

THE MEANING OF LAW AND CHAOS IN DUNGEONS & DRAGONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS TO GOOD AND EVIL

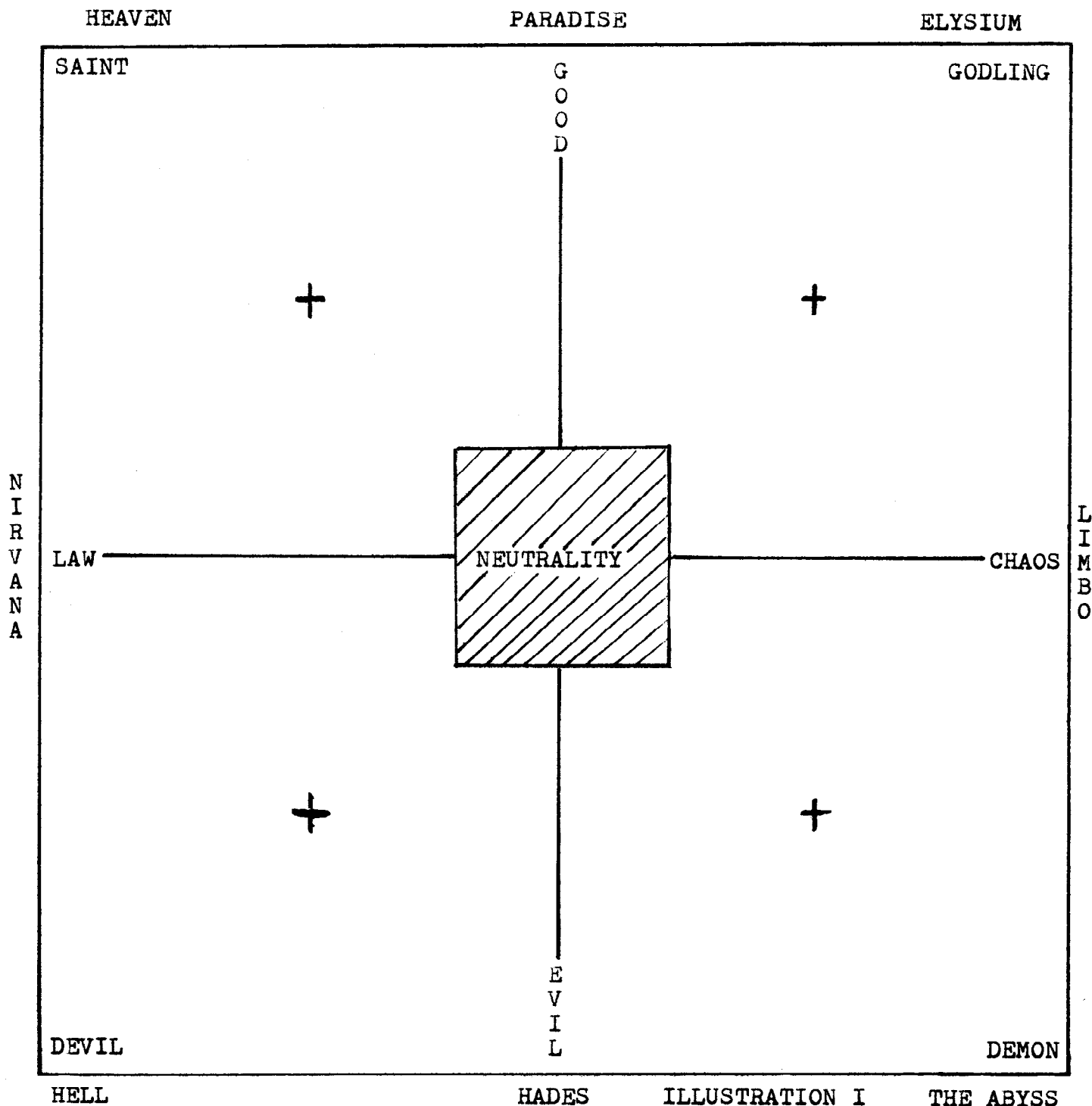
by Gary Gygax

Many questions continue to arise regarding what constitutes a "lawful" act, what sort of behavior is "chaotic", what constituted an "evil" deed, and how certain behavior is "good". There is considerable confusion in that most dungeon-masters construe the terms "chaotic" and "evil" to mean the same thing, just as they define "lawful" and "good" to mean the same. This is scarcely surprising considering the wording of the three original volumes of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. When that was written they meant just about the same thing in my mind — notice I do **not** say they were synonymous in my thinking at, that time. The wording in the GREYHAWK supplement added a bit more confusion, for by the time that booklet was written some substantial differences had been determined. In fact, had I the opportunity to do D&D over I would have made the whole business very much clearer by differentiating the four categories, and many chaotic creatures would be good, while many lawful creatures would be evil. Before going into the definitions of these four terms, a graphic representation of their relative positions will help the reader to follow the further discourse. (See #1)

Notice first that the area of neutrality lies squarely athwart the intersection of the lines which divide the four behavioral distinctions, and it is a very small area when compared with the rest of the graph. This refers to true neutrality, not to neutrality regarding certain interactions at specific times, i.e., a war which will tend to weaken a stronger player or game element regardless of the "neutral" party's actions can hardly be used as a measure of neutrality if it will benefit the party's interest to have the weakening come about.

Also note that movement upon this graph is quite possible with regard to campaign participants, and the dungeonmaster should, in fact, make this a standard consideration in play. This will be discussed hereafter.

Now consider the term "Law" as opposed to "Chaos". While they are nothing if not opposites, they are neither good nor evil in their definitions. A highly regimented society is typically governed by strict law, i.e., a dictatorship, while societies which allow more individual freedom tend to be more chaotic. The following lists of words describing the two terms point this out. I have listed the



words describing the concepts in increasing order of magnitude (more or less) as far as the comparison with the meanings of the two terms in D&D is concerned:

LAW
Reliability
Propriety
Principled
Righteous
Regularity
Regulation
Methodical
Uniform
Predictable
Prescribed Rules
Order

CHAOS
Unruly
Confusion
Turmoil
Unrestrained
Random
Irregular
Unmethodical
Unpredictable
Disordered
Lawless
Anarchy

GOOD (cont.)
Honest
Sincere
Helpful
Beneficial
Pure

EVIL (cont.)
Dishonest
Bad
Injurious
Wicked
Corrupt

The terms "Law" and "Evil" are by no means mutually exclusive. There is no reason that there cannot be prescribed and strictly enforced rules which are unpleasant, injurious or even corrupt. Likewise "Chaos" and "Good" do not form a dichotomy. Chaos can be harmless, friendly, honest, sincere, beneficial, or pure, for that matter. This all indicates that there are actually five, rather than three, alignments, namely:

Basically, then, "Law" is strict order and "Chaos" is complete anarchy, but of course they grade towards each other along the scale from left to right on the graph. Now consider the terms "Good" and "Evil" expressed in the same manner:

LAWFUL/GOOD
CHAOTIC/GOOD

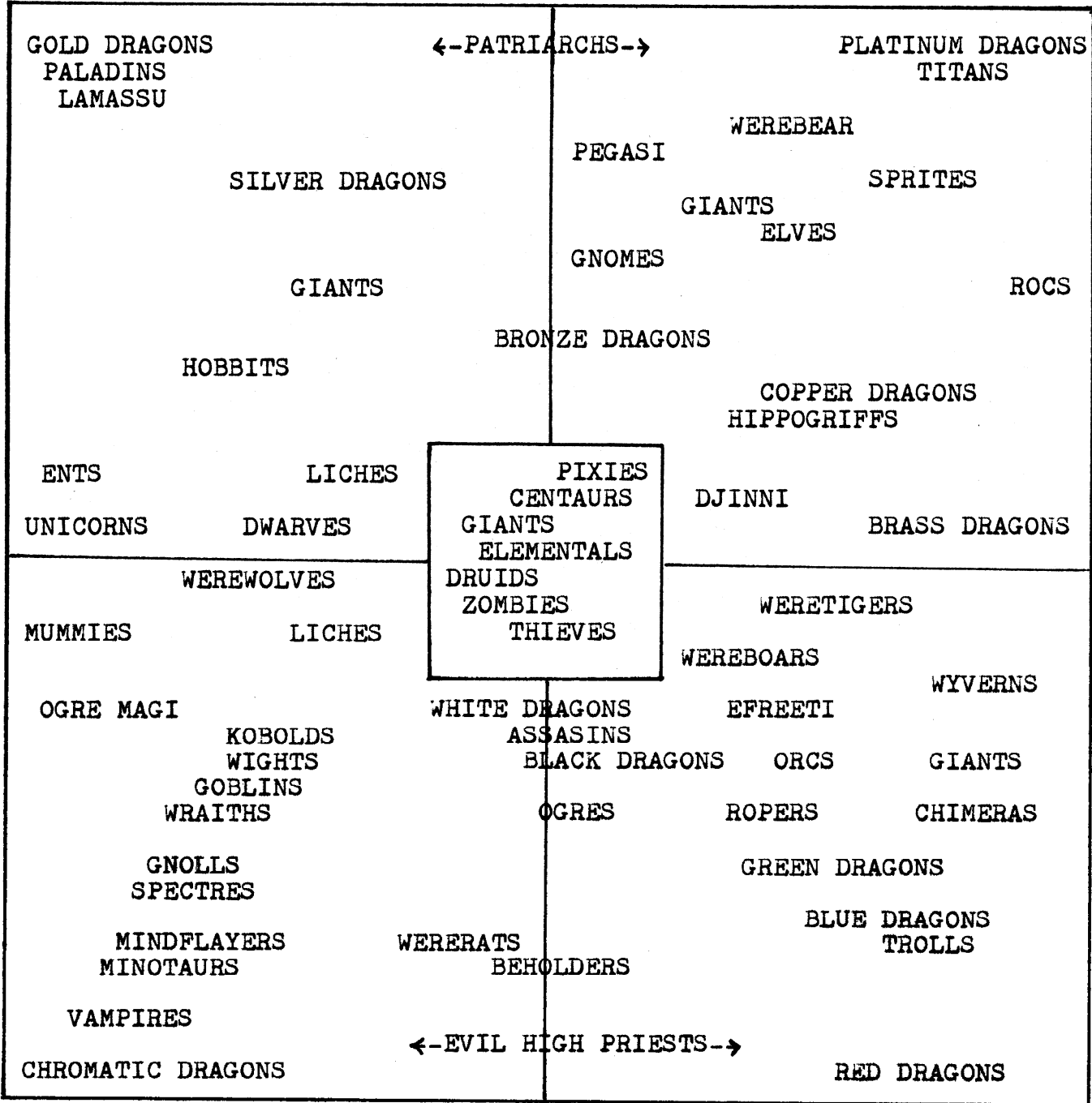
LAWFUL/EVIL
CHAOTIC/EVIL

NEUTRAL

GOOD
Harmless
Friendly
Kind

EVIL
Unfit
Mischievous
Unpleasant

The lawful/good classification is typified by the **paladin**, the chaotic/good alignment is typified by **elves**, lawful/evil is typified by the **vampire**, and the **demon** is the epitome of chaotic/evil. **Elementals** are neutral. The general reclassification of various creatures is shown on Illustration II.



Placement of characters upon a graph similar to that in Illustration I is necessary if the dungeonmaster is to maintain a record of player-character alignment. Initially, each character should be placed squarely on the center point of his alignment, i.e., lawful/good, lawful/evil, etc. The actions of each game week will then be taken into account when determining the current position of each character. Adjustment is perforce often subjective, but as a guide the referee can consider the actions of a given player in light of those characteristics which typify his alignment, and opposed actions can further be weighed with regard to **intensity**. For example, reliability does not reflect as intense a lawfulness as does principled, as does righteous. Unruly does not indicate as chaotic a state as does disordered, as does lawless. Similarly, harmless, friendly, and beneficial all reflect increasing degrees of good; while unpleasant, injurious, and wicked convey progressively greater evil. Alignment does not preclude actions which typify a different alignment, but such actions will necessarily affect the position of the character performing them, and the class or the alignment of the character in question can change due to such actions, unless counter-deeds are performed to balance things. The player-character who continually follows any alignment (save neutrality) to the absolute letter of its definition must eventually move off the chart (Illustration I) and into another plane of existence as indicated. Note that self-seeking is neither lawful nor chaotic, good nor evil, except in relation to other sapient creatures. Also, law and chaos are not subject to interpretation in their ultimate meanings of order and disorder respectively, but good and evil are not absolutes but must be judged from a frame of reference, some ethos. The placement of creatures on the chart of Illustration II. reflects the ethos of this writer to some extent.

Considering mythical and mythos gods in light of this system, most of the benign ones will tend towards the chaotic/good, and chaotic/evil will typify those gods which were inimical towards humanity. Some few would be completely chaotic, having no predisposition towards either good or evil — REH's **Crom** perhaps falls into this category.

What then about interaction between different alignments? This question is tricky and must be given careful consideration. Diametric opposition exists between lawful/good and chaotic/evil and between chaotic/good and lawful/evil in this ethos. Both good and evil can serve lawful ends, and conversely they may both serve chaotic ends. If we presuppose that the universal contest is between law and chaos we must assume that in any final struggle the minions of each division would be represented by both good and evil beings. This may seem strange at first, but if the major premise is accepted it is quite rational. Barring such a showdown, however, it is far more plausible that those creatures predisposed to good actions will tend to ally themselves against any threat of evil, while creatures of evil will likewise make (uneasy) alliance in order to gain some mutually beneficial end — whether at the actual expense of the enemy or simply to prevent extinction by the enemy. Evil creatures can be bound to service by masters predisposed towards good actions, but a lawful/good character would fain make use of some chaotic/evil creature without severely affecting his **lawful** (not necessarily **good**) standing.

This brings us to the subject of those character roles which are not subject to as much latitude of action as the others. The neutral alignment is self-explanatory, and the area of true neutrality is shown on Illustration I. Note that paladins, Patriarchs, and Evil High Priests, however, have positive boundaries. The area in which a paladin may move without loss of his status is shown in Illustration III. Should he cause his character to move from this area he must immediately seek a divine quest upon which to set forth in order to gain his status once again, or be granted divine intervention; in those cases where this is not complied with the status is forever lost. Clerics of either good or evil predisposition **must** likewise remain completely good or totally evil, although lateral movement might be allowed by the dungeonmaster, with or without divine retribution. Those top-level clerics who fail to maintain their goodness or evilness must make some form of immediate atonement. If they fail to do so they simply drop back to seventh level. The atonement, as well as how immediate it must be, is subject to interpretation by the referee. Druids serve only themselves and nature, they occasionally make human sacrifice, but on the other hand they aid the folk in agriculture and animal husbandry. Druids are, therefore, neutral — although slightly predisposed towards evil actions.

As a final note, most of humanity falls into the lawful category, and most of lawful humanity lies near the line between good and evil. With proper leadership the majority will be prone towards lawful/good. Few humans are chaotic, and very few are chaotic and evil.

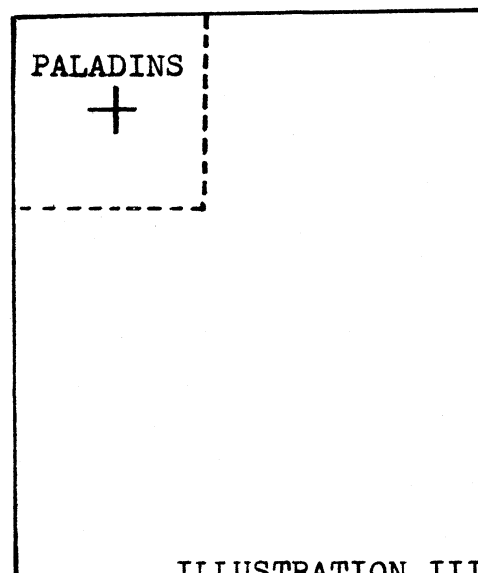


ILLUSTRATION III

Triumphs & Tragedies

This column, to be known as TRIUMPHS & TRAGEDIES, will appear on a semi-regular basis. The subject matter is subject to change as the purpose is to provide reviews of various items; 'zines, games or whatever.

The rating system is relatively simple. There are seven possible ratings, given on an overall basis. In descending order they are: MAJOR TRIUMPH, TRIUMPH, MINOR TRIUMPH, UNDECIDED, MINOR TRAGEDY, TRAGEDY and MAJOR TRAGEDY.

Triumph refers to the Roman practice of recognizing great exploits, while tragedy should be self-explanatory.

This issue's topic is 'zines.

FIRE THE ARQUEBUSIERS! is, "... a fanzine of D & D, variants thereof, and any and all other... fantasy wargames." It is a new publication by Greg Costikyan, 1675 York Av., NY, NY 10028. Price is six issues for \$2.50 or 50¢ each. It is printed on 8½ x 11 stock, rather poorly. The copy we received was barely legible in spots. #1 contained a rather demented article on "Sex in D & D", new character types, a long article on spices and magic, and some other interesting items. It seems to show potential, and could well improve its rating of MINOR TRIUMPH.

JAGDPANTHER doesn't really belong with the rest of these 'zines, but more people should find out about it. This quarterly is available from Jagdpantner Publ., POB 3565, Amarillo, TX 79106 for \$9.00 per year. It is the equal in professional quality to WARGAMERS DIGEST and CAMPAIGN (formerly PANZERFAUST), both of which are far better known. (Neither CAMPAIGN nor WARGAMERS DIGEST will be reviewed here, as that would be both foolish and pretentious. We might as well review S & T or THE GENERAL.)

It is excellently printed on 8½ x 11 stock, with slick covers. It is a veritable goldmine of information on boardgames. Each issue contains dozens of items: variants, reviews, suggested rules changes, etc. It also contains an entire game in each issue. They will be hard to improve on a MAJOR TRIUMPH.

From England comes OWL & WEASEL, a "monthly newsletter from Games Workshop. For those of you that might not recognize them, they are our UK distributor. They print on a rather small 4 x 5 size, though the printing is good. It is a newsy item, with LOTS of games plugged, mentioned, advertised, etc. We have no idea of the rates, but you can find out by writing Games Workshop, 15 Bolingbroke Rd., London W. 14. Rate this a TRIUMPH in its field.

FANTASIA TODAY is a "magazine of postal fantasy gaming." It seems to be based on a massive game, using revised "Midgard" rules. The price varies with the size, so get in touch with Jim Lawson, Rm. 550 Henday Hall, Lister Hall, 116th St.