superstitions of godlike powers. But even as people reach toward the stars, they risk discovering new things as mysterious and inexplicable as the creation of the universe was to our ancestors. Supernatural entities, or "gods" could easily be a part of this.

Perhaps the most common theme in SF religion is the meeting of humanity with an intelligence or alien race which is so far advanced that it is for all intents and purposes god-like. It may be benevolent, seeking to aid humanity's efforts to better itself, or it may not be so kind. Malevolent powers could demand worship, at the threat of utter extinction - a situation quite similar to our primitive ancestors contemplating their doom by forces beyond their control.

Another alternative is the creation of machine intelligences which so far exceed our own that they become "god-like." Future generations might not even realize that it was man who originally created their new masters. (Or see *Flatliners*, beginning on p. 144, for a variant.)

Or it might be that through scientific exploration, we discover a force or intelligence that underlies the fabric of our reality. Such a thing can be studied and analyzed, perhaps even fully understood, thereby attracting advocates who wish to use the truths learned therein to reach whatever ultimate fulfillment the universe provides.

Study of psionics and other mind-expanding techniques may contact god-like entities that exist on other planes of reality. (See *Disciples of Change*, beginning on p. 151, for an example of a "religion" that might lead to such a result.)

Deities of Horror

Deities that inspire horror are generally those whose power is directed toward the dark side, either in terms of monstrous forms, alien intelligences, or the darkness within each of us.

Monsters or demons of horrible visage and immense power are the most popular - bug-eyed aliens from the void, animals of stupendous proportions and true intelligence, dark gods. Any great power with evil intent can easily find those who fear it enough to provide it with worship. Such deities may possess their followers, or simply direct their efforts. The only intelligence necessary is cunning, and even this may not be needed if the entity's powers are tremendous enough.

These monstrous deities could be new inhabitants of the world, either created by man's tampering with natural laws, or recently arrived from elsewhere. Or they may be incredibly ancient, fundamental aspects of darkness and evil born at the world's creation that have recently been unearthed, or whose worship has continued in secret for generations. Their powers can be as many and varied as the GM desires. (The Cthulhu mythos is a marvelous source of inspiration.)

But monster deities are not the only alternative. Forces of madness, insanity, chaos, and entropy can be just as horrific, and might not have forms at all. Worshipers are drawn to such forces by their own destructive desires, or by feelings of duty or tradition. Some even feel they sacrifice themselves for the general welfare, since without evil true goodness cannot exist.

Modern horror often draws upon the beast within, making supernatural entities out of man himself in such forms as vampires and werewolves. While often feared far too much to be worshiped, such creatures could be at the center of a constructed religion.

And, finally, there is the mystical, mysterious god with dark potential and unknown desires. Fear of the unknown is quite real; even if the entity is benevolent, a horrible visage or an inability to make itself understood might create a situation of fear and worship without the "god" truly desiring it.

Enemies

As most deities have friends and allies, so, too, they have their enemies. Animosity might be caused by simple dislike, or particular events that have set the deities at odds, or fundamental antagonisms between the forces they represent.

Opposing Forces

Deities whose powers are mutually contradictory are opposed to the point that they cannot possibly coexist peacefully. Such deities are natural enemies; they cannot help but conflict.

Common examples are deities of light and darkness, good and evil, or life and death. Each by its nature destroys the other. Together they create a balanced whole, but always they must fight, each trying to subdue or destroy the other. Their religions and clerics will almost certainly be like-minded. This is the stuff of eternal conflict, often leading to long, epic battles for dominance.

Given the nature of their powers, it is impossible for both these deities to be dominant in the same place at the same time. Rather, it is a zero-sum game where one will always be weakened in direct proportion to the amount the other is strengthened. Clerics of one will likely acquire special modifiers in dealing with the believers of the other.

Feuds

Other deities have long-term feuds which govern their relationships. They simply do not get along. A deity of the hunt should not be expected to get along with a deity of the hunted! A goddess of mercy and healing will do her best to combat a god of famine, drought, or disease. And an agriculture deity will certainly not think very highly of a god of trade and commerce who promotes the interests of man over nature.

Generally these deities (and their followers) will battle wherever they might meet. But it may be a subtle sort of combat - dragging in other "neutral" deities on one side or another, and specializing in subterfuge rather than warfare. Outright bloodshed is not *necessarily* the only answer. Persecution, intolerance, social snubs or discrimination may also work in places where the two are forced to coexist. But they will never be friends.

Sibling Rivalries

Some deities that should otherwise be friendly may develop rivalries. They might fight over power, the right to certain followers, a coveted person or object. Perhaps it is a matter of personality differences, or of jealousy. These rivalries are generally more subtle than are direct feuds, especially since quite often the deities in question are supposed to be friendly (if not outright allies). Norse mythology gives us the foster brothers Loki and Odin who fought more than they aided one another. This rivalry can be mutual (two deities who compete against one another), or one-sided (one deity takes a dislike to another who still feels friendly or allied).

Coexistence

When the spheres of influence among the deities overlap, their relationships with one another must be considered. Sometimes a competition will result, with each trying to win over the followers of the other and gain complete control of the sphere. Or they will divide the powers, duties and responsibilities of the sphere in an equitable fashion, each content with its own piece. Multiple gods of death might argue, each stealing what souls it can find while figuring

ways to weaken the others. On the other hand, they might split the duties, assigning one to manage the underworld, another to escort dead souls, and yet another to "recruit" from the living.

Often how well deities coexist depends upon the nature of the power and the deities themselves. Deities of war are unlikely to peacefully cooperate, while those of peace and mercy are just as unlikely to come to blows. The splitting of powers and duties might be preordained at creation, or might change with the whims and desires of the deities in question.

Indifference

Deities might not care one way or another about each other. If their spheres of influence do not* overlap or oppose, and their worldviews do not clash (or at least do not come into direct contact), then deities can go merrily on their separate ways without having to worry about one another. Some deities may not even form an opinion of a fellow god until some sort of interaction is required.

Shifts in the Balance

Things change. Deities rise and fall in power. Feuds may occur and eventually be resolved. Alliances may break and scatter. Rivalries may grow between former close allies. New deities may replace old ones. Sworn enemies may be forced to work together to defeat a common foe. Without change, the world stagnates. When developing a cosmos and the deities within, it is important to consider not only the way things are now, but the way things have developed since the early beginning, and the ways they might change in the future. Long wars and early devastations that shaped the world into its current form are recurring themes in many mythologies.

Fate/Destiny/Prophecy

A common theme is the prophecy which predicts major changes in the current balance of things in order to defeat some recognized evil, or to achieve some desired goal. It might be an alliance between forces with a history of bitter conflict, or a betrayal by a trusted ally; perhaps it is the coming of a new-deity that will unite the others, or the death of a central figure that will throw the rest into conflict. In short, it is anything that upsets the whole, bringing a new and (possibly) better order.

Fated final battles are another recurring theme among mythologies. Ragnarok is well known (see p. 15). Generally the final battle constitutes the end of the world, which is then reborn.

Divine Laws

Sometimes the deities themselves recognize the need for rules. If deities can war with one another, then they can also sign treaties and enforce limits upon one another's behavior. A group of squabbling deities may become subject to a greater authority. Of course, all deities may not abide willingly by the law. Some require constant monitoring by their fellow divinities, and spend much of their time trying to slip the bonds of their confinement.

This is a situation rich with potential for limiting the powers of deities, especially as regards their ability to influence the world their followers live in. Cosmic politicking and wrangling can create interesting effects upon the "real" world - causing conflict between religions that were once at peace, or generating intrigue where there was none before - or vice versa!

In the House of the Gods

Some adventures may require the characters to visit the realm of the gods. Usually the PCs are seeking divine assistance beyond that usually available, perhaps even beyond the limits of the gods' power in the mortal realm. Or the adventurers may be seeking a deity for some other reason - hoping to find and resurrect a faded god, or even kill an existing one.

Whatever the case, the GM has several problems. First, how are the travelers getting there? Is this an actual, physical journey, or one of the spirit or mind? Often such lands are guarded by tests of physical prowess, mental capability, or spiritual strength. Guards may even include demigods or divine allies. If this is a required step in an epic quest, the GM must formulate trials that will truly test the mettle of the party members, without presenting insurmountable obstacles.

Then too, the GM must determine the general geography of the place. Is it fixed, or does it change to suit the whims of its inhabitants? Are the deities tied to particular locales, or do they move about? Are there other deities there besides the one that they seek? How difficult will it be to find their goal?

Unless the party is visiting a very minor god, or has some special artifact that renders them invulnerable, combat is unlikely - deities are much too strong to be dealt with that way. Still, the deity may require a test of strength, making the group defeat its servants, or some human/monster form of itself, before speaking with them.



Avatars

Avatars are living manifestations of the deity within the mortal world. In some cases they are wholly and completely of the divine, but more commonly they are some person, animal, or thing that the deity has chosen to invest with its presence and power. Some deities will always have one or more avatars, while others will only create them in times of need.

Human avatars are often chosen from people with special bloodlines, or with a divine mark or favor that renders them more accessible to the power of the god. Avatars will often have divine blood somewhere in their ancestry. The deity may choose to "possess" them for particular times and instances only, or the possession may be a permanent thing, leaving the person no independent will or existence of his own. Some gods might even breed children on mortals specifically for this purpose (see *PC Avatars*, below).

Animal avatars are always chosen from animals that have symbolic meaning or spiritual ties to the divine. Often the deity itself will be thought to have the animal form of its avatars, and the deity's followers will consider those animals to be particularly holy.

Continued on next page ...



Worship

Most deities will have a following - a body of individuals who take inspiration from the god or divine force and apply it to their daily lives. The number of followers may be small or large. Their worship may be single-minded and devotional, or a matter of respect and offering. But some people, somewhere, must know of the god, or its existence may eventually be forgotten.

What Deities Get From Their Followers

Besides recognition, deities may or may not stand to gain anything from their followers. It may be a two-way link, in which each depends on the other . . . or the divine entity may be eternal and all-powerful, with no need at all for the worship its followers give. These are the two basic options.

Nothing

The deity gains nothing from its followers. It is eternal, independent of any need to be worshiped. It may ignore its followers completely, or it may choose to focus on their actions, meddling in their lives for its own reasons.

Religions worshiping these sorts of deities are driven almost completely by the spiritual needs of the people. The deity may, at any time, choose to turn its back on its followers, or it may decide to torment and punish them if they do not do as it wishes. The lack of a reciprocal need makes the deity all-powerful in regards to its followers.

Followers of eternal deities may find them uncaring and perhaps even cruel if the deity is indifferent or oblivious. They can offer nothing the deity craves. The unequal relationship might make the followers humble and subservient, wishing only to please a force to which they can offer nothing but their worship.

Alternatively, a benevolent deity may succor its followers and shower them with benefits just because it can.

Everything

The divine being requires the worship and belief of followers in order to survive. It may be that the deity is simply a potential force, existing without power until fueled by the fervent belief of others. Or it might be that belief actually *creates* the divine force. Or perhaps the deity has great power in an abstract sense, but can only focus its power through the faith and worship of others. Or it might have no ability at all to influence events in the material world except through the beliefs and actions of its followers. (See pp. 24 and 33.)

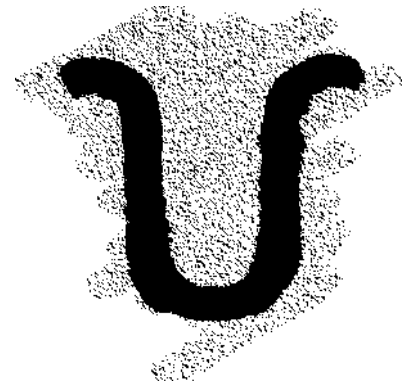
Deities empowered in this fashion are, by definition, limited. Their influence exists only while they have worshipers. This necessary dependence on their followers must affect the nature of the religion. Most likely the deity will take great pains to care for its followers, but a malevolent deity might use cruelty and torture to inspire the fear and respect it needs.

What Deities Give To Their Followers

In order for a deity to gain advocates, the faithful must in turn gain something tangible by worshiping it. Deities (and their associated religions) with nothing to offer their followers will soon find their worship extinct.

Answers

The most common thing a follower gains from his deity is peace of mind. The deity, through the religion that worships it, provides a framework in which to interpret the complexities of life. This framework explains the beginning (a creation myth), advises on dealing with problems that confront the believer, and, in some cases, prophesies an ending (see *The Cosmos*). It answers the common questions that plague humans . . . what kind of creatures we are, where we come from, why we are here, why the world is the way it is, why we suffer and die, and what happens to us after death. And the lifestyle, ceremonies and rituals of the people reflect the deity (see *Symbols*, beginning on p. 65). Where the deity does not directly answer these questions, or provide the necessary guidance, its clerics must extrapolate from divine inspiration, and find acceptable responses (see *Hard Questions*, p. 47).



Avatars (Continued)

Being a personification of the deity in the "real" world, avatars have powers far beyond those of normal humans, but are still less than the god they represent. Avatars, for instance, may be defeated in battle, though this simply destroys the mortal form, freeing the divine energy to return to the deity. Destroying a deity's avatar may, however, weaken the deity for awhile, until the deity can recover the freed energy and turn its attention back to mortal affairs.

PC Avatars

PC avatars should be rare - the powers they represent are strong and their occurrence is potentially unbalancing. GMs should think *carefully* before allowing a player character to become an avatar of a god. Among other things, when the deity possesses the person, he will no longer be in control of his own actions. Instead, the GM takes control of the character. Few players will appreciate such a move.

In some cases the PC will have control over the coming of the deity, able to summon its presence when desired, while in others the deity will "possess" him at times and in circumstances of its own choosing. When not "possessed," the adventurer will generally have no special powers or abilities. Only under the control of the deity (and the GM) will he gain divine powers. Thus, being an avatar has no cost or benefit in terms of character points.

Divine Messengers

In cosmologies where deities either cannot manifest directly in the mortal world or find it quite difficult to do so, they often depend upon divine messengers to see that their wishes and desires are heard. These messengers may be separate demigods that serve the deity for one reason or another, or small, individual manifestations of the god that have separate form and will. Clerics of such deities will be used to dealing with these messengers and often mistake a messenger for the deity itself.

When used with care, divine messengers make excellent GM tools. They are assigned a particular purpose by the deity, but may have to deal with adaptations and variations in the "plan." The deity might even decide that a messenger should oversee the orchestration of one of its plans. It is thereby consigned to the mortal realm for an extended period of time, during which it will likely take on more and more human attributes. (GMs must be careful not to let the messenger take over the adventure in such cases.)

Depending on the circumstances, the messenger might appear in a blaze of light and glory, send the recipient of the message a vision or epiphany, or simply disguise itself in a familiar form so that it may converse with others. GMs can use divine messengers to instigate major quests and adventures, or use them to steer parties back to a more profitable course.

Alternatively, messengers might be sent to disrupt the activities of groups working against a particular deity, in which case they will either have to fight the messenger (much easier than taking on the deity), or work around them.

Love and Pride

Some religions stress the care their deities lavish on the faithful. This can be a source of great pride to their followers, who feel raised above the rest of the world by their god's attention.

Protection

The deity may offer protection from other deities, or even from itself. Malevolent deities commonly promise to destroy their followers last.

Powers

If the gods are real, then they have true powers, which they can grant to their special servants (clerics). The outward display of true power, as well as the opportunity to channel powers beyond those available to normal man, will draw many people to a religion.

Particularly devout servants may even be elevated to semi-divine states so that they can better aid their god.



Divine Manifestations/Intervention

Depending on the nature of the cosmos, the deity may not appear to its followers at all. Deities might not be allowed to manifest upon the material plane, either in physical form or by direct intervention. They might not have the power necessary to "appear," and be able only to make suggestions and influence their followers through visions and dreams. They may be able to appear, but not act, their manifestation little more than a phantasm. On the other hand, they may be able to manifest quite freely in startling and "miraculous" ways, limited only by their own interest and will.

A deity who can and does manifest easily must be carefully handled. A meddlesome, omnipotent deity would have little need for others to do its bidding, and will be likely to organize the world to suit itself very quickly. A limited deity with few abilities once manifested, or a disinterested one who rarely feels the need to exercise power, is more manageable. Remember, also, that deities may manifest for reasons having nothing to do with their followers. Oblivious deities may arrive on predetermined schedules or at inconvenient



moments. Deities may even appear in unexpected forms or in ways that are completely unknown to their followers - this is particularly true of those with random or mysterious natures.

Deities with little or no ability to manifest in the world must keep their followers by faith alone. They will generally have less control over the form and practices of their religion - if they care at all. Those that do care will have to find more subtle ways to reach their followers, and wait for them to act.

A central concern is whether the god initiates the intervention by his will alone, or only at the call of a cleric or other believer. How often the deity can influence events directly, and whether there are any limits on the type and form of the intervention, are other matters the GM must decide.

At the God's Will

The deity manifests at its own discretion. While perhaps most likely, this must be handled carefully to avoid detracting from the accomplishments of the god's followers. This works well with deities of limited influence, as with those who are oblivious or indifferent. Another factor that might be used to limit this is only allowing the deity to appear before true believers. Thus the deity can manifest on its own initiative to request certain actions, behaviors, or sacrifices. It might appear to punish, or to bless.

At the Followers Will

The deity manifests only at the call or invocation of the follower (usually a cleric). The deity could actually possess the follower for a certain amount of time, or the follower might simply call into his presence forces much greater than he could hope to achieve on his own. Generally the follower is allowed to specify a particular goal or task he wishes of his deity. This request is, of course, interpreted by the deity as it sees fit.

Alternatively, a deity may select one or two "chosen" individuals to whom it will appear, answering only their calls.

The simple desire for the deity's intervention is usually not enough to guarantee it. Usually rituals or special invocations are needed (see p. 113). And even then the deity may choose not to answer. It might be busy with some other task, or it might not find the summoning to be of interest. Never should a call for intervention be a "sure" thing - deities are not at the beck and call of their followers, no matter *how* much they may depend on their worshipers.

Frequency

If manifesting requires a great deal of the deity's power, then it will not be willing (or perhaps even able) to do so on a regular basis, or several times in quick succession. The price of summoning the deity's aid should be high, reflecting the cost that the deity must pay in order to answer (see *Divine Intervention*, p. 113).

Limits

The deity should be able to intervene according to its nature and power. Limited deities are, of course, restrained in the effects they can generate. Other factors, including divine agreements and "laws," may limit omnipotent deities (see *Divine Laws*, p. 37).

Temple Guardians

Another common use for divine servants is as temple guardians. In this case, their sole job is to guard and protect the sacred shrines of the deity. (See also *Demigods*, beginning on p. 42.)

Temple guardians spend most of the time either invisible or in static forms where their power drain is minimal. They only manifest upon detection of hostile intent, at which time they appear or awaken and set about their business. Since they are assigned to a single task, the deity usually takes pains to ensure that they are prepared for its eventuality - guardians are some of the nastiest of divine servants to tangle with. Most of their abilities will be combat-oriented, and they will never surrender or flee.

In most cases, the guardians are also backed up by real temple guards. In abandoned temples or remote shrines, the area might be completely devoid of life except for the guardians.

In order to give a party a fighting chance, the GM might come up with obscure and little-known weaknesses that the party can research and use against the guardians. Or, if the guardians are completely separate entities, it might be possible to break the contract that binds them in service to the deity as guardians.



DEMIGODS

A demigod is an immortal spiritual being, semi-divine in nature. Sometimes it is thought to be the offspring of a deity and another creature (animals, humans, other lesser beings or forces). Or it might be a "proto-god," needing only sufficient power and worship to reach full divinity - which happened frequently. Or it may be an altogether inferior being who serves the true deities. All types of spirits - angels, devils, demons and so on - fall under the

Demigods are defined by their attributes and their relationship to the world and the divine (if they serve one). Many different types of demigods may exist within a single world. Each deity may have its own lesser servants, or this privilege may be reserved for only a few deities. Or the world might be full of freely-roaming spirits which may choose individually whether to bind themselves to a deity.

GMs should keep in mind that most cultures don't refer to these beings as "demigods." They are referred to as gods, lesser gods or children of the gods.

Attributes

The essential nature of the demigod, its powers, form(s) and personality, may vary nearly as much as those of gods.

Limits to Power

Each demigod will have specific powers. In no way should these powers approach those of a true deity, even if the demigod is independent. Generally they are limited to a single area or aspect, though this varies directly with the power of the deities they serve. Demigods of an omnipotent divinity are likely to be much more powerful than those of a more limited deity.

Elementals: Elementals are lesser powers commonly found in fantasy worlds. Each elemental embodies the particular attributes of one of the four (more or less) elements in the world. Salamanders or ifrits characterize the essence of fire, undines that of water, golems earth and sylphs wind or air. New elements along with their elementals may be defined - shades for shadow or darkness, elementals of swamp or desert, and so on.



general category of demigods - greater than humans, less than gods.

If deities that control these elements exist, then elementals will most likely serve those deities. If not, the elementals might be bound by some greater force (such as Nature), or might be free to do as they like.

Spirits: In an animistic worldview (see p. 127), a multitude of spirits fill the world, each controlling one specific thing. There are spirits of healing, of sickness, of anger, of justice and so forth.

Servant Entities: Some demigods are merely lesser manifestations of a greater deity's power. These demigods have whatever fraction of power the deity chooses to grant them. Their purpose is entirely to serve the whim and will of the divine by performing certain acts it ordains, which vary widely in scope. These may even have been clerics or devoted servants who have been elevated to a higher sphere of power.

Lesser Gods: A demigod might be an inferior deity, controlling some smaller aspect of the world much as a normal deity would do, but without the same amount of power or influence. Independent-minded lesser gods could watch over some of the more abstract realms of the world, like music, mischief, or midwifery. Sometimes a lesser god is limited to a certain locale.

Ancestors: Some believe that the human soul, upon death, ascends to a higher state of being. One's ancestors might then wander the world, watching over their lands and descendants much as they did while alive. If they followed a particular deity, they might become its servants. Otherwise they might be worshiped on their own as lesser powers.

Physical Form

Demigods may have any physical form. It is less likely that a demigod can change its form, although many can and do.

Domiciles

Demigods may live in the physical world, in the dwelling place of the deity they serve, or in another plane of existence all their own.

Immortality and Death

Like deities, most demigods are immortal. The only way to "kill" one is to find the source of its power and destroy it. However, when they manifest themselves on the material plane (the world), they *are* subject to physical



types of damage (of one kind or another - this will vary according to the individual demigod). If their physical manifestation is destroyed, then their power is dissipated until they can regroup and reform, which may take hours or millennia depending on the demigod and the situation.

Personality

Demigods often take on personalities which closely mirror the source of their power. They may share many of the same personality traits as the deity they serve, or they may be completely different. See *Attitudes*, p. 30. for ideas.

Relationship to the Divine

Demigods will generally have some kind of relationship to the divine, whether it be service, fleeing from service, or the jealous coveting of power. Those who do not seek service with a deity are either free-roaming sorts who wish nothing more than to be left alone, or would-be gods working on their own. Distinguishing factors are the demigod's source of power, its desire for more power, and its willingness to involve itself in the workings of the world.

Messenger

The demigod serves as the eyes, ears and mouth of the deity in the physical world. When the deity wishes to disclose omens or other indications of its desires, it may send the demigod in its place. When it wishes to know something, it sends its messenger to investigate. When not "at work," the messenger will either wander the world observing, or remain near the deity.

Missions

The demigod is sent to perform particular tasks at the deity's request. It will not return until the task is complete or it has irrevocably failed. The task may be anything of particular interest to the deity, and may require the demigod to get help from other deities, demigods, or mortal followers. In some cases the deity is quite specific

about what may and may not be done; in other instances the demigod has almost total free rein.

Demigods with tasks are almost always *servant entities* (p. 43), though the mission might be payment for some other favor, or penance for some wrong. The child of a god was sometimes given a series of tasks to prove himself to his parent, in order to gain status.

Retribution

Servants of retribution are the divine police squad. They are sent out to deal with those who have particularly angered the deity - whether it be a follower who has transgressed against his faith, or a nonbeliever who has desecrated a place or object holy to the deity. Their powers are tailored for annoyance and destruction. They may just harass their target for some length of time specified by the deity. They might cause weapons he touches to shatter, make

with voices and eerie visitations, or generally make every aspect of his life miserable. Depending on the nature of the deity, they might injure or even kill him.

Servants of retribution inflicted on player characters can be treated as a standard *curse* (see p. 95). GMs should never allow one to kill a PC without at least offering him a fair (though not necessarily equal) duel, unless he stupidly asked for it (such as following a lie with "May the gods strike me dead if I lie").

Escorts

Escorts often wait at the fringes of the deity's home to bring any who might venture there before its lord. Others may perform other escort duties as determined by the god, including bringing newly-dead souls to the lands of rest.

Sycophants

The demigod exists to fawn upon and flatter the deity. Particularly common in a cosmic court of the gods, sycophant demigods might serve as courtiers, handmaids, entertainment, or simply as higher entities worshiping the deity in their own fashion. Sycophants will rarely, if ever, leave their duties of praise, and thus almost never answer calls from followers.

Guardian

The demigod guards some place of great import to the deity. Guardians are perhaps the most common sort of divine servant, and next to those of retribution, the nastiest. Some common guardian positions in various mythologies:

Temporal Guardians: Those who protect the holy places of the deity, I their temples and shrines, from desecration and defilement.

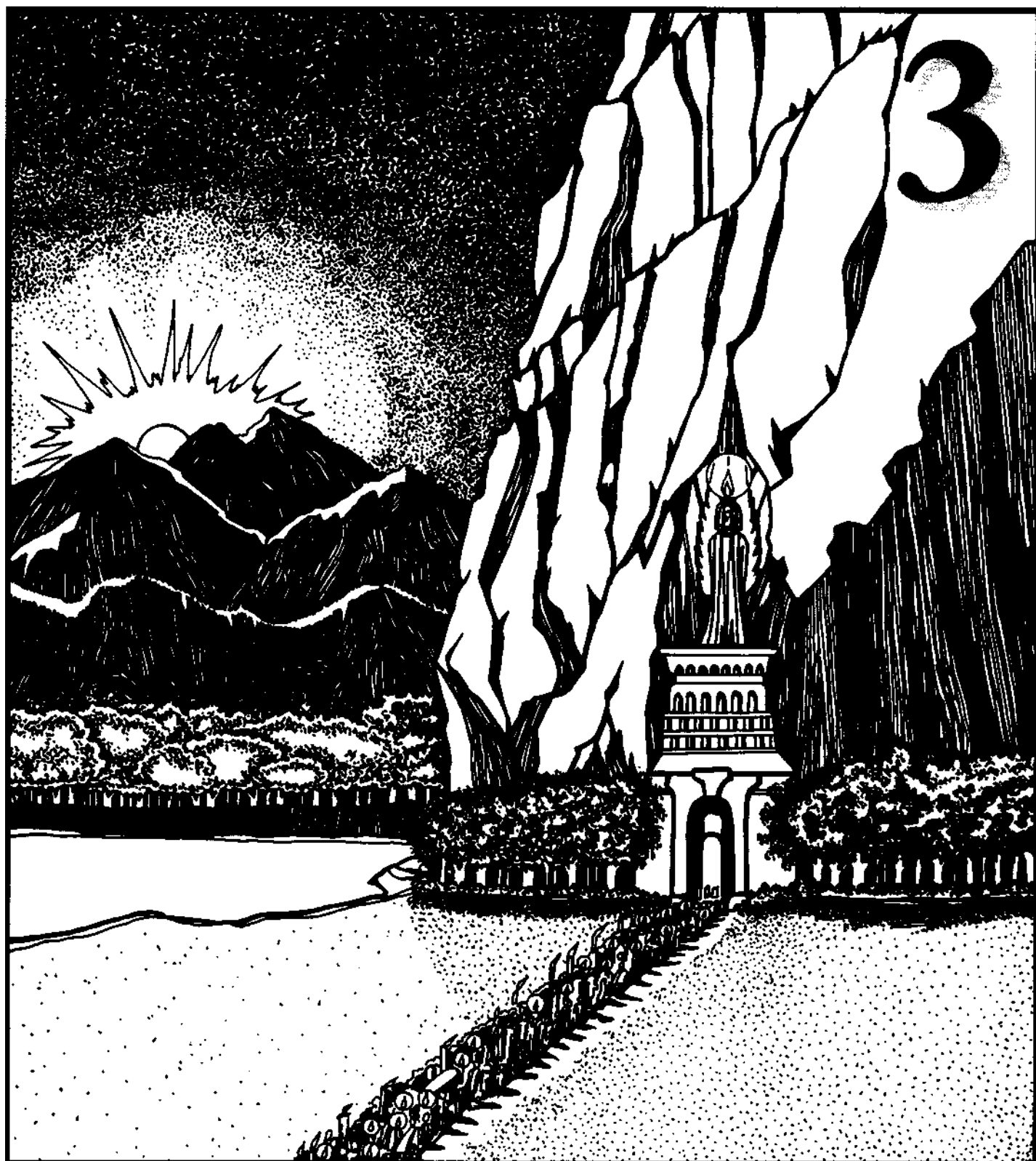
Guardians of the Dead: Those who guard the final resting places of the dead. Such guardians ensure that only those who belong enter, and that they remain as long as necessary (often eternity).

Guardians of the Realms of the Gods: Those who guard the home of the deity. They exist to keep out those who would seek to disturb the divinity. Some bar all passage, while others will offer puzzles or riddles that may be solved in order to gain entrance.



his golden coins turn to lead, haunt him

DEVELOPMENT



How religions begin and develop, how other cultural influences affect them and how they change the culture around them are all issues (among many others) that the GM should consider when designing a game-world religion. Looking at the role religions play in our world can give a GM some ideas on where to start.

The Knights Templar

A classic example of the conflict between State and Church - and how both may change drastically over time - can be seen in the history of the Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar was a crusading order which took part in a religious war in the Holy Land. Originally called "The Order of Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon," it was founded by a group of pious soldiers around the year 1120. They protected pilgrims and lived under religious rule, taking oaths of poverty, chastity and obedience. The organization grew rapidly at a time when trained knights were rare, its greatest strength being its feudal associations. They did not recruit from the upper nobility, but from the more obscure warrior families. In the beginning, distinctions of class were somewhat vague, but by the 13th century an aspirant to the order had to be the son of a knight and his lady.

As the need for trained troops grew, the ethical considerations of the order were laid aside. Different rankings - similar in tone to feudal ones - grew. Beneath the rank of Knight there came to be *sergeants*, also known as serving brothers; *esquires*; *freres casaliers*, rural brothers; and *freres de metier*, servant brothers. The knights came to live a life even more privileged than the secular nobles. By this time the Templars had become the companions and servants of royalty, their humble origins virtually forgotten.

By the end of the 13th century the Templars had drawn a great deal of criticism, most notably by William, Archbishop of Tyre. They had gained a reputation for pride and greed. In addition, they had made the serious political mistake of remaining loyal to the Church during conflicts between the Papacy and Emperor Frederick II.

Continued on next page...

Building a Religion

Once the GM has decided on the cosmology and gods of the game world, it is time to create the religions. Often it is easiest to work backward: figure out what the religion *is*, then decide how it got that way. The GM needs to consider not only the basic nature of the religion, but also how it fits into society. The most obvious expressions of a religion are its ceremonies and symbols (see *Symbols*, pp. 65-87). But how does it interact with society and other religions? Answering these questions will help add a sense of realism and depth to any campaign.

Beliefs

The first step in designing a religion is to decide what its central beliefs are - what view of the world it gives to its followers, how it answers the fundamental questions of life and how it treats those who question it.

All religions have tenets. These can be traditions, scholarly writings, oral histories, commandments and laws. These *doctrines* form a system of principles and laws which state the fundamental beliefs and policies of the religion.

A *dogma* is a doctrine accepted by the followers of a religion as a god-revealed truth. A dogma bolsters the present position of the religion and is supported by both tradition and scripture, as well as being compatible with other accepted doctrines.

Purpose of Life

Perhaps the first questions that anyone might ask concern why we are here, who created us, and whether it was for a specific purpose, on a whim, or by accident. In many cases, the answers tie directly into the mythology of the religion. The creation of life is just another step in the creation of the world, and life's purpose is probably told in myth and legend (see *Creation of Life*, pp. 16-21).

Some religions impose harsh servitude upon their believers, forcing discipline and great sacrifices from them. Others encourage only what people desire anyway - wealth, power, health, prosperity. Some, like Hinduism, define clear-cut paths that restrict each person to a particular position in society.

As important as what the religion teaches its people about the purpose of life is the effect of the answer on believers. Those who believe themselves to be the chosen of the gods are more likely to put their own interests and survival ahead of others. Those who are taught that they are superior to other life forms may abuse them, or may see themselves as shepherds or caretakers. Those who view all life as interrelated are more likely to be tolerant of others.

And not all answers need be steeped in mysticism or "faith." A future religion may use rational or scientific answers: The world was created according to various principles or "laws" of nature. It lives and breathes and continues according to these same laws, no event being independent of a cause or an

effect. A divine force may have created these laws to serve itself, or there may be no divine at all. Man's sole purpose may be to survive.

Hard Questions

Another common question is why we suffer; there must be a reason the young die, sickness comes, and famines, droughts, floods, and all manner of disasters strike. And there must be something we can do about it.

Suffering might be caused by gods warring among themselves. Perhaps a malevolent power causes suffering and disaster, seeking to destroy those who follow a more beneficent deity. Evil could be a necessary opposite to good, neither able to exist without the other, and both essential to the balance of the whole. Perhaps suffering is the deity's punishment for those who would stray from it. a measure of divine displeasure. The deity could be willful, sending miracles and disasters as it sees fit. Or suffering might be a test, to strengthen the souls and minds of true believers.

Each answer offers a different view of the world. Evil forces may be fought. Pain as a necessary part of the whole requires acceptance. Punishments can be avoided by the pious. Willful deities are worshiped avidly, given sacrifices and homage to incur their favor rather than their wrath. Tests can be overcome to gain rewards.

Death

People often wonder what happens when we die - whether death is an ending or a beginning, to be welcomed or feared, whether the spirit moves somewhere beyond to face judgment or remains upon the earth to aid or haunt, or if this life is the sole experience, with nothing after death.

By far the most common religious belief is that some sort of afterlife exists. Most often the soul is judged by its actions in this life, and sent on to face the consequences - those who lived a good life will retire to a paradisiacal existence, or be reborn into a higher state, and those who lived badly will be assigned fates to fit their sins. Those who serve the gods are often given special consideration, and may even be recruited to some future service after their deaths. Some may be denied death by divine blessing or curse until their earthly work is done. Others may ascend to the divine presence without dying at all.

Worship and veneration of spirits is central to many religions. Even religions that do not actively seek communication with spirits and ghosts often have beliefs concerning them, or ceremonies and rites to appease or protect them. (See *Death/Transition*, pp. 19-20.)

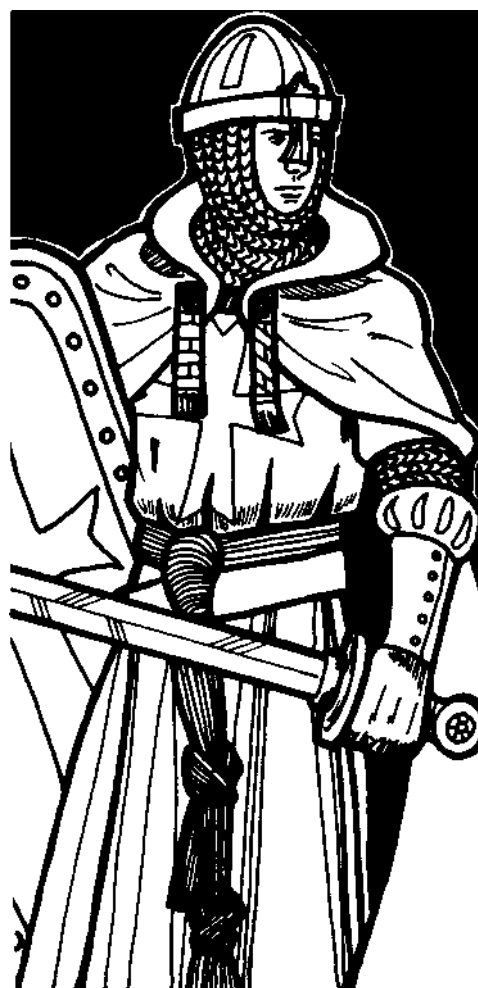
Natural Phenomena

In addition to the all-important questions of life and death, religions usually attempt to resolve questions about the world as a whole. Generally these kinds of questions are answered in myths, which can explain everything from the existence of the stars, to the color of grass or sky, to the occurrence of the seasons, earthquakes and lightning. Often such myths are veiled in allegory and parable. Or a religion might incorporate known fact and scientific rationale into its view of the cosmos.

The GM may want to decide how much actual truth there is in a religion's mythologies, or to leave the question open. (See *Basic Forces of the World*, pp. 13-16.)

The Knights Templar (Continued)

About this time it suddenly became common practice in the French court to denounce enemies for the practice of sorcery or witchcraft. In the Papal court, the fear of such plots was even stronger. On October 13, 1307, agents of the King of France arrested every known member of the Templar order - somewhere between 50 and 100 knights - on charges of heresy. But despite the fears of sorcery, this was simply a convenient excuse. The French government had for some time been demanding a fusion of the Templars with the Hospitallers, the other main military order. They wished to form a single great order that would be led by a son of the King of France. By laying charges of heresy (and ignoring Papal decrees that they had no right to do so) the French crown took control of Templar lands and coffers. The Templar trials were only one of many political arguments between the French government and the Papacy. But by the end, the entire order had been denounced and dissolved, most of its Knights having been tortured and burned at the stake.



The Druids

The Celtic world was an amalgam of people whose languages and traditions were connected, yet did not share any common origin. The Celts were identified as distinctive nations as early as 600 B.C. Each tribe had its own chieftain, but there was no ruler over all, no great Celtic Empire. The continuity of Celtic culture resulted from the influence of the *druids*.

The unity of Celtic society and its control rested with the "men of art," a triumvirate of learned men. These triumvirates were led by the druids, yet the druids were more than priests. They controlled the warriors, and through them controlled the tribes. In Gaul these triumvirates were the *druids, votes* and *hards'*, their Irish counterparts were called *druids, filidh* and *bairdh*. This form of authority illustrates the importance of triple motifs and symbolism in Celtic culture. Both the bards and the vates had religious duties; the vates actually carried out the sacrifices, at which a druidic priest had to be present.

According to Caesar's writings, Britain was the center of druidism. Druids were responsible for divine worship, the performance of ritual and sacrifice (both public and private), the interpretation of ritual questions, the settlement of disputes and the punishment of those who refused to accept their judgment. Those who disobeyed druidic decisions were often banished from the tribe or even the country, and might even become sacrificial victims.

Druidic acolytes were taught by rote; druidic secrets were chanted and sung back and forth between student and master until they were known perfectly.

The most important druidic belief was that the soul passes after death from one world to another. This does much to explain the Celts' famed bravery in battle. It is possible to be reborn in animal, as well as human, form. Magical transformations and metamorphoses are a common theme in Celtic tales. The afterlife was a very real concept and was seen as an extension of earthly existence where all the pleasures and joys of mortal living were somehow intensified. Warriors fought, yet lived to fight other battles; the slaughtered pig was alive the next day, ready to be consumed again.

Continued on next page ...



Scripture

Scriptures are sacred writings. In most cases they began as oral traditions, passed down from generation to generation, often surviving centuries before being written down. During this time, changes occur; even the origins of the knowledge may be lost. To fight this tendency, sacred knowledge is often stylized - the meter, melody, chants and breathing patterns strictly governed and taught. The words themselves might become so sacred that they are whispered, or not spoken at all to any non-believer.

When oral traditions are transcribed, they often become holy objects treated with great veneration and awe. Fragments of these words may be worn as amulets, while recitations of certain phrases may impart blessings or curses. Sacred scriptures can safeguard their secrets by using puzzles, riddles, paradoxes, parables, exaggerations, contradictions, negations or secret languages. The languages used are usually archaic, and require those who would study or read the scriptures to learn an ancient tongue. Often translations of scriptures are discouraged or forbidden, as many consider the words themselves to be the medium by which the divine reveals knowledge to the faithful.

A GM can design scripture to give information about the world as well as the religion . . . or to hide it, making the protagonists puzzle out the meaning over a period of time. Scripture can provide color, background, clues and other valuable cultural information.

Scriptures help define religious identity and codify divine will. They usually include the creation myths of the religion, and often describe its laws and restrictions. These can be quite specific, with long lists of rewards, penances, punishments and compensations. Sometimes they describe covenants between the divine and its worshipers. Leaders and prophets are sometimes granted lost or hidden knowledge through scripture. Scriptures can also include long narratives and histories, and trace the genealogies of important people and families.

Often people believe that scripture reveals eternal and sacred truths. In some religions, these truths are more important than the divine itself; the deity is only a vehicle for enlightenment.

Interpretation of scripture is very important to many religions. *Canons* are those scriptures which have been named "official" by a religious authority. Sections of scripture are sometimes rated in terms of levels of validity and importance. Certain sections and passages are often the keys by which believers interpret the scripture as a whole.

Even written scripture can change over time. Editorial privilege, glosses and translations can affect the interpretation of written works. New scripture is sometimes added with the justification that older works were incomplete or unenlightened.

Religious Rank and Hierarchy

Just like military forces, religions quite often have elaborate hierarchies. The structure depends on the nature of the deity or philosophy, social and economic constraints, the number of worshipers and clerics and the power of the church in the community. The larger the church, the more likely that some sort of hierarchy is necessary. A church with five clerics and a scattering of followers has less need to concern itself with exact levels, positions and stations, though this will not necessarily stop it from doing so.

Most often the hierarchy (theoretically) represents levels of growth and wisdom in the faith. Each rank may reflect new and deeper knowledge of the faith, new spells or skills, and rituals and mysteries hitherto unknown. Or it may simply indicate different levels of duty and responsibility.

Advancement, and what skills, abilities or levels of experience are needed to advance within the structure, must also be considered. Advancement generates goals for clerics, and gives them a sense of achievement that can only improve their faith and devotion.

Often the different ranks will have different titles, garb, daily duties and responsibilities, etc. (see *Symbols*, beginning on p. 65). Not only do such things provide a campaign with color and depth, but they can be interesting roleplaying aids for clerical (and other) characters.

The Druids (Continued)

Astrology and astronomy were important facets of druidic knowledge. The druids claimed to have created the universe. The world was indestructible, yet at some future undefined time both fire and water would prevail.

The Celts as a people were devoted to religion. Sacrifices were both public and private. The Celts believed in capital punishment, but they turned it into a religious rite. Innocents were offered as well, and after a defeat a great leader would offer himself. Self-sacrifice was also common, intended to relieve fellow tribesmen. Sacrifices were made to ensure victory, and to celebrate it. Captives were often promised to the gods before battle, and so could never be ransomed, sold or otherwise given away. Human victims were often offered as foundation sacrifices (and buried beneath the building's cornerstone), or given to appease the god of blight and crop failure.

While the druids did not normally engage in battle, they were deeply involved in combat as magicians, prophets and advisers. They interceded with the gods, and their prayers were often thought to determine the outcome of battles. Druids had great control over the elements: they could send showers of fiery sparks down upon opposing armies, induce magical sleep and transform trees and stones into armed men. They practiced hypnotism; their rites often included long chants, incantations and dancing.



The Inquisition

While holy wars might be waged against those in distant lands, dealing with one's own followers is more difficult. As religious organizations grow, and schisms and "heretical" viewpoints develop, some religions find it necessary to seek out and destroy such contrary opinions. Oppression can become widespread.

The Inquisition was theoretically formed to deal with "heretics" within the church. Often these heretics had done little more than point out the excesses of the Church and its priests. By the 12th century, corruption was rife; reformers such as Pierre de Bruys and Frere Raymond Jean were burned, their views and objections suppressed.

By 1252 the power of the Inquisition had greatly expanded, and had become an elaborate extortion scheme. Property of accused persons was instantly seized by the Church, often to be sold even before a confession had been extracted. The accused actually had to pay for both their imprisonment and their torture. Terror and torture were the tools of the inquisitors. If a person confessed in order to avoid the torture, he was tortured nonetheless, so that his testimony might be "confirmed though ordeal." Even if a person resisted the torture, he might be held indefinitely, charged with *obduracy* for refusing to confess. (Torture remained a legal recourse of the church until 1816.) Trials were a mockery - the entire procedure was kept secret, witnesses were hidden and concealed, anyone who spoke in defense of a heretic was arrested as an accomplice, and any form of evidence was accepted with little question of its validity.

The Inquisition was especially concerned with the matter of "witches." The Inquisitor's handbook, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and Bouget's *Discours des Sorciers* describe in great detail how such persons should be tortured, questioned and killed. During the period of the Inquisition, which pagans often refer to as *the Burning Times*, countless victims were given to the flames. Chroniclers report that entire villages were wiped out. Even in England, the country least touched by the terror of the Inquisition, an estimated 30,000 "witches" were burned between 1542 and 1736.



Orders

Not all hierarchies are strictly linear. Many religions encompass a number of different "orders." In most cases these orders will have differing types of responsibility within the religion - military, scholarly, healing, etc. The GM can be creative with the orders - the larger and more powerful the church, the more likely it will splinter into different groups. This is also a place for potential conflict within a religion - different orders may have almost completely separate hierarchies, and different interpretations of the faith as a whole (always emphasizing whichever area *they* specialize in).

Different orders will likely have different titles, different regalia, perhaps even different symbols to represent their particular areas of the church.

Recruitment

Young clerics must be trained. Often a mentoring or apprenticing situation will be created, whereby a new cleric is assigned to an older and more experienced member of the church, to learn duties and responsibilities by example. A would-be cleric may be required to pass ritualistic tests before being invested with the next level of rank.

No matter what the religion, the method of training new clerics must be considered in detail, for it will be a common background for all clerics of that faith.

Disobedience

Where there are rules, regulations and hierarchies, there must also be ways to deal with those who break them. A church's punishments will vary with the nature of the deity or philosophy worshiped. The GM may define lesser penance such as extra work, extra prayer and short-term vows, as well as greater punishments like long-term vows, expulsion, excommunication, geases, etc. (see *Penance*, p. 60).

Church and State

A religion may be widespread, but if it lays down laws it cannot enforce, it may find its authority questioned or challenged. In some cultures, conflicts between religious and civil authorities are common. In others, they are nonexistent. The GM must decide how church and state interact - how church and civil authorities get along (if they are separate), whether civil laws are based upon religious ethics or mores, whether church and government support one another and how they settle disputes between them.

If the religion *is* the state and the government *is* the church, the rulers are usually considered to be either actually descended from a deity or the divine's worldly representatives. It is this divine connection which grants them the absolute right to rule. The will of the government and the ruling hierarchy is the will of the gods, and must not be questioned. Defiance of governmental edicts is considered to be a religious crime, and the darkest heresy. The rulers of such religious states may be completely out of touch with the needs of their people. Or they could be very concerned with such things, putting a great deal of effort into meeting civic needs. Much of the religion's attitude toward society will depend upon the tenets of the religion. Large bureaucracies are likely to develop, each level of which has great power over those below. These organizations often end up buffering the divine leaders from the very people they rule.

Other state religions may hold that while the ruler is chosen by the gods, and rules by virtue of divine grace, the ruler is not the godhead personified and is thus capable of error. The ruler will need high-ranking clergy to advise him and interpret the will of the gods in difficult cases. This type of influence grants enormous political power to a religion, which might even be able to remove a contrary ruler from power.

Most state religions are notoriously intolerant. They might publicly denounce and outlaw competing religions. State religions are also sensitive to factions within their own ranks, and may go to great lengths to avoid schisms, denouncing or even killing those who object to church policy. The GM might want a tolerant state religion, but this raises more questions. Why is it so tolerant - from doctrine or practicality? Does it have an enlightened leader or is there no true competition? Or does it preach tolerance and then find subtle or underhanded ways to discredit its competition?

Sometimes a government might *adopt* a religion as the "official" or state religion. Such religions are usually chosen in order to manipulate or influence the general populace. If a government can say that its edicts and decisions are the "will of the gods," few will disagree for fear of calling down divine - and civil - wrath upon themselves.

The Reformation

This split within the Christian church resulted in great political upheaval and war. It began with a theological argument. Many people felt that the Roman Church should not be the sole interpreter of scripture. The rising sense of nationalism throughout Europe only encouraged division. The teachings of Luther, strongest in his native Germany, spread into Scandinavia, France and England. Various nobles and princes stood behind their favorite scholars, often switching sides as the political situation developed. In German Switzerland, civil war ensued between the reformers and those who remained Catholic.

Then Calvinism grew to be the greatest religious force in the Reformation, rejecting many of the standards of Luther and Zwingli. In England, many of the Catholic medieval traditions were retained, including territorial divisions and clerical hierarchies. Henry VIII's arguments with Rome resulted in the establishment of the Church of England, but there were few significant changes in worship or doctrine beyond the dissolution of the monasteries and religious houses. All of their wealth went to the Crown. The Bible was translated into English.

During the reign of Edward VI, the Latin mass was outlawed, and statues and images were destroyed. Catholic Queen Mary restored much of the Pope's power in England. Many English Protestants fled; others were tried for heresy and burned at the stake. Later Queen Elizabeth I brought about the final break with Rome, but not all Protestants felt that enough changes had been made. Many Puritans fled to Holland and America.

During this time a counter-revolution (also known as the Catholic Reformation) sprang up in Italy and Spain. Many new religious orders were established, including some that were concerned solely with the Roman Inquisition. Civil war broke out in Holland, with the northern states (under William of Orange) being Calvinist, while the south remained Catholic. In France, the Huguenots (Calvinist French Protestants) battled the Catholic majority. In the following century, the national churches struggled for power in political and religious wars. In the end, the religion of the monarch became the religion of the state.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroaster (also called Zarathustra) was a teacher who lived in northeast Iran sometime during the 5th or 6th century B.C. His teachings (transmitted in the form of hymns called *The Gathas*) extol the wisdom of God and love for the divine, naming him *Ahura Mazda*, the Wise Lord. Ahura Mazda is opposed by the *Angra Mainyu*, the Evil Spirit, destructive force against creative force. Zoroaster also retained some beliefs from the older Aryan religion. According to Zoroaster, every person must choose between these twinned, yet opposite, divine forces. (The later Zurvanite sect named these twin spirits *Ohmazd* and *Ahriman*.)

The holy book of the Zoroastrians is the *Avesta*. It was not written down until the 5th century, the result of years of codification by generations of scholars and disciples. Unfortunately, only partial texts remain. A number of other books were added in the 9th century in an attempt to defend Zoroastrianism against Christian and Islamic pressures.

According to classic Zoroastrianism, both conflicting sides have their own forces. Certain "aspects" of the divine, such as *Integrity*, *Immortality*, etc., became the *Amahraspands*; they sit before the throne of god and protect the elements of the world. The *Yazatas* are numberless other heavenly beings. Several important Yazatas bear remarkable similarity to the old Aryan gods. Opposing these forces of good are hordes of evil spirits and demons. The demons of *Apostasy*, *Anarchy*, *Hunger*, *Thirst*, *Disobedience* and the *Lie* struggle against the holy Amahraspands.

At death, the individual's life is judged. If predominately good, the soul passes onto heaven; if not, the soul travels to hell, where the punishment fits the sin. But hell is seen as a place of reform, for a good God could not allow eternal suffering. When all are finally pure, the devil and his minions will be destroyed, heaven and earth becoming one with God.

Continued on next page...

In some cases the country is actually run by the church alone. Vatican City is an example; within its boundaries, the Pope holds both civil and religious authority. But in other state religions, civil authorities have only minimal influence in the church. While Queen Elizabeth is the theoretical head of the Church of England, she holds little religious power.

In a culture where gods are denied or are not worshiped at all, it is possible that the government itself will be viewed with near-religious awe, worship or even fear. Such cultures would probably put the needs of the state before all other social obligations. The state itself would become god, mother, father, spouse and friend to the individual. Governmental edicts would be sacrosanct. Religious fanaticism would be replaced by patriotic fanaticism.

Civil and Religious Law

Law is cultural knowledge that is used by authoritative agents to settle disputes. If church and state are indistinguishable, clerics might act as policemen and judges, handing down sentences based on religious law. There might be an entire branch of the church dedicated to the judicial system.

If the law of the land and religious law differ, which laws have precedence? Even if religious and civil law are similar, there could be arguments - it is not so much what laws have been broken, but rather who has the right to judge the case. Conflicts of this nature have led religions and governments alike to insist upon a separation of church and state. However, since civil laws are often based upon religious law and dogma, criminals might still be judged according to the standards and mores of the religion.

Civil and religious authorities also argue over who has the right to judge clerics who have committed a civil crime. Civil authorities often insist that the law is the law, and applies to all citizens. Many religions claim that these should remain internal matters, and that judgment and punishment should be left in the hands of religious authorities - a situation similar to diplomatic immunity. If clerics are granted similar immunity to civil law, ordinary citizens might become annoyed at such privilege, or seek to obtain it for themselves by joining the clergy.

Another source of conflict concerns people who break civil law because of religious belief. Some religions might teach their adherents to obey civil authorities, while others might preach resistance. If a person wishes to engage in a harmful or illegal practice for religious reasons, does the state have the power or right to interfere? In some cases, the state may declare children its wards because it believes that the family's religious practices endanger the child's health. Where is the line drawn?

Religion and Property

Power is usually related to land and money. If the religion has a great deal of material property, it may also have a great deal of political and social power. In some societies the church has all the power and responsibility of a feudal lord, complete with vassals, men-at-arms and tenants. Entire villages or cities might be under church rule.

In some societies, churches can accumulate land by convincing people to offer land and temporal goods in order to ensure their salvation or blessing. Or they may make the church the guardian of their minor children. If the church is able to convince a rich ward to join the ranks of its clerics, then his inheritance may go to the church.

Other forms of income include the sale of penances, prayers and indulgences. A cleric might assign a sinful follower prayers as a penance, or the follower might have a special request of the god. The church might guarantee that a number of prayers or offerings would be made in his name in exchange for a donation of money. Churches might have associated markets where sacrificial animals, incense and other gifts could be bought. Many churches support a "tithe" - followers are "encouraged" to donate a certain percentage of their wealth on a regular basis. Some churches sell "indulgences" — official remittance of a penance, or a pardon for a crime, purchased for a set amount of money.

Other Religions

If there is more than one religion in a society, the government may deal with them all equally or it may afford one of them favored status. If other religions are at odds with the government favorite, the authorities may step in. And the religions themselves must cope with the presence of the others.

Religions can deal with each other in three ways - acceptance, indifference or intolerance. Some religions will accept others under the proviso that their own believers not change their practice. Others tolerate them while denying their validity. Still others are completely indifferent, seeing neither threat nor opportunity. Over time beliefs and customs may mingle, and in some extreme cases one religion might be totally amalgamated with another. Or a totally new religion might develop from the melding of the two. But unfortunately, as the many conflicts of history have shown, intolerance seems to be the most common choice.

There are many reasons why a church might resort to forceful means of proselytism. Religions that believe their own view is the only true way often spread their views at swordpoint, offering non-believers a "choice" - *convert or die*. New converts may be slain anyway, to "save" them from falling back into their old ways. Other religions hold that those outside their faith do not have any rights at all - a crime committed against an unbeliever is really no crime at all.

Holy wars often involve land and property, being little more than excuses for a religious state to increase its properties and holdings. Or holy wars are fought over a lost shrine or holy artifact. If the particular shrine is held sacred by more than one religion, then a war might continue for decades or even centuries, while control passes back and forth between the two sides. Other wars may be fought over doctrine, or scriptural interpretation.

If a religion crosses national borders, and the religious hierarchy has political or military influence in both countries, two otherwise opposing nations might cooperate in order to wage war upon a third. In many cases, the driving force behind a holy war is a combination of religious and political factors.

Intolerance does not always result in outright violence. Unbelievers might be looked on with pity, and subjected to helpful attempts to convert him. Or believers might refuse to associate or do business with those outside their own religion. Insults and false rumors might be spread, all subtle ways of trying to force an individual to either abandon his belief or leave to avoid the derogatory barrage.

Roots

Once a GM decides the nature and the present status of a game-world religion, his next step is to work out how it got there. Legends and origin myths are often nebulous, with many different versions existing even within the same cul-

Zoroastrianism (Continued)

The religion of ancient Iran was therefore a mix between the old Aryan faith and Zoroaster's teachings, holding a great deal of influence in its culture, especially during the times of Darius and Xerxes. The Magi were the hereditary priests; their teachings carried Zoroastrianism throughout Iran. It is believed that Roman Mithraism later grew out of these teachings.

Zoroastrianism survived the development of Islam; many smaller cults unified to deal with the threat posed by that religion. Many faithful Zoroastrians moved to India during this time, though small communities remain in Yazd, Kerman and Tehran to the present day. Many modern theological scholars feel that early Zoroastrian belief greatly influenced Jewish (and later Christian) concepts of the devil, heaven and hell, the resurrection and the end of the world.



Messianic Religions

Some religions believe in the coming of a messiah - a great leader, prophet or holy teacher who will deliver the faithful from their oppression. Some believe this will be done violently; others hope for a messianic age of peace and prosperity.

Many religions have a messianic element; often the belief in a messiah is only one of many tenets. Judaism is particularly well known for this belief; almost every prophet in Hebrew scripture has predicted a reign of peace, prosperity and understanding of God. In modern times, Reform and many Conservative Jews feel this will come about gradually, as humanity is slowly enlightened.

Historically, there have been several messianic movements. When the Jews were banished from Spain in 1492, mystical traditions grew in popularity, as did messianic belief. Later, during the 17th century, Sabbatai Zevi was hailed by many as the messiah, with Nathan of Gaza as his prophet. Sabbatai Zevi eventually adopted the Mohammedan religion in 1666, and still retained many of his followers. What are today considered to be mystical heresies flourished during this period. There have been many militant messianic movements throughout history, many adopting a variety of extreme doctrines, wishing to cast off "the burden of Law and Commandments."

Many native North American religions also have messianic traditions, especially in southern areas. Oddly enough, this messiah was commonly described as a white man with a flowing beard. Some scholars believe that this may have influenced the Spaniards' reception in Mexico, Haiti, Yucatan and Peru. Similarly, Pueblo tribes welcomed the Spaniards, who disappointed them by not delivering them from their Apache enemies. The great revolt of 1680 eventually resulted. Later, native prophets such as Tenskwatawa, Kanakuk and Smohalla strengthened the spread of messianic fervor, although their individual teachings varied. Common points, however, included the resurrection of the dead and their people's return to their former glory. In the late 19th century, Squasachtun (John Slocum) introduced the Shaker religion to the native peoples. The Shakers were known for their twitching dances and trances and it is thought that this movement influenced the Paiute messiah and the Ghost Dance apostles.

Continued on next page...

ture. These beliefs are often the seeds of developing religions and are passed on from generation to generation in many ways. The GM should pick a starting point or legend, and determine how it was transmitted. Many ancient traditions greatly honor their teachers and scholars.

Holy Teacher

Many religions begin with the teachings of a single individual. This revered teacher may be a prophet chosen by the deity to bring a specific message. Or he might simply be a wise or learned individual intent upon solving the mysteries of the world. Such teachers might not die, instead being called to serve the divine. Others are deified after their deaths. Holy teachers are common in philosophical and contemplative religions.

The philosophy spreads as others come to the teacher to learn, or as the teacher wanders about speaking to any who will listen. Places where the teacher lived or taught might become holy sites and shrines. Often his lessons are written down, becoming "holy" as they are preserved for later generations. Others may write commentaries; different schools of interpretation may spring up. What began as the teachings of a single person might grow into a number of different yet related religions. If the original teaching disagree with or criticize other schools of thought, its followers might suffer persecution. Teachings of equality and freedom for all might anger governments that practice slavery, or vice versa.

Many different types of religions have holy teachers. Proselytizing religions often develop if the holy teacher was intent upon spreading his teachings, while a teacher who waits for students to come to him often founds a contemplative religion. But some religions develop different sects, both contemplative and proselytizing, each dedicated to a different way of practicing the religion.

Divine Descent

Some religions develop from acts of divine intervention and descent. A representative of the deity, or perhaps even the deity itself, comes into the world and walks among its chosen people. A deity may present itself with great fanfare, using powerful magic or miracles to announce its coming. Others might arrive quietly, becoming holy teachers, spreading wisdom among the faithful.

Sometimes this divine appearance is foretold in prophecy; other times few might notice, the word spreading slowly only after the deity is gone. Often he has a particular task to fulfill. Sometimes the divine sends an intangible spirit, to sanctify a leader or to inspire a chosen prophet. An ordinary person might become a holy teacher under such influence. Divine entities may depart once their work is done, or they may choose to stay and wander, or perhaps dwell within a holy shrine where their followers may consult them.

Ancient Ways

Often religious knowledge is handed down from teacher to student, father to son, mother to daughter and so on. These types of religions usually involve more personal or domestic rites and duties than communal ones. Often these rituals are hidden in mystery and are revealed only to particular people. Some rites may be exclusive to men, others to women. The knowledge may be passed on gradually, the individual learning more and more as he grows older and passes through a series of initiations.

The individuals chosen to hold and pass on this knowledge are revered and even feared by the rest of the society. Such teachings are generally not passed on freely; the applicant must first prove himself worthy. Shamanistic or magical traditions are commonly begun this way.



Such religions are an excellent choice for a GM who wishes to gradually reveal religious information to clerical characters. A cleric could spend a life time uncovering lost knowledge, seeking personal enlightenment and searching for the right student to carry on the tradition.

Constructs

Some religions begin as deliberate constructs. These are not necessarily "false" religions, but they are usually strictly structured. Such traditions are created to deal with a particular social pressure or problem. A culture that is constantly at war might develop cults of holy warriors who are specially chosen. The traditions and structures of these sects might survive as secret societies long after the original religion has been forgotten.

Constructed religions will generally be found in relatively sophisticated societies. Perhaps some sort of magical or technological knowledge would be used to convince people of the power behind the religion. Or there could be a massive propaganda campaign begun by a charismatic leader. If the GM decides that belief alone is enough to actually create gods, such a movement might succeed in doing that. If so, a constructed religion could eventually become mystically powerful in its own right - which might surprise its developers.

Messianic Religions (Continued)

The underlying principle of the Ghost Dance religion was the belief that the entire native race, living and dead, would one day be reunited on a regenerated earth. It exhorted a return to native ways and tradition and a deliverance from white oppression. Much of this doctrine was spread by the visionary Wovoka. Participation in the sacred dances could hasten this reunion of living and dead. This religious movement was seen as a serious threat by government and military alike; hundreds of participants were cut down by U.S. Army fire at Wounded Knee.

Death and Resurrection

Almost all religions have some sort of death story or myth. Souls usually have some place to retire to, either for the rest of eternity or some shorter time while they await reincarnation. In a campaign where magical techniques for resurrection exist, the GM must decide how each religion will view this, in accordance with their own personal beliefs about death.

For the most part, religions which teach that their believers may ascend into the presence of the god, or travel to some paradise to enjoy the rewards of a well-spent life, will consider resurrection to be the ultimate heresy - a great perversion of the desires of the deity. Clerics and faithful followers of this religion will object strongly to being resurrected! Why should they return to the pain and suffering of life when they can retire to the loving embrace of their god? What karma is accumulated by a soul which is yanked back into a worldly existence from which it had escaped? At the very least the person will be disgruntled. In extreme situations he may kill all who so defiled him and then commit ritual suicide, hoping to commend his soul back to the deity.

It may likewise be important that certain rites and rituals are handled correctly for a deceased character. Such a character should be sure to properly instruct those he travels with (if they happen not to share the same faith) of all particulars - just in case the worst should occur.

Fanaticism

Fanatics are those who believe completely and utterly in the teachings of their church. No sacrifice is too great to preserve the faith, and they stint nothing. The church is their world, the deity the only one whose opinion matters.

Fanatics can be difficult to deal with, even for those who follow the same religion, since they take everything to the extreme. Indeed, in some cases, the fanatic may take things *too* far, interpreting the divine will in ways that pervert its intent. Fanaticism is a temperament trait more than a true measure of understanding or communion with the divine. Nothing guarantees that the fanatic has a truer vision of the deity or the religious experience than anyone else.

There is little more frightening than a fanatic with a *mission*, especially someone with an obvious enemy to fight against - for he will stop at nothing. Many of the greatest calamities in epic fantasies have been precipitated by fanatics whose beliefs have strayed beyond the realm of reason.

On the other hand, fanaticism is a common trait among those dedicated enough to devote themselves to the service of a religion. Not *all* fanatics are unyielding extremists, just as not all fanatics are intolerant of those who do not follow their particular religion. The only true constant among them is the fervor and devotion they grant to their calling, and the depth of the sacrifice they are willing to make in its name. (See also the Fanaticism disadvantage, p. B33.)



Changes Over Time

Religions, like their cultures, are not static. They change over time. The GM should keep this in mind when determining both the history of the game world and its religions. What happened in the past will determine how religions (and their clerics) get along and what their future motives are. A religion's future can be influenced by world-shaking events, slow culture changes or the actions of a single determined cleric.

Growth and Maturation

Religions grow and spread in many ways. This depends upon the teachings and beliefs of the adherents, as well as the influence of other religions and cultural elements.

Proselytism

Proselytizing religions actively seek new recruits, and their members put great effort into spreading the word. These clerics might stand on street corners or go from door to door, promising temporal success and eternal salvation. Other religions are content to let their charitable works and accomplishments draw people to them. Food might be free at a soup kitchen, but often the appetizer is a sermon. Proselytizing religions which have great political strength or influence often deny other religions equal opportunity for free speech, or spread their beliefs at swordpoint.

Missionary religions grow as a result of systematic efforts to preach and perform social works. Missionaries spread their beliefs either through proclamation (outright preaching) or through dialogue (which invites intelligent discussion and comparison of differing beliefs).

Some religions are strictly non-proselytizing to the extent that they openly disdain new converts and require them to undergo long training and purification before being accepted. Such religions might require that the potential convert undergo some form of testing or great ordeal to prove their worthiness and enlightenment. Others are seemingly indifferent and merely wait for new members to find them.

Propagation

A religion may spread in slow, piecemeal steps. Buddhism came to China by means of translated scripture and preaching, but the process took 500 years. The spread of Buddhism into China brought a new type of social organization - the monastic community - that became vitally important in medieval Chinese society. To accomplish this, the church needed the patronage of the elite, which took several centuries to obtain. But by the 5th century, the Buddhist church had formed an intellectual clerical elite that posed a serious challenge to the native Taoism. Buddhist writings - scientific and philosophical, as well as religious - were translated from their Indian sources. Kumarajiva, with the patronage of the Emperor, created a corps of translators that far exceeded anything that had previously existed in China. During this time, Buddhism was itself influenced by Taoism, developing a number of purely Chinese sects.

The Common View

The true strength of most religions lies in their followers. While the clergy may have great supernatural or political power, the mass of followers makes up

the body of any religious organization. The belief of the common folk is often a subtle thing, but it is that belief that spreads the religion from generation to generation. Once a religious belief becomes widespread it is extremely difficult to suppress. Even if the religion loses its political influence and the clergy is outlawed, as long as its beliefs are held by the common people, the religion will survive in some form. Clerics will be hidden by their followers, holy objects secreted in obscure places, children taught in private. Nothing is more difficult to remove from a devoted believer than faith.

There is a difference between a devoted worshiper and a follower, however. Devoted worshipers hold their religious beliefs and practices to be of tantamount importance. Their religion is their strength, something they build their life on, something they turn to in times of trouble and need. Little will deter them from the practice of their religion, even physical danger. Saints and martyrs are the ultimate examples of devoted worshipers.

Followers are often less enthusiastic. They may be reverent and take part in all the expected rituals and ceremonies. But when push comes to shove, they falter. Followers lack the binding faith of the devoted worshiper, and often put their life and other possessions above unquestioning faith. They may question and doubt, or simply shrug in indifference. Some religions value doubts and questions, for they believe that if a religion cannot be studied and analyzed it is worthless. But often the devoted worshiper and the casual follower will conflict, the first seeing the latter as weak or flawed, while the follower sees the more fervent worshipers as closed-minded fanatics.

Decline

Religions are similar to growing organisms . . . they develop and they die. Sometimes this decline is the result of external pressure and oppression. Sometimes it is a gradual decay from within. As time progresses, cultures change and sometimes religions do not change along with it. If the values and beliefs of the religion clash with the accepted values of the culture, then followers will begin to question. When they doubt, and begin to reassess their beliefs and involvement in a religious organization, the religion weakens. Followers lose interest in the rites and celebrations, and at best give only lip-service to them.

As a religion weakens with the loss of followers, its social influence also wanes. Followers might also leave if a more appealing religion comes along. Religious values that have become cultural standards might survive long after the religion itself has perished. Other religious elements might be absorbed by new religions. Or the religion might split from within, and survive in some new form.

Adaptation

What happens when a religion runs into something unexpected? Great social change, war, competitive religions, magic, technology - all of these can be serious threats to a religion; all of these must be dealt with - or explained - somehow. Sometimes religions die; other times derivative religions develop. Often schisms result. But something always changes. It is the *how* that the GM must determine. Some of these conflicts may be history, but still have modern repercussions. Others may be present threats. Bringing such concerns into a campaign is a useful GM tool and can result in some interesting situations for both clerical and other characters.

Proselytizing and Party Unity

Clerics of proselytizing religions have a duty to bring the word of their god to all the people of the world. In most cases, proselytizing religions believe that anyone who does not follow their god is damned to a life-after-death of misery. Their clerics have a duty to those they meet, and especially those they form close bonds with, to convert them to the one true faith.

On the other hand, the player must recognize (even if the character will not) that other characters will hold other beliefs equally fervently, and may not be willing even to listen to endless repetitions of the "message," let alone fully convert. It would seem that one or the other (or both) is doomed to frustration and endless argument that can get in the way of party interaction and playing enjoyment.

This is not necessarily the case. Most proselytizing priests are not stupid - they recognize that other people hold strong beliefs, and that endless repetition of the same message is unlikely to do anything but annoy them. A much more common technique is that of conversion by example. By simply following his faith as closely as he can, the cleric believes he will eventually demonstrate its superiority. A quiet comment made at an opportune moment can have more effect than continued barrages. A realistic cleric will realize that he can only expect to save a small number of souls - making each one all that more precious.

If this sort of rationale will not fit with the character concept, then, at the very least, the player can have the character go through the whole speech once, and then simply refer to it on future occasions. This will save the nerves of the other players, even if it doesn't improve the interrelations between characters.

Martyrs

Martyrs are people who are killed by their political or religious enemies as a result of their unswerving conviction and devotion to their beliefs. Often martyrs serve as powerful symbols of oppression or persecution which may stir up both common and religious sentiment.

In some religions, martyrs are worshiped as holy or privileged individuals. Usually celebrations are held upon the death-day of the martyr.

Sometimes miracles occur at the burial sites of martyrs, or are associated with their relics. The teachings of martyrs often sway people, for if it seems that there must be *some* worth in beliefs that someone is willing to die for...

It is worth remembering that someone must perceive the martyr's death in terms of sacred sacrifice. A person who tells of the death in these terms, and a religion that embraces the tale, may have a vested interest in protecting the mythic nature of the death. They may do so without regard to historical reality or the beliefs of either the martyr *or* his slayer...



Natural Change

As a culture changes, so do its mores and behaviors. Religions also change as time progresses. Honored traditions can become hide-bound. If the populace sees the church as old-fashioned or inappropriate, they may abandon it. In order to maintain their influence upon the society, religions may change to increase their popularity and maintain membership. Over time, many religions become more willing to deal kindly with outsiders, often permitting open discourse and more friendly relations. Sometimes this requires a new look at old doctrine: sometimes new translations of scripture are made. Old restrictions, such as those against the investiture of women as priests in some Christian churches, may be lifted. If there are those within the religion who object to these changes, a schism might result.

Conquerors

Many religions have faced conflict and violence over the years. Often a religion is oppressed or outlawed by a conquering nation, and its adherents persecuted. Some religions change under such pressure, melding two cultures, creating an entirely new religion from the mix. Hinduism has its ancient beginnings in two distinct sources - the Indus Valley civilization and the oral traditions of the Aryans. The Vedic scriptures gave Hinduism much of its formal structure and myth. These traditions and beliefs, brought by the Aryan peoples who invaded northwest India, were quickly assimilated into the decaying Harappan cultures.

Other times, it is the religion of the conquerors that changes. In order to make the conqueror's religion more feasible and attractive, elements of the defeated nation's beliefs might be subsumed. All over Europe and the British Isles, many Celtic deities and their associated holy places were assimilated into Christian belief and culture. The Irish goddess Brigit became a Christian saint, her holy shrine at Kildare, a convent of nuns. The popularity of religious mystery and morality plays in medieval Europe echoes those popular in Greek and Roman cultures. These plays began as religious rites and slowly slipped into secular hands, though they were performed to celebrate religious festivals.

Some conquerors ignore the native religions unless they perceive a direct threat. The Romans were notoriously tolerant of native religions, so long as their own beliefs were not threatened. They also took many of the Greek gods as their own; Zeus became Jupiter, Hera became Juno, Aphrodite became Venus, and so on. But even the Greeks adopted the deities of others. Hellenic myths suggest that Athena, worshiped by the Romans as Minerva, was originally the Libyan triple goddess, Anath. Aphrodite, previously known as Asherah or Astarte, was an ancient Syrian goddess famed for her temples, like those in Paphos on Cyprus.

Magic

The GM must carefully consider the role of magic in the game world. Does magic exist? Does it differ from divine aid? Are there magical deities? Do clerics use divine aid, magic, neither, or both?

If magic is seen as a gift of the gods, then it is possible that everyone with talent for magic will be brought to or trained by the church. In a church state, magically gifted individuals might be *required* to register in some fashion. In any case, the church would be most concerned with any individual who uses magical abilities without the sanction of the church.



Magic performed without the sanction of the church is often considered a threat both to the organization of the church and to the privileges of the god. Few clerics will be fond of the mage who blithely dazzles the populace with magic when the cleric is speaking of the all-powerful god.

If the church views any display of arcane power that does not come from their deity as "evil," then the conflict might be serious indeed. If the church has great political or social influence, there may be pogroms and persecution aimed at mages (see *The Inquisition*, p. 50). Even if the church doesn't have a great deal of political power, the individual mage might still have to be wary of clerics determined to destroy him.

Many religions will not have a magical aspect at all. They might be completely rational and scientific in nature, containing no divine element. Some deities could lack access to the material world, or might not be strong enough to share their power with their followers. Religions could be based on a unified worldview, a philosophy and belief rather than demonstrable power. In some cases the religion might suppose an apathetic or indifferent deity; others might simply speculate an unknown reason for the deity's lack of involvement in the world. Or perhaps there *is* no deity, and the church (such as it is) exists to provide what comfort it can amid logical explanations and philosophical rationalizations for the world.

However, a world in which magical deities exist will likely find that those religions without direct divine intervention will dwindle and fade. When the magical power of one deity is readily apparent, why should people worship one who lacks this measurable power? Rational philosophies and explanations hold little weight when compared to miraculous feats of supernatural power.

Paragons

Those in a state of communion with their deity are often considered holy men and women, great paragons of the divine virtue. These individuals remain quite mortal and are often swayed strongly by the events about them, but their viewpoint is at one with their faith, completely and totally embracing the teachings and views of their god.

Teachers, prophets, or warriors of great merit, these holy people have special status in the eyes of their deity through the purity of their actions. Though exactly how they conduct themselves depends entirely upon the nature of their chosen deity, they are as one with the personality, temperament, wishes and goals of their faith. Age is not an important consideration, though most often these individuals are older, having achieved true peace with themselves and an understanding of their place in the greater cosmos. Some cultures define a natural progression whereby anyone of advanced age and inclination devotes himself to the holy teachings, becoming a sage or wise man. Others believe that understanding is independent of age and experience, coming to any who are ready to devote themselves completely to the divine.

Given their elevated status, whether echoed by church rank or not, paragons generally receive special bonuses or divine blessings. At the very least their actions are more likely to find divine favor (with all appropriate bonuses - see p. 93), and often they are blessed with various special abilities.

