

Playing God

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Release 4

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A Basic Fantasy Role-Playing Supplement

INTRODUCTION

Clerics. They are essential to a campaign. Their strength is derived from their faith. Spells are assumed to also be divine in origin. Commune for instance, explicitly mentions communication with the Cleric's deity. But how, as the GM, should this be handled? The short answer is: however you like. Religion in your world can be as simple or complicated as you like. This supplement is intended to help you, the GM, decide HOW to go about it. This is a guide to making your own decisions, not a book full of pre-made deities. That being said, you will find a few sample deities here and there, for illustration purposes. Their suitability for a campaign is NOT guaranteed. Also, just to be clear, the use of the word "god" is not meant to indicate a required gender. Goddesses are just as powerful and amazing as gods, so I will use them indeterminately and somewhat randomly. Please don't read anything else into it! So, let's get started.

CHOOSE YOUR LEVEL (OF COMPLEXITY)

Your first choice is going to be how much effort you want to put into your world's theology. If you have a more hack n' slash sort of game, which focuses on beating up the Bad Guys, then you are probably doing a lot of hand-waving when it comes to wizard spells and such, anyway. If so, then a "Keep It Simple" approach is probably best. But if your players like backstory, and are the type to ask questions that send things off the plot-rails, then a more complex theology is a good idea for your future campaign (and sanity).

The following sections will take you through the different stages. We'll start with a simple theology, move to more complex ones, then finish with a section of "add-ons", ideas to flesh out your basic thoughts with a few juicy details.

ONE FOR ALL

This is, of course, the simplest and easiest of theologies. Your world has just one god. Probably he or she is the creator of the world. Every Cleric somehow worships this one god.

Of course, this means that good and evil Clerics get their spells from the same source. You should give some thought to why this is.

It could be that your goddess is somewhat aloof; having made the world, they are content to simply let things play out. If a Cleric is devoted enough to be granted divine power, they are free to do with it what they see fit.

Otherwise, perhaps the Nemesis add-on (detailed later) might be of use for enemy Clerics.

Sample Deity: Jowenna, Mother of ALL

Jowenna is the creator, the source of all life. As such, she does not play favorites among the races she put into the world. As a result, most Clerics of all races are reluctant to destroy life of any sort, but they are universally ready to destroy undead, which are abominations in the eyes of Jowenna.

ALL HAVE ONE

One of the drawbacks of having only one god in your universe is that it winds up being the source for good and bad races. So, as an alternative, you could consider having a race-based pantheon. This makes a little more work for you, but in this theology, each race has their own Patron Deity. This means that all the gods cooperated in the creation of the world, and also means that each Cleric can count on their god being more invested in their worshipers.

The other facet of this type of theology is that Clerics of different races might wind up having access to different spells, or be excluded from certain ones. For instance, Clerics of evil races might not have access to healing spells, or Dwarven Clerics might only be able to **create** ale instead of water.

FORCES OF NATURE

In this version, each of the gods is a force of nature personified. The thing that appeals here is if you like a rich tapestry of gods. This can be great for GMs and players alike. A theology like this could have hundreds of gods and demi-gods available. For instance, there could be a god of oceans, whose spouse is a god of fresh water, and their children can be found in major lakes, rivers, seas, and bays. There could be a god of air, whose children are each of the major winds.

Before you get too scared of the complexity, the nice thing about this is that NO ONE in the world would know ALL of the deities, so you could create a few to start, and then add interesting ones as you go. A theology like this lends itself very well to the "Promiscuous Gods" add-on detailed later.

Sample Deity: Shuura-Shurra goddess of Air

Shuura-Shurra is the capricious goddess of the air. Sailors especially try to always curry her favor, praying for favorable winds and clear skies. Farmers tend to pray both ways; for her to clear the skies of clouds in times of too much rain, and to bring more clouds in times of drought. When Shuura-Shurra argues with Bolth-Amrith, god of water, violent storms are created that wreak havoc on mortals.

Sample Deity: Blenn, son of Shuura-Shurra, god of Dead Calm

Blenn is a minor, often neglected, even despised deity. Sailors hope to avoid his notice, as do kite-fliers everywhere. While his brothers and sisters create all the wind of the world, he is the opposite. While he is often neglected, he is always present; in the eye of the hurricane, in the center of a tornado. His power keeps the more destructive of his siblings in check, and he is also the only one able to get his mother to see reason when she quarrels with Bolth-Amrith. Blenn's clerics are the ones everyone turns to in times of great storms, and in times of great upheaval – Priests of Blenn are often called to mediate disputes and feuds.

FORCES OF MAN

This type of theology is similar to the "forces of nature" in that the gods are personifications. In this case though, they are personifications of forces of civilization: Love, War, Harvest, Justice, Knowledge, Science, Magic. All of these concepts have a Patron Deity that watches over them. Depending on your thoughts, you could even add son and daughters to the pantheon. For instance, the goddess of Knowledge might have two children subordinate to her: the god of Magic and the goddess of Science.

Sample Deity: Shandala, Patron of Knowledge

Shandala is the guider of civilization, and is heavily vested in progress of all learning. Any progress is good. "Morality" is for OTHER gods;

anything that increases knowledge is worthy of pursuit. She is assisted by her twin children, Olan and Ilan.

Sample Deity: Ilan, goddess of Science

Ilan is the Patron of pure scientific progress completely separate from Magic of any form. Some of the more radical of Ilan's followers eschew any form of magic, even going so far as to destroy items of magic and persecute users of magic. Ilan herself does not condone these actions, she simply has no use for magic, or her twin, who she views as "taking shortcuts".

Sample Deity: Olan, god of Magic

Olan is the Patron of Magic and Magical Research completely separate from Science of any form. Some of the more radical of Olan's followers eschew scientific progress or machines of any sort beyond simple ones, even going so far as to destroy complex inventions wherever they may find them, such as spring-driven cooking spits, or complex door locks. Olan himself does not condone these actions, he simply has no use for Science, or his twin, who he views as "a stodgy stick-in-the-mud".

ELEMENTALISM

Gods in this world are the personification of the traditional four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, Water. They could either be faceless forces or actual personalities. If coupled with the "Promiscuous Gods" add-on you could create additional gods of Steam (Fire and Water), Lava (Fire and Earth), Ice (Water and Air), and Ooze (Earth and Water). If given personalities, Clerics of opposing elements might not get along too well with each other, while Clerics of adjacent elements might be capable of spectacular things if working in conjunction.

Sample Deity: Ban'Gles, The Eternal Flame

Ban'Gles is the personification of fire. She is a goddess of destruction, yes, but also one of renewal, the forest fire that clears the underbrush to allow for more growth. The need to sometimes destroy an old building in order to make a better one. Ban'Gles is a potent, yet capricious deity, her clerics as often found as part of revolutionary armies, as they are volunteering in recovery efforts from natural disasters.

EXISTING MYTHOLOGY

From a work standpoint, this theology is going to be the easiest. Basically, you can adopt an existing mythology: Greek/Roman, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, etc. The nice part is that there is already lots of background material already in existence. The downside to this is that there is a lot of background material already in existence.

What you need to realize is that while it is less work, you are trading your authority to some extent. Your players will be able to access the same sources as you, and will call you out on any “slips” or deviations you make from the source material.

While you are of course the GM, and are the final say in the functioning of your world, having the world use Greek Mythology, for instance, and then having Apollo act like Ares, or having a Cleric of Ares be a voice for Peace will strain the suspension of disbelief that is crucial to a good game session.

ADD-ONS

The following section is full of additional ideas you can add to any of the previous sections. They just add a little flavor to your campaign, and help give some structure to how things go in the game. For instance, the Morgansfort™ campaign has a deity called Tah™, which is the only god in that world, the setting also makes use of (possibly) The Nemesis, Elaborate Established Church, and Heretics (the reformed church).

The Nemesis

This add-on is very useful when you only have one or a few deities. Basically, the god(s) or goddess(es) is(are) good, the Nemesis is bad. You could even have a Nemesis counterpart for each of your deities.

Sample Deity: Yortitch, the Destroyer

Yortitch came to the world from Outside. Not much is known of his history before, but there are hints that he followed Jowenna to the world as part of some kind of feud sometime after the world's creation. Yortitch desires only to wreck and mock everything Jowenna has made. He is the source of ghosts, skeletons, ghouls and zombies. Necromancy is his “gift” to the world.

If you like, you can expand this option to include:

The Balance

This add-on really only makes sense when added with The Nemesis (an add-on to the add-on if you will). This would allow for there to be a “balance-god” for the good and bad counterparts, ensuring that things don't spiral out of control in the celestial realms.

Sample Deity: Halam, god of Balance

Halam's origin is more obscure than even Yortitch's. Halam is a recent arrival in the world.

100 years ago, during a time of worldwide strife, the forces of Jowenna and Yortitch nearly tore everything asunder. Just as everything seemed lost, each battlefield was visited by a shining presence that manifested as a set of ornate merchant's scales. The conflicts stilled, and equal numbers of combatants from each side: humans, elves, orcs, ghouls, necromancers, and others became enveloped in light and made their way to the base of the scale. An emotionless voice spoke; though none can say what words were uttered. At the end, everyone found themselves back home, but of the glowing “Chosen” there was no sign. They are still around, though.

Whenever conflicts threaten to spiral out of control, glowing emissaries of Halam will appear, brokering peace when they can, forcing it when they must. Sometimes they are living, sometimes monsters, sometimes undead; but always glowing, always wearing the symbol of a balance, always bringing peace.

No Established Church

With this add-on, Clerics in your world just “get the call” directly from their deity. Priests might not exist, or else they get their calls directly as well. Perhaps each priest and Cleric recruits a likely youth and makes them an apprentice (which would mean players would have to do so as well!). Worship could be radically different from village to village or be exactly the same, depending upon how active you want your gods to be in the world.

Elaborate Established Church

This add-on is useful when you want your Clerics to have an earthly support network. Churches in every major town and village can be sources of healing, holy water, and even missions. They can be sources of NPC help if needed, and a place to stay for Clerics who are short on cash. Of course, the free room and board could come with the price of doing a few “services” for the local parish!

Heretics

This add-on has a fancy name but merely means that the church has one or more other factions in it. In the example of the churches of Olan and Ilan, for instance, they each had radical sects that are vehemently against the other. There could also easily be sects that think combining Magic and Science to be a worthwhile effort.

Promiscuous Gods

The gods have children, and their children have children. If you want a world with lots of gods, this is a good way of doing it. The nice thing here is that in this worldview, new gods, or newly discovered gods will not be a big deal. Don't worry that you have to come up with all of them at once. This sort of pantheon would always be a work in

progress. Perhaps this world's Clerics and priests are all the sons and daughters of gods in some way, like descendants of demi-gods or something.

Atheism

Finally, we have this alternative for those players who, for one reason or another, want to play a Cleric but don't want it to be saddled with a fake religion. For these players, a Cleric could be devoted to an ideal of some sort. The ideal doesn't matter so much as that whatever ideal is adopted by the player, their character needs to actively pursue it in-game. This doesn't mean they become a one-sided caricature. It does mean that when presented with the opportunity, (and you as the GM should make sure those opportunities occur) they should role-play their commitment to that ideal.

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